

Instagram Marketing Strategies for MSMEs in Culinary: A Qualitative Study of Abdo's

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Abstract

This study analyzes the digital marketing strategy of Abdo's, a local culinary micro, small, and medium enterprise (MSME) in Surabaya, through Instagram. A descriptive qualitative case study was applied using Instagram observation, semi-structured interviews with the co-owner/social media administrator and a customer, and documentation of posts, stories, testimonials, and insights. The findings show that Abdo's relies on cinematic food reels, daily stories, persuasive captions, local hashtags, customer testimonials, direct messages, and limited food-vlogger collaboration. Cinematic food videos were perceived as the most effective content because they visualize product quality, texture, and consumption experience. Nevertheless, Instagram management still faces constraints related to inconsistent content scheduling, limited human resources, uneven visual quality, underused highlights, incomplete price information, and irregular promotions. The study recommends a weekly content calendar, consistent visual identity, complete product information, optimized reels, stories and highlights, stronger user-generated content, and regular insight evaluation. The findings imply that Instagram can function not only as a promotional showcase but also as a brand communication space that supports trust-building and purchase interest among culinary MSME customers.

Keywords: *brand communication, content strategy, culinary MSMEs, Instagram, social media marketing*

INTRODUCTION

Digital technology has changed the way businesses introduce products, build customer relationships, and maintain competitiveness. Social media has become an important marketing channel because it allows businesses to reach audiences quickly, visually, interactively, and relatively efficiently. DataReportal (2025) reported that Indonesia had approximately 212 million internet users, 143 million active social media user identities, and 103 million Instagram users in early 2025. This condition indicates that social media is a strategic space for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to build digital presence and expand their markets.

In contemporary marketing, digital marketing is not merely the act of uploading content. It refers to a strategic process of creating value, managing customer relationships, and using digital channels in a measurable way (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2022). Kotler et al. (2021) also emphasize that marketing increasingly relies on technology, customer experience, and more personal relationships. For culinary MSMEs, this approach is important because customers do not evaluate food only from taste. They also consider visual appearance, brand stories, testimonials, ordering convenience, and seller responsiveness.

Instagram is relevant for culinary marketing because it provides visual features such as feeds, reels, stories, highlights, captions, hashtags, comments, and direct messages. These features enable food products to be presented through color, texture, composition, preparation process, and consumption atmosphere. Alalwan et al. (2017) explain that social media in marketing functions as a space for information, interaction, and influence on consumer decisions. In culinary businesses, visual appeal and fast communication can stimulate interest in trying a product.

However, Instagram use among MSMEs is not always strategically planned. Many MSMEs use Instagram spontaneously, do not have content calendars, lack consistent visual identity, and rarely evaluate content performance. Patma et al. (2021) show that social media marketing and business technology adoption can support the sustainability of Indonesian SMEs, especially when business actors are able to use digital media to maintain marketing activities and customer relationships.

Abdo's is a local culinary MSME in Surabaya that offers Middle Eastern comfort food, including *nasi biryani*, *nasi kebuli*, roasted chicken, shawarma, doner sandwich, vegetarian biryani bowl, and other special products. The Instagram account @abdos.surabaya has been used since the early stage of the business as a promotional medium, a form of social proof, a menu information channel, and an ordering channel. Based on observation on 15 June 2026, the account had 186 followers, 83 following accounts, 140 posts, and 104 reels. The account is active but still faces challenges in maintaining consistency and optimizing Instagram features.

Based on this background, this research addresses the following questions: how does Abdo's use Instagram as a digital marketing channel, what types of content are used, how is consumer interaction developed, what constraints are faced in Instagram management, and what recommendations can improve the effectiveness of Abdo's digital marketing strategy? The study aims to analyze the Instagram-based digital marketing strategy of Abdo's by describing its use of Instagram features, content and promotional strategies, consumer interaction patterns, managerial constraints, and practical recommendations for more directed digital marketing. The originality of this study lies in its case-based analysis of a local culinary MSME that combines Middle Eastern food positioning, visual content practice, and direct customer communication through Instagram.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Marketing for MSMEs

Digital marketing refers to marketing activities that use digital technologies to reach consumers, communicate product value, build relationships, and encourage transactions. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2022) explain that digital marketing should be managed through strategy, implementation, and evaluation of digital channels. In the context of MSMEs, digital marketing is important because it helps businesses with limited resources reach wider markets more efficiently.

