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CONSCIOUS CONSUMERISM, DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION, AND SOCIO-CULTURAL INFLUENCE: TOWARD AN INTEGRATED, TRUST-MEDIATED MODEL OF CONTEMPORARY CONSUMER PURCHASE BEHAVIOR

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Abstract
This study builds and tests a model that demonstrates how conscious consumerism, digital transformation and socio-cultural factors influence consumer purchasing behavior by acting as antecedents to brand trust.A cross-sectional survey was conducted with 385 consumers. The data was analyzed using structural equation modeling. Scales had good psychometric properties. All three exogenous variables had a significant positive effect on consumer purchasing behavior. Brand trust was a strong mediator and had a strong positive effect on consumer purchasing behavior. Digital transformation had a significantly greater effect on consumer purchasing behavior for digital natives than digital immigrants. This study adds to consumer behaviour theory by showing that trust can act as a key mechanism by which ethical inclinations and technology can be turned into action. It also shows the boundary conditions of consumer behaviour by generation. Digital transformation has a greater effect on consumer behaviour for those who have been socialized in a digital environment.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Research Context

With the modern consumer market, there has been an increased need to understand the different factors that affect the way people choose what to buy. Ethical consumption, digitalisation and social influences have all increased in popularity and are all having an effect on the way people shop. Consumers now have to be aware of how their choices will impact them, how technology can effect them and social influences. Ethical consumption has become a core part of modern consumerism. Consumers are becoming more aware of what they want to buy based on their values. Many studies have shown that more consumers, especially younger generations, are choosing products that align with their values. Those that are showing real commitment to being

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ethical, social and sustainable will be rewarded, whilst those that are seen to be exploiting will be punished (Tewari et al., 2025).

Digitalisation has increased rapidly in last few years. With the rise of Artificial Intelligence, online shopping, data and omni-channel shopping. Consumers are using digital platforms to gain information and purchase products from brands. This has become a large part of the consumer-brand relationship (Wasilah & Hartono, 2026).

Social influences have become more prominent. With peer pressure, family conversations, social media and cultural expectations influencing individuals choices. In a modern world where social media is everywhere, the line between individual choices and social pressures have blurred (Gaur et al., 2025).

Whilst there has been much research into each of these factors, there is no specific framework explaining how much each factor contributes. There is no understanding of how they work together. This can cause issues for understanding and applying the research. Marketers, policy makers and designers all need to know what factors are affecting consumers and how they are working together.

1.2 The Centrality of Brand Trust

This research fills this gap by providing and evaluating a model which includes the mediating role of brand trust. The model provides a holistic view of the relationship between CC, DT and SCI on PB. Brand trust is the key psychological construct which mediates these relationships.

Brand trust is theorised to be a key consideration when making decisions as it is a key decision making factor when there is uncertainty and ambiguity (Wasilah & Hartono, 2026). In order for conscious consumerism to be enacted consumers need to trust that the brand is doing what they claim to do ethically. Due to digital transformation consumers trust in the brand, the platform and the algorithm. Due to socio-cultural influences consumers trust in the source of the endorsement and the brand.

The mediating effect of brand trust can be justified as it helps to connect the motivation constructs with the outcome. Without brand trust, conscious consumerism may not be enacted due to the motivation not being present, digital transformation may not result in purchases due to the ease of use not being present and socio-cultural influences may not result in purchases due to the motivation not being present (Tewari et al., 2025). This gives a deeper perception of consumers behave.

1.3 Research Objectives and Contributions

key research objectives and contributions for this study:

- To evaluate the direct effects of conscious consumerism, digital transformation and socio-cultural influences on purchase behaviour;
- To investigate the mediating effect of brand trust;

This study makes several theoretical contributions by bringing together separate areas of consumer research into one framework, whilst also specifying generational differences. In practice, it provides useful insights to help brands develop authentic ethical positions, platform designers to create trustworthy digital platforms .

2. Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Development

2.1 Theoretical Foundations

Theory of Planned Behavior

Ajzen (1991) developed the Theory of the Planned Behavior (TPB), which suggests attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control will affect behavior intention and predict behavior. This theory has been used broadly within consumer studies, especially in cases involving ethical, sustainable and health related behaviors.

