



The Impact of TikTok Shop's Perceived Service Quality and Electronic Word of Mouth on the Purchase Intention of University Students

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of TikTok Shop's perceived service quality and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) on the purchase intentions of undergraduate students at De La Salle University Manila. As TikTok transitions from a social media platform to a key player in social commerce, understanding how its features influence consumer behavior has become crucial. Guided by the SERVQUAL model and e-WOM framework, this research explores how service quality dimensions tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy along with e-WOM factors such as message quality and platform credibility, affect students' likelihood to purchase through TikTok Shop. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected from DLSU undergraduate students who had previously made purchases on the platform. Statistical analyses including descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple linear regression were employed to determine the strength and significance of relationships among the variables. Findings reveal that all five SERVQUAL dimensions and key e-WOM factors significantly influence purchase intention. Notably, assurance and platform credibility emerged as the strongest predictors, emphasizing the importance of trust and secure transaction environments. The results underscore the necessity for sellers and platform managers to enhance service responsiveness. This study is valuable for marketers, businesses, and policymakers seeking to optimize consumer engagement on social commerce platforms. It also fills both theoretical and methodological gaps in the literature by applying traditional service quality and behavioral theories to a dynamic, algorithm driven social commerce environment like TikTok Shop.

Keywords: SERVQUAL Model, Electronic word-of-mouth, TikTok Shop, Purchase Intention

JEL Classifications: M1, M5

1. INTRODUCTION

TikTok Shop has transformed how consumers discover and purchase products on social media. Its sophisticated algorithm curates highly engaging and personalized content, seamlessly integrating product discovery with entertainment. Social media and e-commerce more broadly have significantly changed how consumers interact with brands and make purchasing decisions. This innovation has become especially popular among young adults, including undergraduate students and active social media users, who value convenience and novelty in their shopping experiences (Agustin et al., 2023). TikTok's ability to combine

product discovery, entertainment, and shopping convenience strongly influences consumer behavior.

Launched in the Philippines in April 2022, TikTok Shop was introduced as the short-form video platform's online commerce extension. TikTok Shop hopes to increase business opportunities for small and medium-sized businesses and brands with this brand-new e-commerce platform. All this while offering consumers a brand-new buying experience and chances for regional content producers (Sarabia, 2022).

Following its success, TikTok Shop launched the Unlad Lokal Program in 2023 in collaboration with the Department of Trade

and Industry (DTI) to support Filipino MSMEs. According to Trade Secretary Cristina Roque, Unlad Lokal expands upon DTI's program, connecting digital innovation with conventional businesses. If we give MSMEs practical training, local firms can adapt and lead the digital economy. It was also mentioned that with its rapid adoption, TikTok Shop has positioned itself as a major player in the Philippine e-commerce market.

Perceived service quality and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) are two critical factors that influence online consumer behavior. Perceived service quality, including platform dependability, user-friendliness, and responsiveness, significantly impacts trust and loyalty among users (Abumalloh et al., 2017). TikTok's interactive features, including live streaming and comment sections, amplify the impact of eWOM by facilitating real-time engagement and decision-making (Alfarisi and Sukaris, 2024). With its engaging and interactive content, TikTok has amplified the spread of eWOM, making it an essential platform for businesses seeking to connect with digital consumers.

For students at De La Salle University (DLSU), TikTok Shop provides an enjoyable and convenient shopping experience, particularly for trendy and unique items. In a study by Agustin (2023), purchase decisions are influenced by the platform's perceived usability and reliability and by the recommendations and reviews they encounter through eWOM. Live streaming, in particular, has been noted to create a sense of urgency or fear of missing out (FOMO), which further motivates purchases (Alfarisi and Sukaris, 2024).

This study seeks to bridge the gap between existing research on e-commerce and the emerging dynamics of social media shopping platforms. By focusing on a culturally and demographically specific group of undergraduate students at De La Salle University, it aims to provide valuable insights for marketers, businesses, and researchers interested in understanding and catering to this critical consumer segment.

Based on the findings of this study, the perceived service quality of TikTok Shop significantly influenced the purchase intentions of undergraduate students at De La Salle University. Among the five SERVQUAL dimensions, empathy and assurance emerged as the most influential, while platform credibility among the e-WOM factors showed a significant impact. The results suggest that trust, attentiveness, and authentic reviews are drivers of purchase decisions in a social commerce environment. The study concluded that enhancing both service responsiveness and the quality of online reviews can meaningfully boost consumer trust and encourage stronger purchase intention.

