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MEDIATING ROLE OF BRAND IMAGE IN THE EFFECT OF *EWOM* ON *PURCHASE INTENTION* OF ONLINE TICKETING APPS

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the impact of Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM) on the brand image perception of the Tiket.com application, understand how this brand image perception influences the purchase intention of Tiket.com application users, identify the direct impact of EWOM on the purchase intention of Tiket.com application users, and assess the indirect impact of EWOM on purchase intention through brand image as a mediating variable for Tiket.com application users. The research sample consisted of 203 respondents aged 18 and above, residing in the Greater Jakarta area, and having used the Tiket.com service at least twice in the last year. Respondent data were collected through an online questionnaire using Google Forms with non-probability sampling and purposive sampling techniques. Data analysis was performed using PLS-SEM with SmartPLS v3.2.9 software. The results of the study indicate that EWOM has a positive and significant impact on the brand image perception of the Tiket.com application. Brand image perception has a positive and significant impact on the purchase intention of Tiket.com application users. EWOM also has a positive and significant impact on the purchase intention of Tiket.com application users, and EWOM has a positive indirect impact on purchase intention through the brand image of the Tiket.com application.

Keywords: *EWOM, Brand Image, Purchase Intention, Tiket.com*

1. INTRODUCTION

Currently, the Indonesian Tourism Sector has recovered significantly after facing difficult times during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022, the number of foreign and domestic tourist visits had successfully exceeded the set target. The number of foreign tourist arrivals reached 5.5 million, exceeding the previous target range of only 1.8 to 3.6 million. In addition, foreign tourists' trips reached 800 million, exceeding the target of around 550 million trips. This success has encouraged the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (Kemenparekraf) to double the visit target in 2023, namely 8.5 million visits (Purwowidhu, 2023).

In August 2023, there was a 28.25% decrease in the number of local tourist trips in Indonesia compared to the previous month, reaching a total of 592.7 thousand trips. However, despite the month-on-month decline, the number of trips in August 2023 still showed an increase of 68.43% when compared to the same period in the previous year. The most entry point for travel was by air with 444.46 thousand trips, followed by sea with 95.15 thousand trips, and land with 36.46 thousand trips. This data was collected by the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) from the Directorate General of Immigration, Ministry of Law and Human Rights, as well as mobile positioning data (MPD). Additionally, SiteMinder's Changing Traveler Report 2023 also notes that the majority of Indonesian tourists plan to travel the same or more, indicating high enthusiasm for travel, although some are also planning increased overseas trips (Santika, 2023).

According to research from Kurious conducted by the Katadata Insight Center (KIC), people in Indonesia who plan trips out of town tend to use online travel agent (OTA) services. More

than a snapshot of the OTA users interviewed, namely around 34.5%, chose this service because of various attractive promotions and discounts. As many as 28.7% of respondents chose OTA because of its practicality, and 11.9% chose it because the price was more affordable than buying tickets or investing directly. In addition, 9.1% of respondents chose OTA because of the variety of products offered, 5.6% because of loyalty programs with points or prizes, and 1.1% gave other reasons. As many as 9.1% of respondents did not know or did not respond. Research from Kurious also shows that Traveloka is the OTA service most used by respondents, with a percentage reaching 63.1%. Tiket.com and Pegipegi followed with percentages of 40.4% and 15.4% respectively (Annur, 2022).

One of the travel agents that is currently popular in Indonesia is Tiket.com. The diverse opinions of consumers regarding Tiket.com, conveyed through e-WOM communication in the form of positive or negative comments via blogs, social media, or discussion forums, can provide valuable information for consumers considering purchasing at Tiket.com. This information also contributes to shaping the image of Tiket.com (Faresha, 2017).

The rapid development of the internet has given rise to various information about products, services, and brands, which allows word-of-mouth communication through online media, known as Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) (Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012). E-WOM helps consumers in the online purchasing process because they tend to look for online reviews and testimonials as a guide before deciding to make a transaction on an e-commerce site (Lin et al., 2013). Along with these developments, companies realize the important role of brands in business strategy. Brand image can be formed through consumer experiences with a product, brand, target market, or usage situation. Consumer purchase intentions toward a brand are greatly influenced by brand image (Wu and Lo, 2009). Purchase intention, or what is known as purchase intention, can create motivation that is embedded in the consumer's mind and can become a strong encouragement. When consumers need to fulfill their needs, they will actualize what is in their minds (Maunaza, 2012).

