

## CONSTRUCTION OF TRUST AND RISK IN SHOPPING DECISION-MAKING ON TIKTOK SHOP: A DIGITAL ETHNOGRAPHY STUDY

A'iffatan Dina Khunafa<sup>1a\*</sup>, Anita Sumelvia Dewi<sup>2b</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Universitas Islam Kediri, Kediri, Indonesia

<sup>a</sup> [aiffatandinakhunafa@gmail.com](mailto:aiffatandinakhunafa@gmail.com)

<sup>b</sup> [anita@uniska-kediri.ac.id](mailto:anita@uniska-kediri.ac.id)

(\*) Corresponding Author

[aiffatandinakhunafa@gmail.com](mailto:aiffatandinakhunafa@gmail.com)

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines how trust and risk perception shape shopping decisions on TikTok Shop, a growing form of live streaming-based social commerce in Indonesia. Using a qualitative digital ethnography approach, it explores users' social and emotional experiences through digital observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation of online interactions between hosts and young consumers in East Java. Findings reveal that trust emerges from social interaction, visual cues, and social validation. Communicative, transparent, and responsive hosts enhance credibility, while high-quality visuals reinforce authenticity and professionalism. Comments and testimonials (e-WOM) serve as collective validation, whereas negative experiences heighten perceived risk and caution. From the sellers' perspective, offering discounts, showcasing testimonials, and maintaining honesty and consistency foster trust and loyalty. Theoretically, this study expands understanding of trust and risk in social commerce by emphasizing social and symbolic dimensions often overlooked by quantitative approaches. Practically, it guides TikTok Shop practitioners in building authentic, empathetic communication and encourages consumers to strengthen digital literacy in evaluating seller credibility. Overall, trust and risk in digital shopping arise from the dynamic interaction between humans, algorithms, and social representations within virtual markets. Methodologically, this research also offers uniqueness by applying digital ethnography in the context of social commerce in Indonesia—an approach that is still rarely explored to capture the real experiences embedded in the culture of online consumers.

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## INTRODUCTIONS

The development of digital technology has significantly changed consumer shopping patterns, from direct interactions in stores to online experiences, and now to more interactive forms through live streaming commerce. According to Song & Liu (2021), the use of live streaming in e-commerce increases consumer engagement and trust through a combination of entertainment, real-time interaction, product visualisation, and virtual communities. Thus, shopping through live streaming is not merely an economic transaction, but also a social and cultural experience.

However, this phenomenon presents new challenges related to trust and perceived risk in the digital context (Piranda et al., 2022). Although many quantitative studies have examined the relationship between trust, risk, and purchase intention, there is still limited research that explores in depth how trust is formed socially and emotionally in a highly interactive live streaming environment. Lee (2025) asserts that although trust reduces risk in social commerce, further understanding of the cultural context and cognitive-affective trust transfer is still needed.

A literature review reveals several research gaps. First, most studies use a quantitative approach with a direct relationship model between variables, while qualitative or digital ethnographic approaches are still rarely used to understand social practices in live streaming transactions. Second, the mechanisms of credibility formation through host interactions, user comments, and platform algorithms have not been widely explored. Third, the local cultural context of Indonesia is still minimal in live streaming commerce studies, even though studies such as Sun et al. (2023) in China show that cultural factors influence the formation of trust and risk perception.

Recent research shows that live streaming environmental features such as real-time interactivity, visual immersion, and audience social identity influence cognitive and affective trust, which in turn influence purchasing decisions (Li et al., 2025; Zhao et al. 2024). However, understanding of how these factors specifically shape trust and risk perception remains limited. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the question, ‘How do social, visual, and algorithmic interactions shape trust and risk perception in live streaming commerce in Indonesia?’

