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THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON GENERATION Z CONSUMERS' PURCHASING DECISIONS THROUGH SOCIAL INFLUENCE TRUST MECHANISMS AND PRODUCT PROMOTION

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SUMMARY

The rapid development of social media commerce has changed online shopping behavior with the incorporation of social interaction, user-generated content, and digital marketing in e-commerce platforms. Social commerce has made Generation Z one of the largest user groups, yet little research has been done on the combined effects of social influence, trust mechanisms, and product promotion on their purchase decisions. The study aims to analyze the impact of these three factors on the purchase decisions of Generation Z consumers on YouTube, TikTok and Instagram. This study used a quantitative research design, and a structured questionnaire distributed to 384 valid respondents of Generation Z from China, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore. The measurement model was tested for reliability and validity and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with SPSS and AMOS was used to test the hypotheses. The constructs showed acceptable reliability with Cronbach's alpha ranging between 0.845 and 0.883, composite reliability between 0.879 and 0.910, and average variance extracted (AVE) between 0.645 and 0.771. The structural model demonstrated a good fit ($\chi^2/df = 1.433$, GFI = 0.968, AGFI = 0.950, NFI = 0.969, CFI = 0.991, RMSEA = 0.034). The results indicate that all the hypothesized relationships are positive and significant. Trust mechanisms had the most substantial influence on purchase decisions ($\beta = 0.379$, $p < 0.001$) followed by product promotion ($\beta = 0.240$, $p < 0.001$) and social influence ($\beta = 0.153$, $p = 0.019$). The model explained 32.2% of the variance of purchasing decisions ($R^2 = 0.322$).

Correlation analysis also showed significant positive correlation between social influence ($r = 0.252$), trust mechanisms ($r = 0.429$), product promotion ($r = 0.387$) and purchasing decision (all $p < 0.001$). The study shows that strengthening trust, enhancing real social interaction, and using targeted promotional strategies are effective ways to optimize the purchase decisions of Generation Z consumers, and provides useful theoretical insights and practical guidance for the sustainable development of social media commerce platforms.

Key words: *social media, generation Z, social influence, trust mechanisms, product promotion, purchase decision.*

INTRODUCTION

Background

With the deepening development of the Internet Plus strategy and the gradual improvement of digital infrastructure, the social e-commerce model relying on online dissemination is undergoing rapid evolution and increasingly becoming a mainstream business paradigm. Initially, this model leveraged individual micro-businesses and social tools such as Facebook, Pinterest, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, and WeChat to expand its reach. Subsequently, specialized social online web stores such as Temu, Taobao, AliExpress, Shopee, eBay, Amazon, and Wish emerged one after another. Currently, the market has further segmented, giving rise to platforms centered on content sharing such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram, as well as community-driven shopping models like group buying platforms. Supported by continuous improvements in digital infrastructure and mobile technologies, social media has become an indispensable component of consumers' daily lives. Globally, approximately 4.95 billion people utilise social media, making up more than 61% of the global population, while smartphone adoption continues to stimulate consumer participation in social commerce activities.

Compared to traditional e-commerce, there are many benefits of social e-commerce as well. Not only is social commerce capable of making transactions for goods possible through new media channels such as websites and advertising mediums, but it also creates immediate consumer trust, creating the intention of buying through suggestions from people acquainted within social groups or reviews from online influencers (KOL) [9]. Consumers also tend to post their opinions about products through various online sites such as Instagram, Facebook, Reddit, and TikTok. In this mechanism effectively leverages big data and cloud computing technologies to screen high-quality content, enabling rapid viral dissemination within a short timeframe. It drives explosive traffic growth while significantly reducing advertisers' costs. As an emerging business model, the social impact of social media, consumers' trust in it, and the sales strategies of businesses are all crucial. The research has instilled significant confidence in practitioners amid the current economic landscape and is poised to contribute to stable and positive economic development.

Data indicates that the consumer base for social e-commerce has approached 700 million users. By 2025, its total transaction volume will have reached \$3.7 trillion, garnering significant attention from capital markets. Major Online Web Stores such as WhatsApp, YouTube, TikTok, Reddit, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitch, Instagram, Quora attracted a large number of businesses to establish a presence. With the growing popularity of social commerce, its users' purchase frequency is also on the rise. Social commerce is an e-commerce model primarily conducted through social media, whose core prerequisites lie in building social influence, establishing trust mechanisms, and effectively implementing product promotion strategies. Ultimately, consumers will form purchase intentions and ultimately take action based on interpersonal trust among friends and family, product usage experience, website shopping service quality, and potential risk assessment. For new products, effectively leveraging social influence, trust mechanisms, and promotional strategies is essential to spark consumer curiosity and interest during the initial launch phase.

Research Gap

However, with the rapid development of social commerce, there remain important research gaps. The existing literature has extensively studied consumer behaviour in digital commerce. Most of them have studied social influence, trust mechanism or promotion of products separately. The integrated effects of these factors on consumer purchase intention have received relatively limited attention. Moreover, previous research has mainly focused on the general e-commerce settings, while few studies have investigated these relationships in the specific context of social commerce where interpersonal interaction, user-generated content and online community engagement jointly influence purchase decisions. These limitations indicate the need for a more comprehensive investigation of the mechanisms through which social commerce affects consumer purchase intention.

Research Significance

Addressing these research gaps has both theoretical and practical significance. From a theoretical perspective, it is argued that the integration of social influence, trust mechanisms and product promotion into a common analytical framework enhances the understanding of consumer decision-making in social commerce contexts. In practice, the findings can provide evidence-based recommendations for social commerce platforms and online retailers to boost marketing effectiveness, enhance consumer trust, and improve long-term customer engagement.

