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The Influence of Country of Origin and Brand Image on Vivo Smartphone Purchase Decisions with Word of Mouth as a Moderation Variable: A Study on Vivo Smartphone Users in Sampit City

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Abstract: This study was conducted in Sampit City to examine the influence of Country of Origin and Brand Image on Vivo smartphone purchase decisions, with Word of Mouth (WOM) as a mediating variable. The research involved 65 Vivo smartphone users selected through accidental sampling. Data were collected using questionnaires and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) based on Partial Least Squares (PLS) with WarpPLS 4.0. The analysis included validity and reliability testing, evaluation of the outer and inner models, and hypothesis testing. The results showed that the R^2 value for WOM was 0.415, indicating that Country of Origin and Brand Image explained 41.5% of the variation in WOM. The R^2 value for Purchase Decision was 0.430, indicating that the model explained 43.0% of the variance in purchase decisions. Country of Origin had no significant direct effect on Purchase Decision (t = 1.209; p = 0.227), whereas Brand Image and WOM did. WOM significantly mediated the relationship between Country of Origin and Purchase Decision (t = 2.367; p = 0.018), but did not mediate the relationship between Brand Image and Purchase Decision. The novelty of this study lies in integrating Country of Origin, Brand Image, and WOM within a single model to explain smartphone consumer behavior in a regional market context. The findings demonstrate that WOM strengthens the influence of product-origin perceptions on purchase decisions, while Brand Image remains a key determinant of consumer purchasing behavior.

Keywords: *Country of Origin, Brand Image, Word of Mouth, Purchase Decision, Vivo Smartphone*

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INTRODUCTION

The smartphone industry has become one of the most competitive sectors in today's consumer electronics market. Rapid technological innovation, shorter product life cycles, and the increasing number of smartphone brands have intensified competition among manufacturers in attracting consumers. In Indonesia, competition in the smartphone market is particularly dynamic, with global and Chinese brands such as Samsung, Vivo, Oppo, Xiaomi, and Realme competing to increase their market share. As consumers are offered a wide range of products with similar features and price points, companies must develop effective marketing strategies and build strong consumer perceptions to influence purchasing decisions. Consequently, understanding the factors that shape

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consumer purchase decisions has become increasingly important for smartphone manufacturers seeking to maintain their competitiveness.

Business competition is an inherent aspect of modern markets, affecting both manufacturing and service sectors, including the telecommunications industry, such as smartphones (Srivastava et al., 2013). A smartphone is a multifunctional device that integrates communication technology with advanced operating systems, enabling users to install applications and remain continuously connected to the internet. Currently, the smartphone market is characterized by intense competition, with numerous brands offering various technological advantages such as innovative designs, advanced features, and high product quality (Bojei, 2012). In Indonesia, for instance, there are more than 22 smartphone brands originating from different countries, reflecting the high level of market competition (Herdiana & Alamsyah, 2017). This wide range of available brands significantly influences consumer preferences and purchasing interest.

Competition in the smartphone industry extends beyond product features and pricing strategies to the ability of companies to create strong brand perceptions among consumers (Yaseen et al., 2011). In recent years, smartphone consumers have increasingly considered brand reputation an important factor in their purchasing decisions, given the abundance of products with similar specifications and price ranges. As a result, consumers often rely on brand-related attributes to reduce uncertainty and evaluate product quality before making a purchase. This phenomenon can be observed in the Indonesian smartphone market, where brands such as Samsung, Vivo, Oppo, and Xiaomi continue to compete for market dominance despite offering relatively comparable technological features. Market reports indicate that Vivo has consistently maintained a strong position among the leading smartphone brands in Indonesia, suggesting that consumers not only evaluate functional benefits but also develop favorable perceptions toward the brand. Therefore, brand image plays a crucial role in influencing consumer behavior, as a positive brand image can strengthen consumer trust, increase product preference, and ultimately encourage purchase decisions (Ganesan et al., 2009).

Brand image is defined as the set of beliefs, ideas, and impressions held by consumers about a particular brand (Setianingsih, 2016). It represents the overall perception of the brand formed through information and past experiences (Djatmiko et al., 2015). A strong brand image is therefore an essential requirement for achieving competitive advantage in the market. As consumers are increasingly exposed to various brands through marketing communications and personal experiences, they tend to differentiate between brands based on perceived value and quality. Companies therefore compete to create superior products and services that strengthen their brand image.

The development of a positive brand image is strongly influenced by the quality of products and services offered by companies. High product quality and consistent performance can enhance consumer trust and foster a favorable brand image (Amron, 2018). In turn, a strong brand image is expected to increase sales and generate higher profits for the company. In the Indonesian context, the importance of brand image is evident in the smartphone market. According to International Data Corporation data, in the second quarter of 2022, Samsung ranked as the leading smartphone brand in Indonesia, followed by Vivo. These findings highlight the competitive nature of the smartphone industry and emphasize the importance of brand positioning in influencing consumer purchase decisions.

