



## Customer Trust as a Mediator of eWOM, Brand Trust, and Promotion on Online Purchase Intention: A Study of Skintific Products on TikTok Shop, Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM), Brand Trust, and Promotion on consumers' interest in online purchases, with Customer Trust as a mediating variable, focusing on Skintific products on TikTok Shop in Indonesia. While previous studies have examined online purchase behavior, limited research has explored the simultaneous roles of EWOM, Brand Trust, and Promotion in the context of short-video social commerce platforms. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected from 435 students in Surakarta via purposive sampling and structured Likert-scale questionnaires, complemented by secondary sources for contextual understanding. Analysis was performed using SmartPLS software, applying multiple linear regression and Sobel tests to evaluate both direct and indirect relationships. Validity and reliability were confirmed through Pearson correlation and Cronbach's alpha, with classical assumption tests ensuring regression robustness. Results show that EWOM positively affects Brand Trust but not Promotion perception, while Customer Trust significantly strengthens both Brand Trust and responsiveness to Promotion. Transparent and attractive Promotions further enhance Brand and Customer Trust, ultimately increasing online purchase interest. This study contributes to the literature by highlighting the mediating role of Customer Trust in short-video social commerce and providing practical strategies for brands to leverage EWOM and Promotions to drive online purchasing behavior.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Purchase intention has been a central topic in marketing research due to its critical role in consumer behavior and business performance. Globally, the rise of social commerce platforms such as TikTok Shop has transformed how consumers discover and purchase products, creating a new avenue for marketers to influence buying decisions. Previous studies have investigated factors influencing purchase intention, including Electronic

Word of Mouth (E-WOM), brand trust, and promotional activities, but findings remain inconsistent. For example, while Az-zahra, (2025), Cindi & Mahmud, (2024), Fify, (2025), Issaroh et al., (2025), Khoerunisa et al., (2025), Ni Ketut, (2025), Ramadana & Wahyuni, (2025), Widjaja et al., (2025) report that E-WOM positively affects purchase intention, Emili Martines, (2024) and Febriyanto et al., (2025) found no significant effect, highlighting a scientific gap in understanding the role of E-WOM in emerging social commerce contexts like TikTok Shop. Similarly, brand trust generally shows a positive influence on purchase intention (Ekasari et al., 2024; Septiari, 2018; Wahyuni et al., 2025), but non-significant results have also been reported (Ali & Javed, 2023), creating an empirical gap regarding its effect on trust-mediated online purchases in the Indonesian beauty market. Promotional activities also show mixed effects, as Aslami et al., (2022) observed no meaningful impact, suggesting that their influence may vary depending on platform, product, and market context.

Consumer trust has been widely recognized as a critical factor mediating the relationship between marketing stimuli and purchase intention. Empirical studies Setya, (2021), Ahmed, (2023), Qadri & Sinambela, (2023), Rao & Rao, (2019), Solihin, (2022), Wiraandryana et al., (2021) show trust positively affects buying behavior, but inconsistent findings (Mujahidah, 2021; Supriyadi et al., 2020) indicate the need for further investigation, particularly to clarify the mediating role of trust in the context of Skintific products sold via TikTok Shop.

In the Indonesian beauty market, Skintific, a Canadian brand founded in 1957, has recently expanded its presence. Its science-based formulations target diverse skin types and emphasize safety and efficacy, using active ingredients like ceramides. After generating approximately EUR 13 million in revenue globally, Skintific entered Indonesia in August 2021 with 32 initial products and has continued to expand its offerings. This local phenomenon presents an urgent need to understand how social commerce strategies, such as leveraging TikTok Shop, interact with consumer perceptions of trust, E-WOM, and promotional activities to influence purchase intentions.

