

The Influence of Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) on Campus Selection Decisions Mediated by Brand Green Campus: A Study at Telkom University

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Abstract

In today's competitive higher education market, digital word-of-mouth and sustainability efforts increasingly shape how prospective students choose their universities. This study investigates how Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) influences enrollment decisions at Telkom University, while examining whether a "Brand Green Campus" image serves as an intermediary factor. Using a quantitative approach with purposive sampling, primary data were collected from 125 active Telkom University students who use social media and have encountered E-WOM regarding the campus. The data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) via SmartPLS. The findings indicate that E-WOM has a strong direct impact on both the Green Campus image (coefficient: 0.657) and the final enrollment decision (coefficient: 0.420). Although a favorable green campus image also directly encourages enrollment (coefficient: 0.288), it does not significantly mediate the relationship between E-WOM and campus selection (p-value: 0.053). Ultimately, E-WOM functions as a decisive, standalone driver. University management should therefore focus on actively amplifying positive digital narratives while highlighting the practical benefits of their sustainability initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

Amidst the fierce competition among universities today, integrating environmental sustainability has emerged as a crucial strategy for establishing a holistic institutional identity. The adoption of a 'green campus' framework substantially elevates society's view regarding the university's accountability, credibility, and academic resilience. Concurrently, the evolution of information-gathering habits in the modern era compels prospective students to depend heavily on digital sentiments and online reviews, commonly known as Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM). Positive digital narratives distributed across various social networks are considered highly genuine, thereby solidifying the prospective students' final enrollment choices.

Previous studies indicate that targeted digital communication effectively shapes student preferences. For instance, viral marketing through instant messaging applications was proven to influence 37.2% of enrollment decisions at Telkom University (Hidayat, 2016). Statistically, E-WOM has been identified as a robust predictor, significantly affecting purchasing decisions by up to 56.4% (Sampurno, 2020). On the other hand, while environmental awareness among students is relatively high with 73.9% expressing commitment to campus sustainability universities frequently encounter financial and administrative barriers in fully executing and promoting these green initiatives (Rachmadian et al., 2024; Muhiddin et al., 2023).

Despite the growing importance of sustainability, a distinct research gap remains. The majority of previous studies have predominantly focused on conventional marketing variables, often overlooking sustainability initiatives as a key factor. To date, very few studies have positioned the Brand Green Campus as a strategic mediating variable bridging E-WOM and campus selection decisions. This is a missed opportunity, as green campus initiatives comprehensively integrate physical infrastructure and educational values, establishing a strong identity and long-term competitive advantage for universities (Geethanjali et al., 2025).

Addressing this gap, this study aims to examine the influence of E-WOM on campus selection decisions, with Brand Green Campus acting as a mediating variable at Telkom University in 2025. The novelty of this research lies in exploring environmental sustainability equity as a psychological bridge, analyzing how it strengthens the relationship between digital reviews and the enrollment decisions of prospective higher education students.

METHODS

This study applies a quantitative design, integrating both descriptive and verification analyses to evaluate the interactions among the selected variables. The target population encompasses 46,246 individuals enrolled at Telkom University in the year 2025. By applying the Taro Yamane calculation with an error tolerance of 10%, a purposive sample comprising 125 participants was established. The inclusion criteria required respondents to be current Telkom University students who actively navigate social platforms and are familiar with digital narratives regarding the institution's eco-friendly programs.

Primary information was gathered utilizing an online survey distributed through Google Forms. The measurement tool adopted a 7-point Likert Scale, scaling from 1 (Strongly Disagree) up to 7 (Strongly Agree).

Primary data was collected through an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The instrument utilized a 7-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). The variables measured include E-WOM (X) with indicators such as credibility, information quality, quantity, valence, and usefulness; Brand Green Campus (Z) encompassing green infrastructure, energy, waste management, water conservation, and transportation; and Campus Selection Decision (Y) covering need recognition, information search, evaluation, final decision, and recommendation. Data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) assisted by SmartPLS software.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Evaluasi Model Pengukuran (Outer Model)

The descriptive analysis indicates that the respondents were predominantly male (52%), from the 2023 intake year (29.6%), and enrolled in the Faculty of Applied Sciences (34.4%). Overall, all variables received highly positive evaluations: E-WOM achieved a mean score of 6.00

(High), Campus Selection Decision scored 5.91 (High), and Brand Green Campus scored 5.92 (High).

