

THE INFLUENCE OF BRAND AMBASSADOR TOWARDS PURCHASE DECISION THROUGH BRAND IMAGE AS THE MEDIATOR AT WHITELAB

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Abstract: *The product of cosmetics and skincare sector is currently growing well in Indonesia. A growing number of people are aware of how important it is to keep healthy skin, particularly women. Skincare manufacturers are competing to develop and supply products that may satisfy the demands of potential customers due to the increasing needs of the skincare market. One of Whitelab's marketing strategies is to increase product sales by utilizing brand ambassadors to attract consumer purchasing decisions. Whitelab collaborated with Sehun as a brand ambassador to release an exclusive collaboration package. But, Whitelab's position is still at the bottom of competitors who also use brand ambassadors as a promotion tool. Then, this research aims to know the influence of brand ambassadors towards the customer's purchase decisions through brand image as the mediator at Whitelab, tested based on variables but explained through the influence of each dimension/indicator on each variable. The total sample in this research is 100 respondents with the sampling techniques is non-probability sampling which is purposive sampling. The data collection techniques are through questionnaires, literature review, and interviews. The type of this research is explanatory research that processed used SmartPLS 3.2.9 software with the result indirect effects brand ambassador influences positive significantly on the customers purchase decision through brand image as the partial mediation.*

Keywords: *Brand Ambassador, Brand Image, Purchase Decision*

Introduction

Indonesia's cosmetics and skincare industry has been experiencing strong growth. More individuals, especially women, are realizing how crucial it is to maintain healthy skin. Due to the growing demands of the skincare market, skincare manufacturers are competing to create and supply goods that may satisfy the wants of potential customers. During this pandemic, local cosmetic brands have recorded positive developments. According to the data from the Ministry of Industry (Rochman, 2022), there were 913 cosmetic companies in 2022, an increase compared to 2019 which amounted to 797 companies. This figure is up from 760 companies in the previous year. Skincare and cosmetics from local brands have been more popular recently and have continued to expand. This is also influenced by the product quality of a local brand that is competing with an international brand. Various cosmetic and skincare products from the local brand have emerged. To compete with international brands, local skincare brands are constantly innovating.

One of the local skincare brands members of the DECA Group company, Whitelab, was founded by Jessica Lin and introduced in March 2020. Skincare manufacturers are competing to develop and supply products that may satisfy the demands of potential customers due to the increasing needs of the skincare market. Whitelab engages in promotional activities to make businesses or products known to and recognized by the general public and consumers. Whitelab uses brand ambassadors as a promotional tool to promote the products. Brand ambassadors also help companies shape their brand image. Brand ambassadors will help create a stronger emotional connection between a brand/company and consumers so that it will indirectly build a product image that impacts purchasing decisions and product use (Royan, 2004).

According to Hoeffler & Keller (2003), brand image is the perception and belief made by consumers, which is reflected in the consumer's memory that can introduce a product or service, then it will turn into a marketing strategy to survive among competitors and maintain company resilience.

According to Kotler & Amstrong (2014), purchasing decisions are actions from consumers to want to buy or not the product driven by awareness of fulfilling needs or desires and realizing there are further problems.

Companies compete with each other in terms of product marketing. Communicate product information to consumers effectively and as much as possible to enhance their brand image. Some companies use brand ambassadors to communicate product information to customers. These ambassadors are often chosen from artists or actors who are already well-known in the domestic and international entertainment world.

Whitelab uses brand ambassadors as marketing to attract customers to compete with other brands. Whitelab collaborated with Sehun as a brand ambassador. According to Li Ting Ng of DEVRIES Global (Cambosa, 2022), K-pop is becoming more popular as a trend for brand ambassadors because Korean brands have consistently used K-pop singers or actors as their faces for both domestic and international marketing. With the expansion of the "Korean wave" or "Hallyu," there has been a steady increase of non-Korean brands joining the K-pop brand ambassador scene. The selection of a brand ambassador is critical to realize the identity of a company image. A high interest in K-pop, Whitelab made a member of the Korean boy band EXO Oh Sehun as a brand ambassador. In February 2022, Whitelab announced that they had officially chosen K-pop idol group member EXO Oh Sehun as their brand ambassador. Whitelab chose this figure because he was considered to have bright and shining skin, making it suitable to represent the brand persona. The selection of Sehun as Whitelab's brand ambassador is also a reason to increase awareness of the importance of using skincare, not only for women but also for men. The selection of a new Whitelab brand ambassador is expected to improve product sales.

