

The Impact of Viral Marketing on Generation Z's Purchase Intention toward Food-Sector MSME Products

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Keywords: <i>Viral marketing; Purchase intention; Generation Z; Food-sector MSMEs; Digital marketing.</i> DOI: 10.22437/4pn1eq61 Received: March 18th, 2025 Reviewed: April 12th, 2025 Accepted: May 20th, 2025	<i>This study examines the impact of viral marketing on Generation Z's purchase intention toward food-sector Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise (MSME) products. As digital natives, Generation Z actively engages with social media, making viral marketing an increasingly important strategy for promoting food products. This research employed a quantitative approach using descriptive and explanatory research designs. Data were collected through questionnaires distributed to 202 Generation Z respondents selected using purposive sampling. The research instrument was tested for validity and reliability, while data analysis included descriptive statistics, classical assumption tests, simple linear regression, correlation analysis, and hypothesis testing using SPSS. The findings reveal that Generation Z has a positive perception of viral marketing and demonstrates a high level of purchase intention toward food-sector MSME products. The regression analysis indicates that viral marketing has a positive and statistically significant effect on purchase intention. The correlation analysis also shows a very strong positive relationship between the two variables, suggesting that more effective viral marketing activities lead to higher purchase intention among Generation Z consumers. These findings highlight the strategic role of creative, informative, and shareable digital content in influencing consumer behavior. The study contributes to the digital marketing literature and provides practical implications for MSMEs by emphasizing the importance of optimizing viral marketing strategies to enhance consumer engagement, strengthen purchase intention, and improve competitiveness in the digital marketplace.</i>

1. Introduction

The development of digital technology and social media has brought significant changes to the ways businesses market their products and consumers seek information and make purchasing decisions. The emergence of various digital platforms enables information about products and brands to be disseminated rapidly to the public through social networks. These changes have encouraged businesses, including Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), to adopt digital marketing strategies to reach a broader consumer base and enhance their competitiveness. Social media also enables MSMEs to establish direct interactions with consumers and deliver product information through more interactive and engaging content (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

MSMEs constitute an important sector of the economy that faces both challenges and opportunities as a result of digital technological developments. Digitalization provides MSMEs with opportunities to expand their market reach, improve marketing efficiency, and establish closer relationships with consumers. However, limited resources and digital marketing capabilities remain challenges for some MSMEs in optimizing the use of technology. Therefore, the effective implementation of appropriate digital marketing strategies is an important factor in supporting the sustainability and growth of MSMEs in the digital era (OECD, 2021).

One MSME sector with substantial potential for growth through digital marketing is the food sector. Food products have characteristics that make them highly suitable for communication through visual content, such as photographs and videos, which aligns well with the nature of social media platforms that prioritize visually appealing content. According to Dwivedi et al. (2021), content featuring food presentation, production processes, consumer reviews, culinary recommendations, and consumer experiences can serve as sources of information that influence potential consumers' perceptions and interest in a particular product.

Social media has also transformed the way consumers obtain information about food products. Consumers no longer rely solely on information from conventional advertising but also obtain information from content created by brands, other consumers, influencers, and content creators. Such information can spread widely through sharing, commenting, and interaction among users. Appel et al. (2020) stated that this condition enables a food product that was initially known only to a limited group of consumers to gain broader attention when its content receives a high level of engagement on social media.

One digital marketing strategy that leverages the dissemination of information through social networks is viral marketing. Viral marketing refers to a marketing strategy that encourages consumers to disseminate information about products, brands, or marketing messages to other users through digital media. This strategy is characterized by the rapid and extensive dissemination of messages through consumer networks, enabling information to reach a larger audience compared with conventional marketing communication (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011; Dwivedi et al., 2021).

Viral marketing has become increasingly relevant in the social media environment because consumers not only act as recipients of marketing messages but can also become disseminators of those messages. Content that is considered entertaining, informative, unique, interesting, or capable of evoking certain emotions is more likely to be shared by users. This process can generate a chain reaction of information dissemination, thereby increasing the number of individuals exposed to a particular product or brand (Berger, 2013; Appel et al., 2020).

For MSMEs in the food sector, viral marketing can be an attractive marketing strategy because it enables products to gain broader exposure with relatively limited marketing resources. Food products with unique characteristics in terms of appearance, taste, price, or presentation can be packaged into engaging content that has the potential to attract social media users' attention. When such content is widely shared, MSMEs can increase the reach of their marketing communication and create opportunities to introduce their products to new consumers (Harahap et al., 2023).

The phenomenon of viral marketing has also grown alongside the increasing popularity of short-form video platforms such as TikTok. These platforms allow users to create and distribute content rapidly to broad audiences. Recommendation algorithms on digital platforms also enable content from accounts with relatively small numbers of followers to achieve substantial reach when the content receives positive responses from users. According to Kaye et al. (2021), this condition creates opportunities for food-sector MSMEs to enhance product visibility through creative content that is relevant to current digital trends.

Food products possess characteristics that are highly compatible with the mechanisms of viral marketing on social media. Culinary content featuring visually appealing food, unique production processes, affordable prices, or consumer experiences can generate curiosity and encourage users to respond. Such phenomena can increase consumer attention toward products that were previously unfamiliar to them. In the context of food MSMEs, viral marketing can therefore serve as a means of building product awareness and increasing consumers' likelihood of considering a purchase (Mulya et al., 2023).

One consumer group that is particularly relevant for investigation in the context of digital marketing is Generation Z. Generation Z is a cohort that has grown up in an environment closely connected to digital technology, the internet, and social media. This group tends to use digital platforms to communicate, search for information, follow trends, and discover products and brands that attract their attention. These characteristics make Generation Z a potentially important consumer segment for MSMEs that utilize social media as a marketing channel (Francis & Hoefel, 2018; Priporas et al., 2017).

Generation Z exhibits consumption behavior that differs from that of previous generations due to its high level of engagement with the digital environment. Information obtained through social media can serve as one of the factors shaping consumers' perceptions and preferences toward a product. When a food product becomes popular or widely discussed on social media, Generation Z consumers may be encouraged to seek further information about the product through content, reviews, and recommendations from other users (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021).

The high level of Generation Z's interaction with social media makes this group relatively susceptible to various forms of digital marketing communication. Viral content can increase attention toward a product because consumers encounter the product repeatedly through different accounts and social networks. Repeated exposure to information can enhance consumer awareness and generate curiosity about products that are currently trending. In the context of food products, such conditions may encourage consumers to seek additional information and consider the possibility of making a purchase (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021).

