

4/2/2026 9:22:55	Ya	Ya	Ya	Laki-Laki	22	Sarjana (S1)	Pelajar/Mahasiswa	Rp5.000.001 – Rp10.000.000
4/2/2026 9:26:42	Ya	Ya	Ya	Laki-Laki	22	Sarjana (S1)	Pelajar/Mahasiswa	Rp1.000.000 – Rp3.000.000
4/2/2026 9:39:39	Ya	Ya	Ya	Laki-Laki	22	Sarjana (S1)	Pelajar/Mahasiswa	Rp5.000.001 – Rp10.000.000
4/2/2026 9:54:00	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21	Sarjana (S1)	Pelajar/Mahasiswa	Rp1.000.000 – Rp3.000.000
4/2/2026 9:58:07	Ya	Ya	Ya	Laki-Laki	21	SMA/SMK/ sederajat	Pelajar/Mahasiswa	Rp1.000.000 – Rp3.000.000
4/2/2026 10:02:18	Ya	Ya	Ya	Laki-Laki	23	SMA/SMK/ sederajat	Pelajar/Mahasiswa	< Rp1.000.000
4/2/2026 10:07:48	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	21 thn	SMA/SMK/ sederajat	Pelajar/Mahasiswa	Rp1.000.000 – Rp3.000.000
4/2/2026 10:21:31	Ya	Ya	Ya	Laki-Laki	23	SMA/SMK/ sederajat	Pelajar/Mahasiswa	< Rp1.000.000
4/2/2026 10:26:18	Ya	Ya	Ya	Laki-Laki	34	Sarjana (S1)	Karyawan Swasta	Rp5.000.001 – Rp10.000.000
4/2/2026 10:28:02	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	31	Pascasarjana (S2/S3)	Karyawan Swasta	Rp5.000.001 – Rp10.000.000
4/2/2026 10:29:45	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	27	Sarjana (S1)	Pegawai Negeri (PNS)	Rp5.000.001 –

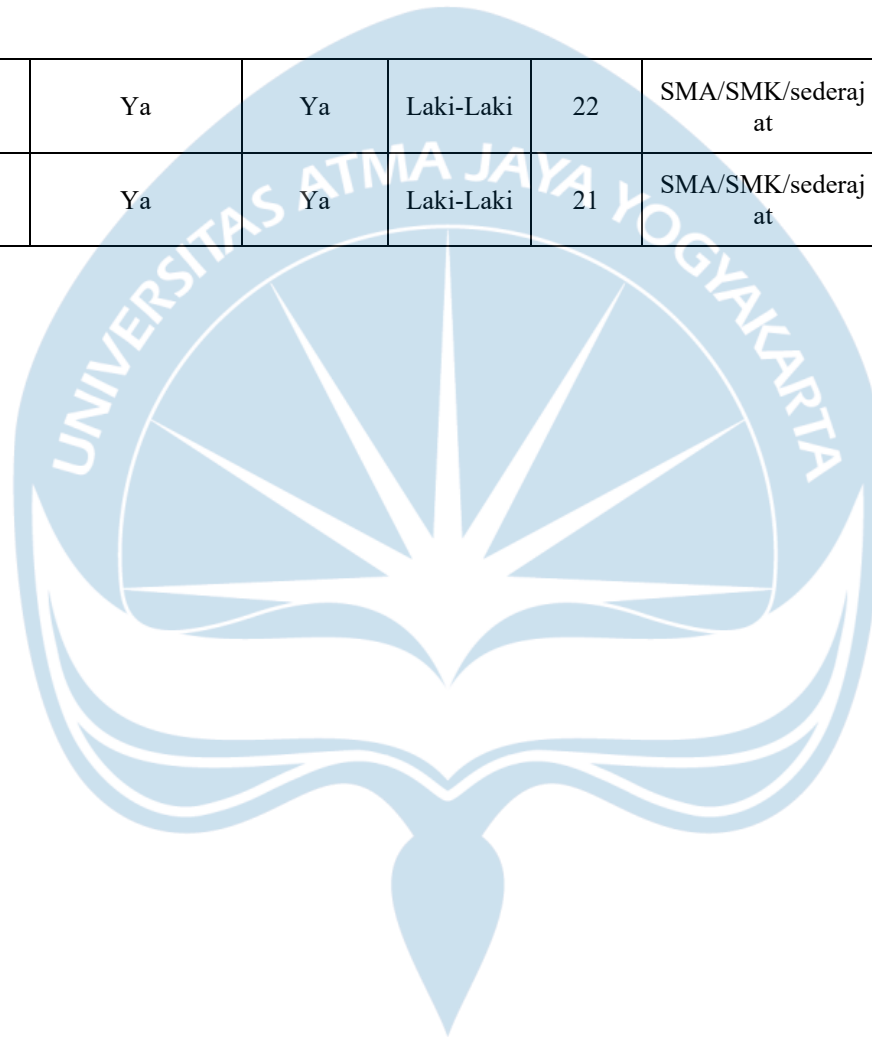
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4/2/2026 10:34:17	Ya	Ya	Ya	Laki-Laki	21	SMA/SMK/ sederajat	Pelajar/Mahasiswa	Rp1.000.000 – Rp3.000.000
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4/2/2026 10:37:15	Ya	Ya	Ya	Laki-Laki	21	SMA/SMK/ sederajat	Pelajar/Mahasiswa	Rp3.000.001 – Rp5.000.000
4/2/2026 10:39:20	Ya	Ya	Ya	Laki-Laki	29	Sarjana (S1)	Karyawan Swasta	Rp3.000.001 – Rp5.000.000
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4/2/2026 10:44:56	Ya	Ya	Ya	Laki-Laki	28	Sarjana (S1)	Pegawai Negeri (PNS)	Rp5.000.001 – Rp10.000.000
4/2/2026 10:46:19	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	24	Sarjana (S1)	Pegawai Negeri (PNS)	Rp3.000.001 – Rp5.000.000
4/2/2026 10:47:42	Ya	Ya	Ya	Laki-Laki	23	SMA/SMK/ sederajat	Pelajar/Mahasiswa	Rp1.000.000 – Rp3.000.000
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4/2/2026 10:50:44	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	20	SMA/SMK/ sederajat	Pelajar/ Mahasiswa	Rp3.000.001 – Rp5.000.000
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4/2/2026 10:55:23	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	24	Sarjana (S1)	Pegawai Negeri (PNS)	Rp5.000.001 – Rp10.000.000
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4/2/2026 10:59:24	Ya	Ya	Ya	Laki-Laki	23	SMA/SMK/ sederajat	Pelajar/ Mahasiswa	Rp1.000.000 – Rp3.000.000
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4/2/2026 11:04:08	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	22	SMA/SMK/ sederajat	Pelajar/ Mahasiswa	Rp3.000.001 – Rp5.000.000
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4/2/2026 11:07:18	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	22	SMA/SMK/ sederajat	Pelajar/ Mahasiswa	Rp3.000.001 – Rp5.000.000

4/2/2026 11:08:46	Ya	Ya	Ya	Laki-Laki	24	Sarjana (S1)	Karyawan Swasta	Rp5.000.001 – Rp10.000.000
4/2/2026 11:09:58	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	22	SMA/SMK/ sederajat	Pelajar/Mahasiswa	Rp1.000.000 – Rp3.000.000
4/2/2026 11:11:16	Ya	Ya	Ya	Laki-Laki	23	SMA/SMK/ sederajat	Pelajar/Mahasiswa	Rp1.000.000 – Rp3.000.000
4/2/2026 11:12:25	Ya	Ya	Ya	Laki-Laki	22	SMA/SMK/ sederajat	Pelajar/Mahasiswa	Rp1.000.000 – Rp3.000.000
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4/2/2026 11:18:05	Ya	Ya	Ya	Laki-Laki	29	Pascasarjana (S2/S3)	Karyawan Swasta	Rp5.000.001 – Rp10.000.000
4/2/2026 12:26:27	Ya	Ya	Ya	Laki-Laki	26	Sarjana (S1)	Karyawan Swasta	Rp5.000.001 – Rp10.000.000
4/2/2026 13:02:52	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	24	Sarjana (S1)	Karyawan Swasta	Rp3.000.001 – Rp5.000.000
4/2/2026 13:19:00	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempuan	22	Sarjana (S1)	Pelajar/Mahasiswa	Rp1.000.000 – Rp3.000.000

4/2/2026 18:29:16	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempua n	21	SMA/SMK/ sederaj at	Pelajar/Mahasisw a	Rp1.000.000 – Rp3.000.000
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4/2/2026 20:16:58	Ya	Ya	Ya	Laki-Laki	22	Sarjana (S1)	Pelajar/Mahasisw a	Rp1.000.000 – Rp3.000.000
4/2/2026 23:05:10	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempua n	21	Sarjana (S1)	Karyawan Swasta	Rp5.000.001 – Rp10.000.00 0
4/2/2026 23:17:56	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempua n	23	Sarjana (S1)	Karyawan Swasta	Rp5.000.001 – Rp10.000.00 0
4/2/2026 23:53:52	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempua n	20	Sarjana (S1)	Pelajar/Mahasisw a	< Rp1.000.000
4/3/2026 0:44:29	Ya	Ya	Ya	Laki-Laki	21	SMA/SMK/ sederaj at	Pelajar/Mahasisw a	Rp1.000.000 – Rp3.000.000
4/3/2026 17:59:38	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempua n	25	Sarjana (S1)	Karyawan Swasta	Rp5.000.001 – Rp10.000.00 0
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4/3/2026 19:56:17	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempua n	21	Sarjana (S1)	Pelajar/Mahasisw a	Rp1.000.000 – Rp3.000.000
4/4/2026 7:01:08	Ya	Ya	Ya	Perempua n	22	SMA/SMK/ sederaj at	Pelajar/Mahasisw a	Rp1.000.000 – Rp3.000.000

