

## SECURING PURCHASE INTENTION OF E-COMMERCE USERS: THE NOMOLOGICAL VALIDITY OF BRANDING AND TRUST

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**ABSTRACT:** It is getting hard for digital brands to secure an edge over competitors; moreover, securing transaction deals. Amid E-Commerce offerings, brand awareness and image are strategically positioned in decision-making. Thus, this study explores this issue by analyzing the nomological validity of brand awareness and brand image on consumers' trust and purchase intention. 165 response rates are secured and presented quantitatively by employing the variance-based PLS-SEM. The results support all hypotheses as well as the mediating effects. The brand image emerges as the most potential strategic position for managerial discretions upon building trust and purchasing decisions among e-commerce users.

**Keywords:** Brand Awareness; Brand Image; Trust; Purchase Intention; E-Commerce

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## INTRODUCTION

Global competition now demands companies to compete with each other in marketing and selling their products (Tavitiyaman et al., 2011; Yong Kim & oh, 2004). Companies must use the right strategy to ensure that their products are still consumed by consumers continuously (Ozaki, 2011). Therefore, every company needs to do and pay attention to the critical need to create new customers and retain old ones. Marketing, in general, is only seen as selling goods or services (Grönroos, 1994, 2006). However, marketing is actually beyond these perspectives. It is a process by which the action of creating a product or service, offering and handing it over to consumers, needs an acquisition or mediating sequence. The product or service must first be introduced to consumers before getting into the hands of consumers with carefully-positioned communication, which is crucial in maintaining its effects. Communication carried out by the company is through promotion. Promotion is a form of marketing communication to disseminate information, influence/persuade, and remind the target market of the company and its products to be willing to accept, buy and be loyal to the products offered (Ambler & Kokkinaki, 1997). This promotion has to be strategically aligned with the marketing strategy to create a better brand engagement with potential customers.

Currently, the company's competition is getting tougher with various marketing strategies, e.g., 4P (Philip Kotler, 1994) vs. 4A (Dadzie et al., 2017). It is getting harder to retain the consumer perception of specific brands. Brands are expected to create associations with a product leading to consumers' attachment, as the high brand equity leads to increased attendance and consumer purchase orientation (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). According to Aaker and Keller (1990), brand equity is a multi-dimensional concept of brand loyalty, awareness, perceived quality, associations, and other proprietary brand assets. In contrast, Kotler and Keller (2007) explain brand equity's knowledge, comprised of brand awareness and brand image. Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) state that forming a solid brand image is critical to building brand equity. Customers will take a more comprehensive perspective on their consumption (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

Existing research has discussed the conceptualization of the variables. However, how the selection and managerial discretions toward the most promising marketing strategy, i.e., brand image or brand awareness, in the context of Indonesia still need further conversations. This agenda emerges as the contesting theory of marketing mix, i.e., 4A of marketing, which points to the importance of psychological awareness in shaping customer decisions (Dadzie et al., 2017). Following the initial conception (Sheth & Sisodia, 2012), they point to the language of marketers as dull and obsolete. Marketers often push their agenda to secure sales instead of speaking in the customers' language. This fact is reinforced by the famous formula of the 4P of marketing (Kotler & Amstrong, 2014). Thus, this paper is expected to illuminate the contrasting effect between brand image (4P) and brand awareness (4A) and provide a ready-to-use strategy for marketers to secure customers' trust and purchasing decisions in selected e-commerce in Indonesia. Discussion and implications will be provided.

## THEORETICAL REVIEW

### *Brand Awareness*

Suri and Monroe (2003) state that brand awareness is essential to brand equity. Based on this perspective, a brand does not have equity until consumers realize the existence of the brand to create the right products, services, and programs to serve the market and embrace all elements in the organization to be service-oriented. According to Aaker and Keller (1990), brand awareness is a potential buyer's ability to recognize or recall a brand as part of a product category. Brand awareness is divided into four conditions, namely: 1) Unaware of the brand, emerging as brands that remain unknown even though they have been warned again through assistance (aided recall); 2) Brand recognition, including product brands that are known to consumers after being reminded again through assistance; 3) Brand recall, when products or services do not need to be reminded again (unaided recall); and 4) Top of mind, as the culmination of the brand in consumers' mindset. Building brand awareness is usually done over a long period because memorization can be successful with repetition and reinforcement. In reality, the brands with a high rate of recall are traditionally the brands that are old with sufficient trust (Grewal et al., 1998; Han et al., 2015), thus

