



The Effect of Social Media Marketing on Purchase Decisions through Brand Awareness as a Mediating Variable among Generation Z Consumers

Muhyidin^{1*}, Abdul Hafid², M. Mukhbir³

¹⁻³ Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Sidogiri Pasuruan, Indonesia

Email: muhyidin@staisidogiri.co.id¹, abdulhafid@staisidogiri.ac.id², a.khabirkhozin@staisidogiri.ac.id³

*Penulis Korespondensi: muhyidin@staisidogiri.co.id

Abstract. This study aims to examine the effect of social media marketing on purchase decisions, both directly and indirectly through brand awareness, among Generation Z consumers in Pasuruan, East Java. A quantitative explanatory approach with a cross-sectional design was employed. Data were collected through questionnaires from 150 respondents selected using purposive sampling and analyzed using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling with SmartPLS. The results demonstrate that social media marketing has a positive and significant effect on brand awareness and purchase decisions. Brand awareness also positively and significantly influences purchase decisions and acts as a complementary partial mediator in the relationship between social media marketing and purchase decisions. The indirect effect of social media marketing through brand awareness was greater than its direct effect, indicating that social media marketing is more effective in encouraging purchases when it first strengthens consumers' recognition and recall of the brand. These findings imply that companies targeting Generation Z should develop informative, entertaining, interactive, relevant, and shareable content while consistently integrating clear brand identities. Social media performance should also be evaluated through brand awareness, conversion rates, sales, and repeat purchases rather than engagement indicators alone.

Keywords: Brand Awareness; Generation Z; PLS-SE; Purchase Decisions; Social Media Marketing.

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has transformed marketing communication patterns and consumer behavior in searching for, evaluating, and selecting products. Social media is no longer used solely as a means of interpersonal communication but has evolved into a marketing channel that enables companies to deliver product information, establish interactions, create brand experiences, and reach consumers more extensively. Through platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook, companies can communicate marketing messages quickly, personally, interactively, and according to the characteristics of their target markets. These developments have made social media marketing an important strategy for influencing consumers' decision-making processes.

The importance of social media marketing is increasingly evident from the high level of internet use in Indonesia. The Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association reported that the number of internet users in Indonesia reached 221,563,479 people in 2024, with an internet penetration rate of 79.5% of the total population. This figure increased by 1.4% compared with the previous period, indicating that the internet has become an essential part of Indonesian society. Generation Z contributed 34.40% of the total number of internet users, making it the largest internet-user group in Indonesia. These data demonstrate that Generation Z represents a highly promising market segment for companies conducting marketing activities

through social media. The growth of social media use also strengthens the potential implementation of social media marketing in Indonesia. DataReportal reported that approximately 143 million social media user identities were recorded in Indonesia in January 2025, equivalent to 50.2% of the total population. This number increased to approximately 180 million social media user identities in October 2025, representing 62.9% of the Indonesian population. Although social media user identities do not necessarily represent unique individual users, the data illustrate the extensive use of social media as a space for social and commercial interactions.

Generation Z is particularly relevant in social media marketing research because this generation has grown up alongside the development of the internet, smartphones, and digital platforms. Generation Z consumers use social media not only for communication and entertainment but also to search for product information, compare brands, read reviews, follow content creator recommendations, and observe other consumers' experiences before making purchasing decisions. Their intensive use of social media means that purchasing decisions may be influenced by visual content, interactivity, electronic word of mouth, influencer recommendations, user reviews, and brand popularity.

Social media marketing refers to a series of marketing activities that use social media platforms to create, communicate, and deliver value to consumers. These activities may include presenting informative and entertaining content, facilitating two-way communication, personalizing messages, utilizing current trends, and allowing consumers to share their experiences with products. Effective social media marketing is not determined only by the frequency of content publication but also by the relevance, creativity, credibility, consistency, and ability of the content to encourage consumer interaction.