4/4/2026 14:28:40	Ya	Ya	Ya	Laki-Laki	22	SMA/SMK/ sederajat	Pelajar/ Mahasiswa	Rp1.000.000 – Rp3.000.000
4/6/2026 4:43:54	Ya	Ya	Ya	Laki-Laki	21	SMA/SMK/ sederajat	Pelajar/ Mahasiswa	Rp3.000.001 – Rp5.000.000



DATA DEMOGRAFI DAN JAWABAN PERTANYAAN

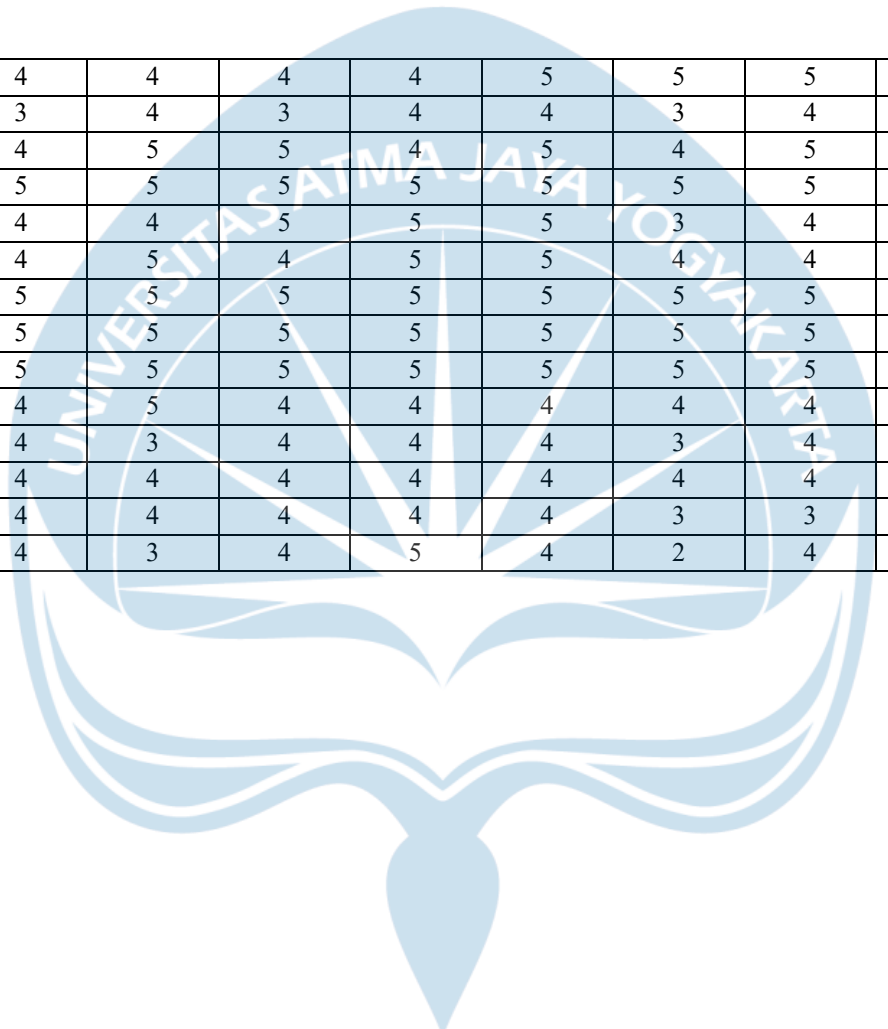
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Lampiran 3 HASIL OLAH DATA

Hasil Deskriptif

Indicators:	Indicator Correlations		Raw File						
	No.	Missing	Mean	Median	Min	Max	Standard ...	Excess Ku...	Skewness
SMI 1	1	0	4.412	5.000	1.000	5.000	0.719	3.085	-1.419
SMI 2	2	0	4.388	5.000	1.000	5.000	0.766	3.619	-1.550
SMI 3	3	0	4.406	5.000	1.000	5.000	0.727	2.866	-1.392
K1	4	0	4.300	4.000	1.000	5.000	0.835	2.963	-1.460
K2	5	0	4.375	5.000	1.000	5.000	0.796	3.484	-1.606
K3	6	0	4.388	5.000	1.000	5.000	0.758	3.838	-1.567
NB1	7	0	4.312	5.000	1.000	5.000	0.860	3.464	-1.605
NB2	8	0	4.150	4.000	1.000	5.000	0.989	1.140	-1.207
NB3	9	0	4.281	4.000	1.000	5.000	0.853	2.460	-1.371
PB1	10	0	4.250	5.000	1.000	5.000	0.981	2.189	-1.523
PB2	11	0	4.213	5.000	1.000	5.000	1.002	1.722	-1.416
PB3	12	0	4.231	4.000	1.000	5.000	0.957	2.867	-1.604

Nilai Outer Loading

Outer Loadings

Matrix		Copy to Clipboard: Excel Format R			
		SMI	kepercay...	niat beli	perilaku ...
K1			0.902		
K2			0.930		
K3			0.922		
NB1				0.920	
NB2				0.911	
NB3				0.934	
PB1					0.902
PB2					0.914
PB3					0.929
SMI 1		0.923			
SMI 2		0.928			
SMI 3		0.928			

Nilai Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Construct Reliability and Validity

Matrix	» ₄ Copy to Clipboard: Excel Format R Format			
	Cronbach...	rho_A	Composi...	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
SMI	0.917	0.918	0.948	0.858
kepercay...	0.906	0.907	0.941	0.843
niat beli	0.912	0.914	0.944	0.850
perilaku p...	0.903	0.907	0.939	0.837

Cross Loading (Discriminant Validity)

Discriminant Validity

	Fornell-Larcker Criter...	Cross Loadings	Heterotrait	
	SMI	kepercay...	niat beli	perilaku ...
K1	0.763	0.902	0.796	0.721
K2	0.787	0.930	0.834	0.711
K3	0.822	0.922	0.776	0.681
NB1	0.772	0.848	0.920	0.774
NB2	0.682	0.764	0.911	0.732
NB3	0.739	0.803	0.934	0.807
PB1	0.615	0.681	0.717	0.902
PB2	0.581	0.689	0.755	0.914
PB3	0.665	0.734	0.819	0.929
SMI 1	0.923	0.785	0.741	0.664
SMI 2	0.928	0.827	0.762	0.648
SMI 3	0.928	0.780	0.702	0.572

Cronbach Alpha dan Composite Reliability

Construct Reliability and Validity

Matrix	» ₄				Copy to Clipboard:	Excel Format	R Format
	Cronbach...	rho_A	Composi...	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)			
SMI	0.917	0.918	0.948	0.858			
kepercay...	0.906	0.907	0.941	0.843			
niat beli	0.912	0.914	0.944	0.850			
perilaku p...	0.903	0.907	0.939	0.837			

Fornell Larcker

Discriminant Validity

Fornell-Larcker...	» ₃				Copy to Clipboard:	Excel Fc
	SMI	kepercay...	niat beli	perilaku ...		
SMI	0.926					
kepercay...	0.861	0.918				
niat beli	0.794	0.874	0.922			
perilaku p...	0.679	0.767	0.837	0.915		

Nilai *Adjusted R-square*

R Square

Matrix	R Square	» ₁	Copy to Clipboard:	Excel Format
	R Square			R Square Adjusted
kepercay...	0.742			0.740
niat beli	0.771			0.768
perilaku p...	0.706			0.702

Nilai *F-square*

f Square

	Matrix		f Square	Copy to Clipboard:		Excel Forr
		SMI	kepercay...	niat beli	perilaku ...	
SMI			2.876	0.029		
kepercay...				0.609	0.019	
niat beli					0.398	
perilaku p...						

Nilai *Q-square*

Construct Crossvalidated Redundancy

Total	» ₇	Copy to Clipboard:		Excel Format	R Fo
	SSO	SSE	Q ² (=1-SSE/SSO)		
SMI	480.000	480.000			
kepercay...	480.000	184.543	0.616		
niat beli	480.000	170.174	0.645		
perilaku p...	480.000	200.092	0.583		

Path Coefficients

Path Coefficients

Mean, STDEV, T-Values, P-...	Confidence Intervals	Confidence Intervals Bias ...	Sample		
	Original ...	Sample ...	Standard ...	T Statistic...	P Values
SMI -> kepercayaan	0.861	0.855	0.044	19.578	0.000
SMI -> niat beli	0.160	0.153	0.097	1.653	0.099
kepercayaan -> niat beli	0.736	0.740	0.086	8.533	0.000
kepercayaan -> perilaku pembelian	0.152	0.164	0.107	1.426	0.154
niat beli -> perilaku pembelian	0.704	0.694	0.109	6.475	0.000

Specific Indirect Effect

Specific Indirect Effects

	Mean, STDEV, T-Values, P-...	Confidence Intervals	Confidence Intervals		
	Original ...	Sample ...	Standard ...	T Statistic...	P Values
SMI -> kepercay...	0.634	0.635	0.093	6.845	0.000
SMI -> kepercay...	0.131	0.140	0.092	1.425	0.155
SMI -> niat beli ...	0.113	0.105	0.069	1.634	0.103
kepercayaan -> ...	0.518	0.515	0.108	4.819	0.000
SMI -> kepercay...	0.446	0.442	0.104	4.307	0.000

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Article

Empirical Analysis of Social Media Influencers' Effect on Consumer Purchase Intentions and Behavior

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Abstract

Social media influencers (SMIs) have become pivotal stakeholders in digital marketing. This study examines how SMIs influence consumer decision-making and investigates the role of trust in this process. Drawing on the theory of planned behavior (TPB), we developed a research model with testable hypotheses. Using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), we analyzed survey data from 232 social media users in Greater London, UK. Our results indicated that SMIs significantly enhance purchase intentions, yet these intentions exhibited only a weak conversion into actual purchasing behavior. Contrary to expectations, trust in SMIs demonstrated a significant negative relationship with purchase intention, suggesting that higher trust may paradoxically diminish purchase likelihood. This counterintuitive finding underscores the complexity of trust dynamics in influencer marketing, where perceived commercialization or consumer skepticism may counteract its positive effects. Furthermore, while SMIs strongly foster trust, our analysis reveals that trust does not mediate the relationship between SMIs and actual purchases. These findings contribute to literature by elucidating the nuanced role of trust and highlighting the intention-behavior gap in influencer marketing. Future research could explore contextual and psychological moderators to deepen our understanding of trust dynamics.

