

Factors Influencing the Purchase Intention of Undergraduate Students Towards Buying Korean Skincare Products

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Abstract— This conceptual paper explores the factors influencing the purchase intention of undergraduate students toward Korean skincare products. Specifically, it examines the impact of three key factors: brand image, celebrity endorsement, and social media. While the Korean Wave (K-wave) has significantly influenced global consumer behavior, research on its effect in the context of Korean skincare products remains limited. By applying a theoretical framework, this paper investigates how brand image, celebrity endorsement, and social media shape consumer purchase intentions. The findings indicate that all three factors namely brand image, celebrity endorsement, and social media have a significant and positive influence on purchase intention. These results underscore the importance of these factors in driving consumer behavior toward Korean skincare products among undergraduate students.

Keywords— Purchase Intention, Brand Image, Celebrity Endorsement, Social Media, Korean skincare products.

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's society, beauty and attractiveness in appearance are continually emphasized as appealing and admirable features. Every level of society uses beauty products on a daily basis, and their use is increasing annually (Lim, Loo, Wong, & Hong, 2020). The beauty industry is expanding quickly in both developed and emerging markets. The worldwide beauty industry is classified into five main business segments: skincare, hair care, color (makeup), perfume, and toiletries. Skincare products are the most common type of beauty product and are widely used in the international beauty industry (Santoso, Yuliarta, Safitri, Anggorowati, & Rahayu, 2024). This is because South Korean skincare products are seen as having a "high reputation" and being commonly "better" than other brands (Putri, Sari, & Ra'fiah, 2023).

Likewise, Chan Kit Yeng (2018) claims that the Korean wave is growing in popularity and influencing Malaysians' way of life. In addition to the sociological changes that the Korean wave caused, the impact on the Malaysian market is obvious. Furthermore, with Korean restaurants, fast noodles, clothing, thereby and cosmetics available locally, Korean products have begun to enter the Malaysian market. The popularity of Korean beauty products in Malaysia has a tremendous impact on undergraduate students. At a young age, individuals prioritize self-appearance and attractiveness, which shape their self-concept and influence how others see them. Beauty enterprises tend to target young clients aged 18

to 27 years due to their increasing spending power and potential for revenue. Therefore, undergraduate students play a significant role as influencers, trendsetters, and opinion leaders for specific social groups and brands (Chan Kit Yeng, 2018).

The Malaysian k-beauty market generated about 313 million US dollars in revenue in 2022. By 2032, Korean beauty product sales are projected to reach around 777 million US dollars, growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 9.54 percent from 2023 (Siddharta, 2024). According to Kim and Loo (2017), South Korea holds a dominant share of the Malaysian makeup and skincare market, with Korean cosmetic products accounting for 57% of imports in 2015.

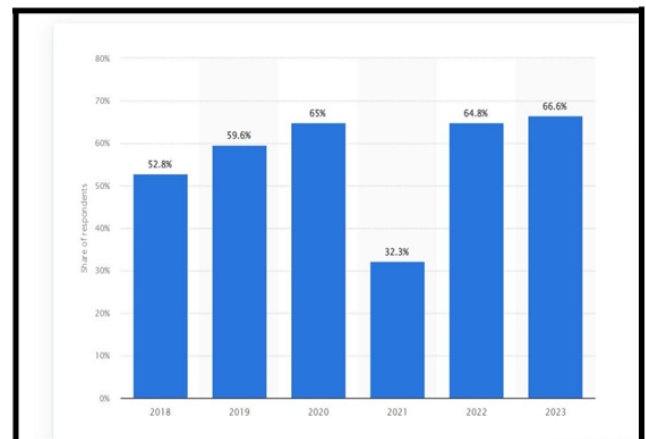


Figure 1. Popularity of South Korean beauty products in Malaysia from 2018 to 2023 Source : Statista (2024)

The bar chart illustrates the increasing popularity associated with South Korean beauty goods in Malaysia from 2018 to 2023, based on the Statista 2024. Starting at 52.8% in 2018, the popularity grew steadily to 59.6% in 2019 and further to 65% in 2020. However, there was a sharp decline in 2021, with popularity dropping to 32.3%. The market recovered strongly in 2022, reaching 64.8%, and continued to rise in 2023, hitting an all-time high of 66.6%. Following a brief dip in 2021, K-beauty's popularity among Malaysians has recovered again.

