



NAVIGATING DIGITAL SELVES: GENDERED CONSUMPTION AND MEDIA WORK AMONG MILLENNIAL WOMEN IN MAKASSAR

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine how social media content influences consumer choices, particularly regarding the behavior of visiting cafés and restaurants not solely for eating and drinking, and how digital content fulfills the sociological needs of consumers. The research focuses on female journalists who are members of the *Ruang Jurnalis Perempuan* (RJP) community in Makassar City. The findings reveal that social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook serve as primary references when selecting comfortable and trendy workspaces. Consumer choices are influenced not only by the menu but also by comfort, supporting facilities, and the ambiance of the location. Furthermore, cafés function as alternative social spaces—venues for networking, idea sharing, and creating collaborative opportunities. These findings highlight a shift in the meaning of consumption and public space, as well as a transformation in women's work lifestyles in the digital era.

Keywords: Digital consumption, female journalists, social media, cafés, social spaces

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui bagaimana konten media sosial memengaruhi pilihan konsumsi masyarakat, khususnya dalam perilaku mengunjungi kafe dan resto yang tidak semata-mata untuk makan dan minum, serta bagaimana konten digital memenuhi kebutuhan sosiologis konsumen. Studi ini dilakukan terhadap jurnalis perempuan yang tergabung dalam Komunitas Ruang Jurnalis Perempuan (RJP) di Kota Makassar. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa media sosial seperti TikTok, Instagram, dan Facebook menjadi rujukan utama dalam memilih tempat bekerja yang nyaman dan sedang tren. Pilihan konsumsi tidak hanya dipengaruhi oleh menu, tetapi juga oleh kenyamanan, fasilitas pendukung, dan suasana tempat. Selain itu, kafe juga berfungsi sebagai ruang sosial alternatif, tempat berjejaring, berbagi ide, dan menciptakan peluang kerja sama. Temuan ini menunjukkan adanya pergeseran makna konsumsi dan ruang publik, serta transformasi gaya hidup kerja perempuan di era digital.

Kata Kunci: konsumsi digital, jurnalis perempuan, media sosial, kafe, ruang sosial



INTRODUCTION

The Makassar city government's commitment to positioning Makassar as a center of culinary tourism was further demonstrated by the launch of the "Makassar City of Delicious Food" branding in early 2023, officiated by the Mayor of Makassar, Moh. Ramdhan Pomanto. This initiative, known as the Delicious Food City program, has gained increasing prominence alongside the rapid growth of the digital industry. Advances in technology have expanded information access and digital penetration across Indonesia, particularly in Makassar, the economic hub of Eastern Indonesia.

This momentum has been reinforced by the emergence of numerous online platforms and applications designed to facilitate everyday activities. Among them, social media stands out—not merely as a tool for communication but also as a vital promotional channel widely utilized by businesses. Its accessibility across diverse demographics enables promotional networks to expand significantly. Social media has become an integral part of corporate communication strategies, recognized as one of the most effective means to engage customers and clients (Pratiwi & Prakosa, 2021).

Social media refers to tools or methods that enable users to share information in the form of text, images, audio, and video with others. It has profoundly reshaped communication strategies between businesses and consumers. Social media encompasses a range of online information sources that consumers increasingly rely on to learn about products, brands, services, and other relevant matters (Setiawan et al., 2024).

Through social media, various forms of content—including news, images, articles, and photographs—can be easily accessed. Many entrepreneurs leverage these platforms to sell

and promote their goods and services, thereby influencing consumer purchasing decisions, including patterns of food consumption.

Social influences play a significant role in shaping eating behaviors. The advent of social media has transformed how consumers seek and select products and services, particularly with the rise of platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok, which have become increasingly popular among users. In the midst of widespread culinary recommendations promoted by content creators, the group most susceptible to this influence is those whose daily routines are deeply intertwined with smartphones and digital devices. A prime example of this demographic is millennial female media workers.

