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DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND MICRO-ENTREPRENEURSHIP: THE ROLE OF INFLUENCER PARTNERSHIPS IN BARRANQUILLA'S GASTRONOMIC SECTOR

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Abstract

This article examines how gastronomic microbusinesses in Barranquilla, Colombia, engage with digital platforms through influencer collaborations to navigate algorithmic challenges, affective labor demands, and resilience-building in uncertain digital markets. Drawing on qualitative case study data, the research highlights how established and emerging businesses differently interpret and respond to platform algorithms, balancing authenticity and optimization in their online presence. Influencer partnerships emerge as critical resources that provide technical support, social capital, and emotional encouragement, enabling microbusinesses to adapt and grow within platform-mediated economies. The study offers practical insights for entrepreneurs, policymakers, and support organizations aiming to foster sustainable and authentic digital micro-entrepreneurship in emerging economies.

Keywords: micro-entrepreneurship, influencer collaborations, digital platforms, affective labor, resilience, gastronomic sector

INTRODUCTION

In the rapidly evolving gig economy, digital platforms like Instagram have transformed the motivational dynamics of microbusiness entrepreneurship, particularly in contexts of economic precarity. Microbusinesses—defined as enterprises with ten or fewer employees—represent approximately 90% of global businesses (Gherhes et al., 2016), yet their survival often hinges on adaptive strategies that blend intrinsic motivation (e.g., self-sufficiency; Hussain & Yaqub, 2010) with extrinsic pressures (e.g., algorithmic visibility; Haenlein et al., 2020). In Colombia, where informal labor structures dominate (Moreno Acosta, 2021), gastronomic influencers exemplify how proactive behaviors intersect with platform affordances to sustain entrepreneurial efforts (Medellin Chamber of Commerce, 2020).

Influencers operate as "hybrid workers" whose motivational drivers—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—are evident in their curation of cultural capital (Cuomo et al., 2017) and ability to enhance microbusiness visibility (Lasmi et al., 2021). Even nano-influencers (those with under 1,000 followers) leverage perceived authenticity (Wibawa et al., 2021), suggesting that micro-entrepreneurial motivation is mediated by relational trust and platform-driven feedback loops (Pasaribu et al., 2023).

This study examines Barranquilla, Colombia, a port city with a vibrant informal economy (de la Hoz Hernandez et al., 2020), to explore how gastronomic influencers negotiate motivational tensions between creative expression (Feldman, 2021) and algorithmic performance demands (Boerman, 2020). Using a qualitative case study approach (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Šikić, 2021), we investigate:

1. How platform algorithms reshape motivation for microbusiness owners (Chopra & Dev, 2022);
2. The role of affective labor (e.g., aesthetic curation; Li & Zhao, 2021) in sustaining effort amid precarity (Nordhagen et al., 2021);
3. Individual differences (e.g., resilience; Reinhard, 2023) in coping with platform stressors.

The informal status of many microbusinesses (Chin, 2020) underscores the psychological complexity of their work: while motivation often originates in necessity (Hussain & Yaqub, 2010), influencers provide symbolic capital (Ao et al., 2023) and algorithmic leverage (Rivera-Abad, 2021), creating a feedback loop where visibility reinforces competence (Sati & Kazancoglu, 2020). Food influencers, for instance, blend lifestyle narratives with consumer trust (Contreras, 2017), a process aligning with goal-directed behavior (Goodman & Jaworska, 2020). Visual storytelling (Tam Sing, 2020) and relational intimacy (Castillo Abanto & Martinez Pereyra, 2022) further illustrate how digital labor demands cognitive-emotional flexibility. As participatory commerce grows (Drenten & Castro-Gonzalez, 2020), the psychological contract between influencers and followers—rooted in consistency (Faatin et al., 2022)—redefines agency in platform-mediated work.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DYNAMICS OF FOOD AND SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

Within contemporary digital economies, the intersection between food content and social media platforms has created new paradigms for understanding consumer behavior and work motivation. Gastronomic experiences mediated through digital platforms extend beyond commercial transactions, involving a complex interplay of psychological drivers, social influence, and platform architectures. For food-related microbusinesses, collaborations with influencers represent strategic visibility approaches rooted in social proof and relational marketing (Cordero Calvo, 2020).

