

## DOES BRAND IMAGE MEDIATE NUTRI-CLAIMS AND PRICE EFFECTS ON GENZ'S BEVERAGE CHOICE?

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the trend of healthy lifestyle in Generation Z consumers in Makassar and the adjustment the industry does towards the brand. The research studies the effects of Nutrition Claims and Price Perception towards the Purchase Intention of Generation Z consumers towards packaged beverages with Brand Image as a mediating factor. The respondents consists of 198 Generation Z living in Kota Makassar who have bought or consumed packaged beverages within the last three months. The data were collected via a questionnaire using a 5-point Likert Scale. The collected data is then processed using SEM-PLS using the SmartPLS application. The results show Nutritional Claims cannot give a direct effect towards Purchase Intention. In contrast, Price Perception can directly affect Purchase Intention. The core result is Brand Image becoming the main catalyst heavily affecting the effects of both Nutritional Claims and Price Perception on Purchase Intention. And so, Brand Image is signified as an important mediating variable in this research. This research is important as it signals for companies to not only add Nutritional Claim labels but also build a good Brand Image, weakening price resistance and building trust towards the products.

Keywords : Brand Image; Nutritional Claims; Packaged Beverages; Price Perception; Purchase Intention

### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menyelidiki tren gaya hidup sehat pada konsumen Generasi Z di Makassar dan penyesuaian yang dilakukan industri terhadap merek. Penelitian ini mengkaji pengaruh Klaim Gizi (Nutrition Claims) dan Persepsi Harga (Price Perception) terhadap Niat Beli (Purchase Intention) konsumen Generasi Z pada produk minuman kemasan, dengan Citra Merek (Brand Image) sebagai faktor mediasi. Responden terdiri dari 198 orang Generasi Z yang berdomisili di Kota Makassar dan pernah membeli, atau mengonsumsi minuman kemasan. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner menggunakan Skala Likert 5 poin. Data yang terkumpul kemudian diolah menggunakan metode SEM-PLS melalui aplikasi SmartPLS. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Klaim Gizi tidak dapat memberikan pengaruh langsung terhadap Niat Beli. Sebaliknya, Persepsi Harga dapat memengaruhi Niat Beli secara langsung. Hasil inti dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa Citra Merek menjadi katalis utama yang secara kuat memengaruhi efek dari Klaim Gizi dan Persepsi Harga terhadap Niat Beli. Oleh karena itu, Citra Merek ditandai sebagai variabel mediasi yang penting dalam penelitian ini. Penelitian ini penting karena memberikan sinyal bagi perusahaan untuk tidak hanya menambahkan label Klaim Gizi, tetapi juga membangun Citra Merek yang baik, guna melemahkan resistensi harga dan membangun kepercayaan terhadap produk.

Kata Kunci : Citra Merek; Klaim Giz; Minuman Kemasan; Persepsi Harga; Niat Beli

### INTRODUCTION

The growth of the Ready-to-Drink (RTD) beverage sector in Indonesia has accelerated substantially, driven by macroeconomic factors such as urbanization, increased mobility, and dynamic lifestyle changes (Akbar Maulana Firmansyah & Rachman, 2025). Data indicate that

the packaged beverage market has significant potential, with a projected value of US\$8.7 billion by 2028 and a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 7.58% (Tetrapak, 2024). In a normative context, the development of this mature, innovation-oriented industry, including product-format innovations such as portable and smart packaging (Jevica, 2024), should align with principles of transparency and the empowerment of consumer rationality.

This expectation is increasingly relevant, given that Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, now represents a critical, digitally native consumer segment (Djafarova & Foots, 2022). This group fundamentally values functionality and brand transparency in disclosing product ingredients (Ballco & Gracia, 2022), which is an essential prerequisite for informed, health-conscious purchasing decisions.

However, empirical reality indicates a significant discrepancy between the industry's growth rate and the resulting public health crisis. High consumption rates of packaged beverages, particularly sweetened drinks, have been linked to an increase in cases of kidney disease and diabetes mellitus, specifically targeting the young population (Ministry of Health RI, 2024). The behavioral paradox of Generation Z reinforces this contradiction. Although they are recognized as a critical, connected demographic with high self-awareness of health issues (Bhutto et al., 2023), data indicates that their daily consumption of sweetened beverages remains high (Ministry of Health RI, 2024). This phenomenon reflects a complex interplay between aspirations to lead a healthy lifestyle, triggered by trends and the post-pandemic era (Jiao et al., 2023) and social and taste preferences. This behavioral contradiction suggests that authentic values often influence Gen Z's purchasing decisions, distinct sensory perceptions and lifestyle trends that support quick-service consumption (Bhutto et al., 2023).

A review of prior research has confirmed a strong theoretical foundation for the determinants of Purchase Intention (PI), which is a key factor influencing consumer behavior and the outcome of the product evaluation process (Septianto et al., 2021). Specifically, Nutritional Claims (NC) are tested as vital information signals (Hernandez-Fernandez et al., 2022) that influence consumer perceptions of a product's health benefits (Prada et al., 2021) and are linked to increased purchase intention (Prates et al., 2022). Furthermore, Price Perception (PP) is recognized as a crucial factor enabling consumers to interpret product value relative to the offered price (Kurz et al., 2023), establishing equitable value (Putra et al., 2024) that moderates purchase propensity (Wasik et al., 2023).

