

Exploring the Influencing Factors of Consumers' Willingness to Buy Agricultural Products Based on Social Influence Theory

Yongyu Chen *

School of Management, Zhongshan Institute, University of Electronic Science and Technology of China, Zhongshan City, 5258400, China

* Corresponding author: A02504720@lawsonstate.edu

Abstract. The agricultural economy plays a key role in developing and constructing the world economy. Countries accelerate the agricultural layout, optimize the trade of agricultural products, positively face the globalization economic transformation, and upgrade the consumer market of agricultural products. However, the number of studies exploring the influence of consumers' willingness to buy from an external social perspective is small. This study starts from the micro perspective of spontaneous social influence, invokes the social influence model, and combines the trust process mechanisms to study the level of consumer willingness to buy agricultural products. The findings demonstrate that spontaneous social impact favorably encourages the development of consumer trust and purchase intention; among these, consumer trust mediates the relationship between spontaneous social influence and purchase intention to some extent. Therefore, the government needs to accelerate the policy sinking strength and improve the policy credibility, enterprises need to pay attention to the influence of good product evaluation, and the consumer market needs to create a good marketing atmosphere. For agricultural trade, agricultural economic development to enrich the relevant theoretical research. Further, clarify the status of agricultural trade, accelerate the transformation and upgrading of agricultural trade and economy, and provide help for the reality of the contradiction between consumers and the market.

Keywords: Agricultural Products, Willingness to Buy, Social Influence Theory, Consumer Trust.

1. Introduction

The agricultural economy is an important part of the national economy. The connotation of agricultural products has changed and become a popular track in the consumer market. The global agricultural economy is developing rapidly, and the scale of the agricultural products market is vast. In 2022, China's import and export of agricultural products amounted to 334.32 billion U.S. dollars. United States agricultural and food exports to the global market totaled \$196 billion. At the same time, with the globalization of the agricultural sector and economic structural reform, the consumer market continues to change, and the labor market is the two sides of the pressure, agricultural products in addition to product quality assurance issues, there are other external social impacts also need to pay attention to.

Both domestic and international researchers have previously examined the variables that shape consumers' intentions to buy agricultural products, focusing on the internal customer, geographical locations, types of employment, and education levels, external and sales levels. At the customer level, demographic characteristics such as customer age can influence the formation of consumer behavior [1]. In analyzing different consumer groups, different geographical locations and employment types significantly impact the consumer behavior of green agricultural products [2]. At the product level, the quality and safety of products in the product market directly impact the willingness to buy when analyzed [3]. Farmers and other producers are implementing innovative technology to enhance the quality of agricultural products to satisfy the needs of the consumer segment as consumer demand for agricultural products rises. In addition, the government and related departments have issued policies on the safety and quality of agricultural products in many places. In the sales market, the emergence of life localized network community group purchase, O2O, O2C, P2C, and other business strategies, combined with the front-end sales model to understand the dynamics of each target market and customer needs. In the academic field, the formation of consumer purchase intention under the role

of different kinds of sales market sales models has a significant role [4]. However, as far as external influences are concerned, there is still not much literature on the influence of social policies, others' evaluations, and other social dimensions.

In summary, based on the perspective of social influence theory, this paper analyzes spontaneous social influence, such as policy influence and others' evaluation. By exploring its role in the formation of consumer trust and willingness to buy, it further clarifies the logical relationship between the formation of consumer willingness to buy, provides corresponding suggestions and countermeasures for each subject in the external market, as well as enriches the theoretical research and supplements the research in related fields.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Overview of Agricultural Products

In recent years, the globalized economic field has shown high quality and rapid growth, and the international trade and import and export of agricultural products have become increasingly frequent. Agricultural products have different interpretations in different countries, and in the existing academic literature at home and abroad, agricultural products have both broad and narrow interpretations. In the broad sense, agricultural products mainly refer to using plants, animals, and other living organisms to produce food and other material production and means of living for economic activities formed by the product, including primary processing and inedible agricultural products. In the narrower sense, agricultural products refer mainly to the direct output of agricultural production activities.

