



Communication Strategies for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises Participation in The Sagarurung Festival, Pali Regency

Meisya Anggraini^{1*}, Esxi Martia Gusma², Bimo Kuncoro Jati³, Raty Rusmiana⁴

¹⁻² Department of Convention and Event Management, Politeknik Pariwisata Palembang, Indonesia

³ Department of Family Education Welfare, Universitas Negeri Jakarta, Indonesia

⁴ Department of Food and Beverage Service, Politeknik Pariwisata Palembang, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author  meisyaan@poltekpar-palembang.ac.id

Abstract:

This study aims to analyze communication strategies implemented to enhance Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) participation in the Sagarurung Festival in PALI Regency. MSMEs play a significant role in supporting regional economic development, particularly through tourism-based events and creative economy activities. This research applies a qualitative research approach by utilizing in-depth interviews, direct observation, document analysis, and SWOT analysis supported by IFAS and EFAS frameworks. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, involving representatives from the Office of Cooperatives and SMEs of PALI Regency, festival organizers, and MSME participants. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman. The findings indicate that the communication strategy implemented in the Sagarurung Festival reflects an Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) approach, incorporating advertising, sales promotion, public relations, personal selling, and direct and digital marketing. Digital communication and interpersonal communication emerged as the most effective strategies in facilitating MSME participation. WhatsApp and social media became the primary communication channels due to their accessibility, speed, interactivity, and efficiency. Furthermore, free booth facilities reduced participation barriers, while public relations and interpersonal communication strengthened trust and sustainable relationships between organizers and MSMEs.

Keywords: Communication; MSME; Sagarurung Festival



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Introduction

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) represent one of the strategic sectors that significantly contribute to Indonesia's economic growth. MSMEs play an important role in creating employment opportunities, increasing community income, reducing economic disparities, and strengthening regional economic resilience. The development of MSMEs has become an important element in supporting national economic growth through business expansion, utilization of local resources, development of creative products, and community empowerment. In Indonesia, the increasing number of MSMEs demonstrates their significant contribution to economic development, with more than 65 million business units operating across various economic sectors according to data from the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs of the Republic of Indonesia in 2024 (Haikal et al., 2025).

In the context of event management, communication plays a crucial role in increasing MSME participation in tourism events and cannot be understood merely as a process of information dissemination. In community-based events, communication functions as a mechanism for building relationships, trust, and engagement between event organizers and stakeholders.

Dialogic communication enables two-way interactions that encourage active stakeholder involvement, while stakeholder engagement is developed through communication processes that create cognitive, emotional, and behavioral connections. Therefore, increasing MSME participation does not solely depend on the amount of information delivered but also on the ability of organizers to establish sustainable relationships with MSME actors (Kent & Taylor, 2002; Loureiro et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the advancement of digital technology has transformed communication patterns between event organizers and participants. The utilization of social media, instant messaging applications, websites, and other digital platforms allows communication processes to become faster, more interactive, and more efficient. Therefore, event organizers are required to implement integrated communication strategies to ensure that messages are effectively delivered to target audiences, including MSME actors (Rehman et al., 2022). Within the context of tourism events, MSME participation becomes an important factor in determining the success of event implementation. The involvement of MSMEs not only contributes to economic benefits through increased product sales but also plays a role in strengthening regional cultural identity and supporting creative economy development. Through participation in events, MSMEs gain opportunities to introduce their products to broader markets, expand business networks, and enhance business capacity through interactions with various stakeholders, demonstrating that MSME involvement in tourism events can generate both economic and socio-cultural impacts (Son et al., 2021).

One of the tourism events that actively involves MSMEs in economic and tourism activities is the Sagarurung Festival, organized by the Office of Cooperatives and SMEs of Penukal Abab Lematang Ilir (PALI) Regency, South Sumatra. This festival integrates cultural elements, culinary attractions, entertainment, and creative economy activities within a series of events (Ossowska et al., 2023). The Sagarurung Festival functions not only as a regional tourism promotion platform but also as a medium for MSMEs to market local products and expand business networks. The Sagarurung Festival has unique characteristics as it highlights traditional local culinary practices through communal cooking and dining activities involving large numbers of community members. These activities have become the main attraction of the festival and have successfully attracted public and tourist attention. In addition, the festival presents various MSME products from culinary, handicraft, and creative economy sectors originating from PALI Regency and other regions in South Sumatra (Pratama et al., 2025).

However, MSME participation in the Sagarurung Festival has demonstrated fluctuating trends. Based on data from the Office of Cooperatives and SMEs of PALI Regency, the number of participating MSMEs reached 22 business actors in 2022, decreased to 18 business actors in 2023, and increased significantly to 37 business actors in 2024. This fluctuation indicates that MSME involvement is influenced by various factors, one of which is the effectiveness of communication strategies implemented by organizers in delivering information, building trust, and encouraging MSMEs' willingness to participate in the festival.

From a marketing communication perspective, state that Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is an approach that integrates various marketing communication elements, including advertising, sales promotion, public relations, personal selling, and direct marketing, to create consistent and effective messages (Kotler & Keller, 2016). In the context of the Sagarurung Festival, these elements can support MSME participation through information dissemination, incentive provision, relationship building with communities, direct communication with business actors, and the utilization of digital media. However, the effectiveness of IMC in tourism event

contexts is not solely determined by the use of multiple communication channels but also by the ability of organizers to integrate communication activities into consistent, relevant, and meaningful messages for target stakeholders. Therefore, an effective communication strategy must connect event objectives with the needs and interests of MSMEs as strategic partners in local economic development.

