



## Analysis of Integrated Marketing Communication Strategies in Building Brand Awareness During Pandemic (Case Study : Rajutan Nyonya SME, Semarang)

<sup>1</sup>Arauna Wangsa Elsha Dara and <sup>2</sup>Lina Sinatra Wijaya

<sup>1,2</sup>Public Relations, Faculty Information Technology, Satya Wacana Christian University  
Jl.Diponegoro No. 52-60, Kota Salatiga, Jawa Tengah, 50711, Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

The pandemic period had an impact on the economic sector in Indonesia, which experienced a decline in sales, especially for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). In contrast to the Rajutan Nyonya Semarang, which has succeeded in developing its business through innovations carried out by implementing an integrated marketing communication strategy. The implementation of this strategy can build public brand awareness of the product. This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach and SWOT analysis. The aim is to find out the marketing communication strategies used by Rajutan Nyonya Semarang in building brand awareness during the pandemic. The results in this study are the application of marketing communication concepts which consist of Direct Marketing, Sales Promotion, Public Relations, Personal Selling, Advertising, Word of Mouth Marketing (WOM), and Event and Experiences. In the interactive marketing strategy, Rajutan Nyonya Semarang has not utilized it optimally on social media. The results of interviews with informants show that the brand of Rajutan Nyonya has been at the Top of Mind level. Referring to the results of the study, it can be concluded that the implementation of an integrated marketing communication strategy carried out by Rajutan Nyonya Semarang to build brand awareness has been successful. This can be achieved because of the strength of recommendations from the community and efforts in satisfying customers through quality products and excellent service. However, there are suggestions for the business owner to be more active in using features on social media and broaden knowledge about digital media.

**E-mail:**  
[araunawangsaelsadara@gmail.com](mailto:araunawangsaelsadara@gmail.com)

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### 1. Introduction

The pandemic that occurred in Indonesia caused all sectors to experience a decline. It is no exception for business sector activities which have been hampered due to the spread of the infectious virus and the government's Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB) policy. The impact felt was not only a decrease in sales but a significant loss stage. According to the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), in July 2020, 82.5% of business actors experienced a decrease in income due to the pandemic (Saumi, 2020). The virus that is increasingly widespread makes entrepreneurs switch to selling online. Not all people have not used digital media as a tool to fulfill their needs. It can be seen from Global Web Index data, which states that 88% of Indonesians actively buy products through digital media, and the remaining 12% of people still make purchases offline (Nurdian, 2020). These problems become a challenge for every business person to innovate his business.

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Central Java are also facing a similar situation. The decreasing turnover is experienced by business owners, especially in handicrafts (Saputra, 2020). Various strategies have been carried out to maintain its existence during a pandemic. However, sometimes, the efforts have not reached the target in reality. It is different from one of the SMEs in Semarang, Central Java, namely Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang. During the pandemic, these SMEs could adapt to innovations in making knitted masks (Arif, 2020). Masks with various motifs and models can attract people's attention and become an opportunity to survive and continue their business without reducing employees. Success cannot be separated from implementing the right integrated marketing communication strategy to building public brand awareness. Philip Kotler and Gary Armstrong (2001) in Prasetyo et al. (2018) state that integrated marketing communication is a company that integrates communication channels to provide clear, consistent, and convincing messages about its products. Offering masks and other knitted products by utilizing the concept of integrated marketing communications, Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang products can be used as the primary choice. They can compete with other competitors during the pandemic. The marketing communication strategies in question include Direct Marketing, Sales Promotion, Public Relations, Personal Selling, Advertising, Word of Mouth Marketing (WOM), Events and Experiences, and Interactive Marketing (Firmansyah, 2020). The implementation of these programs can help SMEs in developing their business. If the marketing communication program is adequately integrated, it will foster brand awareness and customer interest. Brand awareness is a brand that appears in customers' minds and has four levels, namely Unaware of Brand, Brand Recognition, Brand Recall, and Top of Mind, to find out how far the memory and introduction of the product are (Ramadayanti, 2019).

