

MARKETING MIX DYNAMICS AND PSYCHOPOLITICAL INFLUENCES AMONG WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN TERENGGANU'S COTTAGE INDUSTRY

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Abstract. In recent years, the proportion of small business and cottage industry has served as a critical driver of socioeconomic development during post covid-19 pandemic, particularly in the less developed east-coast region of Terengganu, Malaysia. Recent research on small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Malaysia has predominantly focused on government support, economic impact, and business sustainability. However, there remains a lack of clarity regarding SMEs in the food sector on the east coast, particularly those led by women entrepreneurs in rural areas, as prior studies have primarily focused on SME activities within developed space, dominated by male entrepreneurs. This study explores the interplay between marketing mix practices and marketability, specifically examining how these women entrepreneurs navigate product positioning, pricing strategies, distribution channels, and promotional efforts to sustain their businesses. Guided by Peter Sedgwick's Legacy Psychopolitics framework, this research examines the underlying power dynamics, societal structures, and psychological impacts in influencing the decision-making of women entrepreneurs in adapting to modern marketing strategies. Utilizing a multi-method qualitative approach, the data was collected through semi-structured interviews, photo elicitation and field notes focusing on 22 participants from Kuala Nerus, Kuala Terengganu and Marang. Findings revealed that, while strategic marketing mix practices contribute to improved product visibility and consumer reach, significant barriers persist, including limited resources, market competition, and fluctuating consumer demand. Key strategies identified include product innovation, strategic pricing, optimized distribution channels, targeted promotional activities and strong relationships with the customers that align with their preferences. By addressing socio-political and psychological challenges through the lens of Psychopolitics, the findings provide a strategic framework for improving business sustainability and bridging the gap between traditional practices and modern market demands. Eventually, through prioritizing low-cost operations, flexibility, and community-focused approaches, the home cottage industry can ensure their sustainability in a competitive and dynamic market environment.

Keywords: *home cottage industry, women entrepreneurs, marketing mix, customer relationship management, marketability*

Introduction

The home cottage industry is a vital component of Malaysia's economy, particularly in Terengganu, where it provides opportunities for women entrepreneurs. This industry primarily involves producing goods at home by family members or a small number of paid workers. In this study, these industries cover on food products, which are categorized into three types which are frozen food, dry food, and paste products. These businesses often rely on traditional methods, offering unique and culturally significant products to local markets. The importance of the food and beverage sector is evident, as it accounts for 20.4% of the small and medium enterprise (SME) sector in Malaysia

(Azmi, 2020). Among these, women-owned SMEs in Malaysia accounted for 186,930 firms or about 20.6% of total SMEs in 2015 compared 127,429 firms in 2010 (Kamaruddin et al., 2018). Although the contribution of women entrepreneurs to a country's growth is smaller compared to that of men, studies on women entrepreneur in developing countries like Malaysia are still relatively low and limited.

Marketing emerges a critical factor for the success of the home cottage food industry. The marketing mix, commonly known as the 4Ps consists elements of product, price, place, and promotion, provides a framework for understanding and responding to customer needs. An effective marketing mix strategy enables entrepreneurs to offer high-quality products, set competitive prices, ensure accessibility, and implement targeted promotions (Fitriany, 2024). These efforts not only enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty but also increase sales and contribute to the overall success and sustainability of the business (Fitriany, 2024). This study aims to explore how marketing mix practices contributes to the marketability of home cottage food products among women entrepreneurs in Terengganu, focusing on Kuala Nerus, Kuala Terengganu, and Marang. Guided by the theoretical framework of Psychopolitics by Peter Sedgwick's Legacy, this research examines the underlying power dynamics, societal structures, and psychological impacts in influencing the decision-making of women entrepreneurs in adapting to modern marketing strategies based on the marketing mix framework. By addressing socio-political and psychological challenges through the lens of Psychopolitics, the findings provide a strategic framework for improving business sustainability and bridging the gap between traditional practices and modern market demands.

Problem statement

In recent years, the proportion of small business and cottage industry has increased tremendously, serving as a critical driver of socioeconomic development, particularly in regions like Terengganu, Malaysia, during the post-COVID-19 recovery period. Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) account for 97.2% of business establishments in Malaysia, contributing 38.2% to the national GDP and providing employment for 7.3 million people (OECD, 2022). Despite their significant economic contributions, SMEs face considerable challenges that hinder their growth and marketability. Recent research on small-and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Malaysia has predominantly focused on government support (Abhari et al., 2021), economic impact (Mendoza and Tadeo, 2023; Mustapa and Mohamad, 2021), and business sustainability (Kasim et al., 2020). However, there remains a lack of clarity regarding SMEs in the food sector on the east coast, particularly those led by women entrepreneurs, as prior studies have primarily focused on male entrepreneurs leaving a knowledge gap in understanding the unique challenges faced by women in this sector. The study conducted by Kamaruddin et al. (2018) provides evidence of this issue by highlighting that, although the contribution of women entrepreneurs to a country's economic growth is smaller compared to that of men, research on women entrepreneurs in developing countries like Malaysia remains relatively limited, especially when compared to studies in developed countries. This study seeks to address the gaps in understanding the limitation of current marketing mix practices by exploring how marketing mix practices enhance the marketability of food products crafted by women entrepreneurs in Terengganu. By investigating how the marketing practices can improve the marketability of products, this research aims to provide actionable insights to bridge the gap between traditional practices and modern

