

International Marketing Adaptation Strategies of Riau Sago Noodles To Meet Taiwanese Consumer Preferences: Analysis of SMEs in Riau Province

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Abstract. This study aims to examine the international marketing adaptation strategies adopted by Riau sago noodle SMEs to meet Taiwanese consumer preferences and identify the challenges encountered during market expansion. A qualitative multiple case study approach was employed to gain an in-depth understanding of SMEs' adaptation practices. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis involving ten participants, including SME owners, a production manager, an export consultant, a government representative, and an SME development officer in Riau Province, Indonesia. First, SMEs adapted their products to align with Taiwanese consumer preferences by improving product quality, modifying flavor and texture where appropriate, and ensuring compliance with food safety and quality standards required for export markets. Second, packaging and labeling were redesigned by incorporating vacuum-sealed packaging and bilingual information to enhance product attractiveness and consumer trust. Third, SMEs adopted cultural branding strategies by positioning Riau sago noodles as authentic traditional Malay food products with distinctive cultural heritage. Fourth, digital marketing platforms were utilized to promote products internationally and establish direct interactions with potential consumers. Finally, several challenges were identified, including limited market intelligence, certification requirements, and inadequate export networks. The study concludes that successful internationalization requires an integrated adaptation process combining product innovation, cultural authenticity, digital marketing capabilities, and institutional support. These findings provide theoretical contributions to the SME internationalization literature and practical implications for developing export-oriented strategies for traditional food products in emerging economies.

Keywords: international marketing adaptation; SMEs; sago noodles; Taiwanese consumer preferences

Abstrak. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji strategi adaptasi pemasaran internasional yang diterapkan oleh UMKM mi sagu Riau untuk memenuhi preferensi konsumen Taiwan serta mengidentifikasi tantangan yang dihadapi dalam proses ekspansi pasar. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif berganda (qualitative multiple case study) untuk memperoleh pemahaman yang mendalam mengenai praktik adaptasi yang dilakukan oleh UMKM. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur, observasi, dan analisis dokumen yang melibatkan sepuluh partisipan, terdiri atas pemilik UMKM, seorang manajer produksi, seorang konsultan ekspor, seorang perwakilan pemerintah, dan seorang pejabat pembina UMKM di Provinsi Riau, Indonesia. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa, pertama, UMKM melakukan adaptasi produk agar sesuai dengan preferensi konsumen Taiwan melalui peningkatan kualitas produk, penyesuaian rasa dan tekstur sesuai kebutuhan, serta memastikan pemenuhan standar keamanan pangan dan standar mutu yang dipersyaratkan untuk pasar ekspor. Kedua, kemasan dan pelabelan didesain ulang dengan menerapkan kemasan vakum serta informasi dwibahasa guna meningkatkan daya tarik produk dan kepercayaan konsumen. Ketiga, UMKM menerapkan strategi cultural branding dengan memosisikan mi sagu Riau sebagai produk pangan tradisional Melayu yang autentik dan memiliki warisan budaya yang khas. Keempat, platform pemasaran digital dimanfaatkan untuk mempromosikan produk di pasar internasional

sekaligus membangun interaksi langsung dengan calon konsumen. Terakhir, penelitian mengidentifikasi beberapa tantangan utama, yaitu keterbatasan informasi pasar, persyaratan sertifikasi, dan belum memadainya jaringan ekspor. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa keberhasilan internasionalisasi memerlukan proses adaptasi yang terintegrasi, yang mengombinasikan inovasi produk, keaslian budaya, kapabilitas pemasaran digital, dan dukungan kelembagaan. Temuan ini memberikan kontribusi teoretis terhadap literatur internasionalisasi UMKM serta implikasi praktis bagi pengembangan strategi berorientasi ekspor untuk produk pangan tradisional di negara-negara berkembang.

