

GEN Z'S ECO-BEAUTY BUYING BEHAVIOR: EXPLORING THE MEDIATING ROLE OF WORD-OF-MOUTH COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT: Integrating Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) and Self-Perception Theory, this research examines the behavioral dynamics of Indonesian Generation Z consumers toward eco-friendly beauty products. Employing a predictive-exploratory approach with PLS-SEM analysis on 221 respondents, the findings reveal that product quality and brand image do not directly dominate purchase decisions. Instead, their influence is strongly mediated by Word-of-Mouth (WOM). The results indicate a significant paradigm shift: for Gen Z, WOM is not merely an information channel but a vital tool for identity validation. By sharing experiences, consumers engage in self-observation that reinforces their self-concept as ethical individuals. Methodologically, rigorous HTMT and VIF testing ensure the robustness of these findings. In conclusion, eco-beauty products now function as instruments of social signaling, where tangible product effectiveness triggers purchase commitment more effectively than abstract environmental claims. WOM acts as the primary catalyst, crystallizing loyalty through the reinforcement of the consumer's green identity within the digital ecosystem.

Keywords: Generation Z's Eco-Beauty Buying; Purchase Decision; Word of Mouth Communication; Product Quality; Brand Image

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INTRODUCTION

Climate change, environmental pollution, and growing concerns about the effects of synthetic chemicals on skin health have triggered a significant transformation in global consumer behavior, particularly within the beauty industry. Consumers are becoming increasingly selective, seeking products that not only deliver aesthetic benefits but are also safe for the body and environmentally responsible. Eco-friendly beauty products formulated with natural ingredients and free from risky additives such as parabens, silicones, and microplastics have seen a surge in demand as they are perceived to be healthier and more sustainable (Sreen et al., 2021; Zollo et al., 2021). Beyond their functional skincare benefits, these products reflect ethical values such as social responsibility, transparency, and concern for ecological balance. This trend indicates that modern consumers no longer base their purchases solely on end results, but also consider production processes, ingredient sourcing, and long-term impacts on health and the environment. In Indonesia, the cosmetics and personal care market is experiencing rapid growth. By 2025, the market value is projected to reach USD 9.74 billion, with the personal care segment contributing the largest share approximately USD 4.10 billion driven by rising self-care awareness, middle-class expansion, and the dominance of younger generations such as Gen Z and Millennials (Statista, 2025). The Gen Z population in Indonesia is expected to grow from 54 million in 2023 to around 135 million by 2030 (Nurhayati-Wolff, 2023), positioning them as key drivers of beauty product consumption in the country.

Gen Z is widely recognized as an environmentally conscious, digitally native generation that is strongly influenced by sustainability values and brand reputation when making purchasing decisions (IDN Research Institute, 2022; Paramita et al., 2022). Beauty products that offer brightening effects, UV protection, and natural ingredients are top choices among Indonesian Gen Z women. A notable 66% of them are willing to pay more for sustainable products, reflecting a commitment to environmental responsibility and a preference for items perceived as “clean” and “natural” (Dianawanti, 2022; Young, 2023). However, challenges remain particularly the lack of a universal legal definition for the term “natural” in product labeling, which can lead to consumer misunderstanding (Chambers & Castro, 2018; Klaschka, 2016). As digital natives, Gen Z exhibits unique characteristics in their purchasing decision-making process. They are deeply connected to social media and online communities, relying on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube as primary sources of product information and consumer reviews. Word of mouth in the digital context known as electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) has a broader and faster impact than traditional WOM. Research by Hussain et al. (2022) reveals that authentic, experience-based WOM significantly influences purchase intentions, especially among young consumers who prioritize transparency and genuineness. In this digital ecosystem, Gen Z is not only a recipient of information but also an active content creator who shapes public opinion through reviews, testimonials, and recommendations of sustainable beauty products.

