

Bite's Story: Balancing Growth Ambition and Entrepreneurial Reality

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Prologue

The warm aroma of freshly fried doughnuts and melted chocolate filled the air inside Bite's Story Donut and Pastry House (Bite's Story), a small but busy bakery tucked into the heart of Port Dickson, Negeri Sembilan. Customers queued eagerly at the counter, their chatter blending with the hiss of frying oil and the rhythmic hum of a doughnut-making machine, as trays of doughnuts disappeared almost as quickly as they were filled.

Behind the counter, however, stood a weary yet determined figure. At 32 years old, Nazmi, a civil engineering graduate turned entrepreneur, had already come far from a part-time stall assistant during his diploma days to the owner of Bite's Story, which had grown from a modest stall on a polytechnic campus to a bakery with multiple outlets and a loyal customer base. On the surface, it was a picture of success.

But on this particular evening, his thoughts were elsewhere, not on the cash register or the sweet smiles of satisfied customers. Nazmi's mind was far from at ease, wandering to the industry giants, such as Big Apple Donuts and Coffee (Big Apple), Dunkin' Donuts, J.CO Donuts and Coffee (J.CO), and Krispy Kreme. He admired their growth, brand visibility, and sheer dominance of the market.

"Bite's Story is doing fine," he told himself. "But fine is not enough."

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Ambition burned in him. He dreamed of making Bite's Story a household name, a brand that capable of competing with the multinational doughnut chains. Yet, reality weighed heavily as he grappled with inconsistent machine efficiency, daily operational burdens, insufficiently skilled staff, and financial pressures that made every expansion step a constant struggle. As he glanced at the golden-brown doughnuts arranged neatly on trays, ready to be served, a single question lingered as stubbornly as the sweet scent of doughnuts in the shop. He questioned whether to push boldly toward growth or to consolidate and secure what he had already built. His dilemma was apparent. Should he chase ambition at all costs and scale boldly, or settle for a steady, more manageable path that secures survival?

Bite's Story

Nazmi's entrepreneurial spark was first ignited years earlier, during his student days at Politeknik Port Dickson. He was pursuing a diploma in civil engineering, a field that promised stability and prestige. To earn extra income, he took up part-time work at a doughnut stall on campus. Initially, he treated it as a simple job and a way to earn pocket money to cover daily expenses. But he soon unexpectedly discovered a fascination for the art of baking. The precise mixing of ingredients, the steady rhythms of frying dough, and the satisfaction of watching a customer smile as they bit into a warm chocolate-coated treat, all of it stirred something inside him. He began experimenting with recipes in his spare time, drawing inspiration from YouTube tutorials, food blogs, and customer feedback. Friends and classmates often praised his creations. *"Bro, this is better than Big Apple,"* one classmate joked after biting into a soft, chocolate-glazed ring. Those words stuck with him. The idea that his work could rival established brands planted a seed that refused to stop growing.

In 2016, Nazmi took his first real step into entrepreneurship after completing his diploma. With RM15,000 borrowed from his family, he invested in a pastry franchise. He operated under the franchise banner for a year, learning the ins and outs of managing a food stall, including supply chains, cost control and customer service. Yet the experience left him unfulfilled. Selling someone else's brand felt restrictive. He wanted something that reflected his creativity, not just pre-packaged products dictated by a franchisor. *"I wanted to build something of my own,"* he recalled later.

Determined to move beyond franchising, Nazmi enrolled in the Latihan Pembentukan Usahawan (LPU) program under MARA in 2017. The training exposed him to practical aspects of entrepreneurship, including financial planning, branding, customer service, and operations. Crucially, it also provided financing. Nazmi also secured an interest-free loan of RM10,000, a seed capital that would become the foundation of his next big move.

With the support, Nazmi co-founded Bite's Story together with his partner Sazrin, who assumed responsibility for marketing and finance. Their partnership combined Nazmi's entrepreneurial drive, product and operational expertise, with Sazrin's financial acumen. They launched Bite's Story with a clear vision, which is, to create doughnuts that were more than just a product, turning each bite into an experience.



Figure 1: The Bite's Story Branding

Nazmi invested the loan into purchasing a doughnut-making machine, dramatically increasing production capacity. With the machine, he could keep up with large crowds during peak hours. Repaying the loan over three years required strict financial discipline, but Nazmi managed it without default. To him, the repayment milestone was more than a financial responsibility and achievement. It symbolised his determination to build something sustainable. Confidence grew with each passing day, and so did Bite's Story reputation. Students and nearby residents increasingly saw Bite's Story as more than a campus-side venture.

