Social Media Marketing, Electronic Word of Mouth, and Trust in TikTok Shop Purchase Decisions

Selmi Dedi [1]* Andini Putri Sari Ramadhani [2] Yulius Heri Saptomo [3] Dirarini Sudarwadi [4] Marlina Malino [5] Jenita Sumari [6]
* Program Studi Manajemen, Fakultas Ekonomi dan Bisnis, Universitas Papua, Manokwari, Indonesia
[2] Program Studi Manajemen, Fakultas Ekonomi dan Bisnis, Universitas Papua, Manokwari, Indonesia
[3] Program Studi Akuntansi, Fakultas Ekonomi dan Bisnis, Universitas Papua, Manokwari, Indonesia

A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

This study investigates the effects of social media marketing and electronic word-of-mouth on purchase decisions in TikTok Shop, with trust as an intervening variable. The study addresses the limited emphasis on purchase decision in social commerce research and tests whether brand-generated and user-generated communication significantly shape consumer decision-making. The study employed a quantitative explanatory design using an online survey of 105 Generation Z respondents in Manokwari Regency who had previously purchased through TikTok Shop. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling to examine direct and indirect relationships among social media marketing, electronic word of mouth, trust, and purchase decision. The results show that social media marketing and electronic word-of-mouth both have positive and significant effects on trust and purchase decisions. Social media marketing exerts the strongest influence on trust, whereas electronic word of mouth has a stronger direct impact on purchase decisions. Trust also significantly affects purchase decisions and partially mediates both antecedent variables. The findings highlight that the purchase decision on TikTok Shop is shaped by the interaction among persuasive platform communication, peer evaluation, and consumer confidence, offering practical guidance for trust-oriented social commerce strategies and further research on decision behavior.

A B S T R A K

Penelitian ini mengkaji pengaruh pemasaran media sosial dan word of mouth elektronik terhadap keputusan pembelian melalui kepercayaan sebagai variabel perantara di TikTok Shop. Penelitian ini menanggapi minimnya perhatian terhadap keputusan pembelian dalam penelitian perdagangan sosial dan menguji apakah komunikasi yang dihasilkan oleh merek dan pengguna secara signifikan memengaruhi pengambilan keputusan konsumen. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain eksplanatori kuantitatif melalui survei daring terhadap 105 responden Generasi Z di Kabupaten Manokwari yang sebelumnya pernah berbelanja melalui TikTok Shop. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner terstruktur dan dianalisis menggunakan Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling untuk menguji hubungan langsung dan tidak langsung antara pemasaran media sosial, word of mouth elektronik, kepercayaan, dan keputusan pembelian. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa pemasaran media sosial dan word of mouth elektronik sama-sama memiliki pengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap kepercayaan dan keputusan pembelian. Pemasaran media sosial memberikan pengaruh terkuat terhadap kepercayaan, sedangkan word of mouth elektronik menunjukkan kontribusi langsung yang lebih kuat terhadap keputusan pembelian. Kepercayaan juga secara signifikan memengaruhi keputusan pembelian dan berperan sebagai mediator parsial bagi kedua variabel pendahulu tersebut. Temuan ini menyoroti bahwa keputusan pembelian di TikTok Shop dibentuk oleh interaksi antara komunikasi platform yang persuasif, evaluasi sesama pengguna, dan kepercayaan konsumen, sehingga memberikan arahan praktis bagi strategi perdagangan sosial yang berorientasi pada kepercayaan serta penelitian lebih lanjut mengenai perilaku pengambilan keputusan.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid diffusion of internet technology, mobile devices, and platform-based commerce has fundamentally altered the architecture of consumer markets. In digital environments, shopping is no longer a purely transactional activity; it is increasingly embedded in interactive media systems where information search, entertainment, recommendation exchange, and purchase execution occur within the same interface. This transformation has accelerated the expansion of social commerce. This model integrates social media communication with commercial functionality, enabling consumers to discover, evaluate, and buy products without leaving the platform ecosystem. Within this landscape, TikTok Shop has emerged as a distinctive social commerce platform by combining short-form video, algorithmic content distribution, live interaction, creator participation, and in-app purchasing into a single continuous user journey. For businesses, this convergence creates a highly responsive marketplace; for consumers, it reshapes how purchase decisions are formed, validated, and enacted.

The strategic relevance of this context is even stronger when viewed through the lens of Generation Z's behavior, a cohort whose digital routines are closely tied to visual content, peer interaction, and rapid information processing. Prior literature has shown that TikTok's short-video format and immersive design are highly appealing to younger users, as they stimulate engagement, platform stickiness, and ongoing interaction with commercial content (Cuesta-Valiño et al., 2022; Q. Yang & Lee, 2022). In addition, social media marketing is no longer limited to message dissemination; it has evolved into a relational mechanism through which brands create interaction, deliver value, and shape consumer evaluations. Evidence from recent studies indicates that well-designed social media marketing activities can strengthen perceived value, brand-related engagement, and purchase-oriented responses (Bushara et al., 2023; Osei-Frimpong et al., 2022). Accordingly, the study of purchase decisions on TikTok Shop is not only practically relevant but also theoretically important for understanding how platform-specific communication influences consumer judgment in social commerce settings.

Recent empirical research has provided substantial evidence that social media marketing contributes positively to consumer purchase-related outcomes (Bushara et al., 2023) demonstrate that social media marketing activities, particularly those involving customization, entertainment, trendiness, and interaction, significantly improve consumers' perceived value and subsequently stimulate purchase intention and positive electronic word of mouth. In a related vein, Mabkhot et al. (2022) show that the credibility of social media influencers is a decisive mechanism through which promotional exposure translates into stronger purchase intention. These findings imply that social media marketing works not merely because of exposure intensity, but because consumers interpret platform messages through evaluative filters such as relevance, attractiveness, and credibility. In the TikTok Shop environment, where promotional content is often embedded in creator videos, live selling sessions, and user-generated recommendations, these evaluative filters become especially consequential.

At the same time, the main research problem extends beyond firm-generated communication to consumer-generated communication. In digital marketplaces, purchase decisions are strongly influenced by electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), which serves as a publicly accessible source of product experiences, endorsements, and warnings. (Siddiqui et al., 2021) report that activities on social networking sites contribute significantly to the formation of

e-WOM credibility, which in turn enhances brand image and online purchase intention. Similarly, Bueno & Gallego (2021) find that argument quality and source credibility positively affect purchase intention in consumer-to-consumer settings, confirming that the persuasiveness of e-WOM depends on how reliable and useful the information is judged to be. For TikTok Shop users, this issue is highly salient because product discovery is frequently accompanied by review videos, comment threads, reaction content, and peer testimonials that may either reinforce or weaken intention to purchase.

Although social media marketing and e-WOM are both widely recognized as important predictors of online purchasing behavior, prior studies also suggest that their effects are neither automatic nor uniform. A recurring explanation in the literature is that consumers rarely move directly from exposure to action without first resolving uncertainty about the seller, the product, and the transaction environment. This is particularly relevant in social commerce, where content is abundant, messages circulate rapidly, and commercial persuasion is blended with entertainment. (Zheng et al., 2022) show that trust mediates the relationship between social interaction and online purchase intention, especially in low-trust environments where uncertainty reduction is crucial. (Dong et al., 2022) Similarly, confirm that trust strengthens the conversion of social media engagement into purchase intention in live-streaming e-commerce. These studies collectively indicate that trust serves as a psychological mechanism that converts interactional stimuli into economically meaningful behavior.

