



## AI Search Exposure And Behavioral Intentions: Toward A Conceptual Framework For SME Marketing In Indonesia

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### Abstract

**Background.** The rapid proliferation of AI-mediated search tools has fundamentally transformed how consumers discover and evaluate products online.

**Aims.** Despite growing evidence of AI's influence on digital consumer behavior, a significant conceptual gap persists regarding how AI search exposure shapes behavioral intentions—particularly purchase and recommendation intentions—among consumers encountering Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) products.

**Methods.** This systematic literature review synthesizes 20 scholarly sources published between 2020 and 2026, including peer-reviewed journal articles, institutional reports, and working papers, retrieved from Scopus and Google Scholar databases, to examine the relationship between AI search exposure and consumer behavioral intentions in SME marketing contexts. Following PRISMA 2020 guidelines, this review identifies three key themes: (1) AI search as a novel consumer touchpoint that reshapes discovery and evaluation processes; (2) trust and perceived credibility as central mechanisms linking AI exposure to behavioral outcomes; and (3) the unique vulnerabilities and opportunities that AI-mediated search presents for SMEs operating in digital markets.

**Result.** This paper proposes a conceptual framework positioning AI search exposure as an antecedent of purchase and recommendation intention, mediated by consumer trust and perceived AI credibility.

**Conclusion.** Theoretical propositions are developed to guide future empirical research.

**Implication.** Implications for SME marketing strategy in Indonesia are discussed, with particular attention to E-E-A-T optimization strategies.

**Keywords:** AI search exposure, behavioral intentions, SME marketing, consumer trust, Indonesia



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### INTRODUCTION

The digital search landscape has undergone a fundamental transformation over the past decade. Traditional keyword-based search engines, which presented consumers with ranked lists of hyperlinks requiring independent evaluation and comparison, are increasingly being supplanted by AI-mediated search systems that synthesize, curate, and deliver consolidated

natural-language responses to consumer queries (Pham et al., 2024; Werner et al., 2024). Platforms such as Google AI Overviews, ChatGPT, and Perplexity now function as primary information intermediaries, reshaping how consumers encounter products, services, and brands in digital marketplaces. This transformation carries profound implications for consumer behavior, particularly in contexts characterized by high information asymmetry and brand unfamiliarity—conditions that typify most consumer encounters with Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) products.

The economic significance of SMEs underscores the urgency of understanding how AI search environments affect their market performance. In Indonesia, SMEs constitute over 99% of all business entities and contribute approximately 60% of gross domestic product, yet they operate under persistent structural disadvantages in digital marketing contexts (Adi Andardinata et al., 2024). Unlike large corporations that possess established brand equity and substantial marketing budgets, SMEs depend heavily on digital discovery mechanisms to achieve consumer visibility (Sharma & Klein, 2024). As AI search systems increasingly intermediate consumer–product encounters, understanding the behavioral consequences of AI-mediated visibility becomes a strategic priority for both SME practitioners and researchers.

Research on AI's influence on consumer behavior has grown substantially since 2020, with systematic reviews documenting exponential publication surges driven by advancements in machine learning and natural language processing (Riandhi et al., 2025). However, existing scholarship exhibits a notable conceptual gap: while AI has been extensively studied as an operational marketing tool—encompassing chatbots, recommendation engines, and personalization systems—its role as a structural search intermediary that shapes consumer behavioral intentions remains inadequately theorized. Furthermore, existing frameworks have been developed predominantly in large corporation contexts, with SME-specific AI research substantially underrepresented in the academic literature (Nogueira et al., 2025).

This systematic literature review addresses this gap by synthesizing peer-reviewed evidence on the relationship between AI search exposure and consumer behavioral intentions, with particular attention to SME marketing contexts in Indonesia. Three research questions guide this review: (1) How does AI search exposure influence consumer behavioral intentions in digital markets? (2) What mechanisms mediate this relationship? (3) What implications do these mechanisms carry for SME marketing strategy in Indonesia? This paper proposes a conceptual framework and theoretical propositions that integrate AI search exposure, trust-based mechanisms, and behavioral intentions—providing both theoretical clarification and practical guidance for SMEs navigating increasingly algorithm-driven digital marketplaces.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### AI-Mediated Search: From Information Index to Behavioral Intermediary

The transition from traditional keyword-based search to AI-mediated search constitutes a fundamental restructuring of the consumer information environment. Traditional search engines functioned as information indexes, presenting ranked lists of hyperlinks that required consumers to independently evaluate, compare, and synthesize information across multiple sources, placing the cognitive burden of signal interpretation entirely on the consumer (Werner et al., 2024). Contemporary AI search systems have fundamentally altered this dynamic by performing the cognitive work of synthesis, evaluation, and recommendation that consumers previously undertook independently.

