

Exploring the Role of WhatsApp Marketing in Enhancing Business Growth of Homemade Cake Entrepreneurs in Jaffna of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

This study investigates how homemade cake businesses use WhatsApp as a digital marketing tool to promote their products, engage customers, and manage orders in Jaffna. This study contributes by shifting the focus from larger enterprises and urban settings, where most digital marketing research has concentrated, to small-scale, women-led, home-based food businesses in Jaffna, yet underexplored area in Sri Lanka. This research adopts a qualitative methodology using an exploratory design. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 10 homemade cake entrepreneurs in the Jaffna region, selected using purposive sampling and interviews were conducted in person and via virtual platform, ensuring rigor by achieving data saturation. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings are presented under three themes. First, marketing and visibility: entrepreneurs relied on WhatsApp Status, personalized messages, and product photos to attract customers, while integration with Facebook pages enhanced outreach. Second, customer engagement and trust-building: direct communication fostered trust, repeat purchases, and word-of-mouth referrals. Third, order management and growth: WhatsApp simplified order processing, while the combination of Facebook and WhatsApp strengthened customer interaction and sales. The study highlights the need for targeted digital marketing training for micro-entrepreneurs, particularly focusing on WhatsApp Business features such as automated messages, product catalogues, and analytics. NGOs, community development programs, and local authorities can use these insights to design practical interventions that support women-led home businesses in enhancing their digital presence. WhatsApp, being free and widely used, presents a scalable and inclusive marketing solution for small enterprises. Furthermore, policymakers and development agencies should consider integrating digital literacy and marketing skills into broader economic development strategies to empower local entrepreneurs and contribute to regional economic growth.

Keywords: customer engagement, homemade cake business, micro-entrepreneurs, small business digital marketing, WhatsApp marketing