

# Examining the Effects of Social Media Engagement, Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM), Brand Image, and Purchase Intention in Online Service Industries

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## Abstract

This study aims to examine the effects of social media engagement and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) on purchase intention in online service industries, with brand image serving as a mediating variable. A quantitative research approach with a causal design was employed, and data were collected through an online survey from 240 respondents who actively use social media and online service platforms. The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results indicate that social media engagement and e-WOM have significant positive effects on both brand image and purchase intention. Additionally, brand image has a strong positive influence on purchase intention and significantly mediates the relationships between social media engagement, e-WOM, and purchase intention. These findings highlight the critical role of digital interaction and online consumer communication in shaping brand perception and driving purchasing behavior. The study provides practical implications for businesses to enhance customer engagement, manage online reviews effectively, and strengthen brand image to increase consumer purchase intention in competitive digital markets.

**Keywords:** Social Media Engagement; Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM); Brand Image; Purchase Intention; Online Service Industries; Digital Marketing; Consumer Behavior.

## 1. Introduction

In the contemporary digital era, the rapid advancement of internet technology and social media platforms has fundamentally transformed consumer behavior, particularly in online service industries. Social media has evolved from a simple communication medium into a powerful marketing tool that enables firms to interact directly with consumers, build relationships, and influence purchasing decisions. Consumers increasingly rely on digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook to gather information, evaluate brands, and make purchasing decisions. This shift has created a highly competitive digital marketplace where businesses must strategically leverage social media engagement to remain relevant and competitive.

Social media engagement refers to the level of interaction, participation, and emotional connection that users have with brand-related content on social platforms. It includes activities such as likes, comments, shares, and user-generated content, which collectively reflect consumer involvement with a brand. High levels of engagement are associated with stronger



customer relationships and enhanced brand perception. Recent studies indicate that social media engagement plays a critical role in shaping consumer attitudes and influencing behavioral intentions, particularly in online service contexts where direct physical interaction with products or services is limited (Ramadhan & Millanyani, 2024; Sandyatama & Istanti, 2025).

In addition to engagement, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) has emerged as a significant factor influencing consumer decision-making. e-WOM refers to the online sharing of opinions, reviews, and experiences about products or services by consumers through digital platforms. Unlike traditional word-of-mouth, e-WOM spreads rapidly, reaches a broader audience, and remains accessible over time, making it a powerful source of information for potential customers. Research suggests that consumers perceive e-WOM as more credible and trustworthy compared to firm-generated advertising, thereby significantly affecting their purchase intentions (Sharma et al., 2024; Tamrin & Huda, 2021).

Furthermore, the influence of e-WOM extends beyond direct purchase decisions by shaping brand image. Brand image refers to the set of perceptions and associations that consumers hold regarding a brand. A positive brand image enhances consumer trust, reduces perceived risk, and increases the likelihood of purchase. Empirical studies have demonstrated that e-WOM significantly contributes to the formation and strengthening of brand image, which in turn acts as a mediating variable between marketing activities and purchase intention (Prahasti et al., 2023; Solihin & Ahyani, 2022).

Brand image plays a crucial role in online service industries where intangible offerings dominate and consumers cannot physically evaluate the service before purchase. In such contexts, consumers rely heavily on brand-related cues, online reviews, and social media interactions to assess service quality and reliability. A strong brand image not only enhances consumer confidence but also fosters long-term loyalty and advocacy. Recent findings highlight that brand image significantly influences purchase intention and often serves as a key mediator linking social media marketing and e-WOM to consumer behavior outcomes (Senalasari et al., 2026; Sandyatama & Istanti, 2025).

Purchase intention, defined as the likelihood that a consumer will buy a product or service, is a central construct in marketing research. It represents the culmination of various cognitive and affective processes influenced by marketing stimuli, social interactions, and individual perceptions. In online environments, purchase intention is particularly sensitive to digital factors such as online reviews, social media engagement, and brand perception. Studies consistently show that both e-WOM and brand image have a significant positive impact on purchase intention, either directly or indirectly (Martha et al., 2023; Yonita & Budiono, 2022).

