JIPSI: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan dan Sains Islam Interdisipiner
Vol. 5, No. 3, Agustus 2026, pp. 2424-2438
http://journal.amorfati.id/index.php/jipsi || ISSN 2962-9187

Interdisciplinary Scope of Science and Education, Islamic Education and Science, Integration of Science and Islam, Islamic Thought and Philosophy, Integration of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Islamic Studies, Islamic Economics and Business Studies, and Islamic Ethics in Science and Technology

The Effectiveness of Social Media Influencer Marketing in Increasing Generation Z Awareness of Pegadaian Syariah Products in Banjarmasin

Muhammad Hidayat [a,1], Badrian [b,2], Faqih El Wafa [c,3,*]

[a] Universitas Islam Negeri Antasari Banjarmasin, Indonesia;
[b] Universitas Islam Negeri Antasari Banjarmasin, Indonesia;
[*c] Universitas Islam Negeri Antasari Banjarmasin, Indonesia.
[1] dytbjm01@gmail.com; [2] badrian@uin-antasari.ac.id; [3] faqihelwafa@uin-antasari.ac.id
*Correspondent Author; faqihelwafa@uin-antasari.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO

Article history
Received:
24-06-2026
Revised:
23-07-2026
Accepted:
26-08-2026

Keywords
Influencer Marketing; Brand Awareness; Pegadaian Syariah

ABSTRACT

The limited awareness of Pegadaian Syariah products among Generation Z indicates a gap between their intensive use of social media and their understanding of Islamic financial services. This study aimed to analyze the effectiveness of social media influencer marketing and examine its role in increasing Generation Z awareness of Pegadaian Syariah products in Banjarmasin. The study employed field research with a qualitative descriptive approach. Primary data were collected through structured interviews with 25 Generation Z informants (purposively selected based on their residency in Banjarmasin, age 18–24, and active engagement with TikTok or Instagram), while secondary data were obtained from short-video promotional content by local and national influencers, audience responses, product data, and supporting documents. The data were analyzed thematically through data collection, reduction, presentation, interpretation, and conclusion drawing, utilizing Campbell's program-effectiveness indicators and a hierarchical brand awareness framework. Awareness levels were qualitatively identified by classifying informants' responses: brand recognition (identifying the brand when prompted), brand recall (unassisted retrieval of specific products), and top-of-mind (spontaneous first mention for Islamic financial needs). The findings demonstrated that influencer marketing was selectively effective when the content reached the intended audience, used accessible language, provided verifiable information, and was delivered by credible influencers. Most informants reached the brand-recognition and brand-recall levels, whereas top-of-mind awareness emerged only among some informants, particularly in relation to the Gold Savings product. Uneven algorithmic distribution, differences in content preferences, limited informational depth, and skepticism toward paid promotions hindered broader awareness. The study concludes that influencer marketing serves as an initial gateway to product awareness but must be integrated with education, transparency, and official information sources. The study was limited to one city, a relatively small group of informants, and the absence of longitudinal observations examining whether awareness subsequently developed into actual product use.

Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital communication has significantly altered the ways in which financial institutions engage with younger consumers. Social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube now serve not only as sources of entertainment but also as primary channels for Generation Z to access information, assess brands, and form financial preferences. This shift is particularly salient in Indonesia, where Generation Z demonstrates high levels of digital engagement but does not necessarily exhibit a commensurate understanding of financial products. Within the context of Islamic finance, this disparity is noteworthy because digital proficiency does not inherently translate into Islamic financial literacy or the capacity to evaluate the contractual, ethical, and economic dimensions of Sharia-compliant financial services. Prior research indicates that Islamic financial literacy is positively correlated with Generation Z's financial behavior, though this relationship is moderated by factors such as socialization, risk tolerance, and the ability to interpret financial information (Patrisia et al., 2023). Additionally, digital marketing has been shown to influence Generation Z's interest in Islamic financial institutions, while digital literacy and brand image do not consistently yield similar effects (Suparno et al., 2023). These findings underscore a critical distinction between digital connectivity, exposure to financial promotion, brand recognition, and substantive understanding of financial products.

Influencer marketing has emerged as a prominent element within the digital environment, enabling influencers to communicate institutional messages in ways that are perceived as personal, relatable, and accessible. Studies focusing on Indonesian Generation Z demonstrate that influencer-generated content can shape consumer responses, with effectiveness largely dependent on authenticity and transparency, both of which contribute to audience trust (Erwin et al., 2023). The broader literature on influencer marketing identifies credibility, parasocial interaction, authenticity, sponsorship, content value, and audience engagement as central mechanisms influencing consumer behavior (Bansal et al., 2024; Joshi et al., 2025). Research on message processing further indicates that informational value, perceived similarity, authenticity, and source credibility enhance brand credibility. In contrast, consumers' persuasion knowledge may lead to skepticism or resistance toward overtly commercial messages (Liu & Zheng, 2024). Therefore, Generation Z should not be viewed as a passive audience simply because of high social media usage; rather, their responses to influencers are shaped by evaluations of credibility, relevance, commercial intent, and informational value.

