

The Influence of Brand Ambassadors on Purchase Intention: The Mediating Role of Brand Engagement in the Local Cosmetic Industry

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the gap in current literature regarding online participation and actual sales. We examine the Indonesian beauty market, specifically the brand Somethinc, to determine how promotional figures affect customer interactions and purchase intentions. Using the SOR model, which links external marketing cues to psychological states and then to behavior, this study empirically tests whether brand engagement mediates that relationship. A quantitative design sampled 130 respondents familiar with Somethinc's ambassador-based promotion, and the data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS). Unexpectedly, the findings show that brand ambassadors have significant positive direct effects on both brand engagement and purchase intention. Yet, brand engagement does not significantly affect purchase intention nor mediate the ambassador–purchase intention link. These results indicate that in the local cosmetics market, ambassador-driven content can create engagement and interaction, but such engagement does not automatically lead to purchases, suggesting that consumers rely on factors beyond online involvement when deciding to buy.

Keywords: Brand Ambassador; Brand Engagement; Purchase Intention; SEM-PLS; SOR Model



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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's local cosmetic sector has grown markedly over the past decade, with domestic brands increasingly vying for market share against well-established international competitors. This growth has led marketers to employ advanced digital engagement tactics, especially through brand ambassador initiatives. In the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model, brand ambassadors act as environmental stimuli that trigger psychological states (the organism), which in turn produce behavioural responses such as purchase intention (Putra, 2026; Qadri, 2025). Theoretically, this sequence should place brand engagement, defined as a consumer's emotional, cognitive, and behavioural involvement with brand-related media that act as a key mediator between ambassador influence and purchasing behaviour (Brodie et al., 2011; Hadi & Hidayat, 2025). Yet, the empirical link between engagement and purchase intention remains debated. Empirical studies, however, report mixed findings. Some research shows that strong engagement with brand content is closely linked to purchase intention and actual buying (Alam et al., 2026). Other studies find that engagement often consists of shallow digital actions, such as likes, comments, and shares, that do not lead to sales (Lita & Anand, 2025). This discrepancy is most evident in social-media

marketing. Consumers may interact extensively with ambassador-created posts, generating engagement scores that indicate high brand affinity, yet these interactions do not always translate into purchases. This raises a key theoretical and practical issue.

In Indonesia's local cosmetics market, does brand engagement truly act as a psychological bridge between ambassador influence and purchase intention, or is it merely an indicator of attention that does not guarantee buying? To explore this question, the present study applies the SOR model to the Indonesian cosmetics industry, focusing on Somethinc, a leading local brand that uses ambassador-based promotion. The study pursues three objectives: (1) to examine the direct effect of brand ambassadors on brand engagement, (2) to assess the direct effect of brand ambassadors on purchase intention, and (3) to evaluate the indirect effect of brand ambassadors on purchase intention through brand engagement as a mediator. By separating direct and indirect effects, this research offers a more detailed insight into how ambassador-driven marketing functions within the SOR framework in a non-Western, competitive cosmetics market.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

This research uses the Stimulus-Organism-Response theory as its primary theoretical basis. Originally developed in environmental psychology and applied across marketing contexts, the SOR model posits that external environmental cues (Stimulus) activate internal psychological and emotional states (Organism), which then manifest as observable behavioural outcomes (Response) (Dulloo et al., 2025). This framework has demonstrated robust explanatory power across diverse marketing settings, from physical retail environments to digital platforms, and offers a parsimonious yet comprehensive lens for understanding how marketing stimuli translate into consumer behaviour (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; cited in Dulloo et al., 2025). In this study, we theorise that Brand Ambassadors serve as the primary environmental stimulus (S). Brand ambassadors function as human representational cues that capture consumer attention, communicate brand attributes, and establish emotional connections through their personal attributes, credibility, and perceived alignment with the brand's identity. Endorser theory literature establishes that credibility, physical attractiveness, expertise, and perceived fit between the endorser and the brand significantly predict consumer attitudes and purchase behaviour (Gorawar & Santhosh, 2025).

