The Role of Brand Image in Mediating the Influence of Brand Ambassador and Electronic Word of Mouth on Purchase Intention on Product Scarlett Whitening

Anissa Al-Fatwa, Dergibson Siagian*, Yosef Dema3

Management Department, Kwik Kian Gie School of Business and Information Technology, Jl. Yos Sudarso Kav 87, Sunter, Jakarta, 14350, Indonesia.

*Corresponding author email address: dergibson.siagian@kwikkiangie.ac.id

Abstract: In the era of globalization and modernization, the growth of internet users in Indonesia reflects significant changes in people's lifestyles, including their beauty and skin care needs. Skincare has become an essential part of the beauty routine, heavily influenced by societal perceptions of beauty. This research focuses on Scarlett Whitening, a local beauty brand, which experienced a decline in sales starting in July 2023. The method used in this research is a causal method with structural equation modeling (SEM). This study aims to investigate the impact of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) and brand ambassadors on purchase intentions. The results show that while brand ambassadors do not significantly influence purchase intention, e-WOM does. Furthermore, brand image acts as a mediator between e-WOM and purchase intention, but does not mediate the influence of brand ambassadors.

Keywords: brand ambassador, electronic word of mouth, brand image, purchase intention.


1. Introduction

The world is in a new era of innovation and change, driven by globalization and advances in information technology. One effect of globalization is the significant increase in internet usage. According to a survey by APJII (2023), the growth rate of internet users in Indonesia was 1.17% in 2023, reaching a total of 215 million users. This development has impacted people's lifestyles, particularly in how they interact and fulfill their daily needs. For many, especially women, one important need is beauty and skin care. Skincare routines are essential for maintaining healthy, fresh, and beautiful skin, which can boost self-confidence and support emotional well-being. The 2023 ZAP Beauty Index survey found that 58.5% of Indonesian women believe...
that having a clean and smooth face makes them beautiful, while 55.8% feel that a healthy and proportional body is key to their beauty.

The demand for beauty and skincare products has surged, reflecting consumptive behavior in purchasing and using these products. According to Statista, the estimated revenue in the beauty and personal care industry in 2023 is US$8.09 billion, with a predicted annual growth rate of 4.58% from 2023 to 2028. The largest market segment is personal care, valued at US$3.41 billion, followed by skincare at US$2.26 billion, cosmetics at US$1.85 billion, perfume at US$0.43 billion, and beauty technology at US$0.14 billion. The Food and Drug Supervisory Agency reported an increase of 20.6% in the number of beauty industry players, from 819 business units in 2021 to 913 in 2022.

One local beauty brand that has garnered significant attention is Scarlett Whitening, launched by Felicya Angelista in 2017. Scarlett Whitening offers a range of products designed to brighten and maintain healthy skin. The brand’s 5.6 million Instagram followers attest to its widespread appeal. Scarlett Whitening did, however, suffer a major downturn on Indonesian e-commerce platforms following July 2022, with sales falling by 8% in January 2023 (Figure 1), despite its strong sales. This decline suggests that Scarlett Whitening needs to improve its strategies to increase consumer purchase intentions amidst intense competition from brands like Somethinc, Avoskin, Azarine, Wardah, MS Glow, Whitelab, and others.

Figure 1
Scarlett Whitening Sales Data 2022-2023

Sources: Dimia.id in Raida (2023)

An effective marketing strategy is crucial for Scarlett Whitening to understand consumer needs and preferences, ultimately driving purchase intentions. Purchase intention is the likelihood that a customer will buy a product and can be measured through repurchase rates (Ishaq and Prayoga, 2017). To enhance this tendency, motivation is necessary, and using brand ambassadors is a strategy Scarlett Whitening employs to build customer purchase intentions.

According to Rebecca et al. (2022), a brand ambassador is tasked with supporting a brand and promoting its products positively, encouraging
customers to choose the brand's goods. Scarlett Whitening frequently collaborates with South Korean stars as brand ambassadors, including actor Song Joong-Ki. Research on the relationship between brand ambassadors, brand image, and purchase intention has yielded mixed results. Prasetio and Purnamawati (2022) found that brand ambassadors significantly influence purchase intention, while studies by Anandyara & Samiono (2022) and Puspita et al. (2023) found no such influence. This research gap highlights the importance of carefully selecting brand ambassadors, as they represent the brand to potential consumers and impact purchase intention.

