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Research Article

Study of the Relationship of e-WOM to Purchase Decision and Brand Image as A Mediation Variable

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Abstract: This research aims to examine the influence of Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) on Purchase Decisions, with Brand Image serving as a mediating variable, focusing on Torch Bag products in the Malang region. Utilizing a quantitative research approach, data were collected through structured questionnaires from 150 respondents and analyzed using the Structural Equation Modeling - Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) method. The findings reveal that e-WOM significantly affects both Brand Image and Purchase Decisions. Moreover, Brand Image has a strong positive impact on Purchase Decisions and also acts as a partial mediator in the relationship between e-WOM and purchasing behavior. This indicates that positive online reviews and consumer interactions not only build trust and enhance a brand's image but also significantly influence the final purchasing decision. The study contributes to the growing literature on digital consumer behavior and highlights the importance of managing online presence and consumer-generated content. For marketers, the results suggest that investing in strategies to stimulate and manage e-WOM can enhance brand perception and drive sales. Maintaining a consistent and positive brand image through online platforms is crucial in today's competitive digital market landscape.

Keywords: Electronic Word of Mouth; Brand Image; Purchase Decision; Consumer Behavior; Online Marketing.

1. Introduction

The rapid growth and depth of information available on the Internet allows consumers to access this information individually with minimal effort and cost (Park et al., 2009). And the advent and expansion of the Internet has expanded the range of consumer options for gathering product information by including other consumers' comments, posted on the Internet, and has given consumers the opportunity to offer their own consumption-related advice by engaging in electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). With the help of the Internet, information is no longer solely controlled by the news media or big business. Individuals can share their thoughts with millions of Internet users and influence the decisions of others through e-WOM (Duan et al., 2008a). The value of complex information goods is difficult to assess because it is only possible to appreciate them after trying them or understanding their content. In other words, many information and cultural goods are experiential goods that consumers need to sample before judging their quality and location in relation to their ideal product (Bounie et al., 2005). While a steady stream of research on the impact of e-WOM on online sales has emerged in recent years, many questions remain unanswered. Research has shown that consumers are motivated to read and write e-WOM for decision-making and social benefits, and this undoubtedly influences purchase decisions (Hennig-Thurau and Walsh, 2003).

Purchasing decisions can be influenced by marketing both offline and online. In today's digital era, marketing is no longer limited to physical interactions in stores or company locations, but has grown significantly through digital channels such as websites, social media, and

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e-commerce platforms. According to Kotler and Keller (2016), digital marketing allows companies to reach consumers in a more personal and interactive way, which can directly influence consumer purchasing behavior.

Furthermore, Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) emphasized that a strong digital presence through social media such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok gives companies the ability to create higher brand engagement and accelerate the consumer decision-making process. This is supported by Tiago and Veríssimo (2014) who stated that the strategic use of digital media can increase brand awareness and strengthen consumer purchase intentions for the promoted products.

Word of mouth is a communication in which individuals exchange information, especially about good things so that it can influence consultant decisions and will direct the business towards achieving success Sapultra (2022). This is because WOM is marketing that is carried out directly between consultants who have used the services of tellerbult release and tell the experiences they have conveyed to family, and friends where they are more confident with stories and experiences from people closest to Maca. where one recommendation from a known person can provide multiple results from unknown people in the process of purchasing products or services Naimah (2018).

Research conducted by Yayli & Bayram (2012) stated that one of the things that is caused by purchasing decisions is the assessment of buyers who are made online through their e-commerce platforms. Purchasing Decision is one of the factors influenced by electronic word of mouth and brand image. One of the factors that influences purchasing interest is electronic word of mouth. The presence of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) is one of the most effective marketing sources Hennig-Thurau et al, (2004). Previous researchers revealed that electronic word of mouth (eWOM) is more effective than personal selling, traditional marketing and conventional media advertising Cheung, (2014). Now more consumers are using electronic word of mouth (eWOM) to make purchasing choices. Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) is used as a description of informal information provided by consumers to other consumers about purchasing or using products and services. Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) is information about a product or service provided by customers through social networks Yan et al, (2016).

This shows that reviews made by previous consumers influence a person's interest in buying a product. Goldsmith and Horowitz (2006) stated that the use of the internet has changed the way consumers communicate and share opinions or reviews about products or services that have been consumed. The process of communication between consumers via the internet is known as Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM) According to Thurau, electronic word of mouth is a positive or negative opinion made by previous consumers about a product that is general in nature via the internet media Thurau, (2004). One form of electronic word of mouth is like comments and reviews from other users on a social networking site, YouTube, Permadi (2019). This is supported by several previous researchers, such as research conducted by Mughoffar, Sumarwan, & Tinaprilla, (2019) and Zakaria, (2020) the better the reviews about the product in online media, the more consumers are interested in buying the product.

The current modern marketing phenomenon is greatly influenced by the development of digital media, especially social media, which has revolutionized the way companies reach and influence consumers. Internet marketing is considered an effective strategy to add value to products and increase consumer purchasing interest. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media provides an interactive platform that allows companies to build two-way relationships with consumers, while strengthening loyalty and purchasing decisions through more personal communication.

