



## Empowering Micro-Businesses: Unveiling the Catalysts behind Social Media Integration in Indonesia

Adisthy Shabrina Nurqamarani <sup>a 1</sup> , Agus Priyanto <sup>a</sup>, Sarah Fadilla <sup>a</sup> 

<sup>a</sup> *Business Administration Program, Faculty of Law, Social, and Political Science, Tangerang Selatan, Indonesia*

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### Abstract

**Background:** An enormous number of micro-businesses in Indonesia have not joined the digital platforms, despite the evident benefits associated with making this transition. One viable avenue for initiating digitalization is through leveraging social media, characterized by its cost-effectiveness and expansive reach to consumers

**Objective:** This study aims to identify the catalyst behind the social media adoption of micro-businesses in the culinary sector in Indonesia

**Method:** This study adopts a qualitative approach, involving interviewing seven micro-businesses owners in Indonesia who were selected through purposive and snowball sampling. Thematic analysis was employed to derive meaningful conclusions.

**Results:** The study's findings suggest that subjective norms, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, perceived behavioral control, competitive pressure, customer demand, and government support hold important roles in the adoption of social media in micro and small businesses. Considering the importance of government support, it can play a pivotal role by providing support and incentives for MSMEs to integrate social media into their operation. Additionally, strategies for positioning businesses in the digital landscape should be developed, keeping customer demand in mind.

**Conclusion:** Leveraging social media presents a cost-effective means for digitalization. This qualitative study unveils the key drivers: subjective norms, perceived usefulness, ease of use, behavioral control, competitive pressure, customer demand, and government support. Government intervention and customer-centric strategies are crucial for successful social media adoption.

**Keywords:** Digital marketing; micro business; social media integration

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<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [adisthy@ecampus.ut.ac.id](mailto:adisthy@ecampus.ut.ac.id)

## 1. Introduction

As one of the most populated countries in the world, Indonesia's total population reached almost 280 million in 2024 (MacroTrends, 2024), with 63.9 million micro businesses in 2021 (Muhamad, 2023). MSMEs in Indonesia contribute 97% to the country's employment, 61.9% to GDP, and 14.4% to national export. However, based on the performance, Indonesia is still behind Myanmar whose MSMEs contribute 69.3% to GDP, and Singapore whose MSMEs export contribution reaches 38.3% (Investments, 2022; Wibowo, 2020).

The government of Indonesia continues to minimize those gaps by improving the performance of MSMEs through socializing and conducting workshops for MSMEs to utilize digital technologies (Andreya, 2022). However, only 17% of MSMEs had adopted technology in West Java for both operations and marketing in 2020 (Rachmawati et al., 2020). Despite the small number of adoptions among MSMEs, Internet users are growing and will continue to increase every year (Susanti et al., 2019). Therefore, it is of paramount importance to research the catalyst behind technology acceptance (Eze et al., 2021).

It is a critical necessity to research the catalysts behind social media integration since it could contribute to the sustainability of micro-businesses and can further support the country's economy. Previous research in this field focuses heavily on end-users rather than evaluating the effectiveness of adoption by SMEs themselves (Solomon et al., 2023). A lot of current research is primarily dominated by the study of the tactical use of social media platforms (Cartwright et al., 2021). This has created a gap in the study of social media integration within SMEs regarding the catalyst behind social media integration.

MSMEs often struggle to invest in high technology, thus using social media with low investment will be a good start for MSMEs to adopt the technology. This research is important to the development of current scholarly and practical issues about the implementation of technology. Social media is beneficial for numerous substances including promotion, hiring, and overall communications with internal and external stakeholders. Nonetheless, many small businesses often lack the resources required to fully utilize the advantages provided by social media platforms (Qalati, 2021). In addition, resource constraints make them hesitant to use social media for strategic and managerial purposes (Son & Niehm, 2021).

Previous research conducted by Olanrewaju et al. (2020) indicated that most of the research in social media and entrepreneurship employed quantitative approaches through surveys with research on the acceptance of technology-related products mainly using quantitative methods (Andarwati et al., 2020). These indicate a gap in the realization of actual research results phenomenon which cannot be obtained in detail if merely relying on a survey. Using a qualitative approach, this research intends to undertake a thorough investigation of the catalyst behind the social media integration of micro-businesses in the culinary sector in Indonesia. This paper offers the advantage over quantitative studies, in the depth of the findings and detail of the context.

