

The Mediating Role of Brand Image in the Relationship Between Word of Mouth, Product Quality, and Purchase Decisions of Citra Hand and Body Lotion

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Abstract

Keywords:

Brand image, citra hand and body lotion, product quality, purchase decision, word of mouth.

This study aims to examine the effects of word of mouth and product quality on consumers' purchase decisions regarding Citra hand and body lotion, with brand image serving as a mediating variable. A causal quantitative approach was employed, and data were collected through questionnaires distributed to 110 female respondents residing in Kintamani District. The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with the assistance of SmartPLS 4.0 software. The findings reveal that word of mouth, product quality, and brand image each have a positive and significant influence on purchase decisions for Citra hand and body lotion. In addition, both word of mouth and product quality significantly contribute to the enhancement of brand image. The results further indicate that brand image partially mediates the relationships between word of mouth and purchase decisions, as well as between product quality and purchase decisions. These findings suggest that favorable consumer recommendations and superior product quality strengthen the brand image of Citra hand and body lotion, which subsequently encourages consumers to make purchasing decisions. Therefore, maintaining product quality and fostering positive word-of-mouth communication are essential strategies for improving brand image and increasing consumer purchase intentions.

INTRODUCTION

The hand and body lotion market in Indonesia is highly competitive, with several established brands competing to attract consumers, including Citra, Vaseline, Marina, and Nivea. Among these brands, Citra has consistently maintained a strong market position and remains one of the most recognized local skincare brands. According to the Top Brand Index (TBI), Citra has continuously ranked first in the hand and body lotion category from 2019 to 2024, indicating a high level of consumer trust and brand preference.

Table 1. Top Brand Index of Hand and Body Lotion Brands (2019–2024)

Brand	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Citra	38.3	31.5	29.1	29.6	29.7	28.9
Vaseline	19.7	11.8	14.8	16.5	17.1	12.8
Marina	17.8	22.4	16.2	13.6	15.9	15.2
Nivea	6.2	5.4	8.8	8.9	7.2	8.3

Source: Top Brand Award (2024).

As shown in Table 1, Citra consistently outperformed competing brands during the observation period. Nevertheless, its Top Brand Index scores fluctuated over time, suggesting that

consumer evaluations and purchasing behavior may be influenced by various internal and external factors. Although the brand has maintained market leadership, fluctuations in brand performance indicate the need for a deeper understanding of the determinants that drive consumers' purchase decisions. Therefore, identifying the factors that encourage consumers to choose Citra products remains an important issue for both academics and practitioners.

One factor frequently associated with consumer purchase decisions is word of mouth (WOM). WOM refers to interpersonal communication among consumers regarding their experiences with products or services (Sernovitz, 2009). Compared with company-generated promotional messages, recommendations from friends, family members, or other consumers are often perceived as more credible and trustworthy. Positive WOM can reduce consumer uncertainty and strengthen confidence in a product, thereby increasing the likelihood of purchase. Previous studies have demonstrated that WOM positively influences purchase decisions (Rahma & Bambang, 2023; Renaldi et al., 2025). However, other studies have reported different findings, indicating that WOM does not always have a significant impact on consumers' purchasing decisions (Tarigan et al., 2023). These inconsistent results suggest the need for further investigation regarding the role of WOM in influencing consumer behavior.

Another important determinant of purchase decisions is product quality. Product quality reflects a product's ability to perform its intended functions and satisfy consumer expectations through attributes such as reliability, durability, safety, and overall performance (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Consumers generally prefer products that provide superior value and benefits relative to their cost. In the context of skincare products, quality plays a crucial role because consumers expect products to deliver visible and effective results while remaining safe for long-term use. Empirical studies have found that product quality positively influences purchase decisions (Anwar & Astuti, 2025; Anggraini & Suasana, 2024). Conversely, Nasution (2020) reported that product quality does not significantly affect purchase decisions. These contradictory findings indicate that the relationship between product quality and purchase decisions may depend on additional factors that warrant further examination.

