

THE DIGITAL TRINITY: INFLUENCERS, REVIEWS AND BRAND – QUANTIFYING THEIR SYNERGISTIC EFFECT ON FNB PURCHASE INTENTION

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Abstract: Trends in social media marketing have advanced significantly and are being utilized by culinary business operators. These trends are used to build Brand Awareness, which increases consumers' Purchase Intention. The purpose of this study is to analyze the effect of Influencer Marketing and Online Customer Reviews on Purchase Intention, with the mediating role of Brand Awareness. This study was analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Model (PLS-SEM). The collected data were then processed using SMART-PLS. A total of 160 consumers from the Gen Z and Y demographics were surveyed using questionnaires with a 5-point Likert scale. The study shows that Online Customer Reviews can influence Purchase Intention, unlike Influencer Marketing, which only affects Purchase Intention through Brand Awareness. This highlights the central role of Brand Awareness for every trend used, which, in this case, Influencer Marketing and Online Customer Reviews contribute to purchase intention. Therefore, operators in the culinary business must aim to balance the use of existing trends with efforts to enhance their Brand Awareness.

Keywords: *Brand Awareness, Culinary Industry, Influencer Marketing, Online Customer Reviews, Purchase Intention.*

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1. Introduction

The Food and Beverage (F&B) industry in Indonesia is one of the most dynamic and vital economic sectors, showing consistent and significant growth in recent years (Regimun et al., 2019). Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) indicate that in 2023, the number of food and beverage service businesses in Indonesia is expected to reach 4.85 million, representing an increase of around 21.13% compared to 2016, when the number was 4.01 million. This increase is also reflected in the sector's sales value, which has soared dramatically, reaching IDR 998.37 trillion in 2023, up 48.04% from the 2016 sales value of IDR 674.38 trillion (BPS, 2024). This industry is also the most significant contributor to the gross value added of the manufacturing industry, with a contribution of 23.15% (Tamin et al., 2022). The growth projection for 2023 is estimated to reach 5-7% (Ciptawan & Melina, 2023). At the regional level, this growth dynamic is also evident. In addition, Makassar City has approximately 19,000 MSME business units, with the culinary sector being the most dominant (Chahyono et al., 2023).

The strong growth of the F&B industry, both nationally and locally, while promising, has also created an increasingly fierce competition challenge (Rato et al., 2024). This creates a situation where high growth attracts many new players, which in turn increases market density and demands continuous innovation and the implementation of highly effective marketing strategies. Without the ability to innovate and stand out, many foods and beverage (F&B) businesses are at risk of failing in an increasingly crowded and competitive market. Therefore, success in the industry depends not only on macro growth trends but also on the ability of business actors to adapt and implement relevant strategies.

In today's digital era, business competition, particularly in the food and beverage (F&B) industry, necessitates adaptive and innovative marketing strategies to reach consumers (Mancuso et al., 2023) effectively. Consumer purchase intent is significantly influenced by brand perception, information, and credibility built through various communication channels (Singh et al., 2025). In this context, digital marketing has become a crucial tool for companies to build strong brand awareness, which serves as a vital prerequisite for influencing purchasing decisions (Salhab et al., 2023). Optimally, a well-planned and credible digital marketing strategy will result in a high level of brand awareness, which in turn will facilitate and encourage consumer purchase intent (Nishant et al., 2024).

In fact, many culinary companies face challenges in building effective brand awareness amid the rush of information and market competition (Shah et al., 2023). Most brands rely on influencer marketing to reach a wider audience and create authentic narratives (Yudhasepti et al., 2025). However, the effectiveness of these strategies is not always linear, as the credibility of influencers can vary (Luarn et al., 2025). On the other hand, online customer reviews have become a very trusted source of information for potential buyers (Katyal et. al., 2025). However, inconsistent quantity and quality of reviews can reduce their influence on purchase intent (Ahn & Lee, 2024). This empirical condition suggests that, although influencer marketing and online customer reviews are widely utilized, their impact on purchase intent exhibits variability, underscoring the need for a deeper understanding of the underlying mechanisms.

Previous studies have confirmed that influencer marketing has a positive influence on brand awareness and purchase intent (Munir & Watts, 2022). Similarly, other studies have proven that online customer reviews can significantly shape brand perception and consumer purchase intent (Beyari & Garamoun, 2024). Some literature also identifies the mediating role of brand awareness in the relationship between marketing strategy and purchase intent (Harin et al., 2023). Nonetheless, significant Research gaps remain, particularly in the simultaneous interaction between influencer marketing and online customer reviews, as well as in understanding how these two elements collectively influence purchase intent through brand awareness mediation in the specific context of the culinary industry. Research integrating these three variables remains limited, and no model comprehensively explains the synergies between them.

