

The Impact of E-WOM on Purchase Decisions: The Mediating Roles of Marketplace Trust and Brand Image Evidence from Skintific on Shopee

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Abstract

Research aim: This study aims to examine the effect of Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) on purchasing decisions for Skintific products on Shopee, with marketplace trust and brand image as mediating variables.

Design/Method/Approach: This study employs a quantitative approach using a survey method 108 respondents who have purchased Skintific products on Shopee. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (SEM-PLS).

Research Finding: The results show that E-WOM significant influences brand image and marketplace trust. However, E-WOM and marketplace trust do not directly affect purchasing decisions. Brand image significantly influences purchasing decisions and mediates the relationship between E-WOM and purchasing decisions, while marketplace trust does not have a mediating effect.

Theoretical contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that in a mature e-commerce context, brand image plays a more critical role than marketplace trust in influencing purchasing decisions, highlighting the shift from trust-based to perception-based consumer behavior.

Practitioner/Policy implication: The findings suggest that businesses should prioritize strengthening brand image through effective E-WOM strategies rather than focusing solely on enhancing marketplace trust to influence consumer purchasing decisions.

Research limitation: This study is limited to consumers in Kediri Regency and focuses only on Skintific products on Shopee. Further research is recommended to include a broader sample and additional variables to provide more comprehensive insights.

Keywords: E-WOM, Marketplace Trust, Brand Image, Purchase Decisions

1. Introduction

Advancements in digital technology have revolutionized consumer purchasing behavior, especially via e-commerce platforms like Shopee. Consumers now depend not just on information from companies but also on testimonials from other users via electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) (1). This phenomenon is significant because E-WOM is considered more credible and capable of significantly influencing consumers' perceptions and purchasing decisions (2). In the context of increasingly intense business competition, particularly in the

beauty industry, understanding how E-WOM influences consumer behavior is highly relevant to study. The beauty industry, including skincare products, is experiencing rapid growth in the Indonesian e-commerce market. Among local brands, several such as Skintific, Wardah, and Whitelab have successfully captured consumer attention by offering competitive quality at affordable prices (3), (4).

The abundance of product choices makes consumers increasingly selective in making purchasing decisions. The strength of a brand is ascertained not solely by product quality but also by the brand image established in consumers' perceptions. Brand image encompasses the perceptions consumers form when encountering a memorable slogan that becomes entrenched in their consciousness (5). This brand image is heavily influenced by user reviews, product ratings, and previous purchasing experiences shared through E-WOM features (2). Brands that can build a positive perception through consumer testimonials tend to have a greater chance of being chosen over their competitors (6). Therefore, it is important to understand how E-WOM can shape brand image, which ultimately impacts purchasing decisions.

The Shopee platform serves as a hub for various brands ranging from local to international to reach a wide audience through its marketplace system. With a wide range of products across categories such as “skincare, makeup, and body care, Shopee has become one of the primary distribution channel in Indonesia’s digital beauty industry (7). In the digital environment, trust is a key element in reducing the uncertainty and risks perceived by consumers (8). Marketplace trust refers to the level of consumer confidence in the reliability, security, and credibility of a platform when conducting online transaction. (9). Marketplace trust is the level of consumer confidence in the reliability and integrity of an e-commerce platform in facilitating transactions, shaped by system security, institutional safeguards, information quality, platform reputation, and trust in the sellers within it (10). Platforms like Shopee strive to build trust through security systems, user reviews, and buyer protection features (11). However, the effectiveness of marketplace trust in driving purchase decisions has yielded mixed results in previous studies, necessitating further research.

Several prior studies indicate that E-WOM influences purchasing decisions (12), (13), both directly and indirectly through mediating variables such as brand trust (14), (15). However, there is inconsistency in findings, particularly regarding the mediating role of marketplace trust, which in some studies did not show a significant effect (16), (17). Furthermore, most studies still treat E-WOM as a variable that directly impacts purchasing decisions, without delving deeply into the underlying psychological mechanisms (18). Furthermore, previous researchs have examined this phenomenon on platforms such as Instagram(19), Traveloka (20), and tiktok (21), (22). This indicates a research gap that needs to be addressed through this study.