Recent research indicates that the relationship between influencer marketing and consumer outcomes is not inherently linear. For example, Hidayatullah et al. (2025) found that although influencer marketing increased brand awareness among Generation Z, it did not necessarily result in purchase decisions. In contrast, broader social media marketing exerted a more substantial influence on both awareness and purchasing behavior. Studies within Islamic finance reveal similar complexities. Lutfi & Prihatiningrum (2023) identified links between influencer attractiveness, social media engagement, Islamic financial literacy, and intentions to own Sharia banking investment products, with social media engagement being particularly significant. Further research suggests that financial literacy, influencers, social media, and religiosity collectively influence Generation Z's investment decision-making processes (Al-Ma'ruf & Qadariyah, 2024). Recent findings concerning Pegadaian Syariah show that social media can positively affect Generation Z's decisions regarding gold-installment investment products, while also highlighting the importance of financial education and targeted digital communication (Vernanda & Munir, 2026). Collectively, these studies confirm that digital and influencer communication can affect younger consumers, primarily in terms of purchase intention, investment decisions, saving intention, engagement, or product ownership. However, they provide limited insight into how influencer exposure leads to different levels of product awareness, particularly the progression from brand recognition to brand recall, product understanding, and top-of-mind awareness.

This limitation is especially evident within the context of Islamic financial services. Pegadaian Syariah should not be regarded as a typical consumer brand or a conventional financial product, where promotional communication often focuses on convenience, price, accessibility, or functional benefits. Instead, Pegadaian Syariah provides collateral-based financing and investment services that adhere to Sharia-compliant contracts and principles. For instance, the rahn mechanism employs an asset as security for an obligation, with maintenance or safekeeping charges structured through ijarah or mu'nah arrangements rather than conventional interest-based systems (Setiawan et al., 2023; Yuliono et al., 2023). The product portfolio extends beyond traditional pawning to include offerings such as Rahn Hasan, Rahn Flexi, Rahn Bisnis, Amanah, Arrum BPKB, Arrum Emas, Arrum Haji, Gold Installment, and Gold Savings. Consequently, brand recognition of Pegadaian Syariah does not necessarily imply an understanding of the Sharia-compliant features of its products or the distinctions in contracts, costs, benefits, and risks relative to conventional alternatives.

This characteristic imposes an additional communicative challenge for influencer marketing. While influencer credibility for ordinary consumer products is often assessed based on attributes such as attractiveness, expertise, relatability, authenticity, and influencer–brand congruence (Bonus et al., 2022; Lou et al., 2024; Pradhan et al., 2023), credibility in the context of Pegadaian Syariah must also encompass informational accuracy, transparency, ethical communication, explanation of contractual mechanisms, and the verifiability of Sharia claims. Research on Rahn marketing at Pegadaian Syariah indicates that transparency, fairness, ethical service, and ongoing customer education are fundamental to building customer trust, particularly among first-time users (Agatha & Handayani, 2025). Islamic financial marketing thus serves a dual purpose: attracting audience attention and educating consumers about financial mechanisms and Sharia legitimacy. An influencer may succeed in increasing product visibility without necessarily providing adequate information for audiences to understand contractual details or assess the alignment of promotional claims with Islamic financial principles. Therefore, influencer marketing for Pegadaian Syariah should be evaluated not only by metrics such as views, likes, or immediate behavioral intentions, but also by the quality and depth of awareness it generates.

Brand awareness provides a useful framework for examining this distinction. Brand awareness refers to consumers' ability to associate a brand with a particular product category or need and to retrieve that brand from memory when making a decision (Lim & Keni, 2025). The concept can be understood hierarchically through the stages of unaware of the brand, brand recognition, brand recall, and top of mind (Tchelidze, 2023). Brand recognition refers to consumers' ability to identify a brand when prompted, whereas brand recall reflects the ability to retrieve it without assistance. Top-of-mind awareness represents a stronger position in which a brand becomes the first reference that emerges within a particular product category. In digital environments, these stages can also be influenced by information quality, interactivity, trust, virtual engagement, and user-generated opinions (López-Rodríguez et al., 2024). Such distinctions are especially relevant for financial products because awareness does not automatically produce adoption. Consumers may recognize a logo or remember a product name without understanding contractual arrangements, transaction costs, security, benefits, or associated risks. Research on Islamic banking adoption similarly indicates that awareness does not invariably exert a direct influence on usage intention because social influence, perceived ease of use, literacy, and trust may intervene in the decision process (Ningrum et al., 2025).

