

Determinants of TikTok Shop purchasing decisions among Gen Z: Mediation and moderation analysis

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Abstract

This study examines the effects of affiliate marketing and online customer reviews on Generation Z's purchasing decisions on TikTok Shop, with consumer trust as a mediator and perceived ease of use as a moderator. The study used a quantitative approach, collecting data from 100 respondents through purposive sampling and analyzing it with Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS 4. The findings reveal that affiliate marketing ($\beta = 0.553$, $p < 0.001$) and online customer reviews ($\beta = 0.299$, $p < 0.001$) positively and significantly influence consumer trust but have no significant direct effects on purchasing decisions. Consumer trust significantly affects purchasing decisions ($\beta = 0.606$, $p < 0.001$) and fully mediates the effects of affiliate marketing ($\beta = 0.335$, $p < 0.001$) and online customer reviews ($\beta = 0.181$, $p = 0.003$). Meanwhile, perceived ease of use shows no significant moderating effects on the proposed relationships. The model explains 62.3% of the variance in consumer trust and 66.4% in purchasing decisions. Theoretically, these findings support the Stimulus-Organism-Response framework by emphasizing consumer trust as a psychological mechanism connecting digital marketing strategies with purchasing decisions. Practically, marketers should prioritize credible affiliate recommendations, authentic customer reviews, and trust-building strategies to strengthen consumer confidence and encourage purchasing decisions.

INTRODUCTION

Today, global consumer behavior has undergone a significant shift from traditional approaches to digital ecosystems. This transformation is closely intertwined with the rapid advancement of information technology, which has fundamentally changed how modern society accesses, evaluates, and consumes products (Wolor Agustina F et al., 2026). Social media has also evolved; what was once a mere platform for individuals to communicate and share information has now become a crucial strategic tool for businesses to understand consumer behavior, identify market trends, and reach their target audience effectively and accurately (Wang et al., 2022).

The concept of social commerce has emerged as a critical element in the transition towards digitalization. As noted by Irijanto et al. (2026) and Hajli (2015), social commerce integrates social networking with online retail, enabling transactions to be conducted directly through social media platforms. A prominent illustration of this phenomenon is TikTok Shop. Originally launched as a short-form video application, this platform has effectively combined visual media, interactive engagement, and seamless

transaction processes within a single framework. Indonesia's social commerce landscape shows significant growth opportunities, as TikTok Shop's transaction value has surpassed US\$6.2 billion. This positions Indonesia as the second-largest market globally, following the United States, as reported by (Pratama, 2025). Making up the largest user base for TikTok Shop in Indonesia, Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012) displays a fascinating set of shopping habits. While they can be incredibly thorough and critical when judging a product's quality and value, they are equally prone to impulse buying when emotionally swept up by digital content and current social trends (Cahyani & Widyatmoko, 2026; Tigan et al., 2026). Endless exposure to digital stimulation highlights the shift from shopping out of necessity to shopping for pleasure—often referred to as hedonism. Therefore, studying the purchasing decisions of Gen Z is crucial from both academic and practical perspectives.

In the digital ecosystem, affiliate marketing and online customer reviews serve as two fundamental marketing strategies that heavily influence Generation Z's purchasing decisions. According to (Ramli et al., 2024), affiliate marketing on TikTok allows creators or affiliates to

promote products they have personally tested through positive reviews, sharing product links with their audience to drive sales. When combined with live streaming, as Saumantari Asri et al. (2024) point out, this strategy becomes even more powerful because it creates a highly interactive and engaging shopping experience. Meanwhile, online customer reviews act as crucial social proof. Br Simamora et al (2026) emphasize that these reviews play a vital role in the decision-making process by bridging the information gap between buyers and sellers, ultimately reducing customer hesitation before making a purchase.

While previous studies have extensively explored the separate impacts of affiliate marketing and online customer reviews on consumer behavior, a significant research gap remains. As Dewi & Lasmi (2025) highlights, there is a lack of adequate empirical attention given to consumer trust as a mediating factor that connects these two promotional strategies to purchasing decisions on e-commerce platforms. Furthermore, very little research has examined the moderating effect of perceived ease of use rooted in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) on this relationship, particularly within the context of TikTok Shop in Indonesia.