market demands. The findings will contribute to empowering women entrepreneurs, fostering innovation, and ensuring the long-term viability of the cottage food industry in Terengganu.

Significance of study

The home cottage industry in Terengganu faces significant challenges, particularly for women entrepreneurs striving to expand their geographic reach and attract new customers. To move their business forward, they need to adopt more comprehensive communication strategies. Thus, it is essential to look thoroughly at the cause of these problems and seek a solution. This study seeks to explore how the home cottage industry integrated marketing mix practices to enhance product marketability. With 60% of newly established SMEs in Malaysia failing within five years and only 4 out of 10 successfully overcoming growth-related challenges (Ambad et al., 2020), there is an urgent need for targeted strategies to support these enterprises. The lack of studies focusing on the marketing mix within the home cottage industry, particularly in the food sector, demonstrates the importance of this research. By identifying the impact of marketing mix practices, this study provides valuable insights into improving product marketability and fostering business growth. The findings can serve as a roadmap for women entrepreneurs, enabling them to overcome barriers, adopt innovative strategies, and compete in an increasingly dynamic market. Moreover, this research holds broader significance for policymakers and support organizations by offering evidence-based recommendations to design targeted interventions. These interventions can promote gender equality, empower women entrepreneurs, and strengthen the local economy, contributing to sustainable economic growth in Terengganu.

Objective of the study

The objective of study are includes: (1) to determine how home cottage industry conceive marketing mix in each zone (Kuala Nerus, Kuala Terengganu and Marang); and (2) to examine are there any other entrepreneurial marketing practices other than marketing mix practices.

Review of literature

Home cottage industry

Home cottage industries are mainly defined as a small-scale business primarily characterized by production activities carried out within the worker's home (Biswas et al., 2017). The products of cottage industries primarily cater to local markets, highlighting their role in meeting community demands. According to Mmadabuchi (2021), who make a study on cottage business and its motivating factors, cottage industries are integral to economic development, offering significant contributions to job creation, national growth, and poverty alleviation. This is further supported by Subasini (2024), as she pointed out cottage industries are a major source of employment, especially in rural areas where job opportunities are limited.

Women entrepreneurs

According to Ariffin et al. (2020), women entrepreneurship is characterized by female participation in business ownership and managerial roles while women-owned

SMEs in Malaysia is defined where 51% of the equity is held by women or the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or Managing Director (MD) is a woman that owns at least 10% of the equity (Kamaruddin et al., 2018). The increasing participation of women in entrepreneurship strengthens economies and fosters greater inclusivity and equity in business ecosystems globally. However, women often have less formal education or business-specific work experience compared to men when starting their ventures. This disparity is influenced by cultural expectations and household responsibilities, which can limit women's opportunities to gain relevant experience or pursue education in business fields (Ogundana et al., 2021).

Marketing mix practices

Neil H. Borden first introduced the concept of the marketing mix in the 1950s, emphasizing the importance of a well-balanced combination of marketing tools to achieve organizational goals. According to Jasin and Firmansyah (2023), the marketing mix comprises interconnected and strategically organized elements that enable businesses to meet their objectives while fulfilling customer needs. The marketing mix consists of four elements; product, price, place, and promotion that form the core set of controllable factors that influence consumer behavior. Essentially, the marketing mix focuses on identifying consumer needs and delivering products or services that satisfy customer demand (Caesar et al., 2017).

Marketing practices

Over the years, there have been substantial transformations in the marketing of goods and services, as well as in the communication between producers and consumers, in both developed and developing countries. As a result, marketers are increasingly compelled to adapt their marketing communication strategies to align with a more customer-focused, interactive, and dynamic approach. This evolution is encapsulated in the concept of the marketing mix (Caesar et al., 2017).

Marketing mix practices

Products

A product is a combination of goods and services offered by an individual or organization to meet the needs and preferences of the market (Sulistyo, 2021). For Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), the product mix is a strategic approach to addressing client demands, with many SMEs leveraging diverse product combinations to attract and retain customers. Previous studies have identified three key product elements in marketing mix practices that significantly impact SMEs: product quality, packaging, and labelling (Akhmalia, 2023; Kuspriyadi et al., 2023). In order to establish strong customer connections, businesses must provide high-performing, well-crafted products that align with consumer demands, ultimately creating a competitive advantage.