This finding is supported by a Counterpoint Research survey, which indicates that Indonesia is one of the fastest-growing smartphone markets globally and is largely

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dominated by Chinese brands. Among these, Vivo has consistently secured a strong market position, ranking second after Samsung from South Korea. Despite Samsung being widely recognized as a global leader in the electronics industry, particularly in smartphones, Vivo has demonstrated significant growth. In 2020, Vivo distributed approximately 111.7 million smartphone units worldwide, representing 1.5% year-over-year growth. This achievement highlights Vivo's resilience and ability to maintain growth even amid global economic challenges. This trend is consistent with data from the International Data Corporation, which reported that overall global smartphone shipments declined by 5.9% compared to 2019, while Vivo continued to experience positive growth (International Data Corporation, 2022).

Based on these achievements, Vivo can be categorized as one of the top five smartphone brands in the global market. In Indonesia, Vivo holds approximately 21% market share, indicating its strong presence and competitiveness in the domestic market (International Data Corporation, 2022). This dominance is not only the result of product innovation and competitive pricing but also due to strategic marketing approaches. One notable strategy employed by Vivo is leveraging cultural integration, often referred to as "the more local, the more global." This approach is reflected in Vivo's global branding efforts, including its collaboration with major international events such as the UEFA EURO tournaments (Deng, 2020). Such strategies help strengthen the association between the brand and its country of origin, thereby influencing consumer perceptions.

The concept of Country of Origin (COO) plays a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and purchase decisions. Country of origin refers to consumers' perceptions of a product based on the country where it is manufactured or associated with (Kotler & Keller, 2016). It serves as an important extrinsic cue that consumers use to evaluate product quality and reliability. In many cases, consumers rely on country-of-origin information as a heuristic in decision-making, especially when they have limited product knowledge.

In today's market, consumers are becoming increasingly selective when choosing smartphone products (Kang, 2015). The decision-making process involves several stages, including information search, evaluation of alternatives, and the influence of both internal and external factors (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). As a result, marketers must thoroughly understand consumer behavior to position their products in the market effectively. In addition to brand image, country of origin remains a key factor that influences consumer evaluations and preferences.

Country of origin can elicit both positive and negative perceptions of a product, depending on the country's reputation (Lin & Kao, 2007). Positive perceptions tend to enhance consumer confidence and increase the likelihood of purchase, while negative perceptions may discourage purchase. Therefore, the country of origin is often considered an important product attribute that contributes to perceived quality (Gallego & Casillas, 2014).

In the Indonesian context, products originating in China are generally perceived as affordable and offer competitive specifications, makingmaking them attractive to consumers (Sungkar & Budiatmo, 2016). This perception has contributed to the increasing preference for Chinese smartphone brands in Indonesia, including Vivo. Consequently, many consumers tend to choose smartphones based on their country of origin, especially when that country of origin aligns with their expectations for price and performance. This trend is further illustrated by the market share distribution of smartphone shipments in Indonesia, as presented in Figure 1, which shows the

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dominance of foreign smartphone brands, particularly those from China, over the period 2019 to 2021.

Vivo smartphones continue to dominate the Indonesian smartphone market, particularly in the second quarter of 2021, when they achieved a 23.3% market share in product shipments. This Chinese brand has consistently maintained its leading position since the first quarter of 2020, according to Counterpoint Research. According to Counterpoint Research (2022), one of the key factors behind Vivo's sustained market leadership is its reliance on unorganized retail channels for distribution.

Unorganized retail channels refer to distribution systems that operate on a smaller scale but have a significant impact on product sales. These channels typically involve informal markets, small retailers, and wholesalers, where bargaining is common, and products are more accessible to a wider range of consumers (Foster, 2008). This type of distribution strategy allows companies to penetrate deeper into local markets and reach consumers whom formal retail systems may not serve.

However, the effectiveness of unorganized retail channels depends heavily on communication strategies. One of the most influential forms of communication in this context is Word of Mouth (WOM). Word of mouth refers to informal communication among individuals regarding products or services, often in the form of recommendations or shared experiences (Murtiasih et al., 2014). It can be delivered both personally and non-personally by parties outside the organization, making it a credible and persuasive source of information for consumers.

Through word of mouth, Vivo products have become widely recognized and accepted by consumers. This phenomenon is not only evident at the national level but also at the regional level, particularly in East Kotawaringin Regency, including Sampit City. Data from the local Communication and Information Office indicate that Vivo smartphones were among the most preferred brands by consumers during the period 2020 to 2022.

Vivo smartphone brand consistently ranks second in consumer demand in East Kotawaringin Regency during the period 2020–2022. This indicates that consumer purchasing decisions are influenced by multiple factors, among which country of origin and brand image are important determinants of consumer preferences and purchase decisions for smartphone products.

This finding is supported by Sudjianto's (2017) previous research, which found that country of origin and brand image have a significant effect on consumer purchase decisions. The study revealed that consumers tend to prioritize brand image when selecting smartphones, followed by the product's country of origin as a supporting factor in their decision-making. Similarly, Alfarisi (2019) confirmed that both country of origin and brand image influence purchase decisions, particularly in the smartphone market.

Previous studies have reported inconsistent findings regarding the influence of Country of Origin and Brand Image on consumer purchase decisions. For instance, Sudjianto (2017) and Alfarisi (2019) found that both Country of Origin and Brand Image significantly affect smartphone purchase decisions, indicating that consumers consider both the product's country of origin and brand reputation when evaluating smartphone products. However, Herdiana and Alamsyah (2017) reported different results, showing that although Country of Origin has a positive relationship with purchase decisions, its effect is not statistically significant, while Brand Image remains a significant determinant. These contradictory findings suggest that the role of Country of Origin in shaping smartphone purchase decisions remains inconclusive, particularly in emerging markets

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where consumers are increasingly familiar with products from various countries and may place greater emphasis on brand-related attributes than on product origin.

