

The Effect of Brand Ambassador, Social Media Marketing, and E-WOM on Purchase Decision: The Role of Brand Image as a Mediating Variable

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Abstract

This study aims to determine the influence of brand ambassador, social media marketing, and E-WOM on the purchase decision of Tos Tos snack products, considering brand image as a mediating variable. The research method used in this study is a quantitative method with data collection techniques using google forms. A total of 264 respondents were collected using purposive sampling. The criteria for respondents set are in the millennial or Gen Z generation, knowing that NCT Dream is the brand ambassador for Tos Tos snack, and have purchased Tos Tos snack at least 3 months ago. This study uses SmartPLS statistical analysis tools to process the data. The results showed that brand ambassador and social media marketing have a positive and significant effect on brand image; E-WOM has a positive but insignificant effect on brand image; brand image has a positive but insignificant effect on purchase decision; brand ambassador, social media marketing, and E-WOM have a positive but insignificant effect on purchase decision with brand image as a mediating variable; brand ambassador has a positive but insignificant effect on purchase decision; and social media marketing and E-WOM have a positive and significant effect on purchase decision.

Keywords: Brand Ambassador, Social Media Marketing, E-WOM, Brand Image, Purchase Decision

1. Introduction

The snack industry in Indonesia is projected to grow annually by 8,11% from 2024 to 2028 (Statista, 2024). Millennials and Gen Z constitute the largest consumer groups for snacks in Indonesia, accounting for 55% of the market (Statista, 2024). Digital-era consumers tend to seek product information across various online platforms before making purchase decisions, supported by an internet penetration rate of 79,5% (APJII, 2024). Social media plays a crucial role in product marketing, offering a platform for consumers to share reviews through *Electronic Word of Mouth* (E-WOM), which enhances brand image and influences purchase decisions (Marliya & Tafiprios, 2023).

This study aims to examine the influence of brand ambassador, social media marketing, and E-WOM on purchasing decisions for Tos Tos snack with brand image as a mediating variable. Tos Tos, a product innovation by PT Dua Kelinci, was launched in 2023 with NCT Dream as its brand ambassador. The selection of NCT Dream leverages the significant impact of the Korean Wave in Indonesia, which creates a positive perception of Korean-related products (Kim & Choe, 2014). Previous studies indicate that these

factors influence consumer purchasing decisions amid an increasingly competitive market (Marliya & Tafiprios, 2023).

This research is significant as it provides insights for the snack industry to optimize marketing strategies in the digital era. A quantitative research approach is used to measure the influence of independent variables (*brand ambassador*, social media marketing, and E-WOM) on purchase decisions, with brand image as an mediating variable. The findings are expected to provide practical contributions to snack producers, particularly in formulating social media-based marketing strategies and optimizing brand ambassador to build strong brand image and enhance consumer loyalty.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Brand Ambassador

Brand ambassador is an individual or group selected for their popularity or appealing appearance to attract consumer attention and recall in advertising (Kotler & Keller, 2021). The purpose of utilizing brand ambassador is to ensure that advertising messages are easily accepted by consumers, enhancing their confidence in the advertised product (Kertamukti, 2017). According to Royan (2005), brand ambassador are evaluated through four indicators known as VisCAP: visibility, credibility, attraction, and power.

Studies by Syarifudin & Aminah (2023), show that selecting an appropriate *brand ambassador* increases purchase decisions. Furthermore, a positive image of a brand ambassador improves a product's brand image (Andarista et al., 2022). Consumers believe that celebrities influence their trust and attitudes toward a product (Marliya & Tafiprios, 2023). Prior research also shows that brand ambassador have a positive and significant impact on brand image and influence purchasing decisions through brand image as a mediator (Ayuni & Aulia, 2022; Marliya & Tafiprios, 2023).

2.2 Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing refers to utilizing social media and online communities to raise brand awareness through markets efforts, enabling businesses to reach a broader market (Zanjabila et al., 2023). According to Gunelius (2011), social media marketing consists of four indicators: content creation, content sharing, connecting, and community building.

Research by Taan et al. (2021) and Adiningtyas & Hasanah (2023) indicates a positive and significant impact of social media marketing on brand image. Meanwhile, Marliya & Tafiprios (2023) found that while social media marketing does not directly impact brand image significantly, well-executed social media marketing focusing on creating a positive brand image can significantly influence purchase decisions. Additional studies indicate that social media marketing has a significant effect on purchasing decision, particularly when supported by a strong brand image (Narayana & Rahanatha, 2020).

