



The Role of Brand Image Mediation in the Influence of Electronic Word of Mouth on Purchase Intention

ABSTRACT

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The rapid development of the Internet in social media and e-commerce is a major challenge for entrepreneurs, especially in the local beauty product sector that is highly competitive at home and abroad. This research aims to find out the role of brand image in mediating the influence of E-WOM on purchase intention on Azarine cosmetic sunscreen products in Shopee on Malang city. The study is explanatory with a quantitative approach and a survey method conducted on 55 respondents in Malang. Sampling nonprobability with purposive sampling techniques used. Data analysis process using Partial Least Square (PLS) with Smart-PLS 3 devices. E-WOM can have a positive and significant influence on brand image and purchase intention. Brand image can have an influence over purchase intentions. as well as brand image can mediate the influence of E-WOM on purchase intention. This research can enrich an understanding of the mechanisms that affect consumer purchasing interests in the context of the digital age.

Keywords: E-WOM; Brand Image; Purchase Intention; Consumer

| Submitted January 2024 | Reviewed May 2024 | Revised August 2024 | Accepted October 2024
| DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18860/mec-j.v8i3.24596>

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of the Internet in social media as well as e-commerce is a challenge for entrepreneurs who will be very strict in their competition both domestically and internationally. One of the highly competitive business sectors is a beauty product characterized by a local skin care company. Especially in the Z generation, beauty products are quite popular and in great demand (Putri & Nofri, 2023). According to data provided by the Drug and Food Regulatory Authority (BPOM), there is an increase in the number of operators of the cosmetics industry from 819 units in 2021 to 913 units by 2022, representing an increase of 20.6 percent. It's because of the evolution of a time when beauty became the most appreciated thing. Because Generation Z and Millennials tend to feel unconfident or insecure for those who have skin problems. So, the demand for beauty products is rising in social media and e-commerce. One of the beauty products available in Indonesia is Azarine. Azarine is one of the local skin care brands that is on the rise. According to another survey by the

Compas team on the brand of sunscreen products sold best in Indonesia, azarine ranks second with a total product sale of 17.3k in a two-week range in the period 1-15 June 2023.

Consumer purchasing interests should be paid more attention to marketing, especially to the current technological developments. According to Schiffman (2020), purchasing interest is a consumer's tendency or desire to obtain a particular product or service. (Hawkins et al., 2020). Consumer interest is not only because someone likes the product, but also because there are recommendations from others (Packard & Berger, 2017). In addition to recommendations or E-WOMs, the factors that influence purchasing interests are also seen from the brand image built by the company (Iswara & Santika, 2019; Kentzo et al., 2020; Kusuma & Wijaya, 2022).

Technological advances have made the spread of information from mouth to mouth increasingly unlimited. According to Kotler & Armstrong, (2017) The power of mouth-to-mouth promotion is amplified by the Internet through online forums, blogs, social media, and websites. Generally, the form of information that spreads can be reviews, recommendations, comments, and so on, which triggers the interest of other consumers. Some studies also say that E-WOM has a positive influence on purchasing interests (Alrwashdeh et al., 2019; Armawan et al., 2023; Iswara & Santika, 2019). However, there are also some studies that reject and say E- WOM has no influence over buying interests. (Adriyati & Indriani, 2017; Alsoud et al., 2023; Elpansyah et al., 2019).

Buying interest can also be influenced by other factors such as brand image. According to Kotler & Armstrong, (2017) brand image is described as a set of consumer beliefs about a particular brand. Buying interest in consumers does not only arise from information or recommendations from people, but they will first see what the brand image of a product looks like. Consumers will be easily influenced by products that have a strong brand image on their products. (Nurfitriana et al., 2020). It is also in line with some previous research that stated that brand image can have a positive influence on consumer purchasing interests. (Adriana et al., 2022; Evgeniy et al., 2019; Jasin Mochammad, 2022; Kadek et al., 2020; Saputra & Barus, 2020). But there is also research that denies the influence of brand image on purchase intention (Alrwashdeh et al., 2019). Brand image in this study is used as a mediation variable against purchase intention.

