KMAN PUBLISHING INSTITUTE

Article history:
Received 12 August 2026
Revised 15 September 2026
Accepted 05 November 2026
Initial Publish 24 November 2026
Published online 01 January 2027

Journal of Resource Management and Decision Engineering

Volume 6, Issue 1, pp 1-17



Investigating the Effect of Electronic Product Quality Cues on Purchase Intention: The Mediating Roles of Perceived Product Quality and Product Performance Risk

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A r t i c l e I n f o

Article type:
Original Research

How to cite this article:
ShamBayati, N., Khorramrouz Mehrabani, S., & AlYasin, S. M. N. (2027). Investigating the Effect of Electronic Product Quality Cues on Purchase Intention: The Mediating Roles of Perceived Product Quality and Product Performance Risk. *Journal of Resource Management and Decision Engineering*, *6*(1), 1-17.
https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.jrmde.475

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A B S T R A C T

This study aimed to investigate the effect of electronic product quality cues on purchase intention among Digikala customers, with emphasis on the mediating roles of perceived product quality and product performance risk. This applied study employed a descriptive-survey and cross-sectional design. The statistical population consisted of Digikala customers, and because the population size was considered indeterminate, the required sample size was calculated using Cochran's formula, resulting in a sample of 384 respondents. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire measuring electronic product quality cues, product performance risk, perceived product quality, and purchase intention. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with coefficients ranging from 0.715 to 0.767, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 24 for descriptive analyses and SmartPLS version 3 for partial least squares structural equation modeling. The measurement model was assessed through factor loadings, composite reliability, average variance extracted, and the Fornell–Larcker criterion, while the structural model was evaluated using bootstrapping, R^2, and Q^2 indices. Electronic product quality cues significantly affected purchase intention through perceived product quality ($\beta = 0.121$, $t = 4.455$, $p < .001$) and product performance risk ($\beta = 0.131$, $t = 3.605$, $p < .001$), and also had a significant direct effect on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.345$, $t = 2.558$, $p < .001$). The number of reviews, source credibility, review usefulness, and brand experience each significantly influenced purchase intention through both mediators (all $p < .001$). The model explained 45.2% of the variance in product performance risk, 73.9% in perceived product quality, and 92.4% in purchase intention. Q^2 values also indicated strong predictive relevance. The findings show that electronic product quality cues shape online purchase intention both directly and indirectly by strengthening perceived product quality and influencing consumers' perceptions of performance risk, highlighting the importance of credible, useful, and experience-based digital information in e-commerce environments.

Keywords: *Electronic Product Quality Cues; Purchase Intention; Perceived Product Quality; Product Performance Risk; Online Reviews; Source Credibility; Brand Experience; Digikala*

1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of electronic commerce has fundamentally altered the way consumers search for information, evaluate alternatives, form quality judgments, and make purchase decisions. In physical retail settings, customers can often inspect products directly, compare tangible attributes, interact with sales personnel, and reduce uncertainty through sensory experience. In online environments, however, consumers frequently make decisions without direct physical access to the product and therefore depend heavily on digital information, platform-generated signals, customer reviews, brand-related information, and other electronic cues. These cues are particularly important because online purchase intention is formed under conditions of information asymmetry, limited sensory access, and varying levels of uncertainty about actual product performance. Recent studies increasingly show that online purchase intention is not driven merely by functional product information but by a broader combination of perceived value, engagement, trust, reviews, service quality, source credibility, and digital experience (Bilal et al., 2024; Cao & Liu, 2025; Hanaysha, 2025). Consequently, understanding how electronic product quality cues shape consumer judgments has become an important issue in contemporary electronic marketing research.

Electronic product quality cues may be understood as the informational signals available to consumers in digital environments that help them infer the likely quality, reliability, usefulness, and performance of a product before purchase. Because consumers cannot always directly evaluate intrinsic product characteristics online, they often rely on extrinsic and informational indicators as proxies for product quality. The importance of such cues is consistent with research showing that consumer perceptions of quality can be shaped by symbolic, informational, technological, and contextual signals. For instance, perceptions of production processes can influence judgments of product quality (Wilcox et al., 2024), while metaphorical and symbolic product design can affect purchase intention through consumers' interpretive responses to product meaning (Liu & Zhao, 2024). Similarly, blockchain-based product information has been investigated as a technological signal influencing perceived product quality and purchase intention (Refati & Karami, 2024). These findings indicate that consumers rarely judge online products in an informational vacuum; instead, they integrate various electronic cues to construct an overall impression of quality.

Among the most influential electronic cues are online customer reviews. Reviews provide consumers with indirect product experience by allowing them to access the opinions, evaluations, and experiences of previous buyers. Their importance stems from their potential to reduce uncertainty, supplement formal product information, and provide socially validated assessments of product performance. Research has consistently linked online reviews to purchasing decisions and purchase intentions (Chen & Zhang, 2022; Macheka et al., 2024). Reviews are especially influential when consumers perceive them as credible, informative, and useful. However, not all reviews exert the same influence. The presence of deceptive or unreliable reviews may distort consumer judgment and reduce the diagnostic value of review-based information (Zhong & Li, 2021). Therefore, not only the existence of online reviews but also their quantity, usefulness, and perceived credibility may affect the way consumers interpret product-related information.

The number of reviews represents one important cue in this process. A greater number of reviews may be interpreted as evidence of product popularity, market acceptance, prior usage, or reduced uncertainty. Consumers may perceive products with many reviews as more widely tested and therefore potentially less risky. At the same time, review volume can interact with the content and credibility of reviews, meaning that numerical abundance alone does not necessarily guarantee confidence. Research on e-commerce behavior suggests that customer reviews are intertwined with perceived product risk, trust, and customer engagement in shaping purchase intention (Suman & Kurniawati, 2024). Likewise, changes in digital shopping behavior demonstrate that consumers increasingly depend on social and platform-based informational mechanisms when evaluating products in e-commerce and social media environments (Nofrizal et al., 2023). Thus, review quantity can function as an electronic heuristic through which consumers quickly infer product legitimacy, quality, and market acceptance.

