

The Impact of Social Commerce Marketing Strategies on Purchase Intention: The Mediating Role of Consumer Trust Among Social Commerce Users in China

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Abstract

With the rapid development of the social commerce ecosystem in China, integrated marketing strategies including influencer marketing, live-stream commerce, user-generated content and platform interactivity have become critical drivers of consumer behaviour. However, prior studies often examine such strategies in isolation and lack sufficient explanation of the psychological mechanism linking marketing practices to purchase intention. This study aims to examine the impact of social commerce marketing strategies on purchase intention and to test the mediating role of consumer trust. This study adopts a quantitative cross-sectional design, and data are collected via an online questionnaire from 300 Chinese social commerce users with prior purchase experience. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is used to test the measurement model and the structural relationships. The expected findings indicate that social commerce marketing strategies significantly and positively promote consumer trust and purchase intention, and consumer trust mediates the relationship between marketing strategies and purchase intention. This study enriches the theoretical framework of social commerce by integrating the Technology Acceptance Model and Social Influence Theory and provides practical implications for platform operators and marketers to enhance consumer trust and boost sustainable purchase behaviour.

Keywords: *Consumer Trust, China, Marketing Strategies, Purchase Intention, Social Commerce*

Introduction

The proliferation of social media platforms has transformed the landscape of online commerce by embedding purchasing within socially interactive environments, known as social commerce. Unlike traditional e-commerce, which emphasises transactional efficiency, social commerce leverages peer interaction, user-generated content, and real-time engagement to influence consumer decision-making processes (Zhao, Huang, & Li, 2023). In China, it is particularly advanced due to the integration of social networking, mobile payment, and entertainment within super-apps (Xu & Pratt, 2022).

Recent empirical research shows that influencer marketing, live streaming, and community interactivity significantly affect customer engagement and purchase intention (Busalim, Hollebeek, & Lynn, 2023). Live streaming and influencers enhance trust and purchase likelihood by providing real-time information and social validation (Chen & Yang, 2023), while visible metrics like comments and likes to amplify social influence

(Jia, Lowry, & Liu, 2024). However, studies often examine features in isolation, overlooking their combined effects. Trust, though critical (Wang et al., 2022), is rarely explored as a mediating mechanism. Additionally, much research lacks focus on China, limiting generalisability. This study addresses these gaps by examining integrated strategies and the mediating role of trust in China's social commerce environment.

Review of Related Literature

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of the theoretical and empirical literature relevant to social commerce marketing strategies, consumer trust, and purchase intention. The purpose is to establish a conceptual foundation for understanding how marketing strategies influence consumer purchase intention through the mediating role of trust. By analysing existing research, the chapter highlights key insights and identifies gaps that justify the present study.

Purchase Intention in Social Commerce

Purchase intention refers to a consumer's willingness to buy a product and is a strong predictor of actual behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). In social commerce, purchase intention is shaped by interactive features, social validation, and content credibility. Busalim, Hollebeek, and Lynn (2023) show that interactivity and content quality enhance engagement and increase purchase intention. Similarly, visible social cues such as comments and likes to strengthen social influence (Jia, Liu, & Lowry, 2024). Influencer endorsements and live-stream demonstrations further enhance confidence in decisions (Chen & Yang, 2023), while platform credibility also plays a role (Zhao, Xu, & Xu, 2023).

Social Commerce Marketing Strategies

Social commerce marketing strategies include influencer marketing, live-stream commerce, user-generated content (UGC), and platform interactivity. These strategies rely on social interaction, peer influence, and real-time communication (Leong et al., 2023). Influencer marketing enhances trust and purchase intention through credibility and relatability (Chen & Yang, 2023; Wang & Huang, 2023). Live-stream commerce increases social presence and transparency, influencing trust and buying decisions (Chen & Yang, 2023; Jia et al., 2024). UGC provides credible peer-based information and reduces perceived risk (Busalim et al., 2023). Platform interactivity fosters engagement and relational closeness, supporting behavioural outcomes (Leong et al., 2023). Together, these strategies function as an integrated system shaping consumer perceptions.

Consumer Trust

Consumer trust is a central determinant of behaviour in socially interactive digital environments (Gefen et al., 2003). It includes trust in platform integrity, sellers, and peer-generated content (Zhao, Xu, & Xu, 2023). Trust reduces uncertainty and increases confidence in transactions. Wang et al. (2022) confirm that trust consistently predicts purchase intention. Social and interactive features such as live streams and peer reviews enhance trust by increasing transparency and authenticity (Chen & Yang, 2023; Jia et al., 2024).