In addition to WOM and product quality, brand image has been recognized as a key factor affecting consumer behavior. Brand image represents consumers' perceptions, beliefs, and associations toward a particular brand, which are stored in their memory and influence future behavior (Tjiptono, 2015). A strong brand image can create trust, enhance perceived value, and encourage consumers to choose a particular product over competing alternatives. Previous studies have demonstrated that brand image significantly influences purchase decisions (Cahyani, 2024; Djatmiko & Pradana, 2016). Furthermore, brand image has been identified as a potential mediating variable that strengthens the relationship between marketing factors and consumer purchasing behavior.

Several studies have examined the mediating role of brand image in the relationship between WOM, product quality, and purchase decisions. Renaldi and Isan (2025) found that brand image mediates the effect of WOM on purchase decisions, while Santika and Mandala (2019) reported that brand image mediates the influence of product quality on purchase decisions. In contrast, Suryani et al. (2021) concluded that brand image does not significantly mediate the relationship between product quality and purchase decisions. These inconsistent findings indicate the existence of a research gap regarding the mediating role of brand image in consumer purchasing behavior.

Based on the phenomenon observed in the Indonesian hand and body lotion market and the inconsistencies identified in previous studies, this research seeks to investigate the influence of word of mouth and product quality on consumers' purchase decisions regarding Citra hand and body lotion. In addition, this study examines the mediating role of brand image in the relationship between word of mouth, product quality, and purchase decisions among female consumers in Kintamani District, Bali, Indonesia.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research approach with a causal research design to examine the relationships among word of mouth, product quality, brand image, and purchase decisions. The research was conducted in Kintamani District, Bangli Regency, Bali, Indonesia. This location was selected due to its large population and the growing demand for personal care products among female consumers.

The population of this study consisted of female consumers who had purchased and used Citra hand and body lotion products. Because the exact population size was unknown, a non-probability sampling technique was applied using purposive sampling. Respondents were selected based on the following criteria: (1) female consumers residing in Kintamani District, (2) at least 17 years of age, and (3) having purchased and used Citra hand and body lotion products. Following the recommendation of Hair et al. (2019), the minimum sample size for PLS-SEM analysis should be five to ten times the number of indicators used in the research model. Based on this guideline, a total of 110 respondents were included in the study.

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed directly to respondents. All measurement items were adapted from previous studies and modified to fit the context of Citra hand and body lotion products. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree").

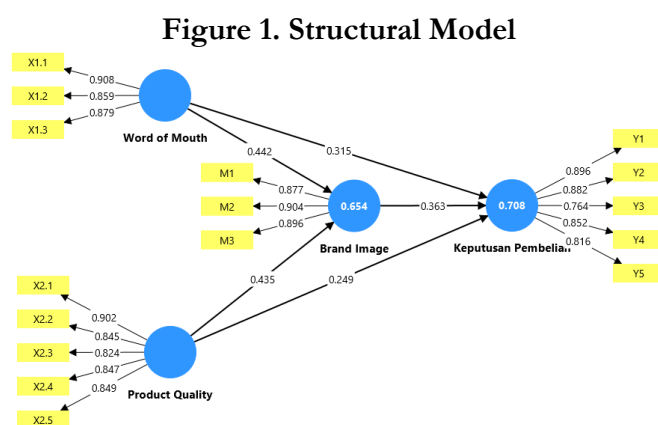
The study involved four variables: word of mouth and product quality as independent variables, purchase decision as the dependent variable, and brand image as the mediating variable. Word of mouth was measured through indicators related to consumer recommendations, positive communication, and product referrals. Product quality was assessed through indicators such as product performance, reliability, safety, and perceived benefits. Brand image was measured based on consumers' perceptions, beliefs, and overall impressions of the brand. Meanwhile, purchase decision was evaluated through indicators reflecting consumers' willingness and actual decisions to purchase the product.