Based on the explanation above, considering the increase in travel interest due to Indonesia's pre-pandemic conditions, as well as customer complaints about Tiket.com services and increasingly fierce competition in the online travel agent industry in Indonesia, this is now a strategic opportunity for Tiket.com to improve its performance. This phenomenon shows the importance of utilizing these opportunities optimally.

Based on the background, identifying and understanding the problems described above, this research problem is formulated as follows:

1. Does Electronic Word of Mouth have a direct and significant influence on the Brand Image of Tiket.com application users in the Jabodetabek area?
2. Does Brand Image have a direct and significant influence on Purchase Intention among Tiket.com application users in the Jabodetabek area?
3. Does Electronic Word of Mouth have a direct and significant influence on Purchase Intention among Tiket.com application users in the Jabodetabek area?
4. Does Electronic Word of Mouth have a significant indirect effect on Purchase Intention through the Brand Image of Tiket.com application users in the Jabodetabek area?

Research conducted by Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) states that e-WOM has a strong direct impact on brand image, which in turn shapes purchasing interest. With the increasing popularity of the internet, customers can access online recommendations for products of interest, thereby influencing the point of purchase and having a major influence on their

purchasing decisions. Therefore, company managers are advised to consider the role of e-WOM in shaping product perceptions for consumers. Research conducted by Torlak et al., (2014) also found that the effect of electronic word of mouth on purchase intention can be explained through brand image. The research results show that brand image has a significant influence on purchase intention. Another conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that brand image plays an important role in determining purchasing interest in cellphone brands through electronic word of mouth.

Figure 1 represents research model and shows the relationship between E-WOM, Brand Image and Purchase Intention. There are four hypotheses proposed in the research below:

H1: Electronic Word of Mouth has a significant direct effect on Brand Image.
H2: Brand Image has a significant direct effect on Purchase Intention.
H3: Electronic Word of Mouth has a significant direct effect on Purchase Intention.
H4: Electronic Word of Mouth has a significant indirect effect on Purchase Intention through Brand Image.

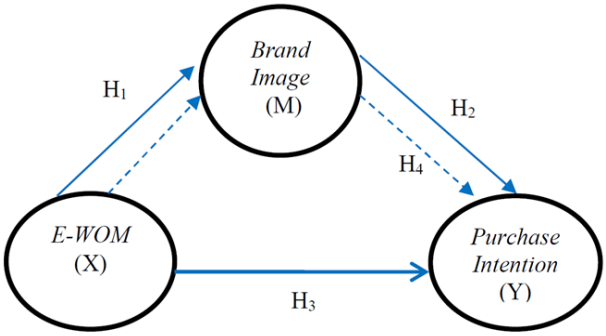

Figure 1 Research Model

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a quantitative type of research. Quantitative research is characterized by an emphasis on the analysis of numerical data processed using statistical methods (Hardani et al., 2020). The data sources in this research consist of primary data and secondary data. According to Hardani et al. (2020), primary data is obtained directly from the source through measurements, own calculations in the form of questionnaires, observations, interviews, and other data collection methods. Meanwhile, secondary data is obtained from reports, books, manuals, and libraries, which are collected from other individuals or organizations. The variables used in this research are electronic word of mouth as the independent variable, purchase intention as the dependent variable, and brand image as the mediating variable.
Population refers to the set of things or people chosen by researchers to study and draw conclusions because they have certain attributes and characteristics (Sugiyono, 2013). In research, each population, including the size and scope of the research, must be explained well, including the scope of the research area and the number of population members (Hardani et al., 2020). In this research, the population used is users of the Tiket.com application in the Jabodetabek area.

The sampling technique used is a nonprobability sampling technique. Sugiyono (2015) explains that nonprobability sampling is a sampling technique that does not provide equal opportunities for each element or member of the population to be selected as a sample. The

nonprobability sampling technique used in this research is purposive sampling. Sugiyono (2015) states that purposive sampling is a technique for determining samples with certain considerations. The criteria for respondents in this study are individuals who are at least 18 years old, reside in the Jabodetabek area, and have used Tiket.com services 2 or more times in the last 12 months. The sample in this study was determined using the inverse square root method by (Kock & Hadaya, 2018) which was developed by (Hair et al., 2021), this calculation resulted in the required sample size of 200 respondents. This research questionnaire was distributed using Google Forms.

