



The Influence of Brand Ambassador, Tagline, and Outlet Location on Purchase Decisions: The Mediating Role of Brand Image

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines the influence of brand ambassador, tagline, and outlet location on purchase decisions, with brand image as a mediating variable, using Malang Strudel as a tourism-based retail case. A quantitative explanatory design was employed using purposive sampling of consumers who had purchased Malang Strudel within the last six months and had prior exposure to brand promotions. Data were collected through structured questionnaires across six outlet clusters and analyzed using PLS-SEM (SmartPLS 4). The results indicate that brand ambassador ($\beta = 0.611$), tagline ($\beta = 0.396$), and outlet location ($\beta = 0.336$) significantly influence brand image. Brand image strongly affects purchase decisions ($\beta = 0.472$) and serves as a key mediating mechanism, with the strongest indirect effect observed in the brand ambassador pathway ($\beta = 0.289$). While brand ambassador and tagline retain significant direct effects on purchase decisions, outlet location exhibits only a marginal direct influence. These findings underscore the central role of brand image as a perceptual bridge that transforms communication cues into consumer behavior. The study extends brand equity theory by demonstrating that brand image functions as the primary conversion mechanism between symbolic branding cues and purchase decisions in tourism-based retail contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian culinary and souvenir industry has experienced rapid growth over the past decade, particularly in tourism-centered regions where brand symbolism and consumer expectations strongly influence purchasing behavior. In major tourism destinations such as Bandung, Yogyakarta, Medan, and the Greater Malang Area, souvenir products are increasingly expected to deliver not only functional value but also emotional and destination-related meaning. This shift reflects the rise of experiential consumption, in which tourists

evaluate souvenirs based on narrative relevance, authenticity, and symbolic connections formed during their travel experiences (Hung, 2021). As digital visibility amplifies the role of storytelling and celebrity influence, brands operating within tourism corridors are increasingly required to integrate persuasive communication cues with strategic retail accessibility to remain competitive (Afifah, 2025; Kulsum, 2025).

Competition in the Greater Malang Area has intensified alongside a substantial increase in tourist arrivals, which rose from 3.19 million in 2021 to 17.91 million in 2024. While this growth creates significant market opportunities, it also presents strategic challenges (Mulyadi & Sutiah, 2025; Prayoga et al., 2025). Numerous celebrity-endorsed souvenir brands initially achieved rapid popularity but subsequently declined due to inconsistent branding, ineffective messaging, and suboptimal outlet placement. Within this context, Malang Strudel recognized as one of Indonesia's longest-standing artist-endorsed souvenir brands offers a relevant empirical setting for examining how branding communication and retail accessibility jointly shape consumer perception and purchasing behavior in a tourism-driven market (Romzy et al., 2025; Zaini et al., 2025).

Brand ambassador selection constitutes a critical component of marketing communication strategies, particularly when symbolic meaning and emotional identification influence consumer evaluations. Celebrity endorsement theory emphasizes that attributes such as attractiveness, credibility, trustworthiness, and value congruence play a central role in shaping consumer interpretations of a brand (Kholifatunnisak, 2024; Ma'isyah et al., 2024). Although endorsers can enhance brand appeal, empirical evidence suggests that their influence on purchase decisions is frequently indirect, operating through brand image rather than exerting strong direct effects (Lawu et al., 2021; Purwati & Cahyanti, 2022). This indicates that brand image may function as an essential perceptual mechanism through which endorsement cues are translated into consumer behavior.

In addition to endorsement strategies, taglines function as verbal identity cues that reinforce brand recall, cultural association, and emotional resonance. Malang Strudel's tagline, "Belum ke Malang Kalau Belum ke Malang Strudel," is widely recognized as a destination-linked message that strengthens perceptions of authenticity and experiential relevance (Mustafa & Maulana, 2024; Suhermanto, 2024). Prior studies indicate that effective taglines contribute to brand meaning and memorability; however, findings regarding their direct influence on purchase decisions remain mixed. Several studies suggest that taglines primarily shape consumer perceptions and attitudes, implying a potential mediating role of brand image in linking tagline effectiveness to purchasing behavior (Parasari et al., 2023).

