

ADVERTISING AND BRAND IMAGE ON PURCHASE INTENTION: THE ROLE OF PRODUCT QUALITY

By:

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of advertising and brand image, mediated by product quality, on consumer purchase intention from Scarlett Whitening beauty products in Cibinong, Indonesia. Using a quantitative survey approach, data were collected from 100 respondents through structured questionnaires and analyzed using Partial Least Square Structure Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS 4.0. The results reveal that: (1) advertising not significant direct effect on purchase intention; (2) brand image has a significant positive effect on purchase intention; (3) product quality has a significant positive effect on purchase intention; (4) advertising significantly influences purchase intention through the mediation of product quality; and (5) brand image not significant affect purchase intention when mediated by product quality. The model explains 72,9% of variance in purchase intention and 76,6% in product quality (R^2), with a predictive relevance (Q^2) of 93.7%. These findings underscore the critical role of brand image and product quality as primary determinants of purchase intention in the Indonesian local beauty market, while suggesting that advertising effectiveness requires product quality as a mediating bridge.

Keywords: Advertising, Brand Image, Product Quality, Purchase Intention

A. INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology and growing awareness of personal appearance and skin health among Indonesia's young population have significantly propelled the growth of the national beauty industry. The cosmetics sector in Indonesia witnessed a remarkable expansion, with the number of cosmetic manufacturers increasing by 21.9%, from 913 companies in 2022 to 1.010 companies by mid 2023. This proliferation has intensified competition among both domestic and international brands, forcing market players to develop distinctive strategies to capture consumer attention and drive purchase intention.

In the contemporary digital era, social media has emerged as a power marketing platform, enabling brands to reach wider audiences more rapidly and efficiently. Influencer marketing, in particular, has become a dominant strategy, with 80% of marketers acknowledging its effectiveness in acquiring new customers while minimizing expenditure (Tanwar, Chaudhry, & Srivastava, 2022). Scarlett Whitening, a local beauty brand founded in 2017 by Indonesia celebrity Felicya Angelista, has leveraged this trend extensively, employing influencer partnerships and social media campaigns to build its brand presence.

Scarlett Whitening emerged as a pioneer in the personal care category on major e-commerce platforms, capturing a market share of 23.2% in 2021 and maintaining dominance at 11.32% in 2022 according to Compass Dashboard data. The brand offers a comprehensive range of products including face lotion, serums, day and night cream, body lotions, and body scrubs, all containing active ingredients such as glutathione and Vitamin E, certified by the Indonesia National Agency for Drug and Food Control (BPOM).

However, despite its initial market dominance, Scarlett Whitening has experienced a decline the emergence of new competing brands, shifting consumer trends, and issues related to counterfeit products that undermine consumer confidence in product quality and brand image. Google trends data also confirmed a declining interest trend for Scarlett Whitening products and influencer marketing during the past year.

This phenomenon raises important academic and practical questions about the relative contributions of advertising, brand image, and product quality in driving consumer purchase intention, particularly when product serves as a mediating variable. Prior research has yielded inconsistent findings: some studies report significant positive effects of advertising and brand image on purchase intention (Saputra, 2018) (Tangka, Hendra, & Tawas, 2022) (Noviningsih, Anggraini, & Ribek, 2022) while others find these relationships to be insignificant or context dependent (Munfarida, Rizkyani, & Gunaningrat, Pengaruh Iklan Citra Merek dan Harga Terhadap Minat Beli Produk Le Minerale , 2024) (Damanik & Purba, 2020).

The background of this reserch is rooted in the phenomenon of rapid growth in Indonesia's beauty industry in the digital era. The use of social media as a marketing platform, particularly through influencer marketing, has become the dominant strategy of local beauty brands such as Scarlett Whitening. Despite successfully capturing the largest market share in 2021-2022, Scarlett Whitening experienced a decline in consumer purchase intention caused by various factors, including the emergence of new competing brands, shifting consumer trends, and

counterfeit product issues that have damaged brand image and undermined consumer confidence in product quality.