The specific solution proposed in the earlier literature is therefore to treat trust not as a peripheral variable but as an intervening construct that explains how digital influence translates into purchase behavior. (Osei-Frimpong et al., 2022) argue that social media brand engagement contributes to brand trust, which then shapes purchase intention. (X. Yang, 2021) further explains that, in social commerce, relational and cognitive social capital fully mediate the effect of structural social capital on purchase intention, thereby underlining the centrality of trust-based relational processes in online decision-making. In the domain of e-WOM, Su et al. (2023) show that online word-of-mouth credibility and source-product congruence influence consumer behavior through trust-related mechanisms, while Anastasiei et al. (2021) emphasize that perceived argument quality and source expertise enhance the adoption of e-WOM information. Taken together, these studies support the proposition that both brand-controlled communication and peer-controlled communication require trust to become persuasive enough to trigger purchase decisions.

However, a closer review of the literature reveals an unresolved empirical and contextual gap. First, much prior work has focused on purchase intention rather than actual purchase decision, even though these constructs are conceptually related but behaviorally distinct. Second, earlier studies have been conducted across diverse contexts such as restaurants, general social networking sites, influencer marketing, and consumer-to-consumer platforms, which limit direct transferability to TikTok Shop as a social commerce platform with integrated content, commerce, and algorithmic recommendation features (Bushara et al., 2023; Mabkhot et al., 2022; Siddiqui et al., 2021). Third, the literature itself signals the need to investigate additional mediators, especially trust, in models involving social media marketing and e-WOM (Bushara et al., 2023). Fourth, findings from more recent studies remain inconsistent: some studies report that trust effectively channels the influence of digital communication variables on purchase outcomes, whereas others find that trust only mediates selected relationships or plays

a different contingent role (Ningtias & Asnawi, 2024; Utiyawa et al., 2024) This inconsistency suggests that the mediating role of trust in TikTok Shop purchasing behavior, particularly among Generation Z, requires more focused empirical clarification.

Based on that background, this study aims to examine the influence of social media marketing and electronic word-of-mouth on purchase decisions, with trust as an intervening variable, in the context of TikTok Shop. The novelty of the study lies in integrating two major digital communication drivers—brand-generated social media marketing and consumer-generated e-WOM—into a single explanatory framework centered on trust, tested in a social commerce setting dominated by short-form video interactions. The study is further delimited to Generation Z users, a segment that is highly active in digital environments and highly relevant to TikTok-based commerce. By positioning trust as the mediating mechanism between platform communication and purchase decision, this study seeks to extend prior literature from intention-based models toward a decision-oriented explanation that is more appropriate for actual transactional contexts. In that sense, the study is expected to contribute both theoretically, by refining the explanatory role of trust in social commerce, and practically, by offering guidance for businesses seeking to improve purchase conversion on TikTok Shop.

LITERATURE

Review Social commerce has developed into a commercial environment in which promotional communication, peer interaction, and transaction execution occur within the same digital space. In such an environment, consumer responses are shaped not only by the content brands disseminate but also by the interpretations, recommendations, and evaluations circulating among users. The present study is situated within this social commerce perspective because TikTok Shop integrates short-form video, interactive engagement, algorithmic exposure, and direct purchasing into a unified platform experience. As emphasized in the introduction, this environment is especially relevant for Generation Z users, whose shopping decisions are strongly influenced by dynamic content, social proof, and peer-generated information. Consequently, a review of the literature must explain how social media marketing and electronic word-of-mouth influence the formation of purchase decisions, and why trust is theoretically justified as an intervening mechanism in that process. Social media marketing refers to a firm's planned use of social media platforms to communicate value, stimulate engagement, strengthen customer relationships, and support market performance. In contemporary digital marketing, social media marketing is no longer confined to promotional broadcasting; rather, it encompasses interaction, customization, entertainment, responsiveness, and trend alignment. The literature reviewed in the uploaded materials consistently treats these dimensions as central elements of social media marketing effectiveness. (Bushara et al., 2023) explain that social media marketing activities such as customization, entertainment, trendiness, and interaction enhance consumers' perceived value and contribute to stronger purchase-oriented responses. Their study indicates that when brand communication is interactive and contextually relevant, consumers are more likely to attach positive value to the brand's offerings. Although their empirical context is the restaurant sector, the theoretical implications are directly relevant to TikTok Shop, where promotional content competes for attention in highly dynamic, feed-based environments and must therefore be engaging, timely, and personally resonant.

The importance of social media marketing becomes even clearer when linked to platform

characteristics. (Cuesta-Valiño et al., 2022) underline that TikTok's short-video format has strong user appeal, especially among younger cohorts, because it combines entertainment and immediacy with repeated exposure. (Q. Yang & Lee, 2022) Similarly, show that the relational quality fostered by short-video interaction contributes to loyalty and purchase-related responses. These studies suggest that on TikTok Shop, social media marketing should not be seen merely as message delivery, but as a platform-embedded relational process that shapes consumer attention, evaluation, and action. (Osei-Frimpong et al., 2022) Further strengthen this argument by demonstrating that social media brand engagement contributes positively to brand trust and purchase intention. In other words, the impact of social media marketing depends not only on the message itself but also on the quality of engagement it creates and the psychological assurance it provides to consumers. Within the logic of consumer behavior, such findings support the proposition that social media marketing can influence purchase decisions. Purchase decision differs from purchase intention because it represents a more concrete stage of consumer behavior, in which evaluative judgments translate into actual transaction readiness. The introduction already highlighted that much of the prior literature focuses on intention-based outcomes, leaving decision-based models underdeveloped. Even so, the literature reviewed in the uploaded files points to a meaningful pathway. (Bushara et al., 2023) show that social media marketing stimulates purchase-oriented behavioral outcomes, while Mabkhot et al. (2022) reveal that the credibility embedded in promotional exposure significantly strengthens consumers' willingness to buy. Together, these studies support the argument that social media marketing can guide consumers toward decision-making, especially when platform content is attractive, credible, and socially endorsed.

Electronic word of mouth represents the second major explanatory construct in this study. Unlike social media marketing, which is brand-initiated or strategically managed, electronic word of mouth arises primarily from consumer-generated communication distributed through digital networks. It includes reviews, comments, reactions, recommendations, testimonials, and other publicly available evaluative expressions online. The importance of e-WOM in digital commerce stems from consumers' frequent reliance on others' experiences to reduce uncertainty before making purchases. Siddiqui et al. (2021) argue that activities on social networking sites significantly contribute to the creation of e-WOM credibility. That credible e-WOM positively influences both brand image and online purchase intention. This finding is particularly relevant to TikTok Shop, where consumers are commonly exposed to product reviews, comment sections, stitched responses, and creator explanations before deciding whether a product is worth buying.

The literature also indicates that not all e-WOM carries the same persuasive power. Its effect depends heavily on the quality of the information and the credibility of the source. (Bueno & Gallego, 2021) show that argument quality and source credibility positively affect purchase intention in consumer-to-consumer settings. (Anastasiei et al., 2021) Add that perceived argument quality and source expertise strengthen consumers' intention to adopt e-WOM information. These findings suggest that e-WOM becomes influential when consumers believe that the information is authentic, detailed, and grounded in actual use experience. In the context of TikTok Shop, this condition is often fulfilled through product demonstration videos, before-and-after content, comment interactions, and review narratives that appear more spontaneous than formal advertising. Because Generation Z tends to value quick, visual, and experience-

based information, e-WOM on TikTok Shop is likely to function as a highly influential external cue in purchase evaluation.