Keywords: social media influencers; purchase intention; purchase behavior; trust; influencer marketing; PLS-SEM



Academic Editor: Adel Ben Youssef

Received: 1 April 2025

Revised: 29 May 2025

Accepted: 3 June 2025

Published: 23 June 2025

Citation: Adaba, G.B.; Frimpong, F.; Mwainyekule, L. Empirical Analysis of Social Media Influencers' Effect on Consumer Purchase Intentions and Behavior. *Platforms* **2025**, *3*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.3390/platforms3030011>

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1. Introduction

Considering the substantial expansion of social media in recent decades, social media influencers (SMIs) are playing an increasingly vital role in how consumers discover, evaluate, and purchase products and services [1–4]. SMIs are digital content creators who have cultivated substantial, engaged followings through strategic self-presentation and niche expertise and who monetize their audience through brand partnerships [5,6]. This phenomenon has changed established marketing models by placing SMIs as intermediaries between brands and consumers [7,8]. Consequently, the influencer marketing industry grew to USD 21.1 billion in 2023, more than three times its size in 2019 [9]. This high growth in revenue underscores the growing capacity of influencer marketing to deliver strategic marketing outcomes [10].

As content creators with huge followings on social media platforms, SMIs offer brands a strategic opportunity to reach a broad audience [5,11]. A growing body of research

on SMIs has emphasized the benefits, including better brand awareness [12], effective consumer engagement [13], and higher sales conversions [2]. Literature also suggests that SMIs influence consumer purchasing intentions [7,14,15]. While robust evidence from recent meta-analyses found a significant impact of SMIs on purchase intention [13], translating intention into actual sales requires further research. Relatively limited studies assess the conversion of purchase intentions into actual purchases [16,17]. This gap between intention and actual behavior is a significant challenge. Moreover, research suggests a positive correlation between trust in an SMI and purchase intention [15,18]. However, there are instances where trust in SMIs does not influence purchase intention and actual purchase [19].

To address these gaps, we investigated the following question: To what degree do SMIs drive consumer purchase intentions and purchase behavior, and what is the role of trust? The specific objectives of this study were to assess (1) the effect of SMIs on purchase intention, (2) how SMIs influence purchase behavior, and (3) the role of trust in the process. To achieve the study's objectives, we developed a conceptual model and formulated hypotheses based on existing literature. We then validated the model and tested the hypotheses using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) of survey data from 232 respondents in the UK. The study findings hold implications for brands seeking to optimize their influencer marketing strategies and contribute to the academic discourse in this rapidly developing research field.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. We first provide a background to the study through a discussion of the prospects and challenges of influencer marketing and the theory of planned behavior (TPB). We then present the research model and hypotheses. Next, we describe the study methodology before we present the study's findings. We discuss the findings and assess their implications. We conclude after a discussion of the study's limitations, and suggestions for future research are offered.

2. Background

2.1. Influencer Marketing: Prospects and Challenges

A symbiotic relationship exists between SMIs and social media, where SMIs utilize their substantial following to enhance their influence. At the same time, engaging and niche-oriented content created by SMIs enhances the user experience on social media [20]. Thus, SMIs have become invaluable to contemporary marketing, providing brands with opportunities to connect with consumers [21].

Literature stresses the strategic benefits SMIs offer organizations, including better customer engagement, improved brand recognition, and the ability to influence consumer perceptions positively [22]. By fostering trust and building a network, SMIs function as credible third-party endorsers, enabling two-way interaction and strengthening brand loyalty [2,7]. Brand partnerships with SMIs whose values align with a brand can enhance brand relatability and image, thereby driving consumer engagement [23,24]. This synergy has increased sales as SMIs present products or services that resonate with their followers. Furthermore, the strategic engagement of SMIs extends a brand's market reach by leveraging their follower networks to reach a broader demographic [23]. The efficacy of SMIs transcends mere reach and visibility metrics. Their ability to shape consumer purchasing decisions may be attributable to their authenticity, relatability, and the trust they cultivate within their follower base. These characteristics have an advantage over traditional marketing, which often lacks the personal touch that SMIs possess [10].

However, while influencer marketing offers several benefits, it also presents critical challenges. One significant issue is the variability in content quality across these platforms, which ranges from credible endorsements to misleading or false information [25]. Further-

more, misinformation, unethical practices, and negative psychological impacts demand stronger regulatory frameworks and ethical standards for SMIs [26,27].

2.2. Theory of Planned Behavior, Purchase Intention, and Buying Behavior

The theoretical underpinning of the research is TPB, a well-established framework for studying the psychological factors of purchase intention and behavior [28]. This theory provides a valuable perspective on how SMIs affect consumer purchase intention and behavior [29,30]. TPB argues that there are three antecedents of purchase intention: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Attitudes measure a consumer's summary evaluation towards a product (either positive or negative). For example, an SMI's endorsement of a product or service is likely to shape consumer attitudes towards purchase intention and actual purchase positively [31,32].

Subjective norms refer to the social pressure on a consumer to conform to the preferences of significant others and social groups. Social media amplifies this pressure through witnessing positive online reactions towards products endorsed by SMIs [33]. Perceived behavioral control is a consumer's perceived ability to purchase a product. Factors related to perceived behavioral control include accessibility, purchase cost, and the complexity of purchase. If a product endorsed by an SMI is immediately available to a consumer and comes at a low perceived cost, the consumer will have an easier time translating intentions into purchase [34].

3. Research Model and Hypotheses

We propose a research model grounded in SMI and consumer purchasing behavior studies with four constructs: SMIs, trust in SMIs, purchase intention, and actual purchase. Figure 1 illustrates the research model and the hypothesized relationships.

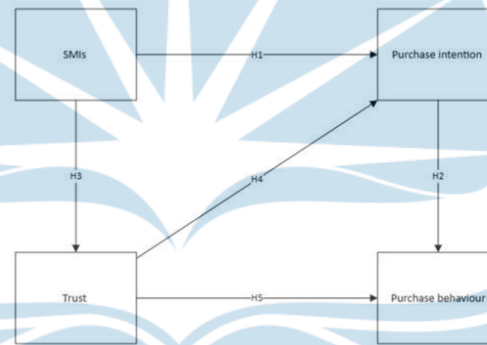


Figure 1. The research model.

3.1. Research Model

Extant research supports a significant relationship between SMIs and consumer purchase intentions [14,35,36]. Studies demonstrate that SMIs can positively influence consumer attitudes towards products or services, potentially leading to a desire to emulate the influencer and engage in a positive behavioral outcome, such as a purchase [37]. Furthermore, research suggests that source–consumer similarity and post-quality perceptions

can partially mediate the influence of SMIs on purchase intention [38]. The attractiveness and interactivity of SMIs have also been identified as factors that strengthen the connection between consumers and brands, ultimately influencing purchase intentions [39]. Also, SMIs can enhance brand recognition and purchase likelihood [18]. The “fear of missing out” (FOMO) has also been linked to consumers’ increased purchase intention towards products endorsed by SMIs [40]. Literature indicates that individuals who regard influencers as credible, exhibit demographic or psychosocial similarities to them, assess their content as high-quality, and establish robust parasocial relationships are more likely to express intentions to consume the products they endorse [41,42]. In contrast, older demographic groups tend to demonstrate reduced intentions towards consumption [43]. Based on the foregoing, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1. *Consumers exposed to SMIs’ content will demonstrate strong purchase intentions.*

SMIs’ impact increases through their variety of content, such as reviews, tutorials, and endorsements, thus creating emotional bonds between them and their followers [44]. Several studies suggest that there is a relationship between SMIs and purchase behavior. For instance, it has been established that fashion influencers have a significant impact on customers’ buying decisions [45]. Also, social identification has a direct impact on young people’s online advertising engagement and purchasing behavior [34]. Finally, purchase intention has a positive impact on purchasing behavior. This suggests that if consumers have already demonstrated purchase intention, they are more likely to actualize their purchase intention into a purchase decision [17]. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

H2. *Purchase intention will positively correlate with actual purchase completion rates among SMI-following consumers.*

3.2. The Role of Trust

In the context of SMIs, trust can be defined as readers’ confidence in an influencer’s credibility, dependability, and authenticity. Consumers’ trust in an SMI affects how they respond or interact with an SMI’s recommendations and what they write [15]. For instance, a study found that trust in the SMI mediates the relationship between consumers and their buying intention. In turn, purchasing intentions and purchasing behaviors are expressions of the influence of the SMIs’ trustworthiness and the strength of their recommendations [46]. SMIs create trust through their relevant material related to a product or service [47]. Having already established trust with their followers, these followers are more likely to listen to an influencer’s opinions [48].

