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Original Article

Social Media Platform Utilization and Perceived Business Growth Among Food Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)

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Abstract

Food Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Cebu City, Philippines, face increasing pressure to adopt digital platforms, yet evidence on how such utilization relates to perceived growth remains limited. This study examined associations between social media platform utilization and perceived business growth among food MSMEs, focusing on four dimensions: social media marketing, online selling, online payment systems, and customer communication. The study used a descriptive-correlational, cross-sectional design and included 100 registered food MSME owners selected through simple random sampling. The researchers collected data using an adapted questionnaire validated by experts and pilot-tested for reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.93$). Descriptive statistics and Spearman's rank-order correlation were used to analyze the data. Results indicated that respondents reported high levels of utilization across all four dimensions (social media marketing ($M = 4.98$, $SD = 0.921$), online selling ($M = 4.75$, $SD = 0.976$), online payment systems ($M = 5.10$, $SD = 0.982$), and customer communication ($M = 4.86$, $SD = 0.897$)) as well as high perceived business growth ($M = 4.97$, $SD = 0.798$). Correlation analysis revealed statistically significant positive associations between each dimension and perceived business growth, with customer communication showing the strongest relationship ($\rho = .729$, $p < .001$). While these findings highlight important linkages between digital engagement and MSME owners' perceptions of growth, the study's cross-sectional, observational design precludes causal inference. Future research should consider longitudinal designs and control for potential confounding variables such as firm size, age, and resources to clarify the direction and mechanisms of these relationships.

Keywords: Business Growth, Cebu City, Digital Platforms, Micro Small and Medium Enterprises, Social Media Marketing.

1. Introduction

Technology use has become increasingly prevalent, offering new opportunities for innovation and growth. For Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), particularly in the food sector, digital tools enable more efficient operations and potentially boost growth. As MSMEs serve as the backbone of many economies worldwide, their ability to adapt and utilize social media activities such as marketing through Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, online selling via Shopee and Grab Food, and secure transactions through GCash and Maya has become a necessity for competitiveness and sustainable growth (Titin et al., 2024).

Prior studies highlight the cost-effectiveness of social media as a growth booster for MSMEs. For example, Bouargan et al. (2020) found that small food vendors in Brunei leveraged social media to promote products and reach broader markets at low cost, directly supporting business expansion. Similarly, Amador (2025) reported that food enterprises in

Albay's 2nd District relied heavily on Facebook for affordable promotion, enhancing visibility and customer engagement.

Despite these insights, little is known about how food MSMEs in Cebu City use social media to increase sales, expand customer reach, or improve services. Most research has focused on global or national contexts, leaving a gap in understanding local practices. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates the relationship between social media use and business growth among food MSMEs in Cebu City. This work also contributes to Sustainable Development Goals 8 and 9 by supporting inclusive economic growth and fostering innovation.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Framework

This section presents the theoretical foundation of this study. The study examines social media utilization (social media marketing, online selling, online payment systems, and customer communication) and business growth. To understand how social media use contributes to the business growth of food Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Cebu City, this study is underpinned by two interrelated theories: the Resource-Based View (RBV) and the Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) Theory. The RBV helps explain how strategically utilizing resources, such as social media platforms, can enhance business growth. At the same time, DOI provides a framework for understanding how MSMEs adopt and integrate social media innovations to improve performance. Together, these theories offer insights into the link between social media utilization and business growth among food MSMEs in Cebu City.

2.1.1. Diffusion of Innovation Theory

Everett M. Rogers first conceptualized the Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) Theory in 1962. The theory explains how new ideas, practices, or technologies spread and are adopted over time within a social system. Diffusion is defined as the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system. DOI highlights four key elements in the diffusion process: (1) innovation, an idea, practice, or object perceived as new; (2) communication channels, the means of sharing information; (3) time, covering the decision process and adoption rate; and (4) social system, the network of units working together toward common goals. These elements explain how innovations spread and why adoption varies (Hornor, 2013).

This theory is particularly relevant to food Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises in Cebu City because social media platforms are a modern innovation that these businesses can adopt to improve marketing, customer communication, online sales, and payment systems. By applying the DOI framework, the study can examine how factors such as relative advantage, compatibility, and observability influence the adoption of social media platforms. Understanding these factors enables food MSMEs to implement social media tools strategically, enhancing customer engagement, expanding market reach, and ultimately achieving business growth. In this context, DOI provides a clear lens for analyzing how the effective adoption and use of social media innovations contribute to the success of local food enterprises.

2.1.2. Resource-Based View Theory

According to Wernerfelt (1984), later expanded by Barney (1991), the Resource-Based View (RBV) theory posits that a business can succeed and remain ahead of competitors by leveraging its capabilities, resources, and abilities. The resources can be what the company owns or controls such as knowledge, technology, skills, equipment, and well-established brands that enable it to operate more effectively than its competitors. Valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources are highly advantageous for MSMEs because they focus on what makes them unique and leverage these strengths to grow and compete in the market (Minarni et al., 2024).

