

THE EFFECT OF PRODUCT QUALITY, PRICE, AND PROMOTION ON IPHONE SMARTPHONE PURCHASE DECISIONS WITH BRAND IMAGE AS A MODERATING VARIABLE (A STUDY OF GENERATION Z STIESIA SURABAYA IN 2025)



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Abstract

This study examines the impact of product quality, price, and promotion on iPhone purchasing decisions among STIESIA Surabaya Z-generation students, with brand image serving as a moderating variable. Furthermore, the study employs a quantitative approach, specifically a survey. The data was collected using purposive sampling. In accordance with this, 134 respondents were chosen because they matched the criteria for validity or reliability as samples. Moreover, the data analysis technique used was Structural Equation Modelling Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS). The evaluation results in the measurement model indicate that all constructs met the criteria. Meanwhile, structural model evaluation indicates that the model describes effectively. Additionally, the hypothesis test found that price has a positive and significant impact on purchasing decisions. However, both product quality and promotion have insignificant effects. In addition, brand image increases the influence of product quality while decreasing the effect of price. Unfortunately, it does not considerably moderate the effect of promotion. The findings lead to the conclusion that Z-generations' purchasing decisions for premium products are driven more by perception of value and brand image than functional qualities and promotion.

Keywords: Product Quality, Price, Promotion, Brand Image, Purchasing Decisions

INTRODUCTION

When purchasing a product, consumers typically begin with a need, followed by searching for information on various alternatives that can fulfill that need, comparing those alternatives, selecting the most suitable product, and finally experiencing post-purchase responses (Nasib et al., 2021). This process also applies to smartphone purchase decisions. Purchase decisions among Generation Z, particularly in buying iPhone smartphones, represent a unique phenomenon. The iPhone is a smartphone brand produced by Apple. Apple has been highly successful in creating a strong brand image, making the iPhone a top-of-mind product among consumers, as evidenced by its high sales growth. Interest in the iPhone is extremely strong, even before the product is officially launched (Saputri & Pranata, 2014).

Various extreme phenomena have occurred in efforts to obtain money to buy an iPhone. In China, a young man sold his kidney to be perceived as “cool” at school (BBC Indonesia, 2012; Antaranews, 2018). There are also cases of criminal acts such as selling a nephew (Hutagaol, 2019; Rinaldi & Utami, 2019), and even selling one’s own child (Salsabilla, 2023). Similarly, among Generation Z—many of whom are still teenagers without independent income—the iPhone remains the most popular brand. Generation Z in Indonesia tends to choose iPhones as their primary devices (Putri et al., 2024). Many prefer buying second-hand iPhones rather than purchasing new smartphones from other brands (Nadia, 2023). In another case, a university student in Mataram falsely claimed to have been kidnapped and demanded a ransom of 25 million rupiah, intending to use the money to buy an iPhone (Utami & Zakaria, 2019).

This phenomenon occurs because iPhones are known for their premium performance, elegant design, and strong brand image among consumers. Their elegant design reflects a modern lifestyle. Apple has also successfully built a strong user community, allowing young consumers to feel connected as part of a shared group, fostering a sense of exclusivity and belonging. Social media promotions further position the iPhone as a symbol of trends and being up-to-date among Generation Z. The aspirational values embedded in Apple’s promotions—such as diversity and equality—also strengthen the brand’s appeal in the Indonesian youth market. This indicates that iPhone purchases are not solely driven by functional needs but also by the identity that young consumers wish to construct (Bita et al., 2025). Most Generation Z consumers believe that using Apple products enhances their self-image, which in turn improves their friendships, social existence, education, and career prospects. To express this image, they often showcase their iPhones in mirror selfies or video content on Instagram (Godeliva & Gelgel, 2022).

Generation Z does not only consider technical or rational aspects, such as whether a smartphone meets their needs, but also emotional and social aspects. A study by Maulida and Nistanto (2024) found that 60% of Generation Z choose smartphones based on brand, while only 40% base their decision on product attributes. This suggests that Generation Z already has strong brand preferences and tends not to thoroughly evaluate product quality, price, or other factors.

This is also supported by a preliminary study conducted by the researcher involving 33 respondents. The results showed that 90.9% of respondents still consider product quality. Promotions such as cashback or discounts were considered by approximately 77.35% of respondents. Additionally, 77.35% reported purchasing based on brand image. Notably,

53.1% of respondents stated they would still purchase a smartphone of their preferred brand even if it is expensive. Although Generation Z is generally not yet financially stable, they are still willing to make installment-based purchases. These preliminary findings indicate that brand image plays a crucial role among Generation Z and appears to influence the relationships between other variables and purchase decisions. Purchase decisions are influenced by several factors. First, environmental influences such as cultural values, ethnicity, social class and status, family and household, and situational factors. Second, individual differences such as resources, motivation, knowledge, attitudes, personality, values, and lifestyle. Third, psychological processes such as learning, as well as marketing strategies (Engel et al., 1995).

