

DETERMINANTS OF CONSUMER PURCHASE DECISIONS ON AGRICULTURAL E-COMMERCE PLATFORMS: A CASE OF PINDUODUO IN CHINA

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ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: 6 October 2025

Revised: 20 October 2025

Published: 3 November 2025

ABSTRACT

This study investigates how six platform stimuli—perceived price discounts, gamification, social commerce features, live-streamer authenticity, perceived supply chain transparency, and product origin storytelling—affect consumer trust (in platform, seller, community) and perceived value (utilitarian, hedonic, social), ultimately shaping purchase intention. This survey research employed a quantitative approach, utilizing a structured questionnaire distributed to consumers in Guangzhou with recent purchase experience of agricultural products on Pinduoduo. With 501 valid responses, multiple regression analysis reveals that all platform characteristics significantly enhance consumer trust and perceived value. Furthermore, trust and value dimensions, particularly trust in the seller ($\beta = 0.209$, $p < 0.001$) and utilitarian value ($\beta = 0.152$, $p < 0.001$), are strong direct predictors of purchase intention. The integrated model explains 38.6% of the variance in purchase intention (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.386$, $F = 28.764$, $p < 0.001$). The findings underscore the critical roles of trust-building and value-creation in social commerce. Platform operators and sellers should prioritize authentic live-streaming, transparent supply chains, and engaging social features to foster consumer confidence and drive sustainable growth in the digital agricultural economy.

Keywords: Agricultural E-commerce, Purchase Intention, Consumer Trust, Perceived Value, S-O-R Model

CITATION INFORMATION: Li, B. H., & Thanathamthee, P. (2025). Determinants of Consumer Purchase Decisions on Agricultural E-Commerce Platforms: A Case of Pinduoduo in China. *Procedia of Multidisciplinary Research*, 3(11), 2.

INTRODUCTION

The digital transformation of commerce has positioned agricultural social commerce as a critical, yet complex, frontier for academic inquiry. Platforms like Pinduoduo have achieved remarkable success by leveraging social features to sell agricultural products—a category plagued by inherent perishability, quality variance, and significant information asymmetry (Huang et al., 2024). This very success presents a pivotal research challenge: understanding the mechanisms through which these platforms overcome profound consumer uncertainty to foster purchase intention.

While existing literature has identified a range of influential factors, from platform interactivity to streamer credibility, the current understanding remains fragmented. A comprehensive, integrated model that deconstructs the interplay between platform stimuli, psychological states, and behavioral responses in this specific context is conspicuously absent (Wang et al., 2024; Tan, 2024). To bridge this gap, this study constructs and empirically validates an integrated framework grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) paradigm. The framework is designed to deconstruct the consumer decision-making process on Pinduoduo by positing that its distinctive platform characteristics serve as external Stimuli (S). These stimuli are internalized through the key psychological mechanisms of Organism (O)—namely, consumer trust and perceived value—which in turn trigger the behavioral Response (R) of purchase intention.

This research aims to 1) To examine the direct influence of social commerce platform characteristics (i.e., perceived price discounts, gamification, live-streamer authenticity, perceived supply chain transparency, and product origin storytelling) on consumers' purchase intention for agricultural products., 2) To investigate the direct effects of these platform characteristics on the mediating psychological states of consumer trust and perceived value., and 3) To analyze the direct impacts of consumer trust (in platform, seller, community) and perceived value (utilitarian, hedonic, social) on purchase intention.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

Social Commerce Platforms and Agricultural Products

Social commerce platforms represent a convergence of e-commerce and social media, creating interactive digital marketplaces where social interactions and user-generated content are integral to the shopping experience (Liu & Hamid, 2024; Zhou et al., 2023). For agricultural products, which are characterized by perishability and quality uncertainty, this model is particularly transformative. The features of social commerce serve as critical tools to mitigate perceived risk by facilitating transparency, building trust through community validation, and creating emotional connections (Huang et al., 2024; Dong et al., 2022). Pinduoduo, with its unique emphasis on group buying, gamification, and live-streaming, exemplifies this model and has been the focus of recent empirical studies examining its success in connecting farmers directly to consumers (Mei et al., 2024; Huang et al., 2024).

The Centrality of Consumer Trust

In an environment where consumers cannot physically inspect goods before purchase, trust becomes the cornerstone of agricultural e-commerce transactions. This is particularly true for platforms like Pinduoduo, where social interactions significantly influence purchasing decisions. The platform cultivates trust through multiple channels that work in concert to reassure buyers. Consumers develop confidence in the platform itself, relying on its technical reliability and institutional safeguards such as payment protection systems and clear dispute resolution mechanisms. This institutional trust forms the foundational layer upon which transactions are built.

