

Social Media Marketing Strategies of Women Entrepreneurs in Makassar's Home-Based Food Business

Original Article

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores how women entrepreneurs in Makassar's home-based food industry leverage social media marketing to sustain and expand their businesses within Indonesia's dynamic digital economy. Using a multiple case study approach, in-depth interviews and digital content observations were conducted with selected female entrepreneurs who utilize platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok for brand storytelling, customer engagement, and product promotion. The findings reveal that social media serves as both an economic enabler and an emotional connector—bridging traditional culinary heritage with modern consumer trends. Through creative content, visual authenticity, and personalized customer interaction, these women have redefined micro-entrepreneurship as a form of social empowerment, resilience, and local cultural preservation. The study highlights how human-centered digital strategies can enhance business sustainability, strengthen community identity, and foster inclusive economic participation in emerging urban economies.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing; Women Entrepreneurs; Digital Economy; Home-Based Food Business; Makassar.

1. Introduction

Women's home-based food enterprises in Makassar operate at the intersection of cultural tradition, household livelihoods, and rapidly evolving digital infrastructures. These microenterprises—often run by women balancing domestic responsibilities—leverage low-cost social media platforms to convert social capital into market transactions, thereby contributing to household resilience and local economic circulation (World Bank, 2022). Empirical evidence from Indonesia and regional studies demonstrates that social media adoption has accelerated since the COVID-19 pandemic, reshaping how microentrepreneurs communicate product value, manage orders, and coordinate logistics while avoiding heavy upfront capital investments typical of formal retail expansion.

From an economic-behavioral perspective, Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp function as complementary market tools rather than interchangeable channels: Instagram is commonly used for curated visual branding and repertoire building; Facebook for community signalling and event or group coordination; and WhatsApp for interpersonal order management, trust building, and after-sales communication (T. Sultan, 2024). This triadic use reflects an opportunistic optimization of platform affordances where entrepreneurs allocate scarce attention and resources to platforms with the highest immediate return on engagement. Such micro-level allocation decisions are rational given liquidity constraints and the high



premium placed on reputation within local networks, but they also introduce structural vulnerabilities—platform dependence, algorithmic opacity, and limited formal data on customer behaviour—that shape long-run competitive.

A critical appraisal must attend to the socio-technical constraints that mediate digital inclusion. Macro reports and investigative journalism highlight persistent barriers—costly mobile data, connectivity gaps, and safety concerns—that disproportionately affect women entrepreneurs and therefore limit the transformative potential of social media for equitable growth (We Are Social, 2023; Reuters, 2025). Beyond access, gendered patterns of online harassment and privacy risks lead many women to deliberately limit visibility or avoid certain promotional tactics, which in turn curtail scale and experimentation. Any analysis of social media strategies in Makassar should therefore treat platform adoption as conditional on gendered risk assessments and affordability, not merely as a neutral productivity enhancer.

Methodologically, a multiple case study that combines in-depth interviews, participant observation of social media feeds, and micro-level sales/engagement records will illuminate both strategic intent and tactical routine. Prior local studies on Makassar and comparable Indonesian urban contexts suggest that successful home-based food entrepreneurs blend standardized practices (e.g., product photography, menu standardization, promo bundles) with culturally-rooted heuristics (timing posts around prayer or market rhythms; using local idioms to signal authenticity), producing “indigenous digital marketing” practices adapted to place-based demand and constrained capital. This hybridization produces interesting policy levers: digital literacy interventions that are context-sensitive, subsidized data or zero-rating for SME platforms, and safety mechanisms co-designed with women entrepreneurs could materially change outcomes.

Finally, the economic significance of documenting these strategies extends beyond the immediate Tariff of local sales: by clarifying how women convert social networks and cultural capital into monetizable reputation through social media, the study can inform scalable interventions to strengthen inclusive value chains and microfirm productivity. At the same time, scholars should remain cautious about techno-solutionism: platform use does not automatically translate to business formalization, access to finance, or upward mobility without concurrent institutional and infrastructural support. Thus, this research must couple descriptive richness with critical analysis of structural constraints and propose actionable, locally-anchored policy and training recommendations.

