

The Mediating Role of Brand Image in Celebrity Endorser and E-WOM Effects on Gen Z's MS GLOW Purchase Decisions in Semarang

Shandya Aissy Syafaq^{1*}, Firdaus², Zailani Abdullah³

^{1,2} Department of Management, Faculty Economic and Business, Universitas Muhammadiyah Semarang, Semarang City, Central Java Province, Indonesia

³ Data Science Study Program, Faculty of Data Science and Computer Science, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, Kelantan, Malaysia

Email: aissysyafaq@gmail.com^{1*}, fir@unimus.ac.id², zailani@umk.edu.my³

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Abstract

This study examines the mediating role of Brand Image in the relationship between Celebrity Endorsers, Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM), and purchasing decisions among Generation Z consumers of MS GLOW skincare products in Semarang, Indonesia. Employing a quantitative approach with twenty measurement indicators across four constructs and using an accidental sampling technique, the study investigates how different communication sources influence Gen Z consumers' perceptions and purchase behavior in the local skincare market. The findings reveal that Celebrity Endorsers neither significantly shape Brand Image nor directly influence purchasing decisions, indicating that celebrity-based persuasion has limited effectiveness for this consumer segment. In contrast, E-WOM exerts a positive and significant effect on both Brand Image and purchasing decisions, underscoring the importance of peer-generated information in building trust and guiding consumer choice. Brand Image is also found to significantly influence purchasing decisions and partially mediate the relationship between E-WOM and purchase behavior, while no mediating effect is observed in the relationship between Celebrity Endorsers and purchasing decisions. These results empirically demonstrate that, within the context of Gen Z skincare consumption in Semarang, peer communication plays a more decisive role than celebrity endorsement. Theoretically, this study refines branding and consumer behavior literature by clarifying the differentiated influence pathways of E-WOM and endorsement cues. Practically, the findings suggest that skincare brands targeting Gen Z should prioritize peer-based digital engagement strategies over celebrity-driven promotion.

Keywords:

Electronic Word of Mouth; Brand Image; Purchase Decision; Generation Z; Skincare Market.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the Industry 5.0 business landscape, digital marketing has become a critical determinant of product success, particularly within the rapidly expanding skincare industry. Contemporary consumers are increasingly shifting their preferences from decorative cosmetics toward skincare products that emphasize functionality, skin health, and long-term benefits. This shift has provided opportunities for local brands such as MS GLOW, which has successfully positioned itself in the Indonesian skincare market by addressing consumer needs ranging from skin brightening to anti-aging solutions. Rather than being a newly emerging brand, MS GLOW represents a fast-growing local skincare brand that has achieved substantial market penetration through intensive digital and social media strategies.

The increasing dominance of local cosmetic brands is supported by empirical evidence. A Populix survey reported by Databoks involving 500 female respondents shows that 54% of Indonesian consumers prefer local cosmetic brands, while only 11% favor international brands, and 35% remain neutral (Lukitaningsih et al., 2023). This trend underscores the importance of understanding how local brands leverage digital communication tools to influence consumer purchasing decisions, particularly among Generation Z (Gen Z), who constitute a highly active and digitally native consumer segment.

Celebrity endorsement has long been recognized as an effective promotional strategy for increasing brand visibility and awareness. By leveraging celebrities' public appeal and perceived credibility, brands aim to attract attention and enhance brand recall (Mulyaningsih, 2024). MS GLOW actively employs this strategy through social media collaborations with high-profile figures such as Nagita Slavina, an Indonesian celebrity with more than 76.9 million Instagram followers. While celebrity endorsers can amplify brand exposure, prior studies suggest that their influence on purchasing decisions is often indirect and contingent upon other psychological mechanisms, such as brand perception and credibility.

In contrast, Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM), which consists of online reviews, ratings, and shared consumer experiences, has emerged as a highly influential information source, particularly for Gen Z consumers. This generation tends to exhibit higher trust in peer-generated content than in firm-controlled or celebrity-driven messages. Consumer engagement through E-WOM enables brands to receive direct feedback, identify dissatisfaction, and continuously adapt their offerings, thereby supporting organizational performance and long-term growth (Ulya, 2023). As a result, E-WOM is frequently regarded as a more credible and persuasive driver of purchasing decisions than traditional endorsement strategies.