This study aims to: (1) examine the direct effect of advertising on consumer purchase intention for Scarlett Whitening product; (2) examine the direct effect of brand image on consumer purchase intention; (3) examine the direct effect of product quality on consumer purchase intention; (4) examine the indirect effect of advertising on purchase intention mediated by product quality; and (5) examine the indirect effect of brand image on purchase intention mediated by product quality. The finding of this study are expected to contribute to the growing body of literature on digital marketing and consumer behavior in emerging markets, particularly within the context of the halal and beauty industry in Southeast Asia. Prior studies have demonstrated that digital advertising and brand equity are increasingly significant determinants of purchase intention among younger consumers in developing economics (Cheung, Pires, & Rosenberger, 2020) (Lim, Osman, Salahuddin, Romle, & Abdullah, 2016). Furthermore, the application of PLS-SEM in this context allows for a robust examination of mediation effects, consistent with methodological recommendations for consumer behavior research in emerging market settings (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, & Ringle, 2019).

B. LITERATURE STUDY

Purchase intention refers to consumers' tendency or inclination to buy a product or service, influenced by multiple factors including product perception, needs, desires, and external stimuli such as advertising, peer recommendations, and past experiences (Purbohastuti & Hidayah, 2020). According to (Kotler & Keller, Marketing Management (14th ed), 2014), purchase intention is consumer behavior that emerges as a response to an object, reflecting the customer's desire to make a purchase driven that emerges as a response to an object, reflecting the customer's desire to make a purchase driven by satisfaction with product quality. (Ferdinand, 2014) identifies four dimensions of purchase intention: transactional interest (tendency to purchase), referential interest (tendency to recommend), preferential interest (primary preference for a product), and explorative interest (seeking information about a product).

Purchase intention is one of main constructs in consumer behavior that reflects a person's intention to make a purchase. This intention arises after going through an alternative evaluation process that includes consumer perceptions of products, needs, and various external influences (Setiadi, Perilaku Konsumen, 2015).

Advertising is a non personal, mass presentation and promotion of ideas, goods, and services through mass media, paid by a specific sponsor (Sudirman, 2023). According to (Kotler & Keller, 2016), advertising objectives should flow from prior decisions about target market, brand positioning, and marketing programs. Advertising goals can be classified based on purpose: informative advertising (creating brand awareness and knowledge), persuasive advertising (creating preference and purchase intention), reminder advertising (stimulating repeat purchases), and reinforcement advertising (assuring uniqueness, informativeness, clarity, and purchase motivation (Tangka, Hendra, & Tawas, 2022).

Advertising is a vital marketing communication instrument in building brand awareness and stimulating consumer purchase intention. In the digital context, advertising through social media enables brands to reach wider audiences more efficiently and cost effectively. (Kotler & Keller, 2016) classify advertising objectives into four categories: informative advertising, persuasive advertising, reminder advertising, and reinforcement advertising, each designed to achieve different communication goals within the consumer purchase process.

Brand image represents consumers' perceptions used to evaluate a product, particularly when consumers lack sufficient knowledge about a product they intend to purchase (Teddy, Dinda, & Zuliestiana, 2020). It is a set of organized associations that form a meaningful whole, constructed from consumer memories, experiences, and feelings about a brand (Fariz, Ustadus, Taufik, & Edi, 2024). A strong brand image not only generates brand trust but also leads to purchase decisions (Munfarida, Rizkyani, & Gunaningrat, 2024). (Nurhayati, 2017) identifies several functions of brand image: market entry (pioneering advantages), source of added product value, corporate store of value, and channel power. Brand image indicators include brand association superiority, brand association strength, and brand association uniqueness (Pasaribu & Lidya, 2022).

Brand image is the perception or impression formed in the minds of consumers regarding a brand, based on their memories, experiences, and associations. A strong brand image serves as a strategic corporate asset that can enhance consumer trust and drive purchase decisions. In the context of an increasingly competitive beauty market, brand image becomes a critical differentiation factor that distinguishes one brand from its competitors (Aaker & Stayman, 1992).

