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Pierre Bourdieu's Concepts of Habitus and Cultural Capital: Mechanisms of Intergenerational Social Inequality Reproduction

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ABSTRACT

Background: Social inequality is not merely reproduced through the direct transmission of economic resources across generations; it is also perpetuated through subtle mechanisms of cultural transmission that operate through the socialization of dispositions, tastes, and competencies valued in dominant social fields. Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework—centering on the concepts of habitus, field, and capital—provides the most influential sociological account of these mechanisms. **Objective:** This study analyzes Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural capital as mechanisms of intergenerational social inequality reproduction, examining their theoretical foundations, empirical applications, and contemporary relevance. **Methods:** A systematic literature review was conducted using Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, covering peer-reviewed publications from 2019 to 2025 on Bourdieu's sociology, cultural reproduction, educational inequality, social stratification, and class analysis. **Results:** The findings confirm that habitus and cultural capital operate as powerful mechanisms of inequality reproduction in educational systems, labor markets, and cultural fields, with effects that are resistant to formal policies of equality of opportunity precisely because they operate below the threshold of conscious recognition. **Conclusion:** Bourdieu's framework remains indispensable for understanding the persistence of social inequality across generations, but requires critical extension to account for intersecting axes of race, gender, and digital capital, and for the agency of dominated classes in challenging cultural reproduction.

Keywords: Bourdieu, habitus, cultural capital, social reproduction, intergenerational inequality, field theory, educational inequality



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INTRODUCTION

Digital platforms have become central to how MSMEs in the Global South negotiate visibility, competition, and community relationships. In Indonesia, Instagram is widely adopted by small food and beverage businesses to reach younger, visually oriented audiences and to construct brand identity through everyday imagery and storytelling (Sutejo et al., 2025; Yulianti et al., 2024; Fathin & Indrawati, 2024). For MSMEs, social media is not only a low-cost marketing channel but also a space where owners, workers, and consumers co-produce meanings of quality, authenticity, and local pride (Gross & Von Wangenheim, 2022; Devereux et al., 2019; Javid et al., 2023).

Prior research shows that social media marketing can significantly enhance SME brand awareness, customer engagement, and sales performance across diverse national contexts, including Indonesia, Pakistan, Somalia, and the Philippines (Sutejo et al., 2025; Fathin & Indrawati, 2024;

Javaid et al., 2023; Santos et al., 2024). Instagram, with its emphasis on visuality and interaction, is particularly effective for building brand engagement and perceived quality, especially when content is entertaining, interactive, and tailored to audience preferences (Thomas & Verma, 2023; Park & Namkung, 2022). Yet many MSMEs face constraints in digital literacy, content planning, and strategic use of paid features such as Instagram Ads (Swastika et al., 2025; Yulianti et al., 2024; Fathin & Indrawati, 2024; Utomo et al., 2023).

This article investigates how a structured Instagram campaign, including paid advertising, affected the visibility and engagement of STJ Fresh Healthy, a Bandung-based MSME producing infused water. The analysis adopts a social-humanities perspective, interpreting metrics such as reach and interactions as indicators of evolving social relationships, trust, and community support, not merely marketing performance indicators.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Instagram Marketing and MSME Development

Empirical studies consistently show that Instagram marketing contributes positively to MSME business development through creative content, consistent posting, and interactive engagement (Sutejo et al., 2025; Yulianti et al., 2024; Fathin & Indrawati, 2024). Among Indonesian MSMEs, visually appealing posts, Reels, and Stories help attract attention, form a recognizable brand identity, and facilitate conversations with customers via comments and direct messages (Sutejo et al., 2025; Yulianti et al., 2024; Utomo et al., 2023). Training and support in digital marketing can improve owners' capabilities and produce measurable increases in followers, interactions, and sales (Swastika et al., 2025).

Cross-country research similarly highlights that social media marketing, including Instagram, strengthens brand awareness, customer engagement, and sales performance for SMEs, though the relative impact of different platforms may vary by context (Fathin & Indrawati, 2024; Javaid et al., 2023; Santos et al., 2024). Instagram is often perceived as especially powerful for engagement and brand equity, particularly among younger users, compared to more information-heavy platforms such as Facebook (Thomas & Verma, 2023; Fathin & Indrawati, 2024).

