

The Mediating Role of Electronic Word of Mouth in the Relationship Between Content Marketing and Purchase Decisions on TikTok Shop

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ABSTRACT

PURPOSE - This study aims to analyze the influence of content marketing on purchase decisions and to test the role of E-WOM as a mediating variable in this relationship among TikTok Shop users. Conceptually, this study employs the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework, positioning content marketing as the stimulus, E-WOM as the socio-psychological mechanism, and purchase decisions as the behavioral response.

METHODOLOGY - The research method used is a quantitative approach with an explanatory design. Data were collected via an online questionnaire administered to TikTok Shop users selected using purposive sampling, with 100 respondents. Data analysis was conducted using SEM-PLS with the assistance of SmartPLS software to test direct and indirect relationships among variables

FINDING - The results revealed that content marketing significantly influenced purchase decisions ($\beta = 0.265$, $p = 0.006$) and E-WOM ($\beta = 0.595$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, E-WOM significantly influenced purchase decisions ($\beta = 0.561$, $p < 0.001$). Regarding indirect relationships, E-WOM significantly mediated the relationship between content marketing and purchase decisions, with an indirect effect coefficient of $\beta = 0.334$ ($p < 0.001$). These findings indicate that E-WOM strengthens the influence of content marketing on purchase decisions among TikTok Shop users.

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INTRODUCTION

Advances in digital technology have brought about fundamental changes in consumer behavior and modern marketing strategies. This transformation is marked by the emergence of social commerce as an evolution of e-commerce that integrates social interaction with digital transactions. In this context, Short video platforms like TikTok have emerged as major forces in influencing online consumer habits. The rapid growth in video consumption has made short-form video content a highly effective marketing tool for capturing attention, building engagement, and driving purchasing decisions (Luo et al., 2025). Platforms like TikTok and

Douyin not only facilitate content distribution but also create a complex ecosystem where social interaction, trust, and product information interact to influence consumer purchasing decisions (Luo et al., 2025; Rachman et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the unique characteristics of short-form video content such as storytelling, information relevance, content suitability, and emotional appeal have been shown to significantly influence consumer engagement through digital interactions like likes, comments, and content sharing (Dong et al., 2024). This indicates that TikTok has transformed from a mere entertainment platform into an integrated marketing ecosystem capable of influencing every stage of the consumer journey. Marketing models emerging on this platform, such as "good shopping decisions" and "selling goods," demonstrate that content strategies have distinct implications for purchase intent and conversion rates (Aprilianti et al., 2024; Wang & Chi, 2025). In the Indonesian context, Studies show that using TikTok for content marketing greatly impacts buying choices, especially through affiliate strategies that improve product exposure and build consumer confidence (Hardianawati, 2023).

However, The connection between content marketing and consumer choices is not consistently straightforward or predictable. Various research findings suggest that content marketing plays a considerable role in influencing buying decisions (Santy & Andriani, 2023), while others find that this influence is indirect or even negative when not supported by other factors such as brand image or consumer trust (Azzahra et al., 2025; Nadir et al., 2022). This inconsistency highlights a major issue in the literature: an absence of comprehension about the processes that facilitate the impact of content marketing on buying choices. Thus, it is important to identify intervening variables capable of explaining this relationship more comprehensively.

As a general solution, the digital marketing literature adopts a psychological approach through the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) A framework to illustrate how marketing content as external triggers impacts the internal reactions of consumers prior to making a buying choice. Within this framework, brief video content that provides practical value, simplicity, and enjoyment serves as a stimulus that shapes consumer trust and perspectives as the entity, eventually resulting in a reaction characterized by the intention to buy and the final decision (Luo et al., 2025). Additionally, content quality can enhance emotional resonance, brand trust, and perceived value, all of which act as mediators in the decision-making process (Apriani et al., 2025). This approach emphasizes that purchase decisions result from a complex process and cannot be explained solely through the direct influence of content marketing.

In this context, Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) emerges as a specific solution with great potential for explaining these mechanisms. E-WOM is defined as the exchange of information among consumers via digital media, including reviews, comments, and product recommendations (Santy & Andriani, 2023). Modern consumers tend to rely on information from fellow users before making a purchase decision, making E-WOM a credible and influential source of information. Research on " " indicates that factors such as source credibility, product information visualization, and emotional polarity within E-WOM content significantly influence consumer purchase intent (Fatimah et al., 2025; Zhai et al., 2022). Thus, E-WOM can serve as a bridge between exposure to marketing content and the formation of purchase decisions.