This study uses a qualitative approach with digital ethnography to explore the social construction of trust and risk perception in depth. This approach was chosen because previous studies tended to ignore the socio-technical and emotional dimensions of user experience (Chang et al. (2024). Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of the Trust and Risk in E-Commerce theory (Gefen, 2000) and the Digital Social Interaction Theory (Goffman & Erving, 1959) in a contemporary context mediated by algorithms and AI. Practically, the results of this study are expected to provide insights for businesses and platform developers such as TikTok in designing more authentic, transparent, and credible strategies, as well as for consumers to increase critical awareness in assessing trust and risk in the digital social space.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The development of live-streaming commerce has given rise to a new form of economic interaction that is rich in social and emotional dimensions. In this type of digital space, the transaction process is not only determined by product quality, but also by how sellers present themselves, build rapport, and create an atmosphere that consumers trust. Trust emerges as a result of a social process involving verbal communication, visual expression, and symbolic interpretation that occurs directly during the broadcast. Two-way interaction allows consumers to assess the authenticity and good intentions of sellers, thereby forming confidence in their credibility. Meanwhile, risk perception arises as a response to the uncertainty inherent in the digital space regarding security, authenticity, and transparency of information. The relationship between trust and risk is reciprocal: the stronger the trust built, the lower the level of risk perceived by consumers.

Based on this understanding, this study departs from the view that trust and risk perception in live-streaming commerce are formed through social interactions mediated by technology. This conceptual framework combines the perspective of the Trust and Risk in E-Commerce theory (Gefen, 2000), which places trust and risk as key factors in online purchasing behaviour, with the theory of digital interaction (Goffman, 1959), which highlights performativity and self-representation in online communication. Through the integration of these two approaches, the formation of trust and risk is understood as the result of a reciprocal relationship between the host, consumers, and the platform system regulated by algorithms. Thus, trust and risk are not only viewed as individual psychological constructs, but also as social and cultural phenomena constructed through communication practices, visualisation, and technological mechanisms in digital spaces such as TikTok Shop.

## METHODS

### Research Type and Approach

Ethnography is a qualitative research method rooted in anthropology and sociology, where researchers live in or interact deeply with the studied community to understand practices, values, interactions, and social meanings that emerge naturally in their lives. In classical ethnography, participant observation, in-depth interviews, and direct documentation become the main instruments for capturing cultural nuances and interactions between individuals. This method pays attention to both physical and social contexts and how people create meaning over their actions in daily life. In the digital context, ethnography develops into digital ethnography, which is ethnography that takes place in cyberspace (online), social media, online communities, and internet-based platforms, where social interactions and meanings emerge through text, video, comments, emojis, and other multimodal elements.

The construction of trust and perceived risk are two concepts that are very relevant in online/social commerce spaces such as TikTok Shop. Trust does not emerge directly; it is built through various digital signals such as seller reputation, review quality, user testimonials, live interactions, and host appearance in videos or streaming. Risk perception can stem from doubts about product authenticity, fraud, unclear refund/return policies, or uncertainty about product descriptions presented visually. Digital ethnography allows researchers to follow how TikTok Shop users interpret these signals in practice - for example, the comments they read, testimonials, how hosts speak or demonstrate products, and how algorithms present content - thus creating doubt or strengthening trust.

One of the advantages of digital ethnography in trust & risk studies is its ability to capture social practices in real time through digital interactions - live streaming, comments, chat, sharing, etc. For example, in the article by Harianto & Ellyawati (2023) it was found that perceived usefulness, trust, and sense of risk significantly influence TikTok Shop consumer loyalty, with consumer satisfaction as a mediator. With digital ethnography, researchers not only see survey numbers, but can explore how users talk about risk/trust, how uncertainty is communicated in comments, and how trust is built through social interactions in videos or live streams.

In addition, digital ethnography also helps explore the role of platform context, algorithms, and digital media affordances in shaping user experiences. For example, how TikTok Shop uses recommendation algorithms, how live hosts choose narratives or visual narratives, how viewers respond - all are part of the construction of trust and risk perception. The study of Brašanac (2024) discusses methodological (and ethical) challenges in studying platforms like TikTok, including how content spreads, how algorithms influence what appears to users, and how data should be collected with attention to privacy and the authenticity of the interaction itself. Studying these elements through digital ethnography provides deeper insights into how trust and risk are not just "variables to be measured," but also "experiences and meanings that are constructed."

### Research Location and Subjects

Virtual location: TikTok Shop Platform

Research Subjects: Young TikTok Users (aged 18-25 years) in East Java who have actively shopped at least twice through TikTok Shop in the last six months.