The effectiveness of influencer partnerships depends on generating authentic engagement rather than superficial exposure. Research shows that content lacking emotional or cultural resonance yields limited conversion (Del Carpio Gutierrez et al., 2022). Self-determination theory helps explain this, as consumers engage more with brands fulfilling psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Microbusinesses, especially those with limited market presence, rely on influencers not just as promoters but as interpreters of brand identity, translating culinary offerings into narratives aligned with consumer values (Cuomo et al., 2017).

Motivationally, influencers act as entrepreneurial agents cultivating personal brands through consistent content creation, affective labor, and strategic platform use (Lasmi et al., 2021). Their ability to generate low-cost, high-impact visibility has shifted marketing priorities toward influencer collaborations over traditional advertising, due to their capacity to foster trust via participatory, peer-endorsed communication (Rivera-Abad, 2021). This reflects broader consumer psychology trends, where audiences distrust institutional advertising and value perceived authenticity and interpersonal connection.

The rise of nano-influencers—those with smaller but highly engaged followings—further highlights psychological dimensions of digital food marketing. Despite modest reach, nano-influencers often achieve higher audience trust due to perceived accessibility and authenticity (Wibawa et al., 2021). Platform algorithms reinforce this by prioritizing content that fosters meaningful interactions over broad but shallow visibility. Sociocultural factors also shape influencer marketing's performative aspects; female influencers often employ emotionally resonant storytelling aligned with culturally constructed food aesthetics while navigating platform expectations on self-presentation (Lepkowska-White & Kortright, 2018; Herrero Ruiz & Navarro-Beltrá, 2021).

Instagram's visual-centric interface has democratized gastronomic representation, allowing diverse food cultures to gain visibility beyond traditional culinary hierarchies (Goodman & Jaworska, 2020). This departs from institutional culinary valuation systems like Michelin ratings by enabling localized and non-Western cuisines to build digital presence through community engagement (Feldman, 2021). However, visibility distribution remains uneven, with Instagram dominating gourmet content while other platforms serve distinct demographics with varied narrative formats (Chopra & Dev, 2022).

The convergence of aesthetic, commercial, and algorithmic factors in food influencer marketing raises questions about consumer autonomy and transparency. Blurred lines between organic endorsements and paid promotions challenge audiences' ability to discern authentic recommendations from commercial content (Ye et al., 2021). These issues have prompted regulatory responses emphasizing disclosure, addressing ethical marketing and fundamental questions about human agency in algorithmically mediated environments. Psychologically, this underscores the need for enhanced digital

literacy and stronger frameworks to understand how platform architectures influence decision-making in gastronomic consumption.

PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE FOOD REVIEWER ECOSYSTEM IN LATIN AMERICA

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The case of 'Tulio Recomienda' illustrates these dynamics at scale. This prominent Colombian food influencer has developed national culinary competitions (Burger Master, Sushi Master, Pizza Master) that employ gamification principles to drive engagement, demonstrating how motivational psychology can be leveraged to amplify business outcomes (Arbeláez & Franco, 2020). These initiatives position the influencer as a systems integrator who redistributes economic opportunity through platform-mediated networks, creating measurable impacts across multiple stakeholder groups.

Figure 1. Five days until "Burger Master"

Source: Tulio Recomienda's Instagram Profile (@tuliorecomienda), 2024

In Barranquilla's competitive food sector, formal establishments actively employ Instagram strategies to enhance customer acquisition, frequently collaborating with influencers to amplify brand visibility (Callejas Porto, 2020). However, informal microbusinesses often lack the technological infrastructure to fully participate in these digital ecosystems (Hernández et al., 2016). This disparity creates opportunities for grassroots influencers like Iro Ramírez (@iroramirezs) to serve as cultural intermediaries, using their platform to elevate underrepresented food vendors through authentic, personally-curated content.

