

The Influence of Digital Marketing and E-WOM on Purchase Decisions in the Marketplace through Brand Trust in Gen Z Students

Darniati ^{1*} Mustari ² Andi Caesar To Tadampali ³ Muh Ihsan Said Ahmad ⁴ Nurwahida ⁵

¹ Universitas Negeri Makassar, Makassar, Indonesia. Email: darniatixiakl2@gmail.com

² Universitas Negeri Makassar, Makassar, Indonesia. Email: mustari7105@unm.ac.id

³ Universitas Negeri Makassar, Makassar, Indonesia. Email: andi.caesar@unm.ac.id

⁴ Universitas Negeri Makassar, Makassar, Indonesia. Email: m.ihsansaid@unm.ac.id

⁵ Universitas Negeri Makassar, Makassar, Indonesia. Email: nurwahida@unm.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aims to examine the influence of digital marketing and Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) on consumer purchase decisions in marketplace platforms, with brand trust positioned as a mediating variable.

Research Method: The study adopts a quantitative research approach. The sample consists of 361 Generation Z students enrolled in the Economics Education Study Program (cohorts 2022, 2023, and 2024) at the Faculty of Economics and Business, State University of Makassar, Indonesia. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed using Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to assess direct and mediating relationships among digital marketing, E-WOM, brand trust, and purchase decisions.

Results and Discussion: The results indicate that digital marketing, Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM), and brand trust have a positive and significant effect on consumer purchase decisions in marketplace platforms. Moreover, brand trust plays a significant mediating role in the relationships between digital marketing and purchase decisions, as well as between E-WOM and purchase decisions. These findings suggest that effective digital communication and positive online consumer interactions enhance trust, which in turn strengthens consumers' willingness to make purchasing decisions.

Implications: In practice, the findings highlight the importance for marketplace platforms and digital marketers of prioritizing trust-building strategies through credible digital marketing content and managing positive E-WOM. For policymakers and educational institutions, the results provide insights into consumer behavior among Generation Z in digital environments. Theoretically, this study reinforces the role of brand trust as a key mechanism linking digital engagement and purchasing behavior. Future research is recommended to expand the sample to other demographic groups, explore additional mediating or moderating variables, and apply longitudinal designs to capture changes in consumer trust and behavior over time.

Keywords: digital marketing; electronic word of mouth (E-WOM); consumer purchasing decisions; brand trust.

Introduction

Technological developments have significantly changed the global marketing landscape. In the past, companies relied only on traditional marketing channels such as physical stores, print media, radio, and television to market their products. However, with advances in digital technology, the way consumers search for information and make purchases has changed significantly. Consumers now rely on the internet, social media, and mobile devices to research products and services before making a purchase. Therefore, the Company must adapt to new customer paths in the digital economy. Kotler et al. (2017) explain that current technologies are not new but have undergone a convergence process that has strengthened their impact on marketing practices worldwide. Businesses now have more opportunities to successfully connect with customers across various digital channels thanks to this convergence of technologies, especially among Generation Z, who are highly connected (born in 1997 - 2012) and grew up with technology, the internet, and social media. Social media and digital platforms are the main means of building relationships with customers (Tumundo et al., 2022). Businesses maintain closeness to consumers by utilizing these media to communicate more quickly and relevantly.

Traditional marketing and digital marketing are now inseparable. In the digital era, the two will complement each other to influence consumer behavior optimally. This means companies must leverage traditional marketing to build trust and closeness with consumers, while using digital marketing to expand reach, improve access to information, and enable faster interactions. The transition from traditional to digital marketing is also evident in the increasingly dynamic changes in consumer channels. Before making a purchase, today's shoppers actively seek and assess information, not just passively receive it. The digital era has made consumers more aware, connected, and cooperative. Therefore, companies must adapt their marketing strategies to support the increasingly complex decision-making process of consumers in the digital age. Marketplaces, or online marketplaces, are platforms where third-party companies offer goods and services. The platform is basically responsible for providing services that facilitate transactions between its users, i.e., buyers and sellers. The platform collects and stores data on each user's activities to analyze their purchasing behaviors, which helps improve marketing activities such as product placements, cross-selling, and customer retention (Kafkas et al., 2021). Research by Sirclo (2019), as cited in Lamis et al. (2022), shows that Indonesian consumers, on average, make 3–5 purchases per month on the marketplace, spending 15% of their monthly income. According to Loro and Mangiaracina (2022), marketplaces have emerged across industries, facilitating the exchange of goods and services of various types for different actors.

In Indonesia, several marketplaces are popular among students, including Shopee, Tokopedia, Lazada, and Bukalapak. TikTok has also launched an online shop platform that offers products similar to those on other marketplaces. Each marketplace has its own advantages, including a diverse selection of trending products, varied pricing, and easy access to product information. However, there are also weaknesses, namely: products that do not match the descriptions listed on the marketplace platform; the condition of the original product; and many sources of information that are not suitable or difficult to trust regarding the brand. Consumers have the freedom to compare products across marketplaces. Therefore, marketers must present accurate displays and descriptions of products in line with the products being sold. According to Ghosh et al. (2022), as cited in Nair and Manohar (2024), today's consumers show an increasing tendency towards environmental awareness and rely more on technology to shape and enhance the shopping experience. Technological developments, particularly

in the adoption of internet-based innovations, have helped companies become globally competitive by enabling faster market coverage, more efficient payment systems, and the customization of products and services (Olomu et al., 2023).

