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Discounts or Brand Image? Unraveling the Drivers of Gen Z Purchase Decisions in Starbucks' "Treat a Friend" Promotion

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Abstract: *The increasing use of digital promotions in the coffee shop industry and the intensifying competition among coffee brands are particularly relevant for Gen-Z consumers. One of the strategies used by Starbucks Indonesia is the "Treat a Friend" promotion through the official LINE account, which offers two drinks at a discounted price. This study aims to analyze the influence of discounts and brand image on Gen Z's purchasing decisions regarding the "Treat a Friend" Starbucks LINE promotion in Palembang City. This research uses a quantitative approach with a causal associative type. Data were obtained through the distribution of questionnaires to 100 respondents selected using a purposive sampling technique. Data were analyzed using SPSS through validity tests, reliability tests, classical assumption tests, multiple linear regression, t-tests, F-tests, and the coefficient of determination. The research results indicate that the research instruments are valid and reliable, and the data meet the classical assumption tests. Discounts and brand image have a positive and significant impact on purchasing decisions, both partially and simultaneously. The R-squared value of 0.751 indicates that both variables can explain 75.1% of the purchasing decision. This finding shows that price appeal and brand image play an important role in shaping Gen-Z's purchasing decisions.*

INTRODUCTION

The advancement of digital technology has aligned Gen-Z's consuming behaviors with online media, particularly in seeking product information and promotions. Badan Pusat Statistik (2024) It was observed that 72.78% of the Indonesian population used the internet in 2024. This situation indicates that digital media is progressively gaining prominence in individuals' lives, particularly in marketing endeavors and the decision-making process regarding purchases. Generation Z, having been raised in a technological environment, typically acquires promotional information more rapidly through digital media, particularly when such promotions correspond with their lifestyle and consumption patterns Tanjung, Elfrianto, & Nasution (2025).

A significant development is the rise in coffee drinking among the youth. Currently,

coffee is seen not merely as a drink but also as an integral aspect of lifestyle and a medium for social interaction Hurdawaty, Wibowo, & Sulistiyowati (2023). According to Databoks (2024) the majority of Gen-Z consumes coffee 1 to 2 times a week. This indicates that coffee shops possess significant potential, particularly when their marketing techniques correspond with the behaviors and traits of young consumers.

The rivalry among coffee shops in Indonesia is intensifying as numerous brands provide comparable items and promotions. GoodStats (2024) reveals that the Indonesian populace favors Kopi Kenangan, Fore Coffee, and Starbucks as their preferred coffee establishments. Although it is not the top brand, Starbucks retains its allure as a globally recognized brand with a robust image. The competition in Palembang is manifested through various promotions by coffee shops, including discounts, buy-one-get-one offers, bundling, coupons, date-specific promotions, and partnerships with banks or e-wallets. Starbucks Indonesia conducts a campaign called the "Treat a Friend" program via its official LINE account. This program provides two medium-sized beverages with a selection of flavors and a discount of up to 55%.

The "Treat a Friend" LINE Starbucks promotion is noteworthy for its emphasis on discounts and the notion of sharing with friends. This concept corresponds with the Gen-Z demographic, which typically favors social experiences and collective consumption activities. Starbucks Indonesia currently employs this promotion as a marketing strategy, appearing approximately 2–3 times weekly. Starbucks Indonesia communicates the campaign through Instagram Stories linked to its official LINE account. Upon adding an account, users can receive promotional information via LINE alerts, facilitating a more direct and personalized delivery of promotional messages.

Initial observations by the researcher at various Starbucks locations in Palembang City indicate that baristas frequently recommend the "Treat a Friend" promotion during its active period. Baristas typically extend this recommendation to consumers accompanied by companions, as the promotion offers two beverages at a more economical rate. Individual consumers should also consider this deal, as it is more cost-effective than purchasing a single drink at the standard price. The allure of the "Treat a Friend" campaign derives not solely from internet marketing communications but also from in-store encounters, barista endorsements, and consumers' perceptions of the more economical pricing.

