

# Exploring the Mediating Role of Brand Image in Linking Word of Mouth and Digital Marketing Decisions

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## ABSTRACT

The construction service industry in Indonesia plays a crucial role in national economic growth, contributing significantly through major infrastructure projects. However, the increasing competition among construction service companies has made it essential for businesses to adopt effective marketing and reputation-building strategies. This study aims to analyse the effect of Word of Mouth (WOM) and digital marketing on the decision to use contractor services, with brand image as a mediating variable, especially at CV. Adicitra Karya in Yogyakarta. This study used a survey of 20 consumers of CV Adicitra Karya, with data collected using a structured questionnaire with a Likert Scale. Data analysis was conducted with Partial Least Squares (PLS) to test the validity, measurement model, and structural model. The results show that WOM has a significant effect on brand image, which in turn affects service utilisation decisions. Digital marketing does not have a significant effect on service utilisation decisions, and its effect on brand image is also limited. This research is useful for businesses in the construction industry, digital marketing, and service-based industries. This research provides insights into how WOM and digital marketing influence consumer decisions, especially in service industries such as construction. This research enriches knowledge by exploring the interactive relationship between WOM, digital marketing, and brand image in the context of construction services. This research provides a unique perspective on how WOM can influence consumer decisions through brand image, especially in a sector that relies heavily on trust and reputation.

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## 1. Introduction

The construction service industry in Indonesia plays a pivotal role in sustaining national economic growth (Fitriani & Ajayi, 2023; Shiha & Dorra, 2023), contributing approximately 10.23% to the country's GDP in the first quarter of 2024. This contribution results primarily from large-scale infrastructure projects such as the Trans-Sumatra Toll Road and the development of the National Capital City of the Archipelago. In Yogyakarta, the construction sector continues to expand, with total investment reaching IDR 29.4 trillion in the first half of 2024. Construction industry depends on effective management and innovation (Oladinrin et al., 2025). However, data from Statistics Indonesia (BPS) indicate a 10.4% decrease in the number of construction service companies over the past three years (BPS, 2024). This decline reflects intensifying market competition, especially among small and medium-sized of construction enterprise. As a result, many construction

businesses must innovate by improving service quality and implementing efficient marketing strategies to maintain their market position and competitiveness (Meng & Brown, 2018).

Consumers in the construction industry have become increasingly selective when choosing service providers. The construction industry heavily depends on a skilled and diverse workforce (Ahmed et al., 2024). Construction owners carefully evaluate service providers based on management expertise (Rasdorf et al., 2010). They prioritize reliability, professional reputation, and trust rather than depending solely on traditional marketing methods. Modern clients value transparency, innovation, and sustainable practices in construction (Weniger et al., 2023). Within this dynamic market, Word of Mouth (WOM) and digital marketing have emerged as critical factors influencing consumer decision-making (Bartschat et al., 2022; Becker et al., 2024; Feng et al., 2023). WOM serves as a credible communication channel that shapes trust and reputation, while digital marketing allows businesses to reach broader audiences through interactive and data-driven media (Liu et al., 2024; F. Wang et al., 2021). Nevertheless, in the context of construction services, previous research has not thoroughly investigated how WOM and digital marketing interact to shape brand image and, consequently, influence service usage decisions (Basri et al., 2023; Pourfakhimi et al., 2020). Most existing studies have focused on consumer goods and online retail sectors, leaving a significant empirical and conceptual gap in service-based industries—particularly in construction, which depends heavily on personal trust and reputation.

Empirical studies have produced mixed evidence regarding the effects of WOM and digital marketing on consumer decisions. WOM's influence on brand image varies; some find it strong, others weak (Haj Khalifa, 2025). Some researchers report that WOM significantly enhances brand image and purchase intentions, whereas others find its influence weak or indirect. Likewise, digital marketing has shown varying levels of effectiveness depending on message consistency, audience engagement, and context. These inconsistencies suggest the need to explore brand image as a mediating variable that explains how WOM and digital marketing jointly affect service utilization decisions in the construction sector.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the influence of WOM and digital marketing on service usage decisions, with brand image as a mediating variable, using CV. Adicitra Karya Yogyakarta as a case study. By integrating the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), and Consumer Engagement Theory, this research seeks to fill an important empirical gap and contribute to developing strategic marketing approaches that strengthen competitiveness, trust, and customer loyalty in Indonesia's construction service industry.

### **Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)**

*The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)*, developed by Fred Davis in 1986, is a theory that explains and predicts the acceptance of technology by individuals. The model focuses on two main factors: *Perceived Usefulness (PU)* and *Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU)*, which influence a person's intention and decision to adopt technology. *Perceived Usefulness (PU)* refers to the extent to which users feel that the use of technology can improve performance or benefits in their work or life, while *Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU)* refers to the extent to which the technology is easy to use without requiring great effort (Davis, 1985; Davis, 1989). In the context of *digital marketing*, these two factors are highly relevant, especially in the influence of new technologies such as mobile applications, social media, and *e-commerce platforms*, which can affect *brand image* and consumer purchasing decisions.

