

The Role of Brand Image as an Intervening Variable in The Relationship Between Customer Experience and Product Quality Towards Buying Decisions

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Abstract. *This study aims to analyze and empirically test the influence of Product quality and Customer experience on Buying decision, with Brand image serving as an intervening variable. This study employs a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design. Research data were collected through a questionnaire distributed to respondents who are consumers of Zerone Japan. Variables were measured using a Likert scale. Data analysis was conducted using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method. The results of the study indicate that: (1) Product quality has a positive effect on Brand image and Buying decision; (2) Customer experience has a positive effect on Brand image and Buying decision; (3) Brand image does not have a significant effect on Buying decision, and Brand image does not mediate the relationship between Product quality and Customer experience and Buying decision. These findings imply that companies need to improve product quality and customer experience as a means to build brand image and encourage purchasing decisions.*

Keywords: *Brand Image; Customer Experience; Product Quality; Purchasing Decisions.*

1. Introduction

The automotive industry is a vast and rapidly growing economic sector, encompassing all companies and organizations involved in the design, development, manufacture, marketing, and sale of motor vehicles. It extends beyond car assembly plants to encompass a much larger ecosystem.

One of the countries with the largest automotive industry is Japan, the world's automotive king, known for its high quality and reliability. The Japanese automotive industry is a vital pillar of the economy. Several factors that make Japan a global automotive industry leader include high product quality and reliability, technological innovation, exceptional durability, and a focus on efficiency and sustainability. Furthermore, Japan is a pioneer in the development of environmentally friendly technologies such as hybrid and electric cars. Consequently, Japanese cars remain highly sought after in Indonesia and dominate the automotive market. Japan is home to many large and well-known automotive companies such as Toyota, Honda, Nissan, Suzuki, Mazda, Mitsubishi, and others. This is supported by data from the GAIKINDO (Indonesian Automotive Association) on the list of best-selling cars in Indonesia. The following data shows sales of Japanese car brands in Indonesia in 2024:

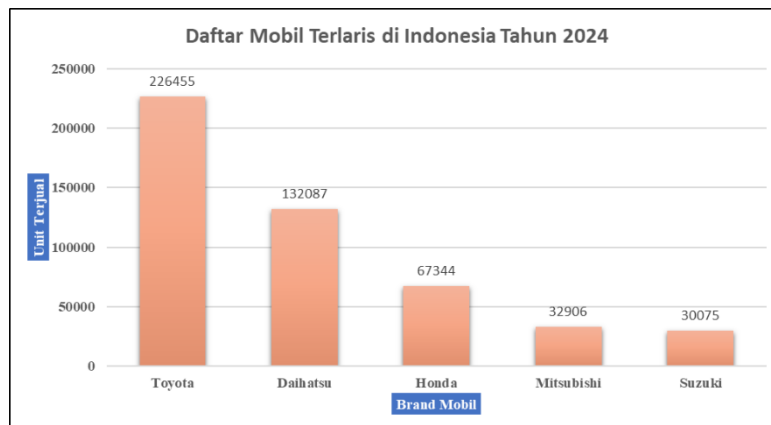


Figure List of Best-Selling Cars in Indonesia

Source: GAIKINDO (2024)

Zerone Japan is a company specializing in the automotive industry, specifically developing autocare products designed to support the maintenance of Japanese-manufactured vehicles. The company provides a variety of vehicle care products and services, such as interior cleaners, glass cleaners, body polishes, and other products aimed at maintaining the cleanliness, appearance, and quality of vehicles. By prioritizing quality and innovation, Zerone Japan strives to provide effective vehicle maintenance solutions to maintain the condition and aesthetic value of vehicles.

Currently, Zerone Japan focuses its product marketing activities through marketplace platforms and social media. The growing public interest in online shopping and the increasing number of available marketplace platforms have created increasingly fierce competition in the e-commerce industry. Shopee is one of the marketplaces used by Zerone Japan and contributes the highest sales compared to other platforms. The following presents data on Zerone Japan's product sales through marketplaces in 3 years final year (2022-2024):