*H1: There is a positive relationship between brand awareness and trust.*

*H2: There is a positive relationship between brand awareness and purchase intention.*

### *Brand Image*

A brand image is a group of associations that connect consumers' thinking to a brand name. A positive brand image is created by strong, unique, and good brand associations (Philip Kotler & Keller, 2007) while understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the brand (Semuel & Lianto, 2014). The brand image systematizes the brand's memory, which contains the target market's interpretation of product attributes, benefits, situations, uses, users, and company characteristics. According to Bone (1995), it describes associations and beliefs towards a particular brand. Meanwhile, a compelling brand image can reflect three things: 1) product character building and providing a value proposition; 2). it conveys the product's character as uniquely indifferent to its competitors, and; 3) as the emotional power of rationality (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). Every company competes to create a positive image of products, services, company names, and brands, better customer knowledge, and well-received (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). Suri and Monroe (2003) state that brand image is a complicated symbol that compiles six levels of meaning or understanding: attributes, benefits, values, culture, personality, and users. Previous studies have pointed to associations between brand image, trust and purchase intention (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Sanny et al., 2020; Sürücü et al., 2019), serving as the base for the following proposition.

*H3: There is a positive relationship between brand image and trust.*

*H4: There is a positive relationship between brand image and purchase intention.*

### *Trusts*

Trust is someone else's belief in the meaning of another person's behavior (Pandey et al., 2020). Thus consumer confidence is defined as the consumer's expectation that the producer is reliable or able to give a sense of trust to fulfill his promises (Semuel & Lianto, 2014). Consumer trust in a particular brand can be obtained if the company's organization grows and maintains a positive emotional bond with consumers (Shahid et al., 2017). Consumer commitment to the product is a trust in using a product, including recommendations and trust (Shahid et al., 2017). Trust is a condition when one of the parties involved in the exchange process is confident in the reliability and integrity of the other party (Grewal et al., 1998). According to Bone (1995), there are three points for generating belief, i.e., ability, as the competence and characteristics of the seller/organization in influencing and authorizing a specific region. The capabilities include competence, experience, institutional attestation, and serviceability. The kindness of the heart (Benevolence) responds to the seller's willingness to provide mutually beneficial satisfaction between himself and the consumer. According to Dawar and Pillutla (2000), benevolence includes attention, empathy, confidence, and acceptability. Finally, integrity is related to how the behavior/habits of property agents in carrying out their business in the form of reasonableness, fulfillment, loyalty, directness, and interrelationship. Following Bone's preposition (1995) that trust or belief is critical upon creating a decision, and how it is generated from previous recommendations in using past products (Shahid et al., 2017), and the reliability of the service providers (Grewal et al., 2017), then a hypothesis can be proposed.

*H5: There is a positive relationship between trust and purchase intention.*

### *Purchase Intention*

According to Ambler and Kokkinaki (1997), interest is a psychological aspect that influences many behavioral attitudes. Interest can also be a source of motivation that will lead a person to perform an activity or action. Buying interest is a psychic activity that arises due to feelings (affective) and thoughts (cognitive) towards a desired good or service. Interest in buying can be interpreted as an attitude of pleasure towards an object that makes the individual try to get the thing by paying for it with money or sacrifice (Ambler & Kokkinaki, 1997). Meanwhile, Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) state that buying interest is the stage of respondents' tendency to act before the buying decision is implemented. Buying interest is different from purchasing intention, as buying intent is a non-continuation of consumer buying interest where the confidence to decide to buy is already in a large percentage. It can be noted that the purchase intention is the final increase in buying interest in the form of confidence before the purchase decision is taken. Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) divided buying interest through indicators like 1) Transactional interest to purchase products or services, or 2) Preferential interest as the behavior of somebody that already has the primary preference for the product. This preference can only be replaced if something happens with the product of his preference. It is settled with 3) Exploratory

interest as the behavior of a person who is always looking for information about the product he is interested in and looking for information to support the positive properties of the product. These variables' constructions lead to the research framework proposal, as in figure 1.

