

The Role of Brand Image in Mediating the Influence of Online Customer Reviews and Perceived Ease of Use on Purchase Decisions

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The rapid development of technology and information has significantly impacted the online travel and tour business, including Penidago.com. This study aims to determine the effect of online customer reviews and perceived ease of use on purchasing decisions, and the role of brand image in mediating these effects on Penidago.com. A quantitative research design was employed, with a population consisting of all Penidago.com users. A sample of 100 respondents was collected using a questionnaire as the research instrument. The findings reveal that online customer reviews have a positive and significant effect on purchasing decisions, while perceived ease of use has a negative and insignificant effect. Additionally, online customer reviews positively and significantly affect brand image, while perceived ease of use has a positive but insignificant impact. Brand image positively influences purchasing decisions and partially mediates the relationship between online customer reviews and purchasing decisions. However, brand image does not mediate the effect of perceived ease of use on purchasing decisions.

Keywords: Brand Image; Online Customer Review; Perceived Ease of Use; Purchase Decision; Tour Service

INTRODUCTION

The development of communication and information technology, particularly the internet, has significantly transformed the marketing landscape. Digital marketing, a key component of e-commerce, has become a rapidly growing trend, especially in Indonesia. According to a We Are Social survey in April 2021, 88.1% of internet users in Indonesia utilized e-commerce services to purchase products—the highest rate globally ([Lidwina, 2022](#)). This advancement in information technology has also had a profound impact on the tourism sector, particularly travel and tour businesses, which are increasingly transitioning to online services. One of the emerging online travel and tour service providers is Penidago.com, offering services such as fast boat tickets, tour packages, and land transportation in Nusa Penida. Penidago.com focuses on simplifying the process of purchasing fast boat tickets for tourists and resolving transportation challenges in Nusa Penida.

Purchasing decisions made online are influenced by various factors, including online customer reviews and perceived ease of use. Online customer reviews significantly affect consumer behavior when selecting products, as positive reviews can increase consumers' purchase intentions ([Astuti et al., 2021](#)). Penidago.com has received numerous positive reviews on Tripadvisor.co.id, yet negative reviews remain, which can impact purchasing decisions. Both positive and negative reviews, along with perceived ease of use, influence purchasing decisions and shape brand image. These factors play crucial roles in determining how consumers perceive a brand and, ultimately, in their decision to make a purchase.

Research Gap

Despite research on the effects of online customer reviews, perceived ease of use, and brand image on purchasing decisions, several gaps remain. First, while studies such as [Rachmad et al. \(2023\)](#) show that online customer reviews significantly influence brand image and purchasing decisions—where positive reviews enhance brand image and encourage purchases—[Wang and McCarthy \(2023\)](#) suggest that negative electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) does not have the same impact on brand image. This gap highlights the need for a better understanding of how negative reviews affect both brand image and purchasing decisions.

Second, the influence of perceived ease of use presents another gap. [Wajidi and Djamin \(2021\)](#) found that ease of use positively affects brand image and purchasing decisions, whereas [Asnawati et al. \(2022\)](#) reported a negative effect. The conflicting results call for further research to clarify the relationship between perceived ease of use and purchasing decisions, given the significant variation in findings.

Brand image as a mediating variable also reveals a gap. Studies by [Asnawati et al. \(2022\)](#) and [Maghfira et al. \(2021\)](#) suggest that brand image mediates the relationship between online customer reviews, perceived ease of use, and purchasing decisions. However, inconsistencies in the findings, particularly in how different types of reviews and varying levels of ease of use affect brand image and purchasing decisions, demand further exploration.

