Research Article

The Effect of Korean Celebrity Brand Ambassador on Brand Loyalty Mediated by Brand Image and Brand Awareness: A Study on MS Glow Customers in Malang City

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Abstract: This study investigates the effect of Korean Celebrity Brand Ambassador towards Brand Loyalty, with Brand Image and Brand Awareness serving as a mediating variable among customers of MS Glow. This study adopts an explanatory research design with a quantitative approach, utilizing offline surveys distributed to 130 respondents for data collection. The data is analyzed using the Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) method. The results of this research show that brand ambassadors do not have a significant effect on brand loyalty. At the same time, brand image and brand awareness are able to mediate the influence between brand ambassadors on brand loyalty. This makes brand image and brand awareness become indirect-only mediation. This empirical study provides useful implications for academics by providing an important contribution to brand administration research by systematically investigating the impact of brand ambassadors on loyalty to the brand as mediated through the image of the brand and brand awareness.

Keywords: Brand Ambassador, Brand Image, Brand Awareness, Brand Loyalty.

I. INTRODUCTION

One type of product that is currently in vogue and gaining more and more enthusiasm is skin care. It is one of the products that fulfil women's basic beauty needs. With the development of this era, skin care is no longer a secondary need but has become a primary need for some women [1]. Consumers themselves are certainly influenced by the variety of skin care brands or skin care products. Each consumer certainly has different considerations when choosing cosmetic products, based on each individual's needs and interests [2]. Therefore, a brand must be able to create ideas that can bring its own value to its business in order to attract consumers. Because the more consumers a company can attract, the more opportunities the company has to build consumer loyalty [3].

Communication or advertising innovation through the use of Korean celebrity brand ambassadors is currently being favoured or followed by various beauty brands as a bridge to provide product information from brands to consumers. The public's passion for the Korean Wave in Indonesia is mostly due to the tremendous expansion of information technology as a result of globalisation [4]. One company that uses Korean celebrity brand ambassadors as a strategy to promote its products is MS Glow.

MS Glow as one of Indonesia's local skincare brands, experienced a decline in total sales. In 2021, MS Glow was first placed as the best-selling skincare with total sales of IDR 38,500,000,000, but in 2022, MS Glow fell to third place with total sales of IDR 29,400,000,000 defeated by Somethinc and Scarlett [5]. Through the data on brand competition by market share, in order to survive in the market and maintain consumer loyalty to the brand, a marketing strategy is needed. This marketing technique aims to identify and keep target consumers by offering and conveying product values to them [6].

Previous research states that brand ambassadors can influence brand loyalty [7][8], but there are also studies that state that brand ambassadors cannot influence brand loyalty [9]. These inconsistent results are a gap for research by adding other variables as mediating variables, namely brand image and brand awareness which are considered to strengthen the influence of brand ambassadors on brand loyalty. The creation of brand loyalty is driven by consumer recognition of brand existence (brand awareness) and the maintenance of brand reputation (brand image) in the view of consumer users [10].

This research is an explanatory study that uses a quantitative analysis approach. Aims to understand the effect of brand ambassadors on brand loyalty by using brand image and brand awareness as mediating variables. Primary data is fully taken from the collected sample, and secondary data is obtained from empirical results.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A) Stimulus-Organism-Response Framework

The S-O-R framework is used to account for external stimuli based on environmental factors that give rise to an individual's cognitive and affective behaviour. In this case, the S-O-R framework has the benefit of understanding how consumer loyalty is due to an interaction between brand ambassadors, brands, and consumers [11]. The S-O-R framework consists of three parts namely stimulus (S) which is an input from the external environment that affects the internal state of the individual, organism (O) Is the process of intervention between stimulus and response in consumer behaviour, and response (R) Merupakan pendekatan atau sebaliknya untuk keputusan akhir pelanggan atau dapat disebut sebagai perilaku individu selanjutnya setelah merasakan sebuah pengalaman yang telah diproses.

B) Marketing Communications

Marketing communication is the way companies try to inform the brand, invite to buy the brand, and establish relationships with consumers either directly or indirectly [12]. By implementing marketing communication, companies can build relationships with consumers. State that there are nine elements in the marketing communication process, namely sender, receiver, main communication tools, message and media, encoding, decoding, response, feedback, and noice.

According to Kennedy & Soemanegara [13], the purpose of marketing communication is to achieve three stages of change. First knowledge change where, at this stage, the company focuses on providing knowledge to consumers about how products or services are used and how they are intended. Second, changes in attitudes related to public interest in the company's products or services. Third, behavioural changes where in marketing its products or services must be in accordance with the intended market segment so that there will be no behavioural changes that cause people to move to other companies' products or services.