Journalists and media professionals, in particular, rely heavily on smartphones to perform their duties. This constant connectivity brings them closer to the rapid circulation of information on social media platforms. Consequently, media workers often become early adopters and disseminators of trends, including the burgeoning culinary scene, which offers new venues for socializing with family, friends, or colleagues.

Over the past two decades, gender dynamics within media and technology have undergone significant transformation, particularly with the rise of the digital era. Numerous studies have highlighted that digital transformation not only opens new avenues for women's participation in the workforce but also introduces novel forms of gender inequality. As Gill (2007) argues within the framework of postfeminist sensibility, digital media frequently portrays a superficial form of female empowerment that remains deeply rooted in neoliberal and patriarchal norms.

Similarly, research by Duffy and Hund (2015) indicates that women working in the digital creative industries often encounter emotional labor, performative demands, and persistent gendered expectations, despite the ostensibly egalitarian nature of digital work environments. In the Indonesian context, Maduratna et al. (2024) found that although women increasingly access digital spaces as active users and content creators, they continue to face structural and cultural discrimination, both online and offline.

However, research specifically focusing on female media workers in Eastern Indonesia, particularly in Makassar City, remains scarce. This gap underscores the need for localized studies that can provide a more comprehensive understanding of gender dynamics in digital labor environments. Investigating women's digital work experiences in regional contexts is crucial for a fuller, more nuanced picture.

This article seeks to address this gap by examining how female media workers in Makassar City navigate, respond to, and engage with the challenges and opportunities presented by digital consumption and production, viewed through a sociological lens. This focus is significant not only in highlighting women's digital participation but also in encouraging critical reflection on the power relations, gender identities, and social structures that shape their lives in the millennial era.

Research conducted by Lawson and Samir (2024) underscores the existence of a gendered digital divide in Indonesia, which substantially impacts women's access to the labor market. They found that limited access to digital devices and the internet hampers women's participation in digital economic activities, including in media and communications sectors. This situation reveals that digital access

is intricately tied to social structures marked by persistent gender biases, which, in turn, influence women's roles in the labor force.

Meanwhile, a study by Winarnita et al. (2022) on female journalists in Indonesia revealed that digital platforms have become critical spaces for women to express identity, advocate for gender equality, and actively participate in digital citizenship. Nevertheless, this engagement is not without challenges, as female media professionals must contend with gender stereotypes, cyber harassment, and social pressures embedded within online cultures. These findings emphasize that women's involvement in digital spaces remains dynamic and continually negotiated within existing social norms.

Both studies demonstrate that despite the opportunities afforded by the digital sphere, female media workers in Indonesia—and by extension in Makassar City—must navigate complex power relations shaped by technology, culture, and gender dynamics.

Journalists, who often work irregular and extended hours—sometimes effectively around the clock—frequently seek venues such as cafes, coffee shops, or restaurants to edit their coverage or process their reports. In many instances, journalists prefer spaces where they can simultaneously work and dine. When selecting these spaces, considerations extend beyond food quality to include the ambiance and aesthetics of the venue, particularly its “Instagrammability,” or whether the setting is appealing enough to share on social media. Thus, the choice of dining venues is increasingly influenced by factors such as comfort, aesthetics, and atmosphere rather than solely culinary quality or nutritional value—shaping contemporary consumption patterns.

Based on this background, the present study explores “Changes in Consumption Patterns Among the Millennial Generation Amidst the Rise of Social Media Content: A Case Study of Female Media Workers.”

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach. It explores a problem within clearly defined boundaries, utilizing in-depth data collection and incorporating a variety of information sources. This research model provides a detailed qualitative examination of individuals or specific social units over a particular period. As Hardiansyah (2015) explains, case studies are characterized by their comprehensive, intensive, detailed, and in-depth nature, and are primarily employed to investigate contemporary issues or phenomena.

