



**GEN-Y CONSUMERS' PURCHASE INTENTION ON VIDEO SHARING  
PLATFORM BASED ON TRUST AND NEED FOR TOUCH IN CHINA**

By

**LIN QIAOLING**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,  
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**July 2024**

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment  
of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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July 2024

**Chairman : Serene Ng Siew Imm, PhD**  
**School : Business and Economics**

Shopping through the short-video-based applications have become the new digital marketing. Owing to this trend, more and more Chinese sellers are starting to market through short videos. Compared with traditional online marketing approaches, short video shopping provides an intuitive, convenient, and entertaining way of promotion, enhancing the overall shopping experience. However, despite gaining high short video views, many sellers face the challenge of low purchase intentions.

Responding to the calls of earlier researchers, the primary objective of this study was to examine the features that impact TikTok purchase intention among Gen-Y consumers in Mainland China. First, based on the Elaboration Likelihood Model, TikTok channel attributes (content diagnosticity, vicarious expression, and online reviews) and TikTok spokesperson attributes (social attractiveness, physical attractiveness, attitude homophily, and product expertise) were suggested as the central and peripheral routes encouraging consumers to generate a flow experience and develop purchase intention on TikTok. Second, the Stimulus-Organism-Response

(S-O-R) Model was applied to explain the mediating role of trust. Third, the study examined the moderating role of need for touch. Data was collected using the purposive sampling approach to identify respondents who were Gen-Y TikTok consumers in mainland China (born between 1981 and 1996) and had shopping experience on TikTok in the past three months. An online based questionnaire was distributed to target respondent via Wenjuanxing. In total, 443 responses were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM).

Three notable findings emerged from this study: 1) flow experience was significantly affected by TikTok channel attributes and TikTok spokesperson attributes. Purchase intention was influenced by content diagnosticity, online reviews, social attractiveness, and product expertise; 2) trust mediated the influences of flow experience on purchase intention, indicating the indispensable role of trust; and 3) Gen-Y TikTok consumers with a lower need for touch and high trust are more likely to exhibit higher purchase intention than those with a higher need for touch. This study enhances existing literature by: 1) expanding the S-O-R model's application within TikTok using ELM theory; 2) uncovering a mediation process in which flow experience affects purchase intention via trust, based on the S-OR model; 3) exploring the moderating effects of the need for touch on purchase intention. In practical terms, this study advises practitioners to embrace the digital trend and make use of short-form video commerce to enhance consumers' shopping experiences, ultimately resulting in favorable purchase intentions. Despite valuable findings, this study has several limitations. It focused on one country, so future research should examine different platforms or countries to understand cultural impacts on short-form video marketing. Additionally, future studies should compare the effects of various spokesperson types, such as

virtual spokespersons, on consumer decisions. Researchers should also examine how the need for touch and purchase motivation vary across product categories.

**Keywords:** Elaboration likelihood model, Flow experience, Stimulus-Organism-Response model, TikTok, Need for touch

**SDG:** GOAL 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, GOAL 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure, GOAL 12: Responsible Consumption and Production



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**NIAT PEMBELIAN PENGGUNA GEN Y DI PLATFORM PERKONGSIAN VIDEO BERDASARKAN KEPERCAYAAN SEBAGAI PENGANTARA DAN KEPERLUAN SENTUHAN SEBAGAI MODERATOR DI CHINA**

Oleh

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Pembelian melalui aplikasi berasaskan video pendek telah menjadi trend pemasaran digital terkini. Disebabkan trend ini, peniaga di China mula memasarkan produk mereka melalui video pendek. Berbanding pendekatan pemasaran dalam talian tradisional, aplikasi video pendek menyediakan cara promosi yang intuitif, mudah dan menghiburkan yang dapat meningkatkan pengalaman membeli-belah secara keseluruhan. Namun, ramai peniaga menghadapi cabaran niat membeli yang rendah walaupun video pendek mereka mendapat tontonan yang tinggi.

Seiring dengan saranan penyelidikan terdahulu, objektif utama kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji ciri yang memberi kesan kepada niat pembelian di TikTok dalam kalangan pengguna Gen Y di Tanah Besar China. Pertama, berdasarkan Model Kemungkinan Penghuraian, atribut saluran TikTok (diagnostik kandungan, ekspresi wakil dan ulasan dalam talian) dan atribut jurucakap TikTok (daya tarikan sosial, daya tarikan fizikal, sikap himofili dan kepakaran produk) telah dicadangkan sebagai laluan pusat dan sisi

yang menggalakkan pengguna menjana pengalaman dan meningkatkan niat pembelian di TikTok. Kedua, model sitimulus-organisma-tindak balas (SOR) telah digunakan untuk menerangkan peranan pengantaraan kepercayaan. Ketiga, kajian ini mengkaji peranan penyederhanaan keperluan untuk sentuhan. Data dikumpul menggunakan persampelan bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti responden yang merupakan pengguna TikTok Gen-Y di tanah besar China (lahir antara 1981 dan 1996) dan mempunyai pengalaman membeli-belah di TikTok dalam tempoh tiga bulan sebelum kajian. Soal selidik dalam talian telah diedarkan kepada responden sasaran melalui Wenjuanxing. Secara keseluruhan, 443 respon telah dianalisis menggunakan Pemodelan Persamaan Struktur Separa Kuasa Dua (PLS-SEM).

Kajian ini melaporkan 3 dapatan penting: 1) aliran pengalaman dipengaruhi dengan ketara oleh atribut saluran TikTok dan atribut jurucakap TikTok. Niat pembelian pula dipengaruhi oleh diagnostik kandungan, ulasan dalam talian, daya tarikan sosial dan kepakaran produk; 2) kepercayaan bertindak sebagai pengantara pengaruh pengalaman aliran ke atas niat pembelian, menunjukkan peranan penting kepercayaan; dan 3) Pengguna TikTok Gen-Y yang mempunyai keperluan sentuhan yang lebih rendah dan kepercayaan yang tinggi lebih berkemungkinan menunjukkan niat pembelian yang lebih tinggi berbanding mereka yang mempunyai keperluan sentuhan yang lebih tinggi. Kajian ini memperkayakan literatur sedia ada dengan: 1) memperluaskan aplikasi model S-O-R dalam TikTok menggunakan teori ELM; 2) mendedahkan proses pengantaraan di mana aliran pengalaman mempengaruhi niat pembelian melalui kepercayaan, berdasarkan model S-O-R; 3) meneroka kesan penyederhanaan keperluan untuk menyentuh ke atas niat pembelian. Dari segi praktikal, kajian ini membimbing pengamal untuk menerima aliran digital dan

menggunakan video pendek untuk meningkatkan pengalaman membeli-belah pengguna dan meningkatkan niat pembelian. Meskipun ia melaporkan penemuan berharga, kajian ini mempunyai beberapa batasan. Ia memfokuskan pada satu negara, oleh itu, penyelidikan masa depan harus meneliti platform atau negara yang berbeza untuk memahami kesan budaya terhadap pemasaran video pendek. Selain itu, pengkaji boleh membandingkan kesan jurucakap, seperti penggunaan jurucakap maya, terhadap keputusan pengguna. Penyelidik juga harus mengkaji perbezaan keperluan untuk sentuhan dan motivasi pembelian merentas kategori produk.

