

Brand Ambassador and Purchase Decisions on Samsung Smartphone among Generation Z

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to explore the influence of brand ambassadors on purchase decisions for Samsung smartphones among Generation Z consumers in Indonesia, focusing on brand awareness and brand image as mediating variables. A quantitative approach was employed, targeting consumers in the Jabodetabek area. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with SmartPLS. The study examines the direct and indirect effects of brand ambassadors on purchase decisions through brand awareness and brand image. The results reveal that BTS, as Samsung's brand ambassador, significantly impacts purchase decisions by enhancing brand awareness and strengthening brand image. These findings highlight the ability of BTS to resonate with Gen Z, capturing their attention and building emotional connections with the Samsung brand. This study underscores the importance of aligning brand ambassadors with the target audience's values, providing actionable insights for engaging Gen Z and driving purchase decisions.

Keywords: *Brand ambassador; Brand awareness; Brand image; Purchase Decision*

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi pengaruh brand ambassador terhadap keputusan pembelian smartphone Samsung di kalangan konsumen Generasi Z di Indonesia, dengan fokus pada kesadaran merek dan citra merek sebagai variabel mediasi. Pendekatan kuantitatif digunakan dalam penelitian ini, dengan target konsumen di wilayah Jabodetabek. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner terstruktur dan dianalisis menggunakan Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) dengan SmartPLS. Studi ini menguji pengaruh langsung dan tidak langsung brand ambassador terhadap keputusan pembelian melalui kesadaran merek dan citra merek. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa BTS, sebagai brand ambassador Samsung, secara signifikan memengaruhi keputusan pembelian dengan meningkatkan kesadaran merek dan memperkuat citra merek. Temuan ini menyoroti kemampuan BTS untuk menarik perhatian Generasi Z dan membangun koneksi emosional dengan merek Samsung. Penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya menyelaraskan brand ambassador dengan nilai-nilai audiens target, memberikan wawasan praktis untuk melibatkan Generasi Z dan mendorong keputusan pembelian.

Kata Kunci: *Brand ambassador; Brand awareness; Brand image; Purchase Decision*

INTRODUCTION

Smartphones have become an essential part of daily life in the digital era, especially for younger generations such as Gen Z. Since the introduction of the first smartphone in 1992, technological advancements have transformed these devices into multifunctional tools supporting various activities, from communication to online transactions. For Gen Z, who are digital natives, smartphones are not only tools but also integral to their lifestyle, enabling them to connect, consume content, and express themselves online. In Indonesia, the role of smartphones has become increasingly crucial, with internet penetration reaching 212.9 million users by early 2023 (Kompas.com, 2023). This growth aligns with the significant reliance of Gen Z on digital technology, particularly social media and e-commerce platforms. The global smartphone industry is marked by intense competition among brands such as Samsung, Apple, Xiaomi, OPPO, and Vivo. According to Counterpoint Research (2024), Samsung led the global market share with 20% in the first quarter of 2024. However, in Indonesia, Samsung faces challenges, with its market share declining from 24% in 2023 to 17.3% in 2024, trailing behind OPPO, which leads with 19.9% (IDC, 2024). To address this, Samsung has implemented various marketing strategies, including collaborations with globally recognized figures such as the South Korean boyband BTS. This strategy aims to enhance brand awareness and foster an emotional connection with younger consumers, particularly Gen Z, who are highly influenced by pop culture and social media trends. Research suggests that celebrity endorsements can significantly impact consumer behavior by strengthening brand image, increasing trust, and influencing purchase decisions (Knoll & Matthes, 2017). Given BTS's global influence and strong engagement with Gen Z, Samsung leverages this partnership to reinforce its brand perception and stimulate consumer interest.