Previous studies have also examined the effects of product quality, price, and promotion on purchase decisions, with inconsistent findings. Research by Sinaga et al. (2023), Saktiawan (2024), Zannah and Suwitho (2022), Ginting et al. (2022), and Hikmatulloh et al. (2024) found that product quality, price, and promotion significantly influence purchase decisions. These findings align with existing theories that both internal factors (such as lifestyle) and external factors (such as brand image, reference groups, product quality, price, and promotion) play significant roles in consumer decisions. The author argues that although Generation Z's smartphone purchase decisions are unique, they are still influenced by controllable variables such as product quality, price, and promotion. Distribution is not included as it is less relevant in the context of iPhone purchase decisions. However, other studies by Septiani and Prambudi (2021) and Sunarti and Chandra (2019) found that product quality does not significantly affect purchase decisions.

There is a research gap between studies that find product quality, price, and promotion to have significant effects and those that find some of these variables insignificant. Therefore, the influence of these variables on smartphone purchase decisions requires further investigation. In addition, there is still limited research on the role of brand image as a moderating variable in smartphone purchase decisions, especially among Generation Z. Previous studies (Saktiawan, 2024b; Arighi, 2024) examined brand image as a mediating variable linking product quality and promotion to purchase decisions. Meanwhile, inconsistent findings also exist regarding brand image as a moderating variable. Jakaria and Fitriani (2023) found that brand image weakens the relationship between price perception and purchase decisions as well as between online promotion and purchase decisions. In contrast, Muharom et al. (2024) found that brand image strengthens the relationship between product quality, product features, promotion, and purchase decisions.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Purchase Decision

The purchasing decision is the stage in the consumer decision-making process where the consumer actually purchases the product after going through the stages of problem recognition, information search, and alternative evaluation (Kotler and Keller, 2016).

Product Quality

A product is anything that can be offered to a market to attract attention, acquisition, use or consumption that can satisfy a desire or need (Kotler and Amstrong, 2008a:76).

Price

Price is the amount of money charged for a product or service, or the amount of value that customers exchange to obtain the benefits of having or using a product or service (Kotler and Amstrong, 2008a:76).

Promotion

Promotion is a marketing activity carried out to increase consumer purchasing interest, promotion also functions to convey information and persuade consumers (Kotler and Amstrong, 2008a:76).

Brand Image

Brand Image is the perception and belief of consumers, as reflected in associations embedded in the customer's memory, which are always remembered first when hearing a slogan and are embedded in the minds of consumers (Kotler and Amstrong, 2008a:76).

RESEARCH METHOD

The type of research used in this study is explanatory quantitative research with a quantitative approach. Explanatory research is research that explores why something happens given the limited information available. The questionnaire distribution procedure was carried out as follows. The researcher first identified active students of STIESIA Surabaya, both male and female, aged between 17 and 28 years, who had purchased an iPhone smartphone at least once whether new or second-hand within the past two years. Respondents who met these criteria were then invited to complete the research questionnaire. Each respondent filled out the questionnaire based on their own understanding and beliefs without any external intervention. After the required number of responses was obtained, the researcher closed access to the Google Form. If any responses were found to be incomplete or contained errors, the questionnaire was returned to the previous section to be completed properly.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

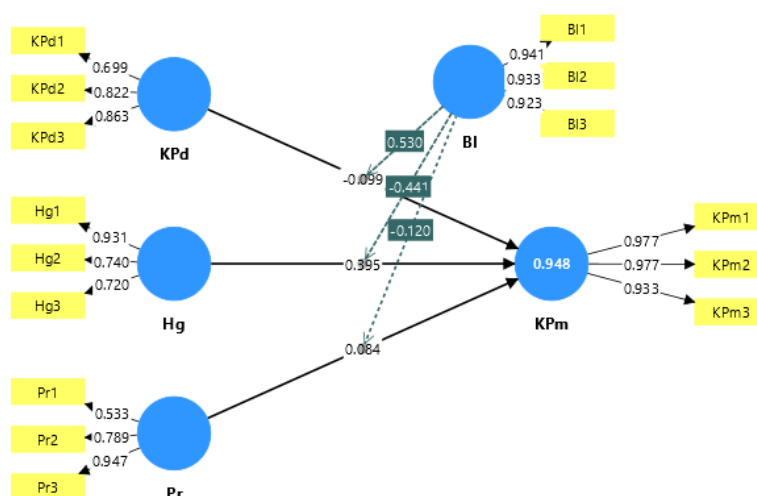


Figure 1.
Path Diagram Construction

Table 1.
Effect Size

	BIHgKpdKpm PrBI X KpdBI X HgBI X Pr
BI	1.343
Hg	0.738
Kpd	0.041
Kpm	
Pr	0.056
BI X Kpd	0.773
BI X Hg	0.708
BI X Pr	0.055

The results of the effect size (f^2) calculation show the relative influence of each independent variable on the dependent variable. An f^2 value greater than 0.35 is categorized as a large influence, a value of 0.15 as a medium influence, and a value of 0.02 as a small influence. Based on these results, Brand Image and Price have a large effect size on Purchasing Decisions, so it can be concluded that these two variables are the main determinants in the research model. In contrast, Product Quality and Promotion show relatively small effect size values, which indicates that the direct contribution of these two variables to Purchasing Decisions is not dominant. However, the results of the Brand Image $\times$ Price and Brand Image $\times$ Product Quality interactions show a fairly strong effect size, which confirms the important role of Brand Image as a moderating variable in strengthening or weakening the influence of independent variables on purchasing decisions. This finding further confirms the strength of brand image as a key factor capable of changing the dynamics of influence between variables in the purchasing decision model.

