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# FACTORS AFFECTING ONLINE PURCHASE INTENTION VIA SOCIAL MEDIA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF YOUNG CONSUMERS IN THAILAND AND GERMANY

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## Abstract

Social media plays an important role in the future of online marketing and e-commerce. Social media advertisement has become a very efficient way of promoting goods online. Due to the increasing number of social media platforms and online users, the potential of e-commerce is constantly expanding. A particularly important target group for marketers is the so-called Generations Y and Z. It is one of the main goals for businesses to attract people from this demographic group and get them to purchase offered products or services. The lack of research on social media purchasing behavior comparing Southeast Asia and Europe is a central goal and a motivation for this research to create new knowledge. The following article's objectives are to draw a comparison between Thai and German social media users from Generation Y and Z and determine factors that influence their purchase intention while shopping through online social media platforms. Data was collected through a structured, quantitative survey questionnaire. A sample of 400 persons was drawn using convenience sampling. SPSS 22 statistics and structural equation modeling through SPSS AMOS 22 were used to analyze the data. The results indicated that attitudes positively influence purchase intention, with a  $\beta$ -Value of 0.501 in Thailand or 0.64 in Germany. At the same time, the Subjective Norm did not fit in the 95% confidence interval in the t-test and was therefore considered to be not significant. This implies that in both countries, young consumers focus on factors like personal beliefs and lifestyle, which corporations operating in the country can use to enhance potential clients' purchase intention.

**Keywords:** Consumer Behavior, Online Purchase Intention, Young Consumers, Structural Equation Modeling

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## Introduction

Shopping through social media is often referred to as social commerce. Platforms are using their high user base to create a seamless shopping experience by integrating shopping features directly into their interface. Some popular social media websites have already found a way for consumers to directly purchase products through their websites. For instance, the Facebook Marketplace gives users the opportunity to interact with each other and sell or buy products directly on Facebook. The customer has not only become aware of a product through social media but can also pay for it directly on the social media platform (Meta, n.d.). To transform themselves into a sales platform, the main social media platforms have developed features that offer their users the complete shopping journey, from product search to transaction completion. Customers can complete the purchase within the social media platform, without leaving it. Understanding and analyzing online purchase intention through social media is important for several reasons. It can help predict the consumer behavior of potential customers, which will make it easier for companies to anticipate future sales and allocate resources accordingly (Cirqueira et al., 2020). Feedback from consumers can provide insights into customer preferences and desires. With these insights companies can optimize customer satisfaction and enhance purchase intention and conversion rates (Shin et al., 2021). Lastly, comparing purchase intention on different social media platforms can provide insights into market trends, helping companies stay competitive and up to date with the latest developments in social commerce.

Germany and Thailand can be compared well as a representative for their regions. Both are among the wealthiest countries in Europe, respectively Southeast Asia, with increasing and expanding markets. Both countries were selected due to a lack of empirical research, which increases the significance of creating evidence due to the emerging markets in these countries and regions. In Thailand and Germany, there is a clear trend toward people purchasing goods online. The development since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic shows that in 2020 19.0% of all social media users were using online social media platforms to purchase goods in Thailand, compared to 34.3% in 2022 (Kemp, 2022a). The number in Germany rose from 18.0% in 2020 to 23.8% in 2022 (Kemp, 2022b). It is, therefore, important to investigate factors influencing purchase intention on social media.

The main objective of this research is to examine factors influencing the online purchase intention of young consumers in Thailand and Germany. Therefore, the following goals can be defined for this study: 1) Explore the influence factors of shopping through social media on consumers' purchase intention. 2) Analyze differences in the influence on purchase intention between Thailand and Germany.

## Literature Review

### Empirical Research

1) Technology Acceptance Model: The technology acceptance model, in short TAM, was introduced by Fred Davis in 1989. Like the theory of reasoned action, the TAM attempts to explain the conditions under which new technologies find user acceptance. Important determinants are perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use (Davis et al., 1989). Perceived usefulness describes the degree to which a user believes that using a particular technology will improve his or her performance. In contrast, perceived ease of use tries to explain the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be effortless. The Intention to use the technology that is examined is directly influenced by the user's attitude towards it. The main goal of this model is to highlight the potential of users. It, therefore, outlines the user-friendliness of a certain technology, such as social media platforms, in this study.

