
The Influence of Product Quality and Electronic Word of Mouth on Purchase Decisions with Buying Interest as Mediation

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the influence of product quality and Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) on the purchase decision of Somethinc cosmetics in Malang City, with buying interest as a mediating variable. Cosmetics have become an essential product for many consumers, especially women, who are looking for high-quality products to improve their appearance and confidence. In this context, e-WOM plays a significant role in shaping consumer perceptions and influencing purchasing decisions. The research method used is quantitative with a survey approach, involving Somethinc consumer respondents in Malang City. Data were collected through questionnaires and analyzed using regression analysis techniques using Smart-PLS 4. The results showed that e-WOM had a significant positive influence on buying interest, which in turn had an impact on purchasing decisions, product quality did not directly affect buying interest, then directly affected purchasing decisions but not significant for Somethinc cosmetics. These findings provide important insights for marketers in formulating effective strategies to increase sales of cosmetic products.

Keywords: Product Quality, e-WOM, Buying Interest, Purchase Decision, Somethinc Cosmetics.

INTRODUCTION

Cosmetics, although not a major need, have a significant role for many consumers, especially women. Cosmetic products increase self-confidence and help express personal identity (Zhao et al., 2020). The use of cosmetics has become a daily routine for many women, and the industry is constantly innovating to offer products that not only meet beauty needs, but also provide additional benefits such as skin care and protection. Thus, the importance of cosmetics for consumers cannot be ignored.

Cosmetics are increasingly important to many consumers, especially women, thanks to their various benefits, such as improved appearance and confidence. Consumers are now more selective in choosing quality products, in accordance with Law No. 8 of 1999. The high demand for quality products has driven the emergence of new brands, both from large and local companies, that compete in creating exciting innovations. This increases choice for consumers and creates complexity in purchasing decisions (Rosyid et al., 2023), while demonstrating the importance of the role of cosmetics in the market.

Somethinc is a local Indonesia beauty brand that focuses on skincare and makeup, designed to meet the needs of millennials who are looking for halal-certified products with quality ingredients and affordable prices. The brand campaign strategy implemented by Somethinc won the Marketeers OMNI Brands of the Year 2024 award for the Brand Campaign Through Omnichannel Marketing category. Somethinc has several advantages that have led to its high sales, with 255,000 products sold in 2022, making it a top choice in the competitive cosmetics market (Marwida et al., 2023). Consumers' purchasing decisions are influenced by a variety of factors (Setiagraha et al., 2021), and this process is an important stage in choosing the products needed.

The high sales of Somethinc are influenced by the interest and needs of consumers, especially women, in cosmetic products. The increasing sales data shows the importance of cosmetics in today's consumer life. In January 2023, Somethinc was listed as one of the five best-selling face serum brands. Consumers are increasingly selective in choosing products based on quality, benefits, and reviews. Products that meet these expectations dominate the market, encouraging manufacturers to continue to innovate and attract consumers' attention. High sales reflect consumer enthusiasm for beauty products.

Consumers are influenced by a variety of factors in making purchasing decisions, including personal needs, preferences, budget, and available information. External factors such as ads, recommendations, customer reviews, and brand image also play an important role. The process begins with the identification of the need, followed by a search for information about the product or brand, either physically or online. After gathering information, consumers evaluate options based on features, quality, price, and reputation. The final decision is influenced by personal preferences and price considerations. After the purchase, the consumer assesses whether the product meets expectations, which can influence future decisions and recommendations to others.

In addition to buying interest, purchasing decisions are influenced by a variety of factors, including product quality and reviews. According to Ghianti & Sukmono (2023), Electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM) is a marketing strategy that utilizes the internet to disseminate information digitally, both positive and negative. Consumer reviews on the Female Daily website show that many feel that Somethinc is effective for their skin. This can be shown by one of the reviews in figure 1.1 about Somethinc consumer reviews.

