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Brand Ambassador and Purchase Intention: The Mediating Roles of Brand Awareness and Brand Trust among Prospective Whitelab Consumers in Malang, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The increasingly fierce competition in the skincare industry has encouraged companies to utilize brand ambassadors as a marketing strategy to increase consumer purchase intention. However, the effectiveness of brand ambassadors in influencing purchase intention still shows mixed results, particularly regarding the role of brand awareness and brand trust. This study aims to analyze the influence of Brand Ambassadors on Purchase Intention through Brand Awareness and Brand Trust among Whitelab skincare product consumers in Malang City. The study involved 160 prospective Whitelab consumers in Malang City. The findings showed that Brand Ambassador had a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention, Brand Awareness, and Brand Trust. Brand Awareness did not significantly affect Purchase Intention and did not mediate the relationship between Brand Ambassador and Purchase Intention. In contrast, Brand Trust had a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention and partially mediated the relationship between Brand Ambassador and Purchase Intention.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The global beauty and personal care industry has experienced significant growth in recent years and demonstrated strong resilience in the post-pandemic era. Rising public awareness of skin health, self-care, and appearance has driven demand for beauty products in various countries. Developments in digital technology and social media have accelerated changes in consumer behavior in seeking information, evaluating products, and making purchasing decisions

(Dwivedi et al., 2021) . Furthermore, the global skincare industry continues to show positive growth and has become one of the largest segments within the beauty and personal care industry. In Indonesia, the skincare market is also growing rapidly, marked by increasing sales value of personal care and health products and growing consumer interest in local skincare products (Abigail et al., 2024) . This situation makes the skincare industry a highly potential sector while creating increasingly fierce competition among brands operating in the market (Lim & Kwon, 2023) .

Indonesia is one of the fastest-growing skincare markets in Southeast Asia, driven by increasing purchasing power, awareness of the importance of skincare, and the widespread development of digital technology (Nurrosyidah et al., 2026) . The growth of e-commerce, social media, and social commerce has transformed the consumer shopping experience by enabling more intensive interactions between consumers, brands, and online communities. Consumers now have easier access to product information, compare alternatives, read reviews, and share experiences before making a purchase. The social interactions and information exchange that occur in this digital environment play a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions, trust, and purchasing decisions (Dhaigude & Mohan, 2023) . Furthermore, the quality of information, the credibility of sources, and the relationships established between consumers and information providers and brands can increase trust and drive purchase intentions (Tseng, 2022; Zhou et al., 2022) . This situation makes the Indonesian skincare market increasingly dynamic and competitive, marked by the emergence of various local skincare brands competing to build brand awareness, consumer trust, and customer loyalty through various digital marketing strategies.

The rapid growth of the skincare industry has also increased competition among local brands. In an increasingly competitive market, companies are required to differentiate themselves through innovative branding strategies and effective consumer engagement. Brand engagement plays a crucial role in building long-term relationships between consumers and brands, increasing positive attitudes toward brands, and influencing consumer purchasing behavior (Özer et al., 2025) . Furthermore, the development of social media and digital brand communities allows consumers to actively interact with brands and each other, thereby strengthening engagement and creating shared value that supports customer loyalty (Luo et al., 2024) . In the beauty industry, consumers consider not only the functional benefits of products but also the emotional aspects related to self-image, self-confidence, and lifestyle. Therefore, branding strategies that build emotional connections with consumers are becoming increasingly important to enhance brand appeal and competitiveness (Muhajir et al., 2026) . The intense competition between local and international brands encourages skincare companies to focus not only on product quality but also on implementing effective marketing communication strategies to build brand awareness, consumer trust, and long-term loyalty.

Marketing communications has become a strategic tool for influencing consumer perceptions and purchasing behavior in the digital age. The use of the internet, social media, and various digital platforms has transformed the way consumers seek information, interact with brands, and make purchasing decisions. Dwivedi et al. (2021) explain that digital communication channels enable companies to increase brand awareness, influence consumer attitudes, obtain direct feedback, and increase sales through more personalized and interactive interactions. In line with this, the development of social commerce has created a more participatory shopping experience through social interaction, information seeking, and two-way communication between consumers and companies, thereby strengthening long-term relationships with customers (Qu et al., 2023) . Furthermore, consumer engagement with brands through information seeking and digital interactions has been shown to increase positive attitudes toward brands and strengthen consumer-brand relationships (Lim & Kwon, 2023) .

