

THE MEDIATING ROLE OF LIFESTYLE IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRODUCT IMAGE AND LOCAL FOOD PURCHASE DECISIONS AMONG GENERATION Z IN TERNATE CITY

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Abstract. This study aims to analyze the influence of product image on local food purchasing decisions among Generation Z in Ternate City, with lifestyle as a mediating variable. The study used a quantitative approach with a survey design. The study population was Generation Z in Ternate City who had consumed local food. A sample of 150 respondents was determined using a purposive sampling technique with the criteria of respondents being Generation Z and having experience purchasing or consuming local food. Data were collected through questionnaires using a Likert scale. Data analysis was performed using Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) which included testing the measurement model (outer model), the structural model (inner model), and testing direct and indirect effects through mediation analysis using the Variance Accounted For (VAF) value. The results showed that product image had a positive and significant effect on purchasing decisions and lifestyle. Lifestyle also had a positive and significant effect on purchasing decisions. In addition, lifestyle was proven to partially mediate the relationship between product image and purchasing decisions with a VAF value of 43.97%. These findings indicate that local food purchasing decisions among Generation Z are influenced by a strong product image and supported by a lifestyle that is developing in the digital era.

Keywords: Local Food; Product Image; Lifestyle; Purchase Decision; Generation Z.

Abstrak. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis pengaruh citra produk terhadap keputusan pembelian pangan lokal pada Generasi Z di Kota Ternate dengan gaya hidup sebagai variabel mediasi. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain survei. Populasi penelitian adalah Generasi Z di Kota Ternate yang pernah mengonsumsi pangan lokal. Sampel berjumlah 150 responden ditentukan menggunakan teknik *purposive sampling* dengan kriteria responden berusia Generasi Z dan memiliki pengalaman membeli atau mengonsumsi pangan lokal. Data dikumpulkan melalui penyebaran kuesioner menggunakan skala Likert. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan *Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares* (SEM-PLS) yang meliputi pengujian model pengukuran (*outer model*), model struktural (*inner model*), serta pengujian pengaruh langsung dan tidak langsung melalui analisis mediasi menggunakan nilai *Variance Accounted For* (VAF). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa citra produk berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap keputusan pembelian serta gaya hidup. Gaya hidup juga berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap keputusan pembelian. Selain itu, gaya hidup terbukti memediasi secara parsial hubungan antara citra produk dan keputusan pembelian dengan nilai VAF sebesar 43,97%. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa keputusan pembelian pangan lokal pada Generasi Z dipengaruhi oleh citra produk yang kuat dan didukung oleh gaya hidup yang berkembang di era digital.

Kata Kunci: Pangan Lokal; Citra Produk; Gaya Hidup; Keputusan Pembelian; Generasi Z.

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INTRODUCTION

Food is a fundamental human need and an essential component of sustainable development. In Indonesia, Law Number 18 of 2012 concerning Food emphasizes the importance of strengthening food security through the utilization of local resources and food diversification. Accordingly, local food serves not only as a source of nutrition but also as a strategic asset for preserving cultural identity, supporting regional economies, and reducing dependence on imported food commodities. Despite these strategic roles, local food consumption has been challenged by rapid changes in consumer behavior driven by globalization and digital technology. Food consumption has evolved beyond fulfilling nutritional needs into a means of expressing lifestyle, identity, and social status, particularly among Generation Z (Suryani, 2022). As the most digitally connected generation, Generation Z is highly influenced by visual appeal, social media exposure, online reviews, and consumption trends when making purchasing decisions (Kusuma & Yuliana, 2021). Recent surveys further indicate that food is among the largest expenditure categories for Indonesian Generation Z, while online food purchasing has become part of their daily lifestyle (BPS, 2023; GoodStats, 2025; JakPat, 2024). These trends present both opportunities and challenges for local food products, which often struggle to compete with modern and globally branded foods.

The issue is particularly relevant in Ternate City, a region renowned for its rich culinary heritage based on sago, cassava, seafood, and indigenous spices. However, data from the Ternate Food Security Agency (2024) indicate that community food consumption remains dominated by rice, whereas the utilization of local carbohydrate sources remains below the expected diversification target. This situation suggests that the abundant availability of local food resources has not been accompanied by strong consumer acceptance, particularly among younger generations. Consequently, understanding the determinants of local food purchasing behavior has become increasingly important for strengthening regional food security and preserving local culinary identity.