Outlet location represents another strategic dimension in tourism-based retail, as placement along high-traffic mobility routes enhances visibility, accessibility, and shopping convenience. Nevertheless, existing research presents inconsistent conclusions regarding whether outlet location directly influences purchase decisions or affects consumer behavior indirectly through perceptions of reliability, accessibility, and brand credibility (Rumajar et al., 2022). In tourism contexts, outlet location often carries symbolic value beyond its functional role, positioning the brand within the overall travel experience and shaping consumer perceptions of legitimacy and destination relevance.

Despite extensive research on brand ambassador, tagline, and outlet location, most prior studies examine these variables in isolation or focus predominantly on non-tourism retail sectors. Empirical investigations that integrate symbolic branding cues and physical accessibility within a unified framework particularly through the mediating role of brand image remain limited in destination-linked souvenir retail contexts. Consequently, there is insufficient understanding of how communication-based strategies and retail accessibility interact through brand image to influence consumer purchase decisions in tourism-driven markets.

This study addresses this research gap by examining the direct and indirect effects of brand ambassador, tagline, and outlet location on purchase decisions, with brand image positioned as a mediating variable, using Malang Strudel as a tourism-based retail case. Accordingly, this study seeks to answer the following research question: to what extent do brand ambassador, tagline, and outlet location influence consumer purchase decisions, and how is this relationship mediated by brand image in tourism-based retail brands? By integrating communication and retail accessibility variables within a single mediation model, this study contributes to the refinement of branding and brand equity theory in tourism-driven markets and provides practical insights for strengthening consumer decision-making through integrated branding strategies.

Literature Review And Hypothesis Development

This section reviews relevant theories and empirical studies to explain the relationships among brand ambassador, tagline, outlet location, brand image, and purchase decision in the context of tourism-based retail brands operating in Indonesia. The discussion is structured according to each primary construct, integrating communication, perceptual, and retail dimensions that shape consumer behavior. Each hypothesis is explicitly derived from theoretical arguments and prior empirical findings, ensuring a strong conceptual foundation for the proposed analytical model.

Brand Ambassador, Brand Image, and Purchase Decision

Brand ambassadors are public figures employed to enhance brand credibility, attractiveness, and symbolic meaning through endorsements aligned with consumer expectations. Drawing on Source Credibility and Meaning Transfer Models, celebrity trustworthiness, expertise, and value congruence shape how consumers interpret brand value. In tourism-based retail contexts, celebrities function as cultural intermediaries who transfer personal symbolism to brands, particularly when their personas align with consumer identity and destination narratives. Prior studies consistently confirm that celebrity endorsement strengthens brand image by enhancing perceived authenticity, emotional resonance, and symbolic value (Lawu et al., 2021; Sabella et al., 2022). However, empirical evidence regarding its direct effect on purchase decisions remains mixed, with several studies indicating that this influence is predominantly mediated by brand image (Purwati & Cahyanti, 2022; Sabella et al., 2022). These inconsistencies underscore the need to examine both direct and indirect effects, forming the basis for the proposed hypotheses.

H1: Brand ambassador has a significant effect on brand image.

H2: Brand ambassador has a significant effect on purchase decision.

Tagline, Brand Image, and Purchase Decision

Tagline serves as a concise verbal identity that conveys brand essence and strengthens recall, emotional association, and cultural meaning. From a linguistic and semiotic perspective, taglines act as symbolic anchors that connect brands to memorable narratives and consumer experiences (Zhang, 2024). In tourism-oriented markets, emotionally resonant and destination-linked taglines enhance brand distinctiveness and perceived authenticity, thereby reinforcing brand image (Parasari et al., 2023). Empirical evidence remains mixed, as some studies report direct effects on purchase decisions, while others indicate that taglines primarily influence consumer behavior indirectly through brand image (Subekti et al., 2020). These findings justify examining both direct and mediated effects, leading to the proposed hypotheses.

H3: Tagline has a significant effect on brand image.

H4: Tagline has a significant effect on purchase decision.

Outlet Location, Brand Image, and Purchase Decision

Outlet location refers to the strategic placement of retail outlets to enhance convenience, visibility, and alignment with consumer mobility. In retail and tourism marketing, location influences consumer perceptions by improving accessibility, reducing purchase effort, and stimulating impulse buying (Paludi & Juwita, 2021; Rumajar et al., 2022). Within destination-based markets, outlet

location also carries symbolic value by embedding the brand within tourist routes and travel experiences. However, empirical findings remain mixed: while some studies report strong direct effects on purchase decisions, others suggest that location primarily affects behavior indirectly through brand image attributes such as visibility, reliability, and convenience (Rumajar et al., 2022). These inconsistencies justify examining both direct and mediated effects, leading to the proposed hypotheses.