Kotler et al. (2021) place technology as a key element of Marketing 5.0 because it allows business actors to understand consumers, build experiences, and strengthen relationships. For culinary MSMEs, digital marketing is not limited to displaying products. It also delivers value, creates trust, and facilitates transactions. Patma et al. (2021) found that business technology use and social media marketing can support the sustainability of SMEs in Indonesia. Therefore, MSMEs' capability to manage social media is a key factor for competitiveness in the culinary sector, where competition is intense and product appeal is highly visual.

Instagram as a Culinary Marketing Medium

Instagram is a visual-based social media platform that enables business actors to display photos, short videos, reels, stories, highlights, captions, hashtags, comments, and direct messages. Tuten (2021) states that social media marketing enables brands to build conversations, strengthen relationships, and display content that can encourage audience participation. In the culinary sector, Instagram's visual features help customers imagine the shape, portion, texture, and consumption experience before purchasing.

Sabila and Amanah (2022) found that the effectiveness of Instagram as a marketing communication medium for food-processing MSMEs is influenced by information completeness, message clarity, visual design, typography, and message frequency. This finding is relevant to culinary account management because customers need complete information before making purchases, including menu items, prices, location, operating hours, and ordering methods. Fawwaz and Oktavianti (2022) also emphasize the role of Instagram in marketing communication strategies for food and beverage MSMEs. Attractive content that suits the target market and is delivered consistently can strengthen culinary business positioning.

Content Strategy and Consumer Engagement

Content strategy is the process of planning, producing, publishing, and evaluating messages so that they match audience needs. Appel et al. (2020) argue that social media has become an important part of brand-consumer relationships because it enables two-way interaction, user participation, and brand experience formation. On Instagram, content strategy can be seen from content type, visual style, caption, call to action, hashtag use, and audience response.

Dwivedi et al. (2021) emphasize that digital and social media marketing operate in a dynamic interaction space. Business actors need to understand consumer behavior, use data, and adjust messages to platform characteristics. In MSME practice, data use can be carried out by analyzing Instagram insights, such as reach, impressions, views, likes, comments, shares, saves, profile visits, and incoming messages. Ashley and Tuten (2015) show that creative strategies in social media content are related to consumer engagement. Strong content usually has visual appeal, clear messages, and relevance to audience needs. Shandy et al. (2023) add

that social media richness can influence brand equity and business performance in food and beverage SMEs.

Social Media Governance and Marketing Mix

Felix et al. (2017) view social media strategy holistically through scope, culture, structure, and governance. For MSMEs, this means that Instagram use should have objectives, division of tasks, content schedules, communication style, and evaluation mechanisms. Without clear governance, an Instagram account may become inconsistent and unable to build a strong brand identity.

Instagram strategy for culinary MSMEs can also be examined using the marketing mix of product, price, place, and promotion. Product appears in menu displays, portions, ingredients, and product variety. Price appears in price information, promotions, discounts, or bundles. Place relates to business location, ordering access, and operating hours. Promotion relates to feed posts, reels, stories, giveaways, testimonials, collaborations, and calls to action. This framework helps evaluate whether an Instagram account has communicated complete marketing information or remains focused mainly on product visuals.

METHODS

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study method. The qualitative approach was selected because the research aimed to understand the Instagram marketing strategy of Abdo's based on actual platform practices, the experiences of the owner/administrator, and customer responses. Creswell and Poth (2018) explain that

qualitative research is suitable for understanding a phenomenon contextually through data collected from participants and their environment.

