

Social media engagement as a mediator of viral marketing, brand image, and Aerostreet purchase intention

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Abstract

The development of social media, especially TikTok, has transformed digital marketing strategies by encouraging more intense interactions between brands and consumers. This research explores the relationships between viral marketing, brand image, and purchase intention, with social media engagement serving as a mediator among TikTok users of the Aerostreet shoe brand in Surabaya. This research applies a quantitative approach with data collection through surveys, involving 160 purposively selected respondents. Data analysis was conducted using the Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach. Empirical findings show a significant relationship between social media engagement and purchase intention. In addition, the findings reveal that social media engagement exerts a significant influence on purchase intention. The mediation analysis further confirms that social media engagement serves as a meaningful intervening mechanism through which viral marketing and brand image affect consumers' purchase intention. These results highlight the critical role of interactive and emotionally engaging content in shaping purchasing decisions, particularly within the TikTok environment. The findings of this study not only contribute to strengthening digital marketing literature, but also provide practical benefits for MSMEs in increasing the effectiveness of marketing communications through social media.

Keywords: viral marketing, brand image, social media engagement, purchase intention.

Introduction

The rapid evolution of the digital environment has encouraged brands to continuously adapt their strategies in building and maintaining long-term relationships with consumers. In contemporary marketing, social media is no longer limited to its role as a communication medium, but has transformed into a strategic platform that shapes brand perceptions, consumer attitudes, and purchasing behavior. Prior studies have emphasized that interactive digital communication significantly influences consumer evaluations and behavioral intentions toward brands (Harrigan et al., 2021; Dwivedi et al., 2021). This transformation is closely linked to the increasing prominence of algorithm-driven social media platforms that actively curate and distribute content based on user preferences and engagement patterns.

Among emerging platforms, TikTok has gained considerable attention due to its unique recommendation system that allows content to be widely disseminated without depending on follower count. This algorithmic mechanism creates substantial opportunities for brands—particularly local brands with limited promotional resources—to achieve rapid visibility and audience reach. Empirical evidence indicates that TikTok's content distribution logic enhances exposure and interaction, thereby strengthening the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies (Kaye et al., 2022). Despite its growing

relevance, academic research that specifically examines TikTok as a marketing platform in developing economies remains relatively limited.

In digital marketing practice, viral marketing has been widely acknowledged as an effective approach to attracting consumer attention through content that is creative, emotionally engaging, and easily shareable. Previous studies have shown that viral content encourages audience participation and facilitates voluntary message diffusion, leading to higher levels of interaction on social media platforms (Tafesse & Wien, 2018). However, the success of viral marketing initiatives cannot be separated from how consumers perceive the brand. Brand image serves as a psychological foundation that shapes trust, credibility, and preference when consumers engage with digital marketing content (Keller, 2013; 2020).

Consumer interaction with brand-related content on social media is commonly conceptualized as social media engagement, which reflects the degree of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral involvement of users. Engagement plays a critical role in digital marketing because it indicates not only message exposure but also active participation. From a theoretical perspective, engagement can be understood through the stimulus–organism–response (S–O–R) framework, in which social media marketing explains how social media content influences attitudes and purchase intentions. (Kim & Johnson, 2016). Empirical research has consistently demonstrated that higher engagement levels strengthen consumer–brand relationships and increase purchase intention (Dessart et al., 2015; Hollebeek et al., 2019).

In the Indonesian context, TikTok has become one of the most dominant social media platforms among Generation Z, including university students. One local footwear brand that actively leverages TikTok’s algorithmic characteristics is Aerostreet, which is recognized for producing viral content aligned with youth lifestyles and affordable brand positioning. Although several studies have examined digital marketing practices on social media platforms, most empirical evidence is derived from developed countries and focuses on global brands. Limited attention has been given to local Indonesian brands operating in highly algorithm-driven environments such as TikTok. Moreover, previous studies tend to analyze viral marketing, brand image, and purchase intention separately or within different platform settings. Consequently, empirical evidence explaining how social media engagement functions as a mediating mechanism in the context of local brands on TikTok remains insufficient.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the influence of viral marketing and brand image on purchase intention through social media engagement among TikTok users of the Aerostreet brand. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on direct relationships among marketing variables, this research adopts a mediation-based framework to examine the indirect role of engagement in shaping purchase intention. In addition, this study employs the Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS–SEM) approach to capture complex causal relationships within an algorithm-driven social media environment. By integrating contextual and methodological perspectives, this research contributes to the digital marketing literature by providing empirical evidence from an emerging economy and strengthening understanding of engagement-based marketing mechanisms on TikTok.

