

Word of Mouth Effects on Purchase Decisions: Examining the Mediating Role of Brand Trust

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Abstract. This study aims to measure the level of WOM (word of mouth) influence, assess the effectiveness of brand trust as a mediator, identify key WOM factors that affect purchase decisions, and analyze the complex interrelationships among these variables. This study employs a quantitative survey approach to objectively test theories by examining relationships among variables. Non-probability sampling is utilized for sample selection, with 96 respondents. Data collection is conducted using a questionnaire. The data was analyzed using the structural equation modeling (SEM) approach with partial least squares (PLS) to test the theoretical model. The research found that word of mouth and brand trust positively affect purchasing decisions. Brand trust can mediate the relationship between word of mouth and purchasing decisions. This study introduces a new dimension by incorporating the variable brand trust as a mediation that explains the relationship between word of mouth and consumer purchase decisions. Thus, the research not only explores diverse findings but also delves deeper into the mechanisms that may be involved in the consumer decision-making process.

Keywords: Word of Mouth, Brand Trust, and Purchase Decision

1 Introduction

In the development of information technology, competition challenges are inevitable. Business people are required to understand changes that occur in the market and face existing opportunities and threats. In maintaining business continuity, the industry needs to continue to develop and adjust marketing strategies following changes in the environment, competition, and organizational situation. One of the factors that can affect business continuity is product innovation. During this pandemic, Chatime's sales strategy declined due to changing patterns of human behavior and habits, which made Chatime innovate by presenting the latest menu. Chatime is traded in several malls in Indonesia. One form of innovation introduced by Chatime during the pandemic is to promote through Chatime's social media platforms or the Chatime mobile application, consumers can easily order Chatime drinks anytime and from anywhere. They can choose between *delivery* through delivery partners or pickup *at* Chatime outlets. The

ordering process involves determining the type of order, the time of order, and the selection of the location of the nearest outlet [1]

Consumers in making decisions to buy a product, have their own opinions to buy the product, for example, consumers are interested and satisfied with the quality and service of the product. Marketing is the process by which companies create a product that has an impression on customers and also builds relationships to attract customer attention with the product being promoted. Purchasing decisions arise in a purchasing process that considers consumer needs, pre-purchase activities, and financial capabilities. Building consumer purchase decisions on the Shopee application has an impact on maintaining the market that Shopee currently has. This study includes consumer personal factors from the concept of the Theory of Planned Behavior (*Theory of Planned Behavior*), which can influence behavior. The theory of planned behavior (TPB) is used extensively within and across many contextual studies [2]. TPB was developed from the *Theory of Reasoned Action* (TRA) to determine human behavior based on perception, behavioral control can change depending on the situation and the type of behavior to be performed. This theory states that a person's behavior is influenced by his intention to perform the behavior. Intention is influenced by an individual's attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceptions of behavioral control. The concept of purchase intent that ends in a purchase decision is influenced by several factors, namely attitudes toward *word of mouth* and brand trust. Purchasing decision is the process of consumers carrying out problem perceptions, collecting information on products or brands, and assessing how a product is viewed as good or not when the selection is used to solve problems, to approach the purchase decision [3] One element that also influences purchasing decisions is trust in the product, this is important because maintaining relationships with customers has a financial impact that companies need to pay attention to.

Word of mouth, according to [4], is an action from a promotional strategy that exists in marketing activities that use the principle of "person to person" which gives the impression and interest of the product to be able to increase sales. Praise, recommendations, reviews, and consumers indirectly promote the product from all aspects. Through *word of mouth*, Chatime products are rapidly popular among millennials. It is more interested in consumers trying and proving for themselves, so Chatime can increase product purchases. In addition, consumer trust in brands and products also influences purchasing decisions. High trust can improve purchasing decisions, while low trust can reduce purchasing decisions. Brand trust refers to the consumer's anticipation that a brand will consistently fulfill its commitments. It hinges on the evaluative dimension of trust. Products with brand characteristics will attract the attention of customers in deciding whether to buy a product or not. Various types of *bubble tea* drinks make Chatime have to attract consumer tastes with a more quality brand image, to trigger consumers to buy Chatime products.

