

DO CONSUMER VOICES OUTPERFORM CELEBRITY INFLUENCE? RELATIVE EFFECTS OF E-WOM, ENDORSEMENT, AND PRICE ON LOCAL PERFUME PURCHASE DECISIONS

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study tests whether consumer-generated electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) has a stronger relationship with local perfume purchase decisions than celebrity endorsement, while controlling for perceived price.

Method: The study uses 119 complete survey responses and 19 five-point Likert items. Construct means are analyzed through multiple regression with standardized coefficients and HC3 heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors. A 5,000-replication bootstrap evaluates the difference between the e-WOM and celebrity-endorsement coefficients.

Finding: Perceived price is the only significant predictor ($\beta = 0.743$, $p < 0.001$). Celebrity endorsement ($\beta = -0.092$, $p = 0.353$) and e-WOM ($\beta = 0.032$, $p = 0.794$) are not significant after the predictors are considered together. The bootstrapped e-WOM-minus-endorsement contrast is also nonsignificant (95% CI = -0.233 to 0.441).

Novelty: Instead of examining promotional variables separately, the study directly compares paid celebrity influence with consumer-generated information for a sensory experience product. The findings challenge the assumption that stronger average e-WOM scores necessarily represent a stronger unique purchasing effect and identify perceived value as the dominant driver.

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INTRODUCTION

Digital platforms have changed how consumers evaluate fragrance products. Buyers can now encounter celebrity or influencer promotions, read large numbers of consumer reviews, compare prices across marketplaces, and complete a transaction without visiting a physical store. This environment is especially important for local perfume brands, which compete with established domestic and international products while relying heavily on social media visibility. Because fragrance is closely connected to identity, confidence, and lifestyle, marketing communication can shape both product expectations and brand meaning.

Celebrity endorsement is widely used to attract attention and associate a public figure's image with a brand. Recent meta-analytic evidence links source credibility, attractiveness, and congruence with consumer responses, while showing that the strength of these relationships varies across outcomes and settings (Han & Balabanis, 2024). Influencer campaigns also depend on the characteristics of the communicator, followers, and promotional content (Leung et al., 2022). Evidence on social-media influencers informs the present credibility argument, although influencer marketing and conventional celebrity endorsement are not identical communication settings.

At the same time, consumers increasingly rely on electronic word of mouth (e-WOM). Reviews and comments offer product information attributed to other consumers, whose credibility must still be evaluated. Recent meta-analyses connect review and reviewer characteristics with e-WOM credibility, information adoption, and purchase intention (Moradi & Zihagh, 2022; Verma et al., 2023a). Verma et al. (2023b) further identify usefulness and information adoption as sequential mechanisms linking e-WOM evaluations with purchase intention. These findings motivate examining consumer-generated information alongside endorsement rather than assuming that exposure alone translates into purchasing.

Perfume creates a special information problem because aroma cannot be fully evaluated through a conventional screen. Consumers normally need direct sensory exposure to judge scent character, projection, and longevity. Recent work on online sensory experience considers how text, images, and other media represent sensory attributes (Hamacher & Buchkremer, 2022), while multisensory research emphasizes interactions among sensory cues (Spence, 2022). In online perfume purchasing, celebrity messages may create a symbolic image, whereas reviews may describe aroma and performance. This application to perfume is a contextual inference; neither source fully replaces smelling the product.

Price supplies a third signal. Consumers evaluate whether an offer is affordable and whether its expected benefits justify the money spent. A comprehensive meta-analysis supports a perceived-value framework that combines benefits, sacrifices, and overall value (Blut et al., 2024). Consumption-value evidence also indicates that functional, emotional, and other benefits can contribute differently to consumer responses across contexts (Mason et al., 2023). For local perfume, perceived price may therefore capture an economic evaluation that overlaps with promotional and review-based information.

Previous marketing studies commonly report separate positive relationships between celebrity endorsement, e-WOM, price, and purchasing outcomes. This approach leaves a practical question unanswered: when these signals compete in the same model, does consumer-generated information contribute more unique explanatory power than celebrity promotion? A high mean score or a significant simple correlation cannot answer this question because the predictors may overlap. Direct comparison requires standardized coefficients and an uncertainty estimate for the difference between them.

