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The Influence of Influencer Endorsement and Social Media Marketing on Purchase Intention with Brand Awareness as a Mediating Variable

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ABSTRACT

The growth of social media has strengthened the role of influencer endorsement and social media marketing in shaping consumer behavior. This study analyzes the effects of these two strategies on purchase intention, with brand awareness as a mediating variable, in the context of Nyemil Saji, a snack brand of a small and medium-sized enterprise promoted on TikTok. Survey data were collected from 114 TikTok users aged 18 to 25 years selected by purposive sampling and were analyzed with multiple linear regression and the Sobel test in SPSS. Social media marketing has a significant positive effect on brand awareness, whereas influencer endorsement does not. Influencer endorsement, social media marketing, and brand awareness each have a significant positive effect on purchase intention. Brand awareness does not mediate the effect of influencer endorsement on purchase intention and only weakly mediates the effect of social media marketing on purchase intention. These findings suggest that brand awareness alone is insufficient to generate purchase intention and that other factors, such as trust, perceived quality, or consumer experience, deserve attention.

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Introduction

The increasing trend of purchases through digital platforms highlights the importance of understanding consumer purchase intention in the social media era, particularly on applications such as TikTok, which rely heavily on social media marketing and influencer endorsement to build brand awareness and stimulate purchase intention. Although these strategies are considered effective, prior studies have produced inconsistent findings, ranging from significant to weak and even negative effects, particularly regarding the role of brand awareness as a

mediating variable. These divergent results indicate a research gap in explaining the relationships among influencers, social media marketing, and purchase intention, especially in the context of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) such as Nyemil Saji. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the influence of social media influencers and social media marketing on brand awareness and purchase intention, and to examine the role of brand awareness as a mediating variable.

Research Gap and Novelty

The literature indicates that consumer exposure to influencers and promotional content can enhance brand recognition and awareness, which in turn fosters trust and brand preference and ultimately drives purchase intention. The novelty of this study lies in the application of the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), in which influencer content and digital marketing activities function as stimuli. The internal processes of consumers, such as perceptions and evaluations of the brand, are conceptualized as the organism through brand awareness (Liu et al., 2019). The final outcome is the response, represented by purchase intention. This framework clarifies how social media stimuli operate through psychological mechanisms to influence purchase intention. By integrating social media influencers, social media marketing, and brand awareness into a single model, this study provides both theoretical and practical contributions regarding how digital marketing strategies can enhance purchase intention. It also assists practitioners in identifying the most effective approaches and influencers for building brand awareness.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

The literature highlights the positive impact of social media influencer endorsement on brand promotion (Nurhandayani et al., 2019). When companies use social media influencers as part of their product marketing activities, the influencers shape consumers' perceptions of a brand. In some cases, consumers may not be fully aware of the brand, yet they still choose to use it because of the influence of these influencers (Hermanda et al., 2019). Thus, social media influencers are expected to have a positive and significant effect on brand awareness.

H1: Social media influencers have a positive effect on brand awareness.

Most companies use electronic communication as a marketing tool to promote their brands and products (Andreani et al., 2021). These tools are employed to enhance firm value and to help strengthen brand awareness. In a quantitative study, Cheung et al. (2022) concluded that effective social media marketing strategies generate trending topics and updates on social media pages, which motivate consumers to invest greater cognitive effort in understanding the focal brand. The authors further suggest that interactive social media content, such as live streaming, chat rooms, and rewards for active consumers who provide feedback, also encourages consumer engagement with the brand. Interactive posts that facilitate the sharing of brand experiences, together with social media features such as polls, Q&A posts, and challenges, promote consumer participation and thereby increase consumers' intention to engage. Thus, social media marketing is expected to have a positive and significant effect on brand awareness.

H2: Social media marketing has a positive effect on brand awareness.

Social media influencer endorsement refers to the practice of engaging social media influencers to promote a company's products and services. Social media influencers, as public figures who present themselves on digital platforms, attract substantial public attention through

the construction of their online personas. By leveraging this image, they are able to engage a large number of followers in various activities. Influencers typically have a significant following on platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and other social media channels. Because of their extensive reach, they are capable of endorsing or promoting both positive and negative activities on social media, which can have a substantial impact on their followers (Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019). Purchase intention is specifically related to consumers' buying behavior, in which consumers demonstrate a positive attitude toward a brand because of specific product attributes and favorable reviews from endorsers. Over the years, social media platforms have received increasing attention from companies as a means of leveraging consumer purchase intention. Thus, social media influencers are expected to have a positive and significant effect on purchase intention.