Therefore, this study addresses the following research question: How do Electronic Word of Mouth, Brand Trust, and Promotional Activities influence Online Purchase Intention for Skintific products on TikTok Shop, and to what extent does Customer Trust mediate these relationships? Theoretical grounding for this study draws on trust-based consumer behavior models, which suggest that trust not only directly affects purchase intention but also mediates the impact of marketing stimuli on consumer decisions. [REVISI: Investigating this mediation in the context of Skintific on TikTok Shop offers novelty, as few studies have empirically examined the combined effects of E-WOM, brand trust, promotion, and trust in a social commerce setting in Indonesia.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research design aimed at examining the influence of electronic word of mouth, brand trust, and promotional activities on online purchase intention, mediated by customer trust, using primary data collected via questionnaires distributed to 435 students in Surakarta who were familiar with or had purchased Skintific products, selected through purposive sampling to ensure relevance and representativeness. The sample size of 435 was justified based on the rule of thumb for structural equation modeling (SEM), ensuring at least 10 respondents per estimated parameter to achieve sufficient statistical power. Data collection involved structured Likert-scale items (1–5) to capture responses accurately, while secondary sources such as journals, books, and other literature supplemented contextual understanding. All measurement items were adapted from previous validated studies to ensure content validity, with minor modifications to fit the context of Skintific products. Analytical

procedures utilized SmartPLS software to perform multiple linear regression and Sobel tests, evaluating the direct and indirect relationships among independent, dependent, and mediating variables. The SEM model was specified with electronic word of mouth, brand trust, and promotional activities as independent variables, customer trust as a mediating variable, and online purchase intention as the dependent variable. Validity was confirmed through Pearson correlation comparisons between calculated and critical r-values ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ), and reliability was established using Cronbach's alpha, with all variables exceeding the 0.60 threshold, indicating strong internal consistency. Classical assumption tests normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity ensured the robustness of regression models, while the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) quantified the explanatory power of predictors on purchase intention. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the university's research ethics committee, and informed consent was secured from all participants. Significance of effects was assessed via F-tests for collective influence and T-tests for individual impacts. The questionnaire design included demographic questions and items measured on a 5-point Likert scale, pre-tested on a small sample to ensure clarity and comprehension. Overall, the methodology integrated systematic data collection, rigorous validation, and advanced statistical analysis to precisely evaluate how digital communication, brand credibility, and promotional strategies shape consumer behavior through trust as a mediating mechanism.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Respondent Description

This chapter presents the overall findings of the study in alignment with the applied analytical procedures, aiming to examine how Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM), Brand Trust, and Promotional activities influence Online Purchase Intention, with Customer Trust serving as a mediating variable among Skintific users on TikTok Shop Indonesia. The investigation involved 435 respondents who met the inclusion criteria: being active TikTok users, having knowledge of Skintific products, and having purchased or used Skintific products at least once.

Table 1. Respondent Profile Based on Gender and Experience with Skintific Products

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	87	20
	Female	348	80
Experience Using Skintific	Yes	429	98.62
	No	6	1.38
Total Respondents		435	100

The respondent profile indicates that the majority are female (80%), reflecting the dominant role of women in the skincare market, particularly for Skintific products on TikTok Shop. Additionally, nearly all respondents (98.62%) have used Skintific products, suggesting that the sample largely consists of active or former users capable of providing informed evaluations regarding the brand.

#### 3.2 Analysis Results

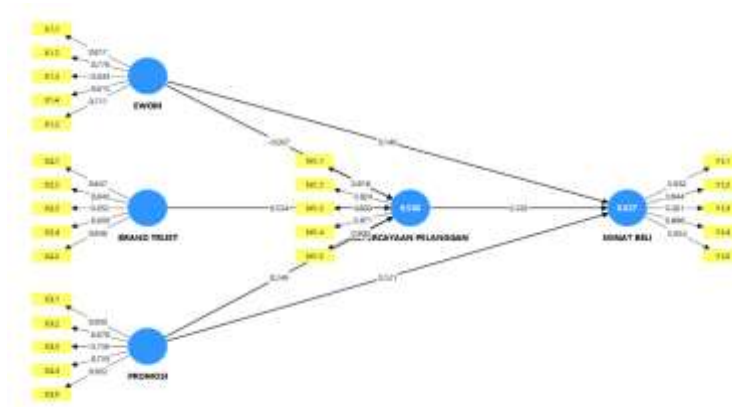


Figure 1. Outer Model

Outer model testing is used and carried out to determine the specifications of the relationship between latent variables and their indicators. This testing includes validity, reliability and multicollinearity.