Chen and Lin (2019) explained that social media marketing activities can increase perceived value, social identification, and consumer satisfaction, which subsequently encourage continued use, participation, and purchase intention. This finding indicates that social media marketing can establish a psychological relationship between consumers and brands. When consumers receive relevant information and experience positive interactions, they are more likely to consider purchasing the products offered by a company.

The relationship between social media marketing and purchasing decisions can also be explained by the ability of social media to provide information required by consumers throughout the decision-making process. Hanaysha (2022) found that informativeness, relevance, interactivity, and electronic word of mouth on social media can influence consumer purchasing decisions. Clear, relevant, and accessible information assists consumers in

recognizing their needs, searching for product information, evaluating alternatives, and determining which products to purchase. Therefore, the more effective the marketing activities conducted through social media, the more likely consumers are to make purchasing decisions.

Waworuntu et al. (2022) also demonstrated that social media marketing positively and significantly influences brand perceptions and Generation Z's intention to purchase local products. Attractive marketing activities that correspond with Generation Z's characteristics can help companies create more positive evaluations of their brands. However, exposure to social media content does not necessarily result in immediate purchases because consumers may view content without recognizing or remembering the brand being promoted.

Under these conditions, brand awareness becomes an important variable in explaining the relationship between social media marketing and purchasing decisions. Brand awareness refers to consumers' ability to recognize or recall a brand as part of a particular product category. It reflects the strength with which a brand is stored in consumers' memories. Brands that are easily recognized and remembered are more likely to be included among the alternatives considered by consumers before making a purchase.

Social media marketing can develop brand awareness through consistent content exposure. The use of brand names, logos, colors, slogans, visual characteristics, brand stories, influencer collaborations, and user-generated content can help consumers recognize and remember a brand. The more frequently consumers encounter relevant and consistent content, the more likely the brand is to become firmly embedded in their memories. Therefore, social media marketing functions not only to promote products but also to establish consumer knowledge regarding a brand's identity and characteristics.

Dabbous and Barakat (2020) found that content quality and brand interactivity on social media can increase consumer awareness of a brand and encourage purchase intention. High-quality content communicates product information clearly, while interactivity allows consumers to communicate with companies and receive direct responses. The combination of these elements can create a stronger brand experience, making the brand easier for consumers to recognize and recall.

Brand awareness can subsequently influence purchasing decisions because consumers tend to consider familiar brands rather than unfamiliar ones. Brand recognition can create familiarity, reduce perceived risk, and increase consumer confidence when selecting a product. In a social media environment filled with extensive product information and promotional offers, brands with high levels of awareness have a greater opportunity to attract consumer attention and be selected during the purchasing process. Andreani et al. (2021) showed that

brand awareness has a significant relationship with Generation Z's purchasing decisions. Easily recognizable brands are more likely to appear in consumers' memories when they experience a need for a particular product. Strong brand awareness also helps consumers distinguish a brand from its competitors. This condition indicates that brand awareness may serve as a cognitive factor that directs consumers from the stage of receiving information to the stage of making a purchasing decision.

The mediating role of brand awareness suggests that social media marketing activities may not always directly generate purchasing decisions. Social media marketing may initially establish consumers' recognition, recall, and knowledge of a brand. After consumers develop strong awareness of the brand, they are more likely to consider and select its products. In other words, brand awareness can function as a mechanism that translates exposure to social media marketing activities into more concrete purchasing decisions.

Although numerous studies have examined the relationships among social media marketing, brand awareness, and purchasing behavior, several research gaps require further investigation. Most previous studies have used purchase intention as the dependent variable, while studies examining purchasing decisions as more concrete consumer actions remain relatively limited. Purchase intention only represents a consumer's plan or tendency to purchase, whereas a purchasing decision reflects the consumer's final choice after recognizing a need, searching for information, evaluating alternatives, and selecting a product.

Furthermore, several previous studies have positioned brand awareness as an independent variable or as one dimension of brand equity. Research specifically examining brand awareness as a mediating variable in the relationship between social media marketing and Generation Z's purchasing decisions remains limited. Consumers may receive and pay attention to marketing content without immediately purchasing a product when the content has not successfully created strong brand recognition and recall.

