INNOVARES
Journal of Innovative Research in Management
EISSN : 3164-2047
Available at https://journal.unpas.ac.id/index.php/innovares

From Key Opinion Leaders to Online Purchase Intention: The Mediating Role of Brand Awareness in Creative Services

Sukma Lola Saputri[1]*, Juanim[1], M Iqbal Baihaqi[1], Rediawan Miharja[2]
[1]Universitas Pasundan
[2]Universitas Singaperbangsa Karawang
*Corresponding email: saputri@gmail.com

Abstract

Digital transformation has encouraged creative service businesses to use social media as a strategic channel for strengthening brand awareness and stimulating online purchase intention. In this context, Key Opinion Leaders have become an increasingly prominent digital marketing instrument because they are able to connect brands and consumers through visibility, credibility, attractiveness, and persuasive influence. This study aims to examine the effect of Key Opinion Leaders on online purchase intention, with brand awareness positioned as a mediating variable among consumers of The Portrait Place Bandung. The study employed a quantitative approach using descriptive and verificative methods. Data were collected through questionnaires distributed to 100 respondents consisting of consumers and individuals familiar with The Portrait Place. The data were analyzed using descriptive analysis and path analysis with the assistance of SPSS. The findings indicate that Key Opinion Leaders, brand awareness, and online purchase intention are all perceived to be in the less favorable category. The verificative results show that Key Opinion Leaders have a positive and significant effect on brand awareness. Key Opinion Leaders also have a positive and significant effect on online purchase intention. In addition, brand awareness is found to have a positive and significant effect on online purchase intention. The mediation analysis further reveals that brand awareness partially mediates the relationship between Key Opinion Leaders and online purchase intention. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of Key Opinion Leaders in creative service businesses is not determined solely by digital exposure, but also by their ability to build brand recognition and brand recall, which subsequently encourage consumers to make reservations or complete transactions online..

Keywords: brand awareness, creative services, digital marketing, Key Opinion Leader, online purchase intention.

INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has reshaped the way business actors establish relationships with consumers, particularly through social media, which now functions not merely as a

communication channel but also as a space where brand perceptions and purchase-related intentions are formed. In Indonesia, the expansion of digital connectivity continues to create new opportunities for creative service businesses to reach broader consumer segments. DataReportal reported that, as of January 2025, Indonesia had approximately 143 million active social media user identities, representing 50.2% of the national population (DataReportal, 2025). This condition indicates that social media has become a crucial infrastructure for marketing activities, especially for businesses that rely heavily on visual appeal, consumer experience, and digital interaction.

One sector strongly affected by this shift is photography services. Photo studios no longer depend solely on physical locations, conventional promotion, or word-of-mouth recommendations. They increasingly rely on digital visibility, visual content, consumer reviews, and promotional activities involving social media figures. In this context, The Portrait Place Bandung represents a creative service business that uses social media to introduce its services, display visual portfolios, and facilitate online reservations. The Portrait Place offers services such as self-photo sessions, porta booth, and Portrait Go, while also providing an online booking facility through a link available on its official Instagram account. Thus, online purchase intention is influenced not only by consumers' need for photography services, but also by how the brand appears, is recognized, and gains trust within the digital environment.

Competition among photo studios in Bandung shows that digital visibility has become a strategic concern. The initial research data indicate that the number of Instagram followers of The Portrait Place is lower than several of its main competitors, including Jonas Photo, Gembira Studio, Papyrus Photo, and Shukakala. In addition, the Key Opinion Leader used by The Portrait Place has fewer followers and lower view counts than the KOLs used by competing photo studios. This condition is important because, in social media marketing, message effectiveness is shaped not only by the promotional content itself, but also by the figure delivering the message, the perceived credibility of that figure, and the extent to which audiences feel socially or emotionally connected to them.

Key Opinion Leaders, or influencers, have become important actors in digital marketing because they are able to build trust, present experiential narratives, and bridge the relationship between brands and consumers. Lou and Yuan (2019) explain that influencer credibility and the value of the message delivered can foster consumer trust in branded content. In a similar vein, Sokolova and Kefi (2020), Saima and Khan (2021), and Ki et al. (2020) show that influencer credibility, parasocial relationships, and audience attachment to digital figures contribute to purchase intention. A recent meta-analysis also indicates that influencer characteristics such as credibility, trustworthiness, attractiveness, expertise, informativeness, and homophily are associated with customer engagement and purchase intention (Ao et al., 2023). Therefore, in the context of photography services, KOLs should not be understood merely as promotional media, but also as sources of social influence that can shape consumers' perceptions of service quality, visual style, and brand appeal.