The services available in the marketplace today are very diverse, including payment methods such as COD and PayLater, as well as other shopping features. Therefore, consumers tend to prefer shopping online because it is more practical and can reduce transportation costs. However, one drawback of online shopping is that customers can only see merchandise through the images the seller uploads. Therefore, consumers need to look for information about the brand, which can be found in reviews or positive comments from other customers. The inability to see products in person makes buyers' trust highly dependent on social evidence displayed online, such as reviews, ratings, testimonials, product photos, and seller responses.

Based on the observed phenomenon and the benefits of marketplaces for consumers, especially students, below are the number of visitors to several marketplaces over the last 5 years that are often used, namely Shopee, Lazada, Tokopedia, Blibli, and Bukalapak.

Table 1. Number of Marketplace Visitors 2020-2024

No	Year	Number of visitors/year	Percentage	Remarks
1	2020	3.238.871.300	-	-
2	2021	4.202.310.000	29,76%	Increase
3	2022	4.474.000.000	6,46%	Increase
4	2023	4.768.000.000	6,57%	Increase
5	2024	3.586.800.000	24,78%	Downward

Based on market data in Indonesia, with the most site visitors, namely in 2023, as many as 4,768,000,000 visitors, then in 2022, as many as 4,474,000,000 visitors, in 2021, as many as 4,202,310,000 visitors, then in 2024, as many as 3,586,800,000, and the least number of visitors is in 2020, as many as 3,238,871,300. However, over the last 3 years, the number of visitors has increased; in 2024, it will decrease. With the development of today's technology, there is a significant impact, especially on the business sector and the economy, through widely used marketplaces that sell a wide range of products. All can be easily achieved with technology. Many companies are competing fiercely to sustain their businesses amid numerous competitors seeking to attract consumer attention and increase sales. Various strategies are used to attract new consumers, such as conducting digital marketing and efforts to build consumer trust in their products.

Advances in digital technology have transformed the world of marketing, with digital marketing and Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) as the main strategies influencing customer behavior, especially among Generation Z, who are very active on social media. Digital marketing allows companies to reach consumers in a more personal and interactive way, thereby increasing the effectiveness of marketing communications. Rapid advances and the confluence of technologies that support digitalization and cultural change have shifted consumer behavior to the digital world. Today's students are increasingly turning to the internet as the main source of information before buying a product or service. They rely on a variety of digital platforms, including social media, review sites, and influencer recommendations, all of which significantly shape consumer perceptions and preferences. Furthermore, more personalized

and responsive interactions through digital channels have raised consumer expectations for the services and communications businesses provide. Therefore, business actors need to develop marketing strategies that can adapt to the dynamics of changing consumer behavior in the digital era.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Marketing through social media is considered cost-effective and does not require specialized skills, making it an accessible way for businesses to promote products, share information, and boost sales. Lerm (2022), in Duffett and Maraule (2024), explains that Generation Z relies on innovation because they grew up with digital technology, expect to stay connected, and expect a seamless digital experience. The use of technology improves the quality of service and affects customer satisfaction. Consumers prefer to make purchases online because of its convenience, ease of comparison, and the ability to find items at lower prices without traveling. Digital marketing and E-WOM are now the main strategies influencing consumer behavior, including among students of the Faculty of Economics and Business at the State University of Makassar. The development of digital technology has changed the global marketing environment.

Students gain a lot of information through digital marketing and ultimately influence their final decision. This aligns with research by Bubphapant and Brandão (2024), which shows that digital marketing influences purchase decisions, especially for practical products or services that do not require direct physical inspection. In this case, digital content is not only used to obtain information but also as a basis for final decisions. In addition, social media advertising can help companies to increase sales and improve client relationships by simplifying digital marketing. Social media advertising has a positive impact on purchase intent (Hosain & Mamun, 2023). Therefore, companies must adjust their digital marketing approach to attract new consumers while maintaining existing customer loyalty and support (Masrianto et al., 2022).

If previously purchase decisions were heavily influenced by conventional advertising or direct recommendations from close people (word of mouth), consumers now increasingly rely on online reviews and opinions, known as Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM). This trend is reflected in the behavior of modern consumers, who increasingly seek and consider online reviews before purchasing a product or service. Mahmud et al., (2024). According to Tran and Strutton (2020), online consumer reviews create an electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM) information system. The review certainly leads to the intention of purchase. College students now rely on online reviews and comments when deciding whether to make a purchase. They assess the product's quality and appearance based on positive reviews and opinions online to inform purchasing decisions. However, purchasing decisions cannot be made solely through digital marketing and online reviews without trust in the brand.

Trust in a brand is an important factor in building and maintaining a solid relationship between consumers and service providers. Research findings by Hanaysha (2022) indicate that trust in brands plays a significant role in influencing consumer purchasing decisions. Brand trust exists when consumers are confident in a service provider's reliability and integrity. This is supported by Hossain et al. (2025), who find that trust also significantly affects perceived quality and purchase intention, meaning that when customers trust a brand, they are more likely to buy the item.

Although digital marketing and E-WOM have been proven to be effective in influencing purchasing decisions, there are still some significant research problems and gaps, especially those related to Generation Z students at the Faculty of Economics and Business, State University of Makassar,

the role of brand trust mediation in relation to digital marketing, E-WOM, is still little studied specifically by researchers, and purchasing decisions among Makassar Generation Z students. A deeper understanding of how brand trust bridges the influence of digital marketing and E-WOM is crucial for planning a more effective marketing strategy. Generation Z students at FEB UNM, although digital natives, face an abundance of information in marketplaces and on social media, which makes it difficult to assess the credibility of sources, given the possibility of false or manipulative reviews. These challenges directly affect the formation of brand trust and their purchasing decisions.