Marketing theory suggests that a strong brand image plays a central role in transforming awareness and information exposure into purchase intention and actual purchasing behavior. For skeptical and information-intensive consumers such as Gen Z, consistency between online reviews, endorsement messages, and the brand's core value proposition is crucial. In the context of MS GLOW, which emphasizes innovation and skin barrier repair, brand image is expected to function as a mediating mechanism that translates E-WOM and promotional cues into purchasing decisions.

Market data further highlight the relevance of MS GLOW as a research context. According to Compass Market Insight (2024), MS GLOW ranks second in skincare product sales in Indonesia, with approximately 46 billion units sold through official stores and 13 billion units through unofficial channels, primarily via major e-commerce platforms such as Shopee, Tokopedia, and Blibli (Andini, 2024). Despite its strong market performance and aggressive digital marketing efforts, empirical studies examining how celebrity endorsers and E-WOM jointly influence brand image and purchasing decisions particularly among Gen Z consumers at the regional level, such as in Semarang remain limited.

Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by investigating the mediating role of brand image in the relationship between celebrity endorsers, E-WOM, and Gen Z purchasing decisions for MS GLOW products in Semarang. By integrating digital marketing theory with localized empirical evidence, this research aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of persuasion mechanisms in the contemporary skincare market.

According to (Wijaya & Sugiharto, 2015), the public is utilized in advertising to recommend the products they sponsor; This practice is called celebrity endorsements. Celebrities can draw public attention to a product or brand, and their charisma or distinctive characteristics can also be interpreted as endorsement of the brand being promoted.

The rating of celebrity endorsers is seen from their popularity, determined by the number of prospective fans (Ramlawati et al. 2020). So, celebrity endorsements use well-known individuals or experts to launch products, make the product more visible and increase perceived value, which successfully motivates consumers to buy (Sella Fatra et al. 2025).

E-WOM is a customer message that discusses the description of the product, especially about its suitability with its image or quality (Aini Anisa et al., 2020). E-WOM is also defined as a platform that facilitates the exchange of information on products and services needed by consumers who do not know each other or whose previous interactions were limited to the online realm.

Brand image represents the consumer's overall understanding of a brand. A strong brand image can improve a company in many ways, including building a profitable position, strengthening its marketing performance, and differentiating it from its competitors (Manggalania et al. 2021). According to (Manggalania et al. 2021); Firdaus et al., (2025) brand image makes it easier for consumers to recognize a brand, evaluate it from product differentiation, and reduce the risk of purchasing a product.

A purchase decision is a structured activity between consumers combining knowledge to assess various options and choose a single action. Basically, this decision represents a problem-solving method that customers use to obtain goods or services that fulfill their desires. Purchasing decisions arise from both internal and external factors. The more goods or services people need, the greater their desire to meet these needs. This leads to the desire to find information about a product needed. Furthermore, this leads to an in-depth search for information about the company that provides the product.

Research conducted (Lomboan, 2013) this finding supports the use of influencers in marketing a brand's products to have an impact on the brand. Therefore, for a brand to use celebrities with image and credibility to represent the brand positively to the public.

H1: It is suspected that Celebrity Support has a positive and relevant impact on brand image.

Whether positive or negative E-WOM can shape a brand image in the minds of customers, depending on the nature of the E-WOM they reach. For managers who are trying to create E-WOM, it is positive to convey a good impression of their brand to potential consumers who access E-WOM (Elseidi et al., 2016). Based on Sharma et al. 2017 in their research, they stated that E-WOM in product discussions and reviews can affect brand image in the eyes of consumers.

H2: It is suspected that E-WOM has positive and relevant results to the brand image. Influencers have a diverse charm, attracting the target audience to make a purchase decision. Based on research by (Sella Fatra et al. 2025), find out if celebrity endorsements have a significant and positive influence on a purchase decision. Gen Z consumers, who are known to be skeptical, may prioritize authenticity and peer-to-peer information (E-WOM) over promotions from celebrities (Putri et al. 2024).

H3: Supposedly Celebrity Endorsements have positive and relevant results on purchase decisions. Research by (Rosario et al., 2016) states that consumers who have a good interaction with electronic reviews (E-WOM), either by reading or submitting online reviews, tend to rely more on this positive experience when making a purchase decision. According to Kamil et al. (2020) Research shows that electronic reviews are a key factor that shows a positive and substantial influence on purchasing choices. Other studies with similar results Huete-Alcocer, 2017 found that electronic reviews have a positive influence on a purchase decision.