Lastly, while many studies examine the influence of online customer reviews, perceived ease of use, and brand image on purchasing decisions, there is limited research on these factors in specific contexts, such as Penidago.com. Further investigation is needed to explain the variability of effects and interactions among these variables in broader

contexts, offering deeper insights into how they influence purchasing decisions in the online travel and tourism industry.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the factors that impact purchasing decisions and brand image on the Penidago.com website. Specifically, it aims to assess how online customer reviews and perceived ease of use influence both purchasing decisions and brand image. Additionally, the study seeks to explore the mediating role of brand image in the relationship between online customer reviews, perceived ease of use, and purchasing decisions. These objectives shape the analysis of how consumer engagement with the platform, through reviews and ease of use, influences their perception of the brand and their purchasing behavior.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Technology Acceptance Model Theory (TAM)

Originally, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) was designed to explain how users accept new information technologies (Jogiyanto in [Ernawatiningsih & Arizona, 2023](#)), such as management information systems or software. However, with technological advancements, TAM has been applied to various technological contexts, including mobile technology, social media, and IoT. Since its introduction in 1986 by Fred Davis, TAM has evolved and been refined over time ([Wicaksono, 2022](#)). According to [Wicaksono \(2022\)](#), TAM is a framework used to understand how users accept and adopt technology.

TAM has undergone significant development since its inception. TAM 2, developed by Venkatesh and Davis in 2000, introduced variables such as social influence, which integrates attitude and subjective norm factors from the original model, and experience as a moderating variable, providing a deeper understanding of how social influences and prior user experiences affect technology acceptance ([Wicaksono, 2022](#)). In 2003, Venkatesh and colleagues developed the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), incorporating additional moderator variables like gender, age, and experience to distinguish between usage intentions and actual technology usage behavior ([Wicaksono, 2022](#)).

TAM 3, introduced by Venkatesh and Bala in 2008, added variables like trust, facilitating conditions, and subjective norms, further enhancing the understanding of factors influencing technology adoption ([Wicaksono, 2022](#)). In 2012, TAM 4 expanded the model by including hedonic motivation and price value, covering motivational and economic aspects of technology adoption ([Wicaksono, 2022](#)). Finally, TAM-Extended, developed by Wu and Wang in 2018, merged elements from UTAUT and TAM, introducing variables such as cognitive absorption, effort expectancy, and performance expectancy to offer a more comprehensive understanding of technology adoption across different contexts ([Wicaksono, 2022](#)).

With these advancements, TAM continues to be optimized for explaining technology adoption, helping organizations improve user acceptance across a wide range of technologies.

Brand Image

Brand image refers to the perception and beliefs formed by consumers, as reflected in the associations stored in their memory ([Kurniasih, 2021](#)). Several factors contribute to the formation of brand image, including product superiority, which plays a crucial role, as

consumers are attracted to brands that stand out in terms of quality and uniqueness ([Candra et al., 2023](#)). Strong brand associations depend on how information is encoded and retained in consumers' memories ([Candra et al., 2023](#)). Uniqueness is another key factor, as competitive advantages differentiate a brand from its competitors ([Candra et al., 2023](#)). Attributes like product benefits, brand personality, user imagery, and organizational credibility also contribute to strengthening a brand's image ([Kurniasih, 2021](#)).

Online Customer Reviews

According to [Hartanto and Indriyani \(2022\)](#), an online customer review is an honest product review posted online by consumers, often considered a form of promotion. Consumers' curiosity about products or services offered in the marketplace can be answered through these reviews, which help them make informed decisions. [Sharma \(2023\)](#) identifies five dimensions of online consumer reviews: source credibility, review quality, review quantity, review valence, and timeliness.

Perceived Ease of Use

Perceived ease of use refers to the belief that using a particular technology is straightforward and requires minimal effort. This concept implies that if individuals perceive a system as easy to use, they are more likely to adopt it, and vice versa ([Astari et al., 2023](#); [Kee et al., 2022](#); [Widagda et al., 2023](#)). Factors influencing perceived ease of use include the quality and consistency of the technology, the reputation of the technology, and the availability of reliable support mechanisms ([Chaniago, 2022](#)). According to Venkatesh and Davis, the dimensions of perceived ease of use include clear interaction with the system, minimal mental effort required, ease of use, and the system's ability to perform tasks as intended ([Asmarina et al., 2022](#)). Indicators such as ease of learning, flexibility, and simplicity in mastering the system are also key to assessing perceived ease of use ([Astari et al., 2023](#)).

