Factors Influencing Brand Perception in the Digital Era

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Abstract

The development of digital technology has changed the way consumers interact with brands, while affecting the way they form perceptions of brands. This research aims to identify and examine various factors that influence brand perception in the digital era through a literature review approach. The review analyzed nine relevant and recent scholarly articles from both local and international contexts. The results show that there are several main factors that influence brand perception, including: the quality and relevance of digital content, multi-platform marketing strategies, brand message consistency, two-way interaction between brands and consumers, the role of influencers, visual identity and brand positioning, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), and consumer perceptions of brand quality and value. These factors are interrelated in shaping consumers' digital experiences that impact emotional and cognitive perceptions of brands. The findings provide important implications for marketing practitioners and brand managers in designing effective and relevant communication strategies amidst the dynamic digital landscape.

Keywords: Brand Perception, Digital Era, Digital Content, E-WOM.

Introduction

The emergence of digital technology has fundamentally changed the way companies engage with consumers, shifting interactions from a one-way communication model to a dynamic, multi-channel experience. This evolution is exemplified by omnichannel marketing, which ensures a seamless customer experience across multiple digital platforms, including social media and mobile apps, thereby enhancing brand relationships and effectively managing brand perception (Olsen, 2018). Furthermore, digital branding plays a crucial role in building a unique online identity that resonates with target audiences, fostering deeper connections. Companies also leverage customer experience management to create personalized and memorable interactions, which are crucial for building loyalty and enhancing brand perception. Furthermore, influencer marketing has emerged as a powerful strategy, enabling brands to reach new audiences and enhance credibility through trusted voices (Mogaji, 2021). Furthermore, content marketing

serves to attract and retain consumers by providing valuable content, thereby building trust and strengthening brand equity.

Brand perception is significantly shaped by direct consumer experiences and external influences, particularly in the digital landscape. A strong brand image, encompassing consumer perceptions influenced by logos, advertising, and customer experiences, plays a crucial role in fostering brand loyalty and advocacy (Chakraborty, 2023). Furthermore, the customer experience of using or consuming a product is determined by all interactions with the brand, and this is crucial. Positive experiences can enhance brand perception, while negative ones can diminish it. Similarly, online reviews serve as a vital source of social proof, with positive feedback boosting brand trust, while negative reviews can damage reputation (Ali, 2023). Furthermore, social media platforms can amplify brand messages and influence consumer emotions, making them crucial for shaping brand perception. Thus, an effective digital marketing campaign can leverage real-time analytics to create personalized experiences, which in turn influence how consumers perceive the brand.

The interplay of social media marketing, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), user experience (UX) design, and digital influencers significantly shapes brand perception across various industries. Social media marketing increases brand awareness and customer loyalty, while e-WOM provides social proof that influences consumer decisions (Ying & Dikčius, 2023). The quality of the user experience is crucial, as seamless interactions foster trust and satisfaction, further enhancing brand perception. Furthermore, digital influencers play a crucial role by leveraging their credibility and engagement to effectively promote brands, thereby increasing reach and awareness (Apostol & Zaharia, 2023). However, the dominance of these factors can vary based on the industry context, the specific digital platform used, and the demographic characteristics of the target market. Previous studies have yielded different findings.

Understanding these conditions is crucial for brands aiming to optimize their marketing strategies in a competitive marketing landscape.

Literature Review

Perception Theory

Perception theory encompasses various frameworks that explain how we interpret sensory information. Gestalt theory posits that our brain organizes visual stimuli into a coherent whole, emphasizing that the whole is qualitatively different from the sum of its parts (Grandi, 2023). Complementing this, bottom-up processing suggests that perception begins with sensory input, where our brain constructs a complete perception from individual components (Audi, 2018). Conversely, top-down processing highlights the role of prior knowledge and expectations in shaping our interpretation of sensory data. Furthermore, feature integration theory explains how our brain combines different features such as color and shape to recognize objects, while the binding problem addresses the challenge of integrating these features into a unified perception (Styhre, 2008).

Brand Equity Model (Aaker & Keller)

The Brand Equity Model (Aaker & Keller) is a concept used to measure the value of a brand. This concept shows how elements of a brand can influence consumer perceptions, purchasing decisions, and loyalty to that brand. The two main models that are often discussed in brand equity are the models developed by David A. Aaker and Kevin Lane Keller.