Purchase intention is an important aspect of consumer behavior that reflects an individual's tendency or willingness to purchase a particular product. Purchase intention may develop after consumers obtain information, recognize their needs, and evaluate a product. Although purchase intention does not necessarily lead to an actual purchase decision, it can serve as an initial indicator of consumers' interest in a particular product or brand (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

Viral marketing is presumed to be associated with the formation of consumer purchase intention because this strategy can increase attention and awareness of a product. When consumers repeatedly encounter a product through widely shared or discussed content, they may obtain additional information about the product. High exposure to a product can generate curiosity and interest, which may subsequently develop into an intention to try or purchase the product (Azis & Syarifah, 2022).

Previous studies examining the influence of viral marketing on consumer behavior have demonstrated an association between viral marketing activities and purchase intention. Azis and Syarifah (2022) found that viral marketing influenced both purchase intention and purchasing decisions. These findings indicate that the viral dissemination of information can be one of the factors contributing to the formation of consumer interest in a product. Therefore, the more effective a viral marketing strategy is in attracting consumers' attention, the greater the likelihood that interest in the marketed product will emerge (Azis & Syarifah, 2022).

In the context of food-sector MSMEs, viral marketing is also a relevant strategy for attracting the attention of social media users. A study by Mulya et al. (2023), which examined viral marketing and online reviews among food-sector MSMEs through TikTok users, demonstrated

that viral marketing activities are an important aspect influencing consumer behavior in the digital environment. The study, which focused on the case of Bakso Cak Pitung in Sidoarjo, highlighted the relevance of TikTok as a marketing medium for food MSMEs in reaching users of digital platforms (Mulya et al., 2023).

Other studies on viral marketing among MSMEs have also indicated that marketing strategies based on the dissemination of information through digital media have the potential to support MSME marketing activities. Harahap et al. (2023) explained that viral marketing can be utilized by MSMEs to expand marketing reach and increase consumer attention toward the products offered. This strategy becomes increasingly important when MSMEs are able to create content that is appealing and relevant to the characteristics of digital consumers (Harahap et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, the virality of a product does not automatically lead to consumer purchase intention. Consumers may pay attention to and interact with certain content without having any intention to purchase the product. Purchase intention can be influenced by various other factors, including product quality, price, trust, brand image, consumer reviews, and the extent to which a product meets consumer needs. Therefore, it is important to empirically examine whether viral marketing influences purchase intention, particularly in the context of food-sector MSME products (Appel et al., 2020).

This condition highlights an opportunity for further research into the relationship between viral marketing and purchase intention among Generation Z consumers. Previous studies have examined viral marketing in relation to purchase intention, purchasing decisions, and MSME marketing; however, research specifically focusing on the influence of viral marketing on the purchase intention of food-sector MSME products among Generation Z remains relevant for further investigation. Differences in product characteristics, digital platforms, and consumer characteristics may produce different findings, thereby necessitating empirical testing within a more specific research context (Azis & Syarifah, 2022; Mulya et al., 2023).

This study is academically relevant because it can contribute to the literature on digital marketing and consumer behavior, particularly regarding the role of viral marketing in shaping Generation Z's purchase intention toward food-sector MSME products. This issue is important to investigate because the development of social media has transformed marketing communication from a one-way communication model into a more interactive process in which consumers also participate in disseminating information (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

Practically, the findings of this study are expected to provide valuable insights for food-sector MSMEs in designing digital marketing strategies that are more aligned with the characteristics of Generation Z. Understanding the influence of viral marketing on purchase intention can assist MSMEs in creating content that is more engaging, informative, relevant, and likely to be shared by social media users. Such strategies are expected not only to increase product popularity but also to encourage the development of consumer purchase intention (Harahap et al., 2023).

Based on the foregoing discussion, the development of social media has created new opportunities for food-sector MSMEs to introduce their products to a broader consumer market. Viral marketing is one strategy with the potential to increase consumers' attention, awareness, and interest in a product. As a consumer group that actively uses social media, Generation Z represents a strategic market segment for investigation. However, the virality of content does not necessarily translate directly into purchase intention; therefore, the relationship between viral marketing and purchase intention needs to be empirically examined. Accordingly, the study entitled "The Influence of Viral Marketing on Purchase Intention toward Food-Sector MSME Products among Generation Z" is important to determine the extent to which viral marketing influences Generation Z's purchase intention toward food-sector MSME products

and to contribute to the development of effective digital marketing strategies for MSMEs amid increasingly competitive business environments (Azis & Syarifah, 2022; Harahap et al., 2023; Mulya et al., 2023).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Viral Marketing

Viral marketing is a digital marketing strategy that leverages the ability of consumers or social media users to disseminate information about products, brands, and marketing messages to other users. The primary characteristic of viral marketing is the rapid and extensive dissemination of information through social networks, enabling marketing messages to reach a broader audience without relying entirely on direct communication from companies. García-Salirrosas (2020) explains that viral marketing is a marketing technique that utilizes interconsumer communication through digital technology, allowing messages to spread through users' own initiatives and providing organizations with opportunities to enhance the value and reach of their communication.

The development of social media has further strengthened the implementation of viral marketing in marketing activities. Digital platforms enable consumers to act not only as recipients of information but also as creators, respondents, and distributors of content within their social networks. This process generates a chain-like dissemination of information, in which a single piece of content can be transmitted from one user to another. In this context, the digital dissemination of information can be understood as an **information cascade**, referring to a process in which information diffuses through social networks and has the potential to achieve a high level of popularity (Zhou et al., 2020).

The effectiveness of viral marketing is also influenced by the characteristics of the messages being communicated. Content containing elements of entertainment, informativeness, emotional appeal, and credibility tends to have greater potential to attract users' attention and encourage sharing. Ethelda et al. (2022), in their literature review, found that viral marketing has a positive impact on purchasing decisions and emphasized the importance of entertaining, informative, and credible messages in increasing marketing exposure. This finding indicates that the success of viral marketing is determined not merely by how frequently content is viewed but also by its ability to encourage consumer engagement and voluntary dissemination.

In addition to content characteristics, viral marketing can be associated with campaign appeal and consumer purchase intention. Girsang and Situmeang (2023) found that viral marketing, campaign appeal, campaign intensity, campaign messages, and product quality are associated with purchase intention in the context of social media-based product marketing. These findings demonstrate that viral marketing strategies can serve as an instrument for attracting potential consumers' attention while simultaneously developing their interest in a product. Thus, viral content can function as an external stimulus that enhances consumer awareness, attention, and interest in a particular product.

