BUILDING BRAND IMAGE IN THE REFILL PERFUME INDUSTRY THROUGH CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE CREATION AND WORD OF MOUTH

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Abstract

The rise in perfume usage has led to many brands or companies establishing refill perfume businesses. The refill perfume industry currently faces challenges in building a strong brand image. This research aims to examine the influence of customer experience and word of mouth in establishing the brand image of the refill perfume industry. The method used in this study is a quantitative descriptive approach with Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Square (SEM-PLS). The analysis tool used is SmartPLS. The population for this study consists of refill perfume consumers from each branch of refill perfume stores in five major cities in West Java Province: Bandung, Tasikmalaya, Garut, Bekasi, and Cirebon. The minimum sample size taken is 332 respondents, using cluster sampling. The results of this study indicate the influence and significance of customer experience and word of mouth in building the brand image of the refill perfume industry.

Keywords: brand image; customer experience; word of mouth; refill perfume; SEM PLS

INTRODUCTION

Since it was introduced by (Gardner & Levy, 1995), brand image communication has become a key aspect of marketing (Bian & Motinho, 2009). At that time, brand image was primarily shaped through advertising and promotions. However, in today's digital era, brand image is influenced by social media, online reviews, and influencer marketing, allowing consumers to play an active role in shaping brand perceptions. These external factors have become an important part of brand image development, requiring companies to be more careful in managing their online reputation. Brand image is a determinant that influences customers' subjective perceptions and consumer behavior (Ryu et al., 2008) and serves as an extrinsic cue when consumers evaluate products before purchasing (Lien et al., 2015). Brand image can also function as a defensive marketing tool to retain customers (Nyadzayo & Khajehzadeh, 2016). In addition to creating a positive impression, a strong brand image supports loyalty programs that enhance satisfaction and emotional bonds with customers. A satisfying customer service experience also reinforces the brand image, making customers more likely to remain loyal. Thus, a well-managed brand image not only attracts new customers but also retains existing ones.

In the marketing literature, researchers have sought to understand how consumers evaluate brands and respond to various branding programs (Gurhan-Carli, Sarial-Abi, & Hayran, 2018). Specifically, how consumers experience a brand is crucial in developing marketing strategies for goods and services (Brakus et al., 2009). The product brand image affects consumers' perceptions of product attributes (Chattopadhyay and Basu, 1990; Kwon and Lennon, 2009); that is, the evaluation of product attributes can be influenced by consumers' impressions of brand image (Beckwith et al., 1978). Consequently, a strong and favorable brand image can positively bias consumers' impressions of product attributes.

Brand image is a critical issue that is constantly discussed and researched both theoretically and empirically. Theoretically, brand image is a very useful medium for satisfying consumers' self-definition needs (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Fournier, 1998), as its symbolic nature (McEnally and de Chernatony, 1999) allows individuals to identify themselves with the brand and imbue their personal identity with significance or differentiate themselves from their social reference groups (Escalas and Bettman, 2005). Empirically, various studies on marketing are inseparable from the existence of product brand image to create a positive impression for consumers. Brand image plays a specific role in companies, as strong brands enhance trust in intangible products (Berry, 2000), enabling customers to better visualize and understand them. In the context of cosmetic products, for example, trust in the quality of products such as skincare is highly dependent on the brand's reputation and its credibility in meeting quality and safety standards. Consumers tend to trust cosmetic brands with a strong image that consistently meet the required quality and regulatory standards, such as BPOM certification (Indonesian Food and Drug Authority). In Indonesia, for instance, brands like Wardah and Sariayu have successfully built a positive image and consumer trust by meeting these standards, which influences consumers' purchasing decisions.

