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## E-Business Capabilities and Performance of Micro-Small Restaurants in Lagawe Ifugao, Philippines

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### ABSTRACT

This study assesses the e-business capabilities of small-scale restaurants in Lagawe, Ifugao, Philippines, focusing on the digital marketing mix and its relationship to business performance. It aims to provide insights into effective digital marketing mix strategies that enhance business resilience while contributing to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure). Using a descriptive-correlational research design, the study examined registered small-scale restaurants operating physically and digitally. Data were collected through a researcher-made questionnaire, validated by experts, and field-tested for reliability. Descriptive statistics and the Spearman-Rho correlation analysis were employed to analyze the relationship between e-business capabilities (product, price, place, promotion) and business performance indicators (monthly income, number of branches, years in business, and employees). Findings indicate that while these businesses effectively utilize digital platforms for product visibility, customer engagement, and online transactions, challenges remain in responsiveness, online security, and adoption of advanced promotional strategies. A significant positive correlation was found between pricing strategies and monthly income, while product strategies showed a strong link to business longevity. However, place and promotion strategies correlated negatively with physical expansion, suggesting that restaurateurs increasingly rely on digital presence over traditional growth. The study highlights the need for enhanced social media engagement, stronger security measures, and strategic digital marketing investments. Strengthening e-business capabilities can help small-scale restaurants in rural areas achieve long-term sustainability and competitiveness in the digital economy.

### INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has unprecedentedly impacted businesses and individuals worldwide, disrupting economies and altering business operations. Lockdowns and restrictions forced enterprises to integrate information and communication technology (ICT) to ensure business continuity and security (Flores *et al.*, 2024). While larger corporations swiftly adapted to digitalization, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) faced significant challenges, particularly in retail, travel, entertainment, hospitality, tourism, construction, and manufacturing sectors (Malinao & Ebi, 2022). Many MSMEs, reliant on in-person interactions, manual labor, and traditional brick-and-mortar models, struggled to keep pace with rapid technological advancements, exacerbating their vulnerabilities and threatening survival (Hendrawan *et al.*, 2024). Digital transformation presents substantial opportunities for MSMEs, such as enhanced operational efficiency, access to broader markets, and improved decision-making through data analysis (Jones, 2024). Successful adaptation requires effective technology management strategies, including aligning technology plans with business goals, integrating appropriate systems, and investing in employee training. Moreover, fostering a strong business identity and embracing innovative sales techniques can enhance competitiveness and customer

satisfaction (Pramesti & Ubaidillah, 2023). Thus, while challenges abound, proactive engagement with digital tools can significantly bolster MSME resilience and growth.

The hospitality and tourism industries, which contribute significantly to global employment and economic growth, were among the hardest hit by the pandemic. Hotels, lodges, restaurants, coffee shops, and travel agencies faced operational disruptions, necessitating innovative recovery strategies (Maitra & Roy, 2024). Post-pandemic resilience in these industries requires proactive measures, particularly adopting and implementing ICT-driven solutions (Segarra *et al.*, 2024). Mobile applications, web-based platforms, and digital payment systems have become critical in sustaining business operations. Digital platforms facilitate online reservations, food delivery services, revenue management, and contactless transactions, transforming how businesses operate and engage with customers (Lian, 2024; Abdul Rahim *et al.*, 2024).

The rapid evolution of digital technology has significantly reshaped the restaurant industry, amplifying the role of digital marketing in customer engagement and business sustainability. Consumers increasingly rely on smartphones and online platforms for dining recommendations, reservations, and food deliveries (Nampoothiri, 2021; Glory *et al.*, 2024). The ability to

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leverage digital marketing strategies, such as social media engagement, website optimization, and online advertising, has become a crucial determinant of restaurant success (Meek *et al.*, 2021). Modern consumers prioritize visually curated experiences, reviews, and seamless digital interactions over traditional dining experiences (Arya & Kolapkar, 2024). Consequently, restaurant owners must continuously innovate their online presence to maintain competitiveness (Amin *et al.*, 2019). A well-designed, interactive website with intuitive user interfaces, updated menus, and efficient reservation systems significantly enhances customer engagement and brand positioning (Ismi Aziz *et al.*, 2024).

In the Philippines, tourism is a major economic driver, with its 7,641 islands offering diverse cultural and natural attractions. The Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), encompassing the provinces of Abra, Apayao, Benguet, Ifugao, Kalinga, and Mountain Province, is renowned for its breathtaking landscapes and rich cultural heritage (Pawid, 2023). The region's tourism industry plays a crucial role in local economic development, supporting businesses such as weaving, wood carving, guided tours, and hospitality services. Among these, the restaurant industry is a cornerstone of tourism, providing employment opportunities and fostering local entrepreneurship.

