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When Strategy Meets Profit: The Role of Marketing Accounting in Driving Economic Growth in the Digital Age

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Abstract

This study explores the integration of marketing and accounting functions in digital-based enterprises and how such integration influences strategic financial decision-making. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected from two fast-growing startups in Indonesia through in-depth interviews, internal documentation, and limited observation. The analysis focused on cross-functional collaboration and performance indicators such as Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC), Return on Marketing Investment (ROMI), and campaign budgeting accuracy. The findings reveal that marketing-accounting integration results in reduced CAC (by up to 40%), improved ROMI (from 1.4:1 to 2.6:1), and greater alignment between budget allocation and customer value creation. Marketing teams benefit from real-time financial insights, while finance departments gain better forecasting accuracy and visibility over campaign efficiency. This integration fosters transparency, shared accountability, and data-driven agility. Beyond practical improvements, the study contributes to the theoretical discourse by reinforcing the notion that marketing accounting serves as a strategic framework not merely a technical coordination within the digital economy. The findings support and extend the literature on marketing accountability and value-based management, emphasizing that digital tools enable dynamic feedback loops between market activities and financial outcomes. This study confirms the relevance of marketing-accounting integration as a conceptual model for organizational alignment, performance clarity, and value creation in digitally driven environments.

Keywords: marketing_accounting, functional_integration, profitability, digitalization, business_strategy
JEL Classification: M31, M41, L21

1. Introduction

Digital transformation has become a major force changing the business landscape globally (Furr et al., 2022). The development of information and communication technologies, such as big data, artificial intelligence (AI), and digital platforms, has accelerated the flow of information and expanded access to markets (Soudeh Pazouki et al., 2025). Companies are not only required to adapt to increasingly dynamic changes in consumer behavior, but must also be able to integrate various internal functions more strategically (Jooss et al., 2024). In this context, accounting and marketing functions that previously ran separately are now being considered for collaboration to create a more adaptive and data-driven business strategy (Struyf et al., 2021). Accounting, which traditionally plays a role in financial recording and reporting, has shifted its function to become a source of strategic information in the decision-making process (Ren, 2022). Financial information not only records past performance, but is also used to analyze cost efficiency (Gardi et al., 2021), evaluate the effectiveness of marketing programs, and project the profit potential of various promotional and distribution activities. On the other hand, marketing that previously focused on creativity and customer engagement is now increasingly required to show financially measurable results (Abdelkader, 2023). This gave birth to an integrative concept known as marketing accounting, which is an approach that combines marketing insights and accounting principles to create strategies that are not only market attractive, but also financially profitable (Hendriarto, 2021). In the highly competitive digital era, the ability to integrate marketing strategies with accounting data and analysis is key to business success (Aljumah et al., 2021). This integration not only improves the accuracy of decision-making, but also assists the company in creating added value and sustainable growth. Therefore, it is important to further examine the strategic role of marketing accounting in driving corporate profits and indirectly contributing to macroeconomic growth (Mensah et al., 2025).

As business complexity increases in the digital age, the need for a cross-disciplinary approach becomes more urgent (Tucker & Alewine, 2023). One approach that is developing and starting to be adopted in managerial practice is marketing accounting, which is the integration between marketing and accounting functions to support more targeted and data-driven strategic decision making (Sidhu & Roberts, 2008). This concept stems from the realization that the success of a marketing strategy is not only measured by the popularity or reach of the campaign, but also by how much it contributes to the company's profitability. Therefore, marketing is no longer seen as a cost center, but as an investment that must be financially accountable. In the practice of marketing accounting, financial data plays an important role in assessing the effectiveness of various marketing programs, ranging from promotion, distribution, to customer loyalty (Iqbal et al., 2021). Data-driven evaluation methods such as return on marketing investment (ROMI), product contribution margin, and break-even point analysis, are used to measure marketing performance in generating profits (Ridwan, 2025). This integration allows managers to make marketing decisions based on the results of accurate quantitative analysis, so that the strategies implemented become more efficient and targeted. Companies that are able to implement marketing accounting optimally will have a competitive advantage because they are able to balance marketing creativity with financial accountability. Furthermore, the development of digital technology has accelerated this integration process. The existence of enterprise resource planning (ERP) software, customer relationship management (CRM) systems, and marketing-finance dashboards, allows companies to access real-time data that combines marketing and financial indicators simultaneously (Randerath, 2024). Thus, marketing accounting is not only a theoretical trend, but also a practical solution that is relevant to the demands of modern business.