Previous studies have consistently identified product image as an important determinant of consumer purchasing decisions because it shapes perceptions of product quality, authenticity, and value (Keller, 2013). Lifestyle has also been recognized as a significant factor influencing food consumption behavior, reflecting individuals' activities, interests, and values that guide purchasing choices (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010). Nevertheless, existing studies predominantly examine modern food products, fast food, or commercial food brands. Moreover, most studies investigate the direct relationship between product image and purchasing decisions, while the psychological mechanism through which lifestyle mediates this

relationship remains insufficiently explored. Empirical evidence focusing on Generation Z consumers of local food in Eastern Indonesia, particularly in culturally distinctive cities such as Ternate, is also still limited.

This research addresses these gaps by examining the mediating role of lifestyle in the relationship between product image and local food purchasing decisions among Generation Z in Ternate City. Unlike previous studies that emphasize direct effects or focus on modern food consumption, this study integrates product image and lifestyle into a mediation framework within the context of local food consumption. This approach offers both theoretical and contextual contributions by explaining how lifestyle shapes purchasing decisions beyond product perceptions and by providing empirical evidence from a region that has received limited attention in consumer behavior research. Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the effect of product image on local food purchasing decisions among Generation Z in Ternate City, examine the influence of product image on lifestyle, investigate the effect of lifestyle on purchasing decisions, and evaluate the mediating role of lifestyle in the relationship between product image and local food purchasing decisions.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research approach with a positivist paradigm to examine the relationship between product image, lifestyle, and local food purchase decisions among Generation Z in Ternate City. Quantitative research is appropriate for testing causal relationships among variables using statistical analysis and hypothesis testing (Sugiyono, 2020). The research was conducted in Ternate City, North Maluku, Indonesia, from November 2025 to February 2026. The population of this study consisted of Generation Z consumers in Ternate City who had previously consumed local food products. Generation Z was selected because this demographic group represents a dominant consumer segment characterized by high digital exposure, dynamic lifestyles, and rapidly changing consumption patterns.

The study employed a quantitative survey design. The population comprised Generation Z consumers residing in Ternate City. The sampling technique used was *non-probability purposive sampling*, in which respondents were selected based on predefined inclusion criteria. To be eligible, respondents had to: (1) belong to Generation Z (aged 12–27 years according to the Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics classification), (2) reside in Ternate City, (3) have purchased and consumed local food products at least twice within the previous six months, and (4) be willing to participate voluntarily by completing the questionnaire. These criteria were established to ensure that respondents possessed sufficient experience with local food products

to provide reliable evaluations. The sample size was determined based on the recommendation for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), which suggests a minimum sample of five to ten observations for each indicator used in the structural model (Hair et al., 2022). As this study employed 15 measurement indicators, the minimum required sample ranged from 75 to 150 respondents. To improve the statistical robustness and stability of the model estimation, this study used the upper limit recommendation, resulting in a final sample of 150 respondents.

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed directly to respondents. The questionnaire was designed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The research instrument consisted of three variables: product image, lifestyle, and purchase decision. Product image was measured using indicators related to product attributes, product quality, product design, benefits, and reputation. Lifestyle was measured through indicators of activities, interests, opinions, product usage, and buying motives. Meanwhile, purchase decision was measured using indicators related to purchase consistency, buying habits, recommendation behavior, repurchase intention, and purchase timing. The data analysis technique used in this study was Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with the assistance of SmartPLS 4. PLS-SEM was selected because it is suitable for predictive and exploratory research models, can handle relatively small sample sizes, and does not require strict assumptions regarding data normality (Hair et al., 2022).

The analysis process consisted of two stages: outer model evaluation and inner model evaluation. The outer model evaluation was conducted to assess the validity and reliability of the constructs. Convergent validity was evaluated using outer loading values and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), where loading values above 0.70 and AVE values above 0.50 indicated acceptable validity. Reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability, with values above 0.70 considered reliable. The inner model evaluation aimed to examine the structural relationships among variables using R-square values, path coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values obtained through the bootstrapping procedure. Hypothesis testing was conducted at a significance level of 5% ($\alpha = 0.05$). A hypothesis was accepted when the p-value was less than 0.05 and the t-statistic exceeded 1.96. Furthermore, mediation analysis was performed to determine the indirect effect of lifestyle on the relationship between product image and purchase decision using the Variance Accounted For (VAF) approach.