Based on the foregoing discussion, viral marketing can be understood as a digital marketing strategy that relies on the rapid dissemination of messages through social networks and active user participation. The success of this strategy is influenced by a company's ability to create content that is engaging, informative, entertaining, relevant, and credible. In the context of MSME marketing, viral marketing has become increasingly important because it can help expand marketing communication reach, enhance brand awareness, increase consumer engagement, and create the potential for purchase intention. Therefore, viral marketing is a relevant variable for research examining consumer behavior and purchase intention toward MSME products in the digital era.

2.2 Purchase Intention

Purchase intention is an important aspect of consumer behavior that reflects consumers' tendency or willingness to purchase a particular product or service. Purchase intention can be understood as a psychological stage that emerges after consumers obtain information, recognize their needs, and evaluate the available product alternatives. In the context of marketing, purchase intention serves as an important indicator because it reflects the likelihood that consumers will engage in purchasing behavior in the future. According to Menidjel and Bilgihan (2022), consumer purchase intention is influenced by various factors related to consumers' perceptions and evaluations of products and shopping experiences. Therefore, understanding the factors that shape purchase intention is essential for companies in developing effective marketing strategies.

Purchase intention is not formed solely on the basis of consumers' functional needs but is also influenced by psychological factors and experiences associated with a brand. Consumers tend to have stronger purchase intentions when they hold positive perceptions of a brand and are able to recall the brand when they need a particular product. Stocchi et al. (2021) demonstrated that consumers' autobiographical memories are associated with brand recall and purchase intention. This finding indicates that consumer experiences and memories can contribute to the formation of interest in a particular brand or product. In the context of food-sector MSMEs, positive experiences related to taste, product quality, packaging, and interactions with the brand may strengthen consumers' tendency to consider making a purchase.

In the digital era, purchase intention is increasingly influenced by information obtained by consumers through social media and e-commerce platforms. Consumers can seek information about products through reviews, recommendations, ratings, and the experiences of other consumers before making purchasing decisions. Rohani et al. (2023) found that electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), consumer ratings, and reputation have a positive influence on purchase intention toward products on e-commerce platforms. These findings demonstrate that information originating from other consumers can help shape positive perceptions and increase consumers' interest in a product. Thus, consumer-to-consumer communication in digital environments has become an important factor in developing purchase intention.

In addition to consumer-generated information, information quality and trust also play important roles in shaping purchase intention. Li et al. (2023) found that information concerning repeated purchase experiences shared through e-WOM can influence consumers' purchase intention. Such information can provide signals regarding other consumers' experiences with a particular product, thereby assisting potential consumers in evaluating the product before making a purchase. In the context of digital marketing, this suggests that the more positive the information received and the higher the level of trust in the information source, the greater the likelihood that purchase intention will be formed.

Purchase intention can also be influenced by social and emotional factors. Zong et al. (2023) explained that the formation of consumer purchase intention may be associated with attitudes, emotional value, identity, and social factors that shape consumers' perceptions of a product. Thus, purchase intention is not solely the result of rational considerations but may also be influenced by emotional and social dimensions.

Based on the foregoing discussion, purchase intention can be defined as a consumer's tendency or willingness to purchase a product, which is formed through the process of evaluating information, perceptions, experiences, trust, as well as social and emotional factors. In research on food-sector MSMEs, purchase intention represents an important variable because it reflects consumers' interest in a product after they have been exposed to marketing information. Viral marketing strategies that generate engaging information, increase consumer

engagement, and encourage the widespread dissemination of information have the potential to become one of the factors influencing the formation of consumer purchase intention.

2.3 Purchase Decision

Food-sector Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) represent one of the business sectors that plays an important role in economic activities within society. This sector encompasses various types of food production and sales businesses, ranging from snacks, ready-to-eat meals, and home-based culinary products to processed foods marketed either directly or through digital platforms. The relatively low barriers to entry and broad market potential of food-sector MSMEs have contributed to the sector's continuous development through diverse product innovations and marketing models. However, as the food MSME sector continues to grow, competition has also intensified, requiring business owners to adapt to changes in consumer behavior and technological developments (Primadhita et al., 2023).

The increasingly digitalized business environment has encouraged food-sector MSMEs to adopt technology in their marketing activities. Social media, online marketplaces, and various digital platforms can be utilized to introduce products, reach broader consumer segments, and establish communication with customers. Febrianti and Prehanto (2022) explain that technological developments have encouraged culinary MSMEs to shift from conventional marketing toward digital marketing, particularly in promotional activities. The utilization of digital media provides food-sector MSMEs with opportunities to enhance product visibility and adapt their marketing strategies to consumer behaviors that are increasingly active in digital environments.

Digitalization has also become an important factor in improving the performance of food-sector MSMEs. Kafrawi et al. (2022) found that digital marketing contributes to increased revenue among culinary MSMEs, primarily by enabling business owners to reach broader consumer segments. Similarly, Primadhita et al. (2023) demonstrated that digital marketing, product quality, and green innovation have positive effects on the performance of food and beverage MSMEs. These findings indicate that the success of food-sector MSMEs is determined not only by product quality but also by the ability of business owners to implement marketing strategies that are aligned with market developments.

Based on the foregoing discussion, food-sector MSMEs can be understood as businesses engaged in the production and marketing of food products within a competitive and dynamic market environment. The utilization of digital technology has become increasingly important for food-sector MSMEs to expand their marketing reach, build consumer awareness, and strengthen their competitiveness. In the context of research on viral marketing and purchase intention, food-sector MSMEs represent a relevant research object because food products are highly visual in nature and can be easily presented and shared through social media. Consequently, they have substantial potential to attract consumer attention and achieve widespread information dissemination through viral marketing strategies.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a quantitative approach using descriptive and explanatory (associative) research designs. The quantitative approach was selected because the study aims to obtain measurable numerical data that can be analyzed using statistical methods. The study focuses on Generation Z's perceptions of viral marketing for food-sector MSME products, Generation Z's purchase intention toward food-sector MSME products, and the effect of viral marketing on purchase intention. Through the quantitative approach, data collected from respondents can be

processed objectively, resulting in conclusions based on measurement and statistical hypothesis testing.

The descriptive research design is employed to address the first and second research questions. Descriptive analysis aims to provide an overview of Generation Z's perceptions of viral marketing and their level of purchase intention toward food-sector MSME products. Perceptions of viral marketing are assessed through several dimensions, including content attractiveness, information quality, entertainment value, information credibility, interactivity, ease of sharing, and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM). Meanwhile, purchase intention is assessed through transactional, referential, preferential, and exploratory intentions. The results of the descriptive analysis are expected to provide an overview of Generation Z's assessment tendencies toward viral marketing activities and their level of interest in food-sector MSME products.