H5: Outlet location has a significant effect on brand image.

H6: Outlet location has a significant effect on purchase decision.

Brand Image, Purchase Decision, and Mediation Effect

Brand image reflects consumers' perceptions, beliefs, and emotional associations toward a brand, shaped by accumulated experiences and marketing stimuli. According to the Customer-Based Brand Equity framework, brand image influences purchase decisions by affecting cognitive evaluations, emotional attachment, and perceived value (Keller, 2020). Empirical evidence consistently identifies brand image as a key predictor of consumer behavior in tourism, retail, and hospitality sectors (Subekti et al., 2020). Additionally, brand image often functions as a mediator, translating the effects of brand ambassador (Sabella et al., 2022), tagline (Parasari et al., 2023), and outlet location (Rumajar et al., 2022) into purchase decisions. These findings support testing multiple mediation pathways in a unified model, leading to the proposed hypotheses.

H7: Brand image has a significant effect on purchase decision.

H8: Brand image mediates the relationship between brand ambassador and purchase decision.

H9: Brand image mediates the relationship between tagline and purchase decision.

H10: Brand image mediates the relationship between outlet location and purchase decision.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a quantitative explanatory design to examine the causal relationships among brand ambassador, tagline, outlet location, brand image, and purchase decision in tourism-based retail consumption in the Greater Malang Area. Quantitative methods allow systematic measurement of latent constructs and hypothesis testing, enabling assessment of both direct and mediated effects (Hair et al., 2021). Explanatory research is particularly suitable for validating theoretically derived relational models involving perceptual constructs such as brand image, which mediates marketing stimuli and consumer behavior.

Data were collected at Malang Strudel outlets in Malang City, Batu City, and Malang Regency, selected for their position in core tourism corridors and high-traffic zones. The population consisted of consumers who had purchased from Malang Strudel within six months and were familiar with the brand, with purposive sampling applied to ensure brand exposure. Structured questionnaires were distributed both online and onsite across six strategic locations, resulting in 110 valid responses that represent diverse consumer groups and travel patterns.

The research instrument used multi-item indicators measured on a five-point Likert scale. Brand ambassador items were adapted from the Source Credibility Model, tagline from linguistic branding and destination-based communication studies, outlet location from retail geography theory, brand image from the CBBE framework, and purchase decision from consumer behavior literature. Items were refined through expert review and pilot testing to ensure clarity, contextual relevance, and measurement adequacy.

Data analysis was conducted using PLS-SEM with SmartPLS 4, following a two-stage procedure for measurement and structural models (Hair et al., 2021). Reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, AVE, outer loadings, Fornell-Larcker, and HTMT criteria. Structural evaluation included path coefficients, t-statistics, p-values via 5,000 bootstraps, R², f² effect sizes, Q² predictive relevance, and mediation testing using VAF. To enhance rigor, content validity, pilot testing, respondent anonymity, construct separation, and multi-location collection were applied to mitigate common method bias, with no signs of pathological collinearity observed.

Table 1. Operational Definitions and Research Indicators

Variable	Operational Definition	Indicators
Brand Ambassador (X1)	A public figure who influences consumer perceptions through credibility, attractiveness, congruence, expertise, trustworthiness, and persuasive power	Credibility
		Attractiveness
		Image Congruence
		Expertise
		Trustworthiness
Tagline (X2)	A short, memorable phrase that conveys the brand's core message and builds emotional and cognitive associations	Persuasive Power
		Message Clarity
		Emotional Appeal
		Uniqueness
Outlet Location (X3)	The geographical positioning of outlets that enhances consumer accessibility, visibility, proximity, and shopping convenience	Brand Relevance
		Accessibility
		Visibility
		Proximity to Target Market
		Traffic Density

Brand Image (Z)	Consumer perceptions and associations formed based on the company, product, and user image	Corporate Image
		User Image
		Product Image
Purchase Decision (Y)	Consumer processes in evaluating, selecting, and deciding to purchase based on needs, information, alternatives, and experience	Need Recognition
		Information Search
		Evaluation of Alternatives
		Purchase Decision
		Post-Purchase Behavior

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Respondent Characteristics

The characteristics of respondents were examined to provide a clearer understanding of the consumer profile of Malang Strudel buyers. Demographic attributes are essential in interpreting consumers' perceptions, preferences, and purchasing behavior, particularly in a tourism-driven souvenir market. The respondent characteristics in this study include gender, age, educational background, and city of origin. A summary of these characteristics is presented in Table 1.

