

The Effect of Viral Marketing, Celebrity Endorser, and Brand Awareness on Purchase Decisions for Skintific Products at STIE Malangkeucecwara with Trust as an Intervening Variable

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the effect of viral marketing, celebrity endorser, and brand awareness on the purchase decision for Skintific products at STIE Malangkeucecwara, with consumer trust as an intervening variable. The study employs a quantitative approach using a survey method with accidental sampling, involving 89 female student respondents. Data were collected via questionnaire and analyzed using multiple linear regression and the Sobel test. Results indicate that viral marketing, celebrity endorser, and brand awareness each have a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions. Consumer trust also proved to mediate the relationships between all three independent variables and purchase decisions. These findings provide practical implications for skincare marketing strategies, particularly in building consumer trust through digital content and collaboration with credible influencers.

INTRODUCTION

The advancement of digital technology and social media has significantly transformed how companies market products to consumers, particularly younger generations. Platforms such as TikTok and Instagram have become primary spaces for brands to build more personal and rapid interactions with audiences (Kannan & Li, 2017). This phenomenon is especially evident in the visually-driven and dynamically trend-following skincare industry (Appel et al., 2020). One brand that has grown rapidly through social media is Skintific, which has successfully captured the attention of Generation Z consumers in Indonesia. Promotional campaigns such as "5X Ceramide" exemplify how digital marketing strategies can create virality and stimulate purchase intent (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Students, as part of Generation Z, are a highly active group in accessing product information through social media (Sieczko et al., 2024). This situation indicates that purchase decisions are increasingly influenced by digital content, influencer recommendations, and consumer brand perceptions (Marc & Rasul, 2022).

Theoretically, viral marketing has become one of the key concepts in digital marketing, emphasizing the rapid dissemination of messages through social networks (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017; Nofal et al., 2022). Viral marketing leverages the electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) mechanism, enabling consumers to voluntarily act as information disseminators (Ismagilova et al., 2020). This strategy is considered effective as it can generate broad exposure at relatively lower costs compared to conventional promotions (Dwivedi et al., 2021). In social media contexts, viral marketing often manifests as creative content that triggers user attention and engagement (Appel et al., 2020). The success of viral marketing depends on message appeal, trend relevance, and the emotional responses of the audience (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017). Skincare, as an experiential product category, is highly suited to viral promotion featuring usage results (Sieczko et al., 2024). Therefore, viral marketing represents a potent strategy for influencing the purchase decisions of young consumers.

In addition to viral marketing, celebrity endorsement is a concept explaining how public figures influence consumer attitudes toward a product (Schouten et al., 2020). This aligns with source credibility theory, emphasizing the importance of an endorser's expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness in shaping positive perceptions (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). In the digital era, influencers are often considered more effective than traditional celebrities due to their greater closeness to their followers (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Endorsements by influencers can strengthen consumer belief in skincare product quality and benefits (Schouten et al., 2020). Brand awareness also plays an important role, as consumers tend to prefer brands they recognize and that carry a strong image (Dabbous & Barakat, 2020). Brand awareness is built through social media exposure, consumer reviews, and consistent marketing communication (Kannan & Li, 2017). Thus, celebrity endorsement and brand awareness serve as strategic elements in building brand-consumer relationships.

Although various studies have shown that viral marketing, celebrity endorser, and brand awareness influence purchase decisions, prior findings have been mixed (Ismagilova et al., 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Schouten et al., 2020). Some studies focus primarily on the direct relationship between digital marketing strategies and purchase decisions without exploring the underlying psychological mechanisms (Fan et al., 2023; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Yet in the skincare industry, purchase decisions are closely tied to consumer safety and confidence in the product (Schouten et al., 2020). Consumer trust has emerged as an important variable that can bridge the influence of marketing strategies on purchase behavior (Marc & Rasul, 2022). However, research examining the role of trust as a mediating variable specifically among Generation Z university students remains relatively limited. The novelty of this study lies in integrating viral marketing, celebrity endorser, and brand awareness within a single model with consumer trust as the intervening variable, thus filling a research gap concerning digital marketing-based skincare purchase decision formation.