In this context, Generation Z students at the Faculty of Economics and Business, State University of Makassar, are the focus of very relevant research, considering that they are a group of digital native consumers with high levels of digital literacy and a tendency to rely on online information and peer recommendations in making purchasing decisions. This study aims to assess the impact of digital marketing and Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) on consumer purchasing decisions, with brand trust as a mediating variable, and provide strategic insights for digital marketers targeting Generation Z consumers, especially in Makassar City. The research findings are expected to contribute to theoretical advances in digital consumer behavior models and provide practical benefits, enabling business actors to develop effective and sustainable marketing strategies.

Based on the problems that arise and the phenomenon that emerges, the researcher intends to conduct a study titled "The Influence of Digital Marketing and Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) on Consumer Purchase Decisions in the Marketplace with Brand Trust as a Mediating Variable in Generation Z Students in Makassar City."

Research Method

Models and Research Hypothesis

This study adopts a quantitative approach, collecting numerical data from questionnaires to assess relationships between variables in line with the developed hypothesis. A questionnaire with a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 4 was distributed to collect data. The operational definition of the free variable is Digital Marketing (X1), measured by social media indicators, digital marketing channels, digital relationships, and brand promotion. Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) (X2) uses indicators of E-WOM credibility, information quality, review valence, and consumer engagement. The bound variable is the purchase decision (Y), modeled using indicators of perceived customer value, service satisfaction, brand image, and effective promotional strategies. The mediation variable, namely brand trust (Z), is measured by indicators of brand goodwill, brand reliability, honesty, and safety.

This research was conducted during September-October 2025, using a questionnaire. This research questionnaire included 51 questions followed by respondents' identities and research variables. In addition, the study determined that each construct was measured using a four-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly agree" (1) to "strongly disagree" (4).

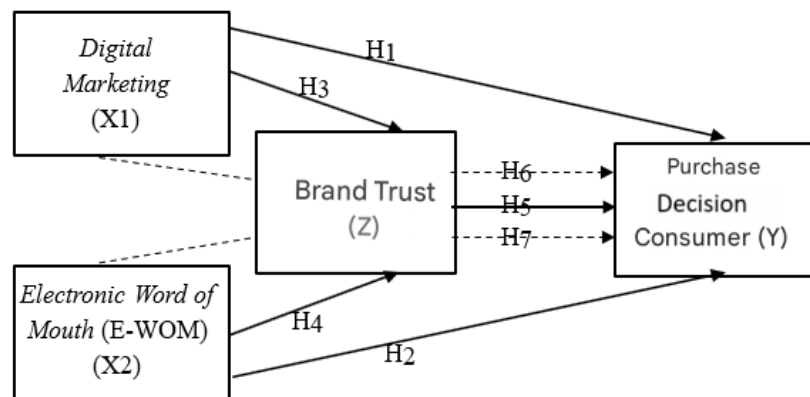


Figure 1. Research Model

Based on Figure 1, this study proposes several hypotheses, as shown in the table below.

Table 2. Hypothesis

Hypothesis	Information
H1	Digital marketing has a positive and significant influence on consumer purchasing decisions.
H2	Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) has a positive and significant influence on consumer purchase decisions.
H3	Digital marketing has a positive and significant influence on brand trust.
H4	Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) has a positive and significant influence on increasing brand trust.
H5	Brand trust has a positive and significant influence on consumer purchasing decisions.
H6	Consumers' purchasing decisions in the marketplace are positively influenced by digital marketing, with brand trust acting as a mediator.
H7	Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) positively influences consumer purchasing decisions in the marketplace through the mediation of brand trust.

Source: Researcher, 2025

Population and Sample

The population in this study comprises active students of the Faculty of Economics and Business at the State University of Makassar, classes of 2022, 2023, and 2024. The number of respondents was determined using the Slovin approach, with a 5% error tolerance, yielding 361 participants from a total population of 3,714 students. Purposive sampling, which is a non-probability sampling approach, is used to select participants based on two criteria: (1) Students must be active students at the Faculty of Economics and Business, State University of Makassar; and (2) Students must have made a purchase on one of the marketplace platforms.

Data Analysis Techniques

The first stage of data processing involves descriptive statistical analysis. Furthermore, SmartPLS software version 4.1.0.6 is used to run PLS-SEM analysis. The PLS-SEM approach assesses the predictive relationships among constructs to determine whether related factors are associated. In the PLS-SEM

analysis procedure, both the measurement model (outer model) and the structural model (inner model) are evaluated thoroughly. Several criteria are applied to evaluate the measurement model (outer model), namely: (1) convergent validity, achieved if the loading factor value exceeds 0.70 and the AVE value exceeds 0.50; (2) discriminant validity, which is assessed through cross loading with a threshold of more than 0.70; and (3) reliability, which is checked using Cronbach's Alpha as well as Composite Reliability with values that must exceed 0.70. In the structural model, the value of R^2 was evaluated using the categories 0.25 (low), 0.50 (medium), and 0.75 (high). At the same time, the effect size (f^2) was categorized as 0.02 for small, 0.15 for medium, and 0.35 for large. The path coefficient ranges from -1 (negative) to +1 (positive) and is significant at the 0.05 level.

Results and Discussion

Analysis Result

Profil demografi dari 361 responden beserta karakteristik Generasi Z yang diperoleh melalui kuesioner yang disebarkan pada Fakultas Ekonomi dan Bisnis Universitas Negeri Makassar disajikan pada Tabel 3.