Businesses that sell beauty products will be able to target market segments with more successful marketing tactics

owing to this insight. This study focuses on undergraduate students since it is believed that better social standing is linked to tertiary education, making student groups social trend-setters (Santoso et al., 2024). To compete in this intense market, a lot of local businesses are likewise raising the quality of their products (Putri et al., 2023). Therefore, this study will focus on three main factors that influence the intention of undergraduates students in Malaysia to purchase Korean skincare products which are brand image, celebrity endorsement, and social media.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Skincare products are the most popular cosmetics, and they have also gained traction in the worldwide cosmetic market (Lee, Goh, & Noor, 2019). There are several Korean skincare brands in Malaysia, namely Innisfree, Laneige, Cosrx, The Face Shop, BANILLA CO, Anua, and many more. Korean cosmetic brands, including Laneige, The Face Shop, and Innisfree, are launching boutique and department shops in Malaysia. Additionally, well-known brands invest heavily in marketing to gain market share in the domestic cosmetics business (Lim et al., 2020). In terms of Korean skincare products in Malaysia, Korean skincare and cosmetics, or K-beauty, have established a solid presence since the early 2000s. Younger Malaysians chose Korean-branded skincare and makeup products used by their favorite celebrities, while local beauty enthusiasts continue to seek out worldwide brands despite the rise of the new class of beauty consumers (Othman, Hoo, & Cheng, 2022). However, despite Korean skincare prominence in the market, earlier research has primarily focused on cosmetics rather than skincare.

Not only Malaysia, but countries like France and the Philippines have also embraced Korean skincare products. According to Bailleux and Menache (2021), while France has long been a leader in cosmetics, South Korean brands have recently gained popularity, offering a fresh wave of beauty products alongside traditional French ones. In Korea, beauty is highly valued, with many consumers using multiple skincare products daily, contributing to the global recognition of innovative products like BB cream (Bailleux et al., 2021). Similarly, in the Philippines, the 'Korean Wave' has fueled interest in Korean skincare, particularly the popular 10-step routine, with consumers drawn to its reputation for high quality and effectiveness (Barrameda, Alaras, & Mondia, 2019). Furthermore, considering the substantial impact caused by the Korean wave (K-wave) on global consumer behavior, research on its influence, particularly in the context of Korean skincare products, remains limited.

Cosmetic products are essential for many women, but improper use can lead to infections. Consumers often overlook ingredient details, opting for products that promise quick results. This demand drives some brands to include harmful, prohibited substances as cheaper alternatives to natural ingredients, jeopardizing users' health (Ridzuan, Kummara, Islah, Jeyamathi, Nur-Alisyia, & Ridzuan, 2021). Jasimah and Ajnida (2022) carried out a study to identify the presence of mercury in skin whitening products, and to identify products containing mercury with the concentration exceeding the

limitation of 1 ppm. According to the study, some of the goods contained dangerous chemicals such as mercury. The presence of mercury in a cosmetic product, whether intentional or unintentional, might be included in the cosmetic formulation by the manufacturer. The ingredient may have negative consequences for users' health (Jasimah & Ajnida, 2022).

Furthermore, numerous products are prohibited by Malaysia's National Pharmaceutical Regulatory Department (NPRO) for containing harmful substances like heavy metals, hydroquinone, and tretinoin. Excessive amounts of heavy metals, such as mercury, lead, and chromium, are often found in cosmetics (Ridzuan et al., 2021). In Malaysia, the use of skincare products containing mercury has raised serious health issues. According to a study, skin rashes were the most frequent adverse effect, affecting 75.86% of participants. Furthermore, 5.9% claimed bodily system impairment, while 15.6% reported psychological problems like worry and depression. Overuse of these products has been connected to major health problems, such as harm to the digestive, neurological, and cardiovascular systems (Zakaria, Hussin, & Jalil, 2024).

Moreover, Lim (2022) reported that researchers from the University of Malaya found over 15% of whitening products in Malaysia to be tainted with mercury. A little over half (51.9%) of the whitening goods have been registered with the National Pharmaceutical Regulatory Authority (NPRO), with the remaining 48.1% not. Additionally, 15.4% of all goods contained mercury at levels exceeding the allowable limit of 1 ppm, with concentrations ranging from 1.81 ppm to as high as 838,123 ppm.

The Ministry of Health Malaysia (2013) states that inhaling vaporized mercury and unintentional skin contact are the two most common ways that people are exposed to mercury that has been spilled. Short-term exposure to mercury may result in only a trace quantity of the metal passing through the skin, usually not enough to be harmful. High amounts of mercury vapor inhalation, however, can cause a number of health concerns, including headaches, eye irritation, a metallic taste in the mouth, coughing, sore throats, shortness of breath, chest pain, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and visual issues. Weight loss, sleeplessness, erythema, tremors, dysarthria, gingivitis, stomatitis, excessive salivation, and a lingering metallic taste are all possible side effects of long-term mercury exposure.