The utilization of LINE as a promotional platform remains crucial. According to DataReportal (2024), internet users in Indonesia have exceeded 212 million, while The Global Statistics (2025) indicate that LINE is used by 39.7% of users in Indonesia. LINE incorporates social elements such as People Nearby, enabling users to locate individuals in proximity to a designated area, thus maintaining its relevance to users' communication behaviors and social interactions Trisnawardani & Arifin (2023). Both entities benefit from the partnership between Starbucks and LINE. Promotions via the official account can enhance app utilization and user engagement on LINE. For Starbucks, the LINE Official Account functions as a direct channel for disseminating promotional information and illustrating that Starbucks items may be acquired at reduced costs through certain programs.

In marketing, discounts serve as an incentive to purchase, as consumers perceive they are obtaining advantages from reduced pricing Kotler, Keller, & Chernev (2022). Nevertheless, price is not the sole determinant that affects purchasing decisions. The brand image is significant as it pertains to consumer perception, experience, and affiliations with the brand Keller & Swaminathan (2020). Numerous studies indicate that discounts and brand perception significantly affect purchase decisions Bustomi, Basari, & Herlina Hafizah & Simangunsong (2024), Laila,

Kurniati, & Trianti Laila et al. (2023), Nubatonis, Salean, Wijayanti, & Bunga (2026), Octhaviani & Sibarani (2021), Sulaksono, Shamsudin, & Hidayah (2022), Sutrisna et al. (2023). Contrarily, oleh Mardiyah, Yulasmi, & Saputra (2025), Sari, Roosmawarni, & Mulyana (2023) discovered that brand image and discounts do not consistently exert a substantial influence on purchasing decisions.

Variations in past research findings suggest that the impact of discounts and brand image on purchasing decisions has not consistently produced the same outcomes. These discrepancies may arise due to variations in research subjects, consumer traits, product categories, and promotional channels employed. Furthermore, the majority of prior research predominantly emphasizes discounts and brand image in marketplaces, fashion items, cosmetics, or digital services broadly. Scarce research focuses on the "Treat a Friend" offer by Starbucks through the Official LINE Account, particularly among Gen-Z in Palembang City. This research is crucial for assessing if discounts and brand image remain influential variables in purchasing decisions inside the realm of digital promotions via instant messaging programs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Purchase Decisions

The purchase decision is the phase in which consumers select a product after evaluating multiple variables. The process is indirect, commencing with the identification of a need, followed by information retrieval, evaluation of several possibilities, decision-making, and ultimately assessing the experience post-purchase Kotler et al. (2022). Aulia, Sulastri, Maulana, and Rosa (2024) elucidate that consumers typically select products or brands they deem most appropriate for their requirements and preferences after evaluating the available information. This study examines the purchasing decisions of Gen-Z in Palembang City regarding Starbucks products after acquiring knowledge about the "Treat a Friend" campaign via the Official LINE Account of Starbucks Indonesia. The determinants of the purchasing decision include recognizing problems, searching for information, appraising alternatives, making the purchase, and post-purchase behavior Kotler et al. (2022).

Discount

Discounts constitute a marketing strategy utilized by corporations to provide price reductions for a specified duration. This method is frequently employed to capture consumer interest, as reduced pricing might convey the perception that consumers are receiving advantages while acquiring the goods Kotler et al. (2022). Sutrisna et al. (2023) elucidate that discounts may manifest as decreases from the original price or various forms of concessions provided to consumers. According to Widjayanto et al (2022), discounts can serve as a mechanism for companies to stimulate consumer engagement with their products or services. In this study, the discount denotes the price decrease offered by Starbucks Indonesia through the "Treat a Friend" campaign. The discount indicators utilized encompass the discount amount, discount length, product types eligible for the discount, and discount frequency Wardani, Hariyana, & Salsabila (2021)

Brand Image

Brand image pertains to the manner in which people perceive and retain a brand, influenced by their experiences, information, and mental impressions. Keller and Swaminathan (2020) explain that consumers' memory retains associations that construct brand image. Aaker (1991) asserts that brand image pertains to a set of associations linked to a brand that affect consumer evaluations of that brand. In a separate study, Mardiyah et al. (2025) assert that brand image constitutes the consumer's perspective concerning brand connections stored in their

memory. Wijaya and Kusnawan (2022) explain that a sequence of consumer perceptions shapes the construction of brand image. This study defines brand image as Gen-Z's opinion of Starbucks as a worldwide entity that provides not only coffee products but also experiences, ambiance, and specific lifestyle values. The brand image metrics utilized encompass the potency of associations, the appeal of associations, and the distinctiveness of brand affiliations Keller & Swaminathan (2020).

