

DYNAMICS OF ONLINE COMMUNITIES AND THE FORMATION OF CONSUMER PURCHASE DECISIONS

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Abstract

This study examines how interactions within online communities influence consumer purchase decisions through two interconnected mechanisms. The analysis reveals that online community interactions shape consumer perceptions through credible information exchange, trust building, collective identity formation, and consumption norm socialization. Information shared in online communities is perceived as more authentic than conventional marketing sources because it originates from real consumer experiences. These experiences are translated into actual purchase decisions through cognitive and affective processes including risk evaluation, social validation, social comparison, and formation of sustainable brand preferences. Trust established within communities serves as the primary bridge linking community experiences to purchasing actions. Social norms developing within communities also affect purchase decisions by encouraging consumers to align their behavior with group expectations. Purchase decisions resulting from this process tend to be more stable and enduring because they have undergone thorough consideration involving multiple perspectives. Online communities function as dynamic information ecosystems where consumer experiences are continuously shared and utilized by other members, creating feedback loops that reinforce community influence on purchasing behavior.

Keywords: online communities, consumer experience, purchase decisions, social influence, trust, electronic word of mouth, consumer behavior.

Introduction

The modern consumption landscape has underwent a fundamental shift along with the widespread penetration of the internet and social media into various aspects of daily life. The rapid development of technology and the internet has also made online transactions an essential part of daily life, leading consumers to increasingly shift from conventional methods to digital platforms to meet various product and service needs (Wulandari & Darmawan, 2022). Today's consumers no longer act as passive recipients of marketing messages from producers, but rather as active participants in a rich and interconnected information ecosystem. The digital space provides a venue for individuals to exchange experiences, seek advice, and form collective opinions about the products and services they consume (Padhiyar, 2025). This phenomenon marks the birth of a new era in which purchase decisions are strongly influenced by the social dynamics occurring in the virtual world. The presence of online forums, social media groups, and other virtual communities has transformed how consumers access, process, and trust the information they receive. This shift in behavior patterns calls for a better understanding of how interactions within online communities shape consumer preferences and choices (Manharbhai, 2025). Such an understanding becomes crucial for business actors, marketers, and academics seeking to capture the essence of consumer behavior in the digital age. The shift from individualistic consumption to collective and social consumption marks a new chapter in the study of consumer behavior.

Online communities exist in diverse forms and platforms, ranging from thematic discussion forums and conversation groups in instant messaging applications to community pages on social media. The internet has expanded the scope of communities from previously local ones to broader and global networks alongside technological and information advancements (Infante & Mardikaningsih, 2022). Advances in digital technology also keep changing how information is shared and used (Khayru, 2025). Each individual has an increasing number of choices in determining the group that serves as a reference for their social identity (Hariani, 2023). Each form of community possesses unique characteristics that affect how its members interact and exchange information (Tausczik & Huang, 2020). Within these communities, reciprocal social relationships are formed, where members mutually provide support, information, and recommendations regarding various products and services. The ongoing interactions are not limited to functional information exchange, but also encompass emotional aspects and social identity. Community members often develop a sense of togetherness and collective identity that reinforces their bonds with one another. These social bonds serve as the foundation for building trust, which becomes a vital asset in influencing purchase decisions. Lu, Zhao, and Wang (2008) demonstrated that trust in virtual communities has a significant impact on members' purchasing behavior. This finding indicates that the quality of social relationships within online communities is a determining factor in the consumer decision-making process.

One of the primary mechanisms linking interactions in online communities with purchase decisions is electronic word of mouth or eWOM. The eWOM phenomenon refers to positive or negative statements made by potential, actual, or former consumers about a product or company, which are made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the internet. Unlike traditional word of mouth, which is limited to physical social circles, eWOM has a much broader reach and a greater impact due to its persistent and easily accessible nature. Products known to consumers have a higher likelihood of being used and encouraging consumers to make purchase decisions (Hariani & Irfan, 2022). A good company image also makes consumers more aware of a brand and more positive toward it (Darmawan, 2019). Information shared within online communities can endure over time and be discovered by information seekers at a later date, reinforcing its influence on purchase decisions. Adjei, Noble, and Noble (2010) revealed that customer-to-customer communication in online brand communities positively influences customer purchasing behavior. This finding confirms that eWOM is not merely a supplement to marketing information, but an independent and credible source of influence in the eyes of consumers.