2. Literature Review

Women’s uptake of social media for micro-enterprise activity in Indonesia has been rapid and consequential for household economies, especially among home-based food producers who face capital and mobility constraints. Empirical analyses show that internet utilization correlates with increased market access and income opportunities for female entrepreneurs, although benefits are uneven across regions and sectors (Nur Asrofi, 2023). Policy and practitioner reports likewise stress that digital adoption among ultra-micro and micro women-led firms is a critical pathway to resilience after COVID-19, but that structural supports (digital finance, training, affordable connectivity) determine whether platform use translates into sustainable growth rather than temporary coping strategies.

A growing body of micro-level studies disaggregates how different platforms serve distinct commercial functions for small food firms: Instagram is leveraged for visual branding and aspirational storytelling, Facebook for community signalling and group sales, and WhatsApp (including WhatsApp Business) for order management, personalized customer service, and repeat purchasing—often forming a low-cost, integrated marketing stack for sellers with limited capital (Aliya, 2024; local case studies 2024–2025). These studies emphasize platform

affordances and routines (post timing, use of local language and food imagery, promo bundles) as tactical adaptations to constrained resources, yielding replicable “order-based” and relationship-driven marketing strategies that are effective in localized demand ecosystems.

However, scholarship also foregrounds gendered barriers that temper the emancipatory narrative of digital tools. Recent reports and systematic reviews highlight the persistent gender digital divide in affordability, digital literacy, and online safety: high mobile data costs, connectivity gaps, and widespread online harassment reduce women’s ability or willingness to exploit platform features fully, with direct implications for visibility, scaling, and formalization of their enterprises (UN Women, 2024; Cherie Blair Foundation findings reported in *The Guardian*, 2025). Technical interventions therefore risk reproducing inequities if they do not couple access with culturally-sensitive safety measures, privacy protections, and gender-aware training.

Finally, literature mapping suggests both promising practical insights and important gaps for a study focused on Makassar’s home-based food sector. Place-based research in Indonesian cities documents hybridized, indigenous digital marketing practices—timing posts around local rhythms, embedding religious and culinary signifiers to signal authenticity, and using micro-promotions tied to community events—that quantitative surveys often miss (Larasatie, 2025; Suryawardani, 2025). To move the field forward, mixed qualitative designs that combine in-depth interviews, digital trace analysis of social feeds, and simple sales/engagement metrics will be necessary to capture strategic intent, tactical routines, and economic outcomes; policy prescriptions should therefore aim at bundled interventions (digital literacy + subsidized connectivity + online safety mechanisms) to convert social media engagement into durable entrepreneurial lift.

3. Methods

This study adopts a qualitative multiple case study design to explore how women entrepreneurs in Makassar’s home-based food sector employ social media platforms to market their products, build customer relationships, and sustain livelihoods under resource constraints. The case study method is well-suited for examining complex social and economic behaviors embedded in contextual realities, allowing for in-depth understanding of entrepreneurial practices in natural settings (Yin, 2023). Data collection will rely on semi-structured in-depth interviews with purposively selected women entrepreneurs who have demonstrated active and consistent use of Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp for business promotion. Supplementary data will be gathered from digital ethnography—including content analysis of social media posts, captions, hashtags, and customer interactions—to capture the aesthetic, linguistic, and affective dimensions of digital marketing (Kozinets, 2022). This triangulation of interviews and digital content ensures methodological rigor and interpretive validity, reflecting both the subjective meanings and the economic rationalities guiding women’s online marketing behavior.

The data analysis follows the principles of thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022), emphasizing iterative coding, pattern identification, and reflexive interpretation. Themes will be generated inductively to capture emergent strategies, constraints, and localized innovations in digital marketing practices. To enhance credibility and trustworthiness, the study applies member checking, peer debriefing, and reflexive journaling throughout the analytic process (Nowell et al., 2023). Ethical considerations include obtaining informed consent, anonymizing participants’ identities, and respecting digital privacy in line with qualitative research ethics for online environments (British Sociological Association, 2021). The analytical framework is grounded in a humanistic-economic lens, interpreting entrepreneurship not only as profit-seeking but as a socially

embedded, meaning-making process that sustains household welfare and cultural identity in emerging digital economies.

