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Digital Social Support Does Not Enhance Eudaimonic Well-Being in Fashion Brand e-WOM Communities: Evidence from Three-Year Digital Trace Data

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Abstract: This study examines whether digital social support (DSS) in fashion brand electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) communities influences consumers' eudaimonic well-being (EWB). Grounded in Self-Determination Theory and Social Support Theory, the study positions meaning orientation (MO) as a mediator and online toxicity (OT) as a moderator. Digital trace data from 400 active consumers comprising 20,134 comments across three platforms (YouTube, Reddit, and X/Twitter) over the period January 2023–December 2025 were analyzed using SEM-PLS (SmartPLS). Results indicate that DSS does not significantly affect EWB either directly or through MO. The moderating effect of online toxicity is also non-significant. These findings suggest that social support within fast fashion consumption spaces does not automatically translate into meaningful psychological well-being. This study contributes by identifying a boundary condition in the digital social support and well-being literature within commercial contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

The digital marketing and social psychology literature has generally assumed that social support within online communities positively impacts psychological well-being. In the context of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), consumers provide mutual validation, information, and empathy through public comments. This phenomenon has attracted significant scholarly attention, particularly regarding its implications for consumer behavior and psychological outcomes in digital environments (Bharej & Singh, 2025; Jayawardhena, 2021; Liu et al., 2024).

The empirical phenomenon motivating this study is the visible mismatch between the high volume of supportive interactions in fashion brand e-WOM communities and the limited indication of deeper psychological development within those interactions. Across platforms such as YouTube, Reddit, and X/Twitter, consumers frequently exchange encouragement, product advice, styling suggestions, and brand validation. However, these interactions are often brief, trend-focused, and consumption-oriented. This raises an important empirical question: although fashion e-WOM communities appear socially supportive, do they actually foster eudaimonic well-being, such as personal growth, purpose, and self-realization, or do they merely sustain surface-level engagement?

However, the majority of prior research has been conducted within health communities or emotional support groups. Commercial consumption contexts such as

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fashion have not been extensively tested in relation to eudaimonic well-being (Ribeiro et al., 2024; Tafesse et al., 2024). These characteristics raise questions about whether social interactions within such spaces possess sufficient depth to generate meaningful psychological outcomes (Amado et al., 2023; Deng et al., 2024; J. Park & Chun, 2025).

Although prior studies have shown that online social support can improve psychological well-being, most of this evidence comes from health-related, emotional support, or adversity-based communities. These contexts differ substantially from fashion brand e-WOM communities, which are shaped by commercial motives, visual trends, algorithmic amplification, and consumption-driven interaction. Therefore, the main research gap in this study lies in the lack of empirical evidence on whether digital social support in commercial fashion e-WOM communities can enhance eudaimonic well-being. In addition, limited research has examined whether this relationship operates through meaning orientation and whether it depends on the level of online toxicity.

The fundamental research question of this study is: Does social support within fast fashion consumption spaces genuinely enhance consumers' eudaimonic well-being? Eudaimonic well-being, as conceptualized by Ryff (D.Ryff, 1989), emphasizes personal growth, life purpose, and self-actualization rather than mere hedonic pleasure. This distinction is critical because fashion communities may generate substantial engagement and activity without necessarily fostering deeper psychological development (Lengieza, 2024; Thongsri et al., 2024).

This study addresses this question using actual behavioral data (digital trace data) spanning three years from January 2023 to December 2025. By employing revealed preferences rather than stated preferences, this research offers a more ecologically valid assessment of the relationship between digital social support and well-being in commercial online communities. The study positions meaning orientation as a mediator and online toxicity as a moderator, testing a comprehensive model using SEM-PLS analysis with 400 consumers and 20,134 comments across YouTube, Reddit, and X/Twitter (Hair et al., 2025; Septian et al., 2022; Warganegara & Hendijani, 2022).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Social Support in e-WOM

Digital social support (DSS) in this study is operationalized as the proportion of comments that are supportive, either emotionally or informationally, toward other consumers. The literature demonstrates that social support increases trust and engagement in online communities [14] (C. T. Bui et al., 2025; Khan et al., 2025). Emotional support encompasses empathy, validation, and encouragement, while informational support includes product reviews, quality assessments, and practical recommendations (Benevento et al., 2025).

