



PURCHASE DECISIONS: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF BRAND IMAGE AND MODERATING ROLE OF CONSUMER REFERENCES IN YAMAHA'S AT-LPM SEGMENT IN WEST JAVA

Eko Wahono¹, Lili Karmela Fitriani², Odang Supriatna³

^{1,2,3}Program Magister Manajemen, Sekolah Pascasarjana, Universitas Kuningan, Jawa Barat, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Intensifying competition in Indonesia's Automatic Low Premium Model (AT-LPM) motorcycle segment where Honda's BeAT has consistently outsold Yamaha's Gear has prompted strategic imperatives around digital engagement and customer relationship management. This study examines how digital marketing and relationship marketing shape consumer purchase decisions, mediated by brand image and moderated by consumer references, among Yamaha AT-LPM consumers at Arista Yamaha dealerships across West Java. A quantitative survey design was employed, with data gathered from 265 respondents selected via proportional probability sampling based on Slovin's formula ($e = 5\%$). Structured questionnaires on a five-point Likert scale operationalized five latent constructs. Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) via SmartPLS 4, with 5,000-resample bootstrapping, was used for hypothesis testing. Outer model results confirmed adequate convergent validity ($AVE > 0.50$), composite reliability ($CR > 0.70$), and discriminant validity ($HTMT < 0.85$). Inner model results show: digital marketing positively affects brand image ($\beta = 0.512$; $t = 8.393$; $p < 0.001$) and purchase decisions ($\beta = 0.214$; $t = 3.963$; $p < 0.001$); relationship marketing positively affects brand image ($\beta = 0.401$; $t = 6.365$; $p < 0.001$) and purchase decisions ($\beta = 0.289$; $t = 4.898$; $p < 0.001$); brand image significantly influences purchase decisions ($\beta = 0.421$; $t = 6.284$; $p < 0.001$) and fully mediates the paths from both digital marketing (indirect $\beta = 0.215$; $p = 0.002$) and relationship marketing (indirect $\beta = 0.169$; $p = 0.004$); and consumer references positively moderate the brand image–purchase decision relationship ($\beta = 0.167$; $t = 3.408$; $p < 0.001$). The R^2 for brand image is 0.614 and for purchase decisions is 0.721. These findings offer actionable guidance for Yamaha and its dealer networks to strengthen digital presence, cultivate relational bonds, and leverage social proof to elevate purchase conversion.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian motorcycle market, and specifically the Automatic Low Premium Model (AT-LPM) segment, constitutes one of the most vigorously contested consumer goods arenas in Southeast Asia. Rising urban mobility demands, combined with consumer preferences for economical and fuel-efficient commuter vehicles, have made this segment both a strategic priority and a battleground for market share. Based on data from the Association of Indonesian Motorcycle Industry (AISI), Honda maintained a dominant national market share of approximately 74–76% in 2022–2024, while Yamaha held around 21–24%. Within the AT-LPM sub-segment, this asymmetry is even more pronounced: Honda's BeAT has consistently outsold Yamaha's Gear across consecutive years, with BeAT recording over 2.5 million units sold in 2023 compared to Gear's approximately 350,000 units. In West Java Indonesia's most populous province and one of Yamaha's key markets Arista Yamaha operates as a major authorized dealer network with multiple outlets serving high-density urban and peri-urban populations, making it a strategically significant research site. The persistent gap between Yamaha and Honda's market positions in this segment invites empirical inquiry into the marketing and brand-related drivers of purchase behavior.