Furthermore, an explanatory or associative research design is employed to address the third research question, namely, to examine whether viral marketing influences purchase intention toward food-sector MSME products among Generation Z. In this study, viral marketing is treated as the independent variable (X), while purchase intention is treated as the dependent variable (Y). The relationship examined in this study is represented as Viral Marketing (X) → Purchase Intention (Y). The analysis aims to determine the direction and magnitude of the effect of viral marketing on purchase intention and to assess whether the relationship is statistically significant.

The object of this study is viral marketing of food-sector MSME products, while the subjects are Generation Z consumers. The respondents are members of Generation Z who actively use social media and have seen, encountered, or been exposed to marketing content related to food-sector MSME products through digital platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, or other social media platforms. Generation Z was selected as the research subject because of its close affinity with digital technology and social media, making this generation particularly relevant for examining viral-based marketing strategies.

Data were collected using questionnaires distributed both directly and through digital media. The research instrument was developed based on indicators for each research variable and employed a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Prior to its use in the study, the questionnaire instrument was subjected to validity and reliability testing to ensure that each statement accurately and consistently measured the intended research variables.

The sampling technique employed in this study is purposive sampling, in which respondents are selected based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. The respondent criteria include being a member of Generation Z, actively using social media, having encountered viral content related to food-sector MSME products, and having experience obtaining information about food products through social media. The sample size was determined based on the requirements of the statistical analysis and the characteristics of the research population.

The collected data were subsequently analyzed in two stages. The first stage involved descriptive statistical analysis to determine Generation Z's perceptions of viral marketing and their level of purchase intention toward food-sector MSME products. The second stage involved inferential statistical analysis, particularly simple linear regression, to examine the effect of viral marketing on purchase intention. The analysis was complemented by a t-test to assess the statistical significance of the effect of variable X on variable Y and by the coefficient of determination (R^2) to determine the extent to which viral marketing explains the variation in Generation Z's purchase intention.

Based on this research design, the study is expected to provide empirical evidence regarding Generation Z's perceptions of viral marketing, their level of purchase intention toward food-

sector MSME products, and the effect of viral marketing on purchase intention. The findings may subsequently serve as a basis for food-sector MSME owners in developing more effective digital marketing strategies that are aligned with the characteristics and preferences of Generation Z.

3.2 Participants

The participants in this study were Generation Z consumers aged between 17 and 28 years. This age group was selected because Generation Z represents a digitally connected consumer segment that is highly exposed to social media content, online trends, and digital marketing activities. Their frequent interaction with social media platforms makes them a relevant population for examining the influence of viral marketing on purchase intention, particularly toward food-sector Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select respondents who met specific criteria relevant to the objectives of the study. The inclusion criteria were: (1) being a member of Generation Z aged 18–28 years; (2) actively using social media platforms, particularly platforms where viral marketing content is frequently encountered, such as TikTok, Instagram, or similar platforms; (3) having seen or encountered viral marketing content related to food products on social media; and (4) having an interest in or experience purchasing food products from MSMEs. These criteria were established to ensure that respondents had sufficient exposure and experience to provide meaningful responses regarding viral marketing and purchase intention.

A total of 202 respondents participated in the study. The sample size was considered adequate for analyzing the relationship between viral marketing and purchase intention. The respondents' characteristics were also considered important in providing a demographic representation of Generation Z consumers and in supporting the interpretation of the research findings. By focusing on respondents who are familiar with social media-based marketing content and have experience purchasing food products, the study was able to obtain data that were directly relevant to the proposed research model.

The use of purposive sampling was appropriate because the study required respondents with specific characteristics related to the research variables. Therefore, the selected participants were not merely Generation Z consumers, but individuals who had relevant exposure to viral marketing and experience or interest in purchasing food-sector MSME products. This approach was expected to improve the relevance and quality of the data obtained for examining the impact of viral marketing on Generation Z's purchase intention.

3.3 Instruments

The research instrument is a questionnaire developed to measure respondents' perceptions of viral marketing and their purchase intention toward food-sector Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). The questionnaire was designed based on the conceptual definitions and indicators of each research variable to ensure that the instrument was consistent with the objectives and theoretical framework of the study. As the research adopts a quantitative approach, the questionnaire serves as the primary instrument for collecting standardized and measurable data from respondents.

The questionnaire consists of two main sections. The first section measures the viral marketing variable (X), while the second section measures purchase intention (Y). Viral marketing refers to marketing activities that encourage consumers to disseminate, share, and discuss marketing content through digital and social media platforms. In this study, the viral marketing variable is measured through several indicators, including content attractiveness, information quality, entertainment value, information credibility, interactivity, ease of sharing,

and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM). These indicators were selected because they represent important characteristics of viral marketing in a social media environment, particularly in relation to how consumers perceive, interact with, and disseminate marketing content.

The purchase intention variable (Y) is designed to measure the extent to which respondents demonstrate an intention or willingness to purchase food products offered by MSMEs. This variable is assessed through four dimensions: transactional intention, referential intention, preferential intention, and exploratory intention. Transactional intention reflects respondents' willingness to make a purchase, whereas referential intention refers to their willingness to recommend the product to other people. Preferential intention represents the tendency to prefer a particular product over competing alternatives, while exploratory intention reflects consumers' willingness to seek additional information about the product before making a purchase. These indicators provide a comprehensive measurement of consumers' behavioral intentions toward food-sector MSME products.

All questionnaire items are measured using a five-point Likert scale to facilitate the quantification of respondents' attitudes and perceptions. The response categories range from 1 to 5, namely 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. The use of a five-point Likert scale allows respondents to express varying degrees of agreement with each statement and enables the resulting data to be analyzed statistically.

Prior to the main data collection process, the research instrument is subjected to validity and reliability testing. Validity testing is conducted to determine whether each questionnaire item appropriately measures the construct it is intended to measure. An item is considered valid when its correlation value meets the required statistical criterion. Meanwhile, reliability testing is performed to assess the internal consistency of the instrument. A reliable instrument should produce relatively consistent measurements when used to assess the same construct.

The questionnaire is distributed to respondents who meet the predetermined sampling criteria, namely members of Generation Z who actively use social media, have encountered viral marketing content related to food-sector MSME products, and have obtained information about food products through social media. The use of these criteria ensures that respondents have relevant experiences and are capable of providing meaningful evaluations of viral marketing activities and purchase intentions.