The cosmetic market in Indonesia is currently a hot topic. Cosmetics are one of the unavoidable human needs, especially for women. As time progresses, economic activities in the cosmetic sector are emerging. According to BPOM (Indonesian Food and Drug Authority), the number of entrepreneurs in the cosmetic field increased from 819 in 2021 to 913 in 2022, representing a growth rate of 20.6% in 2022. The increase in the number of cosmetic entrepreneurs in Indonesia is driven by rising demand for skincare products, evolving beauty trends, and the influence of social media and influencers. Consumers are increasingly favoring local products that are safe and of high quality, especially those with BPOM certification. Additionally, product innovation and trends like "clean beauty" are contributing to the growth of the cosmetic industry in Indonesia. Furthermore, based on data from the National Industrial Information System (2022), the cosmetic industry is reported to employ 59,886 people. Other analyses by Statista (a market research company and global statistics portal) indicate that the largest market segment of the National Cosmetic Industry is the care segment, including skincare and personal care, with a market volume of USD 3.16 billion in 2022. The skincare and personal care segment in Indonesia, with a market volume of USD 3.16 billion in 2022, includes several specific sub-segments. The main consumers are women aged 18-35, especially those interested in beauty trends and skincare. Additionally, the middle and upper-middle classes are also key targets. Other growing sub-segments include consumers who care about sustainability and anti-aging products, allowing cosmetic companies to design more focused marketing strategies tailored to the needs of each group.

Perfume is one of the categories of cosmetics in the form of fragrances, as outlined in Appendix 1, page 34 of Regulation No. 12 of 2020 by the Food and Drug Authority regarding the Notification Procedure for Cosmetics, which states that the category of cosmetics in the form of fragrances includes baby fragrances, body sprays, eau de cologne, eau de toilette, eau de parfum, and perfume. These fragrance categories are classified based on the alcohol content contained within them.

Currently, the global perfume market is driven by two trends, one of which is celebrities advertising perfumes. Many well-known brands employ international celebrities to promote their products or release products under their names. This has a significant impact on customers' purchasing decisions. Another important driver is the trend of individually crafted perfumes made from natural and eco-friendly ingredients.

The global perfume market revenue was USD 0.43 billion in 2023 and is projected to grow annually by 2.65% (CAGR 2023-2028). Comparatively, most revenue is generated in the United States (USD 8,715 million

in 2023). In relation to the total population, the revenue per person is estimated at USD 1.55 in 2023. This is due to the high global perfume prices, which are disproportionate to the average income in Indonesia, where the average regional minimum wage (UMR) is around 2 million rupiah.

In a pre-survey conducted in 2018, several reasons were identified for consumers using perfume. The most common reason for using perfume is the distinctive aroma produced by each variant. However, the brand ranks as the third-lowest reason for consumers using perfume. This has led to a decline in the brand image of perfumes.

Currently, refill perfumes are increasingly marketed worldwide, especially in Indonesia. Historically, the refill perfume industry began in Indonesia five decades ago. On September 8, 1970, the first refill perfume company in Indonesia was established by Lim Ka Thing. This refill perfume company, named Collector Perfume, is located on Jalan Kolektor, Bandung. The differences between original perfumes and refill perfumes lie in several factors, including quality, packaging, aroma, price, and authenticity. The interest of the Indonesian public in refill perfumes is quite high, as with limited purchasing power, refill perfumes become the best alternative for consumers to buy products of comparable quality to original products at very affordable prices. However, the brand image of refill perfumes is continually at stake due to several factors, including the fact that many refill perfumes available in Indonesia pose certain dangers to users. This has also caused a decline in the brand image of refill perfumes.

Another reason for the declining brand image of refill perfumes is due to the high levels of methanol found in many refill perfumes in Indonesia, which can cause skin irritation and even blindness (CNN, 2014). Many refill perfume entrepreneurs overlook the use of perfume solvents, which can harm consumers. It has been commonly found that sellers of refill perfumes use methanol (Methyl Alcohol) both as a solvent and as a cleaning agent for tools/bottles. Methanol is prohibited for use in cosmetics, although it is allowed as a denaturant in alcohol at a maximum concentration of 5% as a percentage of ethanol and isopropyl alcohol (Directorate of Traditional Medicine Standardization, 2022). This poses a problem for refill perfume entrepreneurs, leading to a decline in their brand image. Additionally, the increasing number of refill perfume brands in Indonesia has intensified competition among refill perfume products. Therefore, brand image is crucial to research in order to maintain consumer loyalty to refill perfumes.

