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Analysis of Viral Marketing on Purchasing Decisions on Skincare Through Brand Image as an Intervening Variable

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Abstract: This study examines the effect of Viral Marketing on purchasing decisions for Skintific Skincare products with Brand Image as an intervening variable. This study focuses on Skintific users in Sukabumi City, using a quantitative approach with descriptive causal method. Data was collected through questionnaires from 180 respondents selected using purposive sampling technique. Data analysis was conducted using SEM-PLS method. The results showed that Viral Marketing has a significant influence on Brand Image (R^2=0.608) and purchasing decisions (R^2=0.791). Viral Marketing dimensions, such as information clarity and content attractiveness, contribute positively to improving Brand Image and purchasing decisions. Brand Image also has a significant effect on purchasing decisions, strengthening consumer confidence in the product. However, Brand Image does not effectively mediate the relationship between Viral Marketing and purchasing decisions because the direct effect of Viral Marketing on purchasing decisions is greater than the indirect effect through Brand Image. This study suggests optimizing viral marketing strategies through informative and interesting content on social media and increasing direct interaction with consumers to strengthen brand image and loyalty. This research contributes to digital marketing literature and marketing management practices to improve the effectiveness of marketing strategies in the digital era.

Keywords: Viral Marketing, Purchase Decision, Skincare, Brand Image.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of technology increases competition including the beauty industry (Fatya, et al., 2023). The Ministry of Industry even designated beauty products as a leading sector in the 2015-2035 national industrial development plan. (Nasution & Rangkuti, 2023).. Correspondingly, the Skincare and cosmetics market revenue in Indonesia continues to increase, with predictions of a 10% increase in online sales between 2021 and 2024, due to high public interest. (Nasution & Rangkuti, 2023)..

One of the newcomer skincare brands, Skintific, has managed to get great attention in the Indonesian beauty industry, but in order to survive and develop its products Skintific uses marketing strategies through popular social media platforms, such as TikTok. (Nasution &

Rangkuti, 2023). With more than 2.2 million monthly active users, TikTok is one of the most popular mobile apps in Indonesia, where the beauty category ranks third in the most-watched categories. (Azizah, et al., 2021). Quoted from (Skintific_id, 2024)shows that there were 649,500 posts using the Skintific hashtag and other hashtags such as skintificid which had 261,300 posts in September 2024.

By utilizing interesting features on TikTok, Skintific not only focuses on increasing sales, but also seeks to understand consumer needs, which is the first step in the decision-making process. (Pratama et al., 2022). Consumers will seek appropriate product information, and detailed, clear, and accurate information can increase their trust, which in turn has a positive impact on purchasing decisions (Suherlan, et al., 2022). (Suherlan et al., 2023)..

Skintific implements a Viral Marketing strategy by utilizing social media and the internet to spread information about its products. (Bukit, et al., 2023). This strategy utilizes social relationships to expand content reach and product visibility, while encouraging social media users to talk about the product through viral trends and topics. (Pratama, et al., 2022). The message must be engaging, informative, and credible in order to attract consumer interest and encourage purchases and content sharing (Pratama et al., 2022). (Bukit, et al., 2023).

According to (Ethelda, et al., 2022)Viral marketing can influence consumer purchasing behavior and decisions, because trust in a product or service can be built online through reviews, promotional content, direct interaction, and recommendations from influencers. In this case, Skintific carried out a Viral Marketing strategy by offering special promos for several Skincare products on social media platforms, including Tiktok, with the hope of influencing consumers in making purchasing decisions and increasing product sales. (Bukit, et al., 2023).

To increase sales, strengthening Brand Image is very important, because consumers feel that buying products with a good Brand Image provides a sense of security. (Febriani & Sudarwanto, 2023) . With high trust in Brand Image, consumers are more open to receiving and responding to messages from viral promotions, so that these messages are more effective in influencing purchasing decisions. (Pratama, et al., 2022). Brand Image also helps consumers recognize products, assess quality, and reduce purchase risk by showing the expected value and benefits. (Aini Hikmatul, 2023).. Skintific succeeds in creating positive associations with the brand, which makes consumers believe that its products can meet their needs and are able to compete with other brands. (Apriliani & Setyawati, 2023)..

