

## Exploring Tourists' Booking Intention Through Brand Image, EWOM, and Experiential Marketing

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### Abstract

Bali's leading destination status leads to intense competition in the tourism industry, especially accommodation. This situation calls for a study that could provide marketing insight to accommodation business management on critical factors that shape tourists' booking intention, as understanding the buyer's decision behavior is one of the essential prerequisites of creating a successful marketing strategy. A survey was conducted to collect data. Respondents were prospective tourists who planned to book accommodation in Bali. The study received 167 valid samples. Data was analyzed using Partial Least Square. The results showed that eWOM and experiential marketing significantly affect brand image and booking intention. Brand image mediates the eWOM-booking intention relationship and experiential marketing-booking intention relationship. To encourage tourists' booking intention, it is recommended to improve communication strategies through eWOM by encouraging tourists to share their experiences through electronic media and develop communication containing complete information. Brand image must also be strengthened by ensuring the hotel's quality, attractiveness, and reputation.

### Keywords

eWOM, Experiential Marketing, Brand Image, Booking Intention.

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### Introduction

In many countries, tourism is one of the most important economic sectors supporting the economy (Fang and Ariffin, 2021). In Indonesia, tourism is the second largest foreign exchange contributor after oil and gas. Along with the development of the world of tourism today, one of the proliferating sectors is the hotel industry. Hospitality-related Industries contribute significantly to job creation, social development, infrastructure improvement, and others (Fang and Arifin, 2021). Bali is

still top of mind for Indonesian tourism, where 50 percent of the revenue comes from Bali. Tourism positively impacts business expansion and job opportunities (Alsheikh et al., 2021). Foreign tourist visit data shows a positive trend in tourists visiting Bali from January to August 2022 (BPS, 2022). The increasing number of tourist visits is an indication of development in the tourism sector in Bali. This is expected to increase the number of hotel room occupancy in Bali. In addition, the increasing number of

hotels makes the competition in the hotel sector in Bali more intense. Therefore, analyzing the factors influencing tourists' intention to book a hotel room is necessary.

Purchase intention is the consumer's likelihood to make an actual purchase. Purchase intention arises in response to an object igniting a person's desire to purchase. Intention will create motivation and be recorded in consumers' minds. Marketers need to understand consumer intention in booking a hotel room so that hotels can thrive. It can also strengthen the effectiveness of long-term relationships with tourists. Therefore, the first important step is identifying factors influencing purchase intention (Le et al., 2018). The literature review found that electronic word of mouth (eWOM) is one of the decisive factors influencing purchase intention. eWOM is a communication medium to share information about a product or service consumed between consumers who do not know each other. eWOM has an essential role in influencing consumer behavior, so companies must create and maintain good word of mouth among consumers to attract attention and win the hearts of consumers (Purnamawati et al., 2022). Some studies have found that eWOM significantly encourages purchase intention (Kala and Chaubey, 2018; Evgeniy et al., 2019; Tien et al., 2019; Setiawan et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2021). eWOM allows consumers to reduce the time and effort to get information about specific products or services.

Alrwashdeh et al. (2019) discuss how eWOM platforms, such as online discussion forums and online communities, play an essential role in facilitating product and brand influence. eWOM is considered very important because reviews about a particular thing related to products or services can spread very quickly. This marketing strategy can spread like a virus, another form of word-of-mouth, or one mouse click to the next, encouraging consumers to convey products and services through audio, video, or written information to others online. Positive experiences

delivered by consumers in the form of eWOM will be able to create a brand image. Several studies concluded that eWOM could significantly improve brand image (Tariq et al., 2017; Le et al., 2018; Rosady et al., 2019; Chuang, 2019; Fang and Ariffin, 2021).

Experiential marketing is one of the factors encouraging purchase intention. Rather (2020) revealed that a person's experience related to the perceived benefits received is essential in a journey. Marketers must prioritize managing customer experience for long-term survival and competitive advantage. Fang and Ariffin (2021) stated that nowadays, tourists are more likely to get new experiences and search for unforgettable emotional memories. Some studies have found that experiential marketing effectively influences tourists to visit tourist attractions (Le et al., 2018; Rosady et al., 2019; Chuang, 2019; Fauzi and Wibowo, 2020; Ariyanto, 2021). A pleasant experience will last a long time in the customer's mind and influence consequent behavior, so implementing better experiential marketing will encourage purchase intention.

Experience in response to stimuli such as marketing efforts before and after purchase and presenting sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and relational experiences as strategic modules for experiential marketing. Customer experience acts as an essential driver of competitive advantage and commercial success. Experiential marketing attributes significantly influence emotional responses, brand attitudes, and behavioral intention. Some studies have found that experiential marketing is effective in improving brand image (Le et al., 2018; Sjafitri et al., 2018; Hoseinzadeh and Baktash, 2018; Suryaniprang, 2019; Spyra, 2019).