C) Brand Ambassador

A brand ambassador is someone who represents the best portrait or image of a product, this someone is usually from among celebrities or other popular circles [14]. Companies choose popular people as brand ambassadors because they want to leave an impact on the advertisement and lift the brand image. A brand ambassador has been proven to help increase sales value and maintain customer loyalty. This means that consumers are influenced by brand ambassadors in buying or repurchasing a product [15]. Masyita and Yuliati's previous research stated that the influence of brand ambassadors on brand image has a good and positive contribution so that consumers are interested in using products from that brand. Brand image can emerge from a brand ambassador who has a positive contribution and is in a good category [16].

H_1: Brand ambassadors has a significant influence on brand loyalty
H_2: Brand ambassadors has a significant influence on brand image
H_3: Brand ambassadors has a significant influence on brand awareness

D) Brand Image

Brand image is a person's opinions, thoughts, and perceptions about a brand [17]. The brand image reflects the connections that arise in memory while thinking about a specific brand. These linkages can be understood as type, goodness, strength, and uniqueness [18]. A good brand image is a condition when a consumer thinks about a particular product or service; they immediately become aware of the existence of the product or service and then have the intention to buy it again or recommend it to others [19].

H_4: Brand image has a significant influence on brand loyalty
H_6: Brand image mediates the effect between brand ambassador and brand loyalty

E) Brand Awareness

Brand awareness is the ability of customers to recognize or remember that a brand is a certain part of a product. A brand can be said to have equity if consumers recognize and remember a brand in one product category outside of other products [20]. Awareness creates four values in consumers' minds, namely the ability to remember the brand, the ability to recognize the brand, the consumer's ability to recall the brand, and having distinctive characteristics [21]. Brand awareness is a long-lasting and sustainable asset. A product that has been chosen by consumers directly until they have dominant awareness of the product, the product will be very difficult to replace with other products [22].

Based on previous research, brand awareness can strengthen the relationship between brand ambassadors and brand loyalty [9]. This is because if a brand introduces products or services through brand ambassadors so that consumers can continuously get to know, remember, and think about the products or services offered, maintain the good name of the brand, inform other people about the brand, and even recommend the brand to other people. When making a purchase, the consumer's brand loyalty will be formed [10].

H_5: Brand awareness has a significant influence on brand loyalty
H_7: Brand awareness mediates the effect between brand ambassador and brand loyalty

F) Brand Loyalty

Loyalty is an unwavering commitment to purchase or subscribe to a chosen product or service in the future, even if situational factors and marketing efforts may persuade customers to switch to other goods [25]. Brand loyalty is also defined as the amount to which a customer has an upbeat mindset about a brand, is committed to that brand, and plans to continue purchasing it in the years to come. The reflection of consumer attitudes depends on the experience consumers feel while using the brand. The stronger a consumer develops a perception about a service or product, the greater the possibility that the quality will exceed initial expectations, which in turn can have an impact on their loyalty [26].
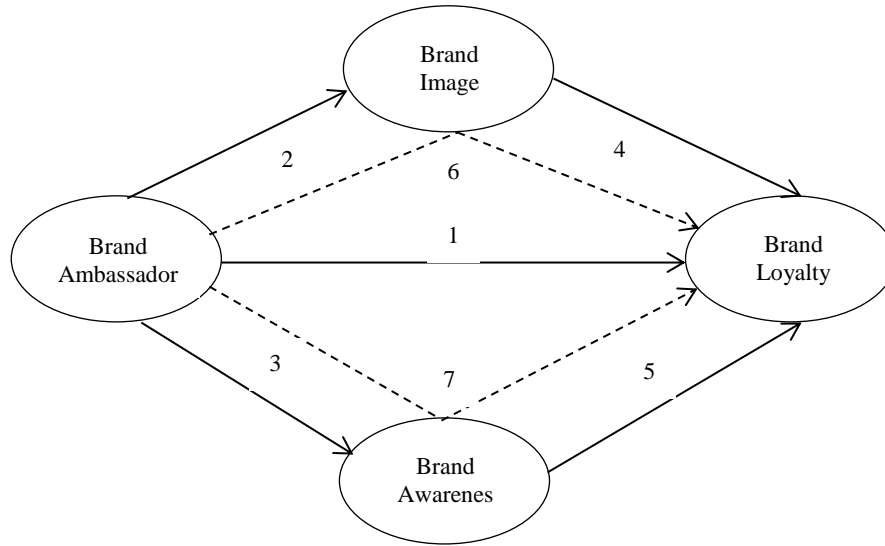
Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

This research adopts an explanatory approach with a quantitative method, focusing on exploring the relationships between variables using a Likert scale instrument that has a range of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The study's target population includes customers of MS Glow, with the sample consisting of 130 respondents selected through purposive sampling. The criteria of respondents are people who use MS Glow at the age of 18 or above.

