

Advertising Exposure, Word of Mouth, and Generation Z Consumer Loyalty in Online Marketplace: The Mediating Influence of Brand Awareness

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Abstract

This study investigates the influence of advertising exposure and word of mouth (WOM) on Generation Z consumer loyalty, examining the mediating role of brand awareness in the context of online purchases on marketplace platforms. We employed a quantitative descriptive approach, gathering primary data through questionnaires and observations of Generation Z consumers who have made at least two purchases on Shopee. Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with the aid of the WarpPLS 7.0 software. The findings reveal that both advertising exposure and WOM significantly enhance brand awareness. Additionally, each has a direct and positive impact on consumer loyalty. However, the influence of advertising exposure and WOM on consumer loyalty does not necessarily require the mediation of brand awareness. These results suggest that Shopee's robust advertising campaigns and effective WOM communications significantly embed the brand within the consumer's psyche, facilitating easy recall of Shopee as a platform known for attractive promotions. In conclusion, the formation of consumer loyalty can occur directly through advertising exposure and WOM, highlighting their pivotal roles in cultivating enduring consumer loyalty to Shopee.

Keywords: Advertising exposure; Consumer loyalty; Generation Z; Word of mouth.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi hubungan antara terpaan iklan dan word-of-mouth (WOM) dengan loyalitas konsumen Generasi Z melalui mediasi brand awareness, khususnya dalam konteks pembelian online di platform Marketplace. Metode deskriptif kuantitatif digunakan dengan pengumpulan data primer melalui kuesioner dan observasi terhadap Generasi Z yang telah berbelanja di Shopee minimal dua kali. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) dengan bantuan program WarpPLS 7.0. Hasil uji menunjukkan bahwa terpaan iklan dan WOM berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap brand awareness. Selanjutnya, terpaan iklan berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap loyalitas konsumen secara langsung, demikian pula WOM. Namun, secara tidak langsung, terpaan iklan dan WOM tidak memerlukan brand awareness untuk memengaruhi loyalitas konsumen. Implikasi temuan ini adalah bahwa iklan yang intens dan pesan yang menarik dari Shopee mampu menanamkan merek di benak konsumen, sementara WOM memudahkan konsumen untuk mengingat merek Shopee sebagai platform yang menawarkan promosi menarik. Kesimpulannya, pembentukan loyalitas konsumen tidak selalu melalui brand awareness, tetapi juga dipengaruhi langsung oleh terpaan iklan dan WOM yang memainkan peran penting dalam pembentukan kesetiaan konsumen terhadap Shopee.

Kata Kunci: Iklan; Loyalitas konsumen; Generasi Z; Word of mouth.

INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, online shopping has significantly transformed how consumers interact with products and services, mainly through word-of-mouth (WOM) advertising. Unlike traditional advertising methods, WOM is perceived as more credible and trustworthy because it typically involves personal

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recommendations. This type of advertising is crucial in marketing research because it explains how consumers relay information and experiences about products or services within their social networks, significantly influencing purchasing decisions. Highlighting the importance of WOM, Das & Ramalingam (2023) demonstrate that positive WOM can significantly enhance brand perception and foster customer retention. Similarly, Töllner & Woisetschläger (2016) found that customer satisfaction is a critical driver of positive WOM, providing essential insights for businesses aiming to stimulate WOM to increase social proof, expand market share, and boost profitability.

The Indonesian market, as the largest e-commerce market in Southeast Asia, offers additional insights into the influence of digitalisation on consumer behaviour. With around 90% of internet users in Indonesia already engaging in online shopping and the market capitalisation of the e-commerce sector projected to hit \$40 billion by 2022, the trend is expected to persist in sync with the pace of digital market evolution (Harisandi et al., 2023; Indartha et al., 2021). In the realm of contemporary marketing, where online advertising provides ease of access and extensive reach, industry players in the creative sector are positioned at the edge of a promising digital transformation (Kotler et al., 2018). The omnipresence of online advertising opens new opportunities for businesses to reach potential consumers, introducing them to products or services in unprecedented ways (Ardianto, 2017; Basaran & Ventura, 2022; Gyenge et al., 2021). In this transformative marketing landscape, the role of WOM has become more crucial than ever in influencing purchase decisions and building brand loyalty, particularly among Generation Z consumers. The findings of Töllner & Woisetschläger (2016) are corroborated by Das & Ramalingam (2023), who illustrates how WOM enhances brand attachment, while Zhang et al. (2020) delve into the dynamics of WOM on social media, offering insights on leveraging WOM to improve customer relationships and brand positioning in the market.

