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The Role Of Brand Awareness In Mediating The Effects Of Soft Selling And Hard Selling Approaches On Purchase Intention In Tiktok Campaigns

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Abstract

This study examines the role of brand awareness in mediating the effects of soft selling and hard selling approaches on purchase intention in TikTok campaigns. The research responds to the growing use of TikTok as a digital marketing platform and to the inconsistent findings regarding the direct effectiveness of soft selling and hard selling. Anchored in the Theory of Planned Behavior, the study uses a quantitative approach and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Data were collected through an online questionnaire from 200 Generation Z TikTok users in Indonesia who had experienced promotional or campaign content on TikTok. The measurement and structural models were evaluated using SmartPLS and bootstrapping. The findings show that soft selling does not significantly affect purchase intention directly (β = 0.111; t = 1.311; p = 0.190), whereas hard selling has a positive and significant direct effect (β = 0.331; t = 5.068; p < 0.001). Brand awareness positively and significantly affects purchase intention (β = 0.356; t = 4.177; p < 0.001), while both soft selling (β = 0.376; t = 4.649; p < 0.001) and hard selling (β = 0.409; t = 4.790; p < 0.001) positively affect brand awareness. Brand awareness fully mediates the relationship between soft selling and purchase intention (indirect β

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= 0.134; t = 2.750; p = 0.006), while it partially mediates the relationship between hard selling and purchase intention (indirect β = 0.145; t = 3.239; p = 0.001). The study indicates that soft selling is more appropriate for building brand awareness as a pathway toward purchase intention, whereas hard selling can stimulate purchase intention directly and through brand awareness.

Keywords: TikTok Campaign; Soft Selling; Hard Selling; Brand Awareness; Purchase Intention; PLS-SEM

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has transformed how consumers obtain information, interact with brands, and evaluate products. Social media has become an important marketing environment because it enables two-way communication, user-generated content, and direct interaction between consumers and brands. In Indonesia, the continued growth of internet and social media use has strengthened the role of digital platforms in consumer behavior. This study reports that Indonesia had approximately 143 million active social media identities in 2025, while TikTok was among the most heavily used platforms, particularly among younger users (Kemp, 2025).

TikTok is distinctive because short-form video combines entertainment, information, creativity, and interaction in a highly dynamic environment. Its format allows brands to integrate promotional messages into storytelling, creator experiences, demonstrations, recommendations, and direct promotional appeals. This makes TikTok not only a social media platform but also an increasingly important channel for digital marketing and social commerce. This study identifies Generation Z, defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012, as a particularly relevant audience because of its close relationship with digital technology and social media (Dimock, 2019).

Within TikTok marketing, two broad communication approaches are frequently observed. Soft selling presents promotional information indirectly through subtle messages, storytelling, personal experience, emotional appeals, and natural product integration. Hard selling, in contrast, communicates product benefits and promotional offers more explicitly through direct calls to buy, discounts, repetition, and persuasive language. Prior research cited in this study suggests that these approaches may generate different consumer responses. Soft selling can strengthen emotional connection and brand-related perceptions, while hard selling can provide

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clear information and direct purchase cues (Lee & Eastin, 2021; Monesa & Simanjuntak, 2024; Muttaqin et al., 2024).

However, the effectiveness of these approaches in generating purchase intention is not necessarily identical. A consumer may enjoy a soft-selling video without immediately developing purchase intention, while a direct promotional message may stimulate an immediate intention to buy. At the same time, repeated exposure and effective presentation may increase consumers' ability to recognize and recall a brand. Brand awareness therefore becomes an important mechanism that may connect promotional communication with purchase intention. This study identifies a research gap in the limited simultaneous examination of soft selling, hard selling, brand awareness, and purchase intention within TikTok campaigns in Indonesia.