Prior studies have established positive associations between online social support and various well-being outcomes. Chi et al. (T. N. Bui et al., 2023) documented beneficial effects in mental health communities, while Thi et al. (C. T. Bui et al., 2025) found that social support enhanced perceived community belonging. However, these findings primarily emerge from communities where members share personal struggles or health challenges. Whether similar mechanisms operate in commercial consumption contexts remains an open empirical question (Rajkumar, 2023).

Eudaimonic Well-Being

Eudaimonic well-being (EWB) emphasizes personal growth, life meaning, and self-actualization [9]. In the fashion context, EWB is measured through expressions of meaningful consumption and personal growth through style. Unlike hedonic well-being, which captures momentary pleasure, eudaimonic well-being reflects deeper psychological functioning. The self-determination theory framework posits that

autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fundamental to eudaimonic experiences. Fashion consumption may satisfy some of these needs through self-expression (autonomy) and community belonging (relatedness), yet whether these satisfactions translate to genuine eudaimonic growth is theoretically ambiguous (Guo et al., 2023; Kinoshita & Sato, 2024; Mina et al., 2024).

Meaning Orientation as Mediator

Meaning orientation (MO) reflects the search for meaning in consumption, including value reflection, authenticity, and sustainable awareness [25]. This variable is tested as a mediator between DSS and EWB based on the theoretical reasoning that social support may first activate meaning-seeking processes, which in turn foster eudaimonic outcomes. When consumers encounter supportive interactions that encourage reflection on brand authenticity, ethical fashion, or purposeful consumption, they may develop a deeper meaning orientation, potentially translating into enhanced well-being. This study hypothesizes that DSS influences EWB through MO (Huta & Waterman, 2014; Palazzeschi & Bonfiglio, 2023; C. Park, 2022).

Online Toxicity as Moderator

Online toxicity is measured as the proportion of toxic comments, including brand bashing and hostility. Theoretically, a toxic environment may weaken the positive effects of social support on well-being. The moderating role of toxicity is particularly relevant in fashion communities where cancel culture, brand bashing, and aggressive discourse are prevalent, especially on platforms like X/Twitter. This study tests whether the DSS-EWB relationship is contingent upon toxicity levels (Lasser et al., 2025; Valkenburg, 2022; C. Zhang et al., 2023).

Hypothesis Development

Based on the literature review, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Prior research suggests that supportive social interaction can stimulate reflective processing and meaning-related evaluation. Social support not only provides emotional reassurance and informational assistance but may also encourage individuals to interpret their experiences in relation to values, authenticity, and personal purpose. In consumption-related contexts, supportive exchanges can create opportunities for consumers to reflect more deeply on why they consume, what brands represent, and how consumption relates to self-expression. This theoretical logic suggests that digital social support may strengthen consumers' meaning orientation (Guo et al., 2023; C. Park, 2022).

H1: DSS positively affects MO.
H2: DSS positively affects EWB.
H3: MO positively affects EWB.
H4: MO mediates the relationship between DSS and EWB.
H5: Online toxicity moderates the relationship between DSS and EWB such that higher toxicity weakens the positive effect.