The problems related to the gap with previous penalties related to variables in question, then the researchers are interested in conducting research cultivating the influence of the direct relationship of E-WOM to the brand image ; E- WOM to purchase intention; and the indirect influence between E - WOM on the purchase intent through the purchase interest.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Purchase Intention

Schiffman, (2020) Proclaims that purchasing interest is a consumer's tendency or desire to acquire a particular product or service. According to Priansa (Wulandari & Wijaksana, 2021) states that consumer interest in shopping is a disturbance of attention to something that accompanies a feeling of pleasure in goods or services, where the individual's interest arouses a desire to arouse a convincing feeling that the good or service is useful, so that the individual wants. have these things for payment. As regards related buy interest indicators according to Ferdinand (2002) as follows, Transactional buy interest, Reference buy interest, Preferential buy interest and Explorative buy interest

E- WOM

Word of Mouth according to Kotler & Armstrong, (2017) Information from mouth to mouth is the most powerful and authentic source of information for consumers as it usually involves friends who are considered trustworthy. Mouth-to-mouth influence can have a strong impact on consumer purchasing behaviour, further amplified by the Internet through online forums, blogs, social media, and websites. Kotler & Armstrong, (2017). e-WOM is a positive or negative statement made by potential customers, actual customers and former customers about a product or company via the Internet. (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Kadek et al., 2020). According to Goyette et al., (2010) there are some measurements related to EWOM as follows: Intensity, Content, Positive and Negative Opinions.

Brand Image

According to Kotler & Armstrong, (2018) a brand image is the set of beliefs that consumers have about a particular brand. A brand image, a set of consumer beliefs about the features, benefits, and services of a brand, is an important brand image for business owners because it influences consumer behavior. (Yuliantoro et al., 2019). Kotler & Keller, (2017) explains that brand imagery describes the extrinsic nature of a product or service, including how a brand seeks to meet the psychological or social needs of customers as a differentiator from competitors. According to Kotler & Keller, (2017) Brand Image can be measured by several indicators such as strength, uniqueness, and superiority.

Hypotheses of the research

Relationship between E-WOM and Brand Image

Social Influence Theory (SIT), as defined by Turner in 1991, encompasses the direct and indirect processes that operate at various levels, including interpersonal, group, and

socio-cultural levels, impacting thoughts, judgments, and behaviors (Perez-Vega et al., 2016)

This theory highlights how individuals are influenced by others in society, whether consciously or subconsciously, leading to changes in their attitudes and actions. Social influence can stem from a variety of sources, such as peers, family, media, and societal norms, shaping individuals' perceptions and decisions.

SIT elucidates the mechanism via which individuals are impacted by the behaviors and viewpoints of others within their social milieu. Social interactions include a variety of techniques that can significantly influence an individual's behavior, attitudes, and beliefs. This concept is very relevant in the context of e-WOM (electronic word-of-mouth), since information and recommendations sent online may greatly influence consumers' perceptions of a firm, namely its brand image and likelihood of making a purchase.

In recent years, there has been considerable academic interest in the correlation between E- WOM and brand image. Multiple studies have investigated the relationship between E- WOM, brand image, and customer behavior, specifically purchase intention. The research conducted by Indriana et al (2023) emphasizes that E- WOM has a favorable and substantial impact on brand image, therefore influencing the desire to make online purchases. This implies that E- WOM has a significant impact on how customers perceive a company, namely in terms of its brand image, which in turn influences their choices when making purchases. Similarly, the study conducted by Budiarti (2024) supports the notion that good E- WOM may improve brand image. This highlights the significance of having a great online reputation to establish a powerful brand image that connects with customers. Regarding E-WOM, previous research has shown that E- WOM has a positive and significant influence on brand image. (Adriana et al., 2022; Armawan et al., 2023; Daswan et al., 2019; Elseidi & El-Baz, 2016; Kusuma & Wijaya, 2022; Solihin, 2022).

H1 : There is an influence between E-WOM on the brand image

Relationship between E-WOM and Purchase Intention

Zahid & Ruswanti (2024) highlighted the significance of E-WOM as a practical determinant that impacts both brand image and purchase intention in the consumer market, hence strengthening the interdependence of both factors. The research conducted by Ali & Javed (2023) provides evidence for this idea. The study investigated how brand trust and product participation mediate the connection between E-WOM and the intention to make a purchase. The study drew upon the theory of planned behavior. This research offered valuable insights into how characteristics such as brand trust and product participation might influence the effect of E-WOM on purchase intention. SIT also underscores the significance of social connection and proactive engagement in society. E-WOM takes place on platforms characterized by extensive user engagement, such as discussion forums or social media, where users can directly communicate with

writers of reviews, and has a more significant impact on purchase intentions (Chu & Kim, 2011).

