From Influence to Intention: How Peer Dynamics and Viral Marketing Shape Gen-Z Food Purchasing Through Brand Awareness

Original Article

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Abstract

Digital platforms and peer interactions play an increasingly central role in shaping Generation Z's consumption behavior, yet limited empirical evidence clearly explains the distinct effects of peer influence and viral marketing on purchase intention through the mediating role of brand awareness, particularly in Bali's food industry. This gap constrains marketers' understanding of which social and digital factors are most influential at different stages of Generation Z's purchasing process. Focused on Generation Z in Bali, this study explores the roles of peer influence and viral marketing in shaping food purchase intention, with brand awareness as a mediator. Employing a quantitative survey design, the data analysis indicates that viral marketing elevates brand awareness, which subsequently enhances purchase intention. Peer influence, however, exerts a direct effect on purchase intention but does not significantly impact brand awareness. The relationship between viral marketing and purchase intention is fully mediated by brand awareness. These findings highlight the distinct pathways through which digital content (viral marketing) and social interactions (peer influence) operate: the former builds brand recognition, while the latter directly drives purchase decisions. This study offers practical implications for food marketers by highlighting the importance of viral strategies that boost brand awareness, alongside using peer influence to convert awareness into purchase intention. Understanding Generation Z's digital behavior and social interactions is essential for developing effective marketing strategies in today's digital environment.

Keywords: Brand Awareness, Generation Z, Peer Influence, Purchase Intention, Viral Marketing.

1. Introduction

A significant shift in consumer behavior has been propelled by the digital revolution, characterized by ubiquitous social media and heightened peer influence. Within this landscape, Generation Z (1997-2012) represents a critical, hyper-connected demographic. They utilize social media extensively as essential tools for discovery, endorsement, and consumption. Therefore, identifying the factors that shape Gen Z's buying behavior is of paramount importance for companies operating in saturated industries, including food and beverage.

Social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram have evolved into dominant marketing channels where viral content and peer-generated recommendations strongly shape consumer perceptions and choices. Unlike traditional advertising, digital marketing content is often embedded within social interactions, allowing consumers to share experiences, opinions, and evaluations instantaneously. The user-generated content and peer communication play a significant role in shaping brand perceptions and influencing behaviors within this particular environment (Laurence & Keni, 2024). As a result, marketing

communication on social media no longer operates solely as firm-to-consumer messaging, but increasingly as consumer-to-consumer influence.

Within the context of food products, visual appeal, emotional engagement, and social validation are fundamental in attracting consumer attention. Food-related content disseminated through social media particularly content featuring peers or influencers has been shown to stimulate emotional responses and consumption desire, increasing the likelihood of impulse purchasing behavior (Phua et al., 2020). This effect becomes even more pronounced in collectivist societies such as Indonesia, where purchasing decisions are often shaped by group norms, shared experiences, and social conformity. In such cultural contexts, viral trends and peer endorsements function not merely as marketing tools but as reflections of collective behavior that greatly shape brand perception and purchase intention (Maria et al., 2019).

Previous studies have extensively examined the influence of peer communication, viral marketing, and brand awareness on consumer purchasing behavior. Empirical evidence suggests that peer interactions on social media significantly influence Generation Z's online purchase intention by shaping perceptions of brand value, credibility, and preference (Le & Ngoc, 2024; Theocharis, 2025). Similarly, viral marketing has been found to enhance brand visibility, emotional attachment, and memorability, particularly in fast-moving consumer goods, thereby strengthening consumers' intention to purchase (Fard & Marvi, 2019; Saripudin et al., 2022).

Despite these findings, a clear research gap remains. Existing studies tend to examine peer influence, viral marketing, brand awareness, and purchase intention as isolated or partially connected constructs. Limited research has systematically explored how peer influence and viral marketing jointly affect purchase intention through the mediating role of brand awareness, particularly within the food sector and the Indonesian digital context. Several recent studies have analyzed purchase intention without explicitly incorporating brand awareness as a mediating mechanism or without capturing the broader influence of peer-driven social networks that dominate Generation Z's online behavior (Anggrasari et al., 2024; Senalasari et al., 2025). This gap restricts a comprehensive understanding of how digital social interactions translate into concrete purchasing intentions among Generation Z consumers.

