Counting the Cost: Driving the Emergence of Decision-Making Behaviour on Competitiveness Brand

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A R T I C L E I N F O

A B S T R A C T

Consumers of skincare products pay more attention to safety and comfort before deciding to make a purchase. For these personal needs, consumers look for skincare products with a brand image and high quality. This research aims to determine the influence of brand image variables on purchasing decisions through switching costs for consumers who buy Somethinc skincare products. The method used in the research is a descriptive method with a quantitative approach. This research was carried out on Somethinc skincare users in the city of Makassar. The research sample was 100 respondents and sampling used a non-probability sampling method. The sampling technique in this research used purposive sampling. The data collection technique used was a questionnaire. The data analysis method used is using structural equational modeling with the help of the Smart-PLS version 3 application. The research results show that brand image influences purchasing decisions, switching costs influence purchasing decisions, and brand image influences purchasing decisions through switching costs.

Introduction

Skincare is one of the products that are very much needed in today's era, considering that many people today want a healthy and well-groomed body and face so that it can increase a person's self-confidence. In meeting their needs, especially needs that concern themselves, a person tends to choose quality and trusted products that can provide satisfaction. Consumers with rational thinking will certainly choose products with good quality, affordable prices, and products that are easy to obtain, which makes consumers feel comfortable using the product. The significant demand from the community has caused an increase in supply, so many skin care product companies have emerged domestically and abroad.

The increasing demand for beauty and facial care products has made national and

international manufacturers compete fiercely to create good quality products. From research and data, Indonesian consumers prefer local beauty products to imported brands (Katadata.co.id, 2023). The search conducted during June-August 2022 produced listing data of up to 10,785 products. From the results of the data analysis, it is known that the Somethinc brand was the best-selling facial serum brand during June-August 2022, with a total sale of 255 thousand products. Of all the facial serum brands in the top 10, only two brands come from abroad: Scarlett (228 thousand) and Garnier (147 thousand).

Somethinc is a skin care product made locally in Indonesia. Although it is a new company, it is considered capable of competing with skincare products from other national and international brands. This can be seen from several data surveys that analyze sales of various skincare products on e-commerce platforms, showing that Somethinc is in first place in the survey results. Of course, this can happen not only because of luck but also because of understanding the advantages and needs expected by consumers and implementing and determining the right marketing strategy to occupy that position.

With so many competing companies, various choices can be purchased by the public, which will later impact consumer purchasing decisions, and companies will gain a competitive advantage (Shen & Ahmad, 2022; Srivastava & Sharma, 2013). In general, a purchasing decision is the purchase of a product from a favorite brand, which is then influenced by two factors, namely interest and purchasing decisions, which are an integrated way that combines understanding to be able to assess two or more alternative attitudes and choose one of them (Abadi et al., 2023; Gain et al., 2018). Salem (2018) saw that there are several series of things that consumers do before deciding to buy a product or service. So, in purchasing decisions, consumers will consider many things, such as conducting surveys, looking for product information,

conducting evaluations, choosing, and finally arriving at a purchase transaction.

In recent years, skincare products have always been associated with women, but now the stigma is starting to change because men are also starting to be aware of their appearance from a young age. The mindset that sticks in their minds allows them to increase their confidence in everyday life through skincare (Sanny et al., 2020). To influence consumers in making purchasing decisions so that they feel comfortable and confident in using a product, manufacturers need to influence and convince consumers to determine the choice of products in their purchases so that they become consumer choices (Parawansa et al., 2023; Moreira et al., 2017).

Literature Review

Determining a person's choice is undoubtedly influenced by various aspects. Brand image is one aspect that influences purchasing decisions (Fariandi & Ariani, 2022; Putri & Tiarawati, 2021). This is especially important for beauty and care products, where purchasing decisions require more consideration, considering consumers are now much more careful in choosing beauty and care products that suit their body conditions (Bidari & Kurniawan, 2023; Sanny et al., 2020). These considerations relate to several things, such as how many people use the product, the suitability of the product, and the expectations obtained after using the product (Abadi et al., 2024). According to (Kotler & Amstrong, 2012), there are five indicators of purchasing decisions: recognition of needs, information search, evaluation of alternatives, decisions, and post-purchase behavior.