The urgency of this study is heightened given the rapidly growing and socially-driven skincare industry in Indonesia. Generation Z—particularly university students—represents the primary market segment with dynamic consumption behavior highly susceptible to digital information. Understanding the factors shaping purchase decisions is crucial for companies designing more effective marketing strategies. This study is expected to provide practical contributions for brands like Skintific in building campaigns that are not only viral but also capable of strengthening consumer trust. Theoretically, the study enriches digital marketing literature by emphasizing the mediating role of trust. The proposed model can serve as a reference for future research in the context of cosmetic products and young consumer behavior.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Viral Marketing

Viral marketing is a digital marketing strategy that leverages the rapid spread of messages through social networks and online media, enabling brand-related information to diffuse exponentially. This concept is rooted in electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), wherein consumers act as voluntary disseminators of information through the digital content they share. Kotler & Armstrong (2021) affirm that viral marketing enables companies to reach wide audiences more cost-efficiently than conventional promotions. The success of this strategy is largely determined by the attractiveness, relevance, and shareability of content, especially if it carries emotional or informational value.

Empirical research shows that viral marketing has a significant impact on purchase decisions, particularly among younger consumers active on social media (Sarpiana et al., 2023). Consumer trust in digital content also strengthens the effectiveness of viral marketing, as consumers tend to consider information credibility before making purchases (Ananda et al., 2025). In the skincare industry, viral marketing is particularly relevant as consumers rely heavily on reviews, tutorials, and testimonials before selecting products. Thus, viral marketing has the potential to shape purchase decisions by increasing brand exposure and reinforcing positive consumer perceptions.

Celebrity Endorser

A celebrity endorser is a publicly known individual used by a company to support its products through personal appeal and social credibility (Jun et al., 2023). This strategy aims to build positive associations between a public figure and a brand, thereby accelerating brand recognition and increasing consumer confidence in the product. Ananda et al. (2025) and Jun et al. (2023) identify three key dimensions of celebrity endorser effectiveness: expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness. An endorser's expertise determines the degree to which consumers regard the figure as competent in a specific product category (Mamun et al., 2023).

Physical appeal and personality also shape consumers' emotional responses, especially for beauty products (Jun et al., 2023). Credibility is a crucial aspect, as consumers place greater trust in endorsers with good reputations and minimal controversy (Calvo-porrall & Rivaroli, 2021). In the skincare industry, celebrity endorsers are often effective because consumers need social validation and confidence in product safety. Therefore, celebrity endorsers can influence purchase decisions both directly and indirectly through enhanced consumer trust in the brand.

Brand Awareness

Brand awareness refers to a consumer's ability to recognize and recall a brand within a specific product category (Dabbous & Barakat, 2020). Zinkhan (1992) emphasizes that brand awareness is the primary foundation of the purchase decision process, as consumers tend to consider brands with which they are already familiar. Brand awareness encompasses two main forms: brand recall and brand recognition (Huang & Sarigöllü, 2012). High brand awareness increases the likelihood of a brand becoming a top choice, as it is associated with product quality and safety (Utama & Ambarwati, 2022).

In the digital era, social media plays a major role in building brand awareness through active company-consumer interaction (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Positive reviews and customer testimonials on e-commerce platforms also reinforce brand awareness and drive purchase decisions (Ahn & Lee, 2024). Research by Oktavia et al. (2024) shows that brand awareness has a significant influence on consumer preferences, particularly in beauty products sensitive to risk perceptions. Thus, brand awareness is a strategic factor in driving purchase decisions and consumer loyalty.

Consumer Trust

Consumer trust refers to an individual's belief in the integrity, reliability, and quality of another party in a business relationship (Peppers & Rogers, 2016). In digital marketing, trust is a key element because consumers often receive product information through social media that cannot be fully verified. Trust is built through perceived product quality, information transparency, and positive prior experiences. Ananda et al. (2025) emphasize that influencer credibility and brand openness strengthen trust, which in turn increases purchase intent. In the skincare industry, trust is especially critical as consumers evaluate product safety and effectiveness before purchasing. Therefore, trust acts as a mediating mechanism linking digital marketing strategies to consumer purchase decisions.