Given the ongoing shifts in societal behavior and consumption patterns, a qualitative approach is particularly well-suited for this research. As noted by Syam and N (2024), qualitative research is appropriate for examining aspects of human life, historical developments, behaviors, organizational functions, social movements, and kinship structures.

Qualitative research is descriptive in nature and tends to employ an inductive analytical approach. In this study, greater emphasis is placed on processes and meanings. For instance, the phenomenon of female media workers in Makassar who work up to 24 hours without the opportunity to return home and prepare meals is examined. In such cases, their choice of a café or *warkop* (traditional coffee shop) as a temporary refuge becomes a critical reference point for understanding digital consumption practices.

The qualitative approach embodies a naturalistic perspective in the exploration of

problems related to individuals, phenomena, symbols, documents, and social symptoms. Thus, qualitative research emphasizes a holistic, complex, and detailed understanding of issues grounded in real-life contexts or natural settings. Research employing an inductive approach, aimed at constructing theories or hypotheses through the revelation of empirical facts, is firmly rooted within the qualitative research paradigm.

RESULTS

The Central Statistics Agency (BPS) reported that Makassar’s economic growth in 2022 reached 5.40 percent, marking a single-digit increase from 4.47 percent in 2021. This growth also reflected a positive trajectory for Makassar’s economy following a contraction during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020.

In 2023, the economy of Makassar, as measured by the Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP) at current prices, reached IDR 226.90 trillion, with GRDP per capita recorded at IDR 155.95 million or approximately USD 8,607.08.

Makassar’s economy grew by 5.31 percent in 2023, a slight decline compared to the 5.40 percent growth achieved in 2022. Nevertheless, this performance remained higher than the economic growth rates of South Sulawesi and the national average in 2023, which stood at 4.51 percent and 5.05 percent, respectively.

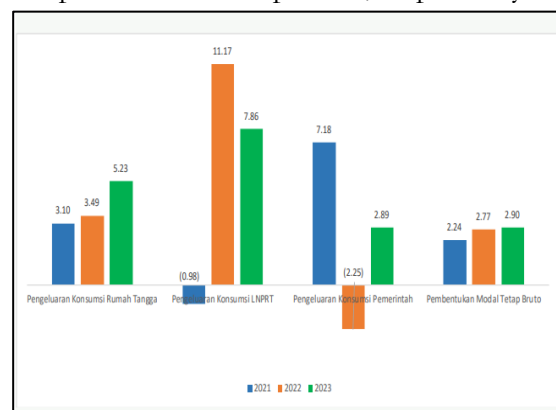


Diagram 1.

GRDP Growth Across Selected Expenditure Components

From the production perspective, the highest economic growth was recorded in the Accommodation and Food and Beverage Services sector, with a growth rate of 12.44 percent. Meanwhile, from the expenditure perspective, the most significant growth occurred in the Consumption Expenditure of Non-Profit Institutions Serving Households (NPISHs), reaching 7.86 percent.

The level of welfare is categorized based on sub-district divisions within Makassar City. Tamalate Sub-district has the highest number of heads of households, totaling 31,642, followed by Biringkanaya Sub-district with 29,609 heads of households. Conversely, Ujung Pandang Sub-district reports the fewest heads of households, amounting to 5,881.

Tamalate Sub-district, despite having the highest number of household heads, also exhibits the lowest welfare level, as indicated by the number of households classified as Pre-Prosperous Families, totaling 10,031 households.



Diagram 2. Population Distribution by Age Group (0–60+) and Gender

The dynamic growth of the café business in Makassar is largely influenced by the city's high level of community mobility. According to data from the Makassar City Regional Revenue

Agency (Bapenda), there are currently hundreds of café businesses registered as taxpayers contributing to the region's income. Specifically, there are 807 cafés or coffee shops recorded in Makassar, with tax revenue realization reaching over IDR 55.63 billion in 2023—a significant contribution to the city's restaurant tax income (IDN Sulsel.com).

