SCORE

Score: Jurnal Lentera Manajemen Pemasaran
Volume 04 No 02 November 2026
E-ISSN:2987-7903

https://lenteranusa.id/



Social Media Marketing and Purchase Intention among Generation Z in Ambon: The Mediating Role of Brand Awareness

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Received: 15-09-2026 Revised : 20-10-2026 Accepted : 28-10-2026 Published : 02-11-2026

Abstract
Social media offers food and beverage (F&B) businesses a means of communicating with digitally engaged consumers, although the mechanisms connecting social media marketing to purchase intention warrant closer examination. This study investigates the relationships among social media marketing, brand awareness and purchase intention among Generation Z consumers exposed to F&B marketing in Ambon City, Indonesia. A quantitative explanatory survey with purposive eligibility criteria was analysed using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). The original analysis reports positive relationships from social media marketing to brand awareness ($\beta = 0.706$, $t = 20.063$), brand awareness to purchase intention ($\beta = 0.361$, $t = 5.173$), and social media marketing to purchase intention ($\beta = 0.565$, $t = 8.713$), each with a reported p-value below 0.001. The model explains 49.8% of brand awareness and 73.8% of purchase intention variance. Multiplying the two component paths yields an indicative indirect coefficient of 0.255; however, its bootstrapped confidence interval and significance were not provided, so statistical mediation remains unconfirmed. The findings emphasise the combined importance of memorable brand communication and direct persuasive content for local F&B marketers. Confirmation of the final sample details and indirect-effect inference is required before publication.

Keywords: social media marketing, brand awareness, purchase intention, generation z, food and beverage

Introduction

Social media platforms increasingly connect brands and consumers through short-form videos, customer conversations and interactive product information. This creates opportunities for food and beverage (F&B) businesses to engage prospective buyers before a physical store visit. Social media marketing is more than exposure: interactivity, entertainment, trendiness, customisation and electronic word of mouth can influence the formation of consumer–brand relationships (Kim & Ko, 2012; Godey et al., 2016). Research on e-commerce marketing similarly identifies several dimensions through which consumers assess brand-generated digital activity (Yadav & Rahman, 2017). Social media elements can also encourage value co-creation and consumer–brand engagement (Cheung et al., 2021).



For Generation Z, social media is an important environment for discovering food, sharing recommendations and judging a brand's relevance. Yet online visibility does not automatically imply purchase intention. Consumers must first notice the brand, retain it in memory and connect its name with particular products or experiences. Keller's (1993) customer-based brand equity framework identifies brand awareness as a fundamental component of brand knowledge. The progression from exposure to recognition and recall offers a plausible explanation for the influence of social media marketing on subsequent purchase consideration.

The Ambon City F&B market is a particularly relevant setting for examining these relationships because local enterprises can use relatively accessible digital channels to compete for consumer attention. Existing studies concerning marketing practice, e-commerce and MSME capacity in Maluku provide contextual support for strengthening digital communication among smaller enterprises (Asnawi et al., 2025; Hamizar et al., 2024; Pelupessy et al., 2023b). Research concerning consumers of F&B products in Ambon has also linked social media marketing and fear of missing out to purchasing decisions (Tubalowony et al., 2025). The present analysis concentrates on a separate psychological mechanism: brand awareness.

Previous empirical findings provide a foundation but leave room for closer interpretation. Bilgin (2018) found that social media marketing activities were related to brand awareness and other brand outcomes. Cheung et al. (2020) demonstrated that interactivity, electronic word of mouth and trendiness could support brand-related knowledge through engagement. Hutter et al. (2013) connected social media interactions with awareness and purchase intention, while Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016) found that consumer-created and firm-created communications do not necessarily influence branding outcomes in identical ways. These differences suggest that marketing activities may shape buying intentions through both brand-related cognition and direct persuasive responses.