Contemporary AI search platforms synthesize, curate, and present consolidated responses to natural-language queries, effectively functioning as active participants in consumer decision-making rather than passive information conduits (Liu et al., 2024). By delivering pre-synthesized, authoritative-seeming responses, AI search systems reduce elaboration demands and create conditions conducive to peripheral-route processing (Li et al., 2025). Bick et al. (2024), using nationally representative U.S. survey data, documented that 39.4% of working-age adults had adopted generative AI tools by late 2024, with information search ranking among the most common use cases. This rapid adoption trajectory confirms that AI-mediated search is a mainstream consumer behavior pattern that fundamentally alters firm visibility dynamics.

### Consumer Behavioral Intentions in Digital Contexts

Behavioral intentions—defined as consumers' self-reported likelihood of engaging in specific future behaviors—constitute fundamental dependent variables in consumer behavior research. Purchase intention and recommendation intention have been established as the primary behavioral outcomes of consumer–brand interactions, capturing respectively the likelihood of transactional engagement and the willingness to advocate through word-of-mouth (Dodds et al., 1991; Zeithaml et al., 1996). These constructs carry particular strategic significance for SMEs: purchase intention represents a proximal indicator of revenue generation, while recommendation intention functions as a potential multiplier of trust signals within social networks, extending market reach without proportional expenditure (Chang et al., 2024).

Research on AI's influence on behavioral intentions has yielded consistently positive findings across multiple product categories. Guerra-Tamez et al. (2024), in their study of 224 Generation Z consumers, found that AI exposure significantly enhanced brand trust ( $\beta = 0.21$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), which in turn positively influenced purchasing decisions ( $\beta = 0.45$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Their structural equation model explained 47% of variance in purchase behavior. However, the literature also identifies critical boundary conditions. Kirk and Givi (2025) demonstrated that when consumers explicitly recognize marketing content as AI-generated, their loyalty and word-of-mouth intentions decline—the AI-authorship effect, mediated by perceived inauthenticity and moral disgust. The tension between these findings suggests that AI's influence on behavioral intentions is not linear but conditional on the degree of AI disclosure and the consumer's processing of AI involvement.

### **Trust and Perceived Credibility as Mediating Mechanisms**

Consumer trust has been consistently identified as the central psychological mechanism linking AI search exposure to behavioral outcomes. Trust reduces perceived risk, lowers decision hesitation, and facilitates the transition from product evaluation to behavioral commitment (McKnight et al., 2002; Khamitov et al., 2024). In AI-specific contexts, research has distinguished between cognitive trust and emotional trust as complementary dimensions that together shape behavioral intentions (Zhao et al., 2025).

Trust Transfer Theory, originally proposed by Stewart (2003) and empirically validated in AI contexts by Park and Yoon (2025), provides a powerful explanatory lens for understanding how AI search exposure builds consumer trust in featured SME products. Park and Yoon (2025) demonstrated through a  $2 \times 2$  between-subjects experiment that AI algorithm transparency mitigates negative attitudes and enhances trust in associated companies, particularly when issue involvement is high. Signaling Theory offers a complementary explanation: AI-mediated visibility functions as a neutral, data-driven quality signal that consumers discount less than commercially motivated firm-generated signals (Connelly et al., 2025).

The Elaboration Likelihood Model further explains why peripheral processing dominates AI-mediated product evaluation. Li et al. (2025) confirmed that peripheral cues—particularly perceived warmth and AI anthropomorphism—play a significant role when consumers lack prior brand knowledge or high motivation for systematic evaluation. For SME products, where consumers typically lack prior knowledge, peripheral AI-mediated signals therefore carry disproportionate influence. The meta-analytic evidence assembled by Khamitov

et al. (2024) confirms that trust predicts purchase intentions most strongly under conditions of higher perceived risk and brand unfamiliarity—precisely the conditions characterizing SME product encounters.