Kata Kunci: Adaptasi pemasaran internasional; UMKM; mi sagu; preferensi konsumen Taiwan

INTRODUCTION

Adaptation in international marketing is acknowledged as a crucial factor influencing export success and global competitiveness. International marketing adaptation entails the alteration of product characteristics, branding, packaging, pricing, and promotional tactics to conform to local market conditions and consumer expectations. Initial research by Cavusgil (1993) indicated that adapting products and promotions substantially enhances export performance, especially in consumer-centric markets where purchasing decisions are heavily swayed by local preferences and cultural influences. Contended that adaptive marketing capabilities allow firms to respond efficiently to varied market conditions and attain enhanced competitive performance. Recent evidence substantiates that dynamic and adaptive marketing capabilities enhance international marketing performance in SMEs functioning within increasingly competitive global markets (Schilke et al., 2021). Moreover, international entrepreneurial orientation, branding capabilities, market knowledge, and market-specific promotional strategies have been recognised as significant determinants of international SME performance (Chang, 2011). These studies indicate that effective internationalisation necessitates firms to reconcile product authenticity with strategic adjustments to local consumer demands and market circumstances.

The importance of marketing adaptation is especially apparent in the food industry, where consumer preferences are heavily shaped by cultural values, dietary practices, sensory expectations, and perceptions of product quality. Research on consumer behaviour in Taiwan consistently reveals that purchasing decisions are influenced by various factors, including product quality, taste, nutritional value, traceability, food safety, and packaging attributes. Chang (2021) et

al. discovered that Taiwanese consumers are inclined to pay elevated prices for food products that offer explicit nutritional information and traceability certification. Similarly, Chen et al. (2020) indicated that sensory attributes and product authenticity substantially affect consumer preferences and price willingness for rice noodles in Taiwan, underscoring the significance of taste adaptation and sensory assessment in the introduction of alternative noodle products. Research on speciality coffee and imported agricultural products indicates that Taiwanese consumers highly prioritise premium packaging, product quality, freshness, and trustworthy information about product origin (Wann et al., 2018; Hsu & Wann, 2004). Recent studies indicate that environmental sustainability, health consciousness, and ethical consumption are increasingly significant factors influencing food purchasing behaviour among Taiwanese consumers (Chang et al., 2024). The findings indicate that consumer acceptance is influenced by a complex interplay of sensory, functional, symbolic, and sustainability-related product attributes.

International market segmentation research highlights that consumers evaluate products not only based on physical attributes but also on the benefits and values linked to those attributes. Hofstede (dalam Žemojtel-Piotrowska & Piotrowski, 2023), posited that product attributes function as mechanisms for consumers to attain desired benefits and personal values, suggesting that successful international marketing strategies must synchronise product characteristics with consumer expectations in particular cultural contexts. This viewpoint is particularly pertinent to traditional food products, as their market acceptance is influenced not only by sensory attributes but also by perceived authenticity, cultural identity, health advantages, and the

symbolic significance associated with the product.

Notwithstanding the extensive literature on international marketing adaptation and consumer behaviour, significant research gaps persist. Initially, prior research has predominantly concentrated on multinational corporations, established export commodities, or extensive international business frameworks, whereas insufficient emphasis has been placed on traditional food products manufactured by SMEs in developing economies (Cavusgil et al., 1993; Reimann et al., 2021). Secondly, empirical studies regarding Taiwanese consumer preferences have predominantly focused on rice noodles, coffee, meat products, healthy foods, and agricultural commodities (Chen et al., 2020; Wann et al., 2018), while sago-based food products remain largely unexamined despite the rising global demand for sustainable and alternative carbohydrate sources. Third, current research typically analyses product adaptation, sensory preferences, marketing capabilities, and consumer behaviour as separate entities. As a result, there is a restricted comprehension of how these factors concurrently interact to affect the acceptance of traditional food products in global markets. Despite Riau Province being the foremost sago-producing area in Indonesia and Taiwan being a significant destination for Indonesian sago exports, no prior research has specifically examined the adaptation of Riau sago noodles to align with Taiwanese consumer preferences. This gap is notably important as SMEs necessitate evidence-based guidance on product formulation, flavour alteration, packaging design, branding, and promotional communication to improve international competitiveness.

Rectifying these deficiencies is crucial from both theoretical and practical viewpoints. Integrating product adaptation, sensory preference analysis, market segmentation, and consumer behavior theoretically enhances the understanding of international marketing adaptation for traditional food products. SMEs in Riau Province necessitate market-specific insights to convert local culinary heritage into globally competitive products. Despite ample sago resources, with annual production surpassing 200,000 tonnes and increasing export prospects to Taiwan, numerous SMEs still face challenges in aligning their products with the preferences of foreign consumers. Consequently, comprehending the determinants that affect

Taiwanese consumer acceptance is crucial for formulating effective product adaptation and market entry strategies.

