The Effect of Brand Ambassadors and Viral Marketing on Purchasing Decisions with Brand Trust as an Intervening Variable

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Keywords	ABSTRACT
brand ambassador, viral marketing, brand trust, purchase decision	This study examines the effect of brand ambassadors and viral marketing on purchasing decisions with brand trust as an intervening variable for consumers of Azarine products in Malang City. The purpose of this study is to understand the factors that influence consumer purchasing decisions in the skincare industry. The approach used is quantitative with the Partial Least Square (PLS) method and a sample of 160 respondents selected through non-probability sampling techniques. Data were collected through questionnaires and analyzed using SmartPLS to test the relationship between variables. The results showed that brand ambassadors have no significant influence on purchasing decisions, while viral marketing has a significant influence on purchasing decisions. In addition, brand ambassadors do not have a significant effect on purchasing decisions through brand trust as an intervening variable, while viral marketing has a significant effect on purchasing decisions through brand trust. This research provides implications for companies in designing more effective marketing strategies, especially in utilizing viral marketing to increase consumer trust and purchasing decisions. Recommendations for future research are to expand sample coverage by considering more diverse demographic factors and exploring other variables that can influence purchasing decisions.

INTRODUCTION

The purchase decision is a complex process influenced by internal and external factors, including cultural trends and marketing strategies (Kotler et al., 2016). One of the trends affecting the beauty industry in Indonesia is the Korean Wave, which drives the growth of the skincare and cosmetics industry to 21.9% by 2023 (Waluyo, 2024).

In skincare marketing, the use of brand ambassadors is an effective strategy in building trust and increasing product appeal. As Azarine did by collaborating with Lee Min Ho as a brand ambassador to emphasize that skincare can be used by everyone (Andina et al., 2023). In addition, viral marketing through platforms such as TikTok also plays a role in increasing consumer awareness

and engagement, as evidenced by Azarine's 50% spike in sales after its products went viral (Viral on TikTok, 2020).

Brand trust is an important factor that mediates the influence of brand ambassadors and viral marketing on purchasing decisions. Previous research shows that brand ambassadors have a significant effect on brand trust, which in turn increases purchasing decisions (Putri & Hidayat, 2024). Therefore, this study aims to analyze the effect of brand ambassadors and viral marketing on purchasing decisions with brand trust as an intervening variable, using Azarine as the research object in Malang City.

METHOD

This research uses quantitative methods with a descriptive approach to analyze the relationship between research variables. The research was conducted in Malang City, which was chosen because it has a large student population as the main target of Azarine skincare products. The research population includes Azarine users aged 20-24 years, with a sample size of 160 respondents selected using purposive sampling technique. Data was collected through an online questionnaire using Google Forms, which contained structured questions based on a Likert Scale with a score range of 1-5.

This study measures four main variables, namely Brand Ambassador, Viral Marketing, Brand Trust, and Purchase Decision. Brand Ambassadors refer to brand representations that build relationships with consumers, while Viral Marketing is a marketing strategy that spreads information widely and quickly. Brand Trust measures consumers' trust in the brand based on credibility and previous experience, while Purchase Decision reflects consumers' actions in choosing and buying products.

Data analysis in this study was carried out using the Partial Least Square (PLS) method to test the relationship between latent variables. The test is carried out through the evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) to measure the validity of indicators on latent variables, as well as the structural model (inner model) to see the relationship between research variables. In addition, a partial test (T-test) is used to measure the effect of each independent variable on the dependent variable.

Based on the theoretical basis and previous research, this study formulates seven main hypotheses. The first hypothesis (H1) tests whether Brand Ambassadors have an effect on Purchasing Decisions. The second hypothesis (H2) examines the effect of Viral Marketing on Purchasing Decisions. The third hypothesis (H3) tests whether Brand Ambassadors have an impact on Brand Trust, while the fourth hypothesis (H4) examines the effect of Viral Marketing on Brand Trust. The fifth hypothesis (H5) evaluates the effect of Brand Trust on Purchasing Decisions. In addition, this study also examines the role of Brand Trust as a mediating variable, with the sixth hypothesis (H6) examining the effect of Brand Ambassadors on Purchasing Decisions through Brand Trust, and the seventh hypothesis (H7) looking at whether Viral Marketing affects Purchasing Decisions through Brand Trust.