The primary subjects of this study are micro-businesses in the culinary sector in Indonesia. Culinary businesses are everlasting businesses as they will always be in demand if people need food, thus one of the micro-businesses that remain sustainable are those within the culinary business (Sinurat et al., 2021). Moreover, businesses in the culinary sector have a substantial effect on the economy. Along with its everlasting demand, consumers' need for a variety and number of foods is growing. This will bring a multiplier effect on employment and increased economic growth (Rosmeli et al., 2022; Saptaningtyas & Rahayu, 2020). Given the noteworthy impact of micro-businesses and their underutilization of social media platforms, particularly in the ever-growing culinary sector, the purpose of this study is to identify the catalysts behind social media integration in Indonesia's culinary industry.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Technology Adoption Theory

Technology adoption can be defined as the act of receiving, integrating, and embracing the latest technology, which is influenced by various factors (Granić, 2022). Technology adoption theory has previously served as a valuable theory to comprehend the effective implementation of numerous innovations and novel business concepts in various contexts (Skafi, 2020; Sujatha & Sekkizhar, 2019).

Research on technology adoption has been conducted for centuries. Early foundations included the diffusion of innovations (DOI) theory about the concept of a predictable adoption curve (Usman, 2019). Subsequently, the technology adoption model (TAM) focused on perceived usefulness and ease of use (Chatterjee, 2021; Nurqamarani et al., 2021a), while the innovation-decision process emphasized five stages of the adoption process: “the knowledge phase, persuasion phase, decision phase, implementation phase, and confirmation phase” (Holland, 2017; Rogers, 2006).

Social network theory explains how the influence of media operates and how both small-scale (micro) and large-scale (macro) social frameworks shape and regulate these influences (Liu et al., 2017). Organizational adoption theories emerged in the 1990s, mostly known as the technology-organization-environment (TOE) framework which elucidates the impact of technology, organization, and environmental factors on the adoption of technology (Abed, 2020; Bryan & Zuva, 2021), followed by a growing importance of contextual and cultural considerations in the adoption of technology (Gajendran & Brewer, 2012; Lin, 2014; Skafi et al., 2020).

Social media marketing theories explain the dynamics and effectiveness of marketing endeavors on social media platforms (Skafi et al., 2020). These theories include the social exchange theory (SE), diffusion of innovation theory (DOI), social identity theory (SI), information processing theory (IP), consumer engagement theory (CE), and social influence theory. SE explains that people belong to social interactions based on cost and benefit evaluations, DOI elucidates the concept of a predictable adoption curve (Amini & Bakri, 2015; Usman, 2019), while SI proposes that individuals classify themselves and others into social groups, thereby impacting their conduct. (Ashforth, 2011; McKeown et al., 2016). Information processing theory explores how individuals acquire, process, and retain information (Herrera et al., 2020), while consumer engagement theory emphasizes active and interactive interactions and social influence theory examines whether peers, influencers, and social connections have a substantial impact on influencing consumer actions.

#### 2.1.1 Technology Adoption of MSMEs

Several studies have evaluated the technology used by MSMEs. Cunningham et al. (2023) observed technology adoption drivers on MSMEs in Europe, particularly in the electronics, automotive, and IT sectors. The study discovered that combining opportunity recognition with organizational or environmental factors helped increase technology adoption. Qalati (2021) investigated how technology-organizational-environmental (TOE) factors influence the adoption of social media and the performance of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in developing nations. They utilized a self-administered closed-ended questionnaire to collect data from randomly chosen participants representing SMEs in Pakistan. The findings revealed a clear positive correlation between TOE factors, the adoption of social media, and SMEs' performance.

Using the technology acceptance model, Nurqamarani et al. (2021b) conducted a literature review of 21 articles on the technology adoption of small-medium businesses and found that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are the predominant influences. Additionally, a study by Wulandari et al. (2020) conducted through surveys of 400 MSMEs in Indonesia found that technology, organization, and environment (TOE) are drivers of technology adoption that influence the firm performance.

The range of study in technology adoption varies across the region, sectors, methods, technology, and respondents (consumer vs seller perspectives). Consequently, adoption theory is expected to continue evolving due to rapid technological advancements and evolving societal needs, one of which is the use of social media marketing among small and medium-size businesses.

### 2.1.2 Subdivision - numbered sections

In the dynamic realm of business evolution, businesses consistently explore the potential of social media marketing (SMM) to drive their success and growth. Firms utilize social media for diverse purposes ranging from communication, creating and sharing content, branding, sales, as well as building and managing relationships with customers (Fakhreldin et al., 2020; Okundaye, 2019; Son & Niehm, 2021).