The widespread distribution of marketing content through social media is a key characteristic of viral marketing, which has the potential to increase user engagement with brands, leveraging interactions between individuals within the social media environment. According to Haque and Fawzi (2022), viral marketing works through the voluntary dissemination of content from one user to another, resulting in marketing messages having a high reach and a stronger level of credibility than conventional advertising. In the context of social media, particularly TikTok, entertaining, relevant, and emotional content has great potential to go viral and encourage active user participation. Based on electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) theory, information shared by fellow users is considered more credible than direct commercial messages from companies (Chiu et al., 2021). When content reaches a certain level of virality, users are no longer merely passive audiences but contribute to the spread of the message through various forms of digital interaction, such as liking, commenting, sharing, and reposting. This reflects the high level of social media engagement that is formed due to social perceptions and normative pressure to participate in popular trends. Furthermore, Social Influence Theory explains that individuals tend to adapt their behavior to their social environment to gain social acceptance and recognition. In the context of TikTok, users are driven to interact with viral content due to social pressure and a desire to be part of a digital community (Lee & Youn, 2023). Empirical evidence indicates that content with high spreadability tends to encourage increased user interaction and participation in the social media environment, whether in the form of attention, interaction, or active participation (Chiu et al., 2021; Wijaya & Ardiansyah, 2022). Therefore, increasing the intensity of viral marketing implementation has the potential to strengthen user engagement on social media by increasing audience attention, emotional responses, and interactive participation. Based on these arguments, the research hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H1: Viral marketing influences social media engagement.

Brand image is a consumer's perception of a brand formed through associations, experiences, and evaluations of product attributes and brand symbols (Keller, 2020). A positive brand image reflects the quality, trustworthiness, and alignment of brand values with the consumer's lifestyle. Thus, user engagement contributes to strengthening ongoing interactions between brands and consumers, particularly in the context of fashion and lifestyle product marketing.

In the context of digital marketing, brand image functions not only as a determinant of purchasing preferences but also as a trigger for consumer engagement in various forms of social media interaction. Positive brand perceptions encourage audiences to actively respond to content, such as liking, commenting, and sharing information with other users. This perspective aligns with Brand Equity Theory, which emphasizes the role of brand value in building psychological connections between consumers. Brands are intangible assets capable of creating emotional value and psychological attachments with consumers (Keller, 2013; 2020). Positive brand perceptions tend to encourage consumers to actively engage in digital activities related to the brand. Based on Emotional Attachment Theory, the emotional attachment formed will be reflected in consumers' interactive behavior on social media. Therefore, social media engagement can be positioned as a reflection of the affective relationship between consumers and brands.

Research by Hidayat and Prabowo (2021) and Dwiarta et al. (2020), also confirms that brand image has a significant influence on consumer engagement on social media. Similar findings were also presented by Sultan and Wong (2023), who showed that a strong brand image can increase user interaction through activities such as commenting, liking, and sharing brand content. Furthermore, Sari and Putra (2022) emphasized that positive brand perceptions encourage consumers to engage more actively in digital communication as a form of affiliation and self-identification with the brand. Therefore, it can be concluded that brand image not only functions as a determinant of brand preference but also as a trigger for active consumer engagement on social media. Based on relevant theoretical foundations and empirical findings from previous research, the following research hypothesis is formulated:

H2: Brand image influences social media engagement.

In the context of digital marketing, social media engagement not only represents consumer behavioral responses but also reflects the psychological involvement formed when consumers process and respond to brand content on social media, such as liking, commenting, sharing, and following accounts (Hollebeek, 2019). This engagement is not merely a passive response, but rather a form of active interaction that demonstrates a psychological closeness between consumers and brands.

Based on the Theory of Planned Behavior Ajzen (1991), positive attitudes formed through interactive experiences, particularly in social media environments, have been shown to influence consumers' behavioral intentions, including purchase intentions. Empirical research supports this linkage in digital contexts (e.g., Shareef et al., 2018; Islam & Rahman, 2020; Nguyen, Lu, & Dinh, 2024). In the digital context, engagement functions as a mechanism that strengthens trust, perceived value, and brand relevance. Various empirical findings indicate that the intensity of consumer engagement is positively related to increased purchase intentions and behavior. Consumers who interact more actively with brands tend to exhibit a higher propensity to purchase (Harrigan et al., 2021; Islam & Rahman, 2022). Furthermore, Alalwan (2020) stated that intense digital interaction can increase positive attitudes toward brands, which ultimately drives purchase intentions. Similar findings were also presented by Purwanto et al. (2021), who found that consumer interaction on social media significantly contributes to strengthening trust and driving purchase intention, especially among MSMEs. Therefore, social media engagement serves as an intermediary variable linking digital marketing implementation with consumer purchasing decisions. Taking into account the conceptual framework and previous empirical evidence, research hypotheses are formulated to test the relationship between variables in the proposed model:

H3: Social media engagement influences purchase intention

Viral marketing creates rapid and widespread message dissemination, generating a stimulus that attracts consumer attention on social media. However, the viral effect does not directly lead to purchase intention; consumers must first actively engage with the content. Within this framework, Social Media Engagement (SME) functions as a psychological process that bridges viral marketing exposure with the formation of consumer purchase intention.