The social-media environment adds further complexity because promotional exposure is not distributed uniformly among users. Recommendation algorithms organize content according to previous interactions and inferred user preferences, creating different digital environments even among individuals of similar age who use the same platform. As a result, high social-media usage does not guarantee exposure to Pegadaian Syariah or other Islamic financial content. Moreover, repeated exposure alone may be insufficient. Research on social-media financial content suggests that the quality and diversity of topics viewed can influence Generation Z's financial literacy more meaningfully than simply using multiple platforms (Angelica & Zen, 2023). Influencer marketing may therefore strengthen brand awareness when information is relevant, understandable, credible, and memorable. However, the same strategy may have limited effects when content fails to enter users' algorithmic environments, appears excessively commercial, lacks informational depth, or conflicts with consumers' expectations of transparency. These conditions suggest that influencer effectiveness should be examined as a conditional process rather than assumed as an automatic consequence of digital exposure.

Banjarmasin offers a relevant contextual setting for investigating this process rather than serving merely as the geographical location of the study. Existing research conducted in Banjarmasin has shown that social media already plays an important role in promoting Sharia financial services. Nikmah et al. (2025), in examining Sharia life-insurance promotion in Banjarmasin, found that social-media communication—particularly through Instagram—can enhance visibility, trust, and relatability when product communication is supported by transparency, honesty, and fairness. This evidence demonstrates that Banjarmasin constitutes a meaningful local context in which Sharia financial institutions are already negotiating the relationship between digital promotion, ethical communication, and consumer trust. At the same time, the effectiveness of influencer-based communication in developing Generation Z's awareness of Sharia pawnbroking and investment products remains insufficiently understood. Studying Pegadaian Syariah in Banjarmasin therefore enables the investigation to extend existing local digital-marketing research from general Sharia financial promotion toward the more specific question of how influencer-mediated messages are encountered, interpreted, verified, remembered, or rejected by younger consumers.

The literature consequently reveals three interrelated research gaps. First, influencer-marketing research has extensively examined credibility, authenticity, engagement, brand attitude, and purchase intention, but has less frequently investigated the qualitative progression from influencer exposure to different stages of brand awareness. Second, research on Generation Z and Islamic finance has largely focused on Islamic banking, investment intention, saving behavior, financial literacy, or product adoption; substantially less attention has been given to Sharia pawnbroking services whose promotion requires simultaneous communication of financial benefits, contractual mechanisms, and Sharia legitimacy. Third, previous studies provide limited explanation of how these processes operate in Banjarmasin, particularly among Generation Z audiences whose exposure to influencer-generated financial content may vary according to platform algorithms, prior knowledge, content preferences, and trust in commercial endorsements. Accordingly, the unresolved issue is not simply whether influencers can promote Pegadaian Syariah, but under what conditions influencer-generated content moves Generation Z from exposure to recognition, from recognition to recall, and from recall toward substantive product understanding and top-of-mind awareness.

To address these gaps, this study investigates the effectiveness of social media influencer marketing in increasing Generation Z awareness of Pegadaian Syariah products in Banjarmasin. Influencer marketing is conceptualized as a multidimensional marketing-communication intervention in which influential social-media figures communicate brand messages through content characterized by varying levels of credibility, authenticity, informational value, interactivity, and perceived proximity to audiences (Durmaz & Ceylan, 2025). Effectiveness is examined not merely through whether promotional content is viewed, but through whether it reaches the intended audience, communicates relevant information clearly, generates satisfactory responses, and contributes to broader communication objectives. Generation Z awareness is analyzed through the stages of unaware of the brand, brand recognition, brand recall, and top of mind, while also considering informants' ability to identify specific products, explain basic benefits, distinguish Sharia characteristics, and verify promotional information.