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Cebu City that adopt the RBV Theory can identify and leverage their unique capabilities, resources, and abilities to gain a competitive advantage. By focusing on this theory's main idea, MSMEs in Cebu City can leverage digital platforms, such as social media and other digital payment systems, as strategic resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable. This approach enables micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises to better connect with customers, reach more people, and streamline their operations, thereby strengthening their market position.

2.2. Previous Research

2.2.1. Social Media Utilization

Digital platforms are increasingly available today and have different impacts across various fields. In this study, digital platforms are defined as tools and systems that require an internet connection to function. These online technologies allow users to interact with services, communicate through information exchange, and conduct transactions involving goods, services, or payments. According to Rachmiani et al. (2024), digital platform utilization in business entails the strategic and practical use of digital tools to grow a business, including social media marketing, online selling, online payment systems, and customer communication. For MSMEs, using these platforms is more than having a website; it involves leveraging their benefits to improve efficiency, reach more people, and stay ahead of competitors (Sutrisno et al., 2023).

Digital tools benefit Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) by enabling them to expand market reach, streamline operations, and enhance customer engagement (Saleh et al., 2025). Using digital platforms not only helps MSMEs expand market reach, streamline operations, and improve customer engagement; it also creates opportunities to compete with larger firms by reducing operational costs and increasing visibility in digital marketplaces, as Santos-Jaén et al. (2023) support. This suggests that digital tools help businesses grow, become more efficient, and increase revenue. Furthermore, digital tools support innovation, facilitate secure online transactions, and strengthen communication with customers (Luo et al., 2025).

Although digital platforms have proven beneficial for MSME growth, adoption challenges remain. A study by Yuwono et al. (2025) found that while digital tools do not always lead to immediate success for MSMEs, they are essential for long-term survival and growth. Abu Hasan et al. (2022) further support this, noting that MSMEs should improve their computer literacy to use these tools effectively. While many MSMEs adopt digital platforms, these tools alone do not directly result in business growth. Successful outcomes depend heavily on how well these firms reconfigure their internal capabilities, particularly through substitutional changes, to integrate digital tools effectively (Hendrawan et al., 2024).

2.2.2. Social Media Marketing

With the rise of digital platforms, Social Media Marketing (SMM) has become a way for MSMEs to promote their brand, products, or services by posting content and engaging with customers (Purba et al., 2025). It is an affordable, straightforward way for MSMEs to build a brand, engage with customers, and drive sales (Wan, 2023). This approach is particularly relevant in the Philippines, where people spend an average of more than four hours per day on social media, one of the highest rates globally (Syaifullah et al., 2021).

Social media marketing, as a way to leverage digital platforms, contributes to MSME growth by increasing online visibility and sales, fostering customer interactions, and enhancing content creativity (Santos et al., 2024). Several studies indicate that SMM is a valuable means for MSMEs in the Philippines to expand their operations. For example, Simbajon et al. (2025) examined marketing among MSMEs in Cebu City and found that effective social media marketing is strongly correlated with business success. As Yadav (2025) explains, SMM use is clearly related to increased sales. They found that activities such as customer engagement and content sharing were beneficial. This indicates that by interacting with their audiences, MSMEs can build customer loyalty and increase sales.

2.2.3. Online Selling

Online selling refers to offering and selling products or services online. This includes using popular platforms such as Shopee and Lazada, as well as social media and a business-owned website. It allows MSMEs to reach a wider audience, conduct transactions electronically, and often integrate payment, delivery, and customer support digitally. E-commerce eliminates the need for physical stores, making it easier for MSMEs to reach customers worldwide. This is a major reason more MSMEs are selling online (Isbahi et al., 2025). Likewise, Montano and Mercado (2023) project that the online shopping market in the Philippines will reach $16.75 billion by 2025 and continue to grow quickly.

The impact of online marketing on MSME growth is a central theme in current studies. According to a survey by Suarniki et al. (2025), e-commerce enables MSMEs to reach more customers, reduce costs, and compete more effectively with larger firms. It also provides valuable insights into consumer purchasing behavior, thereby facilitating product improvements. Montano and Mercado (2023) corroborate this, finding that the emergence of live selling and user-friendly mobile shopping apps is a key driver of this growth. Another e-commerce growth study by Aragon et al. (2025) suggested that companies should continue refining their websites and security to build customer confidence. Beyond selling products online, reliable online payment systems are essential for effective e-commerce among micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), facilitating secure, efficient, and convenient transactions between businesses and their customers (Alobaydi et al., 2025; Arum et al., 2023; Necheporenko & Hrytsenko, 2025).