This study seeks to examine the impact of E-WOM on purchasing decisions, while accounting for the mediating effects of marketplace trust and brand image, specifically on Skintific items on Shopee.” This research aims to enhance digital marketing literature and offer practical insights for company practitioners in formulating more efficient marketing strategies in the e-commerce landscape.

1.1 Statement of Problem

The swift expansion of e-commerce platforms has profoundly altered consumer buying patterns, especially within the cosmetics sector. Consumers are progressively depending on electronic word of mouth for information prior to making purchasing decisions. Nonetheless, the impact of electronic word-of-mouth on purchasing decisions is variable, as not all consumers directly convert online reviews into actual purchasing activity. This suggests that

additional factors may significantly influence consumer choices.

In this sense, brand image is a vital element that embodies consumers' views and impressions of a product, potentially affecting their purchasing decisions. Similarly, marketplace trust is a critical component of online transactions, since it influences consumer confidence in the platform's reliability and security. Notwithstanding their significance, prior research has demonstrated inconsistent findings about the mediating functions of brand image and marketplace trust in the association between electronic word-of-mouth and purchasing decisions.

Consequently, it is essential to investigate the impact of E-WOM on purchasing decisions, both directly and indirectly via brand image and marketplace trust, specifically regarding Skintific items on Shopee. This study aims to resolve these discrepancies and elucidate the links among these variables.

1.2 Research Objectives

This study seeks to investigate the correlations among electronic word-of-mouth, brand image, marketplace trust, and purchasing decisions about Skintific items on Shopee. This research aims to examine the impact of E-WOM on purchasing decisions, brand image, and marketplace trust. This study assesses the influence of brand image and marketplace trust on purchasing decisions. This research examines the mediating roles of brand image and marketplace trust in the relationship between E-WOM and purchasing decisions.

2. Method

This study used a quantitative methodology with a causal-associative design to examine the cause-and-effect relationships among variables in the research model. The quantitative technique was selected for its ability to deliver objective, measurable, and empirically grounded analysis of the impact of E-WOM on purchase decisions via mediating variables. The study was conducted among consumers in Kediri Regency who had purchased Skintific products via the Shopee platform. The population for this study consists of all Shopee users familiar with Skintific products. The sampling technique employed purposive sampling, with the respondent criteria being consumers who had purchased and used Skintific products on Shopee. Based on these criteria, a sample of 108 respondents was obtained. "The selection of these respondents was based on the consideration that direct experience in purchasing the product allows respondents to provide relevant and accurate information regarding the variables under study.

Data collection was executed by the dissemination of questionnaires, both in-person and online, on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The research instrument was developed according to indicators for each variable as outlined below:

- E-WOM (4 indicators) (23): (1) frequency of reading online reviews, (2) frequency of seeking product information through reviews, (3) credibility of reviews, and (4) tendency to follow online recommendations.
- Marketplace Trust (6 indicators) (10): (1) transaction security, (2) system reliability, (3) consumer protection, (4) information honesty, (5) platform reputation, and (6) trust in sellers within the platform.
- Brand Image (14 indicators) (24): includes perceptions of quality, brand uniqueness, reputation, visual appeal, memorability, alignment with needs, trust in the brand, symbolic value, modern image, popularity, product differentiation, quality consistency, positive impression, and brand loyalty.

- Purchase Decisions (8 indicators) (25): (1) need for the product, (2) information search, (3) evaluation of alternatives, (4) confidence in product selection, (5) purchase decisions, (6) purchase frequency, (7) post-purchase satisfaction, and (8) repurchase intention.