The credibility of information obtained from online communities is one of the main reasons why consumers increasingly rely on these sources in the decision-making process. Information originating from fellow consumers is considered more objective and free from commercial interests compared to information from marketers or advertisements. Consumers tend to trust real experiences shared by others because they perceive those experiences as reflecting actual reality (Hajli, 2018). Consumer reviews can help increase information transparency by providing an overview of product or service experiences, allowing other consumers to consider them in the purchase decision process (Negara et al., 2021). Satisfaction with the service a person receives also shapes how they assess and recommend what they use (Darmawan et al., 2022). This trust is reinforced by a sense of togetherness and shared identity formed within the community. Community members often feel that they are part of a group with similar interests and values, making recommendations from fellow members feel like advice from friends or relatives. de Valck (2005) demonstrated that participation in virtual consumption communities has a systematic effect on consumer decision-making. This effect includes changes in brand preferences, product evaluations, and ultimately the purchase decisions made.

Perkembangan teknologi digital dan media sosial telah mempercepat dan memperluas jangkauan The development of digital technology and social media has accelerated and expanded the scope of online community influence on consumer behavior. Platforms such as Facebook,

Instagram, Twitter, and various specialized forums have created spaces where consumers can easily connect with others who share similar interests. This ease of access means that the influence of online communities is no longer limited to small groups of technology enthusiasts, but has reached various segments of society and product categories. Consumers from diverse backgrounds in age, education, and social status now engage in online communities relevant to their needs and interests. Popular figures and advertisements on social media also shape attitudes toward a brand and the intention to buy it (Darmawan et al., 2019). A study by Wang and Yu (2012) found that peer communication through social media has a significant impact on consumer purchase intentions. This finding shows that the influence of online communities has become a mass phenomenon that cannot be ignored by marketers and decision-makers. Understanding the dynamics of this influence becomes increasingly critical as consumer reliance on digital information sources continues to grow.

The primary issue that arises in understanding the influence of online communities on purchase decisions is the complexity and diversity of interactions occurring within them. Each community possesses distinct norms, culture, and social dynamics, resulting in varying degrees of influence across communities. Factors such as community size, member participation levels, quality of shared content, and information source credibility all play a role in determining the extent to which the community affects purchase decisions. Consumers who engage in multiple communities may receive conflicting information, leading to confusion or even decision delay. Too much information can also make consumers tired and stressed when they have to choose (Darmawan & Issalillah, 2025). On the other hand, consumers who strongly identify with a particular community may over-rely on information from that community while overlooking other potentially more objective information sources. This complexity complicates efforts to simply generalize the influence of online communities. Gupta, Kim, and Shin (2010) revealed that converting virtual community members into online buyers is influenced by various interacting factors. The interaction of these factors creates a distinct challenge for researchers aiming to fully comprehend the consumer decision-making process within online community environments.

Consumers often find it difficult to distinguish between genuine reviews from fellow consumers and professionally crafted content created for marketing purposes. Unethical marketing practices, such as generating fake reviews or offering incentives for positive reviews, can damage consumer trust in information obtained from online communities (Renteria-García et al., 2021). Clear rules and legal protection are needed so that consumers are not harmed by misleading information (Ali et al., 2024). When consumers realize they have been manipulated, their trust declines not only toward a specific community, but also toward the entire online information ecosystem. This creates a cycle of skepticism that can hinder the function of online communities as valuable information sources. Consumers may find it increasingly difficult to believe any information they receive from online sources, including information that is actually useful and accurate. Jiménez and Mendoza (2013) demonstrated that the credibility of online reviews significantly influences consumer purchase intentions. Consumer trust becomes an essential element in building long-term relationships (Darmawan & Gatheru, 2021). Open systems that many parties can check also make manipulation harder to hide (Darmawan et al., 2025). These findings highlight the importance of maintaining information integrity within online communities so that they remain a positive and constructive source of influence for consumer purchase decisions.