Source credibility is another central cue in digital purchase decision-making. Consumers typically evaluate not only what information says but also who provides it and whether the source appears knowledgeable, trustworthy, authentic, and unbiased. Source credibility has been shown to play a central role in persuasion and information processing within social media environments (Li & See-To, 2024). It can also strengthen or weaken the influence of perceived value and consumer engagement on purchase intention (Cao & Liu, 2025). In contexts involving product

recommendations, perceived credibility becomes particularly important because consumers may question whether the source has sufficient expertise or whether the recommendation is commercially motivated. Research concerning influencers and perceived risk confirms that perceptions of the recommending source can affect purchase attitudes and intentions by influencing the degree of uncertainty associated with the recommendation (Cabeza-Ramírez & González-Mohino, 2022). Similarly, source credibility, perceived quality, and brand attitude have been identified as interconnected predictors of purchase intention (Yulianti & Keni, 2022). These findings support the proposition that credible information sources can improve consumers' quality judgments and reduce perceived product-related uncertainty.

The usefulness of online information is closely related to source credibility but represents a distinct evaluative dimension. Useful information is relevant, understandable, diagnostic, timely, and capable of helping consumers make better decisions. When consumers perceive online reviews or electronic word-of-mouth information as useful, they are more likely to incorporate that information into their purchase evaluations. Research has specifically highlighted the importance of information-source usefulness and credibility in shaping consumer purchase intention through electronic word of mouth (Shamsi & Shahvari, 2024). The influence of review usefulness may also be understood through dual-process perspectives of information evaluation, in which consumers combine heuristic cues with more systematic assessments of product information. Research on heuristic-systematic cues in e-commerce has demonstrated that such cues can influence purchase intention through perceived product quality (Rosillo-Díaz & González, 2024). Accordingly, useful electronic information can function not only as a direct persuasive mechanism but also as a basis for evaluating product quality and reducing performance-related uncertainty.

Brand experience constitutes another important informational and psychological cue in digital commerce. Unlike isolated product information, brand experience reflects consumers' broader cognitive, emotional, sensory, and relational encounters with a brand over time. Brand experience can be developed through prior product usage, digital interactions, customer service encounters, website experiences, social media communication, and other brand-related touchpoints. Research shows that brand experience is associated with attachment, feedback, advocacy, satisfaction, authenticity, loyalty, and purchase-related outcomes (Hongsuchon et al., 2023; Tran & Nguyen, 2022). Strong brand experiences may create familiarity and confidence, which can make consumers more willing to rely on brand-related expectations when evaluating products online. Co-creation and customer engagement can further strengthen the intensity of brand experience and brand satisfaction (Oklevik et al., 2024), while evidence from service contexts shows that brand experience can influence satisfaction through affective mechanisms such as brand love (Pabla & Soch, 2023). Similarly, positive brand experience has been linked to emotional attachment and loyalty in retail settings (Shahid et al., 2022), suggesting that brand experience may act as an important antecedent of purchase-related judgments.

In the context of digital platforms, brand experience is especially relevant because consumers often encounter brands through mediated rather than direct interactions. Online marketing activities, platform content, recommendations, visual design, and customer communication can contribute to the formation of brand experience. Studies conducted in contexts relevant to Digikala have reported associations between social media marketing activities, brand experience, brand attitude, and purchase intention (Safari, 2024). Research involving Digikala customers has also connected brand experience and perceived value to purchase intention (Rasouli, 2022). Beyond the e-commerce setting, evidence from branding research suggests that packaging semiotics and other symbolic brand signals can influence brand experience, trust, and purchase intention (Jafari & Khanlari, 2024). Digital content marketing may likewise affect customer experience and loyalty through perceived value mechanisms (Jalalzadeh & Gohari, 2023). These studies collectively suggest that brand experience should be considered a meaningful electronic quality cue because it can shape expectations about product reliability before purchase.

A central mechanism through which electronic quality cues may influence purchase intention is perceived product quality. Perceived quality refers to the consumer's subjective judgment of a product's overall excellence, superiority, or expected performance rather than its objectively measured technical quality. This distinction is important because consumers often act on perceptions rather than objective specifications. Product quality has long been associated with customer satisfaction, loyalty, and favorable market outcomes (Gunawan, 2022; Rahmati et al., 2021). In online environments, perceived product quality becomes even more important because consumers must infer quality from

incomplete information. Studies have shown that perceived quality can mediate the influence of marketing and consumer-related variables on willingness to purchase (Hajikarimi Sari et al., 2023). Perceived product quality has also been identified as a moderating or explanatory factor in the relationship between online branding and purchase intention (Haddadian & Dasht Laali, 2025). Thus, electronic cues may influence purchase intention partly because they help consumers form stronger or weaker judgments regarding the expected quality of the product.

Perceived product quality is particularly relevant to the interpretation of online reviews, source credibility, review usefulness, and brand experience. When reviews are numerous, credible, and useful, consumers may infer that a product is more reliable or more capable of meeting expectations. Similarly, positive prior brand experiences can create favorable quality expectations for products that consumers have not yet purchased. This process is consistent with research suggesting that source credibility and perceived quality jointly contribute to purchase intention (Yulianti & Keni, 2022). It is also consistent with evidence that heuristic and systematic electronic cues affect purchase intention through perceptions of product quality (Rosillo-Díaz & González, 2024). Accordingly, perceived quality can be viewed as an interpretive mechanism through which consumers translate abstract online signals into more concrete judgments about expected product performance.

At the same time, online consumers are concerned not only with potential product benefits but also with potential losses. Product performance risk refers to the perceived possibility that a product may fail to function as expected, may not provide the promised benefits, or may be inferior to the buyer's expectations. Performance risk is especially salient in online commerce because consumers cannot physically test products before purchase. Previous research has shown that perceived risk can significantly influence attitudes and purchase intentions in product recommendation contexts (Cabeza-Ramírez & González-Mohino, 2022). Studies of electronic products likewise indicate that perceived quality, perceived sacrifice, and perceived risk jointly contribute to perceived product value (Said & Mustaking, 2021). In online purchasing environments, perceived risk has also been investigated as a mediating mechanism between marketing strategies and purchase intention (Nasiri & Aghababayi, 2024). Therefore, product performance risk represents a critical explanatory construct for understanding why some electronic quality cues increase consumers' willingness to purchase while others generate hesitation.

The importance of performance risk is also supported by research on product development and market uncertainty. Risk management has been identified as an important consideration in new product performance development, particularly where product outcomes are uncertain and firms must manage consumer expectations (Moghadamnia & Rastegarmoghadam, 2022). From the consumer perspective, online purchase decisions involve a related problem: consumers must assess the probability that the product will perform adequately based on signals rather than direct inspection. Electronic quality cues may therefore reduce or increase perceived performance risk. Strong source credibility, useful reviews, positive brand experience, and extensive review activity may reassure consumers and reduce uncertainty, whereas weak, contradictory, or suspicious cues may intensify perceived risk. The resulting risk perception can then shape purchase intention.