This study addresses that gap using 119 complete responses concerning a masked local perfume brand, referred to as Local Perfume Brand X. Its novelty is a direct contest between paid celebrity influence and consumer-generated information for a sensory product, with perceived price included as an economic benchmark. The study asks whether e-WOM uniquely outperforms celebrity endorsement after shared variance is controlled. It also uses heteroskedasticity-robust inference and bootstrap confidence intervals, allowing the conclusion to reflect uncertainty rather than coefficient ranking alone.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Source credibility provides the main explanation for celebrity endorsement in this study. Consumers may respond more favorably when they perceive a communicator as knowledgeable, trustworthy, and attractive. Han and Balabanis (2024) synthesize evidence on these attributes and their relationships with consumer attitudes and intentions. Masuda et al. (2022) additionally examine how influencer attributes relate to purchase intention through trustworthiness, perceived expertise, and parasocial relationships. These contemporary applications support a credibility-based explanation without implying that the present questionnaire was developed or validated in those studies.

The match-up perspective suggests that endorsement effectiveness depends partly on congruence among the communicator, audience, and promoted offer. Leung et al. (2022) show that

follower–brand fit and content characteristics shape campaign effectiveness, including nonlinear relationships. Broader syntheses distinguish multiple predictors and outcomes of influencer effectiveness (Spörl-Wang et al., 2025), with product and platform characteristics acting as boundary conditions (Pan et al., 2025). For perfume, a suitable public figure may help convey a relevant lifestyle or identity, but the unique contribution of endorsement may weaken when other decision information is available. H1: Celebrity endorsement has a positive effect on the purchase decision for Local Perfume Brand X.

The Information Adoption Model explains how consumers decide whether to use online information. Recent meta-analytic evidence indicates that usefulness and credibility relate to behavioral intentions through e-WOM adoption, with processing patterns varying between social-networking and e-commerce platforms (Moradi & Zihagh, 2022). Using 179 studies, Verma et al. (2023b) support a sequential pathway involving usefulness and adoption. Consistent with this reasoning, Ngo et al. (2024) examine credibility, attitudes toward information, usefulness, and adoption in explaining online purchase intention on social-networking sites.

This mechanism is relevant to perfume because reviews can describe opening notes, dry-down, longevity, projection, packaging, or perceived similarity to other fragrances. Such descriptions may help buyers judge whether information is useful for their own decision. Ni and Cheng (2024) show that platform and message characteristics affect e-WOM effectiveness through credibility and diagnosticity. Chauhan and Gupta (2024) further synthesize how both message and source cues contribute to e-WOM credibility. Their findings provide a general rationale for the proposed association; they do not establish a perfume-specific effect. H2: e-WOM has a positive effect on the purchase decision for Local Perfume Brand X.

Perceived value explains the role of price. Consumers do not react only to the nominal amount; they consider affordability and whether expected benefits justify the financial sacrifice. Blut et al. (2024) support evaluating benefits and sacrifices together, while Mason et al. (2023) show that consumption-value relationships depend on the outcome and research context. For a local fragrance, a favorable price evaluation may reduce the perceived financial consequences of choosing a scent without testing it directly. Perceived price is treated here as an economic evaluation rather than a complete measure of multidimensional consumer value. H3: Perceived price has a positive effect on the purchase decision for Local Perfume Brand X.

The novelty hypothesis compares two communication sources. Celebrity endorsement provides a promotional signal, whereas e-WOM can provide accounts of product use. Recent evidence supports the relevance of e-WOM credibility and information adoption (Verma et al., 2023a, 2023b), but influencer research also finds that informative content can support purchase-related outcomes (Pan et al., 2025). Consequently, the literature does not establish that consumer reviews universally outperform endorsers. For a sensory product, practical peer descriptions may nevertheless be more diagnostic than celebrity imagery, motivating the following context-specific test. H4: The positive effect of e-WOM on purchase decisions is stronger than the effect of celebrity endorsement.

