

INCREASING GEN-Z TRUST IN MSME BRANDS THROUGH DIGITAL MARKETING: MEDIATING FACTORS OF INFORMATION QUALITY FROM EWOM ON CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENT AND SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING TOWARD BRAND TRUST

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ABSTRACT

Understanding the influence of information quality from eWOM in mediating the relationship between celebrity endorsement and social media marketing toward brand trust, especially from the perspective of gen-z, is crucial as it provides insights into how MSMEs digital strategies can effectively build trust among this key consumer group. This study examines the role of digital marketing in increasing trust in MSME brands from a gen-z perspective. This study was conducted using a quantitative approach, with data collected cross-sectionally from 221 participants, all of whom were students aged between 19-21 years and active social media users in Jakarta, Indonesia. Data were collected through a questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale. This study underscores the critical role of credible celebrity endorsements and effective social media marketing strategies in enhancing brand trust through high-quality eWOM information, providing valuable insights for UMKM aiming to build trust and engage young, digital-savvy gen-z as consumers. The results show that MSMEs need to pay attention to the quality of information from eWOM, celebrity endorsements, and social media marketing which significantly affect brand trust, and the quality of information from eWOM serves as a mediating factor.

Keywords: brand trust, information quality from ewom, celebrity endorsement, social media marketing, msme, digital marketing, gen-z

INTRODUCTION

Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a vital role in economic development by providing employment opportunities and making significant contributions to GDP. However, MSMEs often face constraints such as limited market reach and lack of consumer trust, which are critical to their growth and competitiveness (Varga, 2021). Digital marketing offers MSMEs a strategic avenue to overcome these challenges by increasing market visibility, engaging customers and building brand trust through online platforms (Risdiyanto *et.al.*, 2023). For gen-z, who are digital natives and highly active on social media, the quality of information they receive online greatly influences their perceptions and decisions. Gen-z values authenticity, transparency and reliability in the brands they trust, so digital marketing strategies, such as eWOM and social media marketing, are highly effective for MSMEs in reaching and engaging this demographic (Purnama *et.al.*, 2023).

Brand trust, defined as the level of consumer confidence in a brand's reliability, honesty, and consistency (Sohaib & Han, 2023), is essential in the digital era where consumers, particularly gen-z, have instant access to brand information through online reviews, social media, and company websites. In digital marketing, building this trust can be achieved through transparency, open communication, and consistency in delivering positive customer experiences (Santoso, 2023). Brand trust can be influenced by information quality (Taufik, 2023), thus information quality from eWOM, which refers to the perceived usefulness, accuracy, relevance, completeness, and trustworthiness of online reviews, comments, and recommendations (Wandoko & Panggati, 2022), plays a critical role in shaping consumer perceptions, especially for a digitally savvy generation like gen-z (Mandagie *et.al.*, 2020).

Celebrity endorsement, a common strategy in digital marketing, leverages the popularity and credibility of celebrities to enhance brand appeal and trustworthiness (Fons *et.al.*, 2024). This strategy is particularly impactful on social media, where celebrities promote products to their followers, thereby increasing brand visibility and attracting a wider audience (Teresa Borges-Tiago *et.al.*, 2023). Social media marketing, which involves creating and sharing content on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter (X), or TikTok, enables brands to interact directly with consumers, fostering closer relationships and higher engagement (Hanaysha, 2022). For gen-z, who prioritize direct and authentic interactions with brands, social media marketing not only increases visibility but also builds brand trust through personalized and interactive content (Altarifi *et.al.*, 2024).

Therefore, understanding the influence of information quality from eWOM in mediating the relationship between celebrity endorsement and social media marketing toward brand trust, especially from the perspective of gen-z, is crucial as it provides insights into how MSMEs digital strategies can effectively build trust among this key consumer group. Thus, the main research question that guides this study is: "How significant is the influence of information quality from eWOM in mediating the relationship between celebrity endorsement and social media marketing toward MSMEs brand trust from the perspective of gen-z?"

Brand Trust

Brand trust is the level of consumer trust in a brand, which reflects their belief that the brand is reliable, honest, and consistent in fulfilling promises and providing good quality products or services (Sohaib & Han, 2023). Brand trust is especially important in the digital world, where consumers have direct access to information about brands through online reviews, social media, and company websites. In digital marketing, building this trust can be done through transparency, open communication, and consistency in providing a positive customer experience (Santoso, 2023).