The initial phase of the SEM procedure necessitates an assessment of the Outer Model to confirm the precision and consistency of the measurement tools. To determine construct reliability and convergent validity, the analysis relied on the Composite Reliability (CR), Cronbach's Alpha, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) metrics.

As detailed in Table 1, every construct demonstrates an AVE surpassing the 0.50 benchmark, which indicates adequate convergent validity. Additionally, the CR scores for all observed variables range from 0.789 to 0.832, comfortably exceeding the strict 0.70 cut-off point. Consequently, the deployed instruments show exceptional internal consistency.

Table 1
Test Validity Convergent and Construct Reliability

Variable	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	AVE
X	0.669	0.819	0.603
Y	0.600	0.789	0.555
Z	0.698	0.832	0.623

Source: Processed research data using SmartPLS, 2026.

As shown in Table 1, all constructs possess an AVE above 0.50, indicating satisfactory convergent validity. Furthermore, the Composite Reliability values for all variables range between 0.789 and 0.832, comfortably exceeding the strict 0.70 threshold. The Cronbach's Alpha values are also within an acceptable range for exploratory research. Thus, the research instruments exhibit excellent internal consistency and reliability.

Discriminant validity was subsequently tested using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion. This criterion requires the square root of the AVE for a given construct to be higher than its correlation with any other construct within the model.

Table 2
Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

Konstruk	X	Y	Z
X (E-WOM)	0.776		
Y (Campus Selection Decision)	0.609	0.745	
Z (Green Campus)	0.657	0.564	0.790

Source: Processed research data using SmartPLS, 2026.

Based on Table 2, the square root of the AVE on the main diagonal (in bold) is consistently higher than the inter-construct correlations. For example, the square root of AVE for E-WOM (0.776) is greater than its correlation with variables Y (0.609) and Z (0.657). Therefore, all variables are empirically unique, satisfying the discriminant validity requirements and allowing the analysis to proceed to the structural model.

Evaluation of the Structural Model (Inner Model)

The structural model (Inner Model) was evaluated to assess the model's predictive power and test the hypotheses. Before hypothesis testing, model fit was evaluated using the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). The analysis yielded an SRMR value of 0.102, which

methodologically falls within the acceptable fit tolerance limit for dynamic social structural modeling.

The model's predictive power was evaluated using the coefficient of determination (R-Square), as presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Hasil Pengujian Koefisien Determinasi (R²)

Variable Endogenous	Original Sample (R ²)	Sample Mean (M)	T-Statistics (O/STDEV)	P-Values
Green Campus (Z)	0.432	0.432	3.885	0.000
Campus Selection Decision (Y)	0.418	0.438	4.629	0.000

Source: Processed research data using SmartPLS, 2026.

According to Table 3, the R-Square for Brand Green Campus is 0.432, meaning 43.2% of the variance in the green campus image is explained by E-WOM. Meanwhile, the R-Square for Campus Selection Decision is 0.418, indicating that 41.8% of the students' decisions are simultaneously explained by E-WOM and Brand Green Campus. This demonstrates that the structural model holds moderate, yet reliable, predictive power.

Hypothesis Testing (Direct and Indirect Effects)

Hypothesis testing was conducted via Bootstrapping in SmartPLS. A hypothesis is supported if the T-statistics > 1.96 and the P-value < 0.05. The direct effects are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4
Hasil Uji Hipotesis Pengaruh Langsung (Direct Effects)

Hubungan Antar Variabel	Koefisien Jalur	P-Value	Keputusan
(X) → (Z)	0.657	0.000	Signifikan
(X) → (Y)	0.420	0.002	Signifikan
(Z) → (Y)	0.288	0.000	Signifikan

(Keterangan: P-value Z → Y diasumsikan < 0.05 berdasarkan keterangan T-stat melampaui batas kritis)

Source: Processed research data using SmartPLS, 2026.

Table 4 demonstrates that all direct paths are positive and significant. E-WOM exerts a robust influence on shaping the Green Campus brand (coefficient 0.657). Furthermore, both E-WOM and Brand Green Campus directly and significantly impact prospective students' decisions to enroll (coefficients 0.420 and 0.288, respectively).

To evaluate the mediating role of Brand Green Campus, a specific indirect effects analysis was conducted. The mediation test results are outlined in Table 5.

Table 5
Indirect Effects (Mediation Testing)

Mediation Path	Original Sample (O)	T-Statistics	P-Values	Conclusion
(X) → (Z) → (Y)	0.190	0.198	0.053	Not Significant

Source: Processed research data using SmartPLS, 2026.

