

ANALYSIS OF OPERATIONAL BARRIERS AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES FOR WAITINGLIST COFFEE MSMEs IN MEDAN CITY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the operational obstacles and development strategies experienced by Waitinglist Coffee, a micro, small, and medium enterprise (MSMEs) in Medan, which is one of the growing culinary businesses. The methodology used is a qualitative approach through direct interviews and field observations to obtain in-depth data on issues related to raw materials, technology, marketing, and labor. The findings of the study show that the main obstacles faced by Waitinglist Coffee include a lack of quality raw material supplies, suboptimal use of digital payment systems, and limitations in digital promotion to reach a wider market. From a human resources perspective, the challenges relate to manual employee management, which impacts work efficiency. Recommended development strategies include enhancing cooperation with local suppliers, utilizing digital technology such as cashier applications and marketing through social media, and technology-based human resource management training. This study is expected to serve as a reference for other MSMEs in the culinary sector in overcoming operational obstacles and designing sustainable development strategies amid increasingly fierce business competition.

Keywords: : MSMEs, cafes, operational obstacles, development strategies, Medan.

INTRODUCTION

Micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) play a vital role in the Indonesian economy. This sector contributes significantly to employment and promotes economic activity in the community. Data from the Ministry of Cooperatives and MSMEs in 2024 shows that MSMEs contribute 61.5% to the national gross domestic product (GDP) and employ around 97% of the workforce in Indonesia. However, despite this significant contribution, MSMEs still face various operational challenges, ranging from raw materials, technology, marketing, to human resources. This is reinforced by the findings of Nasution's (2023) research, which states that “MSMEs in Indonesia often face problems related to raw materials, marketing, and limited human resources.”

In the culinary business world, these challenges are increasing along with the growth in the number of businesses in the food and beverage sector. The city of Medan, one of Indonesia's major cities, has become a center for the development of modern culinary businesses, such as cafes and restaurants, which target young people and young professionals. One example is Waitinglist Coffee Cafe, which offers a coffee and eatery concept with a focus on coffee drinks and accompanying foods. This cafe reflects modern culinary MSMEs that must face changes in consumer behavior, the application of digital technology, and increasing competition in the food and beverage sector.

However, behind their popularity, cafes in Medan, including Waitinglist Coffee, face various operational problems. These problems include fluctuations in raw material prices, a lack of trained human resources, and challenges in adapting to digital technology. According to Siregar (2022), “The main problem for MSMEs in Indonesia is not only a lack of capital, but also management capabilities and the effective use of digital technology.” This is particularly relevant because even though Waitinglist Coffee has implemented a digital payment system such as QRIS, they still record financial transactions and inventory manually. Operational activities that are not fully integrated digitally can lead to inefficiencies, especially in managing raw material stocks and financial reports.

On the other hand, in marketing, MSMEs in the culinary sector face difficulties in creating a strong brand identity amid fierce competition. Social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok have become important promotional tools, but many MSMEs owners lack the skills or consistent content strategies. Haryanti (2023) explains that “MSMEs that utilize digital technology show significant improvements in operational efficiency and market expansion.” However, many MSMEs have not been able to fully leverage the potential of digital technology due to constraints such as time, cost, and the digital skills of business owners (Gusty, Wulandari, et al., 2025).

In human resource management, culinary MSMEs such as cafes still tend to use manual systems. Task distribution, training, and employee performance evaluations are often conducted informally. However, according to research by Pratama (2022), “The quality of human resources is the key to the operational success of MSMEs, especially in terms of customer service and product quality consistency.” This shows that human resource capacity building needs to be a major focus in business development strategies. In addition to internal factors, the external environment also plays an important role in the operation of MSMEs. Macroeconomic aspects such as inflation, people's purchasing power, and changes in consumption patterns affect the sustainability of culinary businesses. According to Aprianto (2023), “Changes in the lifestyle of urban communities, who tend to choose fast food and

modern cafes, present opportunities and challenges for culinary MSMEs that do not adapt.” Waitinglist Coffee needs to adapt to these changes through innovative strategies to not only retain existing customers but also attract new consumers with a unique experience.