This study utilizes the Partial Least Squares-based Structural Equation Modeling (SEM-PLS) technique with SmartPLS software for data analysis. The PLS method was selected because to its ability to analyze intricate models involving latent variables without a stringent requirement for normal data distribution. The analysis was performed in two phases: assessment of the measurement model (outer model) to evaluate validity and reliability, and assessment of the structural model (inner model) to examine the linkages between variables and the study hypotheses.

The evaluation of the outer model aims to assess the quality of the research instruments—specifically, the extent to which the indicators can measure latent variables validly and reliably. The assessment was conducted using the following criteria:

- **Convergent Validity Test**
Measured using factor loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). An indicator is considered valid if it has a factor loading ≥ 0.70 and an AVE ≥ 0.50 , indicating that the indicator effectively explains the latent variable.
- **Discriminant Validity**
Aims to ensure that a variable is truly distinct from other variables. The test is conducted using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) value.
- **Reliability Test**
Assessed based on the Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha values. A construct is considered reliable if it has a value of ≥ 0.70 , indicating internal consistency among indicators in measuring the variable.

Inner model evaluation aims to test the relationships among variables within the research model and to test the proposed hypotheses. Testing is conducted using the following indicators:

- **Coefficient of Determination (R^2)**
Used to measure the ability of independent variables to explain the dependent variable. R^2 values are categorized as weak (0.25), moderate (0.50), and strong (0.75).
- **Significance Test (Path Coefficient)**
Conducted using the bootstrapping method to examine the t-statistic and p-value. The hypothesis is considered significant if the t-statistic > 1.96 and the p-value < 0.05 .
- **Uji Effect Size Test (f^2)**
Used to determine the magnitude of each independent variable's influence on the dependent variable, categorized as small (0.02), moderate (0.15), and large (0.35).
- **Mediation Test (Indirect Effect)**
To test the role of the mediating variable, the significance of the indirect effect is assessed through the t-statistic and p-value. If significant, the mediating variable is proven to mediate the relationship between the variables.

3. Results and Discussion

Respondent Description

The study included 108 consumers who had purchased Skintific products through Shopee and were therefore deemed to have relevant experience. The majority of respondents were women (78.7%) aged 21–29 (73.1%), with students making up the largest demographic (53.7%). In terms of purchasing behavior, most respondents made one purchase per month, with spending ranging from Rp100,000 to Rp300,000. The most frequently purchased products were moisturizers, followed by skincare sets and serums. Overall, these

characteristics indicate that the respondents are a representative group of active e-commerce consumers, meaning the data collected can be used to analyze the influence of E-WOM, marketplace trust, and brand image on purchasing decisions.

Outer Model Evaluation

The results of the outer model evaluation based on PLS-SEM analysis are as follows.