These findings contribute to a deeper knowledge of the underlying processes involved. Some previous research suggests that E-WOM can have a positive influence on purchase intentions. (Adriyati & Indriani, 2017; Aljaafreh et al., 2005; Ardana & Rastini, 2018; Lkhaasuren & Nam, 2018; Markiones et al., 2023; Sa'ait et al., 2016; Yunikartika & Harti, 2022).

H2 : There is an influence between E-WOM on purchase intention

Relationship between Brand Image and Purchase Intention

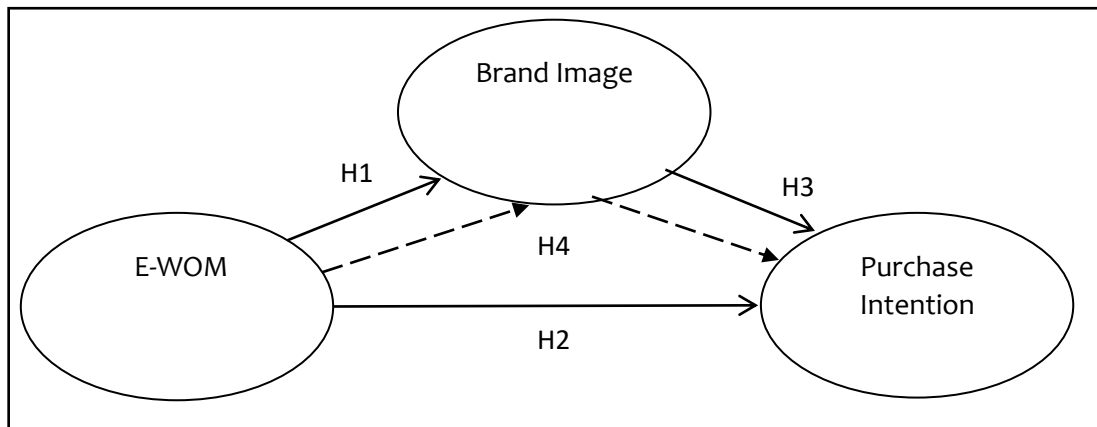
The relationship between brand image and purchase intention is a crucial aspect of consumer behavior and marketing strategies. Numerous studies have delved into this connection, highlighting the significant impact that brand image can have on shaping consumers' intentions to purchase products or services. Brand image, defined as the perception consumers have of a brand, plays a pivotal role in influencing their purchase decisions (Lisnawati et al., 2021). It is widely acknowledged that a positive brand image can directly enhance purchase intention, as consumers tend to gravitate towards brands they perceive favorably (Supradita et al., 2020). Interest in buying can also be influenced by brand image based on some previous research. (Adriana et al., 2022; Armawan et al., 2023; Kadek et al., 2020).

H3 : There is an influence between brand image and purchase intention

The Relationship Between E-WOM and Purchase Intention Through the Brand Image

Fellysia & Simamora (2023) further elaborate on the mediating effect of brand image, indicating that a strong brand image can enhance purchase intention by making products more recognizable and appealing to consumers. This recognition and appeal stemming from a positive brand image can significantly impact consumers' willingness to make a purchase. Having good product-related information will create a brand image so that consumers or prospective consumers will be more confident and willing to buy. This statement is supported by some previous research that stated that E-WOM has a positive influence on purchase intention through brand image (Alsoud et al., 2023; Armawan et al., 2023; Solihin, 2022).

H4 : There is an influence between E-WOM on purchase intention through brand image



Source(s): Figure by authors

Figure 1. Source(s): Figure by authors

METHODOLOGY

The research applies a quantitative approach with a focus on theoretical testing through the measurement of research variables using numerical data, and data analysis using statistical procedures. According to the purposes of the research, this type of research is explanatory (Sugiyono, 2017). The location of this research is in Malang City, with the target population being the entire user of Azarine Sunscreen products in the city. The sample consisted of 55 people, determined by the formula Malhotra et al., (2017) which is $n = 5 \times$ the number of indicators. Sampling is done using nonprobability sampling and purposive samplings. Research data is divided into two sources, primary data and secondary data. The instrument used for data collection is a structured list. A questionnaire is a method of collecting data by submitting questions directly to respondents to be filled in and returned. Data analysis using the PLS SEM analysis method, with validity and reliability testing as well as mediation testing using the Smart-PLS 3 device.