This theory has been used within this study to provide a theoretical framework for understanding how conscious consumerism (attitude), social-cultural influence (subjective norms) and digital transformation (perceived behavioral control – increased ease and convenience) will influence

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purchase behavior. However, the TPB has been criticized for not being very useful at predicting behavior (Pham et al., 2026). This means mediating factors such as brand trust must be considered.

Consumer Socialization Theory

Ward (1974) developed consumer socialization theory to understand how consumers develop skills, knowledge and attitudes around consumerism through interaction with socializing agents. This theory is useful to understand the social-cultural influences on consumer behavior.

In today's digital world consumer socialization has changed by increase in social media, influencer marketing and online communities. Digital natives will have different consumer attitudes than digital immigrants due to being socialized in an environment where there is high amounts of digital media (Agárdi & Alt, 2024). This theory was used to create the hypothesis around the generational cohort impact on the digital transformation and purchase behavior relationship.

Generational Cohort Theory

This theory suggests people who have similar life experiences when growing up will develop similar values, attitudes and behaviors. Generational cohorts are usually grouped by the years they were born in. They will have common experiences such as historical events, technology and cultural changes.

Digital natives and digital immigrants (Prensky, 2001) has become an increasingly important concept to understand within consumer studies. Digital natives (Generation Z and Millennials) will have grown up using digital technology and will be very familiar with using it. Digital immigrants (Generation X and Baby Boomers) will have learnt to use digital technology later in life and therefore may have a more conscious attitude towards using it (Agárdi & Alt, 2024).

Research has shown that digital immigrants are much convinced by user friendliness, subjective norms and risk when deciding to use technology. Whereas digital natives are more influenced by fit with lifestyle and experiences. This has implications for understanding how digital transformation will affect consumer purchase behavior.

2.2 Conscious Consumerism and Purchase Behaviour

Conscious consumerism is a type of consumption where individuals make an effort to study the ethical, social and environmental consequences of their purchases. This goes beyond simply considering environmental impact, it also considers ethical considerations such as labour practices, transparency in the supply chain and social justice (Tewari et al., 2025). Conscious consumers are much more aware of how their consumption impacts society and the environment and will try to purchase to reflect their values.

This can be broken down into three main factors. Environmental consciousness, this considers sustainable products and carbon footprint. Social consciousness considers fair trade and exploitative labour. Ethical consumerism considers boycotting unethical brands and rewarding ethical brands. Overall these factors show that the consumer has a focus on using their purchasing power for positive change in society and the environment.

TPB provides theory for how conscious consumerism can impact purchase behaviour. It suggests that attitudes will impact purchase intentions and therefore behaviour. Conscious consumerism is a psychological trait that means the constructs in TPB have greater explanatory power on sustainable consumption intentions and behaviour.

There is evidence to suggest that conscious consumption traits have a positive impact on purchasing behaviour. Consumers who are more focused on ethical and sustainable factors have higher purchase intentions towards brands that reflect their values. A study into brand activism found that brand activism had a significant

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positive impact on purchase intentions. Brand trust partially mediated this relationship (Wasilah & Hartono, 2026).The literature also proposes that conscious consumers are more likely to boycott brands they see as unethical and reward brands that are genuinely committed to social responsibility (Mingazova et al., 2025).

However, there is evidence of an attitude-behaviour gap. This means that positive ethical attitudes do not always lead to purchases (Pham et al., 2026). This means it is important to look at mediating factors such as trust. Ethical consumption intentions are more probable to lead to acquisitions. if the consumer has maximum trust in the brand. Ethical consumption intentions are more probable to lead acquisition as ethical claims are considered credence attributes that cannot be fully verified. Therefore, the consumer needs to have maximum trust in the brand being genuine and transparent.

From the above arguments we can hypothesise:

H1: Conscious consumerism has a positive direct impact on purchase behaviour.

2.3 Digital Transformation and Purchase Behavior

Digital transformation in retail and consumer markets refers to the integration of digital technologies such as AI recommendation systems, digital transactions, personalization and data into the consumption process. This has led to an increase in availability of product information, making it easier to compare products.

The dimensions of digital transformation are digital engagement (the extent to which consumers use digital tools), digital personalization (the perception that digital tools are personalized), digital convenience (perception of ease of use) and digital trust. All of these contribute to how the consumer interacts with digital transformation in the market.

