

Price and Purchase Decisions for Thrift Product: The Mediating Role of Brand Image

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article distributed under the terms of the
Creative Commons Attribution License.**Abstract**

This study examines the effect of Price on Purchase Decisions, mediated by Brand Image, among university students purchasing thrift fashion products in Kendari City. The novelty of this study lies in explaining the psychological mechanism through which Brand Image translates price perceptions into purchase decisions within the underexplored context of thrift fashion. Using a quantitative explanatory approach, data were collected from 200 respondents through purposive sampling and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS. The results show that Price positively and significantly affects Brand Image and Purchase Decisions, and that Brand Image, in turn, positively influences Purchase Decisions and significantly mediates the relationship between Price and Purchase Decisions. Theoretically, this study extends Signaling Theory and consumer behavior literature by demonstrating the mediating role of Brand Image in second-hand fashion consumption. In practice, the findings suggest that thrift businesses should adopt pricing strategies that reinforce their brand image to influence consumer purchase decisions and promote sustainable fashion consumption.

Keywords: brand image, price, purchase decisions, second-hand fashion

Introduction

The current development of the fashion industry shows significant changes, with increasing consumer awareness of sustainable consumption and the circular economy (Wren, 2022; Petanen et al., 2024; Bubinek et al., 2025; Imschloss & Schulz, 2025). One tangible manifestation of this change is the growing public interest in thrift products, or used clothing that is still fit to wear, which has economic value while supporting environmental sustainability (Amaral & Spers, 2022; Srividya et al., 2024). Thrift products are no longer considered low-end goods but have evolved into part of a lifestyle, especially among the younger generation, who tend to have limited purchasing power but still want to follow fashion trends (Adriansyah & Gumilar, 2024; Ferrinadewi & Nathanael, 2025). This phenomenon is growing stronger with the development of thrift shops, both offline and through digital platforms, which offer a variety of fashion products at relatively more affordable prices compared to new products (Muralikrishnan et al., 2024; Srividya et al., 2024; Moon et al., 2025; Sorum, 2025; Dissanayake et al., 2026). In Kendari City, the trend of consuming thrift products has also grown rapidly, especially among students who see thrift as an economical alternative for fashion consumption.

In the context of consumer behavior, purchasing decisions are a crucial factor in determining the sustainability of a thrift business (Hina & Islam, 2026; Zechiel et al., 2026). Consumer perceptions of the brand image associated with the product, in addition to price,

influence purchasing decisions (Nugraha & Nurdiyansyah, 2022). Price is often a primary consideration because students, as consumers, are highly sensitive to affordability (Yan et al., 2021; Mujahidah et al., 2026). However, for thrift products, a low price alone may not drive purchasing decisions without a positive brand image (Adriansyah & Gumilar, 2024). Modern consumers tend to assess the quality, exclusivity, aesthetic value, and social perception of thrift products before deciding to purchase (Srividya et al., 2024; Balo et al., 2025; Zechiel et al., 2026). This demonstrates that brand image plays a strategic role in bridging the influence of price on purchasing decisions.

Various previous studies have examined the relationship between price, brand image, and purchasing decisions but have yielded inconsistent results. Studies (Nugraha & Nurdiyansyah, 2022; Adriansyah & Gumilar, 2024; Martinez & Iran, 2024; Kamalia & Sukri, 2024) found that price and brand image significantly influence purchasing decisions, as consumers tend to choose products whose prices are perceived as commensurate with the benefits they receive. On the other hand, studies (Tan et al., 2022; Yani et al., 2024; Ferrinadewi & Nathanael, 2025; Akbar et al., 2025; Sihite et al., 2026) indicate that in the lifestyle-based fashion industry, price or economic value and brand image are not dominant factors influencing purchasing decisions. Research by Moon et al. (2023) and Irmasari & Umam (2025) also found that price can shape brand image perception, with prices perceived as reasonable and appropriate for the quality increasing consumer trust in the brand. However, most of this research still focuses on new fashion products, cosmetics, or modern retail products. In contrast, research on thrift products remains relatively limited, especially among students in developing areas such as Kendari City.

