Social Media Strategy to Improve Brand Image: in the Context of Students' Decision Making

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| I N F O	A B S T R A C T
Article History Received : *2021-10-24* Revised : *2021-11-10* Accepted : *2021-12-20* This work is licensed under Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International	This study aims to examine and analyze the influence of social media on brand image and student decision making. This study involved as many as 210 students from the health sciences and business studies program. Of the total 210 data obtained, the remaining 202 data that can be used for further testing and data analysis, this is because there are a number of data that are categorized as outliers so that they must be eliminated. This study is a quantitative research category using a survey approach as a method of data collection. Then, regarding the process of testing and analyzing data, this study uses a structural equation modeling (SEM) approach with AMOS software. The findings of this study confirm that social media has a significant positive effect on brand image and decision making, besides that brand image has a positive and significant effect on student decision making. The findings of this study make a positive contribution to the development of science, especially in the field of marketing strategies through social media in improving brand image and decision making. The findings of this study are expected to make a practical contribution to increasing product competitiveness and consumer confidence. **Keywords:** Social Media; Brand Image; Decision Making;
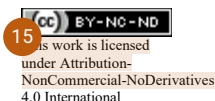
INTRODUCTION

Social media is an online media, the users of which can participate in, share, and create the content including blog, social network, wiki, forum and virtual world. Blog, social network, wiki, forum and virtual world are the form of social media most commonly used by people throughout world (Achmad, 2021). Social media is a media that can create various forms of communication and provide a variety of information to all members of society. The social media intended in this research is microblog social network site, an application allowing the users to be connected to each other by making personal information in order to be connected to others. The personal information can be photographs or images, for example Facebook, path, instagram, twitter, WhatApp and (Sofiyah & Yulinda, 2018). In this context, the research will focus more specifically on discussing the Instagram social media. It is because instagram is one of most popular social media platforms (McCrow-Young, 2020; Meleo-Erwin *et al*., 2021), with the largest number of users in the world (González-Nuevo *et al*., 2021). This phenomenon potentially becomes an opportunity to individuals and organizations to introduce their product to a broader market.

One of ways that can be taken to improve brand image and to influence decision making is to use a good marketing strategy. One of marketing strategies that can be taken is to use digital marketing, among others through social media. A number of scholars state that social media play an important role in improving brand image (Barreda *et al*., 2020; Sanny *et al*., 2020) and consumers' decision making (Gupta, 2016; Prasad *et al*., 2017). One of social media often used in product marketing is instagram. In Instagram there are two promotion channels the users can select: promoted post and non-promoted post. In its management, both of them are not different significantly from each other. The difference lies on their coverage. In promoted post Instagram advertisement, the advertiser can reach broader audience not limited to its followers only, and there are some features that can connect directly to the advertiser's website. The presence of both features can have an indirect impact on the consumers reached, market response, and the increase in the sale volume that will felt by the advertiser.

Viewed from consumer side, the sellers who do promotion using promoted post will be considered as more serious and credible; that is why the promoted post is used more intensively in Instagram. The promoted post can be used by means of having Facebook and business Instagram account. Then the prospective advertiser should select payment method. It can be done by clicking the setting menu on the profile page of Instagram, payment method can be done using credit card or via transfer with ATM. The cost to be paid for the use of promoted post starts from IDR 10,000/day.

The phenomenon occurring today is that the use of Instagram social media as promotion media is no longer monopolized by daily products, but also utilized by educational service providing institutions to promote and to provide information related to the service they offer. The tighter competition between educational institutions requires the providers of educational institution to make innovation in giving information and using appropriate media in order to be appropriate target.