Skintific successfully entered the top five best-selling facial care brands in ecommerce in the second quarter - 2022 in the period April-June 2022 and ranked second successfully competing with the Somethinc brand which was ranked first, Scarlett in third place, followed by Garnier and MS Glow (Fatya, et al., 2023). In addition, Skintific also won seven major awards for some of its products, such as best moisturizer, best eye care conditioner and, best new brand 2022 from TikTok Live Awards 2022, Female Daily, Sociolla, and Beautyhaul. (Fatya, et al., 2023). However, although Skintific has won several awards for its viral marketing strategy, it has not had a significant impact on sales in the following month (Pamungkas & Wardhani, 2024).

Table 1. Table of Best-Selling Care Product Brands in E-Commerce

Brand Name	Total Sales August 16-31, 2022	Total sales September 1-15, 2022
Somethinc	3.8 Billion	729 million
Skintific	2.9 Billion	488 million
Scarlett	4.4 Billion	358 million
Garnier	2.7 Billion	213 million

Source: (Pamungkas & Wardhani, 2024).

The table above shows that Skintific's total sales in the period September 1-15 in 2022 Skintific recorded total sales of 488 million and decreased from the period August 16-31 in 2022 Skintific recorded total sales of Rp2.9 billion. (Pamungkas & Wardhani, 2024).

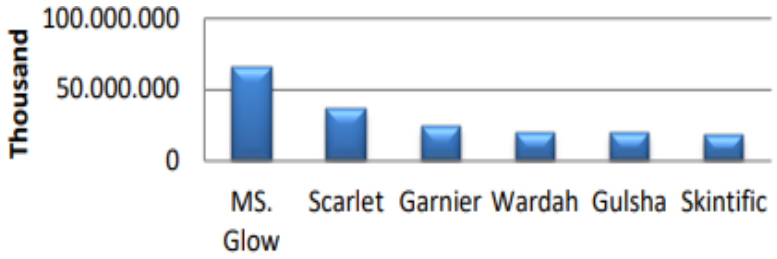


Image 1. Local and Imported Skincare Transaction Data in April 2023
Source: (Lestiyani & Purwanto, 2023)

Based on the picture above, it shows that Skintific continues to decline until it is ranked sixth, this decline is thought to be caused by the difference in results between the Viral Marketing strategy and total sales from Skintific.

This research was conducted on Skintific product users in Sukabumi City. There are many factors in considering when making purchasing decisions, and one of the factors is the efficiency of Viral Marketing and the existence of Brand Image as a form of mediation between Viral Marketing and purchasing decisions.

The research gap in this study shows two different gaps with previous research. According to (Pratama, et al., 2022) Viral Marketing does not have a significant influence on purchasing decisions, while according to (Santoso & Dwijayanti, 2021), Viral Marketing does not have a significant influence on purchasing decisions. (Santoso & Dwijayanti, 2021) found that Viral Marketing has a significant influence on purchasing decisions. In addition, (Ardiansyah, 2021) found that Brand Image significantly influences Viral Marketing, and according to (Anam, et al., 2020) found that Viral Marketing has a significant influence on purchasing decisions. (Anam, et al., 2020) show that Brand Image also has a significant effect on purchasing decisions.

Based on the gaps in previous research, researchers are interested in studying this issue further by taking Skintific Skincare products as the object of research, in a study entitled "Analysis of Viral Marketing on Purchasing Decisions on Skincare Through Brand Image as an Intervening Variable".

