

Improveing Consumer Purchasing Decisions Through Unique Selling Proposition and Brand Image in TA&TO MSMEs in Malang

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Abstract

Increasing competition in the culinary MSME sector has made consumer purchase decisions dependent not only on taste and price but also on product uniqueness and brand image. This study examines the effects of Unique Selling Proposition (USP) on purchase decisions and brand image, the effect of brand image on purchase decisions, and the mediating role of brand image among consumers of TA & TO MSME in Malang. A quantitative explanatory design was employed. Data were collected through questionnaires from 130 consumers who had previously purchased TA & TO products and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results show that USP has a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions ($\beta = 0.449$; $t = 4.736$; $p < 0.001$) and brand image ($\beta = 0.679$; $t = 11.249$; $p < 0.001$). Brand image also has a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions ($\beta = 0.404$; $t = 4.282$; $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, brand image significantly mediates the relationship between USP and purchase decisions ($\beta = 0.274$; $t = 4.342$; $p < 0.001$). The model explains 46.1% of the variance in brand image and 61.1% of the variance in purchase decisions. These findings indicate that a strong USP can strengthen brand image and encourage consumer purchase decisions. Therefore, culinary MSMEs should formulate clear product differentiation and communicate it consistently to strengthen brand positioning and consumer preference.

Keywords: Purchase Decision, Unique Selling Proposition, Brand Image, MSMEs

INTRODUCTION

With the wide variety of products offered by culinary businesses, consumer purchasing decisions are no longer solely determined by taste or price, but rather by the reasons why a product is worth choosing over others. Consumers are increasingly selective and tend to choose products with clear uniqueness and a brand image that can convey confidence in the quality and value offered. This situation places unique selling propositions and brand image as strategic factors that play a crucial role in shaping purchasing decisions, particularly for culinary MSMEs with relatively similar and easily imitated product characteristics.

This competitive phenomenon is particularly pronounced among MSMEs in the traditional culinary sector, including wet cake businesses, which generally offer nearly uniform product types, raw materials, and production methods. This product homogeneity makes it difficult for consumers to differentiate one brand from another, leading to situational purchasing decisions that are not based on strong brand preferences. Under these conditions, MSMEs that fail to clearly communicate their product's uniqueness risk losing their competitive edge in an increasingly competitive market.

This problem is also faced by TA & TO MSMEs, which have competitive product quality and taste, but have not yet fully formulated these advantages as a unique selling proposition that is structured and easily perceived by consumers. Product advantages are still understood as purely functional attributes and have not yet developed into a consistent value message in building a brand image. As a result, consumer purchasing decisions tend to be influenced by

factors such as habit, proximity, or informal recommendations, rather than by attachment to the TA & TO brand.

Empirically, product uniqueness and distinctive value have increasingly been recognized as important factors in shaping consumer responses in competitive markets. In the culinary sector, Ramdani et al. (2019) found that a Unique Selling Proposition (USP) has a positive and significant influence on purchasing decisions because it provides consumers with a clear reason to prefer one product over competing alternatives. More recently, Purnomo and Junipriansa (2025) demonstrated that USP significantly influences both brand trust and purchasing decisions, while brand trust mediates the relationship between USP and purchasing decisions. These findings suggest that product uniqueness may influence consumer behavior not only through a direct evaluation of the product but also through the perceptions that consumers develop toward the brand.

The relationship between distinctive product attributes and consumer responses is further supported by recent international studies in the food and consumer-product sectors. Rehman et al. (2024), using data from 374 consumers in India, found that product packaging semiotics positively influence brand image and perceived brand quality, while brand image significantly influences consumers' purchase intention. Similarly, Siuda and Grębosz-Krawczyk (2025) found that distinctive pro-environmental elements communicated through food packaging positively shape both brand image and purchase intentions for food products. These findings indicate that the distinctive characteristics communicated through a product or its presentation can contribute to favorable brand perceptions and subsequently strengthen consumers' willingness to purchase.

Furthermore, brand image may function not merely as an outcome of marketing activities but also as a mechanism through which consumer responses are formed. Chang (2025) demonstrated that brand image partially mediates the relationship between storytelling marketing and purchase intention, indicating that marketing efforts can influence purchase behavior by first shaping favorable perceptions of the brand. In the food sector, García-Salirrosas et al. (2024), based on 637 consumers and PLS-SEM analysis, found that brand image significantly influences perceived brand quality, satisfaction, brand trust, and brand loyalty. However, its direct effect on purchase intention was not statistically significant, suggesting that the role of brand image in purchase behavior may depend on the characteristics of the product and market context.