An understanding of how interactions within online communities influence purchase decisions becomes paramount in an era where consumers are increasingly connected digitally. Purchase decisions made by consumers today are no longer solely based on rational considerations regarding price and product quality, but are also influenced by complex social and psychological considerations. Even so, price perception and service quality still matter in the final decision (Essardi et al., 2022). Consumers want to feel that they are part of a larger community and that

their choices reflect their core values. The desire for acceptance and recognition by peer groups drives consumers to align their purchasing behavior with the prevailing norms and preferences within their communities. Promotions and a certain lifestyle can also push consumers to buy without much planning (Gardi & Darmawan, 2022). This phenomenon has broad implications for marketing strategy and product development, as marketers need to understand not only what consumers buy, but also why and how they make those decisions. Marketers also need a strong marketing mix to stay competitive (Darmawan & Grenier, 2021). Naylor, Lamberton, and West (2012) revealed that virtual presence in social media settings can influence brand evaluations and purchase intentions. This finding indicates that even merely being part of an online community, without active interaction, can already affect consumer behavior.

The study of consumer experience in online communities is also relevant to efforts aimed at understanding broader transformations in consumer behavior. Experience refers to events undergone by consumers as a response after purchasing and using a product, which subsequently shapes their respective evaluations and impressions of the product (Darmawan, 2022). A good experience with a product builds consumer trust and loyalty toward its brand (Darmawan, 2018). The shift from individual and private consumption toward social and public consumption represents one of the most significant trends in recent decades. Consumers now purchase products not only to fulfill functional needs, but also to express identity and build social relationships. Online communities provide an arena where consumers can display their choices, gain validation from others, and reinforce their social identity. This process creates a dynamic where purchase decisions become increasingly intertwined with identity construction and the search for social meaning. Technology can also change how people see themselves, so their social identity may become less stable (Abror et al., 2025). Understanding these dynamics is key for anyone seeking to comprehend contemporary consumer behavior. Jung, Kim, and Kook (2009) demonstrated that online brand community identity influences community activity characteristics and members' behavioral responses. This strong identity ultimately affects the purchase decisions made by community members.

The research questions proposed in this study are as follows: (1) how interaction mechanisms in online communities influence consumer perceptions toward a product or service; and (2) how consumer experiences within online communities translate into actual purchase decisions. The objective of this paper is to conceptually outline the mechanism through which online community interactions influence consumer perception formation and the process of translating community experiences into actual purchase decisions. Explanations regarding social dynamics, trust, and electronic word of mouth will serve as the primary focus of discussion. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in mapping the relationship between online community participation and consumer purchasing behavior while considering mediating factors such as trust, social identity, and information credibility. Practically, the concepts presented are expected to provide guidance for marketers and online community managers in designing effective strategies to build trust and encourage purchase decisions.

Method

This study applies a qualitative approach through a library research design to explore the dynamics of consumer experience within online communities and its influence on purchase decisions. The selection of this approach is based on the characteristics of the topic, which require an understanding of the subjective meanings embedded in social interactions in digital spaces. As explained by Walsh and Downe (2005), meta-synthesis as a qualitative research method offers a framework for integrating findings from various qualitative studies to obtain a richer understanding of a phenomenon. Literature research, as a variant of qualitative research, allows researchers to synthesize concepts from various written sources without collecting primary field data. This approach is particularly suitable for multidisciplinary topics requiring

the integration of consumer behavior theory, social psychology, and digital media studies. Barnett-Page and Thomas (2009) highlight the importance of critical synthesis methods in combining qualitative research findings to generate a comprehensive understanding. Data sources in this study consist of peer-reviewed scientific journal articles, textbooks published by reputable academic publishers, and research reports relevant to online communities and consumer behavior. The data collection process was conducted through systematic searches in academic databases using predetermined keywords to ensure the completeness and quality of the evaluated materials.

Data analysis in this study applies the thematic analysis approach developed within the qualitative research tradition. Dixon-Woods et al. (2005) assert that synthesizing qualitative and quantitative evidence requires systematic yet flexible procedures to accommodate the complexity of diverse data. The collected data from various literature sources were critically read to capture the core concepts within them and subsequently categorized based on main themes that naturally emerged from the readings. These themes include interaction mechanisms in online communities, trust building and information credibility, electronic word of mouth, and the process of translating community experiences into purchase decisions. The analytical process followed an inductive approach, where conceptual categories were constructed from available readings rather than imposed by a specific theoretical framework. To maintain the validity of findings, source triangulation was performed by comparing arguments across different authors and schools of thought to obtain a balanced picture. Noyes (2010) emphasizes that the role of qualitative evidence in systematic reviews continues to evolve, making meaningful contributions to the understanding of complex social phenomena. The final outcome of this process is a coherent conceptual mapping of consumer experience within online communities and its influence on purchase decisions.