Consumers may consider discounts and brand image prior to making a purchase. Discounts enhance attractiveness through more advantageous pricing, whereas brand image fosters trust and favorable opinions of the brand. Consequently, discounts and brand image are anticipated to affect, both individually and collectively, the purchasing decisions of Generation Z in the "Treat a Friend" LINE Starbucks promotion.

METHOD

This study used a quantitative methodology with a causal associative design to investigate the impact of discounts and brand image on Generation Z's shopping decisions during the "Treat a Friend" promotion on the Official LINE Account of Starbucks Indonesia. The study was carried out in Palembang, using Gen-Z respondents who had previously acquired Starbucks items through promotions.

The primary data was acquired by the dissemination of questionnaires to respondents who fulfilled the research criteria. Concurrently, secondary data were acquired from books, journals, papers, and more sources that substantiate the discourse. Discounts are assessed by metrics like the extent of the discount, the duration of the discount, the category of goods receiving the discount, and the frequency of the discount Wardani et al. (2021). Brand image is evaluated through the strength of associations, the affinity for those associations, and the distinctiveness of brand associations Keller & Swaminathan (2020). The purchase decision is assessed by problem detection, information search, alternative evaluation, buy decision, and post-purchase behavior Kotler et al. (2022). All these variables are subsequently developed into statement items in the questionnaire and assessed using a Likert scale to ascertain the respondents' degree of agreement with each statement Sugiyono (2023).

The research sample was established by purposive sampling, wherein respondents were selected based on criteria that correspond with the research objectives Sugiyono (2023). Respondents must be aged 18 to 29 years, born between 1997 and 2012, reside in Palembang, own the LINE application, be friends with the Official Account of LINE Starbucks Indonesia, and have made at least one purchase through the "Treat a Friend" promotion. The precise population number being indeterminate, the sample size was computed utilizing the unknown population formula, yielding 96.04 respondents, which was subsequently rounded to 100 respondents.

The validity test, reliability, classical assumptions, multiple linear regression, t-test, F-test, and coefficient of determination are employed to assess the data gathered using SPSS. These approaches evaluate the instrument's feasibility, confirm the regression model's suitability, and ascertain the impact of discounts and brand image on purchase decisions, both individually and collectively Ghozali (2021).



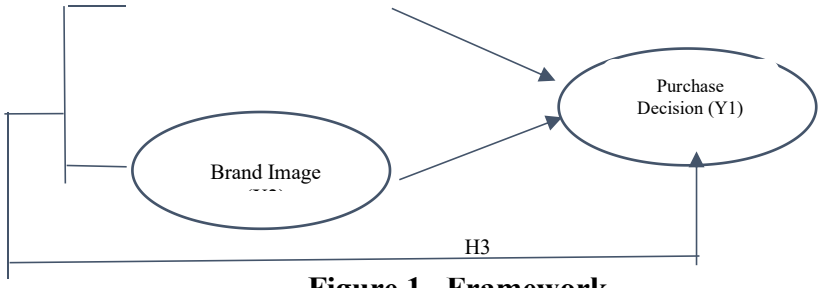

Figure 1. Framework

Figure 1 illustrates the interrelationships among the variables in this study. Discounts and brand image are considered characteristics that purportedly affect purchasing decisions. H1 illustrates the impact of discounts on purchase decisions, whereas H2 demonstrates the effect of brand image on purchasing decisions. Furthermore, H3 suggests that Gen Z perceives discounts and brand image as influencing their purchasing choices in the "Treat a Friend" LINE Starbucks promotion.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Profil Respondents