Relationships Among Variables

Social commerce marketing strategies influence consumer trust by providing informational cues and social validation. Influencer credibility, real-time interaction, and

peer-generated content all strengthen trust (Wang & Huang, 2023; Busalim et al., 2023). Trust, in turn, directly affects purchase intention by reducing perceived risk (Gefen et al., 2003; Wang et al., 2022). Although strategies also influence purchase intention directly, studies often overlook the psychological mechanism underlying this relationship.

Mediating Role of Consumer Trust

Consumer trust serves as a mediating mechanism linking marketing strategies to purchase intention. Trust translates platform stimuli into behavioural intention (Wang et al., 2022). Empirical studies show that trust mediates relationships between innovation features, influencer credibility, and purchase behaviour (Zhao, Xu, & Xu, 2023; Chen & Yang, 2023). Thus, trust explains how social commerce marketing strategies move consumers from engagement to transaction.

Objectives

Social commerce platforms in China invest heavily in influencer collaborations, live-stream selling, interactive content, and user-generated reviews, yet consumer responses remain inconsistent. Empirical research shows that platform interactivity and social presence enhance engagement (Busalim, Hollebeek, & Lynn, 2023), influencer credibility shapes favourable attitudes (Wang & Huang, 2023), and trust plays an important role (Wang et al., 2022). However, studies examine isolated features, making it difficult to determine how multiple strategies collectively influence purchase intention. The effectiveness of integrated strategies remains unclear because the mediating role of consumer trust has not been sufficiently tested, limiting understanding of how strategies translate into actual purchase intention in China

1. To assess the effect of social commerce marketing strategies on consumer purchase intention.
2. To examine the effect of social commerce marketing strategies on consumer trust.
3. To determine the effect of consumer trust on consumer purchase intention.
4. To test the mediating role of consumer trust in the relationship between social commerce marketing strategies and purchase intention.

Methodology

This study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional research design. A quantitative approach is appropriate because the research seeks to test hypothesised relationships among measurable constructs using statistical analysis. The cross-sectional design allows data to be collected from a large number of respondents at a single point in time, which is suitable for examining perceptions, trust, and purchase intention in social commerce contexts. This design aligns with the analytical framework, where relationships among variables are tested using structured survey data and multivariate statistical techniques

Theoretical Foundation

This study is grounded in the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) and Social Influence Theory (Latané, 1981) to explain how technological features and social dynamics influence consumer behaviour. The Technology Acceptance Model posits that perceived usefulness and ease of use shape behavioural intention. In social commerce contexts, features such as interactive content, influencer demonstrations, and live-stream selling enhance perceived usefulness and reduce uncertainty, thereby contributing to the development of trust, a critical determinant of behavioural intention (Wang et al., 2022). Complementing this, Social Influence Theory explains how individuals' attitudes and behaviours are shaped by peer reviews, influencer endorsements, and community

discussions. These social cues influence perceptions of credibility and reliability, strengthening trust and affecting decision-making (Jia et al., 2024; Zhao et al., 2023).

Analytical Framework

The analytical framework proposes that Social Commerce Marketing Strategies function as the independent variable, Consumer Trust as the mediating variable, and Purchase Intention as the dependent variable. The framework assumes that strategies influence purchase intention both directly and indirectly through trust formation.

Conceptual Model

Social Commerce Marketing Strategies → Consumer Trust → Purchase Intention

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, it focuses on social commerce users in China, and findings may not be fully generalisable to other countries where digital infrastructure and consumer culture differ. Second, it relies on self-reported data, which may be subject to bias and may not reflect actual behaviour. Third, it examines consumer perceptions rather than platform-generated data. Fourth, the cross-sectional design limits understanding of changes over time. Finally, although trust is central, other psychological factors influencing purchase intention fall outside the scope of the study.

Findings and Discussion

The target population of this study consists of active social commerce users in China. China represents the largest social commerce market globally, with social commerce usage deeply embedded in everyday digital life. Recent industry and market reports indicate that China has over 800 million social media users, a substantial proportion of whom engage in social commerce activities such as product browsing, influencer-led purchasing, and live-stream shopping. Estimates suggest that several hundred million consumers in China have participated in social commerce transactions, making this population both large and highly relevant to the study.

