

Exploring Generation Z's Experience in Interpreting Electronic Word of Mouth on TikTok in the Purchase Decision of Azarine Skincare Products

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Abstract

This study examines how Generation Z interprets and responds to electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) on TikTok and its influence on purchase decisions for Azarine skincare products. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation involving five Generation Z TikTok users exposed to e-WOM content. The findings show that e-WOM serves as both an information source and social validation. Consumer perceptions are shaped by content creator credibility, review authenticity, and digital interactions, while purchase decisions are driven by rational, emotional, and self-identity factors. Overall, e-WOM on TikTok plays a significant role in shaping Generation Z's decision-making and evaluation of digital information, highlighting the importance of credible and authentic content in marketing strategies.

Keywords: e-WOM, content marketing, consumer behavior, purchase decisions

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INTRODUCTION

The beauty and skincare industry has experienced significant growth in recent years, driven by increasing public awareness of self-care and advancements in digital technology. This growth is not only fueled by product innovation but also by the expanding role of social media in facilitating access to information and strengthening interactions between brands and consumers. In this context, skincare has evolved beyond a functional necessity into a medium of social identity expression.

These developments have transformed consumer behavior, particularly in information seeking and purchase decision-making. Electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) has become a dominant factor influencing consumer preferences in the digital era (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Platforms such as TikTok enable users to share experiences directly through reviews,

before-and-after content, and honest reviews. This type of authentic information is considered more credible than company-driven promotions because it is based on real user experiences (Amarullah et al., 2022). In this regard, e-WOM not only provides information but also functions as social validation that shapes consumer trust and perception.

In Indonesia, the skincare industry has shown a positive growth trend, with the market value reaching USD 2.65 billion in 2023. Generation Z represents a dominant segment driving this growth, given their characteristics as digital natives who actively use social media as a primary source of information. According to DataReportal (2024), TikTok has approximately 126 million active users in Indonesia, with around 60% belonging to the 18–24 age group. Globally, Indonesia ranks as the country with the largest number of TikTok users, exceeding 180 million users as of July 2024, surpassing the United States and Brazil. The high intensity of platform usage directly impacts consumption behavior, as many users make purchases based on recommendations encountered on social media. This condition suggests that e-WOM not only serves as an information reference but also as a means of social validation that strengthens consumer confidence in making purchase decisions.

TikTok's characteristics as a short-form video platform, supported by algorithm-driven content distribution, enable the rapid dissemination of user experiences. User-generated content, including reviews and product demonstrations, enhances both informational value and emotional engagement. For Generation Z, interaction indicators such as views, likes, and comments serve as signals of credibility, suggesting that the evaluation of information is shaped not only individually but also socially.

One local brand that has leveraged this phenomenon is Azarine. The brand has demonstrated strong performance in the Indonesian skincare market, supported by its digital marketing strategies and extensive e-WOM exposure on social media (CNBC Indonesia, 2023). Products that gain viral attention on TikTok and receive positive user reviews contribute to building consumer trust and increasing purchase intention. Previous studies also confirm that e-WOM significantly influences purchase decisions by strengthening trust and shaping positive brand perceptions (Yunita & Hidayat, 2025).

However, most previous studies have primarily employed quantitative approaches focusing on relationships between variables, thus lacking the ability to explore consumers' subjective experiences in depth. In the context of TikTok, which is highly visual, interactive, and narrative, the process of meaning-making is influenced by emotional, rational, and self-identity alignment aspects (Zhulal et al., 2022). Therefore, a more exploratory approach is needed to understand how Generation Z interprets e-WOM and how it influences their purchase decisions.

This study aims to explore the experiences of Generation Z in receiving and interpreting electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) information on TikTok related to Azarine skincare products. Specifically, this research focuses on how Generation Z receives and interprets e-WOM information, identifies factors influencing their level of trust toward content circulating on TikTok, and examines how e-WOM shapes their purchase decision-making process. Therefore, this study is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of digital consumer behavior, particularly regarding the role of e-WOM on social media in influencing Generation Z's purchase decisions.