Nevertheless, the effect of KOLs on online purchase intention does not always occur directly. Consumers often need to recognize, remember, and position a brand in their minds before forming an intention to make a transaction. This is where brand awareness becomes

an important mechanism. Dabbous and Barakat (2020) demonstrate that the quality of social media content and brand interactivity can enhance brand awareness and purchase intention. In other words, social media does not work only by generating an immediate desire to buy; it also operates through the development of stronger brand awareness. In the case of The Portrait Place, KOL-based promotion is more likely to be effective when it enables consumers to recognize the brand, remember the distinctive features of its services, and consider it as an option when they need photography services.

The empirical problem in the initial manuscript shows that The Portrait Place experienced a decline in service users, from 667 in June 2024 to 186 in December 2024. The preliminary survey also indicates that online purchase intention remains relatively low, while KOL and brand awareness are not yet perceived as optimal. These findings suggest that the main issue lies not merely in the availability of online services, but also in the effectiveness of digital influence in transforming consumer attention into brand awareness and transaction intention.

Based on this background, the study aims to analyze the effect of Key Opinion Leaders on online purchase intention, with brand awareness as a mediating variable among consumers of The Portrait Place Bandung. This study is important because it provides insight into how promotion through digital figures operates in the context of creative service businesses, particularly photo studios that rely on visual experience and online reservation systems. Theoretically, this study enriches the digital marketing literature by positioning brand awareness as a mechanism that connects KOL influence with online purchase intention. Practically, the findings may help creative service businesses design more appropriate KOL selection strategies, build brand awareness more consistently, and improve the conversion of social media exposure into online transactions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital marketing has broadened the way firms cultivate consumer attention, trust, and purchase intention. In the social media environment, marketing messages are no longer produced exclusively by companies; they are also conveyed by digital figures who maintain close relationships with their audiences. These figures are commonly referred to as Key Opinion Leaders or influencers, namely individuals who are able to shape followers' perceptions, preferences, and behavioral tendencies through the content they publish on social media. In this study, Key Opinion Leader is positioned as the independent variable, measured through visibility, credibility, attraction, and power. Brand Awareness is positioned as the mediating variable, measured through brand recognition, brand recall, and top of mind. Online Purchase Intention serves as the dependent variable, measured through interest, desire, confidence, and action. This framework is relevant because, in creative service businesses such as photo studios, consumer decisions are often shaped by visual exposure, experiences displayed by others, and the ability of a brand to remain salient in consumers' memory.

Key Opinion Leaders occupy an important position in digital marketing because they are able to deliver promotional messages in a more personal manner than conventional

advertising. Consumers tend to be more receptive to messages delivered by figures perceived as credible, lifestyle-compatible, and emotionally close to their audiences. Lou and Yuan (2019) show that influencer credibility and message value can affect consumer trust in branded content. This is important because trust in the message source becomes an initial gateway through which consumers begin to pay attention to the promoted brand. Sokolova and Kefi (2020) also emphasize that credibility and parasocial relationships between influencers and followers can encourage purchase intention. Thus, KOL effectiveness is not determined merely by the number of followers, but also by the quality of social relationships, credibility, and value congruence among the influencer, the brand, and the audience developed through digital content (Ki et al., 2020; Vrontis et al., 2021).

The visibility dimension refers to the extent to which a KOL is seen and able to reach audiences. In social media contexts, visibility is related to the frequency of content exposure, follower size, view counts, and the figure's ability to bring a brand into consumers' field of attention. However, visibility alone is insufficient. A KOL with a large following may not necessarily be effective if the audience does not trust the figure or if the figure does not fit the character of the brand. For this reason, credibility becomes a crucial dimension. Credibility reflects the extent to which a KOL is perceived as possessing expertise, integrity, and honesty in communicating information. Weismueller et al. (2020) emphasize that source credibility and transparency in endorsement can influence consumers' purchase intention on social media. In the context of photography services, KOL credibility is particularly important because consumers are not purchasing a physical product; they are purchasing an experience, visual quality, studio atmosphere, and confidence that the service booked will meet their expectations.