The study contributes to the literature by integrating program-effectiveness indicators, hierarchical brand awareness, message-processing mechanisms, and Islamic marketing ethics within a qualitative analysis of influencer marketing for Sharia financial services. Unlike studies that primarily examine whether influencer marketing statistically predicts purchase or usage intention, this study focuses on the process through which audiences experience and interpret influencer-generated communication. It therefore explains not only whether influencer marketing appears effective, but also for whom, under what conditions, and at which stage of awareness its effectiveness emerges. In doing so, the study provides a context-sensitive explanation of why intensive social-media use may coexist with limited understanding of Pegadaian Syariah products and why visibility alone cannot be treated as evidence of successful financial communication

Method

The object of this study was the effectiveness of social media influencer marketing in increasing Generation Z awareness of *Pegadaian Syariah* products in Banjarmasin, particularly under conditions in which exposure to promotional content was uneven and audience understanding varied considerably. The study focused on Generation Z's experiences of viewing, interpreting, trusting, recalling, and responding to promotional messages delivered by influencers through TikTok, Instagram, and other digital platforms. In accordance with the design of the original undergraduate thesis, this study employed field research using a qualitative descriptive approach because the data were collected directly from the social context in which the marketing communication phenomenon naturally occurred in everyday life. A qualitative approach enabled the researcher to understand participants' experiences, social interactions, and nuanced interpretations as the primary sources of knowledge (Martin et al., 2024). Primary data were obtained from Generation Z informants through interviews concerning content exposure, perceptions of influencers, product understanding, levels of trust, brand recall, and interest in *Pegadaian Syariah* services. Secondary data included supporting documents, product or customer data, promotional materials, influencer posts, and audience responses reflected in views, likes, and comments. Qualitative descriptive research using structured interviews is appropriate for exploring perceptions and experiences in depth when the issue under investigation is complex and context-dependent (Gürsoy & Vatansever, 2025). Accordingly, the research design was intended to explain the effectiveness of influencer marketing as experienced and interpreted by its target audience.

The primary sources of information consisted of 25 Generation Z informants residing in Banjarmasin who actively used social media and were selected because of their relevance to the phenomenon under investigation. Informants were recruited through purposive sampling, which involved selecting participants according to predetermined considerations and criteria aligned with the research objectives, thereby ensuring that the information was obtained from individuals capable of describing their exposure to *Pegadaian Syariah* promotional content. Purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative research to select participants who possess relevant experience or knowledge concerning the research focus (Rana et al., 2023). The research process began with a preliminary stage involving initial observation and research-design preparation, followed by field data collection, data processing, analysis, and the preparation of the research report and conclusions. Data were collected primarily through structured interviews using a predetermined list of questions designed to explore informants' experiences regarding exposure frequency, message clarity, content appeal, influencer credibility, product knowledge, and levels of brand awareness. An interview guide helps maintain alignment between the discussion and the research questions, while interview results must be systematically documented for subsequent analysis (Crowe & Manuel, 2025). Documentation complemented the interview data through the examination of influencer posts, *Pegadaian Syariah* promotional materials, view counts, likes, comments, and other relevant supporting records. All collected data were then reviewed and edited so that only information relevant to the research focus proceeded to the analytical stage.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis through the stages of data collection, data reduction, data presentation, interpretation, and conclusion drawing. The initial stage involved repeatedly reviewing the interview and documentary data to develop a comprehensive understanding of the context of participants' responses, recurring patterns of experience, and variations among informants. Thematic analysis requires systematic reading, coding, categorization, and theme development while maintaining a direct connection with the research questions (Saunders et al., 2023). During data reduction, relevant material was selected, simplified, and classified, such as content exposure, audience targeting, information clarity, influencer credibility, trust, brand recognition, product recall, and interest in using the services. The reduced data were subsequently organized into narrative accounts or tables to facilitate comparisons across categories and identify recurring patterns. Interpretation was guided by Campbell's program-effectiveness indicators, namely program success, target achievement, satisfaction with the program, input–output relationships, and overall goal attainment. Levels of awareness were analyzed through the stages of unaware of the brand, brand recognition, brand recall, and top of mind, allowing each informant's response to be classified according to the depth of their awareness of *Pegadaian Syariah*. Transparent theme development requires clear documentation of the relationships among codes, categories, empirical evidence, and interpretive decisions so that conclusions can be traced back to the data (Sun et al., 2025). The final stage involved interpreting dominant patterns and variations in participants' experiences to answer the study's two research questions.

Results and Discussion

1. Exposure to and Acceptance of *Influencer* Marketing Among Generation Z

The findings related to *influencer marketing* revealed that *Pegadaian Syariah*'s promotional strategy generated different experiences among the 25 Generation Z informants in Banjarmasin. The informants were approximately 18–24 years old and were predominantly university students, young workers, and active users of TikTok and Instagram, while some also used YouTube Shorts. Promotional content was reported to appear an average of two to three times per month, although the intensity of exposure was not evenly distributed across all informants. Nayla, Aditya, Gatot, Najwa, Fitri, Sapitri, Nur Aisyah, Uwais, and Aulia stated that influencer-generated content simplified financial terminology, transformed the institution's previously traditional image, and introduced product benefits through everyday language, short videos, appealing visuals, local humor, and accessible explanations. Gatot's trust increased when the content presented evidence of transactions and official regulatory identification.

