

THE EFFECT OF MARKETING MIX AND REFERENCE GROUP ON CHICKEN NUGGET PREFERENCE THROUGH BRAND IMAGE

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Article history:

Received
21 November 2022

Revised
18 January 2023

Accepted
23 February 2023

Available online
31 March 2023

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Abstract: Due to the increasingly fast-paced lifestyles and busy lives of urban citizens, the demand for chicken nuggets has continued to rise. This study aims to analyze the effect of the marketing mix (product, place, price, promotion) and the reference group on consumer preference for chicken nuggets through the brand image formed in the market. The respondents consisted of 251 individuals who were selected through voluntary sampling. These respondents were people who had consumed Fiesta and So Good brand chicken nuggets in the last three months. Data were collected through an online questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive and Structural Equation Modeling. The results for Fiesta show that place has a significant effect on brand image. Meanwhile, product, reference group, and brand image have a significant effect on brand preference. The results for Fiesta also indicate that brand image is an intervening variable. Therefore, this study concludes that place significantly affects brand preference through brand image. For So Good, the results show that place and promotion significantly affect brand image, but product, price, and reference group have no significant effect on brand image. Furthermore, product, reference group, and brand image significantly affect brand preference. The indirect effects of So Good's brand with brand image as an intervening variable indicate that place significantly affects brand preference through brand image.

Keywords: brand image, chicken nugget, marketing mix, preference, the reference group

Abstrak: Seiring dengan gaya hidup dan kesibukan masyarakat terutama di perkotaan, permintaan chicken nugget terus mengalami peningkatan. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk menganalisis pengaruh bauran pemasaran (produk, distribusi, harga, promosi) dan kelompok acuan terhadap preferensi chicken nugget melalui citra merek. Responden terdiri dari 251 orang yang dipilih secara voluntary sampling. Responden adalah orang yang mengkonsumsi chicken nugget merek Fiesta dan So Good dalam tiga bulan terakhir. Data dikumpulkan secara online serta dianalisis secara deskriptif dan Structural Equation Modelling. Hasil analisis terhadap merek Fiesta disimpulkan bahwa distribusi berpengaruh signifikan terhadap citra merek. Selanjutnya produk, kelompok acuan, dan citra merek berpengaruh signifikan terhadap preferensi merek. Hasil analisis terhadap merek Fiesta untuk pengaruh melalui citra merek sebagai variabel antara dapat disimpulkan bahwa distribusi berpengaruh signifikan terhadap preferensi merek melalui citra merek. So Good menunjukkan bahwa distribusi dan promosi berpengaruh signifikan terhadap citra merek. Selanjutnya, produk, kelompok acuan, dan citra merek berpengaruh signifikan terhadap preferensi merek. sisanya, distribusi dan promosi tidak berpengaruh signifikan terhadap preferensi merek. So Good untuk pengaruh tidak langsung melalui citra merek sebagai variabel antara mengindikasikan distribusi berpengaruh signifikan terhadap preferensi merek melalui citra merek.

Kata kunci: bauran pemasaran, citra merek, chicken nugget, kelompok acuan, preferensi

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INTRODUCTION

Marketing mix is the combination of different marketing decision variables used by companies to market goods and services (Singh, 2012). To satisfy consumer needs, companies must make decisions related to product, price, distribution, and promotion, and these four groups are considered as the main marketing mix elements. According to Kotler and Keller (2008), a reference group is a social group that consists of someone from all groups who have a direct or indirect influence on the attitude or behavior of that person.

Brand image is the consumer's perception of a brand that consumers can always remember. The good or bad image built by the brand can influence consumer behavior in making purchases. Consumers usually don't have time to acquire full knowledge of a product when making a decision; thus, consumers often rely on brand image as an extrinsic cue to make purchasing decisions (Albari and Safitri, 2018).

Brand preference is the consumer belief that one brand is preferred over other similar brands (Wang, 2015). While Tsai et al. (2015) define brand preference as a preference or choice to buy a particular brand that is decided by customers when they encounter the same type of brand.

Belfoods, Fiesta, and So Good are three chicken nugget brands that are always among the top brands, while the Kanzler brand is not included. The Kanzler brand is a new brand whose sales in the last three months of 2021 have exceeded the top three well-known brands. Online chicken nugget sales at Tokopedia from October to December 2021, cumulatively 56% are controlled by Kanzler, 28% by Fiesta, and the remaining 8% each by Belfoods and So Good.

Based on direct interviews on June 5, 2022, by researchers with Agent X, the largest frozen food agent with six stores in Bogor City, Agent X sells offline in stores and online in several marketplaces. However, online sales volume is still small, less than 10% compared to offline sales.