Table 1. Research Instrument

		Item
E-WOM (Shen, 2021)	E1	I frequently access information related to Azarine sunscreen products
	E2	I talk related to azarine products on social media
	E3	I speak positively about Azarines sunscreeene products on social media
Brand Image (Kotler et al., 2016)	BI1	I feel that the product or service provided meets the needs of the consumer
	BI2	Using a product or service makes me feel confident
	BI3	This product is a reliable skin care & beauty product
Purchase Intention (Kotler et al., 2016)	PI1	I am considering buying Azarine sunscreen products at Shopee
	PI3	I am interested in looking for more information about Azarines sunscreeene products at shopee
	PI4	I was interested in trying to buy Azarins sunscreeene products on shopee

Source(s): Table by authors

RESULTS

Description Characteristics Respondents

The respondents in this study consisted of 22 males (40%) and 33 females (60%). Most respondents were aged between 20-22 years (72.7%), with 5.5% aged 11-19 years and 21.8% aged 23-26 years. Most respondents were unmarried (92.7%) and did not have children (92.7%). In terms of employment, most respondents were undergraduate students (76.4%), with the remainder consisting of unemployed (9.1%), civil servants (1.8%), employees (5.5%), self-employed (3.6%), and freelancers (3.6%). The monthly income of respondents varied, with 47.3% earning less than IDR 1,000,000, 27.3% earning between IDR 1 million - 2 million, 14.5% earning between IDR 2 million - 3 million, 7.3% earning between IDR 3 million - 4 million, and 3.6% earning more than IDR 5 million. As many as 21.8% of respondents live with their parents, 7.3% live with extended family, and 70.9% live with rent or contract. In terms of transaction activity, 56.4% of respondents make 1-2 transactions per month, 36.4% make 3-5 transactions, and 7.3% make more than 5 transactions per month.

Based on the data successfully collected by the researchers, it can be observed that most respondents in this sample are women, as much as 60%, while the male reaches 40%. The majority are in the age group 20-22 years, with a proportion of 72.7%, followed by the 23-26 years age group that reaches 21.8%. From the point of view of profession, most respondents are undergraduate students, most of whom live on cost or contract. In addition, that most respondents have a monthly income of less than 1,000,000 to 2,000,000 rupees, and this affects the respondent's purchase or transaction pattern, which occurs on average only 1 to 2 times in a month.

Convergent Validity

Items with an Outer loading value of less than 0.7 must be removed from the measurement model, whereas items with an outer loading of 0.7 will be retained for as long as internal consistency reliability is achieved.

Table 2. Convergence Validity Test Result Data After Model Evaluation

Code	Outer Loading	CR	AVE
E1	0.774		
E2	0.825	0.819	0.601
E3	0.724		
B11	0.859		
B12	0.790	0.851	0.655
B13	0.777		
PI1	0.766		
PI2	0.823	0.820	0.603
PI3	0.738		

Source(s): Table by authors

Internal consistency/reliability. Based on the results of the data in Table 2 shows that after several evaluations the entire element has a loading factor value above 0.7. It can

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be understood that the correlation value between indicators associated with latent variables has a good value and can be said to be valid. Similarly, in the context of this study, the CR index value indicates that all variables show a strong level of internal reliability. In measuring internal reliability, the assessment is based on a composite reliability value. A latent variable is considered to have a high internal reliance if the composite trust value exceeds 0.7. Therefore, items with factor loads between 0.4 and 0.7 are retained in the measurement model, as internal reliability is achieved by removing some items that do not meet the index values and retaining the items that meet.

Descriptive validity. In this study, the discriminatory validity test was performed using the square root value of AVE. When the AVE is larger compared to the correlation between a latent variable and other late variables, it indicates that there is a discriminating validity for each item on a late variable. Table 3 gives the results of the discriminatory validity test in this study.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity Test Results

	EWOM	Brand Image	Purchase Intention
EWOM	0.775	0.677	0.735
Brand Image	0.677	0.810	0.754
Purchase Intention	0.735	0.754	0.777

Source(s): Table by authors

Table 3 shows the results of the discriminatory validity test by looking at the AVE square root value on the diagonal of the matrix, while the value next to it reflects the correlation coefficient between the variable with other variables in the model. As with the Ewom value of 0.775 which shows a greater value of the correlation value with other variables, so is the case with the BI and PI variables. Therefore, based on Table 3, it can be concluded that the entire variable in this study has items with strong discriminatory validity.