RESULTS

Local food refers to food derived from biological resources including agriculture, fisheries, livestock, and plantations that are consumed according to local potential and wisdom as regulated in Indonesian Law Number 18 of 2012 concerning Food. In Ternate City, local food represents not only a source of nutrition but also an important cultural identity inherited across generations. Historically known as the “Spice Islands,” Ternate possesses rich culinary traditions based on seafood, sago, cassava, bananas, and local spices. Traditional foods such as *pupeda*, *gohu ikan*, smoked fish (*ikan fufu*), and various cassava-based products remain important components of local culinary culture. In the digital era, food consumption among Generation Z has shifted beyond biological necessity toward lifestyle expression and symbolic identity communicated through social media platforms.



Figure 1. Local Food of Ternate City
Source: Internet documentation and local culinary sources.

Respondent Characteristics

The respondents consisted of 150 Generation Z consumers in Ternate City who had consumed local food products

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

No.	Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Female	90	60.0
2	Male	60	40.0
Total		150	100%
No.	Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	17–22 Years	111	74.0
2	23–28 Years	39	26.0
Total		150	100%
No.	Consumption Frequency	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	< 3 Times	37	24.7
2	> 3 Times	113	75.3
Total		150	100%
No.	Types of Local Food Consumed	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	<i>Pupeda</i>	137	91.3
2	Cassava	136	90.7

3	<i>Gohu Ikan</i>	131	87.3
4	<i>Sago</i>	108	72.0
5	<i>Sayur Garu</i>	99	66.0
6	Banana	134	89.3
7	Smoked Fish	116	77.3

Based on Table 1, female respondents dominated the study with 90 respondents (60%), while male respondents accounted for 60 respondents (40%). This finding indicates that female Generation Z consumers tend to consume local food products more frequently than male consumers. Based on age distribution, most respondents were aged 17–22 years, totaling 111 respondents (74%), while respondents aged 23–28 years accounted for 39 respondents (26%). This result shows that younger Generation Z consumers constitute the dominant segment in local food consumption behavior in Ternate City.

Regarding consumption frequency, most respondents consumed local food more than three times, accounting for 113 respondents (75.3%), while 37 respondents (24.7%) consumed local food less than three times. This finding indicates that local food products remain relatively integrated into the daily consumption patterns of Generation Z consumers. In terms of food types consumed, Pupeda became the most consumed local food product with 137 respondents (91.3%), followed by cassava (90.7%), bananas (89.3%), Gohu Ikan (87.3%), smoked fish (77.3%), sago (72.0%), and Sayur Garu (66.0%). The high consumption level of traditional foods such as Pupeda and cassava indicates that local culinary products continue to maintain cultural relevance and acceptance among younger consumers in Ternate City.

Descriptive Analysis

Table 2. Frequency distribution of the product image variable (X)

No.	Response Frequency and Percentage										Mean
	STS (1)		TS (2)		KS (3)		S (4)		SS (5)		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
X.1	3	2,0	0	0	6	4,0	72	48,0	69	46,0	4,36
X.2	3	2,0	0	0	4	2,7	66	44,0	77	51,3	4,43
X.3	3	2,0	1	0,7	10	6,7	54	36,0	82	54,7	4,41
X.4	3	2,0	1	0,7	7	4,7	63	42,0	76	50,7	4,39
X.5	3	2,0	0	0	4	2,7	71	47,3	72	48,0	4,39
X.6	3	2,0	0	0	12	8,0	63	42,0	72	48,0	4,34
X.7	4	2,7	0	0	3	2,0	52	34,7	91	60,7	4,51
X.8	3	2,0	0	0	5	3,3	79	52,7	63	42,0	4,33
Total											4,40

Based on Table 2, the Product Image variable obtained a mean score of 4.40 and was categorized as very high. The highest indicator was X.7 with a mean of 4.51, while the lowest was X.8 with a mean of 4.33.