To address these gaps, this study aims to comprehensively analyze how affiliate marketing and online customer reviews shape the purchasing decisions of Generation Z on TikTok Shop. Specifically, we investigate consumer trust as a mediator and the perceived ease of use of the app as a moderator. Ultimately, this research is expected to enrich the existing literature on digital marketing and e-commerce, offering valuable insights for marketers operating on the TikTok Shop platform.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Affiliate Marketing and Consumer Trust

To put it simply, affiliate marketing works by paying publishers a cut every time someone purchases through their custom links (Vijay et al., 2018). What TikTok did was take this basic idea and attach it directly to video entertainment via the 'yellow basket' (keranjang kuning). It is no longer just about placing a random ad. As explained by Marcelino Tan & Ryans Alexia. (2025), creators now act as trusted experts. Because they come across as authentic, their followers are much more likely to trust the recommendation and follow through with a purchase.

The real game-changer happens when these affiliate links are combined with live streaming. According to Salsabila Nuarindah Ramli et al (2024), this specific combo significantly drives up consumer trust. Live streams remove a lot of the usual online shopping hesitation because buyers can see the product's actual quality and get immediate answers to their questions. In this setting, the affiliate doesn't just act as a salesperson; they act as a trusted third party, giving viewers the final push of confidence they need to buy.

Recent evidence from Dewi & Lasmi (2025), further validates this dynamic. Their study found that TikTok affiliates directly strengthen consumer trust, acting as a key driver for final purchasing decisions. Drawing from this logic, we propose:

H1: Affiliate marketing has a positive and significant effect on consumer trust.

Online Customer Reviews and Consumer Trust

At its most basic level, online customer reviews give buyers a clear breakdown of what a product is really like (Nurhabibah et al., 2022). But on a platform like TikTok, this dynamic shifts. Doloksaribu & Simanjuntak (2024) point out that video reviews hit much harder than plain text because people can actually see the product being used. This visual proof makes the review feel authentic, instantly boosting consumer trust. Ultimately, these reviews help level the playing field between buyers and sellers—clearing up doubts about product quality and making the buyer feel much less at risk (Aswan et al., 2025). Because these reviews act as a primary tool to eliminate doubt and build reliability, we propose:

H2: Online customer reviews have a positive and significant effect on consumer trust

Consumer Trust and Purchasing Decisions

Consumer trust essentially boils down to a buyer's willingness to rely on a seller, which McKnight et al (2002) identify as the critical trigger for purchasing in e-commerce. When it comes to social commerce, Hajli (2015) stresses that trust is absolutely fundamental. It actively drives a consumer's intention to buy by cutting down perceived risks and removing the natural uncertainty of online shopping. But trust does not build itself; it relies heavily on tangible digital marketing tools. Agustin & Fazizah (2023) proved that online customer reviews serve as a highly credible information source, guiding consumers as they evaluate their options and ultimately

pushing them to buy. Similarly, affiliate marketing directly drives purchasing decisions. When affiliates promote and recommend products, they lay down the necessary groundwork of confidence that convinces a buyer to complete the transaction. Together, both strategies act as complementary forces guiding users through their purchasing journey on TikTok Shop. Seeing how these three elements affiliate recommendations, user reviews, and built-up trust—each play a distinct role in securing a final sale, we formulate the following hypotheses:

H3: Affiliate marketing has a positive and significant direct effect on purchasing decisions.

H4: Online customer reviews have a positive and significant direct effect on purchasing decisions.

H5: Consumer trust has a positive and significant effect on purchasing decisions.

The Mediating Role of Consumer Trust

The S-O-R (Stimulus-Organism-Response) theory explains perfectly why trust is so central to this process Mehrabian & Russell, (1974) It suggests that external marketing tools like reviews and affiliate links (the stimulus) must first change how a buyer feels inside (the organism) before they take any action (the response). In our case, that internal shift is all about gaining trust. Trust is what actually connects the promotional tactic to the final sale. Dewi & Lasmi (2025) already demonstrated this dynamic within TikTok Shop, noting that trust acts as a necessary middle step before a user decides to spend their money. Based on this reasoning, we lay out the following hypotheses:

H6: Consumer trust mediates the effect of affiliate marketing on purchasing decisions.