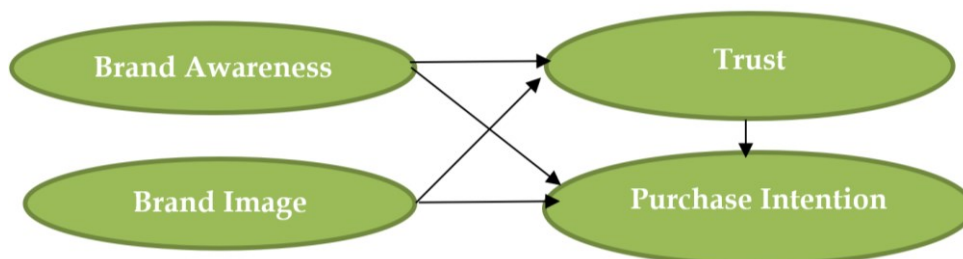


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

## METHODOLOGY

This study approaches the research problems quantitatively. It designs an exploratory causality investigation to answer all proposed hypotheses. The hypotheses are based on the conversation of previous studies. This approach and design are selected because it meets the study's goal to obtain more generalized findings for managerial uses. This study takes place in Makassar, Indonesia, by collecting quantitative responses in survey forms as secondary data.

This study distributes the questionnaires to the users of e-commerce applications to secure the study's objectives and hypotheses. The population in this study is consumers who have made online purchases on online shopping sites in Indonesia, but the number cannot be ensured. The sample obtained was 165 respondents considering that the amount was ten times the number of indicators present ( $13 \times 10 = 130$  respondents) (Hair et al., 2014). This sample size is still within the sample size range that should be used, namely 100-200 respondents (Kline, 1998). This study distributes the questionnaires to potential respondents within a month by maximizing the snowball distribution corresponding to word-of-mouth recommendations. This study presents the distribution of the descriptive information of the respondents in table 1.

All indicators, as evident in table 2, are self-developed, following the needs of this study. Thus, all of the scales need to be validated by several statistical requirements. While the sampling method used is Nonprobability Sampling, we specifically maximize the use of partial-least-square structural-equation-modeling (PLS-SEM) for its ability to manage data with a smaller sample and address the non-parametric benefits. This test allows the author to peer down the quality of the data in terms of the loading factors, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and collinearity measurement. After satisfying the intended validity and reliability, the data can be proceeded to obtain the answers to the proposed hypotheses through the please algorithm and bootstrap analysis. This study employs the Smartpls 3 to investigate the research data.

Table 1. Characteristic Respondent

Descriptions	Frequency	%
Gender		
Man	81	49%
Woman	84	51%
Total	165	100%
Educational Background		
High School	35	21%
Diploma 3/ Diploma 4	25	15%
Bachelor Degree	74	45%
Master or Doctoral Degree	31	19%
Total	165	100%
Marketplace Visits		
Tokopedia.com	57	35%
Shopee	71	43%
JD.ID	17	10%
Bukalapak	13	8%
Lazada	7	4%
Total	165	100%

Source: Research Formulation

Based on table 1 above, it can be seen that most of the respondents were women, 51%. They mostly hold a bachelor's degree by 45% and an avid user of Shopee by 43%. The selection of Shopee indicates the tendency of fashion attributes. Shopee is a well-known marketplace for its vast databases of fashion items, with substantial offerings and discounts. This finding corresponds to the general demographic cues of the respondents.

## RESULTS

### *The Quality Measurement*

Before conducting the hypothesis testing, the variance-based partial-least-square article must meet the quality criteria. Some prerequisite tests are the convergent validity tests, the loading factor, the discriminant validity, and the collinearity tests (Hair et al., 2010). The uses of PLS-SEM allow the presentation of all tests, as in table 2. Based on the results of the outer loading value in table 2, it can be seen that all items used are valued above 0.7 as recommended by Hair et al. (2014). This upper value means that all indicators can measure latent variables corresponding to the item.

Furthermore, the validity value can be reinforced by an AVE value  $> 0.5$ , supporting this research's validity. This study investigates the reliability of constructs by their composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha larger than 0.7. This article reports that brand image and purchase intention are slightly lower than 0.7; however, as all CR is still higher than 0.7, this study can proceed to the discriminant validity test.