In contrast, Fitri and Sapitri considered detailed explanations and consistency with their direct experiences important in strengthening message acceptance. These patterns indicate that content quality, influencer credibility, and communication-style compatibility were the most prominent elements shaping informants' experiences. This finding is consistent with evidence that influencer credibility—particularly expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness—can influence brand image and Generation Z responses (Nugroho et al., 2022). Thus, influencer marketing was effective primarily when the message was actually delivered, relevant, and trusted by the intended audience.

The relationship between the influencer-marketing findings and the empirical problem was evident in the imbalance between Generation Z's intensive social media use and the uneven distribution of *Pegadaian Syariah* promotional content. Hikam, Mirda, Maria, Sa'adah, Hilda, Syamsu, Sultan, Hadijah, and several other informants actively used social media for approximately three to six hours per day but reported never encountering influencer-generated promotions for *Pegadaian Syariah* on their feeds. Their algorithms predominantly displayed entertainment, gaming, beauty, religious, or academic content according to their individual preferences, preventing the marketing message from entering their digital environments. The absence of exposure meant that their product knowledge remained limited to basic pawning services, did not develop further, or was acquired only through physical branches, university courses, friends, and official websites. Some informants also questioned the objectivity of paid promotions because influencers were perceived as presenting mainly the positive aspects of products; consequently, they preferred to verify the information through DSN-MUI fatwas, corporate sources, or academic materials. This skepticism is consistent with findings that influencer marketing may have a weaker effect when audiences do not trust influencer reviews (Mamesah et al., 2023). These data demonstrate that the research problem was not simply whether

Generation Z used social media, but whether content-distribution systems, influencer selection, and message substance were capable of reaching diverse digital interests. Accordingly, the effectiveness of influencer marketing was selective and depended on actual exposure, influencer relevance, and informants' level of trust.

2. Mapping the Level of Brand Awareness Among Informants

Regarding brand awareness, the interviews revealed that informants occupied different positions across the stages of unaware of the brand, brand recognition, brand recall, and top of mind. Nayla initially did not know *Pegadaian Syariah* products, but after viewing influencer content, she was able to recall the Gold Savings product and understand the institution's role. Aditya progressed from merely recognizing the name to understanding Gold Savings and Islamic contractual principles. At the same time, Gatot not only recognized the green visual identity and logo but could also identify Gold Installment and *Arrum BPKB*. Abu Abu Rizki Ghani, Fitri, Sapitri, Nur Aisyah, Uwais, and Aulia demonstrated stronger memory because they could spontaneously mention several products, associate the brand with secure Islamic transactions, or identify Gold Savings as the first reference when discussing gold investment for young people. Among these informants, digital content moved beyond visual recognition by broadening product memory and strengthening the modern image of *Pegadaian Syariah*. However, Hikam, Maria, Laila, Mauliani, and Sultan remained at a limited recognition level because they were familiar only with the physical office, corporate color, or conventional pawning function. These findings indicate that brand awareness was not a single condition but a hierarchy of recognition and recall that developed according to the source and depth of information received. Recent research has similarly found that social media can strengthen Generation Z's brand awareness, particularly through interactive, relevant, and memorable content (Al-Malik et al., 2026). Thus, most informants were positioned between brand recognition and brand recall, while only some had reached top-of-mind awareness.

The relationship between levels of brand awareness and the empirical problem demonstrated that increased awareness did not always originate from influencers and did not necessarily result in product use. Mirda, Amanda, Hadijah, and Ike possessed substantial knowledge of *Pegadaian Syariah* despite receiving little meaningful digital exposure because their understanding had developed through formal education, observation of branch offices, Islamic economics courses, and searches for official information. By contrast, Maria and Laila used social media frequently but continued to have limited understanding, associated *Pegadaian* with financial hardship, or were unable to identify its range of products. Hilda learned about the institution through friends, while Hikam more readily recalled the green color and pawning function than its investment or Islamic financing benefits. These variations demonstrate that brand recognition can develop through physical or social contact.

In contrast, brand recall and top-of-mind awareness require information that is more repetitive, meaningful, and relevant to individual needs. The data also revealed a distinction between knowing the brand, understanding the product, considering its use, and completing a transaction. Aulia, for example, identified Gold Savings as top of mind and intended to recommend it, but had not yet purchased the product. Other empirical findings have likewise shown that brand awareness may directly influence intention. At the same time, influencer marketing and electronic word of mouth may operate through consumer attitudes rather than through a direct effect (Orelskaia et al., 2025). Therefore, the awareness problem identified in this study was hierarchical: brand recognition had developed, but substantive understanding and behavioral conversion remained uneven.

