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Key Opinion Leaders and Electronic Word of Mouth in Fashion Marketplace Purchasing Decisions: The Mediating Role of Customer Engagement

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the associations between Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs), electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), and purchasing decisions among fashion marketplace consumers, with customer engagement as a proposed mediator. A quantitative explanatory survey of 97 purposively selected consumers in South Tangerang City, Indonesia, was analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). The estimated paths to customer engagement were positive for KOLs (β = 0.222) and e-WOM (β = 0.702), while the coefficient from customer engagement to purchasing decisions was 0.811. The model accounted for 79.7% of the variance in customer engagement and 88.6% in purchasing decisions within the sample. The estimated indirect coefficient was 0.180 for KOLs and 0.569 for e-WOM. Although the e-WOM coefficient was numerically larger, the available results do not establish that the two indirect associations differ statistically. This comparison should therefore be interpreted descriptively, particularly because discriminant validity between customer engagement and purchasing decisions was not fully established. However, discriminant validity between customer engagement and purchasing decisions was not fully established, and the reported test statistics for the small direct coefficients require cautious interpretation. The findings identify engagement as a potentially relevant link between digital communication and fashion marketplace purchasing decisions, without establishing a causal mediation process.

Keywords: Customer Engagement; Electronic Word of Mouth; Fashion Marketplaces; Key Opinion Leaders; Purchasing Decisions; Structural Equation Modeling.

1. INTRODUCTION

Fashion purchasing on digital marketplaces involves more than comparing prices or product descriptions. Shoppers encounter recommendations from Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs), peer evaluations, and platform-based promotional messages before making a decision, yet exposure to these messages does not necessarily lead to a purchase. Research on influencer marketing shows that message credibility, creator characteristics, and product fit shape consumer responses in different ways (Joshi et al., 2025; Pan et al., 2025; Sardar & Vijay, 2025). Broader accounts of digital consumer behavior describe the online environment in which these exchanges take place (Girsang et al., 2024; We Are Social, 2024). Recent e-WOM studies, in turn, emphasize review usefulness and information credibility as factors in consumers' online evaluations (Liu et al., 2024; Maru & Vijay, 2024). These differences make it important to distinguish information exposure from the ways consumers engage with and act on that information. The present study considers these processes among fashion marketplace consumers in South Tangerang City, Indonesia.

The fashion category provides a useful setting because buyers must often evaluate appearance, fit, and product quality without physical inspection before ordering. Information provided by sellers can be complemented or challenged by social-media endorsements and previous buyers' reviews, creating competing signals about product suitability. Research conducted in other online purchasing settings indicates that credibility and information adoption can be associated with purchase intentions, but the relationships are not uniform across information characteristics (Firmansyah, 2018; Ngo et al., 2024; Cuong, 2024). Influencer-related communication may also produce different responses depending on whether a message is

perceived as informative, trustworthy, or overly commercial (AlRabiah et al., 2022; Waltenrath, 2024). The variety of marketplace platforms used by the respondents further makes this an examination of cross-platform consumer perceptions rather than the effects of one platform. Understanding these perceptions can help clarify why favorable digital information and purchasing-related behavior do not always coincide.

KOLs are communicators whose perceived expertise, relevance, reach, or credibility may influence audience evaluations of brands and products. Unlike seller-produced advertising, KOL recommendations are interpreted partly through consumers' relationships with the individual delivering the message (Ki & Kim, 2019; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Jacksen et al., 2021; Ilmi & Mahendri, 2023; Yuliana, 2023). Evidence from recent reviews suggests that influencer credibility, content features, and audience characteristics can operate through distinct psychological pathways (Ao et al., 2023; Barari et al., 2026). Studies on authenticity and influencer types have similarly shown that consumers respond differently to communicators and the nature of their endorsements (Belanche et al., 2021; Bu et al., 2022; Andonopoulos et al., 2023; Zniva et al., 2023; Ren et al., 2023). In a fashion marketplace, perceived KOL credibility may invite closer consideration of a product even when it does not directly account for much variation in the reported purchasing decision. Accordingly, this study treats KOL perceptions as one possible antecedent of engagement and purchasing decisions rather than presuming an automatic persuasive effect.

Electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) refers to product evaluations and experiences circulated through online reviews, recommendations, and other consumer-generated messages. These sources can communicate qualities that are difficult to establish from promotional materials alone, although review volume and positive valence do not guarantee credible information. Earlier work established the relevance of online recommendations to consumer decisions (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Erkan & Evans, 2016; Rahmadhani & Prihatini, 2019; Ismagilova et al., 2020; Rachmah & Madiawati, 2022), while more recent syntheses distinguish source-related cues from message-related cues (Chauhan & Gupta, 2024; Haq et al., 2024). Studies of online reviews also show that information adoption, trust, and consumers' assessments of source credibility may matter more than a favorable attitude toward reviews alone (Ngo et al., 2024; Levy & Gvili, 2024). Evidence from marketplace and retail settings suggests that the behavioral relevance of e-WOM can differ according to consumer and product contexts (Slamet & Albab, 2023; Kim et al., 2024). These considerations provide a rationale for examining e-WOM alongside KOL perceptions rather than treating all digital recommendations as an equivalent information source.

