

Affiliate Marketing, Cashback, and Flash Sales as Drivers of Consumer Purchase Decisions in Shopee

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the role of affiliate marketing, cashback programs, and flash sales in driving consumer purchase decisions on the Shopee marketplace. The research adopts a quantitative approach using a survey method involving 130 respondents from Management students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using multiple linear regression. The findings indicate that affiliate marketing has a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions, reflecting the importance of credible recommendations and promotional content. Cashback programs also show a significant positive influence by enhancing perceived economic value among consumers. Furthermore, flash sales demonstrate the strongest effect, as time limited promotions create urgency and encourage immediate purchasing behavior. Simultaneously, all three variables significantly influence consumer purchase decisions. This study highlights the importance of integrated digital marketing strategies in influencing consumer behavior in the e-commerce sector.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has significantly transformed consumer behavior, particularly in the context of online shopping through e-commerce platforms such as Shopee. Increasing market competition compels firms to adopt innovative digital marketing strategies to attract and retain consumers in a highly dynamic environment (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2022; Lemon & Verhoef, 2021; Dwivedi et al., 2021; Tiago & Veríssimo, 2021; Kumar et al., 2021; Bala & Verma, 2020; Verhoef et al., 2021). In this context, understanding the determinants of consumer purchase decisions has become a critical issue in marketing research (Kotler et al., 2021; Gupta & Kim, 2022; Islam et al., 2021; Hoyer et al., 2020).

Purchase decision is a complex process involving need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, and final buying behavior. In digital environments, consumer decision-making is increasingly influenced by online stimuli, where information asymmetry and perceived risk remain significant challenges (Lemon & Verhoef, 2021; Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2022; Rose et al., 2021; Bilgihan et al., 2021; Sharma et al., 2020; Kannan & Li, 2021). Recent studies highlight that digital marketing strategies play a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions, attitudes, and behavioral responses (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Kumar et al., 2021; Pantano et al., 2020; Gao et al., 2021).

Among various strategies, affiliate marketing, cashback programs, and flash sales have gained significant attention in the e-commerce ecosystem. Affiliate marketing leverages third-party promoters to influence consumers through personalized and credible content, thereby enhancing trust and purchase intention (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Ki et al., 2020; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Meanwhile, cashback programs provide financial incentives that increase perceived value and encourage repeat purchases (Zhang et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2021; Li et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2020; Hwang et al., 2021). Flash sales, on the other hand, create a sense of urgency and scarcity, which can stimulate impulsive buying behavior and accelerate decision-making (Huang et al., 2023; Li et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2021; Park et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2021).

However, despite the widespread implementation of these strategies, several challenges remain. Consumers often question the credibility of affiliate content, perceive cashback mechanisms as complex, and experience technical or psychological barriers during flash sales (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Chen et al., 2021; Huang et al., 2023; Gupta & Kim, 2022; Islam et al., 2021). These issues may reduce the effectiveness of promotional strategies and ultimately influence purchase decisions (Kannan & Li, 2021; Sharma et al., 2020; Bilgihan et al., 2021).

Empirical observations among university students indicate relatively low engagement in online purchasing activities, particularly due to uncertainty in product information, lack of trust, and confusion caused by excessive promotional offers (Hoyer et al., 2020; Rose et al., 2021; Gao et al., 2021). Additionally, factors such as negative reviews, price variability, and previous unfavorable experiences further contribute to hesitation in making purchase decisions (Liu et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2020; Pantano et al., 2020).

Given these gaps, this study aims to examine the role of affiliate marketing, cashback, and flash sales as key drivers of consumer purchase decisions in the e-commerce context. This research is expected to contribute to the development of digital marketing strategies by providing empirical evidence on how promotional mechanisms influence consumer behavior in online marketplaces (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Kumar et al., 2021; Verhoef et al., 2021).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Purchase Decision

Purchase decision refers to the stage in consumer behavior where individuals select and ultimately purchase a product after evaluating various alternatives. It is a multi-stage process involving problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior (Kotler & Keller, 2016). This process reflects how consumers integrate information, preferences, and perceived value in making rational or emotional decisions.