Whitelab includes the top 5 local skincare brands in Indonesia that have sold various products in the online marketplace. There is competition between 3 brands among, Whitelab, Somethinc, and Scarlett that also use Korean brand ambassador. The sales of Somethinc have a higher value than the sales of Whitelab. Compared to Somethinc, Whitelab has used a popular brand ambassador from Korea. The problem is that even though Whitelab has used brand ambassador compared to Somethinc as their competitor, the sales of Whitelab are still under Somethinc. Somethinc can increase its sales from 2021 which is placed on the third rank increase to the first rank in 2022, meanwhile, Whitelab can increase its sales from 2021 on IDR 22.2 billion to 2022 on IDR 25,3 billion, but it's still fifth rank (Compas, 2022)

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that there are four problem formulations in this research: 1) How does brand ambassador influence Whitelab's brand image in Semarang? 2) How does brand ambassador influence customers' purchase decisions at Whitelab in Semarang? 3) How does brand image influence customers' purchase decisions at Whitelab in Semarang? 4) How does brand ambassador influence customers' purchase decisions toward the brand image of Whitelab in Semarang

Theoretical Framework

Consumer Behaviour

Consumer behavior is the study of consumption by consumers, such as exchanging something of value for a product or service that satisfies their needs. According to Schiffman & Kanuk (2007), consumers' decision-making is influenced by internal and external factors. Internal factors that shape consumer behavior are motivation, perception, learning, personality, and attitude. External factors include marketing efforts, such as product, promotion, price, and distribution.

Brand Ambassador (X)

Brand Ambassador is someone who offers services to promote a product. Brand ambassadors endorse and promote products, mostly from celebrities. The company also uses non-celebrity public figures such as endorsers (Shimp, 2003). The indicators are:

1. Visibility can be measured by how popular the celebrity is known to the public.
2. Credibility, someone's expertise refers to the knowledge, experience, or skills related to the topic it represents. The level of credibility, trust, and dependability, can be measured by how someone can be trusted.
3. Attraction can be measured in self-support: intelligence, personality traits, lifestyle, skin health, and so on.
4. Power, is the ability of a celebrity to persuade customers to use or buy a product.

Purchase Decision (Y)

According to (Kotler & Armstrong, 2014), purchasing decisions are actions from consumers to want to buy or not the product driven by awareness of fulfilling needs or desires and realizing there are further problems. The indicators are:

1. Product selection, consumers decide to buy a product or use their money for other purposes. In this case, the company should focus on people interested in buying their products.
2. Brand selection, a consumer must decide which brand to buy because each brand has its differences. In this case, companies need to know how consumers acquire a brand.
3. Timing, each consumer's purchase time is different, for example, some people buy it every day, once a week, or even once a month. So the company must prepare products according to consumer needs.
4. Payment method, the method payment for the products purchased must be selected by the consumer. To increase sales through pricing strategies, producers must understand how consumers pay.

Brand Image (Z)

According to (Kotler & Keller, 2009), brand image is the perception and belief made by consumers, which is reflected in the consumer's memory. The indicators are:

1. Strength, refers to an advantage that does not exist on the competitor's brand. In this group of strengths is the physical appearance of the product, the functioning of all the production facilities, the product price, and the emergence of supporting facilities of that product.
2. Uniqueness, is the ability to distinguish a brand from other brands.
3. Favorable, allows the brand to be easily remembered by consumers. In this favorable category, among other things, the ease of the product brand to be pronounced, the ability of the brand to remain remembered by the consumer, the facility of using the product, the suitability of consumers with products, as well as the compatibility between the brand impact in the mind of customers with the image desired by the company on the brand concerned.

