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Purchase Decision Formation Among Generation Z in TikTok Social Commerce

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian mengenai pembentukan keputusan pembelian dalam *social commerce* sebagian besar menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif yang mengkaji hubungan antarvariabel individual, seperti *electronic word-of-mouth* (e-WOM), kepercayaan, persepsi harga, dan pemasaran melalui *influencer*. Akibatnya, perhatian yang diberikan terhadap bagaimana konsumen memaknai berbagai pertimbangan tersebut secara kolektif selama pengalaman belanja mereka masih terbatas. Padahal, hanya sedikit studi yang secara kualitatif mengeksplorasi bagaimana konsumen memaknai pertimbangan-pertimbangan tersebut saat membentuk keputusan pembelian. Studi ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana konsumen Generasi Z menimbang berbagai faktor pembelian dalam lingkungan *social commerce* TikTok. Pendekatan kualitatif diterapkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan sembilan konsumen Generasi Z yang memiliki pengalaman membeli produk melalui TikTok Shop. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik untuk mengidentifikasi pertimbangan utama yang muncul selama pengalaman belanja partisipan. Temuan studi ini mengidentifikasi empat pertimbangan yang saling terkait dalam pembentukan keputusan pembelian: konten yang dipersonalisasi, kepercayaan yang terbentuk melalui *electronic word-of-mouth*, pertimbangan nilai, serta pemberian hadiah bagi diri sendiri (*self-reward*) sebagai pembenaran emosional atas pembelian. Alih-alih menjelaskan keputusan pembelian sebagai hasil dari variabel-variabel yang terpisah, studi ini menunjukkan bahwa konsumen Generasi Z secara aktif menimbang berbagai faktor sebelum mengambil keputusan pembelian dalam lingkungan *social commerce* TikTok.

Kata kunci: **Social Commerce; TikTok Shop; Generasi Z; Pembentukan Keputusan Pembelian; Electronic Word-of-Mouth**

ABSTRACT

Research on purchase decision formation in social commerce has predominantly adopted quantitative approaches that examine the relationships among individual variables, including electronic word-of-mouth, trust, price perception, and influencer marketing. Consequently, limited attention has been given to how consumers interpret these considerations collectively throughout their purchasing experiences. However, limited studies have qualitatively explored how these considerations are interpreted by consumers during their purchase decision formation This study explores how Generation Z consumers negotiate multiple purchase considerations within TikTok's social commerce environment. A qualitative approach was employed by conducting semi-structured interviews with nine Generation Z consumers who had experience purchasing products through TikTok Shop. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify the key considerations emerging throughout participants' shopping experiences. The findings identify four interconnected

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considerations characterizing purchase decision formation: personalized content, negotiated trust through electronic word-of-mouth, value considerations, and self-reward as an emotional purchase justification. Rather than explaining purchase decisions as the outcome of isolated variables, this study demonstrates that Generation Z actively negotiates multiple considerations before forming purchase decisions within TikTok's social commerce environment.
Keyword: ***Social Commerce; TikTok Shop; Generation Z; Purchase Decision Formation; Electronic Word-of-Mouth***

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has transformed the way consumers search for information, interact with sellers, and make purchase decisions. One of the most significant developments is the emergence of social commerce**,** which integrates commercial activities with social media platforms, allowing consumers to discover products, interact with other users, and complete transactions within the same digital environment (Wang et al., 2022). Rather than separating social interaction from commercial activities, social commerce enables consumers to engage in product discovery, evaluation, and purchasing within a single online ecosystem. Among various social commerce platforms, TikTok has experienced substantial growth by combining short-form videos, personalized content recommendations, interactive features, and integrated shopping services into one platform. Rather than functioning solely as an entertainment application, TikTok has become an important shopping space where product discovery and purchasing activities occur simultaneously.

Generation Z has become one of the most active user groups within TikTok's social commerce ecosystem. As digital natives, they are accustomed to consuming information through short-form videos and interacting with online communities before making purchasing decisions. Unlike conventional online shopping, where consumers typically search for products based on existing needs, TikTok enables users to encounter products incidentally through algorithmically personalized content presented on the *For You Page* (FYP). Features such as live streaming, product demonstrations, customer reviews, and interactive comment sections further enrich consumers' shopping experiences and create new ways of engaging with products before purchase (Boeker & Urman, 2022).

