

How eWOM Information Characteristics on BookTok Influence Book Purchase Intention in Indonesia

Zhafira Azka Alifa*, Nurdin Sobari

Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Indonesia, Indonesia

**Corresponding author. Email: zhafira.azka@ui.ac.id*

ABSTRACT

BookTok has grown into one of the most influential book discovery communities on TikTok, where short-form video reviews shape what Indonesian readers choose to buy. Yet little is known about the cognitive process that connects BookTok content to actual purchase intention. This study applies the Information Acceptance Model (IACM) within a Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework to examine how four information-related factors, namely information quality, quantity, credibility, and needs of information, influence how useful consumers find BookTok content, and how that information usefulness subsequently drives information adoption and purchase intention. Survey data from 368 Indonesian TikTok users were analysed using PLS-SEM. The results show that information quantity, credibility, and needs of information significantly shape information usefulness, while information quality does not. Information usefulness strongly predicts information adoption, which in turn directly influences purchase intention and fully mediates the IU-PI relationship. These findings confirm that BookTok operates as a structured eWOM channel in which consumers first evaluate, then internalise, and finally act on book recommendations, with implications for publishers and content creators in Indonesia.

Keywords: *BookTok, eWOM, Information Acceptance Model, Purchase Intention*

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of short-form video platforms has reshaped how consumers access and process product information. On TikTok, user-generated content has evolved beyond entertainment into a powerful source of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) that directly influences consumer behaviour (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Erkan & Evans, 2016). Indonesia sits at the centre of this shift as TikTok's largest market globally, with 180.11 million users (DataReportal, 2025), making it a critical context for understanding how TikTok-based eWOM shapes purchase decisions.

One of the most distinctive eWOM communities to emerge on TikTok is BookTok, a subculture in which users create short videos reviewing, recommending, and discussing books. Unlike conventional online reviews, BookTok content combines emotional reactions, personal reading experiences, and community-based validation within a video format governed by TikTok's algorithmic recommendation system (For You Page/FYP). This format has shown measurable commercial effects: several books that gained widespread traction on BookTok experienced significant sales revivals, including titles that had been out of print for years (Balling & Martens, 2024). For Indonesian publishers and content creators, understanding what drives BookTok's persuasive power is therefore both a theoretical and practical priority.

Despite its growing relevance, the cognitive process through which BookTok eWOM shapes purchase intention remains underexplored. Existing IACM-based research has largely focused on text-based platforms or product categories outside the book domain, such as cosmetics on TikTok (Indrawati et al., 2023) and general social networking sites targeting Generation Z (Ngo et al., 2024). Research addressing BookTok specifically has concentrated on creator characteristics or cultural dimensions (da Silva et al., 2025; Jerasa & Boffone, 2021), leaving the informational dimension of BookTok content largely unexamined within a structured information-processing framework. This study addresses that gap by applying SOR-IACM to examine how eWOM information characteristics and consumer-side antecedents drive information usefulness (IU), information adoption (IA), and purchase intention (PI) among Indonesian BookTok users.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

eWOM refers to any positive or negative consumer statement about a product or company made available to the public via the internet (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Cheung and Thadani (2012) conceptualise eWOM as a communication system involving three interrelated components: the source (the sender), the message (the content and its characteristics), and the receiver (the consumer who processes the information). In the BookTok context, creators serve as the source, book-related video content is the message, and TikTok users who consume the content are the receivers. Prior research on BookTok has focused predominantly on the source dimension by examining how creator credibility and popularity shape book consumption intentions (da Silva et al., 2025). The message dimension, that is, the informational characteristics of the content itself, remains underexplored. This study deliberately focuses on message characteristics as the stimulus, as they represent the most actionable lever available to content creators and publishers in designing effective eWOM content.

To explain how these informational characteristics translate into purchase intention, this study integrates the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework (Mehrabian, 1974) with the Information Acceptance Model (IACM) (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Within SOR, BookTok eWOM content constitutes the stimulus; information usefulness and information adoption represent the organism's cognitive processing; and purchase intention is the behavioural response. IACM specifies that information quality, quantity, credibility, and the consumer's need for information collectively shape information usefulness, which drives adoption and ultimately purchase intention (Erkan & Evans, 2016). This integration has been validated in visual eWOM settings (Bui et al., 2025) and on TikTok in Indonesia (Indrawati et al., 2023). Following Ngo et al. (2024), the attitude toward information construct from the original IACM was excluded to avoid conceptual overlap with information usefulness, as both reflect consumers' internal evaluative responses to information.

3. HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Four antecedents are proposed to influence information usefulness: three reflecting the informational characteristics of BookTok content, and one reflecting the consumer's motivational disposition toward information seeking. Information quality (IQL) refers to the accuracy, relevance, and completeness of eWOM content (Filieri, 2015). When BookTok videos provide clear, factual, and genre-relevant details about a book, consumers are better positioned to evaluate its suitability, which is expected to increase information usefulness (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Rahaman et al., 2022). Information quantity (IQN) refers to the volume and frequency of available eWOM about a product. In TikTok's algorithmically curated environment, repeated exposure to BookTok content about the same title from multiple creators across the FYP creates social proof that reinforces the perception that the information is worth using (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Indrawati et al., 2023). Information credibility (IC) captures the extent to which eWOM is perceived as trustworthy and reliable. In BookTok's mixed content environment, where organic user reviews and publisher-sponsored posts often coexist, credibility functions as a heuristic cue (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) that helps consumers identify which information is worth acting on (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Rahaman et al., 2022). Finally, needs of information (NI) represents consumers' intrinsic motivation to actively seek out information before making a purchase decision. Consumers with higher NI are more likely to engage deeply with BookTok content through the central route of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), resulting in stronger information usefulness (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Ngo et al., 2024).

H1: Information quality positively affects information usefulness.

H2: Information quantity positively affects information usefulness.

H3: Information credibility positively affects information usefulness.

H4: Needs of information positively affects information usefulness.

Once eWOM information is perceived as useful, IACM predicts that consumers will proceed to adopt it as a basis for decision-making, a process validated consistently across social media contexts (Indrawati et al., 2023; Ngo et al., 2024; Sussman & Siegal, 2003). Information adoption represents a deeper cognitive commitment than merely perceiving information as useful: it implies that the consumer has internalised the content and accepted it as personally relevant. In the BookTok context, this corresponds to the moment a viewer moves beyond passively watching a book review and begins treating that review as a genuine reference for their own reading or purchasing decision. Once adopted, information becomes integrated into the consumer's decision set, directly increasing the likelihood of purchase (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Rahaman et al., 2022).

H5: Information usefulness positively affects information adoption.

H6: Information adoption positively affects purchase intention.

4. RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopted a quantitative, descriptive, cross-sectional survey design. Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via purposive sampling to Indonesian TikTok users who met the following inclusion criteria: (1) active TikTok user, (2) book reader, (3) had watched BookTok content, and (4) aged at least 18 years. To anchor respondents' evaluations to a concrete stimulus, three representative BookTok videos were embedded directly in the questionnaire. Respondents were asked to select one video that they found most relevant or engaging, and all subsequent items were answered in reference to that chosen video. The study collected 368 valid responses.

The sample was predominantly female (69.4%), which is consistent with the broader BookTok community's demographic profile. In terms of age, 40.0% of respondents were aged 18 to 21 years, followed by 20.5% aged 26 to 30 years and 17.6% aged 22 to 25 years, reflecting a predominantly young adult user base. Educationally, respondents were split between senior high school graduates (50.9%) and bachelor's degree holders (41.5%). The largest occupational groups were students (40.4%) and private sector employees (25.9%). Geographically, the majority were based in Java (77.2%). Regarding platform usage, 65.4% reported using TikTok for more than two hours per day, and 81.4% reported watching BookTok content at least three to five times per month, confirming adequate exposure to the study stimulus.

All constructs were measured using 5-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Scale items were adapted from Erkan and Evans (2016), Indrawati et al. (2023), and Ngo et al. (2024) and contextualised for BookTok. Data were analysed using PLS-SEM in SmartPLS 4 with 10,000 bootstrap subsamples for hypothesis testing, following procedures recommended by Hair et al. (2022).

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The measurement model met all required PLS-SEM criteria. All outer loadings exceeded 0.70 (within range: 0.717 to 0.889), Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.785 to 0.871, and composite reliability values ranged from 0.861 to 0.912, all above the 0.70 threshold. AVE values ranged from 0.566 to 0.722, confirming convergent validity. Discriminant validity was established through HTMT ratios (all below 0.90) and the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The structural model explains 68.3% of variance in IU ($R^2 = 0.683$), 54.7% in IA ($R^2 = 0.547$), and 38.2% in PI ($R^2 = 0.382$), indicating moderate to substantial explanatory power (Hair et al., 2022). Table 1 presents the full hypothesis testing results.

Table 1. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-value	p-value	f ²	Decision
H1	IQL → IU	0.065	1.268	0.102	0.006	Not Supported
H2	IQN → IU	0.257	4.895	< .001	0.115	Supported
H3	IC → IU	0.228	5.041	< .001	0.076	Supported
H4	NI → IU	0.445	10.383	< .001	0.361	Supported
H5	IU → IA	0.739	24.432	< .001	1.207	Supported
H6	IA → PI	0.618	15.429	< .001	0.617	Supported

Note: β = path coefficient; f² = effect size; Cohen (1988) benchmarks: ≥ 0.02 small, ≥ 0.15 medium, ≥ 0.35 large. Bootstrap subsamples = 10,000.

