

## **The Science of Persuasion: Cialdini's Principles in Shaping Purchase Decision on Shopee Indonesia**

Izara Ridwan<sup>a</sup>, Lila Maria Kaban<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Universitas Pelita Harapan, Medan, Indonesia

<sup>b</sup>Universitas Pelita Harapan, Medan, Indonesia

### **ABSTRACT**

This study investigates whether Cialdini's principles of persuasion – Reciprocity, Social Proof, and Liking – affect consumer purchasing decisions on the Shopee application in Indonesia. Amidst the rapid growth of e-commerce and intense competition among online platforms, understanding the psychological and social factors influencing consumer behavior is increasingly vital. While previous studies have explored general online buying behavior, few have focused specifically on Shopee Indonesia using Cialdini's persuasive strategies. This quantitative research used a purposive sampling technique to gather data from 100 Shopee users who had made at least two purchases. Data was collected via an online questionnaire and analyzed using multiple linear regression. The results show that Social Proof and Liking have a significant and positive effect on purchasing decisions, while Reciprocity does not when tested independently. However, when analyzed simultaneously, all three variables significantly affect purchasing decisions, with a combined explanatory power of 73.5%. The findings highlight the importance of emotional and social strategies in enhancing digital marketing effectiveness and recommend Shopee prioritize influencer engagement and consumer review visibility.

**Keywords:** *Consumer Behavior; Digital Marketing; E-Commerce Platform; Persuasive Marketing; Purchase Decision*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The rapid growth of e-commerce in Indonesia has transformed consumer behavior and business models. Online platforms have become integral to daily transactions, offering convenience, variety, and competitive pricing (Kaban & Angelina, 2022). Among the leading e-commerce platforms, Shopee has emerged as the most visited in Indonesia, consistently ranking at the top in both user traffic and customer preference. Its dominance highlights the need for businesses to implement effective marketing strategies that go beyond price and product features to influence purchasing decisions at a psychological level.

As competition intensifies, understanding the underlying psychological triggers that drive consumers to complete a purchase becomes essential (Kaban & Linata, 2024). Traditional marketing strategies that focus solely on product quality or promotions are no longer sufficient. Instead, companies increasingly turn to persuasive marketing approaches that appeal to consumer psychology. One of the most influential frameworks in this area is proposed by Robert B. Cialdini, who identified six universal principles of persuasion. These principles – Reciprocity, Social Proof, Liking, Authority, Commitment and Consistency, and Scarcity – are widely applied in marketing to influence consumer behavior (Vania & Kaban, 2022).

Although numerous studies have applied Cialdini's principles in various contexts, there remains a limited body of research focusing on how these principles function within Indonesia's digital marketplace, particularly in mobile-based platforms like Shopee. Shopee is an e-commerce platform based in Singapore, owned by Sea Limited, which was established in 2009

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by Forrest Li. Shopee operates in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Philippines, and Taiwan. Shopee started operations in Indonesia in 2015 and has increased its presence across Asia, indicating that it functions as a platform for electronic commerce without needing direct interaction between customers and sellers through the program. Business professionals use the Shopee application due to its better ease of product promotion compared to other e-commerce platforms. There are five e-commerce platforms commonly used in Indonesia, one of which is Shoppe which has the most visitors throughout 2023 (Figure 1).

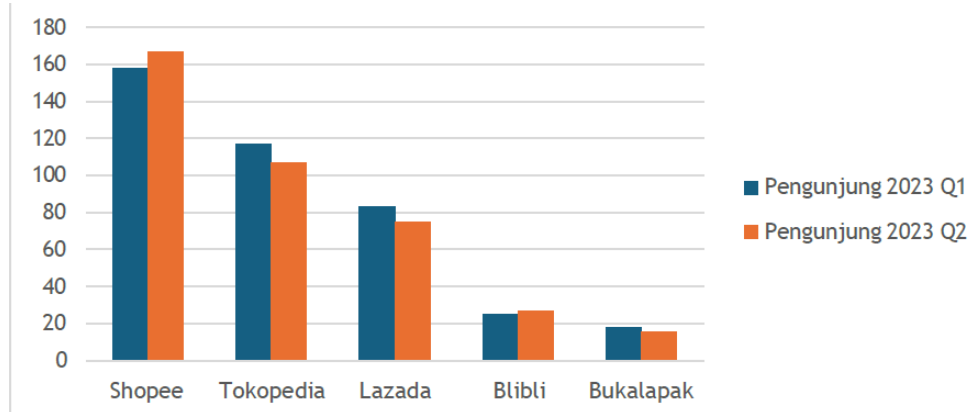


Figure 1. Indonesia's Most Visited E-Commerce in 2023

Source: GoodStats

Furthermore, Shopee is still the most popular e-commerce platforms in Indonesia during 2024 (Figure 2). This can be seen from the percentage of users reaching almost 90%, far surpassing other platforms.