Taking these gaps into account, this study has a pressing need to provide both academic and practical insights into how influencer marketing and online customer reviews work synergistically to influence purchase intent, with brand awareness serving as a mediating variable. The unique aspect of this study is its examination of a mediation model that integrates the two marketing channels, an approach that has not been explored in depth in the context of the culinary industry. The primary purpose of this study is to empirically investigate the influence of influencer marketing and online customer reviews on purchase intention, with brand awareness serving as the mediating factor. The findings of this study are expected to

make a substantial contribution to the digital marketing literature and serve as a strategic guide for culinary industry players in designing more effective and integrated marketing campaigns.

2. Literature Review

Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing leverages credible individuals who influence their audience's purchasing decisions on social media (Joshi et al., 2023). This digital marketing strategy is effective in increasing brand awareness and enhancing product visibility among the target audience (Erwin et al., 2023; Joshi et al., 2023). Influencers also trigger a strong word of mouth (WOM), building consumer trust because they are perceived as more authentic (Lee et al., 2024). Additionally, they create a better brand image at a more affordable cost, as well as build a deep connection with the audience through supporting information (Leung et al., 2022)

In researching the effectiveness of influencer marketing, Liu & Zheng (2024) emphasized that similarities/homophily between influencers and audiences are an essential factor in building parasocial relationships. These similarities enhance the credibility of brands promoted by influencers and can lead to increased consumer purchase intent. There are three main indicators used by them, namely Informative Value, Authenticity, and Homophily (Similarity). Not only that, but another relevant study by Iqbal et al. (2023) and Erwin et al. (2023) also investigated the influence of influencer marketing, focusing on four key indicators: Trustworthiness, Attractiveness, Perceived Expertise, and Perceived Credibility. Furthermore, a Research journal by Gabhane et al. (2024) provides an understanding of the influence of influencer marketing by discussing three main aspects: metrics, Risks, and Best Practices. In his Research, it was stated that there are several quantitative performance indicators, which include: Reach, Impressions, Engagement Rate, Brand Mentions, and Publication Engagement Rate.

Based on some of the indicators mentioned in the previous paragraph, it can be concluded that our Research will identify six main parameters in measuring Influencer Marketing, namely trustworthiness, presenting the perception that influencers are honest, reliable, and unbiased; improving attitudes towards influencers, as well as purchase intent when the audience considers the content credible. (Iqbal et al., 2023). Physical/social attractiveness, as well as an attractive delivery style, conveys a more acceptable message and triggers a positive attitude towards an influencer/brand (Erwin et al., 2023; Iqbal et al., 2023). The similarities between followers and influencers (in terms of values, lifestyle, and demographics) strengthen personal relationships and drive brand buying/collaboration intent (Liu & Zheng, 2024). Perceived expertise refers to the perception that competent influencers will have a positive impact on consumers' attitudes towards influencers (Erwin et al., 2022; Iqbal et al., 2023). The Engagement Rate, which represents the ratio of audience interaction to the content displayed, serves as an indicator of the quality of the audience's relationship with influencers (Gabhane et al., 2024). Reach refers to the number of audiences to which an influencer's content is exposed during a specified period (Erwin et al., 2022; Gabhane et al., 2024).

Online Customer Reviews

Online customer reviews, also known as customer reviews, are defined as any form of opinion submitted by consumers about a product or service they have used (Maharani, 2023). These reviews can take the form of narrative texts (reviews) or quantitative assessments (ratings) and are often found on digital platforms (Setiawan & Sukardi, 2022; Ullal et al., 2021). In the increasingly digital era, customer reviews have become an integral part of the consumer

journey in making purchasing decisions. This suggests that the presence of reviews serves not only as a means of expressing consumer experience but also as a crucial element in shaping the initial perception of a brand or product (Saputra et al., 2024; Aurellia & Amron, 2024). Behind the narrative of experiences shared voluntarily lies a potential influence that can shape awareness, build expectations, and stimulate confidence in potential buyers (Aurellia & Amron, 2024). Online customer reviews also have a significant impact on the image and performance of products in the market. Positive reviews can increase product appeal, expand market reach, and encourage repeat purchases. Conversely, negative reviews can lower purchasing interest and damage a brand's image (Jumawan et al., 2024).

Online customer reviews can be measured by the following indicators: awareness, frequency, comparison, and effect (Sukirman & Kumalasari, 2023). Additionally, you can utilize the indicators of Customer Experience, Rating, and Review Sentiment (Puspitasari, 2025). Another source also stated that online customer reviews are evaluated by indicators of source credibility and argument quality (Pratiwi et al., 2025), allowing for the measurement of online customer reviews using nine key indicators.

Based on some of the indicators mentioned in the previous paragraph, it can be concluded that our Research will identify five main parameters in measuring online customer reviews, namely, awareness, which shows a measure of how consumers know and pay attention to the existence of the review itself (Sukirman & Kumalasari, 2023). Comparison reflects the tendency of consumers to compare information between products through reviews (Sukirman & Kumalasari, 2023). Ratings represent a level of consumer satisfaction that describes how well buyers quantitatively rate a product and can influence consumer purchase intent (Priyanika & Bertuah, 2023). Review Sentiment describes the emotional tone of a review (positive, neutral, or negative) that has been shown to affect brand perception (Arizal, 2023). Argument Quality refers to the logical, detailed, and factual support provided in a review, where the importance of argument quality can increase consumer confidence and aid in decision-making (Nurwahidah, 2022). Each of these parameters will be measured to assess the impact of customer reviews on purchasing decisions.