Purchase Decisions

A purchase decision, as defined by [Warsito et al. \(2022\)](#), involves selecting an action from two or more alternative choices. Purchase decisions reflect a consumer's brand preference and their readiness to buy the chosen product ([Manongko et al., 2021](#)). Understanding this psychological process is essential to grasping consumer behavior ([Setiadi & Se, 2019](#)). Consumers typically go through several stages, including need recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior ([Setiadi & Se, 2019](#)). Cultural, social, and personal factors also influence these decisions, affecting preferences for products, brands, dealers, purchase amounts, timing, and payment methods ([Kotler & Keller, 2022](#)). These dimensions are used as indicators to evaluate purchasing decisions in this research.

Hypotheses Development

The Influence of Online Customer Reviews on Purchase Decisions

Online customer reviews serve as a vital communication tool that allows potential buyers to assess products or services through the experiences shared by other consumers. Studies by [Andono and Maulana \(2022\)](#) suggest that online customer reviews significantly and positively influence purchase decisions. Further support for this can be found in the work of [Chen et al. \(2022\)](#), which also highlights the positive relationship between online reviews and purchase decisions. Based on these studies, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H1: Online customer reviews have a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions.

The Influence of Perceived Ease of Use on Purchase Decisions

Perceived ease of use refers to the level of effort consumers feel is necessary when using a website or online platform. [Widagda et al. \(2023\)](#) highlight that perceived ease of use plays a crucial role in influencing purchase decisions. Other studies, including those by [Iriani and Andjarwati \(2020\)](#), confirm that perceived ease of use has a positive impact on purchase decisions. Therefore, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H2: Perceived ease of use has a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions.

The Influence of Online Customer Reviews on Brand Image

Positive online customer reviews contribute to enhancing brand image, while negative reviews can damage it. [Rachmad et al. \(2023\)](#) provide evidence that online reviews can significantly influence consumers' perceptions of brand image. According to [Putri and Nofri \(2023\)](#), online customer reviews positively affect brand image. The following hypothesis was developed:

H3: Online customer reviews have a positive and significant effect on brand image.

The Influence of Perceived Ease of Use on Brand Image

A consumer's perception of ease when using a platform can directly impact their view of a brand's image. Studies by [Wadjidi and Djamin \(2021\)](#) show that perceived ease of use positively affects brand image. Consequently, the following hypothesis was created:

H4: Perceived ease of use has a positive and significant effect on brand image.

The Influence of Brand Image on Purchase Decisions

Brand image influences consumer memory and associations with a product or service, which directly impacts purchasing behavior. Several studies, including those by [Astuti et al. \(2021\)](#) and [Purnamawati et al. \(2022\)](#), found that brand image positively affects purchase decisions. Hence, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H5: Brand image has a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions.

The Mediating Role of Brand Image in the Relationship between Online Customer Reviews and Purchase Decisions

Online customer reviews shape brand image, which in turn affects purchase decisions. [Maghfira et al. \(2021\)](#) found that brand image mediates the relationship between online customer reviews and purchase decisions. Based on this, the following hypothesis was developed:

H6: Brand image mediates the relationship between online customer reviews and purchase decisions.

The Mediating Role of Brand Image in the Relationship between Perceived Ease of Use and Purchase Decisions

Perceived ease of use can influence brand image, which subsequently impacts purchase decisions. [Asnawati et al. \(2022\)](#) confirmed that brand image mediates the relationship between perceived ease of use and purchase decisions. Accordingly, the final hypothesis is:

H7: Brand image mediates the relationship between perceived ease of use and purchase decisions.

