Brand Image and its Effect on Purchase Decision via eWOM: A Study on Ethnic Fashion Consumers in Indonesia

Ridfa Chairani*
Padjajaran University

Anang Muftiadi
Padjajaran University

Tetty Herawaty
Padjajaran University

Muhamad Rizal
Padjajaran University

ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of brand image on purchasing decisions and explores the mediating role of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) in this relationship, focusing on ethnic fashion brands in Indonesia. Using simple random sampling, data were collected from 157 respondents through a survey questionnaire and analyzed via path analysis. The findings reveal that brand image significantly influences purchasing decisions, although eWOM does not mediate this relationship. This research contributes to the understanding of digital marketing strategies by highlighting the importance of brand image and eWOM in shaping consumer behavior within the ethnic fashion industry. Practical implications include recommendations for the Association of Indonesian Fashion Entrepreneur Designers to enhance brand image through social media and eWOM strategies, extending beyond traditional offline methods. The study is limited to ethnic fashion brands affiliated with INACRAFT Indonesia and focuses specifically on the relationship between brand image, eWOM, and purchasing decisions.

Keywords: Fashion Ethnic, Brand Image, eWOM, Purchasing Decision.

1. INTRODUCTION

Fashion is a system that reflects cultural change within specific groups or customs. It can also divide social classes, status and occupations as well as fulfil the need for uniformity through branded clothing. For centuries, individuals and communities have utilised clothing and other forms of body decoration to communicate nonverbally. These markers signify various aspects, such as occupation, rank, gender, availability, sexuality, loyalty, class, wealth and group affiliation. Additionally, fashion represents a form of freedom in communication. In Indonesia, a significant influence on fashion comes from the Association of Indonesian Fashion Entrepreneur Designers (APPMI), which is composed of designers and entrepreneurs in the fashion sector. According to Poppy Dharsono, the president of APPMI, Indonesia's rich cultural diversity can be a key driver in the development of the country's fashion scene.

Traditional clothing is an important cultural element that encapsulates the identity traditions and heritage of various community groups. For centuries, traditional garments have not only indicated ethnic affiliation but have also played a vital role in representing cultural identity.

The development of traditional fabrics has undergone significant changes over time. In the past, these fabrics were primarily worn during traditional events and ceremonies. However, they have now evolved to become integral to contemporary fashion and have appealed to a wide range of groups. This transformation is influenced by several factors, including globalisation, modernisation and the growth of the fashion industry. In particular, globalisation has broadened the reach of ethnic fashion to international markets, thus prompting a growing number of designers to blend traditional elements with modern styles in their collections. The ethnic fashion trend has gained popularity in Indonesia. The appreciation for traditional clothing, such as batik, weaving and songket, is increasingly evident among the Indonesian people.

The batik-making process has three types. The first type is the written batik, also known as traditional batik, which is created by directly drawing patterns on cloth using a canting and wax. The second type is the stamped batik, which also employs wax but utilises a stamp to apply the patterns. The third type is the printed batik. However, this type of batik cannot be classified as true batik because this process does not involve wax. Weaving involves intertwining lengthwise and crosswise threads to create woven fabric. Transforming individual threads into woven cloth involves several stages that must be carefully managed. This process requires multiple spaces because of the differing levels of complexity at each stage. Songket is a weaving technique that incorporates decorative gold or silver threads into the weft or warp by twisting them, thus adding unique embellishments to the fabric.

In response to the growing interest and demand for traditional fabrics, craftsmen have begun to innovate by combining two techniques: the songket technique with the batik. This innovation has led to the creation of the songket batik woven cloth. The making of this textile is still done by hand using nonmachine looms (ATBM). The batik techniques are applied once the fabric is woven. The advancements in fashion design have allowed traditional regional fabrics to be transformed into appealing clothing choices for the public. Outfits that integrate these traditional fabrics are typically referred to as ethnic fashion.

Ethnic fashion is a clothing style that utilises regional fabrics and incorporates international design influences, such as ready-to-wear woven materials (Wibowo et al., 2021). The Jumputan line features innovative and simple designs that combine comfort with a casual, sophisticated look while promoting the preservation of Indonesia's cultural heritage. Recently, ethnic fashion has gained popularity as it evolved from conservative styles to modern, youthful aesthetics. It has been recognised since the 1960s and is now experiencing a resurgence; ethnic fashion is often referred to as craft fashion, which involves blending contemporary styles with luxurious regional fabrics (Amna & Fayyadh, 2020).

Although well-known designers play a key role in merging traditional fabrics with modern fashion, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) also contribute significantly. Entrepreneurs are creatively transforming traditional fabrics, such as batik, woven textiles and songket, into trendy clothing and accessories. Competition has intensified among the growing number of MSMEs that have entered the ethnic fashion sector. Therefore, large and small brands must enhance their image by focusing on product quality, effective marketing strategies, sustainability and the authenticity of their cultural heritage.

