

# Visual Design and Digital Storytelling Innovation in Strengthening Brand Identity and Product Appeal for Local Culinary Businesses

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This study examines the challenges of competition and digital adaptation faced by local Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the digital era, focusing on Salad Taza, a culinary MSME in Kediri City. MSMEs play a vital role in the Indonesian economy but often encounter obstacles in marketing, branding, and technological adaptation, especially in the digital realm. The objective of this research is to design and implement a rebranding strategy and digital promotional media through creative content to enhance the competitiveness of Salad Taza MSME. The Participatory Action Research (PAR) method was employed, involving active collaboration with the partner through stages of problem identification, intervention design and implementation (including visual design and digital storytelling training), continuous observation, and participatory reflection and evaluation. The activity results indicate that brand identity updates and optimization of digital content (photos/videos, storytelling) using simple applications (Canva, CapCut) significantly improved Salad Taza's brand awareness and independent promotional capabilities. Social media optimization with a content calendar and relevant keyword usage also contributed to enhanced marketing effectiveness. The implementation of this strategy not only has the potential to increase sales conversion and customer loyalty but also strengthens the MSME's position in a competitive market, demonstrating an effective university-based MSME empowerment model.

**Keywords:** MSME, rebranding, digital marketing, creative content, Participatory Action Research

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## 1. Introduction

Competition across various industrial sectors is intensifying in the current digital era, particularly within the local culinary business. Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) form the backbone of the economy, contributing approximately 61% to Indonesia's GDP and absorbing 97% of its workforce (Limanseto, 2025). Despite this strategic role, MSMEs frequently face challenges in maintaining competitiveness, especially in adapting to technological advancements and the digital market. Low technological literacy and a lack of relevant branding strategies remain the primary obstacles preventing micro-scale enterprises from expanding their market access, making digital transformation a critical necessity rather than an option (Sholikha et al., 2025).

A strong digital presence and an appealing brand identity are crucial for success. However, MSMEs face substantial constraints in branding, as visual design and digital storytelling are essential not only to attract attention but also to build emotional connections. Successful rebranding must encompass more than visual changes; it must build emotional rapport through consistent and engaging communication (Kotler Keller, 2016). In the creative industry, regional flagship products must leverage their local uniqueness to build a strong brand image. Local identity-based branding approach is essential for regional MSMEs to position

themselves as a hub for authentic products, which ultimately enhances their market attractiveness in the digital era (Aeni et al., 2025).

One example of a culinary MSME facing these challenges is Salad Taza, a dessert business established in 2019 in Kediri City. Although it has a loyal market, the research identified several critical initial problems that serve as the basis for this study. First, Salad Taza's brand identity was no longer aligned with its product evolution; the original branding focused strictly on fruit salad, while the business had expanded into various pastry and pudding products. Second, there was a significant gap in digital engagement. Although present on Instagram, the content was merely a "static product catalogue" which failed to trigger customer interaction. This lack of engagement resulted in a low conversion rate where promotional views did not translate into sales.

As Kaplan and Haenlein (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) explain, a successful digital presence depends on authentic, interactive, and consistent storytelling to build relationships with the audience. Furthermore, competition in Kediri's healthy food sector is becoming increasingly fierce, with competitors offering more appealing product presentations. These limitations necessitate a rebranding strategy that includes visual design improvements and higher-quality digital content. This aligns with the *Customer Engagement Theory* by Brodie (For, 2011), which states that active interaction between a brand and customers can increase loyalty and sales conversion.

To address these obstacles, a community service project was launched using a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach. This initiative emphasizes capability development through design training and content workshops, enabling the business to operate independently. This article outlines the methodology, findings, and impact of this program, presenting a prototype of university-based MSME empowerment that integrates academic theory with real-world practice.

## 2. Methods

The Participatory Action Research (PAR) method is highly relevant to the objectives of this research and community service for Salad Taza MSME. PAR is a collaborative approach where researchers and participants (in this case, the owner and team members of Salad Taza MSME) work together in every stage of the research: from problem identification, action planning, implementation, observation, to evaluation and reflection. This approach is based on the principles of empowerment and co-learning, where knowledge is not only generated by the researchers but also collectively constructed with the participants. As Clark (J. Spencer Clark & Julie Thiele, 2020) states, "Action research is a process for improving educational practice. Its methods involve action, evaluation, and reflection. It is a process to gather evidence to implement change in practices." In the context of Salad Taza MSME, the application of PAR will be realized through several crucial stages:

1. Joint Problem Identification (Diagnosis)

This stage involves the community service team and Salad Taza collaboratively conducting Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The aim is to thoroughly explore and understand the problems faced, such as declining sales, minimal digital promotion, unengaging social media content, and intense competition. This ensures that the solutions to be designed are truly relevant to the partner's actual needs.