Price

Price has always been a critical determinant in a buyer's decision-making process (Zaman and Ikhwan, 2021). It represents the amount a consumer pays to obtain a desired product or service (Amin, 2021). According to Harahap and Amanah (2020),

low prices are often the primary consideration for consumers when making purchases. However, the process of determining prices is influenced by various factors, including production costs, customer purchasing power, and competitor pricing for similar products (Kocheyov et al., 2024). Businesses in this sector face unique challenges, such as unstable and expensive raw material costs, which make it difficult to maintain competitive pricing while ensuring consistent product quality (Haleem et al., 2019). Additionally, fierce competition within the industry further complicates the pricing strategy, as businesses must strike a balance between affordability and profitability to remain viable in the market.

Place

The place element in the marketing mix focuses on how a company's products are delivered and made accessible to customers. Accordingly, place describes the marketing channels, which are made up of interrelated businesses that control the movement of products from manufacturers to final consumers. This element encompasses critical aspects such as distribution channels, warehouse facilities, transportation modes, and inventory control management. Importantly, the choice of place significantly influences other marketing strategies, such as pricing, by affecting costs and logistics (Caesar et al., 2017). Caesar et al. (2017) emphasize that offering delivery services is an effective way for businesses to attract more customers by enhancing convenience and accessibility. For many small-scale enterprises, locating their operations close to their primary customer base is a practical approach, making it easier for customers to access products and services.

Promotion

Promotion is a vital communication component within the marketing mix, designed to establish and maintain communication with the target audience. In the context of promotional marketing strategies, many small and medium enterprises (SMEs) rely on advertising as their primary promotional tactic. Digital transformation, which involves shifting business operations from traditional methods to a digital environment, has become essential for SMEs aiming to remain competitive and sustainable (Vrontis et al., 2022). Researchers have demonstrated that using social media platforms not only helps SMEs expand their market reach but also aligns with sustainability goals. These platforms enable businesses to provide detailed product information, spark consumer interest, and encourage purchases (Syed et al., 2021). Additionally, these platforms allow businesses to engage directly with customers, receive feedback, and build strong customer relationships (Puspitasari et al., 2024). By utilizing e-commerce platforms like Shopee, Lazada, or their own websites, home cottage industries can showcase their products, provide detailed descriptions, and facilitate online transactions, which is especially beneficial for geographically dispersed customers (Hisyam and Fitriyah, 2024).

Customer relationship management

In the home cottage food sector, customer relationship management (CRM) entails building strong and long-term connections with clients by efficient communication, customer service, and community involvement. A study by Kehinde et al. (2024) on effective customer relationship marketing, customers will feel appreciated when

utilizing tactics like calling them by name in messaging or in-person contacts. Strong connections and long-term success may be attained by the home cottage food sector by emphasizing customer interaction, outstanding service, and significant community involvement.

Psychopolitics

Peter Sedgwick's *Psychopolitics* explores critical aspects of political and social integration within mental health frameworks and their societal impacts (Cresswell and Spandler, 2009). Sedgwick's analysis demonstrates how institutions adapt to crises whether in psychiatry or welfare by aligning their resources to meet societal needs (Cresswell and Spandler, 2009). This concept aligns closely with the challenges faced by the home cottage industry, particularly in market competition and technological advancements. In this context, marketing mix practices can be seen as parallel responses to address these crises. Sedgwick also emphasizes "mutual aid" and the development of voluntary, grassroots initiatives as alternatives to bureaucratic solutions. In the context of the home cottage industry, women entrepreneurs can leverage community-based marketing and cost-effective strategies to sustain production and market reach without relying solely on traditional methods. Lastly, Sedgwick's critique of unequal access to mental health services can parallel challenges in adoption of modern marketing practices within the home cottage industry as women entrepreneurs often face barriers to this, much like Sedgwick advocated for equitable healthcare reforms. The integration of marketing mix practices mirrors Sedgwick's vision of aligning resources to address structural challenges. By drawing from Sedgwick's psychopolitical theory, it can be understood that the home cottage industry requires both systemic innovations and collaborative strategies in addressing contemporary challenges including in the market dynamics of the home cottage industries.