In previous research on the topic of research, the marketing communication strategy of Batik Gonggong "Lawana" Tanjung Pinang in building brand awareness stated that a marketing communication strategy was carried out, namely advertising, face-to-face selling, public relations, sales promotion, and direct marketing to form public awareness (Nur, 2017). Accompanied by using the three main steps of Segmentation, Targeting, and Positioning, a business can run effectively and efficiently. Relevant research also discusses marketing communication strategies for Kopi Kawa Daun Tanah Datar products in building brand awareness, revealing that the marketing communication activities that have been implemented aim to communicate their products (Endri & Prasetyo, 2021). Advertising strategies, sales promotions, publicity, personal selling, and direct and online marketing have succeeded in raising awareness, and product brands can be embedded in people's minds. Meanwhile, this study will analyze eight integrated marketing communication strategies at Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang in building brand awareness during the pandemic using SWOT analysis techniques. Due to the target customers aged 30 years and over who have not used the marketplace as a purchasing medium, the strategy is more directly applied and social media.

Seeing the number of SMEs that have gone out of business due to the pandemic, an in-depth research is needed to implement forms of marketing communication strategies. Through careful planning and implementation of the program, the goal of brand awareness will be achieved. So, based on the background described, this research aims to identify and describe the integrated marketing communication strategy Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang implemented to maintain its business continuity during the pandemic by building public brand awareness. Analyzing business strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats can be used as an evaluation for planning different programs or activities.

## 2. Methods

Referring to the research topic to be carried out, the author uses a qualitative descriptive research method. Research with a qualitative approach is descriptive in the form of words and language, tends to use analysis, and processes and meanings are more highlighted, aiming to understand the phenomena of what is experienced by research subjects, such as behaviour, perception, motivation, action, and others (Hermawan, 2019). The research design used is a case study, which provides an in-depth and detailed description of a situation or object (Nurdin & Hartati, 2019). So, in this study, we will explain

in-depth and detailed integrated marketing communication strategies at Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang to build brand awareness during the pandemic.

The research location was held at Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang, having the address Dolog Indah Housing Number 15, Tlogosari Wetan Village, Pedurungan District, Semarang, 50196. The location choice was due to the uniqueness of Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang, which was able to survive and build brand awareness of its products during a pandemic. The pandemic season has impacted some of Semarang's SME owners and went out of business, but this did not apply to the Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang. The resource persons in this study were Ms Ratih Setyaningrum, the Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang owner. Then, other informants, namely from 20 customers and the Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang community, were categorized by age.

Data collection techniques used are semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation to collect the required information data. Interview techniques were carried out directly in the field and through online media. There is an observation activity on implementing the marketing communication strategy used by Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang. Documentation techniques are needed as complementary data so that research can be trusted and authentic. The data analysis technique uses the SWOT analysis technique, which goes through three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion (Siyoto & Sodik, 2015). SWOT analysis was carried out to analyze various internal and external factors in Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang.

### 3. Results and Discussion

Every success achieved by Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang is closely related to implementing various strategies, especially in integrated marketing communications, to build brand awareness during the pandemic. Observations and interviews were carried out with the owners of the Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang, and the following is a presentation of the research results obtained to find out the strategies used:

#### 3.1 Direct Marketing

All information and product offers are uploaded using social media features in direct marketing activities, including Instagram Feed, Instagram Story, and Whatsapp status. Each side of the product is displayed in detail with detailed photos and interesting captions. It shows the awareness built through photo uploads. It offers sentences that support customers in making purchases, especially on Instagram, one social media that prioritizes photo visualization to support marketing communications (Widyaningrum, 2016). The advantages of the photo upload feature you have can be used to attract customers' attention, accompanied by persuasive offers through captions (Ramadan & Fatchiya, 2021). Therefore, visual photos have an essential role in increasing brand awareness (Sarastuti, 2017). The appearance of attractive product photos can also form a positive image for SMEs (Christiani, 2020). The positive image formed will create a business opportunity to increase customer product demand.

On the Instagram feeds of @rajutannyonya (see Figure 1), there are responses from followers in the comments section in the form of questions about products or giving praises to the product information.