Mangold and Faulds (2009) added that social media plays an important role in the modern marketing communication process because it allows consumers to share experiences, opinions, and recommendations, which have a major influence on other consumers' purchasing decisions. In addition, Ashley and Tuten (2015) showed that a consistent and content-based social media marketing strategy can create high customer engagement and have a direct impact on the formation of product value perceptions.

Brand image plays an important role in brand development because it concerns the reputation and credibility of the company's products. Consumers use brand image as a guideline in trying and consuming products. According to Kotler & Kevin, (2016), brand image describes the extrinsic nature of a product or service, including how the brand tries to meet the psychological or social needs of customers. According to Ardana & Rastini, (2018) brand

image is considered a type of association that appears in the minds of consumers when remembering a particular brand. This association simply appears in the form of certain thoughts or images associated with a brand. With a good brand image of a product, it will generate consumer buying interest. Consumers more often buy well-known brand products because well-known brands are reliable, easy to find, and have unquestionable quality, so that better-known brands are more often chosen by consumers than unknown brands. So that brand image is the most important element that can help the marketing process in a company. This research is in line with research conducted by Johan, Juwita, & Megawati, (2021), Adriyati & Indriani, (2017) stating that electronic word of mouth has a significant influence on brand image and buying interest.

The research will use the Torch Bag product as one of the products that is in great demand among young people, especially those who are already familiar with the product, this product is also known to have the most successful purchase slogan during the online shop. Does this Torch Bag product with some of its slogans have a significant influence on purchasing decisions that will be made by consumers of the product.

2. Literature Review

Consumer behavior theory explains how individuals make purchasing decisions and the factors that influence them. Kotler suggests that the consumer decision-making process is influenced by cultural, social, personal, and psychological factors Riegner (2007). Word of Mouth (WOM) – including Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) – is categorized as a strong social influence because it is a recommendation or testimonial from someone else who is considered more credible than a company's advertisement Riegner (2007). For a long time, classic research has shown the impact of WOM on consumer behavior. Arndt (1967), for example, found that conversations between consumers (WOM) play an important role in the diffusion of new products Kotler (2001). In the modern context, e-WOM (electronic WOM via the internet) is becoming increasingly influential as consumers' use of digital media to search for information before buying increases.

Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM)

Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) is defined by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to many people and institutions via the internet" Riegner (2007). This definition emphasizes that e-WOM includes reviews, comments, or recommendations on widely accessible online platforms. From the perspective of the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen), e-WOM can influence subjective norms and consumer attitudes, namely consumer perceptions of what others think and their assessments of products, which ultimately influence purchasing intentions and decisions. In addition, in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), e-WOM acts as an external stimulus that influences the organism (internal consumer processes such as perception or brand image), which then determines the response in the form of purchasing intentions or decisions Shaheer et al (2024). In other words, information from e-WOM can change consumer perceptions/emotions towards a brand (organism) which then influences purchasing actions (responses).

At the alternative evaluation stage in the consumer decision process, consumers now rely heavily on e-WOM. Studies show that as many as 90% of online consumers read other consumers' opinions on the internet before deciding to buy, and 70% of consumers say they trust online reviews more than information from manufacturers Riegner (2007). E-WOM information is considered more honest and unbiased, so it has a big influence on consumer trust. This is in line with the Source Credibility Theory which states that the level of trust in the source of the message affects the effectiveness of the message. Online reviews from other customers are seen as more neutral and experienced sources, so they greatly influence consumer confidence in a product.

Brand Image

In marketing, a brand is not just a name or logo, but a collection of associations and perceptions in the minds of consumers. The concept of brand equity by Aaker (1991) states that brand value is built through elements such as brand awareness, loyalty, perceived quality, and brand associations Kotler (2001). Brand image is an important component of brand equity, which refers to a collection of associations or impressions that arise in the minds of consumers when they hear a particular brand name Jalivland & Samiei (2012). Kotler (2001) defines brand image as "a collection of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has about an object (brand)". Simply put, brand image is the consumer's perception of the brand.

A similar definition was put forward by Kevin Keller, a brand expert: "brand image is a reflection of consumer perception of a product/brand as stored in consumer memory" Jalivland & Samiei (2012) According to Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity model (1993), a strong brand is formed when consumers have positive brand knowledge, consisting of brand awareness and brand image (meaningful associations). Aaker (1997) even stated that a brand is essentially an image in the minds of consumers – a brand that is easy to remember with a positive image will create closeness and attachment with consumers. In other words, brand image reflects everything that consumers associate with a brand, including product attributes, benefits, values, brand personality, and previous experiences.

