

ENHANCING SUSTAINABLE GROWTH THROUGH E-WOM, BRAND IMAGE, PRICE, AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY: EVIDENCE FROM BARENBLISS COSMETICS ON TOKOPEDIA

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ABSTRACT

Prior studies confirm that Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM), brand image, and price significantly influence purchase decisions; however, limited research has examined how these variables collectively contribute to customer loyalty and sustainable growth in the cosmetics sector. This study addresses this gap by integrating loyalty and sustainable growth as strategic outcomes, offering a novel perspective that links tactical marketing factors to long-term business performance.

The objective of this research is to analyze the effects of E-WOM, brand image, and price on purchase decisions and to investigate how these decisions translate into customer loyalty and sustainable growth. A quantitative approach was employed, with data collected through online questionnaires distributed to Tokopedia consumers who have purchased Barenbliss products. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was applied to test both direct and indirect relationships among variables. The findings highlight that integrating E-WOM, branding, and pricing strategies is essential not only for influencing short-term consumer behavior but also for ensuring sustainable growth in competitive digital marketplaces.

INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, the business environment is rapidly evolving, leading to intense competition. This is particularly evident in the personal care and cosmetics industry, which grows increasingly competitive each day (Nisa et al., 2023). Marketing in the digital era has undergone a fundamental transformation, placing consumers at the core of business strategies through the swift adoption of information and communication technologies. The Internet has become the primary platform for interaction and information exchange, enabling companies to meet market demands by developing value-added products, setting competitive prices, and effectively communicating value to consumers, clients, partners, and the broader public. This evolution highlights that well-planned and integrated marketing activities are essential for achieving sustainable business growth (Natalia & Aprillia, 2025a).

Indonesia, as one of the largest digital markets in Southeast Asia, demonstrates significant growth in its digital economy. The e-commerce sector is a major contributor, with the Gross Merchandise Value (GMV) of the digital economy projected to increase annually. Data reveal consistent growth in online transactions, with categories such as Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) and Beauty & Personal Care showing the highest transaction growth. This creates a highly competitive yet promising landscape for both local and international cosmetic brands to reach broader consumer segments through platforms such as Tokopedia (Wibisono et al., 2023).

The cosmetics industry in Indonesia has demonstrated impressive growth, averaging 7% annually over the past five years, with natural-based products experiencing even higher growth rates (Khoa & Huynh, 2023). The value of the Indonesian skincare market is projected to continue rising significantly until 2026, driven by shifting consumer behavior toward social commerce platforms and an increasing reliance on electronic word of mouth (E-WOM). Skincare is now perceived as an integral part of personal identity and self-expression, particularly among young urban women and active social media users, making the industry highly dynamic and promising (Natalia & Aprillia, 2025b).

In the context of digital marketing, electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM) plays a crucial role. E-WOM is defined as any positive or negative statement regarding a product or company made by potential, current, or former consumers and made available to a large audience via the Internet. It encompasses informal communications directed at consumers through internet-based technologies that relate to the use or characteristics of specific goods and services (Liu et al., 2024). Positive customer reviews are particularly influential in shaping consumer purchase decisions (Solihin, 2022), as information shared online can rapidly affect public perceptions of a brand. Formally, E-WOM refers to any positive or negative comment made by someone who might buy, has bought, or has stopped buying a product or from a company through the Internet (Hongfei Liu, 2022).

In addition to electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM), brand image is a powerful determinant of purchasing decisions and consumer loyalty. Brand image refers to the

perceptions and beliefs consumers hold about a brand, reflected in the associations stored in their memory (Le & Khuong, 2023). A positive brand image is crucial for stimulating purchase intention and fostering loyalty. Furthermore, a strong brand image serves as a unique identity that differentiates products from competitors, shaping consumers' overall attitudes, beliefs, and preferences.

