

# THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING, BRAND IMAGE, AND BRAND TRUST ON GENERATION Z'S PURCHASE INTENTION OF "K-POP MERCH," WITH E-WOM AS A MODERATOR OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Lamhot Romaida Samosir<sup>1</sup>, Antyo Pracoyo<sup>2</sup>, Batara Maju Simatupang<sup>3</sup>, Bambang Budhijana<sup>4</sup>

[lamhotromaida64@gmail.com](mailto:lamhotromaida64@gmail.com)<sup>1</sup>

STIE Indonesia Banking School

## ABSTRACT

*The rapid advancement of digital technology has significantly transformed communication, with social media playing a central role in the fast and borderless exchange of information. Twitter (now X), Tik Tok, Instagram, Tik-Tok are one of the most frequently used platforms by Generation Z, serving not only for entertainment but also as a source of information and influence in purchasing decisions, particularly in the context of K-Pop merchandise. This study examines the effect of digital marketing and brand Image, Brand Trust on purchase Intention among Kpop Merch buyer. The research used a quantitative approach with 407 respondents collected through an online survey. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Drawing on previous studies by Erkan & Evans (2016) and Wang et al. (2018), the research adopts a quantitative approach to analyze consumer perceptions and behavioral intentions. The findings are expected to provide insights into how digital interactions and peer influence affect consumer decisions and offer strategic input for brands leveraging eWOM in the K-Pop industry. The results indicate that Social media marketing, Brand Image, Brand Trust in Purchase Intention, E-WOM has a positive effect on purchase Intention, while Customer Engagement cannot modarate relation Brand Trust with Purchase Intention. These findings provide insights for Kpop Merch companies in designing effective Social Media marketing strategies.*

**Keywords:** Social Media Marketing, Brand Image, Brand Trust, E-WOM, Purchase Intention.

## INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has significantly transformed the way individuals communicate, access information, and interact with brands. Social media platforms have become an essential part of everyday life, enabling users to share content, exchange opinions, and influence each other's decisions in real time. Morissan et al. (2013) argue that although technology may initially position humans as passive users, individuals continuously adapt and reshape technological tools, allowing them to remain active agents in digital interactions. Consequently, social media has evolved into an important environment where social interaction, information exchange, and marketing activities converge.

In the context of digital communication, social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and Twitter (now known as X) play a central role in shaping consumer behavior. These platforms not only facilitate interpersonal communication but also function as effective marketing channels that enable firms to engage with consumers directly. Previous studies indicate that interactions on social media platforms can influence audience engagement and consumer responses to media content and promotional activities (Bennett, 2012). Through these platforms, consumers can easily access product information, share experiences, and participate in discussions that may affect their purchasing decisions.

Alongside the expansion of social media usage, the global spread of Korean

popular culture, commonly referred to as the Korean Wave or Hallyu, has become a major cultural and economic phenomenon. The popularity of K-Pop artists such as BTS, BLACKPINK, EXO, and Super Junior has significantly influenced entertainment consumption and lifestyle trends worldwide, including in Indonesia. As one of the largest markets in Southeast Asia, Indonesia has experienced a substantial increase in the number of K-Pop fans and related consumer activities (CNN Indonesia, 2022). Social media platforms further amplify this phenomenon by enabling fans to interact, share information, and promote products associated with their favorite artists. Previous research also suggests that intensive social media usage among Hallyu fans may encourage consumptive behavior related to K-Pop products (Gusri & Dwatra, 2024).

Generation Z, often described as digital natives, represents one of the most active user groups on social media platforms. This generation not only uses social media for entertainment but also relies on it as a primary source of information and product recommendations. Within online fan communities, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) plays a significant role in shaping consumer perceptions, attitudes, and purchase intentions. Through online discussions, recommendations, and shared experiences, consumers can influence one another's evaluation of brands and products.