Product quality encompasses a product's ability to perform its functions, including durability, reliability, precision, ease of operation and repair, and other valued attributes (Astuti, Ardila, & Lubis, 2021) (Kotler & Keller, 2016). According to (Zakiyah, Ira, & Santi, 2015), product quality comprises eight dimensions: performance, feature, reliability, conformance to specifications, durability, serviceability, aesthetics, and perceived quality. In the context of beauty product, product quality encompasses skin efficacy, safety certification, formulation consistency, and aesthetic packaging design, all of which influence consumer satisfaction and repeat purchase behavior.

Product quality is a critically important dimension in the beauty industry, where consumers place a high priority on the product efficacy, safety, and consistency. Scarlett Whitening product holds BPOM certification and contains clinically proven active ingredients such as glutathione and Vitamin E. However, the presence of counterfeit products in the market has raised concerns about quality consistency and has negatively affected consumer perceptions of brand reliability (Ardhianti & Kusuma, 2023).

This study proposes a mediation model in which product quality serves as an intermediary variable between advertising/brand image and consumer purchase intention. The theoretical framework is grounded in marketing management theory (Limakrisna & Togi, 2017) and consumer behavior theory (Setiadi, 2015) (Kotler & Keller, 2014). The model posits that advertising and brand image influence

product quality perception, which in turn shapes consumers purchase intention. Five hypotheses are proposed:

- H1:** Advertising has significant positive effect on consumer purchase intention for Scarlett Whitening products.
- H2:** Brand image has a significant positive effect on consumer purchase intention for Scarlett Whitening products.
- H3:** Product quality has a significant positive effect on consumer purchase intention for Scarlett Whitening products.
- H4:** Advertising has a significant positive effect on consumer purchase intention mediated by product quality
- H5:** Brand image has a significant positive effect on consumer purchase intention mediated by product quality

A review of prior literature reveals both supportive and contradictory evidence for the proposed relationships. (Saputra, 2018) sound significant positive effects of advertising and brand image on purchase intention for Honda motorcycles. (Noviningsih, Anggraini, & Ribek, 2022) confirmed similar positive effects for IndiHome service. (Tangka, Hendra, & Tawas, 2022) demonstrated that advertising and brand image positively and significantly affect purchase intention and purchase decisions for Ventela shoes. In contrast, (Munfarida, Rizkyani, & Gunaningrat, 2024) found that brand image did not significantly affect purchase intention for Le Minerale product, while (Damanik & Purba, 2020) reported that advertising had no significant effect on purchase intention for Tabita skincare product, though product did. These inconsistencies highlight the context dependent nature of these relationships and justify further investigation. The theoretical underpinnings of this study are further reinforced by the Stimulus Organism Response (SOR) framework, which conceptualizes advertising and brand image as environmental stimuli that trigger cognitive and affective responses in consumers, ultimately leading to behavioral outcomes such as purchase intention (Mohan, Sivakumaran, & Sharma, 2013). Recent empirical evidence from the beauty and personal care sector in Southeast Asia corroborates the central role of perceived product quality as a mediating mechanism: (Teng & Lu, 2016) demonstrated that quality perception significantly mediates the relationship between marketing communications and behavioral intention among cosmetic consumers. Additionally, (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016) established in a multi country study published in the Journal of Marketing Communications that social media advertising positively influences brand equity dimensions, which in turn shape consumer purchase intentions, a finding directly applicable to Scarlett Whitening's influencer driven marketing model.

C. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a quantitative research approach using a cross sectional survey design. The quantitative method is grounded in positivist philosophy and is appropriate for testing hypothetical relationships between variables using statistical analysis (Sugiyono, 2019). A structured questionnaire was used as the primary data collection instrument, consistent with research objective of empirically examining

relationship among advertising (X_1), brand image (X_2), product quality (X_3), and purchase intention (Y).

The study population comprised all consumers of Scarlett Whitening in Cibinong District, West Jawava, who had purchased and used Scarlett Whitening products. Given that the exact population size was unknow, non-probability sampling was employed using the Cochran (1977) formula for unknow populations, yielding a minimum sample of 96 respondents. The final sample was rounded up to 100 respondents to enhance representativeness.

