

The Influence of Product Appearance and Celebrity Endorsement on Purchase Intention with Brand Image as a Mediating Variable: A Study on Cosmetics Consumers in an Emerging Market

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Abstract: This study investigates the influence of product appearance and celebrity endorsement on consumer purchase intention, examining the mediating role of brand image. Employing a quantitative approach with a Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) model, data were collected from 112 student users of the Azarine sunscreen product at the University of Timor. The analysis results indicate that product appearance and celebrity endorsement have a positive and significant effect, both directly and indirectly, on purchase intention. Brand image was proven to be a strong mediator in this relationship; an appealing product appearance and a credible celebrity endorsement significantly enhance brand image, which in turn drives consumer purchase intention. These findings confirm that in the competitive cosmetics market, visual and associative marketing stimuli not only have a direct impact on purchasing decisions but also strategically build the intangible asset of a positive brand image.

Keywords: *Brand Image, Celebrity Endorsement, Product Appearance, Purchase Intention.*

1. Introduction

The skincare industry, particularly in emerging markets like Indonesia, is experiencing exponential growth, fueling intense competition among brands. In this dynamic business environment, companies are required to implement innovative marketing strategies to capture consumer attention and build a competitive advantage. Local brands such as Azarine have successfully gained significant market share through aggressive marketing strategies, including investments in product packaging design (product appearance) and the use of public figures (celebrity endorsement). While these strategies are theoretically believed to be effective in increasing brand awareness, the psychological mechanisms that explain how such stimuli translate into purchase intention still require deeper exploration.

Although previous research has confirmed the positive relationship between product appearance and purchase intention (Hagtvedt & Brasel, 2017) as well as celebrity endorsement and purchase intention (Erdogan, 1999), the role of brand image as a mediating variable in this context has not been fully explored. Brand image, as the consumer's perceptions and associations with a brand (Keller, 1993), could potentially be the crucial bridge that connects marketing stimuli with consumer behavioral responses. This study aims to fill this literature gap by analyzing an integrated relationship model where brand image is positioned as a mediator of the influence of product appearance and celebrity endorsement on the purchase intention for Azarine sunscreen among young consumers, specifically students at the University of Timor. Consequently, this research not only tests direct effects but also uncovers more complex indirect mechanisms, providing a richer understanding of the consumer decision-making process in the cosmetics industry.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Product Appearance and Purchase Intention

Product appearance is defined as the configuration of a product's sensory and aesthetic elements, such as package design, color, shape, and typography, which creates a first impression for consumers (Bloch, 1995; Nugroho, 2012). In marketing, product appearance acts as a "silent salesman" capable of attracting attention, communicating value, and differentiating the product from competitors on the retail shelf (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Research by Orth and Malkewitz (2008) shows that aesthetic package design can trigger positive emotional responses and enhance quality perceptions, which ultimately drives purchase intention. This aligns with the findings of Setiawan (2010)

and Siti (2018), who found a positive and significant correlation between a product's visual appeal and consumers' propensity to buy. Based on these arguments, the first hypothesis is formulated as follows:

- H₁: Product appearance has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention.

2.2. Celebrity Endorsement and Purchase Intention

Celebrity endorsement is a marketing strategy that utilizes the popularity, expertise, or appeal of a public figure to promote a product or brand (McCracken, 1989). The effectiveness of this strategy can be explained by the Meaning Transfer Model, which posits that the symbolic meanings and attributes attached to a celebrity can be transferred to the endorsed product, thereby influencing consumer perceptions (McCracken, 1989). Source credibility, which includes the endorser's expertise and trustworthiness, is a key factor determining the success of the campaign (Ohanian, 1990). Empirical research consistently shows that endorsements from credible and product-relevant celebrities can significantly increase consumer purchase intention (Erdogan, 1999; Rahmawati & Suhud, 2017). Therefore, the second hypothesis is proposed:

- H₂: Celebrity endorsement has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention.