1.1. Research Question

The rise of social commerce platforms, particularly TikTok Shop, has significantly influenced consumer behavior among younger demographics, such as undergraduate students. A study has shown that electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on TikTok is crucial in shaping purchase intentions among college students in Metro Manila, Philippines (Adapon et al., 2024). Additionally,

research indicates that e-service quality and eWOM significantly positively impact purchase decisions among students in Surabaya, highlighting the importance of these factors in online shopping behaviors (Irhamna and Dermawan, 2023). Despite the growing popularity of TikTok Shop, there remains a need to explore how the dimensions of perceived service quality—including tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, empathy, and assurance—and eWOM impact the purchase intentions of students. Understanding these factors is essential for businesses to adapt their marketing strategies effectively and for researchers to address the knowledge gap concerning emerging trends in social commerce. It is with this, that the researchers wished to address to what extent does Tiktok shop's service quality dimensions like tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance, and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) factors impact the purchase intentions of undergraduate students at De La Salle University?

1.2. Review of Related Literature

1.2.1. Growth of e-commerce in the Philippines

E-commerce has become essential to the Philippine retail industry because of rising e-commerce, changing customer trends, and technological advances. The rise of online shopping platforms has changed how Filipinos buy goods and services, providing more ease and accessibility. The growth of e-commerce in the country shows the different factors that affect consumer product demand, such as market penetration, awareness, and changes in consumer behavior. One of the top consumers are Gen-Z and Millennials, since they are more likely to accept digital commerce due to their technological knowledge (Rosales et al., 2024).

Understanding the demographics of e-commerce customers could provide insight into consumer behavior and preferences, which can impact engagement (Rosales et al., 2024). However, the researchers will focus on the results related to age demographics. According to Pocklington (2023), age is a notable factor to consider because younger and older demographics are found to have different preferences. Finding the spot they genuinely want is key to building loyalty, relationships, and satisfaction. In order to be an effective e-commerce seller, one must understand that different age groups have varying needs in terms of quality customer service, price sensitivity, and seller responsiveness (Pocklington, 2023).

Consumer behavior in e-commerce is heavily influenced by age. Younger demographics, particularly millennials and Generation Z, are more prone to buy products and services online. E-commerce platforms frequently require users to be of legal age (18+), while some allow children to make purchases with parental permission. Younger consumers in the Philippines, mainly those aged 18-34, are the most likely to use Internet commerce. This demographic's familiarity with technology, convenience, and ease of use of online purchasing platforms have all contributed to rising demand in this age range (Rosales et al., 2024). Despite baby boomers having made up nearly half of the active workforce, millennials and Generation Z have stood out as the most significant drivers of e-commerce growth.

1.2.2. Service quality

Service quality is probably the most important business success construct, and is as well as related to customer satisfaction (Dimaro, 2023; Roy et al., 2015). Service quality is generally defined as the gap between customer expectations and perceived service received and is an essential input for business success (Sakti et al., 2021). Service quality is defined by Verma (2020) as innate excellence, achieved through uncompromising standards and high achievement recognized by experience offering an exceptional experience. Understanding service quality is necessary because managers who intend to design customer service pledges, resources allocation, and training of staff must do so (Ngambi and Nkemkiafu, 2015).

A decisive feature for success in an e-commerce business is service quality, which means customer satisfaction and loyalty (Simanjuntak and Mayasari, 2023; Dhingra et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2016). Significant dimensions of e-service quality include site organization, responsiveness, reliability, user friendliness, personal need, and efficiency (Simanjuntak and Mayasari, 2023).

1.2.3. Purchase intention

Ghosh (2024) defines purchase intention as the ability of the consumers to purchase a particular product or service, and one of the most important marketing concepts. Social, emotional, logical, moral, psychological, and economic elements cause variances in purchase intention (Renu et al., 2020). In the online environment, usefulness, ease of use, trust, security, and e-WOM are some of the most critical factors (Eneizan et al., 2020).

Consumer-company relationships have been transformed through the innovative power of social media in terms of accessing product information and reviews with comparisons for a purchasing decision (Renu et al., 2020). The quality, relevance, and credibility of online reviews impact the intent to purchase it (Leong et al., 2021). These factors help marketers to deliver effective strategies, increase customer satisfaction, and gain competitive advantage in both traditional and online markets (Renu et al., 2020; Ghosh, 2024).

