The Role of Brand Image in Mediating The Influence of Electronic Word of Mouth (E-Wom) on Purchase Intention

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Abstract: This study was conducted to examine the effect of Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) on brand image and purchase intention, as well as the mediating role of brand image in the relationship between E-WOM and purchase intention. The phenomenon observed is the increasing role of online reviews and digital recommendations in shaping consumers' perceptions of brands and their purchasing decisions. This study used descriptive and associative methods with a quantitative approach. The study population was 356,410 residents of Sukabumi City, with a sample of 200 people randomly selected through probability sampling technique. Validity and reliability testing was conducted using SPSS version 23. The results showed that E-WOM had a significant effect on brand image with all items on the E-WOM variable and brand image declared valid (r_hitung > r_kritis). In addition, brand image also has a significant influence on consumer purchase intention. Brand image acts as a mediator that strengthens the influence of E-WOM on purchase intention. Cronbach's Alpha values for brand image, E-WOM, and purchase intention show high reliability (>0.60). In conclusion, E-WOM and brand image have an important role in shaping consumer purchase intention, with brand image strengthening the relationship between E-WOM and purchase intention. Effective marketing strategies should focus on improving brand image and leveraging E-WOM to drive consumer purchase decisions.

Keywords: Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM), Brand Image, Purchase Intention.

INTRODUCTION

Competition between companies is getting tighter, because every company always tries to get maximum benefits or profits. Increased competition can occur due to many advances and changes that occur in the business world, one of which is marked by changes in the mindset of a growing society, technological advances and lifestyles that cannot be separated from the influence of globalization. In addition, technological developments have led to significant changes in terms of seeking information in the new civilization period, namely the era of information technology, the advancement of information technology makes more and more potential consumers look for what is needed in a product before finally deciding to buy it back.

In recent years, the shoe market has undergone significant changes along with lifestyle transformation, consumer preferences and technological developments. With the advent of e-commerce and online platforms, consumers now have greater access to explore different brands, models and styles of shoes without leaving home.

The rapid growth in the industry presents opportunities as well as challenges for manufacturers, retailers and consumers. Sustainable trends, convenience and innovation in design are the main focus for industry players to meet the increasingly diverse and changing demands of the market.
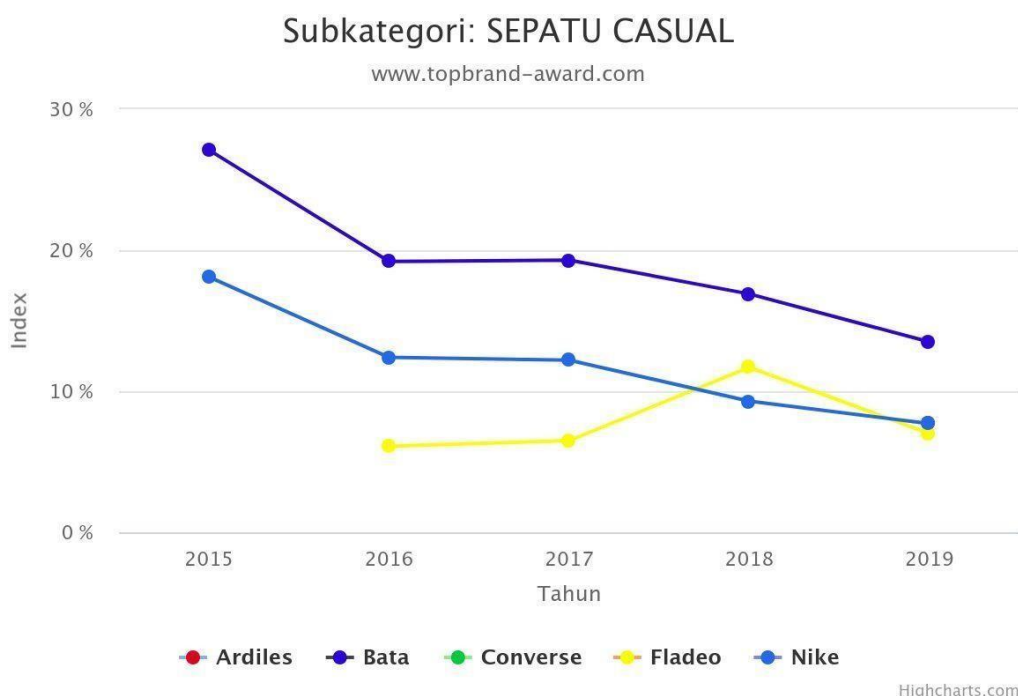
Figure 1. Number of foreign Shoe Brands entering Indonesia
Source: Top Brand Award, 2017-2019

From Figure 1, it can be seen that the foreign shoe brands that have successfully achieved the largest market share in Indonesia are dominated by Bata (27%), Nike (18%), Converse All Star (17%), and Adidas (5.4%) in the casual shoe category. Bata has topped the list since 2015, which means that the largest shoe market share in Indonesia is achieved by foreign brands, namely the Bata brand (Brand Award, n.d.).