Alvionita's research demonstrates that word of mouth significantly impacts consumer purchasing decisions. WOM attributes positively influence purchasing decisions, and the quality of the physical environment has the most influence on word of mouth (WOM), People like to talk about the products they have bought and the services they use, and also talk about the manufacturer of the product and the service provider. Some consumers feel proud because they bring certain products, but some advise others not to think about buying a product. Then *word of mouth* promotion is all about generating good conversations. Other researchers consider WOM as the key to organizational success [5]. However, it is different from the research

conducted by [6] where *Word of mouth* did not have a significant effect on purchasing decisions by consumers, with the gap researchers included brand variables as mediators. This study aims to measure the level of influence of WOM, assess the effectiveness of Brand Trust as a mediator, identify key factors in WOM that influence Purchasing Decisions, and analyze the complex relationship between these variables.

Literature review

Word Of Mouth Definition

Word of mouth or word of mouth is the delivery of data about a product or brand by customers to other customers due to their experience consuming a product or brand and getting satisfaction [7]. Hawkins and Mothersbaugh in [8] said that Through experience or observation of the use of other consumer products, consumers pursue these products and seek data by asking other consumers who recognize and have used the product they want to go to. Mowen and Minor in [9], explained that *word of mouth* is a picture of someone who already knows the product individually because product statements through advertising do not provide precise definitions. *Electronic Word of Mouth* (eWOM) can be used in the marketing industry and as a PR strategy to achieve a good image and reputation in the eyes of the public [10]. *Word of Mouth* (WOM) has a significant role in influencing consumer purchasing decisions.

Brand Trust

Brand trust is understood as the willingness of consumers on average to rely on the brand's ability to fulfill the function [11]. Brand credibility is reflected in on-brand trust so that the possibility for buyers to make repeat purchases is greater. Brand trust has a significant influence on purchasing decisions [12]. In the digital era, brand image is also experiencing new developments and challenges, where brand identity is no longer just limited to logos, but also involves innovative design strategies that consider changes in consumer behavior due to the development of digital technology [13]. Brand trust reflects the customer's belief that a brand meets expectations by upholding the promises the company has made to its customers, namely integrity, trust, and generosity. Trust in a brand can be interpreted as an assessment of its integrity and credibility [14].

Purchasing Decision

Consumers buying a product certainly have their ways and desires. A good company will study buyer behavior in making purchasing decisions. So it is important to focus on the entire buying process so that it is not only focused on purchasing decisions. Purchasing decisions are the process by which consumers evaluate options and select products that are considered to meet their needs or wants [15]. [16] explained that there are three types of decision-making processes, namely: a). Broad decision-making, making begins with doing problems that consumers need to be helped by buying several products. b) Limited decision-making, this decision can occur if the consumer is aware of the problem. So that consumers have more knowledge without the need for new information. c) Habitual decision-making. This decision occurs because consumers know the problem so they buy products without asking for alternative products.

Intervariables Correlation

The Relationship between Word of Mouth and Purchasing Decisions

[17] stated that *word-of-mouth communication* remains the main marketing practice, both small and large businesses, and encourages consumers to purchase for any product. Other people's talk about a product becomes part of the consumer's consideration to choose a product.

Consumers tend to rely more on other people's judgments than advertisements when evaluating products. The stories and experiences of people who use the product can be more interesting and encourage listeners to try the product. This theory is supported by the results of [18]. research which proves that *Word of Mouth* affects purchasing decisions. Furthermore, it is also supported by research by [19] which proves that *Word of Mouth* significantly affects their (consumers') decision to purchase. WOM attributes positively influence purchasing decisions [20]. eWOM and brand trust influence consumers' purchasing decisions [21]; [22].