The theoretical basis of why digital transformation should have a positive effect on purchase behaviour comes from technology acceptance theories and the idea of perceived behavioural control from TPB. With digital tools there is an increase in perceived behavioural control due to the decrease in search costs, removal of access barriers and convenience of digital platforms (Wasilah & Hartono, 2026).

An empirical study presented that digital transformation has a positive role on purchasing decisions. The use of AI on e-commerce platforms has significantly increased consumer trust which has increased purchasing decisions. With AI product recommendations the perception of personalization has significantly increased trust and behaviour intention (Wasilah & Hartono, 2026). Digital marketing has a major positive role on customer trust formation. This increases purchase intention and loyalty.

Digital transformation increases the way consumers evaluate brands. With more detailed information available to them they can review products, compare prices, view products and interact with brands. This increases consumer confidence and reduces perceived risk.

From the theoretical basis and empirical evidence, we can hypothesize:

H2: Digital transformation has a positive direct effect on purchasing behaviour.

2.4 Socio-Cultural Influence

This refers to the amount that consumers feel pressured from their social surroundings (peers, family, reference groups etc.) to behave in certain ways when consuming. This is grounded in TPB's subjective norms and consumer socialization theory. Subjective norms are how much pressure consumers feel from society to do or not do something. They have been proven to consistently effect behaviour intentions (Pham et al., 2026). This can be through direct communication (family discussions about sustainable consumption), observation (observing peers buying habits) and pressure (expectations from society).

Recent research suggests that social pathways can be a powerful driver in collectivist or social consumption. A study was conducted on the sustainable consumption of Vietnamese youth

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and found that consumption behaviour was directly and strongly influenced by the external factors of communication with peers and family. Internal factors relating to attitudes were not a significant driver (Pham et al., 2026).

Studies have shown that descriptive & injunctive norms from peers will increase sustainable purchasing behaviour, especially if the product is public (Ni-Ying et al., 2026). Social media increases cultural norms, pressure from peers and influencer culture. This means that social influences can heavily affect consumer preferences and brand loyalty (Gaur et al., 2025). Overall, this suggests that social influences can be a powerful external factor that can override personal attitudes.

This could be due to consumers using others as an information cue to decide what to consume. This could be due to not having personal experience with the product/brand. Or consumers may feel they should conform to what society expects to receive approval, avoid negative reactions or to fit in. This can help encourage purchase behaviour, especially if the product is social.

From the reasoning above we can hypothesise:

H3: Socio-Cultural Influence has a direct positive effect on Purchase Behaviour.

2.5 Brand Trust

Brand trust is when consumers are confident that a brand will deliver on its promises. This can be broken down into cognitive trust and affective trust. Brand trust has major role in decision making as it helps consumers make decisions when the future is uncertain (D. Y. & Moodbidri, 2026).

Cognitive trust refers to the rational aspect of brand trust. If a brand is seen as competent, reliable and predictable then consumers will have high levels of cognitive trust. Affective trust relates to the emotional connection to the brand. This is based on the consumer's belief that the brand is kind, honest and cares for them.

The theory behind brand trust being a mediator is that it provides a link between the motivation antecedents and the behavioural outcomes. This is key in conscious consumerism as ethical claims are seen as credibility attributes. Therefore, consumers cannot completely validate these claims and must rely on their trust that the brand is genuine.

The literature supports that brand trust has a significant mediating effect on the association between brand activism and purchase intention (0.289 indirect effect of brand trust. In addition, brand trust is the key factor that turns Generation Z's beliefs about sustainability into willingness to pay (D. Y. & Moodbidri, 2026). It has been found that brand trust is the strongest predictor of purchase behaviour ($\beta = 0.377$). (Ong et al., 2025). Brand trust is a key mediator in digital factors. The effect of using AI technology is partially mediated by brand trust (Wasilah & Hartono, 2026). Digital marketing has a major role on customers' trust. This in turn affects purchase intention. (Sari et al., 2026)). Customers are more trusting when they feel they have been personalised.

Brand trust may be a mediator in socio-cultural factors. If consumers trust the source and brand then they are more likely to make the socially accepted choice. Social proof works as it increases trust in the brand. Social influence theory shows that consumers may believe that the brand is trustworthy and reliable when they see others recommend it.

