

Brand Trust Mediates E-Wom And Brand Equity Toward Customer Loyalty on Shopee

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Abstract

Keywords: Brand Equity, Brand Trust, Customer Loyalty, Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM), Shopee

This study aims to examine the influence of Electronic Word of Mouth and Brand Equity on Customer Loyalty, with Brand Trust as a mediating variable, in the context of Shopee Indonesia's e-commerce platform. The research adopts a quantitative approach using a structured survey distributed to active Tiktok and Shopee users. Data were analyzed using the Structural Equation Modeling method with a Partial Least Squares approach. The results show that both Electronic Word of Mouth and Brand Equity have a positive influence on Customer Loyalty. Electronic Word of Mouth also has a significant impact on Brand Trust, while Brand Equity does not. Furthermore, Brand Trust directly influences Customer Loyalty and mediates the relationship between Electronic Word of Mouth and Customer Loyalty, but not between Brand Equity and Customer Loyalty. These findings underscore the importance of trust-building and consumer engagement in digital marketplaces. This research contributes to the field by providing empirical insights into the interplay between consumer perception, trust, and loyalty in the growing landscape of digital commerce.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of technology has significantly accelerated internet usage across the globe, compelling individuals and industries to adapt to digital transformations. In Indonesia, the proliferation of internet access has led to the widespread adoption of digital platforms across various aspects of life, including commerce. According to Internet World Stats (2018), there were approximately 4.208 billion active internet users globally as of June 2018, representing 55.1% of the world's population. This marks a growth of 1,066% from the year 2000. Asia accounted for nearly 49% of these users, with Indonesia alone recording 215.63 million internet users in 2022–2023—an increase of 2.67% from the previous year—representing 78.19% of the total population (Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia, 2023).

This digital shift has reshaped marketing activities in Indonesia, transitioning from traditional face-to-face market interactions to online marketing models that facilitate easier transactions for both consumers and sellers. One major shift is the use of e-commerce platforms, which allow users to buy and sell goods and services via the internet. Saragih and Bagaskara (2023) define e-commerce as a form of trade that relies on internet platforms to facilitate transactions,

with numerous platforms now widely available. Ernst & Young (2018) projected that Indonesia's e-commerce value would grow by 40% annually, reaching USD 130 billion by 2020.

Among various platforms, Shopee has emerged as the most popular e-commerce site in Indonesia. Launched in 2015 by Chris Feng under SEA Group, Shopee initially adopted a C2C model before expanding into a hybrid C2C-B2C approach through the Shopee Mall feature. It is well-known for its in-app chat function, local logistics partnerships, and secure payment methods. According to Databoks Katadata (2023), Shopee led in web traffic with 2.3 billion visits in 2023, far surpassing Tokopedia (1.2 billion), Lazada (762.4 million), Blibli (337.4 million), and Bukalapak (168.2 million). Its visit growth rate of 41.39% (year-to-date) reflects the effectiveness of its marketing and user experience in building brand trust and customer loyalty.

Customer loyalty refers to a strong commitment from consumers to continue purchasing goods or services from a specific company, both presently and in the future (Andalusi, 2021). Maintaining customer loyalty requires identifying the key influencing factors (Nur Hikmah, 2024). Rico et al. (2018) note that trust plays a significant role in fostering loyalty. Brand trust is defined as the consumer's sense of security and confidence in a brand, often based on past experiences (Sharon Madeline, 2019). It contributes to long-term brand-consumer relationships (Sudarwati, Ibnu Surya, 2023) and is widely acknowledged as a key antecedent of loyalty (Mardhatillah, 2022).

However, building brand trust in the digital era is challenging. Companies now rely on Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) to establish and maintain trust. E-WOM refers to consumer recommendations or opinions shared through social media that influence other users (Julica et al., 2022; Kudeshia & Kumar, 2018). Indonesia is currently the largest Tiktok user base globally, with 22.5 million users (Statista, 2020). Tiktok facilitates the spread of E-WOM through short videos and interactive comment sections (Rahmaningsih & Sari, 2022). Viral marketing on Tiktok often stimulates impulsive buying behavior (Dimas Hendrawan, 2018), enhanced by promotional features such as discounts and campaign hashtags (AI Mutanafisa, T., 2021).