This research gap is the crucial basis for this study. Empirically, there are still discrepancies in research findings regarding the dominant influence of price and brand image on purchasing decisions. Contextually, studies on consumer behavior for thrift products remain scarce, despite the distinct characteristics of consumers who purchase them. Thrift products possess unique dimensions such as sustainability values, exclusivity, and social perceptions that can influence consumer purchasing decisions (Srividya et al., 2024; Bai et al., 2026). Furthermore, research that positions brand image as a mediating variable in the relationship between price and purchasing decisions for thrift products is still very limited, particularly in the context of college students as the primary consumers.

Although previous studies have extensively examined the effects of price and brand image on purchase decisions, most have treated these relationships as direct effects or focused on conventional retail and branded products. Limited attention has been paid to understanding the underlying mechanism by which consumers translate price perceptions into purchase decisions in the context of thrift fashion, where products are characterized by uniqueness, limited availability, uncertain quality, and sustainability-related values. Consequently, the role of brand image as a psychological mechanism linking price perceptions to purchase decisions remains insufficiently explored. This study explains how consumers interpret price signals to form brand image, which subsequently shapes their purchasing decisions.

Another contribution of this study lies in its research context. Student consumers are among the most dynamic market segments in the thrift fashion industry because their purchasing behavior is influenced not only by affordability but also by fashion consciousness, uniqueness-seeking, social identity, and sustainability awareness. By investigating student thrift consumers in Kendari City, this study provides empirical evidence from an emerging local market that has received little attention in prior research, thereby enhancing the external validity of consumer behavior theories in the context of second-hand fashion.

Accordingly, the objectives of this study are to analyze the effects of price on brand image and on purchase decisions, the effect of brand image on purchase decisions, and the mediating role of brand image in the relationship between price and purchase decisions among

student thrift fashion consumers in Kendari City. Theoretically, this study contributes to the marketing literature by extending the understanding of the psychological mechanism through which price influences purchase decisions via brand image in the context of second-hand fashion. Practically, the findings provide strategic insights for thrift fashion businesses to develop pricing strategies that not only remain competitive but also strengthen brand image, thereby influencing consumer purchase decisions and supporting the growth of sustainable fashion markets.

Literature Review and Hypotheses

Price

Price is a crucial element in the marketing mix that directly influences consumer perception of a product. According to Kotler (2019), price is the amount of money consumers must pay to obtain a product or service and the benefits of owning it. Meanwhile, according to Tjiptono (2019), price is a monetary unit or other measure exchanged to obtain the right to own or use a good or service that can provide consumer satisfaction. Furthermore, Alma (2018) explains that price is the value of an item expressed in monetary terms and serves as a tool for consumers to assess the benefits of the product they intend to purchase. These definitions demonstrate that price functions not only as a means of economic exchange but also as a signal of a product's quality, value, and positioning in consumers' minds, including in the context of thrift products, which are highly sensitive to perceptions of value and affordability.

Price is closely associated with brand image formation because consumers frequently use price as an initial cue when evaluating a product's quality and overall image. According to signaling theory, Spence (1973) argues that price conveys information about product quality under conditions of information asymmetry. A price perceived as appropriate relative to product quality tends to strengthen positive brand perceptions, whereas an excessively low price without clear quality justification may weaken brand image. In the thrift fashion market, however, price carries a more complex meaning because consumers seek not only affordability but also product uniqueness, authenticity, quality, and social value (Amaral & Spers, 2022). Consistent with this perspective, Navarro-Valero et al., (2026) reported that fair, competitive, and value-consistent pricing enhances consumers' perceptions of both product and store image, while Irmasari & Umam (2025) found that price positively influences brand image because consumers frequently associate price with perceived quality. This issue is especially relevant for university students in Kendari City, whose evaluations of thrift products are likely to depend on whether product prices are perceived as consistent with the product's quality, uniqueness, and value. Therefore, based on signaling theory and previous empirical evidence, price perceptions are expected to strengthen the brand image of thrift products among university students in Kendari City.

