

# The role of Brand Image in Determining the Influence of E-WOM on Brand Trust at Cendana Polytechnic

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## Abstract

This research aims to find out the role of brand image in mediating the influence of E-WOM on Cendana's Polytechnic Brand Trust. The confidence of the people greatly influenced the decision to choose the college as a stamp to continue their education. The research methodology used is a quantitative method where the data collection is carried out using a questionnaire method with the number of samples of the research being 98 students of Cendana Polytechnic. Smart PLS is used as a data processing tool, it can be concluded that E-WOM and brand image have a significant influence on brand trust. This study contributed to the knowledge of how E-WOM and brand image, influenced vocational college brand trust, especially Cendana Polytechnic which has never been studied before.

**Keyword:** E-WOM, Brand Image, Brand Trust

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Currently, economic development and technological advances have driven the growth of the service sector. This in turns has opened up a variety of new opportunities in the service sector, such as higher education services. This technological advancement is utilized by various groups, ranging from children, adults, students, students, and workers, to business people. This technological advancement has made many jobs easier, from communicating and studying to shopping for daily necessities that can be done with just a smartphone (Arianthi & Sampurna, 2020). Education is the result of providing students with an environment that allows them to interact with it to develop their competencies. Education is a process of interaction that happens between teachers and students, which aims to improve mental development so that they can be independent and whole. In general, it can be said that education is a unit of action that enables learning and development.

Polytechnic Cendana is a higher education institution that provides and delivers vocational education to the community. The university, located at Jalan Willièm Iskandar No.261 Medan, has been providing vocational education since 2003 and has produced thousands of graduates spread nationally and internationally. The thing that often happens in the management of higher education on private campuses in Indonesia is intense competition, where more and more days the emergence of other private universities which results in many universities having difficulty in maintaining the quantity or number of students they educate. Of course, this makes every private college manager compete in making the name of their college increasingly recognized by the public and eventually become the place of choice in continuing their education.

Nowadays people often look at assessments from the internet as a comparison when choosing a brand. One of the things that can make people trust a college is E-WOM. Electronic Word of Mouth is a statement of opinion from consumers regarding whether a product is actually and potentially good or bad. Through e-WOM messages, consumers get information about the quality of a product or service. One form of e-WOM is online reviews, which consist of analysis and comments made by consumers about products that have been purchased (Arianthi and Sampurna, 2020). The strategy for electronic communication will be effective in true sense if it is ensured to develop trust in this context among people (Prasad, Gupta and Totala, 2017). Electronic Word of Mouth is more effective than Word of Mouth communication in the offline world, because of greater accessibility and wider reach where consumers use the internet media with the aim of sharing their own experiences of a brand, product, or service that they have used (Siddiqui et al., 2021). In addition, brand image is one of the determining factors in people trusting a brand. A good image that comes out of a brand can increase trust. According to (Kotler and Keller, 2017) All companies strive to build a Brand Image with as many strong, favorable, and unique brand associations as possible. A brand image is also a seller's promise to consistently deliver a series of certain characteristics, benefits, and services to buyers. Business people must be able to place brands in the minds of consumers. The success or failure of the brand can be seen from the brand that is embedded in the minds of consumers. If the brand of a product has a positive image and is believed to be able to meet its needs and desires, then interest in buying a product or service will arise in humans. Conversely, if the brand or brand of a product or service has a negative image, consumer interest in buying the product or service will be low. A positive image can certainly be a strength for the brand used by the product (Sanita, Kusniawati and Lestari, 2019).

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of E-WOM on Brand Trust through the brand image of Cendana Polytechnic, it is hoped that this research will provide benefits at the academic and practical levels. Apart from being useful for scientific development in building public trust in Cendana Polytechnic in particular and for universities in general, this research is expected to be more applicable in providing advice for all stakeholders in making policies related to increasing Public Trust in Cendana Polytechnic so as can increase public interest in choosing Cendana Polytechnic as a place to continue their education.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

### 2.1 Research Framework

#### 2.1.1 E-WOM

Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) is an activity of individuals through online media who exchange information and positive or negative experiences about something they or others have experienced before. (Priansa, 2016:351). The key to WOM is to have an opinion leader, a person who has the power to influence a decision (influencer). (Sari et al., 2017). According to (Lin, Wu dan Chen, 2013) Electronic Word of Mouth can be divided into three indicators, namely:

1. E-WOM Quality; The online review/comment is clear; The online review/comment is understandable; The online review/comment is helpful; The online review/comment is credible; The online review/comment has sufficient reasons supporting the opinions; In general, the quality of each online review/comment is high
2. E-WOM Quantity The number of online review/comment is large, inferring that the product is popular; The quantity of online review/comment information is great, inferring that the product has good sales; Highly ranking and recommendation, inferring that the product has good reputations.
3. E-WOM Credibility; The persons who provided online reviews/comments are experienced; The persons who provided online reviews/comments have abundant knowledge toward the product; The persons who provided online reviews/comments have the ability on judgment; The person provided some different ideas than other sources; The person mentioned some things had not considered.

#### 2.1.2 Brand Image

Brand Image should convey the product's special benefits and positioning. Developing a strong and distinctive image requires creativity and hard work. According to Kotler dan G. Armstrong, (2018:233), Brand image is a series of associations (perceptions) that exist in the minds of consumers towards a brand, usually organized into a meaning. The relationship with a brand will be stronger if it is based on experience and gets a lot of information. Brand image is a series of associations that are perceived by individuals over time, as a result of direct or indirect experience of a brand. (Tjiptono, 2018:219). According to Kotler and Keller, (2017:347), the brand image can be seen from:

1. The superiority of brand association, one of the factors forming the brand image is product excellence, where the product is superior to the competition.
2. The strength of brand associations, every valuable brand has a soul, a special personality is a fundamental obligation for brand owners to be able to reveal, and socialize the soul/personality in the form of advertising, or other forms of promotional and marketing activities. That is what will continue to be the link between the product/brand and the customer.
3. The uniqueness of brand association, is the uniqueness of the product.

#### 2.1.3 Brand Trust

Brand trust according to Chauduri and Holbrook is the willingness of consumers to believe in the brand's ability to perform as promised. (Imaddudin dan Sitanggang, 2022). Meanwhile, according to Delgado, brand trust is a consumer's feeling of security in their interactions with the brand, which is based on the perception that the brand is reliable and responsible for consumer interests and safety. (Madeline dan Sihombing, 2019). Lau & Lee states that there are three indicators of trust in the brand (Brand Trust), namely:

1. Brand Characteristic, Brand characteristics have an important role in determining consumer decision-making to trust a brand, this is because consumers assess before buying it. Brand characteristics related to brand trust include:
  - a. Brand Reputation Consumer perceptions that a brand has a good reputation are closely related to consumer confidence in the brand.
  - b. Brand Predictability This predictability can be related to the level of consistency of product quality. Consumer prediction or perception that a brand can be predicted is closely related to consumer confidence in the brand.
  - c. Brand Competence is a brand that can solve problems faced by consumers and fulfill all their needs. Ability is an important element that affects trust. Consumers may know brand competence through direct use or word-of-mouth communication.
2. Company Characteristic, Company characteristics that are expected to affect consumer trust in the company are as follows:
  - a. Trust in the Company is a sense of trust that the company is good, bona fide, and can create quality products.
  - b. Company Reputation. Consumer perceptions that the company has a reputation for equality are closely related to consumer trust in the brand.
  - c. Perceived Motives of the Company. Consumer perceptions that the company has a favorable motive are closely related to consumer confidence in the brand launched by the company.

- d. Company Integrity is a consumer perception that follows logical principles, such as keeping promises, acting ethically, and being honest.
3. Consumer-Brand Characteristic
- a. Similarity between Consumer's Self-Concept and Brand Personality. Brand personality is an association associated with a brand that is remembered by consumers in receiving it. The similarity between consumer self-concept and brand personality is closely related to consumer confidence in the brand.
  - b. Brand Liking. For consumers, to open their relationship with a brand, the consumer must first like the brand. In the consumer market, if a consumer likes a type of brand (i.e. a brand that he finds appropriate and attractive), consumers will likely trust the brand more.
  - c. Brand Experience. Brand experience is the consumer's experience with the brand, especially in the scope of use. Consumer experience with a brand is closely related to their trust in the brand.
  - d. Brand Satisfaction is the result of a subjective evaluation of what the selected brand has achieved in order to fulfill what consumers expect. This phenomenon is based on the disconfirmation paradigm of consumer satisfaction, where the comparison between consumer expectations and perceived results strongly characterizes the definition of satisfaction.
  - e. Peer Support. One of the determinants of individual behavior is the influence brought by other individuals. To state indirectly that social influence is an important determinant in the formation of individual behavior (Bambang & Heriyanto, 2017).