Purchasing Decision

Purchasing decisions are the final stage of the consumer decision-making process, where individuals choose to purchase a product or service based on an evaluation of various alternatives. According to Kotler and Keller (2016), purchasing decisions are influenced by various factors such as personal, psychological, social characteristics, and external information received by consumers, including promotions, reviews, and recommendations. This process involves five stages, namely problem recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchasing decisions, and post-purchase behavior. In the context of today's digital marketing, purchasing decisions are heavily influenced by information from online platforms such as customer reviews and social media, because consumers are more actively seeking information that can strengthen their beliefs before making a final decision.

The consumer behavior theory of Schiffman and Wisenblit (2015) also explains that purchasing decisions are not only rational, but also influenced by emotional aspects and consumer perceptions of the value offered by the product or brand. Consumers tend to choose products that suit their functional and psychological needs, and these decisions can be modified by brand perceptions formed from personal experiences or external sources such as electronic word of mouth (e-WOM). Therefore, companies need to understand that purchasing decisions are the result of complex interactions between motivation, perception, attitudes, and social and cultural influences mediated by appropriate marketing communication processes.

Theoretical Framework

Based on the theory that has been explained, a conceptual framework can be developed that connects the three variables: e-WOM, brand image, and purchasing decisions. Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) acts as an independent variable that influences Purchasing Decisions (dependent variable) both directly and indirectly through Brand Image (mediator variable). This framework reflects the proposition that e-WOM will form a brand image in the minds of consumers, then the brand image will influence consumer purchasing decisions. A direct relationship between e-WOM and purchasing decisions is also possible, considering that e-WOM can contain persuasive information that immediately encourages consumers to buy. However, the existence of brand image as a mediator can explain how and why e-WOM has an impact - namely by first influencing consumer assessments of the brand.

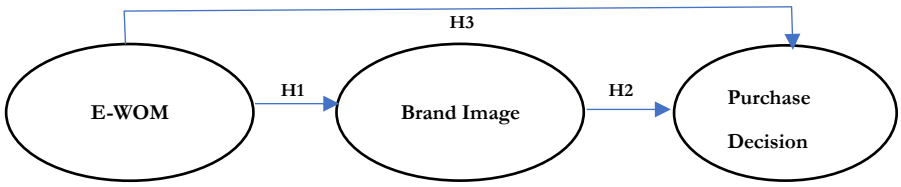

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

In the figure above, the arrow from e-WOM to Brand Image shows the influence of e-WOM on the formation of brand image. The arrow from e-WOM to Purchase Decision illustrates the direct influence of e-WOM on the purchase decision. Meanwhile, the arrow from Brand Image to Purchase Decision represents the influence of brand image (the result of formation by e-WOM and other factors) on the purchase decision. Thus, the framework accommodates the testing of simultaneous relationships between the three variables: (H1) the direct influence of e-WOM → Purchase Decision, (H2) the influence of e-WOM → Brand Image, (H3) the influence of Brand Image → Purchase Decision, and (H4) the indirect influence of e-WOM → Purchase Decision through Brand Image (mediation).

This conceptual framework is supported by previous research findings. For example, the results of Putera & Warmika (2020) analysis on motorcycle consumers show that e-WOM has a significant positive effect on brand image, brand image has a positive effect on purchase intention, and e-WOM has a positive effect on purchase intention; in addition, brand image is proven to mediate the effect of e-WOM on purchase intention. In other words, all relationships between significant variables and mediation are partial. The same thing was also revealed in another study Tariq et al (2017). Therefore, the proposed conceptual model is in line with the literature: e-WOM, brand image, and purchasing decisions are interrelated constructs, where strengthening positive e-WOM will improve brand image, and improving brand image will encourage purchasing decisions that benefit the company.

3. Research Method

This study uses a quantitative approach. According to Sugiyono (2016) quantitative research is a research method based on the philosophy of positivism, which is used to study certain populations and samples. The approach is carried out hypothesis testing, data measurement, and drawing conclusions. The purpose of quantitative research is to find relationships between tested variables, test theories and find generalizations that have predictive value (Sugiyono, 2016).

In order to test the research instrument, validity and reliability tests are carried out. Validity testing is a test used to show the extent to which the measuring instrument used in this study measures what is being measured. Validity testing in this study uses the Product Moment Correlation formula. If r count ≥ r table based on a significant test of 0.05, then the instrument or question items are significantly correlated with the total score and the condition is declared valid. (Umar, 2005)

While the reliability test is a test used to show the extent to which the measurement results with the tool can be trusted, have a level of consistency and stability. Reliability testing in this study uses the Cronbach Alpha formula. If the alpha value > 0.90 means reliability at a perfect level, all items are reliable and all tests consistently have strong reliability. If alpha is between 0.70 - 0.90, reliability is high. If alpha is 0.50 - 0.70, reliability is moderate. If alpha < 0.50, reliability is low. (Umar, 2005)

Sugiyono (2017) stated that validity is the degree of accuracy between the data that occurs in the research object and the data reported by the researcher. Valid data is data that does not differ between the data reported by the researcher and the actual data that occurs in the research object. The validity test of the attitude scale uses the Pearson product moment formula, which is as follows:

$$r = \frac{n\sum X_i Y_i - (\sum X_i)(\sum Y_i)}{\sqrt{\{n\sum X_i^2 - (\sum X_i)^2\}\{n\sum Y_i^2 - (\sum Y)^2\}}}$$

A question is said to be valid and can measure the intended research variable if the validity coefficient value is more than or equal to 0.3 (Azwar, 2016). Based on the results of the instrument test that has been carried out (data attached), it is known that all statement items are declared valid because they have a calculated r value > 0.3. It can be concluded that the questionnaire can be used for further research. A set of questions to measure a variable is said to be reliable and successfully measures the variable we measure if the reliability coefficient is greater than or equal to 0.7 (Ghozali, 2011).