Previous studies have demonstrated that communication plays an important role in encouraging business participation by strengthening business networks, improving MSME performance, and enhancing stakeholder engagement within the tourism sector. Effective business communication contributes to the development of relationships among business actors, while digital communication supports broader interaction and engagement between stakeholders. Nevertheless, most previous studies have focused on general MSME business communication, digital communication, or the economic impacts of events. Therefore, limited attention has been given to how communication strategies implemented by event organizers contribute to increasing MSME participation in culture-based regional festivals (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Fitriyani & Rachmawati, 2024).

This condition highlights a clear research gap. First, previous studies have mainly examined communication as a promotional or marketing instrument, while the role of communication as a mechanism for building MSME participation in tourism events remains relatively underexplored. Second, studies on the implementation of Integrated Marketing Communication in cultural festival contexts have predominantly focused on visitor engagement and destination promotion rather than MSMEs as key stakeholders. Third, limited research has specifically examined communication strategies implemented by event organizers to increase MSME participation in the Sagarurung Festival, PALI Regency, despite the festival positioning MSMEs as an essential component of its implementation. In addition to the research gap, this study also addresses a theoretical gap. Previous research has largely applied marketing communication concepts to explain event promotion effectiveness, while the relationship between communication strategies, stakeholder engagement, and MSME participation has not been comprehensively integrated. In the context of the Sagarurung Festival, increasing MSME participation is not only influenced by promotional effectiveness but also by the ability of communication processes to build understanding, trust, and commitment among business actors regarding the benefits of festival participation. Therefore, integrating the concepts of Integrated Marketing Communication and stakeholder engagement provides a more comprehensive understanding of how communication strategies contribute to MSME involvement in tourism-based events.

This study aims to provide both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of communication strategy studies by integrating the perspectives of Integrated Marketing Communication and stakeholder engagement to understand MSME participation in culture-based tourism festivals. The integration of these perspectives highlights the importance of strategic communication in building relationships, delivering value, and encouraging stakeholder involvement within event contexts (George, 2025; Kotler & Keller, 2016). Practically, this study provides evaluation and strategic recommendations for the Office of Cooperatives and SMEs of PALI Regency in designing more effective communication strategies to increase MSME participation in the Sagarurung Festival. Furthermore, the findings may serve as a reference for other regional event organizers in developing communication models that strengthen MSME engagement as part of sustainable local economic development.

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of the communication strategies implemented to enhance the participation of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the Sagarurung Festival in Penukal Abab Lematang Ilir (PALI) Regency. A qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to explore comprehensively the communication processes, experiences, perceptions, and perspectives of informants regarding the implementation of the festival and the involvement of MSMEs within the event context (Perreault, 2011).

The research subjects consisted of several parties directly involved in the organization and implementation of the Sagarurung Festival, namely: (1) the Office of Cooperatives and SMEs of PALI Regency, (2) MSME actors participating as exhibitors in the festival, and (3) the event organizing team. Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique based on their direct involvement, experience, and relevance to the research focus (Perreault, 2011). This sampling technique allowed the researcher to obtain rich and relevant information regarding the communication strategies implemented to encourage MSME participation in the festival. Research informants in this study were selected based on their relevance to the research objectives and their ability to provide information related to the implementation of the Sagarurung Festival. The selection of informants was conducted by considering specific characteristics that aligned with the research focus. The criteria for selecting informants in this study include: (1) individuals who are directly involved in the planning, management, and implementation of the Sagarurung Festival, including representatives from the local government, event organizers, MSME actors, and other related stakeholders who understand the festival activities; (2) individuals who have knowledge and experience regarding communication strategies, promotional activities, and efforts to encourage MSME participation in the Sagarurung Festival; (3) individuals who are actively involved in the coordination, execution, and decision-making processes related to the implementation of the Sagarurung Festival; and (4) individuals who are willing to provide accurate, open, and in-depth information regarding the implementation of the festival, particularly concerning communication strategies used to increase MSME involvement. The selection of informants based on their relevance, knowledge, and involvement in the research context is an essential aspect of qualitative research to obtain meaningful and comprehensive data (Perreault, 2011).

Data collection in this study was conducted through three primary methods: in-depth interviews, direct observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants, including MSME actors, event organizers, and representatives from local government agencies involved in the festival. These interviews aimed to obtain detailed information regarding the communication strategies implemented, stakeholder coordination processes, and challenges encountered in increasing MSME participation. Through this method, the researcher examined how communication strategies were planned, delivered, and interpreted by various stakeholders involved in the Sagarurung Festival, following the principles of qualitative data collection that emphasize obtaining comprehensive information from relevant sources (Perreault, 2011).

Furthermore, direct observation was conducted by attending the festival activities to examine the implementation of communication strategies in real event situations. The observation focused on promotional media utilized by the organizers, interaction patterns between organizers and MSME participants, event activity flows, forms of MSME involvement, and visitor responses toward festival activities. Through direct observation, the researcher obtained contextual insights

into communication dynamics occurring during both the preparation and implementation stages of the festival. This method also enabled the researcher to capture actual situations and interactions that could not be fully explored through interviews alone (Perreault, 2011).

This analysis was used to identify internal and external factors influencing the effectiveness of communication strategies in increasing MSME participation. The identified factors obtained from interviews, observations, and document analysis were further analyzed using the Internal Factors Analysis Summary (IFAS) and External Factors Analysis Summary (EFAS) matrices. The IFAS matrix was used to evaluate internal factors consisting of strengths and weaknesses of the communication strategies implemented by the festival organizers, while the EFAS matrix was applied to analyze external factors consisting of opportunities and threats affecting MSME participation. The application of SWOT analysis, supported by IFAS and EFAS matrices, provides a systematic framework for evaluating strategic factors and formulating recommendations to improve communication strategies and strengthen MSME engagement in the Sagarurung Festival (Phadermrod et al., 2019; Wheelen & Hunger, 2011).