1.2.4. TikTok: From social media to E-commerce platform

The short-video social media platform, TikTok, was introduced in 2016 and took no time to reach the top among the most widely used apps in the world, especially among kids and young teenagers (Chamanadjian, 2024; Wang, 2022). Wang (2022) added that the platform became successful because of effective marketing strategies, good algorithm technology, and fulfilling the needs of its users. Controversies about Chinese ownership and the extremely young user base seem not to touch and taint the then attractive hub for creativity and education (Zeng et al., 2021). This led to an increase in knowledge-sharing content within the platform, with scientists using advanced techniques to analyze all the teaching topics and audience engagement (Fiallos et al., 2021). More than 700 million downloads in 2019, not to mention the users spend approximately 2 h a day in the app, indicating that TikTok has a strong grip as the dominant firm in digital media (Wang, 2022; Chamanadjian, 2024).

From being a social media site, TikTok today presents itself to be an important e-commerce hub through the platform of TikTok Shop (Nur et al., 2023). According to Li et al. (2023), this change has taken place primarily because of the ability of the platform to provide specifically to target groups, to promote the proper product offerings, and to nurture sales-driven content creators. TikTok Shop enables live streaming and influencer marketing, among other features, offering consumers an interactive and personalized shopping experience (Nur et al., 2023; Erislan, 2024). In addition, Erislan (2024) cited that since Tiktok has been performing well in business, its regulating systems have increased to protect small and medium enterprises. Despite initial skepticism on the part of the consumers, data mining techniques used in the research by Irmayani et al. (2023) found that users' satisfaction with TikTok as an e-commerce site is as high as 96.74%. Such a change in the role of TikTok marks a major landmark in linking social media with e-commerce applications.

1.2.5. University students

Gunawan et al. (2022) found out that since the pandemic and the rise of social media, university students' lifestyles have been influenced by their consumption behaviors. This trend has the potential to become excessive, often without the students' awareness. E-commerce is the primary driver behind students' consumption of trendy and unique items (Gunawan et al., 2022).

Fadillah et al. (2024) further added the factors that drive their intent to shop online include ease of use, discount, safety of transactions, and reviews from other customers. Online shopping has been shown to be a convenient and value-for-money strategy for college students (Kesuma et al., 2020). Nonetheless, there are benefits for which the use of e-commerce has a positive, though weak effect on the purchasing behavior and lifestyle of students (Tampubolon et al., 2023). College students are studied as those striving for identity, independence, and convenience in online shopping behavior (Adnan, 2014). As a rule, they have higher vision, cultural level, and curiosities than the average consumer.

1.2.6. SERVQUAL model

The SERVQUAL approach measures service quality through five dimensions: Reliability, responsiveness, assurance, tangibles, and empathy (Parasuraman, 1988). This model was primarily developed for traditional services but is found to be suitable for e-commerce as well (Shi and Shang, 2020). Service quality would be assessed by the customers by the use of these dimensions, indicated as the difference between a firm's performance and the customers' general expectations. These dimensions have differed in the importance of various types of services. For instance, reliability is highly vital across all types of services, but tangibles are more critical for mixed services and empathy to quasi-manufacturing services. Understanding these critical elements guides management development as it helps in gaining organizational competitive advantage in the global market (Verma, 2020).

1.2.7. Relationship of service quality and purchase intention

Consistently, research has shown that service quality drives purchase intention in most sectors (Rauch et al., 2015; Cho and Sagynov, 2015). In the context of e-commerce, e-service quality also significantly influences purchase intention (Irawan et al.,

2020). Service quality brings together various findings concerning an upward trend in the purchase intentions, not just in the digital market but across different industries. This process emphasizes the urgency for businesses to consider service quality as a number one priority, thus improving purchase intentions of customers.

1.2.8. Electronic word-of-mouth

Electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) is a dominant force in modern e-commerce, significantly influencing consumer behavior and decision-making. e-WOM represents the sharing of experiences, ideas, and recommendations across digital platforms like social media, review sites, and forums. These insights often come in the form of user-generated content, influencer endorsements, and customer reviews, which shape potential buyers' perceptions and purchase intentions (Verma et al., 2023). Studies indicate that e-WOM is especially influential among younger consumers like Millennials and Generation Z, who actively seek information through online platforms (Rosales et al., 2024). Its perceived reliability often surpasses traditional advertising, fostering greater brand trust, loyalty, and customer engagement.