Number of Participants: 2 main informants (purposively selected)

### Data Collection Techniques

Data collection techniques are the most important steps in research, because to obtain data without knowing data collection techniques, this research will not obtain data that meets established data standards. According to Sugiyono in Rahmaoktaviani & Setiawan (2020) qualitative research relies on data from observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation to build holistic understanding of the studied object. The data collection techniques that will be used in this research are as follows:

Digital observation (netnography): observing interactions, comments, video reviews, and promotional patterns carried out by sellers and consumers on TikTok Shop to understand behavior, preferences, and communication strategies used in digital marketing activities on the platform.

In-depth interview: conducted with active users, content creators, and sellers on TikTok Shop to deeply explore experiences, motivations, and factors that influence the shopping decision-making process on the platform in the context of digital ethnography studies.

Digital documentation: collecting screenshots, posts, and observation and interview results, to understand how consumers interact, assess products, and make shopping decisions on TikTok Shop.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

Data analysis is the process of systematically searching and arranging data obtained from interview results, observations, and documentation. Data is analyzed using Dull & Reinhardt (2014) which consists of three main stages: Data condensation

Data condensation is the process of filtering, simplifying, and focusing on raw data obtained from interviews, observations, or digital documentation. At this stage, researchers select parts of data relevant to the research focus, namely the construction of trust and risk in shopping decision-making on TikTok Shop. Data that is irrelevant or repetitive will be reduced to maintain analysis effectiveness.

Data display

After data is condensed, the next stage is data display. This stage functions to systematically present findings so that patterns of relationships between categories or themes can be clearly seen. In this research, data presentation is done through descriptive narrative, thematic tables, and direct quotes from informants. According to Miles (1994), data presentation is an important stage for finding deep meaning from qualitative data, because at this phase researchers begin to see patterns, causal relationships, and logical flows between studied social variables. Good presentation will facilitate researchers in drawing valid and contextual conclusions.

Conclusion drawing/verification

At this stage, researchers interpret analysis results and draw conceptual meaning from the presented data. The resulting conclusions are not merely data summaries, but syntheses that explain how trust and risk are socially constructed in the context of shopping on TikTok Shop. Verification is done repeatedly throughout the analysis process to ensure that conclusions taken are consistent and reliable. Researchers perform triangulation of sources and techniques, comparing data from interview results with observations and digital documentation such as comments or TikTok Shop live recordings.

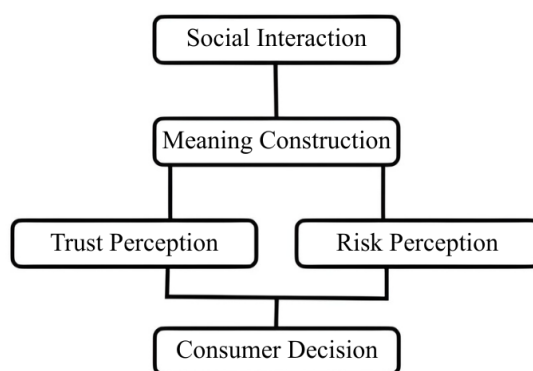
In the digital ethnography approach, data validity testing (trustworthiness) is carried out through adaptation of traditional ethnography principles adjusted to digital space characteristics; this test includes techniques such as source and technique triangulation, digital member checking, audit trail (digital audit trail), and researcher reflexivity toward digital position and bias. For example, researchers can perform triangulation by comparing interview data, online comment observations, and digital artifacts (posts, metadata) to ensure meaning consistency; then interpretation results can be sent back to sources online for them to verify whether the interpretation is appropriate (member checking). Audit trails in the form of digital data collection process notes (screenshots, activity logs, analysis revision versions) are stored so that methods can be traced back, while reflexivity requires researchers to be aware of how algorithms, platforms, and researcher position (insider/outsider) influence data and interpretation. Thus, credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability remain important benchmarks in digital ethnography, but their application methods are adapted to remain relevant to the complexity of online interactions.

In this study, the researcher recognised their position as a digital observer and passive user of TikTok who did not actively make transactions on TikTok Shop. This position provided advantages because the researcher understood the digital cultural context, communication styles, and user interaction dynamics on the platform. However, this position also had the potential to cause interpretative bias due to assumptions or personal experiences with TikTok's



features and algorithms. To maintain objectivity, the researcher engaged in continuous self-reflection throughout the observation and analysis process by recording reflexive memos that documented how the researcher's views, experiences, and position could influence data interpretation. Thus, this reflexive awareness became an integral part of the process of maintaining credibility and transparency in digital ethnographic research.