Social media is not a new technology, but it is still regarded as innovative in small-scale businesses as there are still limited small firms that use it for marketing purposes (Lupo & Stroman, 2020). Social media has evolved into a connecting bridge between micro and small businesses and the prospective customers (Abed et al., 2015). It also helps micro and small businesses to improve their productivity and business revenue (Tripopsakul, 2018). However, micro and small businesses have experienced challenges in digital adoption including a lack of funding, digital training, and regulatory support (Boston Consulting Group X Telkom Indonesia, 2022). Challenges are often experienced by more minor scales of businesses, particularly in restaurants with fewer resources (Lepkowska-White, 2017). Business owners or managers of MSMEs mostly use social media for personal matters instead of strategic and managerial purposes (Made et al., 2022). Additionally, the success of a business hinges on the ability of its owners and managers to analyze and maximize opportunities using social media (Made et al., 2022).

Initial study, such as Constantinides (2014), discussed the paradigm shift in marketing power dynamics due to social media, highlighting the emergence of an empowered consumer archetype. This has necessitated new marketing strategies that integrate social media both as a passive market intelligence tool and an active direct marketing channel. Cesaroni and Consoli (2015) recognized the varying adoption and impact of social media marketing in small firms, emphasizing the importance of an effective approach to fully leveraging social media's capabilities.

## 3. Method

The data were collected through qualitative research methods with a post-positivist approach. This method was selected for numerous reasons. First, the practice of social media by MSMEs is a relatively new phenomenon that has recently become the most debated issue in today's business environment (Rahman et al., 2020). Second, studies on this topic in Indonesia are vital considering its position as the 4th rank in the top countries' social network users in selected countries in 2022 and 2027, which calls for an exploratory study that can be best achieved through interviews. The detailed research design is shown in Figure 1 below. It portrays three steps of research: planning, data collecting, and analysis. The criteria in determining the informants is as follows: (a) MSME employing fewer than 100 employees; (b) been in business for at least three years; (c) is privately owned and operated; and (d) has used social media for at least one year.

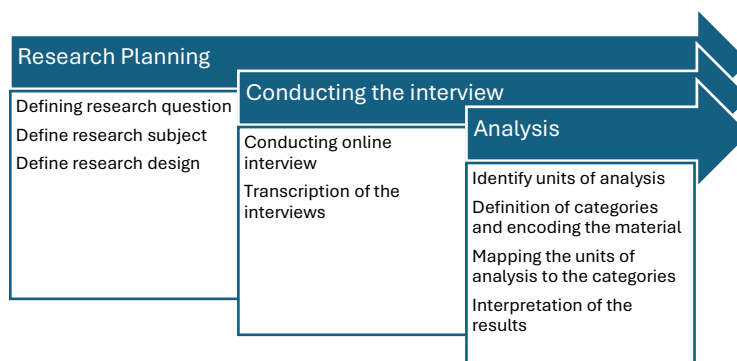


Figure 1. Research design (Modified from Vogelsang et al., 2013))

### 3.1. *Sample / Participants*

The informants of this study were obtained through the snowball sampling method, with the criteria mentioned above. All the businesses recommended by the early participants were interviewed until it reached thirteen participants. Subsequently, seven informants (micro-businesses) who fulfilled all the criteria necessary to address the research inquiries were chosen.

### 3.2. *Instrument(s)*

The instruments used for the data collection are open-ended questionnaires and guidance for interviews. The guideline is used as an instrument to guide the interviewer in conducting the interview. The interview approach is semi-structured interviews. Additionally, the researchers used the recorder to record the interview process, via Zoom and/or MS Teams.

### 3.3. *Data collection procedures*

The data collection was obtained through interviews. The six categories of interviews were crafted to extract maximum information from participants. The questions were divided into six parts including a profile of the participants (an individual aspect), a technological aspect, an organizational aspect, an environmental aspect, and general questions regarding the impact, benefit, challenges, as well as other factors that may influence the adoption of social media in the participants' business. The duration of each interview ranged between 45 to 75 minutes, and all sessions were recorded directly through MS Teams and Zoom to ensure accurate capture of the entire interview.

### 3.4. *Data analysis*

In this study, recordings of the interview were transcribed into MS Word and organized for analysis. Interviews were consistently transcribed to avoid misunderstandings and allow easy and accurate analysis. Afterward, data were examined using the original data encoding scheme. The data collected were evaluated based on the main themes that emerged. After data analysis, the next phase was data presentation and interpretation, following which the results were narrated in themes.