H3: Social media influencers have a positive effect on purchase intention.

Social media marketing refers to the practice of using social media platforms to promote a company's products and services. Social media marketing activities facilitate the rapid and viral dissemination of offerings that capture consumers' attention, thereby increasing purchase intention. Furthermore, Binwani and Ho (2019) state that purchase intention is influenced by social media recommendations, which have a positive effect on users' buying intentions. Given that social media facilitates consumer social interaction, it leads to increased trust and purchase intention. Purchase intention is considered one of the outcomes of social media marketing activities (Yadav & Rahman, 2017), as it reflects consumers' evaluations of a product or brand. Thus, social media marketing is expected to have a positive and significant effect on purchase intention.

H4: Social media marketing has a positive effect on purchase intention.

Brand awareness is an important factor influencing consumer purchase intention. When customers decide to make a purchase, the first thing that comes to mind is the brand name and image (Rungsrisawat & Sirinapatpokin, 2019). Purchase intention refers to consumers' willingness to buy a product or service. Therefore, a positive brand image strengthens brand awareness and increases the likelihood of purchase. When a brand's image holds significant meaning in consumers' memory, it fosters a positive intention toward that brand. Positive brand awareness tends to inspire customers to make purchases (Mao et al., 2020). Similarly, Liu et al. (2019) state that customers are more likely to purchase products they are familiar with. Brand recognition and awareness contribute to brand loyalty and create positive consumer purchase intentions toward the brand. Thus, brand awareness is expected to have a positive and significant effect on purchase intention.

H5: Brand awareness has a positive effect on purchase intention.

Brand awareness plays a crucial role in linking the influence of influencer endorsement to consumer purchase intention. According to Samudro et al. (2020), consumers with a high level of brand awareness are better able to recognize their needs accurately and to understand how to select appropriate brands. This increases the likelihood of including the brand in their purchase consideration set. When consumers follow celebrities or influencers on social media, exposure to the promoted brand generates recognition and a positive understanding of that brand. As explained by Kanwar and Huang (2022), this awareness fosters a sense of satisfaction and encourages further engagement, including the intention to purchase. In other words, the higher the level of brand awareness, the stronger the consumer's motivation to move from merely recognizing a brand to developing purchase intention. Thus, brand awareness is expected to mediate the relationship between social media influencers and purchase intention.

H6: Brand awareness mediates the relationship between social media influencers and purchase intention.

Social media marketing plays a critical role in building brand awareness, which ultimately influences consumer purchase intention. As explained by Rungsrisawat and Sirinapatpokin (2019), when customers intend to purchase a product, the first elements that come to mind are the brand name and image; therefore, marketing activities on social media can strengthen this image through engaging and consistent content. Social media marketing also supports the development of a positive brand image, which, according to Mao et al. (2020), can inspire consumers and foster purchase intention. Furthermore, consumers are more likely to purchase products they are familiar with (Liu et al., 2019); thus, repeated exposure to brands on social media increases the level of brand recognition. Interactive content and direct communication through social media strengthen brand loyalty and contribute to the formation of positive purchase intentions. Effective social media marketing strategies enhance brand awareness, build a favorable brand image, and encourage consumers to develop higher purchase intention. Thus, brand awareness is expected to mediate the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention.

H7: Brand awareness mediates the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention.

Method

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative approach with a survey as the data collection method. Quantitative research is grounded in the philosophy of positivism; it examines a specific population or sample, collects data through research instruments, and analyzes the data statistically to test predetermined hypotheses. This study examines the direct effects of social media marketing and influencer endorsement on purchase intention, as well as their indirect effects on purchase intention through brand awareness as a mediating variable. The case study focuses on TikTok marketing and influencer endorsement for Nyemil Saji products.