Outer Model

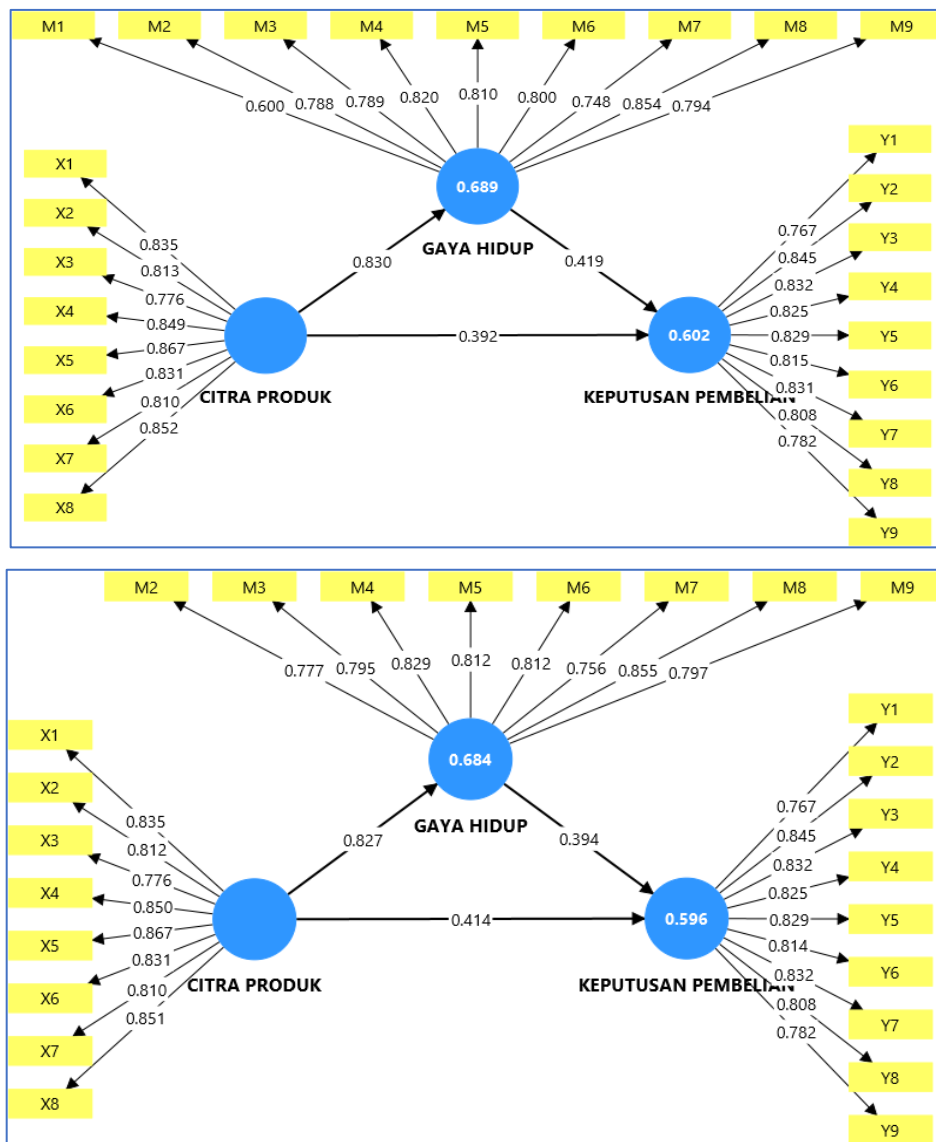


Figure 2. Outer Loading Model Algorithm

Source: *Output SmartPLS*, 2026.

Based on Figure 2, the initial outer loading test shows that most indicators have loading factor values above 0.70, indicating that the indicators are able to explain their respective constructs well. However, indicator M.1 has a loading factor value below 0.70, meaning that it does not meet the convergent validity criterion. Therefore, indicator M.1 was removed and a second-stage outer loading test was conducted.