On the other hand, recent studies by Indriana et al. (2022) and Stefanny et al. (2022) introduce new perspectives on the impact of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) and celebrity endorsements on consumer behaviour within the online marketplace for halal cosmetic products on Shopee. Indriana et al. (2022) explore how eWOM and celebrity influence, mediated by brand image, significantly affect purchase intentions. Similarly, Stefanny et al. (2022) analyse the roles of eWOM and brand image in shaping online shopping behaviours, further underscoring the substantial impact of these factors on consumer decision-making. Additionally, Wiska et al. (Wiska et al., 2022) emphasises the importance of content marketing and eWOM in influencing purchase decisions on TikTok, highlighting the crucial role of social media platforms and content strategies in impacting the preferences of Generation Z consumers. These findings collectively underscore the transformation of WOM, both traditional and electronic, into a potent marketing tool in the digital era, necessitating a strategic and nuanced application to maximise its effects on brand loyalty.

Exploring the dynamics of WOM advertising reveals a complex interplay influencing Generation Z's consumer loyalty, characterised by rapid digital evolution and evolving consumer values. Töllner & Woisetschläger (2016) emphasise the need to understand the antecedents of WOM, particularly how these factors compel consumers to share brand-related experiences. This understanding becomes even more critical when considering Generation Z—a demographic deeply entrenched in digital platforms and valuing authenticity. Further research, such as that Das & Ramalingam (2023), which examines the specific role of WOM in the context of praise, underscores the importance of distinguishing between digital and traditional WOM channels. With Generation Z's significant presence online, it is likely that digital WOM, facilitated through social media and online reviews, influences brand loyalty and consumer behaviour

differently from traditional WOM. This distinction calls for more focused research to effectively dissect and understand how digital and traditional WOM differently affect the behaviours of Generation Z consumers.

Exploring the dynamics of WOM (Word of Mouth) advertising reveals a multifaceted landscape influenced by the digital evolution and shifting consumer values, particularly within Generation Z. Töllner & Woisetschläger (2016) highlight the importance of understanding the factors that compel consumers to share brand-related experiences. However, applying these insights to Generation Z—a demographic deeply integrated with digital platforms and highly valuing authenticity—poses unique challenges. Further investigation is needed to delineate how these factors function within this group. Moreover, Das & Ramalingam (2023) stressed the necessity of differentiating between digital and traditional WOM channels. Considering Generation Z's predominant presence online, there is a strong indication that digital WOM, occurring through social media and online reviews, may have a distinct impact on brand loyalty and consumer behaviour compared to traditional WOM. This scenario underscores the urgent need for focused research to explore the differential effects of digital versus traditional WOM on the behaviour of Generation Z consumers.

Furthermore, the role of WOM in sectors like entertainment and employment, as explored by Roschk & Große (2013) and Van Hove & Lievens (2009), demonstrates the extensive impact of WOM. Nonetheless, the specific consumption patterns and brand perceptions of Generation Z in these sectors remain largely unexplored. The prominence of influencer marketing and the demographic's preference for authenticity necessitate a thorough analysis of how authentic versus sponsored WOM content influences Generation Z's brand perceptions and loyalty. Additionally, given Generation Z's global footprint, cross-cultural studies on the influence of cultural contexts on WOM effectiveness could provide invaluable insights for crafting global marketing strategies. Addressing these research gaps with targeted studies would significantly enhance our understanding of WOM advertising's role in shaping Generation Z consumer loyalty and offer strategic guidance for brands aiming to engage this influential demographic effectively.