3. Overview of Sharia Pawnshop Product Portfolio

Regarding *Pegadaian Syariah*, the data showed that Gold Savings was the product most readily recognized by informants. In contrast, awareness of *Rahn, Amanah, Arrum*, Gold Installment, *Arrum BPKB*, and *Arrum Haji* was more limited and depended on each informant's prior knowledge. Informants who received high-quality digital exposure were able to explain that *Pegadaian Syariah* provides not only pawning services but also gold investment and financing based on Islamic principles. Aditya understood the relationship between the products and interest-free contracts; Gatot could identify Gold Installment and *Arrum BPKB. At* the same time, Fitri was able to mention *Rahn, Amanah, Arrum*, and Gold Savings. Mirda, who had acquired information through formal education, recognized *Rahn, Arrum Haji, Amanah*, and Gold Savings without depending on influencer content. By contrast, Maria, Hikam, Laila, and Sultan continued to perceive the institution merely as a place to pawn assets or obtain funds during financial difficulties. This difference indicates that a diversified product portfolio had not been accompanied by an equally diversified level of knowledge among Generation Z audiences. Literature on *Pegadaian Syariah* operations also records products such as *Rahn Hasan, Rahn Flexi, Rahn Bisnis, Amanah, Arrum BPKB, Arrum Emas, Arrum Haji*, and gold installment services, while emphasizing the importance of strengthening social media promotion to reach younger generations (Setiawan et al., 2023). Accordingly, the findings suggest that the image of *Pegadaian Syariah* is gradually shifting toward that of a modern financial institution, although this change has not been experienced uniformly.

The relationship between the *Pegadaian Syariah* data and the empirical problem became more evident in the unequal level of product recognition and the persistence of the institution's traditional image. The research document recorded 3,191 Gold Savings customers and 1,823 *Rahn* customers based on current data. In comparison, *Mulia Syariah* had 231 customers accumulated over five years, *Arrum Emas* had 230 customers accumulated over three years, and *Amanah* had 67 customers accumulated over three years. Because these figures covered different periods, they could not be interpreted as directly comparable measures of product performance; nevertheless, they indicated that Gold Savings and *Rahn* had greater visibility than the other products. This pattern was consistent with the interviews because Gold Savings was the product most frequently recalled spontaneously.

In contrast, *Amanah, Arrum*, Gold Installment, and *Arrum Haji* were recognized only by informants who had received more detailed information. Among informants who had not encountered promotional content, *Pegadaian Syariah* remained associated with the stigma of being an institution for people experiencing financial difficulty, meaning that its investment and modern financing functions had not yet become common knowledge. Research on Gold Savings marketing has similarly found that limited public understanding remains an obstacle despite the use of multiple promotional channels (Asrandi et al., 2025). The findings therefore confirm that the central issue was not the absence of products. However, the unequal communication of their benefits, contracts, costs, and relevance to Generation Z was a key issue. Overall, *Pegadaian Syariah* had established a strong basis of recognition. However, broader dissemination of information was still necessary to improve understanding of its complete product portfolio.

4. The Role of *Influencer* Marketing in Building Brand Awareness

This study demonstrates that the effectiveness of Pegadaian Syariah influencer marketing was not automatic, but depended on whether promotional content reached the intended audience, matched their informational needs, was delivered by credible figures, and enabled users to verify the message. When content successfully reached informants, the use of everyday language, short videos, appealing visuals, and clear explanations of product benefits helped reposition Pegadaian Syariah from a traditionally perceived institution into a financial service considered more relevant to Generation Z. However, informants who were not reached by platform algorithms, preferred other types of content, or questioned the objectivity of paid endorsements did not experience the same increase in understanding. In this study, exposure to promotional content, brand recognition, brand recall, top-of-mind awareness, purchase intention, and actual product adoption are therefore treated as analytically distinct outcomes rather than as a single sequential effect. Recent evidence in Islamic financial services also indicates that brand awareness may interact with financial literacy and trust rather than being equivalent to behavioral adoption (Mawardi et al., 2025). This distinction is important because some informants could recognize or recall Pegadaian Syariah products without expressing purchase intention. In contrast, others obtained their knowledge from formal education, branch offices, peers, or official information rather than influencer content alone. Consequently, influencer marketing is better interpreted as an initial gateway to awareness and product exploration, rather than as an independent cause of purchase intention or actual product adoption.