Some authors argue that consumers highly value the knowledge and expertise of SMIs in certain areas, making them trusted sources of information [14]. Consumers can interact with SMIs using likes, comments, and sharing of content via social media [2]. The interaction between consumers and SMIs has a two-way direction and allows consumers to ask for advice, ask questions, and share experiences [2]. This allows consumers to gain an SMI’s recommendations [44]. This can increase consumers’ trust in brand recognition and stimulate product sales [49]. It is crucial to build trust when conducting influencer marketing strategies [19]. Informative SMI content, perceived SMI trustworthiness, and perceived SMI attractiveness can positively affect consumers’ trust, which can be conducive to brand awareness and purchase intentions [50]. Therefore, the following hypotheses are formed based on literature:

H3. *Content created by SMIs is likely to build strong levels of trust in products among their audience.*

H4. Trust in SMIs correlates positively with consumer purchasing behavior, leading to a substantial increase in purchase intention.

H5. High trust in SMIs significantly enhances the probability of consumer purchasing behavior regarding products they endorse.

4. Materials and Methods

We employed a positivist quantitative research strategy to validate the proposed research model and its associated hypotheses. The quantitative approach was ideal for this study, as it enabled systematic collection and analysis of data to examine the relationships among SMIs, purchase intention, and behavior, emphasizing objectivity, measurability, and empirical validation [51].

4.1. Data Collection

We utilized a cross-sectional survey because it allowed us to gain a snapshot of the views of consumers on purchase intention and behavior. It also facilitated the identification of relationships between SMIs and purchase intention and behaviors without requiring longitudinal data [52]. Cross-sectional surveys are valuable in several disciplines due to their use, low cost, and ability to provide timely insights [53].

A principal element of surveys is the design of an appropriate questionnaire [54]. Accordingly, we designed a questionnaire from literature on SMI, trust purchase intention, and behavior. Table 1 shows the operationalization and definitions of these constructs and their theoretical foundations. The survey instrument consisted of two parts. The first part was used to collect demographic data, including age, gender, education, employment status, and income. The second collected data on social media interactions between individuals and SMIs and trust purchase intentions and behaviors based on SMI recommendations. Respondents responded to the questions on a 7-point Likert scale. The 7-point scale provided finer granularity than a 5-point scale, allowing for better discrimination between neutral and slightly positive or negative responses [55].

Table 1. Construct definitions, descriptions, and theoretical underpinnings.

Construct	Definition/Description	Indicator	Measurement	Theoretical Grounding/Source(s)
Social Media Influencers (SMIs)	Individuals who cultivate monetizable audiences through curated content, perceived expertise, and parasocial engagement.	SMI_1	The influencer demonstrates expertise in their content niche.	[2,5,6,56]
		SMI_2	The influencer's recommendations appear authentic and trustworthy.	
		SMI_3	The influencer engages consistently with their audience.	
Trust (in SMIs) (TR)	The consumer's confidence in an influencer's authenticity, honesty, and reliability.	TR_1	I trust this influencer's recommendations.	[1,18,19,57,58]
		TR_2	This influencer provides accurate information about products.	
		TR_3	This influencer discloses sponsored content honestly.	

Table 1. Cont.

Construct	Definition/Description	Indicator	Measurement	Theoretical Grounding/Source(s)
Purchase Intention (PI)	The consumer's likelihood of purchasing a product based on an SMI's endorsement.	PI_1	I would consider buying a product recommended by this influencer.	[2,28,56,59–61]
		PI_2	I am willing to pay a premium for products endorsed by this influencer.	
		PI_3	I actively seek out products promoted by this influencer.	
Actual Purchase (AP)	The consumer's actual purchasing actions following exposure to SMI endorsements.	AP_1	I have purchased a product after seeing an influencer promote it.	[28,59,62]
		AP_2	I use promo codes or affiliate links from influencers when shopping.	
		AP_3	I revisit brands introduced to me by influencers.	

We used a convenience sampling method, selecting participants based on their availability and willingness to participate. This approach was chosen for its practicality, cost-effectiveness, and efficient access to the target population. Although convenience sampling is time-saving and easy to implement, it carries the risk of sampling bias, which can potentially limit the generalizability of the results. Despite these limitations of convenience sampling, we considered it appropriate in this case because the study was exploratory [63] and allowed us to gather sufficient data to test the research model and hypotheses.

We distributed the survey link across various social media platforms, primarily Instagram and Facebook. The data collection process spanned a period of two months, specifically from March to May 2024, and resulted in a dataset comprising 232 responses. The participants in this study were residents of the Greater London area of the United Kingdom, providing a diverse representation of perspectives and experiences.

4.2. Data Analysis

We applied PLS-SEM, a variance-based statistical modeling technique, to validate the proposed research model and to test the hypotheses owing to the possibility of latent variables in the measurement model [64]. PLS-SEM's flexibility with non-normal data and small to medium sample sizes made it ideal for this research. Additionally, it enabled simultaneous hypothesis testing, enhancing the rigor of the analysis [65]. We opted for PLS-SEM because of its robustness in handling complex structural models with multiple latent variables and its more flexible requirements for sample size, compared to covariance-based SEM. Furthermore, this technique facilitated the assessment of relationships among latent constructs and estimates of path coefficients to indicate the strength and direction of the relationships among constructs in our model [66,67]. The data were analyzed using Smart PLS (Version 3), an advanced structural equation modeling software. This methodology enabled the exploration of intricate relationships within the dataset, allowing for a nuanced examination of latent constructs and their interrelations [68].

5. Results

This section presents the study findings. Firstly, a descriptive analysis of the study sample is provided. Subsequently, the validity and reliability of the measurement model are evaluated. Finally, the structural model is examined, and the hypotheses of the relationships are tested.

5.1. Descriptive Statistics

A summary of the study sample and descriptive statistics is depicted in Table 2. The average age of the sample was 34, with a gender distribution of 48% male and 52% female. A sizable portion of the sample (34%) was aged between 28 and 37, while those in the 18–27 age group accounted for 31%. Participants aged 38–47 represented 24%, with smaller percentages from the 48–57 (9%) and 58–67 (2%) age groups. Most participants were well-educated, with 52% holding a university degree, 29% pursuing postgraduate studies, 11% with further education qualifications (A-levels or BTECs), 5% having completed secondary education, and 3% with only primary education. The survey also indicated considerable social media engagement among participants, who, on average, used four social media platforms and followed approximately nine SMIs. Half of the sample were full-time employees, and part-time workers made up 15%. Students comprised almost a quarter of the sample (24%). The remaining respondents were either unemployed (2.6%) or self-employed (7.8%). Income levels ranged from GBP 10,000 to above GBP 60,000. Over 60% of respondents earned below GBP 20,000, while a smaller proportion (4.3%) earned above GBP 60,000.

Table 2. Demographic profile of the study sample.

Age	Frequency	Percentage
18–27	71	30.6%
28–37	79	34.1%
38–47	56	24.1%
48–57	21	9.1%
58–67	5	2.2%
Gender		
Female	112	48.3%
Male	120	51.7%
Education		
College or university	121	52.2%
Higher or secondary or further education (A-levels, BTEC, etc.)	25	10.8%
Postgraduate degree	68	29.3%
Primary school	6	2.6%
Secondary school up to 16 years	12	5.2%
Occupation		
Full-time employment	116	50.0%
Part-time employment	35	15.1%
Self-employed	18	7.8%

Table 2. Cont.

Age	Frequency	Percentage
Student	57	24.6%
Unemployed	6	2.6%
Income		
0–10,000	93	40.1%
10,000–20,000	47	20.3%
21,000–30,000	40	17.2%
31,000–40,000	23	9.9%

5.2. Measurement Model Validity Assessment

Convergent and discriminant validity analyses were conducted to evaluate the validity of the measurement model. Convergent validity assessed how well the indicators measured the underlying constructs [69]. The average variance extracted (AVE) values for all the indicators pertaining to each construct were computed. Subsequently, composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha coefficients were examined to evaluate the internal consistency and reliability of the measurement model. Table 3 summarizes the results of the measurement model assessment. The results showed that the study constructs had a high level of reliability. The Cronbach's alpha of all the constructs fell within the acceptable range from 0.746 to 0.899. The internal consistency reliability was satisfactory, since all the CR values were above 0.7 [70].

Table 3. Construct reliability.

Latent Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho_a)	Composite Reliability (rho_c)	The Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Actual purchase (AP)	0.848	0.948	0.936	0.868
Purchase intention (PI)	0.899	0.904	0.937	0.833
SMIs	0.746	0.746	0.887	0.798
Trust (TR)	0.771	0.742	0.744	0.692

The AVE values for all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold value of 0.5, ranging from 0.692 to 0.868. This implied that each construct accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in its respective indicators, thereby demonstrating strong convergent validity [71]. Established criteria require that a latent variable should explain at least 50% of the variance in its associated indicators to ensure adequate measurement reliability. The AVE values confirmed that all constructs met this condition, with each explaining over half of the variance. Therefore, the results offered robust evidence for the convergent validity of the constructs, affirming their reliability and accuracy in evaluating the theoretical dimensions [70].

The heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations is a robust measure of discriminant validity to ensure that the study constructs in the measurement model are distinct. As shown in Table 4, our analysis showed strong evidence of discriminant validity, as all HTMT values fell below the threshold of 0.85 [72]. We observed ratios ranging from a minimum of 0.114 (between trust and SMIs) to a maximum of 0.725 (between purchase intention and actual purchase), further corroborating the discriminant validity of the construct.

