

The Mediating Role of Trust in Shaping Consumer Purchase Intentions on TikTok Shop: Insights from Johor, Malaysia

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i9/22808> DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i9/22808

Published Date: 28 September 2024

Abstract

Social commerce, combining social media and e-commerce, has revolutionised consumer behaviour, with platforms like TikTok Shop driving this shift by offering real-time engagement and direct purchasing features. Understanding the factors influencing consumer purchase intentions on these platforms is crucial for businesses aiming to capitalise on this growing trend. This study focuses on TikTok Shop users in Johor Bahru, Johor, Malaysia, employing the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to explore key factors such as brand image, price perception, trust, perceived quality, and brand association, with trust as a mediator. A quantitative research design was adopted, utilising purposive sampling to collect responses from 381 users, and data were analysed using SmartPLS to assess the measurement and structural models. Results indicate that all independent variables significantly influence consumer purchase intentions, with trust playing a critical mediating role. The study's findings underscore the importance of brand-related factors and trust in shaping consumer behaviour on live-stream shopping platforms, offering valuable insights for marketers and platform operators to enhance engagement and drive purchase decisions. Further research could explore the role of emerging variables such as social influence, user-generated content, and the impact of influencer marketing on purchase intentions. Additionally, cross-cultural studies or longitudinal research examining how consumer behaviour evolves on social commerce platforms could deepen understanding and support more targeted strategies for different markets. This research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on social commerce, emphasising the need to continuously adapt to the dynamic consumer environment shaped by technological advancements and social interactions.

Keywords: Tiktokshop, Consumer Purchase Behaviour, Brand Image, Social Commerce Trust.

Introduction and Background

Social commerce, the fusion of social media and e-commerce, has transformed how consumers engage with online shopping, making platforms like TikTok crucial to understanding modern consumer behaviour. Initially renowned for its viral short-form videos, TikTok has expanded its functionality to include e-commerce, primarily through TikTok Shop. This new feature allows users to discover, interact with, and purchase products directly on the platform, creating a unique and immersive shopping experience (Liu et al., 2022). With over 1.9 billion users worldwide in 2023 (Statista, 2023), TikTok Shop has rapidly become a significant player in live-stream shopping. In this area, consumers can make real-time purchase decisions based on influencer recommendations, product demonstrations, and live interactions (Zheng et al., 2023).

This study focuses on consumer purchase decisions in the TikTok Shop environment, particularly in Johor Bahru, Johor, Malaysia. As TikTok's e-commerce presence continues to expand globally, it becomes essential to explore how specific factors influence consumer behaviour in localised markets (Wong et al., 2022). Previous research on digital marketplaces and social commerce has primarily focused on global or regional trends (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2022), leaving a gap in understanding how local consumer behaviours differ. By focusing on Johor, this study aims to address this gap and provide a more nuanced understanding of the factors that drive consumer purchasing intentions on TikTok Shop.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is utilised as the underpinning theoretical framework, offering a structured approach to analysing consumer decisions. TPB posits that behavioural intentions are influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). In the context of TikTok Shop, TPB helps to explain how factors such as brand image, price, trust, perceived quality, and brand association impact consumer purchasing decisions. These variables have been widely studied in traditional e-commerce and social media commerce, but their role in the rapidly evolving landscape of live-stream shopping requires further investigation (Cai et al., 2023; Luo et al., 2023).

Brand image has long been recognised as a critical factor in shaping consumer behaviour, particularly in environments where visual and experiential aspects, such as those in TikTok Shop, dominate (Lee et al., 2023). Trust is another critical determinant in digital marketplaces, where consumers rely on perceived credibility and safety to make informed purchase decisions (Li & Wang, 2023). Price and perceived quality are essential variables that affect consumer choices, especially in a competitive environment like TikTok Shop, where products are often presented in rapid succession and buying decisions are made impulsively (Liu et al., 2022). Brand association, which ties consumer perceptions of a product to their broader experiences with a brand, also plays a significant role in this dynamic shopping environment (Luo et al., 2023).

