



# Psychological Mechanisms Underlying Online Purchase Intention: The Role of Trust and Perceived Risk

Dr. Hargun Sahni<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Punit Kumar Kanujiya<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Applied Economics, Faculty of Commerce, Shri Jai Narain Misra P.G. College, Lucknow

<sup>1</sup>Email: [h.sahni1996@gmail.com](mailto:h.sahni1996@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce, National P.G. College, Lucknow

<sup>2</sup>Email: [kanauziyaa@gmail.com](mailto:kanauziyaa@gmail.com)

Received: 11 April 2026 | Accepted: 29 April 2026 | Published: 15 May 2026

## Abstract

*Online purchase decisions in electronic commerce are characterised by heightened uncertainty due to the absence of physical interaction and direct product evaluation. To cope with such uncertainty, consumers rely on internal psychological mechanisms when forming purchase intentions. This conceptual paper examines trust and perceived risk as two central psychological mechanisms through which consumers manage uncertainty in online purchasing contexts. Drawing on existing literature, the paper conceptualises perceived risk as a mechanism that amplifies uncertainty and inhibits online purchase intention, while trust functions as a countervailing mechanism that mitigates uncertainty and enhances consumers' willingness to transact online. By adopting a mechanism-based perspective, this study moves beyond variable-centric explanations and offers a theoretically grounded framework explaining how psychological uncertainty management shapes online purchase intention. The paper contributes to e-commerce literature by clarifying the complementary roles of trust and perceived risk and provides a conceptual foundation for future empirical research.*

**Keywords:** Online purchase intention; Trust; Perceived risk; Psychological mechanisms; Electronic commerce

## Introduction

Online purchase decisions in electronic commerce are inherently characterised by a high degree of uncertainty due to the absence of physical interaction between buyers and sellers. Unlike traditional retail environments, consumers engaging in online transactions are unable to physically inspect, test, or examine products prior to purchase. In addition, online transactions require consumers to share sensitive personal and financial information through digital interfaces, further intensifying feelings of vulnerability and loss of control. This impersonal and technology-mediated nature of online interaction often generates a sense of powerlessness among consumers, thereby increasing uncertainty and apprehension in online purchase decision-making (Monsuwé et al., 2004).

As a result of these conditions, psychological mechanisms play a central role in shaping consumer intention on online platforms. In virtual marketplaces, consumers must rely on internal cognitive evaluations rather than direct sensory cues to assess the credibility of sellers, the reliability of transactions, and the safety of information exchange. Prior research in electronic commerce has therefore emphasised the importance of psychological processes that help consumers cope with uncertainty, particularly trust and perceived risk, in influencing online purchase intention.

Perceived risk has been widely recognised as a significant barrier to online purchasing behaviour. It reflects consumers' beliefs regarding potential negative outcomes that may arise from engaging in online transactions, including financial loss, privacy breaches, and product performance failure. Given that online shopping typically involves the disclosure of personal details, residential information, contact numbers, and payment credentials, consumers often perceive higher levels of risk compared

to offline purchasing environments (Chen et al., 2017). Such perceived risks can discourage consumers from completing online transactions, thereby reducing their willingness to purchase through digital platforms.

Conversely, trust has been identified as a critical psychological mechanism that enables consumers to engage confidently in online transactions under conditions of uncertainty. Trust becomes particularly relevant in environments characterised by limited information, lack of direct control, and potential opportunism. In online contexts, trust facilitates consumers' comfort with electronic payments, information sharing, and reliance on digital systems, thereby increasing their readiness to purchase online (McKnight et al., 2002). Prior studies further suggest that trust not only mitigates uncertainty but also contributes to favourable post-purchase outcomes such as satisfaction and loyalty, reinforcing continued engagement with online platforms.

Taken together, existing literature highlights that online purchase intention cannot be adequately understood without considering the psychological mechanisms through which consumers manage uncertainty in electronic commerce environments. Trust and perceived risk emerge as central cognitive processes that shape consumers' willingness to engage in online transactions. Accordingly, a conceptual examination of these psychological mechanisms provides a necessary foundation for understanding online purchase intention and for developing theoretically grounded propositions in the context of electronic commerce.

### **Perceived Risk as a Psychological Mechanism in Online Purchase Intention**

Perceived risk has consistently been identified as a major psychological barrier influencing consumers' willingness to engage in online purchase transactions. In the context of electronic commerce, perceived risk refers to consumers' beliefs regarding the potential for uncertain and undesirable outcomes that may arise from online transactions. These outcomes may include financial loss, misuse of personal information, non-delivery of products, or dissatisfaction with product performance. As online shopping environments require consumers to rely on digital interfaces rather than direct physical inspection, perceptions of risk tend to be amplified when compared to traditional retail settings (Kim et al., 2008).