The object of the research was the digital marketing strategy of Abdo's through the Instagram account @abdos.surabaya. The business is located at Jalan Lidah Wetan Gang V, RW 03, Lidah Wetan, Lakarsantri, Surabaya. Observation was conducted on 15 June 2026 on Instagram posts from 1 May to 14 June 2026. The observed data included account identity, posting frequency, content types, captions, hashtags, stories, reels, highlights, interaction, testimonials, promotion, call to action, and available engagement data.

Informants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in Instagram management or their experience as Abdo's customers. The informants consisted of Hanifah Julman as co-owner and Instagram administrator of Abdo's and Ari as a 26-year-old customer who followed the Instagram account and had purchased products after seeing Instagram content.

Data were collected through Instagram observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observation was used to map content forms and account management patterns. Interviews were used to explore the purpose of Instagram use, content production processes, management constraints, and customer perceptions. Documentation was used to strengthen observation data through screenshots of the account, example posts, testimonials, insight data, and outlet documentation.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2021) explain that thematic analysis can identify, group, and interpret important patterns in qualitative data. The analysis process consisted of data reduction, coding of findings, theme grouping, interpretation, and conclusion drawing. The analytical themes included Instagram use, visual content strategy,

promotional strategy, consumer interaction, management constraints, and strategy recommendations.

Data trustworthiness was strengthened through source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data from the owner/administrator and customer. Technique triangulation was conducted by comparing interview results, Instagram observation, and content documentation.

Table 1. Research Informants

Code	Description
I1	Co-owner of Abdo's; explained business history, target market, Instagram use, promotion, and management constraints.
I2	Instagram administrator of Abdo's; explained content management tasks, editing applications, insights, hashtag use, and improvement needs.
I3	Customer aged 26; follows the Instagram account and had purchased Abdo's products after seeing Instagram posts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of Abdo's and Its Instagram Account

Abdo's is a local culinary MSME in Surabaya that was established on 3 June 2024. The business was previously named Food4unique and changed its name to Abdo's in 2025. The background of the business is related to the owner's desire to channel a cooking hobby into a culinary business with a distinctive identity. The products focus on Middle Eastern comfort food that is authentic but still light enough for daily consumption.

The main products include *nasi biryani*, *nasi kebuli*, roasted chicken, shawarma, doner sandwich, vegetarian biryani bowl, and special products such as BLISS. The target market consists of middle-to-upper-class consumers and university students. The owner positioned

Instagram as a promotional medium and a form of social proof, meaning that Instagram shows business activity, customer testimonials, and evidence of customer experience.

Table 2. Profile of Abdo's and Its Instagram Account

Aspect	Data
Business name	Abdo's
Business type	Local culinary MSME with Middle Eastern comfort food
Year established	3 June 2024; renamed from Food4unique to Abdo's in 2025
Location	Jalan Lidah Wetan Gang V/RW 03, Lidah Wetan, Lakarsantri, Surabaya
Main products	Nasi biryani, nasi kebuli, roasted chicken, shawarma, doner sandwich, vegetarian biryani bowl, BLISS
Target consumers	Middle-to-upper-class consumers and university students
Instagram account	@abdos.surabaya
Account data on 15 June 2026	186 followers, 83 following accounts, 140 posts, 104 reels
Observation period	1 May-14 June 2026

The Instagram profile showed that Abdo's had used basic features such as bio, logo, contact, location, ordering link, feed, reels, story, highlight, caption, hashtag, direct message, and reposted testimonials. Observation data showed that @abdos.surabaya had 186 followers, 83 following accounts, 140 posts, and 104 reels on 15 June 2026.



Source: Research documentation, 2026.

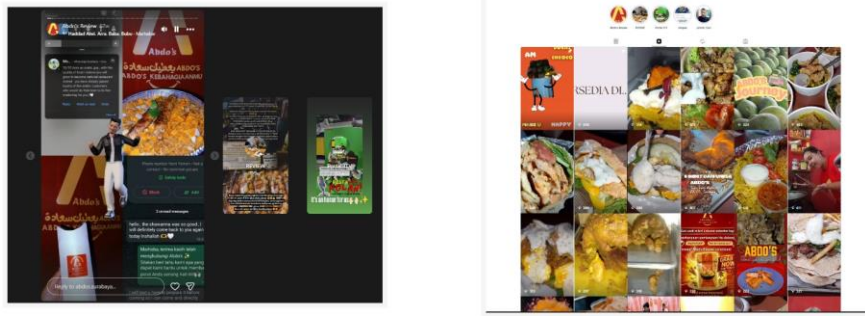
Figure 1. Abdo's outlet in Lidah Wetan, Surabaya

