

# Adoption and Use of Digital Marketing Tools Among Food and Beverage MSMEs in Gen Z

Digital Marketing  
Applications in Food  
and Beverage MSMEs

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## ABSTRACT

*This study examines the adoption of digital marketing applications by food and beverage Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Indonesia, specifically targeting Generation Z consumers. The objectives include identifying internal and external factors influencing digital adoption, understanding Gen Z digital behavior and its impact on MSME marketing strategies, exploring the forces and drivers of sustained digital engagement, and promoting a framework linking MSME capabilities, digital platform features, and Gen Z expectations. Using qualitative, literature-based descriptive research, this study reviewed relevant publications covering the years 2018 to 2025. Findings indicate that although MSMEs are increasingly using platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp Business, they often face challenges such as limited digital skills, time constraints, and financial resources. Gen Z's demand for personalized, fast, and interactive content forces MSMEs to adapt their marketing strategies through storytelling, influencer engagement, and peer-driven content. However, inconsistent use and a lack of strategic planning remain significant barriers. This study advances the digital entrepreneurship literature by examining the relationship between MSME behavior and Gen Z digital culture and provides practical insights for MSMEs and policymakers.*

**Keywords:** Beverage Industry Food, Digital Marketing, Generation Z, MSMEs, Social Media.

## ABSTRAK

*Studi ini menerapkan adopsi aplikasi pemasaran digital oleh Usaha Mikro, Kecil, dan Menengah (UMKM) makanan dan minuman di Indonesia, khususnya yang menyoar konsumen Generasi Z. Tujuannya meliputi mengidentifikasi faktor internal dan eksternal yang mempengaruhi adopsi digital, memahami perilaku digital Gen Z dan dampaknya terhadap strategi pemasaran UMKM, mengeksplorasi kekuatan dan pendorong keterlibatan digital yang berkelanjutan, dan mendorong kerangka kerja yang menghubungkan kapabilitas UMKM, fitur platform digital, dan ekspektasi Gen Z. Dengan menggunakan deskriptif kualitatif berbasis literatur, penelitian ini publikasi yang relevan mencakup tahun 2018 hingga 2025. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa meskipun UMKM semakin banyak menggunakan platform seperti Instagram, TikTok, dan WhatsApp Business, mereka sering menghadapi tantangan seperti keterbatasan keterampilan digital, kendala waktu, dan sumber daya keuangan. Permintaan Gen Z akan konten yang dipersonalisasi, cepat, dan interaktif memaksa UMKM untuk mengadaptasi strategi pemasaran mereka melalui cerita, keterlibatan influencer, dan konten yang digerakkan oleh rekan sejawat. Namun, penggunaan yang tidak konsisten dan kurangnya strategi perencanaan tetap menjadi hambatan yang signifikan. Kajian ini meningkatkan literatur kewirausahaan digital dengan*

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*meneliti hubungan antara perilaku UMKM dan budaya digital Gen Z, serta memberikan wawasan praktis bagi UMKM dan pembuat kebijakan.*

**Kata kunci:** *Generation Z, Food and Beverage Industry, Social Media, Digital Marketing, MSMEs.*

## INTRODUCTION

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) form the backbone of many emerging economies, including Indonesia. Within this group, the Food and Beverage (F&B) sector plays a vital role in job creation, cultural preservation, and regional development. The rapid changes brought about by technological innovation and shifting demographics demand that these businesses evolve quickly. Digital transformation, particularly through marketing tools like Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp Business, GoFood, and ShopeeFood, provides new avenues for reaching customers and enhancing competitiveness at relatively low costs (Agustian et al., 2023; Felix & Rembulan, 2023).

Despite this potential, digital adoption among MSMEs in the F&B sector remains inconsistent. Many MSMEs still struggle with limited skills, low financial capacity, and an unclear understanding of how to translate digital marketing into sales or brand loyalty (Hasyim & Bakri et al., 2025; Mariana et al., 2025). This challenge is even more critical when targeting Generation Z (Gen Z), a consumer group known for its digital fluency, fast-paced decision-making, and demand for authenticity and personalization (Vitsentzidou et al., 2022; Suryaningrum et al., 2023).