Table 1. SWOT Analysis

INTERNAL EXTERNAL		
	S (Strengths)	W (Weakness)
O (Opportunities)	SO Strategy Formulating strategies that utilize strengths to capitalize on opportunities.	WO Strategy Formulating strategies that minimize weaknesses by taking advantage of opportunities
T (Threats)	ST Strategy Formulating strategies that utilize strengths to overcome threats	WT Strategy Formulating strategies that minimize weaknesses and avoid threats

Source: Wheelen & Hunger, 2011

Table 1 presents the SWOT analysis matrix used to identify and evaluate internal factors, including strengths and weaknesses, as well as external factors, including opportunities and threats, that influence the strategic position of an organization. By integrating these internal and external factors, the matrix generates four strategic alternatives: Strength–Opportunity (SO), Weakness–Opportunity (WO), Strength–Threat (ST), and Weakness–Threat (WT) strategies. These strategic alternatives provide a systematic basis for determining appropriate development priorities and formulating strategies that align organizational strengths and weaknesses with external opportunities and threats. In this study, the SWOT matrix is used to analyze the strategic position of the Sagarurung Festival and formulate strategies to strengthen its role as a cultural branding strategy in PALI Regency based on the results of the IFAS and EFAS analyses (Wheelen & Hunger, 2011). The factors identified through interviews and observations were subsequently analyzed using the Internal Factors Analysis Summary (IFAS) and External Factors Analysis Summary (EFAS) matrices. The IFAS matrix was employed to identify and evaluate internal factors consisting of the strengths and weaknesses of the communication strategies implemented by the organizers of the Sagarurung Festival. Meanwhile, the EFAS matrix was used to identify external factors, including opportunities and threats, that may influence the success of increasing MSME participation in the festival. Each factor was assigned a weight and rating based on its level of importance and influence on the communication strategies being implemented, allowing the

analysis to systematically evaluate internal and external strategic factors through the IFAS and EFAS framework (Wheelen & Hunger, 2011).

The Internal Factors Analysis Summary (IFAS) and External Factors Analysis Summary (EFAS) matrices were utilized to systematically assess strategic factors. The weighting process was conducted using a scale ranging from 0.0 (not important) to 1.0 (very important), while ratings were assigned on a scale of 1 (below average) to 4 (excellent). Prior to data calculation, the researcher established standardized criteria for determining weights and ratings based on the results of in-depth interviews and academic justification, as follows:

1. Weight Determination

Weights were assigned to reflect the relative importance of each factor in influencing the effectiveness of communication strategies for enhancing MSME participation in the Sagarurung Festival. The weighting process was carried out by assessing the urgency and significance of each factor within its respective category. Mathematically, the total weight values in both the Internal Factor Analysis Summary (IFAS) matrix and the External Factor Analysis Summary (EFAS) matrix must equal 1.00.

2. Rating Determination

Ratings were used to indicate the actual condition in the field and the effectiveness of the festival organizers in responding to strategic factors related to MSME participation. The assessment employed a four-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated a poor response, 2 indicated a below-average response, 3 indicated an above-average response, and 4 indicated an excellent response.

The results of the IFAS and EFAS calculations were subsequently used to construct the SWOT matrix in order to formulate alternative strategies for improving MSME participation in the Sagarurung Festival. The application of a qualitative approach in this study was intended not only to gain an in-depth understanding through qualitative inquiry but also to strengthen the findings through analysis by weighting strategic factors derived from the IFAS and EFAS matrices. This approach enabled the development of more comprehensive and evidence-based strategic recommendations for enhancing communication strategies and increasing MSME engagement in the Sagarurung Festival, PALI Regency. The use of IFAS and EFAS matrices within the SWOT framework provides a systematic process for evaluating strategic factors and developing appropriate strategies based on internal and external conditions (Wheelen & Hunger, 2011).

Furthermore, document analysis was conducted on various relevant written sources, including Sagarurung Festival reports, policy documents issued by related government institutions, media publications, social media content, and statistical data concerning MSMEs in PALI Regency. Document analysis aimed to complement and strengthen the findings obtained from interviews and observations while providing broader insights into policies, strategies, and the development of MSME participation in the festival. Through this process, the researcher was able to compare official documentation with field findings to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the communication strategies implemented by the organizers. To ensure data validity and reliability, this study applied triangulation techniques by comparing information obtained from different sources and data collection methods. Triangulation enables researchers to generate richer, more comprehensive, and more trustworthy data, thereby improving the validity of research findings. By integrating interviews, observations, and document analysis, this study sought to provide a holistic understanding of communication strategies in increasing MSME participation in the Sagarurung Festival as part of regional entrepreneurship strengthening efforts. The application of

triangulation through multiple data sources supports the process of validating research findings and enhancing the credibility of qualitative studies (Perreault, 2011).

Furthermore, the data analysis technique employed in this study followed an interactive analysis process consisting of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction involved selecting, simplifying, and organizing relevant information related to communication strategies and MSME participation. The reduced data were then systematically presented in the form of narratives and thematic categorizations to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn and continuously verified throughout the research process to ensure consistency and credibility of the findings. The application of this interactive analysis model enabled the study to generate systematic, in-depth, and trustworthy findings regarding communication strategies in enhancing MSME participation in the Sagarurung Festival in PALI Regency (Miles et al., 2014).

