



Social media influencers and e-WOM on Skintific products purchase intentions: the mediating role of brand image

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ABSTRACT

Social media is a digital marketing tool that is more adaptive and provides convenience for its users, including product campaign. Changes in consumer behavior have made companies consider new value propositions for consumers, including utilizing social media influencers and the presence of e-WOM to increase potential consumer's purchasing intentions. This research aims to identify the influence of social media influencers and e-WOM on Skintific products purchase intention through brand image. The research used a quantitative approach with a correlational research type. The sampling technique used was nonprobability sampling, specifically purposive sampling. Data was obtained from Solo Raya respondents. The sample in this study amounted to 200 respondents. The data analysis technique used in this research was SEM PLS (Structural Equation Modeling - Partial Least Square) using SmartPLS statistical software. Results indicate a positive effect between social media influencers and e-WOM on consumer's purchase intention with brand image mediating this relationship.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The improvement of the internet has brought out the revolution of marketing practice. Internet is a better solution to intensify communication with consumers, considering that internet users continuously increase regarding the reachable of access and time. According to data from Datareportal in January 2023, an internet user in Indonesia already reached 212,9 million with social media users as many as 167 million people. Whereas, the average time spent exploring social media is 3 hours 18 minutes. The data shows that 50,4% of social media users utilize it to discover many things that should do or purchase, and 36,5% of users utilize it to find the product to purchase. The numerals encourage the company to increase the utilization of social media as a brand communication channel (Yadav & Rahman, 2018).

Nowadays, every social media user has considerable potential to obtain income with content created as a contribution to product or brand promotion. With the higher popularity of their display, they will increasingly encouraged to collaborate with company

brands with brand recommendations in the display of their social media (Veirman & Hudders, 2020).

Social media influencers have become the focus of company consideration, not only as the channel and potential marketing media, however, become assets in social relations that can be collaborated. The matter can bring out the company inside the comprehensive marketing relation (Augustine, 2019). An influencer refers to someone who is widely known and is regarded as a role model by their follower (Johnstone & Lindh, 2022). According to a report from Marketing Influencer Hub, the marketing industry through influencers will rise to \$21 billion in 2023. Along with the expansion of social media platforms, the role of influencers is becoming increasingly complex. The existence of this complexity establishes the company to consider marketing strategy and new value proposition for consumers (Kannan & Li, 2017). Influencers are configuring the audience perception to encourage purchase intention with their content recommendations about a product. The research conducted by Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández (2019), Lim et al. (2017), Masuda et al. (2022), Sokolova & Kefi (2020) indicates there is a significant influence of influencer involvement on purchase intention. Influencers also play a role in creating value for the brand with consumers to reach marketing communication intention (Enke & Borchers, 2019). In other words, the image of an influencer can influence the brand image (Utami et al., 2020).

Nowadays, e-WOM is still an effective communication method in digital marketing, wherefore the technology expansion enlarges the interaction scale between brand and consumer. E-WOM refers to information-sharing activities regarding a product, service, or brand that generally comes from the consumer's personal experience at the post-purchase stage (Liu et al., 2020). As many as 61% of consumers are using e-WOM before deciding to purchase a product, and 80% of consumers are only available to purchase online since communicate with other online consumers (Munandar, 2021). Social media frequently influences the reputation of a brand, either positively or negatively by observing consumers's reviews as one of the factors to determine the achievement of the brand (Taylor, 2018). The survey according to Marketing Chart in 2020 shows that 'recommendation' has taken a first rank in brand selection. From the data that have been shown, consumers assume that e-WOM is an information source that is trusted and more reliable. Consumer behavior to e-WOM is important to analyze to conceive their purchasing intentions. Through Chakraborty & Biswal (2020) research, it can be emphasized that the higher the power of brand communication, the stronger the brand image. They interpret that review as a message that will create a brand image in consumer's thoughts and eventually will influence their decision.