Overall, the research instrument is structured to generate objective, systematic, and measurable data regarding the relationship between viral marketing and purchase intention. By employing clearly defined indicators, a standardized Likert scale, and appropriate validity and reliability procedures, the instrument is expected to provide accurate empirical evidence for testing the proposed research relationship.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). SPSS was selected because it is appropriate for analyzing the relationships between variables, testing hypotheses, and determining the extent to which viral marketing influences Generation Z's purchase intention toward food-sector MSME products. The analysis consisted of several stages, including descriptive statistical analysis, validity and reliability testing, classical assumption testing, and hypothesis testing using simple linear regression analysis.

First, descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to describe the characteristics and general responses of the respondents. The analysis included the minimum value, maximum value, mean, and standard deviation for each research variable. This analysis was used to provide an overview of respondents' perceptions of viral marketing and their purchase intention toward food-sector MSME products.

Second, the validity and reliability of the research instrument were evaluated. Validity testing was performed using the Pearson Product-Moment correlation to determine whether each questionnaire item appropriately measured its intended construct. An item was considered valid when the correlation coefficient (r -calculated) was greater than the r -table value and the significance level was less than 0.05. Reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha to assess the internal consistency of the questionnaire items. A construct was considered reliable when the Cronbach's Alpha value exceeded the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70.

Third, classical assumption tests were conducted before performing regression analysis. The normality test was used to determine whether the residuals were normally distributed. In addition, a linearity test was conducted to examine whether a linear relationship existed between viral marketing and purchase intention. These tests were performed to ensure that the data met the basic assumptions required for regression analysis.

Finally, hypothesis testing was conducted using simple linear regression analysis to examine the impact of viral marketing on Generation Z's purchase intention toward food-sector MSME products. The regression analysis was used to determine the direction and magnitude of the relationship between viral marketing as the independent variable and purchase intention as the dependent variable. The t -test was employed to examine the partial effect of viral marketing on purchase intention. The hypothesis was considered supported when the significance value (p -value) was less than 0.05 and the calculated t -value exceeded the critical t -value. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was also examined to determine the proportion of variation in Generation Z's purchase intention that could be explained by viral marketing. The findings from these analyses were subsequently used to determine whether viral marketing had a statistically significant impact on Generation Z's purchase intention toward food-sector MSME products.

4. Findings

4.1 General Description of Respondents

Table 1. Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	62	30.7%
	Female	140	69.3%
Age	17–21 years	109	54.0%
	21–24 years	63	31.2%
	25–28 years	30	14.8%
	< IDR 1.000.000	113	56.0%
Monthly	IDR 1.000.000–2.999.999	32	15.8%
Income /	IDR 3.000.000–4.999.999	41	20.3%
Allowance	≥ IDR 5.000.000	16	7.9%

Source: Primary Data, 2024

Based on the respondent characteristics presented in the table, this study involved 202 respondents who belonged to Generation Z and served as the data source for examining the impact of viral marketing on purchase intention toward food-sector MSME products. The respondents' characteristics were categorized based on gender, age, and monthly income or allowance.

In terms of gender, the respondents were predominantly female, with 140 respondents (69.3%), while 62 respondents (30.7%) were male. This composition indicates that female respondents represented a larger proportion of the sample. This condition provides an overview that female respondents constituted the majority of participants in assessing viral marketing and purchase intention toward food-sector MSME products.

In terms of age, the majority of respondents were in the 17–20 age group, comprising 109 respondents (54.0%). This was followed by respondents aged 21–24 years, totaling 63 respondents (31.2%), while 30 respondents (14.8%) were aged 25–28 years. The dominance of the 17–20 age group indicates that most respondents were younger members of Generation Z who are relatively familiar with the use of social media and various digital platforms. This characteristic is relevant to the study because viral marketing commonly utilizes social media as a medium for disseminating information and promoting products.

Regarding monthly income or allowance, the majority of respondents reported an income or allowance of less than IDR 1,000,000, accounting for 113 respondents (56.0%). Furthermore, 41 respondents (20.3%) reported an income of IDR 3,000,000–4,999,999, 32 respondents (15.8%) reported an income of IDR 1,000,000–2,999,999, and 16 respondents (7.9%) reported an income of at least IDR 5,000,000. This composition indicates that the majority of respondents had relatively low levels of income or allowance. This condition may be related to the characteristics of Generation Z, as many respondents are still pursuing their education and have not yet fully entered the workforce.

Overall, the respondent profile indicates that the study was dominated by female respondents (69.3%), respondents aged 17–20 years (54.0%), and respondents with a monthly income or allowance of less than IDR 1,000,000 (56.0%). These characteristics illustrate that the respondents were predominantly younger members of Generation Z with relatively limited purchasing power. Therefore, viral marketing may serve as one of the factors capable of attracting their attention and shaping their purchase intention toward food-sector MSME products. This condition is consistent with the focus of the study, which examines the impact of viral marketing strategies on Generation Z's purchase intention.

4.2 Hasil Pengolahan Data

The present study investigates the influence of viral marketing on the purchase intention of Generation Z toward food products offered by Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). The findings reveal that viral marketing plays a substantial role in shaping consumers' purchasing intentions within the digital environment. Considering that Generation Z represents one of the most digitally connected generations, these findings provide valuable insights into how social media communication strategies can encourage consumer engagement and purchasing behavior.

The descriptive analysis indicates that both Viral Marketing and Purchase Intention were classified within the high category. Specifically, the Viral Marketing variable obtained a mean score of 25,02, while Purchase Intention recorded a mean score of 17,95, suggesting that respondents generally perceived viral marketing activities positively and demonstrated a strong intention to purchase MSME food products. These findings suggest that Generation Z is highly receptive to digital promotional content distributed through social media platforms. Viral content that is creative, entertaining, informative, and easily shareable appears capable of attracting attention and stimulating consumer interest.

This phenomenon is consistent with the characteristics of Generation Z, who have grown up in a technology-driven environment and frequently rely on digital media to search for information, evaluate products, and communicate with peers. Unlike previous generations, Generation Z consumers often trust information circulated through social networking platforms because such information is perceived as authentic and generated by real users rather than by companies alone. Consequently, viral marketing functions not only as a promotional tool but also as a mechanism for increasing product awareness, encouraging social interaction, and influencing consumer decision-making.

Another important finding concerns the quality of the research instrument. The validity test demonstrates that every indicator measuring Viral Marketing and Purchase Intention satisfies the established statistical criteria. The correlation coefficients of all questionnaire items exceeded the critical *r*-table value, indicating that every statement successfully measured the intended construct. This result confirms that the questionnaire possesses strong construct validity and adequately captures respondents' perceptions of viral marketing and their purchase intentions toward food MSME products.

