

GEN Z PURCHASING DECISIONS THROUGH BRAND AWARENESS AND CONSUMER PREFERENCES: THE MODERATING ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS

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ABSTRACT

Background: Gen Z, a generation highly engaged with the digital world, demonstrates unique consumption behaviors shaped by various external influences. The digital lifestyle of Generation Z makes social media a key space for shaping perceptions and purchasing decisions.

Purpose: This study explores the primary factors affecting Gen Z's purchasing decisions, emphasizing the roles of brand awareness and consumer preferences. Additionally, it assesses whether social media influencers strengthen or weaken these relationships.

Design/methodology/approach: This study surveyed 170 Gen Z social media users in Indonesia, using a purposive sampling method. The research instrument was an online questionnaire distributed through Google Forms, consisting of several statements measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.1.0.9.

Findings/Result: The results show that brand awareness has a positive and significant effect on Gen Z purchasing decisions, with a Path Coefficient of 0.415 and a P-value of 0.000 (<0.05). However, consumer preferences do not significantly influence Gen Z purchasing decisions, with a Path Coefficient of -0.017 and a P value of 0.777 (> 0.05). Meanwhile, the social media influencers variable has a positive and significant influence on Gen Z purchasing decisions, with a Path Coefficient value of 0.387 and a P value of 0.000 (<0.05).

Conclusion: The research finds that in the digital age, Gen Z is more influenced by brand exposure and influencers than by personal preferences, reflecting a shift from individual-based decisions to consumption patterns shaped by digital communities.

Originality/value (State of the art): This research contributes to businesses by creating brand awareness and understanding Gen Z consumer preferences, as well as the role of social media influencers as a strength/weakness in shaping brand awareness and consumer preferences, especially in the context of social media

Keywords: brand awareness, consumer preferences, Gen Z purchasing decisions, social media influencers, influencer marketing

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INTRODUCTION

Recent advances in digital media have globally diversified marketing strategies, particularly influencer marketing, wherein firms engage content creators with extensive social media followings (Bisma & Pramudita, 2021). Generation Z (born 1997–2012), as digital natives reliant on Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok for information and brand preferences, constitute a potent consumer segment whose influencer-driven purchasing behavior is a primary focus of contemporary digital marketing (Kahawandala et al. 2020). As this digital-native cohort matures, marketers increasingly prioritize understanding the determinants of their purchasing decisions. This shift urges brands to craft authentic and engaging campaigns that reflect Gen Z’s values. Influencer collaborations have also evolved from mere promotions into long-term, trust-based partnerships.

Indonesia ranks fourth globally in sponsored influencer content and sixth in total influencer presence, with millions of active creators on Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok (DailySocial, 2024). The nation’s fast-growing digital ecosystem has fueled influencer marketing as a key business strategy (Hasim & Nurdiani, 2021). This trend underscores social media’s strong role in shaping young adults’ purchasing decisions (H. H. Ayob et al. 2023). Influencers serve as trusted intermediaries, connecting brands and consumers and driving engagement that boosts brand recognition and competitiveness. According to kompas.com, Indonesia’s internet users reached 221.5 million in early 2024. Generation Z (born 1997–2012, aged 12–27) remains the most connected age group, as noted in the “Indonesian Internet Penetration Survey 2024” by the Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia (APJII). The following outlines the level of internet contribution by generation.

According to the APJII survey in early 2024, Generation Z is the largest group of internet users in Indonesia, accounting for 34.4%, followed by Millennials (30.62%) and Generation X (18.98%) (Figure 1). Therefore, as digital natives, Gen Z is very connected to the internet, especially via smartphones, to access social media such as TikTok, Instagram and YouTube. This Generation uses the internet for entertainment, learning and social interaction, with a strong preference for short, interactive video content. Their dominance reflects the important role of Gen Z in Indonesia’s digital ecosystem. This pattern underscores the need for businesses to align their digital marketing strategies with Gen Z’s online behaviors and content consumption preferences.