After the data was collected, Structural Equation Modelling by Partial Least Square (SEM-PLS) were used to analyze extracted data. Each variable in this study utilizes indicators that have been adapted from Rossister and Percy [27] for brand ambassadors, Alfian [28] for the brand image, Aaker [20] for brand awareness, and Pahlevi and Suhartanto [29] for brand loyalty.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A) Respondent Characteristics

Table 1 shows respondent characteristics. Based on gender, there were more female respondents than male respondents that is 88 female respondents or 68%. Meanwhile, the remaining 42 respondents or 32% were men. These results show that women are the majority of users of MS Glow skincare products. Based on the age characteristics of respondents, the number of respondents with an age range of 18-24 years had the largest number, namely 48 respondents or 37%. This shows that the majority of MS Glow users are Gen Z (Generation Z), which is the age group born from the end of 1990 to 2012. This generation grew up with the development of internet technology. They more often use smartphones and the internet to obtain all information quickly and easily, and can be used to meet their needs.

Based on the results of the questionnaire, the largest number of professionals were students with 36 respondents or 28%. This shows that many of the respondents are young women and still have the title of student. In other words, women have a high level of desire to care for their skin so that it improves their appearance among other friends, and MS Glow is their choice for skin care. Based on the characteristics of the respondent's income, the highest amount is income of less than IDR 1,500,000. This is in accordance with the results of profession characteristics that most respondents are still students who still receive pocket money to make ends meet. So, they do not have income from certain jobs but are still given it by their parents.

Based on the number of respondents, all of them were MS Glow users more than twice. This shows that the loyalty they have is in accordance with the requirements for consumers who are said to be loyal if they have used MS Glow more than 2 times.

Table 1: Demographic Respondents

	Category	Frequency	%
Gender	Female	42	32
	Male	88	68
Age	18-24	48	37
	25-35	36	28
	36-45	29	22
	>45	17	13
Profession	Student	36	28
	Housewife	18	14
	private employees	32	25
	government employees	21	16
	Entrepreneur	23	18
Income	< IDR 1.500.000	42	32
	IDR 1.500.000 – IDR 2.500.000	23	18
	IDR 2.500.000 – IDR 3.500.000	27	21
	> IDR 3.500.000	38	29
Using MS Glow	2 times	0	0
	> 2 times	130	100

B) Measurement Model Analysis

The measurement of validity analysis involves evaluating the outer loading and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) using SmartPLS 4.0. The results of this validity analysis are presented below.

Table 2: Validity Analysis

Measurement Item(s)	Convergent Validity		Discriminant Validity	
	Outer Loading	Result	AVE	Result
Brand Ambassador			0,547	
Cha Eun Woo made me use skincare from MS Glow	0,743	Valid		Valid
Cha Eun Woo is able to convey product-related information to consumers	0,749	Valid		Valid
Cha Eun Woo makes me believe that MS Glow has good products	0,791	Valid		Valid
I want to use the same product that Cha Eun Woo uses	0,730	Valid		Valid
Cha Eun Woo made me like MS Glow, too	0,727	Valid		Valid
I would be more interested in observing information about MS Glow if Cha Eun Woo presented it through advertisements	0,718	Valid		Valid
Cha Eun Woo is a strong reason when use MS Glow products	0,718	Valid		Valid
Brand Image			0,594	
The quality of the products offered by the MS Glow brand meets my expectations	0,791	Valid		Valid
The results of using MS Glow products can increase self-confidence	0,808	Valid		Valid
MS Glow products are produced by companies that have high credibility	0,724	Valid		Valid
The MS Glow brand introduces to the public that its products are produced using sophisticated technology	0,728	Valid		Valid
The MS Glow brand continues to develop new innovations following developments in skincare trends	0,771	Valid		Valid
The MS Glow brand provides complete and consistent information regarding its products	0,823	Valid		Valid
The MS Glow brand has a good image in the eyes of the public	0,789	Valid		Valid
The selling price of MS Glow products is stable	0,776	Valid		Valid
MS Glow has many products that meet my needs	0,722	Valid		Valid
Brand Awareness			0,581	
I am aware of the usefulness of the products from the MS Glow brand that I use	0,843	Valid		Valid
I am aware of the information on every product I use from the MS Glow brand	0,778	Valid		Valid
I easily recognized MS Glow from advertising promotions	0,704	Valid		Valid