Supporting sources discussing how digital ethnography faces methodological challenges and how validity testing can be adapted include the research by Forberg & Schilt (2023) which emphasizing that digital ethnography maintains participatory epistemology - namely researchers as "actors within" the digital world, so validity testing must include engagement in the digital field itself.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework

Digital social interactions such as user comments, testimonials, likes/shares, and direct interactions in live streaming function as "social bridges" that enable users to build symbolic relationships between consumers and sellers in cyberspace. In the context of social commerce, this interaction is not merely one-way communication, but a dialogic process where consumers actively read social signals and interpret seller credibility.

After digital social interaction occurs, consumers conduct an interpretation process of various symbols and narratives, such as how hosts present products, comments from other users, number of viewers, or payment methods/system security to build social meaning about seller credibility and potential losses. This process is constructive: meaning about "honest seller" or "potential fraud" does not automatically emerge, but is actively formed through digital dialogue between sellers, other users, and the platform itself. Research by Sun et al. (2023) shows that risk perception and trust emerge as a result of consumer assessment of streaming attributes (visual, interactivity, transparency) which are interpreted as indicators of credibility or danger.

From the formed meaning, consumers simultaneously form two crucial perceptions: trust and perceived risk. Trust emerges when consumers feel that sellers are reliable, honest, and transparent, while risk perception arises when there are doubts about transaction security, product authenticity, or possibility of expectation mismatch. There is a mutually influencing relationship between the two: trust can reduce risk perception, and the level of perceived risk can decrease trust. Likewise in social commerce literature, the trust-risk perspective is often used as the main theoretical framework for understanding how consumers assess and decide on online purchases (Lee, 2025).

The conceptual framework in the figure describes the relationships between variables that influence consumer decisions. In this model, social interaction becomes the initial factor that forms meaning construction in individuals' minds. The meaning construction process then influences two important aspects, namely trust perception and risk perception toward a product or service. Both of these perceptions ultimately play a role in determining consumer decisions in making purchases or choosing a product.

Finally, the results of this trust construction and risk perception process influence consumer decisions whether they will buy, postpone, or cancel transactions. If the level of trust is higher than the level of risk perception, consumers

tend to make the decision to buy (Chandruangphen et al., 2022). Conversely, if risk perception is more dominant, consumers will avoid or wait for more evidence (for example, looking at comments, more testimonials, waiting for replay of live streams). The conceptual model in live commerce research shows that trust acts as the main driver of purchase intention, while risk can become a barrier or moderator of trust's effect on decisions.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

In qualitative research, informants are understood as individuals who have important roles in conveying data, meaning and social context being studied. Informant selection theory emphasizes that not everyone is suitable to be an informant, but rather those who meet certain criteria such as having direct experience, relevant knowledge, or symbolic representation of the studied phenomenon. Purposive or variation-based informant selection (for example, maximum variation, critical cases, snowball) becomes the main strategy for extracting rich and deep data (Heryana, 2020). In this research, researchers use purposive sampling technique by considering informant relevance to the research focus, namely how trust construction and risk perception are formed in the shopping decision-making process on TikTok Shop. Informant selection is done based on direct involvement in live shopping activities, both as business actors (live hosts) and as active TikTok Shop consumers.

Researchers positioned themselves as passive participant observers during several live broadcast sessions on TikTok Shop between March and April 2025. Observations were conducted by following live broadcasts, recording screens, and noting interaction patterns, comments, and host performance in detail. In some sessions, researchers also interacted lightly in the comments section, for example by sending emojis or short questions, to experience the natural flow of interaction between the host and the audience. This reflective approach allowed researchers to understand the negotiation of trust and risk perception in real time in a digital context.

First Informant: Adinda Khouinnisa (AD)

The first informant is a business actor and live host on TikTok Shop who has been actively conducting live broadcasts for more than one year. She was chosen as a key informant because she has practical experience in building credibility through communication strategies, product presentation, and real-time interaction with viewers. The experience and strategies applied by Aifatana Dina become the main data source in understanding trust construction from the seller or business actor side.

