

THE ROLE OF BRAND IMAGE IN MEDIATING THE EFFECT OF E-WOM ON PURCHASE INTENTION (A STUDY OF PROSPECTIVE CONSUMERS OF BakedByAurea)

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ABSTRACT

Digital consumer reviews have become increasingly strategic in shaping brand perceptions and purchase intention; however, the underlying mechanism within the context of artisanal micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) remains underexplored. This study aims to examine the effect of Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) on purchase intention, with brand image serving as a mediating variable among prospective consumers of BakedByAurea in Denpasar City. The study employed a quantitative associative approach involving 100 respondents selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a structured Likert-scale questionnaire and analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0. The findings indicate that E-WOM has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.339$; $p = 0.000$), a positive and significant effect on brand image ($\beta = 0.667$; $p = 0.000$), and that brand image has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.497$; $p = 0.000$). Brand image was confirmed as a partial mediator in the relationship between E-WOM and purchase intention ($\beta = 0.332$; $p = 0.000$). These findings reinforce the applicability of the Theory of Reasoned Action within the context of digital marketing for MSMEs and imply that managing organic E-WOM constitutes an effective marketing strategy for culinary MSMEs operating without substantial advertising budgets.

Keywords: Electronic Word of Mouth, Brand Image, Purchase Intention

INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian bakery industry, which has experienced annual growth exceeding 10% (APEBI, 2022), alongside a projected market value of USD 49.19 billion in 2023, reflects the substantial potential of this sector, particularly for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), which dominate its production structure. Amid the rapid penetration of digital platforms and shifts in consumer behaviour, where online reviews and recommendations increasingly influence purchasing decisions, artisanal bakery MSMEs face both opportunities and challenges in leveraging Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) as an effective marketing instrument. This phenomenon has become even more relevant considering APJII (2025) data indicating that social media has become the most widely utilised marketing platform among business operators, with a utilisation rate of 38.01%, representing an increase of more than twofold compared with the previous year.

Numerous studies have examined the relationship between E-WOM and purchase intention; however, the findings remain inconsistent. Handoko and Melinda (2021), Prayoga and Yasa (2023), and Siwu and Rahanatha (2024) found that E-WOM has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention, whereas Artamivera (2023) reported the

opposite finding, and Majid and Sumadi (2022) identified a positive but statistically insignificant effect. These inconsistencies suggest the possible presence of variables that mediate or moderate this relationship. Within the context of brand perception formation, several studies have demonstrated that positive E-WOM is capable of establishing a favourable brand image (Handoko & Melinda, 2021; Prabandari et al., 2018; Siwu & Rahanatha, 2024), while a strong brand image subsequently enhances consumers' purchase intention (Prawira & Yasa, 2014). This is consistent with the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1977), which explains that behavioural intention, including purchase intention, is shaped by individuals' attitudinal evaluations and subjective norms, whereby digital reviews function as a source of social norms that influence consumers' perceptions and attitudes toward a brand.