**Kata Kunci:** Model Kemungkinan Penghuraian, Aliran pengalaman, Model sitimulus-organisma-tindak balas, TikTok, Keperluan untuk sentuhan

**SDG:** MATLAMAT 8: Pekerjaan yang Sesuai dan Pertumbuhan Ekonomi, MATLAMAT 9: Industri, Inovasi dan Infrastruktur, MATLAMAT 12: Penggunaan dan Pengeluaran yang Bertanggungjawab

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of the Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|             |                                                   |
|-------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| s-commerce  | Social Commerce                                   |
| e-commerce  | Electronic Commerce                               |
| S-O-R Model | Stimulus-Organism-Response Model                  |
| ELM         | Elaboration Likelihood Model                      |
| TAM         | Technology Acceptance Model                       |
| TAT         | Technology Affordance Theory                      |
| U&G         | Uses and Gratification Theory                     |
| ST          | Signaling Theory                                  |
| NFT         | Need for Touch                                    |
| PLS-SEM     | Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling |
| SPSS        | Statistical Package of Social Science             |
| CMV         | Common Method Variance                            |
| HOC         | Higher-order Construct LOC Lower-order Construct  |
| CR          | Composite Reliability                             |
| AVE         | Average Variance Extracted                        |
| HTMT        | Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio of Correlations       |
| VIF         | Variance Inflation Factor                         |

# CHAPTER 1

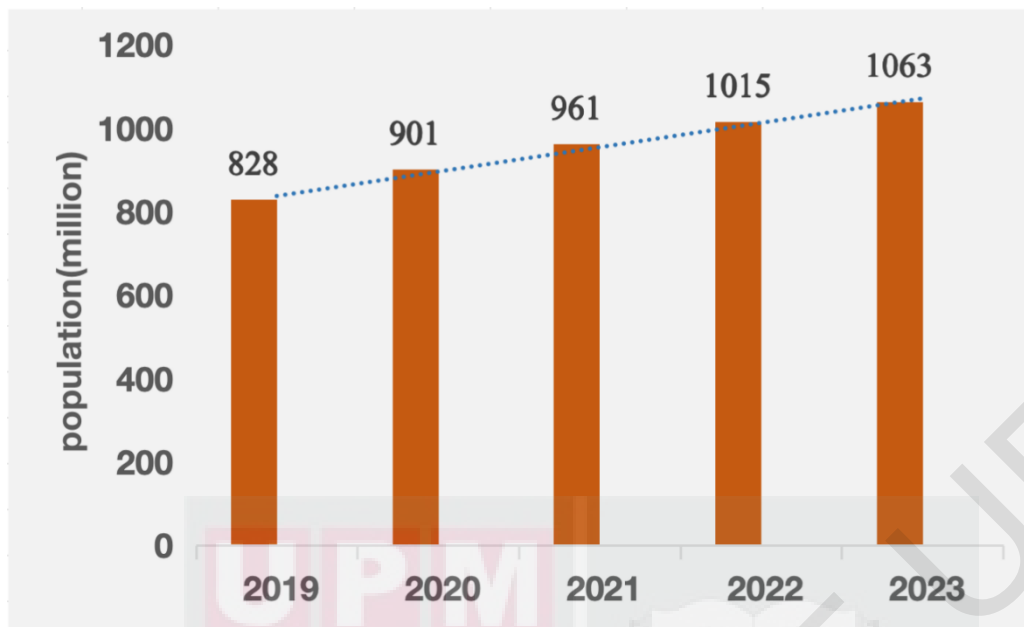
## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

This study examines the factors influencing the purchase intention of mainland Chinese consumers on TikTok. First, the evolution of social media commerce is introduced. Next, the high growth of TikTok globally and its market performance in mainland China are outlined. The problem statement serves as the basis for developing the study's research questions and objectives, followed by a discussion of the study's significance. Finally, the chapter provides the definitions of key terms, concluding with an overview of the thesis organization.

### 1.2 Evolution of Social Media Commerce

Social media is a new form of online media based on user relationships and provides enormous space for user participation (Antony Mayfield, 2008). It serves as a medium for social connection and interactive dialogue among users (Sajid, 2016), offering a platform for users to share their views (Turcotte et al., 2015). Over the last decade, social media has experience exponential growth as internet penetration continues to increase (Hanaysha, 2022). According to Datareportal (2024), as of January 2024, the number of internet users reached 5.3 billion, while social media users surpassed 4.8 billion. Similarly, the rise of the Internet in China has facilitated the development of social media platforms (Wu et al., 2022). As of December 2023, China boasts 1.092 billion Internet users, and the number of social media users has reached 1.063 billion (CNNIC, 2024) (see Figure 1.1).



**Figure 1.1 : Number of Social Media Users in China (in a million) (2019-2023)**  
(Source: China Internet Network Information Center, 2024)

Social media is an emerging media presence based on Web 2.0 that has changed the spread of media forms (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Many marketers have integrated resources into social media (Alalwan et al., 2017). For example, Burberry, a luxury fashion brand, increased its profits by 40% after using social media marketing (Godey et al., 2016). In addition, the apparel brand Kendra Scott increased its new visitors and weekly revenue by 17% and 20%, respectively, using TikTok's short video marketing (Advertising Age, 2022). Similarly, Nike strategically used social media as an advertising platform for its products to engage consumers (Douglas Holt, 2016). It has been shown that social media enables two-way communication compared to traditional media (Nikolinakou & Phua, 2020). It can reach consumers more precisely and stimulate them to buy products at their own pace (Leadleo, 2022).

At this stage, the main types of social media include social networking sites, microblogs, WeChat, blogs, forums, and podcasts (Chinairn, 2021). Social media is

witnessing a growth in both the number of users and the number of platforms (Nikolinakou & Phua, 2020), expanding from merely following, discussing, and interacting to direct consumption and shopping (China People's Network, 2022). On one hand, social media has transformed consumers' information access habits from passively receiving information disseminated by sellers to actively seeking out relevant information (Yannopoulou et al., 2019). On the other hand, fellow consumers on social media platforms can influence purchase intentions (Vrontis et al., 2021). In conclusion, social media helps sellers connections with stakeholders (i.e., suppliers, creditors, and employees) and fosters an effective emotional connections, encouraging active engagement with the brand actively (Alalwan et al., 2017; Kapoor et al., 2018).

Given that the advancement of internet technology and the development of communication means, social media has developed rapidly over the past decade. Throughout the history of social media, the development of the industry can be roughly divided into three phases (Alalwan et al., 2017; Hoffman & Novak, 2012; Hysa et al., 2021).