The attraction dimension explains the appeal of a KOL, including physical appearance, communication style, personality, and perceived social similarity with the audience. This appeal can strengthen consumer identification with the figure promoting the brand. Schouten et al. (2020), Bu et al. (2022), and Kim and Kim (2021) show that product–endorser fit, identification, homophily, and credibility can shape consumer responses to endorsement. In the photo studio business, KOL attractiveness is highly relevant because the service offered is visual and closely connected to consumer self-expression. A KOL whose visual style aligns with the target market can help consumers imagine the experience of using the service. Meanwhile, the power dimension refers to the KOL's ability to encourage audiences to take action, such as seeking further information, visiting the brand account, making a reservation, or sharing information with others. Ao et al. (2023), through a meta-analysis, found that influencer characteristics such as homophily, expertise, trustworthiness, credibility, congruence, entertainment value, informative value, and attractiveness are associated with customer engagement and purchase intention

Although KOLs can attract consumer attention, their influence needs to be understood through the mechanism of brand awareness. Brand awareness refers to consumers' ability to recognize and recall a brand within a particular product or service category. In marketing, brand awareness represents an important early stage because consumers are generally more likely to consider brands with which they are already familiar. Brand awareness may appear

through brand recognition, brand recall, and top-of-mind awareness. In the context of The Portrait Place, brand awareness does not simply mean that consumers have heard the studio's name. It also means that they can recognize the distinctive characteristics of its services, remember the visual experience presented by the brand, and associate the brand with their need for a photo session.

Brand awareness plays a strategic role in connecting promotional exposure with purchase intention. Dabbous and Barakat (2020) show that content quality and brand interactivity on social media can enhance brand awareness and purchase intention. This finding suggests that digital content does not merely work by capturing momentary attention; it also builds brand memory that may shape consumer decision-making. When a KOL presents a brand consistently, consumers may find it easier to recognize the brand name, remember the characteristics of the service, and place the brand within their set of alternatives. Thus, KOLs may act as an initial trigger, while brand awareness functions as a cognitive mechanism that converts promotional exposure into purchase consideration.

Online purchase intention refers to consumers' tendency or readiness to buy through digital platforms. In a service context, online purchase intention may be reflected in consumers' willingness to search for information, compare service options, select packages, make reservations, and complete payments online. Trivedi and Sama (2020), Saima and Khan (2021), and Leung et al. (2022) show that influencer marketing can affect online purchase intention, particularly when influencers are perceived as credible, original in their content, and congruent with the brand being promoted. This indicates that influencers become more influential when consumers rely on social media as an information source before making purchase decisions. In the photo studio business, online purchase intention is closely related to consumers' confidence that the reservation process is convenient, the service is reliable, the photo results will meet expectations, and digital transactions are secure.

The relationship between KOLs and online purchase intention can be explained through social influence and trust in the information source. When consumers see a KOL using or recommending a service, they receive a social signal that the service is worth considering. Such a signal can reduce uncertainty, particularly for services whose quality can only be fully assessed after consumption. However, the influence of a KOL becomes stronger when the promotion is able to generate brand awareness. Patmawati and Miswanto (2022) found that social media influencers affect purchase intention through brand awareness as a mediating variable. This finding reinforces the view that influencers do not only stimulate purchase intention directly; they may also work through the enhancement of consumers' awareness of the brand.

In this study, brand awareness is positioned as a mediating variable because consumers do not necessarily make a purchase merely because they see a KOL. Consumers first need to recognize the brand, understand the services offered, and feel sufficiently assured that the brand is relevant to their needs. The initial manuscript also states that brand awareness acts as a bridge that strengthens the influence of KOLs on online purchase intention. Without brand awareness, KOL-based promotion may not be sufficiently effective in encouraging consumers to make online purchases. Accordingly, the research model does not treat KOLs simply as

promotional instruments, but as sources of digital stimulus that shape brand awareness and subsequently influence online transaction intention.

Based on this literature, the present study is located at the intersection of influencer marketing, brand awareness, and online purchasing behavior in creative services. Its contribution lies in explaining how the influence of digital figures on online reservation intention does not arise only from direct promotional power, but also from their capacity to build brand awareness. In creative service businesses such as photo studios, brand awareness is particularly important because consumers need visual memory, experiential associations, and confidence in the expected service outcome before making a reservation. Therefore, strengthening KOL strategy should not be limited to selecting figures with large followings. It should also consider the alignment between the KOL's character and the brand identity, message credibility, content quality, and consistency in building brand awareness.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative approach using descriptive and verificative methods. The quantitative approach was selected because the study aimed to measure relationships among variables objectively through numerical data obtained from respondents. The descriptive method was used to portray the conditions of Key Opinion Leaders, Brand Awareness, and Online Purchase Intention among consumers of The Portrait Place Bandung. Meanwhile, the verificative method was used to examine both direct and indirect effects among variables in the research model, namely the effect of Key Opinion Leaders on Online Purchase Intention with Brand Awareness as a mediating variable. The initial manuscript was designed to test causal relationships among Key Opinion Leaders, Brand Awareness, and Online Purchase Intention using path analysis.

