

The Influence of Perceived Risk and Cognitive Attitudes Towards Persistent TikTok Weight Loss Advertisements on Consumer Purchasing Intentions in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This conceptual paper investigates the influence of perceived risk and cognitive attitude in the context of persistent TikTok weight loss advertisements and their effects on consumer purchasing intentions in Malaysia. TikTok, as a rapidly evolving platform, has emerged as a dominant advertising channel, particularly for weight loss content targeted at young adults. Drawing on the AIDA model and User-Generated Content (UGC) theory, this paper conceptualizes a framework in which perceived risk influences consumers' safety, performance, and financial outcomes, while cognitive attitudes function as a moderating variable shaping the interpretation and response to these advertisements. With persistent exposure to weight loss content on TikTok, perceived risk emerges as a stabilizing mechanism, where alignment between brand values and visible practices, transparent communication, and the incorporation of relatable human elements such as user narratives or testimonials reinforce cognitive evaluation and emotional resonance. As a result, risk not only drives trust but also shapes users' attention, engagement, and subsequently intention to consider or purchase advertised products.

Keywords: *TikTok, weight loss advertisements, perceived risk, cognitive attitudes, AIDA model, user-generated Malaysia.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid diffusion of social media technologies has reshaped how individuals consume and respond to health information. TikTok, driven by algorithmic personalization and short-form video content, has become a dominant platform (Sohid et al., 2024). Its recommendation system curates persistent streams of weight-loss material, including advertisements, influencer endorsements, and user-generated posts (Amir Hamzah et al., 2025; Zeng et al., 2025). This architecture reinforces attention, normalizes weight loss culture, and shapes cognitive and emotional responses (Jain et al., 2025).

Influencer advertising plays a central role, with narratives of authenticity, personal stories, struggles, and successes fostering parasocial intimacy and trust (Azhar et al., 2025; Adeane & Stasiak, 2024; Gerrath et al., 2024; Leite et al., 2024). Such cues make products appear safer and more effective (Barari et al., 2025). User-generated content (UGC) further amplifies credibility through reviews, testimonials, and transformation videos (Udoka & Ikot, 2024; Lariba, 2024; Niazi, 2025). Together, influencer authenticity and UGC embed commercial messages within social narratives, blurring marketing and peer communication.

Perceived risk reduces purchase intention by triggering affective and cognitive responses. High cognitive attitudes heighten sensitivity to safety, financial, and performance concerns (Pang & Ismail, 2022; Mahbob et al., 2023; Handoyo, 2024; Syamsuar & Witarsyah, 2025). Advertisers often obscure risks through credibility cues such as celebrity endorsements (Pickett et al., 2023), while digital commerce emphasizes rational benefit-risk evaluations shaped by trust (Maulana & Marsasi, 2024).

Cognitive attitude moderates these dynamics, reflecting logical evaluation, credibility assessment, and resistance to persuasion (Bowden, 2022; Xiu et al., 2024). Strong attitudes enable scrutiny, while weaker filters increase susceptibility (Nilsson et al., 2023; Trisetianto & Ali, 2025). TikTok's rapid-fire format reduces cognitive bandwidth, weakening resistance (Opara et al., 2025).

Malaysian consumers aged 18–34 show strong responsiveness to influencer-endorsed health products, driven by perceived risk, social proof, and community validation (Sitorus et al., 2024; Ibrahim et al., 2025). Rising obesity prevalence (L. Hakim, 2025) and escalating TikTok promotions including medical interventions such as injections, supplements, and bariatric procedures (Zeng et al., 2025; Peng et al., 2025; Hess et al., 2025; Malik, 2025) raise concerns about safety and ethics. The literature underscores the urgency of frameworks explaining how risk and cognition interact to shape consumer behavior in Malaysia's digital advertising ecosystem.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Dependent Variable

2.1.1. Perceived Risk

Perceived risk in the TikTok weight loss ecosystem dictates the shift from engagement to action, with credibility as the primary predictor (Shah & Lü, 2022; Raiter et al., 2023). In a sensationalized content environment (TikTok, 2021), trust mitigates uncertainty (Kite et al., 2022; Khurana et al., 2025). Influencer authenticity shapes reliability (Lee & Eastin, 2021; Shaheen et al., 2025; Manafe et al., 2021). Performance uncertainty drives dissatisfaction (Zhivikj et al., 2020; Ibrahim et al., 2023; Thornton et al., 2023; Rad & Melendez-Torres, 2025). Psychological risks emerge via social comparison (Knight, 2023; Longa et al., 2025; Dao & Phuong, 2025; Bhupesh, 2024; Jiménez-García et al., 2025). Ethical promotion reduces risk (Joshi, 2025), while peer validation and governance anchor trust (Ufholz, 2020; Ballara, 2023; Antolović et al., 2025; Monfort et al., 2025).