Within this competitive landscape, digital marketing has emerged as a decisive differentiator. Digital channels including social media platforms, brand websites, and e-commerce ecosystems enable firms to disseminate product information at scale, interact with prospective buyers in real time, and deliver personalized messages aligned with consumer intent (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Ryan, 2021; Tiago & Veríssimo, 2022). Simultaneously, relationship marketing anchored in long-term customer engagement, service responsiveness, and loyalty cultivation has been theorized and empirically documented as a pathway to deepened consumer trust and repeat patronage (Berry, 1983; Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Brand image serves as a pivotal cognitive and affective intermediary in the consumer decision process. Keller's (2013) Customer-Based Brand Equity framework posits that brand associations formed through marketing communications, service encounters, and peer discourse coalesce into a brand image that either accelerates or inhibits purchase commitment. A favorable brand image confers a perceived quality advantage that competitors find difficult to replicate purely through product specification. In parallel, consumer references defined in this study as the social validation inputs received by a potential buyer from family members, peer groups, online communities, and user-generated reviews that collectively influence purchase intention exert a social validation function that amplifies or attenuates the persuasive power of brand image (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Erkan & Evans, 2016; Ismagilova et al., 2020). This conceptualization encompasses word-of-mouth endorsements, testimonials, and community-based recommendations that consumers actively seek prior to high-involvement purchases such as motorcycles.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study draws on three foundational frameworks. Keller's (2013) Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model provides the basis for understanding how marketing inputs translate into brand associations that guide consumer choice. Kotler and Keller's (2016, 2020) consumer decision-making framework contextualizes purchase decisions as outcomes of need recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, and final commitment—processes in which brand image serves as a heuristic shortcut. Morgan and Hunt's (1994) commitment-trust theory grounds relationship marketing as a relational exchange process in which perceived trust and commitment between consumer and firm reduce purchase-related risk and increase behavioral intention.

Despite the growing body of evidence on each construct in isolation, their joint operation in a single structural model—with brand image serving as mediator and consumer references as moderator—remains underexplored, particularly in the context of emerging-market motorcycle retailing. Separately, Rahmawati & Sudaryanto (2021), Putri & Wibowo (2022), and Susanti & Nugroho (2022) confirm pairwise relationships among subsets of these variables, yet no study integrates all four constructs in a single mediated-moderation framework applied to the AT-LPM segment. This constitutes the research gap this study addresses.

Based on the foregoing, this study poses the following research questions: (1) Do digital marketing and relationship marketing significantly affect brand image? (2) Do digital marketing, relationship marketing, and brand image significantly affect purchase decisions? (3) Does brand image significantly mediate the effects of digital marketing and relationship marketing on purchase decisions? (4) Does consumer references significantly moderate the effect of brand image on purchase decisions? The study aims to provide empirically grounded strategic recommendations for Yamaha and its dealer networks in the AT-LPM segment.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

A quantitative survey design was adopted, consistent with the study's objective of testing directional relationships among constructs through hypothesis-driven statistical procedures (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). The study was conducted within the consumer population of Arista Yamaha dealerships across West Java, comprising twelve (12) dealer outlets spanning the cities of Bandung, Bogor, Bekasi, Depok, Cirebon, and Sukabumi. The target respondents were consumers who had purchased a Yamaha AT-LPM motorcycle (Gear, Fazzio, or Fino) from any Arista West Java outlet within the preceding 24 months, ensuring respondents possessed sufficient experiential basis to evaluate all study constructs.

The accessible population comprised all registered consumers of Yamaha AT-LPM products at Arista West Java. Applying Slovin's formula at a 5% margin of error to an estimated population of 3,200 registered buyers, a minimum sample of 356 was identified; after adjusting for proportional representation across outlets, a final sample of 265 respondents was determined and recruited via proportional probability sampling. This technique ensures that every population element carries a known and equal probability of selection proportional to each outlet's purchase volume (Cooper & Schindler, 2014).

Data collection employed a structured, closed-ended questionnaire rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree). Five latent constructs were operationalized as follows: (1) Digital Marketing (X1): four dimensions—social media marketing, search engine optimization/advertising, email marketing, and online content—adapted from Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick (2019) and Ryan (2021); 12 items. (2) Relationship Marketing (X2): four dimensions—trust, commitment, communication quality, and after-sales service—adapted from Morgan & Hunt (1994) and Berry (1983); 12 items. (3) Brand Image (Z—mediator): three dimensions—brand strength, brand favorability, and brand uniqueness—adapted from Keller (2013); 9 items. (4) Consumer References (M—moderator): three dimensions—family recommendations, peer/community endorsements, and online user reviews—adapted from Chevalier & Mayzlin (2006) and Ismagilova et al. (2020); 9 items. (5) Purchase Decision (Y—outcome): five dimensions—product choice, brand choice, dealer choice, purchase timing, and purchase amount—adapted from Kotler & Keller (2016); 10 items. Total: 52 questionnaire

