



Article

The Role of Brand Awareness in Mediating the Influence of Digital Marketing and Digital Content Quality on Increasing Sales of Culinary MSMEs (Case Study in Panam, Pekanbaru)

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze and understand the role of brand awareness as a mediator in the relationship between digital marketing strategies and digital content quality on the sales growth of culinary MSMEs in Panam, Pekanbaru. The research employs a quantitative approach using Path Analysis. Data were collected randomly from culinary MSMEs in Panam, Pekanbaru, over the period from 2020 to 2024. Data analysis techniques include descriptive analysis, normality test, multicollinearity test, autocorrelation test, and heteroskedasticity test. The findings of the study are as follows: 1) Digital marketing strategies have a positive and significant impact on brand awareness of culinary MSMEs. 2) Digital content quality has a positive and significant impact on brand awareness of culinary MSMEs. 3) Digital marketing strategies have a positive and significant impact on the sales growth of culinary MSMEs. 4) Digital content quality has a positive and significant impact on the sales growth of culinary MSMEs. 5) Brand awareness has a positive and significant impact on the sales growth of culinary MSMEs. 6) Digital marketing strategies significantly enhance sales growth through the mediation of brand awareness in culinary MSMEs. 7) Digital content quality significantly enhances sales growth through the mediation of brand awareness in culinary MSMEs.

1. Introduction

The rapid evolution of digital technology has profoundly reshaped business dynamics, particularly for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) operating in the culinary sector. In Panam, Pekanbaru, culinary MSMEs face escalating competition amid a significant shift in consumer behavior toward digital platforms for discovering and purchasing products. Digital marketing has emerged as a vital tool for expanding market presence, fostering customer engagement, and driving sales growth. However, the effectiveness of digital marketing hinges on the quality of digital content and the level of brand awareness among target audiences.

Brand awareness serves as a critical factor in shaping consumer perceptions and influencing purchasing behavior (Umami & Darma, 2021). Acting as a mediator between digital marketing efforts—such as social media campaigns, online advertisements, and search engine optimization (SEO)—and business outcomes like increased sales, brand awareness is amplified by high-quality digital content (Ramli et al., 2025). This includes visually appealing product images, engaging videos, and compelling narratives that reflect brand values. In Indonesia, more than 64 million MSMEs contribute around 61% to the national GDP, yet only about 24% have adopted digital platforms according to data from the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs. This digital adoption gap highlights the urgency for effective strategies to enhance brand awareness through digital channels. Despite these opportunities, many culinary MSMEs in Panam encounter challenges such as limited financial resources, inadequate digital expertise, and a lack of understanding of how brand awareness mediates the impact of their digital strategies (Hidayat & Vania, 2024).

To provide context, a preliminary survey conducted in 2024 among culinary MSMEs in Panam, Pekanbaru, revealed variations in revenue, digital platform adoption, and brand awareness levels, as shown below:

Table 1. Sales of Culinary MSMEs in Panam Pekanbaru

MSME Name	Type of Cuisine	Annual Revenue (IDR)	Digital Platforms Used	Brand Awareness (%)
Rumah Makan	Traditional Food	175,000,000	Instagram, GoFood	68
Warung Makan Ibu Sari	Fast Food	95,000,000	WhatsApp, ShopeeFood	52
Kue Tradisi Nusantara	Cakes and Snacks	130,000,000	Instagram, TikTok	73
Soto Mbak Wati	Traditional Food	210,000,000	GoFood, GrabFood	78

Preliminary Survey by Researcher (2024)

The data highlight that MSMEs with higher revenues, such as Kedai Kopi Cerita Panam, tend to exhibit stronger brand awareness (82%) and leverage a broader array of digital platforms, including websites. In contrast, MSMEs with lower revenues, such as Warung Makan Ibu Sari, demonstrate lower brand awareness (52%) and rely on more limited digital channels, such as WhatsApp. These findings suggest that effective digital marketing strategies and high-quality content are pivotal in enhancing brand visibility and, consequently, sales performance. However, the lower brand awareness among some MSMEs underscores the need for more targeted digital strategies to fully harness their potential.

This study seeks to investigate the mediating role of brand awareness in the relationship between digital marketing strategies and digital content quality in driving sales growth among culinary MSMEs in Panam, Pekanbaru. The findings are expected to offer practical insights for MSME owners to optimize their digital marketing efforts, contribute to the academic discourse on digital marketing within the MSME context, and provide actionable recommendations for stakeholders, such as local governments and MSME associations, to foster inclusive and sustainable digital transformation.