Table 4. Results of discriminant validity (HTMT criterion).

	AP	PI	SMIs	TR
AP				
PI	0.725			
SMIs	0.388	0.233		
TR	0.126	0.054	0.114	

5.3. Measurement Model Reliability Assessment

Internal consistency reliability is fundamental for robust PLS-SEM analyses. Evaluating the measurement model through an estimation of indicator reliability is essential to establish the validity and reliability of the constructs under investigation before structural model analysis. Indicator reliability, computed through outer loadings, is the proportion of variance explained by its corresponding latent construct, following conventional thresholds suggested by Hair et al. [70]. Loadings over 0.708 are considered acceptable, as they indicate that the constructs account for at least 0.708 of the indicator's variance. As presented in Table 5, most indicators had loadings exceeding this threshold. However, a few indicators had loadings from 0.4 to 0.7, although not optimal, and were retained. This is consistent with recommendations by Hair et al. [70], who maintained that keeping such indicators can improve model fit and the robustness of subsequent structural analysis, provided the constructs have adequate internal consistency and reliability.

Table 5. Indicator loadings.

	AP	PI	SMIs	TR
AP_1	0.95			
AP_2	0.961			
AP_3	0.815			
PI_1		0.388		
PI_2		0.937		
PI_3		0.439		
SMI_1			0.757	
SMI_2			0.576	
SMI_3			0.666	
TR_1				0.537
TR_2				0.774
TR_3				0.656

5.4. Structural Model Assessment

The structural model analysis outcomes, which included standardized path coefficients, significance thresholds, and fit indices, are presented in Table 6. These findings elucidate both the predictive validity and explanatory power of the hypothesized relationships within the model.

Table 6. Structural estimates.

Hypothesis	Paths	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	p-Values	Conclusion
H1	SMLs -> PI	0.722	0.707	0.086	8.434	0	Supported
H2	SMLs -> AP	0.112	0.1	0.091	1.233	0.218	Rejected
H3	SMLs -> TR	0.819	0.824	0.034	23.986	0	Supported
H4	PI -> AP	0.141	0.135	0.166	0.849	0.396	Rejected
H5	TR -> PI	−0.971	−0.976	0.137	7.108	0	Supported

Bootstrapping analysis provided mixed evidence regarding the proposed pathways. Hypothesis H1, which posited a positive influence of SMLs on consumers' purchase intentions, received support ($\beta = 0.722$, $t = 8.434$, $p < 0.05$). This finding aligns with meta-analytic evidence on digital persuasion [10]. Conversely, Hypothesis H2, suggesting that SMLs positively affect actual purchase behaviors, lacked support, indicated by a non-significant path coefficient ($\beta = 0.112$; $t = 1.233$; $p > 0.05$).

Hypothesis H3, which asserted that SMLs significantly bolster consumer trust, was robustly supported ($\beta = 0.819$, $t = 23.986$, $p < 0.05$). However, Hypothesis H4, which estimated that perceived trust in SMLs positively impacts consumers' purchase intentions, was not supported ($\beta = 0.141$; $t = 0.849$; $p > 0.05$). Intriguingly, Hypothesis H5, which suggested that SMI recommendations drive actual purchases mediated by trust, was also unsupported ($\beta = -0.971$; $t = 7.108$; $p < 0.05$).

6. Discussion

6.1. Contributions

The results revealed a complex interplay between SMLs, trust, and consumer purchasing decisions, challenging several assumptions in extant literature. Additionally, this research made two contributions that addressed critical gaps in the current body of knowledge regarding the behavioral impacts of SMLs. This was particularly relevant in light of the inconsistencies identified in prior studies [10,16].

First, our confirmation of a significant intention–behavior gap within SMI contexts warrants attention. Despite strong positive correlations between SMLs and purchase intentions, as supported by earlier research [13,37], these intentions accounted for only a marginal portion of the variance in actual purchasing behavior. The expressed intentions accounted for only 2.1% of the variance in actual purchasing behavior ($R^2 = 0.021$). This discrepancy challenged a key assumption of the TPB, which suggests that intention is a precursor to actual behavior [28]. It reinforced criticisms against reliance on intention-based measures in influencer studies [16]. Notably, this disparity between intention and action may be explained by contextual variables, such as price sensitivity [1], product availability, and promotional activities.

Secondly, the study's most theoretically significant finding pertains to the paradoxical role of trust within influencer marketing dynamics. While prior research has consistently viewed trust as a positive mediator in digital persuasion [1,18], our analysis revealed a counterintuitive negative association between trust and purchase intention ($\beta = -0.971$, $p < 0.05$). This finding contradicts the prevailing consensus in marketing literature and suggests that the relationship between trust and consumer decision-making follows more complex mechanisms than previously imagined. Drawing on persuasion knowledge theory [73], we suggest that this inverse relationship emerges when consumers perceive

influencer endorsements as overly commercialized, triggering skepticism that outweighs initial trust. This interpretation is consistent with emerging works on “overtrust” effects in digital contexts [19] and requires a reconsideration of how trust operates within influencer marketing. Overtrust refers to a situation in which confidence in an influencer’s authenticity blinds consumers to the commercial intent, eventually triggering reactance when promotional motives become noticeable [19]. This occurs when the perceived authenticity–commercialization ratio tips beyond individual tolerance thresholds [1].

The interpretation of our findings should be situated within the broader context of cultural and platform-specific dynamics that influence consumer reactions to SMIs. Our study focused on a Western, English-speaking demographic, yet existing literature highlights significant cross-cultural variations in audience engagement with influencer content. For example, research indicates that collectivist societies may display markedly different trust behaviors in influencer endorsements, owing to heightened group conformity [19]. This suggests that the negative trust effects we identified may be either mitigated or intensified in varying cultural contexts.

Moreover, platform architecture and behavioral norms significantly mediate influencer efficacy in ways our research could not comprehensively address. The inherently visual curation of Instagram’s platform ecology may heighten authenticity concerns relative to the perceived spontaneity associated with TikTok content [74]. Consequently, our findings, primarily derived from Facebook and Instagram users, may reflect distinct trust dynamics that would emerge on short-form video platforms or within niche community spaces, where digital relationships are cultivated differently. Also, the intention–behavior gap we observed is likely to vary considerably across platforms, influenced by interface design elements, such as integrated shopping features and the friction involved in external purchasing pathways.

6.2. Implications

The implications of these findings are significant for theory and practice. From a theoretical perspective, they necessitate a reevaluation of the dynamics of trust in the influencer context. This suggests a need to move beyond positive linear models and adopt a more nuanced framework that incorporates varying conditions and the possibility of contradictory effects. Furthermore, these results highlight the critical need for incorporating behavioral metrics in influencer marketing research as opposed to solely relying on intention proxies, which may lead to overestimations of campaign efficacy.

For practitioners, our findings offer strategic recommendations that can inform decision-making and practice. The observed weak correlation between consumer intention and actual behavior implies that brands should enhance conventional engagement metrics, such as likes and shares, by incorporating direct behavioral tracking methods. This approach would enable a more accurate assessment of campaign effectiveness. Secondly, the trust paradox indicates that criteria for influencer selection should prioritize perceived authenticity instead of only focusing on audience size or reported trust metrics. The findings underscore the critical role of contextual factors, suggesting that influencer marketing initiatives be strategically synchronized with pricing strategies and distribution channels. This alignment is essential for optimizing the conversion of consumer intentions into actual purchasing behaviors.

6.3. Limitations and Future Research Directions

The methodological limitations of this study require careful interpretation of its findings. The use of convenience sampling, while pragmatically justified for exploratory research [75], introduces potential selection bias that may compromise the generalizability

of our results. The sample's demographic skew, predominantly comprising young, low-income participants, further limits the applicability of our findings to broader consumer segments. Given the well-documented influence of age and socioeconomic status on responses to SMIs [34], the limited demographic scope of our study raises critical questions regarding the generalizability of our findings to older or higher-income cohorts. This limitation is symptomatic of broader challenges in influencer marketing research, characterized by prevalent reliance on convenience sampling and the predominance of homogenous participant groups. Moreover, although our findings offer valuable insights into consumer segments, they do not adequately illustrate effects at the population level.

The cross-sectional design also imposes constraints on causal inference. While our model identifies significant associations between constructs, longitudinal or experimental designs would better establish changes over time and rule out alternative explanations [52]. Future studies should employ stratified sampling techniques to ensure adequate representation across age groups, income levels, and cultural contexts [52]. Such approaches would address the current overreliance on convenience samples that plagues much of the literature [16].

Our findings highlight the need for more nuanced investigations into the intention-behavior gap in influencer marketing. While we identified a weak translation of purchase intentions into actual behavior, the underlying mechanisms remain underexplored. Subsequent studies should examine contextual moderators, such as price sensitivity [1], product availability, and competitive promotions, which may disrupt intention-behavior consistency. Additionally, mediating factors such as perceived authenticity [18] and social validation warrant further research to explain why even trusted SMIs often fail to drive conversions.

The unexpected negative relationship between trust and intention demands particular attention in future work. This finding contradicts prevailing assumptions in the literature [15] and suggests that trust's role in digital persuasion is more complex than previously theorized. Experimental designs could systematically test boundary conditions, such as varying levels of perceived commercialization, to identify when and why trust backfires. Comparative studies across influencer types (e.g., micro-influencers vs. celebrities) and cultural contexts [76] would further clarify whether this phenomenon is platform-specific or generalizable.

