

Online Community Marketing Strategies for Building Customer Loyalty at UD. Surya in Gunungsitoli City

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Abstract

This research entitled "Online Community Marketing Strategies for Building Customer Loyalty at UD. Surya in Gunungsitoli City" aims to examine the implementation of online community-based marketing strategies by UD. Surya and evaluate effective online community characteristics supporting these strategies. The study also identifies applied online marketing strategies, understands online community interaction roles in customer loyalty formation, and analyzes how online community strategies contribute more significantly than conventional marketing approaches. The research employs qualitative methodology with data collection through in-depth interviews with business owners, marketing staff, and UD. Surya community members. Results show UD. Surya implements online community-based marketing through WhatsApp Groups and Facebook, functioning as direct communication channels. Effective online communities are characterized by active member engagement, open two-way communication, and added value including product information, special discounts, and rapid business responses. Online marketing strategies encompass digital product promotion, brand strengthening through engaging content, and customer testimonials for trust-building. Online community interactions prove crucial in creating belonging and customer loyalty toward UD. Surya. Compared to conventional strategies, online community approaches are more efficient, interactive, and directly impact loyalty and customer growth, making online communities relevant and effective marketing strategies supporting UMKM business growth in the digital era.

Kata Kunci: *Marketing Strategy, Online Community, Customer Loyalty*

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INTRODUCTION

The advancement of digital technology and the increasingly widespread penetration of the internet have fundamentally transformed the manner in which consumers interact with brands and products. In this digital era, online communities have emerged as one of the strategic platforms that companies can leverage to establish closer relationships with their customers. This phenomenon is not confined to large corporations but also extends to small and medium enterprises such as UD. Surya in Gunungsitoli City, which must adapt to evolving consumer behaviour patterns that are increasingly dependent on digital media.

Online communities play a pivotal role in creating interactive spaces between companies and consumers, which can significantly influence purchasing decisions and customer loyalty. Through online communities, companies can establish bidirectional communication, provide direct product information, gather consumer feedback, and foster a sense of brand ownership. This aligns with the assertion by Maslahatun et al (2025), who contend that social media marketing strategies can enhance engagement and consumer

loyalty, particularly among Generation Z, who actively utilise digital platforms. Kansa & Wiryany (2025) further emphasise that marketing communication strategies on platforms such as Instagram require a structured approach to achieve optimal results. Online communities also facilitate word-of-mouth marketing, which is highly effective in influencing other consumers' purchasing decisions.

Previous research has demonstrated the significance of digital marketing strategies in building customer loyalty. Kansa & Wiryany (2025) found that digital marketing strategies exert a significant influence on customer loyalty in the e-commerce era. Meanwhile, Iqbal (2025) revealed that digital marketing strategies through social media can effectively enhance customer loyalty. Permana et al (2025) also substantiated that community marketing can build brand loyalty, particularly through platforms such as TikTok Shop. Surjono (2024) additionally noted that digital marketing management in technology start-up companies can improve customer loyalty through appropriate strategies. Sitindaon (2025) also emphasised the importance of digital marketing strategies for MSMEs in the Industry 4.0 era. However, these studies have predominantly focused on large corporations or specific e-commerce platforms, resulting in a research gap regarding the implementation of online community marketing strategies in small-scale trading businesses in regional areas.

The emerging challenge is that many small and medium enterprises in regional areas continue to encounter difficulties in implementing effective online community marketing strategies. Hanafi & Gunawan (2025), in their research on Toko Wajit Sederhana, demonstrated that whilst marketing strategies can build customer loyalty, their implementation in small businesses presents unique challenges. Syafira & Rohman (2024) also identified various obstacles in implementing social media promotion strategies for MSMEs such as Mie Marlina. Syafira & Rohman (2024) indicated that the influence of social media and online communities on consumer loyalty requires comprehensive understanding of consumer engagement and brand-user relationships. Kuspriyono (2020) added that effective communication management becomes a critical factor in the success of marketing strategies. The primary challenge faced is the lack of understanding regarding how to optimise online communities to build customer loyalty, particularly in the context of small regional businesses that possess distinct market characteristics.