In addition, previous studies have predominantly focused on examining the direct effects of Country of Origin and Brand Image on purchase decisions, with limited attention given to the underlying mechanisms through which these variables influence consumer behavior. The inconsistent empirical evidence indicates a need for further investigation by incorporating Word of Mouth (WOM) as a mediating variable. Therefore, this study seeks to address this research gap by examining whether WOM serves as a mechanism that explains how Country of Origin and Brand Image influence purchase decisions among Vivo smartphone users in Sampit City. By doing so, this study extends previous research and provides a more comprehensive understanding of consumer decision-making in the smartphone market.

The inconsistency across previous findings indicates a research gap, particularly regarding the role of country of origin in influencing purchase decisions. Consequently, recent studies have begun incorporating moderating variables to understand consumer behavior better. For example, (Asshifa, 2022) found that country of origin and brand image have a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions, and that word of mouth significantly moderates these relationships. In contrast, Majid (2021) reported that word of mouth does not significantly influence consumer purchase decisions. These contradictory results highlight the need for further investigation into the role of word of mouth as a moderating variable.

Based on the observed phenomenon, theoretical perspectives, and previous empirical findings, it is evident that there is a research gap concerning the influence of country of origin and brand image on purchase decisions. Variations in findings may be due to differences in research contexts, time periods, and the types of products studied. Therefore, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding by focusing on consumers in Sampit City.

This study uses country of origin and brand image as independent variables and purchase decision as the dependent variable, as supported by previous studies (Alfarisi, 2019; Herdiana & Alamsyah, 2017; Sudjianto, 2017). In addition, word of mouth is included as a moderating variable, following the framework proposed by Ashif (2022). Accordingly, this research aims to examine both the partial effects of country of origin and brand image on purchase decisions and the moderating role of word of mouth in shaping purchase decisions among Vivo smartphone users in Sampit City.

This study is important because research that integrates country of origin, brand image, and word of mouth as a moderating variable in consumer purchase decisions—particularly in regional contexts such as Sampit City—is still limited. Therefore, this study is expected to contribute to the development of marketing science and provide practical implications for companies.

Based on empirical findings and research gaps identified in previous studies, this research examines the effects of Country of Origin and Brand Image on purchase decisions among Vivo smartphone users in Sampit City, with Word of Mouth (WOM) as a mediating variable. Specifically, this study investigates the direct effects of Country of Origin and Brand Image on purchase decisions, the effect of WOM on purchase decisions, and the mediating role of WOM in the relationships between Country of Origin, Brand Image, and purchase decisions.

The novelty of this study lies in integrating Country of Origin, Brand Image, and Word of Mouth within a single empirical framework to explain consumer purchase

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decisions in the smartphone industry, particularly in a regional market context that has received limited attention in previous studies. While prior research has primarily focused on the direct effects of Country of Origin and Brand Image, this study extends the existing literature by examining the mediating mechanism of WOM in shaping consumer purchasing behavior.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the marketing and consumer behavior literature by providing empirical evidence regarding the role of WOM as a mechanism through which consumers translate perceptions of product origin and brand image into purchase decisions. In practice, the findings are expected to provide insights for smartphone manufacturers, particularly Vivo, in developing marketing strategies that strengthen brand image and encourage positive word of mouth to enhance consumer purchase decisions.

RESEARCH METHODS

Population and Research Sample

Population

The study population consists of Vivo smartphone users residing in Sampit City, East Kotawaringin Regency. The selection of Vivo smartphone users as the research population is based on the brand's strong market presence and consumer popularity in the region. According to data from the Communication and Information Office of East Kotawaringin Regency (2022), Vivo was one of the leading smartphone brands in the area, accounting for approximately 21% of the smartphone market share. This indicates that consumers have widely adopted Vivo and represents an appropriate context for examining the influence of Country of Origin, Brand Image, and Word of Mouth on purchase decisions.

In addition, the increasing competition among smartphone brands in the Indonesian market has made consumer purchasing behavior more complex, particularly among users of Chinese smartphone brands such as Vivo. Therefore, focusing on Vivo smartphone users in Sampit City provides a relevant setting for investigating the factors that influence consumer purchase decisions. Since the exact number of Vivo smartphone users in Sampit City is not available, the population size in this study is considered unknown.

Sample

A sample is a subset of a population selected to represent the population under study (Sugiyono, 2018). Since the exact number of Vivo smartphone users in Sampit City is unknown and no official sampling frame is available, this study employed an accidental sampling technique. Accidental sampling allows researchers to select respondents who are readily accessible and willing to participate, provided they meet predetermined criteria, namely residents of Sampit City and active Vivo smartphone users. This sampling technique is considered appropriate for exploratory consumer behavior studies involving populations that are difficult to identify and enumerate comprehensively.

The minimum sample size was determined according to Hair et al. (2010), who recommend a sample size of at least 5 times the number of measurement indicators for PLS-SEM analysis. This study utilized 13 indicators across four latent constructs: Country of Origin, Brand Image, Word of Mouth, and Purchase Decision.