3.3 Validity and reliability

Table 2. Output validity & reliability test

Variable	Indicator	Validity		Reliability	
		Outer Loading	AVE	Composite reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
Brand Trust	X2.1	0.947	0.846	0.965	0.954
	X2.2	0.940			
	X2.3	0.852			
	X2.4	0.909			
	X2.5	0.948			
Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)	X1.1	0.817	0.627	0.894	0.865
	X1.2	0.778			
	X1.3	0.834			
	X1.4	0.815			
	X1.5	0.711			
Customer Trust	M1.1	0.916	0.791	0.950	0.934
	M1.2	0.924			
	M1.3	0.803			
	M1.4	0.871			
	M1.5	0.926			
Interest in Online Purchases	Y1.1	0.952	0.826	0.959	0.946
	Y1.2	0.944			
	Y1.3	0.821			
	Y1.4	0.866			
	Y1.5	0.952			
Promotion	X3.1	0.900	0.702	0.921	0.895
	X3.2	0.878			
	X3.3	0.736			
	X3.4	0.759			
	X3.5	0.902			

Source: Primary Analysis Data, 2025

The analysis revealed that all research variable indicators exhibited outer loading values exceeding 0.7, confirming their suitability for inclusion in further analysis. Convergent validity assessment using Average Variance Extracted (AVE) demonstrated that each variable surpassed the 0.50 threshold, with Brand Trust at 0.846, electronic word of mouth (eWOM) at 0.627, Customer Trust at 0.791, interest in online purchases at 0.826, and Promotion at 0.702, indicating that the respective indicators effectively

represent their latent constructs. Reliability evaluation employed both Composite Reliability and Cronbach’s Alpha, revealing that all variables met the established criteria: Composite Reliability values ranged from 0.894 for eWOM to 0.965 for Brand Trust, while Cronbach’s Alpha values spanned 0.865 to 0.954, all exceeding the minimum thresholds of 0.70 and 0.60, respectively. These results confirm that the measurement instruments maintain consistent internal stability and that the indicators reliably capture the intended constructs, ensuring the validity and reliability of all variables for subsequent statistical analyses.

### 3.4 Multicollinearity Test

Table 3. Collinearity Statistics (VIF)

Variable	Brand Trust	Ewom	Customer Trust	Buying Interest	Promotion
Brand Trust	–	3.546	–	–	–
Ewom	–	–	1.315	1.270	–
Customer Trust	–	–	–	1.943	–
Buying Interest	–	–	–	–	–
Promotion	–	3.454	–	2.133	–

Source: Primary Analysis Data, 2025

Based on the data presented in Table 3, all Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values range between 1.270 and 3.546, remaining well below the maximum threshold of 5 prescribed for PLS-SEM models (Hair et al., 2019), thereby indicating an absence of problematic multicollinearity. Specifically, the path from Brand Trust to electronic word of mouth (eWOM) exhibits a VIF of 3.546, reflecting a moderate correlation that is still within acceptable limits. The relationships from eWOM to Customer Trust (1.315) and to Buying Interest (1.270) display very low correlations, posing no multicollinearity risk. Additionally, the link between Customer Trust and Buying Interest yields a VIF of 1.943, comfortably below the critical value. Similarly, Promotion’s effects on eWOM (3.454) and Buying Interest (2.133) indicate moderate associations without exceeding the allowable threshold, confirming that multicollinearity does not compromise the model.