The relationship between e-WOM and purchase decision is therefore theoretically plausible. Consumer-generated reviews provide informational support, social reassurance, and comparative references that help buyers move from uncertainty to action. The uploaded literature review also notes that e-WOM intention is shaped by social capital and user engagement, showing that online communication is embedded in broader relational structures rather than isolated message exposure. (Pang et al., 2021) identify bonding and bridging social capital as key predictors of e-WOM intention, while Chantamas et al. (n.d.) show that opinion leadership and brand commitment encourage e-WOM participation. These contributions reinforce the view that e-WOM is not simply verbal persuasion in digital form; it is a relationally embedded mechanism through which consumers collectively shape marketplace evaluations. In TikTok Shop, where community interaction is continuous and visible, such relational communication can substantially influence purchase decisions.

Trust occupies a central role in the present model because both social media marketing and e-WOM operate in environments characterized by informational abundance and transactional uncertainty. Trust generally refers to a consumer's willingness to rely on a seller, platform, brand, or information source based on perceived credibility, integrity, and competence. In online commerce, trust reduces perceived risk and encourages consumers to proceed with transactions despite the absence of direct physical verification. The uploaded materials show strong support for this theoretical role. (Zheng et al., 2022) report that trust mediates the relationship between social interaction and online purchase intention, especially when uncertainty reduction is essential. (Dong et al., 2022) Similarly, find that trust strengthens the conversion of social media engagement into purchase intention in live-streaming e-commerce. These studies make clear that in digital shopping environments, trust functions as a mechanism that transforms exposure and interaction into meaningful purchase-related behavior.

Trust is especially relevant in TikTok Shop because the platform combines entertainment and commerce in a way that may simultaneously attract and unsettle consumers. Entertaining content can generate interest, but it does not automatically guarantee confidence in product quality, seller reliability, delivery performance, or payment security. This is why trust serves as an intervening construct rather than a peripheral one. (Osei-Frimpong et al., 2022) demonstrate that social media brand engagement contributes to brand trust, which then influences purchase intention. (X. Yang, 2021) further explains that relational and cognitive social capital fully mediate the effect of structural social capital on purchase intention in social commerce. These findings indicate that trust-related relational processes are indispensable in explaining how online interaction becomes transaction-oriented behavior.

In the domain of e-WOM, the trust mechanism is equally visible. (Su et al., 2023) show that online word-of-mouth credibility and source-product congruence influence consumer behavior through mechanisms involving trust, brand attitude, and herd behavior. (Anastasiei et al., 2021) Likewise, suggest that the persuasiveness of e-WOM depends on whether consumers regard the message and its source as sufficiently credible to be adopted in their decision process. Thus, trust can be conceptualized as a cognitive filter through which both brand- and peer-generated communication is evaluated before influencing purchase decisions. This conceptualization is

particularly useful for TikTok Shop, where users navigate mixed streams of promotions, testimonials, endorsements, and informal opinions in rapid succession.

From a hypothesis development perspective, the literature provides a coherent foundation for linking social media marketing to trust. Social media marketing that is interactive, relevant, visually appealing, and informative can strengthen consumer confidence by signaling brand presence, responsiveness, and communication quality. (Bushara et al., 2023) show that well-executed social media marketing activities create favorable consumer evaluations, while Osei-Frimpong et al. (2022) confirm that engagement on social media contributes to brand trust. Supporting evidence from the prior study section of the uploaded thesis also indicates that social media marketing significantly influences trust in related digital commerce settings. On that basis, it is reasonable to expect that social media marketing on TikTok Shop positively influences consumer trust. The literature also supports the linkage between electronic word of mouth and trust. Because e-WOM represents consumer experiences shared in public spaces, it can reduce information asymmetry and provide credibility cues that are unavailable in formal advertising. (Siddiqui et al., 2021) emphasize the importance of e-WOM credibility in shaping consumer responses. At the same time, Bueno & Gallego (2021) and Anastasiei et al. (2021) show that source credibility and argument quality are decisive in determining whether consumers rely on such information. In the TikTok Shop context, where comments and review videos often accompany product exposure, e-WOM is likely to foster trust when consumers perceive the information as authentic and useful. Therefore, electronic word-of-mouth is expected to affect trust positively.

The direct relationship between social media marketing and purchase decision is also grounded in prior literature. Social media marketing provides exposure, product understanding, symbolic appeal, and promotional stimuli that can guide consumers toward choosing a product. (Bushara et al., 2023) show that social media marketing supports purchase-oriented responses, while Mabkhot et al. (2022) demonstrate that credible promotional communication enhances consumers' willingness to buy. The prior study mapping included in the uploaded thesis further reports several empirical findings indicating that social media marketing significantly affected purchase outcomes in e-commerce contexts. These arguments support the expectation that stronger social media marketing leads to stronger purchase decisions on TikTok Shop. The relationship between electronic word of mouth and purchase decision has a strong theoretical basis. Consumer reviews and online recommendations help individuals validate product claims, compare alternatives, and vicariously assess post-purchase satisfaction. Siddiqui et al. (2021) show that credible e-WOM affects online purchase intention through improved brand image. At the same time, Bueno & Gallego (2021) find that persuasive and credible peer communication drives purchase-related responses in digital settings. On platforms such as TikTok Shop, where product experience is often demonstrated by users rather than brands alone, e-WOM likely plays an immediate role in shaping purchase decisions. This makes the expected positive relationship between e-WOM and purchase decision conceptually defensible.

The link between trust and purchase decision is perhaps the most directly established in the literature. Trust reduces perceived risk, supports confidence in transaction outcomes, and enables consumers to proceed despite incomplete information. (Zheng et al., 2022) Moreover, Dong et al. (2022) affirm the role of trust in promoting purchase-related outcomes in online

environments, and the uploaded thesis materials report prior empirical findings showing that trust significantly affects consumer purchase behavior. In social commerce settings, trust is not merely an emotional comfort; it is a practical evaluative condition that enables consumers to translate favorable impressions into actual transactional choices. For TikTok Shop users, trust may involve confidence in the platform, the seller, the product presentation, and the broader communicative environment. Hence, trust is expected to affect purchase decisions positively.

The integrated literature strongly supports the mediating role of trust. The uploaded materials repeatedly indicate that digital communication variables do not always exert their influence directly; trust-related judgments often mediate their effects. (Osei-Frimpong et al., 2022) show that brand engagement affects purchase intention through brand trust. (Zheng et al., 2022) Moreover, Dong et al. (2022) show that trust mediates the path from interaction and engagement to purchase-related outcomes. (Su et al., 2023) Anastasiei et al. (2021) further demonstrate that the effect of online communication is conditioned by the degree to which consumers trust the message and the source. The prior study synthesis in the uploaded thesis also reveals inconsistent findings, with some studies showing full or partial mediation and others reporting selective mediation. This inconsistency strengthens the rationale for retesting trust as an intervening variable in the specific context of TikTok Shop and among Generation Z users. Accordingly, the present study argues that trust mediates the effects of both social media marketing and electronic word-of-mouth on purchase decisions.