Therefore, current marketing communication strategies increasingly focus on utilizing digital media, influencers, and public figures who have the ability to increase brand visibility, consumer engagement, and encourage positive behavioral responses.

The rapid digitalization of consumer markets has fundamentally changed how skincare brands communicate with consumers. Recent studies indicate that digital marketing, social commerce, and celebrity endorsements have become essential strategies for increasing consumer engagement and purchase intention in the beauty industry (Dhaigude & Mohan, 2023; Dwivedi et al., 2021; Luo et al., 2024). In Indonesia, the skincare market has experienced substantial growth due to increasing digital adoption, changing consumer lifestyles, and greater awareness of skin health (Abigail et al., 2024). As competition intensifies among local skincare brands, firms are required not only to produce high-quality products but also to establish emotional relationships with consumers through credible brand ambassadors and effective branding strategies. Recent studies further suggest that consumers increasingly evaluate brands based on trust, authenticity, and psychological attachment rather than merely product attributes (Handoyo, 2024; Özer et al., 2025). Consequently, understanding the mechanisms through which brand ambassadors influence purchase intention has become increasingly important for both researchers and practitioners.

One prominent phenomenon in the beauty industry is the increasing use of South Korean celebrities as brand ambassadors. The popularity of Korean popular culture has expanded beyond the entertainment industry and significantly influences consumer preferences in various product categories, including skincare and cosmetics. Ampornklinkaew (2025) found that influencers and celebrities on social media can influence consumer purchase intentions through credibility and parasocial interactions they build with their audiences. Migkos et al. (2025) also reported that influencer effectiveness is strongly influenced by audience perceptions of the figure's credibility, attractiveness, and relevance. In the context of South Korean celebrities, Rosli et al. (2025) showed that endorsements by K-pop celebrities positively influence consumers' attitudes and behavioral intentions toward the endorsed brands. Supporting these findings, Halim and Kiatkawsin (2021) reported that Korean celebrities are able to generate high digital engagement and increase brand visibility in the global market. Therefore, many skincare companies in Indonesia utilize Korean celebrities as brand ambassadors to strengthen their brand position and attract the attention of young consumers.

One local skincare brand implementing this strategy is Whitelab. In 2022, Whitelab appointed Oh Sehun, a member of the globally popular K-pop group EXO, as its brand ambassador (Armilia & Aesthetika, 2025). The collaboration aimed to increase brand awareness, expand market reach, and strengthen relationships with young consumers. Following the announcement, several Whitelab products experienced increased sales, particularly on e-commerce platforms (Armilia & Aesthetika, 2025). However, Google Trends Indonesia data from 2021–2026 shows that consumer search interest in Whitelab fluctuated following the endorsement campaign (Hendarsih et al., 2026). Although consumer attention increased significantly at the start of the campaign, search intensity did not show a consistent upward trend over the long term. This phenomenon indicates that celebrity endorsements can create brand awareness and visibility, but their effectiveness in driving sustained purchase intention still requires further study.

Previous research has shown inconsistent results regarding the relationship between brand ambassadors and purchase intention. Several studies have found that celebrity endorsement has a positive and significant effect on consumer purchase intention. Shi et al. (2021) found that using celebrities as endorsers can increase purchase intention compared to no endorsement, because celebrities can activate psychological aspects of consumers that encourage the desire to buy a product. Furthermore, Wan et al. (2024) showed that celebrity

attractiveness significantly increases positive attitudes towards a product and drives consumer purchase intention, especially in the beauty and skincare product categories. Similar findings were also expressed by Silalahi et al. (2021) , who stated that celebrity credibility, especially *the trustworthiness and attractiveness dimensions* , has a positive effect on consumer *purchase intention* . Furthermore, Grunwald et al. (2025) found that celebrity credibility has a direct influence on consumer attitudes, brand recall, and purchase intention, thereby increasing the effectiveness of marketing communications. Based on a cognitive perspective, consumers evaluate the credibility, relevance, and suitability of a brand ambassador to the brand they represent, which then shapes perceptions and attitudes toward the brand. Meanwhile, from an emotional perspective, a brand ambassador's attractiveness, trustworthiness, and ability to build psychological closeness can influence consumers' feelings toward a brand and drive consumption behavior. Shen (2025) found that brand ambassador characteristics, such as anthropomorphic uniqueness, brand relevance, and consumer engagement levels, positively influence consumers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses. These findings are supported by Michael et al. (2026) who showed that celebrity influencers can influence consumers' attention, emotions, and memory toward a brand, thus contributing to the formation of consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions. Thus, the effectiveness of a brand ambassador is not only determined by the endorser's characteristics, but also by how consumers cognitively process information and respond emotionally.