Based on this gap, this study investigates whether soft selling and hard selling affect purchase intention, whether both approaches affect brand awareness, whether brand awareness affects purchase intention, and whether brand awareness mediates the effects of the two promotional approaches on purchase intention. The study contributes by comparing the mediation mechanism of the two communication approaches rather than assuming that all promotional formats influence consumers through the same process.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Theory of Planned Behavior

The study is grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which explains behavioral intention through attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991, 2020). In a TikTok marketing context, promotional messages can influence consumers' evaluations of products and brands, while information and persuasive cues can shape beliefs that precede purchase intention. Brand awareness is positioned as a marketing-related mechanism that can strengthen consumers' familiarity and consideration of the promoted brand.

Soft Selling

Soft selling refers to promotional communication that avoids aggressive purchase pressure and instead embeds the product in a natural communication experience. This study operationalizes soft selling through subtle message delivery, storytelling or personal experience, emotional approach, product integration, and trust-building communication. Such characteristics

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can increase the salience and familiarity of a brand without requiring an immediate purchase response.

Hard Selling

Hard selling emphasizes direct and explicit promotional communication. This study measures it through direct promotional messages, direct calls to purchase, discounts or special promotions, repetition of promotional messages, and strong persuasive language. Because the information and purchase cues are explicit, hard selling is expected to have a more immediate relationship with purchase intention.

Brand Awareness and Purchase Intention

Brand awareness represents the consumer's ability to recognize, recall, and place a brand within the consideration set. This study measures brand awareness using recall, recognition, purchase, top-of-mind awareness, and word of mouth (WOM). Purchase intention represents consumers' willingness, planning, effort, product interest, and planned purchase frequency.

Research Hypotheses

1. H1: Soft selling on TikTok campaigns has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention.
2. H2: Hard selling on TikTok campaigns has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention.
3. H3: Brand awareness has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention.
4. H4: Soft selling on TikTok campaigns has a positive and significant effect on brand awareness.
5. H5: Hard selling on TikTok campaigns has a positive and significant effect on brand awareness.
6. H6: Brand awareness mediates the effect of soft selling on purchase intention.
7. H7: Brand awareness mediates the effect of hard selling on purchase intention.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a quantitative research design. The population consists of active TikTok users in Indonesia who belong to Generation Z, defined in this study as individuals born from 1997 to 2012. The population criteria were: (1) age 14–29 in 2026; (2) having a TikTok account; (3) using TikTok at least 1–2 hours per day during the previous three months; (4) having seen

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promotional or campaign content on TikTok; and (5) having interacted with TikTok content. Because the number of eligible users was not known precisely, the population was treated as infinite.

The sample comprised 200 respondents. This study selected this number based on the SEM-PLS sample-size guidance and 20 measurement parameters. Data were collected using an online questionnaire distributed through Google Forms and social media channels. Each construct was measured using five indicators on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Data analysis employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS. The measurement model was evaluated through convergent validity, discriminant validity, and internal consistency reliability. The structural model was assessed using R-square, f-square, predictive relevance (Q^2), and hypothesis testing. Mediation was examined through bootstrapping and by comparing direct and indirect effects. A mediation effect was considered significant when t-statistics exceeded 1.96 and p-value was below 0.05.

Source: Processed data, 2026.

The sample consisted of 117 women (58.5%) and 83 men (41.5%). Respondents came from multiple regions, with the largest proportion living in Bali (44.5%), followed by Java (22.0%) and Sumatra (16.5%). In terms of daily TikTok use, 46.0% reported using TikTok for 2–3 hours per day, indicating relatively intensive exposure to TikTok content.

The respondents in this study were TikTok users who had experience viewing promotional content or product advertisements on TikTok. The sample consisted of respondents with diverse demographic characteristics, including gender, age, domicile, occupation, and daily TikTok usage intensity. The respondents were predominantly female, while the majority reported using TikTok for approximately 2–3 hours per day. The respondents also came from various regions in Indonesia, with Bali representing the largest proportion. These characteristics indicate that the respondents were active TikTok users and were considered relevant to provide empirical insights into the effectiveness of soft selling and hard selling approaches in TikTok campaigns.