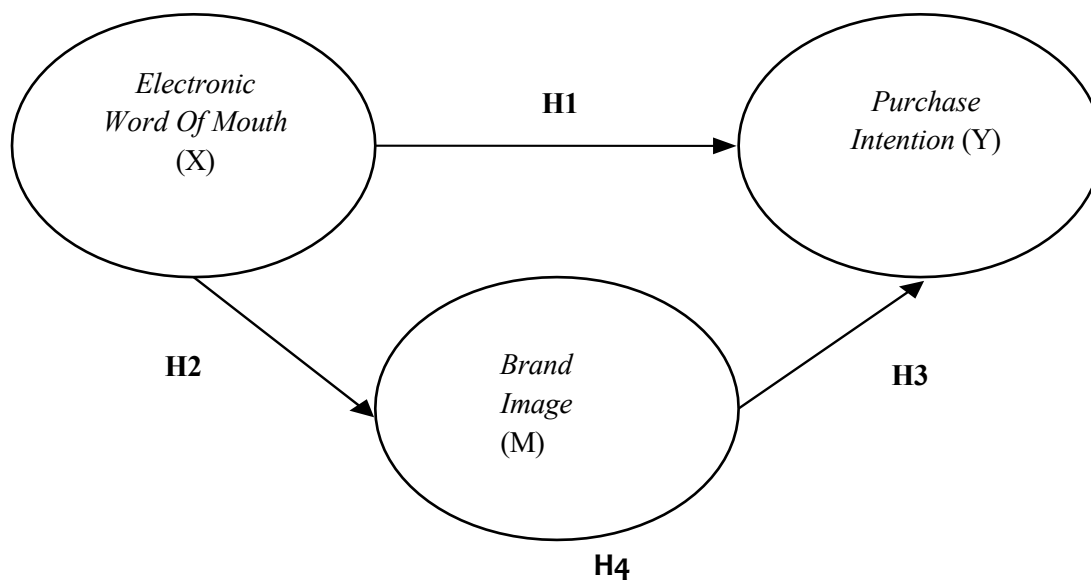


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Nevertheless, studies specifically examining the mediating role of brand image in the relationship between E-WOM and purchase intention within the context of artisanal bakery MSMEs that rely on organic social media marketing remain very limited. Most previous studies have focused on large-scale products or global brands with substantial marketing budgets; therefore, their findings cannot necessarily be generalised to MSMEs with limited resources, such as BakedByAurea. This study seeks to address this research gap by examining the effect of E-WOM on purchase intention through the mediating role of brand image among BakedByAurea consumers in Denpasar City, an artisanal bakery MSME that develops its entire marketing strategy organically through Instagram, Threads, and WhatsApp.

Based on the theoretical review and the identified research gap, this study proposes four hypotheses.

H1: Electronic Word of Mouth has a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention.

H2: Electronic Word of Mouth has a positive and significant effect on Brand Image.

H3: Brand Image has a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention.

H4: Brand Image positively and significantly mediates the effect of Electronic Word of Mouth on Purchase Intention.

This study is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the digital marketing

literature as well as practical implications for culinary MSMEs in designing effective digital communication strategies.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative causal associative approach to examine the effect of Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) on purchase intention, with brand image serving as a mediating variable among prospective consumers of BakedByAurea in Denpasar City. The research location was selected based on the distribution of BakedByAurea's content audience, which indicated that the highest concentration of viewers was in Denpasar City (49%), substantially exceeding that of other cities. Therefore, the residents of Denpasar were considered the most representative population for the purposes of this study.

The study population comprised all residents of Denpasar City who had been exposed to information about BakedByAurea through Instagram and had never purchased its products. Given that the population was considered infinite, the sample size was determined based on the recommendation of Hair et al. (2022), which suggests a sample size of five to ten times the number of indicators for multivariate research. With a total of 12 indicators, the study employed a sample of 100 respondents. The sample was selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria: residing in Denpasar City, having followed or viewed the Instagram account @bakedbyaurea, being at least 15 years of age, and never having purchased BakedByAurea products.

Table 1. Research Variable Indicators

Variable	Indicators	Sources
Electronic Word of Mouth (X)	Reading other consumers' online reviews	Jalilvand & Samiei (2012); Handoko & Melinda (2021);
	Trusting online consumer reviews when making purchasing decisions	Dewani & Rastini (2021)
	Credibility of the information sender	
	Positive comments or recommendations from social media users	
Brand Image (M)	Brand Identity	Juliyanti et al. (2024);
	Strength of Brand Association	Kotler & Keller (2016); Dewani & Rastini (2021)
	Distinctive Characteristics	
	4) Brand Benefit and Competence	
Purchase Intention (Y)	Exploratory Intention	Ferdinand (2006)
	Product Interest	; Tariq et al. (2017);
	Intention to Purchase the Product	Dewani & Rastini (2021)
	Future Purchase Plan	

Source: Primary data processed, 2026

The data collection instrument consisted of a structured questionnaire comprising four sections: an introduction to the study, screening questions, respondent demographics, and statements measuring the research variables. All statements were assessed using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The E-

WOM variable was measured using four indicators adapted from Jalilvand and Samiei (2012), Handoko and Melinda (2021), and Dewani and Rastini (2021), namely: reading other consumers' online reviews, trusting online consumer reviews when making purchasing decisions, the credibility of the information sender, and positive comments or recommendations from social media users. The brand image variable was measured using four indicators adapted from Juliyanti et al. (2024), Kotler and Keller (2016), and Dewani and Rastini (2021), namely: brand identity, strength of brand association, distinctive characteristics, and brand benefit and competence. The purchase intention variable was measured using four indicators adapted from Ferdinand (2006), Tariq et al. (2017), and Dewani and Rastini (2021), namely: exploratory intention, product interest, intention to purchase, and future purchase plans. The suitability of the instrument for the research objectives was confirmed through validity and reliability testing involving 30 preliminary respondents. All indicators achieved outer loading values above 0.70 and composite reliability values above 0.70, indicating that the instrument was valid and reliable.