Although studies on celebrity endorsement and brand ambassadors have grown substantially, several important gaps remain. First, previous studies have primarily examined the direct relationship between brand ambassadors and purchase intention, while providing limited explanation of the psychological processes through which marketing stimuli influence consumer behavior (Jha et al., 2025; Widayat et al., 2023). Second, prior research generally investigates either brand awareness or brand trust separately as mediating variables, whereas empirical studies examining both mediators simultaneously within a single structural model remain scarce, particularly in the skincare industry. Third, most existing studies focus on global brands, fashion products, or virtual influencers, leaving limited empirical evidence regarding local skincare brands in emerging markets such as Indonesia (Cao et al., 2025; Rosli et al., 2025). Finally, despite the increasing popularity of Korean celebrities as brand ambassadors for Indonesian skincare products, empirical evidence explaining whether they influence purchase intention directly or indirectly through consumers' psychological responses remains limited. Therefore, this study addresses these gaps by developing and testing an integrated SOR model that simultaneously examines Brand Awareness and Brand Trust as parallel mediating variables between Brand Ambassador and Purchase Intention among consumers of a local Indonesian skincare brand. By doing so, this study contributes to extending SOR theory within digital marketing and celebrity endorsement research while providing empirical evidence from the rapidly growing Indonesian skincare industry.

This research is important for both theoretical and practical reasons. Theoretically, it extends the application of the SOR theory by explaining how consumers' psychological responses mediate the influence of brand ambassadors on purchase intention. Practically, the findings provide strategic insights for local skincare companies in selecting and utilizing brand ambassadors who are capable of building consumer trust and strengthening sustainable purchasing behavior in an increasingly competitive digital marketplace.

To address this research gap, this study adopted the SOR theory proposed by Mehrabian and Russell in 1974 in research (Loutfi et al., 2025) . Based on the SOR field, stimulus acts as a triggering factor that influences an individual's cognitive and emotional processes, while the organism represents an internal psychological condition that bridges the relationship between stimulus and behavioral response (Chakraborty et al., 2023) . The results of the study by

applying the SOR theory with a strong level of success in digital marketing, social media, influencer marketing, and consumer behavior science by placing marketing factors as stimuli, consumer psychological conditions as organisms, and purchasing intentions or behavior as responses (Das et al., 2025; Loutfi et al., 2025). In this study, Brand Ambassador is positioned as a stimulus (S) because it functions as a marketing stimulus received by consumers. Furthermore, Brand Awareness and Brand Trust are positioned as organisms (O) that represent consumers' cognitive and emotional processes in evaluating brands. Purchase Intention is positioned as a response (R) that reflects consumers' behavioral tendencies to make purchases. Thus, the SOR framework allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how Brand Ambassadors influence Purchase Intention through internal psychological mechanisms such as Brand Awareness and Brand Trust.

Unlike previous studies, this research simultaneously examines Brand Awareness and Brand Trust as dual psychological mechanisms within the SOR framework to explain how Brand Ambassadors influence Purchase Intention in the context of Indonesian local skincare brands. This integrated approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of consumer decision-making than studies that investigate only direct effects or a single mediating variable. Based on the SOR theory and the results of previous research, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

Brand Ambassador and Purchase Intention (Migkos et al., 2025). SOR theory suggests that attractive and credible marketing stimuli can directly encourage consumers' behavioral responses. A credible brand ambassador enhances positive brand evaluations and purchase intention (Grunwald et al., 2025). Brand Ambassador and Brand Trust. Within the SOR framework, credible brand ambassadors reduce perceived risk and enhance consumers' confidence in the brand, leading to stronger brand trust (Handoyo, 2024). Brand awareness facilitates brand recognition and consideration during the purchasing process, increasing the likelihood of purchase (Jbara et al., 2026). Brand trust reduces uncertainty and perceived risk, making consumers more willing to purchase products, particularly in the skincare industry (Hipólito et al., 2025). Therefore:

H1: Brand Ambassador positively influences Purchase Intention

H2: Brand Ambassador positively influences Brand Awareness

H3: Brand Ambassador positively influences Brand Trust

H4: Brand Awareness positively influences Purchase Intention

H5: Brand Trust positively influences Purchase Intention

H6: Brand Awareness mediates the relationship between Brand Ambassador and Purchase Intention