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RESULTS

Measurement Model

Table 1. Convergent Validity

Construct	AVE	√AVE	Outer Loading Range	Decision
Soft Selling	0.541	0.735	0.670–0.815	Valid
Hard Selling	0.580	0.762	0.746–0.787	Valid
Brand Awareness	0.585	0.765	0.746–0.784	Valid
Purchase Intention	0.569	0.754	0.733–0.816	Valid

Source: Processed data, 2026.

All four constructs exceeded the minimum AVE criterion of 0.50. The Fornell–Larcker assessment also showed that the square root of AVE for each construct was greater than its correlations with the other constructs. In addition, all HTMT values reported in this study were below 0.90, supporting discriminant validity. The lowest outer loading was 0.670 for the soft-selling indicator concerning subtle message delivery, and the indicator was retained because the overall measurement model remained acceptable.

Table 2. Construct Reliability

Construct	Indicators	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Decision
Soft Selling	5	0.789	0.854	Reliable
Hard Selling	5	0.819	0.873	Reliable
Brand Awareness	5	0.824	0.876	Reliable
Purchase Intention	5	0.811	0.868	Reliable

Source: Processed data, 2026.

All Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values were above 0.70, indicating adequate internal consistency. These results support the use of all four constructs in the structural model.

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Structural Model

Table 3. R-Square

Endogenous Construct	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Interpretation
Brand Awareness	0.509	0.504	Moderate
Purchase Intention	0.500	0.492	Moderate

Source: Processed data, 2026.

The structural model also demonstrated positive predictive relevance. Based on the R^2 values reported in the thesis, the overall Q^2 calculated for the model was 0.7545, indicating positive predictive relevance.

Table 4. Direct Effects and Hypothesis Testing

Path	β	t	p	Decision
Soft Selling → Purchase Intention	0.111	1.311	0.190	Rejected
Hard Selling → Purchase Intention	0.331	5.068	0.000	Accepted
Brand Awareness → Purchase Intention	0.356	4.177	0.000	Accepted
Soft Selling → Brand Awareness	0.376	4.649	0.000	Accepted
Hard Selling → Brand Awareness	0.409	4.790	0.000	Accepted

Source: Processed data, 2026.

Mediation Effects

Table 5. Indirect Effects and Mediation Analysis

Indirect Path	Indirect β	t	p	Mediation
Soft Selling → Brand Awareness → Purchase Intention	0.134	2.750	0.006	Full / indirect-only mediation
Hard Selling → Brand Awareness → Purchase Intention	0.145	3.239	0.001	Partial / complementary mediation

Source: Processed data, 2026.

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Soft Selling and Purchase Intention (H1)

H1 was rejected. Soft selling had a positive coefficient but did not significantly affect purchase intention directly (β = 0.111; t = 1.311; p = 0.190). This indicates that subtle promotional communication, storytelling, emotional presentation, and natural product integration may not be sufficient to generate an immediate purchase intention. Based on the descriptive analysis reported in the thesis, soft selling had a mean score of 4.06 (Good), with storytelling or personal experience having the highest mean among its indicators (4.30). Purchase intention had a mean score of 4.388 (Very Good), with effort to purchase recording the highest mean (4.505). These results indicate that respondents valued storytelling and were highly willing to make efforts to obtain products, but the positive perception of soft-selling content did not translate into a statistically significant direct effect on purchase intention. Storytelling may create interest and a comfortable viewing experience, while actual purchase intention can still depend on product need, perceived benefits, price, quality, promotional offers, and other consumer considerations. The result therefore suggests that soft selling functions more effectively as a relationship- and awareness-building mechanism than as an immediate sales trigger.

H2 was accepted. Hard selling positively and significantly affected purchase intention (β = 0.331; t = 5.068; p < 0.001). Direct calls to purchase, promotional offers, repetition, and persuasive language provide consumers with explicit purchase cues. This result supports this study argument that hard selling is more capable of producing an immediate response when the campaign objective is to stimulate purchase intention.