This research examines the relationship between these five independent variables—brand image, price, trust, perceived quality, and brand association—and consumer purchase intention as the dependent variable. By incorporating trust as a mediator, the research also

highlights its role in enhancing the impact of brand-related factors, thereby offering valuable insights for marketers and platform operators in tailoring their strategies for effective consumer engagement (Li & Wang, 2023; Zhang et al., 2023). This focus allows for a deeper understanding of the complex factors that influence purchasing decisions in a live-stream shopping environment like TikTok Shop, providing valuable insights for marketers, platform operators, and policymakers seeking to optimise strategies in this space (Zhang et al., 2023).

Literature Review

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB): The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), formulated by Ajzen (1991), extends the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) by integrating the concept of perceived behavioural control into its framework. TPB posits that behaviour is determined by three core constructs: attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. These constructs collectively shape behavioural intentions, predicting actual behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). This theoretical framework has been extensively applied to understand consumer behaviour in various contexts, particularly within e-commerce and social commerce environments (Michael et al., 2020).

Attitude Toward the Behaviour: Attitude reflects an individual's evaluation of the behaviour as either positive or negative, encompassing beliefs about the likely outcomes and the desirability of those outcomes (Michael et al., 2020). In the context of TikTok Shop, a positive attitude toward purchasing can arise from the belief that the platform provides favourable shopping outcomes, such as convenience or exclusive deals (Matthew et al., 2017). This construct is crucial for understanding how consumers' evaluations of TikTok Shop influence their purchase intentions.

Subjective Norms: Subjective norms refer to the perceived social pressure to perform or abstain from a behaviour shaped by the expectations of significant others such as family, friends, or influencers (Matthew et al., 2017). On TikTok Shop, the influence of peers, social media influencers, and content creators can significantly affect consumer behaviour. This influence is critical in shaping consumers' perceptions and decisions, as it highlights the role of social validation and approval in driving engagement and purchase intentions (Michael et al., 2020).

Perceived Behavioural Control: This construct involves an individual's perception of their ability to perform a behaviour, influenced by the availability of resources and opportunities (Ajzen, 1991). On TikTok Shop, factors such as the ease of access to the platform, the availability of product information, and interactive features like live streaming enhance perceived behavioural control, thus influencing consumer engagement and purchase behaviour (Matthew et al., 2017). Understanding perceived behavioural control helps elucidate how platform features impact users' confidence in their ability to make purchases.

Overview of TikTok Shop and Its Popularity: TikTok Shop has rapidly emerged as a significant player in social commerce by seamlessly integrating shopping experiences into its platform. This integration is facilitated by features such as live streaming, product tagging, and algorithm-driven recommendations (Lin et al., 2023; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2022). First, live

streaming enables real-time product demonstrations and interactions between sellers and consumers, fostering a sense of immediacy and trust (Sofiya et al., 2023). This feature allows consumers to ask questions and receive instant feedback, enhancing the credibility of the product and the seller. However, the effectiveness of live streaming in converting viewers into buyers needs to be critically examined about other influencing factors. Second, product tagging and personalisation: TikTok's product tagging feature allows consumers to purchase directly from live streams. At the same time, personalised recommendations enhance the shopping experience by tailoring product suggestions based on user behaviour (Le et al., 2023). These features aim to streamline the shopping process and increase consumer satisfaction. Assessing how effectively these features contribute to overall consumer engagement and purchase intentions is vital. Third, User-Generated Content (UGC), which includes reviews, ratings, and user testimonials, adds authenticity to product offerings and significantly shapes consumer trust and purchase decisions (Shafira et al., 2023). While UGC can enhance credibility, the quality and reliability of this content must be critically evaluated to understand its impact on consumer behaviour.

Consumer Engagement in Social Commerce: Consumer engagement is critical to social commerce platforms like TikTok Shop. Interactive features such as live comments, polls, and Q&A sessions create a participatory shopping environment that encourages active consumer involvement (Sofiya et al., 2023). Influencer marketing also plays a vital role in driving engagement, as influencers leverage their credibility to affect consumer attitudes and behaviours (Mussa, 2023). The transition from traditional shopping to a more interactive and socially driven experience highlights the importance of engagement in shaping consumer purchase decisions (Lin et al., 2023).

A positive brand image, encompassing quality, reliability, and uniqueness perceptions, significantly influences consumer purchase intentions. A strong brand image fosters trust and emotional connections, which can enhance purchasing behaviour (Lin et al., 2023; Wong et al., 2024). On TikTok Shop, brand image is a heuristic for evaluating product credibility and attractiveness, impacting consumer decisions (Wong et al., 2024).