2.2.4. Customer Communication

For MSMEs, effective customer communication is a top priority for building trust and stronger connections (Belinda & Subagyo, 2023). Through digital platforms, businesses can easily share updates, address inquiries, and address concerns, thereby making customers feel valued and understood (Nuseir et al., 2023). In essence, customer communication is the continuous, purposeful exchange of information between a business and its customers to build trust, address concerns, and nurture long-term relationships.

Additionally, Sutrisno et al. (2023) found that social media has become a crucial element in MSMEs' marketing strategies. The study showed that by using social media effectively, MSMEs can build a strong online presence, engage directly with customers, maintain close relationships, expand market reach at minimal cost, and monitor market performance more easily. Consistent with this, Curatman et al. (2021) found that loyalty programs significantly influence program loyalty, which in turn positively affects both store loyalty and communication effectiveness. The study also highlighted that effective communication strengthens store loyalty, demonstrating that structured loyalty initiatives, when combined with consistent communication, contribute to long-term customer commitment.

Together, these findings suggest that social media strategies and loyalty programs both play vital roles in MSME growth. While Ningsih and Tjahjono (2024) highlight the importance of social media in expanding market presence and strengthening customer engagement, Curatman et al. (2021) underscore the value of loyalty programs and communication in retaining customers and fostering brand loyalty. Together, these insights show that MSMEs can improve competitiveness by integrating digital marketing with customer loyalty initiatives. In summary, these practices enhance competitiveness and customer loyalty, thereby providing a strong foundation for business growth.

2.2.5. Business Growth

For MSMEs, business growth is a multifaceted concept that extends beyond increased revenues or sales. Several significant factors drive MSME growth. Utama et al. (2023) proposed a "tripod-based view" model, in which business growth is determined by three factors: the industries in which firms operate, the resources at their disposal, and the institutions that support them. The study found that entrepreneurial knowledge (skills and functional expertise), government assistance, access to financing, and vertical and horizontal industry networks are essential in encouraging MSME owners to expand their businesses. According to Panduwinata et al. (2025), digitalization is central to innovation in the MSME sector. The report shows that digitalization offers various benefits, including improved operational efficiency, expanded market access, and enhanced social, economic, and environmental sustainability. However, the report indicates that scarce resources and uneven digital infrastructure challenge implementation, underscoring the need for targeted support for MSMEs. E-commerce platforms are also a digital strategy that directly supports business expansion. Research on MSMEs in the Philippines found that although early e-commerce adoption during the pandemic yielded uneven outcomes, it had a positive long-run effect as companies adjusted and enhanced their human capital through improved IT skills (Gochoco-Bautista, 2025). This suggests that consistent use of digital technologies, supported by appropriate skills, drives long-term growth.

A study by Fadillah and Rachmat (2025) states that social media marketing is a powerful tool for increasing income and improving MSME business performance. The research found that social media serves as a versatile tool for communication, product marketing, and customer engagement. By enhancing a business's brand presence and enabling online sales, social media has become an indispensable part of a modern marketing strategy. It concludes that social media facilitates direct interaction with consumers, allowing businesses to adapt quickly to customer feedback and preferences, thereby improving sales and competitiveness.

2.3. Justification of Hypothesis

Social media marketing has emerged as a vital tool for enterprises of all sizes, particularly micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). According to Pellegrino and Abe (2023), the growing reliance on social media underscores its relevance in modern business practices. A global study by Qalati et al. (2022) revealed that small businesses in developing countries increasingly adopt social media platforms not only to strengthen customer relationships but also to establish brand identity and enhance overall business performance. Complementing this, Syaifullah et al. (2021) reported a high adoption rate of social media marketing among MSMEs in Metro Manila, with many firms leveraging platforms such as Facebook and Instagram to sustain operations and expand market access. Likewise, Liu et al. (2020) emphasized that active engagement and consistent content sharing through social networks significantly improve sales performance for small online businesses. Similarly, Olazo (2025) concluded that Filipino MSMEs that used social media strategies showed greater resilience and broader market reach.

Taken collectively, these studies affirm that social media marketing is a critical driver of competitiveness, market expansion, and sustainability for food MSMEs. Building on this evidence, the present study hypothesizes that social media marketing is significantly associated with business growth among food MSME owners in Cebu City.

H1: There is a significant relationship between social media marketing and perceived business growth among food MSME owners

Online selling has become a practical and strategic approach for MSMEs because it enables them to reach broader markets, operate across geographic boundaries, and reduce operating expenses relative to traditional brick-and-mortar stores. Supporting this view, several studies further illustrate the growth potential of online selling in specific contexts. Bacasmas et al. (2022) found that women-led MSMEs in Metro Manila that adopted e-commerce experienced increased sales, expanded customer bases, and improved business processes. Beyond the Philippines, Mahomed and Mokhtar (2025) reported that Malaysian MSMEs integrating e-commerce achieved higher customer engagement, broader market reach, and greater operational efficiency.