FIGURE 2. IRO RAMIREZ'S REVIEW VIDEO OF @EMPANADITASADICTIVAS

Source: Iro Ramirez's Instagram Profile (@iroramirezs), 2023

Ramírez's content exemplifies the convergence of multiple psychological and technological elements - including visual storytelling, geotagged data, algorithmic amplification, and audience interaction - that collectively enhance the digital visibility of informal microbusinesses (Díaz, 2023). He showcased previously unknown micro businesses in 2023 which had never received any digital promotion nor had a well-established following on Instagram, changing the way the entrepreneurs interacted with the public and bringing new challenges to the table.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Three complementary theoretical perspectives are integrated in this study to analyze the psychological dynamics within platform-mediated microbusiness ecosystems. The stress-motivation duality framework, based on Yan et al. (2022) and Zhao and Chen (2021), is adopted, and a distinction is made between challenge stressors—such as mastering Instagram content trends—that stimulate innovation and skill development, and hindrance stressors—like unpredictable algorithm changes—that deplete psychological resources. This framework is aligned with Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018), where symbolic capital and mentorship are provided by influencers to buffer against resource depletion. Algorithmic pressures are thus transformed from threats into opportunities for growth. Variations in microbusiness resilience are explained by this framework, with greater adaptive capacity demonstrated by entrepreneurs who engage in cognitive reappraisal—reinterpreting platform demands as skill-building challenges—as supported by Tong et al. (2021), who found burnout reduction through such reframing strategies.

The affective labor paradox framework was also synthesized from Lin et al. (2022) and Widmer et al. (2019) to examine the dual psychological outcomes of emotional labor in digital entrepreneurship. Deep acting—authentic emotional investment in content creation—is shown to build audience trust and sustain engagement, whereas surface acting—performative compliance with algorithmic demands—is linked to creator burnout. The tension between crafting genuine "lifestyle narratives" and executing algorithm-optimized performances is thus explained. Meta-analytic evidence reveals the ambivalent effects of emotional labor, which simultaneously enhances service quality and increases anxiety risks, reflecting participants' experiences of affective labor as both a survival strategy and a mental health burden.

Subsequently, Hobfoll et al.'s (2018) resource caravan model was employed to provide a systems-level perspective on resilience-building through influencer partnerships. Social capital, technical skills, and emotional resources are accumulated and bundled into interconnected "caravans" by successful platform workers. The observed "visibility-competence feedback loop" is exemplified by this process, where algorithmic literacy, social proof, and coping strategies are built in synergistic cycles through influencer collaborations.

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

This qualitative case study explored the psychological dynamics of platform-mediated work among microbusiness owners in Barranquilla, Colombia, focusing on how algorithmic systems reshape motivation, affective labor sustains effort amid precarity, and individual differences influence resilience to platform stressors (Chopra & Dev, 2022; Li & Zhao, 2021; Reinhard, 2023). The research design integrated Creswell's (2013, 2014) frameworks with theoretical perspectives, guiding interview protocols that focused on participants' experiences with algorithmic demands, emotional labor, and resilience strategies.

Participants described how platform pressures alternated between challenges and hindrances, and how they balanced authentic content creation with algorithmic optimization. Purposive sampling ensured diversity in algorithmic literacy and emotional labor intensity, enriching the relevance of captured perspectives. Interview data were contextualized within broader socio-technical systems, situating individual experiences within platform economy structures.

TABLE 1. SAMPLE OF MICRO-BUSINESSES REVIEWED BY IRO RAMÍREZ

Business Account	Business name	Product	Followers (2024)
monicarosania22/	ChoriWay	Traditional Sausages ('Chorizos')	1,530
boliselgordo	Bolis "El Gordo"	Traditional Frozen desserts ('Bolis')	1,129
casadelilo	La Casa de LiLo	Healthy food	1,182
empanaditasadictivas	Empanaditas Adictivas Telecom	Traditional micro pastries	1,856
bakerofoodrestaurante	Bakero Foodie Restaurante	Fusion between Asian and Fast Food	16,600
tehuana.mx	Tehuana	Mexican food	3.231
puebla.taqueria	Taquería Puebla	Mexican food	19,700
butifarrasnandorojas	Butifarras Nando Rojas	Traditional Sausages ('Butifarras')	8.874

Source: Compilation based on Apify Data Crawling and interviews (2024)