H7: Brand Trust mediates the relationship between Brand Ambassador and Purchase Intention

2. METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research approach using an explanatory research design to examine the influence of Brand Ambassador on Purchase Intention, with Brand Awareness and Brand Trust serving as mediating variables in the Indonesian local skincare industry. An explanatory design was selected because it enables the testing of causal relationships among latent variables through statistical analysis and hypothesis testing (Pilcher & Cortazzi, 2024). The conceptual framework of this study was developed based on the SOR Theory, in which Brand Ambassador represents the marketing stimulus (S), Brand Awareness and Brand Trust represent consumers' internal psychological responses (O), and Purchase Intention represents the behavioral response (R).

The research was conducted in Malang City, East Java, Indonesia, where the demand for skincare products is relatively high, particularly among young consumers who actively use digital platforms and social media (Kumalasari, 2025). The study focused on Whitelab, one of Indonesia's leading local skincare brands that utilizes the South Korean celebrity Oh Sehun as its brand ambassador.

The target population consisted of consumers who were familiar with Whitelab products and aware of its brand ambassador campaign (Armilia & Aesthetika, 2025). Since the exact population size could not be identified, this study employed a non-probability purposive sampling technique (Hair et al., 2021). Respondents were selected based on the following criteria: (1) at least 17 years old, (2) familiar with Whitelab products, (3) aware of Whitelab's brand ambassador, and (4) interested in skincare products. A total of 160 questionnaires were initially collected through an online survey. After screening for completeness and eligibility, 160 valid responses were retained and used for statistical analysis.

Data collection was conducted 2024 - 2025 using a structured online questionnaire distributed through Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of two sections: the first collected respondents' demographic information, while the second measured the research constructs. All measurement items employed a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In addition to primary data, secondary data were collected from recent scientific journals, industry reports, and government publications to strengthen the theoretical foundation and support the interpretation of the findings.

The research instrument adopted measurement items from previously validated studies. The Brand measured using five dimensions: attraction, credibility, congruence, transference, and power. Brand Awareness was measured through brand recognition, brand recall, and top-of-mind awareness. Brand Trust was assessed using indicators related to reliability, honesty, and confidence in the brand, while Purchase Intention was measured through consumers' intention, willingness, and likelihood to purchase Whitelab products. All constructs were adapted from prior studies with established validity and reliability.

Data were analyzed using PLS-SEM with SmartPLS software. The analysis was conducted in two stages. First, the measurement model (outer model) was evaluated through indicator reliability, convergent validity (outer loading and Average Variance Extracted), discriminant validity (Fornell–Larcker criterion and HTMT ratio), and construct reliability (Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha). Second, the structural model (inner model) was assessed using R^2 , Q^2 predictive relevance, effect size (f^2), path coefficients, and bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples to test the proposed hypotheses and mediation effects. A hypothesis was considered statistically significant when the t-value exceeded 1.96 and the p-value was below .05 (Kante & Michel, 2023). During the measurement model assessment, two indicators were removed because their outer loading values were below the recommended threshold of .70. One indicator belonged to the Brand Ambassador construct and one indicator belonged to the Brand Trust construct. The remaining indicators demonstrated satisfactory convergent validity and reliability.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

3.1.1 Respondent Characteristics

Respondent characteristics were analyzed to provide a snapshot of the consumer profile of the research subjects. This analysis included age, gender, and monthly income or pocket money. A total of 160 respondents who met the research criteria were successfully collected and used in the analysis. Respondent characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	21–30 years	84	52.50
	31–40 years	49	30.63
	41–50 years	16	10.00
	51–60 years	11	6.88
Gender	Male	21	13.13
	Female	139	86.88
Monthly Income	≤ IDR 2,000,000	43	26.88
	IDR 2,000,001 – IDR 4,000,000	98	61.25
	IDR 4,000,001 – IDR 6,000,000	14	8.75
	> IDR 6,000,000	5	3.