From the theory and evidence we can hypothesise:

H4: Conscious consumerism will have a positive effect on brand trust.

H5: Digital transformation will have a positive effect on brand trust.

H6: Brand trust will have a positive effect on purchase behaviour.

H7: Brand trust will mediate the relationship between conscious consumerism and purchase behaviour.

H8: Brand trust will mediate the relationship between digital transformation and purchase behaviour.

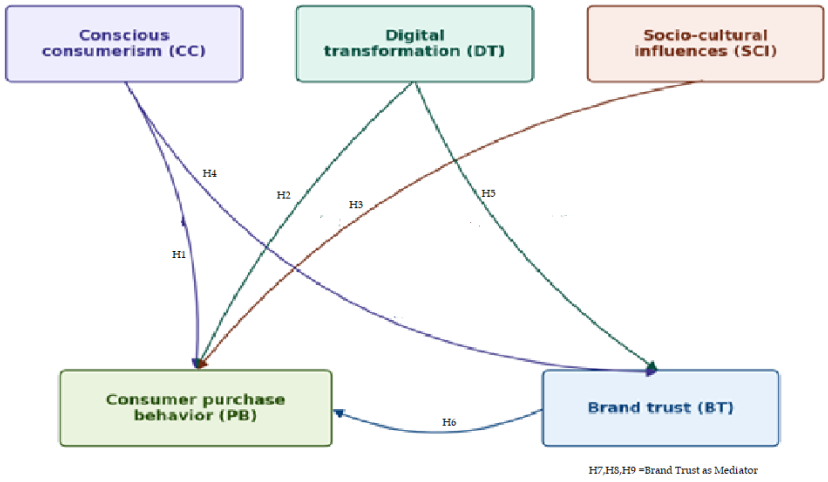
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H9: Brand trust will mediate the relationship between socio-cultural influence and purchase behaviour.

2.6 Research Model

The relationships all come together to create the research model. This shows that conscious consumerism, digital transformation and socio-cultural factors have a direct effect on purchase behaviour. However, conscious consumerism and digital transformation have an indirect effect on purchase behaviour through brand trust.



3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

In this research utilization of cross-sectional survey was done. This type of research design is good for looking at relationships between constructs in one point in time. This is a common type of research design used within consumer behaviour. A cross-sectional survey cannot determine causality but is a good analysis to look at theoretical models.

3.2 Sample, Data Collection and Measures

There was a total of 385 participants. Participants were obtained through online panel providers and social media to ensure a variety of demographics. Participants were told about the purpose of the research and assured that their answers would be kept confidential and anonymous. Informed consent was obtained.

The sample size was well above the minimum required for the PLS-SEM analysis. The minimum sample size can be calculated using the '10 times rule' (Hair et al, 2019). This means that the sample size should be a minimum of ten times the number of arrows going into a construct. The highest number of arrows going into any construct was 3 therefore the minimum sample size should have been 30. However, by increasing the sample size we have increased the statistical power. The sample size was also appropriate for medium effect sizes.

The sample had a good balance of males and females (47.5% males and 52.5% females). It had a good distribution of generations too with 32.2% being Generation Z, 34.5% Millennials, 22.6% Generation X and 10.7% Baby Boomers. Most had a bachelor's degree (54.8%), 33.2% had a masters degree or above and 11.9% had a high school qualification or below. In terms of how often they shopped online 45.7% shopped 3-5

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times per month, 28.8% shopped 6+ times per month and 25.5% shopped 1-2 times per month. The scales were adapted from existing scales to ensure they were valid and reliable. 5-point Likert scale was used for measuring constructs.

4. Data Analysis & Results

Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was used to analyse the data. This was chosen due to being appropriate for exploratory research and theory development. It can be used for complex models and does not require the data to be normally distributed which is often a problem in social science research. It can also be used for a smaller sample size when compared to covariance-based SEM.

The data was analysed in two stages as suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). Firstly the measurement model was analysed to determine reliability and validity. This included looking at the indicator loadings, internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha & composite reliability), convergent validity (average variance extracted) and discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker criterion & Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio). Secondly the structural model was analysed to test the hypotheses. This included looking at the path coefficients, coefficient of determination ,effect sizes and predictive relevance.

