

**OBSERVATION REPORT SEBLAK
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Abstract. *This paper presents an observational analysis of "Seblak Denok," a small culinary business operating in Purwakarta, Indonesia, which specializes in seblak, a traditional spicy Indonesian dish. Initiated by a young entrepreneur, Denok, the business combines traditional flavors with modern innovations to cater to diverse consumer preferences. The study explores the business from a Human Resource Management (HRM) perspective, emphasizing recruitment, employee development, motivation, and work-life balance as key drivers of success.*

Seblak Denok applies a customer-focused marketing strategy by offering customizable products, competitive pricing, and a comfortable dining environment, supported by active promotion through social media and community engagement. The company's strategic positioning—"Traditional Taste with a Modern Twist"—effectively appeals to its target market: students, young professionals, and culinary enthusiasts aged 15–35.

The study also highlights production processes, raw material requirements, and SWOT analysis, providing insights into the business's operational strengths and market opportunities. Despite facing challenges such as limited space and supply chain vulnerabilities, Seblak Denok demonstrates resilience through strategic planning and commitment to quality.

This case underscores how effective HRM practices and innovative marketing strategies can elevate a micro-enterprise into a competitive player in the local food industry. The findings aim to offer valuable lessons for aspiring entrepreneurs and contribute to the understanding of small business development in the Indonesian culinary sector.

Key words: *Seblak Denok, small business, human resource management, culinary entrepreneurship, marketing strategy.*

Introduction

The culinary business sector in Indonesia continues to show promising growth, driven by high public demand for food products and increasing appreciation for local flavors. Among the different types of culinary ventures, traditional snacks and street food remain favorites, not only because of the nostalgic value they contain but also because of their great market potential. One prominent example is seblak, a spicy and savory Indonesian dish made from wet crackers and various other complements, which is popular in various age groups, especially among the younger generation.

Seblak Denok is a micro business that develops in Campaka, Purwakarta. This business was founded by a young entrepreneur named Denok, who was inspired by his love for Indonesian cuisine. Starting from a small cart, Seblak Denok has grown into a local brand that is widely known for its

menu innovations that combine traditional flavors and contemporary touches. Seblak's products have managed to attract customers from various demographics, especially students, young professionals, and foodies.

The success of Seblak Denok is not only determined by the taste of its products, but also by effective human resource (HR) management. Key aspects such as recruitment, employee training, motivation, and internal communication systems are key to improving business performance and customer satisfaction. This strategy is in line with research findings that show that good HR management practices significantly increase positive perceptions of organizations, especially in the MSME culinary industry in Indonesia (Halim et al., 2023).

When it comes to recruitment, Denok emphasizes the importance of choosing individuals who not only have basic skills, but also a growth mindset and a passion for serving customers. Regular training is provided to improve cooking efficiency, product quality, and customer service. This effort is in line with the need for MSMEs to improve the competence of human resources in the face of fierce competition (Rismawati et al., 2025).

Motivational strategies are also an important part of the HRM approach at Seblak Denok. Employees are given performance bonuses, public recognition, as well as opportunities to participate in business decision-making. This kind of engagement increases employee loyalty and a sense of belonging to the business. Research shows that increasing innovation capabilities and employee engagement directly impacts the success of culinary businesses in the digital age (Tong & Anisah, 2024).

Seblak Denok also implements a balanced work system to maintain the physical and mental health of employees, as well as open communication to build trust and continuous improvement. This reflects sustainable business management practices as recommended in the literature of Indonesian culinary MSMEs (Alfarizi & Sari, 2024).

Through a comprehensive HRM approach, Seblak Denok has managed to build a solid and motivated team in supporting the business vision. With consistent product quality, friendly service, and a strong brand identity, Seblak Denok is now a favorite culinary destination for the local community.

The study highlights how small businesses like Seblak Denok can leverage HR management practices to strengthen operations, improve customer satisfaction, and achieve sustainable growth in a highly competitive culinary industry.

