

From Scroll to Sale: A Conceptual Model of Influencer Marketing and Consumer Purchase Intention on TikTok

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Abstract

The rapid rise of TikTok as a dominant social media platform has transformed digital marketing strategies, particularly through influencer-driven content. This conceptual paper examines the critical variables that shape online purchase intention among TikTok users in Malaysia, focusing on five key constructs: influencer credibility, consumer engagement, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), impulse buying behavior, and content presentation. Drawing upon the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as the primary framework, and supported by the Source Credibility Theory, Parasocial Interaction Theory, and Affective Transfer Theory, the paper proposes a comprehensive model that integrates both rational and emotional dimensions of consumer behavior. By synthesizing relevant literature, this study highlights the interplay between social influence, digital content aesthetics, and behavioral triggers in the TikTok ecosystem. The proposed model offers significant theoretical contributions to the field of social media marketing and provides practical implications for marketers, platform developers, and policymakers seeking to understand and harness the persuasive power of influencer marketing.

Keywords: TikTok, Influencer Marketing, Online Purchase Intention, Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Consumer Engagement

Introduction

The digital transformation of marketing has ushered in a new era wherein social media platforms serve as dominant channels for consumer engagement and brand communication. Among these, TikTok has emerged as a powerful vehicle for influencer marketing, particularly within the Malaysian context. The platform's unique algorithm and emphasis on short-form, visually stimulating content have enabled influencers—ranging from celebrities to micro-influencers—to seamlessly blend promotional messages with authentic, relatable narratives. This evolution marks a shift from traditional, impersonal advertising to interactive, consumer-driven content experiences (Schouten et al., 2020; Gunawan & Iskandar, 2020).

Influencer marketing on TikTok involves endorsements and product placements by individuals with perceived authority or expertise in specific niches. The appeal of these influencers lies not only in their content but also in their ability to build parasocial relationships with followers, fostering trust and emotional connection (Koay et al., 2021; Boerman, 2020). Micro-influencers, in particular, often outperform larger influencers in engagement due to their niche authenticity and relatability. In Malaysia, TikTok's rise is particularly significant among younger

demographics, where influencer-led content has been shown to drive both interest and impulse purchasing behavior (Teo et al., 2023; Mahmud et al., 2024).

Research Gap

Despite the widespread use of TikTok in marketing campaigns, limited research has comprehensively examined the interplay of critical variables that influence online purchase intention in this context. While influencer credibility and consumer engagement have been recognized as important factors, there is a paucity of studies integrating other impactful dimensions such as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), impulse buying behavior, and content presentation. Moreover, existing models often fail to encapsulate the complex psychological and social mechanisms that drive consumer behavior on TikTok (Masud & Haque, 2023; Barta et al., 2023).

In particular, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)—a well-established model explaining consumer intentions—has not been sufficiently applied to the TikTok environment. Although TPB posits that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control shape intentions, the theory's interaction with digital-era constructs like influencer trustworthiness, emotional content delivery, and social proof via eWOM requires further elaboration (Nasution et al., 2019; Reinikainen et al., 2020).

Purpose of the Study

This conceptual paper aims to bridge the existing gap by examining how five critical variables—influencer credibility, consumer engagement, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), impulse buying behavior, and content presentation—collectively shape online purchase intention among TikTok users in Malaysia. Grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior and supported by auxiliary frameworks such as the Source Credibility Theory, Parasocial Interaction Theory, and Affective Transfer Theory, this paper seeks to propose an integrated conceptual model explaining consumer behavior in the TikTok influencer marketing ecosystem.

By advancing a more holistic understanding of these constructs and their interrelations, the study not only enriches the academic discourse on influencer marketing but also offers practical guidance for brands leveraging TikTok to engage digital-native consumers.

Research Questions

This study is guided by a set of research questions aimed at uncovering the mechanisms through which influencer marketing on TikTok affects consumer online purchase intention in Malaysia. Specifically, the following questions are posed:

1. What are the key influencer marketing factors that affect online purchase intention on TikTok?
2. How do influencer credibility, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), consumer engagement, content presentation, and impulse buying behavior influence consumer purchase intention?

3. How does the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) explain consumer responses to TikTok influencer marketing?

These questions are designed to explore both the individual and collective impact of various influencer marketing variables, while also framing the inquiry within a robust theoretical foundation.