2.1.2. Cognitive Attitude (Moderating)

Cognitive attitudes are defined as mental processes forming evaluative beliefs (Araujo et al., 2022), crucial in analyzing TikTok weight loss ads. They emerge dynamically through source credibility, message clarity, and platform affordances (Minadeo & Pope, 2022; Bazi et al., 2025), requiring efficient processing (W. Li et al., 2023; Alluhidan et al., 2025). Alignment with user goals shapes valence (Chuang & Chen, 2024). Influencer credibility drives favorable attitudes (Kakar et al., 2024; Tripopsakul & Hoonson, 2025; Gaesser & Angadi, 2021; Pramesti & Alversia, 2023; Hendriana et al., 2022; Elsholiha et al., 2023). Emotional resonance enhances receptivity (Chungcheh & Hossain, 2024; Rocha-Vilca et al., 2024), though dissonance arises when ads contradict prior knowledge (Klug et al., 2021; Montgomery College, 2026). Transparency stabilizes attitudes (Yang & Battocchio, 2020; Kirkpatrick & Lawrie, 2024). Ultimately, cognitive attitudes bridge to behavioral outcomes, moderating purchase intentions in Malaysia's digital ecosystem (Pickett et al., 2023).

2.2. Independent Variable 1

2.2.1. Purchasing Intention

Perceived risk strongly shapes purchase intention in TikTok's weight loss advertising ecosystem. Social proof reduces uncertainty (Huang et al., 2024), yet exaggerated testimonials can heighten skepticism and dissatisfaction (Masuda et al., 2021; Lim & Tan, 2024; Hidayah et al., 2024). Product effectiveness communicated through visual evidence is persuasive but also risky when transformations appear unrealistic (Spasova, 2023; Oyama & Nakano, 2025; Hendriana et al., 2022; Marino & DeMarco, 2024). Interactive features foster commitment but increase vulnerability by deepening psychological investment (Teo et al., 2023; Zamzuri et al., 2024). Emotional narratives inspire purchase consideration (Vrtana & Krizanova, 2023; Gega et al., 2024), though brand trust and transparency are essential to mitigate risk (Kan & Xiang, 2023; García-Salirrosas et al., 2024; Southwick et al., 2021). Temporal heuristics such as urgency and FOMO amplify perceived uncertainty, accelerating decision-making while intensifying risk (Alzaben et al., 2022; Tresna, 2025; Ngo et al., 2025; Cai & Ambad, 2025).

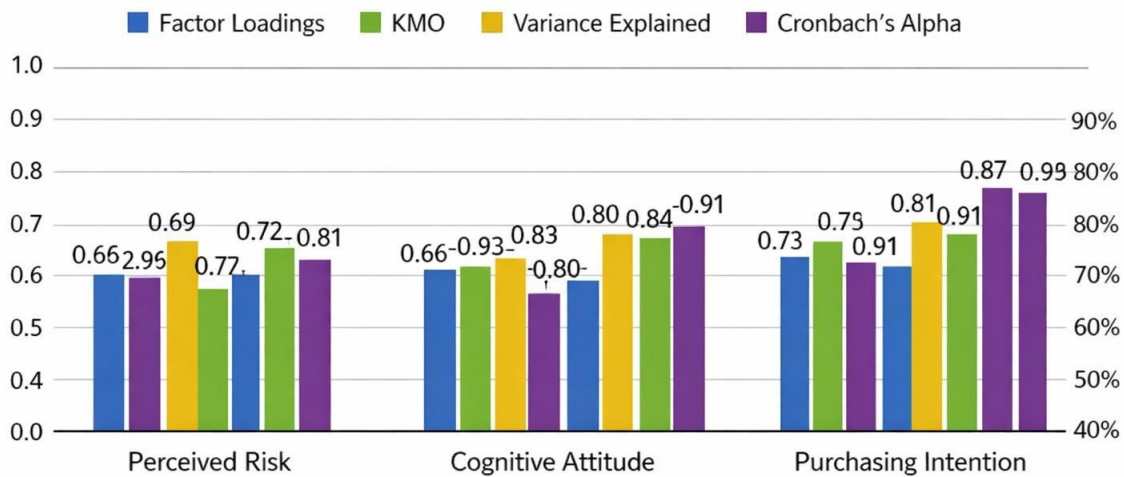
3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a correlational design to examine the influence of perceived risk on consumer purchase intentions toward persistent TikTok weight loss advertisements, with cognitive attitude as a moderating variable. Correlational analysis is appropriate for identifying associations without manipulation, capturing naturally occurring perceptions in digital advertising (Sekaran & Bougie, 2020; Hair et al., 2019). Relationships are tested through correlation, regression, and moderation via interaction terms (Baron & Kenny, 1986). A stratified random sampling design ensures representativeness, dividing respondents into two strata (18–24 and 25–34) with equal allocation (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970; Hossan et al., 2023).

Randomization is achieved via number generators, with recruitment through TikTok Ads Manager and cross-platform dissemination. Data collection uses online questionnaires with screening, consent, and validated scales: perceived risk (Manzoor et al., 2020; Weismueller et al., 2020; Li & Peng, 2021), cognitive attitude (Adetunji et al., 2019; Manzoor et al., 2020; Meliawati et al., 2023; Sari & Lilik Wahyudi, 2024), and purchase intention (Cao & Nguyen, 2025; Wirandamukti & Setyaning, 2025; Madhavedi et al., 2025), measured on five-point Likert scales. Validity is ensured through expert review and factor analysis, reliability via Cronbach's alpha (>0.70) (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), and ethics through informed consent (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Figure 1

Factor analysis and reliability of perceived risk, cognitive attitude, and purchasing intention.