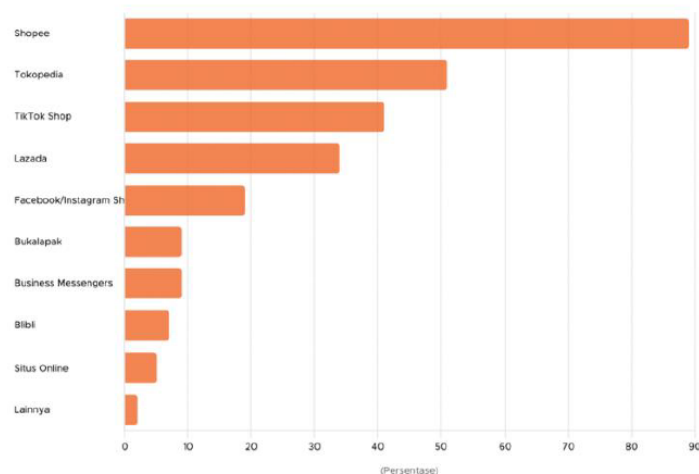


Figure 2. Indonesians' Favorite Online Shopping Channels in 2024

Source: GoodStats

The application of three commonly used principles – Reciprocity, Social Proof, and Liking – within Shopee's persuasive strategies remains underexplored. These principles are frequently reflected in Shopee features such as voucher giveaways, user reviews, product ratings, and influencer promotions.

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Shopee Indonesia has been employing reciprocity strategy for a considerable period of time. The Shopee app frequently offers discount vouchers, including free shipping vouchers, 10% discounts, 3% cashback, and many other interesting deals (Figure 3). In this approach, customers will feel initiated purchasing things as a way of returning their kindness when they receive these vouchers for free.

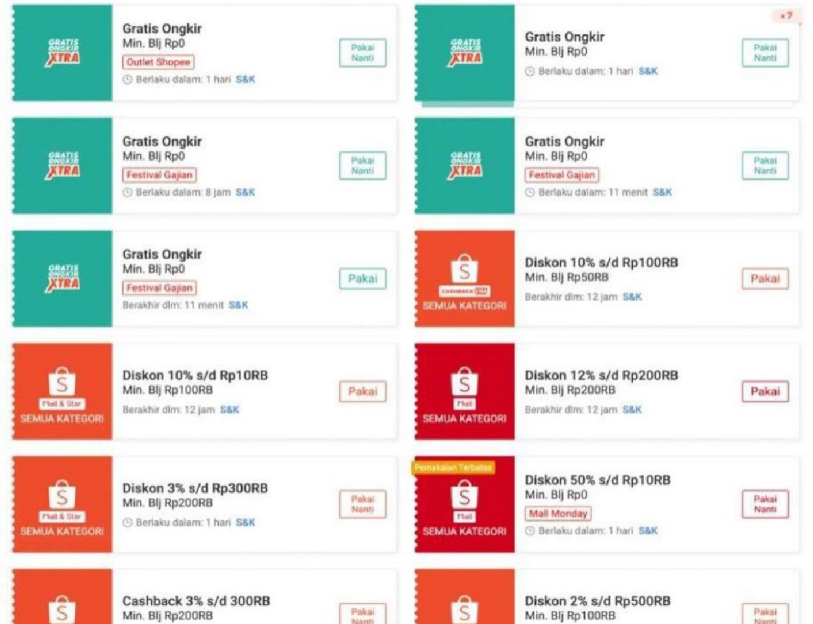


Figure 3. Reciprocity Strategy in Shopee Indonesia

Source: Shopee

Social proof strategy is used to build trust with consumers by demonstrating that a large number of individuals have used or enjoyed a product or service. Customer testimonials, product ratings, positive feedback, and a large number of purchasers can act as social proof that encourages new consumers that the product is worth purchasing (Figure 4). Businesses can increase their credibility and motivate customers to make quicker purchasing decisions by using the strategy of social proof (Shu & Benida, 2023).