A psychological factor, Brand Image (BI), functions as an inherent perception formed from brand experience and communication (Jevica, 2024), acting as a mark of quality (Ballco & Gracia, 2022) that significantly shapes preferences and purchase intention, particularly in the Gen Z demographic which values brand engagement in social activities (B. Singh, 2023).

Although existing literature has provided a fragmented understanding of purchase determinants, including how brands use benefit claims (Hallez et al., 2023) and how Gen Z assesses brands based on tangible evidence (Jiao et al., 2023) and nutritional transparency (Suhud et al., 2022), the research gap underlying this study is the absence of an integrated causal model capable of simultaneously testing and comparing the determining strength of three main factors: Nutritional Claims (NC), Price Perception (PP), and Brand Image (BI), on Purchase Intention (PI).

This structural gap is essential because measuring the relative strength between variables is necessary to address the Gen Z behavioral paradox, in which rational aspirations (NC) may be sidelined by affective factors (BI) or economic factors (PP). Additionally, this study makes a contextual contribution by focusing the test on Generation Z consumers in the packaged beverage market in Makassar City. This context has not yet been represented in an integrated comparative research model.

A deep understanding of Gen Z's decision-making mechanisms is crucial, given that this demographic is the largest and most influential consumer segment of the future, and that serious public health issues exist.

Previous research has provided only separate perspectives; therefore, this study is important for identifying consumers' implicit priorities by simultaneously testing the comparative strength of the three variables. If Brand Image (BI) proves to have the most dominant influence, for example, this would indicate that brand identity and social responsibility are more important than rational evaluations of Nutritional Claims (NC) or price (PP), thereby providing a basis for more prescriptive communication and intervention strategies.

Academically, this research contributes to the development of consumer behavior models by empirically testing an integrated causal model that addresses the identified structural gap. Therefore, the essential objectives of this research are: (1) To identify the significance of the influence of Nutritional Claims (NC), Price Perception (PP), and Brand Image (BI) on Purchase Intention (PI); and (2) To measure and compare the relative strength of these three independent variables in predicting Generation Z's Purchase Intention for packaged beverage products in the Makassar City area.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

### Nutritional Claims

Nutritional Claims are defined as any statement, symbol, or representation on a product packaging label that explicitly or implicitly suggests that the product possesses or lacks certain nutritional characteristics, such as "low sugar," "high protein," or "high fiber" (Jevica, 2024). These claims function as vital quality signals that reduce consumer uncertainty about product

composition, ultimately influencing consumers' perceived value of the product (Sullivan & Kim, 2018); Bhutto et al., 2023). However, the effectiveness of these claims is often constrained by the high skepticism of Generation Z, who tend to be suspicious of claims that are overly grandiose or merely a "health halo" (Franco-Arellano et al., 2020; Ikonen et al., 2020).

Indicators for this variable were derived from three prior studies, each employing a different approach. Rramani et al. (2023) established four indicators: (1) Expected Taste Pleasantness, (2) Expected Healthiness, (3) Expected Satiating Quality, and (4) Perceived Taste Pleasantness. Furthermore, Prates et al. (2022) used three indicators comprising (1) Understanding of Nutritional Information, (2) Healthfulness Perception, and (3) Purchase Intention as a direct response to claims. Meanwhile, Holtrop et al. (2025) measured this variable using four behavioral indicators: (1) Consumer Choice Probability, (2) Quantity Purchased, (3) Claim Effectiveness of Presence Claims (the effectiveness of claims regarding the presence of nutrients), and (4) Claim Effectiveness of Absence Claims (the effectiveness of claims regarding the absence of certain nutrients).

### **Price Perception**

Price Perception refers to how consumers interpret and evaluate the price offered relative to the value, benefits, and quality they receive from the product (Lee & Chen-Yu, 2018; Adel et al. 2023). Price perception is subjective and strongly influenced by intrinsic factors, such as experience, and extrinsic factors, such as competitor prices (Kurz et al., 2023). Conceptually, price encompasses two main functions: as a form of sacrifice (i.e., the monetary cost incurred) and as an indicator of quality (i.e., a premium price reflecting product superiority) (Jiang & Yang, 2017; Niu et al. 2024). Positive price perception occurs when consumers believe the benefits they obtain exceed the costs they must pay (S. Singh & Alok, 2022).

This variable is measured using comprehensive indicators from three reference studies. Yasri et al. (2020) used three perception statement indicators: (1) This brand is cheap, (2) This brand offers value comparable to the price and (3) The price of this brand corresponds to its quality. On the other hand, Fajarwati & Tjahjaningsih (2025) proposed three indicators: (1) Affordability, (2) Suitability to quality, and (3) Benefits. Finally, Putra et al. (2024) complemented this measurement with four indicators: (1) Affordability, (2) Alignment of Price with the Quality of the Product and Service, (3) Price Competitiveness, and (4) Alignment of Price with Benefits.