In this highly competitive environment, brand image is essential to create good brand positioning, and companies always play an important role (Kaur & Soch, 2018). Brand image is related to attitudes in the form of beliefs and preferences towards a brand (Shen & Ahmad, 2022). According to Oladepo &

Abimbola (2015), a good brand image will convince consumers to buy a product because product attributes show its ability to meet consumer needs, thus creating a positive association with the brand. Therefore, companies must create and build a good brand image so that consumer perceptions of the brand or product will also be good.

A strong brand image will significantly influence consumer decisions that will ultimately buy the product or use the service (Thaichon & Quach, 2016). Therefore, most consumers will only transact with businesses they trust, which we can see from a company's brand image. Now, a brand's image is only sometimes formed from customer interactions and experiences with the brand. There are times when potential customers form a brand image in their minds after reading news about the brand or simply after seeing a review from an influencer about the brand (Isyanto et al., 2020; Hsu et al., 2017). Three essential components build a brand image. First, the corporate image formed within the company to build an image significantly influences decisions before purchasing a product. Second is the user image, which is formed in a person who uses a product or service based on personality, social status, or lifestyle. Third, the product image formed in a product includes product attributes, benefits, guarantees, and usefulness for consumers (Aaker & Biel, 2013).

Tight competition with a large selection of beauty and care products allows consumers to switch from one product to another. Customer product switching will later incur several costs, or the desire to switch will decrease or become an additional burden for consumers; this is called switching costs (Abadi et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2001). Somethinc uses

switching costs in its skincare products by providing affordable and competitive prices compared to other skincare brands (Chuah et al., 2017; Ram & Wu, 2016). Switching costs usually refer to consumers' financial costs when switching brands, products, services, or suppliers. However, it is essential to note that these costs include non-financial costs. Other costs include psychological costs, time, and effort. Most product managers know how to improve their product's benefits, but only some consider the cost component of their value proposition (Firdaus & Budiman, 2021; Lestari et al., 2020).

According to (Lee et al., 2001), switching costs are costs incurred by consumers because they switch to other products or services, which would not be experienced if consumers remained loyal to the products or services currently used. Switching costs are generally not immediately felt after consumers switch from one product to another but are only felt after some time when switching or using other products (Susanti et al., 2019; Xhema et al., 2018). Switching costs begin with the consumer's purchasing decision and the implementation of that decision. These decisions can be formed in various ways, one of which is switching costs. When many companies are on the market, while switching costs are low, consumers tend to switch to products from other companies (Ganaie & Bhat, 2023; Hatta & Setiarini, 2018). They will not be loyal to products that have been used before, while consumers will tend to remain loyal if switching costs are high (Calvo-Porral & Lévy-Mangin, 2016). Therefore, Burnham et al. (2003) classify switching costs into three aspects: procedural switching costs, financial switching costs, and relational switching costs. Figure 1 shows the relationship between the factors and the following hypotheses.
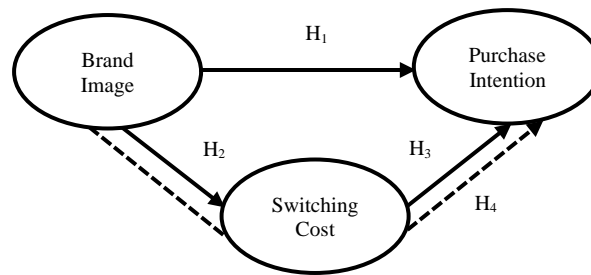
Figure 1.
Theoretical Framework

H1: Brand image has a significant effect on purchasing decisions.

H2: Brand image has a significant effect on switching costs.

H3: Switching costs have a significant effect on purchasing decisions

H4: Brand image has a significant effect on purchasing decisions through switching costs.