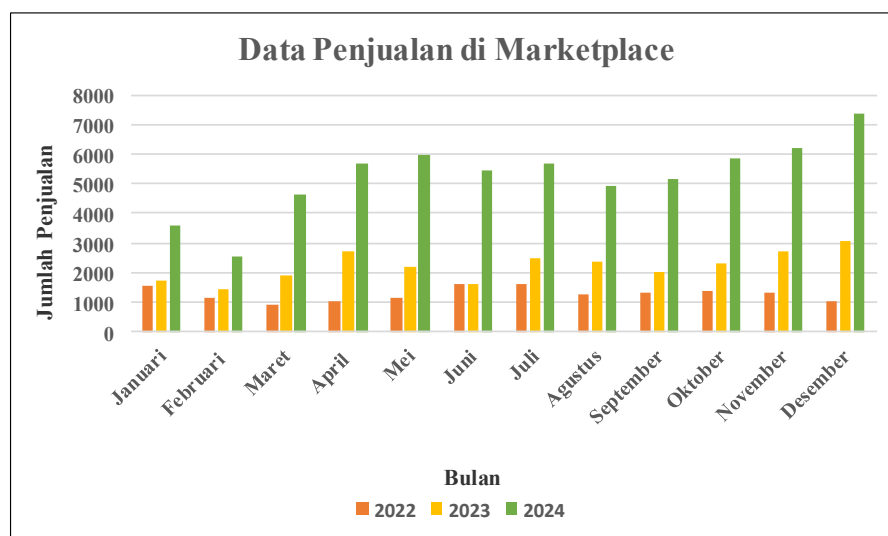


Figure Sales Data by Shopee

Source: Zerone Japan Internal Data (2025)

2. Research Methods

In this study, the researcher used a quantitative approach with a descriptive research type. Descriptive analysis is used to provide an overview of the characteristics of respondents and their responses to the research variables. According to Sugiyono (2022), descriptive statistics are statistics used to analyze data by describing or depicting the collected data as it is without the intention of drawing general conclusions or generalizations. Meanwhile, according to Abdullah et al. (2022), quantitative research is systematic research conducted on a phenomenon by collecting measurable data and analyzing it using statistical, mathematical, or computational techniques. Thus, quantitative research emphasizes structured variable measurement and empirical testing based on numerical data.

Furthermore, this study employed an explanatory research method, emphasizing the relationship between research variables (independent and dependent variables) and

hypothesis testing to verify the proposed hypotheses. According to Creswell and Creswell (2022), a quantitative approach is a research approach used to objectively test theories by examining the relationships between measurable variables. Research variables are measured using specific instruments, generating numerical data that are then analyzed using statistical procedures. A quantitative approach is appropriate for testing hypotheses and identifying relationships or influences between variables based on empirical data.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Respondent Description

This section presents data and statistical overviews regarding brief information about the conditions of the respondents studied. Respondents in this study were customers of CV Zerone Japan, specifically customers who had made purchases on the Marketplace platform, namely Shopee. The study was conducted by distributing online questionnaires through social media (WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok) from July 1, 2026, to July 31, 2026. With a total of 100 respondents, 100 questionnaires were obtained that were completely completed and could be processed. The following is a presentation of the respondent classification data obtained from the questionnaire distribution results:

a. Gender

Table Gender

No	Gender	Amount	%
1	Man	58	58%
2	Woman	42	42%
Total		100	100%

Source: Processed primary data (2026)

The table above shows that the respondents in this study were dominated by male customers, namely 58% with a total of 58 people out of 100 respondents. Meanwhile, female respondents were 42% with a total of 42 people out of 100 respondents. These results indicate that the majority of CV Zerone Japan's customers are male, although the proportion of female customers is also quite large. This dominance of male respondents is in line with the characteristics of the products marketed by CV Zerone Japan, which are mostly

engaged in automotive care, such as vehicle coating, scratch remover, glass polish, and various supporting products for car and motorcycle care. These products are generally closer to the interests and needs of male consumers who tend to have more attention to vehicle care and automotive appearance.

b. Age

Table Age

No	Age	Amount	%
1	17 -25	33	33%
2	26 - 35	51	51%
4	36 - 45	12	12%
5	> 45	4	4%
Total		100	100%

Source: Processed primary data (2026)

Based on the data above, it shows that the age range of Zerone Japan customers is dominated by the age of 26-35 years, namely 51% with 51 people, then in second place is dominated by the age of 17-25 years, namely 33% with 33 people, then in the age range of 36-45 years, namely 12% with 12 people and at the age above 45 years, namely 4% with 4 people. Zerone Japan customers are very varied, which means that Zerone Japan products are in demand by various groups.