However, despite its global success, the effectiveness of this strategy, its effectiveness in local markets like Indonesia remains unclear. Samsung's declining market share in Indonesia, dropping from 24% in 2023 to 17.3% in 2024 (IDC, 2024), indicates that additional factors such as pricing, product features, and local consumer preferences may also play a crucial role in shaping purchase decisions. This raises an important question regarding the extent to which brand ambassadors, brand awareness, and brand image influence the purchase decisions of Gen Z consumers in Indonesia. This study seeks to analyze the influence of brand ambassadors on the purchase decisions of Samsung products through brand awareness and brand image as intervening variables, with a specific focus on Gen Z in the Greater Jakarta (Jabodetabek) area. This region was selected due to its high smartphone penetration and well-developed telecommunications infrastructure. By addressing these objectives, the study aims to contribute to academic literature and provide practical insights for companies in tailoring their marketing strategies to meet the preferences and behaviors of Gen Z in local markets.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Purchase Decision and S-O-R Theory

The purchase decision is the process consumers go through when selecting a brand or product to fulfill their needs (Kotler & Armstrong, 2021). It involves identifying a problem, gathering information, evaluating alternatives, making a purchase, and reflecting on the decision afterward. Factors such as brand trust, perceived value, and emotional appeal significantly influence this process. In this research, purchase decisions represent how consumers respond to Samsung's promotional efforts involving BTS as brand ambassadors.

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Theory, introduced by Mehrabian and Russel in 1974, originates from environmental psychology. According to Armawan et al. (2022), stimuli or cues from the environment can influence individuals' cognitive or emotional responses, which in turn affect consumer behavior. The main assumption of this theory is that behavioral changes occur as a response to specific stimuli received by individuals. Consumers rely heavily on external stimuli, such as advertisements or promotions, which communicate with the organism (perceptions) and lead to a response.

The S-O-R theory consists of three main components:

Stimulus (S): External stimuli that influence individuals. In this research, stimuli include promotions or advertisements conducted by brand ambassadors, often involving celebrities or influencers. These stimuli aim to evoke consumer interest and enhance awareness of specific products or brands (Liu et al., 2019). In this study, Samsung employed BTS as a brand ambassador to spark consumer interest in their smartphones.

Organism (O): Internal processes that occur when an individual receives a stimulus. These processes include cognitive and emotional variables, such as perceptions and sentiments toward a brand. In this study,

the organism is represented by two main variables: brand awareness and brand image. Brand awareness evaluates how well consumers identify and recall Samsung, while brand image reflects consumers' perceptions of the company's reputation, quality, and benefits (Kotler & Armstrong, 2021). Organism explains how consumers process the information received from stimuli, such as advertisements or promotions by brand ambassadors, ultimately shaping attitudes or perceptions toward the advertised product.

Response (R): Behavioral reactions generated after internal processes within the organism. In this research, the response refers to purchase decisions. After being exposed to stimuli from the brand ambassador and undergoing internal processes involving brand awareness and brand image, consumers decide whether or not to purchase the product. According to Koay et al. (2020), the final consumer response reflects an evaluation of perceptions formed through external stimuli and internal processes.

This study applies the S-O-R theory to understand how Samsung's use of brand ambassadors influences consumers. The brand ambassador acts as an external stimulus, affecting consumers' internal perceptions (brand awareness and brand image), which subsequently lead to purchase decisions (Vidyanata, 2022). Prior studies have demonstrated that brand ambassadors play a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and purchasing behavior. For instance, research by Koay et al. (2020) found that celebrity endorsements significantly enhance brand awareness and consumer trust, leading to higher purchase intentions. Similarly, Liu et al. (2019) highlighted that endorsements from well-known figures create positive associations with a brand, reinforcing brand image and emotional connections with consumers.

