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The Role of Brand Preference as Moderation in the Relationship between Social Media Influencer, Brand trust, and Purchase Intention

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine whether an individual's preference for their favorite influencer can strengthen their awareness of the advertised product and ultimately increase their purchase intention. A total of 270 samples were used in this study, following specific criteria. The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 16 and AMOS ver.22. The results of the study indicate that the presence of celebrity influencers is effective in creating consumer awareness, especially among their followers. Furthermore, the higher the awareness of the brand being advertised, the higher the potential purchase intention. Further findings from the study demonstrate that celebrity preference moderates the influence of social media influencers on Brand trust.

Keywords: Social media influencer; Brand trust; Celebrity preference; Purchase intention

INTRODUCTION:

In the world of marketing, the use of celebrities as product endorsers has become a popular strategy for brands to influence consumers' purchase intentions (Li & Xie, 2022). Celebrities possess attractiveness and strong influence over the public, making them effective tools for building positive brand image and boosting product sales (Lee & Zhang, 2022). The utilization of celebrities as endorsers takes place through various media channels, such as television advertisements, print advertisements, social media, and participation in brand promotion events. When consumers see their favorite or admired celebrities endorsing or using specific products, they tend to be influenced and have a higher intention to purchase those products (Kaur & Wadhawan, 2022).

Previous research has identified several factors that affect the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement, such as the celebrity's popularity, consumer trust in the celebrity, the fit between the celebrity and the brand, and the celebrity's credibility in the relevant field. However, there is still room for further research in the context of consumers' purchase intentions influenced by celebrity endorsement. This study aims to deepen the understanding of the influence of celebrity endorsement on consumers' brand purchase intentions. By understanding the factors that influence consumers' purchase intentions in this context, companies can design more effective marketing strategies and enhance the success of their celebrity endorsement campaigns.

Branding plays a critical role in the success of businesses, as noted by Keller and Kotler (2022). Within the online business industry, purchase intention is considered a significant factor for companies (Kurdi et al., 2022). One effective strategy for capturing consumer attention is the use of online influencers, often referred to as "celebrities" in the digital realm (Lou, 2022). These social media influencers play a role in disseminating information and shaping consumer perceptions (Masuda, Han, & Lee, 2022). The practice of using celebrity endorsements has been popular since the 1970s, with successful examples from well-known brands like Air Canada, StrongVolt, and American Express (Lehto, 2022).

According to a 2022 report by the Association of National Advertisers (ANA), approximately 58% of brands had partnerships with around 25 influencers. Research by Lou (2022), Hudders and De Jans (2022), and Leung, Sun, and Asswailem (2022) suggests that influencers have a significant impact on consumer perceptions of advertised products. Effective social media influencers can enhance Brand trust and engage with consumers, leading to a sense of comfort and familiarity with the promoted products (Baharuddin, Musa, Rosle, Ibrahim, & Noh, 2022). Cheung et al. (2019a) emphasize the importance of social media Brand trust in increasing market share, as consumer Brand trust directly influences purchasing



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Literature Review:

Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) Theory

One theory that addresses the concept of intention is the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) Theory proposed by Nagoya et al. (2021). Derived from environmental psychology, this theory examines how individuals react to stimuli in their surroundings. The SOR theory highlights the interplay among three components: stimulus (S), organism (O), and response (R). It suggests that consumer emotions play a vital role in shaping responses to environmental stimuli. In the context of influencer marketing, the influencer serves as the stimulus. The organism, or the individual, can either accept or reject the stimulus. Rejection implies that the stimulus lacks effectiveness in influencing the individual. Conversely, acceptance indicates that the stimulus is effective in influencing the individual. When individuals accept the stimulus presented by the influencer, they pay attention and respond accordingly.