This research seeks to explore and elucidate the mediating role of brand awareness in the interplay between digital marketing strategies and digital content quality in enhancing the sales performance of culinary MSMEs in Panam, Pekanbaru. Specifically, the study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To determine the effect of digital marketing strategies on brand awareness among culinary MSMEs in Panam, Pekanbaru.
2. To evaluate the influence of digital content quality on brand awareness within the culinary MSME sector in the region.
3. To investigate the impact of digital marketing strategies on the sales growth of culinary MSMEs.
4. To assess the effect of digital content quality on the sales growth of culinary MSMEs.
5. To examine the role of brand awareness in driving sales growth for culinary MSMEs.
6. To analyze how brand awareness mediates the relationship between digital marketing strategies and sales growth in culinary MSMEs.
7. To explore the mediating role of brand awareness in the relationship between digital content quality and sales growth in culinary MSMEs.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Digital Marketing

Digital marketing encompasses a range of promotional activities conducted through digital channels and the internet to engage, attract, and retain customers. These activities include social media marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), email campaigns, and online advertising (Dwivedi et al., 2021). The primary strength of digital marketing lies in its cost-effectiveness, ability to target diverse audiences, and provision of measurable analytics for performance assessment. For culinary MSMEs, digital marketing serves as a powerful mechanism to showcase products, foster customer connections, and broaden market reach in a competitive digital landscape (Karunia & Gunarto, 2025).

2.2. Digital Content Quality

Digital content quality refers to the ability of digital materials such as visuals, text, and multimedia to captivate audiences, meet their expectations, and align with a brand's identity (Rungruangjit et al., 2024). High-quality content is characterized by clear communication, visually appealing design, creativity, and consistency. In the context of culinary MSMEs, superior content might include high-resolution food photography, engaging short videos, or compelling narratives that evoke emotional resonance with consumers,

thereby enhancing brand appeal and trust (R. Saputra et al., 2024).

2.3. Brand Awareness

Brand awareness reflects the extent to which consumers are familiar with and can recall a brand. Elevated brand awareness increases the likelihood of consumers choosing a brand's products over competitors (Arvapalli et al., 2012). It is cultivated through consistent brand exposure, distinctive messaging, and positive consumer interactions. For culinary MSMEs, establishing brand awareness involves ensuring that customers recognize the brand's name, logo, and unique identity across digital and physical touchpoints (Abdalla & Asnusa, 2025).

2.4. Sales Growth

Sales growth denotes the increase in revenue over a defined period compared to previous periods, indicating a business's ability to attract new customers and retain existing ones (Wang et al., 2025). Influencing factors include effective marketing strategies, product quality, competitive pricing, market trends, and customer satisfaction. For culinary MSMEs, sales growth is often driven by the ability to capture consumer interest through targeted digital marketing and engaging content that encourages purchase decisions (Diffa Fadhillah, 2023).

2.5. Relationship Between Variables

2.5.1 Digital Marketing and Brand Awareness

Effective digital marketing strategies significantly enhance brand visibility. Tactics such as social media campaigns, collaborations with influencers, and innovative online promotions increase consumer exposure to a brand, thereby strengthening recognition and recall among target audiences. (Sri et al., 2025)

2.5.2 Digital Content Quality and Brand Awareness

High-quality digital content is instrumental in fostering a positive brand image. Visually appealing, informative, and consistent content helps consumers easily recognize and remember a brand, reinforcing its presence in their minds (Syihab & Negoro, 2023).

2.5.3 Digital Marketing and Sales Growth

Well-implemented digital marketing initiatives not only boost brand awareness but also stimulate consumer purchase intent. Targeted advertisements and direct customer engagement through digital platforms can drive transactions and accelerate sales growth for culinary MSMEs (Hodijah et al., 2024).

2.5.4 Digital Content Quality and Sales Growth

Compelling and relevant digital content significantly influences consumer purchasing behavior. For culinary MSMEs, content that showcases appetizing visuals or engaging storytelling can motivate consumers to try products, leading to increased sales (Kalaij et al., 2025).

2.5.5 Brand Awareness and Sales Growth

Strong brand awareness enhances consumer preference and trust, making them more likely to choose a familiar brand over competitors (Amelia et al., 2025).