Figure 1 One of the customer comment on @rajutannyonya Instagram feed

It can be seen that the emergence of two-way communication exists and the process of offering directly to customers. Two-way communication patterns occur between communicators and communicants who provide reciprocal responses (Valdiani & Puspanidra, 2020). The emergence of a direct reaction from customers is part of a marketing strategy that aims to obtain the desired response (Ramadhan et.al, 2020). The role of social media as a marketing communication tool can be a bridge between owners and customers. Especially during the pandemic, social media helps SMEs carry out their marketing activities effectively and open up opportunities to increase sales without being limited by distance and time (Wahyuningrum & Riskiyah, 2021).

In addition to notification of information and offers on social media, customer data management is implemented as a direct marketing strategy. The collection and processing of each customer data in which there is a communication and close relationship accompanied by product offerings can foster customer interest and the possibility of becoming loyal customers. However, to achieve this level of loyalty, business owners must consistently make notifications and remind them of the product's existence. These activities are carried out to build brand awareness and avoid the possibility of product offerings from competitors. Utilization of the concept of database management is also carried out to reach and expand customers (Novalia, 2020). Getting potential customers and interacting directly and efficiently is an opportunity for SMEs to build brand awareness of the product. It can be carried out with direct marketing strategies, namely the database strategy and the front-end concept response (Duncan, 2003). The strategy that takes place from customer data that has been obtained then provides product offers and rational responses to customers. The direct marketing strategy is also implemented when offering specific products to unique customers actively making purchases. The direct marketing method with target customers is related to direct marketing as a marketing process. The person or organization that carries out marketing communicates directly with specific target consumers to generate a response and can increase customer interest in achieving purchasing behaviour (Putra et.al, 2021).

### 3.2 Sales Promotion

In the sales promotion strategy, Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang attracts its customers by providing discounts or product discounts. Bidding activities are carried out online on social media through status features or private messages. The concept of sales promotion within a relatively short period has been determined to be an advantage for the seller to accelerate the sale of products and affect the increase in sales results (Lestari, 2015). Holding special offers on certain days, such as giving discounts on customers' birthdays, will foster a sense of loyalty and take immediate action to own the products offered. Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang developed a promotional program with gifts for every product purchase and bonuses for a particular minimum purchase. The prizes or bonuses are in the form of masks, brooches, coin purses, or other knitting accessories. This statement was confirmed by the results of an interview with one of the customers as an informant, namely Ms Iin, 46 years old, who explained that:

*"Biasanya ya potongan harga berapa persen, kalo misalkan kita beli tas atau apa pasti dapat free, freenya apa ya kayak ee bros kayak masker gitu (Usually, how much is the discount, for example, if we buy a bag or something, we will definitely get it for free, what is free, like bros, like a mask.)"* (interviewed on January 10, 2022)

The strategic practice that has been going on shows that there is a use of sales promotion tools to attract prospective customers and existing customers (Sumawidjaya & Garini, 2016). Coupled with paying attention to customers, it can grow opportunities to immediately have the product offered and become loyal customers (Robinette & Brand, 2001). Using promotional tools is also obtained through communication, incentives, and invitations (Devica, 2019). When the sales promotion strategy is carried out through careful planning stages and realized to the maximum, it can build brand awareness and increase sales figures (Susanto & Sari, 2020).

### 3.3 Public Relations

The Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang's Public Relations (PR) strategy is carried out through social media owned by observing every customer's daily activities on Whatsapp and Instagram status uploads. A direct greeting will be given via private message if a special event such as a birthday or an accident. In

addition, there are Broadcast Messages on certain days, for example, Ramadan or Christmas, as a form of more attention to customers. These activities show that as a communicator, there is interaction to build closeness with the public in the form of reactions and responses given (Kuen, 2019). There is a role of the communication facilitator in reciprocal relationships to influence from an emotional point of view in a positive response and foster a sense of trust in one another (Widyastuti, 2017). It creates positive impressions and opinions that impact the excellent image of the Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang. When a positive image is embedded in customers' minds, they get opportunities to increase product loyalty (Dipura, 2016). Maintaining relationships is also carried out when responding to existing complaints. Although it rarely happens, Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang still prioritizes open and solution services to maintain customer satisfaction. These actions practice the role of public relations, namely as a facilitator of the problem-solving process that handles from the beginning of the problem until the evaluation stage (Sitepu, 2011). Overcoming the problem will increase customer trust and not rule out the opportunity to make a repeat purchase of the product.

