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The Moderating Role of E-WOM on the Effects of Perceived Quality and Brand Ambassador on Purchase Decisions for Running Accessories: Study of Medan Polonia CFD Participants

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Abstract: The increasing popularity of running activities has influenced consumer behavior, particularly in purchasing sports accessories that support performance and lifestyle needs. Understanding factors affecting purchase decisions has become increasingly important as consumers are exposed to both product-related and promotional influences. This study aims to examine the effects of perceived quality and brand ambassadors on purchase decisions and investigate the moderating role of electronic word of mouth among active runners at Car Free Day Medan Polonia. Quantitative approach using purposive sampling was implemented, involving 100 active runners. Data were collected through questionnaires and analyzed using Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA). The findings conclude that perceived quality and brand ambassador had significant impact (partial and simultaneously) to purchase decision, but e-WOM still failed to demonstrate a significant moderating effect.

Keywords: Electronic Word of Mouth, Perceived Quality, Brand Ambassador, Purchase Decision, Car Free Day, Sports accessories

Introduction

The growing popularity of running is a factual trend in latest year. Data from (Indonesia's Ministry of Youth & Sport, 2024) shows that running is a sport with most participant in Indonesia. Growth finally turned sport participation into more than a health-oriented activity, but also a lifestyle practice that is closely linked to consumption patterns (R. Amin et al., 2025), especially for sports accessories that support comfort, performance, and identity. That trend is supported by the empirical findings that running accessories is becoming one of the most highly demanded products in the market (Ken Research, 2024). Survey shows that majority of people in Indonesia also open to buying sport accessories (Indonesia's Ministry of Youth & Sport, 2022)

This trend is also reflected in Car Free Day activities in Medan Polonia. As one of the main spaces for active runner in the 4th largest city in Indonesia, this area becomes an active chamber of running lifestyle. Pre-research observations conducted before found that active

runners in CFD Medan Polonia frequently purchased and use several dedicated running accessories, from shoes, glasses, shirt/jersey, etc. It became clear that this place is a factual arena of the phenomenon mentioned above. With 5000-7000 people actively participate every Sunday morning in this area, this place is a potential research location to gained information about purchasing behavior in sports accessories product.

In marketing research, purchase decisions are commonly influenced by several factors. The assumption aligned with Kotler et al. (2017) explanation under the 4P theory (Product, Price, Place, Promotion). The theory fundamentally argued that people always consider and think before deciding to purchase something (Kotler et al., 2017). By many variables, key factors such as perceived quality, brand ambassador, also e-WOM emerge to the top potential. Perceived quality refers to consumers' subjective evaluation of a product's excellence (Nuzula et al., 2023; Widjajanta et al., 2020). This variable has proven to be significant to purchase decision (Mustika & Piksi, 2021). This concept includes the dimension of performance, features, conformance to specifications, reliability, durability, serviceability, also aesthetics and style. In other hand, brand ambassador is often used as a persuasive communication tool to strengthen brand image and attract attention (Kotler et al., 2017). Shimp (2003) defines it as actor that acts as a marketing tool by representing brand faces. It has a big potential by leveraging its capital. It can be strategically used as a tool to communicate brand value to the public (A. M. Amin & Yanti, 2021), also proven in many similar research as an independent variable that correlates with purchase decisions.

At the same time, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) has become increasingly important because many consumers now rely heavily on online reviews, recommendations, and peer experiences before buying a product. E-WOM significance became clearer especially in the era of digital shopping via social media and e-commerce. Previous studies suggest that e-WOM can positively affect purchase decision also moderate the effect of other marketing aspect (Al-Gasawneh & Al-Adamat, 2020; Amanda et al., 2021; Dyego & Oktavianti, 2020; Ghate & Sheikhalizadeh, 2020). Nevertheless, empirical result for this variable is still inconsistent. Adaby & Nurhadi (2022) found that e-WOM did not moderate other variable effects to purchase decision.

Although prior studies examined the combination of perceived quality, brand ambassador, and electronic word of mouth variables, there's still limited research found positioned e-WOM as a moderator to perceived quality and brand ambassador. This indicates a research gap with the potential to know the result of that combination. Also, prior research is examined tend to focus on beauty & cosmetics, food & beverages, fashion (shoes), and e-commerce industries and community (Putri Utami et al., 2020; Rahmawati et al., 2022; Rimiyati & Alfando Digo Sewanto, 2026; Sofwatunnisa et al., 2025). The literature still provides limited evidence on how these variables operate among active runners in a community-based such as Car Free Day environment.