Instagram Use as a Marketing Medium

Instagram was used by Abdo's to introduce products, communicate menu information, display testimonials, build customer communication, receive questions and orders through direct messages, and strengthen the business image. The use of Instagram as a promotional and communication space is consistent with Tuten's (2021) view that social media marketing enables brands to interact directly with audiences through content and conversation.

The owner stated that the main reasons for using Instagram were promotion and social proof. In other words, Instagram was not only used to sell products but also to show business activities, customer trust, and food quality. This is important in culinary marketing because customers often rely on visual evidence and the experiences of other customers before deciding to buy. Shandy et al. (2023) also state that information richness on social media can create stronger impressions and contribute to brand equity.

The most prominent features were reels and stories. Reels were used to display cinematic product videos, while stories were used for menu updates, customer reposts, and information when the shop was open. However, highlights were not yet fully optimized. Highlights could serve as a permanent information center for menus, testimonials, location, ordering methods, promotions, and frequently asked questions. This limitation shows that social media governance still needs strengthening, consistent with Felix et al. (2017), who emphasize the importance of structure and management in social media strategy.



Source: Research documentation, 2026.

Figure 2. Examples of Instagram content, customer testimonials, and feed/reels display

Instagram Content Strategy of Abdo's

The content strategy of Abdo's was dominated by product content and promotion-based videos. From 11 posts analyzed during the period of 1 May-14 June 2026, there were two feed posts and nine reels. The content categories consisted of four product posts and seven promotional posts. Reels generated a total of 4,366 views based on recorded data, while total likes from posts with available data reached 89 and comments reached eight. These data indicate that reels were the main format supporting visual reach.

The owner and administrator stated that the most frequently produced content was cinematic product videos. This type of content presents food closely, showing texture, color, and the serving process, thereby building emotional and sensory appeal. This finding is relevant to Ashley and Tuten (2015), who show that creative strategy in social media content can increase consumer engagement when the content has visual attractiveness and audience relevance.

Instagram captions tended to use persuasive and storytelling styles. Several captions emphasized taste experience, happiness, comfort, and menu uniqueness. Nevertheless,

observation showed that price information was not consistently included. The administrator stated that posts usually included location and contact information, but not always price. This issue is important because Sabila and Amanah (2022) emphasize that information completeness is an important aspect of Instagram marketing communication effectiveness.

Hashtags were used but could be organized more systematically. Hashtags included #kulinersurabaya, #middleeasternfood, #umkmsurabaya, #hiddengemsurabaya, and #foodcinematography. The administrator mentioned that hashtags were used frequently, with a maximum of five hashtags. This practice is appropriate because local hashtags can help content reach potential customers around Surabaya, but it should be combined with content consistency and clear calls to action.

Table 3. Summary of Instagram Content Analysis

Content Indicator	Observation Finding
Analyzed posts	11 posts from 1 May to 14 June 2026
Post format	Two feed posts and nine reels
Content category	Four product posts and seven promotional posts
Total reel views	4,366 views from nine recorded reels
Total likes	89 likes from posts with available data
Total comments	Eight comments; comments appeared only on one collaboration post
Most effective content according to informants	Cinematic product videos and product review videos
Content weaknesses	Uneven visual quality, inconsistent price information, underused highlights, and irregular promotions

Promotional Strategy through Instagram

Abdo's promotional strategy was carried out through product reels, daily stories, persuasive captions, reposted testimonials, hashtags, and collaboration with food vloggers. The

owner stated that Abdo's had collaborated with food vloggers three times. Such collaborations can extend reach and provide social validation, particularly for potential customers who are not yet familiar with the products.

