

Improving Marketing Communication via WhatsApp Business to Address Declining Sales: A Case Study of *Depot Kita*

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ABSTRACT

In this study, the writer aimed to help *Depot Kita* address the declining sales performance at High Point Apartment's outlet by improving its marketing communication. Based on an interview with the owner, the writer found that *Depot Kita* faced several communication related problems, including unclear communication, a broad target audience, low customer awareness of the business's value proposition, unique selling points (USP), unorganized message, and no CTA. To identify these problems, the writer used Lasswell's Communication Model as the main theory. The data were collected through a semi structured interview with the owner and questionnaires distributed to existing and potential customers. The findings showed that many customers did not know what makes *Depot Kita* different from other food businesses. Customers also expected clearer information, fast responses, and a more organized ordering process. Based on these findings, the writer proposed a marketing communication strategy by focusing on Petra Christian University students as the main target audience, highlighting affordable prices, homemade quality as the business's value proposition, promoting its signature menu items and free delivery offers as its USP, created customized message, CTA and several WhatsApp Business features. Through this project, *Depot Kita* is expected to improve sales performance and customer engagement.

Keywords: customer engagement, Lasswell communication model, marketing communication, sales performance, WhatsApp business

INTRODUCTION

In the era of digitalization, almost all economic activities are conducted through digital platforms due to its convenience and practicality. One of those economic activities can be as simple as ordering food. However, despite the convenience, many FnB businesses fail to achieve higher sales even though they utilize digital platforms. One of the most critical reasons those businesses fail is lack of effective and efficient marketing communication strategies when using digital platforms. Kotler and Keller (2016) conveyed that marketing communication is important to inform, persuade, and remind customers about what a business offers and why it matters. Therefore, in this project, the writer focuses only on formulating and incorporating effective and efficient marketing communication strategies to *Depot Kita*'s digital service activities.

In this project, the writer helped a food and beverage (F&B) business established in 2003 called *Depot Kita*. The business was first opened next to Petra Christian University at Apartment Square and later relocated to Siwalankerto street. Based on initial observations and an interview with the owner of *Depot Kita*, *Depot Kita* is currently experiencing a significant decline in customer numbers. The first reason it experiences such decline is due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, *Depot Kita* was able to achieve 100-300 sales daily. However, after the pandemic, the business experienced significant drops in sales with only 60-70 portions sold daily. The next reason is the relocation of *Depot Kita*'s outlet and changes in customer purchasing behavior. Due to the relocation of *Depot Kita* from Petra Christian University's cafeteria to *High Point Apartment*'s cafeteria, the business became less visible and accessible to existing and potential customers. Additionally, based on the discussion with the owner, the writer found that many of the customers prefer ordering through a digital platform rather than physically visiting the location. Finally, based on initial observations and an interview with the owner of *Depot Kita*,

the writer found that *Depot Kita* still relies heavily on methods like word-of-mouth. This used to work well when the business was located near and inside the university. However, in today's modern digital environment, this approach may no longer be enough to attract new customers or maintain existing ones. After further investigations, the writer found several issues when *Depot Kita* communicates with the customers. Customers often experience slow responses, unclear information about menu availability, and even missed orders because messages get mixed up with personal chats. Some customers have even canceled their orders because of these problems.

Another issue is that *Depot Kita* does not clearly communicate its value proposition. As a result, even though *Depot Kita* offers affordable prices and homemade Indonesian and Chinese food, these strengths are not consistently communicated. Therefore, customers may not understand what makes *Depot Kita* different from other similar food businesses. Ultimately, the writer aimed to solve this problem by formulating and implementing positive marketing communication strategies in *Depot Kita*'s digital activity, specifically through *Depot Kita*'s WhatsApp Business platform.

To implement the solution, the writer referred to multiple theories as guidelines when formulating a good marketing communication strategy for *Depot Kita*. The writer mainly focuses on using marketing communication and Laswell's communication models. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2016), marketing communication is a very important aspect of marketing strategy that combines several communication tools and channels to communicate clear, consistent, and persuasive messages to the target audience. Additionally, marketing communication can also influence consumer decision making throughout the purchasing process (Belch & Belch, 2021). Furthermore, Belch and Belch (2021) explain that marketing communication should deliver clear, consistent, and persuasive messages that support customer engagement and purchasing behavior.