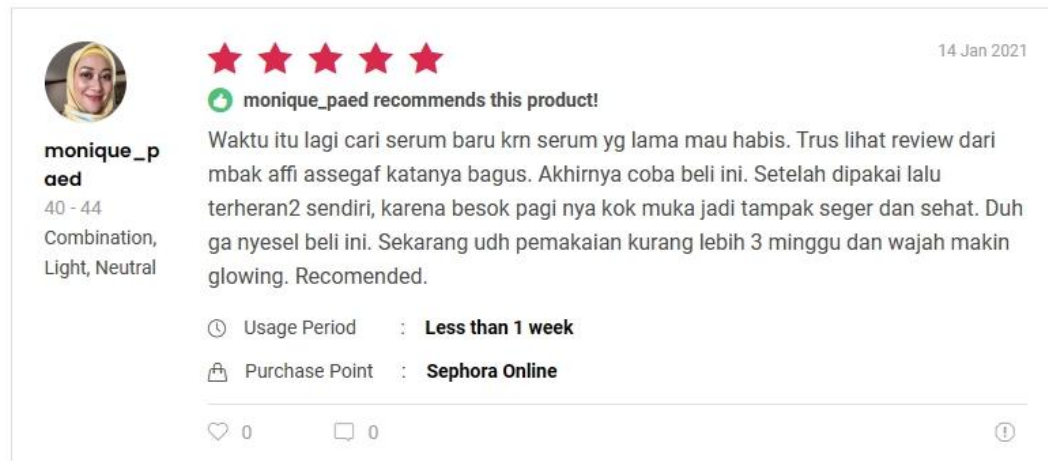


Figure 1. Somethinc Cosmetics User Review on the Female Daily Platform

Source: Female Daily on 2024

Wangsa et al., (2022) explained that Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) is a social communication on the internet where users share information about products with each other. eWOM plays an important role in modern marketing as a source of information that influences purchasing decisions. Sulaksono & Hidayah (2022) showed that eWOM has a

significant impact on purchase decisions, and several other studies also support this. However, there is also research by Wikantari (2022) and others that found that eWOM does not have a significant effect on purchase decisions.

Consumer reviews in figure 1.1 mention the importance of product quality, which partially influences purchase decisions, according to Ghianti & Sukmono (2023). Product quality includes the ability of a product to meet or exceed consumer expectations in terms of features, reliability, durability, and performance. Consumers tend to prioritize quality to ensure value and fulfillment of their needs. Research by Febrianti & Hasan (2022) and (Cuong, 2022) supports that product quality has a significant influence. However, there is also research from (Rosanti et al., 2021) and others that found that product quality does not have a significant effect on purchase decisions.

Fadhlan Thariq & Yen Efawati (2024) found that product quality has a positive and significant effect on buying interest. (Wikantari, 2022) also revealed that buying interest is influenced by product quality, both partially and simultaneously. Al Faruq Abdullah et al., (2023) added that Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) has an impact on purchase interest, and Tobon & García-Madariaga (2021) noted that eWOM increases consumer buying interest. Saputra & M Ridho Mahaputra (2022) showed that buying interest has a positive and significant effect on purchasing decisions, which is also supported by the research of (Pasaribu & Purba, 2020). High buying interest drives higher buying decisions. Product quality and eWOM significantly influence purchasing decisions, with buying interest as an intermediate variable. Consumers tend to rely on online reviews and ratings to evaluate the quality of the products they are going to buy.

METHOD

This study aims to examine the influence of product quality and electronic word of mouth on purchase decisions, with buying interest as a mediating variable. This research is classified as quantitative research. The population of this study consists of consumers of something cosmetics in Malang City. The study used a sample size of 130 respondents, as determined by the formula. The sampling technique used is purposive sampling. In addition, the methodology used is precisely proportional random sampling, which consists of Lowokwaru, Klojen, Sukun, Kedungkandang sub-districts.

This study uses two types of data: primary data and secondary data. Primary data was obtained directly from individuals through interviews and questionnaires, including product promotion and quality, as well as respondent responses from Somethinc consumers in Malang City. Secondary data is obtained indirectly from other sources, such as journals, reports, articles, books, and relevant scientific magazines. The data collection technique is carried out by distributing questionnaires to consumers, which contain a list of questions to get information from respondents.