### **Brand Image**

Brand Image is a collection of associations, beliefs, and overall impressions formed in consumers' minds regarding a brand (Mitra & Jenamani, 2020). This image is not merely a visual identity but the result of the consumer's subjective interpretation of all brand

communication signals, design, product quality, and corporate social responsibility (Gilal et al., 2020). Brand image is generally divided into functional aspects, such as quality and reliability, and symbolic aspects, including brand personality and alignment with consumers' self-images (Bairrada et al., 2018). A strong image functions as a strategic asset that mitigates risk to consumer perceptions and justifies premium pricing (Arruda Filho et al., 2020); Chen et al., 2021).

The measurement of Brand Image in this study comprises indicators from three studies. Araújo et al. (2023) used seven detailed indicators: (1) This brand arouses sympathy, (2) This brand conveys a personality that sets it apart, (3) Buying products of this brand says something about the type of person I am, (4) I have an image of the type of people who buy products of this brand, (5) The products offered by this brand are of high quality, (6) The products offered by this brand have better features, and (7) The products offered by this brand is usually more expensive. García-Salirrosas et al. (2024) measured it through three indicators: (1) The brand has a good reputation, (2) The brand addresses my health concerns, and (3) The brand is reliable. Meanwhile, Khan & Fatma (2023) used four indicators: (1) The brand provides good value for money, (2) The brand is interesting, (3) There is a reason to associate with the brand, and (4) The brand is different from competing brands.

### **Purchase Intention**

Purchase Intention is defined as the subjective probability that consumers will plan to purchase a product or brand in the future and have a strong commitment to do so (Dash et al., 2021; Wulandari et al., 2025). This variable is a key predictor of actual purchasing behavior, reflecting behavioral tendencies formed by positive evaluations of product and brand attributes (Moslehpour et al., 2021). Although high purchase intention does not always translate into actual purchase due to external barriers (Peña-García et al., 2020; Triady et al., 2025), this variable remains a crucial indicator of the success of marketing strategies in securing consumer preference prior to purchase.

Purchase Intention indicators were collected from three research perspectives. Alwan & Alshurideh (2022) established five indicators related to intention and ability: (1) In the future I would intend to become online shopper, (2) My intention to become online shopper is positive and enthusiastic, (3) I am capable to be online shopper over many purchase activities, (4) I have great intention to replace traditional shopping with E-shopping, and (5) While browsing a product, I plan to conduct the purchase process online. Shanbhogue & Ranjith (2024) stated five indicators for the variable: (1) I will never/definitely buy this brand, (2) I definitely do not/definitely intend to buy this brand, (3) I have very low/high purchase interest, (4) I would definitely not/definitely buy it, and (5) I would probably not/probably buy it. Finally, Kung et al.

(2021) used three priority indicators: (1) Consider buying pork first before other items, (2) Prioritize buying pork over other items, and (3) Purchase pork frequently.

### **Hypothesis**

#### **The Influence of Nutritional Claims on Purchase Intention in Packaged Beverages**

Nutritional claims can directly increase perceived value and purchase preference in health-oriented market segments (Steinhauser et al., 2019; Prates et al., 2022). However, this direct relationship is often weakened by skepticism, thus requiring testing (Ballco & De Magistris, 2019). Research suggests that when customers perceive nutritional claims as credible, they utilize these cues as a primary tool for decision-making. Other studies such as Jevica (2024) have indicated that without established trust, excessive claims can instead nullify the claim's effect. Therefore, the first hypothesis of this study is:

H1: Nutritional Claims have a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention.

#### **The Influence of Price Perception on Purchase Intention in Packaged Beverages**

Price perception is a fundamental determinant because it reflects a monetary sacrifice (Calvo-Porrall & Lévy-Mangin, 2017). Strong purchase intention occurs if the price is perceived as fair and the benefits are commensurate with the cost (S. Singh & Alok, 2022). Consumers are more likely to purchase when they perceive the transaction value to be positive (Kurz et al., 2023). Moreover, competitive price perception acts as a decisive factor in product categories such as packaged beverages, where consumers often switch brands (Royo-Vela & Sánchez, 2022). Therefore, the second hypothesis of this study is:

H2: Price Perception has a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention.

#### **The Influence of Brand Image on Purchase Intention in Packaged Beverages**

A strong Brand Image reduces the perceived doubts and risks associated with consumers (Kittur & Chatterjee, 2023). A positive brand image creates a "halo effect," encouraging purchase intention even at premium prices (Widiastiti et al., 2020; Cham et al., 2021). Prior research also highlights that brand image functions as a social signal, whereby consumers purchase brands that align with their ideal self-concept, thereby increasing emotional motivation to purchase (B. Singh, 2023). Additionally, a robust brand image reduces cognitive load for consumers, serving as a reliable shortcut for quality assurance and directly boosting purchase confidence (Araújo et al., 2023). Therefore, the third hypothesis of this study is:

H3: Brand Image has a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention.

#### **The Influence of Nutritional Claims on Brand Image in Packaged Beverages**

Consistent, clear, and evidence-backed nutritional claims build a brand image of a competent and honest company (Hernandez-Fernandez et al., 2022). These claims represent a long-term investment in building a robust brand image (Bialkova et al., 2016; Almughthim &

Jradi, 2023). When a brand consistently highlights specific nutritional benefits, it establishes a "health positioning" in the consumer's mind, differentiating the brand personality as caring and responsible (Huang et al., 2022). Studies also show that accurate nutritional transparency mitigates skepticism, thereby enhancing the brand's reputation for integrity and fostering a stronger, more positive overall image (Prada et al., 2021). Therefore, the fourth hypothesis of this study is:

H4: Nutritional Claims have a positive and significant effect on Brand Image.

