

ABSTRACT

The rapid rise of social media has reshaped the marketing landscape, especially for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in Indonesia. A key challenge lies in how platforms such as TikTok and Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) can be strategically leveraged to drive consumer purchase intention. In this context, Eat Sambel—a digital-based packaged sambal brand—illustrates the dynamic interplay between social media content and online reviews in shaping consumer perceptions and buying decisions. The increasing reliance on digital content presents both opportunities and risks in building a consistent and credible brand image amidst growing competition.

This study is driven by the need to understand how Social Media Usage and eWOM influence brand image and, indirectly, purchase intention. Grounded in theories of consumer behavior and digital marketing strategy, the research adopts a quantitative approach using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) via SmartPLS 4.0. Data were collected from 200 active TikTok users familiar with Eat Sambel. The research instrument was developed using validated indicators from prior studies, encompassing dimensions such as media interaction, eWOM credibility, brand perception, and purchase intention.

The results reveal that both Social Media Usage and eWOM significantly and positively influence Brand Image and Purchase Intention. Moreover, Brand Image acts as a partial mediator between eWOM and Purchase Intention, highlighting the importance of brand image reinforcement in translating digital influence into actual buying behavior. The study also finds that active engagement through TikTok—whether via original content or user reviews—substantially enhances brand credibility and audience loyalty. These findings underscore the importance of evidence-based digital communication strategies in building strong brand equity in the content-driven era. For MSMEs like Eat Sambel, success depends not only on product quality, but also on the ability to manage digital narratives, create authentic consumer experiences, and adaptively respond to eWOM dynamics. The study recommends that businesses integrate social content, digital reputation management, and community-based campaigns into their marketing strategies to sustainably increase consumer purchase intention.

Keywords: *Social Media Usage, TikTok, Electronic Word of Mouth, Brand Image, Purchase Intention, Eat Sambel*