Population and Sample

The population consists of consumers who have purchase intentions toward Nyemil Saji products on TikTok. This study employs purposive sampling, which allows the researchers to select respondents who meet specific criteria closely related to the research objectives. The criteria were individuals aged 18 to 25 years who had seen or interacted with promotional content for Nyemil Saji products or with influencer endorsements of these products on TikTok within the past six months, and who had purchase intentions toward Nyemil Saji products. Based on these criteria, 114 respondents were obtained. The sample size was determined using the Lemeshow formula for populations of unknown size (Levy & Lemeshow, 1999); with a 95% confidence level, a maximum variability of 0.5, and a 10% margin of error, the formula gives a minimum of 96 respondents, which the 114 respondents obtained exceed. Before the main data collection, the questionnaire was pre-tested with a small group of respondents to assess clarity, content validity, and reliability, and several items were refined on the basis of the pretest results. The final questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms through relevant social media platforms and online communities, and respondents participated voluntarily.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed with IBM SPSS. Descriptive statistics summarize the respondents' characteristics and the mean scores of the variables. Item validity was assessed with Pearson item–total correlations, and an item was considered valid when its correlation was significant at $p < 0.05$ (Ghozali, 2018). Reliability was assessed with Cronbach's alpha; values of 0.70 or higher indicate acceptable reliability, and values above 0.60 are still acceptable in exploratory research (Hair et al., 2014).

The hypotheses were tested with two ordinary least squares regression models following the causal-steps approach (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Model 1 regresses brand awareness on social media influencer and social media marketing (H1 and H2), and Model 2 regresses purchase intention on social media influencer, social media marketing, and brand awareness (H3 to H5). The adjusted coefficient of determination (R^2) is interpreted as weak (0.19 to 0.33), moderate (0.33 to 0.67), or substantial (above 0.67) (Chin, 1998). The indirect effects (H6 and H7) were tested with the Sobel test (Sobel, 1982), computed from the coefficients of Models 1 and 2. All tests used a 5% significance level.

Results

Respondent Profile

The respondents were 114 TikTok users selected by purposive sampling. Of these, 84 (73.7%) were male and 30 (26.3%) were female. The largest age group was 20 years old, comprising 62 respondents (54.4%), which indicates that Generation Z consumers show purchase intention toward Nyemil Saji products. Most respondents were students of Universitas Negeri Semarang (UNNES) (66 respondents, 57.9%). The majority of respondents (99 respondents, 86.8%) had viewed Nyemil Saji content from influencers on TikTok within the past six months; the remaining 15 respondents (13.2%) met the sampling criteria through exposure to Nyemil Saji's own promotional content rather than influencer content. The questionnaire was distributed online via social media platforms such as Instagram and WhatsApp. The characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics provide an overview of respondents' perceptions of social media influencers, social media marketing, brand awareness, and purchase intention (Table 2). Social media influencer (SMI) achieved an average score of 74.86%, categorized as high. This indicates that the SMI indicators represent TikTok users' perceptions of influencers, for example the ability to recall a brand promoted by an influencer through videos uploaded on TikTok. Social media marketing (SMM) had an average score of 86.13%, also in the high category, indicating that the SMM indicators capture TikTok users' perceptions of the platform's role in providing opportunities for marketing and for sharing brand-related information. Brand awareness (BA) recorded an average score of 86.76% (high), indicating that the BA indicators represent users' perceptions of how TikTok increases awareness, acceptance, and ease of recognizing and differentiating brands. Purchase intention (PI) achieved an average score of 76.10% (high), showing that the PI indicators capture users' intention to purchase, recommend, and consider brands discovered through TikTok in the future. The consistently high scores across all variables reflect generally positive consumer attitudes toward social media influencers, social media marketing, and brand awareness in relation to purchase intention.

Table 1. Respondent Profile ($n = 114$)

Profile	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	18 years old	1	0.9
	19 years old	20	17.5
	20 years old	62	54.4
	21 years old	23	20.2
	22 years old	3	2.6
	23 years old	3	2.6
	24 years old	2	1.8
	25 years old	0	0.0
Gender	Male	84	73.7
	Female	30	26.3
Origin	UNNES student	66	57.9
	Non-UNNES student	48	42.1
Exposure in the past six months	Have seen snack content from an influencer on TikTok	99	86.8
	Have not seen snack content from an influencer on TikTok	15	13.2

Table 2. Descriptive Analysis

Variable	Mean score (%)	Criterion
Social Media Influencer (SMI)	74.86	High
Social Media Marketing (SMM)	86.13	High
Brand Awareness (BA)	86.76	High
Purchase Intention (PI)	76.10	High

Validity and Reliability

Validity evaluates whether each questionnaire item accurately measures the intended variable. All items have significant Pearson item–total correlations ($p < 0.001$), ranging from 0.631 (SMI4) to 0.922 (BA3); therefore, all items are valid (Table 3). Cronbach's alpha values range from 0.814 to 0.932, exceeding the 0.70 threshold (Hair et al., 2014); therefore, all constructs are reliable (Table 4).