These results indicate that the majority of CV Zerone Japan's customers are in the productive age range, specifically between 26 and 35. This age group generally has a high level of mobility, has a steady income, and has a greater need for vehicle care products to support their daily activities. Furthermore, consumers in this age range tend to be more active in searching for product information through digital platforms and social media, making them more susceptible to company promotions.

c. Work

Table Work

No	Work	Amount	%
1	Civil Servants / State-Owned Enterprises	8	8%
2	Private employees	48	48%
4	Self-employed / Entrepreneur	18	18%
5	Students	14	14%
6	Other	12	12%
Total		100	100%

Source: Processed primary data (2026)

Based on the data above, it can be seen that respondents came from various occupational backgrounds. The largest group of respondents came from private sector employees, namely 48 people (48%). Furthermore, there were 18 respondents (18%) who were self-employed/entrepreneurs, 14 respondents (14%) who were students, 8 respondents (8%) who were civil servants/state-owned enterprises (BUMN), 8 respondents (8%) who were other private sector employees, and 12 respondents (12%) who came from other categories.

These results indicate that Zerone Japan's customers are predominantly private sector employees, with nearly half of the respondents falling into this category. This indicates that Zerone Japan's products are quite attractive to people with a steady income and who are actively working. Private sector employees generally demand practical, high-quality products that add value to their daily lives, making them a potential primary market for Zerone Japan.

e. Purchase Frequency

Table Purchase Frequency

No	Purchase Frequency	Amount	%
1	1 time	58	58%
2	2-3 times	30	30%
4	4-5 times	4	4%
5	>5 times	8	8%
Total		100	100%

Source: Processed primary data (2026)

Based on the frequency of purchases, it can be seen that the majority of respondents made one purchase, namely 58 people (58%). Furthermore, there were 30 respondents (30%) who had made two or three purchases, four respondents (4%) had made four or five purchases, and eight respondents (8%) had made more than five purchases.

These results indicate that Zerone Japan's customer base is still dominated by new buyers or first-time buyers. A percentage of 58% indicates that most consumers have tried Zerone Japan products but have not yet made repeat purchases. This indicates that the company has a fairly good ability to attract new customers, but still needs to improve its customer retention strategy to encourage repeat purchases.

3.2. Descriptive Analysis of Research

This study used descriptive analysis to provide an overview of respondents' responses to the variables studied. This analysis aimed to determine respondents' perception tendencies in assessing each research indicator and to describe the condition of each variable based on data obtained from the research location.

In analyzing the research variable data using a Likert scale with five categories and a numerical score ranging from 1 to 5. To interpret the average value (mean score) obtained, both from each question item and the variable as a whole, this study uses the Three Box

Method (Ferdinand, 2014). This method classifies the average score of respondents into three interpretation categories, namely low, medium, or high based on the score interval into 3 categories, namely: low category, score = 1.00 - 2.33, medium category, score = 2.34 - 3.66 and high/good category, with a score of 3.67 - 5.00. A complete description of the variables can be seen in table.

Table Description of Research Variables

Indicator	Mean	Median	Observed min	Observed max	Standard deviation
CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE					
Sense Experience	4,240	4,000	2,000	5,000	0.680
Feel Experience	3,980	4,000	1,000	5,000	0.812
Think Experience	4,010	4,000	2,000	5,000	0.656
Act Experience	4,000	4,000	1,000	5,000	0.775
Relate Experience	3,870	4,000	1,000	5,000	0.868
PRODUCT QUALITY					
Performance	4,050	4,000	2,000	5,000	0.684
Features	4.130	4,000	1,000	5,000	0.744
Reliability	4,100	4,000	2,000	5,000	0.686
Conformance	4.110	4,000	2,000	5,000	0.691
Durability	4,020	4,000	1,000	5,000	0.707

Serviceability	4,220	4,000	2,000	5,000	0.642
Aesthetics	4,250	4,000	2,000	5,000	0.606
Perceived Quality	4,050	4,000	1,000	5,000	0.726
BRAND IMAGE					
Strength of Brand Association	4,060	4,000	2,000	5,000	0.676
Favorability of Brand Associations	3,930	4,000	2,000	5,000	0.652
Uniqueness of Brand Associations	4,050	4,000	3,000	5,000	0.712
BUYING DECISION					
Product Choice	4,370	4,000	1,000	5,000	0.673
Brand Choice	4,390	4,000	1,000	5,000	0.706
Dealer Choice	4,240	4,000	1,000	5,000	0.709
Purchase Timing	4,240	4,000	1,000	5,000	0.736
Purchase Amount	4,310	4,000	1,000	5,000	0.731

Source: Processed primary data (2026)

4. Conclusion

Based on the previously planned research problem formulation, namely testing the direct influence between exogenous and endogenous variables and testing the indirect influence with the presence of mediating variables, after conducting the research, processing the research data, and conducting other observations, the following results were found:

1. *Customer Experience* Positive Influence on Buying Decisions

Based on the results of the hypothesis testing, customer experience has a positive and significant effect on buying decisions. These results indicate that the better the experience consumers experience when interacting with a product or company, the higher their likelihood of making a purchase decision. Positive experiences can increase trust, comfort, and positive perceptions of a product, thus increasing consumer confidence in making purchasing decisions. Therefore, the results of this study indicate that improving the quality of customer experience is one factor that can drive improved buying decisions.