There are three primary ways in which the current study adds to the literature. First, it develops an integrated framework to examine the combined effects of social influence, trust mechanisms and product promotion on consumers' purchase intention in social commerce. Second, it offers empirical evidence on the relative importance of these determinants, thereby extending the existing literature on consumer behaviour in digital commerce. Third, the findings have practical implications for managers and platform operators to design more effective social commerce strategies and increase consumer participation in the increasingly competitive online markets.

Structure

This is how the remainder of the paper is structured. In Section 2, the research hypotheses are developed and the literature is discussed. Section 3 describes research methodology including questionnaire design, measures development, data collection and analytic procedures. The empirical results are reported in Section 4. Theoretical and managerial implications of the findings are discussed in Section 5. Section 6 concludes the study, outlines its shortcomings, and suggests future research directions.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Contextual Study

Social Influence

Social Influence manifests specifically in how a consumer's purchasing behavior may shift due to the influence of surrounding individuals. Previous research on Social Influence has primarily explored two dimensions. First, the psychological perspective. This perspective focuses on its internal mechanisms, specifically the roles of information exchange and social norms [5]. Second is the network perspective. This perspective focuses on key consumer groups, including those who have already made purchases and wield significant influence over the brand while also impacting others' actions, as well as those who have not yet purchased but whose buying behavior is driven by external forces [11]. The mechanisms of the effect of Social Influence will be mainly explored in this research. As the result of information sharing, norm conformity, or product features, Social Influence may become the cause for conformity. The definition of conformity implies the change in people's attitudes, views, or behaviors under some outside real or imaginary pressure. Social Influence consists of three successive stages: compliance, identification, and internalization. This results in people changed behavioral attitudes. Walter & Stephan

(2023) also emphasized Social Influence as a pervasive psychological phenomenon, arguing that people's behaviors, emotions, and even thoughts can be altered by the influence of others [17]. Furthermore, the effectiveness of Social Influence depends on its ability to achieve sufficient scope, reach, and immediacy in influencing consumers' purchasing decisions. These three metrics also serve as key indicators for assessing whether an individual possesses Social Influence.

Trust Mechanisms

Regarding the definition of the concept of trust, diverse perspectives exist within the academic community. Hamm et al. (2024) proposed that trust is a behavior based on expectations of current interests, meaning the belief that the other party will not exploit one's vulnerability for personal gain [7]. The nature of trust can be seen in cooperation, where people, despite being powerful, will sacrifice control, be vulnerable, and take risks. Similarly, Zhou et al. (2023) state that the development of trust begins with consumers' engagement with social e-commerce associates and the evaluation of the associates' trustworthiness through their attributes [20]. However, consumers' level of trust in social platforms can effectively reduce their perception of potential risks.

Further analyzed the impact of e-commerce platform interface design on Trust Mechanisms levels using the Trustworthiness Model Builder (TMB) framework, examining two dimensions: website quality and structural assurance. With increased e-commerce studies and the development of business models, there has been an increased focus in academic circles on Trust Mechanisms in Social media commerce, as well as ways of improving them.

Product Promotion

Commercial motivation was defined sales as provided by producers or retailers to consumers for the purpose of affecting consumer behavior or action. View sales as a short-term sales strategy that employs various means to induce user demand, thereby stimulating or enhancing their existing purchasing desire. The objectives of product promotion are diverse and are primarily influenced by three key factors: Promotional strategy, Promotional Mindset, and Internal Reference Price. Promotional strategy focuses more on how to effectively communicate information to customers, including whether to disclose external comparison prices to clients, whether discounts are presented as cash amounts or percentages, whether competitors' prices for similar products are published, and whether environmental factors are considered [2]. The Promotional Mindset refers to the primary focus on two emotional responses consumers exhibit during the purchasing process: the distinction between the perception of loss and the perception of gain [12]. Internal Reference Price refers to the customer's subjective internal evaluation criteria for product value, used to measure the value of a product.

Some of the researchers list numerous standard consumer incentive methods, such as price reductions, coupon promotions, gift certificate promotions, counter displays, window promotions, buy-one-get-one-free offers, bundled products, sample distribution, special packaging, and sweepstakes. However, in practical application, these methods may require subtle adjustments. Therefore, most companies typically select only one or a few strategies to combine, rather than comprehensively studying and implementing the entire system. The first is loss reduction, which primarily involves product pricing tactics such as cash discounts, special offers, refunds, and discount coupons. These approaches are expected to help avoid any losses in terms of economics for the consumers. Secondly, Increasing Gains. This approach aims at surprising customers with unexpected gains, like freebies, samples, free trial offers, or competitions. Non-monetary marketing tools, like freebies, induce more positive mental pricing from consumers compared to monetary tools, like discount offers, thus increasing their urge to buy products.

Purchasing Decisions

Frequency of Purchase refers to consumers engaging in purchasing activities more frequently on social e-commerce platforms. Platform Usage Longevity refers to consumers demonstrating interest and willingness to use the platform over the long term.

The study found that consumers' purchasing decisions are influenced by their emotional state, which can be categorized as positive or negative. Positive shopping emotions enhance consumers' preference levels, thereby increasing the likelihood of purchasing behavior. Conversely, negative shopping sentiments may trigger doubts among consumers about products, thereby reducing the likelihood of purchase. In the e-commerce environment, while scholars' research focuses on this issue varies, it was strived to explore the key factors influencing consumers' purchasing decisions. With the continuous evolution of consumer theory, scholars have conducted in-depth research on consumers' purchasing decisions at both theoretical and empirical levels, constructing decision models tailored to local market characteristics. The research holds significant practical implications for further refining the global consumers theory framework and guiding the high-quality development of the e-commerce economy.