This study encompasses 100 Gen-Z participants from Palembang who are cognizant of and have engaged in purchases via the "Treat a Friend" offer on the Official LINE Account of Starbucks Indonesia. The participants were primarily female at 89%, aged 21–23 years at 81%, residing in Palembang Ilir at 69%, students at 83%, and reported an average monthly spending of IDR 1,000,000–2,500,000 at 46%. Regarding purchasing behavior, the majority of respondents utilized the "Treat a Friend" promotion 2–3 times at a rate of 50%. The principal source of knowledge about the promotion originated from Instagram Starbucks Indonesia at 48%, followed by friends at 38%, baristas at 8%, and family at 6%. The primary motivations for the purchases were predominantly appealing discounts of 60%, followed by the impact of peers or the surrounding environment at 19%, product quality at 15%, and the accessibility of the promotion at 6%.

Respondents primarily cited the appealing discount as the reason for purchasing Starbucks items through the "Treat a Friend" offer on the Official LINE Account of Starbucks Indonesia, with 60 respondents (60%) indicating this motivation. Nineteen respondents (19%) indicated that the influence of friends or their surrounding environment motivated their buying decision. Fifteen respondents (15%) selected the quality of Starbucks items, whereas six respondents (6%) cited the convenience of acquiring the promotion as their reason.

The findings demonstrate that discounts are the primary determinant in shaping customer purchasing choices. The discount provided by the "Treat a Friend" campaign enhances perceived value and enables consumers to acquire Starbucks products at a reduced price. Moreover, social variables significantly influence purchase decisions. This trend is apparent from respondents who identify the impact of peers or their environment as the primary reason for acquiring Starbucks items. This discovery corresponds with the traits of Generation Z, who typically evaluate recommendations, experiences, and opinions from their social circles prior to making a purchase. As digital natives, Generation Z consumers are highly connected through social media and online communities, making them more susceptible to peer influence and electronic word-of-mouth.

Furthermore, promotional campaigns that encourage social interaction, such as sharing benefits with friends, tend to resonate strongly with this generation. Consequently, combining attractive discounts with socially engaging promotional strategies can effectively stimulate purchase intentions and strengthen consumer engagement with the brand.

Validity Test and Reliability Test

The instrument test results indicate that all statement items on the discount variable, brand image, and purchasing decision are deemed genuine. The r-table value at a 5% significance level with degrees of freedom df = n - 2, where n = 100, is 0.195, and all calculated r-values exceed the r-table value. Reliability testing is conducted to assess the consistency of the instrument. The criterion used is Cronbach's Alpha > 0.70. The test results show that the discount variable has a value of 0.707 > 0.70, the brand image is 0.739 > 0.70, and the purchase decision is 0.811 > 0.70. Therefore, all variables are declared reliable.

Classic Assumption Test

Table 1. Classic Assumption Test

Test	Indicator	Result	Criteria	Conclusion
Normality	Asymp. Sig	0,073	0,05	Normal
Heteroskedasticity	Sig. Discount	0,222	0,05	There is no heteroscedasticity.
	Sig. Brand Image	0,315	0,05	
Multicollinearity	*Tolerance*	0,416	0,10	There is no Multicollinearity
	VIF	2,406	< 10	

The normality test findings indicate an Asymp. Sig. value of 0.073, which is more than 0.05, signifying that the data follows a normal distribution. The heteroscedasticity test reveals that the discount variable has a significance value of 0.222, which exceeds 0.05, while the brand image variable has a value of 0.315, also exceeding 0.05. The results demonstrate that the regression model shows no evidence of heteroscedasticity. The multicollinearity test reveals a Tolerance value of 0.416, which above 0.10, and a VIF of 2.406, which is below 10, suggesting that the study model does not demonstrate multicollinearity.

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Table 2. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Variable	Coefficient B	t-value	Sig.	Description
Constant	5.977	2.738	.007	-
Discount	.702	5.719	.001	Significant
Brand Image	.746	6.033	.001	Significant
F-test	-	146.603	.001	Significant
R-square	-	-	0.751	75.1%

The multiple linear regression findings indicate a constant value of 5.977, a discount coefficient of 0.702, and a brand image coefficient of 0.746. The derived regression equation is $Y = 5.977 + 0.702X_1 + 0.746X_2$. The findings suggest that discounts and brand perception positively affect purchasing decisions. In the t-test, the discount yielded a t-value of 5.719 with a significance level of <0.001, which is less than 0.05, so validating H1. The brand image yielded a

t-value of 6.033 with a significance level of <0.001, which is less than 0.05; therefore, H2 is acceptable.