Their first outlet was modest, a small stall tucked inside Politeknik Port Dickson, yet demand skyrocketed. Students flocked to the stall for freshly made doughnuts in various flavours. At its peak, sales reached 1,000 to 1,200 doughnuts per day, and during convocation season, the number surged to 2,000. Building on this momentum, Nazmi began expanding to nearby areas. A second outlet at PD Famous sold up to 700 doughnuts daily, further cementing Bite's Story's reputation as a rising local brand.

Resilience through Crisis: The COVID-19 Challenge

By early 2020, Bite's Story had become a local favourite. On weekdays, students streamed to the Politeknik Port Dickson stall between classes, while on weekends, families stopped by the PD Famous outlet for a box of freshly made doughnuts. An additional income stream was provided by orders for convocation events, small parties, and campus functions. For a business barely three years old, Nazmi felt proud of the momentum. He had proven that an engineer could indeed become a baker, and a successful one.



Figure 2: Bite's Story Outlet in Politeknik Port Dickson

But that pride was short-lived. In March 2020, news spread rapidly across Malaysia when the government announced a nationwide Movement Control Order (MCO) to curb the spread of COVID-19. Schools, universities, and most businesses were forced to shut down. Streets emptied almost overnight. For Nazmi, it was as though someone had pulled the plug on his business. The polytechnic closed, cutting off his main outlet. The PD Famous stall also went quiet. With no foot traffic, sales collapsed. Nazmi remembered sitting in his small office at home, staring at his accounts, feeling a sense of panic creeping in.

“If the stalls are closed, how will I pay my staff? How will I repay loans? How will I keep Bite’s Story alive?”

Many small food and beverage (F&B) entrepreneurs in Malaysia faced similar struggles. In 2020, the Department of Statistics Malaysia reported that more than 32% of small food businesses shut down permanently during the first six months of the pandemic. Smaller players did not yet widely adopt delivery platforms, and those who relied on walk-in customers saw their incomes vanish overnight. Nazmi refused to let Bite’s Story become another statistic. While some peers chose to wait out the lockdown, hoping for government relief packages, he knew inactivity could kill his brand. *“If we stop, people will forget us,”* he told his partner, Sazrin.

The first step was drastic yet necessary, as production shifted to his own home kitchen. What had once been a family space turned into a mini bakery. Countertops were covered with trays of dough, bags of flour leaned against the fridge, and boxes for delivery stacked in corners. The smell of frying oil filled the house daily. Nazmi’s family, though surprised at first, adjusted quickly, knowing how much the business meant to him.

With campus stalls closed, Nazmi took to the streets himself. He carefully loaded boxes of doughnuts into his car, often working from early morning until evening to deliver them door-to-door. The sight of the business owner personally handing over warm doughnuts surprised customers. *“It made us feel valued,”* one customer later told him. This personal touch builds loyalty and strengthens community ties. Each knock on a customer’s door was more than just a delivery. It was a reminder that Bite’s Story was still alive and fighting to serve. Over time, customers began spreading the word.

At the same time, Nazmi recognised the growing influence of digital platforms. Social media usage in Malaysia surged during the lockdown, with Malaysians spending an average of more than four hours on social media daily. Seeing the opportunity, Nazmi ramped up Bite’s Story’s presence on Facebook and Instagram. He posted photos of freshly glazed doughnuts, short videos of frying sessions in his home kitchen, and heartfelt captions about his entrepreneurial journey. He

introduced “lockdown specials,” offering discounts for families ordering multiple boxes. Slowly, orders began to pick up.

“It wasn’t just about doughnuts,” he reflected, “it was about staying connected to people when everything else felt distant.”

As online sales grew, Nazmi expanded further by partnering with online food delivery services such as Grab and Foodpanda. At first, it was intimidating to join platforms dominated by bigger brands. But the strategy paid off. Customers became accustomed to the convenience of tapping a screen and having food delivered within 30 minutes. Suddenly, Bite’s Story was visible to thousands of potential customers scrolling through food delivery apps. Orders came from neighbourhoods he had never reached before. A customer in Seremban commented on Instagram, *“I found you on Grab. Your doughnuts are better than J.CO!”*

This exposure gave Bite’s Story a second life during the pandemic. Nazmi often worked late into the night to fulfil orders, exhausted yet grateful.