Therefore, audience targeting, value proposition, USP, messages, and call-to-action (CTA) are important in developing an effective marketing communication strategy. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2018), Identifying the correct target audience is essential because communication strategies must be tailored to the needs, preferences, and behavior of that group. Additionally, value proposition refers to the positive values that a business offers to its customers. It explains why customers should choose a particular product or service over competitors (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). Compared to value proposition, a unique selling point (USP) refers to a characteristic that differentiates a business, product, or service from its competitors (Walansendow et al., 2025). Lastly, the writer uses Laswell's communication models as a guideline. The model explains communication through five elements, which are who, says what, in which channel, to whom, and with what effect (Laswell, 1948).

METHOD

To justify the writer's proposed solution, the writer conducted a data collection method with questionnaire and face to face interview. The writer conducted a questionnaire specifically for existing and potential customers to find out customers' perspectives to justify the writer's solution. In addition to a questionnaire for customers, the writer conducted a face-to-face interview with the owner of *Depot Kita* to find out the internal condition of *Depot Kita* from the owner's perspective.

For the questionnaire, the writer included six types of data. The first type of data collected is information about the current condition of the business. This data was obtained through an interview with the owner of *Depot Kita*. The purpose of collecting this data is to understand the history of the business, its target market, sales performance, communication practices, and the

challenges currently faced by the business. In addition, the interview helps validate whether declining sales are occurring and identifies possible causes of the problem from the owner's perspective. The second type of data is customer awareness and perception of *Depot Kita*. This data is collected to understand how customers first learned about the business, which menu items they prefer, and whether they are aware of *Depot Kita*'s unique selling points (USP). The purpose of collecting this data is to evaluate whether *Depot Kita* has successfully communicated its value proposition to customers. The third type of data focuses on customer ordering behavior and habits. This includes information regarding how often customers purchase food, which ordering channels they prefer, and whether they have experience ordering food through WhatsApp. This data helps evaluate whether *Depot Kita* is currently using the most appropriate communication channels to reach its customers. The fourth type of data was the evaluation of *Depot Kita*'s current communication practices.

This data included customers' perceptions regarding response speed, information clarity, ease of ordering, professionalism, and overall communication quality through WhatsApp. The writer collected this information because it could help identify communication problems that may affect customer satisfaction and purchasing decisions. The fifth type of data was customer expectations regarding communication with food businesses. This data included expectations related to response speed, delivery punctuality, communication quality, promotional information, and ordering convenience. The purpose of collecting this information because it could help the writer to identify the aspects of communication that customers consider important when ordering food. The sixth type of data was customer preferences regarding WhatsApp Business features. This data included customers' opinions about promotional messages, quick replies, menu catalogs, structured ordering formats, and pre-order systems. The writer collected this information because it could serve as a guide in designing a WhatsApp Business solution that matches customer needs and preferences. Furthermore, the questionnaire was created and distributed in a form of Google Form to 60 respondents, consisting of 20 existing customers and 40 potential customers.

In addition to the questionnaire, the writer conducted a face-to-face interview with the owner of *Depot Kita* to obtain detailed information about *Depot Kita*'s current condition and communication practices. To achieve this, the writer focuses on several aspects.

Several topics were discussed during the interview, including:

1. The background of *Depot Kita*;
2. The business concept, target market, and best seller menu items;
3. Change in sales performance before and after the COVID-19 pandemic;
4. Current marketing and promotional activities;
5. The use of WhatsApp and online food platforms;
6. Communications challenges and issues in handling customer orders;
7. The reasons for opening the High Point Apartment outlet and its current sales performance.

The interview was conducted in a semi-structured format. This allows the writer to prepare guiding questions while also exploring additional information when necessary. This interview provided valuable insights into the business problem from the owner's perspective.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this article, the writer discussed the result of the questionnaire and analyzed the realization of the writer's proposed solution. For more details, this chapter consists of: (1) The Result of The Questionnaire (2) Analysis of The Project (3) The Result of The Project.

The Result of the Questionnaire

In the questionnaire, the writer obtained responses from 60 respondents. Among them, 20 respondents were potential customers who fit the business's target market. In the first section of the questionnaire, the writer found several characteristics of the respondents. Most respondents were between 18 and 22 years old, indicating that the majority belonged to the young adult age group. Additionally, students represented the largest group of respondents, with a total of 43 respondents. This was followed by employees with 11 respondents, while the remaining respondents had other occupations. After identifying the age distribution of the respondents, the writer examined the respondents' occupations. Based on the questionnaire results, many of the respondents were students, with a total of 43 respondents. This was followed by 11 respondents of office workers. In addition, three respondents identified themselves as entrepreneurs, two respondents were freelancers, and one respondent was a job seeker. Looking at the questionnaire results, most respondents are university students. This matches the information provided by the owner, who explained that university students make up the largest customer group of *Depot Kita*.