Moreover, the F-test revealed an F-value of 146.603 with a significance level of <0.001, which is less than 0.05; therefore, H3 is accepted. Consequently, discounts and brand image have been demonstrated to strongly and concurrently affect Gen-Z's shopping decisions in the "Treat a Friend" promotion on the Official LINE Starbucks Account.

The coefficient of determination indicates an R-squared value of 0.751. Discounts and brand image account for 75.1% of the purchasing decision, whilst the remaining 24.9% is affected by factors beyond the purview of this study.

Discussion

The test results indicate that discounts exert a positive and significant influence on Gen-Z's shopping decisions in Palembang City during the "Treat a Friend" promotional campaign on the Official LINE Account of Starbucks Indonesia. The t-value of 5.719, with a significance level of 0.001, which is less than 0.05, indicates acceptance of the first hypothesis. These data demonstrate that discounts continue to significantly influence respondents' purchasing decisions. Within the framework of the "Treat a Friend" campaign, the discount renders Starbucks products more economical, as clients can acquire two medium-sized beverages with complimentary flavor selections. The more significant the perceived advantages of the offer, the greater the propensity for people to acquire Starbucks products.

The research findings indicate that the most highly rated discount indication is the discount size. This suggests that Gen-Z is more likely to buy when they perceive the available deals as financially beneficial. The respondents' behavior indicates that the primary motivation for purchasing Starbucks through the "Treat a Friend" promotion on the Official LINE Account was the appealing discounts. Consequently, discounts are perceived not merely as price reductions but also as opportunities to obtain Starbucks products at a more favorable value. A substantial discount instills a sense of frugality in consumers, prompting them to capitalize on the offer.

This outcome aligns with Kotler et al. (2022), which elucidates that discounts constitute a component of sales promotion methods designed to capture consumer attention through temporary price reductions. This study's discount indicators, as referenced by Wardani et al. (2021), include the discount amount, the duration of the discount, the type of goods eligible for the discount, and the frequency of the discount. Consumers are more inclined to make a purchase when the discount is substantial, the promotional period is well-defined, the discounted products align with their preferences, and promotional material is consistently disseminated. Within the competitive landscape of coffee shops in Palembang City, the "Treat a Friend" promotion emerges as a pertinent strategy, providing both economic advantages and a social experience that resonates with the characteristics of Generation Z. The findings are corroborated by Bustomi, Basari, & Herlina Hafizah & Simangunsong (2024), Fadilah, Barkah, Listiana, Hasanudin, & Fauzan (2023) Laila, Kurniati, & Trianti Laila et al. (2023), Nubatonis, Salean, Wijayanti, & Bunga (2026), Octhaviani & Sibarani (2021), Sulaksono, Shamsudin, & Hidayah (2022), Sutrisna et al. (2023) indicating that discounts affect purchasing decisions.

The brand image has been demonstrated to exert a favorable and substantial influence on purchasing decisions. The t-test yielded a t-value of 6.033 and a significance level of 0.001, which is less than 0.05; therefore, the second hypothesis is accepted. The favorable influence suggests that an improved perception of Starbucks among consumers correlates with an increased

probability of purchase. This survey indicates that respondents' shopping decisions are influenced not only by discounts but also by their view of the Starbucks brand.

The brand image metric with the highest rating is favorability or positive brand perception. This suggests that respondents possess a favorable perception of Starbucks, which enhances their confidence in making a purchase. Starbucks is perceived not merely as a coffee retailer, but as a brand that provides product excellence, a pleasant store ambiance, a contemporary identity, and specific lifestyle values. The image enhances the acceptance of the "Treat a Friend" promotion, as consumers possess inherent faith in Starbucks' quality and reputation.