Brand image is an important concept in marketing that refers to the personality, values, and perceived position of a brand in consumers' minds. The theory of brand image is rooted in various psychological, sociological, and marketing principles that help brands create a unique and memorable identity in the market. Brand image is a multidimensional construct that encompasses various aspects of brand identity, including personality, values, positioning, and visual identity. According to Aaker (1997), brand image can be defined as a set of associations that consumers hold about a brand, including attributes, benefits, and values.

The components of brand image can be categorized into two main types: functional and emotional. Functional components refer to the tangible aspects of a brand, such as products or services, packaging, and pricing. Emotional components, on the other hand, are more subjective and relate to consumers' feelings and attitudes toward a brand, such as personality, values, and social responsibility (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

In this study, the variables used are customer experience and word of mouth (WOM). According to Meyer & Schwager (2007), customer experience is the internal and subjective response of customers as a result of direct or indirect interactions with a company. This direct relationship is usually due to initiatives from consumers. The customer experience that customers have with a brand, such as customer service and after-sales support, can influence their perceptions of brand image (Petty, 1997). The influence of customer experience in feeling, thinking, acting, interacting, and enhancing quality, benefits, and good service can determine consumer satisfaction and impact the brand image of a company (Rahayu & Lestari, 2021). In this study, customer experience encompasses various elements that influence customer perceptions of a brand, including: evaluative process, sharing experiences, physical product experience, sensory experiences such as scent and texture, product quality, service quality, scent personalization, customer support & education, refill mechanism, and online experience. All these elements contribute to shaping customer satisfaction and brand image, which in turn can influence purchase decisions and customer loyalty.

According to Sernovitz (2006), word of mouth (WOM) is a conversation that naturally occurs between people. According to Lupiyoadi (2006), word of mouth is a form of promotion that involves recommendations

from person to person regarding the merits of a product. According to Lovelock and Writz (2011), word of mouth is opinions and recommendations made by consumers about their experiences, which have a strong influence on consumer decisions or purchasing behavior. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) define WOM as any positive or negative statement made by potential customers, actual customers, or former customers about a product or company that is available to many people and institutions. In this study, Word of Mouth (WOM) refers to various aspects that influence consumer perceptions and decisions, including: Source Credibility, which refers to the trustworthiness of the information provided by the source; Topics, which cover the types of products or services being discussed; Talking Part, which refers to whether consumers are actively involved in spreading information; Positive WOM, which can influence purchasing decisions in a favorable way; Negative WOM, which can harm a brand's image; and Volume of WOM, which measures the amount of conversation or recommendations made by consumers. All these elements play a crucial role in shaping brand image and influencing consumer behavior.

Therefore, this research will contribute to finding the right model to enhance the brand image of the refill perfume industry in West Java through the variables of customer experience and WOM.

METHOD

The object of this research is refill perfume brands available in West Java. This study uses a quantitative method, with both descriptive and verificative approaches. The quantitative method involves a survey procedure, selecting samples from the population and using questionnaires as data collection tools. Verificative research is conducted to test hypotheses in the field in order to gain an understanding of the influence of exogenous latent variables on endogenous latent variables. This study focuses on describing variables such as customer experience and WOM. To evaluate the research model, this study uses the SEM-PLS analysis method.