2.5.6 The Mediating Role of Brand Awareness

Brand awareness acts as a mediator linking digital marketing strategies and content quality to sales outcomes. (Albiansyah Pratama & Kusumawardhani, 2021).

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Flowchart

Employee performance is the result of work accomplished, and it is examined through the following research flowchart :

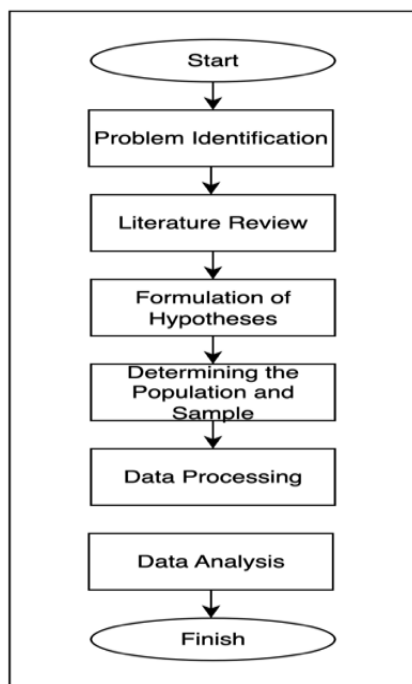


Figure 1. Research Flowchart

3.2. Research Type and Approach

This study adopts a quantitative research approach to test the relationships between variables using statistical methods. The research employs an

explanatory research design to elucidate the direct and indirect effects of digital marketing and digital content quality on sales growth, mediated by brand awareness. Path Analysis is utilized to measure these relationships and assess the mediating role of brand awareness.

3.3. Population and Sample

The population of this study consists of all culinary MSME (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) operators in the Panam area, Pekanbaru, during the period 2020–2024. According to data from the Pekanbaru City Cooperatives and MSME Agency, the number of culinary MSMEs in the Panam area is recorded as 235 business units.

The sampling method used is simple random sampling, ensuring that every member of the population has an equal chance of being selected as a respondent. The sample size was determined using the Slovin formula as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = sample size

N = population size (235 MSMEs)

e = margin of error, set at 5% (0.05)

Calculation:

$$n = \frac{235}{1 + 235(0.05)^2}$$
$$n = \frac{235}{1 + 235(0.0025)}$$
$$n = \frac{235}{1 + 0.5875}$$
$$n = \frac{235}{1.5875} = 148$$

The sample size used in this study is 148 respondents.

3.4. Data Collection Techniques

1. Questionnaire: Closed-ended questions using a five-point Likert scale, distributed either in person or online.
2. Documentation: Collecting secondary data from official reports, publications, and other relevant sources.

3.5. Data Analysis Techniques

1. Descriptive Analysis: Presenting respondent profiles and response distributions.
2. Classical Assumption Tests: Conducting tests for normality, multicollinearity, autocorrelation, and heteroskedasticity.
3. Path Analysis: Measuring the direct and indirect effects among variables.
4. Significance Testing: Using p-values and path coefficients to test hypotheses.

3.6. Operational Definitions of Variables

Table 2. Operational Definition

Variable	Operational Definition	Indicators
Digital Marketing (X1)	Marketing strategies executed through digital platforms to reach and influence consumers.	Online advertising, social media engagement, SEO, digital interactions
Digital Content Quality (X2)	The degree to which digital content is engaging, relevant, and aligned with brand identity.	Clarity of information, visual quality, creativity, consistency
Brand Awareness (Z)	The extent to which consumers recognize and recall a brand.	Brand recognition, brand recall, brand image
Sales Growth (Y)	The increase in revenue over a specific period.	Revenue growth, purchase frequency, customer base expansion

4. Result and Discussion

4.1. Responden Description

This study involved 148 culinary MSME business owners in Panam, Pekanbaru. The following tables show the distribution of the respondents' characteristics.

Table 3. Respondent Profile by Gender

Gender	Count	Percentage (%)
Male	65	43.9%
Female	83	56.1%
Total	148	100%

Based on the data above, the majority of respondents are female (56.1%), indicating that culinary businesses in the Panam area are largely run by women entrepreneurs.

Table 4. Respondent Profile by Age

Age (Years)	Count	Percentage (%)
< 25	18	12.2%
25–34	52	35.1%
35–44	49	33.1%

≥ 45	29	19.6%
Total	148	100%

The majority of MSME owners are in the productive age group of 25–44 years (68.2%). This group has a high potential for adapting to digital marketing technology.