Ifugao province, known for its well-preserved indigenous culture and world-famous rice terraces, has witnessed a surge in tourism-driven economic activities. Small-scale restaurants, often family-owned businesses, contribute to the region's economic fabric by catering to local and international tourists. However, the increasing reliance on digital engagement necessitates a shift in how these small enterprises market their services. Despite the growing digital landscape, many small-scale restaurants in Lagawe, Ifugao, struggle with e-business capabilities, limiting their ability to compete effectively and sustain growth.

This study aims to assess the e-business capabilities of small-scale restaurants in Lagawe, Ifugao, Philippines, focusing on the marketing mix and its relationship to business performance. The study seeks insights into effective digital marketing strategies that enhance business resilience. Furthermore, aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), this research underscores the role of digital transformation in promoting sustainable entrepreneurship and economic development.

Understanding the digital capabilities of small-scale restaurants in Lagawe, Ifugao can offer valuable insights for policymakers, business owners, and tourism stakeholders. The findings will contribute to the broader discourse on digital transformation in the hospitality sector, informing strategies that empower MSMEs to thrive in an increasingly digitalized economy. Ultimately, this study seeks to bridge the gap between traditional

business models and modern technological advancements, ensuring small-scale restaurants' long-term sustainability and competitiveness in a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a pure quantitative research method. Specifically, the descriptive-correlational research design was used to assess e-business capabilities among small-scale restaurateurs and their relationship to business performance in Lagawe, Ifugao.

The study was conducted in Lagawe, Ifugao. The province faces technological limitations, including weak telecommunication signals and low internet penetration. Despite these barriers, online business activities have increased in the locality.

The study focused on all registered small-scale restaurants in Lagawe, Ifugao, which operate brick-and-mortar establishments while selling online through various digital platforms.

A researcher-made questionnaire was developed, covering five major areas: demographics, e-business capabilities, business performance, challenges, and recommendations. The questionnaire was crafted based on relevant literature but was not directly adapted from prior studies. It underwent expert validation, refinement, and field testing for reliability.

Before data collection, the researcher identified and contacted potential respondents. Permission letters were sent for formal consent. Surveys were distributed physically and via email/messenger for remote respondents. Responses were retrieved within seven days, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality in compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (RA 10173).

This study used descriptive statistics and the Spearman-Rho correlation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### E-business Capabilities

#### Product Strategies

The data in Figure 1 shows that micro-small restaurants in Lagawe, Ifugao, have strong online visibility and customer accessibility but face challenges in responsiveness and security measures. Notably, all businesses (100%) ensure their menus are easily read on social media and provide contact numbers, enhancing customer engagement. Additionally, 90% post original food pictures and offer online reservations, reinforcing credibility and convenience for customers. However, only 50% respond quickly to social media inquiries, which may negatively impact customer satisfaction and lead to lost sales opportunities. Furthermore, 70% provide a customer feedback box, indicating an openness to customer opinions, but only 20% limit product visibility to legitimate accounts, and an equally low 20% accept reservations from dummy accounts. This suggests a lack of strict online security measures, which could expose businesses to fraudulent transactions.



**Figure 1:** Percentage Distribution on E-business Capabilities of Restaurants in terms of Product Strategies

These findings highlight the importance of improving customer service efficiency by enhancing responsiveness to social media inquiries. Strengthening online security measures—such as filtering viewers and verifying customer accounts—can help prevent fraud and maintain trust. While current practices effectively boost online presence, further optimization in customer interaction, security, and reservation policies is crucial for sustainable e-business growth. Training restaurateurs in social media engagement strategies, response automation, and digital security could significantly enhance their e-commerce capabilities.

Integrating social media into online food ordering systems significantly enhances customer engagement and operational efficiency. Platforms like Facebook and Instagram facilitate easy access to menus, enabling customers to view original food images and make online reservations, which is crucial for modern dining experiences (Mponela *et al.*, 2024). Quick responses to customer inquiries on these platforms foster positive interaction, while feedback mechanisms allow for continuous improvement in service quality. Moreover, using QR codes for menu access streamlines the ordering process, reducing errors and enhancing user satisfaction (Saiyad, 2024; Saiyad *et al.*, 2024). By limiting product visibility to verified accounts, restaurants can maintain exclusivity and security, ensuring their offerings reach a legitimate audience (Sonwane *et al.*, 2023). These features collectively contribute to a more efficient and user-friendly dining experience.