Influencer credibility significantly influences Gen Z’s purchase intentions, with factors such as brand equity and emotional attachment moderating its effect through influencer characteristics (Wang et al. 2025). Generation Z’s digital fluency heightens their sensitivity to peers, influencers, and online identity cues, prompting brands to harness these factors to build awareness, shape preferences, and drive purchase decisions (Prajapati, 2023). In the pre-purchase stage, social media influencers serve as a critical source of information and validation, eliciting new desires and shaping decisions for both hedonic and utilitarian products (Paquette & Loew, 2018). Hence, this generation’s digital fluency amplifies social influence, making them highly receptive to validation from influencers, peers, and online communities. This dynamic reinforces their purchasing behavior.

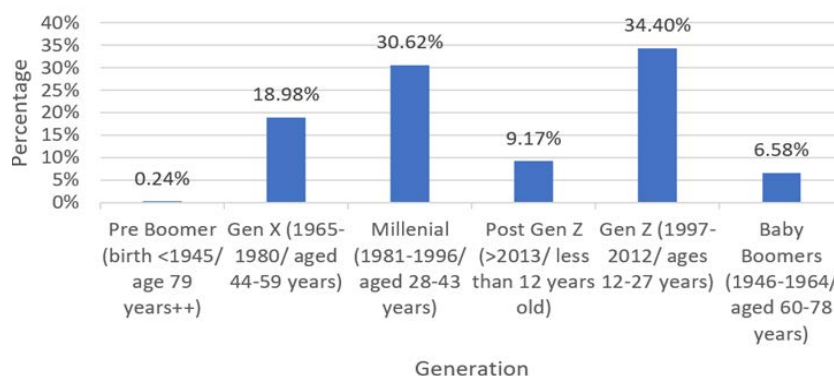


Figure 1. Level of Internet Contribution by Generation Group in 2024 (Kompas.com)

Social media reshapes marketing and strongly influences consumer behavior (Dr. M. Bhuwaneshwari & Hemasuruthi, 2023). Reflecting this transformation, the influence of social media influencers on Generation Z, recognized as the youngest and most digitally savvy consumer cohort, has attracted increasing interest (Ayob et al. 2023). This study examines Generation Z's purchasing decisions in relation to brand awareness and consumer preferences, emphasizing the moderating role of social media influencers. As digital engagement increases, Gen Z's purchasing power becomes more evident. Furthermore, their trust is further strengthened by credible, bold influencers.

This study explores how brand awareness and consumer preferences shape Gen Z purchase intentions, with influencer credibility as a moderator. These findings clarify the mechanisms of social influence in digital marketing and offer insights for developing more effective brand communication strategies. This approach strengthens consumer relationships with brands and highlights the importance of digital trust. Ultimately, this approach contributes to sustainable marketing growth.

METHODS

The respondents were Indonesian social media users on Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, X, YouTube, and Facebook. Employing a quantitative design, this study used purposive sampling to collect data from 170 Indonesian Generation Z social media users via questionnaires distributed on Instagram and WhatsApp. The data focused on assessing variables related to brand awareness, consumer preferences, influencer credibility, and purchase decisions. Primary data were collected directly from respondents, while secondary data originated from scholarly publications. This integration enabled a thorough comprehension of both theoretical concepts and empirical findings.

Primary data were collected online via a Google Forms questionnaire between January and February 2025. The questionnaire comprised structured, closed-ended items to assess respondents' perceptions of brand awareness, influencer credibility, consumer preferences, and purchasing decisions. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) (van de Water et al. 2024). Prior to large-scale administration,

the instrument was pilot-tested with a small sample to confirm its clarity, reliability, and validity. Secondary data were sourced from peer-reviewed journals, academic articles, and credible digital publications to reinforce the theoretical foundation and research hypotheses.

