THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING ON PURCHASING DECISIONS OF E-COMMERCE PRODUCTS THROUGH THE ROLE OF BRAND AWARENESS IN GEN Z USERS

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Abstract

Social media makes it possible for brands and customers to talk to and connect with each other right away. This study utilizes a quantitative methodology. The research seeks to examine the impact of social media marketing and brand awareness on Generation Z's purchasing decisions for e-commerce products. The study utilized purposive sampling to recruit 90 respondents from Generation Z residing in Semarang Regency. The data was gathered through a questionnaire designed with Likert scale metrics. We used the SEM-PLS method to analyze the data, and SmartPLS version 4.1.1.2 to process it. The SEM-PLS method has two steps: first, looking at the exterior model and then the inside model. The research findings validated that social media marketing and brand awareness exert a beneficial influence on purchasing decisions. The brand awareness variable does not seem to lessen the effect of social media marketing on buying decisions. To be competitive in the field of e-commerce, enterprises need pay more attention to social media marketing and brand recognition.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Purchasing Decisions, Brand Awareness, E-commerce.

1. INTRODUCTION

The wider reach of internet connections has changed the individual experience due to the entry of a new era of digitalization. The internet can significantly increase an individual's ability to make and influence decisions about how we connect with others in social situations. Based on data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association in 2024, the increase in internet users in Indonesia is indicated by the frequent access to social media by generation Z with the majority of 51.9% preferring to use Instagram social media. The results of the IDN Research Institute survey showed that 62% of Gen Z respondents in Indonesia were most influenced by advertisements on social media (Muhammad, 2024). Generation Z are active social media users and 90% believe that social media influences their purchasing decisions (Sudrajat et al., 2024).

The purchasing habits of the digital Generation Z are immensely impacted by social media marketing, which is most notable in the case of e-commerce platforms. It is fundamental to their behaviour patterns as well as brand recognition. The members of Generation Z are its heaviest users, as brands advertise and consumers browse for products through social media channels. Marketing experts need to comprehend the unique characteristics of this community in order to successfully develop social media campaigns that effectively influence their purchasing decisions.

Social media has undoubtedly integrated into e-commerce marketing, especially when targeting Generation Z. This group is characterised by profound engagement with social media, which significantly influences their buying behaviour. Studies show that social media

marketing campaigns are very important for increasing brand recognition among Gen Z users (Nugroho et al., 2022). The impact of social media marketing affects the purchasing decisions of e-commerce consumers, especially within 'Gen Z', the youngest age group of customers who are already exposed to technology. This is profoundly connected to the level of brand consciousness and marketing responsiveness. Social media does a very great job in marketing and brand visibility, which works well with Generation Z, arguably the most socially connected generation. It is critical to note the characteristics of this group so that social media marketers can plan appropriately to influence their purchase intentions (Rahman et al., 2020). Through social media networks, brands directly interact with consumers, build a community, and increase customer loyalty (Aljumah et al., 2023).

The buying habits of Gen Z consumers are strongly influenced by the awareness brands have in the market. According to studies, there is a positive relation between heightened awareness of a brand and a consumer's intention to buy; this is because people prefer buying products from brands they have knowledge of and trust (Keilani & Aksari, 2024). According to Waworuntu (2022) social media serves a purpose when it comes to improving brand reputation on Instagram and TikTok. It is not restricted to marketing. It includes customers interacting with brands, sharing their experiences, and even reviewing them. Social engagement is vital to Gen Z since social validation from their peers highly influences their buying decisions (Barus et al., 2024).

Social media marketing in influencer precincts affects the purchasing behavior of Gen Z individuals. Research indicates that the brand image captures the attention of the intended audience (Nguyen & Duong, 2024). Influencers who align with Gen Z values and aesthetics can effectively increase brand awareness and drive purchase decisions, as their endorsements are often perceived as authentic and relevant (Chabata, 2024). This phenomenon underscores the importance of selecting the right influencers who align with the brand identity and target audience.

The relationships Gen Z consumers form with brands through social media interactions can significantly change their purchasing behavior. Marketing strategies that align with Gen Z's social values, such as sustainability, inclusivity, and authenticity, can deepen emotional bonds and drive repeat purchases (Palomo-Domínguez et al., 2023). Gen Z tends to gravitate toward brands that ardently advocate for corporate social responsibility and environmental sustainability. Social responsibility in business is something younger generations heavily consider when making purchasing decisions, a factor which Gen Z values immensely (Song et al., 2020). This development highlights how e-commerce companies must focus on more than just advertising strategies; they have to create brand stories that appeal to the ethical values of the audience.