H1: *Word of Mouth* significantly affects Purchasing Decisions

Brand Trust Relationship to Purchasing Decisions

[23] state that if consumers do not understand a brand, product, or service, they are more likely to trust *brands* that are already known or liked by many people. Purchasing decisions are closely related to consumer behavior. If a brand, product, or service can meet consumer needs, consumers will repurchase. Trust in a brand emerges from a sense of confidence or dependence on the brand, even amidst potential risks, based on the anticipation that the brand can deliver favorable outcomes or align with the needs and preferences of consumers [24]. Brand trust influences purchasing decisions [25] ; [26] H2: *Brand Trust* has a significant influence on Purchasing Decisions

Brand Trust Mediates Word of Mouth Relationships to Purchasing Decisions

In [27] study, the word-of-mouth variable was found to have a significant impact on consumer purchasing decisions. The results showed that E-WOM had a significant effect on brand trust and purchasing decisions H3: *Brand Trus Mediates Word-of-Mouth Relationships* with Purchasing Decisions

2. Method

This research adopts a quantitative approach using survey methodology, which serves as a means to objectively test theories by examining the relationships between variables. According to [28], scientific research can commence when there is a problem supported by accurate data and reliable sources. This study aims to examine the causal effects and relationships among variables, thereby forming a model that elucidates the researched variables. The specific goal of this research is to investigate the influence of Word of Mouth on Purchase Decisions with Brand Trust as the mediator, focusing on Chatime in Sidoarjo. The population for this study consists of Chatime product consumers, with a sample size of 96 consumers.

The data analysis technique employs the Partial Least Square (PLS) approach within Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using SmartPLS software version 3.0. PLS serves as a model for structural equations based on components or variance. It allows for the examination of relationships between latent variables, known as prediction. Confirmatory factor analysis is conducted on constructs with reflexive indicators to assess construct reliability by examining the validity of each indicator. The estimated model empirically describes the relationship between constructs (structural model), and the relationship between indicators and constructs (measurement model). This estimation serves to evaluate the measurement quality and assess whether the model yields satisfactory results in explaining and predicting the target constructs.

Model evaluation follows a two-step process, namely measurement model evaluation and structural model evaluation [29].

The measurement model (outer model) is evaluated through validity tests which include: indicator reliability, internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability ρ_C , reliability coefficient ρ_A), convergent validity (average variance extracted), and discriminant validity. The structural model evaluation (Inner model evaluation) with test significance and relevance of structural model relationships (path coefficient), explanatory power (coefficient of determination; R^2), model comparison, and predictive power (PLS prediction procedure).

3. Results and Discussion

Company Profile

Chatime is a Taiwanese tea beverage franchise brand headquartered in Zhubei City and is known as the largest tea beverage franchise worldwide. The pattern of expansion and increase in the number of Chatime outlets is based on the franchise business model. Chatime has over 2500 outlets in 38 countries. The brand name Chatime is considered unique because it has a double meaning in Chinese, where "Chatime" means "Rising Sun". In addition, in English, this name is a play on words with a double meaning, namely Tea Time (Cha-Time), and also reflects a place to socialize with friends (Chat-time).

Validity and Reliability

Construct validity indicates how well the results obtained from using a measure align with the theory that underpins the test's design. The reliability of a measure demonstrates the extent to which it is free from bias (errors), thus ensuring measurement consistency over time and across various items within the instrument. In other words, the reliability of a measure reflects the stability and consistency of the instrument in measuring concepts and assists in assessing the quality of a measurement [30].

1. Convergent Validity

The correlation of item/indicator scores with construct scores can reflect the convergent validity of measurement models with reflective indicators. If the correlation value is above 0.70, the individual indicator is said to be reliable, but a loading of 0.50-0.60 is still acceptable.