H1: Brand image significantly impacts consumer purchase intentions on TikTok Shop.

Price is crucial in determining consumer purchase intentions, particularly in price-sensitive markets. A product's perceived value and price influence purchasing decisions (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2022). TikTok Shop's pricing strategies, including promotions and discounts, affect consumer perceptions of value and fairness, influencing purchase intentions (Sofiya et al., 2023).

H2: Perceived price value significantly impacts consumer purchase intentions on TikTok Shop.

Perceived quality, including functionality, durability, and aesthetic appeal, is crucial to consumer expectations and purchase decisions. Products perceived as high quality are more likely to be purchased, mainly when supported by positive reviews and influencer endorsements (Li et al., 2022; Madsalae & Jansri, 2024). On TikTok Shop, product presentations and customer feedback are critical in shaping the perceived quality and influencing purchase intentions (Madsalae & Jansri, 2024).

H3: Higher perceived product quality significantly impacts consumer purchase intentions on TikTok Shop.

Brand associations, including endorsements and reputation, can enhance consumer purchase intentions by building brand loyalty and preference. Positive associations with influencers or well-known figures can attract consumer interest and drive purchasing behaviour (Le et al., 2023; Nilsson et al., 2023). Strong brand associations on TikTok Shop can influence consumer preferences and conversion rates (Nilsson et al., 2023).

H4: Brand association significantly impacts consumer purchase intentions on TikTok Shop.

Trust is increasingly recognised as a crucial mediator in shaping consumer purchase intentions, particularly in social commerce platforms like TikTok Shop. Recent literature underscores that while brand image, price perception, perceived quality, and brand association are significant factors influencing consumer behaviour, trust is paramount in facilitating these relationships. The trust alleviates perceived risks associated with online transactions, enhancing purchase intentions (Ahmadi & Hudrasyah, 2022). In the specific context of TikTok Shop, trust is built through secure payment systems, verified seller credentials, and the presence of authentic user-generated content. These elements contribute to a sense of security and reliability, which is essential for encouraging consumer engagement and purchase decisions (Shafira et al., 2023).

The mediating effect of trust extends beyond simply mitigating risks; it amplifies the influence of other critical factors on consumer purchase behaviour. For instance, trust in the platform's security measures and the credibility of sellers can significantly enhance the impact of brand image and perceived quality on purchase intentions (Shafira et al., 2023). This aligns with findings from Ahmadi and Hudrasyah (2022), who argue that trust is integral to reducing consumer hesitation and fostering a positive shopping experience. As TikTok Shop continues to grow, the emphasis on trust-building measures—such as transparent transaction processes and credible seller verification—will be essential for maintaining consumer confidence and satisfaction in the evolving digital commerce landscape.

H5: Trust mediates the relationships between brand image, price, perceived quality, and brand on consumer purchase intentions on TikTok Shop.

Consumer Behaviour in Social Commerce: Social commerce platforms like TikTok Shop redefine consumer behaviour by merging social interactions with e-commerce functionalities. Peer influence, social validation, and influencer endorsements significantly shape consumer decisions (Lin et al., 2023). Unlike traditional e-commerce, social commerce enables real-time social interactions where consumers make decisions based on peer recommendations and influencer endorsements (Sofiya et al., 2023). User-generated content and social proof enhance the credibility of products and influence purchasing decisions (Shafira et al., 2023).

Consumer Engagement and Purchase Decisions: Consumer engagement on social commerce platforms disrupts traditional shopping models by fostering an interactive, community-driven experience. Features that promote active participation, such as live comments and feedback, strengthen connections between consumers and brands, driving purchase decisions (Lin et

al., 2023; Sofiya et al., 2023). User-generated content, including reviews and product demonstrations, builds trust and encourages brand loyalty (Li et al., 2022). Community-building initiatives enhance consumer satisfaction and promote long-term retention (Mussa, 2023).