The study assessed data quality through both validity and reliability testing. Validity was evaluated as the degree to which observed data accurately reflect the research constructs. Reliability was examined as the consistency and stability of measurements, ensured by systematic observation and rigorous recording to maintain interpretive coherence. The analysis employed statistical tools to examine correlations and test hypotheses among the variables under study. These procedures ensured that the findings were robust, credible, and theoretically sound.

Brand awareness is measured using the dimensions of brand recall, brand recognition, purchasing decisions, and consumption (Sitepu et al. 2023). Meanwhile, consumer preferences are measured along the dimensions of practicality or convenience, service quality, consumer confidence, safety, and comfort (Rasya et al. 2024). Purchasing decisions are assessed through buying intention, brand familiarity, personal relevance, and social influence (Ramadhanty, 2022). Influencers are evaluated based on attractiveness, credibility, product match-up, and meaning transfer (Nazhifah, 2024).

Research indicates that brand awareness and consumer preference are key determinants of Generation Z's purchasing decisions (Li et al. 2021). Brand awareness signifies a consumer's capacity for brand recognition or recall, distinct from consumer preference, which denotes their inclination to select one brand over alternatives (Katerina et al. 2023). In this context, social media influencers moderate the effect of brand awareness and consumer preference on purchasing behavior. Their credibility and authenticity amplify brand persuasion among Gen Z consumers. Therefore, understanding this interaction offers a robust foundation for examining Gen Z's purchase intentions in the digital age framework model of the influence of brand awareness, consumer preference, and social media influencers on gen z purchasing decisions in Figure 2. Based on this, this paper proposes the following hypothesis:

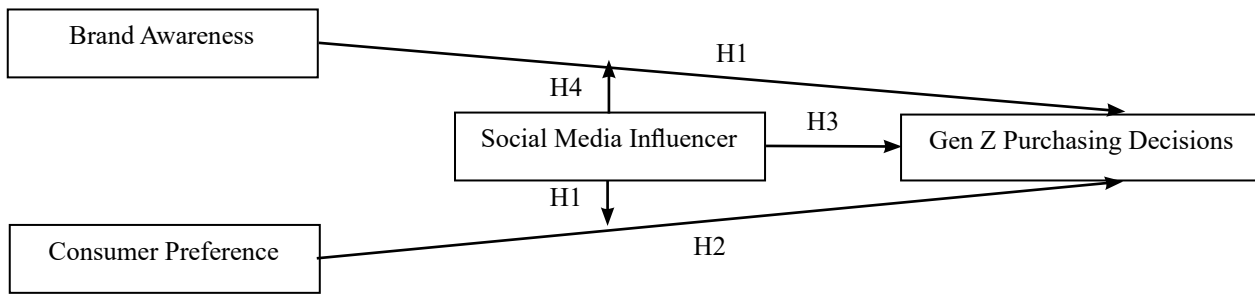


Figure 2. Conceptual framework model of the influence of brand awareness, consumer preference, and social media influencers on gen z purchasing decisions

H₁: Brand Awareness (X1) has a positive impact on Gen Z Purchasing Decisions (Y)

This hypothesis suggests that brand awareness significantly influences Generation Z's purchasing decisions (Genoveva, 2021). As a tech-savvy generation, Gen Z relies heavily on social media as a key source of information. (Bhuaneshwari & Hemasuruthi, 2023). Strong brand awareness helps build audience trust and makes marketing messages more persuasive. Consistent communication reinforces credibility and reputation, strengthening consumer confidence. Consistent delivery of relevant values and qualities fosters trust through credibility, reputation, and social proof, thereby strengthening consumer confidence (Raza et al. 2023). Although brand image may not directly affect purchases, brand awareness can increase the likelihood of purchase through purchase intention (Rasya et al. 2024).