Purchase intention represents the behavioral outcome at the center of this process. It reflects the consumer's conscious willingness, likelihood, or readiness to purchase a product and is frequently used as a proximal predictor of actual consumer behavior. Research across online and digital marketing contexts shows that purchase intention is affected by multiple psychological and informational variables, including customer engagement, affective attachment, trust, perceived value, product quality, perceived risk, and brand-related experiences (Bilal et al., 2024; Hanaysha, 2025). Purchase intention is therefore best understood not as a response to one isolated cue but as the outcome of a broader evaluative process in which consumers integrate information about quality, credibility, utility, experience, and uncertainty.

This integrative perspective is increasingly important because digital consumers face an abundance of information but limited capacity to evaluate every signal systematically. Some consumers may rely on heuristic indicators such as review numbers, while others may scrutinize source credibility, review usefulness, prior brand experience, and quality-related evidence. The resulting perceptions may influence whether consumers view the product as high quality, low risk, or worthy of purchase. Research in service environments further demonstrates that customer interaction and brand experience can shape satisfaction and downstream behavioral evaluations (Njoroge, 2023), while digital service studies show that brand experience can also contribute to loyalty outcomes (Philip & Pradiani, 2024). These findings

reinforce the broader idea that purchase decisions are embedded in cumulative experiences and perceptions rather than isolated transactional judgments.

Despite the growing literature on online reviews, credibility, brand experience, perceived quality, and risk, several conceptual gaps remain. First, many studies examine these constructs separately rather than integrating them into a unified model of electronic product quality cues. Second, much of the existing literature focuses on direct relationships with purchase intention, even though perceived product quality and product performance risk may explain how and why electronic cues influence consumer decisions. Third, studies conducted in specific e-commerce contexts such as Digikala remain relatively limited compared with the rapid expansion of online retail behavior. Although prior Iranian research has examined consumer perceptions, brand experience, digital marketing, perceived quality, and purchase intention (Hajikarimi Sari et al., 2023; Rasouli, 2022; Safari, 2024), greater attention is needed to the simultaneous role of multiple electronic quality cues and the mediating mechanisms through which they operate.

The present study therefore conceptualizes electronic product quality cues as a multidimensional set of signals that includes the number of reviews, source credibility, review usefulness, and brand experience. This approach is consistent with research demonstrating that reviews, information quality, social influence, perceived value, and brand-related experiences jointly shape consumer behavior in electronic markets (Chen & Zhang, 2022; Hongsuchon et al., 2023; Nofrizal et al., 2023). By examining both perceived product quality and product performance risk as mediators, the study also distinguishes between a positive evaluative pathway, through which cues strengthen perceptions of product excellence, and a risk-related pathway, through which cues alter uncertainty regarding product functioning. This dual mechanism provides a more comprehensive explanation of how consumers process quality-related signals in online purchasing contexts.

The importance of such an integrated model is further underscored by the increasing sophistication of contemporary digital environments. Consumers now encounter algorithmic recommendations, artificial intelligence-enabled personalization, review systems, social proof, influencer content, interactive brand communication, and technologically enhanced product information. Artificial intelligence and customer-centric digital systems have been associated with engagement and purchase intention through affective and relational mechanisms (Bilal et al., 2024), while the role of credible sources and consumer engagement continues to receive attention in emerging digital commerce research (Cao & Liu, 2025). These developments increase both the quantity and complexity of available electronic cues, making it essential to identify which cues shape consumer evaluations and through which psychological mechanisms they affect purchase intention.

Accordingly, the aim of this study was to investigate the effect of electronic product quality cues on purchase intention among Digikala customers, with particular emphasis on the mediating roles of perceived product quality and product performance risk.

2. Methods and Materials

The present study employed an applied research design in terms of its purpose, as it aimed to provide empirical evidence regarding the mechanisms through which electronic product quality cues influence consumers' purchase intentions in an online shopping environment. More specifically, the study investigated the effects of electronic product quality cues on purchase intention while examining the mediating roles of perceived product quality and product performance risk among customers of Digikala. In terms of the method of data collection, the study followed a descriptive-survey approach because the research variables were examined as they naturally occurred among consumers without any experimental manipulation or intervention. The study was conducted using a cross-sectional design, meaning that the required information was collected from respondents during a single period rather than through repeated observations over time. This design was considered appropriate for investigating the relationships among electronic product quality cues, perceived product quality, product performance risk, and purchase intention within the context of online consumer behavior.

The statistical population consisted of customers of Digikala, one of the major online retail platforms in Iran. Because the exact size of the population was very large and could not be precisely enumerated, the Cochran formula for an infinite or indeterminate population was used to determine the required sample size. Based on this calculation, a minimum sample size of 384 respondents was established for the study. Accordingly, data were collected from 384 Digikala customers who constituted the final statistical sample. The unit of analysis was the individual customer, since perceptions of electronic quality cues, perceived quality, performance risk, and purchase intention

are consumer-level psychological and behavioral constructs. The use of a relatively large sample also provided an adequate empirical basis for the estimation of the proposed structural relationships and the examination of the mediating mechanisms incorporated into the conceptual model.

Both library-based and field-based methods were employed in the research process. Library research was primarily conducted to develop the theoretical foundations of the study, identify the principal research constructs, clarify the relationships proposed in the conceptual framework, and review previous empirical findings concerning online product quality cues, perceived product quality, perceived performance risk, and purchase intention. Relevant books, domestic and international academic publications, scholarly articles, and electronic databases were examined for this purpose. The field component of the study was used to obtain the primary quantitative data required for empirical hypothesis testing. Questionnaire data collected from Digikala customers constituted the principal source of information for the statistical analyses and evaluation of the proposed research model.

The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire designed to measure the principal constructs included in the conceptual model, namely electronic product quality cues, perceived product quality, product performance risk, and purchase intention. The questionnaire enabled the researchers to obtain standardized responses from the study participants and to quantify consumers' perceptions regarding the information and signals available in the electronic purchasing environment. Electronic product quality cues represented the signals through which customers evaluate product characteristics and quality in the absence of direct physical inspection. Perceived product quality reflected customers' overall judgments regarding the expected quality and superiority of products based on the information available to them. Product performance risk represented consumers' perceptions of the possibility that a purchased product might not perform as expected or might fail to satisfy its intended functional requirements. Purchase intention referred to the consumer's behavioral tendency or willingness to purchase a product through the online platform.