Materials and Methods

In this study, a qualitative multi-method approach was employed, integrating semi-structured interviews, photo elicitation, and field notes to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the subject (Andalib, 2024). The research was conducted across Kuala Nerus, Kuala Terengganu, and Marang, involving 22 participants selected through purposive and snowball sampling techniques. A qualitative approach was chosen to gain deeper insights into the experiences and marketing strategies of women entrepreneurs in the home cottage food industry (Wakelin et al., 2024). Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data collection method, allowing participants to share their experiences in an open-ended format, ensuring flexibility while maintaining focus on the research objectives (Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik, 2021). To enrich data collection, photo elicitation was incorporated, where participants shared images related to their marketing practices, enhancing the depth of insights. Harper (2002) suggests that photo elicitation can evoke stronger cognitive and emotional responses than verbal interviews alone. Additionally, field notes were utilized to document observations, reflections, and contextual elements, supporting a holistic understanding of the data and research environment (Phillippi and Lauderdale, 2017). The study employed purposive and snowball sampling, ensuring that only relevant participants who met specific inclusion criteria were selected (Magnone and Yeziarski, 2024). Participants were selected based on the following inclusion criteria: women entrepreneurs managing their own food-

based home cottage industries; actively engaged in marketing mix strategies; and residing in Terengganu (Kuala Nerus, Kuala Terengganu and Marang). Participants were recruited through social media platforms and face-to-face interviews were conducted at locations convenient for the participants. A total of 22 women entrepreneurs were selected become participants in this study, with equal representation from the three study zones. 2 of the participants are involved in two different type of food products (frozen food product and dry food products, and frozen food products and paste product) resulting the final participants are 22 instead of 24.

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, photo elicitation, and field notes to ensure a comprehensive exploration of marketing mix practices. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in Malay to facilitate effective communication and ensure clarity for all participants (Salleh et al., 2023). Each interview lasted between 35 to 50 minutes and focused on key aspects of marketing mix (product, price, place and promotion) and other entrepreneurial marketing practices (Ambad et al., 2020; Caesar et al., 2017). The open-ended format of the interviews allowed participants to provide detailed responses, while also enabling the researcher to probe deeper into specific topics when necessary. In addition to interviews, photo elicitation was used, where participants submitted images via WhatsApp to support the semi-structured interview by showcasing their branding efforts, packaging strategies, and customer engagement techniques (Harper, 2002). This approach gave a clearer picture of how women entrepreneurs applied marketing mix strategies in their daily business operations. It also highlighted the unique ways marketing practices varied across different regions, reflecting local market conditions and consumer preferences (Cleland and MacLeod, 2021). Furthermore, field notes were taken during interviews and on-site observations to document non-verbal cues, customer interactions, and environmental factors affecting business operations (Phillippi and Lauderdale, 2017). These additional data sources can enhance the depth and accuracy of the study's findings. The data were analysed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke (2006) framework, which involves six key steps (Thomas and Earthy, 2023). First, the researcher familiarized themselves with the data through repeated reading of transcripts to identify initial patterns. Next, coding was performed to categorize meaningful segments of data, followed by theme identification, where related codes were grouped into broad themes. The theme review stage refined and ensured coherence within the themes, after which theme definition was conducted to finalize the core messages emerging from the data. Finally, the writing-up stage synthesized the findings into a structured report. This method enabled the systematic identification of key themes (Zaman and Ikhwan, 2021). By employing a structured analysis approach, the study ensured that findings were robust and accurately reflected the participants' experiences.

Results and Discussion

Demographic profiles

The socio-demographic profile of women entrepreneurs in Kuala Nerus, Kuala Terengganu, and Marang, Terengganu, highlights the important information about their age, education, marital status, and business operations where are most participants (77.27%) are aged 30-49, with 36.36% in the 30-39 range and 40.91% in the 40-49 range, indicating that mid-life women actively engage in entrepreneurship. Meanwhile, 22.73% are above 50, showing continued entrepreneurial participation among older

women. Regarding education, 54.55% have completed secondary education (SPM), 27.27% hold STPM/Sijil/Diploma qualifications, and 13.64% have a degree or higher, illustrating a trend toward higher education's role in entrepreneurship. However, 4.55% have only completed PMR/PT3, suggesting a need for additional educational support, as it is linked to better entrepreneurial skills (Noor et al., 2024). Next, marital status reveals that 81.82% of participants are married, while 18.18% are single, indicating that family dynamics influence entrepreneurial aspirations, presenting both challenges and opportunities. All participants operate as sole proprietors, which aligns with small-scale business trends in the region. Business experience varies, with 40.91% operating for 6-10 years and 31.82% for 11-20 years, demonstrating resilience. Meanwhile, 18.18% have been in business for less than five years, reflecting a growing interest in entrepreneurship driven by social support and financial necessity (Gunasegaran, 2024). The entrepreneurs produce various products, including dry goods (36.36%), frozen products (31.82%), and food pastes (27.73%), showcasing their adaptability to market demands. Their even distribution across Kuala Nerus, Kuala Terengganu, and Marang ensures a well-rounded geographical perspective.

Table 1. Demographic profile of the participants.

Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Age group		
<29	0	0
30-39	8	36.36
40-49	9	40.91
>50	5	22.73
Educational level		
PMR/PT3	1	4.55
SPM	12	54.55
STPM/Sijil/ Diploma	6	27.27
>Degree	3	13.64
Marital status		
Single	4	18.18
Married	18	81.82
Type of Business		
Sole proprietorship	22	100
Years in Business Operations		
<5 Years	4	18.18
6-10 Years	9	40.91
11-20 Years	7	31.82
<21 Years	2	9.09
Types of Products		
Frozen	7	31.82
Dry	8	36.36
Paste	5	27.73
Frozen and dry	1	4.55
Frozen and paste	1	4.55
Zone		
Kuala Nerus	8	36.36
Kuala Terengganu	7	31.82
Marang	7	31.82

Marketing mix

Themes evolved from the interview which are related to marketing mix i.e. product, price, place and promotion is reported in the subsequent sections.

Product

Product marketing strategies used by SMEs revealed in the interviews are summarized in *Table 2*.

Table 2. *Product marketing strategies used by SMEs.*

Product marketing strategies	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Distinctive product	7	31.82
High quality products/ services	22	100
Packaging	16	72.73
Branding	15	68.18
Adapting to market trends	9	40.91

Based on the *Table 2*, the results show that 31.82% of women entrepreneurs focused on offering distinctive products rooted in heirloom recipes in order to preserve the authenticity of the products while adapting to modern tastes. Traditional foods like ‘tepung bungkus,’ ‘sata,’ and ‘keropok’ remained popular with authentic taste, while ‘biskut raya’ was modified to appeal to younger generations, balancing tradition with market demand.

“I choose to make ‘tepung bungkus’ because no one makes that kind of kueh in this area because it is difficult and requires skills with a perfect recipe.”
 [Participant 1, Kuala Nerus].

The results of this study reflect a strong emphasis on maintaining the authenticity of traditional products while also adapting to the evolving market demands. Many of the entrepreneurs interviewed cited using generational recipes as a key factor in creating products with deep cultural significance. This aligns with the findings of Wing and Batcha (2020), who discussed the challenge of maintaining traditional recipes as they pass down through generations. However, some entrepreneurs have adapted traditional recipes by incorporating modern trends, particularly to appeal to younger generations. This finding supports the notion that entrepreneurs must balance tradition with innovation to stay relevant in a competitive market (Lasaiba, 2024). This aligns with the Sedgwick’s analysis that demonstrates how institutions adapt to crises whether in psychiatry or welfare by aligning their resources to meet societal needs but in these industries, entrepreneurs were adapted to current demand (Cresswell and Spandler, 2009). All the participants highlighted the importance of fresh, high-quality raw materials to maintain consistency in taste, appearance, and aroma of the final products. For example, Participant 15 emphasized that using fresh ingredients is key to achieve optimal product quality. Strict quality standards and monitoring are necessary since the quality of the end product is greatly impacted by the quality of the raw materials (Rembulani and Rahmadhia, 2023). This finding aligns with Zaman and Ikhwan (2021), who emphasized that quality plays a pivotal role in satisfying customer expectations and building brand loyalty.

“If the fish is not in good condition, we reject it during inspection to ensure my product (‘keropok keping’) free from itchy and have a good quality.”

[Participant 15, Kuala Terengganu].

Other than that, the need for proper packaging and storage conditions was also pointed out, particularly for frozen products which are more sensitive to the temperature. This is because packaging not only ensures product quality, but also plays a role in marketing. Participant 20 emphasized that certifications like Halal and MeSTI can enhance market appeal, helping her products (‘sambal bilis’) to reach international markets. This was pointed out by the study on implementation of trademarks as intellectual property in packaging, consumer purchase decisions may be greatly influenced by attractive packaging designs, especially in a variety of global marketplaces (Maheni et al., 2024).

“My products have reached Qatar, Yemen, China, and Singapore. My product had no complaints since switching from bottled to retort pouch packaging, which previously led to oil leakage despite proper sealing. For me, Halal certification is crucial for expanding our product, especially for exports process.”

[Participant 20, Kuala Terengganu].

Lastly, branding was highlighted as an important aspect in reflecting the product's identity. According to the participant 11, A strong and suitable brand can attract customers from various segments, encouraging them to try the products. Effective branding not only defines the product itself, but also helps build trust and recognition in the market. A strong brand enhances the value and attractiveness of products by shaping how they are perceived (Tojiri, 2023). This aligns with the findings by Asri et al. (2020), who highlighted that branding significantly influences consumer perception and adds value to products.

“I named my shop ‘Sugar Pastel’ to reflect my products. When people hear the name, they know it’s a dessert with light sweetness. It also suitable for health-conscious customers to enjoy.”

[Participant 11, Kuala Terengganu].

Price

Price marketing strategies used by SMEs revealed in the interviews are summarized in *Table 3*.

Table 3. Pricing marketing strategies used by SMEs.