In addition, further developments of TAM, such as TAM 2 introduced by Venkatesh and Davis (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000), added social and cognitive dimensions such as social *influence* and *cognitive instrumental processes*, which enriched our understanding of external factors that influence consumers' perceptions of technology. Social influence, such as recommendations or reviews from other users, can influence how consumers assess the usability and ease of use of a technology or digital platform. In the context of *word-of-mouth (WOM)*, for example, positive reviews or recommendations from friends, family, or influencers can reinforce *brand image* and increase the *perceived Perceived Usefulness (PU)* of a product or service, ultimately influencing consumers' purchasing decisions (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000).

Meanwhile, in a further development of TAM 3 by Venkatesh and Bala (Venkatesh & Bala, 2008), this model recognises that *trust* and affective responses also play an important role in technology acceptance, which relates to consumers' perceptions of the brand and their experiences with the technology (Suwito et al., 2023). In *digital marketing*, building consumer trust in the brand and positive user experiences can lead to a better perception of the technology used, such as an e-

commerce website or mobile application, which in turn influences purchasing decisions. Research by Legris et al. (Legris et al., 2003), also shows that factors in TAM, such as ease of use and usability of technology, are critical in creating a satisfying user experience and influencing consumers' perceptions of the brand as well as their intention to purchase the product.

### **Integrated Marketing Communications**

*Integrated Marketing Communication* (IMC) theory is an approach that promotes the importance of consistent and coordinated messages through various marketing channels. Schultz 1977 *Integrated Marketing Communication* (IMC) theory. In this context, IMC integrates traditional marketing elements, such as *Word of Mouth* (WOM), with digital marketing strategies to build a strong brand image and effectively influence consumer decisions. IMC serves to create a unified experience for consumers, which is especially important in today's digital age where consumers are exposed to a variety of information from many sources.

One important aspect of IMC is the consistency of messages delivered to consumers, consistency in marketing communications can increase consumer trust in the brand and strengthen the brand image in the minds of consumers (Harizi, 2023; Umbreen & Ali, 2013). In this case, the use of digital channels such as social media is crucial, as these *platforms* enable more direct and personalised interactions between brands and consumers (Rehman et al., 2022; Valos et al., 2016). By utilising social media, companies can integrate different elements of marketing communications to create a more interactive and engaging experience for consumers (Rehman et al., 2022; Rosita et al., 2023). In addition, IMC also plays a role in influencing consumer purchasing decisions.

Integrated communications can increase promotional effectiveness and influence consumer purchase behaviour (Qasem et al., 2022; Umbreen & Ali, 2013). For example, in the context of digital marketing, the use of influencers and engaging content on social media can increase consumer engagement and encourage them to make purchases (Rehman et al., 2022; Rosita et al., 2023). Furthermore, IMC also focuses on creating long-term relationships between brands and consumers. By providing consistent and satisfying experiences, companies can build stronger consumer loyalty (Harizi, 2023; Umbreen & Ali, 2013). This is especially important in a competitive market, where consumers have many choices and can easily switch to another brand if they are dissatisfied with the experience provided. Therefore, companies need to adopt a holistic IMC approach to ensure that all elements of marketing communication work together to achieve the same goal, which is to create value for consumers and improve overall business performance (Harizi, 2023; Mihart, 2012). So, IMC is a very relevant approach in the modern marketing context. By integrating various communication channels and ensuring message alignment, companies can create better experiences for consumers, influence purchasing decisions, and build long-term mutually beneficial relationships.

### **Consumer Engagement Theory**

Consumer engagement theory is seen as essential in understanding how interactions between consumers and brands can influence purchase behaviour and build loyalty. The theory does not have a single founder, but is rooted in broader engagement research in consumer psychology and marketing. One of the key figures in the development of this theory is Brodie et al (Brodie et al., 2011). The theory encompasses several key dimensions including cognitive, emotional, and social aspects that together strengthen the relationship between consumers and brands (Doorn et al., 2010; Islam & Rahman, 2016). Especially in digital marketing, consumer engagement is becoming more relevant given the increasingly active ways consumers interact with brands through social media and other digital channels (Bryła et al., 2022; S. Wang, 2023). In a broader scope, consumer engagement can be linked to the concept of value co-creation, where consumers are not only recipients of products but also participate in the value creation process (Graffigna, 2017; Heerden & Wiese, 2021). This approach describes consumer engagement as an element that not only benefits companies but also provides a more immersive experience for consumers, allowing them to feel more connected to the brands they choose. Consumer Engagement Theory provides an important framework for understanding how interactions between consumers and brands can influence purchase behaviour and loyalty. With targeted strategies to increase engagement, companies can build closer relationships with consumers, which in turn can improve business performance.