Results and Discussion

Interaction Mechanisms in Online Communities and the Formation of Consumer Perceptions

Interactions within online communities take place through various channels and formats, each possessing unique characteristics in influencing consumer perceptions. Discussion forums provide spaces for structured exchange of ideas, where members can ask specific questions and receive answers from fellow members who may have relevant experience (Fan et al., 2022). Social media groups such as Facebook or WhatsApp offer more spontaneous and personal interactions, where members share everyday experiences more informally. Product review platforms like Amazon or TripAdvisor enable consumers to provide detailed evaluations accessible to millions of other users. Each of these channels has its own strengths and limitations in shaping consumer perceptions. Consumers who actively engage in online communities absorb various information from multiple channels and integrate it into their evaluations of a product or service. This information integration process is dynamic and ongoing as consumers gain more experience and knowledge. Understanding the characteristics of each interaction channel is essential for optimizing marketing strategies that leverage online communities as a medium to build positive perceptions.

One crucial aspect of interactions within online communities is their ability to create a sense of togetherness and collective identity among members. Community members sharing similar interests or needs tend to develop emotional bonds that reinforce their sense of belonging to the group. This sense of belonging strongly influences how members process information and form opinions about products or services discussed within the community. When a member receives a recommendation from a fellow member perceived as part of the same group, they tend to accept that information more easily and trust it without requiring additional verification. The strength of social bonds within online communities creates a "peer persuasion" effect that is stronger than

persuasion from commercial sources such as advertisements. Members who feel a strong sense of togetherness are also more open to sharing personal experiences, including both positive and negative experiences with various products. This openness enriches the pool of information available to other members and reinforces the community's role as a source of collective knowledge. Social bonds formed within online communities thus serve as the foundation for shaping coherent and sustainable consumer perceptions.

Trust represents a central element connecting interactions within online communities to the formation of consumer perceptions. Without trust, information shared within the community will be ignored or deemed non-credible by its members. Trust within online communities is built through various mutually reinforcing mechanisms, including consistency in member behavior, quality of shared content, and duration of community membership (Havrylenko & Pichkar, 2025). Trust is not only formed from technical information, but also through repeated experiences, brand reputation, and testimonials from others (Mardikaningsih et al., 2022). Members who consistently provide accurate and useful information build a reputation as trusted sources. This reputation becomes a valuable social asset within the community, where other members rely on information from well-reputed members. Furthermore, members' direct experiences in using a product and sharing those experiences honestly also enhance trust in the conveyed information. The trust established within online communities is context-specific, where members trust recommendations for particular product categories but not necessarily for others. This trust dynamic creates a complex information ecosystem where consumer perceptions are shaped through networks of mutually trusting social relationships.

Information shared in online communities exhibits characteristics distinct from information from conventional marketing sources, and these differences influence how consumers process and perceive it. Information from fellow consumers tends to be perceived as more authentic because it is grounded in real experiences rather than marketing narratives that have undergone curation and editing. Consumers reading others' experiences feel they obtain a more realistic picture of what they will experience if they purchase the product. Information from online communities also frequently includes details about product aspects not disclosed in official marketing materials, encompassing both positive and negative aspects (Kwon & Sung, 2015). This broader and more honest information coverage helps consumers form more accurate expectations about products, ultimately influencing consumer satisfaction and loyalty. The process of perception formation through community information is interactive, where members do not merely receive passive information but can also ask questions, seek clarification, or request additional opinions. This two-way interaction enables consumers to delve deeper into information and construct a more comprehensive understanding of a product or service.

Online communities serve as an arena where consumers can engage in consumption socialization and learn prevailing norms among fellow consumers. Through observation and participation in discussions, consumers learn what criteria are used to evaluate product quality, purchasing practices considered good or bad, and strategies to maximize value from their purchases. This socialization process is crucial because it establishes the reference framework consumers use to evaluate their choices. Consumers newly joining a community will observe the behavior of more senior members and adopt established norms. These consumption norms then become internal standards used to evaluate products and make purchase decisions. Consumption socialization within online communities also encompasses learning about the emotional aspects of consumption, such as how a product makes consumers feel and how those feelings are expressed in social interactions. Understanding this emotional dimension is vital because consumer perceptions involve not only cognitive aspects but equally powerful affective aspects. Online communities thus become a social laboratory where consumers develop and refine their perceptions regarding the value and meaning of consumption.