Regression Model Evaluation

Table 5 summarizes the two regression models. Model 1 has an adjusted R^2 of 0.551, indicating that social media influencer and social media marketing explain 55.1% of the variance in brand awareness. Model 2 has an adjusted R^2 of 0.610, indicating that social media influencer, social media marketing, and brand awareness jointly explain 61.0% of the variance in purchase intention. Both values fall within the moderate category (Chin, 1998).

Hypothesis Testing

A hypothesis is supported when the coefficient is positive and its significance value is below 0.05. As shown in Table 6, social media influencer has no significant effect on brand awareness ($\beta = 0.095$, $p = 0.180$); therefore, H1 is not supported. Social media marketing has a

Table 3. Item Validity

Item	r	p	Remark	Item	r	p	Remark
SMI1	0.888	0.000	Valid	BA1	0.805	0.000	Valid
SMI2	0.779	0.000	Valid	BA2	0.900	0.000	Valid
SMI3	0.888	0.000	Valid	BA3	0.922	0.000	Valid
SMI4	0.631	0.000	Valid	BA4	0.917	0.000	Valid
SMM1	0.708	0.000	Valid	BA5	0.888	0.000	Valid
SMM2	0.775	0.000	Valid	PI1	0.891	0.000	Valid
SMM3	0.863	0.000	Valid	PI2	0.820	0.000	Valid
SMM4	0.742	0.000	Valid	PI3	0.890	0.000	Valid
SMM5	0.807	0.000	Valid	PI4	0.853	0.000	Valid
SMM6	0.689	0.000	Valid				
SMM7	0.784	0.000	Valid				

Note. r = Pearson item–total correlation.

Table 4. Reliability

Variable	Cronbach's alpha	Remark
Social Media Influencer	0.814	Reliable
Social Media Marketing	0.883	Reliable
Brand Awareness	0.932	Reliable
Purchase Intention	0.885	Reliable

Table 5. Model Summary

Model	Dependent variable	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. error of the estimate
Model 1	Brand awareness	0.748	0.559	0.551	0.472
Model 2	Purchase intention	0.787	0.620	0.610	0.578

Note. Model 1 predictors: SMI, SMM. Model 2 predictors: SMI, SMM, BA.

significant positive effect on brand awareness ($\beta = 0.701$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H2. Social media influencer ($\beta = 0.348$, $p < 0.001$), social media marketing ($\beta = 0.416$, $p < 0.001$), and brand awareness ($\beta = 0.184$, $p = 0.040$) each have a significant positive effect on purchase intention, supporting H3, H4, and H5.

Table 6. Hypothesis Testing: Direct Effects

Hypothesis	Path	Standardized β	t	Sig.	Decision
H1	SMI → BA	0.095	1.350	0.180	Not supported
H2	SMM → BA	0.701	9.995	0.000	Supported
H3	SMI → PI	0.348	5.281	0.000	Supported
H4	SMM → PI	0.416	4.608	0.000	Supported
H5	BA → PI	0.184	2.074	0.040	Supported

The indirect effects were evaluated with the Sobel test (Table 7). Because the Sobel statistic equals $z = t_a t_b / \sqrt{t_a^2 + t_b^2}$, where t_a is the t value of the path from the independent variable to brand awareness and t_b is the t value of the path from brand awareness to purchase intention, it can be computed directly from Table 6. The indirect effect of social media influencer on

purchase intention through brand awareness is not significant ($z = 1.131$, $p = 0.258$); therefore, H6 is not supported. The indirect effect of social media marketing on purchase intention through brand awareness is significant ($z = 2.031$, $p = 0.042$); therefore, H7 is supported. Because the direct effect of social media marketing on purchase intention also remains significant, brand awareness acts as a partial mediator.

