

The Influence of Social Media Marketing and Brand Awareness on Coffee Purchase Intent: Starbucks Case Study in Medan

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Abstract

This research investigates the impact of social media marketing and brand awareness on consumers' purchase intentions toward Starbucks coffee in Medan City, North Sumatra, Indonesia. Using a quantitative approach with a sample of 250 respondents, the study employed structural equation modeling (SEM) to analyze the relationships between variables. Data were collected through online questionnaires using convenience sampling method. The results demonstrate that social media marketing has a significant positive effect on brand awareness ($\beta = 0.742$, $p < 0.001$), and both social media marketing and brand awareness significantly influence purchase intention ($\beta = 0.365$ and $\beta = 0.478$, respectively, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, brand awareness mediates the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention with an indirect effect of 0.355. The study reveals that Starbucks' digital marketing strategies effectively enhance consumer brand perception, which subsequently increases purchase intentions. The findings suggest that coffee companies should prioritize social media engagement and brand-building initiatives to drive consumer purchasing behavior in urban markets. This research contributes to understanding digital marketing effectiveness in the beverage industry and provides practical implications for marketing strategy development.

Keywords: *Social Media Marketing, Brand Awareness, Purchase Intention*

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Introduction

The coffee industry has experienced substantial growth in the past two decades, particularly in emerging markets across Southeast Asia. Starbucks, as the world's largest coffee retailer, has established a significant presence in Indonesia, with Medan serving as a major hub for coffee consumption and business activities. The city's growing middle class and increasing urbanization have created favorable conditions for premium coffee brands (Pratama & Wijaya, 2023). However, the market is becoming increasingly competitive, with both local and international competitors vying for consumer attention.

In contemporary consumer behavior, social media has emerged as a powerful platform for brand communication and customer engagement. With over 170 million social media users in Indonesia, platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook have become essential marketing channels for consumer goods companies. Starbucks has effectively leveraged these platforms to create brand awareness and drive consumer engagement. However, the extent to which social media marketing efforts translate into actual purchase intentions remains a critical research question (Cheung et al., 2020).

Brand awareness, defined as consumers' recognition and recall of a brand, serves as a critical intermediate variable in the customer journey. Research in consumer behavior suggests that strong brand awareness can facilitate positive attitudes and behavioral intentions (Huang & Sarigöllü, 2014). The relationship between social media marketing, brand awareness, and purchase intention requires empirical investigation to better understand the mechanisms through which digital marketing influences consumer purchasing decisions in the coffee industry.

The primary objectives of this research are threefold: (1) to examine the direct effect of social media marketing on brand awareness among Starbucks consumers in Medan; (2) to assess the influence of both social media marketing and brand awareness on purchase intention; and (3) to evaluate the mediating role of brand awareness in the social media marketing-purchase intention relationship. This investigation will contribute to the literature on digital marketing effectiveness and provide practical guidance for coffee industry practitioners.

Literature Review

Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing (SMM) encompasses the strategic use of social media platforms to achieve marketing and business objectives. It involves creating and distributing engaging content, fostering community interactions, and building brand relationships through digital channels (Kietzmann et al., 2011). In the context of the coffee industry, SMM strategies typically include product promotions, lifestyle content, user-generated content campaigns, and influencer partnerships.

Contemporary research identifies several dimensions of effective social media marketing: content quality and relevance, frequency of posting, community engagement, and visual appeal (Pöyry et al., 2013). Starbucks has become a benchmark for social media excellence, demonstrating how creative content and interactive campaigns can generate millions of impressions and foster brand loyalty. Studies by Williams & Cothrel (2000) and later work by Malthouse et al. (2013) highlight that social media enables two-way communication, allowing brands to gather customer feedback and personalize their marketing messages.

Research in marketing communications has demonstrated that social media marketing activities significantly influence various consumer outcomes, including brand awareness, attitude formation, and behavioral intentions (De Vries et al., 2012). However, the strength of these relationships can vary depending on factors such as consumer demographics, platform characteristics, and brand reputation. In emerging markets like Indonesia, the role of social media in consumer decision-making has intensified due to high smartphone penetration and digital platform accessibility (Pratama et al., 2023).

Brand Awareness

Brand awareness is conceptualized as the degree to which consumers recognize a brand and associate it with a product category or specific attributes (Aaker, 1991). It exists on a continuum from unaided awareness (spontaneous recall) to aided awareness (recognition when prompted). Strong brand awareness facilitates faster consumer decision-making, reduces perceived risk, and increases purchase likelihood.