Data collection, conducted from March to August 2024, combined three methods. First, semi-structured interviews examined how algorithms influence motivation and behavioral adaptations to visibility metrics. Second, systematic observation of Instagram content assessed affective labor through visual aesthetics, narrative strategies, and community engagement time (Lasmi et al., 2021). Third, resilience was measured using adapted psychological scales, scenario tests simulating platform disruptions, and time diaries documenting coping during income volatility (Nordhagen et al., 2021). Document analysis contextualized findings, reviewing Colombian policy on influencer marketing transparency (Boerman, 2020; Miranda, 2021) and local economic reports (Cámara de Comercio de Barranquilla, 2023). Data were thematically analyzed using NVivo, applying deductive codes from psychological theory and inductive codes from participant responses. Analysis focused on links between algorithmic pressures and motivation, affective labor and business outcomes, and resilience traits and adaptive behaviors. Reflexive journaling documented and mitigated researcher bias arising from the dual role as investigator and participant-observer in Instagram food cultures (Creswell, 2014). This approach enabled a systematic examination of psychological dimensions in platform-mediated entrepreneurship.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The microbusinesses of Barranquilla's gastronomic sector provide a vivid illustration of how tradition, innovation, and psychological adaptation intersect in the age of digital platforms. Through in-depth interviews and digital ethnography, it became clear that each business's journey is shaped by a unique blend of inherited practices, entrepreneurial vision, and the demands of algorithmic environments (Šikić, 2021). The stories of these businesses reveal a spectrum of digital adaptation, from deeply rooted family enterprises to new ventures born in the social media era, all negotiating the complex terrain of visibility, authenticity, and survival (Rivera-Abad, 2021; Sati & Kazancoglu, 2020).

Butifarras Nando Rojas stands as a testament to long-term adaptation and resilience. With nearly two decades of operation, this business has weathered multiple relocations and market changes, yet its core product and values remain unchanged. The owner's decision to entrust Instagram management to his son reflects a broader trend of intergenerational collaboration, where digital literacy is pooled as a family resource (Reinhard, 2023). This approach not only preserves the business's traditional identity but also enables it to engage credibly with digital influencers and new customer segments. The partnership with Iro Ramírez, a prominent local influencer, exemplifies how traditional businesses can harness symbolic

capital and digital amplification to reinforce their market position without resorting to paid advertising (Ao et al., 2023; Ye et al., 2021).

La Casa de Lilo, by contrast, embodies the transformative potential of digital storytelling. Originating as a home-based project in 2016 and formalized in 2019, the business's growth has been driven by a deliberate strategy of cultural promotion and community engagement (Tam Sing, 2020). The owner's hands-on approach to Instagram content—sharing personal narratives, behind-the-scenes moments, and customer testimonials—has cultivated a loyal following and positioned the brand as an authentic voice in Barranquilla's food scene. This deep acting, characterized by genuine emotional investment in content creation, has yielded high engagement rates and enduring customer relationships (Lin et al., 2022). The owner's proactive outreach to bloggers and influencers further demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the digital ecosystem, leveraging collaborative networks to expand reach and diversify the customer base (Pacheco, 2019).

ChoriWay and Taquería Puebla offer additional perspectives on digital adaptation. ChoriWay's transition from a mobile vendor to a fixed-location business was facilitated by enhanced digital visibility, with the owner's personal management of social media accounts underscoring the importance of authenticity and cultural identity (Pasaribu et al., 2023). Taquería Puebla's evolution from a tortilla supplier to a full-service taqueria was similarly catalyzed by the owner's dual expertise in culinary arts and digital design, resulting in visually compelling content that resonates with both local and online audiences. These cases illustrate how microbusinesses can leverage their unique skills and backgrounds to carve out distinctive niches in competitive digital marketplaces (Drenten & Castro-Gonzalez, 2020).

Tehuana's story is particularly instructive in highlighting the challenges of digital transformation. As one of the first in the sample to embrace social media marketing, the owner relied heavily on visual storytelling and platform trends to attract customers. However, as the digital landscape grew more complex, the business struggled to keep pace with algorithmic changes and shifting consumer expectations (Yan et al., 2022). The owner's experience underscores the psychological toll of surface acting—performing authenticity for the sake of algorithmic optimization—which, while initially effective, ultimately led to increased anxiety and creative fatigue (Widmer et al., 2019).

Bakero Foodie Restaurante and Empanaditas Adictivas Telecom further exemplify the diversity of digital strategies among Barranquilla's microbusinesses. Bakero Foodie's chef-owner leveraged professional culinary training to refine both the menu and Instagram strategy, shifting from a broad offering to a specialized focus on ramen. This specialization, combined with visually appealing content, attracted a dedicated customer base and differentiated the brand in a crowded market (Goodman & Jaworska, 2020). Empanaditas Adictivas Telecom, a family-run operation, delegated social media management to the owner's children, reflecting a pragmatic approach to resource allocation and highlighting the generational dynamics at play in digital entrepreneurship (Reinhard, 2023).