Despite the increasing importance of social media marketing in shaping consumer behavior, previous studies have reported inconsistent findings regarding its influence on purchase intention. Furthermore, limited research has examined the roles of brand image and brand trust in mediating consumer responses to social media marketing, particularly among Generation Z consumers in the context of K-Pop merchandise. In addition, the moderating roles of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and customer engagement in strengthening the relationships among these variables remain relatively underexplored, especially in emerging markets such as Indonesia.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the influence of social media marketing on purchase intention among Generation Z consumers of K-Pop merchandise. Specifically, this research investigates the roles of brand image and brand trust as key determinants of purchase intention, while also analyzing the moderating effects of electronic word-of-mouth and customer engagement. The findings are expected to contribute to the growing body of literature on digital marketing and consumer behavior, while providing practical insights for businesses seeking to develop effective marketing strategies in the rapidly expanding K-Pop merchandise market.

## **Hypothesis Development**

### **Social Media Marketing and Purchase Intention**

Social media has become an important platform for consumers to obtain product information and evaluate brands before making purchasing decisions. Information shared through reviews, comments, and recommendations on social media can influence consumer perceptions when it is considered credible. Hilligoss and Rieh (2008) emphasize that information credibility plays a critical role in the early stage of persuasive communication and consumer decision-making.

Purchase intention refers to a consumer's likelihood or willingness to purchase a product in the future (Jasin, 2022). It reflects consumers' attitudes and motivations formed through their experiences in evaluating products and brands (Mukti, 2023). Previous studies also indicate that electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) significantly influences purchase intention, as consumers increasingly rely on online recommendations when searching for product information (Hendri & Budiono, 2021). Furthermore, effective social media marketing strategies can encourage consumers to

share positive experiences through eWOM, which subsequently influences other consumers' purchasing decisions (Salhab et al., 2023).

H1: Social media marketing positively influences Purchase Intention

### **Social Media Marketing and Brand Image**

Social media marketing has become one of the most important tools for companies to communicate with consumers in the digital era. Through interactive platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter (X), companies are able to deliver marketing messages, engage with consumers, and shape consumers' perceptions toward their brands. Social media enables companies to present brand identity, communicate product values, and maintain continuous interaction with their audiences.

Previous studies suggest that social media marketing activities significantly influence consumers' perceptions of brands. According to Erkan and Evans (2016), information shared through social media platforms can shape consumers' cognitive evaluations and perceptions of a brand. Similarly, Dolega et al. (2021) argue that social media platforms enhance brand visibility and strengthen brand image through interactive communication and user-generated content.

When consumers frequently encounter marketing content through social media platforms, they are more likely to develop favorable perceptions toward the brand. Continuous exposure to brand-related content may strengthen brand associations and contribute to the formation of a positive brand image.

Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Social media marketing positively influences brand image.

### **Social Media Marketing and Brand Trust**

Social media marketing also plays a crucial role in building trust between brands and consumers. In digital environments, consumers frequently rely on information shared through social media platforms when evaluating brands and products. Interactive communication, transparency, and responsiveness on social media platforms can enhance consumers' confidence in a brand.

Brand trust refers to consumers' willingness to rely on a brand based on the belief that the brand will deliver its promised value. Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) emphasize that brand trust reduces uncertainty and perceived risk in purchasing decisions. When companies actively engage with consumers and provide reliable information through social media platforms, consumers may perceive the brand as more trustworthy.

Previous studies have shown that effective social media marketing strategies can strengthen brand credibility and consumer trust (Alalwan et al., 2017). Through consistent communication, product information, and customer interaction, social media platforms can help companies establish trustworthy relationships with their consumers.

Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Social media marketing positively influences brand trust.

### **Brand Image and Purchase Intention**

Brand image represents consumers' overall perceptions and associations related to a particular brand. A strong and positive brand image plays a significant role in influencing consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions toward the brand. When consumers perceive a brand positively, they are more likely to consider purchasing products associated with that brand.

According to Kotler and Keller (2016), brand image contributes to consumers'

confidence in the brand and influences their decision-making processes. A positive brand image may enhance consumers' perceptions of product quality, reliability, and value, which ultimately increases their intention to purchase.

Previous studies have consistently demonstrated that brand image positively influences consumers' purchase intention (Hendri & Budiono, 2021). When consumers hold favorable perceptions toward a brand, they are more likely to develop stronger intentions to purchase its products.

Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Brand image positively influences purchase intention.