Table 2. Validity Test Results

No	Variable	Instruments	Outer Loading	Remarks
1	Electronic Word of Mouth (X)	X.1	0,833	Valid
		X.2	0,825	Valid
		X.3	0,889	Valid
		X.4	0,824	Valid
2	Brand Image (M)	M.1	0,896	Valid
		M.2	0,788	Valid
		M.3	0,811	Valid
		M.4	0,821	Valid
		M.5	0,821	Valid
3	Purchase Intention (Y)	Y.1	0,856	Valid
		Y.2	0,892	Valid
		Y.3	0,876	Valid
		Y.4	0,872	Valid

Source: Primary data processed, 2026

Table 3. Reliability Test Results

Instrument	Composite Realibility	Remarks
Electronic Word of Mouth (X)	0,880	Reliabel
Brand Image (M)	0,890	Reliabel
Purchase Intention (Y)	0,899	Reliabel

Source: Primary data processed, 2026

Data were collected both online and offline using Google Forms distributed through WhatsApp, Instagram, and direct administration to respondents who met the sampling criteria during the period from February 2026 to May 2026. The collected data were subsequently analysed using two statistical approaches. Descriptive statistical analysis was employed to describe respondent characteristics and the distribution of responses for each variable using mean scores with an interval criterion of 0.80. Inferential statistical analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0 software. This approach was selected

because it is capable of handling models incorporating mediating variables, does not require normally distributed data, and is appropriate for relatively small sample sizes (Hair et al., 2022). Model evaluation included assessment of the outer model through convergent validity (outer loading > 0.70), discriminant validity (cross-loading and AVE > 0.50), and composite reliability (> 0.70). The inner model was evaluated using the coefficient of determination (R^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and the significance of path coefficients through the bootstrapping procedure with 10,000 bootstrap samples at a significance level of 5% (t-statistic ≥ 1.96 ; p-value ≤ 0.05). The mediating role of brand image was examined based on the criteria proposed by Hair et al. (2022) by sequentially assessing the significance of each path coefficient (p_1 , p_2 , and p_3).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Of the 100 respondents who participated in the study, the majority were female (59%), aged 20–24 years (54%), had completed senior high school/vocational high school education or its equivalent (52%), were students (53%), and earned a monthly income exceeding Rp3,500,000 (33%). This demographic profile reflects a segment of young consumers who are active on social media and possess independent purchasing power, making them representative for examining perceptions of E-WOM and brand image regarding digitally marketed artisanal bakery products.

Table 4. Outer Model Evaluation Results

Variable	Instruments	Outer Loading	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
Electronic Word of Mouth (X)	X ₁	0,870	0,779	0,934	0,908
	X ₂	0,897			
	X ₃	0,882			
	X ₄	0,879			
Brand Image (M)	M ₁	0,802	0,679	0,894	0,860
	M ₂	0,850			
	M ₃	0,826			
	M ₄	0,823			
	M ₅	0,814			
Purchase Intention (Y)	Y ₁	0,832	0,716	0,908	0,874
	Y ₂	0,836			
	Y ₃	0,875			
	Y ₄	0,843			

Source: Primary data processed,, 2026

The outer model evaluation demonstrated that all indicators satisfied the convergent validity criterion, with outer loading values ranging from 0.802 to 0.897, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2022). The discriminant validity assessment using cross-loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) also met the required criteria, with AVE values of 0.779 for E-WOM, 0.679 for brand image, and 0.716 for purchase intention, all exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.50. The composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha values for all three variables were above 0.86, confirming satisfactory internal consistency of the measurement instrument. The complete results of the outer model evaluation are presented in Table 4.