Previous studies have examined purchase decisions within social commerce from various perspectives. Existing research has explored the roles of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), influencer marketing, price perception, trust, and promotional strategies in encouraging consumers' purchasing behavior. Research

consistently demonstrates that e-WOM quality and consumer trust significantly influence purchase intention in social commerce environments (Prasetio & Aulia, 2024). However, these studies predominantly employ quantitative approaches that examine relationships between individual variables. Consequently, purchase decision formation is often explained as the outcome of isolated factors rather than as a process shaped by multiple interconnected considerations experienced by consumers during their shopping journey.

Although previous findings have demonstrated the importance of various social commerce features, relatively few studies have qualitatively explored how Generation Z consumers construct purchase decisions by negotiating these different considerations simultaneously**.** In practice, consumers are simultaneously exposed to personalized content, user-generated reviews, promotional offers, and emotional experiences rather than encountering these factors separately. Understanding how these considerations are interpreted within consumers' lived experiences remains an important area of inquiry that has received relatively limited attention in qualitative social commerce research.

Therefore, this study aims to explore how Generation Z consumers form purchase decisions within TikTok's social commerce environment through their lived shopping experiences. Accordingly, this study explores how Generation Z consumers negotiate personalized content, electronic word-of-mouth, value considerations, and emotional motivations while forming purchase decisions within TikTok's social commerce environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Commerce

Social commerce refers to the integration of social media and electronic commerce, enabling consumers to interact, exchange information, and complete purchasing activities within the same digital platform. Unlike conventional e-commerce, social commerce emphasizes user interaction, content sharing, and community engagement as integral parts of the purchasing process. (Attar et al., 2022) explain that social commerce combines commercial transactions with social interaction, allowing consumers to obtain product information not only from sellers but also from other users through reviews, recommendations, comments, and direct communication.

TikTok represents one of the fastest-growing social commerce platforms by integrating entertainment, social interaction, and online shopping into a single ecosystem. Its recommendation algorithm, *For You Page* (FYP), live streaming,

comment features, and integrated shopping services create a highly personalized shopping environment. Rather than actively searching for products, consumers may encounter products incidentally through personalized content that matches their interests (Attar et al., 2022). Consequently, purchasing activities on TikTok are closely intertwined with consumers' everyday digital experiences.

Electronic Word-of-Mouth in Social Commerce

Electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) refers to opinions, experiences, and evaluations shared by consumers through digital platforms regarding products or services. Unlike traditional word-of-mouth, e-WOM reaches a wider audience and remains accessible over time through online reviews, ratings, comments, and user-generated content.

Within social commerce, e-WOM functions not only as a source of product information but also as a mechanism for reducing uncertainty before purchase. Consumers frequently consult reviews, comments, and other users' experiences to validate product quality and seller credibility. Previous studies have consistently identified e-WOM as one of the most important elements supporting consumer confidence in digital shopping environments. However, emerging studies also suggest that consumers increasingly evaluate the credibility of online information critically, particularly when promotional content and sponsored reviews become more prevalent.

Recent research suggests that consumers increasingly evaluate the credibility of electronic word-of-mouth by comparing multiple information sources rather than relying on a single review. The growing prevalence of sponsored content, influencer marketing, and algorithmically distributed information has encouraged consumers to critically assess online information before making purchasing decisions. Consequently, trust in social commerce is constructed through continuous evaluation of information credibility rather than simple exposure to online reviews (Putri et al., 2024).

Experiential Consumption Theory

Experiential Consumption Theory proposes that consumption is not solely driven by functional needs but also by emotional, symbolic, and hedonic experiences. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), as discussed by (Solomon, 2020), argue that consumers often seek pleasure, enjoyment, fantasy, and emotional satisfaction throughout the consumption process.