This study aims to address the following research question: How can SMEs manufacturing Riau sago noodles modify their products and marketing strategies to align with Taiwanese consumer preferences and improve market acceptance? The study specifically examines the necessary product modifications to align Riau sago noodles with Taiwanese sensory preferences, investigates the impact of packaging and labeling on consumer trust, evaluates the role of taste testing in product adaptation, analyses consumer segmentation patterns pertinent to marketing strategy development, and assesses the efficacy of health-oriented promotional messages in shaping purchase intentions. The study seeks to formulate evidence-based international marketing adaptation strategies to facilitate the successful commercialization of Riau sago noodles in the Taiwanese market.

This study's originality stems from its amalgamation of international marketing adaptation theory, consumer-product relationship theory, sensory food preference analysis, market segmentation, and consumer behaviour perspectives, specifically regarding a traditional sago-based food product. This research establishes a comprehensive framework that elucidates the interplay between product attributes, taste adaptation, packaging and labeling strategies, consumer segmentation, and health-oriented marketing communication in shaping market acceptance in an international context, in contrast to prior studies that examine export marketing strategies or consumer preferences in isolation. This study constitutes one of the initial empirical examinations of Taiwanese consumer preferences for Riau sago noodles, thereby providing novel insights into the internationalization prospects of indigenous Indonesian food products manufactured by SMEs. The results are anticipated to enhance international marketing theory, offer practical guidance for SMEs aiming to penetrate international markets, and assist policymakers in formulating initiatives that bolster the global competitiveness of Indonesia's traditional food sectors.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a multiple case study design to explore the international marketing adaptation strategies

implemented by Riau sago noodle SMEs in responding to Taiwanese consumer preferences. A qualitative case study was considered appropriate because the research aimed to obtain an in-depth understanding of how SMEs interpret foreign market opportunities, identify consumer preferences, and formulate adaptive marketing strategies within the context of international business. Case study research is widely applied in studies of SME internationalization and international marketing because it facilitates comprehensive exploration of strategic decisions and contextual business practices. The study was conducted in Riau Province, Indonesia, one of the main sago-producing regions and the center of sago noodle production. The research focused on selected sago noodle SMEs that have export potential or have been involved in activities related to international markets.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria were: (1) owners or managers of sago noodle SMEs in Riau Province; (2) businesses operating for at least three years; (3) enterprises possessing experience or knowledge regarding export activities and international marketing; and (4) stakeholders involved in product development and market expansion, such as government representatives, SME facilitators, and export consultants. The number of participants ranged from 10 to 15 informants and was determined based on the principle of data saturation.

Data were collected from January to April 2026 through in-depth semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with SME owners, managers, and related stakeholders to obtain information regarding product adaptation, packaging modifications, branding strategies, pricing decisions, promotional activities, and distribution channels intended for the Taiwanese market.

Observations were conducted at production sites and business locations to understand production processes, packaging practices, product characteristics, and operational activities. In addition, documents such as company profiles, promotional materials, product catalogs, export reports, and government publications related to SME development and Taiwanese food market characteristics were examined to enrich and validate the data obtained from interviews.

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which consists of three concurrent

activities: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and repeatedly reviewed to gain familiarity with the data. Subsequently, open coding was performed to identify meaningful units and recurring patterns. Similar codes were grouped into categories and further developed into major themes related to international marketing adaptation strategies and Taiwanese consumer preferences. Thematic analysis enabled the identification of strategic patterns concerning product adaptation, cultural considerations, and market responsiveness among SMEs. Qualitative case studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of thematic and interactive analyses in examining strategic adaptation and decision-making processes within SMEs.

To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the findings, this study employed four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was established through source triangulation by comparing information obtained from interviews, observations, and documentary evidence. Member checking was conducted by returning summaries of interview findings to participants for confirmation. Dependability was maintained through an audit trail documenting all stages of data collection and analysis, while confirmability was ensured by preserving transcripts, field notes, coding records, and analytical memos.