This research contributes significantly to the academic discourse on the impact of WOM (Word of Mouth) advertising on Generation Z consumer loyalty, addressing several vital aspects within the fields of marketing and consumer behaviour. It aims to deepen our understanding of the mechanisms through which WOM influences the purchase decisions and loyalty of Generation Z consumers. This demographic, known for its significant online presence and preference for digital communication, presents a unique opportunity to compare the effects of digital versus traditional WOM channels. While Töllner & Woisetschläger (2016) laid the groundwork by exploring the antecedents of WOM, there remains an essential need to investigate how these factors specifically influence Generation Z, a group that fluidly navigates both online and offline realms. This inquiry is pivotal for harnessing marketing potential in the increasingly digital landscape.

Furthermore, this study explores the impact of influencer marketing and the critical role of authenticity in affecting Generation Z's consumer loyalty, with a specific focus on WOM as a pivotal influence. Given this generation's scepticism towards direct marketing strategies, the balance between authentic and sponsored WOM content is scrutinised. Das & Ramalingam (2023) emphasised the role of praise in WOM, prompting further investigation into how perceived authenticity affects consumer loyalty in the digital era. Through detailed analysis, this research provides actionable insights for marketers aiming to engage with Generation Z effectively and offers a theoretical framework for future studies on cross-cultural differences and the long-term effects of WOM. Ultimately, this study enriches the academic literature on consumer behaviour and offers evidence-based strategies for cultivating loyalty among

Generation Z consumers while also examining the implications of Brand Awareness as a mediating variable in the relationship between WOM and Generation Z consumer loyalty.

RESEARCH METHOD

In this study, the method chosen for sampling is the incidental sampling technique, or what is often known as accidental sampling. Arikunto (2010) mentions the process of selecting a sample that occurs by chance, where individuals who incidentally meet the researcher and meet the criteria set for the study are considered eligible for sampling.

The methodology applied in this research is a Quantitative Descriptive approach, which utilises primary data collected through questionnaires and observations. The subjects of this study are specifically individuals from Generation Z who have made purchase transactions on the Shopee marketplace platform more than twice. The data processing process begins with the data collection stage, followed by the conceptualisation of the research model. After the model conceptualisation stage, this study determined the use of the algorithm analysis method in Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), utilising WarpPLS software version 7.0 for model estimation.

In the analysis process using WarpPLS, there are a series of systematic and sequential steps. First of all, the analysis begins with the creation of a path diagram that is based on previously established theory. This involves designing two main components: the inner model and the outer model, both of which are important parts of the analysis structure. Next, the assumptions of the analysis are checked to ensure that the model to be built is in proper condition for further analysis.

After verification of the assumptions, the process continues with the construction of the entire model, including both the inner and outer models. This step is followed by hypothesis testing, which aims to assess the strength and direction of the relationship between the variables under study. The inner model is obtained through equations that describe the relationship between latent constructs. In contrast, the outer model is obtained from equations that explain the relationship between latent constructs and their indicators.

Finally, model interpretation is done to understand the implications of the analysis results. This involves an evaluation of the overall analysis model, including an examination of the accuracy and relevance of the relationships identified in the study. Through this process, researchers can gain a deep understanding of the dynamics under study, contributing to the development of existing theories and the practical application of the research findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the research and discusses their implications. The findings from this study address the research problems and objectives outlined in the introduction. Specifically, this study investigates the impact of Advertising Exposure (X1) and Word of Mouth (WOM) (X2) on Brand Awareness (Y1) and Loyalty (Y2) using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The aim is to explore how marketing strategies such as advertising and WOM influence brand awareness and loyalty in a competitive environment.

Data were collected through an online survey, and the analysis involved constructing validation and examining the relationships between variables to test the proposed hypotheses. The results, detailed in Table 1, indicate significant positive effects of advertising exposure and WOM on brand awareness and consumer loyalty.

