

THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING AND INFLUENCER MARKETING ON NEW STUDENT REGISTRATION DECISIONS WITH BRAND AWARENESS AS A MEDIATING VARIABLE AT UNIVERSITAS BUMI PERSADA LHOKSEUMAWE

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Received: 04/08/2026 | Revised: 15/08/2026 | Accepted: 02/09/2026 | Published: 23/09/2026

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the influence of social media marketing and influencer marketing on new student registration decisions, with brand awareness as a mediating variable at Universitas Bumi Persada Lhokseumawe. The study used a quantitative survey approach. The population consisted of 400 new students of the 2025–2026 academic year, and 162 respondents were selected using proportionate stratified random sampling. Data were collected using a five-point Likert questionnaire and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4. The results show that social media marketing has a positive and significant effect on brand awareness ($\beta = 0.404$; $t = 4.537$; $p < 0.001$), while influencer marketing also has a positive and significant effect on brand awareness ($\beta = 0.494$; $t = 5.430$; $p < 0.001$). Brand awareness significantly affects new student registration decisions ($\beta = 0.527$; $t = 5.394$; $p < 0.001$). Social media marketing ($\beta = 0.195$; $t = 2.182$; $p = 0.029$) and influencer marketing ($\beta = 0.182$; $t = 2.149$; $p = 0.032$) also have significant direct effects on registration decisions. Furthermore, brand awareness partially mediates the effects of social media marketing (indirect $\beta = 0.213$; $t = 3.352$; $p = 0.001$) and influencer marketing (indirect $\beta = 0.260$; $t = 3.864$; $p < 0.001$) on registration decisions. The R^2 values are 0.742 for brand awareness and 0.737 for registration decisions, indicating substantial explanatory power.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Influencer Marketing, Brand Awareness, New Student Registration Decision, Higher Education.

INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has changed how prospective students search for information and make decisions about higher education. Social media allows universities to communicate quickly, visually, interactively, and continuously with prospective students. The source material reports internet penetration in Indonesia at 80.66% and identifies young users, particularly Generation Z, as an important segment of prospective university students. These developments make digital channels increasingly important in higher-education marketing. Social media marketing is not limited to promotional communication; it can also shape institutional perceptions, engagement, trust, and brand awareness. University content concerning study programs, facilities, student achievements, campus activities, and alumni experiences can help prospective students recognize and remember an institution. At the same time, influencer marketing offers a more personal form of communication because influencers can transfer credibility, authenticity, and social influence to the institutions they promote.

Brand awareness is particularly important in higher education because choosing a university is a high-involvement decision. Prospective students tend to consider institutions that they recognize, remember, trust, and perceive positively. The research material therefore positions brand awareness as a mechanism linking digital marketing activities to the final decision to register. Universitas Bumi Persada Lhokseumawe faces competition from other private and public higher-education institutions. The source material indicates that the university has used social media and local influencers, but empirical evaluation of their effectiveness in strengthening brand awareness and registration decisions has been limited. This study addresses that gap by integrating social media marketing, influencer marketing, brand awareness, and new student registration decisions in one model. Accordingly, this study examines seven relationships: social media marketing → brand awareness; influencer marketing → brand awareness; brand awareness → registration

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decision; social media marketing → registration decision; influencer marketing → registration decision; brand awareness mediating social media marketing → registration decision; and brand awareness mediating influencer marketing → registration decision.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Social media marketing refers to marketing communication conducted through interactive digital platforms to create value, encourage interaction, and build relationships with audiences. In the source material, important dimensions include interaction, content quality and visual attractiveness, posting consistency, responsiveness, and ease of access to university information.

INFLUENCER MARKETING

Influencer marketing uses individuals with social influence to communicate promotional messages to a target audience. Its effectiveness is associated with credibility, authenticity, expertise, attractiveness, relevance to education, audience engagement, and message persuasiveness. For universities, students, alumni, education figures, and relevant local influencers can communicate institutional experiences in a personal and credible manner.