Moreover, emotional involvement, as well as user experience on e-commerce websites has a profound effect on Gen Z's shopping behavior. Optimal online shopping increases brand perception which heightens the purchase intention (Ding et al., 2022). Different features such as personalized suggestions, engaging content, and elements of gamification can increase user engagement and enjoyment, therefore influencing buying decisions (Faganel et al., 2024). Gen Z consumers require higher levels of personalization and interaction, which compels e-commerce sites to adapt their strategies to meet these demands. The combination of social media marketing with e-commerce provides crucial information about customers, which subsequently can be used to improve marketing strategies and increase brand loyalty. By studying the interactions and preferences of consumers on social media, businesses can tailor their marketing approaches to better target Generation Z (Rose et al., 2024).

Such a data-focused approach increases the effectiveness of marketing strategies and builds an understanding of the customers' needs which helps brands to generate more accurate and relevant content. E-WOM processes exercise great impact on Gen Z buying decisions. Positive reviews and recommendations are shared over social media and can improve the brand image of a firm and influence consumers (Ulan et al., 2022). Consumers belonging to Generation Z are more inclined to accept a suggestion from peers than to advertisements, making and trustworthy advertising tool for companies who wish to expand their impact and capture new markets (Supriyatin, 2023). Companies that make use of electronic word-of-mouth can take advantage of this phenomenon to increase sales and better target the market.

This study is crucial as e-commerce increasingly depends on digital marketing, particularly social media, which is the primary communication channel for those in Generation Z. This generation is different because they spend an excessive amount of time on digital platforms, are readily influenced by trends, and worry a lot about brand recognition when they shop. There hasn't been adequate study regarding the way social media marketing, brand familiarity, and Generation Z's buying choices are all connected. So, this study adds to research regarding the way digital consumers behave and helps those in e-commerce come up with better marketing plans for young people that are more focused, effective, and loyal. This research is important because Gen Z's main way of connecting with people is through social media, and digital marketing is what drives e-commerce's growth. This generation is particularly active on digital platforms, readily influenced by trends, and considers brand recognition when buying. The relationship between social media marketing, brand recognition, and Gen Z purchasing decisions has not been extensively examined. This research has academic urgency to enhance the literature on digital consumer behavior and practical urgency for e-commerce businesses to build more targeted, effective, and loyal young consumer marketing strategies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing is centered around garnering attention so that people can interact meaningfully with the content, thus increasing the chances for it to be shared (Yudistira, 2023). Meanwhile, according to Gunelius in Wachjuni et al., (2024) defines social media marketing as a method that involves direct and indirect marketing strategies to build awareness of a particular brand product by utilizing social media platforms. Social media marketing is built on the idea of interaction between brands and their consumers, to listen to their valuable input so that they can improve their experience (Jin et al., 2019). A firm's SMS marketing strategies or campaigns to spark interest in its products or services through social media platforms, blogs, websites, etc. is known as social media marketing (Magasic, 2016). According to Kim & Ko (2012), Berikut adalah contoh metrik pemasaran media sosial: hiburan, interaksi, keterkinian, kustomisasi, dan rekomendasi dari mulut ke mulut.

2.2. Brand Awareness

Brand awareness pertains to the ability of an individual in the target market to recognize, place or remember a given brand within a certain class of products (Salamah et al., 2021), Brand awareness is defined as the condition in which a consumer is adequately acquainted and understands the product (Salamah et al., 2021). Brand awareness plays a role in influencing consumer buying choices. Indicators of brand awareness include: recommending a brand; understanding a brand; understanding the characteristics of a brand; and easily remembering the logo of a brand (Aji et al., 2020).

2.3.   Purchasing Decisions

According to Hanasya (2022), the definition of making a purchase deals with the particular stage in the decision making process of acquiring a product which involves seeking for information related to a certain brand or product. Purchasing decisions can also be defined as the selection of two or more alternative purchasing decision choices, with the intention that consumers who want to buy goods or services must first determine their choice through the available alternatives (Muljadi et al., 2022). Lubis et al., (2020) argue that buying choices form a decision-making process regarding purchases which involves what an individual or a group decides to buy or not to buy. Some indicators of purchasing decisions according to Kotler & Armstrong (2016), include: product choice; brand choice; supplier choice; time of purchase; purchase amount; and payment method.