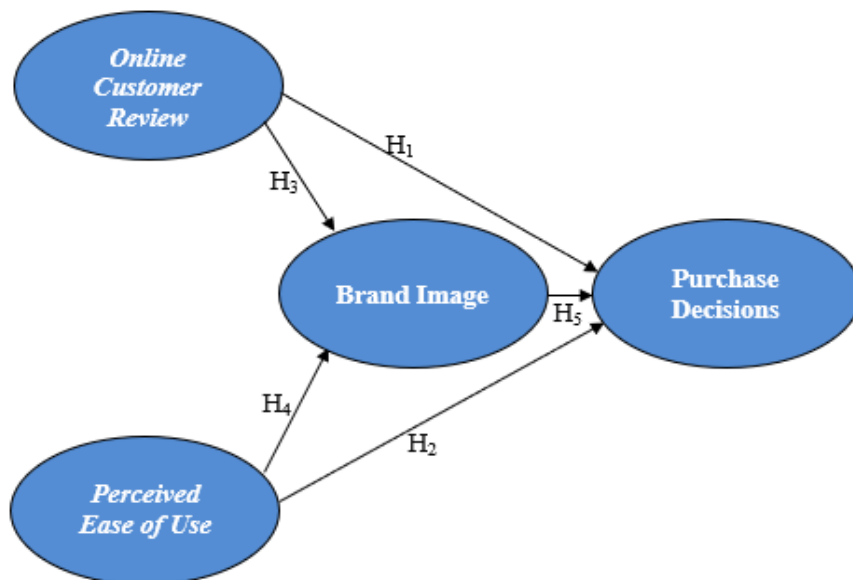
RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a quantitative approach. The population in this study consists of all consumers or users of the e-commerce platform Penidago.com during the research period, with an unknown total number. Since the population size is uncertain, the sample size for this study is determined using Cochran's formula, resulting in a total of 100 samples. In this research, inferential analysis is conducted using Smart PLS to test the measurement and structural models based on the collected questionnaires. This method applies Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) based on variance, utilizing Partial Least Square (PLS), which is suitable for recursive models and latent variable indicators that are formative, reflective, or mixed in nature. PLS divides the analysis into two parts: the structural model (inner model), which shows the relationships between latent variables, and the measurement model (outer model), which assesses the validity and reliability of the indicators. The steps of PLS analysis include developing a theory-based model, creating a path diagram, evaluating the goodness of fit, and testing for convergent and discriminant validity, as well as reliability. The model is evaluated using the R-square to determine how well the model explains the dependent variables and the Q-square to assess its predictive relevance.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the formulated hypotheses, the conceptual framework of this study can be illustrated as follows in [Figure 1](#).

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



RESULTS

Hypothesis Testing

The relationship between each variable can be seen from the results of hypothesis testing carried out by comparing values T-statistic > 1.96 is presented in [Table 1](#) below.

Table 1. The Influence of Exogenous Variables on Endogenous Variables

No.	Relationship Between Variables	Coef. Track	T-statistics	Hypothesis	Note.
1.	Online Customer Review (X1) →Purchase Decision (Y2)	0.214	2.143	H1 is accepted	Sig
2.	Perceived Ease of Use (X2) →Purchase Decision (Y2)	-0.059	0.899	H2 is rejected	NS
3.	Online Customer Review (X1) →Brand Image (Y1)	0.861	16.574	H3 is accepted	Sig
4.	Perceived Ease of Use (X2) →Brand Image (Y1)	0.001	0.018	H4 is rejected	NS
5.	Brand Image (Y1) →Purchase Decision (Y2)	0.669	6.623	H5 accepted	Sig
6.	Online Customer Review (X1) →Brand Image (Y1) →Purchase Decision (Y2)	0.576	6.289	H6 accepted	Sig
7.	Perceived Ease of Use (X2) →Brand Image (Y1) →Purchase Decision (Y2)	0.001	0.017	H7 is rejected	NS

Source: primary data, processed

[Table 1](#) provides information for hypothesis testing influence directly as follows:

Hypothesis Testing Results 1 (H1)

The research results show that the path coefficient has a positive value of 0.214 with a T-statistic = 2.143 (T-statistic > 1.96), so hypothesis 1 (H1), which states: "Online customer reviews have a positive and significant effect on purchasing decisions on the Penidago.com website," is proven. The results indicate that better online customer reviews on the Penidago.com website can increase consumer purchasing decisions.