Based on the results of the instrument test conducted (data attached), all variables are declared reliable because they have a Cronbach alpha coefficient greater than 0.7. It can be concluded that the questionnaire can be used for further research. The questionnaire used is a closed questionnaire that has been scored, the data will be calculated statistically. Using the Likert 5 model with categories, namely strongly agree (SS), agree (S), undecided (R), disagree (TS), and strongly disagree (STS). Data analysis and hypothesis testing use the Structural Equation Model - Partial Least Square (SEM-PLS) method. PLS analysis uses two sub-models, namely the measurement model (outer model) used for validity testing and reliability testing, while the structural model (inner model) is used for causality testing or hypothesis testing for prediction model testing (Ghozali & Latan, 2015).

Evaluation of Measurement Model (Outer Model)

Outer model analysis to test the validity and reliability of the list of questions or questionnaires used, so that valid and reliable data are obtained.

- Convergent Validity
  Convergent validity measures the magnitude of the correlation between constructs and latent variables. Indicators are considered valid if they have an AVE above 0.5 or > 0.5 (Abdullah, 2015).
- Discriminant Validity
  According to Ghozali & Latan, (2015), the discriminant validity method tests discriminant validity with reflective indicators, namely by looking at the cross loading value for each variable must be > 0.7. Another method used is to compare the square root of average variance extracted (AVE) value of each construct with the correlation between other constructs in the model, then it is said to have a good discriminant validity value Ghozali & Latan, (2015).
- Composite Reliability
  The reliability test can be seen from the cronbach alpha value, it is said to be reliable if the cronbach alpha value is more than 0.70. to assess the reliability of the construct, the composite reliability value must be greater than 0.7.

Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model)

Inner model, namely the relationship between latent variables (structural model), also called inner relation, describes the relationship between latent variables based on the substantive theory of the study. (Jaya & Sumertajaya, 2008). The structural model was evaluated using R-square for dependent constructs, Stone-Geisser Q-square test for predictive relevance and t-test and significance of the structural path parameter coefficients.

- R-Square (R^2)
  The R-squares values of 0.75, 0.50 and 0.25 can be concluded as strong, moderate and weak models Ghozali & Latan, (2015). The PLS R-squares results represent the amount of variance of the construct explained by the model (Ghozali & Latan, 2015)
- Q^2 predictive relevance
  The Q^2 value > 0 indicates that the model has predictive relevance, while the Q^2 value < 0 indicates that the model has less predictive relevance Ghozali & Latan, (2015). Q^2 measures how well the observation values are generated by the model and also its parameter estimates.

Furthermore, PLS path modeling can identify global optimization criteria to determine the goodness of fit with the Gof index. used to evaluate measurement models and structural

models and in addition provides a simple measurement for the entirety of the model prediction. The GoF value criteria are 0.10 (GoF small), 0.25 (GoF medium) and 0.36 (GoF large) Ghozali & Latan, (2015).

$$GoF = \sqrt{Com\ x\ R^2}$$

In assessing the significance of the influence between variables, a bootstrapping procedure is performed. The bootstrap procedure uses the entire original sample to resample again. Hair (2011) and Henseler et al. (2009) suggest a number of bootstrap samples of 5,000 with the note that the number must be greater than the original sample. However, some literature (Chin, 2003; 2010) suggest a number of bootstrap samples of 200-1000 is sufficient to correct the PLS standard error estimate (Ghozali & Latan, 2015). In the bootstrap resampling method, the significance values used (two-tailed) t-value 1.65 (significance level = 10%), 1.96 (significance level = 5% and 2.58 (significance level = 1%).

Tested using t-test statistics (partial) to determine whether there is a partial influence between the dependent variable and the independent variable (Ghozali & Latan, 2015). The criteria for testing the hypothesis are:

- If the indirect influence is greater than the direct influence, it is said to mediate.
- If the indirect influence is smaller than the direct influence, it is said not to mediate.
- If the t statistic> 1.967, the influence is significant.
- If the p-value for each variable is <0.05, the research hypothesis is accepted

In order to meet the statistical requirements for using regression analysis tools, classical assumption tests are carried out in the form of normality tests, multicollinearity tests, and heteroscedasticity tests. Normality Test is a tool to see whether the residual value is normally distributed or not. A good regression model will be normally distributed. The normality test in this study uses the Kolmogorov Smirnov Test. If the significant probability is> 0.05, it can be said that the data is normally distributed.