Empirical findings revealed by Chiu et al. (2021) show that marketing content with emotional elements and high relevance tends to encourage increased user interaction on social media. Lee and Youn (2023) found that high user interaction with viral content strengthens perceptions of trend and relevance, which then increases purchase intention. In the Indonesian context, Putri and Nugroho (2021) also emphasized that engagement is a crucial bridge that transforms viral marketing exposure into purchase intention, particularly on the TikTok platform. This aligns with the findings of Saraswati's (2021) study, which demonstrated that engagement is a crucial psychological mechanism that bridges the effects of digital content on purchasing decisions. Habibi et al. (2021) indicated that a strong viral marketing strategy can increase digital engagement, which subsequently influences purchasing decisions. Kim and Yang (2020) also found that SME is an important pathway explaining how viral messages trigger purchase intention through emotional and participatory engagement.

Research by Hasnah (2023) also demonstrated the role of engagement as a mediator between brand attitude and purchase intention. These results also support Customer Engagement Marketing theory, which describes engagement as a strengthening psychological connection between consumers and brands. Another study by Alhabash & McAlister (2015) confirmed that viral content increases engagement, and this engagement triggers purchase action. Theoretically, this aligns with the Stimulus–Organism–Response Framework, where viral content (stimulus) triggers engagement (organism), which then results in purchase intention (response). SME mediation also confirms that viral marketing is not enough to simply create visibility; consumer engagement is a key element that transmits the influence of viral marketing towards increased purchase intention. Thus, the mediation hypothesis is proposed as follows:

H4: Social Media Engagement mediates the effect of Viral Marketing on Purchase Intention.

A positively formed brand image is a crucial foundation for strengthening consumer trust in a product, which is further reflected in increased consumer engagement on social media channels. When a brand is perceived positively, consumers tend to increase their engagement through various forms of interaction on social media, including responding to and participating in brand communication activities. This engagement subsequently drives purchase intention.

Previous research has reinforced this mediating role. Hidayat and Prabowo (2021) demonstrated that brand image increases digital engagement, which ultimately influences purchase intention. Sultan and Wong (2023) found that digital interaction is a crucial tool for strengthening the impact of brand image on purchase intention. Local research by Pratama and Yulianto (2020) also demonstrated that engagement is a significant mediator between brand image and purchase intention among digital generation consumers in Indonesia. Research by Hasnah (2023) also demonstrated the role of engagement as a mediator between brand attitude and purchase intention. These results also support the Customer Engagement Marketing theory, which describes engagement as a strengthening psychological connection between consumers and brands.

Other studies, such as De Vries et al. (2017), show that viral content increases engagement levels, which significantly contributes to purchase intention. Dwivedi et al. (2021) state that brand image is a key driver of consumer engagement in the context of

social media. Consumers who perceive brands as credible and reputable are more likely to create interactive relationships, and these interactions ultimately stimulate purchase intention. Yusuf and Busalim (2018) found that engagement strengthens the effects of viral messages by increasing psychological closeness to the brand. Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016) stated that digital engagement is an explanatory mechanism for how brand perceptions influence purchase decisions. Meng and Berger (2020) found that a strong brand image encourages consumers to interact more actively with the brand's digital content, which then influences purchase intention. The findings of Hassan and Hadi (2020) indicate that social media engagement does not stand as the end result of digital marketing activities, but rather serves as a psychological pathway connecting digital marketing exposure to the formation of consumer purchase intention. Therefore, SME is an important pathway explaining how brand image influences the formation of purchase intention through increased consumer interaction on social media platforms. Thus, the research hypothesis is proposed as follows:

H5: Social Media Engagement mediates the influence of Brand Image on Purchase Intention.

This research model is built on the integration of e-WOM theory and Brand Equity Theory. This model, in which Social Media Engagement functions as a psychological process that facilitates the transformation of digital stimuli into consumer behavioral reactions, is presented. Viral Marketing and Brand Image are positioned as the primary exogenous variables, representing two forms of marketing communication stimuli. Overall, the developed research model emphasizes that the effectiveness of digital marketing activities depends not only on the strength of the message or brand perception, but also on the content's ability to trigger consumer engagement. Based on this, the relationships between variables are formulated in a conceptual framework as shown in Figure 1.

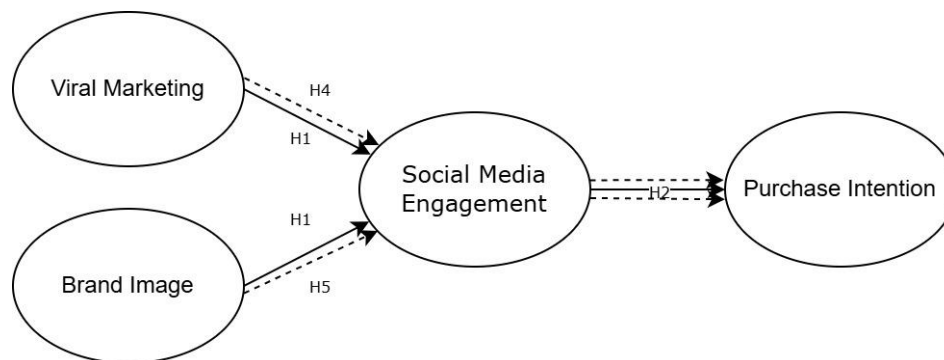


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Method

This study uses a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design. It aims to explain the causal relationship between variables, namely the influence of Viral Marketing (VM) and Brand Image (BI) on Purchase Intention (PI) through Social Media Engagement (SME) as a mediating variable. This approach was chosen because it can simultaneously test direct and indirect effects through variance-based structural modeling.