2.2. Social Influence Theory and Spontaneous Social Influence

Social Influence Theory (SIT) explores the different changes in individual thoughts, feelings, and behaviors under the social influence of others or groups. Kelman has analyzed and summarized the process of social influence through the experimental method many times and believes that the individual's attitudes and behaviors change in different processes when social influences cause subjective norms (conformity, identification, internalization) to be changed. Different processes act on individual attitudes and behavioral changes [5]. Venkatesh and Davis extended the social influence theory by stating that conformity arises from controlling influences and directly affects an individual's willingness to behave. Identification and internalization arise from spontaneous influences that affect behavioral intentions by changing an individual's attitudes [6]. On the other hand, internalized identification reflects an individual's assimilation of others' views into their beliefs and is closely related to trust mechanisms. Voluntary means that the receiver accepts the decision as non-coercive, and spontaneous influence means that the receiver trusts the influencing factor and makes a behavioral decision as non-coercive [7]. Drawing on the definitions of previous scholars, this paper focuses on the deeper role of the spontaneous influence factor. It introduces identity and internalization into the mechanism of consumer trust, defining voluntary social influence as the non-compulsory acceptance of social information by consumers in economic behavior and the internalization of trust in the content of the information,

Through the analysis of past literature, social influence theory has been applied to academic research in many fields, such as knowledge-sharing behavior, consumer purchase behavior, and word-of-mouth management, to analyze the changes in an individual's attitude and decision-making behavior after being influenced by social influence factors, and has achieved good research results. Therefore, this model has a practical application for explaining consumers' purchase intentions. Based on the above analysis, this paper makes the following assumptions:

H1: Spontaneous social influence has a positive effect on purchase intentions

H2: Spontaneous social influence has a positive effect on consumer trust

2.3. Consumer Trust

Consumer trust refers to the consumer as the subject of psychological identity and trusts in an object, which results from internal reinforcement of consumers in economic activities under the effect of external stimuli. Consumer trust is the identification, internalization, and trust of consumers for products or services based on rational analysis [8]. In analyzing the back end of the purchase behavior, consumer trust impacts the consumer's willingness to buy and behavioral decisions [9]. In the analysis of antecedents of purchasing behavior, factors such as reliability, goodwill, competence, and ethical norms at the intrinsic level influence the formation of consumer trust, while at the extrinsic level, policy credibility, legal system, corporate reputation, and interactions with other activists can also influence consumer trust [8, 10-11]. The following hypotheses are made in this paper based on the analysis shown above:

H3: Consumer trust mediates between spontaneous social influence and purchase intention

2.4. Willingness to Buy

Willingness comes under the category of psychology. Fishbein was the first to analyze the mechanism of willingness formation under the consumer market and defined it as the likelihood or subjective probability that a consumer will make a purchase decision [12]. In marketing, willingness to buy results from a kind of consumer psychology, which can be influenced by consumers' personal traits, internal and external product cues, consumption situations, and socio-economics. In the analysis of the purchase behavior of agricultural products, the influence of consumer trust is highlighted due to the product characteristics of agricultural products [13].

3. Research Methodology

The positive research method is a technique for identifying objective phenomena that involves classifying the intrinsic constituent factors of the phenomena, and their universal connections and summarizing the phenomena's fundamental characteristics and operating principles. A questionnaire survey refers to collecting and understanding respondents' attitudes and behaviors, characteristic values, opinions, or beliefs on a particular issue by designing scientific and detailed measurement questions.

This research is conducted by reviewing a large amount of literature and journal articles to explore the relevant issues in a positive research method; in addition, questionnaire surveys are also used to conduct quantitative research, and the required information and data are collected by distributing questionnaires both online and offline. The scope of the research focused on the eastern coastal cities of China, such as Guangdong, Zhejiang, Shanghai, and other cities. Finally, the sample data of this research was analyzed using empirical research methods.

We employed the convenience, judgment, and snowball sampling techniques for our sampling. Multiple methods were used to make the questionnaire sample more socially representative. In theoretical calculations, the effective sample size was 384 with a confidence level of 95%, $z=1.96$, $E=5\%$, and $P=0.5$. In actual practice, this research disseminated 831 questionnaires, of which 305 were invalid samples. Of the remaining 526 valid questionnaires, a valid sampling rate of 63% was obtained.

3.1. Theoretical Models of Research

Social influence theory suggests that individual attitudes and behaviors change from external social inducements, including the influence of others or groups. The trust process building mechanism suggests that trust building originates from information interaction. Based on the social influence theory and the trust process-building mechanism, this study examines the variables affecting consumers' propensity to purchase agricultural items. The independent variable in the research framework is spontaneous social influence; the mediator variable is consumer trust, and the dependent variable is the willingness to buy, as shown in Figure 1.