Table 3. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Respondent Profile		n	%
Gender	Male	109	30.1%
	Women	252	69.9%
Age	19	135	37.4%
	20	76	21.1%
	21	129	35.7%
	22	21	5.8%
	23	10	2.8%
Force	2022	133	36.8%
	2023	64	17.7%
	2024	164	45.4%
Study Programs	Development	31	8.6%
	Economics (S1)		
	Management (S1)	115	31.9%
	Digital Business (S1)	36	10%
	Accounting (S1)	66	18.3%
	Accounting (D4)	20	5.5%
	Economics Education (S1)	34	9.4%
	Accounting Education (S1)	24	6.6%
	Entrepreneurship (S1)	35	9.7%

Source: SmartPls 4 2025 Processed Results

Table 2 shows the demographic profile of each Generation Z student respondent. There were 361 participants in the research sample, with 252 students (69.9%) being the majority of respondents. Among 135 respondents (37.4%), the 19-year-old age group was the largest. The largest generation is the class of 2024, with 164 people (45.4%). The most dominant study program was management with

115 participants (31.9%). The most frequently used marketplace among respondents was Shopee, with 246 people (68.14%).

Measurement Model

The quality of the data in this research model is maintained through validity and reliability tests conducted in the initial stage of the research. This research model meets the criteria for convergent validity because Table 3 and Figure 2 show Loading Factor values > 0.7 and AVE > 0.5 . The latent variable indicator has a larger construct than the other construct indicators, and the square root of AVE is larger than the total connection of all constructs, indicating adequate discriminant validity according to the cross-loading criteria in Table 3. The reliability test results in Table 4 show that Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability exceed 0.7, indicating that all potential variables are reliable. Therefore, it can be concluded that research instruments are reliable and consistent in measuring research variables.

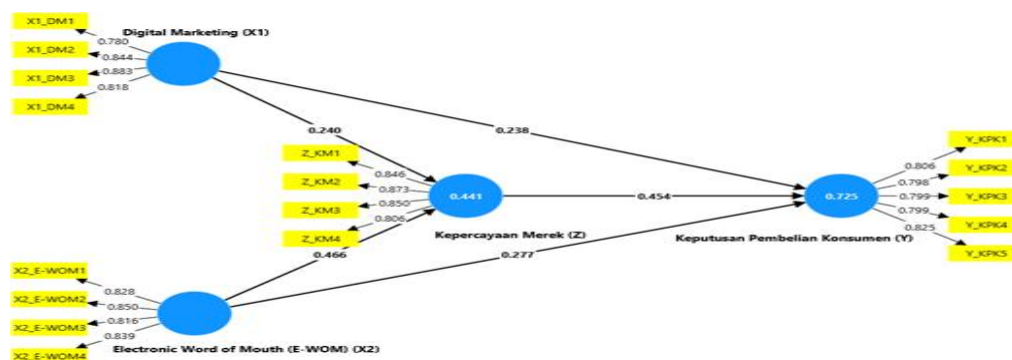


Figure 2. Measurement Model

Table 4. Convergent Validity Test Results

No	Variable	Statement	Loading Factor	Information	AVE
1	Digital Marketing (X1)	DM_1	0.780	Valid	0.692
		DM_2	0.844	Valid	
		DM_3	0.883	Valid	
		DM_4	0.818	Valid	
2	Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) (X2)	E-WOM_1	0.828	Valid	0.695
		E-WOM_2	0.850	Valid	
		E-WOM_3	0.816	Valid	
		E-WOM_4	0.839	Valid	
3	Purchase Decision (Y)	KP_1	0.806	Valid	0.649
		KP_2	0.798	Valid	
		KP_3	0.799	Valid	
		KP_4	0.799	Valid	
		KP_5	0.825	Valid	
4	Brand Trust (Z)	KM_1	0.846	Valid	0.713
		KM_2	0.873	Valid	
		KM_3	0.850	Valid	
		KM_4	0.806	Valid	

Source: SmartPLS 4 2025 Processed Results

Table 5. Results of the Discriminant Validity Test

Code	Item	Cross-loading			
		X1	X2	Y	Z
DM (X1)	DM1	0.780	0.583	0.508	0.399
	DM2	0.844	0.619	0.561	0.481
	DM3	0.883	0.637	0.654	0.537
	DM4	0.818	0.616	0.617	0.513
E-WOM (X2)	EWOM1	0.635	0.828	0.641	0.602
	EWOM2	0.646	0.850	0.618	0.509
	EWOM3	0.592	0.816	0.575	0.468
	EWOM4	0.587	0.839	0.643	0.556
KPK (Y)	KPK1	0.553	0.603	0.806	0.642
	KPK2	0.532	0.582	0.798	0.592
	KPK3	0.526	0.584	0.799	0.682
	KPK4	0.579	0.601	0.799	0.518
	KPK5	0.655	0.628	0.825	0.661
KM (B)	KM1	0.543	0.565	0.713	0.846
	KM2	0.523	0.564	0.633	0.873
	KM3	0.470	0.501	0.624	0.850
	KM4	0.430	0.540	0.626	0.806

Source: SmartPls 4 2025 Processed Results

Table 6. Construct Reliabilitys

No	Variable	Cronbach's alpha	Composite Reliability	Information
1	DM	0.852	0.900	Reliable
2	E-WOM	0.854	0.901	Reliable
3	KPK	0.865	0.902	Reliable
4	CD	0.865	0.908	Reliable

Source: SmartPls 4 2025 Processed Results

Structural Model

The structural analysis of the model in this study was conducted using SmartPLS version 4.0. Based on the results in Tables 5 and 6, the values R^2 and f^2 show how much the independent variable contributes to the dependent variable. The adjusted R^2 value for the consumer's purchase decision is 0.725. This means that digital marketing variables, as well as E-WOM, explain 72.5% of consumer purchase decisions, placing them in the medium category. Meanwhile, brand trust has an adjusted R -squared of 0.441, meaning that digital marketing and E-WOM explain 44.1% of the formation of brand trust and fall into the small category.