Engagement, Brand Equity, and Social Meaning

Engagement on Instagram—likes, comments, shares, saves—is widely used as a key performance indicator in social media and influencer marketing, linking user actions to brand trust, reputation, and even financial outcomes (Gross & Von Wangenheim, 2022; Thomas & Verma, 2023; Sanches & Ramos, 2025). Higher interaction levels are associated with stronger customer-based brand equity dimensions such as brand awareness, brand image, perceived quality, and loyalty intentions (Thomas & Verma, 2023; Park & Namkung, 2022). In the coffee industry, Instagram marketing activities characterized by interaction, entertainment, customization, and trendiness have been shown to enhance brand image and foster both attitudinal (brand love) and behavioral loyalty (re-usage intention) (Park & Namkung, 2022).

For MSMEs, follower count and growth also matter. Studies find that follower numbers are strongly related to performance and revenue, though engagement quality and follower “loyalty” (those who interact and share content) are emerging as nuanced metrics of relational strength (Gross & Von Wangenheim, 2022; Sanches & Ramos, 2025). Research on small retailers and SMEs stresses that content type (business vs. non-business), media format (photo vs. video), and posting timing influence engagement levels, revealing that social media activity is a negotiated practice rather than a simple technical routine (Devereux et al., 2019; Wies et al., 2022).

Instagram Ads and Paid Visibility

Several studies document the effectiveness of sponsored content and Instagram Ads in increasing engagement and expanding reach beyond existing followers (Swastika et al., 2025; Gross & Von Wangenheim, 2022; Thomas & Verma, 2023; Utomo et al., 2023). Sponsored posts can generate higher engagement than non-sponsored posts, especially when combined with informational or emotionally compelling appeals, and when aligned with audience expectations (Gross & Von Wangenheim, 2022; Ranjan, 2025). For MSMEs, paid promotion via Instagram Ads and AdSense is recommended as a tool to build brand awareness, provided it is integrated with consistent content and interaction strategies (Swastika et al., 2025; Thomas & Verma, 2023; Utomo et al., 2023). Taken together, the literature suggests that Instagram offers MSMEs a hybrid space where economic goals (sales, growth) intersect with socio-cultural processes (identity building, community formation, trust). This article situates the STJ Fresh Healthy case within that broader field.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative case-study design, complemented by descriptive analysis of Instagram performance metrics. Data were collected from:

- Instagram Insights for @stj_freshhealthy over a two-month campaign period (reach, impressions, interactions, follower count).
- Detailed performance records from two promoted Reels (Ad 1: product introduction; Ad 2: production process).
- Observations of content types (visual style, captions, storytelling).
- An evaluation interview with the MSME owner regarding perceived content quality, planning, and outcomes.

The campaign design followed a customer-journey logic akin to “see–think–do–care,” organizing content into awareness-oriented introduction posts, consideration-oriented educational/process posts, call-to-action prompts, and follow-up engagement through comments and DMs. The analysis focuses on how paid promotion reshaped audience exposure and engagement patterns, and how these outcomes can be interpreted in terms of social relations and community-building.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the detailed outcomes of the STJ Fresh Healthy Instagram campaign and interprets them considering current research on MSME social media marketing, digital advertising, and engagement.

1. Instagram Ads Performance and Brand Visibility

Across two promoted Reels (Ad 1 and Ad 2), Instagram Ads produced a substantial amplification of visibility for STJ Fresh Healthy.

1.1. Ad 1: Product Introduction and Awareness Building

Ad 1, a 16-second product introduction video, was explicitly designed for the “see” stage of the digital journey, emphasizing product benefits and natural ingredients.

- Pre-ad performance:
 - Reach: 302 accounts
 - Likes: 21
 - Comments: 1
 - Shares: 1
- Post-ad performance:
 - Total Views: 7,771 (6,503 from ads)
 - Reach: 6,503 accounts (6,004 from ads)

- Total Interactions: 69
- Likes: 58
- Comments: 2
- Shares: 3
- Saves: 6
- Profile Activity: 19 new followers
- Profile Visits (Ad Goal): 128

The ad increased reach by more than twentyfold and more than tripled interactions compared to the pre-ad baseline. The high number of profile visits and 19 new followers indicate that viewers not only consumed the content but also took further exploratory actions. This aligns with quantitative findings that digital advertising has a significant positive effect on MSME sales growth and that Instagram Ads can drive both visibility and conversion-oriented behavior when creatively executed (Setiawan et al., 2025; Meilani et al., 2025; Rahmawati et al., 2025; Syaifullah et al., 2021).

