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## Encouraging Purchases Through Stories: The Effectiveness of Word of Mouth in the Digital Era

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the influence of Word of Mouth (WOM) on the purchase decision of Sinom-Tap products. Using a qualitative approach, the study involved in-depth interviews with five purposively selected customers, based on their experience with the product. The findings show that positive customer experiences have a significant impact in shaping recommendations, where recommendations from friends and family are much more trusted than commercial advertisements. Social media plays an important role in accelerating the spread of WOM and increasing the credibility of recommendations. The limitation of this study lies in the relatively small number of respondents, so generalisation of the findings may be limited. Nevertheless, this study makes an important contribution to the marketing literature by highlighting the dynamics of WOM in the context of health products in Indonesia, which remains under-explored. The originality of this study lies in its holistic analysis of the factors that influence WOM effectiveness, including speaker characteristics, topics discussed, and communication tools used, as well as important implications for marketing strategies in the digital era. The findings are expected to provide useful insights for marketers in optimally utilising WOM to increase loyalty and sales growth.

*Word of Mouths, Purchase Decision, Consumer Behaviour, Digital Marketing.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The marketing technique known as Word of Mouth (WOM) emphasises the role of consumers as a means of promotion through oral communication (Susanto et al., 2024). WOM has proven to be one of the most effective strategies due to its ability to influence consumer behaviour (Prayustika, 2016). Consumers tend to trust recommendations from people closest to them, such as friends and family, more than commercial advertisements (Subekti et al., 2020). According to Nielsen, most consumers trust personal recommendations more than any other form of advertising, so WOM can be considered one of the most reliable and effective forms of marketing (Santosa, 2023). This is particularly

relevant in Indonesia, where people have a tendency to gather and socialise, creating space for conversations that can influence purchasing decisions. The existence of strong social communities in Indonesia creates opportunities for WOM to flourish, as people often share experiences and recommendations in various contexts, both in person and through digital platforms (Hamzah & Susanti, 2024). When consumers are satisfied with a product, they will not only recommend it to friends and family, but also share the experience on social media, which can reach a wider audience. Positive customer experiences serve as a very powerful promotional tool, which can increase brand credibility and attract the attention of potential buyers (Erawati et al., 2023).

WOM can drive a viral effect, where one recommendation can trigger a series of others, creating a wide promotional network without significant marketing costs (Glennardo, 2016). Companies that are able to create positive experiences and manage relationships with customers can utilise WOM to strengthen their position in the market (Kusmastuti & Indrianto, 2024). In today's digital era, utilising social media platforms to strengthen WOM is becoming increasingly important, as consumers are increasingly active in sharing their opinions and experiences online. WOM not only serves as a tool to increase sales, but also as a way to build long-term relationships with consumers (Purwitasari & Sulistyowati, 2024). In the long run, an effective WOM strategy can result in higher customer loyalty and create brand advocates who voluntarily promote the product to others. The success of WOM depends on the company's ability to understand and fulfil customer needs, as well as provide a memorable experience that will encourage them to share positive stories with others.

WOM has a significant influence, with an Onbee Marketing Research study showing that WOM communication can have an influence effect of 85% when the topic discussed is conveyed back to others (Basusena & Astiti, 2020). This figure shows how powerful WOM is in shaping consumer perceptions and attitudes towards products. Recommendations from close people not only increase trust in a product, but also accelerate the purchasing decision-making process (Sinurat & Simanjuntak, 2024). The Sinom (beverage) product brand produced by Sinom-Tap applies a promotion and marketing strategy similar to similar products, but it is done behind closed doors and not openly. A clear example of this strategy is the provision of private impressions, which allow consumers to experience the product first-hand before recommending it to others. By utilising digital media such as WhatsApp and email, Sinom-Tap is able to reach consumers directly and personally, maintaining brand image and increasing customer satisfaction.

Changes in consumer behaviour that are increasingly influenced by social and digital contexts make this research very important (Adha, 2022). This suggests that understanding the factors that influence purchasing decisions, especially through WOM, is crucial for companies in crafting effective marketing strategies. In an era where information can spread quickly through social media and other digital platforms, it is important for companies to understand how WOM can be utilised effectively. Many companies still rely on traditional advertising which may not have the same impact compared to WOM (Rahmah & Riyadi, 2025). This study aims to explore and analyse the factors that influence the effectiveness of WOM, which include aspects of speakers, topics, tools, participation, and tracking. Companies can not only design better marketing strategies, but can also build stronger relationships with their consumers.

