

PERCEIVED PRODUCT QUALITY AND BRAND EXPERIENCE ON PURCHASE DECISION: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF BRAND IMAGE AT ERIKA EXOTICBAG

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Abstract

This study investigated the influence of perceived product quality and brand experience on purchase decisions, with brand image treated as a mediating variable, among consumers of Erika Exoticbag, an Indonesian premium fashion label built on exotic reptile leather. A total of 150 respondents who had purchased or were otherwise familiar with the brand were recruited through purposive sampling. Data will be collected using a five point Likert scale questionnaire and processed with Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS SEM) through SmartPLS. The measurement model confirmed that every indicator met the required standards of validity and reliability. The structural model further showed that perceived product quality and brand experience each produced a positive and significant effect on both purchase decisions and brand image. Brand image itself also exerted a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions and functioned as a complementary partial mediator linking the two exogenous variables to purchase decisions. These results reinforce the relevance of the Stimulus Organism Response framework for explaining purchasing behavior toward niche, exotic fashion products. From a managerial standpoint, the findings underline the importance of strengthening product durability and cultivating brand experiences that encourage repeat purchases, both of which are essential for the continued growth of Erika Exoticbag. **Keywords:** perceived product quality; brand experience; brand image; purchase decision; reptile leather fashion product.

INTRODUCTION

The premium fashion industry has expanded rapidly alongside a growing consumer awareness of product quality, exclusivity, and the symbolic meaning attached to personal belongings. Today's consumers no longer purchase products merely to satisfy functional needs; buying decisions increasingly serve as a means of self expression and a marker of social standing. Nareswari and Suprpto (2023) found that among affluent young consumers, the positional and symbolic value of a fashion product often outweighs purely functional considerations as a signal of social prestige. A 2025 report by McKinsey

and Company reinforces this shift, noting that global fashion consumers now place greater weight on emotional experience and exclusivity than on price alone.

One niche segment that reflects this trend is fashion made from exotic reptile leather, such as monitor lizard and snake skin, prized for its distinctive texture and artistic value. Erika Exoticbag, an Indonesian label established in 2019, has built its identity around this uniqueness through handcrafted premium bags and accessories made of reptile leather. Despite carving out a distinct position in the market, the brand faces mounting pressure from global competitors with far greater marketing resources and distribution networks. Internal sales figures also reveal considerable volatility, with a marked decline during the COVID 19 pandemic driven partly by rising consumer concern over sustainability and a weakening of purchasing power for tertiary goods such as bags and fashion accessories.

Within the marketing literature, perceived product quality is known as a key determinant both brand image and purchase decisions (Kotler and Keller, 2016; Hidayanti, 2021; Rahmawati and Prasetyo, 2023). Alongside product quality, brand experience plays an equally important role in forging emotional bonds with consumers and sustaining their loyalty (Taufiq et al., 2021). Both variables are believed not only to effect purchase decisions directly, but also to operate through brand image as a psychological mechanism that connects marketing stimuli to consumer response. Although prior studies have examined the relationships among product quality, brand experience, brand image, and purchase decisions, research that specifically addresses reptile leather fashion consumers, particularly within the Bali market that Erika Exoticbag is currently developing, remains scarce. This gap underscores the need for the present study.

This study is grounded in several complementary theoretical perspectives that explain the relationship between marketing stimuli and consumer purchasing behavior. The primary framework is the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) model developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), which proposes that external stimuli influence consumers through internal cognitive and emotional processes before resulting in observable behavioral responses. Within the context of this research, product quality and brand experience serve as the external stimuli, brand image represents the consumer's internal evaluation, and purchase decision constitutes the resulting behavioral outcome.

The study is further supported by Perceived Value Theory (Zeithaml, 1988), which argues that consumers' purchase decisions are driven by the value they perceive from a product rather than by its functional attributes alone. This perspective highlights that consumers assess the balance between the benefits they receive and the sacrifices they make, making perceived value a critical determinant of purchasing behavior.

In addition, Brand Experience Theory (Brakus et al., 2009) suggests that consumers develop impressions of a brand through sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral experiences. These multidimensional interactions shape consumers' evaluations of the brand and play a significant role in influencing subsequent purchase decisions. Complementing this view, Brand Association Theory (Keller, 1993) explains that brand image is formed through a network of associations stored in consumers'

memory, encompassing brand attributes, personal experiences, and symbolic meanings. Collectively, these theoretical perspectives provide a comprehensive foundation for understanding how product quality and brand experience contribute to the formation of brand image and ultimately affect consumers' purchase decisions.