Among the three informational characteristics of BookTok content, information quantity and credibility proved significant while information quality did not. The absence of a meaningful effect from information quality ($\beta = 0.065$, $p = 0.102$, $f^2 = 0.006$) can be understood by considering how short-form video content is actually consumed. On TikTok's fast-scrolling FYP, users rarely pause to systematically assess how thorough or factually complete a review is; instead, they rely on surface-level signals to decide whether a piece of content is worth their attention (Fu et al., 2020; Park & Lee, 2008). Books as experience products add another layer to this: even a detailed, well-structured review cannot tell a reader whether a particular book will match their personal taste, reading mood, or emotional expectations (Liu et al., 2021). The negligible effect size ($f^2 = 0.006$) confirms that within the BookTok ecosystem, informational completeness alone does not drive information usefulness.

Volume and trustworthiness, by contrast, both proved meaningful. The positive effect of information quantity ($\beta = 0.257$, $p < .001$, $f^2 = 0.115$) reflects the social proof dynamic built into TikTok's algorithmic architecture. When the same book continues to appear across a viewer's FYP from different creators with different styles and audiences, that repetition signals that the title deserves serious consideration (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Song et al., 2021). Information credibility shaped information usefulness in a similar way ($\beta = 0.228$, $p < .001$, $f^2 = 0.076$), acting as a trust filter in an environment where authentic reviews and paid promotions are not always easy to distinguish. When a BookTok review is perceived as genuine and impartial, viewers are more willing to treat it as a useful reference for their reading decisions (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Rahaman et al., 2022).

The strongest driver of information usefulness, however, was not any characteristic of the content itself but the consumer's own motivation to seek information. The effect of needs of information on IU ($\beta = 0.445$, $p < .001$, $f^2 = 0.361$) was the largest among all four antecedents, with an effect size classified as large by Cohen (1988). This finding carries a notable practical implication for practitioners: a viewer who accesses the TikTok platform with the explicit intent of seeking guidance on book selection will find almost any BookTok content more useful than a passive viewer who merely encounters the same video. Drawing on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), consumers with high information needs engage more actively with review content, processing it more thoroughly and arriving at richer usefulness assessments. For publishers and creators, this suggests that reaching audiences with an active reading intent through genre-specific hashtags, reading challenges, or community-driven content formats may prove more consequential than optimising the quality of any individual video.

The path from information usefulness to information adoption was the strongest relationship in the entire model ($\beta = 0.739$, $p < .001$, $f^2 = 1.207$). This result is consistent with the BookTok context: users do not adopt every review they encounter. They first form a judgement about whether the information actually helps them evaluate a book, and only when that judgement is positive do they begin to treat the review as a personal reference. The size of this effect confirms that information usefulness functions as the critical checkpoint in the BookTok information-processing chain (Sussman & Siegal, 2003), consistent with prior IACM research across multiple social media contexts (Bui et al., 2025; Indrawati et al., 2023; Ngo et al., 2024; Rahaman et al., 2022).

Once information is adopted, its conversion into purchase intention is both direct and substantial ($\beta = 0.618$, $p < .001$, $f^2 = 0.617$). This result indicates that BookTok functions not merely as an entertainment or information channel, but as a persuasive medium. When a viewer has genuinely accepted a recommendation as personally relevant, the likelihood of them planning to purchase the book increases considerably. This finding is further supported by the full mediation of IA on the IU-PI relationship (indirect $\beta = 0.497$, $p = 0.018$), which shows that information usefulness alone does not generate purchase intention without the consumer first internalising the information as part of their own decision-making. The sequential mechanism of eWOM characteristics shaping usefulness, usefulness driving adoption, and adoption converting into intention validates the core logic of IACM in the short-form video context and extends its empirical grounding to hedonic, community-based product categories such as books.

6. CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the SOR-IACM framework effectively explains how BookTok eWOM shapes purchase intention among Indonesian TikTok users. Among the four antecedents of information usefulness, needs of information emerges as the dominant predictor ($f^2 = 0.361$), followed by information quantity and credibility, while information quality shows no significant effect. This pattern is attributable to heuristic processing in short-form video environments and the experience-product nature of books. The strong IU to IA path ($f^2 = 1.207$) confirms information usefulness as the critical cognitive checkpoint, and IA fully mediates the path to purchase intention, accounting for 38.2% of its variance.

For practitioners, these findings suggest that publishers and BookTok creators should focus on building high-volume, credible content that directly addresses readers' specific pre-purchase questions, such as genre fit, writing style, and reader suitability, rather than optimising informational completeness alone. Reaching audiences who are already actively seeking reading guidance is likely more effective than refining individual content quality. Future research may extend this model by exploring parasocial relationships with BookTokers, cross-platform comparisons, or reader involvement as potential boundary conditions.

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