The study subjects were from Generation Z and millennials who actively interact on the TikTok platform, focusing on university students in the Surabaya area who had been exposed to viral marketing content and were familiar with the Aerostreet shoe brand. Given that the exact population size was unknown, this study employed a purposive sampling technique. The respondent criteria included being 17 years of age or older, actively using TikTok in the past six months, having experience viewing or interacting with shoe brand content (specifically Aerostreet or the fashion footwear category), and having provided digital responses such as liking, commenting, sharing, or watching brand content. Therefore, the sample size used was 160 respondents, meeting the minimum recommendation in PLS-SEM Hair et al. (2022), which is 16 x 10 times the largest observation indicator on the most difficult path.

The research instrument was developed based on empirical indicators (field studies) from previous studies related to viral marketing, brand image, social media engagement, and purchase intention. The questionnaire was distributed through social media (TikTok in particular) using an online questionnaire (Google Form). The feasibility of the research instrument was evaluated through validity and reliability testing. Internal reliability was measured using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient, and statements for the research variable indicator items were assessed using a Likert scale of 1–5.

Data processing and analysis in this study were conducted using SmartPLS software using the Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach. The analysis procedure was systematically implemented in two main stages. The initial stage focused on testing the measurement model, which aimed to ensure the quality of the indicators in representing the latent constructs. Evaluation at this stage included convergent validity and discriminant validity, taking into account outer loading values, Composite Reliability, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE).

The analysis then continued with testing the structural model to assess the strength and direction of the relationships between the constructs proposed in the research model. Evaluation of the structural model was conducted through analysis of the coefficient of determination (R^2), the model's predictive ability, as measured by Q^2 , and testing the significance of path coefficients between latent variables. The mediation role was then tested by analyzing indirect effects using the Variance Accounted For approach.

Result and Discussion

Understanding respondent descriptions is important because demographic factors often influence social media usage patterns, digital content preferences, and behavior in consuming marketing information, particularly on the TikTok platform. A total of 160 respondents participated in this study via an online survey. Demographic data was collected to identify the distribution of respondents by gender, age, frequency of TikTok use, duration of use per day, and primary purpose for using the platform. This information was necessary to ensure that the research sample was appropriate for the context of the study, namely the behavior of TikTok users as the primary target in testing viral marketing models, brand image, social media engagement, and purchase intention.

Full details of the respondent profile can be seen in Table 1, which displays the sample composition according to the demographic categories analyzed.

Table 1. Respondent Demographics Based on TikTok Usage (N = 160)

Category	Clasification	Amount	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	68	42.5
	Female	92	57.5
Age	18 – 20 year	48	30.0
	20 – 23 year	76	47.5
	23 – 25 year	36	22.5
Study Program	Management	54	33,8
	Accounting	38	23,8
	Engineering	22	13,8
	Communication Science	18	11,3
	Other	28	17,5
Semester	Semester 1–3	44	27,5
	Semester 4–6	66	41,3
	Semester 7–8	50	31,3
Duration of TikTok use per day	< 1 times	28	17.5
	1–2 times	66	41.3
	2–3 times	42	26.3
	> 3 times	24	15.0
Frequency of Opening TikTok	< 5 times per day	30	18.8
	5–10 times per day	70	43.8
	> 10 times per day	60	37.5
Purpose of TikTok Use	Entertainment	78	48.8
	Education	36	22.5
	Shopping (TikTok Shop)	28	17.5
	Content Creator	18	11.3
User Status	Viewer Only (viewer)	123	76.9
	Viewers & Buyers	25	15.6
	Active Content Creator	12	7.5

Based on 160 student respondents in Surabaya, as presented in Table 1, the majority of TikTok users are female (57.5%), with most respondents aged between 20 and 23 years (47.5%). Most participants were enrolled in management-related study programs (33.8%) and were in their fourth to sixth semester (66%). In terms of platform usage, TikTok consumption is dominated by users who spend 1–2 hours per day (41.3%), with 43.8% opening the application between 5–10 times daily. Entertainment remains the primary motivation for using TikTok (48.8%), followed by educational purposes (22.5%), online shopping (17.5%), and content creation (11.3%). Most respondents are passive viewers (76.9%), while only a small proportion actively create content (7.5%).

These usage patterns indicate a high level of exposure to digital marketing content, particularly in the fashion sector, including Aerostreet shoes. The intensity of daily usage and frequent access to TikTok suggests that students constitute a highly receptive segment for advertisements, product reviews, and influencer promotions. Furthermore, the dominance of entertainment-oriented and educational content consumption implies that exposure to brand-related information may occur organically through the For You Page (FYP), creator collaborations, and TikTok Shop features.