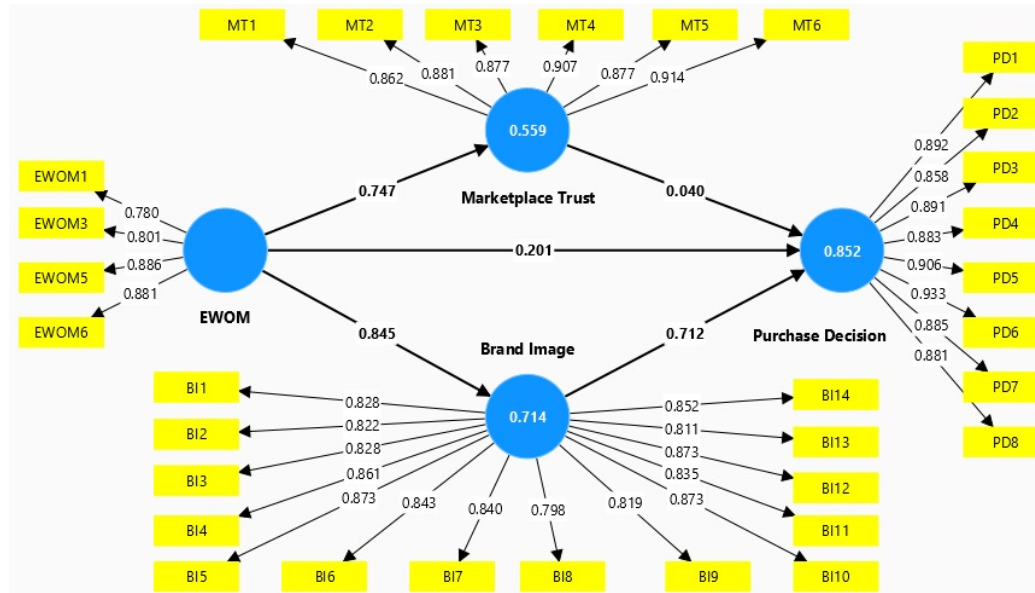


Figure 1. Factor Loadings

Based on the results of the factor loading analysis shown in Figure 1, all indicators for the four variables have outer loadings > 0.70 , meaning that convergent validity is met and no indicators need to be removed. The measurement model used is stable, consistent, and suitable for further analysis (inner model)".

Table 1. Construct Reliability and Validity

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Brand Image	0,968	0,969	0,971	0,706
E-WOM	0,859	0,874	0,904	0,703
Marketplace Trust	0,945	0,949	0,956	0,785
Purchase Decisions	0,963	0,964	0,969	0,795

Source: primary data processed by the researcher, 2025

Table 1 shows that all variables have Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.70, indicating high reliability. This indicates that all constructs are internally reliable.

Additionally, the Composite dependability values (rho_a and rho_c) for all variables exceed 0.70, signifying that all constructions satisfy the standards for high dependability. In fact, values approaching or exceeding 0.95 (as seen in Brand Image and Purchase Decisions) indicate very strong consistency among indicators, although in some literature this may also suggest a very high degree of indicator overlap.

Table 2. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) - Matrix

	Brand Image	E-WOM	Marketplace Trust	Purchase Decisions
Brand Image				
E-WOM	0,808			
Marketplace Trust	0,702	0,814		
Purchase Decisions	0,808	0,706	0,847	

Source: primary data processed by the researcher, 2025

The HTMT test was employed to evaluate discriminant validity, with the condition that the HTMT value must be below 0.90 (or, more stringently, < 0.85). “If all values satisfy this threshold, the constructs can be considered empirically distinct from one another. The results demonstrate that discriminant validity has been effectively achieved, indicating that each variable (Brand Image, E-WOM, Marketplace Trust, and Purchase Decisions) possesses distinct conceptual differences with no substantial overlap across the conceptions.

Regarding convergent validity, all variables have AVE values beyond 0.50, with a range from 0.703 to 0.795. This signifies that each concept accounts for over 50% of its indicator's variation, so confirming the validity of the indicators in reflecting the latent variables. These results demonstrate that the measurement model (outer model) satisfies the criteria for reliability and convergent validity, therefore permitting progression to the subsequent phase of analysis: structural equation modeling (inner model).

Inner Model Evaluation

The results of the inner model evaluation based on PLS-SEM analysis are as follows.

Testing the Coefficient of Determination R-Square (R^2)

The R-square (R^2) value quantifies the explanatory capacity of the endogenous variables within the structural model. This value signifies the degree to which the variance in the dependent variable is elucidated by the independent variables in the model.

Table 3. R-square (R^2)

	<i>R-Square</i>
<i>Brand Image</i>	0,714
<i>Marketplace Trust</i>	0,559
<i>Purchase Decisions</i>	0,852

Source: primary data processed by the researcher, 2025

Table 3 indicates that the R-squared value for Brand Image is 0.714, signifying that 71.4% of the variance in Brand Image is attributable to E-WOM, whilst the remaining 28.6% is affected by extraneous factors not included in the model. The R-squared value for Marketplace Trust is 0.559, signifying that 55.9% of the variance in Marketplace Trust is attributable to E-WOM, whereas 44.1% is affected by other variables not examined in this study. The R-squared value for Purchase Decisions is 0.852, indicating that 85.2% of the variance in Purchase Decisions is attributable to E-WOM, Marketplace Trust, and Brand Image. The remaining 14.8% is affected by extraneous factors beyond the model. The structural model shows strong explanatory power, especially for purchase decisions.