Furthermore, various studies indicate that E-WOM not only has a direct effect but also acts as a mediator in the relationship between content marketing and purchase decisions. Effective content marketing can foster the creation of positive E-WOM, which in turn enhances trust and brand image (Hasani et al., 2023). Other studies indicate that E-WOM influences

purchasing decisions through an indirect pathway by involving brand image and trust as additional mediators (Ibrahim et al., 2024; Tafolli et al., 2025).

Moreover, electronic word-of-mouth may serve as a mediator in how different online marketing methods affect consumer purchases (Kurdi et al., 2022). This evidence strengthens the claim that electronic word-of-mouth is an essential element in the realm of digital marketing that must not be disregarded. However, although the role of E-WOM has been extensively studied, significant research gaps remain. Most studies still separate the analysis of content marketing and E-WOM or only examine their direct effects on purchase decisions. Furthermore, research integrating all three variables into a single mediation model remains limited, particularly in the context of short-form video platforms such as TikTok Shop. In fact, TikTok's characteristics as a platform that combines content, social interaction, and transactions within a single ecosystem make it a unique and relevant context for research. This gap highlights the need for more comprehensive research to understand the role of E-WOM as a mediator in the relationship between content marketing and purchase decisions.

Drawing from the discussion presented earlier, this research intends to examine how Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) serves as a mediator in the effect that content marketing has on purchasing choices in TikTok Shop. The uniqueness of this research stems from the combination of these three key variables into one thorough analytical model, in addition to its concentration on the setting of short-form video platforms, an area that has not been widely studied in existing literature. This study is also grounded in the theoretical justification of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model, which explains the relationship between stimulus, organism, and response in digital consumer behavior. The scope of the study is limited to TikTok Shop users as a representation of consumers within the modern social commerce ecosystem. Thus, this study is expected to provide a theoretical contribution to the development of digital marketing literature as well as practical insights for businesses in designing content marketing strategies capable of fostering positive E-WOM and enhancing purchase decisions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) Theory

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) Theory is a theoretical framework that explains how external stimuli influence an individual's behavioral responses through complex internal processes. In the context of digital marketing, the stimulus (S) in the form of content marketing serves as a trigger that provides information, entertainment, and value to consumers (Hochreiter et al., 2022). This stimulus is then processed within the organism (O) that is, the consumer's psychological and social state, such as perceptions, emotions, and beliefs. These internal processes subsequently generate a response (R) in the form of observable behavior, such as a purchase decision. Thus, the SOR theory asserts that the relationship between stimulus and response is not direct but is mediated by internal processes that influence how consumers understand and respond to the information they receive.

In studies examining how Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) impacts the effect of content marketing on buying choices within TikTok Shop, the SOR Theory provides a strong conceptual foundation. Content marketing is positioned as a stimulus that triggers the formation of E-WOM as a representation of an organism—that is, consumers' cognitive and social responses to the content they consume. E-WOM not only reflects individual interpretations but also functions as social validation that influences the perceptions and trust of other consumers. Through this mechanism, E-WOM becomes a crucial mediator bridging the

influence of content marketing on purchasing decisions. Therefore, the application of SOR Theory in this study enables a more comprehensive understanding of how digital content on TikTok Shop can trigger social interactions and psychological processes that ultimately drive consumer purchasing behavior.

Hypothesis Development

The Relationship Between Content Marketing, Purchase Decisions, and E-WOM

Content marketing in the digital context is defined as the process of creating and delivering content – whether in the form of text, images, videos, or animations – with the aim of providing added value to consumers while building long-term relationships with them (Santy & Andriani, 2023). This definition emphasizes that content marketing is not merely a promotional tool but a communication strategy focused on value creation. From a strategic perspective, content marketing is positioned as a pull strategy, where consumers are actively drawn to relevant and beneficial content, unlike the push approach, which tends to force marketing messages (Hasani et al., 2023; Santy & Andriani, 2023). Additionally, content marketing is understood as a narrative medium that enables brands to interact with consumers through dialogic storytelling (Nadir et al., 2022). Technological advancements, particularly artificial intelligence, have expanded the definition of content marketing to be more data-driven and personalized. AI-based content marketing strategies have proven effective in boosting brand awareness, customer retention, and engagement, although their impact on purchase intent tends to be indirect (Bajrami et al., 2025). This indicates that modern content marketing focuses not only on content creation but also on optimizing content distribution and relevance through technology. In practice, digital content marketing possesses various characteristics that determine its effectiveness. In addition to content marketing, E-WOM is a key concept in digital marketing. E-WOM is defined as the process of information exchange among consumers regarding products or brands through dynamic and widespread digital media (Santy & Andriani, 2023). Unlike traditional marketing communication, E-WOM is horizontal in nature and is more trusted because it stems from the experiences of other consumers. In this context, consumers tend to look for reviews, comments, and recommendations before making a purchase.