Customer engagement offers a potential link between exposure to digital marketing information and consumers' purchasing-related responses. Engagement includes attention and information processing, emotional involvement, and behaviors such as sharing or interacting with content (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014; Dessart et al., 2015; Barger et al., 2016; Tafesse, 2016; Harmeling et al., 2017; Pansari & Kumar, 2017; Kristia, 2021). A review of customer engagement in social media emphasizes that its meaning and measurement depend on the type of interaction under investigation (Lim & Rasul, 2022). More recent influencer studies distinguish audience responses to influencers from responses to the endorsed brands and identify content credibility and relational factors as relevant to engagement (Aldlimi et al., 2025; Ballester et al., 2025). This distinction matters because attending to a product review or sharing a post is not identical to choosing a product, quantity, time, or payment method. The proposed model therefore positions customer engagement as an intervening construct while retaining purchasing decisions as a separate outcome.

Previous research has offered evidence on influencer characteristics, review credibility, and purchasing intentions, but the findings do not automatically resolve how these elements operate together for fashion marketplace consumers. For example, Sardar et al. (2024) studied influencer source and content characteristics in relation to consumer engagement and purchase

intention, whereas Kumar et al. (2025) compared brand-directed and influencer-directed communications. Other studies address digital influence, e-WOM sharing, and influencer credibility in settings that differ in platform, outcome, or consumer population (de Brito Silva et al., 2025; Ooi et al., 2023; Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2024). Reviews likewise identify substantial heterogeneity in influencer effectiveness and mechanisms (Bhardwaj et al., 2024; Pan et al., 2025). Although these studies inform the proposed associations, their outcomes often measure intention, engagement, or behavior in different ways, a distinction also evident in recent retail and social-commerce research (Laksono et al., 2026; Rosengren et al., 2024; Shamim & Azam, 2024). Within the studies reviewed here, KOL-related communication and e-WOM have frequently been examined through different outcomes, including customer engagement, purchase intention, and purchasing behavior. Less clear is how these two information sources are associated with customer engagement and purchasing decisions when examined simultaneously among fashion marketplace consumers. This study addresses that context-specific gap by estimating their direct and indirect associations within a single research model, without claiming to establish a new causal mechanism.

This study examines the associations of KOLs and e-WOM with purchasing decisions and estimates their indirect relationships through customer engagement among fashion marketplace consumers in South Tangerang City. The analysis retains four hypotheses for the direct KOL and e-WOM paths to purchasing decisions and their corresponding engagement-mediated paths, while also estimating the constituent paths to and from engagement. The study contributes a context-specific comparison of how KOL perceptions and e-WOM are associated with customer engagement and purchasing decisions when both information sources are examined within the same model. It also assesses whether the estimated indirect relationships are consistent with an engagement-based interpretation of digital consumer responses. This contribution extends the empirical discussion of digital marketing communication without claiming to establish a new causal theory. Practically, it may inform how fashion sellers balance influencer communication, trustworthy reviews, and opportunities for meaningful customer interaction. Its contribution is contextual and explanatory rather than causal because the information was collected through a cross-sectional, self-reported survey. This limitation also makes the distinctiveness of engagement and purchasing-decision measures especially important when interpreting the mediation model.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design, Setting, and Participants

A quantitative explanatory survey was used to examine the relationships between KOLs, e-WOM, customer engagement, and purchasing decisions. The study was conducted in South Tangerang City, Indonesia, during a six-month period in 2025, and the target population consisted of consumers who had purchased fashion products through online marketplaces. The population size was not known, and the original study used Cochran's formula with Z = 1.96, an assumed proportion of 0.50, and a nominal margin of error of 0.10 to obtain 96.04, rounded up to 97 participants. Respondents were selected using nonprobability purposive sampling based on their relevance to the target population (Sanusi, 2017; Sugiyono, 2019). Because participants were not randomly selected, the formula is treated as the study's original sample-size planning rationale rather than as a basis for probability-sampling precision or population-level inference. The survey design enables analysis of associations among reported perceptions, not determination of the temporal or causal ordering of the constructs (Malhotra, 2013; Sekaran & Bougie, 2017).

2.2 Questionnaire and Response Scale

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire containing 21 items for four constructs: KOLs, e-WOM, customer engagement, and purchasing decisions. Each item was answered on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5), consistent with the original survey coding (Siregar, 2014; Sugiyono, 2019). Responses captured

consumers' perceptions rather than independently observed transactions. Table 1 reports the response categories and scores used in the study. The questionnaire addressed KOL relevance, reach, resonance, and credibility; e-WOM valence, volume, credibility, and timeliness; engagement's affective, cognitive, and behavioral components; and six purchasing-decision dimensions.