H7: Consumer trust mediates the effect of online customer reviews on purchasing decisions.

The Moderating Role of App Ease of Use

Davis (1989) Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) clearly explains why a smooth user experience matters so much. According to the model, if a platform is easy to navigate, users automatically perceive it as more useful, making them much more likely to actually use it. In the context of TikTok Shop, this translates to clear menus, accessible features, and quick payments. As Yun et al (2025) highlight, this perceived ease of use positively shifts the user's attitude and significantly boosts their intent to buy. In reality, even if a user trusts a product or sees a great review, a confusing app interface can easily kill the

sale. Conversely, a seamless app amplifies the desire to buy. With this logic in mind, we hypothesize that an easy-to-use interface strengthens the relationships between our core variables:

H8: App ease of use moderates the effect of consumer trust on purchasing decisions.

H9: App ease of use moderates the effect of affiliate marketing on purchasing decisions.

H10: App ease of use moderates the effect of online customer reviews on purchasing decisions.

METHODS

This study used a quantitative survey to gather data from Indonesian Gen Z consumers (born 1997-2012) who have used TikTok Shop. We used purposive sampling because we specifically needed people who have real experience with the platform. To be included, respondents had to meet three basic requirements: be part of the Gen Z generation, be active on TikTok Shop, and have a track record of at least one purchase. Finally, we analyzed the collected data using statistical software to verify our hypotheses.

Since the total population size is unknown, we determined the minimum sample size using the inverse square root method, as proposed by Kock & Hadaya (2018) and adopted by (Hair et al., 2022). This approach is specifically designed to calculate sufficient sample sizes for PLS-SEM. We calculated the sample size based on the following formula:

$$n = \left(\frac{1,96}{\beta_{min}} \right)^2$$

Where

n = The minimum sample size required.

β_{min} = The minimum expected path coefficient within the model.

Following the guidelines from Hair (2022), we determined the minimum sample size by assuming a path coefficient range between 0.21 and 0.30. Based on these parameters, the calculations were conducted across two scenarios, as detailed below:

$$n = \left(\frac{1,96}{0,21} \right)^2 = (9,333)^2 = 87,11$$

Rounding up, the conservative scenario requires 88 respondents.

$$n = \left(\frac{1,96}{0,30} \right)^2 = (6,533)^2 = 42,68$$

The moderate scenario requires 43 respondents (rounded).

Our final sample of 100 respondents covers the 88 required for the conservative scenario, providing enough statistical power for PLS-SEM. Data came from an online survey using five-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Analysis was done in SmartPLS 4, utilizing variance-based PLS-SEM to assess both outer and inner models simultaneously (Hair et al., 2022). We started by validating the outer model using outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, AVE, and HTMT. Once confirmed, we bootstrapped 5,000 subsamples to verify the inner model hypotheses through path coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values. Mediation effects (H6 and H7) were examined through specific indirect effects, while moderation (H8-H10) relied on two-stage interaction terms.

RESULT

Respondent Profile

This section outlines the profiles of our survey participants. Data was collected via Google Forms, focusing specifically on gender and age, as summarized in the table below:

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	40	40%
	Female	60	60%
Age	16-20	44	44%
	21-23	46	46%
	24-28	10	10%

Source: Primary data (2026)

From the 100 survey responses we collected, 60% were female and 40% were male. Most of our participants were young; in fact, 90 out of 100 fell between the ages of 16 and 23. To break that down further, 46 respondents were 21-23 years old, 44 were 16-20 years old, and the remaining 10 were in the 24-28 age range.