The presence of shopping-oriented users (17.5%) also reflects a tendency toward spontaneous purchasing behavior influenced by short-form video recommendations. This pattern is consistent with Aerostreet's market positioning, which targets young, urban consumers with an active and modern lifestyle. In addition, the dominance of passive viewers highlights the importance of viral content, visual testimonials, and peer reviews in shaping purchase intentions. Meanwhile, active content creators have the potential to function as micro-influencers through user-generated content (UGC), further enhancing brand visibility. Overall, the demographic profile and platform usage behavior of students in Surabaya indicate that TikTok plays a significant role in influencing consumer perceptions, preferences, and purchase intentions toward Aerostreet products.

Figure 2 presents a structural model of the hypothesized relationships between Viral Marketing, Brand Image, Social Media Engagement, and Purchase Intention. The model shows that viral marketing and brand image influence purchase intention both directly and indirectly through social media engagement. This configuration highlights the mediating role of engagement in explaining how digital marketing strategies influence consumer purchasing behavior on TikTok.

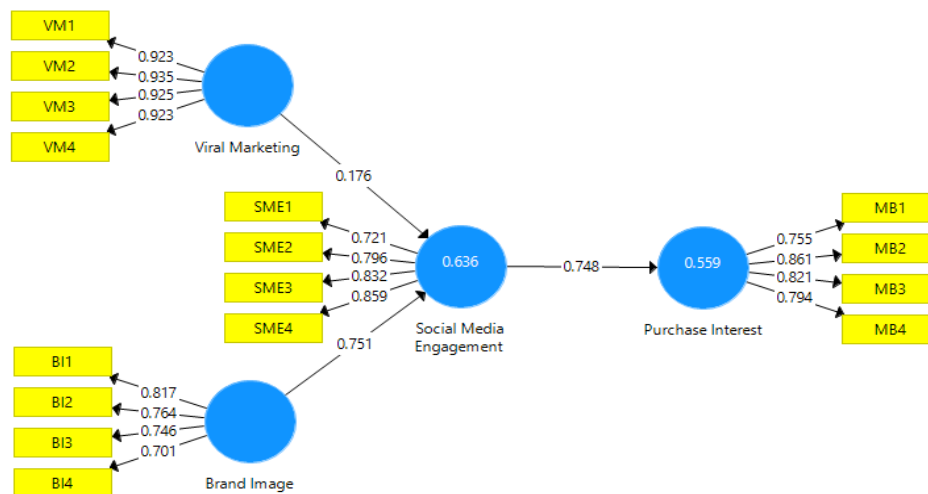


Figure 2. Structural Model of Inter-Variable Relationships

Furthermore, the path from SME to PI reflects the mediating role of consumer engagement in strengthening the relationship between marketing stimuli and purchase intention. This structural configuration suggests that purchase intention is shaped by the combined influence of viral marketing, brand image, and user engagement on social media. By positioning social media engagement as an intermediary variable, Figure 2 presents a systematic causal flow explaining the mechanism by which marketing strategies translate into consumer purchase intention. This model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the effectiveness of digital marketing in the context of local brands on TikTok.

Outer loading analysis was conducted using convergent validity evaluation to ensure the validity and reliability of the indicators, ensuring that each indicator consistently and adequately reflects the latent construct being measured. The results of the outer loading analysis are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Outer loading analysis

Construct	Indicator Code	Outer Loading	Description
Viral Marketing (VM)	VM1	0,923	Fit
	VM2	0,935	Fit
	VM3	0,925	Fit
	VM4	0,923	Fit
Brand Image (BI)	BI1	0,817	Fit
	BI2	0,764	Fit
	BI3	0,746	Fit
	BI4	0,701	Fit
Social Media Engagement (SME)	SME1	0,721	Fit
	SME2	0,796	Fit
	SME3	0,832	Fit
	SME4	0,859	Fit
Purchase Intention (PI)	PI1	0,755	Fit
	PI2	0,861	Fit
	PI3	0,821	Fit
	PI4	0,794	Fit

Note: All indicators meet the loading criteria > 0.70.

Table 2 shows the convergent validity test results in this study, indicating that all items in each indicator of each studied variable meet the required outer loading value of ≥ 0.70 , indicating a "Fit" result. Therefore, the research indicators can be considered valid because they consistently reflect the latent construct without dominant measurement error. This concludes that these indicators have strong internal consistency and are suitable for proceeding to the reliability and discriminant validity evaluation stages.

The adequacy of the measurement model was assessed using Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Composite Reliability (CR), and Cronbach's Alpha. A construct is considered reliable and valid if the AVE value exceeds 0.50, while CR and Cronbach's Alpha values are greater than 0.70. A summary of the test results for the three indicators is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. AVE, Composite Reliability, and Cronbach's Alpha Values

	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha	Decision
Viral Marketing	0.858	0.960	0.945	Valid and Reliable
Brand Image	0.575	0.844	0.765	Valid and Reliable
Social Media Engagement	0.646	0.879	0.816	Valid and Reliable
Purchase Intention	0.654	0.883	0.823	Valid and Reliable

As presented in Table 3, all constructs in this study meet the recommended threshold values, indicating satisfactory convergent validity and internal consistency. The Viral Marketing construct demonstrates strong indicator representation, as reflected by an AVE of 0.858, CR of 0.960, and Cronbach's Alpha of 0.945. Similarly, the Brand Image construct shows adequate measurement reliability, with an AVE of 0.575, CR of 0.844, and Cronbach's Alpha of 0.765. Furthermore, Social Media Engagement exhibits acceptable validity and reliability, with an AVE of 0.646, CR of 0.879, and Cronbach's Alpha of 0.816. Purchase Intention also demonstrates strong measurement quality, as indicated by an AVE of 0.654, CR of 0.883, and Cronbach's Alpha of 0.823.