Bolis "El Gordo" represents a different facet of the digital transformation narrative. Despite limited digital skills, the owner successfully leveraged influencer collaborations to achieve platform visibility and attract new customers. The business's partnership with Iro Ramírez, documented in a widely shared Instagram post, exemplifies how nano-influencer relationships can serve as gateways to broader audiences and new forms of social capital (Wibawa et al., 2021; Rodríguez Galán & Hernández Medina, 2022). This case underscores the democratizing potential of digital platforms, where even the least technologically savvy entrepreneurs can access the benefits of networked visibility through strategic alliances (Ye et al., 2021).

A striking pattern across all eight businesses was their unanimous avoidance of paid Instagram advertising. Instead, organic growth was pursued through a combination of word-of-mouth, community engagement, and influencer partnerships (Sati & Kazancoglu, 2020). This preference for organic strategies reflects both economic constraints and a desire for authentic engagement, as paid advertising was often perceived as impersonal or misaligned with the businesses' values (Salinas, 2018). The diversity of approaches—from intergenerational delegation and owner-driven content creation to multi-platform diversification—demonstrates the flexibility and ingenuity of Barranquilla's micro-entrepreneurs in adapting platform use to their specific contexts.

FIGURE 3. VIDEO REVIEW OF @BUTIFARRASNANDOROJAS

Source: Iro Ramirez's Instagram Profile (@iroramirezs), 2023

The impact of influencer collaborations was consistently described in positive terms, though the nature and extent of the benefits varied (Pacheco, 2019; Rivera-Abad, 2021). Most businesses reported noticeable increases in followers, engagement, and customer inquiries following influencer features, with some noting the arrival of customers from previously untapped neighborhoods or demographics. For example, the video review of Butifarras Nando Rojas (Figure 3) not only boosted digital visibility but also reinforced the business's reputation for quality and tradition. ChoriWay's owner-posted content (Figure 4) illustrates how personal and influencer-driven strategies can be blended to maximize reach and authenticity.

FIGURE 4. CHORIWAY'S OWNER POST IN HER OWN INSTAGRAM ACCOUNT

Source: @minocarosania22's post, june 21, 2023

Despite limited access to advanced analytics, owners relied on observable metrics—such as spikes in followers, comments, and direct messages—to gauge the effectiveness of influencer collaborations (Ye et al., 2021). The perceived value of these partnerships extended beyond immediate sales or engagement, encompassing broader benefits such as enhanced brand credibility, increased confidence in digital experimentation, and a sense of belonging within the wider gastronomic community (Sati & Kazancoglu, 2020). The photograph of Bolis "El Gordo"'s owner with Iro Ramírez (Figure 5) captures the spirit of these collaborations, symbolizing the mutual recognition and support that underpin successful influencer-microbusiness relationships.

FIGURE 5. @BOLISELGORDO'S OWNER POSING WITH @IRORAMIREZS

Source: @boliselgordo Instagram account, june 17, 2023

The psychological dimensions of digital adaptation emerged as a central theme in the interviews. Business owners described an ongoing process of risk assessment, balancing the costs and benefits of time, energy, and emotional investment in digital activities (Boerman, 2020). For some, maintaining a consistent online presence and adapting to algorithmic changes caused stress and uncertainty (Zhao & Chen, 2021), while others found digital engagement empowering, viewing it as an opportunity for skill development and growth (Tong et al., 2021). Influencers were frequently cited as key in mitigating stress, offering practical guidance and emotional support (Wibawa et al., 2021).

Three interconnected psychological processes were identified among Barranquilla's gastronomic microbusinesses. First, managing algorithmic stressors was crucial for digital adaptation and resilience. Established businesses like Butifarras Nando Rojas reframed platform changes as learning opportunities (Yan et al., 2022), a mindset supported by family or influencer mentorship and consistent with Conservation of Resources theory, which emphasizes external resources buffering psychological depletion (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Newer or less digitally literate businesses, such as Tehuana, were more vulnerable to algorithmic unpredictability, underscoring the importance of resource access and support (Zhao & Chen, 2021).