One effective strategy in this context is electronic word of mouth (eWOM), a modern form of communication through digital platforms, such as social media and product review sites. Positive eWOM significantly strengthens the brand image of ethnic fashion brands because positive reviews and testimonials enhance trust and credibility among potential customers. It also helps expand market reach and build a loyal community. Consumers are

increasingly sceptical of marketing and advertisements and prefer to engage with brands that offer positive experiences instead. However, unsatisfactory experiences are often shared on social media, thus potentially impacting a brand's reputation (Phan & Nguyen, 2023). Several challenges need to be addressed because eWOM influences purchasing decisions because consumers trust peer reviews over traditional advertising. Maintaining authenticity and cultural values amid commercialisation while ensuring fair economic benefits for local artisans is crucial. Given these factors, researching ethnic fashion is highly relevant particularly in examining how brand image affects purchasing decisions through eWOM among consumers in Indonesia.

2. RELATED LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. *Brand Image*

Brand image is the perception that consumers have of a brand, which is shaped by the associations stored in the consumers' memories (Kotler & Keller, 2012). It reflects positive and negative attributes (Keller, 2015) and is formed through information and past experiences (Permana & Haryanto, 2014). It is also closely linked to consumers' beliefs and preferences.

Brand image also involves consumers' opinions about a product based on their experiences. A strong brand image builds trust and fosters loyalty, thus aligning with consumer preferences. An image is the overall impression that someone holds, which can be maintained over time.

For instance, a strong brand image offers significant advantages for banks by providing a competitive edge. It reflects consumer perception shaped by their experiences with the product. As Park and Srinivasan (1994) note, understanding brand image requires attention to the product's unique characteristics. The key indicators of brand image include the following (Low & Lamb, 2000):
- *Friendly/unfriendly*: being easily recognisable by consumers.
- *Modern/outdated*: having a model that is up to date or not outdated.
- *Useful/not*: being able to be used well or beneficially.
- *Popular/unpopular*: being familiar in the minds of consumers.
- *Artificial/natural*: having the authenticity of supporting components or form.

Consumers with a positive brand perception are likely to buy products. Kotler and Armstrong (2012) identify three key aspects of an effective brand image: a) building product character and value, b) highlighting unique features to stand out from competitors and c) generating emotional appeal beyond rational factors.

2.2. *Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)*

The rise of the internet has transformed traditional word of mouth (WOM) into eWOM. Hennig-Thurau (as cited in Bhat & Bhat, 2020) defines eWOM as any positive or negative statement about a product or company made by potential, actual or former customers that is shared widely online. Kotler (2008) highlights two key forms of eWOM: buzz marketing and viral marketing, which present new brand information in surprising ways. Overall, eWOM encompasses positive and negative feedback shared on the internet. It has eight identified dimensions according to Hennig-Thurau (2004).
- Platform assistance: the frequency of consumers visiting and writing their opinions.
- Concern for others: the desire to help others in making purchasing decisions.

- Economic incentives/rewards: encouraging human behaviour as a sign of appreciation from the gift giver.
- Helping the company: the desire to help the company in return for the company being satisfied with its products and services.
- Expressing positive emotions/experiences: expressing positive feelings and self-improvement after using a product or service.
- Venting negative feelings: sharing unpleasant experiences to reduce dissatisfaction.
- Social benefits: the perception of receiving social benefits from community members.
- Advice seeking: in the context of web-based opinion platforms, consumption occurs when individuals read product reviews and comments written by others, which can also motivate consumers to write comments.

Goyette et al. (2010) identified three key dimensions of opinion dynamics: intensity, content and valence. These concepts are related to the following: a) eWOM credibility refers to the perceived trustworthiness of recommendations. Credible reviews are likely to influence customers' purchasing decisions (Mariasih & Setiyaningrum, 2021). Review is part of eWOM, which is a direct opinion from someone and not an advertisement. It is also one of the several factors that determine a person's purchase decision (Muljadi et al., 2022). b) eWOM quality is the persuasiveness of comments based on the information provided. High-quality information can enhance customers' acceptance of eWOM channels (Cheung et al., 2009). c) eWOM quantity pertains to the total number of comments on a product or service post. Additional information can affect customers' purchasing choices (Cheung & Lee, 2007; Lee et al., 2008).

2.3. Purchasing Decision

Kotler (2008) explained that purchasing decisions are a key stage in the buyer's decision process. Consumers decide to buy a product after recognising a need, gathering information and evaluating alternatives. Yeo et al. (2022) emphasised that purchasing decisions involve individuals who are directly engaged in selecting products from sellers; thus, these individuals require relevant information to make informed choices. Kotler and Keller, as translated by Tjiptono (2017), identified the key dimensions and indicators that influence these purchasing decisions.