### **Brand Trust and Purchase Intention**

Brand trust is considered one of the most important determinants of consumer purchasing behavior. Trust reduces uncertainty and perceived risk, which are critical factors influencing consumer decision-making. Consumers tend to prefer purchasing products from brands they trust because trust provides assurance regarding product quality and reliability.

Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) argue that consumers who trust a brand are more likely to develop long-term relationships with that brand and exhibit stronger purchase intentions. Similarly, Aydin et al. (2014) suggest that brand trust plays a crucial role in shaping consumers' willingness to purchase products from a particular brand.

When consumers believe that a brand consistently fulfills its promises and provides satisfactory experiences, they are more inclined to purchase products associated with that brand.

Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Brand trust positively influences purchase intention.

### **The Moderating Role of Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)**

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has emerged as one of the most influential sources of information in the digital marketplace. eWOM refers to positive or negative statements shared by consumers about products or brands through online platforms such as social media, review websites, and online forums (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

Consumers often rely on eWOM when evaluating products because online reviews and recommendations are perceived as more credible than traditional advertising messages. According to Erkan and Evans (2016), eWOM significantly influences consumers' attitudes, perceptions, and purchase decisions in online environments.

In the context of social media marketing, eWOM can strengthen the influence of marketing activities by amplifying brand-related information through peer communication. Positive eWOM can enhance brand credibility and reinforce consumers' purchase intentions.

Therefore, eWOM is expected to strengthen the relationships between marketing activities and consumer responses.

H6: Electronic word-of-mouth positively moderates the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention.

### **The Moderating Role of Customer Engagement**

Customer engagement refers to the level of consumers' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral involvement with a brand (Dessart et al., 2015). In online environments, customer engagement may occur through interactions such as commenting, sharing, liking, or participating in discussions related to brand content.

Highly engaged consumers tend to develop stronger relationships with brands,

which may increase their trust and loyalty. Hollebeek (2013) suggests that customer engagement strengthens consumers' psychological connections with brands and enhances their likelihood of supporting the brand through purchasing behavior.

In social media environments, customer engagement may strengthen the influence of brand trust on purchase intention. When consumers actively engage with brand-related content, they may develop stronger emotional connections with the brand, which increases their willingness to purchase its products.

Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H7: Customer engagement positively moderates the relationship between brand trust and purchase intention.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Object**

This study examines the influence of Social Media Marketing, Brand Image, and Brand Trust on Purchase Intention toward K-Pop merchandise in Indonesia. In addition, this study investigates the moderating roles of Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) and Customer Engagement in strengthening consumers' purchase intentions. The research focuses on understanding how social media marketing activities and brand perceptions influence Generation Z consumers' intention to purchase K-Pop merchandise in the Indonesian market.

### **Research Design**

This research adopts a quantitative research design using a survey method to examine the relationships among the proposed variables. Quantitative research is appropriate because it allows the measurement of relationships between independent and dependent variables using numerical data and statistical analysis. Data were collected in a single period through a structured questionnaire distributed online. A total of 407 respondents participated in this study. The respondents consist of Generation Z consumers with diverse demographic backgrounds, including age, gender, and educational level. All respondents meet the research criteria, namely active users of social media platforms such as Twitter (X), Instagram, and TikTok.

**Sampling Technique,** This study employs a non-probability sampling technique using purposive sampling. Respondents were selected based on specific criteria to ensure their relevance to the research objectives. The survey was conducted online using social media platforms including Twitter (X), Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok. Data collection was carried out starting in January 2026. The criteria for selecting respondents are as follows: Individuals aged 13–28 years, representing Generation Z, Active users of social media platforms such as Twitter (X), Instagram, and TikTok, Individuals who are familiar with or have purchased K-Pop merchandise. The minimum sample size was determined based on the recommendation that the number of respondents should be 5–10 times the number of indicators used in the model Ferdinand, (2014). Since this study uses 27 indicators, the sample size meets the recommended requirement. Primary data were collected through an online questionnaire using Google Forms. The questionnaire measured respondents' perceptions of Social Media Marketing, Brand Image, Brand Trust, Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM), Customer Engagement, and Purchase Intention.