Recent studies emphasize that in the digital environment, purchase decisions are strongly influenced by external stimuli such as online reviews, digital promotions, and social influence (Alalwan, 2020; Hajli et al., 2020; Erkan & Evans, 2021; Filieri et al., 2021; Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2020; Leong et al., 2020; Ashraf et al., 2020). In e-commerce platforms like Shopee, the abundance of product choices and information increases decision complexity, making promotional strategies a key determinant of consumer behavior (Pappas et al., 2020; Akram et al., 2021; Bhatti et al., 2020; Arora et al., 2021; Gibreel et al., 2020).

Affiliate Marketing

Affiliate marketing is a performance-based digital marketing strategy in which third parties (affiliates) promote products and receive commissions for successful transactions. This strategy has become increasingly relevant in e-commerce due to its ability to deliver personalized and credible content to target audiences. From a theoretical perspective, affiliate marketing is closely related to the Source Credibility Theory, where consumers are more likely to trust and follow recommendations from perceived credible sources. Affiliates, particularly influencers, act as intermediaries that reduce information asymmetry and enhance consumer trust.

Recent research shows that affiliate marketing significantly influences purchase intention by providing product knowledge, social proof, and persuasive communication (De Veirman et al., 2020; Schouten et al., 2020; Sokolova & Perez, 2021; Breves et al., 2021; Lou & Kim, 2020; Ki & Kim, 2020; Janssen et al., 2022). Therefore, the effectiveness of affiliate marketing depends on message quality, relevance, and credibility (Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2021; Casaló et al., 2020; Djafarova & Bowes, 2021).

Cashback

Cashback is a promotional strategy that offers consumers a partial refund after completing a purchase. It is widely used in digital marketing to increase

perceived value and encourage repeat purchases. The effectiveness of cashback can be explained using Prospect Theory, where consumers perceive cashback as a gain that reduces the perceived cost of a transaction. This perceived economic benefit enhances consumer satisfaction and purchase intention.

Empirical studies indicate that cashback programs positively influence consumer behavior by increasing perceived value, transaction attractiveness, and customer loyalty (Ding et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021; Liu & Mattila, 2020; Wang & Li, 2021; Zhao et al., 2022; He et al., 2020; Nguyen et al., 2021). However, complexity in terms and delayed benefits may reduce its effectiveness (Kim & Lee, 2021; Xu & Huang, 2020).

Flash Sale

Flash sale is a time-limited promotional strategy that offers significant discounts within a short period. This strategy is designed to create urgency and scarcity, encouraging immediate purchasing decisions. The concept of flash sale is grounded in the Scarcity Principle, which suggests that limited availability increases perceived value and desirability. Flash sales also trigger Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), leading to impulsive buying behavior.

Recent studies confirm that flash sales significantly influence purchase decisions by accelerating decision-making processes and increasing perceived urgency (Zheng et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2021; Chen & Yao, 2021; Lin et al., 2022; Sun et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2021; Jiang et al., 2022). However, factors such as system reliability and product quality remain critical in maintaining consumer trust (Park & Lin, 2020; Ma et al., 2022).

HYPOTHESIS

The Effect of Affiliate Marketing on Purchase Decision

Affiliate marketing has emerged as a key digital marketing strategy that leverages third-party endorsements to influence consumer behavior. This mechanism is theoretically grounded in the Source Credibility Theory, which posits that information delivered by credible and trustworthy sources significantly affects consumer attitudes and decisions. In the digital environment, affiliates act as opinion leaders who reduce information asymmetry and enhance consumer trust. Additionally, Social Influence Theory explains that individuals tend to adopt behaviors based on recommendations from reference groups or influencers. In e-commerce platforms such as Shopee, affiliate-generated content plays a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and reducing perceived risk.

Recent studies confirm that affiliate marketing positively influences purchase decisions by enhancing perceived credibility, trust, and information quality (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Casalo et al., 2020; Sokolova & Perez, 2021; Breves et al., 2021). Therefore, stronger affiliate marketing engagement is expected to lead to higher purchase decisions.