Table 1. Validity of the Convergence

	Brand Trust	Purchase Decisions	Word of Mouth
BT1	0.809		
BT2	0.886		
BT3	0.808	0.773	
KP1		0.842	
KP2		0.762	
KP3			
WOM2			0.818
WOM3			0.819

WOM1					0.792
Average (AVE)	Variance	Extracted	0.697	0.629	0.656

The table above indicates that all indicators have loading factor values exceeding 0.70, leading to the conclusion that all indicators satisfy the criteria for convergent validity. How well the measured variable explains the latent variable by measuring variance, each measured variable that is explained by some of the same factors can be assessed with Average Variance Extracted (AVE). A high AVE indicates strong discriminant validity and convergent validity with latent variables. The AVE of the latent variables in this study was 0.697, 0.629, and 0.656. This exceeds the threshold previously recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981) of 0.50. When the square root of the AVE for each construct exceeds the highest correlation between that particular construct and other constructs, then discriminant validity is achieved. [31].

2. Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity, another method for assessing the level of construct validity, is presented in Table 2 as follows:

Table 2 Fornell-Larcker Criterion Result

	Brand Trust	Purchase Decisions	Word Mouth	of
Brand Trust	0.835			
Purchase Decisions	0.616	0.793		
Word of Mouth	0.397	0.539	0.810	
Average (AVE)	Variance Extracted	0.697	0.629	0.656
Discriminant coefficient	validity	1.623	2.339	1.502

The discriminant validity coefficient is computed by taking the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) divided by the highest correlation coefficient between the factors under investigation and the remaining factors. *

and ** indicate significance at 0.05 and 0.01 levels, respectively. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

Discriminant validity can be seen from the square root of the AVE for each construct being greater than the highest correlation between a particular construct and other constructs [32]. From the table above, it is evident that the diagonal values in bold represent the square root of AVE, while the values below them indicate the correlations between constructs. The square root values of AVE exceed the correlations between constructs, thereby indicating that the model is valid as it satisfies discriminant validity.

3. Reliability

The reliability test is conducted to verify the accuracy, consistency, and precision of the instrument in measuring constructs. Measurement of a construct is assessed using both Composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha. These measures provide indications of the internal consistency and reliability of the measurement instrument. Composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha values for each construct are presented in the following 3 tables:

Table 3. Reliability Result

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Information
Brand Trust	0.784	0.873	<i>Reliable</i>
Purchase Decisions	0.707	0.836	<i>Reliable</i>
Word of Mouth	0.738	0.851	<i>Reliable</i>

The Cronbach's Alpha values generated by all constructs are excellent, as they exceed 0.70, indicating that the construct indicators are reliable and pass the reliability test. Similarly, the Composite Reliability values produced by all constructs are also excellent, exceeding 0.70, suggesting that all construct indicators are reliable and meet the reliability tests.

Hypothesis testing

The estimation has successfully met the criteria of the Outer Model. The subsequent step involves testing the structural model, also known as the Inner model. As stated by [33], the purpose of evaluating the structural model (Inner model) is to predict the relationship between latent variables. When assessing the inner model with SmartPLS, attention is drawn to the R-Square R^2 value for each endogenous latent variable. The coefficient of determination R-Square R^2 shows the extent to which endogenous variables are explained by exogenous variables and ranges from zero to one.

Table 4. R-Square R^2 Test Result

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Brand Trust	0.158	0.149
Purchase Decisions	0.482	0.471

The table shows that it is evident that the R-Square Adjusted value for the Brand Trust variable is 0.158, while for the Purchase Decision variable, it is 0.471. These values suggest that both variables fall into the category of moderate to quite strong.

Table 5. Results of Testing the Direct Influence Hypothesis

	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	T Statistic	P Values
Brand Trust -> Purchase Decisions	0.477	0.473	0.114	4.195	0.000
Word of Mouth -> Brand Trust	0.397	0.410	0.087	4.562	0.000
Word of Mouth -> Purchase Decisions	0.350	0.363	0.124	2.815	0.005

The path coefficient table shows that Brand Trust has a statistically significant positive influence on Purchasing Decisions, as indicated by the t-statistic value exceeding 1.96 and the p-value being less than 0.05. Likewise, Word of Mouth shows a significant positive impact on Brand

Trust, as evidenced by a t-statistic value greater than 1.96 and a p-value smaller than 0.05. Apart from that, Word of Mouth also affects positively purchasing decisions, with a t-statistic value exceeding 1.96 and a p-value smaller than 0.05.