2.3 E-WOM

E-WOM is a marketing strategy that leverages the internet to create word-of-mouth communication effects to support marketing efforts (Kotler & Keller, 2021). According to Goyette I. et al., (2010), E-WOM involves consumer-to-consumer communication, exchanging product or service information through electronic media. E-WOM is assessed using three indicators: intensity, valence of opinion, and content (Goyette I. et al., 2010).

Consumers highly involved in evaluating E-WOM actively shape and enhance brand image via social media (Marliya & Tafiprios, 2023). Research by Saputra Juliana & Wardana (2020) dan Marliya & Tafiprios (2023) shows that E-WOM positively and significantly influences brand image, which mediates

the relationship between E-WOM and purchase decisions. Additionally, E-WOM has a direct and significant impact on purchase decisions (Marliya & Tafiprios, 2023; Saputra Juliana & Wardana, 2020).

2.4 Brand Image

Brand image refers to the combination of consumer perceptions and beliefs that influence their interest in purchasing a product (Kotler & Keller, 2021). Brand image serves as a mediating variable by linking the indirect relationship between brand ambassador, social media marketing, and E-WOM with purchasing decisions (Andarista et al., 2022). According to Pasaribu (2022), brand image is evaluated through three indicators: superiority, strength, and uniqueness.

A positive brand image fosters consumer trust, ultimately encouraging them to make purchases (Narayana & Rahanatha, 2020). Studies by Marliya & Tafiprios (2023) dan Putra (2019), confirm that brand image significantly influences purchase decisions.

2.5 Purchase Decision

A purchase decision represents the stage at which consumers decide to buy a product (Imani & Martini, 2021). Nurhasanah *et al.* (2021) describe it as consumer behavior where individuals, groups, or organizations select, purchase, and use goods, services, or experiences to fulfill needs or desires. Kotler & Keller (2021) define purchase decisions through three indicators: confidence in a product, willingness to recommend it, and repeat purchases.

2.6 S-O-R Theory

The S-O-R theory examines how physical and social stimuli influence emotions and cognition, affecting behavioral responses (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). This study applies the S-O-R theory to analyze how brand ambassador, social media marketing, E-WOM, and brand image influence purchase decisions for snack Tos Tos snacks. “Stimulus” involves brand ambassador, social media marketing, and E-WOM, “Organism” relates to brand image, and “Response” pertains to purchase decisions. The theory has been applied in prior research, such as examining the effect of green brand image on green WOM, customer engagement, and purchase intentions on Tik Tok (Lee et al., 2024).

H1: Brand ambassador influences the brand image of Tos Tos snacks.

H2: Social media marketing influences the brand image of Tos Tos snacks.

H3: E-WOM influences the brand image of Tos Tos snacks.

H4: Brand image influences the purchase decision of Tos Tos snacks.

H5: Brand ambassador influences the purchase decision of Tos Tos snacks through brand image as a mediator.

H6: Social media marketing influences the purchase decision of Tos Tos snacks through brand image as a mediator.

H7: E-WOM influences the purchase decision of Tos Tos snacks through brand image as a mediator.

H8: Brand ambassador influences the purchase decision of Tos Tos snacks.

H9: Social media marketing influences the purchase decision of Tos Tos snacks.

H10: E-WOM influences the purchase decision of Tos Tos snacks.

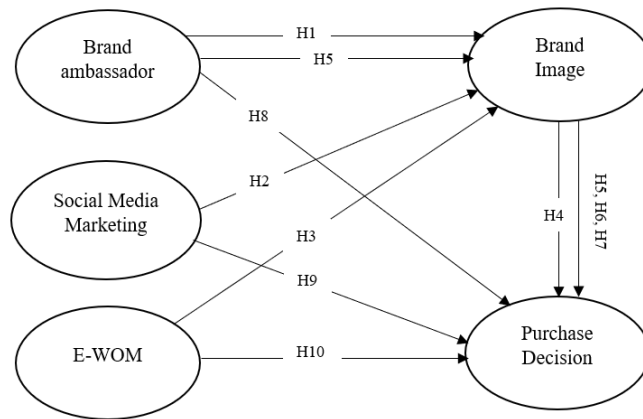


Figure 1. Research Framework
(Source: Marliya & Tafiprios (2023))