The data analysis method used is Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS). The sampling technique used in this research is simple random sampling. According to Sugiyono (2019), simple random sampling is a sampling method in which every element in the population has a known and equal probability of being selected. This sampling method is highly recommended for quantitative research. In this study, the author determines that the required sample size is 332 respondents, corresponding to the number of refill perfume stores in five major cities in West Java. This research focuses on consumers who use refill perfume. Furthermore, the SmartPLS 4 program for Windows is used to analyze the data using PLS-SEM.

RESULTS

Table 1. Recap of Brand Image Variables

No	Dimention	Score	Contribution	Achievement
1	Recognition	5610	29,69%	80,46%
2	Reputation	5723	30,29%	82,09%
3	Afinity	3797	20,10%	81,69%
4	Marketing & Communication	3764	19,92%	80,98%
	Total	**18894**	**100%**	**81,31%**

Based on Table 1, it can be seen that the reputation dimension has the highest contribution and achievement scores, which aligns with previous research. The data management conducted in this study shows that the brand image has a total score of 18.894 out of an ideal score of 23.240 for 10 statements, with an achievement percentage of 81.31%.

Table 2. Recap of Customer Experience Variables

No	Dimention	Score	Contribution	Achievement
1	Cognitive : The condition in which consumers receive something that exceeds their expectations, resulting in a sense of satisfaction (Keiningham et al., 2017).	5885	14,73%	84,41%
2	Content Sharing : Creating a good impression on consumers can generate an affective experience related to the product, leading to feelings of pleasure (Keiningham et al., 2017).	3855	9,65%	82,94%
3	Physical	1894	4,74%	81,50%
4	Sensory : Creating sensory experience through sight, touch, emotions, enjoyment, satisfaction, the process, or results obtained (Keiningham et al., 2017).	5598	14,01%	80,29%
5	Product Quality	3878	9,70%	83,43%
6	Service Quality	3750	9,38%	80,68%
7	Scent Personalization : Scent personalization refers to the customization of fragrance to match individual preferences and needs (Gatti et al., 2020).	3940	9,86%	84,77%
8	Customer Support & Education	3615	9,05%	77,78%
9	Refill Mechanism : Refill mechanism refers to the process of refilling or replenishing a container or device with substances, such as liquids or gases, once they are depleted or consumed (Smith, 2011).	3828	9,58%	82,36%
10	Online Experience	3722	9,31%	80,08%
Total		**39965**	**100%**	**81,89%**

Based on Table 2, it is evident that the cognitive dimension has the highest contribution and achievement scores, consistent with previous research. The data management in this study indicates that customer experience has a total score of 39.965 out of an ideal score of 48.804 for 21 statements, with an achievement percentage of 81.89%.

Table 3. Recap of Word of Mouth Variables

No	Dimention	Score	Contribution	Achievement
1	Source Credibility	3913	17,21%	84,19%
2	Topics	3827	16,83%	82,34%
3	Talking Part	3784	16,64%	81,41%
4	Positive WOM	5656	24,87%	81,12%
5	Negative WOM	3652	16,06%	78,57%
6	Volume of WOM	1908	8,39%	82,10%
	Total	**22740**	100%	**81,54%**

According to Table 3, the positive WOM dimension shows the highest contribution and achievement scores, which aligns with previous research. The data management in this study reveals that word of mouth (WOM) has a total score of 22.740 out of an ideal score of 27.888 for 12 statements, with an achievement percentage of 81.54%.

To assess convergent validity, refer to the results of the factor addition test. If the factor addition value is greater than 0.70, the indicators are considered valid.

