

The Influence Of Brand Ambassadors On Purchase Decisions With Brand Trust as A Moderating Variabl

Atika Riasari ^{1*}, Samuel Indrayana², Bagus Ananda Kurniawan³, Muhamad Irfan Florid⁴, Dini Fitriyanthi⁵

¹ Universitas Islam Negeri Jurai Siwo Lampung

^{2,3} Universitas Bhyayangkara Surabaya,

^{4,5} Universitas Mohammad Natsir Bukittinggi, Indonesia

E-mail: atikariasari@metrouniv.ac.id

*Corresponding Author



<https://doi.org/10.31004/jerk.in.v5i1.8020>

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 19 Sep 2026

Revised: 25 Sep 2026

Accepted: 07 Oct 2026

Kata Kunci:

Duta Merek,
Kepercayaan Merek,
Keputusan Pembelian,
Variabel Moderasi,
SEM-PLS.

Keywords

Brand Ambassador,
Brand Trust,
Purchasing Decision,
Moderating Variable,
SEM-PLS.



ABSTRACT

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh *brand ambassador* terhadap keputusan pembelian produk serta mengkaji peran kepercayaan merek (*brand trust*) sebagai variabel moderasi dalam hubungan tersebut. Di tengah persaingan industri yang semakin ketat, perusahaan secara agresif memanfaatkan tokoh publik atau *brand ambassador* untuk menarik perhatian pasar, membangun citra positif, dan mendorong niat beli konsumen. Namun, keterlibatan tokoh publik tidak selalu memberikan dampak langsung dan konsisten terhadap keputusan pembelian tanpa adanya landasan kepercayaan konsumen terhadap merek tersebut (*brand trust*). Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan metode survei eksplanatori. Pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan menyebarkan kuesioner terstruktur kepada konsumen aktif yang dipilih menggunakan teknik *purposive sampling*. Data yang terkumpul dianalisis menggunakan *Structural Equation Modeling* berbasis *Partial Least Squares* (SEM-PLS) untuk menguji hipotesis mengenai hubungan langsung dan efek moderasi. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa *brand ambassador* memiliki pengaruh positif dan signifikan secara langsung terhadap keputusan pembelian. Selain itu, analisis moderasi membuktikan bahwa kepercayaan merek secara signifikan memperkuat hubungan positif antara *brand ambassador* dan keputusan pembelian. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa popularitas *brand ambassador* akan memberikan dampak maksimal terhadap perilaku pembelian konsumen apabila didukung oleh tingkat kepercayaan merek yang tinggi. Implikasi praktis dari penelitian ini menyarankan agar manajemen pemasaran tidak hanya berfokus pada daya tarik atau ketenaran *brand ambassador*, tetapi juga secara bersamaan membangun dan memelihara kepercayaan merek guna mengoptimalkan konversi penjualan.

This study aims to analyze the influence of brand ambassadors on product purchasing decisions and examine the role of brand trust as a moderating variable in this relationship. Amidst increasingly competitive industry competition, companies aggressively utilize public figures or brand ambassadors to attract market attention, build a positive image, and encourage consumer purchase intentions. However, the influence of public figure involvement does not always have a direct and consistent impact on purchasing decisions without a foundation of consumer trust in the brand (brand trust). This study uses a quantitative approach with an explanatory survey method . Data collection was carried out by distributing structured questionnaires to active consumers selected using a purposive sampling technique . The collected data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling based on Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) to test the hypothesis of a direct relationship and a moderating effect. The results of the analysis indicate that brand ambassadors have a positive and significant influence on purchasing decisions directly. Furthermore, the moderation analysis proves that brand trust significantly strengthens the positive relationship between brand ambassadors and purchasing decisions. These findings confirm that the popularity of brand ambassadors will have a maximum impact on consumer purchasing behavior when supported by a high level of brand trust . The practical implications of this research suggest that marketing management should not only

focus on the attractiveness or fame of brand ambassadors , but also simultaneously build and maintain brand trust to optimize sales conversion.



