

E-WOM AND PRICE EFFECTS ON PURCHASE DECISIONS THROUGH BRAND IMAGE AMONG IQIYI USERS IN MADIUN

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the effect of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) and price on purchase decisions for the iQIYI application, both directly and through brand image, among Generation Z in Madiun. This study uses a quantitative associative approach with purposive sampling of 170 respondents collected through an online questionnaire and analyzed using Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0. The results show that e-WOM and price have a significant effect on purchase decisions, and price has a significant effect on brand image. However, brand image has no significant effect on purchase decisions, e-WOM has no significant effect on brand image, and brand image does not mediate the effect of either e-WOM or price on purchase decisions. These findings indicate that Generation Z in Madiun decides to subscribe to iQIYI based directly on user reviews and price suitability, without going through brand image formation. The findings are expected to serve as input for iQIYI's management in formulating a more effective digital marketing strategy.

Keywords: *Electronic Word of Mouth, Price, Brand Image, Purchase Decision, Generation Z*

A. INTRODUCTION

Background

Advances in information and communication systems have driven a major shift in entertainment consumption from conventional media toward internet-based media. According to a survey by the *Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia* (APJII, 2026), internet penetration in Indonesia has reached 81.7%, with 235 million users, and Generation Z accounting for 89.02% of them. This condition has driven the growth of *Subscription Video on Demand* (SVoD) services, which offer flexible access to premium entertainment content.

One SVoD *platform* from China competing in the Indonesian market is iQIYI, a provider of Asian entertainment content such as Chinese dramas, Korean dramas, anime, and *variety*

shows. Despite offering competitive pricing and premium features (up to 4K quality, ad-free viewing, Dolby Audio/Vision), iQIYI's usage rate in Indonesia (21%) remains below its competitors, VIU and WeTV, which each reach 32% (Lokadata, 2025). Google Trends search data for 2021-2025 also shows public interest in iQIYI is relatively lower than its competitors, indicating that consumers' purchase decisions to subscribe to iQIYI have not been optimally formed.

Several factors are believed to influence purchase decisions for such streaming services. First, *electronic word of mouth* (e-WOM) in the form of reviews, comments, and recommendations from users on social media and the Google Play Store is an important source of information before consumers decide to subscribe (Susilowati & Tukiran, 2024). iQIYI has received positive reviews related to content quality and affordable pricing (a 4.8 rating on the Play Store), but has also received complaints about network disruptions, translation features, and ads shown to VIP subscribers.

Second, price is an important consideration because consumers evaluate whether the benefits received are worth the cost incurred (Kotler et al., 2023). iQIYI offers subscription packages starting from Rp39,000 per month, relatively cheaper than WeTV and VIU. Third, *brand image* is presumed to act as a mediating variable because consumers tend to choose *platforms* that are perceived as popular, trustworthy, and of good quality (Putranto & Supriyono, 2023). iQIYI has attempted to build its brand image through distribution partnerships with Telkomsel and IndiHome, the *Combo Asia* bundling program with Vision+, and promotions featuring popular Chinese actors.

Previous studies show inconsistent findings regarding the relationships among e-WOM, price, *brand image*, and purchase decisions. Some studies found that e-WOM and price significantly affect purchase decisions (Yulindasari & Fikriyah, 2022; Yasmine, 2021), while others found the opposite (Rozaq & Suwitho, 2025; Rajagukguk et al., 2025). Likewise, the mediating role of *brand image* remains debated, some support it (Fietroh & Rizqi, 2025; Irmasari & Umam, 2025), while others reject it (Angellina et al., 2023; Triana & Hidayat, 2023). These inconsistencies, combined with the limited research on iQIYI and Generation Z in Madiun, constitute the research gap that underlies this study.