The research object was consumers of The Portrait Place Bandung, a photography service business that offers photo studio services and facilitates reservations through online media. The population referred to the total consumers of The Portrait Place during 2023 and 2024. Based on company data, the number of consumers reached 14,009 in 2023 and 9,863 in 2024; therefore, the total population used as the basis for this study was 23,872 consumers. This figure indicates that The Portrait Place has a relatively large consumer base, although it continues to face a decline in the number of service users from year to year. Accordingly, this population was considered relevant for examining how Key Opinion Leader-based promotion and brand awareness relate to online purchase intention.

The sample size was determined using the Slovin formula with a 10% margin of error. Based on the calculation in the initial manuscript, the required sample size was 99.58 and was rounded to 100 respondents. The sampling technique used was non-probability sampling with an incidental sampling approach. This technique was chosen because respondents were selected based on accessibility and their relevance to the research criteria, namely consumers or prospective consumers who were familiar with The Portrait Place and were able to assess its Key Opinion Leader promotion, brand awareness, and online purchase intention. Through

this approach, the researcher was able to obtain data more practically from respondents who were relevant to the digital marketing context of The Portrait Place.

Primary data were collected through questionnaires distributed to respondents. The questionnaire was developed based on indicators of each research variable and used a five-point Likert scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” In addition to primary data, the study also used secondary data derived from company documents, consumer records, scientific references, and other relevant sources that supported the understanding of digital marketing and photo studio competition in Bandung. In the initial manuscript, the main data collection technique was the distribution of questionnaires to consumers of The Portrait Place, while secondary data served as supporting material for the analysis.

The study consisted of one independent variable, one mediating variable, and one dependent variable. The independent variable was Key Opinion Leader, measured through four dimensions: visibility, credibility, attraction, and power. Visibility reflects the extent to which a KOL is seen and reaches audiences in the digital space. Credibility refers to the level of trust, integrity, and reputation attributed to the KOL as an information source. Attraction captures the KOL’s personal appeal, communication style, and social fit with the audience. Power reflects the KOL’s ability to influence consumers’ choices, attention, and behavior.

The mediating variable was Brand Awareness, measured through three dimensions: brand recognition, brand recall, and top of mind. Brand recognition refers to consumers’ ability to identify the distinguishing features of The Portrait Place brand. Brand recall reflects consumers’ ability to remember the brand when thinking about the photo studio service category. Top of mind indicates the extent to which The Portrait Place emerges as a primary option in consumers’ minds. The dependent variable was Online Purchase Intention, measured through four dimensions: interest, desire, confidence, and action. These four dimensions describe a gradual process, beginning with consumers’ interest in online services, followed by their desire to use the service, confidence in digital transactions, and tendency to make reservations or purchases online. The operationalization of variables in the initial manuscript consisted of 22 statement items representing the three research variables.

Before the main analysis was conducted, the research instrument was tested for validity and reliability. The validity test was used to ensure that each statement item was able to measure the intended indicator. The reliability test was used to assess the consistency of respondents’ answers across items within each variable. The instrument was considered appropriate when the items met the established validity and reliability criteria. The testing process was carried out using SPSS version 26, which was also used for the main data analysis.

Data analysis was conducted in two stages. First, descriptive analysis was used to describe the tendency of respondents’ responses toward each variable. The average scores were then classified into five assessment categories, ranging from very poor to very good. Second, verificative analysis was conducted using path analysis. Since the questionnaire data were measured on an ordinal scale, the data were first transformed into an interval scale using the Method of Successive Interval before further analysis was performed. Path analysis was used to examine the direct effect of Key Opinion Leaders on Brand Awareness, the direct effect

of Key Opinion Leaders on Online Purchase Intention, the direct effect of Brand Awareness on Online Purchase Intention, and the indirect effect of Key Opinion Leaders on Online Purchase Intention through Brand Awareness.

The path analysis model consisted of two substructures. The first substructure examined the effect of Key Opinion Leaders on Brand Awareness. The second substructure examined the effects of Key Opinion Leaders and Brand Awareness on Online Purchase Intention. The mediating effect was calculated by multiplying the path coefficient from Key Opinion Leaders to Brand Awareness by the path coefficient from Brand Awareness to Online Purchase Intention. Thus, the model allowed the study to explain whether Brand Awareness functioned only as a variable influenced by KOLs, or also as a mechanism that connected KOL influence with consumers' online purchase intention. Hypothesis testing was conducted using the t-test for partial effects and the F-test for simultaneous effects, with a significance level of 5%.