Multicollinearity Test, used to measure the level of association (closeness) of the relationship/influence between independent variables through the magnitude of the correlation coefficient (r). If the tolerance value of the independent variable is more than 10%, it can be concluded that there is no multicollinearity between the independent variables. Heteroscedasticity Test, tests whether the variance of the residuals from one observation to another is the same. If there is a similarity in the variance of the residuals from one observation to another observation that has a fixed value, then it is called homoscedasticity. Heteroscedasticity testing in this study uses the Glejser Test (Ferdinan, 2014).

4. Results and Discussion

Result

Respondent Characteristic

This study involved 150 respondents selected through purposive sampling method. The respondent criteria are consumers who have purchased or considered purchasing Torch Bag products and actively access information through digital media such as social media or e-commerce platforms. The following are the characteristics of respondents in this study:

Table 1. Respondent Characteristic

Respondent Characteristic	Total
Gender	
Male	80
Female	70
Age	
< 20 Years	5
21 – 30 years	70
31 – 40 years	60
> 40 years	15

Employment Status	
Students	65
Private Employee	45
Entrepreneur	20
Civil Servant	10
Others (freelancers, non-permanent)	10

Most respondents (±75%) stated that they shop online at least 1-2 times per month, using marketplaces such as Tokopedia, Shopee, and Torch's official e-commerce. This indicates that the majority of respondents are accustomed to using digital platforms and evaluating e-WOM before making purchasing decisions.

PLS Results

Validity Result

Table 2. Validity Test

Variabel Electronic Word Of Mouth		
Item	Perason Correlation Value	Information
EWOM.1	0.623	Valid
EWOM.2	0.614	Valid
EWOM.3	0.620	Valid
EWOM.4	0.803	Valid
EWOM.5	0.782	Valid
EWOM.6	0.772	Valid
Variabel *Brand Image*		
Item	Perason Correlation Value	Information
BI.1	0.879	Valid
BI.2	0.867	Valid
BI.3	0.875	Valid
Variabel Purchase Decision		
Item	Perason Correlation Value	Information
PD.1	0.856	Valid
PD.2	0.857	Valid
PD.3	0.861	Valid
PD.4	0.884	Valid
PD.5	0.860	Valid

Referring to the data attached to the table, it can be interpreted that each item used to explain each variable in this study has met the existing validity requirements. Where the results obtained from testing all items obtained a Pearson correlation value of more than 0.30 and a positive value. This result can be interpreted that all items are strongly correlated and linear in explaining each existing variable.

Reliability Result

Table 3. Validity Test

Variable	N Item	*Cronbach Alpha*	Information
E-WOM	6 Item	0.800	Reliabel
Brand Image	3 Item	0.845	Reliabel
Purchase Decision	5 Item	0.915	Reliabel

Referring to the test results contained in the table, it can be seen that overall the test results on the four variables in this study have a Cronbach alpha value of more than 0.60. From these results it can be interpreted that the research instrument used produces consistent and stable data. From the two test results, it can be concluded that the research instrument used as a measuring tool in this study has met the validity and reliability requirements, so it can be believed that the results of this study can accurately and reliably describe the social phenomena that occur, especially in observing consumer behavior, in terms of E-WOM, brand image and purchase decision.

Inferential Analysis Results

In the proposed research model, there are 3 latent variables, namely: electronic word of mouth (E-WOM), brand image (BI), and purchase decision (PD). All variables in this study will be measured reflectively, using the first order method which is measured with several measurement items. The E-WOM construct is measured with 6 items, BI is measured with 3 items, while the PD construct is measured with 5 measurement items. The following is the specific SEM-PLS model proposed in this study:

Measurement Model Evaluation Results

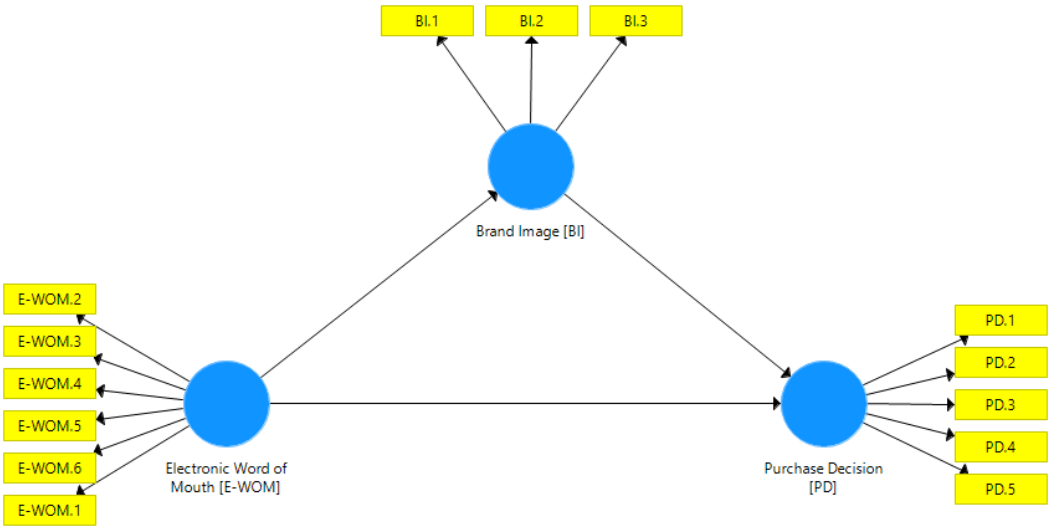

Figure 2. Structural Model Diagram in SEM-PLS (Structural Equation Modeling - Partial Least Squares).

Table 4. Outer Model Evaluation Table

Variabel Electronic Word Of Mouth					
Item	Item Reliability	Convergent Validity			Information
	Outer Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE	
EWOM.1	0.816	0.885	0.912	0.635	Valid
EWOM.2	0.753				
EWOM.3	0.733				
EWOM.4	0.832				
EWOM.5	0.827				
EWOM.6	0.814				
Variabel *Brand Image*					
Item	Item Reliability	Convergent Validity			Information
	Outer Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE	
BI.1	0.879	0.845	0.906	0.763	Valid
BI.2	0.870				
BI.3	0.872				
Variabel Purchase Decision					
Item	Item Reliability	Convergent Validity			Information
	Outer Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE	
PD.1	0.856	0.915	0.936	0.746	Valid
PD.2	0.857				
PD.3	0.861				
PD.4	0.884				
PD.5	0.860				

The measurement model in this study, all constructs built using a reflective measurement model on each variable. The first parameter that researchers use in the evaluation process of this measurement model is the magnitude of the outer loadings value. It can be seen that from the results of the evaluation that has been carried out on 6 indicators in the E-WOM variable, 3 indicators in the brand image variable, and 5 indicators in the purchase decision variable, all indicators have a strong correlation and are positive to each of their latent variables. In this case, researchers use criteria where the outer loadings value on each item must be greater than 0.70.

Meanwhile, the next parameter aspect refers to how well different indicators produce consistent results to measure a latent variable, researchers use three parameters including: cronbach alpha (CA) value, composite reliability (CR) value and average variance extracted (AVE) value. Based on the results of the evaluation that researchers have conducted on the proposed measurement model, researchers can state that each measure used in this study will truly capture the concept to be observed. This is evidenced by the acquisition of CR values exceeding 0.70, CA values exceeding 0.70, and AVE values exceeding 0.05.

Tabel 5. Structural Equation Modeling – Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS)**.**

	Brand Image	***E-Wom***	**Purchase Decision**
Brand Image	-	-	-
E-WOM	0.820	-	-
Purchase Decision	0.835	0.820	-

Next, in the final measurement evaluation process, where the researcher tries to prove that the measurement model built is truly different from each other (convergent validity), the researcher uses the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) parameter. Where in this evaluation process the measurement model must have an HTMT value below 0.90, so that it can be ensured that the model built is truly different. Based on the recapitulation of the HTMT test results, it can be explained that the measurement model that proposed is believed to have differed from one another. The following researchers include a visualization of the results of the measurement model evaluation diagram in this study:

Tabel 6. Structural Model Evaluation Results

Model	**Inner VIF**	**P Value**	**Path**	**F^2/ Upsilon v**
Direct Impact				
E-WOM → Purchase Decision	2.055	0.001	0.198	0.096
Brand Image → Purchase Decision	2.055	0.000	0.743	1.351
E-WOM → Brand Image	1.000	0.000	0.716	1.055
Indirect Impact				
E-WOM → Brand Image → Purchase Decision	-	0.000	0.532	0.283

After the evaluation of the measurement model in this study has been achieved, it is important for researchers to conduct further evaluations, namely structural model evaluations. This evaluation aims to assess the strength and quality of the model built in the study. Where later researchers can assess the predictive power of a proposed model, assess the significance of the relationship between variables and assess the overall quality of the model. The first step taken by researchers before carrying out this structural evaluation process is to check for symptoms of multicollinearity between variables. The variables in the study do not show symptoms of multicollinearity if the inner VIF value is less than 5. Based on the results of the tests that have been carried out, it can be explained that each variable built in a research model does not show symptoms of multicollinearity. So that the next structural evaluation process can be carried out.

Furthermore, based on the results of the evaluation that has been carried out, the researcher obtained the result that the E-WOM variable has a positive and significant influence on purchase decisions. This statement is confirmed by the probability value obtained which shows a value of less than 0.05 and the path coefficient value shows a positive value of 0.198. This result can be interpreted that the relationship between the two variables is linear or in the same direction, where an increase in the value of E-WOM can have an impact on an increase in a consumer's purchase decision. Based on the recapitulation of the test results, it can also be explained that at the structural level E-WOM has a low influence in influencing a person's purchase decision. This is evidenced by the acquisition of an f-square value of 0.096.