Data analysis was performed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0 software. The analysis consisted of two stages: evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) and evaluation of the structural model (inner model). The outer model assessment included tests of convergent validity, discriminant validity, and composite reliability. The inner model evaluation examined the coefficient of determination (R^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), path coefficients, and hypothesis testing. Hypotheses were accepted when the t-statistic exceeded 1.96 and the p-value was less than 0.05, indicating statistical significance at the 5% level.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Instrument Testing

Structural Model



Source: SmartPLS Output Results

Based on Figure 1, all indicators produced loading factor values greater than 0.70. Therefore, each indicator can be considered valid for measuring its respective latent construct.

Research questionnaires must satisfy both validity and reliability requirements to ensure that the collected data are accurate and trustworthy. In this study, instrument testing was conducted on 110 female respondents in Kintamani District who were familiar with and had used Citra hand and body lotion products. Prior to further analysis, the research data were evaluated to confirm their validity and reliability. All testing procedures were performed using SmartPLS version 4.0.

Validity and reliability assessments were carried out through outer model evaluation because the indicators used in this study were reflective in nature. The outer model analysis determines whether the indicators adequately represent the constructs under investigation, namely word of mouth, product quality, brand image, and purchase decision. The results indicated that all indicators achieved loading factor values above 0.70, demonstrating satisfactory validity and compliance with measurement requirements. The outer model evaluation included convergent validity, discriminant validity, and internal consistency reliability testing.

Convergent Validity

Convergent validity was assessed by examining the loading factor value of each indicator. An indicator is considered valid when its loading factor exceeds 0.70.

Table 2. Convergent Validity Test Results.

Variabel	Brand image	Keputusan Pembelian	Product Quality	Word of Mouth
M1	0,877			
M2	0,904			
M3	0,896			
X1.1				0,908
X1.2				0,859
X1.3				0,879
X2.1			0,902	
X2.2			0,845	
X2.3			0,824	
X2.4			0,847	
X2.5			0,849	
Y1		0,896		

Variabel	Brand image	Keputusan Pembelian	Product Quality	Word of Mouth
Y2		0,882		
Y3		0,764		
Y4		0,852		
Y5		0,816		

Source: SmartPLS Output Results

The results show that every indicator obtained a loading factor above 0.70. This finding confirms that all indicators representing brand image, purchase decision, product quality, and word of mouth are valid and adequately reflect their respective constructs.

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity evaluates the extent to which a construct is distinct from other constructs within the model. This assessment was conducted using the Fornell–Larcker Criterion and Cross-Loading values.

Table 3. Fornell–Larcker Criterion Results

Variabel	Brand image	Keputusan Pembelian	Product Quality	Word of Mouth
Brand image	0,892			
Keputusan Pembelian	0,783	0,843		
Product Quality	0,745	0,740	0,854	
Word of Mouth	0,747	0,760	0,700	0,882

Source: SmartPLS Output Results

The table indicates that the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct is higher than its correlations with other constructs. Accordingly, all variables demonstrate satisfactory discriminant validity and are empirically distinguishable from one another.

Composite Reliability

Reliability was examined using Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). A construct is considered reliable when the Composite Reliability value exceeds 0.70.

Table 4. Reliability Test Results

Variabel	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Brand image	0,872	0,921	0,796
Keputusan Pembelian	0,898	0,925	0,711
Product Quality	0,907	0,931	0,729
Word of Mouth	0,858	0,913	0,778

Source: SmartPLS Output Results

The results reveal that all constructs achieved Composite Reliability values above 0.70, Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.70, and AVE values greater than 0.50. These findings indicate that all constructs possess strong internal consistency and meet the required reliability standards.

Inner Model Evaluation

The inner model evaluation was conducted to determine the model's capability to explain the relationships among the latent variables. This assessment included R-square, F-square, Q-

square, and path coefficient analyses.