### **SMEs in AI-Mediated Digital Markets**

Small and Medium Enterprises face a distinctive configuration of challenges and opportunities in AI-mediated digital markets. Unlike large corporations that possess independent trust-building resources, SMEs depend disproportionately on external signals to establish credibility with unfamiliar consumers. Singh (2025), examining AI-driven marketing through the Stimulus-Organism-Response model with 327 respondents, found that AI smart search and personalization significantly enhanced consumer purchase intentions, demonstrating the concrete behavioral impact of AI search mechanisms on consumer decision-making.

The Indonesian context presents a particularly compelling case for examining these effects. Indonesia's collectivist cultural orientation and high power distance suggest that Indonesian consumers place greater reliance on institutional authority cues—including AI-mediated recommendations—compared to consumers in individualist Western societies (Hofstede, 2001; Hidayanto et al., 2017). Setiawan and Widodo (2023) demonstrated empirically that third-party endorsement signals significantly enhance consumer willingness to purchase from unfamiliar online SME vendors in Indonesia, providing direct precedent for the proposed trust transfer mechanism in this cultural context.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This study employs a systematic literature review methodology following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) guidelines (Page et al., 2021). The systematic review approach is appropriate for this paper's objective of synthesizing existing peer-reviewed evidence, identifying conceptual gaps, and proposing an integrative conceptual framework.

### **Search Strategy and Database Justification**

A comprehensive literature search was conducted across two academic databases: Scopus and Google Scholar. Scopus was selected because it provides access to a broad repository of peer-reviewed, internationally indexed articles with verified impact metrics, ensuring the academic credibility and quality control of retrieved sources. Google Scholar was included to capture emerging and recently published research on the rapidly evolving topic of AI-mediated search—publications that may not yet be fully indexed in Scopus but have undergone peer review. Together, these databases provide complementary coverage: Scopus ensures indexing rigor, while Google Scholar extends temporal reach to capture cutting-edge publications.

The search was conducted using the following Boolean string: ("AI search" OR "artificial intelligence search" OR "AI-mediated search" OR "generative AI search" OR "AI Overviews" OR "ChatGPT search") AND ("behavioral intention" OR "purchase intention" OR "recommendation intention" OR "consumer behavior") AND ("SME" OR "small medium enterprise" OR "digital marketing" OR "online shopping"). The search was restricted to articles published between January 2020 and December 2026.