4.1 Respondent Profile

It is nearly balanced from a gender perspective and covers all four generational strata specified in the sampling design, with the two digitally native cohorts (Generation Z and Millennials) comprising 66.7 percent of the sample, consistent with their disproportionate representation in online-panel recruitment.

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	183	47.5%
	Female	202	52.5%
Generation	Generation Z (18–27)	124	32.2%
	Millennials (28–43)	133	34.5%
	Generation X (44–59)	87	22.6%
	Baby Boomers (60+)	41	10.7%
Education	High school or below	46	11.9%
	Bachelor's degree	211	54.8%
	Master's degree or above	128	33.2%
Online shopping (monthly)	1–2 times	98	25.5%
	3–5 times	176	45.7%
	6+ times	111	28.8%

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for all constructs are shown. The mean scores ranged from 3.64 (SCI) to 4.02

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(DT) showing generally positive perceptions. The skewness ranged from -0.55 to -0.29 and kurtosis ranged from -0.31 to 0.21. These are all within the acceptable range for normality (±2). This suggests that the data is approximately normally distributed.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of study constructs (5-point Likert scale).

Construct	Items	Mean	SD	Skew.	Kurt.
Conscious consumerism (CC)	5	3.86	0.71	−0.42	−0.18
Digital transformation (DT)	5	4.02	0.68	−0.55	0.21
Socio-cultural influence (SCI)	4	3.64	0.79	−0.29	−0.31
Brand trust (BT)	4	3.79	0.74	−0.38	−0.05
Purchase behavior (PB)	4	3.91	0.70	−0.47	0.12

4.3 Reliability and Convergent Validity

In Reliability and validity analysis all constructs had good internal consistency with Cronbach's α ranging from 0.81 to 0.88. This is above the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978). Composite reliability (CR) also had good results, ranging from 0.87 to 0.91 which is above the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al, 2019). Average Variance Extracted (AVE) ranged from 0.63 to 0.68 which is above the threshold of 0.50 showing sufficient convergent validity.

Table 3. Reliability and convergent validity

Construct	Items	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Conscious consumerism (CC)	5	0.86	0.90	0.64
Digital transformation (DT)	5	0.88	0.91	0.67
Socio-cultural influence (SCI)	4	0.81	0.87	0.63

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Construct	Items	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Brand trust (BT)	4	0.85	0.90	0.68
Purchase behavior (PB)	4	0.83	0.89	0.66

4.4 Discriminant Validity

In the correlation matrix analysis all values on the diagonal are higher than the off-diagonal values meaning discriminant validity has been achieved according to the Fornell-Larcker criterion. This means that each construct is more correlated with their indicators than other constructs.

Table 4. Discriminant validity — Fornell-Larcker criterion). Diagonal values are the square root of AVE.

Construct	BT	CC	DT	PB	SCI
Brand trust (BT)	0.825				
Conscious consumerism (CC)	0.412	0.800			
Digital transformation (DT)	0.451	0.388	0.819		
Purchase behavior (PB)	0.498	0.436	0.467	0.812	
Socio-cultural influence (SCI)	0.329	0.301	0.276	0.354	0.794

4.5 Structural Model & Hypothesis Testing

Table 5. Structural model / hypothesis testing results

H	Path	β	SE	t	p
H1	CC → PB	0.284	0.052	5.46	< .001
H2	DT → PB	0.331	0.049	6.76	< .001
H3	SCI → PB	0.219	0.057	3.84	< .001
H4	CC → BT	0.372	0.051	7.29	< .001
H5	DT → BT	0.298	0.055	5.42	< .001
H6	BT → PB	0.411	0.048	8.56	< .001

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The hypothesis testing results in all six hypotheses were significant ($p < .001$). The path coefficients (β) show the standardised regression coefficients. The standard error (SE), t-value and p-value show if the relationship is statistically significant.

The results show:

H1: Conscious consumerism positively predicted purchase behavior. This indicates that consumers with stronger ethical and sustainability orientations are more likely to engage in purchase behavior consistent with those orientations.

H2: Digital transformation positively predicted purchase behavior. This indicates that greater engagement with and reliance on digital platforms and tools in the purchase process is associated with higher levels of purchase behavior.