In Ambon, the research opportunity lies in evaluating these two pathways concurrently within local F&B consumption. The model brings together social media marketing as the communication stimulus, brand awareness as the proposed cognitive mechanism, and purchase intention as the behavioural intention outcome. By testing the direct paths alongside an indirect pathway, the study can examine the contribution of brand awareness beyond simple exposure. This is theoretically relevant to brand-knowledge development and practically relevant to local F&B businesses seeking to convert attention into purchase consideration (Pelupessy et al., 2023a; Tabelessy, 2024).

Social Media Marketing and Brand Awareness

Social media marketing has become an important approach for businesses to introduce their products and build relationships with consumers. Through platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook, businesses can share product information, communicate with customers, and present promotional content in a more attractive and accessible way. For food and beverage (F&B) businesses, social media provides an opportunity to display product photographs, videos, menu information, and customer experiences that may attract potential buyers. These activities are particularly relevant to Generation Z consumers, who frequently use digital platforms to discover products and explore available choices. When consumers repeatedly encounter content



from a particular business, they may become more familiar with its name, products, and visual identity.

Brand awareness refers to consumers' ability to recognise and recall a brand within a particular product category. Developing brand awareness is important because consumers are more likely to remember brands they have encountered frequently through marketing communication. Bilgin (2018) explained that social media marketing activities contribute to brand awareness by creating opportunities for brands to interact with consumers and maintain their presence in digital environments. Similarly, Cheung et al. (2020) highlighted the importance of social media marketing activities in influencing consumers' responses to brands. Informative content can help consumers understand the products being offered, while entertaining and interactive content can encourage them to pay greater attention to a brand. Consumer comments, recommendations, and electronic word of mouth may also support brand recognition by increasing the visibility of a business among social media users.

In the context of F&B businesses in Ambon City, consistent social media marketing can help local businesses become more familiar to Generation Z consumers. For example, a local café that regularly uploads information about its menu, new products, and customer experiences may have greater opportunities to remain in consumers' memories. Although social media exposure does not automatically lead to purchasing, it can strengthen consumers' ability to identify a brand when considering F&B products. Therefore, social media marketing is expected to have a positive relationship with brand awareness.

H1: Social media marketing has a positive effect on brand awareness.

Brand Awareness and Purchase Intention

Brand awareness is one of the important considerations that may influence consumers when choosing products from different brands. In a competitive market, consumers are often exposed to several businesses offering similar products, prices, and promotional activities. Under these conditions, brands that are familiar to consumers may have an advantage because they are easier to recognise and remember. Keller (1993) explained that brand awareness is an important component of brand knowledge, particularly through consumers' ability to recognise and recall a brand. When a brand is already familiar, consumers may find it easier to include that brand among the alternatives they consider before making a purchase.

Purchase intention refers to consumers' willingness or tendency to purchase a particular product after considering the available information and alternatives. Although purchase intention does not always result in an actual transaction, it reflects consumers' interest in choosing a product in the future. Brand awareness can contribute to this process because familiar brands may require less effort to identify and evaluate. Consumers who recognise a brand may also feel more confident considering its products, particularly when they have limited information about competing alternatives. Hutter et al. (2013) examined consumer engagement with brand-related communication and demonstrated the relevance of brand awareness to purchase intention. Their findings provide a basis for understanding how consumers' familiarity with a brand can contribute to purchasing considerations.

For Generation Z consumers in Ambon City, brand awareness may become particularly important when selecting food and beverage products. Consumers who frequently see a local



café or beverage brand on social media may remember that business when deciding where to purchase food or drinks. The ability to recognise a brand's name, logo, or products can make it easier for consumers to consider the brand among other available options. However, brand awareness alone does not guarantee a purchase because price, product quality, personal preferences, and other considerations may also influence the final decision. Based on this explanation, higher brand awareness is expected to encourage stronger purchase intention among Generation Z consumers.

H2: Brand awareness has a positive effect on purchase intention.