Within digital shopping environments, emotional experiences may emerge before, during, or after purchase. Shopping activities can become a means of self-

expression, entertainment, or self-reward rather than merely fulfilling utilitarian needs. This perspective is particularly relevant to social commerce platforms, where visually engaging content, interactive features, and personalized recommendations create shopping experiences that extend beyond transactional exchanges. Understanding these emotional dimensions provides an important foundation for interpreting why consumers may decide to purchase products even when functional needs are not the primary motivation.

Within social commerce, shopping activities increasingly combine utilitarian and hedonic motivations, allowing consumers to pursue both functional value and emotional satisfaction simultaneously. This perspective provides an important foundation for understanding purchase decision formation in highly interactive digital environments (Ietto et al., 2021).

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research to explore how Generation Z consumers form purchase decisions within TikTok's social commerce environment. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to understand participants' lived experiences and the meanings they attributed to their shopping activities rather than to examine causal relationships between variables.

Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on predetermined criteria, including active use of TikTok, previous purchasing experience through TikTok Shop, and willingness to share their shopping experiences. This sampling strategy enabled the researcher to obtain rich and relevant information regarding participants' purchase decision formation.

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The interview guide was developed based on the research objectives while allowing participants to describe their experiences openly. All interviews were conducted individually, recorded with participants' consent, and transcribed verbatim for analysis. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study applied source triangulation by comparing information obtained from participants with different shopping experiences and purchasing backgrounds. In addition, member checking was conducted by confirming interview interpretations with several participants to ensure that the findings accurately reflected their experiences. These procedures enhanced the credibility and dependability of the research findings.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Personalized Content as an Initial Purchase Consideration

The findings indicate that personalized content became the earliest point at which participants began considering a purchase on TikTok. Rather than intentionally searching for products, participants commonly encountered products through content recommended by TikTok's *For You Page* (FYP). Continuous exposure to product videos, live streaming sessions, and repeated recommendations gradually attracted their attention and encouraged them to explore products further. In this context, Personalized content served as the initial context in which participants encountered products during their everyday digital experiences, enabling products to become relevant before intentional purchase consideration emerged.

Participants explained that products appearing on their FYP generally matched their personal interests and previous browsing behaviour. As a result, products presented through TikTok's recommendation system were often perceived as relevant to their needs or preferences. Several participants acknowledged that repeated exposure to similar products increased their curiosity and encouraged them to seek additional information before deciding whether the product was worth purchasing. Instead of actively looking for products, participants described their shopping experiences as beginning with content discovery.

Live streaming also emerged as an important form of personalized content. Participants described live sessions as providing opportunities to observe products more clearly through direct demonstrations and real-time explanations. Compared with static product images, live streaming enabled participants to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of product characteristics before continuing to other stages of evaluation.

Product videos likewise played an important role in introducing products. Participants preferred short videos because they allowed them to observe product appearance, usage, and expected outcomes within a relatively short period. This visual presentation helped participants develop an initial understanding of the product and motivated them to gather additional information from other available features before making a purchase decision.

Overall, the findings suggest that personalized content did not directly determine participants' purchase decisions. Instead, personalized recommendations created the initial context in which products became visible, attracted attention, and encouraged further exploration. The decision to purchase was subsequently shaped

through additional considerations, including electronic word-of-mouth, value considerations, and emotional motivations.

Negotiating Trust through Electronic Word-of-Mouth

The findings reveal that electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) constituted an important consideration throughout participants' purchase decision formation. Before deciding to purchase a product, participants rarely relied on a single source of information. Instead, they actively sought validation by comparing multiple forms of user-generated content, including customer reviews, product ratings, comment sections, and creator-generated content. These various sources were interpreted collectively to reduce uncertainty and strengthen confidence before making a purchase.

Customer reviews emerged as the most frequently consulted source of information. Participants described reviews as providing practical insights into product quality, functionality, and suitability based on previous buyers' experiences. Rather than accepting promotional claims presented by sellers, participants preferred to examine reviews containing detailed descriptions, photographs, or videos uploaded by consumers who had already used the products. Such reviews were perceived as offering a more realistic representation of the products than information provided in promotional content.