This research adopts the partial least squares (PLS) technique to process data, where PLS is one of the techniques included in the structural equation modeling (SEM) method. SEM was developed as a solution to limitations in regression analysis, which allows instrument validation and testing of relationships between variable constructs used in this research to become more complex. The decision to use PLS–SEM in this research was based on the advantages highlighted by Hair et al. (2017), namely the flexibility of PLS–SEM for normal distribution of data and its ability to operate with relatively small samples. The data processing process is carried out using the SmartPLS v3.2.9 application and consists of two main stages: measurement analysis or outer model and structural model or inner model.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

According to Hair et al. (2017), the outer model test is applied to ensure the suitability of the calculations used as a measure (valid and reliable), then continued with the inner model test which aims to evaluate the relationship between latent variables based on certain criteria, and finally the hypothesis test needs to be carried out using the bootstrapping method in SmartPLS 3.2.9 software.

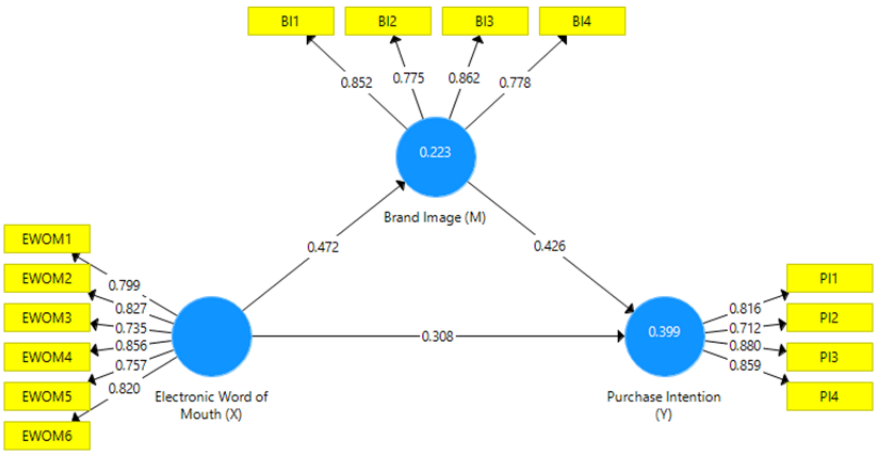

Figure 2 Outer Loadings

Outer model analysis, as explained by Hair et al. (2017), has important aspects in evaluation which include convergent validity, measured through the expected outer loadings value of >0.70, as well as the desired Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value of >0.50. In addition, discriminant validity is evaluated by comparing cross-loadings, Fornell-Larcker, and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) which is desired to influence variables <0.90. Measuring construct reliability also involves Cronbach's Alpha and Composite reliability, where values >0.70 and <0.95 indicate a high level of reliability.

Table 1 Outer Loadings Test Results

	Electronic Word of Mouth (X)	*Brand Image* (M)	*Purchase Intention* (Y)
EWOM4	0.856		
EWOM2	0.827		
EWOM6	0.820		
EWOM1	0.799		
EWOM5	0.757		
EWOM3	0.735		
BI1		0.852	
BI2		0.775	
BI3		0.862	
BI4		0.778	
PI1			0.816
PI2			0.712
PI3			0.880
PI4			0.859

Analysis of the outer loadings values shows that all indicators meet the validity criteria, with the highest value being the PI3 indicator (0.880) and the lowest being PI2 (0.712) for the purchase intention variable. All indicators have outer loading values >0.70, reflecting the suitability of the indicators to the construct (Hair et al., 2017). All variables also meet the requirements for an Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value of >0.50, confirming the validity of the variables in this research as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Average Variance Extracted (AVE) Test Results

	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Electronic Word of Mouth (X)	0.640
Brand Image (M)	0.669
Purchase Intention (Y)	0.671

The cross-loadings test shows that each indicator has a higher value for its variable compared to other variables, indicating the validity and support of the indicator for the variable in question. Table 3 presents results for cross loadings test, while in Table 4 we can see the Fornell-Larcker test results which showed significant changes in relationships between variables, with patterns that met the assessment criteria, confirming construct validity.