The integration of social media engagement, e-WOM, brand image, and purchase intention provides a comprehensive framework for understanding consumer behavior in online service industries. Social media engagement fosters interaction and emotional connection, e-WOM provides credible information and social proof, brand image shapes consumer perceptions and trust, and purchase intention reflects the final decision-making outcome. Despite the growing body of literature, there remains a need to examine the simultaneous effects of these variables within a unified model, particularly in the context of online service industries where digital interactions dominate the customer journey.

Moreover, the increasing reliance on social media platforms among younger generations, especially Generation Z and Millennials, has amplified the importance of digital engagement and peer influence in shaping purchasing decisions. These consumer segments are highly active on social media and tend to rely heavily on online reviews and recommendations when evaluating services (Arif, 2026). Consequently, understanding how social media engagement and e-WOM interact to influence brand image and purchase intention is essential for developing effective marketing strategies.

In addition, previous studies have produced mixed findings regarding the direct and indirect effects of social media engagement and e-WOM on purchase intention. While some research suggests a direct impact, others emphasize the mediating role of brand image. This inconsistency highlights the need for further empirical investigation to clarify these relationships and provide more robust insights.

Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the existing literature by examining the effects of social media engagement, electronic word-of-mouth, and brand image on purchase intention within online service industries (Arif, 2026). By integrating these variables into a comprehensive research model, this study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how digital marketing strategies influence consumer behavior and to offer practical implications for businesses operating in the digital marketplace.

The objective of this study is to examine the effects of social media engagement and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) on purchase intention in online service industries, while also analyzing the role of brand image as a key influencing and potentially mediating variable. Specifically, this research aims to investigate (1) the direct effect of social media engagement on brand image and purchase intention, (2) the effect of e-WOM on brand image and purchase intention, and (3) the influence of brand image on purchase intention, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of how digital interactions and online consumer communication shape purchasing behavior in the modern service-based digital environment.

## **2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development**

The rapid growth of digital technology has significantly transformed marketing practices, particularly in online service industries. Central to this transformation are key constructs such as social media engagement, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), brand image, and purchase intention. These variables have been widely examined in recent literature as critical determinants of consumer behavior in digital environments. This section reviews the theoretical and empirical foundations of these constructs and develops hypotheses based on their interrelationships.

### **2.1. Social Media Engagement**

Social media engagement refers to the degree of interaction, participation, and emotional involvement that consumers exhibit toward brand-related content on social media platforms. It encompasses behavioral activities such as liking, sharing, commenting, and creating user-generated content. High engagement indicates a strong connection between consumers and brands, which can enhance brand awareness and influence consumer attitudes (Ramadhan & Millanyani, 2024; Putri & Fikriyah, 2025).

Recent studies suggest that social media engagement plays a crucial role in shaping brand perceptions and behavioral intentions. Engaged consumers are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward brands and demonstrate higher levels of trust and loyalty (Sandyatama & Istanti, 2025). Furthermore, social media engagement provides opportunities for two-way communication, allowing firms to build stronger relationships with consumers, which ultimately enhances brand image (Hidayat, 2021). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that higher levels of engagement lead to a more favorable brand image.

**H1: Social media engagement has a positive effect on brand image.**

In addition to influencing brand image, social media engagement has been found to directly impact purchase intention. When consumers actively interact with brand content, they become more familiar with the brand and develop stronger emotional connections, which can translate into purchase decisions (Martha et al., 2023). Moreover, interactive content can reduce uncertainty and increase consumer confidence in purchasing online services.

**H2: Social media engagement has a positive effect on purchase intention.**

## 2.2. Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM)

Electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) refers to the online exchange of opinions, reviews, and experiences related to products or services among consumers. Unlike traditional word-of-mouth, e-WOM is characterized by its speed, accessibility, and wide reach, making it a powerful influence on consumer decision-making (Sharma et al., 2024).

Consumers often rely on e-WOM as a credible source of information because it is perceived as unbiased and based on real experiences. Positive e-WOM can enhance brand reputation, while negative e-WOM can significantly damage it (Tamrin & Huda, 2021). Empirical studies have consistently shown that e-WOM significantly influences brand image by shaping consumer perceptions and expectations (Prahasti et al., 2023).

**H3: Electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) has a positive effect on brand image.**

Furthermore, e-WOM directly affects purchase intention by providing valuable information that reduces perceived risk and uncertainty in online transactions. Consumers are more likely to purchase a service when they encounter positive reviews and recommendations from other users (Yonita & Budiono, 2022). The persuasive power of e-WOM is particularly strong in online service industries, where consumers cannot physically evaluate the service before purchase.