Education is a process of providing an environment to enable educators to interact with environment to develop their self ability (Suardi, 2018). Furthermore, Suardi (2018) says that education is a interaction process between instructor and learner, aiming to improve mental development, so that becoming independent and intact persons. Generally, it can be said that education is an action unit allowing for the learning and development process (Dimyati, 2002). A good education, in addition to be determined by the teacher and learner's ability, can also be affected by the choice of good educational institution, interest, and compatibility to the learner. The error made in choosing educational institution will have an impact on the learning outcome. The ability of choosing a good educational institution will be more crucial in attending higher education, university. A university's credibility and the compatibility of major to the prospective student's interest will have an impact on the corresponding students' grade point. The students' decision to choose a university and exactly the faculty is a part of service consuming behavior, in this case educational service.

Understanding consuming behavior is important to businesspersons because each of consumers has certain reason to choose some products. Some consumers can buy a product based on quality and service of product they get. Some others buy a product because they need it, and still some others buy it spontaneously or without certain reason. Furthermore,

this research focuses specifically on discussing the role of social media in improving brand image and students' decision making. Many studies have been conducted on the effect of social media on brand image and consumers' decision making, but in this context of study the social media aspect will focus on the use of instagram platform studied relatively rarely in a number of marketing strategy literatures, particularly concerning the role of social media on brand image in the context of students' decision making for certain study field.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Social Media

Consumers get useful information through social media. Social media helps consumers interact easily with each other. Interaction with the user can affect the consumers' decision (Hasan & Sohail, 2020). Social media has been necessity recently affecting the consumers in many ways. This condition, according to some scholars, can be affected by some factors: cultural, psychological, product, information, and design. Ardiansyah & Sarwoko (2020) in their study found that social media are antecedent determining the consumers' purchasing decision making significantly. This statement is in line with a number of empirical findings revealing that social media affect the consumers' purchasing decision making positively and significantly (Gupta, 2016; Hasan & Sohail, 2020; Prasad et al., 2017; Vongurai et al., 2018). This condition indicates that the higher the social media perception of consumers on a product, the higher will be the consumers' purchasing decision making. Referring to an assumption and a number of empirical findings, the following alternative hypothesis can be formulated:

H_1: Social media affect the consumers' decision making positively and significantly.

Social media, according to Gupta (2016), are basically the peer's influence on decision making; this helps a company create the visibility of their brand, product, and service, and create brand awareness. The heaviest work is to learn how to use social media platform, the way they want the consumers use it and rather than the way the company want to use it. Currently, consumers become cautious with their expenditure. Not only social media are about product and service marketing and sale. But social media is also a platform where a company can create emotional relation through providing extraordinary customer service and conversation, and creating the customers' rich experience. Becker & Lee (2019), through an empirical study, found that social media play an important role in maintaining band image. The similar result is found by Oliveira & Fernandes (2020) that social media like instagram plays an important role in improving a product's brand image. This finding confirms a number of previous empirical findings revealing that social media affect bran image positively and significantly Barreda et al., 2020; BİLGİN, 2018; Gökerik et al., 2018; Sanny et al., 2020). Referring to the assumption and a number of empirical finding, the following alternative hypothesis can be formulated:

H_2: *Social media* affect brand image positively and significantly.

Brand Image

Brand image plays a very important role in creating consumers' purchasing intention and decision (Agmeka *et al.*, 2019; Wang & Tsai, 2014). It is because when consumers have liked a brand, they will buy the brand product without thinking more. Thus, it is important for a company to build brand image in order to create the consumer's confidence in making a decision to buy a product (Djatmiko & Pradana, 2016). Sudaryanto et al., (2021) in their study recently found that brand image affect purchasing decision positively and significantly. Similarly, Anwar & Andrean (2021) in their study found that brand image is a factor affecting the purchasing decision making significantly. This finding is in line with the findings of some previous studies stating that brand image can affect the consumers' purchasing decision (Amron, 2018; Foster, 2016). This condition indicates that the better the brand image, the more likely will the consumers make decision. Referring to the assumption and a number of empirical findings, the following alternative hypothesis can be formulated:

H_3: Brand image affects decision making positively and significantly.