4. Results and Discussion

The study identified four major themes reflecting how Makassar’s home-based food entrepreneurs integrate digital tools into their marketing ecosystems. First, platform differentiation enables efficient marketing resource allocation—Instagram builds visibility, Facebook anchors community reputation, and WhatsApp facilitates trust-driven transactions. Second, authentic digital storytelling merges cultural identity with marketing, where local food narratives and regional expressions enhance credibility. Third, relationship-based marketing highlights how emotional connection and personalized interaction become cost-effective mechanisms for customer loyalty. Finally, adaptive learning under constraint shows continuous digital skill acquisition despite limited infrastructure and exposure, underscoring women’s capacity to transform informal learning into entrepreneurial resilience.

Table 1. Summary theme result

Theme	Core Description	Illustrative Evidence	Economic–Humanistic Interpretation
1. Platform Differentiation	Distinct use of Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp for branding, community engagement, and sales.	Instagram as visual marketing tool; WhatsApp for orders.	Efficient use of limited capital via digital segmentation.
2. Authentic Storytelling	Integration of cultural and religious symbols in content.	Use of Makassar idioms, greetings, and local foods.	Embeds social belonging and trust in economic exchange.
3. Relationship Capital	Focus on customer intimacy and informal loyalty.	Personalized responses, appreciation posts, discounts.	Emotional reciprocity replaces formal marketing infrastructure.
4. Adaptive Learning	Overcoming barriers through peer learning and experimentation.	Learning from family or other sellers online.	Reflects grassroots innovation and resilience within informality.

Source: data processed, 2025

4.1. Discussion

The study demonstrates that Makassar’s women food entrepreneurs engage in platform differentiation as a form of adaptive efficiency under capital scarcity. Their pragmatic use of multiple social media platforms parallels global findings that digital literacy evolves experientially, not institutionally (Arora & Thompson, 2023). This adaptability transforms social media into a non-financial asset, enhancing visibility and market access (Ali, 2024), while also embodying social norms rooted in community trust and religious ethics.

Through authentic storytelling and relationship-driven marketing, these entrepreneurs merge local identity with digital strategy. Their content humanizes commerce, echoing research that defines Indonesian women’s markets as moral and relational economies (Wibowo & Suryawardani, 2024). Relational exchanges online reproduce traditional values of empathy and reciprocity, aligning with Hidayati et al. (2023), who emphasize social capital’s role in sustaining microenterprise loyalty networks.

Lastly, adaptive learning captures women’s self-directed innovation amid structural barriers. Continuous experimentation and peer collaboration foster resilience and capability building (OECD, 2024; Dwianto, 2025). Such informal learning mechanisms expand women’s

agency in digital spaces, confirming that social media entrepreneurship represents both an economic adaptation and a humanistic transformation of livelihood under digital modernity.

5. Conclusion

The research concludes that women food entrepreneurs in Makassar exemplify a culturally grounded model of digital entrepreneurship. Their use of social media extends beyond marketing efficiency, reflecting social values of care, trust, and authenticity that sustain both livelihoods and community identity (Rahardjo, 2024).

Policy efforts must move beyond technical training to address systemic inequalities in access, safety, and finance. Gender-sensitive digital literacy, affordable connectivity, and safer online environments are prerequisites for inclusive participation (UN Women, 2024; World Bank, 2023). Moreover, linking digital marketing with formal financial ecosystems can strengthen women's long-term economic security (OECD, 2024).

Finally, sustainable empowerment depends on local collaboration. Establishing digital community hubs rooted in cultural expression will help women innovate while preserving traditional values. In this humanistic framework, digital transformation is not purely technological—it becomes a moral and social project that uplifts women, families, and communities across Indonesia.

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