Based on previous studies, it can be concluded that the success of MSMEs greatly depends on the ability of entrepreneurs to recognize and overcome operational problems that arise. Aspects such as digitization, human resource development, raw material efficiency, and innovation in marketing are important factors that need to be managed properly. This study aims to examine the operational problems faced by Waitinglist Coffee Cafe in Medan and to find development strategies that can be implemented so that this cafe can grow and compete sustainably. This study is expected to contribute theoretically to enriching the literature on MSMEs operational management and to provide practical recommendations for culinary businesses in Medan to increase their competitiveness in the digital era.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are an important part of the Indonesian economy. MSMEs help create jobs, reduce income inequality, and increase Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Based on Law Number 20 of 2008, MSMEs are classified according to the amount of assets and annual turnover. Micro enterprises have a maximum of Rp50 million in assets and a maximum annual turnover of Rp300 million, while small enterprises have a maximum of Rp500 million in assets and a maximum annual turnover of Rp2.5 billion. In the regional economy, MSMEs play a major role in utilizing local potential, such as natural resources and the surrounding workforce (Suci, 2017). Suci's (2017) research shows that MSMEs contribute more than 60% to the national GDP and account for 97% of the total workforce. This shows how important MSMEs are in maintaining Indonesia's economic stability.

In the city of Medan in particular, the growth of MSMEs is improving, especially in the culinary and modern coffee sectors. Data from the Medan City Cooperative and MSME Office (2023) shows that the number of MSMEs has increased by 15% per year after the pandemic, with the main contribution coming from the culinary, cafe, and beverage sectors. This phenomenon reflects the changing lifestyles of urban communities who tend to prefer spending time in cafes, so that business opportunities in this field continue to grow (Hidayat & Nasution, 2022).

Operational challenges are obstacles that arise in production, resource management, and customer service that can reduce the effectiveness and efficiency of a business. In the world of culinary MSMEs such as cafes, these challenges include difficulties in obtaining quality raw materials, a shortage of skilled labor, and a service system that is still manual in nature. Based on research by Wulandari (2021), the main issues often faced by MSMEs in the culinary sector are uncertainty in the supply of raw materials, unstable price changes, and limited working capital. This can lead to inadequacies in the production process. If the supply of key ingredients such as coffee or food ingredients is disrupted, product quality and customer satisfaction will also be directly affected (Wulandari, 2021).

In addition, human resources issues are also a significant challenge to business continuity. Many MSMEs players in the culinary sector still rely on workers with traditional skills and are not yet accustomed to using digital technology. A study by Marlina and Hasanah

(2020) shows that more than 60% of small culinary businesses in North Sumatra still manage their financial systems manually and do not utilize digital cashier applications or point of sales (POS) systems. This results in slow and inaccurate financial recording processes, as well as error-prone reports (Marlina & Hasanah, 2020).

In addition to internal challenges, external issues also pose obstacles, such as increasingly fierce competition in the cafe sector in big cities like Medan. Based on a survey conducted by the Medan City Tourism Office (2023), there are more than 1,200 cafes actively competing in the city center. Therefore, MSMEs such as Waitinglist Coffee need to have a solid differentiation strategy, whether in terms of taste, venue concept, or service. In this context, research by Siregar (2022) emphasizes that product innovation and customer experience are crucial to winning the competition in the current cafe industry (Siregar, 2022).

On the other hand, challenges in the field of digital technology are also an issue. Although digitization is growing, many MSMEs players still find it difficult to embrace digital marketing technology. Research by Arifin (2021) shows that 55% of culinary MSMEs in Indonesia do not have active social media business accounts, while only 30% utilize digital platforms such as GoFood, GrabFood, or ShopeeFood to expand their marketing reach. As a result, product promotion is still limited to local customers, and sales growth has been slow (Arifin, 2021).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study applies a descriptive qualitative method that aims to gain in-depth insights into the operational challenges and development strategies at Waitinglist Coffee, a micro, small, and medium enterprise (MSMEs) located in Medan. The qualitative method was chosen because this study focuses on exploring phenomena directly through the experiences of business actors.

1. Research Location and Time

The research was conducted at Waitinglist Coffee, located in Medan, North Sumatra, from October to November 2025. The location was deliberately chosen because this cafe is a growing modern culinary MSMEs that is relevant to the research objectives.

2. Research Type and Approach

This research is descriptive qualitative, which is research that presents data in a structured and accurate manner based on information obtained from the field. According to Creswell (2018), this approach is appropriate for understanding the processes, behaviors, and real situations experienced by the research subjects.