In the context of Samsung's collaboration with BTS, several studies have examined the impact of K-pop endorsements on consumer behavior. A study by Lee & Jeong (2023) indicated that endorsements by global celebrities, especially those with a strong social media presence, influence Gen Z's brand perception and decision-making. This aligns with findings by Bismo, et al (2024), who suggested that K-pop idols serve as effective marketing tools for international brands, particularly in Southeast Asian markets, where fan loyalty translates into higher consumer engagement and purchasing power. The study highlights how marketing stimuli, such as advertisements or endorsements, can trigger internal consumer processes, influencing their behavior and decision to purchase a specific product. Thus, the S-O-R theory serves as a fundamental framework for explaining how external stimuli (stimulus) are processed by consumers (organism) and affect their decisions (response) to purchase the advertised product (Armawan et al., 2022)

Brand Awareness

Brand awareness refers to the extent to which consumers can recognize or recall a brand as part of a particular product category (Aaker, 2020). It plays a fundamental role in shaping purchase decisions, as consumers tend to prefer brands they are familiar with, reducing the perceived risk of purchasing (Hendi et al., 2022). Brand awareness consists of two levels: 1) Unaided Recall – when consumers can spontaneously recall a brand without any prompts, 2) Brand Recognition – when consumers identify a brand through visual or auditory cues such as logos, slogans, or celebrity endorsements (Kotler & Keller, 2022).

A strong brand awareness ensures that a brand remains top-of-mind during consumer decision-making. In this study, brand awareness examines how well consumers recognize and recall Samsung, particularly through marketing promotions involving BTS. By leveraging BTS's global appeal, Samsung aims to strengthen brand familiarity and increase its competitive presence in the market.

Brand Image

Brand image is the perception consumers hold about a brand based on their experiences, interactions, and marketing communications (Kotler & Armstrong, 2021). It encompasses strong, favorable, and unique associations that differentiate the brand from competitors (Caputo, 2021). Key attributes of brand image include 1) Strength – How well the brand is established in consumers' minds, 2) Favorability – The extent to which consumers perceive the brand positively, 3) Uniqueness – How distinct the brand is compared to competitors (Gandari & Seminari, 2024).

A well-established brand image encourages higher consumer confidence and preference, leading to increased purchase likelihood (Hendi et al., 2022). Samsung benefits from BTS's association by projecting a youthful, trendy, and innovative brand personality, reinforcing positive consumer perceptions.

Brand Ambassador

A brand ambassador is an individual chosen by a company to represent and promote its brand, products, or services to consumers. According to Barnes & Lea-greenwood (2018), brand ambassadors play a significant role in building emotional connections between consumers and brands, increasing brand awareness, and

influencing purchase decisions. The effectiveness of a brand ambassador depends on: 1) Credibility – Their expertise and authenticity in endorsing the brand, 2) Attractiveness – Their appeal and relatability to the target audience, 3) Congruence – The alignment between the ambassador's image and the brand's identity (Kotler & Keller, 2022).

Samsung collaborates with BTS as its brand ambassadors to strengthen its positioning among Gen Z and millennial consumers. BTS's global influence fosters stronger consumer connections, enhances Samsung's brand appeal, and boosts brand credibility in competitive markets.

Hypothesis Development

A brand ambassador is a well-known individual or group representing a brand, drawing consumer attention to its products (Kotler & Keller, 2022). Kumbara et al. (2023) found that brand ambassadors significantly enhance brand awareness by helping consumers recognize and recall the brand. Santosa & Krisnawan (2023) also confirm that brand ambassadors are effective in boosting brand awareness and shaping positive perceptions. Ambassadors expand brand reach, particularly if they are relevant and credible to the target audience (Hendi et al., 2022). In conclusion, brand ambassadors play a vital role in strengthening the relationship between the brand and consumers, encouraging them to become more familiar with and consider the brand in their purchasing decisions.

H₁: Brand ambassadors have an influence on brand awareness.

Brand image refers to consumers' perceptions of a brand, shaped by interactions and experiences (Caputo, 2021). Kumbara et al. (2023) showed that brand ambassadors play an essential role in forming brand image. If an ambassador's personality aligns with the brand's values, consumers associate the brand with a positive reputation, reinforcing its image. Brand ambassador not only affects brand awareness but also shapes positive consumer perceptions (Santosa & Krisnawan, 2023). The consistency and relevance of the ambassador's message further strengthen brand image and trust (Hendi et al., 2022). In conclusion, brand ambassadors significantly contribute to building a strong brand image, fostering consumer trust and loyalty.