Besides product reviews, participants also paid attention to comment sections when evaluating products. Comments were often used to identify recurring experiences shared by other consumers, particularly regarding product quality, delivery, and seller responsiveness. For several participants, reading comments became an additional step to verify whether the positive impressions presented in videos or live streaming sessions were consistent with the experiences of previous buyers.

Despite relying on electronic word-of-mouth, participants did not automatically regard every source of information as trustworthy. Several participants expressed uncertainty toward creator-generated content because they recognized that some videos were produced as paid endorsements or promotional collaborations. Similarly, comment sections were not always considered fully reliable, as participants were aware of the possibility of manipulated comments or promotional accounts. Consequently, participants did not depend on a single review or creator but compared information from multiple sources before reaching their own conclusions

Overall, these findings indicate that electronic word-of-mouth functioned not merely as a source of product information but as a process through which participants negotiated trust. Rather than passively accepting online information, participants continuously evaluated the credibility of different sources before forming purchase decisions. This suggests that trust within TikTok's social commerce environment was constructed through comparison, confirmation, and personal judgement rather than through a single information source

Value Considerations in Purchase Decision Formation

Value considerations emerged as another important theme in participants' purchase decision formation. After discovering products through personalized content and validating information through electronic word-of-mouth, participants commonly evaluated whether a product offered value that matched their expectations. Rather than focusing solely on obtaining the lowest price, participants considered the relationship between price, product quality, promotional offers, and the overall benefits they expected to receive.

Most participants described comparing prices across different sellers before completing a purchase. However, price comparison was rarely conducted in isolation. Participants also examined product descriptions, customer reviews, seller ratings, and the contents of product packages to determine whether price differences reflected meaningful differences in product quality or purchasing benefits. As a result, purchasing decisions were based on an overall assessment of value rather than on price alone.

Promotional features available on TikTok Shop, such as discounts, vouchers, and free shipping, also became part of participants' evaluations. Several participants explained that these promotions increased the attractiveness of a product, particularly when they had already developed an interest in purchasing it. Nevertheless, promotional offers were generally viewed as supporting considerations rather than the sole reason for making a purchase. Participants continued to compare products and validate information before reaching a final decision.

Overall, the findings indicate that participants evaluated products through an assessment of perceived value rather than price alone. Purchasing decisions were formed after participants considered multiple economic aspects simultaneously, including price, product quality, promotional benefits, and seller credibility. This suggests that economic considerations were interpreted as part of a broader

evaluation process aimed at obtaining products that offered satisfactory value rather than simply the lowest cost.

Emotional Value as a Personal Purchase Justification

In addition to informational and economic considerations, participants also described emotional justifications as part of their purchase decision formation. The findings show that purchasing decisions were not always associated with functional needs. Instead, several participants viewed shopping on TikTok as a form of self-reward after completing daily responsibilities or achieving personal goals. In these situations, purchasing a product represented an opportunity to appreciate themselves rather than simply to acquire a needed item.

Participants explained that the decision to purchase as a self-reward generally emerged after they had already considered other aspects, such as product suitability, reviews, and perceived value. Therefore, emotional motivation did not replace rational evaluation but complemented it. Self-reward provided personal justification that strengthened participants' willingness to complete a purchase once they felt sufficiently confident about the product

Overall, these findings indicate that emotional considerations became one of the elements involved in participants' purchase decision formation. Rather than functioning independently, self-reward emerged alongside personalized content, electronic word-of-mouth, and value considerations. This suggests that purchase decisions within TikTok's social commerce environment were formed through the combination of practical evaluations and personal emotional motivations.

The findings also resonate with Experiential Consumption Theory, which proposes that consumption extends beyond utilitarian needs toward hedonic and emotional experiences. However, unlike previous studies emphasizing emotional impulses as direct purchase drivers, this study indicates that emotional justification emerged only after participants had evaluated product credibility and perceived value.