In the next section, the writer gathered information regarding the respondents' experience in purchasing food from *Depot Kita*'s online platform. Based on the questionnaire results, 20 respondents answered that they had previously purchased food from *Depot Kita* online, while 40 respondents answered that they had never purchased food from *Depot Kita* online. This result is expected because the respondents in this study consisted of both existing customers and potential customers. The 20 respondents who answered "yes" represent existing customers who have had direct experience with *Depot Kita*'s products and communication practices. Meanwhile, the 40 respondents who answered "no" represent potential customers who fit *Depot Kita*'s target market but have not yet made a purchase. By including both groups, the writer was able to collect insights not only from current customers but also from potential customers who may become future customers of *Depot Kita*. Next, 14 respondents who are the existing customers stated that they became aware of *Depot Kita* after seeing or visiting the outlet directly. Additionally, 10 respondents knew about *Depot Kita* through recommendations from friends. In comparison, only one respondent discovered *Depot Kita* through an online food delivery platform. Based on this information, the writer found that direct exposure and word of mouth remain the main sources of awareness for *Depot Kita*.

Therefore, there is still an opportunity for the business to improve its marketing communications to reach more potential customers. Furthermore, 14 respondents (70%) answered that they did not know what differentiates *Depot Kita* from its competitors, while only six respondents answered that they were aware of its uniqueness. This result shows that many customers are familiar with *Depot Kita* but do not clearly understand its unique selling points. As a result, the business may be missing opportunities to communicate its strengths and value to customers. This finding also supports the problem identified in this study, namely that *Depot Kita*'s marketing communication has not effectively communicated the business's uniqueness to its target market.

After identifying customers' awareness of *Depot Kita*, the writer examined how existing customers evaluate *Depot Kita*'s communication through WhatsApp. Most respondents did not have a position regarding *Depot Kita*'s response speed. Eight respondents (40%) gave a neutral response, while six respondents (30%) disagreed and five respondents (25%) strongly disagreed that *Depot Kita* responds quickly to WhatsApp messages. Only one respondent (5%) agreed with the statement. The writer found that quick response remains an issue, as most respondents did not agree that *Depot Kita* replies quickly through WhatsApp. Since quick responses are important in food ordering services, slow communication may affect customer satisfaction and discourage customers from placing orders through WhatsApp. The writer also asked the respondents about the clarity of information provided through *Depot Kita*'s WhatsApp account including menu

information, prices, and food availability. The result expressed that nine respondents (45%) strongly disagreed and seven respondents (35%) disagreed that the information provided is clear. Meanwhile, three respondents (15%) gave a neutral response and only one respondent (5%) agreed. This result shows that many customers experience difficulties in obtaining clear information when communicating through WhatsApp. As a result, customers may need to ask additional questions before placing an order, making the ordering process less efficient. In addition, the writer examined respondents' opinions regarding the convenience of ordering food through *Depot Kita*'s WhatsApp account. nine respondents (45%) disagreed and six respondents (30%) strongly disagreed that ordering through WhatsApp is easy and practical. Meanwhile, five respondents (25%) gave a neutral response. None of the respondents expressed a strong positive opinion regarding the ordering process. The current ordering process may not be well organized or user-friendly. This situation may reduce customers' willingness to use WhatsApp as their preferred ordering channel.

The writer also evaluated how customers perceive the overall communication style used by *Depot Kita* on WhatsApp. The result shows that seven respondents (35%) disagreed and another seven respondents (35%) gave a neutral response when asked whether *Depot Kita*'s communication feels organized and professional. In addition, five respondents (25%) strongly disagreed, while only one respondent (5%) agreed. These questionnaire results show that many respondents do not consider *Depot Kita*'s WhatsApp communication to be professional or well organized. This is caused by using a personal WhatsApp account, which lacks business features that can help organize customer interactions more effectively. Lastly, the writer asked respondents to evaluate *Depot Kita*'s overall communication during the food ordering process. 10 respondents (50%) gave a neutral response, while six respondents (30%) strongly disagreed and four respondents (20%) disagreed that *Depot Kita*'s communication is already good. No respondents chose to agree and strongly agree, indicating a lack of highly positive experiences. This result further supports the previous findings that *Depot Kita*'s communication through WhatsApp still has several weaknesses. Therefore, improvements in response management, information delivery, and communication structure are needed to provide a better customer experience.