Tiktok has now become a dominant promotional tool, including for Shopee, which launched its viral campaign “#RacunShopee.” The campaign encourages users to share product recommendations in video format, significantly increasing brand exposure (Ramadhani & Shasrini, 2023). Tiktok Ads currently reach over 1.56 billion global users each month (We Are Social, 2024). Creative, influencer-backed E-WOM campaigns on Tiktok have been proven to shape brand perception and trust. With product-tagging and direct links to Shopee, consumers are easily driven to purchase decisions (Frida Eka Setianingsih, 2022; Pratiwi et al., 2023; Puspitaningtyas et al., 2024)

In addition to E-WOM, digital promotions also support brand equity. Brand equity refers to the added value a brand brings to a product and plays a crucial role in building competitive advantage (Handi, Handayani et al., 2022; Seo & Park, 2018; Suharto et al., 2022).

Despite these developments, prior studies present mixed results regarding the relationships among E-WOM, brand equity, brand trust, and customer loyalty. For instance, Masrurroh et al. (2023) and Wola et al. (2021) found that E-WOM significantly affects customer loyalty, whereas Gabrielle et al. (2022) and Rahmawati et al. (2022) found no such impact. Similarly, Syukri (2018) and Hakim & Puwoko (2019) identified a positive relationship between brand equity and loyalty, but Ramdani (2022) and Diansyah & Putera (2017) reported otherwise. Conflicting results are also found in studies on brand trust, with Elsje et al. (2023) and Bryan et al. (2023) confirming its effect on loyalty, while Cantona (2024) and Azizah (2017) suggest no significant impact.

These inconsistencies indicate a research gap that warrants further exploration. Therefore, this study aims to identify the relationship between Electronic Word of Mouth and brand equity on customer loyalty, and to examine the mediating role of brand trust in this context, particularly among Shopee users in Indonesia.

METHODS

This study adopts a quantitative research approach. According to Sihotang (2023), a quantitative method is a research approach aimed at testing or confirming hypotheses using numerical data. The primary objective is to analyze causal relationships between different variables (Noviyasari et al., 2021). The research is classified as associative-quantitative, which, according to Sugiyono (2019), seeks to examine the influence or relationships among two or more variables.

The specific method employed in this research is a survey method combined with quantitative data analysis. The analytical technique used is Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), which allows the testing of complex relationships among variables within a conceptual framework.

The data used in this study is primary data, collected through a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to capture and analyze public behavior regarding the use of Shopee and Tiktok applications in the Jabodetabek area. According to Sujarweni and Utami (2019), data obtained directly from respondents through questionnaires, focus groups, panels, or interviews is categorized as primary data.

Sampling in this research was conducted using a non-probability sampling technique with a purposive sampling approach. This method involves selecting respondents based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. Since the exact population size was unknown, the Lemeshow formula was applied to determine the minimum sample size required for the analysis (Riyanto & Hatmawan, 2020).

Data analysis was carried out using WarpPLS 7.0 software, a version of PLS-SEM developed by Ned Kock. As explained by Solimun et al. (2017), WarpPLS is an advanced software package designed to support PLS-based structural modeling with enhanced features, especially in assessing complex variable interactions.

This study examines the relationships among variables to evaluate whether significant effects exist between them. The independent variables used are Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) and Brand Equity, with Brand Trust serving as the mediating variable, while the dependent variable is Customer Loyalty.