Purchase Decision

Purchase decision refers to the actual act of a consumer in choosing and buying a product after going through stages of need evaluation, information search, and post-purchase behavior (Kotler & Armstrong, 2021). Pieters et al. (2021) explain that purchase decisions are influenced by perceived utility, risk, and the credibility of information received. In the context of Generation Z, beauty product purchase decisions are increasingly influenced by visual content, social media virality, and endorsements by public figures (Alghaniy & Mukaram, 2025). Furthermore, purchase intentions are strengthened by the level of trust in the brand and the digital information circulating online (Sulistiyowati & Hwihanus, 2024). Accordingly, purchase decisions in this study are viewed as the outcome of the combined influence of viral marketing, celebrity endorser, brand awareness, and trust as the intervening variable.

HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Based on the literature reviewed above, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- H1: Viral marketing has a positive effect on purchase decision.
- H2: Celebrity endorser has a positive effect on purchase decision.
- H3: Brand awareness has a positive effect on purchase decision.
- H4: Viral marketing has a positive effect on consumer trust.
- H5: Celebrity endorser has a positive effect on consumer trust.
- H6: Brand awareness has a positive effect on consumer trust.
- H7: Consumer trust has a positive effect on purchase decision.
- H8: Consumer trust mediates the relationship between viral marketing and purchase decision.
- H9: Consumer trust mediates the relationship between celebrity endorser and purchase decision.
- H10: Consumer trust mediates the relationship between brand awareness and purchase decision.

Based on the developed theory and hypotheses, this study proposes a conceptual model integrating viral marketing, celebrity endorser, and brand awareness as independent variables influencing purchase decisions, both directly and indirectly through consumer trust as the intervening variable (Figure 1).

[Figure 1. Conceptual Research Model]

METHODS

This study employs a quantitative approach with a causal design to test relationships among variables in a digital marketing model. A quantitative approach was chosen because it enables objective measurement through numerical data and statistical hypothesis testing (Sugiyono, 2013). The study focuses on the effects of viral marketing, celebrity endorser, and brand awareness on the purchase decision for Skintific products, with consumer trust as the intervening variable. The research design is explanatory in nature, aiming to explain causal relationships among the constructs studied. Data were collected through a questionnaire survey administered to relevant respondents in the digital marketing context.

Population and Sample

The population comprised female students of STIE Malangkucecwara who had used or been exposed to Skintific product promotions through social media. Generation Z students were selected because they are active users of digital platforms such as TikTok and Instagram and are highly responsive to online marketing strategies. Based on academic data for the 2024/2025 academic year, the population totaled 761 students. Sample size was determined using the Slovin formula with a margin of error of 10%, yielding 89 respondents. Sampling used an accidental sampling technique—selecting respondents encountered by chance who met the research criteria (Sugiyono, 2013). This technique was chosen for its efficiency in reaching respondents consistent with social media user characteristics.

Variables and Measurement

Table 1. Variables, Operationalization, and Measurement

Variable	Operational Definition	Indicators	Statement Items
Viral Marketing (X1)	A social media marketing strategy with appealing content that spreads rapidly (Sarpiana et al., 2023)	1. Level of user engagement with content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I often talk about Skintific products to my friends • I enjoy sharing positive information about Skintific with others • I recommend Skintific products to people around me

		2. Content dissemination through social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I learned about Skintific products through social media • Information about Skintific packaged in social media videos is conveyed clearly • I easily understand Skintific information because viral TikTok content uses engaging language
		3. Consumer response to online promotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I frequently receive reviews and recommendations (positive or negative) about Skintific from social media or online forums
Celebrity Endorser (X2)	A public figure used in promotions due to their attractiveness, credibility, and suitability to the product (Jun et al., 2023)	1. Authenticity of endorsement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I feel that Skintific's celebrity endorser understands the product being advertised • I feel that Skintific's celebrity endorser is a figure liked by the public
		2. Celebrity credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I trust the celebrity endorsing Skintific products • The celebrity endorser effectively conveys information about Skintific
		3. Celebrity-product fit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The celebrity endorser has characteristics suitable for endorsing Skintific • The celebrity endorser has the appeal to promote Skintific • I feel that Skintific's celebrity endorser has an attractive physical appearance
Brand Awareness (X3)	The level of recognition, recall, and differentiation of a brand by consumers (Oktavia et al., 2024)	1. Brand recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am already generally familiar with Skintific skincare products • I can easily recognize the Skintific logo, and find the Skintific brand easy to pronounce and remember
		2. Consumer brand recall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I will remember the Skintific brand due to promotions or advertisements I have seen • The Skintific brand is the first to come to mind when I intend to buy skincare
		3. Consumer brand experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can differentiate Skintific from other similar skincare products • Skintific is my top choice when buying skincare products
Consumer Trust (Z)	Consumer belief in the quality, safety, and transparency of brand information (Utama & Ambarwati, 2022)	1. Trust in product quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am confident that Skintific products are safe to use • I believe Skintific uses high-quality ingredients
		2. Brand information transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I feel satisfied and believe that Skintific delivers results as claimed