RESULT

This study involved 100 respondents consisting of consumers or individuals familiar with The Portrait Place Bandung. Respondents were selected because they were considered to have relevant experience or knowledge regarding The Portrait Place's social media promotion, the use of Key Opinion Leaders, and the possibility of making reservations or purchasing services online. The findings are presented in several parts, namely respondent characteristics, instrument testing results, descriptive analysis, path analysis, and direct and indirect effects among variables.

The respondent profile indicates that consumers of The Portrait Place were dominated by young and female respondents. Based on gender, most respondents were female, totaling 67 individuals or 67%, while male respondents accounted for 33 individuals or 33%. In terms of age, the largest group was respondents aged 20–30 years, totaling 76 respondents or 76%. This suggests that The Portrait Place is widely known among young consumers who are relatively familiar with social media use and digital transactions. Based on occupation or status, respondents were dominated by students, accounting for 54%, followed by employees at 41% and entrepreneurs at 4%. This composition indicates that the market of The Portrait Place is closely associated with young, digitally active consumers who tend to use social media as a reference when selecting creative services such as photo studios.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	33	33%
	Female	67	67%
Age	< 20 years	9	9%
	20–30 years	76	76%
	31–40 years	14	14%
	> 40 years	1	1%
Occupation/status	Student	54	54%
	Employee	41	41%
	Entrepreneur	4	4%

Source: Processed research data from the undergraduate thesis manuscript, 2025.

Before the main analysis was performed, the research instrument was examined through validity and reliability testing. The validity test showed that the statement items for Key Opinion Leader, Brand Awareness, and Online Purchase Intention met the validity criteria because the calculated r-values exceeded the r-table value of 0.300. For example, all items measuring Online Purchase Intention had calculated r-values ranging from 0.770 to 0.913, indicating that all items were valid and suitable for further analysis. The reliability test also showed that all variables had Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.700, namely 0.960 for Key Opinion Leader, 0.974 for Brand Awareness, and 0.947 for Online Purchase Intention. Therefore, the research instrument can be considered reliable because it produced consistent measurements across the variables.

Table 2. Reliability Test Results of the Research Instrument

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Minimum Threshold	Interpretation
Key Opinion Leader	0.960	0.700	Reliable
Brand Awareness	0.974	0.700	Reliable
Online Purchase Intention	0.947	0.700	Reliable

Source: SPSS data processing results, 2025.

The descriptive analysis indicates that the three research variables were all in the less favorable category. Key Opinion Leader obtained an average score of 3.04. This score suggests that consumers' perceptions of the KOL used by The Portrait Place were not yet sufficiently strong. Several indicators remained weak, including audience interaction with KOL posts, the KOL's physical attractiveness and perceived social similarity, social media users' positive perceptions of the KOL, and the KOL's ability to influence public choices or behavior. The lowest indicator was found in the aspect of attractiveness and social similarity, with a score of 2.92. This implies that the KOL used by The Portrait Place was not yet perceived as having a strong character fit, visual appeal, or social proximity to the target consumers of The Portrait Place.

Brand Awareness obtained an average score of 3.11 and was also categorized as less favorable. The weaker indicators were mainly related to consumers' ability to recognize the distinctive features of the product and brand, the frequency with which consumers heard about The Portrait Place, and the frequency with which they mentioned the brand. This condition suggests that The Portrait Place has not yet developed a sufficiently strong brand identity in consumers' memory. Consumers may be aware of the brand's existence, but they do not necessarily recognize its distinctive service characteristics or position it as their primary option when they need photo studio services.

Online Purchase Intention obtained an average score of 3.17, which also falls within the less favorable category. The indicators that remained weak included the intention to use the service in the future, trust in the security and convenience of digital payment methods, actual behavior in completing transactions through online platforms, and the realization of intention into online transaction behavior. The lowest indicator was found in the action dimension, particularly the actual act of completing a transaction through an online platform. This finding indicates that consumers' interest in The Portrait Place has not yet fully developed into online reservation or purchase behavior.

Table 3. Summary of Descriptive Analysis of Research Variables

Variable	Average Score	Category	Indicator Requiring Attention
Key Opinion Leader	3.04	Less favorable	Physical attractiveness and social similarity of the KOL
Brand Awareness	3.11	Less favorable	Recognition of product and brand distinctiveness
Online Purchase Intention	3.17	Less favorable	Actual completion of online transactions

Source: Processed research data from the undergraduate thesis manuscript, 2025.