2) Theory of Planned Behavior: The Theory of planned behavior, in short TPB (Ajzen, 1991), was developed by social psychologist Icek Ajzen as an extension of his and Martin Fishbeins

Theory of Reasoned Action from 1975. It follows the purpose of predicting and explaining human behavior in specific situations. TPB includes perceived behavioral control, subjective norm, and attitude toward the behavior as key influential factors that can lead to a change in intention, which then, as a motivational factor, influences behavior. Therefore, intention is a central factor in performing an action (Ajzen, 1991). Attitude refers to whether an individual has a positive or negative judgment toward the behavior that is to be performed. Subjective norm considers the social pressure to be able to perform a certain action. The individual is influenced by the social circumstances that it is surrounded by. Perceived behavioral control focuses on the anticipated level of difficulty to be able to perform an action. It is assumed here that both past experiences and potential obstacles are included in the perception (Ajzen, 1991). Perceived behavioral control can indirectly influence the final behavior as well. The three determinants can be subdivided into behavioral, normative, and control beliefs. They are followed by other individual and social factors (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005).

3) Cross-Cultural Behavior: Culture can affect and influence behavior differently. According to Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions, cultures are separated into six different dimensions, highlighting the differences and similarities between different cultures and finding explanations for behavioral patterns of individuals in each culture. Each of the six dimensions highlights a specific characteristic that is crucial for understanding and cooperation between different cultures (Hofstede, 1980). The six dimensions are:

3.1) Power distance: The extent to which less powerful members of a society accept and expect power inequalities.

3.2) Individualism vs. collectivism: The degree to which individuals are integrated into society and prioritize either personal or group goals.

3.3) Masculinity vs. femininity: The distribution of roles between the sexes and the value placed on achievement (masculinity) or care and quality of life (femininity).

3.4) Uncertainty avoidance: The degree of tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity in a society.

3.5) Long-term vs. short-term orientation: The focus on future rewards versus respect and commitment to traditional values.

3.6) Enjoyment vs. restraint: The extent to which the free enjoyment of life and leisure is encouraged and enabled.

### **Related Research**

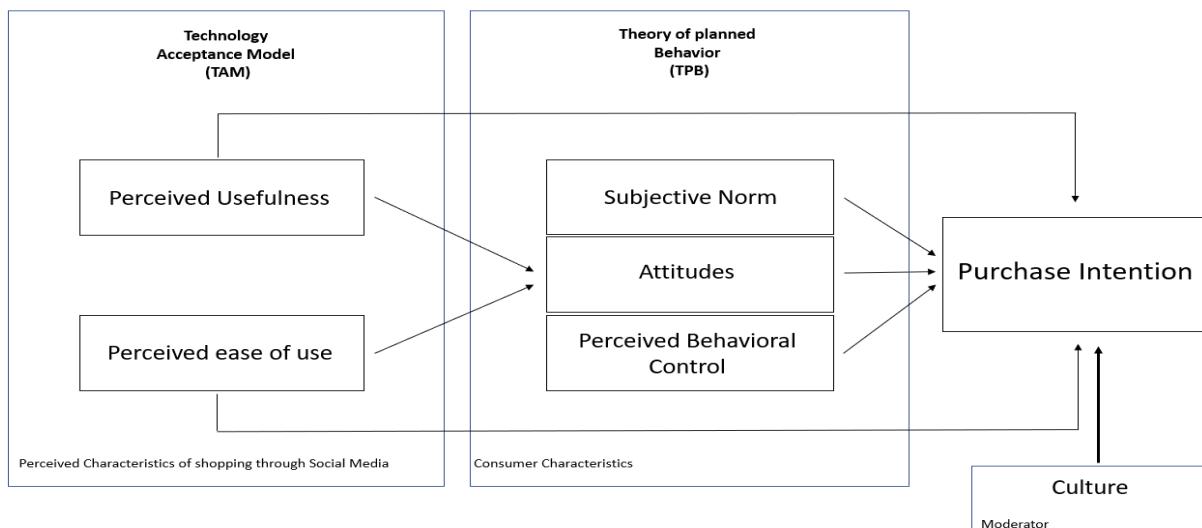
Two studies related to the topic and methodology are reviewed in this part. The studies were conducted in East Asia and Central Europe. The research by Balakrishnan, Dahn, and Yi emphasized the importance of knowledge and experience rather than posting just ads when it comes to the impact of social media marketing on the purchase intention of Generation Y and Z. The researchers conducted a quantitative study at Malaysian universities to examine the role of online advertisement and online communities affecting brand loyalty and purchase intention. They define purchase intention as a subjective judgment made before purchasing a good or a service and evaluated by the consumer. The questionnaire included three sections: one about internet availability and two about the impact of social media marketing on purchase intention and brand loyalty. The study's results suggested that online marketing communications are highly effective in promoting a brand or product on websites such as social media platforms and online forums (Balakrishnan et al., 2014).

