

KEY PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY AS AN EFFORT TO IMPROVE BUSINESS EFFICIENCY AND COMPETITIVENESS IN MEDAN CHEESE DIMSUM MSMEs

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Abstract: *This study aims to determine the Key Partnerships strategy as an effort to improve business efficiency and competitiveness in the Cheese Dimsum MSME in Medan. This research approach uses a qualitative approach. Data collection techniques in this study used observation and interviews. The results show that the Key Partnerships strategy as an effort to increase efficiency is carried out through optimizing partnerships with suppliers, distributors, and digital marketing channels, which will increase resource availability, reduce production costs, and expand the market.*

Keywords: *Key Partnerships, Competitiveness, and MSMEs*

Introduction

MSMEs are a crucial pillar of the Indonesian economy, particularly in their role in creating jobs and stimulating local economic activity. MSMEs in the culinary sector face increasingly fierce competition due to the increasing number of businesses and consumer preferences for more innovative ready-to-eat foods. This situation forces MSMEs to improve operational efficiency to survive in an increasingly competitive market (Sugiarti et al., 2025). A more relevant strategic solution for MSMEs to address these growing challenges is to enhance partnerships, which are crucial for more effective business operations (Bisri, 2024). One particularly interesting MSME to study is the Medan Cheese Dimsum MSME, which operates in the highly competitive food business but faces resource limitations that can hinder its effectiveness.

Despite the market he described as profitable, the Medan Cheese Dimsum MSME still faces several operational challenges that impact its efficiency and competitiveness in the market. These challenges include raw material waste, variable supplier costs, and an inability to utilize technology in production and distribution. Furthermore, the company is still far from leveraging other key strategic strengths, both in collaboration with key suppliers and with digital platforms. This crucial issue has sparked debate about the application of key collaboration strategies related to efficiency and competitiveness in the dynamic culinary sector.

This study aims to identify and analyze the main partnership strategies implemented by Medan Cheese Dimsum MSMEs to improve operational efficiency and business competitiveness. Specifically, this study will review the most relevant forms of partnerships and their contribution to reducing production costs, optimizing the supply chain, and expanding the

marketing network. Furthermore, this study will develop a partnership strategy model that can be used as a reference for other culinary MSMEs in building business sustainability amidst increasingly fierce industry competition. Most studies on improving MSME competitiveness still focus on marketing, product innovation, and capital aspects, while the aspect of strategic partnerships as an effort to improve operational efficiency has not been studied in depth (Sugiantoro & Hakimah, 2025).

Meanwhile, in the food sector, most studies focus on menu innovation and service quality; therefore, studies related to the implementation of partnerships as a core strategy remain gaps. Studies on the implementation of culinary MSMEs in the local Medan context are also still minimal, particularly small businesses based on processed foods such as dim sum. This suggests the need for research specifically analyzing partnership strategies as a solution to efficiency and competitiveness issues.

This study makes a unique contribution by integrating the analysis of key aspects of partnership strategy into the Business Model Canvas approach for the simultaneous analysis of the efficiency and competitiveness of culinary MSMEs. This study also provides a theoretical contribution by broadening the understanding of the importance of partnership as a strategic issue for MSME sustainability, in contrast to its role as an operational support issue. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that this study makes a unique contribution by offering a partnership strategy framework that can be adapted by other MSMEs to address other challenges they face. This means that this study helps fill the literature gap while creating a strong foundation for MSMEs.

Literature Review

Partnership strategies have become a key integral part of improving the efficiency and competitiveness of MSMEs, many of which operate with limited resources. In business model theory, key partnerships are described as "a network of suppliers and partners that is an integral part of the business model." Strategic relationships between companies and external agents are created to support core business activities, reduce operational risk, and maximize resources. This provides businesses with access to critical resources, capabilities, and networks that are difficult to develop on their own. In culinary MSMEs, strategic partnerships also play a role in overcoming various challenges, particularly in terms of capital, technology, and market access (Alhafidz et al., 2025).

Collaboration significantly supports the development of MSMEs through knowledge sharing, innovation, and operational improvements. Through collaborative relationships, MSMEs will have greater adaptability to changing consumer preferences and competitive market conditions. In the culinary industry, collaborations are often carried out with suppliers, distribution services, digital platforms, and promotional partners. This collaboration ensures a broader market and stronger visibility for MSME brands. In the case of the Medan Cheese Dimsum MSME, collaboration with raw material suppliers, food delivery platforms, and digital marketing partners will support the business's sustainability and market expansion in an increasingly competitive environment (Nurhidayah et al., 2025).

Business efficiency is considered a crucial determinant of MSME sustainability because it indicates the extent to which a company is able to maximize output while minimizing costs and resource use. Key partnership strategies enhance efficiency through streamlined supply chains, reduced production costs, and increased distribution effectiveness. Strategic partnerships, for example, involve collaborating with reliable suppliers who can ensure consistent quality and stability of raw materials and other inputs at stable prices. Furthermore, collaboration with

logistics and delivery services will increase the speed and reliability of business operations (Indiana, 2024). In the case of the Medan Cheese Dimsum MSME, strategic partnerships will allow the business to focus on its core activities such as product development and customer service, while simultaneously supporting efforts towards operational efficiency through external collaboration.