2. Action Design and Implementation (Intervention)

In this stage, the proposing team will carry out community service activities according to the agreed schedule, bringing the necessary equipment and materials. Training and direct mentoring are provided to the partner in the process of content creation, social media optimization, and marketing strategy implementation. The partner is not merely an object, but also an active agent

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of change.

3. Continuous Observation and Monitoring

During the implementation, the proposing team will conduct regular monitoring and evaluation, both internally and involving the Research and Community Service Institute (LPPM) of UNESA. This observation aims to assess the effectiveness of the actions taken and identify any emerging obstacles.

4. Participatory Reflection and Evaluation

Finally, the team and partner will reflect on the achieved results, evaluating success indicators (e.g., coordination smoothness, content creation, active partner participation, and continuous utilization of promotional media). The results of this evaluation will serve as the basis for preparing the final report and scientific article, as well as for determining future improvement steps.

### 3. Results and Discussion

The primary objective of this community service activity was to assist Salad Taza in Kediri in designing digital promotional media through creative content creation. The implementation resulted in a comprehensive Rebranding Strategy designed to enhance competitiveness through digital assets.

#### Strengthening Brand Identity

A strong brand identity is a fundamental element in building a positive image in the minds of consumers. According to (David A. Aaker, 1996), brand identity elements such as logos, colors, and typography play a significant role in creating high brand recall and providing a "memory anchor" for consumers. In this regard, Salad Taza updated its visual identity to reflect its current business reality.

Initially, Salad Taza's logo (Figure 1) featured only its flagship product, salad. However, as the business evolved, the product line expanded to include puddings and pastries. The redesign was necessary to ensure "brand coherence"—where the visual identity accurately represents the diverse product offerings. By adopting a more professional and versatile logo, Salad Taza now projects a "quality and healthy" value proposition that is more aligned with contemporary culinary trends.



Figure 1: Comparison of Old and New Salad Taza Logos

#### Digital Content Creation for Brand Awareness Improvement

Engaging and high-quality digital content is a key factor in building customer engagement. Brodie in their *Customer Engagement Theory*, argue that customer engagement is a multidimensional process that goes beyond simple transactions to include emotional and cognitive involvement (For, 2011) . In the context of the digital economy, this involvement is further explained by Kotler, Kartajaya, and Setiawan in their framework of *Marketing 4.0*. They posit that in a world of high connectivity, the customer journey shifts from the traditional AIDA model to the 5A's: Aware, Appeal, Ask, Act, and Advocate (Philip Kotler, Hermawan Kartajaya, 2017) . For Salad Taza, digital content creation serves as the primary engine to move customers from "Aware" (knowing the brand) to "Advocate" (recommending the brand).

This theory was operationalized through several strategic content pillars:

a. Quality Photo & Video Content:

Transitioning from amateur shots to professional product photography. The creation of short-form videos (Reels and TikTok) showcasing the "behind-the-scenes" process serves to build consumer trust and transparency. This aligns with the "Human-Centric Marketing" concept in Marketing 4.0, where brands that show a "human" side including their production process are perceived as more authentic and trustworthy.

b. Digital Storytelling

Shifting from a static catalog to narrative-based content. Storytelling plays a crucial role in building a strong brand image by creating deep emotional bonds and forming an emotional experience that sticks in consumers' memories (Suryana, 2024). By sharing the MSME's journey and local values, Salad Taza creates the "emotional evocativeness" necessary to foster long-term loyalty (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). This storytelling approach is crucial in the "Appeal" and "Advocate" stages, where customers are not just buying a product, but a brand story that resonates with their own values. This approach not only presents product information but also gives the brand a unique character that differentiates it from competitors.

By implementing these strategies, Salad Taza leverages "*Content Marketing*" as defined in Marketing 4.0 not as a hard-sell tool, but as a way to provide value and spark conversations that lead to a sustainable community of loyal advocates. The results of the visual branding training for Salad Taza are consistent, which state that increasing digital literacy capacity and storytelling skills significantly enhances the confidence of business owners in managing their online presence (Wicaksana et al., 2025).



**Figure 2:** Example of Instagram Feed Template  
Social Media and Digital Marketing Optimization

Furthermore, for more effective digital promotion, social media optimization must be conducted with a structured strategy. According to Chaffey & Smith (Smith, 2017) in *Digital Marketing Excellence*, the success of digital marketing heavily depends on posting consistency, appropriate keyword usage, and active interaction with customers. In this regard, several important points implemented include creating a content calendar for consistent posting, writing captions and descriptions with keywords relevant to customer searches, and using appropriate hashtags.

To deepen this strategy, the communication approach used by Salad Taza refers to the integrated marketing communication principles outlined by (Firmansyah, 2020). In his book *Komunikasi Pemasaran*, Firmansyah emphasizes that marketing communication in the digital era is not just about delivering information, but about creating a "brand experience" that is consistent across all touchpoints. For Salad Taza, this was implemented by ensuring that the tone of voice and visual aesthetics on Instagram, WhatsApp, and offline interactions remained synchronized.