Therefore, the minimum required sample size was calculated as follows:

$$n = 13 \times 5 = 65 \text{ respondents}$$

In addition to the indicator-based approach, the adequacy of the sample size was evaluated based on the PLS-SEM method's characteristics. Unlike covariance-based SEM,

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PLS-SEM is designed to accommodate relatively small sample sizes and is particularly suitable for exploratory and prediction-oriented research (Hair et al., 2021). Furthermore, the "10-times rule" proposed by Barclay et al. (1995) suggests that the minimum sample size should be at least ten times the largest number of structural paths directed at any endogenous construct. In the present study, the Purchase Decision construct receives three incoming paths from Country of Origin, Brand Image, and Word of Mouth. Consequently, the minimum sample size required under this criterion is 30 respondents, indicating that the sample of 65 respondents exceeds the recommended threshold.

Therefore, the sample size of 65 respondents is considered methodologically adequate for conducting PLS-SEM analysis and for estimating the relationships among the variables included in the proposed research model

Conceptual and Operational Definition of Research Variables

The following is an explanation of the conceptual and operational definitions of the variables used in the research:

Table 3. Conceptual and Operational Definition of Research Variables

Variable	Conceptual Definition	Indicators	Source of Measurement Items	Scale
Country of Origin (X1)	Country of Origin refers to consumers' perceptions, associations, and beliefs about a product based on the country of origin (Laroche et al., 2005, cited in Listiana, 2013).	1. Country Beliefs 2. People Affect 3. Desired Interaction	Adapted from Laroche et al. (2005) and Listiana (2013)	Five-point Likert Scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)
Brand Image (X2)	Brand Image is the set of perceptions, beliefs, and impressions held by consumers toward a brand that influences their trust and purchasing behavior (Sulistian, 2011).	1. Corporate Image 2. User Image 3. Product Image	Adapted from Sulistian (2011)	Five-point Likert Scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)
Word of Mouth (Z) *(Mediating Variable)*	Word of Mouth (WOM) is interpersonal communication in the form of recommendations, opinions, or information exchange regarding a product or service that may influence consumer behavior (Qadhafi, 2017).	1. Obtaining information from others 2. Encouragement to purchase from others' recommendations 3. Receiving recommendations from others	Adapted from Qadhafi (2017)	Five-point Likert Scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)
Purchase Decision (Y)	The Purchase Decision is the stage in the consumer decision-making process in which consumers choose and purchase a product (Ferdinand, 2006).	1. Transactional Decision 2. Referential Decision 3. Preferential Decision 4. Exploratory Decision	Adapted from Ferdinand (2006)	Five-point Likert Scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)

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Conceptual Framework

According to Sugiyono (2016), the conceptual framework is a model of how theory relates to the various factors identified as important problems. In this model, there are two independent variables and one dependent variable, making it a multiple model.

Based on various theoretical studies described in the previous discussion, to facilitate the research process "The Influence of Country of Origin and Brand Image on Vivo Smartphone Purchase Decisions with Word of Mouth as a Moderation Variable (Study on Vivo Smartphone Users in Sampit City)". The conceptual framework in this study describes the relationships among the independent variables, including Country of Origin (X1) and Brand Image (X2), and the dependent variables, namely Purchase Decision (Y) and Word of Mouth (Z) moderation variables. From the description above, a conceptual framework for research can be made in the image below:

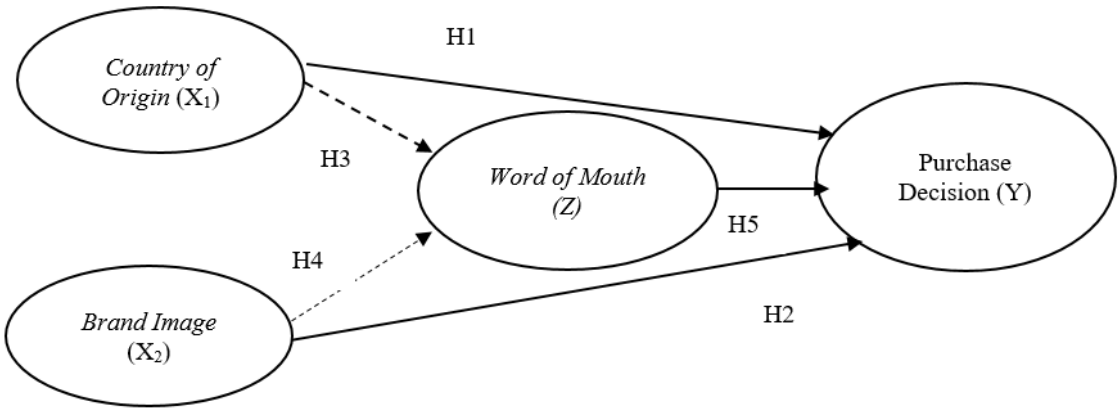

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

Data Source: Data created, 2024

----- = Mediation Relationship

—— = Direct Connection

Research Hypothesis

Hypotheses are tentative propositions derived from theory and previous empirical findings that require empirical testing (Sugiyono, 2018). In this study, the hypotheses were developed based on the theoretical relationships among Country of Origin, Brand Image, Word of Mouth, and Purchase Decision.

