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THE PARADOX OF SUSTAINABILITY OF CULINARY MSMES: DECONSTRUCTING ADAPTIVE STRATEGIES IN DEALING WITH CONTEMPORARY MARKET VULNERABILITIES

Muh. Husriadi[1]*
Halu Oleo University, Kendari, Indonesia
husriadiadi@gmail.com

Usman. M[2]
Halu Oleo University, Kendari, Indonesia

Nada Kusuma[3]
Halu Oleo University, Kendari, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

The culinary Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) sector plays a strategic role in supporting the resilience of the people's economy, but its actors are constantly faced with accumulative pressures in the form of market uncertainty, intense spatial competition, and the dynamics of changing consumer preferences. This study aims to explore in depth the lived experiences of MSMEs in the culinary sector in the early-stage survival phase in formulating adaptive strategies, internalizing operational obstacles, and strengthening the articulation of business sustainability goals. Using a qualitative approach with a descriptive phenomenological design, this study examines the in-depth experiences of the owners and managers of Kedai Ross in the MTQ MSME center area, Kadia District, Kendari City. Primary data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and structured field notes. The results reveal that the operational resilience of micro-enterprises in the early stages is highly dependent on the advantages of physical location differentiation and an interpersonal service orientation centered on customer satisfaction. Although access to digital marketing remains very limited due to the technological literacy gap, business sustainability can be maintained through responsive product adaptations tailored to the tastes of the younger generation (Generation Z) and self-efficacy in dealing with visitor fluctuations due to seasonal factors. The theoretical and practical implications of this research point to the importance of reconstructing a digital literacy mentoring model based on local characteristics and local government policy interventions to ensure the resilience of micro-enterprises in public spaces.

Keywords: Culinary MSMEs, Adaptive Strategy, Digital Literacy, Business Resilience.