Research Indicators

This study uses several indicators for each variable. Each indicator has each question item presented that are described as follow:

Conceptual Model

Royan (2004) explains that a reasonable reason for producers to use celebrities as brand ambassadors is that the personality of the artist or athlete affects the brand's personality (brand image). Brand Image will determine whether the product is superior or more unique than other products. In terms of branding,

celebrities can be a reflection of a brand's personality. Celebrity is a tangible manifestation of various images or associations consumers think of a brand. This is also supported by the results of previous research by Budiman & Nurrahmawati (2017) that brand ambassadors have a positive and significant influence on brand image.

H1: It is predicted that there is a positive and significant influence between brand ambassador to brand image at Whitelab in Semarang.

Brand ambassadors have a goal to increase sales through their actions in increasing the brand value of the advertised product. Celebrities are indirectly expected to build a process of self-image in consumers. Celebrities can be imaginary users for consumers (Royan, 2004). When buying a brand, consumer products also relate to the image of the brand ambassador. In this case, the Brand Ambassador creates a stimulus or encouragement offered by marketers to influence consumers to take a product purchase decision. This is also supported by the results of previous research by Rozalia et al. (2020) that brand ambassadors have a positive and significant influence on a purchase decision.

H2: It is predicted that there is a positive and significant influence between brand ambassador on purchase decision at Whitelab in Semarang.

Consumers more easily recognize positive and negative images, so producers always try to maintain, improve, and enhance the brand image of their products in the eyes of consumers. A positive brand image benefits producers by being better known to consumers. In other words, consumers will determine their choice to buy products with a good image. Likewise, if the brand image is negative, consumers tend to consider it further when buying a product (Sungadji & Sopiah, 2013). Building a strong and positive brand image will help a brand spread its wings and influence consumer purchasing decisions. This is also supported by the results of previous research by Rohmah (2015) that brand image has a positive and significant influence on a purchase decision.

H3: It is predicted that there is a positive and significant influence between brand image on purchase decision at Whitelab in Semarang.

The purpose of a brand ambassador is to increase sales by increasing the brand value of the advertised product Royan (2004). Celebrities are indirectly expected to build a self-image process among consumers. Celebrities can become imaginary users of consumers. Brand ambassadors carry information about a brand that is then communicated to consumers and can influence consumer attitudes towards the brand image, which influences consumer purchasing decisions. In previous research by Elsanti (2017), brand image as a mediating variable helps prove the celebrity endorser has significant influence on purchase intention.

H4: It is predicted that there is a positive and significant influence on brand ambassador toward purchase decision through brand image as a mediator.

Method

Based on background and problem formulation existing data that explained above, this research uses the quantitative approach, which is a method that objectively measures social phenomena. The variables used in this research is brand ambassador (X) as independent variable, purchase decision (Y) as dependent variable, brand image as mediation variable. The population for this research is all customers that buy and use Whitelab products in Semarang city within the age range of 15-50 years old. The number of the existing population is unidentified and there are 100 samples of Whitelab customer. This study uses a non-probability sampling technique. Nonprobability sampling with the purposive sampling method is a sampling technique that does not provide equal opportunities or opportunities for each element or member of the population to be selected as a sample.