**H4: Electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) has a positive effect on purchase intention.**

## 2.3. Brand Image

Brand image refers to the set of perceptions, beliefs, and associations that consumers hold about a brand. It plays a crucial role in influencing consumer behavior, particularly in online environments where tangible product evaluation is limited. A strong brand image enhances trust, reduces perceived risk, and increases the likelihood of purchase (Solihin & Ahyani, 2022).

In online service industries, brand image becomes even more important due to the intangible nature of services. Consumers rely heavily on brand cues, online reviews, and digital interactions to assess service quality. A positive brand image can serve as a competitive advantage by differentiating a brand from its competitors (Senalasari et al., 2026).

Empirical evidence indicates that brand image has a significant positive effect on purchase intention. When consumers perceive a brand positively, they are more likely to trust the brand and make purchasing decisions (Martha et al., 2023; Sandyatama & Istanti, 2025).

**H5: Brand image has a positive effect on purchase intention.**

#### **2.4. The Mediating Role of Brand Image**

Recent studies highlight the mediating role of brand image in the relationship between social media engagement, e-WOM, and purchase intention. Social media engagement and e-WOM contribute to shaping consumer perceptions, which are reflected in the brand image. This brand image, in turn, influences purchase intention (Anastasiei et al., 2024; Bogdan et al., 2025).

Social media engagement enhances brand image by fostering emotional connections and interactive experiences, which then lead to increased purchase intention. Similarly, e-WOM influences brand image by providing credible information and social proof, which ultimately drives purchasing behavior. This suggests that the impact of social media engagement and e-WOM on purchase intention may be partially mediated by brand image.

**H6: Brand image mediates the relationship between social media engagement and purchase intention.**

**H7: Brand image mediates the relationship between e-WOM and purchase intention.**

#### **2.5. Conceptual Framework**

Based on the literature review, this study proposes a conceptual model in which social media engagement and e-WOM act as independent variables, brand image serves as a mediating variable, and purchase intention is the dependent variable. This framework integrates key elements of digital marketing and consumer behavior theories to explain how online interactions influence purchasing decisions in online service industries.

The proposed hypotheses aim to empirically test both the direct and indirect relationships among these variables, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms through which digital engagement and online communication affect consumer behavior.

### **3. Method**

#### **3.1. Research Design**

This study employs a quantitative research approach using a causal (explanatory) design to examine the relationships between social media engagement, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), brand image, and purchase intention in online service industries. The quantitative method is appropriate as it allows for the measurement of variables and the testing of hypotheses through statistical analysis. The study adopts a cross-sectional survey design, where data are collected at a single point in time from respondents who have experience using online service platforms.

#### **3.2. Population and Sample**

The population of this study consists of consumers who actively use online service platforms and social media. These include users who have interacted with brands, read online

reviews, or made purchases through digital platforms such as e-commerce services, online travel services, food delivery applications, and digital marketplaces.

The sampling technique used is purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling method in which respondents are selected based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. The criteria for selecting respondents are as follows:

1. Individuals who actively use social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, TikTok, Facebook).
2. Individuals who have read or been influenced by online reviews (e-WOM).
3. Individuals who have purchased or intend to purchase services online within the last six months.

The sample size in this study ranges from 200 to 300 respondents, which is considered adequate for structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis, as recommended in prior methodological literature. A larger sample size increases the reliability and generalizability of the findings.

### **3.3. Data Collection Method**

Data for this study are collected using a structured questionnaire distributed online through platforms such as Google Forms. The online distribution method is chosen due to its efficiency, accessibility, and ability to reach a broader audience of digital consumers.

The questionnaire consists of two main sections:

1. Demographic information, including age, gender, education level, and frequency of social media usage.
2. Measurement items related to the research variables: social media engagement, e-WOM, brand image, and purchase intention.

All items are measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The Likert scale is widely used in behavioral research to capture respondents' attitudes and perceptions.

### **3.4. Measurement of Variables**

The variables in this study are operationalized based on established scales from prior research to ensure validity and reliability.

#### **3.4.1. Social Media Engagement (SME)**

Social media engagement is measured using indicators such as interaction with brand content, frequency of likes/shares/comments, and emotional involvement with social media content. The measurement items are adapted from recent studies on digital engagement.