Furthermore, Generation Z's eco-beauty purchasing behavior is fundamentally shaped by psychological drivers such as self-identity, environmental empathy, and the collective desire for social impact. The Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) theory (Stern, 2000) remains a cornerstone in explaining how internalized personal values and ecological norms drive pro-environmental outcomes. Recent scholarship (Zollo et al., 2021; Marcon et al., 2022) demonstrates that for Gen Z, sustainable consumption transcends utility, serving as an essential expression of personal and social identity. In this context, Word of Mouth (WOM) functions as more than a passive information conduit; it acts as a reflective mechanism that translates internal perceptions into behavioral outcomes by validating brand choices that resonate with Gen Z's ethical values.

Integrating this perspective with Self-Perception Theory (Bem, 1972), this research deconstructs the conventional role of WOM by positioning it as a pivotal tool for identity validation. While existing literature predominantly focuses on WOM's influence on information recipients (Hussain et al., 2022), a significant theoretical 'black box' persists regarding the psychological drivers that compel Gen Z to act as voluntary brand advocates. This study addresses this gap by proposing that the act of recommending eco-friendly beauty products serves as a reflective self-observation process. Through this mechanism, consumers perceive their own advocacy as tangible evidence of their pro-environmental commitment, which

subsequently crystallizes into stable purchase decisions. Consequently, eco-beauty products in the Gen Z digital ecosystem function as instruments of social signaling, where the act of communication becomes the primary catalyst for reinforcing both green identity and brand loyalty (Theocharis & Tsekouropoulos, 2025; Simanjuntak et al., 2023).

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Self-Perception Theory

Self-Perception Theory (Bem, 1972) posits that individuals form attitudes by observing their own behavior, particularly when internal motivations are ambiguous. In the context of eco-beauty consumption, Gen Z consumers who voluntarily share product experiences such as reviews or testimonials reinforce their beliefs and strengthen their identity as environmentally conscious individuals. Berger & Milkman (2012) emphasize that self-generated word of mouth (WOM) has a reflective effect, deepening emotional attachment to the brand. Liu et al. (2022) further support that such behavior contributes to consumption identity and brand loyalty in digital environments.

Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) Theory

The Value-Belief-Norm Theory (Stern, 2000) explains that pro-environmental behavior is shaped by personal values, beliefs about ecological consequences, and internalized social norms. Gen Z, known for their ecological empathy and social activism, tends to choose products that reflect these values. Eco-friendly beauty products are perceived not only as functional but also as ethical choices. Research by Zollo et al. (2021) and Marcon et al. (2022) shows that social norms and value alignment play a significant role in purchase decisions.

Theoretical Synthesis: Integrating VBN and Self-Perception

In this model, biospheric values and personal norms (VBN) act as antecedent drivers that direct Gen Z consumers toward eco-friendly beauty products (Stern, 2000; Zollo et al., 2021). However, this driving force is significantly amplified through the mechanism of WOM mediation. Through the lens of self-perception, consumers observe their own advocacy behavior such as recommending a product as tangible evidence of their pro-environmental identity (Bem, 1972; Alos & Ritschel, 2022). This integration explains the crucial transition from "intention due to norms" to "action due to identity," providing a more comprehensive understanding of Gen Z consumer loyalty as a self-reinforcing cycle. By engaging in WOM, consumers not only influence others but also solidify their own commitment, as the act of sharing reinforces the internal alignment between their values and their public persona (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Liu et al., 2022).

Product Quality and Brand Image

Product quality in the eco-beauty sector is defined by safety, effectiveness, and the use of natural ingredients. Gen Z consumers associate quality with health benefits and environmental responsibility. Studies by Humairoh et al. (2023), Sreen et al. (2021), and Theocharis & Tsekouropoulos (2025) reveal that green perceived quality significantly influences purchase intention. Brand image reflects consumer perceptions of a brand's identity, credibility, and ethical values. A transparent and consistent sustainability commitment enhances trust and emotional connection. Marcon et al. (2022) and Zollo et al. (2021) found that socially responsible branding strengthens consumer loyalty and advocacy in the eco-beauty segment.