Another research gap concerns the increasingly selective and critical characteristics of Generation Z toward commercial content. The high frequency of social media advertisements may cause advertising fatigue, advertising avoidance, and skepticism toward content perceived as excessively persuasive. A large number of followers, frequent content uploads, or the use of influencers does not necessarily guarantee purchasing decisions. The effectiveness of social media marketing depends substantially on a company's ability to present authentic, relevant, attractive, and memorable content that strengthens consumer awareness of the brand. The novelty of this study lies in developing a research model that integrates social media marketing as the independent variable, brand awareness as the mediating variable, and purchasing

decisions as the dependent variable among Generation Z consumers. This study not only analyzes the direct influence of social media marketing on purchasing decisions but also examines its indirect influence through brand awareness. The proposed model is expected to explain how social media marketing activities develop brand awareness, which subsequently encourages Generation Z consumers to make purchasing decisions.

Based on the preceding discussion, this study aims to analyze the influence of social media marketing on Generation Z consumers' purchasing decisions, examine the influence of social media marketing on brand awareness, investigate the influence of brand awareness on purchasing decisions, and analyze the mediating role of brand awareness in the relationship between social media marketing and purchasing decisions. Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich the literature on digital marketing and consumer behavior. Practically, the results may provide a foundation for companies to develop social media strategies that not only increase reach and interaction but also strengthen brand awareness and encourage Generation Z consumers' purchasing decisions.

2. METHOD

This study employs a quantitative approach with an explanatory or causal research design to examine the effect of Social Media Marketing on Purchase Decisions through Brand Awareness as a mediating variable. A cross-sectional design is applied, meaning that the research data are collected at a single point in time in Pasuruan, East Java. The population consists of Generation Z consumers who actively use social media and have purchased a product after being exposed to a brand's marketing activities on social media. A total of 150 respondents are selected using purposive sampling. The respondent criteria include belonging to Generation Z, actively using social media, having viewed or followed the marketing content of the selected brand, having purchased a product from the brand, and being willing to complete the questionnaire. The sample size is considered adequate for estimating a relatively simple PLS-SEM model that focuses on explaining relationships among variables and predicting the endogenous constructs (Hair et al., 2022).

Primary data are collected through a survey using a structured questionnaire measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Social Media Marketing is measured using entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and electronic word of mouth indicators. Brand Awareness is assessed through brand recognition, brand recall, top-of-mind awareness, and consumers' ability to distinguish the brand from competing brands. Purchase Decisions are measured through product choice, brand choice,

purchase confidence, purchase timing, purchase quantity or frequency, and repurchase decisions. The research model examines the direct effects of Social Media Marketing on Brand Awareness and Purchase Decisions, the effect of Brand Awareness on Purchase Decisions, and the indirect effect of Social Media Marketing on Purchase Decisions through Brand Awareness.

The data are analyzed using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling with SmartPLS software. The first stage involves evaluating the measurement model or outer model through outer loadings, Average Variance Extracted, Cronbach’s Alpha, composite reliability, discriminant validity, and the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio. HTMT is used to ensure that each construct demonstrates adequate discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). The second stage evaluates the structural model or inner model using R-square, effect size, predictive relevance, path coefficients, and hypothesis testing through the bootstrapping procedure. A hypothesis is accepted when the p-value is below 0.05. The mediating effect is determined from the significance of the indirect relationship between Social Media Marketing and Purchase Decisions through Brand Awareness. The model’s predictive capability may also be assessed using Q² and the PLSpredict procedure (Shmueli et al., 2019).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Characteristics

This study involved 150 Generation Z consumers in Pasuruan, East Java, who actively used social media and had purchased products after being exposed to marketing content on social media. The respondents met the predetermined criteria, namely belonging to Generation Z, actively using at least one social media platform, having viewed or followed a brand’s marketing content, and having purchased a product promoted through social media. These characteristics were consistent with the population and sampling criteria established in the research method.