Price is also widely recognized as an important determinant of purchase decisions because consumers evaluate the trade-off between monetary sacrifice and the benefits obtained (Nugraha & Nurdyansyah, 2022; Irmasari & Umam, 2025). Among university students, price sensitivity tends to be relatively high due to limited purchasing power and a desire to obtain fashionable products at affordable prices (Adriansyah & Gumilar, 2024). Consequently, prices perceived as affordable, reasonable, and consistent with product quality increase consumers' confidence and willingness to purchase (Martinez & Iran, 2024). However, empirical evidence regarding the role of price remains inconclusive. Ambardi et al., (2023) and Khan et al., (2024) demonstrated that price positively influences purchase decisions in fashion and retail contexts. In contrast, other studies indicate that non-price attributes, such as brand reputation, product uniqueness, perceived quality, and emotional value, also shape purchasing decisions. These mixed findings are particularly relevant to the thrift fashion market because consumers may be willing to pay relatively higher prices for products perceived as unique, fashionable, authentic,

or of better quality. This purchasing pattern is likely to characterize university students in Kendari City, who actively participate in the growing thrift fashion trend while balancing economic considerations with lifestyle preferences.

H1: Price has a positive effect on the brand image of thrift products among university students in Kendari City.

H2: Price has a positive effect on purchase decisions of thrift products among university students in Kendari City.

Brand Image

Brand image is the perceptions, beliefs, and associations formed in consumers' minds about a brand based on their experiences, information, and interactions. According to Kotler (2019), brand image is a set of perceptions embedded in consumers' memories, reflected through strong, unique, and positive brand associations. Meanwhile, Sihite et al. (2026) explain that brand image is formed from various brand associations organized in consumers' minds, both functional and emotional. Furthermore, Bai et al. (2026) state that brand image is a comprehensive picture of a brand formed from consumers' interpretations of product attributes, benefits, and usage experiences. Thus, brand image can be understood as a construct of consumer perception that plays a crucial role in influencing attitudes and purchasing behavior.

Brand image plays a strategic role in shaping purchase decisions, as consumers tend to choose brands perceived as positive, trustworthy, and aligned with their values and lifestyles (Nugraha & Nurdiyansyah, 2022). Theoretically, brand image serves as an intangible asset that reduces consumers' perceived risk, enhances confidence, and simplifies decision-making under uncertainty (Kotler, 2019). It also serves as a quality signal and symbolic representation that shapes consumer preferences, attitudes, and loyalty (Bai et al., 2026). Consistent with these theoretical arguments, previous studies generally demonstrate that brand image positively influences purchase decisions by strengthening consumer trust and perceived product value (Ambardi et al., 2023; Adriansyah & Gumilar, 2024; Yani et al., 2024; Ferrinadewi & Nathanael, 2025). However, the magnitude of this relationship is not always consistent across industries, product categories, and consumer segments, as consumers in certain contexts may prioritize affordability, functional value, or economic considerations over brand reputation. These variations indicate that the effect of brand image is context-dependent rather than universally dominant, thereby highlighting the need to re-examine its role in the thrift fashion market. This issue is particularly relevant among university students in Kendari City, whose thrift fashion purchasing decisions are influenced not only by affordability but also by product uniqueness and social identity.

The relationship between price and purchase decisions has produced inconsistent empirical findings. Several studies report that competitive pricing directly influences purchase decisions because consumers perceive price as reflecting the value and benefits they receive (Nugraha & Nurdiyansyah, 2022; Adriansyah & Gumilar, 2024; Martinez & Iran, 2024; Kamalia & Sukri, 2024). In contrast, other studies suggest that in lifestyle-oriented markets, such as the fashion industry, price and brand image are not always the primary determinants of purchase decisions, as consumers are also influenced by symbolic and social values (Tan et al., 2022; Yani et al., 2024; Ferrinadewi & Nathanael, 2025; Akbar et al., 2025; Sihite et al., 2026). These mixed findings indicate that the influence of price may operate indirectly through consumers' psychological evaluations. Accordingly, brand image is proposed as a mediating mechanism linking price and purchase decisions (Ritonga, 2024; Irmasari & Umam, 2025). Rather than representing only monetary sacrifice, price also serves as a signal of quality and credibility that shapes brand image (Mujahidah et al., 2026). Consumers tend to associate fair and reasonable prices with higher product quality and stronger brand credibility, particularly when product information is limited (Moon et al. 2023; Irmasari & Umam 2025; Dissanayake

2026). This mechanism is especially relevant in the thrift fashion market for students in Kendari City, where limited product information increases reliance on price cues to evaluate brand image before making purchase decisions

H3: Brand image has a positive effect on thrift fashion purchase decisions among university students in Kendari City

H4: Brand image mediates the effect of price on thrift fashion purchase decisions among university students in Kendari City.