#### **The Influence of Price Perception on Brand Image of Purchase Intention**

Price perception serves as a signal of quality and status. A premium price perceived as commensurate with quality will strengthen the brand image as premium and prestigious (Mansoor & Paul, 2022; B. Singh, 2023). Signaling theory states that in the absence of other tangible cues, consumers rely on price to infer the brand's position in the market hierarchy; thus, a price that is perceived as "worth it" validates the brand's quality promise (Royo-Vela & Sánchez, 2022). Conversely, a price perceived as predatory or inconsistent with the product's value can damage the brand's equity, suggesting that equitable pricing is essential for maintaining a favorable brand reputation (S. Singh & Alok, 2022). Therefore, the fifth hypothesis of this study is:

H5: Price Perception has a positive and significant effect on Brand Image.

#### **The Influence of Nutritional Claims on Purchase Intention through the mediation of Brand Image**

Nutritional Claims enhance Brand Image (image of reliability), and a strong Brand Image subsequently influences Purchase Intention (Chen et al. 2021; Ballco & Gracia 2022). Brand Image serves as a trust filter for validating Nutritional Claims (B. Singh, 2023). This mediation effect is supported by the concept of source credibility, where nutritional information is only internalized into purchase intent if the source is first deemed reputable (Jevica, 2024). Consequently, the "health halo" created by nutritional claims does not directly trigger a sale but instead builds the brand equity necessary to convince the consumer to buy (Holtrop et al., 2025). Therefore, the sixth hypothesis of this study is:

H6: Brand Image positively and significantly mediates the influence of Nutritional Claims on Purchase Intention.

#### **The Influence of Price Perception on Purchase Intention through the mediation of Brand Image**

Brand Image functions as a strong intermediate variable. When a product's price is perceived as commensurate, it strengthens Brand Image, and a good, credible image will increase Purchase Intention (Chen et al., 2021; Suhud et al. (2022). Brand image helps justify

premium pricing. Theoretical frameworks on value transfer suggest that when consumers perceive a price as fair, they attribute this fairness to the brand's character, enhancing their emotional connection to the brand (Kurz et al., 2023). This strengthened brand sentiment then becomes the primary driver of purchase behavior, proving that price acts as an antecedent to the emotional brand relationship that ultimately seals the deal (Putra et al., 2024). Therefore, the seventh hypothesis of this study is:

H7: Brand Image positively and significantly mediates the influence of Price Perception on Purchase Intention.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The population of this study comprises Generation Z consumers domiciled in Makassar City who have bought or consumed packaged beverages within the last three months. Due to the absence of specific census data detailing the exact number of Gen Z actively consuming packaged beverages in Makassar, the population size cannot be definitively calculated and is therefore treated as infinite (Qiu et al., 2022). According to Hair & Alamer, (2022), a minimum sample size of 155 respondents is required for a significant test at the 5% level. This specific sample size was determined using the 10-times rule (Hair & Alamer, 2022), by considering the endogenous variable (Purchase Intention) having three structural paths towards it.

The technique employed is non-probability purposive sampling, which selects participants based on specific criteria (López, 2023). Respondent criteria include: Generation Z (aged 18–30 years), domiciled in Makassar, and having consumed packaged beverage products within the last three months. A questionnaire via Google Forms using a 5-point Likert scale was used as the research instrument to collect data from respondents. The response options were as follows: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. Each item within the questionnaire is used to measure a specific construct. The following constructs and their indicators that were used in this study:

- Nutritional Claims: Expected Healthiness (NC1), Expected Taste Pleasantness (NC2) (Rramani et al., 2023); Understanding of Nutritional Information (NC3) (Prates et al., 2022); Consumer Choice Probability (NC4), Claim Effectiveness of Presence Claims (NC5), Claim Effectiveness of Absence Claims (NC6). (Holtrop et al., 2025)
- Price Perception: Affordability (PP1), Suitability to Quality (PP2), Price Competitiveness (PP3) (Fajarwati & Tjahjaningsih, 2025); Benefits (PP4) (Putra et al., 2024); Price Justification (PP5) (Fajarwati & Tjahjaningsih., 2025).
- Brand Image: Brand Reputation (BI1), Brand Unique Personality (BI2) (García-Salirrosas et al., 2024);, Perceived Brand Quality (BI3), Brand Reliability (BI4) (Araújo et al., 2023); Perceived Brand Value (BI5), Emotional Appeal (BI6) (Khan & Fatma, 2023).

- Purchase Intention: Purchase Interest (PI1), Preference to Buy (PI2), Capability to Buy (PI3) (Shanbhogue & Ranjith, 2024); Attitude towards Product (PI4), Purchase Likelihood (PI5) (Alwan & Alshurideh, 2022); Future Purchase Intent (PI6) (Kung et al., 2021).