The reliability of the measurement instrument was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Cronbach's alpha is one of the most commonly applied indicators of internal consistency reliability and provides an assessment of the extent to which the items measuring a particular construct are internally correlated and consistently represent the same underlying concept. Values approaching 1 indicate stronger internal consistency among the items. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated using PLS software. The coefficient obtained for electronic product quality cues was 0.734, while the coefficient for product performance risk was 0.721. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for perceived product quality was 0.767, and that for purchase intention was 0.715. All of these coefficients exceeded the commonly accepted minimum level of 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency reliability for all constructs included in the research model. Therefore, the questionnaire was considered sufficiently reliable for subsequent descriptive and inferential statistical analyses.

The field questionnaire constituted the main source of quantitative evidence for hypothesis testing, whereas the information obtained through the literature review was used to support the conceptualization and theoretical interpretation of the research variables. Combining these two sources of information allowed the study to establish a theoretical foundation for the proposed model while simultaneously obtaining empirical data directly from consumers operating within the actual online shopping environment. The questionnaire responses were subsequently prepared, coded, and entered into the statistical software for analysis.

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS version 24 and PLS version 3. The analytical procedure consisted of descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. SPSS version 24 was primarily employed for data preparation and descriptive statistical analysis, through which the general characteristics of the collected data and distributions of the research variables were examined. Descriptive statistics were used to provide an overall representation of the sample and the respondents' evaluations of the principal constructs. This stage provided the preliminary statistical basis required before proceeding to the assessment of the measurement and structural components of the proposed research model.

Partial least squares structural equation modeling was performed using PLS version 3 to evaluate the measurement model and test the hypothesized relationships among electronic product quality cues, perceived product quality, product performance risk, and purchase intention. The PLS-SEM approach was considered suitable because the study sought to examine several simultaneous direct and indirect relationships within a unified conceptual framework and to determine the predictive relationships among latent variables. The measurement model was first assessed to establish the reliability and adequacy of the constructs before

interpretation of the structural relationships. Internal consistency reliability was examined using Cronbach's alpha coefficients, with values greater than 0.70 regarded as indicative of acceptable reliability. Following confirmation of the adequacy of the measurement model, the structural model was evaluated to determine the magnitude, direction, and statistical significance of the hypothesized relationships.

The structural analysis focused particularly on the direct effect of electronic product quality cues on purchase intention as well as the pathways connecting electronic product quality cues with perceived product quality and product performance risk. The relationships between the two mediating variables and purchase intention were subsequently examined to determine whether consumers' assessments of product quality and perceptions of performance-related risk could explain the mechanism through which electronic quality cues influence their purchasing intentions. The indirect effects were also assessed within the PLS structural model in order to evaluate the mediating roles of perceived product quality and product performance risk. Accordingly, the analysis made it possible to distinguish the direct influence of electronic product quality cues on purchase intention from the indirect influences transmitted through perceived product quality and product performance risk. The statistical results obtained from the measurement and structural models were then used to evaluate the research hypotheses and determine whether the proposed conceptual model was empirically supported.

3. Findings and Results

The final sample consisted of 384 customers of Digikala who completed the research questionnaire and whose responses were included in the statistical analyses. The respondents represented actual users of the online retail platform and therefore constituted an appropriate sample for examining the effects of electronic product quality cues on purchase intention. Demographic characteristics of the respondents were analyzed using frequencies and percentages as part of the descriptive analysis. However, because the detailed demographic distributions for variables such as gender, age, education, and other background characteristics were not provided in the available dataset, only the confirmed total sample size of 384 respondents can be reported here without introducing unsupported demographic values.

Table 1

Results of the Kolmogorov–Smirnov Normality Test

Variable	Maximum Deviation	Maximum Positive Deviation	Maximum Negative Deviation	Kolmogorov–Smirnov Z	Sig.	Result
Electronic Product Quality Cues	0.165	0.165	-0.121	0.114	< .001	Normality rejected
Product Performance Risk	0.105	0.098	-0.105	0.163	< .001	Normality rejected
Perceived Product Quality	0.162	0.162	-0.121	0.211	< .001	Normality rejected
Purchase Intention	0.132	0.067	-0.132	0.221	< .001	Normality rejected

The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was applied to determine whether the distributions of the principal study variables followed a normal distribution. As presented in Table 1, the significance level for electronic product quality cues, product performance risk, perceived product quality, and purchase intention was below .05. Therefore, the null hypothesis of normality was rejected for all four variables, indicating that none of the study variables followed a normal distribution. Given this distributional characteristic, the use of partial least squares structural equation modeling was appropriate because PLS-SEM does not impose the strict multivariate normality requirements associated with covariance-based structural equation modeling.

Table 2

Measurement Model Reliability and Convergent Validity Indices

Construct	Item	Outer Loading	Composite Reliability	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha
Electronic Product Quality Cues	Q1	0.790	0.801	0.512	0.734
	Q2	0.651			
	Q3	0.743			
	Q4	0.835			
	Q5	0.654			
	Q6	0.863			
	Q7	0.915			
	Q8	0.863			
	Q9	0.830			
	Q10	0.719			
	Q11	0.793			
	Q12	0.632			
	Q13	0.884			
	Q14	0.876			
Product Performance Risk	Q15	0.814	0.826	0.544	0.721
	Q16	0.844			
	Q17	0.815			
	Q18	0.789			
Perceived Product Quality	Q19	0.620	0.750	0.821	0.767
	Q20	0.698			
	Q21	0.741			
	Q22	0.755			
	Q23	0.896			
Purchase Intention	Q24	0.973	0.850	0.858	0.715
	Q25	0.799			
	Q26	0.753			
	Q27	0.888			
	Q28	0.735			

The measurement model was evaluated before testing the structural relationships among the latent constructs. As shown in Table 2, the outer loadings of all questionnaire items exceeded the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.40, with the reported loadings ranging from 0.620 to 0.973. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.734 for electronic product quality cues, 0.721 for product performance risk, 0.767 for perceived product quality, and 0.715 for purchase intention, indicating satisfactory internal consistency reliability. The reported composite reliability coefficients were also above the generally accepted threshold of 0.70. Overall, the reported measurement indices indicated an acceptable level of reliability and convergent validity and therefore supported continuation to the assessment of discriminant validity and the structural model.