UD. Surya, as one of the trading enterprises in Gunungsitoli City, faces particular challenges in implementing online community marketing strategies to build customer loyalty. As a business operating in a region with market characteristics that differ from major cities, UD. Surya needs to develop strategies that align with local conditions whilst still harnessing the power of online communities. This research is significant as it can provide concrete insights into the implementation of online community marketing strategies in small regional businesses, which have rarely been examined in depth. By analysing the case of UD. Surya, this research is expected to contribute to the development of digital marketing theory and practice for MSMEs in Indonesia. Therefore, this study aims to analyse the online community marketing strategies implemented by UD. Surya in building customer loyalty and to identify the factors that influence the success of these strategies.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative methodology with a descriptive approach. According to Sugiyono (2018), qualitative descriptive research aims to comprehensively understand phenomena by collecting narrative or descriptive data through observation, interviews, and documentation. This methodology enables researchers to explore information regarding experiences, perceptions, and policies implemented within the context of online community marketing strategies. As elucidated by Moleong (2021), qualitative descriptive research emphasises meaning rather than generalisation, thereby ensuring that research findings focus on holistic situational understanding within the context of building customer loyalty at UD. Surya in Gunungsitoli City.

Research Variables

According to Moleong (2021), research variables constitute the objects under observation that form the focal point of research attention and represent predetermined constructs that researchers can examine to obtain information for drawing conclusions. This study utilises two principal variables: online community marketing and customer loyalty. The online community marketing variable is measured through four indicators: content creation, content sharing, connecting, and community building. Meanwhile, the customer loyalty variable is assessed through three indicators: loyalty in purchasing products, resistance to negative influences regarding the company, and comprehensive referencing of the company's existence.

Research Location and Subjects

This research was conducted at UD. Surya in Gunungsitoli City, which was selected as the research location as it represents the site or area that constitutes the target object of investigation. The selection of this location was based on the company's relevance to the research topic concerning online community marketing strategies in building customer loyalty.

Data Sources

The data sources in this study comprise two primary categories. Firstly, primary data, which represents information directly and immediately obtained by researchers from original sources for specific research purposes. Primary data were acquired directly from initial sources through observation and interviews with respondents and informants related to online community marketing strategies at UD. Surya. Secondly, secondary data, which encompasses information previously collected and reported by parties other than the researcher. Secondary data function as supplementary information that enriches existing data, enabling research findings to achieve greater accuracy and reach adequate conclusions, whilst enhancing the validity of obtained primary data (Hardani, 2020).

Research Instruments

Research instruments constitute the apparatus required for data collection, encompassing various tools and techniques for obtaining necessary research data. The utilisation of appropriate instruments is crucial as it ensures that collected data are accurate, relevant, and reliable. In this study, the primary data collection instrument is the researcher themselves (human instrument) through observation, questioning, listening, requesting, and data acquisition. As articulated by Haryono (2023), researchers must obtain valid data; therefore, not every potential interviewee can serve as a suitable source.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection in this study employs three principal techniques as outlined by Haryono (2023). Firstly, interviews, which constitute conversations conducted by interviewers to obtain information from sources or informants. This method is utilised to collect data through direct structured interviews between researchers and sources using interview guidelines. Secondly, observation, which involves systematic observation and recording of phenomena emerging from research objects, focusing on problematic aspects within the research to obtain necessary data. Thirdly, documentation, which represents the process of collecting data regarding various matters or variables recorded in the form of notes, transcripts, books, newspapers, magazines, inscriptions, meeting minutes, and other documents that constitute stable and accurate sources reflecting actual situations.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis in this study employs the qualitative data analysis model proposed by (Sugiyono, 2018), which is conducted concurrently with the data collection process. The data analysis process comprises three principal stages. The first stage is data reduction, which involves summarising, selecting essential elements, focusing on significant aspects, and identifying themes and patterns. Reduced data provide clearer perspectives and facilitate subsequent data collection by researchers. The second stage is data display, which in qualitative research can be accomplished through brief descriptions, charts, inter-categorical