Social Media Marketing and Purchase Intention

Social media marketing is not only useful for introducing a brand but can also encourage consumers to develop an intention to purchase its products. Businesses use social media to communicate product benefits, introduce new menus, share promotional offers, and interact directly with potential customers. These activities allow consumers to obtain information before deciding to purchase. Compared with conventional promotional channels, social media provides opportunities for two-way communication, enabling consumers to ask questions, read other customers' experiences, and respond to marketing content. For F&B businesses, attractive food photographs, short videos, promotional messages, and customer recommendations may encourage consumers to consider trying the products being offered.

Kim and Ko (2012) examined social media marketing activities and their relationships with consumer responses, including purchase intention. Their study indicates that marketing activities carried out through social media can contribute to consumers' evaluations and behavioural intentions. Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016) also demonstrated the relevance of social media communication to consumers' responses towards brands. These findings suggest that social media marketing can influence purchase intention by providing information and encouraging consumers to engage with brand-related content. For instance, consumers who discover an appealing food product through a social media post may develop an interest in purchasing it because the content presents the product in an attractive way. Promotional offers and positive customer experiences may further support their purchasing considerations.

Among Generation Z consumers in Ambon City, social media marketing may influence purchase intention because digital platforms are commonly used to explore products and discover new culinary businesses. A local F&B business that shares relevant content, responds to customer enquiries, and communicates product information effectively may encourage potential customers to consider purchasing its products. Importantly, this relationship does not necessarily depend entirely on brand awareness. Consumers may become interested in purchasing after seeing a particular promotional message or product presentation, even when they have limited previous familiarity with the brand. Therefore, social media marketing is expected to have a direct positive relationship with purchase intention.

H3: Social media marketing has a positive effect on purchase intention.

Brand Awareness as a Mediator between Social Media Marketing and Purchase Intention

Social media marketing may influence purchase intention both directly and indirectly through brand awareness. The direct relationship occurs when marketing content encourages



consumers to consider purchasing a product, while the indirect relationship involves the development of brand awareness before purchase intention emerges. In this process, social media marketing provides consumers with information and repeated exposure to a brand. These experiences may help consumers recognise and remember the brand, making it more likely to be considered when a purchasing need arises. Brand awareness therefore provides a possible explanation for how social media marketing activities may contribute to consumers' purchase intention.

The proposed mediating relationship can be understood through the connections among the three variables. Social media marketing activities may first strengthen brand awareness by increasing brand visibility, encouraging interactions, and presenting information that consumers can remember. As consumers become more familiar with a brand, they may be more willing to consider purchasing its products. This explanation is consistent with Keller's (1993) perspective on brand knowledge and the role of awareness in consumers' evaluations. Findings from Bilgin (2018) and Hutter et al. (2013) also provide relevant theoretical and empirical support for the relationships connecting social media marketing, brand awareness, and consumer purchasing responses. However, evidence of separate relationships does not automatically establish a mediating effect.

For example, Generation Z consumers in Ambon City may initially discover a local beverage business through TikTok or Instagram. After repeatedly viewing its products, promotional content, and customer interactions, they may begin to recognise the brand and remember its products. When they later consider buying a beverage, that familiarity may encourage them to include the business among their purchasing options. This illustrates how brand awareness may connect social media marketing activities with purchase intention. At the same time, some consumers may develop an intention to purchase immediately after viewing attractive promotional content, indicating that a direct relationship may also exist alongside the indirect relationship.

Zhao et al. (2010) emphasised that mediation should be evaluated through the significance of the indirect effect. Accordingly, this study proposes brand awareness as a mediating variable and examines the indirect relationship using the bootstrapping procedure in PLS-SEM. A statistically significant indirect effect would provide evidence that brand awareness contributes to explaining the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention. The interpretation of the mediation mechanism will depend on the statistical results, including the direct and indirect effects. Based on this theoretical explanation, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Brand awareness mediates the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention.