Literature Review

This study is grounded in the *Theory of Planned Behavior* (TPB) by Ajzen (1991), which states that individual behavior is determined by *intention*, which is in turn influenced by attitude toward the behavior, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control. In this study, e-WOM relates to subjective norm because consumers are influenced by other users' reviews; price relates to perceived behavioral control because consumers weigh their financial capability; while *brand image* relates to attitude toward the behavior because a positive brand image shapes consumers' beliefs about the iQIYI service.

Electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) is defined as the process of sharing and exchanging information among consumers, in the form of positive or negative reviews about a product or company through the internet and social media (Susilowati & Tukiran, 2024), measured through the indicators of *intensity*, *valence of opinion*, and *content* (Ngo et al., 2024). Price is defined as the amount of money consumers must pay to obtain the benefits of a product or service (Kotler et al., 2023), measured through price affordability, price-quality conformity, price competitiveness, and price-benefit conformity.

Brand image is consumers' understanding and belief about a brand formed through experience, information, and associations stored in memory (Kotler et al., 2022), measured through *strengthness*, *favorability*, and *uniqueness of brand association*. Purchase decision is the moment when a consumer decides to buy a product (Wardhana, 2024), measured through purchase steadiness, buying habits, willingness to recommend, and repurchase.

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

The conceptual framework of this study positions e-WOM (X1) and price (X2) as independent variables, *brand image* (Z) as an intervening variable, and purchase decision (Y) as the dependent variable. Based on the literature review and prior studies, seven hypotheses are proposed as follows:

H1: Electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) has a significant effect on purchase decisions among iQIYI users.

H2: Price has a significant effect on purchase decisions among iQIYI users.

H3: Brand image has a significant effect on purchase decisions among iQIYI users.

H4: Electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) has a significant effect on brand image among iQIYI users.

H5: Price has a significant effect on brand image among iQIYI users.

H6: Brand image significantly mediates the effect of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) on purchase decisions for iQIYI's service.

H7: Brand image significantly mediates the effect of price on purchase decisions for iQIYI's service.

B. METHOD

This study uses a quantitative associative approach to examine the effect of e-WOM and price on purchase decisions through *brand image* as a mediating variable. The study was conducted among Generation Z (born 1997-2012) residing in Madiun, East Java, from March to June 2026.

The population consists of Generation Z iQIYI users in Madiun, whose exact number is unknown; therefore, the sampling technique used is *nonprobability sampling* with a *purposive sampling* method. Respondent criteria include: (1) Generation Z residing in Madiun; (2) male or female; (3) at least 17 years old; and (4) has purchased or subscribed to an iQIYI VIP package at least once. The minimum sample size was determined using the *10 Times Rule* (Hair et al., 2022), i.e., ten times the number of research indicators (14 indicators), yielding a minimum sample of 140 respondents. This study successfully collected 170 respondents through an online questionnaire (Google Form).

Data were collected using a questionnaire with a four-point *Likert* scale (STS = 1 to SS = 4), supported by literature review and documentation. The research variables consist of e-WOM (X1) with indicators of *intensity*, *valence of opinion*, and *content* (Ngo et al., 2024); price (X2) with indicators of price affordability, price-quality conformity, price competitiveness, and price-benefit conformity (Kotler et al., 2023); *brand image* (Z) with indicators of *strengthness*, *favorability*, and *uniqueness of brand association* (Kotler et al., 2022); and purchase decision (Y) with indicators of purchase steadiness, buying habits, willingness to recommend, and repurchase (Wardhana, 2024).