Sernovitz (2015) identified five important elements in WOM, namely Speakers, Topics, Tools, Partaking, and Tracking, which can influence the effectiveness of WOM. These elements provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how WOM functions in the modern marketing context. The characteristics of Talkers are one of the key factors, where credible speakers who have positive experiences can increase consumers' trust in the recommendations given. The topic of conversation also plays an important role, products that have unique or clear benefits tend to attract more attention and be talked about by consumers. This research is in line with findings showing that relevant and interesting communication can strengthen the impact of WOM on consumer purchasing decisions, so companies need to consider these elements in their marketing strategies (Andirwan et al., 2023). The tools used to spread WOM are an important factor in its effectiveness. Research by Setiawan & Chasanah (2025) emphasises that social media and other digital platforms can strengthen or weaken the impact of WOM. In today's digital era, where information can spread quickly through various channels, companies need to utilise this technology to expand their WOM reach. By using the right tools, such as instant messaging apps and social media, companies can reach consumers directly and personally, creating more in-depth interactions. It also allows consumers to participate in conversations, share experiences, and recommend products to their networks, thus accelerating the purchase decision-making process. Taking Part reflects the level of consumer engagement in conversations about products or services. Active consumer participation can be seen in various ways, such as leaving reviews, sharing experiences on social media, or interacting in online forums. Consumers who feel involved tend to share more recommendations with others. According to research by (Zed et al.,

2025), consumers trust recommendations from friends and family more than other forms of advertising, which suggests that consumer involvement in WOM can increase the trust and credibility of the recommendations provided. Companies can create interactive campaigns that ask consumers to share their experiences, such as photo contests or product usage stories, and provide incentives for consumers who participate, such as discounts or gifts. Tracking is concerned with measuring and monitoring the effects of WOM. In the digital age, the ability to track consumer conversations and opinions has become easier with social media analytics tools and digital platforms. Data shows that companies that actively track WOM can identify trends, issues and opportunities in real time. Companies that use analytics to monitor WOM can increase the effectiveness of their marketing campaigns (Ahmad et al., 2022). Some methods for tracking include sentiment analysis, which uses analytical tools to understand how consumers feel about a product or brand through reviews and comments, and social media monitoring to follow conversations on platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

Most previous research has focused on one or two aspects of WOM without considering a holistic approach that includes all the important elements. Researched by Kusrini (2021) highlights the use of WOM in the promotion of new student admissions at SDIT Alam Biruni, but does not delve deeper into the factors that influence the effectiveness of WOM in a broader context. Researched by Lestari & Erawati (2019) found that UGJ's WOM promotion was more effective than social media, but did not explain why and under what conditions WOM was more effective. Researched by Toruan (2018) shows the importance of WOM in marketing at La Perla Plaza Senayan, but lacks emphasis on the mechanism behind WOM that can increase customer loyalty. This study also lacks the influence of digital technology on WOM. Along with the development of technology and social media, the way WOM is spread and received by consumers has changed significantly. This research will analyse how digital platforms, such as social media and instant messaging applications, play a role in accelerating and expanding the spread of WOM. This research becomes more relevant and current, and provides more comprehensive insights for marketers in developing effective WOM strategies in the digital era.

Considering this background, this research aims to bridge the existing gap by conducting a more comprehensive WOM analysis, not only from a communication aspect but also from social and psychological perspectives. This research aims to understand how factors such as the speaker, topic, tools, participation, and supervision interact with each other in shaping the

effectiveness of WOM. With this more holistic approach, it is hoped that it can provide deeper and more relevant insights for marketing practices. Based on the research questions posed, this study also hopes to make a significant contribution to marketing theory and practice, particularly in utilizing WOM as an effective tool in the digital era. By highlighting updates in the digital context and social interactions, this research aims to make a significant contribution to the existing literature and marketing practices in the modern era, as well as assist companies in designing more effective WOM strategies to build long-term relationships between brands and consumers.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This research uses a qualitative approach to explore and analyze the effectiveness of WOM in the context of marketing the Sinom-Tap product. The qualitative method was chosen because it allows researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of customers' experiences, views, and perceptions of the Sinom-Tap product as well as the marketing strategies implemented. The object of this research is Sinom-Tap, which produces and markets Sinom beverage products. The main focus of this research is to understand how WOM influences customer purchasing decisions and how the marketing strategies implemented by Sinom-Tap can enhance the effectiveness of WOM among consumers.

This research will involve five informants who are customers of Sinom-Tap, selected purposively based on certain criteria, including experience using the product and the ability to share information about the product. The informants are expected to have a deep understanding of WOM and experience in sharing recommendations, both directly and through social media. The data collection procedure will be conducted through in-depth interviews, either face-to-face or via virtual platforms, with each interview expected to last 30-45 minutes. The interview questions will be designed to explore information regarding the factors influencing purchasing decisions, experiences in sharing product information, the impact of recommendations from close acquaintances, as well as their views on the marketing strategies implemented by Sinom-Tap.

The interview guide will include open-ended questions related to the experience of using Sinom products, the reasons behind the purchase decision, the influence of recommendations from friends or family, the role of digital media in sharing information about the product, and views on the promotions and marketing strategies employed by Sinom-Tap. This research can provide a deeper understanding of the influence of WOM on the purchasing decisions of Sinom-Tap products, as well as offer strategic recommendations to enhance marketing effectiveness in the future. This method aligns with the research

objectives aimed at exploring the dynamics of WOM in the context of modern marketing, especially in the digital era, where information can spread rapidly and significantly influence consumer behavior.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study were obtained through in-depth interviews with five Sinom-Tap customers who have extensive experience using the product.