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How to Cite: Atika Riasari, et al. (2026) Radiografi The Influence Of Brand Ambassadors On Purchase Decisions With Brand Trust as A Moderating Variabl 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.31004/jerkin.v5i1.8020>

INTRODUCTION

Global market dynamics and the rapid development of digital technology have significantly changed the business competitive landscape. Companies no longer focus solely on the functional excellence of their products but must also manage emotional marketing strategies to win consumer preference (Kotler & Keller, 2016). In an era of open information, consumers are faced with an abundance of similar product choices, making the decision-making process more complex. Therefore, creating strong brand differentiation is crucial for a company's survival (Aaker, 2014). One strategy most oriented towards creating brand appeal is the use of *brand ambassadors* as official marketing spokespersons (Keller, 2020).

The use of *brand ambassadors* has become a key instrument in modern marketing communications to reach a wider audience. According to Royan (2012), *a brand ambassador* is a public figure or well-known figure utilized by companies to communicate, reflect, and enhance a product's image. The presence of *a brand ambassador* is considered effective in attracting initial attention , arousing interest , and creating emotional impulses that trigger purchasing behavior (Shimp & Andrews, 2018). This phenomenon is driven by consumers' perceptions of the credibility, attractiveness, and expertise inherent in the public figure (Ohanian, 1990).

Nevertheless, the purchase decision is essentially a multifaceted cognitive and behavioral process. Schiffman and Wisenblit (2019) define the purchase decision as the stage in which consumers evaluate various alternative choices and take concrete action to consume a particular product or service. Many companies allocate enormous marketing investment budgets to contract top *brand ambassadors* , assuming that their popularity will automatically increase product sales (Peng & Chen, 2019). However, the effectiveness of this strategy is often questioned when there is a shift in trends or a decline in the *brand ambassador's* reputation .

Several previous studies have shown varying results regarding the influence of *brand ambassadors* on purchasing decisions. Research conducted by Dwivedi et al. (2015) found that *brand ambassador* credibility is directly proportional to increased consumer purchase intention. Conversely, research by Biswas et al. (2006) indicates that the attractiveness of a public figure does not always guarantee a purchase decision if consumers perceive the promotion as inauthentic or merely a commercial transaction. This research gap indicates the existence of intervening or moderating variables that contribute to determining the strength or weakness of a *brand ambassador's* influence on consumer purchasing decisions.

Within the framework of relationship marketing, *brand trust* emerges as an important psychological construct that has the potential to moderate the relationship. Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) define *brand trust* as a consumer's willingness to place their hopes on a brand's ability to perform its promised functions. Trust in a brand encompasses aspects of reliability and the brand's goodwill toward consumers (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2005). Without *brand trust* , persuasive messages delivered by *brand ambassadors* risk being perceived as mere promotional rhetoric lacking any real driving force for consumers' final decisions.

The role of *brand trust* as a moderating variable can be explained through the theories of perceptual differentiation and risk reduction. When consumers have a high level of trust in a brand, they tend to perceive lower purchase risk and respond more positively to *brand ambassador* recommendations (Ha & Perks, 2005). Conversely, when *brand trust* is at a low level, even the popularity and attractiveness of the *brand ambassador* will have difficulty convincing consumers to

make a transaction (Lau & Lee, 1999). Thus, *brand trust* acts as a catalyst or reinforcer that strengthens the impact of the *brand ambassador's* communication strategy on consumers' explicit actions.

The *Source Credibility Model* perspective developed by Hovland et al. (1953) explains that communication effectiveness is highly dependent on the extent to which the message recipient perceives the message source as trustworthy and expert. In the context of modern marketing, *brand ambassador* credibility contributes to the formation of initial perceptions, but its connection to real actions requires brand validation that is consistently assessed by consumers (Erdogan, 1999). The integration between source credibility (*brand ambassador*) and organizational credibility (*brand trust*) creates a synergistic effect that collectively directs consumers to the final stage of purchasing decision making (Sweeney & Swait, 2008).