In forming purchase intentions, customers evaluate information about new products before making purchasing decisions (Semuel and Setiawan, 2018). One key method of evaluation is electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), where consumers share information about their experiences with products or services. This phenomenon influences how consumers perceive a brand's image and their purchasing intentions (Chu & Kim, 2018). Putri & Rahyuda (2021) support this by stating that e-WOM significantly positively impacts purchase intention and brand image.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Purchase Intention

In his Theory of Planned Behaviour, Ajzen (1991) asserts that intention is a motivating factor that affects behaviour, indicating the degree of effort and tenacity with which an individual plans to carry out that behaviour. Purchase intention in this study relates to the consumer's goal and level of effort when making purchases (Siagian and Dema, 2024).

2.2. Brand Image

Brand image, according to Green and Keenan (2020), is the perception of a brand that is retained in consumers' memory through brand relationships. Accordingly, a person's mental image or perception of a brand is what is meant to be understood. Brand image strongly and favourably influences purchase intention, according to Yunus et al. (2022). Kameswara and Respati's (2022) research also showed that brand image has a favourable and significant impact on purchase intention.

H1: Brand Image has a positive effect on Purchase Intention

2.3. Brand Ambassador

Faritzal et al. (2023) describe a brand ambassador as a person or group entrusted with representing a brand's products or services. This definition implies that a brand ambassador is often a celebrity who communicates the product to consumers, aiming to influence their purchase plans. The right
brand ambassador can effectively increase consumer purchasing intentions. Echeche et al. (2023) noted that a brand ambassador with a positive image enhances the brand image.

H2: Brand Ambassador has a positive influence on Brand Image

H3: Brand Ambassador positively influences on Purchase Intention

2.4. Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM)

Electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), as defined by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), is the favourable or unfavourable comments expressed online by prospective, present, or past consumers regarding a product or brand. All unofficial digital communication connected to customers' experiences with particular sellers or items is referred to as e-WOM, according to Litvin et al. (2008). According to Jalilvand & Samiei (2012), e-WOM positively affects consumers' perceptions of brands and gives them the opportunity to take other people's perspectives into account when making purchasing decisions.

H4: e-WOM positively affects on Brand Image

H5: e-WOM has a positive impact on Purchase Intention

Furthermore, the relationship between variables, both direct influence and indirect influence, in this research is presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2
Theoretical Framework

3. Methods

The research object studied was Scarlett Whitening, focusing on purchase intention, brand ambassador, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), and brand image. The subjects of the research were consumers of the Scarlett Whitening brand.
3.1. Research Variables

The dependent variable in this study is Purchase Intention. This variable is measured based on Shukla (2010) as cited in Jalilvand & Samiei (2012). It assesses the degree of agreement with indicators such as product selection, recommendations, and future purchases.

Brand Ambassadors are representatives of a brand who can influence consumers’ purchasing activities. Measurement of this variable is based on Rossiter & Percy (1997), which includes four components: Visibility, Credibility, Attractiveness, and Power.

e-WOM is defined as online information about a product or service that helps customers in their purchasing decisions. The measurement follows the Information Acceptance Model (IACM) developed by Erkan and Evan (2016), which includes Information Adoption, Information Usefulness, Information Quality, Information Credibility, Information Task-Fit, Needs of Information, and Attitude Towards Information.

Brand Image refers to the perception consumers have of a brand. According to Keller & Swaminathan (2019), a strong brand image is measured by three factors: Strength of Brand Association, Favorability of Brand Association, and Uniqueness of Brand Association.

3.2. Sampling Techniques

This research employs a non-probability sampling technique. Specifically, judgment sampling is used, targeting customers who are familiar with the Scarlett Whitening brand.

3.3. Data Analysis Techniques

This study uses a structural model to predict cause-and-effect relationships between various latent variables. The structural equations used are:

\[ BI = \gamma_{11} * BA + \gamma_{12} * EWOM \]

and

\[ PI = \beta_1 * BA + \beta_2 * EWOM + \beta_3 * B1 \]

Where, BI refers to Brand Image; BA refers to Brand Ambassador; EWOM refers to Electronic Word of Mouth; and PI refers to Purchase Intention.