The time dimension influences how interactions within online communities shape consumer perceptions gradually and continuously. Consumer perceptions are not the result of a single

interaction, but rather the product of accumulated experiences and information received over a period of time. Members engaged in the community for a long duration develop a deeper and more nuanced understanding of various products compared to new members. This deep understanding encompasses knowledge of trends, changes in product quality, and evolving preferences among consumers. Continuous interaction also allows consumers to verify information over time and adjust their perceptions based on new experiences. Long-term engaged consumers are also more likely to become information sources for other members, further solidifying their position within the community. The time dimension also affects information credibility, where information that has been tested by numerous members and proven accurate over time is deemed more trustworthy. The process of perception formation within online communities is thus dialectical, where members continuously construct and revise their understanding based on ongoing interactions and experiences over time.

Content shared within online communities exhibits significant variation in format, depth, and emotional tone, and this variation influences how consumers perceive such information. Long and detailed textual reviews provide rich factual information regarding product features and performance, assisting consumers in conducting rational evaluations. Conversely, visual content such as photos and videos offers concrete depictions of products and user experiences, directly and emotionally influencing consumer perceptions (Wang et al., 2024). Emotional responses conveyed through emojis, body language, or writing tone also affect how consumers receive and process information. Consumers tend to respond more strongly to content that triggers emotions, whether positive or negative, compared to neutral and factual content. This variation in content formats implies that consumer perceptions are formed through a complex combination of cognitive and affective processing. Consumers exposed to diverse content formats will develop richer and more integrated perceptions compared to those exposed to only a single format. The ability to access various content formats represents one of the major advantages of online communities compared to conventional marketing information sources, which are generally more limited in terms of format variety.

The role of moderation and curation in online communities also influences the quality of interaction and the formation of consumer perceptions. Well-moderated communities tend to exhibit higher quality discussions because irrelevant or misleading content can be filtered or removed. Moderation also protects the community from unethical marketing practices, such as generating fake reviews or undisclosed promotions that can damage member trust. Content curation by moderators or respected members helps other members find the most valuable information amid a sea of available content. This curation process functions as a quality assurance mechanism that ensures the information consumed by members meets certain standards. Community members who recognize effective moderation and curation will place greater trust in the information provided by the community. This trust subsequently influences how they perceive products and recommendations shared within the community. Excessive moderation, on the other hand, can restrict freedom of expression and make members feel that the community is no longer an authentic space for sharing experiences. Balancing freedom and control in moderation thus becomes a critical factor in creating a conducive environment for healthy perception formation.

Information selection by consumers in online communities does not occur randomly, but is influenced by various cognitive biases and motivations that shape information search and processing patterns. Consumers tend to seek information aligned with their pre-existing preferences and beliefs, a phenomenon known as confirmation bias. This bias can lead consumers to ignore information contradicting their beliefs and focus solely on information supporting choices they have already made. Nevertheless, interaction in online communities can also serve as a means to challenge this bias, as other members may present different perspectives and encourage critical reflection. Consumers open to diverse perspectives will develop a more balanced understanding and mitigate the negative impacts of cognitive bias. Consumer

motivations for seeking information also vary, ranging from satisfying curiosity and desiring to reduce purchase risk to needing social validation for choices already made. These differing motivations result in distinct interaction patterns, ultimately shaping consumer perceptions in unique ways. Understanding this information selection process is essential to comprehending how interactions within online communities translate into perceptions that ultimately influence purchase decisions.

Consumer perceptions formed through interactions within online communities have long-term effects extending beyond momentary purchase decisions. A strong and positive perception of a product can yield enduring brand loyalty and reduce the likelihood of consumers switching to alternative brands. Loyalty formed through online communities is often grounded in deeper emotional bonds and social identity compared to loyalty based merely on functional satisfaction. Consumers loyal to a product are also inclined to become brand advocates and recommend it to other community members, creating a positive cycle that reinforces the product's market position. Negative perceptions formed through online communities can be equally damaging or even harder to remedy because negative information tends to spread rapidly and persist over time. Efforts to repair the image of a product that has acquired a negative perception within online communities require consistent, long-term strategies. The long-term effects of perceptions shaped through online communities underscore the necessity for companies to actively monitor and respond to ongoing discussions within those communities. Companies capable of effectively managing consumer perceptions in online communities will gain a significant competitive advantage in an increasingly digitally connected marketplace.