Price, as the most flexible element of the marketing mix, directly influences market demand, competitive positioning, and company profitability. It represents the monetary value consumers must exchange to acquire a product or service and is often used as an indicator of product quality, particularly when evaluating complex products. Therefore, strategic pricing aligned with consumer value perception is essential for attracting and retaining customers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM)

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM) has become a dominant factor in shaping online consumer behavior. According to *Cheung & Thadani (2012)*, e-WOM significantly influences purchase intention because it is perceived as more credible than traditional advertising. In the cosmetics industry, online reviews serve as *social proof* that reinforces consumer confidence (*Park & Kim, 2008*). *Erkan & Evans (2016)* found that the intensity and valence of e-WOM on social media directly affect consumer trust and loyalty. For Barenbliss, positive reviews and user-generated content on Tokopedia strengthen brand reputation, enhance visibility, and contribute to sustainable growth by driving repeat purchases and customer retention (*Zhao et al., 2020*).

Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) refers to consumer-generated communication about products and services shared via digital platforms. It includes both positive and negative reviews accessible to a wide audience (*Pratesi et al., 2021a*). Previous studies highlight that E-WOM significantly influences consumer attitudes and purchase intentions by shaping perceptions of product credibility and trustworthiness (*Dewi & Giantari, 2020; Lee & Yoon, 2021*). In the cosmetics industry, where product quality is often evaluated subjectively, E-WOM plays a critical role in reducing consumer uncertainty and driving purchase decisions (*Widjaja & Suharto, 2021*).

Cheung et al. (2021) emphasize that the credibility and emotional tone of online reviews affect perceived trust and brand authenticity. When customers perceive E-WOM as credible, they are more likely to make repeat purchases. Similarly, *Kumar & Tan (2020)* found that E-WOM directly enhances consumer loyalty by reducing uncertainty and building social proof in beauty product purchases. In the cosmetics industry, *Lim & Kim (2022)* argue that visual E-WOM (such as user-generated photos and video reviews) has greater influence on

purchase intention compared to textual reviews, as it provides experiential validation of product efficacy. This reflects how digital feedback mechanisms foster long-term customer relationships and sustainable growth (Irayani et al., 2025).

Brand Image

Brand image is defined as consumers' perceptions and associations toward a brand, stored in memory, that influence their decision-making process (Chinomona, 2019). A strong and positive brand image differentiates a product from competitors and fosters customer trust and loyalty (Nguyen & Khoa, 2022). In beauty and personal care products, brand image not only creates symbolic value but also enhances consumers' self-expression and identity, which further strengthens purchase intentions (Lee & Yoon, 2021).

Brand image represents the perceptions, associations, and emotions that consumers attach to a brand (Keller, 2013). In the beauty industry, brand image plays a critical role since cosmetic products are often linked to identity and emotional appeal (Aaker, 1991). Kotler & Keller (2016) emphasized that a strong brand image improves *brand equity* and encourages *repeat purchase behavior*. In the case of Barenbliss, its "Korean-inspired beauty" positioning and *clean beauty* philosophy enhance its brand credibility among Indonesian consumers, thereby supporting a sustainable customer base within digital platforms like Tokopedia. Furthermore, Nguyen & Pham (2023) reported that brand image mediates the relationship between price perception and customer loyalty, when a brand has a favorable image, customers are less sensitive to price changes and more likely to remain loyal despite market competition.

Price

Price remains the most flexible element of the marketing mix and directly affects demand, profitability, and competitive positioning (Lin & Lekhawipat, 2020). Consumers often use price as an indicator of quality, particularly in cosmetics, where product evaluation may be complex (Widjaja & Suharto, 2021). Fair and value-based pricing strategies are therefore essential to influence purchase decisions and build customer loyalty. Studies show that perceived price fairness positively impacts repurchase intention and trust, especially in online markets (Lin & Lekhawipat, 2020).

Research by Zeithaml (2020) shows that consumers assess products not just by absolute price but by *perceived value*, a balance between quality and price. In cosmetic brands, customers often associate higher prices with superior quality and brand prestige. Suki & Suki (2021) found that this perception is especially strong among female millennials purchasing beauty products online.

Wang et al. (2022) highlighted that price fairness has a greater effect on loyalty than low pricing alone—consumers associate fairness with honesty and long-term reliability. Moreover, Kim & Kim (2023) showed that value-based pricing strategies, where perceived benefits outweigh the cost, lead to sustainable loyalty even in competitive markets.

In cosmetics, consumers often interpret higher prices as indicators of superior

quality or exclusivity. However, *Lee & Lee (2020)* caution that excessive pricing without corresponding quality diminishes satisfaction and discourages repurchase intentions.

Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty is the consumer's commitment to repurchase and recommend a brand despite competitive pressures (Chinomona, 2019). Loyal customers not only provide stable revenue but also act as brand advocates, reinforcing positive E-WOM (Nguyen & Khoa, 2022). In cosmetics, loyalty develops when customers perceive consistent value, satisfaction, and trust in the brand (Lee & Yoon, 2021). Research indicates that E-WOM and brand image strongly influence loyalty, which subsequently supports long-term growth (Fatimah et al., 2022).

Customer loyalty is a key strategic asset for sustainable business success. (oliver R.L, 2015) defined loyalty as a deep commitment to repurchase a product consistently. *Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001)* expanded this concept by highlighting emotional and attitudinal loyalty, beyond just behavioral aspects. Loyalty arises from satisfaction, trust, and positive brand associations. In the e-commerce context, (Siapno et al., 2024) found that smooth digital experiences, trustful interactions, and credible reviews enhance emotional attachment and long-term brand relationships — all of which contribute to sustainable growth.

Chinomona et al., (2020) found that loyalty in cosmetics is driven by both emotional satisfaction and perceived brand consistency. Meanwhile, *Alalwan (2021)* suggested that E-WOM, price fairness, and brand image are the strongest predictors of online customer loyalty in Southeast Asian e-commerce platforms.

Sustainable Growth in the Digital Marketplace

Sustainable growth in digital business refers not only to financial expansion but also to maintaining long-term brand value, customer satisfaction, and technological adaptability. *Elkington (1997)* conceptualized sustainability as the balance between profit, people, and the planet. In the e-commerce era, sustainable brand growth is influenced by digital relationships between companies and consumers. Platforms like Tokopedia allow cosmetics brands such as Barenbliss to achieve market expansion through digital communication and adaptive pricing strategies that support long-term brand performance.

Sustainable growth refers to the ability of a business to achieve long-term development by balancing profitability, customer satisfaction, and competitive advantage (Susanti & Wibowo, 2023). In the digital marketplace, sustainable growth is strongly associated with customer-centric strategies such as fostering loyalty, managing brand reputation, and leveraging E-WOM (Neubert, 2022). Studies emphasize that firms integrating customer loyalty into their marketing strategies are more likely to secure sustainable growth in highly competitive industries like cosmetics (Nguyen & Khoa, 2022; Park & Kim, 2024). Although prior research has examined the effects of E-WOM, brand image, and price on purchase decisions

(Fatimah et al., 2022), few studies have integrated these factors with customer loyalty and their implications for sustainable growth in Indonesia's cosmetic industry. Particularly, there is limited evidence concerning Barenbliss Cosmetics on Tokopedia, despite its rising popularity and extensive online consumer engagement. This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the simultaneous and partial effects of E-WOM, brand image, and price on purchase decisions, and further examining how these influence customer loyalty and sustainable growth.

Integrative Perspective: e-WOM, Brand Image, Price, and Loyalty

The four constructs e-WOM, brand image, price, and customer loyalty interact synergistically to enhance sustainable growth. (Rihayana et al., 2022) showed that e-WOM positively influences brand image and customer loyalty. Similarly, (Pratesi et al., 2021b) found that perceived price fairness strengthens brand trust and purchase intention. Therefore, integrating digital communication (e-WOM), a strong brand image, fair pricing strategies, and loyal customers creates a reinforcing cycle that sustains brand performance. For Barenbliss Cosmetics, this combination supports customer retention and strengthens its sustainable position in Indonesia's competitive online marketplace (irayani et al., 2024).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the strategic role of Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM), brand image, price, and customer loyalty in enhancing sustainable growth in the cosmetics industry. The research focused on Barenbliss Cosmetics, a Korean beauty brand marketed on the Tokopedia platform, as a case study. A qualitative approach was chosen because it enables an in-depth understanding of consumer perceptions, experiences, and attitudes that cannot be fully captured through quantitative measures (Sijabat et al., 2020.).