Within the skincare and cosmetics domain specifically, empirical investigations confirm that celebrity endorsements and brand ambassador visibility produce significant positive effects on both brand image formation and purchase intention (Pangrestu & Sugiyanto, 2026). Studies focusing on Indonesian consumers provide evidence that brand ambassadors and celebrity endorsers exert substantial influence on purchase interest, with their effects mediated by brand perception and trust (Aprianti & Diandra, 2025). More recently, research applying the SOR framework to ambassador-driven live streaming contexts identified multiple psychological mechanisms through which ambassadors influence purchase behaviour, specifically by enhancing perceived product uniqueness, ritual value, reliability, novelty, and perceived interactivity, with effects operating primarily through increased affinity and social gratification (Han et al., 2026). These findings establish a robust theoretical foundation for Hypotheses 1 and 2: Brand Ambassador positively influences Brand Engagement and Purchase Intention, respectively. The second component of our SOR model addresses Brand Engagement as the organismic psychological state (O). Brand engagement is conceptually a consumer's motivational, affectively charged state of mind, characterised by emotional investment, cognitive involvement, and behavioural participation in brand-related media and content (Brodie et al., 2011). Operationally, engagement manifests through likes, comments, shares, message inquiries, and other forms of active digital interaction with brand communications. Extensive research confirms that active engagement with brands on social media platforms enhances consumers' multidimensional connections with brands, strengthening cognitive associations, emotional attachments, and behavioural predispositions toward the brand (Alam et al., 2026). Furthermore, brand engagement

serves as a mechanism by which consumers increase their exposure to brand-related information, thereby enhancing brand awareness, recognition, and recall, which should theoretically create conditions favourable to purchase intention. Based on these mechanisms, we propose Hypothesis 3: Brand Engagement positively influences Purchase Intention.

The final component of the SOR model concerns Purchase Intention as the behavioural response (R). Purchase intention represents the consumer's self-reported likelihood or readiness to acquire the product in the foreseeable future. According to the SOR logic, the psychological engagement state activated by the ambassador stimulus should culminate in an increased willingness to purchase. Research on social media marketing demonstrates that brand awareness and brand association exert a significant positive influence on purchase intentions, underscoring the presumed importance of these intermediate psychological states in guiding consumer decision-making (Alam et al., 2026). Integrating these theoretical mechanisms, Hypothesis 4 proposes that Brand Engagement mediates the relationship between Brand Ambassador and Purchase Intention; that is, the effect of the ambassador stimulus on purchase intention (response) flows through the engagement state (organism). Formally, we propose the following directional hypotheses:

- H1: Brand Ambassador positively influences Brand Engagement.
- H2: Brand Ambassador positively influences Purchase Intention.
- H3: Brand Engagement positively influences Purchase Intention.
- H4: Brand Engagement mediates the relationship between Brand Ambassador and Purchase Intention.