2.4.Hypothesis Development

The heightened use of social media relates to an increase of brand awareness (Seo & Park, 2018). Social media marketing has been shown to positively affect brand awareness owing to the nature of e-commerce customers due to given characteristics, as demonstrated by several stands of prior research. There are several previous studies that show the relationship connecting social media marketing and brand awareness as studied by Ardiansyah & Sarwoko (2020), which revealed that social media marketing has a positive and significant influence on brand awareness. Research from Barreda et al., (Barreda et al., 2015) states that social media activities have proven to be important in strengthening brand awareness.

Social media marketing is a technique that allows users to market their products or services through social networks, hence capturing a much larger audience (Yong et al., 2018). Previous research conducted by Al-Azzam & Al-Mizeed (2024), demonstrated that the social media marketing variable had a positive and significant impact on purchasing decisions. Additional research findings by Ardiansyah & Sarwoko (2020), it has been demonstrated through research that social media marketing greatly and positively impacts buying decisions.

Increasing brand awareness with the intent of encouraging customer purchases can be effective because brand awareness is connected to improved customer purchasing decisions (Purwanto et al., 2023). Research from Kumar & Gupta (2016) and Siali et al. (2016) implies that increasing purchase consideration is correlated to raising brand awareness. To put it simply, increased brand awareness correlates with heightened probability of purchase. This also aligns with Praditya and Purwanto's research findings (2024), the brand awareness element has a positive and substantial impact on the consumer's decision to buy. Sharifi's (2014) study in confirmed that brand awareness amplifies the effect of the emotional triad on consumers' future purchase intentions. Huang and Sarigöllü (2012), proposed that brand awareness plays an important role in the decisions made by consumers as several patrons employ it as a yardstick for evaluating offered goods.

Based on the findings from various studies, several hypotheses can be formulated, including:
H1: Social Media Marketing has a positive and significant effect on Brand Awareness.
H2: Social Media Marketing has a positive and significant effect on Purchasing Decisions.
H3: Brand Awareness has a positive and significant effect on Purchasing Decisions.
H4: The effect of Social Media Marketing on Purchasing Decisions is influenced by Brand Awareness.

2.5. Research Framework
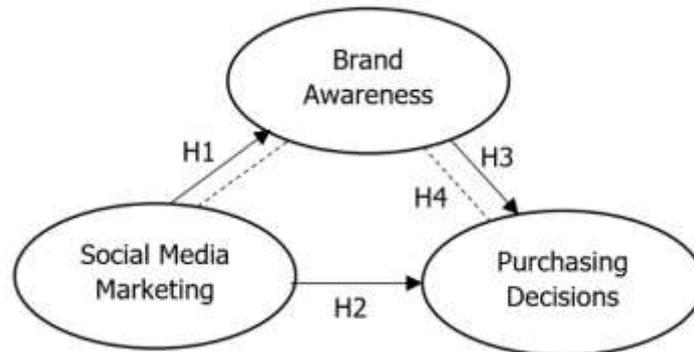
Gambar 1. Research Framework

This research framework identifies the determinants of purchasing behavior of Gen Z in Semarang Regency

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study is quantitative in nature utilizing an associative approach with a low number of variables. The sample population for this study is Generation Z, who are between 18 and 28 years old who live in Semarang Regency. This sampling technique involves delimiter measures which is a form of non-random sampling known as purposive sampling. Considerations and criteria for selecting respondents are based on respondents who have shopped online through e-commerce. The number of samples used in this study was 90 respondents. Primary data in the form of an online questionnaire given to respondents to then be processed and analyzed. Measurement of respondent answer values uses a 1-5 point Likert scale parameter. The data analysis technique includes SEM-PLS with the help of SmartPLS software Version 4.1.1.2. The measuring scale for this research, created after an integration of previous works, is shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Question Items

Variable	Question	Source
Social Media Marketing (SM)	1. I consider the social media content of e-commerce products or services particularly fascinating and entertaining. 2. I believe that the social media of e-commerce products or services provides an avenue for engagement for users. 3. I believe that the social media content of e-commerce products or services shows current trendy information. 4. I believe that the social media of e-commerce products or services provides relevant information to the users. 5. I want to tell my colleagues about the brand of the e-commerce products or services.	Kim & Ko (2012)

