

Social Commerce's Effects on Youth Purchase Intention: A Case Study in Mukah Sarawak

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Received Date: 1 June 2025

Accepted Date: 1 October 2025

Published Date: 10 December 2025

ABSTRACT

This study examines the effects of trust, perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and social commerce constructs on consumer purchase intention among Generation Z in Mukah, Sarawak. As internet usage and social media engagement rise, particularly among rural youth, social commerce has emerged as a significant trend. However, concerns over fraud and negative online experiences remain. Using a quantitative approach and data collected from 386 respondents, the study reveals that all four factors have a significant positive influence on purchase intention. Among them, perceived usefulness has the strongest impact, followed by social commerce constructs, trust, and perceived ease of use. These findings underscore the importance of enhancing platform usability, building trust, and leveraging social features to boost engagement in rural social commerce. The study provides valuable insights for online businesses and policymakers aiming to strengthen digital participation in underserved communities.

Keywords: consumer purchase intention; trust; perceived ease of use; perceived usefulness; social commerce construct

INTRODUCTION

The widespread use of the Internet has significantly increased since its inception in 1991. In Malaysia, internet adoption reached 88.7 percent in 2020, showing a 1.3 percent growth from 2018, with adults in their 20s and 30s spending around 5 to 8 hours online each day. This surge in internet usage, especially among Youth (henceforth Generation Z), has propelled social media into a major platform for communication and sharing, with social networking becoming the second most popular online activity for Malaysians, rising from 85.6 percent in 2018 to 93.3 percent in 2020. This trend, primarily driven by the younger demographic, has also led to the emergence of social commerce, supported by technological advancements that facilitate online product information and purchases. Malaysia has notably embraced social commerce through platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, offering potential growth opportunities for online businesses. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated this shift due to increased online presence, making it vital to emphasize consumer purchase intention in social commerce for economic recovery and business growth. In this context, factors such as trust, perceived usefulness, ease of use, and the social commerce construct play pivotal roles in enhancing

consumer purchase intention, particularly among Generation Z in areas like Mukah, Sarawak. The selection of Mukah, Sarawak as the focal point of this study was based on its distinctive population mix and economic landscape. This region is an area that has not been thoroughly studied in terms of digital consumer behavior. It offers fresh knowledge on how social commerce is embraced and used in rural settings.

Social media is widely used, particularly by Generation Z (born 1995-2003), recognized for their education and digital savvy (Priporas, Stylos, & Fotiadis, 2017). Rapidly growing social media networks serve as vital communication tools, appealing to the younger generation (Zheng & Geetha, 2019). In Malaysia, 20-24-year-olds account for 34.1 percent of internet users, with around 26 million individuals engaged in social media (MCMC, 2020). In Mukah, Sarawak, Generation Z constitutes 15 percent of the rural population, predominantly using social networking sites; however, local entrepreneurs have yet to fully utilize this trend (Tahir et al., 2019). Although social commerce holds potential, consumer hesitation in accepting discounts due to security concerns, fraudulent activities, and negative social media feedback impacts purchase intention (Zheng & Geetha, 2019; Tazali, 2021). Limited research on rural settings and Generation Z (Othman et al., 2019) drives a study identifying factors influencing purchase intention, aiming to bolster confidence and enhance social commerce engagement. In other words, this investigation addresses a significant gap by focusing on a rural demographic, which has been less represented in social commerce research. The study also seeks to understand which factors are most critical in influencing the purchasing decisions of this digitally native but geographically distinct group. Given this context, the significant questions that this study highlights are as follows: Are the factors namely trust, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and social commerce constructs affecting consumer purchase intention in social commerce among Generation Z in Mukah, Sarawak? What is the most significant factor that affects consumer purchase intention in social commerce among Generation Z in Mukah, Sarawak?

Based on past research, a few findings could be revealed. Firstly, trust stands out as a pivotal factor influencing customer purchasing decisions within the context of social commerce, supported by various studies (Ali et al., 2020; Mosunmola et al., 2019; Othman et al., 2019; En et al., 2021; Zheng & Geetha, 2019; See, Khalil, & Ameen, 2019). Zheng and Geetha (2019) emphasize the direct impact of trust on consumer purchase intentions, reflecting Othman et al.'s (2019) finding of a positive relationship between trust and consumer purchase intention. Consequently, consumers are selective about platforms they trust for online purchases, favoring those that minimize risk during transactions. Notably, consumer engagement in social commerce increases with growing trust in the platform. Prior research corroborates the significant link between trust and purchase intention, as demonstrated by See et al. (2019) in a study involving Malaysian online purchase consumers. Likewise, Maia et al. (2020) observed a positive trust-purchase intention relationship among Facebook users, with trust explaining a substantial variance. Ali et al. (2020) assert that trust mitigates the effects of potential disasters for firms and eases consumer concerns, thereby facilitating transaction completion. They further note that trust, along with perceived utility, significantly impacts purchase intention in social commerce. Maia et al. (2020) also highlight trust's pivotal role in shopper engagement, while Ali et al. (2020) reveal variations in online review behavior based on product types.