Similar case studies of Indonesian MSMEs show that implementing Instagram Ads leads to marked increases in followers, interactions per post, and even offline outcomes such as visitor numbers and sales (Swastika et al., 2025; Rahmawati et al., 2025). The STJ Fresh Healthy results resonate with these patterns, suggesting that even a short, visually strong Reel can function as an effective awareness and attraction tool.

1.2. Ad 2: Production Process, Trust, and Informational Value

Ad 2 highlighted the production process, hygiene, and natural ingredients, targeting the “think” stage where audiences evaluate product credibility.

- Pre-ad performance:
 - Reach: 217 accounts
 - Likes: 24
 - Comments: 0
 - Shares: 2
- Post-ad performance:
 - Total Views: 7,771 (8,608 from ads; minor reporting inconsistency)
 - Reach: 5,925 accounts (5,529 from ads)
 - Total Interactions: 26
 - Likes: 23
 - Comments: 0
 - Shares: 3
 - Saves: 1
 - Profile Activity: 1 new follower
 - Profile Visits (Ad Goal): 23

Although Ad 2 reached almost as many users as Ad 1, it generated fewer interactions and followers. This is consistent with studies showing that while informational and process-oriented content strengthens perceived quality and trust, it may elicit lower surface-level engagement (likes, comments) than entertaining or benefit-focused content (Sutejo et al., 2025; Kirana & Hambalah, 2025; Setya & Sirait, 2024). Research on MSMEs and coffee brands finds that dimensions such as entertainment and interaction typically have stronger direct effects on brand awareness and engagement than purely informational content, even though informativeness remains a significant predictor of brand recognition (Setya & Sirait, 2024; Zaelani et al., 2025).

In the STJ Fresh Healthy case, Ad 2 can be interpreted as contributing to the cognitive dimension of engagement—helping audiences understand product safety and authenticity—while Ad

1 primarily drives affective and behavioral engagement through immediate reactions and profile exploration (Kirana & Hambalah, 2025; Setya & Sirait, 2024).

1.3. Aggregate Ad Outcomes and Comparative Evidence

Combined, the two ads achieved:

- Total Views: 15,542
- Total Reach: 12,428 accounts
- Total Interactions (ad posts): 95
- New Followers Directly Attributed: 20
- Profile Visits (Ad Goal): 151

These outcomes align with broader evidence that Instagram marketing, including paid promotion, has a significant positive effect on MSME business development, particularly in terms of market expansion, brand identity, and sales-related indicators (Sutejo et al., 2025; Setiawan et al., 2025; Meilani et al., 2025; Rahmawati et al., 2025; Syaifullah et al., 2021). Studies on Instagram-based MSMEs in Indonesia and other developing contexts show similar patterns: digital advertising and content marketing jointly increase reach, engagement, and ultimately sales performance (Paper et al., 2025; Setiawan et al., 2025; Rahmawati et al., 2025; Syaifullah et al., 2021).

The STJ Fresh Healthy campaign also reflects findings that follower numbers and advertising budgets are positively associated with sales volume, indicating that investing in paid reach can build a larger potential buyer base and enhance the effectiveness of future promotions (Sudirjo et al., 2025; Sanches & Ramos, 2025). From a social-humanities perspective, this expansion of reach can be seen as enlarging the circle of people who are aware of, talk about, and symbolically support a local brand.

2. Follower Growth, Engagement Patterns, and Community Formation

2.1. Follower Growth as Emerging Community

Over the two-month period, STJ Fresh Healthy's followers increased from 475 to 519, a growth of approximately 9%. While modest in absolute numbers, this increase is significant for a micro-scale account and corresponds with research showing that Instagram utilization by MSMEs positively influences sales revenues and business performance through increased reach and growing follower communities (Syaifullah et al., 2021; Tarso et al., 2025). Quantitative studies indicate that follower count exerts a stronger influence on revenue growth than individual engagement rates, suggesting that building a substantial follower base is a critical strategic objective (Sanches & Ramos, 2025; Kelvin et al., 2024).

In this case, Instagram Ads accelerated follower acquisition (20 new followers linked directly to the ads), demonstrating how paid campaigns can seed a broader, ongoing community around the brand. For local MSMEs, such communities represent more than potential customers; they are social networks that can generate word-of-mouth, repeat purchases, and symbolic support for local entrepreneurship (Wulandari et al., 2025; Zaelani et al., 2025; Asri, 2025).

