



## **LETTER OF ACCEPTANCE**

Surabaya, 7 August 2025

To,

**Rafli Bahtiar, Muhammad Yani, Rizky Eka Febriansyah,**

Dear Rafli Bahtiar, Muhammad Yani, Rizky Eka Febriansyah,

Through this letter Ekspektra congratulates the article entitled " **Digital Marketing and Purchasing Decisions: The mediating Role of Online Engagement and Brand Advocacy among Gen Z at McDonald's Sidoarjo** " which has gone through a review process and has been declared ACCEPTED for publication in EKSPEKTRA : Jurnal Bisnis dan Manajemen Volume 9 Number 2 of August 2025.

- Have paid Rp. 750,000,- for publication fees to Bank Jatim account no. (114) 0741000784 with the account name Fakultas Ekonomi Unitomo.

Thus this letter is given to be used properly.

Surabaya, 7 August 2025,

*Editor in Chief*



Prof. Dr. Sri Utami Ady, SE., MM



## **Ekspektra: Jurnal Bisnis dan Manajemen**

**23 July 2025**

**Dear Rafli Bahtiar, Muhammad Yani, Rizky Eka Febriansyah**

Reviewers have now commented on your paper. Title : **“The Influence of Digital Marketing on Purchasing Decisions in the Mediation of Online Engagement and Brand Advocacy (Study on Gen Z Consumers at McDonald's Restaurant in Sidoarjo)”**, you will see that there are a number of issues that need to be addressed before the paper can be accepted for publication by Ekspektra: Jurnal Bisnis dan Manajemen.

### **Reviewer A Comment:**

#### **1. Title of the Study**

- The article title aligns well with the content, but it is a bit too long. Suggestion: make it more concise without losing its meaning, for example, by using “mediating role” instead of “in the mediation of.”.

#### **2. Abstract**

- The abstract of this article accurately reflects the overall content of the paper. Suggestion: add a brief context and practical implications of the findings (such as relevance for business practitioners) to make it more informative.

#### **3. Introduction**

- The introduction is fairly comprehensive, as it includes context, background, relevant theory, and clearly identifies the research gap. However, it is recommended to improve the structure to make it more systematic, clarify the research objectives, and strengthen the local context.

#### **4. Literature Review**

- 1. The integration between the literature is not yet clear. The literature is discussed by individual variables but does not fully demonstrate the relationships between concepts (e.g., direct and mediated relationships in a logical flow). For example, after discussing digital marketing, it should explain how it drives engagement and subsequently influences purchasing decisions.
- 2. Critical Analysis of Previous Studies:
- Most of the cited studies are descriptive in nature and lack critical analysis. It is recommended to include an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of previous research, or highlight contextual differences (e.g., differences in generation, digital platforms used, or regional settings).

- 3. Lack of Local Context:
- The majority of the literature referenced is general or based on international studies. There is limited discussion of the behavior of Gen Z consumers in Indonesia, particularly in Sidoarjo. It is advisable to include more local sources or studies related to digital marketing in the Indonesian F&B industry or Gen Z consumer behavior in the local context.

## 5. Methodology

- 1. Add a narrative summary of the research process: from questionnaire design → distribution → data processing → validity testing → hypothesis testing.
- 2. Justification of the sampling technique: The use of purposive sampling is mentioned, but there is no justification provided for why this method was chosen. For example, it could be due to the specific characteristics of the target group (Gen Z who are active on social media). It is also recommended to include the potential biases and limitations associated with this sampling technique.
- 3. It is mentioned that secondary data were used, but their application is not explained.
- 4. Statistical assumption testing is not mentioned. Add a brief note stating that PLS-SEM does not require normal data distribution and is suitable for small to medium-sized samples.

## 6. Result and Discussion

1. The discussion of each variable appears fragmented. It lacks an explanation of how the variables are interconnected within a comprehensive model.  
Suggested improvement: Add a synthesis that explains the relationships between findings-for example, how online engagement and brand advocacy collectively strengthen the influence of digital marketing on purchasing decisions.
2. Add a more critical analysis, for example: "Why is the direct influence of digital marketing on purchasing decisions smaller than its indirect effect through brand advocacy?"
3. There is no reflection on potential data or interpretation biases. Suggestion: Add a brief discussion acknowledging possible limitations, such as social desirability bias in questionnaire responses, sample representation issues, or response bias due to the self-reported nature of the data. This will enhance the transparency and credibility of the research findings.
4. Visualization is suboptimal...there are many numerical tables, but readers may find it difficult to quickly grasp key insights. Use additional visualization in the form of a summary table of key findings.

## 7. Conclusion and Recommendation

- A more analytical presentation would strengthen the article's academic position not merely as a report of findings, but as a meaningful scholarly contribution.
- There is no emphasis on the strongest or weakest influence paths.
  - The narrative tends to reiterate the results without reflecting on the theoretical contribution or the novelty of the study.
  - It is overly focused on describing McDonald's and has yet to generalize the findings to other brands or the broader industry context.

- Theoretical implications are not explained (e.g., contributions to digital marketing theory or Gen Z consumer behavior).
- Managerial implications are too general and do not specify key metrics or indicators to be considered (e.g., engagement rate, user-generated content, influencer credibility).
- The suggestions are not specific—they do not mention methodological approaches or types of additional variables that could be used (e.g., moderating variables, long-term impact, sentiment analysis).
- There is no reflection on how the generalizability of the findings could be improved (e.g., through random sampling or cross-brand comparison)..

## 8. References

- The reference list sufficiently covers fundamental theories; however, it needs improvement in terms of source quality, formatting consistency, and the inclusion of more international references to enhance the academic credibility of this article in the context of reputable scientific publication.
- 1. Add High-Quality International References
- It is recommended to include 3–5 reputable journal references (Scopus Q1–Q3), such as:
  - Hollebeek, L. D., & Macky, K. (2019). Digital content marketing's role in fostering consumer engagement. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*.
  - Dessart, L. (2017). Social media engagement: a framework and measurement scale. *Computers in Human Behavior*.
  - Chu, S.-C., & Kim, Y. (2011). Determinants of consumer engagement in electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in social networking sites. *International Journal of Advertising*.
- 2. Improve Citation Format & Consistency
- Use a single citation style consistently (APA 7th edition is recommended). Key corrections include:
  - Fix duplicate DOI links.
  - Standardize capitalization in article and journal titles.
  - Ensure all sources include the year and page numbers where applicable.
- 3. Strengthen Theoretical Depth
- Add original sources of the theories used, such as:
  - Oliver, R. L. (1980). A cognitive model of the antecedents and consequences of satisfaction decisions. *Journal of Marketing Research*.
  - Ajzen, I. (1991). The Theory of Planned Behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*.
- 4. Curate Duplicate and Irrelevant References
- Review and remove sources that do not directly support the research focus (e.g., general textbooks or unrelated historical references).
- Avoid non-academic sources such as blogs or news portals unless they are critically analyzed within the study.