Research methods

The type of research used in this study is quantitative research with an associative approach. This study uses a non-probability sampling technique with a purposive approach. We surveyed consumers who use Somethinc products in Makassar. Data were collected by filling out a closed online questionnaire survey. Each item on the questionnaire was measured using a five-point Likert scale, 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree in a closed manner. To ensure users of Somethinc products, two requirements must be met: having used Somethinc products and making purchases other than Somethinc products. Researchers collected samples until 100 samples were obtained. Because the analysis method used is the Structural Equation Model (SEM), the ideal and representative number of samples is between 100-200 (Ringle & Sarstedt, 2016).

The questionnaire was divided into two sections: questions about the respondents'

demographic profile were asked in the first section, and questions about the research variables were asked in the second. The brand image items were taken from Aaker & Biel (2013), who extensively studied three dimensions of brand image: corporate, user, and product. Each dimension was measured with at least two questions. Switching cost was measured as switching from other products or services adapted from (Burnham et al., 2003). The purchase decision was adapted from (Kotler & Amstrong, 2012). The scales were measured on a Likert scale with different response categories to avoid response bias (Hair et al., 2019).

Measurement construction analysis was conducted on brand image variables, switching costs, and purchase intention. The path coefficient in the structural model can predict and measure the influence between variables (Hair et al., 2019). In SEM-PLS analysis, two stages need to be carried out: analyzing the measurement and structural models. The first stage tests the measurement model by conducting validity and reliability analysis on each model size. The second stage tests the structural model by estimating the path between the constructs, thereby determining their significance and the model's predictive ability. Such a sequence ensures the reliability and validity of the construct before drawing conclusions about the nature of the construct relationship and being able to

answer the hypotheses that have been developed.

Results and Discussion

The researcher obtained answers from 100 respondents who had filled out the questionnaire. Table 1 below illustrates the respondent profile. Respondents consisted of 22% male and 78% female. The majority (47.1%) of respondents were aged 18-25 years. Most respondents (45%) worked as employees. Based on monthly income, 47% had income ranging from Rp. 1,000,001.00 - Rp. 2,999,999.00. Most respondents (42%) made purchases 3-4 times a month. Most customers had used Somethinc products for 1-2 years (48%).

Table 1.
Characteristics of Respondents

No.	Characteristic	Criteria	Sample	Percentage
1	Gender	Man	22	22%
		Woman	78	78%
2	Age	18 – 25 years	47	47%
		26 – 35 years	33	33%
		36 – 45 years	16	16%
		≥ 46 years	4	4%
3	Occupation	Students	24	24%
		Employees	45	45%
		State Civil Apparatus	10	10%
		Enterpreneurship	15	15%
		Housewife	6	6%
4	Monthly expenses incurred when shopping	≤ Rp. 500.000,00	24	24%
		Rp. 500.001,00 – Rp. 999.999,00	17	17%
		Rp. 1.000.001,00 – Rp. 2.999.999,00	47	47%
		≥ Rp. 3.000.000,00	12	12%
5	Purchase frequency per month	1 – 2 times	22	22%
		3 – 4 times	42	42%
		≥ 5 times	36	36%
6	Usage experience	< 1 years	31	31%
		1 – 2 years	48	48%
		3 – 4 years	21	21%
		≥ 5 years	0	0%

Sources: Primary data is processed (2024)

This study uses the PLS-SEM analysis method with two stages of analysis: outer model analysis and inner model analysis (Hair et al., 2020). Outer model analysis is carried out to check whether the measurement indicators used are valid and reliable. In comparison, the inner model analysis examines the structural model formed and the relationship between variables in the model. The results of this study's outer model analysis are summarized in Table 2, which is proven to have reliability and validity following the criteria.