Table 3. Final outer loading results of X, M, and Y variables

Indicators	Product Image	Purchase Decision	Lifestyle
X.1	0,835		
X.2	0,812		
X.3	0,776		
X.4	0,850		
X.5	0,867		
X.6	0,831		

X.7	0,810	
X.8	0,851	
Y.1		0,767
Y.2		0,845
Y.3		0,832
Y.4		0,825
Y.5		0,829
Y.6		0,814
Y.7		0,832
Y.8		0,808
Y.9		0,782
M.2		0,777
M.3		0,795
M.4		0,829
M.5		0,812
M.6		0,812
M.7		0,756
M.8		0,855
M.9		0,797

Based on Table 3, all indicator loading values are above 0.70 after the removal of indicator M.1. This indicates that all remaining indicators meet the convergent validity requirement and are considered valid in measuring their respective constructs.

Table 4. *Average Variance Extracted (AVE) Values*

Variable	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Product Image	0,688
Lifestyle	0,647
Purchase Decision	0,665

Based on Table 4, all AVE values are greater than 0.50. This indicates that the constructs of Product Image, Lifestyle, and Purchase Decision have adequate convergent validity and are able to explain the variance of their indicators properly.

Table 5. *Composite reliability and cronbach's alpha test*

Variable	Cronbach's alpha	Composite Reliability (rho_a)
Product Image	0,935	0,936
Lifestyle	0,922	0,923
Purchase Decision	0,937	0,942

Table 5 presents the results of the reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values. A construct is considered reliable if the Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values are greater than 0.70. Based on the table above, all variables have Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values above 0.70. Therefore, it can be concluded that all constructs in this study, namely Product Image, Lifestyle, and Purchase Decision, have good

reliability and consistency in measuring their respective constructs. These results indicate that the indicators used in this study are reliable and suitable for further analysis.

Structural Model Testing (Inner Model)

The structural model in PLS shows the strength of the relationship estimation between latent variables or constructs (Ghozali & Latan, 2015:7). The inner model aims to examine the relationships among the variables in the research model. The structural model evaluation in PLS is carried out by analyzing the R-Square value. The following figure presents the structural model results using the PLS Algorithm and PLS Bootstrapping.

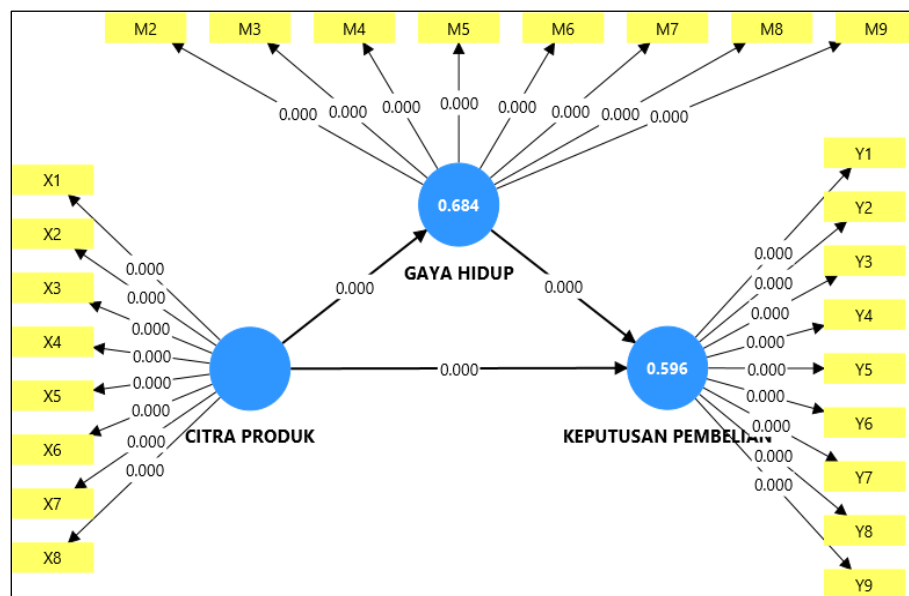


Figure 3. PLS Bootstrapping Results (T-Statistics)

Source: SmartPLS 4.1.1.6 Output, 2026

Based on Figure 3, the results indicate that after conducting validity and reliability testing, all indicators of Product Image, Lifestyle, and Purchase Decision have loading factor values greater than 0.70. In addition, the bootstrapping results show that the relationships among variables are statistically significant based on the T-statistics values obtained from the model.

