

The Mediating Effect of Trust on the Relationship between Online Reviews and Impulse Buying Among Gen Z on Shopee Platform: Conceptual Paper

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i9/22668>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i9/22668

Published Date: 21 September 2024

Abstract

This concept paper proposes a study on the mediating role of consumer trust in the relationship between online reviews and impulse buying among Generation Z (Gen Z) users on Shopee, a leading e-commerce platform in Malaysia. Using the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theoretical framework, the study will explore how online reviews affect consumer trust and impulse buying behaviours within this demographic. The focus will be on how consumer trust mediates the impact of online reviews on impulse buying. The rapid growth of e-commerce has made online reviews a key factor in shaping consumer behaviour. For Gen Z—tech-savvy individuals who heavily rely on digital platforms—these reviews significantly influence their purchasing decisions. Shopee is a major player in Malaysia's e-commerce market, making it an ideal context for this study. The research aims to develop a deeper understanding of the interaction between online reviews, consumer trust, and impulse buying. By examining how consumer trust mediates this relationship, the study will offer both theoretical and practical insights. Theoretically, it will enhance understanding of the dynamics between online reviews and consumer trust. Practically, it will provide actionable recommendations for Shopee and similar platforms to optimize strategies for leveraging online reviews to build trust and drive impulse purchases among Gen Z consumers. The findings are expected to contribute valuable insights into trust dynamics in online environments and improve e-commerce strategies.

Keywords: Customer Trust, Online Customer Reviews, Online Impulse Buying, Social Commerce

Introduction

Technological advancements have enabled the shift from traditional e-commerce to social commerce by leveraging social media for online transactions, thereby enhancing consumption behaviours. Social commerce, an evolution of e-commerce, utilizes social media

platforms—such as Shopee—to facilitate the buying and selling of products and services through interactive and user-generated content (Xiang et al., 2022). In the past two years, social commerce has become the leading shopping platform. Its popularity is driven by global trends involving engaging short videos and trending music. This trend allows merchants to creatively showcase product reviews through both short and long in-feed videos on platforms like Shopee, enabling users to make direct purchases and potentially fostering impulse buying behaviour.

In the digital age, both sales transactions and marketing strategies are evolving. A significant shift from traditional marketing is the rise of digital marketing, which is essential for competing in the modern landscape. The role of digital marketing has become increasingly important as part of an organization's or company's strategy. Today, online customer reviews on social networks, especially on platforms like Shopee, are viewed as powerful marketing tools. They expose consumers to various consumption experiences, aid in decision-making, and relay consumer feedback to companies. Content creators and businesses alike leverage this content for promotional purposes, which helps sellers boost sales, increase views, and gain followers. Overall, the dynamics of social commerce are driven by social engagement, where individuals can act as sellers, consumers, content creators, and opinion leaders (Wang & Xie, 2020).

Generation (Gen Z), comprising individuals born between 1997 and 2012, represents a pivotal consumer segment in the digital age. This cohort, characterized by its digital nativity and profound engagement with technology, has increasingly become a focal point for marketers and e-commerce platforms. In Malaysia, Shopee stands out as a leading e-commerce platform that effectively caters to this demographic, offering a comprehensive social commerce experience that integrates online shopping with social interaction. Platforms like Shopee leverage user-generated content, such as online reviews, to enhance the shopping experience, build trust, and drive purchasing decisions. For Gen Z, who are known for their reliance on peer opinions and digital feedback, online reviews play a crucial role in influencing their purchasing behaviours. As digital natives, Gen Z consumers are particularly adept at navigating online platforms and are highly responsive to the social proof provided by customer reviews. This demographic values transparency and authenticity, making online reviews a key component in their decision-making process. Consequently, understanding how online reviews impact consumer trust and impulse buying is essential for e-commerce platforms seeking to effectively engage this audience.

A significant outcome of social commerce is the rise of impulsive buying behaviours among online customers. On platforms like Shopee, users are exposed to online reviews that influence their purchasing decisions. These reviews provide valuable information that can not only facilitate future purchases but also prompt impulsive buying behaviours. The perceived value of online reviews plays a crucial role in shaping consumers' browsing habits and can enhance customer satisfaction by achieving desired goals. As a result, understanding the impact of online reviews on browsing and impulse buying is vital for brands and businesses aiming to drive sales (Astuti & Nindyaswar, 2022). Impulsive buying, characterized by unplanned and spontaneous purchases, has garnered increasing research attention, particularly in the context of online shopping (Mandolfo & Lamberti, 2021). Previous studies

indicate that the online shopping environment can trigger such impulsive behaviours (Gulfraz et al., 2022; Abdelsalam et al., 2020).