“Every box I deliver keeps us alive one more day,” he told himself.

Still, the months were tough. Raw material costs fluctuated due to supply chain disruptions, and Nazmi often had to negotiate with suppliers for smaller, more frequent deliveries. His energy was stretched thin as by day he was a baker, delivery driver, and marketer; by night, he was an accountant and strategist. Yet through sheer determination, he kept the business afloat.

By mid-2021, as restrictions eased, Bite’s Story had not only survived but expanded its reach. The customer base now extended beyond students to include families, office workers, and online communities who discovered the brand during lockdown. Orders flowed from both walk-ins and digital platforms, creating a hybrid model of in-store and online sales. Reflecting on that period, Nazmi described it as *“the hardest test of my life, but also the most rewarding”*. He realised that resilience, creativity, and adaptability were not just entrepreneurial buzzwords. They were survival tools.

Expansion Milestones

When restrictions eased in early 2022, Malaysians cautiously returned to shops, cafes, and restaurants. For Nazmi, it was the perfect moment to take a bold step forward. After nearly two years of operating out of his home kitchen and juggling personal deliveries, he longed to restore Bite's Story to a proper retail space. Yet this time, he wanted something more permanent than a campus stall or temporary kiosk. After weeks of scouting, Nazmi signed a lease on a shop lot in Seremban. To outsiders, it seemed like a modest space with bare walls, a simple counter, and only one doughnut machine. Yet to Nazmi, that space symbolised a headquarters, a hub where his brand could take root and reflect professionalism. Transforming the space took every ounce of his creativity and resourcefulness. He sketched out the layout himself, deciding where the fryer would stand, where customers could watch their doughnuts being decorated, and how the seating area could feel cozy yet efficient. Posters of colourful doughnuts lined the walls, and a glowing Bite's Story logo hung above the counter. When the doors opened, the response exceeded expectations. Customers who had followed his journey through the pandemic were eager to finally visit a dedicated store. Families drove in from neighbouring towns, students came back for nostalgic reunions, and curious first-timers queued to taste the doughnuts they had seen trending online. The Seremban shop soon became more than just a bakery. It grew into a symbol of survival and growth, a living proof that Bite's Story had outlasted the pandemic storm and was ready to embrace its next chapter.

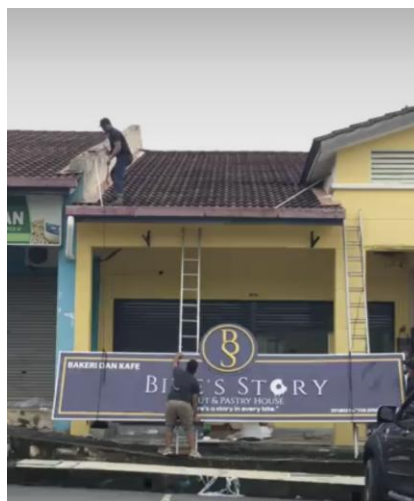


Figure 3: Bite's Story Headquarters in Seremban

With the central kitchen in Seremban supporting production, Nazmi believed that Bite's Story needed a wider footprint to compete with larger chains. By mid-2022, he had launched several other outlets in Port Dickson, Putrajaya, and Cyberjaya. The model was simple but effective. Each stall received 200 doughnuts daily from the Seremban headquarters. Staff at the outlets focused on sales and customer interaction while production remained centralised under Nazmi's watchful eye. This ensured consistency, although it also created heavy logistics, another burden he would later reflect on. For customers, the expansion was a welcome change. In Cyberjaya, office workers discovered Bite's Story via Foodpanda on lunch breaks, then became regulars at the physical stall. In Putrajaya, families stopping by after school runs treated their children to colourful doughnuts decorated with sprinkles and chocolate drizzle. Word-of-mouth referrals grew stronger with each passing week.

Expansion also brought diversification. Nazmi noticed that event planners often sought affordable yet creative desserts to serve at weddings, birthdays, and corporate functions. He seized the opportunity, offering catering packages for large orders. Mini doughnuts, in particular, became a hit. Their bite-sized appeal made them perfect for sharing at gatherings. To his surprise, these were popular with wedding planners who began ordering in bulk for events and ceremonies. By late 2022, Bite's Story was supplying doughnuts to dozens of monthly weddings and events, thanks to collaborations with eleven wedding and event planners. A bride in Port Dickson recalled how her guests swarmed the dessert table, choosing doughnuts decorated in her wedding colours. *"It was fun, unique, and delicious,"* she told Nazmi afterwards. Stories like these amplified the brand's reputation and opened doors to new customer segments.