Development of Hypothesis

Purchasing Decisions and Social Influence

The role of Social Influence in consumer purchasing has attracted widespread attention from many scholars. Early scholars primarily questioned whether Social Influence actually exists. When controlling for social media Social Influence, the impact of Social Influence on product purchase by consumers disappears.

Research indicates that consumers with lower self-centeredness and those occupying intermediate social positions are more easily influenced by others and exhibit convergent behavior. However, previous studies on identifying key consumers have yielded inconsistent conclusions regarding factors such as consumers' susceptibility and the duration of purchase influence. This divergence arises because prior research has focused on a single product or category, failing to account for how Social Influence varies across different product types. Wei et al. (2023) and other scholars examined this issue using various types of virtual products as examples [19]. Specifically, social behavior within these circles serves to express one's views in order to gain others' approval [10]. This form of Social Influence among friends aligns more closely with the "identification and internalization" mechanism that transforms individual attitudes.

Therefore, Social Influence on consumers' purchasing decisions on social media is subject to factors such as informational factors, normative factors, and product attributes.

H1: The Social Influence of Social Media Exerts a Positive Effect on Consumers' Purchasing Decisions.

Trust Mechanisms and Purchasing Decisions

Currently, Social media urgently needs to establish an effective trust system to enhance consumers' satisfaction. In the context of how this actually works, [4] have further extended the TAM. According to his study, the greater the level of consumer trust, the higher will be the evaluation made by the consumers about their perceived usefulness and ease of use, which consequently impacts their buying behavior. [2] has developed hypotheses on factors that influence consumer trust and purchase intentions based on mobile social e-commerce. It was indicated that enhancing consumers' understanding of online shopping and reducing perceived Risk can both effectively strengthen consumer trust [2]. Findings revealed that emotional trust can effectively alleviate consumers' concerns about purchase risks to a certain extent and promote the occurrence of purchasing behavior. Wang et al. (2022) identified consumers' initial trust in online retailers as a critical variable, noting that initial trust in Social media retailers is a prerequisite for consumers' choice to use such retailers [18].

Furthermore, the study posited that consumers' purchase intentions stem from their reliance on the retailer. In traditional e-commerce contexts, perceived ease of use has been shown to significantly and positively enhance consumers' initial trust.

Based on the above study, current research on the relationship between purchase intention and trust predominantly focus on examining trust's direct impact on purchase intention. However, there is

relatively little exploration of how trust influences purchase intention through specific mechanisms in particular contexts. A deeper analysis of these detailed mechanisms will help address trust issues consumers face during the purchasing process, thereby promoting the healthy development of social media commerce.

H2: The Social Influence of Trust Mechanisms on Social Media Exerts a Moderating Effect on Consumers' Purchasing Decisions.

Product Promotion and Purchasing Decisions

For users of social media, product marketing models significantly influence their shopping behavior, with different forms of marketing stimuli particularly effective at strongly stimulating their purchasing needs. Points out that the most common forms of Product Promotion include special price discounts, coupons, rebates, window displays, in-store exhibitions, clearance items, freebies, free samples, special-priced packages, and prize promotion. Skwara (2023) categorized marketing approaches into two primary types based on the Mental Accounting psychological model: loss aversion and gain seeking. Loss aversion refers to Product Promotion activities directly linked to product pricing, such as cash discounts, special discounts, cash rebates, and coupon usage [16]. Increasing revenue refers to separating Product Promotion activities from product pricing, aiming to provide consumers with additional value, such as freebies, free trial periods, and sweepstakes. Immediate discounts refer to price reductions that consumers receive at the point of purchase and payment, such as cash discounts, gifts, and gift cards. Delayed discounts, on the other hand, refer to price reductions that consumers receive after completing a transaction, such as shopping vouchers.

Additionally, categorize incentive marketing activities based on the source triggering actions of consumers into time-dependent short-term incentives (such as discounts and freebies) and continuity-dependent long-term incentives (such as points redemption systems). Found through experimental research that compared to Product Promotion offered in monetary form, Promotional strategies involving tangible (non-monetary) exchanges lead consumers to perceive the purchased product as having greater value, thereby increasing their purchase intention.

Overall, numerous scholars widely agree that large-scale Product Promotion on Social media possesses a strong stimulating effect, effectively triggering consumers' impulse to purchase on these platforms.

H3: The social influence of Product Promotion on social media exerts a positive effect on consumers' Purchasing Decisions.

Critical Summary of Literature and Research Inference

Current literature consistently shows that social media has emerged as a powerful medium for influencing consumer purchase behaviour through social interaction, trust building and promotional activities. Prior research has shown that social influence, such as peer recommendations, online reviews, influencer endorsements, and user-generated content, has a positive effect on consumers' purchase intentions by reducing information uncertainty and enhancing normative influence. Similarly, studies on trust mechanisms have found that platform credibility, seller reputation, perceived usefulness, and transaction security significantly reduce perceived risk and encourage online purchasing. Moreover, research on product promotion has shown that discounts, promotional campaigns, limited-time offers, coupons, and influencer marketing can effectively improve product awareness, create purchase intentions, and induce buying decisions.

Nevertheless, there are some limitations of the existing body of knowledge despite these contributions. First, most of the previous studies have focused on social influence, trust mechanism and product promotion as the separate determinants of consumer behaviour rather than studying their combined effects in one integrated framework. Secondly, the overwhelming majority of research is directed towards traditional e-commerce platforms, with little attention paid to social media commerce settings where interpersonal interaction, community engagement and user-generated content play a joint role in

influencing purchase decisions. Third, empirical evidence focusing specifically on Generation Z consumers, who are the most active users of social media commerce, remains limited, particularly across multiple social media platforms. More importantly, past studies mainly focus on purchase intention and only a few studies have investigated actual purchase decisions using comprehensive structural models.