Phase1: with the advent of the World Wide Web in the 1990s, people were able to send messages with the click of a mouse (Hitzler, 2021). Consequently, a variety of Bulletin Board Systems BBS (BBS) emerged as one of the first social media products to emerge, such as Justin Hall's web page for American college students in 1994 and the launch of Classmate, a classmate dating site, in December 1995. BBS typically consists of several topic groups or boards where users can read or post information (James et al., 1995). According to the data released by CNNIC (2001), as of 2000, 16.32% of users in China used BBS electronic bulletin boards. Social media evolved

from peer-to-peer to peer-to-area communication, dramatically reducing communication costs (He, 2020). Taking advantage of this feature, Chen and Tsai (2020) assert that forums can create brand awareness for companies. Additionally, in May 1997, Six degrees emerged (Travers & Milgram, 1977), built on the theory of six degrees of separation, allowing users to send intra-site messages to 1-3 online friends; the site demonstrated the essence of the Web 2.0 era, which focused on individual users (He, 2020). In 2003, Friendster social networking sites were launched and proliferated, making the "conceptualization" stage of social media, while these sites innovated a new way of online dating and took shape, they did not meet user experience needs well, leading to many problems with the sites, which grew and disappeared rapidly (Bai & He, 2003; Li, 2016).

Phase 2: in the early 2000s, with the diversification and socialization of the Internet, social media, led by MySpace and Qzone, began to take center stage (Wang et al., 2018). These platforms not only allowed users to make friends online in novel way but also provided a personalized platform for users to showcase themselves. For instance, MySpace, founded in 2003, offered a customized music service and space platform for users. With the launch of Qzone, social media's convenience became more widespread, enabling users can to post logs, upload photos in their personal QQ space, and personalize their space to reflect themselves (Zhou et al., 2018; Zhuang et al., 2020). This unique personalized service respects users' varying needs, satisfying their desire for self-express, while also attracting more attention from their online friends (Zhuang et al., 2020). During this era, social commerce also emerged, integrating business and social media functions (Kumar & Sharma, 2022; Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016). S-commerce uses Web 2.0 technologies and social media to

integrate vast amount of data, such as various comments, and disseminate them widely, effectively harnessing the power of social media (Zhou et al., 2013; Soni et al., 2021).

Phase 3: In the mid-2000s, with the popularity of smartphones, social media rapidly transitioned from PCs to mobile devices, ushering in the era of mobile social media based on fragmented time (He, 2020). Facebook, Twitter, and RenRen represent prominent examples of social media platforms that transpose offline human networks into online spaces for social interaction (Sakurai et al., 2021). Facebook, by acquiring Instagram and WhatsApp, has emerged as a dominant mobile advertising platform, addressing its product limitations (Abdelsalam et al., 2020). Snapchat quickly captured the youth market with its "burn after reading" feature, revolutionizing the social media landscape (Wikipedia, 2022). WeChat introduced socialization acquaintances via friend circles based on the accumulated contacts from mobile phones and QQ (Chen et al., 2019a). TikTok, with its concept of musical short videos, has emerged as a leading global platform for short-form video-based social media (Sensor Tower, 2021). Whether it is Facebook and Snapchat internationally or WeChat and TikTok in China, major social media companies are actively developing marketing strategies in response to these trends, emphasizing the growing prominence of social relationships with individuals as nodes. Consequently, the social media industry has entered a booming period (Smith & Short, 2022). Thus, it is relevant to explore user behavior on recent and popular social media platforms, such as TikTok.

In summary, social media marketing has evolved from its phase 1: (peer-to-peer to peer-to-area communication) to phase 2 (commercial integration) and finally to phase 3 (transition from computer to mobile). This evolution has significantly transformed

how sellers promote their products and how consumers gather information and make purchasing intentions. Compared to earlier periods (the 1990s and early 2000s), the phase 3's development has allowed sellers to engage more effectively with consumers and offer personalized services, reshaping traditional marketing models. The rapid proliferation of social media platforms has made it easier for consumers to check product availability and gather marketing information from various sources. The increase in consumer options has compelled sellers to focus more on innovation and service quality. Consequently, social media marketing presents an appealing avenue for research.

### **1.3 Type of Social Media Commerce**

The emergence of Web 2.0 and social media has not only changed the way people communicate, but also created a new business model for enterprises, namely social commerce (s-commerce) (Alalwan et al., 2019). Social commerce (s-commerce) refers to a business model that uses the functions and characteristics of social media platforms to promote, sell and purchase goods and services (Lim et al., 2020). This model greatly improves user experience and corporate marketing effectiveness by combining social interaction and business functions (Alalwan et al., 2019). On this basis, marketing scholars and practitioners have identified two ways to implement social commerce: (1) adding social network functions to traditional e-commerce; (2) adding business functions to social networking sites (Xiao et al., 2023).

The first model involves integrating social network features into traditional e-commerce, representing both an innovation in e-commerce and a crucial strategy to adapt to market changes and meet consumer demands (Lin & Wang, 2023). According

to a report by CNNIC (2023), social media-driven e-commerce sales in China increased by 35% in 2022. E-commerce platforms like Amazon and Taobao feature comprehensive product reviews and Q&A systems (Feng et al., 2023). Statista (2024) reports that as of 2022, Amazon hosted over 175 million user reviews and ratings, significantly enhancing platform interaction through user-generated content. Personalized recommendations on social networks can boost the conversion rate of e-commerce platforms by over 30% (iResearch, 2022). In addition, Amazon has introduced the “Amazon Live” function, which allows sellers to interact with users through videos, showcase the usage and features of products, and further promote sales (Lin & Wang, 2023).

The second model involves incorporating commercial features into social media platforms. This means integrating elements like e-commerce, advertising, and brand promotion into social platforms to leverage their large user base and high interactivity for business objectives (Tajvidi et al., 2020). According to Statista (2024), in 2023, social commerce sales in China surpassed RMB 3,416.58 billion (approximately 488 billion dollars). In line with this trend, "s-commerce" has emerged as a transformative force in the current business landscape, fostering new marketing strategies. This approach includes four main types. First, social media platforms can offer highly targeted advertising and product recommendations by collecting user data (Winter et al., 2021). For example, Facebook's advertising service can deliver customized ads to users based on their browsing history, interests, and location (Sascha Kraus et al., 2022). Second, businesses collaborate with influencers on social media to promote their brands (Agnihotri et al., 2023). Third, customer service and support can be provided through social platforms, allowing timely responses to users' questions and

feedback ((Influencer Marketing Factory, 2022). Fourth, by integrating shopping features directly into social media, users can make purchases while browsing content, minimizing steps and enhancing the user experience (Ahmadi & Hudrasyah, 2022). For instance, TikTok introduced TikTok Shopping, enabling products to embed shopping links in videos so users can buy products directly while watching short videos (Anh et al., 2023).

Overall, as social media platforms have integrated commercial functions, they have evolved from simple advertising tools to comprehensive commercial hubs. By continually adding features, these platforms now meet the diverse needs of both users and sellers. Table 1.1 outlines the four stages of this development and their distinct characteristics.