Prior to data collection, all participants received information regarding the objectives and procedures of the study. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from every participant. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by assigning pseudonyms to participants and securely storing all research data. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Profile of Participants

This study involved ten participants consisting of six owners of Riau sago noodle SMEs, one production manager, one export consultant, one government representative from the SME development agency, and one SME development officer. The participating SMEs had been operating between 5 and 20 years and had

experience in domestic distribution, with several enterprises having initiated export-oriented activities or market exploration toward Taiwan and other Asian countries.

The analysis of interviews, observations, and documents generated five major themes regarding the international marketing adaptation strategies of Riau sago noodle SMEs to meet Taiwanese consumer preferences: (1) product adaptation to health-conscious consumers, (2) packaging and labeling modification, (3) branding and cultural positioning strategies, (4) digital marketing and international promotion, and (5) challenges and support requirements in entering the Taiwanese market.

1. Product Adaptation to Taiwanese Consumer Preferences

The findings revealed that product adaptation represents the most important strategic response undertaken by SMEs to enter the Taiwanese market. Most participants acknowledged that Taiwanese consumers have increasingly shifted toward healthy food consumption and demonstrate strong preferences for products that are natural, safe, and nutritionally beneficial. Consequently, the participating SMEs attempted to reposition sago noodles not merely as traditional Indonesian noodles but also as a healthy food alternative.

One SME owner explained:

“Taiwanese consumers are increasingly concerned about healthy food. We maintain the authenticity of sago noodles but improve the texture and provide information that our products are gluten-free and made from natural ingredients.” (Participant 3)

Similarly, another participant stated:

“We realized that consumers in Taiwan appreciate food products with clear health benefits. Therefore, we emphasize that sago noodles are low in fat and suitable for consumers seeking alternative carbohydrate sources.” (Participant 7)

The interviews further indicated that texture adaptation was a major concern. Several participants explained that Taiwanese consumers generally prefer noodles with a softer and smoother texture compared to traditional Riau sago noodles, which tend to be chewy and slightly firm. One participant noted:

“Traditional sago noodles have a unique texture that local consumers enjoy. However, after studying the Taiwanese market, we realized that we need a softer texture without eliminating the product's originality.” (Participant 1)

Another respondent added:

“Product adaptation does not mean changing our identity. Instead, we modify certain aspects so that consumers can accept the product more easily.” (Participant 4)

Observational data also demonstrated that several SMEs had experimented with modifications in processing techniques, ingredient proportions, and cooking procedures to improve product acceptability. Product samples observed during field visits showed improvements in texture consistency and packaging information related to nutritional benefits.

These findings indicate that product adaptation encompasses both physical modifications and value communication strategies. The emphasis on health benefits, gluten-free characteristics, and natural ingredients reflects SMEs' awareness of the growing health-conscious consumption trend in Taiwan. Such adaptation strategies are particularly important because international consumers frequently evaluate foreign food products based on health attributes, safety considerations, and perceived nutritional value.

The findings further suggest that SMEs are attempting to balance product authenticity and market responsiveness. Rather than abandoning traditional characteristics, the enterprises strategically preserve the cultural identity of sago noodles while introducing modifications that improve market acceptance. Therefore, product adaptation becomes an important mechanism through which SMEs negotiate between preserving local heritage and satisfying international consumer expectations.

2. Packaging and Labeling Modification

The second theme concerns packaging and labeling adaptation. Nearly all participants considered packaging as a crucial element in international marketing because packaging constitutes the first point of interaction between consumers and products. One SME owner explained:

“Initially, our packaging only contained Indonesian information. For the Taiwanese market, we added English and Chinese descriptions, cooking instructions, and nutritional information.” (Participant 2)

Another participant stated:

“International consumers pay attention to packaging quality. We changed from simple plastic packaging to vacuum-sealed packaging to

improve appearance and product safety.” (Participant 5)

Several participants further emphasized that Taiwanese consumers are highly attentive to food safety information and product transparency. One informant explained:

“Consumers in Taiwan usually read labels carefully. They want to know ingredients, nutrition, expiration dates, and product origins before making purchasing decisions.” (Participant 8)

Similarly, another respondent stated:

“We realized that international consumers expect packaging that looks professional and informative. Therefore, we redesigned our labels and included more product details.” (Participant 6)

The observations confirmed these statements. Compared with earlier packaging designs, newer packages demonstrated significant improvements in visual appearance, information completeness, and packaging technology. Several SMEs had introduced vacuum-sealed packaging, attractive logos, and bilingual labeling systems to facilitate consumer understanding.

