



THE INFLUENCE OF BRAND IMAGE AND ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH ON THE DECISION TO PURCHASE VIVO SMARTPHONES AMONG STUDENTS AT STIE EKUITAS BANDUNG

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of the smartphone industry has intensified competition among smartphone brands, making it increasingly important for companies to understand the factors influencing consumers' purchasing decisions. This study aims to examine the influence of brand image and electronic word of mouth (eWOM) on the purchasing decisions of Vivo smartphones among students at STIE Ekuitas Bandung. This research employed a quantitative approach using a survey method. Primary data were collected through questionnaires distributed to 100 respondents selected from the student population. The data were analyzed using multiple linear regression to examine both the partial and simultaneous effects of the independent variables on purchasing decisions. The findings indicate that brand image has a positive and significant effect on purchasing decisions, suggesting that a favorable brand perception increases consumers' intention to purchase Vivo smartphones. In addition, electronic word of mouth (eWOM) also has a positive and significant influence, indicating that online reviews, recommendations, and user experiences shared through digital platforms play an important role in shaping consumer purchasing decisions. Simultaneously, brand image and eWOM significantly influence purchasing decisions, implying that both variables are essential components of an effective marketing strategy. The findings provide practical implications for smartphone companies, particularly Vivo, in strengthening brand image and optimizing digital word-of-mouth strategies to enhance consumer trust and purchase decisions.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology in the Industry 4.0 era has fundamentally transformed the way individuals communicate, access information, conduct business, and interact with one another. Among the most significant technological innovations is the smartphone, which has evolved from a communication device into an essential tool supporting education, entertainment, financial transactions, social networking, and professional activities. Consequently, the global demand for smartphones has continued to increase, particularly in emerging economies where digital adoption is expanding rapidly.

Indonesia represents one of the largest smartphone markets in Southeast Asia, driven by increasing internet penetration, a young digital population, and widespread adoption of mobile technology. The growing demand for smartphones has intensified competition among manufacturers such as Samsung, Apple, Xiaomi, Oppo, and Vivo. These companies continuously compete through product innovation, pricing strategies, promotional campaigns, and digital marketing activities to attract consumers. Because smartphone products often offer comparable technical specifications and features, consumers' purchasing decisions are no longer determined solely by product quality. Instead, intangible marketing factors have become increasingly important in differentiating brands and influencing consumer preferences.

One of the most influential intangible assets is brand image. Brand image reflects consumers' perceptions, beliefs, and associations regarding a particular brand, which are developed through previous experiences, marketing communications, and brand reputation. Keller and Swaminathan (2020) define brand image as the perceptions of a brand reflected by the brand associations held in consumers' memory. A positive brand image enhances consumer trust, reduces perceived risk, strengthens emotional attachment, and increases the likelihood of purchasing a product. Within the smartphone industry, where

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technological features are easily imitated by competitors, maintaining a strong brand image has become an essential strategy for achieving competitive advantage and sustaining customer loyalty.

Alongside brand image, electronic word of mouth (eWOM) has emerged as one of the most influential information sources in digital consumer behavior. The rapid development of social media, online marketplaces, discussion forums, and review platforms has enabled consumers to exchange opinions and experiences regarding products instantly. According to Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), eWOM refers to positive or negative statements made by current, former, or potential customers about a product or company through internet-based platforms. Compared with conventional advertising, online consumer reviews are generally perceived as more objective and trustworthy because they originate from actual users rather than marketers. Positive eWOM can strengthen purchase intentions by increasing product credibility, whereas negative reviews may discourage consumers from purchasing despite attractive product specifications.

Several previous studies have confirmed the importance of brand image and eWOM in influencing purchasing decisions. Cahyani and Mubarak (2024) reported that both variables significantly affect consumers' purchasing decisions. Likewise, Kuswibowo et al. (2023) demonstrated that brand image and eWOM play important roles in consumers' decisions to purchase smartphones. Although these studies provide valuable empirical evidence, they primarily focus on different products, market segments, or broader consumer populations. Moreover, previous studies generally examine the direct relationships among these variables without specifically considering purchasing behavior among university students, who represent one of the most active consumer groups in utilizing smartphones, social media, and online product reviews. Therefore, empirical evidence regarding the influence of brand image and eWOM on Vivo smartphone purchasing decisions among university students remains limited.

