Journal of Digital Management
JDM

Volume 1 (1), February 2026, 7-15 E-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX

CONSUMER BEHAVIOR, MARKETING COMMUNICATION, AND CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE: COMPETITOR BENCHMARKING FOR RICE BOWL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Chowal Jundy Kumoro[1], Lambok Rommy Sulaeman [2], Mahesa Abdul Fattah[3]
[1,2,3] Digital Business Study Program, Politeknik Takumi, Indonesia

Email: chowal.cjk@takumi.ac.id [1], lambok.lrs@takumi.ac.id [2], 2413010003@takumi.ac.id [3]

Article history:
Received February 3, 2026.
Revised February 14, 2026.
Accepted February 21, 2026.

Abstract

The growth of Indonesia's culinary industry has intensified competition among food-service businesses, particularly in practical and affordable products such as rice bowls. For emerging culinary businesses, understanding consumer behavior, marketing communication, and customer experience is essential for developing effective competitive strategies. This study aims to analyze consumer responses to Bowlster Food as a competitor and translate the findings into strategic recommendations for Dampar Pemadam Lapar, a rice bowl business development project. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed through a four-week market research project involving literature review, competitor observation, and semi-structured interviews with three Bowlster Food customers aged 19–23 years. The data were organized into three analytical dimensions: marketing communication, consumer decision-making behavior, and customer experience. The findings show that Instagram was the primary source of brand awareness for all three respondents. Attractive food visuals, perceived uniqueness of Japanese-style menu items, convenient location, practical consumption needs, and promotional incentives influenced purchase decisions. Customer experiences were generally positive, with food ratings above 4 out of 5, although respondents identified weaknesses in service responsiveness, delivery time, food texture after extended holding, and menu variety. Promotional activities such as Ramadan discounts, sauce testers, and free sauce bonuses were positively received and encouraged recommendations. The study concludes that Dampar Pemadam Lapar can strengthen its competitive position by combining consistent social-media communication, visually appealing product presentation, menu differentiation, faster service, customer-feedback mechanisms, and periodic satisfaction evaluation.

Keywords:
Consumer Behavior; Marketing Communication; Customer Experience; Competitor Benchmarking; Rice Bowl; Digital Marketing

1. INTRODUCTION

The culinary sector is highly competitive because consumers can easily compare products, prices, locations, and service experiences. In this environment, food businesses must create value not only through the product itself but also through communication and the total customer experience. Namkung and Jang (2007), for example, found that overall food quality significantly affects customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions, with taste and presentation among the most important food-related attributes. Their findings indicate that product quality and visual presentation are strategic elements rather than merely operational details.

Digital media has further changed how consumers discover and evaluate food businesses. Social-media platforms provide firms with multiple customer touch points before, during, and after purchase.

Lemon and Verhoef (2016) explain that contemporary customer experience develops across multiple touch points and channels, requiring firms to manage the customer journey rather than isolated promotional activities. In the restaurant context, this means that Instagram exposure, product presentation, ordering convenience, service interaction, and post-purchase responses should be viewed as connected components of the customer journey.

Social media can also influence purchase-related attitudes through peer communication. Wang, Yu, and Wei (2012), using survey data from 292 participants, found that social-media peer communication can affect purchase decisions directly through conformity and indirectly by strengthening product involvement. More recent Indonesian research also reports a positive relationship between social-media marketing and purchase intention in food and restaurant contexts (Putri et al., 2022; Surianto et al., 2024). These findings provide a theoretical basis for examining Instagram exposure as an important part of the consumer journey in the present study.

Consumer decision making is also shaped by attitudes, social influences, and perceived control. Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior proposes that behavioral intentions are predicted by attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Although the present study is qualitative and does not test TPB statistically, the framework is useful for interpreting why consumers may respond differently to product uniqueness, social-media exposure, convenience, and recommendations.

For an emerging rice bowl business such as Dampar Pemadam Lapar, competitor benchmarking can therefore provide practical market intelligence. Rather than copying a competitor, benchmarking can reveal which communication practices, product attributes, service elements, and customer experiences are valued by consumers. Bowlster Food was selected as the competitor case because the interviewed respondents had direct purchasing experience and could describe its marketing communication, purchasing process, and customer experience.

