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THE WAY BRAND AMBASSADORS AND BRAND IMAGE AFFECT THE PURCHASING DECISIONS: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF BRAND TRUST

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Abstract

This research examines how brand trust mediates the relationship between brand ambassadors, brand image, and purchasing decisions. The study includes 150 active respondents with transaction experience on Bukalapak, using non-probability sampling and a questionnaire with a 1-7 interval scale for data collection. Path analysis and Sobel tests were applied for data analysis and hypothesis testing. Findings reveal that brand ambassadors and brand image significantly influence brand trust, but do not directly impact purchasing decisions. In contrast, brand trust significantly affects purchasing decisions, playing a crucial mediating role between brand ambassadors, brand image, and consumer purchasing choices. This study underscores brand trust's pivotal role in the consumer decision-making process within the online marketplace context. The results contribute to understanding how perceptions of brand ambassadors and brand image translate into consumer trust, ultimately influencing purchase behaviors. Such insights are valuable for marketers aiming to leverage brand ambassadors and enhance the brand image to foster consumer trust and drive purchasing decisions effectively in competitive digital environments.

Keywords: Brand ambassadors, Brand image, Brand trust, Purchasing decisions

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of technology has significantly impacted various aspects of society. One of the positive effects of today's advanced technology is the transformation of people's lifestyles. Recent trends indicate a shift in consumer behavior from conventional in-store shopping to online shopping through various platforms. The increasing frequency of online shopping can significantly expand opportunities for companies to implement the latest innovations. One notable innovation many companies adopt is the creation of online shopping applications. Bukalapak is a prominent marketplace that meets various consumer needs online. Bukalapak was established to support Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Indonesia. As an intermediary platform facilitating online transactions between sellers and buyers, Bukalapak faces substantial competition. This competitive landscape presents Bukalapak with the difficult task of maintaining and expanding its market share.

The data from topbrand-award.com illustrates that from 2019 to 2022, Bukalapak's Brand Index value has been notably unstable, experiencing considerable fluctuations and declines. This downward trend indicates a significant loss of brand strength and market presence. This shift underscores the increasing competition in the online marketplace sector and suggests that Bukalapak needs to innovate and adapt more effectively to maintain its market position. Data on katadata.com also shows a decline in the number of Bukalapak visits. A significant decrease in Bukalapak traffic suggests potential challenges, as lower visit numbers can lead to reduced product purchases and overall marketplace performance. The consistent decline in visits underscores the need for strategic interventions to attract and retain consumers. To maintain its position and increase the percentage of marketplace services users, Bukalapak must develop an effective strategy to attract more consumers, thereby guiding them to make purchasing decisions regarding the product offered.

Mangkunegara (2019) defines purchasing decisions as a performance framework or representation of what consumers believe when making buying decisions. According to Tjiptono (2020), purchasing decisions are part of consumer behavior, involving actions directly related to obtaining a product or service. These actions also encompass the decision-making process that occurs both before and after purchase. Effendi (2016) states that a purchasing decision is a result or continuum made by a person in a certain position, leading to a choice of actions to satisfy a need. Kotler & Kelly (2016) identify four important indicators in purchasing decisions: buying stability after acquiring product information, deciding to buy because it is the most preferred brand, purchasing because it meets personal wants and needs, and buying based on recommendations from others.

Many factors can influence purchasing decisions, one of which is the presence of a brand ambassador. Firmansyah (2019) defines a brand ambassador as a person or group of people who have a passion for a particular brand, are willing to promote it, and can voluntarily convey informative aspects about the brand. Brand ambassadors can effectively shape consumer views and enhance brand recall. Their endorsement can persuade consumers to buy or use the products they promote, leveraging their popularity and credibility to drive consumer engagement and sales. This role is crucial in building brand trust, as ambassadors often provide authentic and relatable endorsements that resonate with potential customers. Effective brand ambassadors can enhance brand visibility, create positive associations, and drive consumer engagement.