In the next section, the writer examined the expectations of respondents when communicating with FnB business through WhatsApp, especially when ordering food. For more details, the writer provided some questions regarding their expectation in general, response speed, and punctuality. The writer asked the respondents about their expectation of the communication quality when communicating with the business through WhatsApp. Additionally, the writer provided multiple choices for the respondents to choose. The result shows that 53 respondents (88.3%) expected FnB business to provide quick response, 52 respondents (86.7%) expected clear menu and product pricing, and 44 respondents (73.3%) expected easier ordering format. Additionally, 42 respondents (70%) also opted for additional qualities such as friendly communication, while 25 respondents (41.7%) expected information about promotions and discounts (25 respondents or 41.7%) and one respondent (1.7%) expected ethics and manners. To find out what customers expect when ordering food, the writer asked respondents about the importance of receiving a quick response. A total of 36 respondents (60%) answered very important, while 22 respondents (36.7%) answered important. Only 2 respondents (3.3%) stated that a quick response was not very important.

Based on these results, the writer found that customers highly value fast responses when placing food orders. Therefore, response speed should be considered an important aspect of customer communication, as it can affect the overall ordering experience. The final part in this section focused on customers' preferred ordering format. The result shows that 52 respondents (86.7%) stated that they prefer a structured ordering format that includes information such as customer name, menu selection, and delivery or pickup time. Meanwhile, only eight respondents (13.3%) preferred not to use a structured format. The writer found that most respondents prefer a

structured ordering format, as it helps make the ordering process clearer and easier to follow. Therefore, implementing a standardized order format through WhatsApp Business could help improve the ordering experience for customers.

The next section of the questionnaire reveals customers' preference in ordering food. For more details, the writer analyzes the respondents' platform preference if free delivery fee is only applicable when ordering food through WhatsApp. From the result, the writer found that 49 respondents (81.7%) prefer ordering food through WhatsApp if the delivery fee is free. On the other hand, 11 respondents (18.3%) still chose online food delivery platforms. The writer also examined respondents' opinions about receiving promotional information through WhatsApp. 41 respondents (68.3%) stated that they like receiving information about promotions and discounts from food businesses through WhatsApp, while 19 respondents (31.7%) stated otherwise. This result shows that many respondents are open to receiving promotional messages through WhatsApp.

Since respondents were allowed to select more than one option, the total number of responses is higher than the total number of respondents. The writer found that customers are more interested in promotions that provide better value for money. Additionally, 47 respondents (78.3%) showed interest in receiving food and beverage bundle packages, while 34 respondents (56.7%) chose lunch discounts and 26 respondents (43.3%) chose dinner discounts. Therefore, bundle promotions are suitable for attracting customer attention and encouraging them to make purchases. As a result, WhatsApp can be used not only as an ordering channel but also as a tool to inform customers about ongoing promotions and special offers. In the next question, the writer also found that 51 respondents (85%) agreed that the quick reply feature is useful, while only nine respondents (15%) disagreed. The writer found that many respondents believe that quick replies can make communication faster and more efficient. By providing faster and more consistent response, this feature may help customers obtain information more quickly and reduce waiting time during the ordering process.

Finally, the writer analyzed respondents' opinion on the availability of product catalogue in F&B businesses' WhatsApp Business account. In this question, the writer found that 56 respondents (93.3%) conveyed that the menu catalogue in WhatsApp Business can be helpful when ordering food through WhatsApp. On the other hand, four respondents (6.7%) expressed the opposite. Therefore, this result can justify the writer's solution in incorporating menu catalogue in *Depot Kita*'s WhatsApp Business account.

Analysis of the Project

Based on the result of the questionnaire and the discussion with *Depot Kita*'s owner, the writer proposed a solution that includes creating and incorporating customized messages and call-to-action (CTA) through WhatsApp Business and its features, including business profile, greeting message, catalog, quick replies, away message, and broadcast or advertising to improve the quality of *Depot Kita*'s marketing communication. The result of this project is the creation of *Depot Kita*'s official WhatsApp Business account complete with the WhatsApp Business features and customized content that are aligned with the theories and findings. The writers focused on the messages and called-to-action (CTA) elements and applied those elements into the content of the project. Furthermore, to strengthen and justify the project and the use of messages and CTA, the writer first discussed and analyzed audience targeting, value proposition, and USP of *Depot Kita* based on a combination of the writer's discussion with the owner of *Depot Kita* and the result of the questionnaire.