Brand Awareness

Brand awareness is a fundamental element in the strategy of building consumer perception of a product or service, referring to the extent to which consumers can recognize, distinguish, and remember a brand in various purchasing situations (Dewi et al., 2020). In the context of digital marketing, the use of social media influencers has been recognized as an effective strategy for enhancing brand awareness (Lie & Sitinjak, 2024). In the increasingly dominant digital and social media era, brand awareness is not only about name, logo, or brand recognition, but also involves consumers' perceptions, emotions, and associations with the brand (Yeoh an Lie & Cokki, 2024). Research conducted by Purba & Simanjuntak (2024) has shown that brand awareness has a crucial role in subtly shaping consumer purchase intentions, especially in the context of influencer-based marketing strategies. The use of influencers in increasing brand awareness has contributed significantly to digital marketing strategies, primarily due to their ability to create personalized, authentic, and relevant communication with audiences. (Rohmawati & Ahmadi, 2024).

The brand awareness indicators in our study were identified in three different sources that have been tested in previous studies. According to Rohmawati & Ahmadi (2024), brand awareness indicators consist of brand recognition and recall, which are forms of initial and advanced awareness of a brand. Meanwhile, according to Lestari (2023), brand awareness is

measured through brand recall, brand recognition, purchase decision, and consumption. Then, according to Pratamasari & Sulaeman (2022), the measurement of brand awareness is based on the level of brand awareness, which encompasses recognition, recall, top-of-mind awareness, and awareness of the brand.

Furthermore, purchase is the extent to which consumers remember and include the brand of a product in the list of alternatives when they want to buy a good or service. Wuisan & Handra (2023) stated that high awareness increases the likelihood of a brand being chosen by consumers in the purchase process. Fourth, consumption, which is when consumers buy a specific brand because the brand is the first thing that comes to their mind. This suggests that awareness can directly affect actual purchasing behavior (Wuisan & Handra, 2023). Fifth, top of mind, which is one brand that consumers first mention when they think of a specific product category. Wahyuni (2020) stated that top-of-mind reflects the dominance of a brand in consumers' minds and is the highest indicator of brand awareness. Finally, unaware of the brand, which is a condition in which consumers do not know or are not aware of the existence of a brand. According to Wahyuni (2020), consumers at this stage have no exposure to the brand, resulting in zero brand awareness. These six elements complement each other to provide a comprehensive picture of a brand's level of consumer awareness, ranging from a state of unconsciousness to becoming the most recognized and preferred brand. These indicators are crucial in evaluating the effectiveness of marketing communication strategies and the brand's overall perception among consumers.

Purchase Intention

Purchase intention is described as the consumer's decision-making pattern or tendency to buy a specific brand under certain conditions (Suciawan et al., 2025). These tendencies reflect the consumer's desire to use a product or service to meet their needs (Cahyanaputra et al., 2022; Erwin et al., 2023). Several crucial factors in influencing purchase intention are as follows: price, brand, word of mouth, and social impact (Syaputra & Rahmani, 2024). Researchers widely consider purchase intention as one of the strongest predictors of actual purchasing behavior over time (Sondakh et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2022). In modern marketing, a brand or product must be able to demonstrate a unique appeal or value to attract a significant audience. According to Xiong et al. (2021), one way for a brand to showcase its uniqueness is through a key opinion leader, also commonly known as an influencer.

Given the importance of influencers in highlighting product uniqueness, it is essential to understand how purchase intention itself is formed through various stages of consumer decision-making. Research indicates that purchase intention is divided into several interconnected stages, from both the consumer's cognitive and affective sides (Erwin et al., 2023; Franza et al., 2025). The initial stage begins with recognizing the need or identifying the problem, followed by gathering information about products or services that provide solutions (Judijanto et al., 2024). With the rise of technology and e-commerce, influencer marketing has evolved into a crucial ecosystem that offers accurate, fast, and engaging information to potential consumers (Zhou & Tong, 2022; Erwin et al., 2023). When influencers create engaging content, it helps shape a consumer's perception of a brand. It can significantly impact the initial information-gathering process, which in turn affects the potential consumer's purchase intention (Sesar et al., 2022). Potential consumers will then compare various factors, including the benefit, price, and social impact of each product (Assaker et al., 2020). After going through this process, potential consumers tend to evaluate the products offered to make the best decision (Sondakh et al., 2022; Utami & Putri, 2023).

According to several journals, there are key indicators that can be used to determine the effectiveness of influencer marketing on purchase intention. Purbaningsih et al. (2023) categorize purchase intention indicators into five parts: need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase decision. Meanwhile, Ke & Hong (2024) state that consumer purchase intention is part of the consumer attitude theory, which categorizes the cognitive side (logical evaluation and feelings toward the product), the affective side (emotional feelings toward the product), and the behavioral side (purchasing and product usage) as influencing purchase intention. Furthermore, Franza et al. (2025) suggest that these indicators can be divided into four categories: exploratory, preferential, referential, and transactional.