H4: It is suspected that E-WOM has positive and relevant results on purchase decisions. According to research by Rosanti et al. (2021); Waroka et al., (2025), that a good company image and consistently presenting goods or services with a good image are important factors that positively shape a consumer's decision. A positive brand image significantly encourages consumers to choose the brand, as positive perceptions influence the entire process of selecting and evaluating their products.

H5: It is suspected that brand image has a positive and relevant influence on purchase decisions. This hypothesis is based on the argument that the influence of celebrity endorsers on purchase decisions tends to be indirect, where celebrity credibility and attractiveness act as an antecedent for the formation and reinforcement of good in the eyes of consumers (Ramlawati et al. 2020); Prasetyo et al., (2024). This strong brand image then acts as a proximal predictor that effectively drives purchasing behavior. Therefore, if empirical data support this hypothesis, it will be proven that brand image is an important intervention variable, serving as the primary transmission channel that transforms celebrity endorsement efforts into consumer acquisition actions (Putri et al. 2024).

H6: Brand Image is hypothesized to mediate the relationship between Celebrity Endorsers and Purchase Decisions. This hypothesis posits that the influence of celebrity endorsers on purchasing decisions does not occur directly, but rather through the formation of brand image. Celebrity endorsers primarily function as symbolic cues that enhance brand visibility, credibility, and emotional appeal. When consumers perceive consistency between the endorser's image and the brand's values, these cues contribute to a more favorable brand image, which in turn increases consumers' willingness to purchase. From a theoretical perspective, brand image serves as a cognitive filter that translates endorsement exposure into behavioral outcomes. Therefore, the effect of celebrity endorsers on purchase decisions is expected to be indirect and contingent upon the strength of the brand image formed.

H7: Brand Image is hypothesized to positively mediate the relationship between Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) and Purchase Decisions. This hypothesis argues that brand image plays a central mediating role in the mechanism through which E-WOM influences purchasing decisions. Exposure to a consistent volume of positive online reviews strengthens consumers' cognitive evaluations of brand quality, reliability, and reputation. These evaluations contribute to the development of a favorable brand image, which becomes an intrinsic driver of consumer confidence and purchase commitment. Although E-WOM may exert a direct influence on purchasing decisions, its persuasive power is substantially reinforced when mediated through brand image, as internalized brand perceptions reduce perceived risk and enhance trust. Accordingly, brand image amplifies the effect of E-WOM on purchasing decisions (Fadzri et al., 2022; Martini et al., 2025).

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a quantitative approach with an associative research design to examine the relationships among Celebrity Endorsers, Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM), Brand Image, and Purchase Decisions. The target population consists of Generation Z consumers in Semarang City who have purchased or used MS GLOW skincare products. Data were collected from 135 respondents using a non-probability sampling technique, specifically accidental sampling, which is appropriate for exploratory consumer behavior studies where the population size is not precisely known (Sugiyono, 2016). Primary data were obtained through a structured questionnaire distributed online via Google Forms. All measurement items were assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The online distribution method was selected to align with the digital characteristics of Generation Z, who are highly active on online platforms.

Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS software. PLS-SEM was chosen due to its suitability for predictive research models, mediation analysis, relatively small sample sizes, and non-normal data distributions (Hair et al., 2017). The analysis followed a two-stage procedure. First, the outer model was evaluated to assess construct validity and reliability through indicator loadings, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE). Second, the inner model was examined to test the hypothesized relationships by analyzing path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), and hypothesis significance using t-statistics and p-values obtained through bootstrapping.

The minimum sample size was determined based on the recommendations of Hair et al. (2017), which suggest that the number of observations should be at least five to ten times the number of indicator variables. With 20 indicators used to measure four constructs, the minimum required sample size ranged from 100 to 200 respondents. Accordingly, the final sample of 135 respondents was considered adequate to meet the minimum requirements for PLS-SEM analysis and hypothesis testing (Black et al., 2019). Although accidental sampling may limit the generalizability of the findings, this approach remains appropriate for capturing insights into Gen Z consumer behavior within a specific regional and product context. Therefore, the results of this study should be interpreted as context-specific to MS GLOW users in Semarang and may provide a foundation for future research employing probability sampling or larger samples.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study population consisted of Semarang residents who were aware and interested in buying MS GLOW products and were 15-26 years old. The questionnaire was distributed through Google Forms, targeting 120 respondents. Analysis of respondent characteristics data revealed 23 people aged 15-18 years, 100 people aged 19-22 years, and 12 people aged 23-26 years. By gender, 52 respondents were male (38.5%), while 83 respondents were female (61.5%).