Table 4. Convergent Validity

Variable	Dimention	Statement	LF	AVE	Descriptions
	Cognitive	CE1	**0,756**	**0,524**	Valid

Customer		CE2	**0,772**		Valid
Experience		CE3	**0,72**		Valid
	Content Sharing	CE4	**0,749**		Valid
	Physical	CE6	**0,727**		Valid
	Sensory	CE9	**0,73**		Valid
	Product Quality	CE10	**0,751**		Valid
		CE11	**0,727**		Valid
	Service Quality	CE12	**0,743**		Valid
		CE13	**0,746**		Valid
	Scent Personalization	CE14	**0,72**		Valid
		CE15	**0,717**		Valid
	Customer Support & Education	CE16	**0,778**		Valid
	Refill Mechanism	CE19	**0,788**		Valid
	Online Experience	CE21	**0,716**		Valid
Word Of Mouth	Source Credibility	WM1	**0,708**	**0,58**	Valid
	Topics	WM3	**0,775**		Valid
		WM4	**0,753**		Valid
	Talking Part	WM5	**0,773**		Valid
		WM6	**0,804**		Valid
	Positive WOM	WM7	**0,774**		Valid
		WM8	**0,8**		Valid
	Negative WOM	WM11	**0,743**		Valid
	Volume of WOM	WM12	**0,733**		Valid
Brand Image	Recognition	BI1	**0,821**	**0,64**	Valid
		BI2	**0,797**		Valid
	Reputation	BI4	**0,823**		Valid
		BI5	**0,817**		Valid
		BI6	**0,847**		Valid
	Afinity	BI7	**0,792**		Valid
		BI8	**0,854**		Valid
	Marketing & Communication	BI9	**0,803**		Valid
		BI10	**0,776**		Valid

Based on Table 4, since all indicators have loading factor values greater than 0.7, it can be said that the indicators in this study are valid and represent the underlying latent variables. Therefore, it can be concluded that the indicators in this research possess adequate convergent validity.

Composite Reliability and Cronbach's alpha are tests used to measure internal consistency or reliability of the measurement model; their values should be above 0.70 (Ghozali, 2014). This is because it shows that all items in the study consistently measure the same construct. Composite Reliability is also an alternative test to Cronbach's alpha, but the results indicate that it is more accurate than Cronbach's alpha.

Table 5. Composite Reliability da Cronbach's Alpha

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability
Brand Image	0,937	0,946
Customer Experience	0,954	0,958
Word Of Mouth	0,919	0,932

All latent variables in this study can be considered reliable, and the constructed model has a good level of reliability, as indicated by the test results shown in Table 5, which displays the SmartPLS processing results for each latent variable.

In this section, the p-value can be used to check hypothesis testing in SEM-PLS. If the p-value is less than 0.05, the hypothesis is accepted, and the opposite holds true (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2017).

Table 6. Output Path Coefficient

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values	Conclution
Customer Experience → Word of Mouth	0,327	0,328	0,073	4,485	0,000	**Influential**
Customer Experience → Brand Image	0,440	0,440	0,059	7,486	0,000	**Influential**
Word of Mouth → Brand Image	0,474	0,475	0,054	8,791	0,000	**Influential**

DISSCUSSION

The research results indicate that customer experience positively influences word of mouth for refill perfume in West Java. The customer experience variable in relation to word of mouth has a t-statistic of 4.485 > 1.96, indicating an influence of service quality on word of mouth for refill perfume in West Java. Additionally, the p-value for the customer experience variable is 0.000, which is less than 0.05 and therefore significant. Thus, it can be stated that in this hypothesis test, Hα is accepted, meaning that customer experience has a positive and significant effect on word of mouth for refill perfume in West Java. When customers feel satisfied, happy, or impressed with the refill perfume service, they are more likely to share their experiences with others, both directly and through social media. WOM is often seen as more trustworthy than advertisements or direct promotions. When customers are highly satisfied with the refill perfume service, they are more likely to recommend it to friends, family, or acquaintances. This can create a domino effect where more people become interested in trying the same service. This aligns with the research conducted by Sastra and Indrawati (2018), which stated that word of mouth is influenced by customer experience by 61.2%.