Table 1. Likert Scale Measurement

Response Category	Score
Strongly Agree	5
Agree	4
Moderately Agree	3
Disagree	2
Strongly Disagree	1

Table 1 identifies the five ordered response categories applied to every questionnaire item. Higher scores represent stronger agreement with the statement presented. The neutral midpoint of the scale is represented by a score of 3. The scoring scheme was used consistently across all four constructs. These values describe the response coding and do not by themselves establish measurement validity.

2.3 Construct Operationalization

The four constructs were operationalized using the dimensions in the original instrument. KOLs were represented by four items covering relevance, reach, resonance, and credibility, and e-WOM by four items covering valence, volume, credibility, and timeliness. Customer engagement comprised seven items describing affective, cognitive, and behavioral engagement; purchasing decisions comprised six items addressing product choice, brand choice, channel choice, purchase timing, purchase quantity, and payment method. The dimensions were discussed in relation to established marketing and consumer-behavior literature (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Labibunnajah, 2023; Oktaviana, 2023), with more recent conceptual context provided by Lim and Rasul (2022) and Aldlimi et al. (2025). Table 2 reproduces the 21 item statements and their assigned dimensions without altering the original measurement content.

Table 2. Operationalization of Research Variables

Variable	Dimension	Measurement Indicators	Item
Key Opinion Leader (KOL)	Relevance	The KOL has a background appropriate to the promoted product or industry and shares content relevant to the target audience's needs or interests.	1
KOL	Reach	The KOL has a substantial social media following and generates engagement through likes, shares, and comments.	2
KOL	Resonance	The KOL produces authentic, relatable content and provides convincing personal experiences or testimonials.	3
KOL	Credibility	The KOL has a trustworthy reputation and demonstrates extensive knowledge of the promoted products or industry.	4
Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM)	Valence	Positive reviews encourage purchase interest, while negative reviews influence consumers' perceptions of products or services.	5
e-WOM	Volume	The availability of numerous reviews facilitates purchasing decisions and increases consumers' confidence in a product.	6
e-WOM	Credibility	Reviews are perceived as trustworthy when supported by evidence, provided by knowledgeable sources, and published on reputable platforms.	7
e-WOM	Timeliness	Recently published and regularly updated reviews increase consumers' confidence in products.	8
Customer Engagement	Affective Engagement	Consumers demonstrate enthusiasm and interest in the marketing content presented.	9
Customer Engagement	Affective Engagement	Consumers experience enjoyment when interacting with marketers through the content presented.	10

Customer Engagement	Cognitive Engagement	Consumers pay attention to the marketing content presented.	11
Customer Engagement	Cognitive Engagement	Consumers absorb information communicated through marketing content.	12
Customer Engagement	Behavioral Engagement	Consumers are inclined to share marketing content with others.	13
Customer Engagement	Behavioral Engagement	Consumers demonstrate a willingness to learn from marketing content.	14
Customer Engagement	Behavioral Engagement	Consumers support marketing content by distributing it through broader communication channels.	15
Purchasing Decisions	Product Choice	Consumers decide whether to purchase a particular product.	16
Purchasing Decisions	Brand Choice	Consumers determine which brand to purchase.	17
Purchasing Decisions	Distribution Channel Choice	Consumers select purchasing channels based on factors such as location, price, and product availability.	18
Purchasing Decisions	Purchase Timing	Consumers determine when to make purchases according to their preferences and purchasing frequency.	19
Purchasing Decisions	Purchase Quantity	Consumers decide how many products to purchase.	20
Purchasing Decisions	Payment Method	Consumers determine the payment method used to complete a purchase.	21

Table 2 details the full operational definition used for each of the four constructs. Four items describe KOL characteristics and another four represent e-WOM. Seven customer-engagement statements address affective, cognitive, or behavioral involvement. The six purchasing-decision items cover decisions about products, brands, channels, timing, quantities, and payments. The content of these items is important when assessing whether engagement and purchasing decisions are empirically distinguishable.

2.4 Research Procedure and Conceptual Framework

The sequence of research stages is shown in Figure 1, which summarizes the steps described in the available study report.

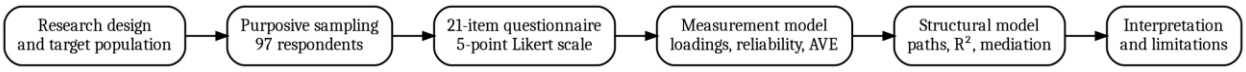


Figure 1. Research Procedure Flow

Figure 1 summarizes the study sequence from research design to interpretation. The target population comprised fashion marketplace consumers, and 97 respondents were selected purposively. The questionnaire included 21 statements measured on a five-point Likert scale. Measurement-model assessment preceded the reporting of structural paths and mediation estimates. The final stage includes the limitations associated with sampling, measurement distinctiveness, and statistical reporting.