Compared to sales data during the COVID-19 pandemic, post-pandemic sales for Fiesta have decreased in sales volume and market share percentage, while for the So Good and Belfoods brands, sales volume has increased, but in percentage terms, market share has decreased. On the other hand, the Kanzler brand experienced a significant increase in sales volume and market share.

Consumer behavior and preferences for a product will continue to change over time, and rapid changes can influence the growth of the food and beverage industry in customer preferences. Furthermore, changes in consumer behavior and preferences can cause existing strategies not to work optimally. Therefore, research on consumer behavior is important for all product brands worldwide (Nisar, 2014).

Research conducted by Lovell (2011) shows that taste is the main consideration for consumers in determining the choice of frozen food products in Thailand, followed by convenience, packaging, price, brand, and serving time. Another study by Ismoyowati (2015) shows that the halal factor is the most important factor for consumers, followed by price, service quality, and brand. At the same time, research on beverage brands in Pakistan by Nisar (2014) and in Indonesia by Rahdini (2014) shows that brands have the most important role in consumer preferences in choosing products, followed by other factors such as price, product quality, and packaging. This is contrary to what was stated by Nguyen (2014) in his research on food products in Thailand. Nguyen argued that brand is not a significant factor that influences consumers in choosing a product, but rather the suitability of price and quality.

Various studies have been conducted previously to show that the factors that play a role in consumer preference for food and beverage products in each country are different. This shows the need to conduct research with a focus on a particular type of product in an area. For example, researchers feel it is important to research consumer preferences in choosing chicken nuggets in the Greater Jakarta area. Therefore, this research will analyze consumer preferences in choosing chicken nugget brands.

Fiesta's top brand index for chicken nuggets is always above the So Good and Belfoods brands. Belfoods chicken nuggets have the lowest top brand index, but the movement pattern is positive and continues to increase yearly. While So Good, starting in 2015, its top brand index continued to decline, although it experienced a slight increase in 2020, after that, it experienced a decline again. Previously, Kanzler's chicken nuggets were not included in the top brands, but sales at Tokopedia at the end of 2021 far exceeded Fiesta, So Good, and Belfoods, which are included in the three top brand products.

This study has several objectives to analyze the differences in the marketing mix, reference groups, brand image, and preferences between brands, analyze the influence of marketing mix and reference groups on brand preferences through brand image, and formulate the best managerial implications in optimizing the production and marketing of chicken nuggets according to with consumer preferences. This study focused on comparing the Fiesta and So Good chicken nuggets, as the two brands with the highest top brand index until this research was carried out.

METHODS

This research applied quantitative study, was conducted in August 2022. Data was collected using an online questionnaire for respondents who bought and had consumed the Fiesta and So Good chicken nuggets in the last three months. Voluntary sampling was carried out to facilitate data collection. The respondent's data was filtered with repeated questions to ensure that the respondent met the requirements regarding two main criteria, the first being domiciled in Greater Jakarta and the second being that the respondent bought and had consumed Fiesta and So Good chicken nuggets in the last three months. The number of respondents who met the criteria in this study was 251 respondents. The data collection needed in this study was carried out using an online questionnaire to the respondents. The online questionnaire was distributed by sending the Google Docs link that was created. In addition, the questionnaire was distributed using WhatsApp messenger, which was sent via private message to close colleagues and colleagues from colleagues, sent in a chain to colleagues' WhatsApp groups.

The research variables were measured using a five-level Likert scale: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) quite agree, (4) agree, (5) strongly agree. The variables of this study consisted of dependent variables, independent variables, and intermediate variables. The dependent variable was brand preference (BP), the independent variables were product (PD), distribution (PL), price (PR), promotion (PM), and reference group (RG), while the intermediate variable was the brand image (BI).

Descriptive analysis was used to provide an overview of economic and demographic characteristics. Paired t-test analysis was used to test the research variables

between the So Good and Fiesta brands. SEM analysis was used to analyze the influence between variables and answer the hypotheses.

The purpose of this study is to analyze marketing mix factors namely product, price, place, and promotion also reference group that affect the brand image and brand preferences of Fiesta and So Good chicken nugget. As well as the indirect effect of product, price, place, promotion and reference group on brand preference through brand image. Based on the research framework in Figure 1, the hypothesis will be used as follows: H1: Products significantly affect the brand image; H2: Distribution significantly affects the brand image; H3: Price significantly affects the brand image; H4: Promotion significantly affects the brand image; H5: Reference significantly affects the brand image; H6: Products significantly affect the brand preference; H7: Distribution significantly affects the brand preference; H8: Price significantly affects the brand preference; H9: Promotion significantly affects the brand preference; H10: Reference groups significantly affect the brand preference ; H11: Brand image significantly affects the brand preference.