The research respondents were Generation Z within the age range of 18 – 30 who have bought or consumed packaged beverages within the last three months. The survey link was distributed via purposive sampling until the target quota of 198 valid responses was achieved. Prior to full distribution, a pilot test involving 30 respondents was conducted to ensure the clarity of the measurement items. The questionnaire was distributed online through social media platforms such as Line, Instagram, and WhatsApp. The collected data was then analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with data processing done using WarpPLS version 8.0

### **Analysis**

This study uses Partial Least Square (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0. This method was chosen because it is effective for complex models and predictive analysis without strict normality assumptions (Hair & Alamer, 2022).

### **Measurement Model**

All latent constructs in this study (NC,PP,BI, PI) were operationalized as reflective measurement models, as the indicators represent manifestations of the underlying theoretical constructs.

1. Validity Test: Consists of Convergent Validity (Outer Loading  $> 0.70$ , with levels of 0.40-0.60 still acceptable for social research; AVE  $> 0.50$ ) and Discriminant Validity using cross-loading where the cross-loading value of the construct must be lower than the construct being assessed (Roemer et al., 2021).
2. Reliability Test: Measures consistency through Composite Reliability ( $> 0.70$ ) and Cronbach's Alpha ( $> 0.60$  or  $> 0.70$ ) (Hair & Alamer, 2022)

### **Structural Model**

1. R-Square Test: Measures the influence of independent variables on the dependent variable, with categories of strong (0.75), moderate (0.50), and weak (0.25) (Ozili, 2022).
2. Hypothesis Test: Uses Bootstrapping to view the significance of the Path Coefficient (direction of influence) as well as T-Statistic ( $> 1.96$ ) and P-Value ( $< 0.05$ ) values as conditions for hypothesis acceptance (Méndez-Suárez, 2021).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Validity Test**

Validity testing using SmartPLS 4.0 indicates that all indicators meet the requirements for convergent validity. The Outer Loading value for each indicator of the Nutritional Claims,

Price Perception, Brand Image, and Purchase Intention variables is above the 0.70 threshold, except for three indicators: NC3, PP1, and PI3, which are at 0.60; a value that is still acceptable for social research. Additionally, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for all latent variables exceeds 0.50, indicating that each construct explains more than half of its indicator variance. For discriminant validity, the cross-loading for the assessed variable was higher than that for other constructs. This confirms that each variable in this model is empirically distinct from the others. Thus, the research instrument is declared valid (see Table 3).

### Reliability Test

The reliability test shows excellent internal consistency. Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values for the four research variables are above 0.70. This indicates that the questionnaire used is reliable and consistent in measuring the variables Nutritional Claims, Price Perception, Brand Image, and Purchase Intention in Gen Z respondents (see Table 4).

### R-Square Test

*R-Square (R<sup>2</sup>)* testing was conducted to observe the structural model's predictive strength:

- Brand Image (R<sup>2</sup> = 0.582): The variables Nutritional Claims and Price Perception can explain **58.7%** of the Brand Image variation, falling into the moderate-to-strong category (see Table 5).
- Purchase Intention (R<sup>2</sup> = 0.645): The variables Nutritional Claims, Price Perception, and Brand Image together can explain **57.8%** of the Purchase Intention variation, indicating a sufficiently strong predictive model (see Table 5).

### Hypothesis Test

The hypothesis test results can be seen in table X. There are 7 hypothesis for this study, where 5 is direct effects and 2 hypotheses is indirect effects of the variables. Based on the analysis results, it is found that H1 is rejected, indicating that NC cannot give a significant effect towards PI (H1: NC → PI; 0.084, 0.985, 0.325). H2 tells the opposite story as PP is able to affect PI significantly, and so is accepted (H2: PP → PI; 0.350, 5.028, 0.000). H3 is also accepted, where BI is beneficial for PI (H3 BI → PI; 0.224, 2,579, 0.010). Next, H4 is accepted, implying that NC can be beneficial for BI (H4: NC → BI; 0.509, 5.713, 0.000). Finally, H5 is also accepted as PP can significantly affect BI (H5: PP → BI; 0.350, 5.028, 0.000).

There are also the indirect effects as shown through H6 and H7. Based on the analysis, it is found that all indirect effects are accepted. H6 is the essential findings of this research, whilst NC cannot directly affect PI, due to the inherent skepticism of Gen Z, it has to go through the mediation of BI to be able to significantly affect PI, therefore H6 is accepted (H6: NC → BI → PI; 0.114, 2.492, 0.013). Next, H7 is also accepted where PP can help build a positive BI that ends up leading to higher PI (H7: PP → BI → PI; 0.078, 2.177, 0.030 (see Table 6).

## Discussion

### **The Influence of Nutritional Claims on Purchase Intention in Packaged Beverages**

The research results indicate that H1 is not supported, meaning Nutritional Claims do not have a significant direct effect on Purchase Intention. Theoretically, this aligns with the findings of (Franco-Arellano et al., 2020) and (Ikonen et al., 2020), who argue that modern consumers, particularly younger demographics, exhibit high levels of skepticism toward health claims on packaging. Previous studies have highlighted that "healthwashing" has made consumers wary; they view claims such as "low sugar" or "high vitamin" as mere marketing gimmicks rather than genuine product benefits. Without a trusted external anchor, these claims are cognitively discounted by consumers and fail to elicit the psychological urge to purchase.

