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Influencer-Based Marketing Strategies for Culinary Businesses on Instagram

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to examine the reasons why small-scale and home-based culinary business owners increasingly adopt Instagram influencer marketing despite its uncertain outcomes. It also seeks to evaluate the extent to which collaboration with influencers affects customers' purchase intentions and contributes to business growth.

Design/methodology/approach: A quantitative approach was employed through an online questionnaire distributed to 22 owners of various culinary businesses, most of which operate on a small or home-based scale. The collected data were analyzed to identify patterns in Instagram usage, influencer collaboration practices, and consumer responses to promotional activities.

Findings: The findings reveal that 77.3% of respondents manage home-based culinary businesses and rely on Instagram as their primary marketing channel. Influencer marketing significantly increases consumer interest, particularly when integrated with Instagram's visual features such as Stories, Reels, and feed posts. These features enhance brand exposure and foster positive consumer attitudes. However, small businesses face notable challenges, including high collaboration costs and difficulties in measuring the tangible impact of influencer campaigns.

Research implications: This study highlights the strategic importance of Instagram influencer marketing for small culinary enterprises in improving brand awareness, customer engagement, and sales performance. However, sustainable outcomes require integration with original content creation, direct customer interaction, and participatory promotional strategies. The findings contribute to the understanding of digital marketing adoption among micro and home-based food businesses and provide practical insights for optimizing influencer collaborations.

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Introduction

Developments in digital technology and the rapid expansion of the global economy have significantly transformed marketing practices across industries, including the culinary sector. The shift toward digitalization has encouraged businesses to move from conventional promotional channels to online platforms that enable broader reach, interactive engagement, and measurable performance outcomes. Social

media, in particular, has become a dominant marketing medium due to its ability to facilitate two-way communication, content sharing, and brand community building (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

Among various platforms, Instagram has emerged as a preferred channel for culinary businesses because of its visually oriented format. The platform allows businesses to present high-quality photos and short videos that stimulate consumers' sensory perceptions and emotional responses—an important factor in food marketing (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Casaló et al., 2020). Visual storytelling through features such as Stories, Reels, and feed posts enhances brand attractiveness and strengthens engagement, particularly among younger consumers who rely heavily on social media for product discovery (Appel et al., 2020).

In Indonesia, the rapid growth of internet penetration and social media adoption has accelerated the digital transformation of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), including home-based culinary businesses. Digital marketing is perceived as more cost-effective, flexible, and scalable compared to traditional advertising methods. For small businesses with limited budgets, social media offers an accessible platform to compete in increasingly open and globalized markets. This phenomenon aligns with the broader dynamics of globalization and free trade, where intensified competition requires businesses to adopt adaptive and innovative marketing strategies to remain sustainable (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

Recent literature emphasizes that social media marketing plays a crucial role in building brand relationships, trust, and customer loyalty. Engagement through social platforms positively influences brand attitude and purchase intention (Casaló et al., 2020). Furthermore, interactive communication and user-generated content contribute to stronger emotional attachment between consumers and brands (Appel et al., 2020). In the culinary context, visually appealing content significantly shapes consumers' perceived product quality and purchase decisions.

An important development in social media marketing is the rise of influencer marketing. Influencers are perceived as credible, relatable, and authentic sources of information, which enhances consumer trust and persuasion effectiveness (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Studies show that influencer credibility, attractiveness, and expertise positively affect consumers' attitudes toward endorsed products and increase purchase intention (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Moreover, micro-influencers are often considered more effective for niche markets and small businesses because of their closer relationships with followers and higher engagement rates (Casaló et al., 2020).

Despite extensive research on social media and influencer marketing, there remains a notable research gap. Many studies examine social media marketing in general or focus on large brands and mainstream industries. Limited research specifically investigates the effectiveness of Instagram influencer strategies for home-based culinary MSMEs, a segment that is rapidly growing yet highly vulnerable to uncertain promotional outcomes and limited financial resources. In addition, prior studies often analyze influencer effects without deeply exploring the integration of Instagram's visual features as a combined strategic approach that may amplify consumer buying interest.