Brand Image as a Mediator

Brand image is one of main aspects important to be considered by every company. Band image can affect a product's sustainability. Some scholars say that brand image can be affected by some factors: quality and price of a product. Brand image can also be affected by how the company does product branding, one way of which is through using social media platform. Some studies found that social media are considered as improving the brand image of product effectively. It can also be seen from empirical findings stating that social media affect brand image positively (Becker & Lee, 2019; Oliveira & Fernandes, 2020). Furthermore, brand image will of course impact the consumers' decision making over a product. The higher the brand image of a product, the higher is the consumers' confidence in making decision related to the product. This statement is confirmed by a number of empirical findings stating that brand image affects the consumers' decision making positively and significantly(Ardiansyah & Sarwoko, 2020; Gupta, 2016; Vongurai et al., 2018). These findings lead to an assumption that brand image can mediate the effect of social media on decision making. Referring to the assumption and a number of empirical findings, the following alternative hypothesis can be formulated.

H_4: Brand image mediates the effect of social media on decision making.

Figure 1. Research Model

RESEARCH METHOD

This research involved 210 students of health science and international trade in Universitas Tunas Pembangunan Surakarta as the respondent of research. The final data used for data analysis consisted of 202 data out of 210 data, because some data belong to outlier category and should be eliminated. Furthermore, this research employed quantitative approach with probability sampling method as data collection technique. Data testing and analysis processes in this research were conducted using structural equation modeling (SEM) with AMOS version 24 software. Brand Image was measured using five items developed by Yana & Made (2016) through adopting five-point Likert scale model. Social media in this context of study focus more specifically on the instagram platform using four items developed by Rully (2015) through adopting five-point likert scale model. Meanwhile, the construct of decision making is measured using five items developed by Hill (2018) through adopting five-point likert scale model.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Measurement Model

Table 1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Construct	Items	Loading Factor	VE	AVE	CR
Social Media	SM1	,678	0,651	0,807	0,851
	SM2	,774			
	SM3	,860			
	SM4	,749			
Brand Image	BI1	,608	0,553	0,743	0,806
	BI2	,608			
	BI3	,818			
	BI4	,692			
	BI5	,629			
Decision Making	DM1	,665	0,556	0,746	0,809
	DM2	,732			
	DM3	,697			
	DM4	,641			
	DM5	,649			

Source: Processed primary data, 2021

The result of *First order Confirmatory factor analysis* (CFA) shows *loading factor*> 0.5; this condition represents that the construct items are valid. The *First order Confirmatory factor analysis* (CFA) also indicates the *goodness of fit* of social media (SM) construct, finding four indices with good fit criteria (RMR, GFI, TLI, and GFI). In brand image (BI) construct, three indices are found with good fit criteria (RMR, GFI, and CFI). Meanwhile, in decision making (DM) construct, all indices meet the good fit criteria. Hair et al., (2014) state that at least three or four indices with good fit criteria are required for a model to be called feasible or adequate. Based on such argument, the research construct models are considered as feasible and adequate, so that neither revision nor modification is required over thee research construct model.

Structural Model
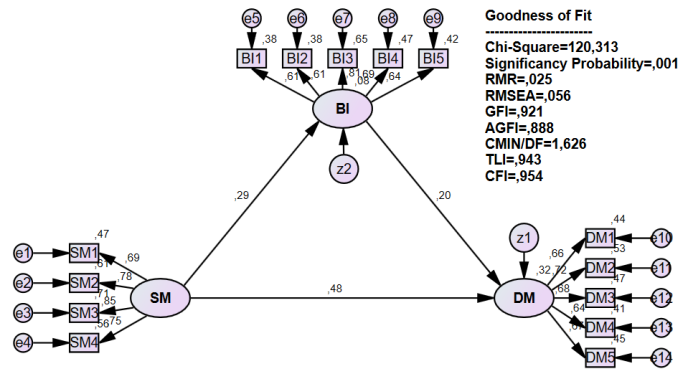
Figure 1. Full Model SEM