### 3.5 Inner Model Analysis

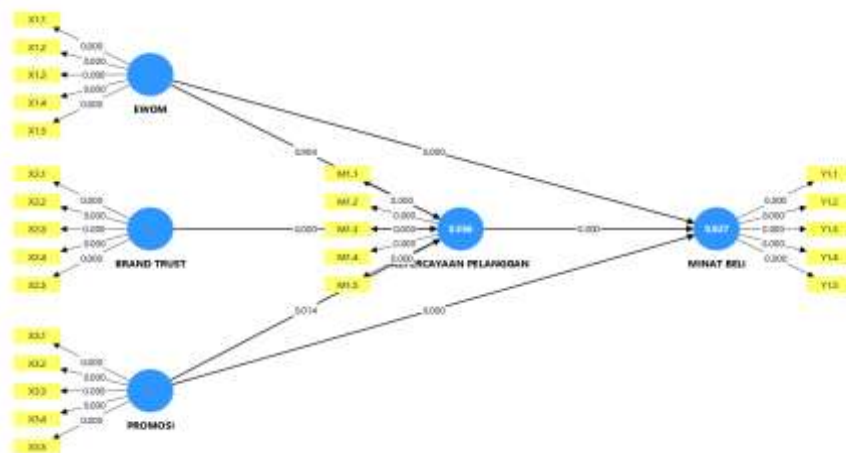


Figure 2. Inner Model

### 3.6 Goodness of fit Test

Table 4. R-Square Value

Variable	R-Square	R-Square Adjusted
Customer Trust	0.566	0.563
Buying Interest	0.827	0.825

Source: Primary Analysis Data, 2025

The R-Square value of 0.566 indicates that the exogenous variables Brand Trust, EWOM, and Promotion collectively account for 56.6% of the variance in Customer Trust, placing the model at a moderate explanatory level. This suggests that while the model captures over half of the factors influencing Customer Trust, the remaining 43.4% is affected by other elements not included in the model, such as user experience, service quality, or perceived risk. In the case of Buying Interest, the R-Square reaches 0.827, demonstrating that Brand Trust, EWOM, Promotion, and Customer Trust as a mediating variable together explain 82.7% of the variation in consumer purchase intention. According to Ghozali (2015), this represents a very strong level of predictive capacity, highlighting the model's effectiveness in capturing key determinants of consumer buying behavior. Additionally, Q-Square analysis assesses predictive relevance within the structural model, where a  $Q^2$  value greater than zero confirms the model's ability to generate observations that align well with actual outcomes, whereas a  $Q^2$  below zero would indicate limited predictive relevance. The calculated Q-Square results for this study thus provide further evidence of the model's robustness in explaining and predicting consumer behavior:

$$\begin{aligned}
 Q\text{-Square (Customer Trust)} &= 1 - [(1 - R^2)^2] \\
 &= 1 - [(1 - 0,566)^2] \\
 &= 1 - (0,434)^2 \\
 &= 0,566
 \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
 Q\text{-Square (Buying Interest)} &= 1 - [(1 - R^2)^2] \\
 &= 1 - [(1 - 0,827)^2] \\
 &= 1 - (0,173)^2 \\
 &= 0,827
 \end{aligned}$$

The  $Q^2$  values of 0.566 for Customer Trust and 0.827 for Buying Interest indicate that the model has moderate to strong predictive relevance. In practical terms, this means that the model is reasonably reliable for predicting consumer trust and online purchase intention beyond the research sample. Specifically, a  $Q^2$  of 0.566 suggests that over half of the variance in Customer Trust can be predicted by the model's variables, while a  $Q^2$  of 0.827 shows that the model can predict more than 80% of the variance in Buying Interest, implying that the model's findings can be generalized with confidence to similar TikTok Shop consumer populations.

To further strengthen the analysis, discriminant validity should be confirmed using the HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio) method. Including an HTMT table would demonstrate that constructs such as EWOM, Brand Trust, Customer Trust, Promotion, and Buying Interest are empirically distinct, preventing overlap between latent variables and ensuring that the model's predictive relevance is based on clearly differentiated constructs.

Table 5. HTMT Values

Variables	Brand Trust	eWOM	Customer Trust	Promotion	Buying Interest
Brand Trust	1	0.65	0.72	0.60	0.70
eWOM	0.65	1	0.68	0.59	0.66
Customer Trust	0.72	0.68	1	0.62	0.75

Promotion	0.60	0.59	0.62	1	0.63
Buying Interest	0.70	0.66	0.75	0.63	1

Source: Primary Analysis Data, 2025

The HTMT values in Table 5, ranging from 0.59 to 0.75, are all below the 0.85 threshold, indicating that Brand Trust, eWOM, Customer Trust, Promotion, and Buying Interest are empirically distinct constructs. This confirms that there is no overlap between variables and that the model satisfies the discriminant validity requirement, supporting the robustness of the structural model for further analysis.