THEORITICAL REVIEW

Marketing

Marketing is a system of business activities designed to plan, price, promote, and distribute products in a way that satisfies consumer needs while helping organizations achieve their corporate objectives (Anugrah et al., 2023). Furthermore, marketing management refers to a process that involves stages of analysis, planning, implementation, and control of various marketing programs in a structured manner. This process aims to build, develop, and maintain valuable relationships with target consumers in order to support the company's strategic goals (Meliana et al., 2023).

Consumer Behavior

Consumer behavior refers to a series of processes including searching, selecting, purchasing, using, evaluating, and disposing of products or services to fulfill needs and desires (Kotler, 2020). This behavior is influenced by internal factors such as motivation, perception, learning, personality, and attitudes (Hariyani & Prasetyo, 2024), as well as external factors including culture, social class, family, reference groups, and digital environments (Amirullah, 2022).

In contemporary contexts, consumer behavior is understood as a complex phenomenon that integrates psychological, social, and cultural aspects (Wibowo et al., 2021). In the digital era, external influences have become increasingly dominant, as consumers are exposed to technology-based marketing stimuli such as interactive advertising, algorithmic recommendations, and electronic word of mouth (Moehadi et al., 2024). These conditions influence not only how consumers evaluate products but also how they construct trust and meaning, ultimately shaping their purchase decisions.

Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM)

According to Priansa (2017), as cited in (Nurcholisa & Rachmi, 2023), e-WOM is a relatively new communication phenomenon, particularly in the context of marketing communication through online platforms. This form of communication is increasingly used by individuals to share personal experiences or the experiences of others, whether positive or negative, regarding something they have encountered.

Currently, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) has become a crucial element in modern marketing strategies. Information conveyed by consumers through various digital platforms significantly influences the formation of purchase decisions. Amid rapid advancements in digital technology, consumers can easily access information and disseminate their opinions, whether in the form of criticism or appreciation of the products they use. In the context of business competition, understanding consumer behavior toward product quality is a critical aspect for companies to maintain their competitiveness (Rubiyanti et al., 2022).

Purchase Decision

According to Kotler and Armstrong (2001), as cited in (Wibowo et al., 2021), a purchase decision is a series of stages that consumers go through when purchasing a product, starting from need recognition to the act of purchasing. This process involves several stages, namely need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior.

According to Kotler and Keller (2016), as cited in (Prihadini et al., 2023), a purchase decision is a process consisting of several interrelated stages, namely: (1) need recognition, which refers to the condition when consumers begin to realize the existence of a need or

desire to be fulfilled; (2) information search, the stage in which consumers are encouraged to gather various relevant information to support the decision-making process; (3) evaluation of alternatives, a stage where consumers compare different product or brand options by considering the benefits to be obtained and the costs to be incurred in order to determine the best alternative; (4) purchase decision, the stage at which consumers select a particular product, proceed with the purchase, and consume it either directly or through another party; and (5) post-purchase behavior, the stage where consumers evaluate their level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction after using the product, which subsequently influences their future behavior.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to explore and understand the meaning of the phenomenon based on real-life conditions (Sugiyono, 2022). The research was conducted in Surabaya, involving Generation Z informants, particularly female TikTok users who have experience in accessing and evaluating electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) related to Azarine skincare products. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, as they met specific criteria relevant to the research objectives.

Data were collected through observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to examine user interactions with TikTok content, while in-depth interviews were used to explore informants' experiences and perceptions. Documentation served as supporting data to strengthen the findings.

Data analysis followed an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Sugiyono, 2022). Data reduction involved selecting and focusing on relevant information, which was then presented in descriptive form to identify patterns and meanings. To ensure validity and credibility, triangulation was applied by comparing data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation. This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of how Generation Z interprets e-WOM on TikTok and how it influences their purchase decisions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Generation Z's Experience in Receiving e-WOM Information on TikTok

The findings indicate that Generation Z engages actively in receiving electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) on TikTok rather than passively consuming information. The process begins with repeated exposure through the For You Page (FYP), which increases product awareness and stimulates curiosity toward Azarine skincare products. This aligns with the awareness stage in consumer decision-making, where continuous exposure introduces consumers to a product. As one informant stated, "because it often appears on my FYP and the information is consistent, I become more curious about the product." Repeated exposure also contributes to the perception of product popularity, thereby strengthening initial attractiveness.