Taken together, these findings consistently demonstrate that online selling directly contributes to business growth and competitiveness. Hence, this study hypothesizes that online selling practices are significantly associated with business growth among food MSME owners in Cebu City.

H2: There is a significant relationship between online selling and perceived business growth among food MSME owners

Online payment systems have become vital tools for MSMEs by enhancing efficiency, reducing manual costs, and making transactions more convenient and accessible. Kilay et al. (2022) emphasized that e-payment and e-commerce significantly strengthen supply chain performance, supported by effective communication, long-term relationships, information sharing, awareness, commitment, agility, and customer satisfaction. Likewise, Fadhilla and Purwanto (2023) revealed that digital literacy and perceptions of personal data security such as PIN verification, confidentiality, and transaction safety encourage MSMEs to adopt e-wallets. Their study highlighted that trust and awareness are essential to strengthening MSMEs' confidence in digital payments and supporting their growth. Similarly, Kusuma (2020) found that perceived usefulness, ease of use, comfort, and social influence were associated with MSMEs' acceptance of mobile payments, with many business owners recognizing their practicality, safety, and value in tracking sales. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated this shift, as reliance on Grab and Gojek, along with OVO and GoPay, highlighted the importance of digital payment systems in sustaining operations during disruptions. Agustina et al. (2023) also stressed that e-payments make transactions faster, more reliable, and less costly while promoting sustainability by reducing paper use.

These combined benefits not only improve financial performance but also help MSMEs remain resilient and competitive. Building on this evidence, the present study hypothesizes that online payment system utilization is significantly associated with business growth among food MSME owners in Cebu City.

H3: There is a significant relationship between online payment systems and perceived business growth among food MSME owners

Customer communication is a vital driver of MSME growth and sustainability. By engaging with customers, businesses gather valuable feedback that drives product and service improvements while building trust and loyalty. Aji (2023) emphasized that digital literacy enables MSME owners to use online platforms effectively, thereby boosting customer relationships and directly enhancing competitiveness. Kumar et al. (2024) found that adopting ICT tools such as social media, e-commerce platforms, and messaging apps not only improves operational efficiency but also ensures consistent communication with customers. Gunawan and Hudiono (2023) argued that digital tools in Industry 4.0 strengthen customer engagement, boost productivity, and expand market reach.

Nevertheless, some MSMEs still face barriers that limit their ability to maximize customer communication fully. Mittal and Raman (2021) observed that financial and resource constraints hinder small firms from adopting advanced communication systems, while Endris and Kassegn (2022) noted that limited infrastructure and lack of training weaken sustained communication efforts. Even so, consistent engagement whether through digital platforms or traditional face-to-face methods remains indispensable, as it strengthens customer relationships, improves satisfaction, and ultimately drives business growth. Building on this evidence, the present study hypothesizes that customer communication through digital platforms is significantly associated with business growth among food MSME owners in Cebu City.

H4: There is a significant relationship between customer communication and perceived business growth among food MSME owners

2.4. Synthesis of the Literature

The reviewed studies show that social media significantly impacts the growth of small businesses. These tools helped MSMEs reach more customers, reduce costs, and streamline operations, while strengthening relationships between customers and owners. At the same time, challenges remain, including limited digital skills, limited access to technology, and the fact that not all businesses see immediate results from digital use. Some studies also indicate that age, gender, education, and income can influence how MSMEs use digital platforms. Overall, the studies agree that social media are powerful drivers of business growth; however, the benefits that MSMEs derive from them can differ depending on their situation and resources. While many previous studies have examined the importance of social media in MSME growth, most have focused on national or global contexts. Our study focuses on a specific local community. Rather than examining MSMEs in general, this study focuses on the experiences of business owners in Cebu City. By concentrating on Cebu City, this study linked findings from other researchers to the real experiences of local business owners. This makes the study valuable not only for understanding how social media helped Cebu City's food MSMEs grow their businesses but also for providing insights that can guide local businesses, support groups, and policymakers in developing more practical, needs-based solutions.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research method, specifically a descriptive-correlational design. The descriptive component aims to provide a detailed overview of the current status of digital utilization and business growth among food MSME owners in Cebu City. The correlational analysis also seeks to identify significant relationships between the two variables by examining the use of digital platforms and its contribution to business growth.

In addition, quantitative data were collected using a structured survey questionnaire to measure the frequency and types of digital platforms used, as well as the corresponding indicators of business growth. The responses were measured using a Likert scale and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. This design is suitable because it enables researchers to analyze relationships among variables and draw statistically based conclusions about correlations.