Promotional forms such as vouchers and discounts had been used, but they were not frequent because the target market was middle-to-upper class. This indicates that Abdo's promotion strategy did not rely primarily on routine discounts. Instead, it emphasized product quality, dining experience, and the exclusivity of certain menus. This approach can be linked to Marketing 5.0, which emphasizes customer experience and personal relationships (Kotler et al., 2021).

Using the marketing mix framework, the product element was strong because menu displays and product videos were dominant. The place element was visible through the location information at Lidah Wetan V/43 Surabaya and ordering contacts. The promotion element appeared through reels, stories, collaborations, testimonials, and promotional captions. However, the price element still needed improvement because prices were not always included in posts. Inconsistent price information may slow purchase decisions because consumers have to ask again through direct messages.

From the AIDA perspective, cinematic reels attracted attention through food visuals, captions attracting interest through taste and experience narratives, testimonials created desire by increasing trust, and calls to action, contact information, and location encouraged action. Some posts already included calls to action such as 'order now' or 'book from now', but they need to be used more consistently across promotional content.

Consumer Interaction and Trust

Instagram also functioned as an interaction space between Abdo's and its customers. Interaction appeared through direct messages, reposted customer stories, customer mentions, and administrator responses to questions. The owner stated that customers more often asked through direct messages about menu availability and pre-orders for certain events. The administrator also stated that responses were given in an informative and friendly manner.

From the customer perspective, Ari stated that he first learned about Abdo's through Instagram and YouTube. He was attracted by food content, customer stories, and product reviews. According to the customer, Abdo's Instagram content helped him know the available menus because the account frequently updated information through stories. He also stated that he had purchased products after seeing Instagram posts, especially biryani, donuts, and kebab.

Customer testimonials became an important element in building trust. The customer stated that testimonials from other buyers increased his confidence in the product. This finding is consistent with Appel et al. (2020), who explain that social media enables consumers to participate in brand experiences and influence the perceptions of other consumers. Reposted testimonials can therefore be understood as user-generated content that strengthens social proof.

However, customer engagement still needed improvement during the observation period. Most posts had no comments, and comments were visible only on the collaboration post. This condition indicates that Abdo's needs more interactive content, such as menu polls, questions in stories, simple quizzes, comment invitations, and behind-the-scenes content. Dwivedi et al. (2021) emphasize the importance of understanding consumer behavior and using interaction data in social media strategy.

Constraints in Managing Abdo's Instagram

The main constraints in Instagram management were related to scheduling, consistency, content production, and limited human resources. The owner stated that content production was often constrained by hectic kitchen conditions during food preparation. The administrator also explained that a content calendar had been used in the past but was not active during the observation period. This means that content activities were still dependent on daily situations rather than stable planning.

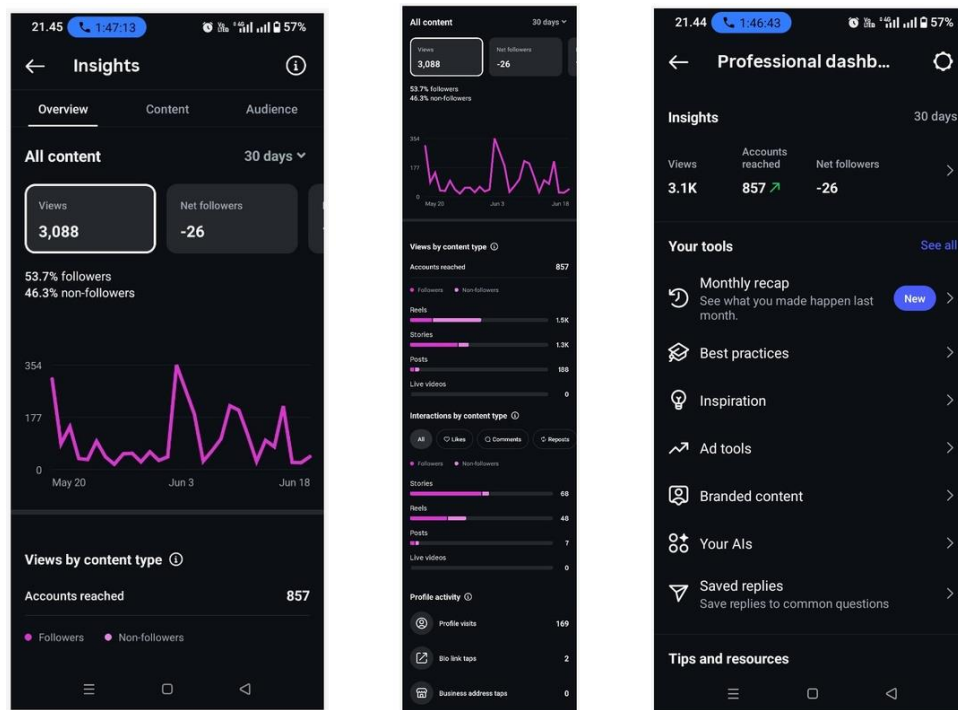
Visual quality was another important issue. Observation showed that photo and video quality still needed improvement in lighting, composition, and visual style consistency. Although Abdo's used Canva, CapCut, YouCut, and AI assistance for captions, a strong visual identity had not yet been formed. In social media strategy, consistent visuals are important because they help customers quickly recognize brand identity.