Outer Model Assessment

Table 2. Outer loadings

Variable	Indicators	Outer loading	Description
AM (X1)	X1_1	0.797	Valid
	X1_2	0.843	Valid
	X1_3	0.844	Valid
	X1_4	0.830	Valid
	X1_5	0.835	Valid
OCR (X2)	X2_1	0.811	Valid
	X2_2	0.795	Valid

Consumer Trust (M)	X2_3	0.850	Valid
	X2_4	0.842	Valid
	X2_5	0.831	Valid
	M_1	0.780	Valid
	M_2	0.868	Valid
Purchase Decision (Y)	M_3	0.795	Valid
	M_4	0.837	Valid
	M_5	0.829	Valid
	Y_1	0.809	Valid
	Y_2	0.810	Valid
Perceived Ease of Use (Z)	Y_3	0.812	Valid
	Y_4	0.826	Valid
	Y_5	0.818	Valid
	Z_1	0.836	Valid
	Z_2	0.819	Valid
	Z_3	0.885	Valid
	Z_4	0.784	Valid
	Z_5	0.810	Valid

Source: SmartPLS 4 output (2026).

Table 2 summarizes the outer model assessment. Outer loadings for Affiliate Marketing (X1), Online Customer Review (X2), Consumer Trust (M), and Purchase Decision (Y) range from 0.780 to 0.868. Since all values exceed the 0.70 threshold suggested by Hair, (2022), the measurement model demonstrates satisfactory convergent validity.

Construct Reliability and Validity.

Table 3. Construct Reliability and Validity

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	AVE
X1 (Affiliate Marketing)	0.888	0.894	0.917	0.689
X2 (Online Customer Review)	0.884	0.895	0.915	0.682
M (Consumer Trust)	0.880	0.881	0.912	0.676
Y (Purchase Decision)	0.874	0.877	0.908	0.664
Z (Perceived Ease of Use)	0.884	0.884	0.915	0.684

Source: SmartPLS 4 output (2026)

The construct reliability and validity metrics in Table 3 indicate that all variables possess strong internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha scores range from 0.874 to 0.888, while both rho_a and composite reliability (rho_c) coefficients comfortably exceed the 0.70 benchmark (Hair et al., 2022). With AVE values falling between 0.664 and 0.689, well above the 0.50 cutoff, the data confirm that our measurement model is

statistically robust and valid.

Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) Results

Table 4. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Variabel	Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)
X1<-> M	0.851
X2<-> M	0.755
X2<-> X1	0.765
Y <-> M	0.895
Y <-> X1	0.723
Y <-> X2	0.627
Z <-> M	0.905
Z <-> X1	0.884
Z <-> X2	0.849
Z <-> Y	0.799

Source: SmartPLS 4 output (2026).

Table 5. Confidence intervals

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	2.5%	97.5%
Z <-> M	0.905	0.906	0.827	0.981

Source: SmartPLS 4 output (2026).

We assessed discriminant validity using the HTMT ratio (Henseler et al., 2015). Most of our constructs were well within the 0.90 limit, with one minor exception: the correlation between Perceived Ease of Use (Z) and Consumer Trust (M) hit 0.905. While this is slightly above the recommended threshold, our bootstrapping results with 5,000 subsamples provide a clear safeguard. Since the 95% confidence interval for this pairing does not reach 1.00, we can confirm that these constructs are statistically distinct. Therefore, the model maintains its discriminant validity.

Hypothesis Testing

We employed a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 subsamples to test our research hypotheses. Following the criteria suggested by Hair et al. (2022), we considered a hypothesis supported if the t-statistic was at least 1.96 for two-tailed tests (or 1.645 for one-tailed) with a p-value below 0.05. Conversely, any path failing to meet these benchmarks was deemed unsupported. The results of these tests are presented in the following table:

Table 6. Hypothesis Testing Results

H	Path	coef. (β)	T-Statistic	P-Value
1	X1 → M	0,553	6,104	0,000

2	X2 → M	0,299	3,499	0,000
3	X1 → Y	-0,016	0,150	0,881
4	X2 → Y	-0,033	0,183	0,855
5	M → Y	0,606	4,960	0,000
8	Z × M → Y	0,037	0,240	0,810
9	Z × X1 → Y	-0,211	1,231	0,218
10	Z × X2 → Y	0,166	1,279	0,201

Source: SmartPLS 4 bootstrapping results (5,000 subsamples, 2026).