R-Square

Table 5. R-Square Test Results

Variabel	R-square	R-square Adjusted
Brand image	0,654	0,648
Keputusan Pembelian	0,708	0,700

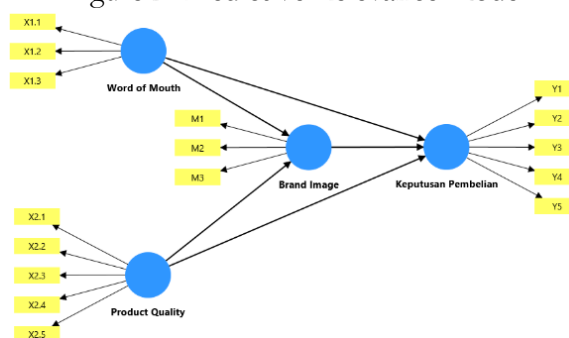
Source: SmartPLS Output Results

The R-square value for brand image was 0.654, indicating that product quality and word of mouth jointly explained 65.4% of the variance in brand image, while the remaining 34.6% was influenced by factors outside the model.

Furthermore, the R-square value for purchase decision was 0.744, meaning that word of mouth, product quality, and brand image collectively accounted for 74.4% of the variation in purchase decisions, whereas 25.6% was explained by other variables not included in this study.

Predictive Relevance (Q-Square)

Figure 2. Predictive Relevance Model



Source: SmartPLS Output Results

Based on the figure above, the Q-square results are summarized in the following table.

Table 6. Predictive Relevance Results

Variabel	Q ²	Keterangan
Brand image	0,636	Memiliki predictive relevance
Keputusan Pembelian	0,637	Memiliki predictive relevance

Source: SmartPLS Output Results

The Q-square analysis shows that all endogenous variables obtained values greater than zero. This result demonstrates that the proposed model possesses adequate predictive relevance and can effectively predict the observed phenomena.

F-Square

Table 7. F-Square Test Results

Variabel	Brand image	Keputusan Pembelian	Product Quality	Word of Mouth
Brand image		0,156		
Product Quality	0,279	0,085		
Word of Mouth	0,287	0,134		

Source: SmartPLS Output Results

The findings indicate that the effect of product quality on brand image ($f^2 = 0.279$) falls

within the moderate category. Similarly, the effect of word of mouth on brand image ($f^2 = 0.287$) is also categorized as moderate.

The influence of product quality on purchase decision ($f^2 = 0.083$), word of mouth on purchase decision ($f^2 = 0.115$), and brand image on purchase decision ($f^2 = 0.136$) are all classified as small effect sizes.

Direct Effect (Path Coefficient)

Path coefficient analysis was conducted to examine the direct relationships between exogenous and endogenous variables. In this study, the exogenous variables consisted of word of mouth and product quality, while brand image and purchase decision served as endogenous variables.

A positive path coefficient indicates a positive relationship between variables. In other words, improvements in word of mouth and product quality are expected to increase brand image and strengthen consumers' purchase decisions regarding Citra hand and body lotion products.

Table 8. Path Coefficient Results

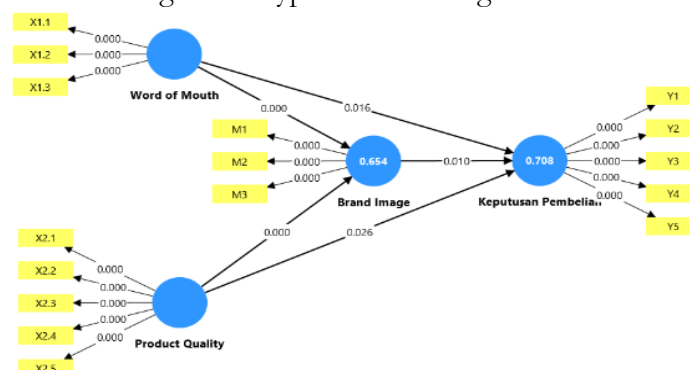
Variabel	Original Sample	T Statistics	P Values
Word of mouth -> Keputusan Pembelian	0,315	2,416	0,016
Product quality-> Keputusan Pembelian	0,249	2,222	0,026
Brand image -> Keputusan Pembelian	0,363	2,590	0,010
Word of mouth -> Brand image	0,442	4,196	0,000
Product quality-> Brand image	0,435	3,989	0,000
Word of mouth -> Brand image -> Keputusan Pembelian	0,160	2,027	0,043
Product quality-> Brand image -> Keputusan Pembelian	0,158	2,398	0,017