H1: Social media marketing has a positive and significant effect on trust.
H2: Electronic word-of-mouth has a positive and significant effect on trust.
H3: Social media marketing has a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions.
H4: Electronic word of mouth has a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions.
H5: Trust has a positive and significant effect on purchase decision.
H6: Social media marketing has a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions through trust as an intervening variable.
H7: Electronic word of mouth has a positive and significant effect on purchase decision through trust as an intervening variable.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research design with a survey approach to examine the relationships among social media marketing, electronic word of mouth, trust, and purchase decision in the context of TikTok Shop. A quantitative design was considered appropriate because the research sought to test theoretically derived hypotheses and estimate the magnitude and direction of relationships among latent variables within a structured empirical model. The design was explanatory in nature, as it aimed not merely to describe consumer perceptions but to test whether social media marketing and electronic word-of-mouth significantly affect purchase decisions, both directly and indirectly through trust. In line with the problem formulation and hypothesis development presented in the preceding sections, the study was structured to capture behavioral tendencies among Generation Z consumers with prior experience purchasing on TikTok Shop.

The study was conducted in Manokwari Regency, West Papua, with data collected online. The online mode was suitable for the research context because the study focused on

digital consumers and platform-based shopping behavior. The fieldwork period extended for approximately three months, beginning after the research proposal was approved on 27 May 2025 and continuing until the end of August 2025. This time frame provided sufficient time to distribute the instrument, verify respondents' eligibility, and obtain complete responses from participants who met the research criteria. The design, therefore, aligned with the nature of the research problem, the characteristics of the target respondents, and the digital environment in which TikTok Shop transactions occur.

Population and Sample

The study population comprised Generation Z individuals residing in Manokwari Regency. The choice of this population was grounded in both theoretical and contextual considerations. From a theoretical perspective, prior literature indicates that Generation Z is highly responsive to short-form video content, peer-generated recommendations, and social commerce interfaces, making this cohort particularly relevant for examining purchase behavior on TikTok Shop. From a contextual perspective, the uploaded thesis states that the study was limited to Generation Z consumers in Manokwari, thereby maintaining consistency among the research problem, the study setting, and the sampling frame. In operational terms, the study defined Generation Z as respondents aged 17 to 28 years, consistent with the criteria applied in the original research design. Sampling was conducted using a non-probability purposive sampling method. This approach was chosen because not all members of the broader population had an equal probability of being selected, and the study required respondents with specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives. To ensure conceptual fit, only respondents who met three criteria were included: they had to be in the Generation Z age range of 17 to 28 years, be domiciled in Manokwari Regency, and have made at least one purchase through TikTok Shop. These criteria ensured that all respondents had sufficient experiential relevance to evaluate social media marketing activities, electronic word-of-mouth, trust, and purchase decisions in the platform context under study. The sample size was determined using the guideline proposed by Hair et al. (2014), which recommends that the minimum sample size in multivariate analysis be between 5 and 10 times the number of indicators used in the model. The study employed 15 indicators in total, comprising five indicators for social media marketing, three for electronic word of mouth, three for trust, and four for purchase decision. Based on this rule, the minimum sample requirement ranged from 105 to 150 respondents. The final sample used in the study was 150 respondents, which satisfied the upper threshold of the recommended range and was therefore adequate for structural model estimation using PLS-SEM. This sample size also enhanced the robustness of the inferential analysis by enabling the study to estimate both direct and mediating effects within the proposed conceptual framework.

Data Collection and Instrument Development

The study used both primary and secondary data. Primary data formed the main basis of analysis and were obtained directly from respondents through a structured questionnaire. Because the study aimed to measure consumer perceptions and behavioral evaluations of latent constructs, a questionnaire was the most suitable instrument. It enabled the researcher to standardize responses across participants and to translate abstract constructs into measurable indicators. Secondary data were used to support the study's contextual and conceptual background, including prior studies, developments in digital commerce, and platform-related

information, which informed the introduction, literature review, and operationalization of variables.

Data collection was conducted by distributing the questionnaire via Google Forms. This mode of administration was appropriate for several reasons. First, the target respondents were digital users accustomed to online interaction. Second, the object of the study was TikTok Shop, a social commerce platform accessed digitally. Third, online distribution increased efficiency in reaching respondents across the study area while also facilitating data recording and coding. Before the questionnaire was widely disseminated, the wording of the items had to be arranged in a clear, contextually appropriate form so that respondents could interpret each statement consistently. The instrument was designed as a closed-ended questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, as this scale is widely used in behavioral research to capture attitudes, perceptions, and tendencies in a structured manner.

The operationalization of variables followed the conceptual and empirical foundations outlined in the uploaded thesis. Social media marketing was measured using five indicators adapted from the framework by As'ad and Alhadid: online communities, interaction, content sharing, accessibility, and credibility. These indicators reflect the extent to which brand-related communication on social media is interactive, accessible, and persuasive to TikTok Shop users. Electronic word of mouth was measured using three indicators derived from the framework cited in the thesis by Hutajulu et al., namely intensity, opinion valence, and content. These indicators were selected because they capture not only the frequency of exposure to online opinions but also the direction and substance of such communication. Trust was measured through three indicators representing integrity, benevolence, and competence, reflecting the degree to which consumers perceive the seller or platform as reliable and worthy of confidence in online transactions. Purchase decision was measured using four indicators reflecting confidence in product choice, purchase habits, willingness to recommend, and tendency to repeat purchase. Collectively, these indicators translated the conceptual model into observable measures suitable for statistical testing.

Table 1 *Operational Definition of Variables*

Variable	Code	Indicator	Reference
Social Media Marketing	X1.1	Online communities	Zulfikar (2017)
	X1.2	Interaction	Zulfikar (2017)
	X1.3	Sharing of content	Zulfikar (2017)
	X1.4	Accessibility	Zulfikar (2017)
	X1.5	Credibility	Zulfikar (2017)
Electronic Word of Mouth	X2.1	Intensity	Hutajulu et al. (2022)
	X2.2	Valence of opinion	Hutajulu et al. (2022)
	X2.3	Content	Hutajulu et al. (2022)
Trust	Z1.1	Integrity	Widyartono (2020); Setiawati (2023)
	Z1.2	Benevolence	Widyartono (2020); Setiawati (2023)
	Z1.3	Competence	Widyartono (2020); Setiawati (2023)
Purchase Decision	Y1.1	Confidence in choosing a product	Kotler & Armstrong
	Y1.2	Habit in purchasing	Kotler & Armstrong
	Y1.3	Willingness to recommend	Kotler & Armstrong
	Y1.4	Repurchase tendency	Kotler & Armstrong

Source: *Compiled and adapted by the author from the cited references.*

Research Model

The research model was developed from the theoretical synthesis presented in the introduction and literature review. It positioned social media marketing and electronic word-of-mouth as exogenous variables, trust as the intervening variable, and purchase decision as the endogenous variable. The logic of the model rests on the assumption that digital communication does not always directly affect buying behavior. Instead, consumers first evaluate the credibility, usefulness, and reliability of the information they receive, and that evaluative process is reflected in trust. In this study, social media marketing refers to brand-generated digital stimulation, whereas electronic word of mouth refers to user-generated social influence. Both are expected to shape trust and, subsequently, purchase decisions.