The nature of online transactions inherently involves the exchange of sensitive personal and financial information, such as residential addresses, contact details, and payment credentials. This extensive information disclosure contributes significantly to consumers' perception of risk and apprehension while purchasing online. Prior research suggests that concerns related to privacy protection, payment security, and transaction reliability are central components of perceived risk in electronic commerce, often discouraging consumers from completing online purchases (Chen et al., 2017).

Empirical studies further indicate that perceived risk exerts a negative influence on online purchase intention by increasing consumers' hesitation and reducing their confidence in digital platforms. For instance, research conducted among university students in Ghana revealed that financial risk and product risk significantly reduced consumers' willingness to engage in mobile shopping, highlighting the inhibiting role of perceived risk in online purchasing behaviour (Dogbe, 2019).

Similarly, security risk particularly concerns regarding payment safety and data protection has been identified as one of the most influential dimensions of perceived risk negatively affecting online purchase intention (Ariffin, 2018).

In addition to financial and security-related concerns, perceived risk in online shopping extends beyond monetary loss to encompass broader uncertainties related to product expectations and information accuracy. Prior studies argue that consumers may perceive risk not only in terms of the amount paid but also in the possibility that the product received may not meet expectations or that personal information may be exploited without consent (Andrews & Boyle, 2008; Nagar et al., 2000). These multidimensional risk perceptions collectively shape consumers' reluctance to transact online. Existing literature also highlights that perceived risk is not a singular construct but comprises multiple dimensions, including financial risk, product risk, privacy risk, time risk, delivery risk, performance risk, and psychological risk. Studies suggest that these various forms of risk jointly influence online consumers' purchasing behaviour, with website characteristics and transaction safeguards playing a significant role in moderating consumers' risk perceptions (Martin & Camarero, 2009; Tsai & Yeh, 2010; Almousa, 2011; Javadi et al., 2012; Zhang et al., 2012).

Taken together, these findings position perceived risk as a critical psychological mechanism that shapes online purchase intention by intensifying consumers' sense of uncertainty and vulnerability in digital transactions. Understanding perceived

risk as a multidimensional and cognitively driven mechanism provides a strong conceptual basis for its inclusion in models of online consumer behaviour and underscores its relevance in explaining consumers' hesitation toward online purchasing

## **Trust as a Psychological Mechanism in Online Purchase Intention**

Trust assumes a particularly critical role in environments characterised by uncertainty, limited control, and information asymmetry conditions that are inherent in electronic commerce. In situations where consumers lack direct knowledge of sellers and are unable to physically verify products or services, trust functions as a psychological mechanism that enables cooperative behaviour despite potential risks. As argued in early theoretical work on trust, it becomes especially relevant under conditions of ignorance and uncertainty, where individuals must rely on expectations regarding the reliability and integrity of others rather than direct evidence (Gambetta, 1988).

In the context of online shopping, trust reflects consumers' confidence in the ability, integrity, and benevolence of online vendors and platforms. Prior research suggests that trust facilitates consumers' willingness to engage in online transactions by increasing their comfort with electronic payments, reliance on digital interfaces, and disclosure of personal information. When consumers perceive online platforms as trustworthy, they are more likely to overcome apprehension related to security and privacy, thereby strengthening their intention to purchase online (McKnight et al., 2002).

Scholars have further conceptualised trust as a multidimensional construct encompassing factors such as trustworthiness of the service provider, reliability of transactions, integrity of online vendors, and competence in delivering promised services. For instance, studies highlight that attributes such as reliability, competence, and transparency contribute significantly to the formation of consumer trust in online environments, ultimately enhancing purchase intention (Pappas, 2018). Similarly, website-related characteristics including aesthetic appeal, personalisation features, and financial security mechanisms have been found to play a crucial role in fostering consumer trust toward online shopping platforms (Wu et al., 2017).

Beyond platform-level features, trust has also been shown to extend to broader institutional and contextual dimensions. Research indicates that website reputation, perceived relative advantage, and favourable brand or platform image positively influence consumers' trust toward online shopping, reinforcing favourable attitudes and purchase intentions (Akroush & Al-Debei, 2015). Empirical evidence from developing regions further suggests that trust often emerges as a prerequisite for consumers' adoption of electronic services, particularly in contexts where online commerce is still evolving and institutional safeguards are perceived as weak (Chaturvedi et al., 2019).

Additionally, studies examining trust in cross-cultural and international contexts demonstrate that trust in third-party assurances and culturally embedded norms of trust significantly shape consumers' intentions to continue purchasing online. For example, research conducted in the Chilean context highlights that trust-related factors particularly trust in third-party systems and institutional assurances exert a strong influence on online purchasing behaviour, underscoring the broader socio-cultural foundations of trust in electronic commerce (Bianchi, 2012).

