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Exploring the Interplay of Product Attributes, CEO Brand Image and Purchase Intention in the Cosmetic Industry: A Comprehensive Review

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Abstract: The cosmetics industry is highly competitive, with consumer purchase intentions influenced by both tangible attributes, such as product quality, and intangible factors, such as CEO branding. This study explores the interplay between product attributes and CEO brand image, emphasizing the role of mediating factors such as perceived quality, brand image, and information search behavior. By utilizing the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and Cue Utilization Theory (CUT), the research provides insights into how intrinsic (e.g., product features) and extrinsic (e.g., branding) cues shape consumer decisions. Case studies of successful Malaysian CEOs, including Naeemah Abdul Rahman of Nurraysa, highlight how personal branding aligned with ethical and cultural values drives loyalty and trust. The findings offer a comprehensive framework for understanding consumer behavior and provide actionable strategies for marketers to enhance engagement and differentiation in a saturated market. Practical implications include leveraging emerging technologies, such as augmented reality, to complement branding strategies and improve consumer experience. Future research should address regional and cultural nuances and explore the long-term impacts of CEO branding on customer loyalty and brand equity.

Keywords: *Cosmetics Industry, CEO Branding, Product Attributes, Consumer Behavior*

1. Introduction and Background

The global cosmetic industry is a highly competitive and rapidly evolving domain, where consumer purchase intentions are influenced by a complex interplay of tangible factors, such as product attributes, and intangible elements, like branding and perceived quality. As consumer preferences shift towards personalized and innovative offerings, brands face mounting pressure to remain relevant in this dynamic market. In Malaysia, the makeup segment has experienced significant growth, buoyed by the influx of both international powerhouses and emerging local brands striving to capture consumer attention (Hassim, Rahmah & Ahmad, 2019). This growth is fuelled by changing consumer demographics, increasing disposable incomes, and the expanding influence of social media platforms, which have amplified the visibility of both global and homegrown brands. However, the homogeneity of many cosmetic products, characterized by minimal differentiation in attributes such as formulation, packaging, and functionality, presents unique challenges for marketers attempting to position their offerings in a saturated market (Landwehr, Wentzel & Herrmann, 2012).

To navigate this competitive landscape, recent trends underscore the strategic importance of CEO branding as a critical differentiator. Unlike traditional branding approaches that rely solely on product features or corporate identity, CEO branding leverages the personal attributes, credibility, and influence of brand founders or leaders to enhance brand appeal. Figures such as Kylie Jenner, the founder of Kylie Cosmetics, and Naeemah Abdul Rahman, the founder of Nurraysa, exemplify this approach by combining her branding with the promotion of halal and affordable cosmetics. Kylie Jenner has successfully capitalized on her massive social media following to transform her identity into a billion-dollar cosmetics empire, illustrating the profound impact of leveraging a CEO's image to establish trust and emotional connection with consumers (Eyada & Abdel Rahman, 2020). Similarly, Naeemah Abdul Rahman's integration of her dedication to halal principles and entrepreneurial journey into Nurraysa's brand narrative has cultivated a loyal customer base in Malaysia. This highlights how a strong CEO brand image, aligned with ethical values and consumer needs, can significantly drive purchase intentions (Hossain, 2020; Hassim, Rahmah & Ahmad, 2019).

This paper aims to explore the nuanced interactions between product attributes and CEO brand image, focusing on how these factors are mediated by consumer perceptions of quality, brand image, and information search

behavior. By utilizing the frameworks of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and Cue Utilization Theory (CUT), the study delves into the mechanisms through which tangible and intangible cues influence consumer decision-making. SCT provides insights into the reciprocal dynamics between individual, behavioral and environmental factors, emphasizing the role of CEO branding as an environmental influence shaping consumer perception (Bandura, 1986). Meanwhile, CUT highlights the significance of both intrinsic and extrinsic cues, such as product features and branding, in guiding consumer evaluations of quality and purchase intent (Olson & Jacoby, 1972; Symmank, 2018). Together, these frameworks offer a comprehensive lens to examine the strategies that brands can adopt to thrive in the competitive global cosmetics market.

2. Theoretical Framework

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) is a foundational framework for understanding the dynamic interplay between individual behavior, environmental factors, and personal cognition in decision-making (Bandura, 1986). In recent applications, SCT has been widely used to explore consumer behavior, particularly in industries like cosmetics. The theory offers valuable insights into how external cues, such as CEO branding and promotional strategies, shape consumer perceptions and beliefs. Studies have shown that consumers actively process these external stimuli, interpreting them through the lens of their personal experiences and social influences, rather than passively absorbing information (Han & Kim, 2022; Wang et al., 2020). For example, a CEO's perceived trustworthiness and credibility act as environmental factors that significantly influence consumer attitudes and intentions (Andreini, Fetscherin & Zarantonello, 2020). Kylie Jenner's role in promoting Kylie Cosmetics illustrates how a strong personal brand can effectively bridge the gap between consumer cognition and behavior, making her products more relatable and trustworthy. Furthermore, SCT emphasizes the role of observational learning, suggesting that consumers who see CEOs endorsing their products may perceive these endorsements as authentic, thereby increasing the likelihood of purchase. This active engagement underscores SCT's relevance in analyzing how promotional strategies affect decision-making within the cosmetics industry.