According to iResearch (2022), the penetration rate of internet users and online consumers has nearly reached saturation, leading traditional e-commerce into a phase of traffic mining. As a prominent form of s-commerce, short-form video commerce has emerged as a novel method for sellers to attract users (Xiao et al., 2023). Especially in China, the huge user base and high stickiness of short video platforms make them an ideal carrier for social commerce (Lin et al., 2022). Short-form video commerce involves sellers using short video content to promote and sell products or services online (Xiao et al., 2023). Although the current purchase rate of short videos is relatively low (iResearch, 2022), the high frequency of user interaction and content participation on short video platforms (Gao, 2021) is expected to significantly increase users' purchase intentions in the future. Studies indicate that visual content, such as videos, garners more attention than text and pictures because humans process visual

information much faster (Anh et al., 2023). This makes short videos an effective tool for advertising and promotion. Nowadays, short videos increasingly collaborate with e-commerce platforms like Shopee, Lazada, Zalora, and AliExpress (Khulaidah & Irsalinda, 2020). Due to the natural complementarity between e-commerce and short videos, short videos have become an important channel for companies and brands to obtain users. In summary, s-commerce has entered the era of social media shopping, particularly short video shopping (see Table 1.1). Short-form video commerce significantly impacts how sellers provide products and meet user experience needs. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of short-form video commerce can offer deeper insights into user purchase behavior and enhance sales opportunities.

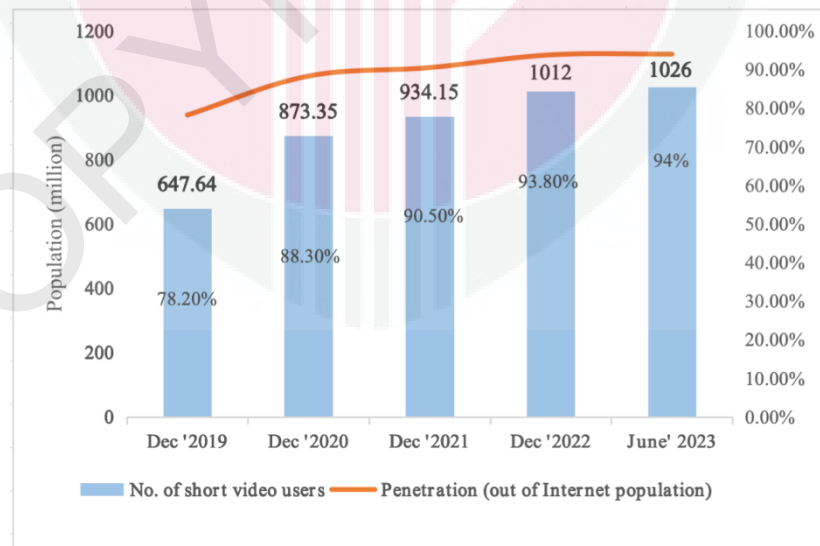
**Table 1.1 : Type of Social Commerce**

| <b>Phase 1<br/>mid-2000s<br/>Advertising</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <b>Phase 2<br/>early 2010s<br/>Brand promotion</b>                                                                                                                                                                  | <b>Phase 3<br/>mid-2010s<br/>Customer service</b>                                                                                                                                                                                          | <b>Phase 4<br/>late 2010s to present<br/>E-commerce</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Social media advertising: in 2004, Facebook allowed brands to place ads in users' news feeds. This feature brought a steady source of revenue to the social networking site and was quickly copied by other platforms.                                                                                            | Brand Pages and Fan Interaction: Brands began to create official pages on the platform, interact with fans and publish brand content. For example, Facebook launched the brand page feature in 2007.                | Social Customer Service: Brands create dedicated customer service accounts on Twitter and Facebook to quickly respond to customer questions and complaints.                                                                                | Social e-commerce: Social media platforms begin to directly integrate e-commerce functions. For example, Instagram launched the shopping tag function in 2016, allowing users to purchase products directly within the platform.                                                                            |
| Precision advertising technology: With the advancement of data analysis technology, social networking sites began to use user data for precision advertising. For example, the Beacon project launched by Facebook in 2007 was canceled due to privacy issues, but it opened the era of personalized advertising. | Influencer Marketing: Brands work with well-known spokespersons (influencers) on social media to promote products through their influence. This method quickly expanded to platforms such as Instagram and YouTube. | Chatbots: With the development of AI technology, brands have deployed chatbots on social media platforms to automate common customer service requests. For example, Facebook Messenger launched a platform that supports chatbots in 2016. | Short Video Shopping: Since 2018, short video shopping has rapidly emerged in the Chinese market and gradually expanded to the world. Platforms such as TikTok and Instagram began to provide short video shopping functions, where merchants can showcase products through short videos and sell directly. |

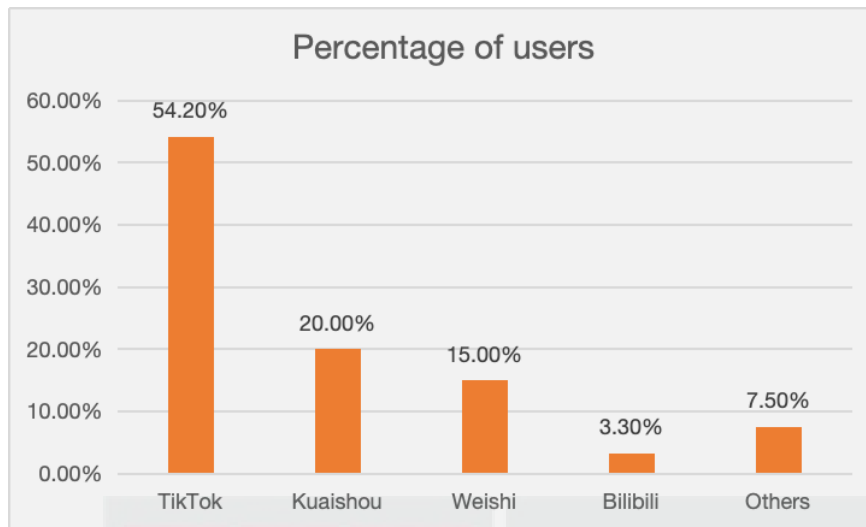
(Source: Agnihotri et al., 2023; Ahmadi & Hudrasyah, 2022; Influencer Marketing Factory, 2022; Winter et al., 2021)

## 1.4 Overview of Short-form Video Commerce in China

The extensive growth of social media and the widespread use of mobile devices have together driven the diversification of online shopping. There is no doubt that the current online marketing landscape has elevated short video commerce to a significant and influential sector, playing a crucial role in China's economic activities (iResearch, 2022). According to CNNIC (2024), by 2023, the number of short video users in China had reached 1.026 billion (see Figure 1.2). Short videos typically last from a few seconds to several minutes (Xiao et al., 2023). Users can create, share, and interact with others through short video apps. Consequently, sellers can use engaging and dynamic short video content to more effectively showcase product features and usage, capturing consumer interest and stimulating purchase desire (Anh et al., 2023). According to the iResearch (2022) report, Douyin, Kuaishou, Weishi, and Bilibili are the most frequently used short video platforms by Chinese users (see Figure 1.3).