Collectively, these studies position trust as a central psychological mechanism that enables consumers to cope with uncertainty in online environments. By fostering confidence in digital platforms, transaction systems, and institutional safeguards, trust reduces perceived vulnerability and facilitates consumers' readiness to engage in online purchasing. As such, trust provides a strong theoretical justification for its inclusion as a core psychological mechanism influencing online purchase intention.

## **Perceived Risk and Trust as Interrelated Psychological Mechanisms**

Although perceived risk and trust have often been examined as distinct constructs in online consumer behaviour research, existing literature suggests that they are closely interrelated psychological mechanisms operating within the same cognitive process of uncertainty management. In electronic commerce environments, consumers simultaneously evaluate potential negative outcomes associated with online transactions and assess the reliability and credibility of online platforms, vendors, and transaction systems. Perceived risk heightens consumers' sense of vulnerability by emphasising uncertainty related to security, privacy, and product performance, whereas trust functions as a counterbalancing mechanism that mitigates such uncertainty by fostering confidence and reassurance in digital transactions.

Rather than operating independently, trust and perceived risk interact dynamically during online purchase decision-making. High levels of perceived risk can weaken consumers' confidence and discourage online transactions, particularly when trust in online platforms or institutional safeguards is insufficient. Conversely, the presence of trust can alleviate consumers' concerns by reducing the salience of perceived risk, thereby facilitating intention formation and transactional readiness. This interdependence suggests that trust does not merely exert a direct influence on online purchase intention but also shapes how consumers cognitively interpret and respond to perceived risks in virtual marketplaces.

Accordingly, understanding online purchase intention requires a conceptual perspective that recognises trust and perceived risk as complementary psychological mechanisms rather than isolated determinants. Viewing these constructs through a mechanism-based lens provides deeper theoretical insight into how consumers manage uncertainty in online environments and highlights the importance of integrating both trust-building and risk-reduction considerations within conceptual models of online consumer behaviour.

### Conceptual Framework and Propositions

Based on the preceding conceptual discussion, this study proposes a psychological framework in which online purchase intention is shaped by consumers' uncertainty management processes. Perceived risk and trust are conceptualised as two opposing psychological mechanisms operating within this process. While perceived risk amplifies consumers' sense of uncertainty and inhibits online purchase intention, trust mitigates uncertainty by fostering confidence in online platforms and transaction systems. Together, these mechanisms determine consumers' readiness to engage in online purchasing under conditions of uncertainty.

### Propositions

- P1: Psychological mechanisms aimed at managing uncertainty play a central role in shaping online purchase intention in electronic commerce environments.
- P2: Perceived risk functions as a psychological mechanism that amplifies consumers' sense of uncertainty, thereby reducing their intention to engage in online purchase transactions.
- P3: Trust operates as a psychological mechanism that mitigates uncertainty in online environments, thereby enhancing consumers' intention to purchase through digital platforms.
- P4: Trust and perceived risk jointly influence online purchase intention by shaping how consumers cognitively interpret and manage uncertainty in electronic commerce contexts.



Figure 1 = Conceptual Framework

### Conclusion

The growing reliance on electronic commerce has intensified the need to understand how consumers form purchase intentions in environments characterised by uncertainty, information asymmetry, and limited control. Unlike traditional retail contexts, online shopping requires consumers to make decisions without direct physical interaction, thereby increasing their dependence on internal cognitive evaluations rather than tangible cues. In this context, psychological mechanisms play a decisive role in shaping online purchase intention.

This conceptual paper has examined perceived risk and trust as two central psychological mechanisms through which consumers manage uncertainty in online purchase decision-making. The review of existing literature highlights that perceived risk amplifies consumers' sense of vulnerability by emphasising potential negative outcomes associated with

online transactions, while trust functions as a countervailing mechanism that fosters confidence in online platforms, vendors, and institutional safeguards. Rather than operating independently, trust and perceived risk are shown to be closely interrelated, jointly influencing consumers' willingness to engage in online purchasing.

By conceptualising trust and perceived risk as complementary mechanisms within a broader uncertainty-management process, this study offers a mechanism-based perspective that moves beyond variable-centric explanations of online purchase intention. Such a perspective provides deeper theoretical insight into why these constructs consistently emerge as influential factors in electronic commerce research and underscores the importance of considering their dynamic interaction in conceptual models of online consumer behaviour.

The conceptual synthesis presented in this paper provides a foundation for the development of theoretically grounded propositions that can guide future empirical research. Researchers may build upon this framework by examining how trust and perceived risk interact with other psychological, situational, and social mechanisms across different consumer segments, product categories, and cultural contexts. From a practical standpoint, the findings suggest that effective online commerce strategies should simultaneously focus on reducing perceived risk and strengthening trust to facilitate consumers' readiness to purchase in digital environments.