Consumers often use country of Origin (COO) as an extrinsic cue in evaluating product quality and reliability. Consumers tend to associate products originating from certain countries with specific levels of technological advancement, innovation, and product quality. Positive perceptions of a product's country of origin may increase consumer confidence and encourage purchase decisions (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Previous studies by Sudjianto (2017) and Alfarisi (2019) found that Country of Origin significantly influences consumer purchase decisions. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Country of Origin has a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions.

Brand Image reflects consumers' overall perceptions and evaluations of a brand. A favorable brand image can reduce consumers' perceived risk, strengthen trust, and increase preference toward a product. In the smartphone industry, where many products offer similar features and prices, brand image often becomes an important determinant

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of consumer choice. Previous studies have consistently reported a significant relationship between Brand Image and purchase decisions (Herdiana & Alamsyah, 2017; Sudjianto, 2017). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Brand Image has a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions.

Word of Mouth (WOM) plays an important role in influencing consumer evaluations and purchasing behavior. Recommendations and information shared by other consumers can strengthen the impact of product-related perceptions on purchase decisions. Consumers who hold positive perceptions regarding a product's country of origin are more likely to share favorable information with others, which may subsequently influence purchasing behavior. Accordingly, WOM may act as a mediating mechanism between Country of Origin and purchase decisions. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Word of Mouth mediates the relationship between Country of Origin and purchase decisions.

Similarly, a strong Brand Image may encourage consumers to communicate positive experiences and recommendations to others. Such positive WOM can strengthen consumers' purchase intentions and actual purchasing behavior. Therefore, WOM is expected to mediate the relationship between Brand Image and purchase decisions. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Word of Mouth mediates the relationship between Brand Image and purchase decisions.

In addition, WOM has been widely recognized as an influential source of information in consumer decision-making. Recommendations from family, friends, and other consumers are generally perceived as more credible than company-generated promotional messages. Previous studies have shown that positive WOM can significantly encourage consumer purchase decisions (Asshifa, 2022). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Word of Mouth has a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Evaluation of the Outer Model Measurement Model

Validity Test Results

The validity test assesses the construct validity of the tool; in this case, the questionnaire must be able to measure the concept it purports to measure. The validity test assesses the content validity and criterion validity. This validity test is used to see the content of a variable to be measured.

According to Mustafa (2010) and Ghozali and Latan (2015), the validity of an instrument is a measure of how precisely it produces data that reflect the actual size being measured. An instrument is valid if it measures what it is intended to measure.

The validity testing procedure is convergent validity, i.e., correlating the item (component) score with the construct score to produce a loading factor. According to Chin (1998) and Ghozali and Latan (2015), a correlation is said to meet convergent validity if its loading is between 0.5 and 0.6. In this study, validity is assessed based on SmartPLS 4.0 output. The validity test in this study was taken by 65 respondents, with the results to be described as follows:

Hasil Convergent Validity

Convergent validity can be assessed by the correlation between a component or indicator and its construct. According to Chin (1998) in Ghozali and Latan (2015), a

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correlation is said to meet the validity criterion of convergence if its value loading is high, i.e., the correlation between the indicator and its contractor is greater than 0.70. However, at the initial assessment stage, a loading value of 0.40-0.60 can be considered sufficient. So that the results' convergent validity can be seen in the following Table 4:

Table 4. Results of Convergent Validity and Discriminant Validity (Cross Loading)

	Brand Image	*Country Origin*	Purchase Decision	WOM
B1	0.900	0.695	0.676	0.587
B2	0.890	0.583	0.519	0.578
B3	0.872	0.595	0.506	0.518
C1	0.548	0.893	0.530	0.504
C2	0.580	0.927	0.551	0.619
C3	0.587	0.905	0.593	0.508
M1	0.583	0.534	0.546	0.870
M2	0.635	0.560	0.571	0.853
M3	0.523	0.550	0.602	0.849
Y1.1	0.601	0.690	0.825	0.535
Y1.2	0.623	0.520	0.828	0.501
Y1.3	0.522	0.523	0.799	0.505
Y1.4	0.599	0.564	0.834	0.521

Source: Smart PLS Processing Results version 4.0, 2024.

Based on Table 4, all indicators exhibit loading factors above the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating that the measurement model meets the requirements for convergent validity. For the Brand Image construct, the loading factor values range from 0.872 to 0.900, with indicator B1 showing the highest loading value (0.900). This result indicates that B1 is the strongest indicator in representing the Brand Image construct. Likewise, the Country of Origin construct exhibits loadings ranging from 0.893 to 0.927, with indicator C2 having the highest loading (0.927), suggesting that it contributes most to explaining consumers' perceptions of the country of origin.

For the Word of Mouth (WOM) construct, the loading factor values range from 0.849 to 0.870. Among these indicators, M1 records the highest loading value (0.870), indicating that obtaining information and recommendations from others is an important dimension of WOM among Vivo smartphone users. Meanwhile, the Purchase Decision construct shows loading values ranging from 0.799 to 0.834. Indicator Y1.4 has the highest loading factor (0.834), followed closely by Y1.2 (0.828) and Y1.1 (0.825), demonstrating that all indicators contribute substantially to explaining consumer purchase decisions.

Overall, the Country of Origin construct exhibits the strongest indicator loadings among all constructs, followed by Brand Image, Word of Mouth, and Purchase Decision. These findings indicate that all indicators are highly correlated with their respective latent constructs and adequately represent the concepts being measured. Therefore, all indicators were retained for subsequent reliability and structural model analyses.