Results and Discussion

1. Results

This study finds that the communication strategies implemented to enhance MSME participation in the Sagarurung Festival are influenced by a combination of internal and external conditions that are interrelated. The data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation involving key informants, namely representatives from the Office of Cooperatives and MSMEs and the Project Manager of the Sagarurung Festival. The analysis of these conditions is presented through a SWOT framework, which identifies the main internal strengths and weaknesses as well as external opportunities and threats affecting communication effectiveness in MSME participation (Wheelen & Hunger, 2011).

Table 2. External and Internal Factors

No	SWOT Analysis	Statements
1.	Strength	1. Strong coordination among the Office of Cooperatives and MSMEs, event organizers, and MSME actors facilitated effective communication and information dissemination. 2. A comprehensive MSME database enabled targeted communication and efficient participant management. 3. The use of digital communication channels (WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and online platforms) accelerated information dissemination and stakeholder interaction. 4. Previous experience in organizing regional events strengthened communication planning and stakeholder engagement
2.	Weakness	1. Limited human resources reduced the effectiveness of communication outreach and follow up activities. 2. The existing digital communication system has not fully supported integrated and real-time information management. 3. Informal communication practices occasionally resulted in inconsistent information among MSME participants. 4. Limited evaluation and feedback mechanisms restricted continuous improvement of communication activities.
3.	Opportunities	1. Increasing adoption of social media among MSMEs provides broader opportunities for digital communication. 2. Government support through free booths and promotional assistance encourages MSME participation. 3. High enthusiasm among MSMEs to promote local products creates favorable conditions for communication campaigns. 4. Collaboration with government agencies, communities, and private stakeholders strengthens communication networks and promotional activities.

No	SWOT Analysis	Statements
4	Threats	1. Competition from other festivals and business events may reduce MSME participation. 2. Unequal access to digital communication technology among rural MSMEs may limit information dissemination. 3. Limited production capacity and business commitments may reduce MSME readiness to participate. 4. Infrastructure constraints, including unstable internet connectivity, may disrupt digital communication activities.

Source: Research Result, 2026

The [Table 2](#) shows the internal and external conditions of communication strategies in increasing MSME participation in the Festival Sagarurung event in PALI Regency were analyzed using the SWOT method. The analysis was conducted by identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in accordance with the actual conditions of marketing communication implemented by the event organizers. Each identified factor was then assessed using a scale from 1.0 (poor) to 4.0 (very good), based on the results of interviews with the Department of Cooperatives and MSMEs, the Event Project Manager, and field observations ([Wheelen & Hunger, 2011](#)).

Furthermore, internal factors (strengths and weaknesses) and external factors (opportunities and threats) were mapped and assigned weights according to their level of significance in influencing the success of the communication strategy. The significance scale used ranged from 1 (significant) to 4 (very significant). After that, weights were assigned to each strategic factor using a scale from 0.0 (not important) to 1.0 (very important), with the condition that the total weight of all factors does not exceed 1.00. These weights reflect the extent to which each factor influences the strategic position of the communication strategy in enhancing MSME participation in the event. Through this method, the study is able to determine priority areas and the strengths of communication strategies that need to be developed, while also identifying weaknesses that must be improved to achieve maximum MSME participation.

Table 3. IFAS Matrix

INTERNAL FACTORS				
NO.	STRENGTH	WEIGHT	RATING	SCORE
1.	Strong coordination among stakeholders	0.18	4	0.72
2.	Comprehensive MSME database	0.10	4	0.40
3.	Effective use of digital communication channels	0.15	4	0.60
4.	Experience in organizing regional events	0.15	3	0.45
TOTAL		0.58		2.17
	WEAKNESS	WEIGHT	RATING	SCORE
1.	Limited human resources	0.10	4	0.40
2.	Limited digital communication system integration	0.12	2	0.24
3.	Informal communication practices	0.10	2	0.20
4.	Limited feedback and evaluation mechanisms.	0.10	2	0.20
TOTAL		0.42		1.04
TOTAL IFAS (S+W)		1.00		3.21

Source: Research Result, 2026

[Table 3](#) presents the IFAS (Internal Factor Analysis Summary) calculation, indicating that the total Strength score is 2.17, while the total Weakness score is 1.04. The difference between

these values results in a positive net internal factor score of 1.13 ($2.17 - 1.04 = 1.13$). This positive value indicates that the internal conditions supporting MSME participation in the Sagarurung Festival are more influenced by strengths than weaknesses (Wheelen & Hunger, 2011). The main strengths are reflected in strong stakeholder coordination, the availability of an MSME database, the effective use of digital communication channels, and experience in organizing regional events. Meanwhile, the identified weaknesses include limited human resources, limited digital communication system integration, informal communication practices, and limited feedback and evaluation mechanisms. Overall, the IFAS results indicate that the communication strategies implemented have a strong internal foundation to support MSME participation and engagement in the event.

Table 4. EFAS Matrix

EXTERNAL FACTORS				
NO.	OPPORTUNITIES	WEIGHT	RATING	SCORE
1.	Growing social media adoption among MSMEs	0.15	4	0.60
2.	Government support through free booths and promotion	0.10	3	0.30
3.	High MSME participation interest	0.20	3	0.60
4.	Stakeholder collaboration opportunities	0.15	4	0.60
TOTAL		0.60		2.10
	THREATS	WEIGHT	RATING	SCORE
1.	Competition from other festivals	0.10	2	0.20
2.	Unequal digital access among MSMEs	0.10	2	0.20
3.	Production and business constraints	0.08	2	0.16
4.	Internet and infrastructure limitations	0.12	2	0.24
TOTAL		0.40		0.80
TOTAL EFAS (O+T)		1.00		2.90

Source: Research Result, 2026

Table 4 presents the EFAS (External Factor Analysis Summary) calculation, indicating that the total Opportunity score is 2.10, while the total Threat score is 0.80. The difference between these values results in a positive net external factor score of 1.30 ($2.10 - 0.80 = 1.30$) (David & David, 2016; Wheelen & Hunger, 2011). This positive value indicates that the external environment influencing MSME participation in the Sagarurung Festival is dominated by opportunities rather than threats. The main opportunities are derived from growing social media adoption among MSMEs, government support through free booths and promotion, high MSME participation interest, and stakeholder collaboration opportunities. Meanwhile, the identified threats include competition from other festivals, unequal digital access among MSMEs, production and business constraints, and internet and infrastructure limitations.