The conceptual model therefore includes three simultaneous predictors: celebrity endorsement, e-WOM, and perceived price. The first two represent competing communication sources, whereas price represents the economic evaluation of the offer. Including all three in one regression prevents the study from interpreting overlapping bivariate relationships as independent effects. The coefficient difference for H4 is evaluated with bootstrap resampling because simply observing that one coefficient is numerically larger does not establish a statistically meaningful difference.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study applies a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design. The source workbook contains 119 respondents with complete answers to 19 five-point Likert items. The product name is masked as Local Perfume Brand X. Five items measure celebrity endorsement (CE1–CE5), five measure e-WOM (EW1–EW5), four measure perceived price (PR1–PR4), and five measure purchase decision (KP1–KP5). Responses range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The accompanying manuscript states that data collection was associated with the Scent of Indonesia Vol. 3 event at Tunjungan Plaza Surabaya on 27–29 June 2025 and used an online questionnaire. However, the workbook contains 119 item-response records, whereas the earlier manuscript reported a population of 116 and an analytical sample of 90. This article treats the 119 complete records as a new analytical dataset. Individual demographic and screening responses are unavailable and are not imputed.

Construct scores are calculated as the arithmetic mean of their items. Reliability is assessed using Cronbach's alpha, and corrected item–total correlations are used as an item-quality check. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations summarize the data. Harman's unrotated first-factor share is reported only as a limited diagnostic for common-method concentration; it is not treated as proof that common-method bias is absent. This restricted interpretation follows recent discussion of the complexity of common-method bias and the limitations of simple diagnostic remedies (Podsakoff et al., 2024).

Hypotheses are tested with multiple ordinary least-squares regression: Purchase Decision = $\alpha + \beta_1$ Celebrity Endorsement + β_2 e-WOM + β_3 Perceived Price + ε . All variables are standardized before estimation so that coefficients can be compared. Because the Breusch–Pagan test indicates heteroskedasticity, HC3 robust standard errors and confidence intervals are reported. Multicollinearity is checked with VIF, residual shape with Jarque–Bera, and residual ordering with Durbin–Watson.

To test H4, 5,000 bootstrap samples are drawn with replacement at the respondent level. The difference $\beta_{\text{e-WOM}} - \beta_{\text{endorsement}}$ is calculated for every sample. H4 is supported only when the 95% percentile interval for this difference excludes zero. A sensitivity model removes CE1 because its corrected item–total correlation is below 0.30. The study identifies associations rather than causal effects. The emphasis on interval estimation and distinguishing direct from mediated relationships is consistent with contemporary regression-based guidance (Hayes, 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

All 119 records contain the 19 required Likert responses. Purchase decision has the highest mean (4.37), followed by perceived price (4.24), e-WOM (4.18), and celebrity endorsement (4.07). These high values indicate generally favorable evaluations and also suggest possible ceiling concentration. The bivariate correlations with purchase decision are 0.359 for celebrity endorsement, 0.534 for e-WOM, and 0.714 for perceived price. Thus, e-WOM has a stronger simple correlation than endorsement, but price has the strongest association.

Cronbach's alpha is 0.750 for celebrity endorsement, 0.897 for e-WOM, 0.792 for perceived price, and 0.795 for purchase decision. Most corrected item–total correlations exceed 0.30. CE1 is an exception at 0.143, suggesting that its trustworthiness wording does not move consistently with the other endorsement items. The item is retained in the main model for transparency and comparability with the planned scale, while a sensitivity test removes it.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

Construct	Items	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Cronbach α
Celebrity endorsement	5	4.072	0.624	2.800	5.000	0.750
e-WOM	5	4.176	0.626	2.000	5.000	0.897
Perceived price	4	4.239	0.581	2.500	5.000	0.792
Purchase decision	5	4.366	0.522	3.000	5.000	0.795

Source: Processed survey data, N = 119.

The standardized regression explains 51.5% of the variation in purchase decision (adjusted $R^2 = 0.502$; $F = 40.625$, $p < 0.001$). Perceived price is positive and significant ($\beta = 0.743$, HC3 $p < 0.001$), supporting H3. Celebrity endorsement is negative and nonsignificant ($\beta = -0.092$, $p = 0.353$), while e-WOM is positive but nonsignificant ($\beta = 0.032$, $p = 0.794$). H1 and H2 are therefore not supported after the predictors are considered simultaneously.

The result does not mean that endorsement and e-WOM are irrelevant. Both have positive bivariate correlations with purchase decision. Their unique coefficients become small after perceived price and shared variance are included. e-WOM correlates 0.743 with perceived price, suggesting that favorable reviews may communicate value-for-money information. When price captures that evaluation directly, e-WOM contributes little additional variance. Similarly, endorsement may attract attention without independently determining the final purchase once value is considered.