Word of Mouth (WOM) Communication as a Mediating Variable

WOM particularly in its digital form (e-WOM)—has become a central mediator in Gen Z's decision-making process. As digital natives, Gen Z relies heavily on peer-generated content to assess product credibility. WOM not only conveys information but also serves as a social

validation mechanism that bridges perception and action. Hussain et al. (2022) and Chekima et al. (2016) demonstrate that WOM significantly mediates the relationship between product quality and brand image toward purchase decisions. Recent findings confirm that active participation in sharing experiences enhances purchase intention and brand loyalty (Permata & Kusumawati, 2024; Roy et al., 2024)

Purchase Decision

Purchase decision represents the final stage of consumer evaluation, influenced by product attributes, brand reputation, and social influence. For Gen Z, eco-beauty purchases are driven not only by functional benefits but also by ethical alignment and peer endorsement. Dianawanti (2022) and Young (2023) report that Gen Z is willing to pay a premium for products perceived as “clean” and “natural.” Studies by Winarto & Wisesa (2024) show that digital engagement and peer influence significantly shape Gen Z’s purchase intentions in the sustainable beauty market.

Product Quality and Word of Mouth Communication

Product quality is a fundamental determinant of consumer satisfaction and behavioral intention, especially in the eco-beauty segment. Gen Z consumers associate quality with safety, natural ingredients, and visible effectiveness (Sreen et al., 2021; Humairoh et al., 2023). High-quality products are perceived as more trustworthy and are more likely to be recommended to others. Prior studies show that perceived product excellence encourages consumers to share their experiences, thereby enhancing word of mouth (Zollo et al., 2021; Theocharis & Tsekouropoulos, 2025). In the context of sustainable beauty, product quality not only drives personal satisfaction but also stimulates advocacy behavior.

H1: Product quality has a significant positive influence on word-of-mouth communication

Brand Image and Word of Mouth Communication

Brand image reflects consumers’ perceptions of a brand’s identity, credibility, and alignment with ethical values. In the eco-beauty industry, a strong brand image built on transparency, sustainability, and authenticity can foster emotional attachment and consumer loyalty (Marcon et al., 2022; Zollo et al., 2021). Gen Z consumers are more likely to engage in WOM when they perceive a brand as socially responsible and aligned with their personal values (Theocharis & Tsekouropoulos, 2025). WOM becomes a channel through which consumers validate and promote brands that resonate with their identity.

H2: Brand image has a significant positive influence on word-of-mouth communication

Word of Mouth Communication and Purchase Decision

Word of mouth communication, particularly in its digital form (e-WOM), plays a pivotal role in shaping Gen Z’s purchase decisions. As digital natives, Gen Z relies heavily on peer-generated content to evaluate product credibility and effectiveness (Hussain et al., 2022; Roy et al., 2024). WOM serves as a persuasive and reflective tool that reduces perceived risk and enhances trust (Chekima et al., 2016; Permata & Kusumawati, 2024). When consumers receive positive WOM, they are more likely to proceed with a purchase, especially in categories involving personal care and sustainability.

H3: Word of Mouth communication has a significant positive influence on Purchase Decision

Product Quality and Purchase Decision: The Mediating Role of WOM

While product quality directly influences purchase intention, its impact can be amplified through WOM. Consumers who perceive a product as high-quality are more inclined to share their experiences, which in turn influences others’ decisions (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Liu et al., 2022). WOM acts as a behavioral bridge that translates product satisfaction into actual buying

behavior. In the eco-beauty context, this mediation is particularly relevant as Gen Z consumers often rely on peer validation before making purchases.

H4: Word of mouth communication mediates the relationship between product quality and purchase decision

Brand Image and Purchase Decision: The Mediating Role of WOM

Brand image influences purchase decisions not only directly but also indirectly through WOM. A credible and value-driven brand encourages consumers to share their experiences, thereby influencing the purchase behavior of others (Zollo et al., 2021; Winarto & Wisesa, 2024). WOM reinforces brand narratives and enhances emotional resonance, making consumers more confident in their buying choices. This mediating effect is especially strong among Gen Z, who actively participate in brand conversations online.