Document analysis further showed that packaging redesigns were accompanied by efforts to comply with international food labeling standards. Nutritional information, storage instructions, and preparation guidelines were included to increase consumer confidence and reduce uncertainty associated with unfamiliar food products.

The findings suggest that packaging adaptation performs multiple functions in international markets. First, it protects product quality during transportation and storage. Second, it facilitates communication by providing essential product information. Third, it serves as a promotional instrument capable of creating favorable first impressions among consumers.

Furthermore, packaging adaptation contributes significantly to trust-building processes. Since Taiwanese consumers may not be familiar with sago noodles, professional packaging and informative labels become important signals of product quality and reliability. Consequently, packaging adaptation emerges as both a marketing strategy and a mechanism for reducing consumer uncertainty regarding foreign food products.

3. Branding and Cultural Positioning Strategy

Another significant finding concerns branding and cultural positioning strategies. Most participants emphasized that product uniqueness

and cultural authenticity represent important competitive advantages in international markets. One participant stated:

“We do not want our product to be perceived as just another noodle product. We promote it as a traditional food from Riau with unique ingredients and cultural heritage.” (Participant 1)

Another informant remarked:

“Taiwanese consumers are interested in ethnic and authentic foods. Therefore, we highlight the story behind sago and the tradition of the Malay community in Riau.” (Participant 8)

Participants explained that storytelling and cultural narratives are increasingly integrated into branding strategies. Rather than competing directly with mass-produced noodle products, SMEs attempt to create product differentiation through authenticity and heritage.

One SME owner explained:

“Our strength lies in our story. Sago has been part of Malay civilization for generations. We want consumers in Taiwan to experience not only the product but also the culture behind it.” (Participant 3)

Similarly, another respondent noted:

“Consumers today appreciate products with identity and meaning. Traditional food has emotional value and can attract niche markets.” (Participant 9)

Observations indicated that some SMEs had incorporated cultural symbols, traditional motifs, and descriptions of Riau's culinary heritage into their packaging designs and promotional materials. Product brochures frequently highlighted the historical significance of sago within Malay communities and presented sago noodles as authentic cultural products from Indonesia.

These findings indicate that branding strategies have moved beyond functional attributes toward symbolic and emotional positioning. Cultural authenticity provides opportunities for SMEs to create differentiation and develop unique market identities.

The findings further suggest that Taiwanese consumers demonstrate growing interest in ethnic foods and authentic culinary experiences. Therefore, branding strategies that emphasize cultural narratives and local identity may create additional value and enhance product attractiveness. In this context, authenticity functions as an intangible asset capable of strengthening competitive advantage and supporting market penetration efforts.

4. Digital Marketing and International Promotion

The findings also revealed the strategic importance of digital marketing in facilitating international market expansion. Most participating SMEs acknowledged that digital technologies provide opportunities to promote products beyond national boundaries despite limited financial resources.

One participant explained:

“We use social media because it allows us to reach international consumers at relatively low cost. Through digital platforms, we can present product information and receive feedback directly from potential customers.” (Participant 4)

Another respondent stated:

“Digital marketing provides opportunities for SMEs that have limited financial resources. Online promotion can introduce Riau sago noodles to consumers outside Indonesia, including Taiwan.” (Participant 9)

Several participants reported utilizing social media platforms, websites, online marketplaces, and digital communication applications to disseminate information regarding product characteristics and health benefits.

One SME owner remarked:

“Through social media, consumers can immediately ask questions about ingredients, cooking methods, and nutritional information. This interaction helps us understand consumer preferences.” (Participant 2)

Another participant explained:

“International buyers increasingly use digital platforms to search for products. Therefore, digital presence is no longer optional; it has become essential.” (Participant 5)

Observations showed that most SMEs maintained active social media accounts and regularly shared product images, preparation methods, and information regarding the benefits of sago. Several enterprises had also produced digital promotional materials in English to facilitate communication with international audiences.

The findings suggest that digital marketing functions not only as a promotional tool but also as a market intelligence mechanism. Through online interactions, SMEs can collect information regarding consumer preferences, receive feedback, and identify emerging market trends.