Through creative, informative, and engaging visual content, supported by influencer collaborations, culinary businesses may enhance brand visibility, shape positive consumer attitudes, and stimulate purchase intention. Therefore, this study offers novelty by emphasizing the combined role of influencer partnerships and

Instagram's image-based features in strengthening marketing performance among small and home-based culinary enterprises.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the extent to which influencer-based marketing strategies on Instagram affect consumers' purchase intention and support the development of culinary MSMEs. It is expected that this research will provide practical guidance for business actors in optimizing digital promotion effectiveness and contribute academically to the growing body of literature on influencer-based marketing strategies. This study is based on the hypothesis that the use of influencers on Instagram has a positive effect on consumer purchase intention and enhances marketing outcomes for small culinary businesses.

Literature Review

Digital Marketing in the Culinary Industry

Digital marketing has evolved into a strategic necessity for businesses in the era of technological disruption and globalization. The integration of digital platforms into marketing communication enables firms to reach wider audiences, build interactive relationships, and generate measurable outcomes (Dwivedi et al., 2021). For culinary businesses, digital marketing is particularly relevant because food products rely heavily on sensory appeal and visual presentation to stimulate consumer interest. Social media marketing facilitates two-way communication between brands and consumers, fostering engagement and relationship quality (Appel et al., 2020). In the context of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), digital platforms offer scalability and flexibility that traditional advertising channels cannot provide. MSMEs benefit from lower promotional costs, real-time feedback, and targeted segmentation features, making digital marketing a practical and competitive tool (Tajvidi & Karami, 2017).

In food-related industries, visual appeal plays a decisive role in influencing perceived quality and purchase decisions. High-quality digital imagery and video content can increase perceived tastiness, product value, and brand attractiveness, thereby stimulating buying intention (Casaló et al., 2020). Therefore, digital marketing is not merely a communication channel but a strategic instrument for shaping consumer perception in the culinary sector.

Instagram as a Visual-Based Marketing Platform

Instagram is widely recognized as a visually oriented platform that enables brands to communicate through aesthetic imagery, short-form videos, and interactive features such as Stories and Reels. Visual-based communication is processed faster by consumers and tends to create stronger emotional engagement compared to text-based content (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Research suggests that visually appealing content significantly enhances brand attitude and purchase intention, particularly among younger users who rely on Instagram for product discovery (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). The platform's algorithm also supports content virality, increasing exposure potential for small businesses with limited marketing budgets.

Moreover, Instagram facilitates parasocial interaction—an emotional connection between users and content creators—which strengthens persuasive influence and brand trust (Lou & Yuan, 2019). For culinary MSMEs, the ability to display appetizing food visuals combined with interactive engagement features makes Instagram an effective promotional medium.

Influencer Marketing and Consumer Purchase Intention

Influencer marketing has become a dominant strategy within digital ecosystems. Influencers are perceived as opinion leaders who possess credibility, attractiveness, and expertise, which significantly affect consumers' attitudes toward endorsed products (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Their persuasive power stems from perceived authenticity and trustworthiness rather than formal advertising authority. Empirical studies show that influencer credibility positively influences consumer trust and purchase intention (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Similarly, Sokolova and Kefi (2020) found that parasocial relationships between followers and influencers significantly increase buying intention.

Micro-influencers, in particular, have gained attention due to their higher engagement rates and closer relationships with followers. Casaló et al. (2020) argue that perceived authenticity and relatability enhance the effectiveness of influencer endorsements. For culinary MSMEs, collaborating with micro-influencers may offer a cost-effective yet impactful promotional alternative compared to celebrity endorsers.