Purchase intention is also influenced by brand image. Brand image is vital in managing sustainable results that present the uniqueness of a company. Brand image is a perception in customers' minds related

to a product. Brand image is critical because it increases market share and success, thus enabling the company to have a better position in the market (Alrwashdeh et al., 2019). By developing brand image and expanding brand portfolio, companies that create new products will benefit from an established brand image (Agmeka et al., 2019). A positive brand image can significantly increase purchase intention (Tariq et al., 2017; Imbayani and Gama, 2018; Kala and Chaubey, 2018; Pan and Chen, 2019; Agmeka et al., 2019). Through brand image, it will be easier for consumers to choose between two or more alternatives.

Many studies have discussed the role of eWOM and experiential marketing on purchase intention. Still, studies on the impact of eWOM on tourist decisions in choosing accommodation are not widely studied. Therefore, this study aimed to examine the eWOM and booking intention relationship in the scope of the tourism industry, specifically the accommodation industry. Based on the research background, the primary purposes of this research are to examine the influence of eWOM and experiential marketing on tourists' booking intention and determine whether brand image mediates the relationship between constructs. This analysis is expected to provide insight and enrich the literature on consumer purchase behavior, especially in the scope of tourism.

Bali was chosen as the research focus location for two reasons. First, Bali is Indonesia's leading tourist destination and is famous worldwide. The accommodation business greatly supports tourism activities. Therefore, to maintain its superior image, it is essential to understand the factors influencing tourists' decision to choose accommodation. Second, the leading tourist destination status leads to intense competition for the tourism business in Bali, especially accommodation. This situation calls for a study that could provide marketing insight into accommodation business management on critical factors shaping tourists' booking intentions. As

mentioned by Lendel & Varmus (2015), understanding the behavior of a buyer's decision is an essential prerequisite to creating a successful marketing strategy.

## Literature Review

### *Purchase Intention*

Purchase intention is how likely consumers are to buy a brand and service or how likely consumers are to move from one brand to another (Kotler and Keller, 2016). Priansa (2017) explains purchase intention as consumer behavior that arises as a response to objects that show a person's desire to purchase. Understanding consumer purchase intention can help companies understand the market and adjust product or service offerings to increase sales and profit (Agmeka, 2019). Intention is related to feelings and emotions. When a person feels happy and satisfied in buying goods or services, it strengthens the interest in buying; dissatisfaction usually eliminates intention. According to Sangadji and Sopiah (2013), consumer characteristics will affect consumer attitudes toward shopping. Purchase intention can be identified through the following indicators (Ferdinand, 2014): 1) Transactional intention is a person's tendency to buy a product, 2) Referential intention is a person's tendency to recommend products to others, 3) Preferential intention describes a person's behavior who has a primary preference for the product. This preference can only be changed if something happens to the reference product. 4) Exploratory intention describes a person's behavior who is always looking for information about the product he is interested in and looking for information to support the favorable properties of the product.

### *Electronic Word of Mouth*

Word of mouth is described as informal person-to-person communication between non-commercial communicators perceived by the receiver regarding a brand, product, organization, or service (Alrwashdeh et al., 2019). Traditional WOM is further

described as informal communication directed at other consumers about the ownership, use, or characteristics of specific goods and services or their sellers. Priansa (2017) described word of mouth as a marketing activity in providing information on a product or service from one consumer to another to discuss, promote, and sell a brand to others. Technological developments, especially the Internet, have changed how consumers communicate to change traditional WOM into online WOM (Cheung and Thadani, 2012).

Benowati and Purba (2020) explored the following eWOM indicators: 1) Intensity: the number of eWOM available online; 2) Valence of opinion: the existence of opinions in the form of positive or negative values made by consumers on about brands, services, or products; 3) Content: information about brands, services, or products conveyed online. Chen et al. (2021) research in the tourism industry measures eWOM using the following indicators: 1) Usefulness is considered a criterion that reflects judgment. Beneficial reviews can help customers evaluate and increase credibility, which also means that these reviews can increase customer confidence in purchasing; 2) Credibility has always been an essential issue in online communication research topics. As the Internet population grows, consumers have more online experiences. Readers will receive credible comments and influence subsequent behaviour; 3) The quality of information is considered a classification issue. The characteristics of the message used to assess quality consider all aspects of the review, including trustworthiness, subjectivity, reputation, relevance, timeliness, completeness, appropriate quantity, comprehension, and simplicity; 4) Professionalism is an indicator that is closely related to credibility. Professional knowledge means in-depth knowledge of a particular field. Therefore, reviewers' expertise in trust-based and experience-based services will increase value and influence. Ismagilova (2022) examined the

effectiveness of eWOM used four indicators as follows: 1) Rating: overall star rating; 2) Content: length, the number of words, images/photos, valence, objectivity or subjectivity, emotion, the intensity of emotions, details of information, actions described and reactions, type of review (attributed value and simple recommendation), diagnostic review, technical information, diversity of arguments, claims of expertise, persuasive words, mode of presentation; 3) quality, elevation, timeliness, accuracy, completeness; 4) volume is the total number of online reviews posted.