This limitation constitutes the research gap addressed in the present study. Unlike previous studies, this research specifically investigates Vivo smartphones within the context of university students at STIE Ekuitas Bandung. This consumer segment is particularly relevant because students are highly exposed to digital marketing, frequently engage with online reviews, and actively rely on social media when evaluating smartphone alternatives. Accordingly, this study provides a more context-specific understanding of how brand image and eWOM jointly influence purchasing decisions within a highly digitalized consumer environment. The findings are expected to enrich the literature on consumer behavior in the smartphone industry while offering practical insights for smartphone manufacturers in developing more effective branding and digital marketing strategies.

Based on this background, the research questions are formulated as follows: (1) Does brand image significantly influence purchasing decisions for Vivo smartphones among STIE Ekuitas Bandung students? (2) Does electronic word of mouth significantly influence purchasing decisions for Vivo smartphones among STIE Ekuitas Bandung students? and (3) To what extent do brand image and electronic word of mouth simultaneously influence purchasing decisions?

Therefore, the objectives of this study are: (1) to analyze the influence of brand image on purchasing decisions for Vivo smartphones among STIE Ekuitas Bandung students; (2) to analyze the influence of electronic word of mouth on purchasing decisions for Vivo smartphones among STIE Ekuitas Bandung students; and (3) to examine the simultaneous influence of brand image and electronic word of mouth on purchasing decisions for Vivo smartphones among STIE Ekuitas Bandung students.

2. METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional survey approach to examine the influence of Brand Image and Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) on purchasing decisions for Vivo smartphones among students of STIE Ekuitas Bandung. A quantitative approach was selected because it enables the objective measurement of relationships among variables through statistical analysis.

The population consisted of all active students of STIE Ekuitas Bandung who had experience using or purchasing Vivo smartphones. Because not all students met the research criteria, purposive sampling was employed. Respondents were selected based on the following criteria: (1) active students of STIE

Ekuitas Bandung, (2) users or purchasers of Vivo smartphones, and (3) individuals familiar with Vivo products and online consumer reviews. Based on these criteria, 100 respondents participated in this study.

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed directly to respondents, while secondary data were obtained from academic journals, books, previous studies, industry reports, and other relevant publications.

All questionnaire items were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

The research variables were measured using established indicators from previous studies. Brand Image was measured using the dimensions of strength, favorability, and uniqueness proposed by Keller and Swaminathan (2020). Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) was measured using the dimensions of intensity, interaction, review volume, and perception adapted from Goyette et al. (2010). Meanwhile, Purchasing Decision was measured through indicators including product choice, brand choice, purchase timing, purchase quantity, purchase channel, and payment method.

Prior to hypothesis testing, the research instrument was evaluated through validity and reliability tests. Item validity was assessed using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, whereas reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha. The results confirmed that all measurement items met the required validity and reliability criteria.

The collected data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics were employed to describe respondents' demographic characteristics and perceptions toward each research variable. Inferential statistical analysis was conducted using Multiple Linear Regression Analysis to examine the influence of Brand Image and eWOM on Purchasing Decisions.

Before performing regression analysis, classical assumption tests—including normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity tests—were conducted to ensure that the data satisfied the assumptions of multiple regression analysis.

Hypothesis testing consisted of both partial and simultaneous analyses. The t-test was applied to examine the individual effect of each independent variable on purchasing decisions, whereas the F-test was employed to evaluate their simultaneous influence. Furthermore, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was calculated to determine the proportion of variance in purchasing decisions explained by Brand Image and eWOM. All statistical analyses were performed using a 5% significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$).

Table 1 Operationalization of Variables

Variable	Definition	Dimension	Indicator	Scale	Item
Brand Image (X1)	Brand Image is consumers' perception of a brand. This perception is formed through brand associations stored in consumers' memories. Brands with a positive image are more likely to be purchased (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020).	Strength	Consumer perception of the quality and durability of Vivo smartphones.	Interval	1
			The extent to which the Vivo brand is recognized in the market and considered a preferred choice.	Interval	2
		Favorability	Consumer evaluation of the value offered by Vivo smartphones compared to competing brands.	Interval	3
			Consumer satisfaction with Vivo smartphones, particularly regarding ease of use and overall value provided by the product.	Interval	4