The results of the f^2 test in this study indicate that digital marketing has a small influence on consumer purchase decisions ($f^2 = 0.089$). Consumer purchasing decisions, to a small degree, are influenced by Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) (0.108). Brand trust was slightly influenced by digital marketing (0.047). Furthermore, there was a moderate influence between E-WOM and brand trust (0.177). Brand trust has a major effect on consumer purchasing decisions (0.419).

Table 7. R-Square Test Results (R2)

No	Variable	R – Square	Information
1	KPK	0.725	Medium
2	KM	0.441	Small

Source: SmartPls 4 2025 Processed Results

Table 8. Results of the F-squared (F2) test

No	Variable	R – Square	Information
1	(X1)-> (Y)	0.089	Small influence
2	(X1)-> (W)	0.047	Small influence
3	(X2)-> (Y)	0.108	Small influence
4	(X2)-> (Z)	0.177	Moderate influence
5	(Z) -> (Y)	0.419	Big influence

Source: SmartPls 4 2025 Processed Results

Table 8. Hypothesis Test Results

Hypothesis Testing Results	Hypothesis	Std.B	T-Statistics	P Values	Results
Straight Effect	X1 -> Y	0.068	3.522	0.000	Supported
	X1 -> Z	0.059	4.064	0.000	Supported
	X2 -> Y	0.076	3.630	0.000	Supported
	X2 -> Z	0.059	7.941	0.000	Supported
	Z -> Y	0.045	9.990	0.000	Supported
Indirect Effect	X1 -> Z -> Y	0.029	3.814	0.000	Supported
	X2 -> Z -> Y	0.035	6.016	0.000	Supported

Source: SmartPls 4 2025 Processed Results

Hypothesis testing H1 to H7, as listed in Table 8, involves independent variables in the form of digital marketing and E-WOM. The dependent variable is the consumer's purchasing decision, and the mediating variable is brand trust. Based on the test results in Table 8, the relationship between digital marketing and consumer purchase decisions was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.068$, $t = 3.522$, $p < 0.0000$), so the H1 hypothesis was accepted. Furthermore, the data in Table 8 show that digital marketing has a positive and significant effect on brand trust ($\beta = 0.059$, $t = 4.064$, $p < 0.000$), confirming that H2 is accepted. In addition, Table 8 shows that Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) has a positive and significant influence on consumer purchasing decisions ($\beta = 0.076$, $t = 3.630$, $p < 0.000$), supporting H3. The findings for H4 are supported by Table 8, which shows that E-WOM also significantly positively affects brand confidence ($\beta = 0.059$, $t = 7.941$, $p < 0.000$). Similarly, there was a positive and significant relationship ($\beta = 0.045$, $t = 9.990$, $p < 0.000$) between brand trust and customer purchase decisions, supporting H5. Table 8 also includes the results of the indirect influence analysis. H6 is supported because brand trust has been shown to mediate the relationship between digital marketing and customer purchase decisions ($\beta = 0.029$, $t = 3.814$, $p < 0.000$). In addition, Table 8 shows that the relationship between E-WOM and customer purchase decisions is mediated by brand trust ($\beta = 0.035$, $t = 6.016$, $p < 0.000$), supporting H7.

Discussion

The Influence of Digital Marketing on Consumer Purchasing Decisions in the Marketplace among Generation Z Students

Students of the Faculty of Economics and Business at UNM who are actively exposed to digital marketing can obtain more complete and accurate product information, enabling them to assess and compare products more carefully, which in turn affects purchasing decisions in the marketplace. In this study, four indicators of digital marketing were analyzed: social media, digital marketing channels, brand promotion, and digital relationships. Digital relationships proved to be the most influential. This is evident in the high level of interaction between FEB students and brands through direct messages, comments, and chat features on digital platforms, which makes them feel closer to and cared for by sellers. Social media can provide interesting product information and content. At the same time, effective marketing channels help college students access products more easily. Brand promotion through discounts, special offers, and creative content also drives interest in buying. However, the trust and closeness created through digital relationships are more decisive in students' purchasing decisions, as students feel that the information they receive is personal, responsive, and relevant to their needs. Thus, digital marketing strategies that emphasize online interaction and personal relationships have proven very effective at influencing the purchasing decisions of FEB UNM students.

The results of this study can be explained by combining Fred D. Davis's (1989) Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Robert F. Lauterborn's (1990) 4C Marketing. TAM emphasizes that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use affect consumers' attitudes toward technology use. In the context of digital marketing, when digital platforms or content are easily accessible and useful, Generation Z students are more likely to see, assess, and buy products. Meanwhile, the 4C Marketing (customer, cost, convenience, communication) framework emphasizes the student perspective, where digital marketing that highlights product value, ease of access and purchase, clear pricing, and interactive, responsive communication can increase students' interest and purchase decisions. Thus, the more effectively digital marketing meets the TAM and 4C factors, the higher the likelihood that students will make purchases.

Various results of previous studies also strengthen this research. Research by Armutcu et al. (2024) shows that, among Turkish consumers, digital marketing has a positive and significant influence on purchasing behavior. In the study, consumers exposed to digital advertising, social media promotions, and online marketing content were more likely to make product purchases. Ben and Hnich's research (2024) also finds that various digital channels, such as email, search ads, and display ads, are used to encourage customers to visit websites and complete conversion actions, such as product purchases. The consistency of these findings indicates that digital marketing as a whole can strengthen consumer purchasing decisions.

Digital marketing can serve as a primary strategy to influence consumer purchasing decisions, especially among students of the Faculty of Economics and Business at the State University of Makassar. Business actors need to strengthen responsive, personalized, and consistent digital interactions to build trust and interest in buying among Generation Z consumers. Thus, implementing a digital marketing strategy that emphasizes digital relationships as the primary indicator is important for increasing the effectiveness of purchasing decisions among Generation Z consumers.

