

# Factors Affecting Students' Online Purchase Intention in Urban Areas

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## ABSTRACT

The expansion of digital technologies has significantly reshaped consumer behavior, with online shopping becoming increasingly prevalent. This study examines factors influencing online purchase intention among urban university students in Malaysia, focusing on social influence, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), website content, and attitude. A quantitative research design was employed using a structured online questionnaire distributed to students in public and private universities. Data were analyzed to test hypotheses regarding the relationships between independent variables and online purchase intention. Findings are expected to provide valuable insights for online retailers and marketers in developing effective digital strategies targeted at young, digitally active consumers. The study also contributes to the academic literature by clarifying how social influence, eWOM, website content, and attitude jointly shape online purchase intention among urban university students in Malaysia.

**Keywords:** Attitude, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), Malaysia, online purchase intention, social influence, urban university students, website content

## INTRODUCTION

The widespread adoption of digital technologies such as the internet, mobile applications, and social media platforms has profoundly transformed consumer lifestyles and purchasing behaviors worldwide. As of January 2021, there were approximately 4.66 billion active internet users, representing 59.5% of the global population (Statista, 2021). This digital proliferation has contributed to the rise of online shopping as a mainstream mode of commerce.

Online shopping refers to the process of purchasing goods or services via internet-based platforms, typically involving product selection, digital payment, and delivery logistics (Market Business News, 2021). This form of commerce offers convenience, time efficiency, and flexibility, fueling its adoption among younger, tech-savvy consumers.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the digital shift, increasing consumer reliance on online channels for essential and non-essential purchases (East, 2020). With improved trust in digital transactions and seamless user experiences, traditional brick-and-mortar models are increasingly complemented—or replaced—by e-commerce platforms (Saleem & Yaseen, 2022).

In Malaysia, the trend mirrors global patterns. According to the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC, 2022), over 82% of Malaysians now engage in online transactions, with urban areas leading adoption due to better infrastructure, smartphone penetration, and digital literacy. Prior studies highlight that convenience, practicality, and trust significantly influence online purchase intention among

Malaysian consumers (Ratih et al., 2020; Dewi & Zakaria, 2020). Younger demographics, particularly university students aged 20–30, dominate this segment (Milo, 2019; Simon & Sarah, 2019).

Given this context, this study aims to examine the factors influencing online purchase intention among urban university students in Malaysia, focusing on social influence, eWOM, website content, and attitude, guided by the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) posits that an individual's behavioral intention is influenced by attitude, subjective norms (social influence), and perceived behavioral control. Attitude reflects an individual's overall evaluation of the behavior, subjective norms capture social pressures, and perceived behavioral control denotes confidence in performing the behavior. TPB has been extensively applied in consumer behavior studies, including online shopping, making it an appropriate framework for this research.

### Online Purchase Intention

Online purchase intention refers to a consumer's willingness or likelihood to buy products or services via the internet. It is often influenced by perceived usefulness, trust, eWOM, and website quality (Suparno, 2020; Zhang & Jiang, 2021). In Malaysia, Dewi and Zakaria (2020) found that social influence, system security, and perceived pricing significantly shape online purchase intention. Additionally, external cues such as website content and online reviews play vital roles in reducing uncertainty and enhancing trust (Ariff et al., 2014; Nuseir, 2019).

### Social Influence

Social influence refers to the impact that individuals or groups have on a person's attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors. In online contexts, it includes the influence of family, friends, peers, and online communities. Studies show that social norms and peer opinions significantly affect consumers' confidence and purchase decisions (Doan, 2020; Ratih et al., 2020).

**Hypothesis H1:** Social influence has a significant relationship with students' online purchase intention in urban universities.

### Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) refers to the sharing of product or service experiences through digital channels such as social media and review platforms. Credible and persuasive eWOM positively influences trust and purchase intention (Nuseir, 2019; Suparno, 2020; Saleem & Yaseen, 2022).

**Hypothesis H2:** eWOM has a significant relationship with students' online purchase intention in urban universities.

### Website Content

Website content encompasses textual and visual elements such as images, descriptions, and navigation. Well-structured, accurate, and interactive websites enhance user experience and confidence, which positively influence online purchase intention (Chen & Lin, 2020; Athapaththu & Kulathunga, 2018).

**Hypothesis H3:** Website content has a significant relationship with students' online purchase intention in urban universities.

## Attitude

Attitude represents an individual’s overall evaluation (favorable or unfavorable) toward performing a specific behavior (Fazio, 1995). Within TPB, attitude is a strong predictor of behavioral intention. Local evidence supports that Malaysian students’ trust, perceived usefulness, and positive online experiences foster favorable attitudes that, in turn, enhance online purchase intention (Suparno, 2020; Dewi & Zakaria, 2020).