Hypothesis Testing Results 2 (H2)

The research results show that the path coefficient has a negative value of -0.059 with a T-statistic = 0.899 (T-statistic < 1.96), so hypothesis 2 (H2), which states: "Perceived ease of use has a negative and insignificant effect on purchasing decisions on the Penidago.com website," cannot be proven. The analysis shows that increasing perceived ease of use does not impact purchasing decisions.

Hypothesis Testing Results 3 (H3)

The research results show that the path coefficient is positive at 0.861 with a T-statistic = 16.574 (T-statistic > 1.96), so hypothesis 3 (H3), which states: "Online customer reviews have a positive and significant effect on brand image on the Penidago.com website," is proven.

website," is proven. The analysis suggests that better online customer reviews on Penidago.com improve the brand image of the e-commerce platform.

Hypothesis Testing Results 4 (H4)

The research results show that the path coefficient has a positive value of 0.001 with a T-statistic = 0.018 (T-statistic < 1.96), so hypothesis 4 (H4), which states: "Perceived ease of use has a positive and significant effect on brand image on the Penidago.com website," cannot be proven. The analysis shows that the ease of use of the website does not influence the brand image of Penidago.com.

Hypothesis Testing Results 5 (H5)

The research results show that the path coefficient is positive at 0.669 with a T-statistic = 6.623 (T-statistic > 1.96), so hypothesis 5 (H5), which states: "Brand image has a positive and significant influence on purchasing decisions on the Penidago.com website," is proven. The analysis shows that a higher brand image leads to more purchasing decisions.

Hypothesis Testing Results 6 (H6)

The research results show that the path coefficient is positive at 0.576 with a T-statistic = 6.289 (T-statistic > 1.96), so hypothesis 6 (H6), which states: "Brand image mediates the influence of online customer reviews on purchasing decisions on the Penidago.com website," is proven. The analysis shows that better online customer reviews enhance brand image, which in turn increases purchasing decisions.

Hypothesis Testing Results 7 (H7)

The research results show that the path coefficient is positive at 0.001 with a T-statistic = 0.017 (T-statistic < 1.96), so hypothesis 7 (H7), which states: "Brand image mediates the influence of perceived ease of use on purchasing decisions on the Penidago.com website," cannot be proven. The analysis indicates that perceived ease of use does not mediate brand image and, therefore, does not impact purchasing decisions for Penidago.com users.

Analysis of the Role of Mediation

In principle, examining this mediation model aims to determine whether the mediating variable intervenes as fully mediated, partially mediated, or not mediated at all. This method of mediation model examination follows the instructions of Hair et al. in [Ghozali \(2020\)](#), as outlined below:

Effect A

Examines the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable in a model without involving mediating variables, specifically examining the Online Customer Review variable (X1) or Perceived Ease of Use (X2) on Purchasing Decisions (Y2).

Effect B

Examines the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable in a model involving mediating variables, specifically examining the Online Customer Review variable (X1) or Perceived Ease of Use (X2) on Purchasing Decisions (Y2) with Brand Image (Y1) as the mediating variable.

Effect C

Examines the effect of the independent variable on the mediating variable in the model, specifically examining the Online Customer Review variable (X1) or Perceived Ease of Use (X2) on Brand Image (Y1) as the mediating variable.