This study was triangulated through interviews and a review of the company's data. Additionally, to ensure reliability, all activities and conversations were documented. Theoretical and evaluative validity were attained by offering explicit elucidations of social media phenomena and associated concepts. Judgmental validity was secured by refraining from making subjective judgments about the data. Study validity and reliability were upheld by crafting and implementing research protocols that furnished comprehensive descriptions of the methodologies and procedures utilized in the research (Creswell, 2009).

## 4. **Results**

### *Driver of Social Media Adoption: Perceived Usefulness*

Amid the subtopics related to the drivers of social media adoption, the perceived usefulness of social media occurred the most. All interviewees agreed with the idea that social media is used for promotion, given the large number of users on social media. As quoted from Informant 4, 'We use social media to promote menus and various things about the café, it also makes it easy to interact online with potential customers such as asking for info on access to the café or operating hours.' This is consistent with previous findings stating that perceived usefulness is linked with technology acceptance (Singh et al., 2020) and 'Perceived usefulness also acts as a driver of SME's intention to adopt technology (Reniati et al., 2018).

*Driver of Social Media Adoption: Subjective Norm*

Besides perceived usefulness, the subjective norm is also considered the influencing factor. Subjective norm refers to the belief about people's acceptance, whether peers and important people will think he or she should engage in the activity (LaMorte, 2022).

As quoted from Informant 4, 'We use social media as we just tune in with the trend and follow what's trending, plus social media like Instagram has a lot of users.' This is consistent with the findings of Al-Emran et al. (2020) who stated that subjective norms have a positive effect on the intention to use technology.

*Driver of Social Media Adoption: Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU)*

PEOU is another factor mentioned by interviewees that influences social media adoption. PEOU together with Perceived Usefulness belong to influences of technology adoption in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) theory. As quoted from Informant 4: 'We use social media like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok because they are simple, easy, and fast'.

This is consistent with the findings that indicate ease of use has a momentous effect on the intention to use technology (Nenandha, 2022). However, only one respondent mentioned easiness as the driver. The rationale as to why it is insignificant is that it failed to boost users' beliefs about its ability (He et al., 2018a). People who are struggling in life or who don't think well of themselves, for instance, might not have the courage to try anything new, even if adoption seems like a simple process (He et al., 2018b).

*Driver of Social Media Adoption: Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC)*

Informant 1 stated 'I use social media as I must take care of my children, my husband, and the house, so how do I manage the time but still able to manage my business? Well, in the end, I maximize social media.' This shows how social media is compatible with her existing norms. This is relevant to the previous finding which stated that perceived behavioral control positively affects the intention to use technology (Al-Emran et al., 2020). Nonetheless, like the previous driver (PEOU), PBC is rarely mentioned. Perceived behavioral control was considered an insignificant predictor of behavioral intention to engage with Facebook advertising (Sanne & Wiese, 2018). This is quite different from previous findings that PBC is a significant factor that influences intention in a social media context (Hansen et al., 2018). The reason could be that the user is already capable of using social media and thus does not need additional abilities to engage with the advertising feature of social media (Sanne & Wiese, 2018).

*Driver of Social Media Adoption: Competitive Pressure*

Competitive pressure often be regarded as an influencing factor in technology acceptance (Chiu et al., 2017; Matikiti et al., 2018). A quantitative study through the survey method of 144 SMEs by Lina and Suwarni (2022) also found that competitive pressure has a significant positive effect on technology adoption. A similar finding is also found in the study by Asiaei and Ab. Rahim (2019). It is also supported by the statement from I1.

'My competitors have strong social media presence, that's how it is! They have a lot of followers on Instagram, use ads, then use all kinds of endorsements, so my positioning who was at the top began to be overtaken, that's it. Well, that's when I started to wake up again (focus on social media). It turns out that one of them is there are promotions through social media, that's it, and we start focusing on social media as well.'

*Driver of Social Media Adoption: Customer Demand (Pressure from Customer)*

Besides pressure from competitors, the customer also holds a role in influencing technological adoption. Customer demand (pressure from customer) refers to the customer's capacity to pressure the organization, potentially affecting their sensitivity to price changes implemented by SMEs (Ahani, 2017). As explained by I2, customers ask to order online via WhatsApp. This was supported by I3, that

customers from different cities who are far away from her offline outlets would like to order online. These indicate that there is a need for a bigger reach of customers, which can be obtained using social media. As mentioned by Lina & Suwarni (2022), when utilizing technology becomes a key method for companies to effectively meet customer expectations and needs, it naturally encourages them to adopt technological solutions. Accordingly, as consumer demand for expanding markets through digital platforms, SMEs are likewise motivated to embrace it.