The Medan Polonia CFD context is important because it is not only a public space for physical activity, but also a recurring social arena where runners interact, exchange product experiences, and observe product use in real time. This context is especially relevant because runners often exchange information through digital communities and social media, making

online recommendations a likely influence in their buying process (Rachmawaty et al., 2023; Wulandari, 2020; Syadzwina et al., 2024). This makes the setting particularly relevant for examining whether online recommendations can strengthen or weaken the influence of several major marketing variables. The unique contribution of this study lies in extending consumer behavior research to a localized sports-community context in urban society.

Academically, this study contributes to marketing literature by clarifying whether the effects of perceived quality and brand ambassador remain consistent in a community-based sports market and whether e-WOM functions as a contextual boundary condition in purchase decision making. Practically, the findings may help sports-accessory marketers design more targeted strategies by improving product quality, selecting brand ambassadors that fit runners' identities, and using digital communication more selectively in community settings.

The study therefore aims to test the direct effects of perceived quality and brand ambassador, the simultaneous effect of both variables, and the moderating role of e-WOM. The hypotheses and logical framework in this research are as mentioned below:

H1: Perceived quality has significant effect on purchase decision

H2: The use of brand ambassador has significant effect on purchase decision

H3: Perceived quality and the use of brand ambassador simultaneously have significant effect to purchase decision

H4: e-WOM has significant role on moderating perceived quality effect to purchase decision

H5: e-WOM has significant role on moderating brand ambassador effect to purchase decision

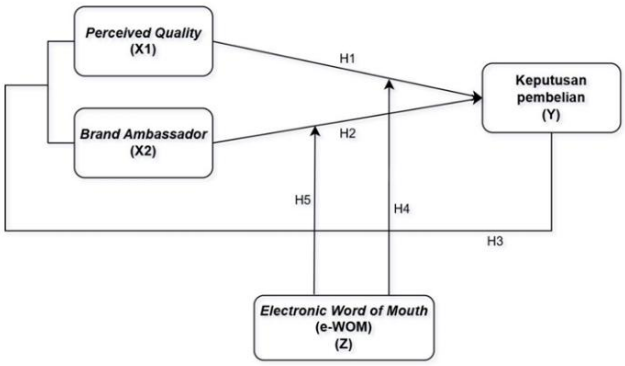

Figure 1. Logical Framework in This Research

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative inferential design to examine the relationships among perceived quality, brand ambassador, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), to purchase decision. The research object was active runners who participate in Car Free Day Medan Polonia and who have purchased running accessories. A quantitative approach was selected because it allows the relationships among variables to be tested statistically in a structured & measurable way (Waruwu et al., 2025).

The population consisted of individuals who took part in Car Free Day activities in Medan Polonia, with the sample drawn using purposive sampling. The sample size was set

at 100 respondents based on the Lemeshow formula as the case met the condition of an unknown population size (Elsyia et al., 2023). Inclusion criteria require respondents to be active runners at Car Free Day Medan Polonia for at least the past 3 months and had purchased running accessories during the activity period. Data was collected through a closed-ended questionnaire distributed via Google Form. Research conducted with ethical norms as participants provided informed consent prior to participation.

The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1, strongly disagree, to 5, strongly agree (Sugiyono, 2023). Perceived quality was measured through indicators of performance, features, conformance to specifications, reliability, durability, serviceability, and aesthetics and style (Das Guru & Paulssen, 2020). Brand ambassador were measured through visibility, credibility, attraction, and power (Shimp, 2003). Electronic word of mouth was measured through sharing positive experiences, giving recommendations, and encouraging others to buy (Pebrianti et al., 2020). Purchase decision was measured through product choice, brand choice, distribution channel choice, purchase timing, and purchase quantity (Kotler et al., 2017).

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS. The analysis included descriptive statistics, validity testing using Pearson Product Moment correlation, reliability testing using Cronbach's alpha, classical assumption tests (multicollinearity, Glesjer's heteroscedasticity, & normality using Kolmogorov-Smirnov One Sample test), Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA) that also includes t-test, F-test, and coefficient of determination (R^2). Mean centering was applied before creating interaction terms to reduce potential multicollinearity (Yaremych & Preacher, 2024).