Research Objectives

To address the above questions, the study proposes the following research objectives:

1. To identify the key factors of influencer marketing that influence consumer online purchase intention on TikTok.
2. To examine the role of influencer credibility, eWOM, consumer engagement, impulse buying behavior, and content presentation in shaping purchase intention.
3. To assess the applicability of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) in explaining consumer responses to TikTok influencer marketing.

These objectives are essential in constructing a conceptual framework that not only builds on prior research but also offers novel insights specific to the Malaysian TikTok user context.

Theoretical Model

This study employs the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as its primary theoretical lens. TPB posits that an individual's behavioral intention is shaped by three core components:

- Attitudes toward the behavior (i.e., favorable or unfavorable evaluations),
- Subjective norms (i.e., perceived social pressure to perform or not perform the behavior),
- Perceived behavioral control (i.e., the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior) (Ajzen, 1991).

In this paper, TPB is extended by integrating five critical influencer marketing constructs as independent variables that influence online purchase intention, conceptualized as the dependent variable. These constructs are:

1. Influencer Credibility – Trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, authenticity, and relatability of the influencer.
2. Consumer Engagement – User interaction with influencer content (likes, shares, comments), emotional connection, and participation.
3. Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) – User-generated content, reviews, and shared opinions that shape consumer perceptions.

4. Impulse Buying Behavior – Unplanned, emotionally driven purchases prompted by influencer content.
5. Content Presentation – Visual appeal, storytelling, entertainment value, clarity of message, and call-to-action.

To further deepen the analysis, three supporting theories are incorporated:

- Source Credibility Theory (Ohanian, 1990): Suggests that a communicator's effectiveness is largely influenced by their perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness.
- Parasocial Interaction Theory (Tran et al., 2019): Explains the one-sided emotional bonds that followers develop with influencers, which can translate into behavioral change.
- Affective Transfer Theory (Pease & Brewer, 2008): Highlights how emotions elicited by media content can transfer to the brand being promoted, thus influencing consumer attitude and behavior.

This integrative model enables a more comprehensive understanding of how TikTok influencer marketing triggers behavioral intentions, especially in a digitally active and youth-oriented market like Malaysia.

Literature Review

1. Influencer Credibility

Influencer credibility is a foundational construct in understanding the impact of social media marketing, particularly on platforms like TikTok. It refers to the degree to which an influencer is perceived as trustworthy, knowledgeable, authentic, attractive, and relatable (Bi & Zhang, 2022). Rooted in Source Credibility Theory (Ohanian, 1990), credibility encompasses several dimensions:

- Trustworthiness and Expertise are critical to consumer confidence in product recommendations (Tamsir et al., 2023).
- Authenticity and Similarity create a sense of relatability, making influencer content more believable (Gega et al., 2024).
- Attractiveness enhances emotional appeal and receptivity to marketing messages (Barta et al., 2023).

Prior research confirms that influencers perceived as credible are more effective in shaping attitudes and purchase intentions than traditional advertising figures (Reinikainen et al., 2020; Hendriana et al., 2022).

2. Consumer Engagement

Consumer engagement captures the depth of interaction between users and influencer content. It includes behavioral, emotional, and cognitive involvement, such as likes, shares, comments, and participation in challenges (Harisandi et al., 2023; Iqbal et al., 2022). High engagement fosters a parasocial connection, making the influencer's recommendations feel more personal and persuasive (Tran et al., 2019).

On TikTok, engagement is further amplified by the platform's interactive design, where trends, duets, and collaborations blur the lines between content creator and consumer. Engaged consumers often experience a stronger emotional bond with influencers, which significantly increases the likelihood of responding positively to brand promotions (Tham et al., 2023).

3. Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) refers to consumer-generated content, including reviews, ratings, and feedback shared across social platforms. It serves as a powerful form of social proof, especially on TikTok, where viewers rely on peer opinions before making purchase decisions (Filieri et al., 2018).

Research shows that:

- The quality and volume of information shared positively correlate with perceived product credibility (Hasena & Sakapurnama, 2021).
- The valence of feedback—whether positive or negative—significantly affects consumer attitudes (Dewi & Sudiksa, 2019).
- Credibility and influence of eWOM are strong predictors of online purchase intention, particularly when reviews come from perceived “peers” rather than brands (Rahma, 2020; Iqbal et al., 2022).