Tabel 6. R-Square and Adjusted R-Square Values

	R-square	Adjusted R-square
Lifestyle	0,684	0,682
Purchase Decision	0,596	0,591

Based on Table 6, the R-Square value for the Purchase Decision variable (Y) is 0.596, indicating that Product Image and Lifestyle explain 59.6% of the variance in Purchase Decision, while the remaining 40.4% is influenced by other variables not examined in this study. Meanwhile, the R-Square value for the Lifestyle variable (M) is 0.684, meaning that

Product Image explains 68.4% of the variance in Lifestyle, while the remaining 31.6% is influenced by other variables outside this research model.

Hypothesis Testing

Direct Effect Hypothesis Testing

Table 7. Path Coefficients (Mean, STDEV, t-value)

Variables	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Lifestyle → Purchase Decision	0,394	0,399	0,118	3,340	0,000
Product Image → Lifestyle	0,827	0,807	0,080	10,346	0,000
Product Image → Purchase Decision	0,414	0,414	0,112	3,701	0,000

The path coefficient values indicate the significance level of the hypotheses tested in the structural model. The explanations are as follows:

- H1 : Product Image has a positive effect on Purchase Decision. The analysis results show that the T-statistic value is $3.701 > 1.65$ and the P-value is $0.000 < 0.05$. Therefore, H0 is rejected and Ha is accepted. This indicates that a better product image leads to higher purchase decisions.
- H2 : Product Image has a positive effect on Lifestyle. The analysis results show that the T-statistic value is $10.346 > 1.65$ and the P-value is $0.000 < 0.05$. Therefore, H0 is rejected and Ha is accepted. This means that a better product image positively influences lifestyle.
- H3 : Lifestyle has a positive effect on Purchase Decision. The analysis results show that the T-statistic value is $3.340 > 1.65$ and the P-value is $0.000 < 0.05$. Therefore, H0 is rejected and Ha is accepted. This indicates that a higher lifestyle orientation leads to higher purchase decisions.

Indirect Effect Hypothesis Testing

Table 8. Path Coefficients (Mean, STDEV, t-value)

Variables	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Product Image → Purchase Decision	0,326	0,322	0,102	3,209	0,001

Based on Table 8, the indirect effect of Product Image (X) on Purchase Decision (Y) through Lifestyle as a mediating variable has a T-statistic value of $3.209 > 1.65$ and a P-value of $0.001 < 0.05$. These results indicate that Lifestyle significantly mediates the relationship

between Product Image and Purchase Decision. Therefore, the mediation hypothesis (H4) is accepted.

Table 9. Total effect and VAF value

Variables	Direct Effect	Direct Effect	Direct Effect	Direct Effect
Product Image → Lifestyle → Purchase Decision	0,414	0,827x0,394 = 0,325	0,414+0,325 = 0,739	0,325/0,739 = 43,97%

Based on Table 9, the VAF value for the relationship between Product Image, Lifestyle, and Purchase Decision is 43.97%. Since the VAF value falls between 20% and 80%, it can be concluded that Lifestyle acts as a partial mediating variable in the relationship between Product Image and Purchase Decision.

DISCUSSION

The Effect of Product Image on Purchase Decision

The findings demonstrate that product image plays an important role in shaping local food purchase decisions among Generation Z consumers. From the perspective of consumer behavior theory, product image functions as a cognitive shortcut that helps consumers evaluate product quality and reduce perceived purchase risk before making a buying decision (Keller, 2013). This mechanism is particularly relevant for Generation Z, who are frequently exposed to abundant product information through digital media and therefore tend to make rapid evaluations based on visual appeal, brand reputation, and symbolic value. Rather than relying solely on functional product attributes, Generation Z often associates products with personal identity, lifestyle, and social recognition, making a favorable product image an important determinant of purchasing behavior.

The influence of product image is also closely related to the distinctive consumption characteristics of Generation Z. As digital natives, they are highly responsive to attractive packaging, authentic brand narratives, and online recommendations shared through social media platforms. For local food products, a positive image extends beyond perceptions of quality and taste; it also reflects cultural authenticity, regional identity, and support for local producers. When these symbolic and emotional values are successfully communicated, consumers are more likely to perceive local food as modern, relevant, and compatible with their lifestyle, thereby increasing their willingness to purchase. This finding suggests that product image creates value not only through product performance but also through the meanings consumers attach to the product.