Cue Utilization Theory (CUT)

Cue Utilization Theory (CUT) posits that consumers rely on both intrinsic and extrinsic cues to assess product quality and make purchasing decisions (Olson & Jacoby, 1972). Intrinsic cues, such as product features and formulation, relate to the inherent qualities of the product, while extrinsic cues, including branding, endorsements, and packaging, provide additional information that consumers use when direct evaluation of product quality is not feasible (Symmank, 2018). Recent studies have highlighted that extrinsic cues like celebrity endorsements and packaging aesthetics significantly influence consumer behavior, especially in competitive markets like cosmetics (Chen et al., 2021; Lee & Choi, 2020). This reliance on cues is particularly relevant in the cosmetics industry, where sensory attributes like texture and scent are often not directly assessable until after purchase.

Branding, as an extrinsic cue, plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer perceptions. For instance, Naeemah Abdul Rahman's active involvement in Nurraysa's marketing campaigns demonstrates how a CEO's image can serve as a powerful signal of quality and authenticity, effectively reinforcing consumer trust (Hassim, Rahmah & Ahmad, 2019). Additionally, digital marketing efforts, such as influencer collaborations and social media presence, have become increasingly effective in enhancing brand credibility and reaching younger demographics (Kwon & Kim, 2022). Similarly, attractive and unique packaging designs are often perceived as indicators of premium quality, influencing consumer preferences and willingness to pay (Landwehr, Wentzel & Herrmann, 2012).

Key Constructs and Relationships

Product Attributes

Product attributes, encompassing both intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics, are critical drivers of purchase decisions in the cosmetics industry. Intrinsic attributes, such as design and features, directly relate to the functional and aesthetic value of the product. Design/style, for instance, appeals to visual and emotional aspects

of consumer preferences, while features such as long-lasting effects and skin compatibility address usability and functionality (Koschate-Fischer, Diamantopoulos & Oldenkotte, 2012).

In addition to traditional attributes, modern consumers increasingly value products that align with their lifestyle and ethical considerations. Attributes such as sustainability, cruelty-free formulations, and inclusivity in product shades have become key differentiators in a highly competitive market (Alhedhaif, Lele & Kaifi, 2016). For example, Fenty Beauty's focus on diversity and inclusivity has redefined consumer expectations, proving that product attributes tailored to underrepresented demographics can significantly impact market success.

CEO Brand Image

CEO branding has emerged as a strategic component of corporate identity, especially in industries like cosmetics, where personal connection and authenticity are crucial. A CEO's brand image, defined by traits such as leadership, personality, and performance, can directly influence consumer trust, loyalty, and purchase intentions (Andreini, Fetscherin & Zarantonello, 2020).

Take Naeemah Abdul Rahman of Nurraysa as an example. By integrating her commitment to halal values and entrepreneurial journey into the brand narrative, she has created an emotional connection with her audience, fostering loyalty and enhancing brand perception (Hassim, Rahmah & Ahmad, 2019). Similarly, Huda Kattan's active engagement on social media has not only bolstered Huda Beauty's brand equity but also positioned her as a relatable figure, reinforcing consumer trust through her direct involvement in product endorsements (Eyada & Abdel Rahman, 2020).

Mediating Factors

The relationship between product attributes, CEO branding, and purchase intentions is often mediated by several key factors:

Perceived Brand Image: A brand's perceived reliability, attractiveness, and reputation significantly influence consumer trust and purchase decisions. Research shows that brands associated with a positive CEO image often enjoy higher consumer confidence and loyalty (Lien et al., 2015).

Perceived Quality: Consumer judgments about a product's overall excellence and reliability are central to purchase intentions. High perceived quality not only enhances consumer satisfaction but also reduces perceived risks, making consumers more likely to repurchase and recommend the product (Washburn & Plank, 2002).

Information Search Behavior: Consumers often engage in deliberate efforts to gather information about products and brands before making a purchase. This behavior reduces uncertainty and enhances decision-making by allowing consumers to compare alternatives and validate claims (Jacoby et al., 1994). In the digital age, platforms like Instagram and YouTube have become critical sources for consumers to explore reviews, tutorials, and endorsements, further emphasizing the role of CEO branding in influencing information search behavior.