3.2. Respondents and Inclusion-Exclusion Criteria

The respondents of this study are the registered owners of food Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) located in Cebu City. These business owners were officially registered, and the study included one hundred (100) respondents to represent the sample of food MSMEs in the City. This study aimed to examine food-sector MSMEs to gain a comprehensive understanding of how these businesses use social media platforms to promote their products, reach more customers, and support overall business growth. They were selected because they have direct knowledge and experience in managing their business operations and using social media platforms to promote their products and support business growth. The researchers used simple random sampling, specifically the fishbowl method, to select respondents from Cebu City, ensuring each qualified and registered business owner had an equal chance of inclusion in this study.

Participants were selected using predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the sample aligned with the research objectives. To be eligible, respondents must be current owners of a registered micro, small, or medium enterprise (MSME) operating in Cebu City. In addition, their business must be in the food sector and actively use at least one digital platform, such as social media, online marketplaces, or food delivery applications, in its operations. Eligible participants must also voluntarily agree to participate in the study by providing informed consent. Conversely, MSME owners were excluded if they did not meet the inclusion criteria mentioned above.

3.3. Research Instrument

In this study, an adapted survey questionnaire, based on prior studies and related literature, served as the primary instrument for collecting quantitative data. The instrument collects data on MSMEs' use of digital platforms and their perceived impact on business growth. The questionnaire was divided into five major sections, reflecting the study's variables.

The first section focuses on Social Media Marketing, assessing the use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok to promote products and services, post content, advertise, and expand customer reach. This section draws on studies by Ellyawati and Kusumatriawan (2024); Lestari et al. (2024); as well as Sharabati et al. (2024), which emphasize social media's role in marketing and visibility.

The second section covers online selling, examining MSMEs' experiences with e-commerce platforms such as Shopee, Lazada, and Facebook Marketplace for selling products, managing transactions, and increasing sales volume. The APEC MSME survey served as the primary supporting reference for this section, highlighting the benefits of online platforms in reaching customers and improving sales transactions. The third section examines Digital Payment Systems, focusing on payment methods such as GCash, Maya, and bank transfers to ensure efficient, fast, and convenient business transactions. This section draws on Verma and Agrawal (2024), the SIDBI (2025) report, and the PayNearby MSME Digital Index (2025), which show how digital payments improve operational efficiency and customer satisfaction.

The fourth section evaluated Customer Communication, particularly the use of platforms such as Messenger, Viber, and email to strengthen customer relationships, improve services, and enhance customer loyalty. Supporting studies for this section include Ellyawati and Kusumatriawan (2024) as well as Sharabati et al. (2024), and the APEC MSME survey, which emphasize the importance of digital communication in enhancing customer engagement and service quality.

Finally, the fifth section measured Business Growth, assessing the overall impact of digital platform utilization on sales revenue, profitability, competitiveness, and market advantage. This section draws on studies by Lestari et al. (2024), Sharabati et al. (2024), and the PayNearby MSME Digital Index (2025), which underscore how digital platforms enhance business growth and market competitiveness. These prior studies and related literature supported each questionnaire item to ensure construct validity. Responses were measured using a 6-point Likert Scale, where (6) = Strongly Agree, (5) = Agree, (4) = Slightly Agree, (3) = Slightly Disagree, (2) = Disagree, and (1) = Strongly Disagree. To establish content validity, three research experts validated the researcher-made survey instrument. They received informed consent, a transmittal letter, a validation form, and the survey questionnaire. The validation process lasted for two weeks, after which the experts determined whether the instrument was accepted, accepted with conditions, or rejected.

3.4. Validity and Reliability

To ensure that the survey accurately measured the use of social media platforms and their perceived effect on business growth, the questionnaire was developed around the study's key areas: social media marketing, online selling, online payment systems, and customer communication. Two research teachers reviewed the instrument to ensure that the questions were clear, relevant, and aligned with the study's objectives. They used the feedback to revise the items and improve clarity.

After validation, the researchers conducted a pilot test with 20 food MSME owners in Cebu City. The researchers distributed, collected, organized, and analyzed the questionnaires. Cronbach's Alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of the survey items, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.93, which confirmed the instrument's consistency, dependability, and suitability for use in the study. The results validated the instrument's reliability and its suitability for obtaining accurate data from the selected respondents in Cebu City.

3.5. Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers submitted a letter requesting a complete list of the registered Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Cebu City. This existing list served as the basis for identifying qualified respondents and helped researchers ensure the data were legitimate. After securing the data, the researchers selected MSMEs that met the inclusion criteria using a sampling method to ensure that only suitable and willing participants took part in data collection. These inclusion criteria are considered the main factors: business registration, continuous operation in Cebu City, and use of social media platforms. After identifying the target respondents, the researchers personally approached the selected MSME owners and discussed the study's objectives.