These findings are consistent with Keller's (2013) brand image theory, which argues that favorable, strong, and unique brand associations positively influence consumer decision-making. They also support the empirical findings of Marcelina et al. (2023), Nalendra et al. (2023), and Akbari et al. (2024), who reported that a positive product image enhances consumer trust and purchase intention. However, this study extends previous research by demonstrating that, in the context of local food consumption, product image is closely intertwined with cultural identity and lifestyle orientation among Generation Z consumers. This indicates that strengthening local food competitiveness requires not only improvements in product quality but also the development of compelling branding strategies that emphasize authenticity, cultural value, and digital engagement. Consequently, product image should be viewed as a strategic intangible asset capable of enhancing the attractiveness and long-term competitiveness of local food products in the digital marketplace.

The Effect of Product Image on Lifestyle

The findings indicate that product image significantly contributes to lifestyle formation among Generation Z consumers. Product image represents not only perceptions of product quality but also a symbolic expression of identity, values, and social affiliation (Keller, 2013). This relationship is particularly relevant for Generation Z, whose consumption behavior is closely linked to self-expression and identity construction. As digital natives, they are strongly influenced by social media, influencers, and online communities, making products with attractive branding and authentic cultural narratives more likely to become part of their daily lifestyle (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

These findings are consistent with Zahroh (2023) and Permadi et al. (2024), who found that product image positively influences lifestyle. This study further demonstrates that, in the context of local food consumption, product image shapes lifestyle by aligning with Generation Z's values of cultural pride, sustainability, and responsible consumption. Therefore, strengthening local food branding through digital storytelling, modern packaging, and social media engagement can encourage local food to be perceived not only as a traditional product but also as part of a contemporary lifestyle.

The Effect of Lifestyle on Purchase Decision

The findings indicate that lifestyle is an important determinant of local food purchase decisions among Generation Z consumers. From a consumer behavior perspective, lifestyle extends beyond patterns of consumption and encompasses the ways individuals express their

identity, values, interests, and social roles through the products they choose (Kotler & Keller, 2016). For Generation Z, purchasing decisions are often influenced not only by functional product attributes but also by the extent to which products reflect their personal identity and desired social image. Consequently, consumption becomes a form of self-expression through which individuals communicate who they are and the values they support.

This phenomenon is particularly relevant in the digital era, where social media has become an integral part of Generation Z's daily life. Digital platforms continuously expose young consumers to influencers, online communities, user-generated content, and lifestyle trends that shape perceptions of desirable consumption behaviors. As a result, local food consumption is increasingly associated with broader symbolic meanings, including cultural pride, environmental responsibility, support for local communities, and healthy living. When local food products are perceived as compatible with these values, consumers are more likely to incorporate them into their lifestyle and translate this identity into actual purchasing decisions. Thus, lifestyle functions as a psychological mechanism that connects personal values with marketplace behavior rather than simply reflecting habitual consumption.

The relationship between lifestyle and purchase decisions can also be explained through the symbolic consumption perspective, which argues that consumers select products that reinforce their social identity and desired status within their reference groups. Among Generation Z, food choices are frequently displayed through social media as part of personal branding and social interaction. Therefore, purchasing local food represents not only a consumption decision but also an opportunity to demonstrate authenticity, cultural awareness, and social responsibility. This explains why consumers whose lifestyles emphasize these values exhibit stronger intentions to purchase local food products.

These findings are consistent with previous studies by Fitriani et al. (2022), Yuriananda et al. (2023), and Aulia et al. (2024), which reported that lifestyle positively influences purchase decisions. However, this study provides additional insight by demonstrating that, in the context of local food consumption, lifestyle operates through identity expression and digital social influence, two characteristics that strongly define Generation Z consumer behavior. Therefore, enhancing local food competitiveness requires marketing strategies that extend beyond communicating product quality to creating symbolic value through engaging digital content, authentic storytelling, and social media campaigns that resonate with the identity and lifestyle aspirations of younger consumers.