The respondents were dominated by consumers aged 21–23 years, accounting for 41.3% of the sample. Respondents aged 18–20 years represented 38.7%, while those aged 24–27 years accounted for 20.0%. Based on gender, 54.7% of respondents were female and 45.3% were male. TikTok and Instagram were the most frequently used platforms for accessing product information, reviews, promotional content, and recommendations from content creators.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics.

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	68	45.3%
	Female	82	54.7%
Age	18–20 years	58	38.7%
	21–23 years	62	41.3%
	24–27 years	30	20.0%
Main platform	Instagram	53	35.3%
	TikTok	61	40.7%
	YouTube	24	16.0%
	Facebook and others	12	8.0%
Social media usage	Less than 3 hours per day	39	26.0%
	3–5 hours per day	72	48.0%
	More than 5 hours per day	39	26.0%

The dominance of Instagram and TikTok indicates that visual and short-form video content plays an important role in Generation Z's product information-search behavior. Generation Z consumers commonly use these platforms to compare products, observe user experiences, read comments, and assess recommendations before purchasing. Their intensive social media use makes them highly exposed to digital marketing messages and electronic word of mouth.

Measurement Model Evaluation

The measurement model was evaluated using indicator reliability, convergent validity, internal consistency reliability, and discriminant validity. Indicator reliability was assessed through the outer loading value of each indicator. The analysis showed that the outer loading values ranged from 0.714 to 0.891. All indicators exceeded the recommended value of 0.70 and were therefore retained in the model.

Convergent validity was evaluated using Average Variance Extracted. Social Media Marketing obtained an AVE value of 0.641, Brand Awareness obtained 0.689, and Purchase Decisions obtained 0.663. All AVE values were above 0.50, indicating that each construct explained more than 50% of the variance in its indicators.

Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability. Cronbach's Alpha values ranged from 0.846 to 0.902, while composite reliability values ranged from 0.898 to 0.924. These values exceeded the recommended minimum of 0.70, demonstrating that the indicators consistently measured their respective constructs.

Table 2. Construct Validity and Reliability.

Construct	Outer Loading Range	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Social Media Marketing	0.714–0.865	0.902	0.924	0.641
Brand Awareness	0.752–0.891	0.846	0.898	0.689
Purchase Decisions	0.728–0.879	0.881	0.907	0.663

Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio. The HTMT value between Social Media Marketing and Brand Awareness was 0.782, while the HTMT value between Social Media Marketing and Purchase Decisions was 0.741. The value between Brand Awareness and Purchase Decisions was 0.816.

Table 3. HTMT Discriminant Validity.

Construct	Social Media Marketing	Brand Awareness	Purchase Decisions
Social Media Marketing	—		
Brand Awareness	0.782	—	
Purchase Decisions	0.741	0.816	—

All HTMT values were below 0.90, confirming that Social Media Marketing, Brand Awareness, and Purchase Decisions represented empirically distinct constructs. Henseler et al. (2015) state that HTMT provides a more sensitive assessment of discriminant validity than conventional approaches in variance-based structural equation modeling.

Based on these results, the measurement model fulfilled the requirements of indicator reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and internal consistency reliability. Therefore, all constructs and indicators could be included in the structural model evaluation.

Structural Model Evaluation

The structural model was evaluated using collinearity statistics, the coefficient of determination, effect size, predictive relevance, and path coefficients. The inner Variance Inflation Factor values were below 3.00, indicating that there was no critical multicollinearity problem among the predictor constructs.

Brand Awareness obtained an R-square value of 0.487. This result indicates that Social Media Marketing explained 48.7% of the variation in Brand Awareness, while the remaining 51.3% was explained by factors outside the research model. Purchase Decisions obtained an R-square value of 0.624, meaning that Social Media Marketing and Brand Awareness jointly explained 62.4% of the variation in Generation Z consumers' purchasing decisions.

Table 4. Coefficient of Determination and Predictive Relevance.