Table 2. Respondent Characteristics

No	Category	Description	Frequency	Percentage
1	Gender	Male	37	33.6%
		Female	73	66.4%
2	Age	16–17 years	2	1.8%
		18–25 years	24	21.8%
		25–30 years	26	23.6%
		30–35 years	26	23.6%
		35–40 years	10	9.1%
		> 40 years	22	20.0%
3	Education	Senior High School	32	29.1%
		Diploma	6	5.5%
		Bachelor's Degree	60	54.5%
		Master's Degree	12	10.9%
		Doctoral Degree	0	0%
4	City of Origin	Local (Greater Malang Area)	17	15.5%
		Visitors (Outside Malang Raya)	93	84.5%

The results show that the majority of respondents were female (66.4%), while males accounted for 33.6%, reflecting trends in the culinary and souvenir industry where women typically engage more in shopping, pay greater attention to product details, and exhibit stronger emotional involvement in selecting

souvenirs. Female consumers particularly value product aesthetics, flavor variations, and packaging quality, aligning with Malang Strudel’s offerings, and are more likely to purchase souvenirs as expressions of care or cultural habit.

Most respondents were aged 25–35 years (47.2%), followed by 18–25 years (21.8%) and over 40 years (20%), suggesting that Malang Strudel attracts young and middle-aged adults with strong purchasing power. Younger consumers (18–25) respond strongly to digital promotion, celebrity endorsement, and outlet atmosphere, while the 25–35 group prefers high-quality, practical, and aesthetically appealing products.

Regarding education, 54.5% held a Bachelor’s degree, 29.1% completed Senior High School, and 10.9% had a Master’s degree, indicating a medium-to-highly educated consumer segment that critically evaluates product quality, brand reputation, and marketing communications. Educated consumers respond effectively to brand ambassadors, taglines, flavor innovation, and packaging design, aligning with Malang Strudel’s positioning.

Finally, 84.5% of respondents were tourists from outside the Greater Malang Area, while only 15.5% were locals, confirming the brand’s reliance on visitor mobility. Malang Strudel’s popularity among tourists is reinforced by its strong association with the Malang travel experience, memorable tagline, and strategic outlet locations along major tourism routes such as Batu, city center corridors, and toll-road rest areas, enhancing accessibility and visibility.

Measurement Model Results (Outer Model)

Outer Loading Analysis

Outer loadings were evaluated to assess indicator reliability and validity, with values above 0.70 considered adequate for representing their latent constructs. Due to the large number of indicators from multidimensional constructs such as Brand Ambassador, Tagline, and Outlet Location, results are summarized at the dimension level. This approach preserves the theoretical structure of each variable, aligns with journal standards for high-indicator PLS-SEM models, and facilitates clearer interpretation of construct performance. A summary of outer loading values by variable and dimension is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Outer Loading

Variable	Indicator	Avg Outer Loading
Brand Ambassador (X1)	Credibility	0.856
	Attractiveness	0.836
	Image Congruence	0.863
	Expertise	0.863
	Trustworthiness	0.845

	Persuasive Power	0.869
	Message Clarity	0.905
Tagline (X2)	Emotional Appeal	0.880
	Uniqueness	0.892
	Brand Relevance	0.890
	Accessibility	0.886
Outlet Location (X3)	Visibility	0.907
	Proximity to Target Market	0.890
	Traffic Density	0.873
	Corporate Image	0.873
Brand Image (Z)	User Image	0.879
	Product Image	0.872
	Need Recognition	0.884
	Information Search	0.887
Purchase Decision (Y)	Evaluation of Alternatives	0.891
	Purchase Decision	0.860
	Post-Purchase Behavior	0.914

Source: Primary Data Processed by Researcher (2025)

The results show that all indicators across the five latent constructs meet the 0.70 loading threshold, with average values ranging from 0.836 to 0.914, confirming strong convergence and accurate representation of the conceptual structure. Brand Ambassador exhibits particularly high loadings in Image Congruence, Expertise, and Persuasive Power, highlighting the role of credible endorsers. Tagline shows strong reliability in Uniqueness and Brand Relevance, reinforcing brand identity. Outlet Location demonstrates consistently high loadings in Accessibility and Visibility, confirming strategic outlet placement. Brand Image and Purchase Decision dimensions also show excellent reliability, indicating robust measurement of consumer perceptions and decision processes. Overall, the indicators are valid, reliable, and theoretically consistent, providing a solid foundation for structural model analysis.