Purchasing Decision

A purchasing decision is the final stage in the consumer decision-making process, involving the selection of one alternative from among available options based on specific considerations. According to Kotler (2019), a purchasing decision is a consumer's decision to select and purchase the most preferred brand after evaluating various alternatives. Schiffman & Wisenblit (2019) define a purchasing decision as the result of a consumer's problem-solving process, which includes need recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, and ultimately the decision to purchase. Meanwhile, according to Toebast-wensink & Soyer (2026), a purchasing decision is part of consumer behavior that reflects how individuals make choices in allocating their resources, such as time, money, and effort, to acquire goods or services. Furthermore, Yan et al. (2021) explain that a purchasing decision is an integrative process in which consumers combine knowledge to evaluate two or more alternatives and choose one. Thus, a purchasing decision can be understood as a complex process influenced by internal and external factors that culminate in the purchase of a product or service.

Research Method

This study employed a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design, aiming to explain causal relationships between variables through testing pre-formulated hypotheses. This approach was chosen because the study examined the direct and indirect influence of price on purchasing decisions, with brand image as a mediating variable, among college students who use thrift products in Kendari City. Explanatory quantitative research is considered the most relevant because it can provide empirical explanations of the structural relationships between variables using statistically processed numerical data.

The population of this study comprised all college students who use thrift products in Kendari City. Because the population size was unknown, the sample size was determined based on Hair et al. (2017), who stated that the minimum sample size in multivariate research, specifically using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), is 5 to 10 times the number of indicators. This study included a total of 20 indicators adapted from (Guiot & Roux, 2010; Cervellon et al., 2012; Turunen & Pöyry, 2019): 8 for price, 5 for brand image, and 7 for purchasing decisions. Thus, the minimum sample size is $20 \times 10 = 200$ respondents. Using 200 respondents is considered ideal to increase the validity, reliability, and generalizability of the research results. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, which is based on specific criteria. The respondents were students in Kendari City who had purchased and used thrift products at least twice in the last six months.

Data collection was conducted through in-person and online questionnaires using a 1–5 Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to agree strongly. The research instrument was developed using indicators for each variable, adopted from relevant prior research. Before use, the research instrument was tested for validity and reliability to ensure its appropriateness. The data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling based on Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 3.0. The analysis consisted of evaluating the measurement (outer) and structural (inner) models. The measurement model was assessed through indicator reliability (outer loading ≥ 0.70), internal consistency reliability using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite

Reliability (CA and CR ≥ 0.70), convergent validity using Average Variance Extracted (AVE ≥ 0.50), and discriminant validity using the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT < 0.90). The structural model was evaluated by examining multicollinearity using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF < 5.00) and explanatory power using the coefficient of determination (R^2). Finally, the proposed hypotheses were tested, and hypotheses were considered supported when the t-value exceeded 1.96 and the p-value was less than 0.05 (Hair et al., 2019).

Results and Discussion

Results

Table 1 shows that the respondents were predominantly female (58%) and mostly from UHO (48%), indicating that thrift fashion consumption is widespread among university students in Kendari City. More than half of the respondents purchased thrift products 1–2 times during the last six months (54%), with clothing (54%) being the most frequently purchased item, followed by bags, accessories, and shoes. In addition, most respondents preferred shopping at physical thrift stores (73%), suggesting that consumers tend to assess product quality and condition in person before purchasing due to the uncertainty associated with second-hand products. These characteristics confirm that the respondents represent an appropriate consumer segment for examining the influence of Price on Purchase Decisions through Brand Image, as purchasing behavior in the thrift fashion market is closely associated with price affordability and product credibility

Table 1. Characteristics Responden

Characteristics	Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	84	42
	Female	116	58
University	UHO	96	48
	IAIN	40	20
	UMK	34	17
	Others	30	15
Frequency of purchase of thrift products in the last 6 months	1–2 times	108	54
	3–5 times	60	30
	> 5 times	32	16
Types of used products most often purchased	Clothing	108	54
	Shoes	14	7
	Bags	46	23
	Accessories	20	10
	Others	12	6
Shopping channel	Physical thrift store	146	73
	Social Media	54	27

Table 2 shows that all constructs satisfy the recommended criteria for measurement model evaluation. The retained indicators demonstrate adequate indicator reliability, while the values of Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability confirm satisfactory internal consistency. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) further indicates that all constructs achieve acceptable convergent validity, and the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values suggest the absence of multicollinearity among the indicators. In addition, the coefficient of determination (R^2) indicates that the endogenous constructs have moderate explanatory power, suggesting that the proposed model accounts for a meaningful proportion of the variance in Brand Image and Purchase Decision. These findings confirm that the measurement model is reliable and valid, providing a sound basis for evaluating the structural model.