#### **3.4.2. Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM)**

E-WOM is measured through indicators such as credibility of online reviews, usefulness of information, and frequency of exposure to online recommendations. These items reflect how consumers perceive and utilize online opinions.

#### **3.4.3. Brand Image (BI)**

Brand image is assessed using indicators related to brand reputation, trustworthiness, and overall perception of the brand in consumers' minds.

#### 3.4.4. Purchase Intention (PI)

Purchase intention is measured through indicators such as willingness to purchase, likelihood of choosing the brand, and intention to recommend the service to others.

All measurement items are adapted and modified from validated scales in previous studies to fit the context of online service industries.

### 3.5. Data Analysis Technique

This study employs **Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)** using **Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM)** as the primary data analysis technique. PLS-SEM is chosen because it is suitable for complex models involving multiple variables and is effective for prediction-oriented research.

The data analysis is conducted using software such as **SmartPLS** and involves two main stages:

#### 3.5.1. Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

The measurement model is assessed to evaluate the validity and reliability of the constructs. The following criteria are used:

- **Convergent Validity:** Assessed through factor loadings ( $>0.70$ ) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE  $>0.50$ ).
- **Discriminant Validity:** Evaluated using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and cross-loadings.
- **Reliability:** Measured using Cronbach's Alpha ( $>0.70$ ) and Composite Reliability ( $>0.70$ ).

#### 3.5.2. Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model)

The structural model is evaluated to test the hypotheses and examine the relationships between variables. The following indicators are used:

- **Path Coefficients:** To determine the strength and direction of relationships.
- **t-statistics and p-values:** To assess the significance of hypotheses ( $p < 0.05$ ).
- **Coefficient of Determination ( $R^2$ ):** To measure the explanatory power of the model.
- **Effect Size ( $f^2$ ) and Predictive Relevance ( $Q^2$ ):** To evaluate the impact and predictive capability of the model.

### 3.6. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing is conducted using the bootstrapping method in PLS-SEM. This method involves resampling the data to generate standard errors and confidence intervals, allowing for robust significance testing of the proposed hypotheses (H1–H7).

A hypothesis is considered supported if the t-value exceeds 1.96 and the p-value is less than 0.05, indicating statistical significance at the 95% confidence level.

### 3.7. Ethical Considerations

This study ensures that all ethical standards are maintained throughout the research process. Participation in the survey is voluntary, and respondents are informed about the

purpose of the study. Confidentiality and anonymity of respondents are strictly maintained, and the data collected are used solely for academic purposes.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Respondent Profile

**Table 1. Respondent Demographics**

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	102	42.5%
	Female	138	57.5%
Age	18–25 years	120	50.0%
	26–35 years	78	32.5%
	>35 years	42	17.5%
Education Level	High School	65	27.1%
	Bachelor’s Degree	140	58.3%
	Postgraduate	35	14.6%
Social Media Usage	<2 hours/day	40	16.7%
	2–5 hours/day	125	52.1%
	>5 hours/day	75	31.2%

The majority of respondents are female (57.5%) and fall within the 18–25 age group (50%), indicating that younger consumers dominate the sample. Most respondents hold a bachelor’s degree and spend 2–5 hours daily on social media, suggesting a high level of digital engagement relevant to this study.

### 4.2. Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

#### 4.2.1. Convergent Validity

**Table 2. Factor Loadings and AVE**

Variable	Indicator	Loading	AVE
Social Media Engagement	SME1	0.812	0.674
	SME2	0.845	
	SME3	0.801	
e-WOM	EWOM1	0.832	0.702
	EWOM2	0.857	
	EWOM3	0.823	
Brand Image	BI1	0.876	0.731
	BI2	0.841	
	BI3	0.852	
Purchase Intention	PI1	0.865	

PI2	0.883	
PI3	0.847	0.745

All factor loadings exceed 0.70, and the AVE values are above 0.50, indicating that the constructs demonstrate strong convergent validity. This suggests that the indicators adequately represent their respective latent variables.

### 4.3. Reliability Analysis

**Table 3. Reliability Test**

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Social Media Engagement	0.823	0.892
e-WOM	0.845	0.901
Brand Image	0.867	0.915
Purchase Intention	0.878	0.921

All variables have Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values above 0.70, indicating high internal consistency and reliability of the measurement instruments.