- Product choice: Consumers can make decisions to buy a product or use their money for other purposes. In this case, the company must focus its attention on the people who are interested in buying a product and the alternatives they are considering.
- Brand choice: Buyers have to decide which brand to buy.
- Choice of dealer: Buyers must decide which dealer to visit.
- Time of purchase: Consumer decisions on when to purchase can vary depending on the consumers' needs.
- Purchase amount: Consumers can make decisions about how much of a product they will buy at any one time.

According to Kotler (2013), purchasing decisions are influenced by four key factors: cultural factors, social factors, personal factors and role- and status-related factors. Cultural factors include the culture, subculture and social class that significantly shape consumer behaviour. Social factors refer to the crucial role of groups and families who provide guidance to consumers' attitudes and values. Families can be families of orientation (parents and siblings) or families of procreation (couples with children). Personal factors include age,

family life cycle, work environment, lifestyle, personality and psychological aspects. Role- and status-related factors involve the individuals' role and status in an organisation, which can directly impact their purchasing behaviour.

2.4. Conceptual Framework

This study hypothesised that eWOM strengthens the influence of brand image on purchasing decisions. The conceptual framework is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework
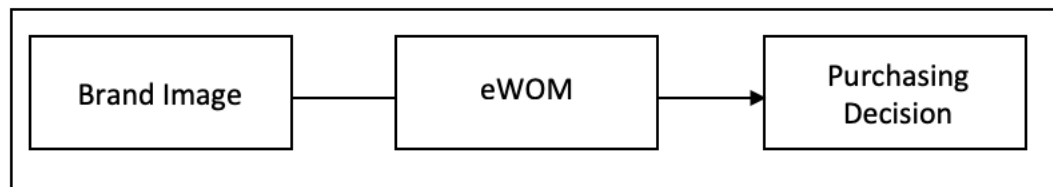
3. METHODOLOGY

This study focused on consumers of ethnic fashion clothing companies in Indonesia whose brands participated in INACRAFT 2023. These brands utilised online shopping platforms to interact with consumers for transactions, product promotions and other activities. A quantitative research approach was employed, which specifically included explanatory research to test the relationships among hypothesised variables (Mulyadi, 2016). The primary aim of this research was to describe and analyse the impact of brand image on purchasing decisions through eWOM).

Data were collected using simple random sampling (Sugiyono, 2011). The questionnaire was developed based on a field survey of consumers regarding the research variables. It incorporated statements that focused on these variables and were structured in detail to represent the entire consumer population accurately. The data reference consisted of information regarding realities, opinions, knowledge and facts, which were gathered through direct interactions with participants or secondary data sources, such as published statistics. Questionnaires were distributed to respondents who met the specific criteria that had been established in the survey, including having subscribed for at least three months. The forms were disseminated either directly at the research location or via Google Forms. The operational definitions and items for each variable are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Operational Definitions and Items for Each Variable

Variable	Operational Definitions	Dimension
Brand Image	It is a rational and emotional perception of a particular brand. (Low & Lamb, 2000)	Friendly
		Modern
		Useful
		Popular
		Artificial
eWOM	A means of communication in the form of negative or positive suggestions that	Platform Assistance
		Concern for others
		Economic Intensive
		Helping Company

		Expressing Positive Emotions
	occur on the internet. (Hennig-Thurau, 2004)	Venting Negative Feelings
		Social Benefits
		Advice Seeking
Purchasing Decisions	This stage involves the buyer's decision process, namely, when consumers buy the product. (Kotler & Keller, 2017)	Product Choice
		Brand Choice
		Choice of Dealer
		Time of Purchase
		Purchase Amount

The data analysis techniques used included validity testing, reliability testing, convergent validity testing and partial least squares structural equation modelling. Validity tests assess how effectively an instrument measures a specific concept. Meanwhile, reliability tests evaluate the consistency of measurements across instruments. Convergent validity is determined by the loading factor of reflective indicators. A loading value of at least 0.1 is deemed sufficient.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Characteristics

Table 2 shows that female consumers outnumber male consumers, thus reflecting research that highlights the strong connection between women and fashion. Women typically invest more time in shopping and engage more with promotional materials than men (Walsh et al., 2001). Most buyers of ethnic fashion clothing are aged 20 to 39 years, which corresponds to early adulthood (Hurlock, 2007). For young women, appearance significantly impacts self-confidence and self-concept with a focus on body shape. Enhancing their appearance is a crucial way for them to express their identity and desire for perfection (Sari, Wirman & Dekrin, 2021).