The measurement of variables in this study includes several key aspects. Product quality is assessed through indicators related to durability, reliability, and performance, using a Likert scale to gauge respondents' perceptions. Electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) is evaluated by examining the influence of online reviews and recommendations on consumer perceptions and purchasing decisions, also utilizing a Likert scale. Buying interest is measured by determining respondents' willingness to purchase and their interest in Somethinc products, again employing a Likert scale for consistency. Lastly, purchase decisions are assessed through questions regarding actual buying behavior, including the frequency of purchases and the likelihood of recommending the product. This comprehensive approach ensures a thorough understanding of the factors influencing consumer behavior.

The data analysis in this study uses SmartPLS software, which can explain the relationship between variables and perform various analyses in one test. PLS method is latent variables that are not directly measured and can be measured with indicators. This method was chosen because the variable being studied is a latent variable measured through a questionnaire filled out through a Google Form. SmartPLS measurement consists of an outer model with three forms of tests: convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability. Then the measurement of the inner model also consists of three forms of calculation: R Square, F Square, Fit Model Test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study obtained data from 130 respondents, with men at 20/15.4% and women at 110/84.6%. The age range of respondents 14-16 was 2.3%, 17-19 was 20%, 20-22 was 56%, and 23 years old was over 21.5%. The distribution of respondents' residences was as follows:

40% lived in lowokwaru, 19% lived in klojen, 22.3% lived in breadfruit, and 18.5% lived in kedungkandang.

The measurement model (outer model) is used to assess the validity and reliability of the model. The validity test measures the accuracy of the research instrument, while the reliability test assesses the consistency of the measuring instrument and the respondent's response. Validity is measured through convergent and discriminatory validity. The validity of the indicator is determined by the value of the loading factor which indicates endogenous and exogenous variables. The indicator is considered valid if the outer loading value is more than 0.7. However, Ghozali & Latan (2014) stated that outer loading values between 0.50 and 0.60 are still acceptable in scale development studies. The results of the convergent validity test analysis will be presented next. The convergence validity test, which is described in the table and processed using SmartPLS 4.0, shows that all items have an outer loading value above 0.5, so it can be considered valid.

Table 1. Outer Loading and Cross Loading

Variable	Item	Value	Description	Product Quality (X1)	E-WOM (X2)	Purchase Decision (Y)	Purchase Interest (Z)
Product Quality	X1.1	0.873	Valid	0.873	0.649	0.424	0.357
	X1.2	0.939	Valid	0.939	0.563	0.466	0.346
	X1.3	0.671	Valid	0.671	0.430	0.197	0.205
	X1.4	0.815	Valid	0.815	0.463	0.393	0.254
	X1.5	0.583	Valid	0.583	0.336	0.407	0.159
	X1.6	0.864	Valid	0.864	0.516	0.447	0.303
E-WOM	X2.1	0.910	Valid	0.561	0.910	0.524	0.387
	X2.2	0.793	Valid	0.523	0.793	0.488	0.310
	X2.3	0.696	Valid	0.525	0.696	0.422	0.238
	X2.4	0.785	Valid	0.363	0.785	0.422	0.259
	X2.5	0.793	Valid	0.523	0.793	0.488	0.310
	X2.6	0.813	Valid	0.496	0.813	0.441	0.334
Purchase Decision	Y1	0.812	Valid	0.402	0.532	0.812	0.437
	Y2	0.716	Valid	0.402	0.403	0.716	0.243
	Y3	0.840	Valid	0.350	0.476	0.840	0.430
	Y4	0.896	Valid	0.353	0.484	0.896	0.469
	Y5	0.779	Valid	0.409	0.442	0.779	0.361
	Y6	0.718	Valid	0.441	0.489	0.718	0.420
	Y7	0.776	Valid	0.442	0.424	0.776	0.476
	Y8	0.822	Valid	0.400	0.448	0.822	0.593
Buying Interest	Z1	0.783	Valid	0.128	0.229	0.488	0.783
	Z2	0.783	Valid	0.128	0.229	0.488	0.783
	Z3	0.867	Valid	0.341	0.335	0.422	0.867
	Z4	0.829	Valid	0.373	0.264	0.392	0.829