7. Conclusions

We examined SMIs, purchase intention, purchase behavior, and the role of consumer trust. This study made two contributions. First, the findings affirmed the capacity of SMIs to impact consumers' purchase intentions. However, we observed a substantial intention-behavior gap, as our model explained only 2.1% of the variance in actual purchasing behavior. This empirical evidence of weak behavioral translation questions the theoretical assumption of intention-behavior alignment within digital contexts. Second, we found a negative relationship between trust and intention, which contradicts most existing literature. This paradox implies that highly polished and overtly commercial influencer content may activate persuasion knowledge, converting trust into skepticism. Our findings substantiate growing concerns regarding authenticity deficits in influencer marketing [1] while challenging the universal applicability of trust-based persuasion through SMIs. These contributions call for a paradigm shift from the uncritical adoption of influencer marketing strategies to evidence-based frameworks that recognize (1) the fragile nature of digital trust, (2) the mediating influence of platform-specific contextual factors, and (3) the essential distinction between engagement, purchase intention, and purchase behavior.

These findings suggest that brands should prioritize authenticity in influencer collaborations, align partnerships with pricing and distribution, and focus on sales metrics rather than just engagement. Future research should explore trust's adverse effects, cross-cultural differences in influencer effectiveness, and use longitudinal studies to assess behavioral outcomes over time.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, G.B.A., F.F. and L.M.; methodology, G.B.A.; formal analysis, G.B.A.; investigation, G.B.A., F.F. and L.M.; resources, G.B.A., F.F. and L.M.; data curation, G.B.A.; writing—original draft preparation, G.B.A.; writing—review and editing, F.F. and L.M. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Our study involving human participants received formal approval from the University of East London's Ethics Review Board (ETH2324-0011 and 20 August 2023).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Available upon request.

Conflicts of Interest: No conflicts of interest.

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Lampiran 6 JURNAL ACUAN 2

Indonesian Journal of Business and Entrepreneurship, Vol. 11 No. 3, September 2025
Permalink/DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17358/ijbe.11.3.545>

Available online at
<http://journal.ipb.ac.id/index.php/ijbe>

INFLUENCER MARKETING AND PURCHASE INTENTION: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF TRUST

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Article history:

Received
5 January 2025

Revised
24 April 2025

Accepted
19 August 2025

Available online
30 September 2025

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ABSTRACT

Background: Digitalization had transformed consumption patterns, positioning influencer marketing as a dominant strategy in contemporary business. Social media influencers significantly enhanced brand awareness and purchase intention, particularly among students as active technology users. However, their impact was mediated by trust, which strengthened consumer responses to marketing messages. Thus, examining trust as a mediating variable between influencer marketing, brand awareness, and purchase intention was essential to advance marketing knowledge within the student market segment.

Purpose: This study aims to examine the influence of influencer marketing on brand awareness and purchase intention, emphasizing the mediating role of trust. While influencer marketing is recognized as a driver of consumer decisions, its impact is often indirect, shaped by consumer trust. Prior studies have overlooked this mediating factor, particularly within the student market segment. Addressing this gap, the research provides new insights into digital marketing by highlighting trust as a critical determinant of effectiveness.

Design/Methodology/Approach: This study employed a quantitative research design at Tadulako University, Pahu, Indonesia, from February to October 2024. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to 86 postgraduate students, determined via the Slovin formula from a population of 630. The instrument, validated by expert review and pilot testing, used a five-point Likert scale. Data analysis utilized descriptive statistics and path analysis with SmartPLS 4 to examine causal relationships and ensure validity and reliability.

Finding/Result: The results demonstrate that influencer marketing significantly enhances brand awareness, purchase intention, and trust among students. Trust itself positively influences both brand awareness and purchase intention, while also serving as a significant mediator between influencer marketing and these outcomes. Path analysis confirms all hypotheses, underscoring the central role of trust in strengthening consumer perceptions and decisions. These findings highlight that influencer marketing effectiveness depends not only on brand exposure but also on building sustainable trust-based relationships.

Conclusion: This study concludes that influencer marketing significantly enhances brand awareness and purchase intention among graduate students, with trust acting as a pivotal mediating factor. Trust reduces perceived risks and reinforces consumer confidence, thereby amplifying marketing effectiveness. The study contributes novel insights by positioning trust as a central mechanism in digital marketing strategies. However, due to the limited sample size, findings should be interpreted cautiously and further validated across broader contexts and product categories.

Originality/State of the art: This research contributes to the existing literature by emphasizing the mediating role of trust in influencer marketing's effects on graduate students, providing insights for marketers targeting this demographic in the context of mobile phone purchases.

Keywords: influencer marketing, brand awareness, purchase intention, consumer decisions, digital marketing

How to Cite:

Evrianti, H., Wanti, S., Asriadi, & Wulandari, P. (2025). Influencer marketing and purchase intention: The mediating role of trust. *Indonesian Journal of Business and Entrepreneurship*, 11(3), 545. <https://doi.org/10.17358/ijbe.11.3.545>

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INTRODUCTION

Social media and social networking have dramatically changed the way people get information and news. Hruska & Maresova (2020) stated that individuals with high household income and higher education levels in the United States are highly dependent on social media usage. The dependence of young people on social media fosters their ability to navigate information critically and with greater awareness (Swart, 2023). The use of and dependence on social media extend beyond young people to all groups, significantly shaping users' everyday behaviors (Koçak et al. 2021). This has the consequence that the need to search for information from social media and from fellow consumers has become more urgent than ever, data from Twitter and Annalect revealed that almost 40% of Twitter users involved in the survey said they bought something because of an influencer's tweet (Karp, 2016).

The advancement of digitalization has transformed consumption patterns across diverse groups. In modern marketing, effectiveness is also determined by marketing communication through influencers and interactive activities that stimulate customer motivation (Mawaddah et al. 2025; Ryndian Gusty et al. 2025). Influencer marketing has become the most dominant marketing strategy in digital business in recent years (Leung et al. 2022). Influencer engagement and influence have recently become the digital consumer standard for increasing brand awareness and purchase intent (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019). Influencer marketing involves individuals on social media in decision making (Martínez-López et al. 2020). Social media influencers are online/digital personalities who have a large following on one or more social media platforms (YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, or blogs), who have an influence on their followers. Unlike celebrities or public figures who are mostly known through traditional media, social media influencers are "ordinary people" who have become famous online celebrities through what they create and post on social media (Hudders et al. 2021). Influencers generally have expertise in a particular field such as food, nightlife, lifestyle, beauty or fashion. Influencer marketing, accompanied by product quality, has a significant and positive impact on purchase decisions and consumer satisfaction (Hasan et al. 2025). Based on Chan et al. (2023) findings, the global market value of influencer marketing is projected to reach USD 21.1 billion by 2025, indicating its rapid growth and relevance in

contemporary marketing strategies. A recent Twitter study showed that consumers can give the same level of trust to social media influencers as they do to their friends (Singh et al. 2020).

Mobile phones have become a necessity for almost all groups in society including students. The use of mobile phones by students in addition to being a means of communication includes: accessing the internet, interacting on social media, lecture needs, and others (Sobaih et al. 2020). According to the study, students use most of 62.5% for interaction needs on social media and browsing the internet, while the other half (40.63%) use mobile phones to listen to music (Lestari & Yarmi, 2017). This indicates that students as active users of communication technology make students one of the potential segments of the mobile phone market and in their daily activities are very close to the influence of internet marketing, especially influencer marketing (Roblek et al. 2019). In decision making, Brand awareness is an important factor especially in mobile phone marketing (Brabo et al. 2021). Brand awareness is the first stage in a consumer's journey towards a purchasing decision (Ardiansyah & Sarwoko, 2020). Brands that have an impression and are easy to remember will have competitive value in consumer decisions (Sari Dewi et al. 2020). Consumers who have high brand awareness will involve the brand as part of the consideration when deciding on a purchase. Brand awareness is the foundation in building brand equity. In addition, in making decisions in purchasing mobile phones, consumers also tend to involve other factors such as trust (Maulana & Marista, 2021).

Influencer marketing is a link between brand awareness and the decision whether consumers will buy or not, but its influence is indirect (Ali & Alquda, 2022). This is due to another marketing factor, namely trust as a key element (Popova et al. 2019). Trust is a key element that strengthens the relationship between influencers and potential consumers, so it can affect how effectively marketing messages are received and translated into purchase intentions (Chetoui et al. 2020). Although there are many studies examining the influence of influencer marketing, most of them have not explicitly investigated the role of trust as a mediating variable that links influencer marketing to marketing outcomes such as brand awareness and purchase intention. Therefore, it is very important to investigate the influence of influencer marketing on brand awareness and purchase intention through

the mediation of trust variables in the student market segment. An in-depth study related to how the student market segment responds to influencer marketing to recognize (brand awareness) and grow the desire to buy (purchase intention), is important to continue to be carried out in various consumer segments. The findings are expected to enrich marketing science by providing a novel perspective on the development of internet marketing concepts, emphasizing the mediating role of trust in influencer marketing within the student market segment.

METHODS

This research was conducted at Tadulako University, Jl. Soekarno Hatta No.KM. 9, Tondo, Mantikulore, Palu, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. This research took place from February to October 2024. This study primarily used quantitative data, which focused on numerical measurements to identify and analyze relationships between variables. The sources of data are: (1) Primary Data: This data is directly collected from respondents, specifically postgraduate students of Tadulako University, through a structured questionnaire or survey; (2) Secondary Data: Data from existing literature or previous studies.