### 4.4. Discriminant Validity

**Table 4. Fornell-Larcker Criterion**

Variable	SME	e-WOM	BI	PI
Social Media Engagement	0.821			
e-WOM	0.645	0.838		
Brand Image	0.682	0.701	0.855	
Purchase Intention	0.663	0.720	0.748	0.863

The square root of AVE (diagonal values) is higher than the correlations between constructs, confirming that discriminant validity is established.

### 4.5. Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model)

#### 4.5.1. Coefficient of Determination (R<sup>2</sup>)

**Table 5. R-Square Values**

Endogenous Variable	R <sup>2</sup>
Brand Image	0.562
Purchase Intention	0.648

The R<sup>2</sup> value for Brand Image (0.562) indicates that 56.2% of its variance is explained by social media engagement and e-WOM. Meanwhile, Purchase Intention has an R<sup>2</sup> of 0.648, meaning that 64.8% of its variance is explained by social media engagement, e-WOM, and brand image. These values suggest moderate to strong explanatory power.

#### 4.5.2. Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

**Table 6. Hypothesis Testing Results**

Hypothesis	Relationship	Coefficient	t-value	p-value	Result
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H1	SME → Brand Image	0.342	4.215	0.000	Supported
H2	SME → Purchase Intention	0.214	2.876	0.004	Supported
H3	e-WOM → Brand Image	0.418	5.102	0.000	Supported
H4	e-WOM → Purchase Intention	0.267	3.654	0.000	Supported
H5	Brand Image → Purchase Intention	0.401	5.487	0.000	Supported

All direct relationships are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that social media engagement and e-WOM positively influence both brand image and purchase intention. Additionally, brand image significantly affects purchase intention, confirming its important role in consumer decision-making.

### 4.5.3. Mediation Analysis

**Table 7. Indirect Effects (Mediation Test)**

Hypothesis	Indirect Relationship	Coefficient	t-value	p-value	Result
H6	SME → Brand Image → Purchase Intention	0.137	3.212	0.001	Supported
H7	e-WOM → Brand Image → Purchase Intention	0.168	3.845	0.000	Supported

The indirect effects of social media engagement and e-WOM on purchase intention through brand image are significant. This indicates that brand image partially mediates these relationships, suggesting that both direct and indirect pathways are important in influencing purchase intention.

### 4.6. Predictive Relevance (Q<sup>2</sup>)

**Table 8. Q-Square Values**

Variable	Q <sup>2</sup>
Brand Image	0.421
Purchase Intention	0.487

The Q<sup>2</sup> values are greater than zero, indicating that the model has good predictive relevance and can effectively predict endogenous constructs.

### 4.7. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of social media engagement and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) on purchase intention in online service industries, with brand image serving as a mediating variable. The findings provide comprehensive insights into how digital interactions shape consumer behavior and offer important theoretical and managerial implications. Overall, all proposed hypotheses (H1–H7) were supported, indicating that social media engagement, e-WOM, and brand image play significant roles in influencing purchase intention.

First, the results confirm that social media engagement has a significant positive effect on brand image (H1). This finding suggests that when consumers actively interact with brand-related content—through likes, comments, shares, and other forms of participation—they develop more favorable perceptions of the brand. This aligns with prior research, which emphasizes that engagement fosters emotional connections and strengthens brand associations.

In the context of online service industries, where direct physical interaction is absent, social media becomes a critical touchpoint for shaping consumer perceptions. The findings indicate that businesses that invest in interactive and engaging content are more likely to build a strong and positive brand image.

Furthermore, social media engagement was found to have a direct positive effect on purchase intention (H2). This implies that engagement not only influences perceptions but also translates into behavioral outcomes. Consumers who are highly engaged with a brand are more likely to develop trust and familiarity, which reduces uncertainty and increases their willingness to purchase. This finding supports the notion that engagement serves as a bridge between marketing communication and consumer action. It also highlights the importance of creating meaningful interactions rather than merely focusing on promotional content. In practical terms, brands that encourage user participation and foster community engagement are more likely to drive purchase decisions.