In addition to customers, there is one part and function of public relations: establishing relations with the government (Government Relations) (Kasali, 2000). Maintaining relations with the government can be done through participation in every activity held (see Figure 2), for example, training, workshops, and other programs.



Figure 2 FGD Activities for Consolidating SME Exports from the Kemenkop of SME

The benefits obtained are in the form of marketing opportunities and product promotions. You can then expand your network and reach a broader market through these benefits. Moreover, it can also impact all business licensing processes, which will be faster and easier. If there are obstacles or problems, they will get protection (Kasali, 2000). When actively involved in every government activity, there will be publicity about the existence of a business (see Figure 3).



Figure 3 One of the publications in the Central Java Tribune mass media

Because this publication can build brand awareness and a positive image that can increase sales results (Kotler & Armstrong, 2008), opportunities will be obtained through more widely recognized products, and businesses will grow. When a business has developed, it will impact the community's economy by involving human resources from the surrounding environment in the production of products.

### 3.4 Personal Selling

After the policy from the government is informal, face-to-face sales activities with customers can be carried out. The bidding and buying process occurs at the SME Knitting Nyonya Semarang location. The owner takes a personal approach through intense interaction about their products. It can be seen that there is a form of service to customers who come to the business location called Retail Selling (Saladin, 2007). There is two-way communication that occurs between the seller and the buyer. The closeness is built through reciprocal interactions with customers. The relationship between the seller and the buyer is not just a sale interest but can gradually reach the stage of friendship (cultivation) (Priansa, 2017). Interactive communication is carried out to dig deeper into the wants and needs of a product. When the product is in demand, the customer will feel satisfied and create a good rating. Efforts to satisfy customers mean that customer loyalty can be achieved (Kurriwati, 2017). After achieving the purpose of the sales, the final step that has been taken is to maintain customer satisfaction by reconfirming the product received. Whether it is in line with expectations, to get opportunities through purchase stimuli in large quantities which have an impact on sales results (follow up) (Kotler & Amstrong, 2016). It builds brand awareness and a positive customer image and fosters trust in the product (Wahid & Puspita, 2017). The suitability of the products and services provided can be a distinct advantage for a business.

### 3.5 Advertising

Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang uses print advertising media in leaflets (see Figure 4) compared to other media such as billboards, newspapers, or magazines. Good sales results and products that are artisanal or not produced on a large scale are the reasons for their selection. SME owners provide leaflets and give them to potential customers at every exhibition activity.



Figure 4 Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang's Leaflet

Based on this, it can be seen that there is the use of below-the-line advertising to introduce the products offered. The use of leaflets as advertising media aims to provide product information, create brand awareness, persuade customers to make purchases, change perceptions with unique sales, strengthen consumer attitudes, serve as reminders of products, and shape the brand, corporate, and product images (Anggiani, 2018). The design characteristics, product display, and service information presented will get a positive assessment for a business. It can be a differentiator from competitors and an opportunity to gain consumer interest. However, weaknesses were found in leaflet media: the high cost of printing, requiring a long printing process, and quickly being damaged or lost if not cared for (Arsyad, 2014). Thus, it is necessary to pay attention to leaflets as an advertising medium.

### 3.6 Word of Mouth Marketing (WOM)

The existence of the Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang has grown with the help of disseminating information from customers to those closest to them. Customers express their satisfaction with the purchased products directly and through social media. It is in line with the results of an interview with 51 years old Ms Ririn as a customer who said:

*"Kalo pas lagi make, trus ada temen yang, kok bagus ya, nggone sopo (punya siapa), trus saya bilang ini saya belinya disini, trus saya paringi (berikan) nomernya, monggo*

*(silahkan) menghubungi pribadi..saya selalu posting di status, masker by Rajutan Nyonya trus saya paringi (berikan) nomer Hpnya (When I am using it, then there is a friend who, how good is it, whose own, then I say I bought this here, then I give the number, please contact personally. I always post on my social media, mask by Rajutan Nyonya then I will give the phone number...)" (interviewed on January10, 2022)*

The WOM concept that has occurred indicates a discussion about a product in a conversation between individuals that goes naturally or is called the Organic Word of Mouth. At the direct meeting, there is a communication process by providing information and product recommendations for the primary choice. While on social media, customers will upload product photos and write captions and business name tags in the status feature (see Figure 5).