Digital Marketing Adoption among MSMEs

The adoption of digital marketing among MSMEs is driven by the need for competitiveness and operational efficiency. Social media technologies allow small businesses to improve market responsiveness, customer engagement, and brand awareness with relatively limited financial resources (Tajvidi & Karami, 2017). Digital platforms also enable performance tracking and consumer behavior analysis, although small businesses often face limitations in measuring return on investment (ROI) due to limited analytical capabilities (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Nevertheless, digital marketing contributes to cost reduction and broader market access, making it a strategic enabler for MSME growth.

In emerging economies, where internet penetration continues to rise, digital adoption among MSMEs plays a crucial role in strengthening economic resilience and competitiveness in open markets.

Consumer Engagement, Loyalty, and Behavioral Factors

Consumer engagement is a critical determinant of digital marketing success. Engagement—manifested through likes, comments, shares, and direct messages—strengthens brand relationships and enhances loyalty (Appel et al., 2020). Interactive communication fosters emotional attachment and long-term customer retention. Younger generations, particularly millennials and Gen Z, are the most active social media users and are highly responsive to influencer recommendations and visually driven content (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Their purchasing decisions are often influenced by online reviews, peer opinions, and social proof.

However, influencer marketing effectiveness depends on content relevance, creative design, and alignment with brand identity. Inauthentic collaborations or poorly designed promotional messages may reduce credibility and negatively impact consumer trust (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Furthermore, high collaboration costs and uncertain measurable outcomes remain significant challenges for small businesses.

Research Gap and Conceptual Contribution

Although prior studies confirm the positive impact of social media and influencer marketing on consumer behavior, limited research specifically examines the integrated role of Instagram's visual features and influencer collaboration in the

context of home-based culinary MSMEs. Most existing literature focuses on large brands or general social media effects without isolating the combined strategic mechanism of visual content optimization and influencer endorsement.

This study contributes by addressing this gap, emphasizing how influencer partnerships combined with Instagram's image-based features influence consumer purchase intention and support the growth of small culinary enterprises. The integration of visual marketing theory, influencer credibility theory, and MSME digital adoption perspectives provides a more comprehensive understanding of marketing effectiveness in this sector.

Methods

This study employed a quantitative survey design to examine the effectiveness of Instagram influencer marketing in increasing consumer purchase intention and supporting the growth of culinary MSMEs. Primary data were collected from 22 culinary business owners who actively use Instagram as a promotional medium, the majority of whom operate small-scale or home-based enterprises. The structured questionnaire included items measuring business characteristics, intensity of Instagram usage, utilization of visual features (feed, stories, and reels), frequency of influencer collaboration, perceived credibility and effectiveness of influencer promotions, and their impact on consumer buying interest. The measurement indicators were conceptually adapted from contemporary influencer marketing and digital engagement studies that emphasize credibility, authenticity, engagement, and behavioral intention (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Schouten et al., 2020). Secondary data were obtained from recent scholarly literature on digital marketing, influencer marketing, and MSME digital adoption to strengthen the theoretical framework and contextualize the findings (Vrontis et al., 2021).

Data were collected through an online questionnaire using predominantly closed-ended Likert-scale items to allow measurable analysis, complemented by limited open-ended responses to capture contextual insights. Respondents were screened to ensure they were active culinary entrepreneurs and Instagram users for promotional purposes. The data were analyzed using quantitative descriptive techniques to identify trends and patterns aligned with the research objectives, namely: (1) mapping the characteristics of culinary MSMEs using Instagram, (2) examining the intensity of visual feature utilization, (3) assessing the perceived influence of influencer collaboration on purchase intention, and (4) identifying challenges in implementing influencer-based marketing strategies. Given the exploratory nature of the study and the relatively small sample size, descriptive analysis was considered appropriate to interpret relationships between marketing practices and perceived outcomes. The findings were then interpreted in light of current influencer marketing and digital engagement frameworks to provide strategic implications for culinary MSMEs in the digital era.