Table 2.
Hypothesis Testing

No Relationship Variable	BetweenPath Coefficient	T-Statistics	P-Value	Conclusion	Direction of Relationship
H1Product Purchase Decision	Quality $\rightarrow$ -0.099	1.062	0.288	Not Significant	Negative
H2Price $\rightarrow$ Decision	Purchase0.395	7.505	0.000	Significant	Positive
H3Promosi $\rightarrow$ Decision	Purchase0.084	1.758	0.079	Not Significant (marginal)	Positive
H4Brand Image $\times$ Quality $\rightarrow$ Decision	Product0.530 Purchase	5.280	0.000	Significant	Positive
H5Brand Image $\times$ Price $\rightarrow$ Purchase Decision	-0.441	7.061	0.000	Significant	Negative
H6Brand Image $\times$ Promosi $\rightarrow$ Purchase Decision	-0.120	1.791	0.073	Not Significant (marginal)	Negative

The Effect of Product Quality on Purchase Decisions

Product quality does not have a significant effect on iPhone purchase decisions among Generation Z students at STIESIA Surabaya. This result can be explained by the characteristics of the respondents, who are Generation Z students using iPhones. In general, iPhones are perceived to have a high and relatively homogeneous standard of quality in the minds of consumers. The findings indicate that Generation Z students at STIESIA Surabaya do not consider product quality as the primary factor in deciding to purchase an iPhone. Instead, Generation Z tends to prioritize brand image over technical quality in their purchase decisions.

The Effect of Price on Purchase Decisions

Price has a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions. Generation Z students at STIESIA Surabaya tend to evaluate the alignment between price and product quality before making a purchase. When the price is perceived as appropriate relative to the product's value, it increases the likelihood of purchase. Generation Z is highly critical in assessing value for money. Although iPhones are expensive, they perceive the price as justified by the quality, durability, and security of the product, and they often view price as an indicator of quality.

The Effect of Promotion on Purchase Decisions

Promotion has a positive but not significant effect on purchase decisions. This indicates that the promotional efforts implemented may not be sufficiently attractive to capture the attention of Generation Z students at STIESIA Surabaya or may not provide a strong enough stimulus in the decision-making process. One reason for this is that Apple, as the producer of the iPhone, rarely engages in aggressive promotional strategies.

The Moderating Role of Brand Image on the Relationship Between Product Quality and Purchase Decisions

The results show that brand image strengthens the effect of product quality on purchase decisions. A positive brand image enhances consumers' perceptions—particularly among Generation Z students at STIESIA Surabaya—of product quality, thereby encouraging purchase decisions. This strengthening effect occurs because Apple's brand image elevates perceived quality, where even minor quality aspects are viewed as outstanding when the brand is highly regarded. Generation Z tends to assess quality through brand image rather than technical specifications.

The Moderating Role of Brand Image on the Relationship Between Price and Purchase Decisions

The moderating role of brand image on the relationship between price and purchase decisions shows a negative and significant effect. This means that when brand image is strong, the influence of price on purchase decisions becomes weaker. Generation Z students at STIESIA Surabaya with positive brand perceptions tend to be less sensitive to price. When brand image is strong, higher prices are perceived as reasonable for premium products, indicating that prestige becomes more important than cost.

CONCLUSION

1. Product Quality does not have a significant effect on Purchase Decisions.
2. Price has a positive and significant effect on Purchase Decisions.

3. Promotion has a positive but not significant effect on Purchase Decisions.
4. Brand Image positively and significantly moderates the relationship between Product Quality and Purchase Decisions.
5. Brand Image negatively and significantly moderates the relationship between Price and Purchase Decisions.
6. Brand Image negatively but not significantly moderates the relationship between Promotion and Purchase Decisions.

Limitations and Implications

This study has several limitations, including only using respondents within a specific product context, so the results cannot necessarily be generalized to all product types or industries. Other variables, such as brand trust, consumer satisfaction, or brand loyalty were not included in the model, even though they may influence purchasing decisions. For businesses, especially in highly competitive product sectors it is crucial to build and strengthen brand image through consistent communication, excellent service, and positive customer experiences, pricing strategies need to be aligned with brand perception; strong brands can set premium prices without losing consumer loyalty, product quality must be maintained, as a good brand image cannot be maintained without tangible quality support and promotions should focus on creating a memorable brand experience, not just price cuts or fleeting advertisements.

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