

The Impact of Brand Image in Mediating the Relationship Between EWOM And Purchasing Intention

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ABSTRACT: This research study aims to explore the role of brand image as a mediator on the relationship between electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and consumers' purchasing intention. Drawing upon the concept of brand image, defined by Keller in 1998, the paper argues that eWOM has become a key factor to strengthen brand image as it has been used among consumers to form expectations of the brand. Data were collected from 400 participants from Bangkok, with a mix of both generations X, Y, and Z. Path Analysis was utilized to examine the direct and indirect relationships among variables simultaneously. Findings suggest that brand image is strongly influenced by eWOM, and that brand image will further influence consumers' purchasing intention as proposed. Future research implications are suggested as well as practical implications for business managers are provided to encourage the formation of a good brand image through eWOM.

KEYWORDS: Brand Image, eWOM, Brand building, Branding, electronic word of mouth, purchasing intention

I. INTRODUCTION

The purchasing behavior of consumers has transformed significantly due to the rapid development of online communication platforms and social media networks. These platforms allow consumers across the globe to interact in real-time, making their purchasing decisions more informed than ever. Social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook have revolutionized the way consumers gather information about products and services, creating a more transparent and connected marketplace. This phenomenon results in a newly-launched customer journey which includes two additional stages: research and review. Research involves searching for not only product/service information but also comparing brands, items, and products and reading reviews especially through electronic word of mouth (eWOM) from existing customers. Conversely, reviews represent the process of sharing experiences, both positive and negative, which is called eWOM referral (Henning-Thaurau et al., 2004). In other words, Customers in this era are not only well aware but also conscious of the products or services they choose. Questions such as "What to purchase?", "How to purchase wisely?", "Why to purchase the product?", or "What does the brand represent?" constantly occur in people's minds when they purchase products/services. Even though the performance and quality are quite good, a negative image of brands or owners can result in an unsuccessful purchasing intention process.

The image of a brand tends to impact the intention of consumers to buy and the success of the company's marketing efforts (The World Intellectual Property Report, 2013). The image of a brand can be reinforced or ruined by WOM or vice versa. Now, with the advancement of technology and the widespread use of social media, the emergence of e-WOM has enhanced the role of e-WOM in influencing consumers' purchase intention. Brand image, mostly defined as consumer's general perception and feeling about a brand Ghodeswar (2008) and Janonis et al. (2007), is affected by this powerful eWOM to maintain or increase its status among consumers. Through narrative analysis and reviewing existing credible academic journals on eWOM, it is widely argued that eWOM directly affects both brand image and purchasing intention (Meng et al., 2022, Marliawati and Cahyaningdyah, 2020). Therefore, positive, or negative brand image held by consumers is expected to strengthen or weaken the relationship between e-WOM and consumer purchase intention.

The notable cases can be viewed through the purview of multiple sectors and cases, that have had experienced negative brand image. This ranges from the poor service quality of airlines and the comments of the customers in their social media platform to the negative brand image and sentiment of the customers related with the Big-Pharma. Yet, despite the poor service

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quality or exorbitant prices offered by firms operating in these sectors, it can be realized that these brands are expected to have a negative impact on brand image, which is expected to negatively impact on the intention to purchase. Considering such, the findings of this study is expected to have a thorough review on the role of brand image as a mediator in a relationship between eWOM and purchasing intention. This research paper argues that brand image plays significant role in mediating the effect of eWOM on purchasing intention among consumers, especially among young generation consumers, who are connected and online long hours a day.

The case of the e-WOM and effect on purchasing intention is ever-more significant in the case of the Gen-Y and Gen-Z, whereby, the respondents are realized as capable respondents that are active users of various platforms and are contributors of the creation and sharing of content. The Gen-Z, also those that were born between 1995-Present are individuals, who have approximately 90% of users that use social media regularly, specifically Facebook users. On the other hand, nearly 90% of the millennials are recognized as the users of various social media platform, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn. The level of engagement of the Gen-Z and millennials have recognized and realized as individuals that focus in managing practices of sharing content, reviews, and feedback, as well as, providing professional insights and product reviews. This is specifically important, as over 90% of consumers shopping online are influenced or are informed from online word-of-mouth, as well as reviews of contents (Siebert, 2022). With the high degree of purchasing power of the Gen-Z and Millennials, it is imperative to perform this study to inform the managers of the brands.