		3. Prior consumer satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I believe Skintific is a trusted brand in the skincare market
Purchase Decision (Y)	The intention and act of purchasing a product after being influenced by marketing, endorsement, and brand awareness (Sulistiyowati & Hwihanus, 2024)	1. Purchase intention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am interested in buying Skintific products • I am willing to recommend Skintific products to others
		2. Purchase frequency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I make Skintific my primary choice when buying skincare
		3. Reasons for purchase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I seek as much information as possible before buying Skintific products • I buy Skintific due to influence from those around me • I buy Skintific because its price is relatively affordable

Data Collection Method

Research data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed directly to respondents. The research instrument was developed based on variable indicators previously tested in prior studies. Before the main distribution, a limited pilot test was conducted to ensure the instrument was well understood and met the requirements of validity and reliability. Questionnaires were administered to students meeting the criteria of being active social media users who are familiar with Skintific products. Collected data were then processed and analyzed using inferential statistical methods. The survey approach was chosen for its effectiveness in capturing consumer perceptions related to digital marketing.

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was conducted in several stages. First, descriptive statistical analysis was used to describe respondent characteristics and the distribution of variable responses. Second, validity and reliability tests were performed to ensure the research instrument was suitable for use, with the criterion Cronbach's alpha > 0.60 (Hair et al., 2021). Third, classical assumption tests—including normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity tests—were conducted to ensure the regression model met the required statistical assumptions (Ghozali, 2016). Subsequently, hypothesis testing was performed using multiple linear regression to analyze direct effects between variables. Finally, the mediating role of consumer trust was examined using the Sobel test to assess the significance of indirect effects from independent variables on purchase decisions. If the Sobel Z-value > 1.65 at the 5% significance level, mediation is deemed significant.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive statistical analysis provides a general overview of the distribution of respondent responses to the research variables, including minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation values.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variable	Number of Items	Mean
Viral Marketing (X1)	8	4.337
Celebrity Endorser (X2)	9	4.437

Brand Awareness (X3)	5	4.371
Consumer Trust (Z)	4	4.636
Purchase Decision (Y)	6	4.466

All research variables yielded mean values above 4.00, indicating that respondents tended to provide very positive assessments of viral marketing, celebrity endorser, brand awareness, trust, and purchase decisions for Skintific products. The highest mean was found for the trust variable (4.636), reflecting a very strong consumer belief in the quality and safety of the product, suggesting that Skintific's marketing strategy has successfully built positive perceptions and driven purchase decisions.

Validity Test

Validity testing determines the extent to which an instrument measures what it is intended to measure. Pearson Product Moment correlation was used, comparing each item's r-count against the r-table. With 89 respondents (df = 87), the r-table at $\alpha = 0.05$ is 0.2084.

Table 3. Validity Test Results

Variable	Instrument	r-count	r-table	Description
Viral Marketing (X1)	X1.1	0.537	0.2084	Valid
	X1.2	0.419	0.2084	Valid
	X1.3	0.536	0.2084	Valid
	X1.4	0.690	0.2084	Valid
	X1.5	0.676	0.2084	Valid
	X1.6	0.637	0.2084	Valid
	X1.7	0.658	0.2084	Valid
	X1.8	0.674	0.2084	Valid
Celebrity Endorser (X2)	X2.1	0.772	0.2084	Valid
	X2.2	0.689	0.2084	Valid
	X2.3	0.673	0.2084	Valid
	X2.4	0.728	0.2084	Valid
	X2.5	0.730	0.2084	Valid
	X2.6	0.705	0.2084	Valid
	X2.7	0.629	0.2084	Valid
	X2.8	0.730	0.2084	Valid
	X2.9	0.706	0.2084	Valid
Brand Awareness (X3)	X3.1	0.636	0.2084	Valid
	X3.2	0.630	0.2084	Valid