Marketing communication through influencers is utilized to trigger and spark potential consumer interest in line with the new paradigm where social media users act as independent brand ambassadors (Schwemmer & Ziewiecki, 2018) (Boerman, 2020). Research on this subject continues to develop as time goes by. Previous research, such as that conducted by Chen et al. (2023), Johnstone & Lindh (2022), Chetioui et al. (2020), Hudders et al. (2021), Masuda et al. (2022), Indrawati et al. (2022), dan Verma et al. (2023) only explained the role of social media influencers or e-WOM on purchase intention, where social media influencers or e-WOM have a positive effect on purchase intention. However, these studies have not revealed the role of brand image as a mediator in this relationship in current conditions. There is also the closest findings from Woodroof et al. (2020). However, the study revealed that influencer marketing is considered less effective due to the lack of transparency of influencers in promoting products or brands. Influencer transparency in e-WOM has a significant influence on purchase intention and consumer perceptions of the effectiveness of a product. Consumer perception will lead them to form a brand image. These things are gaps found in the previous research.

Nevertheless, previous literature reveals the doubts felt by consumers when they consider purchasing but they will also accept the risks that will be felt if it does not meet expectations (Biswas et al., 2006; Kim et al., 2008). review of recent literature on influencer marketing and e-WOM brings out these gaps. The most highlighted previous research results only focused on the effect of recommendations from influencers and other consumers on their audience's purchase intention (Chetioui et al., 2020; Dwidienawati et al., 2020; Hudders et al., 2021), but did not find image involvement brand in mediating this linkage. The closest finding is the finding from Woodroof et al. (2020) which explains that influencer marketing is considered less effective due to the lack of transparency of influencers in promoting products or brands. Influencer transparency in e-WOM has a significant influence on purchase intention and consumer perceptions of the effectiveness of a product. Consumer perception will lead them to form a brand image.

The most common problem faced by companies in the beauty sector lies in the brand image itself which will lead to consumer purchasing intentions. Consumers will face various alternative choices and need to identify these alternative choices before deciding to make a purchase. Statista data shows that revenue from the Beauty and Personal Care market in Indonesia in 2023 will reach US\$ 7.95 billion with an estimate that will continue to grow by 4.80% every year, which means that the development of skincare products in Indonesia continues to increase every year. This data shows that demand for skincare products will continue to encourage companies to innovate to increase sales of their products. Skintific is a skin care product with very high demand at the moment. The skincare brand with the campaign 'We Repair Your Skin Barrier' has won several awards at the Sociolla Award 2022, Female Daily Best of Beauty Awards 2022, Beautyhaul Awards 2022, and Tiktok Live Awards 2022. The significant increase in sales of Skintific products plays an important role in social media influencers and e-WOM.

The urgency in this research focuses on seeing how effective the involvement of brand image is in influencer marketing and e-WOM to increase consumers' purchasing interest in Skintific products. Collaboration with influencers and support from e-WOM not only contribute significantly to marketing success but are also crucial factors in building and strengthening brand image. The success of product's branding can be seen as a positive result of the effective synergy between social media influencers and e-WOM, which together create a positive impact on consumer perception and increase product appeal.

In connection with this, the research focuses on finding updates from previous research based on suggestions from previous researchers, whether there is a mediating effect of brand image on the influence of social media influencers and e-WOM on purchase intention. This research aims to analyze the influence of influencers and e-WOM on purchase intention for Skintific products and the role of brand image which mediates this influence.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research is quantitative research, where the process of collecting data and interpreting it involves calculating numbers or quantifying data. The data obtained was analyzed using SmartPLS 3.0 software with a Structural Equation Model (SEM) approach based on Partial Least Square (PLS). Data was collected through a questionnaire of 200 respondents with 19 question items. The data collection technique was carried out by distributing questionnaires online via Google Forms to the people of Solo Raya. The sample selection technique used in this research is a nonprobability sampling technique with a purposive sampling type. The samples that will be taken have criteria, namely the

people of Solo Raya, over 17 years old, familiar with Skintific products, and familiar with social media influencers on social media.

A conceptual framework for illustrating the relationships between latent variables, both directly and indirectly, is presented in Figure 1.

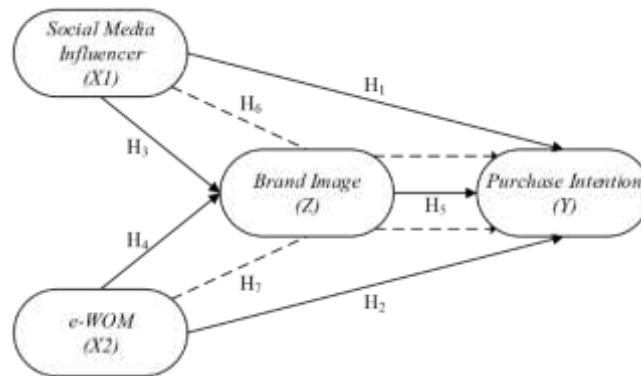


Figure 1. Research Model

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Observing from the demographics of the respondents, the majority of respondents were in the age range of 17 to 25 years with a percentage of 98%, the majority were domiciled in Surakarta as many as 89 people with a percentage of 44.5%, and all respondents used social media, had knowledge of social media influencers, and had knowledge about Skintific products.

