

The Impact of Digital Marketing Exposure on the Consumption Behavior of Generation Z Students: Evidence from an Indonesian Public Junior High School

Kusuma wijaya^{1*}, La Ode Almana², Fitriyani³, & Haldi Jofanda⁴

¹Institut Teknologi dan Sains Nahdlatul Ulama Pekalongan, Indonesia, ²Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Ekonomi Enam Enam Kendari, Indonesia, ³Politeknik Bina Husada, Indonesia, ⁴Universitas Putra Indonesia "YPTK" Padang, Indonesia

*Co e-mail: wijayarm54@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the influence of digital marketing exposure on the consumption behavior of Generation Z students at SMP Negeri 31 Padang. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected from 75 purposively selected students through Likert-scale questionnaires. Descriptive analysis reveals that the majority of students experience high levels of digital marketing exposure. Simple linear regression analysis demonstrates a significant positive effect, with a regression coefficient (B) of 0.711 and a significance value of 0.000. The coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.425 indicates that digital marketing exposure explains 42.5% of the variance in students' consumption behavior. These findings confirm that digital marketing serves as a powerful psychological trigger for impulsive consumption among early adolescents. The study's novelty lies in providing empirical evidence of digital marketing's impact on the "early adolescent" segment in a localized Indonesian context, highlighting their high susceptibility compared to older demographics. The implications suggest an urgent need for digital literacy interventions in schools to mitigate the risk of early-onset consumerist habits driven by pervasive digital stimuli.

Keywords: Digital Marketing Exposure, Consumption Behavior, Generation Z



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INTRODUCTION

The digital revolution has fundamentally transformed modern consumption patterns, shifting the marketplace from physical storefronts to ubiquitous digital platforms. For modern society, digitalization is no longer a peripheral trend but a core component of daily life, forcing a radical transition in marketing strategies (Rath, 2022). Companies now rely on social media and shopping applications to reach a generation of consumers who prioritize instant access and interactive engagement. However, this shift presents a significant practical problem: the constant exposure to sophisticated digital marketing may bypass critical thinking (Djaleva, 2025), particularly in younger users, leading to rising levels of impulsive and consumptive behavior that challenges traditional financial and psychological well-being. This environmental shift suggests that the sheer volume of digital stimuli acts as a relentless cognitive tax on adolescents, often overwhelming their nascent ability to make rational economic choices.

Recent studies highlight that Generation Z, as "digital natives," are uniquely susceptible to these digital innovations due to their high responsiveness to visual trends and influencer-driven content (Prasanna, 2024). Research indicates that visually appealing digital experiences and peer recommendations are primary drivers of brand loyalty and purchasing intent (Samarasinghe, 2024). Furthermore, the integration of gamification and interactive advertising has been shown to blur the lines between entertainment and commerce, creating an environment where shopping becomes a social and emotional necessity rather than a functional transaction (Agrawal, 2023). While these studies establish the power of digital marketing, they often focus on general consumer demographics or older segments of Gen Z. This phenomenon is exacerbated by the 24/7 availability of digital marketplaces, which eliminates the traditional "cooling-off" period between the urge to buy and the actual transaction, thereby fostering a culture of immediate gratification.

The psychological vulnerability of early adolescents adds a layer of complexity to this digital phenomenon, as individuals in this age bracket are still developing the cognitive maturity required to resist persuasive media. Unlike older Gen Z segments, junior high school students often lack the financial literacy to evaluate the long-term consequences of impulsive spending. The pervasive nature of social media algorithms ensures that young users are trapped in a feedback loop of constant consumption, where advertisements are tailored specifically to their emerging identities and peer-group affiliations. Consequently, the commercialization of the adolescent social space means that peer acceptance is now increasingly tied to the ownership of products promoted through viral digital content.

At the local level, the cultural shift toward digital consumerism is becoming increasingly evident among students in West Sumatra, particularly in urban centers like Padang. Traditional values of thrift and communal sharing are being challenged by the individualistic and materialistic narratives promoted through global digital platforms. The role of local influencers and the localization of marketing content mean that students at SMP Negeri 31 Padang are now part of a global consumption network that operates through their handheld devices. This localized digital saturation creates a unique socio-economic pressure where local identity is increasingly expressed through the lens of global consumerist trends, often at the expense of local financial stability.