Given that Generation Z prioritizes authenticity, social interaction, and digital engagement over traditional advertising in purchase decisions, this research addresses a notable literature gap. It does so by developing a cohesive model that integrates peer influence, viral marketing, brand awareness, and purchase intention. Introducing brand awareness as a mediator enables a more refined analysis of how digital and social forces collectively influence consumer behavior within the food industry. The study's aims are therefore to: (1) analyze the effect of peer influence on brand awareness; (2) examine viral marketing's impact on brand awareness; (3) assess peer influence's effect on purchase intention; (4) determine viral marketing's effect on purchase intention; (5) evaluate the brand awareness–purchase intention link; (6) test the mediating role of brand awareness between peer influence and purchase intention; and (7) examine its mediating role between viral marketing and purchase intention.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Peer Influence

Peer influence describes the social process by which an individual's attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors are affected by their peer group. This concept is a central component of the Reasoned Action Model explaining behavioral shifts, particularly within younger demographics (Hendarman & Andriani, 2024). In consumption contexts, peer

influence occurs when individuals make purchasing decisions not solely based on functional needs, but also in response to social signals, emotional support, and shared experiences from friends, colleagues, or family members (Gunawan et al., 2023).

Peer influence is typically distinguished into two primary types based on the underlying motivation. Normative influence drives conformity to gain social approval, whereas informational influence encourages individuals to adopt peer-provided information as a credible basis for decision-making (Gunawan et al., 2023). In digital environments, these mechanisms are amplified by constant online connectivity, where social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube display social approval cues in the form of likes, comments, shares, and reposts. These cues function as observable indicators of popularity and acceptance, reinforcing both normative and informational influence.

Within social commerce, peer groups play a critical role in reducing uncertainty and evaluating brand credibility, as consumers tend to rely more on peer recommendations than on firm-generated advertising messages (Ao et al., 2023). For Generation Z, who are highly social, digitally literate, and identity-driven, peer opinions and social trends strongly guide consumption choices. Based on this theoretical foundation, peer influence is expected to directly affect purchase intention, as individuals are motivated to align their buying behavior with peer expectations. Moreover, repeated peer exposure to a brand may also contribute to brand awareness, although this effect may depend on whether peers actively communicate brand-related information. This reasoning provides a theoretical basis for examining the role of peer influence in shaping both brand awareness and purchase intention.

2.2. Viral Marketing

Encompassing strategies like social media, mobile, video, app, and email marketing, digital marketing aims to connect with consumers continuously across digital platforms (Salim & Putri, 2024). Within this domain, viral marketing refers to marketing messages designed to spread rapidly through user sharing across digital networks. There are various important factors that can shape the success of viral marketing, such as credibility of the source, the quality of information, the entertainment factor, and support from promotional activities.

Trustworthiness is a crucial element in viral marketing effectiveness, as consumers are more likely to accept and share messages originating from credible sources such as influencers, experts, or established brands. This trust reduces perceived risk and enhances positive brand evaluations, which is particularly important in the food sector, where safety and quality perceptions are critical (Fard & Marvi, 2019). Entertainment value further enhances virality, as emotionally engaging or humorous content encourages voluntary sharing. On platforms like TikTok, viral campaigns often integrate brand messages with trending challenges, music, or relatable narratives, transforming passive viewers into active participants (Pane et al., 2024).

Although organic sharing is central to virality, strategic promotion through influencer collaborations and targeted advertising often serves as an initial trigger that accelerates message diffusion and sustains engagement across platforms (Çakirkaya & Afşar, 2024). From a theoretical perspective, repeated exposure to viral content increases brand salience and familiarity, thereby strengthening brand awareness. As awareness increases, consumers become more likely to consider the brand during decision-making, suggesting an indirect pathway through which viral marketing influences purchase intention. This theoretical logic supports the inclusion of brand awareness as a mediating variable between viral marketing and purchase intention.

2.3. Brand Awareness

Brand recognition pertains to how easily consumers can identify and remember a brand when thinking about a specific type of product (Lee et al., 2019). It represents a fundamental component of brand equity, as higher awareness signals credibility, familiarity, and relevance in consumers' everyday lives (Salim & Putri, 2024). Brands with strong awareness are more likely to be included in consumers' consideration sets (Rosdiana & Indrawati, 2024), increasing their probability of being selected during purchase decisions (Hendarsin et al., 2024).