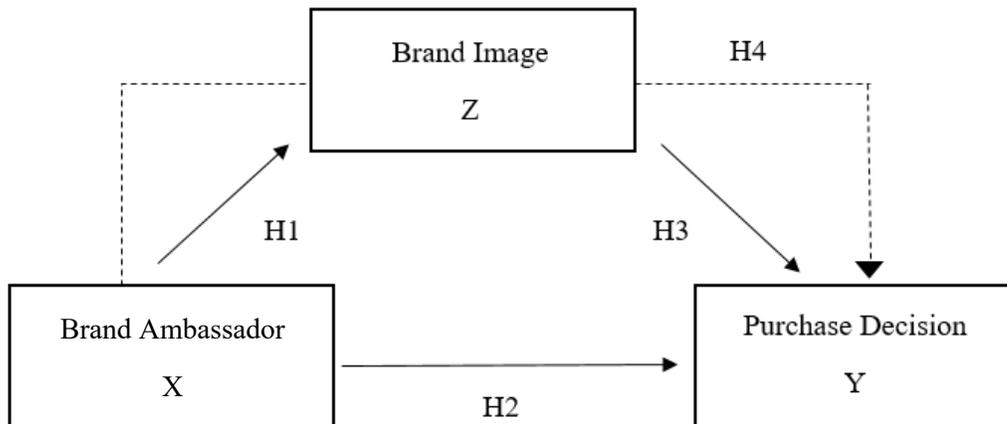


Figure 1. Hypothesis Model

Result

Respondent's Demographic

The total number of respondents in this study is 100 persons, and those are Whitelab customers in Semarang City. The respondent's identity comprises of age, gender, and occupation.

Table 1. Respondent's Demographic

No	Age (Years Old)	Frequency	Percentage
1.	15-20	13	13%
2.	21-30	80	80%
3.	31-40	6	6%
4.	41-50	1	1%
Total		100	100%
No	Gender	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Male	8	8%
2.	Female	92	92%
Total		100	100%
No	Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Employee	21	21%
2.	Private sector employee	12	12%
3.	Student	49	49%
4.	Housewife	3	3%
5.	Entrepreneur	13	13%
6.	Others	2	2%
Total		100	100%
No	Income	Frequency	Percentage
1.	≤Rp 3.000.000	45	45%
2.	>Rp 3.000.000-Rp 5.000.000	29	29%
3.	>Rp 5.000.000-Rp 7.000.000	16	16%
4.	>Rp 7.000.000	10	10%
Total		100	100

Source: Processed primary data, 2023

Convergent Validity

Table 3 shows if the three variables have a large AVE value compared to the critical value of 0.5. It can be concluded that all variables meet the requirements of convergence validity.

Table 2. Convergent Validity Result

Variables	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Brand Ambassador (X)	0,820
Brand Image (Z)	0,838
Purchase Decision (Y)	0,752

Source: Processed primary data, 2023

Discriminant Validity

Based on the cross loading, the discriminant validity of the measurement model is assessed. Second, to ensure good discrimination validity, the square root of AVE for each construct must be greater than the correlation between construct in the model. The cross loading results show good validity, as the correlation between constructs and indicators is greater than the correlation between indicators and other constructs. Brand ambassador variable is greater than 0.7. Then brand image variable value greater than 0.7. Finally, purchase decision variable value greater than 0.7.

Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha

The construct reliability test performed in addition to the structural validity test was evaluated using composite reliability and Cronbach alpha. Table 4 shows the results of the SmartPLS test on reliability test through composite reliability and Cronbach's Alpha.

Table 3. Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha Result

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Brand Ambassador (X)	0,927	0,948
Brand Image (Z)	0,935	0,954
Purchase Decision (Y)	0,916	0,938

Source: Processed primary data, 2023

The results for the composite reliability output demonstrate a reasonable outcome, with a score of more than 0.70 for each of these variables. This result demonstrates the extremely high consistency and stability of the instrument utilized. In other words, it can say that the instrument's reliability is fulfilled. Then, it can be concluded that these three variables in this research are reliable.

Structural Model Test (Inner Model)

After the outer model was accepted by using the validity and reliability test, the next evaluation was testing the inner model by using R-Square.

Table 4. R-Square Result

	R Square
Brand Image (Z)	0,539
Purchase Decision (Y)	0,580

Source: Processed primary data, 2023

Based on the result of the R-Square on the table 5 above, it shown that the construct variability of Brand Image that can be explained by Brand Ambassador is 53,9%, then for the rest of 46,1% described by the other variables that not analyzed in this research. Then, for the construct variability of Purchase Decision that can be explained by Brand Ambassador is 58%, then for the rest of 42% described by the other variables that not analyzed in this research.

Discussion

The hypotheses were assessed through the path coefficient by looking toward the path parameters and T-Significant level.