Taken together, these studies indicate that distinctive product attributes can shape consumer perceptions of a brand, while brand image can subsequently influence consumer responses. However, recent studies have generally examined these relationships through specific marketing activities, packaging attributes, or brand-related factors rather than explicitly examining USP as an antecedent of brand image and purchase decision. Evidence concerning the mediating role of brand image in the relationship between USP and purchase decisions also remains relatively limited, particularly in traditional culinary MSMEs, where products may have similar characteristics and are relatively easy for competitors to imitate. Therefore, examining brand image as a mediating mechanism between USP and consumer purchase decisions is important for understanding how product uniqueness can be transformed into a meaningful competitive advantage. Based on this research gap, the present study investigates the effect of USP on purchase decisions, the effect of USP on brand image, the effect of brand image on purchase decisions, and the mediating role of brand image in the relationship between USP and purchase decisions among consumers of TA & TO MSME in Malang.

Based on the phenomenon of competition, the problems of TA & TO MSME partners, and empirical findings from previous research, this research is important to conduct. This study seeks to analyze the role of unique selling propositions in building brand image and its influence on MSME consumer purchasing decisions. The results of this study are expected to provide theoretical contributions in the development of MSME marketing studies and produce applicable

strategic recommendations for strengthening the competitiveness of wet cake MSMEs amidst increasingly fierce market competition

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design that aims to analyze the causal relationship between unique selling propositions, brand image, and consumer purchasing decisions in TA & TO MSMEs in Malang. According to Hair et al. (2022), quantitative research using structural equation modeling is appropriate for examining relationships among latent constructs and empirically testing hypothesized relationships within a theoretical model. The research objects are consumers who have purchased TA & TO MSME products.

The study population included all consumers of TA & TO MSMEs. Since the exact population size was unknown, the sample size was determined based on Hair et al. (2017), which was 10 times the number of research indicators. With 13 indicators used, the sample size was set at 130 respondents. The sampling technique used purposive sampling with the criterion that respondents had purchased TA & TO MSME products at least once.

This study used three variables: unique selling proposition as the independent variable, purchasing decision as the dependent variable, and brand image as the mediating variable. Primary data were obtained through a questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Additionally, secondary data were obtained from relevant documents and business profiles.

Data analysis was performed using Structural Equation Modeling based on Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) with the help of SmartPLS software. Evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) was carried out through testing of convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability using loading factor values, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Composite Reliability, and Cronbach's Alpha. Furthermore, evaluation of the structural model (inner model) was carried out through testing the R-square value and hypothesis testing using the bootstrapping method with a significance level of 5%. The test results were used to analyze the direct and indirect influences between variables in the research model.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Respondent Characteristics

The study involved 130 consumers of TA & TO MSME products. The majority of respondents were female, aged between 20–25 years, and worked as students. Most respondents had purchased TA & TO products more than three times, indicating that the respondents had sufficient experience in evaluating the products and brands offered by the MSME.

Measurement Outer Model

Outer model evaluation was conducted to test the validity and reliability of the research constructs. The tests included convergent validity, as measured by outer loading values, discriminant validity, as measured by Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and construct reliability, as measured by Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability. The following is a visualization of the factor loadings for each indicator.