The structural model assessment, based on the bootstrapping results with 5,000 subsamples, is detailed in Table 6 below:

Our analysis confirms H1, highlighting the significant role of Affiliate Marketing in shaping Consumer Trust ($\beta = 0,553$, $T = 6,104$, $p < 0,001$). This substantial path coefficient suggests that on social commerce platforms like TikTok, consumers lean heavily on affiliators as arbiters of product credibility. By acting as intermediaries who demystify product information, affiliators effectively mitigate the perceived risks that typically hinder a purchase. This finding mirrors the work of Dewi & Lasmi (2025), who observed that influencer-led marketing is a cornerstone of brand trust. Moreover, it reinforces Ramli et al (2024) perspective that interactive features such as live streaming—are crucial for Gen Z, as they provide the transparency and responsiveness needed to build genuine confidence.

H2: Online customer reviews have a positive and significant effect on consumer trust.

We found strong support for H2, with Online Customer Reviews proving to be a significant driver of Consumer Trust ($\beta = 0,299$, $T = 3,499$, $p < 0,001$). Although the path coefficient indicates a moderate effect, it's clear that these reviews act as a crucial proxy for physical product inspection. This aligns with Kamisa et al (2022), who highlight how peer feedback effectively mitigates the inherent uncertainty of digital shopping. Essentially, these reviews serve as a signal that narrows the information gap between seller and buyer a point emphasized by (Aswan et al., 2025). When consumers feel they have a clear understanding of a product through the experiences of others, that trust becomes the catalyst for their final purchase decision, mirroring the patterns observed by (Nurhabibah et al., 2022).

H3: Affiliate marketing has a positive and significant direct effect on purchasing decisions.

Contrary to our expectations, H3—which proposed that Affiliate Marketing positively influences Purchase Decisions—was not supported. The bootstrapping results in Table 6 yield a path coefficient of -0,016 with an insignificant T-statistic of 0,150 ($p = 0,881 > 0,05$). This indicates that, within this model, affiliate marketing does not exert a direct or statistically significant effect on the final decision to purchase. These findings mirror the work of Sakdiah Halimatus et al (2025), who similarly reported an insignificant relationship between these two variables. This suggests that exposure to affiliate promotions alone may be insufficient to trigger a transaction, implying that other mediating factors or drivers are likely required to convert engagement into actual sales

H4: Online customer reviews have a positive and significant direct effect on purchasing decisions.

Our data did not support H4, as Online Customer Reviews showed no significant impact on purchase decisions ($\beta = -0,033$, $T = 0,183$, $p = 0,855$). This suggests that for our respondents, reading reviews isn't the main reason they decide to buy a product. This matches Rahmawati (2021), who also found that reviews don't always guarantee a sale. It is possible that consumers are becoming more skeptical about whether reviews are authentic, or they might just prioritize other things like price or brand reputation when making their final decision.

H5: Consumer trust has a positive and significant effect on purchasing decisions.

We found that Consumer Trust has a strong and significant impact on Purchase Decisions ($\beta = 0,606$, $T = 4,960$, $p < 0,001$), meaning H5 is supported. This substantial path coefficient shows that trust is a huge factor for our respondents when they decide to buy something. This matches the findings of Innukertarajasa & Hayuningtias (2023), who also noted that trust is vital in online shopping. Basically, when consumers feel safe and believe the seller will deliver what is promised, they are much more likely to actually go through with the purchase.

H8: App ease of use moderates the effect of consumer trust on purchasing decisions.

which proposed that Perceived Ease of Use (Z) moderates the effect of Consumer Trust (M) on

Purchase Decisions (Y). The interaction term ($Z \times M \rightarrow Y$) yielded an insignificant result ($\beta = 0.037$, $T = 0.240$, $p = 0.810$), indicating that app usability does not amplify or diminish how trust translates into purchase behavior. This suggests that for Gen Z TikTok Shop users, ease of use has become a baseline expectation rather than a meaningful catalyst in the trust-purchase relationship. As Rihidima et al. (2025) argue, digital platform convenience is now simply taken for granted by consumers and no longer functions as a differentiating factor in their decision-making process.

H9: App ease of use moderates the effect of affiliate marketing on purchasing decisions.