The research problem is how consumer experiences with a competing rice bowl business can be translated into practical strategic recommendations for Dampar Pemadam Lapar. Accordingly, this study aims to: (1) identify the main communication channels and promotional responses associated with Bowlster Food; (2) examine consumer decision-making patterns; (3) evaluate positive and negative elements of customer experience; and (4) formulate evidence-based strategic implications for Dampar Pemadam Lapar.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Social Media Marketing and Consumer Purchase Intention

Social-media marketing enables firms to communicate with consumers through content, interaction, sharing, and electronic word-of-mouth. Wang et al. (2012) demonstrated that peer communication through social media can influence purchase decisions through both direct social influence and increased product involvement. In an Indonesian ready-to-eat food context, Putri et al. (2022) found that social-media marketing and electronic word-of-mouth significantly contributed to purchase intention and purchase decisions. Similarly, Surianto et al. (2024) reported that social-media marketing positively and significantly influenced purchase intention in an Indonesian restaurant context. These studies support the relevance of examining Instagram as a consumer awareness and consideration channel.

2.2 Consumer Decision-Making

Consumer behavior involves psychological and situational processes that influence how individuals select, purchase, consume, and evaluate products. Ajzen (1991) explains that behavioral intentions are influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In food purchases, these constructs may be reflected in perceived product attractiveness, recommendations or social influence, and practical considerations such as location, time, and ordering convenience. The present study uses these concepts as interpretive lenses rather than as variables for statistical hypothesis testing.

2.3 Food Quality and Behavioral Intentions

Food quality is a central determinant of restaurant satisfaction. Namkung and Jang (2007) found that food quality significantly affects customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions, and that taste and presentation were particularly important. Research in the Indonesian restaurant sector similarly found that food quality and service quality positively influence customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions (Anwar et al., 2023). These findings support the interpretation of the respondents' comments concerning taste, presentation, texture, and menu variety.

2.4 Service Quality and Customer Experience

Service quality concerns how customers evaluate the performance of service delivery. Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985) established a conceptual model emphasizing the importance of understanding gaps between expected and perceived service. In restaurant settings, service quality interacts with food quality and other environmental elements. Ryu, Lee, and Kim (2012) found that service quality and food quality have positive and significant effects on customer satisfaction and loyalty in an ethnic restaurant context. Therefore, employee responsiveness and delivery speed observed in the present study are treated as important customer-experience issues.

2.5 Customer Experience and Customer Journey

Lemon and Verhoef (2016) conceptualize customer experience as a phenomenon that develops across multiple touch points during the customer journey. This perspective is important for digital food businesses because the experience starts before purchase through social-media exposure and continues through ordering, consumption, service interaction, and post-purchase communication. A customer may therefore tolerate one weakness if other touch points generate strong value, but repeated negative experiences can weaken satisfaction and retention.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 Research Design

This study used a descriptive qualitative case-study approach as part of a Learning Factory market research project for Dampar Pemadam Lapar. The study focused on Bowlster Food as a competitor and used direct consumer experiences as the primary source of qualitative market intelligence.

3.2 Research Period and Participants

The project was conducted over four weeks. Week 1 covered literature review, preliminary research, competitor identification, and preparation of interview instruments. Week 2 focused on customer interviews. Week 3 involved data organization and analysis, while Week 4 was used to formulate business recommendations and finalize the project.

Three respondents were interviewed using purposive sampling: Maulana (19 years old), Bintang (20 years old), and Suprianti (23 years old). All respondents had direct experience purchasing from Bowlster Food. Because the sample was small, the findings are interpreted as exploratory qualitative evidence rather than statistically generalizable estimates.

3.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through literature review, competitor observation, and semi-structured interviews. The interview information was grouped into marketing communication, consumer behavior, and customer experience. Supporting observations were obtained from publicly accessible digital information related to the competitor.