**Gambar 5** Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang's customer testimony

This activity is a development of WOM, which uses internet media to provide positive and negative information about a product brand (e-WOM) (Sandes & Urdan, 2013). A form of recommendation can lead to a new understanding of a product brand from the information provided. The power of recommendations increases potential customers' trust and buying interest (Damayanti, 2019). Word of mouth can be taken by customers and effectively build brand awareness and increase sales figures to satisfy customers through their products and services (Hasan, 2010). Met expectations will allow customers to return to make purchases and demonstrate their loyalty to the product.

### 3.7 Events and Experiences

Activities are held to take place both online and offline. Through support from the government, Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang takes advantage of the facilities provided, such as live and virtual exhibitions (see Figure 6). Of course, the products displayed have passed the selection stage from the government. There are types of promotional events from these activities that offer products to introduce a business's brand (Cholil, 2018). During the offline exhibition event, there is a process of introduction to purchasing action that involves customers directly by providing information services regarding product details.



**Figure 6** The offline and virtual exhibition of the Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang





Figure 8 Social Event held by Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang

Based on the activities carried out, it can be a business advantage because customers will increase trust and grow their awareness which affects loyalty to a product brand (Nisa & Singgih, 2019). Likewise, with social activities that invite customers and other entrepreneurs to donate to the community, the activity's target (Corporate Philanthropy) (Roza, 2014). Voluntary assistance can increase the positive image of the business (Priyadi et.al, 2020). It is because the actions taken show empathy and are sensitive to the needs of the surrounding environment, which impact improving the community's quality of life. The benefits received are not only on customer loyalty to the product brand but also have an impact on the behaviour of the community (customers and other entrepreneurs) to understand better the social conditions that occur. With a positive image that is owned, you will get the opportunity to reach new customers so that it impacts the sustainability of a business.

Moreover, to increase knowledge, customers can also take courses taught directly by the business owner (see Figure 9).



Figure 9 Knitting training at the store of Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang

These activities provide a valuable experience for customers and build awareness of brands that can support business continuity (Oktaviani & Rustandi, 2018). All course activities are published through Instagram social media and stored in the Instagram Highlight feature. Thus, the community's opportunity to participate in course activities will be more excellent, and the brand's presence will be more widely known.

### 3.8 Interactive Marketing

Marketing done through online media has been widely used by entrepreneurs. Various activities can be done to bring up an interaction. Especially in social media, as one of the developments of online media, business owners can take advantage of its features to create two-way communication with customers. However, based on an interview with the Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang owner, Instagram social media is only used to upload products and activities, and the interaction process on Instagram DMs (see Figure 10), Whatsapp link listed in the Instagram bio.



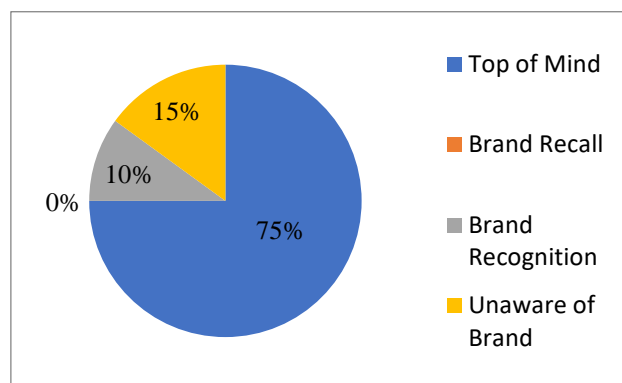
**Figure 10** Interactions on Instagram's Direct Message (DM) Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang

Communication between the owner and prospective customers occurs with a two-step communication model (two-step flow). The owner will direct potential customers to make purchases via Whatsapp. It is a weakness of the communication model carried out. Namely, prospective customers are reluctant to follow up because of their privacy. The passive attitude shown can reduce the ongoing relationship because interaction only occurs when customers ask questions via Instagram DM (Tambunan, 2018).

Meanwhile, some benefits can be obtained from using social media features such as the Quiz, Polling, or Question Box features on Instagram. Interactive marketing media through Instagram features can increase interaction, impression, and attention and build relationships with followers (Pamungkas & Sastika, 2021). If the interaction continues, it will automatically build brand awareness of the product brand.