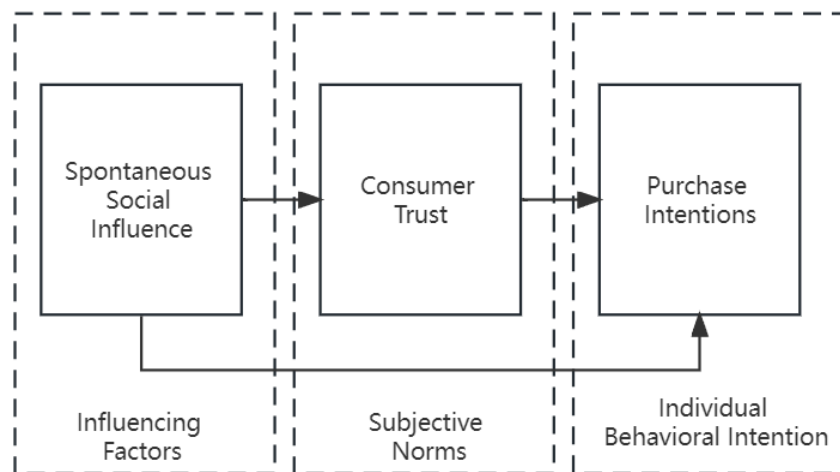


Figure 1. Research Framework (Photo credit: Origin)

3.2. Research Design and Methodology

This study uses online text analysis and empirical analysis to explore the relevant issues; the questionnaire survey method is also used for quantitative research, and the required information and data are collected by distributing questionnaires online and offline. The table shows 4 questions on spontaneous social influence, 3 on consumer trust, and 3 on willingness to buy, all using a Likert 5-point scale.

Before the study was formally distributed, this questionnaire underwent pre-test reliability analysis to guarantee the validity of the results. The variables' pre-test items are displayed in Table 1 below, along with statistical findings from the reliability analysis; the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for all the variables is greater than 0.70, and the CTIC of the corrected items is more than 0.6. Therefore, it is proved that all the variables have good reliability above, and all the items can be retained to continue to be distributed as the official questionnaire.

Table 1. Results of pre-test analysis

Construct and Item		CITC	Deleted alpha coefficients of line	Cronbach's Alpha
Spontaneous Social Impact (SSI)	I think will make me focus on produce:			
	SSI1 Agricultural Policy Extension	0.740	0.804	0.858
	SSI2 Advertising in the mass media	0.740	0.804	
	SSI3 testimonials from others	0.669	0.834	
	SSI4 Consumer Reviews	0.664	0.835	
Consumer Trust (CT)	I believe produce is:			
	CT1 reliable	0.797	0.961	0.932
	CT2 is reassuring	0.943	0.834	
	CT3 is trustworthy	0.887	0.889	
Purchase Intentions (PI)	PI1 I am willing to buy agricultural products	0.697	0.838	0.845
	PI2 I intend to buy produce in	0.829	0.688	
	PI3 I will be buying produce for a long time	0.753	0.827	

4. Analysis of Results

4.1. Reliability Analysis

As can be seen in Table 2, Cronbach's alpha coefficient ranges from 0.832 to 0.941, the Factor loading of all observed variables is greater than 0.70, CR values were all over 0.8, AVE is a factor of more than 0.7, which indicates that this study's scale has a high degree of internal consistency with good convergent validity. Table 3 shows that the AVE open squares are greater than the correlation coefficients between the variables, indicating that there is also good discriminant validity between the variables.

Table 2. Internal reliability analysis table

Construct and Item		Factor loading	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Spontaneous Social Impact (SSI)	SSI1	0.805	0.832	0.8882	0.7655
	SSI2	0.801			
	SSI3	0.761			
	SSI4	0.783			
Consumer Trust (CT)	CT1	0.919	0.941	0.9628	0.8926
	CT2	0.906			
	CT3	0.919			
Purchase Intentions (PI)	PI1	0.777	0.845	0.9108	0.7731
	PI2	0.724			
	PI3	0.865			

Table 3. Distinctive validity

Variant	VSI	TC	PI
SSI	0.816		
TC	0.531**	0.945	
PI	0.506**	0.529**	0.879

Note: Data in the diagonal of the matrix are the arithmetic square root of the AVE value; the symbol ** represents significance at the $p=0.01$ level.

4.2. Regression Analysis

In the regression analysis data processing, the analysis results were obtained: among the paths affecting consumers' willingness to buy agricultural products, spontaneous social influence has a positive impact on customers' propensity to buy agricultural products ($\beta = 0.506$, $t = 13.411$, $p \leq 0.001$) and consumer trust ($\beta = 0.531$, $t = 14.337$, $p \leq 0.001$), as shown in Table 4., with the adjusted regression model explaining strengths of 25.4% and 28.0%, respectively, and the two models $F = 179.864$ and $F = 205.554$ also reached the significant level. Thus, H1 and H2 are supported; when consumer trust is added to the relationship between spontaneous social influence and willingness to buy, the effect of spontaneous social influence on willingness to buy is significant ($\beta = 0.313$, $t = 7.528$, $p = 0.000$). The adjusted level of explanation reaches 34.7%. $f = 140.689$ also reaches a significant level, indicating that consumer trust plays a partially mediating role between spontaneous social influence and the intention to purchase. On the basis of the aforementioned analysis, H3 is confirmed, and it indicates that people's motivation to purchase agricultural products has a somewhat mediating influence.