H3: Socio-cultural influence positively predicted purchase behavior. This indicates that perceived social pressure and normative expectations from peers, family, and broader cultural contexts are associated with higher levels of purchase behavior.

H4: Conscious consumerism positively predicted brand trust. This indicates that consumers with stronger ethical and sustainability orientations are more likely to trust brands that align with their values.

H5: Digital transformation positively predicted brand trust. This indicates that greater engagement with digital platforms and tools is associated with higher levels of brand trust.

H6: Brand trust positively predicted purchase behavior. This indicates that consumers who trust brands are more likely to engage in purchase behavior. Notably, brand trust was the strongest single predictor of purchase behavior in the model.

4.6 Hypothesis Testing: Mediation Effects

Table 6. Mediation Effects / hypothesis testing results

H	Path	β	CI
H7	CC → BT→ PB	0.153	[0.098, 0.218]
H8	DT → BT→ PB	0.122	[0.076, 0.179]
H9	SCI → BT→ PB	0.081	[0.042, 0.128]

The mediation hypotheses (H7–H9) were tested. Table 6 presents the indirect effects and their confidence intervals.

H7: The indirect effect of conscious consumerism on purchase behavior through brand trust was significant. This indicates that brand trust partially mediates the relationship between conscious consumerism and purchase behavior. Consumers with stronger ethical orientations are more likely to trust brands, and this trust, in turn, facilitates purchase behavior.

H8: The indirect effect of digital transformation on purchase behavior through brand trust was significant. This indicates that brand trust partially mediates the relationship between digital transformation and purchase behavior. Greater engagement with digital platforms enhances trust, which in turn facilitates purchase behavior.

H9: The indirect effect of socio-cultural influence on purchase behavior through brand trust was significant. This indicates that brand trust partially mediates the relationship between socio-cultural influence and purchase behavior. Social endorsement and normative pressure enhance trust, which in turn facilitates purchase behavior.

These results confirm that brand trust partially mediates the relationships between each of the three exogenous constructs and purchase behavior. The direct effects remain significant

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after accounting for the indirect effects, indicating partial rather than full mediation.

5. Discussion

5.1 Interpretation of Key Findings

Overall, the findings have provided strong evidence that the proposed model is appropriate for explaining the relationship between consumer purchases and trust in an integrated model

Firstly, all 3 macro-level variables were found to have a significant effect on purchase behaviour. It shows that ethical tendencies, digitalisation and social culture are all important drivers of consumer behaviour. Digitalisation had the largest effect size on purchase behaviour (β = 0.331), followed by conscious consumerism (β = 0.284), then social culture (β = 0.219). This shows that digitalisation and ethical tendencies have a larger, more direct effect on purchase behaviour in modern times. This is in line with research showing that digital platforms have provided huge transformative power within consumer markets (Tewari et al., 2025), and ethical consumption has become a mainstream value (Wasilah & Hartono, 2026). This is because the digitalisation of retail has provided numerous benefits to consumers, such as recommendations, increased ease of purchase and more information about products, leading to an increase in purchase behaviour. Likewise, the mainstreaming of ethical consumption has caused a large increase in conscious consumerism.

The smaller effect size of social culture shows it is still important however may work via other avenues. This follows theories of social proof which suggest social culture will cause trust in the brand (Gaur et al., 2025).

Secondly, brand trust was found to be an important mediator. Conscious consumerism (β = 0.372), and digitalisation (β = 0.298) had large effects on brand trust. This was then found to be the strongest individual predictor of purchase behaviour (β = 0.411). This supports the idea that trust can convert consumer intentions to action.

With conscious consumerism, trust is very important. Ethical behaviours are a credence attribute meaning they cannot be completely validated by the consumer. Therefore, there needs to be an element of trust that the brand is genuine and being open and honest (D. Y. & Moodbidri, 2026). These results follow previous research that has shown brand trust is an important mediator between brand activism and purchase intention, and that consumer trust is a major driver between sustainable beliefs and willingness to pay (Wasilah & Hartono, 2026). (Mingazova et al., 2025). With digitalisation, trust reduces uncertainty within the customer. They must trust the platform, algorithm and brand to take action (Sari et al., 2026). Social culture also had a significant indirect effect through brand trust, showing social proof works via an increase in brand trust.