Platforms such as TikTok have amplified e-WOM's impact. TikTok's interactive, short-form video format enables users to generate, share, and consume information rapidly, making it a powerful e-WOM tool (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). Various types of e-WOM interactions—many-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-many, and one-to-one—emerge on TikTok, each influencing consumer behavior in unique ways. For example, a popular review with numerous likes and shares (many-to-one) serves as social proof, while interactive content such as duets and stitches (many-to-many) fosters a collaborative environment where opinions evolve in real time. Direct exchanges, like private messages (one-to-one), also enable personal product recommendations from friends, boosting credibility.

Research underscores e-WOM's strong influence on purchase intentions on platforms like TikTok. Indrawati et al. (2022) found that e-WOM positively affects purchase intentions, citing that quality and quantity of information play significant roles. Cahyono (2023) applied the Theory of Planned Behavior to show that e-WOM impacts attitudes, norms, and perceived control, which collectively drive purchase intentions. This study, conducted with TikTok users, revealed that 87% of purchase intentions could be explained by e-WOM factors such as source credibility, content quality, and quantity. Understanding the dynamics of e-WOM on TikTok enables businesses to attract new customers, retain existing ones, and drive conversions, emphasizing the need for brands to stay attuned to trends and evolving consumer behaviors in e-WOM.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Conceptual Framework

While the core study revolves around purchase intention, the SERVQUAL Model was utilized as the framework to explore how service quality dimensions, such as tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, impact purchase decisions. Variables pertaining to e-Wom like message quality and platform credibility which collectively shaped users' purchasing

decisions (Vi et al., 2021), were integrated with SERVQUAL to form this conceptual framework as shown in Figure 1.

2.2. Hypotheses of the Study

H₁: TikTok Shop's Tangibility significantly impacts the purchase intentions of DLSU students.

Research indicates that tangibility, encompassing the physical aspects of a service, significantly influences consumer purchase intentions. A study on the Shopee e-commerce platform found that tangible elements positively affect purchasing decisions (Angelica and Gunawan, 2024).

H₂: TikTok Shop's Reliability significantly impacts the purchase intentions of DLSU students.

Reliability in service delivery is crucial for building consumer trust, which significantly influences purchase intentions. For example, a study on the relationships between service quality, satisfaction, and purchase intention found that reliability positively affects customer satisfaction, leading to increased purchase intentions (Kim et al., 2017).

H₃: TikTok Shop's Responsiveness significantly impacts the purchase intentions of DLSU students.

Research indicates that responsiveness, defined as the willingness to help customers and provide prompt service, significantly influences customer satisfaction and purchase intentions (Alsagaf and Althonayan, 2018).

H₄: TikTok Shop's Empathy significantly impacts the purchase intentions of DLSU students.

Empathy in service delivery, reflecting a company's ability to understand and share customer feelings, enhances customer satisfaction and loyalty. A study by Bae et al. (2023) demonstrated that customer empathy mediates the relationship between a retail firm's environmental orientation and customer purchasing behavior towards eco-friendly goods, highlighting empathy's role in influencing purchase intentions.

H₅: TikTok Shop's Assurance significantly impacts the purchase intentions of DLSU students.

Assurance, involving the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust, is pivotal in influencing customer satisfaction and purchase intentions. A study analyzing the influence of service quality dimensions, including assurance, on customer satisfaction found that assurance significantly affects customer satisfaction, which in turn impacts purchase intentions (Setiono and Hidayat, 2022).

H₆: TikTok Shop's Quality of Message significantly impacts the purchase intentions of DLSU students.

The quality of messages in electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) communications, characterized by clarity, relevance, and

informativeness, plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer purchase intentions. A study by Amarullah et al. (2022) demonstrated that effective communication alleviates consumer doubts and anxieties, thereby reducing decision-making costs and enhancing purchase intentions.

H₇: TikTok Shop's Platform credibility significantly impacts the purchase intentions of DLSU students.

The credibility of the platform hosting eWOM significantly affects consumers' perceptions and purchase intentions (Wu et al., 2018). It was demonstrated that the perceived credibility of eWOM platforms positively influences purchase intentions, with social media platforms showing higher tie strength and social cues compared to e-commerce websites.

2.3. Research Design

The study utilized a quantitative method approach with descriptive and causal research design. The data was analyzed using linear regression.