H9 was not supported, as our analysis shows that Ease of Use does not moderate the link between Affiliate Marketing and Purchase Decisions ($T = 1,231$, $p = 0,218$). The path coefficient of -0,211 suggests that how easy a platform is to use neither strengthens nor weakens the impact of affiliate promotions. This finding reflects the perspective of Rihidima et al. (2025), who argue that in today's e-commerce landscape, convenience is simply a basic standard something consumers take for granted. Essentially, the success of affiliate campaigns now hinges on more strategic factors like information quality, interactivity, and the credibility of the affiliator, rather than just how easy the app is to navigate. For the modern digital shopper, platform usability is no longer the tipping point for an affiliate-driven purchase.

H10: App ease of use moderates the effect of online customer reviews on purchasing decisions.

H10 was not supported, as our analysis indicates that Ease of Use does not significantly moderate the impact of Online Customer Reviews on Purchase Decisions ($T = 1,279$, $p = 0,201$). Although the path coefficient shows a positive trend ($\beta = 0,166$), the lack of statistical significance means we cannot conclude that usability acts as a catalyst here. This aligns with Febrianah & Sukaris. (2022), who also found that customer reviews may not always be a primary driver of purchase decisions in a marketplace setting. In our study, this suggests that reviews might not be strong enough to trigger a transaction on their own, regardless of how easy the platform is to use. This indicates that other underlying factors likely influence the decision-making process for our respondents, which warrants further exploration.

R-square

To evaluate the predictive power of our structural model, we assessed the R^2 values for our endogenous constructs. Following the benchmarks established by Hair. (2022) the R^2 values are classified into three levels: 0.25 for weak, 0.50 for moderate, and 0.75 for substantial predictive power. The R^2 values derived from our research model are presented in the following table:

Table 7. R-square

	O	M	STDEV	T statistics	P values
M	0.623	0.632	0.064	9.695	0.000
Y	0.664	0.703	0.058	11.366	0.000

Source: SmartPLS 4 output (2026).

The structural model's predictive accuracy was evaluated using R^2 coefficients. The results for the endogenous variables are summarized in the following table:

As shown in Table 7, the R^2 value for Consumer Trust (M) is 0.623. Following the classification by Hair et al (2022), this indicates a moderate level

of predictive accuracy, as it exceeds the 0.50 threshold. Specifically, the exogenous variables in our model successfully explain 62.3% of the variance in Consumer Trust, while the remaining 37.7% is likely attributed to external factors outside the scope of this study.

For Purchase Decisions (Y), Table 7 shows an R^2 of 0.664. Based on Hair (2022), this indicates a moderate level of predictive power since it is above 0.50. This means our model explains 66.4 % of the variance in purchase decisions, while the remaining 33.6 % is likely influenced by other factors not included in this study.

Mediation Hypotheses (H6 and H7):

We tested the mediation hypotheses (H6 and H7) by analyzing the specific indirect effects through the bootstrapping procedure in SmartPLS. Based on Hair et al (2022), the mediation type is classified by looking at both direct and indirect effects. Full mediation happens when only the indirect effect is significant, while partial mediation occurs if both are significant. The results are summarized in Table 8:

Table 8. Mediation Results

H	V	Indirect Effect	T-Statistic	P-Value	Direct Effect	T-statistic	P-value
H6	X1 → M → Y	0,335	3,715	0,000	-0,016	0,150	0,881
H7	X2 → M → Y	0,181	3,015	0,003	-0,033	0,183	0,855

Source: SmartPLS 4 output (2026).

H6: Consumer trust mediates the effect of affiliate marketing on purchasing decisions.

Our analysis supports H6, showing that Consumer Trust significantly mediates the relationship between Affiliate Marketing and Purchase Decisions (indirect effect: $\beta = 0,335$, $T = 3,715$, $p < 0,001$). Since the direct effect between these two variables is insignificant ($T = 0,150$, $p = 0,881$), this represents a 'full mediation' based on (Hair et al., 2022). This means affiliate promotions alone aren't enough to drive a purchase; they completely rely on consumer trust to work. This aligns with Khafifah et al (2025) who noted that trust acts as a crucial bridge. Ultimately, consumers are only motivated to buy through an affiliate link if they already trust the product and the affiator promoting it.

H7: Consumer trust mediates the effect of online customer reviews on purchasing decisions.