Literature Review

The culinary industry in Indonesia is one of the fastest growing MSME sectors and has a significant contribution to national economic growth. According to Maulana (2024), digitalization has driven a major transformation in the marketing practices of micro and small-scale culinary businesses, allowing business actors to reach a wider range of consumers through social media and e-commerce platforms (Maulana, 2024). This provides a great opportunity for culinary MSMEs to expand their market reach and increase competitiveness.

However, technological advances and fierce competition also require MSMEs to improve the quality of internal management, especially in the aspect of human resources. A study by Halim et al. (2023) highlights that HRM practices such as employee training, performance evaluation, and compensation significantly affect positive perceptions of organizations and contribute to the performance of culinary small businesses (Halim et al., 2023).

Employee training and development are important aspects in driving service quality and product innovation. Rismawati et al. (2025) found that digital-based training for culinary MSME employees has a positive impact on increasing customer satisfaction and operational efficiency (Rismawati et al., 2025). This emphasizes the importance of investing in human resource capacity development for business sustainability.

On the other hand, an adaptive and collaborative managerial approach is also important. The study by Tong and Anisah (2024) shows that the success of culinary MSMEs in the digital era is influenced by a combination of emotional intelligence, product innovation, and the courage to take risks. Although emotional intelligence and innovation were not directly significant in the study, the courage to take risks was shown to be a major predictor of business success (Tong & Anisah, 2024).

Furthermore, Alfarizi and Sari (2024) emphasized the importance of *Green Knowledge Management* in sustainable culinary business practices. They suggest that MSMEs start implementing environmentally friendly innovations and digitalization systems as part of a long-term business strategy (Alfarizi & Sari, 2024).

From the study, it can be seen that the success of culinary MSMEs is not only determined by product quality, but also by the ability to manage human resources strategically and adaptively to changing times. Strengthening the HRM aspect is an important foundation in facing challenges and taking advantage of opportunities in the increasingly dynamic culinary industry.

Research Methods

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the operational and managerial strategies of Seblak Denok MSMEs in the real context of their business activities. The qualitative approach was chosen because it was able to provide a deep understanding of business practices, including the decision-making process, social relations within the organization, and the cultural values inherent in the management of local culinary businesses. Qualitative research allows researchers to understand the context and dynamics of business holistically, especially in capturing aspects that are not quantitatively measured, such as motivations, perceptions, and values that affect MSME business strategies (Fadhilah, 2020).

The location of the study was determined at the Seblak Denok shop, Campaka, Purwakarta Regency, West Java. The selection of this place was carried out purposively by considering business characteristics that are relevant to the focus of the research, namely traditional culinary MSMEs with a local market base and a strategy to survive in a competitive industry. The research was conducted in early 2024 during the main operational period, namely from 11.00 to 18.00 WIB, with the aim of obtaining representative data related to workflows, demand intensity, and interaction with customers.

Data collection was carried out through two main techniques, namely participatory observation and informal interviews. Observations are carried out directly on activities in the shop, including the production process, service, to promotion and payment methods. The researcher recorded the routine activities and responses of owners and employees in the face of a surge in demand. This observational approach is in line with the methods used in other MSME research that emphasizes the importance of contextual data to authentically describe managerial practices (Anggraini et al., 2020).

The interview was conducted with the business owner, Ms. Denok, using a semi-structured format to explore the business strategy, business vision and mission, challenges faced, and approaches in human resource management. This interview reinforced the observation data with more in-depth verbal information. In addition, interviews are also conducted spontaneously with customers to find out consumers' perceptions of products and services. This informal interview technique provides flexibility in digging into information that may not appear in rigid instruments.

The instruments used in the study included field observation sheets, interview guides, and diaries. The validity of the data is maintained through triangulation of sources, namely by comparing data from observations, interviews, and documentation such as digital promotional media and

customer reviews on social media. This triangulation technique is important to ensure the accuracy of data in qualitative studies (Muchayatin & Purwardhani, 2021).

Data analysis was carried out with a thematic approach, namely identifying general patterns from the results of observations and interviews and then categorized based on the theoretical framework used. The theoretical framework in this study includes human resource management theory, marketing strategies (marketing mix), and SWOT analysis to understand the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats faced by culinary MSMEs (Kholik & Rahmi, 2023).