The study followed the sequence summarized in Figure 1, from defining the population and constructs to interpreting the PLS-SEM estimates. Its conceptual framework treats KOLs and e-WOM as exogenous constructs, customer engagement as an intervening construct, and purchasing decisions as the outcome. H1 and H2 relate to the direct KOL and e-WOM paths to purchasing decisions, respectively, whereas H3 and H4 concern their respective indirect paths through customer engagement. The constituent paths from each information source to engagement and from engagement to purchasing decisions were also estimated in the model. Figure 2 presents the original conceptual relationships with the hypothesized direct and indirect links. This framework specifies associations that can be examined statistically rather than establishing a temporal sequence of behavior.

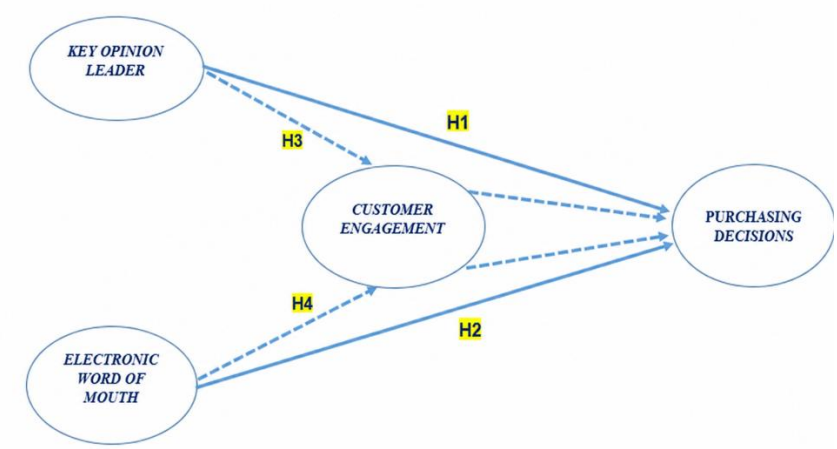


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Figure 2 places KOLs and e-WOM on the left, customer engagement in the middle, and purchasing decisions on the right. Solid paths represent the direct relationships tested in H1 and H2. The routes through the central engagement construct correspond to the proposed indirect hypotheses H3 and H4. The diagram indicates that the research considers both direct and mediated pathways. It does not by itself demonstrate that the proposed mediation occurred causally.

2.5 Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS 4. The measurement model was evaluated using outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), and the Fornell–Larcker discriminant-validity criterion, following the original analysis plan (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2019; Ghozali & Latan, 2020). The reported benchmarks included loadings around 0.70 or above, reliability coefficients of at least 0.70, and AVE of at least 0.50. Structural results were examined through path coefficients, R^2, adjusted R^2, and the reported standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). The original hypothesis-testing procedure specified two-tailed tests at a 0.05 significance level with bootstrapping for direct and indirect relationships (Yamin & Kurniawan, 2011). Contemporary PLS-SEM guidance also emphasizes discriminant-validity and reporting quality when interpreting a mediation model (Ringle et al., 2023). Because the available tabulation does not include bootstrap standard errors and confidence intervals for every path, statistical assertions in this article are limited to the information that is actually reported.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

The 97 surveyed fashion marketplace consumers comprised 63 women (64.9%) and 34 men (35.1%). Respondents aged 18–24 years formed the largest age group (55.7%), followed by those aged 25–34 years (17.5%); 13 respondents (13.4%) were younger than 18 years. Students (55.7%) and employees (33.0%) were the largest occupational categories. Shopee was the most frequently reported marketplace (40.2%), followed by Tokopedia (28.9%), TikTok Shop (14.4%), Lazada (11.3%), and Zalora (5.2%). Table 3 provides the frequencies and percentages for these respondent characteristics.

Table 3. Respondent Characteristics

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	34	35.1%
	Female	63	64.9%
Age	Under 18 years	13	13.4%
	18–24 years	54	55.7%

	25–34 years	17	17.5%
	35–44 years	6	6.2%
	Over 45 years	7	7.2%
Occupation	Student	54	55.7%
	Employee	32	33.0%
	Entrepreneur	10	10.3%
	Other	1	1.0%
Marketplace	Shopee	39	40.2%
	Tokopedia	28	28.9%
	TikTok Shop	14	14.4%
	Lazada	11	11.3%
	Zalora	5	5.2%

Table 3 shows that younger shoppers accounted for a large share of the study population. Women were more numerous than men in the analyzed sample. Student respondents comprised more than half of the participants. The five listed marketplaces were all represented, with Shopee accounting for the largest group. These distributions describe the respondents and should not be interpreted as representative market shares.

The sample composition affects the interpretation of the model because its results primarily reflect the views of respondents reached through purposive recruitment. In particular, students and consumers aged 18–24 years accounted for large proportions of the responses, while older age groups had relatively small counts. Age, gender, occupation, and platform use were described but were not estimated as moderators in the structural model. The study therefore cannot establish whether a given association differs systematically between demographic or marketplace subgroups. This sampling context is particularly relevant when considering whether its results might apply to the wider fashion marketplace population.