Brand Awareness (BA)	1. I will encourage others to make use of this e-commerce product and service. 2. This is a brand whose e-commerce product and service I always know. 3. I know this brand's e-commerce product and service very well. 4. This is a brand whose e-commerce product and service logo is always remembered.	Aji et., al (2020)
Purchasing Decisions (PD)	1. I will buy products through e-commerce because of the wide selection offered. 2. I will buy products through e-commerce because of the many brands offered. 3. I will acquire things through e-commerce because of the many providers supplied. 4. I will acquire things through e-commerce due to the convenience of time scheduling. 5. I will acquire products through e-commerce because of the freedom to decide the amount of items to be purchased. 6. I will buy things through e-commerce because of the many options to pay.	Kotler & Amstrong (2016)

Source: Processed primary data, 2025

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION
RESULT
4.1.Respondent Characteristics

Respondents from Generation Z aged between 18 to 28 years and residing in Semarang Regency who have purchased products through e-commerce platforms. The total sample for the testing of research instruments was set at 90 respondents. The data collection results indicated that females formed the majority of respondents with a total of 60, while male respondents were 30. From an age perspective, Generation Z is dominated by respondents aged 18-21 years which was 54 people (60%), while the second position is for respondents aged 22-25 years who were 27 people (30%), and the last is for respondents aged 26-28 years who were 9 people (10%). In terms of the use of shopping portals, Generation Z were mostly users of Shopee which had 45 respondents (50%), followed by Tokopedia which had 27 respondents (30%), while Blinli and Lazada were each supported by 9 respondents (10%).

4.2.OUTER MODEL

4.2.1. Convergent Validity

Convergent validity evaluates how well the indicators correspond with the constructs (Andria et al., 2023). Parameters with Outer Loading between 0.5 and 0.6 are classified as satisfactory. A concept is thought to have an important effect when the correlation is over 0.7 (Ghozali & Latan, 2015). All indicators in Table 2 exceed these values; therefore, all results are deemed valid.
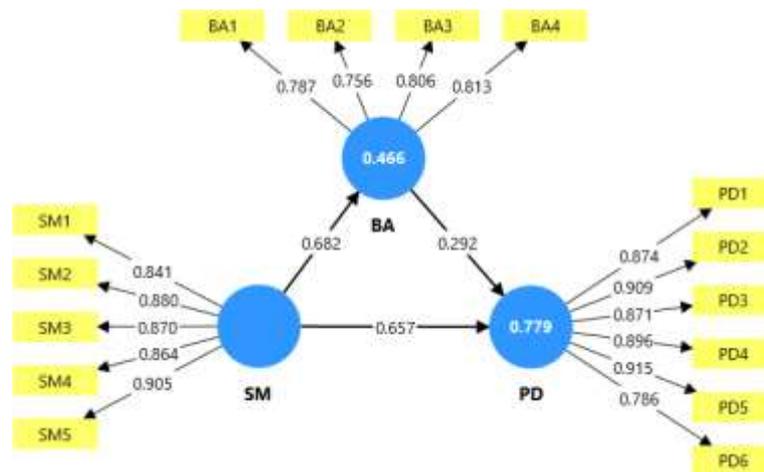
Figure 2. Outer Loading Diagram

Table 2. Convergent Validity Test Results

Outer loadings - Matrix			
	Brand Awareness	Purchasing Decisions	SM
BA1	0.793		
BA2	0.759		
BA3	0.800		
BA4	0.809		
PD1		0.886	
PD2		0.928	
PD3		0.894	
PD4		0.893	
SM1			0.842
SM2			0.880
SM3			0.870
SM4			0.863
SM5			0.905

4.2.2. Discriminant Validity

As cited in Henseler et al. (2015), discriminant validity focuses on a unique dependency for each variable construct in the latent model which is sufficiently different from other variables. In validity checking, a parameter value of average variance extracted (AVE) is used, with the minimum threshold being 0.5 or greater. This means that when a value greater than 0.5 exists, those items can account for more than 50% of the variability they possess; this value indicates that constructs exist at 0.5 or above (Sarstedt et al., 2021). All the AVE numbers for each variable in Table 3 exceed 0.5 which shows their validity.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity Testing