3. Method

This study employs a quantitative method with data collection using non probability sampling through a purposive sampling approach. Data were gathered using a questionnaire designed with a likert scale. The online questionnaire was created in Google Forms and distributed via social media. Respondents were required to be from the millennial and Gen Z generations, aware of NCT Dream as the brand ambassador for Tos Tos snacks, and had purchased Tos Tos snacks within the last three months. The formula by Sekaran & Bougie (2019) was used to calculate the sample size, resulting in a total 264 respondents. The independent variables in this study are brand ambassador (X1), social media marketing (X2), and E-WOM (X3). The dependent variable is purchase decision (Y), with brand image (Z) as the mediating variable. The analysis method used is SEM-PLS with SmartPLS 3 software. Instrument validity and reliability were tested through the outer model test, while hypotheses were tested using the inner model test with path coefficients, t-values, and p-values.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Descriptive Statistical Analysis of Respondents

Among the 264 respondents, 88 were male and 176 female. In terms of age, 166 respondents were aged 12-27 years, and 98 were aged 28-43 years. Based on occupation, 32 were students, 76 were university students, 104 were employees, 46 were entrepreneurs, and 6 were in other categories. Regarding monthly income or allowance, 41 respondents earned less than Rp 1.000.000, 83 earned Rp 1.000.000 – Rp 3.000.000, 99 earned Rp 3.000.000 – Rp 5.000.000, and 41 earned more than > Rp 5.000.000.

4.2 Outer Model Evaluation

Table 1. Validity and Reliability Tests

Scale Items	Outer Loading	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
Brand Ambassador (BA) (Iswanto & Sanaji, 2021)				
NCT Dream is popular among the public.	0,850	0,666	0,923	0,899
NCT Dream has a positive image.	0,771			
NCT Dream is reliable as a brand ambassador.	0,834			

NCT Dream has strong appeal.	0,838			
NCT Dream possesses advantages as a brand ambassador.	0,788			
NCT Dream enhances the brand image of Tos Tos snacks.	0,813			
Social Media Marketing (SMM) (Palda et al., 2024)				
The creation of Tos Tos snacks social media content is engaging.	0,818	0,685	0,916	0,885
The social media platforms of Tos Tos snacks present updated and informative content.	0,833			
Tos Tos snacks social media is effective in sharing content.	0,860			
The social media content of Tos Tos snacks is communicative.	0,846			
Feedback from consumers is available.	0,792			
Online communities provide information that is quick and accessible.	0,816			
E-WOM (EWM) (Goyette I. et al., 2010)				
I talk more about Tos Tos snacks compared to other snacks.	0,821	0,696	0,902	0,854
I speak positively about Tos Tos snacks.	0,812			
I recommend Tos Tos snacks to others.	0,838			
Positive reviews from others about Tos Tos snacks give me confidence to make a purchase.	0,865			
Brand Image (BI) (Wisnu Wardhana et al., 2021)				
Tos Tos snacks have good quality.	0,828	0,686	0,914	0,874
Tos Tos snacks have an attractive appearance.	0,832			
The price of Tos Tos snacks is competitive with similar products.	0,821			
Tos Tos snacks have unique features compared to similar products.	0,811			
Tos Tos snacks are easy to remember.	0,848			
Purchase Decision (KP) (Iswanto & Sanaji, 2021)				
Tos Tos snacks are my priority snack choice.	0,878	0,727	0,929	0,908
Having NCT Dream as the brand ambassador makes Tos Tos snacks the best choice.	0,811			
Recommending Tos Tos snacks to others.	0,835			
Repeating purchases of Tos Tos snacks.	0,885			

The result showed that the loading factor for each indicator was greater than 0,7, indicating that all indicators in this study are valid. The average extracted variance (AVE) for each indicator was greater than

0,5, confirming the validity of the indicators. The composite reliability value was $\geq 0,6$ and cronbach's alpha $\geq 0,7$, indicating that all indicators in this study meet the reliability requirements.

4.3 Inner Model Evaluation

Table 2. R-Square Adjusted and Q-Square Result

Construct	R-Square Adjusted	Q-Square
Brand Image	0,893	0,606
Purchase Decision	0,894	0,640

Based on Table 2, the R-Square Adjusted value for brand image is 0,893, and for purchase decision, it is 0,894. These values indicate that the R-Square Adjusted for brand image and purchase decision is categorized as strong. Additionally, the Q-Square value for brand image is 0,606, and for purchase decision, it is 0,640, demonstrating strong predictive capabilities for both variables.