Table 1. Model fit and quality indices

No	Model fit and quality indices	Fit Criterion	Result	Description
1	Average path coefficient (APC)	$p < 0.05$	0.401, $P < 0.001$	Very significant
2	Average R-squared (ARS)	$p < 0.05$	0,747, $P < 0.001$	Very significant
3	Average adjusted R-squared (AARS)	$p < 0.05$	0,790, $P < 0.001$	Very significant
4	Average block VIF (AVIF)	Acceptable if ≤ 5 , ideally ≤ 3.3	3.36	Accepted
5	Average full collinearity VIF (AFVIF)	Acceptable if ≤ 5 , ideally ≤ 3.3	5.00	Accepted
6	Tenenhaus GoF (GoF)	Small ≥ 0.1 , medium ≥ 0.25 , large ≥ 0.36	0.700	Accepted
7	Sympson's paradox ratio (SPR)	Acceptable if ≥ 0.7 , ideally = 1	0.800	Accepted
8	R-squared contribution ratio (RSCR)	Acceptable if ≥ 0.9 , ideally = 1	0.976	Accepted
9	Statistical suppression ratio (SSR)	Acceptable if ≥ 0.7	1.00	Accepted
10	Nonlinear bivariate causality direction ratio (NLBCDR)	Acceptable if ≥ 0.7	01.00	Accepted

The results of the analysis (table 1) show significant positive effects of advertising exposure and WOM on brand awareness and consumer loyalty. The study utilises various model quality indices to validate the findings, providing important insights for marketing strategy and brand development. The results of this study offer strategic guidance for marketers in designing advertising campaigns and utilising WOM to increase brand awareness and strengthen customer loyalty.

The model quality indices used in this study include Average Path Coefficient (APC) with a result of 0.401 and $p < 0.001$, which indicates very high significance, Average Block VIF (AVIF) with a value of 3.36 and Average Full Collinearity VIF (AFVIF) with a value of 5.00, both of which indicate minimal multicollinearity problems. Tenenhaus GoF (GoF) reached a value of 0.700, indicating a good model fit. In contrast, Sympson's Paradox Ratio (SPR) and R-squared Contribution Ratio (RSCR) with values of 0.800 and 0.976, respectively, confirmed the consistency and contribution of the independent variables to the R-squared value. The Statistical Suppression Ratio (SSR) and Nonlinear Bivariate Causality Direction Ratio (NLBCDR) both reached perfect values (1.00), indicating the absence of statistical suppression and a clear direction of causality between variables.

The average full collinearity VIF (AFVIF) value, which reaches the maximum acceptable limit of 5.00, indicates that the model is at the tolerance level for multicollinearity but still below the threshold that could compromise the validity of the conclusions, so reinforcing its strength. At 3.36, the somewhat lower average block VIF (AVIF) value demonstrates that there is no appreciable multicollinearity among the blocks of measured variables. These two indices show that the model may be trusted not to have major distortions due to multicollinearity, which is usually a worry in studies including multiple predictor variables.

Moreover, the model exhibits great consistency in the expected direction of causation, as indicated by the 1.00 perfect Nonlinear Bivariate causation Direction Ratio (NLBCDR). This suggests that the suggested theory and the extremely apparent and in-line causal link between the variables in the model match. These findings thus give a reasonable basis for the assertion that WOM and advertising are

ubiquitous and dependable in raising brand awareness and customer loyalty. These findings are pretty pertinent to marketers trying to grasp the elements influencing the development of brand awareness and loyalty in a dynamic and competitive market.

These indices collectively confirm the reliability of the model, indicating that the research methodology successfully captures the dynamics between advertising exposure, WOM, brand awareness and loyalty. The results of this study provide valuable evidence regarding the critical role of strategic marketing communications in fostering loyalty and brand awareness, providing actionable insights for marketers seeking to navigate the complexities of consumer engagement in today's competitive landscape.

Additionally, Tables 2, 3, 4, and 5 present the R-squared, Adjusted R-squared, Composite Reliability, and Cronbach's Alpha coefficients, respectively. These tables collectively confirm the reliability and robustness of the constructs used in the study.

Table 2. R-squared coefficients

TRIKLAN	WOM	BRAWARN	LOLYALI
	0.867	0.721	

Table 3. Adjusted R-squared coefficients

TRIKLAN	WOM	BRAWARN	LOLYALI
	0.865	0.715	

Table 4. Composite reliability coefficients

TRIKLAN	WOM	BRAWARN	LOLYALI
0.841	0.853	0.865	0.893

Reliability: If composite reliability > 0.7, then the questionnaire is reliable

Table 5. Cronbach's alpha coefficients

TRIKLAN	WOM	BRAWARN	LOLYALI
0.747	0.762	0.790	0.837

Reliability: If alpha > 0.6, then the questionnaire is reliable

Moreover, Table 6 and Table 7 detail the indirect effects and corresponding p-values for paths involving two segments. These tables provide further insights into the mediation effects within the model.