Table 5. Hypothesis Result

	Path Coefficient	T-Statistics	P-Values	Conclusion
Direct Effect				
Brand Ambassador (X) -> Brand Image (Z)	0,734	11,992	0,000	H1 Accepted
Brand Ambassador (X) -> Purchase Decision (Y)	0,291	2,254	0,025	H2 Accepted
Brand Image (Z) -> Purchase Decision (Y)	0,522	4,339	0,000	H3 Accepted
Indirect Effect				
Brand Ambassador (X) -> Brand Image (Z) -> Purchase Decision (Y)	0,383	3,651	0,000	Partial Mediation

Source: Processed primary data, 2023

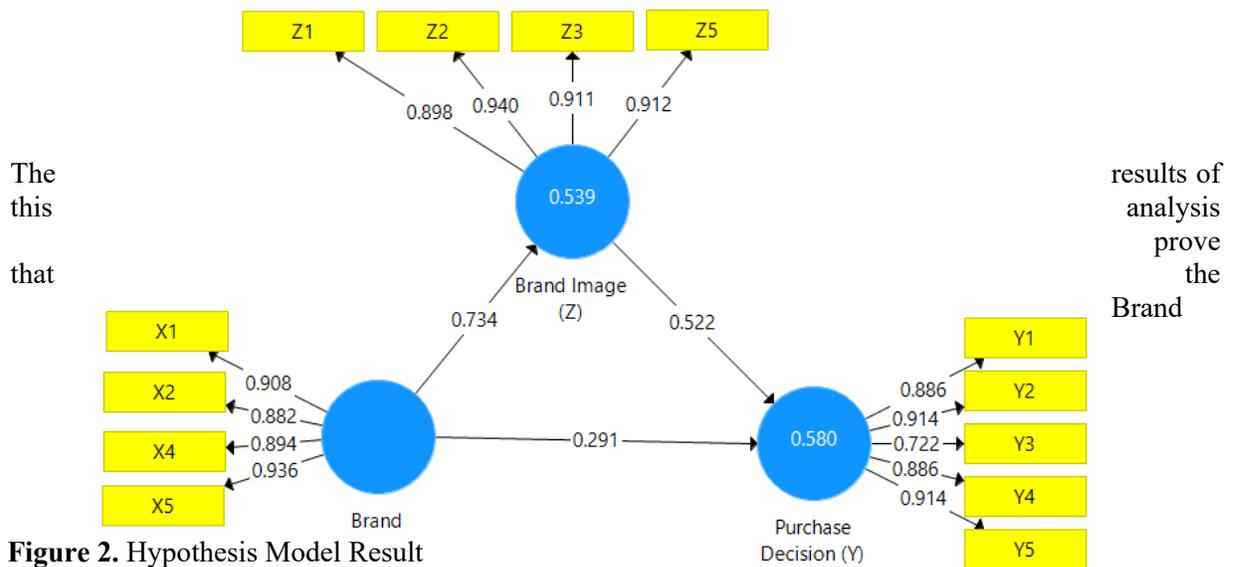


Figure 2. Hypothesis Model Result

Ambassador path coefficient (X) has a positive effect on Brand Image (Z) with a score of 0,734 and a t-statistic score of 11,992 > T-table score of 1.96 and a P-Values of 0.000 < 0.05. This research proves that the Brand Ambassador has a positive and significant effect on Brand Image, which it means H1 accepted. Brand Ambassador path coefficient (X) has a positive effect on Purchase Decision (Y) with a score of 0,291 and a t-statistic score of 2,254 > T-table score of 1.96 and a P-Values of 0.025 < 0.05. This research

proves that the Brand Ambassador has a positive and significant effect on Purchase Decision, which it means H2 accepted.

The Brand Image path coefficient (Z) has a positive effect on Purchase Decision (Y) with a score of 0,522 and a t-statistic score of 4,339 > T-table score of 1.96 and a P-Values of 0.000 < 0.05. This research proves that the Brand Image has a positive and significant effect on Purchase Decision, which it means H3 accepted.