Although the concept of marketing accounting offers a relevant and strategic approach in facing the business challenges of the digital era, the reality is that many companies are still unable to implement it optimally. Marketing and accounting functions are generally still positioned separately in the organizational structure and in the decision-making process (Eriksson et al., 2025). This leads to information disintegration, where marketing activities are often designed based on intuition or market trends, without considering the full financial implications. As a result, the marketing strategies implemented tend to be less efficient in creating measurable profit value.

On the other hand, available financial reporting systems are generally not designed to assess the performance of specific marketing activities (Santamaria et al., 2021). Traditional financial statements present only general information about revenues and costs, without sufficient detail to evaluate the results of each marketing program (Velte, 2022). This hampers the process of evaluating and controlling the effectiveness of the marketing strategy that has been implemented. When these two functions are not connected, companies risk missing opportunities to develop more adaptive and data-driven strategies, and fail to maximize the return on their marketing investments. This problem becomes even more crucial in the midst of intense business competition and rapid changes in consumer behavior. Without solid integration between marketing and accounting, companies tend to experience inefficiencies in budget allocation, errors in pricing, and difficulties in measuring marketing's contribution to profit growth (Gharios & Abu Khalaf, 2024). Therefore, systematic efforts are needed to bridge this gap through the implementation of an effective and sustainable marketing accounting approach.

Although the urgency of integration between marketing and accounting is increasingly recognized, academic and empirical studies that specifically address how the application of marketing accounting can contribute to firm profitability and economic growth are still relatively limited, especially in the context of developing countries such as Indonesia. Many previous studies have only focused on evaluating marketing in general or on financial reporting aspects without linking it to marketing strategies directly. This creates an important knowledge gap to fill, especially in explaining the collaborative mechanism between these two crucial business functions. Furthermore, most of the available studies are still conceptual and have not explored in depth the application of marketing accounting in real business practices, including in the context of digitalization that demands speed, accuracy and efficiency of information. The lack of literature examining the real impact of marketing and accounting integration on financial performance and company growth leaves this topic wide open for comprehensive research. Especially in today's digital era, where financial data and consumer behavior can be accessed in real-time, it is important to examine how the integration between the two can be utilized to build smarter, more adaptive business strategies that have a direct impact on economic growth. This research is expected to fill this gap by providing an empirical perspective on the implementation of marketing accounting, and examining the extent to which this approach can support data-driven strategic decision-making in the digital business ecosystem.

While various global studies have explored the strategic integration of marketing and accounting functions emphasizing their impact on value creation, financial performance, and organizational alignment most of these discussions remain theoretical or are conducted in Western corporate settings. In the context of Indonesia, empirical research on how marketing-accounting integration is practically implemented, particularly within digitally driven businesses and SMEs, is still rare and underdeveloped. Existing studies tend to treat marketing and accounting as siloed disciplines, without investigating their synergetic potential in strategic decision-making, especially related to pricing, return on marketing investment (ROMI), and customer lifetime value (CLV). This study seeks to address this gap by examining how marketing accounting operates as a strategic tool in Indonesian digital enterprises. The research explores how data from marketing activities such as campaign costs, conversion rates, and customer acquisition costs can be translated into financial metrics that influence profitability and business scalability.