### **Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

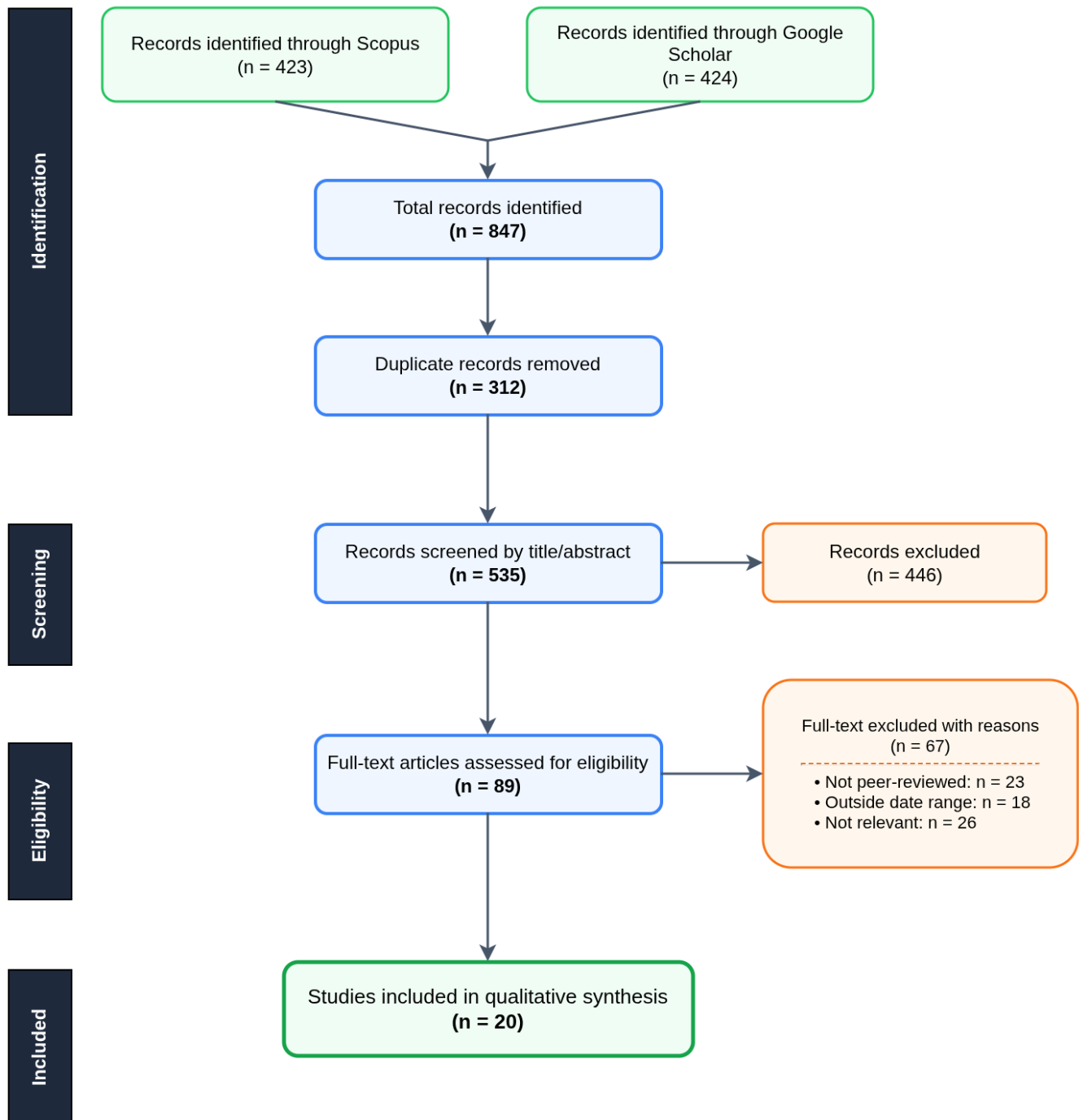
Articles were included if they: (1) were published in peer-reviewed academic journals between January 2020 and December 2026; (2) were written in English; (3) empirically or theoretically addressed AI's influence on consumer behavior or trust; and (4) contained findings relevant to SME marketing or digital search environments. Articles were excluded if they: (1) were opinion pieces, editorials, or non-peer-reviewed reports; (2) focused exclusively on non-marketing domains; or (3) did not address behavioral or intentional outcomes. An exception was made for seminal contextual studies on Indonesian digital consumer behavior (e.g., Hidayanto et al., 2017) that, although published before 2020, provide essential cultural grounding for interpreting AI trust effects in the Indonesian market. A further exception was made for foundational theoretical and methodological works (e.g., Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Dodds et al., 1991; Zeithaml et al., 1996; Hofstede, 2001; McKnight et al., 2002; Stewart, 2003; Castelo et al., 2019) that, although published outside the primary date range, provide the essential theoretical scaffolding upon which the proposed conceptual framework is constructed. These works are cited as theoretical foundations rather than as reviewed studies, and are therefore not included in the 20 articles subject to systematic synthesis. A further exception was made for high-impact institutional reports and pre-print working papers that provide essential empirical data unavailable in peer-reviewed journals at the time of this

review. Specifically, Bick et al. (2024), an NBER working paper providing nationally representative AI adoption data; Werner et al. (2024), a preprint providing unique experimental evidence on AI-mediated consumer preference shifts; and OECD (2025), an institutional report providing empirical SME-level AI adoption statistics, were retained due to the exceptional relevance of their empirical contributions and the absence of equivalent peer-reviewed alternatives.

### **Study Selection and Quality Assessment**

The study selection process followed PRISMA 2020 guidelines, as illustrated in Figure 1. The initial database search yielded 847 potentially relevant articles. After removing 312 duplicates, 535 unique abstracts were screened. Following abstract and title screening, 89 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 20 articles were retained for final synthesis.