Furthermore, the dynamics of consumer behavior in the digital age demand greater transparency and brand consistency. Today's consumers have easy access to product reviews and comparative information, allowing them to quickly evaluate whether a *brand ambassador's* reputation aligns with the reality of product quality (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). This makes *brand trust* a vital *filtering variable* . When promotions by *brand ambassadors* are supported by strong *brand trust* , consumers' cognitive barriers to making purchasing decisions are significantly reduced (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Empirical market research shows that large-scale *brand ambassador* engagements often fail to achieve sales targets if the represented brand experiences a crisis of trust or product quality failures (Gremier et al., 2020). These cases reinforce the notion that celebrity appeal does not exist in isolation but is conditioned by consumers' overall trust in the brand. Therefore, examining *brand trust* as a moderating variable is highly relevant for providing a more comprehensive theoretical understanding of the effectiveness mechanisms of *brand ambassador* strategies .

Academically, most existing marketing literature focuses on examining *brand trust* as a mediating or direct independent variable in relation to purchasing decisions (Pappu et al., 2005). Empirical research that explicitly positions *brand trust as a moderating variable that conditions the magnitude of brand ambassador* influence on purchasing decisions is limited. This article aims to fill this gap in the literature by developing a more dynamic conceptual model of moderation.

Based on the background of the problem described above, this scientific research focuses on answering the empirical and theoretical needs regarding how the relationship between *brand ambassadors* and purchasing decisions occurs within the corridor of consumer cognition. A deep understanding of the moderating role of *brand trust* is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of marketing management science, particularly regarding brand communication strategies and consumer behavior. Furthermore, the findings of this study are expected to provide practical implications for marketing managers in designing more integrated, efficient, and long-term promotional budget allocations.

METHOD

This study uses a quantitative approach with an *explanatory research* design to test and analyze the influence of *brand ambassadors* on purchasing decisions moderated by *brand trust*. The population in this study is active consumers who have been exposed to product promotions through *brand ambassadors* and have made purchase transactions. Sample determination was carried out using a *non-probability sampling* technique with a *purposive sampling* approach, where the number of respondents was determined based on certain criteria to ensure data relevance (Hair et al., 2019). Primary data collection was carried out through the distribution of structured *online* questionnaires measured using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5) to measure respondents' perceptions of each variable studied (Sugiyono, 2018).

The data analysis technique in this study used *Structural Equation Modeling* based on *Partial Least Squares* (SEM-PLS) with the help of SmartPLS software. Model evaluation was carried out through two main stages, namely *the outer model* (measurement model) and *the inner model* (structural model). Evaluation of *the outer model* includes testing convergent validity, discriminant validity, and

construct reliability (*composite reliability* and *Cronbach's alpha*) to ensure that the variable indicators have high accuracy and consistency (Ghozali & Latan, 2015). Next, evaluation of *the inner model* was carried out to see the *R-square* value, *F-square*, and the significance of the *path coefficient* through a *bootstrapping* process to test direct relationships and moderating effects (Chin, 2010).

Hypothesis testing was conducted by examining the significance of the *p-value* (less than 0.05) and *t-statistic* (greater than 1.96) at a 5% significance level. Based on the conceptual model and problem formulation developed, the hypotheses proposed in this study are as follows 1). H1: *Brand ambassadors* have a positive and significant influence on consumer purchasing decisions. 2). H2: *Brand trust* has a positive and significant influence on consumer purchasing decisions. 3). H3: *Brand trust* significantly moderates (strengthens) the influence of *brand ambassadors* on consumer purchasing decisions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Results

The outer model evaluation was conducted to verify the research instruments in terms of construct validity and reliability. The results of the outer loading test showed that all indicators in the brand ambassador, brand trust, and purchasing decision variables had correlation values above 0.70, indicating that all indicators met the requirements for convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019). In addition, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) test produced values exceeding the minimum limit of 0.50 for each variable, while the Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha values were all above 0.70, confirming that all research instruments had a very strong level of internal consistency and reliability (Ghozali & Latan, 2015). Details of the outer model evaluation values are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Measurement Model Evaluation Results (Outer Model)