Table 1.
Operational Variable

No.	Variable	Dimensions	Indicators
1.	Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) (X1) (Goyette et al., 2010)	1) Intensity of interaction on social media 2) Positive valence of opinion 3) WOM content	1) Consumers frequently talk about the Shopee application. 2) Consumers talk about Shopee to many other people. 3) Consumers recommend Shopee to others. 4) Consumers recommend TikTok to others. 5) Consumers talk about the positive aspects of shopping on Shopee as influenced by promotions seen on TikTok. 6) Consumers discuss the quality of products purchased on Shopee due to TikTok promotions. 7) Consumers discuss the ease of transactions on Shopee.
2.	Brand Equity (X2) (Amelia, 2018)	—	1) Consumers find it more reasonable to use Shopee compared to other e-commerce platforms. 2) Even when other platforms offer similar features, consumers still prefer Shopee. 3) If another platform is objectively better, consumers still choose Shopee. 4) If another platform is similar, consumers feel more familiar using Shopee.
3.	Brand Trust (Z) (Aslam et al., 2019)	—	1) Consumers believe Shopee is a trustworthy and honest platform. 2) Consumers feel confident in Shopee. 3) Shopee fulfills its promises and commitments to customers.
4.	Customer Loyalty (Y) (Aslam et al., 2019)	—	1) Consumers intend to make repeat purchases on Shopee in the future. 2) Consumers' perceptions of Shopee will not change easily over time. 3) Changing consumers' preferences toward Shopee would require significant reconsideration.

Source: Data processed (2025)

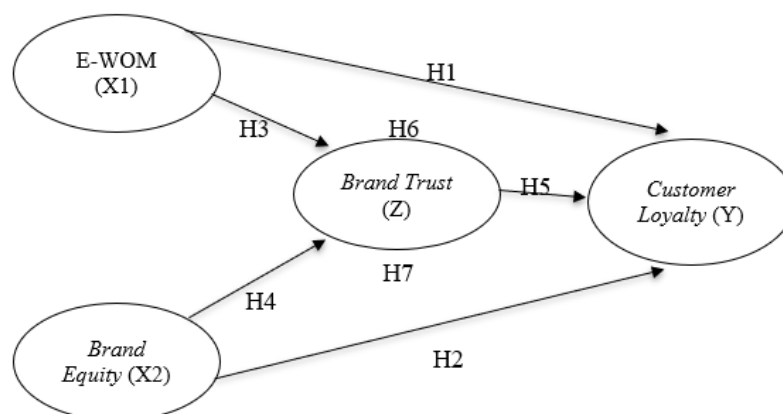


Figure 1.
Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework above illustrates the relationships among the variables involved, which ultimately converge on Customer Loyalty. The framework shows that Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) (X1) and Brand Equity (X2) serve as independent variables, Brand Trust (Z) functions as the mediating variable, and Customer Loyalty (Y) is the dependent variable.

This study focuses on understanding the role of E-WOM and Brand Equity in shaping customer loyalty, with Brand Trust acting as the connecting element. The primary objective is to explore how consumer perceptions of online communication and brand strength can influence their level of loyalty. In addition, the study examines the extent to which Brand Trust is capable of mediating the influence of E-WOM and Brand Equity on Customer Loyalty within the context of digital marketing on the Tiktok platform.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. RESULTS

Respondent Characteristics

Based on the collected data, the majority of respondents in this study were female, totaling 143 individuals or 73% of the 196 respondents. Meanwhile, male respondents accounted for 53 individuals, or approximately 27%. This indicates that women are more dominant as users of Shopee and Tiktok in the Greater Jakarta area (Jabodetabek), which serves as the focus of this research.

In terms of place of residence, most respondents were from Tangerang, with 102 individuals (52%), followed by Jakarta with 43 individuals (22%), Depok with 25 individuals (13%), Bogor with 14 individuals (7%), and Bekasi with 12 individuals (6%). This distribution reflects a relatively even spread of Shopee and Tiktok users across the Jabodetabek area, with the highest concentration in Tangerang.

Regarding occupation, nearly half of the respondents were students, totaling 95 individuals (48%). Additionally, 77 respondents (39%) were employees, 15 individuals (8%) were entrepreneurs, and the remaining 9 respondents (5%) worked in other fields. All respondents in this study were active users of Shopee, and 100% of them had previously made purchases on the platform, ensuring the data collected is relevant and aligned with the research objectives.

Measurement Model Analysis (Outer Model)

Convergent and Discriminant Validity Test and Construct Reliability

The results of the convergent validity test in Table 2 show that the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all variables exceed the threshold of 0.5. This indicates that the indicators for each construct are able to explain a sufficient proportion of variance within their respective constructs.

Furthermore, since the AVE values for each variable are greater than the correlations between constructs (results not shown as all meet the required criteria), discriminant validity is also confirmed.