A restaurant is generally defined as a business activity that offers services in the form of food and beverages. An informal restaurant, meanwhile, prioritizes a relaxed and unrestrictive atmosphere, with cafés serving as a prime example. A café is characterized as an establishment providing food and light beverages, equipped with facilities for the preparation, storage, and/or serving of these products, all housed in a fixed and permanent location (Permen Parekraf No. 10 of 2014).

In *The Main Factors in Selecting Café Locations in Semarang City*, Khoirul et al. (2019) define a café as: “a place used for drinking coffee accompanied by small snacks or light meals. A café typically features a permanent building that serves soft drinks—primarily coffee—and snacks, and does not operate on a mobile basis.”

Historically, cafés—commonly referred to as coffee shops—were often associated with less comfortable, less attractive spaces characterized by a monotonous atmosphere. However, with the passage of time, cafés have undergone substantial transformations, particularly in terms of their function and social role. Modern cafés have introduced a reimagined ambiance that appeals not only to adults but increasingly to young people, both men and women, who now frequent these spaces.

A range of activities, from reading and studying to hosting meetings, is now commonly conducted in cafés, largely due to the comfortable environment they offer. What

were once mere venues for drinking coffee have evolved into alternative public spaces, playing an important role in urban social life. Contemporary cafés have adapted their concepts, services, and spatial designs, strategically occupying significant urban areas—from city corners to rows of modern shopfronts—thereby integrating themselves into the fabric of the city (Arifin & Amin, 2024).

DISCUSSION

Food Product Content on Social Media

The expansion of internet access, as a consequence of rapid advancements in information technology, has significantly facilitated the fulfillment of various human needs across all sectors of life. Beyond its functions in education, entertainment, shopping, and social networking, the internet has profoundly influenced people's mindsets and lifestyles, particularly in their choices of products for consumption.

One such example is the fulfillment of daily food needs. In urban communities characterized by high mobility, such as in Makassar City, eating out has become a common practice, especially among families in which both spouses are employed. In this context, the choice of dining venues is no longer primarily driven by the quality or nutritional value of the food, but is instead shaped by lifestyle considerations, visual appeal, and the elite ambiance of the establishment.

Among the many factors influencing food consumption behavior, social media content plays a critical role. Information regarding dining places and food products is widely disseminated by so-called content creators through images, videos, and written reviews, which are then posted on various platforms such as Instagram and TikTok.

According to Aripadono (2020), Instagram is defined as a social networking site designed for sharing stories through digital images. This observation is confirmed by one of the informants in this study, who noted that the primary factor influencing her choice of dining location was content creator reviews found on social media. Fakra Rauf, a female journalist working for an online media outlet in Makassar, stated that she seldom cooks at home and tends to dine at cafes or restaurants recommended by netizens.

"After my morning reporting assignments, I usually have afternoon coverage as well. But I often feel reluctant to return home due to the long commute. As an alternative, I look for a place to work, usually guided by recommendations from TikTok or Instagram," she explained at the end of March 2024.

Recommendations shared by social media users, food bloggers, and content creators serve not only as sources of information but also exert persuasive influence, offering advice, suggestions, and benchmarks that shape food consumption behavior (Karini et al., 2022). Several popular social media accounts, such as *Makan-makan Makassar*, *Ngemil Makassar*, and *Jajanan Makassar*, serve as key references for Fakra in selecting cafes and restaurants for leisure. Her dual role as a female worker and journalist, coupled with her extensive access to information via her smartphone—a crucial tool in her profession—enables her to quickly absorb trending information about hangout spots circulating on social media, ultimately influencing her food consumption choices.

Fakra's account regarding her dining preferences, shaped by reviews from social media content creators, aligns with the findings of Bradshaw et al. (2024), who argue that an individual's lifestyle is reflected in their activities, interests, and opinions. Similarly, Helma Malini (2021) defines lifestyle as an

individual's active adaptation to social environments to fulfill the needs for unity and social interaction.