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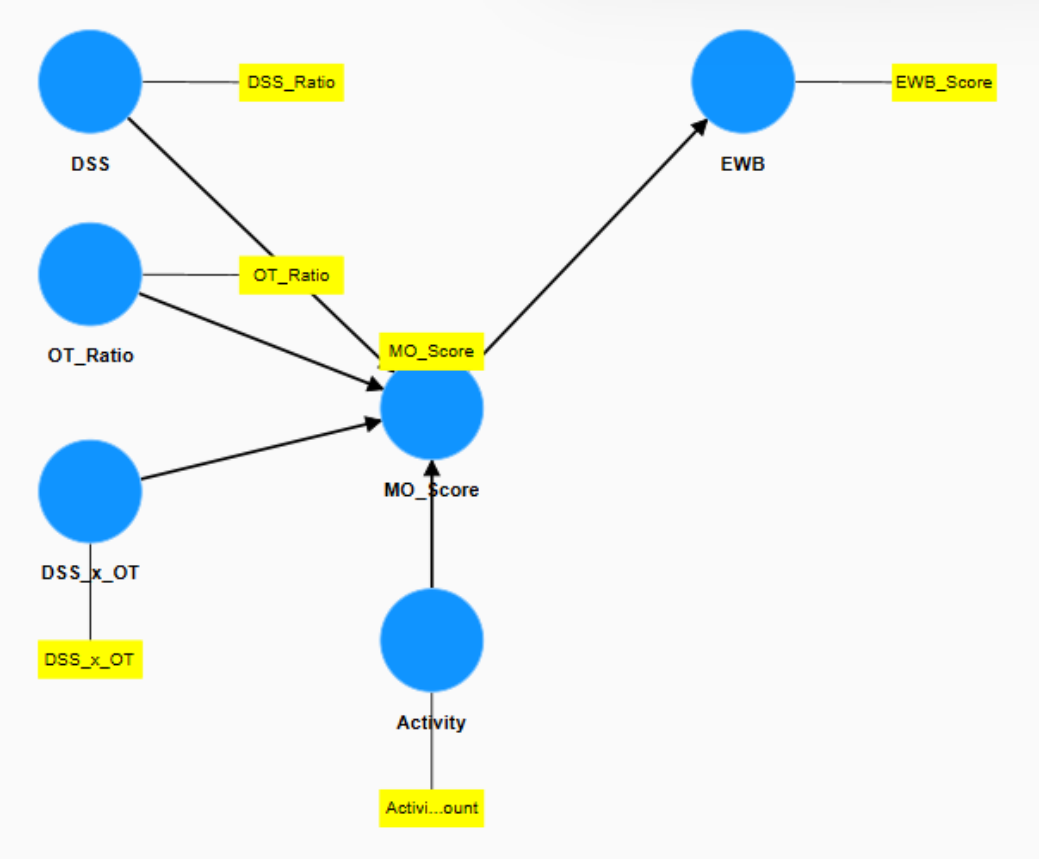

Note: DSS = Digital Social Support; EWB = Eudaimonic Well-Being; MO = Meaning Orientation; OT = Online Toxicity; DSS×OT = Interaction term (moderator).

Figure 1. Proposed Research Model
Source: Processed data (2025)

METHODS

This study employs a quantitative explanatory approach using secondary digital trace data. Unlike survey-based research that relies on stated preferences, this study utilizes revealed behavioral data extracted from public consumer comments on social media platforms, providing higher ecological validity (Gummer et al., 2025; Li et al., 2025).

The dataset comprises 400 active consumers who produced a total of 20,134 comments across three platforms: YouTube (160 consumers), Reddit (120 consumers), and X/Twitter (120 consumers). The observation period spans January 2023 to December 2025 (36 months), covering the post-pandemic digital era characterized by significantly increased social media consumer activity. YouTube data were extracted from public comments on fashion brand marketing videos, haul videos, and influencer collaborations. Reddit data originated from fashion-related subreddits discussing honest reviews, quality discussions, and sustainability debates. X/Twitter data were collected from replies and quote-tweets on viral fashion threads(Bharej & Singh, 2025; C. T. Bui et al., 2025).

All variables were computed from actual behavioral data rather than survey instruments. At the text level, each comment was systematically coded, then aggregated to the individual consumer level. The dependent variable, EWB_Score, represents the average eudaimonic well-being per consumer, calculated as the mean of purpose and growth indicators across all comments (Joshanloo, 2024; Ryff, 2024; Z. Zhang et al.,

2025). The independent variable, DSS_Ratio, represents the proportion of supportive comments (emotional or informational). The mediator, MO_Score, captures meaning orientation through three indicators: purposeful consumption, personal style growth narratives, and brand authenticity reflection. The moderator, OT_Ratio, represents the proportion of toxic comments. Control variables include Activity_Count (total comments), Avg_Text_Length (average character length), and Total_Engagement (cumulative likes and replies received) (Asanprakit & Kraiwanit, 2024; Godard & Holtzman, 2024; Shihy & Awaad, 2025).

Analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling with Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) in SmartPLS with 5,000 bootstrap samples. SEM-PLS was selected due to its suitability for exploratory research with non-normal data distributions and complex models involving mediation and moderation simultaneously (Fithriyana et al., 2022; Tarisa & Windya, 2024). A sentiment and eWOM classification pipeline was developed to process the raw text-level data into SmartPLS-ready constructs, incorporating sentiment polarity classification, eWOM typology assignment, and user-level aggregation (Aurèle & Damir, 2024; Chen et al., 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for all variables at the consumer level (N = 400). The average DSS_Ratio is 0.747, indicating that approximately 75% of consumer comments contain supportive content. The mean EWB_Score is 0.283, suggesting relatively low levels of eudaimonic expression. Mean OT_Ratio is 0.066, reflecting moderate toxicity levels. The sentiment classification pipeline identified 41% positive, 52% neutral, and 7% negative comments at the text level (Liu et al., 2024; Valkenburg, 2022).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max
DSS_Ratio	0.747	0.066	0.500	0.933
EWB_Score	0.283	0.040	0.150	0.405
MO_Score	0.271	0.047	0.150	0.403
OT_Ratio	0.066	0.045	0.000	0.250
DSS_x_OT	0.049	0.034	0.000	0.163
Activity_Count	50.335	17.078	20	90
Avg_Text_Length	100.282	27.629	61.950	168.800
Total_Engagement	2113.388	833.153	430	4455