Its collaborative approach to product development sets Bite's Story apart from larger chains. Nazmi believed customers wanted to feel more involved, so he invited them to create. Through social media campaigns, he encouraged customers to share flavour ideas. Some suggested combining local tastes like pandan and gula Melaka, while others wanted playful twists such as peanut butter with rainbow sprinkles. Nazmi tested the ideas in his kitchen, refining them until they worked. By 2023, Bite's Story offered 60 doughnut varieties, with 16 directly inspired by customer suggestions. These "community creations" became a talking point. This approach of co-

creation did more than simply add variety to the menu. It built a more profound sense of loyalty and gave customers the feeling that they were part of the brand's journey.

But beneath the growth, cracks were forming. The more Bite's Story grew, the more Nazmi realised growth came at a price, and he was the one paying it, in terms of energy, time, and peace of mind.

The Doughnut Industry in Malaysia: Opportunities and Pressures

On a busy Saturday afternoon at a shopping mall in Kuala Lumpur, it was common to see long queues forming outside doughnut chains like Big Apple, J.CO, Dunkin' Donuts and Krispy Kreme. Their brightly lit and strategically located outlets offered not just pastries but an entire experience. Customers snapped photos of colourful glazed doughnuts for Instagram, parents treated children after shopping, and young couples lingered over coffee and dessert. These were more than snacks. They were symbols of lifestyle and modern indulgence.

The food and beverage sector has long been one of Malaysia's most dynamic industries, contributing more than RM100 billion to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2022, employing hundreds of thousands of workers nationwide. Rising urbanisation, dual-income households, and a growing middle class have fuelled steady demand for affordable indulgences like doughnuts, cakes, and speciality beverages. Even within pastries, doughnuts have gained remarkable traction. Once perceived as a Western treat, doughnuts are deeply integrated into Malaysian food culture. Local adaptations, such as pandan, gula Melaka, or durian-flavoured toppings, have helped international chains connect with local palates. This cultural fusion created fertile ground for smaller players like Bite's Story, which could leverage authenticity, affordability, and community-driven branding.

Still, the dominance of international chains loomed large. Big Apple, for example, operates over 80 outlets nationwide with a strong franchising model. Its stores maintain consistent branding, including bright interiors, open kitchen concepts, and rows of attractive doughnuts displayed like jewels behind glass counters. Similarly, J.CO, originally from Indonesia, entered Malaysia with a premium positioning. Known for trendy branding and creative flavours, J.CO attracted younger

demographics who saw the brand as part of their lifestyle. Their outlets combined coffee culture with doughnut indulgence, turning casual snacking into social rituals. Dunkin' Donuts, though older and more established, maintained visibility by adapting menus with local favourites and by positioning itself as both a quick snack stops and a family-friendly brand. Together, these chains shaped consumer expectations by offering a wide variety, polished presentation, reliable consistency, and strong nationwide presence. For Nazmi, competing with such giants felt like standing in the shadow of skyscrapers while trying to grow a modest shop.



Figure 4: Bite's Story Outlet in Port Dickson

Despite the dominance of big brands, cracks in the market left room for local players. Malaysian consumers, particularly younger generations, increasingly valued affordable artisanal products and enjoyed supporting homegrown businesses. 68% of Malaysian consumers were willing to pay more for local brands if they offered unique flavours or personalised experiences. Nazmi recognised this shift. Unlike multinational chains, Bite' Story had the freedom to experiment with local flavours, such as onde-onde inspired doughnuts filled with palm sugar and coated in grated coconut. He could also involve customers in product design, giving them the rare opportunity to participate in the creative process. Affordability became another strength, as his doughnuts were priced lower than those sold by J.CO or Krispy Kreme, making them especially appealing to students and families. Most importantly, Nazmi built genuine personal connections with his customers by delivering boxes of doughnuts himself or naming flavours after their suggestions.

These qualities gave Bite's Story a sense of authenticity that resonated deeply within the local community.