Progressions in Literature

Extant literature has consistently highlighted the significant impact of product attributes and CEO branding on consumer behavior and purchase intentions. Product attributes, both intrinsic (e.g., design, features) and extrinsic (e.g., packaging, branding), are key determinants in shaping consumer preferences and decisions. Intrinsic attributes such as functionality, quality, and aesthetic appeal are critical in industries like cosmetics, where consumers value both performance and visual representation (Koschate-Fischer, Diamantopoulos & Oldenkotte, 2012). Similarly, extrinsic attributes, particularly branding, play an influential role in providing consumers with cues about product reliability and status (Olson & Jacoby, 1972).

CEO branding has emerged as a particularly effective strategy in fostering consumer trust and brand loyalty. Studies show that endorsements by CEOs can enhance the perceived credibility of a brand, leading to stronger consumer engagement and higher purchase intentions (Andreini, Fetscherin & Zarantonello, 2020). For

instance, Kylie Jenner's success with Kylie Cosmetics and Huda Kattan's Huda Beauty demonstrates how personal branding by CEOs can transform brands into global phenomena. By leveraging their personal images and extensive social media followings, both CEOs have effectively built trust and emotional connections with their consumers, thereby driving brand equity and consumer loyalty (Eyada & Abdel Rahman, 2020; Hossain, 2020).

Furthermore, the literature highlights that consumer reliance on CEO branding is often intertwined with product cues, as these cues collectively form the basis for trust and perceived value. For example, a strong CEO presence combined with premium product attributes significantly increases the likelihood of purchase, especially in markets where direct product evaluation is limited (Symmank, 2018). Despite these findings, a holistic understanding of how product attributes and CEO branding interact to influence consumer behavior remains underexplored.

Identified Gaps

Limited Integration
While existing studies emphasize the importance of both intrinsic and extrinsic product attributes, they often do so in isolation. For instance, research frequently focuses on single attributes, such as packaging or design, rather than examining their combined effects on consumer perceptions and behavior (Symmank, 2018). This fragmented approach fails to capture the synergistic impact of multiple cues, which is particularly relevant in the cosmetics industry where consumers rely on a combination of product features and external branding to assess quality and value (Koschate-Fischer, Diamantopoulos & Oldenkotte, 2012). Future studies should adopt a more integrative framework that considers how intrinsic and extrinsic attributes interact to shape consumer decision-making.

Regional Context
The majority of research on CEO branding has been conducted in Western markets, where cultural norms, consumer behavior, and market dynamics differ significantly from those in regions like Southeast Asia. In Malaysia, for example, cultural factors such as collectivism, trust in local entrepreneurs, and reliance on social proof play a unique role in shaping consumer responses to CEO branding (Hassim, Rahmah & Ahmad, 2019). While international examples like Kylie Jenner and Huda Kattan dominate the discourse, there is limited empirical evidence on how local CEOs, Such as Naeemah Abdul Rahman of Nurraysa, influence consumer behavior within the Malaysian context. Addressing this gap would provide valuable insights into the interplay of cultural and market-specific factors in CEO branding.

3. Methodological Challenges

The methodological approaches employed in existing studies on product attributes and CEO branding often lack the sophistication needed to capture the complexity of these relationships. While qualitative methods provide valuable exploratory insights, few studies employ advanced quantitative techniques, such as structural equation modelling (SEM), to validate complex theoretical frameworks and test mediating effects (Osorio, Centeno & Cambra-Fierro, 2020). SEM, in particular, allows for the simultaneous examination of multiple variables and relationships, making it an ideal tool for understanding how product attributes, CEO branding, and mediating factors like perceived quality and brand image interact to influence purchase intentions. Future research should leverage these advanced methodologies to provide more robust and generalizable findings.

4. Theoretical Contributions

This review bridges the gaps in understanding consumer behavior in the cosmetics industry by integrating two prominent frameworks: Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and Cue Utilization Theory (CUT). SCT, which emphasizes the interplay between individual, environmental, and behavioral factors (Bandura, 1986), provides a dynamic perspective on how external influences such as CEO branding interact with personal cognition to shape purchase intentions. By incorporating mediating variables such as perceived brand image, perceived quality, and information search behavior, this review extends SCT's applicability in the domain of consumer

behavior. These mediators illuminate the pathways through which product attributes and CEO branding influence consumer decisions, offering deeper insights into the underlying mechanisms.

Similarly, CUT's emphasis on intrinsic (e.g., product features) and extrinsic (e.g., branding) cues highlights the importance of multi-dimensional product evaluations in shaping consumer perceptions (Olson & Jacoby, 1972). By applying CUT in this context, the review advances the understanding of how tangible and intangible attributes collectively influence purchase intentions. This integration of SCT and CUT not only enriches the theoretical discourse in marketing but also provides a robust framework for future empirical studies to validate these interactions in various cultural and market-specific settings (Symmank, 2018).