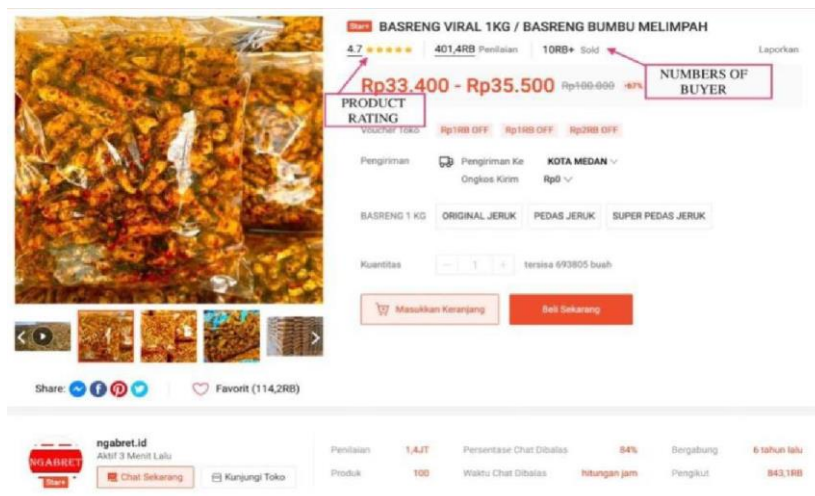


Figure 4. Social Proof Strategy in Shopee Indonesia

Source: Shopee

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The liking strategy is based on the idea that people are more likely to be influenced by those they like or have something in common with. When people have similar backgrounds, interests, or experiences, they may feel a sense of connection that makes them more likely to be influenced by one another. People are more likely to purchase a product or accept an idea from someone they find attractive or familiar than from someone they do not like. Using popular influencers to promote items and developing material that is relevant and appealing to the target audience are examples of how to use this strategy (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Liking Strategy in Shopee Indonesia

Source: Shopee

Based on the phenomena above, therefore, this study aims to examine how these three persuasive strategies affect consumer purchasing decisions in the Shopee Indonesia application. By analyzing the influence of Reciprocity, Social Proof, and Liking, the research seeks to provide empirical insights into the effectiveness of persuasive marketing tactics in the context of mobile e-commerce. The findings are expected to contribute both to academic literature and to practical marketing strategies that enhance customer engagement and conversion rates on digital platforms.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Persuasive Marketing and Consumer Behavior

Persuasive marketing refers to strategic efforts that aim to influence consumer attitudes, emotions, and actions toward a desired outcome (Singh & Pathak, 2023). Unlike informational marketing, which focuses on product features and rational arguments, persuasive marketing seeks to connect with consumers on a psychological level. This approach is especially relevant in online marketplaces where consumers cannot physically interact with products and must rely on indirect cues such as reviews, recommendations, and visual design (Kagoya & Mkwizu, 2023). In such contexts, persuasion becomes a crucial element in converting interest into actual purchasing decisions.

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The principles of persuasion by Cialdini (2007) provide a foundational framework for understanding how consumers can be influenced. These principles are widely applied in marketing, public relations, and behavioral economics. They include Reciprocity, Social Proof, Liking, Authority, Commitment and Consistency, and Scarcity. Each principle addresses a specific psychological trigger that can affect decision-making. This study focuses on three of these principles – Reciprocity, Social Proof, and Liking – which are most commonly implemented in the Shopee application.

### **Reciprocity**

The principle of reciprocity is based on the idea that individuals feel obligated to return favors or kindness. In marketing, this is often operationalized through free trials, discount vouchers, giveaways, or bonus services. Cialdini (2007) argues that when customers receive something valuable at no cost, they are more inclined to respond positively, often by making a purchase. In e-commerce, reciprocity may be reflected in promotions such as cashback offers or free shipping vouchers. Previous study by Song et al. (2021) has shown that reciprocity can strengthen customer loyalty and increase the likelihood of purchase, although the effect may vary depending on perceived value and relevance.

### **Social Proof**

Social proof refers to the tendency of individuals to align their behavior with that of others, especially in uncertain situations. In digital marketing, this principle is frequently applied through user reviews, ratings, and purchase statistics. According to Cialdini (2007), individuals are more likely to adopt a certain behavior if they observe others doing the same, particularly those they perceive as similar. Research by Chen et al. (2022) highlights the role of social proof in building consumer trust and reducing hesitation in online purchases. On platforms like Shopee, the number of reviews, rating levels, and like counts serve as indicators of a product's credibility and popularity.