Brand trust was found to be the most important predictor of purchase behaviour (β = 0.411). Previous research has shown brand trust to be the strongest predictor of real behaviour in extended TPB models (Ong et al., 2025). This is because trust acts as a key filter that helps reduce uncertainty when purchasing.

5.2 Theoretical Contributions

Firstly, this study brings together three distinct areas of consumer research: conscious consumerism, digital transformation and socio-cultural influence to provide a concise model of purchasing behaviour. Although there is a large body of work in each of these areas, they have not been combined, therefore hindering our understanding of how they interact to influence consumer purchasing behaviour. This study demonstrates that all three constructs have a direct and independent effect on purchasing behaviour. In addition, CC and DT were found to have an indirect effect through brand trust. This provides a more holistic understanding of consumer purchasing behaviour in today's society.

This is key from a theoretical perspective as it highlights that consumer behaviour today is multi-determined. Consumers are influenced by their

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ethical values, use of digital technologies and social environments. Understanding how these factors interact is key to developing comprehensive theories.

Secondly, this study contributes to theory around brand trust. The findings demonstrate that brand trust is a key mediator. This is in line with the idea that brand trust acts as a filter when there is a lack of certainty and information asymmetry (D. Y. & Moodbidri, 2026). This contributes to consumer-brand relationship theory by providing evidence that brand trust is the key factor that transforms a range of motivational factors into consumer behaviour. This could have implications for understanding other consumer behaviours.

5.3 Practical Implications

Implications for Brand Managers and Marketers

Given the importance of brand trust as a mediator, brands must invest in building ethical and digital strategies around verifiable trust signals. As conscious consumerism plays an important role in purchasing behaviour due to brand trust, brands must avoid greenwashing and false ethical claims as this will not only hinder purchasing behaviour but will cause the trust mechanism to be lost.

Brands must focus on being transparent, gaining third party certifications and clearly communicating their ethical values. This means providing concrete evidence of ethical practices throughout the supply chain, giving third party certifications, and engaging with stakeholders. Brands should also take care to address consumer concerns.

Digital strategies, such as using AI technology to personalise, should be focused around increasing brand trust. If consumers feel they are receiving a fair and non-invasive personalisation from brands this will increase trust and behavioural intentions. However, if brands are seen to be using digital strategies which reduce trust then this will reduce the positive effect digital strategies have on purchasing behaviour (Wasilah & Hartono, 2026). Brands should make sure they are transparent with their digital strategies, ensuring they are getting consent and that recommendations are seen as helpful.

Implications for Platform Designers and Technology Firms

The large direct effect of digital transformation shows that investing in improving user experience, personalisation and reliability will have a positive effect on consumer behaviour, especially with digital natives. However, due to the mediating effect of brand trust, this will only be effective if the platform can create a trustworthy environment.

By creating features that increase transparency around data usage, recommendations and seller credibility, the behavioural effect of digital transformation will be increased. Platforms should focus on giving users control over their data, making recommendations clear and verifying seller credibility. Features that increase brand trust, such as reviews, ratings, secure payment systems and quick customer service, will help increase trust.

Implications for Policymakers and Consumer Advocacy Groups

The large direct effect of socio-cultural influence shows that social norms and communication with peers can be used to encourage sustainable purchasing behaviour. Policies and campaigns which use peer networks and communication with family members may be more effective than changing attitudes of individuals (Pham et al., 2026).

As brand trust was found to be a mediating factor, policies that encourage brands to be more credible with their sustainable claims will increase the effectiveness of social norm interventions. Policymakers should consider implementing policies that require brands to be transparent with their ethical claims, gain third party certifications for their sustainability labels and penalising greenwashing. Consumer advocacy groups can educate consumers on how to verify ethical claims.

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Implications for Closing the Attitude-Behaviour Gap

The findings of this research show that there is a practical way to close the attitude-behaviour gap. As conscious consumerism is mediated by brand trust, strategies that increase brand trust will be more effective than simply increasing awareness. This includes being transparent with the supply chain, gaining independent certifications and being genuine with brand activism (Tewari et al., 2025).