From a methodological perspective, the validity of the research instrument is essential because it ensures that the observed relationships among variables genuinely represent the underlying concepts being investigated. When questionnaire items accurately measure theoretical constructs, researchers can interpret statistical findings with greater confidence. In this study, the satisfactory validity results strengthen the credibility of the subsequent regression analysis and hypothesis testing. The reliability analysis further supports the quality of the measurement instrument. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient reached 0,941, substantially exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0,70. Such a high reliability coefficient indicates excellent internal consistency among the questionnaire items. In other words, respondents answered the items consistently, suggesting that the instrument provides stable and dependable measurements of both Viral Marketing and Purchase Intention.

High internal consistency is particularly important in behavioral research because consumer perceptions and attitudes cannot be observed directly. Instead, researchers rely on multiple questionnaire items to represent latent variables. Therefore, the reliability demonstrated in this study indicates that the measurement model effectively captures respondents' attitudes toward viral marketing without substantial measurement error. This finding enhances the overall robustness of the empirical analysis.

Before conducting regression analysis, the study evaluated the assumptions required for linear regression. The normality test using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov procedure produced a significance value of 0,085, exceeding the conventional significance level of 0.05. This outcome confirms that the residuals are normally distributed, satisfying one of the principal assumptions of regression analysis. Likewise, the heteroscedasticity test indicated no evidence of unequal variance among residuals, suggesting that the regression model fulfills the assumption of homoscedasticity.

The fulfillment of these statistical assumptions is particularly important because violations may lead to biased parameter estimates and unreliable significance tests. Since the data satisfy both normality and homoscedasticity assumptions, the regression coefficients estimated in this study can be interpreted with greater confidence. Consequently, the subsequent analyses accurately represent the relationship between Viral Marketing and Purchase Intention.

The simple linear regression analysis provides compelling evidence regarding the influence of Viral Marketing on Purchase Intention. The estimated regression equation,

$$Y = 3,425 + 0,580X$$

indicates that Viral Marketing positively affects consumers' purchase intention. The positive regression coefficient (0,580) implies that every one-unit increase in Viral Marketing is associated with an increase of 0,580 units in Purchase Intention. This finding demonstrates that improvements in viral marketing activities are likely to produce corresponding increases in consumers' willingness to purchase food products from MSMEs.

From a theoretical perspective, this result supports the argument that digital communication significantly influences consumer decision-making. Viral marketing creates repeated exposure to promotional messages through extensive social sharing, thereby increasing product visibility

and familiarity. Frequent exposure may reduce consumers' uncertainty regarding unfamiliar products while simultaneously strengthening positive product perceptions. As a result, consumers become more inclined to evaluate and eventually purchase products that repeatedly appear within their social media networks.

The positive regression coefficient also highlights the importance of emotional engagement in digital marketing. Viral content often contains humorous, entertaining, inspirational, or emotionally appealing elements that encourage users to share information voluntarily. Such voluntary sharing extends the reach of promotional messages beyond traditional advertising channels and enhances the credibility of the information because it originates from friends, relatives, influencers, or other trusted social connections.

Furthermore, the correlation analysis reveals a remarkably strong positive relationship between Viral Marketing and Purchase Intention. The correlation coefficient ($R = 0,812$) falls within the category of a very strong positive relationship. This finding indicates that respondents who perceive viral marketing more positively also tend to exhibit higher purchase intentions toward MSME food products.

The strength of this relationship suggests that viral marketing has become an integral component of consumer behavior among Generation Z. Modern consumers are continuously exposed to digital content through platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook. These platforms facilitate rapid information dissemination, enabling promotional content to reach large audiences within a short period. Consequently, consumers become increasingly familiar with products that receive substantial online attention, making them more likely to develop favorable purchasing intentions.

Overall, the findings presented in this section demonstrate that Viral Marketing is not merely a communication strategy but a significant determinant of consumer behavior among Generation Z. The combination of high descriptive scores, valid and reliable measurement instruments, fulfillment of regression assumptions, positive regression coefficients, and a very strong correlation collectively supports the conclusion that viral marketing effectively enhances purchase intention toward food MSME products. These findings provide empirical evidence that MSMEs should continuously invest in creative digital marketing strategies capable of encouraging audience engagement, social sharing, and online interaction to strengthen consumer purchase intentions in an increasingly competitive digital marketplace.

5. Discussion

Based on the statistical analysis conducted in this study, Viral Marketing was found to play a significant role in shaping Generation Z's purchase intention toward food products offered by Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). The findings provide empirical evidence that digital marketing strategies emphasizing the rapid dissemination of information through social media have become increasingly relevant in influencing consumer behavior among Generation Z. The discussion in this section is organized according to the three research objectives, beginning with Generation Z's perception of Viral Marketing, followed by their purchase intention toward MSME food products.

Generation Z's Perception of Viral Marketing for MSME Food Products

The first research objective sought to examine Generation Z's perception of Viral Marketing in the context of food MSMEs. The descriptive analysis revealed that respondents exhibited a positive perception of Viral Marketing, as reflected by the high mean score obtained for this variable. This finding indicates that Generation Z generally accepts and appreciates marketing activities that utilize digital media and social networking platforms to disseminate product information rapidly and extensively.

The positive perception identified in this study can be explained by the distinctive characteristics of Generation Z. As digital natives, this generation has grown up surrounded by smartphones, high-speed internet, and social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook. These platforms have become their primary sources of entertainment, communication, and product information. Consequently, marketing messages delivered through digital platforms are more likely to capture their attention than traditional promotional methods. Unlike conventional advertising, Viral Marketing encourages voluntary participation, allowing consumers to interact with, share, and discuss promotional content within their social networks. Such interactions enhance the visibility and credibility of marketing messages because information is often transmitted through trusted peers rather than directly from firms.

In the context of food MSMEs, Viral Marketing commonly relies on visually attractive content, including short-form videos, appealing food photography, customer testimonials, product reviews, trend-based content, and user-generated content. These forms of communication are particularly effective because food products possess strong visual appeal that can easily stimulate consumers' curiosity and emotional responses. When food products are presented through creative and aesthetically pleasing content, consumers become more interested in learning about the product and are more likely to engage with the content by liking, commenting, sharing, or recommending it to others. Such engagement substantially increases the likelihood that promotional messages will spread organically across digital platforms.

The findings also suggest that Generation Z no longer functions merely as passive recipients of marketing information. Instead, they actively participate in the communication process by becoming content distributors themselves. Social media algorithms further amplify this phenomenon by continuously recommending popular or highly engaged content to broader audiences. Consequently, consumers contribute directly to expanding the reach of promotional campaigns without additional advertising expenditure by MSMEs. This characteristic distinguishes Viral Marketing from conventional promotional approaches, making it a cost-effective marketing strategy for small businesses with limited financial resources.