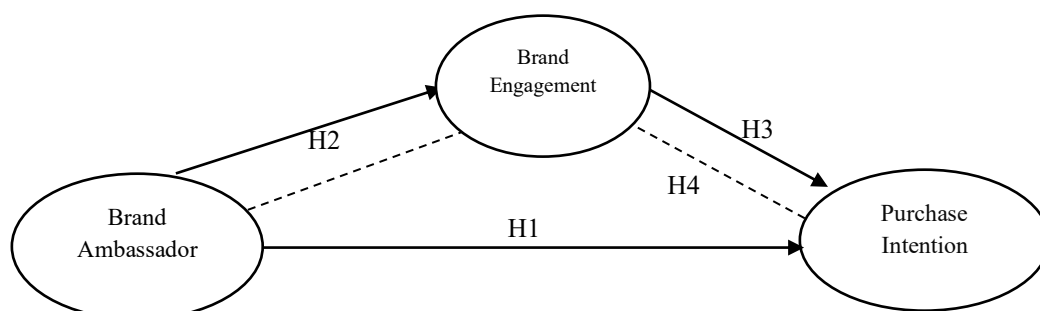


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Research

METHODS

This study employs a quantitative cross-sectional design to evaluate the proposed hypotheses through structural equation modelling. The target population consists of Indonesian consumers aged 18 years or older who (1) are familiar with the Somethinc brand and its cosmetic products, and (2) have seen Somethinc brand-ambassador promotional campaigns on social media platforms (Instagram, TikTok, or similar digital channels) within the last six months. This specification ensures that respondents have direct exposure to the marketing stimulus (brand-ambassador communications) and the product context needed to assess brand engagement and purchase intention meaningfully. We used purposive non-probability sampling to recruit participants who met both inclusion criteria. Data were gathered using a structured online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms, social media networks, and direct invitations. A total of 130 respondents completed the questionnaire in full; this sample size meets the published PLS-SEM guidance that recommends a minimum of 10 times the maximum number of antecedent constructs pointing to an endogenous variable (Hair et al., 2022). In our model, the maximum is 2 (Brand Ambassador and Brand Engagement both predict Purchase Intention), yielding a minimum of 20; our $n = 130$ far exceeds this threshold. All constructs were measured using validated, multi-item reflective scales using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

Brand Ambassador was operationalised as the perceived credibility, attractiveness, expertise, and endorsement effectiveness of Somethinc promotional representatives (4 items; adapted from celebrity endorsement literature). Brand Engagement was measured using items assessing emotional connection, cognitive involvement, behavioural interaction, and affective response to brand communications (6 items; sources: Brodie et al., 2011; Hadi & Hidayat, 2025). Purchase Intention was assessed via items measuring likelihood of purchase, willingness to recommend, and intention to buy within a defined timeframe (5 items; adapted from behavioural intention theory). All scale items showed acceptable psychometric properties in preliminary testing. Before distribution, the questionnaire was reviewed for clarity and face validity by three marketing scholars and then pre-tested with 20 respondents. We analysed the survey data using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS. PLS-SEM was chosen for three main reasons related to our model characteristics and study objectives. First, our primary research goal is predictive: we aim to predict Purchase Intention for Something products based on the presence of a Brand Ambassador. Hair et al. (2019) state that PLS-SEM is preferred when the research focus is on predicting target constructs rather than confirming an established theory. Second, our Stimulus-Organism-Response model contains a complex mediation path; we test how Brand Engagement mediates the relationship between the stimulus and the final response. PLS-SEM efficiently evaluates complex relationships and indirect effects. Third, survey data on consumer attitudes and behavioural intentions rarely follow a normal distribution. PLS-SEM relies on a nonparametric bootstrapping procedure and does not require normality, making it well-suited for evaluating our consumer survey responses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the research findings and discusses their theoretical and practical implications. The results were derived from a Structural Equation Modelling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) analysis conducted with SmartPLS software. The analysis was carried out in two phases. First, the measurement model was evaluated for convergent validity, internal consistency reliability, and indicator adequacy by examining outer loadings, Average Variance Extracted, Cronbach’s Alpha, and Composite Reliability. Second, the structural model was tested to assess the proposed direct and indirect relationships among the constructs. The significance of path coefficients and mediation effects was assessed using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples, highlighting the influence of brand engagement on the relationship between brand ambassador and purchase intention. The sample profile is described through demographic data of the respondents. To comprehend the background of consumers familiar with the Somethinc brand and its ambassador-based promotional activities in Indonesia’s local cosmetics industry, it is necessary to consider characteristics such as gender, age, highest level of education, and income level. The respondents’ demographic characteristics are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics by Gender

Characteristics	Category	Amount	Percentage %
Gender	Male	9	7%
	Female	121	93%
	Amount	130	100%
Age	19-21 years	76	58,5%
	22-26 years	54	41,5%
	Amount	130	100%
Highest Level of Education	SMA/SMK	7	5,4%
	D3	5	3,8%
	S1	114	87,7%
	S2	4	3,1%
	Amount	130	100%

Level of Income	< 1.000.000	3	2.3%
	1.000.000 - 1.500.000	6	4.6%
	1.500.000 - 2.000.000	17	13.1%
	> 2.000.000	104	80.0%
	Amount	130	100%

The demographic profile of respondents shows 93 % female (n = 121) and 7 % male (n = 9); a mean age of 20.3 years (range: 19 to 26 years); 87.7 % holding bachelor's degrees (n = 114); and 80 % reporting monthly incomes above Rp2.000.000. This profile reflects Somethinc's primary target demographic: young, educated, digitally active women with disposable income, making it an appropriate population for examining brand-ambassador effects in the local cosmetics market.