H4 is not supported. The bootstrap mean difference between e-WOM and celebrity endorsement is 0.121, but its 95% interval extends from -0.233 to 0.441 ($p = 0.473$). Consumer voices therefore do not statistically outperform celebrity influence in this dataset. The central novelty is consequently a negative finding: coefficient ranking and higher average scores are insufficient evidence of superiority. Directly testing the contrast changes the interpretation from 'e-WOM is dominant' to 'neither communication source provides a clear unique effect.'

Table 2
Standardized Regression with HC3 Robust Inference

Predictor	β	Robust SE	p-value	95% CI	Decision
Celebrity endorsement	-0.092	0.098	0.353	[-0.287, 0.103]	H1 not supported
e-WOM	0.032	0.124	0.794	[-0.213, 0.278]	H2 not supported
Perceived price	0.743	0.127	<0.001	[0.492, 0.994]	H3 supported
e-WOM – endorsement	0.121	Bootstrap	0.473	[-0.233, 0.441]	H4 not supported

Source: Author's calculations. Model $R^2 = 0.515$; adjusted $R^2 = 0.502$; N = 119.

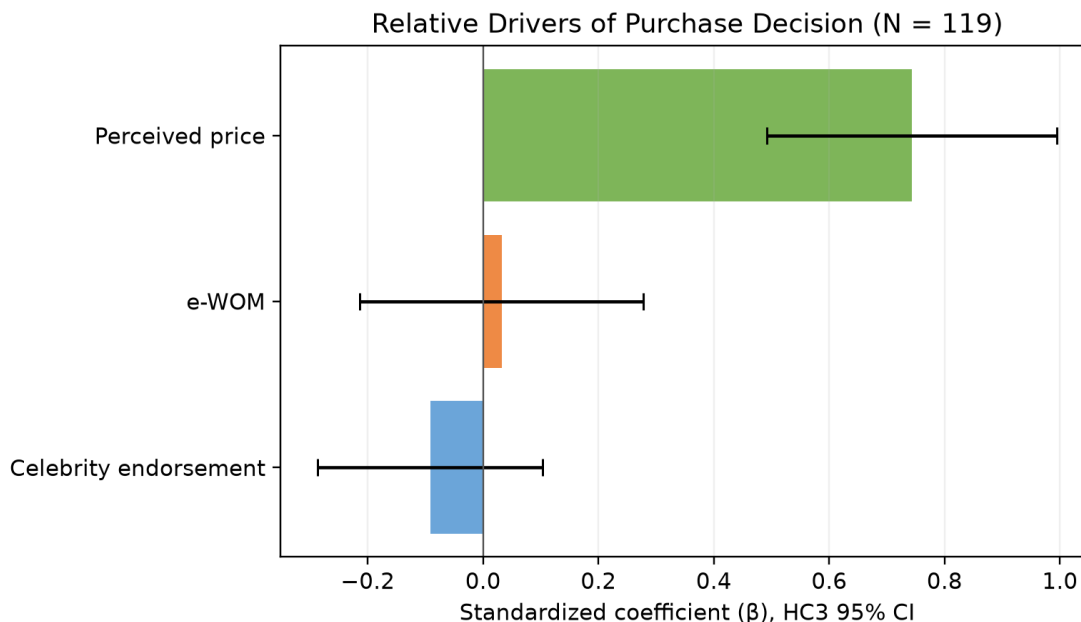


Figure 1. Standardized Effects on Purchase Decision (HC3 95% Confidence Intervals)

Source: Author's calculations from 119 survey responses.

The price result is consistent with a benefits–sacrifices interpretation of perceived value (Blut et al., 2024). For a product that cannot be smelled online, affordability may matter when buyers face uncertainty about product performance. However, price evaluation should not be equated with the full set of functional, emotional, and social benefits discussed in consumption-value research (Mason et al., 2023). The current evidence suggests that the measured price evaluation is more closely associated with purchase decision than either promotional exposure or peer information after their shared variance is controlled.