TABLE I. Malaysian skincare products that contain the hazardous substance mercury (2023-2024)

No.	Name of product	Toxic substances detected
1	Glory Cosmetics Facecream	Mercury
2	ZMY Magnetic Aura Night Cream	Mercury
3	N GLOWING EWSB	Mercury
4	Karisma Golden Turmeric Cream	Mercury and Betamethasone 17-Valerate
5	GB Herbal Cream Treatment	Mercury and Betamethasone 17-Valerate
6	Ailas Wild Rose Petal Face Cream	Tretinoin and Mercury
7	Desha Night Cream (Moisturizer)	Tretinoin and Mercury
8	Karisma Turmeric Booster Cream	Mercury
9	Flashhskinnz Treatment Cream	Mercury
10	Flashhskinnz Moist Suncreen	Mercury

Despite being aware of the possible negative reactions, some cosmetic manufacturers continue to use illegal substances and hazardous chemicals as ingredients in their products due to their low cost and effectiveness, which causes them to disregard safety regulations (Hadi, Awadh, Zamli, Ai, & Jamshed, 2020). Some unscrupulous producers have also disguised their counterfeit cosmetic items with names and packaging identical to the actual ones and marketed them at lower prices (Hadi et al., 2020).

Locally, mercury-containing products are easily accessible due to a lack of regulations. The study conducted by Zakaria et al., (2024) revealed that Malaysian adults have a high level of knowledge regarding mercury-containing cosmetics, which provided new insight into the knowledge aspect, as found not exclusively explored in the local context.

Moreover, mercury is one of the elements in the periodic table with the symbol Hg and belongs to group 12 (Wang & Zhang, 2015) is widely used for its properties of being liquid at room temperature, having a uniform and rapid volume expansion, high density and low evaporation (Wang & Zhang, 2015). Despite its benefits, mercury is highly toxic and has a long half life in the atmosphere, and its widespread use in cosmetics could be extremely harmful to human health (Wang & Zhang, 2015).

Therefore, mercury is often included in cosmetics as an excipient because it can cause skin whitening by inhibiting melanin production, which results in pigmentation and color in hair and skin (Bastiansz, Ewald, Saldaña, SantaRios, & Basu, 2022).

In general, 15.4% of the goods contained mercury, with concentrations above the statutory limit of 1 ppm. The exceeding concentrations ranged from 1.81 pm to 838.123 ppm. Of the goods detected with excessive mercury amounts, 87.5% were not registered with local authorities. Furthermore, half of them were found to be on the National Pharmaceutical Regulatory Agency (NPRO) list of banned products (Lim, 2022).

III. SIGNIFICANT OF STUDY

Despite Korean skincare prominence in the market, earlier research has primarily focused on cosmetics rather than skincare. As a result, this study aims to shed light on skincare products (Lee et al., 2019). Furthermore, considering the substantial impact caused by the Korean wave (K-wave) on global consumer behavior, research on its influence, particularly in the context of Korean skincare products, remains limited. Existing studies have primarily focused on aspects such as repurchase intention, brand attitude, and perceived quality (Lim et al., 2020). Consequently, there is a need for further exploration of other factors that shape Malaysian undergraduate students' intention to purchase Korean skincare products. Hence, this study introduces brand image, perceived quality, celebrity endorsement, and social media as independent variables towards purchase intention of Korean skincare products (Lim et al., 2020).

IV. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- Research Objective 1: To examine the influence of brand image on the purchase intention of undergraduate students in Malaysia towards buying Korean skincare products.
- Research Objective 2: To examine the influence of celebrity endorsement on the purchase intention of undergraduate students in Malaysia towards buying Korean skincare products.
- Research Objective 3: To examine the influence of social media on the purchase intention of undergraduate students in Malaysia towards buying Korean skincare products.

V. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Research Question 1: How does the brand image of Korean skincare products affect the purchase intention of undergraduate students in Malaysia?
- Research Question 2: Do undergraduate students in Malaysia trust and are influenced by celebrities when making skincare product choices, specifically Korean skincare brands?
- Research Question 3: Do undergraduate students in Malaysia are influenced by social media when making skincare product choices, specifically Korean skincare brands?

VI. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Purchase Intention

Purchase intention is a common topic for study because comprehending consumer behaviour plays an important role. Researchers have found that consumers are keen to buy a product or service when they have decided to buy it beforehand (San, Hock, & Yin, 2020). San et al., (2020) conducted a study examining the impact of psychological factors and social factors on the purchase intention of Korean products among 200 Gen Y respondents in Malaysia. The findings found that attitudes towards Korean entertainment media and celebrities significantly influenced consumers' intention to purchase Korean products. However, social influence was found to have no significant impact towards Korean products purchase intention.

Additionally, purchase intention refers to how likely someone is to buy a product, and it is an indicator of consumer behaviour. (Lee et al., 2019). Lee et al., (2019) conducted a study examining what factors influence consumers' intention to buy skincare products among 150 students from a private institution in Melaka. The finding of the study found that people are more likely to buy skincare products when they have higher levels of brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. However, perceived quality is the most important factor influencing their intention to purchase the products.