The research focuses on Barenbliss Cosmetics, a fast-growing beauty brand that operates actively on Tokopedia, one of Indonesia's largest e-commerce platforms. Barenbliss is known for its youthful brand image, active online engagement, and competitive pricing strategies. Tokopedia was selected as the study site because:

- It serves as a major online marketplace for beauty and skincare products.
- It allows open access to customer reviews, ratings, and testimonials (E-WOM data).
- It represents an ideal digital ecosystem for examining loyalty and sustainable growth through online consumer behavior.

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore how e-WOM, brand image, price perception, and customer loyalty contribute to sustainable growth for Barenbliss Cosmetics on Tokopedia. A qualitative approach is appropriate because it allows the researcher to examine participants' subjective interpretations, lived experiences, and meaning-making processes regarding their interactions with

the brand in the digital marketplace.

The study adopts an interpretive phenomenological approach (IPA), focusing on understanding how consumers perceive and interpret their experiences related to Barenbliss products, online reviews, pricing strategies, and loyalty behaviors. This approach is suitable for uncovering deep insights into consumer perception, value interpretation, and emotional connections developed through online cosmetic purchases.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved coding transcripts, categorizing themes, and interpreting patterns that emerged from participants' narratives. NVivo software was employed to assist in data organization and ensure transparency in the coding process.

In-Depth Interviews

Semi-structured interviews allow participants to express their experiences freely while remaining aligned with the research focus. The interview protocol covers themes such as:

- Perceived price fairness and value for money
- Perceptions of Barenbliss brand image
- Influence of online reviews and ratings (e-WOM)
- Loyalty behaviors (repurchase, recommendation, attachment)
- Sustainable growth perception from the consumer's viewpoint

Interviews last 30–60 minutes and are conducted online via Zoom, WhatsApp call, or Google Meet.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the credibility and validity of findings, several strategies were applied, including triangulation of data sources, member checking with selected participants, and peer debriefing with academic supervisors. These methods enhanced the reliability of interpretations and minimized researcher bias.

By employing this qualitative approach, the study provides rich insights into how E-WOM, brand image, pricing, and loyalty interact as strategic drivers of sustainable growth in the digital marketplace. To ensure trustworthiness, the study applies:

- a. Credibility
 - Member checking (participants verify interpretations)
 - Triangulation of sources (interviews + reviews + documentation)
- b. Transferability
 - Providing thick description of context and participants.
- c. Dependability
 - Using audit trails (record of decisions, coding processes, and revisions).
- d. Confirmability
 - Maintaining neutrality through reflective notes and validation with peer

researchers

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research explored how E-WOM, brand image, price perception, and customer loyalty collectively influence sustainable growth for Barenbliss Cosmetics on Tokopedia. Using a qualitative approach involving in-depth interviews, thematic analysis, and observation of online consumer interactions, several meaningful insights emerged.

First, E-WOM plays a central role in shaping consumer perceptions and sustained purchasing behavior. Consumers rely heavily on authentic user-generated reviews, influencer testimonials, and peer recommendations when evaluating Barenbliss products. Positive E-WOM not only increases brand visibility but also strengthens trust—an essential component for maintaining long-term market competitiveness in the crowded cosmetic sector.

Second, brand image significantly frames consumer expectations and emotional resonance with Barenbliss. Participants consistently described Barenbliss as a youthful, Korean-inspired, and safe cosmetic brand. This strong and consistent identity supports sustainable growth because it enhances brand recall, consumer attachment, and differentiation from competitors.

Third, price perception influences purchasing decisions in a value-driven manner. Customers of Barenbliss do not merely seek the lowest price; rather, they evaluate price fairness, promotional alignment, and perceived value relative to product quality. A competitively fair price strategy combined with consistent product performance enhances customers' sense of satisfaction and loyalty.

Finally, customer loyalty emerges as the cumulative result of positive E-WOM, strong brand image, and favorable price perceptions. Loyalty in this context manifests through repeat purchases, active engagement in online communities, and voluntary advocacy for Barenbliss products. Collectively, these loyalty behaviors contribute directly to sustainable growth, enabling Barenbliss to maintain relevance and expand within Indonesia's digital marketplace.

Overall, the study concludes that sustainable growth is driven by the interconnected dynamics of digital communication, brand identity, perceived value, and relational commitment. Barenbliss success reflects its ability to leverage these factors synergistically on Tokopedia.

