

Brand activation strategy of @kebulsate.jogja through Instagram as a social media platform in building brand image

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Abstract

Social media has become a strategic platform for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to build brand image effectively and affordably. This study aims to analyze the brand activation strategy implemented by @kebulsate.jogja through Instagram and its contribution to brand image formation. The research employs a descriptive qualitative approach using in-depth interviews, Instagram content documentation, and source triangulation, while data analysis is conducted through data reduction, data display, and thematic conclusion drawing based on the brand activation framework. The findings reveal that the strategy is implemented systematically through five stages: discovery, strategic development, creative development, delivery, and evaluation. Its implementation is reflected in informative content highlighting the uniqueness of herbal red seasoning, the use of customer testimonials as social proof, and cross-MSME collaborations to expand reach and strengthen positioning. Conceptually, these practices function not only as promotional activities but also as mechanisms for building brand association, emotional engagement, and relational bonding that contribute to brand image formation.

Keywords

Brand activation, Brand image, Instagram, Social media

Introduction

Social media platforms currently play a vital role as intermediaries between brands and customers or potential customers, as they are considered more practical and cost-effective tools for product promotion [1]. One of the most prominent platforms is Instagram, a free social networking application that emphasizes visual content [2]. This has encouraged many business owners to utilize Instagram as a medium to build and strengthen their brand image. Therefore, business actors must determine appropriate strategies to increase product awareness and market presence.

Brand image is a crucial factor contributing to brand development, as it refers to consumers' perceptions of a brand when considering a particular product category [3].

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From a brand management perspective, brand image is formed not only through promotional communication but also through consistent associations, customer experiences, and continuous interactions between the brand and its audience [4]. Consequently, businesses require strategies that are not merely informative but also capable of activating emotional and relational consumer engagement. One business that utilizes Instagram as a platform to enhance its brand image is Kebul Sate Jogja.

@kebulstate.jogja represents a street food culinary business offering red satay with herbal red seasoning, claimed to be the first of its kind in Indonesia. The red seasoning is produced from herbal ingredients fermented with *Monascus purpureus* SP, which is recognized for its potential health benefits, including supporting platelet production for dengue patients and possessing anticancer properties. The outlet is located on Kahar Muzakir Street, Terban Subdistrict, Yogyakarta City.

In its marketing activities, @kebulstate.jogja utilizes Instagram under the same account name as its primary promotional platform. The following Table 1 presents a comparison of Kebulstate's competitors based on their Instagram follower counts.

Table 1. Comparison of Instagram followers @kebulstate.jogja and Its competitors

No	Instagram Account Name	Number of Followers
1.	@kebulstate.jogja	2.114
2.	@sate.pakdhe	1.376
3.	@satemerahpangkah	320

(Source: Researcher's documentation from Instagram) Accessed on 8 juli 2025

Brand activation strategy is defined as a form of promotion aimed at bringing a brand closer to its consumers through various attention-grabbing activities. In other words, brand activation represents interactive engagement between a brand and its existing or potential customers, which can be carried out through both online and offline activities [5]. Furthermore, brand activation strategies can foster customer loyalty and strengthen long-term relationships with consumers [6].

Although several studies have examined brand activation in the context of corporations or large-scale brands [5];[6], research on its implementation within street food-based MSMEs integrated with social media remains relatively limited. Moreover, most previous studies have been descriptive in nature and have not explicitly linked brand activation practices to the conceptual framework of brand image formation [4];[7].

Based on this research gap, the study formulates the following research questions:

1. How is the brand activation strategy implemented by @kebulstate.jogja through Instagram?
2. How does this strategy conceptually contribute to brand image formation?
3. How can brand activation practices in this MSME context expand the theoretical understanding of brand activation in digital branding?

Accordingly, this study aims not only to describe the practice of brand activation but also to analyze it within the framework of branding theory and digital marketing communication in order to generate broader theoretical implications.

Method

Qualitative research is an approach used to understand phenomena related to human and social issues. In this method, researchers seek to provide a detailed description of findings based on participants' perspectives, field data, and in-depth data analysis. This approach was selected because the study aims to describe the brand activation strategy implemented by @kebulsate.jogja through Instagram in building its brand image. Data collection techniques in this qualitative study involved both research objects and subjects. The object of this study is the Instagram account @kebulsate.jogja, while the research subjects include the business owner, Rois, and one waiter, Rusman. Informants were selected through purposive sampling, considering their direct involvement in planning, managing, and executing the brand activation strategy, thus making them relevant and credible sources for addressing the research questions [10]. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore facts, opinions, and experiences, guided by a structured interview protocol [11].

Documentation was also employed to systematically record both primary and secondary data in accordance with the research focus [12]. Data were obtained from relevant documents, including screenshots of the @kebulsate.jogja Instagram account as visual data sources. Data analysis followed the interactive model of analysis, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification [13]. Thematic categorization was applied to identify patterns and meanings relevant to the brand activation framework [14]. To ensure credibility and enhance the potential for replication, the study applied source triangulation and member checking with the informants [15];[16]. Based on the research background and formulated research questions, this study aims to analyze the brand activation strategy implemented by @kebulsate.jogja in building its brand image.