Results and Discussion

As a result of 100 sets of questionnaires distributed to the research's samples, the insight of the respondents descriptively shown on the table below:

Table 1. Respondent Distribution & Characteristics

Variables	Option	% of n (100)
Age	20-25 years old	35%
	>45 years old	29%
	<19 years old	18%
	26–45 years old	18%
Status	Working	57%
	Undergrad Student	40%
	Student	3%
Domicile	Medan City	96%
	Outside Meda	4%
Frequencies of running activity in CFD Medan Polonia	Every week	41%
	3x a month	36%
	2x a month	16%
	1x a month	7%

Following the demographic profile analysis, descriptive statistics were conducted to provide an overview of respondents' perceptions on whole variables. The analysis was performed by calculating the mean and standard deviation values of each indicator. The results shown on the table below:

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Min Value	Max Value	Mean	Std. Deviation
Perceived Quality (X1)	16	40	29.07	5.276697
Brand Ambassador (X2)	15	36	25.44	4.566722
Electronic Word of Mouth/e-WOM (Z)	12	29	20.02	3.997423
Purchase Decision (Z)	10	35	17.19	3.611695

As a part to verify whether the research instrument is valid and reliable, this study implements the evaluation by using Pearson Product Moment Validity Test with significant value of 0,05 (two-tailed). In this case, an item was considered valid if the calculated correlation coefficient exceeded the critical value (r-calculated > r-table = 0.197; n = 100) and the significance value was below 0.05 (Ramadhan et al., 2024). The results from this test show that all items are valid, as shown on the table below:

Table 3. Pearson Product Moment Validity Test

	Perceived Quality (X1)		Brand Ambassador (X2)		e-WOM (Z)		Purchase Decision (Y)	
Items	**Value**	**Result**	**Value**	**Result**	**Value**	**Result**	**Value**	**Result**
Q1	0.739	Valid	0.593	Valid	0.591	Valid	0.781	Valid
Q2	0.620	Valid	0.522	Valid	0.657	Valid	0.703	Valid
Q3	0.679	Valid	0.588	Valid	0.727	Valid	0.705	Valid
Q4	0.573	Valid	0.602	Valid	0.670	Valid	0.777	Valid
Q5	0.634	Valid	0.480	Valid	0.624	Valid	0.593	Valid
Q6	0.776	Valid	0.575	Valid	0.706	Valid	-	-
Q7	0.666	Valid	0.606	Valid	-	-	-	-
Q8	0.701	Valid	0.570	Valid	-	-	-	-

Note: Q (Question item)

Reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha to assess the consistency of questionnaire items. A variable is generally considered reliable if Cronbach's Alpha value exceeds 0.60, even better if exceeds 0,70 (Saputra & Sumantyo, 2022). The results from this test made it clear that all variables is reliable, as shown on the table below:

Table 4. Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test

Variable	Value	Result
Perceived Quality (X1)	0.827	Reliable
Brand Ambassador (X2)	0.700	Reliable
Electronic Word of Mouth/e-WOM (Z)	0.744	Reliable
Purchase Decision (Y)	0.759	Reliable

Classical assumption tests were conducted to ensure the suitability of the regression model. This phase contains 3 sets of tests, which are Normality Test, Multicollinearity Test, and Heteroscedasticity Test. The normality test is conducted with Kolmogorov-Smirnov rule. The logic of this test is when the coefficient value exceeds 0,05, then the data did not show any distribution problem. As shown on the table below, the coefficient result is 0.128. Since 0.128 > 0.05, so the data passed this test.

Table 5. Kolmogorov-SmirnovNormality Test

		Unstandardized Residual
N		100
Normal Parameters[a,b]	Mean	.0000000
	Std. Deviation	3.16637869
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.079
	Positive	.049
	Negative	-.079
Test Statistic		.079
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		**.128[c]**

Multicollinearity testing was also conducted using tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values to examine whether high correlations existed among independent variables within the regression model. Variables were considered free from multicollinearity if tolerance values exceeded 0,10 and VIF values were below 10 Click or tap here to enter text.(Kyriazos & Poga, 2023). As shown on the table below, all the tolerance values exceeded the minimum number, also the VIF is all far below 10. Therefore, it becomes clear that this data passed the multicollinearity test.

Table 6. Multicollinearity Test

Variable	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	**VIF**
Perceived Quality (X1)	0,774	1.292
Brand Ambassador (X2)	0,773	1.293
Electronic Word of Mouth/e-WOM (Z)	0,706	1.416
Interaction from X1 to Z (X1Z)	0,750	1.334
Interaction from X2 to Z (X2Z)	0,785	1.275

The heteroscedasticity test was conducted by using the rules of Glesjer model. This is needed to determine whether unequal variance occurs in the data. In addition, scatterplot is also generated to ease the observation of any odd pattern. The logic is when the scatterplot shows random pattern and the Glesjer test coefficient exceeds 0,05, the heteroscedasticity is not detected. It means the data that tested in the regression model is valid to be interpreted. As shown in the figure and table below, the test results meet the criteria. Therefore, this test also passed. The regression shown later in this research is valid to prove the hypotheses.