This rejection reflects the reality of the packaged beverage market, where almost every product displays similar health jargon. When every bottle on the shelf claims to be "healthy," the claim loses its differentiating power (Almughthim & Jradi, 2023). Consumers in this sector often treat nutritional labels as merely added fluff; they see them but do not base their immediate purchase decisions on them because they suspect the claims may conceal other unhealthy aspects (e.g., low sugar but high levels of artificial preservatives). The mere presence of a label is insufficient to overcome the inertia of habit or the skepticism of marketing tactics.

Generation Z in Makassar demonstrates a sophisticated yet cynical approach to product evaluation. Although they are health-conscious, their "digital native" nature allows them to fact-check or critically analyze marketing attempts instantly. They are likely to ignore a health claim on a random beverage unless they already trust the brand (Jevica, 2024). For this demographic, a claim is merely text; without the backing of a reputable brand name, it fails to translate latent health interest into active purchase intention.

### **The Influence of Price Perception on Purchase Intention in Packaged Beverages**

The research confirms that H2 is supported, demonstrating that Price Perception has a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention. This supports classical economic theory and the findings of (S. Singh & Alok, 2022; Triady et al., 2025), which assert that positive price perception arises when consumers believe the benefits they obtain exceed the monetary sacrifice. Additionally, (Kurz et al., 2023) reinforce that for mass-market products, economic value remains the primary driver of behavioral intention. When the price is perceived as "fair" or "competitive," it removes the financial barrier to entry, thereby facilitating the purchase.

This finding indicates that price remains the most tangible variable for consumers, serving as the ultimate gatekeeper in decision-making. In the beverage aisle, split-second decisions are often made based on the price tag relative to the perceived refreshment value; if a product feels "overpriced," the psychological pain of paying outweighs the potential pleasure of

consumption (Royo-Vela & Sánchez, 2022). This is particularly relevant for the respondents, Generation Z in Makassar, who are predominantly students or young professionals managing tight budgets. For this demographic, the value of the perceived money spent is paramount. Even if they are interested in modern trends or health benefits, the economic reality of the price point must first validate their savvy shopping ability before a purchase intention can be formed (Wasik et al., 2023).

### **The Influence of Brand Image on Purchase Intention**

The research results show that H3 is supported, indicating that Brand Image has a dominant positive influence on Purchase Intention. This is consistent with the work of Wasik et al. (2023) and Ballco & Gracia (2022), who emphasize that for younger generations, a brand is not merely a name but a marker of quality and social identity. Theoretical models of consumer behavior suggest that Brand Image acts as a risk reducer: in a market saturated with choices, a strong brand creates a "safe harbor" for consumers, assuring them of consistent quality and social acceptance, thereby significantly increasing purchase probability.

This explains why consumers gravitate toward familiar logos even when cheaper or ostensibly "healthier" generic alternatives exist; the brand serves as a mental shortcut that bypasses the need for extensive product evaluation (B. Singh, 2023). This dynamic is intensified among respondents in Makassar, where Gen Z is highly socially connected and influenced by peer perceptions. For them, holding a beverage from a reputable brand is a form of social currency that signals a modern lifestyle. Consequently, a positive brand image provides the emotional reassurance and social status necessary to convert their attention into a definitive intention to buy, overriding other rational calculations (Chen et al., 2021).

### **The Influence of Nutritional Claims on Brand Image in Packaged Beverages**

The research results indicate that H4 is supported, meaning Nutritional Claims significantly affect Brand Image. This aligns with (Hernandez-Fernandez et al., 2022), who state that evidence-based claims project competence and honesty. While claims may not trigger an immediate sale (as seen in H1), prior research by Holtrop et al. (2025) suggests they function as long-term "reputation bricks." By consistently communicating nutritional information, a company signals transparency and alignment with contemporary health trends, thereby enhancing the brand's overall perception.

This suggests that nutritional claims are best utilized as branding tools rather than sales triggers. When a brand consistently displays "No Preservatives" or "100% Real Fruit," it showcases a commitment to quality. Over time, consumers begin to associate the brand name itself with health and quality (Jevica, 2024). The claim elevates the brand from a mere

commodity to a "lifestyle partner," enriching its intangible equity even if customers do not read the label every time.

For Gen Z respondents in Makassar, who value transparency and authenticity, these claims serve as proof of a brand's integrity. They may not buy a drink *just* because it claims to be healthy (H1), but they will *respect* a brand that makes such claims (H4). This respect translates into a superior brand image. The respondents view brands that disclose nutritional information as more honest and "on their side," which is crucial for building the emotional connection that defines a strong brand image (Firmansyah & Rachman, 2025).

### **The Influence of Price Perception on Brand Image in Packaged Beverages**

The research results show H5 is supported, confirming that Price Perception contributes significantly to Brand Image. This supports the findings of (Mansoor & Paul, 2022), who argue that price functions as a key signal of quality and prestige. Theoretically, price and image have a symbiotic relationship; a price perceived as "competitive" suggests a brand is consumer-friendly, while a "premium" price—if justified—can signal exclusivity and high standards. B. Singh, (2023) notes that fair pricing strategies reinforce the perception of a brand's benevolence and value proposition.