Source: SmartPLS Output Results

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was performed to determine the significance of the relationships among the research variables. The evaluation was based on the t-statistic and p-value obtained through the bootstrapping procedure.

Figure 3. Hypothesis Testing Model



Source: SmartPLS Output Results

Table 8. Hypothesis Testing Results

Variabel	Original Sample	T Statistics	P Values
Word of mouth -> Keputusan Pembelian	0,315	2,416	0,016
Pr			
oduct quality-> Keputusan Pembelian	0,249	2,222	0,026
Brand image -> Keputusan Pembelian	0,363	2,590	0,010
Word of mouth -> Brand image	0,442	4,196	0,000
Product quality-> Brand image	0,435	3,989	0,000
Word of mouth -> Brand image -> Keputusan Pembelian	0,160	2,027	0,043
Product quality-> Brand image -> Keputusan Pembelian	0,158	2,398	0,017

Source: SmartPLS Output Results

The hypotheses were evaluated using the bootstrapping method in SmartPLS. A hypothesis was accepted when the t-statistic exceeded 1.96 and the p-value was below 0.05.

VAF Mediation Test (Variance Accounted For)

Variance Accounted For (VAF) is a method used to measure the magnitude of the mediating effect of an intervening variable in the relationship between independent and dependent variables.

Where:

a = direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable

b = effect of the independent variable on the mediating variable

c = effect of the mediating variable on the dependent variable

According to Hair et al. (2014), the interpretation criteria are:

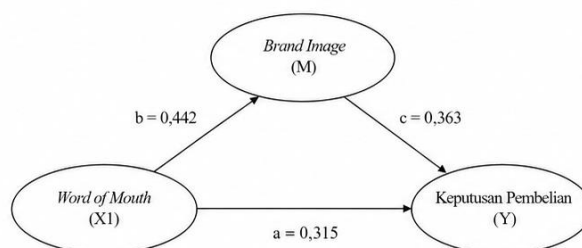
VAF > 80% = Full mediation

20% ≤ VAF ≤ 80% = Partial mediation

VAF < 20% = No mediation

Mediating Effect of Brand Image on the Relationship Between Word of Mouth and Purchase Decision

Figure 4. Direct and Indirect Effect Model of Word of Mouth



Known values:

a = Direct effect of Word of Mouth on Purchase Decision = 0.315

b = Effect of Word of Mouth on Brand Image = 0.442

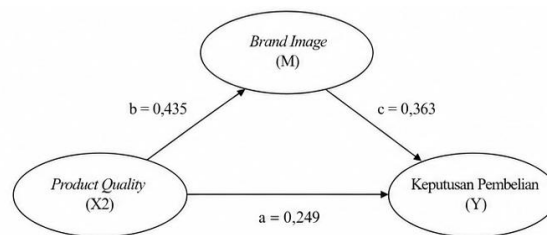
c = Effect of Brand Image on Purchase Decision = 0.363

The VAF value was calculated using the formula above.

The calculation produced a VAF value of 33.75%. Since this value falls within the range of 20%–80%, brand image is considered to partially mediate the influence of word of mouth on purchase decision.