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Characteristic	Number (n)	Percentase
Gender		
Female	83	61.5
Male	52	38.5
Age		
15-18 years old	23	17
19-22 years old	100	74.1
23- 26 years old	12	8.9

Source: Data Processing (2025)

3.1. Measurement

This research model involves four main constructs: Celebrity Endorser and E-WOM (independent), Brand Image (mediation), and Purchase Decision (dependent). A total of 20 measurement items, adapted from previous studies, were used as data collection instruments by applying a five-point Likert scale to capture respondents' responses.

Table 2. Statement Indicators

No	Variable	Measurement question items	References
1	Celebrity Endorser	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Celebrity supporters appear on various social media platforms. Celebrity supporters have the power to influence opinion among Gen Z. They trust the honesty of celebrity endorsers when recommending products. They love the appearance of celebrity endorser. 	(Putri et al., 2025)
2	E-WOM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Product reviews on social media. Most of the product reviews I read online are positive. The user experience shared online is easy for me to understand. The online reviews of the products I saw provided accurate details. The number of product shares I see online is very high. 	(Fani et al., 2024)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading other users' reviews online greatly influenced my decision to buy the product. 	
3	Brand Image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The packaging design is very attractive because it looks modern. • This product provides benefits that meet my skincare needs. • Using products increases my confidence in social interactions. • MS GLOW has a different formula and ingredients than other skincare brands. • I believe it has advantages that positively set it apart from other competing skincare brands. 	(Saputra et al., 2025)
4	Purchase Decision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the right skincare products for my needs. • Buying the product repeatedly after using it. • Allocate funds to purchase products compared to other similar products. • Which payment method (e-wallet, bank transfer, cash on delivery) is the easiest to buy the product. • Select a specific time or event (e.g., discount, match date) to purchase a product. 	(Kirana et al., 2024)

Source: Data Processing (2025)

3.2. Outer Model Analysis

The analysis is organized into two main phases: assessing (outer model) and evaluating structural model (inner model). The first stage verifies the validity and reliability of the research construct, while the second stage assesses hypothetical relationships between latent variables within a conceptual framework.

Based on the findings of the Table 3 Validity Test, the Outer Loading value for each indicator across variables (X1, X2, Y, and Z) is > 0.70 . As a result, any statement items used to measure the construction of Celebrity Endorser, E-WOM, Purchase Decisions, and Brand Image are considered valid.

Table 3. Outer Loadings

Indicator	Loading Factor	Indicator	Loading Factor
CE1	0.827	BI1	0.776
CE2	0.845	BI2	0.828
CE3	0.778	BI3	0.832
CE4	0.861	BI4	0.830
E-WOM1	0.784	BI5	0.815
E-WOM2	0.785	PD1	0.842
E-WOM3	0.801	PD2	0.818
E-WOM4	0.765	PD3	0.825
E-WOM5	0.825	PD4	0.723
E-WOM6	0.792	PD5	0.713

Source: Data Processing (2025)

Table 4. Cronbach Alpha, Composite Reliability, AVE

Variable	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Celebrity Endorser	0.875	0.875	0.686
E-WOM	0.847	0.850	0.627
Brand Image	0.881	0.881	0.666
Purchase Decision	0.844	0.848	0.618

Source: Data Processing (2025)

The evaluation of the measurement model confirms its suitability for empirical studies, meeting the criteria of reliability and validity of the construct. Strong internal consistency, demonstrated by all Alpha Cronbach values exceeding 0.70 (with the highest Brand Image score at 0.881 and the lowest Purchase Decision at 0.844), and supported by all Composite Reliability (CR) scores above 0.70. In addition, the

convergent validity is adequate, as the AVE for all four variables is greater than 0.50, indicating that the latent variable effectively captures most of its indicator variance.

Table 5. Criteria Fornell-Larcker

	Brand Image	Celebrity Endorser	E-WOM	Purchase Decision
Brand Image	0.871			
Celebrity Endorser	0.612	0.845		
E-WOM	0.758	0.693	0.880	
Purchase Decision	0.551	0.510	0.655	0.852

Source: Data Processing (2025)

Based on the Brand Image construct, it is considered PASSED, because the root of AVE (0.871) is greater than all its correlations (0.612, 0.758, 0.551). The Celebrity Endorser construct is considered PASSED, because the root of AVE (0.845) is greater than all its correlations (0.612, 0.693, 0.510). Meanwhile, the Electronic Word Of Mouth construct is considered PASSED, as the root of AVE (0.880) is greater than all its correlations (0.758, 0.693, 0.655). And for the construction of the Purchase Decision, it is considered PASSED, since the root of AVE (0.852) is greater than all its correlations (0.551, 0.510, 0.655).