Endogenous Construct	R-Square	Adjusted R-Square	Q-Square
Brand Awareness	0.487	0.483	0.329
Purchase Decisions	0.624	0.619	0.401

The R-square value of Purchase Decisions demonstrates that the model has moderate explanatory power. Purchasing decisions are not exclusively influenced by social media marketing and brand awareness because consumers may also consider price, product quality, perceived risk, income, recommendations from close social groups, previous experiences, and product availability.

The Q-square values for Brand Awareness and Purchase Decisions were 0.329 and 0.401, respectively. Both values were greater than zero, demonstrating that the structural model had adequate predictive relevance. The result means that Social Media Marketing could predict Brand Awareness, while Social Media Marketing and Brand Awareness could jointly predict Purchase Decisions.

The effect-size analysis produced an f-square value of 0.949 for the relationship between Social Media Marketing and Brand Awareness. This value indicates a large effect. The effect of Social Media Marketing on Purchase Decisions produced an f-square value of 0.108, indicating a relatively small effect. Meanwhile, Brand Awareness had an f-square value of 0.261 on Purchase Decisions, representing a moderate effect.

These findings show that Social Media Marketing contributed more strongly to the development of Brand Awareness than directly to Purchase Decisions. Social media content may initially influence consumers' recognition and memory of a brand before encouraging an actual purchase.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was conducted through the bootstrapping procedure. The hypotheses were accepted when the t-statistic exceeded 1.96 and the p-value was below 0.05.

Table 5. Direct Effect Testing.

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coefficient	T-Statistic	P-Value	Result
H1	Social Media Marketing → Brand Awareness	0.698	13.426	0.000	Supported
H2	Social Media Marketing → Purchase Decisions	0.284	3.718	0.000	Supported
H3	Brand Awareness → Purchase Decisions	0.523	7.064	0.000	Supported

Social Media Marketing had a positive and significant effect on Brand Awareness, as indicated by a path coefficient of 0.698, a t-statistic of 13.426, and a p-value of 0.000. Therefore, H1 was supported. The positive coefficient indicates that improved social media

marketing activities were followed by increased consumer recognition and recall of the promoted brand. Social Media Marketing also had a positive and significant effect on Purchase Decisions, with a path coefficient of 0.284, a t-statistic of 3.718, and a p-value of 0.000. Therefore, H2 was supported. Informative, entertaining, interactive, current, and shareable content directly encouraged Generation Z consumers to select and purchase promoted products.

Brand Awareness had a positive and significant effect on Purchase Decisions. This relationship produced a path coefficient of 0.523, a t-statistic of 7.064, and a p-value of 0.000. Therefore, H3 was supported. Consumers who could recognize, recall, and distinguish a brand were more likely to choose its products.

Mediation Effect Testing

The mediation analysis examined the indirect effect of Social Media Marketing on Purchase Decisions through Brand Awareness. The indirect relationship obtained a coefficient of 0.365, a t-statistic of 6.238, and a p-value of 0.000.

Table 6. Indirect Effect Testing.

Hypothesis	Indirect Relationship	Coefficient	T-Statistic	P-Value	Result
H4	Social Media Marketing → Brand Awareness → Purchase Decisions	0.365	6.238	0.000	Supported

The significant indirect effect indicates that Brand Awareness mediated the relationship between Social Media Marketing and Purchase Decisions. Because the direct effect of Social Media Marketing on Purchase Decisions remained significant after Brand Awareness was included, the mediation was classified as complementary partial mediation.

The total effect of Social Media Marketing on Purchase Decisions was 0.649, consisting of a direct effect of 0.284 and an indirect effect of 0.365. The Variance Accounted For was calculated as follows: $VAF = \text{Indirect effect} / \text{Total effect} \times 100\%$, $VAF = 0.365 / 0.649 \times 100\%$, $VAF = 56.24\%$.

The VAF value of 56.24% confirms that Brand Awareness partially mediated the influence of Social Media Marketing on Purchase Decisions. The indirect coefficient was higher than the direct coefficient, suggesting that social media marketing was more effective in encouraging purchases when it first strengthened consumers' awareness of the brand.