Variable	Definition	Dimension	Indicator	Scale	Item
Electronic Word of Mouth (X2)	Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) refers to internet-based communication involving positive or negative opinions and reviews shared by current, potential, or former consumers regarding a product or service. Such information is publicly available through digital media (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).	Uniqueness	Consumer trust in Vivo's unique features, such as camera technology and fast-charging capabilities.	Interval	5
			Consumer perception of distinctive designs and features that differentiate Vivo from competitors.	Interval	6
		Intensity	Frequency of searching for information about Vivo smartphones on social networking sites (e.g., Instagram, Twitter, Facebook) within a week.	Interval	7
			Amount of time spent reading reviews about Vivo smartphones on social media platforms within a month.	Interval	8
		Interaction	Frequency of commenting or participating in discussions regarding experiences with Vivo smartphones in online communities.	Interval	9
			Level of participation in discussions regarding new features or software updates of Vivo smartphones in online forums.	Interval	10
		Review Volume	Number of positive and negative reviews about Vivo smartphones found on e-commerce platforms and social media within a certain period.	Interval	11
			Influence of the number of reviews on consumer trust when purchasing Vivo smartphones.	Interval	12
		Perception	Consumer ability to remember and understand information obtained from reviews about Vivo smartphones.	Interval	13
			The extent to which consumers feel confident in their purchasing decisions after reading positive	Interval	14

Variable	Definition	Dimension	Indicator	Scale	Item
Purchasing Decision (Y)	Purchasing Decision is part of consumer behavior that examines how individuals, groups, and organizations select, purchase, use, and evaluate goods, services, ideas, or experiences to satisfy their needs and wants (Kotler & Armstrong, 2020).	Product Choice	reviews about Vivo smartphones.	Interval	15
			Consumer satisfaction with the main features of Vivo smartphones (e.g., camera quality, battery life, and performance).		
		Brand Choice	Consumer choice based on product specifications that meet their needs.	Interval	16
			Consumer loyalty toward Vivo based on previous experiences or recommendations.		
		Channel Choice	Consumer trust in the Vivo brand compared to competing brands.	Interval	17
			Consumer preference for purchasing Vivo smartphones through physical stores or online channels.		
		Purchase Quantity	Availability of Vivo smartphones in consumers' preferred retail outlets.	Interval	18
			Decision to purchase more than one Vivo smartphone unit in a single transaction.		
		Purchase Timing	Purchase decisions based on specific Vivo models or variants.	Interval	19
			Purchasing Vivo smartphones during product launches or promotional periods.		
Payment Method	Timing of purchase decisions influenced by discounts or special offers.	Interval	20		
	Preference for payment methods such as credit cards, bank transfers, or digital wallets when purchasing Vivo smartphones.				
	Consumer preference for installment plans or credit financing when purchasing Vivo smartphones.	Interval	21		
		Interval	22		
		Interval	23		
		Interval	24		
		Interval	25		
		Interval	26		

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

This study investigated the influence of Brand Image and Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) on Purchasing Decisions for Vivo smartphones among students of STIE Ekuitas Bandung. Data were collected from 100 respondents using structured questionnaires and analyzed using Multiple Linear Regression Analysis with IBM SPSS Statistics.

Prior to hypothesis testing, the research instrument was evaluated through validity and reliability tests. The results indicated that all measurement items satisfied the required validity and reliability criteria. Furthermore, the regression model fulfilled the classical assumption tests, including normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity, indicating that the model was appropriate for hypothesis testing.

Descriptive statistics showed that respondents generally perceived Vivo smartphones positively. The Brand Image variable obtained favorable responses across the dimensions of strength, favorability, and uniqueness, indicating that respondents considered Vivo to possess a recognizable and competitive brand image. Likewise, respondents positively evaluated the eWOM variable, suggesting that online reviews, recommendations, and discussions on digital platforms played an important role in shaping their perceptions of Vivo smartphones.

The regression analysis revealed that Brand Image has a positive and statistically significant effect on Purchasing Decisions ($p < 0.05$). This finding indicates that consumers are more likely to purchase Vivo smartphones when they perceive the brand positively.

Similarly, Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) also has a positive and statistically significant influence on Purchasing Decisions ($p < 0.05$). Positive reviews, recommendations, and shared user experiences through social media and online platforms increase consumers' confidence in purchasing Vivo smartphones. The simultaneous hypothesis test (F-test) demonstrated that Brand Image and eWOM jointly have a significant influence on Purchasing Decisions ($p < 0.05$). Moreover, the coefficient of determination (R^2) indicated that Brand Image and eWOM explained a substantial proportion of the variation in purchasing decisions, while the remaining variance was attributable to other factors not included in this study.