Another constraint was the underuse of highlights. The owner and administrator both stated that Instagram highlights had not been optimized. Highlights can serve as permanent information centers for potential customers. With organized highlights, customers do not need to search across many posts to find menus, location, testimonials, ordering methods, and promotions.

Insight evaluation had been carried out, especially for views, comments, and shares. However, it should be made more structured through regular recording. Insight data can be used to determine effective content types, proper posting times, preferred formats, and messages that lead to purchase actions. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2022) emphasize the importance of evaluation in digital channel management so that strategy is based not only on intuition but also on data.

Table 4. Constraints in Instagram Management

Constraint	Finding	Impact
Limited human resources	The owner/administrator also handles production, service, and content management.	Content production becomes difficult when the kitchen is busy.
Inactive content calendar	A content schedule existed in the past but was not actively used during the observation period.	Posts become situational and less planned.
Uneven visual quality	Photos and videos need stronger lighting, composition, and visual style.	Brand identity is not yet visually strong.
Underused highlights	Highlights exist but are not used as structured menu, promotion, location, and ordering information.	Potential customers must search manually for information.
Incomplete price information	Captions generally include location and contact information, but prices are not always included.	Customers need to ask through direct messages before buying.
Irregular promotions	Vouchers and discounts have been used, but only rarely.	Promotional momentum is not fully used to encourage purchases.



Source: Research documentation, 2026

Figure 3. Instagram insight documentation of Abdo's

Discussion

The findings show that Instagram plays a dual role for Abdo's: as a promotional showcase and as a brand communication space. This dual role aligns with Tuten (2021), who argues that social media marketing involves both content display and audience conversation. In the case of Abdo's, Instagram is used to show food visuals, provide menu updates, repost customer experiences, and receive direct orders or inquiries. Therefore, Instagram supports not only visibility but also customer relationship formation.

The dominance of cinematic reels confirms the importance of visual content in culinary marketing. Food products require sensory imagination, and video content can present texture, steam, color, sauce, and serving process more dynamically than static photos. This supports Ashley and Tuten's (2015) finding that creative social media content can stimulate engagement. However, the low number of comments also suggests that visual appeal alone is not sufficient. Engagement requires interactive prompts, audience participation, and content formats that invite responses.

The finding that price information is not consistently included indicates an incomplete marketing mix on Instagram. Product, place, and promotion elements are visible, but the price element needs improvement. From a practical perspective, complete information can reduce the cognitive effort required by consumers. Sabila and Amanah (2022) emphasize that information completeness and message clarity affect Instagram marketing effectiveness. For Abdo's, including price ranges, menu highlights, location, operating hours, and ordering links can help accelerate purchase decisions.