Information Quality from eWOM

Information quality in the context of eWOM refers to the extent to which information shared by consumers online, in the form of reviews, comments, or recommendations, is considered useful, accurate, relevant, complete, and reliable by the recipient of the information (Wandoko & Panggati, 2022). The quality of information from eWOM plays a role in digital marketing strategies where information shared by consumers online can shape the perception of social media users towards a product (Mandagie *et.al.*, 2020).

Celebrity Endorsement

Celebrity endorsement is a marketing strategy that uses celebrities or famous figures to promote products or brands with the aim of leveraging the popularity, image, and influence of the celebrity to increase the appeal and credibility of the product (Fons *et.al.*, 2024). Celebrity endorsement is part of a digital marketing strategy that is often used to increase brand visibility, build consumer trust, and attract the attention of a wider audience, where celebrities use social media platforms to promote products to their followers (Teresa Borges-Tiago *et.al.*, 2023).

Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing is a marketing effort carried out through social media platforms to increase brand visibility, build relationships with consumers, and promote products or services, which involves creating and sharing content on social media to achieve marketing goals (Hanaysha, 2022). Social media marketing is one of the main components of digital marketing, where brands use platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter (X), or TikTok to reach and interact with consumers directly. This strategy allows brands to build closer relationships with customers and drive engagement (Altarifi *et.al.*, 2024).

Hypothesis development

Celebrities involved in brand promotion can provide credibility signals that increase consumer trust in the brand. Research shows that celebrities can strengthen the perception of brand trust in luxury brands, by increasing consumer confidence through the credibility they bring (Khan & Zaman, 2021). In addition, in the context of tourist destinations, the fit between celebrities and destinations strengthens destination brand trust through a mediation process that links celebrity endorsements to tourist trust (Zhang & Xu, 2024). Thus, celebrities play an important role in increasing consumer trust in brands.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Celebrity Endorsement affect Brand Trust

Celebrities who have high credibility can act as sources of information that are trusted by many people, in accordance with the source credibility theory where celebrities are often considered to have more accurate and relevant knowledge, expertise, or access to information, so that the information they support through eWOM tends to be considered higher quality (Fileri *et.al.*, 2023). In addition, the presence of celebrities increases the reach and visibility of eWOM, which ultimately triggers more evaluation and interaction, strengthening the perception that the information is more reliable and useful (Dhun & Dangi, 2023). Thus, celebrities play an important role in improving consumers' perceptions of the quality of information spread through eWOM (Manchanda *et.al.*, 2022).

H2: Celebrity Endorsement affect Information Quality from eWOM

Social media marketing has a positive effect on brand trust because through marketing activities on social media, consumers can experience elements of entertainment, interaction, personalization, and eWOM that increase their trust in the brand. (Haudi *et.al.*, 2022). In addition, in the context of fashion brands, social media marketing mediates the

process of value co-creation and brand loyalty, where brand trust acts as a positive link between social media marketing and brand loyalty, as well as the intention to contribute to value creation (Sohaib & Han, 2023). Thus, social media marketing plays an important role in building brand trust through more personal and relevant interactions and engagement with consumers.

H3: Social Media Marketing affect Brand Trust

Social media marketing can affect the quality of information from eWOM because effective social media marketing provides interesting, relevant, and informative content, which ultimately increases consumers' perceptions of the credibility and accuracy of information shared through eWOM (Labib *et.al.*, 2018). Based on signalling theory, interactions that occur through social media provide positive signals about the quality of products or services, so that eWOM generated from social media marketing campaigns is considered to be of higher quality (Nian & Sundararajan, 2022). In addition, social media marketing elements such as entertainment, personalization, and consumer engagement create a more positive experience, which makes consumers tend to share more complete, clear, and relevant information through eWOM, thereby improving the quality of information in the eyes of other consumers (Em *et.al.*, 2020; Ha *et.al.*, 2016).

H4: Social Media Marketing affect Information Quality from eWOM

Information quality in the form of information persuasiveness, trustworthiness, and completeness has been shown to influence consumers' trust in green brands (Taufik, 2023). Information quality is needed to build brand trust, where in the context of applications, consumers trust a brand more when the information is considered accurate and relevant (Xie *et.al.*, 2024). This supports the argument that in the context of eWOM, high information quality also facilitates the formation of brand trust, because both involve the evaluation of digital information by consumers. Based on information processing theory, consumers tend to process and evaluate the information they receive before making a decision, and high quality information from eWOM in the form of online reviews creates a positive perception in consumers (Alzate *et.al.*, 2021).