The Effect of Product Image on Purchase Decision through Lifestyle as a Mediating Variable

The findings indicate that lifestyle partially mediates the relationship between product image and purchase decisions, suggesting that the influence of product image extends beyond direct consumer evaluations. A favorable image of local food products encourages Generation Z consumers to develop lifestyles that reflect cultural appreciation, healthy living, and support for local products. These lifestyle orientations subsequently reinforce purchasing decisions, indicating that consumers respond not only to product attributes but also to the symbolic meanings attached to consumption. This mediating mechanism is particularly relevant to Generation Z, whose consumption behavior is strongly influenced by identity expression and social interaction within digital environments. Products perceived as authentic, modern, and socially meaningful are more likely to be incorporated into consumers' lifestyles and communicated through social media as part of their personal identity. Consequently, lifestyle serves as a bridge that transforms positive product perceptions into consistent purchasing behavior.

These findings are consistent with those of Tana and Bessie (2022), Zahroh (2023), and Aulia and Wati (2024), which reported that lifestyle mediates the relationship between product image and purchase decisions. However, this study highlights that, in the context of local food, lifestyle functions not merely as a behavioral pattern but as a mechanism through which cultural values, digital identity, and social influence strengthen the effect of product image on purchasing decisions. This implies that improving the competitiveness of local food products requires marketing strategies that integrate branding with lifestyle-oriented digital engagement, enabling local food to become part of Generation Z's identity rather than simply an alternative consumption choice.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that product image has a positive and significant effect on both lifestyle and purchase decisions of local food among Generation Z consumers in Ternate City. Lifestyle also has a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions and serves as a partial mediating variable in the relationship between product image and purchase decisions. These findings indicate that a favorable product image not only directly encourages consumers to purchase local food but also indirectly strengthens purchasing decisions by shaping lifestyles that reflect cultural appreciation, responsible consumption, and local identity.

The study contributes to the consumer behavior literature by demonstrating that lifestyle functions as an important mechanism linking product image to purchase decisions in the context of local food consumption among Generation Z. The findings suggest that local food is increasingly perceived not only as a functional product but also as a symbol of identity and contemporary lifestyle shaped by digital communication and social values. Practically, these results highlight the importance of integrating branding, product innovation, and lifestyle-oriented digital marketing strategies to enhance the attractiveness and competitiveness of local food products among younger consumers.

This study is limited to Generation Z consumers in Ternate City and focuses only on product image and lifestyle as determinants of purchase decisions. Future studies are encouraged to include respondents from different regions and demographic groups, employ longitudinal or comparative research designs, and incorporate additional variables such as brand trust, perceived value, social media marketing, environmental awareness, and cultural identity to provide a more comprehensive understanding of local food purchasing behavior.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, several operational recommendations are proposed for local food business actors, policymakers, and future researchers.

First, local food MSMEs should strengthen product image by redesigning packaging with contemporary visual identities, providing standardized product information (e.g., ingredients, nutritional value, and production date), and maintaining consistent product quality. Business owners are also encouraged to establish active digital branding through Instagram, TikTok, and other social media platforms by producing short-form promotional videos, collaborating with local content creators, and sharing stories that emphasize the cultural heritage and authenticity of Ternate's local food. Second, the local government and related agencies should implement regular capacity-building programs for local food producers, including branding workshops, digital marketing training, product photography, and e-commerce utilization. In addition, facilitating participation in culinary festivals, local food exhibitions, and digital marketplace campaigns would increase product visibility and market access. Financial support for packaging innovation and product certification should also be prioritized to enhance consumer confidence and market competitiveness.

Third, marketing strategies should position local food as part of Generation Z's lifestyle rather than merely as traditional cuisine. Promotional campaigns can emphasize themes such as healthy living, cultural pride, environmental sustainability, and support for local

communities. Interactive activities, including social media challenges, user-generated content competitions, campus roadshows, and collaborations with influencers and university communities, may effectively increase engagement and encourage repeated purchases among younger consumers. Finally, future studies are recommended to examine additional determinants of local food purchasing behavior, such as digital marketing, brand trust, perceived value, environmental awareness, cultural identity, and social influence. Researchers are also encouraged to employ longitudinal or comparative designs across different regions to better understand changes in Generation Z consumption behavior and improve the generalizability of research findings.

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