Drawing on this theoretical and empirical foundation, the study proposes seven hypotheses. Perceived product quality is expected to have a positive effect on purchase decisions (H1), consistent with Syaifuddin (2024) and Nilowardono et al. (2024). Brand experience is likewise expected to positively influence purchase decisions (H2), as reported by Irawanti (2024). A strong brand image is expected to positively drive purchase decisions (H3), in line with Su (2021) and Kent and Bernarto (2021). Perceived product quality (H4) and brand experience (H5) are each expected to positively affect brand image, following Giantari (2021) and Santini et al. (2020). Finally, brand image is expected to mediate the effects of both perceived product quality (H6) and brand experience (H7) on purchase decisions, as suggested by Damajaya and Sukawati (2025) and Fuadi (2024). These seven hypotheses were tested empirically to provide evidence and managerial implications for strengthening product quality, brand experience, and brand image strategies within the niche reptile leather fashion industry.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a quantitative, explanatory research design to examine the causal relationships among perceived product quality, brand experience, brand image, and purchase decisions. The population comprised consumers who had either purchased or otherwise engaged with reptile leather fashion products, whether through direct purchase or exposure via various marketing channels. A sample of 150 respondents was selected through purposive sampling, with the criterion that respondents had purchased or possessed adequate familiarity with Erika Exoticbag products.

Primary data were gathered through an online questionnaire using a five point Likert scale ranging from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree) (Sugiyono, 2019). The instrument consisted of four sections covering respondent demographics, items measuring perceived product quality across functional and aesthetic dimensions, items measuring brand experience across its sensory, affective, behavioral, and intellectual dimensions, and items measuring brand image and purchase decisions. All items were subjected to preliminary validity and reliability testing prior to distribution.

The data were analyzed in two stages. First, descriptive statistics were used to present the respondents' demographic profiles and describe their responses to each research variable. Next, the proposed research model was tested using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.1. This method was selected because it is well suited for examining complex relationships among latent variables and can produce reliable estimates even when the data do not fully satisfy the assumption of normality.

The evaluation began with the measurement model (outer model) to ensure that the constructs met the required standards of validity and reliability. Convergent validity was assessed using outer loading values and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE),

whereas discriminant validity was examined using the Fornell–Larcker criterion. Construct reliability was then evaluated through Composite Reliability and Cronbach's alpha values. After confirming the adequacy of the measurement model, the structural model (inner model) was assessed by examining the coefficient of determination (R^2) and predictive relevance (Q^2). Finally, hypothesis testing was carried out using the bootstrapping procedure. A hypothesis was considered statistically supported when the p -value was below 0.05 or the t -statistic exceeded 1.96.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Characteristics

The questionnaire, distributed to 150 respondents, produced a profile dominated by female consumers, who accounted for 128 respondents or 85.3 percent, indicating that Erika Exoticbag products appeal more strongly to women, who typically show greater interest in fashion items. In terms of age, most respondents fell within the 25 to 30 year range, comprising 72 respondents or 48.0 percent, reflecting a segment of young adults with modern lifestyles drawn to aesthetic value and exclusivity. By education level, respondents holding a Diploma IV or Bachelor's degree formed the largest group at 86 respondents or 57.3 percent, while by income, the majority earned between IDR 5,000,000 and IDR 10,000,000 per month, accounting for 64 respondents or 42.7 percent. This demographic profile suggests that Erika Exoticbag consumers generally possess sufficient purchasing power and literacy to critically evaluate product quality. A summary of respondent characteristics is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Respondent Characteristics

Characteristic	Classification	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	22	14.7
	Female	128	85.3
Age	25 to 30 years	72	48.0
	31 to 36 years	55	36.7
	Above 37 years	23	15.3
Education	Senior High School	12	8.0
	Diploma I to III	27	18.0
	Diploma IV / Bachelor's Degree	86	57.3
	Master's Degree	25	16.7
Monthly Income	IDR 3,000,000 to IDR 5,000,000	56	37.3
	IDR 5,000,000 to IDR 10,000,000	64	42.7

	Above IDR 10,000,000	30	20.0
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Source: author's data processed, 2026