### Positive Experience and Recommendations

All sources report positive experiences with the Sinom-Tap product, which is the main driving force behind recommending the product to others. Source A stated, *"I feel that Sinom products are very tasty and healthy, so I always recommend them to my friends."* This positive experience encompasses various aspects, including taste, health benefits, and attractive packaging. Researched by Sinurat & Simanjuntak (2024) shows that a good user experience significantly contributes to WOM behavior. Positive recommendations from satisfied customers can create a snowball effect, where other consumers feel encouraged to try the product.

Positive experiences not only enhance customer satisfaction but also create higher loyalty. Source B emphasizes that *"they will remain loyal to brands that provide satisfying experiences and will continue to recommend the product as long as its quality is maintained."* Research by Andreas & Yunita (2016) shows that high customer loyalty can be measured by how often they recommend the product to others. Maintaining product quality standards is key to creating a sustainable positive experience.

### The Role of Recommendations from Friends and Family

On average, sources emphasize that recommendations from friends and family have a significant influence on purchasing decisions. Source C stated, *"I trust recommendations from my friends more than advertisements."* *"If they say it's good, I will definitely try it."* Research by Subekti et al. (2020) found that consumers trust recommendations from close acquaintances, indicating that WOM from close acquaintances has much greater power compared to commercial advertisements. Building strong relationships with customers not only affects loyalty but also their ability to recommend products to others.

Purchase decisions often involve seeking information that includes others. Source D explains that *"before trying a new product, they tend to ask for opinions from friends or family members who have tried it."* Research by Budiarti (2025) shows that consumers are more likely to buy products recommended by people they trust. This creates an opportunity for Sinom-Tap to leverage satisfied

customers as brand ambassadors, encouraging them to share positive experiences with their social circles.

### **The Influence of Digital Media**

Social media and digital communication platforms have proven to play an important role in accelerating the spread of WOM. Source E revealed, "*I often share my experiences about Sinom on Instagram.*" Many of my friends became interested after seeing my post. Research by Agesti et al. (2024) shows that digital platforms can exponentially expand the reach of WOM, allowing information to spread faster compared to traditional methods. Social media not only serves as a communication channel but also as a platform for building communities around brands.

The informants also noted that they are often exposed to content from influencers on social media. Research by Nawastuti & Irmawati (2023) shows that influencers can enhance brand credibility and appeal, thereby increasing the likelihood of consumers trying the recommended products. Research by Rifiani et al. (2022), found that influencers with a moderate number of followers have a higher level of trust compared to influencers with a very large number of followers. A more personal connection can enhance the effectiveness of WOM. Sinom-Tap can leverage this strategy by collaborating with influencers who share values and audiences aligned with their brand, thereby expanding WOM reach and building trust among potential customers.

### **Effective Marketing Strategy**

In terms of marketing strategy, the source provided constructive feedback. Source D noted, "*Sinom-Tap should interact more frequently with consumers through social media.*" For example, they could hold contests or sweepstakes. Research by Fauzy & Ahmadi (2024) shows that customer engagement in marketing can increase brand loyalty. Interactive activities such as contests or giveaways provide consumers with the opportunity to interact directly with the brand and encourage them to share their experiences with others. This creates a viral effect that can significantly increase brand visibility.

A strong narrative is also an important factor. Source E emphasizes "*the importance of transparency in brand communication, suggesting that Sinom-Tap should highlight the story behind the product more, such as the production process and the health values contained within it.*" Storytelling can enhance consumers' emotional attachment to the brand, which in turn can encourage them to recommend the product (Rachmad et al., 2023). Creating relevant and engaging narratives for the audience can help brands differentiate themselves from competitors in an increasingly competitive market.

## CONCLUSION

This research has revealed that WOM has a significant influence on the purchasing decisions of Sinom-Tap products, with positive customer experiences being a key factor in the effectiveness of WOM. From the interview results, it is clear that recommendations from friends and family are much more trusted by consumers compared to commercial advertisements, creating a snowball effect that encourages more people to try the product. In addition, the role of social media and digital platforms in accelerating the spread of information is also very important. The informants noted that they often share positive experiences on social media, which shows that digital technology not only expands the reach of WOM but also enhances the credibility of the recommendations given. A deeper understanding of the factors influencing WOM, such as the speaker, topic, and tools used, becomes very important for companies in designing effective marketing strategies.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that Sinom-Tap leverage the existing positive experiences by developing a referral program that involves satisfied customers as brand ambassadors. The company also needs to strengthen interactions with consumers through social media, including holding contests or giveaways that can increase engagement and encourage customers to share their experiences. Additionally, it is important to engage in compelling storytelling about the product, as this can enhance consumers' emotional attachment. For future research, it is recommended that researchers further explore the role of influencers in WOM and how various digital platforms can affect the effectiveness of recommendations. This research can also expand its scope by involving more variables, such as consumer demographics and product types, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of WOM dynamics in various contexts. This research not only provides new insights into the effectiveness of WOM but also offers strategic recommendations that can help Sinom-Tap leverage the potential of WOM in the digital era to enhance customer loyalty and sales growth.

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