H5: Information Quality from eWOM affect Brand Trust

METHOD

This quantitative research examines patterns, relationships, and trends among brand trust, information quality from eWOM, celebrity endorsement, and social media marketing to address the research questions. Data were collected cross-sectionally using a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire distributed via digital media. Simple random sampling was employed, resulting in a total sample of 221 participants who are students between 19-21 years old, as part of gen-z, and active social media users in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Table 1. Sample

Characteristics	Frequency
Gender	
Male	118
Female	103
Combined Social Media Used	
Instagram	194 of 221
Tiktok	140 of 221
Twitter (X)	83 of 221
Facebook	17 of 221

Brand trust is measured by trusts the information delivered, trusts the statement given, trusts a brand's action, trusts the benefits given (Danniswara *et.al.*, 2017). Information quality from eWOM is measured by eWOM information is clear, eWOM information is based on facts, eWOM information is relevant, eWOM information is detailed (Ngo *et.al.*, 2024). Celebrity endorsement is measured by celebrity is popular, celebrity is posted by a brand, celebrity is appealing, celebrity's profile matches the product (Danniswara *et.al.*, 2017). Social media marketing is measured social media marketing affecting behaviour, accessing social media for seeking opinions, advertising in social media are effective, expert opinions are available, in social media (Dhankhar *et.al.*, 2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The reliability test ensures that the Cronbach's Alpha value is ≥ 0.70 and the Composite Reliability value ≤ 0.95 , and the indicator loading value $\geq 0,700$. The validity test ensures that the AVE value is ≥ 0.50 , and the HTMT value is < 0.90 . Reliability tests show that the constructs and indicators are reliable. *Validity tests show that the constructs and indicators are valid.* The collinearity test ensures that there is no collinearity between constructs, with the condition that the VIF value is < 5 (Hair et al., 2017). *This test shows that there is no collinearity between variables (Hair et al., 2017).*

Table 2. Reliability Test & Validity Test & Collinearity Test

Constructs	Indicators	CA & CR	Indicators Loading	AVE	HTMT			Collinearity	
					BTR	IQL	CEN	BTR	IQL
Brand Trust (BTR)	BTR1	0.840 & 0.893	0.832	0.676					
	BTR2		0.843						
	BTR3		0.849						
	BTR4		0.761						
Information Quality from eWOM (IQL)	IQL1	0.831 & 0.888	0.798	0.664	0.748			1.856	
	IQL2		0.839						
	IQL3		0.780						
	IQL4		0.840						
Celebrity Endorsement (CEN)	CEN1	0.880 & 0.918	0.803	0.736	0.678	0.685		1.618	1.332
	CEN2		0.865						
	CEN3		0.877						
	CEN4		0.885						
Social Media Marketing (SMM)	SMM1	0.752 & 0.844	0.710	0.575	0.633	0.741	0.613	1.616	1.332
	SMM2		0.811						
	SMM3		0.772						
	SMM3		0.736						

*CA = Cronbach's Alpha. CR = Composite Reliability

Path coefficient testing is conducted to determine whether there is a significant relationship between variables according to the research model, with the condition that the t-value is > 1.96 and the p-value is < 0.05 , with the expected coefficient value being positive (an increase in exogenous variables will increase endogenous variables) (Hair et al., 2017). The results of the analysis show that there is a significant and positive influence between variables according to the research model, applicable to both direct relationships and relationships through mediating factors.