3.3. Inner Model Analysis

Table 6. Path Coefficient

Variable	Brand Image	Purchase Decision
Brand Image		0.364
Celebrity Endorser	0.044	0.234
E-WOM	0.583	0.298

Source: Data Processing (2025)

Path Coefficient analysis Table 6 revealed several positive effects between variables. Specifically, the Celebrity Endorser variable positively affected brand image (0.044) and Purchase Decision (0.234). Similarly, E-WOM had a positive impact on brand image (0.583) and Purchase Decision (0.298). Finally, Brand Image itself has a positive impact on Purchase Decisions (0.364). Notably, the strongest association found was between E-WOM and Brand Image (0.583), suggesting that an increase in positive product reviews leads to a much better brand image.

The analysis of the internal model was assessed using a determination coefficient (R-squared). The following are the results of the R-square test in Table 7.

Table 7. Coefficient of Determination

Variable	R-Squares	R-Customized Square
Brand Image	0.382	0.373
Purchase Decision	0.603	0.594

Source: Data Processing (2025)

Structural model analysis revealed that the R2 values for both latent variables were substantial, suggesting that independent variables explained most of the variance. Specifically, predictors account for 38.2% of the Brand Image variance ($R^2 = 0.382$), and even 60.3% of the Purchase Decision variance ($R^2 = 0.603$).

The F2 value measures the relative impact (magnitude) of the predictor construct on F2 of the endogenous (predicted) construct. Based on Table 8, the relationship between the E-WOM variable and the Purchase Decision variable has the largest interpretation value, which is 0.510. Meanwhile, the relationship between the Celebrity Endorser variable and the Brand Image variable had the smallest interpretation value, which was 0.044.

Table 8. Effect Size

Relationship between variables	F ²	Category
Brand Image -> Purchase Decision	0.364	Large
Celebrity Endorser -> Brand Image	0.044	Small
Celebrity Endorser -> Purchase Decision	0.250	Medium
E-WOM -> Brand Image	0.583	Large
E-WOM -> Purchase Decision	0.510	Large

Source: Data Processing (2025)

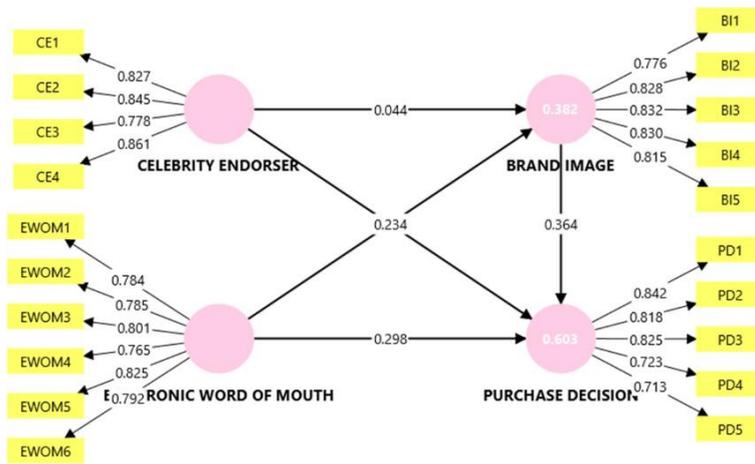


Figure 1. PLS-SEM Hypothesis Testing Results Model. Source: PLS-SEM

3.4. Direct Effects Hypothesis

Hypothesis testing was carried out using Smart PLS, with findings assessed based on Original Sample (O), t-statistics, and p-value. The path coefficient represents the direction and magnitude of the interaction between latent constructions. Most of the proposed pathways show statistical significance at the 5% threshold, as evidenced by a t-value of > of 1.96 and a p-value of < 0.05.