The price tag is essential for how the brand is perceived; a product priced appropriately prevents the brand from appearing "cheap" or "greedy," instead validating the brand's promise of quality (Kurz et al., 2023). For respondents in Makassar, price sensitivity does not merely mean seeking the cheapest option; it also entails seeking a price that makes sense. When these Gen Z consumers encounter a price they perceive as justified, their respect for the brand increases. They view the brand as one that understands its customers and offers fair value, and this perception of "fairness" becomes a critical component of the brand image, shifting the brand from a transactional utility to a trusted entity.

### **The Influence of Nutritional Claims on Purchase Intention Through the Mediation of Brand Image**

A key finding of this study is that H6 is supported, meaning Brand Image fully mediates the relationship between Nutritional Claims and Purchase Intention. This result aligns with Chen et al. (2021). Ballco & Gracia (2022) also suggest that, in the face of aschemanskepticism, the brand acts as a necessary filter; the claim enhances the brand's credibility, and this enhanced credibility ultimately drives purchase.

This mechanism resolves the paradox of why H1 was rejected while H6 is accepted. It implies that consumers do not buy "claims"; they buy "brands that possess these claims." A nutritional label alone is just ink on plastic; however, when that label convinces the consumer that "this is a high-quality brand," the consumer buys the product because they trust the brand

(Holtrop et al., 2025; Wulandari et al., 2025). The claim is the fuel, but the brand image is the engine that drives the purchase decision.

For Gen Z respondents in Makassar, this finding is pivotal. Because they are skeptical of empty promises, they require the "security" of a strong brand image to validate a nutritional claim. They will not buy a random drink simply because it is labeled "Healthy," but they will buy a drink from a reputable brand that they perceive as healthy. The nutritional information successfully convinced them that the brand is good, and because they view the brand favorably, they decided to purchase (Franco-Arellano et al., 2020).

### **The Influence of Price Perception on Purchase Intention Through the Mediation of Brand Image**

The research results indicate that H7 is supported, indicating that Brand Image partially mediates the effect of Price Perception on Purchase Intention. This aligns with Suhud et al. (2022), who found that price perception influences purchase intention both directly (via the economic route) and indirectly by shaping brand impression (via the psychological route) (Yasri et al., 2020). Theoretical models of Brand Equity support this, suggesting that a justified price point enhances the overall "perceived quality" of the brand, which is a major precursor to purchase commitment.

This finding highlights a dual-pathway to purchase. A good price makes the product attractive because it is affordable. However, it also makes the product attractive by signaling "good value" and "honesty," thereby polishing the brand's reputation (indirect effect). Consumers feel smart for finding a good deal from a good brand. The synergy between financial accessibility and psychological brand reassurance creates the strongest possible motivation to purchase (Putra et al., 2024).

For the respondents in Makassar, this confirms that their decision-making is a mix of logic and emotion. They buy because the price fits their budget (H2), but they also buy because a fair price increases their liking and trust in the brand (H7). The mediation effect suggests that for Gen Z, a fair price is not just about saving money; it's about validating that the brand is a worthy choice for their lifestyle, reinforcing their intention to consume the product (Fajarwati & Tjahjaningsih, 2025).

### **CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that for Gen Z in Makassar, Brand Image is the pivotal factor. Nutritional Claims are ineffective when used in isolation due to high skepticism, but become highly potent when used to build brand reputation. Adding to this, it is discovered that Nutritional Claims can affect Purchase Intention only through the mediating effects of Brand Image. Price Perception can also affect Brand Image positively, which in turn creates a lower

resistance towards price of the products offered. Companies are advised not to focus solely on including nutritional labels, but to build credible branding so that these claims are trusted and can drive sales.

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### FIGURES AND TABLES OF DATA ANALYSIS

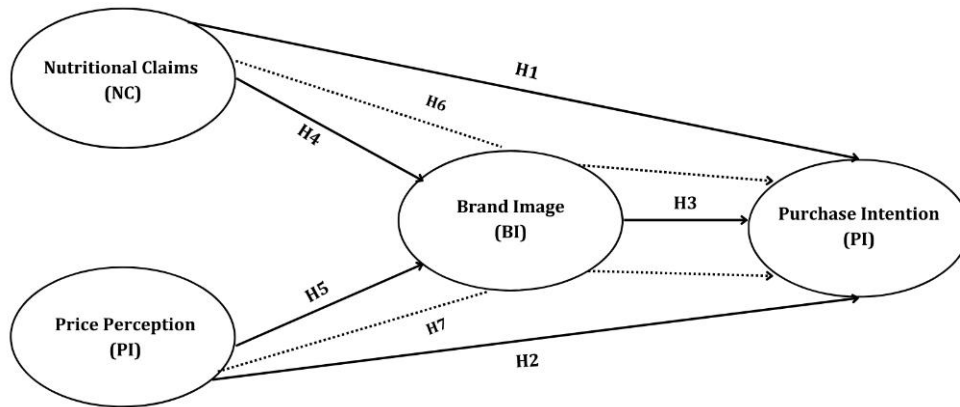


Figure 1: Research Model  
Source: Primary Researcher Data, 2025

Table 1. Characteristics of Respondents

Respondent's Occupation	Number	%	Respondent's Income	Number	%
Student (College/University)	73	45.96%	< Rp 1.000.000	29	21.72%
Student	29	14.65%	Rp 1.000.0000 - Rp 1.999.999	35	19.70%
Employees	39	19.70%	Rp 2.000.000 - Rp.2.999.999	41	20.71%
Business Owners/Entrepreneurs	16	8.08%	Rp 3.000.000 - Rp 3.999.999	37	18.69%
Freelancer/Part-time	16	8.08%	> Rp 4.000.000	38	19.19%
Others	7	3.54%	Total	180	100%
Total	180	100%			