Table 5. Inner Model Evaluation Results

Variable	R ²	R ² Adjusted	Q ²
Brand Image	0,445	0,439	—
Purchase Intention	0,587	0,578	0,771

Source: Primary data processed, 2026

The inner model evaluation yielded an R² value of 0.445 for brand image and 0.587 for purchase intention, indicating that the model exhibits moderate explanatory power for both endogenous variables. The Q² value of 0.771 confirms the model's strong predictive relevance, as presented in Table 5.

Table 6. Direct Effects Test Results

Hypothesis		Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T-Statistics	P-Values
H1	E-WOM → Purchase Intention	0,339	0,341	0,095	3,582	0,000
H2	E-WOM → Brand Image	0,667	0,670	0,098	6,792	0,000
H3	Brand Image → Purchase Intention	0,497	0,499	0,086	5,781	0,000

Source: Primary data processed, 2026

Hypothesis testing using the bootstrapping procedure produced the findings presented in Table 6. E-WOM was found to have a positive and significant effect on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.339$; $t = 3.582$; $p = 0.000$), thereby supporting H1. This finding is consistent with the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), which posits that E-WOM functions as a form of subjective norms, serving as a digital social reference that shapes consumers' beliefs and purchase intentions (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). Positive reviews and recommendations disseminated through social media create normative pressure that

encourages prospective consumers to consider purchasing, even before any direct interaction with the product occurs. This finding corroborates the results of Handoko and Melinda (2021), Prayoga and Yasa (2023), Siwu and Rahanatha (2024), and Kusuma and Wijaya (2022), while also clarifying the inconsistencies reported by Artamivera (2023) and Diinaar et al. (2025), which may be attributable to differences in product characteristics and market contexts. Within the context of artisanal bakery MSMEs such as BakedByAurea, which operate without substantial advertising budgets, this finding confirms that organic E-WOM through Instagram can effectively stimulate purchase intention.

E-WOM was also found to have a positive and significant effect on brand image ($\beta = 0.667$; $t = 6.792$; $p = 0.000$), thereby supporting H2. This relatively high path coefficient indicates that E-WOM is the primary determinant of BakedByAurea's brand image, exerting a stronger influence than its direct effect on purchase intention. Within the TRA framework, this finding can be explained through the mechanism of attitude formation, whereby information repeatedly received from other consumers through digital platforms gradually develops into collective beliefs that become embedded as a consistent brand perception. The highest mean score among the brand image indicators was obtained for the statement regarding product quality being superior to that of competitors (mean = 4.24), indicating that the E-WOM circulating through BakedByAurea's Instagram account effectively communicates the product's superiority to prospective consumers. This finding is consistent with Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) and Yodpram and Intalar (2020), who emphasised that the consistency of digital reviews plays a significant role in building positive brand associations.

Furthermore, brand image was found to have a positive and significant effect on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.497$; $t = 5.781$; $p = 0.000$), thereby supporting H3. The strength of brand association indicator achieved the highest outer loading value (0.850), indicating that the strength of brand associations stored in consumers' minds constitutes the most influential component of brand image in encouraging purchase intention. This finding reflects the attitude toward behavior mechanism within the Theory of Reasoned Action, whereby consumers' positive evaluations of a brand directly increase their propensity to purchase. Consumers who have developed strong associations with BakedByAurea as a high-quality artisanal bakery are more likely to exhibit stronger purchase intentions because perceptual uncertainty in the decision-making process has been reduced through a well-established brand image. This finding is in line with Prawira and Yasa (2014), Putri and Wandebori (2016), and Prayoga and Yasa (2023), who demonstrated that a strong brand image reduces perceived risk and strengthens consumer confidence in making purchasing decisions.

Table 7. Indirect Effects Test Results						
Type of Effect		Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T-statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Specific Indirect Effects	E-WOM (X) -> Brand Image (M)-> Purchase Intention (Y)	0,332	0,328	0,085	3,899	0,000