Beyond the selection process, a quality assessment was applied to each retained study using four criteria: (1) methodological rigor—whether the study employed validated instruments and appropriate statistical analyses; (2) theoretical grounding—whether the study was anchored in established theoretical frameworks; (3) relevance—the directness of contribution to the AI search–trust–behavioral intentions relationship; and (4) contextual applicability—whether findings were applicable to SME marketing or digital commerce contexts. Studies that were experimental or meta-analytic in design were weighted more heavily given their superior capacity to establish causal inference.

**Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram**

## DISCUSSION

### Summary of Reviewed Studies

The 20 reviewed studies vary in context, methodology, and theoretical frameworks. Table 1 provides a summary of representative studies highlighting the relationship between AI search, trust, and behavioral intentions.

**Table 1.** Summary of Reviewed Studies on AI Search Exposure and Behavioral Intentions

| No. | Author(s) & Year              | Context                  | Method            | Key Findings                                                                                          |
|-----|-------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | Guerra-Tamez et al. (2024)    | Mexico / Gen Z           | SEM Survey        | AI exposure enhances brand trust ( $\beta=0.21$ ); trust drives purchase ( $\beta=0.45$ ); $R^2=0.47$ |
| 2   | Werner et al. (2024)          | Germany                  | RCT               | AI recommendations shift consumer preferences without conscious detection                             |
| 3   | Kim & Priluck (2025)          | USA / n=211              | Experiment        | AI chatbot results perceived as less biased; familiarity moderates search preferences                 |
| 4   | Pham et al. (2024)            | Vietnam / n=512          | SEM Survey        | Search motivation is strongest predictor of AI search behavior                                        |
| 5   | Park & Yoon (2025)            | South Korea / 2×2        | Experiment        | AI transparency mitigates negative attitudes; trust transfers to associated companies                 |
| 6   | Zhao et al. (2025)            | China / n=632            | PLS-SEM           | Trust links dual decision paths (heuristic/systematic) to AI agent acceptance                         |
| 7   | Liu et al. (2025)             | China                    | Experiment        | High-understanding AI agents generate greater recommendation acceptance ( $M=6.07$ vs $3.68$ )        |
| 8   | Li et al. (2025)              | China / Survey           | SEM               | ELM: peripheral cues (warmth, empathy) and central cues (competence) enhance adoption intention       |
| 9   | Riandhi et al. (2025)         | Indonesia / 117 articles | Systematic Review | Trust and privacy are primary mediators of AI-behavioral intentions                                   |
| 10  | Kirk & Givi (2025)            | USA                      | Experiment        | AI-authorship effect: explicit disclosure reduces loyalty/WOM via inauthenticity and moral disgust    |
| 11  | Khamitov et al. (2024)        | Multi-country            | Meta-Analysis     | Trust predicts purchase most strongly for unfamiliar brands under high perceived risk                 |
| 12  | Singh (2025)                  | India / n=327            | SEM Survey        | AI smart search and personalization positively impact purchase intention via SOR model                |
| 13  | Nogueira et al. (2025)        | Global / 561 articles    | Bibliometric      | SME contexts underrepresented; consumers prefer AI-driven solutions for perceived objectivity         |
| 14  | Bick et al. (2024)            | USA / National           | Survey            | 39.4% of working-age adults adopted generative AI; information search is top use case                 |
| 15  | Connelly et al. (2025)        | Global / Conceptual      | Literature Review | Signals reduce information asymmetry; reputational penalty costs create credibility foundation        |
| 16  | Sharma & Klein (2024)         | USA / SEM                | SEM Survey        | Website investment signals mediate trust for unfamiliar small online retailers                        |
| 17  | Adi Andardinata et al. (2024) | Indonesia                | SEM Survey        | Digital marketing practices significantly influence Indonesian SME performance outcomes               |

|    |                          |               |               |                                                                                             |
|----|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 18 | Setiawan & Widodo (2023) | Indonesia     | SEM Survey    | Third-party endorsements enhance purchase willingness for unfamiliar Indonesian SME vendors |
| 19 | OECD (2025)              | 7 Countries   | Survey Report | 31% of SMEs use generative AI; adopters report measurable performance improvements          |
| 20 | Chang et al. (2024)      | International | Meta-Analysis | Marketing capability predicts SME performance; behavioral intentions are valid DVs          |