	Z5	0.839	Valid	0.381	0.476	0.507	0.839
	Z6	0.867	Valid	0.341	0.335	0.422	0.867

The validity of discrimination is measured through the value of cross loading, where a construct is considered valid if it can predict indicators in its block better than indicators from other blocks. The correlation between the indicator and the construct should be higher compared to the correlation with other constructs. The table above shows the cross loading value, which indicates that the correlation of the indicator with its construct is higher than the correlation with other constructs. All indicators of product quality, E-WOM, buying interest, and purchase decisions can describe its construction well, so it is considered valid. Then for the average variance extracted (AVE) value on the product quality variable as X1 of 0.641, the e-wom variable as X2 of 0.642, the variable of purchase decision as Y of 0.634, and the variable of buying interest as Z of 0.686. of the values obtained from all variables have an average variance extracted (AVE) value greater than 0.50 so that all variables can be declared valid.

The reliability test using SmartPLS 4.0 was carried out by assessing Cronbach's alpha value. A construct is considered reliable if Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values are greater than 0.70. Cronbach's alpha value for the variables is: product quality (X1) 0.882, E-WOM (X2) 0.887, purchase decision (Y) 0.917, and buying interest (Z) 0.908. The composite reliability values for the variables were: product quality (X1) 0.913, E-WOM (X2) 0.914, purchase decision (Y) 0.933, and buying interest (Z) 0.929. All variables have values above 0.70, so all constructs are considered reliable.

Inner Model Analysis. The R Square test is the coefficient of determination in endogenous constructs. Based on the R-Square value grouped into three, a model can be categorized as weak if it has a value of 0.25, moderate if it has a value of 0.50, and strong if it has a value of 0.75. the R-square value of the purchase decision variable is 0.478 or 47.8%. So it can be stated that the variable of purchase decision can be explained by product quality, e-WoM and buying interest by 47.8%. While the remaining 53.2% were influenced by other variables. Meanwhile, buying interest has an R-square value of 0.168 or 16.8%. So it can be stated that the variable of buying interest can be explained by product quality and e-WoM by 16.8%, while the other 84.2% is influenced by other variables.

Effect size (F square) is used to measure the influence on the structural level. The value of the F square is interpreted as follows: 0.02 indicates a small influence, 0.15 indicates a moderate influence, and 0.35 indicates a large influence. The value of F square obtained by the product quality variable on the purchase decision has a value of 0.030 so it can be stated to have little effect. The variable of product quality on buying interest has a value of 0.023 so that it can be stated to have a small effect. The E-WOM variable on purchase decisions has a value of 0.129 so that it can be declared to have an effect close to moderate. The E-WOM variable on buying interest has a value of 0.056 so it can be stated to have little effect. And the variable of buying interest in purchasing decisions has a value of 0.207 so that it can be stated to have a close effect.

The fit test of the model was measured by the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value. An SRMR score below 0.1 indicates a good fit model, while a value below 0.08 is considered perfect.

In Hussein's book (2015), hypothesis testing is carried out using t-statistical values and probability values. The analysis reveals that while product quality does not influence the buying interest of Somethinc consumers in Malang City, there are significant insights from related studies. Novianty et al. (2022) and Isbahi (2023) concluded that product quality positively impacts buying interest, which contrasts with the current findings regarding Somethinc. On the other hand, the research confirms that electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) significantly boosts consumer buying interest for Somethinc products in Malang City. This outcome aligns with Karim and Istiyanto (2020), who examined various factors, including e-WOM, and found a positive correlation with buying interest. Additionally, Febrina (2023) highlighted the role of social media marketing and e-WOM as influential in shaping potential buyers' interests, suggesting that strong e-WOM can serve as a critical driver in consumer purchasing decisions. Together, these studies underscore the complex interplay between product quality and e-WOM in influencing consumer behavior, reiterating the need for brands to focus on generating positive e-WOM to attract interest, even in the absence of product-related advantages.