Table 9. Effects of the Dirrect Hypothesis

	Original Sample	Average Sample	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P value	Conclusion
H1: Celebrity Endorser -> Brand Image	0.044	0.056	0.151	0.292	0.770	Not Supported
H2: Electronic Word Of Mouth -> Brand Image	0.583	0.582	0.130	4.495	0.000	Supported
H3: Celebrity Endorser -> Purchase Decision	0.234	0.227	0.132	1.764	0.078	Not Supported
H4: Electronic Word Of Mouth -> Purchase Decision	0.298	0.281	0.141	2.117	0.034	Supported
H5: Brand Image -> Purchase Decision	0.364	0.387	0.139	2.622	0.009	Supported

Source: Data Processing (2025)

Overall, the empirical results are statistically credible; however, a deeper interpretation is required to explain the underlying mechanisms behind the observed relationships. This section discusses each hypothesis by integrating the statistical findings with relevant theory and contextual characteristics of Generation Z consumers in Semarang.

The results of Hypothesis 1 indicate that Celebrity Endorsers do not have a significant effect on Brand Image. As shown in Table 9, the relationship between Celebrity Endorser and Brand Image produced a p-value of 0.77 and a t-statistic of 0.29, both of which fail to meet the accepted significance thresholds. This finding suggests that the presence of celebrity figures in MS GLOW’s promotional activities does not meaningfully shape consumers’ perceptions of the brand. One possible explanation is that Generation Z consumers in Semarang tend to be highly skeptical toward celebrity-driven messages, particularly when endorsements are perceived as overly commercial or inconsistent with actual product performance. In local contexts where peer communication is dense and easily accessible, celebrity endorsement may function merely as an awareness tool rather than a determinant of brand perception.

In contrast, Hypothesis 2 is supported, indicating a significant positive relationship between E-WOM and Brand Image. The statistical results show a p-value of 0.00 and a t-statistic of 4.49, confirming that higher levels of positive online reviews and consumer-generated content strengthen MS GLOW’s brand image in Semarang. This finding aligns with signaling theory and prior studies suggesting that peer-generated information is perceived as more credible and diagnostic than firm-controlled communication. For Gen Z consumers, repeated exposure to authentic reviews reinforces perceptions of product quality, reliability, and brand reputation, which are central components of brand image.

The rejection of Hypothesis 3, which examines the direct influence of Celebrity Endorsers on Purchase Decisions, further reinforces the limited persuasive role of celebrity endorsement within this context. The obtained p-value of 0.78 and t-statistic of 1.76 indicate that celebrity exposure alone is insufficient to drive

actual purchasing behavior. Although the t-statistic approaches the critical threshold, it remains statistically insignificant, suggesting that while celebrities may attract attention, they do not provide the level of trust or risk reduction required for Gen Z consumers to commit to purchasing skincare products. This outcome supports the argument that purchasing decisions in high-involvement product categories such as skincare rely more on experiential and informational cues than symbolic appeal.

Hypothesis 4 is supported, demonstrating that E-WOM has a direct and significant effect on Purchase Decisions. The t-statistic of 2.11 and p-value of 0.03 indicate that positive online reviews, recommendations, and shared experiences significantly increase consumers' likelihood of purchasing MS GLOW products. This finding highlights the instrumental role of E-WOM in reducing perceived risk and uncertainty, especially for skincare products where outcomes are personal and not immediately observable. In the Semarang context, where consumers actively rely on marketplace reviews and social media discussions, E-WOM serves as a primary decision-making reference.

Finally, the results support Hypothesis 5, confirming that Brand Image significantly influences Purchase Decisions ($p = 0.00$; $t = 2.62$). These finding underscores brand image as a critical psychological mechanism that translates information exposure into behavioral action. A strong and positive brand image enhances consumer confidence, reinforces trust, and strengthens emotional attachment, all of which increase the likelihood of purchase. This result also explains why E-WOM exerts a stronger overall influence than celebrity endorsement: E-WOM contributes directly to brand image formation, which in turn drives purchasing decisions.

Taken together, these findings suggest that in the Semarang skincare market, persuasive effectiveness has shifted from celebrity-centered promotion toward peer-driven digital communication. Celebrity endorsers may still play a role in increasing visibility, but they are no longer sufficient to shape brand image or purchasing decisions without support from credible consumer-generated information. This pattern reflects the evolving behavior of Generation Z consumers, who prioritize authenticity, transparency, and shared experiences over symbolic endorsement.