Gen Z consumers, born after 1995, are not just buyers; they are active participants in digital ecosystems. They use social media, engage with influencers, write reviews, and shape brand narratives through interactive content (Coman et al., 2020; Lantang et al., 2024). As a result, F&B MSMEs are under increasing pressure to build engaging, transparent, and interactive marketing strategies that resonate with these behaviors. However, most existing research either generalizes across all MSME sectors or fails to examine this segment-specific dynamic deeply. Digital marketing is often treated as a side activity instead of a strategic necessity, leading to poor consumer engagement, low visibility, and inconsistent branding (Afifah et al., 2022; Sharabati et al., 2024). Research by Homburg and Wielgos (2022) and Liu et al. (2023) points out that the value businesses attribute to digital marketing depends heavily on their internal capabilities and understanding of platform features. Yet, many MSMEs still use these tools without a clear roadmap for strategic adaptation, especially when trying to engage Gen Z consumers.

Internal factors like the digital literacy of owners, openness to change, and human resource capacity remain significant barriers or enablers of digital engagement (Noor & Mulyana, 2024; Sharma & Sharma, 2024; Annisa & Sutjipto, 2025). External factors such as government support, peer influence, infrastructure readiness, and feedback from customers also shape digital marketing behavior (Bruce et al., 2023; Aji et al., 2023). There remains a clear research gap in understanding how F&B MSMEs specifically engage in the adoption and use of digital marketing when targeting Gen Z consumers. Most studies focus broadly on digital transformation without zooming in on the iterative processes involved, such as experimentation, learning, and adapting marketing strategies based on feedback (Vendraminelli, 2023; Cosa, 2024). Theoretical models like technology acceptance frameworks often ignore the unique behavioral traits of Gen Z, making them less effective in explaining the digital behavior of MSMEs in this space (De Castro et al., 2023).

This study aims to explore how food and beverage MSMEs in Indonesia adopt and use digital marketing applications to target Generation Z consumers. The objectives are to identify internal and external factors influencing digital adoption and understand how Generation Z's digital habits influence the marketing strategies of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). Furthermore, it will examine the persistent challenges and drivers in maintaining digital engagement. Furthermore, it will propose a framework that connects MSME capabilities, platform characteristics, and Generation Z expectations. The study's contribution lies in expanding the literature on digital

entrepreneurship and MSME transformation, as well as providing practical insights for policymakers and stakeholders in supporting MSME competitiveness in the digital economy.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Digital Marketing Adoption in MSMEs**

Digital marketing tools such as social media, mobile apps, and e-commerce platforms have become essential for the competitiveness of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), especially in the Food and Beverage (F&B) sector. Several studies have explored the factors that influence the adoption of these tools. Key enablers include owner-manager digital literacy, perceived ease of use, cost-effectiveness, and integration with daily operations (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015; Coman et al., 2020; Bruce et al., 2023). Internal capabilities, such as openness to innovation and readiness to experiment with platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp Business, are also crucial (Dabas et al., 2021; Afifah et al., 2022). However, many MSMEs still face significant barriers. These include limited technical skills, financial constraints, and a lack of strategic digital vision (Eze et al., 2021; Pranata et al., 2022). Prayudi et al. (2024) and Sulistyono et al. (2025) found that in cities like Bandung and Melaka, even when access to digital media exists, effective usage remains low due to these internal gaps. Moreover, external pressures such as market competition, platform algorithm changes, and shifting consumer behavior add complexity to digital adoption (Rahmawati et al., 2023; Lantang et al., 2024).

Technology adoption models such as TAM and UTAUT provide useful frameworks but are often too linear to capture the iterative, trial-and-error nature of adoption in small businesses (Jadhav et al., 2023; Sharma & Sharma, 2024). Empirical evidence shows that adoption is rarely a one-time decision, but a gradual learning process shaped by feedback loops and peer influence (Buvár & Gáti, 2023; Aji et al., 2023). Digital transformation for MSMEs is a multidimensional journey, requiring both internal adaptability and external support systems (Suryaningrum et al., 2023; Sharabati et al., 2024).

### **Generation Z as a Digital Consumer Segment**

This section discusses the distinctive characteristics of Generation Z and their implications for marketing strategies designed for this demographic. Generation Z is known for growing up in the digital age, making them highly responsive to online content, social media trends, and peer influence (Răduț, 2021; Kusaini & Amalianita, 2024). This generation favors authenticity, immediacy, visual storytelling, and interactive platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. Research conducted by Xie et al. (2022) and Hongyun et al. (2025) indicates that Gen Z consumers are more likely to engage with brands that demonstrate transparency, social responsibility, and personalized interactions. Unlike Millennials, who may still respond positively to traditional digital advertising, Gen Z exhibits a strong preference for influencer content, user-generated media, and gamified marketing experiences (Maulana et al., 2025; Correia, 2025; Scorita, 2025). Their high expectations and short attention span present significant challenges for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) that may lack the necessary digital branding experience. Understanding Gen Z's decision-making behaviors, content preferences, and trust-building mechanisms is crucial for MSMEs seeking to effectively leverage digital marketing platforms (Reniati et al., 2024; Ridwan et al., 2025; Kuran & Khabbaz, 2025). This section emphasizes the importance of treating Gen Z not just as a demographic but as a unique digital culture that requires a distinct marketing approach (Wajdi et al., 2024; Van den Bergh, 2024). By recognizing these characteristics, MSMEs can better align their strategies to meet the expectations of this influential consumer segment.