Measurement Model (Outer Model) Evaluation

Convergent validity testing showed that all items measuring perceived product quality, brand experience, brand image, and purchase decisions produced outer loading values above the 0.70 threshold and AVE values above 0.50, confirming that every indicator adequately reflected its respective construct. Discriminant validity testing using the Fornell Larcker criterion further confirmed that the square root of AVE for each construct exceeded its correlation with other constructs, indicating adequate discriminant validity. In addition, Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha values for all variables exceeded 0.70, demonstrating that the research instrument possessed strong internal consistency and was suitable as a measurement tool. A summary of the outer model results is presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Summary of Validity and Reliability Test Results

Variable	Outer Loading Range	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
Perceived product quality	0.724 to 0.876	0.687	0.946	0.935
Brand experience	0.719 to 0.877	0.670	0.890	0.835
Brand image	0.755 to 0.890	0.725	0.913	0.872
Purchase decision	0.711 to 0.881	0.681	0.864	0.764

Source: author's data processed, 2026

Structural Model (Inner Model) Evaluation

The R Square value for brand image was 0.405, indicating that perceived product quality and brand experience jointly explained 40.5 percent of the variance in brand image, while the R Square value for purchase decisions was 0.579, indicating that 57.9 percent of its variance was explained jointly by perceived product quality, brand experience, and brand image. Both values fall within the moderate category. The Q Square predictive relevance value of 0.750 indicates strong predictive relevance for the research model, with 75 percent of the variance in purchase decisions explained by the model, whether through direct effects or through the mediating role of brand image. A summary of the R Square values is presented in Table 3.

Table 3
R Square Values

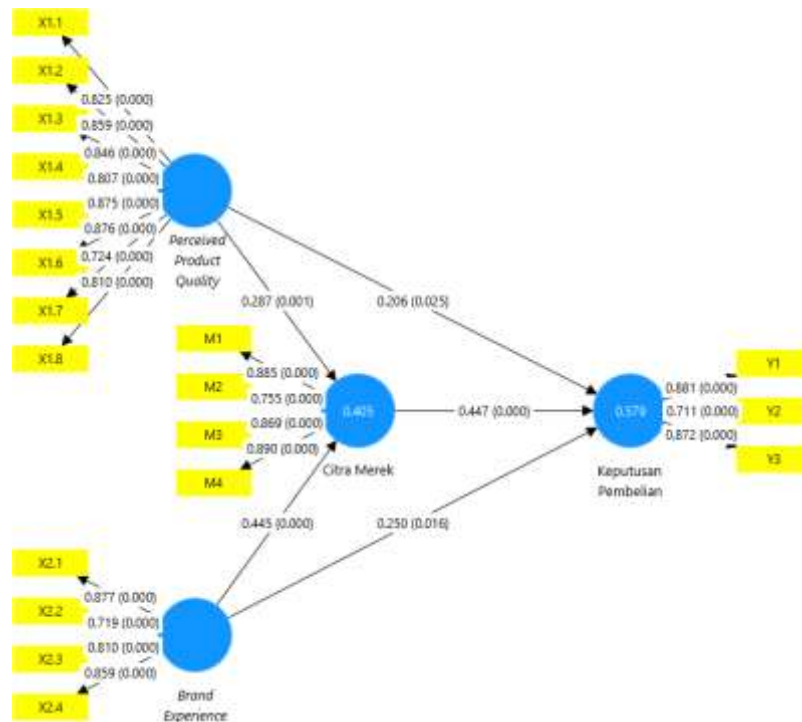
Endogenous Variable	R Square	Category
Brand image	0.405	Moderate
Purchase decision	0.579	Moderate

Source: author's data processed, 2026

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was carried out through a bootstrapping procedure, with relationships considered significant when the p value fell below 0.05 or the T statistic exceeded 1.96. As shown in Figure 1 and Table 4, all seven proposed hypotheses were supported by the results.