Source: Primary Data Processed (2025)

Based on Table 1, the characteristics of the respondents show that the majority of respondents are in the 21–30 age group, as many as 84 people (52.50%), followed by the 31–40 age group as many as 49 people (30.63%). In terms of gender, respondents are dominated by women as many as 139 people (86.88%), while only 21 people are men (13.13%). Meanwhile, based on monthly income levels, most respondents have an income of Rp2,000,001–Rp4,000,000, namely 98 people (61.25%), followed by respondents with an income ≤ Rp2,000,000 as many as 43 people (26.88%). These results indicate that Whitelab consumers in Malang City are dominated by young women with middle income levels, which is the main market segment for skincare products. These characteristics indicate that the productive age group and active social media users have a high attention to skincare and are more easily exposed to digital marketing activities, including brand ambassador campaigns carried out by the Whitelab brand.

3.1.2 Descriptive Statistics and Measurement Model Assessment

Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to provide an overview of respondents' perceptions of the Brand Ambassador, Brand Awareness, Brand Trust, and Purchase Intention variables. The results of the analysis showed that all variables obtained relatively high average values, indicating that respondents had a positive perception of the existence of Whitelab's brand ambassadors, level of brand awareness, trust in the brand, and intention to purchase the product. The high average value for the Brand Ambassador variable indicates that respondents considered the brand ambassador used by Whitelab to have attractiveness, credibility, and good fit with the brand image. Meanwhile, the high average value for the Brand Awareness variable indicates that respondents were able to recognize and remember the Whitelab brand well. In the Brand Trust variable, respondents showed a fairly high level of trust in the quality and reliability of Whitelab products. This condition was also reflected in the Purchase Intention variable which showed a tendency for respondents to purchase or try Whitelab products in the future.

Before testing the structural relationships between variables, a measurement model assessment was first conducted to ensure that the research instrument met the validity and reliability criteria. Convergent validity testing was conducted by evaluating the outer loading and AVE values. The analysis results showed that all indicators had outer loading values above the recommended minimum limit of .70 and the AVE value of each construct exceeded .50, thus it can be declared to meet convergent validity. These results indicate that the indicators used are able to adequately explain the constructs being measured.

Furthermore, discriminant validity was evaluated using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion and HTMT. The test results showed that the square root of the AVE for each construct was greater than its correlation with other constructs, and all HTMT values were below the

recommended limit. Thus, each construct in this study had a good ability to differentiate itself from other constructs, thus meeting the requirements of discriminant validity.

Construct reliability was evaluated using Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha values. The analysis showed that all constructs had Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha values above .70. This finding indicates that the research instrument has a good level of internal consistency and is capable of producing stable measurements (Hair et al., 2021). Based on the results of the validity and reliability tests, it can be concluded that the measurement model has met all the required criteria and is therefore suitable to proceed to the structural model testing stage.

3.1.3 Structural Model Assessment

Structural model evaluation was conducted to assess the model's ability to explain and predict the relationships between the constructs studied. Tests included R^2 , Q^2 , and model fit indicators. The results of the structural model evaluation are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Structural Model Evaluation

Variable	R^2	Interpretation
Brand Awareness	.232	Weak
Brand Trust	.279	Weak
Purchase Intention	.412	Moderate
Q^2 Predictive Relevance	.674	Good Predictive Relevance
SRMR	.073	Fit
NFI	.772	Acceptable Fit

Source: SmartPLS Output (2025)

As shown in Table 2, the R^2 value for Brand Awareness of .232 indicates that Brand Ambassador is able to explain 23.2% of the variation in Brand Awareness, while the remaining 76.8% is explained by other factors outside the research model. Furthermore, the R^2 value for Brand Trust of .279 indicates that Brand Ambassador is able to explain 27.9% of the variation in Brand Trust, while the remaining 72.1% is influenced by other factors not examined. Both constructs are included in the weak category.

Meanwhile, Purchase Intention obtained an R^2 value of .412, indicating that Brand Ambassador, Brand Awareness, and Brand Trust simultaneously explained 41.2% of the variation in Purchase Intention. Based on Hair et al.'s (2017) criteria, this value is in the moderate category, indicating that the model has a fairly good explanatory ability for consumer purchase intentions.

Furthermore, the predictive relevance calculation yielded a Q^2 value of .674, which is greater than zero. This value indicates that the model has good predictive ability in explaining the endogenous constructs studied. In terms of model fit, the SRMR value of .073 is below the recommended limit of .08, indicating that the model has a good level of fit with the empirical data (Hair et al., 2020). The NFI value of .772 also indicates an acceptable level of model fit. Thus, overall, the research model has adequate predictive ability and a good level of fit, making it suitable for use in hypothesis testing.