## 2.2 Research Methodology

The type of research in this study is associative research, namely research that connects two or more variables using a quantitative approach. (Situmorang, 2017). The variables connected in this study are, E-WOM, brand image, and brand trust. The population in this study were all active students at Cendana Polytechnic Medan in the 2022 / 2023 academic year, totaling 398 students. In this study, researchers used purposive sampling techniques. Purposive sampling is a research sampling technique based on certain criteria. Because this research will discuss social media variables, the researcher provides criteria for determining the sample by making active students of the 2019-2022 Cendana Polytechnic who get information on Instagram social media related to the registration of new Cendana Polytechnic students, namely a total of 98 students. The data analysis technique in this study uses descriptive statistical analysis and SEM-PLS to test the ten hypotheses proposed in this study. Each hypothesis will be analyzed using SmartPLS 4.0 software to test the relationship between variables.

## 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Validity and Reliability Test

Variable	Items	Outer Loading	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	AVE
Brand Image	B.IMG1	0.775	0.882	0.882	0.629
	B.IMG2	0.822			
	B.IMG3	0.795			
	B.IMG4	0.777			
	B.IMG5	0.768			
	B.IMG6	0.819			
Brand Trust	B.TURST2	0.775	0.866	0.867	0.600
	B.TURST4	0.791			
	B.TURST5	0.768			
	B.TURST6	0.827			
	B.TURST7	0.743			
	B.TURST8	0.741			
	EWOM1	0.789			
	EWOM2	0.755			
E-WOM	EWOM3	0.753	0.946	0.946	0.586
	EWOM4	0.804			
	EWOM5	0.810			
	EWOM6	0.785			
	EWOM7	0.723			
	EWOM8	0.748			
	EWOM9	0.738			
	EWOM10	0.775			
	EWOM11	0.733			
	EWOM12	0.797			
	EWOM13	0.758			
	EWOM14	0.746			

Source: SmartPLS 4.0 (2023)

The brand image variable is measured by 6 valid items where the outer loading value lies between 0.768 - 0.822 which indicates that the 6 items are strongly correlated in explaining the brand trust of Cendana Polytechnic with an acceptable level of reliability of the brand trust variable (greater than 0.70).

The brand trust variable is measured by 6 valid items where the outer loading value lies between 0.741 - 0.827 which indicates that the 6 items are strongly correlated in explaining the brand trust of the Cendana Polytechnic with an acceptable level of reliability of the brand trust variable (greater than 0.70).

The E-WOM variable is measured by 14 valid items where the outer loading value lies between 0.723 - 0.810 which indicates that the 14 items are strongly correlated in explaining the brand trust of the Cendana Polytechnic with an acceptable level of reliability of the brand trust variable (greater than 0.70).

Based on Table 1, it can be seen that the Cronbach's Alpha value of all variables lies between 0.883 - 0.941 or greater than 0.70. The Composite Reliability value lies between 0.904 - 0.955 or greater than 0.70. The Convergent Validity value indicated by the AVE value is located between 0.585 - 0.810 or greater than 0.50. So it can be concluded that all variables have met the requirements of Construct Reliability and Validity.

In checking the outer model, the next step is checking Discriminant validity Hair *et al.*, (2019) recommend HTMT because this measure of discriminant validity is considered more sensitive and accurate in detecting discriminant validity. The recommended value is below 0.90. The results of discriminant validity can be seen in Table 2 below:

**Tabel 2 Heterotrait-monotrait ratio Discriminant Validity Result**

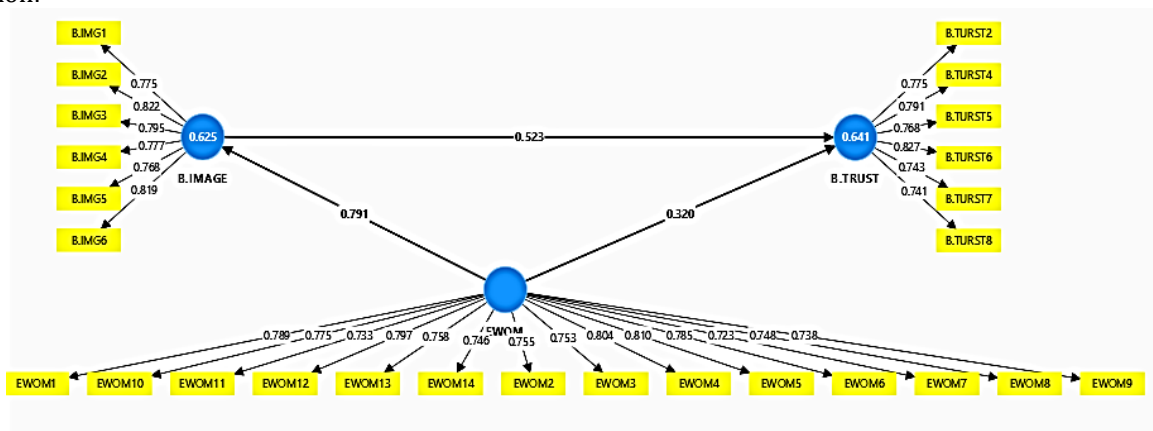
	Brand Image	Brand Trust	EWOM
Brand Trust	0.886		
EWOM	0.864	0.808	

Source: SmartPLS 4.0 (2023)

Based on Table 2, the test results indicate that the HTMT is below 0.90 for the variable pair, so discriminant validity is achieved.

### 3.2 Hypotesis Test

For each of the variables tested, it is equipped with indicators that are developed from the relationship between theories. The results of the analysis using Partial Least Square (PLS) can be seen in the following description:



**Figure 1. PLS Inner Model**

Based on the Inner Model, statistical output of direct effect and specific indirect effect is compiled on the hypothesis test result that can be shown on the Table 3

**Table 3. Hypotesis Test Result**

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics ( O/STDEV )	P values
EWOM -> Brand Image (H1)	0.791	0.794	0.043	18.468	0.000
EWOM -> Brand Trust (H2)	0.320	0.317	0.103	3.118	0.002
Brand Image -> Brand Trust (H3)	0.523	0.530	0.096	5.442	0.000
EWOM -> Brand Image -> Brand Trust (H4)	0.414	0.421	0.082	5.026	0.000

Source: SmartPLS 4.0 (2023)

Based on the results of hypothesis testing presented in Table 4, it shows four hypotheses proved accepted, as evidenced by a p value of less than 0.5

### 3.3 Evaluation of Goodness and Fit of Model

PLS is a variance-based SEM analysis to test the theory of the model that focuses on prediction studies, therefore several measures were developed to declare the suitability of the proposed model is acceptable such as

R Square, F Square, Q Square, SRMR, PLS Predict (Hair et al., 2019). Based on the results of the structural model calculation, the results of  $R^2$  and  $F^2$  are found as follows:

**Table 4. R-square Result**

	R-square	R-square adjusted
<b>Brand Image</b>	0.625	0.621
<b>Brand Trust</b>	0.641	0.633

Source: SmartPLS 4.0 (2023)

The R-square statistical measure describes the size of the variation in endogenous variables that can be explained by other exogenous or endogenous variables in the model. According to Hair, et.al (2011), the interpretation value of R-square is 0.25 (the model has a weak influence) 0.50 (the model has a moderate or moderate influence), and 0.75 (the model has a strong influence).

Based on Table 4, it can be said that the effect of E-WOM on brand image is 62.5% (Moderate Influence). Likewise, the effect of E-WOM and brand image on brand trust is 64.1% (Moderate Influence).

**Table 5. F-square Result**

	Brand Trust	Brand Image	EWOM
<b>Brand Trust</b>			
<b>Brand Image</b>	0.285		
<b>EWOM</b>	0.107	1.668	

Source: SmartPLS 4.0 (2023)

The purpose of looking at the value of the F-Square or effect size is to assess the amount of influence between variables. As a guideline, f-square values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35, respectively, represent small, medium, and large effects (Cohen 1988) of an exogenous latent variable. Effect size values of less than 0.02 indicate that there is no effect (Sarstedt et al., 2020).

Table 5 shows that the brand image variable on the Brand Trust variable has an F-square value of (0.285) which means a medium effect. the E-Wom variable on the brand trust variable has an F-square value of (0.107) which means a small effect. the E-Wom variable on the Brand Image variable has an F-square value of (1.668) which means a large effect.