Table 6. Results of Indirect Influence Hypothesis Testing

	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	T Statistic	P Values
Word of Mouth -> Brand Trust -> Purchase Decisions	0.189	0.193	0.061	3.095	0.002

From the table above, it can be seen that: Word of Mouth has an indirect effect on Purchasing Decisions through Brand Trust. It can be concluded that brand trust can mediate the relationship between Word of Mouth and Purchase Decisions.

Table 7. Relevance Prediction Test

	SSO	SSE	Q^2 (=1- SSE/SSO)
Brand Trust	288.000	259.562	0.099
Purchase Decisions	288.000	208.675	0.275
Word of Mouth	288.000	288.000	

Based on Predictive Relevance calculation (Q^2) Table 8 shows the values of 0.099 and 0.275, so it can be concluded that the model has relevant predictive values

amalia.umt@ac.id3Fit Model Evaluation

Evaluate this study's fit model, using the *Normal Fit Index* (NFI) test model.

Table 8. Fit Model Evaluation Test

	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
NFI	0,695	0,695

The findings revealed that both the fit values of the measurement (saturated model) and the structural model (estimated model) were identical. These findings suggest that the model in the study exhibits a Normal Fit Index (NFI) value, indicating that it is 69.5% superior to the null model.

Discussion

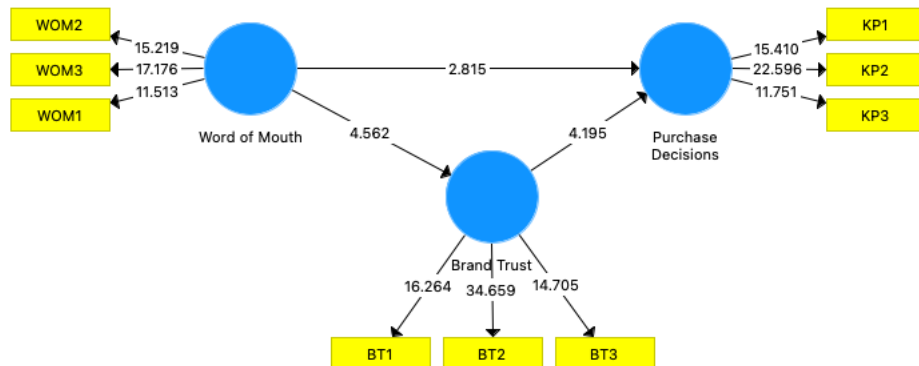


Fig. 1. Bootstrapping Test Results

Word of Mouth influences Chatime's Purchasing Decision in Sidoarjo

Based on the results of the analysis, shows that *word of mouth* has a positive and significant effect on purchasing decisions. This shows that *word of mouth* is now effective because technology develops so rapidly then makes consumers easily talk about a product and make purchases repeatedly. Recommendations or information spread by word of mouth positively influence consumers' decisions to buy chatime products. In *word-of-mouth* communication, consumers can generally compare Chatime with other products, and find information on others that Chatime is a place that suits consumer needs. Because the reason consumers buy Chatime is influenced by *word of mouth* it can improve purchasing decisions at Chatime in Sidoarjo. These findings point to the important role of recommendations from others in shaping consumer preferences and beliefs, ultimately influencing their purchase actions. The implication is that marketing strategies that support and increase word of mouth can be a key factor in achieving success in product sales. The results of this study are following the results of the study, The suggestion that word of mouth entails communication that leads to meaningful conversations is evident. Individuals often inquire about the quality of a product or service from others before making a purchase decision. Hence, word of mouth can significantly influence an individual's purchasing decision. This study's findings are corroborated by research conducted by [34] which proves that *word of mouth* has a positive effect on purchasing decisions. In line with research proves that *word of mouth* has a significant effect on purchasing decisions.