Hypothesis Testing (Direct Effect)

The study employed the bootstrapping method for hypothesis testing within PLS. A hypothesis is deemed significant if the t-statistic exceeds 1.96 and the p-value is below 0.05.

Table 4. Significance Test of Direct Effects

	<i>Original Sample(0)</i>	<i>T- Statistics</i>	<i>P-Value</i>	Hypothesis
<i>Brand Image -> Purchase Decisions</i>	0,712	5,478	0,000	Accepted
<i>E-WOM -> Brand Image</i>	0,845	28,945	0,000	Accepted
<i>E-WOM -> Marketplace Trust</i>	0,747	13,342	0,000	Accepted
<i>E-WOM-> Purchase Decisions</i>	0,201	1,866	0,062	Rejected
<i>Marketplace Trust -> Purchase Decisions</i>	0,0	0,327	0,743	Rejected

Source: primary data processed by the researcher, 2025

The test results in Table 4 show that Brand Image is the most significant factor in purchase decisions. E-WOM has no direct effect, but it strongly shapes brand image and enhances marketplace trust. Marketplace Trust does not significant influence purchasing decisions. The finding indicate that marketplace trust does not significantly influence behavior within a mature e-commerce environment. In previous studies, trust was considered a primary determinant of online purchasing behavior. However, in the current context, trust may no longer function as a distinguishing factor, but rather as a baseline expectation that consumers expect major platforms like Shopee to meet. This phenomenon can be explained through the concept of institutional trust maturity, where trust becomes a standard benchmark rather than a determining factor. When consumers perceive that all major e-commerce platforms have provided adequate security, reliability, and protection, trust is no longer actively evaluated in every transaction. Instead, consumers shift their focus to other factors that offer greater differentiation. Furthermore, marketplace trust in this study appears to function primarily as a risk-reduction mechanism rather than a direct driver of purchasing decisions. This means that trust helps reduce uncertainty and perceived risk, but does not necessarily motivate consumers to complete a purchase. As a result, even though E-WOM significantly increases marketplace trust, this increase does not translate into actual buying behavior. In contrast, brand image shows a strong and significant influence on purchase decisions, indicating that consumers rely more on brand perception when making purchasing choices. This suggests that in a highly competitive marketplace with relatively equal levels of platform trust, brand image becomes a key differentiating factor that directly drives consumer decisions.

These findings also suggest that previous assumptions regarding the central role of trust in e-commerce may need to be reconsidered, particularly in contexts where platform credibility is already well established. Therefore, future research should further explore the conditions under which trust remains relevant, as well as how it interacts with other variables such as brand perception and perceived value.

Testing the Hypothesis of Indirect Influence (Mediation)

Table 5. Significance Test of Mediation

	<i>Original Sample(0)</i>	<i>T-Statistics</i>	<i>P-Value</i>	Hypothesis
E-WOM -> Marketplace Trust -> Purchase Decisions	0,030	0,326	0,744	Rejected
E-WOM -> Brand Image -> Purchase Decisions	0,601	5,264	0,000	Accepted

Source: primary data processed by the researcher, 2025

The results in Table 5 clearly indicate that marketplace trust does not have a mediating effect. The minimal and negligible coefficient values suggest that although E-WOM can enhance marketplace trust, this trust is insufficient to compel buyers to complete a purchase. Marketplace trust is not a crucial factor in the buying decision-making process. Consumers do not consider platforms trust as the main purchase criterion for acquiring Skintific items. Brand Image substantially mediates the correlation between E-WOM and purchasing decisions. E-WOM affects purchasing decisions by shaping brand perception. Consumers refrain from direct purchases because to E-WOM.” E-WOM fosters a positive perception of the brand. It is this perception that ultimately drives the purchase decisions.