Secondly, numerous studies concur on the importance of perceived ease of use in social commerce's impact on consumer purchase intention (Ali et al., 2020; Mosunmola et al., 2019; Othman et al., 2019; En et al., 2021; Zheng & Geetha, 2019; See et al., 2019). This attribute is particularly significant due to its role in providing consumers with clear and straightforward purchasing directions within the context of social media platforms. A seamless and comfortable purchasing experience on websites is pivotal for successful virtual transactions, with Zheng and Geetha (2019) emphasizing that a well-designed website boosts consumer satisfaction and purchase intention. Consumers' preference for fast and easy transactions drives the importance of user-friendly websites in social commerce, as complex platforms deter purchases. Addressing consumer concerns on product quality, service, and reputation, organizations and sellers should creatively design interfaces, simplifying website content and functions to enhance their appeal (Zheng & Geetha, 2019). Zheng and Geetha (2019) also highlight the correlation between

perceived ease of use and purchase intention, referencing past studies that support consumers' inclination toward simple and convenient purchasing systems. En et al.'s (2021) research, involving 160 respondents and examining perceived ease of use's relationship with purchase intention, further validates the positive correlation through statistically significant results ($p=0.000$).

Thirdly, perceived usefulness emerges as a significant determinant of consumer intentions in adopting social commerce in Malaysia, supported by Othman et al. (2019), Zheng and Geetha (2019), Iriani and Andjarwati (2020), En et al. (2021), Gunawan et al. (2019), and Keni (2020). The consensus among these researchers is that higher perceived usefulness positively influences consumer purchase intentions within social commerce. This perspective stems from consumers' recognition of social media's value in facilitating anytime, anywhere online purchases, thus favoring it over traditional in-store shopping (Zheng & Geetha, 2019). Consequently, a shift from physical to online sales, like social commerce, offers the advantages of cost reduction and enhanced convenience (Zheng & Geetha, 2019). This notion is particularly resonant in Malaysia, as En et al.'s (2021) study involving 166 respondents from Xiamen University Malaysia (XMUM) students underscores the significant positive correlation between perceived usefulness and consumers' online purchase intentions ($\beta = 0.273$, $R = 0.182$, $p\text{-value} = 0.021 > 0.05$).

Fourthly, social commerce constructs emerge as a decisive factor influencing consumers' purchase intentions through social commerce in Malaysia, as corroborated by Ali et al. (2020), Li (2019), Sheikh et al. (2019), Makmor et al. (2019), and Riaz et al. (2021). These researchers concur that elements like reviews, ratings, referrals, recommendations, and online forums significantly impact consumers' purchase intentions within social commerce platforms. Makmor et al. (2019) emphasize the importance of these components, revealing that they stimulate purchase intentions, particularly when consumers seek information, fostering a sense of community that guides purchase decisions. In this era of evolving technology, Riaz et al. (2021) highlight the transition from Web 2.0 e-commerce to social commerce, where consumers actively engage in virtual purchasing by sharing experiences and seeking knowledge through social networking sites. This practice empowers consumers to make informed decisions through shared information, reviews, and ratings (Riaz et al., 2021). In the Malaysian context, Makmor et al. (2019) demonstrate a significant impact of social commerce constructs on purchase intentions, reflecting this relationship through their study involving 100 respondents from three universities, with a strong correlation between the constructs and purchase intention (t statistics = 3.363, $p = 0.001$). In addition, to strengthen the empirical grounding, this study compares findings from other rural areas within Southeast Asia where social commerce is emerging as a key economic driver. For instance, studies in similar rural settings in Indonesia by Kadop and Yansen (2023) have shown unique user engagement patterns which can provide comparative insights for understanding Mukah's context. This hypothetical study could explore how social commerce platforms are utilized by rural communities in Indonesia, considering factors such as trust, perceived ease of use, and social influence.

