

Personal Branding Strategy through TikTok in Increasing Interest in Purchasing MSME Products in Medan City

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Abstract. The development of social media has driven the transformation of MSME marketing strategies, including the use of TikTok as an interactive, content-based digital promotion platform. This study aims to analyze the role of personal branding strategies through TikTok in increasing interest in purchasing MSME products in Medan City. The approach used is participatory assistance with stages of needs identification, training and content creation practice, implementation of personal branding strategies, and evaluation of the impact on consumer response. The research subjects are SME actors who actively use TikTok as a promotional medium. The results of the study show that the consistent, authentic, and communicative application of personal branding can increase audience engagement, strengthen the credibility of business actors, and encourage an increase in consumer purchasing interest. The change in communication patterns from one-way promotion to two-way interaction through the comment and live streaming features has proven to strengthen the emotional closeness between MSME actors and consumers. In addition, the increase in the digital literacy of participants also supports the optimization of TikTok features in reaching a wider market. This study concludes that personal branding is an effective digital marketing strategy in strengthening the competitiveness of MSMEs in the creative economy era. These findings have practical implications for MSME players to integrate personal identity into digital marketing strategies, as well as enriching social media-based entrepreneurship studies at the local level.

Keywords: Personal Branding, TikTok, Purchase Interest, MSMEs, Digital Marketing.

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has fundamentally changed the entrepreneurial landscape in Indonesia, including in the city of Medan, one of the economic growth centers in North Sumatra [1]. Digital transformation has encouraged micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to adapt to social media-based marketing patterns. Whereas promotions were previously carried out through conventional methods such as banners, brochures, or word-of-mouth marketing, digital strategies have now become an unavoidable necessity [2].

This change has become increasingly relevant since the rise of internet penetration and social media use among urban communities, especially the younger generation. This phenomenon shows that the competitiveness of MSMEs is no longer determined solely by product quality, but also by their ability to build strong communication and image in the digital space. Among various social media platforms, TikTok has been one of the media that has experienced the most significant growth in recent years [3]. TikTok not only serves as a means of entertainment, but has also developed into a medium for promotion and transactions through features such as live streaming, TikTok Shop, and affiliate systems [4].

The interactive nature of short video content makes marketing messages easier to accept and share. According to Nasrullah (2019) in a study of digital communication, social media shapes a more participatory and dialogical communication pattern, thereby creating a closer relationship between communicators and audiences. In the context of MSMEs in Medan City, many business actors have begun to utilize TikTok to introduce culinary, fashion, and beauty products in a creative and personal way [2].

An interesting phenomenon that has emerged is the shift in the role of MSME players, who are no longer merely sellers but also digital public figures. They appear directly in promotional content, share stories of their business struggles, show the production process, and interact in real time with consumers [5]. This practice reflects the application of a personal branding strategy, which is an effort to build an authentic and consistent self-image in order to be known, trusted, and remembered by the audience [1]. In the context of digital marketing, personal branding is an important element because consumers tend to trust individuals who are considered to have integrity and emotional closeness. Handayani and Rahman (2020) in the Journal of Economics and Management explain that a relationship-based approach (relationship marketing) has a positive influence on consumer loyalty and purchasing interest in small businesses [6].

In Medan, competition among MSMEs is becoming increasingly fierce, especially in the culinary and fashion sectors, which are very popular with the public. Many products have relatively similar characteristics, so differentiation is no longer sufficient in terms of price and quality alone. In this situation, the personal image of the business owner becomes an added value that distinguishes one product from another. Research by Fadli and Nasution (2021) in the *Journal of Community Service and Empowerment* shows that digital literacy and branding strategies have a significant effect on the success of MSME digital transformation. Business owners who are able to package their identity in an attractive way tend to find it easier to build trust and attract consumers' attention [8].

Consumer purchasing interest in the digital environment is influenced by various psychological factors, including perceptions of the credibility of information sources. When MSME players appear consistent, communicative, and demonstrate expertise in their field, consumers will be more confident in the quality of the products offered [9]. Rahmawati and Lubis (2022) in the *Madani Community Service Journal* found that the credibility of communicators has a significant relationship with consumer purchase intent for SME products. This shows that personal branding is not just an image-building effort, but a strategy to build trust that impacts consumer behavior [10].

However, not all MSME players in Medan are able to utilize TikTok optimally. Some still use social media merely as a product showcase without a strong personal narrative [3]. The content produced tends to be monotonous and less interactive, making it difficult to penetrate TikTok's engagement-based distribution algorithm. In fact, the TikTok algorithm provides a great opportunity for creative content to reach a wide audience without high promotional costs. This situation creates a gap between MSMEs that understand personal branding strategies and those that do not [11].