	X3.3	0.667	0.2084	Valid
	X3.4	0.772	0.2084	Valid
	X3.5	0.682	0.2084	Valid
Consumer Trust (Z)	Z1	0.759	0.2084	Valid
	Z2	0.819	0.2084	Valid
	Z3	0.755	0.2084	Valid
	Z4	0.843	0.2084	Valid
Purchase Decision (Y)	Y1	0.732	0.2084	Valid
	Y2	0.763	0.2084	Valid
	Y3	0.824	0.2084	Valid
	Y4	0.654	0.2084	Valid
	Y5	0.785	0.2084	Valid
	Y6	0.712	0.2084	Valid

All items across all variables (Viral Marketing X1, Celebrity Endorser X2, Brand Awareness X3, Consumer Trust Z, and Purchase Decision Y) yielded r-count values greater than the r-table (0.2084). Therefore, all items are declared valid, confirming that the instruments accurately measure the intended constructs.

Reliability Test

Reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha, with instruments considered reliable if alpha > 0.60.

Table 4. Reliability Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Description
Viral Marketing (X1)	0.743	Reliable
Celebrity Endorser (X2)	0.874	Reliable
Brand Awareness (X3)	0.703	Reliable
Consumer Trust (Z)	0.799	Reliable
Purchase Decision (Y)	0.836	Reliable

All variables achieved Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.60, confirming reliability. The highest value was for Celebrity Endorser (X2) at 0.874, indicating very high internal consistency among its items.

Normality Test

The normality test examines whether the regression model's residuals are normally distributed. The One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) Test was employed.

Table 5. Normality Test Results

Model	N	Mean Residual	Std. Deviation	K-S Statistic	Sig. (2-tailed)	Conclusion

Model 1	89	0.0000000	0.33234794	0.126	0.053	Normal
Model 2	89	0.0000000	0.26315679	0.064	0.200	Normal

Significance values of 0.053 (Model 1) and 0.200 (Model 2) both exceed 0.05, confirming that residuals in both models are normally distributed and the normality assumption is satisfied.

Multicollinearity Test

Multicollinearity was assessed using Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values. A Tolerance > 0.10 and VIF < 10 indicate the absence of multicollinearity.

Table 6. Multicollinearity Test – Model 1 (Dependent Variable: Consumer Trust Z)

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance
(Constant)	.825	.484		1.705	.092	
X1 (Viral Marketing)	.258	.124	.224	2.086	.040	.573 / VIF 1.747
X2 (Celebrity Endorser)	.246	.083	.254	2.945	.004	.888 / VIF 1.127
X3 (Brand Awareness)	.362	.111	.357	3.263	.002	.553 / VIF 1.808

In Model 1, all independent variables show Tolerance > 0.10 and VIF < 10: X1 (0.573; 1.747), X2 (0.888; 1.127), X3 (0.553; 1.808). No multicollinearity is present.

Table 7. Multicollinearity Test – Model 2 (Dependent Variable: Purchase Decision Y)

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance
(Constant)	-.745	.392		-1.901	.061	
X1 (Viral Marketing)	.393	.101	.318	3.882	.000	.545 / VIF 1.836
X2 (Celebrity Endorser)	.142	.070	.137	2.036	.045	.805 / VIF 1.242
X3 (Brand Awareness)	.442	.094	.406	4.712	.000	.492 / VIF 2.034
Z (Consumer Trust)	.177	.086	.165	2.048	.044	.563 / VIF 1.776

In Model 2, all Tolerance values exceed 0.10 and VIF values are below 10, confirming no multicollinearity across both models.

Heteroscedasticity Test

Table 8. Heteroscedasticity Test – Model 1 (Dependent Variable: |Residual|)

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.023	.231		4.430	.000
X1	-.058	.059	-.132	-.982	.329
X2	-.028	.040	-.076	-.708	.481

X3	-.083	.053	-.213	-1.559	.123
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In Model 1, the significance values for X1 (0.329), X2 (0.481), and X3 (0.123) all exceed 0.05, indicating no heteroscedasticity.