Based on Purbaningsih et al. (2023), five parameters are used to measure purchase intention, derived from the previously mentioned indicators. First, need recognition refers to the consumer's need for the product they wish to buy. Second, information search, where the consumer searches for information about the product they want to buy. Third, evaluation of alternatives, where the consumer considers options from other products they might purchase. Fourth, the purchase decision, where the consumer makes a selection and considers the options. Fifth, post-purchase decision, which refers to how the consumer feels after purchasing and using the product. These three aspects contribute to the development of the consumer attitude theory. From these parameters and the sides of the consumer attitude theory, four dimensions contribute to purchase intention, which are: first, exploratory, the consumer's tendency to seek information. Second, preferential, where consumers develop a specific preference or liking for a product. The third, referential, is when the consumer recommends or suggests the product to others. The fourth and final transaction occurs when the consumer commits to the purchase of the product. All these elements, dimensions, and parameters work together to provide a sensible look inside the steps a consumer takes before making a purchase.

3. Research Method

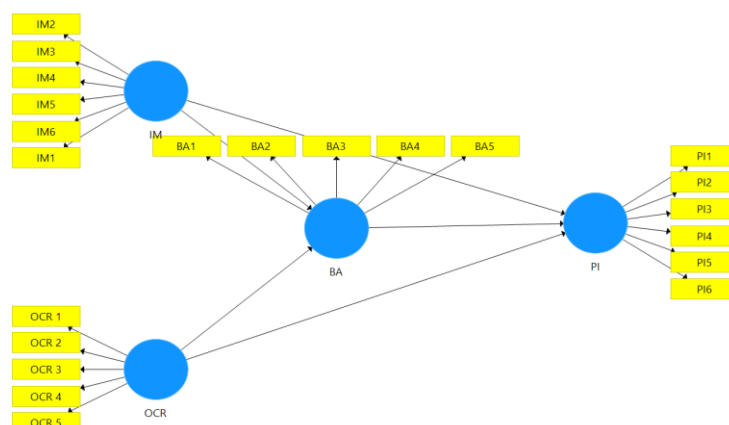


Figure 1: Research Model

This study aims to analyze and test the influence of influencer marketing and online customer reviews on purchase intent, using brand awareness as a mediating variable. This Research was conducted among millennials and Generation Z in Indonesia, focusing on consumers in specific areas, namely Makassar City, for products in the culinary industry. The research was conducted over a period of 6 months, from March 2025 to August 2025.

This research was conducted through a survey using a questionnaire instrument as a collection of respondent data on a Likert scale (5-point scale). The target respondents of this study are millennials (born between 1981 and 1996) and Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012), who have encountered food influencer content and testimonials or reviews submitted in food-related content and applications. The study's respondents numbered 160 consumers, with an 80% response rate among the 200 questionnaires distributed. The research questionnaire was distributed directly to millennials and Gen Z online through social media, and participants filled out the Google Form that had been provided. PLS-SEM is used as a tool to analyze the results of data collection by processing data using SmartPLS. The following are the respondent characteristics collected through the questionnaires.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

| Characteristics | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Gender | | |
| Men | 74 | 54% |
| Women | 87 | 46% |
| Monthly Earnings or Monthly Allowance | | |
| ≤ Rp1.000.000 | 50 | 31.1% |
| Rp 1.000.001 - Rp 3.000.000 | 64 | 39.8% |
| Rp 3.000.001 - Rp 5.000.000 | 25 | 15.5% |
| ≥ Rp5.000.001 | 22 | 13.7% |

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

This To analyze the results of the data that has been obtained, several tests are carried out, including:

Goodness of Fit Test

Thus, the model in this study is fitted based on the test results presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Goodness of Fit Test

| | <i>Saturated Model</i> | <i>Estimated Model</i> |
|-------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| SRMR | 0.078 | 0.078 |
| d_ULS | 1.559 | 1.559 |
| d_G | 0.500 | 0.500 |
| Chi-Square | 440.826 | 440.826 |
| NFI | 0.711 | 0.711 |

Validity Test

Convergence Validity

Two leading indicators will be used to test the validity in this study, including convergent validity (through loading factor and average variance extracted (AVE) values) and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2017). Convergent validity is incorporated into the measurement model in SEM-PLS, also known as the outer model (Sholihin & Ratmono, 2020). There are two main criteria used to evaluate whether the outer model meets the requirements for convergent validity in a construct (measurement instrument/questionnaire): (1) the loadings value must be

≥ 0.70 (Hair et al., 2017; Hulland, 1999) and (2) the value of ρ must be significant (< 0.05) (Hair et al., 2017; Kock, 2020). Based on these requirements, construct testing or research instruments, both Influencer Marketing (IM), Online Customer Reviews (OCR), Brand Awareness (BA), and Purchase Intention (PI), have met the requirements for convergent validity because the loadings value of each construct is above 0.70 (Hair et al., 2017; Kock, 2020; Sholihin & Ratmono, 2020). Some loading factors are below the value of 0.70 but are still within the acceptable range of 0.40-0.70, which is considered suitable for social research (Hair et al., 2017). As shown in the table below, it is accepted for use in social research (Hair et al., 2017). This is evident in the table below.