Mean construct scores were 3.87 for e-WOM, 3.83 for KOLs, 3.52 for purchasing decisions, and 3.40 for customer engagement. The values were above the five-point scale midpoint, with the two information-source constructs evaluated more positively than the engagement construct. The distinction suggests that favorable attitudes toward KOLs and reviews need not correspond to equally strong participation in brand-related content. These descriptive patterns are consistent with the need to distinguish perceptions of information from engagement behavior (Dessart et al., 2015; Lim & Rasul, 2022). The construct means and available measurement statistics are summarized together in Table 4.

The measurement model included all 21 original indicators. Reported outer loadings ranged from 0.773 to 0.979, Cronbach's alpha from 0.925 to 0.984, composite reliability from 0.947 to 0.987, and AVE from 0.817 to 0.914. The reported outer loadings and AVE values met the study's stated criteria for indicator performance and convergent validity. However, the exceptionally high reliability coefficients for customer engagement (α = 0.984; CR = 0.987) and purchasing decisions (α = 0.968; CR = 0.975) warrant careful interpretation. Such values may indicate strong internal consistency, but they may also reflect similarities or redundancy among measurement items. Therefore, reliability estimates should be considered alongside the conceptual distinctiveness of the constructs. Exceptionally high reliability, however, may also reflect similar item content, especially for closely related behavioral constructs. Table 4 reports the construct-level descriptive statistics, loading ranges, and reliability and validity estimates.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics and Measurement Model Assessment

Construct	Mean	Loading range	Cronbach's α	Composite reliability	AVE
Key Opinion Leader	3.83	0.841–0.956	0.925	0.947	0.817
Electronic Word of Mouth	3.87	0.861–0.959	0.935	0.953	0.837
Customer Engagement	3.40	0.936–0.979	0.984	0.987	0.914
Purchasing Decisions	3.52	0.773–0.969	0.968	0.975	0.867

Table 4 shows that the e-WOM construct had the highest mean score of the four variables. All reported indicator loading ranges were above the prespecified loading benchmark. Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability exceeded 0.90 for every construct. Customer engagement had the highest alpha and composite reliability, values that also suggest possible item redundancy. The AVE estimates support convergent validity but do not establish that all four constructs are distinct.

The strongest reliability estimates occurred for customer engagement (α = 0.984; composite reliability = 0.987) and purchasing decisions (α = 0.968; composite reliability = 0.975). Although such figures demonstrate consistency among reported items, they should not be treated as sufficient evidence of measurement quality. In a survey measuring both content participation and decision-related actions, similarities between items may strengthen relationships between latent scores. Research on customer engagement emphasizes the conceptual need to differentiate participation from outcomes such as purchase intention or behavior (Pansari & Kumar, 2017; Aldlimi et al., 2025). This consideration motivates a closer examination of discriminant validity.

The Fornell–Larcker matrix is displayed in Table 5. The diagonal entries were 0.956 for customer engagement, 0.915 for e-WOM, 0.931 for purchasing decisions, and 0.904 for KOLs. The correlation between customer engagement and purchasing decisions was 0.939, which exceeded the square root of AVE for purchasing decisions (0.931). The correlation between customer engagement and purchasing decisions was 0.939, which was lower than the square root of AVE for customer engagement (0.956) but higher than that for purchasing decisions (0.931). Accordingly, the Fornell–Larcker criterion was not satisfied for purchasing decisions relative to customer engagement. This result indicates that the empirical distinction between these two constructs remains insufficiently established. Consequently, the strong structural relationship between them should be interpreted cautiously. This finding qualifies subsequent interpretation of their estimated structural relationship.

Table 5. Discriminant Validity Assessment Using the Fornell–Larcker Criterion

Construct	CE	e-WOM	PD	KOL
Customer Engagement (CE)	0.956			
Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM)	0.883	0.915		
Purchasing Decisions (PD)	0.939	0.857	0.931	
Key Opinion Leader (KOL)	0.795	0.817	0.776	0.904

Table 5 reports diagonal square roots of AVE and the correlations between pairs of constructs. The customer engagement–purchasing decisions correlation was the highest off-diagonal value in the matrix. That correlation exceeded the purchasing-decision diagonal entry, indicating incomplete discriminant validity for this pair. The remaining reported comparisons did not show the same exception. The table therefore supports a more cautious assessment of mediation than convergent-validity statistics alone would suggest.

Because the customer engagement and purchasing-decision measures were not fully distinguished by the reported criterion, their strong observed association may partly reflect overlapping measurement. This does not negate all observed relationships, but it limits the strength of claims about a separate mediating mechanism. The matrix also indicates that e-WOM and customer engagement were highly correlated (0.883), although this value did not exceed their respective diagonal entries. An HTMT analysis and a close examination of potentially overlapping items would provide a stronger assessment of discriminant validity, as emphasized in methodological discussions of PLS-SEM (Ringle et al., 2023). The analysis presented here preserves the original model and treats its mediation interpretations as tentative.