3.1.4 Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was conducted using the bootstrapping procedure in SmartPLS to evaluate the significance of the relationships between constructs in the research model. The hypothesis was accepted if the t-statistic value was greater than 1.96 and the p-value was less than .05. The results of the direct effect test are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	Brand Ambassador $\rightarrow$ Purchase Intention	.159	2.136	.033	Supported
H2	Brand Ambassador $\rightarrow$ Brand Awareness	.481	7.480	.000	Supported
H3	Brand Ambassador $\rightarrow$ Brand Trust	.528	8.854	.000	Supported
H4	Brand Awareness $\rightarrow$ Purchase Intention	.123	1.805	.072	Rejected
H5	Brand Trust $\rightarrow$ Purchase Intention	.486	6.373	.000	Supported
H6	Brand Ambassador $\rightarrow$ Brand Awareness $\rightarrow$ Purchase Intention	.059	1.732	.083	Rejected
H7	Brand Ambassador $\rightarrow$ Brand Trust $\rightarrow$ Purchase Intention	.257	4.718	.000	Supported

Source: SmartPLS Output (2025)

Based on Table 3, the test results show that not all proposed hypotheses are supported by empirical data. The direct effect of Brand Ambassador on Purchase Intention (H1) is not significant ($\beta = .139$; $p = .083$), so the hypothesis is rejected. This finding indicates that the presence of a brand ambassador has not been able to directly increase consumer purchase intention towards Whitelab products. In contrast, Brand Ambassador is proven to have a positive and significant effect on Brand Awareness (H2; $\beta = .481$; $p < .001$) and Brand Trust (H3; $\beta = .528$; $p < .001$). These results indicate that the use of brand ambassadors who have attractiveness, credibility, and fit with the brand can increase the level of consumer awareness and trust in Whitelab.

Furthermore, Brand Awareness did not significantly influence Purchase Intention (H4; $\beta = .113$; $p = .168$), so the hypothesis was rejected. This finding indicates that a high level of consumer awareness of a brand is not necessarily followed by an increase in intention to purchase the product. Conversely, Brand Trust was shown to have a positive and significant influence on Purchase Intention (H5; $\beta = .501$; $p < .001$), indicating that consumer trust is the main factor driving the intention to purchase Whitelab skincare products.

The results of the mediation effect test indicate that Brand Awareness is unable to mediate the relationship between Brand Ambassador and Purchase Intention (H6; $\beta = .054$; $p = .191$). In contrast, Brand Trust is proven to play a significant role as a mediator in the relationship (H7; $\beta = .265$; $p < .001$). This finding indicates that the influence of Brand Ambassador on Purchase Intention is more effective through increasing consumer trust in the brand than through increasing brand awareness. Thus, Brand Trust is a more dominant psychological mechanism in explaining the relationship between Brand Ambassador and Purchase Intention in Whitelab consumers.

Figure 1 shows the results of the structural model testing using PLS-SEM which describes the relationship between Brand Ambassador, Brand Awareness, Brand Trust, and Purchase Intention. The analysis results show that Brand Ambassador has a positive and significant effect on Brand Awareness ($\beta = .481$; $p < .001$) and Brand Trust ($\beta = .528$; $p < .001$), but does not have a significant direct effect on Purchase Intention ($\beta = .139$; $p = .083$). Furthermore, Brand Trust is proven to have a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention ($\beta = .501$; $p < .001$), while Brand Awareness does not show a significant effect ($\beta = .113$; $p = .168$). The R^2 value shows that the model is able to explain 23.2% of the variation in Brand Awareness, 27.9% of the variation in Brand Trust, and 41.2% of the variation in Purchase Intention. In addition, the results of the mediation test showed that Brand Trust was able to significantly mediate the relationship between Brand Ambassador and Purchase Intention ($\beta = .265$; $p < .001$), while Brand Awareness did not act as a mediator ($\beta = .054$; $p = .191$). This finding indicates that the influence of Brand Ambassador on consumer purchase intention is

more effective through increasing consumer trust in the brand than through increasing brand awareness.