Results

This study describes the brand activation strategy implemented by @kebulsate.jogja through Instagram in building its brand image. The research process involved in-depth interviews with the owner and a waiter, as well as documentation of activities from the @kebulsate.jogja Instagram account.

@kebulsate.jogja implements its brand activation strategy by prioritizing engaging and casual yet informative content. Based on interviews with the owner and staff, this approach plays a significant role in both brand building and promotion. Consistency is also identified as a key factor in shaping brand image, as the account regularly uploads

daily content featuring product information and the atmosphere of the outlet, packaged in a relaxed but informative style [17].

According to Saeed et al., brand activation can be understood as a systematic model consisting of five interconnected stages [18]. The implementation at @kebulsate.jogja can be described as follows:

1. **Discovery:** The process began when Rois, initially a chicken meat supplier, faced excess stock in his freezer. This situation encouraged him to seek ways to increase the economic value of the product. He then developed red herbal-seasoned satay based on the fermentation of *Monascus purpureus* SP, inspired by his undergraduate thesis topic.
2. **Strategic Development:** With this unique product, Kebulsate.jogja positioned itself as a culinary business offering delicious and healthier satay through herbal red seasoning. The target audience includes students, university students, tourists, and Yogyakarta residents aged 17–40 who actively use Instagram. The strategy focuses on content consistency, storytelling, testimonials, and collaborations.
3. **Creative Development:** The developed content includes Reels, feed posts, and Stories (10–30 seconds) featuring product highlights, educational information about the herbal seasoning, customer testimonials in photo or video format, and collaborations with other MSMEs such as coffee shops or complementary food vendors to expand reach.
4. **Delivery:** The strategy is executed through regular uploads on feeds and Reels (2–4 times per week) and daily Instagram Stories containing operational information, real-time updates, and customer interactions. Promotional efforts are strengthened through collaborative programs, such as offering 10 free satay portions to selected buyers at partner coffee shops, as well as simple birthday giveaways.
5. **Evaluation:** Evaluation is conducted monthly by reviewing sales figures and content productivity during the period.

The effectiveness of these stages is reflected in the increase in followers, sales growth, and the rising number of customers visiting the outlet after discovering it on Instagram. Through informative and engaging content, @kebulsate.jogja has successfully attracted not only local customers from Yogyakarta but also tourists who intentionally visit to experience the distinctive herbal red satay.

Discussion

The content displayed on the Instagram account @kebulsate.jogja presents comprehensive information regarding the preparation process and serving of red-spiced satay show in Figure 1. This informative content is also utilized to educate

audiences about the uniqueness of the product, which derives from the use of natural herbal ingredients. From a brand image perspective, communicating production processes and distinctive raw materials functions to build strong, favorable, and unique brand associations in consumers' minds [19];[4]. Differentiation based on the "herbal" attribute does not merely serve as a product characteristic but also contributes to shaping perceived quality and strengthening the brand's positioning as a healthier satay alternative compared to competitors. Therefore, such informative content is not solely educational in nature but strategically contributes to building brand image.



Figure 1. The process of preparing red-spiced satay and explanation of the herbal red seasoning

In addition, customer testimonial content related to product quality and service is consistently shared on @kebulstate.jogja's Instagram account at Figure 2. Theoretically, customer testimonials can be understood as a form of social proof that enhances credibility and trust in digital marketing communication [20]. Within the experiential marketing framework, positive testimonials shared through Instagram foster emotional engagement and experiential value, as potential customers are able to vicariously experience the product through visual and narrative representation. Furthermore, in the context of brand activation, direct interaction and customer experience are essential elements in creating emotional attachment to the brand [5]. Experience-based activation thus extends the function of brand activation beyond promotion, transforming it into the creation of meaningful brand experiences that contribute to customer loyalty.

Moreover, @kebulstate.jogja frequently engages in collaborative initiatives, including a partnership with Sender Coffee in Figure 3. From the perspectives of co-branding and relationship marketing, cross-business collaboration reflects a strategy to expand brand associations through social networks and community engagement [4]. This collaboration generates shared brand value, broadens exposure, and reinforces positioning within the local culinary ecosystem. Additionally, birthday appreciation programs function as relational bonding strategies that strengthen long-term brand relationships with customers [20].



Figure 2. Direct testimonials from the owner to customers and independent customer reviews



Figure 3. Free 10-portion promotion in collaboration between @kebulsate.jogja and Sender Coffee

These findings indicate that brand activation in the context of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) is not solely oriented toward building brand image, but also toward fostering long-term customer relationships and sustainable brand engagement.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the brand activation strategy implemented by @kebulsate.jogja through Instagram is conducted systematically through the stages of discovery, strategic development, creative development, delivery, and evaluation. The strategy is realized through informative content highlighting the uniqueness of the herbal red seasoning, the utilization of customer testimonials as social proof, and cross-MSME collaborations to expand reach and strengthen brand associations. Conceptually, these practices function not merely as promotional efforts, but also as mechanisms for building brand association, fostering emotional engagement, and strengthening relational bonding, all of which contribute to the development of brand image and brand equity. These findings affirm that social media-based brand activation within the context of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) can serve as an effective strategy for building brand image while simultaneously reinforcing long-term relationships with consumers.

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