The reported standardized root mean square residual was 0.058. The R^2 value for customer engagement was 0.797 (adjusted R^2 = 0.793), while the R^2 for purchasing decisions was 0.886 (adjusted R^2 = 0.882). These values indicate that the model accounted for substantial

within-sample variation in the two endogenous constructs. They do not provide a test of predictive accuracy for new respondents or demonstrate causal effects. Figure 3 reproduces the fitted SmartPLS model with its original indicator loadings, path coefficients, and endogenous R^2 values.

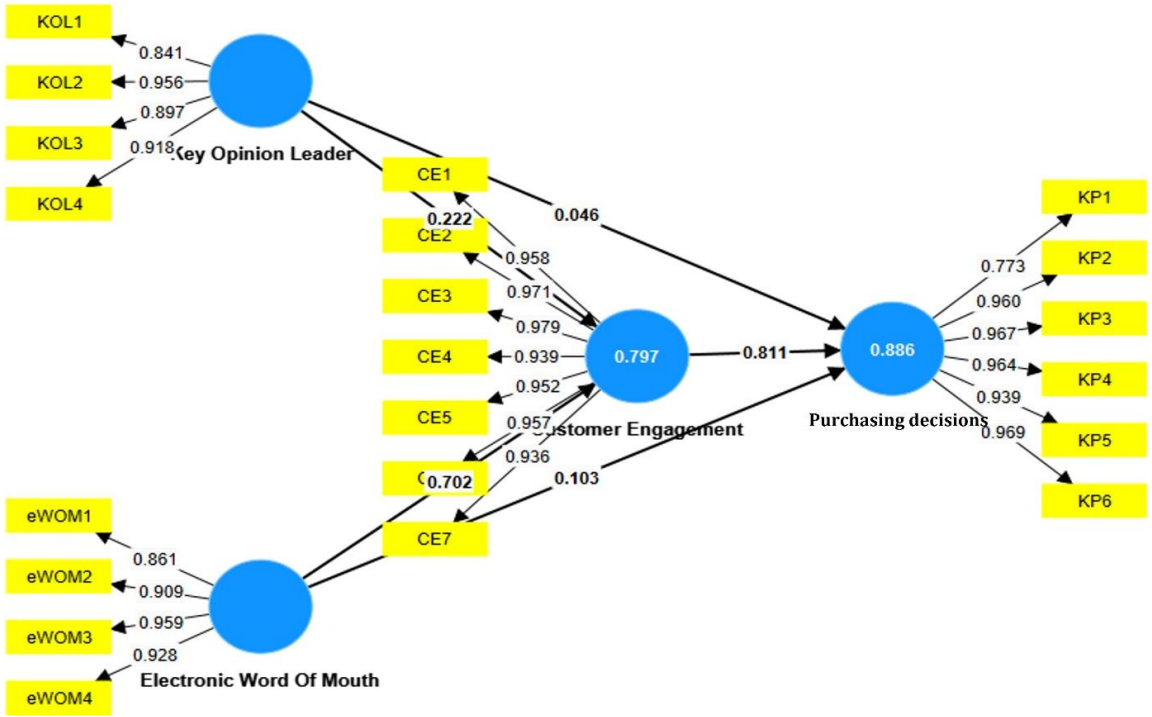


Figure 3. PLS-SEM Measurement and Structural Model

Figure 3 depicts the estimated model obtained from SmartPLS 4. The constituent coefficients are 0.222 for KOLs to engagement, 0.702 for e-WOM to engagement, and 0.811 for engagement to purchasing decisions. The direct coefficients from KOLs and e-WOM to purchasing decisions are much smaller, at 0.046 and 0.103. The figure also displays R^2 values of 0.797 and 0.886 for the two endogenous constructs. These graphical estimates must be interpreted together with the incomplete discriminant-validity evidence and the reported hypothesis-testing table.

The indirect coefficient for KOLs through customer engagement was 0.180, consistent with the product of the constituent coefficients 0.222 and 0.811. The corresponding indirect e-WOM coefficient was 0.569, consistent with the product of 0.702 and 0.811. The coefficient from customer engagement to purchasing decisions was larger than either direct coefficient from the two information-source constructs. The original table reports t-statistics and p-values for the two direct and two indirect hypotheses but not for the three constituent paths. Table 6 reproduces the reported estimates without introducing unreported bootstrap statistics.

Table 6. Structural Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis / relationship	β	t-statistic	p-value
KOL → CE	0.222	—	—
e-WOM → CE	0.702	—	—
CE → PD	0.811	—	—
H1: KOL → PD	0.046	7.173	< 0.001
H2: e-WOM → PD	0.103	6.636	< 0.001
H3: KOL → CE → PD	0.180	2.195	0.028
H4: e-WOM → CE → PD	0.569	5.895	< 0.001

Table 6 indicates positive coefficients for all seven displayed paths. The two estimated indirect associations were 0.180 for KOLs and 0.569 for e-WOM. The reported p-values for the

indirect paths were 0.028 and below 0.001, respectively. Table 6 reports significant p-values for both direct relationships, with coefficients of 0.046 for KOLs and 0.103 for e-WOM. However, the corresponding bootstrap standard errors and confidence intervals are not presented. Consequently, the reported significance levels cannot be independently assessed from the information provided in the table. The direct-path findings should therefore be interpreted cautiously, and definitive conclusions regarding H1 and H2 should be avoided. Missing test statistics for the constituent paths further limit a definitive interpretation of the proposed mediation mechanism.