Research no.2 by Balaban and Mustătea was conducted in Romania and Germany and aimed to determine social media influencers' credibility level from a users' perspective and how that affects social media marketing. The questions of their research were: How are social media influencers defined? What does influencer marketing represent for users? And lastly, what are the differences in the perception between Romania and Germany? The approach was qualitative, using the method of group discussions in each of the two countries. In these discussions, they addressed the topics "Influencer marketing," "Source credibility," and

“advertising value.” The results showed that the most important factors for the credibility of a social media influencer were attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, and similarity. Recommendations from the study were for marketers to use influencer marketing as a tool for campaigns and for influencers to focus on building trustworthiness to build up relationships with their communities (Balaban & Mustătea, 2019).

### Conceptual Framework

The framework of this research is based on the concepts of Planned Behavior by Ajzen and Technology Acceptance by Davis. Ajzen examined the influence of Subjective Norms, Attitudes, and Perceived Behavioral Control on the intention to perform a behavior. The framework of this study is supplemented by the Technology Acceptance Model by Davis, which is used to determine the direct influence of a technology user’s perceived usefulness and ease of use on intentional behavior. Additionally, same as in the original concept by Davis, it is used to investigate the impact on consumer attitudes. In total, ten Hypotheses have been developed based on the framework. Hypothesis number 10, which includes cultural dimensions, serves as a moderating variable in this research. That is because culture determines the strength or the amount to which the independent variables influence purchase intention, based on Hofstede’s cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1980).



**Figure 1** Framework

According to the framework and the definitions of the variables, the following hypotheses can be established:

- H1** Attitudes significantly influence purchase intention in Thailand and Germany.
- H2** Subjective Norm significantly influences purchase intention in Thailand and Germany.
- H3** Perceived Behavioral Control significantly influences purchase intention in Thailand and Germany.
- H4** Perceived Usefulness significantly influences purchase intention in Thailand and Germany.
- H5** Perceived ease of use significantly influences purchase intention in Thailand and Germany.
- H6** Perceived Usefulness significantly influences Attitudes in Thailand and Germany.
- H7** Perceived ease of use significantly influences Attitudes in Thailand and Germany.
- H8** Perceived Usefulness indirectly influences purchase intention in Thailand and Germany.
- H9** Perceived ease of use indirectly influences purchase intention in Thailand and Germany.
- H10** The impact of factors influencing purchase intention differs significantly between Thailand and Germany.

## Methodology

The study will be conducted as descriptive research using non-proportional quota sampling. The method was selected because it allows a targeted representation and a simpler implementation focused on young consumers.

### Population and Sample

The population is defined as “all social media users between the ages of 18 and 40 in Germany and Thailand”. People in this cohort fall into Generations Y and Z. As the exact number of that population cannot be determined precisely, and the number of social media users is rising daily, the sample that was drawn from the total population had to be calculated with an unknown population size.

The research was conducted using non-proportional quota sampling. It is used primarily because of the difficulties in obtaining a true random sample due to the participants' different locations, availabilities, and accessibilities from Thailand and Germany. With the sampling type used, persons are recruited directly through social media, which assures that the participants fit in the demographic group needed for the study.

### Instrument Testing

Before the start of the study, a pretest was conducted using 30 participants from each country, who were selected through randomized convenience sampling. After that, an SPSS analysis was carried out using Cronbach's Alpha. The survey was tested on having a value higher than 0.70, which is referred to as being reliable (Cronbach, 1951). The reliability test of this study showed an average value for all variables of 0.821 for Thailand and 0.809 for Germany. It was, therefore, approved to be used for the final collection of primary data. The following table shows the result for each variable:

**Table 1** Cronbach's Alpha Results

Variables	Thailand	Germany
Perceived ease of use	.846	.719
Usefulness	.874	.877
Attitudes	.818	.754
Subjective Norm	.908	.874
Behavioral Control	.834	.743
Purchase Intention	.650	.887
<b>Ø</b>	<b>0.821</b>	<b>0.809</b>

## Data Analysis

Descriptive Analysis: The study analyzes data by using the following statistical methods: Frequencies and percentages are used to identify the composition and distribution of the participants' personal information along with gender, age, education, income, occupation, and social media usage. Mean and standard deviation are used to describe and interpret the scores of the factors influencing purchase intention based on the participants' responses from Thailand and Germany.