The development in the use of social media technology has led for a significant level of creation and sharing of information, including the sharing of reviews and feedback of the products across the social media platform. Brands have leveraged this networking environment and technology as a platform for acquiring relevant feedback from the consumer, which has been evident across multiple MNEs and SMEs globally. In addition to that, influencers and customers of these brands are also sharing their experiences associated with the use of the product, which is usually categorized as, positive, negative, or neutral sentiment. These sentiments provide new customers or existing customer with high switching risks with information, that leads to either higher loyalty or switching of the product. Generally, a negative sentiment increases the churn rate among customers, providing a negative impact on the firm's revenue. Further research studies have also suggested that this can negatively impact brand image, to a point of "no recovery". For instance, the sensitivity of the brand image is even more crucial in the context of pharmaceutical brands, that are recognized to charge extravagant prices, which has negatively affected the pharmaceutical brand image. Despite the exorbitant prices, it can be recognized that, the brands are often preferred due to either limited choice, or minimal effect on the consumer behaviour. Thus, the relevance of e-WOM does not stand anymore due to increase in the saturation of these types of marketing strategies, especially with increasing number of inorganic contents, such as fake profiles being used to make unrealistic comments on businesses and brands. Hence, assessing the current scenario, it is imperative to evaluate the effects of e-WOM on customer purchasing intention, and the mediating role of brand image on the proposed relationship.

Existing literature emphasizes the direct impact of eWOM on purchasing intention (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Meng et al., 2022). However, limited research examines whether brand image acts as a mediating factor in this relationship, especially in emerging markets like Thailand. Given the purchasing power and digital savviness of Generation Y and Z consumers in Bangkok, understanding how eWOM influences their perception of brand image and purchasing behavior is crucial for businesses.

This study aims to address this research gap by investigating the mediating role of brand image in the relationship between eWOM and purchasing intention. The findings will contribute to both academic literature and practical strategies for brand managers seeking to optimize their eWOM strategies in the digital age.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Social Media Platform

Social media platforms have been instrumental in changing the world of marketing and consumer behaviour. Kirtiş and Karahan (2011) suggested that although it started as a tool for entertainment and communication, it has quickly become a primary source of market information, giving consumers and businesses a place to interact, complain and praise.

According to Jenkins (2006), the earliest definition of social media platform was proposed, which defined social media as a "convergence culture" that allows media, culture, and collective intelligence to foster effective communication between users. Qualman (2009) furthered the definition of a social media platform, defining social media as a tool to deal with excess information on the internet. In both papers by Jenkins (2006) and Qualman (2012), social media was defined as a tool for communication, which is specifically imperative in the context of instant communication and transparency. Some examples cited in the paper by Qualman (2009) included Twitter and Facebook. However, since 2009 till 2023, the social media platform has innovated and emerged into new platforms like Pinterest, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, and other platforms (Huang et al., 2023). The research

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shows that social media features allowing customer relationships while telling brand stories and creating communities drive significant enhancements to collaborative brand development and consumer interaction. Making sure brand content on social media exists in good condition leads consumers to trust the brand more and drives their buying decisions. (Cheung et al., 2021). Research data found that social media advertising value components which include informativeness along with credibility and entertainment capabilities affect consumer engagement as well as purchase intention. The research provides evidence that brand image together with eWOM has essential power to lead customer buying choices. (Hussain et al., 2022).

Brand identity co-creation happens actively among customers as they participate in social media platforms. Positive eWOM influences brand trust and loyalty which produces strengthening effects on brand image. Studies conducted by Moghadamzadeh et al., 2020 demonstrated that personalized social media advertisement enhances customer perception of brands while strengthening their loyalty which underlines the importance of brand image in digital consumer decisions (Salonen et al., 2024). A high level of consumer interaction combined with positive eWOM creates considerable improvements in brand image together with trust perception. According to (Cheung et al., 2021) eWOM creates positive effects on brand image that act as a purchase intention intermediary. The study demonstrates how consumer perceptions about value influence buying behavior. According to Hassan et al. (2021) eWOM functions as a key element for knowledge acquisition by consumers who use it to assess brand reliability and product trustworthiness (Khoirunnisa & Albari, 2023).

