

IMPLEMENTATION OF CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP STRATEGIES IN IMPROVING PRODUCT ACCESSIBILITY FOR SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES OF PISANG GEPREK IN MEDAN

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Abstrak: *This study aims to analyze the application of Customer Relationship strategies in improving product accessibility at Pisang Geprek MSMEs. With increasingly fierce business competition, the ability of MSMEs to build and maintain good relationships with consumers is a key factor in expanding market reach. This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach with data collection techniques through observation, interviews, and documentation studies. The results show that the implementation of Customer Relationship strategies such as responsive service, utilization of social media, provision of loyalty promotions, and consistent communication can increase closeness with consumers and make it easier for consumers to access products. In addition, these strategies have an impact on increasing purchase interest and customer loyalty. Thus, it can be concluded that Customer Relationship strategies play an important role in increasing the accessibility and competitiveness of Pisang Geprek MSMEs amid dynamic market competition.*

Keywords: *Customer Relationship, loyalitas, UMKM.*

INTRODUCTION

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are a strategic sector in the national economy due to their dominant role in employment and their contribution to local economic growth. In urban areas such as Medan, culinary MSMEs are developing dynamically in line with changes in consumption patterns, which are increasingly shifting towards fast food made from local ingredients. One culinary product that shows considerable market potential is pisang geprek (smashed banana), which is widely developed by micro and small MSMEs. However, the increasing number of businesses in this sub-sector has also led to fierce competition,

meaning that the success of MSMEs is not only determined by product quality, but also by the ability of businesses to reach, serve, and retain customers (Sri et al., 2025).

In the context of culinary MSMEs, product accessibility is an important aspect that influences customer purchasing decisions. Accessibility is not only defined as the physical availability of products, but also includes the ease with which customers can obtain information, place orders, receive products, and establish ongoing communication with business actors. However, various studies show that MSMEs still face limitations in managing distribution channels, marketing communications, and the use of information technology, which ultimately impacts their market reach and business sustainability (Yudi, 2018).

One approach that is considered relevant to address this issue is the customer relationship strategy. This strategy emphasizes efforts to build and maintain long-term relationships with customers through understanding their needs, improving service quality, and intensive and continuous communication. The concept of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) does not always have to be implemented in the form of complex technological systems, but can also be realized through a personal approach, direct interaction, and systematic management of customer experience, especially in the context of MSMEs (Lukman & Adler, 2025).

A qualitative approach is important in examining customer relationship strategies in MSMEs because it allows researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and actual practices of business owners and customers. Through this approach, customer relationship strategies are not only viewed as a managerial concept, but as a social process that is formed from daily interactions between MSMEs and their consumers. Previous studies have shown that personal relationships, trust, and informal communication play a significant role in building customer loyalty among culinary SMEs (Cinthya & Simanjuntak, 2024).

However, studies on customer relationship strategies in culinary MSMEs are still dominated by quantitative and general approaches, which have not been able to explore in depth how these strategies are applied in specific sub-sectors. In addition, research that specifically links customer relationship strategies with increased product accessibility—such as ease of ordering, distribution flexibility, and closeness of customer relationships—is still relatively limited, especially among culinary MSMEs in Medan. In fact, the characteristics of local MSMEs and the social relationships between business actors and customers have the potential to influence the effectiveness of these strategies (B.Miles et al., 2014).

Based on these conditions, this study aims to explore and gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of customer relationship strategies in improving product accessibility among banana geprek MSMEs in Medan City. This study uses a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation to explore the forms of customer relationship practices, the perceptions of MSME actors and customers, as well as the supporting and inhibiting factors of its implementation. Through this approach, it is hoped that this study can provide a contextual and empirical understanding of the role of customer relationship strategies in supporting the sustainability and competitiveness of culinary MSMEs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a very important role in the national economy due to their contribution to job creation, income distribution, and strengthening the regional economy. MSMEs are also the backbone of the local economy, especially in the rapidly growing culinary sector in urban areas such as Medan. The growth of culinary MSMEs is driven by increasing public demand for ready-to-eat meals made from locally sourced ingredients that are easily accessible and affordable (Nur, 2024).

One of the culinary products that has grown in popularity among MSMEs is pisang geprek, which is easy to produce, uses abundant raw materials, and has strong appeal for various consumer segments. However, the increasing number of businesses in this sub-sector has led to increasingly fierce competition. This situation requires MSMEs to not only rely on product quality, but also on their ability to build relationships with customers in order to survive and thrive amid market competition (Dini et al., 2025).