## References

- [1]. Akroush, M. N., & Al-Debei, M. M. (2015). An integrated model of factors affecting consumer attitudes towards online shopping. *Business Process Management Journal*, 21(6), 1353–1376. <https://doi.org/10.1108/BPMJ-02-2015-0022>
- [2]. Almousa, M. (2011). Perceived risk in apparel online purchase: A multi-dimensional perspective. *Canadian Social Science*, 7(2), 23–31.
- [3]. Andrews, L., & Boyle, M. V. (2008). Consumers' accounts of perceived risk online and the influence of communication sources. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 11(1), 59–75. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13522750810845559>
- [4]. Ariffin, S. K. (2018). Influence of consumers' perceived risk on consumers' online purchase intention. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 12(3), 309–327. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JRIM-11-2017-0100>.
- [5]. Bianchi, C. (2012). Risk, trust, and consumer online purchasing behaviour: A Chilean perspective. *International Marketing Review*, 29(3), 253–275. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02651331211229750>
- [6]. Chen, C. F., Xu, X., & Arpan, L. (2017). Between the technology acceptance model and sustainable behaviour: Exploring mobile shopping adoption. *Sustainability*, 9(12), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su9122301>
- [7]. Chaturvedi, S., Gupta, S., & Hada, D. S. (2019). Perceived risk, trust and information seeking behaviour as antecedents of online app buying behaviour: An exploratory study in the context of Rajasthan. *Journal of Internet Commerce*, 18(4), 417–443. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332861.2019.1677491>
- [8]. Dogbe, C. S. K. (2019). Perceived online risk, consumer trust and mobile shopping behaviour. *Journal of African Business*, 20(3), 390–406. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15228916.2019.1584272>
- [9]. Gambetta, D. (1988). Can we trust trust? In D. Gambetta (Ed.), *Trust: Making and breaking cooperative relations* (pp. 213–237). Basil Blackwell.
- [10]. Javadi, M. H. M., Dolatabadi, H. R., Nourbakhsh, M., Poursaeedi, A., & Asadollahi, A. R. (2012). An analysis of factors affecting on online shopping behaviour of consumers. *International Journal of Marketing Studies*, 4(5), 81–98. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijms.v4n5p81>
- [11]. Kim, D. J., Ferrin, D. L., & Rao, H. R. (2008). A trust-based consumer decision-making model in electronic commerce: The role of trust, perceived risk, and their antecedents. *Decision Support Systems*, 44(2), 544–564. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dss.2007.07.001>
- [12]. Martin, S. S., & Camarero, C. (2009). How perceived risk affects online buying. *Online Information Review*, 33(4), 629–654. <https://doi.org/10.1108/14684520910985657>

- [13]. McKnight, D. H., Choudhury, V., & Kacmar, C. (2002). Developing and validating trust measures for e-commerce: An integrative typology. *Information Systems Research*, 13(3), 334–359. <https://doi.org/10.1287/isre.13.3.334.81>
- [14]. Monsuwé, T. P. Y., Dellaert, B. G. C., & de Ruyter, K. (2004). What drives consumers to shop online? A literature review. *International Journal of Service Industry Management*, 15(1), 102–121. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09564230410523358>
- [15]. Nagar, K., Gandotra, P., & Sharma, V. (2000). Perceived risk and information search in consumer decision-making. *Journal of Consumer Studies*, 24(3), 210–225.
- [16]. Pappas, N. (2018). User experience and personalised online shopping: A fuzzy-set analysis.
- [17]. *European Journal of Marketing*, 52(7–8), 1679–1703. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-10-2016-0599>
- [18]. Tsai, M. T., & Yeh, Y. L. (2010). Factors affecting consumer purchase intention in online shopping. *Journal of Business Research*, 63(9–10), 1027–1036. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2009.01.007>
- [19]. Wu, W. Y., Quyen, P. T. P., & Rivas, A. A. A. (2017). How e-servicescapes affect customer online shopping intention: The moderating effects of gender and online purchasing experience. *Information Systems and e-Business Management*, 15(3), 689–715. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10257-016-0323-x>
- [20]. Zhang, L., Tan, W., Xu, Y., & Tan, G. (2012). Dimensions of perceived risk and their influence on online consumers' purchasing behaviour. *Communications in Information Science and Management Engineering*, 2(7), 8–14.

**Cite this Article:**

Sabni, H. & Kanujiya, P.K. (2026). Psychological Mechanisms Underlying Online Purchase Intention: The Role of Trust and Perceived Risk. *International Journal of Humanities, Commerce and Education*, 2(5), 295–300.

**Journal URL:** <https://ijhce.com/>    **DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.59828/ijhce.v2i5.98>