In digital environments, brand awareness is reinforced through consistent exposure, cohesive brand identity, and consumer-generated content such as reviews, shares, and peer discussions. These repeated exposures not only enhance recognition but also foster trust and emotional attachment (Bernarto et al., 2020). Consequently, brand awareness serves as a critical psychological mechanism that translates social influence and viral exposure into behavioral outcomes (Sudarman et al., 2025). From a theoretical standpoint, higher brand awareness reduces cognitive effort in decision-making and increases confidence, thereby strengthening purchase intention. This position supports the role of brand awareness as a mediator linking both peer influence and viral marketing to purchase intention.

2.4. Purchase Intention

Purchase intention becomes an extremely handy tool in forecasting purchase decisions (Salina & Sudaryanto, 2023). Many variables may affect a person's buying intention. These influences include personal, social, and life situations. Interpersonal environments and perceptions of product quality and value are paramount to a buyer's purchase intention. The main elements affecting purchase intentions include e-WOM, brand awareness, and brand image (Salim & Putri, 2024). Things like viral marketing and what friends say can shape what people believe and how they feel about a product, which makes them more ready to buy. This is especially clear in areas like food and lifestyle, where people often decide what to buy based on what's popular and what others are doing (Zimand-Sheiner & Lissitsa, 2024).

Buyers' willingness and preparedness to purchase a product are often seen as accurate indicators of their actual purchasing behavior (Salina & Sudaryanto, 2023). Purchase intention is shaped by a combination of personal factors, social influences, and situational conditions, including peer recommendations, perceived product value, and brand-related perceptions. Prior research identifies electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), brand awareness, and brand image as key determinants of purchase intention (Salim & Putri, 2024).

In social media-driven consumption contexts, viral marketing and peer communication influence consumers' beliefs, emotions, and perceived social approval, making them more inclined to purchase, particularly in food and lifestyle categories where trends and social validation play dominant roles (Zimand-Sheiner & Lissitsa, 2024). To capture the multidimensional nature of purchase intention, scholars often include indicators such as purchase probability, purchase planning, willingness to pay, and recommendation intention. These indicators acknowledge that intention may not always translate into behavior due to situational constraints, but they nonetheless provide a robust measure of consumer motivation (Ao et al., 2023; Riorini, 2017). Theoretically, purchase intention represents the final outcome of the influence process, where peer influence and viral marketing exert both direct and indirect effects through brand awareness.

2.5. Gen-Z

Generation Z comprises individuals born between 1997 and 2012 and is often referred to as the "Internet Generation" or "digital natives" due to their lifelong exposure to digital technologies and social media (Huwaida et al., 2024). This cohort relies heavily on digital platforms to obtain information, express identity, and engage in consumption-related activities. Social media plays a central role in shaping Generation Z's awareness, preferences, and purchasing decisions, as they are continuously exposed to peer opinions, trends, and user-generated content.

Generation Z consumers value authenticity, shared experiences, and social credibility more than traditional advertising messages. Their purchasing behavior is strongly influenced by online communities, peer interactions, and rapidly spreading digital trends (Sjahruddin & Adif, 2024). Given these traits, Generation Z is not only highly vulnerable to peer effects and viral content but also relies on brand awareness as a key mental benchmark. This makes the demographic a profoundly pertinent context for studying the interrelationships among peer influence, viral marketing, brand awareness, and buying intent.

3. Methods

This study applies a quantitative methodology, implementing Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to test the hypothesized relationships among peer influence, viral marketing, brand awareness, and purchase intention among Gen Z in Bali. The selection of PLS-SEM is justified by its appropriateness for exploratory research with predictive aims and models that incorporate several constructs and mediating pathways. Its key advantage over covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM) lies in its flexibility; PLS-SEM does not require strict normality assumptions and performs reliably with complex models and limited sample sizes (Hair Jr et al., 2021).

Further, the objective of this study is not solely to confirm an established theoretical model, but to explain and predict consumer behavior by examining both direct and indirect effects among latent variables. PLS-SEM is therefore more appropriate than CB-SEM, as it emphasizes variance explanation and predictive accuracy rather than model fit alone. This approach aligns with the study's aim to assess the mediating role of brand awareness and to capture the behavioral mechanisms underlying peer influence and viral marketing within a digital consumption context (Nallaluthan et al., 2024; Ringle et al., 2023).