Table 2. Outer VIF, Outer Loading, and R Square

Variables	Item	VIF	Outer Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE	R Square
Price	P1	1.512	0.742	0.763	0.840	0.512	
	P2	1.306	0.720				
	P3	1.610	0.759				
	P5	1.355	0.658				
	P8	1.410	0.694				
Brand Image	BI1	1.246	0.702	0.712	0.822	0.536	0.345
	BI3	1.415	0.717				
	BI4	1.410	0.733				
	BI5	1.377	0.774				
Purchase Decision	PD4	1.553	0.765	0.757	0.845	0.576	0.421
	PD5	1.475	0.722				
	PD6	1.511	0.802				
	PD7	1.357	0.746				

Table 3 presents the results of the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) analysis to assess discriminant validity among the latent constructs. The findings indicate that all HTMT values are below the recommended threshold of 0.90 (Henseler et al., 2016), demonstrating that each construct is empirically distinct from the others. This indicates that Price, Brand Image, and Purchase Decision measure different conceptual domains and do not exhibit problematic overlap.

Table 3. Rasio Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT)

	Brand Image	Price
Price	0.789	
Purchase Decision	0.692	0.785

Table 4 summarizes the results of the hypothesis testing for both direct and indirect relationships. The findings indicate that all proposed hypotheses are supported. Price has a positive and significant effect on brand image, suggesting that consumers perceive fair and appropriate pricing as an important signal in shaping favorable brand perceptions. Price also exerts a positive direct effect on purchase decisions, indicating that competitive pricing encourages consumers to purchase thrift fashion products. Furthermore, brand image positively influences purchase decisions, implying that consumers are more likely to purchase thrift products when they hold favorable perceptions of the brand. The mediation analysis further demonstrates that brand image significantly mediates the relationship between price and purchase decisions, indicating that the influence of price is transmitted not only directly but also indirectly through consumers' brand evaluations.

Table 4. Hypothesis Test Results

Hypothesis	Original Sample	T statistik	P Values	Results
Direct Influence				
Price -> Brand image	0.587	7.908	0.000	Accepted
Harga -> Purchase decisions	0.452	3.378	0.001	Accepted
Brand image -> Purchase decisions	0.270	2.062	0.040	Accepted
Indirect Influence				
Price -> Brand image -> Purchase decisions	0.159	2.029	0.043	Accepted