In addition, the communicative and expressive nature of Medan's people is actually a potential social asset in building a strong personal brand. The uniqueness of the dialect, communication style, and cultural closeness can be a unique selling point in digital content. If utilized strategically, these characteristics can create a distinctive identity and strengthen the position of products in the local and national markets. Thus, personal branding through TikTok is not only a marketing strategy, but also part of strengthening local entrepreneurial identity [8].

Based on the description of this phenomenon, it can be understood that personal branding strategies through TikTok play an important role in increasing consumer interest in MSME products in Medan. Although this practice is becoming increasingly popular, scientific studies that specifically examine the relationship between personal branding on TikTok and consumer interest in the local context of Medan are still limited [12]. Therefore, this study is relevant in providing empirical evidence regarding the influence of personal branding strategies on consumer interest. The research findings are expected to provide practical contributions for SME actors in designing more effective digital marketing strategies, while also enriching the literature on digital entrepreneurship at the national level [7].

2. METODOLOGI

This study uses a participatory mentoring approach that places MSME actors as subjects and active partners in the process of strengthening personal branding strategies through TikTok [13]. This approach was chosen because it was considered capable of encouraging direct participant involvement in the learning process and contextual digital marketing practices. According to Mardikanto and Soebiato, the participatory empowerment model is effective in increasing the capacity of business actors because it is oriented towards a collaborative learning process and continuous competency strengthening [14].

The mentoring process is carried out in three main phases, namely the needs identification phase, the training and practice phase, and the evaluation and reflection phase. In the initial phase, brief observations and interviews were conducted with MSME actors in Medan City to identify their level of digital literacy, patterns of social media use, and obstacles in building personal branding [3]. This phase is important to ensure that the mentoring material is tailored to the real needs of the participants. Fadli and Nasution (2021) emphasize that MSME mentoring programs will be more effective if they are based on specific and contextual needs analysis [5].

The second stage consists of technical training and hands-on practice in creating TikTok content that focuses on personal identity formation, message consistency, persuasive communication techniques, and engagement feature optimization. Participants are encouraged to showcase their unique values, business stories, and personal characteristics as part of their branding strategy. This hands-on approach is in line with the findings of Handayani and Rahmanyang, who state that practice-based learning increases business owners' understanding and confidence in implementing digital marketing strategies [15].

The final stage involves evaluation through observation of content development, interaction levels, and audience response as reflected in comments, number of views, and purchase interest. A joint reflection process is carried out to identify changes in participants' digital communication behavior. With this collaborative and

applicable mentoring method, it is hoped that MSME players will not only understand the concept of personal branding, but also be able to implement it sustainably in their digital marketing activities.

2.1 Personal Branding

Personal branding in this study is understood as a strategy to build a consistent, authentic, and valuable image of MSME players on the TikTok platform. This concept emphasizes how individuals represent their identity, expertise, character, and business values so as to form a positive perception in the minds of the audience [3]. In the digital context, personal branding is not only related to visual appearance, but also communication style, business storytelling, and interaction with followers. This approach is relevant to digital communication theory, which states that the emotional closeness and credibility of the communicator influence the audience's trust. Therefore, personal branding in this study is measured through indicators of message consistency, authenticity, content uniqueness, and the quality of interaction with the audience [8].

2.2 TikTok as a Digital Marketing Medium

TikTok is positioned as a digital marketing medium based on short video content and engagement-based distribution algorithms. This platform allows MSME players to build two-way communication through comment features, live streaming, and TikTok Shop [1]. TikTok's interactive and accessible characteristics provide opportunities for businesses to reach a wider market without large promotional costs. According to Handayani and Rahman (2020), the effectiveness of social media in marketing is influenced by the ability of businesses to utilize interactive features to build relationships with consumers. In this study, the use of TikTok was analyzed through the frequency of uploads, content creativity, use of interactive features, and audience engagement levels [5].

2.3 Interest in Purchasing MSME Products

Purchase interest is the psychological tendency of consumers to make a purchase after receiving information stimuli about a product. In the context of digital marketing, purchase interest is influenced by perceptions of source credibility, message appeal, and product relevance to consumer needs. Trust in the communicator has a significant relationship with purchase intent for MSME products. Therefore, in this study, purchase intention is measured through indicators of interest in the product, willingness to try, intention to repurchase, and willingness to recommend the product to others [9].