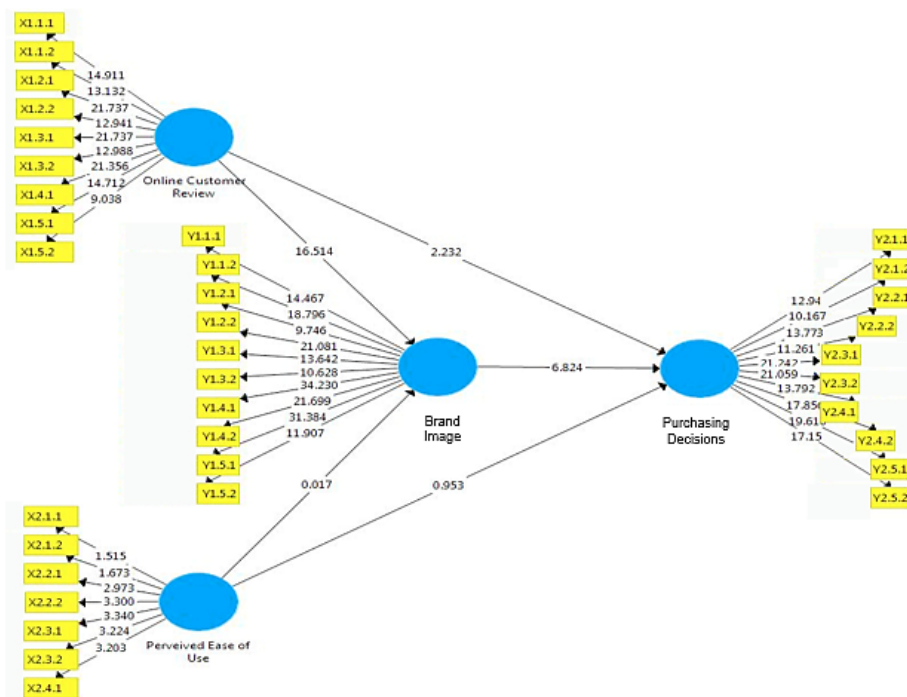
Effect D

Examines the effect of the mediating variable on the dependent variable in the model, specifically examining the Brand Image variable (Y1) on Purchasing Decisions (Y2).

The results of the examination of the effect of exogenous variables on endogenous variables, as described in [Table 1](#), indicate that Brand Image (Y1) mediates the indirect effect of Online Customer Reviews (X1) on Purchasing Decisions (Y2). These results are supported by mediation tests for Effects A, C, and D, which show significant values based on the path coefficient. Therefore, the Brand Image variable is a partial mediator of the indirect effect of Online Customer Reviews (X1) on Purchasing Decisions (Y2). However, the results for Effect C indicate that the path coefficient is insignificant, demonstrating that Brand Image (Y1) does not mediate the indirect effect of Perceived Ease of Use (X2) on Purchasing Decisions (Y2).

The following [Figure 2](#) shows the overall research results.

Figure 2. Research Results



DISCUSSION

For H1, which proposed that online customer reviews have a positive and significant effect on purchasing decisions, the findings confirmed this hypothesis. The study revealed that various aspects of online reviews, such as credibility, quality, and timeliness, play a crucial role in influencing purchasing decisions. This supports the notion that customers rely heavily on reviews when deciding to make a purchase, aligning with previous studies like [Andono & Maulana \(2022\)](#) and [Chen et al. \(2022\)](#).

H2, which posited that perceived ease of use would positively and significantly affect purchasing decisions, was not supported by the data. The results showed no significant relationship between perceived ease of use and purchasing decisions. This unexpected result may be attributed to the respondents' demographic characteristics—mainly millennials and highly educated individuals—who are generally more familiar with online platforms, as [Lubis et al. \(2022\)](#) suggested. Therefore, perceived ease of use might not be a critical factor in their purchasing decisions.

Regarding H3, which suggested that online customer reviews positively affect brand image, the study confirmed this hypothesis. Review quality, in particular, was identified as the most influential factor in shaping a positive brand image, aligning with the findings of [Putri and Nofri \(2023\)](#). This demonstrates that customer reviews not only influence purchasing behavior but also enhance the perception of the brand.

H4, which hypothesized that perceived ease of use would have a positive effect on brand image, was not supported. The findings indicated no significant impact of ease of use on brand image, in line with the results of [Asnawati et al. \(2022\)](#). This suggests that ease of navigation or use does not leave a lasting impression on the brand's image for these users.

H5, which stated that brand image has a positive and significant effect on purchasing decisions, was supported by the study. A strong brand image indeed led to higher purchasing decisions, reinforcing the relationship between consumer perception of the brand and their buying behavior, as evidenced by [Astuti et al. \(2021\)](#) and [Purnamawati et al. \(2022\)](#).