Table 7. Glesjer's Heteroscedasticity Test

Variable	t	Sig.
Constant	10.862	.000
Perceived Quality (X1)	-.409	.683
Brand Ambassador (X2)	-.1371	.174
Electronic Word of Mouth/e-WOM (Z)	.579	.566
Interaction from X1 to Z (X1Z)	1.176	.243
Interaction from X2 to Z (X2Z)	-.026	.979

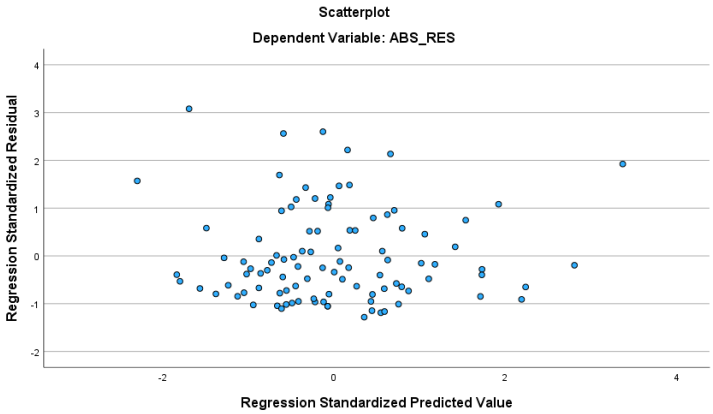

Figure 2. Heteroscedasticity Scatter Plot Observation

As a part of hypotheses testing, regression model using regression analysis (as a part of MRA test) was employed to investigate how both independent variables (Perceived Quality and Brand Ambassador) partially and simultaneously affect the dependent variable (Purchase Decision). The logic is when the coefficient <0,05, it means there's an effect to the dependent strategy. The MRA output shows coefficient of 0,002 for X1 to Y and 0,017 for X2 to Y. Since both numbers are below 0,05. Therefore, it can be proven that both independent variables affect the dependent variable in partial.

Table 8. Partial Effect from X1 and X2 to Y in MRA output

Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	17.190	.326	52.749	.000[b]
CX1	.210	.067	.307	3.155	.002

CX2	.186	.236	.236	2.420	.017

ANOVA model output (F-test) in the MRA set can be used to interpret the existence of simultaneous effect from both independent variables to dependent variable (Mardiatmoko, 2024). The sig. value on the test was 0.000. Therefore, since it was under 0,05, so it can be interpreted that there's a simultaneous effect from perceived quality and brand ambassador to purchase decision. Those results mean that hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 are confidently supported and accepted.

Table 9. Simultaneous Effect from X1 and X2 to Y in MRA output

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	261.236	2	130.618	12.299	.000[b]
Residual	1030.154	97	10.620		
Total	1291.390	99			

Coefficient of determination model summary table output on the MRA test also needed to be interpreted. This coefficient assesses the explanatory power of the model. By reading the data, we know how far and strong the independent variables explaining the dependent variables. As displayed on the table below, the R-square value obtained was .202, indicating that 20.2% of the variation in purchase decisions could be explained by both perceived quality and brand ambassador variables. The remaining 79.8% was influenced by other factors outside the model.

Table 10. R^2 Output (Coefficient of Determination) on X1 & X2 to Y

R Square	Adj. R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.202	.186	3.259

Predictors: (Constant), CX2, CX1
Dependent Variable: Y

To answer the hypotheses 4 and 5, MRA test were conducted. The coefficient results on that test can be used to interpret whether there's an effect from e-WOM (Z) to the relation from Perceived Quality (X1) to Purchase Decision (Y) also Brand Ambassador (X2) to Purchase Decision (Y). With the same criteria of <0,05 to surpass the test, the result on the table below shows that the sig. value is 0,067 for the interaction from Z to X1-Y, also 0,270 for the interaction from Z to X2-Y. As both numbers are above 0,05, it can be interpreted that e-WOM did not moderate the relation between both independent variables (X1 and X2) to dependent variables (Y). Therefore, Hypothesis 4 and 5 was confidently rejected.

Table 11. Moderating Effect from Z to X1 & X2 to Y in MRA output

Variable	t	Sig.
Constant	46.974	.000
Interaction from X1 to Z (X1Z)	1.850	.067

Interaction from X2 to Z (X2Z)	-1.110	.270

The findings in this research suggest that consumers tend to consider product quality perceptions when deciding to purchase sports accessories. It's also supported the notion that perceived quality functions as an important determinant in consumer evaluation processes and purchasing behavior (Widjajanta et al., 2020). Individuals who perceive products as durable, reliable, and suitable for their needs are more likely to proceed with purchase decisions. Active runners may prioritize functionality, comfort, and product performance because these products are closely associated with their physical activities and routines.