The rise of social media has significantly expanded the scope of online criticism, positioning it as a crucial and effective channel for information exchange. Research has highlighted the critical role of trust in establishing and maintaining social exchange relationships (Chen & Sriphon, 2020). In the realm of social commerce, where customer trust is paramount, online reviews become a vital element. These reviews impact consumer trust by offering insights into product or service quality, store reliability, and previous purchasing experiences (Alkhalifah, 2022). This is particularly important in the online shopping environment, where the complexity and variety of interactions, coupled with the potential for deceptive practices, make trust a key factor. According to Guo and Wu (2020), online customer reviews are a crucial source of information, helping consumers assess the quality of products and services. As consumer trust in online reviews increases, it can lead to impulse purchases based on these recommendations.

Online customer reviews have become crucial for modern consumers, significantly affecting their online purchasing behaviour. These reviews provide key information that can shape consumer decisions and have been shown to play a significant role in influencing online buying habits (Chen et al., 2020). Despite the recognized importance of online reviews, there is limited research on how these reviews might drive impulsive buying behaviour among consumers. It has been suggested that customer trust may regulate the impact of online reviews on impulsive purchasing (Lăzăroiu et al., 2020). Additionally, Moreno, Fabre, and Pasco (2022) proposed that customer trust can mediate the relationship between online reviews and impulse buying behaviour. In the context of social commerce, particularly on the Shopee platform, customer trust is a critical factor that influences impulsive buying.

Research on the impact of online customer reviews on impulse buying, mediated by customer trust, is crucial due to the significant role of customer trust. Online reviews can affect how customers perceive products and companies, and high levels of trust can enhance purchasing decisions and contribute to a company's success. Additionally, understanding the role of impulse buying in decision-making can influence customer choices. Investigating how online customer reviews impact impulse buying can provide valuable insights for companies, helping them to understand the factors that shape customer purchasing decisions and to craft more effective marketing strategies. In a competitive business environment, it is essential for companies to grasp how online reviews affect customer perceptions and purchasing behaviour. This research can assist companies in developing more competitive and effective marketing strategies by highlighting the influence of online reviews and customer trust on impulse buying.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Stimulus Organism Response (SOR) Theory

The significant role of online customer reviews in shaping purchase promotions and customer trust through mediation is highlighted. The Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory is a psychological framework used to understand and predict human behaviour across various contexts. This theory explores the interplay between external stimuli, internal processes, and

behavioural outcomes. It has been applied to various research areas, including marketing (Wu et al., 2020). However, there is a gap in research concerning the impact of recommendations and rewards as stimuli in recommendation systems within real-world online shopping environments. The SOR theory posits that external stimuli (stimulus) affect an individual's internal psychology (organism), which in turn shapes behavioural responses (response).

According to the SOR framework, consumer behaviour intentions are influenced by external factors, such as online customer reviews. The SOR concept refers to how external stimuli impact an individual's perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours (Han et al., 2022). In this theory, "stimulus" represents factors that trigger consumer perceptions and decision-making. "Organism" denotes the internal processes—primarily emotional and cognitive—that mediate between external stimuli and the individual's actions. In this study, customer trust serves as a key construct within this framework. The final element of the SOR theory is "response," where individuals react to stimuli according to specific behavioural patterns. The SOR model provides a systematic approach to understanding how an organism's response to the external environment affects its cognitive and psychological states (Bastos & Moore, 2021).

Online customer reviews and consumer trust

Impulse buying is significantly influenced by consumer behavior on platforms like Shopee. Han (2023) found that when consumers plan to make online purchases, they often seek to reduce their uncertainty by consulting online customer reviews related to electronic trading platforms, including Shopee. These reviews provide valuable insights from other users' experiences. Potential buyers also turn to online reviews to gather additional information about products beyond what is available directly on the platform. This approach helps alleviate their concerns and informs their purchasing decisions. Studies by Fahrozi et al. (2022), Han (2023), and Farki et al. (2016) support this, demonstrating that online customer reviews have a positive and significant impact on consumer trust.

H1: Online customer reviews have a positive impact on consumer trust.

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Research by Kim and Kim (2021) and Emeraldia and Kurniawati (2021) indicates that online customer reviews characterized by attractiveness and expertise positively influence consumer trust in a brand. Additionally, Racherla, Mandviwalla, and Connolly (2012) found that online product reviews can enhance consumer trust. Ek Styvén, Foster, and Wallström (2017) demonstrated that increased trust can lead to higher rates of impulse buying. Similarly, Han (2023) observed that greater trust among social media users correlates with increased impulse purchasing behavior. Moreno, Fabre, and Pasco (2021), also reported that online trust positively affects impulse buying. Lavenia and Erdiansyah (2022), further confirmed that online customer reviews boost trust and positively influence impulse purchases.

Additionally, Rachmat (2021), found that online product reviews can enhance consumer trust. Bao & Yang (2022), demonstrated that increased trust is associated with higher rates of impulse buying. Similarly, Han (2023), observed that greater trust among social

media users, including those on Shopee, correlates with increased impulse purchasing behaviour. Moreno, Fabre, and Pasco (2021) also reported that online trust positively affects impulse buying. Lavenia and Erdiansyah (2022) further confirmed that online customer reviews on platforms like Shopee boost trust and positively influence impulse purchases.