3.2 Discussion

The principal pattern is that e-WOM had a larger estimated relationship with customer engagement (β = 0.702) than KOLs did (β = 0.222). Among surveyed fashion marketplace consumers, reviews and peer evaluations may have provided information that supported further attention to products and content. Research on e-WOM distinguishes the credibility and usefulness of review information from simple exposure to favorable evaluations (Maru & Vijay, 2024; Chauhan & Gupta, 2024). The larger e-WOM coefficient may reflect the relevance of peer-generated product information when consumers evaluate fashion products that cannot be physically inspected before purchase. Online reviews may provide additional perspectives on product appearance, fit, and perceived quality, whereas the KOL construct combines several attributes, including relevance, reach, resonance, and credibility. These differences may help explain why e-WOM exhibited a stronger estimated relationship with customer engagement in the present sample. However, because the study did not separately examine review usefulness, perceived risk, or information adoption, these explanations should be regarded as plausible interpretations rather than directly tested mechanisms. Other marketplace research likewise relates review credibility and information adoption to consumers' purchasing intentions (Ngo et al., 2024; Cuong, 2024). The present results extend that discussion to a model using customer engagement as an intervening construct, while remaining restricted to self-reported associations.

The estimated KOL-to-engagement pathway was positive but smaller than the e-WOM-to-engagement pathway. This difference does not mean that KOLs are ineffective, because it compares coefficients within one sample and one specification rather than an experiment that isolates communication channels. Influencer reviews suggest that credibility, product congruence, authenticity, and audience identity can shape responses in different ways (Vrontis et al., 2021; Ao et al., 2023; Joshi et al., 2025). Studies of influencer authenticity and message characteristics also show that influence need not increase merely with popularity or exposure (Zniva et al., 2023; Ren et al., 2023). The KOL measure in this study combined reach and resonance with perceived relevance and credibility, so the findings cannot isolate which attribute best explains consumer participation. A practical interpretation is to evaluate communication relevance and trustworthy content alongside audience size, rather than infer the effect of any individual KOL dimension.

Customer engagement exhibited a large positive estimated coefficient toward purchasing decisions (β = 0.811), but that relationship requires careful conceptual interpretation. The engagement construct included attention, enjoyment, learning from content, and information sharing, whereas purchasing decisions included choices about products and purchasing arrangements. Theoretically, these are related but not identical activities, a distinction emphasized in foundational engagement research (Dessart et al., 2015; Pansari & Kumar, 2017). Contemporary evidence also separates brand or content engagement from purchase intentions or actual transactions (Lim & Rasul, 2022; Kumar et al., 2025; Ballester et al., 2025). Given the discriminant-validity results, the large coefficient between customer engagement and purchasing decisions (β = 0.811) requires careful interpretation. The observed association may partly reflect insufficient empirical distinction between the two constructs rather than an entirely separate engagement-to-purchasing relationship. Although customer engagement may be associated with

consumers' purchasing-related responses, the present measurement results do not provide sufficient evidence to interpret this coefficient as a direct behavioral conversion effect. Therefore, the relationship should be understood as a strong within-sample association whose conceptual distinctiveness requires further examination. Its magnitude is therefore best understood as a strong within-sample association, not a demonstrated behavioral conversion effect.

The e-WOM indirect association via customer engagement (β = 0.569) was larger than the corresponding KOL association (β = 0.180). This ranking follows the differences in the two information-source paths to engagement because both proposed indirect routes share the same engagement-to-decision coefficient. Studies examining e-WOM sharing and engagement show that interaction with consumer-generated information can accompany or support purchasing intentions, although the mechanisms vary across settings (Levy & Gvili, 2024; Haq et al., 2024). Similarly, research on consumer-generated information and shopping behavior indicates that online communication does not always translate directly into transactions (Kim et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2024). The two positive indirect coefficients in this study are therefore compatible with engagement-related pathways, not proof that a change in review exposure would cause a change in purchase behavior. The cross-sectional design and discriminant-validity finding prevent stronger claims about causal mediation.

The reported statistics for H3 and H4 indicate positive indirect coefficients with reported p-values of 0.028 and below 0.001, respectively. The reported direct coefficients, by contrast, were only 0.046 for KOLs and 0.103 for e-WOM even though Table 6 attached large t-values to them. Those combinations cannot be adjudicated from the manuscript alone because the corresponding bootstrap standard errors and confidence intervals are not provided. As a result, the study does not establish whether engagement represents partial or complete mediation, nor should the text describe every direct hypothesis as definitively supported. Recent methodological guidance stresses that measurement quality and the completeness of structural reporting are central to interpreting PLS-SEM models (Ringle et al., 2023). Maintaining this distinction between observed coefficients and confirmed inferential results is necessary to keep the discussion aligned with the available evidence.