Considering these research gaps, this study proposes an integrated conceptual framework based on Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Theory, Social Influence Theory, and Trust Theory to examine the combined influence of social influence, trust mechanisms, and product promotion on the purchasing decisions of Generation Z consumers on YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. This study employs Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to analyze data collected from 384 Generation Z respondents and provide empirical evidence for the relative importance of these determinants. Thus, the research contributes to the extant literature by offering a detailed explanation of purchasing behaviour of Generation Z in social media commerce and practical implications for marketers and platform managers who are seeking to improve consumer engagement and facilitate sustainable platform growth.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Conceptional Framework

The analytical framework proposed in this study was built through the combination of existing literature with established consumer behavior theories. The main theoretical foundation of this study is the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory, which explains how external environmental stimuli impact consumers' internal psychological states and subsequently impact consumers' behavioral responses. Social Influence and Product Promotion are external stimuli that consumers are exposed to through social media platforms, and Trust Mechanisms are the internal cognitive and emotional evaluations of consumers in social commerce. Eventually, these psychological responses influence the behavioral response, which is the Purchase Intention of Generation Z consumers.

The proposed framework is also based on the Social Influence Theory and Trust Theory. Social Influence Theory posits that interactions with peers, influencers and online communities significantly impact people and therefore social influence is an important factor in the consumer decision-making process. According to Trust Theory, consumers are more likely to engage in online purchasing if consumers perceive social media platforms, online sellers, and product information as trustworthy. These theories fully explain the combined effect of social interaction, trust formation and promotional activity on purchase intention in social commerce.

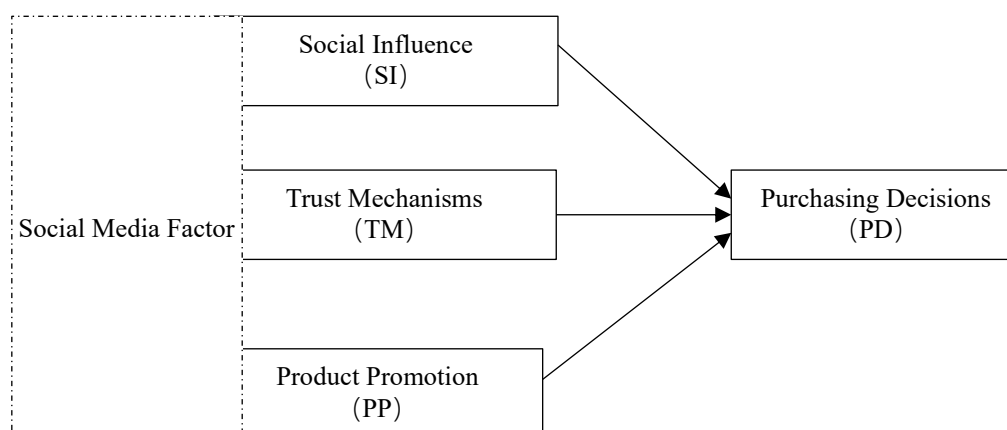


Figure 1. Proposed conceptional framework

Based on the theoretical background and previous empirical studies, this study develops an integrated conceptual framework in which Social Influence, Trust Mechanisms and Product Promotion are the independent variables affecting the Purchasing Decisions of Generation Z consumers in figure 1.

Participants

The target population was Generation Z consumers who had made a recent purchase on YouTube, TikTok, or Instagram. Generation Z was operationalized as those born between the years 1995 and 2010. However, for the purpose of research ethics, the final sample consisted of only those respondents who were 18 years or older at the time of data collection. To qualify, respondents had to have used all three social media platforms, made at least one purchase related to social media during the third quarter of 2025, between July 1 and September 30, and spent over US\$500 in total during that period. The criteria were designed to ensure that participants possessed adequate recent and relevant experience to judge social influence, trust mechanisms, product promotion, and purchasing decisions in social media contexts. The probability of recall bias was also reduced by limiting the reference period to the last three months.

It was collaborated with promotional agencies in China, Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore that partner with YouTube, TikTok and Instagram to recruit participants. These agencies assisted in identifying potentially eligible users from their existing consumer databases and disseminated the research invitation. The users' contact details were not passed directly to the research team prior to consent to protect personal information. First, potential participants were given a brief description of the study, including its purpose, eligibility requirements, expected time to complete, voluntary nature, and arrangements for data confidentiality.

Selection was done in a two step procedure. Potential respondents first answered a number of screening questions on their year of birth, country of residence, platform use, recent purchase experience and total spending. The eligible sampling pool was derived from respondents who met all inclusion criteria. Then participants were randomly chosen from this pool by using computer-generated random numbers. Where possible selection was conducted separately across countries and platforms to reduce the risk of respondent bias in a single market or platform dominating the sample.

Selected participants were contacted through the built-in messaging functions of the relevant social media platforms and asked to complete an electronic questionnaire. Before the main questionnaire, each participant had to read the participant information statement and provide electronic informed consent. Participation was voluntary and participants could withdraw at any point prior to submission of answers without penalty. Participants were asked to fill the questionnaire individually and to give only one response. The analytical dataset did not contain personally identifiable information. After collection, the questionnaires were screened for completeness, duplicate submissions, inconsistent responses to the eligibility questions, excessively short completion times, and patterned answering.