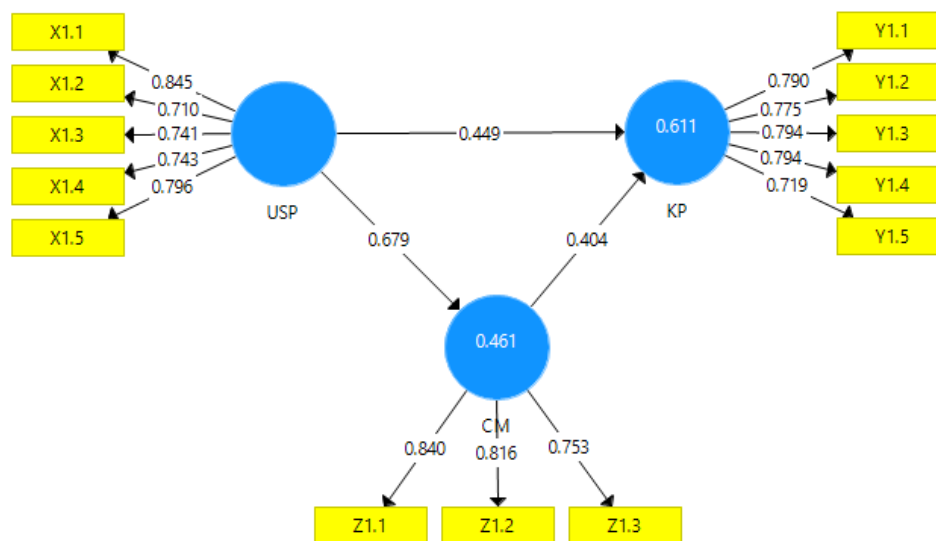


Figure 1 Loading Factor

Figure 1 shows the results of model testing using the Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach. The outer loading values for all indicators range from 0.710 to 0.845 for the Unique Selling Proposition (USP) construct, 0.719 to 0.794 for the Purchase Decision (KP) construct, and 0.753 to 0.840 for the Brand Image (CM) construct. All these values have met the minimum threshold of 0.70, indicating that the indicators are able to reflect the constructs being measured well.

Table 1 Results of Construct Validity and Reliability Tests

Construct	Outer Loading	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Information
Unique Selling Proposition (USP)	0.710–0.845	0.590	0.826	0.878	Valid and Reliable
Brand Image (CM)	0.753–0.840	0.647	0.727	0.846	Valid and Reliable
Purchasing Decision (KP)	0.719–0.794	0.600	0.833	0.882	Valid and Reliable

Source: Processed data (2026)

Based on Table 1, it is known that all indicators have outer loading values above 0.70, thus meeting the convergent validity criteria. The highest outer loading value is found in indicator X1.1 at 0.845 in the Unique Selling Proposition construct, while the lowest value is 0.710 in indicator X1.2. Nevertheless, all indicators are still above the recommended minimum limit of 0.70 and are therefore declared valid.

Furthermore, discriminant validity measured using Average Variance Extracted (AVE) shows that all constructs have an AVE value greater than 0.50. The Brand Image construct has an AVE value of 0.647, Purchase Decision of 0.600, and Unique Selling Proposition of 0.590. These results indicate that each construct is able to explain more than 50% of the variance of its indicators, thus meeting the requirements of discriminant validity.

In terms of reliability, all constructs had Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values above 0.70. Cronbach's Alpha values ranged from 0.727 to 0.833, while Composite Reliability values ranged from 0.846 to 0.882. Thus, all constructs in this study were declared reliable and able to consistently measure the research variables..

Measurement Inner Model

After all constructs have been declared to meet the validity and reliability criteria in the outer model evaluation stage, the next step is to evaluate the inner model (structural model). The inner model evaluation aims to measure the research model's ability to explain the relationships between the latent variables studied. One indicator used in the inner model evaluation is the coefficient of determination (R-Square), which indicates the extent to which exogenous variables can explain endogenous variables in the research model. The results of the R-Square test are presented in

Table1R-Square Value

Endogenous Variables	R-Square	R-Square Adjusted	Category
Brand Image (CM)	0.461	0.457	Moderate
Purchasing Decision (KP)	0.611	0.605	Moderate-Strong

Source: SmartPLS data processing results, 2026.

Based on Table 4.3, the R-Square value for the Brand Image variable is 0.461 with an Adjusted R-Square value of 0.457. These results indicate that 46.1% of the variation in Brand Image can be explained by the Unique Selling Proposition variable, while the remaining 53.9% is influenced by other factors outside the research model. This value is included in the moderate category, which indicates that the Unique Selling Proposition has a fairly good ability to explain the formation of Brand Image in TA & TO MSME consumers.

Meanwhile, the Purchase Decision variable has an R-Square value of 0.611 and an Adjusted R-Square value of 0.605. This indicates that 61.1% of the variation in Purchase Decision can be explained by the Unique Selling Proposition and Brand Image variables, while the remaining 38.9% is influenced by other variables not included in the research model. These values are included in the moderate to strong category, so it can be concluded that the research model has good predictive ability in explaining consumer purchasing decisions in TA & TO MSMEs.

Furthermore, after the model's ability to explain endogenous variables is known through the R-Square value, the next stage is to test the relationship between variables in the research model through path coefficient analysis and hypothesis testing.