Purchase intention also refers to a consumers' willingness or likelihood to buy a product or service in the future (Putri et al., 2023). Putri et al., (2023) conducted a study examining how the country of origin affects the purchase intention of Korean skincare products. The study also explored how perceived quality and perceived price links between country of

origin and purchase intention among 140 Gen Z respondents in West Java, Indonesia. The study found that perceived quality had a significant impact on purchase intention, while perceived price and place of origin had less of an impact. When perceived quality was considered as a mediating factor, the country of origin had a stronger effect towards purchase intention. Moreover, purchase intention reflects a person's desire or motivation to buy a product after thinking about it carefully (Lim et al., 2020). Lim et al., (2020) conducted a study to see how different value components influence the purchase intention for Korean beauty products among 351 undergraduates aged 18 to 26. The finding found that functional, social, and epistemic values strongly affect purchase intention for Korean cosmetics products. However, social value was the most important and had the largest potential for growth.

The correlation between purchase intention and buying interest is clear because it connects the intention of the consumer to buy a product with how many units they had planned to buy within a certain period (Novilia, Rahayu, & Hendrayati, 2023). Novilia et al., (2023) conducted a study examining the impact of price consciousness, brand image, and celebrity endorsement on purchase intention in the whitening skincare category among 96 Gen Y women, aged 27 to 42, in Indonesia. The findings of this study revealed that all these three factors are correlated with purchasing intention in the whitening skincare category.

Furthermore, purchase intention helps in showing what people think about certain products, services, or brands (Christine, Kempa, & Vincevica-Gaile, 2020). Christine et al., (2020) conducted a study examining how attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control influence people's intention to buy skincare products among 130 respondents. The findings showed that attitudes and sense of control influence the purchase intention of someone. However, subjective norms didn't seem to matter much.

In addition, projected income, price people expect to pay, and benefits of products can affect the intention to purchase (Minochaa & Singh, 2024). Minochaa and Singh (2024) studied how experience and subjective norms impact the connection between intention to purchase and behaviour of purchase among 498 participants. The study found that experience played a big role in shaping purchase intention. In contrast, subjective norms do not moderate the same relationship. Besides, purchase intention reflects the likelihood of consumers remaining loyal to a specific brand or product over time (Mamun, Naznen, Yang, Ali, & Hashim, 2023). Mamun et al., (2023) investigated the impact of celebrities' credibility attributes and consumers' interest in celebrities on their attitudes toward advertisements for endorsed green skincare products, purchase intentions, and willingness to pay a premium price for these products among 778 Malaysian consumers. The study found that credibility features, exquisite personality, dignified image, knowledge, and customer attention to celebrities all had a positive effect on their perceptions regarding endorsed commercials. Similarly, credibility characteristics (exquisite personality, dignified image, knowledge, and customers' association with

celebrities) have a significant positive impact on perceptions toward brands. Lastly, how people think about advertising and branding has a significant impact on whether they want to buy green skincare products and if they are willing to pay more for the products.

As intention is a strong predictor of behavior, it is one of the best predictors of real-life behavior of consumer (Royani & Imaningsih, 2024). Royani et al., (2024), conducted a study examining the influence of environmental concern, altruistic value orientation, and perceived behavioral control on green purchase intention using attitude as mediating variable on 153 respondents living in Jakarta, Bandung, Semarang, Surabaya, Yogyakarta, and Tangerang. The research found substantial effects of environment and altruistic value orientation and perceived behavioral control on consumers attitude. Environmental concern and altruistic value orientation have a small impact on eco-friendly purchasing intention while perceived behavioral control has a large influence. The attitude significantly affects the probability of buying the environmentally friendly products, fully mediating the impact of environmental concern and the altruistic value orientation, and partially mediating the effect of perceived behavioral control.

Lastly, one of the significant factors influencing the decision of buying in the future is a consumer's commitment or intention to buy a good or service (Cherdsri, Kittinorarat, & Acherayawathan, 2024). Cherdsri et al., (2024) investigated the factors impacting trust and purchase intention for skincare items purchased using the Instagram application among 400 users. The study discovered that trust strongly influenced skincare product purchase intention via Instagram at the 0.01 level. E-commerce expertise and perceived ease of use had an indirect effect on purchase intention, with statistical significance at the 0.01 level. At the 0.05 level, perceived risk had an indirect influence on purchase intention.

B. Brand Image

Othman, Hoo, and Cheng (2022) view brand image as an identity symbol, such as a name, sign, symbol, or logo, that differentiates one product from another. Othman et al., (2022) investigated the impact of price consciousness, brand image, and celebrity endorsement on the purchase intention of Korean skin care products among 257 Malaysian female Gen Y respondents. According to the study's findings, only brand image influences Malaysian females in Generation Y's buying intention for Korean skincare products.

In an economic context, Agustini and Elistia (2024) interpret brand image as the value customers derive from using a brand, reflecting their relationship with the brand. Agustini and Elistia (2024) conducted a study examining the factors that affect the intention of consumers' to buy skincare products using brand image as the moderation factor on 267 active TikTok users who are interested in skincare products. The findings showed that social media marketing, online customers reviews, influencer endorsement, and brand image positively influence buy intention. However, price consciousness does not influence the purchase intention of skincare products on the Tiktok platform.