Method

A quantitative, cross-sectional explanatory survey was designed to examine three constructs: social media marketing (SMM), brand awareness (BA) and purchase intention (PI) in the F&B sector of Ambon City. Eligibility criteria were residence in Ambon City, membership in the study-defined Generation Z age group (approximately 17–26 years), active use of social media and prior exposure to digital F&B marketing. Recruitment used purposive sampling, and



responses were obtained by online questionnaire. The source draft identifies an anticipated sample of 150–200 people but does not provide the final number of usable responses, the number screened out, the exact fieldwork period or an auditable recruitment log. These details require confirmation from the original survey dataset; an anticipated sample is not presented as an achieved sample.

Responses were recorded on five-point agreement scales. The intended dimensions of SMM were informativeness, interactivity, entertainment, trendiness, customisation and electronic word of mouth; BA comprised recognition, recall, top-of-mind awareness and familiarity; and PI captured stated likelihood, preference and consistency of intended purchase. Established work on perceived social media marketing activities (Kim & Ko, 2012; Yadav & Rahman, 2017) and brand knowledge (Keller, 1993) informed the conceptual structure. The available document does not contain the actual item wording, item count by construct, scale translation record, pilot-test evidence or the SmartPLS output needed to verify a higher-order measurement specification. The reported results are therefore treated as a three-construct model, pending checks against the original instrument and model configuration.

PLS-SEM was applied to estimate the measurement and structural relationships. Reported internal consistency indices included Cronbach's alpha, rho_A and composite reliability, while convergent validity was assessed with average variance extracted (AVE). Discriminant validity was examined through heterotrait–monotrait ratios (HTMT), following Henseler et al. (2015). Structural results included R^2, adjusted R^2, f^2 and bootstrapped direct path coefficients, t-statistics and p-values. In line with PLS-SEM reporting guidance (Hair et al., 2019), an inferential test of H4 requires the bootstrapped specific indirect effect and its confidence interval. The version of SmartPLS, the bootstrap resampling count, missing-data treatment, indicator loadings, collinearity statistics and the original Fornell–Larcker correlation matrix are unavailable in the supplied document and should be verified before submission.

Results and Discussion

Measurement model

The supplied analytical summary reports acceptable internal consistency and convergent validity for all three constructs. Cronbach's alpha ranges from 0.829 to 0.972, composite reliability from 0.886 to 0.977, and AVE from 0.661 to 0.878 (Table 1). The SMM reliability statistics are notably high, suggesting strong internal consistency but also indicating that potential item redundancy should be checked using the original indicator loadings and wording. Values reported below are transcribed directly from the original manuscript, without reconstructing missing indicator-level results.

Table 1. Construct reliability and convergent validity

Construct	Cronbach's α	rho_A	Composite reliability	AVE
Brand awareness	0.829	0.833	0.886	0.661
Purchase intention	0.887	0.889	0.922	0.748
Social media marketing	0.972	0.972	0.977	0.878



Discriminant validity was assessed using HTMT. The values for BA–PI (0.882), BA–SMM (0.784) and PI–SMM (0.882) are below the more permissive 0.90 benchmark, although the two 0.882 values exceed a stricter 0.85 guideline (Henseler et al., 2015). The conclusion is therefore threshold-dependent. The original draft does not give the latent-variable correlation matrix required to reproduce a Fornell–Larcker table, nor confidence intervals around HTMT; neither has been fabricated in this revision.

Table 2. Discriminant validity: heterotrait–monotrait ratios (HTMT)

Construct pair	HTMT	Comparison with 0.90
Brand awareness – Purchase intention	0.882	Below threshold
Brand awareness – Social media marketing	0.784	Below threshold
Purchase intention – Social media marketing	0.882	Below threshold

Structural model: explanatory power and effect sizes

As Table 3 shows, SMM explains 49.8% of BA variation (R^2 = 0.498; adjusted R^2 = 0.495). Together, SMM and BA explain 73.8% of PI variation (R^2 = 0.738; adjusted R^2 = 0.735). These results describe explanatory power within the observed sample; they are not evidence of out-of-sample predictive accuracy or causal identification. The reported f^2 values indicate a large contribution of SMM to BA (0.994), a medium contribution of BA to PI (0.250), and a large contribution of SMM to PI (0.612), using conventional descriptive benchmarks (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 3. Explained variance of endogenous constructs