The Influence of Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) on Consumer Purchase Decisions in the Marketplace among Generation Z Students

Empirically, E WOM provides tangible benefits to consumers by disseminating information on E-WOM credibility, the quality of relevant reviews, clear review valence, and active consumer engagement. Exposure to positive reviews from fellow users increases trust and confidence in choosing a product, while detailed, high-quality information makes it easier to evaluate it. Positive review valence drives purchase motivation, and consumer engagement, such as reading and sharing reviews, amplifies social interactions that impact purchasing decisions. FEB UNM students who actively read reviews and interact with E WOM content tend to be more confident in choosing products. They use information from reviews as a key consideration before making a purchase, compare quality and price, and assess the seller's reputation. Active involvement in E WOM helps students receive more accurate recommendations and reduce the risk of product dissatisfaction. This shows that E WOM is a strategic tool for the marketplace to increase the effectiveness of purchasing decisions among Generation Z consumers.

E WOM is part of consumers' digital capabilities for assessing online information, enabling them to quickly adapt to trends and product recommendations in the marketplace. This aligns with the Information Adoption Model (IAM) framework introduced by Sussman and Siegal (2003), which emphasizes that consumers adopt credible and relevant information to support decision-making. In the context of E-WOM, if online reviews, testimonials, or recommendations are considered useful, accessible, and credible, students will be more motivated to buy products. Information generated through E-WOM is considered more credible and objective than traditional promotions, thereby encouraging consumers to make purchase decisions with greater confidence (Sakas et al., 2022).

The relationship between Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) and consumer purchasing decisions has been widely proven. Chu et al.'s (2025) research found that the credibility and quality of E-WOM significantly affect purchase intentions and behaviors related to hotel room bookings in the UK hospitality market. Research by Ngo et al. (2024) shows that (E-WOM) on social media can influence online purchase decisions through the path of information reliability, information benefits, attitudes towards information, and receipt of information by Vietnamese individuals who are actively involved in E-WOM activities on various SNS platforms. These findings are supported by research by Daud et al. (2024), which states that consumer engagement in reading and reviewing strengthens the influence of E-WOM and increases consumer confidence in purchasing decisions on TikTok.

The practical implications of these findings suggest that marketplace managers and digital marketers need to encourage the positive spread of E WOM through content strategies, testimonials, and online community interactions. By improving the quality and credibility of reviews, businesses can strengthen consumer trust, especially Generation Z students, thereby increasing the effectiveness of purchasing decisions and user loyalty on digital platforms. This aligns with the findings of Bilal et al. (2023), who reported that E WOM has a positive and significant effect on the values and attitudes of young Chinese consumers, which in turn drives their intention to make online purchases. The study results show that E-WOM has a positive effect on the purchasing decisions of Generation Z students at FEB UNM. Students who actively read product reviews and recommendations are more confident in assessing quality, comparing alternatives, and making choices before buying. Active involvement with E-WOM content makes it easier to make more informed decisions, so E-WOM plays an important role as a strategic tool in increasing the effectiveness of student purchasing decisions.

The Influence of Digital Marketing on Brand Trust in Generation Z Students

The results of research in the field show that the four indicators of digital marketing, namely social media, digital marketing channels, digital relationships, and brand promotion, actually form the trust of Generation Z FEB UNM students. Students reported that exposure to social media content helped them get to know the brand better and felt the brand was active and transparent in providing information. In addition, easily accessible digital marketing channels, such as responsive apps, informative websites, and clear transaction notifications, give the impression that the marketplace has a professional and secure system. However, the most effective way to strengthen trust is the digital relationship indicator, where students feel comfortable because customer service is responsive, chat features are effective, and order status updates are provided in real time, creating an interactive relationship that increases a sense of security and value. On the other hand, consistent, non-misleading brand promotions, such as free shipping, flash sales, and discount programs, make students more confident that the marketplace is credible and offers real benefits.

Theoretically, these results are consistent with Consumer Behavior Theory, which explains that brand trust is formed when consumers receive information they consider relevant, consistent, and that meets their expectations. Among students, intense digital interactions make them feel closer to the brand, reducing risk perception and increasing confidence in the brand's reliability. In addition, the study's results align with Trust-Based Marketing Theory, which emphasizes that trust arises when consumers experience quality, responsiveness, and transparency in interactions. This theory explains that trust and satisfaction are the top priorities for both customers, influencers, and social media platforms (Adesokan et al., 2024). Quick customer service responses, active chat features, and real-time order updates demonstrate the quality of strong digital relationships, underscoring that digital marketing plays a direct role in building brand trust among FEB UNM students. Maintained digital relationships and good digital promotion significantly increase consumer trust and loyalty on modern digital platforms in four European countries (France, Spain, Portugal, and Italy) (Mas-Machuca et al., 2021).

Adiningtyas and Auliani (2024) stated that social media and digital marketing channels not only convey information quickly but also build emotional closeness and trust through the right content, direct interaction, and personalized services. Digital marketing and trust in a brand are interrelated and influence one another in building a company's competitive advantage in the digital era within the business-to-business relationship sector (Hofacker et al., 2020). Through social media and other digital platforms, digital marketing not only helps companies reach customers but also strengthens customer trust and connection with brands over time (Krishen et al., 2021).

These field findings strengthen the hypothesis that digital marketing affects brand trust. The role of social media in disseminating information, the ease of access through various digital marketing channels, the quality of digital relationships, and consistent, clear brand promotion all contribute to an increased sense of security, confidence, and attachment among students to a marketplace. Therefore, digital marketing plays a key role in building credibility, enhancing perceived reliability, and strengthening brand trust among FEB UNM students.