Marketers and policymakers should focus on reducing the lack of trust. This can be done by providing credible information, making sure brand claims align with brand actions and creating accountability.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that can be considered for further research.

Firstly, the study uses a cross-sectional design which limits the ability to determine causality. The theoretical framework implies directionality, however, using a longitudinal or experimental design would improve the evidence of causality. Future research can use panel data or field experiments to observe how changes in conscious consumerism, digital engagement and socio-cultural influence affect brand trust and purchase behaviour over time. A longitudinal design can also help determine developmental processes and bidirectional relationships.

Secondly, the study uses self-report measures to measure purchase behaviour. Although this is a common method used in consumer research, a future study can include behavioural data to provide further evidence of the findings. Future research can include actual purchase data, click stream data or scanner data to determine the extent to which people say and do different. Using a mixed methods approach can increase confidence in the findings.

Thirdly, although the sample was diverse in gender, generation, education and online shopping behaviour, it may not be representative of the wider population. The study did not indicate where the data was collected from geographically or culturally. Future research should look to test the model in different cultural settings. In particular, collectivist cultures may differ in how socio-cultural influence affects purchase behaviour. Furthermore, emerging markets may have different levels of digital transformation and conscious consumerism.

Conducting cross-cultural research would be useful to determine whether brand trust acts as a mediator of the relationships in different cultures. In collectivist cultures socio-cultural influence may have a greater impact on purchase behaviour and brand trust. In individualistic cultures conscious consumerism may have a greater impact.

Fourthly, the study assumes brand trust is a single dimension construct. However, previous research indicates that brand trust is multi-dimensional. Future research can break down brand trust into cognitive and affective trust to see if different mechanisms are at play.

Cognitive brand trust may be a more important mediator for digital transformation as consumers will place importance on their rational evaluation of the reliability of the platform and fairness of algorithms. Affective brand trust may be a more important mediator for conscious consumerism as consumers will place importance on their emotional connection with brands that align with their values.

Fifthly, the study did not look at brand type. The effect of conscious consumerism, digital transformation and socio-cultural influence may vary depending on the product category (utilitarian vs hedonistic, search vs experience vs credence goods). Future research can look to include product category as a moderator. For example, conscious consumerism may have a greater impact on products with high ethical relevance (food, clothing, cosmetics) compared to those with low ethical relevance (electronics, household goods). Digital transformation may have a greater impact on products that are easy to evaluate online (standardised goods) compared to

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those that need to be physically assessed (furniture, clothing). Socio-cultural influence may have a greater impact on products with maximum social visibility (luxury goods, fashion) compared to those with low social visibility (household goods).

Lastly, the study looked at brand trust as the only mediator. Whilst the results show that brand trust is an important mediator there may be other factors that play a role. Future research can look to compare other mediators or look at multiple mediation. For example, digital transformation may have an impact on purchase behaviour through perceived convenience and perceived value. Conscious consumerism may have an impact on purchase behaviour through self-identity and moral satisfaction. This will provide a fuller understanding of the psychological processes.

6. Conclusion

An integrated Model of modern consumer purchasing behaviour is developed and tested in this research. It was found that all 3 macro level factors have a major direct role on consumer purchasing behaviour. Brand trust was found to be an important mediator that allowed conscious consumerism, digital transformation and to a lesser extent social-cultural factors to translate into consumer purchasing behaviour.

The results of this research add to consumer behaviour theory by providing an integrated model encompassing different areas of literature. This study shows how trust can act as a mediator between ethical and technology antecedents and consumer purchasing behaviour. Generational factors were also specified. From a practical perspective it highlights the importance of brands creating authentic trust by using ethical practices and trustworthy digital design. Policymakers can use social networks and trust to encourage sustainable consumption.

Overall this study provides an integrated model of consumer purchasing behaviour based on trust. The findings show that trust can act as a functional requirement for brands, rather than just a desired trait. Brands who are able to create and maintain trust in all areas will be more likely to succeed in the modern marketplace.

Future research could further this study by using longitudinal and experimental methods. Including behavioural data would help. The model could also be tested in different cultural settings. Trust can be multi-dimensional so future research should look into this area. Future research could also look into other possible mediators. This will help further understanding of how conscious consumerism, digital transformation and social-cultural factors work together to influence modern consumer behaviour in the 21st century.

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