1. Aaker's Brand Equity Model

David A. Aaker developed the Brand Equity model by identifying five key elements that can build and measure brand strength. These elements are:

1) Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is a measure of how often and to what extent consumers consistently choose a brand

over competing brands.

2) Brand Awareness

Brand awareness measures the extent to which consumers recognize or recall a particular brand in a particular product category.

3) Perceived Quality

This is the consumer's perception of the quality of the product or service offered by a brand compared to competitors.

4) Brand Associations

Brand associations are the images consumers have of a brand based on their experiences, values associated with the brand, or perceptions of the brand itself.

5) Brand Assets

Brand assets include things that add value to a brand, such as patents, trademarks, or relationships with consumers, as well as competitive advantages that can be built through resources such as global recognition or consistent product quality.

2. Keller's Brand Equity Model

Kevin Lane Keller developed a model called Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE), which focuses more on consumer perceptions of a brand. Keller emphasized the importance of building brand knowledge, which consists of two main components: brand awareness and brand image.

1) Brand Identity

The first stage is brand awareness, which is the foundation for building a relationship with consumers. Consumers must be able to recognize or recall a brand before they can form associations or make a purchase decision.

2) Brand Meaning

At this stage, consumers begin to associate certain attributes with the brand, either through functional attributes (such as product quality) or symbolic attributes (such as status or a lifestyle associated with the brand).

3) Brand Response

At this stage, consumers make an assessment of the brand. This assessment can take the form of

perceived quality and purchase intention or brand loyalty.

4) Brand Resonance

This is the top stage of the pyramid, where consumers feel deeply connected to the brand. They not

only purchase the product regularly, but also feel emotionally involved with the brand, which can

lead to very high levels of loyalty and even influence others.

Brand equity, in Aaker and Keller's theory, focuses on how a brand can build and maintain long-

term value through managing customer loyalty, product quality, and positive brand associations.

By creating consistent and emotional experiences for customers, brands can strengthen their market

position and increase competitiveness.

Theory of Planned Behavior

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is a psychological theory developed by Icek Ajzen

in 1985 to explain the factors that influence a person's intention to perform a behavior. This theory

is an extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), previously developed by Ajzen and

Martin Fishbein. TPB explains that the intention to perform an action is the strongest predictor of

actual behavior, and this intention is influenced by three main elements: attitude, subjective norm,

and perceived behavioral control.

Three main elements of the Theory of Planned Behavior

1) Attitude

Attitude refers to a person's attitude toward a behavior, whether they perceive it as positive or

negative. This attitude is shaped by an assessment of the potential consequences of performing the

behavior.

2) Subjective Norm

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Subjective norm refers to an individual's perception of the extent to which people important to them (such as family, friends, or coworkers) support or expect them to perform a behavior.

3) Perceived Behavioral Control

Perceived behavioral control refers to the extent to which a person feels they have control or ability to perform a particular behavior. This includes internal factors (e.g., skills or knowledge) and external factors (e.g., barriers or available resources).

Methods

This study uses a literature review approach with the aim of identifying and analyzing factors influencing brand perception in the digital era based on a review of previously published scientific literature. This approach is descriptive-qualitative and focuses on a systematic review of academic articles from various reputable sources. The inclusion criteria used include scientific journal articles published between 2018 and 2024 and examining topics relevant to brand perception in a digital context with articles written in English or Indonesian and originating from journals that have gone through a peer-reviewed process.