2.3.1. Sampling design

The study utilized a combination of convenience and purposive sampling in selecting its respondents. Under this approach, participants were deliberately chosen based on characteristics that closely align with the objectives and scope of the research. Purposive sampling entails the intentional selection of individuals who are deemed most capable of providing relevant and meaningful data for the study. The use of this sampling strategy allowed the researchers to efficiently gather information from respondents who could best contribute to addressing the research questions and achieving the study's objectives.

2.3.2. Data sources

This study was conducted at De La Salle University (DLSU), which is located on Taft Avenue in Manila City, Philippines. The study focuses on undergraduate students given their familiarity with e-commerce platforms such as TikTok Shop. They are an ideal demographic for looking into how perceived service quality affects purchase behavior since they utilize internet shopping on a regular basis. The researchers initially computed a target sample size of 394 respondents using Slovin's formula at a 5% margin of error. However, due to low survey response rates, the final dataset consisted of 301 valid respondents only.

The measures employed to operationalize the variables in the research model are adopted from prior research. Purchase intention was measured using the instrument of Tilahun et al. (2023) while for e-Wom which consists of two measurement items platform credibility and quality of message, measurement scales were adopted from Amin (2019). Lastly, SERVQUAL dimensions of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy were all based on Nguyen et al. (2018). All items were recorded using the 5-point Likert scale.

2.3.3. Reliability tests

Cronbach's alpha is a method of assessing reliability by comparing the amount of shared variance, or covariance, among the items

making up an instrument to the amount of overall variance. The concept suggests that a reliable instrument should exhibit substantial covariance between items relative to the total variance George and Mallery (2003). To measure the internal consistency and the reliability of the variables used in the study, a pre-test with 30 respondents was conducted.

Based on the scale reliability statistics arising from the responses in the pre-test (Table 1), the measurement scales for all the variables had acceptable internal consistency, as their Cronbach's alpha coefficients were able to hurdle the minimum threshold of 0.60.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Demographics

Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The age distribution indicates that a substantial majority (74.4%) are aged 18-21, while 25.6% fall within the 22-25 age group. In terms of gender, male respondents comprise nearly 56% of the sample.

3.2. Regression Analyses Results

All predictor variables were found to have significant impact towards purchase intention as indicated in Table 3.

3.3. Summary of the Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables

The overall descriptive statistics revealed that the respondents

Table 1: Cronbach alpha

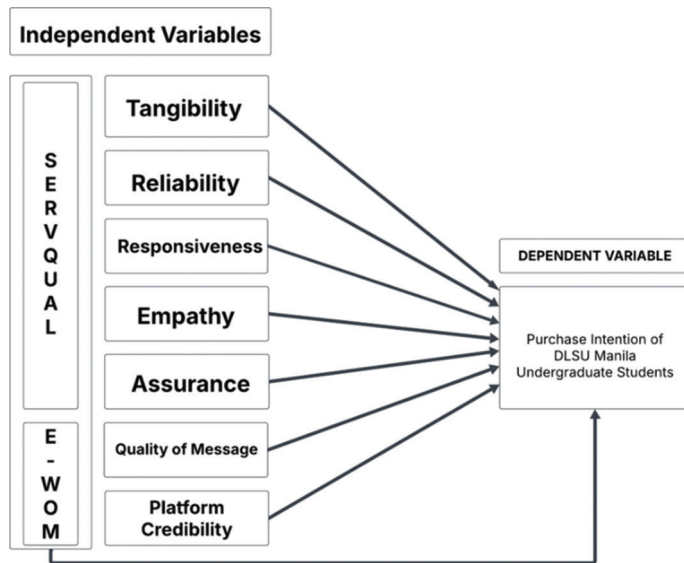
Variables	Cronbach alpha
Tangibility	0.600
Reliability	0.776
Responsiveness	0.803
Assurance	0.793
Empathy	0.728
Quality of message	0.675
Platform credibility	0.752
Purchase intention	0.880

Table 2: Demographics

Respondents' profile	n	Percentage
Age distribution		
Young adults	224	74.4
Adults	77	25.6
Gender		
Male	168	55.8
Female	133	44.2

Table 3: Regression results on purchase intention

Variables	P-value
Tangibility	<0.001
Reliability	<0.001
Responsiveness	<0.001
Assurance	<0.001
Empathy	<0.001
Quality of message	<0.001
Platform credibility	<0.001

Figure 1: Proposed conceptual framework

exhibited high levels of agreement across all major variables, indicating positive perceptions toward TikTok Shop's service quality, eWOM characteristics, and purchase intentions. Among the service quality dimensions, tangibility ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 0.73$) recorded the highest mean, suggesting that DLSU undergraduate students strongly agree that TikTok Shop's interface is user-friendly, visually appealing, and professional. This aligns with Budi et al. (2023), who found that ease of use and professional presentation increase trust and intention to purchase in online platforms.