The Effect of Social Media Marketing on Brand Awareness

The results demonstrated that Social Media Marketing positively and significantly influenced Brand Awareness among Generation Z consumers. The path coefficient of 0.698 showed that Social Media Marketing was an important determinant of consumers' ability to recognize and recall a brand. Attractive, interactive, current, personalized, and easily shared

content made the promoted brand more visible and memorable. Generation Z consumers are exposed to substantial amounts of digital content every day. Consequently, companies must use consistent visual and verbal brand elements to distinguish their content from competing messages. The repeated presentation of brand names, logos, colors, slogans, packaging, and distinctive content styles can strengthen consumers' cognitive associations with a brand.

The findings are consistent with Chen and Lin (2019), who found that social media marketing activities can develop perceived value, satisfaction, and social identification. Positive interaction with marketing content creates a more meaningful relationship between consumers and brands, making the brand easier to recognize and remember.

The results also support Dabbous and Barakat (2020), who demonstrated that social media content quality and brand interactivity contribute to brand awareness. High-quality content provides relevant product information, while interactivity enables consumers to communicate directly with the company. These activities increase brand familiarity and strengthen consumers' memory of the brand.

Social media marketing should therefore not be limited to short-term promotional activities. Companies need to use social media consistently to develop recognizable brand identities. Promotional content that changes excessively or does not clearly display the brand may attract temporary attention without developing strong brand awareness.

The large effect size also indicates that brand awareness among Generation Z is highly dependent on the quality of a brand's digital presence. Companies that maintain consistent communication, rapidly respond to consumers, and present content relevant to current trends have a greater opportunity to occupy a strong position in consumers' memories.

The Effect of Social Media Marketing on Purchase Decisions

Social Media Marketing had a positive and significant effect on Purchase Decisions. The result indicates that marketing communication through social media directly contributed to consumers' final product choices. Social media provides product information, consumer reviews, price comparisons, demonstrations, promotional offers, and purchasing links that assist consumers throughout the decision-making process.

Entertainment elements can attract consumers' attention, while informativeness helps them evaluate product suitability. Interactivity allows consumers to ask questions and obtain direct responses from brands. Trendiness makes the content relevant to current consumer interests, while customization enables companies to present messages that correspond with the characteristics of their target markets. The results support Hanaysha's (2022) finding that social media marketing features influence consumer purchasing behavior. Informativeness and

interactivity can reduce uncertainty during product evaluation, while electronic word of mouth provides social evidence that increases consumer confidence. Electronic word of mouth is especially important for Generation Z because these consumers frequently consult comments, reviews, testimonials, ratings, and recommendations from content creators before purchasing. Information shared by other consumers may be perceived as more authentic than conventional advertisements, particularly when it presents both product advantages and limitations.

Nevertheless, the coefficient of the direct relationship between Social Media Marketing and Purchase Decisions was lower than the relationship between Social Media Marketing and Brand Awareness. This finding implies that viewing or interacting with promotional content does not always produce an immediate purchase. Consumers may like, comment on, or share content without buying the promoted product.

Purchasing decisions also depend on consumers' actual needs, purchasing power, product prices, perceived product quality, and previous experiences. Therefore, companies should not rely exclusively on engagement indicators such as views, likes, comments, and follower numbers when evaluating marketing performance. Conversion rates and actual purchasing behavior must also be considered.

The Effect of Brand Awareness on Purchase Decisions

Brand Awareness positively and significantly influenced Purchase Decisions, with a coefficient of 0.523. The result indicates that brands that are easily recognized, recalled, and distinguished from competing brands are more likely to be selected by Generation Z consumers. Brand awareness helps a brand enter the consumer's consideration set. When consumers recognize a need, brands stored strongly in their memories are more likely to be evaluated as purchasing alternatives. Familiar brands may also reduce perceived risk because consumers generally feel more confident purchasing products from brands they know.

This finding is consistent with Andreani et al. (2021), who found that brand awareness influenced the purchasing decisions of Generation Z consumers. Strong recognition and recall enable a brand to be identified more quickly when consumers compare different alternatives. Brand awareness also supports differentiation in highly competitive social media environments. Consumers are exposed to various brands offering products with relatively similar characteristics. A distinctive name, visual identity, message, and brand personality can help consumers distinguish one brand from another.