H1: Affiliate marketing has a positive and significant effect on consumer purchase decisions.

The Effect of Cashback on Purchase Decision

Cashback is a widely used promotional strategy that provides financial incentives to consumers after completing a transaction. This mechanism can be explained through Prospect Theory, which suggests that consumers evaluate outcomes based on perceived gains and losses. Cashback is perceived as a gain, thereby reducing the perceived cost of purchase and increasing perceived value. Furthermore, cashback aligns with Behavioral Pricing Theory, where promotional pricing strategies influence consumer perceptions and decision-making. From a behavioral perspective, cashback also functions as a reinforcement mechanism consistent with Operant Conditioning Theory, where rewards increase the likelihood of repeated purchasing behavior.

Recent studies indicate that cashback programs significantly enhance purchase decisions by increasing perceived economic benefits and transaction attractiveness (Chen et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2021; Zhao et al., 2022). Thus, higher cashback incentives are expected to positively influence consumer purchase decisions.

H2: Cashback has a positive and significant effect on consumer purchase decisions.

The Effect of Flash Sale on Purchase Decision

Flash sale is a time-limited promotional strategy designed to create urgency and stimulate immediate purchasing behavior. This strategy is grounded in the Scarcity Principle, which suggests that limited availability increases perceived value and desirability. Additionally, flash sales trigger Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), where consumers experience psychological pressure to act quickly to avoid missing opportunities. This phenomenon is closely related to Impulse Buying Theory, which explains how emotional arousal and time pressure can override rational decision-making. Within the Stimulus Organism Response (SOR) framework, flash sale acts as a strong external stimulus that generates emotional responses, leading to rapid purchase decisions. Empirical evidence shows that flash sales significantly influence purchase behavior by increasing urgency and impulsive buying tendencies (Li et al., 2022; Huang et al., 2023; Zheng et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2021).

H3: Flash sale has a positive and significant effect on consumer purchase decisions.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

To clarify the research objectives, this study develops an analytical framework that illustrates the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable within the context of e-commerce, particularly on the Shopee platform.

This study examines the influence of affiliate marketing (X_1), cashback (X_2), and flash sale (X_3) as independent variables on consumer purchase decisions (Y) as the dependent variable. These relationships are analyzed both partially and simultaneously to determine the extent to which each marketing strategy contributes to consumer decision-making. From a theoretical perspective, this framework is grounded in the Stimulus Organism Response (SOR) Theory, where affiliate marketing, cashback, and flash sale act as external stimuli that influence consumers' internal evaluations (organism), ultimately resulting in behavioral responses in the form of purchase decisions. Thus, the analytical framework of this study can be illustrated as follows:

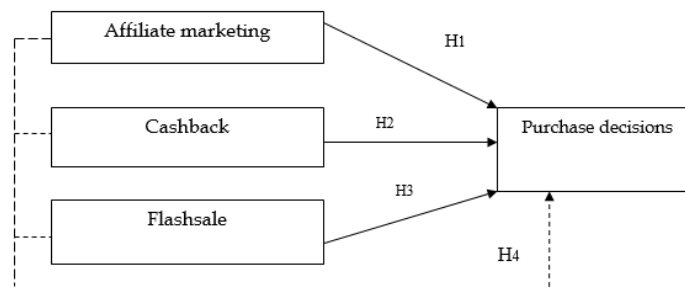


Figure 1. Analytical Framework

RESEARCH RESULT

This study was conducted using a quantitative approach involving 130 student respondents. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using multiple linear regression to examine the effect of independent variables on consumer purchase decisions in the Shopee marketplace.

Multiple Linear Regression Results

The results of the multiple linear regression analysis indicate that affiliate marketing, cashback, and flash sale have a significant effect on consumer purchase decisions.

From the calculation results, the regression equation is:

$$Y = 1,725 + 0,231 X_1 + 0,180 X_2 + 0,430 X_3 + e$$

The results of the multiple linear regression analysis indicate that all independent variables have positive coefficients, suggesting a direct relationship with consumer purchase decisions on the Shopee platform.