H₁: Content Marketing Influences Purchase Decisions

H₂: Content Marketing Has a Significant Effect on E-WOM

The Mediating Role of E-WOM in the Relationship Between Content Marketing and Purchase Decisions

Empirical studies on the relationship between content marketing and purchase decisions have yielded mixed results. Some studies have found a significant direct effect (Hardianawati, 2023), while others indicate that the effect is indirect (Bajrami et al., 2025; Hasani et al., 2023). In fact, in some cases, content marketing has a direct negative effect but an indirect positive effect through brand image. This inconsistency highlights the importance of considering mediating variables such as E-WOM. The mediating role of E-WOM becomes crucial in explaining these relationships. Effective content marketing can generate positive E-WOM through consumer engagement, which subsequently influences the purchasing decisions of other consumers (Hasani et al., 2023). Additionally, E-WOM can also influence brand image and trust, which ultimately impacts purchasing decisions (Tafolli et al., 2025). In the context of short-form video platforms, this mechanism becomes more complex because interactions between content, emotions, and social interactions occur simultaneously. Research indicates that content quality can enhance emotional resonance and trust, which in turn drives E-WOM

and purchasing decisions (Apriani et al., 2025). Additionally, factors such as source credibility and product visualization in videos also influence the effectiveness of E-WOM (Zhai et al., 2022). Various factors influence purchasing decisions, including content marketing, E-WOM, trust, brand image, and consumer engagement. Content marketing can influence purchasing decisions both directly and indirectly through mediating variables such as brand image (Nadir et al., 2022). E-WOM also has a significant influence both directly and through the formation of trust and brand image (Rachman et al., 2024; Tafolli et al., 2025).

H₃: E-WOM has a significant effect on purchase decisions

H₄: E-WOM mediates the relationship between Content Marketing and Purchase Decisions

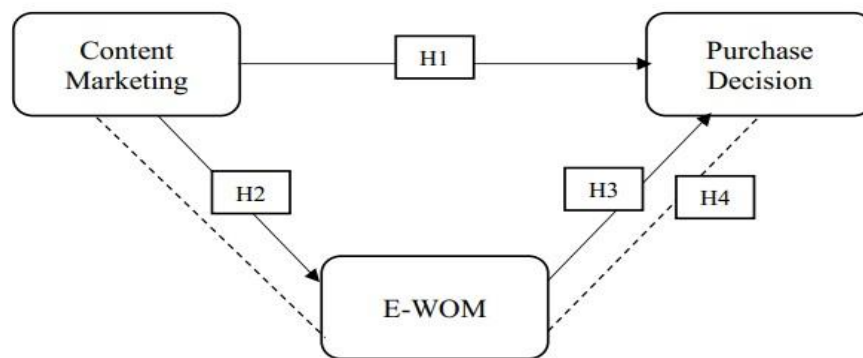


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design to examine the direct and indirect relationships among content marketing, Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM), and purchase decisions on TikTok Shop. The study adopted the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework, positioning content marketing as the stimulus, E-WOM as the organism, and purchase decision as the behavioral response (Arikunto, 2019). The population consisted of active TikTok Shop users in Indonesia who had experience interacting with promotional content and purchasing products through the platform (Sugiyono, 2017). A purposive sampling technique was applied to ensure that respondents met specific inclusion criteria, namely: (1) active TikTok users, (2) individuals exposed to marketing or promotional content on TikTok Shop, and (3) users who had purchased products or used TikTok as a purchase reference. Based on these criteria, a total of 100 valid respondents participated in the study. Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The measurement indicators for content marketing, E-WOM, and purchase decision were adapted from prior validated studies and adjusted to the TikTok Shop context. Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS software. PLS-SEM was selected because it is appropriate for prediction-oriented studies, capable of simultaneously analyzing measurement and structural models, and suitable for moderate sample sizes without requiring strict normality assumptions (Musyaffi et