According to Then and Johan (2020) three important indicators to measure brand image are strength (ideal advantages), uniqueness (differentiation) and appeal (positioning through consumer and competitive analysis). Then and Johan (2020) studied the effect of SK-II skincare product purchase intention on 121 Jakarta consumers/users through product quality, brand image, and brand trust. The results of this study indicate that brand image and trust significantly influence the intention to buy, but product quality is not significant towards the intention to purchase.

In addition, Ekklesia and Kesumahati (2023) stressed that a solid image of a brand may complement the needs of customers while also increasing their desire to purchase the product. Ekklesia and Kesumahati (2023) conducted a study examining what factors will impact the intention of purchasing Korean cosmetics and skincare products among 301 respondents. The findings of this study indicate that E-WOM, brand awareness, and brand image all have a strong beneficial effect on purchase intention. Brand ambassador and sender expertise have no meaningful impact on buying intention. E-WOM and brand awareness have a large beneficial impact on brand image. E-WOM and brand awareness, as mediated by brand image, have a considerable beneficial impact on purchase intentions.

Moreover, Suwuh, Kindangen, and Saerang (2022) noted that brand image is the fundamental objective, as are the business's standing and achievements, as well as public relations. Suwuh et al., (2022) investigated the impact of the Korean wave, brand ambassador, and brand image on the purchase intention of Somethinc skincare products among female Manado City skin care users. The findings revealed that the Korean wave had a negative impact on purchase intention, whereas brand ambassadors and brand images have a positive impact.

Lastly, Yi (2023) stated that a consumer's recollection or mind-stored impression of a business's expertise and understanding is referred to as brand image. Yi (2023) conducted a study to examine the attribution theory to determine the major dimensions (social media, brand image, pricing, and perceived value) that can influence the purchase intention of skin care products among 250 users of skin care products. The findings indicate that social media, brand image, and pricing have a significant relationship with the purchase intention of skin care products. Contrary to expectations, perceived value has an insignificant relationship with the purchase intention of skin care products

Relationship Between Brand Image and Purchase Intention of Undergraduate Students Towards Buying Korean Skincare Products

Many studies have been conducted in the past to determine the connection between brand image and the intention to buy Korean skincare products. Othman et al. (2022) found that brand image is positively connected with purchase intention with a p-value of 0.000 and a beta coefficient of 0.252, both significant at the 0.05 level. This study indicates that consumers' intentions to buy are mainly influenced by brand attributes, including attitude, image, benefits, information, character, and dedication (Othman et al., 2022).

On the same note, Ekklesia and Kesumahati (2023) showed that brand image has a positive impact on purchase intention. The established brand image leads to consumer interest and trust, which then results in sales, especially for Korean skincare products that are high in quality and have an appealing design of the packaging.

Moreover, Agustini and Elistia (2024) found that brand image significantly impacts the intention of purchase and serves as the most important external factor when consumers choose between variable products. This research is supported by Then and Johan (2020), who noted the positive effect of brand image on consumers' intent to buy. Similarly, Yi (2023) stated that there is a connection between brand image and the intention to purchase skincare products. Yi (2023) also stated that intention to buy skincare products is influenced by consumers' perception towards the brand whether it happens right away or a while later.

Therefore, in accordance with all past studies, it can be noted that there is a positive correlation between brand image and consumers' purchase intention towards purchasing Korean skincare products. A positive brand image impacts consumers' trust in a product, which in turn leads to the increasing likelihood of consumers to buy a product. In other words, companies with strong.

C. Celebrity Endorsement

In order to pull the attention of consumers, effective marketing tools can be used which is celebrity endorsement. It has been used across different industries (Othman et al., 2022). Othman et al., (2022) conducted a research investigating the influence of celebrity endorsement, brand image, and price consciousness towards Korean skincare products purchase intention on 257 Gen Y females in Malaysia. The findings show that only brand image influences the purchase intention of Korean skincare products among Malaysian Gen Y females.

Additionally, credibility of endorsement will be enhanced when celebrities like actors and athletes endorse products outside their normal fields (Novilia et al., 2023). Novilia et al., (2023) conducted a study examining the impact of price consciousness, brand image, and celebrity endorsement on purchase intention in the whitening skincare category among 96 Gen Y women, aged 27 to 42, in Indonesia. The findings of this study revealed that all these three factors are correlated with purchasing intention in the whitening skincare category.

Moreover, famous celebrities will lead consumers to be motivated in knowing about a certain product and its brand (Agustini & Elistia, 2024). Agustini and Elistia (2024) conducted a study examining the factors that affect the intention of consumers' to buy skincare products using brand image as the moderation factor on 267 active TikTok users who are interested in skincare products. The findings showed that social media marketing, online customers reviews, influencer endorsement, and brand image positively influence buy intention. However, price consciousness does not influence the purchase intention of skincare products on the Tiktok platform.