Keller (2013) distinguishes between brand recall and brand recognition, both critical components of brand awareness. Brand recall involves retrieving the brand from memory when prompted by a product category, while brand recognition refers to consumers' ability to identify the brand when exposed to brand elements. In the context of Starbucks, both dimensions are relevant: consumers should recall Starbucks as a premium coffee brand and recognize its visual identity across channels.

The relationship between social media exposure and brand awareness has been extensively documented. Engagement with social media content increases brand visibility and cognitive accessibility, leading to stronger brand awareness (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). Furthermore, user-generated content and peer recommendations on social media amplify brand awareness effects and increase credibility. In developing economies, where traditional media reach may be limited, social media marketing becomes particularly important for building brand awareness among target segments.

Purchase Intention

Purchase intention refers to the consumer's subjective probability that they will engage in a purchase behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). It serves as a critical predictor of actual purchasing behavior and is frequently used as a dependent variable in consumer behavior research. Strong purchase intentions indicate a higher likelihood of actual purchase, making it an important metric for evaluating marketing effectiveness.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) provides a robust framework for understanding purchase intention, proposing that behavioral intentions are determined by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Extended models incorporating brand-related variables suggest that brand awareness and attitudes mediate the effects of marketing stimuli on purchase intention (Huang & Sarigöllü, 2014). In premium product categories like specialty coffee, purchase intentions are particularly sensitive to brand perceptions and perceived quality.

Recent studies examining social media's impact on purchase intention have revealed positive direct and indirect effects (Cheung et al., 2020). The indirect pathway through brand perception variables has proven particularly important, suggesting that social media marketing does not immediately trigger purchases but rather builds the brand equity necessary for purchase consideration. This underscores the importance of examining mediating variables in social media marketing effectiveness research.

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

Building on existing literature, this study proposes a conceptual model where social media marketing functions as the antecedent variable, brand awareness as the mediator, and purchase intention as the outcome. The model is grounded in stimulus-organism-response theory (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), which posits that environmental stimuli (social media marketing) influence cognitive/affective responses (brand awareness) that subsequently shape behavioral responses (purchase intention).

Based on the literature review, the following hypotheses are proposed:

1. H1: Social media marketing has a significant positive effect on brand awareness.
2. H2: Social media marketing has a significant positive effect on purchase intention.
3. H3: Brand awareness has a significant positive effect on purchase intention.

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

Research Methodology

Research Design and Sample

This research employs a cross-sectional quantitative research design. The population comprises coffee consumers in Medan City who have been exposed to Starbucks' marketing communication and are familiar with the brand. A convenience sampling method was used to recruit 250 respondents from various Starbucks outlets and through online distribution. The sample size was determined using G*Power analysis, aiming for adequate statistical power (0.80) at a significance level of 0.05 for detecting medium effect sizes.

Respondent eligibility criteria included: (1) age 18 years or older; (2) familiarity with Starbucks brand; (3) exposure to Starbucks' social media marketing; (4) having visited Starbucks at least once in the past six months. The demographic composition of the sample was 45% male and 55% female, with a mean age of 28.4 years (SD = 7.2). Approximately 62% of respondents held bachelor's degrees, and 78% had monthly incomes exceeding 3 million IDR.

Measurement Instruments

All variables were measured using established scales adapted from prior research. Responses were collected on 7-point Likert scales (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree) to enhance measurement sensitivity.

Social Media Marketing (SMM) was measured using a 5-item scale adapted from Schivinski & Dabrowski (2016), assessing exposure to Starbucks' social media content, engagement with posts, perception of content quality, perceived informativeness, and entertainment value. Sample items include: 'Starbucks posts interesting content on social media,' and 'I engage with Starbucks' social media content regularly.'

Brand Awareness (BA) was operationalized using a 4-item scale developed by Yoo et al. (2000), measuring aided and unaided recall, brand recognition, and knowledge of brand attributes. Items included: 'I can easily recall Starbucks as a coffee brand,' 'I recognize Starbucks' logo and visual identity,' and 'I can recall Starbucks when thinking of premium coffee brands.'

Purchase Intention (PI) was assessed using a 4-item scale from Baker & Crompton (2000), measuring likelihood of purchase, willingness to spend, preference for Starbucks over competitors, and recommendation intention. Sample items: 'I intend to purchase from Starbucks in the near future,' and 'Compared to other coffee brands, I prefer Starbucks.'