#### *Driver of Social Media Adoption: Government Support*

Government support is one of the factors which influence the adoption of digital marketing for MSMEs. It is considered a stimulant factor that affects technology adoption and belongs to one of the significant predictors of technology adoption in TOE theory (Budiono et al., 2020; Safari et al., 2015). I3 mentioned that the government in West Java encourages MSMEs to use digital advertising instead of depending entirely on printed or traditional advertising. I1 also mentioned that the government often carries out training, and workshops about digital marketing, social media, and skills to support the use of social media (i.e., photography). This is consistent with previous research by Chiu et al. (2017). Previous studies also found government support as a significant driver of technology adoption (Chiu et al., 2017; Safari et al., 2015; Solaja et al., 2020).

#### *Implication of the Study*

The implications of the study on the catalysts behind social media integration of micro-businesses in the culinary sector in Indonesia are multifaceted and significant for various stakeholders, including policymakers, business owners, and support organizations. According to the findings, the following factors influence social media adoption: perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, subjective norm, perceived behavior control, competitive pressure, consumer demand, and government support.

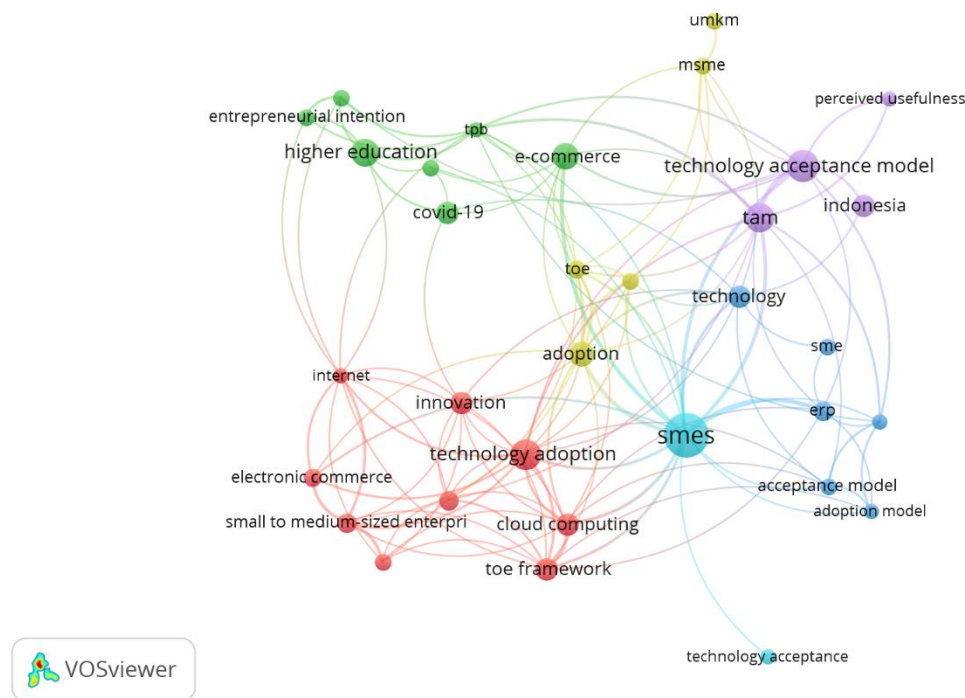
The findings show the crucial role of government support in facilitating the digital transition of micro-businesses. Policymakers should consider creating incentives, grants, training programs, and infrastructure improvements to support social media adoption. Moreover, perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness are among the drivers of social media adoption. It indicates that the technology (social media) was perceived to be easy and useful, thus technology providers should focus on creating user-friendly, affordable, and accessible social media tools tailored to the needs of micro-businesses. In addition, subjective norms also influence the adoption in which the community leaders and successful entrepreneurs shall act as influencers, encouraging other micro-business owners to adopt social media by sharing their success stories and benefits. As one of the implications of this study, it is suggested to create online communities where micro-business owners can share experiences, challenges, and best practices can foster a supportive environment for digital adoption.

## **5. Discussion**

### **Theoretical Contribution**

From an academic perspective, this study contributes to knowledge regarding the catalysts in adopting social media in MSMEs in Indonesia. Small businesses are different from large businesses as decisions in that small businesses are created based on managers and/or owners relatively for the short-term while large businesses are built on company vision and mission aligned with the business' long-term planning and strategy (Kumar et al., 2022).