Result and Discussion

Respondents Characteristic

The characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1. All respondents are directly involved in managing culinary businesses and actively utilize Instagram as a marketing platform. This criterion ensures that the data collected

accurately reflect the experiences and perceptions of business actors who implement digital marketing strategies in practice.

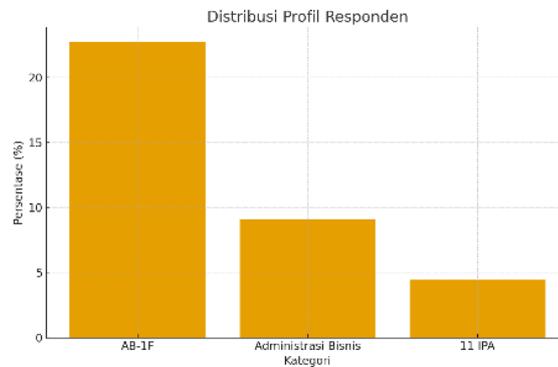
Table 1. Respondent Profile

Question	Information	Propose yourself (%)
Major/Class	AB-1F	22,7
Business Administration	9,1	9,1%
11 IPA	4,5	4,5%

Based on Table 1, the largest proportion of respondents came from the AB-1F class (22.7%), followed by those with a Business Administration background (9.1%) and respondents from the 11th grade science class (4.5%). Although the distribution indicates varied educational backgrounds, the overall composition suggests that most respondents belong to younger and productive age groups. This demographic profile is particularly relevant because younger entrepreneurs tend to be more adaptive to technological developments and more familiar with social media platforms.

The dominance of young culinary entrepreneurs in this study supports previous findings that younger generations are the most active internet users and demonstrate a higher tendency to adopt social media for commercial purposes (Iskandar et al., 2017). Their familiarity with digital platforms enhances their ability to utilize Instagram features such as visual content, interactive engagement tools, and influencer collaborations. Therefore, the respondent profile strengthens the relevance of this study in examining Instagram-based influencer marketing strategies within technology-oriented and digitally adaptive culinary MSMEs.

Figure 1. Respondent Profile Distribution Bar Chart



Types of Culinary Businesses

The types of culinary businesses operated by the respondents are presented in Table 2. The data show that the majority of respondents (77.3%) manage home-based culinary businesses. Meanwhile, 9.1% operate physical stores, and smaller proportions run restaurants (4.5%), food trucks (4.5%), and other types of culinary ventures (4.5%).

Table 2. Types of Culinary Businesses

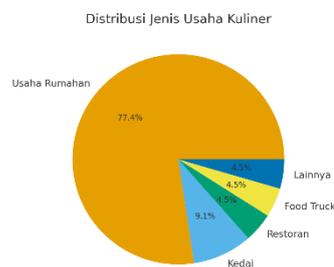
Type of Business	Propose yourself (%)
Home Business	77,3
Store	9,1
Restoran	4,5
Food Truck	4,5
Other	4,5

This distribution indicates that micro-scale and home-based enterprises dominate the sample, highlighting that small culinary entrepreneurs are the most active

users of Instagram as a promotional medium. Home-based businesses generally operate with limited capital and marketing budgets, making cost-efficient digital platforms highly attractive. Social media marketing enables these enterprises to reach broader audiences without incurring high advertising expenses associated with traditional media.

These findings align with the perspective that digital marketing adoption among MSMEs is largely driven by efficiency considerations, flexibility, and accessibility (Desembrianita et al., 2023). Instagram provides a low-cost yet high-visibility promotional channel, allowing home-based culinary businesses to compete in increasingly competitive markets. Therefore, the dominance of home businesses in this study reinforces the relevance of examining influencer-based marketing strategies within the context of micro and small-scale culinary enterprises.