Source: Processed digital trace data (2023–2025)

Table 2 shows the distribution of comments across platforms. X/Twitter exhibits the highest toxicity rate (9.3%), consistent with the platform's culture of real-time discourse and cancel culture, while YouTube demonstrates the highest support rate (78.2%). Reddit occupies an intermediate position with the highest engagement depth per comment.

Table 2. Platform Comparison

Platform	N Users	N Comments	Toxic Rate	Support Rate
YouTube	160	8,085	4.6%	78.2%
Reddit	120	6,026	6.2%	73.1%
X/Twitter	120	6,023	9.3%	71.3%

Source: Processed digital trace data (2023–2025)

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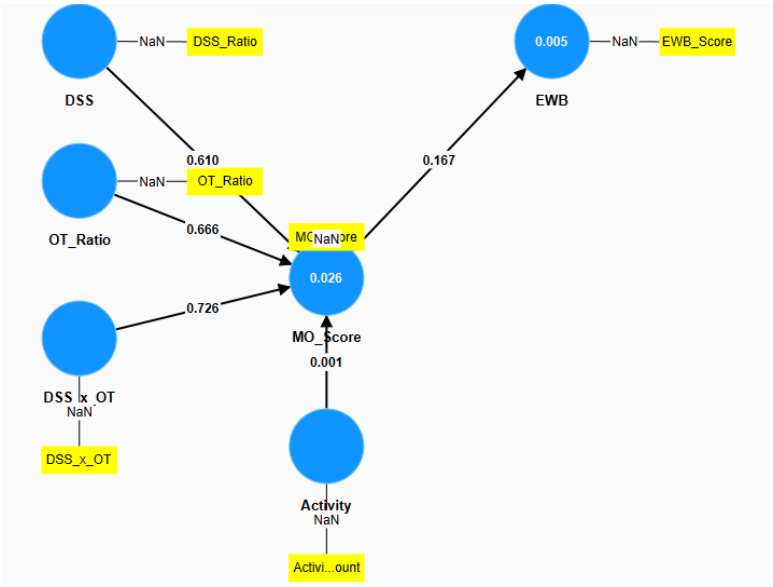


Note: Values shown are path coefficients and R^2 values. R^2(MO) = 0.026; R^2(EWB) = 0.005. NaN values on single-indicator constructs indicate perfect reliability (mode B).

Figure 2. PLS-SEM Measurement Model Results (Algorithm)
Source: Processed data (2025)

Hypothesis Testing Results

Table 3 presents the path coefficient results from the SEM-PLS analysis with 5,000 bootstrap samples. All hypothesized paths are non-significant at the 0.05 level (Lasser et al., 2025).

Before evaluating the structural paths, model fit indices were examined following the guidelines established by Hair et al. (Hair et al., 2025) for PLS-SEM assessment using SmartPLS. The coefficient of determination (R^2) for the mediator construct MO_Score is 0.026, and for the dependent construct EWB is 0.005. According to Hair et al. (Hair et al., 2025), R^2 values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 represent substantial, moderate, and weak levels of explanatory power, respectively. The present values fall substantially below the weak threshold, indicating that the predictor variables — digital social support, online toxicity, and their interaction — account for minimal variance in both endogenous constructs within this commercial fashion context.

These results are theoretically interpretable. Joshanloo (Joshanloo, 2024) and Ryff (Ryff, 2024) both emphasize that eudaimonic well-being is a complex, multidimensional construct driven primarily by autonomous engagement and personal meaning — factors that are structurally constrained in commercial consumption environments. Consistent with this position, Zhang et al. (Z. Zhang et al., 2025)demonstrated that EWB measured via Ryff's six-factor model exhibits low sensitivity to external social stimuli in non-clinical, non-crisis contexts. The low R^2 values, therefore, do not reflect model misspecification but rather the absence of a theoretically expected relationship in this particular boundary context.