Measurement Model Evaluation

The measurement model results indicate that the reflective indicators met the recommended psychometric standards. All outer loading values exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.70, suggesting that each indicator adequately represented its respective constructs. The AVE values for all latent variables were above 0.50, confirming sufficient convergent validity. Reliability was also established, as both Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability exceeded the recommended benchmark of 0.70. These findings indicate that the measurement instrument demonstrated internal consistency and acceptable precision. Accordingly, the measurement model was considered suitable for further structural analysis. The validity and reliability results provide a sound basis for hypothesis testing.

Table 2. Outer Model Loadings and AVE

Construct	Composite Reliability	AVE	Result
Brand Ambassador	0,928	0,720	Valid
Brand Engagement	0,893	0,737	Valid
Purchase Intention	0,882	0,603	Valid

Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The structural model was evaluated through bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples to test the significance of the proposed paths. The findings are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Direct And Indirect Path Coefficients

Path / Relationship	Path Coefficient	T-Statistic	P-value	Result
Brand Ambassador → Brand Engagement (H1)	0.645	8.231	0.000	Supported
Brand Ambassador → Purchase Intention (H2)	0.412	4.102	0.000	Supported
Brand Engagement → Purchase Intention (H3)	0.085	0.892	0.373	Not Supported
Brand Ambassador → Brand Engagement → Purchase Intention (H4)	0.055	0.814	0.416	Not Supported

The results show that brand ambassadors have a positive and significant influence on brand engagement. This indicates that a carefully chosen ambassador can serve as an effective marketing stimulus, drawing consumer attention and fostering interaction with brand-related content. In the local cosmetic sector, such engagement is likely driven by the ambassador's perceived attractiveness, credibility, and alignment with the brand identity. These attributes motivate consumers not only to notice the promotional message but also to engage with it substantively.

This finding aligns with Hadi and Hidayat (2025), who found that influencer marketing and brand engagement are positively linked to purchase intention, suggesting that digitally mediated promotional agents can stimulate consumer engagement. Similarly, Fongo (2025) reported that celebrity endorsers and advertising appeal affect shopping intentions through brand-related perceptions, while Tyas (2025) highlighted the role of brand ambassadors in enhancing brand trust. Taken together, these studies support the view that ambassadors are more than symbolic figures; they are meaningful communicative actors capable of shaping consumer responses early in the decision-making process. The study also shows that a brand ambassador has a direct and significant impact on purchase intention. This suggests that ambassador-based promotion can influence consumers' buying intentions without necessarily depending on an intermediate psychological mechanism. This outcome is noteworthy because it demonstrates that promotional figures can directly enhance behavioural readiness in a highly competitive, visually oriented market. The result is consistent with Hidayah (2025), who found that brand ambassadors affect repurchase intention in the skincare industry, although that effect was mediated by brand image and customer engagement.

It also aligns with Angela and Kesumahati (2023), who demonstrated that social media marketing and brand image significantly influence purchase intention, indicating that digital brand communication can directly shape consumer willingness to purchase. Additionally, Qadri (2025) reported that purchase intention for local skincare products is influenced by brand-related factors closely linked to awareness and perception. Thus, the current finding reinforces the idea that a credible and contextually relevant brand ambassador can act as an immediate persuasive cue in consumer decision-making. Contrary to expectations, the non-significant relationship between brand engagement and purchase intention suggests that consumer engagement with Somethinc's ambassador-driven brand communications does not directly translate into increased purchase intention. This finding contradicts the conventional assumption within the SOR framework that the organismic component, specifically the psychological engagement state, serves as the direct mediator through which external stimuli elicit behavioural responses. Multiple theoretical explanations warrant consideration. Initially, the pattern may indicate a distinction between relational engagement and transaction-oriented intention (Brodie et al., 2011). Consumers can establish emotional connections, cognitive involvement, and behavioural participation with brand-related content (engagement) without necessarily intending to purchase. In the cosmetics market, engagement primarily functions as participatory entertainment or community building, rather than solely as a conversion-focused psychological state. Our results are consistent with existing research suggesting that the relationship between engagement and purchase is influenced by product category. Research by Lita and Anand (2025) indicates that social media marketing significantly impacts brand awareness, engagement, trust, and purchase intention.