**Recommendation: Requires Moderate revision**

### **Reviewer B Comment:**

1. Title of the Study
  - Remove the word "The Influence" from the title.
2. Abstract
  - The abstract already shows a summary of the content of the article. in addition, provide the implications of the research results both theoretically and practically.
3. Introduction
  - for theories that have a known inventor, such as TPB or TRA, enter the name of the inventor, Ajzen, and likewise for other theories.
  - The introduction portion is 10% of the total article, describing the background of the problem phenomenon at the research location, the importance of this research, and the contradictory results of previous research so as to create a research gap and novelty and research objectives.
4. Literature Review
  - The literature review adequately represents the research topic and the relationship between variables.
5. Methodology
  - There is no need for theory in the method, it is directly operational in what is done.
  - Descriptions are too long and there is a lot of repetition. Improve the structure of method writing.
6. Result and Discussion
  - Table writing adjusts to the template
  - Provide an explanation for the R2 value for each variable Z1, Z2, and Y
  - Provide a general explanation, perhaps related to the research location, why the results of the hypothesis test show that all are accepted, both direct and indirect effects.
  - Does this mean that there is no problem in Mc Donald, so there is no need to do this research? Provide your explanation.
7. Conclusion and Recommendation
  - What are the implications for the company of this research to address the issues raised in the introduction?.
8. References

Add research from other countries to strengthen arguments and insights in this research topic.

### **Recommendation: Requires Minor Revision**

#### **Note:**

- Give **red letters** for revisions from reviewer 1 and **yellow** for revisions from reviewer 2.
- Minimum number of pages 15
- Include plagiarism results with turnitin at a maximum of 20%
- Please proofread the article according to the template.

- Please adjust the table writing with the Ekspektra journal template

**Editor**

Atul Kumar

## "Digital Marketing and Purchasing Decisions: Online Engagement and Brand Advocacy as Mediating Variables among Gen Z at McDonald's Sidoarjo"

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### ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the role of online engagement and brand advocacy in mediating the relationship between digital marketing and purchase decisions among Gen Z consumers at McDonald's restaurants in Sidoarjo. Adopting a quantitative descriptive approach, the study surveyed 108 respondents selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire with indicators measured on a Likert scale and analyzed using PLS-SEM with SmartPLS 3.0. The findings reveal that digital marketing significantly influences both online engagement and brand advocacy, which in turn significantly affect purchase decisions. Notably, both mediators play a crucial role in strengthening the indirect effect of digital marketing on purchase decisions. These results emphasize the importance of creating interactive digital content and fostering brand-related conversations to effectively drive purchasing behavior among digitally native Gen Z consumers. The study contributes to marketing literature by highlighting the mediating mechanism of consumer engagement and advocacy in a localized digital context and suggests practical implications for F&B marketers targeting similar demographics.*

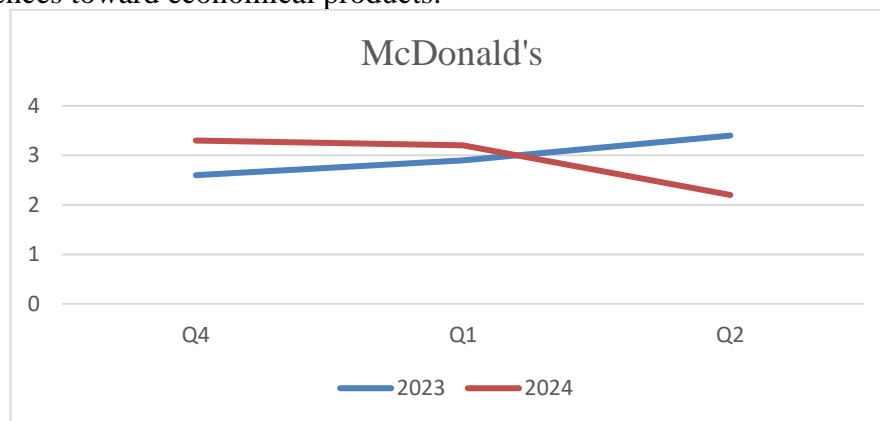
**Keywords:** Digital Marketing; Online Engagement; Brand Advocacy; Purchase Decision

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has revolutionized the way companies interact with consumers. The shift from conventional marketing methods to digital marketing is not just a trend, but a strategic necessity to maintain business competitiveness in this fast-paced and connected era. Digital marketing has become a cornerstone of corporate promotional strategies, leveraging various channels such as social media, search engines, online content, and influencers to enhance brand visibility, build customer relationships, and drive purchasing decisions (Charviandi et al., 2023).

The food and beverage (F&B) industry is one of the sectors most impacted by and most adaptive to digital transformation. Innovations in product form and packaging, app-based services, and social media marketing strategies have become

strategic tools in attracting consumers who are increasingly health-conscious, trend-conscious, and brand-image conscious Rahmawati, (2022) However, this industry also faces global challenges, such as inflationary pressures and changing consumer preferences toward economical products.



**Table 1. McDonald's Sales**

In the second quarter of 2023, McDonald's achieved a profit of US\$1.9 billion driven by a 5% increase in revenue to US\$6.2 billion, mainly from Japan, Latin America and Europe. However, McDonald's experienced a decline in revenue due to a combination of global inflation and socio-political impacts such as the boycott movement triggered by the Middle East conflict (Elshaer et al., 2025). In Indonesia, especially in areas such as Sidoarjo where the majority of the population is Muslim, this sentiment has also reduced consumer loyalty to international brands. In addition, inflation has caused consumers to turn to home-cooked meals, so McDonald's has relied on value packages to maintain sales. Declines were recorded in international markets (1.1%), the US (0.7%) and China (1.3%) due to the slow recovery of the F&B sector and the impact of the Middle East conflict. Nevertheless, McDonald's remains optimistic with an operating margin target of 40%-50% and expansion investment of US\$2.7 billion. Digital, economic and socio-cultural factors have been shown to influence consumer purchasing decisions (Nurkhalisa & Daulay, 2025).

This situation shows that consumer purchasing decisions are not only determined by promotions or prices, but are also influenced by digital, social, and cultural factors. In this context, understanding the Generation Z (Gen Z) consumer group is crucial. Gen Z refers to individuals born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, known as digital natives, they grew up with technology and incorporate social media into their daily activities. According to APJII, Gen Z is the primary internet user in Indonesia, and they are active on various platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter (Salam et al., 2024). Therefore, understanding Gen Z's digital behavior, especially in a local context like Sidoarjo, is highly relevant for current marketing strategies.

One important approach to understanding Gen Z behavior in the digital age is through the concept of online engagement. Online engagement refers to the level of active consumer participation in brand activities or content in the digital world, which can be manifested through likes, comments, sharing content, or following brand accounts on social media (Suryaningrum et al., 2023). This level of engagement reflects consumers' emotional closeness, interest, and loyalty toward a brand, which then influences purchasing decisions (Mutaqin et al., 2023).



High online engagement also encourages brand advocacy, which is when consumers voluntarily and actively recommend a brand to others based on their positive experiences. This form of promotion is considered more credible and influential because it comes from people close to them, not from company advertisements. Brand advocacy is typically done without direct incentives from the company and has the power to build trust and enhance the brand's image in the public eye (Paramita & Riorini, 2023) and (Kartikowati et al., 2024). This advocacy not only helps expand market reach but also strengthens consumers' intent to make a purchase.

All these processes ultimately lead to the purchase decision, which is a psychological and behavioral process where consumers choose, buy, and use a specific product or service. This purchase decision does not happen spontaneously but through rational consideration, past experiences, and influence from the social environment such as family, friends, and online communities (Franklyn & Cokki, 2021). In the context of Gen Z, who are highly digitally connected, purchasing decisions are also often triggered by viral content, reviews from other consumers, and targeted digital campaigns.