al., 2022). The analysis procedure consisted of two stages. First, the outer model evaluation was conducted to assess measurement quality through convergent validity using Average Variance Extracted ($AVE > 0.50$), discriminant validity using Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio ($HTMT < 0.90$), and reliability using Cronbach's. Second, the inner model evaluation examined the structural relationships among variables through path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and bootstrapping procedures to test the significance of direct and indirect effects.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Outer Model Results

The external framework in PLS-SEM is utilized to assess the connections among latent constructs and their indicators in order to validate the integrity of the research tools. Evaluation takes place through methods like convergent validity (AVE), discriminant validity (HTMT), and construct reliability (Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha). An indicator is deemed valid if it reaches the suggested loading threshold, and a construct is regarded as reliable if it fulfills the reliability standards. This phase is essential to guarantee that every variable is measured precisely and consistently prior to examining the relationships between variables in the internal model.

Validity Test Results

Convergent validity is evaluated by employing the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which determines how well a latent construct accounts for the variance present in its indicators. A construct demonstrates strong convergent validity when the AVE value is at least 0.5, meaning that over half of the variance in the indicators is clarified by that particular construct. Thus, the AVE test ensures that the indicators used adequately represent the construct being measured.

Table 1. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) Test Results

	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Content Marketing	0.577
E-WOM	0.562
Purchase Decision	0.572

Source: Processed by Researchers (2026)

Based on the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) test results in Table 1, all constructs in this study showed values above the recommended minimum threshold of 0.50. The Content Marketing construct has an AVE value of 0.577, E-WOM of 0.562, and Purchase Decision of 0.572. These results indicate that each construct is able to explain more than 50% of the variance in its respective indicators. Thus, it can be concluded that all variables have met the criteria for convergent validity and are suitable for use in subsequent structural equation modeling analysis.

Discriminant Validity Results (HTMT)

Discriminant validity can be evaluated using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) to ensure that one construct is truly distinct from another. The recommended HTMT value is < 0.90 , depending on the level of precision used. If the HTMT value falls below this threshold, then discriminant validity is established. This test is important to ensure there is no overlap

between constructs so that each variable has clear conceptual uniqueness.

Table 2. Discriminant Validity

Construct	Content Marketing	E-WOM
E-WOM	0.718	
Purchase Decision	0.739	0.896

Source: Processed by Researcher (2026)

Based on the results of the discriminant validity test in Table 2, the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) values between constructs are below the recommended threshold (< 0.90). The correlation coefficient between Content Marketing and E-WOM is 0.718, and between Content Marketing and Purchase Decision is 0.739, indicating no issues with discriminant validity. Furthermore, the correlation between E-WOM and Purchase Decision, at 0.896, remains within the acceptable range. These results indicate that each construct in the study possesses sufficient conceptual distinction, thereby fulfilling the criterion for discriminant validity.

Reliability Test Results

Reliability testing aims to assess the internal consistency of indicators in measuring a latent construct. The testing is conducted using Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach’s Alpha, with a recommended minimum threshold of ≥ 0.70 . Values meeting these criteria indicate that the indicators possess a good level of consistency in representing the construct. Thus, the reliability test ensures that the research instrument can generate stable and reliable data for further analysis.

Table 3. Cronbach’s Alpha Test Results

Construct	Cronbach’s Alpha
Content Marketing	0.818
E-WOM	0.805
Purchase Decision	0.753

Source: Processed by Researchers (2026)

Based on the reliability test results in Table 3, all constructs showed Cronbach’s Alpha values above the recommended minimum threshold of 0.70. The Content Marketing construct had a value of 0.818, E-WOM 0.805, and Purchase Decision 0.753. These values indicate that each construct has a good level of internal consistency. Thus, it can be concluded that all variables in this study are reliable and suitable for further analysis.

Inner Model Results

The internal framework in PLS-SEM serves to examine causal links between latent constructs within the study model. The assessment is carried out through path coefficients, the significance of statistics (t-statistics and p-values), and the coefficient of determination (R^2) to evaluate the model's capacity to clarify the dependent variable. Furthermore, the mediation effects are analyzed with the bootstrapping technique to ascertain the importance of indirect effects. This phase is vital for investigating the research hypotheses and confirming that the model has sufficient predictive capability in clarifying the connections among the variables.