Measurement Item(s)	Convergent Validity		Discriminant Validity	
	Outer Loading	Result	AVE	Result
I recognized MS Glow from relatives	0,744	Valid		Valid
I recognized MS Glow from the product display	0,709	Valid		Valid
I easily recognize products released by the MS Glow brand	0,822	Valid		Valid
When I am asked to name a skincare brand, I will mention MS Glow	0,729	Valid		Valid
MS Glow has a slogan or advertisement that is easy to remember	0,765	Valid		Valid
I easily get to know MS Glow products	0,742	Valid		Valid
MS Glow is the first brand that I remember compared to other skincare brands when buying skincare products	0,792	Valid		Valid
Skincare products from MS Glow are products that I always use to treat skin problems	0,742	Valid		Valid
Brand Loyalty			0,694	
I will repurchase skincare products from MS Glow	0,857	Valid		Valid
Skincare from MS Glow is my first choice when buying skincare	0,878	Valid		Valid
I recommend MS Glow to others	0,847	Valid		Valid
I have good reviews of the MS Glow	0,742	Valid		Valid

As shown in Table 2, the outer loading scores from each item in a brand ambassador, brand image, brand awareness, and brand loyalty scored more than 0.7, and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) also scored above 0.5, which was confirmed as valid. Thus, this result fulfils the prerequisite for subsequent analysis. The assessment of reliability analysis is by examining the value of composite reliability scores and Cronbach's alpha.

Table 3: Reliability Analysis

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Brand Ambassador	0,863	0,867
Brand Image	0,914	0,918
Brand Awareness	0,927	0,932
Brand Loyalty	0,851	0,851

Table 3 displays the composite reliability value for each variable exceeding 0.7, along with Cronbach's alpha value also exceeding 0.7. Consequently, it is concluded that all items are considered reliable.

C) Structural Model Test

The inner model analysis predicts the causality between variables using the determinant coefficient (R2), predictive relevance (Q2), and goodness of fit. The determinant coefficient on each variable was assessed, with brand image exhibiting a good score (0.303) followed by brand awareness (0.190) and brand loyalty (0,468). The level of predictive relevance in this study is 0.317; thus, it can be concluded that the model in this study has relevant predictive value. Where the model used can explain the information in the research data by 31.7%, and this research has a good observation value because the value nilai Q^2 $0 < Q^2 < 1$.

D) Hypothesis Test

The direct impact can be observed through the t-statistic and p-value between variables using the bootstrapping method in SmartPLS 4.0. Hypotheses were considered significant if the t-statistic score exceeded 1.960 with a significance of 5% and the p-value was less than 0.05.

Table 4. Direct Hypothesis Testing

Relationship	Path Coefficient	t-Statistic	p-Value	Result
Brand Ambassador → Brand Loyalty	-0.129	1.921	0.055	Not Accepted
Brand Ambassador → Brand Image	0.550	9.927	0.000	Accepted
Brand Ambassador → Brand Awareness	0.436	7.212	0.000	Accepted
Brand Image → Brand Loyalty	0.239	2.392	0.017	Accepted
Brand Awareness → Brand Loyalty	0.576	7.024	0.000	Accepted

Table 4 explains direct hypothesis testing: brand ambassador has an insignificant effect on loyalty (β = -0.129; t = 1.921; p > 0.05), whereas brand ambassador has a significant effect on brand image (β = 0.550; t = 9.927; p < 0.05), and brand ambassador has a significant effect on brand awareness (β = 0.436; t = 7.212; p < 0.05). As a result, H1 is not supported, but

H2 and H3 are supported. Both brand image and brand awareness also significantly affect loyalty (β = 0.239; t = 2.392; p < 0.05 and β = 0.576; t = 7.024; p < 0.05). Therefore, it also supported H4 and H5.

The examination of indirect effects in hypothesis testing involves analyzing the path coefficient scores and assessing the significance through t-statistics and p-values derived from the original sample data.

Table 5. Indirect Hypotesis Testing

Relationship	Path Coefficient	t-Statistic	p-Value	Result
Brand Ambassador → Brand Image → Brand Loyalty	0.131	2.348	0.019	Accepted
Brand Ambassador → Brand Awareness → Brand Loyalty	0.251	4.649	0.000	Accepted

According to Table 5, the result of the indirect effect of brand image between brand ambassador to brand loyalty (β = 0.131; t = 2.348; p < 0.05) and brand awareness between brand ambassador to brand loyalty (β = 0.251; t = 4.649; p < 0.05) show mediating effect towards purchase intention. Brand image and brand awareness are found to fully mediate the relationship between brand ambassadors and brand loyalty. Consequently, hypotheses H6 and H7 are supported based on these findings.