Table 3

Fornell–Larcker Criterion for Discriminant Validity

Construct	Electronic Product Quality Cues	Product Performance Risk	Perceived Product Quality	Purchase Intention
Electronic Product Quality Cues	0.865			
Product Performance Risk	0.801	0.967		
Perceived Product Quality	0.762	0.864	0.989	
Purchase Intention	0.672	0.797	0.762	0.893

The Fornell–Larcker criterion was used to assess discriminant validity among the latent variables. According to the reported results in Table 3, the diagonal values, representing the square roots of the respective average

variance extracted values, were higher than the corresponding inter-construct correlations reported within their respective rows and columns. The diagonal coefficients were 0.865 for electronic product quality cues, 0.967 for product performance risk, 0.989 for perceived product quality, and 0.893 for purchase intention. On the basis of the reported Fornell–Larcker results, the constructs demonstrated adequate empirical distinctiveness, providing support for the discriminant validity of the measurement model. Taken together with the reliability and convergent validity results, these findings suggested that the measurement model was sufficiently adequate for subsequent structural model assessment.

Table 4

Coefficients of Determination for the Endogenous Constructs

Endogenous Construct	R^2	Reported Interpretation
Product Performance Risk	0.452	Strong
Perceived Product Quality	0.739	Strong
Purchase Intention	0.924	Strong

The explanatory power of the structural model was evaluated using the coefficient of determination, R^2. As presented in Table 4, the R^2 value for product performance risk was 0.452, indicating that approximately 45.2% of its variance was explained by the predictor variables included in the model. The R^2 value for perceived product quality was 0.739, indicating that 73.9% of its variance was accounted for by its antecedent variables. The highest explanatory power was observed for purchase intention, with an R^2 of 0.924, meaning that approximately 92.4% of the variance in purchase intention was explained by the predictors and mediating constructs incorporated into the structural model. According to the criteria adopted in the study, these results indicated substantial explanatory capability, particularly for perceived product quality and purchase intention, and supported the adequacy of the structural component of the proposed model.

Table 5

Stone–Geisser Predictive Relevance Results

Endogenous Construct	Q^2	Reported Interpretation
Product Performance Risk	0.391	Strong
Perceived Product Quality	0.360	Strong
Purchase Intention	0.410	Strong

The Stone–Geisser Q^2 criterion was used to examine the predictive relevance of the structural model for the endogenous constructs. As shown in Table 5, the Q^2 values were 0.391 for product performance risk, 0.360 for perceived product quality, and 0.410 for purchase intention. All values were substantially greater than zero and exceeded the benchmark of 0.35 used in the study to indicate strong predictive relevance. These findings demonstrated that the structural model possessed considerable predictive capability for all three endogenous constructs. In particular, the Q^2 value of 0.410 for purchase intention indicated that the combination of electronic product quality cues, perceived product quality, and product performance risk provided substantial predictive relevance for consumers' purchase intentions.

Table 6

Q^2 Model Predictive Relevance Indices

Variable	Q^2
Electronic Product Quality Cues	0.373
Product Performance Risk	0.389
Perceived Product Quality	0.394
Purchase Intention	0.391

The additional Q^2 results reported in Table 6 further supported the predictive adequacy of the model. The reported values ranged from 0.373 to 0.394, with electronic product quality cues showing a value of 0.373, product performance risk 0.389, perceived product quality 0.394, and purchase intention 0.391. All reported values were positive and exceeded the criterion of 0.35 applied for strong predictive relevance. Thus, the supplied predictive-relevance indices consistently indicated that the model possessed satisfactory predictive capacity and that the relationships specified among the constructs provided meaningful predictive information.

Table 7

Results of All Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Structural Path	Path Coefficient	Standard Error	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	Electronic Product Quality Cues → Perceived Product Quality → Purchase Intention	0.121	0.066	4.455	< .001	Supported
H2	Electronic Product Quality Cues → Product Performance Risk → Purchase Intention	0.131	0.078	3.605	< .001	Supported
H3	Electronic Product Quality Cues → Purchase Intention	0.345	0.024	2.558	< .001	Supported
H4	Number of Reviews → Product Performance Risk → Purchase Intention	0.066	0.025	2.829	< .001	Supported
H5	Number of Reviews → Perceived Product Quality → Purchase Intention	0.095	0.085	3.749	< .001	Supported
H6	Source Credibility → Product Performance Risk → Purchase Intention	0.188	0.039	2.636	< .001	Supported
H7	Source Credibility → Perceived Product Quality → Purchase Intention	0.198	0.038	3.574	< .001	Supported
H8	Review Usefulness → Product Performance Risk → Purchase Intention	0.108	0.097	3.298	< .001	Supported
H9	Review Usefulness → Perceived Product Quality → Purchase Intention	0.105	0.083	4.411	< .001	Supported
H10	Brand Experience → Product Performance Risk → Purchase Intention	0.162	0.116	2.813	< .001	Supported
H11	Brand Experience → Perceived Product Quality → Purchase Intention	0.163	0.067	3.253	< .001	Supported

The bootstrapping results presented in Table 7 supported all of the proposed research hypotheses. Electronic product quality cues had a significant indirect effect on purchase intention through perceived product quality ($\beta = 0.121$, $t = 4.455$, $p < .001$) and through product performance risk ($\beta = 0.131$, $t = 3.605$, $p < .001$), supporting the two principal mediation hypotheses. Electronic product quality cues also demonstrated a significant direct association with purchase intention ($\beta = 0.345$, $t = 2.558$, $p < .001$), showing that the effect of electronic product quality cues was not limited to the proposed mediating pathways. Regarding the subsidiary hypotheses, the number of reviews significantly affected purchase intention through product performance risk ($\beta = 0.066$, $t = 2.829$, $p < .001$) and perceived product quality ($\beta = 0.095$, $t = 3.749$, $p < .001$). Source credibility also showed significant indirect effects through product performance risk ($\beta = 0.188$, $t = 2.636$, $p < .001$) and perceived product quality ($\beta = 0.198$, $t = 3.574$, $p < .001$). Similarly, review usefulness significantly influenced purchase intention through product performance risk ($\beta = 0.108$, $t = 3.298$, $p < .001$) and perceived product quality ($\beta = 0.105$, $t = 4.411$, $p < .001$). Finally, brand experience significantly affected purchase intention through product performance risk ($\beta = 0.162$, $t = 2.813$, $p < .001$) and perceived product quality ($\beta = 0.163$, $t = 3.253$, $p < .001$). Overall, these findings indicate that both perceived product quality and product performance risk functioned as significant mediating mechanisms linking electronic product quality cues and their constituent dimensions to consumers' purchase intentions.