**Figure 1.2 : Chinese Short Video Users: Population and Penetration (2019-2023)**  
(Source: China Internet Network Information Center, 2024)



**Figure 1.3 : Most Used Short Video Platforms by Chinese Short Video Users in 2023**

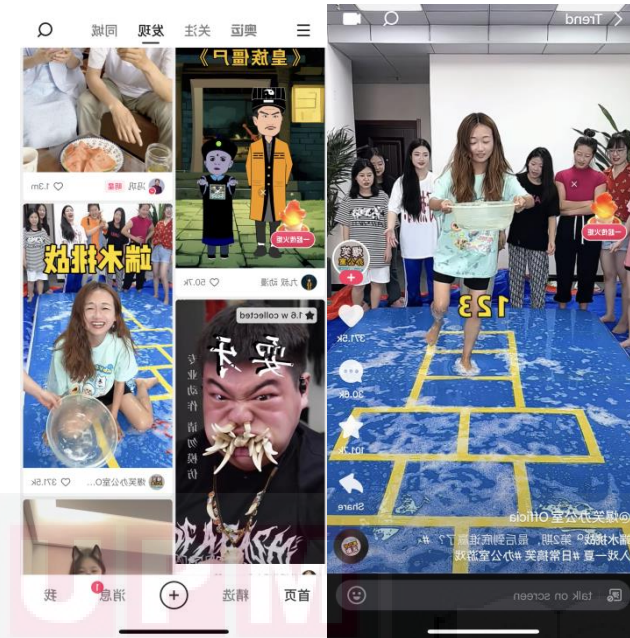
(Source: China Internet Network Information Center, 2023)

The TikTok platform, launched by ByteDance company in 2016, quickly ascended to become the most extensive and popular short video platform in China (iResearch, 2022). According to a CNNIC (2024) report, TikTok has 809 million users in China, capturing over 54% of the market share. TikTok employs an advanced algorithmic recommendation system to provide personalized content to users, enhancing user engagement and consumption (TikTok, 2022). Additionally, 60% of TikTok's user base comprises Gen-Y (born between 1981 and 1996), with a user demographic that spans from cities to rural areas (AdWeek, 2021) (see Figure 1.4).



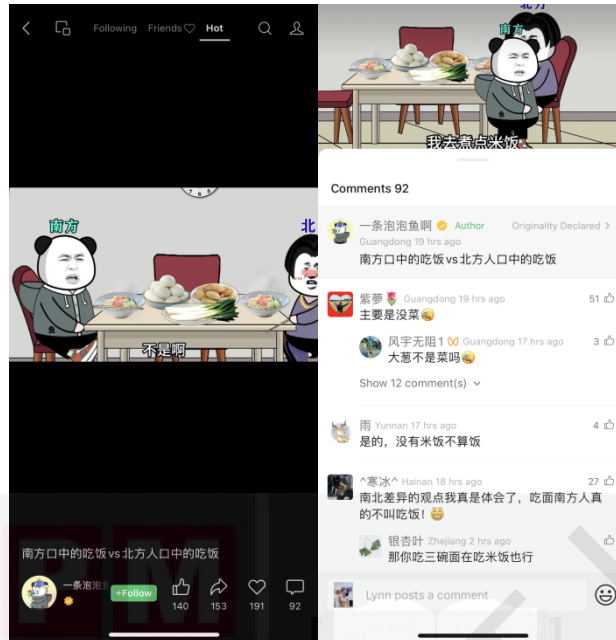
**Figure 1.4 : The Short Video Platform-TikTok**

The Kuaishou platform, established in 2011, initially served as a GIF creation tool before evolving into a short video sharing platform (Zhou & Liu, 2021). By 2023, it had surpassed 500 million monthly active users, securing the second spot in China's short video market (CNNIC, 2023). Kuaishou promotes sharing daily life, showcasing talents, and capturing authentic moments, fostering a warm and inclusive community atmosphere (Zhou & Liu, 2021). This emphasis on authenticity and interactivity has made Kuaishou especially popular in China's medium-sized cities and rural areas (iResearch, 2022) (see Figure 1.5).



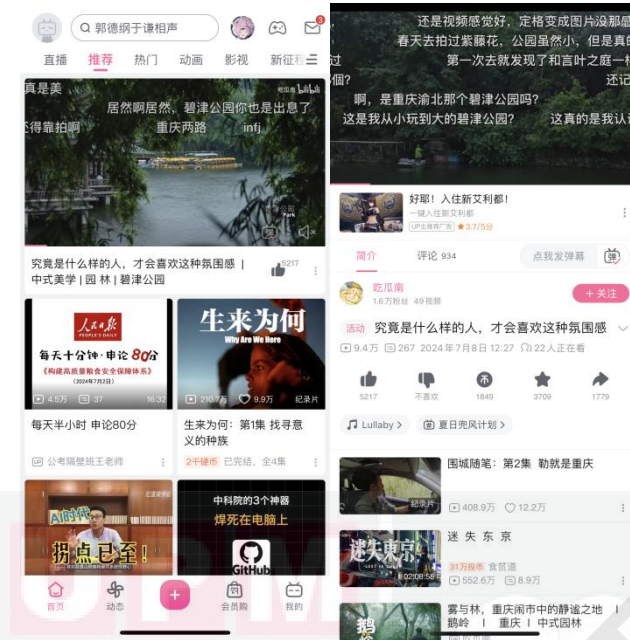
**Figure 1.5 : The Short Video Platform-Kuaishou**

Weishi is a short video sharing platform by Tencent, was launched in 2013 and has garnered a substantial user base through Tencent's social network (Han, 2022). Despite having a presence in the short video market, its market share remains relatively small (CNNIC, 2023). Weishi, known for its strong social attributes, emphasizes user interaction and sharing (iResearch, 2022). Users can log in to Weishi using their WeChat and QQ accounts, making it easy to share short video content on these social platforms (see Figure 1.6).



**Figure 1.6 : The Short Video Platform-Weishi**

Bilibili platform was founded in 2009, initially served as a community for enthusiasts of second-dimension culture (Schneider, 2021). Its primary user base consists of young people, particularly Gen-Z. By 2023, Bilibili boasted over 300 million monthly active users (CNNIC, 2023). The platform's unique community culture and high user engagement are pivotal to its success (Gao, 2021). Through diverse content and active user interaction, Bilibili has fostered a strong sense of community and loyalty, enhancing the user experience and brand recognition (Schneider, 2021) (see Figure 1.7).



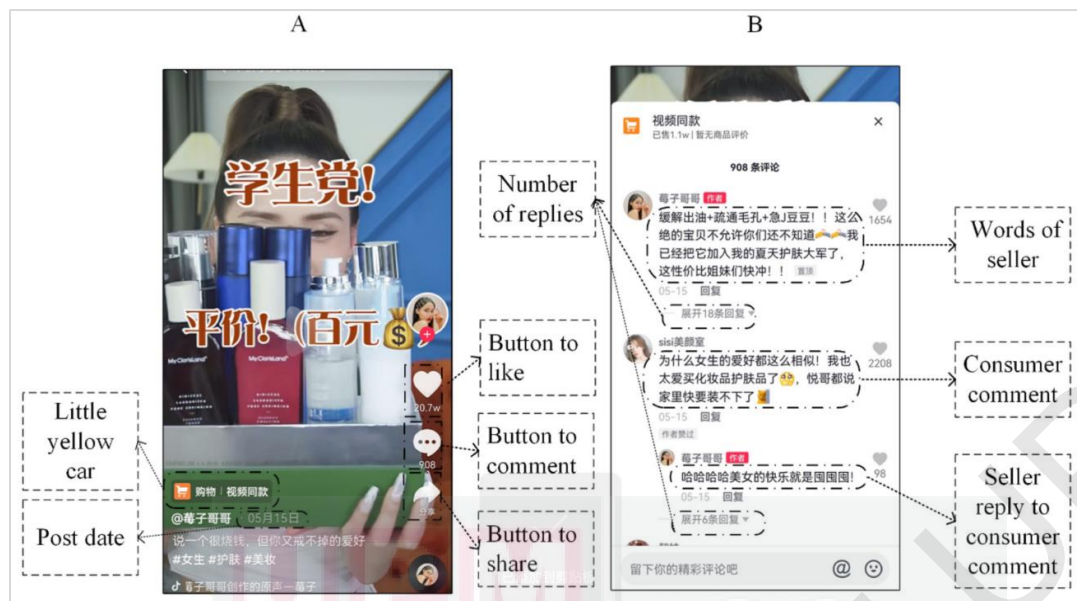
**Figure 1.7 : The Short Video Platform-Bilibili**

Compared with traditional social commerce, short video commerce has significant advantages and enables consumers to make more informed intentions.