This study adds to the theoretical understanding of technology adoption by integrating various factors such as subjective norms, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, perceived behavioral control, competitive pressure, customer demand, and government support into existing models like the technology acceptance model (TAM), technology, organization, and environment (TOE) framework, and the theory of planned behavior (TPB).



**Figure 2.** Network analysis of articles discussing technology adoption on MSME based on author keywords.

Figure 2 above shows that the most common theories on technology adoption in literature are TAM, TOE, and TPB. This study explores the use of the TOE, TPB, and TAM in analyzing the utilization of social media marketing by MSMEs. This study proves that factors like subjective norms, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, perceived behavioral control, competitive pressure, customer demand, and government support hold important roles in the adoption of social media in micro and small businesses. It confirms that most factors deemed as relevant in TPB, TOE, and TAM are relevant in this study, particularly in micro and small businesses in the culinary industry in Indonesia. Among the most common theories in technology adoption, TAM explains the personal factor that influences technology adoption and is relevant to MSMEs as most micro and small businesses are managed solely by owners and only have fewer than five employees. Factors including perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness are mentioned in TAM theory.

TOE suggests how external and internal factors influence management's decision to adopt and utilize technology. Government support, competitive pressure, and customer demand influence the adoption of social media marketing. TPB suggests the relationship between attitude, subjective norm, and perception impacts individual behavior in deciding or/and taking action. This study also confirms several variables of TPB are consistent with the findings of this study, which are subjective norms and perceived behavioral control. All this might help to explain why MSMEs sometimes fall behind in implementing digital marketing, particularly social media marketing. Additionally, this study adds to the literature on digital adoption by giving context-specific perceptions from the Indonesian culinary sector, thereby enriching the global understanding of how cultural and economic contexts influence technology adoption.

### Methodological Contributions

As mentioned earlier in this paper, this study offers an advantage over other study as it uses a qualitative approach which brings more detailed explanations of the phenomena. The use of a qualitative methodology, particularly thematic analysis, offers a greater grasp of the social media integration of



micro-business owners in the culinary sector in Indonesia. This approach contrasts with the predominantly quantitative methods used in previous studies, providing rich, detailed insights that numbers alone cannot convey.

### **Practical Contributions**

The study offers practical contributions for micro-business owners in the culinary sector on the importance of adopting social media. By understanding the key drivers, such as customer demand and perceived usefulness, owners can better strategize their social media marketing efforts. The findings also deliver valuable recommendations for policymakers on how to support micro-businesses in their digital transformation journey. Specifically, the study suggests that government interventions should focus on providing incentives, training, and infrastructure support to facilitate social media adoption. Factors that have been pointed out in this study can function as a framework for designing targeted interventions and support programs. For example, training programs can be developed to enhance the perceived usefulness and ease of use of social media tools, while influencers can be organized to influence subjective norms positively.

### **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

The study only involved interviews with seven micro-business owners, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. The small sample size implies that the findings may not be relevant to all micro-businesses in Indonesia or sectors outside the culinary. Besides, while qualitative methods provide in-depth insights, some of the drawbacks are the lack of statistical rigor and generalizability of their findings. Therefore, future research is suggested to involve more samples and use mixed methods to accommodate rich and in-depth insights while also still capturing the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, exploring the research by examining the consumers' perspective to measure the actual effect of social media adoption on the company's success will provide a practical guide for micro-businesses to optimize their social media marketing integration.

## **6. Conclusions**

The main aim of the study was to undertake an in-depth investigation of the drivers of social media integration in MSMEs in the culinary sector in Indonesia. This study uses the TPB, TAM, and TOE frameworks to guide the research process and assist in categorization. The results confirmed that most variables mentioned in TPB, TAM, and TOE are relevant in this study. This qualitative research reveals essential factors influencing social media adoption, including subjective norms, perceived utility, usability, behavioral control, competitive dynamics, consumer demand, and governmental backing. Effective integration of social media relies significantly on government support. These findings highlight the crucial role of both internal perceptions and external pressures in driving social media adoption. Despite the contributions of this study, it has several limitations including the small sample size and the qualitative methodology that limit the generalizability of the findings. Future studies should consider expanding the sample size and variety to enhance generalizability. A mixed method combining qualitative and quantitative approaches could provide in-depth insights and statistical support for the findings. Lastly, future studies may examine the consumer perspective and measure the impact on business performance. This would offer practical guidance for micro-businesses aiming to leverage social media effectively.

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