Table 4. Analysis of pathways

Model	Type of Effect	β	T-value	F-value	Adjust R ²	Reach
SSI→PI	direct impact	0.506***	13.411	179.864	0.254	H1 Support
SSI→TC	direct impact	0.531***	14.337	205.554	0.280	H2 Support
SSI→TC→PI	indirect impact	0.313***	7.528	140.689	0.347	H3 Support

Note: Spontaneous Social Influence VSI, Consumer Trust TC, Purchase Intention PI, *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

5. Conclusions and Implications

5.1. Conclusions

Based on the social influence theory, this paper models the trust process and explores spontaneous social influences such as policy influence and other people's evaluation. The study results show that spontaneous social influence significantly affects purchase intention. When consumers are influenced by others' evaluation, policy guidance, and media publicity and promotion in purchasing behavior, it can promote the formation of consumption intention. Consumers' exposure to spontaneous social influence can foster consumer trust, which furthers the development of consumers' readiness to buy, in the relationship between spontaneous social influence and the propensity of customers to purchase.

5.2. Recommendations and Limitations

With the advent of globalization, technology, and human resources in the agricultural sector are developing rapidly; the laying of infrastructure and the emergence of new forms of Internet+ shopping has together formed the background for the digital transformation of rural industries. With the implementation of the "Digital Commerce for Rural Development" project, the model of e-commerce to help farmers has gradually developed, and the demand for residents to buy agricultural products has become increasingly strong. Based on the survey results, relevant suggestions are drawn to provide countermeasures to increase consumers' willingness to buy agricultural products from the government, enterprises, and consumer markets, actively promote agricultural trade activities, promote the development of agricultural engineering and adapt to the globalization economic trend.

Based on the government level, it should improve the agricultural structure's layout and deepen the agricultural system's construction. The government and related departments actively promote implementing policies and regulations and adopt legal and moral education to awaken consumers' awareness. The role of policies and regulations is to regulate the market of agricultural products, ensure good product quality and improve consumers' willingness to buy agricultural products. Furthermore, the government needs to implement the relevant policies and regulations strictly, standardize the production of agricultural products, and ensure the legitimacy of all steps in the agricultural production chain. And finally, the government should adopt a variety of appropriate publicity measures to enhance the credibility of the policies and regulations and the credibility of the government so as to strengthen the impact of the policies. In this way, it can effectively raise the public's awareness of the need to purchase agricultural products.

Rich publicity and marketing modes create a word-of-mouth consumption matrix based on the enterprise level. Enterprises actively respond to the government's call to comply with relevant laws and regulations and cooperate with the government to improve the policy publicity work. Then, enterprises need to clarify their positioning, according to the core competitiveness of enterprises through the Internet, community group purchasing, blind box economy, and other new consumer model trends, to strengthen the vitality of the enterprise and a clear sales model, which need to pay attention to product quality as well as word-of-mouth publicity, good product quality is the basis for determining a good reputation. However, products with a good reputation also need to be widely publicized. The marketing strategy of good word-of-mouth publicity is also something that companies need to pay attention to. In conclusion, connecting the government requirements and consumer demand, forming the agricultural market production chain with a rich marketing model, realizing the

external market leverage marketing, and reasonably creating a good evaluation of agricultural products.

Based on the consumer market, coupling product market elements to create good market competition. In the consumer market, it is necessary to minimize the problem of information asymmetry, create a good consumer market link, and improve consumer trust. It is followed by improving the acceptance of the consumer market, iterating the marketing strategy of agricultural products, and ensuring a good market operation mechanism, by optimizing the market conditions, consumers to meet the consumer demand in the market environment is full of reliable and detailed information to stimulate the consumption; enterprises to understand the consumer behavior, exploring innovations in the marketing strategy, looking for the potential point of contact, creating advantages of the selling point. There are still some limitations in this study, which will be focused on improvement in the follow-up research process. First, the method of questionnaire survey to collect data, the quality and quantity requirements are in line with the norms, but the data source is relatively single. Secondly, other factors affecting purchase intention need to be considered. This paper only analyzes the external spontaneous social influences; future research can also explore and analyze other influences. Finally, this paper only investigates the role of consumer trust in the mechanism of spontaneous influences on consumer purchase intention, and future research can also consider exploring other theoretical perspectives.

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