Mediating Effect of Brand Image on the Relationship Between Product Quality and Purchase Decision

Figure 5. Direct and Indirect Effect Model of Product Quality



Known values:

a = Direct effect of Product Quality on Purchase Decision = 0.249

b = Effect of Product Quality on Brand Image = 0.435

c = Effect of Brand Image on Purchase Decision = 0.363

The VAF value was calculated accordingly.

The analysis generated a VAF value of 38.81%. Because this value lies between 20% and 80%, brand image is classified as a partial mediator in the relationship between product quality and purchase decision.

DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that word of mouth has a positive and significant effect on purchase decision, with a path coefficient of 0.315, a t -statistic of 2.416 (> 1.96), and a p -value of 0.016 (< 0.05). These results indicate that interpersonal communication plays a crucial role in shaping consumers' purchasing decisions regarding Citra hand and body lotion products. Recommendations and opinions shared by friends, relatives, and other consumers can strengthen consumer confidence and encourage product purchases. According to Sernovitz (2009), word of mouth refers to naturally occurring communication among consumers regarding their experiences with a product or service. Information obtained from personal contacts is generally perceived as more credible than company-generated promotional messages. Consequently, the greater the amount of positive recommendations received by consumers, the stronger their intention and willingness to purchase a product. The present findings are consistent with those of Rahma and Bambang (2023), who reported that word of mouth significantly influences purchase decisions because consumers tend to place greater trust in the experiences of fellow users. Similarly, Renaldi et al. (2025) found that positive word-of-mouth communication enhances consumer confidence and increases the likelihood of product adoption.

In addition to word of mouth, product quality was also found to exert a positive and significant influence on purchase decision, as reflected by a path coefficient of 0.249, a t -statistic of 2.222 (> 1.96), and a p -value of 0.026 (< 0.05). This finding suggests that improvements in

the quality of Citra hand and body lotion products are associated with a higher likelihood of consumer purchase decisions. Before making a purchase, consumers carefully evaluate product attributes such as durability, functionality, reliability, and overall performance. Kotler and Armstrong (2016) define product quality as a product's ability to perform its intended functions, including durability, reliability, ease of use, and other characteristics that satisfy consumer needs. In the context of this study, respondents perceived Citra hand and body lotion as a high-quality product offering multiple variants, safe usage, and benefits that align with consumer expectations. These findings support the results of Anwar and Astuti (2025), who concluded that product quality positively affects purchasing decisions because consumers tend to select products capable of delivering the expected value. Likewise, Anggraini and Suasana (2024) emphasized that superior product quality increases consumer confidence and encourages purchasing behavior.

The results further indicate that brand image has a positive and significant impact on purchase decision, with a path coefficient of 0.363, a t-statistic of 2.590 (> 1.96), and a p-value of 0.010 (< 0.05). This finding implies that a stronger brand image contributes to a greater likelihood of consumers choosing Citra hand and body lotion products. A favorable brand image fosters trust, confidence, and positive perceptions among consumers, which subsequently influence their purchasing behavior. According to Tjiptono (2015), brand image consists of consumers' associations, perceptions, and beliefs regarding a brand that are stored in memory. A strong brand image generates positive evaluations and reinforces consumer trust, thereby increasing the probability of purchase. The findings of this study are consistent with those reported by Cahyani (2024), who found that a favorable brand image significantly enhances consumer purchase decisions because buyers generally prefer brands with established reputations. Similarly, Djatmiko and Pradana (2016) identified brand image as one of the key determinants of consumer purchasing behavior.

Beyond its direct influence on purchase decision, word of mouth was also found to positively and significantly influence brand image, as evidenced by a path coefficient of 0.442, a t-statistic of 4.196 (> 1.96), and a p-value of 0.000 (< 0.05). This finding suggests that positive consumer conversations and recommendations contribute substantially to strengthening the brand image of Citra hand and body lotion products. Satisfied consumers are more likely to share favorable experiences with others, thereby creating positive perceptions of the brand. Word of mouth serves as an effective communication channel because the information conveyed is based on actual user experiences rather than promotional claims. As consumers receive positive recommendations, their perception of the brand tends to improve. These findings are in line with the studies conducted by Renaldi et al. (2025), Pramesti and Rahanatha (2019), and Anggraini and Suasana (2024), all of which reported a significant positive relationship between word of mouth and brand image.