The results of the IFAS and EFAS analysis indicate that the internal factor score is 3.21, while the external factor score is 2.90. Both values show positive conditions, indicating that the communication strategy for MSME participation in the Sagarurung Festival has a favorable strategic position. Based on the SWOT analysis, this position supports a growth strategy by utilizing existing strengths and external opportunities to enhance MSME involvement and strengthen communication effectiveness during the event (David & David, 2016).

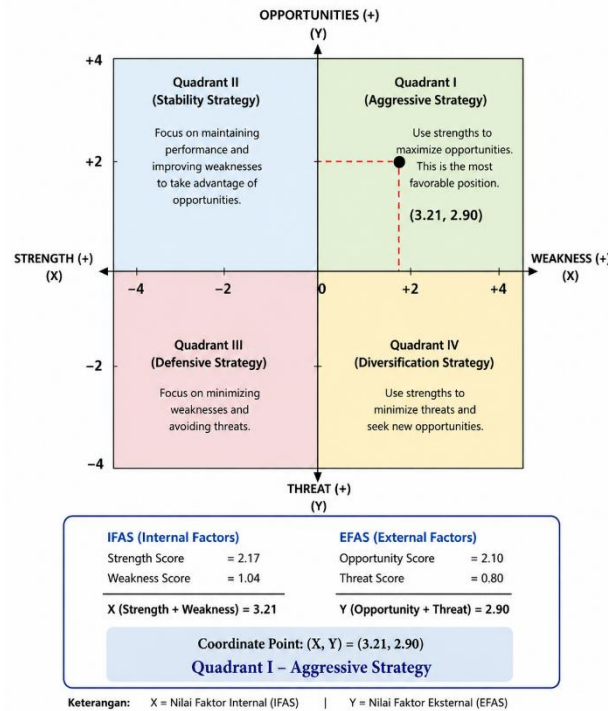


Figure 1. SWOT Matrix

Source: [Wheelen & Hunger, 2011](#) and Researcher, 2026

Figure 1 show that the strategic position of the communication strategy for increasing MSME participation in the Sagarurung Festival based on the results of the IFAS and EFAS analyses. The IFAS analysis produced a total internal factor score of 3.21, which was obtained from a strength score of 2.17 and a weakness score of 1.04. This result indicates that the communication strategy is supported by strong internal capabilities, particularly through effective stakeholder coordination, the availability of a comprehensive MSME database, the utilization of digital communication channels, and previous experience in organizing regional events. Although several weaknesses remain, including limited human resources, insufficient integration of digital communication systems, informal communication practices, and limited evaluation mechanisms, these factors do not outweigh the organization's overall internal strengths. Meanwhile, the EFAS analysis generated a total external factor score of 2.90, consisting of an opportunity score of 2.10 and a threat score of 0.80. This finding suggests that the external environment provides favorable opportunities, such as increasing social media adoption among MSMEs, government support, strong stakeholder collaboration, and high MSME interest in participating in the festival, while external threats remain relatively manageable. The combination of these internal and external factor scores places the communication strategy at the coordinate point (3.21, 2.90), positioning it in Quadrant I (Aggressive Strategy) of the SWOT matrix. This strategic position indicates that the organization possesses strong internal capabilities while operating in a supportive external environment. Therefore, the most appropriate strategic direction is to implement an SO (Strength–Opportunity) strategy, which emphasizes leveraging organizational strengths to maximize available opportunities through stronger stakeholder collaboration, optimization of digital communication, effective utilization of government support, and continuous innovation in communication strategies to further enhance MSME participation in the Sagarurung Festival ([David & David, 2016](#); [Wheelen & Hunger, 2011](#)).

Based on this strategic position, the most appropriate approach is the SO (Strength–Opportunity) strategy, which focuses on leveraging internal strengths to maximize external

opportunities (David & David, 2016). This strategy emphasizes strengthening digital communication systems, enhancing collaboration among stakeholders, optimizing government facilitation, and reinforcing relationship-based communication to further increase MSME participation in the Sagarurung Festival.

2. Discussion

The communication strategy implemented in the Sagarurung Festival in Penukal Abab Lematang Ilir (PALI) Regency reflects an Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) approach through the utilization of various communication elements, including advertising, sales promotion, public relations, personal selling, and direct and digital marketing, to deliver consistent and effective messages to target audiences. However, within the context of the Sagarurung Festival, the implementation of IMC does not occur in a balanced manner between conventional and modern media. Instead, it demonstrates a transformation toward a digital-first communication approach, indicated by the dominance of digital platforms such as WhatsApp and social media in disseminating information to MSMEs. This finding indicates that communication integration is not merely a technical process but also an adaptive response to audience communication behavior. The preference for digital communication channels occurs because MSMEs as the primary target audience tend to prioritize speed, social proximity, and cost efficiency in accessing information. Therefore, the effectiveness of communication strategies is influenced by the ability of organizations to align communication channels with audience characteristics and customer interaction points. Thus, IMC in the Sagarurung Festival should not only be understood as a promotional strategy but also as a participatory communication system that encourages MSME engagement in local-based tourism events. The concept of integrating multiple communication channels to create consistent messages and strengthen audience relationships is aligned with the principles of Integrated Marketing Communication (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