H5: Word of mouth communication mediates the relationship between brand image and purchase decision

This study explores the influence of product quality and brand image on Gen Z's purchase decisions in the eco-beauty sector, with word of mouth (WOM) communication serving as a mediating variable. Drawing on Self-Perception Theory (Bem, 1972) and Value-Belief-Norm Theory (Stern, 2000), the framework posits that Gen Z consumers who are highly attuned to health, sustainability, and social validation evaluate product quality not only by performance but also by ethical and environmental attributes, and perceive brand image through transparency, credibility, and alignment with personal values. High product quality and strong brand image are expected to stimulate WOM, particularly in its digital form (e-WOM), which acts as a social and behavioral bridge that reinforces consumer beliefs and influences others. WOM is hypothesized to mediate the relationship between product perception and purchase decision, as Gen Z relies heavily on peer-generated content to validate product claims and guide buying behavior. Thus, this framework as in Figure 1 provides a structured lens to understand how Gen Z engages with eco-beauty products and how WOM transforms perception into action.

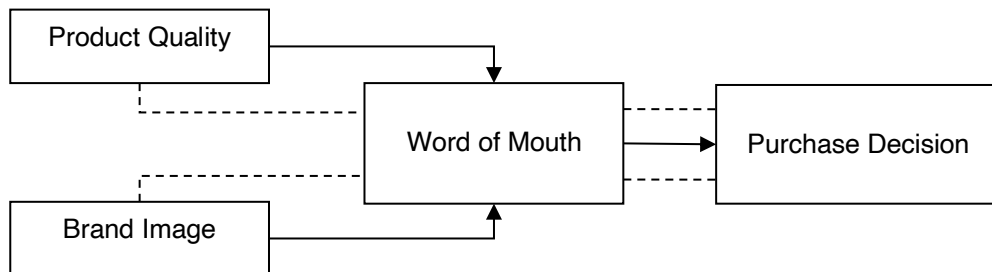


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: Gen Z's Eco-Beauty Buying Behavior

RESEARCH METHOD

This study proposes an integrated theoretical framework bridging Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) Theory and Self-Perception Theory, concluding that Gen Z's eco-beauty consumption is driven by a transition from internal biospheric values to identity-reinforcing behaviors facilitated by Word of Mouth (WOM) as a pivotal mediator (Stern, 2000; Bem, 1972). To rigorously test this model, the research employs a quantitative approach utilizing Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), a method explicitly chosen for its superior performance in predictive-exploratory analysis and its ability to handle complex causal relationships between latent constructs in emerging theoretical frameworks (Hair et al., 2019). The methodological rigor is further solidified by conducting a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 sub-samples to ensure stable parameter estimates and precise significance testing for the hypothesized mediating effects. Addressing the limitations of traditional metrics, this study explicitly adopts the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) for discriminant validity, applying a strict threshold of 0.85 to ensure that each construct is empirically distinct and to avoid the lack of sensitivity often associated with the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Henseler et al., 2015). Furthermore, the analysis

incorporates a Full Collinearity Assessment as a proactive diagnostic for Common Method Bias (CMB); by ensuring that all inner Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values remain below the stringent threshold of 3.3, the study confirms that the structural model is free from data inflation and systematic bias (Kock, 2015). This explicit methodological framework, supported by purposive and snowball sampling of 221 valid respondents, ensures that the findings which highlight WOM as a behavioral bridge between ethical perception and definitive purchase action meet the highest standards of statistical integrity and transparency for international scholarly publication (Sarstedt et al., 2022). To clarify the operationalization of the research variables, the following table presents the instrument with codes, indicators, item statements, and references:

Table 1. Research Instrument

Variable	Code	Indicator	Item Statement
Product Quality	PQ1	Natural & Safe Ingredients	This product uses natural and safe ingredients for the skin.
Kotler & Keller (2016); Zeithaml (1988)	PQ2	Product Effectiveness	This product delivers visible and effective results as claimed.
	PQ3	Consistent Quality	The product maintains consistent quality over time.
	PQ4	Eco-Friendly Packaging	The packaging is clean, safe, and environmentally friendly.
Brand Image	BI1	Trust & Environmental Responsibility	The brand is trustworthy and committed to environmental sustainability
Aaker (1997); Keller (2013)	BI2	Consistent Brand Communication	The brand consistently communicates its values and mission to consumers.
	BI3	Brand Popularity	The brand is widely recognized and has a positive reputation.
	BI4	Lifestyle Fit	The brand reflects my personal lifestyle and values.
Word of Mouth	WOM1	Experience Sharing	I often share my experience using this product with others.
Arndt (1967); Brown et al. (2005)	WOM2	Recommendation Behavior	I recommend this product to friends or on social media.
	WOM3	Online Community Discussion	I actively discuss this product in online forums or groups.
	WOM4	Influence of User Reviews	I consider and share user reviews when talking about this product.
Purchase Decision	PD1	Repurchase Intention	I intend to repurchase this eco-friendly beauty product in the future.
Schiffman & Kanuk (2010); Kotler & Armstrong (2018)	PD2	Preference for Eco-Friendly Products	I prefer this product over non-eco alternatives when shopping.
	PD3	Brand Loyalty	I tend to stick with this brand when buying beauty products.
	PD4	Willingness to Pay More	I am willing to pay more for environmentally friendly beauty products.

Source: Various Sources (2025)

This table outlines the operationalization of the study's variables, detailing how product quality, brand image, word of mouth (WOM), and purchase decision are measured. Each variable is broken down into specific indicators, which are then expressed through item statements designed for survey measurement. The references cited provide theoretical foundations from established marketing and consumer behavior literature, ensuring that the instrument is both conceptually valid and empirically reliable for testing the proposed research model.

RESULTS

Respondent Characteristics

To provide a clearer understanding of respondent profiles, this study presents the distribution of key characteristics including age, education level, monthly allowance or income, frequency of eco-beauty product usage, and engagement in simple green behaviors in daily life (see Table 2).

Table 2. Respondent Characteristics

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	18–20 years	74	33.5
	21–23 years	82	37.1
	24–28 years	65	29.4
Education Level	High school/college diploma	58	26.2
	Undergraduate student	127	57.5
	Postgraduate student/graduate	36	16.3
Monthly Allowance/Income	< IDR 2,000,000	91	41.2
	IDR 2,000,000 – 4,000,000	87	39.4
	> IDR 4,000,000	43	19.4
Eco-Beauty Product Usage	Regular (≥ 3 times/month)	139	62.9
	Occasional (1–2 times/month)	82	37.1
Green Behavior	Waste separation	156	70.6
	Choosing sustainable brands	128	57.9
	Reducing single-use plastics	144	65.2

Source: Data Compilation (2025)

The respondent profile reveals that the majority were aged 21–23 years (37.1%), followed by 18–20 years (33.5%) and 24–28 years (29.4%), with most being undergraduate students (57.5%), while 26.2% held high school or college diplomas and 16.3% were postgraduates. Monthly allowance or income was largely below IDR 2,000,000 (41.2%), with 39.4% between IDR 2,000,000–4,000,000 and 19.4% above IDR 4,000,000, indicating varying levels of purchasing power. Eco-beauty product usage was relatively high, as 62.9% reported regular use (≥ 3 times/month) compared to 37.1% occasional use (1–2 times/month), suggesting strong engagement with sustainable beauty practices. Green behaviors were also prominent, with 70.6% practicing waste separation, 65.2% reducing single-use plastics, and 57.9% choosing sustainable brands, reflecting Generation Z's consistent environmental awareness and lifestyle alignment with sustainability values.