To efficiently reach the target population, data were gathered through an online questionnaire disseminated on social media channels, including Instagram, X, and WhatsApp. This approach was particularly suitable for engaging Generation Z participants (aged 18-24), a cohort known for its substantial social media use and frequent exposure to peer-driven and viral content (Salhab et al., 2023). Employing a non-probability purposive sampling method, the study collected 230 valid responses. The technique was chosen to guarantee that respondents possessed the necessary characteristics, such as being active social media users and having encountered viral food marketing content (Sugiyono, 2015).

The research procedure followed a systematic and sequential process. The first stage involved an extensive literature review and hypothesis development. During this phase, relevant studies on peer influence, viral marketing, brand awareness, and purchase intention were critically reviewed to establish a robust theoretical framework. Hypotheses were formulated based on established theories, including social influence theory and viral marketing theory, to ensure theoretical consistency and relevance (Çakirkaya & Afşar, 2024; Yan et al., 2023). In the second stage, the questionnaire was developed using a 7-point Likert

scale to measure respondents' perceptions of the four main constructs. Measurement items were adapted from validated instruments used in prior empirical studies, ensuring content validity and construct reliability (Hameed et al., 2023; Hendarman & Andriani, 2024). The third stage involved data collection, where respondents provided demographic information and evaluated statements related to peer influence, viral marketing exposure, brand awareness, and food purchase intention.

PLS-SEM analysis was performed in SmartPLS. Initial evaluation focused on the measurement model's validity and reliability. Convergent validity (factor loadings > 0.70, AVE > 0.50), discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker criterion), and internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability > 0.70) were all confirmed. Subsequently, the structural model's quality was assessed based on path coefficients, the explanatory power (R^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2), following established guidelines (Henseler et al., 2015).

Finally, the significance of direct and indirect effects was tested via bootstrapping in SmartPLS. Hypotheses regarding the mediating role of brand awareness and other paths were assessed using the t-statistics and p-values generated from this procedure (Nallaluthan et al., 2024). In summary, the application of PLS-SEM, supported by a rigorous measurement and structural model evaluation, provides a comprehensive and methodologically sound framework for analyzing the complex relationships among peer influence, viral marketing, brand awareness, and purchase intention. This approach enables robust predictive insights into Generation Z's digital consumption behavior and offers valuable implications for marketing strategy development.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Research Results

The validity and reliability of the constructs were verified through measurement model assessment. For convergent validity, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were examined. As detailed in Table 1, the AVE for each construct surpasses the 0.50 benchmark (Brand Awareness = 0.620; Peer Influence = 0.620; Viral Marketing = 0.618; Purchase Intention = 0.549), indicating that convergent validity is satisfactorily met.

Table 1. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) Values for Each Construct

	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Brand Awareness	0.620
Peer Influence	0.620
Purchase Intention	0.549
Viral Marketing	0.618

The measurement model demonstrated both convergent and discriminant validity. First, all indicator loadings (0.655-0.840) exceeded the acceptable minimum, confirming that the items are suitable representations of their constructs (Hair et al., 2021). Second, as presented in Table 2, discriminant validity was established via the Fornell-Larcker criterion, where the square root of each construct's AVE was higher than its correlations with other constructs, affirming their distinctiveness.

Table 2. Fornell-Larcker Discriminant Validity Assessment Results

	Brand Awareness	Peer Inluence	Purchase Intention	Viral Marketing
Brand Awareness	0.787			
Peer Inluence	0.276	0.787		
Purchase Intention	0.622	0.437	0.741	
Viral Marketing	0.538	0.482	0.525	0.786

To evaluate scale reliability, Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability were computed. The results (Table 3) confirm that all constructs meet the 0.70 benchmark, indicating that the measures possess sufficient internal consistency.

Table 3. Reliability Test Results

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)
Brand Awareness	0.798	0.827	0.866
Peer Inluence	0.703	0.740	0.830
Purchase Intention	0.727	0.734	0.829
Viral Marketing	0.795	0.802	0.866

The reliability analysis indicates that all constructs possess adequate internal consistency. The Composite Reliability (CR) values range from 0.829 to 0.866, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. Similarly, Cronbach's Alpha values fall within acceptable limits. The results support the idea that the tools used in this research are dependable and can generate similar outcomes from all participants.

Model evaluation included R^2, f^2, Q^2, and path coefficient analysis. The R^2 results (Table 4) show that Peer Influence and Viral Marketing collectively explain 29.0% of the variance in Brand Awareness. Meanwhile, Peer Influence, Viral Marketing, and Brand Awareness together explain 47.9% of the variance in Purchase Intention. These proportions indicate a moderate explanatory strength for the proposed relationships.