Bata shoes are iconic shoes among students in Indonesia Bata shoes have been engraved in Indonesia since 1931, 14 years before the year of Indonesia's proclamation. At that time, Bata cooperated with NV, netherlandsch -Indisch, as a shoe importer operating in Tanjung Priok. Six years later, Tomas Bata established a shoe factory in the middle of a rubber plantation in the Kalibata area, located at Jl. Kalibata Raya South Jakarta. Furthermore, shoe production began in 1940. In 1982, PT Sepatu Bata, TBK was listed on the Jakarta Stock Exchange on March 24th. In 1994, the construction of the Shoe factory in Purwakarta was completed. As one of the largest factories in Indonesia, Bata specializes in injection shoe products for domestic and foreign consumption. Currently Bata Indonesia occupies a 6-story building; the office of PT.Sepatu Bata, TBK in Cilandak, South Jakarta. Until now, the Bata brand in Indonesia has really had a long journey. What was once called school shoes with the tagline "Back to School," has served a variety of different market segments. This includes other brands namely Marie Claire, Comfit, Power, Bubblegummers, North Star, B-First, and Weinbrenne (Wikipedia, 2024).

A shoe manufacturer that has existed for decades in Indonesia, PT Sepatu Bata Tbk, managed to grow positively in the first quarter of 2017. In details, Bata's sales in the first quarter reached Rp 200 billion, up slightly from Rp 198.3 billion last year. Meanwhile, its gross profit reached Rp 88.7 billion from Rp 81.03 billion in the same period last year. As for the net profit, it has now jumped 4 times compared to the same period last year to Rp 2.3 billion, with this data, of course, it can affect the Company's brand image. (Dwinanto Iskandar, 2017)

The brand image of a company in Indonesia is often measured by the Top Brand Index data. Top Brand Index is an award given to brands that achieve the predicate given based on the assessment obtained from the results of a nationwide survey. The Top Brand Index is measured using three parameters, namely based on the brand that was first mentioned by the respondent when the product category was mentioned, based on the brand that was most recently used and consumed by the respondent and finally based on the brand that the respondent wants to use and consume in the future (Narendra iswara & Santika Wayan, 2022).

Brand image certainly plays an important role in increasing sales. According to Yoestini and Sulityari in (Kristanto & Pudjoprastyono, 2021) a positive brand image determines the impression of a store and motive. Of course, brick shoes sales have increased or decreased sales, this is due to several factors. In 2022 the loss of brick shoes swelled 107% in 2022 (Ahdiat, 2023).
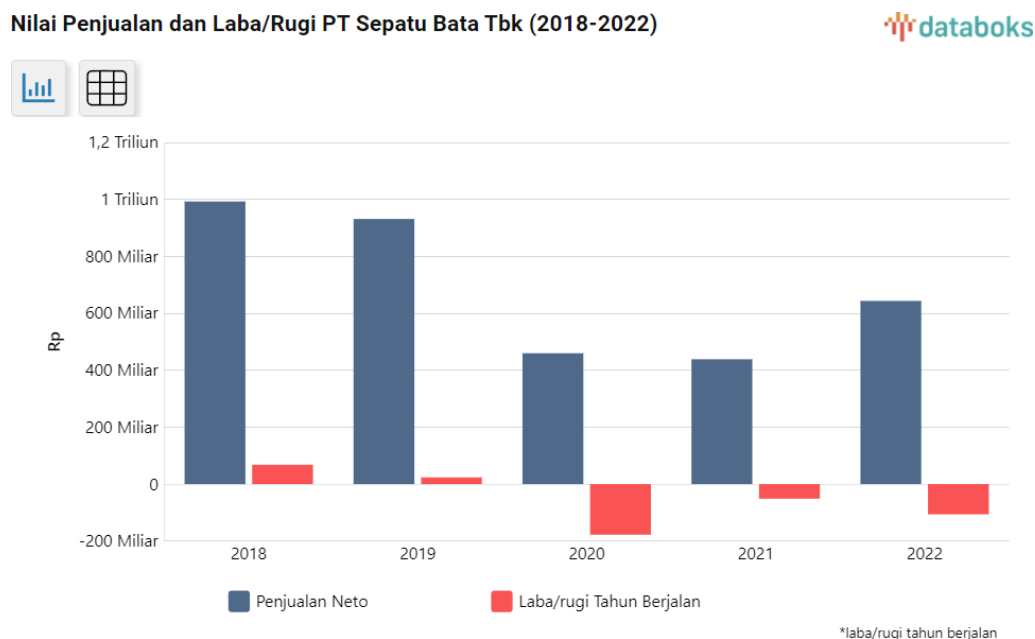
Figure 2. Sales and Profit/Loss of PT Sepatu Bata
Source : https://databoks.katadata.co.id/