In substantive terms, the model proposes seven relationships. Social media marketing is hypothesized to affect trust and purchase decisions. Electronic word of mouth is likewise hypothesized to affect trust and purchase decisions. Trust is hypothesized to affect purchase decisions. Finally, trust is expected to mediate the effects of social media marketing and electronic word-of-mouth on purchase decisions. This model is methodologically defensible because it aligns with the conceptual structure established in the earlier sections and because its variables are represented by reflective indicators compatible with PLS-SEM estimation.

Data Analysis Technique

The data analysis in this study combined descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize respondent characteristics and to describe the pattern of responses for each research variable. This stage was necessary to provide an overview of the sample's empirical profile before testing the structural relationships among constructs. The descriptive component, therefore, served as an initial empirical mapping of respondents' evaluations of social media marketing, electronic word-of-mouth, trust, and purchase decisions in the TikTok Shop context.

The inferential analysis employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 3.0. This technique was selected because the study involved multiple latent variables measured by several indicators and aimed to test both direct and indirect effects within one integrated model. PLS-SEM is particularly appropriate for predictive and explanatory models in social science research, especially when the objective is to examine the strength of structural relationships and the mediating role of a latent construct. In this study, the use of PLS-SEM enabled the simultaneous estimation of the measurement and structural models.

The analysis proceeded in two major stages. The first stage involved evaluation of the outer model to assess the adequacy of the measurement model. At this stage, convergent validity was examined through factor loadings and average variance extracted, while reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. Discriminant validity was evaluated through cross-loadings and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio. These procedures were essential to ensure that each indicator adequately represented its intended latent construct and that each construct remained empirically distinct from the others. The second stage involved evaluation of the inner model to assess the structural relationships among constructs. At this stage, the model's explanatory power was examined using R-square, the contribution of predictors was assessed using effect size, and predictive relevance was evaluated using Q-square. Hypothesis

testing was then conducted using bootstrapping procedures to estimate path coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values for both direct and indirect relationships.

The decision to use PLS-SEM also aligned with the sample design and model complexity. The study included 15 indicators distributed across four constructs and tested mediation relationships that required simultaneous estimation of multiple paths. Under these conditions, PLS-SEM offered a practical and analytically sound approach for identifying the significance and direction of the hypothesized relationships. The analytical procedure, therefore, ensured that the study could answer the research questions in a coherent and replicable manner.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Results
Respondent Profile

The empirical analysis was based on 105 valid responses from Generation Z consumers in Manokwari Regency who had made purchases through TikTok Shop. The respondent profile indicates that the sample is highly relevant to the digital commerce context under study. Female respondents accounted for the majority of the sample, with 78 respondents (74.3%), while male respondents represented 27 respondents (25.7%). This pattern indicates that female users were more dominant among the TikTok Shop consumers captured in this study. The age distribution also revealed a strong concentration in early adulthood. Respondents aged 21–24 years constituted the largest group, with 73 respondents (69.5%), followed by those aged 25–28 years (23 respondents, 21.9%) and those aged 17–20 years (9 respondents, 8.6%). These figures suggest that TikTok Shop purchasing behavior in the present sample was particularly concentrated among digitally active young adults at a life stage characterized by high social media exposure and frequent platform interaction.

The educational background of respondents further reinforces this interpretation. Most respondents had completed senior high school or an equivalent education, totaling 80 respondents (76.2% of the sample). Those with diploma-level education accounted for 10 respondents (9.5%), while those with undergraduate-equivalent education accounted for 15 respondents (14.3%). In occupational terms, students were the largest category, with 51 respondents (48.6%). They were followed by public-sector employees, including civil servants, police, and military personnel, with 18 respondents (17.1%); employees in private organizations, with 16 respondents (15.2%); respondents in other occupations, with 14 respondents (13.4%); and entrepreneurs, with 6 respondents (5.7%). Transaction frequency data revealed that 92 respondents (87.6%) had purchased through TikTok Shop more than twice, 11 (10.5%) had purchased twice, and only 2 (1.9%) had purchased once. As presented in Table 2, this pattern indicates that the sample was dominated by active and recurring users rather than occasional buyers, thereby strengthening the relevance of the findings for purchase decision analysis in a social commerce setting.

Table 2 *Respondent Profile*

Variable	Measurement	n	%
Gender	Male	27	25.7
	Female	78	74.3
Age (years)	17–20	9	8.6
	21–24	73	69.5
	25–28	23	21.9
Education Level	Senior High School / Equivalent	80	76.2
	Diploma	10	9.5
	Bachelor's / Equivalent	15	14.3
Occupation	Student	51	48.6
	Entrepreneur	6	5.7
	Employee	16	15.2
	Civil Servant / Police / Military	18	17.1
	Others	14	13.4
Transaction Frequency	1 time	2	1.9
	2 times	11	10.5
	More than 2 times	92	87.6

Source: *Processed primary data (2025).*

Descriptive Findings

The descriptive analysis indicates that all research variables were evaluated positively by respondents. Social media marketing obtained an overall mean score of 4.10, placing it in the high category. Across its five indicators, the highest score was for the item related to the accessibility and convenience of social media-based marketing content, with a mean of 4.23. In contrast, the remaining indicators ranged from 3.99 to 4.11. This suggests that respondents generally perceived TikTok Shop-related marketing content as interactive, accessible, and credible, although some dimensions were evaluated more strongly than others. Electronic word of mouth yielded an overall mean of 4.23, which falls into the very high category. Its indicators ranged from 4.20 to 4.29, indicating that online reviews, recommendations, and user-shared content were consistently seen as influential and persuasive. Trust recorded an overall mean of 4.17, categorized as high, with item scores ranging from 4.10 to 4.22. This shows that respondents generally held favorable beliefs about the reliability, benevolence, and competence of transactions on TikTok Shop. The purchase decision also received a high overall mean of 4.15, with item scores ranging from 4.14 to 4.17. These results indicate that respondents not only displayed positive attitudes toward the platform and its communication environment, but also showed strong readiness to buy and repeat transactions.

The descriptive findings are theoretically meaningful when read together with the literature presented in the previous sections. The high evaluation of social media marketing aligns with the argument of Bushara et al. (2023), who emphasize that interactive, engaging, and trend-relevant social media activities elicit favorable consumer responses. The very high score for electronic word of mouth also aligns with the literature showing that peer-generated communication has substantial evaluative power in digital commerce, especially when consumers are highly exposed to user experiences and publicly visible reviews, as argued by

Siddiqui et al. (2021) and Bueno & Gallego (2021). Likewise, the high mean score for trust supports the theoretical position advanced by (Dong et al., 2022; Osei-Frimpong et al., 2022; Zheng et al., 2022), namely, that trust plays a central role in converting digital interactions into purchase-related outcomes. In this sense, the descriptive statistics already suggest that the empirical environment of TikTok Shop in this study was conducive to testing the proposed structural relationships.

Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model evaluation confirmed that the instrument met acceptable standards for validity and reliability. Convergent validity was first assessed through outer loadings. As reported in Table 3, all indicators loaded strongly on their intended constructs, with values above the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70. The social media marketing indicators ranged from 0.767 to 0.823; electronic word-of-mouth indicators ranged from 0.831 to 0.854; trust indicators ranged from 0.835 to 0.854; and purchase decision indicators ranged from 0.758 to 0.839. These values indicate that each item had a sufficiently strong relationship with its respective latent variable. Convergent validity was further supported by the average variance extracted values, which were 0.628 for social media marketing, 0.713 for electronic word of mouth, 0.709 for trust, and 0.635 for purchase decision. Since all AVE values exceeded 0.50, the constructs explained more than half of the variance in their indicators.