The values of Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha for all constructs are above 0.7 (with the exception of Customer Loyalty, which remains within the acceptable range), indicating that the measurement instruments used in this study are reliable.

Table 2.
Convergent and Discriminant Validity, and Construct Reliability

Variable	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
E-WOM	0.745	0.897	0.866
Brand Equity	0.835	0.902	0.854
Brand Trust	0.829	0.868	0.772
Customer Loyalty	0.752	0.795	0.613

Source: Data Processed (2025)

The results in Table 2 confirm the reliability of the measurement instruments used in this study. The evaluation was carried out using two indicators: Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha. The analysis shows that all measured variables exceed the minimum threshold of 0.5—both in terms of composite reliability (0.897; 0.902; 0.868; 0.795) and Cronbach's alpha (0.866; 0.854; 0.772; 0.613).

These findings indicate that the indicators within each variable demonstrate sufficient internal consistency. In other words, all questionnaire items can be sustainably used to represent the constructs being measured. With both validity and reliability criteria met, the research is deemed ready to proceed to the next stage of analysis, namely the evaluation of the structural model fit (goodness of fit).

Structural Model Analysis (Inner Model)

Convergent and Discriminant Validity Test and Construct Reliability

Table 3 presents the results of the structural model fit assessment, which was conducted to evaluate whether the relationships among constructs in the research model are statistically appropriate. The table shows that all model indicators fall within the ideal range.

The values of Average Path Coefficient (APC), Average R-Squared (ARS), and Average Adjusted R-Squared (AARS) are statistically significant with p-values < 0.001. In addition, other key indicators such as VIF values, Goodness of Fit (GoF), and R-Squared Contribution Ratios confirm that the model meets the required goodness-of-fit criteria.

Table 3.
Model Fit and Research Quality Indicators

No.	Quality Indicator	Research Result	Accepted Value	Conclusion
1.	Average Path Coefficient (APC)	0.311, $p < 0.001$	$p \leq 0.05$	Good APC
2.	Average R-Squared (ARS)	0.539, $p < 0.001$	$p \leq 0.05$	Good ARS
3.	Average Adjusted R-Squared (AARS)	0.533, $p < 0.001$	$p \leq 0.05$	Good AARS
4.	Average block VIF (AVIF)	2.726	Acceptable if ≤ 5 , ideally ≤ 3.3	Ideal AVIF
5.	Average Full Collinearity VIF (AFVIF)	2.723	Acceptable if ≤ 5 , ideally ≤ 3.3	Ideal AFVIF
6.	Tenenhaus Goodness of Fit (GoF)	0.581	Small ≥ 0.1 , Medium ≥ 0.25 , Large ≥ 0.36	Ideal GoF
7.	Sympson's Paradox Ratio (SPR)	1.000	Acceptable if ≥ 0.7 , ideally = 1	Ideal SPR
8.	R-Squared Contribution Ratio (RSCR)	1.000	Acceptable if ≥ 0.9 , ideally = 1	Ideal RSCR
9.	Statistical Suppression Ratio (SSR)	1.000	Acceptable if ≥ 0.7	Ideal SSR
10.	Nonlinear Bivariate Causality Direction Ratio (NLBCDR)	1.000	Acceptable if ≥ 0.7	Ideal NLBCDR

Source: Data Processed (2025)

Table 4.
Results of Direct and Indirect Effects Testing

Hypothesis	Path	Path Coefficient (β)	P-Value	Description
H1	$X1 \rightarrow Y$	0.194	<0.001	Significant
H2	$X2 \rightarrow Y$	0.521	<0.001	Significant
H3	$X1 \rightarrow Z$	0.703	<0.001	Significant
H4	$X2 \rightarrow Z$	0.022	0.376	Not Significant
H5	$Z \rightarrow Y$	0.112	0.055	Significant
H6	$X1 \rightarrow Z \rightarrow Y$	0.079	0.057	Mediated
H7	$X2 \rightarrow Z \rightarrow Y$	0.003	0.480	Not Mediated

Source: Data Processed (2025)