Moving on, celebrities who use certain products and show it to the world will create a solid connection with consumers.

This leads to an increased credibility and intention to purchase a product. Consumers also tend to pay higher prices when they feel the connection (Al Mamun et al., 2023). Mamun et al., (2023) investigated the impact of celebrities' credibility attributes and consumers' interest in celebrities on their attitudes toward advertisements for endorsed green skincare products, purchase intentions, and willingness to pay a premium price for these products among 778 Malaysian consumers. The study found that credibility features, exquisite personality, dignified image, knowledge, and customer attention to celebrities all had a positive effect on their perceptions regarding endorsed commercials. Similarly, credibility characteristics have a significant positive impact on perceptions toward brands. Lastly, how people think about advertising and branding has a significant impact on whether they want to buy green skincare products and if they are willing to pay more for the products.

The main goal of celebrity endorsements is to increase the likelihood of consumers purchasing the advertised products (Aslinda, Sudarmiatin, & Rahayu, 2024). In a study by Aslinda et al. (2024), 261 respondents who were Scarlett cosmetics buyers in Malang City were asked to evaluate the impact of celebrity endorsements on quality, perceived value, and purchase intention. Perceived value was used as an intervening variable. The results of the study demonstrate that there is a statistically significant and positive relationship between perceived value and celebrity endorsement, as well as between perceived quality and perceived value, celebrity endorsement and purchase intention, perceived value and purchase intention, and perceived quality and purchase intention via perceived value. In the meanwhile, buying intention is positively and marginally influenced by perceived quality.

Publicly recognized individuals with significant achievements have an advantage, as their popularity positively impacts the attractiveness of the brand they endorse (Leonita, 2023). The study by Leonita (2023) looked at how celebrity endorsements influence consumers' propensity to buy while accounting for 153 respondents' perceptions of quality and value. The study's findings show how important perceived quality and celebrity endorsement are in influencing consumers' intentions to make a purchase. Even though celebrity endorsements can affect purchase intentions, the effect is less strong when consumers doubt the product's quality. Although celebrity endorsements can lead people to feel like the product has more value, they don't directly impact the purchase intention. Thus, perceived value doesn't mediate the relationship between celebrity endorsement and the intention to purchase.

Finally, celebrity endorsement is an effective tool when talking about the skincare industry because public figures are trusted when it comes to advertising beauty products (Adzharuddin & Salvation, 2020). Adzharuddin and Salvation (2020) conducted a study to examine how celebrity endorsement affects the purchase intentions of young consumers of L'Oreal's skin-care products. The findings showed that celebrity endorsements and celebrity traits increase young consumers' intention to purchase L'Oreal's skin-care products.

Relationship Between Celebrity Endorsement and Purchase Intention of Undergraduate Students Towards Buying Korean Skincare Products

Some researchers have investigated the correlation between celebrity endorsement and purchase intention of Korean skincare products. Agustini and Elistia (2024) found that celebrity endorsement has a positive effect on purchase intention. The followers' intention to purchase is influenced by the influencers. This is because influencers have a high number of followers and attractive profiles on social media where they share their ideas and hobbies (Agustini & Elistia, 2024).

Likewise, Halim and Keni (2021) found that celebrity endorsement positively impacts purchase intention, especially for facial care products (skincare). When the products are endorsed by celebrities, consumers will have the tendency to use the same products. Ho, Phan, and Le-Hoang (2020) noted that celebrity endorsements contribute to this desire.

Similarly, Novilia et al., (2023) discovered that celebrity endorsement significantly impacts the purchase intention of whitening skincare products. This may be due to the trustworthiness of celebrity that makes the consumers believe what they say. This evidence is assisted by Aziz, Omar, and Ariffin (2019), who implied that celebrity endorsements play a key part in encouraging consumers. It is said to be an effective way to attract attention and encourage purchase intention. Additionally, Leonita (2023) and Aslinda et al., (2024) proved that celebrity endorsement has a positive effect on purchase intention.

Thus, based on the findings of these past studies, there is a positive relationship between celebrity endorsement and purchase intention towards buying Korean skincare products.

C. Social Media

Social media is an online platform that eases the process of how people share information, communicate, marketing, and group projects (Sanny, Arina, Maulidya, & Pertiwi, 2020). Sanny et al., (2020) conducted a study to explore how social media marketing affects brand image and trust, and how these factors will influence the purchase intention. The research is among 203 male respondents in Indonesia. The findings showed that social media marketing significantly affects both brand image and trust, which in turn, shapes the intention to purchase.

Social media includes platforms such as blogs, video-sharing platforms, and social networking sites (Laksamana, 2018). Laksamana (2018) conducted a study examining the influence of social media marketing towards purchase intention and brand loyalty among 286 respondents. It has been shown that purchase intention and loyalty of a brand can be increased by using social media.