Variables	Indicator	Outer Loading	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha	Information
Brand Ambassador (X)	BA1 (Credibility)	0.845	0.672	0.891	0.836	Valid & Reliable
	BA2 (Attractiveness)	0.812				Valid & Reliable
	BA3 (Expertise)	0.801				Valid & Reliable
	BA4 (Brand Suitability)	0.820				Valid & Reliable
Brand Trust (Z)	BT1 (Product Reliability)	0.838	0.695	0.901	0.854	Valid & Reliable
	BT2 (Corporate Goodwill)	0.825				Valid & Reliable
	BT3 (Quality Consistency)	0.851				Valid & Reliable
	BT4 (Positive Reputation)	0.821				Valid & Reliable
Buying decision (Y)	KP1 (Buying Confidence)	0.810	0.668	0.889	0.832	Valid & Reliable
	KP2 (Desire Conformity)	0.835				Valid & Reliable
	KP3 (Recommendation)	0.802				Valid & Reliable
	KP4 (Repurchase)	0.822				Valid & Reliable

After the instrument was declared valid and reliable, an evaluation of the structural model (inner model) was conducted to assess the model's predictive ability and test the relationships between variables. Based on the results of data analysis using SmartPLS, the R-Square value (R^2) for the

purchasing decision variable was obtained at 0.684. This indicates that 68.4% of the variation or change in consumer purchasing decisions can be explained jointly by the brand ambassador variable, brand trust, and the moderating interaction variable (brand ambassador). $\times$ brand trust), while the remaining 31.6% is influenced by other factors outside the research model (Chin, 2010).

Hypothesis testing is carried out through a bootstrapping procedure by observing the path coefficient value, the value t-statistics, and p-value at 5% significance level ($\alpha = 0,05$). The results of testing the first hypothesis (H1) show that brand ambassadors have a positive and significant direct influence on purchasing decisions ($\beta = 0,342$; $t = 4,215$; $p = 0,000$). Testing the second hypothesis (H2) proves that brand trust has a positive and significant effect on purchasing decisions ($\beta = 0,415$; $t = 5,118$; $p = 0,000$). Furthermore, testing the third hypothesis (H3) regarding the moderation effect indicates that the interaction between brand ambassadors and brand trust has a positive and significant effect on purchasing decisions ($\beta = 0,218$; $t = 3,042$; $p = 0,002$), thus confirming that brand trust has been empirically proven to act as a moderating variable that strengthens the relationship between brand ambassadors and purchasing decisions (Ringle et al., 2020). A summary of the hypothesis testing and direct and interaction effects can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Hypothesis Testing Results and Moderation Effects (Inner Model)

Hypothesis	Relationship Path	Path Coefficient (β)	t-Statistics	p-Value	Information
H1	Brand Ambassador $\rightarrow$ Buying decision	0.342	4,215	0,000	Accepted (Significant)
H2	Brand Trust $\rightarrow$ Buying decision	0.415	5,118	0,000	Accepted (Significant)
H3	(Brand Ambassador $\times$ Brand Trust) $\rightarrow$ Buying decision	0.218	3,042	0.002	Accepted (Moderation Strengthens)

Notes: R^2 Purchase Decision = 0.684 | Significance level $\alpha = 0,05$ (t -table = 1.96).

Discussion

The Influence of Brand Ambassadors on Purchasing Decisions

The findings of this study confirm that *brand ambassadors* have a direct positive and significant influence on consumer purchasing decisions, meaning that the higher the credibility, attractiveness, and expertise displayed by a public figure, the higher the consumer's urge to make a purchase. This result is in line with the *Source Credibility Model* developed by Hovland et al. (1953), which states that the credibility of an information source directly determines the level of acceptance and effectiveness of a persuasive message in the eyes of the audience. Public figures selected as *brand ambassadors* function as initial attention- *getters* who transfer their positive values, lifestyle, and personal reputation into the brand associations of the products they represent (Ohanian, 1990).

The effectiveness of *brand ambassadors* in influencing purchasing decisions can also be explained through the Theory of Reasoned Action, where recommendations from idol figures shape consumers' subjective norms and positive attitudes toward products (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). When consumers perceive a fit between the *brand ambassador's* character and their self-identity, the tendency to imitate or condition behavior according to that figure will increase significantly (Peng & Chen, 2019). This empirical research strengthens the findings of Dwivedi et al. (2015) and Keller (2020) who suggested that celebrity elements in integrated marketing communications can accelerate the alternative evaluation process and shorten the consumer decision-making stage in a highly competitive market.