Effect Size Test (f-square / f^2)

Table 6. Effect size test (f-square / f^2)

	f-square
Brand Image -> Purchase Decisions	0,527
E-WOM -> Brand Image	2,496
E-WOM -> Marketplace Trust	1,265
E-WOM -> Purchase Decisions	0,078
Marketplace Trust -> Purchase Decisions	0,003

Source: primary data processed by the researcher, 2025

The findings of the effect size (F-square) analysis presented in Table 6 indicate that the intensity of the correlations among variables in this study model differs. The findings indicate that E-WOM has a very strong influence on brand image, with an F^2 value of 2.496. This indicates that E-WOM is a primary factor in shaping consumers’ perceptions of a brand. Online reviews and ratings effectively shape brand image. This aligns with studies (1) and (26). E-WOM also demonstrates a very strong influence on marketplace trust, with an f^2 value of 1.265. These results confirm that information circulating on digital platforms can increase consumers’ trust in marketplaces. The more positive and credible the E-WOM received by consumers, the higher their level of trust in the e-commerce platform they use (16).

Brand image significant influence on purchase decisions with an f^2 value of 0.527. This indicates that brand image is a key factor in driving consumers’ purchasing decisions. Consumers typically select products with a favorable image, rendering brand image the most significant factor in influencing purchasing behavior. The direct impact of E-WOM on purchasing decisions is comparatively minimal, evidenced by a f^2 value of 0.078. This suggests that although E-WOM contributes to consumer information, its impact on purchasing decisions is not direct. This finding reinforces previous results that E-WOM plays a more indirect role through the formation of brand image (27).

Marketplace trust shows a very small influence on purchase decisions, with an f^2 value of 0.003. This indicates that trust in the marketplace is not a primary factor consumers consider when making purchase decisions for Skintific products on Shopee. Consumers tend to prioritize brand aspects over trust in the platform. This result aligns with the assertion that trust no longer determines purchase decisions once a platform is generally trusted (28). Marketplace trust plays a greater role in reducing risk rather than directly driving purchase decisions (17). This explains why trust is not significant for purchase decisions.

4. Conclusion

This study shows that E-WOM does not exert a substantial direct influence on purchasing decisions, but plays a crucial indirect function via brand image. E-WOM considerably influences brand image and marketplace trust; however, only brand image substantially impacts purchase decisions. Simultaneously, marketplace trust does not exert a substantial impact on purchasing decisions, whether directly or as a mediating variable. These findings confirm that in the context of purchasing Skintific products on Shopee, consumers prioritize their perception of the brand over their trust in the platform. Therefore, brand image serves as a key factor in driving purchasing decisions, while also acting as the primary channel linking the influence of E-WOM to consumer behavior.

This study advances marketing science, specifically in digital marketing and consumer behavior, by highlighting the essential significance of brand image as a significant determinant of purchasing decisions. This study offers insights for business practitioners, particularly in the skincare sector, to prioritize the enhancement of brand image via effective E-WOM initiatives to improve consumer purchasing decisions. This study is constrained by a narrow respondent pool and its concentration on a singular product and platform, specifically Skintific on Shopee. Consequently, it is advisable for future study to broaden the respondent base, incorporate other factors, and investigate various businesses or platforms to achieve more comprehensive findings.

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The author acknowledges the use of ChatGPT (OpenAI) as an aid in the writing process for this article, specifically for language editing, paraphrasing, and academic sentence structuring. It is important to emphasize that data analysis, research design, and interpretation of results were conducted independently by the author without the use of AI. All AI-generated content has undergone thorough review, editing, and validation to guarantee correctness, originality, and academic integrity. Consequently, the findings and ultimate conclusions articulated in this study are solely the author's responsibility.

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