H₂: Brand ambassadors have an influence on brand image.

Purchase decisions are influenced by various factors, including brand ambassadors (Kotler & Armstrong, 2021). Brand ambassadors significantly impact purchase decisions, especially if they are highly reputable and relevant to the product (Febrian et al., 2022). Consumers are more likely to trust products promoted by credible ambassadors, increasing their likelihood of purchase. Consumers tend to choose products endorsed by well-known ambassadors due to the positive image and emotional connection they create (Hendi et al., 2022). Brand ambassadors influence purchase decisions by enhancing emotional involvement and connection (Dewi et al., 2020). In conclusion, brand ambassadors significantly affect purchase decisions through their reputation, credibility, and appeal.

H₃: Brand ambassadors have an influence on purchase decisions.

Brand awareness indicates how well consumers recognize a brand and is crucial in influencing purchase decisions (Aaker, 2019). Hendi et al. (2022) concluded that higher brand awareness encourages purchases because it builds trust and confidence in product quality. Brand awareness also helps consumers differentiate brands, facilitating product selection. Dewi et al. (2020) supported this, stating that consumers are more comfortable purchasing from brands they recognize. Gandari & Seminari (2024) added that brand awareness enhances customer loyalty, increasing the likelihood of repeat purchases. In conclusion, the higher the brand awareness, the greater its influence on purchase decisions.

H₄: Brand awareness has an influence on purchase decisions.

A positive brand image increases product appeal and impacts consumer purchase decisions (Caputo, 2021). Hendi et al. (2022) found that a strong brand image increases customer preference for a product, especially if the brand is associated with values like innovation, quality, and trust. A positive image creates confidence, making consumers more likely to believe that the product will meet their expectations. Gandari & Seminari (2024) discovered that a strong brand image gives a competitive edge, as consumers prefer products from brands with a good image over competitors. Dewi et al. (2020) emphasized that a positive brand image influences both initial and repeat purchases due to consumer trust. In conclusion, a strong brand image significantly impacts purchase decisions by attracting consumers and fostering loyalty.

H₅: Brand image has an influence on purchase decisions.

Brand ambassadors can influence purchase decisions by shaping a positive brand image (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2019). Hendi et al. (2022) concluded that brand ambassadors are crucial in creating and reinforcing brand images, which ultimately affect purchase decisions. When an ambassador aligns with the

brand's values, a more positive brand image forms in consumers' minds, making them more likely to choose that product. Kala et al. (2022) added that the impact of brand ambassadors on purchase decisions is stronger when they successfully shape a positive brand image, which mediates the relationship between the ambassador and purchase decisions. Kumbara et al. (2023) supported this, stating that effective ambassadors create positive brand associations, influencing purchase decisions. In conclusion, brand ambassadors help form positive brand perceptions, enhancing consumer loyalty and purchase decisions.

H₆: Brand ambassadors influence purchase decisions through brand image as an intervening variable.

Brand ambassadors effectively enhance brand awareness, which ultimately influences purchase decisions (Aaker, 2019). Hendi et al. (2022) found that the presence of a well-known brand ambassador helps a brand gain more consumer attention, facilitates brand recognition, and increases the likelihood of consumers considering the product during purchase. High brand awareness is a critical first step in influencing consumer choice and purchase. Santosa (2023) emphasized the ambassador's role in creating strong brand awareness, ensuring the brand is remembered during purchase decisions. Febrian et al. (2024) added that increased brand awareness, created by brand ambassadors, significantly affects purchase decisions, as consumers are more likely to choose familiar products. In conclusion, brand ambassadors play a crucial role in building strong brand awareness, which ultimately affects consumer choice and purchase decisions.