Table 9. Heteroscedasticity Test – Model 2 (Dependent Variable: |Residual2|)

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	.547	.217		2.523	.014
X1	.104	.056	.256	1.855	.067
X2	-.046	.039	-.134	-1.184	.240
X3	-.155	.052	-.432	-.978	.379
Z	.020	.048	.056	.411	.682

In Model 2, all significance values (X1: 0.067; X2: 0.240; X3: 0.379; Z: 0.682) are above 0.05, confirming the homoscedasticity assumption is met in both models.

Regression Analysis

Table 10. Regression Analysis – Model 1 (Dependent Variable: Consumer Trust Z)

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	.825	.484		1.705	.092
X1	.258	.124	.224	2.086	.040
X2	.246	.083	.254	2.945	.004
X3	.362	.111	.357	3.263	.002

From Model 1, the path equation is: $Z = 0.258X1 + 0.246X2 + 0.362X3 + e$. Consumer trust is positively influenced by all three independent variables. Viral marketing ($\beta = 0.258, p = 0.040$) indicates that broader viral content spread increases consumer confidence in the product. Celebrity endorser ($\beta = 0.246, p = 0.004$) shows that credible public figures strengthen consumer trust. Brand awareness exerts the strongest influence ($\beta = 0.362, p = 0.002$), indicating that higher brand recognition leads to greater trust.

Table 11. Regression Analysis – Model 2 (Dependent Variable: Purchase Decision Y)

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	-.745	.392		-1.901	.061
X1	.393	.101	.318	3.882	.000
X2	.142	.070	.137	2.036	.045
X3	.442	.094	.406	4.712	.000
Z	.177	.086	.165	2.048	.044

From Model 2, the path equation is: $Y = 0.393X1 + 0.142X2 + 0.442X3 + 0.177Z + e$. All variables significantly and positively influence purchase decisions. Brand awareness has the strongest effect ($\beta = 0.442, p = 0.000$), followed by viral marketing ($\beta = 0.393, p = 0.000$), consumer trust ($\beta = 0.177, p = 0.044$), and celebrity endorser ($\beta = 0.142, p = 0.045$). The indirect effects via trust are: viral marketing (0.0457), celebrity endorser (0.0435), and brand awareness (0.0641). Total effects are: viral marketing (0.4387),

celebrity endorser (0.1855), and brand awareness (0.5061), confirming brand awareness as the most influential overall variable.

Hypothesis Testing (t-test)

Results from Tables 10 and 11 confirm that all hypotheses (H1–H7) are supported. All independent variables significantly and positively affect both consumer trust (H4, H5, H6) and purchase decisions (H1, H2, H3), and consumer trust itself significantly influences purchase decisions (H7).

Sobel Test (Mediating Effect of Consumer Trust)

H8 – Viral Marketing → Trust → Purchase Decision

Coefficients: X1→Z: $\beta = 0.258$, SE = 0.124; Z→Y: $\beta = 0.177$, SE = 0.086.

Sobel Z = $0.258 \times 0.177 / \sqrt{[(0.177)^2 \times (0.124)^2 + (0.258)^2 \times (0.086)^2]} = 1.79$

Since Z = 1.79 > 1.65, H8 is supported. Consumer trust significantly mediates the effect of viral marketing on purchase decisions.

H9 – Celebrity Endorser → Trust → Purchase Decision

Coefficients: X2→Z: $\beta = 0.246$, SE = 0.083; Z→Y: $\beta = 0.177$, SE = 0.086.

Sobel Z = $0.246 \times 0.177 / \sqrt{[(0.177)^2 \times (0.083)^2 + (0.246)^2 \times (0.086)^2]} = 2.00$

Since Z = 2.00 > 1.65, H9 is supported. Consumer trust significantly mediates the effect of celebrity endorser on purchase decisions.

H10 – Brand Awareness → Trust → Purchase Decision

Coefficients: X3→Z: $\beta = 0.362$, SE = 0.111; Z→Y: $\beta = 0.177$, SE = 0.086.

Sobel Z = $0.362 \times 0.177 / \sqrt{[(0.177)^2 \times (0.111)^2 + (0.362)^2 \times (0.086)^2]} = 2.41$

Since Z = 2.41 > 1.65, H10 is supported. Consumer trust significantly mediates the effect of brand awareness on purchase decisions.