Brand Awareness and Purchase Intention (H3)

H3 was accepted. Brand awareness positively and significantly affected purchase intention (β = 0.356; t = 4.177; p < 0.001). Consumers who recognize and remember a brand more easily are more likely to consider it when evaluating a purchase. This finding reinforces the role of brand awareness as a key marketing mechanism linking exposure to behavioral intention.

Soft Selling and Brand Awareness (H4)

H4 was accepted. Soft selling positively and significantly affected brand awareness (β = 0.376; t = 4.649; p < 0.001). Storytelling, personal experience, emotional communication, and natural product integration can make promotional content feel more relevant and less intrusive, helping consumers recognize and remember the brand.

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Hard Selling and Brand Awareness (H5)

H5 was accepted. Hard selling positively and significantly affected brand awareness (β = 0.409; t = 4.790; p < 0.001). Explicit product information, promotional messages, and repetition can increase brand recognition and recall. This study therefore shows that both communication approaches are useful for awareness, although their mechanisms differ.

Brand Awareness as a Mediator of Soft Selling (H6)

H6 was accepted. The indirect effect of soft selling through brand awareness was significant (β = 0.134; t = 2.750; p = 0.006), while the direct effect of soft selling on purchase intention was not significant. Based on the mediation criteria used in this study, this represents full or indirect-only mediation. In other words, soft selling contributes to purchase intention primarily after it first strengthens brand awareness.

Brand Awareness as a Mediator of Hard Selling (H7)

H7 was accepted. The indirect effect of hard selling through brand awareness was significant (β = 0.145; t = 3.239; p = 0.001), while the direct effect remained significant (β = 0.331; t = 5.068; p < 0.001). This represents partial or complementary mediation. Hard selling therefore operates through two routes: an immediate route toward purchase intention and an indirect route through stronger brand awareness.

NOVELTY AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The main novelty lies in integrating soft selling and hard selling with brand awareness as a mediator of purchase intention in the Indonesian TikTok campaign context. Rather than treating the two promotional approaches as interchangeable, the findings reveal different mechanisms. Soft selling requires brand awareness as the principal pathway toward purchase intention, whereas hard selling can generate purchase intention directly while also being strengthened through brand awareness.

For practitioners, soft-selling content should emphasize credible experiences, relevant storytelling, personal narratives, emotional connection, and transparent information. This study identifies trust-building communication as the lowest-rated soft-selling indicator (mean = 3.84), suggesting room for improvement. Hard-selling content should make direct promotional information more attractive and creative; the lowest-rated hard-selling indicator was direct

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promotional-message delivery (mean = 4.015). Brand awareness should be strengthened through consistent visual identity, memorable messages, and repeated but relevant communication. This study recommends combining both approaches: soft selling for long-term awareness and relationship building, and hard selling during launches, seasonal promotions, or discount periods when a faster purchase response is desired.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The study is limited to TikTok and Generation Z users in Indonesia, so the findings may not generalize to other platforms, age groups, countries, or cultural contexts. The model includes only soft selling, hard selling, brand awareness, and purchase intention, while other factors such as e-WOM, brand image, brand trust, perceived value, perceived quality, customer engagement, content quality, and price perception may also influence purchase intention. The online quantitative survey captures stated perceptions rather than deeper consumer experiences. Finally, the cross-sectional design cannot observe changes in consumer responses as TikTok trends, algorithms, and marketing strategies evolve. Future studies may use broader samples, multiple platforms, mixed methods or qualitative approaches, and longitudinal designs.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that soft selling does not significantly increase purchase intention directly, but it significantly increases brand awareness, which in turn increases purchase intention. Hard selling significantly increases both purchase intention and brand awareness, and brand awareness further strengthens its effect on purchase intention. Therefore, the two approaches should not be treated as substitutes with identical outcomes. Their effectiveness depends on the communication objective: soft selling is particularly valuable for building brand awareness and longer-term consumer relationships, while hard selling is more suitable for generating immediate purchase intention and can be reinforced by awareness-building activities.

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