The next convergent validity test involves examining AVE values, where the AVE value requirement is ≥ 0.5 to be considered valid (Hair et al., 2017; Kock, 2020). Based on the results of data analysis, the AVE values for each variable were obtained: IM = 0.526, OCR = 0.579, BA = 0.592, and PI = 0.501, all of which exceed 0.50. These results indicate that each construct in the valid research variable is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Validity Test Result

| Variables and Indicators | Loading Factor | P Value | AVE Cross-Loadings | | | | AVE |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|-----------|--------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | | | IM | OCR | BA | PI | |
| Influencer Marketing (IM) | | | | | | | 0.526 |
| IM1 | 0.695 | < 0.000 | 0.695 | 0.208 | 0.272 | 0.170 | |
| IM2 | 0.703 | < 0.000 | 0.703 | 0.224 | 0.335 | 0.238 | |
| IM3 | 0.526 | < 0.000 | 0.526 | 0.269 | 0.231 | 0.191 | |
| IM4 | 0.673 | < 0.000 | 0.673 | 0.228 | 0.343 | 0.233 | |
| IM5 | 0.697 | < 0.000 | 0.697 | 0.207 | 0.246 | 0.208 | |
| IM6 | 0.602 | < 0.000 | 0.602 | 0.235 | 0.239 | 0.208 | |
| Online Customer Reviews (OCR) | | | | | | | 0.579 |
| OCR1 | 0.731 | < 0.000 | 0.336 | 0.731 | 0.522 | 0.506 | |
| OCR2 | 0.743 | < 0.000 | 0.176 | 0.743 | 0.500 | 0.493 | |
| OCR3 | 0.738 | < 0.000 | 0.261 | 0.738 | 0.494 | 0.465 | |
| OCR4 | 0.845 | < 0.000 | 0.373 | 0.845 | 0.557 | 0.634 | |
| OCR5 | 0.743 | < 0.000 | 0.159 | 0.743 | 0.452 | 0.547 | |
| Brand Awareness (BA) | | | | | | | 0.592 |
| BA1 | 0.705 | < 0.000 | 0.377 | 0.431 | 0.705 | 0.458 | |
| BA2 | 0.811 | < 0.000 | 0.379 | 0.554 | 0.811 | 0.444 | |
| BA3 | 0.831 | < 0.000 | 0.330 | 0.517 | 0.831 | 0.583 | |
| BA4 | 0.722 | < 0.000 | 0.385 | 0.460 | 0.722 | 0.413 | |
| BA5 | 0.770 | < 0.000 | 0.303 | 0.577 | 0.770 | 0.578 | |
| Purchase Intention (PI) | | | | | | | 0.501 |
| PI1 | 0.787 | < 0.000 | 0.277 | 0.574 | 0.492 | 0.787 | |
| PI2 | 0.788 | < 0.000 | 0.215 | 0.533 | 0.524 | 0.788 | |
| PI3 | 0.722 | < 0.000 | 0.129 | 0.532 | 0.478 | 0.722 | |
| PI4 | 0.711 | < 0.000 | 0.180 | 0.534 | 0.423 | 0.711 | |
| PI5 | 0.512 | < 0.000 | 0.344 | 0.284 | 0.409 | 0.512 | |
| PI6 | 0.692 | < 0.000 | 0.275 | 0.459 | 0.435 | 0.69/ | |

Discriminant Validity

The first discriminant validity test was carried out using a cross-loading value, where the loading value of other constructs is expected to be lower than the loading value of the construct itself. (Hair et al., 2017; Sholihin & Ratmono, 2020). Based on the results of data analysis, the values of all constructs in the variables were found to have larger loadings than cross-loadings to constructs in other variables. These results indicate that the criteria for discriminatory validity are met, as shown in Table 3.

Reliability Test

The reliability in this study was tested through internal consistency by examining Cronbach's Alpha (CA) and Composite Reliability (CR) values. According to Hair et al. (2017), the minimum acceptable value for these two indicators is 0.60 or higher, while Kock (2020) recommends a higher standard of 0.70 or higher. The results of the data analysis showed that this research instrument met the reliability requirements, as the IM and OCR values for each study construct variable were above 0.70, indicating that it could be categorized as reliable. Cronbach's alpha values are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Reliability Test Result

| Variable | Cronbach's Alpha/CA | Composite Reliability/CR |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Influencer Marketing (IM) | 0.728 | 0.815 |
| Online Customer Reviews (OCR) | 0.818 | 0.873 |
| Brand Awareness (BA) | 0.827 | 0.878 |
| Purchase Intention (PI) | 0.796 | 0.856 |

R-Square Test

This test demonstrates how independent variables can influence dependent variables. In this study, all independent variables can affect 0.481 or 48.1% of the brand awareness (BA) variable. Furthermore, 0.542 or 54.2% affected the purchase intention (PI) variable. This is evident in the table below.