Table 1. Model Structural

Construct	Items	Loading Factor	VE	AVE	CR
Social Media	SM1	,687	0,652	0,807	0,852
	SM2	,783			
	SM3	,845			
	SM4	,750			
Brand Image	BI1	,613	0,554	0,744	0,807
	BI2	,615			
	BI3	,805			
	BI4	,686			
	BI5	,645			
Decision Making	DM1	,663	0,556	0,745	0,809
	DM2	,725			
	DM3	,684			
	DM4	,640			
	DM5	,671			

Source: Processed primary data, 2021

Table 2. Discriminant Validity

Construct	SM	BI	DM
SM	**0,807**		
BI	0,287	**0,744**	
DM	0,478	0,200	**0,745**

Source: Processed primary data, 2021

Full model structural shows the loading factor value of all indicators > 0.5, meaning that all construct indicators are valid. *Full model structural* also shows convergent validity of construct comprehensively with VE > 0.5, AVE > 0.5 and CR > 0.7, indicating that the construct items in full model are reliable. Furthermore, the AVE square root of each latent constructs is higher than the correlational value between constructs, indicating that every

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construct has met the discriminant validity assumption well. Lastly, *full model structural* features six indices with good fit criteria (RMR, RMSEA, GFI, CMIN/DF, TLI, and CFI) so that structural model is considered as feasible and adequate.

Univariate data normality shows that most critical ratio (c.r.) values on skewness are on the rate lower than ± 2.58. Meanwhile, the multivariate data normality shows that *critical ratio* (c.r) values on kurtosis are on the rate of 2.226 or lower than ± 2.58. Next, the output of *mahalanobis distance* shows that there is no data beyond 31.319; therefore, there is no multivariate outlier. Thus, overall, the SEM assumption has been fulfilled well, so that data testing can be followed with hypothesis analysis stage.

Table 3. Hypothesis Test

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Conclusion
BI	←	SM	,287	,082	3,263	,001	Significant
DM	←	SM	,478	,090	5,135	***	Significant
DM	←	BI	,200	,087	2,368	,018	Significant

Note: *** < 0,001

Hypothesis testing shows the coefficient value of *standardized regression weight* for social media construct on brand image of 0.287 with C.R. value of 3.263 > 1.96, meaning that the ***first hypothesis is supported.*** The coefficient value of *standardized regression weight* for social media construct on decision making is 0.478 with C.R. value of 5.135 > 1.96, indicating that ***the second hypothesis is supported***. The coefficient value of *standardized regression weight* for brand image construct on decision making is 0.200 with C.R. value of 2.368 > 1.96,, indicating that ***the third hypothesis is supported***

Mediation effect of Brand Image

Table 4. Direct Effect, Indirect Effect, and Total Effect

Direction of mediating Effect	Standardized Direct Effect	Standardized Indirect Effect	Standardized Total Effect	Note
SM → BI → DM	,478	,057	,535	Significant

Source: Processed primary data, 2021

The result of direct effect and indirect effect tests shows the value of the direct effect of social media on decision making through by brand image of 0.478, higher than the indirect effect of social media construct on decision making through brand image with the value of 0.057. In addition, the result of *sobel* test calculation shows $t_{statistic}$ value of 1.78 lower than the t_{table} value < 1.96. It means that brand image does not serve as a mediating factor on the effect of social media on decision making, so that the ***fourth hypothesis is not supported.***