During this discussion, the researchers emphasized the study's importance, particularly how respondents' information would be used and how the results could benefit them through recommendations to improve their businesses. In addition, the researchers distributed informed consent forms to emphasize voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time without obligation or consequence. The informed consent also explained that there were no risks involved and that responses would remain confidential and be used only for academic purposes.

To ensure accuracy, the researchers provided clear, understandable instructions to guide each respondent in completing the questionnaire. Respondents were informed that completing the questionnaire took approximately 10-15 minutes. The researchers also remained available in case the participants required clarification on certain items. Once the questionnaires were completed, the researchers collected each respondent's participation. The researchers carefully checked each response for completeness and clarity and asked respondents for clarification when needed. The researchers encoded valid responses in statistical software and summarized them for analysis to ensure data accuracy. Specifically, the researchers conducted the encoding process systematically to prevent errors, and they organized and tabulated the data correctly. This careful process ensured the data remained reliable and accurate.

3.6. Data Analysis

This study used both descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics, such as the mean and standard deviation, provide a current perspective on the digital utilization and business growth of food MSMEs in Cebu City. These provide specific details on business owners who use digital platforms and reflect their businesses' growth in recent years.

The independent variables, Social Media Utilization, are examined through four factors: (a) social media marketing, (b) online selling, (c) online payment systems, and (d) customer communication. Under this, the descriptive results present data on the number of digital platforms used, how businesses post online, whether they use online payments, and how they communicate with customers. Business growth is measured by changes in sales performance, expansion of the customer base, increased market reach, and development in the number of employees.

To determine the connection between the independent and dependent variables, the study employs inferential statistics. Pearson's Correlation coefficient is used to assess the association between the utilization of digital platforms and business growth, with Spearman's rank correlation coefficient used as an alternative if necessary. Overall, the analysis seeks to determine how digital platforms have helped food MSMEs in Cebu City and how this affects their business growth and progress. Using descriptive and inferential methods, the study provided valuable insights into how tools such as social media marketing, online selling, online payments, and customer communication help businesses remain competitive and grow sustainably.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

This study followed ethical standards to protect the rights, privacy, and safety of all respondents. MSME owners in Cebu City who participated in the study received complete information about the research, including its purpose, procedures, and potential outcomes, through an informed consent form. The researchers ensured that all respondents were treated with respect, fairness, and care. The researchers obtained approval from the appropriate academic authority before starting the study to ensure compliance with all ethical guidelines.

The researchers clearly explained the study's purpose, procedures, and expectations for respondents. Each participant received clear information about their involvement, including potential risks and benefits. Participation was entirely voluntary. Respondents had the full right to say yes or no, and even if they agreed initially, they could withdraw at any time without facing negative consequences.

Confidentiality and privacy were given the highest importance. The research team kept all information shared by respondents strictly confidential. All names and identifying information were removed and replaced with codes to prevent the recognition of any MSME in reports or findings. The research team stored data securely and made it accessible only to the team.

The researchers also made sure participants felt comfortable throughout the study. The researchers respected respondents' time and effort and took measures to minimize stress or discomfort. The goal was to create a safe space where business owners could share their honest experiences without fear of judgment or exposure. These ethical practices helped ensure the study produced useful results while protecting the dignity and rights of everyone involved.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the results and discussion based on data gathered and analyzed from food MSME owners in Cebu City. The findings highlight how different dimensions of social media utilization such as social media marketing, online selling, online payment systems, and customer communication relate to perceived business growth, customer reach, and operational stability.

4.1. Statistical Results

Table 1. Respondents' Evaluation of Social Media Marketing

Items	Mean	SD	Interpretation
I regularly use social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, TikTok) to promote my business offerings.	4.99	1.126	Agree
Social media advertisements help increase my customer reach.	4.89	1.156	Agree
Posting content on social media helps attract potential customers.	5.01	1.126	Agree
My brand's visibility has significantly improved through social media marketing.	4.89	1.104	Agree
I believe social media contributes significantly to my business growth.	5.11	1.083	Agree
Overall	4.98	0.921	Agree

Source: Processed data (2026)

Table 2. Respondents' Evaluation of Online Selling

Items	Mean	SD	Interpretation
I use online selling platforms (e.g., Shopee, Lazada, Facebook Marketplace) to sell my products.	4.39	1.528	Agree
Using online selling platforms expands my market reach beyond traditional selling.	4.69	1.164	Agree
I find online selling platforms efficient and convenient for processing sales transactions.	4.79	1.025	Agree
Online platforms have played a significant role in boosting my sales performance.	4.84	1.219	Agree
Online selling contributes positively to my overall business performance.	5.05	1.109	Agree
Overall	4.75	0.976	Agree

Source: Processed data (2026)