1. Audience Targeting

Based on the interview with the owner, in the past, *Depot Kita*'s target audience was too broad, including Petra Christian University students, office workers, families, and residents living around the surrounding area. However, targeting too many customer segments may reduce the effectiveness of marketing communication because the messages are not directed toward a specific audience. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2018), businesses should clearly identify their target audience to ensure that communication efforts are relevant and effective. The interview with the owner revealed that approximately 80-90% of *Depot Kita*'s customers are Petra Christian University students. This finding is supported by the questionnaire results, where many respondents were students aged between 18-22 years old. Therefore, while still accepting orders from the market, the writer and the owner agreed that putting more focus on Petra Christian University students would be more appropriate to produce clearer messages and CTA rather than targeting a broader audience.

2. Value Proposition of *Depot Kita*

Based on the interview with the owner, *Depot Kita* was established with the goal of providing quality food and affordable prices, especially for Petra Christian University students. This value proposition has been maintained since the business was first established in 2003. However, the owner explained that the business has experienced declining sales, particularly after the pandemic, despite still offering the same products and pricing strategy. This finding is supported by the questionnaire results, as shown in the questionnaire, 14 of 20 existing customers stated that they did not know what makes *Depot Kita* different from other food businesses. This finding shows that many customers are not fully aware of the value offered by *Depot Kita*. In other words, the business's value proposition has not been communicated clearly to customers. To address this issue, the writer discussed the value proposition of *Depot Kita* with the owner. Based on the discussion, the writer proposed that *Depot Kita*'s value proposition consists of three main elements: providing quality food, offering affordable prices, and serving menu options that are suitable for Petra Christian University students. According to Osterwalder et al. (2014), a value proposition should clearly communicate the benefits and value that a business offers to its customers. Therefore, the value propositions proposed by the writer should be communicated more effectively to help customers recognize the value that *Depot Kita* offers. As a result, the writer integrated these value proposition elements into WhatsApp Business account through the business profile description, greeting message, promotional content, and product catalog.

3. Unique Selling Point of *Depot Kita*

Based on the interview, the owner explained that *Nasi Ayam Goreng Kremes* and *Nasi Ayam HongKong* are the signature menu items of *Depot Kita*. These menu items have been offered for many years and are considered some of the business's best-selling products. However, the questionnaire results show that many customers are not aware of what makes *Depot Kita* different from other food businesses. As mentioned before in the result of the questionnaire, 14 of 20 existing customers stated that they did not know what differentiates *Depot Kita* from its competitors.

In addition, the questionnaire results revealed that respondents showed strong interest in promotional offers, particularly food and beverage bundle promotions. As shown in the result of the questionnaire, food and beverage bundle packages were the most preferred promotion type, selected by 47 respondents. Based on this finding, the writer discussed several

promotional ideas with the owner. After that, the owner agreed with the writer's ideas to introduce a special bundle promotion targeted at Petra Christian University students. This can be the USP of *Depot Kita*. The proposed bundle promotion combines one food item and one beverage at a special price of IDR 25,000. Previously, customers would spend approximately IDR 32,000 when purchasing the items separately. The promotion is available during selected happy hour periods and is specifically designed to match the needs of students looking for affordable meal options. In addition, students who purchase the bundle promotion during the happy hour period will have the opportunity to receive free delivery. Therefore, the writer considers this bundle promotion and free delivery offer to be part of *Depot Kita*'s Unique Selling Point (USP). Besides highlighting the business's signature menu items, the promotion provides additional value that is relevant to the target market and differentiates *Depot Kita* from competing food businesses.

4. Message and Call-to-Action (CTA)

In the past, *Depot Kita* communicated with customers through a personal WhatsApp account. Based on the interview with the owner, customer messages were sometimes missed because the messages mixed with personal chats and other incoming orders. As a result, communication was not always well organized, and customers did not always receive information. The questionnaire findings also support this issue. The questionnaire also showed that many respondents were dissatisfied with several aspects of *Depot Kita*'s WhatsApp communication. In addition, the result shows that respondents expect food businesses to provide fast responses, clear menu information, and a simple ordering process. The findings also show that respondents are interested in promotional offers, especially food and beverage bundle promotions, as presented in the result of the questionnaire.