Compared with previous studies that have predominantly examined the relationship between influencers and consumer attitudes or purchasing behavior, the present findings provide a more detailed explanation of why the influence emerged among some members of Generation Z but weakened among others; recent evidence likewise shows that influencer marketing can strongly relate to Generation Z consumer behavior, while its influence does not operate uniformly across consumers (Župan et al., 2025). The findings suggest that the effectiveness of influencers should be distinguished from the effectiveness of the content they deliver. In this study, source-level effectiveness refers to whether the influencer is perceived as credible, trustworthy, relatable, and sufficiently knowledgeable. In contrast, content-level effectiveness concerns whether the promotional message itself is understandable, relevant, informative, transparent, and appropriate to the audience's needs. Research on digital marketing in Islamic financial services similarly indicates that social media communication becomes more useful when promotional strategies are combined with direct education, product understanding, and attention to transaction security (Natasya et al., 2025). Thus, a credible influencer may initially attract attention but cannot compensate for content that lacks sufficient explanation of products, contracts, fees, benefits, or risks. Conversely, informative content may also have limited influence if audiences distrust the person delivering it. The repeated sense of familiarity and relatability described by several informants may additionally be interpreted as a parasocial dimension of influencer communication, in which perceived social proximity helps attract initial attention to the message. Nevertheless, such perceived proximity did not eliminate the informants' need to verify financial information. Influencer effectiveness and content effectiveness are therefore related, but they should not be treated as identical dimensions of communication effectiveness.

5. Increased Awareness Among Gen Z in Banjarmasin City Regarding Pegadaian Syariah Products

A key reflection arising from the findings is that the value of influencer marketing for Pegadaian Syariah should be assessed through changes in the quality of knowledge rather than solely through increases in views or engagement. Informants who could recognize the Pegadaian Syariah brand were not necessarily able to explain the differences among Rahn, Arrum, Amanah, Gold Installment, and Gold Savings, indicating that brand recognition alone should not be interpreted as evidence of comprehensive product understanding. This distinction is particularly important in Islamic financial services because Islamic financial literacy has been shown to influence Generation Z's financial behavior and risk tolerance (Patrisia et al., 2023). By contrast, when influencer exposure encouraged informants to examine contractual arrangements, fees, legality, Sharia compliance, or official sources, the content functioned as a trigger for further learning rather than as a complete source of financial knowledge. The tendency of audiences to compare promotional messages with peer opinions, testimonials, reviews, or other online information can also be understood through electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM); evidence from Islamic banking indicates that e-WOM can influence actual financial behavior through the intermediary roles of interest and trust (Istiqomah et al., 2025). The important contribution of influencer content is therefore not necessarily that it completes the consumer decision process, but that it may create an initial reason for consumers to search, compare, and verify further information. This reinforces the interpretation of influencer marketing as a gateway between initial exposure and deeper financial-information processing.

The implications of these findings lie in the need to shift campaign design from figure-centered promotion toward an integrated communication process that connects reach, education, verification, and trust. Several informants expressed skepticism toward paid promotional content, particularly when they perceived endorsements as emphasizing positive product attributes without sufficient explanation of costs, risks, or supporting evidence. In the context of this study, this response can be interpreted as advertising skepticism, because commercial intent appears to function as an additional filter through which audiences assess the credibility of promotional information. Research on Islamic banking also indicates that influencer attractiveness and social-media engagement may be associated with intentions to own Sharia financial products. In contrast, Islamic financial literacy plays an important role in how consumers respond to those influences (Lutfi & Prihatiningrum, 2023). This helps explain why exposure to the same influencer does not necessarily produce the same response among all members of Generation Z. Informants with stronger prior knowledge were more likely to verify promotional claims. In contrast, those with limited prior knowledge could remain at the recognition stage without developing a deeper understanding. For Pegadaian Syariah, transparency concerning sponsorship, product mechanisms, fees, risks, and sources of verification is therefore important not merely as a promotional technique but as a mechanism for maintaining the credibility of financial communication.