The hypothesis testing was conducted to examine both direct and indirect effects among the constructs. Based on the results shown in Table 3, it is found that Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) has a significant effect on Customer Loyalty ($\beta = 0.194$; $p < 0.001$) and Brand Trust ($\beta = 0.703$; $p < 0.001$). Meanwhile, Brand Equity significantly affects Customer Loyalty ($\beta = 0.521$; $p < 0.001$), but does not significantly influence Brand Trust ($p = 0.376$). Brand Trust was also found to affect Customer Loyalty, though the result shows marginal significance ($p = 0.055$). The mediation test indicates that Brand Trust mediates the relationship between E-WOM and Customer Loyalty ($p = 0.057$), but does not mediate the relationship between Brand Equity and Customer Loyalty ($p = 0.480$).

These findings suggest that while both E-WOM and Brand Equity play crucial roles in fostering customer loyalty, they operate through different mechanisms. E-WOM not only directly strengthens loyalty but also does so by building Brand Trust—highlighting the

psychological pathway through which digital word-of-mouth influences consumer behavior. In contrast, Brand Equity influences loyalty more directly, suggesting that consumers may rely on the perceived value of a brand without necessarily developing a strong trust relationship.

Figure 2 illustrates the path diagram of the relationships among variables in the tested research model using WarpPLS.

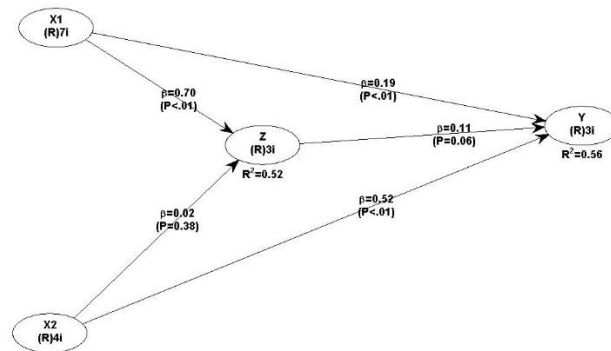


Figure 2.

Path Diagram of the Research Model

Source: Data processed using WarpPLS 7.0 (2025)

2. DISCUSSION

The Effect of Electronic Word of Mouth on Customer Loyalty

The results indicate that E-WOM has a positive and significant influence on customer loyalty. This suggests that the greater the number of positive reviews or recommendations on TikTok regarding a certain product, the higher the tendency of customers to remain loyal to that brand. This finding is consistent with Erkan and Evans (2016), who stated that E-WOM significantly affects consumer behavior and can build brand loyalty through the credibility and trustworthiness of information. This effect can be explained through cognitive and socio-psychological frameworks. When consumers are exposed to E-WOM—such as video reviews, peer recommendations, or influencer content—they receive social input that reinforces their confidence in a product. As trust grows, customers are more likely to exhibit loyal behavior and repeat purchases.

Findings by Masrurroh et al. (2023) also reveal that E-WOM significantly affects customer loyalty. The greater the E-WOM perceived by consumers, the stronger their loyalty. Similar conclusions were reached by Wola et al. (2021), who confirmed a significant relationship between E-WOM and customer loyalty.

The Effect of Brand Equity on Customer Loyalty

Brand equity is also found to have a significant impact on customer loyalty. This finding supports the view that positive perceptions of brand strength—such as quality, uniqueness, and Shopee's image—contribute to the consumer's tendency to remain loyal. This is in line with Syukri (2018), who argued that brand equity and customer loyalty significantly influence each other. When a product delivers value, consumers tend to show higher levels of brand commitment. Hakim & Purwoko (2019) also confirmed this reciprocal relationship. Furthermore, Basuki (2017) asserted that brand equity significantly influences customer loyalty. In other words, the higher the brand equity built around a product or service, the stronger the likelihood of enhancing customer loyalty toward the company.

The Effect of Electronic Word of Mouth on Brand Trust

E-WOM also significantly affects brand trust. This means that online reviews and electronically disseminated information are capable of shaping consumer trust in Shopee. This result aligns with Charvia & Erdiansyah (2020), who conducted research among social media users and found that social media promotions can enhance consumer trust in a brand or service. Supporting this, Erkan & Evans (2016) emphasized that E-WOM enhances trust through the reliability and honesty of content. Thus, the quality and authenticity of TikTok content significantly influence consumer trust in products offered on Shopee.