The results of the analysis show that product quality has a significant effect on the purchase decision of Somethinc Cosmetics consumers in Malang City. This means that the better the quality of Somethinc products, the higher the consumer's purchasing decision.

These findings support the research of Dewi Widhy Asti et al., (2022) and Febrianti & Hasan, (2022), who also stated that product quality has a positive effect on purchasing decisions. However, these results contradict Murtiningsih (2023) research, which states that product quality has no effect on purchasing decisions.

The analysis indicates that e-WOM significantly impacts the purchase decisions of Somethinc Cosmetics consumers in Malang City, suggesting that improved e-WOM correlates with a higher likelihood of purchasing. This finding resonates with the work of Febrianti and Hasan (2022), who also identified a positive relationship between e-WOM and buying decisions, particularly in conjunction with product quality and brand image. Similarly, Murtiningsih (2023) highlighted the importance of word of mouth, along with product quality and pricing, in shaping coffee beverage purchase decisions, reinforcing the notion that consumer perceptions shared through e-WOM play a crucial role in influencing buying behaviors. However, this evidence contradicts Lailiyah et al. (2023), who argued that e-WOM does not significantly affect purchase decisions.

The analysis results demonstrate that purchase interest substantially affects the purchasing decisions of Somethinc cosmetics consumers in Malang City. This indicates that as purchase interest escalates, customers' purchasing decisions concurrently increase. These findings corroborate the research by Ridwan (2022) and M. Arpah et al., (2023), which also assert that purchase interest influences purchasing decisions.

The analysis reveals that product quality does not have an indirect effect on the purchase decisions of Somethinc consumers in Malang City when mediated by buying interest. This finding contrasts with the studies conducted by Ghianti and Sukmono (2023), Suharyanto and Rahman (2022), and Wikantari (2022), all of which suggest that product quality positively and significantly influences purchase decisions through buying interest. In their research, Ghianti and Sukmono explored various factors affecting consumer choices, emphasizing the role of product quality. Similarly, Suharyanto and Rahman highlighted the interaction of e-WOM and social media marketing with product quality in shaping purchase decisions. Moreover, Wikantari's investigation into social media marketing further supports the idea that product quality enhances purchasing behavior. However, the current findings indicate that while product quality might be an important factor, it does not function as a mediating variable in this context. In contrast, e-WOM shows a significant indirect effect on

purchase decisions, mediated by buying interest, suggesting that positive consumer feedback plays a pivotal role in influencing purchasing behaviors, regardless of the product quality perception. This means that the better the e-WOM, the higher the buying interest, which in turn improves the purchase decision. This finding is in line with the research of (Mahmud et al., 2024), which also states that e-WOM influences purchase decisions through buying interest, thanks to recommendations and positive reviews from consumers.

CONCLUSION

The product quality variable has no direct effect on the buying interest of Somethinc consumers in Malang City, where consumers feel that product quality does not attract buying interest. In contrast, e-WOM has a significant effect on buying interest, although the effect is small, because e-WOM can spread quickly and widely. Product quality also has a significant effect on purchasing decisions, although the influence is weak. E-WOM has a moderate influence that is quite good in improving purchase decisions. Buying interest shows a great influence on purchasing decisions, but cannot mediate the influence of product quality on purchasing decisions. However, buying interest acts as a mediator between e-WOM and Somethinc's consumer purchase decisions in Malang City.

This research cannot be said to be perfect because it still has several shortcomings and limitations, then it can add other variables such as brand awareness, consumer behavior and brand equity. Subsequent research should incorporate additional variables such as brand awareness, consumer behavior, and brand equity to enhance the understanding of their influence on purchasing decisions. Analyzing the impact of various forms of electronic word-of-mouth, including positive and negative reviews, on consumer behavior may yield valuable insights. These improvements could strengthen the conclusions related to Somethinc cosmetics consumers in Malang City.

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