Numerous previous studies have attempted to predict consumer purchase intention within social commerce using various models. However, as of now, no research has delved into investigating the consumer purchase intention within Malaysia's youthful demographic residing in rural areas. Hence, the primary objective of this study is to explore the impact of factors, specifically trust, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and social commerce constructs, on consumer purchase intention within social commerce among Generation Z in Mukah, Sarawak. Additionally, this research seeks to identify the most influential factor affecting consumer purchase intention within social commerce among Generation Z in Mukah, Sarawak. To achieve this, the study employs a correlation and multiple regression analysis approach to unveil the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable. Thus, below is the proposed theoretical framework for this study adapted from Zheng and Geetha (2019) and Ali et al. (2020).

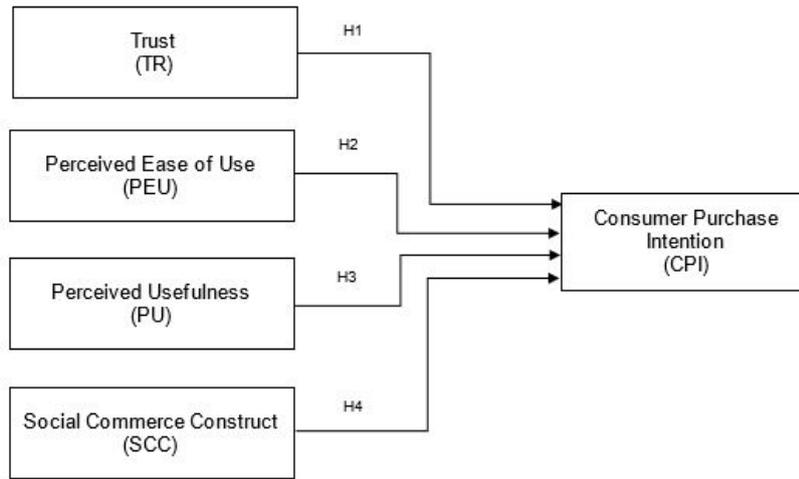


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework

Besides that, by examining the scatter plot graphs generated, Figure 2 illustrates a distinct trend where all the independent factors are aligned positively with the dependent variable.

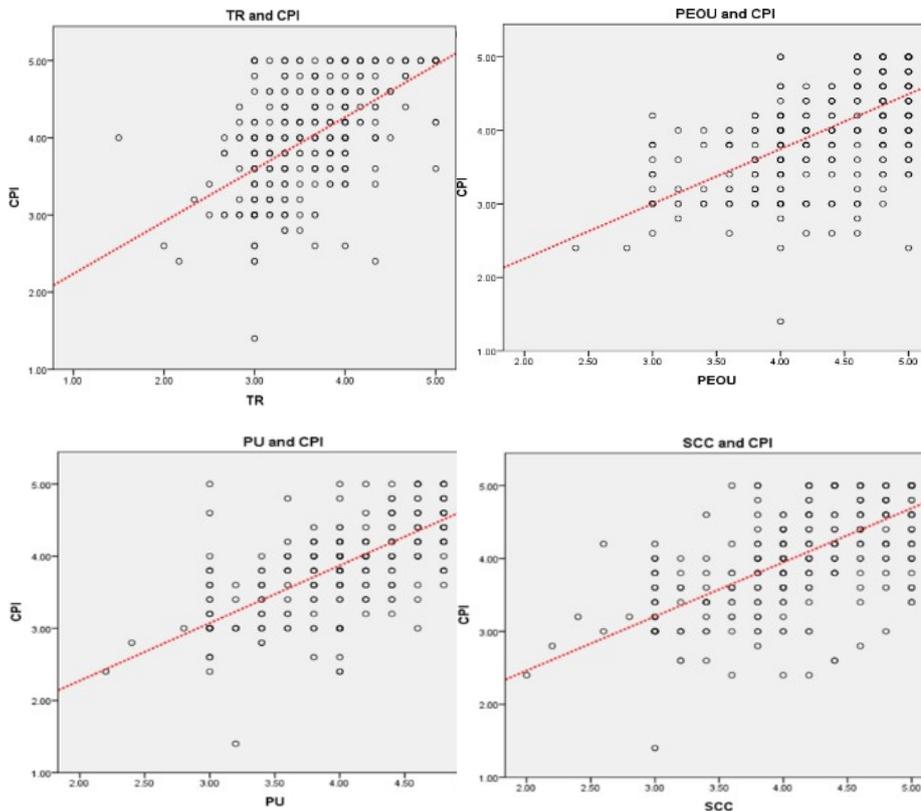


Figure 2. The association between all independent variables and dependent variables

Notes: CPI – Consumer Purchase Intention; TR – Trust; PEOU – Perceived Ease of Use; PU – Perceived Usefulness; SCC – Social Commerce Construct

The structure of this paper is as follows: The initial section presents an overview of how social commerce influences consumer purchase intention. Moving on, the second section offers a concise exploration of the research design and methodology employed to examine the correlation between social commerce and consumer purchase intention. The third section delves into the results and research outcomes derived from the estimations. Additionally, the fourth section engages in a discussion on consumer purchase intention among Generation Z in Mukah, Sarawak.