Table 4. R² and Adjusted R² Values

	R Square	R Square adjusted
Brand Awareness	0.290	0.284
Purchase Intention	0.479	0.471

Effect size (F square) analysis, shown in Table 5, reveals that Viral Marketing has a large effect on Brand Awareness F square = 0.302, while Brand Awareness has a large effect on Purchase Intention F square = 0.305. Peer Influence exhibits a small-to-moderate effect on Purchase Intention F square = 0.078.

Table 5. F Square Effect Size Results

	Brand Awareness	Peer Inluence	Purchase Intention	Viral Marketing
Brand Awareness			0.305	
Peer Inluence	0.000		0.078	
Purchase Intention				
Viral Marketing	0.302		0.029	

Analysis of effect sizes reveals substantial influences. Viral Marketing strongly affects Brand Awareness (f^2 = 0.302), and Brand Awareness strongly affects Purchase Intention (f^2

= 0.305). Peer Influence shows a notably smaller effect on Purchase Intention (f^2 = 0.078). This pattern suggests that Viral Marketing is fundamental for establishing brand visibility, and Brand Awareness is a more powerful direct antecedent of purchase intention than Peer Influence.

$Q^2 = 1 - (1-R1)(1-R2)$
$Q^2 = 1 - (1 - 0.290)(1 - 0.479)$
$Q^2 = 1 - (0.791)(0,521)$
$Q^2 = 1 - 0,412111$
$Q^2 = 0,587889$
$Q^2 = 58,7\%$

The Q^2 value of 0.587 from the Stone Geisser test indicates that the model shows significant predictive accuracy. With a Q^2 value greater than zero, it suggests that the model can accurately forecast endogenous variables. This supports the model's suitability for examining Gen Z consumer behavior within the context of marketing communication and social interaction dynamics.

The hypothesis test results (Table 6) confirm several key relationships. Viral Marketing exerts a strong, positive effect on Brand Awareness (β = 0.528, p < 0.001). Brand Awareness, in turn, significantly increases Purchase Intention (β = 0.473, p < 0.001). Furthermore, Peer Influence directly enhances Purchase Intention (β = 0.230, p = 0.005). However, Peer Influence does not significantly affect Brand Awareness (β = 0.021, p = 0.767), and Viral Marketing lacks a significant direct path to Purchase Intention (β = 0.159, p = 0.060).

Table 6. Hypotheses Testing Results

	Original sample	T statistics	P values
Brand Awareness → Purchase Intention	0.473	7.395	0.000
Peer Inluence → Brand Awareness	0.021	0.297	0.767
Peer Inluence → Purchase Intention	0.230	2.790	0.005
Viral Marketing → Brand Awareness	0.528	7.686	0.000
Viral Marketing → Purchase Intention	0.159	1.879	0.060

Results of the mediation test, detailed in Table 7, indicate that Brand Awareness plays divergent mediating roles. It shows no mediating effect between Peer Influence and Purchase Intention. However, it fully mediates the effect of Viral Marketing on Purchase Intention, as evidenced by a statistically significant indirect path (β = 0.250, p < 0.001).

Table 7. Hypothesis Mediation Test Results

	Original sample	T statistics	P values
Peer Inluence → Brand Awareness → Purchase Intention	0.010	0.294	0.769
Viral Marketing → Brand Awareness → Purchase Intention	0.250	5.759	

4.2. Discussion

This study reveals several important insights into Generation Z's purchasing behavior, particularly the distinct roles of peer influence and viral marketing. One of the most notable findings is that peer influence significantly affects purchase intention but does not significantly influence brand awareness. This result highlights a critical distinction between cognitive and behavioral mechanisms in Gen Z consumption.

From a theoretical perspective, this finding suggests that peer influence operates primarily through normative pressure rather than informational influence. While peers may encourage purchasing behavior through social approval, conformity, or fear of exclusion, they do not necessarily contribute to brand recognition or recall. This aligns with the notion that Gen Z consumers prioritize authenticity and autonomy; peer-driven messages that appear performative or trend-driven may be disregarded at the awareness stage (Hendarman & Andriani, 2024). In the context of Bali, where digital exposure is high and viral content is abundant, brand awareness may be shaped more by algorithm-driven content than by interpersonal communication. Conversely, viral marketing emerges as the strongest predictor of brand awareness, supporting existing theories that emphasize repetition, emotional engagement, and algorithmic amplification as key drivers of brand recall. Platforms such as TikTok expose users to viral content regardless of social ties, enabling rapid diffusion and consistent exposure that enhances memory encoding and recognition. This finding reinforces prior research indicating that viral marketing is particularly effective at the cognitive stage of the consumer decision-making process.