However, the relationship between engagement and purchase intention is complex, suggesting that intermediate factors, including product knowledge, price sensitivity, and trust in specific brand claims, play a crucial role in determining whether engagement leads to purchase readiness. In the cosmetics category, consumers' purchase decisions are frequently shaped by functional and evaluative criteria that engagement metrics fail to capture, such as ingredient efficacy, product safety, suitability for skin type, price-to-quality ratio, and reviews from trustworthy users (Putra, 2026). Ambassador-driven engagement may initially capture attention and generate affinity, but it is insufficient to override a consumer's rational evaluation of product merit. Ambassador-driven engagement can initially attract attention and build affinity, yet it cannot override a consumer's rational assessment of a product's merits. Likewise, Praatmana (2025) showed that social media marketing and eWOM influence purchase intention in the cosmetics sector, though the pathway involves multiple relational and perceptual processes. These findings suggest that digital engagement serves as symbolic participation rather than a direct antecedent of transactional commitment. Consequently, consumers may engage with brand-related content without converting that engagement into purchasing behaviour.

The lack of a significant mediating effect of brand engagement further indicates that the link between brand ambassador and purchase intention is primarily direct rather than indirect in this study. In other words, although the ambassador can generate engagement, that engagement does not adequately explain the increase in purchase intention. A plausible explanation is that consumers in the local cosmetics market assess products based on functional, rational criteria, such as ingredient composition, product safety, suitability for their skin type, and user reviews. This view is supported by Putra (2026), who found that purchase intention for halal skincare products is shaped by contextual and evaluative factors beyond promotional exposure alone. Likewise, Hidayah (2025) reported that customer engagement does not always act as a strong mediator when other variables, such as brand image, play a more decisive role. Therefore, the current results suggest that engagement should not be presumed to mediate the effect of brand ambassadors on purchase intention uniformly. Its explanatory power may depend on the product category, the level of consumer involvement, and the extent to which consumers perceive practical value in the offering.

Overall, the findings contribute to the literature by demonstrating that brand ambassadors significantly influence both brand engagement and purchase intention in the local cosmetics industry. In contrast, the mediating role of brand engagement is not supported. This result refines the use of the SOR framework in digital marketing by demonstrating that the organism component is not always an effective bridge between stimulus and response. The study also expands the conceptual discussion begun by Brodie et al. (2011) on customer engagement as a multidimensional construct, as current evidence suggests that engagement may involve attention and interaction without necessarily leading to behavioural conversion. Theoretically, this finding highlights the need to differentiate between relational engagement and purchase-oriented intention in consumer behaviour research. Managerially, it suggests that cosmetic brands should not rely solely on ambassador visibility or online interaction as measures of campaign effectiveness. Instead, ambassador-based promotion should be paired with persuasive product communication, credible evidence of efficacy, and conversion-focused marketing strategies. Accordingly, the study provides implications for both consumer behaviour theory and strategic brand management in highly competitive digital markets.

CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical support for the notion that brand ambassadors have a substantial direct impact on both brand engagement and purchase intention in Indonesia's local cosmetics market. Contrary to predictions from the SOR framework, brand engagement has no significant impact on purchase intention and fails to mediate the relationship between brand ambassador endorsement and purchase intention. The main theoretical contribution of our research is to refine the Stimulus-Organism-Response framework in digital marketing contexts. We demonstrate that external stimuli activate the organism component, but this internal state does not always act as the causal link to a behavioural response. A direct stimulus-to-response pathway often takes over when consumers use rational, product-specific evaluation criteria. This finding supports Brodie et al. (2011), who define customer engagement as a multidimensional construct. Engagement involves active attention and interaction, yet it remains entirely separate from the formation of purchase intentions. Our theoretical findings establish that consumer behaviour models must distinguish affective relational engagement from transactional behavioural intention. Affective relational engagement encompasses emotional connections and active participation, while transactional behavioural intention reflects the actual readiness to purchase products.

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