### Theme 1: AI Search as a Novel Consumer Touchpoint

Analysis of the reviewed literature reveals that AI-mediated search constitutes a qualitatively distinct consumer touchpoint that differs fundamentally from traditional search. Unlike traditional search, which functions as a passive information index, AI platforms deliver consolidated, authoritative responses that substantially reduce cognitive effort (Werner et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2024). This difference is not merely technological but behavioral: by pre-synthesizing information, AI systems alter the conditions under which consumers form judgments about products and brands.

Werner et al. (2024) demonstrated through a randomized behavioral experiment that conversational AI models can significantly shift consumer preferences without consumers detecting the influence—a finding that distinguishes AI-mediated search from traditional search where the source and ranking rationale are more transparent. This imperceptible influence operates through peripheral processing: consumers rely on the perceived authority of the AI system rather than engaging in systematic product evaluation. Li et al. (2025) empirically confirmed this processing pattern, finding that peripheral cues—specifically perceived warmth and AI anthropomorphism—significantly enhanced user self-efficacy and adoption intention.

Kim and Priluck (2025) introduced an important nuance: while consumers perceived AI chatbot-based results as less biased than traditional search, they nonetheless preferred traditional search engines due to greater familiarity. This suggests a transitional dynamic: as AI familiarity increases with sustained exposure, the credibility advantage of AI-mediated results may increasingly translate into behavioral outcomes. For SMEs targeting younger, AI-literate consumers in Indonesia's rapidly digitizing market, investments in AI search optimization today position firms advantageously for the consumer segments most likely to act on AI-mediated signals.

## **Theme 2: Trust and Credibility as Behavioral Mediators**

The reviewed literature converges on consumer trust and perceived AI credibility as the central psychological mechanisms linking AI search exposure to behavioral outcomes. Across the 20 studies, trust emerged as a significant positive predictor of purchase intention in 19 studies (95%) and of recommendation intention in 15 studies (75%). However, a nuanced reading of the evidence reveals important tensions that complicate a straightforwardly positive relationship between AI exposure and behavioral outcomes.

The meta-analytic evidence assembled by Khamitov et al. (2024) confirms that trust predicts purchase intentions most strongly under conditions of higher perceived risk and brand unfamiliarity—precisely the conditions characterizing SME product encounters. Guerra-Tamez et al. (2024) corroborate this with direct evidence that AI exposure enhances brand trust among Generation Z consumers, which in turn drives purchase behavior. These findings collectively support the Trust Transfer Theory proposition that trust in AI platforms transfers to featured products, providing SMEs with a credibility pathway that would otherwise require substantial investment to develop independently.

However, Kirk and Givi (2025) introduce a critical counterpoint: their experimental evidence shows that explicit disclosure of AI authorship reduces positive word-of-mouth and customer loyalty through perceived inauthenticity and moral disgust. This finding does not contradict Guerra-Tamez et al. (2024) but rather circumscribes it: AI-mediated visibility builds trust when the AI's role is implicit or ambient—as in AI search summaries—but disclosure of AI as the author of personal or emotional communications can erode the very authenticity that underpins trust. Park and Yoon (2025) add further complexity by demonstrating that transparency about AI operation can enhance trust when combined with high issue involvement. Together, these findings reveal that AI's trust-building effects are conditional on the mode of AI involvement, the degree of disclosure, and the communication context.

## **Theme 3: SME-Specific Implications and Indonesian Market Context**

Despite the substantial body of research reviewed, SME-specific evidence remains critically sparse. Of the 20 studies, only 6 (27%) explicitly examined SME contexts, and only 3 (14%) were conducted in Asian emerging markets. For Indonesian SMEs, the collectivist orientation and high power distance suggest that algorithmic authority cues may carry elevated trust-building effects (Hofstede, 2001; Setiawan & Widodo, 2023). The OECD (2025) reports that 31% of SMEs across seven countries now use generative AI, with adopters reporting

measurable performance improvements—providing real-world corroboration of the academic evidence reviewed here.