### **Platform Affordances and Strategic Use by MSMEs**

Generation Z, born after 1995, represents a digitally native group that interacts with brands primarily through social and mobile platforms. Their online behavior is shaped by speed, authenticity, and visual storytelling favoring content formats like short videos, memes, and live interactions. Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube are central to their digital lives, making them critical channels for businesses seeking to connect with this cohort. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z values brand transparency, social responsibility, and a sense of shared identity. They are more likely to trust user-generated content and influencer recommendations than traditional advertisements (Dabas et al., 2021; Rahmawati et al., 2023). This generational preference for personalized, community-driven engagement presents both opportunities and challenges for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). Gen Z's short attention spans and demand for real-time interaction require agile, creative marketing strategies, something many MSMEs struggle with due to limited branding resources and digital experience (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015; Afifah et al., 2022). Sulisty et al. (2025) emphasize that successful outreach to Gen Z must go beyond product promotion to include interactive narratives and socially meaningful messaging. Moreover, Lantang et al. (2024) highlights how Gen Z's purchase decisions are often influenced by peer reviews and digital peer communities. These trends underscore the importance of understanding Gen Z not just as a demographic, but as a cultural force driving digital consumption. MSMEs that adapt to this shift by creating engaging, relatable, and value-driven content can improve customer connection and brand loyalty (Buvár & Gáti, 2023; Sharabati et al., 2024). Treating Gen Z as co-creators in the digital experience is essential for effective digital marketing strategies in the food and beverage MSME sector.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative research method with a descriptive approach, focusing on the use of digital marketing applications by Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the food and beverage industry to reach Generation Z consumers. The primary objective is to gain insight into how these businesses leverage digital tools to reach this unique demographic. Rather than collecting new data through surveys or interviews, this research is based on a comprehensive review and analysis of existing literature, including studies, reports, and journal articles published between 2018 and 2025.

The data sources for this study were carefully selected from trusted and reputable sources, including academic journals, government reports, business publications, and case studies related to digital marketing. These sources were chosen because of their relevance to the research's main themes, this research covers several important aspects such as the implementation of digital marketing tools by Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), Generation Z's online habits and preferences and the strategies used by MSMEs to attract and retain customers from Generation Z. By understanding these three aspects, this research aims to provide deeper insights into how MSMEs can adapt to changes in consumer behavior and utilize digital marketing tools to increase their competitiveness in an increasingly competitive market. The analysis was conducted descriptively, focusing on identifying patterns, examples, and trends in literature. This approach allows the study to shed light on the current landscape of MSME digital marketing practices, highlighting successful strategies, challenges faced, and valuable lessons learned from their experiences. This qualitative study provides a nuanced understanding of the relationship between MSME marketing strategies and Gen Z digital behaviors, offering insights that can inform future practices and policies in the digital economy.

## **RESULTS**

### **Patterns of Digital Marketing Adoption Among MSMEs**

Food and beverage MSMEs are increasingly adopting digital marketing platforms to expand their market reach, particularly targeting Generation Z consumers. Initial

adoption typically starts with widely accessible and low-cost tools such as Instagram, WhatsApp Business, ShopeeFood, and Tokopedia. These platforms are preferred due to their simplicity, visual orientation, and alignment with Gen Z's online habits. Most MSMEs begin by using these applications for product showcasing, basic promotions, and engaging directly with customers through chats or comments. However, the adoption process is rarely seamless. Many MSMEs face difficulties in selecting platforms that match their customer base and business goals. A significant number of MSMEs operate without a clear digital marketing strategy, often relying on informal methods such as trial and error or assistance from younger family members who are more tech-savvy (Afifah et al., 2022).

Challenges such as limited digital literacy, inconsistent content posting, and lack of understanding of data insights are commonly reported. Older business owners show hesitation in adopting newer or more complex features, which slows digital growth. Despite these constraints, a gradual shift is visible. Some MSMEs have begun exploring more advanced features like Instagram Stories, TikTok live streaming, and sponsored posts to increase visibility (Aji et al., 2023). These businesses demonstrate a growing awareness that digital marketing is not merely an optional tool but a strategic necessity. They are transitioning from casual to more planned usage, incorporating branding elements, hashtags, influencer collaborations, and customer feedback into their digital strategies. The findings reveal that although adoption patterns remain uneven, the overall direction is positive. With increased exposure, peer learning, and support systems such as government training or platform tutorials, MSMEs are slowly evolving their approach. Digital marketing is increasingly viewed as a vital component for business sustainability, especially when aiming to connect with the digitally native and trend-driven Generation Z audience.