2. Method, Data, and Analysis

This research employs a qualitative case study approach to explore the integration between marketing and accounting functions in digital-based businesses. The study aims to understand how marketing-related data and metrics are interpreted and translated into strategic financial decisions within real organizational contexts. Data collection was conducted over a period of three months, from January to March 2024, involving two high-growth digital startups operating in the e-commerce and creative industries. A total of six informants were selected using purposive sampling: three from the marketing departments (Head of Digital Marketing, Performance Analyst, and Campaign Strategist) and three from the finance teams (Accounting Manager, Budgeting Officer, and CFO). The primary techniques used included in-depth semi-structured interviews, documentation review (internal reports and dashboards), and limited participatory observation during cross-departmental meetings. To ensure data validity, triangulation of sources and methods was applied. Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles & Huberman (1994), which consists of three concurrent steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

3. Results

The company that is the subject of this research is a digital-based startup engaged in social media marketing and management services for MSME players. The company operates online with a B2B (business-to-business) business model, and has experienced rapid growth in the last three years. The scale of the business is small-medium with a lean organizational structure that is adaptive to technological change. Since its inception, the company has adopted digital systems in daily operations, including the use of cloud-based accounting software, marketing analytics dashboards, and customer management systems (CRM). Integration between marketing and accounting functions began to be emphasized when management realized the need for data-driven evaluation in designing growth strategies. Previously, marketing decisions were mostly based on intuition and market trends, without considering financial contributions in a measurable manner. But as the need to streamline budgets and accurately evaluate campaign effectiveness grew, companies began to develop integrated reporting systems between finance and marketing divisions. This is characterized by the presence of indicators such as Return on Marketing Investment (ROMI), contribution margin of certain campaigns, and break-even analysis in marketing decision-making. This integration process is still being strengthened, but it has shown a shift in organizational culture towards a data-driven approach in executing digital business strategies.

The pattern of integration between marketing strategy and accounting in the studied companies is done through a collaborative approach based on data and systems. The company implements regular coordination between the marketing and finance teams in every stage of campaign planning and evaluation. Every marketing campaign designed must be accompanied by an analysis of cost projections, revenue targets, and estimated return on investment calculated by the accounting team. This process is facilitated through the use of a cloud-based integrated information system that allows both teams to access data in real-time, both related to budget, campaign performance, and other financial indicators. The work structure between the marketing and accounting teams is synergistic, with complementary roles. The marketing team is responsible for designing strategies, selecting promotional channels, and managing brand content and communications, while the accounting team tracks budgets, calculates customer acquisition costs, and evaluates campaign effectiveness financially. In practice, these two teams often have monthly evaluative meetings to review performance data and formulate further strategies based on the integrated analysis. This integration not only improves the transparency of marketing fund management, but also encourages a more accountable and profit-oriented decision-making culture.

The results show that companies actively use financial data as the primary basis for designing and evaluating marketing strategies. The most frequently utilized accounting data include profit and loss statements by marketing channel, promotional cost breakdowns, and customer acquisition records based on specific campaigns. Informants from the finance team stated that each campaign plan must go through a cost-benefit analysis stage to determine its feasibility and potential profitability. This analysis includes calculating the contribution margin of each type of service marketed and estimating the break-even point for each promotional channel used. One practice that is consistently applied is the calculation of Return on Marketing Investment (ROMI), where marketing results in the form of increased sales or revenue are compared to the costs incurred for the campaign. For example, in a digital promotion campaign through social media, the accounting and marketing teams jointly analyzed conversion data and compared it with advertising and content costs. From the analysis, it was found that campaigns conducted through the Instagram platform generated a ROMI of 180%, while similar campaigns on other platforms only reached 90%. This finding became the basis for management to prioritize certain channels in their next marketing strategy. This systematic use of financial data not only improves marketing effectiveness, but also strengthens the accountability and efficiency of promotional budget use within the framework of a competitive digital business.