Hasil Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity refers to the extent to which a construct is empirically distinct from other constructs within the model. In this study, discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), discriminant validity is established when the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct is greater than its correlations with other constructs

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in the model. This indicates that a construct accounts for more variance among its indicators than among indicators of other constructs.

The results of the Fornell-Larcker Criterion are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Output Cross Loading

Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	Brand Image	***Country Origin***	**Purchase Decision**	**WOM**
Brand Image	0.887			
Country Origin	0.553	0.909		
Purchase Decision	0.518	0.512	0.828	
WOM	0.522	0.604	0.634	0.857

Source: Smart PLS Processing Results version 4.0, 2024.

Based on Table 5, the square root of AVE for Brand Image is 0.887, which is higher than its correlations with Country of Origin (0.553), Purchase Decision (0.518), and Word of Mouth (0.522). Similarly, the square root of AVE for Country of Origin is 0.909, exceeding its correlations with Brand Image (0.553), Purchase Decision (0.512), and Word of Mouth (0.604).

Furthermore, the Purchase Decision construct has an AVE of 0.828, which is greater than its correlations with Brand Image (0.518), Country of Origin (0.512), and Word of Mouth (0.634). Likewise, the Word of Mouth construct demonstrates a square root of AVE value of 0.857, exceeding its correlations with Brand Image (0.522), Country of Origin (0.604), and Purchase Decision (0.634).

These results indicate that the square root of AVE for each construct is greater than the corresponding inter-construct correlations. Therefore, all constructs satisfy the Fornell-Larcker Criterion, confirming that adequate discriminant validity has been achieved. This finding suggests that Country of Origin, Brand Image, Word of Mouth, and Purchase Decision are empirically distinct constructs and measure different conceptual phenomena within the proposed research model.

Research Reliability Test

According to Ghozali and Latan (2015), the Reliability Test is a tool for measuring a questionnaire, which serves as an indicator of a variable. A questionnaire is considered reliable if a person's answers to questions are consistent and stable over time.

Reality states the extent to which the results or measurements are reliable and provide relatively consistent measurement results after several measurements. To assess the reliability of the research variables, alpha coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) and composite reliability were used. A measurement item is considered reliable if its alpha coefficient is greater than 0.7 (Ghozali & Latan, 2015). In this study, reliability is assessed from the SmartPLS 4.0 output. The reliability test in this study was taken from as many as 65 respondents, with the results to be described as follows:

Table 6. Results of the Latent Variable Reliability Test

Construct Reliability and Validity

	Cronbach's Alpha	***rho_A***	***Composite Reliability***	***Average Variance Extracted (AVE)***
Brand Image	0.866	0.874	0.917	0.787
Country Origin	0.895	0.915	0.934	0.826

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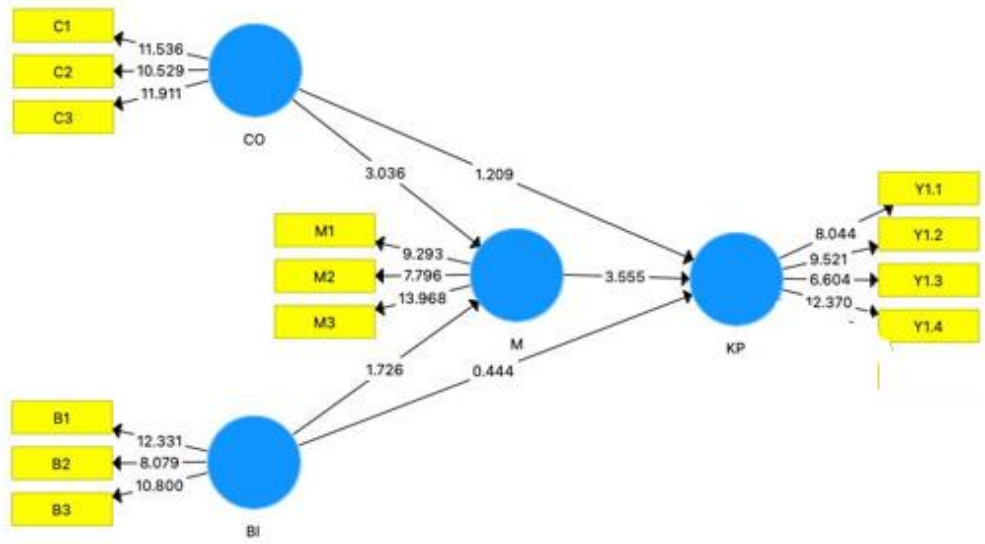
Purchase Decision	0.886	0.886	0.916	0.886
Wom	0.820	0.825	0.893	0.735

Source: Smart PLS Processing Results version 4.0, 2024.

Based on the calculation of the results of the Reliability Test of the research instrument above, it shows that the variables "Country of Origin (X1) and Brand Image (X2), as well as Purchase Decision (Y) and Word of Mouth (Z)", have a Cronbachs Alpha value greater than 0.6 and a Composite Reliability greater than 0.7, so it is declared Reliable (Ghozali & Latan, 2015).