Construct reliability and validity - Overview				
	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Brand Awareness	0.801	0.806	0.870	0.625
Purchasing Decisions	0.922	0.923	0.945	0.811
SM	0.922	0.927	0.941	0.761

4.2.3. Reliabilty

An instrument is said to be reliable when the average AVE is more than 0.5. Moreover, both reliability and his Cronbach's alpha score exceed 0.7 (Ghozali, 2021). In Table 3, the data output that has high reliability is the one with the Composite Reliability value above 0.7. Based on the results, all composite reliability values of the research variables are greater than 0.7; leading to the conclusion that the variables together provide an adequate level of reliability and stability.

Table 4. Composite Reliability Test

Construct reliability and validity - Overview				
	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
DPA	0.957	0.959	0.967	0.854
PCS	0.942	0.943	0.958	0.852
PCV	0.961	0.963	0.972	0.895
SCI	0.834	0.867	0.881	0.597

Reviewing Table 4 confirms that all variables' values of Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability exceed the threshold of 0.70; meaning that all of them meet the reliability standard and are valid, hence, the evaluation of the structural model can be performed.

4.3. INNER MODEL

4.3.1. R-Square

The R-square figure expresses the degree of the exogenous variables' determination on the endogenous variables. The larger the Rsquare figure, the greater the level of determination. In Hair's opinion as cited in Latan & Ghozali (2015), a model is categorised as strong if it has a value of 0.75, a moderate model if the value is 0.50, and categorised as a weak model if the value is 0.25. As shown in the Table, the Brand Awareness Rsquare (R^2) value of 0.468 can be categorised as moderate while the Purchasing Decisions R-square (R^2) value of 0.780 can be categorised as strong.

Table 5. R-Square (R^2) Value

R-square - Overview		
	R-square	R-square adjusted
Brand Awareness	0.468	0.461
Purchasing Decisions	0.780	0.775

4.3.2. Path Coefficients

Fahlevi et al. (2024), the route coefficient indicates the effect an independent variable has on the dependent variable. In this study, it was found that for Social Media Marketing to Brand Awareness the value was 0.682, for Social Media Marketing to Purchasing Decisions it was 0.657, and for Brand Awareness to Purchasing Decisions it was 0.292. It is apparent from the data that all of the variables had positive route coefficients which indicates there was a significant impact from the independent variables.

4.3.3. Hypothesis Testing

While conducting hypothesis tests, researchers utilise bootstrapping testing methods to evaluate the significance of direct and indirect impacts. All descriptions regarding the relationships among variables in the four hypotheses are provided in table 6.

Table 6. Hypothesis Testing

Path coefficients - Mean, STDEV, T values, p values					
	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|) ▼	P values
SM -> BA	0.682	0.670	0.148	4.609	0.000
SM -> PD	0.657	0.611	0.148	4.436	0.000
BA -> PD	0.292	0.329	0.122	2.392	0.017

Specific indirect effects - Mean, STDEV, T values, p values					
	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values
SM -> BA -> PD	0.199	0.231	0.123	1.617	0.107

The results of the hypothesis test endorse the following assertions: The first theory (H1) which stated that Social Media Marketing substantially increases Brand Awareness was accepted due to the obtained path coefficient of 0.682 and the p-value of 0.000. The second hypothesis (H2) is accepted concerning the previously stated assumptions in this study that there is a high impact of Social Media Marketing on Purchasing Decisions, with the path value of 0.657 and p-value of 0.000 (which is less than 0.05). Any increase in Social Media Marketing will result in enhanced Purchasing Decisions. The third theory (H3) is accepted concerning the high impact of Brand Awareness on increasing Purchasing Decisions, as shown with the path coefficient of 0.292 and p-value of 0.024. The fourth hypothesis (H4) was contradicts the earlier revelations in the study and thus fails to hold with the P- value of 0.000 which is more than 0.05.

4.3.4. Goodness of Fit (GoF)

In SEM-PLS, the model validation is done by performing the hypothesis testing goodness of fit which ascertains the functionality and accuracy of the model. The GoF value ranges from zero to one, and with it aids in determination of 0.1 is designated as small GoF, 0.25 is medium GoF, and 0.36 is large GoF (Suhayat et al., 2023). To find GoF, use the equation √average AVE and √average R-square. It is a sum of both values (Ghozali & Latan, 2015). Based on the outcomes shown in the table 7, SmartPLS 4.1.1.2 calculates GoF value which in this case is 0.45. As far as GoF catgories concerned, 0.45 is in the strong or big group since it is 0.36 and above.