Further research papers by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) stated that there are several types of social media platforms, including social media websites and application platforms, blogging sites, micro-blogging and wiki sites, forums, and others. Emerging social media technologies have also stated that they connect virtual reality (VR) technology with existing social media networks. Raman (2009) stated that social media platforms are categorised based on knowledge representation and user involvement levels. Another person cited that social media includes two participants, users and web publishers, along with a platform where these individuals connect and exchange information (Touchette & Schanski, 2015). Further findings proposed by Mamonov et al. (2016) claimed that social media platforms can be used for improved user engagement, and businesses can capitalise on social media platforms to improve social media engagement. Most of the user-generated content in this form is, therefore, eWOM because the main aim of the online feedback systems and review websites is to provide consumers with information for product evaluation. Therefore, consumer comments are associated with product and service marketing and are generally a part of the eWOM impact on brand reputation, and can also influence trust. Other studies, such as those by Bickar and Schindler (2001), Nonetheless, all these past studies demonstrate that eWOM can, directly and indirectly, impact various brand elements, and this can influence consumer attitudes towards the brand, how they may perceive the brand and whether or not they will purchase the product, that is, their eventual purchase intention.

B. Brand Image

Brand image, in the existing literature by Wijaya (2013), represents the subjective perception of a brand from the outside, which the brand owner specifically controls. The literature by Lee et al. (2014) defines brand image as the way that customers view a specific brand, including factors such as emotion, reputation, impression, and others. On the other hand, a brand image – in the literature by Janonis et al. (2007), is defined as the subjective perception of a brand from the outside, representing the way that brand owners want the brand audience to perceive the brand, as Nandan (2005).

In comparative literature by Ghodeswar (2008) and Janonis et al. (2007), brand image and brand identity are compared, and the findings suggest that brand identity is how a brand presents itself, while brand image is how others perceive a brand. However, a strong brand identity aligns with and has a positive effect on brand image. Furthermore, when a company successfully communicates its desired brand identity (for instance, fulfilling its brand promise), it can shape a positive brand image in the minds of consumers, leading to a positive brand image in the minds of consumers. Furthermore, the findings by Rosengren et al. (2010) suggested that if there is a disconnect between brand identity and brand image, this can often lead to increased scepticism and a negative perception of the brand, which can have a negative effect on the brand's overall image and word-of-mouth. Further literature by de Paula and Chaves (2017) states that a significant relationship between brand image, brand equity, brand positioning, and brand identity is explored. The authors, de Paula and Chaves, noted in their study (2017) that brand image and brand identity can help a company take a place among its rivals. For example, when brands meet customer expectations, this helps them give a positive image and be considered worth more. Furthermore, the paper by Sallam (2014) stated that brand image and brand identity could directly influence brand love and purchase decision-making among consumers. For instance, a positive brand image and a positive brand identity can develop a new variable called brand love, and this can also improve purchasing decisions among consumers.

Dam and Dam (2021) argue that one element that all brands are vitally aiming to achieve at their maximum positive level is brand image. Brand image, a pivotal concept in the realm of marketing and consumer behaviour, can be defined as the

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amalgamation of consumers' perceptions, impressions, and associations regarding a specific brand (Keller, 1993). In his paper on the dimensions of brand personality, Aaker (1997) stated that brand image is a mental construct that people form based on their experiences, exposure to brand communication, and interaction with the brand's goods or services. Moreover, Alic et al. (2020) state that brand image is a multidimensional construct that encompasses various facets, such as brand personality, brand associations, and brand benefits. Arguably, brand image incorporates a variety of elements, as indicated by all the renowned authors. However, it all simplifies the concept of how stakeholders perceive the brand, with the ultimatum for brands to have their names synonymised with certain attributes. For instance, Apple signifies innovation and quality, whereas Google signifies search engines, and Coca-Cola signifies soft drinks.

C. Influence of Electronic WOM on Brand Image

Mayzlin (2005) suggested that word of mouth, in its deepest concept, is an emotional input of consumers towards a product or service provided by the brand. Anderson (1998) states that since WOM has been here for decades, it allows the formation of opinions regarding the brand, and these opinions ultimately form the brand image. Mayzlin (2006) and Patel (2015) suggested that when opinions are formed, and images are somewhat described in the minds of people, it creates trust or distrust towards the brand. Keller (1993) and Herr et al. (1997), for instance, suggested that although traditional WOM has been powerful, online or eWOM is going to be much more powerful. Although his study has been for over 2 decades now, recent studies such as that by Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) have suggested that with the influx of social media sites, review sites, and other platforms for people to communicate, eWOM will become the ultimate destroyer or maker of brands.