### 3.9 Level of Brand Awareness of Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang

Interviews were conducted with 20 informants consisting of 10 customers and ten people from the surrounding community with four predetermined age categories to determine how far customers and the surrounding community remember and know about the Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang product brand. After the interview stage, the authors obtained the results that can be displayed through the following Pie Diagram (see Figure 11):



**Figure 11** Percentage of brand awareness level of Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang

Based on the diagram above shows that at the Top Of Mind level, 75% of the informants, or 15 people can name the product brand of the Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang for the first time. It indicates the success of SMEs in building their brands so that product brands can be mentioned easily. The interview results also found that the source of information about the Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang came from the closest people such as neighbours and work friends. The power of word-of-mouth recommendations can be more trusted and effective than the promotional activities of businesses in influencing product selection decisions (Lovelock et.al, 2010). Success can also be shown by recognizing informants who have purchased masks, bags, and other knitting accessories. By prioritizing product quality and excellent service, it will attract customers to make it their first choice.

At the Brand Recall level, 0% of the informants are obtained, or there are no informants who can mention the brand without using assistance. It happens because efforts to make it easier for people to

remember product brands are still lacking, so it is pretty tricky for people to realize it. Then, at the Brand Recognition level, 10% of the informants or as many as two people answered the Rajutan Nyonya brand after receiving assistance in the form of the location and name of the business owner. At this level, the informant knows the existence of the product brand but has not yet reached the maximum stage in memory. Meanwhile, at the Unaware of Brand level, 15% of informants or three people who did not know were aware of or recognized the brand's existence. These results become a task that needs attention to expand its brand by actively developing marketing communication strategies. Supported by solid promotions, it will increase awareness and make people more attached to the product brand (Ramadayanti, 2019).

#### 4. Conclusion

Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang has integrated marketing communication strategies to build public brand awareness during a pandemic. In the Direct Marketing strategy, Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang conveys information through social media Instagram, and Whatsapp, manages customer databases and offers products directly to customers actively making purchases. The Sales Promotion concept is implemented by providing product discounts, special price offers on certain days, gifts, and minimum purchase bonuses via status and private messages on social media. The role of public relations is implemented through particular attention to customers, Broadcast Messages containing greetings on certain days, and fostering relationships with the government. Implementation of Personal selling is carried out by offering face-to-face at SME locations. Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang is more likely to use leaflet media in the advertising strategy. The WOM concept can work with customers by providing information and recommendations in person and on social media. Holding exhibitions, fashion shows, social actions, and knitting courses with the Event and Experiences strategy. Regarding the interactive marketing strategy in using features on Instagram social media, it has not been used optimally to build communication with customers.

Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang's success can also be seen in 75% of the informants at the Top of the Mind level. It is because of the excellent quality of the products and the best services provided. Meanwhile, for brand recall, 0% of informants were obtained, there were 10% of informants on brand recognition, and 15% of informants were unaware of the brand. The advice that can be given is to maximize social media features as a marketing communication tool to expand product brands so that the Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang owner needs to learn and add insight about digital media. Future researchers are expected to use this research as reference material in the development of research to be carried out. The integrated marketing communication strategies with the addition of other variables such as the level of brand image or brand loyalty to obtain different and more in-depth results. They can also read other reference sources to get discoveries or knowledge in conducting research.

Implementing the integrated marketing communication strategy can be seen as the strength of Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang, namely the unique appearance of its products on social media, the implementation of attractive promotions, and paying attention to proximity to customers and the government. Due to customer satisfaction, good WOM actively participates in various activities to build awareness and increase sales. Some weaknesses are owned, which are not yet produced on a large scale due to limited human resources. The cost of leaflet media is expensive and perishable, and the lack of trust of potential customers in virtual exhibitions and knowledge about online media is still minimal. The opportunities in Rajutan Nyonya SME Semarang are getting new customers with database management, opportunities for collaboration with other entrepreneurs through their participation in activities, business developments that can impact the surrounding environment, and strong customer trust to obtain loyal customers. However, threats were found that could affect sales in the form of product strength, similar competitors who are increasingly creative and active on social media, and product concepts that other sellers imitate.

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