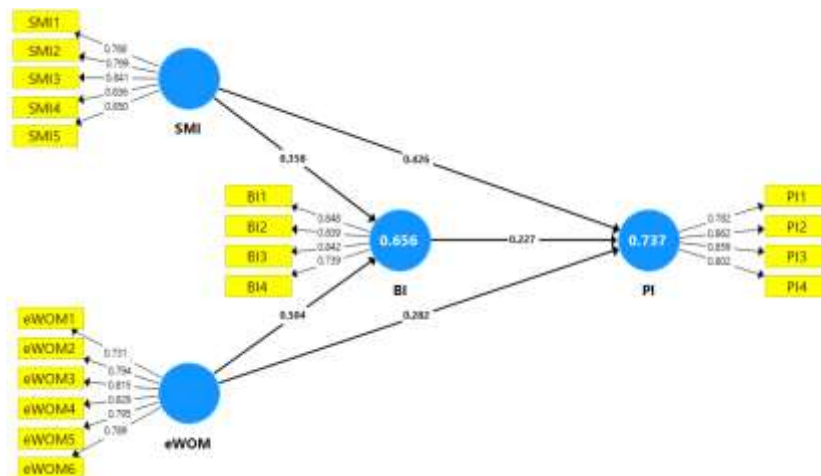


Figure 2. Outer Model

Based on Figure 2, all statements are declared valid because they already have a loading factor above 0.70.

Table 1. Reliability Test

Variabel	Cronbach's Alpha	Rho_A	Composite Reliability	AVE
Social Media Influencer	0.877	0.842	0.911	0.669
e-WOM	0.882	0.848	0.910	0.684
Purchase Intention	0.845	0.880	0.896	0.671
Brand Image	0.834	0.884	0.890	0.629

Based on Table 1, all variables have Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values > 0.7, so it can be concluded that the research instruments are reliable.

Table 2. Reliability Test

Variabel	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Purchase Intention	0.845	0.880
Brand Image	0.834	0.884

R-Square is used to evaluate the structural model (inner model) for the independent variables. R square test results are presented in Table 2. R-square value is purchase intention 0.733. It means, 73.3% purchase intention variable is explained with by the variables social media influencer, e-WOM, and brand image. The remaining 26.7% is explained by other variables outside the model. Furthermore, the R-square value of brand image is 0.652 and is categorized as moderate. This means that 65.2% of the brand image variable can be explained by the social media influencer and e-WOM variables. The remaining 34.8% is explained by other variables outside the model.

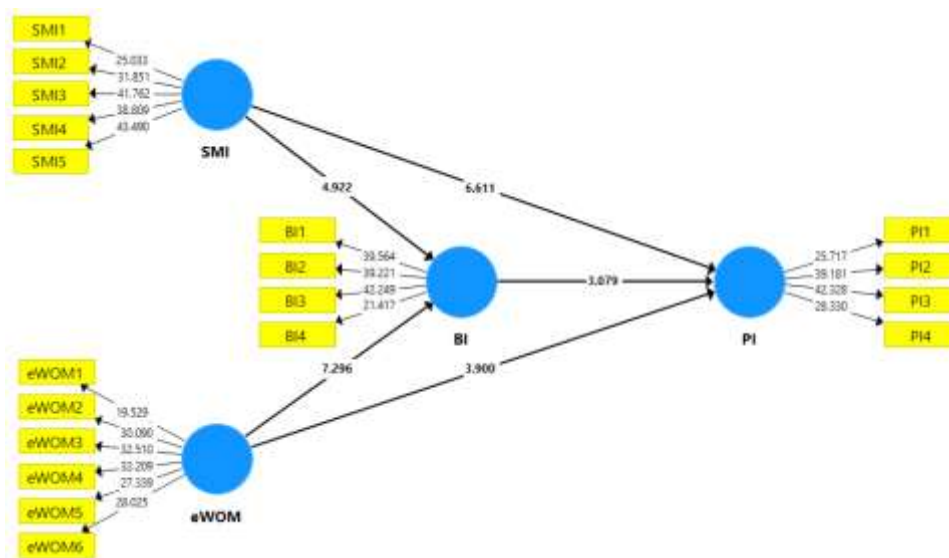


Figure 3. PLS Bootstrapping

The following are the results of direct effect test.