Finally, the fifth section concludes by summarizing the key findings and suggestions to be recommended.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a correlational research approach to examine the connection between factors influencing consumer purchase intention among Generation Z in social commerce. The findings from these established relationships will be employed to make predictions about the nature of their connection. The data collection process will occur once, as a cross-sectional study design is employed, allowing for data to be gathered at a single point in time to address the research question (Sekaran, 2003).

The study's target population is mainly focused on Generation Z individuals residing in Mukah, Sarawak. The total population size was obtained from the "Current Population Estimates 2022" report issued by the Department of Statistics Malaysia. This population subset includes individuals aged 19 to 25 years, resulting in a total population of 6,000 individuals born between 1997 and 2003. This study employed convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling technique where respondents are selected based on their availability and willingness to participate (Taherdoost, 2016). The method was selected due to practical limitations, including time restrictions and resources, which are prevalent in social science research. In Mukah, a rural and semi-urban area with limited access to large-scale random sampling systems, convenience sampling has enabled the researcher to effectively and efficiently contact the targeted demographic. The sampling process concludes once the desired number of participants has been reached. Although this method allowed access to an adequate sample size, it may introduce sampling biases such as selection and non-response bias, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings. Individuals more engaged with or knowledgeable about social commerce may be overrepresented. Therefore, the results may not fully reflect the broader Generation Z population in Mukah. Future research is recommended to adopt probability-based sampling methods, such as stratified or cluster sampling, to enhance representativeness and improve the robustness of the findings. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research. Participation was voluntary, respondents were informed of the study's purpose, and anonymity was maintained. The study was conducted by following standard research ethics protocols, and consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. This study used the formula established by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). Following their guidelines, given the total population of approximately 6,000, a sample size of 361 respondents from Generation Z in Mukah, Sarawak will be determined. In this study, the chosen research instrument is a questionnaire. The questionnaire comprises six sections. Section A includes demographic inquiries, while Sections B, C, D, and E address trust, perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and social commerce constructs, respectively. Section F contains questions on consumer purchase intention.

After collecting questionnaires from the participants, the data analysis for this research was carried out using IBM SPSS Statistics 22. Initially, a demographic analysis was performed using descriptive analysis techniques to reveal population characteristics. Subsequently, correlation analysis statistics were used to investigate the relationships between independent and dependent variables. Moreover, to identify the primary factors influencing consumer purchase intentions in the context of social commerce among Generation Z, multiple regression analysis was employed. Illustrated in Figure 1, the proposed conceptual framework serves as the basis for the regression model retained in this study, which can be expressed through the following equation:

$$CPI = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 TR + \alpha_2 PEU + \alpha_3 PU + \alpha_4 SCC + \mu$$

Where *CPI*, *TR*, *PEU*, *PU* and *SCC* are consumer purchase intention, trust, perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and social commerce constructs, respectively. α_0 is constant, whilst α_1 to α_4 are coefficient vectors and, μ is the disturbance term. We expect a priori the expected sign for all variables as $\alpha_1, \alpha_2, \alpha_3, \alpha_4 > 0$.

To explore the interconnections among variables, this study formulated hypotheses. The *t*-test was used to identify the existence of the relationship between independent variables and consumer purchase intention in social commerce among generation Z in Mukah, Sarawak, where the null hypothesis can be defined as: $H_0: \alpha_n = 0$, against $H_a: \alpha_n \neq 0$, where $n = 1, 2, 3$ and 4.

RESULTS

Out of 400 distributed questionnaires, 386 were returned with valid responses, yielding a 96.5 percent response rate. These 386 complete and valid questionnaires were used for data analysis, providing the obtained results.