The path analysis for the first substructure shows that Key Opinion Leader has a positive and significant effect on Brand Awareness. The standardized beta coefficient is 0.868, with a t-value of 17.326 and a significance value of 0.000. This result indicates that the stronger consumers' perceptions of the Key Opinion Leader, the higher their brand awareness of The Portrait Place. The correlation between Key Opinion Leader and Brand Awareness is also 0.868, which falls into the very strong category. The coefficient of determination for the first substructure shows an R Square value of 0.754. This means that Key Opinion Leader explains 75.4% of the variance in Brand Awareness, while the remaining 24.6% is explained by factors outside the research model.

In the second substructure, Key Opinion Leader and Brand Awareness were simultaneously tested in relation to Online Purchase Intention. The analysis shows that Key Opinion Leader has a path coefficient of 0.322, with a t-value of 2.534 and a significance value of 0.013. Meanwhile, Brand Awareness has a path coefficient of 0.489, with a t-value of 3.854 and a significance value of 0.000. These results indicate that both variables have positive and significant effects on Online Purchase Intention. However, the coefficient of Brand Awareness is higher than that of Key Opinion Leader, suggesting that Brand Awareness is the stronger predictor of consumers' online purchase intention.

Table 4. Path Analysis Results among Variables

Relationship among Variables	Path Coefficient	t-value	Sig.	Interpretation
Key Opinion Leader → Brand Awareness	0.868	17.326	0.000	Positive and significant
Key Opinion Leader → Online Purchase Intention	0.322	2.534	0.013	Positive and significant
Brand Awareness → Online Purchase Intention	0.489	3.854	0.000	Positive and significant

Source: SPSS data processing results, 2025.

The coefficient of determination for the second substructure shows an R value of 0.785 and an R Square value of 0.616. This means that Key Opinion Leader and Brand Awareness jointly explain 61.6% of the variance in Online Purchase Intention. The remaining 38.4% is influenced by other variables outside the model, such as price, service quality, digital trust, ease of reservation, consumer reviews, promotions, and customer experience. The partial contribution analysis shows that Key Opinion Leader contributes 24.02% to Online Purchase Intention, while Brand Awareness contributes 37.55%. These findings indicate that Brand Awareness plays a more dominant role than the direct effect of KOL in explaining online purchase intention.

The simultaneous test also confirms that the second substructure model is significant. The F-value is 77.682 with a significance value of 0.000, indicating that Key Opinion Leader and Brand Awareness jointly have a significant effect on Online Purchase Intention. This result reinforces the view that consumers' intention to make online reservations or purchases is influenced not only by the presence of KOLs, but also by the extent to which such promotion is able to build brand awareness.

The indirect effect of Key Opinion Leader on Online Purchase Intention through Brand Awareness was calculated by multiplying the path coefficient from Key Opinion Leader to Brand Awareness by the path coefficient from Brand Awareness to Online Purchase Intention, namely 0.868 × 0.489 = 0.424. Thus, the indirect effect is 0.424, or 42.4%. At the same time, the direct effect of Key Opinion Leader on Online Purchase Intention remains significant, with a coefficient of 0.322. This indicates that Brand Awareness functions as a partial mediator. In other words, KOLs can directly influence Online Purchase Intention, but the effect becomes stronger when KOLs first increase consumers' awareness of The Portrait Place brand.

Table 5. Summary of Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects

Type of Effect	Calculation	Value
Direct effect of KOL → Online Purchase Intention	0.322	0.322
Indirect effect of KOL → Brand Awareness → Online Purchase Intention	0.868 × 0.489	0.424
Total effect of KOL on Online Purchase Intention	0.322 + 0.424	0.746
Simultaneous contribution of KOL and Brand Awareness to Online Purchase Intention	R Square	0.616 or 61.6%
Remaining effect of other variables	1 − 0.616	0.384 or 38.4%

Source: Processed research data from path analysis results, 2025.

Overall, the study reveals three main findings. First, Key Opinion Leader, Brand Awareness, and Online Purchase Intention at The Portrait Place are all in the less favorable category, indicating that its digital marketing strategy still requires strengthening. Second, Key Opinion Leader has a very strong effect on Brand Awareness. Third, Brand Awareness serves as an important mechanism linking Key Opinion Leader to Online Purchase Intention. These findings suggest that the use of KOLs in creative service businesses should not be directed merely toward increasing exposure. It should also be designed to build brand recognition, strengthen consumer memory, and encourage actual online reservation behavior.