However, Nazmi was not alone. Across Malaysia, numerous small bakeries and home-based entrepreneurs were entering the doughnut space. Social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok lowered entry barriers, enabling anyone with an oven and a smartphone to market their pastries, offering everything from viral Bomboloni to Cronuts. The rise of food and beverage entrepreneurship created a new reality for Bite's Story, where competition came from two different directions. On one side were the global chains, armed with vast resources, polished branding, and the ability to deliver consistency across every outlet. On the other side were countless micro-entrepreneurs who flooded the online market with trendy, low-cost treats that quickly captured the attention of budget-conscious customers. Nazmi often felt caught in the middle, too small to compete with the giants in marketing power, yet too structured to match the flexibility of home bakers who operated from their kitchens with little overhead expense.

The pandemic also reshaped how Malaysians consumed food. Online food delivery grew dramatically. Grab reported a 30% increase in orders nationwide between 2020 and 2022, while Foodpanda expanded aggressively into smaller towns. Nazmi adapted early, but scaling within this model came with challenges. Delivery platforms took significant commissions, sometimes as high as 30%. This squeezed tight margins for a small brand like Bite's Story. Balancing visibility on platforms with profitability became an ongoing struggle. At the same time, health consciousness was rising. Consumers began seeking baked alternatives, reduced sugar, or plant-based ingredients. Chains responded by offering "lite" versions of their products. Nazmi noticed customers occasionally asking for healthier variants, a request he had yet to fully explore.

These industry dynamics often left Nazmi torn. On one hand, he saw an opportunity where consumers craving local identity, affordable indulgence, and personalised experiences. On the other hand, he felt the pressure of expectations. Whenever he visited a mall and saw the polished counters of J.CO or the bustling lines at Big Apple, he wondered whether Bite's Story could achieve that level of visibility. That tension between opportunity and pressure, between local authenticity and global dominance, became the reality that defined the playing field for Bite's

Story. It was an industry where survival required not just passion for baking but also sharp business acumen, continuous innovation, and the ability to scale operations carefully without losing the essence of what made the brand unique.

Entrepreneurial Challenges

Running Bite's Story was never about flour, sugar, and oil. For Nazmi, each growth stage brought new challenges that tested his resilience and vision. In 2024, believing that automation could increase efficiency, Nazmi made a bold purchase. He invested RM12,000 in a new doughnut-making machine marketed as capable of producing 30 doughnuts per batch with perfect consistency. The reality, however, was sobering. The machine's output was erratic. Doughnuts emerged in uneven shapes, with textures that failed to meet the Bite's Story standard. Customers who were used to soft, fluffy products quickly noticed inconsistencies. Returns and complaints trickled in. Nazmi refused to abandon the investment too quickly. He experimented late into the night for weeks, adjusting recipes, altering frying times, and recalibrating settings. But no matter how much he tinkered, the results never aligned with his expectations. The financial loss was painful, but the time and energy drained were more costly.

Technology failures were not the only burden. Logistics soon became another invisible chain binding Nazmi to exhaustion. From his central kitchen in Seremban, he personally managed deliveries to outlets in Port Dickson, Putrajaya, and Cyberjaya, sometimes covering over 200 kilometres daily. His mornings began at 4:00 a.m., kneading dough and supervising production. By 9:00 a.m., trays were stacked in his car, and he set off on long delivery runs. The highways blurred together from Seremban to Cyberjaya, Cyberjaya to Putrajaya, then looping back through Port Dickson before returning home late at night. Each journey was gruelling. Traffic jams drained his patience, and carrying heavy trays left his back aching. By evening, when most entrepreneurs would sit to review accounts or plan strategy, Nazmi found himself collapsing onto the couch, too fatigued to think about growth. While competitors invested in third-party logistics or franchise networks, Nazmi remained tied to his car, sacrificing strategic foresight for operational survival.

“I spend so many hours on the road every single day,” he muttered, shaking his head. “By the time I return, I am too tired to think about new ideas or plan for the future. If this continues, how will I ever grow the business?”

If machines and logistics tested his stamina, manpower tested his patience. Scaling Bite’s Story required a reliable team, but finding employees who could replicate his standards was like searching for a needle in a haystack. Nazmi tried hiring fresh graduates, part-timers, and even relatives. Each came with promise, but none could consistently deliver the “Bite’s Story texture”, the softness, uniformity, and flavour balance that customers had grown to expect. Some employees rushed the process, producing doughnuts that were undercooked inside. Others lacked the discipline to maintain hygiene or presentation standards. Customers noticed. A slightly smaller doughnut or a topping applied unevenly was enough to spark complaints. Nazmi attempted to create training manuals and spent hours coaching new hires, but many left after a short time, unable to handle the long hours or modest pay typical of small F&B businesses. Eventually, Nazmi returned to making the doughnuts himself, ensuring quality but trapping production capacity within his personal limits. At night, while reviewing accounts, he often sighed,

“If I cannot build a reliable team, then Bite’s Story will never grow beyond me. But if I keep doing everything myself, how long before I burn out?”