To understand the relationship between these variables, this study uses the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) developed by (Ajzen, 1991). This theory explains that individual behavior is influenced by the intention to perform a certain action, which is formed through three main components: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived control over the behavior. In the context of marketing, TPB explains that consumer purchasing decisions are influenced by attitudes toward digital promotions, the social influence of brand advocacy, and the extent to which they feel they have control over the decision (Purwanto et al., 2022). Strong purchase intention, according to this theory, is the main indicator of actual action.

Although variables such as digital marketing, online engagement, and brand advocacy have been extensively studied previously, findings remain varied. Some studies indicate that digital marketing has a positive influence on purchasing decisions (Listania & Zulfahmi, 2023) and (Puspitasari & Permata, 2024), while others show negative or insignificant effects (Amar et al., 2023) and (Schepers & Nijssen, 2018). This inconsistency indicates a research gap that needs further exploration, especially in a local context such as Sidoarjo Regency, which has distinct cultural, economic, and digital characteristics compared to metropolitan cities.

Based on the background and gaps outlined above, this study aims to analyze the influence of digital marketing on purchasing decisions, with online engagement and brand advocacy as mediating variables, among Gen Z consumers at McDonald's restaurants in Sidoarjo. This study is expected to contribute theoretically to the digital marketing literature while providing practical recommendations for F&B businesses in developing more contextual and consumer behavior-based strategies.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESIS FORMULATION**

### **Buying Decision**

The purchasing decision is a rational process whereby consumers choose products or services from various available alternatives to meet their needs (Febriansah & Meiliza, 2020). Factors such as price, quality, brand image, and trust are key considerations in this process (Kumbara, 2021). In the context of Gen Z consumers in Indonesia, particularly in the fast-food industry such as McDonald's in Sidoarjo, purchasing decisions are also influenced by digital factors such as

engagement with online content and perceptions of the brand on social media. Aguspriyani et al., (2023) state that Gen Z tends to consider their interactions on social media, peer recommendations, and exposure to digital campaigns as important factors in making purchasing decisions. Other research shows that online engagement plays a role in shaping trust and emotional affiliation that strengthen purchasing decisions (Huter et al., 2013), while brand advocacy further reinforces purchase intent through trusted word-of-mouth communication (Goh et al., 2022). Thus, purchasing decisions are not only influenced by product characteristics but also by digital interactions and social relationships built through digital platforms

### **Digital Marketing**

Digital marketing refers to the use of digital channels to promote products and services while building interactive communication with consumers. It serves as a strategic tool to increase brand visibility and encourage consumer purchasing decisions (Andrianti & Oetardjo, 2022). Through websites, social media, email, and affiliate platforms, digital marketing facilitates personalized interactions between brands and their target audience (Na et al., 2025). Digital marketing plays a critical role in generating online engagement, especially through social media. Interactive features on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Shopee Live allow consumers to respond directly to brand content by liking, commenting, or sharing, which enhances emotional connections with the brand (Kotler & Armstrong, 2008). These interactions often lead to brand advocacy, especially among Gen Z consumers who prefer authentic and visual content. While existing studies demonstrate that digital marketing positively influences purchase intent, many are descriptive in nature and overlook the mediating role of engagement and advocacy (Erwin, et al., 2023). Additionally, generational preferences and platform-specific behaviors are rarely discussed. Gen Z consumers, for example, are more responsive to short, personalized content than traditional advertising formats. Kartikowati et al., (2024) measured using the following six indicators: 1) website, 2) search engine marketing, 3) web banners, 4) social media, 5) email marketing, and 6) affiliate marketing.

### **Online Engagement**

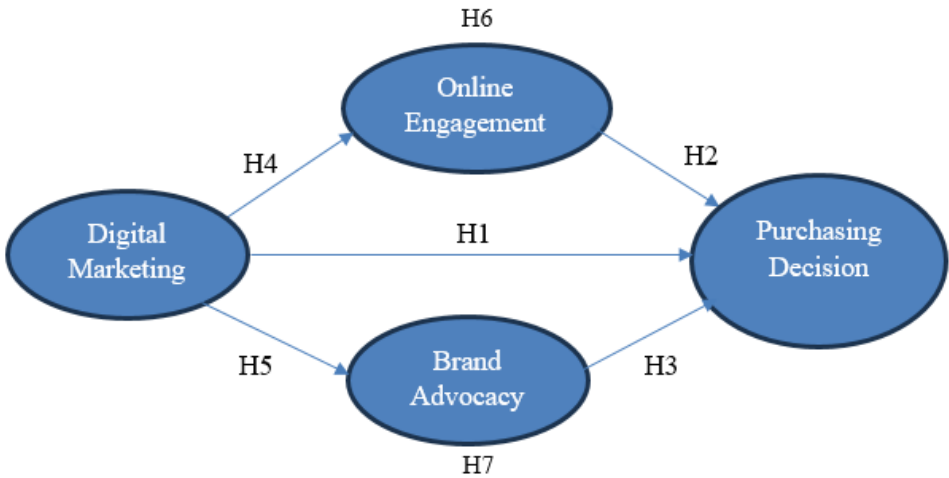
Online engagement refers to the level of interaction, active involvement, and emotional connection between consumers and brands through digital platforms. Engagement serves as a bridge between digital marketing strategies and consumer loyalty building, especially in the context of Generation Z, who are active on social media (Sarkis et al., 2025). This engagement is not only technical in nature but also reflects consumers' psychological participation in brand content and communities (Bonsón & Ratkai, 2021). Engagement is typically measured through digital metrics such as likes, comments, and content sharing. The number of likes indicates consumer interest, while comments reflect two-way interaction between consumers and the brand (Coelho et al., 2020). High engagement can encourage brand advocacy, which influences purchasing decisions through recommendations from other consumers (Iswati & Lestari, 2021). However, most previous studies are descriptive and only focus on measuring metrics without discussing the process of engagement formation comprehensively. For example, the study by Ruse et al., (2023) only reviewed likes and comments on Instagram without evaluating their impact on Gen Z's purchase intent. Many studies also fail to distinguish demographic characteristics, even though Gen Z prefers visual and interactive content over previous generations.

Online engagement is formed through relevant, engaging, and interactive digital content delivered through digital marketing strategies. This engagement serves as a mediating variable between digital marketing and purchasing decisions. According to Iswati & Lestari, (2021), online engagement can be measured using the following indicators: 1) likes, 2) comments, 3) content sharing, and 4) following brand accounts.

**Brand Advocacy**

Brand advocacy refers to consumers voluntarily recommending a brand to others based on their positive experiences. Brand advocacy is an important element in marketing because it can influence purchasing decisions through trust and social recommendations (Kusumasari & Sanica, 2022). Brand advocacy is a form of positive communication without incentives carried out by consumers who have emotional ties and high loyalty to a brand (Morhart et al., 2013). In the context of digital marketing, brand advocacy often arises from high engagement on social media, such as interaction with interesting and personalized content. Previous research indicates that brand advocacy has a strong impact on purchasing decisions (Darwin, 2020). However, most studies remain descriptive and have not considered differences in digital platforms or the characteristics of Gen Z, who are more responsive to visual and authentic content (Bilro et al., 2020). According to Bilro et al., (2020) brand advocacy can be measured using five indicators, namely: 1) intention to recommend, 2) positive word-of-mouth promotion, 3) resilience to negative information, 4) brand identity, and 5) product sustainability.