Pricing marketing strategies	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Cost-based	22	100
Lowest price	12	54.55
Fixed	2	9.09
Value-based	8	36.36
Competitive-based	7	31.82
Promotional	18	81.82

In terms of pricing strategies, all participants (100%) employed a cost-based pricing model, as it is simple and adaptable to fluctuations in raw material costs, aligning with literature that highlights its simplicity and adaptability to fluctuations in raw material prices as key factors for its popularity (Zaman and Ikhwan, 2021). A primary consideration when setting prices is the raw material cost, which can be unstable. According to Gupta (2024), this approach is especially critical when raw material prices rise unpredictably. Participant 4, who establish frozen products shared that, the main reason for her to increase the price of her products is due to the increasing price of raw materials such as fish and sago.

“The main reason for increasing my price of the products is due to the rising cost of raw materials, such as fish and sago.”

[Participant 4, Kuala Terengganu]

To maintain affordability, 54.55% of entrepreneurs made efforts to keep prices as low as possible. For instance, Participant 3 who run a business of frozen food products, emphasized the importance of ensuring that her products appeal in price. Entrepreneurs' attempts to keep prices affordable align with research by Harahap and Amanah (2020), which emphasizes that low prices are a key consideration for consumers, particularly when product prices increase due to raw material costs. In order to offset the higher costs of certain packaging materials, such as containers, the entrepreneur strategically chose more affordable packaging type which is plastic packaging as it is a cost-effective alternative, allowing her to offer products at a lower price point without compromising quality.

“Usually, I will mark up the price for products inside the containers as it is more expensive. So, I decided to sell plastic only, as I can cut the cost for packaging.”

[Participant 3, Kuala Nerus]

To build customer loyalty and increase sales volume, some entrepreneurs employed flexible and competitive pricing strategies. This approach, which attracts price-sensitive customers, is an effective method for increasing sales and gaining customer loyalty during busy seasons. Harahap and Amanah (2020) also support this, noting that offering discounts during peak demand periods can drive sales volume, particularly for small businesses targeting a local or seasonal market. For instance, participant 4 noted that they kept their prices competitive by comparing them with others competitors, as most sellers offered local products at affordable rates. They typically provided discounts during public holidays or celebrations like Hari Raya, given that a significant portion of their customer base came from outside Terengganu.

“I compare my prices with competitors, as most of us keep prices low due to sell the local products. We offer discounts during public holidays or celebrations like Hari Raya, as 65% of my customers are from outside Terengganu. Customers who buy in larger quantities receive the agent's price.”

[Participant 4, Kuala Terengganu]

Some entrepreneurs adopted value-based pricing strategies, which allowed them setting prices that reflected the quality and service they provided. Seefried et al. (2024)

suggest that this pricing strategy allows businesses to set prices that accurately reflect product quality by focusing on customer preferences, enhancing customer satisfaction and trust. This was supported by participant 5 that highlighted the importance of pricing stability, by noting the lower prices from competitors could be due to the use of different ingredients, making direct comparisons difficult. She emphasized that switching to cheaper ingredients would affect the product's consistency, so she focused on offering a price that fairly reflected its value to customers.

"If competitors offer lower prices, it's likely due to using different type of ingredients. So, direct comparisons are difficult. I do not focus on having the lowest price, as reducing the price require me switching to cheaper ingredients and it can compromise the quality. I believe it's better to offer a reasonable price that reflects the product's value."

[Participant 5, Marang]

To maintain consistent prices despite rising costs, some entrepreneurs have adjusted product portion sizes, as noted by Participant 11. She explained that to keep prices stable, they may slightly reduce portion sizes to offset increases in production costs. This approach allows businesses to absorb increased costs without raising prices, offering a way to maintain profitability without losing customers due to price sensitivity (Berry, 2024). For example, participant shared that before the fluctuation in the prices of certain ingredients, she sold cookies in containers with about 45 pieces. However now, she sells it with approximately 40 pieces while maintaining the same price. This strategy enables entrepreneurs to manage expenses without burdening customers with higher prices.

"To maintain the price, I may slightly reduce portion sizes to offset rising of certain costs."

[Participant 11, Kuala Terengganu]

Place

Marketing strategies related to place used by SMEs revealed in the interviews are summarized in *Table 4*.

Table 4. Place marketing strategies used by SMEs.

Place marketing strategies	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Direct channels	22	100
Multi-Channel Distribution	21	95.45

In the context of the marketing mix, "place" refers to the venues and distribution channels where a product or service is made accessible to consumers. Most participants in the study sell their products within their local area or at direct stalls, which help reduce transportation costs and ensure effective distribution. A significant 95.45% of participants utilize indirect channels involving intermediaries, such as distributors or retailers, to broaden their customer base and enhance customer convenience. Participant 5 pointed out, by adopting a multi-channel approach, she able to reach more customers. According to she also, this approach brings more benefits, as most new customers are discovered through indirect channels. Multi-channel distribution strategies, as

demonstrated by Participant 5, can offer a competitive advantage by increasing customer reach and satisfaction. By combining both direct and indirect channels, businesses can enhance customer convenience and attract new customers, especially through intermediaries like distributors and retailers (Al Fayad, 2020).