Table 3 Cross Loadings Test Results

	Electronic Word of Mouth (X)	*Brand Image* (M)	*Purchase Intention* (Y)
EWOM1	**0.799**	0.312	0.390
EWOM2	**0.827**	0.347	0.389
EWOM3	**0.735**	0.248	0.244
EWOM4	**0.856**	0.446	0.534
EWOM5	**0.757**	0.444	0.385
EWOM6	**0.820**	0.403	0.418
BI1	0.435	**0.852**	0.522

BI2	0.308	**0.775**	0.332
BI3	0.362	**0.862**	0.447
BI4	0.411	**0.778**	0.522
PI1	0.341	0.535	**0.816**
PI2	0.458	0.355	**0.712**
PI3	0.439	0.534	**0.880**
PI4	0.435	0.428	**0.859**

Table 4 Fornell-Larcker Test Results

	Brand Image (M)	*Electronic Word of Mouth* (X)	*Purchase Intention* (Y)
Brand Image (M)	**0.818**		
Electronic Word of Mouth (X)	0.472	**0.800**	
Purchase Intention (Y)	0.571	0.509	**0.819**

The Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) value also meets the requirement of <0.90, following the guidelines of Hair et al. (2017), confirming the validity of all indicator items and variables tested. Finally, results for Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability Test shows that all variables are reliable and ready proceed into further statistical analysis.

Table 6 Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability Test Results

	Cronbach's Alpha	*Composite Reliability*
Electronic Word of Mouth (X)	0.888	0.914
Brand Image (M)	0.836	0.890
Purchase Intention (Y)	0.834	0.890

According to Hair et al. (2017), structural model analysis aims to evaluate the relationship between latent variables based on several criteria. Some of the main criteria in assessing structural models in PLS-SEM include the level of R2 value, f2 effect size, predictive relevance of Q2, and significance of path coefficients.

Table 7 R Square Value

	R Square	*R Square Adjusted*
Brand Image (M)	0.223	0.219
Purchase Intention (Y)	0.399	0.393

The purchase intention variable in this research reveals that around 39.9% of the variation in purchasing interest of Tiket.com application users can be explained by electronic word of mouth. Although the R Square value is between moderate and weak levels of influence, this result is still consistent with the marketing perspective of Hair et al. (2017). However, around 60.1% of the variation in purchase intention was caused by other factors not included in this study. In addition, the low f2 value (0.123) for electronic word of mouth indicates the limited impact of this variable on purchase intention.

Table 8 f Square Value

	Brand Image (M)	*Electronic Word of Mouth* (X)	*Purchase Intention* (Y)
Brand Image (M)			0.235
Electronic Word of Mouth (X)	0.286		0.123
Purchase Intention (Y)			

It is important to note that the mediating variable, brand image, plays a more significant role with an f2 value of 0.235, indicating a moderating influence on purchase intention. The results of analysis using the blindfolding method also provide positive confirmation (Q2 = 0.255), confirming the positive influence between electronic word of mouth and purchase intention through brand image. Even though the electronic word-of-mouth variable has a low direct influence on purchase intention, these results show that the role of brand image as a mediator can increase this positive impact indirectly.

Table 9 Construct Crossvalidated Redundancy Value

	SSO	SSE	Q^2 (=1-SSE/SSO)
Brand Image (M)	812.000	697.795	0.141
Electronic Word of Mouth (X)	1.218.000	1.218.000	
Purchase Intention (Y)	812.000	604.793	0.255

The bootstrapping method is used to evaluate the significance of paths between constructs, taking into account the t-statistic and p-value. In this research, the recommended number of bootstrap samples is 5,000 to ensure accurate results. A significance level of 5% (1.96) for the t-statistic value and p-value <0.05 is used as a guideline for determining the significance of the relationship between exogenous and endogenous variables. In the bootstrapping results, an original sample (O) value greater than 0 indicates a positive relationship between these variables (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 10 Bootstrapping Test Results

	Original Sample (O)	*Sample Mean (M)*	*T Statistics*	*P Values*
BI (M) -> PI (Y)	0.426	0.427	5.622	0.000
EWOM (X) -> BI (M)	0.472	0.483	7.079	0.000
EWOM (X) -> PI (Y)	0.308	0.311	4.219	0.000

Based on the bootstrapping results, it can be concluded that the electronic word of mouth variable on purchase intention, the brand image variable on purchase intention, and the electronic word of mouth variable on the brand image show an original sample (O) value that is greater than 0, a t-statistic that exceeds 1.96, and p-value less than 0.05. This indicates that the relationship between these variables is positive and directly significant in the context of this research.