R squared. The determination coefficient, or R-squared, is used to measure the extent to which an independent variable in a research model can explain variation in a dependent variable. R-quared values range from 0 to 1, where the closer to 1 indicates a better level of ability to describe data. In the context of research, R-Squared was used to evaluate how far independent variables are able to provide a good explanation of variations in dependant variables.

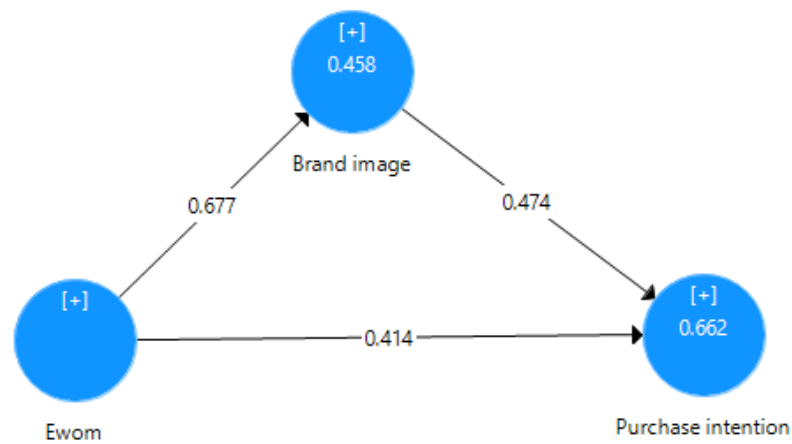
Table 4. R-Square Structural Model Value

Influence	R-square
Ewom, BI => PI	0.662
Ewom => BI	0.458

Source(s): Table by authors

Based on Table 4, the R-square obtained from the influence of the Ewom and BI variables on Purchase Intention has an index value of 0.662, which means that Ewom's and BI's variables can explain the purchase intention variable of 66.2% and for the

remaining 33.8% are described by other variables outside the study. Including also in the impact of Ewom on brand image obtains a value of 0.458 which means the brand image is able to be explained by Ewom of 45.8%, whereas the rest is described with other variable outside the research is 54.2%. In the PLS-SEM analysis, the assessment of the hypothesis is carried out by observing the p-value value associated with the path coefficient that describes the exogenous variable influence, namely Ewom, on the endogenic variable, i.e. brand image and purchase intent in the context of this study. Figure 2 is a representation of a structural model that visualizes the relationship between variables in this study.



Source(s): Figure by authors

Figure 2. Results of the Hypothesis Test on the Structural Model

The coefficients shown by the inter-variable arrow mark in Figure 1 reflect the extent to which the influence produced by the exogenous variable on the endogenic variable. To provide an explanation of the results of the hypothesis testing, this information can be interpreted and presented in Table 5, which details the impact given by the independent variables on the dependent variables.

Table 5. Research Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path Coefficient	T-Statistic	P Value
H1 Ewom -> Brand image	0.677	10.998	0.000
H2 Ewom -> Purchase intention	0.414	2.725	0.007
H3 Brand image -> purchase intention	0.474	3.210	0.001

Source(s): Table by authors

Table 5 shows that the track coefficient test results show a significant positive influence of all related variables. The first finding to explain the H1 line coefficient between Ewom and brand image of 0.677 with a T-count of 10.998 greater than 1.96 and a P value of less

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than 0.05, i.e. 0,000 smaller than the specified level of significance, this indicates that Ewom has a positive and significant influence on brand image. The next result was also shown on the influence of Ewom on purchase intention which has a line coefficient value of 0.414 with T- count of 2.725 larger than 1.96, and P-value of 0.007 less than 5%. From these results it can be understood that there is a positive and significant influence of brand image on purchase intention.

Based on the test of the hypothesis carried out and the presentation of the results above, it can be concluded that the entire hypotheses H1, H2, H3 are acceptable. All related variables in this study have a positive and significant influence between direct influence relationships.