Figure 1



Hypothesis Testing Results (SmartPLS 4.1 Bootstrapping Output)

Source: author's data processed, 2026

Table 4
Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path	Coefficient	T Statistics	P Values	Result
H1	Perceived product quality → Purchase decision	0.206	2.237	0.025	Supported
H2	Brand experience → Purchase decision	0.250	2.409	0.016	Supported
H3	Brand image → Purchase decision	0.447	3.965	0.000	Supported
H4	Perceived product quality → Brand image	0.287	3.301	0.001	Supported
H5	Brand experience → Brand image	0.445	4.716	0.000	Supported

H6	Perceived product quality → Brand image → Purchase decision	0.128	2.438	0.015	Supported
H7	Brand experience → Brand image → Purchase decision	0.199	2.803	0.005	Supported

Source: author's data processed, 2026

Perceived product quality was found to have a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions (coefficient of 0.206; p value of 0.025), supporting H1. Brand experience likewise had a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions (coefficient of 0.250; p value of 0.016), supporting H2. Brand image showed a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions, with the largest coefficient among the direct exogenous paths at 0.447 (p value of 0.000), supporting H3. Perceived product quality and brand experience were each found to positively and significantly shape brand image, with coefficients of 0.287 (p value of 0.001) for H4 and 0.445 (p value of 0.000) for H5. Regarding the indirect paths, brand image was confirmed to mediate the effect of perceived product quality on purchase decisions (coefficient of 0.128; p value of 0.015), supporting H6, and to mediate the effect of brand experience on purchase decisions (coefficient of 0.199; p value of 0.005), supporting H7. Because both the direct and indirect effects along these two mediation paths were significant and pointed in the same direction, the role of brand image is best classified as complementary partial mediation.

Discussion

The finding that perceived product quality positively affects purchase decisions confirms that consumers evaluate not only a product's core function but also its design, visual appearance, and aesthetic value, all of which contribute to a sense of exclusivity. The stronger consumers' perception of the quality of Erika Exoticbag's reptile leather products, the greater their confidence that the product is worth owning, a pattern consistent with Syaifuddin (2024) and Nilowardono et al. (2024). Within the SOR framework, perceived product quality functions as a stimulus that consumers process internally, generating a response in the form of purchase intention and decision, a mechanism also explained by Perceived Value Theory (Zeithaml, 1988).

A positive brand experience, particularly the visual experience of observing the design, color, and aesthetic concept of reptile leather products, was likewise shown to encourage purchase decisions, reinforcing the findings of Irawanti (2024), Taufiq et al. (2021), and Rahmawati and Prasetyo (2023). This result aligns with Brand Experience Theory (Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello, 2009), which holds that purchase decisions are driven not only by functional elements but also by consumers' emotional and sensory engagement with a brand.

Brand image emerged as the strongest direct determinant of purchase decisions in this study. Consumers perceive Erika Exoticbag as possessing an appeal and identity that is difficult for other luxury fashion brands to replicate, generating a sense of pride and an emotional impulse to purchase, consistent with Su (2021) and Kent and Bernarto (2021). Beyond their direct effects, perceived product quality and brand experience were also shown to shape a strong brand image, as explained by Brand Association Theory

(Keller, 1993), which in turn indirectly drives purchase decisions. The complementary partial mediating role of brand image along both paths reinforces the findings of Damajaya and Sukawati (2025), Wibowo et al. (2022), and Fuadi (2024), who similarly describe brand image as a psychological bridge connecting quality and experience related stimuli to consumers' final purchase decisions.

Taken together, these results reinforce the relevance of the Stimulus Organism Response framework for explaining purchasing behavior toward niche, exotic fashion products, while offering new empirical evidence from the Indonesian local market, a context that remains underexplored in the marketing literature on reptile leather products.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that perceived product quality and brand experience each exert a positive and significant effect on both purchase decisions and brand image among consumers of Erika Exoticbag. Brand image was also found to positively and significantly affect purchase decisions and to serve as a complementary partial mediator of the effects of both exogenous variables on purchase decisions. These findings indicate that strengthening product quality and brand experience contributes not only directly to purchase decisions but also indirectly through the reinforcement of consumers' perceived brand image.

From a practical standpoint, Erika Exoticbag's management is encouraged to improve the durability and material quality standards of its products by sourcing more premium raw materials and applying stricter quality control, given that long term durability was rated by respondents as an area still requiring improvement. Efforts to strengthen brand experience should also be directed toward strategies that encourage repeat purchases, such as periodic new collection launches, limited editions, customer loyalty programs, and more intensive emotional engagement through social media. Future research is encouraged to broaden the respondent base and incorporate additional relevant variables, such as price, brand trust, lifestyle, social media marketing, and perceived value, to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing purchase decisions for niche reptile leather fashion products.

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