Reliability analysis

Cronbach's Alpha values were calculated for each construct to determine internal consistency. All values exceeded 0.70, indicating acceptable to excellent reliability (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). Table 1 presents the summary:

Table 1. Table of summary reliability analysis results

Variables	No. of Item	Cronbach's Alpha (Pilot Test)	Cronbach's Alpha (Actual Survey)
Consumer Purchase Intention	5	0.769	0.885
Trust	6	0.876	0.874
Perceived Ease of Use	5	0.771	0.831
Perceived Usefulness	5	0.685	0.895
Social Commerce Construct	5	0.861	0.896

Descriptive analysis

This research employed descriptive analysis to summarize the gathered data and underpin the specific research findings pertaining to its cases. This analytical approach yielded various outcomes, encompassing frequencies, mean, maximum, minimum, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis.

Based on Table 2 below, mean values for various factors exceed the standard deviation, indicating low variability. The data distribution has both positive and negative values, resulting in skewness. Trust shows a right skew due to positive values, while other factors exhibit left a skew due to negative values. Kurtosis measures distribution characteristics, with all variables indicating a flatter distribution (platykurtic) with fewer extreme outliers compared to a standard distribution.

Table 2. Data summary statistics

	<i>CPI</i>	<i>TR</i>	<i>PEOU</i>	<i>PU</i>	<i>SCC</i>
Mean	4.0269	3.6459	4.3762	4.1943	4.1078
Maximum	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Minimum	1.40	1.50	2.40	2.20	2.00
Std. Dev.	0.70567	0.62604	0.61315	0.66299	0.68254
Skewness	-0.300	0.382	-0.790	-0.450	-0.384
Kurtosis	-0.512	-0.53	-0.250	-0.713	-0.665
Valid (N)	386	386	386	383	386

Notes: *CPI* – Consumer Purchase Intention; *TR* – Trust; *PEOU* – Perceived Ease of Use; *PU* – Perceived Usefulness; *SCC* – Social Commerce Construct; *Std. Dev.* – Standard Deviation

Correlation analysis

In this study, correlation analysis was employed to investigate the connections between variables. The Pearson Correlation Matrix, as recommended by Sekaran and Bougie (2013), is used to evaluate these relationships. Hence, it is vital to emphasize that this analysis does not establish causation but rather uncovers associations.

In Table 3 below, this study summarizes the results among Generation Z in Mukah, Sarawak. Trust and purchase intention exhibit a moderate positive correlation ($r=0.600$; $p=0.00$), indicating that increased trust is linked to higher purchase intention. Perceived ease of use displays a moderate positive correlation ($r=0.574$; $p=0.00$), suggesting that greater ease of use is associated with a higher likelihood of purchase. Perceived usefulness is positively correlated ($r=0.750$; $p=0.00$) with purchase intention, as is the social commerce construct ($r=0.718$; $p=0.00$). Notably, there is no significant multicollinearity among the independent variables, as they are not strongly correlated with each other.

Table 3. Pearson correlation of consumer purchase intention variable

Variable	CPI	TR	PEOU	PU	SCC
CPI	1				
TR	0.600**	1			
PEOU	0.574**	0.441**	1		
PU	0.750**	0.537**	0.606**	1	
SCC	0.718**	0.582**	0.569**	0.695**	1

Notes: CPI – Consumer Purchase Intention; TR – Trust; PEOU – Perceived Ease of Use; PU – Perceived Usefulness; SCC – Social Commerce Construct

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Multicollinearity analysis

Multicollinearity tests in regression analysis assess the correlation among independent variables in a multiple regression model. These tests aim to detect and quantify multicollinearity to ensure the reliability of the regression results. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), calculated as $(1 / \text{tolerance})$, is used for this purpose. Ideally, VIF scores should be close to 1, but values below 5 are acceptable, while values above 10 indicate high collinearity, suggesting the variable may not be necessary.

Table 4 results reveal that all values in this analysis are close to 1 and do not exceed 5. This finding indicates that the variables exhibit low multicollinearity among each other. In essence, the coefficients for the correlated variables in this study remain stable, dependable, and trustworthy.

Table 4. Multicollinearity test results

Variable	Tolerance	VIF
Trust	0.622	1.608
Perceived Ease of Use	0.585	1.709
Perceived Usefulness	0.436	2.293
Social Commerce Construct	0.435	2.300

Notes: VIF - Variance Inflation Factor

Regression analysis

This study established four hypotheses in response to the first research question. Using multiple regression analysis, this study explored the connection between trust, perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and the social commerce construct on consumer purchase intention in

Mukah, Sarawak. The data revealed strong, positive relationships, with each independent variable (trust, ease of use, usefulness, and social commerce concept) showing a positive coefficient (0.202, 0.146, 0.430, and 0.291). These coefficients were statistically significant, supporting all four hypotheses. In summary, there is a substantial association between trust, ease of use, usefulness, and the social commerce construct of consumer purchase intention among Generation Z in Mukah, Sarawak.