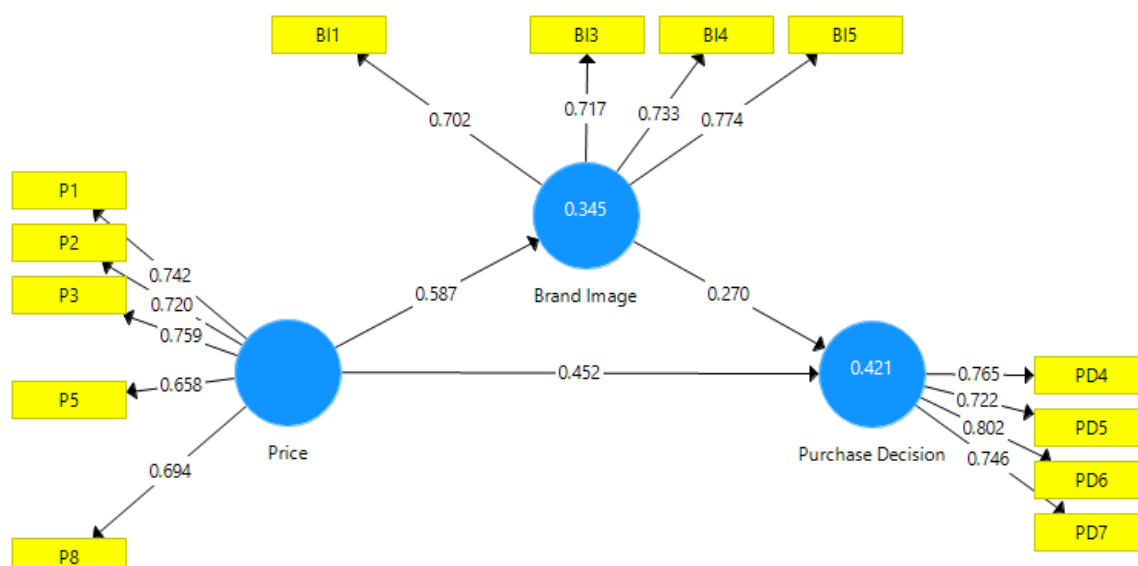


Figure 1. Outer Model

Discussion

The Effect of Price on Brand Image

The results of this study indicate that price has a positive and significant effect on brand image for thrift products among university students in Kendari City. This finding suggests that consumers perceive price not only as an indicator of affordability but also as an important signal for evaluating the credibility and quality of thrift products. In the thrift fashion market, where product quality is often difficult to assess before purchase, consumers rely more heavily on observable cues such as price to reduce uncertainty. When the price is perceived as fair and consistent with the product's condition and quality, consumers develop a more favorable brand image because the product is considered to offer both functional and economic value.

This finding is particularly meaningful in the context of Kendari City, where university students represent a highly price-conscious consumer segment with limited purchasing power but strong interest in fashion trends. Unlike consumers in premium fashion markets, students often seek products that balance affordability, uniqueness, and acceptable quality. Consequently, price serves not merely as a monetary consideration but also as a cue that helps consumers judge whether thrift products represent a smart and worthwhile purchase. The perception that thrift products provide comparable quality at lower prices than new fashion products further strengthens brand evaluations and reinforces the image of thrift fashion as an economical yet fashionable consumption alternative (Moon et al., 2025). This contextual characteristic helps explain why price exerts a relatively strong influence on brand image in this study.

From the perspective of signaling theory, Spence (1973) finds that price functions as a quality signal when consumers face information asymmetry. However, this signaling mechanism appears to be more prominent in the thrift fashion market because consumers have limited opportunities to evaluate product durability, originality, and condition before purchase. As argued by (Toebast-Wensink & Soyer, 2026), consumers frequently rely on price when objective quality information is unavailable. Likewise, Amaral & Spers (2022) emphasize that second-hand fashion purchases involve not only functional considerations but also symbolic values such as uniqueness, exclusivity, and sustainability. Therefore, in the Kendari thrift market, an appropriate price simultaneously communicates product quality, uniqueness, and consumption value, thereby strengthening consumers' perceptions of the brand.

The findings are generally consistent with Kotler (2019), Ritonga (2024), and Irmasari & Umam (2025), who argue that appropriate pricing contributes positively to brand image

because consumers interpret price as a signal of product value, credibility, and trust. Nevertheless, the present study also extends the existing literature by demonstrating that the influence of price on brand image is highly context-dependent. While previous studies have primarily examined conventional retail products, branded fashion, or general consumer goods, this study shows that in the thrift fashion market, price takes on a more strategic role because it reduces uncertainty associated with heterogeneous product quality and limited product information. Thus, the contribution of this study lies not only in confirming the positive relationship between price and brand image but also in explaining why this relationship becomes particularly salient among university students in Kendari City, where affordability, product uniqueness, and perceived value jointly shape consumers' evaluations of thrift fashion products.

The Influence of Price on Purchasing Decisions

The results indicate that price has a positive and significant effect on university students' purchase decisions for thrift fashion, confirming that price remains a key consideration in consumer decision-making. However, this finding should not be interpreted merely as consumers' preference for low prices. Instead, it reflects consumers' evaluation of value for money, where purchasing decisions arise when the perceived benefits of thrift products outweigh the financial sacrifice. In the Kendari context, where students generally have limited purchasing power and thrift products provide affordable yet fashionable alternatives, consumers tend to perceive reasonably priced products as offering both economic and functional value.

Beyond affordability, consumers also evaluate whether the price is consistent with the product's quality and condition. Given the heterogeneous quality of thrift products, consumers cannot rely solely on brand reputation and instead assess the physical condition, uniqueness, and usability of the product before making a purchase. Competitive pricing, particularly when perceived as fair relative to product quality, enhances consumer confidence and reduces perceived purchase risk (Moon et al., 2023; Kaminskiene et al., 2025). These findings suggest that, in the thrift fashion market, price functions not only as a monetary consideration but also as a signal of product quality and value, thereby strengthening consumers' willingness to purchase.