4.4 Hypothesis Test Result

Table 3. Direct Hypothesis Test Result

	Path Coefficient	T Value	P Values	Keterangan
Brand Ambassador → Brand Image	0,519	7,098	0,000	Significant
Social Media Marketing → Brand Image	0,280	2,548	0,011	Significant
E-WOM → Brand Image	0,179	1,689	0,092	Not Significant
Brand Image → Purchase Decision	0,045	0,389	0,698	Not Significant
Brand Ambassador → Purchase Decision	0,212	1,781	0,076	Not Significant
Social Media Marketing → Purchase Decision	0,362	4,708	0,000	Significant
E-WOM → Purchase Decision	0,364	3,987	0,000	Significant

Table 4. Indirect Hypothesis Test Result

	Koefisien Jalur	T Value	P Values	Keterangan
Brand Ambassador → Brand Image → Purchase Decision	0,023	0,383	0,702	Not Significant
Social Media Marketing → Brand Image → Purchase Decision	0,013	0,365	0,715	Not Significant
E-WOM → Brand Image → Purchase Decision	0,008	0,328	0,743	Not Significant

Based on Table 3. and Table 4. Above, the analysis results are follows:

The Influence of Brand Ambassador on the Brand Image of Tos Tos Snacks

This study indicates that brand ambassador have an impact on the brand image of Tos Tos snacks. The influence of Brand ambassador is positive and significant on brand image of Tos Tos snacks. This finding aligns with the studies by Andarista et al. (2022) and Marliya & Tafiprios (2023) which state that brand ambassador have a positive and significant impact on brand image. According to Andarista et al. (2022), the more positive the image of the brand ambassador, the more positive the brand image of a product or brand. Consumers trust the celebrities can influence their beliefs and attitudes toward a brand (Marliya & Tafiprios, 2023).

The Influence of Social Media Marketing on the Brand Image of Tos Tos Snacks

This study shows that social media marketing affects the brand image of Tos Tos snacks positively and significantly. These results are consistent with previous research by Taan et al. (2021) and Adiningtyas & Hasanah (2023) which state that social media marketing has a positive and significant effect on brand image. However, this finding contradicts the study by Marliya & Tafiprios (2023) which suggests that social media marketing does not directly and significantly impact brand image. Social media enables direct communication between brands and consumers, enhancing engagement and emotional connection with the audience (Taan et al., 2021).

The Influence of E-WOM on the Brand Image of Tos Tos Snacks

The study reveals that E-WOM has no significant impact on the brand image of Tos Tos snacks, despite showing a positive but insignificant influence. This finding contradicts the studies by Saputra Juliana & Wardana (2020) and Marliya & Tafiprios (2023), which report a positive and significant impact of E-WOM on brand image. However, it aligns with studies by Afreh & Al-adaileh (2020) and Pratama & Azizah (2022) which state that E-WOM does not significantly influence brand image. This suggests that while consumers actively engage in E-WOM, it is not strong enough to significantly enhance brand image. Excessive E-WOM may create noise that disturbs consumers' perception of the brand image (Afreh & Al-adaileh, 2020).

The Influence of Brand Image on the Purchase Decision of Tos Tos Snacks

The study shows that brand image has a positive but insignificant impact on purchase decisions of Tos Tos snacks. This result contrasts with studies by Marliya & Tafiprios (2023) and Putra (2019) which report a positive and significant effect of brand image on purchase decisions. However, it aligns with Foster (2017) and Maupa (2019), which found that brand image positively but insignificantly influences purchase decisions. The brand image of Tos Tos snacks is not strong enough to significantly affect consumer's purchasing decisions. Although a brand may have a good image, it is not always the primary factor influencing consumer purchase decisions (Suardana et al., 2024).

The Influence of Brand Ambassador on the Purchase Decision of Tos Tos Snacks with Brand Image as a Mediating Variable

The study finds that brand ambassador have no significant impact on purchase decisions for Tos Tos snacks with brand image as mediating variable. This result contrasts with the studies by Marliya & Tafiprios (2023) and Ayuni & Aulia (2022), which report a significant influence of brand ambassador on purchase decisions mediated by brand image. However, it aligns with Al-Fatwa et al. (2024) who state that brand ambassador positively but insignificantly affect purchase decisions through brand image. Although a brand has a good image, it is not always the main factor influencing consumer purchase decisions (Suardana et al., 2024).