The competitiveness of MSMEs is closely related to their ability to create and maintain competitive advantage. A favorable position can be achieved through product differentiation, cost efficiency, service quality, or innovation. Key partnerships are a source of competitive advantage because they provide access to superior inputs, specialized expertise, and innovative marketing channels. Businesses in the culinary industry benefit from these partnerships by being able to maintain consistent product quality, develop differentiated products, or simply provide faster and more reliable service (Wulandari et al., 2025). The Medan Cheese Dimsum MSME can use strategic partnerships as a means to enhance product differentiation and improve customer satisfaction with the aim of achieving a more favorable competitive position in the market.

Yulisnawati (2025) states that implementing a key partnership strategy in the culinary business requires careful partner selection, clear communication, and long-term commitment. Successful partnerships require mutual trust, shared goals, and a sustainable collaborative framework. In practice, MSMEs in the culinary sector implement partnerships in the form of long-term supplier agreements, collaboration with digital food delivery platforms, and participating in promotional activities using social media. For the Medan Cheese Dimsum MSME, effective strategy implementation is expected to improve business efficiency, expand market access, and enhance competitiveness. Thus, a key partnership strategy is vital in supporting the growth and sustainability of MSMEs involved in the culinary industry.

Method

This study uses a qualitative descriptive research design to examine key partnership strategies as a means to improve business efficiency and competitiveness in the Medan Cheese Dimsum MSME. A qualitative approach is deemed appropriate because this study seeks to delve deeper into the forms of partnerships that have been developed, their roles in the production and distribution processes, and their contribution to operational performance. By emphasizing real-world business practices and stakeholder experiences, this approach allows for a proper understanding of how partnership strategies are implemented and managed in the context of small businesses.

This research was conducted at the Medan Cheese Dimsum MSME (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise) because it is an active partnership-based business. The business activities examined in this study are naturally occurring, allowing researchers to capture real-life interactions between the business and its partners. Data collection was conducted over a predetermined research period to provide in-depth observation and interaction with the participants.

Primary data was obtained through in-depth interviews and direct observation. Interviews with key informants, including the business owner, employees, suppliers, distributors, and partners involved in digital marketing and online food delivery platforms, were conducted. These informants were selected purposively due to their direct involvement and knowledge of the partnership strategies implemented by the business. Observations of production activities, supply procurement, distribution mechanisms, and marketing processes were conducted to understand how partnerships impact daily operations and efficiency.

Data were analyzed using a qualitative analysis process through reduction, presentation, and drawing conclusions. Interview transcripts and observation notes were systematically reviewed to identify recurring patterns, themes, and relationships related to the role of partnerships, cost efficiency, resource availability, and competitive advantage. The findings were interpreted by the empirical data by linking them to theoretical perspectives on key partnerships, operational efficiency, and MSME competitiveness. Data triangulation was used to strengthen the information and ensure the credibility and validity of the data by comparing interview data with observation data and supporting documents on business operations and partnership issues. This will test the validity of the conclusions and provide an in-depth explanation of how effective partnership management contributes to greater efficiency and competitiveness in the Medan Cheese Dimsum MSME.

Result And Discussion

The research results show that the Key Partnership Strategy is crucial in improving operational efficiency and competitiveness at Dimsum Lumer Medan. This is because partnerships provide a sustainable supply of raw materials. Furthermore, through collaboration with delivery companies, they are able to reach a wider market. These elements are crucial in helping the company lower costs, improve service, and strengthen its position in the local culinary industry.

This study validates the literature's assertion that key partnerships are a crucial aspect of MSME businesses, as proposed by the Business Model Canvas application. Increased operational efficiency with supply chain stability and reduced production costs align with Porter's proposed value chain, where supplier synergy is crucial for sustainable value capture (Siregar et al., 2025). This study also validates previous literature that strategic partnerships are effective in enhancing MSME competitiveness by leveraging external resources, technology, and markets. Therefore, the implication of these findings is that a partnership approach is not only appropriate for addressing resource deficits but also crucial for promoting MSME sustainability in the culinary business.



The research findings show that several key partnership strategies effectively contribute to improving operational efficiency and the competitiveness of Medan Cheese Dimsum MSMEs. Partnerships with suppliers, online platforms, logistics companies, or the community are evident, ensuring supply stability, reducing production costs, accelerating production logistics, and enhancing business promotion. This demonstrates that the sustainability of culinary MSMEs in a competitive market relies heavily on collaboration.

Conclusion

The key partnership strategies that improve business efficiency and competitiveness in the Medan Cheese Dimsum MSME are summarized here. The results demonstrate that effective partnership management with suppliers, distributors, and digital marketing platforms provides full resource utilization, creates cost efficiencies, and results in improved market expansion. Strategic collaboration for a business leads to simplified production processes, reduced operational costs, and increased distribution effectiveness, which directly support overall operational performance.

This study further shows that sound partnership management enhances the competitiveness of MSMEs through product consistency, service reliability, and market responsiveness. Partnerships not only serve as an operational support mechanism for small businesses but also serve as strategic assets, enabling adaptation to a competitive market environment. This is particularly true because the integration of digital marketing and online delivery platforms has increased customer visibility and accessibility, thereby strengthening businesses' competitive advantage.

This research, in general, strongly emphasizes the fact that key partnerships are a strategic path to sustainability for MSMEs. Through maximum collaboration and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships, small businesses will be efficiently enhanced in strengthening their competitiveness for long-term business sustainability in an increasingly dynamic and competitive market environment.

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