Table 3. Respondents' Evaluation of Online Payment Systems

Items	Mean	SD	Interpretation
I use digital payment methods (e.g., GCash, PayMaya, Bank transfers) in my business transactions.	5.21	1.112	Strongly Agree
Accepting digital payments makes transactions easier and faster for my customers.	5.17	1.112	Strongly Agree
Using digital payments improved efficiency in my business.	5.15	1.095	Agree
Offering digital payments has increased customer satisfaction.	4.99	1.196	Agree
Digital payment options contribute to my business's growth.	4.99	1.156	Agree
Overall	5.10	0.982	Agree

Source: Processed data (2026)

Table 4. Respondents' Evaluation of Customer Communication

Items	Mean	SD	Interpretation
I use digital platforms (e.g., Messenger, Viber, and Email) to communicate with my customers.	4.59	1.263	Agree
Quick responses through digital communication help improve customer relationships.	4.82	1.073	Agree
Customer feedback received through digital platforms helps me improve my products/services.	4.92	1.102	Agree
Digital communication (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok) helps me provide better customer service.	4.92	1.070	Agree
Effective online communication contributes to customer loyalty.	5.07	1.199	Agree
Overall	4.86	0.897	Agree

Source: Processed data (2026)

Table 5. Respondents' Evaluation of Business Growth

Items	Mean	SD	Interpretation
My sales revenue has increased since using digital platforms.	4.89	0.982	Agree
Digital platforms have enabled me to attract new customers.	5.10	0.876	Agree
Using digital platforms increases my business profit.	4.92	1.112	Agree
Leveraging digital platforms has enhanced my ability to compete effectively.	4.91	0.984	Agree
The utilization Digital platforms have contributed to the overall growth of my business.	5.06	0.920	Agree
Overall	4.97	0.798	Agree

Source: Processed data (2026)

Table 6. Spearman's Rank-Order Correlations Between Digital Platform Utilization and Perceived Business Growth

Variables	ρ (Spearman)	p-value	Strength (Interpretation)
Social Media Marketing	0.670	< .001	Strong positive
Online Selling	0.636	< .001	Strong positive
Online Payment Systems	0.652	< .001	Strong positive
Customer Communication	0.729	< .001	Strong positive

Note. ρ = Spearman's rho. All tests were conducted using a two-tailed significance level of 0.05. The strength of the correlation was interpreted using standard guidelines: 0.10 (small), 0.30 (moderate), and 0.50 or higher (strong).

Source: Processed data (2026)

4.2. Discussions

As shown in Table 1, food MSME owners in Cebu City generally agree that social media marketing contributes to business growth (M = 4.98, SD = 0.921). High ratings for posting content (M = 5.01) and regular platform use (M = 4.99) highlight the importance of active engagement, while lower scores for advertisements (M = 4.89, SD = 1.156) suggest effectiveness varies by strategy and budget. These findings align with Purba et al. (2025); Simbajon et al. (2025); Wan (2023); and Yadav (2025), who emphasize that social media marketing increases visibility, engagement, and sales. Huda et al. (2025) and Santos et al. (2024) further show that consistent interaction strengthens customer relationships and performance, while Liadeli et al. (2023) highlight that content sharing boosts brand awareness. Overall, social media marketing is perceived as a valuable tool for enhancing visibility and customer engagement.

The results suggest that active social media use and consistent content posting are important strategies for enhancing business growth, as indicated by high mean scores on statements about regular social media use and content posting. These findings align with prior studies showing that social media marketing can significantly increase visibility, customer engagement, and sales for small businesses. For instance, Huda et al. (2025) emphasized that MSMEs that regularly interact with their audience on social media tend to build stronger customer relationships and loyalty. Similarly, Santos et al. (2024) found that effective social media marketing strategies among MSMEs in Cebu City were strongly associated with increased customer engagement and improved business performance. In addition, Liadeli et al. (2023) noted that activities such as sharing content and maintaining an active social media presence contribute to higher sales and greater brand awareness. These studies support the interpretation that consistent and strategic use of social media platforms enables food MSME owners to attract customers, strengthen brand visibility, and foster business growth.

As seen in Table 2, respondents agree that online selling platforms positively contribute to MSME growth (M = 4.75, SD = 0.976). Respondents agreed most strongly with overall business performance (M = 5.05), while adoption levels varied for platform use (M = 4.39, SD = 1.528). This suggests that while online selling is widely recognized as beneficial, usage intensity differs among owners. Philippine MSMEs adopted online selling as a primary resilience strategy during the COVID-19 pandemic, though evidence indicates the benefits emerged with a lag and depended on digital maturity (Cueto et al., 2022; Gochoco-Bautista, 2025; Mia et al., 2024). Similarly, multiple studies indicated that online retail gained extra market share against offline retail in only a few months that under normal circumstances would have taken several years to achieve (Szász et al., 2022). Brazilian online stores recorded a 47% revenue increase in the first half of 2020, with April 2020 alone showing 81% year-over-year growth (Silva et al., 2021). Together, these studies reinforce that online selling is a core strategy for resilience and competitiveness.

