

An Exploratory Study on MSME Promotional Practices Within the Marapthon Season 3 Live Streaming Ecosystem in Indonesia

Lidya Djuwita Pratiwi Canon^{1*}, Zerah Elisa Derek², Yoan Purnamasari Makapuase Bahalau³

¹⁻²Digital Business Study Program, Primaniyarta Academy of Business and Finance, Nouth Sulawesi, Indonesia

³Digital Banking & Finance Study Program, Primaniyarta Academy of Business and Finance, Nouth Sulawesi, Indonesia

ORCID/Email:

First AUTHOR : <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1113-6347> / lidyacanon18@gmail.com

Second AUTHOR : - / zerahelisa12@gmail.com

Third AUTHOR : - / bahalaui@gmail.com

Corresponding author email: lidyacanon18@gmail.com

Article Info

Received: 19/02/2026

Revised: 22/04/2026

Accepted: 29/05/2026

Online: 30/06/2026

Abstract

This study explores the promotional practices of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) within the live streaming ecosystem of Marapthon Season 3, Indonesia's largest live streaming marathon hosted on Reza Arap's YouTube channel from February to May 2026. Employing an exploratory qualitative approach combined with netnographic observation of live sessions, digital documentation, and analysis of audience interaction, this research examines how MSMEs leverage a non-commercial, entertainment-driven streaming space for promotion. The findings reveal a distinctive model in which MSMEs do not sell directly but "purchase" visibility through micro-donations (from IDR 10,000) that trigger on-screen messages read aloud by creators to hundreds of thousands of real-time viewers. This donation-mediated promotion operates through parasocial relationships, community belonging, and a soft-selling atmosphere rather than formal endorsement contracts. Several MSMEs reported rapid sell-outs after brief five-second exposures. The study identifies the reversal of gift-giving logic into a marketing instrument as a novel construct and positions Marapthon as a temporary creator-community promotional ecosystem. These findings extend live commerce literature and offer practical implications for low-cost, community-based MSME promotion strategies.

Keywords: MSME promotion; live streaming; Marapthon; parasocial interaction; donation-mediated promotion



© 2026 by the author(s)

This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

INTRODUCTION

The digital transformation has fundamentally reshaped the marketing landscape for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). Social media and digital platforms enable MSMEs to reach broader audiences at relatively low cost while engaging directly with prospective consumers (Syukri & Sunrawali, 2022; Sihura, 2025). In Indonesia, MSMEs constitute the backbone of the national economy, making access to affordable yet high-impact digital promotional channels a highly strategic issue (Prihandono, Wijaya, Wiratama, Prananta, & Widia, 2024).

One rapidly growing channel is live streaming commerce a practice that combines live broadcasting, entertainment, and real-time interaction to drive purchasing behavior (Wongkitrungrueng & Assarut, 2020; Sun, Shao, Li, Guo, & Nie, 2019). Most existing literature examines live commerce models on commercial platforms such as Shopee Live and TikTok Shop, where sellers act as streamers and transactions occur directly within the broadcast via shopping cart features (Huang, Zhu, Hao, & Deng, 2023; Maharani & Dirgantara, 2023). In such models, parasocial interaction and social presence have been shown to drive impulse buying behavior (Xiang, Zheng, Lee, & Zhao, 2016; Gao, Chen, Gao, & Yu, 2022).

A new phenomenon that has yet to receive substantial academic attention is Marapthon Season 3: The Last Tale. Marapthon is Indonesia's largest live streaming marathon (subathon), initiated by Reza Oktovian (Reza Arap) together with AAA Clan. It ran nonstop for more than 100 days from February 8, 2026, reaching its conclusion on May 20, 2026, and temporarily ranked among the top live streams in the world. Notably, Marapthon is not a commercial platform but rather a community entertainment space. Within it, MSME operators leveraged the donation feature (media share) as a promotional tool: with donations starting from IDR 10,000, their promotional messages appeared on screen and were read aloud by the creator to hundreds of thousands of real-time viewers, without any formal endorsement contract.