DISCUSSION

Effect of Viral Marketing on Purchase Decision

Viral marketing (X1) is proven to have a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions (Y) with $p = 0.000$ and a regression coefficient of 0.393. This indicates that the more effective Skintific's viral campaigns on social media, the greater the purchase intent among STIE Malangkecewara students. Ismagilova et al. (2020) describe viral marketing as exponentially spreading e-WOM through digital networks, while Kotler & Armstrong (2021) highlight its cost-efficiency and broad reach over traditional methods. Emotional and informative content rapidly increases brand awareness and stimulates purchase intent. These findings are consistent with Sarpiana et al. (2023), who report high viral marketing effectiveness among young beauty consumers, and with Oktavia et al. (2024), who confirm viral campaigns' major contribution to digital purchase processes.

Effect of Celebrity Endorser on Purchase Decision

Celebrity endorser (X2) significantly and positively influences purchase decisions (Y), with $p = 0.045$ and a coefficient of 0.142. Although the effect is smaller relative to the other variables, the presence of a public figure remains a meaningful driver of purchase decisions. Jun et al. (2023) argue that celebrity endorser effectiveness depends on attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness. Schouten et al. (2020) demonstrate that credible endorsers enhance purchase decisions, a finding echoed by Fitri & Sianipar (2025) regarding emotional connection and social legitimacy in beauty marketing.

Effect of Brand Awareness on Purchase Decision

Brand awareness (X3) shows the strongest effect on purchase decisions with a coefficient of 0.442 and $p = 0.000$. Students more familiar with Skintific show higher purchasing propensity. Lou & Yuan (2019) stress

that brand awareness is a foundational element in consumer decision-making, while Sulistyowati & Hwihanus (2024) demonstrate a positive correlation between brand awareness and both loyalty and purchase decisions. Lou & Yuan (2019) further note that social media interactions effectively enhance brand recall, which is highly relevant for Skintific.

Mediating Effect of Consumer Trust

Sobel test results confirm that consumer trust significantly mediates all three pathways. For viral marketing ($Z = 1.79$), trust strengthens the pathway from X1 to Y. Ismagilova et al. (2020) affirm the role of trust in e-WOM and purchase intent, while Ananda et al. (2025) show trust to be the main mediator between digital campaigns and purchase decisions. For celebrity endorser ($Z = 2.00$), Jun et al. (2023) highlight endorser credibility and authenticity as key determinants of consumer trust. Schouten et al. (2020) and Fitri & Sianipar (2025) further confirm this mediating role in beauty marketing. For brand awareness ($Z = 2.41$), Kotler & Armstrong (2021) maintain that brand awareness is most effective when paired with consumer trust. Oktavia et al. (2024) and Utama & Ambarwati (2022) corroborate that brand awareness exerts a stronger effect on purchases when accompanied by trust, consistent with Fan et al. (2023) on the role of brand trust in beauty e-commerce.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that viral marketing, celebrity endorser, and brand awareness each have a positive and significant effect on the purchase decisions of STIE Malangkececwara students for Skintific products. Consumer trust is also confirmed as a significant mediating variable between all three digital marketing strategies and purchase decisions, demonstrating that promotional success depends not only on message reach or endorser fame, but also on the level of trust formed in the consumer's mind. Practically, these findings suggest that Skintific should continue strengthening its viral content strategy, selecting credible endorsers, and building consistent brand awareness to enhance consumer trust and drive purchase decisions. Theoretically, this study enriches digital marketing literature by affirming trust as an essential mediating mechanism bridging marketing strategy and consumer behavior.

For future research, it is recommended that the scope be expanded to include students from other campuses or more diverse consumer segments to improve generalizability. Future studies may also incorporate additional variables such as price perception, product quality, customer satisfaction, or online reviews to create a more comprehensive model. Longitudinal or experimental methods are also advised to capture changes in consumer behavior over time and more dynamically measure the impact of viral campaigns and endorsements.

This study has several limitations. First, the scope is limited to STIE Malangkececwara students, limiting generalizability. Second, the variable set is limited to viral marketing, celebrity endorser, brand awareness, trust, and purchase decisions, while other influential factors may exist outside the model. Third, data were collected cross-sectionally, precluding the capture of long-term shifts in consumer perception. These limitations are expected to serve as a foundation for future research development.

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