Given TikTok's viral potential, eWOM can quickly amplify brand visibility and influence consumer behavior on a large scale.

4. Impulse Buying Behavior

Impulse buying is defined as a spontaneous, emotionally driven purchasing decision, often characterized by minimal cognitive processing (Teo et al., 2023). TikTok's fast-paced, visually immersive environment naturally fosters such behavior. Research highlights several mechanisms:

- Spontaneity and emotional arousal triggered by engaging content encourage immediate action (Tartaraj et al., 2024).
- Immediate gratification is heightened through time-sensitive offers or influencer excitement (Mussa, 2023).
- Limited consideration reflects the consumer's bypassing of rational evaluation due to affective triggers (Tham et al., 2023).

Influencers who combine entertainment with persuasive messaging are particularly effective in inducing impulse buying, especially among Gen Z and millennials in Malaysia (Teo et al., 2023; Sibulan & Limos-Galay, 2024).

5. Content Presentation

Content presentation refers to how information is visually and narratively delivered in influencer marketing. Effective presentation enhances both cognitive processing and emotional engagement. Elements include:

- Visual appeal and storytelling enhance content memorability and message clarity (Astuti & Risqiani, 2020; Fellysia & Simamora, 2023).
- Entertainment value and call-to-action features increase user enjoyment and drive conversions (Barta et al., 2023; Hidayah et al., 2024).

On TikTok, where attention spans are short and competition is intense, creative content presentation can distinguish a brand and drive virality. Studies show that engaging content is more likely to be shared, thereby extending reach and enhancing brand recall (Sohid et al., 2024).

6. Online Purchase Intention (Dependent Variable)

Online purchase intention reflects a consumer's likelihood of buying a product as a result of exposure to marketing stimuli. It is influenced by both rational (e.g., perceived product value) and emotional (e.g., connection with influencer) factors. Within the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) framework, purchase intention is shaped by:

- Attitudes (formed by content experience and trust in influencer),
- Subjective norms (influenced by peer reviews and eWOM),
- Perceived behavioral control (ease of accessing and buying products via TikTok) (Ajzen, 1991; Nasution et al., 2019).

Empirical studies confirm that influencer credibility, engagement, eWOM, content aesthetics, and emotional triggers significantly influence the formation of purchase intention on digital platforms (Masud & Haque, 2023; Barta et al., 2023).

Table 1 is the conceptual model measurement table summarizing the independent and dependent variables, their constructs, and measurement items, followed by an explanation of why these variables were chosen for the study.

Table 1: Conceptual Model Measurement Items

Variable	Construct	Measurement Item Example	Source
Influencer Credibility	Trustworthiness	“The influencer is honest and conveys truthful information.”	Bi & Zhang (2022)
	Expertise	“The influencer possesses sufficient knowledge and expertise about the product.”	Tartaraj et al. (2024)
	Attractiveness	“The influencer is appealing and visually engaging.”	Barta et al. (2023)
	Similarity	“The influencer shares common characteristics or interests with me.”	Gega et al. (2024)
	Authenticity	“The influencer presents themselves genuinely and consistently.”	Bi & Zhang (2022)
Consumer Engagement	Interaction	“I actively engage with the influencer’s content through likes, shares, and comments.”	Harisandi et al. (2023)
	Connection	“I feel a personal connection to the influencer and their content.”	Iqbal et al. (2022)
	Feedback	“I enjoy providing feedback on the influencer’s posts.”	Tartaraj et al. (2024)
	Community Feeling	“I feel part of a community with others following the same influencer.”	Hidayah et al. (2024)
	Participation Level	“I often participate in challenges or trends initiated by the influencer.”	Sugiran et al. (2022)
Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)	Quality of Information	“The recommendations I see from other users are detailed and helpful.”	Filieri et al. (2018)
	Volume of Information	“There are numerous reviews about the influencer and the products they promote.”	Hasena & Sakapurnama (2021)