Product accessibility is an important factor in determining the success of culinary MSMEs. Accessibility is not only related to the physical availability of products, but also includes the ease with which customers can obtain information, place orders, receive products, and communicate with business owners. MSMEs with good product accessibility tend to find it easier to reach consumers and retain customers in the long term (Revita & Ahmad, 2023)

Various studies show that MSMEs still face obstacles in improving product accessibility. Limited distribution channels, weak marketing communication, and low utilization of information technology are the main obstacles affecting the market reach of MSMEs. This condition makes it difficult for many MSMEs to expand their market and maintain business sustainability, especially for MSMEs operating on a micro and small scale (Adinda et al., 2025).

Customer relationship strategies are one approach that is considered relevant to addressing these issues. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is understood as a business strategy oriented toward building long-term relationships with customers through customer information management, service quality improvement, and effective and sustainable communication. The main focus of CRM is to create value for customers and build sustainable loyalty (Ayu & Vembri, 2025).

In the context of MSMEs, CRM implementation is not always carried out through complex technological systems. Many MSMEs implement simple customer relationship strategies through a personal approach, direct communication, friendly service, and attention to customer needs. This approach is considered appropriate for MSMEs, which have limited resources but are still able to build trust and emotional closeness with customers (Ausgaria & Sari, 2024).

Previous studies have shown that the implementation of customer relationship strategies has a positive effect on customer satisfaction and loyalty. (Faradilla & Moh, 2022) states that CRM can improve the quality of relationships between businesses and customers, which ultimately leads to improved business performance. Another study on culinary MSMEs also found that good relationships with customers can increase repeat purchases and word-of-mouth recommendations (Dewi & Abdul, 2023).

In addition to influencing customer loyalty, customer relationship strategies also play a role in improving product accessibility. Good relationships with customers enable MSME players to understand consumer preferences, adjust ordering channels, and increase product distribution flexibility. Thus, customer access to products becomes easier and more responsive to market needs (Yudastio & Refi, 2024).

However, most research on CRM in MSMEs is still general in nature and focuses more on customer satisfaction and sales performance. Studies that specifically discuss the relationship between the implementation of customer relationship strategies and increased product accessibility are still relatively limited, especially in traditional culinary MSME subsectors such as pisang geprek. In addition, research with a local context in the city of Medan is also rarely found in existing literature (Sugiyono, 2013).

Based on the literature review, it can be concluded that customer relationship strategies have great potential in improving product accessibility and the sustainability of culinary MSMEs. However, further research is needed to examine in depth how these strategies are

implemented by banana geprek MSMEs in Medan, as well as how they affect product accessibility from the perspective of business actors and customers. This research is expected to fill this gap and provide theoretical and practical contributions to the development of culinary MSMEs.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive design to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of customer relationship strategies in improving product accessibility among banana geprek MSMEs in Medan City. A qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to explore the meanings, experiences, and actual practices of MSME actors as well as customer perceptions of product accessibility, which cannot be comprehensively explained through a quantitative approach (Sugiyono, 2022).

The research location was set in Medan City, considering that this area is one of the centers for the development of culinary MSMEs in North Sumatra, including banana geprek MSMEs. The research subjects consisted of banana geprek MSME owners, employees involved in product service and distribution, and customers who regularly make purchases. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, based on specific criteria such as experience in running a business, intensity of interaction with customers, and direct involvement in the marketing and service processes (Nur'aeni & Irma, 2022).

Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews were used to obtain information related to the customer relationship strategies implemented, forms of communication with customers, and efforts made to improve product accessibility. Observations were carried out to directly observe the interactions between MSME actors and customers, the service process, and the product ordering and distribution mechanisms. Documentation was used as supporting data in the form of sales records, promotional media, and archives of communication with customers (Mentari et al., 2023).

Data analysis was conducted qualitatively using an interactive analysis model that included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was carried out by selecting and focusing on data relevant to the research objectives, particularly those related to the implementation of customer relationship strategies and product accessibility. Data presentation was carried out in the form of descriptive narratives to facilitate understanding of the patterns and themes that emerged. Conclusions were drawn continuously throughout the research process to obtain valid and meaningful findings (TRachmat & Rafika, 2025).

The validity of the data in this study was maintained through source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from MSME owners, employees, and customers. Technique triangulation was conducted by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation. In addition, the researcher also conducted member checks with informants to ensure that the data and interpretations produced were in accordance with the informants' experiences and views (TRachmat & Rafika, 2025).