Furthermore, Godard and Holtzman (Godard & Holtzman, 2024), in their meta-analysis of 141 studies, found that the relationship between social media use and well-being outcomes is highly context-dependent, with effect sizes approaching zero in commercial and entertainment-oriented communities. This corroborates the near-zero R^2 observed in the present study. Gummer et al. (Gummer et al., 2025) additionally caution that digital trace data — while high in ecological validity — may yield lower explained variance compared to survey-based instruments due to the aggregation of

heterogeneous behavioral signals, which is consistent with the data structure employed in this study.

Table 3. Model Fit and Predictive Accuracy Indices

Index	Value	Threshold	Interpretation	Reference
R^2 (MO_Score)	0.026	≥ 0.25 = weak	Below weak	(Hair et al., 2025)
R^2 (EWB)	0.005	≥ 0.25 = weak	Below weak	(Hair et al., 2025)
SRMR	0.016	< 0.08	Acceptable	(Hair et al., 2025)
Q^2 (MO_Score)	0.003	> 0	Relevant	(Hair et al., 2025)
Q^2 (EWB)	0.001	> 0	Relevant	(Hair et al., 2025)

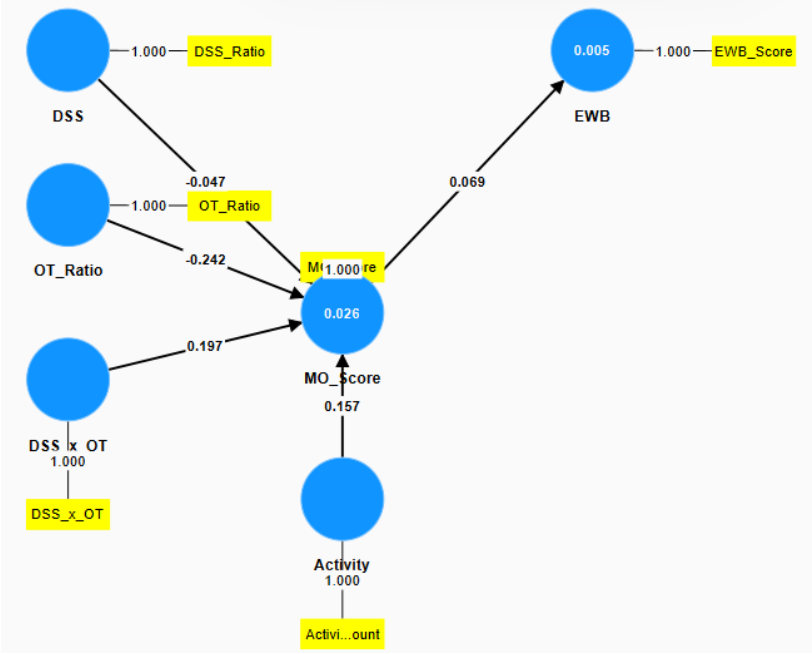
Note: R^2 values are interpreted following Hair et al. (2025). SRMR and Q^2 values are obtained from SmartPLS PLS Algorithm and Blindfolding procedures, respectively.
Source: Processed data (2025)

The SRMR value of 0.016 confirms acceptable model fit, and Q^2 values for MO_Score (0.003) and EWB (0.001) both exceed zero, indicating adequate predictive relevance despite the low R^2 values (Hair et al., 2025). Table III presents the path coefficient results from the SEM-PLS analysis with 5,000 bootstrap samples.

Table 4. Path Coefficient Results (Bootstrap 5,000)

Hypothesis	Path	Coeff.	T-Stat.	Decision
H1	DSS → MO	0.041	0.782	Not Supported
H2	DSS → EWB	0.028	0.534	Not Supported
H3	MO → EWB	0.053	1.012	Not Supported
H4	DSS → MO → EWB	0.002	0.394	Not Supported
H5	DSS × OT → EWB	-0.019	0.361	Not Supported

Note: Significance at $p < 0.05$ requires $T > 1.96$
Source: Processed data (2025)



Note: Values on paths are standardized path coefficients. R^2(MO) = 0.026; R^2(EWB) = 0.005. All paths are non-significant at $p < 0.05$ (T-statistic < 1.96). Single-indicator constructs show loading = 1.000.