In addition, influencers use their skills, status, and large following on social media to influence others as they have more subscribers (Rorasa & Luthfia, 2020). Rorasa and Luthfia, (2020) conducted a study examining how social media influencers (SMI), electric word of mouth (EWOM), and perceived quality (PQ) impact purchase intention (PI) for beauty products among 210 female respondents, aged 17-30,

who followed a beauty influencer. The results revealed that all three factors which are social media influencers, electronic word of mouth, and perceived quality together had a significant effect on purchase intention.

Moreover, in order to follow up with trends and any news on social media, consumers will follow and communicate with influencers. Influencers tend to be active on social media to post about their activities such as fitness or video games on platforms like YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram (Yi, 2023). Yi (2023) conducted a study to examine the theory of attribution in order to know the big dimensions (social media, brand image, pricing, and perceived value) which can affect the intention of purchasing skincare products on 250 skincare users. The findings revealed that social media, brand image, and pricing have a significant relationship with the purchase intention of skin care products.

As stated by Chrisniyanti and Fah (2021), consumer intention can be impacted by social media content that delivers information about a brand or product as it gathers information and shares experiences. Chrisniyanti and Fah (2021) conducted a study examining the influence of social media marketing activities (SMMA) on purchase intention of skincare products among Indonesian young adults on 271 respondents aged 18 to 34 years old. The result of the findings indicates that social media marketing activities (SMMA) have a positive significance on purchase intention of skincare products.

Finally, Santosa et al., (2024) stated that giving people information they need before making a purchase in social media will help increase people’s intention to buy a product. In their study, they examined what affects a student's decision to buy Korean skincare products by surveying 300 students. Based on their studies, three factors have been found to influence the intention to purchase Korean skincare products namely the Korean wave (pop culture), social media, and reference groups (like friends or influencers). The study revealed that both Korean Wave and social media had a strong and positive influence on buying intention. However, reference groups didn’t have much impact on buying intention.

Relationship Between Social Media and Purchase Intention of Undergraduate Students Towards Buying Korean Skincare Products

Some researchers have investigated the connection between social media and purchase intention of Korean skincare products. Santosa et al., (2024) conducted a study and concluded that social media is significant and positively influences purchase intention towards buying Korean skincare products. In that study, Santosa et al., (2024) remarked that undergraduate students' awareness about social media drives the engagement and interest in buying Korean skincare products.

Beside that, the marketing activities through social media significantly impact the purchase intention for skincare products (Chrisniyanti and Fah, 2021). Similarly, Yi, (2023) found that there is a relationship between social media and the purchase intention of skin care products. Moreover, Larasati and Oktivera (2019) also discovered that social media significantly impacts purchase intention, and Rorasa & Luthfia (2020) noted that social media influencers have a significant

impact on purchase intention. Social media is a really good platform at giving people an endless amount of information that is easy to get right away (Santosa et al., 2024). In addition, social media is not only helpful at helping people learn about the quality and price of Korean skincare products, but it also allows them to share content, interact with other customers, and to get creative (Fatimah, 2020). Also, when people see promotions on social media, it makes them more likely to buy skincare products (Pop et al., 2020).

Thus, according to the findings of these past studies, there is a positive relationship between social media and purchase intention towards buying Korean skincare products.

D. Proposed Theoretical Framework

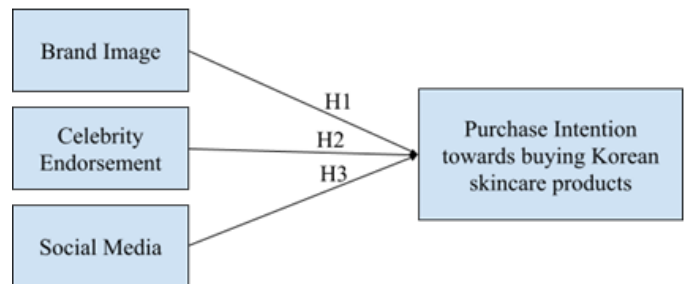


Figure 2. Proposed Theoretical Framework of Factors Influencing the Purchase Intention of undergraduate students in Malaysia towards buying Korean skincare products

Thus, from the above mentioned relationship, the hypothesis for this study can be derived as follows:

H1: There is a positive relationship between brand image and the purchase intention of undergraduate students towards buying Korean Skincare products.

H2: There is a positive relationship between celebrity endorsement and the purchase intention of undergraduate students towards buying Korean Skincare products.

H3: There is a positive relationship between social media and the purchase intention of undergraduate students towards buying Korean Skincare products.