Positive statements on eWOM communication can increase consumers' positive attitudes toward products and services and increase purchase intention. Several previous studies, as revealed by Kala and Chaubey (2018), found a significant influence of eWOM on purchase intention in India. Research by Evgeniy et al. (2019) also confirms that eWOM influences the purchase intention of Korean brand cars in Russia. In addition, Tien et al. (2019) explained that eWOM could encourage purchase intention through social networking sites in Taiwan. Setiawan et al. (2021) examined 200 prospective tourists in Indonesia and 100 prospective Japanese tourists, proving that eWOM positively affects visiting intention. Chen et al. (2021) research through the world travel website TripAdvisor found that reviews and information to searchers about hotels, restaurants, and tourist destinations at ten restaurants in the top three regions of New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago found that eWOM measured by usefulness, credibility, information quality, and professionalism effectively predicted travellers' levels of purchase intention.

In addition, positive eWOM can also create a brand image. Research conducted by Tariq et al. (2017) on customers of Rawalpindi and Islamabad mobile phone users found eWOM can improve the brand image of these mobile phone products. Le et al. (2018) found eWOM effectively

improves the brand image of tourist attractions in Australia. Furthermore, Rosady et al. (2019) also found that eWOM improves IKEA's brand image. Chuang (2019) found that eWOM positively affects brand image of Magong City, Taiwan. Fang and Ariffin (2021), who researched World Heritage Sites in Malaysia, also found that eWOM effectively improves brand image. Ariyanto (2021) found that eWOM significantly and positively impacts brand image. These empirical findings underlie the following hypothesis:

H<sub>1</sub>: eWOM has a positive and significant influence on booking intention

H<sub>2</sub>: eWOM has a positive and significant influence on brand image.

### *Experiential Marketing*

Experiential marketing identifies and satisfies consumer needs, engaging consumers through two-way communication that brings a brand's personality to life and adds value to the target audience. Rather (2020) mentioned experiential marketing as product communication and marketing campaigns that touch the heart, overwhelm the senses, stimulate the mind, and belong to a lifestyle. Consumers want marketing communications or offers delivered for an experience. As a result, marketers increasingly utilize experiential marketing to build experiential relationships with consumers. Rosady et al. (2019) explained that experiential marketing is a communication model that synergizes the message's meaning and proves the message creates consumers' experience with high meaningfulness.

Rather (2020) mentioned that experiential marketing aims to produce a solid integrated experience that simultaneously feels, senses, acts, thinks, and relates, which can be explained as follows: 1) Sense is focused on the senses by producing sensory experiences which are sight, taste, touch, sound, and smell. 2) Feel marketing enriches consumers' emotions and inner feelings by generating affective experiences ranging from slightly positive moods

related to the brand or purpose to intense feelings of pride and excitement. 3) Think involves problem-solving and cognitive experience, which involves creatively inferring. 4) Act draws on the consumer's life by focusing on physical experiences, showing customers alternative lifestyles, interactions, and ways of doing things. 5) Relate extends beyond customer priorities. Personal feelings connect the customer with something outside of his circumstances. Relate enriches the customer's desire for self-improvement (e.g., future "ideal self" who wants to connect).

Consumer experience plays a vital role in making choices that ultimately influence purchasing decisions. Some of the results of previous research conducted by Le et al. (2018) found experiential marketing effective in influencing tourist intention to visit tourist attractions in Australia. Another finding by Rosady et al. (2019) was Strategic Experience Modules (SEMs) that affect purchase intention in IKEA products. Chuang research (2019) found experiential marketing positively affects tourists' purchase intention in Magong City, Taiwan. In addition, Fang and Ariffin's (2021) research on World Heritage Sites in Malaysia also found that experience will encourage potential tourists to visit. Ariyanto (2021) found that experiential marketing encourages interest in visiting Fix Laluna Bima City.