Responses failing these quality-control checks were excluded. A total of 384 valid questionnaires were retained for the final quantitative analysis. After submission, each participant received an automated thank-you message. No further contact was made unless the participant had separately agreed to receive information about the research results.

Instruments

Data was gathered using a standardised survey in the current research. In the survey questionnaire there were dual sections. In the primary section, data regarding the range of birthdays of the participants, their gender, social media usage, country of residence, and purchasing ability was gathered. In the second section, which concentrated on the content of the research, there were three independent variables namely Social Influence, Trust Mechanisms, and Product Promotion along with one dependent variable called Purchasing Decisions. The three indicators under the Social Influence category were Informational Influence, Normative Influence, and Product Attributes Influence. On the other hand, the three indicators of Trust Mechanisms comprise Ease of Use, and Risk, Perceived Usefulness. The three indicators of Product Promotion include Promotional Strategy, Promotional Mindset, and Internal Reference Price.

This study evaluates using the Likert Five-Point Scale. Based on their particular circumstances,

respondents must rank their responses from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

The measurement items and their indicators were adapted from previous studies to ensure content validity. Table 1 shows the constructs, measurement indicators, and the references that support their use in this study.

Table 1. Measurement scales

Research Factors		Indicator Details	References
Social Media Factor (SMF)	Social Influence (SI)	Informational Influence Normative Influence Product Attributes Influence	[20]
	Trust Mechanisms (TM)	Perceived Usefulness Perceived Convenience Perceived Risk	[8][21]
	Product Promotion (PP)	Promotional Strategy Promotional Mindset Internal Reference Price	[1][2]
Purchasing Decisions (PD)		Recommend Ability Frequency of Purchase Platform Usage Longevity Desire to Purchase Goods	[15]

A pilot survey was done to ensure questionnaire validity and reliability. The research team chose 100 target group respondents for the pilot study. After removing invalid responses, the study team had 96 valid surveys. 96 valid questionnaires for reliability were analysed. The Cronbach's α values for all construct measures exceeded the consensus norm of 0.70. The study shows that the measurement methods utilised internally consistent and reliable, making them eligible for the survey.

Sampling and Data Gathering

Based on data on social media users, globally media user base has now reached 4.95 billion people. Among them, China has 1.071 billion social media users, Malaysia has over 8 million users, Indonesia has 139 million users, and Singapore has 5.79 million users. Considering the demographics of Gen Z, the overall potential number of respondents within the study area (that is, potential respondents among the Generation Z that satisfy the requirements of this research) is expected to be about 300 million. Following the traditional methodology for estimating the sample size, the resulting statistically significant sample size should be 384 for this research.

The original plan of this study assumed collecting data from 500 people. However, because this survey was conducted online, there were several participants who did not read the introductory message; in addition, some people were willing to participate in the survey but did not manage to complete the questionnaire within September 20 and 30, 2025. After eliminating those cases, the actual number of respondents was 430. Subsequently, the research team performed data cleansing and analysis of the questionnaires, and the total number of valid cases turned out to be 384. Thus, this sample size satisfies the requirement set forth for achieving statistical significance. The current study demonstrates that the data collected in this study have high validity and rigorousness.

Data Analysis

For testing the scale reliability and validity, Cronbach's α , CR, and AVE, using SPSS was calculated. Further, the EFA test was performed and data appropriateness was checked with KMO and Sphericity (Bartlett's). Later, all the constructs in the survey were checked for discriminant validity, that is, whether there were any correlations between latent variables based on Pearson Correlation Analysis. Finally, SEM model was created and path analysis was performed.

STUDY OUTCOMES

Sample Analysis

In this study, 384 survey responses were considered valid, taking into account several attributes of respondents including the range of date of birth, gender, favorite social media sites, nationality, and expenses.

The demographic characteristics of the respondents were analysed to get a picture of the sample composition. Table 2 displays the respondent profile by age, gender, preferred social media platform, country of residence, and spending level.

Table 2. Sample characteristics analysis

Characteristics	Classification Item	Sample Size	Percentage
Date of Birth Range	1995–2000 years	103	26.8%
	2001-2005 years	139	36.2%
	2006-2010 years	142	37.0%
Gender	Male	154	40.1%
	Female	230	59.9%
Popular Social Media Platforms	YouTube	98	25.5%
	TikTok	154	40.1%
	Instagram	132	34.4%
Country of Residence	China	137	35.7%
	Malaysia	89	23.2%
	Indonesia	102	26.6%
	Singapore	56	14.6%
Spending Limit	500-1000USD	127	33.1%
	1001-2000USD	107	27.9%
	2001-5000USD	94	24.5%
	Over 5,001 USD	56	14.6%

Generation Z is defined as the generation of individuals who were born from 1995 to 2010. In the current sample population, Generation Z respondents who were born from 2006 to 2010 represented the majority group, accounting for 37.0%.

Regarding gender composition, there were more female participants who accounted for 59.9%. Analysis Results show that women might have a greater tendency to engage in online shopping through social media platforms compared to their male counterparts.

Regarding their favorite social media platform, there were more respondents who used TikTok rather than Instagram; however, there was a lesser number who engaged in online shopping on YouTube. Analysis Results reveal that TikTok has the highest number of users in online shopping and is highly influential as a social media platform.

With respect to respondent distribution by nation, more participants came from China and Indonesia. This can be qualified to the huge amount of internet users and social media subscribers in those countries.

As for spending level, those spending between \$500 and \$1000 on online platforms represented the majority group. According to Analysis Results, the use of social media in online shopping entails moderate levels of spending.