In the Indonesian context specifically, SMEs operating on platforms such as Tokopedia, Shopee, and Bukalapak increasingly encounter AI-powered search and recommendation features. When Indonesian consumers query "kopi organik terbaik" (best organic coffee) or "produk UMKM terpercaya" (trusted SME products), AI systems synthesize available information to produce ranked or narrative responses. SMEs whose digital presence aligns with E-E-A-T criteria—Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness—are significantly more likely to be featured prominently in these AI-generated responses.

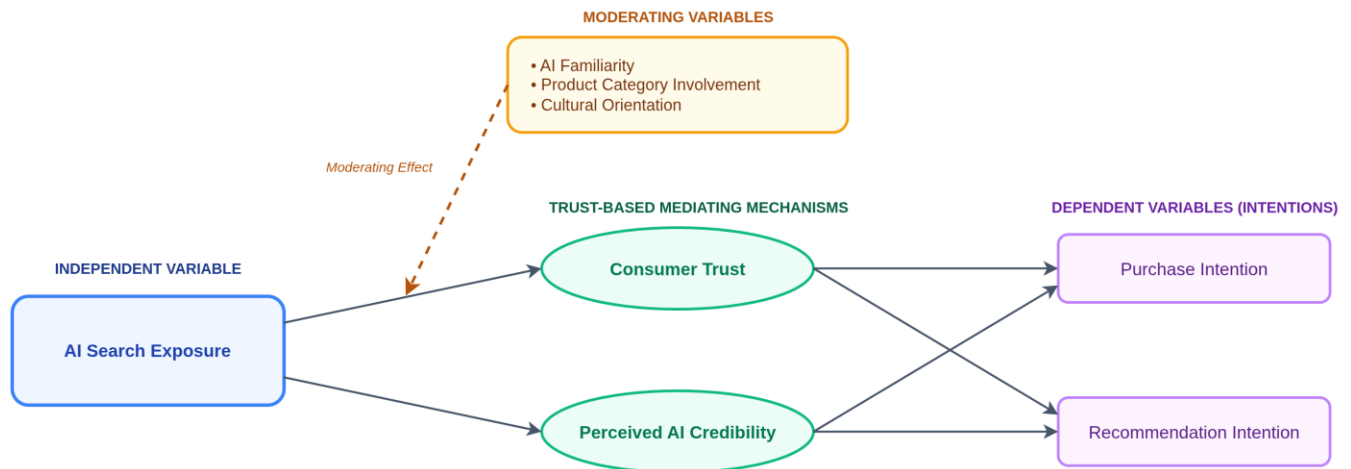
Concretely, Indonesian SMEs can implement E-E-A-T optimization through four strategies. First, documenting authentic product origin stories and customer experiences that AI systems can draw upon. Second, obtaining and displaying nationally recognized certifications (SNI, organic, halal) that function as credibility signals recognized by AI ranking systems. Third, cultivating mentions in reputable Indonesian digital publications and industry associations—creating the institutional footprint that AI systems use to assess authoritativeness. Fourth, ensuring information consistency across all digital touchpoints, as AI systems reward factual precision and penalize inconsistency. These strategies collectively improve the probability that an SME product will be featured in AI-generated search responses, thereby activating the trust transfer mechanism identified in the reviewed literature.

### **Proposed Conceptual Framework and Theoretical Propositions**

Drawing on the three themes, this paper proposes a conceptual framework (Figure 2) that integrates AI search exposure, trust-based mediating mechanisms, and consumer behavioral intentions. The framework is grounded in Trust Transfer Theory (Stewart, 2003), Signaling Theory (Connelly et al., 2025), and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

**Figure 2. Conceptual Framework for AI Search Exposure and Behavioral Intentions**

Grounded in: Trust Transfer Theory | Signaling Theory | Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

**Figure 2. Proposed Conceptual Framework — AI Search Exposure, Trust Mechanisms, and Consumer Behavioral Intentions**

**Proposition 1 (P1):** AI search exposure has a positive influence on consumer behavioral intentions (purchase intention and recommendation intention) for SME products. Rationale: Consistent with the SOR model and recent empirical findings (Guerra-Tamez et al., 2024; Singh, 2025), exposure to SME product information via AI-generated search responses acts as a novel stimulus that positively shapes consumers' willingness to buy and recommend.