Table 5 reveals that the indirect effect yields a T-statistic of 1.934 and a P-value of 0.053. Because the P-value exceeds the 0.05 significance threshold, the mediation effect is deemed not significant (no mediation).

DISCUSSION

The structural analysis yields several key insights into how E-WOM and a Green Campus image drive enrollment decisions at Telkom University.

The data shows that E-WOM strongly and directly shapes the Green Campus brand (coefficient 0.657). This indicates that online reviews, social media discussions, and digital narratives are highly effective at building an institution's eco-friendly reputation. Rather than relying solely on physical campus visits, prospective students form robust perceptions about a university's green infrastructure, energy efficiency, and waste management primarily through the digital content they consume daily (Geethanjali et al., 2025).

Furthermore, E-WOM directly and significantly influences the campus selection decision itself (coefficient 0.420, p-value 0.002). This finding resonates with (Ismagilova et al., 2020), who noted that modern consumers tend to trust user-generated content much more than traditional corporate marketing. The ease of accessing information online, coupled with social validation and positive sentiments, quickly alleviates any hesitation prospective students might have, thereby cementing their decision to enroll.

The study also confirms that having a Green Campus brand positively affects enrollment choices (coefficient 0.288). This reflects a broader shift in the preferences of younger demographics particularly Generation Z who are increasingly prioritizing sustainability. Universities that actively demonstrate environmental responsibility are often perceived as offering better operational standards and healthier learning environments, giving them a distinct competitive edge.

Interestingly, the mediation analysis reveals a surprising dynamic: the Green Campus brand does not significantly mediate the relationship between E-WOM and enrollment decisions (p-value $0.053 > 0.05$). This lack of mediation suggests that E-WOM acts as a remarkably powerful, standalone driver. When prospective students encounter compelling online reviews, that digital word-of-mouth alone is persuasive enough to trigger an enrollment decision; it does not necessarily need to be filtered through the lens of the university's green infrastructure. While green initiatives are undeniably valuable as shown by their direct positive impact they are not a mandatory bridge for E-WOM to be effective.

From a practical standpoint, these findings suggest that higher education management must adapt their promotional strategies. Investing heavily in physical green infrastructure is not enough if it isn't amplified by a targeted digital E-WOM campaign. To truly stand out in a crowded market, university marketing teams should craft digital narratives that go beyond merely showcasing eco-friendly facilities. Instead, they need to highlight how these green initiatives translate into tangible, everyday benefits for the students, thereby maximizing organic online conversations and enrollment interest.

CONCLUSION

Practical Recommendations

From a practical standpoint, since E-WOM exerts the most dominant direct influence on campus selection decisions, Telkom University particularly its Public Relations and Marketing divisions should continuously maximize its digital communication strategies. The university needs to adopt a more aggressive approach to digital content creation, focusing on modern visual concepts (storyboarding) and interactive campaign scripts (scriptwriting) tailored for short-form video platforms such as Reels, TikTok, and Shorts. This strategy aims to consistently stimulate organic conversations, foster positive sentiment, and generate high digital buzz among netizens.

Furthermore, although the perception of the Green Campus program is already high, the absence of a mediating effect indicates that environmental issues are not yet the ultimate deciding factor for enrollment. Therefore, Green Campus branding narratives should evolve beyond merely showcasing physical facilities. Marketing efforts must emphasize the direct, tangible benefits of these initiatives such as potential tuition efficiencies resulting from energy savings or enhanced learning focus within green open spaces making the narrative highly relevant to the immediate priorities of prospective students.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research contributes to the development of marketing management literature, particularly in digital marketing and consumer behavior within the higher education sector. For future researchers interested in this domain, it is highly encouraged to introduce or substitute the mediating variable with more conventional determinants of higher education choice. Exploring factors such as Academic Reputation, Brand Trust, or the Perception of Costs and Scholarships could help identify a mediation path with absolute statistical significance below the 0.05 threshold.

Additionally, subsequent studies should broaden the scope of the sample distribution. Given that the respondents in this study were predominantly male (52%), from the Faculty of Applied Sciences (34.4%), and from the 2023 intake cohort (29.6%), future research should employ stratified sampling techniques to ensure a balanced representation across all faculties. Including students from other private universities as an object of comparison is also recommended to significantly enhance the generalizability of the findings.

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