**Framework**



**Figure 1. Conceptual Framework**

**Hypothesis**

**The Influence of Digital Marketing on Purchasing Decisions**

Research by R. Aisy indicates that digital marketing has a positive and significant impact on increasing purchasing decisions. Digital marketing is a form of marketing products and services using various types of electronic media via the internet, often referred to as digital media (Aisy, 2021). Sonatasia, D. Onsardi, and EO Arini state that digital marketing has a positive and significant impact on purchasing decisions (Sonatasia et al., 2020). Digital marketing can be defined as a company and product promotion strategy utilizing digital technology through various

electronic media available today (A. W. Maulana et al., 2024). Furthermore, research by Busca et al. also demonstrated that digital marketing has a positive and significant impact on increasing purchasing decisions (Busca & Betrandias, 2020). This shows that the implementation of an intense digital marketing strategy can encourage an increase in consumers' tendency to make purchases.

### **H1: Digital Marketing has a positive and significant influence on Purchasing Decisions**

#### **The Influence of Online Engagement on Purchasing Decisions**

According to KC Sugianto, Online Engagement significantly influences purchasing decisions, emphasizing the need for brands to provide experiences and uniqueness to the content created that can attract consumer sympathy (Sugianto, 2020). According to A. Miranda, he also highlights the positive impact of Online Engagement on purchasing decisions, noting that engagement and advocacy can be fostered through requests for feedback and reviews from consumers, which strengthens brand advocacy and emotional bonds (Kapti et al., 2024). Previous research has shown that Online Engagement influences purchasing choices due to interactions between consumers who propose brands to other consumers, thereby facilitating brand advocacy (Sashi et al., 2019).

### **H2: Online engagement has a positive and significant effect on Purchasing Decision**

#### **The Influence of Brand Advocacy on Purchasing Decisions**

According to A. Keller's research, brand advocacy has a significant positive influence on product purchasing decisions. This is because loyal consumers support brands or services they consider good through word of mouth communication, which in turn increases demand for those products. Word of mouth is one of the main characteristics of brand advocacy. (Keller, 1993). Shalsabilla's research also shows that brand advocacy has a significant positive impact on purchasing decisions. Consumers who act as "information spreaders" for a brand will share positive reviews through word of mouth, thereby encouraging others to become new buyers or users of the brand (Kasamira et al., 2024). Meanwhile, research by D. Mazumdar and A. Chakravarty found that brand advocacy significantly influences product purchasing decisions. Consumers tend to evaluate a brand first before deciding to buy a product. In this process, brand advocacy through word of mouth containing positive information from other consumers plays an important role in strengthening the brand image and influencing purchasing decisions (Johannes & Rasyid, 2017).

### **H3: Brand Advocacy has a positive and significant effect on Purchasing Decision**

#### **The Influence of Digital Marketing on Online Engagement**

Research by Erwin et al. shows that digital marketing has a significant positive impact on online engagement. Key digital marketing strategies to employ include content marketing, search engine optimization, paid advertising, social media marketing, and email marketing (Erwin, Ardyan, Ilyas, & Ariasih, 2023). Similarly, W. Erfiana and D. Purnamasari asserted that digital marketing significantly increases online engagement, highlighting that content marketing leverages digital media platforms to effectively reach audiences (Erfiana & Purnamasari, 2023). Furthermore, research by Depak Verma revealed that digital marketing influences

online engagement, as social media has gained immense popularity among consumers and marketers, providing numerous opportunities to share ideas, promote content, endorse brands, and foster interactions with target audiences (Bala & Verma, 2018).

**H4: Digital marketing has a positive and significant effect on online engagement.**

#### **The Influence of Digital Marketing on Brand Advocacy**

A study conducted by A. Puspitasari et al. showed that digital marketing positively and significantly influences Brand Advocacy, as consumers are now viewed as active participants in the marketing process rather than merely passive recipients (S. Kartikowati et al., 2024). A. Miranda also asserted that digital marketing significantly increases Brand Advocacy due to the participatory relationship built between the brand and its owner, which is anticipated to lead to consumer-generated brand advocacy for the company (Sawhney et al., 2005). Furthermore, Shawnew's previous research supports the idea that digital marketing influences Brand Advocacy, highlighting that consumer engagement with a brand can increase the likelihood of brand advocacy (Sashi et al., 2019).

**H5: Digital marketing has a positive and significant effect on Brand Advocacy**

#### **The influence of online engagement mediates the relationship between digital marketing and purchasing decisions.**

Based on research by Dinni Anfasa Aziza, online engagement has been shown to play a bridging role between digital marketing and consumer purchasing decisions (Rizal & Harsono, 2022). This is based on the Consumers Culture Theory (CCT) concept, which explains that consumer behavior patterns are dynamically influenced by environmental culture. In this theory, the concept of product user culture encompasses consumer behavior, implementation, and optimism, which then emerges as considerations for product users when purchasing. On the other hand, research by Bagus Nurcahyo (Nurcahyo & Riskayanto, 2021) and GT Mulyansyah (Mulyansyah & Sulistyowati, 2021) This proves that online engagement plays a significant role in connecting digital marketing and consumer purchasing decisions. Based on this assumption, the following hypothesis can be drawn:

**H6: Online engagement mediates the relationship between digital marketing and purchasing decisions.**

#### **The Influence of Brand Advocacy Mediating the Relationship between Digital Marketing and Purchasing Decisions**

According to M. Darwin, brand advocacy plays a bridging role between digital marketing and purchasing decisions (Darwin, 2020). A similar opinion was expressed by H. Kartajaya (Kartajaya & Waizly, 2010) and Y. Andriyani and W. Zulkarnaen, who stated that brand advocacy plays a mediating role in this relationship. This is due to the close relationship between consumer purchasing decisions for a product and consumer behavior. Consumer behavior is a crucial element in marketing activities that companies must understand. This is because companies do not fully understand what is in the minds of product users before, during, or after purchasing a product. In this study, the series of purchasing decision-making involves mediation by brand advocacy first, which then influences the consumer's decision to purchase the product or not. The digital era has brought major



changes to consumer habits, so companies must adapt to new ways of creating, marketing products, and managing operations to stay relevant with the times.

### **H7: Brand Advocacy mediates the relationship between Digital Marketing and Purchasing Decision**

## **3. RESEARCH METHOD**

This study uses a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional survey design that aims to determine the effect of digital marketing strategies on Generation Z consumers' purchasing decisions, with online engagement and brand advocacy as mediating variables. The research was conducted by distributing an online questionnaire to respondents who met the research criteria. The collected data was then processed through instrument validation, reliability testing, and hypothesis testing using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach.

### **Sampling Technique**

The sampling technique used in this study was non-probability, purposive sampling. This technique was chosen based on the consideration that the research target was Generation Z, who are active users of social media and have experience purchasing McDonald's products. This group is considered relevant because it plays a significant role in both the consumption and promotion of products digitally. Therefore, purposive sampling is deemed appropriate to capture the specific characteristics of the target population. Although suitable for capturing the specific characteristics of respondents, this technique has limitations in representing the population as a whole, so the results must be interpreted within the context of the group being studied.