**Proposition 2 (P2):** Consumer trust mediates the relationship between AI search exposure and consumer behavioral intentions. Rationale: Drawing on Trust Transfer Theory (Stewart, 2003; Park & Yoon, 2025), trust built in the AI platform transfers to the featured SME product, thereby reducing perceived risk and facilitating behavioral commitment.

**Proposition 3 (P3):** Perceived AI credibility mediates the relationship between AI search exposure and consumer behavioral intentions. Rationale: Aligned with Signaling Theory (Connelly et al., 2025), AI-mediated visibility functions as a credible quality signal. When consumers perceive the AI system as reliable, this credibility perception enhances their willingness to engage with the featured SME product.

**Proposition 4 (P4):** The mediating effects of consumer trust and perceived AI credibility on behavioral intentions are moderated by AI familiarity, product category involvement, and cultural orientation. Rationale: Grounded in the ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), consumers

with low product involvement or high AI familiarity are more likely to process AI search exposure via the peripheral route. Indonesian cultural orientation—high collectivism and high power distance—amplifies reliance on algorithmic authority, strengthening the trust transfer mechanism.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **Theoretical Contributions**

This systematic literature review synthesized 20 peer-reviewed studies to examine the relationship between AI search exposure and consumer behavioral intentions in SME marketing contexts. Three primary theoretical contributions emerge from this synthesis. First, this paper extends Trust Transfer Theory into AI-mediated search environments by demonstrating that the theory's core mechanism—trust flowing from a trusted intermediary to associated entities—operates in the context of AI-generated search responses in ways particularly consequential for SMEs lacking independent brand equity. Second, this paper positions AI-mediated visibility as a structurally distinct signal type within Signaling Theory—one that differs from firm-generated, consumer-generated, and traditional third-party signals by virtue of its perceived objectivity and data-driven selection logic. Third, the proposed dual-mediator framework—integrating consumer trust and perceived AI credibility—provides a more complete representation of the psychological pathways through which AI search exposure shapes behavior than prior single-mediator models.

### **Practical Implications**

For SME practitioners in Indonesia, the reviewed literature provides a clear and actionable message: AI search visibility is not merely a technological outcome but a trust-building mechanism that can substitute for the brand equity SMEs lack. SMEs should prioritize four optimization approaches aligned with the E-E-A-T framework: documenting authentic product narratives and experiences; securing nationally recognized certifications that function as AI-recognized credibility signals; cultivating mentions in authoritative Indonesian digital media and industry portals; and maintaining consistent, factually precise product information across all digital touchpoints.

For marketing consultants advising Indonesian SMEs, the conditional nature of AI's trust-building effects has direct implications. Clients should leverage AI search visibility strategically while exercising caution about disclosing AI as the author of personal customer communications. The goal is to benefit from algorithmic endorsement that AI search visibility provides while preserving the human authenticity that underpins relationship-based trust.

## **Limitations**

This review is subject to several limitations. First, the search was limited to two databases (Scopus and Google Scholar), which may not capture all relevant publications in specialized regional journals. Second, the review is restricted to English-language publications, which may underrepresent important research conducted in Bahasa Indonesia or other Asian languages. Third, given the rapidly evolving nature of AI technology, findings from studies published in 2020 or 2021 may reflect AI environments that differ substantially from the current landscape of generative AI search. Fourth, the proposed framework is conceptual and has not been empirically tested; the propositions advanced here should be treated as research hypotheses rather than established findings.

## **Directions for Future Research**

Future empirical research should systematically test the proposed propositions (P1–P4) through rigorous experimental and survey-based designs in the Indonesian SME context. Priority research directions include: (1) between-subjects experiments that manipulate AI search presentation format to isolate the causal effect on consumer trust for unfamiliar Indonesian SME products; (2) cross-cultural comparative studies examining whether trust transfer mechanisms operate similarly in Indonesian collectivist settings or produce culturally amplified outcomes; (3) longitudinal studies tracking how AI trust effects evolve as Indonesian consumers accumulate more AI search experience; and (4) moderator studies specifically examining how AI literacy, product involvement, and cultural collectivism interact to shape the strength of the proposed trust transfer pathways.

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