Experiential marketing significantly influences emotional responses, brand attitudes, and behavioural intent. Previous research by Lee (2018) found that experiential marketing elements significantly create a brand image in Shopping Complexes in South Korea. Sjafitri et al. (2018), who conducted research at Bank Nagari Ulak Karang Padang Branch, found that feel, think, and relate marketing significantly affect brand image. Hoseinzadeh and Baktash (2018) investigated experiential marketing on brand image at the Royal Mattress Company in Iran found that experiential marketing directly affects brand image. As

a result, experiential marketing is an efficient method to create the right mentality so that companies can make their brand known as an excellent and valuable brand in the public's minds. Suryaniprang (2019) found that experiential marketing influences the company's image in the hospitality industry in Bandung, West Java. Spyra (2019) stated the concept of experiential marketing as an idea that is the basis for building a brand communication strategy on social media in Poland. Based on the empirical evidence, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H<sub>3</sub>: Experiential marketing has a positive and significant influence on booking intention

H<sub>4</sub>: Experiential marketing has a positive and significant influence on brand image.

#### *Brand Image*

Brand image is considered one of the most important intangible assets that impact consumer perception of the company. Tjiptono and Chandra (2017) explained that brand image describes consumer confidence and association with a particular brand. Firmansyah (2019) defines brand image as the perception of a brand as reflected by brand association. Brand image is customers' perceptions and beliefs, as reflected by associations in customer memory. The brand image includes knowledge and trust in brand attributes (cognitive aspects). Yoeliastuti et al. (2021) measured brand image with the following indicators: 1) Easy to remember means that the brand elements chosen should be easy to remember and call or pronounce. Symbols, logos, and names should be attractive and unique to attract the public's attention to be recognized and consumed. 2) Easy to identify, meaning in addition to the logo, a brand is known through the message and how products are packaged and presented to consumers. Through intensive communication, a particular product can attract attention and be easily recognized by consumers. 3) A positive perception of the company means people's perception of the company's identity. This view is based on people's knowledge of the company. Said

(2020) mentioned that hotel properties with a strong brand image could achieve greater sales than weaker competitors. In his research, brand image was measured with the following indicators: 1) Hotel brand has appeal, 2) Hotel brand shows reliability, 3) Hotel brand indicates reputation.

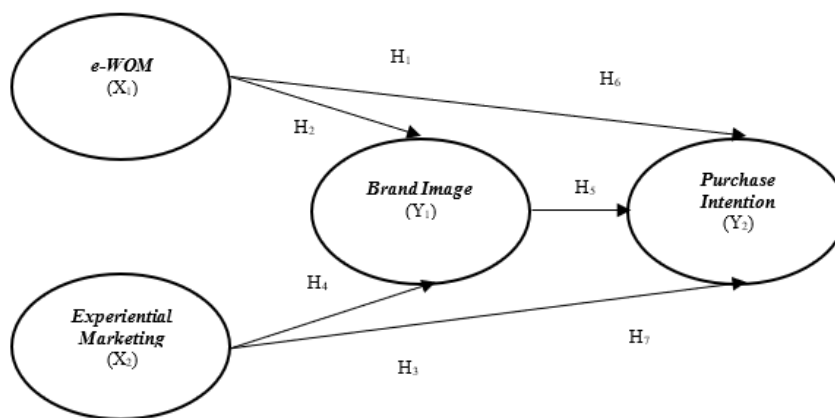
When a brand has been embedded in the minds of consumers, it will create an interest in the brand. So that, through brand image, it will make it easier to invoke purchase intention of potential customers. Tariq et al. (2017), who researched mobile phone users in Rawalpindi and Islamabad found that brand image can increase purchase intention. Imbayani and Gama (2018) found that brand image positively and significantly affects purchase intention in respondents who use Gojek application in Denpasar City. Research by Kala and Chaubey (2018) stated that brand image significantly influences product purchase intention in India. Pan and Chen's (2019) research on tourists in Taiwan found that promotional activities will shape brand image and increase consumer perception and purchase intention. Liang and Lai (2022) found that brand image directly impacts tourist intention to visit Guangdong, China. In addition, Tariq et al. (2017) found that good marketing techniques through eWOM can improve brand image and purchase intention. Kala and Chaubey (2018) stated that consumers would seek information before buying a product by considering the brand image of the product. Evgeniy et al. (2019) found that eWOM has an impact on improving brand image and purchase intention in Korean brand products in Russia. Yohana et al. (2020) stated that brand image would increase the influence of eWOM on purchase intention of Xiaomi smartphone products in Denpasar. Setiawan et al. (2021) emphasized that eWOM improves the brand image of a destination and the interest in visiting Japan and Indonesia. Suryaniprang (2019) found that experiential marketing influences purchase intention through the corporate image. Hsiao et al. (2021) researched Taiwan's leading outdoor

leisure brand, GoHiking, and found that experiential marketing activities significantly influence brands and purchase intention.