Social Media Influencer

Influencer marketing refers to the practice of external individuals exerting influence on consumer purchasing decisions (Jin, Muqaddam, & Ryu, 2019). Social media influencers primarily aim to engage their target audience through digital platforms (Vrontis, Makrides, Christofi, & Thrassou, 2021). These influencers utilize various social media channels, such as blogs, tweets, and other platforms, to shape the attitudes of their followers (Jin et al., 2019). By consistently creating and sharing relevant content related to the topics they promote, influencers can capture the attention and loyalty of their audience (Jin et al., 2019). The rise in popularity of social media influencers can be attributed to the accessibility and affordability of modern influencer marketing strategies (Glucksman, 2017). Companies can effectively leverage social media influencers to achieve their business objectives, including raising awareness for new product launches, driving online sales, and building a favorable brand reputation (Andreani, Gunawan, & Haryono, 2021). When a company promotes its own products solely through its social media business page, the posts may be easily overlooked or perceived as overt advertising. However, when the company collaborates with influencers to endorse or review their products, people tend to pay more attention to the content, as it feels less like a traditional advertisement (Andreani et al., 2021). Based on the insights from various researchers mentioned earlier, it can be concluded that social media influencers are individuals who possess the ability to influence others' purchasing decisions through popular social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok.

Brand trust

According to Khadim et al. (2018), trust is defined as a positive expectation that others will not act opportunistically. It is a shared expectation between individuals that one party can trust the speech or actions of another. Trust plays a crucial role in building long-term relationships between parties. Ebrahim (2020) also found that brand trust has a positive and significant effect on customer loyalty. Brand trust encompasses expectations of reliability and intensity from both brands. Ebrahim (2020), Khadim et al. (2018) explain that trust consists of specific beliefs related to integrity (the honesty and



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promise-keeping ability of the trusted party), benevolence (the trusted party's care and motivation to act in the best interests of those who trust them), competency (the trusted party's ability to meet the needs of those who trust them), and predictability (the consistency of the trusted party's behavior).

Brand Preference

Brand preference holds significant importance in understanding consumers' brand choices and receives considerable attention from marketers (Shiva, Arora, & Rishi, 2022). It serves as a reflection of consumers' evaluations of brands and encompasses three responses: cognitive, affective, and conative or behavioral. The cognitive component includes brand beliefs, the affective response reflects consumers' level of liking or emotions towards the brand (Kucharczuk, Oliver, & Dowdell, 2022), and the conative component predicts consumer behavior or actions (Armstrong, Adam, Denize, & Kotler, 2014). Building brand equity, which benefits from brand preference and consumers' purchase intention, has been emphasized (Shiva et al., 2022). Based on the aforementioned perspectives, it can be concluded that celebrity preference represents the alignment between consumers and a specific brand, thereby enhancing consumers' purchase intention. In this study, the alignment between a brand and its audience's preferences is explored from the viewpoint of consumers who already had a liking for the brand prior to its promotion by influencers. The preference or dislike for the influencer does not impact consumers' Brand trust if they already had a favorable opinion of the product beforehand. Moreover, the presence of Brand trust among consumers can stimulate purchase intentions by reinforcing preferences for a particular brand. Thus, brand preference serves to strengthen consumer awareness and purchase intentions.

Purchase Intention

Purchase intention refers to the decision-making process that involves understanding the factors influencing consumers' inclination to purchase a particular brand. It serves as a key indicator for consumers to access and evaluate specific products. Masuda et al. (2022) define purchase intention as the possibility, willingness, plan, and readiness of consumers to make a future purchase of a product or service. High purchase intention indicates a potential increase in actual purchases (Kurdi et al., 2022). When consumers have the intention to purchase, it signifies a commitment to a brand, which can drive their purchasing behavior (Masuda et al., 2022). According to Pop, Hlédik, and Dabija (2023), purchase intention represents consumers' tendency to make a purchase or engage in purchase-related actions, and it can be measured by assessing the likelihood of consumers making a purchase. Moreover, Masuda et al. (2022) consider purchase intention as an effective tool for predicting the consumer's purchasing process. The formation of purchase intention can be influenced by both internal and external motivations throughout the purchase process.