Table 2. Characteristics

Gender	Percent
Women	70%
Men	30%
Age	
<20 y.o	12.1%
20–39 y.o	83.2%
40–54 y.o	4.2%
>54 y.o	0.5%

4.2. Descriptive Analysis of Brand Image

Brand image is defined by experts (e.g. Dobni and Zinkhan, 1990) as the emotional or reasoned perception that consumers have towards a brand. Limmerman (Noble, 1999) viewed it as a collection of associations related to the brand. Brand image includes physical factors, such as packaging, logo and product functionality, as well as psychological factors shaped by emotions, beliefs and values. The psychological aspects often have a significant influence on brand perception. Low and Lamb (2000) identified indicators of brand image, including friendly, modern, useful, popular, gentle and artificial. Consumers perceive brands of ethnic fashion as high quality and reliable, which significantly impacts their purchasing decisions.

Table 3. Result of Brand Image Descriptive Analysis

Dimension	Item	Answer Score 1	2	3	4	5	Mean
Friendly	CM1	0	4	26	101	59	4.13
	CM2	0	2	19	108	61	4.20
Average of Friendly							4.17
Modern	CM3	0	2	9	114	65	4.27
	CM4	1	0	10	112	67	4.28
Average of Modern							4.28
Useful	CM5	1	0	5	95	89	4.43
	CM6	1	0	9	102	78	4.35
Average of Useful							4.39
Popular	CM7	1	5	43	77	64	4.04
	CM8	0	3	10	106	71	4.29
	CM9	2	24	16	96	52	3.91
Average of Popular							4.08
Artificial	CM10	0	2	31	103	54	4.10
	CM11	0	3	8	108	71	4.30
Average of Artificial							4.20
Average of Brand Image							4.22

Item CM5 indicates that the ethnic clothing sold is of good quality: it has an average rating of 4.43 and a 50% agreement response. However, clothes should not only look good but also be versatile. The ready-to-wear concept merges traditional fabrics with modern designs, thus ensuring style and authenticity. Brands must guarantee that their ethnic garments are of high quality to meet consumer expectations. Analysis of brand image shows that the 'usefulness' dimension is a key consideration for consumers when purchasing ethnic clothing. Brand image can be assessed using the dimensions of the following variables:
a. Friendly
    Many emerging brands need to establish a unique identity. At the INACRAFT exhibition, several ethnic fashion brands showcased distinct characteristics that made their products easily recognisable through their models, colours and patterns. One standout brand, Noesa, drew inspiration from traditional Sikka ikat weaving in Maumere, East Nusa Tenggara. They reinterpreted these motifs with new colour combinations and unique

designs. Noesa also shared the stories of the weavers, thus promoting a positive brand image on their website and Instagram. While Noesa successfully builds connections with the community, many ethnic fashion brands in Indonesia struggle to differentiate themselves because they focus mainly on their products without sharing the narratives behind the fabrics.

b. Modern
Traditional fabrics, such as woven textiles, songket and batik, which were once reserved for ceremonies, such as weddings, are now integral to ethnic fashion clothing. These fabrics carry not only cultural significance but also commercial value, thus reflecting consumers' desire to incorporate them into everyday life. Fashion designers increasingly use these traditional materials as a foundation for modern ready-to-wear clothing. For example, Toba Tenun, a brand showcased at Jakarta Fashion Week 2024, presented 16 looks that blend North Sumatra weaving with contemporary styles. Their Masa Rani collection features motifs inspired by the Karo tribe. Toba Tenun highlights how ethnic fashion can evolve while other brands also compete to meet consumer demands with innovative designs.

c. Useful
The ready-to-wear concept in ethnic fashion blends traditional fabrics with modern styles, thus ensuring fashion and functionality. High-quality clothing is crucial for consumer satisfaction. An interview with Kaind's owner revealed that producing high-quality ethnic wear is a primary goal. Their designs, which are made from the cocoon threads of eri caterpillars, are intended for everyday use and prioritise comfort. Similar commitments to quality can be found in other brands, such as Nona Rara, which is known for its garments made by experienced tailors. Both brands believe that excellent products contribute to a strong positive image in the market.

d. Popular
Numerous ethnic fashion clothing brands are emerging, thus increasing competition in the market. Established brands, such as Danar Hadi and Batik Keris, are working to enhance their visibility among consumers. They need to show that their offerings can be stylish and modern beyond just traditional wear. Many consumers learn about these brands through relatives or friends, which positively influences consumers' perception even if they have not purchased anything yet. This familiarity helps facilitate their decision-making when considering buying a product.

e. Artificial
An ethnic fashion brand must utilise traditional fabrics from specific regions. The authenticity of the patterns, materials and manufacturing methods is highly valued by consumers who appreciate Indonesian culture. Many customers are closely tied to their regional heritage, thus making authenticity an important factor in their choices. For the Noesa brand, the creation of woven fabrics is guaranteed to be authentic in terms of the area of origin and selling location. The blend of traditional fabrics with modern designs adds unique value, thereby demonstrating that these fabrics can be used in everyday wear and not just for cultural ceremonies. Other brands also prioritise maintaining the original characteristics and manufacturing techniques of their fabrics.