Table 2. The Outer Model Measurements

Constructs	Scales	Loading	t-value	VIF	alpha	rho_A	CR	AVE
Brand Awareness	BrandAw1	0.865	33.424	2.309				
	BrandAw2	0.866	35.685	2.431	0.888	0.889	0.923	0.749
	BrandAw3	0.869	33.950	2.388				
	BrandAw4	0.862	34.304	2.362				
Brand Image	BrandImg1	0.745	13.688	1.197				
	BrandImg2	0.783	15.905	1.421	0.659	0.658	0.814	0.594
	BrandImg3	0.783	21.555	1.342				
Purchase Intention	PurchInt1	0.826	19.178	1.450				
	PurchInt2	0.789	17.502	1.351	0.695	0.700	0.831	0.622
	PurchInt3	0.748	10.589	1.303				
Trust	Trust1	0.827	26.283	1.563				
	Trust2	0.802	22.973	1.475	0.763	0.764	0.864	0.678
	Trust3	0.841	30.828	1.630				

Source: Adapted Smartpls 3 Output

The Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) is the best test to reveal the discriminant validity of the data. This study presents in table 3.

Table 3. The Heterotrait-Monotrait Test

Constructs	Brand Awareness	Brand Image	Purchase Intention
Brand Awareness			
Brand Image	0.824		
Purchase Intention	0.720	0.813	
Trust	0.729	0.870	0.822

Source: Adapted Smartpls 3 Output

The scores of the HTMT test reveal support for this study's discriminant validity. This finding is evident by all scores being lower than 0.9. This final criterion is the building block for the hypothesis testing in the inferential statistics as in the PLS-SEM's requirements.

### *The Nomological Validity*

Testing is carried out to determine the strength of the influence of exogenous variables on endogenous variables, either directly or indirectly. This study conducted the bootstrapping procedures for 165 sample sizes and repetitions of resampling by 500 times loading results to provide the specific answers to hypothesized relationships. Furthermore, the path analysis will be the foundation for obtaining the effect size. The findings, as evidenced in table 4, reveal the acceptance of all proposed relationships. The strongest predictor is the relationship between brand image and trust, demonstrating the highest relevance for managerial discretion uses. This study also formulates the indirect effects of the investigated relationships. The statistical evidence also supports the mediating products of trust in all relationships. However, the effect sizes are

pretty small for managerial discretions. Furthermore, the graphical presentation of the finding is presented in figure 2.

Table 4 The Summary of Statistical Tests

Paths	Effects	t-value	P-value
Brand Awareness → Purchase Intention	0.239	3.118	0.002
Brand Awareness → Trust	0.345	4.706	0.000
Brand Image → Purchase Intention	0.198	2.320	0.021
Brand Image → Trust	0.404	5.394	0.000
Trust → Purchase Intention	0.334	3.410	0.001
Brand Awareness → Trust → Purchase Intention	0.115	2.500	0.013
Brand Image → Trust → Purchase Intention	0.135	3.168	0.002
R <sup>2</sup> to Purchase Intention		0.446	
R <sup>2</sup> to Trust		0.458	