items. Instrument validity was confirmed through Confirmatory Factor Analysis; items were retained when outer loading exceeded 0.70. Convergent validity was assessed via Average Variance Extracted (AVE > 0.50). Composite Reliability (CR > 0.70) and Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha > 0.60$) confirmed construct reliability. Discriminant validity was evaluated using the HTMT criterion (threshold < 0.85) and the Fornell-Larcker criterion (square root of AVE exceeds inter-construct correlations).

The primary analytical technique was SEM-PLS implemented in SmartPLS 4. Assessment proceeded in two stages: (1) outer model evaluation, confirming construct validity and indicator reliability as above; and (2) inner model evaluation via bootstrapping (5,000 resamples) to derive path coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values for direct and indirect effects, along with R² (explanatory power), Q² (predictive relevance; threshold Q² > 0), and f² (effect size: 0.02 = small, 0.15 = medium, 0.35 = large). The moderation effect was operationalized through a product-term interaction (Brand Image × Consumer References) entered as an additional predictor of purchase decisions. Mediation significance was assessed using Upsilon V statistics (Lachowicz et al., 2018; Ogbeibu et al., 2022), where thresholds of 0.02 (small), 0.075 (medium), and 0.175 (large) classify practical effect magnitude.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Respondent Profile

Table 1 presents the respondent characteristics. The sample was predominantly male (87.2%), consistent with the broader AT-LPM consumer profile wherein working-age males constitute the primary commuter-motorcycle buyer group. The 26–35 age cohort represented the largest segment (36.6%), followed by 17–25 year-olds (27.9%). Kotler & Keller (2016) note that productive-age consumers exhibit elevated information-seeking propensity through digital channels prior to durable goods purchases a tendency directly consequential for digital marketing strategy design.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	231	87.2%
	Female	34	12.8%
	Total	265	100%
Age	17–25 years	74	27.9%
	26–35 years	97	36.6%
	36–45 years	63	23.8%
	> 45 years	31	11.7%
	Total	265	100%

3.2 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive analysis of the five latent constructs indicated uniformly positive perceptions (Table 2). Brand image obtained the highest mean score (M = 4.25; "Very Good"), followed by digital marketing (M = 4.21; "Very Good"), purchase decision (M = 4.18; "Good"), relationship marketing (M = 4.13; "Good"), and consumer references (M = 4.08; "Good"). The premium positioning of brand image in consumer perceptions corroborates Keller's (2013) argument that accumulated marketing communications and experiential touchpoints consolidate into durable positive brand associations that transcend transactional encounters.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Category
Digital Marketing (X1)	4.21	0.62	Very Good
Relationship Marketing (X2)	4.13	0.58	Good
Brand Image (Z)	4.25	0.55	Very Good
Consumer References (M)	4.08	0.61	Good
Purchase Decision (Y)	4.18	0.57	Good

3.3 Outer Model Evaluation

Table 3 presents the outer model assessment results. All indicator outer loadings ranged from 0.711 to 0.844, exceeding the 0.70 threshold. AVE values ranged from 0.598 to 0.641, satisfying the >0.50 convergent validity criterion. Composite Reliability values (0.877–0.898) and Cronbach's Alpha values (0.851–0.878) all exceeded their respective thresholds of 0.70 and 0.60, confirming construct reliability. Discriminant validity was established via HTMT ratios (all below 0.85) and the Fornell-Larcker criterion (square root of AVE for each construct exceeded its highest correlation with any other construct). These results confirm that all constructs possess adequate validity and reliability for structural model estimation.