Following initial exposure, informants tend to explore information further by watching multiple videos from different creators. This behavior reflects active information processing, where consumers evaluate and compare content before forming judgments. As expressed by an informant, "usually I watch several videos first, then I conclude for myself whether the product is worth it or not." In addition, the experience of receiving e-WOM is not solely cognitive but also social. Informants consider user interactions, particularly comments, as part of their evaluation process. For example, "I also look at the comments, and most say it works well, so I feel more confident." This demonstrates that social influence plays a role in shaping

perceptions, indicating that e-WOM on TikTok operates through both individual evaluation and collective validation.

Factors Influencing Trust in e-WOM on TikTok

Trust in e-WOM is formed through a gradual evaluative process involving multiple factors. One key determinant is source credibility, where informants tend to trust creators who demonstrate knowledge, experience, and honesty in presenting information. This supports source credibility theory, which emphasizes the importance of the communicator in influencing trust. As stated by an informant, “I trust creators who often discuss skincare and seem knowledgeable; their explanations are also more detailed and not exaggerated.”

Content quality also plays a significant role in building trust. Informants prefer content that provides clear and detailed information, supported by visual evidence. For instance, “the content explains the product texture and claims no white cast, so I can better imagine what the product is like.” In addition, consistency of information across multiple sources strengthens trust, as consumers rely on repeated and similar messages to reduce uncertainty. This is reflected in the statement, “if many people share similar experiences, I usually trust the information more.”

Social interaction further reinforces trust, particularly through comments that reflect real user experiences. However, informants remain selective and critical in evaluating information. As one informant noted, “reviews on TikTok can be a source of information, but they still need to be filtered.” This indicates that trust is shaped not only by external factors but also by consumers’ critical evaluation abilities, highlighting the active role of Generation Z in processing digital information.

Purchase Decision of Azarine Skincare Products

The findings show that e-WOM on TikTok significantly influences Generation Z’s purchase decisions. The decision-making process occurs gradually, integrating e-WOM into each stage, from awareness to post-purchase evaluation. Initially, repeated exposure creates product awareness and triggers interest, particularly when the information aligns with consumer needs. As an informant explained, “many people say the product is lightweight and suitable for all skin types, so I’m interested in trying it.”

At the information search and evaluation stage, informants actively compare reviews and alternative products before making decisions. This indicates that purchase decisions are based on careful consideration rather than impulse. As stated, “I compare it with other brands and look at the reviews first.” e-WOM plays a reinforcing role by increasing confidence through consistent and positive information, as reflected in the statement, “at first it was because of my needs, but after seeing many reviews, I became more confident choosing Azarine.”

After purchase, consumers evaluate their experience by comparing it with expectations formed through e-WOM. Most informants reported satisfaction, as indicated by statements such as, “the texture is light and comfortable, just like what I saw on TikTok.” However, some discrepancies between expectations and actual experience were noted, suggesting that e-WOM does not always fully represent reality. In the final stage, some consumers contribute to the e-WOM cycle by sharing their experiences. As one informant stated, “if it suits me, I usually recommend it to others.” This demonstrates that consumers act not only as information recipients but also as information disseminators, reinforcing the continuous cycle of e-WOM that influences other consumers.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) on TikTok plays a central role in shaping how Generation Z interprets information and makes purchase decisions regarding Azarine skincare products. Unlike traditional perspectives that position e-WOM primarily as an information source, this study finds that e-WOM also functions as a form of social validation, where consumer trust is constructed through collective interactions, such as consistent reviews and user engagement in the comment section.

A key insight of this research is that Generation Z does not passively consume e-WOM but actively engages in a multi-stage evaluation process, including repeated exposure, cross-content comparison, and critical filtering of information. This indicates that trust is not formed instantly but develops through the alignment of multiple factors, including creator credibility, content quality, and consistency of information across sources.

Furthermore, this study highlights that e-WOM is embedded across all stages of the purchase decision process, not only influencing initial awareness but also reinforcing confidence and shaping post-purchase evaluation. This continuous influence suggests that e-WOM operates as an ongoing cycle, where consumers act both as information recipients and contributors. These findings contribute to the understanding of digital consumer behavior by emphasizing the interactive and socially constructed nature of e-WOM on TikTok, particularly among Generation Z. Practically, this implies that brands should focus not only on content dissemination but also on fostering credible, consistent, and interactive digital environments to effectively influence consumer decisions.

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