Table 7. Hypothesis Testing: Indirect Effects (Sobel Test)

Hypothesis	Indirect path	t_a	t_b	Sobel z	p	Decision
H6	SMI → BA → PI	1.350	2.074	1.131	0.258	Not supported
H7	SMM → BA → PI	9.995	2.074	2.031	0.042	Supported (partial)

Discussion

The results for Hypothesis 1 indicate that social media influencers do not have a significant effect on brand awareness. This finding contradicts prior studies such as Munir and Watts (2025), who reported a positive and significant relationship between influencers and consumer brand awareness, and Zapata Tito et al. (2025), who found that influencers significantly enhance brand awareness. The discrepancy suggests that influencer effectiveness depends heavily on factors such as influencer quality, content relevance, engagement level, and alignment between the influencer's audience and the brand's target market. In this study, the lack of influence may reflect a mismatch in influencer strategy, resulting in suboptimal brand awareness outcomes.

The analysis for Hypothesis 2 shows that social media marketing has a positive effect on brand awareness. This finding is consistent with Hidayatullah et al. (2025) and Simamora and Suparna (2025), who confirm that social media marketing significantly contributes to increasing brand awareness. This result reinforces the notion that social media marketing is not merely an additional promotional channel but a strategic tool that enhances consumer awareness of a brand through informative content, appealing visuals, active interaction, and consistent posting.

Hypothesis 3 confirms that social media influencers have a positive effect on purchase intention. This finding is in line with Lestari and Yuniarinto (2024), who found a positive and significant effect of social media influencers on purchase intention, but differs from Febriyanti et al. (2024), who found no significant direct effect. These mixed results suggest that influencer effectiveness in shaping purchase intention depends on credibility, relevance, and the appropriateness of endorsement strategies.

Hypothesis 4 indicates that social media marketing positively affects purchase intention. Kartika and Pandjaitan (2023) likewise found that social media marketing has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention. Effective marketing on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, through engaging and relevant content, can strengthen consumer purchase intention toward Nyemil Saji products.

Hypothesis 5 shows that brand awareness positively influences purchase intention. This finding aligns with Chen (2024), who found that higher brand awareness increases the likelihood of purchase decisions. This highlights the importance of creative content, consistent interaction, and strong visual branding in shaping consumer buying intentions.

The results for Hypothesis 6 indicate that brand awareness does not mediate the relationship between social media influencers and purchase intention. Because social media influencers

do not significantly increase brand awareness (H1), the indirect path cannot be established, while the direct effect on purchase intention remains significant (H3). This pattern is consistent with Hidayatullah et al. (2025), who found that brand awareness mediated the effect of social media marketing, but not that of influencer marketing, on the purchase decisions of Generation Z TikTok Shop users. It also accords with Sesar et al. (2022), who emphasize the direct role of influencer credibility in purchase intention.

Hypothesis 7 demonstrates that brand awareness mediates the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention, although the mediation is partial and relatively weak. The findings of Zeqiri et al. (2024) support this result, indicating that social media marketing strengthens brand awareness, which in turn enhances purchase intention. However, if social media marketing is perceived negatively, it may weaken brand awareness and subsequently reduce purchase intention.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The findings of this study indicate that social media influencer endorsement does not have a significant effect on brand awareness, suggesting that the influencer strategies used to promote Nyemil Saji on TikTok have not effectively built brand awareness. In contrast, social media marketing has a positive effect on brand awareness, confirming the importance of creative, interactive, and consistent marketing strategies. Both social media influencer endorsement and social media marketing have positive effects on purchase intention. In addition, brand awareness positively influences purchase intention, confirming its role as a key factor in consumer decision-making.

However, brand awareness does not mediate the relationship between influencer endorsement and purchase intention and only partially and weakly mediates the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention. These findings suggest that digital marketing strategies have a stronger direct effect on purchase intention than an effect that relies solely on increasing brand awareness.

Therefore, companies are recommended to optimize the alignment between influencer endorsement and brand identity while strengthening social media marketing strategies that foster emotional connection and trust. This study is limited by its cross-sectional design, its purposive sample of young TikTok users, and its focus on a single brand. Future research is encouraged to expand the sample size and respondent characteristics, to test indirect effects with bootstrapped confidence intervals (Preacher & Hayes, 2008), and to include additional variables such as brand trust, user experience, and content quality to provide a more comprehensive understanding.

Authors' Declaration

This research was designed and conducted by the authors, including idea formulation, methodological design, data analysis, and the writing of the results and discussion. The authors take full responsibility for the content of this article and ensure that all parts have been prepared objectively and in accordance with the research data. All authors have reviewed and approved this manuscript for publication.

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