## 2. Method

This study focuses on consumers of construction services CV. Adicitra Karya in Yogyakarta, with the object of research on the effect of Word of Mouth (WOM), digital marketing, and brand image on service usage decisions, with brand image as a mediating variable. The research population consisted of 20 consumers of CV Adicitra Karya services, and the entire population was used as respondents. The research variables consisted of independent variables (WOM and digital marketing), mediating variable (brand image), and dependent variable (service usage decision). Data were collected using a structured questionnaire with a Likert scale and analysed using descriptive analysis and inferential analysis through Partial Least Squares (PLS). The following are the three tests used to analyse the data in this study: First, the Outer Model Test aims to test the validity and reliability of the indicators used in the measurement model. At this stage, testing convergent validity and discriminant validity is carried out to ensure whether the measured constructs truly represent the intended variables. Reliability is also tested using Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha to ensure the internal consistency of the indicators used. Second, the Inner Model Test aims to analyse the structural relationship between the variables in the model. This test measures the effect of independent variables (WOM and digital marketing) on the dependent variable (service usage decision), as well as the effect of brand image as a mediating variable. This test also tests the R-Square ( $R^2$ ) value to see how well the model can explain variations in the dependent variable and measure the strength of the influence between variables through  $f^2$  (Effect Size). Third, hypothesis testing is carried out to test the relationship between variables in the model by paying attention to the path coefficient value and p-value. This test aims to test whether the hypothesis proposed in this study can be accepted or rejected. Hypothesis testing is carried out using bootstrapping which results in a t-statistic value and p-value, where the p value that is smaller than 0.05 indicates that the relationship between variables is significant.

## 3. Result

### Respondent Characteristics

The majority of respondents in this study were in the age range of >46 years (60%), with the education level dominated by postgraduate graduates (55%). Most respondents work as private employees (60%) and have a monthly income between 5-10 million rupiah (70%). This shows that the respondents have a high educational and professional background, as well as middle to upper economic conditions. These findings are important in understanding service utilisation preferences and decisions, as well as for designing appropriate marketing strategies.

**Table 1 Characteristics of respondents**

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
26-35 years old	1	5%
36-45 years old	7	35%
>46 years	12	60%
Education		
High School	2	10%
Bachelor (S1)	7	35%
Postgraduate (S2 / S3)	11	55%
Jobs		
Private Employee	12	60%
PNS/TNI/POLRI	7	35%
Lecturer	1	5%
Monthly Income		
< 2 million	2	10%
2-5 million	4	20%
5-10 million	14	70%
Total	20	100%

Source: Primary data 2025

### Respondent data analysis

The majority of respondents showed a positive view of the promotion of CV ADICITRA KARYA contractor services, both through family and friend recommendations and digital media such as social media, email marketing, and the company website. As many as 60%-85% of respondents felt that they received information or recommendations through personal relationships, indicating that word of mouth is very effective in influencing consumer decisions. On the other hand, 85% of respondents feel that they are often exposed to promotions on social media and 80% in emails. In addition, 75%-90% of respondents considered the value of the service to be worth the cost and were satisfied with their experience, and 75%-85% conducted market research before deciding to use the service. To maintain and increase usage decisions, companies need to ensure service quality and pricing remain competitive, increase information transparency, and strengthen digital presence by providing relevant and accessible content, and utilising customer reviews to strengthen credibility.

### Data Analysis Results

**Table 2 Outer Model Results**

Test Testing	Construct	Indicators	Value	Description
Convergent Validity	Brand Image (BI)	BI_1	0.845	Valid
		BI_2	0.766	Valid
		BI_3	0.843	Valid
		BI_4	0.792	Valid
		BI_5	0.861	Valid
		BI_6	0.895	Valid
		BI_7	0.873	Valid
		BI_8	0.809	Valid
	Digital Marketing (DM)	DM_1	0.884	Valid
		DM_2	0.906	Valid
		DM_3	0.859	Valid
		DM_4	0.84	Valid
		DM_5	0.828	Valid
		DM_6	0.884	Valid
		DM_7	0.906	Valid
		DM_8	0.796	Valid
	WOM	WOM_1	0.839	Valid
		WOM_2	0.894	Valid
		WOM_3	0.92	Valid
		WOM_4	0.927	Valid
		WOM_5	0.842	Valid
		WOM_6	0.902	Valid
		WOM_7	0.795	Valid
		WOM_8	0.863	Valid
Discriminant Validity	BI	-	0.837	$\sqrt{\text{AVE}} >$ correlation between constructs
	WOM	-	0.874	$\sqrt{\text{AVE}} >$ correlation between constructs
	Decision to Use Services (DUS)	-	0.797	$\sqrt{\text{AVE}} >$ correlation between constructs
	DM	-	0.87	$\sqrt{\text{AVE}} >$ correlation between constructs
HTMT	WOM <-> BI	-	0.718	HTMT value < 0.9
	DUS <-> BI	-	0.812	HTMT value < 0.9
	DUS <-> WOM	-	0.47	HTMT value < 0.9
	DM <-> BI	-	0.606	HTMT value < 0.9
	DM <-> WOM	-	0.425	HTMT value < 0.9
	DM <-> DUS	-	0.341	HTMT value < 0.9
Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	BI	-	0.7	AVE > 0.5, reliable
	WOM	-	0.764	AVE > 0.5, reliable
	DUS	-	0.636	AVE > 0.5, reliable
	DM	-	0.756	AVE > 0.5, reliable