relationships, and flowcharts, with narrative text being the most frequently employed presentation format. The third stage is conclusion drawing/verification, wherein initial conclusions remain tentative and subject to modification if robust supporting evidence is not discovered during subsequent data collection phases.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Research findings constitute scholarly work containing information and data obtained during field research activities. This information was gathered through in-depth interviews conducted directly with informants, observation, and documentation in accordance with predetermined guidelines. The research object utilized was UD. Surya in Gunungsitoli City. This study aims to: examine the implementation of online community-based marketing strategies employed by UD. Surya Gunungsitoli City; identify the characteristics of effective online communities in supporting marketing strategies at UD. Surya; analyze online marketing strategies implemented at UD. Surya; investigate the role of online community interactions in fostering customer loyalty; and determine the extent to which online community strategies contribute to customer base expansion compared to conventional marketing strategies. The researcher conducted these phases using interview protocols, obtaining data from six informants consisting of the Owner of UD. Surya, Administrative Staff, and Customers/Consumers as follows:

UD. Surya Gunungsitoli City implements online community-based marketing strategies as one approach to expand market reach and establish closer relationships with customers. This strategy involves actively building digital communities across various social media platforms including Facebook, WhatsApp Groups, and Instagram. Through these communities, UD. Surya can interact directly with customers, provide updates on new products, and respond promptly to inquiries or complaints.

Furthermore, UD. Surya regularly shares relevant and engaging content for its community members, such as household furniture maintenance tips, exclusive promotions for community members, and customer testimonials. Through this approach, the company focuses not only on sales but also on creating customer loyalty and trust. The online community serves as a platform for building a sense of belonging, where customers feel they are an integral part of UD. Surya.

This strategy has proven effective as customers not only become buyers but also voluntary promoters who share product information with their relatives or friends. Additionally, the two-way communication established helps UD. Surya understand market needs more accurately, enabling them to adapt products and services according to customer preferences.

Based on interviews conducted by the researcher with informant Darni Gea (Owner of UD. Surya) on Monday, June 30, 2025, at 10:00 AM WIB, regarding the question: "Could you explain how the online community-based marketing strategy began to be implemented at UD. Surya?" The respondent stated: "*Certainly, the online community-based marketing strategy at UD. Surya began implementation following the increased use of social media among the Gunungsitoli community, particularly after the pandemic period. Initially, we only used Facebook and WhatsApp to share product information simply. However, over time, we realized that by building an active customer community, we could more easily reach and maintain good relationships with consumers. We began forming customer groups, sharing promotional content, light education about products, and providing rapid response services through chat. This strategy is not merely about selling, but also building closeness and trust between customers and our business.*"

Subsequently, the researcher continued interviewing informant Mrs. Ingati Zebua (Customer of UD. Surya Gunungsitoli City) with the same question and timeframe, where she stated: "*I continue following because I want to know if there are new offers, but honestly speaking, the presentation is less attractive and there is rarely truly new or different content.*"

The researcher then interviewed informant Mrs. Murnia Zandrato (Customer of UD.

Surya Gunungsitoli City) with the same question and timeframe, where she stated: "*I follow the community because I'm already in it, but actually I don't really anticipate the information. If it were more interactive or had educational content, perhaps I would be more enthusiastic about following.*"

Based on the interviews with the aforementioned informants, the researcher can explain that customers remain interested in following the community as they expect product information or promotions, but content quality and variety constitute important factors that have not been fully satisfied. Content that is overly monotonous or lacks innovation results in low engagement.