Table 6. Indirect effects for paths with 2 segments

	TRIKLAN	WOM	BRAWARN	LOLYALI
LOLYALI	-0.032	-0.018		

Table 7. P values of indirect effects for paths with 2 segments

	TRIKLAN	WOM	BRAWARN	LOLYALI
LOLYALI	0.289	0.377		

The E2 hypothesis testing of the indirect influence (mediation) of Advertising Exposure on Loyalty through Brand Awareness shows a path coefficient of -0.032 and p = 0.289, confirming the significant mediation effect, albeit with a negative direction (Table 7). This indicates that while brand awareness acts

as a mediator, its impact on the pathway from Advertising Exposure to Loyalty is not as initially hypothesised.

Based on the test results on variable X1 Ad Exposure and WOM X2 on Loyalty through Brand Awareness, it is confirmed that X1, namely Ad Exposure to Brand Awareness, has a positive and significant effect directly. This happens because the advertisements aired by Shopee as one of the marketplaces, in this study succeeded in instilling the brand in customers through intense advertisements that are easy to understand and easy to remember.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that both advertising exposure and word of mouth (WOM) significantly enhance brand awareness and loyalty among consumers. The use of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) confirmed that strategic marketing communications significantly contribute to the development of brand loyalty and awareness in a competitive market environment. The indices like Average Path Coefficient, R-squared, and others demonstrated robust model performance, affirming the positive effects of the studied variables.

Our findings confirm the critical role of advertising in enhancing brand awareness and shaping consumer behaviour, resonating with the broader marketing literature that underscores the importance of strategic communication in brand development. For instance, Oppong et al. (2022) emphasised that brand credibility mediates the relationship between brand awareness, brand image, and WOM, reinforcing the integral role of credibility in effective WOM strategies. This suggests that the impact of advertising and WOM on consumer perceptions is significantly augmented by the credibility of the brand, which acts as a foundational element in enhancing consumer trust and engagement. Similarly, studies by Badawi & Basif (2023) and Vinh et al. (2021) reinforce this viewpoint by illustrating how brand equity, encompassing brand image and awareness, facilitates positive consumer attitudes towards electronic WOM and enhances various dimensions of brand equity, including loyalty and perceived quality.

Contrastingly, research by Aileen et al. (2021) and Soelasih & Sumani (2021) offers a nuanced perspective, indicating that the effectiveness of WOM and social media marketing in increasing brand awareness is not always guaranteed. These studies suggest that while WOM can be a potent tool in the marketer's arsenal, its success is contingent upon the context and execution of the strategy. This variability highlights the complex nature of consumer interactions in digital spaces where not all marketing efforts yield uniform outcomes. The differences in these findings prompt a more cautious approach to assuming the effectiveness of WOM, suggesting that a deeper understanding of the targeted consumer base and the strategic integration of advertising with digital communication channels are crucial for achieving desired marketing outcomes.

The research illuminates the nuanced and sometimes unpredictable effects of word-of-mouth (WOM) and social media marketing on purchase intentions. While social media marketing has shown a consistent ability to increase purchase intent, the impact of WOM is more variable. This variability highlights the complex dynamics of consumer behaviour, where WOM, despite being a potent source of recommendations, does not uniformly influence purchase decisions across different contexts (Kadarisman & Ariyani, 2021; Luthfiyatillah et al., 2020). This divergence emphasises the need for marketers to not only rely on the traditional strengths of WOM but also to harness the structured reach and targeting capabilities of social media marketing. As noted by Dilasari et al. (2022) and Sudirjo (2023), the effectiveness of marketing strategies can significantly depend on the specific context and the evolving

preferences of consumers, underscoring the importance of adaptability and strategic insight in navigating the complex landscape of digital consumer engagement.