Second Informant: Ardika Putra (AP)

The second informant is an active TikTok Shop consumer (KA) who has made product purchases through the live streaming feature at least twice in the last six months. This informant was chosen because he has direct experience in assessing host credibility, reading comments from other users, and experiencing both risks and satisfaction in online transactions. The consumer perspective is used to explore how trust perception and risk are formed from the message receiver (audience) side in digital interaction spaces.

Thematic analysis was conducted through open, axial, and selective coding of interview transcripts and observation notes. From the coding process, a number of recurring meanings emerged regarding the formation of trust and risk perception in direct shopping activities. Seven dominant themes relevant to the research focus are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Thematic Analysis

Main Theme	Informant Field Data	Researcher Interpretation
Social Interaction as the Beginning of Trust Formation	"Usually I look at how the host speaks, if they can explain the product in detail and show the item directly, I become trusting." (AD,IK,PU)	Natural and transparent social interaction becomes the basis for the formation of trust (Oliveira et al., 2017). Communicative and responsive hosts strengthen credibility perception in the eyes of audiences.

Main Theme	Informant Field Data	Researcher Interpretation
	"What's most important is the communication method. Viewers must feel invited to chat, not just told to buy." (AN,IK,K)	
Visual Role in Building Credibility	"If the visual display is clear, lighting is good, and the host looks professional, I immediately feel that the store is serious." (AN,IK,K)  "Before going live I make sure lighting and camera are good so it looks professional." (AN,IK,K)	Visual aspects become symbols of professionalism and authenticity. Good visual display strengthens trust perception toward digital stores (Amarullah et al., 2022).
Negative Experience as a Caution Builder	"I have, phone casing, it turned out the item that came did not match what was in the product photo, so since then I've been more careful." (AN,IK,K)	Risk and negative experiences function as consumer learning (Bauer, 1960). Emerging risk perception strengthens consumers' ability to control shopping decisions.
Influence of Comments and e-WOM on Decisions	"I almost always read comments first. If many people say it's good and fast delivery, I become more convinced." (AD,IK,PU)	Comments from other users become a strong form of electronic word of mouth in creating a sense of security (Mukhlisoh et al., 2023). Social validation becomes a source of digital trust.
Popularity as Initial Trust Signal	"If the followers are many, it means the store has been trusted by many people. But I also look at the attitude, not just numbers." (AD,IK,PU)	Popularity functions as a trust cue, but is not sufficient without being supported by interactive and honest behavior from sellers.
Seller Strategy in Building Trust and Encouraging Checkout	"Usually I give flash sale discounts during live, or show testimonials from previous buyers." (AN,IK,K)	Persuasion strategies such as discounts and testimonials function doubly: attracting interest and lowering buyer risk perception (Bray, 2008).
Role of Algorithm and TikTok Features in Store Image Formation	"If my live stream gets on FYP, viewers can increase drastically and the store becomes more well-known." (AN,IK,K)	Features like FYP, comments, and gifts become social indicators that strengthen digital reputation and public trust toward stores.
Honesty and Consistency as the Basis of Digital Reputation	"I always maintain honesty and respond quickly if there are complaints. Must make them feel comfortable." (AN,IK,K)	Digital reputation is built from authenticity, responsibility, and open communication. Consistency creates long-term consumer loyalty.

Source: Processed data by researchers, 2025

Based on the results of thematic analysis, it can be concluded that the formation of trust and risk perception in shopping decisions on TikTok Shop is greatly influenced by the process of digital social interaction. Consumers not only evaluate products functionally, but also in terms of communication and visual representation displayed by sellers. Hosts who are communicative, responsive, and able to display products authentically through live broadcasts are

considered more credible. Meanwhile, comments and testimonials from other users serve as a strong form of social validation that reinforces buyers' confidence. Conversely, negative experiences such as product mismatches become lessons that shape consumers' caution and strategies in assessing the level of risk before making a transaction.

These findings are also reinforced by field observations of the patterns of interaction between hosts and viewers. Adinda, one of the informants who acts as a host, often greets new viewers by mentioning their names and responding to comments directly. For example, when a viewer asked, 'Ma'am, do you still have the green one?', she smiled and held the product up to the camera while replying, 'Yes, we still have it, ma'am. This is the green one. There are only a few left, so click on the yellow basket before they run out.' After the broadcast session, she explained, 'If I only talk one-way, people get bored quickly. But if I read the comments and respond quickly, they feel that I am really there.' This kind of interaction shows that trust is not solely built through verbal persuasion, but through real-time emotional and affective engagement between the seller and the audience in the live broadcast space.