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to describe respondents' responses, and inferential statistics using *Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares* (SEM-PLS) with the assistance of SmartPLS 4.0 (Ghozali & Kusumadewi, 2023). The *outer model* evaluation includes convergent validity (outer loading ≥ 0.50 and AVE ≥ 0.50), discriminant validity (cross loading), and reliability (Cronbach's Alpha ≥ 0.60 and Composite Reliability ≥ 0.70). The *inner model* evaluation includes the coefficient of determination (R^2) and predictive relevance (Q^2). Hypothesis testing was conducted through the *bootstrapping* procedure with a significance criterion of *t-statistics* > 1.96 and *p-values* < 0.05 at a 5% significance level.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Respondent Characteristics

The object of this study is the iQIYI video streaming application, founded in 2010 by Baidu Incorporated. Of the 170 respondents who participated, the majority were female (85.9%), aged 21-24 years (79.4%), university students (77.6%), residents of Madiun City (60.6%), and had subscribed to iQIYI 2-5 times (56.5%). Most respondents had an income/allowance of Rp500,000-Rp2,000,000 per month, indicating that iQIYI is favored by students with lower-to-middle purchasing power.

Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

The convergent validity test results show that all indicators have an *outer loading* value above 0.50 and an *Average Variance Extracted* (AVE) value above 0.50, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Validity and Reliability Test Results

Variable	Outer Loading (range)	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Remarks
e-WOM (X1)	0.785 - 0.839	0.665	0.748	0.856	Valid & Reliable
Price (X2)	0.680 - 0.792	0.544	0.721	0.826	Valid & Reliable
Brand Image (Z)	0.768 - 0.787	0.609	0.679	0.824	Valid & Reliable
Purchase Decision (Y)	0.774 - 0.849	0.661	0.828	0.886	Valid & Reliable

Source: Data processed by the researcher with SmartPLS 4.0 (2026)

All AVE values above 0.50 indicate that the indicators validly represent their constructs. The *cross loading* test results also show that each indicator has the highest loading value on its own construct compared to other constructs, so the model satisfies discriminant validity. Cronbach's Alpha ≥ 0.60 and Composite Reliability ≥ 0.70 values across all constructs show that the research instrument is reliable and suitable for structural model analysis.

Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model)

Table 2. R-Square and Q-Square Test Results

Endogenous Variable	R-Square	Adjusted R-Square	Q ² predict	Predictive Relevance
Brand Image (Z)	0.558	0.553	0.541	Yes
Purchase Decision (Y)	0.404	0.393	0.377	Yes

Source: Data processed by the researcher with SmartPLS 4.0 (2026)

The R-Square value for *brand image* of 0.558 indicates that e-WOM and price can explain 55.8% of the variance in *brand image*, while the R-Square value for purchase decision of 0.404 indicates that e-WOM, price, and *brand image* can explain 40.4% of the variance in purchase decision. Both values fall into the moderate category (Chin, 1998). The Q² values for both endogenous variables are above zero, so the research model is considered to have good predictive relevance.

Hypothesis Testing Results

Table 3. Path Coefficient Test Results (Hypothesis Testing)

Hypothesis	Path	Path Coefficient	T-Statistics	P-Values	Remarks
H1	e-WOM -> Purchase Decision	0.317	3.418	0.001	Significant (Accepted)
H2	Price -> Purchase Decision	0.335	2.863	0.004	Significant (Accepted)
H3	Brand Image -> Purchase Decision	0.070	0.701	0.484	Not Significant (Rejected)
H4	e-WOM -> Brand Image	-0.032	0.459	0.646	Not Significant (Rejected)
H5	Price -> Brand Image	0.766	13.507	0.000	Significant (Accepted)
H6	e-WOM -> Brand Image -> Purchase Decision	-0.002	0.258	0.796	Not Significant (Rejected)
H7	Price -> Brand Image -> Purchase Decision	0.054	0.694	0.488	Not Significant (Rejected)

Source: Data processed by the researcher with SmartPLS 4.0 (2026)

Discussion

The test results show that e-WOM has a significant effect on purchase decisions (H1 accepted), supported by descriptive findings that the *content* indicator (mean 2.91) received the highest rating compared to *valence of opinion* (2.63) and *intensity* (2.55). This means that the quality and clarity of review content play a greater role than the frequency of reviews circulating. This finding is consistent with Yulindasari & Fikriyah (2022), Shandy et al. (2025), Apriliani & Setyawati (2023), Darmawan & Setiawan (2024), Fietroh & Rizqi (2025), Inayati et al. (2022), Putri et al. (2024), and Sanjaya & Budiono (2021), who also found a significant effect of e-WOM on purchase decisions.