Similar results were also obtained by researchers from the results of the structural model evaluation process in the relationship between brand image and purchase decision which was positive and significant. These results indicate that the more positive an individual's perception in viewing a brand, the more it will impact the increase in purchase decision from the individual concerned. This statement can be proven by the acquisition of the probability test value which shows a value of less than 0.05 and a positive influence coefficient value of

0.743. Furthermore, researchers can also explain based on the existing evaluation results that the brand image variable has a high influence at the structural level in influencing purchase decision.

Still referring to the same tabulation results, it can be explained that E-WOM is able to influence brand image positively and significantly. These results indicate that the higher the E-WOM owned by an individual will have a significant impact on increasing their perception of a brand. This statement can be proven by obtaining the results of the structural model evaluation of the relationship between the two variables where the probability value in the relationship has a value of less than 0.05, and the path coefficient value shows a positive value of 0.716. Meanwhile, regarding the magnitude of the influence that E-WOM can provide in improving brand image, it can be categorized as a high influence at the structural level, where this is confirmed by obtaining an f-square value of 1.055.

In the indirect influence model, researchers obtained results that brand image is able to significantly provide a mediating influence in the relationship between E-WOM and purchase decisions. This result can be proven through the acquisition of the probability value of the structural evaluation results which show a value of less than 0.05. With this result, it can be interpreted that the presence of high E-WOM from a consumer can cause an increase in the brand image they perceive, so that in the end it can increase the purchase decision for a product. Meanwhile, to be able to find out the magnitude of the mediating influence given by job satisfaction in the model, researchers used the upsilon-v statistical calculation method with the following formula: Upsilon v = β ^ 2 MX × β ^ 2 YMX. Based on the results of these calculations, the upsilon v value was obtained as 0.283. So it can be interpreted that at the structural level the brand image variable has a moderate mediating influence in the relationship between E-WOM and purchase decisions.

Meanwhile, to be able to evaluate the suitability or feasibility of the model, researchers use four parameters, including: R-square, Q-square, SRMR, and PLS Predict, the following is a recapitulation of the test results:

Table 7. Inner Model Evaluation Table and PLS Predict Output

R-Square	**Brand Image**	**0.513**		
	Purchase Decision	**0.801**		
Q-Square	**Brand Image**	**0.381**		
	Purchase Decision	**0.582**		
SRMR		**0.059**		
PLS PREDICT	**PLS**		**LM**	
Item	**RMSE**	**MAE**	**RMSE**	**MAE**
BI.1	0.734	0.621	0.768	0.638
BI.2	0.781	0.565	0.704	0.572
BI.3	0.747	0.614	0.762	0.619
PD.1	0.753	0594	0.771	0.601
PD.2	0.744	0.609	0.757	0.589
PD.3	0.788	0.608	0.777	0.589
PD.4	0.762	0.613	0.786	0.624
PD.5	0.722	0.561	0.747	0.574

Based on the results of the tests that the researcher has conducted, the researcher obtained the results that in terms of predictive power, the brand image construct in this structural model has a high predictive power. This can be confirmed from the test results obtained by the R-square value of 0.513 or equivalent to 51.3%. While the purchase decision construct has a high predictive power. This statement can be proven through the acquisition of the R-Square

value of the construct of 0.801 or equivalent to 80.1%. If the suitability of the model in this study is based on the Q-square parameter, it can be concluded that the two constructs (brand image and purchase decision) in the model built have shown relevant predictive values, or it can be interpreted that this model is robust and generalizable. It can be further explained from the recapitulation results above that the model in this study shows an SRMR (standardized root mean square residual) value of 0.059, which can be interpreted that the model built has a fit or model fit. The suitability of this research model is also confirmed by the PLS predict results, where the RMSE and MAE values of the PLS model have lower values when compared to the LM model. So it can be ascertained that the structural model built in this study is of high quality, valid, and credible to be used in explaining the research results. The following is a visualization of the SEM-PLS algorithm model specifications.

Hypothesis Test Results

This study aims to examine the effect of Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) on Purchase Decision with Brand Image as a mediating variable. Based on the results of the SEM-PLS analysis shown in the table, all relationships between variables show significant results, indicated by a p-value <0.05.