In addition to communication, visual dimensions also play an important role in shaping perceptions of credibility. Based on observations, researchers noted that the host's face is usually displayed at the top of the screen, while the bottom contains a 'flash sale' banner, a product carousel, and constantly moving comments such as 'The pictures are real' or 'I already bought it, it arrived quickly!'. Occasionally, warning comments such as 'Be careful, this is a new store' appear, which serve as community-based warnings among viewers. This pattern of visual and textual interaction shows that trust and suspicion arise simultaneously and are continuously negotiated through public interaction in the digital shopping space.

From the side of TikTok Shop live performers, trust-building strategies are carried out through a combination of technical, performative, and social aspects. They prepare attractive live displays, maintain honesty, and actively interact with viewers to create positive emotional relationships. The use of TikTok features such as For You Page, comments, and gifts helps strengthen store image while increasing exposure to new audiences. Behavioral consistency and responsibility in responding to customer complaints also become the basis for digital reputation formation. Overall, analysis results show that trust and risk on TikTok Shop are social constructions formed from a combination of human interaction and data validity, digital systems, and emotional experiences in virtual commercial spaces.

These findings indicate that trust in live online shopping is formed through a layered process involving various social and sensory cues, such as voice intonation, lighting, comment flow, and algorithmic exposure. Meanwhile, risk perception is shaped not only by previous negative experiences, but also by community discourse and the credibility of the host. Thus, the live streaming environment functions as both a marketplace and a social arena, where emotions, information, and technology interact in complex ways.

## Discussion

The results of this research show that the formation of trust and risk perception in shopping decisions on TikTok Shop is a complex and dynamic social process, involving interactions between human factors, technology, and symbolic representations. In this context, trust is not solely built through product quality, but through how hosts and consumers interact in digital spaces. Social interactions that are communicative, transparent, and responsive become the main foundation for the formation of trust. Hosts who are able to explain products clearly, respond to comments in real-time, and display friendly and convincing attitudes will more easily gain credibility in the eyes of audiences. This finding is consistent with the view of Oliveira et al. (2017) who confirm that social presence and authentic communication play an important role in building trust in online environments.

In addition to social interaction, visual aspects are also proven to have significant influence on credibility perception. Clear live displays, good lighting, and professional host appearance create an impression of seriousness and trustworthiness. Visualization like this not only functions as product information media, but also as a symbol of professionalism that strengthens digital store reputation. This is consistent with findings by Amarullah et al. (2022) who emphasize the importance of visual quality as a non-verbal indicator of seller reliability. In the context of



performance-based commerce like TikTok Shop, aesthetic and technical aspects become integral parts of communication strategies that grow consumer trust.

Negative experiences in previous transactions are also proven to play an important role in forming risk perception and consumer caution. Informants who have experienced product mismatch develop caution in assessing stores or hosts before transacting again. This is consistent with Bauer's (1960) consumer risk theory which views risk perception as a result of social learning. Thus, bad experiences do not merely have negative impacts, but function as adaptive mechanisms that strengthen consumers' ability to control shopping decisions in digital spaces.

Other findings show that comments and testimonials from other users (electronic word of mouth or e-WOM) become strong factors in building a sense of security and buyer confidence. Consumers tend to seek social validation through positive reviews before conducting transactions. In this context, e-WOM functions as a form of collective trust that strengthens individual decisions, as stated by Mukhlisoh et al. (2023) that user reviews are the main instrument of digital trust formation. Seller popularity, number of followers, and appearance in For You Page (FYP) features also become initial trust signals (trust cues). However, popularity alone does not guarantee credibility if not accompanied by honesty and behavioral consistency. This shows that digital trust is relational and performative, demanding proof through real interactions, not just quantitative numbers.