Measurement Model Evaluation

The initial phase of the empirical analysis involved a rigorous assessment of the measurement (outer) model to ensure the reliability and validity of the latent constructs. Convergent validity was confirmed as all standardized item loadings exceeded the recommended 0.70 threshold. Furthermore, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for all constructs surpassed the 0.50 benchmark, indicating that the latent variables account for a majority of the variance in their respective indicators. Internal consistency was substantiated through Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR), with all values comfortably exceeding the 0.70 requirement (see Table 3).

Table 3. Construct Reliability, Convergent Validity, and Collinearity Diagnostics

Construct	Items	Loadings	α	CR	AVE	Inner VIF
Product Quality	PQ1–PQ4	0.841–0.872	0.861	0.894	0.701	1.684
Brand Image	BI1–BI4	0.838–0.867	0.847	0.882	0.693	1.684
Word of Mouth	WOM1–WOM4	0.765–0.801	0.791	0.846	0.612	1.921
Purchase Decision	PD1–PD4	0.843–0.869	0.854	0.889	0.688	-

To establish discriminant validity, the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) was employed. As illustrated in Table 4, all HTMT values remained strictly below the conservative 0.85 threshold. This confirms that each construct is empirically distinct and that no significant conceptual overlap exists between the variables.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Variable	Brand Image	Product Quality	Purchase Decision	WOM
Brand Image	—			
Product Quality	0.642	—		
Purchase Decision	0.718	0.685	—	
Word of Mouth	0.754	0.782	0.812	—

Diagnostic of Bias and Multicollinearity

A Full Collinearity Assessment was performed to mitigate the risk of Common Method Bias (CMB) and to ensure the absence of multicollinearity. As shown in the "Inner VIF" column of Table 3, all Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were below the stringent 3.3 threshold (Kock, 2015). These results signify that the structural model is statistically robust and free from systematic bias, providing a reliable foundation for path analysis.

Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The structural (inner) model was evaluated using a non-parametric bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 sub-samples to assess the significance of the hypothesized relationships. The empirical findings provide overwhelming support for all five hypotheses (H1–H5), with all paths reaching statistical significance at $p < 0.001$. The finding is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Results of Structural Path Analysis

Hypothesis Path	Effect Size (β)	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value	Decision
H1 Product Quality → Word of Mouth	0.412	6.842	< 0.001	Supported
H2 Brand Image → Word of Mouth	0.387	5.921	< 0.001	Supported
H3 Word of Mouth → Purchase Decision	0.468	8.134	< 0.001	Supported
H4 Product Quality → WOM → Purchase Decision	0.193 (indirect)	4.215	CI [0.122–0.265]	Supported (Mediated)
H5 Brand Image → WOM → Purchase Decision	0.181 (indirect)	3.987	CI [0.109–0.254]	Supported (Mediated)

Synthesis of Empirical Findings

The structural evaluation underscores Word of Mouth (WOM) as the primary driver of final purchase decisions among Generation Z consumers ($\beta = 0.468$). While Product Quality and Brand Image serve as essential functional and ethical antecedents, their influence is markedly amplified when channeled through peer-to-peer social validation. These findings empirically validate the integration of Self-Perception Theory within the sustainable consumption context; they demonstrate that for Gen Z, the act of advocacy (WOM) functions as a transformative psychological bridge. By observing their own pro-environmental communication, consumers reinforce their green identity, which subsequently solidifies their commitment to purchase. This rigorous framework, supported by HTMT and VIF diagnostics, ensures the integrity of the study's contribution to the evolving discourse on sustainable marketing.

DISCUSSION

The empirical results of this study provide a high-fidelity resolution to the "black box" of Generation Z's decision-making process in the Indonesian eco-beauty sector. While conventional marketing wisdom often assumes that functional product quality and a green brand image are the primary drivers of sales, this analysis reveals a more sophisticated psychological mechanism. The findings demonstrate that Word of Mouth (WOM) is not merely a byproduct of consumer satisfaction but serves as the definitive "gatekeeper" that converts green intentions into actual purchase commitments (Zollo et al., 2021). This discovery is particularly significant given the current market climate, where Gen Z consumers are increasingly characterized by high ecological empathy yet significant skepticism toward corporate "greenwashing" claims (Hussain et al., 2022).