H<sub>5</sub>: Brand image has a positive and significant influence on purchase intention.

H<sub>6</sub>: Brand image mediates the influence of eWOM on purchase intention.

H<sub>7</sub>: Brand image mediates the influence of experiential marketing on purchase intention.



**Figure 1. The conceptual research framework**

## Research Method

This study employs a quantitative technique and the survey method to accomplish the research goal: to analyze the influence of dependent variables on the independent variables. The quantitative approach explores a social or humanitarian issue by testing a theory based on several constructs, assessed in numbers, and statistically evaluated to confirm the accuracy of the theory's predicted generalizations (Creswell, 2003). A sample of people is surveyed through the responses to questions to gather information (Check & Schutt, 2011). In-depth examination of a target population's traits, understanding of their attitudes, perceptions, motivations, and beliefs, and broad collection of their opinions on a phenomenon of interest to the researcher are the goals of survey research (Chrysochou, 2017). This study used the survey approach because its qualities were appropriate for learning about the target population's perceptions and opinions regarding decision-making. When the goal of the study is to test hypotheses, identify statistical relationships between variables, make predictions, and generalize research findings to the study population (Chrysochou, 2017), which is what this study's goals are, the

quantitative approach with the survey method is also the best method to use.

Data collection was conducted through a survey using a questionnaire as the instrument. A preliminary survey was conducted on 30 respondents to assess construct measurement instruments. The results showed that research constructs were one-dimensional and reliable, with alpha levels above 0.6. The survey was then conducted on 167 prospective tourists who planned to book accommodation in Bali.

The population in this study is all prospective tourists who planned to book accommodation in Bali. In determining sample size, Hair Jr et al. (2010) stated that the minimum ratio of observations to measured variables is 5:1. This study uses 20 measured variables; therefore, five times the number of measured variables are 100 observations or samples. This study received 167 valid samples which have met the minimum criteria required.

To ensure sample representativeness, sample was taken from prospective tourists from the top ten countries of Bali's most visitors: Australia, India, Singapore,

England, US, Malaysia, Germany, Russia, South Korea, and China (Annur, 2023), as well as domestic tourists from Indonesia. This study also used purposive sampling technique to select the sample. This study set the sample criteria: tourists who planned to book accommodation in Bali in the most recent month. These time criteria were intentional so that respondents could still clearly recall their decision-making process, thus resulting in accurate responses to the research questionnaire. The contact method used was through travel agencies and star hotels in each regency in Bali. Tourists who had expressed interest in booking accommodation through travel agencies or star hotels were given the research questionnaire. The measurement scale in the questionnaire uses Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Data analysis was conducted with partial least square (PLS) technique, which combines multiple regression and factor analysis to perform a simultaneous examination upon either the relationship between the measured variables and the latent constructs or the relationship between

latent constructs. PLS analysis was conducted in two stages. The first stage examined the measurement model by testing the measurement item validity and reliability of each construct. The second stage examined the structural model to analyze the path significance between constructs.

## Results and Discussion

### *Validity and Reliability Test*

The validity test results are shown in Table 1, which shows that the indicators of electronic word of mouth, experiential marketing, brand image, and purchase intention have met the convergent validity requirement with loading factor value greater than 0.5. However, the  $X_{1.5}$  indicator has a value of 0.491, which means that the indicator cannot measure its latent construct well.

The reliability test results in Table 2 show the construct reliability value of each construct equal to and above 0.6. This means that all indicators consistently reflect the same latent construct.



**Table 1. Validity Test Results**

Construct	Measurement Item	<i>p</i> value	Loading factor
Electronic Word of Mouth (X <sub>1</sub> )	X <sub>1.1</sub> Intensity of eWOM	<0,001	0,828
	X <sub>1.2</sub> Usefulness of eWOM	<0,001	0,665
	X <sub>1.3</sub> Credibility of eWOM	<0,001	0,771
	X <sub>1.4</sub> Quality of information on eWOM	<0,001	0,734
	X <sub>1.5</sub> Rating of the accommodation	<0,001	0,491
	X <sub>1.6</sub> Content of eWOM	<0,001	0,773
Experiential Marketing (X <sub>2</sub> )	X <sub>2.1</sub> The marketing communication is sense-evoking	<0,001	0,678
	X <sub>2.2</sub> The marketing communication arouses feelings	<0,001	0,748
	X <sub>2.3</sub> The marketing communication stimulates cognitive thinking	<0,001	0,670
	X <sub>2.4</sub> The marketing communication encourage actions	<0,001	0,614
	X <sub>2.5</sub> The marketing communication is relatable	<0,001	0,730
Brand Image (Y <sub>1</sub> )	Y <sub>1.1</sub> The hotel has a reliable image	<0,001	0,775
	Y <sub>1.2</sub> The hotel is appealing	<0,001	0,640
	Y <sub>1.3</sub> The hotel has a good reputation	<0,001	0,699
	Y <sub>1.4</sub> The hotel brand is easily remembered	<0,001	0,726
	Y <sub>1.5</sub> The hotel brand is easily recognized	<0,001	0,632
Purchase Intention (Y <sub>2</sub> )	Y <sub>2.1</sub> Intention to book the hotel	<0,001	0,614
	Y <sub>2.2</sub> Prefer the hotel over others	<0,001	0,720
	Y <sub>2.3</sub> Intention to recommend the hotel	<0,001	0,770
	Y <sub>2.4</sub> Intention to explore more information about the hotel	<0,001	0,679