The research framework is made to be able to see the influence of factors that can influence consumer selection based on brands, both directly on brand preferences and indirectly, namely through brand image which is described in Figure 1.

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics

The respondents are residents of the Greater Jakarta area aged between 15 to 56 years, who have purchased or consumed chicken nuggets from Fiesta and So Good brands in the last three months. Thirty percent of the respondents are male, and 70% are female. The age group that dominated the respondents was between 35 to 45 years. Furthermore, the marital status of the respondents was dominated by those who were married. The sample was dominated by those who had completed senior high school education. Housewives accounted for the largest percentage of the sample at 29%. Almost half of the respondents (50%) had a monthly income of Rp. 2,000,001-Rp. 6,000,000, and 47% of respondents lived in Jakarta.

Chicken Nugget Buying Behavior

The purpose of buying chicken nuggets for 93% of respondents was purely for personal/family consumption, and the main reason for buying chicken nuggets was that it was practical. The highest choice of places to shop for chicken nuggets was at general frozen food stores. The consideration of respondents in choosing to buy chicken nuggets at a frozen food store was dominated by the proximity of the store to their residence. Sources of information received by consumers regarding the Belfoods, Fiesta, Kanzler, and So Good brand chicken nuggets were measured by five sources of information media, namely print media, social media, television broadcasting, radio broadcasting, and direct information from friends/

family. Television media for Fiesta and So Good brands dominated as a source of information received by consumers. Fiesta was the most frequently purchased/consumed brand, accounting for 46%, followed by So Good (21%), Kanzler (15%), and Belfoods (6%).

Difference Test between Brands

The highest average score for the seven variables is for Fiesta, except for the price. Of the seven variables, there were significant differences between Fiesta and So Good for the product variables (PD), distribution (PL), price (PR), reference group (RG), brand image (BI), and brand preference (BP). Only promotion (PM) did not differ significantly between Fiesta and So Good brands. Details can be seen in Table 1.

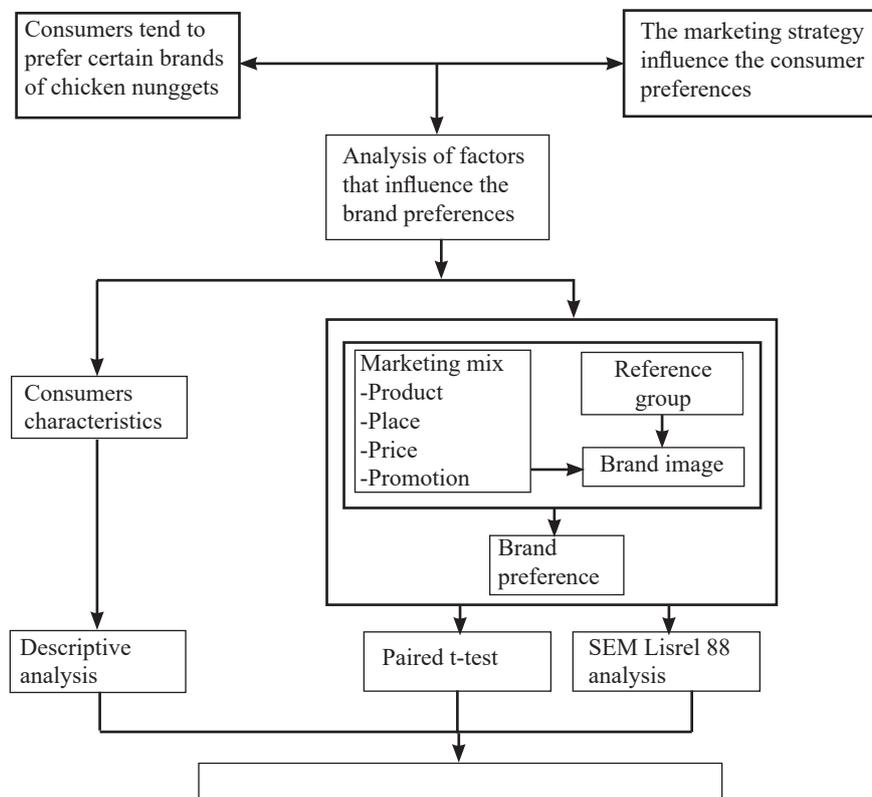


Figure 1. Research hypotheses

Table 1. Results of different test analyses with paired t-test

Variables	Fiesta	So Good	Different test	P-value
Product (PD)	4.08	3.99	0.090	0.001**
Distribution (OT)	4.19	4.11	0.084	0.000**
Price (PR)	3.97	4.01	-0.040	0.026*
Reference group (RG)	3.52	3.46	0.053	0.015*
Promotion (PM)	3.75	3.74	0.020	0.068
Brand image (BI)	4.29	4.24	0.041	0.017*
Brand preference (BP)	4.09	3.93	0.161	0.000**