DISCUSSION

The findings show that the Key Opinion Leader-based marketing strategy adopted by The Portrait Place has not yet reached an optimal level, although statistically it has been shown to play an important role in shaping Brand Awareness and Online Purchase Intention. Descriptively, Key Opinion Leader, Brand Awareness, and Online Purchase Intention were all categorized as less favorable. In the Key Opinion Leader variable, the main issues were reflected in the low intensity of content exposure, the limited relevance of content to consumer needs, the weak encouragement to seek further information, and respondents' limited

confidence in following KOL recommendations. These findings suggest that the mere presence of a KOL is not sufficient to generate strong digital influence. In the context of creative service marketing, KOLs need to demonstrate stylistic proximity, credibility, and visual fit with the brand character so that promotional messages are not only seen, but also trusted and remembered by consumers.

This finding is consistent with Lou and Yuan (2019), who argue that the effectiveness of influencer marketing is not determined merely by exposure, but also by source credibility and the value of the message delivered. A KOL with a certain number of followers or views is not necessarily effective if the message is not perceived as relevant, authentic, or aligned with audience needs. In the case of The Portrait Place, the KOL may function as an entry point for attracting consumer attention, yet that attention has not fully developed into strong trust. This is important because photo studio services are experience-based. Consumers do not only consider price or service availability; they also imagine photo quality, studio atmosphere, visual style, and the convenience of the reservation process.

The effect of Key Opinion Leader on Brand Awareness was found to be very strong. The path coefficient of 0.868 indicates that the stronger consumers' perceptions of the KOL, the higher their awareness of The Portrait Place. The t-value of 17.326 and the significance value of 0.000 indicate that the relationship is statistically significant. This finding reinforces the argument that KOLs act as intermediaries between brands and digital audiences. Through the content they share, KOLs can introduce the brand name, display the experience of using the service, and help consumers recognize the distinctive characteristics of The Portrait Place. In creative service marketing, this effect is particularly important because consumers often become familiar with a brand through visual representations displayed by others, not only through formal information provided by the company.

Theoretically, this result supports the view that influencers or KOLs may operate as social cues that enhance brand recognition. Schouten et al. (2020) emphasize that endorsement effectiveness is shaped by identification, credibility, and fit between the endorser and the product. When a KOL's image is consistent with the character of the service, consumers can more easily associate the figure with the promoted brand. In the case of The Portrait Place, this means that KOL selection should not rely solely on popularity, but should also consider visual style compatibility with the target market, especially young consumers who treat photo studio services as part of self-expression and social media content creation.

Brand Awareness was also found to have a positive and significant effect on Online Purchase Intention. The path coefficient of Brand Awareness on Online Purchase Intention was 0.489, which is higher than the direct coefficient of Key Opinion Leader on Online Purchase Intention, which was 0.322. This means that, in the model, Brand Awareness has a stronger role in shaping online purchase intention than the direct effect of KOLs. The finding suggests that consumers are more prepared to make online reservations or transactions when they already recognize, remember, and position The Portrait Place as one of the options in the photo studio category. In other words, brand awareness becomes an important prerequisite before consumers move toward the purchase action stage.

This finding is consistent with Dabbous and Barakat (2020), who show that social media content quality can strengthen Brand Awareness and subsequently encourage Purchase Intention. In the context of The Portrait Place, Brand Awareness does not merely mean that consumers have seen the brand name. It also means that they understand the distinctive features of the service, remember the visual experience offered, and perceive the brand as relevant to their needs. The descriptive findings indicate that Brand Awareness remains in the less favorable category, particularly in terms of recognizing the distinctiveness of the product or service, the frequency with which consumers hear the brand name on social media, and the extent to which The Portrait Place appears in conversations related to photo studios. This suggests that the brand is not yet strong enough to become a spontaneous choice in consumers' minds.

Online Purchase Intention, which was also categorized as less favorable, indicates a gap between digital attention and transaction behavior. Consumers may have seen the promotion, known the studio's existence, or felt interested in the services offered, but they are not necessarily willing to make reservations through an online platform. The problems are reflected in consumers' willingness to make The Portrait Place their main choice, willingness to pay through digital methods, intention to reserve through an online link, and willingness to complete online reservation transactions. This suggests that online purchase intention is not shaped only by promotion, but also by security perceptions, process convenience, information clarity, and consumers' confidence in the service.

From a digital consumer behavior perspective, this finding is in line with Trivedi and Sama (2020), who argue that influencer marketing can affect online purchase intention, but its effect depends strongly on how consumers develop perceptions of the brand. In experience-based services such as photo studios, perceived risk tends to be higher than in simple product purchases. Consumers need assurance that the photo results will meet expectations, the reservation schedule will be easy to arrange, the payment process will be secure, and the studio experience will be consistent with what is promoted. Therefore, strengthening purchase intention should not rely only on KOLs, but also on clear service package information, customer testimonials, portfolio displays, price transparency, and a simple booking process.