Convergent Validity and Construct Reliability

Convergent validity was evaluated using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct and subdimension. An AVE value of 0.50 or higher indicates that a construct explains more than half of the variance of its indicators. Construct reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR), with threshold values of 0.70 or above considered satisfactory for internal consistency.

The complete results for AVE, Composite Reliability, and Cronbach's Alpha are presented in Table 4. All constructs in this study demonstrate acceptable to excellent convergent validity and reliability.

Table 4. Convergent Validity and Construct Reliability Results

Variable	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha	Remarks
Brand Ambassador (X1)	0.731	0.974	0.972	Valid & Reliable
Tagline (X2)	0.793	0.967	0.962	Valid & Reliable
Outlet Location (X3)	0.785	0.966	0.961	Valid & Reliable
Brand Image (Z)	0.767	0.957	0.946	Valid & Reliable
Purchase Decision (Y)	0.782	0.964	0.957	Valid & Reliable

Source: Primary Data Processed by Researcher (2025)

The results indicate that all constructs exceed the recommended threshold for AVE, confirming strong convergent validity. Composite Reliability values range from 0.957 to 0.974, while Cronbach's Alpha values fall between 0.946 and 0.972, demonstrating excellent internal consistency across all measurement constructs.

These findings confirm that the indicators consistently measure their respective latent variables and that the measurement model is robust, reliable, and suitable for further structural model analysis. The strong reliability values also align with the high loading performance observed in the outer model, reinforcing the stability and accuracy of the measurement instrument used in this study.

Discriminant Validity Analysis

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT). The Fornell–Larcker test ensures that the square root of each construct's AVE exceeds its correlations with other constructs, confirming greater shared variance with its own indicators. The HTMT ratio provides a stricter assessment, with values below 0.85 (conservative) or 0.90 (liberal) indicating adequate discriminant validity. Results for both tests are presented in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5. Fornell–Larcker Criterion

Variable	Z (Brand Image)	Y (Purchase Decision)	X3 (Outlet Location)	X2 (Tagline)	X1 (Brand Ambassador)
Z (Brand Image)	0.875				
Y (Purchase Decision)	0.763	0.888			
X3 (Outlet Location)	0.370	0.271	0.889		
X2 (Tagline)	0.389	0.425	0.009	0.892	
X1 (Brand Ambassador)	0.621	0.559	0.050	-0.017	0.855

Source: Primary Data Processed by Researcher (2025)

Interpretation:

Diagonal values (bold) represent $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$. Each diagonal value is higher than any correlation in its row/column, indicating that discriminant validity is achieved for all constructs.

Table 6. Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Variable	Z (Brand Image)	Y (Purchase Decision)	X3 (Outlet Location)	X2 (Tagline)	X1 (Brand Ambassador)
Z (Brand Image)	0.782				
Y (Purchase Decision)	0.375	0.268			
X3 (Outlet Location)	0.396	0.428	0.055		
X2 (Tagline)	0.634	0.568	0.086	0.073	
X1 (Brand Ambassador)					

Source: Primary Data Processed by Researcher (2025)

Interpretation:

All HTMT values fall below 0.85, indicating strong discriminant validity and confirming that each construct is empirically distinct.

The results of both the Fornell–Larcker and HTMT analyses confirm that the measurement model meets all required discriminant validity standards. The square root of AVE for each construct is greater than its inter-construct correlations, and all HTMT ratios fall well below the conservative threshold of 0.85. These findings demonstrate that the constructs used in this study are conceptually and statistically distinct, free from multicollinearity issues, and appropriate for further structural model evaluation.

Structural Model Result (Inner Model)

The structural model was assessed to examine the causal relationships among the constructs and evaluate the predictive capability of the model. The evaluation followed the recommended PLS-SEM criteria, including examination of path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and model fit indices. The results of these analyses are presented in the following tables.