Note: * significant at $p < 0.05$; ** significant at $p < 0.01$

Overall Model Fit Test (Goodness of Fit)

In this study, the goodness of fit was measured using several indicators, namely RMR, RMSEA, GFI, AGFI, CFI, IFI, NFI, and RFI, as presented in Table 2. The findings revealed that almost all indicators achieved the desired level of fit or cut-off value, indicating that the model fits well and is reliable. Only the AGFI (Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index) parameter fell under the category of marginal fit.

Hypothesis Test

The results of the direct effect test for all variables on Fiesta are presented in Table 3, while those for So Good are displayed in Table 4.

The Effect of Product on Brand Image

The product of Fiesta does not have a significant direct effect on brand image. This is indicated by the result of the t-value of -0.36, which is lower than 1.96, indicating that there is no significant effect between variables. Thus, the first hypothesis (H1) is rejected. The path coefficient results show that the influence has a negative direction (-0.091). Similarly, the product of So Good does not directly affect the brand image. This is indicated by the result of the t-value of -0.42, which is also lower than 1.96, indicating no significant effect between variables. Thus, the first hypothesis (H1) is rejected. The path coefficient results show

that the influence has a negative direction (-0.066). The results of this study are not consistent with the research conducted by Noerchoidah (2013), which states that products significantly influence brand image. However, according to the descriptive test, both chicken nugget products, Fiesta and So Good, received good assessment scores from respondents, indicating that product quality improvements did not significantly affect brand image.

The Effect of Distribution on Brand Image

On the other hand, the distribution of Fiesta and So Good has a significant direct influence on brand image. The t-values for Fiesta and So Good are 3.18 and 4.84, respectively, both greater than 1.96, indicating a significant influence between variables. Therefore, the second hypothesis (H2) is accepted. Furthermore, the path coefficient results show that the influence has a positive direction (0.73 for Fiesta and 0.76 for So Good). This indicates that the better the distribution, the better the brand image. This study's results align with the research of Saputra (2017), which states that location variables, particularly locations, have a significant effect on brand image. Good distribution ensures better availability of chicken nuggets, as they are food products that consumers may need at any time without having to plan extensively to buy them. Thus, whenever consumers want chicken nuggets, these products must be easily available to them. The easier it is to obtain, the better the brand image will be.

Table 2. The goodness of Fit (GOF) research model

Goodness of Fit	Cut off value	Fiesta		So Good	
		Value	Conclusion	Value	Conclusion
RMSR (Root Mean Square Residual)	≤ 0.05	0.028	Good Fit	0.032	Good Fit
RMSEA (Root Mean square Error of Approximation)	≤ 0.08	0.062	Good Fit	0.067	Good Fit
GFI (Goodness of Fit)	≥ 0.90	0.91	Good Fit	0.90	Good Fit
AGFI (Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index)	≥ 0.90	0.86	Marjinal Fit	0.85	Marjinal Fit
CFI (Comparative Fit Index)	≥ 0.90	0.98	Good Fit	0.98	Good Fit
IFI (Incremental Fit Index)	≥ 0.90	0.98	Good Fit	0.98	Good Fit
NFI (Normed Fit Index)	≥ 0.90	0.96	Good Fit	0.96	Good Fit
RFI (Relative Fit Index)	≥ 0.90	0.95	Good Fit	0.95	Good Fit

Table 3. The results of the direct effect test using the SEM for Fiesta brand

Path	Beta	t-value	Conclusion	R-Square
H1: Product (PD) → Brand image (BI)	- 0.091	-0.36	Reject H1	0.50
H2: Distribution (PL) → Brand image (BI)	0.73	3.18	Accept H2	
H3: Price (PR) → Brand image (BI)	- 0.22	-1.67	Reject H3	
H4: Promotion (PM) → Brand image (BI)	- 0.057	-0.32	Reject H4	
H5: Reference group (RG) → Brand image (BI)	0.30	1.76	Reject H5	
H6: Product (PD) → Brand preference (BP)	0.36	1.99	Accept H6	0.63
H7: Distribution (PL) → Brand preference (BP)	- 0.020	-0.11	Reject H7	
H8: Price (PR) → Brand preference (BP)	- 0.095	-0.95	Reject H8	
H9: Promotion (PM) → Brand preference (BP)	- 0.16	-1.24	Reject H9	
H10: Reference group (RG) → Brand preference (BP)	0.31	2.52	Accept H10	
H11: Brand image (BI) → Brand preference (BP)	0.49	5.02	Accept H11	