Hypotheses Development

Social media influencer on Brand trust

Social media marketing is widely recognized as an effective tool for cultivating customer relationships, as stated by Ibrahim et al. (2021) and Khadim et al. (2018). Interactions through social media platforms can help establish trust and alleviate uncertainties that may hinder customers from engaging with brands and making online transactions. Consumers perceive social media as a reliable source of information, making it an essential component of marketing practices. Sanny et al. (2020) found that social media marketing has a positive impact on brand trust, which aligns with the findings of Bernardo et al. (2020). They concluded that social media marketing positively influences brand trust, and an increase in social media marketing efforts correlates with an increase in brand trust levels. Based on these findings, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Social media influencer has a positive effect on Brand trust

Brand trust on purchase intention

Various concepts of brand trust have been explored in the branding literature, as noted by Shin et al. (2019). Several scholars have found that increased trust in a brand leads to higher repurchase intentions and brand preference (Chinomona et al., 2013). Previous research has also shown that brand trust is a predictor of brand preference (Afsar 2014). Furthermore, there is a positive relationship between brand trust and purchase intention, indicating that as brand trust strengthens, the likelihood of purchase intention increases (Aydin et al., 2014; Sanny et al., 2020). Multiple studies have confirmed the positive impact of brand trust on purchase intention (Sanny et al., 2020). Based on these findings, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2:Brand trust has a positive effect on purchase intention

Brand preference as moderating

Brand preference refers to the customer's favorable judgment and inclination towards a particular brand. It signifies that the customer has positive emotions and feelings associated with that brand. Brand preference typically occurs during

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the evaluation stage of the customer's decision-making process (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Furthermore, researchers have emphasized the importance of celebrity preference as a significant factor influencing purchase intention. It has been found that brand preference positively impacts purchase intention (Emor & Pangemanan, 2015; Pool et al., 2018). Based on these findings, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3:Brand preference moderates the effect of social media influencer on Brand trust.

H4:Brand preference moderates the effect of Brand trust on purchase intention.

METHOD

The sampling method used in this study is purposive sampling and snowball sampling with nonrandom sample selection criteria, which involve selecting members of the population who meet specific criteria. The criteria in this study include participants who have viewed influencer content on social media. The study aims to collect approximately 200 data samples. Data will be collected through the distribution of questionnaires using an online platform, specifically Google Forms, to reach a larger number of participants. Based on the developed hypotheses, the research model can be illustrated as presented in Figure 1. This study utilizes the IBM AMOS software version 22 for data analysis.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data used in this study are primary data collected through an online questionnaire distributed by clicking the link provided by the researcher using Google Forms. IBM SPSS Statistics version 15 was used to test the validity and reliability of the data. Furthermore, hypothesis testing in this study was conducted using IBM AMOS version 22 software. The response rate of the questionnaires distributed through Google Forms can be seen in the following:

Validity Testing

The researcher utilized factor analysis with the KMO Bartlett's test as the standard assessment to evaluate the sample adequacy in this study. Questionnaire items were considered valid if they achieved a factor loading of more than 0.7.

Table 1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0,842
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1692,809
	Df	120
	Sig.	0,000

The table above shows the results of the sample adequacy test, as indicated by the KMO MSA value of 0.842. This value is greater than 0.7, indicating that the sample in this study is suitable for factor analysis. The results of the factor analysis for each variable can be seen in Table 4.9 below:

Table 2. Validity Results

Social media influencer			
Kode	Factor Loading	Status	
SMI1	0,737	Valid	
SMI2	0,817	Valid	
SMI3	0,754	Valid	
SMI4	0,765	Valid	
SMI5	0,758	Valid	
Brand trust Item			
BT1	0,628	Valid	
BT2	0,770	Valid	
BT3	0,732	Valid	
Brand Preference			
BP1	0,649	Valid	
BP2	0,855	Valid	
BP3	0,876	Valid	

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BP4	0,866	Valid	
BP5	0,789	Valid	
Purchase Intention			
PPI1	0,914	Valid	
PPI2	0,871	Valid	
PPI3	0,680	Valid	

The table of factor analysis results above shows that all items in each variable, including social media influencer, Brand trust, brand preference, and purchase intention, have factor loadings greater than 0.5 and KMO Bartlett's test value > 0.5. This indicates that the questionnaire items used in the study are considered valid.