Table 3. Path Coefficient – Direct Effect

H	Direct Path	Value	t-Value	p-Value	Status
H1	CEN → BTR	0.299	4.299	0.000	Accepted
H2	CEN → IQL	0.393	5.998	0.000	Accepted
H3	SMM → BTR	0.133	2.120	0.034	Accepted
H4	SMM → IQL	0.375	5.202	0.000	Accepted
H5	IQL → BTR	0.392	6.065	0.000	Accepted

Table 4. Path Coefficient – Mediating Effect

H	Indirect Path	Value	t-Value	p-Value	Status
H6	CEN → IQL → BTR	0.147	4.147	0.000	Accepted
H7	SMM → IQL → BTR	0.147	3.617	0.000	Accepted

The variability of endogenous variables can be explained by all exogenous variables (R^2) with moderate values close to 50% for brand trust and information quality from eWOM. Celebrity endorsement and social media marketing have small impact on brand trust ($f^2 < 0.15$), and even tough information quality also has small impact on brand trust, the value is close to moderate impact ($0.145 < 0.15$). However, celebrity endorsement and social media marketing have a

moderate impact on brand trust (< 0.35). The predictive relevance (Q^2) analysis shows that the research model is able to explain and predict endogenous variability based on exogenous variability, with a value > 0 (Hair *et.al.*, 2017).

Table 5. Coefficient of Determination- Effect Size-Predictive Relevance

Constructs	R^2	f^2 BTR	f^2 IQL	Q^2
BTR	0.478			0.315
IQL	0.461	0.145		0.300
CEN		0.105	0.215	
SMM		0.021	0.214	

These results show that the research model is robust enough to support path coefficient analysis

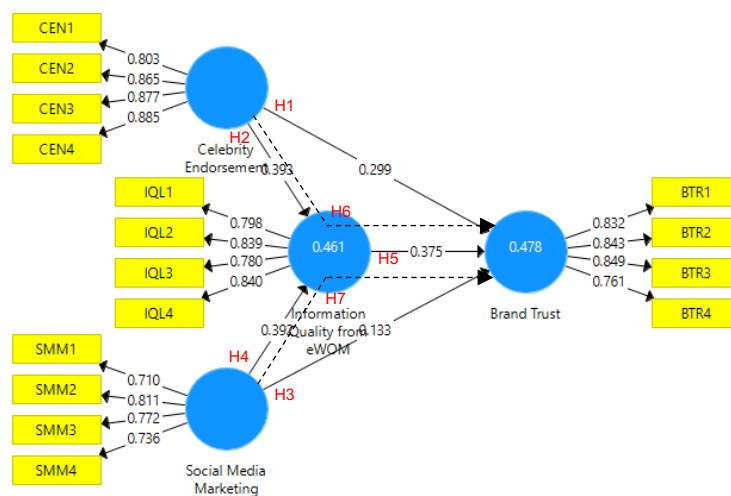


Figure 1. Research Model

The results of this study highlight the significant relationships between celebrity endorsement, social media marketing, information quality from eWOM, and brand trust among young, active social media users in Jakarta, Indonesia. The data analysis, conducted through path modeling, reveals that celebrity endorsement positively and significantly affects brand trust ($\beta = 0.299$, $p < 0.01$). This supports Hypothesis 1 (H1) and indicates that credible celebrities enhance consumer trust in brands through their influence and perceived authenticity (Khan & Zaman, 2021). Additionally, celebrity endorsement significantly impacts the perceived quality of information from eWOM ($\beta = 0.393$, $p < 0.01$), confirming Hypothesis 2 (H2). This finding aligns with the source credibility theory, suggesting that the credibility and popularity of celebrities enhance the perceived reliability and usefulness of information shared online (Filiari *et al.*, 2023; Manchanda *et.al.*, 2022)

Social media marketing was also found to have a significant positive effect on brand trust ($\beta = 0.133$, $p = 0.034$), supporting Hypothesis 3 (H3). This finding suggests that effective social media marketing strategies that engage consumers through personalized and interactive content can foster stronger trust in brands, consistent with previous research showing that social media marketing enhances brand equity and loyalty (Haudi *et.al.*, 2022; Sohaib & Han, 2023). Furthermore, social media marketing significantly impacts information quality from eWOM ($\beta = 0.392$, $p < 0.01$), supporting Hypothesis 4 (H4). This implies that brands employing robust social media strategies contribute to the perception of higher information quality in eWOM, which is critical in shaping consumer perceptions and trust (Labib *et.al.*, 2018; Nian & Sundararajan, 2022).

Moreover, the study found a significant relationship between information quality from eWOM and brand trust ($\beta = 0.375$, $p < 0.01$), supporting Hypothesis 5 (H5). High-quality information from eWOM enhances consumer trust, which aligns with the Information Processing Theory, suggesting that consumers evaluate the credibility and relevance of information before forming trust (Alzate *et al.*, 2021; Xie *et al.*, 2024). The mediation analysis further revealed that information quality from eWOM mediates the relationship between celebrity endorsement and brand trust (indirect effect $\beta = 0.147$, $p < 0.01$), as well as between social media marketing and brand trust (indirect effect $\beta = 0.147$, $p < 0.01$).