Construct Validity and Reliability

The present study made use of SPSS as the software for analyzing the validity and reliability of measurement instruments. Measurement scales were observed using Average Variance Extracted (AVE),

Cronbach's α and Composite Reliability (CR).

Factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were used to assess the reliability and convergent validity of the measurement model. Results are presented in table 3.

Table 3. Validity and reliability test table

Factors	Variable	Factor Loading	Cronbach's α	CR Value	AVE Value
SI	SI1	.857	.845	.900	.751
	SI2	.852			
	SI3	.890			
TM	TM1	.837	.862	.887	.723
	TM2	.828			
	TM3	.885			
PP	PP1	.867	.883	.910	.771
	PP2	.833			
	PP3	.931			
PD	PD1	.776	.858	.879	.645
	PD2	.816			
	PD3	.809			
	PD4	.812			

The results indicate satisfactory reliability and convergent validity, as all Cronbach's alpha, CR, and AVE values exceed the recommended thresholds.

Questionnaire internal constancy was determined using Cronbach's α for 13 questions of importance in the study. Research reveals that Cronbach's α scores for each scale were all greater than the academic minimum of .70, with values ranging from .845 to .883. Internal consistency of the questionnaire is good.

Internal consistency for the questionnaire was established for 13 crucial questions through Cronbach's α test. Findings show that Cronbach's α scores for each scale surpassed the academic minimum value of 0.70, with values lying between 0.845 and 0.883. Internal consistency of the questionnaire is good. Analysis results reveal that all factors have good internal consistency and stability, providing a solid basis for later Structural Equation Modeling analysis.

Questionnaire internal consistency was analyzed for 13 important questions through Cronbach's α test. Research reveals that Cronbach's α scores for each scale exceeded the academic minimum of 0.70, with values lying between 0.845 and 0.883. Questionnaire internal consistency is good. The measurement items possess strong convergent validity, which adequately reflects the underlying constructs of the subjects.

Factor Extraction and Interpretation

The current study utilized Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) in measuring dimensions of the scale latent variable. At the onset, Bartlett's sphericity and KMO test was done to determine the data is suitable for factor analysis. Meanwhile, the cumulative variance explained by the resultant factor structure formed an important indicator for explanatory influence in the analysis.

The construct validity of the measurement model was examined by conducting an exploratory factor analysis (EFA). The factor loadings together with the KMO statistic, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, eigenvalues and cumulative variance explained are given in table 4.

Table 4. Validity test outcomes for the Z generation social media consumer purchase decision scale

Factor	SI	TM	PP	PD
SI1				.857
SI2				.852
SI3				.890
TM1			.837	
TM2			.828	
TM3			.885	
PP1		.867		
PP2		.833		
PP3		.931		
PD1	.776			
PD2	.816			
PD3	.809			
PD4	.812			
KMO	.815			
χ^2	2733.468			
df	78			
Sig.	.000			
λ	4.893	1.989	1.665	1.457
Variance Percentage(%)	37.64	15.298	12.808	11.205
Cumulative Variance Percentage(%)	37.64	52.938	65.746	76.951

Measuring indicates KMO=0.815, which exceeds the standard of academics of 0.80. Analysis Results indicate existence of common factors for items in scale, representing that factor analysis is suitable.

In Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, $\chi^2=2733.468$, $df=78$, $p=0.000$. Thus, factor analysis is considered appropriate since it is statistically significant and thus, the null hypothesis of independence of variables cannot be accepted.

Analysis Results for Cumulative Variance Contribution indicate that common factors obtained from factor analysis cumulatively account for 76.95% of variance. High explanatory ability reveals that the scale consists of the essential features of the targeted concept.

Correlation Analysis

Table 5. Correlation analysis results among variables

Factor	SI	TM	PP	PD
SI	r	1	0.250**	.197**
	significance(2-tailed)		0.000	.000
	N	384	384	384
TM	r	0.250**	1	.329**
	significance(2-tailed)	0.000		.000
	N	384	384	384
PP	r	0.197**	0.329**	1
	significance(2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	
	N	384	384	384
PD	r	0.252**	0.429**	.387**
	significance(2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	.000
	N	384	384	384
**. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).				
*. The correlation was significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).				

Correlation analysis for this study was done via Pearson Correlation Analysis where examine latent

factors of linear relationships. Core concepts such as Social Influence, Trust Mechanisms, Product Promotion, and Purchasing Decision were critically analyzed.

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to test the relationships between the study variables. Table 5 presents the levels of significance and correlation coefficients.

The findings indicate statistically significant positive correlations among all study variables, providing preliminary support for the proposed hypotheses.

Correlation analysis reveals statistically significant associations between all variables. Correlation Coefficient and Significance Levels are as follows: There is a significant positive relationship between social influence and consumers' purchasing behavior ($r = 0.252$, $p < 0.001$). There is a significant positive relationship between Trust Mechanisms and Purchasing Decisions ($r = 0.429$, $p < 0.001$). Product Promotion and Purchasing Decisions are positively associated ($r = 0.387$, $p < 0.001$).

Common Method Bias Analysis

Since all data were collected using a single questionnaire, Harman's single-factor test was conducted to assess common method bias. The findings are reported in table 6.

Table 6. Common method bias analysis using harman's single-factor test

Indicator	Result	Threshold	Conclusion
Number of factors with eigenvalues > 1	4	>1	Acceptable
Variance explained by the first factor	37.640%	<50%	No significant common method bias

The first unrotated factor accounted for 37.640% of the total variance, which is below the recommended threshold of 50%. Therefore, common method bias is unlikely to have substantially influenced the results of this study.

Developing Structural Equation Model

To assess the relationships between various variables theoretically, the current study made use of AMOS to create a structural equation model. Figure 2 illustrates the estimated structural model used for hypothesis testing.