Referring to the Table 3, respondents strongly agree that online payment systems enhance business operations (M = 5.10, SD = 0.982). Frequent use of digital payment methods (M = 5.21) underscores their convenience, while perceptions of direct growth impact varied (M = 4.99, SD = 1.156). Mustapha et al. (2025) noted that digital payment adoption enhances efficiency and customer satisfaction; Mustapha et al. (2025) explained that payments simplify financial processes; and Hudri and Sabbar (2026) highlighted smoother transactions and better customer experiences. These findings confirm that cashless transactions improve efficiency and service delivery, reinforcing their role in modern MSME operations.

Looking at the Table 4, respondents agree that digital platforms are important for customer communication (M = 4.86, SD = 0.897). Respondents agreed most strongly with customer loyalty (M = 5.07), while actual usage scored lowest (M = 4.59), reflecting uneven adoption despite recognized benefits. Nesterenko (2021) as well as Rochefort and Ndlovu (2024) emphasize that online communication fosters loyalty and brand awareness, while Li et al. (2023); Raza (2024); and Shinde et al. (2025) show that online feedback improves products and satisfaction. Chowdhury et al. (2023) and Jørgensen et al. (2022) caution that usage depends on skills and resources. Overall, digital communication helps MSMEs build stronger relationships and retain customers, though implementation varies.

As shown in Table 5, Respondents generally agree that digital platform utilization contributes to perceived business growth (M = 4.97, SD = 0.798). Attracting new customers (M = 5.10) was the most significant benefit, while increased revenue (M = 4.89, SD = 0.982) showed more variability. Lestari et al. (2024) demonstrated that social media adoption improves visibility and engagement; Apidana and Rusvinasari (2024) found that combining social media with innovation boosts profitability; and Yadav (2025) reported that targeted advertisements expand reach and retention. These results confirm that integrating digital platforms into business strategies is crucial for sustainable growth and competitiveness.

Table 6 presents the Spearman's rank-order correlations between each dimension of digital platform utilization and perceived business growth. Customer communication showed the strongest positive association ($\rho = .729$, $p < .001$), followed by social media marketing, online payment systems, and online selling. Business growth was treated as the dependent variable and therefore not listed as a predictor. These results indicate that MSMEs reporting higher levels of customer communication through digital platforms also tended to report higher perceptions of business growth. Similarly, greater engagement in social media marketing, online payment systems, and online selling were each positively associated with perceived growth.

These findings align with prior studies highlighting the role of digital platforms in shaping MSME performance and sustainability. Research has shown that social media marketing enhances brand visibility and customer reach (Akanji et al., 2026), digital payment systems streamline transactions and improve convenience (Hudri & Sabbar, 2026), and online selling expands market access beyond physical boundaries (Luz, 2025). Sustained customer communication through digital channels has also been linked to trust, loyalty, and long-term relationships (Nesterenko, 2021; Raza, 2024; Rochefort & Ndlovu, 2024). While the observed associations are consistent with these insights, the cross-sectional design limits causal inference. Future research using longitudinal or controlled approaches could better clarify whether digital platform use drives business growth or whether growth-oriented firms are simply more likely to adopt such platforms.

5. Conclusion

The study concluded that social media use is significantly associated with perceived business growth among food Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Cebu City. The findings demonstrate that social media platforms play a central role in promoting growth, strengthening customer interaction, and improving operational efficiency. Most MSME owners reported high levels of digital tool utilization across four dimensions: social media marketing, online selling, online payments, and customer communication. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok were widely used to advertise products, increase brand awareness, and attract customers. Online selling enabled businesses to expand beyond physical stores, offering buyers convenience and accessibility. Online payment systems such as GCash and PayMaya complemented these efforts by facilitating faster, safer, and more reliable transactions, thereby enhancing customer satisfaction and encouraging repeat purchases. Customer communication through Messenger, Instagram Direct, and TikTok messages further strengthened relationships, building trust, loyalty, and long-term engagement.

Taken together, these digital tools contributed to the perceived growth of food MSMEs in Cebu City. The results support the Diffusion of Innovation Theory and the Resource-Based View Theory, which explain that adopting digital innovations and leveraging resources strategically can improve competitiveness and sustain business growth. However, the study has limitations. It focused solely on food MSMEs in Cebu City, which may limit generalizability to other industries or regions. Reliance on owners' self-reported perspectives may not capture all dimensions of business performance, and the study did not consider long-term outcomes or external factors such as economic conditions and government support. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into how social media and digital platforms support MSME growth. It underscores the importance of digital adoption for sustainability, competitiveness, and local economic development, offering practical implications for policymakers, support organizations, and MSME owners seeking to thrive in the digital economy.

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