Table 3. Direct Effect Test

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
SMI -> PI	0.426	0.428	0.064	6.611	0.000
eWOM -> PI	0.282	0.281	0.072	3.900	0.000
SMI -> BI	0.358	0.355	0.073	4.922	0.000
eWOM -> BI	0.504	0.509	0.069	7.296	0.000
BI -> PI	0.227	0.228	0.074	3.079	0.002

The following are the results of indirect effect test.

Table 4. Indirect Effect Test

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
SMI -> BI -> PI	0.081	0.080	0.030	2.746	0.006
eWOM -> BI -> PI	0.114	0.116	0.042	2.693	0.007

Based on the direct effect test results in Table 3, the original sample values and p-values show a direct influence between variables. The results of the analysis of the direct effect of social media influencers on purchase intention show that the original sample value was 0.426 and the p-values 0.000 were declared significantly positive. This is in line with research by Jiménez-Castillo dan Sánchez-Fernández (2019), Lim et al. (2017), Masuda et al. (2022), Sokolova and Kefi (2020). In this research, social media influencers were able to shape consumers' purchasing intentions for Skintific products. In general, consumers tend to show a positive response to skin care product recommendations from Skintific conveyed by social media influencers, thereby increasing their desire to buy. When an influencer recommends a product, it can help the brand effectively attract the attention of new customers, especially when the influencer builds an image as an honest and knowledgeable individual, or has relevant experience. As predicted, when consumers perceive a social media influencer as a trustworthy individual, they are more likely to have the intent to purchase the product. These results fill the gap in previous research, especially that of Woodroof et al. (2020) which explains the non-transparency of influencer recommendations. Influencer credibility, which is supported by information provided consistently, clearly, and relevantly, can convince consumers regarding their intention to purchase a product.

The results of the analysis of the direct effect of e-WOM on purchase intention show that the original sample value was 0.282 and the p-values of 0.000 were declared significantly positive. Based on the results of this research, e-WOM has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention. The results of this test are in line with research conducted by Park et al. (2021), Chae et al. (2020) These results show that all forms of e-WOM help potential consumers to see the assessments of consumers who have purchased products from Skintific. In the context of online shopping, e-WOM plays a significant role in reducing the information gap that potential customers may have. Experienced consumer evaluation can also reduce doubts and perceived risks. Furthermore, quantity, quality, credibility, and usefulness of information act as important components in influencing consumer behavior, the impact of which leads to purchase intentions. These components clarify consumers' understanding of an ambiguous product or service.

The results of the analysis of the direct effect of social media influencers on the brand image show that the original sample value is 0.358 and p-values of 0.000 are declared significantly positive. Based on the results of hypothesis testing in this research, social media influencers have a positive effect on brand image. These results are in line with research by Hermanda et al. (2019), Arwachyntia et al. (2022), and Afifah et al. (2022) which states that influencers have a positive influence on brand image. The involvement of influencers in marketing is aimed at creating value for a brand from a consumer perspective. Social media influencers and brands emphasize that successful collaborations occur when they demonstrate high interest and motivation in effective marketing campaigns. Social media influencers contribute to opening a positive perspective towards the brand. Influencers use their skills, such as persuasive abilities, social interaction, content creation, and relationship development to convey the meaning of Skintific products. Brand representation explains that having a clear direction in marketing strategy allows for better focus. Collaborating with influencers in marketing campaigns is one successful way. A clear, trustworthy, and attractive orientation can facilitate consumers in conveying product values. This interaction is referred to as the level of engagement and communication between the influencer, brand, and consumer.

The results of the analysis of the direct effect of e-WOM on the brand image show that the original sample value is 0.504 and the p-values 0.000 are declared significantly positive. The research results that show that e-WOM has a significant effect on brand image support the research of Armawan et al. (2023), Yolanda et al. (2023), and Mihardjo et al. (2019). Assessments about products will influence other people's perceptions of a

brand. Although companies present information related to the products themselves, consumers also share their experiences, opinions, feedback, etc. on various platforms to increase their knowledge. The brand image itself depends on how consumers evaluate their products based on the consumer's usage experience. This research reveals that quality, quantity, credibility, and useful information have a significant influence on brand image. The strength of information about a brand is a form of representation of existing values so that consumers can create their perceptions from information obtained from the experiences of other consumers.