3.4 Data Analysis

The analysis followed a thematic process. First, interview responses were organized according to the three analytical dimensions. Second, recurring themes were identified, including Instagram exposure, food visual appeal, convenience, product uniqueness, promotional incentives, service responsiveness, delivery time, food quality, and feedback. Third, the themes were interpreted as competitive strengths and weaknesses. Finally, the findings were compared with relevant marketing and consumer-behavior literature and translated into recommendations for Dampar Pemadam Lapar.

Table 1. Analytical Dimensions

Dimension	Focus of Analysis
Marketing communication	Information sources, social-media exposure, promotional activities, and consumer responses
Consumer behavior	Need recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase decision, and situational factors
Customer experience	Pre-purchase expectations, purchase interaction, product/service evaluation, feedback, and repurchase intention

4. RESULTS

4.1 Instagram as the Main Awareness Channel

All three respondents reported discovering Bowlster Food through Instagram. This consistency indicates that Instagram was the primary awareness touch point among the interviewed consumers. Respondents described the visual presentation of Chicken Karage and Chicken Katsu as attractive and capable of creating curiosity.

The finding is consistent with prior research. Wang et al. (2012) showed that social-media peer communication can influence purchase decisions, while Putri et al. (2022) found significant effects of social-media marketing and electronic word-of-mouth on purchase intention and purchase decisions in the ready-to-eat food context. Surianto et al. (2024) likewise found that social-media marketing positively influenced purchase intention in an Indonesian restaurant context. However, the present study does not claim that Instagram caused the respondents' purchases; it only documents Instagram as their reported source of initial awareness.

Table 2. Marketing Communication Findings

Element	Evidence from Respondents	Strategic Implication
Instagram	All three respondents identified Instagram as their awareness source.	Maintain consistent visual and short-form content.
Food visuals	Chicken Karage and Chicken Katsu visuals created curiosity.	Invest in attractive food photography and video.
Discounts	Ramadan discounts were positively remembered.	Use seasonal and periodic promotions.
Sampling	Sauce testers created direct product experience.	Use sampling or limited product trials.
Bonuses	Free sauce bonuses generated positive reactions.	Use selective value-added incentives.

4.2 Consumer Decision-Making Patterns

Maulana sought convenient food particularly during holidays or after classes. Instagram created initial awareness, while proximity reduced the effort required to try the product. He perceived Chicken Karage as relatively distinctive compared with other local options.

Bintang tended to purchase when busy or needing a quick meal. Instagram exposure established awareness, while the perception that Chicken Katsu differed from ordinary roadside chicken supported evaluation. Friendly interaction with young employees also contributed to a comfortable experience.

Suprianti frequently purchased because she liked the taste and found the product visually appealing. She particularly favored Japanese-style food and Chicken Katsu with mentai sauce. Despite experiencing delivery delays, she continued to repurchase and communicated feedback directly to the seller.

These patterns can be interpreted using Ajzen's (1991) framework. Positive product attitudes are reflected in liking the taste and visual presentation; social influences may operate through Instagram and recommendations; and perceived behavioral control is reflected in practical considerations such as location, time, and ordering convenience. Because the study did not measure TPB constructs directly, this interpretation is theoretical rather than a statistical test of the model.

Table 3. Consumer Decision-Making Patterns

Respondent	Main Trigger	Key Evaluation	Outcome
Maulana	Practical food need and Instagram exposure	Visual appeal, proximity, uniqueness	Purchased directly and recommended
Bintang	Time pressure and need for fast food	Differentiation, taste, friendly service	Purchased and rated highly
Suprianti	Japanese-style interest and Instagram exposure	Taste, visual appeal, favorite sauces	Frequent purchase and feedback

4.3 Food Quality and Product Presentation

Overall food evaluations were positive. Maulana rated taste at 4.5 out of 5, while Bintang gave an overall food rating of 4.8 out of 5. Respondents also considered the visual presentation of the menu attractive. These observations are consistent with Namkung and Jang (2007), who found that food quality significantly affects satisfaction and behavioral intentions and that taste and presentation are especially important.