H₂: Consumer Preference (X2) has a positive impact on Gen Z Purchasing Decisions (Y)

Consumer preferences significantly influence Generation Z's purchasing decisions, as this group exhibits distinctive consumption behaviors and unique values in its decision-making (Petrock, 2021). As a growing market force, Generation Z's purchasing decisions are strongly shaped by the alignment of brand values and messaging with their preferences, fostering trust, emotional connection, and loyalty (Voorn et al. 2020). Understanding how consumer preferences influence purchasing decisions is increasingly crucial, particularly in early stages such as need recognition and information search. Information obtained by consumers plays an important role in shaping their preferences, which, in turn, influences purchasing decisions (Dhingra, 2023). After purchase, consumers evaluate product performance, and when it aligns

with their values, they tend to leave positive reviews, recommend it to others, repurchase, and strengthen long-term brand loyalty (Sainy & Joshi, 2024).

H₃: Social Media Influencers (Z) have a positive impact on Gen Z Purchasing Decisions (Y)

This hypothesis explores the strong influence of social media influencers on Generation Z's purchasing decisions (Dhingra, 2023). As digital natives, Gen Z's constant engagement with social platforms significantly shapes their preferences and behaviors (Macheka et al. 2023). They rely heavily on trusted influencer recommendations when making purchases. To reach this segment, brands leverage influencer marketing to enhance awareness and shape consumer preferences (Jayanto et al. 2022). Social media further amplifies this effect by providing easy access to information and shared user experiences (Maulid et al. 2022).

H₄: Social Media Influencers (Z) moderate the relationship between Brand Awareness (X1) and Gen Z Purchasing Decisions (Y)

This hypothesis posits that influencers significantly moderate the relationship between brand awareness and Generation Z's purchasing decisions (Hermawan, 2020). It allows consumers to access, share and discuss information about brands, which significantly influences their purchasing decisions. Social media interactions foster consumer trust and brand awareness, while credible, authentic, and engaging influencers expedite information dissemination, thereby amplifying brand recognition. (Pinto & Paramita, 2021). Thus, social media serves as a strategic element beyond communication, fostering brand awareness, influencing consumer behavior, and enhancing digital competitiveness (Upadana & Pramudana, 2020). Additionally, Generation Z favors visually engaging

content, while platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube serve as their primary channels for discovering brands. (Genoveva, 2021).

H₃: Social Media Influencers (Z) moderates the relationship between Consumer Preference (X2) and Gen Z Purchasing Decisions (Y)

In the context of Generation Z’s social media activity, influencers are proposed to moderate the link between consumer preferences and purchase decisions (Fathinasari et al. 2023). Generation Z relies more on influencer or micro-influencer recommendations than on traditional ads (Bhattacharya, 2024). Trust builds through authentic and relevant influencer reviews that foster emotional engagement (Gaur, 2024). Due to their selective nature, Gen Z values authentic, experience-based content and direct interaction with influencers (Jain, 2024). This dynamic highlights the crucial role of influencer credibility in shaping Gen Z’s purchasing behavior.

RESULTS

Respondent Characteristics

Respondent characteristics refer to the attributes of individuals involved in a research study. These encompass demographic, social, and behavioral dimensions such as age, gender, and lifestyle patterns. Identifying these attributes enables researchers to understand the composition of their sample accurately.

Such understanding enhances the validity and precision of data interpretation. Ultimately, it ensures that research findings are representative of the intended population.

Based on the demographic data in Table 1, the majority of participants are women aged 17-27 years who are students, have monthly expenses between IDR 500,000 and IDR 1,000,000, and have been using social media for 5-10 years. The long duration of use indicates that social media has become an integral part of their lives, serving as a means of communication, entertainment, and information (Guritno et al. 2022). Social media drives early-maturity consumers to make value-focused, trend-driven purchases shaped by influencer and community reviews.