Most studies show that electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) runs as a vital factor for shaping customer brand perceptions and their buying choices (Cheung et al., 2021; Hussain et al., 2022). The impact of electronic word-of-mouth depends directly on brand image because constructive brand depiction boosts customer trust and maintains their loyalty (Moghadamzadeh et al., 2020). Through social media platforms users can now develop brand value along with businesses because they can participate in brand engagement (Cheung, Lee, & Jin, 2021).

Multiple recent investigations demonstrate how eWOM functions as a decisive factor for building brand trust and consumer buying decisions (Pradana, Ariffin, & Wahab, 2022). Many researchers have analyzed the influence of eWOM quality together with volume and discovered that detailed reviews create robust brand perceptions and build consumer trust (Hassan, Melinda, & Siddiqui, 2021). According to Salonen et al. (2024) successful digital content marketing strategies enhance brand identity thus they boost purchasing motivation.

The main tool for product discovery along with brand reputation building among Generation Y and Z is social media (Khoirunnisa & Albari, 2023). eWOM has risen to become a vital brand management tool because consumers check review ratings and peer feedback along with product assessments prior to any buying decisions.

D. Customer purchase intention

Morrison (1979), in their early studies, elaborated that the intention to purchase refers to the probability that a consumer is going to purchase a product or service offered by a brand. Cheng et al. (2021) further indicated that a variety of factors influence consumer/customer purchase intention, and this can range from variables such as brand image, need recognition, credibility, authenticity, and more recently, variables such as sustainability, environmental friendliness, health-consciousness and others. Meanwhile, the study by Younus et al. (2015) reviews celebrity endorsements, product packaging, and customer knowledge related to purchase intention. Pradana et al. (2022) indicate that the incorporation of subjective variables that promote the purchase of a product or the motivation to purchase a product or service is, therefore, categorised as purchase intention.

That said, the impact of eWOM in digital marketing has gained more popularity. Research has indicated that eWOM significantly impacts both consumer perceptions and behaviour, which turns it into a powerful factor in purchase intention. Positive eWOM, through its influence on brand image and trustworthiness, can increase the odds that consumers would prefer a particular brand over other competing brands. Cheung and Thadani's (2012) research stressed the revolutionary influence of eWOM on consumer decision-making, stating that eWOM serves as a bridge between the image of a brand and the purchase intention of a consumer. Furthermore, according to Keller's (1993) explanation of brand image principles, a strong, positive brand image not only draws customers but also encourages their loyalty and trust. This study used quantitative research to examine how electronic word-of-mouth referrals affect brand image and customer purchasing intentions in mid-generation Y to generation Z individuals. The initial step involved a comprehensive review and collection of information from existing narrative research papers and articles published between the years 2010 and 2023. The selected articles were primarily sourced from reputable journals with high impact factors, ensuring the inclusion of significant and valid knowledge related to the topic. After thoroughly reviewing the collected papers, a research framework was developed (Figure 1). In order to investigate the hypothesised electronic word-of-mouth benefits of brand image and customer purchasing intentions

H3

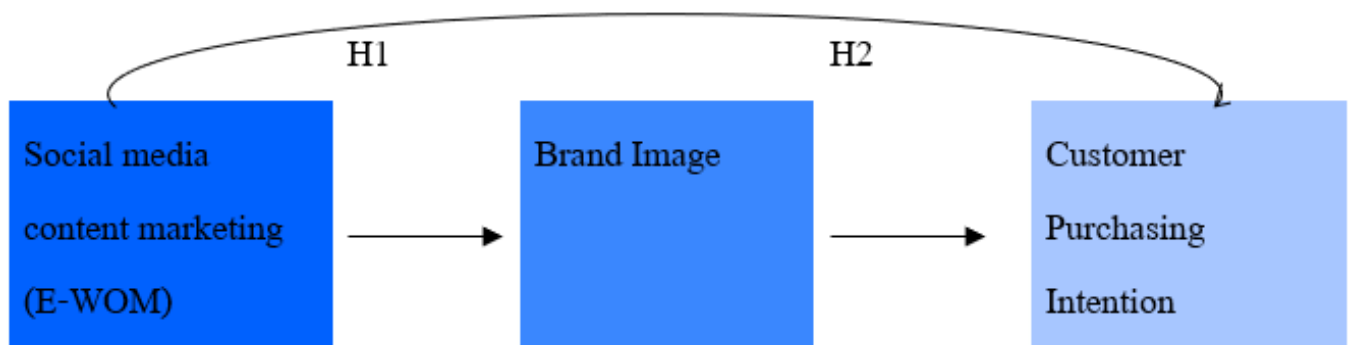


Figure 1 Research Framework

Variables

- Independent Variables: eWOM
- Dependent Variable: Customer Purchasing Intention
- Mediation Variable: Brand image