Test Testing	Construct	Indicators	Value	Description
Composite Reliability & Cronbach's Alpha	BI	-	0.941	Reliable ( $\geq 0.70$ )
	WOM	-	0.971	Reliable ( $\geq 0.70$ )
	DUS	-	0.96	Reliable ( $\geq 0.70$ )
	DM	-	0.988	Reliable ( $\geq 0.70$ )

Source: Primary data 2025

In this study, the evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) was carried out with several validity and reliability tests to ensure the quality of the model used. The Convergent Validity test shows that most indicators are valid with a loading factor greater than 0.7, except DM\_9 and DM\_10 which were removed because the loading factor was below 0.7. The Discriminant Validity test shows that the root AVE of each construct is greater than the correlation between constructs, indicating that the model meets the criteria for discriminant validity. Cross Loading results also show appropriate values between indicators and constructs. HTMT testing shows that all values are lower than 0.9, which indicates good discriminant validity. For Average Variance Extracted (AVE), all construct values are greater than 0.5, which indicates good reliability. Finally, the Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha tests show satisfactory values, where all latent variables have values above 0.70, which means that this research instrument is reliable. Overall, this measurement model can be used for further analysis.

### Inner Model

Inner model testing aims to analyse the effect of exogenous variables on endogenous variables. The test results show that this model has good predictive relevance, with an R-Square value for Brand Image of 0.612 and for Service Usage Decision of 0.653, which indicates the model's ability to explain 61.2% and 65.3% of the variation in the two variables. The f-Square test shows that Brand Image has a very strong influence on Service Usage Decision ( $f^2 = 1.140$ ), while WOM has a strong influence on Brand Image ( $f^2 = 0.593$ ) and a weak influence on Service Usage Decision ( $f^2 = 0.029$ ). Digital Marketing shows a moderate influence on Brand Image ( $f^2 = 0.315$ ) and a weak influence on Service Usage Decisions ( $f^2 = 0.074$ ). The Q-Square test shows a  $Q^2$  value for Brand Image of 0.399 and Service Usage Decision of 0.338, which indicates that the model has good predictive relevance, with each model being able to explain approximately 39.9% and 33.8% of the variation in the data.

**Table 3. Inner Model Results**

Test Testing	Endogenous Variable	Value	Description
R-Square ( $R^2$ )	BI	0.612	Explains 61.2% of the variation in Brand Image
	DUS	0.653	Explains 65.3% of the variation in service usage decisions
$f^2$ Effect Size	BI $\rightarrow$ DUS	1.140	Very strong influence
	WOM $\rightarrow$ BI	0.593	Strong influence
	WOM $\rightarrow$ DUS	0.029	Weak influence
	DM $\rightarrow$ BI	0.315	Moderate influence
	DM $\rightarrow$ DUS	0.074	Weak influence
Q-Square	BI	0.399	Good predictive relevance (39.9% of variation predicted)
	DUS	0.338	Good predictive relevance (33.8% of variation predicted)

Source: SmartPLS 4.0 results, processed by researchers (2025)