SEM: Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was used to check whether the observed variables measure the intended latent construct of influence on online purchase intention and if the model can be applied to the population size. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was then used to examine whether the construct matches the hypotheses directly and indirectly. Prior to that, the level of fit was measured to check if the model fit the data and if the relations between the observed variables were statistically significant. SPSS and SPSS AMOS are used to analyze the data.

The parameters are estimated by using path coefficients, variances and covariances and summarized in a path model. SPSS AMOS calculates maximum likelihood estimation, representing the probability of observing the sample data given in the model.

The model is specified by assessing the fit of the model using the indicators Chi-Square, RMSEA, CFI, TLI, and NFI, as suggested by Hu & Bentler (1999). This step is necessary to interpret the estimated parameters to understand the structure of the data and test hypotheses about the relationships among variables in the model.

## Results

### Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Chi-square and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) are the indicators used to assess goodness of fit. Additional indicators to test incremental fit are the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), and Normed Fit Index (NFI). The level of acceptance is based on the guidelines by Kline (2005) and Hooper et al. (2008). The results for the goodness of fit in Thailand indicate an acceptable level of fit with RMSEA = 0.069, CFI = 0.936, TLI = 0.923, and NFI = 0.978. Therefore, the model shows a good level of fit according to previous research (Hooper et al., 2008). The results for goodness of fit in Germany show a better goodness of fit than in Thailand, with RMSEA = 0.076, CFI = 0.919, TLI = 0.906, and NFI = 0.960. All indicators are accepted.

### Structural Equation Modeling

The results from Thailand indicate the following level of fit statistics: RMSEA = .029; GFI = .894; AGFI = .826; CFI = .863; TLI = .953; NFI = .714. These results show an acceptable level of fitness. Ideally, RMSEA should be lower than .06 and TLI larger than .95 (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

The calculated Data from Germany results in the following Output: RMSEA = .010; GFI = .879; AGFI = .829; CFI = .852; TLI = .954; NFI = .796. The results from Germany suggest a slightly higher level of fit, with a lower RMSEA and a higher TLI value compared to Thailand.

### Hypothesis Testing

In Thailand, only the subjective norm can be considered as not significant, as the value of the t-test is higher than the accepted 0.005 in a 95% confidence interval with a result of  $0.207 > 0.005$ . Therefore, the hypothesis that subjective Norms significantly influence purchase intention is not supported. All other Hypotheses have a lower value than 0.005 and are statistically significant. The highest  $\beta$ -Values appear at H1 with a value of 0.501.

In Germany, the same as in Thailand, the only insignificant variable is the Subjective Norm with a value of  $0.264 > 0.005$ . At a determined confidence interval of 95%, Subjective Norm has to be considered not significant. The results from Germany also showed the same results in  $\beta$ -Values as H1, the impact of Attitudes on purchase intention, has the highest value with 0.64.

the  $R^2$  values of the dependent variables Purchase Intention and Attitudes show that H1 to H5 explains 63% of the variation in purchase intention in Thailand and 66% in Germany. H6 and H7 explain 66% of the variation in Attitudes in Thailand and 67% in Germany.

## Discussion

The research found that Attitudes have the highest positive influence on purchase intention and perceived usefulness the highest positive influence on attitudes in both countries. It supports the theory that factors like lifestyle effectively determine the likeliness of whether or not an individual is willing to purchase a product, as suggested in previous studies (Balaban & Mustătea, 2019). The study results also suggest that attitudes toward the use of online social media platforms are highly influenced by the perceived usefulness of the platform. Interestingly, attitudes are rated significantly higher in Thailand than in Germany. Nonetheless,

the correlation values on purchase intention do not differ on a high level. This suggests that Thai people tend to lay a high significance on attitude factors when deciding to purchase a good online when their attitudes. In contrast, Germans might be negatively influenced by their purchase intention if the good focuses too much on attitude factors, as they see online shopping less as a part of their lifestyle.