H₇: Brand ambassadors influence purchase decisions through brand awareness as an intervening variable.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a quantitative research approach with a design combining descriptive and causal techniques. Quantitative research was chosen to numerically test the relationships between variables, providing objective insights into how brand ambassadors influence purchase decisions through brand awareness and brand image. Descriptive techniques were utilized to detail the sample characteristics, while causal techniques aimed to identify cause-and-effect relationships among the variables. The research period spanned four months, encompassing data collection and analysis phases. Data sources consisted of primary data, collected through structured questionnaires distributed via online platforms, ensuring broader accessibility to respondents. The questionnaires included demographic questions and items measured using a 5-point Likert scale to capture perceptions of the brand ambassador (BTS), brand awareness, brand image, and purchase decisions. A total of 178 respondents participated in the survey. However, 55 responses did not meet the inclusion criteria. After filtering the data, 123 valid responses were deemed suitable for further processing and analysis.

The population targeted all Samsung smartphone users in the Greater Jakarta area (Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, Bekasi) with a high level of technology adoption. The sample was determined using purposive sampling, focusing on individuals experienced in using Samsung products, and aware of Samsung's BTS marketing campaigns. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares (PLS) with SmartPLS software. PLS was selected due to its flexibility in handling non-normal data distributions and small sample sizes, making it ideal for this study.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics			
Profile		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Man	77	62,60%
	Woman	46	37,40%
Age	18 - 20	25	20,33%
	20 - 25	98	79,67%
Occupation	Student	83	67,47%
	Employees	25	20,33%
	Entrepreneurs	15	12,20%
Budget for Buying Smartphone	< 2 mio	12	9,76%
	2 - 4 mio	25	20,33%
	4 - 6 mio	43	34,95%
	6 - 8 mio	16	13,01%

	> 8 mio	27	21,95%
Domicile	Jakarta	26	21,14%
	Bogor	25	20,32%
	Depok	12	9,76%
	Tangerang	44	35,77%
	Bekasi	16	13,01%
The Samsung Series that is used	Galaxy	21	17,07%
	Series S	39	31,71%
	Series A	47	38,21%
	Others	16	13,01%

Source: Processed survey data from respondents, 2024

The respondent profile reveals several dominant characteristics that shape the overall analysis. Based on table 1, the majority of respondents are male (62.60%), aged between 20–25 years (79.67%), indicating a predominantly young and male demographic. Most respondents are students (67.47%), highlighting that the primary target group for this study consists of younger individuals in education, likely to be technology-savvy and highly engaged with digital trends. In terms of smartphone budgets, the largest segment allocates between 4–6 million IDR (34.95%), followed by those spending more than 8 million IDR (21.95%), suggesting that respondents tend to invest in mid-range to high-end smartphones. Regarding domicile, the highest concentration is in Tangerang (35.77%), followed by Jakarta (21.14%), indicating that the sample is more distributed across suburban areas within the Jabodetabek region. When it comes to the Samsung series, Series A is the most used (38.21%), followed by Series S (31.71%), showing a preference for affordable yet feature-rich devices among respondents. These findings emphasize that the respondents are young, urban, and inclined towards mid-to-premium smartphones, with a strong interest in Samsung's affordable and flagship offerings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data collected from 123 respondents, the analysis was conducted to evaluate the proposed research model. The process began with the outer model assessment to ensure the validity and reliability of the measurement model, followed by the inner model assessment to examine the structural relationships between variables. Finally, hypothesis testing was performed to determine the significance and strength of the relationships between the constructs. The following section presents the results of these analyses in detail.