Hypothesis Testing

After the model's ability to explain endogenous variables is known through the coefficient of determination (R-Square), the next step is to conduct hypothesis testing to determine the significance of the relationship between variables in the research model. Hypothesis testing is carried out by analyzing the path coefficient, t-statistic, and p-value obtained through the bootstrapping procedure in SmartPLS. A relationship is declared significant if it has a t-statistic value greater than 1.96 and a p-value less than 0.05 at a 5% significance level. The results of the research hypothesis testing are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Relationship between variables	Path Coefficient	T-Statistic	P-Value	Decision
H1	USP → Purchase Decision	0.449	4,736	0,000	Accepted
H2	USP → Brand Image	0.679	11,249	0,000	Accepted

H3	Brand Image → Purchase Decision	0.404	4,282	0,000	Accepted
H4	USP → Brand Image → Purchase Decision	0.274	4,342	0,000	Accepted

Source: Processed data (2026)

Based on Table 3, all hypotheses proposed in this study are accepted because they have a p-value of less than 0.05. The test results indicate that the Unique Selling Proposition (USP) has a positive and significant effect on purchasing decisions. This finding indicates that the stronger the uniqueness of the products offered by TA & TO MSMEs, the higher the consumer's tendency to make a purchase.

Furthermore, Unique Selling Propositions have also been shown to have a positive and significant impact on brand image. These results indicate that product uniqueness can shape positive consumer perceptions of TA & TO brands. The clearer the product differentiation offered, the stronger the brand image formed in the minds of consumers.

Furthermore, brand image has a positive and significant influence on purchasing decisions. This indicates that consumers tend to choose products with a positive image because they are perceived as more trustworthy and capable of meeting their needs. Thus, brand image is a significant factor influencing consumer purchasing behavior.

The results of the mediation effect test indicate that brand image can mediate the influence of Unique Selling Proposition on purchasing decisions. This finding indicates that product uniqueness not only drives purchasing decisions directly but also through the formation of a positive brand image. Therefore, strengthening the Unique Selling Proposition followed by building a positive brand image can be an effective strategy to improve consumer purchasing decisions in TA & TO MSMEs.

Discussion

The Influence of Unique Selling Proposition on Purchasing Decisions

The results of the hypothesis testing indicate that the Unique Selling Proposition (USP) has a positive and significant effect on purchasing decisions. This is indicated by a path coefficient of 0.449, a t-statistic of 4.736, and a p-value of 0.000. Therefore, the first hypothesis (H1), which states that the Unique Selling Proposition influences purchasing decisions, is accepted.

The results of this study indicate that the stronger the uniqueness of a TA & TO MSME's product, the higher the consumer's tendency to purchase it. This uniqueness can include product characteristics, taste, appearance, packaging, or benefits that differentiate it from similar products offered by competitors. This uniqueness is the primary reason consumers choose a product among the many available alternatives.

The findings of this study align with the concept of a Unique Selling Proposition introduced by Reeves, which is a unique advantage not possessed by competitors and provides a compelling reason for consumers to choose a product. A Unique Selling Proposition serves as a key differentiator that helps consumers understand the specific benefits a product will provide compared to competitors. Anggrianto et al. (2017) explain that a USP is an important factor in positioning and attracting consumers' attention through distinct advantages over competitors. The results of this study are also supported by research by Ramdani et al. (2019) which found that a Unique Selling Proposition has a positive and significant effect on consumer purchasing decisions at Overtime Coffee Ciamis.

In the context of TA & TO MSMEs, these results indicate that the product differentiation strategy implemented so far has been able to create a perception of uniqueness in the minds of consumers. Therefore, MSME managers need to continue to maintain and develop unique product characteristics to remain relevant to consumer needs and able to compete with similar products in the market.

The Influence of Unique Selling Proposition on Brand Image

The results of the hypothesis testing indicate that the Unique Selling Proposition has a positive and significant effect on Brand Image. This is indicated by a path coefficient of 0.679, a t-statistic of 11.249, and a p-value of 0.000. Thus, the second hypothesis (H2) is accepted.

The path coefficient value of 0.679 is the highest value in the research model, indicating that the Unique Selling Proposition is a very strong factor in shaping the brand image of TA & TO MSMEs. The clearer and stronger the uniqueness of the product, the more positive the consumer perception of the brand.

According to Keller (2013), brand image is a collection of perceptions stored in consumers' memories about a brand that are formed through experience, communication, and interaction with the product. Meanwhile, Kotler and Keller (2016) explain that product differentiation is one of the main foundations in forming a strong brand image. This concept is in line with the view of Silvia Ekasari (2026) who stated that USP functions as a cognitive pillar that highlights the rational differences of a product, thereby strengthening the brand image and distinguishing it from competitors.