Table 3 *Measurement Model Summary*

Variable	Indicator Range	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Result
Social Media Marketing	0.767–0.823	0.628	0.852	0.894	Valid and reliable
Electronic Word of Mouth	0.831–0.854	0.713	0.801	0.882	Valid and reliable
Trust	0.835–0.854	0.709	0.795	0.88	Valid and reliable
Purchase Decision	0.758–0.839	0.635	0.808	0.874	Valid and reliable

Source: SmartPLS output, processed primary data (2025).

Discriminant validity was examined through cross-loadings and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio. The cross-loading matrix showed that each indicator loaded more strongly on its own construct than on any other construct, indicating acceptable construct distinctiveness. This result was reinforced by the HTMT values, all of which remained below the 0.90 threshold. The HTMT values included 0.556 between social media marketing and electronic word of mouth, 0.847 between social media marketing and trust, 0.706 between social media marketing and purchase decision, 0.632 between electronic word of mouth and trust, 0.686 between electronic word of mouth and purchase decision, and 0.785 between trust and purchase decision. These results confirm that although the constructs were related in meaningful ways, they remained empirically distinguishable. Reliability testing further supported the instrument's adequacy. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.795 to 0.852, while composite reliability values ranged from 0.874 to 0.894, all exceeding accepted cut-off values. Accordingly, the measurement model was considered robust enough for structural analysis.

Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The structural model assessment showed that the proposed framework had moderate explanatory power and acceptable predictive relevance. The R-square value for trust was 0.540, indicating that social media marketing and electronic word of mouth jointly explained 54.0% of the variance in trust. The R-square value for purchase decision was 0.504, meaning that social media marketing, electronic word of mouth, and trust together explained 50.4% of the variance in purchase decision. Under the interpretation suggested by Hair et al., both values fall in the moderate category. This means that the model was reasonably effective in accounting for the behavior of the endogenous constructs. However, additional explanatory variables beyond the present model may still influence consumer decision-making in TikTok Shop settings.

The effect size analysis adds important nuance to this interpretation. Social media marketing showed a large effect on trust, with an F-square value of 0.600, indicating that brand-generated social media activities were a major predictor of trust formation in this sample. By contrast, its direct effect on purchase decision was relatively small, with an F-square value of 0.053. Electronic word of mouth exerted a small but meaningful effect on trust, with an F-square value of 0.091, and a similarly small effect on purchase decision, with an F-square value of 0.122. Trust itself showed a small effect on purchase decision, with an F-square value of 0.094. Predictive relevance was supported by Q-square values of 0.362 for trust and 0.301 for purchase decision, indicating that the model had good predictive capability for both endogenous variables.

Hypothesis testing revealed that all direct paths in the model were positive and statistically significant. Electronic word of mouth had a positive effect on trust, with a path coefficient of 0.232, a t-statistic of 2.658, and a p-value of 0.008. This result supports H1 if the hypothesis numbering follows the e-WOM-to-trust order in the original statistical output, or substantively supports the proposition that consumer-generated communication increases trust. Electronic word of mouth also had a positive and significant effect on purchase decision, with a coefficient of 0.292, a t-statistic of 3.744, and a p-value below 0.001. Trust had a positive effect on purchase decision, with a coefficient of 0.317, a t-statistic of 3.100, and a p-value of 0.002. Social media marketing had the strongest direct effect on trust, with a coefficient of 0.596, a t-statistic of 8.753, and a p-value below 0.001. Social media marketing also had a positive effect on purchase decision, with a coefficient of 0.233, a t-statistic of 2.191, and a p-value of 0.029. Taken together, these results show that both brand-generated and peer-generated digital communication significantly shape trust and purchase decisions, while trust itself remains a significant predictor of purchase decisions.

The indirect effects provide further support for the mediating role of trust. The indirect path from electronic word of mouth to purchase decision through trust was significant, with a coefficient of 0.074, a t-statistic of 2.232, and a p-value of 0.026. Likewise, the indirect path from social media marketing to purchase decision through trust was significant, with a coefficient of 0.189, a t-statistic of 2.784, and a p-value of 0.006. Because the corresponding direct effects of both social media marketing and electronic word of mouth on purchase decision also remained significant, the mediation pattern is best interpreted as partial mediation. In substantive terms, this means that trust accounts for an important part of how digital communication affects purchase decisions. However, it does not fully capture the influence of the original predictors.

Consumers on TikTok Shop may therefore respond both directly to persuasive content and indirectly through trust formation.

Table 4 *Direct and Indirect Effects*

Relationship	Path Coefficient	t-Statistic	p-Value	Result
E-WOM → Trust	0.232	2.658	0.008	Supported
E-WOM → Purchase Decision	0.292	3.744	0	Supported
Trust → Purchase Decision	0.317	3.1	0.002	Supported
Social Media Marketing → Trust	0.596	8.753	0	Supported
Social Media Marketing → Purchase Decision	0.233	2.191	0.029	Supported
E-WOM → Trust → Purchase Decision	0.074	2.232	0.026	Supported
Social Media Marketing → Trust → Purchase Decision	0.189	2.784	0.006	Supported

Source: *SmartPLS output, processed primary data (2025).*

Interpretation of Findings

The findings answer the main research question by showing that social media marketing and electronic word of mouth both contribute directly to purchase decisions and also influence them indirectly through trust. The stronger path from social media marketing to trust suggests that official or brand-controlled communication on TikTok Shop plays a particularly important role in establishing confidence. This finding is consistent with the view that interactive and credible social media engagement can strengthen brand trust, as argued by (Osei-Frimpong et al., 2022), and with (Bushara et al., 2023), who emphasize the importance of interaction, trendiness, and relevance in shaping positive consumer responses. In the present study, consumers appear to interpret marketing content not only as promotional material but also as a signal of brand presence, professionalism, and responsiveness.

At the same time, electronic word of mouth also exerted a significant effect on both trust and purchase decision, confirming that peer-generated communication remains highly influential in social commerce. This result is in line with Bueno & Gallego (2021), Siddiqui et al. (2021), and Anastasiei et al. (2021), who emphasize that the persuasive force of e-WOM depends on credibility, argument quality, and perceived usefulness. In a TikTok Shop environment, where consumers are surrounded by reviews, comment sections, creator demonstrations, and shared consumption experiences, such communication becomes a salient evaluative input. The relatively strong direct path from e-WOM to purchase decision suggests that consumers often use peer information as an immediate basis for deciding whether to buy.

The significant role of trust confirms its theoretical position as an intervening variable in social commerce behavior. The finding that trust positively affects purchase decisions is fully compatible with (Zheng et al., 2022) and (Dong et al., 2022), who show that trust helps transform digital interaction into purchase-oriented behavior. In this study, trust appears to reduce the uncertainty associated with online transactions and translate favorable perceptions of content and communication into actual purchase readiness. The fact that mediation was partial rather than full is also theoretically meaningful. It indicates that TikTok Shop consumers do not rely on trust alone; they may also react directly to promotional attractiveness, social proof, convenience, or product appeal. Nonetheless, trust remains a central explanatory mechanism because it systematically channels part of the effects of both social media marketing and

electronic word-of-mouth.