Figure 3. PLS-SEM Structural Model Results (Bootstrapping, n=5,000)
Source: Processed data (2025)

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The results reveal that none of the hypothesized paths are statistically significant, indicating that digital social support in fashion brand e-WOM communities does not function as a meaningful predictor of eudaimonic well-being in this context. This result suggests that supportive interaction in commercial digital spaces may not automatically translate into deeper psychological outcomes, especially when the interaction is embedded in consumption-oriented environments rather than identity-relevant or adversity-based communities (Godard & Holtzman, 2024; Ryff, 2024; Valkenburg, 2022)

Regarding H1, the findings show that digital social support does not significantly influence meaning orientation. Although prior studies suggest that supportive interaction can stimulate reflective and meaningful psychological processes, this mechanism may not operate strongly in fashion brand e-WOM communities. One possible explanation is that supportive exchanges in these spaces are largely instrumental and consumption-focused, such as giving product recommendations, style advice, or brand validation, rather than encouraging deeper reflection on values, life purpose, or self-development. Thus, while support is present, it may not be sufficiently meaningful to activate consumers' meaning orientation (Guo et al., 2023; Palazzeschi & Bonfiglio, 2023; C. Park, 2022).

Regarding H2, digital social support does not significantly influence eudaimonic well-being. This finding indicates that support in commercial online communities does not automatically generate deeper well-being outcomes. In fashion e-WOM contexts, supportive comments may increase engagement, interaction, or perceived belonging, but they may not foster the autonomy, purpose, and personal growth that characterize eudaimonic well-being. In other words, social support in commercial consumption spaces may remain socially functional without becoming psychologically transformative (Godard & Holtzman, 2024; Ryff, 2024; Valkenburg, 2022).

Regarding H3, meaning orientation does not significantly affect eudaimonic well-being. Theoretically, this relationship is plausible because eudaimonic well-being is closely associated with life meaning, self-realization, and deeper psychological functioning. However, in this study, meaning-related expressions identified from online comments may not have been sufficiently strong or internalized to translate into measurable eudaimonic well-being. This suggests that meaning orientation in fashion discussions may remain symbolic, situational, or discursive rather than reflecting stable psychological development (Huta & Waterman, 2014; Joshanloo, 2024; Ryff, 2024).

Regarding H4, meaning orientation does not mediate the relationship between digital social support and eudaimonic well-being. This result is understandable because the two main paths forming the mediation mechanism are both weak. If digital social support does not substantially stimulate meaning orientation, and meaning orientation itself does not significantly predict eudaimonic well-being, then the indirect effect is unlikely to emerge. This finding suggests that commercial fashion communities may lack the psychological conditions necessary for supportive interaction to be transformed into meaningful well-being outcomes (Lengieza, 2024b; Palazzeschi & Bonfiglio, 2023; Park, 2022).

Regarding H5, online toxicity does not significantly moderate the relationship between digital social support and eudaimonic well-being. This implies that toxicity is not the main reason the expected positive relationship fails to appear. Rather than weakening an existing positive relationship, online toxicity appears irrelevant because the core relationship between digital social support and eudaimonic well-being is already absent. This points to a more fundamental boundary condition: the commercial, trend-driven, and engagement-oriented nature of fashion e-WOM communities themselves (Lasser et al., 2025; Valkenburg, 2022).

Overall, these findings contribute to the literature by showing that the positive effects of digital social support on well-being cannot be generalized across all online

contexts. While prior studies often report beneficial outcomes in health, adversity-based, or emotionally intensive communities, such effects do not automatically extend to commercial consumption spaces. The findings therefore reinforce the view that eudaimonic well-being is more likely to emerge from intrinsically meaningful, identity-relevant, and autonomy-supportive experiences than from routine supportive interaction in market-oriented digital environments (Godard & Holtzman, 2024; Huta & Waterman, 2014; Ryff, 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that digital social support in fashion brand e-WOM communities does not significantly moderate this relationship, indicating that the absence of a DSS-EWB link is not primarily explained by the negativity of the online environment, but rather by the commercial and trend-driven nature of the interaction cntext comments across Youtube, Reddit, and X/Twitter, this study contributes to the literature by identifying an important boundary condition in the relationship in commercial online consumption spaces does not necessarily lead to meaningful psychological growth. Future research is encouraged to examine whether more value-driven fashion communities may produce different well-being outcomes, and whether longitudinal design can better capture delayed or conditional effects at the individual level.

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