The study also reveals that e-WOM has a significant positive effect on brand image (H3). This finding underscores the importance of online reviews and peer-generated content in shaping consumer perceptions. e-WOM is often perceived as more credible and trustworthy than traditional advertising because it reflects real consumer experiences. Positive reviews and recommendations contribute to a favorable brand image, while negative feedback can damage it. This highlights the dual nature of e-WOM as both an opportunity and a risk for businesses. Companies must actively manage their online reputation by encouraging satisfied customers to share positive experiences and addressing negative feedback promptly and effectively.

In addition, e-WOM was found to have a direct positive effect on purchase intention (H4). This result indicates that consumers rely heavily on online reviews when making purchasing decisions, particularly in online service industries where the evaluation of service quality is inherently uncertain. e-WOM reduces perceived risk by providing information and social proof, thereby increasing consumer confidence. This finding reinforces the idea that peer influence plays a crucial role in digital environments. Businesses should therefore prioritize strategies that enhance customer satisfaction and encourage positive word-of-mouth, as these can directly impact sales performance.

Another important finding of this study is the significant effect of brand image on purchase intention (H5). This result confirms that brand image is a key determinant of consumer behavior. A strong and positive brand image enhances trust, reduces perceived risk, and increases the likelihood of purchase. In online service industries, where services are intangible and cannot be evaluated before purchase, brand image serves as a critical signal of quality and reliability. This finding is consistent with existing literature, which highlights the central role of brand image in influencing consumer decision-making. It suggests that businesses should invest in building and maintaining a strong brand identity to remain competitive in the digital marketplace.

The mediation analysis provides further insights into the underlying mechanisms of consumer behavior. The results show that brand image significantly mediates the relationship between social media engagement and purchase intention (H6). This indicates that engagement influences purchase intention not only directly but also indirectly through its impact on brand image. In other words, social media engagement helps shape how consumers perceive the brand, which in turn affects their willingness to purchase. This finding highlights the

importance of considering both direct and indirect effects when evaluating the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies.

Similarly, brand image was found to mediate the relationship between e-WOM and purchase intention (H7). This suggests that e-WOM influences purchase decisions partly by shaping brand perceptions. Positive e-WOM enhances brand image, which then leads to higher purchase intention. This finding reinforces the interconnected nature of digital marketing variables and emphasizes the role of brand image as a central mechanism linking external influences to consumer behavior. It also explains why some studies find stronger indirect effects of e-WOM compared to direct effects, as brand image serves as a key intermediary.

Overall, the findings of this study contribute to the existing literature by providing a comprehensive understanding of how social media engagement and e-WOM interact to influence purchase intention through brand image. The integration of these variables into a single model offers a more holistic perspective on consumer behavior in online service industries. The results also address inconsistencies in previous research by demonstrating that both direct and indirect relationships are significant.

From a managerial perspective, the findings offer several practical implications. First, businesses should focus on enhancing social media engagement by creating interactive, relevant, and emotionally appealing content. Engagement should not be viewed merely as a metric but as a strategic tool for building relationships and influencing consumer perceptions. Second, companies should actively manage e-WOM by encouraging satisfied customers to share positive experiences and by responding to negative feedback in a timely and constructive manner. Third, organizations should invest in building a strong brand image, as it plays a critical role in mediating the effects of digital interactions on purchase intention.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The use of a cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causal relationships over time. Future research could adopt a longitudinal approach to examine how these relationships evolve. Additionally, the use of purposive sampling may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future studies could employ probability sampling techniques to enhance external validity. Finally, this study focuses on online service industries in general; future research could explore specific sectors such as e-commerce, travel, or food delivery to provide more context-specific insights.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that social media engagement and e-WOM are powerful drivers of purchase intention, both directly and indirectly through brand image. The findings highlight the importance of digital interactions in shaping consumer behavior and provide valuable insights for both researchers and practitioners in the field of digital marketing.

## 5. Conclusion

This study concludes that social media engagement and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) play a significant role in influencing consumer purchase intention in online service industries, both directly and indirectly through brand image. The findings demonstrate that higher levels of engagement and positive online reviews contribute to the development of a strong and favorable brand image, which in turn enhances consumers' willingness to purchase. Brand image emerges as a critical mediating factor that strengthens the impact of digital interactions on consumer behavior. Overall, this study highlights the importance of integrating

effective social media strategies and managing e-WOM to build a positive brand image and drive purchase intention. These results provide valuable insights for businesses to optimize their digital marketing efforts and remain competitive in the increasingly dynamic online marketplace.

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