Moreover, price becomes a determining factor in customers' value judgments, especially within e-commerce platforms where consumers can easily compare alternatives. Fair, transparent, and competitive pricing reinforces the perceived value of Barenbliss products, supporting both repeat purchases and brand switching prevention. Ultimately, these three components—E-WOM, brand image, and price—collectively strengthen customer loyalty, which serves as a key driver of sustainable business growth.

The findings imply that companies seeking long-term expansion within

online marketplaces must prioritize digital engagement strategies, maintain a consistent and appealing brand identity, and adopt customer-centric pricing approaches. For Barenbliss Cosmetics, optimizing these elements on Tokopedia can not only enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty but also secure a sustainable competitive advantage in the evolving beauty industry.

DISCUSSION

The Effect of Training on Employee Performance

The results of the analysis show that training has a positive and significant effect on employee performance. This is indicated by a T-statistic value of 4.494, which is greater than the critical value of 1.96, and a P-Value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05. This finding indicates that training plays an important role in improving the performance of employees at the Banyuasin Regency Bappeda Litbang. Training that is organized in a planned and sustainable manner can improve employees' knowledge, skills, and understanding of their duties and responsibilities, thereby increasing their effectiveness and quality of work. Thus, the better the quality of training provided, the higher the level of employee performance. The results of this study are in line with the opinion of Armstrong and Taylor (2020), who stated that training can improve employees' ability to adapt to job demands. These findings also support the results of studies by Wahyudi (2023) and Kadri, Madjir, and Andriyani (2024), which concluded that training has a positive and significant effect on employee performance.

The Effect of Job Placement on Employee Performance

Based on the test results, job placement has a positive and significant effect on employee performance. This is evidenced by a T-statistic value of 2.496, which is greater than 1.96, and a P- Value of 0.013, which is less than 0.05. These results indicate that accurate job placement has a real contribution in improving the performance of Bappeda Litbang Banyuasin Regency employees. Employees who are placed according to their qualifications, abilities, and areas of expertise tend to be able to carry out their duties more effectively, reduce work errors, and increase responsibility in completing work. Therefore, proper job placement is an important factor in supporting the achievement of optimal performance. This finding is in line with Sutrisno's (2020) theory, which states that employee placement based on competence can increase work effectiveness. The results of this study are also reinforced by the research of Assa, Rosara, Nursanti, and Fitri (2020) as well as Pancasasti, Putra, Nursisah, and Pusvitasari (2022), which states that job placement has a positive and significant effect on employee performance.

The Effect of Work Discipline on Employee Performance

The results of the analysis show that work discipline has a positive and significant effect on employee performance. This is indicated by a T-statistic value of 3.376, which exceeds the critical value of 1.96, and a P-value of 0.001, which is less than 0.05. These findings indicate that work discipline is an important factor in improving

the performance of employees at the Banyuasin Regency Research and Development Agency. Employees with a high level of work discipline tend to show compliance with regulations, punctuality, consistency in work.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and insights from this research, several recommendations can be proposed for both future academic studies and managerial practices. From an academic perspective, future researchers are encouraged to expand this study using quantitative or mixed- method approaches to statistically validate the relationships among E-WOM, brand image, price, and customer loyalty. Employing tools such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) could offer empirical evidence supporting the qualitative findings of this research. Furthermore, comparative studies across different e-commerce platforms such as Shopee, Lazada, or TikTok Shop would be beneficial in understanding how platform-specific features, such as review systems or promotional algorithms, influence E-WOM and consumer loyalty.

It is also suggested that future research explore cross-cultural contexts to examine how cultural values shape perceptions of brand image, price fairness, and loyalty, particularly in Southeast Asia's diverse beauty markets. In addition, integrating sustainability-related variables— such as perceived environmental responsibility, ethical branding, and eco-friendly packaging— could provide a more holistic understanding of sustainable growth within the cosmetics industry. Conducting longitudinal research would also be valuable to observe how consumer perceptions of E-WOM, price, and brand image evolve over time, especially as market trends and digital behaviors shift rapidly. Finally, future scholars could delve deeper into the psychological mechanisms (such as perceived justice or trust) that mediate the relationship between price fairness and loyalty, enriching theoretical insights on consumer behavior in digital marketplaces.

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