4.2. Descriptive Variable Analysis

Each variable was measured using a 1–5 Likert scale. The average scores reflect the respondents' perceptions of the research indicators.

Table 5. Average Scores of Research Variables

Variable	Average	Category
Digital Marketing (X1)	4.21	Very Good
Content Quality (X2)	4.15	Good
Brand Awareness (Z)	4.10	Good
Sales Growth (Y)	4.05	Good

The highest score is for the Digital Marketing (4.21) variable, which indicates that MSME owners are quite active in using digital media. The lowest score, although still in the good category, is for Sales Growth (4.05). This suggests that current digital strategies have not been fully optimized to increase sales turnover.

4.3. Research Instrument Testing

Before further data analysis, validity and reliability tests were conducted to ensure the research instrument (questionnaire) was of good quality and produced consistent results.

1. Validity Test

The validity test measured whether the questionnaire items accurately reflected what they were designed to measure. This test used the Pearson Product Moment correlation in SPSS, with the following criteria:

- a. An item is valid if its calculated r-value (r-count) is greater than the r-table value. With an n of 148 and a significance level (α) of 0.05, the r-table value is 0.161.
- b. An item is invalid if its r-count value is less than or equal to the r-table value.

Table 6. Validity Test Results

Variabel	Item	Corrected Item– Total Correlation	r-tabel	Ket
	X1.1	0.544	0.161	Valid
	X1.2	0.618	0.161	Valid

Digital Marketing (X1)	X1.3	0.524	0.161	Valid
	X1.4	0.568	0.161	Valid
	X1.5	0.512	0.161	Valid
Content Quality (X2)	X2.1	0.628	0.161	Valid
	X2.2	0.428	0.161	Valid
	X2.3	0.573	0.161	Valid
	X2.4	0.482	0.161	Valid
	X2.5	0.546	0.161	Valid
Brand Awareness (Z)	X2.6	0.865	0.161	Valid
	Z.1	0.356	0.161	Valid
	Z.2	0.274	0.161	Valid
	Z.3	0.463	0.161	Valid
Sales Growth (Y)	Z.4	0.543	0.161	Valid
	Y.1	0.473	0.161	Valid
	Y.2	0.552	0.161	Valid
	Y.3	0.532	0.161	Valid

Analysis: All questionnaire items for variables X1, X2, Z, and Y had *r-count* values greater than 0.161, confirming that all items are valid and suitable for this study.

2. Reliability Test

The reliability test assessed the instrument's ability to produce consistent results upon repeated measurement. This was performed using Cronbach's Alpha, based on the following criterion An instrument is reliable if its Cronbach's Alpha (α) value is greater than 0.60 (Nunnally, 1994).

Table 7. Reliability Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Description
Digital Marketing (X1)	0.882	Reliable
Content Quality (X2)	0.873	Reliable
Brand Awareness (Z)	0.880	Reliable
Sales Growth (Y)	0.870	Reliable

Analysis: All research variables had Cronbach's Alpha values greater than 0.60, indicating that the instrument is reliable and consistent for use in this study.

4.4 Classical Assumption Tests

4.4.1 Normality Test

The normality test aims to examine whether, in the regression model, both the dependent and independent variables have a normal distribution. The normality test is conducted using a normal P-P plot analysis. Normality can be detected by observing the distribution of data points along the diagonal axis of the normal probability plot. As shown in Figure 2, the decision-making criteria are as follows:

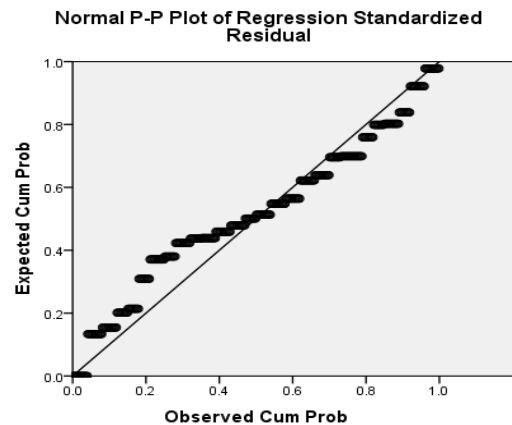


Figure 2. Normality Test Results

From the results of the normality test shown in Figure 2 above, it can be seen that the data points are distributed around the diagonal line and follow its direction. Therefore, the regression model used in this study meets the normality assumption, and the data can be used for further analysis.