Table 2. Validity and Reliability

Variable	Measurement Item	Cross Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE
Brand Ambassador	BA1 The BTS brand ambassador clearly supports and represents Samsung's products well.	0,878	0,934	0,792
	BA2 The image or characteristics of the BTS brand ambassador align with the values upheld by the Samsung brand.	0,913		
	BA3 I trust the information provided by the BTS brand ambassador about Samsung's products.	0,908		
	BA4 The BTS brand ambassador captures my attention through their personality and lifestyle.	0,904		
	BA5 The BTS brand ambassador has a strong influence on my decision to purchase this Samsung smartphone.	0,844		
Brand Awareness	BW1 When I think of smartphones, Samsung is the first brand that comes to mind.	0,686	0,731	0,556
	BW2 I can recall the Samsung brand without assistance after thinking about similar products.	0,835		
	BW3 I can easily recognize the Samsung smartphone brand when I see its logo, colors, or advertisements.	0,74		

Brand Image	BW4	I have heard of or known about the Samsung smartphone brand before.	0,713		
	BI1	I often associate the Samsung smartphone brand with high-quality products.	0,826		
	BI2	I believe that the Samsung smartphone brand provides greater value compared to other smartphone brands.	0,848	0,789	0,703
	BI3	The Samsung smartphone brand has unique qualities that differentiate it from its competitors.	0,842		
Purchase Decisions	KP1	I felt that my needs or issues were clear before deciding to purchase this Samsung smartphone.	0,73		
	KP2	I found it easy to gather information about Samsung smartphones from various sources before deciding to buy.	0,817		
	KP3	I compared different smartphone brands before deciding to purchase a Samsung smartphone.	0,649	0,802	0,562
	KP4	I am confident that this Samsung smartphone is the right choice compared to other products.	0,752		
	KP5	I am satisfied with my decision after purchasing this Samsung smartphone and feel that it meets my expectations.	0,789		

Source: Processed data using SmartPLS software, 2024

Based on table 2, it can be concluded that all measurement items for each variable are valid and reliable. Validity was tested using cross-loading values, where a measurement item is considered valid if its cross-loading exceeds the threshold of 0.6. The results show that all items meet this criterion, indicating that they accurately represent their respective variables. Reliability was assessed through Cronbach's Alpha and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Cronbach's Alpha values for all variables exceed the ideal threshold of 0.70, with Brand Ambassador at 0.934, Brand Awareness at 0.731, Brand Image at 0.789, and Purchase Decisions at 0.802, demonstrating strong internal consistency. Furthermore, AVE values for all variables are above 0.5, with Brand Ambassador at 0.792, Brand Awareness at 0.556, Brand Image at 0.703, and Purchase Decisions at 0.562, confirming sufficient convergent validity. In conclusion, all constructs exhibit high levels of reliability and convergent validity, making them suitable for use in the study.

Table 3 Goodness of Fit

	R SQUARE
BRAND AWARENESS	0.244
BRAND IMAGE	0.260
PURCHASE DECISION	0.662
Average of R SQUARE	0.389

Source: Processed data using SmartPLS software, 2024

Table 3 demonstrate the relationships between the latent variables and the strength of the structural model. The R Square (R^2) values indicate the proportion of variance explained by the independent variables. For Brand Awareness, an R^2 of 0.244 suggests that 24.4% of its variance is influenced by the Brand Ambassador variable, reflecting a moderate explanatory power. Similarly, for Brand Image, an R^2 of 0.260 indicates that 26% of its variance is explained by the Brand Ambassador. This shows that Brand Ambassador moderately impacts the perception and recall of the Samsung brand. The most substantial relationship is seen in the Purchase Decision variable, with an R^2 of 0.662, indicating that 66.2% of the variance in Purchase Decision is explained collectively by Brand Awareness and Brand Image. This highlights the significant role of these mediating variables in shaping consumer behavior, particularly among Generation Z. The Goodness of Fit (GoF) value, calculated using the AVE mean of 0.653 and R^2 mean of 0.389, results in a GoF score of 0.504. According to established benchmarks, this represents a strong fit, confirming that the model aligns well with the data and effectively explains the relationships between variables. This strong GoF value validates the robustness of the proposed theoretical model, emphasizing the importance of Brand Ambassador in enhancing Brand Awareness and Brand Image, which in turn significantly influence Purchase Decision. These findings

support the conclusion that both rational and emotional factors contribute to shaping consumer decisions, with Brand Awareness and Brand Image serving as critical mediators.