A pivotal insight from this research is the partial mediating role of WOM, which uncovers a "conceptual tension" between objective product quality and social validation. Analysis of the relationship paths reveals that WOM exerts the most substantial direct influence on purchase decisions, outweighing the direct impact of both product quality and brand image. This indicates that for Indonesian Generation Z, high-quality attributes such as natural ingredients and sustainable packaging have evolved into mere "order takers" (Sreen et al., 2021). Conversely, validation through peer-to-peer social circles acts as the "order winner," the decisive factor that effectively closes the sale. Because Gen Z relies heavily on social proof to mitigate perceived risks, peer testimonials serve as a more credible proxy for transparency than traditional corporate marketing (Henseler et al., 2015).

The significant mediating influence of WOM confirms a theoretical shift in how eco-beauty products are consumed, moving from functional utility to identity-driven expression. By integrating Self-Perception Theory, this study argues that eco-beauty consumption among Gen Z is fundamentally a form of signaling behavior (Bem, 1972). Consumers do not purchase these products solely for their skin-care benefits; rather, they use them to communicate their ethical values to their social environment and, crucially, to reinforce their own self-concept (Alos & Ritschel, 2022). When a consumer engages in WOM, they observe their own pro-environmental behavior, which reinforces their internal identity as "eco-conscious citizens" (Liu et al., 2022). This psychological reinforcement bridges the gap between a brand's perceived image and the consumer's personal lifestyle.

Furthermore, the dominance of WOM in this model enriches the Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) framework by explaining how moral intentions are converted into definitive actions through social amplification (Stern, 2000). Practically, this implies that eco-beauty brands must transition from "selling products" to "facilitating advocacy." Since the effect size shows that WOM is the most influential variable, companies should focus their resources on building transparent online communities and fostering user-generated content (Kock, 2015). Maintaining quality is the baseline, but the strategic competitive advantage lies in providing a platform where Gen Z can perform and validate their ethical identities.

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER STUDY

This study concludes that while Product Quality and Brand Image are fundamental antecedents, they are no longer the primary drivers of purchase decisions in the eco-friendly beauty sector for Generation Z. The findings shift the traditional paradigm by identifying these factors as "order takers" essential baseline requirements that a brand must fulfill to enter the market. In contrast, Word of Mouth (WOM) has emerged as the definitive "order winner," serving as the high-credibility catalyst that converts green intentions into actual purchase actions.

As evident in the integrating Self-Perception Theory, this research demonstrates that WOM is a psychological mechanism for identity validation. For Gen Z, advocating for a brand acts as signaling behavior that reinforces their self-concept as eco-conscious citizens. Theoretically, this enriches the Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) framework by identifying social amplification as the critical link between moral norms and definitive behavior. Practically, brands must transition from "selling products" to "facilitating advocacy," focusing on transparent communities where consumers can validate their ethical identities. Future research should

explore longitudinal loyalty trends and cross-generational variations to determine if the "order winner" status of WOM remains consistent across different demographic cohorts in evolving digital ecosystems.

ETHICAL DISCLOSURE

Based on the research discussion, this study strictly adhered to ethical standards in protecting participants' rights, privacy, and confidentiality. All participants provided written informed consent prior to participation. They were informed about the study's purpose, their voluntary participation, the right to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality of their responses. Moreover, the research design ensured transparency, minimized potential risks, and respected cultural sensitivities. Data collection and analysis were conducted responsibly, with careful attention to accuracy, fairness, and integrity, thereby reinforcing the ethical foundation of the study.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare no conflict of interest in this research. No financial support, employment, stock ownership, consultancies, patents, or professional relationships influenced the study. All analyses and conclusions were conducted independently to ensure objectivity, integrity, and adherence to academic and ethical standards.

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