Overall, these findings confirm that all constructs possess adequate convergent validity and internal consistency. Therefore, the measurement model satisfies the required quality criteria and is suitable for further structural model analysis. The results of the discriminant validity test using the Fornell–Larcker criterion indicate that the square root of the AVE for each construct is higher than the correlations between the other constructs. This is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity Values

Construct	Brand Image	Purchase Intention	Social Media Engagement	Viral Marketing
Brand Image	-	-	-	-
Purchase Interest	0.887	-	-	-
Social Media Engagement	0.901	0.904	-	-
Viral Marketing	0.159	0.201	0.330	-

Table 4 shows that the results of the discriminant validity test using the HTMT ratio for all constructs are below the threshold of 0.85 and/or 0.90. The HTMT test results indicate that the level of relationship between constructs is within acceptable limits, so there is no overlapping meaning between the measured variables. This finding indicates that each construct is able to clearly represent a distinct concept. With these conditions met, the measurement model is deemed to have adequate construct separation to proceed to structural relationship analysis. The coefficient of determination (R^2) indicates the extent to which endogenous constructs are explained by their respective exogenous variables. According to PLS-SEM evaluation guidelines (Hair et al., 2022), higher R^2 values reflect stronger explanatory power.

Table 5. R-Square Results

Endogen Construct	R^2	Category
Social Media Engagement	0.636	Moderate
Purchase Intention	0.559	Moderate

Based on the analysis results, the Social Media Engagement (SME) construct achieved an R^2 value of 0.636, indicating that Viral Marketing and Brand Image jointly explain 63.6% of the variance in user engagement. This result suggests a moderate level of explanatory power.

Furthermore, the Purchase Intention (PI) construct recorded an R^2 value of 0.559, demonstrating that Viral Marketing, Brand Image, and Social Media Engagement collectively account for 55.9% of the variance in consumer purchase intention. This finding confirms that the proposed model exhibits adequate predictive capability in explaining purchasing behavior, while the remaining 44.1% is attributable to factors beyond the scope of this study. The Q-square (Q^2) value was evaluated to assess the predictive relevance of the structural model in explaining endogenous constructs. A Q^2 value greater than zero indicates that the model has adequate predictive capability, whereas values equal to or below zero suggest limited predictive relevance. The analysis results show that the Social Media Engagement (SME) and Purchase Intention (PI) constructs obtained positive Q^2 values of 0.397 and 0.357, respectively. These values confirm that the proposed model demonstrates sufficient predictive relevance for both endogenous variables.

The resulting Q^2 value of 0.612 indicates a strong level of predictive relevance for the structural model. This finding suggests that approximately 61.2% of the variation in purchase intention among TikTok users of Aerostreet shoes in Surabaya can be explained by viral marketing and brand image through the mediating role of social media engagement. Meanwhile, the remaining variance is influenced by other factors beyond the scope of the present study.

Overall, these results confirm that the research model possesses strong predictive capability in explaining user behavior within the TikTok-based digital marketing context. The effect size (f^2) was examined to assess the relative impact of each exogenous construct on the endogenous variables. According to Hair et al. (2022), f^2 values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 indicate small, medium, and large effects, respectively. The results show that viral marketing has a moderate effect on social media engagement ($f^2 = 0.083$), while brand image exhibits a small-to-moderate effect ($f^2 = 1.516$). Furthermore, social media engagement demonstrates a strong effect on purchase intention ($f^2 = 1.768$). These findings indicate that social media engagement plays a substantial role in explaining purchase intention, whereas viral marketing and brand image primarily contribute through their influence on engagement.

The structural model was evaluated to assess its overall quality, explanatory power, and predictive relevance. The R^2 value for the Purchase Intention construct was 0.559, indicating that viral marketing, brand image, and social media engagement jointly explain 55.9% of the variance in consumer purchase intention. This result reflects a moderate to substantial level of explanatory power within the context of TikTok-based digital marketing. Furthermore, the positive Q^2 values for Social Media Engagement (0.397) and Purchase Intention (0.357) confirm that the model possesses adequate predictive relevance for the endogenous constructs. In addition, the model fit assessment shows that the SRMR value of 0.102 remains within acceptable tolerance limits, while the NFI value of 0.902 meets the recommended threshold of 0.90, indicating an acceptable level of model fit.

To complement the evaluation, the Goodness of Fit (GOF) index was calculated using the square root of the product between the average AVE and average R^2 values (Tenenhaus et al., 2005). However, following recent PLS-SEM guidelines (Hair et al., 2022), model evaluation primarily relies on R^2 , Q^2 , and effect size measures, while GOF serves as a complementary indicator. Overall, the comprehensive evaluation confirms that the proposed structural model meets the required feasibility standards and is suitable for

hypothesis testing. Path coefficients were analyzed to assess the strength and direction of relationships, with significance determined by t-statistics > 1.96 and p-values < 0.05.