Based on table 4, several conclusions can be drawn regarding the relationships between Brand Ambassador, Brand Awareness, Brand Image, and Purchase Decision.

H1: Brand Ambassador → Brand Awareness

The results support H1 with a significant relationship (T-statistic = 6.656, $p = 0.000$). This finding aligns with studies by Kumbara et al. (2023) and Santosa et al. (2023), which highlighted that brand ambassadors play a pivotal role in enhancing brand recognition and recall. Hendi et al. (2022) further emphasized that credible ambassadors effectively expand brand reach, particularly among target demographics such as Gen Z. This is particularly relevant for Gen Z, who are digital natives and highly exposed to social media and digital content. Popular brand ambassadors like BTS have significant appeal to Gen Z, as they tend to idolize public figures who align with their lifestyle and values. Campaigns involving brand ambassadors can generate buzz on digital platforms, thereby enhancing awareness among Gen Z.

H2: Brand Ambassador → Brand Image

H2 is also supported (T-statistic = 6.798, $p = 0.000$), confirming the strong influence of brand ambassadors on brand image. This aligns with findings by Kumbara et al. (2023) and Hendi et al. (2022), who noted that brand ambassadors significantly shape brand image when their personality and values align with the brand. Caputo (2021) similarly emphasized that ambassadors reinforce positive associations and create emotional connections with the brand. For Gen Z, brand ambassadors with good reputations, high credibility, and cultural relevance can strengthen their perception of a brand. Samsung's collaboration with BTS, for instance, highlights creativity and innovation—values that Gen Z highly appreciates—helping to build a strong brand image.

H3: Brand Ambassador → Purchase Decision

H3 is not supported (T-statistic = 0.704, $p = 0.482$), indicating that brand ambassadors do not directly impact purchase decisions. This resonates with Dewi et al. (2020), who suggested that purchase decisions are often driven more by rational factors such as price, quality, and features, rather than emotional connections created by ambassadors. This aligns with Gen Z's behavior, as they tend to be critical and not directly swayed by celebrity endorsements when making purchasing decisions. Instead, they consider rational factors such as price, product features, and customer reviews before deciding to buy.

Table 4. Hypothesis testing

	Original Sample (O)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values	Result
BRAND AMBASSADOR → BRAND AWARENESS	0.494	0.074	6.656	0.000	Supports H ₁
BRAND AMBASSADOR → BRAND IMAGE	0.51	0.075	6.798	0.000	Supports H ₂
BRAND AMBASSADOR → PURCHASE DECISIONS	0.05	0.071	0.704	0.482	Doesn't Support H ₃
BRAND AWARENESS → PURCHASE DECISIONS	0.513	0.094	5.482	0.000	Supports H ₄
BRAND IMAGE → PURCHASE DECISIONS	0.332	0.093	3.564	0.000	Supports H ₅
BRAND AMBASSADOR → BRAND AWARENESS → PURCHASE DECISIONS	0.494	0.074	6.656	0.000	Supports H ₆
BRAND AMBASSADOR → BRAND IMAGE → PURCHASE DECISIONS	0.51	0.075	6.798	0.000	Supports H ₇

Source: Processed data using SmartPLS software, 2024

H4: Brand Awareness → Purchase Decision

The results confirm H4 (T-statistic = 5.482, $p = 0.000$), showing that higher brand awareness significantly influences purchase decisions. This supports findings by Hendi et al. (2022) and Gandari & Seminari (2024), who highlighted that brand awareness builds trust and helps differentiate the brand, thereby encouraging purchases. For Gen Z, familiarity with a brand frequently seen on various digital platforms builds trust in that brand. In a world filled with information, brands with high awareness are more likely to be considered by Gen Z when making purchase decisions.