- Short videos showcase various aspects of products in an engaging and appealing manner, enabling viewers to quickly and clearly grasp the products' features and functions (Wongkitrungrueng & Assarut, 2020).
- Consumers can gather valuable information from the real experiences of other users through online reviews and responses (Gao, 2021).
- Product spokespersons reveal their faces, offer personalized services, and guide consumers. Consumers can assess the credibility and appeal of these spokespersons using simple cues or heuristic reasoning in the environment (Sun et al., 2019).

The various informational cues outlined above capture the core value and key features of short video commerce (see Figure 1.8). Therefore, studying short video commerce should focus on how consumers process the diverse information presented in the

environment. Xiao et al. (2023) emphasizes that research concentrating on specific platforms can yield precise and detailed insights. This study selected TikTok as the specific research context for several reasons: First, according to CNNIC (2024), TikTok boasts over 809 million active users in China, holding more than 54% of the market share. Its large user base and market share make it highly representative. Second, TikTok utilizes advanced recommendation algorithms to deliver personalized content, enhancing user engagement and consumption (Newton & Southerton, 2021). Third, TikTok offers a wide range of content types (e.g., entertainment, education, and e-commerce) and has achieved commercial success in various formats, making it a typical example of short video commerce (Haenlein et al., 2020). Additionally, among TikTok's user base, 60% are Gen-Y (born between 1981 and 1996), 42% earn more than 8,000 yuan, and 79% hold a bachelor's degree or higher (TikTok GMV, 2023). Compared to older generations, younger individuals often seek personalized shopping experiences (Deng et al., 2022). Since most of Gen-Y are digital natives proficient in using Internet services, in-depth research on TikTok can provide more convincing and practical findings, offering robust academic support for the development of the short video industry (TalkingData, 2022).



**Figure 1.8 : The Short Video Product Display Interface**

a) main video interface; b) comment interface.

In summary, the rise of short video commerce offers marketers promising opportunities for advertising and promotion. TikTok platform plays a pivotal role in advancing short video commerce, providing an excellent chance for sellers to regain or strengthen their market position (Deng et al., 2022; iResearch, 2022). Therefore, understanding consumers' purchase intentions on TikTok is crucial for sellers. As demonstrated by the four popular short video applications—Douyin, Kuaishou, Weishi, and Bilibili—short videos help users better evaluate products and make more informed purchasing decisions by presenting rich product content and heuristic information (Anh et al., 2023; Han, 2022; Schneider, 2021; Zhou & Liu, 2021). Thus, studying purchase intentions in short video commerce should focus on how consumers process the various information presented in the environment.

## 1.5 Problem Statement

According to the data of CNNIC (2024), by June 2023, the number of short video users in China had reached 1.026 billion, accounting for 94% of all internet users. Such massive traffic has driven many sellers to start to be enthusiastic about short videos to promote their products. In 2023, advertising revenue from short-form video platforms reached RMB 300 billion (about US\$ 42.9 billion) (QuestMobile, 2023). The short video industry has grown rapidly and ranks first in advertising market size among all media types. Compared with traditional online marketing approaches, the effect of the short video is more significant. First, short-form video increases user stickiness and enables precise marketing through powerful and flexible interaction (Zhao & Wagner, 2022). Second, short-form video advertising is less in cost and has richer channels for delivery (iResearch, 2022). More and more Chinese sellers are starting to use short videos on TikTok to market their products, with TikTok's ad sellers growing by 500% in 2020 (TikTok, 2021). In addition, WARC (2021) reports that two-thirds of marketers surveyed stated they would allocate the most spending on TikTok compared to any other online platform in 2022.

Despite the notable growth of short video commerce in the social media marketing industry, users' purchase intention of short videos remains a significant challenge that hinders further expansion. According to a Sensor Tower industry survey (2021), nearly 60% of sellers posted short videos with high views, the purchase rate was only between 1% and 2%. In fact, this issue has not been addressed in multiple industry reports. For instance, nearly 80% of users stated that if the short video content does not meet their needs, they will choose not to buy and instead turn to other platforms (iResearch, 2022). Additionally, an industry survey by CTR (2021) revealed that more

than 68% of users had a negative experience after clicking on a purchase page ad, causing them to immediately exit the page. Furthermore, over 65% of consumers feel uncertain about products they did not purchase (iResearch, 2022). As a result, short video sellers must focus on providing a satisfying experience to attract consumers to make purchases. Undoubtedly, improving the purchase rate of short videos has become a complex task for sellers, especially as consumers' experience needs continue to increase (Zhao & Wagner, 2022; Xiao et al., 2023).

At this point, it is worth acknowledging that the existing literature provides little guidance for short video sellers on how to implement effective strategies, particularly in identifying the factors that drive consumer purchase intention. Xiao et al. (2023) noted that despite the growing popularity of short videos, research on this topic is still in its early stages. In the academic literature, studies on the short video industry primarily focus on user attention engagement (Meng & Leung, 2021), addiction (Qin et al., 2022), continuation intention (Yang et al., 2023), and adoption intention (Wang, 2020a). While these studies offer valuable insights into the short video industry and marketing literature, empirical research on the factors driving consumer purchase intention remains underexplored, highlighting a critical gap that warrants further investigation. Purchase intention reflects consumers' interest in and motivation to purchase a product or service, and it is an important indicator for predicting actual purchasing behavior (Chaudhuri et al., 2021). Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to investigate the factors influencing the purchase intention of Gen-Y in mainland China on TikTok. An extensive literature review indicates that there are three research gaps that need to be addressed in this context.

First, it can be observed that the drivers of purchase intention in the context of short videos are not well defined, often overlooking key factors and barriers identified by existing theories. Several studies have indicated that the characteristics of social media channels and spokespersons significantly influence consumers' purchase intentions (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020a; Stragier et al., 2016). This view is supported by the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Cacioppo & Petty, 1986), which posits that individuals process information and are persuaded through two main routes: the central route (related to information quality) and the peripheral route (related to environmental characteristics). Therefore, this study uses TikTok channel attributes as the central route and TikTok spokesperson attributes as the peripheral route.