Throughout 2022, the issuer code Bata experienced a 57% increase in cost of goods sold to IDR 383.43 Billion, then its sales and marketing expenses rose 10% to IDR 214.46 Billion, while administrative expenses rose 42% to IDR 111.15 Billion. As a result, in 2022 BATA scored a loss for the year of 106.12 Billion, swelling 107% from the previous year's loss (Ahdiat, 2023).
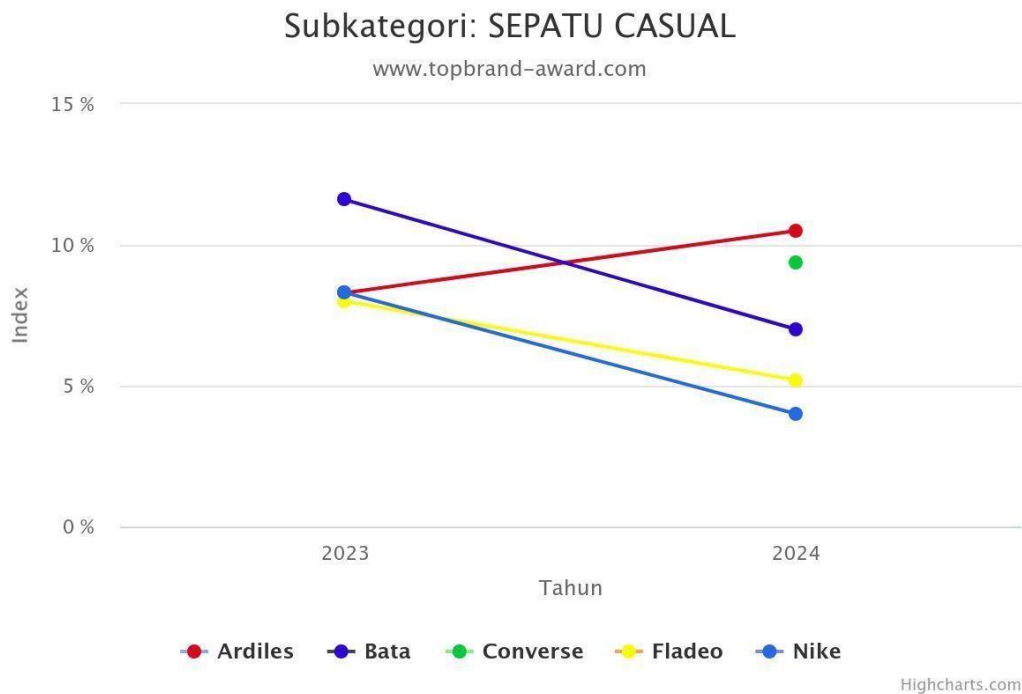
Figure 3. Percentage decrease of Bata brand shoes
Source: Top Brand Award, 2023-2024

In Figure 3, there was a decline in brick shoe products again in 2023-2024, the Top Brand Index of Bata Shoe products decreased by 4.6% to 7%. This happened because of the less vigorous promotion carried out by Bata Shoe manufacturers which resulted in a decrease in sales (Brand Award, n.d.).

Judging from the above phenomenon, the author wants to prove that the lack of interest in buying brick brand shoes in the city of Sukabumi, so the author is interested in conducting a pre-research questionnaire for shoe wearers in Sukabumi City.

Table 1. Pre-research Questionnaire

No.	Statement	Agree	Disagree	Number of Respondents
1	The appearance of brick brand shoes has its own uniqueness in attracting consumer attention	2	8	10
2	Contemporary design in brick brand shoes	1	9	10
3	Brick brand Shoe product advertisements evoke a desire to purchase the product	1	9	10
4	Bata brand shoes are a leading product	2	8	10
5	Information media evokes the desire to buy brick brand shoes	1	9	10

Source: Processed by the author, 2024

The author's survey of 10 people in Sukabumi City resulted in several points explaining that the lack of interest in brick products has led to a decrease in the number of sales of brick brand shoes. One of the factors that influence interest is the lack of shoe designs made by manufacturers, this phenomenon proves that interest or the influence of others greatly affects consumer buying interest in brick shoes.