Table 2.
Contruct Validity and Reliability

Constructs/Item	Loading Factor	α	CR	AVE
Brand Image		0,870	0,900	0,563
BI1	0,804			
BI2	0,734			
BI3	0,728			
BI4	0,746			
BI5	0,772			
BI6	0,739			
BI7	0,725			
Switching Cost		0,879	0,911	0,631
SC	0,702			
SC2	0,709			
SC3	0,768			
SC4	0,881			
SC5	0,853			
SC6	0,835			
Purchase Intention		0,881	0,905	0,578
PI1	0,754			
PI2	0,776			
PI3	0,748			
PI4	0,789			
P5	0,739			
P6	0,722			
P7	0,790			

Sources: Primary data is processed (2024)

In this study, the questionnaire items have a factor loading value above 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019), which means that the measured variables represent the construct in the expected direction and provide evidence of convergent validity. In addition, this study uses Average Variances Extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) also to estimate convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019). According to Hair et al. (2020), dimensions with an AVE value of more than 0.5 will be considered to have high convergent validity. As shown in Table 2, all dimensions have AVE and CR greater than the predetermined limit value, so their convergent validity has met the criteria. Table 2 shows the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of all constructs greater than 0.70 and the Composite Reliability (CR) value higher than 0.7, which indicates high reliability and a good level of consistency (Hair et al., 2020).

Table 3.
Discriminant Validity of Variables (Fornell & Larcker Criterion)

	Brand Image	Purchase Intention	Switching Cost
Brand Image	0,750		
Purchase Intention	0,685	0,760	
Switching Cost	0,638	0,699	0,794

Sources: Primary data is processed (2024)

Table 3 presents the interfactor correlation analysis between brand image, switching cost, and purchase intention. It shows that the square root of AVE for each construct exceeds the shared correlation among the constructs in the research model, indicating good discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

After testing the external model, the next step is to test the direct effects between the variables and the indirect effects shown in Table 4.

Table 4.
Hypothesis Testing

Variable	Direct		Indirect		Total	
	Path Coefficient	T Statistics	Path Coefficient	T Statistics	Path Coefficient	T Statistics
BI → PI	0.299	2.892**	-	-	0.299	2.892**
BI → SC	0.685	8.582**	-	-	0.685	8.582**
SC → PI	0.494	4.535**	-	-	0.494	4.535**
BI → SC → PI	-	-	0.339	4.504**	0.638	7.807**

Sources: Primary data is processed (2024)

*Noted: BI= brand image, SC= switching cost, & PI= purchase intention. *significance level < 0.05, **significance level < 0.01*

Based on the direct influence test results on hypothesis 1, it shows that brand image has a significant effect on purchase intention (0.299) and a t-statistics value of 2.892. The results of hypothesis 2 show that brand image significantly affects switching cost (0.685) with a t-statistics value of 8.582. Hypothesis 3 testing shows that switching cost significantly affects purchase intention (0.494) with a t-statistics value of 4.535. Meanwhile, the results of indirect testing on hypothesis 4 show that brand image significantly affects purchase intention through switching cost (0.339) and a t-statistics value of 4.504.
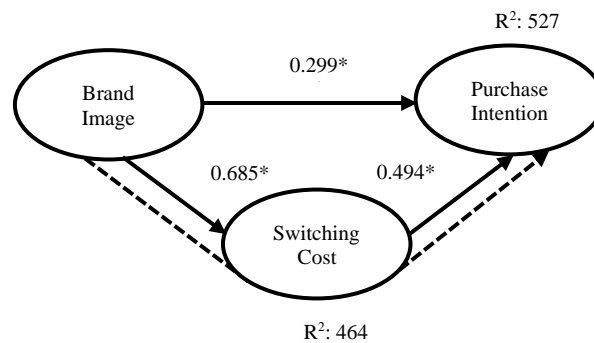

Figure 2. Structural Model Testing of The Theoritical Model

Discussion
Brand Image to Purchase Intention
The analysis of brand image and purchasing decisions found that brand image significantly affects purchasing decisions, meaning that if the implication of brand image increases, then purchasing decisions will also increase. Likewise, if the implication of brand image is low, employee purchasing decisions will decrease. Understanding and providing what customers need and want is vital in marketing management because sometimes, the representation of a product that we use reflects the consumer. For this reason, companies must

create and instill a good brand image to be accepted and maintained by customers (Abadi et al., 2024; Putri & Tiarawati, 2021; Isyanto et al., 2020). The more selective and perfectionist a person is, the greater the consideration in purchasing decisions when choosing a product, especially the newest and highest-quality ones (Shen & Ahmad, 2022; Lestari et al., 2020; Salem, 2018).