“Most of my customers finding me through Sabasun, as I paste my contact number on the packaging.”

[Participant 5, Kuala Terengganu]

In other hand, Participant 7 does not use indirect channels, explaining that her products are easily accessible in stores. She operates her business through her mother's grocery shop, offering frozen coconut milk. This setup is convenient for customers, especially since most locals have their own coconut trees and the product is readily available elsewhere.

“I only sell it at my mother's grocery shop, since coconut milk is widely available and easily assessable.”

[Participant 7, Marang]

Several participants emphasized the importance of accessibility by ensuring their businesses are located close to where potential customers live. This reduces transportation costs and attracts buyers who prefer physical stores where they can see, touch, and feel products during the purchasing process. In this case, the aroma of food products plays a crucial role in influencing customer perception and purchasing decisions (Patnaik et al., 2024). This was highlighted by participant 2 on how the aroma of products like 'sata' can trigger customers' sensory responses, influencing their purchasing decisions and enhancing their overall experience.

“Most customers prefer buying ‘sata’ in physical stores, as it engages our senses, especially smell, in judging the product. Actually, by smell, we can imagine how the products will taste”

[Participant 2, Kuala Nerus]

For a business to provide a good customer experience, it should be strategically located for high visibility and easy accessibility, taking into account factors like foot traffic and parking. As stated by Rosiana and Cahyani (2024), this view emphasizing that well-located businesses can increase foot traffic and customer engagement, leading to higher sales. Participant 4 expressed that a poorly located business will have lower visibility, leading to decreased purchasing power.

“If the shop not strategically placed, it's hard to reach, reducing visibility and effecting our sales.”

[Participant 4, Kuala Terengganu]

In order to ensure fairness for customers located further away, some entrepreneurs offer services such as COD (Cash on Delivery) and after-sales delivery to meet customer demand. COD is particularly valuable for building customer trust, especially for long- time customers who face challenges with online payments while after-sales

delivery provides customers with tracking information, which demonstrates proactive management of deliveries and helps maintain trust. This practice is consistent with Caesar et al. (2017), who found that delivery services can attract customers, particularly those who value convenience and timely service. Participant 4 exemplified this by offering delivery services through various couriers and ensuring that customers are informed of any delays.

“We use deliveries. We also track shipments process and contact the customers if there’s a delay to enhance their confidence in our products.”

[Participant 4, Kuala Terengganu]

Participant 17 also shared their experience of offering COD and shipping services. Initially, these options helped grow their business, but once it became more stable, they discontinued COD due to time constraints. They also faced challenges with shipping, including damage to products during transit and high shipping costs, particularly for customers in distant regions like Sabah and Sarawak. This was supported by Biyela (2024), increased customer complaints might result from high rates of package breakage during transportation.

“We used to offer COD but stopped due to time constraints. We tried shipping, but despite bubble wrapping, products often arrived damaged, and we gain poor feedback.”

[Participant 17, Marang]

Promotion

Promotion marketing strategies used by SMEs revealed in the interviews are summarized in *Table 5*.

Table 5. Promotion marketing strategies used by SMEs.

Promotion marketing strategies	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Word of mouth	22	100
Personal selling	19	86.36
Participate in industry events	14	63.64
Traditional advertising	1	4.55
Social media	20	90.91

Home cottage industry sellers (100%) often rely on word of mouth (WOM) to convey product information and persuade buyers, as recommendations from family and friends are seen as more trustworthy. According to Chen and Yuan (2019), word of mouth (WOM) is widely regarded as one of the most effective forms of marketing, with 61% of marketing executives acknowledging its importance. Participant 1 stated that they rarely use social media like TikTok and Facebook, relying instead on WOM for product attention.

“People know my products through word of mouth, as I’m not active on social media like TikTok and Facebook as I am already old.”

[Participant 1, Kuala Nerus]

Participant 8 use personal selling to promote their products, believing it effectively convinces customers by highlighting product strengths. This direct interaction allows sellers to tailor messages to customer needs. Participant 8 offers product testers to encourage the customers make purchasing.

“I offer testers to customers during sales, along with an explanation, so they can taste the product and feel confident in their purchase.”

[Participant 8, Marang]

Other than that, Participant 21 promotes their products by attending industry events, enhancing visibility and enabling direct customer engagement. They shared that most promotions occur during classes they attend, attracting customers and generating sales. The event host also helped by using their tagline, “cili boh kejujuran,” further boosting her product visibility. Study on effect of event marketing on purchase decisions conducted by Nuraeni and Hadita (2022) pointed out the link between event marketing and purchase decisions is mediated by purchasing interest, which is greatly influenced by event marketing.