	Valence Feedback	of	"The feedback I see on TikTok regarding products is predominantly positive."	Dewi & Sudiksa (2019)
	Credibility eWOM	of	"I trust the reviews and comments made by other consumers."	Iqbal et al. (2022)
	Influence eWOM	of	"I am influenced by others' opinions before making a purchase."	Rahma (2020)
Impulse Buying Behavior	Spontaneity		"I often make impulse purchases when I see enticing influencer content."	Teo et al. (2023)
	Emotional Response		"Influencer content makes me excited and leads to spontaneous buying."	Tartaraj et al. (2024)
	Immediate Gratification		"I feel a strong urge to buy immediately after watching TikTok videos."	Mussa (2023)
	Influencer Impact		"The influencer's style encourages me to try promoted products."	Barta et al. (2023)
	Limited Consideration		"I do not overthink purchases promoted by influencers."	Tham et al. (2023)
Content Presentation	Visual Appeal		"The influencer's videos are visually engaging."	Astuti & Risqiani (2020)
	Storytelling		"The influencer effectively tells a story that captures my interest."	Fellysia & Simamora (2023)
	Entertainment Value		"The content is entertaining, enhancing my perception of the brand."	Barta et al. (2023)
	Clarity of Message		"The promotional message is clearly communicated."	Filieri et al. (2018)
	Call to Action		"The influencer encourages me to purchase the product."	Hidayah et al. (2024)
Online Purchase Intention (DV)	Behavioral Intention		"I am likely to purchase a product after watching TikTok influencer content."	Ajzen (1991); adapted from multiple sources

Each variable was selected based on empirical evidence and theoretical relevance:

1. **Influencer Credibility:** Chosen due to its centrality in the Source Credibility Theory. Trust, expertise, and authenticity build consumer confidence and foster brand alignment (Reinikainen et al., 2020; Bi & Zhang, 2022).
2. **Consumer Engagement:** Engagement levels (likes, comments, emotional connection) are predictive of deeper consumer-brand relationships and are critical within the Parasocial Interaction Theory (Tran et al., 2019).
3. **Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM):** eWOM serves as social proof, driving purchase decisions. Consumers are more likely to trust peer-generated content than brand messaging (Filieri et al., 2018; Rahma, 2020).
4. **Impulse Buying Behavior:** Particularly relevant in the context of TikTok's short-form, emotionally stimulating videos. This construct is informed by Affective Transfer Theory (Pease & Brewer, 2008) and is supported by studies on impulsive youth consumer behavior (Teo et al., 2023).
5. **Content Presentation:** The delivery format of influencer content—visual appeal, clarity, entertainment—is essential in grabbing attention and reinforcing message retention (Astuti & Risqiani, 2020; Barta et al., 2023).
6. **Online Purchase Intention (Dependent Variable):** Represents the outcome behavior the study aims to explain, based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which links intentions with actual purchasing behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

Conceptual Model and Hypothesis

The following section explains about the hypothesis and the conceptual model (Refer to Figure 1.0)

H1: Influencer Credibility and Online Purchase Intention

Influencer credibility—comprising trustworthiness, expertise, authenticity, attractiveness, and similarity—is widely recognized as a key determinant of consumer trust and behavioral intention in online contexts. The Source Credibility Theory (Ohanian, 1990) posits that the perceived credibility of a message source influences the persuasiveness of communication. Studies by Bi and Zhang (2022) and Reinikainen et al. (2020) confirm that trustworthy and knowledgeable influencers are more likely to foster positive attitudes toward brands and drive purchase intention, particularly on visual platforms like TikTok.

H1: Influencer credibility has a significant positive effect on online purchase intention among TikTok users.

H2: Consumer Engagement and Online Purchase Intention

Consumer engagement involves interactive behaviors such as likes, comments, shares, and emotional connections with influencers. Based on Parasocial Interaction Theory, these engagements simulate real relationships, enhancing the influencer's persuasive impact (Tran et al., 2019). Harisandi et al. (2023) and Tham et al. (2023) find that higher engagement leads to stronger emotional attachment and increases consumers' willingness to purchase endorsed products.

H2: Consumer engagement has a significant positive effect on online purchase intention among TikTok users.

H3: Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) and Online Purchase Intention

eWOM—defined as peer-generated reviews, recommendations, and discussions—serves as a form of social proof that influences consumer decisions. According to Filieri et al. (2018) and Leong et al. (2021), the quality, volume, and credibility of eWOM are strong predictors of purchase behavior. TikTok's viral nature amplifies these effects, making eWOM a critical variable in shaping brand perception and behavioral outcomes.

H3: Electronic word-of-mouth has a significant positive effect on online purchase intention among TikTok users.