Table 5. R-Square Test Result

| | R-Square | R-Square Adjusted |
|-----------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| BA | 0.488 | 0.481 |
| PI | 0.550 | 0.542 |

Hypothesis Test

Hypothesis testing in this study was conducted by analyzing data using SmartPLS software, with a focus on two key indicators. First, the path coefficient value (β) indicates the direction of influence, where a positive value indicates a positive impact and a negative value indicates a negative impact. Second, the significance value (p) determines the level of significance of the influence, provided that the value p below 0.05 indicates a significant influence, while the value of p above 0.05 means that the effect is not substantial (Hair et al., 2017; Sholihin & Ratmono, 2020; Kock, 2020). These two indicators are the basis for evaluating the relationship between variables in the research model. The required T-statistic value is at least 1.96.

There are 7 (seven) hypotheses in this study, namely H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, H6, and H7. Based on the results of data processing, it was found that H1 showed a positive and significant influence of Influencer Marketing (IM) on Brand Awareness (BA), H1 ($\beta = 0.230$, $p = 0.000$, T-Statistics = 4.356). H2 shows a positive and significant influence of Online Customer Reviews (OCR) on Brand Awareness (BA), H2 ($\beta = 0.584$, $p < 0.000$, T-statistic = 10.693). H3 does not show a significant influence of Influencer Marketing (IM) on Purchase Intention (PI), H3 ($\beta=0.014$, $p = 0.402$, T-Statistics=0.249. H4 shows a positive and significant influence of Online Customer Reviews (OCR) on Purchase Intention (PI), as indicated by H4 ($\beta = 0.476$, $p = 0.000$, T-statistic = 6.576). H5 shows a positive and significant influence of Brand Awareness (BA) on Purchase Intention (PI), as indicated by H5 ($\beta = 0.328$, $p = 0.001$, T-statistic = 3.260). The results of the H6 test showed that Brand Awareness (BA) could mediate the influence of Influencer Marketing (IM) on Purchase Intention (PI), as indicated by H6 ($\beta = 0.076$, $p = 0.008$, T-statistic = 2.433). The results of the H7 test showed that Brand Awareness (BA) could mediate the influence of Online Customer Reviews (OCR) on Purchase Intention (PI), as indicated by H7 ($\beta=0.192$, $p = 0.000$, T-Statistic=3.521) (see Table 6). This suggests that the mediation provided by Brand Awareness (BA) is full and partial. Brand awareness provides full mediation of the influence of influencer marketing on purchase intent, as only with the mediation of brand awareness can influencers effectively influence purchase intention. However, brand awareness only partially mediates the influence of online customer reviews on purchase intent, as the results of mediation and direct influence remain positive and significant. Partial mediation of Brand Awareness in this study is categorized as complementary partial mediation.

Table 6. Hypothesis Test Result

| Hypothesis | Result | |
|--|---|----------------|
| H1: Influencer Marketing has a positive and significant effect on Brand Awareness in the culinary industry | ($\beta=0.230$, $p=0.000$, T-Statistic=4.356) | H1 Accepted |
| H2: Online Customer Review has a positive and significant effect on Brand Awareness in the culinary industry | ($\beta=0.584$, $p=0.000$, T-statistic=10.693) | H2 Accepted |
| H3: Influencer Marketing has a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention in the culinary industry | ($\beta=0.014$, $p=0.402$, T-statistic=0.249) | H3 Rejected |
| H4: Online Customer Review has a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention in the culinary industry | ($\beta=0.476$, $p=0.000$, T-statistic=6.576) | H4 Accepted |
| H5: Brand Awareness has a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention in the culinary industry | ($\beta=0.328$, $p=0.001$, T-statistic=2.260) | H5 Accepted |
| H6: Brand Awareness mediates the influence of Influencer Marketing on Purchase Intention in the culinary industry | ($\beta=0.076$, $p=0.008$, T-statistic=2.433) | H6 Accepted |
| H7: Brand Awareness mediates the influence of Online Customer Reviews on Purchase Intention in the culinary industry | ($\beta=0.192$, $p=0.000$, T-statistic=3.521) | H7 Accepted |

4.2. Discussion

Influencer Marketing (IM) to Brand Awareness (BA)

The results of the study clearly demonstrate a positive and significant relationship between Influencer Marketing and Brand Awareness. This strategy is an effective way to increase brand visibility and recognition, driven by the influencer's credibility and homophilia (similarity) factors, which strengthen brand acceptance and recall. Influencers' trust, appeal, and expertise, as well as their reach and engagement levels, are strong predictors of brand recognition, particularly among Gen Z and Millennials, even in specific industries such as culinary, proving that Influencer Marketing is effective in building lasting brand awareness.