Based on the results of research data analysis of hypothesis 1, electronic word of mouth (EWOM) is statistically proven has an effect size (f 2) of 0.286. The t-statistic path coefficient is 7.079, with a p-value of 0.000 < 0.05 on brand image, confirming that EWOM has a direct positive and significant influence on the Tiket.com brand image. The high response from

respondents, especially on the EWOM1 indicator with an average of 4.52, shows that most respondents often read consumer reviews about Tiket.com to assess service quality. This finding is consistent with previous research by Parama and Seminari (2020) confirming that EWOM has a direct positive and significant impact on the brand image of Tiket.com.

Furthermore, based on the results of research data analysis of hypothesis 2, it was found that brand image has an effect size (f2) of 0.235. The t-statistic path coefficient is 5.622, with a p-value of 0.000 < 0.05 on purchase intention, indicating that brand image has a direct positive and significant influence on consumer purchase intention. The high response from respondents, especially on the BI4 indicator with an average of 4.54, indicates that the majority of respondents consider Tiket.com to be a reliable OTA platform. This finding aligns with previous research by Faresha (2017) and Astuti and Hasuti (2022) which supports that brand image has a positive and significant influence on the purchase intention of Tiket.com application users.

The results of data analysis of hypothesis 3, EWOM has an effect size (f2) of 0.123. The t-statistic path coefficient is 4.219, with a p-value of 0.000 < 0.05 on purchase intention, indicating that EWOM has a direct positive and significant influence on the purchase intention of Tiket.com application users. In the purchase intention variable, respondents gave the highest score to the PI4 indicator with an average of 4.65, indicating that most respondents tend to choose Tiket.com as the main choice for their trip, which is influenced by reviews and recommendations from other users. This finding aligns with previous research by Faresha (2017) and Chinho et al. (2013) which confirmed that EWOM has a positive and significant effect on the purchase intention of Tiket.com application users.

Finally, hypothesis 4 testing result concluded that EWOM has a positive and significant influence on purchase intention through brand image indirectly. This finding is supported by the original sample (O) value of 0.201, the t-statistic path coefficient of 4.236, and the p-value of 0.000. This shows that EWOM positively and significantly influences purchase intention indirectly through perceptions of the brand image among users of the Tiket.com application. This finding is consistent with previous research by Parama and Seminari (2020) which confirmed that EWOM has an indirect positive impact on purchase intention through the mediation of brand image among users of the Tiket.com application.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of the analysis of research regarding the influence of electronic word of mouth on purchase intention through the brand image on the Tiket.com application, it can be concluded that electronic word of mouth has a positive and significant influence both directly and indirectly through the brand image on the purchase intention of application users Tiket.com. These findings emphasize the important role of electronic word of mouth in forming positive perceptions of brand image, which in turn motivates purchasing intentions of Tiket.com application users in the region. These results provide valuable insights regarding marketing strategies and brand image management on the Tiket.com as well as other OTA platform.

Based on the conclusions and research findings, several recommendations can be proposed for Tiket.com, online travel agents, and future researchers who are interested in exploring similar issues. This research shows the positive and significant impact of electronic word of mouth on brand image, as well as a strong relationship between brand image and purchase intention.

Therefore, Tiket.com is advised to continue paying attention to electronic interactions with customers, improving brand reputation, and strengthening engagement with consumers. Initiatives such as increasing interesting content on social media, highlighting the unique advantages of Tiket.com, and maintaining quality electronic word of mouth can motivate customers to increase their purchasing interest. For future researchers, it is recommended to explore new indicators, such as customer satisfaction, and consider variations in research methods, such as in-depth interviews, to gain insights on the factors influencing customer purchase intentions.

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