On the other hand, the test results show that WOM directly affects Brand Awareness in a positive and significant way. The use of WOM can help customers remember the brand, as found in this study regarding Shopee. In this context, the creation of customer loyalty does not always depend on brand awareness, as advertising exposure and WOM can directly influence loyalty without going through Brand Awareness. For example, Shopee advertisements that use the Shopee COD jargon are successfully embedded in customers' memories, which in turn strengthens customer loyalty. In addition, WOM can also influence loyalty without having to go through brand awareness because promotions that are often generated from WOM can have an impact that customers feel directly, such as the ease of use of the Shopee application and transaction security.

The implications of these findings are significant for marketers. They suggest that to effectively build and sustain brand loyalty and awareness, a dual approach incorporating both innovative advertising and active management of WOM is essential. Marketers should not only focus on the content and reach of their advertising but also on fostering positive customer experiences that are likely to generate favourable WOM.

The positive effects observed may be attributed to the synergistic impact of advertising and WOM, where each complements the other in enhancing the consumer's brand perception. Advertising often serves as the first contact point, introducing the brand and its values, while WOM provides validation and trust through peer influence. This synergy is particularly effective in a digital marketplace where consumers are bombarded with numerous choices and rely heavily on peer reviews and testimonials.

Based on the findings, marketers should consider strategies that not only enhance the reach and appeal of their advertising but also actively encourage and leverage WOM through customer engagement initiatives such as loyalty programs, customer reviews, social media interactions, and influencer partnerships. Additionally, ongoing monitoring and analysis of both advertising impact and WOM sentiment are crucial to adapt strategies in real time and maintain competitive advantage. Training and development for marketing teams on integrating digital tools and social media analytics into their strategic plans would also be beneficial.

CONCLUSION

This research significantly highlights the potent influences of Word of Mouth (WOM) and advertising exposure on brand awareness and consumer loyalty, presenting robust empirical evidence through the use of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings delineate how WOM, paired with strategic advertising efforts, effectively elevates brand recognition and fortifies relationships with consumers in a highly competitive market landscape. Notably, the study confirms the proposed theoretical model and validates the underlying hypotheses, demonstrating that WOM and advertising are not just complementary but also critically necessary for successful marketing campaigns. The direct impacts of these marketing strategies on brand loyalty and awareness underline the importance of an integrated and innovative approach in marketing practices. Furthermore, the results emphasise the crucial role of effective communication and brand credibility in shaping consumer perceptions and decisions, especially in a technology-driven marketplace. This study not only offers strategic insights for marketers but also charts a course for the adept application of WOM and advertising to enhance brand visibility and consumer engagement in complex market environments.

This research makes significant contributions to both the theory and practice of marketing by elucidating the integrated impact of Word of Mouth (WOM) and advertising on brand loyalty and awareness. The methodological application of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) adds a robust analytical dimension to understanding the dynamics of these marketing strategies in a competitive environment. Conceptually, this study advances the existing marketing literature by demonstrating that WOM and advertising are not merely adjuncts but are central to the formulation of effective marketing strategies. It offers a nuanced perspective on how these elements interact to shape consumer behaviour, emphasising the role of brand credibility and effective communication. This research provides a framework for marketers to harness the synergistic effects of WOM and advertising, thereby enabling more precise and effective marketing interventions.

While this study offers comprehensive insights into the impact of WOM and advertising, several limitations suggest directions for future research. One limitation is the scope of the data, which predominantly relies on online surveys that may not capture the full spectrum of consumer experiences and perceptions across different demographic or cultural backgrounds. This could affect the generalizability of the findings to other market conditions or consumer segments. Future studies could expand on this research by incorporating a more diverse dataset, possibly through multi-country or cross-cultural studies, to examine the applicability of the findings globally. Additionally, the study primarily focuses on the quantitative impacts of WOM and advertising, potentially overlooking the qualitative aspects such as emotional engagement or brand attachment. Future research could integrate qualitative methodologies to provide a deeper understanding of the emotional and psychological factors driving consumer loyalty and brand awareness. Lastly, considering the rapid evolution of digital marketing landscapes, subsequent research could explore the effects of emerging digital marketing technologies and platforms on the efficacy of WOM and advertising strategies.

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