2. *Customer Experience* Positive Influence on Brand Image

Based on the results of the hypothesis testing that has been conducted, it is known that customer experience has a positive effect on brand image. These results indicate that the better the experience a consumer feels when interacting with a product or company, the more positive the brand image formed in the consumer's mind. When consumers have a good experience, consumers tend to form a more positive perception of the brand. This positive experience can increase consumers' trust, comfort, satisfaction, and confidence in the company. Furthermore, this experience can be stored in consumers' memories and become the basis for forming associations with the brand. If consumers consistently have a positive experience, the brand will be more easily associated with quality, service, reliability, and other positive values. Thus, consumer experience is one of the factors that can play a role in forming and improving brand image.

3. *Product quality* Positive Influence on Buying Decisions

Based on the results of hypothesis testing, it is known that product quality has a positive effect on purchasing decisions. These results indicate that the better the product quality perceived by consumers, the higher the consumer's tendency to make a purchase decision. Product quality is one of the important considerations for consumers before making a purchase decision. Consumers tend to consider the product's quality, performance, reliability, durability, and suitability to their needs and expectations. When a product is able to provide benefits and quality according to consumer expectations, the level of consumer confidence in choosing that product will increase.

The positive influence of product quality on buying decisions indicates that improving product quality can encourage consumers to be more confident in making purchases. Good quality products not only provide direct benefits to consumers but also reduce risks and doubts that arise before purchasing. Therefore, it can be concluded that the better the product quality offered, the higher the consumer's buying decision. Therefore, companies need to maintain and improve product quality to meet consumer expectations and encourage purchasing decisions.

4. *Product quality* Positive Influence on Brand Image

Based on the results of the hypothesis testing, it was found that product quality has a positive effect on brand image. These results indicate that the better the product quality perceived by consumers, the more positive the brand image formed in their minds. Product quality is one factor that can shape consumer perception of a brand. Consumers not only judge products based on the benefits they receive but also associate product quality with the brand's ability and credibility to meet their needs. Products with good and consistent quality can provide positive experiences, thus forming positive associations with the brand.

When consumers perceive a product's quality as meeting their expectations, trust and positive evaluation of the brand can increase. Conversely, product quality that does not meet expectations can create negative perceptions and potentially degrade the brand's image. Therefore, it can be concluded that the better the product quality, the more positive the brand image formed in the minds of consumers. Therefore, companies need to maintain consistent product quality as one way to build and maintain a positive brand image.

5. *Brand image* No Significant Influence on Buying Decision

Based on the results of the hypothesis testing, it was found that brand image did not significantly influence buying decisions. These results indicate that a product's brand image is not a significant factor in determining consumer purchasing decisions in this study. The lack of influence of brand image on buying decisions indicates that consumers don't solely consider a brand's perception or image when making purchasing decisions. Consumers may consider other factors they directly experience, such as product quality, price, product benefits, suitability to needs, promotions, and experiences gained from interacting with the product and company. Even though a brand has a positive image, this condition does not necessarily directly encourage consumers to make a purchase. Consumers can have a positive view of a brand, but their final decision is still influenced by other considerations that are considered more relevant to the consumer's needs and conditions at the time of purchase. This indicates that a positive brand image is not strong enough to be a primary factor in determining buying decisions in this study. The results of this study also indicate that consumers tend to evaluate the benefits and value they will obtain before making a purchase. In other words, consumers not only consider how a brand is perceived, but also consider whether the product is able to meet their needs and provide benefits according to expectations. Therefore, a good brand image needs to be supported by other factors, such as product quality, appropriate price, service, and positive consumer experiences. Thus, it can be concluded that brand image does not significantly influence buying decisions. This means that changes or improvements in brand image were not able to have a strong enough influence on consumer purchasing decisions in this study. Companies still need to build a positive brand image, but these efforts should be carried out simultaneously with

improving other factors that are more directly related to consumer considerations when making purchases.

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