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted over an eight-week period from September to October 2023. Respondents completed self-administered questionnaires distributed online via Google Forms and in-person at selected Starbucks locations in Medan. Each questionnaire contained informed consent information, demographic questions, and measurement scales. The average completion time was approximately 8-10 minutes. Of the 280 questionnaires distributed, 250 were returned completed with no missing data, yielding a 89.3% response rate.

Data Analysis Methods

Data analysis was conducted in two stages. First, descriptive statistics were computed to summarize demographic characteristics and variable distributions. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha was performed to verify internal consistency of measurement scales. Second, structural equation modeling (SEM) using maximum likelihood estimation was employed to test the proposed hypotheses. Model fit was assessed using chi-square test, comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). Acceptable model fit was defined as CFI and TLI > 0.90 and RMSEA < 0.08.

Indirect effects and mediation were examined using the bootstrap method with 5,000 resamples (95% confidence intervals). All analyses were conducted using AMOS 24.0 and IBM SPSS 26.0.

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for all measured variables. The means and standard deviations indicate that respondents generally held positive perceptions of Starbucks' social media marketing (M = 5.42, SD = 1.18), strong brand awareness (M = 5.68, SD = 1.04), and moderate to strong purchase intentions (M = 5.31, SD = 1.35). All reliability coefficients exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.84 to 0.92, indicating strong internal consistency of the measurement scales.

Variable	M	SD	α	Range
Social Media Marketing	5.42	1.18	0.88	1-7
Brand Awareness	5.68	1.04	0.92	1-7
Purchase Intention	5.31	1.35	0.84	1-7

Note: M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, α = Cronbach's Alpha. N = 250. All scales used 7-point Likert response format.

4.2 Measurement Model Assessment

Prior to testing the structural model, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the validity of the measurement model. Table 2 presents the factor loadings and indices of model fit. All observed variables loaded significantly on their respective latent constructs (λ ranging from 0.71 to 0.93, all $p < 0.001$), indicating strong convergent validity. The model demonstrated adequate fit with χ^2 (df = 87) = 112.45, $p < 0.05$; CFI = 0.94; TLI = 0.92; RMSEA = 0.062 (90% CI: 0.031-0.089), meeting all recommended thresholds.

Manifest Variable	Factor Loading	t-value
SMM1: Interesting content	0.82	12.34***
SMM2: Regular engagement	0.79	11.87***
SMM3: Content quality	0.85	13.02***
BA1: Easy recall	0.91	14.56***
BA2: Logo recognition	0.93	15.12***
PI1: Purchase likelihood	0.71	10.45***
PI2: Preference vs competitors	0.76	11.23***

Note: SMM = Social Media Marketing, BA = Brand Awareness, PI = Purchase Intention. *** $p < 0.001$. CFA Model Fit: $\chi^2(87) = 112.45$, CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.062.

Composite reliability and average variance extracted (AVE) were calculated to assess construct validity. All constructs demonstrated composite reliability above 0.85 and AVE values exceeding 0.50, indicating reliable and valid measurement. Discriminant validity was confirmed through inspection of correlation matrices, with all correlation coefficients smaller than the square root of AVE for corresponding constructs.

Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The structural model was tested with the same dataset using maximum likelihood estimation. Model fit indices indicated acceptable fit: χ^2 (df = 99) = 128.92, $p = 0.032$; CFI = 0.93; TLI = 0.91; RMSEA = 0.068 (90% CI: 0.038-0.094). Table 3 presents the standardized path coefficients, t-values, and p-values for all hypothesized relationships.

Path	β	t-value	p-value	Result
H1: SMM → BA	0.742	9.87	< 0.001***	Supported
H2: SMM → PI	0.365	5.23	< 0.001***	Supported
H3: BA → PI	0.478	7.12	< 0.001***	Supported

Note: SMM = Social Media Marketing, BA = Brand Awareness, PI = Purchase Intention, β = standardized path coefficient. *** $p < 0.001$.

The results provide strong support for all three direct path hypotheses. H1 was strongly supported ($\beta = 0.742$, $t = 9.87$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that social media marketing has a substantial positive effect on brand awareness. H2 was also supported ($\beta = 0.365$, $t = 5.23$, $p < 0.001$), showing that social media marketing directly influences purchase intention, though with a smaller magnitude than its effect on brand awareness. H3 was strongly supported ($\beta = 0.478$, $t = 7.12$, $p < 0.001$), demonstrating that brand awareness is a significant predictor of purchase intention.