METHOD

This research uses a quantitative method with a causal descriptive approach, which explains the relationship between variables objectively through theory and statistical analysis. (Widianingsih, et al., 2022).. This study determined the population of Sukabumi City residents who had purchased Skintific products after seeing viral content on TikTok, spread across 7 urban villages. Using non-probability sampling technique of purposive sampling type, the sample size was calculated by SEM-PLS analysis. Data collection methods can be done in various ways, such as interviews, questionnaires, observation, observation, testing, documentation, and others. (Sugiyono, 2015). This study applies the Smart PLS method to analyze data after measuring attitudes with semantic differential. Smart PLS is a component-based SEM model that does not require multivariate normal distribution, with latent variable estimates calculated through linear combinations of indicators, and includes an external relationship (outer model) between latent variables and indicators. (Purwanti, Y., & Chasanah, 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Results

Coefficient of determination (R^2)

R-square (R^2) measures the effect of independent latent variables on the dependent. The value is 0 to 1, with prediction accuracy: 0.75 high, 0.5 medium, and 0.25 low. (Hair, et al., 2023).

Table 2. R-Square Table

Indicator	R-Square	Friability
Brand Image (M)	0,608	Medium
Purchase Decision (Y)	0,791	High

Source: Data processed Research, 2024 (using SmartPLS 3.0 software)

The R^2 table measures the effect of viral marketing on brand image and purchasing decisions. The R^2 value for brand image (M) is 0.608, which means that it influences purchasing decisions by 60.8%, with the remaining 39.2% influenced by other variables. Meanwhile, the R^2 value for purchasing decisions (Y) is 0.791, indicating that viral marketing and brand image influence 79.1%, with the remaining 20.9% influenced by other variables.

Effect Size (F-Square)

Effect size is a procedure that shows how much influence the construct has on the changes that occur. Effect size is divided into three categories, namely small (0.02), medium (0.15), and large (0.35). (Kock & Hadaya, 2018).

Table 3. Effect Size Results

	X	M	Y
Purchase Decision (Y)			
Viral Marketing (X)		1,552	0,453
Brand Image (M)			0,382

Source: Data processed Research, 2024 (using SmartPLS 3.0 software)

Table 3 shows the results of the effect size calculation which indicates that the effect of viral marketing on purchasing decisions with a value of (0.453) is included in the large category. Meanwhile, the effect of brand image on purchasing decisions with a value of (0.382) is also classified as large, and the effect of viral marketing on brand image with a value of (1.552) can be categorized as a very large influence.

Hypothesis Test of Direct and Indirect Effect (Specific Indirect Effect)

Bootstrapping was conducted to test the significance between variables using resampling of the entire original sample with one-tailed significance and a t-value of 1.654. (Hair, et al., 2023). The following table shows the results of the significance test:

Table 4. Direct Effect Test

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values
X → M	0,780	0,764	0,084	9,290	0,000
X → Y	0,492	0,480	0,268	2,928	0,004
M → Y	0,451	0,464	0,182	2,486	0,013

Source: Data processed Research, 2024 (using SmartPLS 3.0 software)

Based on table 4, it shows that the hypothesis is accepted if the t-statistic> 1.654 and p-value <0.05, as shown in the path coefficient table 4. (Hair, et al., 2023). This table shows that all items are significant to the construct, confirming that viral marketing and brand image shape purchasing decisions.

Based on the inner model scheme previously presented, the path coefficient test illustrates the strength of the influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable. For example, the value of 9.290 shows the effect of viral marketing on brand image, while the value of 2.486 shows the effect of brand image on purchasing decisions. The significance level of this influence can be seen through the p-value table, which produces data below 0.05.

The following table shows the indirect effect analysis to measure the role of brand image in mediating the relationship between viral marketing and purchasing decisions.