1. Advertising

Advertising activities through conventional media such as television, radio, and print media are not the primary strategy for reaching MSMEs in the Sagarurung Festival. Instead, the dissemination of information regarding the festival implementation, participant registration, event schedules, and available facilities is predominantly conducted through digital media, particularly WhatsApp and social media platforms. This finding is supported by interviews with informants, who explained that information about the Sagarurung Festival is initially delivered to MSME groups under the supervision of the local government through WhatsApp Groups, social media, and communication networks established through previous development programs. According to the informants, this approach is considered more effective because MSME actors are more active in using digital media and respond more quickly compared to conventional media channels. This finding is consistent with recent studies showing that MSMEs are more responsive to digital communication platforms than conventional media because digital communication enables faster interaction, broader reach, and lower promotional costs (Chatterjee et al., 2021; Dwivedi et al., 2021). The informant explained that conventional advertising media, such as television and radio, were not used as the main communication channels because MSMEs generally obtain information through WhatsApp and social media platforms. The informant stated that digital communication channels are more effective in delivering festival-related information due to their accessibility and ability to facilitate direct interaction with MSME participants. This finding indicates that the selection of communication media in the Sagarurung Festival is based on the characteristics and communication behavior of the target audience. In other words, the communication strategy

applied is audience-driven, meaning it is adapted to the communication habits of MSMEs, who commonly use WhatsApp and social media to obtain business-related information. Through this approach, festival information can be received quickly by MSME actors, thereby facilitating coordination and participant registration processes. However, the study also shows that MSME participation in the Sagarurung Festival is still predominantly dominated by business actors who are part of the government assisted MSME groups under the Office of Cooperatives and SMEs of PALI Regency. Most participants receive information through communication networks that have been established by the local government, while MSMEs outside these assisted groups remain relatively less engaged. This condition indicates that the communication reach has not yet fully extended to all MSME actors in PALI Regency. From the perspective of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) advertising is one of the key marketing communication elements that functions to build awareness and deliver information to target audiences through integrated communication channels (Kotler & Keller, 2016). However, the findings reveal that advertising in the Sagarurung Festival is more oriented toward disseminating information within existing networks rather than expanding communication reach to new MSME groups. This indicates that the full potential of advertising to create broader awareness among all MSME actors in PALI Regency has not yet been fully utilized.

In the Sagarurung Festival context, advertising no longer functions as the primary medium for building awareness but has shifted into a supporting instrument within a broader digital communication system. Information dissemination mainly occurs through WhatsApp Groups and social media channels connected to the MSME binaan network. This reliance on established networks indicates that the communication strategy tends to be insider-oriented, meaning it is more effective in reaching MSMEs already connected to government institutions rather than expanding outreach to new audiences. This reflects a paradox in digital IMC: although information access becomes faster and more efficient, inclusiveness of reach does not automatically increase. Thus, advertising in the Sagarurung Festival primarily functions as a mechanism to strengthen existing communication networks rather than as a tool for expanding MSME participation more broadly.

2. Sales Promotion

Sales promotion in the Sagarurung Festival is implemented through the provision of free booths and exhibition spaces for participating MSMEs. This facility serves as one of the main attractions that encourages business actors to take part in the festival. Based on interview findings, MSME informants stated that the availability of free booths helps reduce the costs required to participate in exhibition activities, making them more interested in joining. Sales promotion is a short-term incentive aimed at encouraging target audience response and participation (Kotler & Keller, 2016). In the Sagarurung Festival, the provision of free booths not only functions as a supporting facility but also as an incentive that encourages MSMEs to make the decision to participate in the festival. Typically, the allocation of booth locations is mapped and arranged by the relevant government office. The findings indicate that MSME participation decisions are influenced not only by information about the festival but also by economic considerations. For some business actors, rental costs are often a major barrier to participating in exhibitions or events. Therefore, the provision of free booths and spaces is perceived as an effort to reduce the risks and financial burden borne by participants. The informant explained that the free booth program was very helpful because MSME participants did not need to pay rental fees for the space provided. This facility became one of the communication strategies used by the organizers to encourage MSME participation, as it provided convenience and reduced the costs that

participants needed to prepare. Through this approach, the organizers were able to build positive relationships with MSME actors and increase their interest in participating in Sagarurung Festival. With these reduced barriers, MSMEs have greater opportunities to promote their products, expand marketing networks, and increase sales during the festival. However, the findings also show that the free booth facility is mostly utilized by MSMEs that are already registered under and supported by the Department of Cooperatives and SMEs of PALI Regency. This indicates that although the sales promotion strategy succeeds in encouraging participation among MSMEs within the government's existing support network, its impact on expanding participation beyond this group remains relatively limited. The effectiveness of this incentive tends to be concentrated among MSMEs already within the government's development network. This finding is supported by previous studies showing that financial incentives and government support significantly influence MSME participation in tourism and regional events because they reduce operational barriers and improve business opportunities (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2015; Yousaf et al., 2025).

This provision of free booths demonstrates that the Sagarurung Festival not only functions as a medium for cultural promotion but also as an instrument of local economic empowerment that provides opportunities for MSMEs to engage in regional tourism activities. Thus, sales promotion through the provision of free booths and spaces contributes to increasing MSME participation, although its reach still needs to be expanded so that the benefits of the festival can be experienced by a wider range of business actors in PALI Regency. Therefore, sales promotion in the Sagarurung Festival functions as a catalyst for participation but remains limited in creating broader economic inclusivity.