Reliability Testing

The results of the questionnaire's reliability testing using Cronbach's alpha as the measure of reliability, which is > 0.6 for each item of the variables, can be seen in Table 4.15 below:

Table 3. Reliability Testing

Code	Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Category
SMI	Social Media Influencer	0,823	Reliable
BT	Brand trust	0,792	Reliable
BP	Brand Preference	0,868	Reliable
P	Purchase Intention	0,765	Reliable

The table above shows that all variables in this study are considered reliable, as indicated by Cronbach's alpha values above 0.60. This means that the variables including social media influencer, Brand trust, brand preference, and purchase intention have high reliability, indicating a high level of accuracy in using these variables in research.

Descriptive Statistical Analysis

 Table 4. Descriptive Statistic Results

Code	Variable	Mean	Deviation Standard
SMI	Social Media Influencer	3,73	0,642
BT	Brand trust	3,96	0,617
BP	Brand Preference	3,67	0,687
P	Purchase Intention	3,87	0,699

From the descriptive table above, it can be observed that the social media influencer variable has a mean value of 3.73, while Brand trust has a mean value of 3.96. Furthermore, brand preference has a mean score of 3.67, and purchase intention has a mean score of 3.87. The average scores for each variable are considered good and evenly distributed, as they are above 3.5. This indicates that these variables are suitable for use in the study.

Model Fit Test

The model fit test in this study is evaluated using goodness of fit criteria. These assumptions must be met prior to conducting SEM analysis. If these assumptions are satisfied, model testing can proceed. The evaluation of goodness of fit can be seen in the table below along with the suggested cut-off values:

Table 5. Model Fit Test Results

Index	Cut-off Value	Value	Result
Chi-square	The smaller, the better	265,200	Poor
GFI	> 0,90	0,885	Poor
NFI	> 0,90	0,926	Fit
TLI	> 0,90	0,937	Fit
CFI	> 0,90	0,955	Fit
RMSEA	≤ 0,08	0,08	Fit

Table 5 above shows the results of the analysis of each category of the index model used by the researcher. From the table above it can be seen that although the chi-square value and the GFI value are in the "not fit" category, the other index values



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appear to fulfill the requirements based on the opinion of (Treiblmaier, 2006). This can be seen from the comparison with the Cut-off Value or the recommended value, the NFI value is 0.926 which is greater than 0.90. Furthermore, the RMSEA value is 0.08 which is the same as 0.08, which means that this model can be said to be good. Then the CFI and TLI values are 0.955 and 0.937, this value is also greater than 0.90 meaning that this research model can be said to be a good model.

Hypothesis Testing Results

The hypothesis testing in this study was carried out using IBM AMOS version 22 software. The test results can be seen in the following table:

Table 6. Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses	Estimate	P-value	Results
H1: Social media influencers have a positive effect	2,715	0,000	Supported
on Brand trust			
H2: Brand trust has a positive effect on purchase	0,161	0,046	Supported
intention			
H3: Brand preference moderates the influence of	0,688	0,000	Supported
social media influencers on Brand trust			
H4: Brand preference moderates the effect of Brand	0,030	0,299	Not Supported
trust on purchase intention			

The Effect of Social Media Influencers on Brand trust

Table 6 above can be seen that the influence of social media influencers on Brand trust has a P-value of 0.000 which is less than 0.05 (<0.05) and also has a positive estimated value of 2.715, which means it is first supported. The hypothesis that social media influencers have a positive effect on Brand trust is accepted. The influence of an influencer on social media can indeed create a trend setter. Therefore, nowadays many business people are collaborating with influencers to work together by promoting a brand so that it is more widely known by the public. This will also increase Brand trust in the minds of consumers. People who previously did not know and were not aware of the existence of the brand but after being advertised by an influencer, people became aware of the presence of a product from a brand.