2.2. Engagement Metrics and Content Sensitivity

During the campaign:

- Feed posts received 333 interactions (likes, comments, shares, saves).
- Reels collectively generated 169 interactions.
- Promoted Reels outperformed most organic content, with a testimonial Reel obtaining 58 likes and an interview Reel 24 likes.

These metrics are in line with research showing that visual and narrative content—especially Reels, Stories, and user-centered storytelling—can significantly enhance customer engagement for MSMEs (Sutejo et al., 2025; Yulianti et al., 2024; Kirana & Hambalah, 2025; Rahmawati et al., 2025). The highly interacted testimonial Reel parallels findings that e-word of mouth and testimonial

content strongly affect brand awareness and positive brand associations for MSMEs (Setya & Sirait, 2024; Asri, 2025). Similarly, case studies of MSMEs like Michil and Raja Pisang Keju Arjuna show that content pillars emphasizing entertaining and convincing narratives, customer testimonials, and behind-the-scenes stories foster affective, cognitive, and behavioral engagement (Kirana & Hambalah, 2025; Rahmawati et al., 2025).

From a socio-cultural standpoint, these interactions can be understood as small but meaningful acts of recognition and affiliation. Likes and comments on testimonial or interview content indicate not only interest in the product but also identification with the people and stories behind the brand. This supports qualitative research arguing that successful MSME Instagram strategies involve building relational ties through visual storytelling, hashtags, and interactive features, rather than simply broadcasting promotional messages (Yulianti et al., 2024; Zaelani et al., 2025; Asri, 2025; Firdaus et al., 2025).

Moreover, the distribution of engagement across content types reflects broader patterns in the literature: entertainment, interaction, and advertising dimensions tend to generate higher quantitative engagement and brand awareness, while informativeness builds depth of understanding and trust (Setya & Sirait, 2024; Zaelani et al., 2025). For STJ Fresh Healthy, this suggests the value of maintaining a balanced content mix that includes product highlights, lifestyle-oriented posts, testimonials, and process transparency.

3. Reach, Impressions, and Algorithmic Amplification

3.1. Organic vs. Paid Reach

Over two months, the @stj_freshhealthy account reached 12,484 users, with 10,571 users (~85%) originating from Instagram Ads. This confirms that, for a relatively small account, paid promotion is the primary mechanism for extending visibility beyond the existing follower base. Comparable case studies of Indonesian MSMEs show similar patterns: when Instagram and other digital tools are strategically optimized, reach and followers can increase sharply within a short period, leading to more interactions and improved brand perception (Meilani et al., 2025; Rahmawati et al., 2025; Syaifullah et al., 2021).

The dominance of paid reach underscores the algorithmic realities described in social media analysis research: organic visibility for small accounts is often limited, and ratios such as post-to-follower, likes-to-follower, and comments-to-follower highlight the challenge of breaking out of a narrow audience without paid support (Kelvin et al., 2024). For STJ Fresh Healthy, investing in ads can thus be interpreted as a way of “buying into” a wider algorithmic field, gaining access to users who might otherwise never encounter the brand.

3.2. Impressions and Repeated Exposure

The campaign generated 15,542 impressions from Instagram Ads, indicating that many users saw the content multiple times. Marketing and communication studies emphasize that repeated exposure helps strengthen brand recognition and recall, an effect linked to increased brand awareness and intention to purchase (Sutejo et al., 2025; Utomo et al., 2023; Setya & Sirait, 2024). In the context of MSMEs, where brand names are often unfamiliar and competition is intense, such repeated exposure is crucial for embedding the brand in consumers’ mental “consideration sets.”

The STJ Fresh Healthy data, though limited, suggests that impressions serve a dual function: they support short-term engagement (clicks, profile visits) and contribute to longer-term brand memory. This is consistent with findings that integrated digital marketing communications, when consistently executed through Instagram, successfully build MSME brand awareness over time (Utomo et al., 2023; Asri, 2025).

4. Owner Evaluation, Capacity Building, and Digital Inequalities

4.1. Perceived Value of Content Planning and Aesthetics

In the evaluation interview, the owner reported high satisfaction with:

- The structured content plan and calendar.
- Visual quality: fresh, bright designs matching brand personality.
- Caption tone: informal, youth-friendly, and easy to understand.