Since April 2022, Bukalapak has collaborated with South Korean actor Song Joong Ki as a brand ambassador. It is hoped that his association with Bukalapak will influence consumer's perceptions of the brand, making it more memorable and appealing. Royan (2015) identifies three main characteristics that brand ambassadors must possess, which can be used as indicators: attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise. Research conducted by Rani (2022), Wulandari (2018), and Prasetyo & Utama (2018) demonstrates a positive and significant relationship between brand ambassadors and purchasing decisions. In contrast, studies by Edrin & Fhatiyah (2022) indicate that brand ambassadors do not play a significant role in influencing consumer purchasing decisions.

When consumers make purchasing decisions, they often attach emotional feelings to the product brand they perceive as suitable. In this context, brand image plays a crucial role in fostering a favorable attitude towards the brand. Keller & Swaminathan (2020) define brand image as the consumer perceptions and actions toward a brand, based on the positive and

negative attributes they associate with it. According to Rommy et al. (2018), brand image can provide a positive incentive for buyers or potential buyers to purchase a product or service without considering other similar brands. Rangkuti (2009) identifies several indicators that characterize brand image, including recognition, reputation, affinity, and loyalty.

Research conducted by Primolassa & Soebiantoro (2022), Zulkarnain (2021), and Mahiri (2020) supports the existence of a positive and significant correlation between brand image and consumers' purchasing decisions. These studies suggest that a strong brand image can effectively influence consumers' choices, enhancing their likelihood of purchasing a product. Conversely, research by Yunita & Indriyatni (2022) and Rohmanuddin & Suprayogo (2022) indicates that brand image does not have a significant impact on purchasing decisions. This discrepancy highlights the complexity of consumer behavior and suggests that other factors such as price, product quality, and personal preferences, may also crucial roles in the decision-making process. These conflicting findings underscore the need for businesses to adopt a multifaceted approach in their marketing strategies, ensuring they address various aspects that can influence consumer purchasing behavior.

The influence of brand ambassadors and brand image on customer purchasing decisions can be mediated by the presence of brand trust. Consumers are more likely to buy or use a product when they have trust in the brand. Laksono & Suryadi (2020) state that brand trust is the consumer's confidence in the brand's ability to deliver on its promises according to the features it displays. Similarly, Wahyuni (2019) defines brand trust as a consumer's perception of a company's reliability, based on their experiences with the brand in meeting expectations, providing satisfaction, and ensuring product performance. Chi (2011) stated that brand trust means that a consumer believes a brand is reliable, has comprehensive functions and features, offers quality assurance, and provides good after-sales service. This trust is crucial in building long-term customer loyalty and driving repeat purchases. According to Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001), four indicators can be used to measure brand trust: reliability, dependability, honesty, and safety.

Research conducted by Nureza & Ramadhan (2023) and Putri & Harti (2022) supports the notion that brand trust plays a role in mediating the impact of brand ambassadors on consumer purchasing decisions. In contrast, Diyanti & Edastama (2022) found that brand trust was unable to mediate this relationship. Similarly, findings by Aurelia & Sidharta (2023) and Aeni (2021) indicate that brand trust can serve as an intermediary between brand image and consumer purchasing decisions. However, Diyanti & Edastama (2022) also found that brand trust does not contribute to mediating the effect of brand image on consumer purchasing decisions. These conflicting findings highlight the complex nature of consumer behavior and the need for further research to understand the conditions under which brand trust effectively mediates these relationships.

METHOD

This research employs a quantitative approach through surveys. The study focuses on the population of Bukalapak marketplace consumers in Indonesia, whose exact number is unknown. Therefore, a purposive sampling technique was used to select a sample size of 150 respondents. Data collection uses a questionnaire with an interval scale of 1-7. The research employed path analysis and the Sobel test for data analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Path analysis involved constructing two regression models. Model 1 assessed the impact of brand ambassadors and brand image on brand trust. Meanwhile, model 2 examined the influence of brand ambassadors, brand image, and brand trust on purchasing decisions.