H2: Consumer trust has a positive impact on impulse buying.

Therefore, based on the existing literature and hypotheses detailed above, the research framework was developed as in Figure 1.

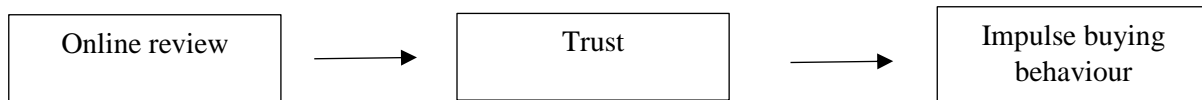


Figure 1: Research Framework

Methodology

This conceptual paper employs the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theoretical framework to explore the potential mediating role of consumer trust in the relationship between online reviews and impulse buying behaviour among Generation Z users on the Shopee platform. The paper synthesizes existing literature on consumer behaviour, online reviews, and trust, and proposes a conceptual model that illustrates how online reviews act as stimuli influencing consumer trust and, subsequently, impulse buying decisions. This model aims to provide a theoretical foundation for future empirical studies, offering a structured approach to understanding these relationships in the context of e-commerce platforms like Shopee.

Discussion and Limitation

This conceptual paper examines the potential mediating effect of consumer trust on the relationship between online reviews and impulse buying among Generation Z users on the Shopee platform. It stated that online customer reviews significantly influence both consumer trust and impulse buying behaviors, with trust acting as a key mediator in this dynamic. The paper contributes to the understanding of how online reviews, as a form of social proof, shape purchasing behaviors through the trust they engender in consumers. The theoretical foundation is grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, where online reviews serve as stimuli affecting consumers' internal states, particularly trust, which then drives their behavioral responses, such as impulse buying. Positive online reviews are theorized to enhance trust in the Shopee platform, thereby increasing the likelihood of impulse purchases.

However, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the scope of this study is confined to Generation Z users, which may limit the applicability of the theoretical framework to other demographic groups or platforms. Consumer behavior varies across age groups and e-commerce environments, potentially requiring adaptations of the proposed model. Second, the conceptualization of key constructs such as "trust" and "impulse buying" is based on existing literature, which may differ in definition and operationalization across studies. These variations could influence the theoretical assumptions and outcomes of this research. Third,

the study focuses exclusively on the Shopee platform, which may not fully represent the diversity of online retail environments. Platform-specific features or regional differences could impact the generalizability of the proposed relationships. Finally, the rapid evolution of digital marketing practices and technology could affect the relevance of the proposed theoretical model. Future research should consider these dynamics and explore the adaptability of the framework in different contexts.

In summary, while this paper theorizes that consumer trust serves as a critical mediator in the relationship between online reviews and impulse buying among Generation Z users on Shopee, the limitations outlined suggest areas for further empirical research. These investigations will be essential for testing the hypotheses and exploring the practical implications of the theoretical insights for e-commerce platforms.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In summary, this conceptual paper examines how consumer trust functions as a mediator in the interaction between Generation Z Shopee platform users' impulse buying behaviour and online reviews. The results imply that consumer trust is influenced by internet reviews, which has a substantial impact on impulsive purchasing decisions. An organized method of comprehending these dynamics has been made possible by using the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theoretical framework, which emphasizes the significance of customer trust as a mediator in the context of social commerce.

Positive internet evaluations boost consumer trust, which in turn encourages more impulsive purchases, according to the evaluated research. This is in accordance with other studies that highlight the importance of trust in online shopping contexts, especially for Gen Z and other digital natives who are greatly impacted by user-generated material and peer opinions (Christin, 2023; Hilal, 2022). The study emphasizes that the chance of impulsive purchases rises with customer trust in online reviews, indicating that e-commerce sites such as Shopee might take advantage of this relationship to build consumer confidence and boost sales.

Several suggestions can be made to deal with the ramifications of these discoveries. The administration and display of online reviews should be given top priority by e-commerce platforms to guarantee their authenticity and transparency. To improve the legitimacy of reviews, this can be accomplished by putting in place verification methods for reviewers or by promoting confirmed purchases (Dong et al., 2018). According to Handayani et al. (2022) and Rosania (2023), marketing strategies ought to prioritize the prominent display of positive reviews and testimonials on product pages to optimize their influence on consumer trust and impulsive buying. Third, to build community and trust among users, platforms should interact with users through interactive features that facilitate real-time feedback and responses to reviews ("The effects of online consumer reviews on impulse buying behaviour toward trust of the live streaming platform and interactivity in the context of live streaming", 2023). Finally, more empirical study is required to evaluate the suggested model across various e-commerce platforms and demographics. This will allow for a deeper understanding of the dynamics of changing online customer behaviour (Mahliza, 2020).

In conclusion, e-commerce success depends on the interaction of online evaluations, customer trust, and impulse buying, especially when it comes to Generation Z consumers on sites like Shopee. E-commerce platforms can improve consumer engagement and satisfaction by improving their marketing strategies and by comprehending and maximizing these interactions.

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