4.4.2 Multicollinearity Test

Table 8. Multicollinearity Test Results

Variable	Tolerance	VIF	Description
Digital Marketing	0.712	1.404	No issue
Content Quality	0.705	1.419	No issue
Brand Awareness	0.690	1.448	No issue

All VIF values are less than 10. Therefore, there is no multicollinearity issue among the variables in the research model.

4.4.3 Heteroscedasticity Test (Glejser Test)

Table 9. Heteroscedasticity Test Results

Variable	Sig.	Description
Digital Marketing	0.118	No heteroscedasticity
Content Quality	0.097	No heteroscedasticity
Brand Awareness	0.165	No heteroscedasticity

Since the significance values for all variables are greater than 0.05, it can be concluded that there is no heteroscedasticity.

4.5 Heteroscedasticity Test (Glejser Test)

Table 10. Path Analysis Results

No	Hypothesis	Path of Influence	Path Coefficient (β)	t-count	Sig.	Decision
H1	$X1 \rightarrow Z$	Direct	0.482	5.971	0.000	Accepted
H2	$X2 \rightarrow Z$	Direct	0.395	5.215	0.000	Accepted
H3	$Z \rightarrow Y$	Direct	0.441	5.342	0.000	Accepted
H4	$X1 \rightarrow Y$	Direct	0.310	3.200	0.002	Accepted
H5	$X2 \rightarrow Y$	Direct	0.284	2.923	0.004	Accepted
H6	$X1 \rightarrow Z \rightarrow Y$	Indirect	0.212	-	-	Accepted
H7	$X2 \rightarrow Z \rightarrow Y$	Indirect	0.174	-	-	Accepted

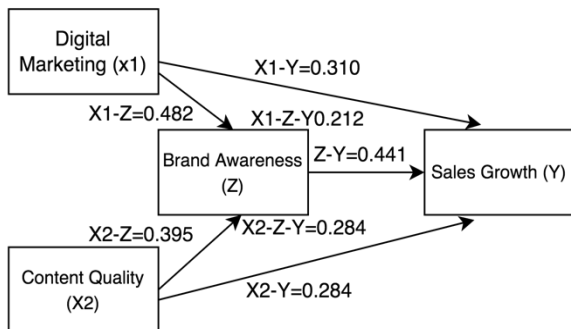


Figure 3. Path Analysis Model and Path Coefficients

Table 11. Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Endogenous Variable	R^2	Interpretation
Brand Awareness (Z)	0.52	Moderate contribution
Sales Performance (Y)	0.61	Strong contribution

The coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to evaluate the explanatory power of the research model. As shown in Table 11, the R^2 value for brand awareness (Z) is 0.52, which indicates that 52% of the variance in brand awareness can be explained by digital marketing strategies (X1) and digital content quality (X2). This value reflects a moderate contribution according to the criteria suggested by Chin (1998), implying that both digital marketing and content quality play an important role in strengthening brand awareness among culinary MSMEs in Panam, Pekanbaru.

Meanwhile, the R^2 value for sales performance (Y) is 0.61, meaning that 61% of the variance in sales performance can be explained collectively by digital marketing, content quality, and brand awareness. This suggests a strong explanatory power of the model, highlighting that the integration of digital strategies and brand awareness significantly contributes to improving the sales performance of culinary MSMEs. The findings confirm that brand awareness not only serves as a direct driver of performance but also acts

as a mediator that amplifies the influence of digital marketing and digital content quality on sales outcomes.