The results of this study are in line with the brand image theory of Oladepo & Abimbola (2015) that a good brand image will convince consumers to decide to buy a product because product attributes can show its ability to meet consumer needs, thereby creating a positive association with the brand. The sales level is high, so in just a few years, the Somethinc company has become one of the best beauties and facial care product manufacturers. Therefore, the company also continues to strive to improve its image in the eyes of customers by providing good quality products and being able to reflect the people who use these products as intelligent and modern consumers (Parawansa et al., 2023; Abadi et al., 2023; Gain et al., 2018). Every interaction consumer makes with the brand, such as good customer service, an easy-to-navigate website, user-friendly products, and good marketing, can increase the chances of making repeat purchases.

Brand Image to Switching Cost
The analysis of brand image and switching costs found that brand image significantly affects switching costs, meaning that if the implications of brand image increase, switching costs will also increase. Likewise, switching costs will decrease if the implications of brand image are low. Brand image is a perception or belief held by consumers that is reflected in their personal experiences (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Brand image is not only an indicator that customers can use when considering making a purchase but can also make consumers willing to incur switching costs due to customer perceptions of

the brand image of a product or company (Firdaus & Budiman, 2021; Kaur & Soch, 2018; Ram & Wu, 2016).

Companies must be able to provide trust and guarantees for consumers, especially regarding products related to consumer skin care. In this case, the company requires permission from the relevant parties to guarantee the quality and goodness of the product. In addition, the company can create a complaint service that is easily accessible when something happens to consumers while using the product. This can then build a good perception for customers towards the company so that customers are then willing to transfer costs based on the brand image created by the company (Fariandi & Ariani, 2022; Xhema et al., 2018; Yasri & Engriani, 2018). In addition, regarding product image, companies must also pay attention to providing attractive packaging. In this case, a company must pay attention to consumer needs regarding the products offered. In this case, beauty and facial health product companies need to pay attention to the packaging that should be made; for example, it must be easy to carry, use, and durable. The Somethinc skincare company needs to consider these things to maintain product packaging, considering that the products used are generally routinely used and can be carried anywhere. Based on the results of the analysis of respondent characteristics, it is known that students and employees dominate the majority of customers. This can be one of the factors that results in low respondents' assessment of product packaging.

Switching Cost to Purchase Intention
The analysis of switching costs and purchasing decisions found that switching costs significantly affect purchasing decisions, meaning that if the implications of switching costs increase, purchasing decisions will also increase. As described in the literature review, several reasons indicate that switching costs affect purchasing decisions; thus, switching

costs are essential to consider. These switching costs can be financial or non-financial, depending on the magnitude of the customer's desire. However, the study's results also show that it is relatively easy for customers to switch from one product to another. This finding suggests that switching costs, which are assessed in terms of financial switching costs associated with new expenses incurred by consumers when switching to another product, have the most substantial impact on purchasing decisions compared to other factors included in the modelling (Susanti et al., 2019; Hatta & Setiarini, 2018; Calvo-Porral & Lévy-Mangin, 2016). This further strengthens the assumption that increased switching costs due to new consumer spending when switching to another product will increase purchasing decisions. From a managerial perspective, it is crucial to understand how switching cost barriers can be further improved (Ganaie & Bhat, 2023; Hatta & Setiarini, 2018).

In line with the opinion put forward by Burnham et al. (2003), switching costs are the costs consumers must pay to switch from a company's current product or service to a competitor's product or service. Therefore, switching costs will be important when many companies are in the market (Chuah et al., 2017). When there are many companies, while switching costs are low, customers tend to switch to products from other companies. They will not be loyal to the products they used previously, whereas if switching costs are high, customers will tend to remain loyal (Hsu et al., 2017; Stan et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2001). While immediate expenses may be associated with changing brands, it is essential to weigh the long-term advantages (Gain et al., 2018; Srivastava & Sharma, 2013). These include possible cost reductions, higher-quality products, and enhanced customer support. By concentrating on the long-term advantages, businesses can rationalize the expense of switching brands. Thorough planning and study are needed to minimize the expense of change. Businesses may ensure a

seamless transition by utilizing the trial time, talking about, and considering the long-term benefits.