H4: Impulse Buying Behavior and Online Purchase Intention

Impulse buying is characterized by unplanned, emotionally driven decisions, often triggered by stimuli such as excitement, urgency, or emotional arousal. TikTok's immersive format is conducive to impulse buying, as noted by Teo et al. (2023) and Mussa (2023), who found that influencer content can elicit immediate gratification and limit rational deliberation. Influencer-driven content often shortens the consumer decision-making process, leading directly to spontaneous purchases.

H4: Impulse buying behavior has a significant positive effect on online purchase intention among TikTok users.

H5: Content Presentation and Online Purchase Intention

The visual appeal, storytelling quality, and clarity of promotional content significantly impact how consumers interpret and respond to marketing messages. Based on Affective Transfer Theory (Pease & Brewer, 2008), emotional responses to content can transfer to the associated brand. Research by Astuti and Risqiani (2020) and Barta et al. (2023) affirms that well-presented content increases message retention, emotional engagement, and purchase intent.

H5: Content presentation has a significant positive effect on online purchase intention among TikTok users.

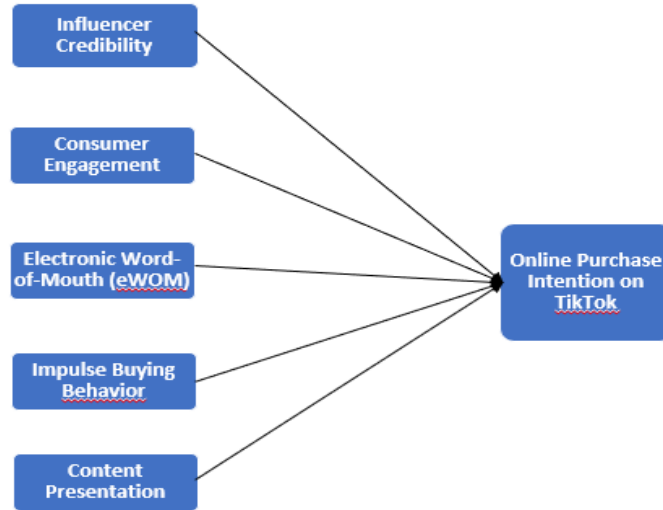


Figure 1.0 Conceptual Model

Conclusion

This conceptual research model provides a comprehensive framework to understand how influencer marketing on TikTok affects consumer online purchase intention, with specific attention to five key constructs: influencer credibility, consumer engagement, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), impulse buying behavior, and content presentation. Grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior and supported by the Source Credibility Theory, Parasocial Interaction Theory, and Affective Transfer Theory, this model offers valuable theoretical and practical insights.

Contribution to Academia

For academic researchers, this model contributes to the expanding literature on digital consumer behavior by offering an integrative framework that captures both cognitive and emotional drivers of purchase intention. It bridges gaps in current studies by examining the combined effects of psychological (e.g., impulse buying), social (e.g., eWOM), and media (e.g., content presentation) variables within a TikTok-specific context. It also extends the applicability of TPB by integrating modern digital constructs, encouraging future empirical validation across diverse cultural and technological settings.

Contribution to Marketers and Brands

For marketing professionals and brand strategists, the model serves as a strategic guide to design more effective TikTok influencer campaigns. It highlights the importance of choosing credible and relatable influencers, encouraging authentic engagement, and leveraging user-generated eWOM to increase brand trust. The emphasis on content creativity and emotional triggers also enables brands to craft compelling campaigns that align with consumer preferences and increase conversion rates, particularly among Gen Z and millennial users.

Contribution to Policymakers and Regulators

For policymakers, particularly in consumer protection and digital advertising regulation, this research provides insight into how persuasive content on platforms like TikTok can influence consumer behavior, including impulsive purchasing tendencies. Understanding these mechanisms supports the development of more informed guidelines around influencer disclosures, ethical advertising, and digital literacy initiatives—ensuring that consumers, especially youth, are empowered to make informed choices.

Contribution to Social Media Platforms

For TikTok and similar platform developers, the findings can inform algorithmic design and user interface decisions that prioritize transparent influencer partnerships, community-driven engagement, and responsible advertising. The model also underscores the potential of data-driven insights to tailor user experiences, while promoting ethical content creation standards that align with user trust and platform integrity.

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