2.4 Research Stages

This study uses a participatory mentoring approach that is carried out in several systematic stages. The first stage is the identification of needs through observation and interviews with MSME actors in Medan City to determine their level of digital literacy and understanding of personal branding. The second stage is the implementation of training and practice in creating TikTok content that focuses on personal identity formation, persuasive communication techniques, and optimization of interactive features [10]. The third stage was implementation and monitoring, where participants directly applied personal branding strategies to their TikTok accounts. The final stage was evaluation and reflection, which measured developments in engagement, audience response, and changes in purchasing interest based on consumer interactions. Through these stages, this study not only aimed to produce empirical findings but also to provide practical impacts in the form of increasing the capacity of MSME players in managing sustainable digital marketing strategies [3].



Figure 1. Research Stages

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Result

The implementation of assistance for MSME players in Medan City shows a significant change in the way they build marketing communication through TikTok. In the initial observation stage, most participants still used their TikTok accounts solely as a medium for uploading products without strong personal narratives. The content created tended to be descriptive and informative, such as displaying product prices and specifications, but did not highlight the identity or character of the business owner. The level of audience interaction was also relatively low, as indicated by the lack of comments, shares, and increases in the number of followers [4].

After undergoing personal branding training and practice, there has been a change in content presentation patterns. MSME players have begun to appear directly in videos, sharing stories about the production process, business values, and personal experiences in starting a business [2]. Content that was previously one-way has become more communicative and interactive. Some participants utilized live streaming features to interact in real-time with consumers, answer questions, and offer special deals. This change resulted in an increase in views and engagement rates during the mentoring period [7].

From the consumer response perspective, increased purchasing interest was evident through an increase in direct messages inquiring about product details, an increase in the number of clicks on purchase links, and an increase in transactions during the personal branding strategy implementation period [3]. Consumers also showed more positive responses in the comments section, such as providing testimonials, expressing appreciation for the content delivery, and recommending the account to other users. This indicates that a personal branding-based approach is able to build emotional closeness that impacts purchase intent [7].

In addition, participants in the mentoring program showed increased confidence in producing content. They were more consistent in uploading videos, used a more relaxed yet persuasive communication style, and dared to explore their creativity according to their respective characters. This consistency contributed to the formation of a stronger digital identity. Overall, the results of the study show that the personal branding strategy through TikTok has a positive impact on increasing interaction and interest in purchasing MSME products in the city of Medan [9].

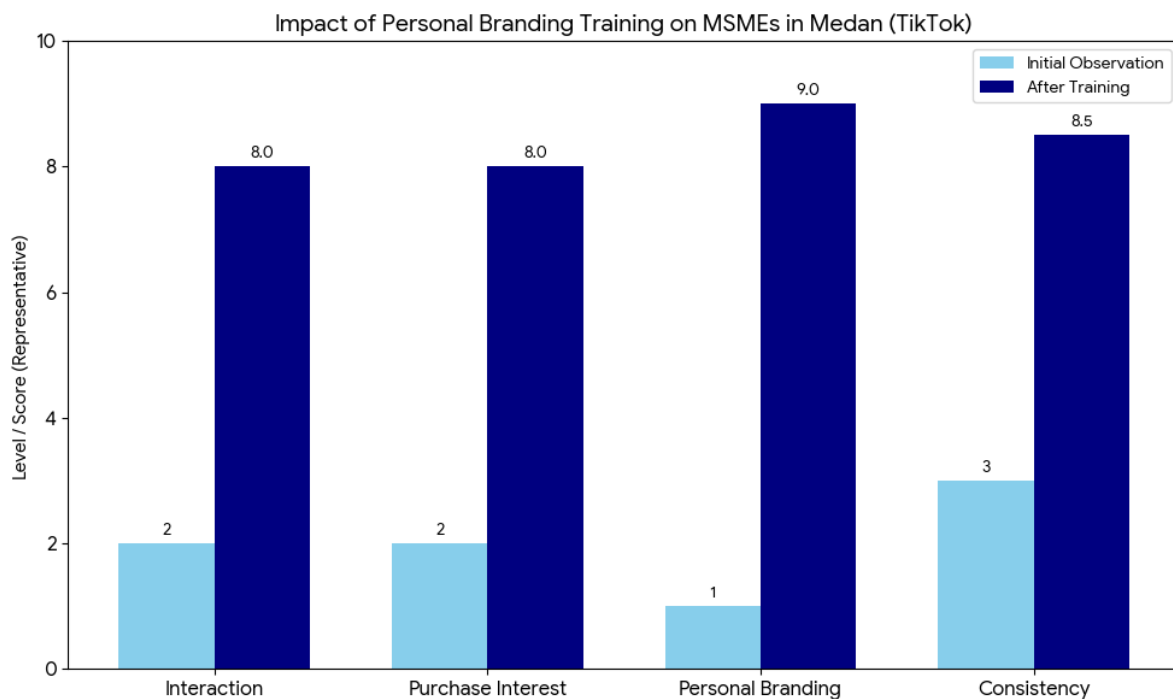


Figure 2. Improvement before and after the Personal Branding Strategy

3.2. Discussion

The findings of this study reinforce the view that personal branding is a strategic element in digital marketing for MSMEs. In the context of TikTok, consumers not only evaluate products in terms of function and price, but also based on their perception of the person behind the product. When business owners are able to present