Brand Image to Purchase Intention Through Switching Cost
The importance of switching costs is further strengthened by the finding that switching costs moderate the relationship between brand image and purchase decisions. If switching costs increase, the relationship between brand image and purchase decisions weakens (Isyanto et al., 2020; Xhema et al., 2018). From a practical perspective, these results emphasize the importance of creating switching costs to increase purchase intention and even retain existing customers if customer satisfaction decreases (Thaichon & Quach, 2016). High switching costs will have an impact on reducing the sensitivity of the influence of brand image on customer loyalty and purchase decisions, which means that when customers choose to remain loyal, their primary consideration is no longer because of the positive brand image of the services they use but because of high switching costs (Bidari & Kurniawan, 2023; Ganaie & Bhat, 2023; Firdaus & Budiman, 2021).

Switching costs can strengthen the relationship between brand image and purchasing decisions only when the brand image of the service used by the customer is negative (Shen & Ahmad, 2022; Susanti et al., 2019; Ram & Wu, 2016). This includes the money needed to buy new products and the time and effort to investigate new brands and products. Emotional costs related to brand preservation could also exist, such as the fear of choosing the incorrect course of action or losing familiarity with the current brand. On the other hand, sticking with one brand could have more costs. If consumers do not test new brands, they can miss out on more reasonably priced or higher-quality products. Offering competitive prices and providing excellent

value can prevent customers from switching to cheaper competitors. Although price is not always the primary factor in brand switching, it can make a difference, especially in competitive markets.

Conclusions and suggestions

Brand image has a significant influence on purchasing decisions. Brand image has a significant influence on switching costs. Switching costs have a significant influence on purchasing decisions. Brand image significantly influences purchasing decisions through switching costs, which shows that the better a company's brand image, the higher the customer's purchasing decision through switching costs. Brand image plays a role in retaining customers to make purchasing decisions. Somethinc can apply to switch costs to maintain customer loyalty. If customers feel low satisfaction, the perceived value of customers is low, and the brand image becomes negative, switching costs can play a role in strengthening the influence of brand image to trigger purchasing decisions. The existence of substitute brands is another factor in brand switching. Customers might discover a new brand that offers superior features, quality, or cost to their existing brand. When considering brand preservation, the best course of action is to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of doing so.

Customers should consider things like how satisfied they are with the brand right now, whether there are other options, and how much preservation will cost. As a result, people can decide what is best for them. Companies must increase the quality of their products in response to customer requests and modern trends. For example, they could develop skin care products that instantly brighten the face.

This requires ongoing attention to detail and advancements in the field. Matters of brand trust that are continuously maintained, consumer satisfaction and loyalty to continue to retain old consumers and attract new consumers. In addition, it is also essential to maintain customer relationships because it will make customers think twice before switching to competitors. Loyalty programs in the form of membership or community-building efforts can make customers feel valued and appreciated, thus encouraging ongoing loyalty.

Understanding the beginning of a brand is essential for consumers considering switching. By understanding the reasons for preservation, the costs associated with it, the role of brand loyalty, the importance of research, and the best choices, consumers can navigate the transition smoothly and make decisions that best suit their needs. Consumers will feel more satisfied with the quality of the product without having to wait long, so consumer purchasing interest will increase. In further research, researchers can further deepen the research object by using men as samples because most of this research tends to be dominated by women. Companies can make the right decisions and minimize the risks that cause detrimental errors by conducting research first. Therefore, companies must develop strategic methods to create and utilize a more troublesome (and expensive) customer switching process so that customers become reluctant to switch to competitors. Finally, consumers may change their minds due to external factors, such as changes in their lifestyle or income.

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Abadi, Musa, Haeruddin, Abadi, & Mustafa
Counting the Cost: Driving the Emergence of Decision-Making Behaviour on Competitiveness Brand

Page 26