### Pricing Strategies

The data in Figure 2 indicate that all micro-small restaurateurs (100%) accept online payment methods such as GCash, PayMaya, and bank transfers, reflecting a strong adoption of digital transactions. Additionally, 80% display prices on social media, ensuring transparency and helping customers make informed purchasing decisions.

However, only 20% require an initial or down payment for online reservations, and none offer installment payment options. This suggests that while online transactions are widely embraced, there is a reluctance to implement pre-payment or flexible payment schemes.

The high acceptance of digital payments signifies that restaurateurs are adapting to cashless transactions, which improves customer convenience and aligns with the growing e-commerce landscape. However, the low adoption of down payments and the absence of installment options may expose businesses to order cancellations or last-minute changes, potentially leading to financial losses. To mitigate this, businesses could require partial reservation payments to secure orders. Additionally, exploring installment-based payment models—especially for bulk orders or catering services—could attract a wider customer base and enhance revenue streams. Clear payment policies and leveraging secure digital payment platforms can further strengthen consumer trust and financial stability.

The integration of online payment systems, such as GCash and Maya, has transformed the ordering and reservation landscape, particularly in the Philippines. These digital wallets facilitate various payment methods, including bank transfers and installment options, enhancing user convenience and satisfaction (Gumasing & Ilagan, 2023). Online reservation systems streamline the ordering process, allowing users to reserve and pay for services through mobile applications, saving time and improving efficiency for consumers and businesses (Subrahmanyam, 2021; Karim *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, the ability to display prices on social media platforms increases transparency and accessibility, catering to a broader audience and accommodating diverse payment preferences. These advancements in online payment and reservation systems reflect a significant shift towards digital solutions in consumer transactions, promoting flexibility and user engagement (Anggraeny, 2024).

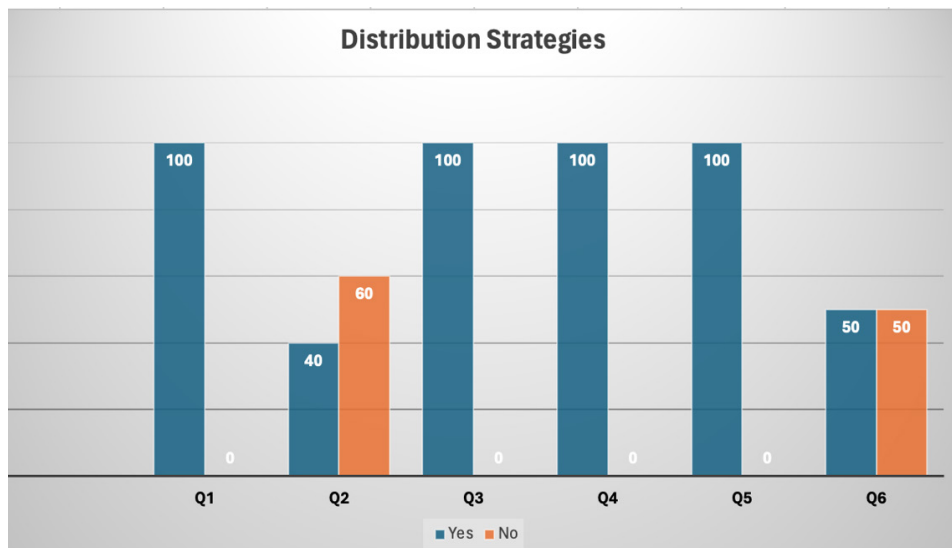


**Figure 2:** Percentage Distribution on E-business Capabilities of Restaurants in terms of Pricing Strategies

**Distribution Strategies**

The data suggest in Figure 3 that micro-small restaurants in Lagawe, Ifugao, effectively use social media to present their businesses in an appealing and accessible manner. All respondents (100%) ensure that their restaurants appear clean and cozy online, provide a menu checklist, and have easily searchable business names on social media platforms.

Additionally, their mobile social media accounts are user-friendly, ensuring seamless customer interaction. However, only 40% post Google Maps of their locations, which may hinder customers from easily finding their physical stores. Furthermore, while 50% offer delivery services, the other half do not, potentially limiting their reach, especially for customers who prefer home delivery.