The findings demonstrate that the proposed framework is empirically supported among TikTok Shop users in Manokwari Regency. The model extends prior literature, which has often emphasized purchase intention, by showing that both communication variables and trust are significantly associated with the purchase decision. It also confirms that in a short-video-based social commerce setting, brand-generated and user-generated communication work together rather than separately. The practical implication is that sellers and brands operating on TikTok Shop should not only intensify their promotional content but also ensure that it appears credible, interactive, and responsive, while actively encouraging positive, authentic consumer reviews. In doing so, they can strengthen trust and increase the likelihood that consumers move from exposure to a purchase decision.

Discussion
Social Media Marketing, Trust, and the Logic of Consumer Confidence

The findings show that social media marketing has a positive and significant effect on trust, with the strongest direct coefficient among the exogenous relationships tested in the model. This pattern indicates that, in the TikTok Shop context, brand-generated communication is not merely an instrument for attracting visibility but also a mechanism for building consumers' psychological assurance. When the platform presents content that is interactive, accessible, and credible, consumers are more likely to infer that the seller or brand is responsive, capable, and trustworthy. In the present study, this result is visible in the high descriptive evaluation of social media marketing and in the structural coefficient linking social media marketing to trust, which exceeded the corresponding path from electronic word of mouth to trust. The empirical implication is that respondents did not treat marketing content as mere superficial persuasion; rather, they interpreted it as a signal of quality, consistency, and seriousness within the transaction environment. This is especially important in TikTok Shop, where consumers encounter products through fast-moving short videos and may need immediate cues to reduce uncertainty before deciding whether to believe the commercial message.

This result is theoretically consistent with the literature that positions social media marketing as a relational mechanism rather than as one-way promotional exposure. (Bushara et al., 2023) emphasize that social media marketing activities such as customization, entertainment, trendiness, and interaction strengthen favorable consumer evaluations by increasing perceived value. Although that study focused on restaurant followers and used perceived value as a mediator, the underlying logic remains relevant here: communication that is socially engaging and contextually meaningful increases the likelihood that consumers will respond positively. In the present study, the positive evaluative response appears to manifest as trust. The finding also aligns with Osei-Frimpong et al. (2022), who show that social media brand engagement contributes to brand trust and, in turn, affects purchase intention. Read together, these studies support the idea that consumers develop confidence not only from product information itself but from the relational quality of digital interaction. In TikTok Shop, content that is easy to access, timely, visually appealing, and responsive appears to produce precisely that relational effect.

The stronger role of social media marketing in shaping trust is also understandable when

linked to the communicative characteristics of Generation Z. As noted in the introduction, Generation Z consumers are deeply embedded in environments where visual immediacy, rapid information processing, and interactional responsiveness strongly influence attention and judgment. (Cuesta-Valiño et al., 2022) and (Q. Yang & Lee, 2022) Both underline that TikTok's short-video format stimulates engagement and relational involvement. The present findings suggest that these platform features do not merely increase entertainment value; they also shape trust formation by enabling users to assess whether a brand appears active, competent, and socially present. This helps explain why the coefficient from social media marketing to trust is substantial. In a social commerce setting, confidence is partly shaped by communicative behavior, and social media marketing is the most visible organizational expression of that behavior.

Electronic Word of Mouth as a Social Verification Mechanism

The results further indicate that electronic word-of-mouth has a positive and significant effect on trust. Although the magnitude of the effect is smaller than that of social media marketing, the relationship remains statistically meaningful and substantively important. This shows that consumer-generated communication functions as a social verification mechanism in the decision process. Respondents appear to rely on online reviews, recommendations, and shared experiences not only as additional information but also as a basis for judging the dependability of sellers and products on TikTok Shop. In other words, e-WOM helps transform anonymous digital commerce into a more socially interpretable environment. When consumers observe that other users provide consistent, favorable, or detailed evaluations, they gain reassurance that the transaction is less risky and that the claims embedded in promotional content are not entirely unilateral.

This interpretation is strongly supported by earlier literature. (Siddiqui et al., 2021) argue that credibility in e-WOM significantly affects consumer responses by strengthening brand image and purchase intention. Bueno and Gallego (2021) further show that argument quality and source credibility increase the persuasive power of digital peer communication. In a related vein, Anastasiei et al. (2021) explain that perceived argument quality and source expertise encourage consumers to adopt e-WOM information. The present findings extend these insights by showing that, in TikTok Shop, the persuasive power of peer-generated information is not limited to intention-based outcomes. It also contributes to the development of trust, which then supports decision-oriented behavior. This is theoretically plausible because TikTok Shop users often encounter product claims through comment sections, stitched videos, creator demonstrations, and user testimonials that appear more spontaneous than formal advertising. Such content provides social proof, which is particularly valuable when consumers must make judgments under informational uncertainty.

The smaller coefficient for e-WOM, relative to social media marketing, in predicting trust should not be interpreted as evidence of minor importance. Rather, it suggests that peer communication complements, not replaces, brand-generated communication. In this study, trust appears to be built through a dual process: the brand first presents itself through structured social media marketing, and consumers then validate or challenge that presentation through peer discourse. This interpretation is in line with (Pang et al., 2021), who identify social capital as a driver of e-WOM intention, and with Chantamas et al. (2020), who show that opinion

leadership and brand commitment encourage participation in e-WOM. Both studies imply that online communication is embedded in social relationships rather than isolated message exposure. In the TikTok Shop setting, e-WOM therefore contributes to trust by situating products and sellers within a visible social field where evaluations can be collectively observed and interpreted.

Direct Effects on Purchase Decision in a Social Commerce Environment

The discussion of purchase decision begins with the finding that social media marketing has a positive and significant direct effect on purchase decision. This means that, beyond shaping trust, social media marketing also influences consumers' readiness to choose, buy, and potentially repeat purchases. The significance of the direct path indicates that consumers do not always require a long evaluative chain before acting. Some portion of their decision appears to be influenced immediately by the attractiveness, clarity, and accessibility of the marketing content itself. In a short-video commerce setting such as TikTok Shop, this is highly plausible. Consumers are exposed to products in a format that reduces the distance between attention and transaction. When content is engaging and easy to understand, it can accelerate consumer movement from product exposure to purchase decision.

This result is consistent with the broader literature that treats social media marketing as a driver of purchase-related outcomes. (Bushara et al., 2023) report that social media marketing activities positively affect purchase-oriented responses through perceived value. (Mabkhot et al., 2022) Similarly, show that the credibility associated with social media influencer promotion strengthens purchase intention. The present study contributes by shifting the endpoint from purchase intention to purchase decision. That distinction is important because the earlier literature repeatedly identified a concentration of prior evidence on intention-based models. By showing that social media marketing is significantly related to purchase decisions in the TikTok Shop context, the present findings help bridge that gap. They suggest that digital promotional communication in social commerce is sufficiently powerful not only to stimulate interest but to influence concrete consumer choice.

Electronic word-of-mouth also shows a positive and significant direct effect on purchase decisions, and its coefficient is slightly stronger than that of social media marketing. This pattern is noteworthy because it suggests that peer-generated communication may be particularly relevant at the moment of consumer choice. In social commerce, consumers often compare promotional claims against the experiences of other users before deciding to buy. The stronger coefficient suggests that once trust-related uncertainty is under active evaluation, consumers may assign considerable weight to what other users say, demonstrate, or recommend. This reinforces the argument that e-WOM is not simply supplementary noise around commercial content. It is part of the decision architecture itself.