The use of testimonials and customer reposts is significant because it strengthens trust and social proof. Appel et al. (2020) note that social media enables users to participate in brand

experiences, while Shandy et al. (2023) show that rich information on social media can influence brand equity and business performance among food and beverage SMEs. For Abdo's, testimonials are particularly important because the product category is experiential. Potential buyers may rely on other customers' experiences when evaluating whether to try unfamiliar Middle Eastern comfort food.

The main managerial problem is not the absence of Instagram use, but the lack of systematic governance. The account already uses reels, stories, highlights, hashtags, and direct messages, but these features are not yet fully integrated into a consistent strategy. Felix et al. (2017) emphasize that social media strategy should include scope, culture, structure, and governance. In the Abdo's case, governance can be improved by clarifying content responsibilities, creating a realistic content calendar, standardizing visual templates, and documenting insights weekly.

The use of Instagram insights represents a promising step toward data-based marketing, but the evaluation needs to be more structured. Dwivedi et al. (2021) emphasize the need to understand consumer behavior and use data in digital marketing. For a small culinary business, this does not require complex analytics. A simple weekly table recording views, shares, saves, comments, profile visits, and direct messages can help identify which content works and which content should be improved.

The recommended model can be summarized as follows: Instagram content begins with visual product presentation through reels, feed posts, stories, captions, and hashtags; it is strengthened by promotion and interaction through testimonials, direct messages, collaborations, calls to action, and customer reposts; it is evaluated through insight data; and it is expected to support brand awareness, trust, purchase interest, and repeat purchase.

Table 5. Recommended Instagram Marketing Strategy for Abdo's

Strategic Area	Recommendation	Success Indicator
Content calendar	Plan weekly posts for products, testimonials, behind-the-scenes, menu education, promotions, and story interactions.	At least four to five planned posts per week and active stories when the shop is open.
Visual identity	Use consistent templates, color tone, food photography style, and caption format.	Feed and reels become easier to recognize as Abdo's content.
Reels, stories, and highlights	Use cinematic reels, daily story updates, and highlights for menu, testimonials, location, ordering, promotion, and FAQ.	Higher views, shares, profile visits, and direct messages.
Post information	Include product name, benefits, price or price range, location, contact, operating hours, and call to action.	Repeated questions through direct messages decrease.
User-generated content	Repost customer reviews, photos, and dining experiences.	Consumer trust and social proof increase.
Insight evaluation	Record reach, views, likes, comments, shares, saves, profile visits, and direct messages weekly.	Future content is planned based on performance data.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Conclusion

Instagram has an important role in the digital marketing strategy of Abdo's as a local culinary MSME. It is used to introduce products, communicate menu information, build business image, display testimonials, receive questions and orders through direct messages, and maintain customer relationships. The main strategies include visual product content, especially cinematic reels, daily stories, persuasive captions, local hashtags, reposted testimonials, and limited food-vlogger collaboration.

The most effective content according to the owner, administrator, and customer is cinematic food video and product review content because they show visual appeal and consumption experience. However, Instagram management still faces constraints, including limited human resources, inconsistent content scheduling, uneven visual quality, underused highlights, incomplete price information, and irregular promotions. These constraints show that Abdo's needs more systematic social media governance.

The study concludes that Instagram should be managed not only as a visual product showcase but also as an integrated brand communication channel. When content planning, visual identity, information completeness, customer interaction, and insight evaluation are managed consistently, Instagram can strengthen trust and purchase interest for culinary MSMEs.

Recommendations

Practically, Abdo's should create a weekly content calendar, improve visual consistency, optimize reels, stories and highlights, include complete information in every promotional post, increase user-generated content, and evaluate insights regularly. Highlights should be reorganized into menu, testimonials, location, ordering method, promotions, events, and frequently asked questions so that new customers can access information easily.

Academically, this study contributes to the understanding of Instagram-based digital marketing practices among local culinary MSMEs by showing how platform features, visual content, social proof, and data evaluation interact in a small business context. Future researchers may develop quantitative studies to measure the influence of Instagram content quality on purchase intention, purchase decisions, customer loyalty, or brand awareness. Further studies may also

compare several culinary MSMEs to identify broader patterns of Instagram marketing effectiveness.

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