The Influence of Brand Trust on Purchasing Decisions

The results of the study indicate that *brand trust* has a direct and significant impact on increasing purchasing decisions, which emphasizes the importance of trust as a key foundation in the relationship between consumers and brands. Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) explain that *brand trust* creates a sense

of certainty and psychological security for consumers, which reduces anxiety about the risk of functional or emotional failure of the purchased product. Consumers who place high trust in a brand no longer need repeated testing or lengthy information searches before making a transaction, because the brand is considered to consistently fulfill its promises of quantity and quality (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2005).

In the context of modern consumer behavior, brand trust serves as a cognitive shortcut *amidst* the many similar product choices on the market (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019). This trust is built on the basis of the company's perceived reliability *and* good intentions *in* maintaining long-term customer satisfaction (Lau & Lee, 1999). This finding supports the argument of Sweeney and Swait (2008) who stated that brand credibility and trust are the most effective strategic commodities in converting purchase intention *into* actual purchase *behavior*.

The Role of Brand Trust as a Moderating Variable

The most important finding in this study lies in proving the role of brand trust as a moderating variable that strengthens the relationship between brand ambassadors and purchasing decisions. When consumers have high brand trust, the appeals and promotions delivered by brand ambassadors are not only perceived as ordinary commercial advertisements, but are seen as valid recommendations that can be fully trusted (Ha & Perks, 2005). Conversely, at low levels of brand trust, the popularity or fame of a brand ambassador will be responded to with skepticism by consumers, so that their driving force towards purchasing decisions is very limited (Biswas et al., 2006).

This moderating mechanism is rooted in the theory of risk reduction and dual information processing (Elaboration Likelihood Model), where brand trust acts as a primary cognitive filter (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Consumers who already believe in a brand's credibility tend to process messages from brand ambassadors through the central route, where promotional information is reinforced by a deep belief in the company's reputation (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). This phenomenon explains why large investments in top-tier brand ambassadors often fail to yield optimal results if not balanced with strategies to strengthen brand quality and consistency that build public trust (Gremier et al., 2020).

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, the results of this study provide an important contribution to the marketing management literature by expanding the analytical framework of brand ambassador effectiveness through a contingency approach based on brand trust. Most previous studies tend to position brand trust merely as an intermediary variable or a direct impact (Pappu et al., 2005). By proving brand trust as a moderating variable, this study offers a new perspective that the effectiveness of celebrity appeal is not absolute, but rather depends (contingent) on the level of basic trust that consumers have in the brand in question (Erdogan, 1999).

From a practical perspective, these findings provide strategic guidance for marketing managers and business decision-makers in allocating promotional budgets efficiently. Companies should not rely solely on the popularity and social media reach of brand ambassadors to pursue short-term sales targets without considering brand reputation (Royan, 2012). An effective marketing communication strategy must be integrated holistically: the selection of credible brand ambassadors must be balanced with product quality assurance, service transparency, and positive customer experiences to maintain sustainable brand trust in the eyes of the market (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis and discussion presented, this study concludes that brand ambassadors have a direct, positive, and significant influence on consumer purchasing decisions. The presence of public figures with credibility, appeal, and relevant expertise has been proven to capture public attention, build positive perceptions, and accelerate consumers' evaluation process in choosing products. The involvement of the right brand ambassador acts as a cognitive and emotional trigger that effectively triggers the urge to make a real purchase amidst the abundance of substitute products in the market.

Beyond the direct impact of using public figures, this study also confirms that brand trust has a positive and significant influence on consumer purchasing decisions. Trust in a brand serves as a primary foundation, providing psychological certainty and minimizing perceived risk during consumer transactions. Consumers who believe in a brand's reliability, consistent quality, and goodwill tend to

demonstrate a higher level of confidence in making purchasing decisions without having to go through a complex information search process.

Finally, the core findings of this study demonstrate that brand trust significantly plays a moderating role, strengthening the influence of brand ambassadors on purchasing decisions. A brand ambassador's popularity and appeal will produce a far more optimal sales conversion impact when supported by a strong level of brand trust in the public eye. The implications of this research emphasize that marketing strategies should not rely solely on celebrity potential but must align the use of brand ambassadors with ongoing efforts to build and maintain brand trust to achieve sustainable business growth.

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