The Influence of Social Media Marketing on the Purchase Decision of Tos Tos Snacks with Brand Image as a Mediating Variable

The study finds that social media marketing does not significantly impact purchase decisions for Tos Tos snacks through brand image as a mediating variable. This result contrasts with the studies by Marliya & Tafiprios (2023) and Narayana & Rahanatha (2020) which report a significant influence of social media marketing on purchase decisions mediated by brand image. However, these findings align with Arief et al., (2024) who report that social media marketing does not significantly affect purchase decisions through brand image. The brand image of Tos Tos snacks is not strong enough to mediate social media marketing's impact on purchase decisions. Although a brand has a good image, it is not always the main factor influencing consumer purchase decisions (Suardana et al., 2024).

The Influence of E-WOM on the Purchase Decision of Tos Tos Snacks with Brand Image as a Mediating Variable

The study finds that E-WOM does not significantly affect purchase decisions for Tos Tos snacks through brand image as a mediating variable. This result contrasts with the studies by Marliya & Tafiprios (2023) and Saputra Juliana & Wardana (2020) which report a significant influence of E-WOM on purchase decisions mediated by brand image. However, these findings align with Hasan & Erika (2023) which state that E-WOM does not significantly influence purchase decisions through brand image. The brand image of Tos Tos snacks is not strong enough to mediate E-WOM's impact on purchase decisions. Although a brand has a good image, it is not always the main factor influencing consumer purchase decisions (Suardana et al., 2024).

The Influence of Brand Ambassador on the Purchase Decision of Tos Tos Snacks

The results of this study find that brand ambassador has no significant influence on the purchase decision of Tos Tos snacks. The effect of brand ambassador positive but not significant regarding purchase decision. This finding contradicts the studies by Syarifudin & Aminah (2023) and Marliya & Tafiprios (2023), which state that brand ambassador have a significant influence on purchase decision. However, this study aligns with the findings of Gusdaputra et al. (2023) and Iswanto & Sanaji (2021), which conclude that brand ambassadors do not significantly influence purchase decisions because brand ambassadors are not fully correlated with purchase decisions, as other factors play a role. Snacks fall into the category of daily consumer goods, often purchased impulsively, with purchase decisions being more influenced by factors such as taste, price, and social media marketing rather than the brand ambassador (Duarte et al., 2013).

The Influence of Social Media Marketing on the Purchase Decision of Tos Tos Snacks

The results of this study show that social media marketing significantly influences the purchase decision of Tos Tos snacks. The effect of social media marketing is positive and significant regarding purchase decisions. This finding aligns with the studies by Marliya & Tafiprios (2023) and Zanjabila et al. (2023) which state that social media marketing has a significant influence on purchase decisions. Social media serves as a platform for two-way interaction between consumers and brands, which influences consumers' purchase decisions (Raichur et al., 2023). When social media marketing is utilized effectively, it increases product visibility and frequency of exposure, ultimately boosting purchase decisions (Narayana & Rahanatha, 2020).

The Influence of E-WOM on the Purchase Decision of Tos Tos Snacks

The results of this study indicate that E-WOM significantly influences the purchase decision of Tos Tos snacks. The effect of E-WOM is positive and significant regarding purchase decisions. This finding aligns with the studies by Marliya & Tafiprios (2023) and Saputra Juliana & Wardana (2020) which conclude

that E-WOM has a positive and significant impact on purchase decisions. When consumers see positive E-WOM, they tend to feel more confident in making a purchase (Marliya & Tafiprios, 2023). In the digital era, E-WOM plays a significant role in influencing purchase decisions because it contains authentic and independent information, particularly when it reinforces aspects such as the quality, taste, and price of a product, which are perceived as more objective by consumers (Duarte et al., 2013).

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concludes that brand ambassador and social media marketing have a positive and significant influence on brand image; E-WOM has a positive but not significant influence on brand image; brand image has a positive but not significant influence on purchase decision; brand ambassador, social media marketing, and E-WOM have a positive but not significant influence on purchase decision when mediated by brand image; brand ambassador has a positive but not significant influence on purchase decision; and social media marketing and E-WOM have a positive dan significant influence on purchase decision. This study highlights the importance for company to focus more on social media marketing and Positive E-WOM to enhance purchase decision. Additionally, company could explore moderating factors that could strengthen the relationship between brand ambassador and purchase decision. Future research could incorporate other variables, such as price and flavor preference, and investigate other relevant mediating variables.

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