Table 4. The results of the direct effect test using the SEM for So Good brand

Path	Beta	t-value	Conclusion	R-Square
H1: Product (PD) → Brand image (BI)	- 0.066	-0.42	Reject H1	0.57
H2: Distribution (PL) → Brand image (BI)	0.76	4.84	Accept H2	
H3: Price (PR) → Brand image (BI)	- 0.21	-1.34	Reject H3	
H4: Promotion (PM) → Brand image (BI)	0.53	2.23	Accept H4	
H5: Reference group (RG) → Brand image (BI)	- 0.32	-1.67	Reject H5	
H6: Product (PD) → Brand preference (BP)	0.70	4.81	Accept H6	0.69
H7: Distribution (PL) → Brand preference (BP)	- 0.070	-0.42	Reject H7	
H8: Price (PR) → Brand preference (BP)	- 0.20	-1.60	Reject H8	
H9: Promotion (PM) → Brand preference (BP)	- 0.18	-0.80	Reject H9	
H10: Reference group (RG) → Brand preference (BP)	0.40	2.36	Accept H10	
H11: Brand image (BI) → Brand preference (BP)	0.30	2.44	Accept H11	

The Effect of Price on Brand Image

The price of Fiesta has no significant effect on brand image. This is shown by the results of the t-value of -1.67. This value is less than 1.96, meaning there is no significant effect between variables. The third hypothesis (H3) is not accepted and rejected. The results of the path coefficient show that the influence has a negative direction (-0.22), indicating that the higher the price, the lower the brand image. Thus, the price of So Good does not significantly affect the brand image. This is indicated by the results of the t-value of -1.34. This value is less than 1.96, meaning there is no significant effect between variables. The third hypothesis (H3) is not accepted and rejected. The results of the path coefficient show that the influence has a negative direction (-0.21), which indicates that the higher the price, the lower the brand image. This is not in line with Leksono and Herwin's (2017) research, which states that price has a significant effect on brand image, that the higher the price, the higher the brand

image. Similar to research conducted by Saputra (2017), it was found that the price has a t-value (2.167) > t-table (1.960) and a significance of 0.037 < 0.05, partially price has a significant effect on brand image. Therefore, higher prices are likely to result in a better brand image.

The Effect of Promotion on Brand Image

The promotion of Fiesta has no significant effect on brand image. This is indicated by the t-value of -0.32, which is less than 1.96, meaning that there is no significant effect between variables. Thus, the fourth hypothesis (H4) is not accepted and is rejected. The results of the path coefficient show that the influence has a negative direction (-0.057). This indicates that increasing the promotion will decrease the existing brand image. On the other hand, the promotion of So Good significantly influences the brand image, as indicated by the t-value of 2.23, which is greater than 1.96, indicating a significant influence between variables. Thus, the

fourth hypothesis (H4) is accepted. The results of the path coefficient show that the influence has a positive direction (0.053), indicating that if the promotion is increased, the existing brand image will improve. So Good's promotion is considered to be in line with the intended target market segment. Therefore, with increased promotion, the So Good brand image will continue to increase.

The results of the research on Fiesta are not in line with Rizki's research (2016), which states that advertising attractiveness has a positive effect on brand image. However, the results for So Good are in line with Saputra's research (2017), which concluded that the promotion variable significantly affects brand image. The better the promotion, the better the brand image. This is consistent with Leksono and Herwin's (2017) research on the effect of price and promotion on brand image, which shows the promotion variable's regression coefficient to be positive and significant. This means that promotion significantly affects job satisfaction, and the higher the promotion, the higher the brand image. Marzolina and Marni (2011) also stated in their research that promotion has a significant effect on brand image and is the most influential factor.

The Effect of Reference Groups on Brand Image

The reference group of Fiesta does not directly affect the brand image. This is indicated by the results of the t-value of 1.76, which is less than 1.96, meaning there is no significant effect between variables. Thus, the fifth hypothesis (H5) is rejected. The results of the path coefficient show a positive direction (0.30) of influence, indicating that a better reference group leads to a better brand image. Similarly, the reference group of So Good does not directly affect the brand image. This is shown by the results of the t-value of -1.67, which is less than 1.96, meaning there is no significant effect between variables. Thus, the fifth hypothesis (H5) is also rejected. The results of the path coefficient show a positive direction (-0.32) of influence, indicating that a better reference group leads to a better brand image.