1. the coefficient value of affiliate marketing is 0.231, indicating that an increase in affiliate marketing activities is associated with an increase in consumer purchase decisions. This finding suggests that more effective affiliate-based promotions contribute to higher consumer engagement and purchasing behavior.
2. the coefficient value of cashback is 0.180, which also shows a positive relationship. This implies that improved cashback programs enhance

perceived economic value, thereby encouraging consumers to make purchase decisions.

3. flash sale has the highest coefficient value of 0.430, indicating that it exerts the strongest influence on purchase decisions among the variables examined. This result reflects that time-limited promotions create urgency and significantly stimulate consumers to make immediate purchases.

Overall, these findings confirm that affiliate marketing, cashback, and flash sale positively contribute to consumer purchase decisions, with flash sale emerging as the most dominant factor.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the significant role of digital marketing strategies in shaping consumer purchase decisions on the Shopee platform. Affiliate marketing functions as a critical source of information that influences consumer trust. This result is consistent with the Source Credibility Theory, which suggests that the effectiveness of marketing communication depends on the perceived trustworthiness and expertise of the information source. Higher credibility of affiliators enhances consumer confidence, thereby increasing the likelihood of purchase decisions (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Cashback has been proven to enhance consumers' perceived value. This finding aligns with Prospect Theory, where consumers perceive cashback as a gain that reduces the overall cost of transactions. As a result, consumers feel they receive additional economic benefits, which positively influences their purchasing decisions (Zhang et al., 2022). Flash sale emerges as the most influential factor in this study. This can be explained through the Scarcity Principle and the concept of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), where limited-time offers create urgency and emotional pressure. These conditions trigger impulsive buying behavior, leading consumers to make faster purchase decisions (Huang et al., 2023).

Overall, the integration of affiliate marketing, cashback, and flash sale demonstrates a synergistic effect in influencing consumer behavior. Within the Stimulus Organism Response (SOR) framework, these strategies act as external stimuli that shape internal consumer evaluations and ultimately generate behavioral responses in the form of purchase decisions.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that affiliate marketing, cashback, and flash sale have a positive and significant effect on consumer purchase decisions on the Shopee platform. Among these variables, flash sale emerges as the most dominant factor, indicating that time-limited promotional strategies play a crucial role in driving consumer purchasing behavior. Furthermore, the simultaneous effect of these three variables confirms that the integration of informational, economic, and psychological marketing stimuli significantly influences consumer decision-making in the digital marketplace.

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed. First, e-commerce platforms should enhance the credibility and quality of affiliate

marketing by ensuring that affiliators provide accurate, transparent, and trustworthy product information. Cashback programs should be designed to be more transparent, simple, and easily redeemable in order to maximize perceived value and avoid consumer confusion. Flash sale strategies should be optimized through system reliability and platform stability to ensure a seamless user experience, especially during high traffic promotional periods.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Future research is recommended to further enrich and extend the findings of this study in the context of digital consumer behavior on platforms such as Shopee. Subsequent studies are encouraged to incorporate additional variables, such as trust, customer satisfaction, and perceived value, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the determinants of purchase decisions. These variables may also function as mediators or moderators within the research model. Future research should consider employing more advanced analytical approaches, such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) or Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM), to better capture complex relationships among variables and improve model robustness. Expanding the research scope to include more diverse consumer segments such as different age groups, professions, or geographic regions would enhance the generalizability of the findings and provide broader insights into consumer behavior across various market contexts.

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Additionally, flash sales trigger Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), where consumers experience psychological pressure to act quickly to avoid missing opportunities. This phenomenon is closely related to Impulse Buying Theory, which explains how emotional arousal and time pressure can override rational decision-making.

Within the Stimulus Organism Response (SOR) framework, flash sale acts as a strong external stimulus that generates emotional responses, leading to rapid purchase decisions. Empirical evidence shows that flash sales significantly influence purchase behavior by increasing urgency and impulsive buying tendencies (Li et al., 2022; Huang et al., 2023; Zheng et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2021). Furthermore, the author acknowledges all parties who have supported the completion of this research, both directly and indirectly.

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