The Influence of Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) on Brand Trust in Generation Z Students



Research in the field shows that the credibility of E-WOM is one of the main reasons students trust a brand. FEB UNM students are more confident in reviews that appear honest, as written, and are supported by evidence such as photos or videos of purchases. The quality of clear, complete, and easy-to-understand information makes students believe in a brand. This detailed information provides a clearer picture, so students are more likely to trust the brand. In addition, the valence of reviews makes college students trust a brand even more when they see many consistent, positive reviews that accurately reflect the user experience. On the other hand, the negative reviews that appear also reflect their consideration of the brand's honesty. The high level of consumer involvement makes students confident in products that are widely discussed and reviewed by other users. The four indicators above are strong reasons why E-WOM can build brand trust among Generation Z students when shopping.

Theoretically, these results are consistent with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) proposed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986), which explains that people form attitudes and beliefs through deep processing of information and by attending to additional cues. This theory is relevant to E-WOM because it helps explain how consumers evaluate information before making purchasing decisions (Acikgoz et al., 2024). Field findings show that FEB UNM students trust brands when E WOM reviews are honest, clear, complete, include user experience, and engage active consumers, enabling them to assess information well and build trust in the brand. In addition, these findings align with Consumer Behavior Theory, which states that consumer trust is formed through cognitive and emotional evaluations of information. Quality E WOM reviews help students confidently assess the brand before deciding to buy.

Research by Seifert and Kwon (2020) supports this study, which suggests that positive E-WOM on social media increases brand trust because consumers rate reviews from fellow users as more relevant, honest, and trustworthy. E-WOM as a strategic tool for companies that want to build brand credibility with effective online review management in the context of the hospitality industry in Spain (Shu et al., 2025). In addition, Habib et al.'s (2021) research aligns with this study, which finds that E-WOM plays a crucial role in shaping customer trust in branded clothing products in India. Various studies confirm that E WOM has an important role in shaping consumer trust in brands. The trust built through E WOM, especially relevant, honest, and trustworthy reviews, encourages consumers to rate and choose brands with more confidence. Therefore, for companies looking to increase brand credibility and consumer trust, it is important to manage E WOM strategically through effective online review management.

The Influence of Brand Trust on Consumer Purchasing Decisions in Generation Z Students

Research in the field shows that brand goodwill is one reason students buy products. FEB UNM students are more confident in brands that pay attention to the interests of consumers and do not only focus on their own profits. The brand's reliability makes students more confident, as the products are readily available and deliver on promised quality and functionality, so they are not hesitant to make a purchase. Honesty makes students believe in the brand through clear, complete, and as-is-like product information. Security ensures that students feel protected when using products and making transactions in the marketplace, according to research by Sun et al. (2023), which suggests that a high level of security in online transactions can reduce risk perception and increase trust in brands in the world of livestreaming-based e-commerce and social commerce in China. The four indicators above are strong reasons why brand trust can drive Generation Z students' purchasing decisions in the marketplace, with brand reliability as the most influential factor.

Theoretically, these field findings are reinforced by Consumer Behavior Theory, which explains that consumers shape purchasing decisions through cognitive and emotional evaluations of brand information and perceptions. Students assess the brand's reliability, goodwill, honesty, and safety before deciding to buy, so that the trust they form drives the purchase decision. In other words, brand trust is a major psychological factor influencing consumer behavior in the marketplace. Glen L. Urban's Trust-Based Marketing Theory (2003) is also used to explain the relationship between brand trust and purchasing decisions. This theory explains that trust is the main factor in maintaining long-term customer relationships, which in turn affects satisfaction and repurchase decisions. As students' trust in a brand increases, their tendency to make repeat purchases also increases.

Various results of previous studies also strengthen this research. Anaya-Sánchez et al. (2020) found that trust in brands has a strong direct influence on increasing repurchase intent by brands' online communities. The same results were found in Na et al.'s (2023) study, which confirmed that consumer purchasing decisions are significantly influenced by brand trust among Chinese students in the smartphone industry. In line with Oppong et al. (2021), who found that the intensity of consumer confidence in the OTC (Over-the-Counter) herbal market toward brands strongly influences consumers' purchasing decisions, especially due to perceptions of brand reliability and honesty. Furthermore, consumers who trust the brand feel secure with the product and perceive less risk when purchasing at a retail chain in northern Brazil known as Bemol (Cardoso et al., 2022). Various studies show that brand trust plays a significant role in shaping the purchasing decisions of Generation Z students. Therefore, to strengthen purchasing decisions, companies should focus on building and maintaining brand trust through consistent product quality, transparent information, and positive interactions with consumers so that they can influence purchasing decisions more effectively and precisely.

Increasing brand trust among Generation Z students, especially when shopping, is important. Business actors need to consistently focus on building reliability, goodwill, honesty, and product safety. This strategy can be implemented by providing clear product information, reliable services, and secure transaction protection. Thus, the hypothesis that brand trust has a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions is accepted and empirically supported among UNM Faculty of Economics and Business students.

The Influence of Digital Marketing on Consumer Purchase Decisions through Brand Trust in Generation Z Students

Research in the field shows that digital marketing strategies that are implemented strategically, by showing brand attention to the interests of students, displaying reliable products, presenting honest and complete information, and ensuring the security of transactions, make students more confident in making purchases in the marketplace. Trust built on goodwill, reliability, honesty, and brand security plays a key role in strengthening the influence of digital marketing on students' purchasing decisions. Trust helps consumers overcome the perceived risks of uncertainty and vulnerability inherent in online transactions, thereby increasing customer trust and purchase intent (Handoyo, 2024).