PLS Model Scheme for Brand Awareness variable, Consumer Preference, Gen Z Purchasing Decisions, and Social Media Influencer

Structural equation modeling has become a leading analytical method, especially in business and social science research. In structural equation modeling, multivariate techniques assess the outer model, which defines relationships between latent variables and their observed indicators (Ankan et al. 2023). A model was developed to illustrate variable relationships; indicators above 0.50 were considered valid for analysis. (Hair et al. 2019) Therefore, each query used to measure the indicator is valid and can effectively explain the indicator. The results of this study are shown in Figure 3.

Table 1. Respondent characteristics based on gender, age, job, monthly expenses, and duration of using social media

Characteristics		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	55	32.4
	Female	115	67.6
Age	12-27	170	100
	Under 12	0	0
Job	Students	134	78.8
	Others	36	21.2
Monthly Expenses	< IDR 500,000	21	12.4
	IDR 500,000 – IDR 1,000,000	61	35.9
	IDR 1,000,000 – IDR 2,000,000	41	24.1
	> IDR 2,000,000	47	27.6
Duration of Using Social Media	< 1 year	0	0
	1-5 years	30	17.6
	5-10 years	90	52.9
	> 5 years	50	29.4

Convergent Validity

Ensuring construct validity is essential in research, as it confirms that the study’s measurements accurately reflect the intended theoretical constructs. The minimum loading factor value for convergent validity

in SmartPLS is 0.7. Outer loadings between 0.5 and 0.6 are acceptable for convergent validity. As shown in Table 2, all values exceeded 0.5, confirming strong indicator–construct relationships and validating the model (Ghozali, 2021).

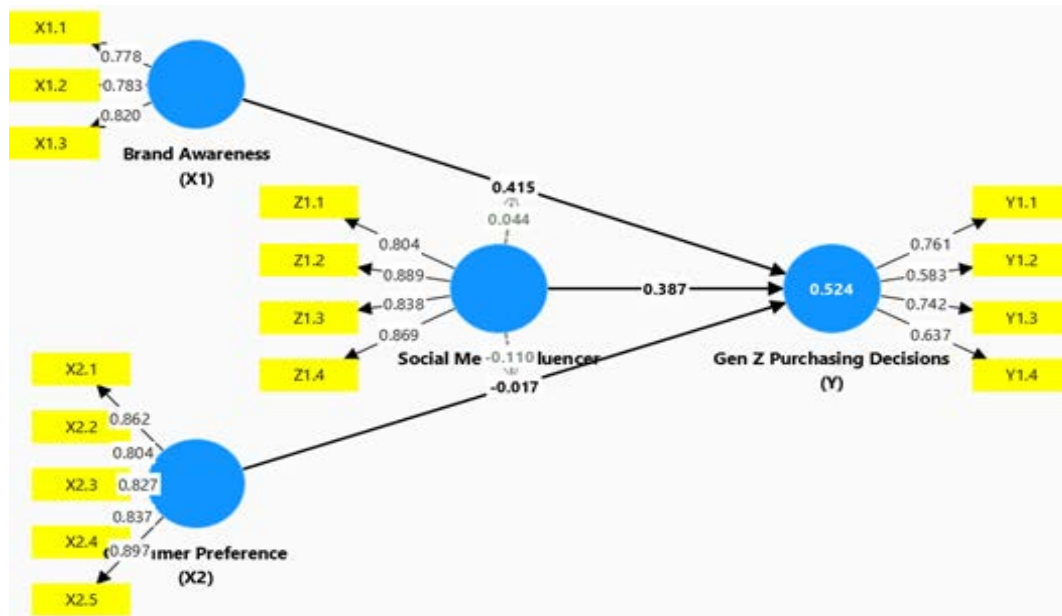


Figure 3. PLS Model scheme results for brand awareness, consumer preference, gen z purchase decision, and social media influencer variables

Table 2. Outer loadings results between brand awareness, consumer preference, gen z purchasing decisions, and social media influencers