Figure 2. Distribution Circle Diagram of Culinary Business Types



Utilization of Instagram in Culinary Marketing

The findings indicate that all respondents actively utilize Instagram as their primary promotional platform. Product presentation is predominantly conducted through visual-based content, including photos, short videos, Stories, Reels, and feed posts. Respondents emphasized that visually appealing content significantly enhances product attractiveness and stimulates audience curiosity. This reinforces the argument that visual-based social media plays a crucial role in shaping consumer perception and influencing behavioral intention, particularly in food-related businesses where sensory appeal is essential (Saputra et al., 2022).

The use of Instagram’s interactive features also contributes to higher engagement levels. Respondents reported increases in likes, comments, shares, profile visits, and overall reach after optimizing visual features consistently. This suggests that Instagram functions not only as a display platform but also as an engagement-driven marketing ecosystem.

Furthermore, the majority of respondents have collaborated with influencers, ranging from micro-influencers to those with broader audiences. Most business actors reported noticeable increases in engagement metrics following influencer partnerships. Higher interaction rates indicate improved visibility and audience exposure. These findings support previous research demonstrating that influencer endorsements enhance consumer trust and brand credibility, ultimately strengthening marketing performance (Bs et al., 2023). Influencer-generated content is perceived as more persuasive than direct brand advertising because it appears more relatable and experience-based.

The Influence of Influencers on Consumer Buying Interest

The survey results reveal that most respondents perceived a positive impact of influencer collaboration on consumer buying interest. Business actors observed increases in inquiries, direct messages, product orders, and overall sales performance after influencer promotions were published.

Several key factors were identified as determinants of promotional effectiveness:

1. Influencer–product compatibility – The alignment between the influencer’s persona, lifestyle, and the culinary product significantly affects audience acceptance. Respondents noted that mismatched collaborations reduce credibility and audience trust.
2. Quality of visual content – High-resolution, aesthetically appealing photos and engaging short videos enhance perceived product value and professionalism.
3. Follower size and engagement rate – While the number of followers contributes to exposure, respondents emphasized that engagement rate (active interaction) is more influential than sheer audience size.
4. Authenticity of recommendations – Honest and experience-based reviews generate stronger persuasive effects compared to scripted or overtly promotional content.

Interestingly, several respondents highlighted that collaborations with micro-influencers tend to produce more meaningful results compared to large-scale influencers. Micro-influencers are perceived as having closer relationships with their followers, leading to higher engagement rates and stronger trust formation. Their recommendations are often viewed as more authentic and relatable, which increases consumer confidence and purchase intention.

Overall, the findings suggest that influencer marketing effectiveness in culinary MSMEs is not solely determined by audience size, but rather by authenticity, engagement quality, visual presentation, and strategic alignment between influencer identity and brand positioning. These results underline the importance of carefully selecting influencers and integrating visually compelling content to maximize the impact on consumer buying interest.

Discussion

The findings confirm that digital marketing—particularly through visually oriented platforms such as Instagram—plays a strategic role in strengthening brand visibility and stimulating consumer purchase intention among culinary MSMEs. The dominance of visual content (photos, short videos, Stories, and Reels) supports the theoretical perspective that digital environments enhance brand–consumer interaction through engaging and immersive communication formats (Appel et al., 2020). From a cost-efficiency standpoint, Instagram provides an accessible promotional medium for micro and home-based culinary enterprises with limited capital. This aligns with research suggesting that social media reduces promotional costs while expanding market reach, making it particularly valuable for small businesses operating in competitive environments (Tajvidi & Karami, 2017). The findings further reinforce the notion that digital marketing adoption among MSMEs is driven by flexibility, scalability, and measurable engagement outcomes (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Moreover, the results demonstrate that engagement metrics—such as likes, comments, and reach—function as social proof mechanisms that influence consumer perceptions. In

digital marketing theory, such interactive signals strengthen perceived popularity and credibility, which in turn shape purchase intention.