2.3. The Mediating Role of Brand Image

Brand image is the set of perceptions and associations held in a consumer's mind regarding a brand, formed through both direct and indirect experiences (Keller, 1993). A professionally and consistently designed product appearance contributes directly to the formation of a strong and positive brand image (Aaker, 2012), as consumers often use visual cues to judge a brand's quality and personality. Similarly, celebrity endorsement serves as a strategic tool to shape or reinforce brand image, where the positive image of the celebrity is transferred to the brand they represent (Kamins, 2019). A positive brand image, in turn, is a proven strong predictor of purchase intention, as consumers are more likely to buy products from brands they perceive as high-quality, trustworthy, and reputable (Wu et al., 2011; Setyawan & Haryanto, 2020). Thus, brand image is predicted to play a significant mediating role. Based on this logic, the following hypotheses are formulated:

- H₃: Product appearance has a positive and significant effect on brand image.
- H₄: Celebrity endorsement has a positive and significant effect on brand image.
- H₅: Brand image has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention.
- H₆: Brand image mediates the effect of product appearance on purchase intention.
- H₇: Brand image mediates the effect of celebrity endorsement on purchase intention.

3. Research Methods

This study employed a quantitative approach to test the proposed hypotheses. The research population comprised all students at the University of Timor who are users of the Azarine sunscreen brand. As the exact population size was unknown, a purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents. The inclusion criteria were active students of the University of Timor who had purchased or used Azarine sunscreen. A total of 112 respondents were collected who met the criteria, a number deemed adequate for analysis using PLS-SEM (Ferdinand, 2006).

Primary data were collected through an online questionnaire using a four-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 4 = Strongly Agree) to measure the research variables. These variables included Product Appearance (X₁), Celebrity Endorsement (X₂), Brand Image (Z), and Purchase Intention (Y). Data analysis was performed using SmartPLS 4 software via the Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach. This method was chosen for its ability to analyze complex models with latent variables and handle non-normally distributed data (Hair et al., 2017). The model evaluation included two stages: evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) to test for validity and reliability, and evaluation of the structural model (inner model) to test the research hypotheses (Huda et al., 2025).

4. Result and Discussion

4.1. Result

4.1.1. Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

The results of the outer model analysis indicated that all indicators were valid and reliable. Convergent validity was established, with all indicator outer loadings exceeding the 0.70 threshold and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct surpassing 0.50. Discriminant validity was also confirmed, as the cross-loading of each indicator was higher on its respective construct than on any other. Finally, the construct reliability tests yielded satisfactory results, with Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values for all variables above 0.70, indicating high internal consistency.

4.1.2. Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model)

The structural model demonstrated substantial predictive power. The R-Square value for the Brand Image variable was 0.728, meaning 72.8% of its variance can be explained by Product Appearance and Celebrity Endorsement. Meanwhile, the R-Square value for Purchase Intention was 0.822, indicating that 82.2% of the variance in purchase intention can be explained by the three independent variables in the model.

The results of the hypothesis testing (see Table 1) showed that all direct paths were statistically significant. Product Appearance ($\beta = 0.348$, $p < 0.001$) and Celebrity Endorsement ($\beta = 0.222$, $p < 0.01$) had a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention, thus supporting H₁ and H₂. Similarly, Product Appearance ($\beta = 0.612$, $p < 0.001$) and Celebrity Endorsement ($\beta = 0.262$, $p < 0.01$) had a significant effect on Brand Image, supporting H₃ and H₄. The influence of Brand Image on Purchase Intention was also positive and significant ($\beta = 0.387$, $p < 0.001$), thus supporting H₅.