The strategy that is less applied by the company can be a factor that affects consumer buying interest in the product, the strategy is the lack of new innovations for brick shoe products. This is inseparable from the diminishing market conditions, be it consumers who

choose other products or are bored with the company's own products, strategies are needed that can encourage an increase in sales of the company's products so that what the company wants can be achieved, one of the strategies is the Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) strategy.

According to (Brown et al., 2005) words of mouth (WOM) occurs when customers talk to others about their opinions about a particular brand, product, service, or company to others "e-WOM is very suitable to be applied in Indonesia. This is supported by the results of research on the 2007 Global Consumer Study conducted by the Nielsen research institute. This study shows that Indonesia is among the top five countries where e-WOM is considered the most credible form of advertising. Of the 47 countries in the world, Indonesia ranks, after Hong Kong and Taiwan." This is what makes marketers more interested in getting involved using e-WOM as a marketing tool. Based on the following statement, it can be seen that E-WOM can also play a very big role in seeing consumer interest in new brands in the market.

Bata shoes themselves are still unable to satisfy the market share in Indonesia compared to their competitors who have their own differentiation of products so that they are easily recognized by consumers and in the era of a new civilization, namely the era of digital generation civilization where people have been thoroughly influenced by the internet, including the millennial generation where the millennial generation is inseparable from gadgets so that the millennial generation first looks for information about a product before making a purchase, more get online reviews from the internet about a product, if the E-WOM communication obtained about a product is good, the higher the consumer buying interest, but the phenomenon obtained is that E-WOM communication about Bata brand shoes is less attractive to the millennial generation because online reviews about Bata brand shoe products are low.

The news that occurs regarding the shortcomings and advantages of BATA spreads very quickly with the Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WoM) refers to any positive or negative opinions from potential customers, regular customers, and former customers about a product or service marketed by a company that is spread via the internet (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

The positive impact of E-WOM activities can certainly play a very large role in seeing consumer interest in new brands in the market. Conversely, if the product gets negative reviewers, it can cause product perceptions and change consumer buying interest in a product.

This research plan proves that how much role Brand image plays in mediating the influence of Electronic Word of Mouth on consumer buying interest. The results of research conducted by (Meybiani et al., 2019) state that Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) has no significant effect on consumer buying interest. while research conducted by (Sinaga & Sulistiono, 2020) states that Electronic Word of Mouth has a positive and significant effect on buying interest. Research conducted by (Adriyati & Indriani, 2017) states that Electronic Word of Mouth has a positive and significant effect on Brand Image. The results of the study (Ahmad et al., 2020) state that brand image has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention.

Based on the phenomena that occur at this time, the authors are interested in conducting research with the title "The Role of Brand Image in Mediating the Effect of E-Wom on Purchase Intention (Survey on Bata Shoe Products in Sukabumi City)".

METHODS

This research used descriptive and associative research methods through a quantitative approach. Population members in this study amounted to 356,410 people as residents of Sukabumi city who were registered with the Sukabumi City Statistics Agency for the 2022/2023 period. The selection of Sukabumi City residents was carried out randomly or randomly through probability sampling techniques in each sub-district used as a population in this study, with the number of samples used in the study of 200 people. Validity test calculations in this study were carried out using SPSS version 23 for Windows. In this study,

what will be tested is the validity of the brand image instrument, Electronic Word of Mouth, Purchase Intention.

Validity Test

This validity test uses the product moment correlation formula. Data processing is shown in the table below:

Table 2. Brand Image Validity Test Results

Item	rcount	rkrisis	Description
M1.1	0,821	0,5	Valid
M1.2	0,694	0,5	Valid
M1.3	0,739	0,5	Valid
M1.4	0,656	0,5	Valid
M1.5	0,561	0,5	Valid
M1.6	0,676	0,5	Valid
M1.7	0,598	0,5	Valid
M1.8	0,687	0,5	Valid
M1.9	0,705	0,5	Valid

Source: Processed by Researchers, 2024 (Using IBM SPSS Statistic Version 23)

Table 2 shows that the results of the validity test on the Brand Image variable all show results from above 0.5 which means rcount> rcritical, so that all items on the Brand Image variable are declared valid. So each of these items is suitable for research.
1. Electronic Word of Mouth Validity test results

This validity test uses the product moment correlation formula. Data processing is shown in the table below:

Table 3. Electronic Word of Mouth Validity Test Results

Item	rcount	rkrisis	Description
X1.1	0,735	0,5	Valid
X1.2	0,734	0,5	Valid
X1.3	0,656	0,5	Valid
X1.4	0,630	0,5	Valid
X1.5	0,655	0,5	Valid
X1.6	0,661	0,5	Valid
X1.7	0,637	0,5	Valid
X1.8	0,673	0,5	Valid
X1.9	0,625	0,5	Valid

Source: Processed by the Author, 2024 (Using IBM SPSS Statistic 23)

Table 3 shows that the results of the validity test on the Electronic Word of Mouth variable all show results from above 0.5 which means rcount> rcritical, so that all items on the Brand image variable are declared valid. So each of these items is suitable for research.