This discussion resonates with the analysis by Stellarosa and Rachmatullah (2020), who explain that the concept of simulation is used to describe various relationships of production, consumption, and communication within consumer society, particularly through mass media, supermarkets, the entertainment industry, and fashion. Simulation represents the evolution of the early stages of simulacra, where reality loses its independent existence, merging with the signs and images of reproduced models. As a result, distinctions between representation and reality, image and reality, signs and concepts, and the imaginary and the real become blurred (Astuti, 2017).

Social media, therefore, functions as an interactive communication medium that enables two-way engagement and feedback. It facilitates social interaction among individuals through the production, sharing, and exchange of information, including ideas and diverse forms of content, within virtual communities (AC Sari, R Hartina, R Awalia, H Irianti, 2018).

Changing Patterns of Consumption Behavior

Consumption activities are economic actions involving the gradual or complete utilization of a product's or service's utility value. Each time an individual engages in consumption, they obtain and utilize goods or services to meet their life needs (Wahit, 2020). In recent years, consumer behavior has undergone significant transformations alongside the proliferation of social media content showcasing fast food, where nutritional value and food quality are often no longer prioritized.

One notable impact of social media use is the gradual shift in people's behavioral patterns. Whereas eating habits were traditionally motivated by the basic needs of satisfying hunger and thirst, today's motivations for eating have become far more complex. The choice of cafes or restaurants is no longer primarily based on the diversity of food menus offered, but rather influenced by multiple other factors, particularly during work breaks.

Several informants in this study revealed that a cafe's unique concept—differentiating it from others—often becomes a major consideration. For instance, the availability of aesthetically pleasing or comfortable spaces encourages individuals to remain longer and complete their work within the premises.

This was affirmed by Rubi Sudikkio, a journalist at a radio station in Makassar, who was one of the informants interviewed for this study. Rubi emphasized that the availability of prayer facilities at a cafe or restaurant is a primary consideration when choosing a place to dine. In her view, while most eateries in Makassar offer delicious food, not all provide complete and clean facilities such as adequate prayer rooms and sanitary restrooms.

"My main concern is whether there is a prayer room, followed by the cleanliness of the toilets. I need a place where I can not only eat but also continue my office work, typing and waiting for my next assignment," she explained.

Farasa and Kusuma (2015) argue that comfort is a psychological condition wherein individuals feel at ease and satisfied within a place, encouraging them to linger for extended periods. Comfort, in this context, is shaped by both the physical and non-physical attributes of a space.

The distribution of cafes across Makassar is uneven, with certain areas experiencing a dense concentration of establishments, while

others have relatively few. This disparity arises from differing local conditions, giving rise to comparative advantages in certain locations. Interviews with female journalists from the Makassar Women's Journalist Space Community (Ruang Jurnalis Perempuan - RJP) indicated that their primary motivations for visiting cafes are professional: conducting work, engaging in social interactions, attending meetings, with only a minority visiting solely for food and beverages.

This evolving interaction pattern reflects a fundamental shift in how cafes are utilized. Cafes have increasingly transformed into workspaces for visitors, with individuals often willing to wait for available meeting rooms to continue their professional tasks. Despite this functional shift, visitors generally maintain casual attire, blending indistinguishably with other patrons. Thus, occupational identity is not overtly signaled through clothing, but rather inferred through behavioral cues—such as the presence of laptops and the focused demeanor of individuals at work.

One of the defining characteristics of modern society, according to Sutherland (2018), is the “separation of personal time and public time.” A clear manifestation of modernization in everyday life is the division between time allocated for work and time reserved for leisure. The fast-paced nature of modern life compels individuals to dedicate significant periods solely for rest and recreational activities. For modern society, leisure time is not merely an escape from the demands of work, but also a means of engaging with symbols and lifestyles that serve to distinguish them from other social classes.