The analysis process is carried out inductively by interpreting data based on the social and cultural context of business activities. The results of the initial coding are then reduced to key themes that reflect Seblak Denok's managerial practices and defensive strategies. Each finding is reflected with previous theories and literature to explain its scientific relevance. This approach strengthens the credibility of the findings and contributes to the development of business strategy models based on local practices of MSMEs (Ariescy et al., 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

The results of observations on Seblak Denok's business operations revealed that the human resource management (HR) carried out was greatly influenced by an interpersonal approach and informal training. Employees are recruited through a kinship or personal closeness approach, without formal selection procedures. Nevertheless, the results still reflect a positive and productive work environment. This is in line with the findings of Halim et al. (2023), who stated that training and development, performance evaluation, and compensation systems have a significant influence on positive perceptions of HR management practices in culinary MSMEs. However, the informal recruitment process based on personal proximity did not show significant influence, a pattern consistent with the practice in Seblak Denok.

In daily activities, training is carried out directly by the owner through on-site job guidance. Every employee learns through hands-on practice, from cooking techniques to customer service. This approach has proven to be effective in improving job skills quickly and efficiently. According to Rismawati et al. (2025), digital training based on hands-on practice in the field can improve service quality and customer satisfaction in culinary MSMEs. With flexibility in the division of tasks and open communication between owners and staff, Seblak Denok has succeeded in creating a supportive and collaborative work atmosphere.

In terms of marketing, Seblak Denok utilizes social media such as Instagram and WhatsApp to promote products and reach customers. This strategy is very relevant in the digital era, especially for MSME actors with limited resources. The use of social media is also combined with word-of-mouth promotional strategies and simple customer loyalty programs. This strategy is in line with the findings of Rahman (2023) and Maulana (2024), which show that the use of social media by culinary MSMEs is able to expand market reach and increase revenue, especially after the pandemic period that accelerated the digitalization of small businesses.

Product innovation is another advantage of Seblak Denok. Consumers can adjust the spiciness level, choose toppings according to taste, and enjoy a variety of flavors that are not monotonous. This innovation has been proven to increase product appeal and customer loyalty. Daulay (2023) said that innovation and autonomy in business management contribute greatly to the competitive capabilities of culinary MSMEs, especially in urban areas such as Greater Jakarta. Seblak Denok's decision to continue exploring product variations is an adaptive step in responding to the dynamics of consumer taste.

However, there are several obstacles that are also observed. One of the main challenges is the limited small business space, so customer comfort and operational efficiency are often compromised during peak hours. In addition, the financial recording system that is still carried out manually is an obstacle in evaluating business performance accurately. This condition is in accordance with research by Putri and Husna (2024), which found that many culinary MSMEs still face limitations in physical infrastructure and financial administration, which ultimately hinders the decision-making process and business development.

Overall, the observation results show that Seblak Denok is able to manage its business effectively through a contextual and adaptive management approach. Despite facing limited resources, strategies based on social relations, product innovation, and marketing digitalization have proven to be able to improve business performance and competitiveness in the midst of a competitive local culinary market.

DISSCUSIONS

The results of observations on Seblak Denok's business show how a simple but adaptive managerial strategy can be the foundation for success for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the culinary sector. In the context of human resource (HR) management, an approach based on interpersonal relationships applied by business owners is one of the key elements. The owner not only acts as a manager but also as a mentor who guides the employee directly in daily activities. This practice is in line with the typical characteristics of MSMEs, where the organizational structure tends to be flat and the relationship between individuals is closer. As stated by Halim et al. (2023), informal training, performance-based compensation systems, and open communication can significantly increase employee perception of HR management, although the recruitment process based on personal proximity does not always have a direct impact on business performance.

In terms of skill development, on-the-job learning implemented by Seblak Denok has proven to be effective in improving productivity and service quality. This method allows for quick and contextual knowledge transfer according to daily operational needs. This finding is strengthened by Rismawati et al. (2025) who stated that the practice of direct training in the field for culinary MSMEs can increase customer satisfaction because employees are better prepared to deal with consumer needs. In addition, flexibility in work tasks and adjusted operational schedules also create a more humane work environment, which is a plus in itself amid the challenges of MSMEs in retaining the workforce.