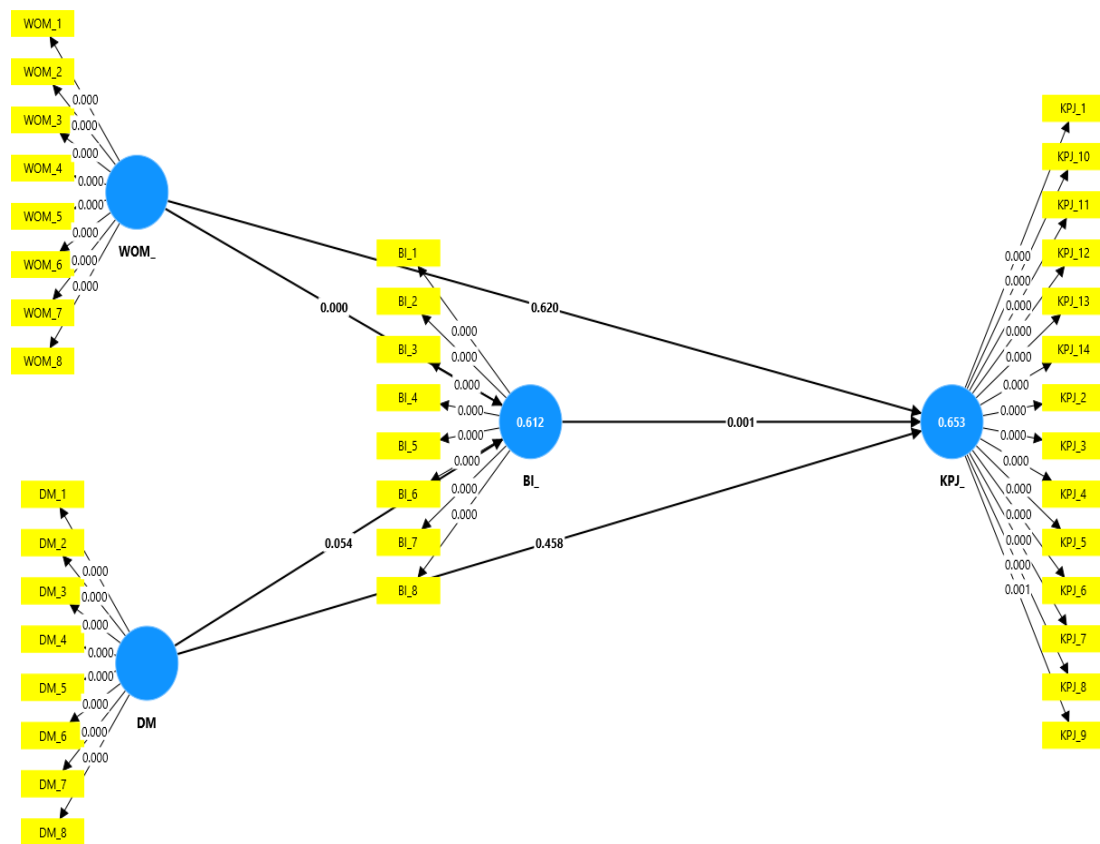
The results of direct hypothesis testing (direct effect) show that Brand Image has a positive and significant effect on Service Usage Decisions (coefficient = 1.010, p-value = 0.001). Word of Mouth (WOM) has a significant positive effect on Brand Image (coefficient = 0.532, p-value = 0.000), but has no direct significant effect on Service Usage Decisions (coefficient = -0.141, p-value = 0.620). Digital Marketing shows an insignificant effect on Brand Image (coefficient = 0.388, p-value = 0.054) and Service Usage Decision (coefficient = -0.204, p-value = 0.458). In testing the indirect effect hypothesis, WOM is shown to have a significant indirect effect on Service Usage Decisions through

Brand Image (coefficient = 0.537, p-value = 0.011). However, Digital Marketing does not show a significant indirect effect on Service Usage Decisions through Brand Image (coefficient = 0.392, p-value = 0.114).

**Table 4. Hypothesis Testing Results (Path Coefficient Estimation)**

Testing	Coefficient (O)	P-Value	Description
<b>Direct Effect</b>			
WOM → DUS	-0.141	0.62	H1 Rejected
DM → DUS	-0.204	0.458	H2 Rejected
BI → DUS	1.010	0.001	H3 Accepted
WOM → BI	0.532	0	H4 Accepted
DM → BI	0.388	0.054	H5 Rejected
<b>Indirect Effect</b>			
WOM → BI → DUS	0.537	0.011	H6 Accepted
DM → BI → DUS	0.392	0.114	H7 Rejected

Source: SmartPLS 4.0 results, processed by researchers (2025)



**Figure 4.1 Bootstrapping Test Results**  
 Source: Processing Output with smartPLS 4.0

#### 4. Discussion

##### The Effect of Word of Mouth (WOM) on Service Usage Decisions

The results of this study indicate that Word of Mouth (WOM) has no significant effect on service usage decisions and is even negatively correlated, which is contrary to the hypothesis proposed in this study. Therefore, the first hypothesis (H1) which states that WOM has a positive effect on service usage decisions must be rejected. This finding indicates that in the context of this study, WOM does not function as a factor that encourages consumers to choose the services offered.

In relation to Consumer Engagement Theory, this finding contradicts the basic concept of the theory, which assumes that higher consumer engagement with the brand, whether emotionally,

socially, or cognitively, will increase the influence of WOM on purchase or service usage decisions. The theory explains that when consumers are more engaged with the brand experience, they are more likely to be influenced by information received through WOM. However, in this study, although WOM influenced brand image, its influence on service usage decisions was very limited. This indicates that other factors such as service quality, consumer education, or more personalised interactions with the brand may be more dominant in influencing consumer decisions (Dosi, 2023; Ranti & Setiyaningrum, 2022).

Previous research shows that in some cases, Word of Mouth (WOM) has no significant effect on the decision to use services (Bhuvanawari et al., 2022; Pratiwi et al., 2023). This could be due to the lack of credibility of the WOM source, the irrelevance of the information received, or the presence of other factors such as price, service quality, and digital marketing that are more dominant in influencing consumer decisions. Moreover, in certain sectors involving technical or specific services, consumers are more likely to seek information from more formal and credible sources. Therefore, although WOM has potential, its influence may be limited, and companies need to rely on various other marketing strategies to effectively influence service utilisation decisions. Other research also shows that WOM does not increase service usage decisions (Wakhida & Sanaji, 2020).

The influence of WOM on the decision to use construction services may be limited due to several factors, such as the need for further education about the benefits and quality of services that cannot be fully conveyed through WOM. Services are intangible, so consumers need more in-depth information and first-hand experience. Lack of personal engagement and interaction also reduces the influence of WOM, especially if the recommendation is not in-depth enough or comes from a less trusted source. Therefore, companies need to optimise interactive and educational experiences through digital marketing, such as providing in-depth content, increasing interaction through personalised channels such as social media or webinars, and choosing effective marketing channels to increase consumer engagement.