The Effect of Brand Equity on Brand Trust

Findings show that Brand Equity does not significantly affect Brand Trust. This suggests that even when brand equity is high, it does not directly generate consumer trust in the brand within this context. Trust is not necessarily built on brand equity alone. This supports Laroche et al. (2013), who stressed that trust is formed through personal interaction and performance evidence, not merely through reputation. Therefore, multiple supporting experiences are needed to develop long-term consumer trust, ultimately leading to purchase decisions.

The Effect of Brand Trust on Customer Loyalty

Brand trust is found to influence customer loyalty, albeit at a marginal level of significance ($p = 0.055$). This indicates that consumer trust in Shopee plays a role in encouraging loyalty, although it is not the dominant factor. Basuki (2017) also found that brand trust affects customer loyalty. The higher the trust in a brand, the more likely customers are to remain loyal, make repeat purchases, and even recommend the product to others. Trust fosters a sense of security and confidence in product quality, ultimately strengthening the emotional bond between consumers and the brand. This becomes a critical foundation for building long-term loyalty in an increasingly competitive market—although, compared to other variables in this study, trust is not the main driver of loyalty.

The Mediating Role of Brand Trust in the Relationship Between E-WOM and Customer Loyalty

Brand trust is proven to mediate the relationship between E-WOM and customer loyalty. This means the effect of E-WOM on loyalty is not only direct but also reinforced through trust formation. Consumers who receive positive E-WOM tend to build trust in the brand first, which subsequently leads to loyal behavior. Rachman & Rusli (2023) highlighted that when consumers feel trust, they are more likely to engage in purchasing behavior, and trust positively impacts perceived value in online shopping. Elsjie et al. (2023) also supported this finding, stating that both Brand Trust and E-WOM significantly contribute to forming customer loyalty among Shopee users.

Veloutsou (2015) explained that numerous marketing studies have consistently attempted to identify the factors that underlie brand loyalty. Among the most significant are customer satisfaction, trust levels, and brand perception. These findings strengthen the significance of this hypothesis. Trust helps build long-term commitment, even if its coefficient is weaker than other variables. This indicates that while not dominant, brand trust still plays an important role. In other words, although E-WOM on platforms like TikTok can influence customer loyalty, the effect does not occur instantly. Consumers first develop brand trust through the reviews or testimonials they encounter, from which loyalty begins to form. This highlights brand trust as a psychological mechanism that bridges the influence of digital information on loyal behavior.

The Mediating Role of Brand Trust in the Relationship Between Brand Equity and Customer Loyalty

Conversely, brand trust is not found to mediate the relationship between Brand Equity and Customer Loyalty. This implies that the effect of brand strength on loyalty is more direct and does not require trust as an intermediary. In other words, strong brand equity alone is sufficient to foster loyalty without needing trust formation. This reflects that for Shopee users, brand strength is already familiar and credible enough that trust does not need to be explicitly formed. It also suggests that in today's digital context, trust is more likely to emerge through social interaction (such as E-WOM) than through brand image alone.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the influence of Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) and Brand Equity on Customer Loyalty, with Brand Trust as a mediating variable in the context of Shopee Indonesia's e-commerce platform. The findings confirm that E-WOM significantly strengthens customer loyalty by shaping consumer perceptions through peer recommendations and user-generated content, particularly on platforms like Tiktok. Brand Equity also plays a critical role in fostering loyalty, as consumers who perceive high brand value are more likely to engage in repeat purchases. Furthermore, E-WOM is proven to enhance Brand Trust, which subsequently contributes to long-term loyalty. However, while Brand Trust significantly impacts loyalty, its mediating role is only evident in the relationship between E-WOM and Customer Loyalty, and not between Brand Equity and Customer Loyalty. This implies that trust is built more through experiential and social interaction than brand perception alone. Practically, these findings highlight the importance for marketers to prioritize authentic E-WOM strategies and interactive brand experiences to strengthen consumer trust and loyalty. Future research may explore other potential mediators such as customer satisfaction or perceived value, and consider employing alternative sampling methods or examining broader demographic segments to enhance the generalizability of results.

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