3.5. Mediation Effects Test (Specific Indirect Effects)

Table 10. Indirect Effects

	Original Sample	Average sample	Standard Deviasi	T Statistics	P Values
Celebrity Endorser -> Brand Image -> Purchase Decision	0.016	0.029	0.067	0.241	0.809
E-WOM -> Brand Image -> Purchase Decision	0.213	0.222	0.090	2.357	0.018

Source: Data Processing (2025)

Based on the mediation effect test presented in Table 10, Brand Image does not function as a significant mediating variable in the relationship between Celebrity Endorser and Purchase Decision. The indirect effect yields an original sample value of 0.016, a t-statistic of 0.241, and a p-value of 0.809, which does not meet the accepted significance threshold ($p < 0.05$). This result indicates that the persuasive influence of celebrity endorsers fails to translate into purchase decisions through the formation of brand image. Although Brand Image is empirically proven to influence Purchase Decisions directly (H5), and Celebrity Endorsers may contribute to brand exposure, the combined indirect pathway does not produce a meaningful behavioral impact. This finding suggests that celebrity endorsement alone is insufficient to strengthen brand perceptions in a way that motivates Generation Z consumers to complete purchases, particularly in the skincare context where functional credibility and personal experience are critical.

In contrast, the mediation analysis reveals a significant indirect effect of Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) on Purchase Decisions through Brand Image. The results show an original sample value of 0.213, a t-statistic of 2.357, and a p-value of 0.018, indicating that Brand Image plays a statistically significant mediating role. Exposure to online reviews, ratings, and peer recommendations first shapes consumers' cognitive and affective evaluations of the brand, strengthening perceptions of quality, trustworthiness, and reliability. These reinforced brand perceptions subsequently encourage consumers to make purchasing decisions.

Furthermore, since the direct effect of E-WOM on Purchase Decisions (H4) remains significant, Brand Image is identified as a partial mediator. This implies that E-WOM influences purchasing behavior through two complementary pathways: directly by reducing uncertainty and perceived risk, and indirectly by enhancing brand image. This dual mechanism highlights the superior persuasive power of peer-generated information compared to celebrity endorsement among Generation Z consumers. Overall, these findings emphasize that in the Semarang skincare market, brand image serves as an effective psychological conduit for peer-based digital communication but not for celebrity-driven promotion. From a theoretical perspective, the results refine mediation models in digital marketing by demonstrating that the effectiveness of brand image as a mediator depends on the credibility and diagnostic value of the information source. Practically,

this suggests that firms should prioritize strategies that stimulate authentic consumer reviews and engagement rather than relying solely on celebrity endorsers to influence purchasing decisions.

4. CONCLUSION

This study was motivated by fundamental changes in digital marketing practices within the Industry 5.0 landscape and the rapid expansion of the skincare industry, particularly among Generation Z consumers. Focusing on MS GLOW as a leading local skincare brand in Semarang, this research examined the mediating role of Brand Image in the relationship between Celebrity Endorsers, Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM), and Purchase Decisions.

The findings demonstrate that Celebrity Endorsers do not have a significant effect on either Brand Image or Purchase Decisions among Generation Z consumers. This result indicates that celebrity-based promotion has limited persuasive effectiveness in this context, suggesting a shift away from symbolic endorsement toward more experience-based and peer-driven information sources. In contrast, E-WOM exerts a strong and significant influence on Purchase Decisions, both directly and indirectly through Brand Image. Brand Image is empirically confirmed as a partial mediator, indicating that online reviews and consumer recommendations not only reduce uncertainty but also strengthen brand perceptions, which in turn encourage purchasing behavior.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to digital marketing and consumer behavior literature by clarifying that the mediating role of Brand Image is contingent upon the credibility of the information source. While peer-generated content effectively translates into favorable brand perceptions and purchasing decisions, celebrity endorsement fails to activate the same mediating mechanism among digitally literate Generation Z consumers. Practically, the findings suggest that skincare brands targeting Generation Z should prioritize strategies that encourage authentic consumer reviews, interactive digital engagement, and consistent brand messaging rather than relying heavily on celebrity endorsers.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the sample size is relatively modest and limited to Generation Z consumers in Semarang, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other regions or demographic groups. Second, the use of accidental sampling and online questionnaires may introduce response bias and limit population representation. Future research is encouraged to employ probability sampling, larger and more diverse samples, and comparative brand analysis to further validate and extend the findings. Overall, this study highlights the growing importance of peer-driven digital communication and brand image in shaping purchasing decisions in the contemporary skincare market, offering both theoretical insights and practical guidance for marketers navigating the evolving Industry 5.0 environment.

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