E) Discussion

Based on the results of data analysis, hypothesis one is rejected because it shows that brand ambassadors do not have a significant effect on brand loyalty. This is in line with research from Muna et al. [2] and Kim et al. [9], which states that brand ambassadors do not significantly influence brand loyalty. The use of celebrities does not always lead to the emergence of certain behaviors, such as the desire to buy a product or loyalty. The association created uses brand signals to build messages related to company commitment. Each celebrity has different strengths seen from visibility, credibility, attractiveness, and power in generating further effects in the form of loyalty to the brand. Thus, a celebrity who is a brand ambassador for a brand cannot determine a consumer's loyalty.

In this research, brand ambassadors have a significant influence on the brand image, so hypothesis 2 is accepted. This hypothesis is in line with research from Masyita & Yuliati [16] and Lestari [30] that brand ambassadors have a significant influence on brand image. The use of celebrities often represents the product as a whole because of the attractiveness that celebrities have, as well as the positive image they have. Brand ambassadors will assist in forging a closer emotional bond between a company and its customers, which will subsequently strengthen the brand's reputation and influence consumers' decisions to buy and repurpose products [31].

The research results prove that brand ambassadors significantly impact consumer awareness of a brand, so hypothesis 3 is accepted. These results are in line with research from Gunawan & Susilo [32] that there is a significant relationship between brand ambassadors and brand awareness. So, it is important to choose a brand ambassador who is effective in building brand awareness. Choosing the right brand ambassador can certainly help build emotional connections with consumers, create a positive influence, and increase consumer trust in the brand. This can contribute to increased brand awareness and generate a positive impact on overall brand equity.

Based on the results of the data analysis, shows that brand image has a significant effect on brand loyalty, so hypothesis 4 is accepted. These results are in line with research by Caroline & Brahmana [33] and Chinomona & Maziriri [34], which states that brand image has a significant effect on brand loyalty. If consumers are satisfied with the brand image, then the brand must be able and strive to increase the benefits of the product and then obtain a product that is easily recognized and meets consumer needs. This can make consumers more satisfied and ignore other product offers or be loyal to the products they use.

Brand awareness has a significant effect on brand loyalty. These findings are consistent with a study by Sivaram et al. [23], which found a strong relationship between brand awareness and brand loyalty. The higher level of consumer awareness of the brand used, the more loyalty to the brand will increase. If there is marketing stimulation from a brand with the aim of forming brand awareness, then consumers will continue to remember one brand compared to other brands. So, when consumers remember and are aware of the existence of a brand to the point of informing and recommending a brand, then this has become one way of forming brand loyalty through brand awareness.

Through data analysis, the results showed that brand image was able to mediate the influence between brand ambassadors and brand loyalty, so hypothesis 6 was accepted. These results are in line with research from Saini et al. [24] who state that brand image has a positive and significant effect on brand loyalty and is able to significantly mediate the influence of brand ambassadors on brand loyalty. A strong brand image will provide a competitive advantage for a brand. So, suppose the brand ambassador can convey information about the brand or product well and interestingly through attractiveness, credibility,

expertise, trustworthiness, and compatibility of the brand ambassador with the brand. In that case, the information will continue to stick in the minds of consumers. This can increase repeat purchases as consumers feel a closer connection to the brand.

Brand awareness is also able to mediate the influence between brand ambassadors and brand loyalty. The mediation impact of brand awareness is known to be fully mediated. This is in line with research from Kim et al. [9], that brand awareness is able to mediate the relationship between brand ambassadors and brand loyalty. Brand awareness refers to the extent to which consumers recognize a brand, and brands must try to embed the brand in consumers' minds with positive things. So, consumers have the awareness to buy again and be loyal.

IV. CONCLUSION

This research shows that the independent variable, namely brand ambassador, does not have a significant influence towards brand loyalty. However, brand image and brand awareness have been proven to be able to fully mediate the influence of brand ambassadors on brand loyalty. Companies need to pay attention to the visibility, credibility, attractiveness and power of a brand ambassador used in advertising to ensure that consumers will notice the information conveyed by the brand ambassador. Companies must also maintain good relations with consumers and maintain brand reputation so that consumers voluntarily recommend products to others when they are asked to mention a brand.

Suggestions for further research are to expand the research sample throughout Indonesia to obtain more comprehensive research results. It is also hoped that further research will develop this research so that it can be sustainable and updated by adding other variables or expanding the research object, which will contribute to enriching better understanding.

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