4. Result

4.1. Validity and Reliability Test

The validity of the questionnaire items was assessed by evaluating the factor loadings for each item across all variables. An item is considered valid if its factor loading is above 0.5 and it is statistically significant. The evaluation
results indicate that (table 1), all statement items for the four variables meet these criteria and are therefore declared valid.

Table 1
Validity Test Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
<th>P-Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>BA1</td>
<td>0.810</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>BA2</td>
<td>0.755</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>BA3</td>
<td>0.801</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>BA4</td>
<td>0.829</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
<th>P-Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>EWOM1</td>
<td>0.719</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>EWOM2</td>
<td>0.798</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>EWOM3</td>
<td>0.747</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>EWOM4</td>
<td>0.663</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>EWOM5</td>
<td>0.695</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>EWOM6</td>
<td>0.593</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>EWOM7</td>
<td>0.711</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
<th>P-Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>BI1</td>
<td>0.890</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>BI2</td>
<td>0.867</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>BI3</td>
<td>0.847</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>0.811</td>
<td>Reliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>EWOM</td>
<td>0.830</td>
<td>Reliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>BI</td>
<td>0.837</td>
<td>Reliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>PI</td>
<td>0.867</td>
<td>Reliable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To test for reliability, the WarpPLS 8.0 software was used. If a statement item's Cronbach's Alpha value is more than 0.70, it is regarded as dependable. The findings, which are shown in Table 2, show that the Cronbach's Alpha value surpasses 0.70 for each of the following variables: brand ambassador, electronic word of mouth, brand image, and buy intention. As a result, every variable in this study has been deemed credible.

Table 2
Reliability Test Results
4.2. Causal Relationships Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

Based on the results of the analysis, the resulting structural equation is obtained as follows:

\[ BI = 0.02 \times BA + 0.55 \times EWOM; \quad R^2 = 0.32 \]
\[ PI = 0.06 \times BA + 0.21 \times EWOM + 0.69 \times BI; \quad R^2 = 0.62 \]

Figure 3
Hypothesis Testing Results

The percentage of variance in the latent (endogenous) variables that the model can explain is shown by the R-Squared (R²) value. The latent endogenous variable "brand image" in the structural equation model has an R² value of 0.32. This suggests that 32% of the variation in brand image can be explained by the brand ambassador and e-WOM variables combined, with other factors accounting for the remaining 68%. The R² value for the variable representing purchasing intention is 0.62. This shows that the factors associated with brand ambassador, e-WOM, and brand image account for 62% of the variance in consumer purchase intention, with other variables not included in this model accounting for 38% of the variance (Figure 3).

The results of hypothesis testing are presented in Table 3, which shows the direct effects between variables, and Table 4, which shows the indirect effects. The tables' results led to the following finding: Although not statistically significant (P-Value = 0.41), brand ambassadors have a positive (0.02) impact on brand image. e-WOM has a substantial (P-Value < 0.01) and favourable (0.55) impact on brand image. Purchase intention is significantly and favourably influenced by brand image (0.69, P-Value < 0.01). Brand ambassadors have a negative (-0.06) and non-significant effect on consumers'
purchase intentions (P-Value = 0.24). Purchase intention is significantly and favourably impacted by E-WOM (0.21, P-Value = 0.01).

Table 3
Results of Variable Direct Effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationships</th>
<th>Effects</th>
<th>P-Value</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand Ambassador – Brand Image</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>Hypothesis rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic Word of Mouth – Brand Image</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
<td>Hypothesis accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Image – Purchase Intention</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
<td>Hypothesis accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Ambassador – Purchase Intention</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>Hypothesis rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic Word of mouth – Purchase intention</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>Hypothesis accepted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4
Results of Variable Indirect Effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From – To</th>
<th>Through</th>
<th>Effects</th>
<th>P-Value</th>
<th>Hasil</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand Ambassador – Purchase Intention</td>
<td>Brand Image</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>0.417</td>
<td>Hypothesis rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic Word of Mouth – Purchase Intention</td>
<td>Brand Image</td>
<td>0.382</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
<td>Hypothesis accepted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding the indirect effects, the influence of brand ambassadors on purchase intention through brand image is positive (0.014) but not significant (P-Value = 0.417). The influence of e-WOM on purchase intention through brand image is positive (0.382) and significant (P-Value < 0.01).