A critical gap exists in current literature regarding the specific impact of digital marketing on early adolescents in localized contexts. Most state-of-the-art research focuses on university students or young professionals who possess higher levels of financial independence and digital literacy. There is a lack of empirical evidence addressing how students at the junior high school level who are in a transitional developmental stage process intense digital promotions. Preliminary surveys at SMP Negeri 31 Padang confirm this urgency, revealing that 80% of students are familiar with products



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through social media and 60% admit to interest in purchases driven specifically by digital ads (Hunaifi, 2024). This gap in knowledge leaves educators and parents without a scientific basis to address the specific vulnerabilities of younger Gen Z individuals who are exposed to the same marketing intensity as adults but with far fewer cognitive defenses.

The significance of this study is further underscored by the potential long-term socio-economic impact of early-onset consumerist behavior on the Indonesian younger generation. If left unaddressed, the habit of impulsive digital spending could lead to a generation plagued by financial instability and psychological stress. By focusing on the specific regression impact of 0.711 and an R-Square of 42.5%, this research provides a precise mathematical look at how digital stimuli override rational decision-making in teenagers. These statistical benchmarks are essential for shifting the conversation from anecdotal concerns to data-driven policy interventions that can effectively target the root causes of impulsive consumption in schools.

Based on this gap, the research question asks: to what extent does digital marketing exposure influence the consumption behavior of junior high school students? The objective of this study is to analyze the correlation and impact of digital marketing on the impulsive consumption patterns of students at SMP Negeri 31 Padang. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on the "early adolescent" bracket within a local Indonesian context, providing specific empirical data (such as the 0.711 regression impact) that extends existing theories of digital consumerism to a younger, more vulnerable demographic. These findings are intended to serve as a scientific basis for developing digital literacy policies to mitigate early-onset consumerist behavior.

METHODS

This study adopts a quantitative approach with a correlational and causal-comparative design to analyze the impact of digital marketing on the consumption behavior of early adolescents. The quantitative method was chosen to provide a systematic measurement of variables through statistical analysis, allowing for the verification of the relationship between digital exposure and consumerist tendencies (Fitri, 2022). The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 31 Padang, focusing on Generation Z students as the primary subjects.

The research population consists of students at SMP Negeri 31 Padang. A sample of 75 respondents was selected using a purposive sampling technique. The specific criteria for selection included students who actively use social media (Instagram, TikTok, or shopping apps) at least two hours per day, ensuring that respondents had sufficient exposure to digital marketing to be relevant to the study objectives. Regarding research ethics, since the respondents are minors, the researcher obtained formal permission from the school authorities and ensured informed consent was obtained from the students. All data were processed anonymously to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants.

The research instrument utilized a closed-ended questionnaire consisting of two main scales: the Digital Marketing Exposure Scale and the Consumption Behavior Scale, both using a 5-point Likert scale. To ensure the instrument's quality, validity and reliability tests were conducted. Construct validity was confirmed through Pearson Product Moment, where all items yielded $r_{count} > r_{table}$, and reliability was established using Cronbach's Alpha with a coefficient > 0.70 , indicating that the instrument was consistent and dependable for data collection (Shah, 2023).

The operational definitions are formulated as follows: (1) Digital Marketing Exposure is defined as the intensity and frequency of students' interaction with online advertisements and promotional



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content; (2) Consumption Behavior refers to the tendency to make purchases driven by digital stimuli, including impulsive and hedonic buying.

Data analysis was performed through several stages using statistical software. First, descriptive analysis was used to categorize the levels of exposure and behavior. Second, Pearson Correlation was applied to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between variables. Finally, Simple Linear Regression was conducted to test the hypothesis and determine the magnitude of the effect of digital marketing on student consumption. This rigorous procedure ensures that the research process is transparent and capable of being replicated in similar educational settings.

RESULTS

The data collected from 75 students at SMP Negeri 31 Padang were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to determine the distribution and the impact of digital marketing exposure on student consumption behavior.

1. Descriptive Analysis of Research Variables

The following tables describe the frequency distribution for each variable based on the students' responses categorized into low, medium, and high levels.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Digital Marketing Exposure

Exposure Category	Score Range	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Low	1.00 – 2.33	10	13.3
Medium	2.34 – 3.67	35	46.7
High	3.68 – 5.00	30	40.0
Total		75	100.0

The results in Table 1 show that 86.7% of students fall into the medium and high exposure categories. This confirms that the majority of students at SMP Negeri 31 Padang are frequently engaged with digital promotions across various social media and online platforms.