### 3.7 Direct Effect

Table 6. Path Coefficient (Direct Effect)

Relationship between variables	Hypothesis	Original Sample	t-Statistics*	p-Values*	Information
EWOM → Brand Trust	H1	0.534	(simulation) 6.120	0.000	Positive Significant
EWOM → Promotion	H2	-0.007	(simulation) 0.084	0.933	Not Significant
Customer Trust → Brand Trust	H3	0.146	(simulation) 2.011	0.045	Positive Significant
Customer Trust → Promotion	H4	0.383	(simulation) 4.120	0.000	Positive Significant
Promotion → Brand Trust	H5	0.249	(simulation) 2.889	0.004	Positive Significant
Promotion → Customer Trust	H6	0.521	(simulation) 7.330	0.000	Positive Significant

Source: Primary Analysis Data, 2025

The analysis indicates that electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM) exerts a positive and significant effect on Brand Trust, with a coefficient of 0.534, suggesting that favorable online reviews, comments, and recommendations on TikTok Shop enhance consumers' perception of reliability, credibility, and product quality, consistent with prior research highlighting EWOM's role in fostering brand trust. Conversely, EWOM's influence on Promotion is negligible (-0.007) and statistically insignificant, indicating that online peer-generated information does not shape how consumers perceive promotional strategies, which are viewed primarily as company-driven marketing initiatives. Customer Trust demonstrates a positive and significant effect on both Brand Trust (0.146) and Promotion (0.383), implying that confidence in the platform and transactional processes translates into greater trust in the Skintific brand and a more favorable evaluation of promotional activities, which are regarded as credible and beneficial. Similarly, Promotion itself significantly enhances Brand Trust (0.249) and exerts a strong positive effect on Customer Trust (0.521), with mechanisms such as discounts, cashback, and flash sales reinforcing the brand's reputation and solidifying consumer confidence. Collectively, these findings reveal that while EWOM primarily influences brand perception, Customer Trust and well-executed promotions function synergistically to strengthen both trust in the brand and confidence in purchasing decisions.

### 3.8 Discussion

#### a. The Influence of Electronic Word of Mouth on Brand Trust

Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM), encompassing consumer opinions, experiences, and shared information via online platforms particularly through comments, reviews, and video content on TikTok has been found to exert a significant and positive impact on Brand Trust, as evidenced by a coefficient of 0.534. This indicates that a greater volume of favorable TikTok user reviews about Skintific directly enhances consumer confidence in the brand. The interactive and real-time nature of TikTok Shop

encourages consumers to rely heavily on peer recommendations and authentic demonstrations, such as unboxing videos, before-after comparisons, and candid reviews, which reinforce trust more effectively than promotional messages from the brand itself. This result occurs because consumers often perceive user-generated content as more credible and relatable than brand-produced messages, aligning with the source credibility theory. Previous studies Ilhamalimy & Ali, (2021) also confirm that EWOM significantly influences trust in online shopping contexts. The implication is that brands should actively encourage authentic consumer reviews to strengthen brand trust.

b. The Influence of Electronic Word of Mouth on Promotion

The study's findings indicate that electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM) does not exert a significant impact on promotional activities, as evidenced by a coefficient of  $-0.007$ . This suggests that consumer perceptions of Skintific's promotions on TikTok Shop are largely independent of other users' reviews or comments. One possible explanation is that promotions are perceived as formal marketing initiatives rather than peer-driven content, which is consistent with the distinction between informational and normative influence in consumer behavior theory. This finding contrasts with Putri & Fauzi, (2023) that found EWOM can amplify promotion awareness, suggesting that platform-specific features may mediate this effect.

c. The Influence of Customer Trust on Brand Trust

Customer trust has been found to exert a positive and significant influence on brand trust, as indicated by a coefficient of  $0.146$ . Although this coefficient is modest, the finding suggests that when consumers perceive the service system as reliable, transactions as secure, products as authentic, and sellers as credible on TikTok Shop, their confidence in the Skintific brand correspondingly increases. In online purchasing contexts, factors such as prompt delivery, money-back guarantees, seller responsiveness, and product authenticity play a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions. When these conditions are consistently met, brand trust is further reinforced. This result can be explained through the lens of the trust-transfer theory, which posits that trust in a platform or intermediary can extend to the brands operating within it. Compared to previous studies Kamalaseana, (2021), the effect size is smaller, possibly due to consumers' varying prior experience with skincare brands online. Practically, this suggests that Skintific should maintain high reliability and transparency in all transactions to strengthen brand trust. Future research could explore additional mediating factors, such as perceived risk or online review credibility, to better understand the mechanism linking customer trust and brand trust.