2. Results of Validity Testing of Purchase Intention
      This validity test uses the product moment correlation formula. Data processing is shown in the table below:

Table 4. Validity Test Results of Purchase Intention

Item	rcount	rkrisis	Description
Y1.1	0,755	0,5	Valid
Y1.2	0,700	0,5	Valid
Y1.3	0,690	0,5	Valid
Y1.4	0,657	0,5	Valid
Y1.5	0,650	0,5	Valid
Y1.6	0,660	0,5	Valid
Y1.7	0,706	0,5	Valid
Y1.8	0,694	0,5	Valid
Y1.9	0,625	0,5	Valid
Y1.10	0,620	0,5	Valid
Y1.11	0,677	0,5	Valid
Y1.12	0,644	0,5	Valid

Source: Processed by the Author, 2024 (Using IBM SPSS Statistic 23)

      Table 4 shows that the results of the validity test on the Purchase Interest variable all show results from above 0.5 which means rcount> critical, so that all items in the Purchase Interest variable are declared valid. So each of these items is suitable for research.

Reliability Test
      Reability test is a tool for measuring questionnaires, which are indicators of a variable or construct. A questionnaire is said to be reliable or reliable if the respondent's response to the question is consistent or stable over time.
      The construct reliability value comes from the square of the total (sum) standard loading value divided by the square of the total standard loading value plus the sum error value. The formula is as follows:

$$Construct\ Reliability = \frac{(\sum Std.Loading)^2}{(\sum Std.Loading)^2 + \sum \varepsilon_j}$$

$$Variance\ Extracted = \frac{\sum Std.Loading^2}{\sum Std.Loading^2 + \sum \varepsilon_j}$$

Description:
      Where the standard loading value comes from the standardized loading value for each indicator (AMOS output results, Lisrel). While the error (e) comes from the measurement error of each indicator: (1- Loading2).
      The cut off value for the construct reliability test is accepted if the value is> 0.70, but if the research is still explanatory the value below 0.7 is still acceptable.
      The recommended cut off value for the *variance extracted* test > 0.50. A variance extracted (VE) value > 0.50 indicates that the amount of variance of the indicators extracted by the latent construct is more than the error variance.

SPSS version 23 software to test reliability. The results of the reliability test are shown in the following table:

Table 5. Reliability Test Results

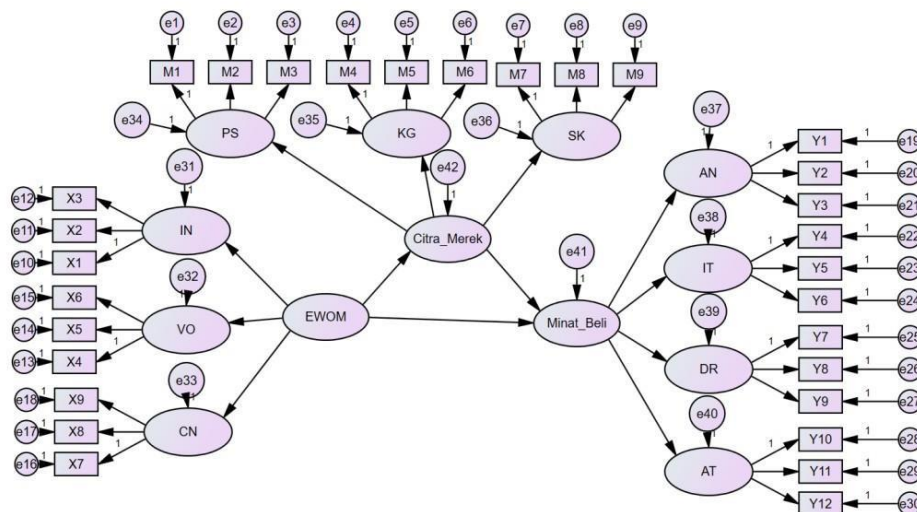| Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Standard Value	Description
Brand Image	0,857	0,60	Reliable
Electronic Word of Mouth	0,848	0,60	Reliable
Purchase Intention	0,899	0,60	Reliable