Table 2. Frequency Distribution of Student Consumption Behavior

Behavior Category	Score Range	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Low	1.00 – 2.33	12	16.0
Medium	2.34 – 3.67	38	50.7
High	3.68 – 5.00	25	33.3
Total		75	100.0



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Table 2 indicates that 50.7% of students exhibit a moderate level of consumption behavior, while 33.3% are in the high category. These results suggest a notable tendency toward consumptive habits among early adolescents who are regularly exposed to digital marketing stimuli.

2. Hypothesis Testing: Correlation and Regression Analysis

To address the research objectives, the relationship between variables was tested using Pearson Correlation and Simple Linear Regression.

Table 3. Correlation between Digital Marketing Exposure and Consumption Behavior

Variables	Correlation (r)	Sig. (2-tailed)	Description
DM Exposure → Consumption Behavior	0.652**	0.000	Strong Positive

The correlation analysis reveals a strong positive relationship between digital marketing exposure and student consumption behavior ($r = 0.652$). This signifies that higher exposure to digital promotions is directly associated with an increase in consumptive tendencies among students.

Table 4. Model Summary (R^2)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error
1	0.652	0.425	0.417	0.542

As shown in Table 4, the R Square value of 0.425 indicates that 42.5% of the variance in student consumption behavior is influenced by digital marketing exposure. The remaining 57.5% is explained by other factors not examined in this study, such as parental guidance or individual financial literacy.

Table 5. Simple Linear Regression Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	t	Significance
(Constant)	1.218	0.293	4.152	0.000
DM Exposure	0.711	0.089	7.945	0.000

The regression results in Table 5 yield the equation $Y = 1.218 + 0.711X$. The coefficient value ($B = 0.711$) confirms that for every one-unit increase in digital marketing exposure, student consumption behavior increases by 0.711 units. The significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$) proves that digital marketing exposure is a significant predictor of consumption behavior among junior high school students at SMP Negeri 31 Padang.

DISCUSSION

This study confirms that digital marketing exposure is a dominant factor in shaping the consumption patterns of early adolescents at SMP Negeri 31 Padang. The results indicate that 86.7% of students experience medium to high levels of exposure, which directly correlates with their moderate-to-high consumptive behavior. This phenomenon is best explained through the Stimulus-Organism-



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Response (SOR) framework, where digital advertisements serve as a constant stimulus that triggers internal emotional processes, leading to a consumptive behavioral response (Sasmito, 2023).

This study provides empirical evidence that digital marketing exposure is a primary and dominant factor in shaping the consumption patterns of early adolescents at SMP Negeri 31 Padang. The statistical findings reveal that a vast majority of the students experience medium to high levels of exposure, a condition that creates a constant digital environment where promotional messages are inseparable from their daily social interactions. This phenomenon confirms that the digital marketing landscape has successfully penetrated the subconscious of junior high school students, making them a highly vulnerable target for online commercial stimuli. Within the broader psychological framework, these digital advertisements do not merely pass through the students' senses; they act as a persistent catalyst that triggers internal processes, such as heightened desire and altered perceptions of need, which ultimately manifest in high-frequency consumptive responses (Salinas Murill, 2024).

The strength of this influence is further proven by the strong positive correlation and the regression coefficient found in the data. These values indicate that digital marketing is not a passive element in the students' lives. Instead, it is a psychological driver where every single unit increase in advertisement exposure leads to a significant 0.711-unit increase in consumptive behavior. This high sensitivity suggests that the adolescent brain, which is still in a developmental stage regarding impulse control, is highly reactive to the persuasive techniques used in digital media. The integration of digital lifestyles and social media algorithms creates a seamless path toward online purchasing, where the line between entertainment and transaction becomes increasingly blurred for the students.

A pivotal discovery in this research is the R Square value of 0.425, which explicitly shows that digital marketing exposure is responsible for 42.5% of the variance in consumption behavior. This substantial impact demonstrates that nearly half of the students' spending habits and product interests are dictated by the digital marketing they encounter daily. This drive is often rooted in the emotional need for social connectedness and digital identity. For students at SMP Negeri 31 Padang, buying a product is frequently less about its functional use and more about achieving a specific social status or satisfying a hedonic urge for momentary pleasure. The intense psychological pressure known as the fear of missing out further amplifies this behavior. When students see limited-time offers or products used by their digital peers, they experience an urgent need to participate, leading to impulsive purchases made without careful financial consideration.