The integration of marketing and accounting functions within the company showed a positive impact on profitability and the quality of strategic decision-making. One of the key indicators identified was an increase in operational cost efficiency in promotional activities. Based on internal reports obtained, total marketing costs for the first quarter of 2024 decreased by 17% compared to the same period the previous year, without reducing the level of customer acquisition. This decrease is attributed to the team's ability to allocate promotional budgets based on channel performance that has been financially analyzed, particularly through the calculation of ROMI and contribution margin. In addition, the integration also contributed to accuracy in pricing. Informants from the finance team mentioned that service prices are no longer set solely based on market surveys, but through the calculation of the actual cost structure, including fixed and variable costs per unit of service. This helps the company to set prices that are both competitive and profitable. The following table shows the changes in marketing expenditure effectiveness before and after integration:

Table 1. Changes in Marketing Expenditure Effectiveness Before and After Integration

Indicator	Before Integration	After Integration
Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC)	Rp 145.000	Rp 97.000
ROMI Average per Campaign	110%	165%
Percentage of Effective Budget Allocation	58%	84%

Furthermore, informants noted that interdivisional integration has created a more objective and measurable decision-making culture. One marketing manager stated, "*We no longer just focus on the number of ad impressions or interactions, but also on how much profit is actually generated from each campaign.*" This shows that the financial perspective is now an integral part of marketing strategy, which in turn strengthens the company's position for sustainable growth.

The results show that the utilization of digital technology plays an important role in supporting the integration between marketing and accounting. The company has adopted a cloud-based Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system that is directly linked to Customer Relationship Management (CRM), as well as an analytics dashboard specifically designed to unify financial and marketing data. This system allows each division to access the same information in real-time, such as campaign budget data, sales performance, customer acquisition costs, and conversion rates per digital channel. The dashboard is also equipped with key performance indicators (KPIs) that display Return on Marketing Investment (ROMI), contribution margin, and customer lifetime value (CLV), which are automatically updated based on inputs from both divisions.

This digitalization has driven significant changes in the company's internal work processes. Prior to the adoption of technology, coordination between the marketing and accounting teams was manual and reactive, which often led to delays in evaluation and mismatches between promotional plans and actual financial conditions. But after the implementation of the digital system, the evaluation process has become more proactive and structured. Every marketing campaign is now required to go through a data-driven approval system, with budget simulations and profitability predictions automatically calculated by the ERP system before execution. One informant stated, "*We can now monitor campaign performance on a daily basis and know immediately if there are costs that exceed targets or results that are below expectations.*" This change has not only increased the speed of decision-making, but also created greater operational efficiency and accountability in the management of company resources.

Although the integration of marketing and accounting has shown a positive impact on the effectiveness of business strategies, the research also revealed a number of challenges in the implementation of the marketing accounting concept. The main obstacle found is the coordination between divisions that has not been fully optimized, especially in the initial planning stage of the campaign. Several informants from the marketing team revealed that there were often differences in priorities and working languages between the marketing creative team and the finance team, which led to unsynchronized data-based planning. This difference includes not only a different understanding of terms, but also the approach in viewing success: the marketing team tends to judge in terms of engagement or reach, while the accounting team emphasizes profit value and cost efficiency.

The comparative analysis between the pre- and post-integration phases of marketing and accounting functions reveals significant improvements in operational efficiency and strategic clarity. The most notable changes are reflected in key performance indicators such as Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC), Return on Marketing Investment (ROMI), and budget allocation effectiveness.

Table 2. illustrates the performance comparison before and after the integration process

Metric	Before Integration	After Integration
Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC)	IDR 320,000	IDR 190,000
ROMI	1.4:1	2.6:1
Budget Utilization Rate	68%	92%
Campaign Cycle Time	21 days	12 days

These results align with Srivastava et al (1998), who emphasized that marketing resources, when managed through financially accountable frameworks, can significantly enhance firm value and decision-making speed. The observed improvements in ROMI and CAC in both firms demonstrate how integration enables not only efficiency but also agility in responding to dynamic market conditions. This view is echoed by a marketing lead who stated:

"We used to run campaigns without knowing if we were overspending. Now, we get real-time financial feedback, and we adjust our spend with confidence." (Informant M2)

From the finance side, a budgeting analyst noted:

"Marketing used to be a 'black box' for us. Since we implemented joint reporting with the marketing team, we've been able to track ROI per campaign and forecast better." (Informant F1)

Such remarks illustrate how integration fosters transparency and shared accountability. Not only do both departments benefit from aligned metrics, but they also build mutual understanding of performance indicators, which is crucial for strategic cross-functional coordination. Overall, the post-integration phase demonstrates that marketing accounting when applied through synchronized data sharing, mutual goal setting, and real-time reporting can reduce inefficiencies and empower data-driven decisions.