3. Public Relations

Public Relations (PR) in the Sagarurung Festival plays an important role in building trust between the organizers and MSMEs. Ongoing communication conducted by the Department of Cooperatives and MSME of PALI Regency creates long-term relationships that encourage MSMEs to continue participating in the festival from year to year. The research findings show that information regarding the implementation of the Sagarurung Festival is always officially conveyed by the department to MSMEs every year, particularly to business actors who are registered in the development program. The informants stated that they regularly receive information related to schedules, registration procedures, and the facilities provided in the festival, so they do not experience difficulties in accessing information and can directly prepare for participation. In addition, MSMEs under the development program are also provided with training to support their continuous growth and competitiveness in line with current MSME trends, both in terms of products and promotion. Informants stated that the training provided helps strengthen relationships and trust among stakeholders, including training in packaging, processing Sagarurung smoked fish, business capital development, and other capacity building activities. PR, according to (Kotler & Keller, 2016), functions to build public credibility and trust through communication that is non-commercial but strategic in nature. In the context of the Sagarurung Festival, PR does not only serve as an information channel but also as a means of building institutional trust that becomes the foundation for MSME engagement in the event. Critically, these findings indicate that MSME participation decisions are influenced not only by the content of communication messages but also by the level of trust in the organizing institution. The consistency of communication conducted every year creates the perception that the Sagarurung Festival is a stable, well-planned, and reliable government program. This becomes one of the main reasons MSMEs continue to participate repeatedly in the event. Conceptually, PR in this context functions not only as an information provider but also as a reinforcement of long-term relationships between

the government and MSMEs. Trust built through repeated communication becomes a key factor driving sustained participation. However, this relational pattern also creates a communication structure that tends to be exclusive, as trust and access to information are more strongly formed within the network of supported MSMEs compared to those who are not yet integrated. Thus, PR in the Sagarurung Festival can be understood as a mechanism of relationship governance within a community-based event tourism ecosystem.

This finding indicates that trust in institutions and effective stakeholder communication play important roles in strengthening community support and participation in tourism initiatives. Therefore, public relations (PR) in the Sagarurung Festival functions as a relationship governance mechanism that maintains the continuity of MSME participation in event tourism through the development of trust and sustainable stakeholder relationships (Chang, 2020).

4. Personal Selling

Personal selling in the Sagarurung Festival is carried out through interpersonal communication between organizers and MSMEs, both face-to-face and via WhatsApp. This form of communication includes coordination, mentoring, and technical explanations related to registration procedures, booth allocation, activity schedules, and festival implementation regulations. The research findings show that most MSMEs receive information and guidance directly from the Department of Cooperatives and MSMEs of PALI Regency as well as the organizing committee. MSME informants stated that personal communication helps them understand information that has not been fully explained through general announcements or digital media.

Personal selling is a two-way form of communication that allows direct interaction between the organization and the audience. Unlike advertising, which is one-way, personal selling provides opportunities for the audience to ask questions, obtain clarification, and receive direct feedback (Kotler & Keller, 2016). In the context of the Sagarurung Festival, this function is reflected in the role of the organizers, who not only deliver information but also assist MSMEs throughout the preparation process until the festival takes place. The informant explained that coordination was carried out both directly and through WhatsApp to ensure that the information provided was clearer and easier for MSME participants to understand. According to the informant, direct communication helped build better relationships with participants, while the use of WhatsApp facilitated the delivery of information related to festival activities, registration processes, booth requirements, and other technical matters. Through this approach, the organizers were able to provide explanations more effectively and ensure that MSME participants received the necessary information to participate in Sagarurung Festival. Therefore, personal selling functions as a means of reducing uncertainty and increasing MSMEs' trust in the festival organization. The clearer the information received, the greater the likelihood of MSME participation. The findings also indicate that MSME participation in the Sagarurung Festival is not solely built through mass communication, but through interpersonal relationships that have been established between the Department of Cooperatives and SMEs and its supported business actors. This explains why most festival participants still come from MSME groups that are already connected to the local government's communication network. The existing relationships facilitate coordination and at the same time enhance the level of trust in the festival program.

The findings indicate that relationship marketing and interpersonal communication play important roles in strengthening stakeholder commitment, as direct interaction facilitates trust-building and mutual understanding. In the context of tourism and MSMEs, effective communication, stakeholder coordination, and collaborative engagement are essential factors in

enhancing participation and supporting tourism event development as well as local business sustainability. Therefore, personal selling in the Sagarurung Festival demonstrates that MSME participation success is not only determined by mass promotion but is also strongly influenced by the quality of interpersonal relationships established between event organizers and business actors as the main stakeholders of the event (Chase et al., 2023; Payne et al., 2017; Yoon & Wang, 2023).

5. Direct dan Digital Marketing

Direct and digital marketing serve as the main communication channels in the Sagarurung Festival, particularly through WhatsApp, Instagram, and official digital media owned by the Department of Cooperatives and SMEs of PALI Regency. Information related to registration, event schedules, technical implementation, and booth facilities is delivered quickly and directly to MSMEs, especially business actors who are part of the department's development network.

The research findings show that most MSMEs become aware of and decide to participate in the Sagarurung Festival through information distributed via WhatsApp Groups or direct digital communication with the relevant government office. MSME informants stated that information received through WhatsApp is easier to understand, faster to access, and allows them to obtain immediate responses when they have questions regarding the festival's implementation. The informant explained that these platforms were chosen because they are considered effective communication channels for reaching MSMEs quickly and widely. WhatsApp was used to facilitate direct communication regarding festival information, registration procedures, booth arrangements, and other technical matters, while Instagram was utilized to promote festival activities and increase public awareness. Through the use of digital media, the organizers were able to provide accessible information and encourage greater MSME participation in Sagarurung Festival.