From the side of TikTok Shop live performers, trust-building strategies are carried out through a combination of technical, social, and emotional approaches. Hosts try to attract attention by giving discounts, displaying testimonials from previous buyers, and maintaining empathetic and open communication. This strategy not only increases purchase interest, but also lowers consumer risk perception, as revealed by Bray (2008) that persuasion in digital contexts has a dual function: building trust and encouraging purchase action. In addition, TikTok's algorithmic features such as comments, gifts, and FYP also strengthen store reputation by creating wide social exposure.

Honesty and consistency emerge as the most fundamental dimensions in digital reputation formation. Seller informants emphasize the importance of maintaining authenticity and responsibility toward customers, including responding to complaints quickly and openly. This practice creates long-term loyalty because consumers feel security and comfort in transactions. This is consistent with the concept of trustworthiness proposed by Mayer et al. (1995), that integrity and behavioral consistency are the main pillars of interpersonal and digital trust.

Overall, the results of this research confirm that trust and risk on TikTok Shop are social constructions formed through human interactions with digital systems and emotional experiences in virtual commercial spaces. This process shows the combination between social logic rooted in communication, reputation, and collective validation and algorithmic logic determined by recommendation systems and digital exposure. Thus, trust in the context of TikTok Shop cannot be understood only as a technological aspect, but as a result of dynamic interactions between human behavior, symbolic representations, and social media structures that shape today's digital commerce ecosystem.

However, the dynamics of trust building on TikTok Shop are not entirely organic or neutral. Behind seemingly authentic social interactions, there are manipulative practices that subtly shape consumer perceptions. Several informants admitted to becoming sceptical of fake reviews, sponsored testimonials, or the use of buzzers and fake urgency such as false claims of 'limited stock'. Practices such as these show that the dimension of trust in social commerce is not only built through interpersonal communication, but also through symbolic engineering strategically produced by sellers or even by the platform itself. This indicates that digital trust does not always reflect authenticity, but can be the result of impression management (Goffman & Erving, 1959) carried out in the context of the attention economy.

In addition, the results of this study also show that the TikTok algorithm plays a significant role as a social actor in shaping consumer trust and risk structures. Through recommendation logic and the 'For You Page (FYP)' feature, the algorithm determines seller visibility and the types of interactions that receive high exposure. Within the framework of actor-network theory (Latour, 2005), algorithms are not merely technological instruments, but agents that participate in negotiations within social-digital networks, mediating relationships between sellers, buyers, and content. This creates a new power asymmetry in which the platform has the symbolic authority to determine who

appears credible in the digital space. Thus, trust in TikTok Shop is not only the result of human social interactions but also a product of technological and economic algorithmic configurations that implicitly guide consumption behaviour.

By examining this dimension, this study invites readers to view trust in live streaming e-commerce more critically, not only as the result of positive social interactions, but also as a space that is vulnerable to manipulation, commodification of authenticity, and platform dominance. This perspective expands on previous findings and opens opportunities for further research to explore how digital ethics, algorithmic transparency, and consumer literacy can play a role in building a more equitable and authentic social commerce ecosystem.

## CONCLUSION

This research shows that in the context of TikTok Shop-based social commerce, trust and risk perception do not emerge spontaneously, but are formed through complex social, symbolic, and digital processes. Digital social interactions, such as communication in live streaming, user comments, visual displays, and testimonials become the main foundation for trust formation between sellers and buyers. Interaction authenticity, transparency in information delivery, and visual quality play important roles as credibility signals. Conversely, negative experiences and testimonials that do not match raise risk perception, which then influences the level of consumer caution in making purchase decisions.

From the seller's side, trust-building strategies are carried out through a combination of technical aspects (lighting, video quality, and product clarity), social aspects (responsive and communicative interaction), and symbolic aspects (honesty, empathy, and image consistency). TikTok features such as For You Page (FYP), comments, and gifts strengthen store exposure and reputation as a form of digital public trust. Honesty, consistency, and openness in responding to customer complaints prove to be key in maintaining consumer loyalty.

Theoretically, this research enriches understanding of how trust and risk in social commerce are socially constructed in the algorithm-based digital era. Digital ethnography enables researchers to understand the dynamics of meaning and emotion behind online shopping behavior that cannot be fully explained by quantitative approaches. Practically, these findings can serve as guidance for TikTok Shop business actors to design more authentic communication strategies, and for consumers to be more critical and reflective in assessing seller credibility in virtual shopping spaces.

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