Source: Primary data processed, 2026

The mediation analysis revealed that brand image significantly mediates the effect of E-WOM on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.332$; $t = 3.899$; $p = 0.000$), indicating a partial mediation effect because the direct influence of E-WOM on purchase intention remained significant after brand image was incorporated into the model, as presented in Table 4. This partial mediation reveals two simultaneous pathways through which the effect operates: a direct pathway, whereby E-WOM influences purchase intention through normative mechanisms, and an indirect pathway, whereby E-WOM first strengthens brand image, which subsequently translates into purchase intention through consumers' attitudinal evaluation process. These findings extend the theoretical understanding of the Theory of Reasoned Action within the context of digital marketing by demonstrating that brand image is not merely an antecedent of purchase intention but also serves as an accumulator of perceptions that strengthens and prolongs the influence of E-WOM on purchase intention. In contrast to Kusuma and Wijaya (2022), who identified full mediation in the context of large-scale e-commerce, the partial mediation observed in this study indicates that, for MSMEs with relatively limited brand exposure, E-WOM is still capable of directly generating purchase intention without necessarily passing through a fully developed brand image formation process. This may occur because consumers interact with E-WOM in situations where urgency or product availability becomes a stronger trigger for spontaneous purchasing decisions.

Overall, the findings of this study provide a theoretical contribution by reinforcing the applicability of the Theory of Reasoned Action within the context of digital marketing for MSMEs, particularly by offering a more comprehensive explanation of how the components of subjective norms and attitude toward behavior operate through the mechanisms of E-WOM and brand image in shaping purchase intention. From a practical perspective, these findings underscore the importance of systematically managing E-WOM for artisanal bakery MSMEs. BakedByAurea and similar businesses are encouraged to actively motivate customers who have made purchases to share authentic reviews on social media, utilise user-generated content as an instrument for building brand image, and ensure consistent product quality as the primary substance underpinning E-WOM. It should be noted that this study is limited by its geographical scope, which is confined to Denpasar City, and by its sample size of 100 respondents. Consequently, caution should be exercised when generalising the findings to broader market contexts. Future research is

recommended to incorporate additional variables, such as consumer trust, perceived quality, or the intensity of social media usage, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behaviour dynamics within the digital marketing ecosystem of MSMEs.

CONCLUSION

This study successfully confirmed all four proposed hypotheses. E-WOM was found to have a positive and significant effect on purchase intention, a positive and significant effect on brand image, and brand image was found to have a positive and significant effect on the purchase intention of prospective consumers of BakedByAurea in Denpasar City. Furthermore, brand image was confirmed as a partial mediator in the relationship between E-WOM and purchase intention, indicating that both the direct and indirect pathways through brand image operate simultaneously and reinforce one another. These findings consistently support the premise of the Theory of Reasoned Action, which posits that consumers' behavioural intentions are shaped by the combination of subjective norms derived from digital social references and evaluative attitudes formed through brand perceptions.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in strengthening the applicability of the Theory of Reasoned Action within the context of digital marketing for MSMEs, a domain that has received considerably less attention in the literature than studies focusing on large-scale brands or digital platforms. The finding of partial mediation, in particular, provides a new perspective on the mechanism through which E-WOM influences consumer behaviour. Specifically, for artisanal MSMEs with developing brand exposure, E-WOM not only operates through the gradual formation of brand image but is also capable of directly stimulating purchase intention through the normative pressure generated by the accumulation of positive reviews on social media. This finding extends and refines previous studies, which have predominantly concluded that the relationship is fully mediated in the context of e-commerce or well-established branded products.

From a practical perspective, culinary MSMEs that rely on organic digital marketing should prioritise strategies that actively encourage and facilitate the creation of high-quality E-WOM. Practical initiatives may include providing modest incentives for consumers willing to share authentic reviews on social media, consistently managing user-generated content as a tool for strengthening brand image, and maintaining strict consistency in product quality, which constitutes the primary substance of consumer reviews. For policymakers, these findings underscore the importance of digital marketing literacy programmes specifically designed for culinary MSMEs, as effective management of E-WOM and digital brand image has been shown to exert a direct influence on the development of consumers' purchase intention without requiring substantial investment in paid advertising.

This study is not without limitations. Its geographical scope, which is limited to Denpasar City, together with the sample size of 100 respondents, restricts the generalisability of the findings to broader market contexts or to MSMEs with different characteristics. Moreover, the cross-sectional research design does not allow for the observation of changes in consumer perceptions over time. Future studies are therefore encouraged to expand the geographical coverage, increase the sample size, and incorporate additional variables such as consumer trust, perceived quality, or the intensity of social media usage, which may serve as moderating or mediating variables in the

relationships examined. A longitudinal research approach may also be considered to capture the evolution of the influence of E-WOM on brand image and purchase intention as the digital ecosystem of MSMEs in Indonesia continues to develop.

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