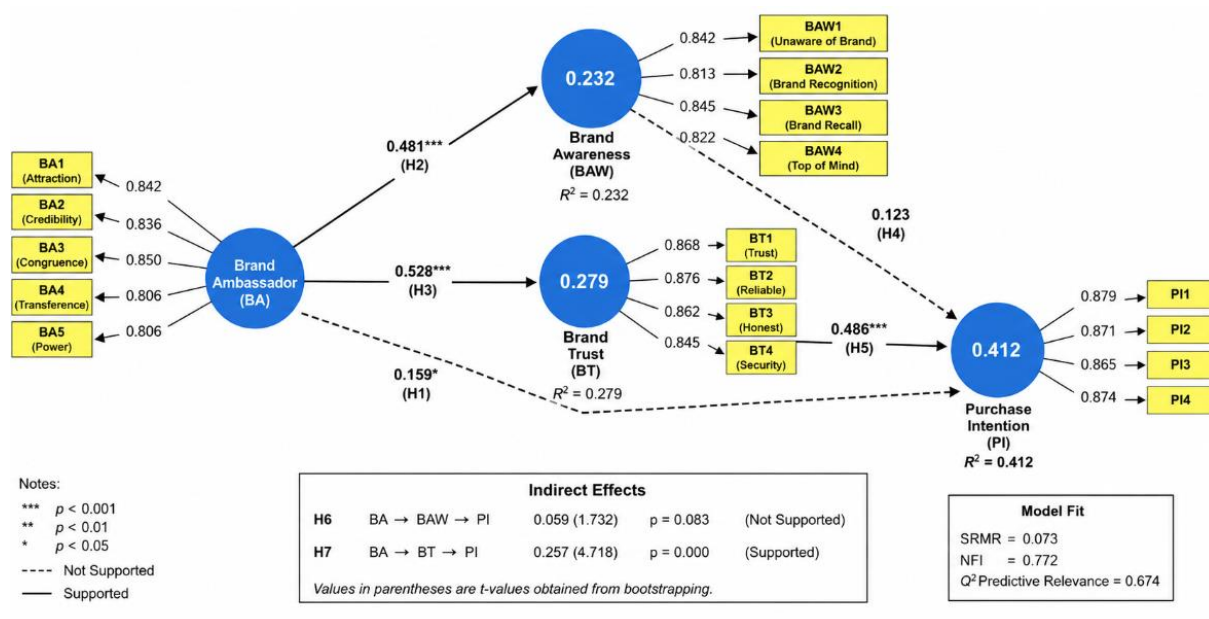


Figure 1. Structural Model and Path Coefficients

Source: SmartPLS Output (2025)

3.2 Discussion

This study examined the influence of Brand Ambassador on Purchase Intention through the mediating roles of Brand Awareness and Brand Trust within the context of Indonesia's local skincare industry. Overall, the findings demonstrate that Brand Ambassador significantly enhances Brand Awareness and Brand Trust but does not directly influence Purchase Intention. Furthermore, Brand Trust serves as a significant mediator between Brand Ambassador and Purchase Intention, whereas Brand Awareness does not. These findings provide empirical support for the SOR Theory, suggesting that marketing stimuli influence consumer behavior primarily through internal psychological processes rather than through direct effects.

The first finding indicates that Brand Ambassador does not have a significant direct effect on Purchase Intention. This result differs from previous studies by (Grunwald et al., 2025; Shi et al., 2021; Wan et al., 2024), which reported that celebrity endorsement positively influences consumers' purchase intentions by increasing product attractiveness and favorable attitudes. The inconsistency may be explained by the characteristics of skincare products, where consumers tend to make purchasing decisions based on product safety, effectiveness, and credibility rather than celebrity popularity alone. In Indonesia's skincare market, consumers are increasingly well informed through digital platforms and therefore evaluate products more critically before making purchasing decisions. Consequently, although a brand ambassador successfully attracts consumer attention, this marketing stimulus is insufficient to directly generate purchase intention without strengthening consumers' confidence in the brand.

The results further reveal that Brand Ambassador has a positive and significant effect on Brand Awareness. This finding is consistent with previous studies conducted by (Jbara et al., 2026; Migkos et al., 2025; Rosli et al., 2025), which concluded that celebrity endorsers increase brand visibility, improve brand recognition, and strengthen consumers' ability to recall a brand. The appointment of Oh Sehun as Whitelab's brand ambassador successfully increased consumer exposure to the brand through social media and digital marketing campaigns. From

the perspective of SOR Theory, Brand Ambassador functions as an external stimulus that effectively generates consumers' cognitive responses by enhancing brand recognition and recall.