From a marketing perspective, Seblak Deno's strategy shows that active and consistent use of social media can be an effective tool to expand market reach without large promotional costs. The use of Instagram and WhatsApp, as well as direct interaction with customers through content and personal communication, is becoming a promotional strategy that is relevant to today's young consumer behavior. This approach is supported by research by Rahman (2023) and Maulana (2024) which states that culinary MSMEs that are active on social media tend to experience increased income and consumer reach, especially in the post-pandemic context where people's consumption patterns are increasingly digital.

Furthermore, innovation in products is the driver of Seblak Deno's success in maintaining relevance in the local market. Providing the option to adjust the level of spiciness and toppings not only increases customer satisfaction, but also creates a personalized consumption experience. In line with Daulay (2023), innovative strategies like this strengthen the competitiveness of MSMEs because they provide product differentiation that is not offered by competitors. Flexibility in the menu also allows businesses to respond to changing consumer trends without having to make major changes in the cost structure.

However, this discussion also did not ignore the limitations faced by Seblak Denok, which is a common challenge in

MSME management. The physical limitations of the place of business and the absence of a modern financial recording system are obstacles in the scale of business growth. Without a simple accounting system that is well documented, business performance evaluation becomes difficult. This hinders data-driven strategic decision-making. Putri and Husna (2024) stated that the lack of structured financial records among MSMEs is often the root of problems in managing cash flow and cost efficiency.

This discussion shows that the key to the success of MSMEs like Seblak Denok does not always depend on large resources or advanced technology, but on the use of local strength, interpersonal relationships, and adaptive innovation. By maintaining a collaborative spirit and openness to change, Seblak Denok has the potential to not only survive, but also develop sustainably in the midst of increasingly dynamic culinary industry competition.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECCOMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of observations and analyses that have been carried out, it can be concluded that Seblak Denok is one of the examples of culinary MSMEs that have successfully managed their businesses effectively through an adaptive and interpersonal relationship-based management approach. The success of this business is supported by simple but relevant human resource management practices in the context of micro-businesses, such as hands-on training in the workplace, open communication between owners and employees, and flexibility in the division of tasks and working time. Even though it does not implement a formal HR system, Seblak Denok is still able to create a productive and harmonious work environment, which contributes to operational stability and customer satisfaction.

The marketing strategy carried out also shows high effectiveness, especially in utilizing digital platforms such as Instagram and WhatsApp as a medium of communication and promotion. This approach not only expands the reach of consumers, but also increases two-way interaction between businesses and customers, which is important in building loyalty and brand image. Innovation in the menu—especially flexibility in topping choices and spiciness—is an added value that distinguishes Seblak Denok from its competitors and reflects its high adaptability to market tastes.

However, this business also faces some classic obstacles that are commonly experienced by MSMEs, such as limited business space and the lack of a well-documented financial recording system. This can hinder business growth in the long run, especially as operational scale increases and management complexity increases. Therefore, strengthening in the administrative aspects and financial management is an urgent need that must be responded to immediately.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Seblak Denok is advised to start building a simple financial recording system, either manually that is more structured and by utilizing digital financial applications that are easily accessible and user-friendly. This step is important for monitoring cash flow, measuring sales performance, and making it easier to make data-driven strategic decisions. On the other hand, the capacity building of the business premises can begin to be planned gradually through realistic financial calculations, given the potential future growth of demand.

In addition, regular and more systematic employee training can be a long-term investment in improving service quality and operational efficiency. Businesses also need to strengthen partnerships with the culinary community and digital platforms to expand market exposure and opportunities. In terms of innovation, maintaining consistency in taste quality and remaining open to consumer input will go a long way in maintaining customer loyalty amid changing culinary trends.

Thus, Seblak Deno's business model proves that local culinary MSMEs can grow sustainably if they are able to manage human resources wisely, utilize technology effectively, and continue to innovate while maintaining local values that are their business identity.

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