themselves authentically and consistently, an emotional connection is created that fosters trust. This trust is the main foundation for generating purchasing interest [2].

The results of this study are in line with the concept of relationship marketing, which emphasizes the importance of long-term relationships between sellers and buyers. Two-way interactions through comments and live streaming strengthen consumers' sense of closeness and participation in the business journey [5]. In the context of Medan City society, which is known for being communicative and expressive, a humanistic and interactive personal branding approach has proven to be more effective than formal and rigid promotions. This shows that digital marketing strategies need to be adapted to local social and cultural characteristics [8].

In addition, these findings also show that digital literacy is a supporting factor for successful personal branding. MSME players who understand TikTok's algorithms and are able to manage content consistently tend to reach a wider audience. However, personal branding is not just a matter of technical content production, but rather a process of building an authentic identity. Authenticity is the main differentiator amid highly competitive content. Consumers are more likely to respond to narratives that are honest and relevant to their daily lives than to excessive promotions [6].

From an entrepreneurial perspective, personal branding can be viewed as a form of non-product innovation that strengthens the competitiveness of MSMEs. While product innovation focuses on the quality and differentiation of goods, personal branding focuses on the differentiation of the identity of the business owner. The combination of the two creates added value that is difficult for competitors to imitate. In the long term, this strategy not only increases purchasing interest but also builds customer loyalty [3].

Thus, this discussion confirms that personal branding strategies through TikTok have practical and theoretical implications. Practically, MSME players in Medan need to integrate personal identity into every digital marketing activity. Theoretically, these findings enrich the study of digital entrepreneurship by placing personal branding as a strategic variable in influencing consumer behavior [12]. Moving forward, further research could examine the influence of other variables such as brand trust, content quality, or interaction intensity on purchasing decisions in greater depth [13].

4. CONCLUSION

This study confirms that personal branding strategies through TikTok play a significant role in increasing interest in purchasing MSME products in Medan. The shift in communication patterns from informative promotions to a more personal, authentic, and interactive approach has proven to increase audience engagement and consumer response to the products offered [10]. These findings are in line with Nasrullah's (2019) view that participatory digital communication creates emotional closeness between communicators and audiences, thereby building positive perceptions that impact consumption behavior [15].

In addition, this study shows that personal branding is not merely an image strategy, but rather a process of building credibility and trust. When MSME players consistently present their identity in a manner that is relevant to the values of their business, consumers tend to have a higher level of confidence in the quality of the product. This is supported by the findings of Rahmawati and Lubis (2022), which confirm that the credibility of the communicator has a significant effect on consumers' intention to purchase MSME products. Thus, personal branding can be understood as a strategic instrument in shaping digital trust [11].

From an implementation perspective, the success of this strategy is also influenced by the digital literacy of MSME players. The ability to understand algorithms, utilize interactive features, and maintain content consistency are supporting factors in expanding market reach. Handayani and Rahman (2020) state that the effectiveness of social media marketing is highly dependent on the ability of business players to build sustainable relationships with consumers. Therefore, strengthening digital capacity is an important prerequisite for optimizing personal branding on the TikTok platform [3].

In the context of local entrepreneurship in Medan, the communicative and expressive nature of the community serves as social capital that supports the success of this strategy. The local cultural identity that is naturally displayed in digital content is able to create strong differentiation amid market competition [1]. The digital transformation of MSMEs will be more effective if it is supported by an approach that is contextual and in line with the characteristics of the social environment. Thus, personal branding not only strengthens the image of the business, but also represents local identity as a competitive added value [7].

Overall, this study enriches the study of digital entrepreneurship by placing personal branding as a strategic variable in influencing consumer purchasing interest. This strategy has practical implications for MSME players to not only focus on product innovation, but also on managing their identity in the digital space. In the future, further research can develop a more comprehensive model by including variables such as brand trust, content quality, and customer loyalty to deepen the understanding of the dynamics of MSME digital marketing in the creative economy era [11].

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