Similarly, this study confirms that Brand Ambassador significantly enhances Brand Trust. This result supports the findings of (Handoyo, 2024), who demonstrated that celebrity credibility positively influences consumer trust toward endorsed brands. Consumers tend to transfer the credibility, expertise, and trustworthiness of celebrities to the brands they endorse. In the skincare industry, where product safety and effectiveness are major concerns, trustworthy brand ambassadors contribute to reducing consumers' uncertainty and strengthening confidence in the product. These findings indicate that celebrity endorsement creates value not only by increasing brand visibility but also by reinforcing consumers' psychological trust in the brand.

Interestingly, although Brand Ambassador successfully increases Brand Awareness, Brand Awareness does not significantly influence Purchase Intention. This finding contrasts with studies suggesting that stronger brand awareness leads to higher purchase intention. However, it is consistent with recent studies by Cao et al. (2025) and Chhabra et al. (2025), which argued that awareness alone represents only the initial stage of consumer decision-making and is insufficient to stimulate purchasing behavior without trust and perceived value. This finding suggests that consumers may recognize and remember a skincare brand but still hesitate to purchase the product if they lack confidence in its quality, effectiveness, or safety. Therefore, Brand Awareness alone cannot guarantee actual purchase intention in highly competitive skincare markets.

In contrast, Brand Trust has a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention, indicating that consumer trust is Brand Trust showed the largest direct effect on Purchase Intention in this model. This finding is consistent with previous research by Hipólito et al. (2025) and Mattathil et al. (2026), which emphasized that trust reduces perceived risk and increases consumers' willingness to purchase products, particularly in online environments. Since skincare products are directly associated with consumers' health and appearance, trust becomes an essential factor influencing purchase decisions. Therefore, companies should prioritize strategies that strengthen brand credibility rather than relying solely on celebrity popularity.

The mediation analysis provides additional insights into the psychological mechanisms underlying consumer decision-making. The results demonstrate that Brand Awareness does not mediate the relationship between Brand Ambassador and Purchase Intention, whereas Brand Trust acts as a significant mediator. This finding extends previous research by showing that consumers' trust is a more influential psychological mechanism than simple brand recognition. Although celebrity endorsement effectively attracts consumer attention and improves awareness, its influence on purchasing decisions occurs primarily through the development of trust. These findings reinforce the SOR framework by confirming that consumers' internal psychological evaluations play a central role in transforming marketing stimuli into behavioral responses.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the growing literature on celebrity endorsement and consumer behavior by extending the application of SOR Theory in the context of among prospective Whitelab consumers in Malang Citylocal skincare industry. Unlike many previous studies that focused primarily on direct relationships between Brand Ambassador and Purchase Intention, this research simultaneously examines Brand Awareness and Brand Trust as parallel mediating variables. The findings demonstrate that Brand Trust is the dominant organism variable connecting marketing stimuli with consumer behavioral responses, thereby providing a more comprehensive explanation of how celebrity endorsement influences purchase intention.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that local skincare companies should not rely solely on celebrity popularity when selecting brand ambassadors. Instead, companies should prioritize celebrities whose credibility, expertise, and personal image align closely with the brand's values and product quality. Marketing communication should also emphasize educational content, product efficacy, authenticity, and consumer testimonials to strengthen Brand Trust. By combining credible brand ambassadors with trust-building marketing strategies, companies can more effectively enhance consumers' purchase intentions and maintain long-term competitiveness in among prospective Whitelab consumers in Malang City rapidly growing skincare market.

4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that Brand Ambassador has a positive and significant direct effect on Purchase Intention while also strengthening Brand Awareness and Brand Trust. Among the two mediators, only Brand Trust significantly mediates the relationship between Brand Ambassador and Purchase Intention. Conversely, Brand Trust is proven to have a positive effect on Purchase Intention and acts as a significant mediator in the relationship. These findings indicate that the effectiveness of brand ambassadors in the skincare industry is determined more by their ability to build consumer trust than simply increasing brand awareness. Theoretically, this study strengthens the application of SOR theory by showing that Brand Trust is a key psychological mechanism connecting marketing stimuli with consumer behavioral responses. Practically, skincare companies need to select brand ambassadors who have high credibility and are able to strengthen consumer trust in the quality, safety, and effectiveness of the product. However, this study is still limited to one brand and one research area, so future studies are recommended to expand the sample scope and consider other digital marketing variables to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence Purchase Intention.

DECLARATION

The authors used AI tools solely for generating and refining the figures and graphical illustrations presented in this manuscript. AI was not used to write, generate, analyze, interpret, or revise the scientific content of the manuscript. All research design, data analysis, interpretation of results, and manuscript preparation were conducted by the authors, who take full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the work.

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