R-Square Test Results

Table 4. R-Square Test Results

Construct	Adjusted R-Square
E-WOM	0.348
Purchase Decision	0.553

Source: Processed by Researchers (2026)

According to the findings from the coefficient of determination (R^2) analysis presented in Table 4, the E-WOM variable exhibits an Adjusted R-Square value of 0.348. This means that the independent variables within the model can account for 34.8% of the variation in E-WOM. In contrast, the Purchase Decision variable has an Adjusted R-Square value of 0.553, which signifies that 55.3% of the variation in purchasing decisions can be attributed to the research model. These outcomes suggest that the model demonstrates a moderate to strong capacity for explaining the connections among the variables.

Effect Size Results (F^2)

Table 5. Effect Size (F^2)

Construct	Content Marketing	E-WOM	Purchase Decision
Content Marketing		0.549	0.104
E-WOM			0.464
Purchase Decision			

Source: Processed by Researchers (2026)

Based on the results of the effect size test (f^2) in Table 5, the effect of Content Marketing on E-WOM has a value of 0.549, indicating a large effect. Meanwhile, the effect of Content Marketing on Purchase Decision, at 0.104, is classified as a small effect. On the other hand, the effect of E-WOM on Purchase Decision is 0.464, which falls into the large effect category. These results indicate that E-WOM plays a stronger role in influencing purchase decisions compared to the direct effect of content marketing.

Predictive Relevance Results (Q^2) Construct Cross-Validated Redundancy

Table 6. Predictive Relevance (Q^2)

Variable	Q^2
Content Marketing	
E-WOM	0.184
Purchase Decision	0.300

Source: Processed by Researchers (2026)

According to the findings from the predictive relevance assessment (Q^2) shown in Table 6, the E-WOM variable registers a value of 0.184, while the Purchase Decision variable reflects a value of 0.300. A Q^2 value exceeding zero signifies that the model effectively predicts both variables. In particular, the greater Q^2 value associated with Purchase Decision suggests that the model possesses enhanced predictive relevance concerning the purchase decision aspect. Therefore, it is evident that the research framework demonstrates sufficient predictive ability.

Bootstrapping Test Results

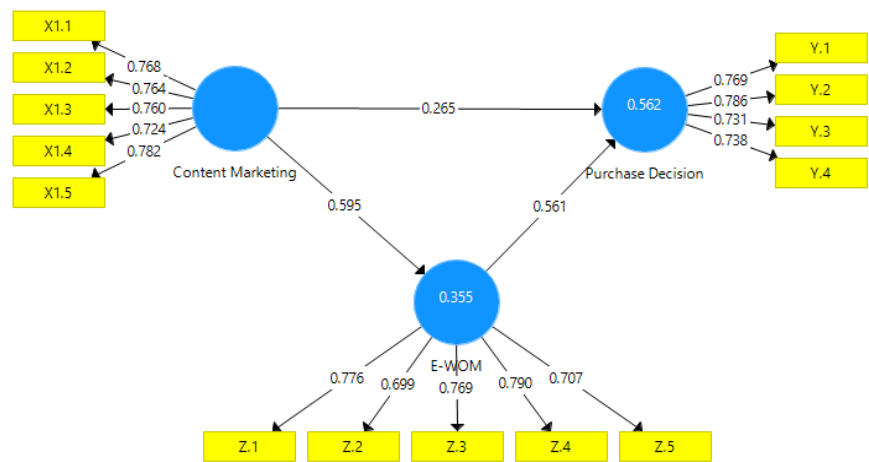


Figure 2. Conceptual Bootstrapping Results

According to the findings from the structural equation modeling analysis, Content Marketing positively influences E-WOM with a coefficient of 0.595 and has a direct impact on Purchase Decision with a coefficient of 0.265. Furthermore, E-WOM positively affects Purchase Decision with a coefficient of 0.561. The R² values reveal that E-WOM stands at 0.355 and Purchase Decision at 0.562, implying that the model has a moderate level of explanatory capability. These findings suggest that E-WOM serves as a mediator enhancing the effect of Content Marketing on purchasing decisions.