6. Islamic Marketing Ethics Regarding Influencer Content

The findings also show that the barriers to influencer marketing can be separated into four related communication problems. First, algorithmic distribution represents a reach problem, because promotional information cannot influence audiences who never encounter it in their personalized social-media environment. Second, content preference represents a relevance problem, as some informants spent substantial time on social media but primarily consumed entertainment, gaming, beauty, religious, or academic content and therefore rarely encountered Pegadaian Syariah promotions. Third, limited informational depth represents a comprehension problem, because short promotional content may generate recognition without giving audiences enough information to understand contracts, fees, benefits, risks, or differences between products. Fourth, skepticism toward paid promotion represents a trust problem, particularly when promotional content appears excessively commercial or does not provide opportunities for verification. These findings indicate that the effectiveness of particular types of content should not be inferred directly from the popularity of the influencer delivering them. Evidence among Generation Y and Z similarly suggests that educational and value-aligned social-media communication can contribute to brand awareness and other brand-related outcomes (Ibrahim & Marsasi, 2023). In Islamic banking more specifically, digital marketing and financial literacy have been found to influence Generation Z's interest even when brand image itself does not show the same effect, indicating that informational and educational dimensions may operate independently from general brand perceptions (Suparno et al., 2023). Consequently, educational content that combines accessible language, product explanations, transaction simulations, transparent costs, and verification channels may contribute differently to awareness than entertainment-oriented endorsements, even when the same influencer delivers both.

Based on these findings, a staged campaign architecture is needed to move audiences from exposure to recognition, recognition to recall, recall to product understanding and verification, and only subsequently toward informed consideration and possible adoption. This sequence should not be interpreted as an automatic funnel because individual movement between stages remains dependent on prior knowledge, content relevance, credibility, trust, and the consumer's own financial needs. Qualitative research on Generation Z's Sharia investment decisions likewise indicates that financial literacy, influencers, social media, and religiosity interact in shaping financial decision-making rather than operating as isolated determinants (Al-Ma'ruf & Qadariyah, 2024). Pegadaian Syariah should therefore combine culturally relatable local influencers with figures who possess sufficient Islamic financial expertise, while developing different types of content for different communication objectives. Short and entertaining content may primarily support reach and recognition; product-specific explanatory videos may support understanding; expert-led content may strengthen credibility and verification; and testimonials or customer experiences may encourage social validation. Brand awareness and trust are also relevant to Generation Z's interest in Islamic financial services, suggesting that awareness-building campaigns should be accompanied by strategies that protect institutional credibility rather than focusing only on visibility (Hestiyanti & Hasan, 2025). Campaign evaluation should consequently measure reach, recognition, recall, product understanding, information verification, purchase intention, account registration, and actual transactions as separate outcomes, rather than using engagement or awareness as proxies for product adoption

Conclusion

The most striking finding of this study is that Generation Z's intensive use of social media does not automatically lead to a stronger understanding of Pegadaian Syariah products. Influencer marketing was selectively effective as an initial gateway to awareness when promotional content reached informants' digital environments, was delivered by credible and relevant figures, used accessible language, and provided information that could be independently verified. Under these conditions, the content helped reposition Pegadaian Syariah from a traditionally perceived institution to a financial service considered more relevant to younger consumers, particularly through Gold Savings, Rahn, Gold Installment, and Arrum. Nevertheless, most informants remained at the levels of brand recognition and brand recall, while only a limited number reached top-of-mind awareness; therefore, increased awareness should not be attributed exclusively to influencer marketing or assumed to lead automatically to purchase intention or actual product adoption. Theoretically, the study contributes an integrated understanding of program effectiveness, levels of brand awareness, message processing, and Islamic marketing ethics. Practically, Pegadaian Syariah should select influencers not only for popularity but also for audience relevance, credibility, communication ability, local familiarity, and knowledge of Islamic finance; clearly disclose paid partnerships; design educational content that explains product benefits, contracts, fees, risks, and transaction procedures; and integrate influencer content with official Pegadaian Syariah websites, verified social-media accounts, branch offices, and other verification channels. Campaign effectiveness should consequently be evaluated through distinct indicators—including reach, recognition, recall, product understanding, information verification, consideration, intention, registration, and actual transactions—rather than views and likes alone.

The limitations of this study arise primarily from its contextual boundaries: it involved 25 purposively selected Generation Z informants in Banjarmasin and relied on structured interviews and promotional content documentation available during the research period. Its findings were not intended for statistical generalization and could not capture subsequent changes in platform algorithms, influencer popularity, promotional campaigns, or Pegadaian Syariah products. More importantly, the study did not follow informants longitudinally to determine whether recognition, recall, product understanding, and interest eventually developed into actual adoption and sustained product use. Future research should therefore examine larger and more diverse Generation Z populations across multiple cities and employ quantitative, longitudinal, or experimental designs to test the relationships among influencer exposure, source credibility, content characteristics, Islamic financial literacy, brand awareness, trust, purchase intention, and actual product adoption. Comparative studies could also examine nano-, micro-, and macro-influencers; local versus national or expert influencers; educational versus entertainment-oriented content; and different forms of sponsorship disclosure. Combining interviews or surveys with digital engagement metrics, account-registration data, and transaction records would further clarify whether and under what conditions awareness progresses toward consideration and behavioral outcomes, thereby extending the explanatory reach of the present qualitative findings.

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