The interviews also identified a product-quality weakness: Bintang observed that chicken could become tough when the product was held for too long. This suggests that consistency should be evaluated not only immediately after preparation but also under realistic consumption and delivery conditions. For Dampar Pemadam Lapar, food quality management should therefore include taste, texture, temperature, presentation, and packaging.

4.4 Service Quality and Delivery Experience

The interviewed customers generally perceived employees as young and friendly, but one respondent observed insufficient responsiveness during order preparation. Another respondent experienced slow delivery. These findings are consistent with the service-quality perspective of Parasuraman et al. (1985), which emphasizes the importance of gaps between expected and perceived service performance.

The importance of service quality is also supported by restaurant research. Anwar et al. (2023), studying Kimukatsu Restaurant in Indonesia, found that food quality and service quality positively affected customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Ryu et al. (2012) similarly reported positive effects of food and service quality on satisfaction and loyalty in an ethnic restaurant context. Therefore, service responsiveness and delivery time should not be treated as secondary operational issues; they are part of the customer's perceived value.

Table 4. Customer Experience Findings

Aspect	Positive Finding	Improvement Area
Food quality	Taste generally rated above 4/5.	Maintain consistency, texture, and presentation.
Employee interaction	Staff perceived as young and friendly.	Increase attentiveness and professional service behavior.
Delivery	Online ordering provides convenience.	Improve preparation and delivery-time consistency.
Menu variety	Japanese-style differentiation is attractive.	Add controlled new variants.
Feedback	Customers provide direct feedback and continue purchasing.	Formalize feedback collection and response.

4.5 Promotions, Satisfaction, and Word-of-Mouth

Respondents reported positive experiences with Ramadan discounts, sauce testers, and free sauce bonuses. These activities provided additional value and contributed to favorable perceptions of the brand. The findings also indicate willingness to recommend the product.

The relationship between satisfaction and behavioral intentions is supported by restaurant research. Namkung and Jang (2007) found that food quality affects behavioral intentions through satisfaction, while Hidayat et al. (2020) examined the links among food quality, service quality, satisfaction, and repurchase intention in hot-plate restaurants. In the present study, the evidence is qualitative and cannot establish causal effects, but the respondents' willingness to repurchase and recommend is consistent with this broader theoretical relationship.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Digital Awareness and the Customer Journey

The fact that all respondents first encountered Bowlster Food through Instagram indicates that social media functioned as an important early touch point. Lemon and Verhoef (2016) argue that customer experience develops through multiple touch points and channels, meaning that digital exposure should be integrated with the subsequent physical and service experience. For Dampar Pemadam Lapar, Instagram should therefore be designed as the first stage of a broader customer journey rather than as an isolated advertising channel.

Content should combine product-focused visuals, short videos, customer testimonials, preparation scenes, promotional information, and clear ordering instructions. This recommendation is supported by research showing that social-media communication can influence purchase-related outcomes (Wang et al., 2012; Putri et al., 2022; Surianto et al., 2024).

5.2 Product Differentiation and Visual Appeal

Japanese-style menu elements were perceived as distinctive by the respondents. This perceived uniqueness can support differentiation when it is communicated consistently. Namkung and Jang (2007) also demonstrate the importance of taste and presentation for satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Accordingly, Dampar Pemadam Lapar should develop a recognizable signature menu, sauce, topping, packaging, or visual style rather than competing solely through price.

5.3 Convenience and Perceived Control

Convenience was a recurring purchase factor because respondents purchased when busy, hungry, returning from classes, or seeking a quick meal. This can be interpreted through Ajzen's (1991) perceived behavioral control concept: consumers are more likely to act when the behavior is perceived as feasible and

easy. For the business, this means that fast preparation, simple ordering, multiple payment options, clear delivery information, and reliable service can reduce barriers between intention and purchase.

5.4 Customer Experience and Retention

The findings indicate that customer experience extends beyond food taste. Friendly employee interaction created comfort, while slow service and delivery generated dissatisfaction. Lemon and Verhoef (2016) emphasize that customer experience is formed across multiple touch points, while Namkung and Jang (2007) show that food quality can affect behavioral intentions through satisfaction. Thus, Dampar Pemadam Lapar should manage product quality and service quality together.