Table 6. T-Statistic Results

		Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T-Statistic (O/SRDEV)	P- Value	Decision
H1	Viral Marketing → Social Media Engagement	0.176	0.175	0.051	3,471	0.001	Accepted
H2	Brand Image → Social Media Engagement	0.751	0.755	0.041	18,549	0.000	Accepted
H3	Social Media Engagement → Purchase Intention	0.748	0.751	0.045	16,735	0.000	Accepted

The results of the influence of Viral Marketing on Social Media Engagement show that viral marketing has a positive and significant effect on social media engagement, with a path coefficient of $\beta = 0.176$ and a significance level of $p < 0.05$. This finding indicates that the intensity and appeal of viral content can encourage active user engagement in the form of interactions on social media. Therefore, the hypothesis stating a direct influence of viral marketing on social media engagement is empirically supported.

The results of the influence of Brand Image on Social Media Engagement show that brand image contributes positively and significantly to increased social media engagement, as indicated by a path coefficient of $\beta = 0.751$ with $p < 0.05$. These results indicate that consumer perceptions of a strong and credible brand image encourage higher participation in digital activities, such as responding to and interacting with brand content. Therefore, the hypothesis regarding the direct influence of brand image on social media engagement is accepted.

The empirical test results confirm that Social Media Engagement has a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention. The path coefficient value of $\beta = 0.748$ with a significance level of $p < 0.05$ indicates that the higher the consumer's participation in digital interaction activities, the greater their tendency to form purchase intentions. Therefore, the hypothesis of a direct influence between the two variables is accepted. After evaluating the path coefficient results, a mediation analysis was conducted.

The indirect effect analysis shows that social media engagement functions as a significant mediator in the relationship between viral marketing and purchase intention. The significance of the mediation effect is reflected in the t-statistic of 3.428, which exceeds the threshold of 1.96, and the p-value of 0.001, which is less than the 0.05 significance level. These findings indicate that the effectiveness of viral marketing in increasing consumer purchase intention operates not only through message exposure alone, but also through increased user engagement with digital content. Thus, the test results provide empirical support for the proposed mediation hypothesis.

Table 7. Results of the SME Mediation Test

Mediation Path	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistic (O/STDEV)	P-Value	Decision
H4 Viral Marketing → Social Media Engagement → Purchase Intention	0.131	0.131	0.038	3.428	0.001	Accepted
H5 Brand Image → Social Media Engagement → Purchase Intention	0.562	0.567	0.049	11.417	0.000	Accepted

The mediation path analysis shows that social media engagement plays a significant role in transmitting the influence of brand image on purchase intention. The indirect path, Brand Image → Social Media Engagement → Purchase Intention, proved statistically significant. This is demonstrated by the t-statistic of 3.428 and the p-value of 0.000, which are below the 0.05 significance threshold. These findings confirm that a positive brand image drives consumer engagement on social media, which subsequently strengthens purchase intention. Therefore, the mediation hypothesis stating the role of social media engagement as a link between brand image and purchase intention is accepted.

This study discusses the empirical findings by linking them to the proposed theoretical framework and previous research. The discussion focuses on analyzing the influence of viral marketing and brand image on purchase intention, both directly and indirectly through social media engagement as a mediating variable, particularly in the context of a local footwear brand operating on TikTok.

The results indicate that viral marketing has a positive and significant effect on TikTok users' social media engagement. This suggests that creative, emotionally appealing, and shareable content encourages users to actively interact through liking, commenting, and sharing. In the context of TikTok, its algorithmic mechanism that promotes content based on engagement rather than follower count strengthens the role of viral marketing as an initial trigger of consumer interaction. For local brands such as Aerostreet, this mechanism provides strategic opportunities to gain visibility without substantial promotional budgets. Engaging content not only increases exposure but also stimulates affective and behavioral responses.

These findings are consistent with Park et al. (2022) and Lee and Youn (2023), who reported that viral content on short-video platforms enhances emotional engagement and voluntary participation. Therefore, viral marketing functions as a critical entry point for building early-stage consumer-brand interaction in digital environments. This study demonstrates that brand image significantly influences consumer engagement on social media. Perceptions of quality, credibility, and brand relevance encourage consumers to participate more actively in digital interactions. From the perspective of Brand Equity Theory (Keller, 2020), a strong brand image facilitates emotional attachment and long-term relational bonds. In the case of Aerostreet, its affordable positioning and youth-oriented branding strengthen consumer identification, which is reflected in higher engagement levels.

This finding supports Hidayat and Prabowo (2021) and Sultan and Wong (2023), who

reported that consumers tend to engage more with brands that align with their personal values and lifestyle. Thus, brand image serves as a psychological foundation that motivates consumers to interact with brand content on TikTok.