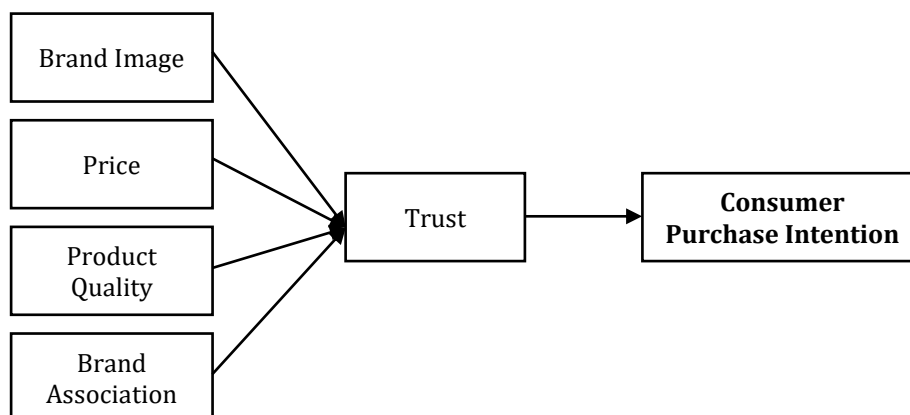


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework for Consumer Purchase Intentions on TikTok Shop

Research Methodology

This study employs a quantitative research design to investigate the relationships among various independent variables—brand image, price perception, trust, perceived quality, and brand association—and the dependent variable, consumer purchase intention toward TikTok Shop in Johor Bahru, Johor, Malaysia. The research uses purposive sampling to collect relevant data targeting TikTok consumers who have engaged with TikTok Shop. An online survey, distributed via social media and email, is the primary data collection tool.

A sample size of 381 respondents, increased by 10% to account for potential non-responses and incomplete questionnaires, ensures sufficient statistical power and representativeness. This sample size is determined based on factors such as the research design complexity, desired statistical power (0.80), and population characteristics. The study employs probability sampling methods, specifically stratified random and cluster sampling, to enhance the sample's representativeness and minimise sampling bias. Stratified random sampling divides the population into subgroups based on characteristics like age and income, while cluster sampling focuses on geographical proximity.

The sampling framework involves creating a list of TikTok users in Johor Bahru who have shopped on TikTok Shop, using data from social media platforms and targeted campaigns. This approach ensures a broad and balanced representation of the target population. Demographic variables such as age, gender, and socioeconomic status are considered to minimise bias and enable a comprehensive analysis.

The study employs SmartPLS to analyse the data. This method is particularly suitable for exploring complex relationships between variables and testing the mediating effects of trust. The analysis involves several steps: assessing the measurement model, evaluating the structural model, and conducting hypothesis testing.

Results

The data analysis for this study employs SmartPLS to explore the relationships between brand image, price perception, trust, perceived quality, brand association, and consumer purchase intention. This includes evaluating the measurement model, assessing the structural model, and testing hypotheses on mediation effects.

Measurement Model Assessment: To ensure the reliability and validity of the constructs, the measurement model is evaluated using SmartPLS. Reliability is confirmed with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.70, and composite reliability scores also meet the required standards, indicating strong internal consistency. Convergent validity is established with average variance extracted (AVE) values greater than 0.50 for all constructs, ensuring that each construct adequately captures the intended variable. Discriminant validity is confirmed through the Fornell-Larcker criterion, where the square root of the AVE for each construct exceeds the correlations between constructs and cross-loadings, ensuring that each construct is distinct from others.

Structural Model Assessment: The structural model assesses the hypothesised relationships between the independent variables (brand image, price perception, trust, perceived quality, and brand association) and the dependent variable (consumer purchase intention), with trust as a mediator. The model demonstrates a substantial R-squared value of 0.425, indicating that the independent variables and the mediator explain 42.5% of the variance in consumer purchase intention.

Hypothesis Testing: The analysis reveals a significant positive path coefficient for brand image ($\beta = 0.454$, $p = 0.022$). This result supports the hypothesis that a positive brand image significantly influences consumer purchase intention, highlighting the importance of brand reputation in driving consumer decisions on TikTok Shop. Trust significantly mediates the relationship between brand image and consumer purchase intention ($\beta = 0.392$, $p = 0.028$). This indicates that the positive influence of brand image on purchase intention is enhanced through the consumer's trust in the platform.