Results and Discussion

Literature Review Study Results

Table. Literature Review Study Results

No.	Author(s), Title, and Year	Objective	Method	Conclusion
1	Branka Dropulić, Zoran Krupka, Goran Vlašić – Brand Equity in a Digital Age: Systematic Literature Review, 2022	To review literature on brand equity in the digital age, identify gaps, and find potential future research areas.	Bibliometric analysis followed by a narrative review of articles published in the Web of Science database.	This study contributes to brand management literature by offering streams for new research in brand equity in the digital age.
2	Tatik Suryani, Abu Amar Fauzi, Mochamad Nurhadi – Enhancing Brand Image in the Digital Era: Evidence from Small and	To validate key factors influencing the enhancement of brand image in the digital era based on schematic theory.	Survey of 400 respondents from four major cities in Java (Surabaya, Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta) using	Website and social media quality have no direct effect on brand image; the effect is mediated through brand

	Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in Indonesia, 2021		quota sampling technique.	awareness and e- WOM.
3	Riad Shams, Sheshadri Chatterjee, Ranjan Chaudhuri – Developing Brand Identity and Sales Strategy in the Digital Era: Moderating Role of Consumer Belief in Brand, 2024	To determine the factors shaping brand identity in the digital era and examine the moderating role of consumer trust in the brand on purchase decisions.	Online survey of respondents meeting age and digital media usage criteria.	The study provides insights on how brand identity and sales strategies can be developed in the digital era by considering consumer trust as a moderating factor in the decision-making process.
4	Stefen R. A. Taroreh et al. – Brand Positioning Strategy in Digital Business: Literature Review, 2024	To explore and identify current trends in brand positioning strategies relevant to the digital context based on existing research.	Literature review.	The study identifies that modern consumers spend most of their time online, making digital branding a crucial part of brand positioning strategies.
5	Elok Nur Affah Al Akromi – The Influence of Digital Marketing on Brand Perception among Millennials and Gen Z, 2024	To examine the influence of digital marketing strategies on brand perception among Millennials and Gen Z.	Online survey of respondents meeting age and digital media usage criteria.	Digital marketing positively influences brand perception among Millennials and Gen Z, with a stronger effect on Gen Z. Gen Z's preference for interactive and personalized content indicates they have a more positive perception of brands active on digital platforms.
6	M. Saritha, P. Anupama, S. Jalaja, Reena Thakur – The Impact of Influencer Marketing on Brand Perception and Consumer Purchase Intentions: A Social Influence Theory Perspective, 2019	To explore the impact of influencer marketing on brand perception and purchase intentions through the lens of Social Influence Theory.	Literature review.	Influencer marketing is an important strategy for shaping consumer attitudes and driving purchase decisions, leveraging normative and informational influence from influencers as social agents.
7	Rezki – Digital Influencers and Their Effect on Brand Perception and Loyalty, 2023	To examine the impact of digital influencers on brand image and loyalty, focusing on influencer credibility.	Quantitative research using a survey of 500 respondents; correlation, regression, ANOVA, and	Influencer credibility is positively associated with brand image and attitudes toward the brand, highlighting the importance of

			ANCOVA	credibility in
			analysis.	influencer marketing.
8	Qiao C. – The Impact of Social Media on Brand Perception and Consumer Behavior, 2023	To analyze how social media platforms influence brand perception and consumer behavior.	Literature analysis.	Social media provides more direct, flexible, and diverse communication channels for brands, enabling increased visibility and consumer recognition in a competitive market. Interactive social media advertising and platform user evaluations significantly influence consumers' purchase decisions.
9	Denpharanto A. Krisprimandoyo et al. – Exploring the Relationship between Social Media Engagement, Customer Reviews, and Brand Perceptions: A Comprehensive Study in Retail Industry, 2024	To investigate the relationship between social media engagement, customer reviews, and brand perception in the retail industry.	Qualitative analysis of customer- generated content and social media interactions.	The study reveals key themes and patterns affecting brand sentiment and consumer behavior, highlighting the importance of social media engagement and customer reviews in shaping brand perception.

Based on the results of the journal literature review, the factors influencing brand perception in the digital era include:

- 1. Digital Marketing Strategy
- a. Relevant and engaging digital content

In the fast-paced and distraction-filled digital era, relevant and engaging digital content is a crucial factor in shaping brand perception in the minds of consumers. The relevance and appeal of content determine the extent to which a brand's message is received, understood, and internalized by the target audience. According to Elok Nur Affah Al Akromi (2024), relevant content is content that aligns with consumers' values, particularly Millennials and Gen Z. This

affinity includes the appropriateness of the theme, language style, and platform used with the audience's digital habits.