### **The Effect of Digital Marketing on Service Usage Decisions**

The results of this study indicate that Digital Marketing has no significant effect on service usage decisions, p-value 0.458, which is greater than 0.05. This shows that digital marketing has no effect on consumers' service usage decisions is not significant enough in this study. In other words, although digital marketing can increase brand visibility and exposure, it is not enough to influence consumers' decision to use the services offered.

In relation to the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) theory, which explains that Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) are the two main factors that influence technology adoption, this finding can be said to contradict this theory in the context of the influence of digital marketing on service usage decisions. According to TAM, if the technology (in this case digital marketing) is perceived as useful and easy to use, then the effect on the decision will be positive. However, the results of this study show that although digital marketing is accepted and used by consumers, its influence on service usage decisions is limited. This may be because the usefulness or ease of use offered by digital marketing is not clear enough or cannot be translated well by consumers in the context of the services offered.

Previous research also supports these findings which state that digital marketing does not have a significant effect on service usage decisions (Chan et al., 2021). This finding shows that although digital marketing can expand reach and increase brand exposure, in some cases, digital marketing strategies are not always effective in influencing consumer decisions to use certain services (Suyatna et al., 2024). This could be due to several factors, such as a lack of engagement or positive response from the audience to the digital content, or perhaps consumers prefer personal recommendations and first-hand experience over information obtained through digital channels. Therefore, the results of this study highlight the importance of combining digital marketing with other marketing strategies to create a more significant impact in influencing service usage decisions.

The findings suggest that companies need to optimise digital marketing strategies by creating educational and interactive content such as webinars, customer testimonials and video tutorials. Direct interaction through social media and customer feedback is also important to build engagement and improve consumer understanding. Companies should be selective in choosing the right digital channels, based on market analysis, and conduct trials to find the most effective platforms. Although digital marketing does not have a significant influence on the decision to use

services, improving the strategy with educational content, personalised interactions, and choosing the right channels can strengthen its influence on consumer decisions.

### **The Effect of Brand Image on Service Usage Decisions**

The results showed that Brand Image has a significant positive effect on service usage decisions, with a p-value of 0.001, which is smaller than 0.05. This shows that a positive brand image can encourage consumers to choose and use the services offered by the company. This shows that a positive brand image can encourage consumers to choose and use the services offered by the company. The better the brand image owned by the company, the more likely consumers are to trust and use these services. In relation to Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) theory, these findings strongly support the argument that integrated and consistent communication can enhance brand image and, ultimately, influence purchase or service usage decisions. IMC theory emphasises the importance of alignment of messages delivered through various marketing channels to build a strong brand image in the minds of consumers. This research shows that a brand image formed through consistent communication strategies, both through traditional and digital channels, can have a positive impact on consumers' decision to use services.

Brand image, which reflects how consumers perceive a brand based on their experiences and perceptions, is a key factor in the service sector, which is more abstract and intangible compared to physical products. A brand that has a positive image will be more easily accepted by consumers, as they tend to feel more secure and confident in using the services offered. These results are also in line with the findings of previous studies, such as those found by Harianto & Yucha (2022), which reveal that a strong brand image can increase purchasing decisions in various sectors, including services. Research by Fadlil et al. (2022), also stated that a positive brand image increases consumers' credibility and trust in the product or service, which in turn affects their decision to buy or use the service. However, although these findings support IMC theory, there are several factors that can influence the relationship between brand image and service usage decisions. One of the main factors is consistency in the consumer's experience. If a company cannot fulfil the expectations built by its brand image, this may lead to a mismatch between the positive brand image and consumers' decision to use the service. For example, if companies market their services as premium or high-quality, but consumers do not feel the same when using the service, then a strong brand image will not be enough to influence their decision.

Previous research shows that a strong brand image does play an important role in building consumer loyalty. Agus et al. (Agus et al., 2024), emphasised that a positive brand image can form consumer loyalty, which leads to a decision to continue using the services or products of the brand. However, this also depends on the direct experience received by consumers when using the service. If the experience is consistent with the image built, then the decision to use the service will be more easily influenced. The discrepancy between these findings and previous theories may be caused by the difference between brand perception and actual experience. If companies fail to maintain service quality in accordance with the brand image built, although a positive brand image can increase the desire to try, this is not enough to ensure long-term service usage decisions. The practical implication is that companies need to focus on the consistency between the communicated brand image and the experience felt by consumers. Companies should integrate effective marketing communications across channels, maintain service quality, and pay attention to consumer feedback for continuous improvement. By maintaining alignment between brand image and consumer experience, service utilisation decisions will be more influenced by a positive brand image, increasing loyalty and business growth.