4.3. Descriptive Analysis of eWOM

eWOM significantly influences consumer behaviour by providing essential information that simplifies purchasing decisions. It is crucial for assessing the quality of products and services (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). Although eWOM lacks face-to-face interaction, it is nevertheless powerful because of its directness, broad reach and credibility from real

evidence. Recommendations and reviews from other consumers can greatly impact potential buyers' interest. eWOM consists of positive or negative statements from individuals who have used or purchased a product (Hennig-Thurau, 2004). Moreover, this information is easily accessible online.

The primary data collected through a questionnaire revealed that the item with the highest average score, EWOM1, is rated at 4.46. This outcome reflects that social media helps consumers become aware of ethnic clothing brands. About 49.5% of respondents agreed that social media simplifies information access. Additionally, it allows for recommendations from networks, thus increasing people's desire to purchase products. Effective social media promotions can spread product information widely, attract more consumers and positively impact business revenue (Wiratama et al., 2022).

Table 4. Descriptive eWOM

Dimension	Item	Answer Score					Average
		1	2	3	4	5	
Platform Assistance	EWOM1	1	0	2	94	93	4.46
	EWOM2	1	0	13	100	76	4.32
	EWOM3	2	1	17	102	68	4.23
Average of Platform Assistance							4.34
Concern for other	EWOM4	2	3	14	109	62	4.19
	EWOM5	2	5	31	97	55	4.04
Average of Concern for Other							4.12
Economic Intensive	EWOM6	5	15	29	99	42	3.84
Average of Economic Intensive							3.84
Helping Company	EWOM7	3	3	18	118	48	4.08
	EWOM8	2	5	37	102	44	3.95
Average of Helping Company							4.02
Expressing Positive Emotions	EWOM9	2	3	22	108	55	4.11
	EWOM10	0	0	14	120	56	4.22
Average of Expressing Positive Emotions							4.17
Venting Negative Feelings	EWOM11	4	22	34	94	36	3.72
	EWOM12	6	32	36	80	36	3.57
Average of Venting Negative Feelings							3.65
Social Benefits	EWOM13	3	16	37	101	33	3.76
	EWOM14	2	2	3	122	61	4.25
Average of Social Benefits							4.01
Advice Seeking	EWOM15	1	4	14	108	63	4.20
Average of Advice Seeking							4.20
Average of eWOM							4.06

Nona Rara is an ethnic fashion brand that was launched in 2014 as a response to the Indonesian interest in ready-to-wear batik clothing. In 2015, the brand began promoting its products on Instagram, where it actively shares photos, videos and stories. Online buyers often express more complaints than offline shoppers because of their expectations for easy transactions. When these expectations are unmet, consumers voice their frustrations on social media, which can lead to negative eWOM. Nona Rara's Instagram presence allows consumers

to familiarise themselves with its products, thus helping these consumers make informed purchasing decisions based on the experiences of others.

The weakest statement, EWOM12, indicates that when respondents have negative experiences with a brand, they share their stories on social media for the brand to address the issues. This trend suggests that many people use social media to provide feedback, which subsequently helps brands improve. Consumers tend to trust WOM more than advertisements because personal stories about products can be more compelling and persuasive than other marketing strategies. Advances in internet media have facilitated consumers' ability to seek firsthand information and experiences from others before making a purchase.