In the TA & TO MSME sector, the uniqueness of the products offered has been proven to create positive brand perceptions. Consumers not only recognize the product based on its benefits but also associate the TA & TO brand with unique characteristics that differentiate it from competitors. This is a crucial asset for building future consumer loyalty.

The Influence of Brand Image on Purchasing Decisions

The results of the hypothesis testing indicate that brand image has a positive and significant effect on purchasing decisions. This is indicated by a path coefficient of 0.404, a t-statistic of 4.282, and a p-value of 0.000. Thus, the third hypothesis (H3) is accepted.

The results of this study indicate that the better the brand image of TA & TO MSMEs, the higher the consumer's likelihood of making a purchase. Consumers tend to choose products with a good reputation because they are perceived as more trustworthy, high-quality, and able to meet their expectations.

According to Keller and Swaminathan (2020), brand image is a consumer's perception of a brand, formed from various associations about the company, users, and the product itself. When consumers have a positive perception of a brand, their confidence in making purchasing decisions increases.

The findings of this study align with those of Rizaldi and Suprayogi (2024), who demonstrated that brand image significantly influences purchasing decisions for The Body Shop products in Indonesia. This study demonstrated that consumers are more likely to purchase products from brands perceived as having good quality, reputation, and value. This finding is also supported by Handayani and Sutawijaya (2024), who found that brand image positively influences purchasing decisions for fashion products because it increases consumer trust in the products offered.

For TA & TO MSMEs, these results demonstrate the importance of maintaining consistent product quality, marketing communications, and consumer experience so that the established brand image remains positive and is able to encourage increased purchasing decisions..

The Role of Brand Image in Mediating the Influence of Unique Selling Proposition on Purchasing Decisions

The results of the indirect effect test indicate that the Unique Selling Proposition has a positive and significant influence on Purchasing Decisions through Brand Image. This is indicated by a path coefficient value of 0.274, a t-statistic value of 4.342, and a p-value of 0.000. Thus, the fourth hypothesis (H4) is accepted.

These findings indicate that brand image acts as a mediating variable, bridging the influence of unique selling propositions on purchasing decisions. This means that the uniqueness

of TA & TO MSME products not only directly influences purchasing decisions but also first forms a positive brand image before ultimately encouraging consumers to make a purchase.

Theoretically, these results align with consumer behavior models that explain that unique product attributes shape consumer perceptions of a brand, which then influence purchasing decisions. Keller (2013) explains that strong differentiation results in more positive brand associations, thereby increasing the likelihood of a purchase. This concept is further reinforced by Silvia Ekasari (2026), who states that USPs serve as the foundation for brand image formation and differentiation, ultimately influencing consumer behavior.

The results of this study show that the success of the TA & TO MSME marketing strategy does not only depend on the uniqueness of the product, but also on the company's ability to communicate this uniqueness so as to form a positive brand image in the minds of consumers. In other words, the stronger the USP and the better the brand image formed, the greater the opportunity for consumers to make a purchasing decision.

Therefore, TA & TO MSMEs need to integrate product differentiation strategies with sustainable brand strengthening strategies so that product excellence is not only recognized by consumers, but also embedded as a positive image that can increase purchasing decisions.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the influence of Unique Selling Proposition (USP) and Brand Image on Purchase Decisions among consumers of TA & TO MSMEs in Malang. The findings reveal that Unique Selling Proposition has a positive and significant effect on Purchase Decisions and Brand Image. Furthermore, Brand Image positively and significantly influences Purchase Decisions. The results also confirm that Brand Image mediates the relationship between Unique Selling Proposition and Purchase Decisions. These findings indicate that product uniqueness serves as an important differentiating factor that strengthens brand image and ultimately encourages consumers to make purchasing decisions. Therefore, strengthening both Unique Selling Proposition and Brand Image can be considered an effective strategy for improving consumer purchase decisions in MSMEs.

Based on the findings, TA & TO MSMEs are encouraged to continuously strengthen their Unique Selling Proposition by highlighting product uniqueness and communicating it consistently through marketing activities. In addition, efforts to maintain and enhance Brand Image should be prioritized through product quality improvement, customer service excellence, and effective branding strategies. Future studies are recommended to incorporate additional variables, such as product quality, price perception, customer satisfaction, and electronic word-of-mouth, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of factors influencing consumer purchase decisions in MSMEs.

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