The sample size was determined using the formula proposed by (Hair, et al., 2017), which is to multiply the number of variable indicators by 5 to 10. In this study, there were 18 indicators, so the minimum sample size required was

$$n = 6 \times 18 = 108 \{ \text{respondents} \}$$

The use of this formula takes into account the limitations in knowing the exact population size, as well as the limitations of resources in the research process. However, purposive sampling techniques have the potential for bias and limitations in terms of generalization, so they need to be recognized as part of the weaknesses of the method used.

### **Types and Sources of Data**

The data used in this study consisted of both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained directly through questionnaires distributed to Generation Z consumers in Sidoarjo who have purchased McDonald's products. These respondents were selected based on their active engagement with digital platforms, making them relevant to the research objectives.

Secondary data were obtained from literature reviews, scientific journals, company manuals, and other supporting documents. This data was used to support the formulation of the research framework, particularly in understanding the context of digital marketing strategies, consumer behavior among Generation Z, and relevant theoretical foundations. Additionally, secondary data played a role in guiding the development of the questionnaire and providing a comparative basis for interpreting empirical findings.

## Research Instruments

The purchasing decision is a rational process whereby consumers choose products or services from various available alternatives to meet their needs (Febriansah & Meiliza, 2020). Factors such as price, quality, brand image, and trust are key considerations in this process (Kumbara, 2021). In the context of Gen Z consumers in Indonesia, particularly in the fast-food industry such as McDonald's in Sidoarjo, purchasing decisions are also influenced by digital factors such as engagement with online content and perceptions of the brand on social media. Aguspriyani et al., (2023) state that Gen Z tends to consider their interactions on social media, peer recommendations, and exposure to digital campaigns as important factors in making purchasing decisions. Other research shows that online engagement plays a role in shaping trust and emotional affiliation that strengthen purchasing decisions Huter et al., (2013) while brand advocacy further reinforces purchase intent through trusted word-of-mouth communication. Thus, purchasing decisions are not only influenced by product characteristics but also by digital interactions and social relationships built through digital platforms.

## Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis in this study was conducted using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach. This method was chosen because it has advantages in handling complex models with many latent variables and indicators. In addition, PLS-SEM does not require data to have a normal distribution. PLS-SEM is more flexible when used in the context of social survey data, which tends to be non-normal or asymmetrical. This makes PLS-SEM highly relevant for use in this study, given that data obtained from online questionnaire distribution may have a non-normal distribution. Furthermore, PLS-SEM is also suitable for use in studies with small to medium sample sizes, ranging from 30 to approximately 200 respondents. This is in line with the guidelines outlined by (Hair, et al., 2017), which state that the minimum sample size for PLS-SEM can be determined by multiplying the number of indicators by 5–10. In this study, the sample size of 108 respondents met the minimum requirement. Data processing with PLS-SEM was carried out in two main stages:

### 1. Outer Model

This stage aims to measure the quality of the instrument by assessing the validity and reliability of the construct. Some of the indicators used include:

- Convergent validity through outer loading values ( $\geq 0.7$ )
- Discriminant validity through Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values ( $\geq 0.5$ )
- Reliabilitas internal through Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability ( $\geq 0.7$ )

### 2. Inner Model

This stage is used to test the relationship between variables in the structural model. The evaluation is carried out using:

- Nilai R-Square ( $R^2$ ) value to see the explanatory power of independent variables on dependent variables
- F-Square ( $f^2$ ) value to assess the magnitude of the influence of one construct on another

- T-statistic and p-value to test the significance of the relationship between variables.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

##### A. Research result

**Table 2.** Respondent Characteristics

Respondent Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
<b>Gender</b>		
Man	31	28.7%
Woman	77	71.3%
<b>Age</b>		
17-20 Years	26	24.1%
21-25 Years	46	42.6%
26-28 Years	36	33.3%
<b>Work</b>		
Students	79	73.1%
Government employees	6	5.6%
Private employees	8	7.4%
Self-employed	6	5.6%
Other	9	8.3%
Domiciled in Sidoarjo. Have you ever made a purchase at McDonald's?	108	100%

Source: SPSS processed data (2025)

Based on the respondent characteristics data, the majority of those who participated in the survey were women (77 people) compared to men (31 people). In general, this reflects the consumer trend of McDonald's in Sidoarjo, where women are more active in consumption activities at this fast food restaurant. The majority of respondents (46 people) were aged between 21 and 25 years, an age group that tends to have a dynamic lifestyle and choose McDonald's as one of their favorite places to eat. In addition, most respondents were students (79 people), indicating that McDonald's in Sidoarjo is popular among the younger generation. All respondents were consumers who had made purchases at McDonald's in the Sidoarjo area and all were familiar with the McDonald's brand, which indicates the strong brand penetration and popularity of McDonald's in the area.

##### B. Data analysis

The method for analyzing data was carried out using PLS-SEM and SmartPLS 3.0 software. There are two steps taken, namely testing the measurement model ( Outer Model ) and testing the structural model ( Inner Model ).

##### 1. Model Testing Measurement (Outer Model)

The measurement model test aims to evaluate the validity and reliability of



construct and indicator measurements. This measurement model test is carried out using internal consistency (Composite Reliability), convergent validity, indicator reliability (Average Variance Extracted) , and discriminant validity . The factor loading value is considered valid if the correlation value is > 0.7. Therefore, it can be used for further analysis (Hair, et al., 2017).

1.1 Validity Test

Table 3. Convergent Validity Value ( Loading Factor)

Indicator	Digital Marketing	Online engagement	Brand Advocacy	Purchasing Decisions
DM1	0.816			
DM2	0.805			
DM3	0.809			
DM4	0.818			
DM5	0.740			
DM6	0.792			
OE1		0.828		
OE2		0.824		
OE3		0.863		
BA1			0.789	
BA2			0.820	
BA3			0.859	
PD1				0.800
PD2				0.766
PD3				0.738
PD4				0.793
PD5				0.819
PD6				0.797

Source: Data processed by SmartPLS 3.0 (2025)

Based on the data in the table above, it can be seen that each indicator for this variable has an outer factor value > 0.70. This indicates that all indicators are valid because they meet the required correlation criteria .

Table 4. Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Indicator	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Information
Digital Marketing (X1)	0.635	Valid
Online engagement (Z1)	0.703	Valid
Brand Advocacy (Z2)	0.678	Valid
Purchasing Decisions (Y)	0.618	Valid

Source: Data processed by SmartPLS 3.0 (2025)

Based on Table 4, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value obtained shows a value above 0.5. This proves that each construct has adequately met the requirements for convergent validity.

Discriminant Validity, the level of construct validity can be measured in a second way, namely using discriminant validity which is presented in table 5 below:

**Table 5.** Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Lacker Criterion)

	Brand Advocacy	Digital marketing	Online Engagement	Purchasing Decisions
Brand Advocacy	<b>0.823</b>			
Digital marketing	0.815	<b>0.797</b>		
Online Engagement	0.770	0.778	<b>0.838</b>	
Purchasing Decisions	0.900	0.831	0.822	<b>0.786</b>

Source: Data processed by SmartPLS 3.0 (2025)

From the table above, it can be seen that the diagonal value printed in bold is the square root of AVE and the value below it is the correlation between constructs, the square root value of AVE is greater than the correlation between constructs and all AVE values are  $>0.70$ , so it can be concluded that the model is valid because it meets discriminant validity.