IV. DISCUSSION

This study demonstrates the significant influence of brand image, celebrity endorsement, and social media on undergraduate students’ purchase intention toward Korean skincare products. While these results align with earlier research, a more critical examination reveals deeper theoretical and practical implications

Firstly, the findings reaffirm that brand image exerts a considerable effect on purchase intention. Previous studies have shown that a favorable brand image strengthens consumer trust, credibility, and loyalty (Othman, Hoo, & Cheng, 2022; Ekklesia & Kesumahati, 2023). Among undergraduates, Korean brands are often perceived as innovative, effective, and trend-setting, which appears to enhance their intention to purchase. Nevertheless, these results should be interpreted against the backdrop of increasing concerns regarding product safety and authenticity. Incidents involving harmful substances, such as mercury in whitening creams, have raised consumer skepticism toward skincare products (Jasimah & Majdina, 2022; Zakaria, Hussin, & Jalil,

2024). This suggests that although brand image is influential, its sustainability as a driver of purchase intention is dependent on consumers' confidence in product safety, ethical practices, and regulatory compliance. Future research could therefore examine the interaction between brand image and perceived product risk in determining purchase behavior.

Secondly, the study confirms that celebrity endorsement significantly influences purchase intention, underscoring its persuasive effect on younger consumers. This supports the findings of Mamun et al. (2023), who argue that celebrity endorsements can strengthen brand credibility and desirability. However, the literature presents divergent findings. Othman et al. (2022), for instance, reported that celebrity endorsement had no significant effect on the purchase intention of Malaysian Gen Y females. These inconsistencies indicate that the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement is context-specific, often depending on factors such as the perceived congruence between the celebrity and the brand, or the authenticity and credibility of the endorser. It is therefore important to recognize that celebrity influence is not universally effective but may be moderated by consumer skepticism and cultural alignment.

Thirdly, the study highlights the notable impact of social media on purchase intention, reflecting the digital orientation and lifestyle habits of Generation Z consumers. Social platforms expand exposure to beauty trends, amplify electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), and enhance brand-consumer engagement (Yi, 2023; Santosa et al., 2024). However, the influence of social media must also be considered in relation to its risks. Hadi et al. (2020) caution that unethical actors use social media to market counterfeit and unsafe products, thereby eroding consumer trust. This dual role of social media—as both a platform for engagement and a channel for misinformation—suggests that while it is a critical driver of purchase intention, its credibility hinges on proper regulation and consumer awareness.

Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to the literature on consumer behavior and marketing by providing empirical evidence on the determinants of purchase intention toward Korean skincare products in the Malaysian undergraduate context. Specifically, it extends the application of theories such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) by highlighting the roles of brand image, celebrity endorsement, and social media as influential constructs beyond the traditional predictors of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). Furthermore, it adds to the discourse on consumer culture and cross-cultural marketing by demonstrating how globalized beauty trends intersect with local consumption practices. The findings also contribute to ongoing debates in the literature, particularly regarding the inconsistent impact of celebrity endorsement, thereby encouraging future research to test potential moderating variables such as cultural congruence, consumer skepticism, and endorsement authenticity.

Practical Contributions

From a managerial perspective, the study offers actionable insights for both international skincare brands and local retailers. First, the significance of brand image underscores the importance of maintaining quality assurance, transparency, and ethical branding, as these elements are critical to sustaining consumer trust. Second, while celebrity endorsement remains a powerful promotional strategy, marketers should carefully evaluate the congruence between endorsers and their brands to avoid consumer skepticism. Third, given the influence of social media, firms should leverage digital platforms strategically, not only to promote products but also to combat misinformation by strengthening consumer education and regulatory compliance. Policymakers may also draw upon these insights to regulate the cosmetic industry more effectively, ensuring consumer safety while supporting the sustainable growth of the beauty sector.

V. CONCLUSION

In summary, many Malaysian undergraduate students are getting into Korean skincare products. This is particularly driven by several factors such as brand image, celebrity endorsement, and social media which helps in shaping their intention to purchase in today's market. Purchase intention is the likelihood of someone to make a planned purchase. It is also a good indicator to show whether they will actually purchase the product. It is influenced by things like income, price, and the product's benefits. It also shows how loyal and dedicated consumers are to a brand.

The significant role of brand image in leading purchase intentions have been highlighted in several research. Studies by Othman et al., (2022) and Ekklesia and Kesumahati, (2023) confirm that positive brand characteristics like quality, design, and reputation influence consumer decisions. A strong brand image is really important in deciding whether people opt for Korean skincare products, both immediately and in the future.

Furthermore, celebrity endorsements also play a key role when it comes to whether people want to buy something, especially skincare. With the increasing number of followers and trusted profiles, celebrities help in making the products look appealing and catch the attention of consumers, making it a really effective marketing tool.

Lastly, social media plays a big role in shaping how people buy things. It provides platforms for learning about products, engaging with brands, and interacting with others. Studies by Santosa et al., (2024), Fatimah (2020), and Yi (2023) noted that social media is not only to educate consumers, but it also helps in boosting their intention to buy products especially by using influencers endorsements or promotions. Overall, consumers intention and perception about a particular product is influenced by social media.

To sum up, the three key factors namely brand image, celebrity endorsements and social media must be used by the business in the skincare industry in order to connect well with the intended target customers and remain competitive in a shifting market.

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