Simultaneously, trust is directed toward individual sellers and live-stream hosts who serve as personal intermediaries in the digital marketplace. These individuals bridge the information

gap through their perceived authenticity and expertise, allowing buyers to feel confident about product quality despite the lack of physical inspection. The transparency and genuineness demonstrated by sellers during live-stream sessions significantly reduce perceived risks. Furthermore, the collective wisdom of the user community provides additional validation through shared experiences and social proof. When consumers see numerous positive reviews and observe others making similar purchases, their confidence in both the platform and specific sellers strengthens considerably. This multidimensional trust framework effectively transforms what would otherwise be a high-risk transaction into a viable commercial exchange.

The Role of Perceived Value

Consumer decisions in agricultural e-commerce extend beyond simple price considerations to encompass a broader valuation of the entire shopping experience. This comprehensive assessment weighs what consumers receive against what they sacrifice, forming what researchers term perceived value. The practical benefits—competitive pricing, product quality, and shopping convenience—represent the utilitarian dimension that satisfies rational purchasing motives. These functional aspects ensure that basic consumer needs for efficiency and economic value are adequately met.

However, the evaluation process incorporates more than just practical considerations. The emotional and social dimensions of shopping significantly influence consumer behavior. Platforms like Pinduoduo have mastered the art of transforming routine purchases into engaging experiences through gamified interactions and entertaining live-stream content. This emotional engagement creates positive associations that enhance the overall shopping experience. Additionally, the social aspects of group purchasing and community interactions fulfill consumers' needs for social connection and belonging. The ability to share shopping discoveries and participate in collective buying activities adds a meaningful social layer to what might otherwise be a purely transactional process. When these diverse elements—practical, emotional, and social—combine to create a compelling value proposition, consumers develop stronger intentions to purchase, demonstrating how value perception drives commercial outcomes in modern e-commerce.

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Framework

The S-O-R model has been extensively and successfully applied in e-commerce and live-streaming research to explain consumer behavior (Mei et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2022; Guo et al., 2021). Its strength lies in its ability to model the process through which environmental stimuli (S) are processed through internal organismic states (O) to drive behavioral responses (R). This framework is particularly suited to the context of Pinduoduo, as the platform is a stimulus-rich environment designed to actively shape user engagement. Furthermore, the high-uncertainty nature of agricultural products makes the internal psychological states of trust and value critical mediators, a central tenet of the S-O-R paradigm.

Theoretical Foundation

This study develops a comprehensive theoretical framework grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) paradigm to examine the consumer decision-making process on agricultural social commerce platforms. In this framework, the six platform characteristics serve as the external Stimulus (S). The internal psychological processes of Consumer Trust and Perceived Value constitute the Organism (O). Finally, Purchase Intention represents the behavioral Response (R).

The construct of consumer trust is operationalized through three dimensions: trust in the platform, trust in the seller, and trust in the community (Chen, Li, Chen, & Lu, 2024c). Perceived value is decomposed into utilitarian, hedonic, and social value (Feng & Wei, 2023; Chen, Chen, & Cai, 2024a).

Based on this framework and a thorough review of literature, 3 main hypotheses were formulated (as shown in Figure 1 of the conceptual framework of this study). These hypotheses

posit significant positive relationships from platform characteristics to trust (H1), from platform characteristics to perceived value (H2), from platform characteristics, trust dimensions, and perceived value to purchase intention (H3).