Purchase Decision Formation among Generation Z in Tiktok

The findings of this study demonstrate that purchase decision formation among Generation Z within TikTok's social commerce environment is shaped through multiple interconnected considerations rather than a single dominant consideration. Instead of relying solely on product information or promotional content, participants continuously interpreted personalized recommendations, validated information through electronic word-of-mouth, evaluated perceived value, and incorporated personal emotional motivations before completing a

purchase. These findings suggest that purchase decision formation in social commerce is better understood as a process of negotiating various considerations embedded within consumers' digital shopping experiences.

The first finding highlights the role of personalized content as an initial purchase consideration. Participants frequently encountered products through TikTok's recommendation algorithm, particularly on the *For You Page* (FYP), rather than through intentional product searches. Conceptualization of social commerce as an environment where commercial activities are embedded within social interaction. More specifically, the present study demonstrates that TikTok's personalized recommendation system extends this concept by positioning personalized content as the initial context through which purchase decision formation begins. Consequently, consumers often begin considering products that were not part of their initial purchase intentions but become relevant through continuous exposure to personalized content.

The second finding demonstrates that electronic word-of-mouth functions as a space where consumers negotiate trust before making purchase decisions. Although reviews, comments, and creator-generated content were frequently consulted, participants did not accept these sources uncritically. Instead, they compared information across multiple sources to assess credibility before deciding whether a product was trustworthy. This finding expands previous discussions of electronic word-of-mouth by illustrating that trust is actively constructed through consumers' evaluation of diverse information sources rather than passively received from individual reviews or recommendations. Within TikTok's social commerce environment, the abundance of user-generated content encourages consumers to become active evaluators of online information.

The third finding indicates that value considerations extend beyond price comparison. Participants assessed the overall value offered by products through the combination of price, product quality, promotional benefits, and seller credibility. Rather than pursuing the lowest available price, they sought products that provided satisfactory value according to their own expectations. This finding suggests that economic considerations in social commerce are interpreted as comprehensive value assessments, reflecting consumers' efforts to balance financial expenditure with perceived product benefits.

The final finding reveals that self-reward constitutes an emotional purchase consideration within participants' shopping experiences. Consistent with Experiential Consumption Theory (Solomon, 2020), participants described

purchasing products not only to fulfil functional needs but also to experience emotional satisfaction. However, the findings indicate that emotional motivation did not replace practical evaluation. Instead, self-reward emerged after participants had considered product information, validated credibility, and assessed perceived value. This suggests that emotional considerations complemented, rather than substituted, other purchase considerations throughout the decision formation process.

Collectively, these findings suggest that purchase decision formation within TikTok's social commerce environment cannot be adequately understood through isolated considerations. Instead, Generation Z consumers actively negotiate personalized content, electronic word-of-mouth, value, and emotional justification throughout their shopping experiences. This study therefore contributes to social commerce literature by offering a qualitative perspective that conceptualizes purchase decision formation as a process of negotiating multiple considerations embedded within consumers' lived digital experiences.

CONCLUSION

This study explored how Generation Z consumers form purchase decisions within TikTok's social commerce environment through a qualitative approach. The findings demonstrate that purchase decision formation is not based on a single consideration but emerges through the continuous negotiation of multiple considerations encountered during consumers' shopping experiences. Personalized content introduces products into consumers' digital routines, electronic word-of-mouth serves as a space for validating information and negotiating trust, value considerations guide consumers in assessing the overall worth of products, and self-reward provides emotional justification for completing a purchase. Together, these considerations shape how purchase decisions are formed within TikTok's social commerce ecosystem.

The findings contribute to the social commerce literature by extending the understanding of purchase decision formation beyond variable-based explanations. Rather than viewing personalized content, electronic word-of-mouth, value, and emotional motivation as independent determinants, this study demonstrates how Generation Z consumers actively interpret and negotiate these considerations before making purchase decisions. This perspective highlights the dynamic and experiential nature of consumer decision formation within contemporary social commerce platforms.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that sellers and businesses operating on TikTok should not rely solely on promotional strategies. Building consumer confidence requires the integration of relevant personalized content, credible electronic word-of-mouth, competitive value offerings, and shopping experiences that resonate with consumers' emotional expectations. Future research may further explore purchase decision formation across different social commerce platforms or among other consumer groups to enrich the understanding of consumer behaviour within evolving digital commerce environments.

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