**Figure 3:** Percentage Distribution on E-business Capabilities of Restaurants in terms of Distribution Strategies

The strong online presence and mobile-friendly platforms suggest that restaurateurs are maximizing digital marketing strategies. However, the low integration of location-based services like Google Maps may inconvenience first-time visitors, especially customers. Encouraging businesses to add Google Maps links and clear directions can improve accessibility and foot traffic. Additionally, the limited adoption of delivery services indicates a potential gap in customer convenience. Expanding delivery options through in-house services or third-party logistics could enhance customer satisfaction and boost

sales. Optimizing location visibility and delivery services can further strengthen their e-business capabilities and competitiveness. Integrating social media in restaurant marketing has become essential for enhancing customer engagement and driving visit intentions. Restaurants utilize platforms like Facebook to share menus, cleanliness updates, and delivery options, significantly influencing customer perceptions and decisions. The effectiveness of these strategies is underscored by the increased engagement rates observed during the COVID-19 pandemic, where

direct communication about safety and services became paramount (Manningham *et al.*, 2024). Additionally, advanced recommendation systems that leverage user-generated content, such as image classification and sentiment analysis, can provide personalized dining suggestions based on implicit user preferences (Yap *et al.*, 2024). This approach improves customer satisfaction and addresses food safety concerns, as cleanliness and food quality are critical factors in customer reviews (Singh *et al.*, 2024). Ultimately, a user-friendly social media presence that facilitates easy access to information and delivery services is vital for modern restaurants to thrive in a competitive landscape.

### Promotional Strategies

The data in Figure 4 indicate that micro-small restaurants in Lagawe, Ifugao, rely on organic social media strategies rather than paid digital marketing techniques. While a high percentage (80-90%) actively post promos and use video marketing, only 30% pay for social media ads, and 10% collaborate with influencers or use affiliate marketing.

Additionally, only 20% invest in brand visibility or sponsor online activities, suggesting a limited approach to expanding their audience reach. However, 80% utilize direct customer engagement strategies, such as sending offers via text, email, and push notifications, indicating a focus on personalized marketing.

While these businesses effectively use cost-efficient promotional strategies like video marketing and direct customer outreach, their low investment in paid ads, influencer marketing, and brand partnerships may limit their audience growth. Paid advertising and influencer collaborations can enhance visibility, attract new customers, and boost credibility. Additionally, sponsorships, live-streamed events, and affiliate marketing can help expand engagement and brand awareness. To maximize online presence, restaurateurs should consider a balanced approach integrating organic and paid digital marketing strategies. Providing training on cost-effective ad campaigns and influencer collaborations could help them compete more effectively in the e-commerce landscape.



Figure 4: Percentage Distribution on E-business Capabilities of Restaurants in terms of Promotional Strategies

Social media marketing employs various strategies to improve brand visibility, audience engagement, and customer interaction. These strategies generally fall into three main categories: paid advertising, influencer marketing, and direct engagement tactics. Paid advertisements, such as sponsored posts on platforms like Instagram and Facebook, are widely used to expand reach and promote content. These ads are often more cost-effective than traditional marketing methods and provide measurable results through analytics (Close Scheinbaum, 2016). However, their effectiveness depends on content relevance and platform algorithms, as engagement rates can vary significantly (Hidayanto *et al.*, 2022).

Beyond paid ads, influencer marketing has become a dominant strategy, particularly in the health, lifestyle, and consumer goods industries. Businesses leverage influencers' credibility to foster authentic connections

and brand loyalty. Since influencers create engaging and relatable content, they are particularly effective at building trust and increasing audience engagement, especially among younger demographics (Gell *et al.*, 2024). In addition to paid promotions and influencer collaborations, businesses use direct engagement tactics to interact with customers. Reward-based sharing and live-streamed events help increase participation and boost content visibility (Ye, 2022). Similarly, text messages, emails, and push notifications serve as personalized communication channels for delivering offers and promotions effectively (Hidayanto *et al.*, 2022). Businesses also employ sponsorships and affiliate marketing to expand their reach by leveraging existing networks and partnerships.