Table 3. Outer Model Evaluation Results

Construct	Loading Factor	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's α
Digital Marketing (X1)	0.742–0.831	0.623	0.891	0.872
Relationship Marketing (X2)	0.711–0.819	0.598	0.877	0.851
Brand Image (Z)	0.763–0.844	0.641	0.898	0.878
Consumer References (M)	0.728–0.812	0.609	0.882	0.857
Purchase Decision (Y)	0.751–0.838	0.632	0.895	0.874

Note: AVE = Average Variance Extracted; CR = Composite Reliability; α = Cronbach's Alpha

3.4 Inner Model: Direct Effects and Moderating Effect

The structural model yielded $R^2 = 0.614$ for brand image and $R^2 = 0.721$ for purchase decisions, indicating that the predictors explain 61.4% and 72.1% of variance in the respective endogenous constructs. Q^2 values (brand image = 0.381; purchase decision = 0.512) confirm adequate predictive relevance. Table 4 presents path coefficients, t-statistics, p-values, and f^2 effect sizes for all direct and moderating hypotheses.

Digital marketing exhibited a substantial positive effect on brand image ($\beta = 0.512$; $t = 8.393$; $p < 0.001$; $f^2 = 0.351$), indicating that Yamaha's coordinated deployment of social media campaigns, online advertising, and interactive digital platforms reinforces consumer brand perception with considerable force. This aligns with Kotler & Keller (2016), who assert that digital marketing creates bidirectional communication channels fostering emotional proximity and positive brand evaluations, and replicates Rahmawati & Sudaryanto's (2021) finding in a related product context. Relationship marketing likewise positively predicted brand image ($\beta = 0.401$; $t = 6.365$; $p < 0.001$; $f^2 = 0.213$), confirming that service responsiveness, communication quality, and customer-oriented dealer practices consolidate into favorable brand associations. Berry's (1983) foundational proposition—that sustained relational engagement generates mutual value and loyalty—receives empirical support here.

Both antecedents demonstrated significant direct effects on purchase decisions: digital marketing ($\beta = 0.214$; $t = 3.963$; $p < 0.001$; $f^2 = 0.064$) and relationship marketing ($\beta = 0.289$; $t = 4.898$; $p < 0.001$; $f^2 = 0.112$). The comparatively larger coefficient for relationship marketing suggests that trust and commitment—core relational constructs per Morgan & Hunt (1994)—more directly mobilize purchase commitment than informational digital messaging alone, possibly because relational signals reduce perceived purchase risk in a high-involvement, high-ticket product category such as motorcycles. Brand image exerted a meaningful direct effect on purchase decisions ($\beta = 0.421$; $t = 6.284$; $p < 0.001$; $f^2 = 0.198$), confirming that accumulated brand associations function as heuristic cues that simplify purchase choice under competitive ambiguity. Keller's (2013) brand equity model is supported: where brand image is strong, consumers require less deliberative processing before committing to a purchase.

The moderating interaction between brand image and consumer references on purchase decisions was significant ($\beta = 0.167$; $t = 3.408$; $p < 0.001$; $f^2 = 0.041$). This indicates that the persuasive efficacy of brand image is amplified when accompanied by social endorsement from family, peers, and online communities. The f^2 of 0.041 reflects a small-to-medium practical effect, suggesting that while consumer references do not displace the primary brand image effect, they provide a meaningful additive boost—particularly relevant in a social-media-saturated environment where user reviews are readily accessible. Chevalier & Mayzlin (2006) and Erkan & Evans (2016) provide theoretical grounding, emphasizing the objectivity attributed to peer reviews relative to brand-controlled messaging in the AT-LPM purchase context.

Table 4. Hypothesis Testing Results: Direct Effects and Moderating Effect

Hyp.	Path	β	t-stat	p-value	f ²
H1	Digital Marketing (X1) → Brand Image (Z)	0.512	8.393	<0.001	0.351
H2	Relationship Marketing (X2) → Brand Image (Z)	0.401	6.365	<0.001	0.213
H3	Digital Marketing (X1) → Purchase Decision (Y)	0.214	3.963	<0.001	0.064
H4	Relationship Marketing (X2) → Purchase Decision (Y)	0.289	4.898	<0.001	0.112
H5	Brand Image (Z) → Purchase Decision (Y)	0.421	6.284	<0.001	0.198
H6	Brand Image × Consumer Ref. → Purchase Decision	0.167	3.408	<0.001	0.041