However, these findings differ from Soesanto and Hanif's (2017) study, which concluded that the reference group has a positive and significant effect on brand image. Their study found an estimated value of 0.654 for the influence of the reference group on brand image, indicating a positive and significant influence. In contrast, for the Fiesta and So Good brands, the role of

the reference group in influencing brand image has not been significantly observed. This could be due to both brands' inability, especially in terms of promotion, to identify a suitable reference group figure or influencer that can positively influence consumers and enhance the brand image of both products.

The Effect of Product on Brand Preference

The product of Fiesta has a significant direct effect on brand preference, as indicated by the t-value of 1.99, which is greater than 1.96, indicating a significant influence between variables. Thus, the sixth hypothesis (H6) is accepted. The path coefficient results show a positive direction (0.36) of influence, indicating that a better product leads to better brand preference. Similarly, the product of So Good has a significant direct effect on brand preference, as indicated by the t-value of 4.81, which is greater than 1.96, indicating a significant influence between variables. Thus, the sixth hypothesis (H6) is also accepted. The path coefficient results show a positive direction (0.70) of influence, indicating that a better product leads to better brand preference.

These findings are consistent with Gunawan and Siagian's (2018) study, which found that a quality product has a positive effect on brand preference, generating a desire to choose a brand. Additionally, Anggita and Ali (2017) also stated that product quality has a positive and significant effect on purchasing decisions, either partially or simultaneously.

The Effect of Distribution on Brand Preference

The distribution of Fiesta does not have a significant direct effect on brand preference, as indicated by the t-value of -0.11, which is less than 1.96, indicating no significant effect between variables. Therefore, the seventh hypothesis (H7) is rejected. The path coefficient results show a negative direction (-0.020), indicating that distribution has no significant effect on brand preference. Similarly, the distribution of So Good does not have a direct effect on brand preference, as indicated by the t-value of -0.42, which is less than 1.96, indicating no significant effect between variables. Therefore, the seventh hypothesis (H7) is also rejected. The path coefficient results show a negative direction (-0.070), indicating that distribution has no significant effect on brand preference.

These findings differ from Gunawan and Siagian's (2018) research, which found a positive effect of distribution on brand preference, indicating that a more positive distribution value perceived by consumers leads to more positive brand preference. Additionally, Adisaputra's (2017) research also showed that distribution significantly influences brand preference.

The Effect of Price on Brand Preference

The price of Fiesta does not have a direct significant effect on brand preference. This is indicated by the results of the t-value of -0.95. The value is less than 1.96, which means there is no significant influence between variables. Hence, the eighth hypothesis (H8) is rejected. Furthermore, the path coefficient shows a negative direction (-0.095), which means that the price has no significant effect on brand preference.

The price of So Good does not have a direct significant effect on brand preference. This is indicated by the results of the t-value of -1.60. The value is less than 1.96, meaning there is no significant influence between variables. Thus, the eighth hypothesis (H8) is rejected. Furthermore, the path coefficient shows a negative direction (-0.20), indicating that the price has no significant effect on brand preference.

These results are not consistent with the findings of Adisaputra's research (2017), which indicates that price has a significant effect on brand preference. Therefore, if a company wants to increase brand preference, it is important to pay attention to the price offered to consumers. However, in the case of chicken nuggets, the price does not significantly affect consumers' preference. This might be due to the fact that consumers do not buy chicken nuggets regularly, making price considered non-fundamental in their purchasing decision.

The Effect of Promotion on Brand Preference

The promotion of Fiesta does not directly affect the brand preference, as indicated by a t-value of -1.24. This value is less than 1.96, indicating no significant effect between variables, and thus the ninth hypothesis (H9) is rejected. The path coefficient results reveal a negative influence (-0.16). Similarly, the promotion variable for So Good does not directly affect the brand preference, with a t-value of -0.80, also indicating no significant effect between variables, and H9 is rejected.

The path coefficient shows a negative influence (-0.18). These results differ from Gunawan and Siagian's research (2018), which states that promotion positively impacts brand preference. Brand preference requires promotion because consumers become interested in the brand through interaction. Thus, the more positive the promotion, the more positive the brand preference will be.