The results indicate that social media engagement has a positive and significant influence on purchase intention. This confirms that digital interactions are not merely symbolic but play a substantive role in shaping consumer decisions. Engagement represents cognitive and emotional involvement, which facilitates favorable attitudes and evaluations toward brands. This finding is consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior Ajzen (1991), which emphasizes the role of attitudes in determining behavioral intentions.

Moreover, this result aligns with Harrigan et al. (2021) and Islam and Rahman (2022), who found that engagement enhances trust, perceived value, and emotional closeness. For Aerostreet, active engagement on TikTok strengthens consumer confidence and increases the likelihood of purchase. The mediation analysis confirms that the influence of viral marketing on purchase intention is significantly transmitted through social media engagement. This indicates that viral content alone is insufficient to directly stimulate purchase intention without generating meaningful consumer interaction. Viral marketing increases exposure and attractiveness, which encourages users to interact with content. This interaction reflects the internalization of marketing messages, leading to stronger purchase intention toward Aerostreet products.

These findings support the Theory of Social Influence Cialdini (2021) and are consistent with Zhang et al. (2022) and Harrigan et al. (2021), which emphasize engagement as a key mechanism connecting digital stimuli and behavioral responses. The findings also confirm that social media engagement significantly mediates the relationship between brand image and purchase intention. A positive brand image alone does not automatically translate into purchasing behavior unless supported by active engagement. From the Brand Equity perspective Keller (2020), brand image creates psychological attachment, which is manifested through engagement behaviors. These behaviors signal trust, loyalty, and emotional investment. This result supports Hidayat and Prabowo (2021) and Sultan and Wong (2023), who argue that engagement transforms brand perceptions into concrete behavioral intentions. Therefore, engagement functions as a crucial bridge linking brand perceptions and purchasing decisions.

Conclusion

This study examines the influence of viral marketing and brand image on purchase intention through social media engagement among Aerostreet shoe consumers on TikTok. Using the PLS-SEM approach, several important conclusions can be drawn. First, viral marketing has a positive and significant effect on social media engagement. Creative, relevant, and shareable content increases user interaction, which subsequently supports purchasing decisions. Second, brand image significantly influences social media engagement. Strong, credible, and value-oriented brand perceptions enhance emotional involvement and consumer trust in digital environments. Third, social media engagement has a significant effect on purchase intention, confirming that active interaction is a key determinant in shaping consumer buying intentions. Fourth, social media engagement significantly mediates the relationship between viral marketing and purchase intention. The effectiveness of viral strategies depends largely on their ability to generate meaningful

engagement. Fifth, social media engagement also mediates the relationship between brand image and purchase intention. A positive brand image produces stronger purchasing effects when accompanied by high engagement levels. Theoretically, this study extends digital marketing literature by validating the mediating role of social media engagement in an algorithm-driven platform context, particularly for local brands. Methodologically, this study provides empirical evidence using PLS-SEM in examining integrated marketing constructs. Practically, the findings offer strategic insights for local footwear brands such as Aerostreet in designing engagement-oriented digital marketing campaigns.

Overall, these findings confirm that the success of digital marketing depends not only on content exposure, but also on the brand's ability to create meaningful interactions with its audience. The study's findings also revealed that viral marketing and brand image play a strategic role in increasing consumer purchase intention for Aerostreet shoes on TikTok, through social media engagement as a mediating variable. Thus, viral marketing has been shown to drive user engagement, while a positive brand image strengthens consumer interaction with brand image content, building consumer purchase intention on short-video-based social media platforms. From a practical perspective, the results of this study provide important implications for businesses, particularly MSMEs, in designing social media-based digital marketing strategies. The findings indicate that increased purchase intent is achieved not only through intense viral promotions or strengthening brand image, but also through the brand's ability to create content that encourages active consumer participation. Therefore, businesses need to focus their marketing strategies on creating content that is interactive, relevant, and able to build emotional engagement with their audiences. For brands utilizing TikTok as a marketing channel, these results emphasize the importance of optimizing interactive features such as comments, challenges, and user-generated content to strengthen engagement. This strategy not only increases brand visibility but also increases the chances of converting digital engagement into consumer purchase intent.

While this study provides relevant findings, there are several limitations that require consideration. First, this study used a survey approach with a cross-sectional design, which is unable to capture the dynamics of changes in consumer behavior over time. Second, the study's scope was limited to TikTok users in the Surabaya area and focused on a single product brand. Therefore, generalizing the results to other geographic contexts or product types requires caution. Furthermore, this study relied on respondent perception data collected through questionnaires, so the potential for subjective bias cannot be completely avoided. Other variables that could potentially influence purchase intention, such as brand trust, price, or product quality, have also not been incorporated into the research model.

Based on these limitations, future research is recommended to employ a longitudinal design to more dynamically capture changes in consumer engagement and purchase intention. Future research could also expand the study context by including different social media platforms or product categories to increase the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, future researchers could develop the conceptual model by adding other moderating or mediating variables, such as brand trust, perceived value, or consumer involvement, to gain a deeper understanding of the mechanisms that shape purchase intention in the digital environment. A mixed methods approach could also be considered to explore qualitative aspects of consumer engagement that have not been fully captured

through quantitative approaches.

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