E. Hypothesis Summary

- H1: Electronic word-of-mouth has a positive impact on purchase intention and indirect effect on brand image
H2: Electronic word-of-mouth has a positive impact on purchase intention.
H3: Brand image has a positive impact on purchase intention

To address the research hypotheses, comprising of H1 through H3, this study intends to evaluate the inter-relationship that exists between e-WOM, brand image, and purchase intention using a quantitative methodology. A quantitative methodology is defined as the practice of using numerical measure of the key constructs. Past literature, including Siddiqui et al., (2021) and Handoko and Melinda (2021) have measured the reviewed each of the constructs – which have been selected in this research study. Due to the measurable nature of the constructs of this study, using quantitative research stands as a best-fit for the study. Furthermore, this study also intends to collect data from 400 participants, which can be best collected using a close-ended questionnaire. Therefore, this study applies the use of quantitative methodological approach in measuring (collecting of data) and analyzing the relationship between the proposed constructs.

III. METHOD

A. Population and Sampling

The target population for this study consists of individuals from mid-generation Y to Generation Z residing in Bangkok, Thailand. The particular focus of the research study being in Bangkok, Thailand is due to the region being the hometown of the researcher, and the ease of accessibility of the dataset. Participants will be recruited by distributing the survey questionnaire online through various social media platforms. A convenience sampling technique was employed to select a sample of 400 participants, which is 10 to 20 times the number of variables based on the guideline proposed by Hair et al. (2010). The minimum sample size for this study of 400 sample respondents also supports the notion of Krejcie and Morgan (1970), who confirm that, any population group that are more than 1 million stand to be 400 respondents. Furthermore, using a convenience sampling strategy, according to Saunders et al., (2023) refers to a non-probability sampling technique, which allows convenience accessibility and proximity to the researcher, wherein, the insight can be collected through a straightforward and conducted quickly. Furthermore, the use of convenience sampling strategy also is expected to help in performing a pilot study, which – according to Ghazali (2016), is the process of testing a questionnaire or research instrument in terms of the research reliability. Considering such, the findings of this study would collect a total of 30 respondents to analyze the reliability of the test. To ensure the selection of participants who align with the research objectives, the researcher utilised specific screening questions, which is expected to assess participants' online shopping habits, regular use of social media platforms, and age. The purpose of these questions was identifying individuals who fit the desired sample group.

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B. Data Collection and Method tool

In addition, based on existing literature and recommendations from the advisory professor, data for this study was collected using a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire was posted on social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, with a link provided for participants to access and the questionnaire independently. Approximately 400 social media users who were expected to be part of the target sample and have a predisposition towards eWOM were invited to participate.

Table 1 Reliability Level Analysis

No.	Coefficient of Cronbach's Alpha	Reliability Level
1	More than 0.90	Excellent
2	0.80-0.89	Good
3	0.70-0.79	Acceptable
4	0.60-0.69	Questionable
5	0.50-0.59	Poor
6	Less than 0.59	Unacceptable

Source: Terán-Yépez et al. (2020)

A pilot study of 30 respondents was analyzed using the SPSS platform and the statements will be removed, and further scale analysis will be performed. Using the Cronbach's Alpha score, it was noted that, the reliability scale alpha-value less than 0.59 to 0.69 represents that there is a lack of internal consistency, and therefore, the variables are incapable of explaining the variable that is intended. However, considering the reliability scale is higher than 0.70 is considered to be acceptable, with a high reliability level.