Brand Trust Influences Chatime's Purchase Decision in Sidoarjo

Based on the results of the analysis, shows that *brand trust* affects positively and also significantly purchasing decisions. This shows that the brand trust of Chatime always provides good quality, varied products, Chatime has a good image in maintaining the quality of its products and also provides convenience and practicality in each of its products for direct consumption. In addition, consumers who have a high level of trust in the Chatime brand tend to make more positive purchasing decisions. These findings highlight the important role of brand trust as a factor influencing consumer preferences in choosing products from Chatime. The implication is that building and maintaining consumer trust in brands can be a key strategy in improving purchasing decisions in the marketplace. The results of this study follow the opinion of [35] states when consumers have very limited information about products and perceive that various risks can occur in purchasing a product or if the wrong choice of risk

received is large enough, then consumers will choose products based on their trusted products. Products and brands with a good reputation to choose from are considered safer. Thus, the more someone believes in the brand, it will influence someone in making buying decisions. The results of this study are in line with the results of the study [36].

Brand Trust Mediates Word of Mouth Relationships to Purchasing Decisions

In the process of purchasing decisions, Word of Mouth (WoM) has a significant influence, where experience and recommendations from others play an important role. However, mediation by Brand Trust becomes a key element in shaping the relationship between WoM and purchasing decisions. Brand trust plays a significant mediator role in the relationship between word of mouth (WOM) and purchasing decisions. This means that not only does WOM positively and significantly influence purchase decisions, but also brand trust actively plays a role in connecting consumer engagement through WOM to the final decision to purchase a product. When consumers hear positive testimonials, trust in the brand can be strengthened, creating a solid foundation for purchasing decisions. Conversely, negative testimonials can undermine trust in a brand. In other words, trust in the brand acts as an intermediary that amplifies the positive impact of WOM on purchasing decisions, demonstrating the complexity and importance of these factors in the consumer decision process. The implication is that strengthening brand trust can increase the effectiveness of WOM campaigns in motivating consumers to make purchases.

Therefore, efforts to build and maintain chatime's Brand Trust of consistency, credibility, and positive experience are essential in marketing strategies, helping consumers filter WoM information and lead them to more convincing purchasing decisions on chatime products. This is in line with the results of research which shows that *word-of-mouth* variables have a significant effect on consumer purchasing decisions. The results showed that E-WOM had a significant effect on brand trust and purchasing decisions

4. Conclusion

Word of Mouth significantly influences Chatime's purchasing decisions in Sidoarjo, marketing strategies that support and increase word of mouth can be a key factor in achieving success in product sales. This shows that the higher the level of *word of mouth* performed, the more purchasing decisions will increase. The results of this study are supported by previous research from [37] which proves that *word of mouth* has a significant effect on purchasing decisions. *Brand* trust has a positive and significant influence on purchasing decisions, it can be concluded that brand trust is a factor that influences consumer preferences in choosing products from Chatime. Building and maintaining consumer trust in brands can be a key strategy in improving purchasing decisions in the market. Brand Trus mediates the relationship between Word of Mouth (WoM) and purchasing decisions. Trust in the brand acts as an intermediary that amplifies the positive impact of WOM on purchasing decisions, demonstrating the complexity and importance of these factors in the consumer decision process. The implication is that strengthening brand trust can increase the effectiveness of WOM campaigns in motivating consumers to make purchases.

Future research recommendations

This research still needs some improvements to be done in future research that has a relationship with similar research objects so that it can make this research better. The suggestions for improvement are as follows: For Chatime, by increasing *word of mouth*, it can add quality service for consumers such as providing promotions for members and making *giveaways* to attract the attention of new consumers so that customer satisfaction increases. For Chatime's side to maintain the trust that has increased. For further researchers, it is recommended to conduct research outside the independent variables used in this study, for example, Green WOM, and Green Trust, because chat time is also starting to concern with environmentally friendly products.

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