Meanwhile, engaging content is content that captures attention and sparks active participation from the audience. Interactivity is also key, for example, through quizzes, digital challenges, or polls that encourage direct engagement. Furthermore, this study confirms that content that is not only relevant but also engaging can increase engagement, build brand trust, and foster long-term loyalty.

b. Multi-platform marketing strategy

In the highly fragmented digital era, consumers are no longer confined to a single channel to obtain information or interact with brands. Branka Dropulić, Zoran Krupka, and Goran Vlašić (2022), in their systematic study on digital brand equity, emphasize the importance of integration across various digital channels, such as social media, websites, email marketing, video streaming, and e-commerce platforms. Effectively implementing a multi-platform strategy can strengthen consumer perceptions of a brand by creating a comprehensive and seamless brand experience. When consumers perceive alignment between the content, values, and interactions offered by a brand across various channels, this leads to increased trust and loyalty in that brand.

c. Brand message consistency across digital channels

Amidst the rapid flow of information in the digital era, brand message consistency is key to shaping positive consumer perceptions of a brand. This consistency refers to a brand's ability to convey a consistent message, values, and identity across all digital communication channels, including social media, websites, email, and e-commerce platforms. Consistent messaging across digital platforms can increase consumer credibility and trust in a brand, while strengthening brand associations in consumers' minds. When a brand's message is delivered with the same tone, visual style, and values repeatedly across multiple channels, it builds a strong and recognizable

perception among audiences. In practice, this means that the slogan, logo, tone of voice, and values communicated on social media should align with those conveyed on the official website or other platforms.

2. Social Media Engagement

Digital transformation has transformed the relationship between brands and consumers from a one-way street to a more open and dynamic two-way communication. In the digital era, consumers are not only message recipients but also play an active role in shaping brand image and perception. Research by Rezki (2023) explains that brands that actively respond to reviews, complaints, or questions quickly and provide solutions will gain positive perceptions related to professionalism, empathy, and reliability. Third, participation in digital social trends is also an increasingly important strategy for building relevant and adaptive brand perceptions. Saritha et al. (2019) and Elok Nur Affah Al Akromi (2024) show that brands that are able to participate in viral trends or emerging social discourses, such as social awareness campaigns, viral challenges, or meme culture, will more easily reach younger consumers such as Gen Z and millennials.

3. Influencer Marketing

Three key elements influence the effectiveness of influencers in shaping brand perception: the influencer's credibility and appeal, emotional connection with the audience, and the social influence generated by endorsements. First, an influencer's credibility and attractiveness are key determinants in building positive brand perceptions. Saritha et al. (2019) explain that consumers tend to trust recommendations from influencers who are perceived as competent, honest, and personally engaging. Second, the emotional connection between influencers and their audiences serves as an invisible force that strengthens the impact of communication. Rezki (2023) emphasizes that the psychological bond built through regular interactions and the influencer's personal narrative can create high levels of trust and engagement. Third, the social influence and trust generated by endorsements play a significant role in shaping consumers' intentions to try or purchase a product. A study by Qiao (2023) states that the effect of endorsements operates not

only at the informational level but also through social proof mechanisms, where consumers refer to the actions or opinions of trusted figures as a basis for decision-making.

4. Brand Identity & Positioning

In the highly competitive digital era, a brand's ability to stand out and stick in the minds of consumers is crucial. Several factors, such as brand uniqueness and differentiation, strong visual identity, and brand positioning relevant to the target market, are fundamental aspects in shaping positive brand perceptions. First, brand uniqueness and differentiation play a key role in creating consumers' initial attraction to a brand. According to research by Riad Shams et al. (2024) and Taroreh et al. (2024), brands that deliver unique value, whether in terms of product features, user experience, or messaging, are more easily recognized and remembered by audiences. Branka Dropulić et al. (2022) emphasize that a strong and consistent visual identity across various digital platforms such as Instagram, websites, and apps can strengthen positive brand associations and enhance consumer recall. Colors that align with the brand's personality, a recognizable logo, and a tone of voice that aligns with the target audience's characteristics will strengthen the perception that the brand has a clear and authentic identity. It highlights that brands must understand the preferences, lifestyles, and expectations of their target audiences, particularly younger generations like Gen Z and millennials, to position themselves relevantly. Effective positioning not only conveys "who" the brand is but also answers the question "why this brand is important and different" to consumers in the context of their daily lives.