The respondent profile provides an additional boundary on the interpretation of these associations. More than half of the sample were aged 18–24 years and more than half were students, while Shopee accounted for the largest reported marketplace group. Research has identified variation in influencer responses across audience characteristics, social-media formats, and purchasing contexts (Ooi et al., 2023; Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2024; Pan et al., 2025). Work on fashion-related influencers likewise demonstrates that source and content factors can interact with product involvement (Sardar et al., 2024; Shamim et al., 2024). The current analysis does not contain platform-specific or demographic subgroup comparisons, so it cannot show that its coefficients would apply equally to older shoppers or every marketplace. These characteristics limit generalization without diminishing the descriptive relevance of the surveyed population.

A further implication concerns the distinction between favorable perceptions and consumers' active involvement. The mean e-WOM and KOL scores (3.87 and 3.83) exceeded the mean customer-engagement score (3.40), even though each value was above the scale midpoint. This pattern is consistent with the possibility that respondents can judge information sources positively without engaging strongly with marketplace content. Recent research differentiates influencer-generated attention, perceived credibility, engagement actions, and purchasing outcomes (Aldlimi et al., 2025; Sardar & Vijay, 2025; Barari et al., 2026). Studies of persuasive or highly personal influencer communication further suggest that credibility and perceived appropriateness may shape how audiences respond (AlRabiah et al., 2022; Waltenrath, 2024). Future models could separately examine such mechanisms, but the present data do not identify a particular mechanism as causal.

For fashion marketplace businesses, the results suggest examining review credibility and opportunities for substantive participation alongside KOL reach. Seller responses to authentic

reviews, accessible product information, and communication tailored to shoppers' questions are plausible engagement-oriented practices, although this survey does not evaluate interventions or sales outcomes. Research on influencer marketing indicates that communication characteristics can have different associations with engagement, intentions, and transactions (Pan et al., 2025; Barari et al., 2026). Other studies have drawn attention to the roles of authenticity, persuasion, and digital influence (Wang & Weng, 2024; de Brito Silva et al., 2025; Galle et al., 2026; Zhou et al., 2026). The practical contribution here is to avoid treating exposure metrics or favorable review sentiment as substitutes for meaningful engagement. Recommendations should therefore be regarded as implications consistent with the model rather than strategies proven effective by this study.

Several limitations shape the study's contribution to the literature. The sample consisted of 97 purposively recruited respondents, and its concentration among young shoppers restricts population-level generalizability. The cross-sectional questionnaire cannot establish timing between the predictors, engagement, and purchasing decisions, while common-source self-reporting may influence their observed correlations. The discriminant-validity exception involving engagement and purchasing decisions also limits confidence that the mediation pathways relate fully separate latent constructs. Studies using validated, conceptually distinct engagement measures, a broader range of respondents, observed purchase behavior, and complete resampling statistics could investigate these relationships more decisively (Ringle et al., 2023; Bhardwaj et al., 2024). Within these boundaries, the study contributes a locally situated comparison of KOL- and e-WOM-related associations in a single fashion marketplace model.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study evaluated KOLs, e-WOM, customer engagement, and purchasing decisions among 97 fashion marketplace consumers in South Tangerang City, Indonesia. Positive coefficients linked KOLs and e-WOM to engagement (β = 0.222 and 0.702) and engagement to purchasing decisions (β = 0.811), while the estimated indirect coefficients were 0.180 and 0.569. The model accounted for 79.7% of engagement variance and 88.6% of purchasing-decision variance within the sample. Although the e-WOM-related indirect estimate was larger than the KOL-related estimate, the discriminant-validity exception between engagement and purchasing decisions limits claims about the distinctiveness of the proposed mediator. Small direct coefficients and incomplete bootstrap reporting also restrict definitive inference about H1 and H2. Accordingly, the findings support a cautious interpretation of customer engagement as a potentially relevant intervening construct, not an established causal mechanism.

For fashion marketplace sellers targeting consumers with characteristics similar to those represented in this sample, the findings suggest that credible e-WOM, relevant KOL communication, and opportunities for customer interaction may be considered complementary elements of digital marketing. Particular attention may be given to the quality and credibility of consumer-generated information, given its stronger estimated relationship with customer engagement in this study. However, these recommendations should be interpreted as implications of the observed associations rather than proven marketing strategies, since the study did not directly evaluate marketing interventions or actual sales outcomes. The implications are most appropriately applied to consumers resembling the predominantly young, purposively selected respondents rather than assumed to generalize to all marketplace users. Further research can investigate the same conceptual relationships with more diverse samples, more clearly differentiated engagement and purchasing-decision measures, longitudinal or behavioral data, and complete inference for indirect and direct pathways. Such research would strengthen the evidence without changing the substantive findings reported in the present study.

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