The research findings also show that customer experience positively influences brand image for refill perfume in West Java. The customer experience variable in relation to brand image has a t-statistic of 7.486 > 1.96, indicating an influence of service quality on brand image for refill perfume in West Java. Moreover, the p-value for the customer experience variable is 0.000, which is less than 0.05 and significant. Therefore, it can be stated that in this hypothesis test, Hα is accepted, indicating that customer experience has a positive and significant effect on the brand image of refill perfume in West Java. Investing in enhancing customer experience not only contributes to increasing customer satisfaction but also builds a strong foundation for strengthening brand image. By prioritizing positive customer experiences, brands can leverage the positive impact on building reputation and long-term business growth. By focusing on customer experience, refill perfume brands can continuously improve their services. Feedback from customers about their experiences can be used to identify areas for improvement and optimize service processes. This aligns with the research conducted by Rahayu and Lestari (2021), which stated that customer experience contributes positively, strongly, and significantly to brand image, with an influence of 77.1%, while the remaining 22.9% is influenced by other variables. The mechanisms of influence from customer experience to brand image include direct interactions, perceptions and emotions, as well as reputation and testimonials.

The research results also show that word of mouth positively influences brand image for refill perfume in West Java. The word of mouth variable in relation to brand image has a t-statistic of 8.791 > 1.96, indicating an influence of word of mouth on brand image for refill perfume in West Java. Additionally, the p-value for the word of mouth variable is 0.000, which is less than 0.05 and significant. Therefore, it can be stated that in this hypothesis test, Hα is accepted, meaning that word of mouth has a positive and significant effect on the brand image of refill perfume in West Java. Positive WOM consistently helps build a strong and positive brand image in the market. This creates a solid foundation for brand image, which is a valuable asset in building customer loyalty and gaining market share. Recommendations from word of mouth are generally seen as more credible than direct promotions by brands. When people hear positive testimonials about refill perfume from friends or family, they tend to perceive the brand as having good quality and being trustworthy. This illustrates consumer participation in refill perfume trial programs and providing positive reviews. This aligns with

research conducted by Jalilvand (2012), which stated that word of mouth is one of the most effective factors influencing brand image and purchase intentions in the consumer market. Word of Mouth (WOM) can influence brand image by building positive perceptions through recommendations from trusted sources, such as friends or family. Consistently positive WOM can strengthen brand image because it is considered more credible than direct advertisements. However, to ensure that WOM causes a change in brand image rather than just a correlation, further research is needed using experimental or longitudinal approaches to observe changes in brand perception.

Both in the context of Word of Mouth (WOM) and brand image, customer experience shows a highly significant impact. Positive customer experiences can increase the likelihood of customers talking about the brand to others (WOM) and strengthen the overall brand image. Refill perfume brands in West Java that focus on the quality of customer experience can reap significant benefits in building brand reputation and expanding their market reach.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings in the field, it shows that there are several conclusions. First customer experience has a positive and significant effect on word of mouth for refill perfume in West Java. This is because positive customer experiences often lead to high levels of satisfaction. When customers are happy or impressed with the refill perfume service, they are more likely to share their experiences with others, both directly and on social media. Second, customer experience and word of mouth (WOM) have a positive and significant impact on the brand image of refill perfumes in West Java. This indicates that focusing on providing positive experiences for consumers is crucial, as it can enhance positive perceptions of the brand image and improve the brand's reputation in specific areas. Additionally, consistently positive WOM can help build a strong and positive brand image in the market, creating a solid foundation for brand image that is essential in fostering customer loyalty and gaining market share. Third, this study has a limitation in terms of the number of respondents. Therefore, it is recommended that future researchers expand the respondent pool to obtain better results and a more evenly distributed percentage of respondents across different age groups.

Then there are several recommendations, collect customer feedback on their experiences with support and education to continuously make improvements. Provide clear and reliable information about products and services, such as benefits, ingredients, and production processes, to build customer trust. Then, future research related to building the brand image of the refill perfume industry through the creation of customer experience and Word of Mouth. Therefore, it is recommended that future researchers incorporate additional factors identified by the researchers or add new variables.

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