Effect of Brand trust on Purchase Intention

Based on the analysis of Table 6, it is evident that the influence of social media influencers on Brand trust yields a statistically significant result, with a p-value of 0.046, which is smaller than the significance level of 0.05 (<0.05). Additionally, the estimated coefficient value for this relationship is 0.161, indicating a positive effect. These findings support the second hypothesis, which suggests that Brand trust positively impacts purchase intention. When individuals become aware of a product from a specific brand, they are more likely to seek additional information about the brand, including its benefits and uses. This increased awareness ultimately leads to a stronger intention to purchase, particularly if the individual has a genuine need for the product. It is important to note that the actual realization of purchase intention can occur either immediately or in the future, depending on each individual's circumstances.

Brand Preference Moderates the Effect of Social Media Influencers on Brand trust

From According to the findings presented in Table 6, the moderating effect of brand preference on the relationship between social media influencers and Brand trust is rejected. The statistical analysis shows a p-value of 0.000, which is smaller than the significance level of 0.05 (<0.05), indicating that the influence of social media influencers on Brand trust is moderated by brand preference. The coefficient of 0.688 indicates a positive relationship. The presence of brand preference strengthens the impact of social media influencers on Brand trust, supporting the third hypothesis of this study. Influencers have the ability to influence their followers, including their consumption choices regarding endorsed products or services. This influence is particularly strong when consumers have had positive experiences with the brand being advertised. Ultimately, it all boils down to individual preferences. Preferences are based on compatibility, and different people have different brand preferences, leading to varied responses. When individuals see their favorite influencers endorsing a brand on social media, they become interested because there is a match between the influencer and the advertised brand. Each brand has its own unique characteristics, which may appeal to certain individuals but not necessarily to others. On the other hand, when individuals do not have any reference or connection, regardless of how influential the advertisers are, they are unlikely to pay attention or show interest.



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Brand Preference Moderates the Effect of Brand trust on Purchase Intention

Based on the information provided in Table 6, it can be observed that brand preference has a moderating effect on the relationship between Brand trust and purchase intention. However, the results do not support the hypothesis. The p-value of 0.299 is greater than the set significance level of 0.05 (<0.05), indicating that brand preference does not significantly strengthen the relationship between Brand trust and purchase intention. The estimate or coefficient of 0.030, which is positive, suggests that brand preference does not have a significant impact on the relationship. The findings suggest that being aware of a brand's presence does not guarantee a person's interest in making a purchase, especially if they do not have a sense of compatibility or liking for the brand. Consumer familiarity with a specific brand that aligns with their preferences plays a crucial role. Additionally, even if consumers have a liking for a particular brand and find it suitable, if the advertiser or influencer promoting the brand is not their favorite celebrity, it may not generate purchase intention.

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusion provides a brief description of the most important research findings that made a significant contribution to advancing the field under study. Final assessment of the significance of the research findings in relation to their implications. Indication of research limitations. Suggestions for improvement related to research limitations. Recommendations for future research and for policy changes. This study focuses on the moderating effect of brand preference on social media influencer relationships, Brand trust and purchase intention towards products from certain brands. The use of an influencer has indeed been proven to increase consumer awareness and influence their purchase intention for a brand. The impact caused by using influencers to advertise on social media is to attract attention and create awareness among their fans, so that it is expected to increase purchase intention for the advertised product. Based on the results obtained, of the four hypotheses proposed, three hypotheses were accepted and only one hypothesis was rejected. social media influencer and Brand trust proved to have a positive and significant effect on purchase intention. Furthermore, the moderating effect of brand preference is proven to moderate the effect of Brand trust on purchase intention.

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