The interaction dynamics within online communities create an environment where consumer perceptions are continuously shaped, maintained, and modified through complex social processes. This process involves rich information exchange, trust building, collective identity formation, and consumption norm socialization. Each element of this process is interconnected and mutually influential, creating an organic and adaptive system. Consumers engaged in online communities not only form their own perceptions but also contribute to shaping the perceptions of other members through reciprocal interactions. This interactive and participatory nature distinguishes online communities from other information sources and imparts an extraordinary power of influence over consumer behavior. A deep understanding of interaction mechanisms within online communities and their influence on consumer perception formation provides the foundation for effective marketing strategies in the digital age. Companies capable of leveraging online communities as a medium to build positive perceptions will be able to influence consumer purchase decisions more directly and meaningfully. Overall, this analysis demonstrates that interactions within online communities are not a simple phenomenon, but rather a rich and complex social process with broad implications for consumer behavior.

From Community Experience to Purchase Decisions: The Process of Translation and Implementation

Experiences obtained by consumers through participation in online communities are not automatically translated into purchase decisions, but rather through a complex series of cognitive and affective processes. This translation process begins when consumers receive information from the community, then evaluate its credibility and relevance, before ultimately deciding whether that information will influence their purchase choices (Xiao-ping & Jiaqi, 2012). Customer-to-customer communication in online brand communities has a significant influence on customer purchasing behavior, with positive information shared by community members exerting a stronger moderating effect than negative information. This finding indicates that consumers tend to be more responsive to positive recommendations from fellow community members compared to negative warnings, a pattern reflecting selective optimism in processing social information. The information evaluation process in online communities involves assessing

argument quality, source credibility, and the tie strength between the sender and receiver of information. Consumers who receive information from community members possessing good reputations and strong ties tend to be more easily influenced in their purchase decisions.

Trust established within online communities serves as the primary bridge connecting community experiences to actual purchase decisions. Without trust, even rich information will not suffice to drive consumers toward taking purchasing action. Trust within online communities is built through various mechanisms, including consistency in member behavior, quality of shared content, and duration of community membership (Wang et al., 2024). Consumers who have been engaged in a community for a long time tend to develop deeper trust in the information provided by that community. This trust then becomes a determining factor in the decision-making process, where consumers are more willing to rely on recommendations from communities they trust. Consumer perception of virtual communities, which they term the sense of virtual community or SOVC, reinforces the influence of online comments on consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. This finding confirms that the stronger the sense of togetherness consumers feel toward a community, the greater the influence of that community on their purchase decisions.

The process of translating community experiences into purchase decisions also involves evaluating perceived risk by consumers. Consumers who receive information from online communities will consider the extent of risk associated with purchasing the product, including functional, financial, and social risks. Information from the community can reduce perceived risk by providing a clearer picture of real experiences from other users. Consumers who feel they have acquired sufficient understanding of the product through community discussions will feel more confident in making purchase decisions. This reduction in perceived risk represents one of the primary mechanisms connecting online community participation with increased purchase intention. Consumers who were previously hesitant due to lack of information or direct experience with the product can be encouraged to purchase after receiving reassuring information from the community. The role of online communities as a risk reducer is particularly vital, especially for experience goods whose quality is difficult to evaluate prior to purchase.

Social norms developing within online communities also influence the process of translating experience into purchase decisions. Every community has a set of norms regulating member behavior, including norms regarding which products are deemed good or bad, which brands are valued, and what purchasing practices are considered appropriate. Consumers who strongly identify with a community tend to align their purchasing behavior with prevailing norms. This adjustment occurs because consumers seek to maintain their acceptance and status within the community (Ding et al., 2020). Social norms in online communities can drive consumers to purchase specific products or avoid others, regardless of their personal preferences. The strength of these social norms heavily depends on the extent to which consumers identify with the community and how important that community is to their social identity. Consumers possessing a strong community identity exhibit higher compliance with prevailing norms and are more likely to translate community experiences into purchase decisions aligned with those norms. This dynamic demonstrates that consumption within online communities is not neutral; rather, it can serve as a space for symbolic competition where social status and hierarchy are formed and altered (Sinambela & Halizah, 2023).