The Effect of Reference Group on Brand Preference

The reference group of Fiesta has a significant direct effect on brand preference, as indicated by a t-value of 2.52, which is greater than 1.96. This means there is a significant influence between variables, and H10 is accepted. The path coefficient results show a positive influence (0.31), indicating that a better reference group leads to better brand preference. Similarly, the reference group of So Good directly affects brand preference, with a t-value of 2.36, also indicating a significant influence between variables, and H10 is accepted. The path coefficient shows a positive influence (0.40), indicating that a better reference group leads to better brand preference. These results align with Amirullah et al.'s (2020) study, which shows that the reference group has a positive and significant impact on purchasing decisions.

The Effect of Brand Image on Brand Preference

The brand image of Fiesta has a significant direct influence on brand preference, as indicated by a t-value of 5.02, which is greater than 1.96. This means there is a significant influence between variables, and H11 is accepted. The path coefficient results show a positive influence (0.49), indicating that a better brand image leads to better brand preference. Similarly, the brand image of So Good has a significant direct influence on brand preference, with a t-value of 2.44, also indicating a significant influence between variables, and H11 is accepted. The path coefficient shows a positive influence (0.30), indicating that a better brand image leads to better brand preference. These results align with Amirullah et al.'s (2020) study, which states that brand image significantly affects brand preferences, and Chiu et al.'s (2010) study, which concludes that positive brand image increases brand preference.

The r-square value for brand image on Fiesta is 0.50, while for So Good, it is 0.57. This means that the product, distribution, price, reference group, and

promotion variables influence brand image by 50% for Fiesta and 57% for So Good, while the remaining 50% and 43% respectively are influenced by other variables not examined. Furthermore, the r-square value for brand preference for Fiesta is 63%, and for So Good, it is 69%. This means that the product, distribution, price, reference group, promotion, and brand image variables influence 63% for Fiesta and 69% for So Good, while the remaining 37% for Fiesta and 31% for So Good are influenced by other variables that were not studied.

The Effect of Marketing Mix and Reference Group on Brand Preference through Brand Image

The results of the SEM analysis on Fiesta, regarding indirect effects through brand image as an intermediary variable in this study, can be seen in Table 5, while the results for So Good products can be found in Table 6.

Empirical test results on Fiesta indicate that among the 4P marketing mix components (product, distribution, price, and promotion) and reference group, only distribution has a significant positive effect on brand preference through brand image. This is supported by a t-value of 2.52, which is greater than 1.96, indicating a significant influence between variables. Additionally, the path coefficient of 0.36 indicates a positive direction, meaning that better distribution has a better effect on brand preference through brand image. However, the other components, product, price, reference group, and promotion, have no significant effect on brand preference through brand image.

Regarding So Good products, the SEM results indicate that distribution significantly affects brand preference through brand image, supported by a t-value of 2.04 greater than 1.96. The path coefficient shows a positive direction of 0.23, which indicates that better distribution has a better effect on brand preference through brand image. Conversely, product, price, reference group, and promotion do not significantly affect brand preference through brand image. Interestingly, the study's findings show a difference from Ronald and Sugiharto's research (2017) on the effect of product variables on brand preferences through brand image. While they concluded that brand image functions as an intermediate variable that strengthens the effect of product quality on brand preference, the results of this study suggest that the direct relationship between product quality and customer preference only has a value of $\beta = 0.27$. The study's hypothesis regarding the relationship between product quality and brand image ($\beta = 0.79$) and the relationship between brand image and customer preference ($\beta=0.53$) were more significant, indicating that the relationship is influenced by brand image as an intermediate variable.

Similarly, the influence of price and promotion on brand preference through brand image differs from the results of Ahmad, Alwie, and Kornita's (2021) research, which suggests that both variables significantly influence brand preference through brand image. However, these results align with Tanjung's (2013) research, which demonstrates that price significantly influences brand preference through brand image.

Table 5. The results of the indirect effect test using the SEM Fiesta model

Path	Beta	T-value	Conclusion
Product (PD) → Brand image (BI) → Brand preference (BP)	-0.04	-0.35	Insignificant
Distribution (PL) → Brand image (BI) → Brand preference (BP)	0.36	2.52	Significant
Price (PR) → Brand image (BI) → Brand preference (BP)	-0.11	-1.67	Insignificant
Reference group (RG) → Brand preference (BP) → Brand Image (BI)	-0.03	-0.33	Insignificant
Promotion (PM) → Brand image (BI) → Brand preference (BP)	0.15	1.77	Insignificant