In addition, the lack of human resources with cross-disciplinary understanding is also a challenge. Informants from the managerial team mentioned that not all staff have an adequate understanding of basic financial concepts such as ROMI, contribution margin, or break-even analysis, which should be part of the considerations in developing marketing strategies. On the other hand, some accounting staff were still unfamiliar with digital marketing metrics such as cost-per-click or customer acquisition cost (CAC), resulting in a slow integration process. To overcome these challenges, the company has implemented a number of strategic solutions, such as cross-divisional training that focuses on data literacy and basic financial understanding for the marketing team, as well as an understanding of digital marketing analytics for the accounting team. In addition, the company started to establish a cross-functional team consisting of representatives from both divisions to ensure that any strategic decisions are discussed collaboratively from the start. The company also developed a unified SOP and utilized an automated notification system in the ERP dashboard to encourage more responsive communication between teams. These measures were considered effective by informants in reducing coordination gaps and building a more holistic data-driven work culture.

4. Discussion

The integration of marketing and accounting functions has proven to be a digital business strategy that strengthens competitiveness through a real-time data-driven approach. The results show that this collaboration drives the design of marketing strategies that are not only creative, but also financially efficient. The application of metrics such as Return on Marketing Investment

(ROMI), contribution margin, and customer acquisition cost estimation facilitates more targeted budget allocation, competitive pricing accuracy, and significant improvements in cost efficiency in line with the findings of data-driven digital marketing capabilities that improve managerial accounting performance in retail companies.

In the context of MSMEs, research by Zaelani & Nono (2023) revealed that digital marketing and AI integration are positively correlated with the profitability of small and medium enterprises, suggesting that marketing accounting can improve business investment decisions. This approach reinforces academic findings on the synergy between marketing and accounting functions as a value center and a tool for creating competitive advantage in the digital era. Nielsen (2024) adds that merging marketing and accounting data through a unified platform enhances predictive capabilities and real-time response to market changes. In practical terms, field research results show that the allocation of promotional funds becomes more efficient, indicated by a decline in customer acquisition cost (CAC) and an increase in ROMI as shown by internal data. Decisions such as advertising channel selection, service price adjustments, and optimization of campaign spending are based on historical data analysis, minimizing the risk of loss. This approach also supports the micro-economy by strengthening the business structure of small-scale enterprises through more careful use of resources and evidence-based decisions in line with the principle of value creation promoted by Rust et al. (2004) and modern researchers.

The integration of marketing and accounting through digitalization has proven to be highly relevant and important in modern marketing accounting practices. The findings of this study indicate that the use of ERP systems and integrated dashboards enables companies to access and analyze marketing and financial data in real time, a practice that is consistent with the literature emphasizing that digitalization improves consumer behavior analytics and profit-based decision-making. For example, Ye & Chua (2023) reveal that digital content measured through high ROI generates concrete sales increases, and digital management of CAC significantly impacts the profitability of retail companies. On the other hand, this study also confirms that although modern marketing accounting theory suggests that integrating these functions should result in more accurate profit projections and cost efficiency (Srivastava et al., 1998; Hustkin, 2024), in practice, there are still obstacles in the form of knowledge gaps and cross-divisional coordination issues. For example, there are still differences in perception between marketing teams focused on engagement and accounting teams emphasizing profit margins. These findings reveal the need for cross-disciplinary training and the formation of cross-functional teams a gap that has not been extensively discussed in previous quantitative studies. Overall, digitalization serves as a catalyst enabling marketing accounting to be effectively operationalized. However, this research also shows that technological transformation alone is insufficient: organizations must ensure that a data-driven work culture and financial-marketing literacy are integrated into their human resource development strategies. These findings enrich the theory with empirical evidence that digitalization must be balanced with investments in human competencies to ensure that the integration of these functions truly drives profit and microeconomic growth, especially in the digital age.