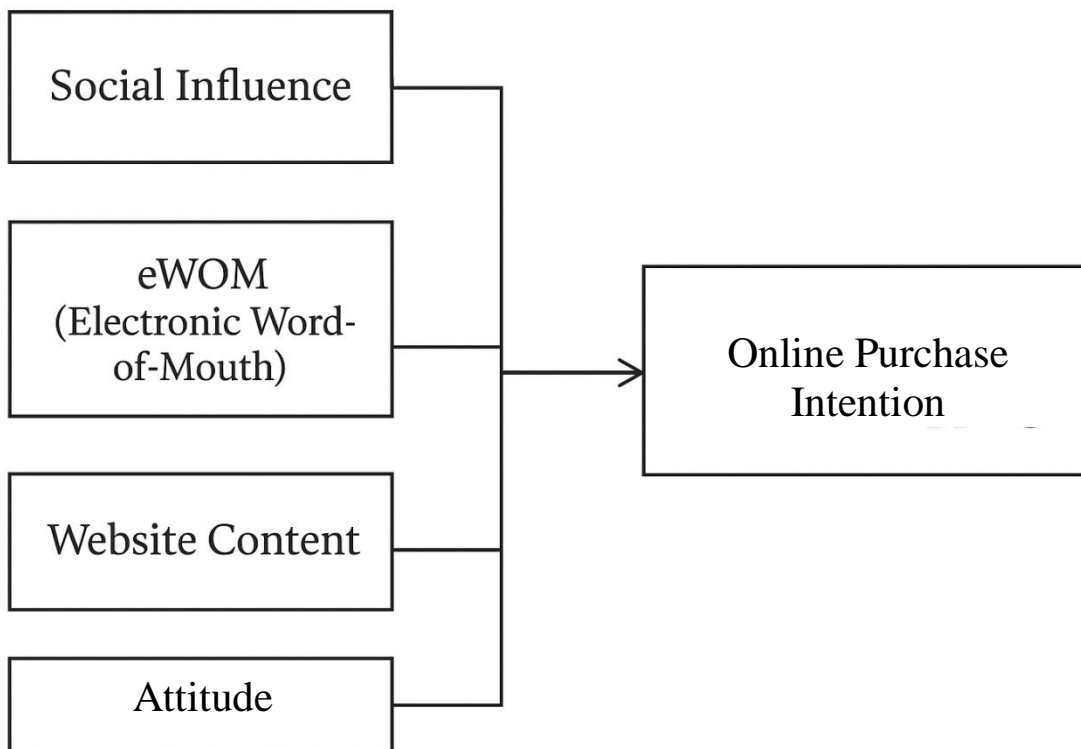
**Hypothesis H4:** Attitude has a significant relationship with students’ online purchase intention in urban universities.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), this study proposes that social influence, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), and website content affect students’ attitude toward online shopping, which in turn influences their online purchase intention.

**Figure 1** below illustrates the conceptual framework of the study.

**Figure 1:** Conceptual framework illustrating the relationship between Social Influence, eWOM, and Website Content as independent variables influencing Attitude Toward Online Shopping, which subsequently affects Online Purchase Intention.



## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study employs a quantitative, descriptive–correlational research design to examine the relationships between the independent variables (social influence, electronic word of mouth (eWOM), website content, and attitude) and the dependent variable (online purchase intention). The quantitative approach allows statistical testing of hypotheses and supports generalization of findings to a broader population. The design is grounded

in the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which emphasizes that attitudes, social influence, and perceived behavioral control shape behavioral intentions.

## **Quantitative Research**

Quantitative research focuses on collecting and analyzing numerical data through structured instruments such as questionnaires. This approach is suitable for identifying correlations, testing hypotheses, and making data-driven decisions. It provides an objective method to assess how social influence, eWOM, website content, and attitude affect students' online purchase intentions.

## **Data Collection Method**

Both primary and secondary data collection methods were employed to ensure comprehensive and reliable results.

### **Primary Data**

Primary data was obtained through a structured online questionnaire distributed to urban university students in Malaysia. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) to measure perceptions of each variable:

- Social Influence
- Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)
- Website Content
- Attitude
- Online Purchase Intention

The questionnaire was designed based on validated measurement items adapted from previous studies. Google Forms was used to distribute and collect responses due to its accessibility and ease of use.

### **Secondary Data**

Secondary data was gathered from academic journals, scholarly articles, books, and reputable online sources relevant to the study's variables. This information provided theoretical support for the conceptual framework and guided the development of hypotheses based on TPB.

## **Sampling**

### **Sampling Frame**

The sampling frame consists of students currently enrolled in public and private universities located in urban areas of Malaysia. This group was chosen because they are active users of digital platforms and represent a demographic with high online purchasing behavior.

### **Sampling Technique**

A convenience sampling technique was employed, which is a type of non-probability sampling where respondents are selected based on their availability and willingness to participate. This method was chosen due to its practicality, cost-effectiveness, and suitability for collecting data within a limited timeframe.

### **Sample Size**

A total of 150–200 respondents was targeted to ensure sufficient representation for statistical analysis. This range aligns with recommendations for correlational studies involving multiple variables. The sample size is

expected to provide reliable results for testing relationships among the constructs using statistical tools such as SPSS or SmartPLS.

## Data Analysis Techniques

Data collected from the questionnaires will be analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The following techniques will be applied:

- Descriptive analysis to summarize respondents' demographic profiles.
- Reliability analysis (Cronbach's Alpha) to ensure internal consistency of the measurement items.
- Correlation analysis to determine relationships among variables.
- Multiple regression analysis to test the hypotheses and identify the influence of independent variables on online purchase intention.

## Summary

This methodology provides a structured approach to examine the relationships among social influence, eWOM, website content, and attitude toward online purchase intention among urban university students in Malaysia. By adopting a quantitative correlational design underpinned by the Theory of Planned Behavior, the study ensures both theoretical grounding and empirical rigor.

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