The use of one or a combination of data collection techniques depends on the problems faced or used by the researcher. The research data used by the authors in this study include primary data and secondary data. Several methods that can be used to obtain primary data include observation, interviews, questionnaires, literature review and documentation. The data analysis technique used by the authors in this study is Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using the Partial Least Square (PLS) application and hypothesis testing.
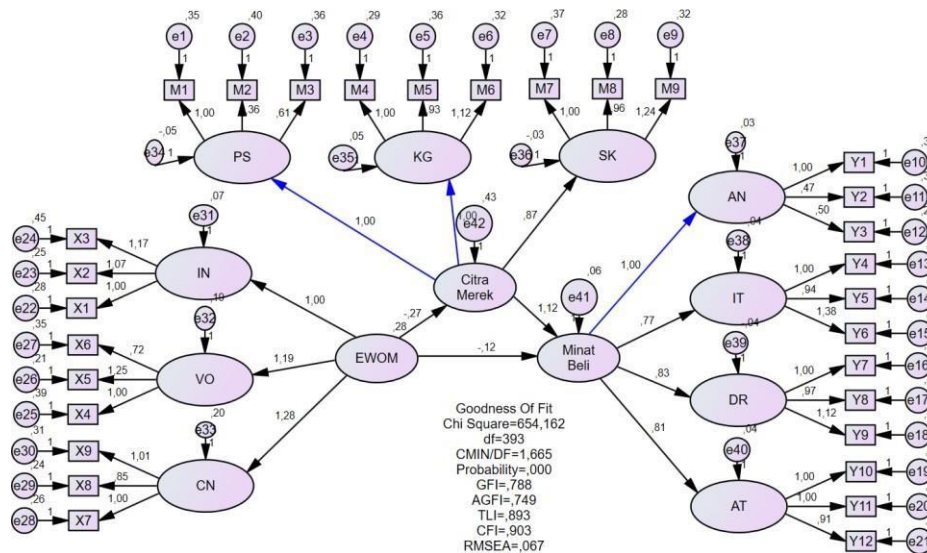
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Results
1. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Test

SEM is a combination of two separate statistical analyses: factor analysis and simultaneous equation modeling. Aims to determine the relationship between variables. The research hypothesis is depicted in the structural equation modeling diagram in the figure below:

2. Full Model Test

The data entered must meet the SEM classical assumption requirements consisting of normality test, multicolonearity test and outliers. The following is a result of a full structural model using AMOS version 22 software:

Image 4. Full Model Test
Source: Data processing results, 204 (AMOS version 22)

Based on Figure 4 below, this model does not meet the fit criteria. It can be seen that the Chi-square calculation value shows 654.162, the smaller the chi-square value, the better the model will be. And with the GFI and AGFI values still below <0.90 which should be> 0.90. therefore, this model needs to be modified to be able to get a model that fits the criteria.

3. Model Modification

Modification is only needed if the previous estimation model is not fit and does not meet the goodness of fit criteria. The following are the results of AMOS output after modifying the model:
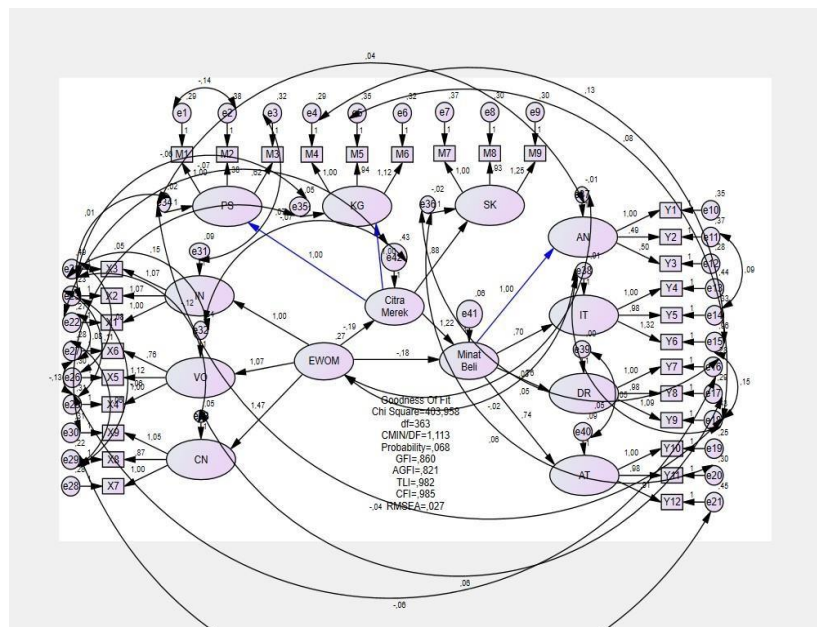
Image 5. Modified Full Model
Source: Data processing results, 204 (AMOS version 22)

After modification, it can be seen that the significant results of Chi- square have decreased to 403.958 with a probability of 0.068 above the significance value of 0.05. This is supported by other criteria that have been met such as CMIN/DF 1.113 < 2, RMSEA 0.027 < 0.08, TLI 0.982 > 0.90 and CFI 0.985 > 0.90. Although the GFI AND AGFI values can only

be accepted at marginal fit because they are still below the criteria. However, overall it can be concluded that it has met the requirements and fit because only two GOF criteria are accepted with marginal fit (Ferdinand, 2014).