**Table 6. Model Fit SRMR and NFI**

	Saturated model	Estimated model
<b>SRMR</b>	0.073	0.073
<b>d_ULS</b>	1.876	1.876
<b>d_G</b>	1.278	1.278
<b>Chi-square</b>	626.387	626.387
<b>NFI</b>	0.704	0.704

Source: SmartPLS 4.0 (2023)

In PLS Model research, a model fit test needs to be carried out to see whether the model proposed in the study is suitable for use or consider the SRMR and NFI values.

Based on the results of the calculations, it is known that the result of the SRMR value on the estimated model is  $0.073 < 0.1$ , which means that the model is an acceptable fit. Empirical data can explain the influence between variables in the model. The value of NFI in the calculation results is  $0.704 > 0.5$ , which means that the model in this study is acceptable.

### 3.4 Discussion

The effect of E-WOM on brand image has Moderate Influence, and the effect of E-WOM and brand image on brand trust also has Moderate Influence. It means the variation in endogenous variables can be explained by other exogenous or endogenous variables in this model. Based on the SRMS results it could also be seen that this research model is an acceptable fit that empirical data can explain the influence between variables in the model, not only that NFI result shown that the model in this study is acceptable.

### E-Wom affect Cendana Polythecnic Brand Images

The hypotesis in this study is accepted, according to Kotler and Armstrong, (2018) brand image is a perception and belief by consumers as a picture of the associations contained in consumer memory. Building and maintaining a strong image is very important for a company if it wants to attract and retain consumers. Brand image can be seen from several things such as: the superiority of brand associations, the strength of brand associations, and the uniqueness of brand associations. The result of this study are in line with the research result from (Kala, 2018) the results obtained show the significant impact of e-WOM on brand image. Furthermore, the results of research (Yonita & Budiono, 2020) e-WOM has a significant effect on brand image.



### **E-Wom affect Students Brand Trust to Cendana Polythecnic**

The hypotesis in this study is accepted, according to (Priansa, 2016) electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) is an activity of individuals through online media who exchange information and positive or negative experiences about something they or others have experienced before. Electronic Word of Mouth can be divided into three indicators, namely: E-WOM Quality; E-WOM Quantity; E-WOM Credibility (Lin, Wu and Chen, 2013). The results of this study are in line with the research results from dari (Putri, Santra dan Putrana, 2021) which explain that Electronic Word of Mouth has an effect on trust. Furthermore, the results of research (Yulianto & Soesanto, 2019) show that Electronic Word of Mouth has a significant effect on trust.

### **Brand Image affect Students Brand Trust to Cendana Polythecnic**

The hypotesis in this study is accepted, according to (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018), brand image is a perception and belief by consumers as a picture of the associations contained in consumer memory. Building and maintaining a strong image is very important for a company if it wants to attract and retain consumers. Brand image can be seen from several things such as the superiority of brand associations, the strength of brand associations, and the uniqueness of brand associations. The results of this study are certainly in line with the results of research (Ulya & Astuti, 2016) which states that brand image has a significant positive effect on trust. Higher levels of brand image are associated with higher levels of brand trust (Chinomona, 2016). When a company already has a good image and quality, there will be a sense of trust in the minds of consumers (Desembrianita et al., 2021).

### **E-Wom Affects Polytechnic Cendana Brand Trust through Brand Image**

The hypotesis in this study is accepted, based on result from the p-value of the specific indirect effect of E-WOM on Brand Trust through brand image with shown that the existence of brand images is proven able to mediate the influence between E-WOM and brand trust. The strategy for electronic communication will be effective in true sense if it is ensured to develop trust in this context among people (Prasad, Gupta and Totala, 2017). A brand image that is perceived positively will create trust (Febriani & Sudaryanto, 2018). A positive brand image can make consumers more interested and trust in the products offered (Wijaya, 2023).

## **4. CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this study is to determine the role of brand image in mediating the influence of E-WOM and brand trust, thus providing a better understanding of vocational college managers regarding the impact of e-wom which has a significant effect on college image and also its impact on public trust, as well as input to college managers regarding the support needed to improve a good image and public trust. From the data processing, it can be concluded that E-WOM and brand image have significantly influenced Polytechnic Cendana's brand trust. In addition, brand image is known to mediate the influence between E-WOM and brand trust. Suggestions to the Polytechnic Cendana that it can maintain the brand image that is built so that it is still able to create public trust in the Polytechnic Cendana. the next researcher is expected to increase the number of samples in the study and also to include other variables in future research models such as social media marketing and enrollment decisions.

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