These findings correspond with Keller and Swaminathan (2020), who elucidate that brand image is constructed from associations retained in customers' memory. Aaker (1991) asserts that brand image pertains to a constellation of connections that influence consumer perceptions of a brand. This study's markers of brand image, as referenced by Keller and Swaminathan (2020), include the strength of associations, favorable appraisal or liking, and the originality of those associations. These findings corroborate the studies of Gunawan and Yulianthini (2022), Hafizah and Simangunsong (2024), Natalia, Andrian, and Sumantyo (2023), Nubatonis, Salean, Wijayanti, and Bunga (2026), and Sahetapy and Manteiro (2026), which demonstrates that brand image affects purchase decisions.

Concurrently, discounts and brand perception exert a considerable influence on purchasing decisions. The F-test yielded a computed F-value of 146.603 and a significance level of 0.001, which is less than 0.05; therefore, the third hypothesis is accepted. The positive correlation suggests that improved discount implementation and a robust brand image of Starbucks significantly increase the probability of Gen-Z in Palembang City engaging in purchases through the "Treat a Friend" campaign. This result indicates that multiple factors, specifically a blend of promotional appeal and favorable brand perception, influence the respondents' purchasing decisions.

This study indicates that discounts yield economic advantages since buyers perceive they are receiving a more economical price. Simultaneously, brand image assures that the acquired product retains high quality and brand equity. The purchasing choice is further supported by the respondents' information patterns, as the majority first discovered the campaign through Instagram Starbucks Indonesia, followed by recommendations from friends. This suggests that digital information and social endorsements assist consumers in identifying promotions prior to making a purchase decision.

This study revealed that most respondents were primarily female and aged 21-23, suggesting that Generation Z more often utilizes the "Treat a Friend" promotional scheme for purchases. According to the theory of buy decision-making, consumers do not make immediate decisions; rather, they progress through multiple stages: detecting needs, seeking information, assessing options, making a purchase decision, and engaging in post-purchase behavior Kotler et al. (2022).

In this research environment, promotional information via Instagram and the official LINE account aids customers in identifying available deals, while discounts and the Starbucks brand image enhance their decision-making process. The R-squared value of 0.751 signifies that discounts and brand image account for 75.1% of the purchasing decision, whereas the remaining 24.9% is affected by extraneous factors not examined in this study, including product quality, service, store location, lifestyle, peer recommendations, or alternative promotional methods. The findings corroborate the studies Bustomi et al. (2024), Hafizah & Simangunsong (2024), Laila et al. (2023), Nubatonis et al. (2026), Octhaviani & Sibarani (2021), Sulaksono, Shamsudin, &

Hidayah (2022), Sutrisna et al. (2023), indicating that discounts and brand image can affect purchasing decisions both independently and concurrently. Consequently, Starbucks' digital promotion strategy via the official LINE account is pertinent as it merges price attractiveness with the robust brand image already ingrained in consumers' perceptions.

CONCLUSION

The research findings indicate that discounts significantly influence Gen Z's purchase decisions in Palembang City during the "Treat a Friend" LINE Starbucks promotion. This indicates that discounts remain a significant factor for young buyers. The stronger the appeal of the discount, the clearer the promotional validity period, the more suitable the product, and the more frequently the promotion is presented, the greater the consumer's inclination to make a purchase. The brand image exerts a favorable and substantial influence on purchasing decisions. This research indicates that Gen-Z evaluates promotional pricing and perceives Starbucks as a robust, known brand with a favorable reputation. Discounts and brand image concurrently exert a substantial impact on purchase decisions, evidenced by a coefficient of determination of 75.1%, and the remaining 24.9% is attributable to extraneous factors not examined in this study.

This study's results theoretically support marketing research indicating that discounts and brand image influence purchasing decisions, particularly in digital promotions via instant messaging services. Starbucks Indonesia is recommended to persist with the "Treat a Friend" campaign via the Official LINE Account, considering the discount magnitude, promotion duration, product category, and promotional frequency. Starbucks must uphold its brand image through product quality, service, and customer experience. Future research should incorporate additional variables such as product quality, service quality, electronic word of mouth, lifestyle, and social influence, as well as broaden the scope of the study.

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