Meanwhile, reliability ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 0.80$), responsiveness ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 0.83$), assurance ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.74$), and empathy ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 0.86$) all obtained means interpreted as "Agree," showing that students perceive TikTok Shop sellers as reliable, knowledgeable, and considerate, consistent with Pires et al. (2024), who highlighted the importance of trust and empathy in e-commerce satisfaction.

In terms of eWOM variables, message quality ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 0.69$) and platform credibility ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 0.71$) both achieved "Strongly Agree" interpretations. This suggests that respondents consider TikTok Shop's reviews accurate, clear, and trustworthy which are all factors that enhance confidence in purchasing decisions (Cheung et al., 2021). Lastly, purchase intention obtained an overall mean of 3.93 ($SD = 0.98$), categorized as "Agree," indicating a generally positive outlook toward future purchases on TikTok Shop.

3.4. Discussion of Results

The results as shown in Table 3 indicate a statistically significant positive association between tangibility and purchase intention ($\beta = 0.552$, $P < 0.001$). This finding reinforces the core propositions of the SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) and is consistent with Ladhari (2010), who emphasized that physical cues such as visual appeal and professional presentation enhance perceived service quality and consumer confidence. In a similar vein, Khan et al. (2024) demonstrated that aesthetically pleasing and

user-friendly interfaces in e-commerce environments significantly increase consumer engagement and purchase propensity.

Within the context of DLSU students, the structured layout of TikTok Shop, together with clear product imagery and visually appealing design elements, likely contributes to perceptions of authenticity and trustworthiness, thereby strengthening purchase intention. This observation aligns with Kim and Lennon's (2013) concept of "visual trust," which suggests that design-related cues in digital platforms can compensate for the absence of physical interaction by signaling quality and credibility. Consequently, tangibility serves not only as a functional indicator of trust but also as a source of emotional reassurance, highlighting its central role in influencing consumer behavior within social commerce settings.

The analysis further revealed that reliability (see Table 3) exerts a significant influence on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.469$, $P < 0.001$). This result is consistent with prior studies by Zeithaml et al. (1996), which underscored the importance of consistent and dependable service in fostering customer satisfaction and purchase confidence. For students who heavily depend on the convenience of online shopping, factors such as accurate product information, prompt delivery, and dependable seller performance are particularly salient. This finding also supports the work of Meilatinova (2021), who found that reliability in digital commerce environments directly affects repurchase intentions. The strong effect observed may further reflect Filipino consumers' heightened sensitivity to perceived online transaction risks, positioning reliability as a critical determinant of trust and subsequent purchasing behavior.

Responsiveness likewise demonstrated a significant positive effect on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.439$, $P < 0.001$), corroborating the findings of Rita et al. (2019), who reported that timely and effective communication enhances buyer confidence in online contexts. On TikTok Shop, sellers who promptly address inquiries and efficiently resolve concerns exhibit attentiveness and professionalism, which contribute to higher customer satisfaction. Moreover, given the fast-paced and interactive nature of TikTok, real-time responsiveness may replicate elements of social interaction, thereby elevating perceived service quality and reducing perceived risk. The significance of this result may also be explained by the Filipino cultural value of pakikisama (harmonious interpersonal relations), wherein responsiveness is interpreted as a sign of care and respect, ultimately motivating students to proceed with purchases.

For assurance, the findings reveal a strong positive relationship between assurance and purchase intention (odds ratio = 2.918, $P < 0.001$). This outcome aligns with Parasuraman et al. (1988), who defined assurance as the knowledge, courtesy, and credibility of service providers that foster customer trust. In digital commerce settings, assurance is reflected in secure payment mechanisms, seller verification, and transparent return and refund policies. Supporting this result, Handoyo (2024) found that perceived security and trustworthiness significantly encourage online purchasing behavior. For DLSU students, assurance functions as an indicator of transaction safety within the digital marketplace. The high level of significance suggests that when TikTok Shop

effectively communicates data security and seller legitimacy, students are more inclined to engage in purchasing activities.