Subsequently, the researcher continued interviewing informant Mrs. Yuarni Lase (Customer of UD. Surya Gunungsitoli City) on Monday, June 30, 2025, at 1:00 PM WIB, with the question: "In your opinion, how is the quality of interaction between store administrators and customers in the online community?" She stated: "*Generally it's good, the admin is quite friendly. It's just that sometimes the response is rather slow, especially outside working hours. But it's still understandable.*"

The researcher then interviewed informant Mrs. Ingati Zebua (Customer of UD. Surya Gunungsitoli City) with the same question and timeframe, where she stated: "*In my opinion, the interaction is less active. The admin rarely greets or opens discussion spaces. So, the atmosphere feels like just a bulletin board.*"

Subsequently, the researcher interviewed informant Mrs. Murnia Zendrato (Customer of UD. Surya Gunungsitoli City) with the same question and timeframe, where she stated: "*The interaction is quite flat. I feel the admin only shares information but doesn't attempt to gather opinions or input from customers. So I feel less involved.*"

Based on the interviews with the aforementioned informants, the researcher can explain that the quality of interaction between administrators and customers is perceived as still suboptimal. Although several customers consider the admin sufficiently friendly, time limitations and minimal discussion space make interactions less dynamic and do not actively involve customers.

Discussion

Digital Marketing Strategy Based on Online Communities at UD. Surya Gunungsitoli City

In the current digital era, online marketing has become one of the important strategies implemented by many business practitioners, including Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) such as UD. Surya Gunungsitoli City. Digital marketing has proven effective in enhancing MSME competitiveness amid increasingly intense market competition (Rudianto, 2023). Based on research findings, UD. Surya implements online community-based marketing strategies as one approach to expand market reach and establish closer relationships with customers. As expressed by Darni Gea, owner of UD. Surya, "the online community-based marketing strategy at UD. Surya began implementation following the increased use of social media among the Gunungsitoli community, particularly after the pandemic period." The implementation of this strategy follows the rapidly developing digital marketing trends in the social media era, where companies can interact directly with target audiences and build more effective brand awareness (Wijaya et al., 2025). UD. Surya actively builds digital communities across various social media platforms including Facebook, WhatsApp Groups, and Instagram. Through these communities, the company can interact directly with customers, provide updates on new products, and respond promptly to inquiries or complaints. This social media marketing strategy aligns with research demonstrating the importance of customer engagement in digital platforms (Koesrianti & Tanega, 2024).

Furthermore, UD. Surya regularly shares relevant and engaging content for its community members, such as household furniture maintenance tips, exclusive promotions for community members, and customer testimonials. This approach focuses not only on sales but also on creating customer loyalty and trust, consistent with research demonstrating that digital marketing strategies have significant influence on customer loyalty in the e-commerce era (Devi & Romansyah, 2024). Despite the implementation of online community strategies,

research findings reveal several challenges faced by UD. Surya. Based on customer interviews, it was discovered that content quality and variety constitute important factors that have not been fully satisfied. Ingati Zebua, one of the customers, stated that "the presentation is less attractive and there is rarely truly new or different content." This finding indicates that overly monotonous or insufficiently innovative content can result in low customer engagement. This aligns with research emphasizing the importance of attractive and varied marketing communication strategies for maintaining customer engagement (Syafira & Rohman, 2024).

Research findings also reveal that the quality of interaction between administrators and customers is perceived as still suboptimal. Yuarni Lase stated that although "the admin is quite friendly, sometimes the response is rather slow, especially outside working hours." Meanwhile, Ingati Zebua assessed that "the interaction is less active. The admin rarely greets or opens discussion spaces. So, the atmosphere feels like just a bulletin board." This finding demonstrates that although online community platforms have been established, suboptimal management can hinder customer loyalty formation. Consistent and meaningful interaction between companies and customers is crucial for strengthening emotional connections to brands (Surjono, 2024). Marketing strategies focusing on building long-term relationships with customers through effective communication have proven capable of enhancing customer loyalty (Hanafi & Gunawan, 2025).