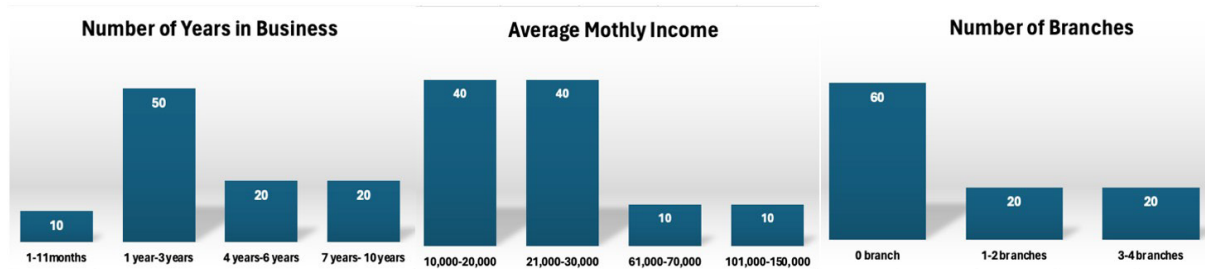
To maximize effectiveness, businesses should integrate traditional and digital marketing approaches into a holistic strategy. Combining email marketing with social media

campaigns can enhance customer engagement and build long-term brand loyalty (Plume & Slade, 2018; Martínez-Navarro & Bigné, 2017). According to Ines and Tolentino (2024), social listening and social search significantly affect consumer perceptions, aiding in product discovery and understanding of brand attributes. Positive social media interactions strongly influence purchasing decisions. Moreover, social media emerges as a primary source of product information, with user-generated content deemed more authentic than traditional advertising. The study underscores the effectiveness of social listening tools in providing valuable insights for businesses, enhancing brand perception, and earning consumer loyalty. While paid advertisements provide visibility, direct engagement fosters relationships, and influencer collaborations build trust, a well-balanced approach incorporating all three elements is crucial for achieving sustainable digital marketing success. As the social media landscape evolves, businesses must remain adaptable and audience-centric, using diverse strategies to enhance their online presence

and foster meaningful customer connections.

**Business Performance**

The data on average monthly income, number of branches, and years in business provide valuable insights into the financial stability, growth trajectory, and sustainability of micro-small restaurateurs in Lagawe, Ifugao, Philippines, as shown in Figure 5. The majority (80%) of small-scale restaurateurs earn between ₱10,000 to ₱30,000 per month, which indicates that most businesses operate with modest revenue streams. This suggests that these businesses are likely self-sustaining but not highly profitable, with limited capital for expansion. However, a small percentage (10%) report a monthly income between ₱61,000 to ₱70,000, and another 10% earn as much as ₱101,000 to ₱150,000, highlighting the presence of a few high-performing establishments. This income disparity suggests that some businesses have successfully leveraged digital platforms, diversified their offerings, or implemented effective business strategies, setting them apart from the majority.



**Figure 5:** Business Performance of Restaurants

Regarding business expansion, 60% of respondents do not have additional branches, implying that most restaurateurs operate as single-location businesses with limited scalability. Only 20% have 1-2 branches, and another 20% operate 3-4 branches, indicating that a minority have successfully expanded. The limited expansion could be attributed to financial constraints, market saturation, or operational challenges, reinforcing the need for strategic growth plans, access to funding, and digital marketing efforts to increase profitability. In terms of business longevity, half (50%) of the businesses

have been operating for 1-3 years, suggesting that many are still in their early growth phase. Meanwhile, 20% have been in business for 4-6 years, and another 20% for 7-10 years, indicating a small but stable segment that has demonstrated resilience. However, businesses operating for less than a year (10%) suggest that some entrepreneurs struggle with sustainability, possibly due to financial difficulties, competition, or inadequate digital adaptation.

**Relationship between E-business Capabilities and Business Performance**

**Table 1:** Spearman-rho correlation between e-business capabilities of small-scale restaurateurs and business performance

Variables		Product	Price	Place	Promotion
Average Monthly Income	Correlation Coefficient	-.103	.339	.216	.227
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.762	.049*	.532	.502
Number of Branches	Correlation Coefficient	-.165	.000	-.467	-.364
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.629	1.000	.147	.271
Number of Years in Business	Correlation Coefficient	.369	-.400	-.252	-.377
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.039*	.223	.456	.253
Number of Employees	Correlation Coefficient	.135	.170	.320	-.104
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.691	.616	..338	.762

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

The Spearman-rho correlation analysis shown in Table 1 examines the relationship between e-business capabilities (Product, Price, Place, Promotion) and business performance indicators (Average Monthly Income, Number of Branches, Number of Years in Business, and Number of Employees) among small-scale restaurateurs in Lagawe, Ifugao. The findings provide insight into how different aspects of e-business impact financial stability, business longevity, and growth potential.