After the validity test is conducted, the next step is to measure the reliability or internal consistency of the construct. This measurement is carried out using Cronbach's Alpha, Rho\_A, and Composite Reliability values, with each indicator expected to have a minimum value of 0.7. The results of the reliability test are presented in Table 6:

## 1.2 Reliability Test

**Table 6.** Reliability Test Composite And Cronbach's Alpha

Indicator	Cronbach's Alpha	Rho_A	Composite Reliability	Information
Digital Marketing (X1)	0.885	0.885	0.913	Reliable
Online engagement (Z1)	0.789	0.791	0.877	Reliable
Brand Advocacy (Z2)	0.762	0.767	0.863	Reliable
Purchasing Decisions (Y)	0.876	0.880	0.906	Reliable

Source: Data processed by SmartPLS 3.0 (2025)

The Cronbach's Alpha value is very good because the value above  $>0.70$  guarantees the reliability of the construction indicators meets the reliability test. The Composite Reliability value produced by all constructs is not good because the value is above  $>0.70$ , which means the construct indicators meet the reliability test standards.



**2. Model Testing Structural (Inner Model)**

Measurement model in inner model become a structural model in knowing the causal relationship between latent variables. With the stages bootstrapping , T-statistic test parameters obtained in predicting the existence of a relationship. The inner model shows the strength of the estimates between latent variables and constructs.

**2.1 R-Square Test ( $R^2$ )**

The coefficient of determination (R -Square ) is a way to determine the extent to which endogenous constructs can be explained by exogenous constructs. A value between 0 and 1 is expected in the coefficient of determination ( R- Square ). Structural model testing begins with knowing the value of R -Sqaure on each endogenous latent variable becomes the predictive power in the structural model. The R- Square value of 0.67 is categorized as strong. 0.33 is categorized as moderate. 0.19 is categorized as weak (Hair et al., 2017). The results of the R-Square test are presented in Table 6.

**Table 7.** R-Square Test

Indicator	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Online engagement (Z1)	0.605	0.601
Brand Advocacy (Z2)	0.665	0.662
Purchasing Decisions (Y)	0.859	0.855

Source: Data processed by SmartPLS 3.0 (2025)

R-Square ( $R^2$ ) is used to evaluate the level of significance of the relationship between variables or constructs. The R-square value has three criteria: 0.67 is categorized as strong, 0.33 is categorized as moderate, and 0.19 is categorized as weak. The table shows that the R-Square value for the Online Engagement variable is 0.612, while for the Brand Advocacy variable it is 0.673, and for the Purchasing Decisions variable of 0.858 which is included in the strong category

**2.2 F-Square Test ( $F^2$ )**

**Table 8.** F-Square Test

	Digital Marketing	Online engagement	Brand Advocacy	Purchasing Decisions
Digital Marketing		1,530	1,984	0.065
Online engagement				0.150
Brand Advocacy				0.641
Purchasing Decisions				

Source: Data processed by SmartPLS 3.0 (2025)

F-Square value is useful for assessing the extent of the influence of an independent variable on a dependent variable individually. A value of 0.02 is considered small, 0.15 is considered moderate, and 0.35 is considered large.

Based on Table 8, the F-Square value of the Digital Marketing variable on Online Engagement is 1.530, which is included in the large category because the value is far above 0.35. This shows that Digital Marketing has a large influence in increasing Online Engagement. The F-Square value for Digital Marketing on Brand Advocacy is 1.984, which is also included in the large category, so it can be concluded that Digital Marketing plays a large role in encouraging the formation of Brand Advocacy. Furthermore, the F-Square value on Digital Marketing on Purchasing Decisions of 0.065 is included in the small category, indicating that the direct influence of Digital Marketing on purchasing decisions is relatively low. For Online Engagement on Purchasing Decisions, the F-Square value of 0.150 is also included in the medium category, while Brand Advocacy on Purchasing Decisions has an F-Square value of 0.641, which is included in the large category, thus indicating that Brand Advocacy has a very strong influence on purchasing decisions.

### 2.3 Hypothesis Testing

**Table 9.** Path Coefficients

Indicator	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ( O/STDEV )	P Values	Results	Hypothesis
Digital Marketing -> Online Engagement	0.778	0.769	0.064	12,131	0,000	Positive and significant impact	Accepted
Digital Marketing -> Brand Advocacy	0.815	0.805	0.055	14,729	0,000	Positive and significant impact	Accepted
Online Engagement -> Purchasing Decisions	0.250	0.243	0.092	2,724	0.007	Positive and significant impact	Accepted
Brand Advocacy -> Purchasing Decisions	0.560	0.566	0.075	7,492	0,000	Positive and significant impact	Accepted
Digital Marketing -> Purchasing Decisions	0.181	0.183	0.083	2,176	0.030	Positive and significant impact	Accepted

Source: Data processed by SmartPLS 3.0 (2025)

The table above shows the results of the significance level test to determine the answer to the hypothesis in this study. The results of the hypothesis testing can be seen from the T-statistic and P-value . If the T-statistic value is  $> 1.96$  and the P-value is  $< 0.05$ , the hypothesis is accepted. Conversely, if the T-statistic value is  $< 1.96$  and the P-value is  $> 0.05$ , the hypothesis is rejected. Based on the table above, it can be explained that:

1. digital marketing variable shows a value of 12.131 >1.96 in the t-table, while the p-value is 0.000 <0.05. This can be concluded that the measurement results explain that digital marketing has a positive and significant effect on online engagement at McDonald's Sidoarjo.
2. digital marketing variable shows a value of 14.729 >1.96 in the t-test table, while the p-value is 0.000 <0.05. This can be concluded that the measurement results explain that digital marketing has a positive and significant effect on brand advocacy at McDonald's Sidoarjo.
3. online engagement variable shows a t-value of 2.724 >1.96, while the p-value is 0.007 <0.05. This measurement result indicates that online engagement has a positive and significant impact on purchasing decisions. at McDonald's Sidoarjo.
4. brand advocacy variable shows a value of 7.492 in the t-table with a value of 1.96, while the p-value is 0.000 <0.05. This can be concluded that the measurement results explain that brand advocacy has a positive and significant effect on purchasing decisions. at McDonald's Sidoarjo.
5. digital marketing variable shows a t-value of 2.176 >1.96, while the p-value is 0.030 <0.05. This measurement result indicates that digital marketing has a positive and significant influence on purchasing decisions. at McDonald's Sidoarjo.

**Table 10.** Specific Indirect Effect

Indicator	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ( O/STDEV )	P Values	Results	Hypothesis
Digital Marketing -> Online Engagement -> Purchasing Decisions	0.194	0.188	0.075	2,599	0.010	Positive and significant impact	Accepted
Digital Marketing -> Brand Advocacy -> Purchasing Decisions	0.457	0.455	0.065	6,981	0,000	Positive and significant impact	Accepted

Source: Data processed by SmartPLS 3.0 (2025)

In Table 10, we can see the specific indirect effect value or mediation test indicating that Digital Marketing influences Purchasing Decisions through the mediating role of Online Engagement and Brand Advocacy because the significance value is below 0.05 . This can be seen as follows:

1. The measurement results of the variables Digital Marketing (X1) -> Online Engagement (Z1) -> Purchasing Decisions (Y) show an average value of 0.188 with a t value of 2.599 and a significance of 5%, so it can be concluded that Online Engagement is able to mediate the relationship between Digital Marketing and Purchasing Decisions .