Brand trust is the main link that strengthens the influence of digital marketing on purchase decisions in the marketplace. These findings align with Consumer Behavior Theory, which holds that consumers evaluate brand information and perceptions before purchasing, and with Trust-Based Marketing Theory, which emphasizes that trust is the foundation for building long-term relationships and influencing purchasing decisions. Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) Theory of Stimulus-Organism-

Response (S-O-R) is also in accordance with this study. In this theory, digital marketing acts as a stimulus, providing information and promotion through digital channels. These stimuli trigger an internal organism in the form of brand trust, which is the consumer's belief that the brand is credible, reliable, honest, and safe. Brand trust then drives a more confident purchase decision. Thus, digital marketing serves not only as a means of promotion but also as a tool to build trust, encouraging student purchasing decisions.

This research is also strengthened by the results of various previous studies that well-executed marketing strategies through social media have an important impact on the level of consumer trust in brands, reflected in customer loyalty and their desire to make repurchases in the context of social media marketing for green products in Taiwan (Hu et al., 2024). Research by Ling et al. (2023) indicates that increased consumer trust in a company, developed through successful digital initiatives, can increase consumers' propensity to make transactions. The research by Islam and Sheikh (2024) reinforces these findings, stating that social media use and other forms of digital interaction significantly affect consumer purchasing decisions and increase consumer trust in brands. Digital marketing is a primary channel for conveying information and building trust in brands, which in turn influences consumers' purchasing decisions in the fashion industry (Ray et al., 2023). Various studies confirm that digital marketing plays an important role in influencing Generation Z students' purchasing decisions through brand trust. An effective digital marketing strategy builds students' trust by demonstrating good intentions, reliability, honesty, and brand safety, so they are more confident making purchases. Therefore, business actors need to implement effective digital marketing, maintain the quality of information and digital interactions, and build brand trust to improve purchasing decisions and create a positive experience for students in the marketplace.

The Influence of Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) on Consumer Purchase Decisions through Brand Trust

Research in the field shows that brand trust mediates the effect of E WOM on students' purchasing decisions in the marketplace across four main indicators. Brand reliability is the most influential because E WOM reviews emphasize the consistency of product and service quality. Hence, students are confident that brands can be trusted and encouraged to make purchases. Brand goodwill can be seen in the brand's attention to consumers, such as quick responses to questions or complaints, which builds students' belief that the brand cares and motivates them positively. Honesty is reflected in reviews that present clear, transparent information, so that students can assess the brand objectively and feel safe making purchasing decisions. Security is strengthened through reviews that emphasize secure transactions and consumer data protection, so students are more confident making purchases. These four indicators work together to build trust, the primary factor that explains how E WOM encourages students to make purchases in the marketplace with greater confidence.

These findings align with Consumer Behavior Theory, as students base their beliefs on others' experiences before deciding to buy. In addition, in accordance with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), students process credible and complete E WOM reviews in depth, so that the trust formed influences purchasing decisions. Thus, these two theories reinforce the finding that E WOM mediates the effect of brand trust on student purchasing decisions in the marketplace.

The level of student trust strengthens the relationship between E-WOM influence and purchase decisions, as students feel confident and secure when making transactions based on recommendations or reviews from fellow consumers. When students find positive reviews and recommendations from

other users, trust in the brand increases, which in turn makes them choose the product when shopping. Strengthened by the research of Bilal et al. (2021), the higher the quality, credibility, and suitability of information in E-WOM, the more consumers will have confidence in a product, ultimately motivating more people to make online purchases of fashion products in China.

Various results of previous studies also strengthen this research. In accordance with research by Rao et al. (2021), who explained that E-WOM has a significant impact on building trust in brands, and that this trust is the main factor influencing consumer purchase intentions in the context of smartphone brand fan pages on the social networking site Facebook. According to Chen et al. (2021), trust formed through E-WOM is an important factor that strengthens purchasing decisions in the e-commerce context. In addition, research by Sudaryanto et al. (2025) shows that consumer trust in a brand is greatly influenced by (E-WOM) and online customer reviews, and purchasing decisions have a significant impact on consumer trust in a brand, in the context of household electronics purchases in East Java. Furthermore, positive reviews from other consumers will build customer trust in the brand and help determine purchase intent on social media, especially Facebook (Lee et al., 2020).

Studies confirm that E WOM plays an important role in influencing Generation Z students' purchasing decisions through brand trust. Credible and relevant consumer reviews build student trust by emphasizing reliability, goodwill, honesty, and brand safety, making students more confident about purchasing on the marketplace. Therefore, business actors need to monitor and manage E WOM strategically, ensure positive reviews are conveyed effectively, and build brand trust to improve purchasing decisions and create a positive experience for students in the marketplace.

Conclusion

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that digital marketing and Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) have a positive and significant impact on Generation Z's decision to shop online. In addition, digital marketing and E-WOM play a significant positive role in influencing brand trust. Indirect influence analysis shows that brand trust acts as a mediating factor, significantly and positively increasing the impact of Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) and digital marketing on customer purchase decisions.

Based on the study's findings, the researcher can examine other variables that affect purchasing behavior, such as risk perception, consumer personality, and students' digital literacy, to make the analysis more comprehensive. For businesses, it is important to continue strengthening an honest, relevant, and responsive digital marketing strategy and to encourage positive reviews from consumers to increase customer trust and loyalty. Students are also advised to be more critical when assessing reviews (E-WOM) and other digital information, and to improve their digital literacy to make more informed, accurate decisions.

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Corresponding author

Darniati can be contacted at: darniatixiia2@gmail.com