Path Coefficient Test Results

Table 7. Path Coefficient Test Results

	Sample Original (O)	Average Sample (M)	STDEV	(O/STDEV)	P-Values
CM → E-WOM	0.595	0.605	0.060	9.895	0.000
CM → PD	0.265	0.261	0.095	2.781	0.006
E-WOM → PD	0.561	0.571	0.094	5.940	0.000
CM → E-WOM → PD	0.334	0.346	0.070	4.757	0.000

Source: Processed by Researchers (2026)

Based on the results of the path coefficient test in Table 7, Content Marketing has a positive and significant effect on E-WOM with a coefficient of 0.595 (P-Values 0.000 < 0.05). Additionally, Content Marketing also has a significant effect on Purchase Decision with a coefficient of 0.265 (P-Values 0.006 < 0.05). E-WOM demonstrates a positive and significant effect on Purchase Decision with a coefficient of 0.561 (P-Values 0.000 < 0.05). Furthermore, the indirect effect of Content Marketing on Purchase Decision through E-WOM, with a coefficient of 0.334 (P-Values 0.000 < 0.05), is also significant. These results indicate that E-WOM acts as a mediator that strengthens the relationship between Content Marketing and purchase decisions.

Discussion

The Impact of Content Marketing on Purchase Decisions

The conclusions from the study suggest that content marketing directly impacts buying choices in a notable way. Theoretical implications of these results emphasize that the link between content marketing and buying choices is intricate and involves numerous factors. Features of content like relevance of information, use of narratives, and emotional resonance have been identified as factors that enhance consumer interaction, leading to an increase in purchasing decisions (Dong et al., 2024). Additionally, the dimensions of utility, ease of use, and entertainment value of short-form video content also play a role in building consumer trust. Directly, these findings align with previous research indicating that content marketing can influence consumer purchasing decisions moderately to strongly, particularly in the context of social media (Hardianawati, 2023; Santy & Andriani, 2023). However, there is variation in findings across the literature. Some studies indicate that the influence of content marketing is not always direct but is mediated by psychological variables such as trust and brand image (Nadir et al., 2022; Tafolli et al., 2025). Thus, the effectiveness of content marketing depends heavily on content quality, the platform context, and the accompanying mediation mechanisms.

The Impact of Content Marketing on E-WOM

The research results indicate that content marketing has a positive and significant impact on E-WOM. These findings confirm that content that is relevant, valuable, informative, and consistent can encourage consumers to interact, share experiences, and disseminate information through social media. Thus, content marketing serves not only as a marketing communication tool but also as a primary driver in the formation of E-WOM within the TikTok Shop ecosystem. In the context of short videos, the dimensions of utility, ease of use, and entertainment were also found to strengthen consumer trust, which in turn drives the formation of E-WOM. These findings indicate that the higher the quality of content marketing, the greater the likelihood that consumers will generate positive electronic word-of-mouth. Conceptually, these results align with the findings (Hasani et al., 2023) showing that content marketing positively influences E-WOM as one of the primary channels in digital marketing. This relationship can be explained through content characteristics that enhance consumer engagement, such as information relevance, storytelling, and emotional appeal (Dong et al., 2024). Furthermore, these research results support the argument that E-WOM is part of the mechanism linking content marketing to subsequent consumer behavior. Research (Kurdi et al., 2022) confirms that digital marketing channels can trigger E-WOM that influences purchasing decisions, while (Nadir et al., 2022) indicates that the impact of content marketing can be stronger when supported by mediating variables. Therefore, in the context of TikTok Shop, effective content marketing must be understood as a catalyst for digital social interactions that generate positive E-WOM and sustainably expand marketing influence.

The Influence of E-WOM on Purchase Decisions

The results of the study indicate that Electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM) has a positive and significant effect on purchasing decisions. These findings confirm that information, reviews, and recommendations shared among consumers via digital media serve as an important reference source in the decision-making process. Consumers tend to utilize E-WOM to reduce uncertainty and risk before making a purchase, thereby increasing their confidence in the selected product or brand. Conceptually, these results align with various studies demonstrating a positive relationship between E-WOM and purchase decisions. A study (Nadir et al., 2022) found that E-WOM exerts both direct and indirect effects through brand image,