Note: f² thresholds: 0.02 = small, 0.15 = medium, 0.35 = large (Cohen, 1988)

3.5 Mediation Analysis

Table 5 presents the mediation test results via indirect effects through brand image. Brand image functioned as a significant mediator in both structural paths. The indirect effect of digital marketing on purchase decisions through brand image was $\beta = 0.215$ ($t = 3.071$; $p = 0.002$), and the indirect effect of relationship marketing through brand image was $\beta = 0.169$ ($t = 2.864$; $p = 0.004$). These results indicate that digital marketing and relationship marketing do not operate exclusively through direct persuasion; rather, a substantial portion of their purchase-influencing capacity is channeled through the brand perceptions they engender. Keller's (2013) Customer-Based Brand Equity framework is affirmed: brand image is not merely an outcome of marketing inputs but a consequential intermediary that translates marketing effort into behavioral intention. The Upsilon V effect sizes for both mediated paths fell within the medium-to-large range, substantiating the practical significance of brand image as a mediating mechanism in Yamaha's marketing ecosystem. The pattern is consistent with full mediation characteristics in both paths, in that indirect effects are substantial while direct effects, though significant, are comparatively smaller implying that brand-building activities serve as the primary channel through which marketing investment converts to purchase behavior in the AT-LPM segment.

Table 5. Mediation Test Results (Indirect Effects via Brand Image)

Hyp.	Mediation Path	Indirect β	t-stat	p-value	Upsilon V
H7	Digital Marketing (X1) → Brand Image (Z) → Purchase Decision (Y)	0.215	3.071	0.002	Medium-Large
H8	Relationship Marketing (X2) → Brand Image (Z) → Purchase Decision (Y)	0.169	2.864	0.004	Medium

Note: Upsilon V thresholds: 0.02 = small, 0.075 = medium, 0.175 = large (Lachowicz et al., 2018)

4. CONCLUSION

This study establishes four principal conclusions. First, digital marketing ($\beta = 0.512$) and relationship marketing ($\beta = 0.401$) each exert statistically significant positive direct effects on brand image, with digital marketing demonstrating the stronger influence ($R^2 = 0.614$). Second, digital marketing ($\beta = 0.214$), relationship marketing ($\beta = 0.289$), and brand image ($\beta = 0.421$) all significantly predict purchase decisions, with relationship marketing showing the strongest direct effect among the two antecedents ($R^2 = 0.721$). Third, brand image significantly mediates both antecedent–outcome paths: the indirect effect of digital marketing through brand image is $\beta = 0.215$ ($p = 0.002$) and of relationship marketing is $\beta = 0.169$ ($p = 0.004$), with Upsilon V effect sizes in the medium-to-large range—indicating that marketing inputs exert their performance-influencing capacity primarily through the brand perceptions they construct. Fourth, consumer references significantly and positively moderate the brand image–purchase decision relationship ($\beta = 0.167$; $p < 0.001$), such that a favorable brand image produces stronger purchase conversion when reinforced by family, peer, or community endorsements. For Yamaha's management and Arista dealers, these findings advocate for a three-level marketing architecture: (1) digital content strategy enhancing reach, relevance, and interactivity of social media campaigns and online product information to build cognitive brand associations; (2) relational service design training dealer staff in responsive communication, after-sales engagement, and loyalty programming to cultivate emotional brand bonds; and (3) social proof activation incentivizing satisfied customers to generate and share authentic reviews, leveraging the moderating amplification documented between consumer references and brand-image-driven purchase conversion. The finding that relationship marketing demonstrates a stronger direct purchase-decision coefficient than digital marketing alone suggests that investment in relational capability may yield superior short-term conversion returns in this segment.

This investigation is bounded by its cross-sectional design and single-region sampling frame; causal attribution and national generalizability require longitudinal and multi-region replication. Future studies might examine the temporal dynamics of brand image formation in response to digital campaign intensity, incorporate objective performance metrics (e.g., actual sales data) alongside perceptual measures, and test the proposed framework in other motorcycle segments or comparable durable-goods categories across the Indonesian archipelago.

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