Evaluation of Structural Models (Inner Model)

After conducting an outer model test, the next step is to conduct an inner model test. Internal model testing, or structural model testing, is conducted to examine the relationships among the construct, the significance value, and the R-squared of the



research model.

Figure 2. Structural Model

Source: Smart PLS Processing Results version 4.0, 2024.

Based on Figure 2, the model structure in this study uses Country of Origin (X1) and Brand Image (X2), as well as Purchase Decision (Y) and Word of Mouth (Z), with the results of the PLS structural model evaluation beginning with looking at the R-square of each dependent latent variable. The table below is the result of the R-square estimate using PLS.

R-square

Based on the Structural Model, the R-square of the dependent latent variable can be seen in Table 7 as follows:

Table 7. R-square

	R Square	***R Square Adjusted***
Purchase Decision	0.430	0.402
Wom	0.415	0.397

Source: Smart PLS Processing Results version 4.0, 2024.

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Based on Table 7 above, which shows the value of R^2 (R-square) for the Word of Mouth (Z) variable at 0.415 (41.5%), R^2 is deemed feasible and adequate/moderate. This value indicates that the Word of Mouth variable can be explained by the Country of Origin and Brand Image variables, accounting for 41.5%. In comparison, the remaining 59.95% was influenced by variables not included in the study. The R^2 value for the purchase decision variable is 0.430 (43.0%), which is high and acceptable. This value indicates that this variable can be explained by the Word of Mouth variable (43.0%), while the remaining 57.0% is influenced by other variables not included in the study.

Q-Square

In addition, to measure whether or not the model is predictable, it can be measured through Q-Square (Q^2). If the Q-Square is greater than 0, the model is predictable. Meanwhile, if the model is ≤ 0, it is unpredictable. The R^2 values in this study were $R^2$1 of 0.415 and $R^2$2 of 0.430, respectively.

The following are the results of the Q-Square calculation in this study:

$Q^2 = 1 - (1 - R^2 1)\ (1 - R^2 2)$ Q2 = 1 – (1- 0,415) (1- 0,430)

Q2 = 1 – (0,585) (0,57)

Q2 = 1 – 0,333

Q2 = 0,667

Q2 = 66,7 %

Based on the Q^2 test above, the predictive relevance value is 0.667, or 66.7%. This indicates that the model is feasible, as it explains 66.7% of the data's diversity. In contrast, the remaining 33.3% is explained by other variables not included in the research model or by errors. The Q^2 value of 66.7% indicates that the PLS model is well formed, as it explains 66.7% of the overall information.

Hypothesis Test

Structural equation modeling tests the relationships among the variables in the study. Structural model testing is performed using a t-test. The basis for testing the hypothesis: directly with the values in the output patch coefficients, and indirectly with the effects. Here is a complete explanation of hypothesis testing.

Hypothesis testing is used to test the truth of a statement. The hypothesis test can be evaluated from the t-statistic and p-value: if the t-statistic > 1.96 and the p-value < 0.05, then the hypothesis is accepted; if the t-statistic < 1.96 and the p-value > 0.05, then the hypothesis is rejected. The following are the t-statistic and p-value values in Table 8:

Table 8. Hypothesis Test Results

Path Coefficients
Mean, STDEV, T-Values, P-Values

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values
Brand Image -> Purchase Decision	0.061	0.042	0.137	0.444	**0.657**
Brand Image -> Wom	0.271	0.244	0.157	1.726	**0.085**
Country Origin -> Purchase Decision	0.454	0.448	0.150	3.036	**0.003**
Country Origin -> Wom	0.181	0.176	0.150	1.209	**0.227**
Wom -> Purchase Decision	0.493	0.470	0.139	3.555	**0.000**

Source: Smart PLS processing results version 4.0, 2024.

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Based on the Table, it can be concluded that the results of hypothesis testing are as follows:

1. Country of Origin has no significant positive or negative influence on the Purchase Decision.

   Based on the test results, the Country of Origin variable for the Purchase Decision has a t-statistic value of 1.209 and a p-value of 0.227, so H1 is rejected because the t-statistic is less than 1.96 and the p-value is greater than 0.05. Thus, it was concluded that the Country of Origin variable had no influence on Purchase Decisions for Vivo Smartphone users in Sampit City.
2. Brand image significantly influences purchase decisions.

   Based on the test results, the brand image variable for the purchase decision had a t-statistic of 3.036 and a p-value of 0.003, so H2 was rejected because the t-statistic exceeded 1.96 and the p-value was less than 0.05. Thus, it is concluded that the brand image variable influences the Purchase Decision of Vivo Smartphone users in Sampit City.
3. Word of Mouth has a positive and significant effect on Purchase Decisions.

   Based on the test results, the word-of-mouth variable for the Purchase Decision has a t-statistic of 3.555 and a p-value of 0.000, so H5 is accepted because the t-statistic is greater than 1.96 and the p-value is less than 0.05. Thus, it was concluded that the word-of-mouth variable has a positive influence on Purchase Decisions in Vivo Smartphone users in Sampit City.

Mediation Analysis

According to Ghozali and Latan (2015), the mediation test is a set of statistical procedures used to investigate whether a given dataset exhibits a mediation structure. A mediation structure presupposes a conceptualization of the mechanism by which independent variables can affect dependent variables not directly, but through additional intervening processes captured by the mediator variables. Intermediate variables are additional variables that sit between independent and dependent variables. An intermediate variable (mediator) passes the effect from the independent variable to the dependent variable.