Empathy, on the other hand, emerged as the most influential predictor of purchase intention ($\beta = 0.580, P < 0.001$). This finding is consistent with Ladhari (2010), who emphasized that personalized service and emotional engagement play a vital role in driving consumer loyalty and engagement in e-commerce environments. Within TikTok Shop's social commerce context, empathy extends beyond technical assistance to include sincere interaction, personalized communication, and emotional sensitivity. Given the collectivist orientation of Filipino consumers, interpersonal warmth and relationship-building are particularly valued in service encounters. Sellers who demonstrate empathy—such as by addressing customers by name or acknowledging their concerns—enhance emotional satisfaction and trust, which in turn translates into stronger purchase intentions. This underscores the importance of social and emotional connection as a distinguishing feature of TikTok Shop compared to more traditional e-commerce platforms.

The results for message quality also show a significant positive relationship between message quality and purchase intention ($\beta = 0.348, P < 0.001$), lending support to Cheung and Thadani (2012), who found that clear, informative, and persuasive messages enhance perceived credibility and influence online purchasing decisions. Similarly, Ismagilova et al. (2020) identified message quality as a key component of effective electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). In the TikTok Shop environment, concise yet engaging product-related content—often delivered through short-form videos—facilitates informed decision-making among consumers. This finding indicates that students respond positively to messages that successfully integrate entertainment with informativeness, consistent with Ducoffe's (1996) advertising value theory, which posits that informativeness and credibility are strong predictors of favorable consumer attitudes. Accordingly, sellers who produce high-quality, authentic, and persuasive content are more likely to convert consumer interest into actual purchases.

Finally, platform credibility was found to have a significant positive effect on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.458, P < 0.001$), supporting McKnight et al. (2002), who emphasized the central role of trust and perceived security in online consumer behavior. As TikTok incorporates e-commerce functionalities within a social media framework, establishing platform credibility becomes essential in mitigating skepticism toward emerging purchasing channels. This result is further supported by Filieri and McLeay (2014), who argued that a credible platform enables trust transfer from the system to individual sellers. For Filipino students, features such as verified seller indicators, secure payment options, and transparent return policies likely enhanced perceptions of safety and legitimacy. Thus, platform credibility serves as the foundational mechanism through which service quality and eWOM factors effectively translate consumer interest into purchase intention.

4. CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical evidence on the determinants of purchase intention in social commerce by examining the roles

of service quality dimensions, message quality, and platform credibility within the context of TikTok Shop among Filipino university students. Consistent with the SERVQUAL framework (Parasuraman et al., 1988), the findings confirm that tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy all exert significant positive effects on purchase intention, underscoring the continued relevance of traditional service quality constructs in emerging, socially embedded e-commerce environments.

Among these factors, empathy emerged as the strongest predictor, highlighting the critical importance of social-emotional engagement in social commerce platforms. This result suggests that beyond functional efficiency, consumers—particularly in collectivist cultures such as the Philippines—place substantial value on personalized interaction, relational warmth, and emotional responsiveness. Tangibility and reliability also demonstrated strong effects, indicating that visually appealing interfaces, accurate information, and dependable service execution remain essential in mitigating perceived online transaction risks. Furthermore, responsiveness and assurance were shown to enhance consumer confidence by fostering perceptions of attentiveness, professionalism, and transactional security.

Beyond service quality, the study extends existing literature by integrating message quality and platform credibility into the analysis. The significant influence of message quality underscores the persuasive power of concise, informative, and engaging content in short-form, video-driven commerce environments. Meanwhile, platform credibility was found to function as a foundational trust mechanism, enabling the transfer of trust from the system to individual sellers and facilitating the conversion of consumer interest into purchase intention.

Overall, the findings contribute to the growing body of social commerce research by demonstrating that purchase intention in integrated social media-commerce platforms is shaped by a combination of functional service quality, emotional connection, persuasive communication, and institutional trust. For practitioners, the results suggest that sellers and platform operators should prioritize empathetic engagement, visual and informational clarity, reliable service performance, and credibility-enhancing mechanisms to strengthen consumer trust and purchasing behavior. Future research may build on these findings by examining longitudinal effects, cross-cultural comparisons, or behavioral outcomes beyond purchase intention to further enrich understanding of consumer decision-making in social commerce ecosystems.

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