Moreover, digital technologies significantly reduce market entry barriers for SMEs. International expansion traditionally requires

substantial investments in advertising and distribution infrastructure. However, digital platforms enable SMEs to establish international visibility with relatively limited resources. Therefore, digital marketing constitutes an essential strategy that supports the internationalization process of resource-constrained enterprises.

5. Challenges and Support Requirements in Entering the Taiwanese Market

Despite the adaptive efforts demonstrated by SMEs, participants identified several challenges in penetrating the Taiwanese market.

One participant stated:

“The biggest challenge is understanding market requirements in Taiwan. We need more information about consumer preferences and food standards.” (Participant 6)

Another respondent remarked:

“SMEs still need support related to export procedures, certification, and market networking because international expansion requires considerable resources.” (Participant 10)

Participants frequently mentioned certification requirements, food safety standards, logistics costs, and limited market intelligence as significant barriers.

One SME owner explained:

“We know that Taiwan has strict food regulations, but many SMEs do not fully understand the required procedures and certification processes.” (Participant 1)

Another participant stated:

“Exporting products requires networks and market information. Without support from government institutions and export agencies, SMEs face considerable difficulties.” (Participant 7)

Observations confirmed that only a limited number of participating SMEs possessed sufficient documentation and certifications necessary for export activities. Most enterprises remained in the market exploration stage and required additional assistance in terms of regulatory compliance, product standardization, and international networking.

Document analysis also indicated that governmental programs supporting SME internationalization remain limited in terms of market-specific training and export facilitation services. Participants consistently expressed the need for greater institutional support, market research assistance, and capacity-building initiatives.

These findings indicate that successful internationalization requires more than product adaptation and marketing creativity. SMEs also need institutional support systems that facilitate market access, provide export-related knowledge, and strengthen organizational capabilities.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the international marketing adaptation strategies of Riau sago noodle SMEs involve the integration of product adaptation, packaging modification, cultural branding, digital promotion, and capability development. The results further indicate that successful adaptation requires balancing authenticity and responsiveness to consumer preferences.

Product adaptation strategies enable SMEs to address health-conscious consumption trends in Taiwan while preserving the traditional identity of sago noodles. Packaging modifications increase consumer trust by improving information transparency and perceived product quality. Cultural branding creates differentiation through authentic narratives and heritage-based positioning, whereas digital marketing expands international visibility and facilitates direct engagement with potential consumers.

However, the findings also reveal that adaptation strategies alone are insufficient to guarantee successful market entry. The challenges related to regulations, certification requirements, and market intelligence suggest that SME internationalization depends heavily on institutional support and collaborative networks. Therefore, sustainable competitiveness in the Taiwanese market requires an integrated approach combining adaptive marketing strategies, continuous innovation, and supportive policy interventions.

In conclusion, the internationalization of Riau sago noodles represents both an economic opportunity and a cultural endeavor. By strategically adapting products and marketing practices while preserving local identity, SMEs can enhance their competitiveness and position Riau sago noodles as distinctive and healthy ethnic food products within the Taiwanese market.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the international marketing adaptation strategies of Riau sago noodle SMEs are multidimensional, encompassing product adaptation, packaging and labeling modifications, cultural branding, digital marketing utilization, and capability

development. These findings suggest that successful SME internationalization requires continuous adjustment to foreign consumer preferences and market dynamics.

First, product adaptation emerged as a crucial strategy for entering the Taiwanese market. The participating SMEs modified product texture and emphasized health-related attributes such as natural ingredients, gluten-free characteristics, and low-fat content. This finding is consistent with the study of Ali et al. (2023), which argues that adaptive marketing capabilities enable SMEs to identify international opportunities and adjust products according to changing market preferences. The increasing demand for healthy and functional food products among Taiwanese consumers provides a strategic opportunity for Riau sago noodles to position themselves as alternative carbohydrate-based products with added nutritional value.

Second, the findings indicate that packaging and labeling modifications play an important role in increasing consumer trust and facilitating market acceptance. The participating SMEs redesigned packaging by incorporating bilingual information, nutritional labels, and modern packaging technologies. According to Chaldun et al. (2024), export-oriented SMEs require product standardization and market-oriented adaptation strategies to improve competitiveness and facilitate foreign market entry. Informative and attractive packaging functions not only as a protective mechanism but also as a communication instrument that reduces uncertainty among international consumers who may be unfamiliar with the product.