The data collection technique employed in this study was survey. This method was suitable for gathering quantitative data from a large sample of participants. The survey included questions designed to capture information regarding the respondents' gender, age, occupation, and other variables relevant to the research. Table 1 is a comparative table of respondent characteristics based on gender, age and occupation. The population in this study were all active postgraduate students of Tadulako University with a total of 630 people. With a sample size of 86 students. Determination of the number of samples based on the Slovin formula as follows:

$$n = N / N.e^2 + 1 = 630 / (630).(0,1)^2 + 1 = 86$$

Description: n (Number of Samples); N (Number of Populations); e (Tolerable Margin of Error).

Data analysis was conducted using two main techniques. First, descriptive statistical analysis was applied to summarize the main features of the data, including the frequency, percentage, and distribution

of respondents based on gender, age, and occupation. Second, inferential statistical analysis (path analysis) was employed to test the relationships among the studied variables. The analysis was performed using SmartPLS 4 software, which was appropriate for structural equation modeling (SEM) and path analysis. By employing these techniques, this study aims to explain cause-effect relationships among the variables and ensure that the results are statistically valid and reliable.

The research instrument was a structured questionnaire designed based on established constructs from prior studies. Each item was measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Content validity was ensured through expert judgment, while a pilot test involving 30 respondents was conducted to assess clarity and reliability. The final questionnaire demonstrated satisfactory reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. The sample was drawn from a population of 630 active postgraduate students at Tadulako University. Using the Slovin formula with a 10% margin of error, the minimum required sample size was 86 respondents, which was deemed sufficient to represent the population while balancing feasibility. This justification ensures that the sample size is both statistically appropriate and practically manageable.

Convergent validity evaluation is carried out by looking at the loading factor value. The Loading factor value is a quantity that shows the relationship between the construct and its indicators. The convergent validity value is declared valid if the outer loading value is above 0.50 (Yusoff et al. 2020). After processing using the SmartPLS 4.0 application, the results of the loading factor calculations can be observed in the Table 2.

The Table 2 shows that all indicators have a loading factor value above 0.5. Indicators that have a loading factor value above 0.5 are declared to have high validity so that they meet the requirements of convergent validity. Evaluation of discriminant validity is carried out by comparing the root value of the Average Variance Extract (AVE) with the correlation between constructs. Variables are considered to meet discriminant validity if the root value of AVE is higher than the correlation of the constructs (Rönkkö & Cho, 2022). A good AVE is required to have a value of more than 0.5. The Table 3 shows the AVE and square root values of AVE for each construct in this study.

The SmartPLS 4.0 output results for the composite reliability value are depicted in the following Table 4. The table shows that the AVE value for each construct has met the requirements, which is more than 0.5. A construct is declared reliable if it has a composite reliability value > 0.7 .

Based on the results of the analysis, it is known that the composite reliability value for all constructs exceeds 0.7. Therefore, all constructs are stated to have good reliability according to the minimum required limit. Analysis of variance (R²) or determination test is carried out to determine the magnitude of the correlation between the independent variables and the dependent variable. The value of the determination

coefficient based on the results of the analysis using Smart PLS 4.0 can be observed in the Table 5.

From the results of the analysis as shown in the table above, it is known that Brand awareness is able to explain the variability of the Trust and Influencer Marketing constructs by 57.1%, the remaining 42.9% is explained by other constructs not examined in this study. In addition, the results of the analysis also show that Purchase Intention is able to explain the Trust and influencer marketing constructs by 50.7%. Furthermore, the results of the analysis also show that Trust is able to explain the variability of the Influencer Marketing construct by 50.2%.

Table 1. Respondent characteristics based on gender, age and occupation

Variable	n	%	Variable	n	%
Gender			Occupation		
Male	35	41%	Student	35	41%
Female	51	59%	Housewife	3	4%
Age			Civil Servant	25	30%
21-25 years	13	15%	Teacher	8	8%
26-30 years	60	70%	Consultant	2	3%
31-35 years	9	10%	Private Employee	8	8%
Over 36 years	4	5%	Tutor	4	5%
			Driver	1	1%

Table 2. Loading factor values

	X1.	Y.	Z.1.	Z.2.		X1.	Y.	Z.1.	Z.2.
X1.2	0.834				Z.1.1			0.834	
X1.3	0.763				Z.1.2			0.887	
X1.4	0.833				Z.1.3			0.875	
X1.5	0.798				Z.1.4			0.845	
X1.6	0.812				Z.2.1				0.861
Y.1		0.788			Z.2.2				0.843
Y.2		0.825			Z.2.3				0.878
Y.3		0.877			Z.2.4				0.860

Table 3. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) Value

Variables	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Brand Awareness	0.740
Influencer Marketing	0.653
Purchase Intention	0.741
Trust	0.690

Thus, the research hypothesis framework can be described in Figure 1. Based on the hypothesis framework, the hypotheses proposed in this study are as follows:

- H1: Influencer marketing has a significant effect on students' brand awareness.
- H2: Influencer marketing has a significant effect on students' Purchase intention.
- H3: Influencer marketing has a significant effect on trust.
- H4: Trust has a significant effect on students' brand awareness.
- H5: Trust has a significant effect on students' Purchase intention.
- H6: Trust significantly mediates the effect of influencer marketing on brand awareness.
- H7: Trust significantly mediates the effect of influencer marketing on purchase intention.

RESULTS

Hypothesis testing is carried out based on the results of the inner model test (structural model), including the R-square output, parameter coefficients, and t-statistics. The structural model of this study is described in Figure 2. Furthermore, the results of the path coefficients in this study are described in the following Table 6.

Thus, the hypothesis test (direct effect) shows:

H1: Influencer marketing has a significant effect on students' brand awareness.

The test results show a t-statistic value of 5.291 and a P value of 0.000. From these results, the t-statistic is significant, because the t-statistic > 1.66 with a P value > 0.05 so that the first hypothesis is accepted. This proves that Influencer Marketing has an influence on Brand Awareness. This is in line with the findings of Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández (2019), influencer engagement and influence have recently become the digital consumer standard for increasing brand awareness and purchase intent.

H2: Influencer marketing has a significant effect on students' Purchase intention.

The test results show a t-statistic value of 2.686 and a P value of 0.007. From these results, the t-statistic is significant, because the t-statistic > 1.66 with a P value > 0.05 so that the second hypothesis is accepted. This proves that Influencer Marketing has an influence on Purchase Intention. This supports the conclusions drawn by Saad et al. (2025).

Table 4. Composite reliability value

Variables	Composite Reliability Value
Brand Awareness	0.919
Influencer Marketing	0.904
Purchase Intention	0.919
Trust	0.870

Table 5. R-square value

Variables	R-square	Adjusted R-square
Brand Awareness	0.571	0.561
Purchase Intention	0.507	0.495
Trust	0.502	0.496

Table 6. Path coefficients results

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Influencer Marketing → Brand Awareness	0.564	0.564	0.107	5.291	0.000
Influencer Marketing → Purchase Intention	0.354	0.396	0.132	2.686	0.007
Influencer Marketing → Trust	0.708	0.706	0.065	10.840	0.000
Trust → Brand Awareness	0.243	0.240	0.116	2.087	0.037
Trust → Purchase Intention	0.416	0.402	0.129	3.225	0.001

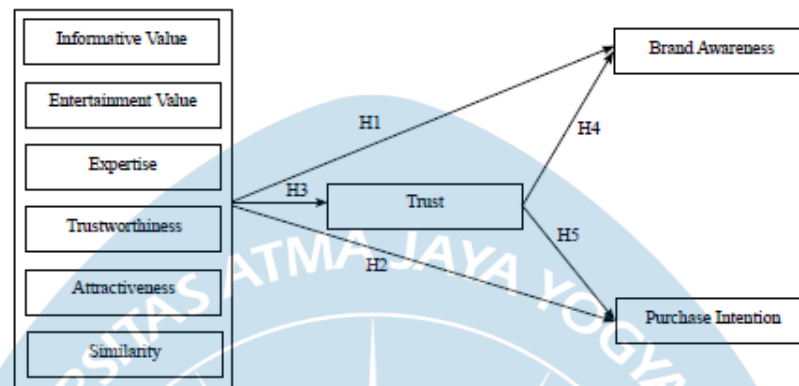


Figure 1. Research hypothesis framework

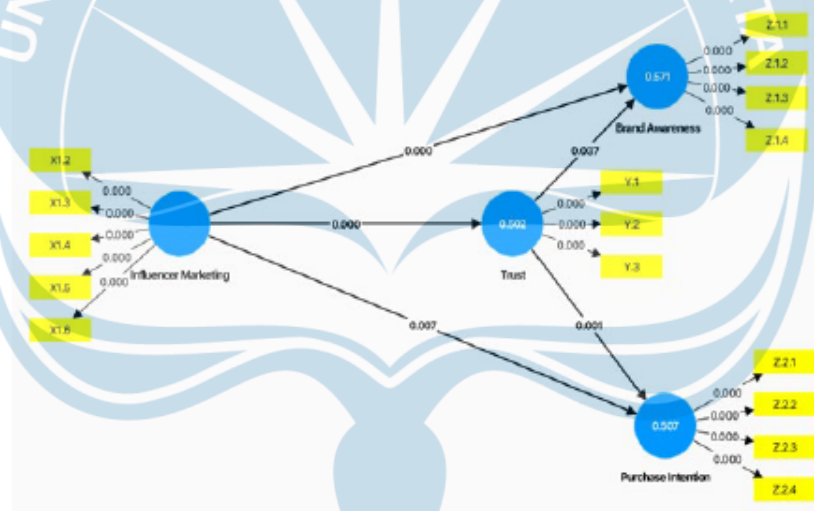


Figure 2. Bootstrapping model

H3: Influencer marketing has a significant effect on trust.