while (Wang & Chi, 2025) confirmed that E-WOM drives purchase intent, which subsequently leads to purchasing behavior and customer loyalty. This indicates that E-WOM not only influences short-term decisions but also has long-term effects on consumer behavior. The mechanism of E-WOM's influence is multidimensional, encompassing brand image formation and trust, the credibility of information sources, as well as the quality and visualization of product information. Additionally, moderating factors such as brand strength and consumer involvement also determine the effectiveness of E-WOM. However, some studies indicate that the influence of E-WOM is not always directly significant but depends on mediating variables such as trust and brand image (Santy & Andriani, 2023; Tafolli et al., 2025). Therefore, in the context of TikTok Shop, E-WOM must be understood as a complex social mechanism influencing purchasing decisions.

The Mediating Role of E-WOM in the Relationship Between Content Marketing and Purchase Decisions

The results of the study indicate that Electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM) mediates the indirect relationship between content marketing and purchase decisions. These findings confirm that information, reviews, and recommendations shared among consumers via digital media serve as a key reference source in the decision-making process. Consumers tend to utilize E-WOM to reduce uncertainty and risk before making a purchase, thereby increasing their confidence in the selected product or brand. The mechanism of E-WOM's influence is multidimensional, encompassing brand image formation and trust (Tafolli et al., 2025), the credibility of information sources (Putz et al., 2025), as well as the quality and visualization of product information (Zhai et al., 2022). Additionally, moderating factors such as brand strength and consumer engagement also determine the effectiveness of E-WOM. Conceptually, these findings align with various studies demonstrating a positive relationship between E-WOM in mediating the relationship between content marketing and purchase decisions. Research (Nadir et al., 2022) found that digital marketing exerts an indirect influence through E-WOM, while (Azzahra et al., 2025) confirmed that E-WOM drives purchase intent, which subsequently leads to purchasing behavior and customer loyalty. This indicates that E-WOM not only influences short-term decisions but also has long-term effects on consumer behavior. Therefore, in the context of TikTok Shop, E-WOM needs to be understood as a complex social mechanism influencing purchasing decisions. Theoretically, the findings of this study support the development of the SOR model in the context of social commerce by demonstrating that purchasing behavior on TikTok Shop is shaped by the interaction between content stimuli and digital social processes. Practically, these findings underscore that businesses on TikTok Shop need to design content marketing that is not only visually appealing but also capable of sparking conversations, recommendations, and positive reviews. Such a strategy is crucial because marketing success on TikTok Shop depends not only on content quality but also on its ability to generate credible, persuasive, and relevant E-WOM for consumers.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the relationship between content marketing, Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM), and purchasing decisions on TikTok Shop is interrelated and not entirely linear. Content marketing has been shown to have a positive influence on purchasing decisions, both directly and indirectly through E-WOM as a mediating variable. However, the indirect influence via E-WOM demonstrates a more dominant strength, confirming that E-WOM plays a crucial role in enhancing the effectiveness of content

marketing in influencing consumer behavior. These findings indicate that purchase decisions are influenced not only by the quality of content but also by social interactions, trust, and perceptions formed through E-WOM. Theoretically, this study makes an important contribution to strengthening and expanding the application of the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) model in the context of digital marketing, particularly social commerce. Content marketing, as a stimulus, does not directly generate behavioral responses but rather through a mediating mechanism in the form of E-WOM as a socio-psychological process. Furthermore, this study also supports the concept of serial mediation in digital marketing, where content marketing and E-WOM operate sequentially in shaping purchase decisions and consumer loyalty. The roles of trust, emotional resonance, and content quality such as information relevance and storytelling further reinforce this mechanism. From a practical standpoint, this study confirms that businesses on TikTok Shop need to view content marketing as a long-term strategy for fostering positive digital interactions and conversations. Content must be designed to be informative, authentic, and engaging to drive positive E-WOM through reviews, comments, and consumer recommendations. Additionally, collaborations with credible creators and effective brand reputation management are critical factors in boosting consumer trust and influencing purchasing decisions. Consequently, E-WOM should be treated as a strategic asset within the digital marketing ecosystem. This study has several limitations, including the use of a cross-sectional design that cannot capture long-term dynamics, a limited sample size, and the use of questionnaire-based data that may contain subjective bias. Therefore, future research is recommended to use a longitudinal approach, expand the sample scope, and combine survey data with actual behavioral data to enhance the validity and generalizability of the findings.

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