BRAND AWARENESS

Brand awareness is the ability of prospective students to recognize, remember, and distinguish a university. It is reflected in recognition of the university name and logo, ease of remembering the university identity, positive perceptions of reputation and educational quality, exposure to digital promotion, and trust in institutional credibility. Brand awareness is treated as the mediator between digital marketing activities and registration decisions.

NEW STUDENT REGISTRATION DECISION

The new student registration decision represents the outcome of prospective students' evaluation before selecting and registering at a university. Indicators used in the source material include information search, evaluation of alternative universities, confidence in choosing the university, intention to register, and satisfaction with the registration decision. Based on the theoretical framework and previous studies presented in the source material, the hypotheses are:

H1: Social media marketing has a positive effect on brand awareness.

H2: Influencer marketing has a positive effect on brand awareness.

H3: Brand awareness has a positive effect on new student registration decisions.

H4: Social media marketing has a positive effect on new student registration decisions.

H5: Influencer marketing has a positive effect on new student registration decisions.

H6: Brand awareness mediates the relationship between social media marketing and new student registration decisions.

H7: Brand awareness mediates the relationship between influencer marketing and new student registration decisions.

METHOD

The research was conducted at Universitas Bumi Persada Lhokseumawe, Aceh. The research object was new students of the 2025–2026 academic year. The population consisted of 400 students across ten study programs. Based on the SEM sample-size approach, 162 respondents were obtained. The sampling technique was proportionate stratified random sampling so that the study programs were represented proportionally. Primary data were collected through questionnaires using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire measured four constructs: social media marketing, influencer marketing, brand awareness, and new student registration decision. The empirical material reports ten indicators for each construct in the analysis. Data were analyzed using PLS-SEM with SmartPLS 4. The evaluation consisted of the measurement model (outer model) and structural model (inner model). Convergent validity was assessed using outer loadings and AVE; discriminant validity was assessed using cross-loadings, Fornell-Larcker, and HTMT; reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability. Structural evaluation used R^2 , f^2 , model fit, path coefficients, t-statistics, p-values, and bootstrapping for direct and indirect effects.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

The empirical material reports that 75.3% of respondents were female and 24.7% were male. Most respondents were aged 18–20 years (71.6%), followed by 21–23 years (19.8%) and under 18 years (8.6%). By school background, 51.9% came from senior high schools (SMA), 26.5% from vocational schools (SMK), and 21.6% from other schools. The largest study-program group was Nursing (30.9%), followed by Management (19.8%) and Midwifery (13.6%). Social media was the largest reported source of university information at 38.9%.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Social Media Marketing	3.92	0.87
Influencer Marketing	3.89	0.82
Brand Awareness	3.95	0.89
New Student Registration Decision	3.93	0.92

All four variables had mean scores close to 4, indicating generally positive respondent perceptions. The highest social-media item means were associated with ease of understanding information and helping respondents know the university better (both 3.99). For influencer marketing, the highest mean was the clarity and persuasiveness of promotional messages (3.97). Brand awareness was highest for recognition of the university name (4.19), while the registration decision was highest for willingness to choose the university again (4.09).

MEASUREMENT MODEL

Construct	Loading Range	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Social Media Marketing	0.707–0.814	0.932	0.942	0.597
Influencer Marketing	0.730–0.832	0.927	0.939	0.605
Brand Awareness	0.724–0.806	0.928	0.939	0.608
Registration Decision	0.753–0.846	0.936	0.946	0.636

All reported outer loadings exceeded 0.70 and all AVE values exceeded 0.50, supporting convergent validity. Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values were above 0.70 for all constructs, indicating strong internal consistency. Cross-loading results showed that each indicator loaded highest on its intended construct. The Fornell-Larcker results reported square roots of AVE of 0.773, 0.778, 0.780, and 0.798 for social media marketing, influencer marketing, brand awareness, and registration decision, respectively. HTMT values were below 0.90, with the highest at 0.899, so discriminant validity was considered acceptable.

STRUCTURAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESIS TESTING

Relationship	β	t-statistic	p-value	Decision
Social Media Marketing → Brand Awareness	0.404	4.537	0.000	Accepted
Influencer Marketing → Brand Awareness	0.494	5.430	0.000	Accepted
Brand Awareness → Registration Decision	0.527	5.394	0.000	Accepted

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Social Media Marketing → Registration Decision	0.195	2.182	0.029	Accepted
Influencer Marketing → Registration Decision	0.182	2.149	0.032	Accepted

All five direct-effect hypotheses were supported. Influencer marketing had the strongest effect on brand awareness ($\beta = 0.494$), whereas brand awareness had the strongest direct effect on the registration decision ($\beta = 0.527$). This suggests that credible and relevant influencer communication can strengthen recognition and trust, while a stronger university brand in the minds of prospective students increases confidence in registering.

Indirect Relationship	Indirect β	t-statistic	p-value	Mediation
Social Media Marketing → Brand Awareness → Registration Decision	0.213	3.352	0.001	Partial
Influencer Marketing → Brand Awareness → Registration Decision	0.260	3.864	0.000	Partial

Both indirect effects were significant. Because the corresponding direct effects also remained significant, brand awareness functions as a partial mediator in both relationships. Thus, social media marketing and influencer marketing influence registration decisions through two routes: directly and indirectly by first strengthening brand awareness.

MODEL EXPLANATORY POWER

Endogenous Construct	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Interpretation
Brand Awareness	0.742	0.738	Substantial
Registration Decision	0.737	0.732	Substantial

Social media marketing and influencer marketing explain 74.2% of the variance in brand awareness. Social media marketing, influencer marketing, and brand awareness explain 73.7% of the variance in new student registration decisions. The f^2 results show a medium effect of social media marketing on brand awareness (0.286), a large effect of influencer marketing on brand awareness (0.428), small direct effects of social media marketing (0.052) and influencer marketing (0.046) on registration decisions, and a large effect of brand awareness on registration decisions (0.378).

DISCUSSION

The positive effect of social media marketing on brand awareness confirms that consistent, informative, attractive, and interactive digital communication can strengthen prospective students' recognition and recall of Universitas Bumi Persada. The finding is consistent with the source material's discussion of social media as an important channel for communicating study programs, facilities, achievements, and campus activities. Influencer marketing produced the strongest effect on brand awareness among the two digital marketing predictors. This finding emphasizes that influencer effectiveness is not merely a matter of follower count; credibility, knowledge, relevance, engagement, and persuasive communication are important. In the university context, influencers who can present authentic experiences and have a close relationship with the target audience can make the institution more memorable and trusted. Brand

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awareness had the strongest direct effect on registration decisions. This result indicates that recognition, recall, positive reputation, and trust are central mechanisms in higher-education choice. Prospective students are more likely to register when the university is already familiar and positively positioned in their minds. The significant partial mediation effects demonstrate that digital marketing should not be evaluated only by immediate conversion. Social media and influencer activities can first build awareness, which subsequently strengthens the registration decision. This supports the conceptual role of brand awareness as a bridge between marketing stimuli and behavioral response.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that social media marketing and influencer marketing positively and significantly influence brand awareness at Universitas Bumi Persada Lhokseumawe. Brand awareness also has a positive and significant effect on new student registration decisions. Both social media marketing and influencer marketing have significant direct effects on registration decisions. In addition, brand awareness significantly mediates both relationships, with partial mediation in each case. The structural model has substantial explanatory power, with R^2 of 0.742 for brand awareness and 0.737 for registration decisions. Practically, the university should prioritize informative, creative, interactive, and consistent social-media content; improve response speed to prospective students; and collaborate with credible influencers who are relevant to education and the local target market. Because brand awareness has the strongest direct contribution to registration decisions, digital promotion should consistently reinforce the university's identity, reputation, educational quality, and credibility.

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