Despite existing challenges, research findings demonstrate that UD. Surya's online community strategy has positive impact. Customers not only become buyers but also voluntary promoters who share product information with their relatives or friends. The established two-way communication helps UD. Surya understand market needs more accurately, enabling them to adapt products and services according to customer preferences. This phenomenon corresponds with research demonstrating that social media promotion strategies have positive impact on consumer loyalty, where customers active in online communities tend to become voluntary brand ambassadors (Syafira & Rohman, 2024). Well-managed online communities can create positive environments for customers to remain continuously engaged in company activities.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings conducted through observation, interviews, and documentation, and considering the discussion presented in the previous chapter, the following conclusions can be drawn: The implementation of online community-based marketing strategies at UD. Surya has proven effective in building consumer proximity, enhancing trust, and strengthening customer loyalty. By utilizing social media and community groups, UD. Surya has successfully created warm and participatory communication, enabling the company to compete effectively in the intensely competitive market environment.

The characteristics of effective online communities at UD. Surya are marked by active participation, sense of ownership, two-way communication, inter-member support, brand identity consistency, adaptability to trends, trust, and community resilience. All these aspects have demonstrably supported online marketing strategies and significantly contributed to expanding UD. Surya's market reach. The online marketing strategies implemented at UD. Surya have generated positive impacts on sales enhancement, consumer reach expansion, and strengthened customer relationships. Through social media and digital communication, UD. Surya has successfully established a more responsive, efficient marketing system that aligns with current societal needs. Technological support and adaptive capabilities constitute the primary keys to this strategy's success.

Interactions within online communities play a crucial role in forming and maintaining customer loyalty. Through active communication, emotional engagement, and transparency, online communities serve not merely as promotional platforms but also as venues for building meaningful relationships between customers and businesses. Online community strategies possess advantages in creating deeper customer engagement, strengthening trust, and accelerating information dissemination. Compared to conventional strategies that tend to be

unidirectional, online communities are more interactive and responsive to changing market needs. With appropriate management, digital communities can become valuable assets for business growth.

Research Limitations

This study acknowledges several limitations that warrant recognition and may serve as considerations for future research. First, the research scope is limited to a single business unit, namely UD. Surya in Gunungsitoli City, thus generalizing research findings to similar businesses in other regions requires further investigation. Second, the relatively short research duration has not permitted comprehensive observation of the long-term impacts of online community-based marketing strategy implementation. Third, limited access to more detailed quantitative data regarding sales increases and other digital marketing metrics prevents precise measurement of financial impact analysis. Fourth, the research focus predominantly emphasizes business owner and manager perspectives, while in-depth consumer and community member viewpoints have not been maximally explored. Fifth, limitations exist in analyzing the comparative effectiveness of various social media platforms utilized, preventing specific recommendations for optimal platforms. Sixth, this study has not thoroughly examined challenges and potential risks that may emerge in online community management, such as handling negative criticism or digital communication crises.

Research Contributions

This research provides practical contributions for small and medium enterprise practitioners in understanding online community-based marketing strategy implementation. Research findings demonstrate that digital community approaches can serve as effective and affordable marketing alternatives, particularly for businesses with limited capital for conventional promotion.

Theoretically, this study enriches the literature on digital marketing within the context of small businesses in Indonesia, specifically in regions with distinctive socio-cultural characteristics such as Nias. This research also provides concrete illustrations of effective online community characteristics supporting local business marketing strategies. The methodological contribution of this research lies in utilizing qualitative approaches capable of revealing the dynamics of online community interactions comprehensively. This approach enables deeper understanding of community member behavior patterns, interaction quality, and factors influencing customer loyalty formation through digital platforms.

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