5.5 Competitive Strategy for Dampar Pemadam Lapar

Table 5. Evidence-Based Strategic Recommendations

Observed Finding	Relevant Literature	Recommended Response
Instagram is the main awareness source.	Wang et al. (2012); Putri et al. (2022); Surianto et al. (2024)	Develop consistent Instagram content and connect it to clear ordering paths.
Food visuals stimulate curiosity.	Namkung & Jang (2007)	Use high-quality food photography, video, and consistent presentation.
Japanese-style products are perceived as distinctive.	Differentiation interpreted from respondent data; food quality literature supports presentation and product evaluation.	Develop a recognizable signature menu and visual identity.
Customers value practical and fast food.	Ajzen (1991) on perceived behavioral control	Prioritize fast preparation, simple ordering, and reliable delivery.
Promotions generate positive memories.	Consumer behavior and purchase-intention literature	Use seasonal discounts, sampling, bundles, and bonuses selectively.
Friendly staff improve comfort, while slow service creates dissatisfaction.	Parasuraman et al. (1985); Anwar et al. (2023)	Establish service standards and monitor response time.
Customers provide direct feedback.	Lemon & Verhoef (2016)	Create structured feedback channels across the customer journey.

6. BUSINESS IMPLICATIONS

The research produces four major implications for Dampar Pemadam Lapar. First, digital marketing should build awareness through consistent visual communication rather than relying only on promotional announcements. Second, product differentiation should be explicit and supported by consistent visual identity. Third, operational convenience, particularly preparation and delivery speed, should be treated as part of the value proposition. Fourth, customer feedback should become a continuous input for menu and service improvement.

The recommended implementation can be staged. In the short term, the business can standardize Instagram content, food presentation, and basic service procedures. In the medium term, it can test new menu variants, bundles, and customer-retention programs. In the longer term, accumulated customer and sales data can be used to evaluate campaign effectiveness, menu performance, repeat purchases, and customer satisfaction.

6.1. Limitation

This study has several limitations. First, only three customers were interviewed, so the findings cannot be generalized to the broader rice bowl market. Second, the four-week project period limited longitudinal observation. Third, competitor information was obtained primarily through customer interviews, observation, and publicly accessible digital information rather than internal Bowlster Food data. Finally, theoretical frameworks such as the Theory of Planned Behavior were used only as interpretive lenses and were not statistically tested.

Future studies should involve a larger and more diverse sample and combine qualitative interviews with quantitative surveys, social-media analytics, online-review analysis, and sales data. Such an approach would enable the proposed relationships among social-media exposure, food quality, service quality, satisfaction, and purchase or repurchase intention to be tested quantitatively.

7. CONCLUSION

This study examined marketing communication, consumer behavior, and customer experience in Bowlster Food as a competitor benchmark for Dampar Pemadam Lapar. Instagram was the primary awareness channel among all three respondents, while attractive food visuals, Japanese-style differentiation, convenient location, practical consumption needs, and promotional incentives influenced purchase decisions.

Customer experience was generally positive, particularly regarding food taste and friendly interaction. Nevertheless, respondents identified weaknesses in employee responsiveness, delivery speed, food texture after extended holding, and menu variety. These findings are consistent with established research emphasizing the importance of food quality, service quality, customer experience, and social-media communication in shaping satisfaction and behavioral intentions (Namkung & Jang, 2007; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Anwar et al., 2023).

For Dampar Pemadam Lapar, competitiveness should be developed through an integrated strategy combining consistent digital marketing, strong visual presentation, distinctive menu positioning, fast and reliable service, structured customer feedback, and continuous product innovation. The study also demonstrates that competitor benchmarking within a Learning Factory can provide practical market intelligence while developing students' applied research capabilities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Politeknik Takumi, the Digital Business Study Program, the Learning Factory team, lecturers, and the consumers who participated in the market research project for their support and contributions.

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