4.4. **Outer and Inner Models**

The following figure presents an illustration of the structural equation modelling used in this research:
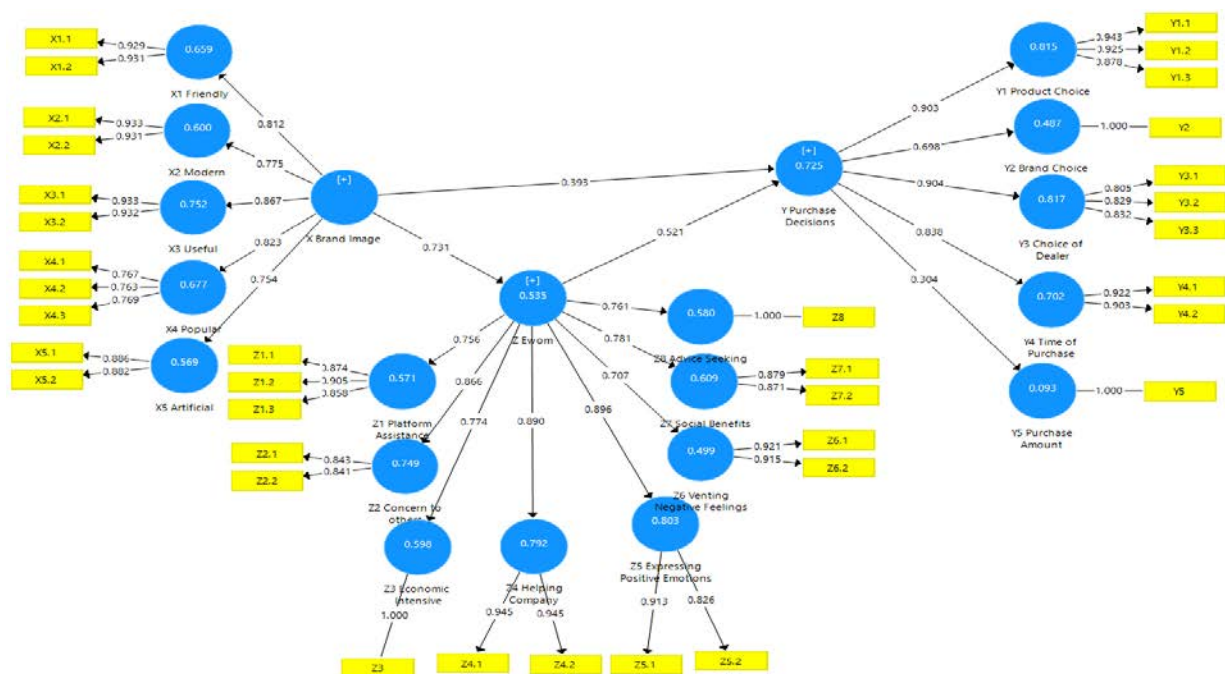

Figure 2. Loading Factor

Table 5. Validity and Reliability Tests

Variable	Code	Validity	Reliability
	X1.1	0.929	
	X1.2	0.931	
	X2.1	0.933	
	X2.2	0.931	
	X3.1	0.933	
Brand Image	X3.2	0.932	0.918
	X4.1	0.767	
	X4.2	0.763	
	X4.3	0.769	
	X5.1	0.886	
	X5.2	0.882	

	Z1.1	0.874	
	Z1.2	0.905	
	Z1.3	0.858	
	Z2.1	0.843	
	Z2.2	0.841	
	Z3	1.000	
EWOM	Z4.1	0.945	0.944
	Z4.2	0.945	
	Z5.1	0.913	
	Z5.2	0.826	
	Z6.1	0.921	
	Z6.2	0.915	
	Z7.1	0.879	
	Z7.2	0.871	
	Z8	1.000	
	Y1.1	0.943	
	Y1.2	0.925	
	Y1.3	0.878	
	Y2	1.000	
Purchase Decisions	Y3.1	0.805	0.920
	Y3.2	0.829	
	Y3.3	0.832	
	Y4.1	0.922	
	Y4.1	0.903	
	Y5	1.000	

The table above presents the results of convergent validity testing. All variables have indicators with loading factor values of more than 0.6 or 0.5, which means that all indicators met the criteria for convergent validity. Based on the table above, the results of the reliability test analysis show that the composite reliability score is greater than 0.7, which means that all variables are reliable and have passed the test requirements.

Table 6. Discriminant Validity

	X Brand Image	Z EWOM	Y Purchase Decisions
X Brand Image	0.912		
Y Purchase Decisions	0.734	0.838	
Z EWOM	0.731	0.808	0.828