Using a qualitative approach, this study aims to provide an in-depth and contextual understanding of how customer relationship strategies are implemented by banana geprek MSMEs in Medan and their role in improving product accessibility and business sustainability.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study indicate that the implementation of customer relationship strategies in banana geprek MSMEs in Medan City is still largely simple and personal in nature.

MSME players build relationships with customers through direct communication, friendly service, and attention to customer preferences and needs. This intensive interaction allows business players to get to know their customers more closely, creating an emotional bond that encourages repeat purchases. These findings are in line with the view that (Muhammad, 2025) which states that personal relationships are an important element in the implementation of CRM in small businesses.

Based on the interview results, the customer relationship strategy implemented by banana geprek MSMEs includes providing quick responses to orders, flexibility in ordering methods, and willingness to customize products according to customer requests. This practice is considered to be able to increase customer convenience in accessing products, both in terms of information and the ordering process. This supports the findings (Santi & Roberto, 2025) which emphasizes that CRM serves as a means to create added value through customer-oriented services.

The results of the observation show that good relationships with customers have an impact on increasing product accessibility, particularly in terms of distribution. MSME players tend to be more responsive in delivering products to regular customers, including providing priority services and flexible delivery times. This condition shows that customer relationship strategies not only play a role in building loyalty, but also in improving informal and adaptive distribution systems. These findings are in line with research (Suriyanti et al., 2024) which states that long-term relationships with customers can increase the effectiveness of distribution channels.

From the customer's perspective, the interview results revealed that ease of communication and closeness to MSME players were the main factors influencing purchasing decisions. Customers felt more comfortable placing orders because of the trust and open communication. This relationship also encouraged word-of-mouth promotion, which indirectly expanded the MSME market reach. These findings reinforce the research results (Alfia & Hadita, 2023) which shows that the quality of customer relationships affects customer loyalty and recommendations.



Picture 1. Banana Geprek Medan products

However, this study also found several obstacles in the implementation of customer relationship strategies. Limited human resources and a lack of understanding among MSME players regarding the concept of CRM systematically resulted in customer relationship strategies not being managed in a structured manner. Relationships with customers still depend on the experience and intuition of business players, and are therefore not well documented.

Further discussion shows that the application of customer relationship strategies in banana geprek MSMEs in Medan has great potential to increase product accessibility if managed in a more focused manner. The relationships established with customers enable MSME players to obtain direct feedback on product quality, service, and distribution systems. This information can be used to adjust business strategies to better suit market needs.

Overall, the results of the study show that customer relationship strategies play an important role in improving the accessibility of banana geprek MSME products, particularly through increased ease of ordering, distribution flexibility, and ongoing communication with customers. However, for these strategies to be more effective and sustainable, efforts are needed to improve the capacity of MSME actors to manage customer relationships more systematically. These findings have practical implications for the development of culinary SMEs and theoretical contributions to enriching studies on the relationship between customer relationship strategies and product accessibility.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that customer relationship strategies play an important role in improving product accessibility for banana geprek MSMEs in Medan City. The relationships built between businesses and customers through intensive communication, friendly service, and attention to customer needs have proven to make it easier for customers to access products. This strategy is a major supporting factor in maintaining business sustainability amid increasingly fierce culinary competition.

The implementation of customer relationship strategies in banana geprek MSMEs is still mostly done in a simple manner and based on a personal approach. Although not yet systematically integrated, this approach remains effective in building trust and emotional closeness with customers. These good relationships encourage repeat purchases and strengthen customer loyalty, which indirectly expands the market reach of MSMEs.

The results also show that customer relationship strategies contribute to increased product accessibility through ease of ordering and distribution flexibility. MSME players who have close relationships with customers tend to be more responsive to demand and able to tailor services to consumer needs. This makes customers feel more comfortable and assisted in obtaining products, thereby increasing overall satisfaction.

However, this study found several obstacles in implementing customer relationship strategies, particularly related to limited resources and a lack of understanding among MSME actors regarding structured customer relationship management. Customer relationships still depend on the experience and intuition of business actors, so they are not yet documented and managed optimally. This has the potential to limit the effectiveness of these strategies in the long term.

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that customer relationship strategies have great potential to increase product accessibility and support the sustainability of banana geprek MSMEs in Medan. Therefore, efforts are needed to increase the capacity of MSME actors in managing customer relationships more systematically so that the benefits obtained can be sustainable. This research is expected to serve as a basis for the development of culinary MSME management strategies that are more customer-oriented.

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