3. Data Collection Techniques

Data in this study was collected through two main techniques, namely:

o In-depth interviews

The interview was conducted with Candro Sianturi, 21 years old, a waiter/employee at Waitinglist Coffee who is also a student. The purpose of this interview was to obtain

information about raw material management, service, digital systems, operational challenges, and marketing strategies implemented.

- Field observation

Observations were made by directly monitoring the cafe's operational activities, employee workflows, service systems, and facility conditions. This observation technique was used as a verification method to ensure consistency between the informants' statements and the practices in the field. In addition to primary data, this study also utilized secondary data in the form of references from books, journals, scientific articles, and other sources related to MSMEs, operational management, and business development strategies.

4. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using a qualitative analysis model as proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of three stages:

- Data Reduction

This stage involves selecting and simplifying data from interviews and observations to focus on key themes, namely raw material constraints, technology, human resources, and marketing.

- Data Presentation

The reduced data is then presented in the form of a narrative description so that the relationships between themes can be clearly seen.

- Conclusion Drawing

This stage is carried out to interpret the meaning of the analyzed data, thereby producing findings on operational conditions and providing recommendations for MSME development strategies. The following images show the flowchart of the work procedure to support the realization of the methods offered in this activity.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to explore in greater depth the operational challenges faced by the Waitinglist Coffee MSME in Medan and the development approaches taken to maintain competitiveness in the culinary sector. From interviews with Candro Sianturi, one of the waiters at the cafe, and direct observation, it was revealed that Waitinglist Coffee is a modern cafe with a casual dining concept that offers not only coffee, but also light and heavy meals such as fried rice, toast, and pasta. This variety of menu items gives the cafe a broad target market, ranging from students to young workers and families.

1. Operational Challenges in Raw Materials

Based on interviews, one of the major problems faced by Waitinglist Coffee is its dependence on coffee and food supplies from outside the region. Candro explained that most of the coffee beans used are sourced from local suppliers in Sidikalang and Tanah Karo. However, during the rainy season, coffee supplies are often hampered by transportation and weather problems. As a result, raw material prices become unstable and affect daily operating costs.

This condition is in line with Prasetyo's (2021) research, which states that the instability of raw material prices and supply is one of the biggest challenges for culinary MSMEs, as it greatly affects the stability of production costs and product quality. In addition, food ingredients such as meat, vegetables, and bread are still purchased daily from traditional markets, so their quality and freshness are not always guaranteed.

According to Heizer & Render's (2017) theory on operational management, efficient supply chain management must involve good raw material planning to reduce dependence and maintain quality. However, at Waitinglist Coffee, stock records are still kept manually using notebooks, without a digital system. This often leads to surpluses or shortages of certain ingredients, which disrupt service efficiency. This finding is in line with Setiawan's (2022) research, which shows that many culinary MSMEs in Medan still use traditional operational methods, resulting in suboptimal efficiency and accuracy in stock planning.

2. Technological and Payment System Challenges

In terms of technology, Waitinglist Coffee has implemented two payment methods: manual (cash) and digital (via QRIS, GoPay, and Dana). According to Candro Sianturi, the majority of younger customers prefer digital methods because they are faster and easier. However, daily transaction records are still done manually using cash books (Gusty, Siregar, et al., 2025). This results in inaccurate daily income summaries and makes detailed financial analysis difficult. According to Wibowo (2021), the implementation of a Point of Sales (POS) system in the culinary business can increase the accuracy and efficiency of financial reports by up to 35 percent. The use of a POS system also supports business owners in better analyzing cash flow and customer spending behavior.

However, Candro stated that the implementation of a comprehensive digital system has not been carried out, constrained by software subscription costs and a lack of training for employees. This shows that the digitization of MSMEs does not only depend on technology, but also on the readiness of human resources (Gusty, Wulandari, et al., 2025). Rachmawati (2020) emphasized that the digital transformation of MSMEs requires an increase in digital understanding among business actors and employees so that the implementation of the system can take place effectively.

3. Human Resources (HR) Aspects

From the interviews, it was revealed that Waitinglist Coffee has a team of six people, including baristas, cashiers, cooks, and waiters. Human resource management is still carried out directly and does not have a formal organizational structure or digital attendance system. The recruitment process usually takes place through recommendations from friends or acquaintances, rather than through a formal selection process. Candro Sianturi mentioned that the main challenge in managing HR is the high employee turnover rate, mainly because many workers are still students with part-time jobs. This often causes instability in service quality.