Figure 1

Outer Measurement Model of the Research Model with Standardized Coefficients in SmartPLS 3

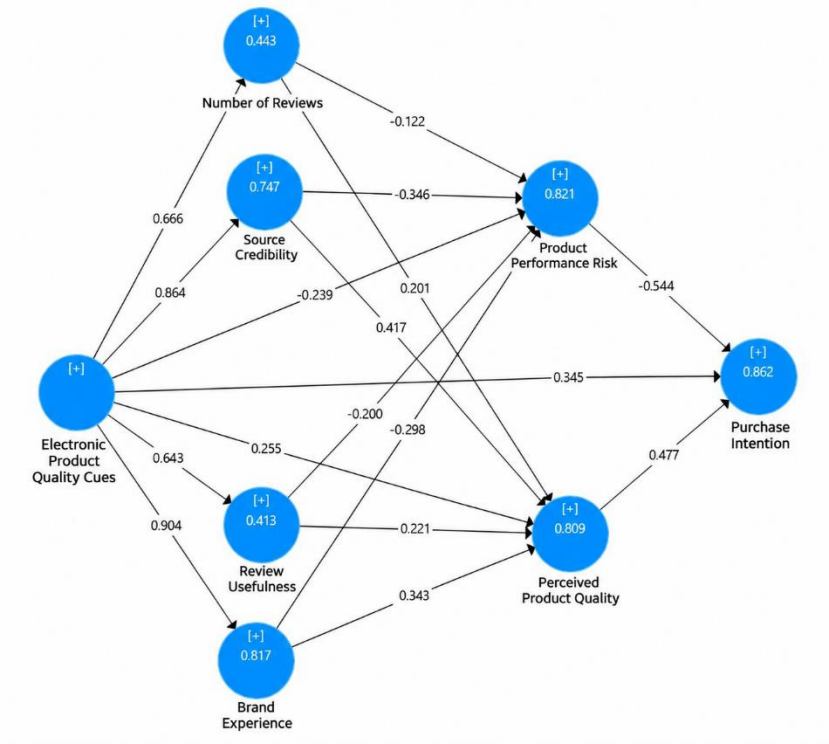
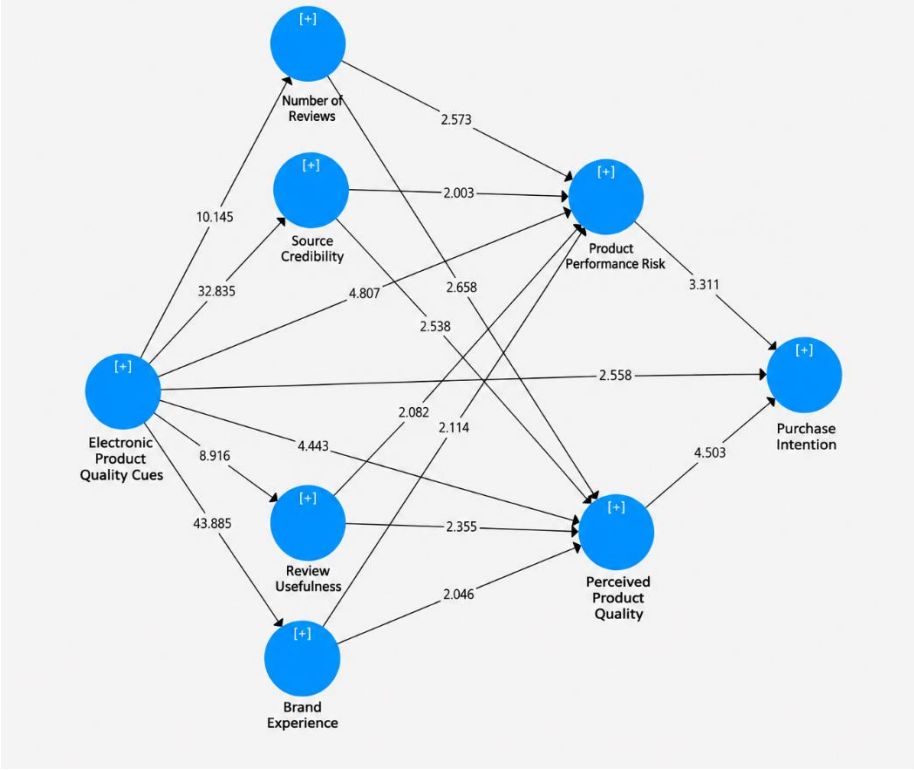


Figure 2

Inner Structural Model of the Research Model Based on Bootstrapping Results in SmartPLS 3



4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the present study showed that electronic product quality cues had a significant effect on purchase intention both directly and indirectly through perceived product quality and product performance risk. More specifically, electronic product quality cues significantly affected purchase intention through perceived product quality, with an indirect path coefficient of 0.121 and a t-value of 4.455. The mediating pathway through product performance risk was also significant, with a path coefficient of 0.131 and a t-value of 3.605. In addition, the direct effect of electronic product quality cues on purchase intention was significant, with a path coefficient of 0.345 and a t-value of 2.558. These results indicate that consumers do not rely only on the presence of electronic cues when forming purchase intentions; rather, such cues influence the way they evaluate the likely quality and performance reliability of a product. This interpretation is consistent with research showing that online reviews, website quality, perceived service quality, and trust play important roles in online purchase intention (Hanaysha, 2025). It is also consistent with evidence that heuristic and systematic cues influence e-commerce purchase intention through perceived product quality (Rosillo-Díaz & González, 2024). The findings therefore reinforce the view that electronic product quality cues operate through both cognitive evaluation and uncertainty reduction.

The significant mediating role of perceived product quality suggests that consumers translate online information into judgments about whether a product is likely to be satisfactory, dependable, and superior in its category. This mechanism is especially important in online purchasing because consumers cannot physically inspect the product before purchase. Previous research has similarly shown that perceived quality can influence purchase intention and can function as an important explanatory variable between marketing-related stimuli and consumer responses (Yulianti & Keni, 2022). The present findings are also aligned with evidence showing that technological information mechanisms such as blockchain can improve perceived product quality and strengthen purchase intention (Refati & Karami, 2024). Likewise, the study by Haddadian and Dasht Laali emphasized the role of perceived product quality in shaping the relationship between customers' perceptions of online branding and purchase intention (Haddadian & Dasht Laali, 2025). Taken together, these studies support the conclusion that perceived product quality is not merely an outcome of product attributes but is also constructed from the informational environment surrounding the product.