Endogenous construct	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Variance explained
Brand awareness	0.498	0.495	49.8%
Purchase intention	0.738	0.735	73.8%

Table 4. Reported effect sizes (f^2)

Predictor → Outcome	f^2	Interpretive magnitude
SMM → Brand awareness	0.994	Large
Brand awareness → Purchase intention	0.250	Medium
SMM → Purchase intention	0.612	Large

Direct hypothesis testing

All three reported direct coefficients are positive and statistically significant at the 5% level. SMM shows the largest reported association with BA (β = 0.706, t = 20.063), while its direct association with PI (β = 0.565, t = 8.713) is greater than the BA–PI coefficient (β = 0.361,

t = 5.173). The submitted draft records p = 0.000 for these paths, which is presented here in the conventional form p < 0.001. Table 5 uses only the original numerical results.

Table 5. Direct-effect hypothesis tests

Hypothesis	Structural path	β	t-statistic	p-value	Decision
H1	SMM → Brand awareness	0.706	20.063	< 0.001	Supported
H2	Brand awareness → Purchase intention	0.361	5.173	< 0.001	Supported
H3	SMM → Purchase intention	0.565	8.713	< 0.001	Supported

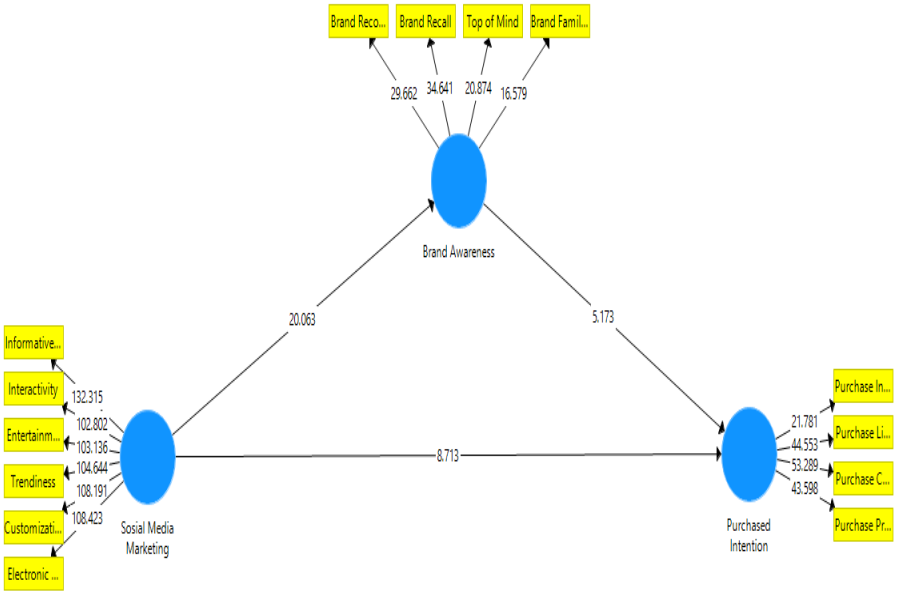


Figure 1.Bootsraping Model

Indirect-effect interpretation

The product of the reported SMM → BA (0.706) and BA → PI (0.361) coefficients is 0.254866, giving an indicative standardised indirect coefficient of approximately 0.255. Adding the reported direct coefficient of 0.565 gives an indicative total coefficient of approximately 0.820. These are arithmetic reconstructions from rounded path estimates, not independently estimated SmartPLS mediation outputs. A positive product is compatible with the proposed mechanism, but it cannot establish a statistically significant indirect effect without its bootstrapped confidence interval. Accordingly, H4 is not classified as supported or rejected at this stage (Zhao et al., 2010).