In the cross-loading table, the value for each latent variable is greater than the values of other latent variables.
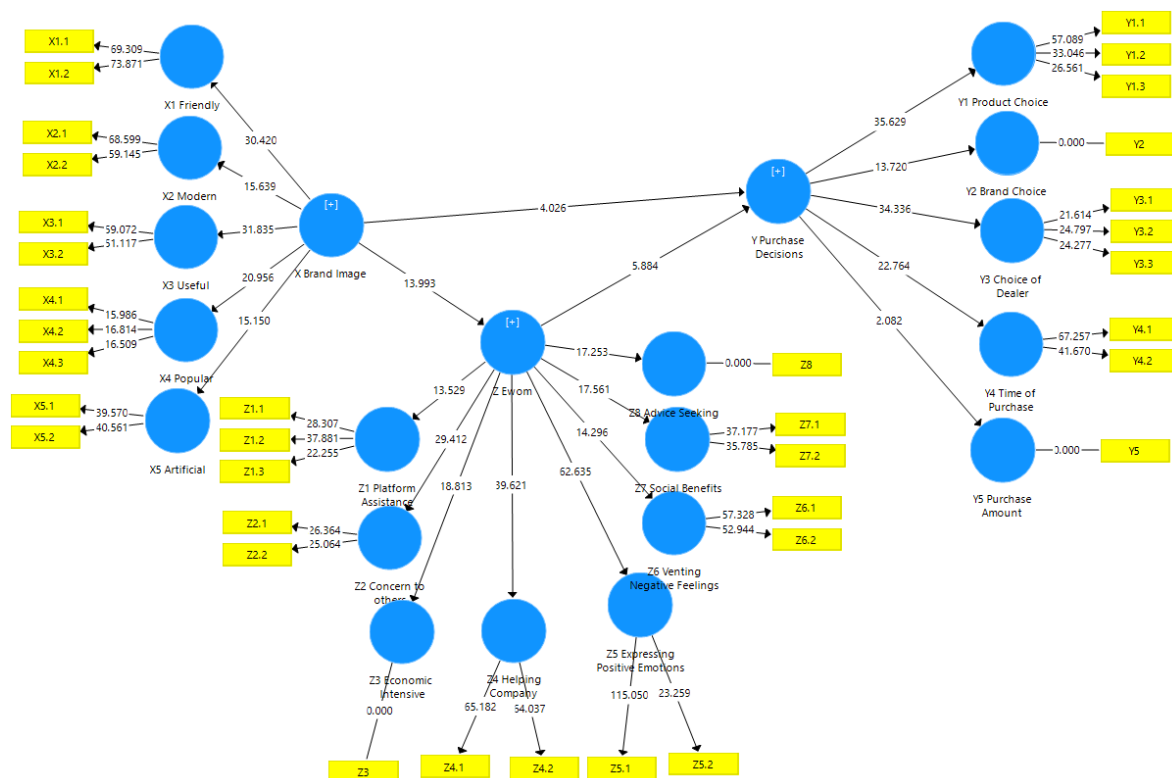
Figure 3. Inner Model

Effect of Brand Image and EWOM on Purchase Decision

The results of the hypothesis test can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7. Direct and Indirect Effects

Variables	T Statistic	P Value	Decision
Brand Image → **Purchasing Decisions**	4.026	0.000	Significance
Brand Image → EWOM → **Purchasing Decisions**	5.361	0.000	Significance

Table 7 presents the following influences of exogenous variables on endogenous variables:
1. Brand image significantly affects purchasing decisions. The outcome shows a t-statistic of 4.026 (greater than 1.96) and a p-value of 0.000 (less than 0.05). Thus, the first hypothesis is accepted.
2. Brand image significantly influences purchasing decisions through eWOM. The outcome shows a t-statistic of 5.361 (greater than 1.96) and a p-value of 0.000 (less than 0.05). Therefore, the second hypothesis is accepted.

4.5. Brand Image Influences Purchasing Decisions

The increasing number of ethnic fashion clothing entrepreneurs has sparked a competition to become the most recognised brand among consumers. Establishing a strong brand image, which involves ensuring that a company's brand is the top choice for ethnic fashion, is a significant challenge in this industry. Consumers consider various factors when selecting a product, including quality, price and the brand's reputation. A positive brand image is crucial because it influences consumer perception and preference. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2017), key aspects of brand image include product reputation and ease of recognition.

- Product strength is a physical advantage that a product brand has that is not found in other product brands.
- The uniqueness of a product is the level of differentiation of the product from its competitors. This impression is obtained by consumers regarding the attributes of a product that other products do not have.
- Excellence entails the convenience of a product brand that is easy for consumers to pronounce and easy to remember. The product becomes a consumer favourite.

The bootstrapping results from the SmartPLS output reveal that the t-statistic for the influence of brand image on purchasing decisions is 3.138 with a p-value of 0.002 (less than 0.05). This result supports the second hypothesis, thus indicating a significantly positive effect of brand image on purchasing behaviour. The quality indicator of brand image has the highest outer loading value of 0.821, thus suggesting that a strong brand image leads to perceptions of high product quality. This finding aligns with previous research by Ali et al. (2023) and Razy and Lajevardi (2016), thereby confirming that a strong brand image positively affects consumers' purchasing decisions.

A previous study revealed that three components of brand image, namely, corporate, user and product image, significantly affect purchase decisions among petrol consumers in Indonesia (Simbolon & Yohanes, 2018). Brand image is essential for guiding consumers' judgments and influencing their purchase choices. The impact of the brand image of apparel on purchase intentions was explored using self-congruity theory, thus confirming that brand image and perceived quality significantly affect consumers' decisions in the apparel industry. This finding aligns with the findings of Azmy, Nauyoman and Zakky (2020), thus highlighting that a strong brand image improves purchasing decisions as consumers evaluate products that meet their expectations.