Table 6. The results of the indirect effect test using the SEM So Good model

Path	Beta	T-value	Conclusion
Product (PD) → Brand image (BI) → Brand preference (BP)	-0.02	-0.39	Insignificant
Distribution (PL) → Brand image (BI) → Brand preference (BP)	0.23	2.04	Significant
Price (PR) → Brand image (BI) → Brand preference (BP)	-0.06	-1.18	Insignificant
Reference group (RG) → Brand preference (BP) → Brand Image (BI)	-0.09	-1.24	Insignificant
Promotion (PM) → Brand image (BI) → Brand preference (BP)	0.16	1.42	Insignificant

Likewise, the effect of promotion on brand preference through the brand image is not consistent with the findings of Prasetyaningtyas' research (2013), which indicated that brand image serves as a perfect mediator for advertising and promotional variables in influencing consumer purchase intentions. This suggests that consumers have a positive perception of advertising, leading to an improved brand image, which in turn increases their purchase intentions.

Managerial Implications

The results of SEM analysis on both brands show that distribution significantly influences brand image, then brand image is proven to significantly influence brand preference. The highest indicator contribution to the distribution variable for the So Good brand is the brand that is easy to find in modern retail stores (loading factor 0.48). Thus producer can continue to maintain and improve this brand image by continuing to increase supply to modern retail stores. Based on distribution variables, Fiesta and So Good both got the highest score, these two products are considered easy to find. But the results of the different test on the Fiesta distribution variable are significantly better than So Good. This is partly due to the significant difference in scores related to the availability of So Good chicken nuggets at Best Meat stores, the So Good score is below the Fiesta availability score at Fresmart stores. This is also in line with the respondents' answers to the questionnaire regarding consumer behavior, in which knowledge about Best Meat outlets, the number of outlets, and the number of consumers who shop at Best Meat outlets are lower than Freshmart. So by a thorough analysis process related to additional investment and operational costs associated with sales profit potential, in the future it can be considered to increase the number of Best Meat outlets accompanied by more massive promotions, so that outlets are better known and easier to find by consumers in many places.

The results of the SEM analysis proved that product variables can significantly influence brand preference. The results of the paired t-test show that the Fiesta product variable score is higher than So Good. Indicators of products that differ significantly are the delicious taste and attractive packaging design, Fiesta gets a higher score than So Good. So it needs to be an important consideration for So Good to conduct research in an effort to improve taste to make it more delicious and to research more attractive packaging designs to get better consumer preferences.

The reference group is proven to significantly influence brand preferences, for both brands the indicator of the reference group variable that has a large contribution is the indicator of choosing a brand because it follows recommendations from friends, has the highest loading factor value (0.74 for Fiesta and 0.73 for So Good). The same thing with the indicator of choosing a brand because it refers to artists or celebrities who have a high loading factor (0.69 for Fiesta and 0.66 for So Good). This indicates that the opportunity to influence consumers through reference groups can be carried out well, so chicken nugget producers need to consider using influencers in advertisements in order to increase consumer preference.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The analysis of the results from the different tests using the paired t-test shows that, overall, Fiesta obtains a higher average score than So Good for six out of the seven variables being compared: product, distribution, promotion, reference group, brand image, and brand preference. The only variable where So Good scores higher is the lower price. The paired t-test reveals significant differences between the two brands for the product, distribution, price, reference group, brand image, and brand preference variables, except for promotions.

Regarding Fiesta, distribution has a direct effect on brand image, whereas product, price, reference group, and promotions do not have a significant effect. Furthermore, product, reference group, and brand image have a significant impact on brand preference. Among the variables, only distribution has a significant effect on brand preference through brand image, whereas product, price, reference group, and promotion have no effect.

For So Good, distribution and promotions have a direct effect on brand image, whereas product, price, and reference group do not have a significant effect. Moreover, product, reference group, and brand image have a significant effect on brand preference, while distribution, promotion, and brand image do not affect brand preference. Similar to Fiesta, only distribution has a significant effect on brand preference through brand image for So Good, while product, price, reference group, and promotion have no effect.

Recommendations

To develop future research related to the effect of marketing mix and reference groups on preference through brand image, (1) it is suggested to consider comparing well-known and less well-known chicken nugget brands to see the differences more clearly; (2) social media should be explored as a promotional medium, and research can be conducted to determine the most effective type of social media for chicken nuggets promotion; and (3) to expand the scope of the research, future studies can include areas beyond Greater Jakarta to identify new potential areas for marketing chicken nuggets.

Researchers cannot fully control respondents' answers to the questions posed in the questionnaire, partially because Fiesta and So Good chicken nuggets have several variants. Furthermore, respondents' knowledge and memory of the criteria evaluated from the various chicken nugget variants used in this study may not be the same.

FUNDING STATEMENT: This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not - for - profit sectors.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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