Table 6. Mediation assessment using available information

Effect	Estimate	Inference available
Direct SMM → PI	0.565	Yes: $p < 0.001$
Indirect SMM → BA → PI	≈ 0.255*	No: CI and p unavailable
Total SMM → PI	≈ 0.820*	No: original CI unavailable
H4: mediation	Not established	Original bootstrap output needed

Discussion

Social media marketing and brand awareness

The positive SMM–BA coefficient supports the proposition that digital communication is associated with stronger brand recognition and recall among the surveyed consumers. This relationship is consistent with Bilgin's (2018) findings regarding social media marketing and brand awareness and the brand-knowledge pathway observed by Cheung et al. (2020). For Ambon's F&B businesses, repeated exposure through informative, interactive and recognisable content may help brands remain available in consumer memory. The high f^2 estimate implies that SMM is an important explanatory variable within the fitted model, although the particular dimensions responsible cannot be ranked without indicator- or dimension-level estimates.

Brand awareness and purchase intention

The BA–PI path indicates that brand memory is associated with stronger intention to purchase. Keller's (1993) brand knowledge framework provides an explanation: consumers are more likely to consider brands that are accessible in memory at the time of evaluation. Hutter et al. (2013) similarly report links among social media engagement, awareness and purchase intention. This finding does not imply that awareness alone ensures a completed transaction; perceived quality, price, access and other decision factors remain outside the current model.

Direct contribution of social media marketing

A positive direct SMM–PI coefficient remains after BA is included. One interpretation is that social media content conveys immediate product cues, social validation or persuasive information beyond brand recognition. Research by Kim and Ko (2012), Godey et al. (2016) and Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016) suggests that digital communications can influence brand-related evaluations and consumer responses through several pathways. The finding is consistent with the practical need for F&B marketers to combine recognisable brand identities with content that answers consumers' immediate product questions. However, the cross-sectional design cannot identify the temporal sequence or eliminate reverse association.

Proposed mediation and implications for local firms

The calculated product of the two component paths is positive and thus consistent with a potential awareness pathway, but it is not yet a formal mediation finding. The interpretation must remain conditional until the specific indirect effect is tested through bootstrapping. This restraint matters because significant component paths do not replace an indirect-effect confidence interval



(Zhao et al., 2010). Future analyses could also examine differences across platforms and subgroups, and test predictive performance using holdout procedures outlined in contemporary PLS-SEM guidance (Hair et al., 2019).

For small F&B enterprises in Ambon, the practical priority is to communicate a stable brand identity while providing content that is relevant to Generation Z: clear product descriptions, recognisable visuals, responsive interactions and credible customer conversations. Local studies on e-commerce transformation, market networks and SME marketing strategies underscore the value of systematic digital capability development, although their contexts are not identical to the present survey (Hamizar et al., 2024; Mardiani et al., 2024; Pelupessy et al., 2023b; Tubalawony et al., 2024). Managers should assess outcomes with platform analytics and actual sales data where possible instead of treating stated purchase intention as confirmed purchasing behaviour. Related work on branding in Ambon also suggests a role for affective brand relationships, which could be included in future models (Tabelessy, 2024).

Conclusion

The study reports positive direct associations of social media marketing with brand awareness and purchase intention and a positive association of brand awareness with purchase intention among Generation Z respondents in Ambon's F&B context. The reported model explains 49.8% of brand awareness and 73.8% of purchase intention variance. A calculated indirect coefficient of approximately 0.255 is compatible with the proposed awareness mechanism, but mediation cannot be claimed as statistically established until the original bootstrapped indirect-effect confidence interval is supplied. The findings suggest that local F&B marketers should build recognisable brands while offering informative and engaging digital content. Their interpretation is constrained by non-probability sampling, a cross-sectional self-report design, the absence of observable purchase data and incomplete disclosure of the sampling and measurement procedures. Future research should provide full PLS-SEM outputs, examine the proposed mediation directly, and compare intention-based results with subsequent customer behaviour.

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