The findings are consistent with consumer behavior theory, which posits that price is an important component of the marketing mix influencing perceived value and purchase decisions (Kotler 2019). Consumers generally prefer products that maximize benefits while minimizing sacrifice (Khan et al., 2024), and positive price perceptions enhance purchase decisions by increasing perceived value (Nugraha & Nurdiansyah 2022; Martinez & Iran 2024). Similar findings have been reported by (Ambardi et al., 2023; Srividya et al., 2024, Adriansyah & Gumilar, 2024). Nevertheless, previous studies have also shown that in some fashion markets, purchase decisions are influenced more by symbolic value, brand image, and lifestyle than by price alone (Tan et al., 2022; Yani et al., 2024; Ferrinadewi & Nathanael, 2025; Akbar et al., 2025; Sihite et al., 2026), indicating that the role of price may vary across different market contexts.

This study therefore extends the existing literature by demonstrating that the influence of price on purchase decisions is context-dependent. Unlike studies conducted in premium fashion or metropolitan markets, the thrift fashion market in Kendari is characterized by consumers who are highly value-conscious and must cope with uncertainty regarding product quality. Consequently, students rely more heavily on price as an indicator of quality, fairness, and economic value before making purchase decisions. These findings highlight the Kendari thrift market's specific contribution, showing that affordability, perceived quality, and value for money collectively strengthen the role of price in shaping consumers' purchase decisions.

The Influence of Brand Image on Purchasing Decisions

The results indicate that brand image has a positive and significant effect on thrift fashion purchase decisions among university students in Kendari City, suggesting that purchasing decisions are influenced not only by price considerations but also by consumers' perceptions of product quality, credibility, and symbolic value. A favorable brand image reduces uncertainty and strengthens consumers' confidence in purchasing thrift products, which are often associated with quality inconsistency and the stigma of being second-hand goods (Sihite et al., 2026). This finding supports signaling theory, which holds that consumers rely on intangible cues, such as brand image, when objective product information is limited. In the context of thrift fashion, where consumers cannot fully evaluate product quality before purchase, brand image becomes an important mechanism for reducing perceived risk and facilitating purchase decisions.

Beyond its functional role, brand image also reflects the emotional and social value attached to thrift fashion. Consumers, particularly university students, increasingly perceive thrift products as symbols of individuality, fashion consciousness, and environmental responsibility rather than merely affordable alternatives (Amaral & Spers, 2022). Consequently, a positive brand image enhances consumers' self-confidence and strengthens the perception that thrift fashion represents a modern and sustainable lifestyle (Moon et al., 2025; Zechiel et al., 2026). This finding suggests that the influence of brand image extends beyond product evaluation to encompass identity expression and social meaning, which are particularly relevant among younger consumers.

The present findings are generally consistent with previous studies demonstrating that brand image positively influences purchase decisions (Nugraha & Nurdiansyah 2022; Ambardi et al. 2023; Ferrinadewi & Nathanael 2025; Irmasari & Umam, 2025). However, the strength of this relationship may differ across market contexts. Several previous studies conducted in conventional retail or lifestyle fashion markets have reported that consumers may prioritize economic considerations or product attributes over brand image (Adriansyah & Gumilar, 2024). In contrast, the results of this study indicate that brand image remains an important determinant in Kendari City's thrift fashion market. One possible explanation is that consumers face greater uncertainty about the quality, authenticity, and condition of second-hand products than when purchasing new products. Under such conditions, brand image functions as a substitute quality cue, enabling consumers to make purchase decisions despite limited product information. This finding demonstrates that the role of brand image becomes more pronounced in markets characterized by information asymmetry and perceived risk.

Another noteworthy contribution of this study lies in its research context. Kendari represents an emerging thrift-fashion market where consumers, particularly university students, are motivated by economic constraints, fashion trends, and growing awareness of sustainable consumption. These characteristics distinguish the market from those examined in most previous studies and suggest that consumers evaluate thrift products through both utilitarian and symbolic perspectives. Consequently, this study extends the existing literature by demonstrating that brand image is not merely a marketing asset but also a psychological mechanism that helps consumers interpret product value in the context of second-hand fashion. Therefore, thrift business owners should focus not only on competitive pricing but also on strengthening brand image through consistent product quality, transparent product information, effective marketing communication, and positioning strategies that emphasize uniqueness, sustainability, and consumer trust (Youn et al., 2025; Londoño-bedoya et al., 2025; Bai et al., 2026).