This finding is consistent with the research conducted by Fauzi et al. (2024), which suggests that an influencer's credibility can enhance brand visibility on social media, facilitating consumers' recognition and recall of brands. In addition, Liu & Zheng (2024) explain that homophily (similarity) between influencers and their audiences strengthens parasocial relationships, resulting in a more memorable message for consumers. Thus, influencer marketing has been proven to be an effective strategy for increasing brand awareness, especially among Gen Z and Millennials, who frequently use digital media.

Furthermore, a study by Iqbal et al. (2023) suggests that an influencer's trustworthiness, attractiveness, and perceived expertise are strong indicators that can drive brand recall and recognition. This is reinforced by Gabhane et al. (2024), who demonstrate that engagement rate and reach play a crucial role as valid indicators in spreading brand awareness. These results support that influencer marketing not only has a positive effect on interaction but is also effective in building long-term brand awareness within the culinary industry.

Online Customer Reviews (OCR) to Brand Awareness (BA)

The influence of Online Customer Reviews on Brand Awareness has proven to be positive and significant. The results confirm that reviews, exceptionally positive and authentic ones, play a crucial role in forming early insights and serve as an effective catalyst for increasing brand recognition, even outperforming conventional promotions. The rating and quality of the review narrative substantively reinforce the brand's image and memory. Repeated exposure to positive reviews is essential for Gen Z and Millennials, who conduct extensive research, making recommended brands easier to recognize and remember.

This finding is consistent with a study by Chakraborty & Bhat (2017), which confirms that customer reviews are not simply an opinion, but also an essential factor in building early insights for a brand. Aurellia & Amron (2024) add that positive Online Customer Reviews can increase brand awareness through real consumer experiences. This aligns with the findings from Sukirman & Kumalasari (2023) on the awareness and comparison indicators present in Online Customer Reviews, which help potential consumers recognize brands faster than traditional promotions.

Furthermore, Puspitasari (2025) emphasizes that positive ratings and customer reviews strengthen a brand's image in the consumer's mind. Reviews with clear, logical arguments significantly contribute to shaping brand recall. In other words, the more frequently potential consumers read positive reviews, the greater the likelihood they will recognize and recall recommended culinary brands, especially among the Gen Z and Millennial populations, who often seek information before making a purchase.

Influencer Marketing (IM) to Purchase Intention (PI)

Research results consistently conclude that Influencer Marketing does not have a significant direct impact on consumers' Purchase Intent; consumers prioritize product intrinsic factors, such as quality, relevance, and brand credibility (as demonstrated through certification and market achievements). While effective in increasing exposure and awareness, influencers' influence on purchasing decisions is indirect. Its primary function is to build a positive brand image, which then acts as the primary mediator that drives purchase intent. This confirms that long-term value and brand credibility are far more dominant than momentary promotional impulses.

A study conducted by Amalia & Nurlinda (2022) reveals that consumers primarily focus on the relevance and suitability of the product to their personal needs, as well as on the trust established through quality, certification, and market achievements. In other words, although promotion through influencers can increase exposure, consumers' final decision to purchase is more influenced by perception of the product's benefits, authenticity, and brand credibility.

The research by Nurhandayani et al. (2024) also states that Influencer Marketing does not directly affect Purchase Intention because the primary role of the influencer is to build a positive brand image in the consumer's mind. Only after this brand image is established would it be capable of encouraging the consumer's purchase intention. Therefore, the influence of influencer marketing on purchase intention is indirect and mediated by brand image.

Online Customer Reviews (OCR) to Purchase Intention (PI)

Empirical findings reveal a positive and statistically significant correlation between Online Customer Reviews and Purchase Intention. Consistent with the literature, positive reviews are essential because they foster trust and reduce uncertainty in decision-making, as supported by indicators such as ratings. Positive sentiment in UPO reinforces the perception of quality and serves as strong social proof. For Gen Z and Millennials, the authenticity of consumer reviews makes them more trusted and influential than traditional marketing, effectively driving NPs, especially in the culinary industry.

This aligns with the studies by Saputra et al. (2024) and Aurelia & Amron (2024), which found that positive reviews build trust and reduce uncertainty in purchasing decisions. Sukirman & Kumalasari (2023) also assert that indicators such as comparison and rating make it easier for consumers to evaluate alternatives, therefore increasing the likelihood of Purchase Intention.

Other findings from Puspitasari (2025) indicate that positive sentiment in customer reviews strengthens consumer perception of product quality, which in turn implies an increase in purchase intention. A study by Setiawan & Sukardi (2022) also notes that consumer reviews are often used as a primary reference point by Gen Z and Millennials before making a purchase, as they are considered more authentic than company advertisements. Therefore, reviews work as a highly effective social proof tool in influencing purchase intention within the culinary industry.

Brand Awareness (BA) to Purchase Intention (PI)

Brand Awareness has been proven to have a positive and significant influence on Purchase Intention. These findings are consistent with the existing literature, confirming that the easier it is for consumers to recognize and remember a brand, the more likely it is to be included, even prioritized, on their list of considerations when making a purchase decision. Strong brand

awareness, especially that which reaches the "top-of-mind" level, predominantly strengthens purchase intent and facilitates the step from awareness to actual purchase action.