Several MSME operators reported their products selling out within moments of appearing on screen for approximately five seconds. In addition to spontaneous donations, the organizing team also introduced a curated program called “UMKM Day,” which selected business owners to promote their products in dedicated broadcast sessions. This phenomenon presents a promotional pattern distinctly different from conventional live commerce, making it a relevant subject for in-depth exploration. Against this backdrop, this study aims to: (1) explore the forms and mechanisms of MSME promotional practices within the Marapthon Season 3 live streaming ecosystem; (2) understand the factors that make such practices effective for MSMEs; and (3) identify the associated challenges and risks. The central research question is: “How do MSMEs practice promotion within the Marapthon Season 3 live streaming ecosystem, and why does this practice yield impact?” This study is expected to expand the live commerce literature while offering practical implications for community-based MSME promotional strategies.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with an exploratory research design. This design was selected because the phenomenon under investigation is novel, dynamic, and insufficiently documented, necessitating an in-depth exploration of meaning rather than hypothesis testing (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research object is MSME promotional practices within the Marapthon Season 3 live streaming ecosystem on Reza Arap’s YouTube channel during the period from February 8 to May 20, 2026. Data collection was conducted through three complementary techniques. First, netnographic observation (Kozinets, 2015) of live broadcast sessions, viewer interactions, comment sections, and the dynamics of the media share/donation feature. Second, digital documentation comprising screenshots, broadcast clips, official uploads from the @weareaaaclan account, and credible online media coverage. Third, tracing the digital footprint of participating MSMEs, including testimonials and sales responses they shared in public spaces. Operational definitions in this study include: MSME promotional practice as any effort by business operators to display their products or services within the broadcast; the live streaming ecosystem as the network of creators, viewer communities, platform features, and interaction norms that constitute the broadcast space; and donation-mediated promotion as the mechanism of obtaining visibility through the act of making donations.

Data analysis employed thematic analysis through the stages of data reduction, categorization and coding, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was maintained through source triangulation cross-referencing broadcast observations, official documentation, and media coverage as well as referential adequacy. This research is non-interventional toward its subjects and observed only publicly accessible interactions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

The exploratory findings identified six major themes describing MSME promotional practices within the Marapthon Season 3 ecosystem. These six themes and their key findings are summarized in Table 1 and subsequently elaborated narratively.

Table 1. Themes of MSME Promotional Practices in the Marapthon Season 3 Ecosystem

Table 1. Themes of MSME Promotional Practices in the Marapthon Season 3 Ecosystem

Theme	Key Findings
1. Donation-mediated promotion	MSMEs do not sell directly; instead, they "purchase" visibility through donations starting from IDR 10,000 that trigger on-screen messages read aloud by the creator for approximately 5 seconds.
2. Minimal capital, massive reach	At very low cost, messages reach hundreds of thousands of simultaneous viewers; several products were reported sold out within seconds.
3. Soft selling with a "hangout" vibe	The relaxed and familiar broadcast atmosphere makes promotions feel organic and non-intrusive, making them well-received by the audience.
4. Curated "UMKM Day" program	A formal-curative channel: the organizing team selects MSMEs across product categories (food, beverages, clothing, crafts) to appear in dedicated broadcast sessions.
5. Trust, community & social impact narratives	Parasocial relationships and a sense of community belonging, reinforced by donation narratives for teachers, schools, and MSMEs, build audience trust in the promoted products.
6. Challenges & risks	Very brief exposure windows, unpredictable timing, competition among donors, the temporary nature of the program, and fraud risks by parties falsely claiming to represent Marapthon.