4.6 Discussion

- Hypothesis Test 1, H1: Digital marketing has a positive and significant effect on brand awareness. The path coefficient of 0.482 with a significance of 0.000 indicates that digital marketing strongly influences brand awareness. This finding is consistent with (Cristie Yen & Fahlevi, 2023), who found that social media promotions significantly improve consumer recognition of brands. Similarly, (Angelyn & Kodrat, 2021) reported that active digital campaigns expand market reach for MSMEs. However, unlike studies conducted in larger metropolitan areas such as Jakarta, where digital marketing impact is often maximized due to higher internet penetration, the present study highlights that even in Panam, Pekanbaru—where MSMEs face resource constraints—digital marketing still plays a crucial role in raising brand awareness.
- Hypothesis Test 2, H2: Content quality has a positive and significant effect on brand awareness, with a coefficient of 0.395 and significance of 0.000. This result aligns with (Irdasyah et al., 2022), who emphasized that visually appealing product photos and engaging narratives increase consumer attention. Similarly, (Alfian et al., 2024) noted that consistent and informative content fosters brand recall. Nevertheless, compared to research in e-commerce platforms such as Shopee or Tokopedia (Meliawati et al., 2023), where content optimization is supported by platform features, culinary MSMEs in Panam must rely on organic strategies such as Instagram storytelling and customer-generated content, indicating different contextual challenges.
- Hypothesis Test 3, H3: Brand awareness has a positive and significant effect on sales growth ($\beta = 0.441$; sig = 0.000). This supports Keller's (2013) theory that strong brand awareness leads to a top-of-mind position, driving consumer loyalty. Empirical evidence from (A. H. D. Saputra et al., 2024) also confirms that higher brand awareness increases repeat purchase intention. Interestingly, while these studies often emphasize established national brands, the current findings show that even micro culinary businesses in Panam can leverage awareness as a determinant of sales, suggesting that awareness-building is equally critical at the MSME level.
- Hypothesis Test 4, H4: Digital marketing positively affects sales growth ($\beta = 0.310$; sig = 0.002). This

finding is consistent with, who showed that paid online advertisements increase purchase conversion rates. It also echoes global studies highlighting digital channels as sales accelerators. However, compared with prior findings in larger retail contexts where digital marketing has an even stronger direct impact, the relatively moderate coefficient in this study suggests that for MSMEs, digital marketing works more effectively when combined with awareness-building strategies rather than as a standalone driver of sales.

5. Hypothesis Test 5, H5: Content quality has a positive and significant effect on sales growth ($\beta = 0.284$; sig = 0.004). Which stressed that detailed product information and customer reviews increase consumer trust and purchase intention. Found that culinary businesses with high-quality photos and storytelling attract more buyers on social media. Yet, compared to research on established e-commerce platforms where reviews are systematically displayed, MSMEs in Panam rely more heavily on direct customer testimonials and word of mouth, showing contextual differences in how content drives trust and sales.
6. Hypothesis Test 6, H6: Digital marketing indirectly affects sales growth through brand awareness, with an indirect effect value of 0.212. This mediation effect supports the findings who argued that digital campaigns first shape consumer awareness before influencing purchase behavior. It also aligns with the AISAS (Attention–Interest–Search–Action–Share) model, which highlights awareness as the entry point in consumer decision-making. Unlike prior studies in e-commerce that often show stronger direct effects of digital marketing on sales, this study emphasizes that for culinary MSMEs, awareness-building is an essential intermediary step.
7. Hypothesis Test 7, H7: Content quality indirectly influences sales growth through brand awareness, with an effect of 0.174. This supports the AIDA model, where awareness precedes consumer action. It is also consistent with findings, who found that engaging content enhances recognition and subsequently stimulates sales. However, unlike studies on larger brands where content marketing is heavily budgeted, MSMEs in Panam rely on low-cost strategies such as Instagram reels, TikTok short

videos, and user-generated content, making the pathway from content to awareness and then to sales more resource-driven yet still effective.

5. Conclusion

This research investigated the influence of digital marketing and content quality on sales growth, mediated by brand awareness, among culinary MSMEs in Panam, Pekanbaru. Based on the analysis and discussion, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. Digital marketing has a positive and significant effect on brand awareness. This indicates that well-planned online marketing strategies, such as social media campaigns and digital advertising, effectively increase the recognition and visibility of MSME brands.
2. Content quality positively and significantly influences brand awareness. The study shows that creating attractive, relevant, and consistent content strengthens the public's familiarity with and perception of a brand.
3. Brand awareness has a positive and significant effect on sales growth. The findings prove that higher consumer recognition of a brand leads to increased purchasing intent and customer loyalty, directly contributing to sales performance.
4. Digital marketing has a direct positive and significant impact on sales growth. This highlights its dual role: not only does it build the brand, but it also stimulates immediate purchase decisions.
5. Content quality directly and positively affects sales growth. The research demonstrates that engaging and informative content is crucial for attracting new buyers and encouraging repeat purchases, thus boosting sales.
6. Brand awareness mediates the relationship between digital marketing and sales growth. The study confirms that the positive impact of digital marketing on sales is amplified when it successfully builds strong brand awareness first.
7. Brand awareness also mediates the relationship between content quality and sales growth. This finding suggests that high-quality content is more effective at driving sales when it first helps establish a strong foundation of brand awareness among consumers.

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