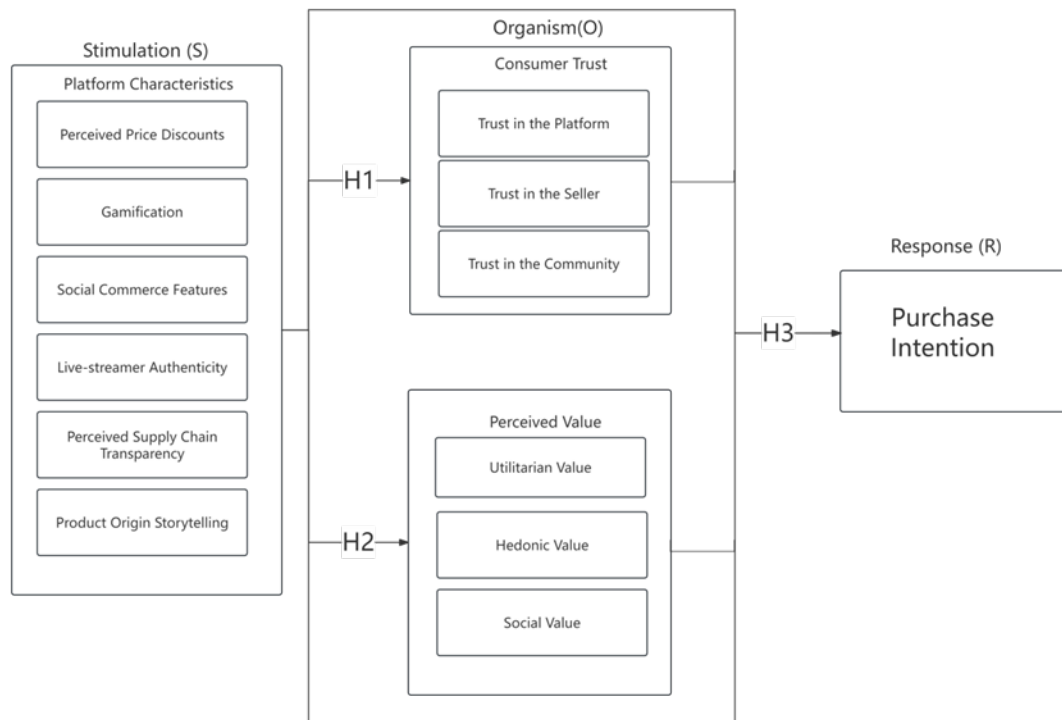


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

The construct of social commerce platform characteristics is decomposed into six key dimensions:

Perceived Price Discounts: This refers to the consumer's subjective assessment of obtaining a product at a favorably low price, often facilitated by group-buying mechanisms, which directly enhances the economic utility of the purchase (Guo et al., 2021; Tan, 2024).

Gamification: This denotes the integration of game-design elements into the shopping process to enhance user engagement, enjoyment, and psychological attachment, thereby transforming transactional activities into immersive experiences (Feng & Wei, 2023).

Social Commerce Features: This captures the functionalities that enable and encourage social interactions, such as sharing, community reviews, and visibility of peer purchases, which foster a sense of community and generate social proof (Chen et al., 2024b; Liu & Hamid, 2024).

Live-streamer Authenticity: This reflects the perceived genuineness, credibility, and sincerity of the live-stream host, which serves as a critical relational cue that facilitates trust transfer and reduces perceived risk (Wu et al., 2024; Zheng et al., 2023).

Perceived Supply Chain Transparency: This represents the extent to which consumers believe they have access to credible information regarding a product's origin, journey, and production methods, directly addressing information asymmetry and building confidence in product quality (Dong et al., 2022).

Product Origin Storytelling: This involves the use of narrative content to communicate the geographical, cultural, and human context behind a product, thereby enriching its symbolic meaning and fostering an emotional connection with consumers (Zhu & Su, 2024; Yang et al., 2022).

Based on these dimensions, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Platform Characteristics have a significant positive effect on Consumer Trust, Perceived Value, and Purchase Intention

H2: Consumer Trust has a significant positive effect on Purchase Intention

H3: Perceived Value has a significant positive effect on Purchase Intention

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Method and Instrument: A quantitative research approach was employed, utilizing a structured questionnaire for data collection. The instrument was developed based on established scales from prior literature. It comprised sections measuring the six platform characteristics, three dimensions of consumer trust, three dimensions of perceived value, and purchase intention, all using a five-point Likert scale. Content validity was confirmed by three domain experts via an Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) Index, with all items scoring above 0.7.

Population and Sample: The target population was consumers in Guangzhou, China, aged 18-65, who had purchased agricultural products on Pinduoduo within the past six months. The sample size was determined using the standard formula for proportion estimation for unknown populations (Daniel, 1999), yielding a minimum of 385 respondents. In response to invalid questionnaires, over 500 questionnaires were distributed.