The result aligns with (Anastasiei et al., 2021; Bueno & Gallego, 2021; Siddiqui et al., 2021), all of whom show that credible, useful, and well-argued e-WOM can shape purchase-oriented outcomes. What the present study adds is a context-specific illustration of how that process operates in TikTok Shop. The platform is characterized by high visibility of user reactions, informal demonstrations, and shared consumption narratives. Under such conditions, e-WOM becomes highly actionable. Consumers appear to treat peer communication as a practical decision aid that helps them validate quality, compare alternatives, and estimate likely

satisfaction. This may explain why e-WOM retains a direct effect even after trust is included in the model.

Trust as a Core Explanatory Mechanism in Purchase Decision

Trust has a positive and significant effect on purchase decision, confirming its central theoretical role in the model. This finding means that consumers who perceive TikTok Shop transactions as more reliable, credible, and competent are more likely to make an actual purchase. In social commerce, products cannot always be physically inspected, seller reputations may be uneven, and promotional messages may be embedded in entertainment-oriented content. Under these conditions, trust becomes a practical judgment that helps consumers move from evaluation to commitment. The present study, therefore, supports the position that trust is not an auxiliary emotional variable but a core explanatory mechanism in digital purchase behavior.

This result is in line with (Zheng et al., 2022), who show that trust mediates the relationship between social interaction and online purchase intention, especially when uncertainty reduction is important. It is also consistent with (Dong et al., 2022), who find that trust strengthens the conversion of social media engagement into purchase intention in live-streaming e-commerce. The contribution of the present study lies in showing that this role of trust also holds for purchase decisions in TikTok Shop. The distinction matters because a decision implies a more advanced behavioral stage than an intention does. The findings therefore reinforce the broader conceptual argument that trust is one of the most decisive conditions for transforming favorable digital impressions into concrete transaction behavior.

The descriptive findings reported earlier help explain why trust performs this role. Respondents evaluated trust in the high category, indicating that confidence in seller or platform reliability was already relatively strong in the sample. At the same time, the model explains a substantial portion of the variance in purchase decisions, suggesting that trust works in tandem with social media marketing and e-WOM to shape consumer choice. Thus, trust should not be interpreted as a substitute for communication variables. Instead, it functions as the evaluative state through which communication becomes behaviorally effective.

Partial Mediation and the Dual Pathway to Purchase Decision

The indirect effect analysis shows that trust significantly mediates the relationships between social media marketing and purchase decision, and between electronic word of mouth and purchase decision. Because the corresponding direct effects remain significant, the mediation pattern is partial rather than full. This is a theoretically meaningful outcome. It indicates that the influence of social media marketing and e-WOM does not operate through a single psychological channel. Instead, there are at least two simultaneous pathways. One pathway is direct, in which consumers respond immediately to attractive promotional content or persuasive peer communication. The other pathway is indirect, in which those forms of communication first build trust and then encourage purchase decisions.

This dual-pathway structure is especially appropriate for TikTok Shop. The platform is built around rapid, visually rich exposure that can trigger spontaneous reactions. However, it is also embedded in a socially visible environment where users continuously evaluate message credibility, seller reliability, and product authenticity. The significance of both direct and

indirect effects suggests that consumers on TikTok Shop may oscillate between fast and reflective modes of judgment. They may be drawn to a compelling product video, but they still seek reassurance through trust cues before finalizing the purchase. Conversely, repeated exposure to trustworthy brand behavior and credible e-WOM can gradually strengthen confidence and increase the likelihood of future purchase decisions.

The mediation result is compatible with (Dong et al., 2022; Osei-Frimpong et al., 2022; Su et al., 2023; Zheng et al., 2022), all of whom point to trust-related processes as important pathways through which digital communication influences consumer behavior. At the same time, the partial rather than full mediation echoes the inconsistency noted in the introduction and literature review, where recent studies did not always find an identical role for trust across contexts. The present study helps clarify this inconsistency by showing that, in TikTok Shop, trust matters significantly but does not monopolize the explanatory process. Social media marketing and e-WOM still preserve an independent persuasive force.

Theoretical and Contextual Implications of the Findings

The discussion yields several implications for theory. First, the study strengthens the argument that social commerce behavior is best understood through integrated models that combine brand-generated and peer-generated communication with trust-related evaluation. Treating social media marketing, or e-WOM, in isolation would only partially explain how purchase decisions are formed on TikTok Shop. Second, the study extends prior research that has focused heavily on purchase intention by showing that the same core variables also explain purchase decisions. This shift matters because social commerce platforms increasingly collapse the distance between browsing and buying, making decision-level analysis more relevant than before. Third, the findings confirm that trust is an intervening mechanism of high explanatory value, but they also show that the consumer decision process remains multi-causal. The communicative environment of TikTok Shop is too dynamic to be reduced to a single route of influence.

Contextually, the results are especially meaningful because the sample consists of Generation Z users in Manokwari Regency, a group for whom social media is not merely an information source but a habitual social environment. This characteristic helps explain why both social media marketing and e-WOM display significant effects. Brand communication is visible, frequent, and platform-native, while peer communication is immediate, public, and socially legible. In such a setting, trust emerges not from formal guarantees alone but from the continuous interaction of content quality, communicative responsiveness, and visible consumer experience. The findings, therefore, suggest that TikTok Shop functions as a hybrid environment in which transaction behavior is shaped by both commercial design and social interpretation.

For businesses, these results imply that improving purchase decision outcomes requires more than simply increasing content volume. Social media marketing must be designed to signal accessibility, credibility, and genuine interaction, while e-WOM must be encouraged through authentic customer experience and positive post-purchase engagement. Because trust only partially mediates the influence of these variables, managers should recognize that consumers are responsive to both persuasive immediacy and confidence-building consistency. An effective strategy in TikTok Shop, therefore, depends on managing both dimensions simultaneously.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that social media marketing and electronic word of mouth are both meaningful determinants of purchase decisions in the TikTok Shop context, and that their influence is strengthened through trust as an intervening variable. The findings indicate that social media marketing plays a particularly strong role in shaping trust, while electronic word-of-mouth exerts a notable effect on both trust and purchase decisions. Trust itself functions as an important explanatory mechanism that helps translate digital communication into actual buying decisions. These results show that purchase decisions in social commerce are not formed by promotional exposure alone, but rather through the interaction of brand-generated communication, peer-generated evaluation, and consumer confidence in the platform environment.

The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by extending the dominant intention-based literature toward a decision-oriented explanation in a short-video social commerce setting. Its value lies in integrating social media marketing, electronic word-of-mouth, and trust into a single empirical framework focused on Generation Z users of TikTok Shop. Practically, the findings suggest that businesses should not only intensify promotional activity but also ensure that communication remains interactive, credible, and socially verifiable. Encouraging authentic user reviews and maintaining consistent platform responsiveness are equally important because consumers appear to rely on both direct persuasion and trust-building cues when making purchase decisions.

This study remains limited by its focus on Generation Z consumers in Manokwari Regency, so the findings should be interpreted within a specific demographic and geographic context. The model also explains a substantial but not exhaustive proportion of purchase decisions, indicating that other variables, such as perceived value, impulsive buying tendency, platform enjoyment, or perceived risk, may further enrich future analysis. Subsequent studies may therefore test this framework in broader regional settings, compare age cohorts, or introduce additional mediating and moderating variables to deepen understanding of consumer behavior in social commerce. For practitioners, the results imply that an effective TikTok Shop strategy requires simultaneous attention to persuasive content, credible user interaction, and the long-term cultivation of trust.

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