IV. RESULTS

The findings of the demographic findings suggest that majority of the respondents prefer shopping online, with 48.3% respondents preferring Instagram and 23.9% respondents preferring TikTok as a shopping platform. The findings of the study align with the preferences of the age group, as this study comprised of respondent that are Generation-Z, who are characterized as the iGeneration, or Centennials. The reason could also be supported based on the use of the social media platform, wherein, majority of the respondents us social media between 1 to 2 hours (30.4%) and 3 to 5 hours (43.6%) daily. However, it is also noteworthy to see that, there are some respondents that use more than 5 hours of social media at 23.9%. In terms of shopping behaviour, the respondents generally shop between 2 to 3 times per month (comprising of 61.3% of the respondents), followed by 2 to 3 times per week (29.5% of the respondents). Some respondents also have a habit of shopping every day, which could however, also include shopping across offline stores. Finally, 44.1% of the total respondents always read some form of review, and 51.2% sometimes engage with the review. Thus, reviews can act as an important factor influencing the purchasing behaviour of the Centennial generation.

A. Path Analysis Model

The path analysis model (PA) is implemented in this research to analyze the relationship between eWOM, Brand Image, and Purchasing Intention. A general descriptive statistics analysis is initially performed, and the results are presented in the following table below.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics for Path Analysis Model (N = 447)

Variables	M	SD	Min	Max
eWOM	0.560	0.0402	0.481	0.639
Brand Image	0.238	0.0424	0.155	0.321
Purchasing Intention	0.532	0.0414	0.450	0.613

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In addition to the descriptive statistics for Path Analysis Model, the Initial Data, presenting the r-squared and chi-square is presented in the following table below.

Table 3 Path Analysis (PA) Initial Analysis Results (N = 447)

Variables	eWOM			BI			PS		
	DE	IE	TE	DE	IE	TE	DE	IE	TE
eWOM	-	-	-	0.931	-	-	0.154	-	-
BI	0.931	-	0.931	-	-	-	-	-	-
PS	0.154	0.808	0.962	-	0.868	0.868	-	-	-
R-square	0.93			0.87			-		
Chi-square= 10.819, df=10, Relative Chi-square=1.082, p=0.372									
RMSEA= 0.014 RMR= 0.018 GFI= 0.993 AGFI= 0.981 NFI=0.987									

The path analysis ran for the 3 variables, eWOM, BI, and PS resulted in showcasing the r-squared value for the chi-square (χ^2) = 10.819, df = 10, and a p-value of 0.372. In addition to that, the key fit indices were observed in this study, including the RMSEA (Room Mean Squared Error of Approximation) = 0.014, and the RMR (Root Mean Square Residual) = 0.018. Referencing the author – Schumacker & Lomax (2016), it can be noted that, $RMSEA \leq 0.05$, $RMR \leq 0.05$, indicating that the value is a good fit. In addition to that, the GFI (Goodness of Fit Index), AGFI (Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index), and NFI (Normed Fit Index) were all in the range of 0.9 – 1. This indicates that, the model has a near to perfect fit. To further evaluate the mediation model, the maximum likelihood (standardized) estimated and selected fit indices are reviewed in the following table below.

Table 3 Maximum Likelihood Standardised Estimates and Selected Fit Indices (N = 447)

Description	Estimates	T-values
Direct Paths		
Social media (eWOM) > Brand Image	0.931	8.706
Social media (eWOM) > Purchasing Intention	0.154	0.336
Brand Image > Purchasing Intention	0.868	1.884
InDirect Paths		
Social media (eWOM) > Brand Image > Purchasing Intention	0.868	1.884
Equation Error Variances		
Social media (eWOM)	0.442	-
Brand Image	0.324	-
Purchasing Intention	0.265	-
Selected Fit Indices		
X square	10.819	-
Root-Mean square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	0.014	-
Root-Mean square Residual (RMR)	0.018	-

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Goodness of Fit Model (GFI)	0.993	-
Adjusted Goodness of Fit Model (AGFI)	0.981	-
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	0.987	-

The findings of the Path Analysis (PA) portray the relationship between eWOM, Brand Image, and Purchase Intention, wherein, all 3 hypotheses were confirmed in this study, as the path coefficient between eWOM and purchasing intention (PS) 0.154, the direct relationship between BI and PS was 0.868, and the indirect effects was 0.868. Furthermore, the RMSEA and RMR are below 0.05, indicating a good-fit of the model. Furthermore, the GFI, AGFI, and NFI for the selected factors were higher than 0.900, indicating a nearly perfect fit for the developed model. The findings can be illustrated through the following SEM figure model presented