Each item was measured using a six-point Likert scale, where:

1 = Strongly Disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Slightly Disagree

4 = Slightly Agree

5 = Agree

6 = Strongly Agree

### Data Analysis Technique

The collected data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0 software, while Microsoft Excel was used for preliminary data processing. PLS-SEM was chosen because it is suitable for analyzing complex models involving multiple constructs and moderating variables, as well as for predicting relationships between latent variables (Hair et al., 2021). The analysis includes evaluation of the measurement model (validity and reliability tests) and the structural model to test the proposed hypotheses regarding the relationships between Social Media Marketing, Brand Image, Brand Trust, eWOM, Customer Engagement, and Purchase Intention.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Respondent Profile

This study involved 407 respondents who met the research criteria, namely Generation Z individuals who actively use social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and X (Twitter) and are familiar with K-Pop merchandise products.

The demographic profile shows that the respondents were predominantly female (84%), while male respondents accounted for 16%. In terms of occupation, the majority of respondents were students (57%), followed by employees (32%), entrepreneurs (6%), and other occupations (5%). Regarding age distribution, most respondents were in the 19–24 years age group (62%), followed by 25–28 years (26%), 14–18 years (9%), and 13 years (3%). These results indicate that the sample represents a segment of young consumers who are highly active on social media and have a strong interest in K-Pop merchandise products.

### Measurement Model Evaluation

The measurement model was evaluated using convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability tests in the PLS-SEM framework. Table 1. The results indicate that all indicators have outer loading values above 0.70, demonstrating strong convergent validity. In addition, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs exceed the recommended threshold of 0.50, indicating that the constructs explain a substantial proportion of the variance in their indicators.

Table 1 Outer Loading and AVE

Variabel	Indikator	Ave	Loading Factor
<b>BI</b>	BI1	<b>0.619</b>	0.819
	BI2		0.778
	BI3		0.782
	BI4		0.769
<b>BT</b>	BT1	<b>0.599</b>	0.793
	BT2		0.739
	BT3		0.760
	BT4		0.802
<b>CE</b>	CE1	<b>0.595</b>	0.807
	CE2		0.774
	CE3		0.739

Variabel	Indikator	Ave	Loading Factor
<b>EWOM</b>	CE4		0.765
	EWOM1	<b>0.621</b>	0.757
	EWOM2		0.774
	EWOM3		0.823
	EWOM4		0.778
	EWOM6		0.806
<b>PI</b>	PI1	<b>0.650</b>	0.770
	PI2		0.825
	PI3		0.811
	PI4		0.818
<b>SMM</b>	SMM1	<b>0.592</b>	0.779
	SMM2		0.775
	SMM3		0.784
	SMM5		0.739

Sources: Smart PLS 4.0 Test Result, (2026)

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (Table 2). and the Fornell–Larcker criterion. The HTMT results show that all values are below the threshold of 0.90, indicating that each construct is empirically distinct from the others. Similarly, the Fornell–Larcker (Table 3) analysis demonstrates that the square root of AVE for each construct is greater than the correlations with other constructs, confirming adequate discriminant validity. The cross-loading analysis further supports these findings, as each indicator loads more strongly on its corresponding construct than on other constructs. Overall, these results confirm that the measurement model demonstrates good validity and is suitable for structural model evaluation.

Table 2 Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) Test Result

	BI	BT	CE	EWOM	PI	SMM	CE x BT	EWOM x SMM
<b>BI</b>								
<b>BT</b>	0.824							
<b>CE</b>	0.778	0.806						
<b>EWOM</b>	0.665	0.724	0.748					
<b>PI</b>	0.787	0.824	0.845	0.783				
<b>SMM</b>	0.500	0.524	0.517	0.392	0.506			
<b>CE x BT</b>	0.595	0.645	0.596	0.491	0.539	0.495		
<b>EWOM x SMM</b>	0.547	0.561	0.520	0.350	0.501	0.442	0.807	

Sources: Smart PLS 4.0 Test Result, (2026)

In Table 3 shows that Reliability testing also indicates satisfactory results. The Cronbach’s Alpha values range from 0.771 to 0.847, while Composite Reliability values range from 0.853 to 0.891, all exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. These findings confirm that the measurement instruments used in this study exhibit strong internal consistency and reliability.