	Brand Awareness (X1)	Consumer Preference (X2)	Gen Z Purchasing Decisions (Y)	Social Media Influencer (Z)
X1.1	0.778			
X1.2	0.783			
X1.3	0.820			
X2.1		0.862		
X2.2		0.804		
X2.3		0.827		
X2.4		0.837		
X2.5		0.897		
Y1.1			0.761	
Y1.2			0.583	
Y1.3			0.742	
Y1.4			0.637	
Z1.1				0.804
Z1.2				0.889
Z1.3				0.838
Z1.4				0.869
Social Media Influencer (Z) x Consumer Preference (X2)				
Social Media Influencer (Z) x Brand Awareness (X1)				

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was established by comparing the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) with inter-construct correlations for all constructs. Based on Table 3, all constructs used in each construct/variable have an AVE root (bolded numbers) that is greater than the correlation value with other variables. Therefore, it can be concluded that all constructs have met the evaluation of discriminant validity (valid).

Model Collinearity Test

Collinearity was tested using VIF; all values were below 5.00, indicating no collinearity issues (Table 4).

Reliability

Ensuring construct validity is essential in research, as it confirms that the study's measurements accurately reflect the intended theoretical constructs. An AVE above 0.5 is ideal, but Maruf et al. (2021) found that values below 0.5 remain acceptable if Composite Reliability exceeds 0.6 (Table 5).

Table 3. Discriminant validity - fornell-larcker criterion results between brand awareness, consumer preference, gen z purchasing decisions, and social media influencers

	Brand Awareness (X1)	Consumer Preference (X2)	Gen Z Purchasing Decisions (Y)	Social Media Influencer (Z)
Brand Awareness (X1)	0.794			
Consumer Preference (X2)	0.354	0.846		
Gen Z Purchasing Decisions (Y)	0.651	0.273	0.685	
Social Media Influencer (Z)	0.604	0.427	0.628	0.851

Table 4. Collinearity Statistics (VIF) results of each variable indicator brand awareness, consumer preference, gen z purchasing decisions, and social media influencers

	VIF
X1.1	1.385
X1.2	1.370
X1.3	1.387
X2.1	2.864
X2.2	2.399
X2.3	1.967
X2.4	2.571
X2.5	3.249
Y1.1	1.333
Y1.2	1.587
Y1.3	1.336
Y1.4	1.617
Z1.1	1.866
Z1.2	2.698
Z1.3	2.111
Z1.4	2.492
Social Media Influencer (Z) x Consumer Preference (X2)	1.000
Social Media Influencer (Z) x Brand Awareness (X1)	1.000

Structural Model

R-Square (R^2)

The coefficient of determination (R^2) quantifies the proportion of variance in the dependent variable explained by the independent variables. It serves as an indicator of the model's predictive power, typically categorized as weak (0.25), moderate (0.50), or strong (0.75). Table 6 shows an Adjusted R^2 of 0.510, indicating that exogenous variables explain 51% of the variance in Gen Z purchasing decisions, with the remaining 49% due to other factors.

Effect Size (f^2)

The f^2 effect size measures an exogenous variable's unique impact; values of 0.35, 0.15, and 0.02 indicate strong, moderate, and minor effects (Cohen, 1988). 0.35 indicates a strong effect, 0.15 represents a moderate effect, and 0.02 suggests a small but significant effect. Table 7 shows that brand awareness ($\beta = 0.221$) and influencers ($\beta = 0.183$) moderately affect Gen Z purchasing decisions, while consumer preference and its interactions show weak but significant effects.

Hypothesis Testing

In SmartPLS, hypothesis testing is performed by calculating the P value for each path coefficient and analyzing the probability/significance values (P values) and T-statistics. Path coefficient analysis tests exogenous effects on endogenous variables; positive or negative signs indicate direction, and $P < 0.05$ indicates significance. Based on Table 8, Brand Awareness (X1) \rightarrow Gen Z Purchasing Decisions (Y) = 0.415 (Positive), P values $0.000 < 0.05$ (significant); Consumer Preference (X2) \rightarrow Gen Z Purchasing Decisions (Y) = -0.017 (Negative), P values $0.777 > 0.05$ (insignificant); Social Media Influencer (Z) \rightarrow Gen Z Purchasing Decisions (Y) = 0.387 (Positive), P values $0.000 < 0.05$ (significant).