### **Liking**

Liking is based on the premise that people are more easily influenced by individuals or brands they find attractive, relatable, or trustworthy. Cialdini (2007) notes that liking can stem from factors such as familiarity, physical attractiveness, shared values, or compliments. In e-commerce, this principle is often executed through influencer marketing, user-friendly interfaces, and brand storytelling. A study by Kaban & Augustinus (2025) suggests that consumers who feel a personal connection to influencers or brands are more likely to engage with promotional content and complete a purchase.

### **Purchasing Decisions in E-Commerce**

Purchasing decisions in online marketplaces are influenced by a combination of cognitive, emotional, and social factors. According to Sharma et al. (2022), these decisions involve evaluating product alternatives based on perceived value, convenience, brand image, and trustworthiness. In e-commerce, trust is often built through indirect signals such as reviews, endorsements, and transparent return policies. Forés et al. (2025) emphasize that digital consumers rely more on social cues and recommendations than on traditional advertising. Given the intangible nature of online products, persuasive strategies become essential in shaping consumer intent and driving conversion.

### **Research Gap**

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Although many scholars have examined the impact of persuasive strategies in online marketing, limited research has focused specifically on mobile-based platforms such as Shopee Indonesia. Moreover, existing studies rarely isolate the effects of Cialdini's principles in the e-commerce context of Southeast Asia. This study addresses this gap by analyzing the individual and combined impact of Reciprocity, Social Proof, and Liking on consumer purchasing decisions within the Shopee application.

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Research Design**

This study applies a quantitative descriptive approach to examine the influence of persuasive marketing strategies based on Cialdini's principles – Reciprocity, Social Proof, and Liking – on consumer purchasing decisions in the Shopee Indonesia application. The research aims to test hypotheses through statistical analysis, drawing conclusions based on empirical data obtained from respondents.

#### **Population and Sample**

The population in this study consists of Shopee Indonesia users who have made at least two purchases using the application. A purposive sampling method was employed to select respondents who met these criteria. The total sample comprised 100 active Shopee users. This sampling technique ensures the relevance of respondents to the research objectives.

#### **Data Collection**

Primary data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via digital platforms. The questionnaire was developed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The instrument consisted of items measuring the independent variables (Reciprocity, Social Proof, and Liking) and the dependent variable (Purchasing Decision). Each construct was measured using three validated indicators adapted from previous research.

#### **Operationalization of Variables**

Reciprocity was measured through indicators such as customer appreciation, fulfilling promises, and customer rewards. Social Proof was measured using indicators including number of reviews, rating levels, and like rates. Liking was assessed based on expertise, reputation, and attractiveness. Purchasing Decision was evaluated through indicators related to product choice, brand choice, and distributor choice.

#### **Data Analysis**

The data collected were analyzed using SPSS version 30. The analysis included descriptive statistics, validity and reliability testing, classical assumption tests (normality, multicollinearity, heteroscedasticity, and linearity), and hypothesis testing using multiple linear regression. The significance level was set at 0.05.

The model tested the individual and combined effects of the three independent variables on the purchasing decision of Shopee users. The coefficient of determination (adjusted R square) was used to measure the explanatory power of the model.

### **RESULTS**

The study involved 100 Shopee users who had made at least two purchases. Prior to hypothesis testing, instrument validation was conducted. All indicator items for Reciprocity,

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Social Proof, Liking, and Purchasing Decision were found valid and reliable. Cronbach's Alpha values for all constructs exceeded 0.7, confirming internal consistency.

Descriptive statistics revealed that respondents generally agreed with the presence and influence of persuasive marketing elements in the Shopee platform. The highest mean score was observed in the Social Proof variable, indicating that reviews and ratings are key drivers of consumer trust.

A multiple linear regression analysis was performed to test the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable. The regression model showed an adjusted R square of 0.735, meaning that 73.5 percent of the variation in purchasing decisions could be explained by Reciprocity, Social Proof, and Liking combined (Table 1).

### Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.862 <sup>a</sup>	.743	.735	1.76238

a. Predictors: (Constant), Liking, Reciprocity, Social Proof

Table 1. Coefficient of Determination (Prepared by Authors, 2025)

The t-test results showed that Social Proof and Liking had a positive and significant effect on purchasing decisions, with significant values below 0.05. In contrast, Reciprocity did not have a statistically significant effect when tested individually (Table 2). However, the F-test result indicated that all three variables, when considered together, had a significant joint effect on the dependent variable (Table 3).

### Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.838	1.633		1.126	.263
	Reciprocity	.050	.073	.042	.687	.494
	Social Proof	.241	.066	.266	3.682	<.001
	Liking	.644	.071	.638	9.017	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Purchasing Decision

Table 2. Partial Hypothesis Test (Prepared by Authors, 2025)

### ANOVA<sup>a</sup>

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	860.577	3	286.859	92.357	<.001 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	298.173	96	3.106		
	Total	1158.750	99			

a. Dependent Variable: Purchasing Decision

b. Predictors: (Constant), Liking, Reciprocity, Social Proof

Table 3. Simultaneous Hypothesis Test (Prepared by Authors, 2025)

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study confirm that persuasive marketing strategies rooted in social and psychological cues play a crucial role in shaping consumer behavior in the digital

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marketplace. The significant effect of Social Proof aligns with prior research, highlighting the importance of reviews, ratings, and product popularity in influencing online purchasing decisions. In uncertain purchase environments such as e-commerce, consumers tend to rely on the behavior and experiences of others. Shopee's use of visible buyer feedback, high ratings, and purchase counts serves as a strong validation mechanism that encourages consumers to proceed with purchases.

Liking also demonstrated a significant positive effect. This supports the theory that consumers are more likely to engage with content and make purchasing decisions when they feel a personal connection with endorsers or brands. Shopee's collaborations with social media influencers and content creators effectively tap into this principle, increasing engagement, trust, and loyalty of customers.

Contrary to expectations, Reciprocity did not significantly influence purchasing decisions when tested individually. This may be due to the perception that promotional offers such as vouchers or cashback are standard features in all e-commerce platforms, reducing their psychological impact. Consumers may have become desensitized to these incentives, viewing them as expected rather than exceptional.

The combined influence of the three variables confirms that persuasive strategies do not operate in isolation. Their effectiveness is magnified when strategically integrated. For e-commerce platforms like Shopee, understanding how these elements interact offers valuable insights for designing more impactful marketing campaigns.

These results suggest that Shopee and similar platforms should continue to invest in strategies that promote visibility of user feedback and foster emotional connections through influencer marketing. Meanwhile, reciprocity strategies may require innovation to regain their persuasive appeal.

### CONCLUSION

This study explored the influence of three persuasive marketing strategies – Reciprocity, Social Proof, and Liking – on consumer purchasing decisions in the Shopee Indonesia application, based on Robert Cialdini's theory of persuasion. The results reveal that Social Proof and Liking have a significant and positive impact on purchasing decisions, while Reciprocity does not show a statistically significant effect when tested independently. However, when analyzed together, all three variables significantly influence consumer decision-making, with a strong explanatory power of 73.5 percent.

These findings suggest that Shopee's marketing effectiveness relies heavily on social validation mechanisms and emotional appeal, such as user reviews, product ratings, and influencer endorsements. Reciprocity, while still relevant, may have lost some of its persuasive power due to its routine presence across e-commerce platforms.

Overall, the study emphasizes the importance of integrating psychological principles into digital marketing strategies. Shopee and similar platforms are encouraged to enhance their use of social proof and liking elements while rethinking how reciprocity can be made more personalized and impactful for today's consumers.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on persuasive marketing in digital commerce by applying Cialdini's principles within the context of a leading Southeast Asian platform, Shopee Indonesia. It confirms the relevance of Social Proof and Liking as key psychological drivers of online purchasing behavior. The findings offer empirical support for the theoretical framework proposed by Cialdini and demonstrate its applicability in mobile-based e-commerce settings. Furthermore, the study highlights the need to revisit and contextualize traditional persuasive strategies, such as Reciprocity, especially in digital environments where customer expectations continuously evolve.



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Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be proposed for e-commerce platforms, particularly Shopee Indonesia, to enhance their marketing strategies. First, Shopee should strengthen its use of social proof by prominently displaying best-selling products, verified buyer reviews, and aggregate rating scores. This visibility can reinforce consumer trust and reduce purchase hesitation. Additionally, the platform is encouraged to collaborate with influencers whose personal branding aligns with the target audience. Rather than relying solely on popular figures, Shopee should prioritize influencers who resonate emotionally and culturally with their followers, thereby increasing the persuasive impact through the liking principle.

Furthermore, the strategy of reciprocity can be made more effective by personalizing promotional offers. Instead of generic discounts, Shopee could provide customized vouchers or exclusive deals based on a user's browsing history, purchase frequency, or loyalty level. This approach helps consumers feel uniquely valued and can rekindle the sense of obligation that underlies the principle of reciprocity. Lastly, future research is recommended to expand the scope of persuasive marketing variables by including Scarcity, Authority, or Commitment and Consistency. Researchers may also consider comparative studies across other e-commerce platforms or consumer segments to understand differences in how persuasive strategies influence purchasing behavior (Barus et al., 2025).

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