Based on these findings, the writer created customized messages and call-to-action (CTA) for *Depot Kita*'s WhatsApp Business account. The messages were designed to provide clear information and make the ordering process easier for customers. Meanwhile, the call-to-action (CTA) was developed to support the proposed USP, namely the happy hour bundle promotion and the free delivery opportunity for Petra Christian University students. Some examples of the call-to-action (CTA) messages are "Looking for tasty meals without spending too much money? Enjoy *Depot Kita*'s Happy Hour Menu with free delivery. Order Now!". Therefore, the writer believes that this approach can help improve customer engagement and support purchasing decisions, which may contribute to improving *Depot Kita*'s sales performance.

Output of the Project

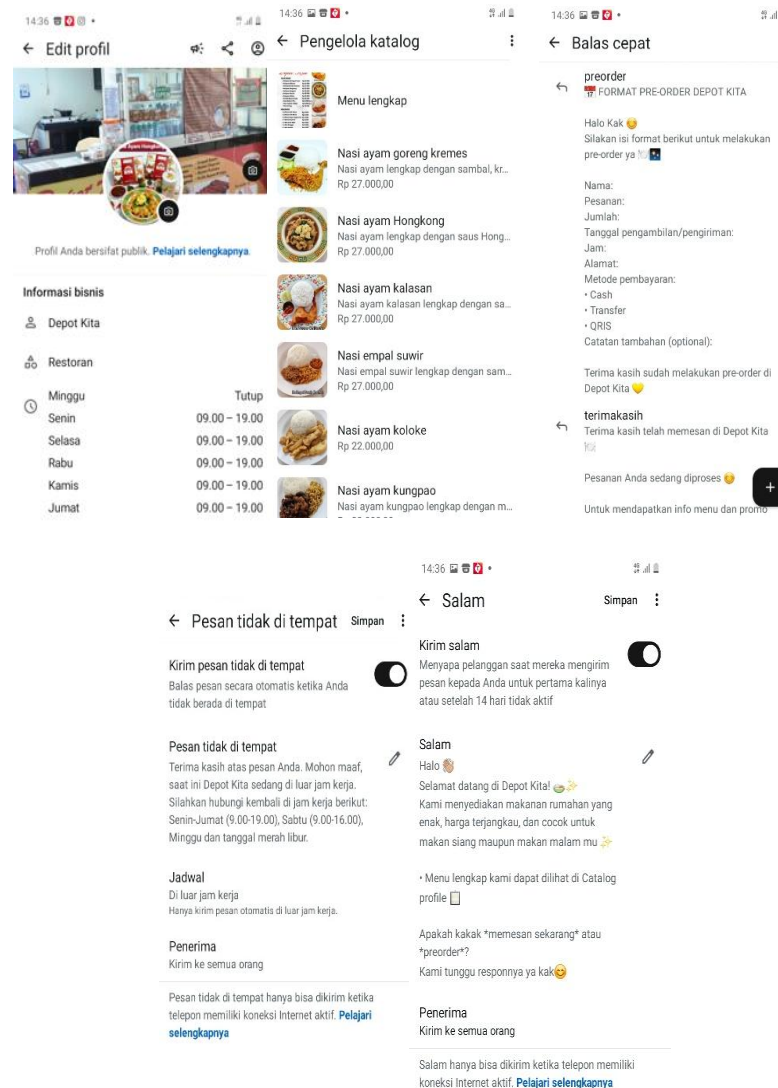


Figure 1. *Depot Kita*'s WhatsApp Business Showcase

As mentioned before, after the writer formulated the message and CTA by analyzing the correct target audience, value proposition, and the USP of *Depot Kita*, the writer implemented the message and CTA on *Depot Kita*'s WhatsApp Business account through its features. As a result, the writer produced customized *Depot Kita*'s business profile, greeting messages, food catalog, customized quick replies, and away messages.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the writer managed to help *Depot Kita* improve its marketing communication by analyzing both the related theories and the result of the questionnaire. By analyzing these aspects, the writer improved *Depot Kita*'s marketing communication quality in terms of audience targeting, value proposition, and unique selling point. After analyzing these aspects, the writer formulated and implemented these elements in *Depot Kita*'s message and CTA elements. Furthermore, because of the writer's idea and formula, *Depot Kita* now has a proper WhatsApp Business account complete with the features that are aligned with the writer's solution.

This result combined with the writer's proposed solution and project can further assist the owner of *Depot Kita* in practicing good marketing communication.

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