Discussion

The result of data analysis has confirmed that social media has positive significant effect on the students' decision making. This result obviously proves the findings of some

previous studies on the important role of social media in improving the consumers' decision making (Gupta, 2016; Hasan & Sohail, 2020; Prasad et al., 2017; Vongurai et al., 2018). Social media has brought significant change gradually to lifestyle (Chukwuere & Chukwuere, 2017) and behavior of individuals (Ullah et al., 2021). Jiang et al., (2021) reveals that most individuals allocate more their time to use internet and social media. This change of individuals' lifestyle and behavior creates a big opportunity to expand the market of a product. Generally, social media contains various news and information like sport, entertainment, culture, politics, business, and economy. The use of social media experiences progress today as it has begun to be used for commercial purpose. The social media platform like instagram has been used widely by business actors as online promotion and purchasing media. Instagram is equipped with features to post information and news including image and short-term video (Chen, 2018). These features will provide interesting information on a product. In addition, social media like instagram is also equipped with the feature of review on commentary column for respective images and videos. The more interesting the design of a product equipped with positive review and comment, the stronger will be the consumers' confidence in making decision related to product purchase. Huang & Benyoucef (2017) states similarly that the design of social trade can improve the consumers' trust and purchasing decision.

Furthermore, the result of data analysis also confirms that social media affect brand image positively and significantly. This finding confirm the findings of some previous studies revealing that social media can be an effective measure to improve a product's brand image (Barreda et al., 2020; BİLGİN, 2018; Gökerik et al., 2018; Sanny et al., 2020). Each of social media platforms like instagram provides service to the users to do commercial activities. Both individuals and organizations are competing for designing social media trading with attractive appearance and understandable detail of information. These measures are, of course, taken to build a product's brand image. Trading and product design is not the only measure to improve brand image. The scholars state that service quality is one of important aspects in building brand image (Dam & Dam, 2021; Lin et al., 2020). Service quality in the context of social media can be done by responding quickly to the consumers' response, thereby creating satisfaction.

The result of data analysis also confirms that brand image has positive and significant effect on the consumers' decision making. This finding confirms the findings of previous studies revealing that brand image affects the decision making significantly (Amron, 2018; Anwar & Andrean, 2021; Foster, 2016; Sudaryanto et al., 2021). Brand image is a part of product equity (Godey et al., 2016; Khan et al., 2019). A positive brand image will generate strong trust among the consumers (Lien et al., 2015). This trust is, of course, in line with the consumers' decision related to a product (Oghazi et al., 2018). The higher the trust in a product, the higher is the consumers' opportunity of making decision to buy the product. Brand image does not mediate the effect of social media on the consumers' decision making. It may occur because social media can affect directly the consumers in making certain decision. The availability of direct message feature allows for the interaction between sellers and buyers and provides easy access to the information on product and the guarantee of transaction security strengthens the consumers' trust and confidence in certain product.

Therefore, this condition will affect directly the consumers' decision making related to the product.

CONCLUSION

Considering the result of test and data analysis, it can be concluded that social media plays an important role in improving brand image and the consumers' decision making. It can be seen from the empirical findings revealing the positive significant effect of social media on brand image and students' decision making. Before deciding on choosing a study program, the prospective students will search for information first related to the study program and university they will choose. The presence of social media facilitates the prospective students to get necessary information. In this context of study, the students' decision making will be affected by appearance and detail of information presented in social media. Attractive design and adequate detail of information will encourage the prospective students' positive perception on the study program they will take and of course will lead to the decision making to join it. This condition obviously reflects the strong contribution of social media to creating positive perception on brand and the perception leads them to decision making.

This research has a limitation. It has not adopted yet a well-established basic theory idea to explain the research model. The future research is expected to explain the effect of social media on brand image and consumers' decision making through a well established basic theory idea that has been studied widely in business and management science like *Theory of Reasoned Action* (TRA) or *Theory of Planned Behavior* (TPB), etc. The finding of current research is expected to have theoretical implication to marketing strategy field concerning the effect of social media on improving the brand image and consumers' decision making. In addition, this finding is also expected to be practical foundation to business performers, including individuals and organizations, to give service optimally in using social media as marketing strategy, particularly concerning the attractive appearance of product and adequate and understandable detail of information.

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