5. Discussion

The first hypothesis (H1), which states that brand ambassadors positively impact brand image, is not supported by the research findings. Thus, it can be said that Scarlett Whitening's brand image is unaffected by the brand ambassador. The results of Echeche et al. (2023) and Angelita et al. (2022), which showed that brand ambassadors favourably and significantly influence brand image, are in conflict with this conclusion. The disparity can be linked to Song Joong-Ki's scandal at the close of 2022, which hurt Scarlett Whitening's reputation among customers.
There is evidence to support the second hypothesis (H2), which claims that electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) improves brand image. Therefore, it can be said that a rise in e-WOM improves the perception of the brand. These results are consistent with Jalilvand & Samiei's (2012) study, which demonstrated that e-WOM has a major and favourable impact on a brand's image.

The third hypothesis (H3), that brand image has a favourable influence on purchase intention, is supported. As a result, an improved brand image leads to higher consumer purchase intent. This is consistent with previous study by Lisnawati et al. (2020) and Kameswara & Respati (2022), who discovered that brand image had a favourable and significant impact on purchase intention.

The fourth hypothesis (H4), proposing that brand ambassadors positively influence purchase intention, is not supported. Hence, brand ambassadors do not affect Scarlett Whitening consumers' purchase intention. This finding contrasts with Faritzal et al. (2023), which showed that brand ambassadors positively and significantly influence purchase intention. While Song Joong-Ki serves as a brand ambassador for Scarlett Whitening, his influence is insufficient to impact consumer purchase intention significantly.

The fifth hypothesis (H5), that e-WOM has a favourable impact on purchase intention, has been supported. As a result, a rise in e-WOM raises customer purchasing intent. This finding is consistent with the findings of Leong et al. (2021) and Kala & Chaubey (2018), who found that e-WOM had a large and favourable impact on consumer purchase intentions.

Regarding indirect effects, the hypothesis that brand ambassadors positively influence purchase intention through brand image is not supported. Thus, there is no mediation of the connection between purchase intention and brand advocates by the brand image variable. This outcome runs counter to Oktaviany & ZA's (2021) findings, which indicate that brand image has the ability to moderate the impact of brand ambassadors on purchase intention. The inability of Song Joong-Ki's brand image to sufficiently affect Scarlett Whitening's brand image to influence consumer purchasing plans may be the reason for the lack of mediation.

On the other hand, there is evidence to support the concept that e-WOM enhances purchase intention through brand image. The association between e-WOM and purchase intention is therefore mediated by the brand image variable. These findings are in line with the study of Edeline & Praptiningsih (2022), which showed that brand image effectively acts as a mediator between e-WOM's impact on consumer purchase intention.

6. Conclusion

It is concluded that brand ambassadors do not, either directly or through brand image, influence purchase intention based on the previously reported findings. On the other hand, electronic word of mouth, or e-WOM,
has a noteworthy and advantageous influence on purchase intention. Through brand image, this effect might appear directly or indirectly. These findings emphasise how important brand image is as a mediator, increasing the effect of e-WOM on purchase intention more so than direct influence.

Drawing from the previous conclusion, it is hoped that businesses will take into account how consumers perceive them, and that they will be influenced to do so by highlighting their superiority as a skin care brand, since consumers are still unable to make a purchase decision. Scarlett Whitening need to ensure that information about products spread on the internet is accurate, such as that the content in the product matches its claims. In addition, to increase consumer purchase intention, the company can share information according to the product's target audience, so that the product can become an alternative solution for consumers. Scarlett can promote whitening products for consumers who have dull skin issues.

In this research, the variables used are still limited, so the author hopes that future research can further optimize this research by developing a new research model or adding other variables to the research.

References


Erkan, I., & Evans, C. (2016). The influence of eWOM in social media on consumers’ purchase intentions: An extended approach to