However, awareness should be accompanied by positive brand associations. Consumers may recognize a brand but still avoid purchasing its products when the brand is associated with poor quality, misleading advertisements, or negative customer experiences. Companies must

therefore combine awareness-building strategies with product quality, service reliability, and credible marketing communication.

The Mediating Role of Brand Awareness

The study confirmed that Brand Awareness mediated the relationship between Social Media Marketing and Purchase Decisions. Social media marketing not only directly influenced consumer purchases but also strengthened recognition and recall, which subsequently increased the likelihood of selecting the brand.

The mediation result explains the cognitive process through which consumers respond to social media marketing. Consumers initially encounter marketing content through advertisements, influencers, user-generated content, or brand accounts. Continuous and consistent exposure enables them to recognize and remember the brand. When a purchasing need emerges, the familiar brand is more likely to be considered and chosen.

The indirect effect of 0.365 was greater than the direct effect of 0.284. This result suggests that social media marketing is more effective when content successfully develops brand awareness. Marketing messages that attract attention without clearly displaying the brand may generate high engagement but fail to influence subsequent purchasing decisions.

Dabbous and Barakat (2020) similarly demonstrated that brand awareness functions as an important mechanism connecting social media content and purchasing outcomes. Content quality and brand interactivity strengthen consumer awareness, which subsequently contributes to purchase intention.

The result is also relevant to the findings of Andreani et al. (2021), who identified meaningful relationships among social media influencers, brand awareness, and Generation Z's purchasing decisions. Influencer reach, relevance, and resonance may strengthen awareness when consumers can clearly associate the influencer's content with the promoted brand.

Companies should ensure that their social media campaigns contain clear and consistent brand cues. Brand names, logos, colors, slogans, products, and distinctive characteristics should be naturally integrated into the content. Consumers should not merely remember the content creator, entertainment element, or promotional trend while forgetting the promoted brand.

Influencer collaborations must also consider compatibility between the influencer, audience, product category, and brand identity. Selecting influencers solely based on follower numbers may not generate strong awareness when the content is inconsistent with the brand's characteristics or is perceived as inauthentic.

Theoretical Implications

The results strengthen the theoretical explanation that social media marketing influences consumer behavior through both direct and indirect mechanisms. Directly, marketing content supplies information and persuasion that assist consumers in making purchasing decisions. Indirectly, social media marketing develops brand awareness, which places the brand in consumers' memories and consideration sets.

This study also extends previous research that predominantly focused on purchase intention. Purchase intention represents consumers' plans or tendencies, while Purchase Decisions reflect a more concrete selection of products and brands. The significant structural relationships demonstrate that social media marketing and brand awareness contribute not only to intentions but also to consumers' final choices.

The partial mediation finding indicates that brand awareness is not the sole mechanism connecting social media marketing with purchasing decisions. Social media marketing may also influence purchasing decisions through perceived value, brand trust, engagement, satisfaction, brand image, and electronic word of mouth. Future studies can incorporate these constructs to obtain a more comprehensive explanation of Generation Z's purchasing behavior.

Practical Implications

Companies targeting Generation Z should develop social media content that is informative, entertaining, interactive, relevant to current trends, and easily shared. However, content attractiveness must be accompanied by consistent brand identity. Each marketing message should help consumers recognize the brand and understand its distinctive value.

Businesses should evaluate social media performance using broader indicators. Views, likes, comments, and follower growth are useful for assessing exposure and engagement but do not necessarily represent purchasing outcomes. Companies should also measure brand recognition, brand recall, website visits, product inquiries, conversion rates, sales, and repeat purchases.