There are two types of influences on the mediation model: direct and indirect. Direct influence is the relationship between exogenous and endogenous latent variables in the PLS pathway model. Meanwhile, the indirect influence explains the relationship between endogenous and exogenous latent variables with the third variable in the PLS model (Hair, 2010). In this study, there are two paths of mediation as follows:

To assess the level of influence in the mediation pathway, we use the Variance Accounted For (VAF) method, which quantifies the effect of mediation based on the VAF value. If the VAF is> 80%, the mediation variable is Full Mediation; if 20% ≤ VAF < 80%, the mediation variable is Partial Mediation; and if VAF is < 20%, the mediation variable is not mediating (Hair, 2014). The following table shows the results of the mediation test using SmartPLS:

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Table 9. Mediation Test Results

Specific Indirect Effects
Mean, STDEV, T-Values, P-Values

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values
Brand Image -> Wom -> Purchase Decision	0.133	0.122	0.085	1.577	**0.115**
Country Origin -> Wom -> Purchase Decision	0.224	0.211	0.095	2.367	**0.018**

Source: Smart PLS processing results version 4.0, 2024.

Based on Table 9, the results of the mediation test can be concluded with the following hypothesis:

1. Country of Origin through Word of Mouth has a positive and significant effect on Purchase Decisions.

   Based on the results of the Country of Origin variable test on the Purchase Decision through Word of Mouth as a mediation variable that has a t-statistic value of 2.367 and a p-value of 0.018, H3 is accepted because the t-statistic is greater than 1.96 and the p-value is less than 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Word of Mouth variable affects the relationship between the Country of Origin variable and Purchase Decision in Vivo Smartphone users in Sampit City.
2. Brand Image through Word of Mouth has no significant effect on Purchase Decisions.

   Based on the test results, the Brand Image variable for Purchase Decisions through Word of Mouth has a t-statistic of 1.577 and a p-value of 0.115, so H4 is rejected because the t-statistic is less than 1.96 and the p-value is greater than 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Word of Mouth variable does not affect the relationship between the Brand Image variable and Purchase Decision among Vivo Smartphone users in Sampit City.
3. Mediation VAF Calculation

   VAF is a measure of how much the mediating variable can absorb direct influence. If the VAF is greater than 80%, the mediating variable is fully mediated. If the VAF ranges from 20% to 80%, the mediation is partial; if it is below 20%, there is no mediation (Hair, 2014). For more details, see Table 10:

Table 10. Mediation VAF Calculation

Indirect influence	1,577
Direct influence	2,367
Total influence = 1,577 +2,367	3,944
VAF = Indirect influence/total influence	0,666

Source: Results of primary data in research, 2023.

Based on the VAF calculation in the table, the VAF is 0.666 (66%), indicating that the variables Country of Origin and Brand Image, assisted by the Word of Mouth variable, partially mediate Purchase Decisions. This is because the brand image cannot be mediated by word of mouth in the purchase decision, whereas the variable country of origin can.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the influence of Country of Origin and Brand Image on Vivo smartphone purchase decisions, with Word of Mouth (WOM) acting as a mediating

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variable. The findings reveal that Brand Image and Word of Mouth are important determinants of purchase decisions, whereas Country of Origin does not directly influence them. These results indicate that smartphone consumers tend to rely more on brand-related perceptions and interpersonal recommendations than on the country of origin. A notable finding of this study is the mediating role of Word of Mouth in the relationship between Country of Origin and purchase decisions. This result suggests that consumers' perceptions regarding a product's country of origin may not directly translate into purchasing behavior but can influence purchase decisions indirectly through interpersonal communication and recommendations.

In contrast, Word of Mouth does not mediate the relationship between Brand Image and purchase decisions, indicating that a strong brand image can directly shape consumer preferences and purchasing behavior without requiring additional reinforcement through interpersonal communication. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the marketing and consumer behavior literature by providing empirical evidence that the influence of Country of Origin on purchase decisions operates through a communication mechanism, namely Word of Mouth. The findings also reinforce the central role of Brand Image as a direct predictor of consumer purchase decisions in the smartphone industry. Thus, the study extends previous research by clarifying the different pathways through which Country of Origin and Brand Image affect consumer behavior. From a practical perspective, the findings imply that Vivo should prioritize strategies to strengthen its brand image by consistently positioning its products, driving innovation, and communicating product quality. In addition, the company should actively encourage positive Word of Mouth by enhancing customer experience, developing customer referral programs, utilizing consumer testimonials, collaborating with technology influencers, and strengthening engagement through digital platforms and social media communities. These strategies can help increase consumer trust and more effectively stimulate purchase decisions than relying solely on the product's country of origin. This study is subject to several limitations. First, the sample size was limited to 65 respondents, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Second, the use of accidental sampling may not fully represent the characteristics of all Vivo smartphone users. Third, the study was conducted only in Sampit City, which may limit the applicability of the findings to other geographical contexts. Therefore, future research is recommended to employ larger, more diverse samples, use probability-based sampling techniques, and include respondents from different regions. Future studies may also incorporate additional variables such as product quality, price perception, customer satisfaction, brand trust, and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) to develop a more comprehensive understanding of consumer purchase decisions in the smartphone industry.

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