Perceived Behavioral Control also correlates positively with purchase intention. The values do not greatly differ between Thailand and Germany. As Chiou (1998) suggested, Perceived Behavioral Control still has a slightly lower impact than Attitudes. It supports the theory that technical competence and confidence in using online platforms positively influence purchase intention. Individuals who feel more competent in their ability to perform online transactions are more likely to have a higher intention to make purchases (Chiou, 1998). It matches Ajzen's idea that perceived power determines self-confidence and the belief in the ability to navigate challenges and take action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005). Both Thai and German participants appear to be familiar and confident with online shopping processes through social media, such as the payment procedure.

Perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use both highly impact purchase intention. It correlates with Sin et al. (2012), who have tested the impact on Malaysian students and found that people tend to purchase products through social media if the process of using social media in terms of ordering and delivering is simple and easy to understand (Sin et al., 2012). Thai and German responses are similar in their results, and both perceive online shopping on social media to be easy to learn and understand.

The lowest correlation between an independent and a dependent variable is shown between Subjective Norms and purchase intention. It can be interpreted that the influence of support by people close to an individual does not play a high role in their intention of buying a good. According to the study results, people from Generations Y and Z in Thailand and Germany are not highly encouraged by family members or persons they value to use social media platforms for online shopping. Therefore, it does not play an important part in their decision-making. Another reason for subjective norm not being supported in the theory testing section might be that the observed participants perceived the action of purchasing goods through social media to be an independent decision-making process and, therefore, did not feel influenced or impacted by others. Decision-making is an independent act that people are willing to complete by themselves.

## Conclusion

To draw a conclusion from the results, it is necessary to note that social media usage differs in Germany and, therefore, the level of influence. The results show that the participants from Thailand are more committed or likely to shop online through social media as, for all variables, the average agreement to the questions is higher than the German participants. Even though the statistics show that Thai consumers only use Twitter and Facebook more frequently than Germans, it appears that German consumers do not commonly use social media platforms for online shopping. Previous studies have shown that people from central European countries prefer classic online shopping platforms like Amazon, etc., rather than social media platforms to buy goods online (Smith et al., 2013).

The positive influence of attitude and perceived behavioral control emphasizes that purchase intention increases with the willingness to engage in online shopping through social media (Ajzen, 1991). The more individuals are convinced of having control over the purchasing process, and the more they perceive shopping online as a part of their lifestyle habits, the higher the engagement and, therefore, the intention to purchase goods online. It is notable that Attitude factors are significantly lower rated in Germany, which suggests a lower self-understanding for people from Generation Y and Z in Germany who do online shopping through social media

platforms. It can be assumed that Germans prefer classic online shopping platforms like Amazon, which is not widely used in Thailand.

### Suggestions

The study shows results that can be used by marketers to develop online marketing strategies using the approaches of Planned Behavior and Technology Acceptance. The use of the internet and social media platforms has been significantly increasing in the past years. Recent studies have shown that it can be highly valuable for managers to focus on social media and online marketing. According to Mason et al. (2021), the COVID-19 pandemic has lifted the importance of social media and e-commerce as consumers have increased the utilization of social media as a tool for collecting information about products and evaluating them. Kemp (2022a) points out that people are increasingly using social media as a source for making purchases.

The results of the study have shown that businesses should stimulate attitude factors. They can do that, for example, by developing a clear brand identity, engaging customers through personalized communication, or creating communities around the brand (Honold, 2023).

The following suggestions for businesses can be concluded from this study:

- 1) Focus on e-commerce on Instagram in Germany and Facebook in Thailand. As the yearly published Digital Report by Kemp points out, these platforms have been shown to be the most frequently used in a particular country.
- 2) Attitude is a strong Driver of purchase intention. As Ajzen suggests, a person's beliefs and evaluations affect the outcome of an action, in this case, the purchase of a product. The Beta values have shown a strong impact. However, there is potential to enhance attitude factors in Germany.
- 3) Importance of Technology Acceptance. TAM variables have shown an influence on purchase intention. Therefore, user-friendliness is important. The handling should be easy to learn, understand, and use effectively in daily life.
- 4) Enhance personal experience by analyzing users' preferences and interactions to be able to present tailored product recommendations that align with individual interests. As Dawson (2022) has shown, personalized user experience positively influences consumer engagement.

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