Source: Adapted Smartpls 3 output

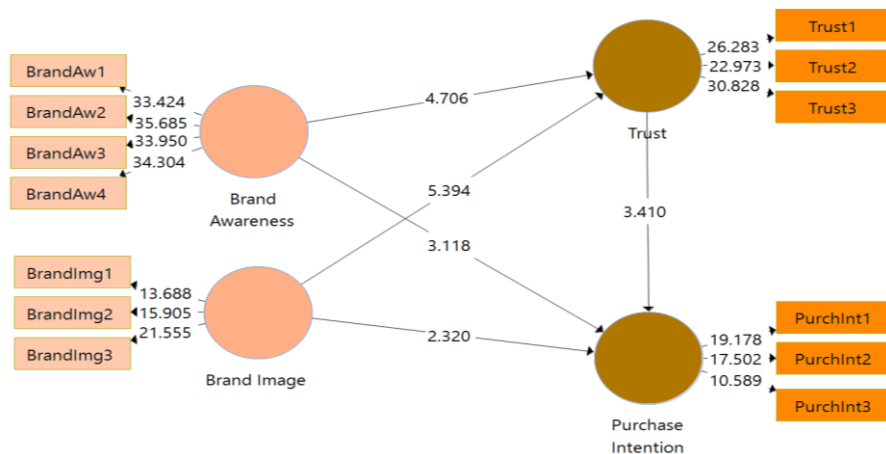


Figure 2. The Bootstrapping Presentation  
Source: Smartpls 3 Output

## DISCUSSION

The influence of brand awareness on trust is found to be existing and supports hypothesis 1. The relationship reveals that consumers are very thoughtful in selecting their products. The role of trust is the extent of consumer confidence in the brands presented in front of them daily (de Leaniz & del Bosque, 2015). The situation that occurred in this study was seen from the answers of respondents to the questionnaires that had been shared, dominantly answered very much agreed or supported the brands to be used for its proven benefits in the broader stratum of society and succeeded in convincing the wearer for its reliability to meet the needs of consumers. This is in line with the research by Sharma et al. (2017), where brand awareness significantly influences trust. On the contrary, research that has been done by (Seo et al., 2020) where the results of his study showed that there was no significant influence on trust with brand awareness as an independent variable.

The influence of brand awareness on purchase intention shows that they can be explained by statistical tests, confirming hypothesis 2. This is clear that the



extent to which the brand is affiliated with the hearts of consumers will ultimately add to the increase in the marketability of companies connected to online shopping sites that consumers are interested in. This situation will greatly help existing brands understand consumers' interests and intentions by understanding consumer enthusiasm in choosing the final product. This is in line with the research carried out by (Kurniasari & Budiatmo, 2018), which states that brand awareness significantly affects purchase intention. However, another article finds a different result where brand awareness does not influence purchase intention (Shahid et al., 2017).

This study proceeded with the investigation of the potential causality of brand image and trust. The statistical analysis supports the research formulation in hypothesis 3. This finding implies that consumers today are very thoughtful in selecting their products. This process will accumulate in the trust as the extent of consumer confidence in the brands presented in front of them daily or brand image. The situation in this study was seen from the respondents' answers to the questionnaires that had been shared. They mostly agreed or supported that the brands to be purchased had proven benefits in the broader stratum of society. E-commerce is succeeded in convincing the wearer of their reliability to meet the needs of consumers. This is in line with the research (Dash et al., 2021; Solihin, 2021), where brand image significantly influences trust. This finding competes with Sanny et al. (2020), where there was no significant influence of brand images to trust.

The influence of brand image on purchase intention can be significant, supporting hypothesis 4. That the results obtained are significant by looking at the situation in the field reveals the agreement that dominant respondents or potential buyers always see the reality between the image or impression, which will eventually imprint on the minds of the consumers themselves both in terms of benefits and usefulness (Rastini & Respati, 2021). This state of affairs is in line with the research conducted by Seo et al. (2020), where brand image significantly influences purchase intention. Another study found an insignificant influence of brand awareness on purchase intention (Solihin, 2021). The findings imply that a complex formation of relationships must be considered upon deriving specific strategic decisions in marketing.

That brand awareness and brand images influence purchase intentions through trust reveal the causality of dependent variables supporting hypothesis 5. This significant finding points to the mediating roles of all investigated relationships. The substantial evidence suggests that e-commerce must play strategic psychological roles in influencing customers' purchase decisions (Kurata & Nam, 2010). Appreciating the complex human nature allows further understanding of devising strategic measures to control users' minds. This process must be fully appealed to as the customers can easily switch to other applications with a better offering (Ozaki, 2011). This study presents some exciting and different findings from previous studies where respondents gave inconsistent statements but tended to answer very much in agreement concerning the habits and patterns of consumers' attention to the brand they

selected. The dominance of existing e-commerce brands tries to give a diverse impression with their respective efforts in attracting consumers. In their capacity as selectors, consumers will expect more value from their payment, as consumer confidence plays a vital role in achieving the ultimate goal of a product to be purchased. Thus, trust contributes significantly to consumers in determining the final decision of selecting a brand. This condition is in line with the research by Sidharta et al. (2018), where brand awareness and images affect purchase intention through trust.

## FURTHER STUDY

This study provides a new contribution to the conversation in online marketing among the local e-commerce giants in Indonesia. The study provides information that supports the capacity of brand awareness and image to propel consumers' trust and finally to the decision to purchase. The indirect relationships are also supported. This finding is constructed from the online users of Indonesian e-commerce.

This study certainly comes out imperfectly. The data is still insufficient to grasp a generalization in the research phenomenon. The constructed variables require comparison across the many indicator suggestions among previous researchers. Thus, we suggest that future and aspiring researchers obtain more extensive data with sufficient distribution across the map and proceed with better scales in capturing the shopping behavior of Indonesian shoppers.

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