Table 5. Indirect Effect

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values
X → M → Y	0,352	0,359	0,155	2,264	0,024

Source: Data processed Research, 2024 (using SmartPLS 3.0 software)

From the table above, it can be seen that there is a mediating relationship between viral marketing and purchasing decisions through brand image. The following are the results of data analysis that describes the relationship between viral marketing variables (X), brand image (M), and purchasing decisions (Y) based on hypothesis testing that has been carried out:

a. Hypothesis 1
   The test results show that viral marketing (X) has a significant effect on purchasing decisions (Y), with a t-statistic of 2.928 and a p-value of 0.004 (t-statistic> 1.654 and p-value <0.05).
b. Hypothesis 2
   Viral marketing (X) has a significant influence on brand image (M), with a t-statistic of 9.290 and a p-value of 0.000 (t-statistic> 1.654 and p-value <0.05).
c. Hypothesis 3
   Brand image (M) has a significant positive effect on purchasing decisions (Y), with a t-statistic of 2.486 and a p-value of 0.013 (t-statistic> 1.654 and p-value <0.05).
d. Hypothesis 4
   The test results show that the relationship between viral marketing (X) and purchasing decisions (Y) through brand image (M) is significant, with a t-statistic value of 2.264 and a p-value of 0.024. Statistically, Ho is rejected and Ha is accepted because the t-statistic is more than 1.654 and the p-value is less than 0.05.

Total Effect

The total effect is obtained from the sum of the direct and indirect effects in the research model. The following are the results of the calculation of the total effect:

Table 6. Total Effect

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values
Viral marketing (X) → Brand iamge (M)	0,780	0,764	0,084	9,290	0,000
Viral Marketing (X) → Purchase Decision (Y)	0,843	0,839	0,052	16,144	0,000
Brand Image (M) → Purchase Decision (Y)	0,451	0,464	0,180	2,486	0,0013

Table 6 shows that the total effect between variables has a positive and significant result, with a t-statistic> 1.654 and a p-value <0.05. The total effect generated by the viral marketing variable on brand image shows a significant positive value, with a total effect of 0.780. In addition, the viral marketing variable also has a significant positive effect on purchasing decisions, with a total value of 0.843. Meanwhile, the effect of brand image on purchasing decisions is recorded as significant positive, with a total value of 0.451.

Total Indirect Effect

The total indirect effect is obtained from the sum of the indirect effects in the research model. The following are the results of the calculation of the total indirect effect:

Table 7. Total Indirect Effect

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values
Viral marketing (X) → Brand iamge (M)					
Viral Marketing (X) → Purchase Decision (Y) Brand Image (M) → Purchase Decision (Y)	0,352	0,359	0,155	2,264	0,024

Source: Data processed Research, 2024 (using SmartPLS 3.0 software)

In table 7, it can be seen that the total indirect effect is 0.352, with significant positive results on the latent variable viral marketing (X) on purchasing decisions (Y).

Influence Summary Matrix

A summary of the influence between variables in this study is presented in a matrix to facilitate the analysis of the relationship between latent variables.

Table 8. Influence Summary Matrix

Latent Variable	T-Statistic of Path Coefficient	P-Value	Direct Influence	Indirect Effect	Total Influence
Viral marketing (X) → Purchase Decision (Y)	3,056	0,002	0,780	0,000	0,780
Viral Marketing (X) → Brand Image (M)	8,954	0,000	0,492	0,004	0,843
Brand Image (M) → Purchase Decision (Y)	2,602	0,010	0,451	0,013	0,451
Viral marketing (X) → Brand iamge (M) → Purchase Decision (Y)	2,308	0,021	0,352	0,024	0,150

Source: Data processed Research, 2024 (using SmartPLS 3.0 software)

Viral marketing is more effective in increasing purchasing decisions directly without involving brand image as a mediating variable, as seen from table 8, where the direct effect between viral marketing and purchasing decisions has a higher significance than the indirect effect through the mediating variable.

Discussion

The analysis was conducted on the indicators of the independent variables (viral marketing and brand image) and the dependent variable (purchase decision) through a questionnaire to 180 respondents.