This finding aligns with Purba & Simanjuntak (2024), who found that brand awareness plays a crucial role in shaping consumer purchase intentions indirectly. The higher the level of brand recognition and recall, the more likely consumers are to include the brand in their list of purchase considerations. Situmorang & Siringoringo (2023) and Triad et al. (2025) also emphasized that strong brand recall facilitates consumers' ability to remember and choose a brand when making a purchase decision.

Furthermore, research by Wuisan & Handra (2023) and Triad et al. (2025) confirms that brand awareness can influence the purchase and consumption stages, where consumers tend to buy products that are familiar to them. Wahyuni (2020) noted that top-of-mind awareness plays a dominant role in strengthening purchase intentions, as brands that first appear in consumers' minds are typically prioritized. This finding aligns with Rohmawati & Ahmadi (2024), who emphasize that strong brand awareness facilitates the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies in driving consumers towards purchase intent.

Brand Awareness (BA) mediates the influence of Influencer Marketing (IM) on Purchase Intention (PI).

The results of this study support that brand awareness mediates the influence of influencer marketing on purchase intention. In today's digital marketing realm, brand awareness plays a crucial role as a bridge between influencer marketing and consumer purchase intent. Research confirms that influencers are successful in increasing brand awareness, as consumers recognize and remember the brand. This increase in early awareness is crucial in mediating and triggering purchase intention. That is, influencers' influence on purchasing behavior is indirect, but entirely through increasing brand equity in the minds of consumers.

Fauzi et al. (2024) demonstrate that influencer marketing effectively enhances brand awareness through the credibility, authenticity, and engagement generated by influencers. Furthermore, increased brand awareness plays a crucial role in strengthening purchase intention, as evidenced by Purba & Simanjuntak (2024), which highlights that brand awareness is a vital first step in forming a purchase intention. In other words, when consumers recognize and remember the brands that influencers promote, their likelihood of making a purchase increase.

The results of this study support that brand awareness mediates the influence of influencer marketing on purchase intention. Fauzi et al. (2024) demonstrate that influencer marketing effectively enhances brand awareness through the credibility, authenticity, and engagement generated by influencers. Furthermore, increased brand awareness plays a crucial role in strengthening purchase intention, as evidenced by Purba & Simanjuntak (2024), which emphasizes that brand awareness is a vital first step in developing purchase intention. In other words, when consumers recognize and remember the brands that influencers promote, their likelihood of making a purchase increase.

Brand Awareness (BA) mediates the influence of Online Customer Reviews (OCR) on Purchase Intention (PI)

The results of this study indicate that online customer reviews are a significant driver of purchase intent, with brand awareness serving as a crucial intermediary. Positive reviews empirically increase brand perception and recognition, which in turn strengthens buying tendencies due to increased confidence of potential buyers. Review sentiment and ratings

improve brand image, and the authenticity of reviews makes them a highly credible source, especially for young consumers (Gen Z and Millennials) who trust information from fellow users more than traditional brand promotion. Therefore, customer reviews shape brand awareness first, which then becomes a catalyst for realizing purchase intent.

Maharani (2023) and Aurellia & Amron (2024) affirm that positive reviews increase consumer perception of brands, which in turn strengthens purchase intent. Sukirman & Kumalasari (2023) also explained that the awareness generated from reading consumer reviews makes the brand easier to recognize, allowing potential buyers to be more confident in their purchase decision. Thus, reviews function to form brand awareness first before finally affecting purchase intention.

This finding is supported by Puspitasari (2025), who emphasizes that positive review ratings and sentiment enhance brand image, resulting in higher brand recall and a positive impact on purchase intention. This finding is also in accordance with research by Setiawan & Sukardi (2022), which found that Gen Z and Millennials tend to make online reviews the primary source of information when purchasing culinary products, as they are considered more authentic than brand promotions.

5. Conclusion

This research demonstrates that influencer marketing and online customer reviews have a significant impact on Brand awareness, serving as a key mediator in increasing purchase intention among Generation Z and Millennials in the culinary industry in Makassar City. The results of the analysis indicate that influencer marketing has no direct effect on purchase intent but does have a significant impact through the mediation of brand awareness. On the other hand, online customer reviews have been proven to influence consumer purchase intentions, both directly and through their role in enhancing brand awareness. The role of brand awareness in this study is found to be a full and complementary partial mediator, emphasizing that brand awareness is a crucial factor in strengthening the relationship between digital marketing strategy and consumer purchase intention.

Marketing strategies in the culinary industry, particularly through influencers and online reviews, should be prioritized to enhance consumer brand awareness and loyalty. Approaching through collaboration with relevant influencers, presenting authentic customer reviews, and maintaining consistency in product and service quality are practical steps to strengthen brand awareness while increasing purchase intent. This is particularly relevant for the younger generation, who tend to trust digital recommendations when making purchasing decisions.

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