5. Customer Reviews & UGC (User-Generated Content)

In today's digital era, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), or online consumer reviews and recommendations, has become one of the most significant forces in shaping brand perceptions. Consumers no longer rely solely on company advertisements; they now increasingly trust the opinions of fellow users, who are perceived as more honest, spontaneous, and free from commercial bias. e-WOM has a significant influence on shaping a positive or negative brand image. According to Qiao (2023) and Krisprimandoyo et al. (2024), customer reviews on social

media, online forums, and platforms like Google Reviews or e-commerce marketplaces are the primary reference points for potential consumers in assessing product credibility and quality. Similarly, user-generated content (UGC), such as photos, videos, testimonials, and stories published by consumers on social media, has become a valuable branding asset. Suryani et al. (2021) stated that the influence of e-WOM and the availability of authentic UGC are crucial factors in building strong, trustworthy, and positive brand perceptions. In the digital era, the power of consumers as creators and disseminators of information has become a central element in the brand image formation process, and marketers cannot ignore it.

6. Brand Awareness & Trust

In this highly competitive and information-rich digital era, brand awareness is a crucial foundation for building strong brand perceptions. Brands that are easily recognized, frequently seen on various digital platforms, and consistently deliver their messages have a greater chance of entering consumers' minds. As explained by Branka Dropulić et al. (2022), a brand's digital visibility significantly determines how consumers remember and evaluate a brand, even before they directly interact with the product or service.

In this context, perceptions of brand credibility play a crucial role. Brand credibility refers to the extent to which consumers believe a brand can consistently deliver on its promised quality. As explained by Riad Shams et al. (2024), credibility is a combination of online reputation, customer experience, and transparency in a brand's digital communications. Brands with high recognition, trust in their marketing promises, and consistent credibility are more likely to build positive perceptions and long-term loyalty among increasingly selective digital consumers.

7. Consumer Belief / Brand Belief

One crucial element influencing brand perception in the digital era is consumer confidence in the quality and value offered by the brand. According to findings by Riad Shams et al. (2024)

and Dropulić et al. (2022), trust in brand quality is formed from previous experiences, user reviews, and first impressions conveyed in digital communications.

Beyond rational perception, emotional and cognitive perceptions also shape consumers' perspectives on a brand. Cognitive perception relates to how consumers assess and understand a brand based on factual information such as product features, price, and technical advantages. In this regard, Suryani et al. (2021) emphasize the importance of creating brand experiences that appeal to consumers' emotions, for example through storytelling, socially relevant campaigns, or humanistic customer service.

Conclusion

A comprehensive analysis of extant literature encompassing a wide range of contemporary studies shows that brand perception is now influenced not only by conventional advertising practices and inherent product quality, but also by immersive and interactive digital experiences that are integrative. Several key factors found to influence brand perception include:

- 1. The significance and quality of digital content serve as the primary gateway for consumers to learn about and evaluate a brand.
- 2. A consistent and integrated multi-platform marketing strategy can increase brand visibility and brand recognition broadly and massively.
- 3. Consistency in brand messaging across digital channels significantly determines the credibility and image of the brand in consumers' perceptions.
- 4. Two-way interactions between brands and consumers, including engagement with feedback and participation in digital trends, strengthen emotional closeness, thus building positive perceptions.
- 5. The role of influencer marketing is crucial, especially in creating social connections, trust, and emotional influence on the target audience.
- 6. A brand's visual identity and positioning are crucial markers of differentiation in capturing consumer attention amidst the competitive digital era.

- 7. Electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) and user-generated content have proven to be among the most trusted sources of reference for consumers in the digital age.
- 8. The level of brand recognition and perception of brand credibility are also key foundations for building long-term trust.
- 9. Belief in product quality and brand values, as well as the cognitive and emotional perceptions evoked by a message, will be determining factors in building consumer loyalty.

Overall, brand perception in the digital age is built and influenced by a balance between rational and emotional approaches. Therefore, a brand's ability to build authentic and responsive relationships with its consumers through various digital channels will significantly determine how consumers perceive a brand.

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