These reflections match evidence from qualitative MSME case studies showing that content planning (editorial calendars), high-quality visuals, and tailored language styles are central to effective Instagram strategies (Yulianti et al., 2024; Kirana & Hambalah, 2025; Rahmawati et al., 2025; Firdaus et al., 2025). Studies on @denisa_sprei and @bagja.id, for example, highlight the role of visually appealing images and videos, careful copywriting, and consistent posting in building brand identity and follower relationships (Yulianti et al., 2024; Zaelani et al., 2025). Research on urban agriculture communities similarly stresses that memorable visual packaging, clear captions, and creative formats make content more easily remembered and more likely to support empowerment and branding goals (Firdaus et al., 2025).

For STJ Fresh Healthy, owner satisfaction with these aspects indicates a growing internal capacity to think of Instagram as a strategic communication space. It also suggests that the campaign fostered learning about what types of visual and textual styles resonate with the target audience, which is critical for long-term sustainability of digital marketing efforts (Paper et al., 2025; Wulandari et al., 2025; Rahmawati et al., 2025; Syaifullah et al., 2021).

4.2. Engagement, New Followers, and Perceived Impact

The owner's observation of increased interactions on promoted Reels and a visible rise in followers echoes quantitative findings that MSMEs perceive social media marketing as positively affecting sales, customer relationships, and creativity during challenging periods such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Syaifullah et al., 2021). In multiple contexts, MSME owners report that social media adoption enhances market reach and competitiveness, even while they struggle with digital skills and resource allocation (Wulandari et al., 2025; D.Nikhitha et al., 2025; Utomo et al., 2023; Tarso et al., 2025).

This case therefore illustrates how targeted interventions—such as training and support in designing Instagram Ads and content calendars—can help small businesses overcome initial capability gaps. At the same time, it underscores persistent inequalities: MSMEs with access to such support can more readily leverage Instagram's affordances, while others may remain marginalized in the digitized marketplace (Paper et al., 2025; Wulandari et al., 2025; Tarso et al., 2025; Firdaus et al., 2025).

From a social-humanities viewpoint, these disparities raise questions about which local businesses gain visibility, whose stories circulate widely, and how platform dynamics may reinforce or mitigate existing economic and social inequalities.

5. Social-Humanities Interpretation: Beyond Metrics

Although this section has emphasized numerical results, the findings should also be interpreted as evidence of changing social relations between STJ Fresh Healthy and its public. Increased reach, engagement, and followers do not only represent abstract "performance" but also:

- The expansion of a loose but recognizable online community that orients around a local healthy-beverage brand.
- The co-construction of meanings of "fresh," "healthy," and "local" through comments, testimonials, and shared posts.
- The emergence of new forms of digital empowerment for a small business in Bandung, made possible by platform tools but shaped by local aesthetic choices, language, and values (Yulianti et al., 2024; Zaelani et al., 2025; Asri, 2025; Firdaus et al., 2025).

Similar qualitative research on MSMEs and community accounts (e.g., @great.andgreen) shows that Instagram can serve as a space for digital empowerment, community development, and value-driven storytelling, not only for commercial promotion (Asri, 2025; Firdaus et al., 2025). The STJ Fresh Healthy campaign adds to this picture by showing how paid advertising and structured content planning intersect with these broader socio-cultural processes—making the brand more visible while embedding it within narratives of youthfulness, health, and urban consumption in contemporary Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that strategically managed Instagram campaigns, incorporating both organic content and paid Ads, can substantially enhance MSME visibility, engagement, and follower growth. The marked increases in reach, impressions, interactions, and followers are consistent with broader research showing that Instagram marketing, when supported by visually appealing, interactive content and targeted advertising, contributes to MSME development and customer-based brand equity.

Beyond technical effectiveness, the findings underscore the social and cultural dimensions of digital marketing. Ads that highlight product benefits and healthy lifestyles attract engagement and new followers, while content revealing production processes helps construct trust and perceived quality. Engagement metrics capture not only marketing performance but also the formation of community around local brands.

For policy and practice, the study suggests the importance of capacity-building initiatives that help MSMEs design structured content calendars, use Instagram's paid tools, and interpret metrics in relation to both economic and social objectives. For social-humanities scholarship, the case invites further inquiry into how small businesses in Indonesia and similar contexts negotiate identity, trust, and inequality within platformized economies.

Future research could combine such case studies with surveys or longitudinal revenue data to more rigorously model the relationships between Instagram metrics, community engagement, and financial outcomes, and compare Instagram's role with other platforms such as TikTok and Facebook across different sectors and regions.

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