Furthermore, the positive perception observed in this study indicates that Generation Z values content that is authentic, entertaining, emotionally engaging, and relevant to current social trends. Consumers within this generation are increasingly skeptical of overly commercial advertisements but tend to trust content that appears natural and reflects genuine consumer experiences. Therefore, successful Viral Marketing campaigns should prioritize authenticity rather than purely promotional messages. Food MSMEs capable of producing relatable, creative, and interactive content are more likely to establish stronger relationships with Generation Z consumers.

The findings of this study are consistent with those reported by Velia and Candraningrum (2019), who examined the influence of Viral Marketing through Instagram promotional videos on consumers' purchasing decisions for Bakso Goreng iONG. Their study demonstrated that visual promotional content effectively attracts consumer attention toward food products. Although their research focused on purchasing decisions rather than purchase intention, both studies emphasize the importance of visually engaging digital content in increasing consumer awareness of food products. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that visually attractive viral content is particularly relevant among Generation Z, whose daily activities are closely integrated with digital media.

Similarly, the findings correspond with those reported by Mulya et al. (2023), who investigated the influence of Viral Marketing and online reviews on purchasing decisions among TikTok users purchasing Bakso Cak Pitung products. Although their dependent variable was purchasing decision, whereas the present study focuses on purchase intention, both studies demonstrate that Viral Marketing constitutes an important component of digital marketing

strategies for food MSMEs. The consistency between these findings suggests that Viral Marketing contributes not only to consumers' awareness of products but also to the development of favorable attitudes during the early stages of the purchasing process.

Overall, the findings indicate that the positive perception of Viral Marketing among Generation Z represents a valuable opportunity for food MSMEs to strengthen their digital marketing performance. Rather than merely disseminating product information, MSMEs should develop content capable of encouraging user engagement and stimulating voluntary information sharing. Marketing content that is emotionally appealing, informative, entertaining, visually attractive, and aligned with current social media trends is more likely to generate widespread exposure and increase consumer awareness.

Generation Z's Purchase Intention toward Food MSME Products

The second research objective examined Generation Z's purchase intention toward food MSME products. The descriptive analysis revealed that respondents demonstrated a high level of purchase intention, indicating that Generation Z generally expresses strong interest in food products offered by MSMEs. This finding suggests that respondents are willing to search for additional product information, evaluate available alternatives, consider purchasing the products, and potentially recommend them to others.

Purchase intention represents one of the most critical stages within the consumer decision-making process because it reflects consumers' psychological readiness to make future purchases. Before engaging in actual buying behavior, consumers typically progress through several stages, including problem recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, preference formation, and purchase intention. Within this process, Viral Marketing serves as an external marketing stimulus that introduces products to potential consumers and motivates them to seek additional information regarding the products being promoted.

For Generation Z, digital platforms have become the primary environment in which product evaluation occurs. Consumers frequently encounter trending food products through viral videos, influencer recommendations, customer-generated reviews, and algorithm-driven content recommendations. Continuous exposure to such content increases product familiarity and stimulates curiosity, encouraging consumers to search for more detailed information regarding taste, product quality, price, uniqueness, location, and previous customer experiences. Consequently, Viral Marketing acts as the initial trigger that moves consumers from simple awareness toward genuine purchase consideration.

Another important explanation for the high purchase intention observed in this study relates to the emotional characteristics of food products themselves. Unlike many durable consumer goods, food products are capable of generating immediate sensory and emotional responses through attractive visual presentation. High-quality photographs and videos displaying texture, freshness, color, and serving style can evoke appetite and stimulate consumers' desire to experience the product personally. Therefore, visually compelling digital content substantially enhances consumers' willingness to consider purchasing food products promoted through social media.

The present findings support the study conducted by Hadita and Faeni (2022), who concluded that Viral Marketing has a positive and significant influence on purchase intention. Their research further demonstrated that consumer behavior mediates the relationship between Viral Marketing and purchase intention, suggesting that effective digital communication shapes favorable consumer responses before purchasing decisions are made. These findings reinforce the argument that Viral Marketing serves as an effective mechanism for increasing consumer interest in products promoted through digital media.

Likewise, the results are consistent with Azis and Syarifah (2022), who reported that Viral Marketing positively influences both purchase intention and buying decisions. The agreement between the two studies indicates that Viral Marketing functions not merely as a communication strategy but also as an important determinant of consumer behavior throughout multiple stages of the purchasing process. The present study contributes additional evidence by demonstrating that this relationship is particularly strong among Generation Z consumers purchasing food MSME products.

However, the present findings differ from those reported by Fitri and Syaefulloh (2023), who concluded that Viral Marketing does not directly influence purchase intention but instead affects purchase intention indirectly through online customer reviews. This discrepancy highlights that the effectiveness of Viral Marketing depends on the research context, product characteristics, consumer segments, and analytical models employed. Their study focused on fashion products marketed through TikTok Shop while incorporating online customer reviews as a mediating variable, whereas the present study directly examined the relationship between Viral Marketing and purchase intention among Generation Z purchasing food MSME products. Because food products possess stronger visual and emotional characteristics than fashion products, Viral Marketing may exert a more immediate influence on consumer interest in this context.

Overall, the discussion presented above demonstrates that Generation Z exhibits both a positive perception of Viral Marketing and a high level of purchase intention toward food MSME products. These findings suggest that strategically designed Viral Marketing campaigns can effectively strengthen consumer awareness, stimulate curiosity, and foster purchase intention, thereby providing food MSMEs with a valuable competitive advantage within today's increasingly dynamic digital marketplace.

The Effect of Viral Marketing on Purchase Intention of Generation Z toward Food MSME Products

The third research objective was to analyze the effect of Viral Marketing on Generation Z's purchase intention toward food products offered by Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). Based on the results of hypothesis testing, Viral Marketing was found to have a positive and significant effect on purchase intention. This finding indicates that improvements in Viral Marketing activities will contribute to an increase in Generation Z's intention to purchase food MSME products. Therefore, Viral Marketing is not only effective as a communication tool for increasing product exposure but also functions as an important factor in shaping consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions.

The significant relationship between Viral Marketing and purchase intention can be explained through the mechanism of digital information diffusion. Viral Marketing enables product-related information to spread rapidly through social media networks, allowing consumers to receive recommendations from various sources within a relatively short period. For Generation Z, who frequently interacts with digital platforms, repeated exposure to viral content can increase brand awareness, strengthen product recognition, and create positive associations with promoted products. As consumers become more familiar with a product, their perceived uncertainty decreases, which subsequently increases their willingness to consider purchasing the product.