Social validation represents one of the psychological mechanisms linking community experiences to purchase decisions. Consumers frequently seek validation from others prior to making purchase decisions, particularly for products possessing social or status dimensions. Online communities provide an arena where consumers can obtain validation for their choices, both before and after purchase. Consumers receiving positive validation from the community regarding their choices feel more confident and satisfied with their decisions. Conversely, consumers encountering criticism or rejection from the community may reconsider their choices or even cancel their purchase intentions. This social validation process is vital in shaping

purchase decisions because consumers want to ensure their choices are accepted by their reference group. Online communities providing constructive and supportive feedback are more effective in driving purchase decisions compared to communities that are critical or unsupportive.

The emotional dimension of community experiences also plays a critical role in the translation process toward purchase decisions. Interactions within online communities involve not only the exchange of factual information, but also the transmission of emotions and feelings regarding products and consumption experiences. Consumers experiencing excitement, enthusiasm, or satisfaction expressed by other community members tend to absorb these emotions and develop a desire to experience the same. Conversely, negative emotions such as disappointment or anger expressed within the community can impede purchase intentions. Shared emotional experiences in online communities frequently exert a stronger influence than factual information because emotions are more memorable and trigger responses faster. Emotionally engaged consumers within a community are more likely to translate their community experiences into purchasing actions. Companies capable of evoking positive emotions through their online communities will possess an advantage in driving consumer purchase decisions.

Community experiences also influence purchase decisions through the formation of sustainable brand preferences. Consumers exposed to positive discussions about a brand in online communities develop a more favorable attitude toward that brand. This favorable attitude then serves as the foundation for long-term brand preferences that influence future purchase decisions. Brand preferences formed through online communities are often stronger than those formed through advertising because they are grounded in the real, credible experiences of others. Consumers who have developed strong brand preferences tend to choose that brand when faced with purchase decisions, even when other alternatives are available. These brand preferences can also shield the brand from negative information, as consumers tend to maintain their preferences despite conflicting information. Online communities thus serve as effective instruments for building long-term brand preferences that drive repeat purchase decisions.

The process of social comparison in online communities influences purchase decisions by providing reference points for consumers to evaluate their options. Consumers naturally compare themselves with others, including in terms of purchase decisions and consumption. Online communities provide numerous opportunities for social comparison because members can observe what others buy and consume. Consumers who see other community members possessing a particular product may feel driven to purchase the same product to avoid missing out or to gain acceptance within the group. Social comparison can also operate in the opposite direction, where consumers avoid products that are unpopular within their community. The influence of social comparison is particularly strong when consumers identify themselves with other community members and view them as relevant reference points. Consumers who perceive themselves as similar to other community members will be more influenced by those members' choices and behaviors in their purchase decisions.

Purchase decisions resulting from community experiences are often more stable and enduring compared to decisions generated from other information sources. Decisions grounded in information from online communities have undergone a more thorough evaluation process involving considerations from multiple perspectives. Consumers who have discussed their choices with other community members tend to feel more confident in their decisions and are less likely to experience post-purchase regret. This confidence arises because consumers feel they have conducted adequate due diligence before making a decision. Stable and enduring decisions benefit companies by reducing the likelihood of product returns or customer complaints. Satisfied consumers are also more likely to become loyal customers and recommend products to others. Online communities thus not only influence initial purchase decisions but also contribute to long-term satisfaction and loyalty.

The role of online communities in shaping purchase decisions extends to post-purchase aspects, where consumers return to the community to share their experiences after buying a product. These post-purchase experiences then become feedback that influences the future purchase decisions of other consumers. This cycle creates a sustainable information ecosystem where consumer experiences are continuously shared and utilized by other community members. Consumers having positive post-purchase experiences will share their satisfaction and reinforce positive recommendations for the product. Conversely, consumers experiencing disappointment will share their negative experiences and may deter other consumers' purchase decisions. This feedback loop transforms online communities into an effective quality control mechanism, where high-quality products receive continuous recommendations while poor products receive warnings. Companies recognizing this dynamic will be motivated to maintain the quality of their products and services to continue receiving positive reviews in online communities.