Third, the study found that cultural branding and authenticity constitute valuable competitive advantages. SMEs strategically promoted Riau sago noodles as traditional Malay food products possessing unique cultural heritage and distinctive ingredients. This finding supports the argument of Chang et al. (2023), who emphasize that marketing capabilities and strategic positioning significantly influence international SME performance. By highlighting local identity and cultural narratives, SMEs can differentiate their products from conventional noodle products and create symbolic value that appeals to consumers seeking authentic ethnic food experiences.

Fourth, digital marketing emerged as a strategic mechanism that facilitates international market expansion. Most participating SMEs utilized social media and digital communication

platforms to introduce products and interact with prospective consumers. This finding is in line with Hultman et al. (2023), who found that social media communication and listening strategies positively influence export performance by enabling firms to engage directly with international customers and gather market intelligence. Likewise, Lubis et al. (2025) argue that digital marketing has become an essential instrument for expanding market reach and increasing the competitiveness of Indonesian SMEs. Digital technologies therefore provide cost-effective opportunities for SMEs to establish international visibility despite limited financial resources.

Finally, despite implementing adaptive strategies, the participating SMEs experienced several barriers related to market intelligence, certification requirements, and export networking. These findings are consistent with Chopra et al. (2024), who emphasize that

successful foreign market entry requires institutional support, market information, and collaborative networks. Similarly, Reimann et al. (2021) argue that adaptive marketing capabilities alone are insufficient unless they are supported by organizational learning and external resources. Therefore, the sustainable internationalization of Riau sago noodle SMEs depends not only on product and marketing adaptation but also on the development of institutional support systems that facilitate export readiness and market access.

Overall, the findings suggest that international marketing adaptation should be viewed as a continuous and integrated strategic process. The ability to preserve cultural authenticity while simultaneously responding to Taiwanese consumer preferences enables Riau sago noodle SMEs to create competitive advantages and strengthen their potential for sustainable international market expansion.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the international marketing adaptation strategies adopted by Riau sago noodle SMEs to meet Taiwanese consumer preferences and explored the challenges encountered during international market expansion. The findings demonstrate that successful internationalization requires a comprehensive adaptation process that extends beyond product modification. SMEs strategically adapted product characteristics by emphasizing health-related attributes, improving texture, and maintaining the authenticity of traditional sago

noodles. Packaging and labeling were redesigned through bilingual information, nutritional labeling, and vacuum-sealed packaging to enhance product credibility and consumer confidence. In addition, cultural branding was employed to position Riau sago noodles as authentic Malay heritage products, while digital marketing platforms were utilized to increase international visibility and facilitate direct interaction with potential consumers. Nevertheless, SMEs continue to face significant challenges related to limited market intelligence, export certification, regulatory compliance, and insufficient international business networks.

The study contributes to the international marketing and SME internationalization literature by proposing an integrated adaptation framework that combines product innovation, cultural authenticity, packaging adaptation, digital marketing capabilities, and institutional support. Unlike previous studies that primarily examine these dimensions separately, this research demonstrates that their integration is essential for enhancing the competitiveness of traditional food products in international markets. The findings also extend the understanding of international marketing adaptation by illustrating how local cultural identity can be preserved while responding to the specific preferences of foreign consumers.

From a practical perspective, SME owners should continuously improve product quality, strengthen health-oriented value propositions, invest in internationally competitive packaging, and expand digital marketing activities targeting overseas consumers. Government agencies and SME development institutions should provide stronger support through export facilitation programs, market intelligence services, international certification assistance, participation in international trade exhibitions, and capacity-building programs that enhance SMEs' export readiness.

This study has several limitations. It focuses exclusively on sago noodle SMEs in Riau Province and primarily explores adaptation strategies for the Taiwanese market using a qualitative multiple case study approach. Consequently, the findings may not be directly generalizable to other traditional food industries or export destinations. Future research is recommended to employ mixed-method or quantitative approaches involving larger samples of SMEs and multiple international markets to validate and extend the proposed adaptation

framework. Comparative studies across different countries and traditional food products would also provide broader insights into the determinants of successful SME internationalization in emerging economies.

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