### **The Effect of Word of Mouth (WOM) on Brand Image**

The results showed that Word of Mouth (WOM) has a significant influence on brand image, with a p-value of 0.000, which is smaller than 0.05. This shows that recommendations or word of mouth can significantly improve brand image. In the context of digital and modern marketing, WOM serves as a very powerful marketing tool because consumers tend to trust information obtained from friends, family, or other users more than direct advertisements or promotions from companies. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) theory may help explain these results. TAM states that consumers' perceptions of the usefulness and ease of use of a technology or product are strongly influenced by external factors, including social recommendations from friends or family (Choi, 2023). In this case, WOM serves as a form of social influence that can strengthen consumers' perceptions of Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) of a brand or service. When

consumers hear positive experiences from people they trust, this can improve the brand image in their eyes, making it more attractive and easier to accept. WOM can improve brand image because positive talk from satisfied consumers can create a better impression of the brand in the minds of other consumers. This social influence is often much stronger than the influence of advertising or promotions carried out by companies. A study by Kotler & Keller (Kotler & Keller, 2016) states that the influence of peers or highly credible individuals (such as influencers) can strengthen brand image, as consumers are more likely to accept the opinions of others they trust.

Previous research also supports these findings, showing that WOM has a positive impact on brand image and consumers' decision to purchase a product or service (Bernarto et al., 2022; Dhewi & Kurnianto, 2023). Wedari & Yasa (Wedari & Yasa, 2022) added that WOM not only forms a positive perception of the brand but also serves as a tool to increase consumer loyalty and strengthen long-term relationships between brands and consumers. This shows that WOM has an important role in building a stronger brand image (Kurniawan, 2023). Companies should strategically utilise WOM to strengthen brand image, one of which is by encouraging positive reviews from satisfied consumers and providing incentives for those who share positive experiences. In addition, companies need to maintain product or service quality so that consumers feel satisfied and encouraged to speak positively. Active and transparent community management, both online and offline, can also strengthen the positive impact of WOM. Companies should also be selective in choosing credible and relevant influencers or brand ambassadors to increase the power of WOM and brand image. Based on these findings, WOM is proven to have a significant influence on brand image, so companies must wisely utilise the power of WOM, maintain consistent service quality, and strengthen relationships with consumers to build a sustainable brand image.

### **The Effect of Digital Marketing on Brand Image**

The results show that Digital Marketing has a significant influence on brand image, with a p-value of 0.054. Although the p-value is slightly higher than 0.05, which indicates a fairly strong tendency for this influence, the effect cannot be considered fully significant based on conventional limits. However, this result still reflects that digital marketing, although it may not be entirely strong in shaping brand image, still has a contribution that can improve consumers' perception of the brand. Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) theory provides a relevant basis for understanding these results. IMC emphasises the importance of message consistency through various marketing channels to build a strong brand image (Jusuf, 2023). In the context of digital marketing, the use of various online channels such as social media, digital advertising, and e-commerce can strengthen brand image through integrated and consistent messages. When these channels are used effectively, they are able to convey more in-depth information about the brand and help build stronger relationships with consumers, although their effectiveness can vary depending on the quality and targeting of the channels used.

These results support research by Mahajan (2022) who found that digital marketing can influence brand image, but the strength of the influence depends on the quality and type of digital channels used. Good use of social media and management of relevant content can strengthen brand image, but if these channels are not used appropriately or do not deliver messages that match consumer expectations, then their influence on brand image will be limited. However, the results of this study slightly contradict previous studies that are more optimistic about the direct impact of digital marketing on brand image. For example, research by Chotimah & Akrom (Chotimah & Akrom, 2024) shows that effective use of social media and digital marketing strategies can significantly improve brand image. This could be due to differences in the content strategy or market segmentation used by the companies in this study compared to those of previous studies. In this case, it may be that the companies in this study have not fully optimised the use of digital platforms or are not engaging audiences in a compelling enough way.

Results that are not fully significant may be due to a lack of proper targeting in the digital marketing strategy or the ineffectiveness of the content presented. If the audience is not relevant to the product or service, or the message is not engaging or consistent, the impact on brand image will be limited. Low frequency of interaction can also limit the formation of a strong brand image. The practical implication is that companies need to focus on a more integrated digital marketing strategy by improving audience targeting and selecting appropriate channels. The use of social media should involve more personalised interactions to build strong relationships with consumers, as well as optimising content quality to reflect brand values and characteristics.

### **The Indirect Influence of Word of Mouth (WOM) on Service Usage Decisions through Brand Image**

The test results for the indirect effect of Word of Mouth (WOM) on Service Usage Decisions through Brand Image show a significant effect. With a p-value of 0.011 which is smaller than 0.05, it can be concluded that Brand Image statistically mediates the relationship between WOM and service usage decisions. This positive influence indicates that when WOM has a positive impact on brand image, this will strengthen consumer decisions to use the services offered. In the context of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) theory, this finding reinforces the view that consistent and positive communication through various channels, including WOM, plays an important role in building a strong brand image. WOM, which often involves recommendations from friends, family, or even influencers, has a major influence in shaping consumers' perceptions of brands, which then impacts their decision to choose or use certain services (Schultz, 1977). WOM serves as a more personalised and authentic communication channel compared to traditional promotions, so consumers tend to trust and be influenced by reviews or recommendations received through social media or everyday conversations.