The analysis reveals a statistically significant positive correlation between the Price variable and Average Monthly Income ( $r = 0.339$ ,  $p = 0.049$ ). This suggests that businesses that display clear pricing strategies online, accept online payments, and maintain price transparency tend to have higher monthly income levels. This underscores the importance of well-structured pricing models in online platforms to attract and retain customers. However, the correlations between Product (-.103), Place (.216), Promotion (.227), and Monthly Income were not statistically significant, indicating that while these elements contribute to business visibility and customer engagement, they do not directly impact income levels. This could suggest that small restaurateurs are still in the early stages of optimizing product offerings and promotional strategies in their e-business approach.

The Place variable shows a moderate negative correlation with the number of branches ( $r = -0.467$ ,  $p = 0.147$ ), suggesting that businesses with well-managed online presence (e.g., clear Google Maps location, online menu visibility, and delivery options) tend to have fewer physical branches. This may indicate that a strong digital presence is an alternative to physical expansion, reducing the need for additional locations. Similarly, the Promotion variable negatively correlates with the number of branches ( $r = -0.364$ ,  $p = 0.271$ ). This may imply that businesses investing in social media marketing, online advertisements, and influencer collaborations rely more on virtual expansion than physical growth. This highlights the increasing importance of digital marketing over traditional brick-and-mortar expansion in the restaurant industry.

A significant positive correlation is observed between Product and Number of Years in Business ( $r = 0.369$ ,  $p = 0.039$ ). This suggests that businesses continuously improving their product offerings, maintaining quality, and leveraging digital platforms to showcase their menu are more likely to sustain long-term operations. It emphasizes the role of product consistency and innovation in ensuring business longevity. On the other hand, negative but non-significant correlations between Price (-0.400), Place (-0.252), Promotion (-0.377), and Business Longevity suggest that while pricing strategies, digital presence, and promotional efforts are crucial, they may not necessarily guarantee long-term survival. Other factors, such as operational efficiency, customer satisfaction, and market adaptability, may significantly ensure sustainability.

There were no significant correlations between e-business

capabilities and the number of employees, with weak or inconsistent relationships across all variables. This implies that while small-scale restaurateurs engage in e-business strategies, these efforts have not yet significantly influenced workforce expansion. This could be due to the digital nature of e-business, where automation and technology reduce the need for additional employees. However, investment in a skilled workforce for digital marketing, online customer service, and delivery operations could become necessary as businesses scale up.

E-business capabilities, including digital marketing and e-commerce, enhance operational efficiency and customer engagement, which are crucial for performance (Hamidah *et al.*, 2022). For instance, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that effectively utilize digital marketing capabilities have shown improved marketing performance, with a notable influence from market orientation (Muhammad & Indarwati, 2023). Additionally, integrating e-commerce capabilities allows restaurateurs to adapt to changing market conditions, fostering better strategic orientations and hybrid channels that contribute to overall performance (Bi *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, the quality of e-services and food significantly impacts customer satisfaction, influencing business performance and highlighting the importance of e-business capabilities in enhancing customer experiences (Lu *et al.*, 2020). Thus, synthesizing these capabilities is essential for small-scale restaurateurs aiming to improve their business outcomes.

## CONCLUSION

Micro-small restaurants in Lagawe, Ifugao, leverage social media for visibility and engagement but face challenges like slow response times and weak security, impacting efficiency and consumer trust. Enhancing responsiveness and cybersecurity can improve customer satisfaction and safeguard transactions. The rise of digital payments signals a shift toward cashless transactions, yet hesitation in adopting pre-payments and installment plans may lead to financial instability. Implementing flexible payment schemes can enhance revenue security and attract more customers. Despite improved visibility through social media, limited integration with Google Maps and delivery services restricts accessibility. Expanding location-based services and delivery options can improve customer reach and operational efficiency.

Furthermore, reliance on organic marketing, with minimal investment in paid ads, influencer collaborations, and sponsorships, limits audience expansion. A balanced strategy combining organic and paid efforts can strengthen brand visibility. Financial constraints and operational challenges hinder scalability, highlighting the need for strategic growth plans and digital marketing efforts. Transparent pricing strategies positively impact revenue, while digital presence and promotions improve visibility but do not directly drive income growth. A robust online presence can reduce dependence on physical expansion, emphasizing the importance of digital

marketing in sustaining small businesses. Restaurant owners should adopt strategic digital marketing and financial management practices to enhance sustainability. Policymakers and business support organizations should provide training and resources to optimize digital strategies, financial models, and operational efficiency, ensuring long-term growth and competitiveness in the evolving business landscape.

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