Data analysis was performed using Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-Sem_ with SmartPLS 4.0 software. PLS-SEM was chosen because it is particularly suitable for complex models with mediating variables and can accommodate both reflective and formative measurement models (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2019).

D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study gathered data from 100 respondents, with a demographic profile dominated by young adults. The majority of respondents were female (88%), reflecting the primary target market for beauty products. In terms of age, 85% of respondents were in the 20-25 years age group, 14% were aged 17-20 years, and only 1% were aged 25-30 years. Regarding educational background, 55% held a diploma or bachelor's degree, while 45% had completed high school/vocational school. Occupationally, 70% were students/university students, 20% worked in other sectors, 6% were entrepreneurs, and 4% were homemakers.

Table 1.
Respondent Profile

Characteritic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	88	88%
	Male	12	12%
Age	<20 years	14	14%
	20-25 years	85	85%
	25-30 years	1	1%
Education	SMA/SMK	45	45%
	Diploma/Bachelor	55	55%
Job	Student	70	70%
	Entrepreneur	6	6%
	Housewife	4	4%
	Other	20	20%

Source: Primary data processed

The measurement model was evaluated for validity and reliability. Table 2 presents the outer loading values for all indicators, which ranged from 0.731 to 0.847, all exceeding the 0.70 threshold confirming convergent validity.

Table 2.
Outer Loading

Variable	Indicator	Outer Loading	AVE	CR/ α
Advertising (X1)	X1.1-X1.7	0.737-0.809	0.586	0.908/0.882
Brand Image (X2)	X2.1-X2.4	0.731-0.824	0.594	0.854/0.772
Product Quality (X3)	X3.1-X3.7	0.741-0.836	0.628	0.922/0.901
Purchase Intention (Y)	Y1.1-Y1.5	0.732-0.847	0.665	0.908/0.873

Source: Primary data processed

All AVE values exceeded the 0.50 threshold (advertising:0.586; brand image: 0.594; product quality: 0.628; purchase intention: 0.665), confirming discriminant validity. Composite Reliability values ranged from 0.854 to 0.922, and Cronbach's Alpha values ranged from 0.772 to 0.901, all exceeding the 0.70 threshold, confirming the reliability of all constructs.

The coefficient of the determination (R^2) for product quality was 0.767 (strong), indicating that 76.7% of the variance in product quality was explained by advertising and brand image. The R^2 for purchase intention was 0.729 (strong), indicating that 72.9% of the variance in purchase intention was explained by the model variables. The predictive relevance value (Q^2) was calculated as 0.937 (93.7%), substantially exceeding zero, confirming the model's excellent predictive accuracy.

Table 3
Hypothesis Testing Results (Direct Effects)

Path Relationship	T-Statistic	P-Value	Result
Advertising → Purchase Intention	0.267	0.789	Not Significant
Brand Image → Purchase Intention	5.504	0.000	Significant
Product Quality → Purchase Intention	2.098	0.036	Significant
Advertising →Prod. Quality → Purchase Int.	2.285	0.022	Significant
Brand Image →Prod. Quality →Purchase Int.	1.215	0.224	Not Significant

Source: SmartPLS 4.0

Effect of Advertising on Purchase Intention

The analysis revealed that advertising did not have a significant direct effect on consumer purchase intention for Scarlett Whitening products (T-stat = 0.267, $p = 0.789$). This finding contradicts studies by (Saputra, 2018) (Tangka, Hendra, & Tawas, 2022), who reported a significant positive influence of advertising on purchase intention, but aligns with (Damanik & Purba, 2020), who similarly found no significant direct effect in the skincare product context.