Table 7. *Goodness of Fit* (GoF)

Model fit	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.073	0.073
d_ULS	0.647	0.647
d_G	0.463	0.463
Chi-square	219.822	219.822
NFI	0.823	0.823

4.3.5. *Effect Size*

Effect Size evaluates the correlation between a variable and its effect, and can be understood as the difference in effect occurrence between control and experimental groups (Khairunnisa et al., 2022). F-square value (f^2) of small category refers to values of 0.02, 0.15 only covers the mid-range, while 0.35 delineates the large category (Sarstedt et al., 2021). Based on the data in Table 8, the brand awareness variable has a small influence on purchasing decisions, as indicated by an effect size (f2) of 0.111. Meanwhile, the social media marketing variable has a large effect on brand awareness, at 0.878, and on purchasing decisions, as indicated by an effect size (f2) of 1.263.

Table 8. *Effect Size*

f-square - Matrix	Brand Awareness	Purchasing Decisions	SM
Brand Awareness		0.111	
Purchasing Decisions			
SM	0.878	1.263	

4.4. DISCUSSION

Social Media Marketing Towards Brand Awareness

The first hypothesis confirms that Social Media Marketing positively affects Brand Awareness, and the effect is significant. Earlier literature also reported useful findings particularly Priatni et al., (2020), which claimed that the Social Media Marketing variable has an impact on Brand Awareness and it is both positive and significant. The outcomes of this study correspond to the findings made by Salamah et al., (2021), where it can be noted that Social Media Marketing has a significant influence on Brand Awareness within the e-commerce user demographic. Trust and positive relationships with consumers can be developed, and brand awareness can be greatly heightened with an effective marketing strategy.

Social Media Marketing Towards Purchasing Decisions

The second hypothesis validates that Social Media Marketing exerts a positive and substantial impact on Purchasing Decisions. These findings are in accordance with Munawaroh & Nurlinda's (2023) research which indicates that Social Media Marketing directly affects buying behavior. Hawa's (2022) research also shows the same results, stating that the Social Media

Marketing variable significantly influences the purchasing decision variable. Since social media facilitates the posting of visual content, advertising, comments, and interactions, it is one of the most effective platforms for influencing consumers' purchasing decisions.

Brand Awareness Towards Purchasing Decisions
The third hypothesis which states that "Brand Awareness has a positive and significant impact on Purchasing Decisions" is proven correct here. These findings are in line with Salsabiela et al (2022), who demonstrated the Brand Awareness variable's direct effect yields positive value and considerable influence on the purchasing decision variable. In Mahendra and Tobing's research (2025), the Brand Awareness variable's significant impact on the purchasing decision variable also confirmed their hypothesis reasoning. Enhancing Brand Awareness serves as an important investment for a business since it helps build customer loyalty, increases sales, and improves market position.

Social Media Marketing on Purchasing Decisions Influenced by Brand Awareness
The fourth hypothesis which states that the Brand Awareness variable acts as a mediator between Social Media Marketing and Purchasing Decisions is not confirmed. This is particularly relevant in the context of the findings by Gabriella et al., (2022), who identified that the variable of social media marketing did not significantly impact Purchasing Decisions through Brand Awareness. Research from Upadana (2020) found different results which showed that the Brand Awareness variable mediated the Social Media Marketing variable on purchasing decisions.

5. CONCLUSION

The final outcome of this study outlines several factors that affect the Purchasing Decisions of e-commerce products in relation to generation Z in Semarang Regency. This study, which incorporated a questionnaire, prepared 90 respondents whose data were collected and analyzed Social Media Marketing and Brand Awareness impact on purchase decisions. Marketing through Social Networks has a notable effect on Purchasing Decisions. The Brand Recognition variable positively contributes to, and significantly impacts the purchasing decisions of e-commerce products by generation Z. Brand Awareness has been proved not to mitigate the impact of Social Media Marketing Strategies on Purchasing Decisions. It is suggested that providers of e-commerce platforms harness Social Media Marketing methods to capture prospective consumers attention, as it is less expensive, more effective, faster, and more efficient than traditional marketing methods.

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