Respondent's Gender	Number	%	Respondent's Age	Number	%
Male	84	46.46%	18 Years Old	29	14.55%
Female	96	53.54%	19-21 Years Old	79	39.90%
Total	180	100%	22-24 Years Old	59	29.80%

	25-27 Years Old	14	7.07%
	28-29 Years Old	3	1.52%
	Total	180	100%

Purchase Frequency	Number	%
Never bought, but intends to purchase	17	9.60%
1-3 Times	60	34.34%
4-6 Times	48	26.26%
7-9 Times	25	15.66%
10-12 Times	17	8.59%
>12 Times	13	5.56%
Total	180	100%

Table 2. Indicators Variable

Variables	Indicators	References
<i>Nutritional Claims (NC)</i>	Expected Healthiness (NC1)	Prates et al., (2023); Rramani et al., (2023); Holtrop et al. (2025)
	Expected Taste Pleasantness (NC2)	
	Understanding of Nutritional Information (NC3)	
	Consumer Choice Probability (NC4)	
	Claim Effectiveness of Presence Claims (NC5)	
	Claim Effectiveness of Absence Claims (NC6)	
<i>Price Perception (PP)</i>	Affordability (PP1)	Yasri et al., (2020); Putra et al. (2024); Fajarwati & Tjahjaningsih (2025)
	Suitability to Quality (PP2)	
	Price Competitiveness (PP3)	
	Benefits (PP4)	
	Price Justification (PP5)	
<i>Brand Image (BI)</i>	Brand Reputation (BI1)	Araújo et al. (2023); Khan & Fatma (2023); Garcia-Salirrosas et al. (2024)
	Brand Unique Personality (BI2)	
	Perceived Brand Quality (BI3)	
	Brand Reliability (BI4)	
	Perceived Brand Value (BI5)	
	Emotional Appeal (BI6)	
<i>Purchase Intention (PI)</i>	Purchase Interest (PI1)	Kung et al. (2021); Alwan & Alshurideh (2022); Shanbhogue & Alwan & Alshurideh (2022)
	Preference to Buy (PI2)	
	Capability to Buy (PI3)	
	Attitude towards Product (PI4)	
	Purchase Likelihood (PI5)	
	Future Purchase Intent (PI6)	

Table 3. Validity Test

Variables and Indicators	Loading Factor	P-Values	Cross Loading				AVE
			NC	PP	BI	PI	
Nutritional Claims (NC)							0.527
NC1	0.686	0.00	0.686	0.268	0.329	0.249	
NC2	0.730	0.00	0.730	0.398	0.561	0.462	
NC3	0.759	0.00	0.759	0.361	0.525	0.369	
NC4	0.722	0.00	0.722	0.415	0.528	0.287	
NC5	0.731	0.00	0.731	0.308	0.466	0.281	
Price Perception (PP)							0.605

PP1	0.780	0.00	0.450	0.780	0.443	0.497	
PP2	0.697	0.00	0.391	0.697	0.477	0.411	
PP3	0.808	0.00	0.298	0.808	0.426	0.548	
PP4	0.820	0.00	0.396	0.820	0.519	0.551	
Brand Image (BI)							0.575
BI1	0.816	0.00	0.571	0.414	0.816	0.367	
BI2	0.736	0.00	0.460	0.440	0.736	0.452	
BI3	0.786	0.00	0.548	0.437	0.786	0.375	
BI4	0.776	0.00	0.499	0.420	0.776	0.309	
BI5	0.714	0.00	0.516	0.437	0.714	0.374	
BI6	0.717	0.00	0.496	0.547	0.717	0.624	
Purchase Intention (PI)							0.652
PI1	0.836	0.00	0.439	0.478	0.490	0.836	
PI2	0.738	0.00	0.419	0.535	0.607	0.738	
PI3	0.792	0.00	0.327	0.546	0.368	0.792	
PI4	0.829	0.00	0.337	0.504	0.315	0.829	
PI5	0.839	0.00	0.356	0.543	0.458	0.839	

Table 4. Reliability Test

Hypothesis	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho a)
BI	0.852	0.854
NC	0.779	0.786
PI	0.866	0.867
PP	0.781	0.787

Table 5. R-Square Test

Hypothesis	R-square	R-square adjusted
BI	0.556	0.551
PI	0.473	0.464

Table 6. Hypothesis Test

Hypothesis	Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	T statistics	P values	Results
NC -> PI	0.084	0.985	0.325	<i>H1 Not Supported</i>
PP -> PI	0.473	5,689	0.000	<i>H2 Supported</i>
BI -> PI	0.224	2,579	0.010	<i>H3 Supported</i>
NC -> BI	0.509	5,713	0.000	<i>H4 Supported</i>
PP -> BI	0.350	5,028	0.000	<i>H5 Supported</i>
NC -> BI -> PI	0.114	2,492	0.013	<i>H6 Supported</i>
PP -> BI -> PI	0.078	2,177	0.030	<i>H7 Supported</i>