Table 3 Reliability & FL Test Result

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Fornell Larcker
<b>BI</b>	0.795	0.796	0.867	0.787
<b>BT</b>	0.776	0.780	0.856	0.774
<b>CE</b>	0.773	0.776	0.855	0.772
<b>EWOM</b>	0.847	0.848	0.891	0.788
<b>PI</b>	0.820	0.821	0.881	0.806
<b>SMM</b>	0.771	0.772	0.853	0.770

Sources: Smart PLS 4.0 Test Result, (2026)

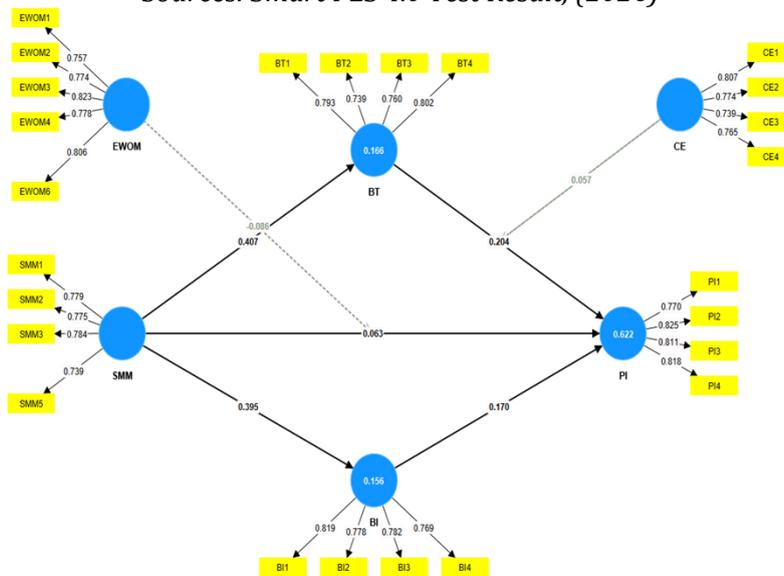


Figure 1 Output Outer Model

Sources: Smart PLS 4.0 Test Result, (2026)

**Structural Model Evaluation**

The structural model was assessed by examining the coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>) and hypothesis testing. The results show that Brand Image has an R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.156, indicating that Social Media Marketing explains approximately 15.6% of the variance in Brand Image. Similarly, Brand Trust has an R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.166, meaning that 16.6% of its variance is explained by the model. These values indicate relatively weak explanatory power for both constructs.

In contrast, Purchase Intention shows an R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.622, indicating that 62.2% of the variance in purchase intention is explained by the independent variables in the model. This suggests that the model has moderate predictive capability in explaining consumers' purchase intentions toward K-Pop merchandise (Table 4).

Tabel 4 R-Square and R-Square Adjusted

	R-square	R-square adjusted
<b>Brand Image</b>	0.156	0.154
<b>Brand Trust</b>	0.166	0.164
<b>Purchase Intention</b>	0.622	0.615

Sources: Smart PLS 4.0 Test Result, (2026)

## Hypothesis Testing

The results of hypothesis testing reveal several significant relationships among the variables. First, Brand Image has a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention ( $\beta = 0.170$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This finding indicates that a stronger brand image increases consumers' likelihood of purchasing K-Pop merchandise. This result (Table 5) is consistent with previous studies emphasizing the importance of brand perception in influencing consumer purchasing behavior.

Table 5 Hypothesis Testing Result

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics ( O/STDEV )	P values
BI -> PI	0.170	0.166	0.048	3.535	0.000
BT -> PI	0.204	0.204	0.062	3.258	0.001
CE -> PI	0.242	0.244	0.048	5.011	0.000
EWOM -> PI	0.280	0.281	0.049	5.753	0.000
SMM -> BI	0.395	0.395	0.058	6.794	0.000
SMM -> BT	0.407	0.407	0.060	6.764	0.000
SMM -> PI	0.063	0.061	0.027	2.326	0.020
CE x BT -> PI	0.057	0.054	0.031	1.824	0.068
EWOM x SMM -> PI	-0.086	-0.083	0.031	2.784	0.005
SMM -> BI -> PI	0.067	0.066	0.022	2.990	0.003
SMM -> BT -> PI	0.083	0.083	0.028	2.935	0.003

Sources: Smart PLS 4.0 Test Result, (2026)

Second, Brand Trust significantly influences Purchase Intention ( $\beta = 0.204$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). This result highlights that consumers who trust a brand are more likely to develop purchase intentions toward the brand's products.