H5: Brand Image → Purchase Decision

H5 is supported (T-statistic = 3.564, $p = 0.000$), demonstrating that a strong brand image positively impacts purchase decisions. This aligns with Caputo (2021), Hendi et al. (2022), and Dewi et al. (2020), who emphasized that a positive brand image fosters trust and increases purchase intent among consumers. Gen Z is highly conscious of the values represented by a brand. If the brand image reflects values they support, such as innovation, sustainability, or inclusivity, they are more likely to purchase the product. Samsung's collaboration with BTS creates emotional associations that strengthen brand image in the eyes of Gen Z.

H6: Brand Ambassador → Purchase Decision through Brand Awareness

H6 is supported (T-statistic = 6.656, $p = 0.000$), confirming that brand ambassadors indirectly influence purchase decisions by enhancing brand awareness. This finding supports studies by Hendi et al. (2022) and Febrian et al. (2024), which highlighted the role of brand ambassadors in facilitating consumer recognition and trust through increased awareness. This indicates that for Gen Z, brand ambassadors are effective in creating attention toward a brand, which then influences purchase decisions. Gen Z, who are highly responsive to digital trends and social media, are more likely to consider brands they are familiar with.

H7: Brand Ambassador → Purchase Decision through Brand Image

H7 is supported (T-statistic = 6.798, $p = 0.000$), indicating that brand ambassadors indirectly affect purchase decisions by strengthening brand image. This aligns with Febrian et al. (2024) and Kumbara et al. (2023), who noted that ambassadors reinforce positive brand perceptions, creating emotional connections that indirectly influence purchasing behavior. Gen Z tends to purchase products they associate with positive values or figures they admire. Collaborations with brand ambassadors improve the brand image, which in turn influences purchase decisions. However, these decisions are still influenced by rational considerations such as product features and price.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the impact of brand ambassadors, brand awareness, and brand image on the purchase decisions of Samsung smartphones, focusing on Generation Z. The findings indicate that brand ambassadors significantly enhance brand awareness, with BTS strengthening recognition and recall among younger consumers. Brand ambassadors also positively influence brand image by aligning their values, such as creativity and inclusivity, with Samsung's attributes of premium quality and technological innovation. However, the study revealed that brand ambassadors do not directly affect purchase decisions. Instead, Gen Z's purchase decisions are influenced by both rational and emotional factors. While product quality, features, and pricing remain critical in decision-making, brand ambassadors like BTS play a key role in strengthening brand awareness and brand image, which ultimately contribute to purchase decisions. This highlights the importance of leveraging brand ambassadors who align with Gen Z's values, as emotional connections fostered through branding efforts can enhance consumer loyalty and influence purchasing behavior.

The research has several implications for marketing strategies. Brands targeting Gen Z should prioritize ambassadors who align with their values and leverage campaigns that build both strong brand awareness and a positive brand image. This approach can enhance emotional connections while addressing rational purchase considerations. Furthermore, the findings highlight the importance of integrating cultural relevance and digital presence to effectively engage this demographic.

Research limitations include a focus on a single brand (Samsung) and a specific demographic (Gen Z in Indonesia), which may limit the generalizability of the results. Additionally, the study primarily relied on self-reported data, which might be subject to bias. For applications or future developments, companies can explore how different types of brand ambassadors (e.g., influencers, celebrities) affect various consumer segments and evaluate their impact across multiple industries. Brands could also investigate the role of other factors, such as social media engagement or sustainability efforts, in shaping Gen Z's purchasing behavior.

Future research should address the limitations of this study by expanding the sample scope beyond Gen Z in Indonesia to other age groups or regions, enabling broader generalizability. Additionally, incorporating multiple brands, rather than focusing solely on Samsung, could offer a more comparative perspective on the effectiveness of brand ambassadors. To deepen insights, future studies could adopt qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, to explore the emotional and cultural factors influencing Gen Z's purchasing decisions. Lastly, investigating the long-term impact of brand ambassador campaigns on brand loyalty would provide a more comprehensive understanding of their effectiveness.

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