What distinguishes the present study from prior research lies in its ability to explain why advertising fails to exert a direct effect, rather than merely reporting the null result. Most previous studies treated the non-significant advertising purchase intention relationship as an isolated finding without further contextual elaboration. The current study advances this understanding by integrating the respondent's sociodemographic profile, predominantly Generation Z female university students aged 20-25 years, as an explanatory lens. This demographic

possesses high advertising literacy, meaning they are more critical of conventional advertising possesses high advertising literacy, meaning they are more critical of conventional advertising messages and are less easily persuaded to purchase solely on the basis of advertising messages and are less easily persuaded to purchase solely on the basis of advertising exposure. Unlike prior studies that examined general consumer populations, this study specifically captures the behavioral logic generated content (UGC) rather than one way paid advertising.

Further, the current research offers a novel structural explanation through the high interconstruct correlation between advertising and product quality ($r=0.856$), which exceeds the square root of the AVE for both constructs. This collinearity indicates that respondents tend to perceive advertising and product quality simultaneously, causing the direct effect of advertising on purchase intention to become statistically undetectable in isolation, a mechanism not identified in earlier studies. The finding thus contributes a more nuanced theoretical contribution: advertising's influence is not absent, but rather absorbed into an indirect pathway mediated by product quality perceptions, which the mediation analysis subsequently confirms.

This result may also be attributed to advertising saturation. Consumers in the digital age are exposed to an overwhelming volume of beauty advertisements, reducing the marginal impact of any single advertisement. The lowest mean score among advertising indicators was for attraction to try the product after seeing the advertisement. ($M= 4.12$), while the highest for message clarity ($M = 4.33$), suggesting that while consumers appreciate clear advertising message, such appreciation does not automatically translate into purchase intention.

These results indicate that advertising alone is insufficient to convert consumer interest into concrete purchase intention, particularly within a segment characterized by financial constraints and prologed decision making processes.

Effect of Brand Image on Purchase Intention

Brand image demonstrates the strongest significant positive effect on purchase intention ($T\text{-stat} = 5.504$, $p = 0.000$). This finding is consistent with (Noviningsih, Anggraini, & Ribek, 2022), (Tangka, Hendra, & Tawas, 2022), and (Purnama & Syahab, 2023), all of whom reported positive and significant effects of brand image on purchase intention in the beauty and personal care sectors.

The key differentiating contribution of the present study lies in how it contextualizes and deepens the interpretation of the brand image purchase intention relationship beyond what prior studies have offered. While existing research has consistently confirmed this relationship at the aggregate level, the current study uniquely demonstrates that the strength of this effect, reflected by the highest T-statistic in the model (5.504) is specifically driven by the cultural and digital immersion patterns of its respondent profile. Female consumers aged 20–25 years with diploma or bachelor-level education constitute the segment most sensitive to brand image within the beauty product category. They inhabit a digital ecosystem heavily shaped by brand-related discussions on TikTok, Instagram, and online beauty communities, meaning that positive perceptions toward Scarlett Whitening had already been deeply embedded prior to survey exposure.

Moreover, the present study advances prior literature by providing empirical evidence that brand image operates as a self-sufficient driver of purchase intention one that does not require mediation through product quality to be effective (as the nonsignificant mediation result in H5 further confirms). This represents a theoretical refinement over studies that positioned product quality as a necessary bridge between brand image and purchase intention. In the Scarlett Whitening context, where 55% of respondents hold higher educational qualifications and possess stronger brand evaluative capabilities, a well-established brand image is sufficient on its own to generate purchase motivation, rendering the mediation pathway redundant.

The highest mean score among brand image indicators was for the perception that Scarlett has a strong reputation in the beauty market ($M = 4.34$), indicating that Scarlett's established market position and brand associations are the primary drivers of consumer purchase motivation. This result aligns with (Kotler & Keller, 2014) assertion that brand equity, comprising both brand awareness and brand image, is a fundamental driver of consumer purchase decisions. The strong brand equity accumulated by Scarlett Whitening through celebrity endorsements, BPOM certification, and consistent product quality has created robust positive associations in consumers' minds. Practically, this finding implies that sustained investment in brand reputation management yields measurably stronger returns on purchase intention than advertising expenditure alone.

The high correlation between brand image and purchase intention (0.842) reflects a strong closeness between the constructs. This highly significant effect indicates that, in the context of Scarlett beauty product consumers, brand image has a strong direct leverage on purchase intention without requiring an intermediary variable.