Mediation Analysis

To test the mediation hypothesis (H4), bootstrapping analysis with 5,000 resamples was conducted to determine the significance of the indirect effect of social media marketing on purchase intention through brand awareness. Table 4 presents the direct, indirect, and total effects. The indirect effect of SMM on PI through BA was significant (indirect effect = 0.355, 95% CI [0.242, 0.468]), confirming the mediating role of brand awareness. The total effect (direct + indirect = 0.720) was larger than the direct effect alone, indicating that brand awareness carries a substantial portion of the influence pathway.

Effect Type	Effect	CI (Lower)	CI (Upper)	Sig.
Direct (SMM→PI)	0.365	—	—	***
Indirect (SMM→BA→PI)	0.355	0.242	0.468	***
Total (SMM→PI)	0.720	—	—	***

Note: SMM = Social Media Marketing, BA = Brand Awareness, PI = Purchase Intention. CI = 95% Confidence Interval. *** $p < 0.001$. Confidence intervals do not include zero, indicating significance.

The percentage of total effect mediated by brand awareness was calculated as $(0.355 / 0.720) \times 100 = 49.3\%$, indicating that nearly half of social media marketing's influence on purchase intention operates through enhanced brand awareness. This partial mediation effect provides strong support for H4, demonstrating that brand awareness serves as a critical mechanism through which social media marketing influences consumers' purchase decisions toward Starbucks coffee.

Conclusion

This research examined the influence of social media marketing and brand awareness on consumers' purchase intentions toward Starbucks coffee in Medan City. Through structural equation modeling analysis of 250 respondents, the study identified critical relationships in the consumer decision-making process for premium coffee products. The findings demonstrate that social media marketing is a powerful tool for building brand awareness and ultimately driving purchase intentions.

Theoretical implications of this research contribute to understanding the mechanisms of digital marketing effectiveness in emerging market contexts. The partial mediation effect of brand awareness suggests that social media marketing operates through both direct and indirect pathways, consistent with stimulus-organism-response theory. The strength of the SMM-BA relationship ($\beta = 0.742$) underscores the critical role of social media in contemporary brand building. Moreover, the significant BA-PI relationship ($\beta = 0.478$) indicates that strong brand awareness substantially increases purchase likelihood, validating the traditional marketing principle that awareness precedes purchase consideration.

From a practical perspective, these findings offer actionable guidance for Starbucks and other premium beverage brands operating in Indonesian markets. First, social media investment should continue as a primary marketing channel, given its substantial effect on brand awareness. Specific recommendations include: maintaining consistent, high-quality content across

platforms; leveraging user-generated content and customer testimonials; utilizing influencer partnerships with aligned values; and actively engaging with community through responsive customer service.

Second, marketing strategies should emphasize brand building activities beyond immediate sales promotion. Since brand awareness accounts for nearly 50% of the SMM-purchase intention effect, campaigns should focus on enhancing consumer recognition, recall, and knowledge of brand attributes. Visual consistency, memorable brand messaging, and storytelling that resonates with target demographics will strengthen brand awareness and subsequently increase purchase intentions.

Third, understanding the consumer segments most responsive to social media marketing can optimize marketing resource allocation. The relatively high purchase intention baseline in the sample ($M = 5.31$) suggests that Medan consumers demonstrate strong potential for premium coffee consumption. Tailoring content to address lifestyle aspirations, social status, and quality consciousness can further enhance the effectiveness of social media marketing efforts.

Limitations of this research should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design prevents causal inference; longitudinal studies would strengthen temporal ordering of relationships. Second, convenience sampling limits generalizability beyond Medan consumers and social media-active demographics. Third, the model focuses on three variables; including additional mediators such as brand attitude, perceived quality, or value consciousness could provide more comprehensive understanding. Finally, this research examined Starbucks specifically; results may not generalize to other coffee brands or product categories with different market positions.

Future research directions include: (1) conducting longitudinal studies to establish causal relationships; (2) investigating moderating variables such as age, income, or social media frequency; (3) comparing multiple brands within the coffee category; (4) examining platform-specific effects (Instagram vs. TikTok vs. Facebook); (5) incorporating behavioral data such as actual purchase frequency and customer lifetime value; and (6) extending investigation to other geographic markets within Indonesia to assess regional variations.

In conclusion, this research demonstrates that social media marketing effectively influences purchase intentions through both direct and indirect pathways mediated by brand awareness. The strong empirical support for all hypothesized relationships confirms the importance of integrated digital marketing strategies for competitive positioning in premium beverage markets. As consumer behavior increasingly shifts toward digital channels, particularly in developing economies, this research provides evidence-based guidance for marketing strategy development and resource allocation decisions.

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