The finding also qualifies the credibility-based endorsement argument. Recent research links influencer credibility with attitudes and purchasing through intermediate consumer responses (Masuda et al., 2022; Ooi et al., 2023). Meta-analytic evidence likewise distinguishes antecedents, mediators, and different marketing outcomes (Pan et al., 2025; Spörl-Wang et al., 2025). A nonsignificant direct coefficient in this study does not rule out an earlier role in attention or consideration. Future research should explicitly measure brand awareness, trust, attitudes, and perceived value before testing these possible mechanisms.

The e-WOM literature similarly emphasizes an adoption process. Credibility and attitudes toward information can relate to purchase intention through usefulness and adoption (Ngo et al., 2024; Verma et al., 2023b). The present model measures e-WOM evaluation but does not separately measure these mediators. Its nonsignificant direct coefficient may therefore reflect an unmeasured mechanism rather than the absence of informational influence. This is a possible explanation, not a mediation result established by the present data.

Diagnostic results support several precautions. VIF values range from 1.60 to 2.46 and do not indicate serious multicollinearity. However, heteroskedasticity is present (Breusch–Pagan $p = 0.005$) and residuals are nonnormal (Jarque–Bera $p < 0.001$), so HC3 inference and bootstrap intervals are more appropriate than conventional standard errors. Durbin–Watson is 2.00. Harman's first factor explains 43.8% of item variance, below the common 50% rule, but this check cannot eliminate common-method concerns. As Podsakoff et al. (2024) explain, same-source measurement can introduce several forms of bias that are not resolved by a single-factor screen.

Table 3

Diagnostic and Sensitivity Tests

Test	Result	Interpretation
VIF	1.60–2.46	No serious multicollinearity
Breusch–Pagan	$p = 0.005$	Heteroskedasticity detected
Jarque–Bera	$p < 0.001$	Residuals are nonnormal
Durbin–Watson	2.00	No obvious residual ordering
Harman first factor	43.8%	Limited diagnostic; below 50%
Sensitivity: remove CE1	Price $\beta = 0.717$, $p < 0.001$	Main conclusion unchanged

Source: Author's calculations.

Removing CE1 does not change the conclusion: celebrity endorsement remains nonsignificant ($\beta = -0.020$, $p = 0.848$), e-WOM remains nonsignificant ($\beta = 0.012$, $p = 0.926$), and perceived price remains significant ($\beta = 0.717$, $p < 0.001$). For managers, the implication is not to abandon celebrities or review management. Celebrity content can create reach and brand meaning, while e-WOM can reduce uncertainty. Nevertheless, these activities should be connected to a clear value proposition through credible performance claims, sampling opportunities, discovery sets, and prices that consumers consider fair. Research in clothing e-customisation links multisensory perception with purchase intention (Li et al., 2022), and a virtual-reality advertising experiment examines engagement under different sound–scent combinations (Brenngman et al., 2022). These adjacent contexts motivate testing sensory support and sampling for perfume; they do not demonstrate the effectiveness of those interventions in this dataset.

The study has limitations. The product name is masked, demographic information is unavailable, and the 119-response workbook is inconsistent with the earlier manuscript's population and sample figures. The cross-sectional design cannot establish causality. All constructs use self-reported data collected in one survey, and high mean scores may restrict variance. The sample context may not represent all Indonesian perfume buyers. These issues should be resolved through documented screening, broader sampling, verified respondent profiles, and behavioral purchase data.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study directly compares consumer-generated e-WOM with celebrity endorsement in explaining purchase decisions for a local perfume brand. Using 119 complete responses, the model shows that perceived price is the dominant unique predictor, whereas celebrity endorsement and e-WOM are not significant after their overlap with price is controlled. The bootstrapped coefficient contrast does not support the claim that consumer voices outperform celebrity influence. The practical message is that communication should reinforce a convincing value proposition rather than function as a substitute for it. Future studies should collect verified demographic and screening information, measure the mediating roles of trust, information adoption, and perceived value, and use actual purchasing behavior or experimental designs.

DECLARATION OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE USAGE

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) used artificial intelligence solely to check the consistency between in-text citations and the reference list, improve grammar and sentence clarity, and assist in formulating more specific and clearly stated research gaps and research novelty. Artificial intelligence was not used to generate research data, conduct statistical analysis, interpret the findings, or determine the conclusions. The author(s) reviewed and revised all AI-assisted outputs and remain fully responsible for the accuracy, originality, integrity, and final content of the manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author(s) declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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