The intensity of consumer participation in online communities influences the extent to which community experiences translate into purchase decisions. Consumers who act merely as passive observers (lurkers) are exposed to the same information as active members, but the influence on their purchase decisions may not be as strong as on actively participating members. Members who actively participate in discussions, ask questions, and share their own experiences develop deeper engagement with the community. This deeper engagement yields more intensive information processing and stronger social bond formation, ultimately enhancing the community's influence on purchase decisions. Active consumers are also more likely to receive direct feedback from other members and clarify their doubts prior to making decisions. This distinction between passive observers and active participants demonstrates that online communities do not influence all consumers in the same way. Strategies to encourage active participation in communities can serve as an effective means to amplify community influence on purchase decisions.

Purchase decisions influenced by online communities frequently involve more collective and social considerations compared to decisions made individually. Consumers engaged in online communities tend to consider not only their personal needs and preferences, but also the expectations and evaluations of the community (Chiang et al., 2021). These collective considerations can yield decisions more closely aligned with community norms and values, which further solidifies the consumer's bond with the community. Decisions made by considering the community's perspective also tend to be more resilient against conventional marketing influences because consumers have developed stronger loyalty toward the community than toward specific brands or companies. This phenomenon demonstrates that online communities have become an independent social force in shaping consumer behavior, occasionally exerting even stronger influence than corporate marketing efforts. Companies seeking to influence consumer purchase decisions need to consider not only how to communicate with consumers directly, but also how to interact with the online communities to which those consumers belong. In modern marketing, the ability to build relevant communication with consumers serves as a key to creating long-term relationships between companies and digital service users (Gardi et al., 2021).

The relationship between participation in online communities and purchasing behavior is complex and mediated by various psychological and social factors. Trust, social validation, community norms, risk reduction, preference formation, and social comparison all play roles in determining the extent to which community experiences influence purchase decisions. Adjei, Noble, and Noble (2010) demonstrated that customer-to-customer communication in online brand communities exerts a significant influence on purchasing behavior, with positive information exerting a stronger effect. Huang, Hsiao, and Chen (2012) added that the sense of virtual community reinforces the influence of online comments on attitudes and purchase intentions. Together, both findings illustrate that the influential power of online communities on purchase decisions depends not only on the quality of shared information, but also on the extent

to which consumers perceive connectedness and shared identity with the community. Understanding this translation process provides the foundation for developing more effective strategies to leverage online communities as a medium to influence consumer behavior.

Conclusion

Interactions within online communities exert a significant influence on consumer purchase decisions through two primary interconnected mechanisms. First, interaction mechanisms within online communities shape consumer perceptions through credible information exchange, trust building, collective identity formation, and consumption norm socialization. Information shared in online communities is perceived as more authentic and trustworthy compared to conventional marketing sources because it originates from the real experiences of fellow consumers. Second, experiences obtained within online communities are translated into actual purchase decisions through a translation process involving risk evaluation, social validation, social comparison, and the formation of sustainable brand preferences. Trust established within the community serves as the primary bridge connecting community experiences to purchasing actions. Social norms developing within the community also influence purchase decisions by encouraging consumers to align their behavior with group expectations. Purchase decisions resulting from this process tend to be more stable and enduring because they have undergone thorough consideration involving multiple perspectives. Online communities thus function as dynamic information ecosystems where consumer experiences are continuously shared and utilized by other members, creating feedback loops that reinforce community influence on purchasing behavior.

For marketers and brand managers, an understanding of online community influence mechanisms highlights the necessity for strategies that are more participatory and relationship-based rather than traditional, one-way marketing approaches. Companies need to allocate resources to build and maintain healthy online communities where members feel valued and heard. Investing in effective community moderation and providing beneficial content will enhance credibility and trust, ultimately driving purchase decisions. For online community platform managers, these findings underscore the importance of creating conducive environments for authentic and constructive information exchange. Policies that protect information integrity and prevent unethical marketing practices will preserve the community's value as a trusted information source. For consumers, awareness of online community influence on their purchase decisions can foster a more critical mindset in processing information received from online sources. Consumers need to carefully consider the credibility of information sources and not rely solely on community opinions without conducting independent evaluations of products to be purchased.

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