Practical Implications

From a practical perspective, the findings underscore the importance of a cohesive marketing strategy that integrates product attributes and CEO branding to influence consumer behavior effectively. Marketers should prioritize enhancing intrinsic product attributes such as design, functionality, and sustainability to align with modern consumer values, including inclusivity and ethical consumption (Alhedhaif, Lele & Kaifi, 2016). Concurrently, leveraging extrinsic cues, particularly CEO branding, can help differentiate products in a saturated market.

CEO endorsements, especially on social media platforms, serve as powerful tools for building consumer trust and engagement. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube enable CEOs to directly interact with audiences, fostering emotional connections and enhancing brand credibility (Lawal, 2020). For example, CEOs like Kylie Jenner and Huda Kattan have successfully utilized their branding to amplify product appeal and drive consumer loyalty (Eyada & Abdel Rahman, 2020). Brands should consider adopting similar strategies, ensuring that CEO branding aligns with the core values and identity of the product to create a consistent and compelling narrative.

Moreover, investing in digital tools such as augmented reality (AR) for virtual try-ons can further enhance consumer experience. These technologies allow consumers to assess product attributes like shade and texture virtually, reducing uncertainty and improving purchase confidence. By integrating these elements into a unified strategy, brands can effectively engage modern consumers and build lasting relationships.

Recommendation on Future Research

The role of emerging technologies, such as virtual try-ons and AI-driven personalized recommendations, presents an exciting avenue for future research. These innovations can significantly reshape consumer perceptions by providing interactive and tailored shopping experiences. Studies should explore how these technologies influence perceived quality, brand image, and purchase intentions, particularly in the context of the cosmetics industry (Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020).

Given the predominance of Western-centric studies in CEO branding, future research should conduct cross-cultural analyses to understand how cultural nuances affect the impact of CEO branding on consumer behavior. For instance, collectivist cultures like Malaysia may place greater emphasis on trust and community alignment, altering the effectiveness of CEO branding strategies compared to individualistic cultures (Hassim, Rahmah & Ahmad, 2019). Exploring these variations can provide valuable insights for global brands seeking to tailor their strategies to diverse markets.

The long-term effects of CEO branding on consumer loyalty and brand equity remain underexplored. Research should investigate how consistent CEO involvement over time impacts brand perceptions, customer retention, and financial performance. Additionally, studies could examine the risks associated with CEO branding, such as reputational damage resulting from personal controversies, and how brands can mitigate these challenges while maintaining their competitive edge (Andreini, Fetscherin & Zarantonello, 2020).

5. Conclusion

The interplay between product attributes, CEO brand image, and mediating factors such as perceived quality, perceived brand image, and information search behavior is central to shaping consumer purchase intentions

in the makeup industry. Product attributes, encompassing both intrinsic characteristics (e.g., design and features) and extrinsic cues (e.g., branding and packaging), influence consumer perceptions and decision-making processes. Similarly, CEO brand image acts as a powerful extrinsic cue, enhancing trust, emotional connection, and brand credibility when leveraged effectively. Together, these factors create a comprehensive framework that can explain consumer preferences and behaviors in a highly competitive and dynamic market.

This review highlights the importance of addressing existing research gaps, particularly the limited integration of intrinsic and extrinsic cues, the lack of regional studies focusing on cultural contexts like Malaysia, and methodological challenges in studying complex relationships. By synthesizing insights from Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and Cue Utilization Theory (CUT), this review provides a holistic understanding of how external and internal factors influence purchase intentions. The integration of these theories not only extends their applicability to the cosmetics industry but also offers a robust framework for future empirical research.

Practical recommendations for industry practitioners emphasize the need for cohesive strategies that enhance both product attributes and CEO branding. Marketers should focus on aligning intrinsic qualities such as sustainability and functionality with the extrinsic appeal of CEO endorsements to create compelling narratives. Furthermore, leveraging emerging technologies like virtual try-ons and AI-driven personalization can further enhance consumer engagement and decision-making confidence.

For academia, this review contributes to the theoretical discourse by identifying underexplored areas such as the long-term effects of CEO branding on consumer loyalty and the role of cultural factors in shaping branding strategies. The findings provide actionable insights for future research, including cross-cultural comparisons and advanced quantitative methodologies like structural equation modelling to validate complex constructs.

Ultimately, the insights drawn from this review contribute to a deeper understanding of consumer behavior in the cosmetics sector, offering valuable guidance for both scholars and practitioners. By leveraging these theoretical and practical insights, stakeholders can navigate the evolving landscape of the makeup industry more effectively, driving innovation, consumer satisfaction, and market success.

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