**Table 2. Reliability Test Results**

Variable	Construct Reliability
eWOM (X <sub>1</sub> )	0,666
Experiential Marketing (X <sub>2</sub> )	0,813
Brand Image (Y <sub>1</sub> )	0,733
Purchase Intention (Y <sub>2</sub> )	0,881

*Hypotheses Testing*

Path analysis results are shown in Table 3. The first test showed that H1 was rejected, where eWOM had an insignificant influence on purchase intention. The mediating role of brand image in this relationship must be examined to determine whether the mediation is perfect that causes the relationship to appear insignificant. H2 is accepted where eWOM positively influences brand image. H3 is accepted where experiential marketing positively

affects purchase intention. H4 is accepted where experiential marketing has a significant positive influence on brand image. H5 is accepted that brand image has a positive influence on purchase intention. The R<sup>2</sup> value of brand image is 0.49. Based on the criteria, the model is in moderate model criteria, meaning that variation in eWOM and experiential marketing explain brand image by 49 percent, the remaining 51 percent is explained by other variables not included in the model. Purchase

intention has an  $R^2$  value of 0.53, meaning that variations in eWOM, experiential marketing, and brand image can explain variations in purchase intention by 53 percent; other variables outside the model explain the remaining 47 percent.  $Q^2$  value obtained is 0.76, which means that the estimated model is in the strong criteria, where 76 percent of endogenous construct variations can be explained by exogenous construct.

#### *Mediation Test*

The mediation test found that brand image perfectly mediates the influence of eWOM on purchase intention. Tested separately without mediation variable, the influence of eWOM on purchase intention showed significant results ( $p < 0.001$ ;  $\beta = 0.54$ ). When brand image was included in the model as a mediator, the path coefficient of

the eWOM-purchase intention relationship decreased to a degree where the relationship was not significant ( $p = 0.05$ ;  $\beta = 0.13$ ). This shows the perfect mediating role of brand image in the relationship so that H6 is accepted. Furthermore, brand image partially mediates the influence of experiential marketing on purchase intention. Tested separately without mediation variable, the effect of experiential marketing on purchase intention showed significant results ( $p < 0.001$ ;  $\beta = 0.69$ ). When brand image was included in the model as a mediator, the path coefficient of the experiential marketing-purchase intention relationship decreased but remained significant ( $p < 0.001$ ;  $\beta = 0.43$ ). This indicates partial mediation role of brand image in the relationship so that H7 is accepted.

**Table 3. Hypothesis Test Results**

Construct	Path Coefficient	P value	Remark
eWOM -> Purchase Intention	0,014	>0,426	Insignificant
eWOM -> Brand Image	0,340	<0,001	Significant
Experiential Marketing -> Purchase Intention	0,422	<0,001	Significant
Experiential Marketing -> Brand Image	0,443	<0,001	Significant
Brand Image -> Purchase Intention	0,357	<0,001	Significant
eWOM -> Brand Image -> Purchase Intention	0,130	<0,005	Perfect Mediation
Experiential Marketing -> Brand Image -> Purchase Intention	0,430	<0,001	Partial Mediation
$R^2$ Brand Image : 0,494			
$R^2$ Purchase Intention : 0,527			
$Q^2$ : 0,76			

## **Discussion**

### *The Influence of EWOM on Purchase Intention*

eWOM has a positive and significant influence on purchase intention. Better reviews about a hotel in online media can improve the hotel's image in consumers' minds, encouraging tourists to book the hotel. EWOM is a communication medium to share information about a product or service consumed between consumers who

do not know each other. Positive statements on eWOM communication can increase consumers' positive attitudes toward products and services and encourage purchase intention. EWOM has an essential role in influencing consumer behavior. In this study, it was found that eWOM could improve a hotel's brand image. The number of reviews, the ability of reviews to explain a hotel, the credibility of the source that provides reviews, the quality of information about the hotel, high ratings, and detailed

information will create a good brand image. Then, the hotel will be considered to have reliability, appeal, reputation, easy to remember and recognize. So, in the end, it will encourage tourists to stay at the hotel. The results of this study are in line with the findings of Tariq et al. (2017), Kala and Chaubey (2018), Evgeniy et al. (2019), Setiawan et al. (2021), and Chen et al. (2021), who found that eWOM significantly predicts purchase intention. Marketers are expected to pay greater attention to improving communication strategies through eWOM by encouraging more tourists to convey their experiences through electronic media. In addition, it can also improve the quality and completeness of information to attract potential tourists to stay.