Data Collection and Analysis: Data were collected online via the Wenjuanxing platform (www.wjx.cn). A total of 501 valid responses were obtained. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS software. Reliability and validity tests were conducted first, followed by multiple regression analysis to test the proposed hypotheses.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Sample Descriptive Statistics

A total of 501 valid responses were collected from consumers in Guangzhou who had purchased agricultural products on Pinduoduo. The sample profile was balanced, with 58.7% female respondents. The majority of respondents (72.3%) were aged between 26 and 45. A significant proportion (80.8%) held a bachelor's degree or higher, indicating a highly educated sample. Furthermore, the sample consisted of frequent purchasers, with most buying agricultural products on Pinduoduo either monthly (41.1%) or weekly (48.5%). This profile suggests a sample of highly engaged, educated core users, which enhances the data's relevance to the research context.

Reliability and Validity Analysis

The reliability of the measurement scales was rigorously assessed to ensure the internal consistency of the research instrument. This was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, a statistical measure that determines how closely related a set of items are as a group. As detailed in Table 1, the Cronbach's alpha values for all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.85, demonstrating excellent internal consistency and high measurement reliability.

Table 1 Reliability and Validity of Constructs

Dimension	Cronbach's α
Platform Features	0.969
Consumer Trust	0.872
Perceived Value	0.851
Purchase Intention	0.93
Overall	0.923

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the bivariate relationships among the twelve key research variables. The results, as detailed in Table 2, indicate that most of the platform characteristics, trust variables, and value variables demonstrated significant positive

correlations with each other, confirming the fundamental interrelationships between the constructs in the conceptual model.

Table 2 Pearson Correlation Matrix of Key Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1	1***											
2	0.731***	1***										
3	0.743***	0.708***	1***									
4	0.741***	0.713***	0.727***	1***								
5	0.746***	0.787***	0.748***	0.745***	1***							
6	0.768***	0.749***	0.748***	0.726***	0.768***	1***						
7	0.024***	0.016***	0.01***	0.03**	0.015**	0.008**	1***					
8	0.056***	0.053***	0.031***	0.043*	0.025**	0.087***	0.017***	1***				
9	0.005***	0.014***	0.023**	0.032**	0.009*	0.018**	0.039*	0.07**	1***			
10	0.014***	0.036***	0.074***	0.046***	0.043**	0.06***	0.127***	0.171***	0.004**	1***		
11	0.018***	0.015***	0.022**	0.028**	0.42**	0.036**	0.178***	0.176***	0.01**	0.04**	1***	
12	0.050***	0.050***	0.015**	0.06***	0.007***	0.043***	0.057**	0.014**	0.284***	0.023***	0.063**	1***

Note1: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Note2: 1) Perceived Price Discounts 2) Gamification 3) Social Commerce Features 4) Live-streamer Authenticity 5) Perceived Supply Chain Transparency 6) Product Origin Storytelling 7) Trust in Platform 8) Trust in Seller 9) Trust in Community 10) Utilitarian Value 11) Hedonic Value 12) Social Value.

Regression Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

This section presents the results of multiple regression analyses conducted to test the proposed hypotheses. The findings detail the impacts of platform characteristics on consumer trust and perceived value, and subsequently, the effects of all variables on purchase intention.

Platform Characteristics Regression analysis of six variables on consumer trust

A multiple regression was conducted to test hypotheses H1, with the six platform characteristics as independent variables and the composite score of Consumer Trust as the dependent variable. The results, presented in Table 3, show a statistically significant model ($F = 84.9$, $p < 0.001$) that explains 48.7% of the variance in Consumer Trust (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.487$).

Table 3 Platform Characteristics Regression analysis of six variables on consumer trust

Linear regression analysis results n=501						
	Non-standardized coefficient	Standard error	Standardization factor	t	P	VIF
	B		Beta			
constant	1.315	0.135	-	9.765	0.000***	-
Perceived price discount	0.052	0.018	0.093	2.926	0.004***	1.043
Gamification	0.058	0.018	0.101	3.216	0.001***	1.027
Social Commerce Features	0.342	0.018	0.602	18.662	0.000***	1.076
Live-streamer Authenticity	0.064	0.019	0.106	3.39	0.001***	1.006
Perceive supply chain transparency	0.055	0.017	0.1	3.197	0.001***	1.015
Product Origin Storytelling	0.056	0.017	0.104	3.315	0.001***	1.025

Note: $R^2 = 0.493$, adjust $R^2 = 0.487$, $F = 84.9$, $P = 0.000$ ***

All six platform characteristics had a significant positive effect on Consumer Trust ($p < 0.01$ for all), providing full support for hypothesis H1. An examination of the standardized beta coefficients (Beta) reveals their relative importance. Social Commerce Features (Beta = 0.602) was the most potent predictor, substantially outweighing the others. This was followed by Live-streamer Authenticity (Beta = 0.106), Product Origin Storytelling (Beta = 0.104), Gamification (Beta = 0.101), Perceived Supply Chain Transparency (Beta = 0.100), and Perceived Price Discounts (Beta = 0.093). All Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were well below 5, indicating no multicollinearity concerns.