Figure 5: One of the Bite’s Story Promotion Campaigns in Social Media

Perhaps the most draining challenge came from within, through his partnership with Sazrin. When they first launched Bite's Story, their roles were clearly defined, with Nazmi taking charge of product development and daily operations while Sazrin managed finances and marketing. In the beginning, this arrangement worked well. Their shared vision kept them moving forward, and their different strengths complemented each other in a way that gave the business stability and momentum. But as the business grew, cracks appeared. Sazrin's involvement in financial management began to feel increasingly superficial. Bookkeeping was often delayed, and financial planning lacked the depth Nazmi needed to make informed expansion decisions. Marketing efforts dwindled, leaving Nazmi to shoulder not just operations but also promotions. Their meetings became rare, and when they did sit down, discussions focused narrowly on immediate profits rather than long-term strategy. Nazmi longed for conversations about franchising models, branding campaigns, or exploring healthier product lines. Instead, he found himself alone in those dreams. Nazmi felt abandoned in the trenches, forced to micromanage every detail from machine maintenance to staff training, daily deliveries, customer complaints, and even menu innovations. The more he carried, the less he trusted Sazrin, and Bite's Story became a one-man show.

Individually, each challenge was manageable. Together, they formed a cycle of exhaustion that weighed heavily on Nazmi's spirit. Machines that failed, endless roads that drained him, disappointed staff, and a disengaged partner all contributed to his growing dilemma. Bite's Story had the product, the customers, and the brand potential. Yet beneath the surface, Nazmi felt like he was treading water, barely keeping afloat under the weight of responsibilities.

Steps Toward Improvement

Despite the fatigue that weighed on him, Nazmi's entrepreneurial spirit refused to be extinguished. Each challenge he faced forced him to think critically about what needed to change. He shifted his mindset from simply "working harder" to "working smarter." The first step was acknowledging that his time was his most limited resource. Between dough-making, deliveries, firefighting, and daily problems, he had little room left for creativity or strategy. He realised that Bite's Story would remain trapped in a cycle of stagnation unless he could reclaim his time.

Nazmi began exploring practical solutions. He plans to design structured production schedules, reducing his tendency to experiment endlessly with machines outside of working hours. He considered contacting machine suppliers for formal training sessions and even considered visiting other bakeries to learn best practices.

“If I want breakthroughs, I need to study technology systematically, not randomly,” he told himself.

For logistics, he researched third-party delivery services beyond just Grab and Foodpanda. Courier firms specialising in business-to-business (B2B) distribution offered subscription models that, while not cheap, could save him hours on the road. He calculated that outsourcing even half of his daily routes could give him back at least 15–20 hours per week, precious time he could reinvest in planning and innovation.

Human capital remained his most significant hurdle, but Nazmi refused to relinquish the dream of building a team. Instead of relying on untrained part-timers, he envisioned partnerships with Polytechnic institutions and vocational colleges. Students from culinary programs could be offered internships, providing him with motivated trainees while giving them real-world experience. Nazmi began drafting training modules with step-by-step guides on dough preparation, frying techniques, hygiene standards, and customer service to ensure consistency. He wanted new recruits to learn how to make doughnuts and embody the Bite’s Story ethos, which rested on passion, precision, and pride. He also thought about building a core team of permanent staff, perhaps three to four people he could invest in long-term. They would become the backbone of operations, ensuring that even if he stepped away, the quality and culture of the business would remain intact.

The partnership with Sazrin was a thorny issue. He began to draft ideas for regular management meetings where both partners could sit down, review performance, and plan ahead. At times, Nazmi considered the possibility of restructuring the partnership, either by renegotiating equity stakes or even bringing in an additional partner who could add value. While not an easy decision, he realised that Bite’s Story could no longer thrive if the partnership dynamic remained unbalanced.