Discussion

		Coefficients			
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t
1	(Constant)	6.462	1.804		3.582
	Brand Image	.155	.054	.255	2.872
	eWOM	.663	.095	.622	7.000
					Sig.
					<.001
					.005
					<.001

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2406,061	2	1203,030	112,114	<.001 ^b
	Residual	1040,849	97	10,730		
	Total	3446,910	99			

The Influence of Brand Image on Purchasing Decisions

The findings demonstrate that Brand Image positively and significantly influences consumers' purchasing decisions. This result suggests that consumers tend to prefer Vivo smartphones when they perceive the brand as reliable, attractive, and capable of delivering expected product performance. A favorable brand image reduces consumers' perceived risk and strengthens confidence during the purchasing process. These findings are consistent with Keller and Swaminathan (2020), who argue that brand image consists of consumers' perceptions and associations stored in memory that ultimately influence behavioral intentions. Strong, favorable, and unique brand associations enhance consumers' confidence and increase the likelihood of purchasing a product.

The present findings are also consistent with previous studies by Cahyani and Mubarak (2024) and Kuswibowo et al. (2023), both of which concluded that brand image significantly influences purchasing

decisions. In the smartphone industry, where products often possess comparable technological features, brand image functions as a strategic differentiating factor that shapes consumer preferences.

The Influence of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) on Purchasing Decisions

The results further indicate that eWOM positively and significantly influences Purchasing Decisions. Consumers increasingly rely on digital information sources, including online reviews, recommendations, ratings, and discussions available through social media and e-commerce platforms before deciding to purchase smartphones.

These findings support Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), who emphasize that eWOM represents one of the most influential forms of communication in the digital marketplace because information generated by fellow consumers is generally perceived as more trustworthy than company-generated promotional messages. The findings also corroborate previous studies reporting that positive eWOM increases consumers' purchase confidence, while negative reviews may discourage purchasing intentions. For Vivo smartphones, positive online engagement strengthens consumers' evaluations and ultimately encourages purchasing decisions.

The Simultaneous Influence of Brand Image and eWOM on Purchasing Decisions

The simultaneous analysis demonstrates that Brand Image and eWOM jointly exert a positive and significant influence on Purchasing Decisions. This finding indicates that purchasing decisions are not determined by a single factor but rather by the interaction between consumers' perceptions of a brand and the information they obtain from digital communication channels. Brand image creates an initial perception of quality and reliability, whereas positive eWOM reinforces these perceptions through authentic consumer experiences. Together, these factors produce a stronger persuasive effect than either variable alone, thereby increasing consumers' confidence in selecting Vivo smartphones. These findings contribute to consumer behavior literature by confirming that traditional branding strategies and digital communication mechanisms complement each other in influencing purchasing decisions. From a managerial perspective, smartphone manufacturers should simultaneously strengthen brand image and encourage positive online consumer engagement to improve purchasing outcomes and maintain competitive advantage in an increasingly digital marketplace.

4. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the influence of Brand Image and Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) on the purchasing decisions of Vivo smartphones among students of STIE Ekuitas Bandung. The findings indicate that Brand Image has a positive and significant influence on Purchasing Decisions. A favorable brand image strengthens consumers' trust and confidence in Vivo smartphones, thereby increasing their likelihood of making a purchase. This finding confirms that brand image is an important determinant of consumer decision-making in the highly competitive smartphone market. The study also found that Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) has a positive and significant influence on Purchasing Decisions. Positive online reviews, recommendations, and user experiences shared through digital platforms contribute to consumers' product evaluations and encourage purchasing behavior. This result highlights the growing importance of digital communication in influencing consumer decisions. Furthermore, the results demonstrate that Brand Image and eWOM simultaneously have a positive and significant influence on Purchasing Decisions. These findings suggest that consumers' purchasing decisions are shaped by the combined effect of their perceptions of the brand and the information obtained from online communication channels. Therefore, companies should integrate branding strategies with digital marketing efforts to strengthen consumer confidence and improve purchasing outcomes. Overall, this study contributes to the marketing literature by providing empirical evidence regarding the combined role of Brand Image and eWOM in influencing smartphone purchasing decisions among university students. The findings also provide practical insights for smartphone manufacturers, particularly Vivo, in developing effective branding and digital engagement strategies.

Based on the findings, Vivo is encouraged to strengthen its brand image by maintaining product quality, continuously introducing product innovations, and consistently communicating its unique value proposition. In addition, the company should actively encourage positive electronic word of mouth by enhancing customer satisfaction, responding promptly to consumer feedback, and utilizing social media platforms to foster positive consumer engagement. Future studies are recommended to involve larger and more diverse samples from different universities or regions to improve the generalizability of the findings. Researchers may also include additional variables such as product quality, price perception, brand trust, customer satisfaction, or social media marketing to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of smartphone purchasing decisions.

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