Furthermore, Viral Marketing influences purchase intention through several psychological mechanisms, including attention, emotional engagement, trust formation, and social influence. Viral content that is creative, entertaining, and relevant to consumers' interests is more likely to attract attention compared with conventional promotional messages. When consumers feel emotionally connected to marketing content, they are more likely to develop positive attitudes

toward the product. In addition, social interactions such as likes, comments, shares, and recommendations from other users serve as forms of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), which can strengthen consumer confidence before making purchasing decisions.

The significant influence of Viral Marketing found in this study is also related to the characteristics of food MSME products. Food products are highly dependent on sensory perceptions, including appearance, taste expectations, uniqueness, and emotional appeal. Through social media content, MSMEs can visually communicate product attractiveness by presenting appealing images, short videos, customer testimonials, and creative storytelling. Such content enables consumers to imagine the consumption experience before purchasing, thereby increasing their desire to try the product. This explains why Viral Marketing can become a powerful strategy for food MSMEs in influencing Generation Z consumers.

The results of this study support previous findings by Hadita and Faeni (2022), who demonstrated that Viral Marketing has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention. Their research emphasized that viral promotional activities encourage consumer responses by increasing product awareness and generating positive perceptions. The consistency between their findings and the present study confirms that Viral Marketing is an effective digital marketing approach in influencing consumers' behavioral intentions. However, the current study provides additional insight by focusing specifically on Generation Z consumers and food MSME products, which represent a consumer segment with high dependence on social media information.

Similarly, the findings are consistent with Azis and Syarifah (2022), who found that Viral Marketing significantly affects purchase intention and purchasing decisions. Their research suggests that viral marketing strategies can create stronger consumer engagement and motivate consumers to move from awareness toward purchase behavior. The similarity of results indicates that Viral Marketing has become an important determinant of consumer decision-making in the digital era, particularly when consumers rely heavily on online information before purchasing products.

The findings also support the research conducted by Mulya et al. (2023), which examined the influence of Viral Marketing and online reviews on purchasing decisions among TikTok users purchasing Bakso Cak Pitung products. Their study demonstrated that Viral Marketing contributes significantly to consumer purchasing behavior in the food sector. Although their research focused on purchasing decisions while the present study examines purchase intention, both findings indicate that viral content plays an essential role in creating consumer interest and encouraging further interaction with food products promoted through social media.

However, differences can be observed when comparing the current findings with the study conducted by Fitri and Syaefulloh (2023). Their research found that Viral Marketing did not directly influence purchase intention but affected it through online customer reviews. This difference may occur due to variations in product categories, consumer characteristics, and research models. Their study focused on fashion products marketed through TikTok Shop, where consumers may require additional evaluation through reviews before purchasing. In contrast, food products generally have stronger emotional and visual appeal, allowing Viral Marketing content to directly stimulate consumer curiosity and purchase intention. Therefore, the effectiveness of Viral Marketing may depend on how consumers perceive the product category and the level of information required before making a purchase decision.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the development of digital marketing and consumer behavior literature by confirming that Viral Marketing functions as an external stimulus that can influence consumers' behavioral intentions. The findings support the principles of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, where Viral Marketing acts as a stimulus that affects consumers' internal psychological processes, such as awareness,

interest, and attitudes, which subsequently lead to behavioral responses in the form of purchase intention. This study strengthens previous theoretical explanations by demonstrating that Viral Marketing is particularly relevant in understanding Generation Z consumer behavior within the context of social media-based marketing.

From a practical perspective, the findings provide valuable implications for food MSME actors. MSMEs should recognize social media not only as a promotional channel but also as an interactive platform for building relationships with consumers. To maximize the impact of Viral Marketing, MSMEs need to develop content strategies that emphasize creativity, authenticity, entertainment value, and consumer involvement. Strategies such as collaborating with micro-influencers, encouraging user-generated content, utilizing trending topics, creating engaging short videos, and highlighting customer experiences can increase the likelihood of content being shared widely among Generation Z audiences.

Additionally, MSMEs should focus on maintaining product quality because viral exposure alone is insufficient to create sustainable consumer loyalty. Positive viral content must be supported by consistent product quality, reliable service, and positive customer experiences. When consumers receive products that match their expectations, they are more likely to provide positive reviews and voluntarily share their experiences, creating a continuous cycle that strengthens future Viral Marketing activities.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Viral Marketing has a significant contribution to increasing Generation Z's purchase intention toward food MSME products. Viral Marketing enables MSMEs to expand product visibility, build consumer trust, and influence purchasing considerations through digital interactions. The combination of creative content, social engagement, and authentic consumer experiences makes Viral Marketing a strategic approach for MSMEs to compete in the digital marketplace. Therefore, food MSMEs are encouraged to optimize Viral Marketing strategies as part of their long-term marketing efforts to attract Generation Z consumers and enhance business competitiveness.

6. Conclusion

Intention of Food MSME Products among Generation Z, supported by descriptive analysis, instrument testing, classical assumption tests, simple linear regression analysis, correlation analysis, and hypothesis testing, several conclusions can be drawn.

First, Generation Z shows a positive perception of Viral Marketing for food MSME products. As digital natives with high engagement on social media platforms, Generation Z is highly exposed to product information delivered through digital content. Creative, informative, attractive, and trend-based viral content can increase product awareness, stimulate curiosity, and encourage interaction among consumers. Therefore, Viral Marketing is considered a relevant strategy for food MSMEs to reach Generation Z as an active digital consumer segment.

Second, Generation Z demonstrates a positive purchase intention toward food MSME products. Digital information obtained through social media can encourage consumers to recognize products, seek further information, evaluate alternatives, and consider purchasing decisions. Purchase intention is influenced by factors such as product attractiveness, information quality, consumer experiences, and product popularity in digital environments.

Third, the findings indicate that Viral Marketing has a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention. The simple linear regression analysis produced a positive regression coefficient of 0.580, indicating that improvements in Viral Marketing strategies will increase consumers' purchase intention. The correlation coefficient value of 0.812 demonstrates a very strong positive relationship between Viral Marketing and Purchase Intention. Furthermore, the t-test result showed that the t-value (19.692) was greater than the t-table value (1.972), with a significance level of $0.000 < 0.05$. Thus, H_0 was rejected and H_1 was accepted.

Overall, this study confirms that Viral Marketing is an important digital marketing strategy for food MSMEs in attracting Generation Z consumers. Through effective social media-based marketing, MSMEs can increase product awareness, build consumer interest, and encourage purchase intention, thereby strengthening their competitiveness in the digital marketplace.

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