1. Effect of Viral Marketing (X) and Brand Image (M)

In SmartPLS 3 software, hypothesis testing is seen from the path coefficient table. It can be seen in table 4 that the exogenous viral marketing construct has a significant effect on the brand image construct (O = 0.780, t-statistic = 9.290> 1.654, p = value = 0.000 <0.05). The higher the viral marketing, the more brand image increases. This is in line with research according to (Ardiansyah, 2021) found that viral marketing significantly affects brand image.

The results of descriptive analysis show that the average respondent's assessment of viral marketing is high (8.08). The highest dimension was clarity of information with an indicator of product reviews/testimonials (8.34), while the lowest was product knowledge with an indicator of seeking product information (7.67). This shows that viral marketing is influencing consumers of Skintific products in Sukabumi City. Meanwhile, the analysis shows that the average brand image is also high (8.27). The highest ratings were in the affinity dimension and the indicator of brand relevance to consumers' values and lifestyle (8.40), while the lowest scores were in the recognition dimension in the indicator of superiority over competing brands (4.13). These results confirm that viral marketing plays a role in improving the brand image of Skintific product consumers through the dimensions of recognition, reputation and affinity.

2. The influence of Brand Image (M) and Purchasing Decisions (Y)

Table 4.8, the exogenous brand image construct has a significant effect on purchasing decisions with a coefficient value (O = 0.451), t-statistic 2.486 (> 1.65), and p-value 0.013 (<0.05). This shows that the higher the brand image, the higher the purchasing decision, in line with research according to (Anam, et al., 2020) shows that brand image also has a significant effect on purchasing decisions.

The results of descriptive analysis show that the average respondent's assessment of brand image is in the high category (8.27). The highest assessment is in the affinity dimension in the indicator of brand relevance to consumer values and lifestyle (8.40), while the lowest value is in the recognition dimension in the Skintific logo/symbol indicator is attractive (4.13). This shows that brand image has a strong influence on consumers of Skintific products. Meanwhile, the average respondent's assessment of purchasing decisions is in the very high category (8.31). The highest assessment is in the product selection dimension, namely according to needs (8.52), while the lowest value is in the brand selection dimension in the attractive design indicator (8.07). Based on this data, brand image has a significant influence on purchasing decisions, which is supported by dimensions such as product selection, brand selection, channel selection, purchase time, purchase amount and payment method.

3. The influence of Brand Image (M) in mediating the relationship between Viral Marketing (X) and Purchasing Decisions (Y)

In SmartPLS 3.0 software, the mediation test is seen from the specific indirect effect table. First, the direct effect of viral marketing on purchasing decisions is positive and significant (O=0.492) with a t-statistic of 2.928 (>1.654) and a p-value of 0.004 (<0.05). Furthermore, table 4.8 shows that brand image can mediate the relationship between viral marketing and purchasing decisions with a mediation value (O=0.352), t-statistic 2.264, and p-value 0.024, which is also significant. However, table 4.10 shows that the mediation value (O=0.352) is smaller than the direct effect (O=0.492). Thus, it can be concluded that the mediating effect of brand image is not significant.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research that has been conducted regarding the analysis of viral marketing on purchasing decisions with brand image as an intervening variable, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Viral marketing has a significant effect on brand image among users of Skintific products in Sukabumi City. This means that the greater or more effective viral marketing is, the greater the influence on brand image. This high viral marketing is supported by three dimensions, namely, product knowledge, clarity of information and talking about products.
2. Viral marketing has a significant influence on purchasing decisions for Skintific users in Sukabumi City. This means that the greater the effectiveness of viral marketing, the greater the influence on consumers in making purchasing decisions. This high viral marketing is supported by three dimensions, namely, product knowledge, information clarity and talking about products.
3. Brand image has a significant effect on purchasing decisions for Skintific users in Sukabumi City. This means that Skintific product users are confident in making purchasing decisions if Skintifik products have a positive brand image. This is supported by three dimensions namely, recognition, reputation and affinity.
4. Brand image is not effective in mediating the relationship between viral marketing and purchasing decisions for Skintific product users in Sukabumi City because the indirect effect value is smaller than the direct effect value.

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