Path Coefficients & Effect Size (f^2)

The evaluation of the structural model begins with the assessment of path coefficients (β) to determine the magnitude and direction of relationships among constructs. Path coefficients represent the strength of the hypothesized causal effects and indicate how strongly each exogenous variable influences its

respective endogenous construct. In addition, the effect size (f^2) is examined to measure the substantive contribution of each predictor to the R^2 value of the endogenous variable. According to (Hair et al., 2017, 2019, 2021), f^2 values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 indicate small, medium, and large effects, respectively.

Table 7. Path Coefficients and Effect Size (f^2)

Relationship	β	Effect Size (f^2)	Interpretation
Brand Ambassador → Brand Image	0.611	0.53	Large
Brand Ambassador → Purchase Decision	0.266	0.12	Small
Tagline → Brand Image	0.396	0.20	Medium
Tagline → Purchase Decision	0.245	0.09	Small
Outlet Location → Brand Image	0.336	0.17	Medium
Outlet Location → Purchase Decision	0.080	0.01	Very Small
Brand Image → Purchase Decision	0.472	0.36	Large

Source: Primary Data Processed by Researcher (2025)

The results demonstrate that Brand Ambassador has the strongest influence on Brand Image, followed by Tagline and Outlet Location. Meanwhile, Brand Image shows a substantial and dominant effect on Purchase Decision, confirming its mediating relevance. Direct effects from Brand Ambassador and Tagline to Purchase Decision remain statistically meaningful but relatively weaker, whereas Outlet Location exhibits only a marginal effect. These findings indicate that consumer decisions in the context of Malang Strudel are heavily shaped by perceived brand image, supported by credible ambassadors and persuasive taglines.

Indirect Effects (Mediation Analysis)

Mediation analysis examined the indirect effects of Brand Ambassador, Tagline, and Outlet Location on Purchase Decision through Brand Image. In PLS-SEM, significant indirect coefficients (β) indicate meaningful mediation and reveal underlying mechanisms influencing consumer behavior. The total indirect effects are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Indirect Effects (Mediation Results)

Indirect Path	Indirect Effect (β)	Interpretation
Brand Ambassador → Brand Image → Purchase Decision	0.289	Supported (Significant Mediation)
Tagline → Brand Image → Purchase Decision	0.187	Supported (Significant Mediation)
Outlet Location → Brand Image → Purchase Decision	0.159	Supported (Significant Mediation)

Source: Primary Data Processed by Researcher (2025)

The results indicate that Brand Image is a key mediator in translating branding variables into purchase decisions. The indirect effect of Brand Ambassador is highest ($\beta = 0.289$), showing that endorsements influence decisions mainly through enhanced brand perceptions. Tagline also contributes indirectly ($\beta = 0.187$) by improving brand evaluation, while Outlet Location, despite a weak direct effect, shows a moderate indirect effect ($\beta = 0.159$), indicating strategic placement enhances brand perception and drives consumer choice. Overall, Brand Image effectively channels branding stimuli into favorable behavioral outcomes.

Model Predictive Power ($R^2 + Q^2$)

To evaluate the explanatory and predictive capability of the structural model, the coefficient of determination (R^2) and predictive relevance (Q^2) were assessed. R^2 indicates the proportion of variance in an endogenous variable explained by its predictors, whereas Q^2 measures the predictive accuracy through blindfolding. Values above 0.50 for both metrics reflect substantial explanatory and predictive strength in PLS-SEM.

Table 9. Model Predictive Power (R^2 and Q^2)

Variable	R^2	Q^2	Interpretation
Brand Image (Z)	0.658	0.494	High predictive relevance
Purchase Decision (Y)	0.635	0.489	High predictive relevance

Source: Primary Data Processed by Researcher (2025)

Both endogenous constructs Brand Image and Purchase Decision exhibit substantial R^2 values exceeding 0.63, indicating that the predictors explain a considerable portion of variance. The Q^2 values, which approach 0.50, confirm strong predictive relevance, meaning the model not only explains but also accurately predicts consumer behavior. These results collectively demonstrate that the research model is robust and theoretically well-supported.

Model Fit Indices

Model fit was assessed to ensure that the estimated PLS-SEM structure adequately represents the observed data. Although PLS-SEM prioritizes prediction rather than model fit, several recommended indices including SRMR, NFI, and chi-square provide insight into overall model adequacy. Table X shows the results of the model fit evaluation.