Last, the result of the path coefficient about the influence of brand ambassador on purchase decisions through brand image shows that this result succeeds in proving that the fourth hypothesis is accepted. The influence of brand ambassador (X) on purchase decision (Y) through brand image (Z) is influenced positively with a value of 0.383 and the tstatistics value is 3.651 > the t-table score is 1.96 and the pvalue is 0.000 which is < 0.05. This research proved that the brand ambassador that has been implemented by Whitelab can influence the customer's purchase decision of its products positively through brand image as the partial mediation.

Summary

The research result of 100 respondents of the Whitelab customers in Semarang is related to consumer behavior about how people select, buy, use, and evaluate products or services to meet their needs and desires. Consumer behavior is related to the customer's purchase decision, which in this research is influenced by the brand ambassador and brand image of Whitelab. The research result is the brand ambassador variable influence positive significantly on the brand image variable on the Whitelab products. So, it can be concluded that the company that utilize the brand ambassador for representing Whitelab, can increase the brand image of brands. The customers that impressed will give compliment to the brand, then it can build good image on the customer perception about the products. Then, brand ambassador variable has a significant positive effect on the customer purchasing decision variable for Whitelab products. So it can be concluded that companies that use brand ambassadors to represent Whitelab have been successful and able to increase the number of customers to buy their products, especially for skin care products because many customers are interested in trying the products advertised by Oh Sehun. Next, brand image variable has a significant positive effect on the customer purchasing decision variable for Whitelab products. So, it can be concluded that if a company has a good brand image among consumers, it can also increase consumers to decide to buy their products because consumers will be sure to buy these products. Last, brand ambassador variable has a significant positive effect on customer purchasing decision variables through brand image as a partial mediator on Whitelab products. So, it can be concluded that if a company succeeds in using a brand ambassador as a product representation it can increase consumers to decide to buy their products, where with or without brand image mediation but brand ambassadors can improve brand image, and also brand image can increase customers to purchase their products.

Suggestion

Based on the result of the research, company is expected to pay more attention to the brand ambassadors used, because the use of brand ambassadors from abroad (Oh Sehun) is not enough if they cannot improve brand image and purchase decisions for Whitelab products. In addition to utilizing global brands, companies need to select local brand ambassadors, for example through popular figures/celebrities based on a location or country they want to target as marketing locations, because this will further assist Whitelab's promotional activities. This is because there are items that are still below the variable mean score, namely item X4, which is about the appearance and personality of the brand ambassador with a mean score of 3.56. From the description of X4 statement regarding attractive physical appearance and personality, according to consumers Oh Sehun is not suitable in the dimensions of attraction.

Whitelab must continue to increase the frequency of promotions with their brand ambassador, so that the Whitelab brand can be known and familiar to many people. The Whitelab company is expected to be able to carry out other activities that also support product marketing such as exhibitions, giving price discounts, and improving product quality to increase the number of sales of Whitelab products apart from relying on the role of brand ambassador. This is because there are items that are still below the variable mean score, namely Item Y3, which is regarding brand selection with a mean score of 3.3. Then, it can be concluded that Whitelab needs to improve a thing to increase customers' purchasing decisions to their products, such as whitelab need to provide information and education about the benefits of products so that consumers are interested in purchase their products.

The company must establish a positive brand image. Formation of a positive brand image will influence consumer decisions in determining purchasing decisions. Formation of brand image can be achieved by building product quality and brand image from a good brand ambassador. This is because there are items that are still below the variable mean score, namely Item Z5 which is about varied range of products with a mean score of 3.68. The favorable dimension that has below the mean is regarding to varied range of Whitelab products. It can be concluded that item Z5 that has mean score 3.68, which means according to consumers, Whitelab still needs a more varied variant of products. Whitelab needs to develop information about its products.

Some of the aforementioned recommendations are anticipated to be understood and accepted as input by the parties of Whitelab or DECA Group in order to improve their brand image and product sales of Whitelab products. This can also increase the company's exposure among a large audience in the market while also providing benefits.

Due to the limitations of researchers in carrying out research and with existing limitations, it is hoped that further researchers can explore about respondent profiles, such as product purchases, service, and visits.

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