The Role of Brand Image in Mediating the Influence of Price on Purchasing Decisions

The results indicate that Brand Image positively and significantly mediates the relationship between Price and Purchase Decisions for thrift fashion products among university students in Kendari City. These findings suggest that price influences purchasing decisions not only directly but also indirectly by shaping consumers' perceptions of brand image. When thrift products are perceived as fairly priced, affordable, and consistent with their quality, consumers develop more favorable brand evaluations, which subsequently strengthen their purchase decisions. This finding implies that price functions not only as an economic consideration but also as a symbolic cue that enhances consumers' confidence in choosing thrift fashion products.

The mediating role of Brand Image is particularly relevant in the thrift fashion market because consumers often face uncertainty regarding product quality, authenticity, and durability before purchase. Consequently, they rely more heavily on price as a signal of quality and credibility, consistent with Signaling Theory Spence (1973). This mechanism is especially evident among university students in Kendari City, whose purchasing decisions are influenced not only by affordability but also by product uniqueness, self-expression, and environmental awareness. Therefore, an appropriate pricing strategy strengthens the perception that thrift fashion represents a smart, fashionable, and sustainable consumption choice, thereby increasing consumers' confidence in their purchase decisions (Kaminskiene et al., 2025; Zechiel et al., 2026; Dissanayake et al., 2026).

These findings support the arguments of Kotler (2019) and Mujahidah et al. (2026), who emphasize that consumers frequently use price as a cue for evaluating brand quality and reputation, and are consistent with the studies of (Ritonga (2024; Irmasari & Umam 2025; Wijayanti et al. 2024; Gunawan et al.(2024; Kamalia & Sukri 2024), which highlight the mediating role of Brand Image in the relationship between price and purchasing decisions. However, unlike most previous studies conducted in the context of new fashion products, cosmetics, or conventional retail, this study demonstrates that the mediating role of Brand Image becomes particularly important in the thrift fashion market, where product quality is more heterogeneous and difficult to evaluate before purchase. Accordingly, this study extends the consumer behavior literature by showing that in the Kendari thrift market, price primarily serves as a quality signal that strengthens brand image, reduces perceived risk, and ultimately influences consumers' purchase decisions.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Price has a positive and significant influence on Brand Image and Purchase Decisions among university students purchasing thrift fashion products in Kendari City. In addition, Brand Image positively affects Purchase Decisions. It partially mediates the relationship between Price and Purchase Decisions, indicating that consumers evaluate price not solely as an economic consideration but also as a signal that shapes favorable brand perceptions before purchase decisions. These findings demonstrate that an effective pricing strategy strengthens purchase decisions both directly and indirectly through the development of a positive brand image.

Theoretically, this study extends the application of the Theory of Planned Behavior, Consumer Behavior Theory, and Signaling Theory by demonstrating that price influences on purchasing decisions are not merely direct economic effects but also operate through consumers' psychological evaluations of brand image in the context of thrift fashion. Unlike previous studies that have predominantly focused on new fashion products or conventional retail settings, this research provides empirical evidence from the second-hand fashion market, where product quality is often uncertain, and consumers rely more heavily on price as a quality signal. Consequently, the study contributes to the growing literature on sustainable fashion marketing by highlighting that brand image plays a pivotal role in reducing perceived risk and

encouraging sustainable consumption among young consumers. From a managerial perspective, thrift business owners should develop pricing strategies that not only remain affordable but also communicate product quality and value, while simultaneously strengthening brand image through product curation, service quality, digital marketing, and social media engagement to enhance consumer confidence and long-term purchasing behavior.

Future research is encouraged to develop a more comprehensive model by incorporating additional variables, such as social media marketing, lifestyle, trust, perceived quality, customer experience, and green consumer behavior. Further studies should also examine different consumer segments, including the general public, young professionals, or sustainable fashion communities across different regions, to improve the generalizability of the findings. Finally, employing mixed-methods or qualitative approaches would provide deeper insights into the psychological, social, and sustainability-related motivations underlying consumers' decisions to purchase thrift fashion products, thereby advancing the understanding of sustainable consumption behavior in emerging markets.

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