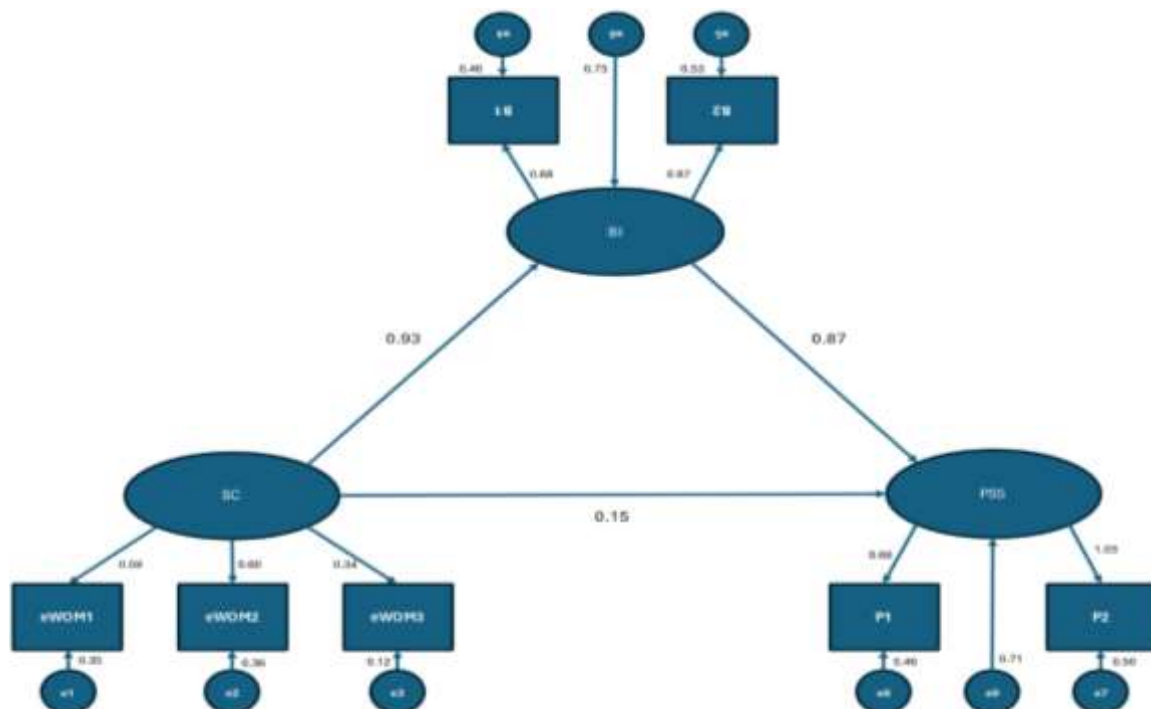


Figure 2 Standardized Model

The following table summarises the hypotheses tested in this study:

Table 4 Summary of Hypotheses

Hypotheses	Accepted or Rejected
H1: Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) has a positive impact on purchase intention (PS) and indirect effect on brand image (BI).	Accepted
H2: Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) has a positive impact on purchase intention (PS).	Accepted
H3: Brand Image (BI) has a positive impact on purchase intention (PS).	Accepted

V. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This research study aimed at investigating the effects of eWOM on consumer purchasing intention and brand image, in the context of Bangkok, Thailand. In this research study, the researcher establishes the argument that, the eWOM across social media platform can have a significant impact on the purchasing intention of consumers. In light to this argument, the paper develops 3 primary hypotheses, which includes – (i) H1: Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) has a positive impact on purchase intention (PS) and indirect effect on brand image (BI), (ii) H2: Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) has a positive impact on purchase intention (PS), and (iii) H3: Brand Image (BI) has a positive impact on purchase intention (PS). To test the hypotheses, this study