In terms of mediation, H6 proposed that brand image would mediate the relationship between online customer reviews and purchasing decisions. The findings partially supported this hypothesis, as brand image did mediate the effect of online customer reviews on purchasing decisions, although the mediation was only partial. This shows that customer reviews can directly influence purchasing decisions, but their effect is also enhanced through the improvement of brand image.

Finally, H7, which suggested that brand image would mediate the relationship between perceived ease of use and purchasing decisions, was not supported. The lack of a significant impact of perceived ease of use on both brand image and purchasing decisions explains why brand image did not serve as a mediator in this context.

Overall, the findings validate most of the hypotheses, particularly regarding the importance of online customer reviews and brand image in influencing purchasing decisions, while showing that perceived ease of use is not a decisive factor in this specific case.

CONCLUSION

The objectives of this research are to examine several factors that influence purchasing decisions and brand image on the Penidago.com website. Specifically, the study aims to determine the effect of online customer reviews and perceived ease of use on purchasing decisions and brand image. Additionally, it seeks to understand the role of brand image in mediating the relationship between online customer reviews, perceived ease of use, and purchasing decisions. These objectives guide the analysis of how consumer

interactions with the platform, through reviews and ease of navigation, affect their overall perception of the brand and their purchasing behavior.

The results of this study reveal that online customer reviews have a positive and significant influence on purchasing decisions on Penidago.com. This means that higher-quality reviews from customers lead to increased purchasing decisions. In contrast, perceived ease of use does not significantly impact purchasing decisions, which can be attributed to the familiarity of modern consumers, particularly younger generations, with online platforms. This suggests that while ease of use is important, it is not a decisive factor in influencing purchasing decisions in this context. Furthermore, the study shows that online customer reviews also have a positive and significant effect on the brand image of Penidago.com. Good customer reviews contribute to an improved brand image, while perceived ease of use does not have a strong enough impact on brand image to be considered significant.

Moreover, the brand image itself has a positive and significant influence on purchasing decisions, indicating that a strong brand image leads to higher purchasing decisions. In terms of mediation, brand image partially mediates the relationship between online customer reviews and purchasing decisions. This means that while online customer reviews can directly influence purchasing decisions, they also impact purchasing decisions indirectly through the brand image. However, brand image does not mediate the relationship between perceived ease of use and purchasing decisions, suggesting that ease of use does not significantly affect either brand image or purchasing decisions.

The research implications highlight the importance of the quality of online customer reviews. The quality of reviews was found to be the strongest indicator within the online customer review variable, meaning that Penidago.com management should focus on providing excellent service to encourage positive and honest reviews from consumers. On the other hand, the quantity of reviews received the lowest response from consumers, suggesting that management should motivate more customers to leave reviews to build trust with potential buyers. Regarding brand image, the indicators of brand attitude and behavior were the strongest in reflecting the overall brand image, while brand identity received the lowest response. To address this, Penidago.com should differentiate itself from other e-commerce platforms by enhancing its unique characteristics, making it more recognizable and memorable to potential customers.

LIMITATION

Research on the role of brand image in mediating the influence of online customer reviews and perceived ease of use on purchasing decisions is still limited, so it is difficult to find journals that support the variables studied. This research uses primary data collected through questionnaires from 100 Penidago.com e-commerce consumers. However, the number of respondents is not enough to describe the actual situation. The focus of this research is on purchasing decisions on Penidago.com, so the results cannot yet represent the effectiveness of the influence of these variables on e-commerce in general. During the data collection process, there were obstacles because the information provided by respondents through questionnaires did not always reflect their true opinions, due to differences in respondents' assumptions, understanding or honesty. Therefore, additional data collection techniques are needed such as interviews and observations to support the results of research analysis.

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The authors whose names are listed immediately below certify that they have no affiliation with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria, educational grants, participation in speakers' bureaus, membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest and expert testimony or patent licensing arrangement, or nonfinancial interest (such as personal or professional relationship, affiliation, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or material discussed in this manuscript.

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