Another key finding is that viral marketing does not directly influence purchase intention, but instead exerts its effect entirely through brand awareness. This indicates that attention and engagement alone are insufficient to trigger purchasing behavior unless consumers first develop familiarity and trust in the brand. For Gen Z consumers, who are highly sceptical of exaggerated online hype, brand awareness functions as a necessary cognitive filter that legitimizes viral exposure before it can translate into intention. Meanwhile, brand awareness plays a pivotal role in driving purchase intention, confirming classical branding theory that awareness precedes evaluation and intent. Recognizable brands reduce perceived risk and simplify decision-making in saturated digital environments. This is particularly relevant in the food sector, where familiarity is closely associated with safety, quality, and reliability.

The mediation results further clarify these dynamics. Brand Awareness fully mediates the relationship between Viral Marketing and Purchase Intention, but does not mediate the relationship between Peer Influence and Purchase Intention. This indicates two distinct behavioral pathways: viral marketing influences purchase intention through cognitive brand-building mechanisms, while peer influence directly affects purchase intention through social validation and conformity. This dual-pathway model provides a more nuanced understanding of Gen Z consumer behavior, emphasizing that awareness is the key mechanism for viral content, whereas social pressure drives peer-based purchasing decisions. Overall, the findings contribute to contemporary digital marketing theory by demonstrating that peer influence and viral marketing affect different stages of the consumer decision process. For practitioners, this suggests that viral campaigns should prioritize brand visibility and memorability, while peer-based strategies should focus on reinforcing trust and social acceptance to convert awareness into purchase intention.

5. Conclusion

This research investigated the effects of peer influence and viral marketing on brand awareness and purchase intention for Generation Z consumers, proposing brand awareness as a mediator. The results demonstrate that viral marketing strongly boosts brand awareness, which then elevates purchase intention. Peer influence, however, directly drives purchase intention without significantly building brand awareness. Notably, brand awareness fully mediates the impact of viral marketing on intention but does not mediate the effect of peer

influence. Theoretically, this study enriches the digital marketing discourse by synthesizing peer influence, viral marketing, and brand awareness into a unified model, specifically applied to Gen Z's food consumption behavior in Indonesia. The findings highlight that peer influence and viral marketing operate through distinct behavioral mechanisms: viral marketing primarily influences cognitive processes by strengthening brand recognition and recall, whereas peer influence exerts a more immediate social and normative effect on purchasing decisions. This distinction advances existing consumer behavior theories by clarifying the differentiated roles of social and digital stimuli in shaping purchase intention.

From a managerial standpoint, the findings suggest that marketers targeting Generation Z should prioritize the design of viral marketing strategies that explicitly aim to build brand awareness rather than merely generating short-term engagement. Viral content should be crafted to ensure consistent brand cues, such as clear visual identity, repeated brand mentions, recognizable packaging, and emotionally resonant storytelling, to enhance brand recall and familiarity. Leveraging platform-specific features such as TikTok trends, short-form videos, interactive challenges, and algorithm-friendly content can further amplify exposure and reinforce brand memory. In addition, marketers should collaborate with influencers who are perceived as authentic and credible to ensure that viral messages align with Gen Z's values and avoid perceptions of inauthentic hype. At the same time, peer influence should be strategically utilized to strengthen purchase intention by fostering social validation and trust within online communities. Encouraging user-generated content, reviews, and peer-to-peer recommendations can help translate brand awareness into actual purchasing decisions, particularly for food products where social reassurance reduces perceived risk.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The research is confined to Bali, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to regions with different cultural or social dynamics. Additionally, the cross-sectional design captures data at a single point in time, restricting insights into long-term behavioral changes. The study also omits variables such as brand trust, product quality, or consumer satisfaction, which could further influence purchase intention. Future research should expand the sample across multiple regions in Indonesia or Southeast Asia to improve external validity. Longitudinal studies could better reveal how Generation Z's responses to peer influence and viral marketing evolve. Furthermore, including additional mediators or moderators such as brand trust, perceived authenticity, or product quality—and comparing effects across product categories or generational cohorts would deepen the understanding of digital consumer behavior.

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