This study confirms that influencer marketing significantly enhances consumer buying interest in the culinary sector. However, effectiveness is contingent upon several critical factors: (a) audience–influencer compatibility, (b) congruence between visual content and product character, and (c) authenticity of endorsements. The importance of influencer–brand fit supports endorsement congruence theory, which posits that alignment between the influencer’s persona and the brand increases persuasive effectiveness (Schouten et al., 2020). When culinary products are promoted by influencers whose lifestyle and content themes match the product category, audiences perceive the endorsement as more credible and relevant.

Authenticity emerged as a decisive factor in influencing purchase intention. This finding aligns with influencer credibility theory, which emphasizes that trustworthiness and perceived honesty significantly impact consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Consumers are more likely to respond positively to experience-based, unscripted testimonials rather than overtly commercial promotions.

Interestingly, the finding that micro-influencers often generate stronger engagement and more meaningful purchase responses provides an important managerial implication for culinary MSMEs. Previous studies suggest that micro-influencers foster closer parasocial relationships, leading to higher perceived authenticity and relational trust (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). While some earlier perspectives emphasized the broad reach of macro-influencers, this study highlights that engagement quality and audience relevance may outweigh follower quantity in determining campaign success. This contributes to the growing body of literature suggesting that influencer effectiveness should be measured through engagement depth rather than audience size alone.

Despite its effectiveness, the study also identifies several challenges in implementing influencer marketing strategies. First, high collaboration costs associated with large influencers pose financial constraints for MSMEs. This reflects a common tension in digital marketing between reach maximization and cost efficiency. Second, respondents reported difficulties in quantitatively measuring campaign impact, particularly in attributing sales directly to influencer promotions. This challenge is consistent with broader digital marketing research highlighting attribution complexity and limitations in performance tracking among small enterprises (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Third, mismatches between influencer image and brand identity can reduce credibility and weaken persuasive impact. Endorsement incongruence may create skepticism among consumers, thereby diminishing campaign effectiveness (Schouten et al., 2020). Finally, limitations in content quality—either due to inadequate creative direction or inconsistent branding—may undermine promotional outcomes. Effective social media marketing requires strategic content design and integration rather than isolated promotional posts (Appel et al., 2020). Without a coherent content strategy, influencer collaborations may fail to generate sustainable brand equity.

Overall, the discussion highlights that while influencer marketing is a powerful strategic tool for culinary MSMEs, its success depends on careful influencer selection, authenticity, visual quality, engagement optimization, and performance evaluation mechanisms. The findings reinforce contemporary digital marketing theory that emphasizes relational trust, engagement intensity, and strategic congruence as primary drivers of consumer purchase intention in social media environments.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Instagram functions as a strategic and cost-efficient promotional platform for culinary MSMEs, particularly home-based enterprises. Its visual-oriented features—such as photos, videos, Stories, and Reels—enable businesses to enhance product attractiveness, strengthen brand visibility, and shape positive consumer perceptions. The findings confirm that digital engagement mechanisms on Instagram contribute significantly to increasing consumer buying interest. Influencer marketing emerges as an effective strategy in amplifying promotional impact. Collaborations with influencers—especially those whose audience profile aligns with the target market and who deliver authentic, experience-based content—are associated with higher engagement and stronger purchase intention. The study also highlights that micro-influencers may generate more meaningful outcomes due to closer audience relationships and higher perceived credibility. However, the effectiveness of influencer marketing is not automatic. It depends on strategic alignment between influencer persona and brand identity, content quality, authenticity of endorsements, cost considerations, and the ability of business owners to integrate influencer campaigns with consistent and interactive communication strategies. Influencer marketing should therefore be positioned as part of a broader digital marketing ecosystem rather than as a standalone promotional tactic. Despite its contributions, this study has limitations, particularly the relatively small sample size, which restricts generalizability. Future research is recommended to involve larger and more diverse samples, incorporate inferential statistical analysis, and explore additional variables such as engagement metrics, return on investment (ROI), and long-term brand equity. Such expansion would provide deeper insights into the sustainability and scalability of influencer-based marketing strategies for culinary MSMEs in the evolving digital landscape.

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