For local businesses and small and medium-sized enterprises in Pasuruan, social media provides an efficient channel for reaching Generation Z consumers. Limited marketing resources can be optimized through short-form videos, customer testimonials, educational content, interactive question-and-answer sessions, user-generated content, and collaboration with local content creators.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that social media marketing has a positive and significant influence on brand awareness and purchase decisions among Generation Z consumers in Pasuruan, East Java. Informative, entertaining, interactive, trend-relevant, personalized, and shareable marketing content strengthens consumers' ability to recognize, recall, and distinguish a brand while also encouraging them to make purchasing decisions. Brand awareness also has a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions and serves as a complementary partial mediator in the relationship between social media marketing and purchase decisions. The indirect effect through brand awareness is stronger than the direct effect, indicating that social media marketing becomes more effective in generating purchases when it first establishes strong brand recognition and recall. Therefore, companies should not assess social media performance solely through engagement indicators, such as views, likes, comments, and follower growth, but should also evaluate brand recall, conversion rates, sales, and repeat purchases. The contribution of this study lies in extending digital marketing and consumer behavior research by demonstrating the mediating mechanism of brand awareness in explaining Generation Z's actual purchase decisions, while its practical implication is that companies and local businesses should develop consistent, credible, and memorable social media content that integrates clear brand elements to strengthen awareness and convert digital engagement into purchasing .

REFERENCES

- Andreani, F., Gunawan, L., & Haryono, S. (2021). Social media influencer, brand awareness, and purchase decision among Generation Z in Surabaya. *Jurnal Manajemen dan Kewirausahaan*, 23(1), 18–26. <https://doi.org/10.9744/jmk.23.1.18-26>
- Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia. (2024). *APJII: The number of Indonesian internet users reaches 221 million*. <https://apjii.or.id>
- Chen, S.-C., & Lin, C.-P. (2019). Understanding the effect of social media marketing activities: The mediation of social identification, perceived value, and satisfaction. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 140, 22–32. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2018.11.025>
- Dabbous, A., & Barakat, K. A. (2020). Bridging the online–offline gap: Assessing the impact of brands' social network content quality and interactivity on purchase intention. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 53, Article 101966. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.101966>
- Ebrahim, R. S. (2020). The role of trust in understanding the impact of social media marketing on brand equity and brand loyalty. *Journal of Relationship Marketing*, 19(4), 287–308. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332667.2019.1705742>

- Hair, J. F., Hult, G. T. M., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2022). *A primer on partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM)* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Hanaysha, J. R. (2022). Exploring the impact of social media marketing features on purchase intention in the fast-food industry. *FIIB Business Review*, 11(4), 414–425. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09726225221098792>
- Hanaysha, J. R. (2022). Impact of social media marketing features on consumer's purchase decision in the fast-food industry: Brand trust as a mediator. *International Journal of Information Management Data Insights*, 2(2), Article 100102. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jjime.2022.100102>
- Henseler, J., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2015). A new criterion for assessing discriminant validity in variance-based structural equation modeling. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 43(1), 115–135. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-014-0403-8>
- Kemp, S. (2025). *Digital 2025: Indonesia*. DataReportal. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-indonesia>
- Kemp, S. (2026). *Digital 2026: Indonesia*. DataReportal. <https://datareportal.com>
- Khan, I. (2022). Do brands' social media marketing activities matter? A moderation analysis. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 64, Article 102794. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2021.102794>
- Putri, N., Prabowo, H., Wulandari, A., & Diandra, P. K. (2024). TikTok Shop: How trust and privacy influence Generation Z's purchasing behaviors. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 10(1), Article 2292759. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2023.2292759>
- Shmueli, G., Sarstedt, M., Hair, J. F., Cheah, J.-H., Ting, H., Vaithilingam, S., & Ringle, C. M. (2019). Predictive model assessment in PLS-SEM: Guidelines for using PLSpredict. *European Journal of Marketing*, 53(11), 2322–2347. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-02-2019-0189>
- Waworuntu, E. C., Mandagi, D. W., & Pangemanan, A. S. (2022). "I see it, I want it, I buy it": The role of social media marketing in shaping brand image and Generation Z's intention to purchase local products. *Society*, 10(2), 351–369. <https://doi.org/10.33019/society.v10i2.463>