Content quality is the biggest obstacle to video marketing success (Dobrian et al., 2013). To address this issue, sellers and video creators are advised to connect their video content effectively to consumer experiences and product needs (Zhai et al., 2022). For example, showing product content and providing detailed product functions and features through short videos can significantly enhance consumer satisfaction and perceived value (Jiang & Benbasat, 2007). Existing studies further point out that vividness and diagnosticity are important dimensions of content quality (Yang & Lee, 2022). In addition, scholars call for more mechanisms to be developed to improve the quality of information content (Yang & Lee, 2022). For example, enriching online reviews with positivity and depth can empower consumers with better understanding of product information (Cheung et al., 2012; Zhu et al., 2020). Therefore, this study further proposes that TikTok channel attributes contain three dimensions: content diagnosticity, vicarious expression, and online reviews. It argues

that adopting a perspective centered on product information quality is essential for devising a more effective marketing strategy.

On the other hand, researchers have recognized that using spokesperson attributes can develop more effective marketing strategies and increase purchase intentions (Masuda et al., 2022; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020a). Based on ELM and existing literature (Bont & Schoormans, 1995; Kim, 2022; Ladhari et al., 2020), this study proposes TikTok spokesperson attributes as a peripheral route for consumer information processing. These attributes include social attractiveness, physical attractiveness, attitude homophily, and product expertise. Therefore, this study proposes that TikTok channel attributes and TikTok spokesperson attributes are important factors that help increase short video purchase intention.

Second, much of the previous marketing literature has only examined the direct relationship between the factors and consumers' purchase intention. The underlying mechanism of how these factors drive consumer behavior needs a more in-depth explanation (Chang et al., 2016; Kim, 2022). This model has the potential to be enhanced by incorporating of mechanisms that provides practitioners with insights into the fundamental processes driving purchase intentions. As pointed out by Yang et al. (2023), flow experience is crucial for understanding the mechanism of shopping experience. Although flow experience is not a new concept, research indicates that emerging platforms (e.g., TikTok) can offer unique user experiences that may impact flow differently (Zhao & Wagner, 2022). Therefore, it's necessary to re-explore flow experience in the context of TikTok. Most literature only explains the direct relationship between flow experience and purchase intention (Kim, 2022; Yang et al.,

2023; Zhou, 2019). However, Chawla and Joshi (2023) suggest that direct relationships may not capture all influencing factors in real situations. Introducing mediating variables can improve the explanatory power and accuracy of the model, providing a deeper understanding of consumers' psychological and behavioral processes on TikTok. Unlike traditional e-commerce platforms with security measures (Soleimani, 2022), TikTok focuses on content creation and sharing and lacks anti-fraud measures, making user trust in products and spokespersons critical (Zhang et al., 2022). To address this gap in the literature, based on Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974a), this study highlights flow experience and trust as two potential organisms influencing TikTok purchase intention, with trust acting as the mediator between flow experience and purchase intention.

Finally, literature emphasizes the need to examine how individual differences produce different results during information processing (Gao et al., 2021; Luqman et al., 2017). Individual differences may impact the strength and direction (positive vs. negative) of the relationship between motivation factors and behavioral responses (Gao et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the impact of individual differences has received limited attention in the TikTok context literature. For example, the need for touch is an essential concept during product evaluation (Workman, 2010). Besides, prior research on NFT has shown that compared to low-NFT consumers, those with a high-NFT score report significantly higher levels of frustration and lower levels of trust in their product-related judgments (Silva et al., 2021). Similarly, the effects of flow experience and trust on consumer purchase intention may vary depending on individual differences. Therefore, the need for touch is proposed as a moderator to investigate

the changes in short video purchase intention that may result from consumers' flow experience and trust.

In short, this study aims to understand the factors influencing the purchase intention of mainland Chinese consumers on TikTok. Supported by the elaboration likelihood model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), TikTok channel attributes and TikTok spokesperson attributes were identified as the main motivating factors to flow experience and purchase intention. The S-O-R model was used in this study, suggesting that trust as a mediator, while the need for touch acts as a moderator in the relationship between flow experience, trust, and purchase intention.

## **1.6 Research Questions**

To fill the gaps identified in the preceding section, the primary research question of this study is to examine the factors that affect the TikTok purchase intention among Gen-Y consumers. Three specific research questions are addressed.

- i. Do TikTok channel attributes and TikTok spokesperson attributes affect flow experience and purchase intention among Gen-Y consumers?
- ii. Does flow experience affect purchase intention among Gen-Y consumers?
- iii. Does trust mediate the relationship between flow experience and purchase intention among Gen-Y consumers?
- iv. Does the need for touch moderate the relationship between flow experience/trust and purchase intention among Gen-Y consumers?

## **1.7 Research Objectives**

Accordingly, the following objectives were designed:

1. To evaluate the extent to which TikTok channel attributes and TikTok spokesperson attributes affect flow experience among Gen-Y consumers.
2. To evaluate the extent to which TikTok channel attributes and TikTok spokesperson attributes affect purchase intention among Gen-Y consumers.
3. To evaluate the impact of flow experience on purchase intention among Gen-Y consumers.
4. To investigate the mediating effect of trust between flow experience and purchase intention among Gen-Y consumers.
5. To investigate the moderating effect of need for touch between flow experience/trust and purchase intention among Gen-Y consumers.

## **1.8 Significance of Study**

The study of the purchase intention of mainland Chinese consumers on TikTok makes a significant contribution to the existing literature from both theoretical and managerial perspectives.

### **1.8.1 Theoretical Significance**

The theoretical perspective of this study holds significant value in three aspects. First, Given the variety of information users encounter while watching short videos, the Elaboration Likelihood Model by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) is regarded as having significant explanatory power and conceptual clarity (Gao et al., 2021). Therefore, the elaboration likelihood model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) is proposed as a supporting theory for this study. It aids in understand how the relationship between stimulus and

organism (S-O) of the SOR model operates in the TikTok context (Shiau et al., 2022), elucidating the factors driving purchase intention on this platform. Specifically, ELM explains how the central route (which involves ponder arguments related to product information quality) and the peripheral route (which relies on heuristic cues about target behavior) affect consumers' shopping experience and purchase intentions (Gao et al., 2021). As such, this study argues that TikTok channel attributes as the central route and TikTok spokesperson attributes as the peripheral route. Based on the findings of prior research (Li et al., 2013a; Yang et al., 2023), TikTok channel attributes are expressed in three dimensions: content diagnosticity, vicarious expression, and online reviews. Meanwhile, TikTok spokesperson attributes comprise four dimensions: social attractiveness, physical attractiveness, attitude homophily, and product expertise. Therefore, this study expands the application of ELM in the TikTok context by examining the TikTok channel attributes and TikTok spokesperson attributes influence the purchase intention of mainland Chinese consumers on TikTok.