Third, Customer Engagement also shows a positive and significant relationship with Purchase Intention ( $\beta = 0.242$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This suggests that higher levels of consumer interaction and engagement with a brand can encourage stronger purchase intentions.

Fourth, Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) has a significant positive effect on Purchase Intention ( $\beta = 0.280$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This indicates that online reviews and recommendations play a crucial role in influencing consumers' purchasing decisions.

Furthermore, Social Media Marketing significantly affects Brand Image ( $\beta = 0.395$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and Brand Trust ( $\beta = 0.407$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). These findings suggest that effective social media marketing strategies can strengthen both brand perception and consumer trust.

Social Media Marketing also shows a direct positive effect on Purchase Intention ( $\beta = 0.063$ ,  $p = 0.020$ ), although the magnitude of the effect is relatively small. This indicates that while social media marketing directly influences purchasing intentions, its stronger impact may occur indirectly through brand perception and trust.

## Moderating Effects

The moderating analysis produced mixed results. The interaction between Customer Engagement and Brand Trust (CE  $\times$  BT) does not significantly affect Purchase Intention ( $\beta = 0.057$ ,  $p = 0.068$ ). This suggests that brand trust does not strengthen the influence of customer engagement on purchase intention. Instead, customer engagement appears to influence purchase intention directly rather than through interaction with brand trust. In contrast, the interaction between Electronic Word-of-

Mouth and Social Media Marketing (EWOM  $\times$  SMM) shows a significant negative moderating effect ( $\beta = -0.086$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ). This result indicates that when social media marketing intensity increases, the influence of eWOM on purchase intention may weaken. This phenomenon may occur due to information overload or increased consumer skepticism toward promotional content.

**Mediating Effects,** The mediation analysis reveals that both Brand Image and Brand Trust act as significant mediators in the relationship between Social Media Marketing and Purchase Intention.

Specifically, Social Media Marketing indirectly influences Purchase Intention through Brand Image ( $\beta = 0.067$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ). This suggests that social media marketing activities can enhance purchase intention by strengthening consumers' perceptions of the brand. Similarly, Social Media Marketing also indirectly influences Purchase Intention through Brand Trust ( $\beta = 0.083$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ). This finding indicates that building consumer trust is an important mechanism through which social media marketing strategies influence purchasing decisions.

Overall, these results highlight the critical role of brand perception, consumer trust, and online communication in shaping Generation Z consumers' purchase intentions toward K-Pop merchandise.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study examines the influence of Social Media Marketing, Brand Image, Brand Trust, Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM), and Customer Engagement on Purchase Intention toward K-Pop merchandise among Generation Z consumers in Indonesia. The results indicate that Social Media Marketing significantly influences Brand Image and Brand Trust, both of which positively affect Purchase Intention. In addition, Customer Engagement and eWOM also show significant positive effects on Purchase Intention, suggesting that consumer interaction and online information play an important role in shaping purchasing behavior. Social Media Marketing also demonstrates a direct but relatively small influence on Purchase Intention. The moderation analysis reveals that Customer Engagement does not significantly strengthen the relationship between Brand Trust and Purchase Intention, while eWOM negatively moderates the relationship between Social Media Marketing and Purchase Intention. Furthermore, mediation analysis confirms that Brand Image and Brand Trust serve as important mechanisms through which Social Media Marketing indirectly influences consumers' purchase intentions. Overall, the findings highlight the strategic importance of social media marketing, brand perception, and digital consumer interaction in influencing Generation Z purchasing behavior in the K-Pop merchandise market.

This study has several limitations. First, the sample focuses only on Generation Z consumers in Indonesia who are familiar with K-Pop merchandise, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Second, the study examines a limited number of variables related to social media marketing and consumer behavior. Future research may expand the model by including additional variables such as brand loyalty, perceived value, or consumer satisfaction. Moreover, future studies could explore other industries within the creative economy to provide broader insights into digital marketing strategies.

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