The significant mediating role of product performance risk provides another important explanation for the influence of electronic quality cues. Consumers in online environments often face uncertainty about whether a product will actually function as expected after purchase. Electronic cues can either reduce or intensify this uncertainty. The present study showed that product performance risk significantly mediated the relationship between electronic product quality cues and purchase intention, indicating that consumers use online information to assess possible failure, disappointment, or mismatch between expected and actual performance. This finding is consistent with previous studies demonstrating that perceived risk has a substantial effect on purchase attitudes and purchase intention in online recommendation settings (Cabeza-Ramírez & González-Mohino, 2022). It also aligns with research showing that perceived risk mediates the relationship between product- and website-related marketing strategies and online purchase intention (Nasiri & Aghababayi, 2024). Similarly, perceived risk has been recognized as an important determinant of perceived value in electronic-product contexts (Said & Mustaking, 2021). Therefore, the present results confirm that product performance risk is a key psychological mechanism through which consumers interpret electronic quality signals.

The direct significant relationship between electronic product quality cues and purchase intention further shows that online cues can influence purchase decisions independently of the mediators examined in this study. This finding suggests that some cues may directly activate consumer confidence, perceived desirability, or readiness to buy without requiring a fully elaborated evaluation of quality or risk. Such a result is consistent with evidence showing that customer reviews and online information directly influence purchasing decisions (Chen & Zhang, 2022). It also corresponds with research indicating that consumer engagement, perceived value, source credibility, and affective attachment can directly or indirectly strengthen purchase intention (Bilal et al., 2024; Cao & Liu, 2025). The direct effect observed in the present study implies that electronic quality cues have both immediate persuasive value and indirect evaluative value.

With regard to the subsidiary hypotheses, the number of reviews significantly influenced purchase intention through both product performance risk and perceived product

quality. The indirect effect through product performance risk had a path coefficient of 0.066 with a t-value of 2.829, whereas the indirect effect through perceived product quality had a path coefficient of 0.095 with a t-value of 3.749. These findings suggest that a greater number of reviews may signal product popularity, repeated market use, and wider consumer experience, thereby reducing uncertainty and strengthening perceptions of quality. This result is consistent with prior research showing that online customer reviews influence purchase intentions and can interact with risk perceptions and trust-related mechanisms (Macheka et al., 2024; Suman & Kurniawati, 2024). It is also supported by Chen and Zhang, who demonstrated the important role of online reviews in consumer purchasing decisions (Chen & Zhang, 2022). However, the results should also be interpreted in light of studies showing that deceptive reviews can undermine consumer confidence and negatively affect purchase intention (Zhong & Li, 2021). Thus, review quantity appears to be influential, but its effect is likely stronger when review authenticity and quality are also perceived positively.

Source credibility also had significant indirect effects on purchase intention through both product performance risk and perceived product quality. The pathway through product performance risk showed a path coefficient of 0.188 and a t-value of 2.636, whereas the pathway through perceived product quality showed a path coefficient of 0.198 and a t-value of 3.574. These effects were among the stronger indirect relationships observed in the model, suggesting that source credibility is a particularly important electronic cue. Consumers are more likely to rely on information when they believe that its source is trustworthy, knowledgeable, and unbiased. This finding strongly agrees with Li and See-To, who emphasized the central role of source credibility in persuasive information processing within social media environments (Li & See-To, 2024). It is also consistent with evidence showing that source credibility can strengthen the relationship between perceived value, consumer engagement, and purchase intention (Cao & Liu, 2025). Furthermore, prior research has identified source credibility as an important predictor of perceived quality and purchase intention (Yulianti & Keni, 2022). The present results therefore suggest that credibility reduces consumers' doubts while simultaneously reinforcing beliefs about product quality.

The significance of source credibility can also be understood through its capacity to reduce information asymmetry. In e-commerce, consumers usually have less product-specific knowledge than sellers, platform operators, or experienced reviewers. When a source is considered credible, consumers may use its information as a substitute for direct inspection. This lowers the perceived likelihood that the product will perform poorly and increases the perceived likelihood that the product possesses desirable qualities. Similar mechanisms have been identified in research examining influencers' product recommendations, where perceived risk can alter the impact of recommendations on attitudes and purchase intentions (Cabeza-Ramírez & González-Mohino, 2022). Research on electronic word of mouth has also highlighted the combined importance of information-source usefulness and credibility in shaping purchase intention (Shamsi & Shahvari, 2024). These studies support the present finding that credibility functions as both a quality signal and a risk-reduction mechanism.

Review usefulness was another significant predictor of purchase intention through both mediating pathways. The indirect effect through product performance risk was significant, with a path coefficient of 0.108 and a t-value of 3.298, while the indirect effect through perceived product quality was also significant, with a path coefficient of 0.105 and a t-value of 4.411. These results indicate that consumers are more likely to rely on reviews when they perceive them as informative, relevant, clear, and helpful for evaluating products. Useful reviews appear to reduce uncertainty and improve consumers' ability to infer likely product quality. This finding is consistent with research showing that information-source usefulness and credibility affect consumer purchase intention through electronic word-of-mouth processes (Shamsi & Shahvari, 2024). It also aligns with the heuristic-systematic perspective showing that consumers combine quick cues and more detailed information processing when assessing online products (Rosillo-Díaz & González, 2024). Thus, review usefulness should be viewed not simply as an informational characteristic, but as a decision-support mechanism that enables consumers to make more confident evaluations.

The significant effect of review usefulness also supports the broader literature on customer engagement in e-commerce. When reviews provide meaningful information, consumers are more likely to remain engaged with the product page, compare alternatives, and develop stronger purchase intentions. Previous studies have shown that customer reviews and product risk interact with trust and engagement in influencing e-commerce purchase intention (Suman & Kurniawati, 2024). The present results extend this

understanding by showing that review usefulness contributes to purchase intention through both perceived quality enhancement and risk reduction. This dual role is important because the same review can simultaneously increase positive expectations and decrease concerns about product failure.

Brand experience also significantly influenced purchase intention through both product performance risk and perceived product quality. The indirect pathway through product performance risk had a path coefficient of 0.162 and a t-value of 2.813, while the pathway through perceived product quality had a path coefficient of 0.163 and a t-value of 3.253. These findings indicate that previous interactions with a brand shape consumers' expectations about future product performance. Positive brand experiences can provide consumers with a sense of familiarity and predictability, reducing uncertainty and strengthening confidence in product quality. This finding is in line with research showing that brand experience contributes to brand attachment, feedback, and advocacy (Hongsuchon et al., 2023). It is also supported by findings indicating that brand experience is associated with satisfaction, authenticity, and brand equity (Tran & Nguyen, 2022).