Delegation was equally important. Nazmi recognised that he had been clinging to every detail out of fear of failure. But he also understood that a business could not grow if the founder refused to let go. Small steps, like assigning routine kitchen tasks to assistants and outsourcing deliveries, became part of his plan to free himself for higher-level thinking.

“If I can free up my time, train a reliable team, restructure partnerships, and innovate consistently,” he thought, “Bite’s Story could move from survival to growth.”



Figure 6: Newspaper feature highlighting Nazmi as founder of Bite’s Story

A Glimpse of Possibility

Above all, Nazmi knew that innovation was his strength. Customers loved that Bite’s Story offered flavours inspired by their own suggestions. Of the 60 doughnut menu options, 16 came directly from customer ideas. It is proof of the brand’s collaborative DNA. He wanted to push this further, perhaps even launching seasonal community challenges where customers could compete to design the next bestseller. Health-conscious products also lingered in his mind. Could Bite’s Story create baked, low-sugar, or plant-based doughnuts for the growing wellness segment? This was unexplored territory in the Malaysian doughnut market, and he wondered if it could be his competitive edge against both global giants and home-based competitors.

Nazmi also entertained bigger ideas. What if Bite's Story embraced a franchising model? Instead of personally managing every outlet, he could license the brand, recipes, and training to aspiring entrepreneurs. This would allow expansion without the bottleneck of his physical presence. Alternatively, he thought about cloud kitchens with centralised production units that served multiple delivery-only outlets. Such a model required less overhead than full retail shops and could align with the rising trend of online food delivery. Catering also offered potential. Bite's Story had already gained traction in supplying weddings, birthdays, and corporate functions. He could tap into a lucrative revenue stream by formalising this into a structured service, with packages for bulk orders.

Sustainability, too, entered his thoughts. With global conversations around food waste and eco-friendly packaging, Nazmi wanted Bite's Story to evolve responsibly. He could experiment with biodegradable packaging and consider partnerships with local suppliers to reduce his carbon footprint. Positioning Bite's Story as both delicious and responsible could resonate strongly with younger, socially conscious consumers.

As he lay out these ideas in his notebook late at night, Nazmi felt a flicker of hope. For the first time in months, he was not just reacting to problems but actively envisioning solutions. The road ahead was still uncertain, and execution would not be easy. Yet Nazmi's willingness to rethink his role and embrace new models marked a turning point. Bite's Story had been born from resilience, and with the proper steps, it could evolve into a brand with staying power.

Epilogue

It was nearly midnight in Seremban, and the bakery was finally quiet. The last trays had been washed, the counters wiped down, and the hum of machines faded into silence. Nazmi sat alone on a stool behind the counter, notebook open before him. The faint smell of fried dough still lingered in the air, sweet yet heavy, much like the thoughts that pressed on his mind. He looked at the numbers scribbled on the pages, which included sales volumes, delivery costs, staff wages, and machine repairs. To outsiders, Bite's Story seemed vibrant, with social media posts displaying smiling customers, creative flavours, and boxes of doughnuts packed and ready for delivery. Yet

behind the curtain, Nazmi knew the truth. The business stood at a crossroads, and the subsequent decision would shape not only his brand but also his life.

In one vision, Bite's Story remained modest but steady. He could scale back expansion, limit operations to one or two outlets, and focus on maintaining quality. This path promised manageable stress and more personal time. Customers would still enjoy his doughnuts, and he would safeguard the reputation he had worked so hard to build. But this vision also carried the risk of stagnation. Would Bite's Story fade into obscurity as larger chains and trendier newcomers dominated the market?

In the other vision, he pursued aggressive growth. He could franchise, expand to new towns, introduce healthier lines, and invest in advanced equipment. Bite's Story might one day stand shoulder-to-shoulder with J.CO, Big Apple, and Dunkin'. The thought thrilled him. Yet he knew such ambition came with immense risks, including financial debt, relentless operational demands, and the possibility of personal burnout. Could he handle the pressure without breaking?

Nazmi stared at the blank half of the notebook page, torn between two futures – security versus ambition, survival versus dominance. As the clock ticked past midnight, Nazmi whispered to himself,

“If I keep pushing, maybe I can build something bigger than myself. But if I slow down, am I betraying my dream?”

One truth remained as he closed his notebook and turned off the lights. The future of Bite's Story, whether it remained a beloved local bakery or evolved into a nationwide contender, depended on what Nazmi chose to do next.

The room was silent, but the weight of the question was deafening.