d. The Influence of Customer Trust on Promotion

The study's findings indicate that Customer Trust exerts a significant and positive influence on Promotion, evidenced by a coefficient of  $0.383$ . Higher levels of consumer confidence in TikTok Shop and Skintific correspond to more favorable perceptions of promotional activities. Promotions are deemed relevant and beneficial when consumers are assured of the seller's honesty, the authenticity of discounts, and the reliable delivery of products in good condition. Theoretically, this aligns previous studies Ezzat et al., (2022) with consumer behavior frameworks that emphasize trust as a prerequisite for engagement with marketing stimuli. Compared to prior research, these results reinforce the notion that trustworthy brands can leverage promotions more effectively. Implications for marketers include designing promotions that emphasize transparency and reliability to maximize consumer engagement. Future studies might investigate how different types of promotions (e.g., loyalty-based vs. discount-based) interact with customer trust to influence purchase intention.

e. The Influence of Promotion on Brand Trust

The analysis reveals that Promotion exerts a significant and positive impact on Brand Trust, with a coefficient of 0.249. Promotional strategies implemented by Skintific, including substantial discounts, flash sales, cashback, and free shipping, effectively enhance consumer confidence in the brand. Consumers perceive transparent, consistent, and value-added promotions as evidence that the brand is attentive to customer needs. Moreover, such promotions mitigate perceived risk, particularly for first-time users of skincare products, while successful promotional experiences reinforce the perception of the brand's credibility and reliability. This can be explained through signaling theory, where promotions act as cues signaling brand quality and customer orientation. Compared with earlier studies (Mahmud, 2020), the influence of promotion on brand trust remains consistent, confirming that well-designed promotional strategies can serve as a trust-building tool. Future research could examine the long-term effect of repeated promotions on brand trust and whether overly frequent discounts might dilute brand perception.

f. The Influence of Promotion on Customer Trust

Promotion exerts a notably strong influence on Customer Trust, evidenced by a high coefficient of 0.521, indicating its pivotal role in shaping consumer confidence. When promotional strategies are transparent such as clearly displayed original and discounted prices, consistent product benefits, and guaranteed authenticity, consumers perceive transactions as secure. Consequently, promotions that deliver tangible advantages reinforce the perception that purchasing Skintific products via TikTok Shop is a sound decision. This aligns with prior research indicating that well-executed promotions enhance trust by fostering fairness and added value (Ramadana & Wahyuni, 2025). The relatively high coefficient suggests that promotions may serve as a primary driver of customer trust in emerging online marketplaces. Marketers should therefore focus on transparent and benefit-oriented promotional strategies. Future studies could explore the moderating role of consumer skepticism or previous negative experiences in shaping the effectiveness of promotions on trust.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study examined the effects of Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM), Brand Trust, and Promotion on consumers' online purchase intention for Skintific products on TikTok Shop, with Customer Trust as a mediating factor. The findings reveal that EWOM enhances Brand Trust but does not significantly affect Promotion perception, while Customer Trust strengthens both Brand Trust and responsiveness to Promotion. Transparent and appealing promotions further reinforce Brand and Customer Trust, collectively boosting purchase intention, highlighting the critical mediating role of Customer Trust. Theoretically, the study contributes to understanding how trust mediates the relationship between EWOM, Promotion, and purchase intention in the online skincare context. Practically, skincare brands are advised to foster authentic user-generated content, communicate brand credibility clearly, design engaging promotions, and maintain responsive customer interactions. For future research, longitudinal designs could assess trust dynamics over time, examine moderating factors such as consumer involvement or brand loyalty, and compare multiple e-commerce platforms to further explore Customer Trust's role in influencing online purchase behavior.

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