Table 8. Path Coefficient Significance Table

Relationship Between Variables	*P-Value*	Information
E-WOM → Purchase Decision	0.001	Significant
Brand Image → Purchase Decision	0.000	Significant
E-WOM → Brand Image	0.000	Significant
E-WOM → Brand Image → Purchase Decision	0.000	Significant

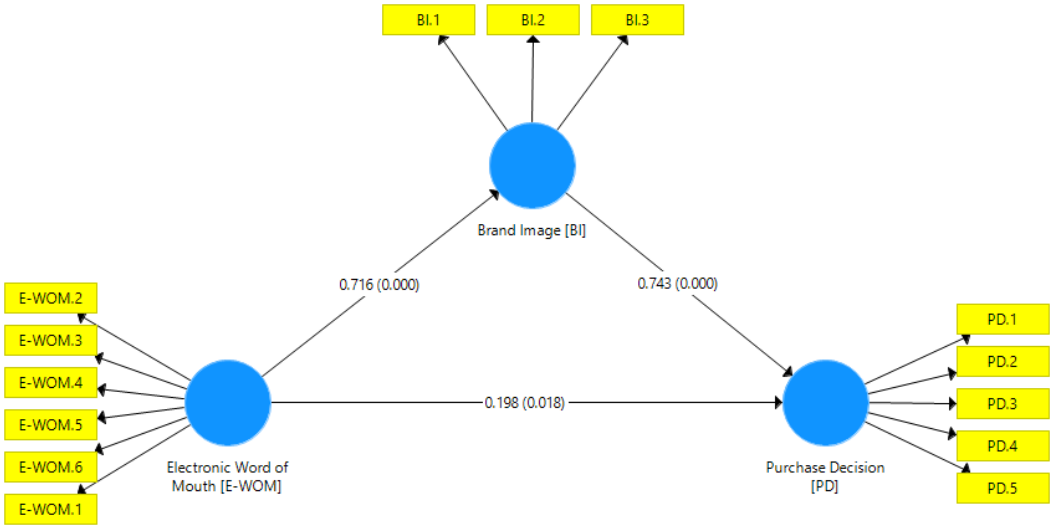

Figure 3.

The p-value of 0.001 indicates that e-WOM has a significant influence on purchasing decisions. This finding is in line with the opinion of Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) who stated that e-WOM is a form of digital interpersonal communication that strongly influences consumer attitudes and behavior. Consumers tend to trust reviews from fellow users because they are considered more objective than promotions from companies (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006).

Based on the p value of 0.000, it can be concluded that Brand Image significantly influences Purchase Decision. This is in line with Keller's (1993) Customer-Based Brand Equity

theory, which emphasizes that positive perceptions of a brand can increase consumer tendency to buy. Kotler and Keller (2016) also emphasized that a strong brand image strengthens trust and reduces perceived risk in the purchasing process.

The test results show a p-value of 0.000, which means that e-WOM has a significant effect on Brand Image. This shows that exposure to online customer reviews and testimonials contributes to shaping consumer perceptions of a brand. Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold (2011) stated that positive e-WOM can substantially improve brand image, while negative reviews can drastically reduce brand perception.

This indirect effect also shows significance with a p value of 0.000, so that Brand Image is proven to mediate the effect of e-WOM on purchasing decisions. This mediation indicates that information from e-WOM not only has a direct impact on purchasing decisions, but also indirectly through the formation of a positive brand image. Baron and Kenny (1986) stated that mediation occurs if the intermediary variable mediates the relationship between the independent and dependent variables significantly, as happened in this study.

5. Comparison

This study supports and extends the theory of Consumer Behavior and Marketing Communication Model by showing how e-WOM plays a dual role, both directly and through brand perception in influencing purchase decisions. This strengthens the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model where e-WOM acts as a stimulus, Brand Image as an organism (cognitive/emotional response), and Purchase Decision as a response (behavior).

These findings provide strategic input for business actors, especially in the retail and e-commerce industries. Companies need to manage and promote positive e-WOM through customer testimonials and product reviews. Focus on consistently strengthening Brand Image, as it has proven to be an important bridge in forming purchasing decisions. Respond to negative reviews quickly and wisely to maintain public perception of the brand.

6. Conclusions

Sections must summarize briefly and concisely the contents of the document or essay. This section may contain (1) A summary of the main results, findings, and evidence from your research or analysis. (2) Synthesis of findings, namely the relationship between findings and research objectives, and show how these findings support arguments or hypotheses. (3) The author may also be able to discuss the implications of research findings for research benefits. What is the contribution or impact on the knowledge or topic discussed? (4) Limitations and suggestions for further research.

Author Contributions:

Author 1 was primarily responsible for the conceptual framework and overall research design. They led the development of the methodology, prepared the data collection instruments, and conducted the survey process. In addition, Author 1 carried out the statistical analysis using SEM-PLS, created the visual representations of the model and findings, and drafted the original version of the manuscript. Their role was essential in ensuring the analytical rigor and consistency of the study from start to finish.

Author 2 contributed significantly to the literature review and theoretical foundation of the research. They supervised the research process, ensured the validity of the methodology, and reviewed the data analysis outputs. Author 2 also edited and refined the manuscript to improve academic quality and clarity. Furthermore, they managed the project timeline, coordinated administrative tasks, and assisted with the acquisition of funding support. Their involvement ensured the strategic direction and academic integrity of the final work.

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Data Availability Statement: We encourage all authors of articles published in FAITH journals to share their research data. This section provides details regarding where data supporting reported results can be found, including links to publicly archived datasets analyzed or generated during the study. Where no new data were created or data unavailable due to privacy or ethical restrictions, a statement is still required.

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