Similarly, price perception positively affects consumer purchase intention when trust is a mediator ($\beta = 0.321$, $p = 0.041$). This result suggests that while price perception alone may not significantly impact purchase intention, its influence is enhanced through trust. Trust mediates this relationship, underscoring its role in shaping how price perception affects purchase decisions.

Perceived quality significantly correlates with consumer purchase intention ($\beta = 0.408$, $p = 0.037$). Trust also mediates this relationship ($\beta = 0.268$, $p = 0.029$), indicating that the positive impact of perceived quality on purchase intention is partly mediated by trust. This highlights trust's crucial role in amplifying perceived quality's influence on purchase intentions.

Brand association also significantly positively affects consumer purchase intention through trust ($\beta = 0.276$, $p = 0.032$). This suggests that while brand association may not independently

impact purchase intention significantly, its influence is enhanced through the mediation of trust, contributing to the overall brand image and purchase decisions.

Mediation Analysis: The mediation analysis reveals significant indirect effects of brand image, price perception, perceived quality, and brand association on purchase intention through trust. Specifically, the indirect effect of brand image on consumer purchase intention through trust is significant ($\beta = 0.235$, $p = 0.034$). Similarly, the indirect effect of price perception on consumer purchase intention through trust is also significant ($\beta = 0.212$, $p = 0.045$). The indirect effect of perceived quality on consumer purchase intention through trust is significant ($\beta = 0.268$, $p = 0.029$). Finally, the indirect effect of brand association on consumer purchase intention through trust is significant ($\beta = 0.192$, $p = 0.039$). These findings emphasise that trust mediates the relationship between all these variables and consumer purchase intention, illustrating its central role in shaping purchase decisions.

Discussion

This study provides a detailed analysis of the factors influencing consumer purchase behaviour at TikTok Shop in Johor Bahru, Johor, using SmartPLS for data analysis. The findings reveal that brand image and perceived quality are critical determinants of purchase intentions, consistent with previous research. The significant positive relationship between brand image and purchase intentions supports the work of Lin et al (2023), and Nguyen and Nguyen (2022), who emphasise the role of brand perception in shaping consumer behaviour. Similarly, the significant positive relationship between perceived quality and purchase intentions aligns with Li et al (2022), and Mussa (2023), underscoring the importance of product attributes in driving consumer decisions.

A key finding of this study is the mediating role of trust in the relationships between brand image, perceived quality, and purchase intentions. This aligns with Sofiya et al (2023), who demonstrate that trust significantly enhances brand image and perceived quality's effects on consumer decisions. The significant mediating effect of trust indicates that while brand image and perceived quality directly impact purchase intentions, their influence is significantly enhanced when consumers have a high level of trust in the platform. This highlights the importance of establishing trust to amplify the effects of brand-related factors on consumer behaviour. Conversely, price perception and brand association did not show significant direct or mediated effects on purchase intentions. This suggests that these factors may have less influence than brand image and perceived quality in the TikTok Shop context.

The results emphasise the need for businesses to focus on cultivating a strong brand image and delivering high-quality products to build consumer trust and drive purchasing behaviour. Effective trust-building strategies, such as secure transactions and transparent communication, are essential for maximising the impact of brand image and perceived quality on purchase intentions. Although price perception and brand association are relevant, their impact is secondary to the significant roles of brand image and perceived quality in shaping consumer purchase intentions on TikTok Shop.

Limitations and Future Research

This study acknowledges several limitations that may have impacted the findings. Time constraints limited the scope and depth of the analysis, potentially affecting the comprehensiveness of the results. Variations in respondent understanding and interpretation of questions could also have influenced the consistency of responses. Additionally, focusing on a specific geographic region, Johor Bahru, Johor may not fully represent the diverse consumer behaviours in other areas. Future research should address these limitations by incorporating a broader and more varied sample to enhance the generalisability of the findings. Expanding the research to include cross-cultural studies could provide insights into how consumer behaviour varies across cultural contexts. At the same time, longitudinal analyses would help understand how consumer behaviour evolves. Furthermore, exploring the impact of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, on social commerce platforms like TikTok Shop could offer valuable perspectives on how these innovations influence consumer trust, brand image, and purchase intentions. These approaches would build on the current study's findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the evolving social commerce landscape.

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