This condition makes the coordination process more effective compared to other communication media. This finding is consistent with recent international studies emphasizing the strategic role of digital marketing and social media communication in enhancing stakeholder participation within tourism and event ecosystems. Digital and social media marketing facilitate interactive, real-time, and measurable communication processes that strengthen audience engagement and organizational connectivity. Technology-driven communication through digital platforms also enhances stakeholder collaboration, participation, and information sharing in the development of community-based tourism. Furthermore, the utilization of social media platforms such as Instagram and WhatsApp contributes to improving promotional effectiveness, expanding audience reach, and facilitating continuous interaction between event organizers and local business actors within tourism destinations and events (Abidin et al., 2023; Kotler & Keller, 2016).

6. IMC

Overall, the research findings show that the implementation of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) in the Sagarurung Festival has developed into an integrated communication ecosystem that combines digital and interpersonal approaches. This integration is reflected in the interconnected roles of various communication elements, including advertising, sales promotion, public relations, personal selling, and direct and digital marketing, which collectively support information dissemination and encourage MSME participation. The integration of these communication elements represents the fundamental principles of Integrated Marketing Communication in creating consistent messages and strengthening stakeholder engagement (George, 2025; Kotler & Keller, 2016).

The SWOT analysis shows that the communication strategy of the Sagarurung Festival is influenced by both internal organizational capacity and external factors. The main strength identified lies in the effective coordination between the Office of Cooperatives and MSMEs, the

organizing committee, and MSME actors. The utilization of digital platforms such as WhatsApp groups and online systems also supports faster information delivery and more efficient coordination among stakeholders. These findings indicate that stakeholder collaboration and effective communication serve as important factors in supporting successful festival management and strengthening participation among involved actors (Chang, 2020).

However, several weaknesses were identified, including limited human resources, dependence on informal WhatsApp-based communication, and limited outreach beyond government-assisted MSMEs. These conditions affected information consistency and inclusiveness of participation, indicating that communication effectiveness may be influenced by organizational readiness and resource availability. External opportunities were identified through the utilization of social media platforms and government support, including free booth facilities that encouraged MSME participation. Meanwhile, threats included competition from other events, infrastructure limitations, and unequal access to information among MSMEs. These findings demonstrate that communication effectiveness depends not only on media selection but also on stakeholder support and organizational adaptability (Ramdan et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the study reveals that the communication strategies implemented in the Sagarurung Festival differ from conventional marketing approaches that primarily rely on mass media promotion. Digital platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram functioned not only as promotional tools but also as communication channels for coordination, interaction, and relationship building. In addition, direct communication between organizers and MSME actors contributed to strengthening trust and participation, demonstrating the importance of relationship-based communication in maintaining long-term stakeholder relationships (Gronroos, 1994).

The findings confirm that the effectiveness of communication in the Sagarurung Festival is not determined by large-scale advertising alone, but by the integration of digital communication, interpersonal interaction, and stakeholder collaboration. The implementation of these integrated approaches demonstrates that communication strategies in regional tourism events require adaptive digital media utilization, strong stakeholder relationships, and inclusive communication systems to encourage MSME participation. These findings extend the application of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) theory by showing that the integration of various communication channels can strengthen engagement and participation within regional tourism contexts (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

Conclusion

This study shows that the communication strategies implemented in the Sagarurung Festival were conducted through an Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) approach involving various elements, including advertising, sales promotion, public relations, personal selling, and direct and digital marketing. Among these strategies, digital communication and interpersonal communication emerged as the most effective approaches in increasing MSME participation in the festival. The findings indicate that conventional advertising was less effective in reaching MSMEs compared to digital platforms such as WhatsApp and social media, which were considered faster, more accessible, and more interactive. Furthermore, the provision of free booths successfully encouraged MSME participation by reducing financial barriers and business risks. Public relations activities also contributed to building trust and maintaining long-term relationships between organizers and MSME actors through consistent communication and information dissemination. Direct communication through interpersonal coordination and WhatsApp groups

strengthened MSMEs' understanding of the festival and increased their engagement in the event. The study also found that digital marketing became the dominant communication channel because it enabled information to be distributed quickly, efficiently, and widely to MSME participants. However, despite the strategic role of digital communication, the study identifies a critical structural limitation in which MSME participation remains predominantly concentrated among government-assisted (binaan) MSMEs. This indicates that communication effectiveness, although efficient, has not yet achieved full inclusivity. The integration of multiple communication channels to deliver consistent messages and strengthen stakeholder engagement reflects the principles of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) in developing effective organizational communication strategies.

The IFAS–EFAS analysis shows that the Sagarurung Festival communication strategy is positioned in Quadrant I (Aggressive Strategy), with a positive internal factor score (3.21) and a positive external factor score (2.90). This indicates that the communication system is supported by strong internal coordination and favorable external opportunities. Therefore, the main conclusion of this study is that communication effectiveness in regional tourism events is not determined solely by media integration, but is strongly influenced by stakeholder relationships, institutional trust, and the inclusiveness of communication networks. Therefore, future studies are recommended to include a broader and more diverse range of MSME participants, particularly those outside the government-assisted network, in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of communication effectiveness. Such an approach is important to capture how different groups of business actors experience, interpret, and respond to communication strategies within regional tourism events, especially in relation to inclusivity, access to information, and participation dynamics.

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