Our findings support H7, demonstrating that

Consumer Trust fully mediates the impact of Online Customer Reviews on Purchase Decisions. The indirect effect is significant ($\beta = 0,181$, $T = 3,015$, $p = 0,003$), while the direct effect is not ($T = 0,183$, $p = 0,855$). Based on Hair et al. (2022), this confirms a full mediation. Essentially, merely reading reviews does not directly push consumers to buy; those reviews must first build a sense of trust. This aligns conceptually with Fika Sari & Kholifah (2026). Although their study reported partial mediation, the underlying premise is identical: online reviews only drive sales when they successfully establish security and confidence in the consumer's mind. Trust acts as the vital bridge that converts an online review into an actual transaction.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how affiliate marketing and online customer reviews shape the purchasing decisions of Generation Z on TikTok Shop, with consumer trust positioned as a mediator and perceived ease of use as a

moderator. The findings give a clear answer to that objective: neither affiliate marketing nor online customer reviews move Gen Z consumers toward a purchase on their own. Both strategies matter, but only indirectly, by first building consumer trust, which then becomes the actual driver of the purchase decision. Affiliate marketing and reviews appear to convince consumers to trust a seller or product; it is that trust, not the promotional tactic itself, which ultimately converts interest into a transaction. Perceived ease of use, meanwhile, did not strengthen or weaken any of the relationships tested, suggesting that a smooth app experience is no longer a meaningful differentiator for this generation of TikTok Shop users. Theoretical implications.

These results lend strong support to the S-O-R framework as an explanation of purchasing behavior on social commerce platforms: external stimuli such as affiliate promotions and reviews only translate into a behavioral response once they have altered the consumer's internal state of trust. The full mediation pattern found for both H6 and H7 positions consumer trust as a near-obligatory pathway rather than one route among several, extending earlier TikTok Shop research (e.g., Dewi & Lasmi. (2025)) by showing that this mediating role holds for two distinct promotional mechanisms at once, within a single integrated model.

At the same time, the consistent non-significance of perceived ease of use as a moderator complicates a straightforward application of the Technology Acceptance Model in this setting: usability seems to function as a baseline expectation for Gen Z TikTok users rather than a factor that amplifies or weakens the influence of trust, affiliate marketing, or reviews on purchasing decisions. Practical implications. For brands and sellers on TikTok Shop, the message is fairly direct: investing in affiliate creators or chasing review volume will not pay off if those efforts fail to build genuine trust. Affiliate content should prioritize credibility and authenticity over sheer reach, and review strategies should focus on transparency rather than quantity, since trust, not exposure, is what ultimately moves Gen Z toward checkout.

Continued investment in interface usability is also unlikely to be the lever that drives additional sales; once an app reaches an acceptable baseline of ease of use, further refinements appear to offer diminishing returns compared with trust-building initiatives such as verified-seller badges, transparent transaction histories, or authentic, unscripted live-selling sessions.

Research limitations. This study has several limitations. The use of purposive, non-probability sampling restricted to Indonesian Generation Z respondents limits how far these findings can be generalized to other age groups, cultures, or markets. The cross-sectional design, built entirely on self-reported Likert-scale responses, also leaves the model exposed to common method bias and cannot establish causality with the same confidence as an experimental or longitudinal design. Finally, while the sample of 100 respondents exceeded the minimum threshold required for this PLS-SEM model, a larger and more demographically varied sample would allow for more robust subgroup comparisons and stronger statistical power.

Recommendations for future research. Future studies could track the same consumers' trust and purchasing behavior over time, compare TikTok Shop against other social commerce platforms such as Shopee Live or Instagram Shopping, or replace perceived ease of use with alternative moderators, such as content credibility, parasocial relationships with affiliates, or institutional-level platform trust, that may interact more meaningfully with the trust-purchase pathway identified here. Qualitative follow-up work could also help explain why usability failed to moderate any of the tested relationships, an outcome this quantitative design can document but not fully explain. Taken together, this study's main contribution is showing, within a single integrated model, that consumer trust is not just one factor among many but the central mechanism through which TikTok Shop's two most common promotional tools actually translate into purchases, a finding that should redirect both scholarly attention and marketing budgets away from promotional reach and toward the harder, slower work of earning Gen Z's trust.

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