Cafés and restaurants, in general, function not only as spaces for alleviating fatigue or resting, but also as public arenas where diverse forms of social interaction take place. In

adulthood, the range of activities among coffee shop patrons becomes increasingly varied, encompassing consumption activities such as enjoying food and beverages, as well as social practices like gathering, networking, engaging in work or business meetings, and participating in educational pursuits.

Fulfillment of Biological, Psychological and Social Needs

According to Willis (2014), human needs can be categorized into three primary domains: biological, psychological, and social. Biological needs refer to the innate requirements originating from within an individual. Needs or motives are defined as the internal drives that compel living beings to act in pursuit of desired goals. Biological needs, in particular, stem from intrinsic biological impulses and are present from birth; thus, they are considered instinctive and do not require learning (Willis, 2014). Examples include the need for food, water, breathing, and rest.

In this study, the choice to visit eating establishments such as cafés and restaurants is seen as an effort to fulfill biological needs, with the primary consideration being the food menu offered. As expressed by one of the informants, Dita Anggraini, a journalist for *Berita Kota Makassar (BKM)*: “I usually look at the food menu first—whether it's recommended, the reviews from previous visitors, and whether the price matches the quality of the food. Even though I visit cafés primarily to work, to write and complete coverage assignments,” she explained.

Psychological (psychic) needs encompass the mental and emotional impulses that drive individuals to achieve their goals. These needs are personal and subjective. Psychological needs include religious fulfillment and the need for safety and security (Willis, 2014). For instance, religious needs pertain to spiritual beliefs and practices. Among working-age

journalists, typically ranging from 23 to 45 years old, adherence to religious practices such as performing the five daily prayers is deeply ingrained. The need for security, on the other hand, involves protection from potential threats in the surrounding environment.

This is illustrated by the testimony of Rahma, a journalist from an online media outlet in Makassar: *"The food must be hygienic and, most importantly, halal. Additionally, worship facilities, such as places for ablution and prayer, must be clean in accordance with religious prescriptions for Muslims like myself,"* she said.

Another informant, Sasa Anastasya, emphasized that in choosing a café to work from, comfort and security are key considerations. She evaluates whether the parking area is safe, whether incidents of theft have occurred, and whether the café is equipped with CCTV and security personnel. As explained by this journalist from *Harian Rakyat Sulsel*, such precautions are crucial, especially since she often spends an entire day working in cafés and sometimes needs to leave her belongings temporarily under the care of friends or café staff when called for sudden field assignments: *"Vehicle thefts are not uncommon. Several journalist colleagues have had their vehicles stolen while parked at cafés or coffee shops,"* she remarked.

Social needs pertain to the individual's relationship with others and the external environment. These needs are diverse and complex, making categorization challenging. According to Thomas, as cited by Willis (2014), social needs include the need to be recognized, the need for acknowledgment from others, the need to belong, and the need for new experiences.

Frequenting cafés and restaurants creates opportunities for social interaction—meeting new people, reconnecting with old friends,

relatives, or professional contacts, and nurturing social bonds. Several informants in this study indicated that their preference for working in cafés stems from the social environment, which not only facilitates casual interaction but also opens avenues for career advancement.

This sentiment is echoed by Mira, an online journalist in Makassar who also serves as an advertising manager at *Rakyat News*: *"At cafés, we often meet government officials or key figures from various companies. These meetings can open opportunities for news collaborations, which, in turn, can enhance our professional network and increase our income,"* she said.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the dynamics of digital consumption among female journalists in Makassar City, particularly members of the Women's Journalist Space Community (Ruang Jurnalis Perempuan – RJP), extend beyond food and beverage consumption. Their consumption practices are shaped by the role of social media as a source of trend information, the need for comfort and supportive work environments, and the use of cafés as alternative public spaces for fostering social and professional relationships. These patterns reflect a broader shift in the lifestyles and work ecosystems of millennial women within an increasingly fluid and flexible digital era. The findings affirm that the work practices of female journalists are influenced not only by economic and technological factors but also by social, psychological, and cultural dimensions embedded within informal workspaces such as cafés.

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