Moderated regression tested whether moderators affected the independent–dependent relationship; $P < 0.05$ indicates significance. Based on Table 8, Social Media Influencer (Z) x Brand Awareness (X1) \rightarrow Gen Z Purchasing Decisions (Y) = 0.044 (positive/reinforcing), P values $0.452 > 0.05$ (insignificant); Social Media Influencer (Z) x Consumer Preference (X2) \rightarrow Gen Z Purchasing Decisions (Y) = -0.110 (negative/weakening), P values $0.067 > 0.05$ (insignificant).

Table 5. Construct reliability and validity results between brand awareness, consumer preference, gen z purchasing decisions, and social media influencers

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho a)	Composite reliability (rho c)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Brand Awareness (X1)	0.708	0.713	0.836	0.630
Consumer Preference (X2)	0.902	0.921	0.926	0.716
Gen Z Purchasing Decisions (Y)	0.636	0.653	0.778	0.469
Social Media Influencer (Z)	0.872	0.872	0.913	0.724

Table 6. Coefficient of determination (r-square) results of gen z purchasing decisions

	R-square	R-square adjusted
Gen Z Purchasing Decisions (Y)	0.524	0.510

Table 7. Effect size results between brand awareness, consumer preference, gen z purchasing decisions, and social media influencers

	Gen Z Purchasing Decisions (Y)
Brand Awareness (X1)	0.221
Consumer Preference (X2)	0.000
Gen Z Purchasing Decisions (Y)	
Social Media Influencer (Z)	0.183
Social Media Influencer (Z) x Brand Awareness (X1)	0.004
Social Media Influencer (Z) x Consumer Preference (X2)	0.025

Table 8. Results of hypothesis testing on the influence of brand awareness, consumer preference, and social media influencers on gen z purchasing decisions

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Significant
Brand Awareness (X1) → Gen Z Purchasing Decisions (Y)	0.415	0.422	0.065	6.360	0.000	Significant
Consumer Preference (X2) → Gen Z Purchasing Decisions (Y)	-0.017	-0.009	0.061	0.284	0.777	Insignificant
Social Media Influencer (Z) → Gen Z Purchasing Decisions (Y)	0.387	0.383	0.065	5.941	0.000	Significant
Social Media Influencer (Z) x Brand Awareness (X1) → Gen Z Purchasing Decisions (Y)	0.044	0.041	0.059	0.752	0.452	Insignificant
Social Media Influencer (Z) x Consumer Preference (X2) → Gen Z Purchasing Decisions (Y)	-0.110	-0.098	0.060	1.833	0.067	Insignificant

The Effect of Brand Awareness on Gen Z Purchasing Decisions

Brand awareness significantly and positively influences Gen Z purchasing decisions ($\beta = 0.415$, $p = 0.000$), confirming its crucial and reliable role in shaping the purchase behavior of this digitally connected demographic, consistent with prior research (Rasya et al. 2024). Elevated brand awareness fosters consumer familiarity and trust, ultimately strengthening purchase intentions. Among digitally immersed Gen Z consumers, well-recognized brands are more effective in capturing attention and stimulating engagement. It suggests that maintaining consistent brand visibility and messaging across social media enhances recall and emotional connection. Consequently, building strong brand awareness is essential for marketers seeking to influence Gen Z purchasing behavior.