The findings of this study have a number of important practical implications for the business world, especially in dealing with the complexity of the digital market, which demands data-driven strategic responses. First, companies need to strengthen strategic integration between marketing and accounting divisions through the formation of cross-functional teams with formal and structured communication channels. Regular coordination meetings, shared standard operating procedures (SOPs), and cross-divisional goal mapping can help create alignment in planning and evaluating performance-based marketing strategies. Second, human resources (HR) training is a crucial aspect. Companies need to provide financial data literacy training for marketing teams, as well as training on understanding digital marketing metrics for accounting teams. This way, both divisions not only understand their respective roles but are also able to collaborate in strategic decision-making. Additionally, the development of integrated information systems such as Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), Customer Relationship Management (CRM), and analytical dashboards serves as the technological foundation supporting marketing accounting practices. These systems must be able to consolidate data in real-time, present relevant key performance indicators, and provide predictive analytics features to support more responsive and targeted planning. The managerial implications of these findings also include the importance of top management's commitment to integration initiatives, through policies that encourage interdepartmental synergy, profit-based performance measurement, and an organizational culture that places data at the core of decision-making. With this approach, companies will be more adaptive in addressing the challenges of the digital economy and able to optimize profitability through measurable and collaborative strategies.

The findings of this study contribute significantly to the emerging literature on marketing accounting, a domain that integrates marketing performance metrics with financial accountability to support strategic decision-making. While prior studies have primarily explored this integration conceptually, this research offers empirical validation from the perspective of digital-based businesses in a developing economy context. The alignment between marketing and accounting functions, as shown in this study, reinforces the argument that cross-functional data integration enhances not only operational efficiency but also strategic coherence across departments. This research extends the theoretical discourse by demonstrating how marketing accounting functions not only as a monitoring tool but also as a value-creating mechanism through shared metrics such as CAC, ROMI, and customer lifetime value (CLV). Furthermore, the role of digitalization emerges as a critical enabler in this integration process. Digital tools such as real-time dashboards, campaign analytics, and automated financial tracking facilitate continuous feedback loops between marketing activities and financial outcomes. These digital capabilities enable organizations to move from isolated, reactive decision-making to more integrated, proactive strategies. This supports the framework proposed by Rust et al (2004), who argued that value creation in the digital age stems from customer-centered data being translated into financial returns through internal alignment and strategic insight. In this sense, digital transformation does not merely provide tools; it fundamentally reshapes the relationship between customer insights and firm performance. By embedding financial metrics into marketing workflows, organizations unlock greater accountability, precision, and long-term value.

5. Conclusion, Limitations, and Suggestions

Conclusion

This study reveals that the integration of marketing and accounting functions contributes not only to operational efficiency but also to improved strategic alignment and financial accountability. Through a comparative case study of two digital enterprises, it was found that marketing accounting by linking metrics such as CAC, ROMI, and CLV with budgeting and reporting systems enables more informed and agile decision-making. Both marketing and finance teams reported greater transparency, shared objectives, and measurable impact on profitability. These findings demonstrate that marketing accounting is more than a set of performance metrics; it functions as a cross-functional framework that supports continuous learning, internal coordination, and value creation. The empirical evidence from this study reinforces the theoretical proposition that data-driven integration between marketing and finance enhances strategic clarity in fast-paced, digital business environments. This research confirms marketing accounting as a relevant model for strategic financial decision-making in the digital era.

Limitations and suggestions

This research has several limitations that need to be observed. First, the scope of the study is limited to one or several companies that have implemented marketing and accounting integration in the context of digitalization. This limits the generalizability of the findings to various types of industries or different business scales, especially companies that are still in the early stages of digital transformation. Second, the qualitative approach used generates contextually rich data but does not allow for quantitative measurement of the broad financial impact. Third, the subjective perceptions of informants are the main source of data, so the potential for interpretive bias still needs to be taken into account, despite triangulation. Future research should aim to validate these findings through quantitative studies across multiple industries and regions in Indonesia, allowing for broader generalization and statistical modeling. In addition, investigating how organizational culture, digital maturity, or leadership style moderates the success of marketing accounting integration may offer richer theoretical and practical insights.

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