This view is in line with Robbins & Judge (2019), who stated that high turnover can disrupt operational stability and reduce organizational productivity.

Even so, Waitinglist Coffee strives to maintain morale and comfort at work by creating a friendly environment. Candro stated that new employees usually receive brief training on how to serve and present coffee so that service standards are maintained. This is in line with Hasibuan's (2016) HR management theory, which emphasizes the importance of training and employee development to improve work quality, especially in service sectors such as culinary.

4. Marketing and Business Development Strategy

The interview with Candro Sianturi revealed that Waitinglist Coffee's marketing strategy focuses on promotion through social media, particularly Instagram and TikTok. Promotional content is presented in a simple manner, highlighting the café's cozy atmosphere, signature menu items, and weekly specials (Gusty & Darniyus, 2025). Candro explained that many customers come after seeing posts on social media or through recommendations from friends. In terms of business development, Candro revealed that the cafe plans to establish a new branch in the Medan Johor area. This plan arose due to the increasing number of customers and limited seating at the main location. However, this expansion plan is still in its early stages and will be carried out after considering strategic locations and capital capabilities. This step reflects a gradual development strategy tailored to financial conditions and market opportunities, as explained in the business growth theory by Zimmerer & Scarborough (2018), which states that successful business expansion must be carried out carefully by considering resource readiness and the local market situation.

CONCLUSIONS

From the results of research conducted through observation and interviews at Waitinglist Coffee in Medan, it can be concluded that this micro, small, and medium enterprise (MSME) has great potential for growth, especially with the increasing demand from urban communities for coffee and modern food. This cafe not only focuses on selling coffee, but also offers a variety of heavy and light food options tailored to the tastes of young people in Medan. This shows that Waitinglist Coffee can adapt to lifestyle changes and successfully combine the beverage and food businesses into one harmonious venture.

In terms of technology and payment, Waitinglist Coffee has implemented digital payment systems such as QRIS, GoPay, and Dana. However, daily transaction records are still done manually. This results in financial reports that are not entirely accurate. Although this SME has transitioned to a digital payment system, challenges in digital transformation remain. The readiness of human resources to understand and use digital systems plays a role in this.

Regarding human resources (HR), an interview with Candro Sianturi (waiter) revealed that employee management is still done manually, without a formal organizational structure or digital attendance system. Most employees are students with part-time jobs, which results in a high turnover rate and impacts service quality. Nevertheless, the cafe strives to create a flexible and friendly working atmosphere, as well as providing brief training on customer service and coffee serving to maintain quality. This shows that although HR management is still simple, there is an awareness of the importance of training for employee development.

In terms of marketing, Waitinglist Coffee uses social media such as Instagram and TikTok as promotional tools, which are quite effective in attracting young consumers. However, the current marketing strategy is still short-term and does not include customer loyalty programs or collaborations with local communities that could strengthen the brand image. The cafe's success in maintaining its existence shows that adapting to consumer behavior and utilizing digital media is important, although strengthening the digital system and long-term strategies are still very necessary to increase competitiveness.

Overall, the results of this study support the MSMEs management theory according to Suci (2017) and Rahmawati (2020), which states that the success of MSMEs in the culinary sector is influenced by the efficiency of resource management and the ability to adapt to technology. Waitinglist Coffee is a real-life example of how MSMEs in the culinary sector strive to survive and thrive amid various operational challenges, demonstrating that innovation and digitalization are key factors in facing modern business competition.

Waitinglist Coffee is advised to strengthen business sustainability through several strategic steps, such as establishing long-term partnerships with local suppliers to maintain a stable supply of ingredients, and starting to use inventory management applications to automatically monitor stock levels. In the field of technology, the implementation of a POS system is essential for more accurate financial records and more efficient data-driven business decisions. From a human resources perspective, internal training, the adoption of a digital attendance system, and the provision of incentives are necessary to reduce turnover rates. In marketing, cafes should maximize their digital strategies through search engine optimization, creative content, collaborations with influencers, and customer loyalty programs. For long-term development, plans to open new branches must be supported by location surveys, market analysis, and regular collection of customer feedback. With these steps, Waitinglist Coffee has a significant opportunity to grow as a competitive culinary MSMEs in the city of Medan.

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