The Effect of Consumer Preference on Gen Z Purchasing Decisions

While consumer preferences are recognized as influencing Gen Z purchasing decisions, shaped by factors such as personal values, ethics, and perceived value (Sjahrudin & Adif, 2024), the analysis showed a weak, insignificant adverse effect of consumer preference on purchasing decisions ($\beta = -0.017$, $p = 0.777$), indicating no significant impact within the tested model. It indicates that social influence and brand engagement may more strongly shape Gen Z's purchasing behavior. It highlights their reliance on digital endorsements over personal preference.

Thus, examining the interplay between external and internal factors is essential to understanding purchase intentions.

The Effect of Social Media Influencers on Gen Z Purchasing Decisions

Consistent with prior research highlighting their role as credible, trusted sources for digitally native Gen Z consumers (Andreani et al. 2021). Social Media Influencers significantly and positively influence Gen Z Purchasing Decisions ($\beta = 0.387$, $p = 0.000$). This finding underscores the crucial role of influencers in shaping the purchasing behavior of this demographic and their importance in digital marketing strategies. Their persuasive power enhances brand credibility and fosters stronger emotional connections with consumers. Consequently, brands that effectively collaborate with influencers can achieve higher engagement and long-term loyalty among Gen Z audiences.

The Moderating Effect of Social Media Influencers on the Relationship between Brand Awareness and Gen Z Purchasing Decisions

In the digital era, where social media serves as a primary communication channel, brand awareness significantly influences Gen Z purchasing decisions. Social media influencers are particularly impactful, acting as trusted information sources whose marketing efforts positively affect purchasing decisions and strengthen brand awareness's influence on purchase intention (Andreani et al. 2021). The influencer-brand

awareness interaction did not significantly moderate Gen Z purchasing decisions ($\beta = 0.044$, $p = 0.452$). These results suggest that influencer credibility may operate independently rather than strengthening the effect of brand awareness. Nevertheless, influencers remain important in maintaining consumer engagement and strengthening positive brand perceptions among Gen Z audiences.

The Moderating Effect of Social Media Influencers on the Relationship between Consumer Preference and Gen Z Purchasing Decisions

Based on the research results, social media influencers and consumer preferences have a negative, but insignificant, effect on Gen Z purchasing decisions ($\beta = -0.110$, $p = 0.067$). It means that the role of social media influencers does not moderate the relationship between consumer preferences and Gen Z purchasing decisions. It is in line with research (Babu et al. 2024), which found that social presence or parasocial interaction did not significantly influence purchase intention in Gen Z samples, thus indicating that several channels of social media influence do not strengthen or moderate the relationship between consumer preferences towards influencers and Gen Z purchasing decisions. This finding confirms that the influence of influencers is not always determinant, but can depend on the level of trust and relevance of the message received by the audience.

Managerial Implications

The findings provide strategic guidance for marketers in crafting effective brand communication for Generation Z. Results reveal that brand awareness strongly influences purchasing decisions, while consumer preferences do not. It indicates that awareness holds a greater role in shaping Gen Z behavior. Therefore, companies should focus on consistent, targeted campaigns emphasizing visual appeal, authenticity, and interactivity. Partnering with credible influencers can further boost reach and strengthen brand impact.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Findings reveal that while brand awareness and social media influencers significantly drive Gen Z purchasing decisions, consumer preferences do not exert a

significant direct influence. Neither the relationship between brand awareness and purchasing decisions nor that between consumer preferences and purchasing decisions is significantly moderated by the presence of influencers, highlighting the distinct independent roles of brand awareness and influencers as primary determinants of Gen Z's purchasing behavior.

Recommendations

Acknowledging limitations inherent in the restricted sample size ($N=170$) and purposive selection, which constrain generalizability and may introduce bias, alongside the exclusion of external factors and an invalid variable dimension, future research should employ broader sampling strategies and explore a wider array of influences, including brand trust, customer experience, psychological factors, technological advancements like AI and content virality, and diverse demographic characteristics, for a more comprehensive understanding of Gen Z's digital consumption patterns.

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