Effect of Product Quality on Purchase Intention

Product quality shows a significant positive effect on purchase intention ($T\text{-stat} = 2.098$, $p=0.036$), consistent with (Haqiqi & Handari Adji, 2021) and the broader consumer behavior literature. The highest mean score was for product satisfaction ($M = 4.26$), while the lowest was for performance/efficacy consistency with advertised claims ($M = 4.03$), suggesting a slight gap between consumer expectations set by advertising and actual product experience.

Product quality was significantly associated with purchase intention ($t = 2.098$, $p = 0.036$). This finding is consistent with evidence from Indonesian skincare research showing that product quality is associated with purchasing decisions (Luthfia & Maya, 2022). The highest mean among the reported product-quality indicators was satisfaction with product quality ($M = 4.26$), while the lowest was consistency of performance/efficacy with advertised claims ($M = 4.03$).

The distinctive contribution of the present study on this relationship lies in its empirical grounding in the direct consumption experience of respondents, rather than relying on hypothetical purchase evaluations as many prior studies have done. The highest mean score was found for the item "I am satisfied with the quality of the Scarlett products that I use" ($X3.7$, $M = 4.26$), where the phrase "that I use" signals that respondents were not merely prospective buyers with limited product

knowledge, but active users with firsthand quality experience. This shifts the analytical frame from anticipated product quality to experienced product quality a distinction that strengthens the internal validity of the relationship and that is seldom made explicit in comparable studies.

Respondents' profile as active users of beauty products suggests that they possess direct experience with product quality. Furthermore, the current study uniquely connects the product quality, purchase intention relationship to the rejection of the advertising–purchase intention direct effect (H1), thereby constructing a coherent behavioral narrative: educated, experience-oriented young consumers place greater trust in factual product performance than in marketing communication. This cross-hypothesis interpretive linkage, where the acceptance of H3 is explained by reference to the rejection of H1, adds theoretical coherence that isolated hypothesis testing in prior research fails to provide.

This finding reinforces the theoretical proposition that product quality is a critical mediating variable that bridge the gap between marketing communications and actual purchase behavior. When consumers perceive high product quality, including performance, features, reliability, durability, and aesthetics, they develop higher purchase motivation, grounded in rational evaluation rather than persuasive influence.

Mediated Effect of Advertising Through Product Quality

The indirect effect of advertising on purchase intention through product quality is significant (T-stat = 2.285, $p = 0.022$). This is a particularly important finding, as it reveals that while advertising lacks direct impact on purchase intention, its effectiveness is significantly enhanced when it successfully highlights and communicates product quality attributes.

The principal differentiating value of this finding relative to prior research lies in its resolution of an apparent paradox: how can advertising be simultaneously ineffective (H1 rejected) and effective (H4 supported) within the same model? Prior studies that examined either the direct advertising, purchase intention relationship or mediation pathways in isolation were unable to capture this nuance. The present study, by testing both direct and indirect paths within a unified structural model, reveals that advertising's influence is pathway dependent, it cannot convert awareness into purchase intention directly, but it can do so meaningfully when it successfully communicates product quality cues. This finding offers a more sophisticated account of advertising effectiveness than binary significant/not-significant conclusions found in much of the existing literature.

The acceptance of this mediation hypothesis, while H1 (the direct effect of advertising) was rejected, is an interesting finding that can be explained through the respondent profile. Educated young consumers do not make purchases directly because of advertising; rather, informative and clear advertisements (highest mean in X1.6 = 4.33: "The advertising message is clear and easy to understand") function as cognitive triggers that shape or reinforce perceptions of product quality.

In other words, for female university students aged 20-25 years, the mechanism operates as follows: advertisement exposure: "this product appears to be of high quality" purchase intention is formed. Advertising did not directly

encourage them to purchase; instead, it built a mental construction of quality, which subsequently served as bridge toward purchase intention. This respondents profile, critical yet still receptive to information, was highly consistent with a partial mediation model of this kind and represents a behavioral pattern that prior research in the Indonesian skincare market has not explicitly modeled.