2. The measurement results of the variables Digital Marketing (X1) -> Brand Advocacy (Z2) -> Purchasing Decisions (Y) show an average value of 0.455 with a t value of 6.981 and a significance of 5%, so it can be concluded that Brand Advocacy is able to mediate the relationship between Digital Marketing and Purchasing Decisions .

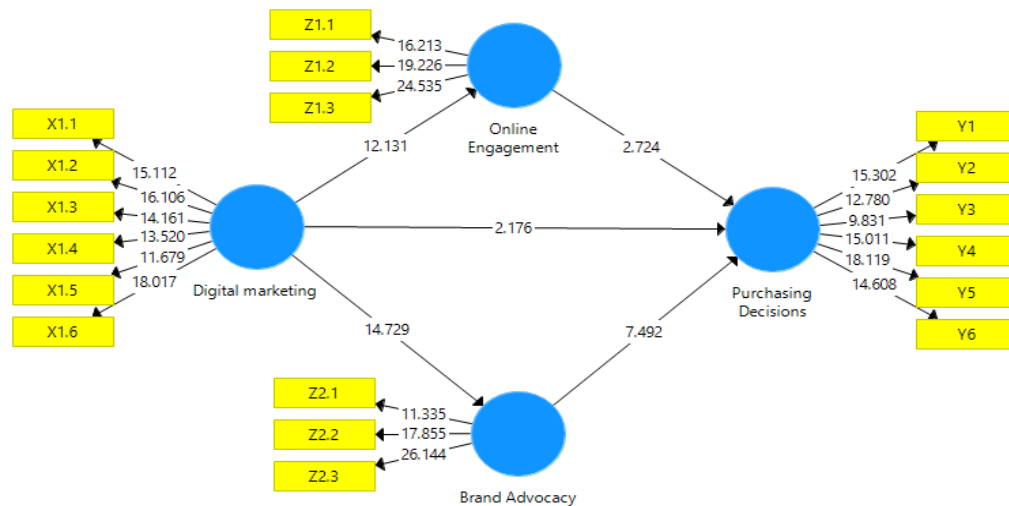


Figure 2 Bootstrapping Test Results

## C. Discussion

### The Influence of Digital Marketing on Online Engagement

Empirical results show that digital marketing has a positive and significant effect on online engagement, with a path coefficient value of 0.778, indicating a relationship between variables, a t-statistic value of 12.131 greater than the t-table value of 1.96, and a p-value of 0.000 less than 0.05, indicating that the relationship between these variables is significant. These results align with the findings of Erwin, et al., (2023) and Erfiana & Purnamasari, (2023), who noted that digital marketing has a positive and significant influence on online engagement. However, these results do not align with the findings of Safitri & Komaryatin, (2025), who stated that Work Motivation does not have a significant influence on Performance.

High online engagement is an important link between digital marketing strategies and deeper consumer responses. Active Gen Z consumers who engage with and respond to McDonald's digital content tend to demonstrate positive support for the brand, such as recommending it, sharing their experiences, and providing feedback in digital spaces. Such responses significantly influence purchasing decisions, as peer influence and social proof are perceived as more credible and convincing, particularly among this generation.

These findings show that the success of digital marketing depends not only on the delivery of promotional messages, but also on how consumers actively engage with brands through digital platforms. Online engagement enables the creation of more personal and sustainable relationships between consumers and brands, while brand advocacy strengthens trust through recommendations from fellow users. For Generation Z, who are highly responsive to authentic experiences and opinions from their community, the combination of both creates a stronger influence on purchasing decisions compared to conventional promotions. Therefore, building meaningful interactions and encouraging



consumer participation in sharing positive experiences is a key strategy in enhancing the effectiveness of digital marketing.

### **The Influence of Digital Marketing on Brand Advocacy**

The partial results indicate that digital marketing has a positive and significant effect on brand advocacy, with a path coefficient value of 0.815, indicating a relationship between the variables, and a t-statistic value of 14.729, which is greater than the t-table value of 1.96, and a p-value of 0.000, which is

less than 0.05, indicating that the relationship between these variables is significant. This finding aligns with the research by (R. S. Kartikowati et al., 2024) and Sawhney et al. (no year), which confirms that digital marketing positively and significantly impacts brand advocacy by making consumers active participants in the marketing process. However, in Satya et al., (2023) research, it is explained that digital marketing has a negative effect on brand advocacy.

Consumers who are satisfied with the quality of information and digital interactions offered by McDonald's are more likely to recommend the product to others. This positive response occurs not only through direct word-of-mouth communication, but also through content sharing activities on social media. Creative and engaging digital content, such as promotional videos, user-generated content (UGC), and interactive campaigns that capture consumers' attention, build emotional connections, and foster trust in the brand. As a result, consumers are not only interested in purchasing but also voluntarily share their positive experiences with their social networks.

Brand advocacy plays a crucial role in strengthening the overall impact of digital marketing on consumer purchasing decisions. Although digital marketing strategies can directly influence purchase intent through attractive promotions and easy access to information, this influence is often weaker than social cues originating from the consumer's own environment. Recommendations from friends, family, or fellow users are considered more authentic and emotionally convincing than messages delivered directly by companies. In this context, the primary strength of digital marketing lies in its ability to foster engagement that encourages consumers to voluntarily express support and share positive experiences with a brand. When consumers are motivated to become active brand advocates, the resulting social influence creates a stronger and more sustainable impact on the purchasing decision-making process.

### **The Influence of Online Engagement on Purchasing Decisions**

Empirical results show that Online Engagement has a positive and significant effect on purchasing decisions, with a path coefficient value of 0.250, indicating a relationship between variables, and a t-statistic value of 2.724, which is greater than the t-table value of 1.96, and a p-value of 0.007, which is less than 0.05, indicating that the relationship between these variables is significant. This finding aligns with the research by Sugiyono, (2020) and Kapti et al., (2024) which emphasizes that online engagement has a significant influence on purchasing decisions. This differs from the research by Chasanah & Saino, (2021), who states that online engagement does not have a significant influence on purchasing decisions.

Online engagement not only has a direct impact on purchasing decisions,

but also has an indirect effect that is reinforced through brand advocacy. When consumers feel valued and engaged, they are more inclined to recommend products to others, either directly or through social media. This process strengthens social trust and expands the brand's reach, which ultimately drives more purchases.

In other words, online engagement plays an important role as a link between digital marketing strategies and purchasing decisions, as it creates more meaningful interactions between consumers and brands. When consumers feel engaged, they are more likely to share their positive experiences, which then shapes brand advocacy and expands the reach of marketing influence. In the context of Generation Z, who are highly active on social media, this participatory and interactive approach is key, as they are more responsive to experiences shared organically by fellow users than to direct promotions from companies.

### **The Influence of Brand Advocacy on Purchasing Decisions**

Brand advocacy has a positive and significant effect on purchasing decisions, with a path coefficient value of 0.560, indicating a relationship between variables, and a t-statistic value of 7.492, which is greater than the t-table value of 1.96, and a p-value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05, indicating that the relationship between these variables is significant. These results align with the findings of Keller, (1993) and Kasamira & Prabawani, (2024) which indicate that brand advocacy has a positive and significant impact on purchasing decisions. However, in Schepers & Nijssen, (2018) research, it was noted that brand advocacy has a negative and significant impact on purchasing decisions.