A strong brand image helps consumers understand a product by providing valuable information beyond price, including product quality (Nugraha & Nurdiyansyah, 2022). A positive brand image influences consumers' choices because consumers tend to prefer brands with a good reputation (Cahyani, 2023). In the clothing industry, consumer purchase intention is related to brand image; self-consistency and perceived quality act as mediators, which are influenced by self-motivation and brand familiarity (Simbolon & Yohanes, 2018). Research has shown that brand image significantly affects purchasing decisions across various sectors, including automotive, apparel and technology.

4.6. Brand Image Influences Purchasing Decisions with eWOM as a Mediator

Positioning and a strong brand create a lasting bond between consumers and the brand, thus shaping a positive brand image. This image reflects how consumers perceive the brand and influences their product choices (Severi & Ling, 2013). Consumers select products that they believe can meet their needs; a positive brand image encourages purchasing decisions by conveying trusted attributes through advertising (Durrani et al., 2015). The perception that a brand fulfils consumers' desires reinforces trust and aligns with the consumers' needs. This

idea demonstrates that brand image significantly influences purchasing decisions, thereby confirming the second hypothesis.

Brand image is the representation of a brand; as such, a positive image can significantly influence purchasing decisions (Severi & Ling, 2013). This favourable perception is often communicated through WOM promotions among consumers. Brands with a strong image can further boost consumers' desire to purchase (Hidayat et al., 2021). In this study, the SmartPLS analysis revealed a t-statistic value of 0.756 and a p-value of 0.450, thus indicating no significant effect of brand image on purchasing decisions when eWOM is considered. This finding suggests that in the ethnic fashion industry, eWOM does not strengthen the influence of brand image on purchase behaviour. This outcome is in contrast to other industries where eWOM has a positive impact on brand perception. For example, in the Sharia banking sector in Indonesia, eWOM effectively influences Generation Z's decisions to use these services (Suparno, 2009). Additionally, Donthu et al. (2021) noted that purchasing interest in Sharia banking is shaped by brand image and eWOM because positive WOM can significantly impact consumer choices (Sijoria et al., 2019).

This study aligns with research on camera purchasing decisions influenced by Generation Z. The analysis shows that brand image significantly impacts purchasing intentions through eWOM. The internet serves as a key platform for consumers to share reviews and advertisements, which can encourage potential buyers to consider new camera options (Fachrozie, 2017). eWOM involves the spread of information about products, services or brands from one consumer to another directly or through media (Brown et al., 2005). It allows consumers to share opinions, thus guiding potential buyers towards or away from specific products and brands (Hawkins & Saleem, 2024).

Ethnic fashion has distinct characteristics that differentiate it from traditional apparel. These traits include unique designs, colours, materials and embedded cultural meanings. For many individuals, ethnic fashion serves to express identity and heritage. The motives for purchasing such clothing are often driven more by social and psychological factors than by functionality. Consumers seek to showcase their identity, connect with their community and enhance self-confidence. While eWOM provides valuable information through reviews and recommendations, many consumers trust their personal experiences and the meanings they derive from ethnic fashion. Each consumer interprets the product through their experiences and beliefs, thus making their perspective unique. Consequently, consumers often prioritise their personal understanding of the clothing over eWOM because they feel a deep connection to the meanings and values represented in ethnic fashion.

Nevertheless, eWOM significantly influences consumer purchase intentions in the fashion industry. According to Sylvia and Ramli (2023), it is an effective tool for shaping a brand's image. Effective management of eWOM can foster a positive brand image. Meanwhile, negative feedback can deter potential buyers particularly in ethnic fashion, which has unique characteristics. In the competitive digital marketing landscape, effective eWOM management is essential.

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Brand image does not significantly affect the purchase decision of consumers regarding ethnic fashion when considering eWOM. However, negative eWOM, especially unfavourable consumer reviews, can quickly harm a brand's reputation and influence purchasing choices. Reviews that highlight product flaws or poor service can drive potential buyers to seek alternatives with better ratings. Therefore, establishing a strong and consistent brand image is vital to mitigate the impact of negative eWOM. Businesses in the ethnic fashion sector can leverage social media and websites to share stories about artisans and the cultural significance

of their traditional fabrics. In doing so, these companies can foster emotional connections with their customers. Companies can also enhance business outcomes across industries by building a strong, authentic brand image, which is essential for fostering trust and loyalty while differentiating a brand from competitors. Effectively leveraging eWOM involves encouraging positive reviews through digital campaigns and addressing negative feedback promptly to maintain reputation. Businesses should focus on consumer-centric innovation by using feedback from eWOM to refine offerings and align with customer values, such as quality and sustainability. Emphasising social and cultural connections can deepen consumer relationships, while personalised marketing strategies and technology integration, such as AI-driven recommendations and sentiment analysis, can amplify reach and impact. Collaborating with stakeholders further strengthens brand authenticity and market positioning.

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