With a systematic and data-based approach, this study aims to understand how Brand Ambassador and Viral Marketing influence Purchasing Decisions with Brand Trust as an intervening variable. The results of this study are expected to provide insight for companies in developing more effective marketing strategies.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework
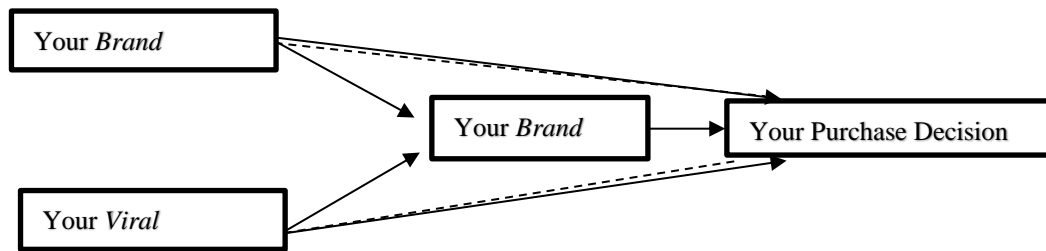
RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Research Results

This section presents the research results in a concise and clear manner in accordance with the methods used. Research data is presented in the form of tables and graphs placed as close as possible to the relevant paragraphs.

This research focuses on Azarine as the object of study, with its background, development, and awards. This information provides context for the analysis conducted. The research respondents were users of Azarine products in Malang City with certain criteria. Their characteristics were analyzed based on domicile, gender, age, and income. Tabulated data is presented in tables to facilitate analysis.

B. Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis was conducted to describe the research variables, namely Brand Ambassador (X1), Viral Marketing (X2), Purchase Decision (Y), and Brand Trust (Z). Data was collected using a Likert scale and displayed in the form of tables and graphs.

The results show that the majority of respondents recognize the Azarine Brand Ambassador, but the level of trust in the information conveyed still varies. Marketing strategies through social media have proven effective in increasing brand awareness. However, there is still a tendency for some respondents to skip advertisements. Respondents generally have a high level of trust in Azarine, although there are indications that this trust is based more on personal experience than promotion by the Brand Ambassador. Purchasing decisions are influenced more by individual needs than by external factors such as the use of Brand Ambassadors.

C. Model Evaluation

Model evaluation is carried out through testing the outer model (validity and reliability) and inner model (R-square and predictive relevance tests). The results show that the research model has good predictive power on purchasing decision variables.

D. Hypothesis Testing Results

The hypotheses were tested using the PLS method with the main results as follows:

1. Brand Ambassador does not have a significant influence on Purchasing Decisions.
2. Viral Marketing has a significant effect on Purchasing Decisions.
3. Brand Trust is a mediator that strengthens the relationship between Viral Marketing and Purchasing Decisions.

E. Discussion

Brand Ambassadors increase brand exposure but do not directly influence purchasing decisions because consumers consider product quality more. Meanwhile, Viral Marketing is effective in increasing product awareness and recommendations, which significantly impacts purchasing decisions. Consumer trust in brands is based more on personal experience than the influence of public figures. Widespread information through viral marketing strengthens consumer trust in brands.

Trust in the brand is a major factor in driving purchasing decisions. Although brand ambassadors can increase brand trust, it does not automatically drive purchasing decisions. Instead, viral marketing increases brand trust, which in turn has a positive impact on purchasing decisions.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the analysis and discussion, this study shows that Viral Marketing has a significant influence on purchasing decisions, both directly and through Brand Trust as a mediating variable. Effective Viral Marketing is able to build consumer trust, which then contributes to an increase in purchasing decisions.

In contrast, the use of Brand Ambassadors has no direct influence on purchase decisions, suggesting that public figures in marketing need to be combined with other strategies to be more effective. Brand trust proved to be an important factor driving purchase decisions, confirming that marketing strategies should be focused on improving product quality and consumer trust.

The results of this study contribute to the development of marketing strategies, especially in the beauty industry. Future research prospects can examine the effectiveness of other marketing strategy combinations and develop customer experience-based approaches to increase brand trust and loyalty.

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