The mediating role of Brand Awareness is the most important finding of this study. The indirect effect of Key Opinion Leader on Online Purchase Intention through Brand Awareness is calculated as 0.868 × 0.489 = 0.424. Thus, Brand Awareness becomes the mechanism explaining how KOLs can encourage online purchase intention. Since the direct effect of KOLs on Online Purchase Intention remains significant, the mediation can be understood as partial mediation. This means that KOLs may directly influence purchase intention, but their effect becomes more meaningful when they first strengthen consumers' awareness of the brand. Academically, the value of 61.6% should be interpreted as the simultaneous contribution of Key Opinion Leader and Brand Awareness to Online Purchase Intention, rather than as the value of the indirect effect.

This mediation finding supports Patmawati and Miswanto (2022), who found that Brand Awareness can mediate the relationship between social media influencers and purchase intention. In other words, KOLs do not always operate by directly persuading consumers to

buy. They may also work through the formation of brand memory and brand recognition. In the context of The Portrait Place, an effective KOL is not merely one who shows themselves using the service. Rather, an effective KOL is one who can make audiences recognize the brand name, understand the studio's uniqueness, imagine the service experience, and relate the brand to their personal needs. Brand Awareness therefore becomes the bridge between digital exposure and transaction intention.

The practical implications of these findings are clear. The Portrait Place needs to be more selective in choosing KOLs. The selected KOLs should not only have a large number of followers, but should also demonstrate active engagement, a positive reputation, a visual style consistent with the studio's identity, content originality, and proximity to young consumer segments (Bu et al., 2022; Kim & Kim, 2021; Leung et al., 2022). In addition, KOL content should be designed more consistently so that it does not function merely as short-term promotion. Content may be directed toward real service experiences, the reservation process, before-and-after photo results, studio atmosphere, service packages, and customer stories. In this way, KOLs do not function only as message carriers, but also as agents who help construct the brand experience.

Theoretically, this study contributes to digital marketing literature by showing that the relationship between KOLs and Online Purchase Intention in creative services cannot be understood simply as a direct relationship between promotion and purchase. A cognitive process lies between the two, namely Brand Awareness. For consumers, brands that are more familiar, easier to remember, and clearer in identity are more likely to be considered in online purchase decisions. Thus, the main contribution of this study lies in emphasizing that the effectiveness of KOLs in creative service businesses depends on their ability to build strong brand awareness before stimulating digital transactions.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Key Opinion Leader, Brand Awareness, and Online Purchase Intention at The Portrait Place Bandung are all in the less favorable category. This condition indicates that the digital marketing strategy implemented by the business has not yet generated a strong influence in consumers' minds. The KOL used by The Portrait Place has not fully succeeded in developing appeal, social proximity, and behavioral influence among consumers. At the same time, Brand Awareness of The Portrait Place remains insufficiently strong, particularly in terms of recognizing the distinctive characteristics of the brand and recalling the brand as a primary option in the photo studio service category.

From the verificative analysis, Key Opinion Leader has a positive and significant effect on Brand Awareness. This finding indicates that digital figures with visibility, credibility, attractiveness, and persuasive power can help consumers recognize and remember a brand. Key Opinion Leader also has a positive effect on Online Purchase Intention, although its direct effect is smaller than the effect of Brand Awareness. This suggests that KOL-based promotion can attract consumer attention, but online purchase intention becomes stronger when consumers first develop adequate brand awareness.

Brand Awareness has a positive and significant effect on Online Purchase Intention. Consumers who are more familiar with, more capable of recalling, and more likely to position The Portrait Place as an option in the photography service category tend to show stronger intention to make reservations or complete transactions online. In addition, Brand Awareness acts as a partial mediator in the relationship between Key Opinion Leader and Online Purchase Intention. Therefore, the influence of KOLs on online purchase intention does not occur only through a direct path, but also through the process of building brand awareness.

Theoretically, this study strengthens digital marketing literature by demonstrating that the effectiveness of Key Opinion Leaders in creative service businesses cannot be separated from their ability to build Brand Awareness. Practically, The Portrait Place needs to select KOLs who are not only popular, but also credible, relevant to the brand character, and close to the target consumers. KOL content should also be directed toward strengthening brand identity, presenting service experiences, explaining the ease of online reservation, and building consumer confidence in digital transactions. Future studies may include other variables such as trust, perceived value, service quality, customer experience, or electronic word of mouth to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Online Purchase Intention in creative services.

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