4. SEM Hypothesis Test

Hypothesis testing is used in answering the hypothesis in this study. Hypothesis testing can be seen from the critical ratio (CR) value in the regression weight output results on the AMOS software. If the critical ratio value is greater than the critical value, namely - with a significance P value of less than 0.05, the hypothesis can be accepted. The following are the results of hypothesis testing in this study:

Table 6. SEM Hypothesis Test Results

HYPOTHESIS TEST						
Hypothesis	*Standard Estimate*	*Estimate*	*S.E*	*C.R*	*P*	**Conclusion**
EWOM ☐ Brand Image		-,270	0,123	2,203	0,028	*Supported*
Image Merek☐ Purchase Intention		1,224	0,094	13,029	***	*Supported*
Brand Image ☐ EWOM ☐ Purchase Intention	Mediation Test		C.R = 5.713 > 1.651			*Supported*

Goodness Of Fit (GOF) Testing			
Goodness Of Fit	*Cut of Value*	**Analysis Result**	**Conclusion**
Chi-Square	Expectedly small	403,958	*Good Fit*
Probability	≥ 0,05	0,068	*Good Fit*
CMIN/DF	≤ 2,00	1,113	*Good Fit*
RMSEA	≤ 0,08	0,027	*Good Fit*
GFI	≥ 0,90	0,860	*Marginal Fit*
AGFI	≥ 0,90	0,821	*Marginal Fit*
TLI	≥ 0,90	0,982	*Good Fit*
CFI	≥ 0,95	0,985	*Good Fit*

Effect Testing			
	Direct	*Indirect*	**Total**
EWOM ☐ Brand Image	0,782	0,000	0,782
Brand Image ☐ Purchase Intention	1,224	0,000	1,224
EWOM ☐ Purchase Intention	0,424	0,303	0,727

Source: Data processing results, 2024 (AMOS version 22)

a. Hypothesis 1

H_0 : EWOM has no effect on Brand Image H_a: EWOM has an effect on Brand Image Based on table 6, the CR value of the EWOM variable on Brand Image is 2.203> 1.651 (t-table at the 5% significance level is 1.651) with a pvalue = 0.000 which is smaller than 0.05. It can be concluded that hypothesis 1 H_0 is rejected, and H_a can be accepted. And it can be underlined that the EWOM variable has an effect on Brand Image.

b. Hypothesis 2

H_0 : Brand image has no effect on buying interest H_a: Brand image affects buying interest Based on table 6, the CR value of the brand image variable on Purchase Intention is 13.029> 1.651 (t-table at a significance level of 5%, namely 1.651) with a p value = 0.000 which is

smaller than 0.05. It can be concluded that hypothesis 1 H0 is rejected, and Ha can be accepted. And it can be underlined that the Brand Image variable has an effect on Purchase Intention.

c. Hypothesis 3

H0 : Brand image does not mediate the relationship between EWOM and purchase intention

Ha: Brand Image mediates the relationship between EWOM and buying interest.

In hypothesis 3, this test was carried out through the calculation of the sobel test calculator according to Daniel Sopier to test the effect of mediation. This study uses the Sobel Test Calculator tool through the analyticscalculators.com website, the results show 5.713> 1.651 (t-table at the 5% significance level is 1.651). And the p value can be seen from the two tailed probability = 0.001, which is smaller than 0.05. It can be concluded that hypothesis 3 H0 is rejected and Ha is accepted that the Brand Image variable has a significant influence in mediating the relationship between the EWOM variable and Purchase Intention.

5. Direct and Indirect Effects
    a. Direct Effect

    Direct influence can be called due to the existence of exogenous variables that affect directly to endogenous variables without any influence from mediating variables.

    Based on table 6, it can be seen that the direct effect of the EWOM variable on Brand Image is 0.782, then the direct effect of EWOM on purchase intention is 0.424 and the direct effect of brand image on purchase intention is 1.224.

    b. Indirect Effect

    Indirect effect or can be called an indirect effect where there are exogenous variables and endogenous variables that influence, assisted by the influence of mediating variables.