Platform Characteristics Regression analysis of six variables on consumer perceived value

To test hypotheses H2, a multiple regression was performed with the six platform characteristics predicting the composite score of Perceived Value. The model was statistically significant ($F = 22.346$, $p < 0.001$) and accounted for 19.5% of the variance in Perceived Value (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.195$), as shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Platform Characteristics Regression analysis of six variables on consumer perceived value

Linear regression analysis results n=501						
	Non-standardized coefficient		Standardization factor	t	P	VIF
	B	Standard error	Beta			
constant	1.453	0.178	-	8.186	0.000***	-
Perceived price discount	0.129	0.024	0.219	5.489	0.000***	1.043
Gamification	0.069	0.024	0.114	2.893	0.004***	1.027
Social Commerce Features	0.086	0.024	0.143	3.548	0.000***	1.076
Live-streamer Authenticity	0.096	0.025	0.152	3.888	0.000***	1.006
Perceive supply chain transparency	0.085	0.023	0.146	3.721	0.000***	1.015
Product Origin Storytelling	0.104	0.022	0.184	4.658	0.000***	1.025

Note: $R^2 = 0.204$, adjust $R^2 = 0.195$, $F = 22.346$ $P = 0.000$ ***

All six independent variables demonstrated a significant positive effect on Perceived Value ($p < 0.01$), supporting hypotheses H2. In this model, Perceived Price Discounts (Beta = 0.219) was the strongest predictor. It was followed by Product Origin Storytelling (Beta = 0.184), Live-streamer Authenticity (Beta = 0.152), Perceived Supply Chain Transparency (Beta = 0.146), Social Commerce Features (Beta = 0.143), and Gamification (Beta = 0.114). VIF values remained within acceptable limits.

Regression analysis of twelve variables on purchasing intention

A comprehensive multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis 3. All twelve variables—the six platform characteristics, the three trust dimensions, and the three value dimensions—were entered simultaneously as independent variables to predict Purchase Intention. This approach assesses the unique contribution of each predictor while controlling for all others in the model. The full model was statistically significant ($F = 28.764$, $p < 0.001$) and explained 38.6% of the variance in Purchase Intention (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.386$). The detailed results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5 Regression analysis of twelve variables on purchasing intention

Linear regression analysis results n=501						
	Non-standardized coefficient		Standardization factor	t	P	VIF
	B	Standard error	Beta			
constant	-1.327	0.283	-	-4.692	0.000***	-
Perceived price discount	0.151	0.036	0.159	4.178	0.000***	1.257
Gamification	0.092	0.036	0.095	2.551	0.011**	1.198
Social Commerce Features	0.099	0.044	0.103	2.254	0.025**	1.805
Live-streamer Authenticity	0.075	0.037	0.074	1.997	0.046**	1.177
Perceive supply chain transparency	0.093	0.035	0.1	2.654	0.008***	1.238
Product Origin Storytelling	0.107	0.036	0.119	3.003	0.003***	1.347
Trust in the platform	0.134	0.036	0.143	3.678	0.000***	1.302
Trust in the seller	0.193	0.034	0.209	5.655	0.000***	1.180
Trust in the community	0.114	0.035	0.125	3.221	0.001***	1.295

Linear regression analysis results n=501						
	Non-standardized coefficient		Standardization factor	t	P	VIF
	B	Standard error	Beta			
Utilitarian Value	0.145	0.039	0.152	3.748	0.000***	1.411
Hedonic Value	0.114	0.039	0.121	2.902	0.004***	1.500
Social value	0.085	0.041	0.092	2.073	0.039**	1.708

Note: $R^2 = 0.400$, adjust $R^2 = 0.386$, $F = 28.764$ $P = 0.000$ ***

The regression results offer a detailed mapping of the direct determinants shaping purchase intention within the proposed model. The analysis substantiates the significant roles of trust and perceived value, while clarifying the more nuanced direct contributions of platform features.