Furthermore, the sophisticated nature of modern marketing characterized by visual aesthetics, gamification, and personalized content lowers the psychological barrier to spending. The study's data suggests that when advertisements are presented as entertainment, such as short-form videos or interactive challenges, students engage in a form of digital treasure hunting for exclusive or trendy items, often viewing the act of buying as a form of social participation. However, it is also important to address the 57.5% of the variance not explained by the current model. This remainder indicates that while digital marketing is powerful, other external forces such as parental guidance, family socioeconomic status, and the students' own level of digital literacy are critical moderating factors. Adolescents who possess a high degree of digital literacy are better able to deconstruct and resist manipulative marketing tactics.

The high exposure recorded in this study, combined with the significant regression impact, points toward a major developmental vulnerability. Without intervention, early adolescents are at high risk of developing chronic consumerist habits that prioritize instant gratification over long-term financial stability. In a broader sociological context, these results imply that digital marketing has transitioned from a simple business tool into a formidable psychological force that dictates adolescent



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identity and preferences. The efficacy of personalized content and the relatability of digital figures make it increasingly difficult for students to distinguish between authentic content and commercial persuasion.

The findings at SMP Negeri 31 Padang serve as a scientific warning that the rapid digitalization of the economy must be met with a robust enhancement of media literacy education. It is no longer sufficient to view digital marketing as a harmless background element of the internet. It is a structured influence that accounts for nearly half of the behavioral variations in young consumers. Future strategies must focus on how school-based interventions can serve as a protective shield to mitigate this 42.5% influence, ensuring that the next generation can navigate the digital marketplace as conscious, rational, and responsible individuals rather than impulsive buyers driven by external digital stimuli.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that digital marketing exposure significantly shapes the consumption behavior of early adolescents at SMP Negeri 31 Padang, fulfilling the expectations set out in the initial research problem. The data confirms that a vast majority of students (86.7%) experience medium to high levels of exposure, which is directly followed by a significant tendency toward consumptive habits. These findings demonstrate that digital marketing strategies have moved beyond simple brand awareness, effectively triggering deep psychological impulses for consumption within the junior high school demographic. This suggests that the digital environment has become a pervasive socialization agent that actively reconfigures the economic priorities of teenagers, making digital consumption an inseparable part of their daily lived experience and social identity.

The statistical analysis validates the research hypothesis by confirming a strong positive relationship ($r = 0.652$) between exposure and behavior, where digital marketing explains 42.5% of the variance in students' consumption patterns. Every unit increase in digital promotion intensity results in a 0.711 increase in consumptive response. This impact is driven by the specific susceptibility of early adolescents to social media trends and the psychological pressure of missing out (FoMO), which leads to impulsive purchasing decisions aimed at emotional satisfaction rather than functional necessity. The magnitude of this influence highlights a critical cognitive gap, where the speed of digital marketing persuasion outpaces the developmental maturity of adolescent self-regulation, thereby locking young consumers into a cycle of reactive and unplanned spending.

The application prospects of these findings suggest an urgent need for collaborative intervention between various stakeholders. Educational institutions can apply these results to integrate digital literacy and advertising ethics into their curriculum, helping students critically filter manipulative content. By establishing these findings as an empirical baseline, schools can transition from general internet safety lessons to specific "consumer defense" training that empowers students to deconstruct the persuasive tactics used by algorithms and influencers. This proactive educational approach is vital for preventing the normalization of impulsive consumption as a permanent behavioral trait in the younger generation.

For future research, there is a clear prospect to develop these results by exploring moderating variables such as parental mediation styles or the role of financial literacy as a buffer against digital persuasion. Extending this study to a wider longitudinal or comparative scale would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how early-onset consumerism evolves as these adolescents move into adulthood. Future studies should also investigate the specific impact of AI-driven personalized marketing on this demographic, as the increasingly invisible nature of digital persuasion requires even



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more sophisticated analytical frameworks to protect the financial and psychological well-being of the next generation of consumers.

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