Research conducted by Fazrin et al., (2024) and Martin Martin & Rachman (2024) supports these findings, where WOM is proven to strengthen brand image and influence consumer purchasing behaviour. WOM has been recognised as a very influential factor in consumer decisions, especially in terms of creating trust in brands. Kochhar & Bhagat (Kochhar & Bhagat, 2024) also show that WOM affects brand image which in turn impacts consumer decisions, including in the service sector. Therefore, these findings corroborate that brand image formed through WOM is an important mediator in encouraging consumers to use certain services. Practically, the results of this study provide important directions for companies to further utilise Word of Mouth strategies in their marketing. One way is to encourage customers to share their positive experiences through reviews or testimonials on social media. In addition, companies can also utilise influencers to increase trust and strengthen brand image, as their influence is often stronger in shaping public perception. Companies can increase consumer engagement by conducting referral programmes, offering discounts or rewards for successful recommendations, and ensuring that positive customer experiences are effectively conveyed through WOM.

### **The Indirect Effect of Digital Marketing on Service Usage Decisions through Brand Image**

The results of the analysis for the indirect effect of Digital Marketing on Service Usage Decisions through Brand Image show insignificant results. The path coefficient value of 0.392, t-statistic 1.579, and p-value 0.114 which is greater than 0.05 indicate that Brand Image does not statistically mediate the relationship between Digital Marketing and service usage decisions. This means that although digital marketing can influence brand image, its impact on consumers' decision to use services is not significant enough in the context of this test. From the perspective of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) theory, which suggests that perceptions of the ease of use and usefulness of technology influence consumers' intentions and decisions to adopt a technology or service, this finding can be explained. Digital marketing does have the potential to build a strong brand image through various platforms, such as social media, mobile apps, or online advertising. However, if the factors that influence consumers' experience in interacting with digital technologies or platforms are not optimised enough, then the impact on service usage decisions will be reduced (Tuyen et al., 2022). One reason that could explain this insignificance is the lack of consumer engagement in the digital experience, so that even if the brand image is strengthened through digital marketing, it is not enough to directly drive the decision to use the service.

Research by Tuyen et al (2022), shows that although Digital Marketing is effective in building brand image, in some contexts, especially in more complex services or services, its impact on usage decisions can be more limited. Iqbal et al (Iqbal et al., 2024) , also suggests that the use of digital channels to build brand image needs to be balanced with more in-depth interactions with consumers to generate a significant impact on purchase decisions or service usage. This finding is consistent with research showing that while digital marketing can strengthen consumer perceptions of brands, other factors such as consumer education and personalisation in digital interactions play a greater role in service usage decisions. The practical implication of these findings is that companies should pay attention to more in-depth factors in digital marketing. While strengthening brand image through digital channels is important, companies also need to improve other elements of digital interaction, such as personalisation, consumer education, and building a more interactive user experience. Using influencers or campaigns that encourage direct engagement can be a

solution to increase the impact of digital marketing on usage decisions. In addition, companies need to evaluate their content strategy to ensure that the messages delivered through digital marketing not only enhance brand image, but can also provide enough information for consumers to feel confident in making a service utilisation decision. Thus, to create a significant impact, digital marketing strategies need to focus more on building deeper two-way relationships with consumers

## 5. Conclusion

From the results of the analysis that has been carried out, it can be concluded that Word of Mouth (WOM) has a significant effect on Service Usage Decisions through Brand Image. The test results show that Brand Image is proven to be a significant mediator in the relationship between WOM and service usage decisions. This finding supports existing theories, such as Consumer Engagement Theory and Integrated Marketing Communication Theory, which state that recommendations from others or positive experiences shared through WOM can improve consumers' perceptions of brands, which in turn influence their decisions to use services. Digital Marketing does not show a significant indirect effect on Service Usage Decisions through Brand Image. This result shows that although Digital Marketing has the potential to improve brand image, its influence on service usage decisions is not strong enough. This is likely due to the ineffectiveness of the digital strategy implemented, lack of consumer engagement, and non-optimisation in building deeper relationships between brands and consumers. For future research, it is recommended to expand the understanding of the influence of digital marketing on service usage decisions by considering factors such as personalisation and consumer education, as well as analysing specific digital channels such as social media or mobile applications. A longitudinal study approach is also recommended to monitor the long-term influence of digital marketing on brand image and service utilisation decisions. For companies, it is recommended to optimise Word of Mouth (WOM) strategies by leveraging reviews, testimonials, and recommendations from customers or influencers, as well as increasing consumer interaction through interactive content such as webinars and Q&A sessions. A focus on personalising marketing messages and educational content is also important to increase consumer trust. In addition, companies need to evaluate and optimise their digital channels, select platforms that suit their target audience, and use relevant social media and influencers to strengthen their brand image and influence usage decisions.

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