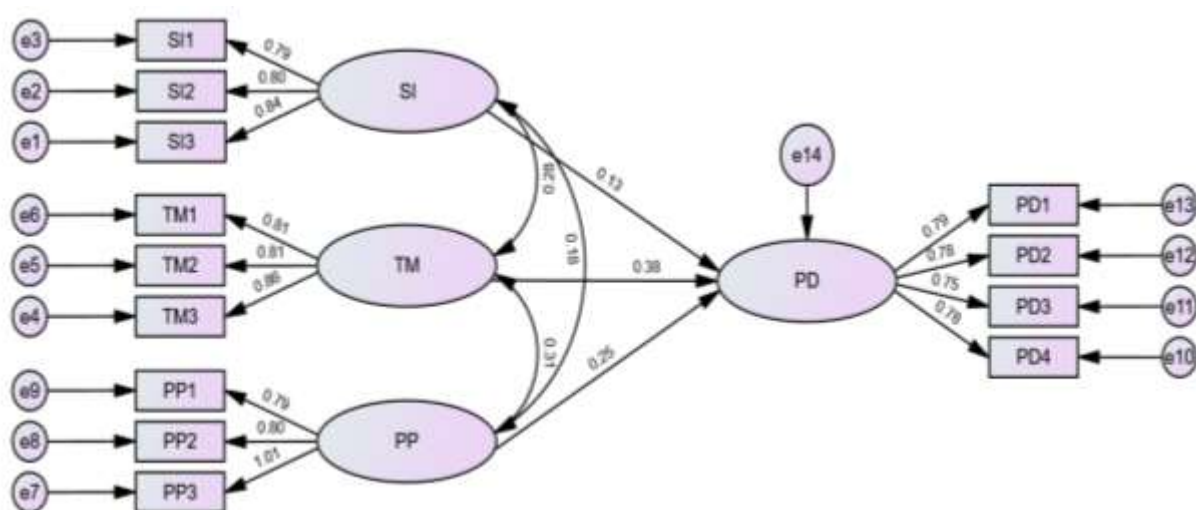


Figure 2. Structural equation model

The structural model demonstrates significant positive relationships among the constructs and provides the basis for hypothesis testing.

In addition, this paper used a range of goodness-of-fit measures to assess the fit of structural equation models. It was helped to confirm scientifically that the models have been constructed appropriately and that the results of the study can be trusted.

The adequacy of the structural model was evaluated using several goodness-of-fit indices. The model fit statistics are reported in table 7.

Table 7. Structural equation model (SEM) fit indices (N=384)

Measurement Model	X^2/df	GFI	AGFI	NFI	CFI	RMSEA
Evaluation Indicators	<3	>0.90	>0.90	>0.90	>0.90	≤0.08
Outcome Modelling	1.433	0.968	0.950	0.969	0.991	0.034
Test Results	Consistent	Consistent	Consistent	Consistent	Consistent	Consistent

The structural model test fit was fully performed. With regard to the ratio X^2/df , the value obtained was 1.433, which is ideal considering it lies between 1 and 3. Regarding absolute fit, the values of GFI and AGFI were 0.968 and 0.950 respectively, above the cut-off point of 0.90. For incremental fit, NFI value was 0.969 and the CFI value was 0.991, well above the minimum requirement of 0.90. Notably, CFI indicates how good is the data fit in the model. In addition, the high RMSEA value of 0.034 indicates good fit accuracy. This was obtained through dividing by a tough threshold of 0.05. Overall, all the fit indices indicate that there is a very high structural validity for the proposed model.

Hypothesis Testing

The proposed hypotheses were tested through path analysis within the SEM framework. Table 8 summarizes the path coefficients, critical ratios, p-values, effect sizes, and the decisions of the hypotheses. Among the three predictors, Trust Mechanisms exhibited the strongest positive influence on Purchasing Decisions, followed by Product Promotion and Social Influence.

Table 8 presents the structural model results for hypothesis testing. All three structural paths are positive and statistically significant. SI → PD has a positive but relatively small effect on PD ($\beta = 0.153$, C.R. = 2.349, $p = 0.019$), supporting H1. TM → PD exhibits the strongest positive influence on PD ($\beta = 0.379$, C.R. = 6.369, $p < 0.001$), supporting H2. Likewise, PP → PD has a significant positive effect on PD ($\beta = 0.240$, C.R. = 4.936, $p < 0.001$), supporting H3.

Table 8. Structural model results for hypothesis validation

Hypothesis	Structural Path	Path Coefficient (β)	S.E.	Critical Ratio (C.R.)	p-value	Effect Size	Decision
H1	SI → PD	0.153	0.065	2.349	0.019	Small	Supported
H2	TM → PD	0.379	0.059	6.369	< 0.001	Moderate-Strong	Supported
H3	PP → PD	0.240	0.049	4.936	< 0.001	Moderate	Supported

Model Explanatory Power

The coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to assess the structural model's explanatory ability. Table 9 presents the proportion of variance explained in the dependent construct.

Overall, all proposed hypotheses are supported, with TM → PD emerging as the most influential predictor, followed by PP → PD and SI → PD.

Table 9. Model explanatory power (R^2)

Endogenous Construct	R^2	Interpretation
PD	0.322	The predictors (SI $\rightarrow$ PD, TM $\rightarrow$ PD, and PP $\rightarrow$ PD) jointly explain 32.2% of the variance in PD, indicating moderate explanatory power.

The model explains 32.2% of the variance in PD ($R^2 = 0.322$), indicating moderate explanatory power.