The results of the analysis of the direct effect of brand image on purchase intention show that the original sample value was 0.227 and the p-values of 0.002 were declared significantly positive. The results of the hypothesis test state that brand image has a positive effect on purchase intention. The results of this research are in line with previous research by Agmeka et al. (2019), Phung et al. (2019), and Consumers tend to choose products that are well-known or already have the right brand image. If a product has a positive brand image in the eyes of consumers and is believed to be able to fulfill their needs and desires, then the intention to buy a product will arise in consumers. On the other hand, if a product is considered to have a negative image, consumers' purchase intentions towards that product will be low.

Furthermore, the results of the indirect effect test are in Table 4. The results of the indirect effects analysis between social media influencers, brand image, and purchase intention show that the original sample value is 0.081 with p-values of 0.006 which are declared significantly positive. The results of this research state that brand image mediates the influence of social media influencers on purchase intention. Consumers evaluate the influencer's overall credibility in presenting product value during the decision-making process. This process may involve considering whether the influencer can be relied upon to convey valuable and accurate information, in line with consumer expectations. Influencers shape and change consumer perceptions about Skintific products so that they will create a value called brand image. A strong brand image will trigger significant purchasing intentions.

Furthermore, the results of the indirect effects analysis between e-WOM, brand image, and purchase intention show the original sample value of 0.114 with p-values of 0.007 that are declared significantly positive. In line with the closest findings, namely research El-said (2020) and Rao et al. (2021), brand image mediates the influence of e-WOM on purchase intention. The tendency of consumers to consider information produced by social media users as credible and trustworthy and to continuously search for product-related information via the internet is increasing. Consumer trust in product reviews by previous consumers involves the process of creating value for a brand's product that ultimately encourages them to make purchases based on e-WOM informations.

4. CONCLUSION

This research refers to the social media influencer and e-WOM literature by studying the indirect effects of influencers and e-WOM on purchase intention through brand image. Influencer characteristics have been well explained through the theory-based belief, expertise, and attractiveness paradigm, where consumer confidence, expertise, and attractiveness act as precursors to purchase intent. The results of this research also imply that reviews, comments, and discussions about a brand can increase customers' perceptions of the brand's credibility, thereby leading to increased brand credibility, increased trust, and greater purchase intentions.

Based on the results of the research that has been conducted, it can be concluded that social media influencers have a significant positive effect on purchase intention, e-WOM has a significant positive effect on purchase intention, social media influencers

have a significant positive effect on brand image, e-WOM has a important positive effect on brand image, brand image has a significant positive effect on purchase intention, brand image mediates the influence of social media influencers on purchase intention, and brand image mediates the influence of e-WOM on purchase intention.

As far as this research is concerned, it contributes to the knowledge base about phenomena influencing new consumer behavior and the existing literature on influencer marketing and e-WOM. Marketing using social media influencers is very necessary to build a product brand image. The better the influencers convey opinions about Skintific products on social media, the more the product image will improve and increase buying interest. Previous consumer reviews are also a good marketing tool for Skintific. So the better the reviews on Skintific products, the more consumer buying interest will increase. By building a brand image, it will be easier for consumers to remember Skintific products. The better the image of Skintific in the minds of consumers, the higher the consumer's buying interest.

Based on the research results, marketers can strengthen e-WOM by making their referrals for reviews conducted by influencers. It helps marketers control marketing strategies. Marketers may better understand their customers so that the content influencers share can be under management control. e-WOM can be useful for improving products or even being an inspiration for developing new products. These findings will offer benefits in copywriting to better target consumer needs. Existing indicators can be taken into consideration to improve marketing activities.

There are several limitations in this research. This study focuses on the beauty products industry, so the respondents are mostly women. In addition, this research only focuses on consumer perceptions and their shopping intentions. Further research are recommended to explore the role of social media influencers and e-WOM and their impact on brand image from company perceptions.

This research is expected to become a reference and consideration in developing marketing strategies to better consider the role of influencers and the quality of e-WOM. It is hoped that the results of this research can be used as an additional source of reference in marketing management theory for future researchers who will examine similar problems, as well as to develop this research by considering other factors that are not included in the variables described in this research.

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