“I promote my product during classes I attend, where participants come from various place. I used 'cili boh kejujuran' as my tagline because I packed it in clear white packaging.”

[Participant 21, Marang]

With digitalization, social media has become a powerful promotional tool. Participant 4 noted that platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp help businesses reach wider audiences cost-effectively. Melović et al. (2020) explain that these factors have contributed to the shift from traditional to digital marketing strategies, making social media platforms highly effective for reaching large audiences. Despite the dominance of digital marketing, Jan et al. (2025) argue that traditional marketing strategies still have a place, as they complement digital methods and strengthen the overall message. This was proven by participant 21, still use traditional methods like radio to target less digital-savvy audiences.

“The world is now going digital. So, we have to adapt our business to the current situation by being active on social media platforms such as Tiktok and Instagram.”

[Participant 4, Kuala Terengganu]

“I appeared on the radio for an entrepreneur campaign. After my appearance, there were new customers who recognise me through it, which boosted my sales.”

[Participant 21, Marang]

Other entrepreneurial marketing practices (Customer relationship management)

Other marketing practices exercised by respondents in their business are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Customer relationship management.

Marketing strategies	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Keeping in touch	20	90.91

Customer preferences	22	100
Good service	15	68.18
Society awareness	1	4.55
Community support	9	40.91

Participants highlight the importance of CRM, focusing on customer satisfaction beyond the traditional marketing mix. According to Khan et al. (2020), customer satisfaction plays a crucial role in building a business's reputation and fostering long-term loyalty, particularly in turbulent markets. Participant 4 actively seeks feedback, follows up with customers, and addresses issues by offering refunds and improving products while some emphasized that considering customer preferences can enhance satisfaction, even for small orders, fostering loyalty. Guerola-Navarro et al. (2022) emphasize that consumer needs and expectations are rapidly evolving, and businesses must remain responsive to these changes such as participant 13 who adapt to market trends by offering popular products and stressed creativity as key to standing out among the others.

“If it is our fault, we offer a refund. We always ask for feedback and reviews to improve our products.”

[Participant 4, Kuala Terengganu]

“I accept customer orders, even in small quantities, and strive to fulfil my customer’s preferences in order to retain their loyalty.”

[Participant 16, Marang]

“To stand out, we need creative ideas so people recognize our unique products.”

[Participant 13, Kuala Terengganu]

Additionally, participant 11 emphasized the importance of businesses being aware of current issues and customer concerns, particularly in relation to social responsibility. Understanding these issues can significantly impact customer purchasing decisions, so businesses must address them thoughtfully to uphold a positive image. As point out by Wang et al. (2021), the potential risks for brands that take a public stance on controversial issues, as such actions may lead to boycotts. For instance, Participant 11 chose to stop making Cadbury tarts during Eid due to concerns about potential boycotts of certain brands.

“Being aware of current issues is important. For example, during Eid, customers asked about Cadbury tarts. If I sold something others disapprove, they might not buy from me.”

[Participant 11, Kuala Terengganu]

Lastly, community support also emerged as a key strategy in these participants. Several participants emphasized the importance of supporting local communities and building strong networks with other businesses. This was discussed by Sheth (2020), the interconnectedness between businesses and local communities, suggesting that businesses should support and nurture their local networks. For example, Participant 16 mentioned that, they encourage customers to communicate with them regarding any

issues with products and suggested, the businesses should support one another through mutual promotion.

“If there's an issue with our products, we encourage customers to communicate with us. I do not accept any payment if something goes wrong. Supporting each other by promoting each other's products helps build a strong network and expand our market reach.”

[Participant 16, Marang]

Conclusion

In conclusion, the entrepreneurs in this study actively engage in the marketing mix, although they face significant challenges primarily due to the unstable market conditions. This instability makes it difficult for them to maintain consistent demand and adjust to changing customer preferences. In order to navigate these challenges, they place a strong emphasis on customer relationship management, fostering positive relationships to maintain customer loyalty. These entrepreneurs, especially those from home-based cottage industries, often find themselves overwhelmed by the complexities of managing larger customer bases, which can lead to difficulties in maintaining product quality, fulfilling orders, and keeping up with customer expectations. Furthermore, women entrepreneurs play a pivotal role in shaping how they position their products in the market. External forces, such as societal expectations, gender roles, and economic pressures, influence their behaviours and decision-making processes. These factors create a unique set of challenges for women in the cottage industry, compelling them to navigate both market demands and societal perceptions as they strive to grow their businesses. Thus, while there are significant opportunities for growth, the entrepreneurs must carefully balance external pressures and market instability to achieve long-term success and sustainability in their business.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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