Similarly, the findings also indicate that the presence of a brand ambassador contributes to shaping consumer perceptions and increasing purchase decisions. It is resonance with previous studies that argue public figures and influential individuals may enhance brand attractiveness and improve consumer confidence toward a product (Idris et al., 2024; Mustika & Piksi, 2021; Sijabat & Nugrahani, 2025). It supports the assumption that active runners are influenced by individuals they perceive as credible, attractive, or relevant to sports lifestyles. The use of brand ambassadors who embody athletic identity may strengthen consumers' emotional connection with products and stimulate purchasing behavior. As Siswanto & Haryono (2025) finds that brand ambassador could create and build personal and emotional aspect that can influence people to buy certain product. It's the most popular marketing concept that is used by brand from digital conventional society to social media society.

Furthermore, the simultaneous analysis demonstrated that Perceived Quality and Brand Ambassador collectively influenced purchase decisions suggests that consumer purchasing behaviour not only explained through a single factor alone but also through a combination of promotional factors. From a theoretical perspective, the findings support consumer behavior theories emphasizing that purchasing decisions emerge from multidimensional evaluations involving both functional and symbolic attributes (Barbaritano & Savelli, 2021; Żurek et al., 2026). Consumers do not merely assess product utility but also interpret marketing signals and social meanings embedded within promotional activities.

However, the moderating analysis produced different findings. Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) was unable to moderate the relationships between independent variables and purchase decisions. This finding contradicts several previous studies suggesting that online reviews and digital recommendations strengthen marketing effects and consumer responses (Julia & Slamet, 2022). The insignificant moderating role of e-WOM indicates that online communication may not necessarily alter the influence of perceived quality and brand ambassadors within this context.

Several explanations may account for this outcome. First, active runners participating in Car Free Day communities may rely more heavily on direct interpersonal experiences and face-to-face recommendations than online information. Community-based sports environments often facilitate direct interaction and experience sharing among participants,

potentially reducing dependence on electronic communication channels (Räikkönen & Hedman, 2025). This interpretation is consistent with the distinction between traditional WOM and e-WOM, where direct interpersonal communication may perceived as more personal and credible, whereas online recommendations may be viewed as more distant and less emotionally embedded (Sundram et al., 2022).

Second, consumers purchasing sports accessories may prioritize product performance and practical usage experience over digital opinions from other runners. Rachmawaty et al. (2023) opinion that runners tend to be active in digital communities not necessarily translate to purchase decision. There's probability that another factor played bigger role. In this setting, information gained from online reviews or digital recommendations may function as supplementary input only, not significance factor to support or cancel the intention of buying that already created by other factors.

The present findings contribute theoretically by demonstrating that variables commonly found significant in broader digital marketing contexts may not necessarily perform similarly across all consumer settings. This study highlights the importance of contextual factors when examining moderating effects in consumer behavior research. Contexts in which consumers are primarily digitally mediated and contexts in which offline community experience remains dominant should be distinguished.

Conclusion

This study found that perceived quality and brand ambassador had significant effects, both partially and simultaneously, on purchase decisions among active runners at Car Free Day Medan Polonia, particularly in the context of sports accessories. These findings suggest that consumers continue to rely on product-related evaluations and promotional cues when making purchasing decisions. However, the results also indicate that electronic word of mouth failed to moderate the relationships between perceived quality, brand ambassador, and purchase decisions. This finding does not necessarily imply that e-WOM lacks importance in consumer behavior; rather, it suggests that e-WOM may not function as a strengthening mechanism within the relationships examined in this study.

The findings provide important implications for consumer behavior and marketing research by demonstrating that the moderating role of e-WOM may depend on specific contextual conditions and may not operate uniformly across consumer settings. In community-based sports environments such as Car Free Day activities, purchase decisions may be shaped more strongly by direct product evaluations and promotional representations, while e-WOM may play different role within the decision-making process.

From this context, practical recommendation can be given, that marketers who targeting sports communities should focus on improving product quality and selecting brand ambassadors who are relevant and closely aligned with consumers' identities and lifestyles. While online communication remains valuable, its role should not be assumed to automatically strengthen the effects of other marketing variables that used on the campaign.

For future research, additional variables such as price perception, lifestyle, social influence, community attachment, or product involvement may be considered to provide a

broader understanding of purchase decisions. Future studies are also encouraged to examine different demographic groups or sports communities and to explore alternative roles of e-WOM, including its potential function as an independent variable rather than solely as a moderator.

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