Table 1. Data Analysis Results

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	2.462	1.214		2.027	.044
Brand Ambassador	.279	.078	.191	3.582	.000
Brand Image	.777	.054	.765	14.334	.000
2 (Constant)	1.310	1.324		.989	.324
Brand Ambassador	.063	.087	.042	.724	.470
Brand Image	.172	.090	.165	1.903	.059
Brand Trust	.751	.089	.732	8.473	.000

In Model 1, it is observed that brand ambassadors have a positive and significant influence on brand trust among Bukalapak marketplace users. This indicates that the more effectively a brand ambassador represents the brand, the more consumer trust in Bukalapak increases. This finding is in line with Digdowiseiso et al. (2021), Mardiyah & Nora (2018), and Fadila (2021) which state that brand ambassador has a positive and significant impact on brand trust. Similarly, brand image positively and significantly influences brand trust. This implies that a more favorable brand reputation enhances consumer trust in Bukalapak. This finding is in line with Maunaza (2012), Antoni & Herianto (2017), and Suliastyari (2012) which state that brand image has a positive and significant impact on brand trust.

However, in Model 2, brand ambassadors do not significantly influence purchasing decisions. This suggests that the current brand ambassador, Song Joong Ki, does not affect consumers' decisions to make transactions on Bukalapak. Similar findings are reported in studies by Steri et al. (2019) and Lailiya (2020), which state that brand ambassadors may not significantly influence purchasing decisions. Similarly, brand image does not have a significant influence on purchasing decisions. This means that changes in Bukalapak's brand reputation do not impact consumer transaction decisions. This finding aligns with the research of Mahiri (2020) and Hera & Furqoniah (2023), which also concluded that brand image does not significantly affect purchasing decisions. In contrast, brand trust has a positive and significant influence on purchasing decisions. This indicates that higher consumer trust leads to a greater likelihood of making transactions.

Table 2. The result of the Sobel test

Variable	Sobel test statistic	Probability
Brand ambassadors	3.549	.000
Brand image	12.852	.000

The Sobel test results in Table 3 indicate that brand trust significantly functions as a mediating variable. This suggests that brand trust effectively mediates the relationship between brand ambassadors and brand image in purchasing decisions. This means that while the brand ambassadors and brand image do not directly affect purchasing decisions, they do so indirectly through their impact on brand trust. Therefore, the current brand ambassador, Song Joong Ki, and changes in brand reputation can significantly influence purchasing decisions when mediated by brand trust. These findings are consistent with previous research by Nureza & Ramadhan (2023), Aurelia & Sidharta (2023), Putri & Harti (2022), and Aeni (2021), which demonstrated that brand trust can mediate the influence of brand ambassadors and brand image on purchasing decisions. This suggests that when consumers perceive a brand as good and trustworthy, they are more likely to make purchasing decisions with confidence. The role of brand trust as a mediating variable underscores its importance in translating the effects of brand ambassadors and brand image into actual consumer behavior. In other words, the impact of brand ambassadors and brand image on purchasing decisions is channeled through brand trust, highlighting its crucial intermediary role in this process.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reveal that both brand ambassadors and brand image have a positive and statistically significant impact on brand trust. However, these factors do not directly influence purchasing decisions. Instead, brand trust itself is a significant predictor of purchasing decisions. This indicates that while brand ambassadors and brand image might not directly alter consumer purchasing behavior, the trust cultivated in the brand through these elements is crucial in guiding consumers' decisions to make purchases. Consequently, strategies focused on enhancing brand trust could be more effective in shaping consumer behavior than those relying solely on brand ambassadors or brand image. This insight emphasizes the importance of building and maintaining brand trust as a central component of marketing strategies to drive consumer purchasing decisions. Future research should explore additional factors that contribute to brand trust and investigate their potential mediating roles in the relationship between brand ambassadors, brand image, and purchasing decisions.

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