    Based on table 6, it can be seen that the indirect effect of the EWOM variable on Purchase Intention through Brand Image is 0.303.

    c. Total Effect

    The result of the sum of the direct effect and the indirect effect is called the total effect.

    In table 6, it can be seen that the results of the analysis show that the total effect of EWOM on Brand Image is 0.782 and the total effect of EWOM on purchase intention is 0.727. Meanwhile, the total effect of Brand Image on purchase intention is 1.224.

DISCUSSION
1. The Effect of Electronic Word of Mouth (E-Wom) on Brand Image

Based on the results of the validity test in this study, all items in the E-WOM variable are declared valid with an r_count value greater than r_critical. This shows that the information disseminated through E-WOM can be received well by consumers and has a significant influence on their perception of the brand.

E-WOM affects brand image through several mechanisms. First, positive reviews from other consumers can increase trust and positive perceptions of the brand. For example, the high validity values of items X1.1 (0.735) and X1.2 (0.734) indicate that consumers highly value and trust online reviews, which in turn strengthen brand image. Secondly, positive E-WOM helps brands achieve greater visibility in the digital marketplace, which in turn enhances brand reputation. Thus, positive electronic word-of-mouth communication plays an important role in shaping and enhancing brand image.

2. The Effect of Brand Image on Purchase Intention

The validity test results show that all items in the brand image variable are declared valid, with a value of r_hitung> r_kritis. This indicates that brand image has a significant influence on consumer buying interest. For example, item M1.1 has an r_count value of 0.821 which indicates a strong influence of brand image on purchase intention.

This influence can be explained through several factors. First, a positive brand image creates a sense of trust in consumers that the products offered are of good quality, as seen from the high validity values on items such as M1.3 (0.739). Second, a strong brand image provides emotional added value for consumers, which makes them more likely to choose and buy the product compared to products from other brands. This is also evident from item M1.7 with a validity value of 0.598, which although lower, still shows significant validity.

3. The Role of Brand Image in Mediating the Effect of Electronic Word of Mouth (E-Wom) on Purchase Intention

Brand image plays an important mediating role in the relationship between E-WOM and purchase intention. The results show that all variables are reliable, with Cronbach's Alpha values for brand image (0.857), E-WOM (0.848), and purchase intention (0.899) all above the 0.60 standard, indicating consistency in measurement.

This mediation process can be seen from how positive E-WOM improves brand image, which then increases purchase intention. For example, positive reviews on item X1.6 (0.661) not only improve brand image but also increase consumers' purchase intention, as seen from the high validity value on item Y1.1 (0.755). A good brand image acts as an amplifier of the relationship between E-WOM and purchase intention, making consumers more trusting and ultimately more interested in buying the product.

In this case, brand image functions as a mediating variable that strengthens the overall impact of E-WOM on purchasing decisions. Therefore, brands that can utilize E-WOM to strengthen their image will be better able to attract consumer buying interest and increase sales. An effective marketing strategy should include efforts to build and maintain a positive brand image and encourage positive communication through E-WOM.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research that has been carried out regarding the Role of Brand Image in Mediating the Effect of Electronic Word of Mouth (E-Wom) on Purchase Intention, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The shoe industry has become an integral part of people's daily lives, not only as foot protection, but also as an expression of personal style and identity. The development of the shoe industry not only reflects advances in technology and design, but also plays an important role in global fashion trends. The strategy that is less applied by the company can be a factor that affects consumer buying interest in the product, the strategy is the lack of new innovations to brick shoe products. This is inseparable from the diminishing market conditions, be it consumers who choose other products or are bored with the company's own products, strategies are needed that can encourage an increase in sales of the company's products so that what the company wants can be achieved, one of the strategies is the Electronic Word of Mouth (e- WOM) strategy.

2. EWOM has a significant effect on Brand Image among consumers of Bata Brand Shoes products in Sukabumi City. This can be explained that Bata in building Brand Image is assisted by several dimensions such as Intensity, Valence Of Opinion, Content.

3. Brand Image has a significant effect on Purchase Interest in consumers of Bata Brand Shoes in Sukabumi City. This can be explained that Bata products in increasing their Purchase Interest must be able to build a good and trusted Brand Image, so that consumers can be

more confident in choosing Bata products than other brands.

4. Brand Image mediates the relationship between EWOM and Purchase Interest in consumers of Bata Brand Shoes in Sukabumi City. This shows that to build buying interest, companies must be able to build a brand image so that it can be viewed favorably by consumers, after that EWOM will be more easily influenced because of a strong Brand Image and will be more effective in increasing consumer buying interest.

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