#### *The Influence of eWOM on Brand Image*

A better eWOM will improve the brand image of star hotels in Bali. Alrwashdeh et al. (2019) discuss how eWOM platforms, such as online discussion forums and online communities, play an essential role in facilitating product and brand influence. eWOM is considered very important because reviews about a particular thing related to products or services can spread very quickly. In this study, it is proven that eWOM can improve a hotel's brand image. The number of reviews, the usefulness, credibility of sources, the quality of information, and the review content can enhance the image of a star hotel. A high number of reviews is vital as reviews about a hotel tourists often see will make it easier for tourists to remember. So that tourists will perceive that the hotel has reliability, appeal, and reputation. The results of this study are following the research of Tariq et al. (2017), Le et al. (2018), Rosady et al. (2019), Chuang (2019), Fang and Ariffin (2021), Ariyanto (2021) where eWOM can create brand images. Marketers are expected to encourage tourists to write reviews with clear information by providing instructions or review formats related to things that need to be shared and posting photos, videos, and stories during their stay. The number of eWOM can be increased by

encouraging credible tourists to write reviews by providing benefits in vouchers or discounts that can be used directly or on future stays so that tourists are willing to leave positive reviews. This can help improve the hotel's brand image.

#### *The Influence of Experiential Marketing on Purchase Intention*

This study proves that experiential marketing by hotel marketers can increase tourist interest in booking the hotel. This means that indicators, namely sense, feel, think, act, and relate in experiential marketing strategies, can encourage tourist intention to stay at star hotels in Bali. In this case, tourists perceive that familiarity formed through experiential marketing will create confidence, a better attitude toward the product or service, and a higher intention to book the hotel. A hotel promotion that describes the hotel environment arouses the feelings and thoughts of tourists, inviting tourists to participate, and displaying things related to tourist interests will encourage them to book the hotel. This is because most tourists, after seeing experiential marketing promotion with specific information about the company's vision and mission, benefits offered, the storytelling associated with the hotel will ignite tourists' interest. Offering more details that ignite consumers' feeling will spark their interest in staying. This finding is following the research of Le et al. (2018), Rosady et al. (2019), Chuang (2019), Fang and Ariffin (2021), and Ariyanto (2021) that experiential marketing encourages intention to purchase. Experiential marketing can be improved by building familiarity that can arouse feelings with promotions that display complete information, one of which can be done with a virtual tour that can directly show the hotel environment. In addition, it can be done by exploring deeper into the hotel's philosophy to provide specific information about the company's mission and vision and benefits offered will spark tourists' interest to book the hotel.

### *The Influence of Experiential Marketing on Brand Image*

Experiential marketing will improve the hotel's brand image. Experience in response to stimuli such as pre and post-purchase marketing efforts presents sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and relational experiences as strategic modules for experiential marketing. Customer experience acts as an important driver of competitive advantage and commercial success. Experiential marketing attributes significantly influence emotional responses and directly influence brand attitudes. In this study, experiential marketing was able to increase brand image. This means that the indicators, namely sense, feel, think, act, and relate, formed by marketers will create a deep impression in tourists' hearts. A hotel promotion that describes the hotel environment arouses the feelings and thoughts of tourists, inviting tourists to participate, and displaying things related to tourist interests will create a good image. Experiential marketing has shown that a company's long-term competitive advantage in the form of brand image can be gained by continuously exceeding customers' cognitive, emotional, and sensory expectations. The results of this study follow the results found by Le et al. (2018), Sjafitri et al. (2018), Hoseinzadeh and Baktash (2018), Suryaniprang (2019) and Spyra (2019) which found that the concept of experiential marketing has a significant influence on brand image. Experiential marketing can be improved by highlighting the hotel's philosophy, physical environment, and uniqueness to arouse the tourists' feelings. And the relate indicator needs to invite tourists to participate by creating and conveying a concept that appeals to tourists.