Second, this study adopts the S-O-R model as the underpinning theory to understand the mechanism driving purchase intention on TikTok. Mehrabian and Russell (1974) identify three sequential stages describing how environmental cues (stimuli) influence consumers' cognitive or emotional state (organism), thereby driving to drive their behavior (response). While some studies have explored the importance of trust in the short-form video marketing, the emphasis on trust the context of TikTok remains relatively sparse (Haenlein et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2022a). Unlike traditional e-commerce platforms, in which trust and security mechanisms are built on the platform (Reichheld & Schefter, 2000; Yeon et al., 2019), TikTok refrains from interfering with user content and does not deal with security or fraud issues (Tuncer, 2021). In a virtual

environment, when users experience a flow state, they become more receptive and aligned with the content (Arghashi & Yuksel, 2022; Bao & Huang, 2018). This cognitive consistency boosts their trust in the information, which in turn has a significant impact on purchase intention (Hyun et al., 2022). The S-O-R model provides the conceptual basis for identifying trust as a mediating role between flow experience and purchase intention (Liu et al., 2022). Trust, viewed as a psychological state in this study, incorporates both affective and cognitive dimensions (Hong & Cha, 2013).

Finally, this study contributes value to the existing literature by exploring the individual differences affecting consumer purchase intention in the TikTok context. Specifically, individual differences may impact the strength and direction (positive vs. negative) of the relationship between motivation factors and behavioral responses (Gao et al., 2021). For example, Luqman et al. (2017) proposed that individual differences produce different results during information processing. However, the impact of individual difference has received limited attention in TikTok-related context literature. Scholars have suggested that individuals use different haptic preferences when gathering information before generating purchase intentions. That is, not all individuals have the same haptic needs (i.e., lower need for touch vs higher need for touch) (Pino et al., 2020a; Ranaweera et al., 2021). The need for touch concept is becoming increasingly important in online shopping environments where immediate haptic information is lacking (Duarte & e Silva, 2020; Kim, 2022). However, the existing literature ignores the potential impact of the need for touch on online purchase behavior (Lee et al., 2017). Therefore, the need for touch may be an

individual difference moderating the impact of flow experience and trust on purchase intention.

### **1.8.2 Practical Significance**

First, this study provides suggestions and insights to TikTok marketers in developing an effective short-form video marketing strategy and an enjoyable shopping experience to encourage consumers to purchase on TikTok. Specifically, marketers can better understand target consumers' basic needs by exploring the detail of product content and employing diverse presentation styles. The study emphasizes the importance of managing the comment sections of short videos. A well-maintained comment section can be used to address potential buyers' concerns, provide additional information, and contribute to sustaining a positive user experience. Furthermore, the study underscores the significance of marketers focusing on establishing trust within short videos. In a competitive market, cultivating trust is a pivotal factor in engaging users and driving purchase intentions. In addition, marketers can identify the level of need for touch among target consumers and combine the haptic attributes of products to create different touch experiences for consumers with different needs for touch.

Second, by emphasizing the importance of spokespersons in short videos, this study provides guidance on the essential attributes that spokespersons should possess to drive user purchases. For instance, spokespersons need to continuously enhance their attractiveness (social and physical attractiveness) while aligning their image with the promoted product. Additionally, the spokesperson should be familiar with the product's capabilities and be able to clearly introduce the product to the consumer in in-depth language.

Finally, policymakers can use the information from this study to recognize the significant benefits of short-form video commerce for businesses and countries. Therefore, policymakers need to offer support, including policy support, technology input support, and industry certifications, to practitioners to promote healthy growth and innovation in the short video industry. In addition, policymakers should implement a robust consumer protection system to ensure trust and provide an optimal shopping experience for consumers.

### **1.9 Scope of Study**

The main scope of this study is structured around consumers' perspectives towards short video application (i.e., TikTok platform) purchase intention. The rapid increase of social media and advancements in digital technology have promoted the growth of short video marketing (CNNIC, 2022). This trend has led an increasing number of Chinese sellers to use TikTok for marketing purposes. Despite high view counts on TikTok, many sellers face the challenge of low purchase intentions (iResearch, 2022). Therefore, this study aims to identify the factors influencing TikTok purchase intentions in Mainland China. The fact that Mainland China is classified as a developing country with a high internet penetration rate makes it an interesting context to explore.

For data collection, purposive sampling was used to target Gen-Y individuals in Mainland China, born between 1981 and 1996 (Brosdahl & Carpenter, 2011), who have watched shopping-related TikTok videos in the past three months. Analyzing Gen-Y behavior is valuable, as they make up 60% of TikTok's user base and are known for their digital nativity and purchasing power (TalkingData, 2022). TikTok was

chosen for this study due to its prominence as the leading short video platform in China, with 809 million users and a 54% market share (CNNIC, 2023). Therefore, choosing TikTok platform as the research subject enhances the study's representativeness and validity.

#### **1.10 Definition of the Terms**

Table 1.2 contains the definitions of all variables used in this study. These concepts are content diagnosticity, vicarious expression, online reviews, social attractiveness, physical attractiveness, attitude homophily, product expertise, flow experience, trust, need for touch, and purchase intention.

**Table 1.2 : Definitions of the Terms**

| NO | Construct               | Definition                                                                                                                               | Source                              |
|----|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1  | Content diagnosticity   | The degree to which sellers use online product information to help consumers to assess the product.                                      | Yi et al. (2017)                    |
| 2  | Vicarious expression    | Consumers' perceived levels of understanding of available content.                                                                       | Chen et al. (2019)                  |
| 3  | Online reviews          | Evaluations and opinions of products and services created based on personal usage experience.                                            | Zhang et al. (2014)                 |
| 4  | Social attractiveness   | The extent to which a person is perceived as attractive, desirable or likable within social contexts.                                    | Kim (2022)                          |
| 5  | Physical attractiveness | How appealing or pleasing a person's physical features and aesthetic beauty are.                                                         | Sokolova and Kefi (2020)            |
| 6  | Attitude homophily      | The degree to which people tend to bond with similar others.                                                                             | Masuda et al. (2022)                |
| 7  | Product expertise       | In terms of peak or at least high levels of knowledge, experience and problem-solving skills within a given domain.                      | Wiedmann and Von Mettenheim (2021)  |
| 8  | Flow experience         | A state in which users are fully engaged and immersed in a given activity.                                                               | Zhao and Wagner (2022)              |
| 9  | Trust                   | Consumers' belief the product will meet the intended expectations, and the spokesperson is trustworthy, and not cheating their audience. | Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut (2020) |
| 10 | Need for touch          | A preference for the extraction and utilization of information obtained through the haptic system.                                       | Peck and Childers (2003)            |
| 11 | Purchase intention      | Consumers will plan or be willing to purchase a certain product or service in the future.                                                | Wang et al. (2013)                  |

### 1.11 Organization of Thesis

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 discusses the study's background and the problem statement. And then, eight research questions and objectives are presented, as well as the significance of the study. Chapter 2 comprehensively reviews relevant theories and literature from previous studies. In chapter 3, the theoretical

framework is presented, and specific testable hypotheses are formulated. Chapter 4 continues with the research methodology, describing the research design, data collection procedures, and data analysis methods used in this study. Next, Chapter 5 presents the findings and analysis. Finally, Chapter 6 summarizes the research, theoretical and managerial implications, limitations, and future research directions.

## **1.12 Conclusion**

In summary, this study aims to understand the factors influencing consumers' purchase intention on TikTok in mainland China. This chapter provides a detailed outline for the research presented in subsequent chapters. The research context, problem statement, objectives, questions, implications, and definitions of terms are all components of this section. The next chapter will be dedicated to reviewing the literature on social media purchase intention and the unanswered gaps in the literature.

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