Likewise, product quality was found to have a positive and significant effect on brand image, with a path coefficient of 0.435, a t-statistic of 3.989 (> 1.96), and a p-value of 0.000 (< 0.05). The results indicate that higher product quality contributes to the development of a stronger and more favorable brand image for Citra hand and body lotion products. Consumers tend to form positive evaluations of a brand when the products they use consistently meet or exceed expectations. Product attributes such as durability, functionality, safety, and overall benefits play an important role in shaping brand perceptions. Therefore, the better the quality delivered by the product, the more positive the image that develops in consumers' minds. These findings corroborate the conclusions of Noerchoidah (2013), Hermawan (2025), and Suryaantini

(2022), who also reported that product quality significantly enhances brand image.

The mediating analysis further revealed that brand image significantly mediates the relationship between product quality and purchase decision, with an indirect effect coefficient of 0.158, a t-statistic of 2.398 (> 1.96), and a p-value of 0.017 (< 0.05). These findings suggest that product quality not only directly influences purchase decisions but also affects them indirectly through the formation of a positive brand image. Consumers do not evaluate product quality solely based on functional attributes; they also consider the reputation and symbolic value associated with the brand. When a product consistently delivers high quality, consumers are more likely to develop favorable perceptions of the brand, which subsequently strengthens their intention to purchase. Therefore, brand image acts as an important mechanism linking product quality to consumer purchasing decisions. This result is consistent with the findings of Santika and Mandala (2019), Hermawan (2025), and Putri and Prasetya (2025), who demonstrated that brand image serves as a significant mediator between product quality and purchase decision.

A similar pattern was observed in the relationship between word of mouth and purchase decision, where brand image was found to play a significant mediating role. The analysis showed an indirect effect coefficient of 0.160, a t-statistic of 2.027 (> 1.96), and a p-value of 0.043 (< 0.05). This result indicates that positive word-of-mouth communication can increase consumers' purchase decisions by fostering a favorable brand image. When consumers receive positive recommendations regarding Citra products, they are more likely to develop positive perceptions of the brand. These perceptions subsequently enhance their confidence in the product and increase the likelihood of purchase. Brand image therefore functions as an important intermediary that strengthens the influence of word of mouth on consumer decision-making. A well-established brand image reinforces the credibility of consumer recommendations and amplifies their impact on purchasing behavior. This finding supports the studies of Rahma and Bambang (2023), Renaldi et al. (2025), and other previous research demonstrating that brand image plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between word of mouth and purchase decision..

CONCLUSION

This study examined the effects of word of mouth and product quality on purchase decisions, with brand image serving as a mediating variable among consumers of Citra hand and body lotion products in Kintamani District. The findings indicate that both word of mouth and product quality have positive and significant effects on purchase decisions. Brand image was also found to positively influence purchase decisions, highlighting its important role in shaping consumer behavior.

Furthermore, the results demonstrate that word of mouth and product quality significantly contribute to the development of a favorable brand image. Positive consumer recommendations and high product quality strengthen consumers' perceptions of the brand, which in turn encourage purchasing decisions. The mediation analysis further revealed that brand image partially mediates the relationships between word of mouth and purchase decision, as well as between product quality and purchase decision.

These findings suggest that companies should focus on maintaining product quality while encouraging positive word-of-mouth communication to strengthen brand image and increase consumer purchase decisions. Future studies are recommended to incorporate additional variables and broader research settings to provide a more comprehensive understanding of consumer purchasing behavior.

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