Source: Author's own elaboration, 2026

First, donation-mediated promotion mechanism emerged as the most distinctive finding. Unlike Shopee Live or TikTok Shop, which provide direct transaction channels, Marapthon does not offer a buying or selling feature. MSMEs gain promotional space by making donations through the media share feature; each donation triggers a message on the broadcast screen that is read aloud by the creator and witnessed simultaneously by all viewers. In this way, the donation serves as an "access ticket" to the community's attention stage. Second, minimal capital with massive reach. A relatively small donation amount (starting from IDR 10,000) can generate exposure to hundreds of thousands of active viewers. Several MSME operators, including food businesses run by public figures, reported sharp sales increases and even sell-out conditions shortly after their messages appeared on screen. This cost-effectiveness is what makes the practice particularly attractive for MSMEs operating on limited marketing budgets. Third, soft selling pattern with a "hangout" atmosphere. The relaxed broadcast atmosphere in which the creator eats, chats, or plays games alongside the community makes product mentions feel natural and free from the feel of hard advertising. Promotions blend seamlessly into community conversations, thereby reducing audience resistance to commercial messages. Fourth, curated channel through the "UMKM Day" program. In addition to spontaneous donations, the organizing team opened a registration process and selected MSMEs from various product categories to appear in dedicated broadcast sessions. This pathway provides additional structure and legitimacy while extending impact for selected business owners. Fifth, the role of trust, community, and social impact narratives. The parasocial closeness between creator and viewers, combined with a strong community

identity and donation narratives supporting contract teachers, schools, and MSMEs, builds a foundation of trust. Viewers tend to perceive products mentioned in this space as part of a shared community experience rather than mere commercial objects. Sixth, challenges and risks. Visibility lasting only approximately five seconds demands concise and timely messaging. Timing is uncertain and competitive given the number of competing donors, while the program itself is temporary in nature (concluding May 20, 2026). Additionally, fraud risks emerged from parties falsely claiming to represent the Marapthon team, prompting the organizers to repeatedly caution MSME participants to remain vigilant.

Discussion

The above findings both confirm and extend the live commerce literature. Consistent with Xiang et al. (2016) and Gao et al. (2022), parasocial interaction and social presence proved to be significant drivers of audience response. Similarly, the creator's role as a trusted figure affirms the argument by Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut (2020) that live streaming builds the trust and engagement that drives purchase intention. However, the Marapthon context introduces a fundamental distinction: the broadcast space is not a commercial channel but a community entertainment venue, meaning that promotion occurs indirectly. This constitutes the novelty of the present study. Live commerce literature generally frames gift-giving or donations as a form of viewer appreciation directed at the streamer (Yu, Jung, Kim, & Jung, 2018). Within the Marapthon ecosystem, however, this logic is reversed: MSME operators rather than ordinary viewers become the donating party, and their donations are deliberately deployed as a marketing instrument targeting the audience, rather than merely as recognition for the creator. The researcher terms this phenomenon "reverse gift-giving as a promotional instrument." This construct complements the live commerce framework that has hitherto centered on direct transactions.

The second novelty lies in the conceptualization of Marapthon as a temporary creator-community promotional ecosystem. This space is governed by distinctive norms soft selling, a spirit of togetherness, social impact narratives, and anti-fraud governance which collectively determine promotional success. In other words, MSME promotional effectiveness is determined not by the platform's commercial features but by the social capital and trust that form within the community. This enriches the social media-based MSME marketing perspective (Syukri & Sunrawali, 2022; Sihura, 2025) with ecosystem and parasocial dimensions. Practically, these findings demonstrate that MSMEs can achieve substantial promotional outcomes at minimal cost, provided they can read timing effectively, craft concise and relevant messages, and position themselves authentically within community culture. Nevertheless, the temporary nature and unpredictability of such ecosystems require MSMEs to avoid over-reliance on a single channel, integrating it instead into a broader and more sustainable marketing strategy.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that MSME promotional practices within the Marapthon Season 3 live streaming ecosystem operate through a donation-mediated promotion mechanism that is indirect, low-cost, yet massively reaching. Their effectiveness rests on parasocial interaction, social presence, a soft-selling atmosphere, and the trust and communal solidarity of the audience rather than on the platform's transactional features. Beyond spontaneous donations, the curated "UMKM Day" program extends impact for selected business participants. The novelty of this study lies in two contributions: (1) the identification of the construct of "reverse gift-giving as a promotional instrument," whereby MSME donations are deployed as a marketing tool directed at the audience; and (2) the conceptualization of Marapthon as a temporary creator-community promotional ecosystem with its own distinctive norms. These findings extend the live commerce literature, which has heretofore centered on direct transaction models.

This study carries limitations, namely its focus on a single case (Marapthon Season 3) and its reliance on publicly accessible data. Future research is recommended to conduct in-depth interviews with MSME operators and creators, quantitatively measure sales impact, and test the generalizability of the constructs across other live streaming ecosystems. For MSME practitioners, it is advisable to leverage community momentum authentically while integrating it into a broader, sustainable marketing strategy..