Given the vast size of this population and the absence of a comprehensive public database of all social commerce users, it is not feasible to access every member of the population. Therefore, the study focuses on a representative sample of active users who meet the study criteria. The unit of analysis is the individual consumer. This is appropriate because the study investigates personal perceptions of social commerce marketing strategies, individual levels of trust, and individual purchase intentions. Since the conceptual framework examines psychological and behavioural responses at the consumer level, each respondent represents one unit of analysis.

Sampling Technique

Given the absence of an accessible sampling frame for all social commerce users in China, this study adopts a non-probability purposive sampling technique. Respondents are selected based on specific criteria:

- They must be active users of at least one social commerce platform
- They must have been exposed to influencer marketing, live-stream selling, or user-generated product content
- They must have prior experience purchasing through social commerce platforms

Purposive sampling is justified because the research aims to gather data from individuals who are directly relevant to the phenomenon under investigation. Since the study

examines perceptions of marketing strategies and trust formation, only users with actual platform experience can provide valid responses.

Sample Size

To ensure adequate statistical power for multivariate analysis and mediation testing, the study targets a minimum sample size of 300 respondents. This size is considered appropriate for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), which requires sufficient observations to estimate multiple relationships simultaneously and assess model fit.

Data Collection Method

Primary data will be collected using a structured online questionnaire. An online survey is appropriate because the target population consists of digital platform users, and it allows efficient access to a geographically dispersed sample. The questionnaire will be distributed through social media groups, online communities, and networks of social commerce users. Participation will be voluntary, and respondents will be informed about the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality.

Measurement of Variables

All variables in the conceptual framework will be measured using multi-item scales adapted from established studies, ensuring reliability and validity.

- Social Commerce Marketing Strategies will be measured through items reflecting perceptions of influencer marketing, live-stream interaction, user-generated content, and platform interactivity.
- Consumer Trust will be measured using items assessing trust in platform information, sellers, and peer-generated content.
- Purchase Intention will be measured using items capturing the likelihood of buying products through social commerce platforms.

Responses will be recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis will be conducted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), as this technique is suitable for testing complex relationships among latent variables and examining mediation effects.

SEM is appropriate for this study for three reasons:

1. It allows simultaneous testing of multiple relationships between independent, mediating, and dependent variables.
2. It assesses the measurement model (reliability and validity of scales).
3. It enables testing of the mediating role of consumer trust through indirect effect analysis.

The analysis will proceed in two stages:

Measurement Model Assessment

Reliability and validity of constructs will be evaluated using:

- Cronbach's alpha
- Composite reliability
- Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
- Discriminant validity

Structural Model Assessment

Hypotheses will be tested by examining:

- Path coefficients
- Significance levels
- Coefficient of determination (R^2)
- Mediation analysis using bootstrapping to test indirect effects

Significance

This study contributes to theory and practice by advancing understanding of consumer behaviour within social commerce environments. From a theoretical perspective, it conceptualises marketing strategies as a multidimensional construct and integrates strategic, psychological, and behavioural variables into a comprehensive framework. The inclusion of consumer trust as a mediating variable clarifies the psychological mechanism linking platform strategies to purchase intention (Wang et al., 2022; Zhao, Xu, & Xu, 2023). From a practical standpoint, it provides insights for platform operators and businesses to design effective strategies in China's competitive social commerce environment.

Conclusion

This chapter reviews literature on social commerce marketing strategies, consumer trust, and purchase intention, establishing a conceptual foundation for the study. Purchase intention is shaped by interactive features, social validation, and content credibility, with interactivity and engagement significantly enhancing buying decisions (Busalim, Hollebeek, & Lynn, 2023; Jia, Liu, & Lowry, 2024). Social commerce marketing strategies—including influencer marketing, live-stream commerce, user-generated content, and platform interactivity—rely on peer influence and real-time communication to shape consumer perceptions (Leong et al., 2023). These strategies enhance trust through credibility, transparency, and social proof (Chen & Yang, 2023; Wang & Huang, 2023). Consumer trust, a key determinant in digital environments, reduces uncertainty and predicts purchase intention (Gefen et al., 2003; Wang et al., 2022). The literature highlights that trust mediates the relationship between marketing strategies and purchase intention, explaining how engagement translates into transaction behaviour.

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