The highest mean score for advertising clarity (message is very clear and easy to understand, $M = 4.33$) combined with high product satisfaction scores suggests that when advertising effectively communicates quality attributes, it becomes a more powerful driver of purchase intention. This finding supports a partial mediation model in which product quality partially mediates the advertising, purchase intention relationship, aligning with (Kotler & Keller, 2016) framework on advertising effectiveness.

The high correlation between advertising and product quality ($r = 0.856$) further corroborates this mediation pathway. These findings carry an important practical implication: advertising strategies focused on communicating quality superiority rather than mere visual appeal or brand awareness will generate more effective purchase intention conversion through the product quality mediation route.

Mediated Effect of Brand Image Through Product Quality

Brand image did not significantly influence purchase intention through product quality mediation ($T\text{-stat} = 1.215$, $p = 0.224$). This finding differed from (Nofiana, Prasetya, Teguh, Zuhro, & Sutini, 2024) but aligned with the nuanced understanding that the mechanism through which brand image affected purchase intention may have been primarily direct rather than indirect through product quality perceptions.

The theoretical advancement offered by this study lies in its ability to provide a structural and profile-based explanation for why the mediation pathway fails, an explanatory depth that is largely absent in comparable prior research. Whereas Nofiana et al. (2024) and similar studies reported significant brand image $\rightarrow$ product quality $\rightarrow$ purchase intention mediation, the present study demonstrates that this pathway becomes redundant when brand image is sufficiently dominant as a direct driver. Specifically, when the direct brand image, purchase intention path is highly significant ($T\text{-stat} = 5.504$, $p = 0.000$), the mediation route through product quality lacks sufficient residual variance to operate meaningfully, a ceiling effect that prior studies with weaker direct effects did not encounter and therefore could not identify.

Although brand image is fairly highly correlated with product quality (0.782), the mediation pathway is not significant. This can be interpreted as indicating that the influence of Brand Image is already dominant directly on purchase intention, leaving insufficient “room” for product quality to function as a meaningful mediator.

The rejection of this hypothesis is further explained by an important characteristic of the respondent sample: 70% of respondents were active users of Scarlett products who already possessed direct and internalized knowledge of product quality. For consumers with established consumption experience, brand

image does not need to function as a proxy signal for quality, it operates as an independent motivational force. The sequential logic of brand image → quality inference → purchase intention is characteristic of prospective buyers who lack direct product experience and rely on brand cues to estimate quality. In contrast, experienced users bypass this inferential step entirely, allowing brand image to influence purchase intention directly. This behavioral distinction, between inference-based and experience-based purchase motivation, represents a conceptual contribution that broadens the theoretical scope of mediation models in consumer behavior research.

A plausible explanation is that brand image already operates as a holistic perceptual construct that directly shapes purchase intention, and routing it through product quality does not add explanatory value. Additionally, consumer concerns about counterfeit products, indicated by the lowest mean score for product performance consistency with advertised claims ($M = 4.03$), may have weakened the brand image product quality, purchase intention chain. This finding invites future research to examine how the strength of mediation varies as a function of consumer experience level and product category familiarity.

E. CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the influence of advertising and brand image, mediated by product quality, on consumer purchase intention for Scarlett Whitening beauty product in Cibinong. First, advertising does not have a significant direct effect on purchase intention (H_1 rejected), suggesting that advertising alone is insufficient to convert consumer attention into purchase motivation in the competitive Indonesian beauty market. Second, brand image has the strongest significant positive direct effect on purchase intention (H_2 accepted), underscoring the primacy of brand equity as a driver of consumer purchase behavior. Third, product quality significantly and positively influences purchase intention (H_3 accepted), confirming that actual product experience is a critical determinant of consumer behavior. Fourth, advertising significantly influences purchase intention when mediated by product quality (H_4 accepted), revealing that advertising effectiveness is enhanced when it successfully communicates product quality attributes. Fifth, brand image does not significantly influence purchase intention through product quality mediation (H_5 rejected), suggesting that brand image operates more powerfully through direct perceptual channels.

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