The results concerning brand experience are also consistent with studies emphasizing the emotional and relational consequences of customer experiences. Positive brand experience has been shown to strengthen emotional attachment and loyalty (Shahid et al., 2022), while co-creation and engagement can reinforce brand experience and satisfaction (Oklevik et al., 2024). Research in service contexts has similarly demonstrated that brand experience affects satisfaction through affective pathways such as brand love (Pabla & Soch, 2023). In digital services, brand experience has also been linked to brand image and loyalty (Philip & Pradiani, 2024). The findings of the present study extend this literature by showing that brand experience can also influence purchase intention through consumers' judgments of product quality and performance risk.

The relevance of brand experience is particularly notable in the context of Digikala. Consumers who have previous positive experiences with a platform or the brands offered through it may perceive subsequent purchases as less uncertain. Prior research involving Digikala customers has found that brand experience and perceived value are related to purchase intention (Rasouli, 2022). Similarly, social media marketing activities have been linked to brand experience, brand attitude, and purchase intention in the Digikala context (Safari, 2024). These findings support the present results and suggest that brand experience may operate as a form of accumulated evidence that consumers use when evaluating unfamiliar or new products.

The results also correspond with broader findings on experiential and symbolic cues in marketing. Packaging semiotics, for example, can shape brand experience, brand trust, and purchase intention (Jafari & Khanlari, 2024), while cultural and symbolic design can affect consumer purchase intention by influencing product interpretation (Liu & Zhao, 2024). Similarly, perceived values in branded content marketing can influence customer experience and loyalty (Jalalzadeh & Gohari, 2023). These studies collectively suggest that consumers interpret many kinds of cues—visual, symbolic, informational, and experiential—when evaluating products. The present study therefore contributes to this body of research by conceptualizing electronic product quality cues as an integrated set of signals rather than isolated variables.

The strong explanatory power of the structural model further supports the relevance of the proposed relationships. The R^2 values were 0.452 for product performance risk, 0.739 for perceived product quality, and 0.924 for purchase intention, indicating that the model explained a substantial proportion of the variance in the endogenous constructs, particularly purchase intention. The Q^2 values also indicated strong predictive relevance. These results suggest that the combination of electronic product quality cues, perceived quality, and performance risk provides a meaningful framework for understanding online purchase intention. Previous research has repeatedly shown that purchase intention in digital environments is shaped by combinations of trust, reviews, engagement, perceived service quality, perceived value, and brand-related experiences rather than by a single determinant (Bilal et al., 2024; Hanaysha, 2025; Nofrizal et al., 2023). The present results are therefore consistent with the broader view that online purchase intention is multidimensional and emerges from an integrated evaluation process.

At the theoretical level, the findings suggest that electronic product quality cues operate through two simultaneous mechanisms. The first is an enhancement mechanism, in which cues strengthen perceived product quality and therefore increase purchase intention. The second is a risk-reduction mechanism, in which cues influence perceptions of product performance uncertainty and thereby affect willingness to purchase. These mechanisms are theoretically compatible with previous studies showing that perceived quality, perceived sacrifice,

and perceived risk jointly shape product value evaluations (Said & Mustaking, 2021), as well as research on new-product risk management emphasizing the importance of performance uncertainty in product-related decisions (Moghadamnia & Rastegarmoghadam, 2022). In addition, evidence that product quality supports satisfaction, loyalty, and performance outcomes further strengthens the interpretation that quality perceptions are central to consumer decision-making (Gunawan, 2022; Rahmati et al., 2021).

The findings also indicate that the online purchasing process should be understood as a combination of informational, experiential, and affective judgments. Consumers assess objective-looking information such as review quantity, but they also interpret subjective cues such as source credibility and brand experience. Such processes are compatible with contemporary digital marketing research, which shows that consumer engagement and affective attachment can strengthen purchase intention (Bilal et al., 2024). The effect of consumer xenocentrism on willingness to purchase through perceived quality and product attitude likewise shows that quality perceptions can serve as an intermediary between broader consumer orientations and purchase behavior (Hajikarimi Sari et al., 2023). Likewise, traditional production cues can influence perceived product quality even when the intrinsic properties of the product are not directly assessed (Wilcox et al., 2024). These studies reinforce the conclusion that consumer perceptions are shaped by contextual signals and inferred meanings rather than by purely technical product attributes.

The present study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the study employed a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to make strong causal inferences regarding the relationships among electronic product quality cues, perceived product quality, product performance risk, and purchase intention. Second, the data were based on self-reported questionnaire responses, which may be affected by recall bias, social desirability, or common method variance. Third, the study was limited to Digikala customers, and therefore the findings may not be fully generalizable to other e-commerce platforms, geographic contexts, or consumer segments. Fourth, purchase intention was examined rather than actual purchasing behavior, and intention does not always translate directly into completed transactions. Finally, although the model included several important electronic quality cues, other potentially relevant variables such as price sensitivity, trust in the platform, product involvement, review valence, perceived authenticity, privacy concerns, and prior online shopping experience were not included.

Future studies could address these limitations by employing longitudinal or experimental designs to provide stronger evidence regarding causal relationships among electronic cues, quality perceptions, risk perceptions, and purchasing behavior. Researchers could also compare different e-commerce platforms or conduct cross-cultural studies to determine whether the relative importance of review quantity, source credibility, review usefulness, and brand experience differs across markets. Future research may also distinguish between positive and negative reviews, verified and unverified reviews, expert and consumer-generated content, or high- and low-involvement products. Including actual purchase behavior, repurchase intention, switching behavior, or post-purchase satisfaction would extend the explanatory value of the model. Additional mediators and moderators such as trust, product involvement, price consciousness, consumer expertise, perceived authenticity, digital literacy, and age could also be incorporated to develop a more comprehensive understanding of online purchase decision-making.

From a managerial perspective, e-commerce platforms and online retailers should actively manage the quality of electronic product information because consumers use such information to judge both expected product quality and potential performance risk. Platforms should encourage authentic and sufficiently detailed customer reviews, clearly display verified-purchase indicators, and improve mechanisms that help consumers identify the most useful reviews. Retailers should also strengthen source credibility by presenting transparent product specifications, reliable seller information, expert content, and consistent product claims. Brand managers should invest in positive and coherent brand experiences across digital touchpoints because prior favorable experiences can reduce uncertainty and strengthen quality expectations. In addition, online retailers should identify products associated with high perceived performance risk and provide stronger warranties, comparison tools, return guarantees, technical demonstrations, and post-purchase support. By systematically improving these cues, e-commerce firms can reduce uncertainty, enhance perceived product quality, and ultimately increase consumers' willingness to purchase.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all individuals helped us to do the project.

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

Ethics Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were considered.

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