Findings in the field show that many respondents decided to buy McDonald's products after seeing positive reviews or posts from their friends on platforms such as Instagram Stories or TikTok. Some respondents also admitted that they were often tempted to buy after receiving promotional links or proof of purchase, such as cashback receipts, from friends. Some even voluntarily shared discount information with their friends, becoming active brand advocates even without direct incentives from the company.

Brand advocacy does not just happen overnight, but is formed through a process that begins with online consumer engagement triggered by digital marketing strategies. Digital marketing creates engagement, which in turn encourages consumers to actively support the brand. This support is reflected in word-of-mouth communication and recommendations, ultimately strengthening purchasing decisions. Loyal consumers tend to share their positive experiences, recommend products, and reinforce the brand's image in the digital space, which indirectly drives increased demand. This relationship flow demonstrates that the indirect influence of digital marketing through consumer support is more significant than its direct influence, as consumers particularly younger generations who are highly socially connected, tend to trust information from their social circles more than promotional messages directly from companies.

### **The Influence of Digital Marketing on Purchasing Decisions**

Empirical results show that Digital Marketing has a positive and significant effect on purchasing decisions, with a path coefficient value of 0.181, indicating a relationship between variables, and a t-statistic value of 2.176, which is greater than the t-table value of 1.96, and a p-value of 0.030, which is less than



0.05, indicating that the relationship between these variables is significant. These research findings align with the findings of Priyanti & Mudji, (2022) and Sonatasia et al., (2020) which state that digital marketing, particularly that involving community interaction and support, has a positive and significant influence on purchasing decisions. This contrasts with the findings of (Listania & Zulfahmi, 2023), who stated that there is a negative influence on purchasing decisions.

All respondents stated that McDonald's clear, attractive, and easily accessible digital information influenced their purchasing decisions. Price promotions, ease of transaction, and product variety communicated through platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and the McDonald's app were the main attractions. Eye-catching ad visuals and offers like "Buy 1 Get 1 Free" or personal discounts prompt quick responses from consumers. Furthermore, the effectiveness of digital marketing is enhanced by active consumer engagement, where consumers not only receive information but also share it, leave comments, and recommend it to others. This interaction builds trust and expands the reach of promotions in a more persuasive and credible manner.

Interestingly, the data also shows that the direct influence of digital promotion is not always the main factor in purchasing decisions. This may be because many consumers are now less trusting of advertisements that are overly promotional. Instead, they place more trust in reviews from other users, shared content, or endorsements from influencers, as these are perceived to be more honest and based on real experiences. All of these forms are part of brand advocacy, which helps build trust in a product. When consumers see others giving support or sharing positive experiences about a brand, they are more likely to purchase that product than if they only saw advertisements from the company.

### **The influence of online engagement mediates the relationship between digital marketing and purchasing decisions.**

The results of the study indicate that online engagement mediates the influence of digital marketing on purchasing decisions with a positive effect of 19%, a t-value of 2.599, and significance at  $p < 0.05$ . These results show that active consumer participation on social media strengthens the influence of digital marketing on purchasing decisions. This finding is supported by the research of Nurcahyo & Riskayanto, (2021) and Mulyansyah & Sulistyowati, (2021) who state that online engagement plays an important role in bridging the influence of digital marketing strategies on consumer behavior. Meanwhile, in Habib et al., (2022) research, it is stated that there is no significant influence of online engagement as a mediator between digital marketing and purchasing decisions.

In practice, McDonald's successfully drives digital engagement through various interactive campaigns on social media. Consumers, especially Gen Z, often engage with promotional content such as video challenges, menu reviews and viral comments on platforms like TikTok and Instagram. Activities such as liking, sharing and interacting with such content extend the reach of promotional messages organically while building an emotional connection between brands and customers.

This kind of engagement creates a social validation space that increases consumer trust in the brand. Consumers tend to trust information that comes from

fellow users more than one-way promotions from companies. Therefore, McDonald's digital strategy that encourages active participation is key in strengthening the influence of digital marketing on purchasing decisions.

### **The Influence of Brand Advocacy Mediating the Relationship between Digital Marketing and Purchasing Decisions**

The results showed that brand advocacy was proven to mediate the effect of digital marketing on purchasing decisions with a *t* value of 6.981 and a significance level of 1%. This means that effective digital marketing can encourage consumers to recommend products voluntarily, which in turn strengthens purchasing decisions. This finding is in line with research by (Darwin, 2020) and (Heriyanto, 2024) which states that brand advocacy acts as a positive link between digital marketing strategies and consumer purchasing behavior. However, Chandra et al., (2025) research explains that brand advocacy as a mediation between digital marketing and purchasing decisions has no significant effect.

The facts on the ground show that McDonald's consumers often share their experiences on social media after responding to an engaging digital campaign. Some respondents admitted that they became interested in buying after seeing positive reviews or attractive promotions from friends on Instagram or TikTok. McDonald's digital strategy of engaging visual content and interactive promotions encourages consumers to become active brand advocates through testimonials or personal recommendations.

In this case, brand advocacy becomes an important channel that conveys marketing messages in a more authentic and trusted manner. Consumers tend to trust recommendations from fellow users more than direct promotions from companies. Therefore, McDonald's needs to continue to strengthen brand advocacy through relevant digital content in order to maintain loyalty and drive sustainable purchasing decisions.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, SUGGESTIONS AND LIMITATION OF THE RESEARCH**

This study concludes that there is a positive and significant effect of digital marketing on online engagement, brand advocacy, and purchasing decisions of Gen Z consumers at McDonald's Sidoarjo. Digital marketing that is designed in an informative, engaging and interactive manner is proven to increase consumer engagement in digital interactions, build loyalty and drive purchase actions. Online engagement and brand advocacy each also positively influence purchase decisions, with consumers who actively interact digitally showing a greater propensity to purchase products.

An interesting finding from this study is that the indirect influence of digital marketing through consumer engagement and advocacy is stronger than its direct influence. This suggests that consumers trust information gained through other users' experiences, such as recommendations from friends or testimonials on social media, more than one-way promotions from companies. Thus, the ultimate power of digital marketing lies not only in its content, but also in the extent to which it encourages participation and organic dissemination of messages by consumers.

The practical implications of these findings suggest that McDonald's needs

to continue to optimize digital marketing strategies that are aligned with Generation Z preferences, through the use of innovative visual content, participatory promotion development, and strategic collaboration with content creators who have an affinity with the young audience segment. Developing digital communities that actively engage consumers can be a long-term effort to strengthen customer loyalty and expand brand influence consistently.

The limitations of this study lie in the purposive sampling method and the limited research location in the Sidoarjo area, so the results cannot be generalized to other regions. Therefore, future studies are recommended to expand the geographical coverage to areas such as Surabaya, Gresik, and Pasuruan, and consider additional variables such as brand trust and customer satisfaction to enrich the understanding of digital consumer behavior in the current era.

In addition, future research could explore different methodological approaches, such as longitudinal studies or qualitative approaches, to explore the dynamics of relationships between variables in more depth. Other moderator variables can also be considered, and research objects from different industries can be used to see potential differences in findings in a broader context.

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