The second research question is addressed through multiple regression analysis examining the associations between independent and dependent variables. In Table 5, the R-square value indicates that 66.4 percent of the variance in customer purchase intention is explained by trust, perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and the social commerce construct, leaving 33.6 percent attributed to unexplored factors. Table 5 also highlights the statistical significance of the regression model, with a substantial F value ($F=118.626, p=0.000$), leading to the rejection of null hypotheses. Additionally, in Table 5, trust, perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and the social commerce construct exhibit p-values below 0.01 and 0.05 ($p=0.000, p=0.021, p=0.000, p=0.000$), indicating their significant relationship with consumer purchase intention. Perceived usefulness has the highest alfa value ($\alpha = 0.430$), followed by the social commerce construct, trust, and perceived ease of use, with corresponding alfa values of ($\alpha = 0.291$), ($\alpha = 0.202$), and ($\alpha = 0.146$).

Table 5. Results of multiple regression

Variable	Coefficients	Standard Error	T-Stat
TR	0.202	0.042	4.757***
PEOU	0.146	0.063	2.325**
PU	0.430	0.048	8.984***
SCC	0.291	0.047	6.261***
C	-0.369	0.221	-1.672
F-Statistic		188.626**	
R-Squared		0.664	

Notes: *** denotes statically significant at 1 percent; ** denotes statically significant at 5 percent. TR – Trust; PEOU – Perceived Ease of Use; PU – Perceived Usefulness; SCC – Social Commerce Construct; C – Constant

DISCUSSION

Previous research by En et al. (2021), Othman et al. (2019), Keni (2020), and Zheng and Geetha (2019) align with this study's findings, emphasizing the importance of trust, ease of use, and usefulness in shaping consumer purchase intention in social commerce. Recent studies by Riaz et al. (2021), Sheikh et al. (2019), and Makmor et al. (2019) further support this correlation, highlighting the positive relationship between social commerce constructs and consumer purchase intention. Recognizing these factors' significance is crucial for enhancing consumer purchase intention in the digital landscape. Notably, perceived usefulness emerges as the most influential factor, echoing En et al. (2021) and Gunawan et al. (2019). Conversely, Othman et al. (2019) found perceived ease of use to be the primary influencer of consumer purchase intention, emphasizing the streamlined nature of social commerce in facilitating seamless transitions across platforms, ultimately boosting consumer purchase intention. Alternatively, the findings are contrasted with data from the study that focused on urban areas by En et al. (2021). This comparison reveals that while the influence of perceived usefulness and trust is significant in both contexts, the motivations and barriers experienced by consumers vary significantly, with rural consumers placing higher value on community endorsement and direct social influences. From a theoretical perspective, the findings appear to support the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), particularly in demonstrating the roles of perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness in influencing behavioral intention. Additionally, the influence of trust and social commerce constructs suggests the relevance of integrating Social Influence Theory and Trust Theory into models of online consumer behavior. This integrated

theoretical approach is especially pertinent in the context of rural digital consumers, who may rely more heavily on social validation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In conclusion, the primary goal of this study is to investigate the impact of factors, particularly trust, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and social commerce constructs, on consumer purchase intention within social commerce among Generation Z in Mukah, Sarawak, and to identify the most influential factor influencing consumer purchase intention within social commerce among Generation Z in Mukah, Sarawak. Following the theoretical basics from prior literature, this research suggested a conceptual model by combining trust, perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and the social commerce construct with consumer purchase intention. The results of this research revealed that all the independent variables have direct positive and significant effects on young generations in rural areas focused in Mukah, Sarawak's online purchase intention toward social commerce in Malaysia. Hence, online retailers and marketers should emphasise and be more focused on this area to increase their competitiveness, especially the factors that have been studied in this research. For instance, local businesses should focus on enhancing the transparency and user-friendliness of their platforms to build trust, and policy makers may consider creating educational programs that boost digital literacy among rural youth to foster more informed social commerce interactions. Future research could explore comparative contexts, include moderating variables such as digital skills or income level, and adopt qualitative methods for deeper insights.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to acknowledge the support of Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Terengganu and Politeknik Mukah, Sarawak.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts and declare the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors contributed equally to the conception, design, data collection, analysis, and writing this paper. Each author reviewed and approved the final manuscript for submission.

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