Price also has a significant effect on purchase decisions (H2 accepted), with the price-quality conformity indicator receiving the highest mean (3.27). Consumers evaluate price not merely in terms of cheapness, but rather in terms of whether it is proportionate to the content quality received. This result is consistent with Yasmine (2021), Khutba (2022), Irmasari & Umam (2025), Nurwidianti & Gusti (2025), Ramadhani & Ahmadi (2024), Rozaq & Suwitho (2025), Susilowati & Utari (2022), Syafulloh et al. (2021), Tarigan et al. (2023), and Wicaksono et al. (2023).

In contrast, *brand image* does not have a significant effect on purchase decisions (H3 rejected), consistent with Listyarso & Yulianto (2023) and Irawanti (2024), but differing from Pramana & Rahmawati (2026) in the context of Disney+ Hotstar. This finding indicates that Generation Z prioritizes concrete benefits (content quality, price, ease of access) over brand perception. e-WOM also has no significant effect on *brand image* (H4 rejected), consistent with Angellina et al. (2023) and Widiya et al. (2025), suggesting that iQIYI's brand image is shaped more by users' direct experience than by digital reviews alone.

Price has a significant and strong effect on *brand image* (H5 accepted, coefficient 0.766), consistent with Melati et al. (2021), Tarigan et al. (2023), Triana & Hidayat (2023), Rajagukguk et al. (2025), Yaqin et al. (2023), and Tojiri (2025), showing that competitive pricing that is proportionate to the benefits received can strengthen iQIYI's brand image in consumers' minds.

Because the path from *brand image* to purchase decision is not significant, *brand image* is also unable to mediate the effect of e-WOM (H6 rejected) or price (H7 rejected) on purchase

decisions. This finding is consistent with Angellina et al. (2023), Widiya et al. (2025), and Sejati & Sumiati (2026) for the e-WOM path, and with Triana & Hidayat (2023), Mumin et al. (2024), and Rahmawati & Solagracia (2024) for the price path, but differs from Fietroh & Rizqi (2025) and Irmasari & Umam (2025). These results suggest that Generation Z iQIYI users in Madiun make subscription decisions directly based on reviews and price, without going through a brand image formation process first.

D. CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) and price have a significant effect on purchase decisions for iQIYI's service among Generation Z in Madiun, whereas brand image has no significant effect on purchase decisions or on e-WOM. Price is shown to have a significant and strong effect on the formation of brand image, yet the mediating role of brand image in the relationship between e-WOM or price and purchase decisions is not statistically significant. These findings indicate that Generation Z in Madiun decides to subscribe to iQIYI based directly on the quality of user reviews and price suitability, without requiring a brand image formation process as an intermediary. Theoretically, these results contribute to the study of brand image mediation models in the context of video-on-demand applications in Indonesia, while also showing that a direct path can dominate among digital-native consumer segments such as Generation Z.

E. SUGGESTIONS

For iQIYI's management, it is recommended to prioritize the quality of user review content, for example through collaboration with content creators or structured review programs that discuss content and feature comparisons in a specific manner, as well as maintaining a pricing strategy that is transparent and proportionate to the content quality offered. Given that brand image has not been shown to act as a mediator, iQIYI should not focus solely on brand-image strategies, but should also strengthen functional aspects such as content quality and variety, application stability, and the overall viewing experience.

For future researchers, it is recommended to expand the sample beyond Generation Z in Madiun City so that the results can be more generalizable, and to consider other intervening

variables that may be more relevant, such as trust, customer satisfaction, or perceived value, given that brand image in this study was not shown to act as a mediator. The use of a longitudinal or mixed-method approach is also recommended to capture the dynamics of e-WOM and price perceptions, which change rapidly in the digital streaming industry.

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