### *The Influence of Brand Image on Purchase Intention*

A better brand image will encourage tourists to book star hotels in Bali. A brand is an essential concept in marketing activities, so it plays a tremendous role in enabling consumers to identify a company, leading to differentiating a brand from

competitors. Brand image contributes to consumers' cognition about a particular brand, thus influencing consumer buying behaviour. In this study, brand image can increase tourist' intention to stay. This means when a brand has been embedded in consumers' minds by showing reliability, attractiveness, and reputation, it will create an interest in the brand. So that, through brand image, it will be easier to attract potential tourists to stay because consumers tend to choose brands that are already known or already have the right brand image. If a product with a positive brand image is perceived to be able to meet their needs and desires, consumers will intend to buy a product or service. This is in line with the research of Tariq et al. (2017), Imbayani and Gama (2018), Kala and Chaubey (2018), Pan and Chen (2019), and Liang and Lai (2022) found that brand image directly impacts purchase intention. To create an easily recognizable image, it is necessary to promote continuously and periodically the hotel's uniqueness and characteristics. Brand image must also be maintained by always paying attention to quality, attractiveness, and reputation, providing quality service through quality personnel. In addition, brand image can be strengthened by creating an official professional website that can make it easier for customers to reserve rooms. The website can also indicate whether a hotel has high quality or not.

### *The Role of Brand Image in Mediating the Influence of eWOM on Purchase Intention*

Brand image perfectly mediates the relationship between eWOM and purchase intention in star hotels in Bali. Through the many reviews about a hotel, the ability of eWOM to help tourists make decisions, the credibility of sources that wrote eWOM, good quality information, ratings, and detailed information can create a good hotel image. Brand image is represented by tourists' perceptions of the reliability of a hotel, hotel attractiveness, and good reputation, and hotels are easy to remember and recognize. A hotel with a positive image will encourage consumer interest to

choose the brand. With eWOM, tourists will choose already-known hotels with the right brand image. The image created in the minds of tourists will form a pattern of consistent behavior toward purchase intention. This means that creating a strong hotel image will not only encourage tourists to make hotel reservations but also encourage them to recommend the hotel and look for more information about it. So, brand image explains the relationship between eWOM and purchase intention. This result is following the research of Tariq et al. (2017), Kala and Chaubey (2018), Evgeniy et al. (2019), as well as Yohana et al. (2020), and Setiawan et al. (2021) who found that eWOM increases brand image and purchase intention.

*The Role of Brand Image in Mediating the Influence of Experiential Marketing on Purchase Intention*

Brand image mediates the relationship between experiential marketing and purchase intention at star hotels in Bali. Experiential marketing is a marketing communication that stimulates tourists' emotions, thus creating purchase intention. Experience is conceptualized as a combination of senses, affect, and cognition. The cognitive component consists of physical attributes or intangible qualities that satisfy a need, the affective component refers to the customer's mood or feelings (e.g., pleasure), and the sensory component can cause excitement and pleasure. Experiential marketing creates consumers' emotional attachment to a brand by involving five elements to create interest. With experiential marketing, hotels will be easier to remember and recognize. The hotel will also be seen as having reliability, good reputation, and appeal. So that in the end, the brand image created will encourage tourists to stay and explore more information about the hotel. A strong brand image is a competitive advantage. Therefore brand must rise to give meaning to the hotel's relationship with consumers. When consumers grasp the meaning and feel the product benefits, it can instill memories that impact purchase intention.

So, brand image explains the relationship between experiential marketing and purchase intention. This result is following the findings of Suryaniprang (2019) and Hsiao et al. (2021), which found that experiential marketing significantly affects brands and influences purchase intention.

## Conclusion

Amid intense competition in the hotel industry, it is important to understand factors that encourage booking intention. The results showed that eWOM has a significant positive impact on brand image and booking intention, experiential marketing has a significant positive influence on brand image and booking intention, brand image has a significant positive impact on booking intention, brand image partially mediates the influence of eWOM on booking intention, and perfectly mediates the influence of experiential marketing on booking intention.

Practical implications derived from the study results are: to increase booking intention, hotel marketers need to increase the intensity and quality of eWOM, develop an experiential marketing strategy exploring the hotel's philosophy to provide specific information about the company's mission and vision or the benefits offered, provide quality service through quality personnel to improve hotel's reputation, implement a referral program by offering discounts to tourists who recommend the hotel to colleagues.

This study has some limitations and there are abundant opportunities for further research. A limitation of this study is the limited generalization of research results in other industries because the unique characteristics of different industries can change a series of factors that influence purchase intention. Second, due to this study's descriptive nature, there was no manipulation or control of the antecedents of booking intention (as would be required in an ideal experimental design), so conclusions on the relationships between constructs in this study require further and

continuous study. Further research can examine factors other than eWOM and experiential marketing that can affect purchase intention, such as marketing mix, trust, or perceived value. In addition, further research could employ qualitative methods to explore the topic.

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