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adopted the use of a mono-quantitative methodological approach, whereby, the data was collected using close-ended survey questionnaire. Strict ethical conduct were confirmed in the context of this study, including ensuring the participants being informed, obtaining relevant consent from the respondents, and thoroughly examining the research instrument to ensure no harm to the participants. Following the quantitative research approach, this research collected data from a total of 447 respondents using a close-ended questionnaire. The data analysis focused on using a path analysis (PA) approach, testing the relationship between, the effects of eWOM on PS, eWOM on BI, and BI on PS. The results showcased that, the proposed hypotheses are aligned, and therefore, eWOM has a direct effect on PS, an indirect effect on BI, and BI has a direct effect on PS. The findings align with previous research indicating that eWOM significantly influences brand image (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Meng et al., 2022). However, this study further establishes that brand image fully mediates the relationship between eWOM and purchasing intention among young consumers in Bangkok. This implies that eWOM alone is insufficient to drive purchasing decisions unless it enhances brand image. The electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has been rising over the years, as the social media has proliferated in use over the years (Jenkins 2006; Sigar et al., 2021). The author, Sigar et al. (2021) stated that, eWOM practices has influences the volume and scope of word-of-mouth travel, that contributes to the informational awareness of the consumers, specific to the quality of product/service delivered by the brand. This type of content, when delivered by the users, can often contribute to shaping the attitude of customers towards brands that have online presence, whether through owned media or earned media channels. This was confirmed in the early research paper by Rodgers and Wang (2011), which explored UGC as a factor of eWOM, that allows consumers to develop specific positive, negative, or neutral expression/attitude towards a brand. Hence, in the context of this research, the author intends to compare and justify the findings presented in the literature review. The first hypothesis of this study was – “Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) has a positive impact on purchase intention (PS) and indirect effect on brand image (BI)” – which was found in the past research papers such as, Dewi and Gintari (2020), Yohana et al. (2020), and Ilyas et al. (2021). However, the researcher – Ilyas et al. (2021) also found that, trust is a key factor in defining the purchasing intention. While this stands as a limitation in this study – as trust is not adopted in this paper, future works can consider the relationship of trust as a mediating variable in exploring the relationship between eWOM, trust, brand image, and purchasing intention.

In addition to that, further research papers such as, Hassan et al. (2020) also integrated sub-dimensions of eWOM in studying the relationship between the eWOM variables and PS – which aligns with the H2 of this study: “Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) has a positive impact on purchase intention (PS)”. The research by Hassan et al. (2020) discusses the key factors of eWOM quality, eWOM quantity, sender’s expertise, and purchasing intention. Although this study does not integrate each of the eWOM variables, the findings of this paper and Hassan et al. (2020) conform with each other. Khoirunnisa and Albari (2023) also confirms this finding, stating that, the eWOM drives improved product knowledge, and this product knowledge can lead to a specific decision making in the context of the intent to purchase among the consumers. Moreover, prominent authors such as Keller (1993) and Cheung and Thadani (2012) have suggested that eWOM’s power should not be underestimated. Reviews from consumers, that is, positive eWOM’s can lead to improved brand recognition, awareness, and ultimately what most brands sought for, that is, brand loyalty. Consumers, in the present era are more focused on finding reviews online and being able to have a positive eWOM portfolio amongst brands, can influence the purchasing intention greatly. Especially considering the context of this study whereby majority of the people who partook in the study claim to read it ‘always’ or ‘sometimes’. This majority of the people can be generalized in Thailand, and resultantly contributing to a major part of the decision making process.

VI. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study highlight several managerial implications, specifically for businesses that are operating in Bangkok, Thailand – and beyond to similar regions. One of the most significant implications of the finding is associated with the segmented marketing approach, which includes tailoring eWOM strategies o specific market segment, understanding the relevant demographic, psychographic, and behavioral practices. In addition to that, the relevance of the findings also suggests that the finding should incorporate constructs such as trust to further develop and confine to developing a fine-tune relationship. Similarly, the findings of this study would also businesses to create incentive programs, such as discount and loyalty points to review their products, or provide positive testimonials – which in the short term can boost revenue, and in the long-term can have a significant impact on sales and market share.

VII. LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

In addressing this research, the author found that, there were notable limitations, that could be addressed through future research. Firstly, it was noted that, the research adopted a quantitative approach. Using a mono-method has restricted this research to performing an objective assessment, focusing on the inter-relationship that exists between the eWOM, brand image, and purchasing intention. However, future research study can adopt and implement a mixed methodological approach, that

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focuses in using both qualitative (interview) and quantitative (survey) to collect the data. This can allow collecting data from both open-sources and close-ended sources, enriching the findings and its generalizability. Furthermore, using open-sources such as interviews can also allow the researchers to create a grounded framework on identifying the key attributes and characteristics of the e-WOM, which can enhance the findings of the study. Secondly, this research is limited by the scope of the study. The scope of this study comprises of respondents from Bangkok, Thailand, and despite collecting 400+ data, the generalizability of the findings could be limited to the context of Thailand, of countries that are culturally similar. Hence, future studies can expand the scope of the research in exploring new scope of the research. The expansion of the scope to new regions, not limited to Thailand, can allow the research study to be associated with a broader generalizability of the findings.

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