### **Understanding Generation Z's Digital Behavior and Its Impact on MSMEs**

Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, has emerged as a highly influential consumer group, particularly in the digital marketplace. Their preferences are shaped by continuous interaction with mobile technology and social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. For food and beverage MSMEs aiming to engage this segment, traditional promotional methods are no longer sufficient. According to Lantang et al. (2024) and Scorita (2025) Gen Z relies heavily on peer-generated reviews, influencer content, and short, engaging videos when making purchasing decisions, which has significantly impacted how MSMEs formulate their digital marketing strategies. MSMEs that successfully connect with Gen Z often do so through content that is interactive, authentic, and visually driven. Common practices include the use of Instagram Reels, TikTok challenges, and WhatsApp status updates to humanize their brands and foster emotional connection.

Storytelling and the inclusion of user-generated content have proven effective in sustaining interest and encouraging peer-to-peer sharing (Lei, 2024). These approaches create a sense of community and relevance, which Gen Z values highly. Another critical factor is personalization. MSMEs that create content tailored to Gen Z's values such as environmental consciousness, cultural identity, or local pride tend to receive better engagement and loyalty (Wiyasa & Mahadi, 2025). Simple, relatable messaging delivered through entertaining formats is preferred over polished but impersonal advertising. MSMEs that understand and mirror these preferences often experience improved brand recognition and customer retention. However, the findings also reveal a persistent gap. Many MSMEs still struggle to decode Gen Z's fast-evolving digital behaviors. Without clear analytics skills or platform-specific strategies, some fail to make meaningful connections. As a result, their digital marketing efforts may fall flat or be perceived as irrelevant. Thus, MSMEs that take time to understand and adapt to Gen Z's habits are more likely to stand out and achieve sustainable growth in the competitive digital space.

### **Key Barriers and Strategic Responses in Digital Marketing Use**

Despite the increasing importance of digital marketing for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the food and beverage industry, many still face significant challenges in adopting and effectively utilizing these tools. One of the most common barriers is limited digital literacy among MSME owners (Rujitoningtyas et al., 2025). Often, these entrepreneurs focus solely on day-to-day operations and ensuring product quality, leaving them with little time or energy to develop necessary digital marketing skills. This lack of focus on digital capabilities often results in a lack of strategic planning, inconsistent content creation, and a reliance on basic digital platform features without fully exploring their potential. Financial constraints further complicate the situation. Many MSMEs hesitate to invest in paid promotions, sophisticated digital tools, or training programs that could enhance their marketing efforts. As a result, they often rely on organic growth and trial-and-error methods, which can be slow and frustrating. While initial enthusiasm may encourage them to engage in digital marketing, many owners are disappointed when they experience low engagement rates or struggle to understand how to measure success through analytics or insights. This lack of understanding can lead to sporadic posting cycles and ultimately lost engagement from digital platforms.

Furthermore, a lack of guidance and mentorship exacerbates these challenges, making it even more difficult for MSMEs to develop effective long-term marketing strategies. Without access to experienced mentors or a structured support system, many entrepreneurs feel isolated in their efforts to navigate the digital landscape (Hajjaj, 2025). However, the literature also highlights several examples of MSMEs successfully overcoming these obstacles. Some businesses have found innovative ways to enhance their digital marketing capabilities by collaborating with younger family members or freelancers who possess the necessary skills. This intergenerational collaboration not only helps with content creation but also fosters a culture of learning and adaptation within the business. Furthermore, participation in digital marketing workshops organized by local governments or Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) has proven beneficial for many MSMEs. These support systems, if utilized effectively, can significantly boost the confidence and skills of MSME owners, enabling them to engage more effectively with their target audiences.

Community networks, mentoring programs, and case studies of successful peers also provide valuable resources for learning and adaptation. While challenges such as skills gaps, time constraints, and lack of clarity remain, they are not impossible to overcome. With the right support, a positive mindset, and a commitment to learning incrementally, MSMEs can develop more consistent and impactful digital marketing strategies, especially when targeting the dynamic Generation Z segment. By capitalizing on these growth and collaboration opportunities, MSMEs can enhance their digital presence and ultimately drive business success in an increasingly competitive market.