Identify indirect effects. In PLS-SEM, the indirect effect illustrates the impact of the Ewom variable on Purchase intention through the brand image intermediate. The direct effect coefficient is obtained by multiplying the direct influence of Ewom on brand image with the direct impact of brand image on Purchasing intention. The Sobel test is used to evaluate these indirect effects. A P-value result below 5% indicates a significant indirect influence between these variables. This indicates that Ewom has a significant influence on Purchase intention through the intermediary brand image.

Table 6. Identify Indirect Impacts

	Inderect Influence	Path Coefficient	T-Statistic	P Value
H4	Ewom -> Brand image -> <i>purchase intention</i>	0.321	2.781	0.006

Source(s): Table by authors

Table 6 of this study shows the results of the indirect influence path coefficient and the p value of indirect impact. Based on the above table, the tracks influence was obtained from Ewom's influence on purchase intention through brand image of 0.321 with a P-value of $0.006 < 0.05$ which indicates that the brand image is able to mediate between the influence of Ewom on purchase intent.

DISCUSSION

The data analysis yielded many conclusions in this research that may address the original premise. The first discovery about the impact of E-WOM on brand image demonstrates favorable and statistically significant outcomes. This indicates that the brand image of Azarine Cosmetic sunscreen products is influenced by user feedback, even negative reviews and comments. This demonstrates that the function of electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM) in enhancing brand image encompasses a range of review kinds, including positive evaluations as well as negative ones. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that good evaluations have a significant influence in enhancing brand image. Azarine goods endeavor to enhance their brand image by consistently creating a favorable impression on customers, therefore encouraging them to offer positive evaluations. This aligns with other prior research that have reported favorable and

substantial outcomes of E-WOM on brand image (Adriana et al., 2022; Armawan et al., 2023; Daswan et al., 2019; Elseidi & El-Baz, 2016; Kusuma & Wijaya, 2022; Solihin, 2022).

It has been shown that E-WOM has a strong and favorable impact on the intention to make a purchase. The data presented here corroborate the findings of other researchers who reported similar outcomes (Adriyati & Indriani, 2017; Aljaafreh et al., 2005; Ardana & Rastini, 2018; Lkhaasuren & Nam, 2018; Markiones et al., 2023; Sa'ait et al., 2016; Yunikartika & Harti, 2022). Evidence suggests that the presence of electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM) or information found in reviews and other sources may have an impact on the inclination or intention of Shopee users to buy Azarine Cosmetic products. There is a direct correlation between positive evaluations of the Azarine Cosmetic sunscreen product and increased customer interest in purchasing it. The investigated indicators also demonstrate that frequent positive information sharing by customers with others produces a pattern of purchase intention.

Moreover, the impact of the correlation between brand image and purchase intention demonstrates favorable and statistically significant outcomes. These findings indicate that Azarine Cosmetic has effectively established and managed its brand image on Shopee, resulting in increased customer willingness and desire to make purchases. Consequently, the Company's brand image directly influences the level of customer interest in purchasing its products. These findings are consistent with other prior investigations that have shown comparable outcomes (Adriana et al., 2022; Armawan et al., 2023; Kadek et al., 2020).

According to the data analysis, the brand image has a role in influencing the connection between E-WOM and the level of interest in making a purchase. By focusing on the brand image of Azarina Cosmetic, reviews and information about Azarine sunscreen products have the potential to captivate customer attention. This also demonstrates that the function of brand image as a mediator is somewhat mediating in nature, indicating that brand image has the ability to effectively connect E-WOM and buy intention. Furthermore, it suggests that the impact of E-WOM on purchase intention may also be maximized in the absence of brand image. The results presented in this study corroborate the findings of multiple other studies (Alsoud et al., 2023; Armawan et al., 2023; Solihin, 2022).

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the presentation of the results and the discussion, then it can be drawn the conclusion that all the existing hypotheses are acceptable. The direct relationship between variables has a positive and significant value. Where the influence of the E-WOM relationship on the brand image has a positive and significant value.

Limitations and Recommendations

The study is limited by the restricted development of variables and the exclusive emphasis on one metropolitan location as the topic of investigation. Researchers may explore other elements that may impact purchase intention, such as marketing

communication, brand awareness, brand personality, and brand equity, to shape a brand image. One way to enhance the research method is by augmenting the sample size, which leads to a greater diversity of responses and enables the use of more current data analysis techniques.

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