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author expresses gratitude to the AAA Clan team and the entire Marapthon community for their contribution in creating the ecosystem that served as the object of this study. Appreciation is also extended to academic colleagues who provided constructive feedback during the writing process.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization, L.D.P.C.; Methodology, L.D.P.C.; Investigation, L.D.P.C.; Resources, L.D.P.C.; Data Curation, L.D.P.C.; Writing – Original Draft Preparation, L.D.P.C.; Writing – Review & Editing, L.D.P.C.; Visualization, L.D.P.C.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

- Azmi Fadhilah, D., & Pratiwi, T. (2021). Strategi pemasaran produk UMKM melalui penerapan digital marketing: Studi kasus pada kelompok usaha "Kremes Ubi" di Desa Cibunar, Kecamatan Rancakalong, Sumedang. *Coopetition: Jurnal Ilmiah Manajemen*, 12(1), 17–22.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Gao, H., Chen, X., Gao, H., & Yu, B. (2022). Understanding Chinese consumers' livestreaming impulsive buying: A stimulus-organism-response perspective and the mediating role of emotions and Zhong Yong tendency. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 881294. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.881294>
- Hou, F., Guan, Z., Li, B., & Chong, A. Y. L. (2020). Factors influencing people's continuous watching intention and consumption intention in live streaming: Evidence from China. *Internet Research*, 30(1), 141–163. <https://doi.org/10.1108/INTR-04-2018-0177>
- Hu, M., Zhang, M., & Wang, Y. (2017). Why do audiences choose to keep watching on live video streaming platforms? An explanation of dual identification framework. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 75, 594–606. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.06.006>
- Huang, Z., Zhu, Y., Hao, A., & Deng, J. (2023). How social presence influences consumer purchase intention in live video commerce: The mediating role of immersive experience and the moderating role of positive emotions. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 17(4), 493–509. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JRIM-01-2022-0009>
- Kozinets, R. V. (2015). *Netnography: Redefined* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Maharani, S., & Dirgantara, I. M. B. (2023). Factors influencing immersion during Sharia live streaming shopping and its effect on purchase intention (A study on TikTok Indonesia social commerce). *Jurnal Ilmiah Ekonomi Islam*, 9(2), 2942–2953. <https://doi.org/10.29040/jiei.v9i2.9854>
- Prihandono, D., Wijaya, A. P., Wiratama, B., Prananta, W., & Widia, S. (2024). Digital transformation to enhance Indonesian SME performance: Exploring the impact of market competition and digital strategy. *Problems and Perspectives in Management*, 22(2), 103–113. [https://doi.org/10.21511/ppm.22\(2\).2024.09](https://doi.org/10.21511/ppm.22(2).2024.09)
- Sihura, H. K. (2025). The role of social media in MSME marketing strategies in the digital era. *Jurnal Education and Development*, 13(1), 703–706.
- Sun, Y., Shao, X., Li, X., Guo, Y., & Nie, K. (2019). How live streaming influences purchase intentions in social commerce: An IT affordance perspective. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, 37, 100886. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.elerap.2019.100886>
- Syukri, A. U., & Sunrawali, A. N. (2022). Digital marketing in the development of micro, small, and medium enterprises. *Kinerja: Jurnal Manajemen Organisasi dan Industri*, 19(1), 170–182. <https://doi.org/10.30872/jkin.v19i1.10207>
- Wongkitrungrueng, A., & Assarut, N. (2020). The role of live streaming in building consumer trust and engagement with social commerce sellers. *Journal of Business Research*, 117, 543–556. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.08.032>

- Xiang, L., Zheng, X., Lee, M. K. O., & Zhao, D. (2016). Exploring consumers' impulse buying behavior on social commerce platform: The role of parasocial interaction. *International Journal of Information Management*, 36(3), 333–347. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2015.11.002>
- Yu, E., Jung, C., Kim, H., & Jung, J. (2018). Impact of viewer engagement on gift-giving in live video streaming. *Telematics and Informatics*, 35(5), 1450–1460. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2018.03.014>