The test results show a t-statistic value of 10.840 and a P value of 0.000. From these results, the t-statistic is significant, because the t-statistic > 1.66 with a P value > 0.05 so that the third hypothesis is accepted. This proves

that Influencer Marketing has an influence on Trust. Trust is a key element that strengthens the relationship between influencers and potential consumers, so it can affect how effectively marketing messages are received and translated into purchase intentions (Chetioui et al. 2020).

H4: Trust has a significant effect on student brand awareness.

The test results show a t-statistic value of 2.087 and a P value of 0.037. From these results, the t-statistic is significant, because the t-statistic > 1.66 with a P value > 0.05 so that the fourth hypothesis is accepted. This proves that Trust has an influence on Brand Awareness. Influencer marketing is a link between brand awareness and the decision whether consumers will buy or not, but its influence is indirect (Ali & Alquda, 2022).

H5: Trust has a significant effect on student Purchase intention.

The test results show a t-statistic value of 3.225 and a P value of 0.001. From these results, the t-statistic is significant, because the t-statistic is > 1.66 with a P value > 0.05 so that the fifth hypothesis is accepted. This proves that Trust has an influence on Purchase Intention in line with the findings of M. Arpah et al. (2023).

Meanwhile, based on hypothesis testing (indirect influence) shows on Table 7:

H6: Trust significantly mediates the influence of influencer marketing on brand awareness

The test results show a t-statistic value of 1.986 and a P value of 0.047. From these results, the t-statistic is significant, because the t-statistic is > 1.66 with a P value > 0.05 so that the fifth hypothesis is accepted. This proves that Trust mediates the influence of Influencer Marketing on Brand Awareness.

H7: Trust significantly mediates the influence of influencer marketing on purchase intention

The test results show a t-statistic value of 3.108 and a P value of 0.002. From these results, it is stated that the t-statistic is significant, because the t-statistic is > 1.66 with a P value > 0.05 so that the fifth hypothesis is

accepted. This proves that Trust mediates the influence of Influencer Marketing on Purchase Intention.

Influencer Marketing Significantly Influences Brand Awareness

The findings demonstrate that influencer marketing significantly enhances brand awareness among students. Respondents reported that greater recognition of mobile phone brands are frequently promoted by influencers. This aligns with Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández (2019), who emphasize that consistent influencer engagement has become a standard mechanism for strengthening consumer awareness. Similarly, Leung et al. (2022) argue that social media influencers function as opinion leaders whose repetitive exposure increases brand recall. However, compared to traditional advertising, influencer-driven awareness relies more heavily on perceived authenticity and relevance of content (Hudders et al. 2021), which explains why students easily remember brands endorsed by influencers; they trust.

Influencer Marketing Significantly Influences Purchase Intention

This study confirms that influencer marketing positively shapes purchase intention, as students perceive influencer-generated content particularly reviews and demonstrations as useful in decision-making. This result corroborates Saad et al. (2025), who found that influencer credibility strongly affects purchase decisions among university students in Saudi Arabia. Likewise, Hasan et al. (2025) emphasize that influencer marketing, when combined with product quality, leads to higher consumer satisfaction and stronger purchase intent. Nevertheless, our findings highlight that while influencers increase interest, final purchase decisions are still moderated by pragmatic factors such as price and personal needs, consistent with Martínez-López et al. (2020), who note that influencer marketing alone is insufficient to guarantee actual purchases.

Table 7. Path Coefficients Results (indirect effects)

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Influencer Marketing → Brand Awareness	0.172	0.171	0.087	1.986	0.047
Influencer Marketing → Purchase Intention	0.295	0.283	0.095	3.108	0.002

Influencer Marketing Significantly Influences Trust

The findings demonstrate that influencer marketing fosters consumer trust, particularly when influencers exhibit authenticity, transparency, and consistent communication. This supports Chetoui et al. (2020), who identify credibility as a central factor in shaping consumer confidence, and Singh et al. (2020), who note that consumers may trust influencers as much as personal acquaintances. Extending these insights, this study shows that students' trust is shaped not only by expertise and content relevance but also by interactive engagement, such as responding to questions or providing feedback, which strengthens relational bonds. Such engagement positions influencers as relational partners rather than distant opinion leaders, fostering long-term trust. Importantly, this trust reduces perceived risks in online purchasing, enhances message credibility, and mediates the effectiveness of influencer marketing in translating brand exposure into stronger purchase intentions.

Trust Significantly Influences Brand Awareness

The findings reveal that trust plays a crucial role in strengthening brand awareness, reinforcing prior studies such as Ali & Alquda (2022), who emphasize its mediating function between influencer marketing and brand equity. When students perceive influencers as credible and authentic, they are more likely to recognize and recall promoted brands, which is consistent with Sari Dewi et al. (2020), who highlight the impact of trust on brand memorability. This study extends existing knowledge by demonstrating that trust not only reinforces cognitive recognition through repetitive exposure but also creates a relational dimension, wherein brand awareness is shaped by perceptions of influencer integrity and consistency. Thus, trust operates as both a psychological and relational mechanism, amplifying the effectiveness of influencer-driven communication in embedding brands within consumers' evaluative and decision-making processes.

Trust Significantly Influences Purchase Intention

Trust emerges as a critical determinant of purchase intention. Respondents indicate that they are more likely to buy products endorsed by influencers they consider credible. This result is consistent with M. Arpah et al. (2023), who found that trust reduces

perceived risks in online purchasing, thereby strengthening intention to buy. Moreover, honest reviews and transparent communication by influencers are essential in mitigating uncertainty, which echoes findings by Hudders et al. (2021), regarding influencer authenticity. Our results highlight that while rational considerations such as price remain important, trust operates as a psychological enabler that facilitates decision-making.

The Mediating Role of Trust

This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that trust significantly mediates the relationship between influencer marketing and both brand awareness and purchase intention. These results are consistent with Popova et al. (2019), who emphasize the centrality of trust in digital marketing effectiveness. However, unlike prior studies that often treat trust as a static factor, our findings suggest that trust is dynamically built through consistent exposure, authenticity, and interactive engagement. This insight provides a novel contribution, showing that the effectiveness of influencer marketing depends not merely on brand visibility but also on cultivating sustainable trust-based relationships.

Managerial Implications

In practical terms, the results of this study provide important guidance for marketing managers aiming to maximize the effectiveness of influencer marketing in enhancing brand awareness and purchase intention, particularly among university students. The findings confirm that students tend to recall and recognize mobile phone brands frequently promoted by influencers they follow on social media. Therefore, managers should prioritize collaborations with influencers who not only have substantial reach but also demonstrate strong engagement with the target demographic. Selecting influencers based on credibility, authenticity, and alignment with the product category is essential to ensure that marketing messages resonate effectively with younger consumers.

Beyond brand exposure, influencer marketing has been shown to directly influence purchase intention. To translate this potential into tangible sales outcomes, marketing managers should encourage influencers to deliver authentic product reviews, practical demonstrations, and transparent comparisons

that assist consumers in evaluating product value. Offering influencers access to exclusive product trials or early launches can enhance the credibility of their recommendations and foster stronger audience engagement. A key contribution of this study is the evidence that trust mediates the impact of influencer marketing on both brand awareness and purchase intention. For this reason, managers must develop campaigns that actively cultivate trust. This can be achieved through transparent disclosure of sponsorships, clear communication of both strengths and weaknesses of the product, and consistent interaction with consumers via Q&A sessions, live streams, or comment responses. Such practices strengthen consumer confidence and improve the perceived integrity of both influencers and brands.

Furthermore, sustainable influencer marketing requires moving beyond short-term promotional campaigns. Managers are encouraged to establish long-term partnerships with carefully selected influencers to ensure consistent messaging and ongoing credibility. This approach can create deeper consumer-brand relationships and reduce reliance on one-off promotions that may only yield temporary results. Companies should also monitor influencer performance using key performance indicators (KPIs) such as engagement rate, conversion rate, and sentiment analysis to evaluate campaign effectiveness and make necessary adjustments.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

This study demonstrates that influencer marketing significantly affects both brand awareness and purchase intention among graduate students, with trust serving as a crucial mediating factor. Specifically, influencers enhance brand recognition through consistent and relevant content, while trust strengthens these effects by reducing perceived risk and reinforcing confidence in purchase decisions. The novelty of this study lies in highlighting trust not merely as a complementary factor but as a pivotal mechanism that amplifies the impact of influencer marketing within the student market segment. However, given the limited sample size, these findings should be interpreted with caution and may not be fully generalizable beyond this context.

Recommendations

Mobile phone companies targeting graduate students are encouraged to employ influencer marketing strategies that emphasize trust-building, such as selecting credible influencers, ensuring transparency in communication, and fostering authentic engagement with audiences. Higher education institutions may also incorporate awareness of influencer marketing into digital literacy initiatives, enabling students to critically evaluate marketing content. Future research should broaden the scope by including diverse student populations across different institutions and examining other product categories to test the robustness and applicability of these findings in wider consumer contexts.

FUNDING STATEMENT: This research is funded by the BLU Fund of the Faculty of Economics and Business, Tadulako University for the 2024 Fiscal Year in accordance with the Research Program Implementation Assignment Agreement Number: 2653/UN28/KU/2024 dated May 28, 2024.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST: The author declares no conflict of interest.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI STATEMENT: During the preparation of this work, the authors used Grammarly in order to check grammar and polish text. After using this tool/service, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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