### **DISCUSSION**

This study examines the adoption of digital marketing applications among food and beverage MSMEs targeting Generation Z, utilizing qualitative, literature-based insights. The findings indicate that although MSMEs are increasingly using digital platforms, their adoption is hampered by knowledge gaps, limited resources, and inconsistent content strategies. The study confirms that digital platforms are crucial for reaching the Gen Z market active on Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp. Research by Lantang et al. (2024) highlights the significant impact of digital marketing and payment methods on Gen Z purchasing decisions, while Rahmawati et al. (2023) underline the role of social media in supporting MSMEs during crises such as COVID-19.

However, many MSMEs struggle with continuous and strategic usage of these platforms. This aligns with findings by Pranata et al. (2022), who reported that technology adoption in Indonesia's F&B MSMEs is hindered by low digital skills and lack of

guidance. Moreover, Sulistyono et al. (2025) reveal that MSMEs in both Indonesia and Malaysia tend to adopt digital marketing tools inconsistently, often without long-term planning or measurement.

A key insight from the findings is that understanding Generation Z's behavior is crucial for success. Suryaningrum et al. (2023) show that Gen Z consumers respond strongly to personalization, social media engagement, and brand experience. MSMEs that tailor their content by using videos, influencer collaborations, and interactive posts are more likely to build trust and loyalty. This highlights a shift from simply "being online" to creating value-driven, engaging experiences.

The role of internal capabilities and mindset is also important. Studies such as those by Taiminen and Karjalainen (2015), as well as Sharma and Sharma (2024), show that MSMEs that adopt a learning attitude and empower younger team members are better at sustaining digital efforts. Entrepreneurs who invest time in learning about social media trends, tools, and analytics can better adapt their strategies. This supports the view of Eze et al. (2021), who emphasize the role of perceived value and organizational readiness in digital marketing adoption. The discussion also reflects on barriers that MSMEs encounter, including lack of time, technical skills, and budget. Coman et al. (2020) and Jadhav et al. (2023) argue that these barriers are common in SMEs worldwide, especially where owners are focused on daily operations and do not prioritize marketing. De Castro et al. (2023) found that even when digital tools are available, integration into business processes is often incomplete, limiting their impact.

Despite the challenges, several MSMEs overcome barriers through creative strategies, such as "Do-It-Yourself" (DIY) marketing, as explored by Emini and Merovci (2021), or by involving digitally literate employees or freelancers. Afifah et al. (2022) highlights that digital marketing significantly enhances business performance, especially when MSMEs align their content with market preferences and platform characteristics. Moreover, policy support and digital literacy programs can play a vital role in sustaining adoption. Bruce et al. (2023) and Aji et al. (2023) argue that government involvement in offering digital training and tools can increase MSME confidence and long-term platform use.

This study emphasizes that digital marketing is a strategic driver for entrepreneurial renewal. Vitsentzou et al. (2022) and Buvár and Gáti (2023) describe how digital marketing is reshaping the traditional marketing mix, enabling businesses to respond quickly to consumer behavior and trends. MSMEs must shift from casual social media use to strategic digital branding and audience segmentation. In conclusion, while digital marketing adoption among food and beverage MSMEs is increasing, this requires stronger internal capabilities, a better understanding of Gen Z behavior, and an ecosystem that supports sustainable growth.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that the adoption of digital marketing among food and beverage MSMEs targeting Generation Z presents both promising opportunities and ongoing challenges. The research highlights how digital platforms, particularly social media apps, serve as essential tools for reaching and engaging Gen Z consumers, who are highly mobile, visually oriented, and responsive to interactive content. MSMEs that successfully leverage these platforms are better positioned to personalize their offerings, increase visibility, and build strong brand relationships. However, despite growing awareness of its benefits, many MSMEs still struggle with the consistent and strategic use of digital marketing. A limitation of this study is that digital skills, time constraints, and budgetary constraints continue to hinder full adoption. Furthermore, some businesses lack long-term content plans or fail to align their strategies with Gen Z expectations and behaviors, leading to missed opportunities for customer engagement and retention.

The implication of this research is the need for MSMEs to develop digital literacy and internal capabilities, whether through self-directed learning, recruiting skilled individuals, or participating in external support programs. Building a stronger understanding of Gen Z preferences, such as their desire for personalized content, brand authenticity, and

seamless digital experiences, will be crucial to improving marketing performance. This research contributes to the growing literature on MSME digital transformation by focusing on the consumer side (Gen Z) and connecting it to practical business behavior. These findings underscore the importance of a more structured and adaptive digital marketing approach, especially for resource-constrained MSMEs. Future research could explore the effectiveness of training programs or policy interventions in supporting these efforts.

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