Table 10. Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Value	Cut-off	Interpretation
SRMR	0.053	< 0.08	Good fit
NFI	0.744	> 0.70	Acceptable
Chi-square	2,873.995	—	Acceptable
d_ULS	6.098	—	Acceptable
d_G	6.835	—	Acceptable

Source: Primary Data Processed by Researcher (2025)

As shown in Table 10, the SRMR value of 0.053 indicates a good model fit, while the NFI value of 0.744 falls within an acceptable range. Although the NFI value is slightly below the ideal threshold, PLS-SEM emphasizes predictive accuracy rather than global model fit. In this regard, the satisfactory SRMR and the strong Q^2 values indicate adequate predictive relevance, confirming that the proposed model is appropriate for explaining the relationships among the studied constructs.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that Brand Ambassador, Tagline, and Outlet Location shape Brand Image, which in turn strongly influences Purchase Decision for Malang Strudel, a tourism-driven culinary brand. Brand Ambassador has the strongest effect on Brand Image ($\beta = 0.611$) and a notable direct effect on Purchase Decision ($\beta = 0.266$), highlighting the role of credibility, attractiveness, expertise, and persuasive power in shaping consumer perceptions. This aligns with Source Credibility and Meaning Transfer Theories, showing that endorsements transfer positive qualities to the brand and directly motivate purchases in hedonic, experiential product markets (Purwati & Cahyanti, 2022; Sabella et al., 2022).

Tagline also exerts a significant effect on Brand Image ($\beta = 0.396$) and Purchase Decision ($\beta = 0.245$), indicating that emotionally resonant, memorable messaging enhances brand evaluation and motivates consumer action. However, its indirect influence through Brand Image ($\beta = 0.472$) is stronger than its direct effect, suggesting that consumers are primarily guided by overall brand perception rather than by taglines alone (Nisa & Khalid, 2024).

Outlet Location has a moderate effect on Brand Image ($\beta = 0.336$) but the weakest direct effect on Purchase Decision ($\beta = 0.080$), showing that accessibility and visibility contribute to perceptions but do not strongly drive purchase without supporting psychological and experiential factors. This finding aligns with branding literature emphasizing that in tourism-driven markets, intentional, experience-oriented consumption often outweighs convenience considerations (Keller, 2013).

Brand Image itself exhibits a strong effect on Purchase Decision ($\beta = 0.472$, $f^2 = 0.36$), confirming its central role as the dominant predictor in the model. It encapsulates past experience, product quality signals, reputation, and symbolic associations, particularly relevant in tourism-linked souvenir consumption. Mediation analysis indicates that Brand Image partially mediates the effects of Brand Ambassador and Tagline, consistent with Signaling Theory and prior studies showing that perceptual internalization of external branding cues drives behavioral outcomes (Parasari et al., 2023).

Overall, the results validate the theoretical model, highlighting the critical role of symbolic, experiential, and affective branding strategies in tourism-based product markets. Endorsement and narrative-based messaging strengthen brand perception, which is essential for converting communication strategies into purchase behavior. While Outlet Location enhances accessibility, psychological and symbolic factors, reinforced through Brand Image, remain the primary drivers of consumer decision-making in the culinary souvenir context.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that purchase decisions in tourism-based culinary souvenir markets are shaped less by functional considerations and more by symbolic and experiential factors. The most important finding reveals that brand image plays a central mediating role in translating marketing stimuli into consumer behavior. Specifically, brand ambassador and tagline significantly strengthen brand image, which subsequently exerts a decisive influence on purchasing decisions. Among all variables, the brand ambassador emerges as the most influential factor, underscoring the critical importance of credibility, attractiveness, and value congruence in tourism branding. These results provide an important insight that, within destination-driven consumption contexts, consumers are more responsive to persuasive communication and emotional brand associations than to outlet accessibility alone.

From a scholarly perspective, this research contributes to the branding and tourism marketing literature by empirically integrating brand ambassador, tagline, and outlet location within a mediation framework that positions brand image as a key explanatory mechanism. The study extends prior research by highlighting how communication-based branding strategies outperform physical retail attributes in influencing consumer decisions in souvenir industries. Nevertheless, the study is limited by its reliance on purposive sampling and a cross-sectional design, which constrain generalizability and causal interpretation. Future research is encouraged to adopt longitudinal approaches, compare multiple destination-based brands, and incorporate moderating variables such as perceived price fairness, tourist motivation, and destination image to deepen understanding of consumer decision-making dynamics in tourism-oriented retail settings.

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