Table 1: Results of Direct and Indirect Effect Hypothesis Testing

<i>Hypothesis</i>	<i>Path</i>	<i>Coefficient (β)</i>	<i>T-Statistic</i>	<i>P-Value</i>	<i>Decision</i>
Direct Effects					
H ₁	Product Appearance -> Purchase Intention	0.348	3.312	0.000	Supported
H ₂	Celeb. Endorse. -> Purchase Intention	0.222	2.360	0.009	Supported
H ₃	Product Appearance -> Brand Image	0.612	6.180	0.000	Supported
H ₄	Celeb. Endorse. -> Brand Image	0.262	2.489	0.006	Supported
H ₅	Brand Image -> Purchase Intention	0.387	4.646	0.000	Supported
Indirect Effects (Mediation)					
H ₆	Product App. -> Brand Image -> Purchase Intention	0.237	3.752	0.000	Supported
H ₇	Celeb. Endorse. -> Brand Image -> Purchase Intention	0.101	2.105	0.018	Supported

Source: Processed Data from SmartPLS 4 (2025)

The mediation analysis revealed that Brand Image significantly mediates the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The indirect effect of Product Appearance on Purchase Intention via Brand Image was significant ($\beta = 0.237$, $p < 0.001$), which supports H₆. Likewise, the indirect effect of Celebrity Endorsement on Purchase Intention via Brand Image was also found to be significant ($\beta = 0.101$, $p < 0.05$), supporting H₇.

4.2. Discussion

The findings of this study provide strong empirical evidence for the dual role of product appearance and celebrity endorsement in influencing consumer purchase intention within the cosmetics industry. In line with H₁ and H₂, both variables directly enhance purchase intention. The significant influence of product appearance ($\beta=0.348$) affirms sensory marketing theory, where visual cues like attractive packaging serve as a cognitive shortcut for consumers to evaluate product quality and make purchasing decisions (Bloch, 1995). On the other hand, the significant impact of celebrity endorsement ($\beta=0.222$) aligns with Source Credibility Theory, which posits that consumers are more likely to adopt attitudes and behaviors recommended by sources they perceive as trustworthy and attractive (Ohanian, 1990).

However, the primary contribution of this research lies in demonstrating the mediating role of brand image (H₆ and H₇). The results indicate that a substantial portion of the influence from product appearance and celebrity endorsement on purchase intention is channeled through brand image. A superior product appearance ($\beta=0.612$ on brand image) not only captures immediate attention but also builds a long-term perception of the brand's quality and professionalism, which ultimately fosters trust and drives purchase intention (Aaker, 2012). The same occurs with celebrity endorsement, which effectively transfers positive associations (beauty, success) from the celebrity to the brand ($\beta=0.262$), strengthening the brand image and making it more desirable to consumers (McCracken, 1989). This implies that marketing managers should not view these two strategies merely as short-term sales tactics but as strategic investments in building brand equity.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This study concludes that product appearance and celebrity endorsement are critical antecedents of purchase intention for cosmetics consumers. Furthermore, brand image plays a crucial mediating role, explaining the mechanism through which these two marketing stimuli are translated into behavioral intent. An appealing product appearance and a credible celebrity endorsement effectively build a positive brand image, which in turn becomes a primary driver of consumer purchase intention. All hypotheses proposed in this research were supported, providing empirical backing for the conceptual model.

Theoretically, this research enriches the marketing literature by integrating three key constructs (product appearance, celebrity endorsement, and brand image) into a single predictive model of purchase intention. Practically, these findings offer strategic guidance for brand managers, especially in the cosmetics industry. Azarine and its competitors are advised to not only focus on visual appeal and endorser selection but also to actively monitor and manage how these strategies contribute to the formation of a strong and positive brand image. For future research, it is recommended to replicate this model with a larger and more diverse sample, and to consider other contextual variables such as product involvement, price, and the influence of online reviews for a more comprehensive understanding.

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The authors declare that generative AI or AI-assisted technologies were not used in any way to prepare, write, or complete this manuscript. The authors confirm that they are the sole authors of this article and take full responsibility for the content therein, as outlined in COPE recommendations.

Informed Consent

The authors declare that informed consent was not required as there were no human participants involved.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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