Second, affective labor negotiation was complex and ambivalent. Deep acting—authentic emotional investment in content—was linked to higher engagement and audience trust, as in La Casa de Lilo's case (Lin et al., 2022), but also demanded significant psychological energy and risked burnout, especially for female entrepreneurs facing gendered platform expectations (Widmer et al., 2019; Rodríguez Galán & Hernández Medina, 2022). Surface acting, while scalable, was associated with increased anxiety and lower creative satisfaction.

Third, resilience built through resource caravans and influencer mediation was critical for survival and growth. Businesses combining algorithmic literacy, social proof, and emotional support—often via influencer collaborations—showed greater adaptability (Hobfoll et al., 2018; Reinhard, 2023). Even digitally limited businesses like Bolis "El Gordo" accessed these benefits through nano-influencer partnerships, illustrating inclusive networked resilience (Wibawa et al., 2021). The "visibility-competence feedback loop" reinforced digital presence and self-efficacy, fostering adaptation and innovation (Sati & Kazancoglu, 2020). Regarding algorithmic stressors, established businesses demonstrated resilience by reframing platform changes as skill-building (Yan et al., 2022), while newer ventures showed vulnerability (Zhao & Chen, 2021). The universal avoidance of paid ads reflects strategic resource allocation, with businesses bundling resources or delegating digital labor (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

Labor outcomes varied: La Casa de Lilo's deep acting achieved high engagement, while Tehuana's surface acting prioritized scalability at the cost of increased anxiety (Lin et al., 2022; Widmer et al., 2019). This paradox was especially pronounced for female entrepreneurs (Rodríguez Galán & Hernández Medina, 2022). Resilience emerged through influencer-mediated resource caravans, with higher survival linked to combined algorithmic literacy, social proof, and emotional buffering (Reinhard, 2023).

These findings suggest microbusiness training should address both challenge stressors (skill-building) and hindrance stressors (coping) (Yan et al., 2022; Tong et al., 2021). Platforms could enhance mental health support and disclosure standards (Boerman, 2020). NGOs might facilitate influencer mentorship and shared analytics tools. While focused on Barranquilla's food sector, the study highlights influencer collaborations as psychosocial infrastructure in platform economies (Ye et al., 2021). Future research should quantify cognitive reappraisal's impact, compare platforms, and track resource development longitudinally. Ultimately, these findings deepen understanding of micro-entrepreneurship in digital markets, revealing how algorithmic adaptation, affective labor management, and networked resilience shape business survival (Reinhard, 2023; Hobfoll et al., 2018).

CONCLUSIONS

This study reveals that microbusinesses in Barranquilla's gastronomic sector engage with digital platforms in ways that transcend traditional marketing, with influencer collaborations playing a crucial role in shaping their digital success. These partnerships not only boost visibility but also assist businesses in navigating algorithmic challenges, managing the emotional labor of maintaining an online presence, and building resilience amid the uncertainties of platform-mediated markets. Three key patterns emerged: established businesses tend to view algorithmic changes as opportunities for learning and innovation, whereas newer or less digitally skilled businesses often experience these changes as stressors. Secondly, the emotional labor involved in content creation presents a tension between authenticity and optimization—authentic content builds stronger trust but requires more psychological effort, while optimized content reaches wider audiences but risks burnout and perceived inauthenticity. Thirdly, successful microbusinesses combine technical skills, social capital, and emotional support, often through influencer partnerships, exemplifying a resource caravan model of resilience.

These findings suggest practical implications: training programs should enhance both digital skills and psychological coping strategies to help entrepreneurs manage platform-related stressors. Platforms could improve transparency by clarifying algorithmic processes and providing mental health support tools. Local organizations might develop mentorship programs linking experienced entrepreneurs and influencers with newcomers, fostering knowledge sharing and emotional support. While focused on Barranquilla's food sector, these insights may apply to other contexts, warranting further research on different platforms, longitudinal impacts of influencer collaborations, and the effects of various influencer relationships on business outcomes.

Ultimately, success in digital economies requires balancing adaptability with authenticity. Despite rapid algorithmic and market changes, human factors—trust, community, and resilience—remain foundational. This study underscores the vital role of relational intimacy and emotional labor in digital entrepreneurship, emphasizing that technology alone does not guarantee success. The most successful microbusinesses integrate technical adaptation with authentic connection, using digital tools as extensions of their identity and values. These insights provide valuable guidance for entrepreneurs, policymakers, and support organizations aiming to build resilient, authentic, and adaptive microbusiness ecosystems in the digital age.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

FUNDING INFORMATION

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