Effective digital promotion requires a structured strategy rather than sporadic posting. According to Chaffey & Smith (Smith, 2017), digital marketing excellence is achieved through the integration of the "5Ss" (Sell, Serve, Speak, Save, Sizzle). This was implemented at Salad Taza through:

1. Consistency: The use of a content calendar (Table 1) to maintain the "Speak" element—ensuring the brand remains top-of-mind.
2. SEO & Keywords: Writing captions with relevant keywords to improve searchability within Instagram’s algorithm.
3. Interaction: Encouraging two-way communication to "Serve" and "Sizzle," turning followers into an active community

**Table 1:** Example Digital Content Calendar

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Brand Introduction & Teaser	New Visual Identity & Product Showcase	Storytelling & Engagement	Product Expansion & Initial Promotion
Focus on announcing the rebranding and building anticipation. Example content: Short teaser videos/animations, interactive polls, behind-the-scenes snippets, team introductions, and countdown to launch.	Launch the new logo and visual identity. Showcase core Salad Buah products with the refreshed brand. Example content: Animated videos/images revealing the new logo, professional product photos and videos, infographics on features and benefits, customer testimonial videos or quotes, and calls to action.	Share the brand story, discuss product benefits, and present interactive content. Example content: Narrative videos about Salad Taza's founding story, infographics on fruit benefits, live Q&A sessions or polls for audience interaction, and educational videos on health tips.	Highlight other products like Vegetable Salad and Cookies, and launch initial promotions or giveaways. Example content: Professional product photos for vegetable salads, puddings, and cookies, discount promo announcements, collaborative content with local influencers, and giveaway announcements.

**Table 2.** Summary of The Observed Outcomes

Domain	Outcome	Supporting Research
Brand Identity Strengthening	Increased brand awareness and formation of a positive image.	Aaker, 2014
Digital Content Creation for Brand Awareness Improvement	Business owners can independently create content with the help of applications like Canva, CapCut, and others.	Brodie et al., 2011
Social Media and Digital Marketing Optimization	Improved skills in social media management and digital promotion.	Chaffey & Smith, 2017

### Sustainability and Participatory Reflection

The success of this strategy is not merely reflected in increased awareness but also in its sustainability. The empowerment approach aligns with the principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR). As noted by Clark (J. Spencer Clark & Julie Thiele, 2020), PAR focuses on cyclical improvement and capacity building. By mastering digital tools, the owner of Salad Taza has moved from a passive recipient of aid to an active innovator.

This self-sufficiency ensures that the impact of the community service is lasting. Beyond direct sales, the initiative fostered "E-loyalty" a concept where the combination of a strong identity and engaging digital presence builds a "secret weapon" of trust in the fierce competition of Kediri’s healthy culinary industry (Reichheld & Scheffer, 2000).

### 4. Conclusion

Based on the results and discussion, it can be concluded that a rebranding strategy and digital promotion optimization through creative content are crucial steps for culinary MSMEs like Salad Taza to enhance competitiveness in the digital era. The Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach proved effective in

empowering the partner, not only by providing immediate marketing solutions but also by significantly increasing the partner's capacity to manage brand identity and digital content independently.

The updated logo and visual identity, accompanied by the production of high-quality photo/video content and digital storytelling, successfully strengthened brand awareness and built deeper emotional connections with consumers. Training in the use of accessible design applications like Canva and CapCut equipped the Salad Taza team with sustainable skills for continuous promotion. Furthermore, social media optimization through content calendars and strategic keyword usage improved marketing effectiveness. This university-based empowerment model serves as a vital prototype for supporting local economic growth by integrating academic theory with practical MSME needs.

Despite the positive outcomes, the researchers acknowledge certain limitations that provide opportunities for future study. First, this study focused on a short-term intervention; therefore, future research should employ a longitudinal approach to measure the long-term impact of rebranding on actual sales growth and Return on Investment (ROI). This aligns with the findings of Lady et al. (2025), who emphasize that while digital marketing optimization significantly improves promotional reach, continuous tracking and measurement are essential to ensure strategic effectiveness over time (Meilani & Cuandra, 2025). Second, as this study was limited to a single MSME in the culinary sector, future community service projects could expand the scope to larger MSME clusters. Furthermore, following the inclusive model suggested by Wicaksana et al. (2025), future initiatives should also consider targeting diverse entrepreneur groups, such as those managed by persons with disabilities, to foster a more inclusive digital economy. Finally MSMEs must remain adaptive to the Industry 4.0 era by not only creating content but also utilizing data-driven insights to refine their social media marketing strategies.

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