The findings provide robust evidence for the influence of consumer trust. All three dimensions of trust emerged as significant positive predictors of purchase intention. Notably, trust in the seller ($\beta = 0.209$, $p < 0.001$), trust in the platform ($\beta = 0.143$, $p < 0.001$), and trust in the community ($\beta = 0.125$, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, all dimensions of perceived value demonstrated significant direct effects on purchase intention. Utilitarian value ($\beta = 0.152$, $p < 0.001$), hedonic value exhibiting a significant positive relationship ($\beta = 0.121$, $p < 0.01$), and social value showed a significant though comparatively smaller effect ($\beta = 0.092$, $p < 0.05$).

The analysis of the direct paths from platform characteristics to purchase intention of trust and value perception. The direct effects, in order of magnitude based on standardized coefficients, are as follows: perceived price discounts ($\beta = 0.159$, $p < 0.001$), product origin storytelling ($\beta = 0.119$, $p < 0.01$), social commerce features ($\beta = 0.103$, $p < 0.05$), perceived supply chain transparency ($\beta = 0.100$, $p < 0.01$), gamification ($\beta = 0.095$, $p < 0.05$), and live-streamer authenticity ($\beta = 0.074$, $p < 0.05$).

In conclusion, the regression results solidify the central premise that internal psychological states are paramount in driving consumer behavior on this platform. Trust, particularly in the seller, and perceived value, especially its utilitarian dimension, function as the primary direct antecedents of purchase intention. The platform's design characteristics, while retaining measurable direct effects, appear to exert their primary influence by systematically cultivating this trust and amplifying this perceived value, the findings support hypotheses H3.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

This study provides robust empirical evidence illuminating the factors that drive consumer purchase intention on Pinduoduo's agricultural product platform. The findings strongly affirm the applicability of the S-O-R framework in this context, delineating a clear pathway wherein platform characteristics function as external stimuli that are processed through the critical internal psychological states of trust and perceived value, ultimately triggering the behavioral response of purchase intention.

The results yield several nuanced insights with significant implications. Foremost, the paramount influence of trust in the seller underscores the profoundly interpersonal nature of social commerce. Within an environment where pre-purchase physical inspection is impossible, the live-streamer or farmer emerges as a vital human proxy for credibility, a finding that resonates with trust transfer theory (Chen et al., 2024c). Consumers place their confidence in the individual representing the product, making this relational dimension the most powerful direct predictor of their intention to buy.

Furthermore, the potent effects of utilitarian value and perceived price discounts reaffirm the enduring power of economic rationality. These findings align seamlessly with Pinduoduo's core value proposition of delivering cost-effective deals, demonstrating that functional benefits and

financial savings remain fundamental drivers in the consumer decision calculus, even within a highly social and engaging platform environment.

A particularly insightful finding concerns the role of social commerce features. While these features were identified as the strongest predictor for building consumer trust, their direct effect on purchase intention was comparatively attenuated. This pattern suggests that the primary function of social elements—such as sharing and community interactions—is not to directly provoke a purchase, but rather to cultivate a trustworthy and socially validated environment. This supportive ecosystem, in turn, facilitates and encourages the final purchase decision, highlighting the nuanced, indirect role of social dynamics.

From a theoretical standpoint, this research contributes by moving beyond a fragmented examination of isolated factors. It integrates a comprehensive set of platform stimuli with the multidimensional psychological mechanisms of trust and value perception, thereby offering a more holistic and nuanced understanding of consumer psychology within agricultural social commerce. The demonstrated interplay between external platform design and internal psychological processes enriches the application of the S-O-R paradigm in this evolving context.

Practically, the findings deliver actionable guidance for platform operators and agricultural sellers. The evidence underscores the necessity of prioritizing authentic live-streamers who can genuinely connect with consumers and bolster seller trust. Concurrently, enhancing supply chain visibility and crafting compelling product origin stories are critical strategies to mitigate information asymmetry and build confidence. Finally, continuously refining engaging social and gamified features remains essential for fostering the trustworthy environment and perceived value that collectively stimulate purchases.

This study is limited by its focus on a single platform (Pinduoduo) and city (Guangzhou), which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future research could expand to other platforms and regions for comparative analysis. The cross-sectional design limits causal inference.

We also see a clear path for methodological evolution in future work. Our study employed multiple regression to test direct effects, which was appropriate for our hypotheses. However, this approach doesn't simultaneously test the entire network of relationships implied by the S-O-R framework. A natural next step would be for future research to employ Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to validate the entire framework and investigate the full mediating pathways between platform stimuli, psychological states, and behavioral responses.

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Data Availability Statement: The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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