DISCUSSION

Discussion of Social Influence

The results reveal that Social Influence positively affects Generation Z consumers' purchasing decisions in social media commerce. This means that consumers increasingly rely on peer recommendations, online reviews and community interactions to evaluate products, especially in an information overload context. The results are in line with the findings of Mishra & Maity (2021) who showed that informational influence increases consumers' confidence in online purchasing [13]. Similarly, consumers with previous product experience are more susceptible to discussions about product attributes than traditional advertising. The results are theoretically consistent with Social Influence Theory, which suggests that behavioural choices of individuals are affected by their social networks.

Discussion of Trust Mechanisms

Trust Mechanisms proved to be one of the strongest predictors of purchasing decisions. This finding indicates that the Generation Z consumers are highly concerned with the platform's credibility, transaction security, and seller's reliability prior to making purchase decisions. Due to the greater uncertainty of social commerce compared to traditional retailing, trust can effectively reduce perceived risk and facilitate online transactions. The results are consistent with the findings of [6] who concluded that trust significantly reduces perceived purchasing risk, and [14] who found that a merchant's reputation indirectly strengthens the intention to purchase through trust formation. These findings provide additional support for Trust Theory by demonstrating that trust is an important psychological mechanism that explains the relationship between social commerce environments and purchasing behaviour.

Discussion of Product Promotion

Product Promotion also had a positive effect on purchase decision. The finding suggests that not only do promotional activities increase the visibility of products but also it was generated a sense of scarcity and urgency that leads to immediate purchasing behaviour. The outcome is consistent with well-executed promotion campaigns that considerably increase consumers' purchase intention. However, high promotion frequency can decrease consumers perceived promotional value and impair the effectiveness of the campaign. So, firms have to strike a delicate balance between the intensity of promotions and perceived exclusivity to maximize long-term customer engagement.

Theoretical Implications

The present study makes several theoretical contributions. Firstly, it enriches the literature of consumer behaviour in social commerce by integrating social influence, trust mechanism and product promotion into one analytical framework. Second, the findings provide empirical support to Social Influence Theory and Trust Theory in explaining the purchasing behaviour of Generation Z consumers. Third, the study contributes to the existing literature by identifying that social interaction, psychological trust and marketing activities jointly influence the purchasing decision in social commerce rather than any individual factor.

Practical Implications

The results have practical implications for operators of social media platforms and online retailers. Businesses should enhance community engagement, promote genuine user-generated reviews, boost transaction security, and deploy personalised promotional campaigns. Platform managers should also have transparent seller verification systems to increase consumer trust and reduce perceived risk of purchase.

Limitations

While this study provides theoretical and practical insights into consumer purchasing behaviour in social media commerce, some limitations should be acknowledged. Firstly, the sample was restricted to 384 Generation Z respondents, and although random sampling was used, the sample may not represent the diverse population of social media users, thereby limiting the generalizability of the findings. Secondly, the narrow focus on Generation Z impedes the generalisability of the findings to other age groups, as consumers of different generations may differ in their social media usage patterns, trust formation, responses to promotional activities and purchasing behaviours. Third, a cross-sectional questionnaire design was adopted in this study that cannot fully explore the changes of purchasing behaviour over time. It cannot also establish causal relationships owing to the nature of the data collected at a single point of time. Future research should increase the sample size, include respondents from various age groups and cultural backgrounds, and apply longitudinal, experimental or mixed-method approaches such as qualitative interviews to achieve a more holistic understanding of consumer behaviour in social media commerce. In addition, future research could investigate other factors that could impact the study, such as electronic word of mouth, influencer credibility, perceived risk, platform engagement, and privacy concerns in order to further extend the proposed research framework and improve its explanatory power.

Future research should compare different countries and cultural contexts, investigate various social media platforms, and examine additional variables such as influencer credibility, electronic word of mouth, privacy concerns, and perceived enjoyment. Longitudinal and experimental research designs are also recommended to establish causal relationships and examine changes in consumer behaviour over time.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the effects of Social Influence, Trust Mechanisms, and Product Promotion on Generation Z consumers' purchase decision in social media commerce using survey data collected from 384 valid respondents. Based on multiple regression analysis and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) using SPSS and AMOS, the proposed conceptual framework was empirically supported. The overall structural model demonstrated an acceptable model fit ($\chi^2/df = 1.433$, GFI=0.968, AGFI=0.950, NFI = 0.969, CFI = 0.991, RMSEA = 0.034). Correlation analysis revealed significant positive associations between Social Influence and Purchase Decision ($r = 0.252$, $p < 0.001$), Trust Mechanisms and Purchase Decision ($r = 0.429$, $p < 0.001$), and Product Promotion and Purchase Decision ($r = 0.387$, $p < 0.001$). These findings suggest that higher levels of social influence, trust, and product promotion are associated with stronger purchase intention among Generation Z consumers. Among these factors, Trust Mechanisms exhibited the strongest standardized effect, suggesting that consumer confidence in platform credibility, transaction security, and seller reliability is the most influential determinant of Generation Z consumers' purchasing decisions in social media retail environments. The results add to the emerging literature on social commerce by offering empirical evidence that consumer purchase intention is jointly determined by social interaction, trust formation and promotional activities. The proposed framework extends the previous studies by integrating these determinants in a single model, providing a more comprehensive explanation of Generation Z consumer behaviour in digital commerce. From a managerial perspective, the results indicate that social media platforms and online retailers should improve community engagement, encourage authentic user-generated content, increase platform transparency and transaction security, and implement personalized promotional tactics. Initiatives like this can help build consumer trust, drive engagement and ultimately improve purchasing performance and long-term platform sustainability.

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