0.01). These findings indicate that both celebrity endorsement and social media marketing build brand trust not only directly but also indirectly by enhancing the perceived quality of information in eWOM.

However, the mediation factor is less significant than the direct effect of celebrity endorsement on brand trust. In contrast, mediation factor is more significant than the direct effect of social media marketing on brand trust. The coefficient of determination (R^2) for brand trust was 0.478, indicating that 47.8% of the variance in brand trust can be explained by celebrity endorsement, social media marketing, and information quality from eWOM. For information quality from eWOM, the R^2 was 0.461, showing that 46.1% of the variance is explained by celebrity endorsement and social media marketing. These R^2 values suggest that the model has a moderate explanatory power, indicating a strong relationship between the variables (Hair *et.al.*, 2017).

Effect size (f^2) analysis showed that celebrity endorsement had a moderate and small effect on information quality from eWOM ($f^2 = 0.215$) and brand trust ($f^2 = 0.105$), while social media marketing had a moderate effect on information quality from eWOM ($f^2 = 0.214$) but a small effect on brand trust ($f^2 = 0.021$). These effect sizes suggest that while both celebrity endorsement and social media marketing significantly contribute to information quality, their impact on brand trust varies, with celebrity endorsement playing a more substantial role (Hair *et al.*, 2017).

Blindfolding results showed predictive relevance with Q^2 values of 0.315 for brand trust and 0.300 for information quality from eWOM, indicating that the model not only explains the variance but also has adequate predictive power (Hair *et.al.*, 2017). These findings underscore the importance of celebrity endorsement and social media marketing as strategic tools in digital marketing, capable of enhancing consumer trust through the mediation of high-quality eWOM information.

Lastly, the sample characteristics, consisting of 221 students aged 19-21 years who are active social media users, provide a relevant demographic for examining the effects of digital marketing strategies in the context of young consumers. The balanced gender distribution and the prevalence of popular platforms like Instagram and TikTok among the respondents underscore the importance of targeting social media platforms that resonate with this demographic for effective marketing outcomes.

Overall, this study underscores the critical role of credible celebrity endorsements and effective social media marketing strategies in enhancing brand trust through high-quality eWOM information, providing valuable insights for UMKM aiming to build trust and engage young, digital-savvy gen-z as consumers. Future research could further explore the long-term effects of these strategies and investigate potential moderating factors, such as cultural influences or varying levels of consumer involvement, to deepen the understanding of these dynamics in different contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study found that celebrity endorsement, social media marketing, and the quality of information from eWOM based on the gen-z perspective have a significant influence on increasing MSME brand trust. The main findings show that celebrity endorsement positively influences brand trust and the quality of information from eWOM. In addition, social media marketing also contributes positively to brand trust and the quality of information from eWOM. Information quality from eWOM itself is proven to significantly influence brand trust and acts as a mediator between celebrity endorsement and brand trust, as well as between social media marketing and brand trust, although it is not very significant for the relationship between celebrity endorsement and brand trust. This study expands the understanding of the role of celebrities and social media marketing as well as the quality of information from eWOM, among gen-z in increasing trust in relevant MSME brands in digital marketing strategies in the digital era. The contribution of this study is to emphasize the importance of celebrities and interactions through social media in building consumer trust, especially in the context of eWOM which is becoming increasingly dominant among gen-z as digital consumers.

Practical implications of this study include the importance for MSMEs to choose celebrities with high credibility and build effective social media strategies to increase trust from gen-z as consumers. For example, by MSMEs emphasizing relevant and interactive content, MSMEs can improve the quality of information received by gen-z as consumers through eWOM, which in turn will strengthen brand trust. However, this study has several limitations, including the focus on a limited sample of college students in Jakarta, which may not fully represent the wider population. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve a more diverse sample and consider a longitudinal approach to understand the long-term impact of celebrity endorsement and social media marketing on brand trust. In

conclusion, this study underlines the importance of the right digital strategy in building MSME brand trust, and opens up opportunities for further exploration of the interaction between digital marketing elements and gen-z’s perceptions as consumers.

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