The figure illustrates the ranges of factor loadings, KMO values, variance explained, and Cronbach's Alpha for the three constructs. Perceived Risk (Loadings: 0.66–0.89, KMO: 0.72–0.81, Variance: 53.8–69.4%, Alpha: 0.78–0.89), Cognitive Attitude (Loadings: 0.66–0.93, KMO: 0.80–0.83, Variance: 61.7–74.0%, Alpha: 0.84–0.91), and Purchasing Intention (Loadings: 0.73–0.94, KMO: 0.81–0.91, Variance: 67.4–84.5%, Alpha: 0.87–0.95). All constructs demonstrated strong reliability and validity.

Table 1

Summary of Factor Analysis and Reliability Metrics for Key Constructs

Construct	Key Dimensions	Factor Loadings (Range)	KMO	Bartlett's Test (Sig.)	Cronbach's Alpha	Variance Explained
Perceived Risk	Financial risk, safety, performance uncertainty	0.66 – 0.89	0.72–0.81	$p < 0.001$	0.78–0.89	53.8–69.4%
Cognitive Attitude	Knowledge, self-dissatisfaction, and relatability	0.66 – 0.93	0.80–0.83	$p < 0.001$	0.84–0.91	61.7–74.0%
Purchasing Intention	Desire, intention, likelihood of purchase	0.73 – 0.94	0.81–0.91	$p < 0.001$	0.87–0.95	67.4–84.5%

This table summarizes the results of exploratory factor analysis and reliability testing for the three key constructs. All constructs demonstrated strong factor loadings, adequate sampling (KMO), significant Bartlett's Test results, and high internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha), confirming their validity and reliability.

Perceived risk captures consumer hesitation toward TikTok weight loss ads, encompassing financial risk, safety concerns, and performance uncertainty. Factor loadings for items such as PRFR3 (0.83) and PRPU1 (0.87) confirm strong representation. KMO values (0.72–0.81) and significant Bartlett's Test ($p < 0.001$) validate sampling adequacy.

Cronbach's Alpha values (0.78–0.89) indicate reliable internal consistency. Respondents expressed skepticism about exaggerated claims and anxiety over long-term safety, reinforcing risk as a decisive cue in purchase hesitation.

Cognitive attitude reflects knowledge, self-dissatisfaction, and relatability, shaping how consumers interpret and respond to ads. Items such as CAK2 (0.86) and CASD3 (0.93) loaded strongly, with KMO values (0.80–0.83) confirming adequacy. Cronbach's Alpha values (0.84–0.91) demonstrate excellent reliability. Findings highlight that consumers actively evaluate credibility, often verifying information, while dissatisfaction with body image and relatable influencer narratives intensify engagement. This validates cognitive attitude as a moderating variable in the relationship between risk and purchase intention.

Purchasing intention encompasses desire, intention, and likelihood of purchase. Items such as PID3 (0.91) and PILP3 (0.94) showed very high loadings, with KMO values (0.81–0.91) and Eigenvalues explaining up to 84.54% variance. Cronbach's Alpha values (0.87–0.95) confirm excellent internal consistency. Results indicate that emotional desire, deliberate planning, and repeated exposure to ads significantly drive purchase likelihood, especially when credibility and relatability are established.

This shows that perceived risk is a strong deterrent, cognitive attitude moderate's consumer evaluation, and purchase intention is reliably predicted by credibility, relatability, and repeated exposure.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study found that perceived risk significantly influenced Malaysian consumers' purchasing intentions toward persistent TikTok weight loss advertisements, with cognitive attitude acting as a crucial moderator. Financial and safety concerns heightened skepticism, while performance uncertainty reinforced hesitation. Cognitive attitude shaped these effects: strong evaluative filters enabled critical validation, reducing risk perception and enhancing persuasion, whereas weaker attitudes amplified doubt and demanded greater evidentiary support (Bowden, 2022; Xiu et al., 2024).

Theoretically, the research extends the AIDA model by embedding risk within socio-technical processes and integrates UGC theory to highlight peer validation as a persuasive mechanism. Practically, the findings guide marketers toward transparency and authenticity, regulators toward stricter oversight, and educators toward strengthening media literacy and cognitive resilience. With Malaysia's obesity rates among the highest in Southeast Asia (L. Hakim, 2025), these insights underscore urgent ethical and public health implications, ensuring digital advertising evolves responsibly within social commerce ecosystems.

5. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that perceived risk plays a significant role in shaping Malaysian consumers' purchasing intentions toward persistent TikTok weight loss advertisements, with cognitive attitude serving as a critical moderating variable. Financial, safety, and performance uncertainties were found to deter purchase decisions, while strong cognitive attitudes enabled consumers to validate claims and critically reduce risk perceptions. Integrating the AIDA model with UGC theory highlights how algorithmic reinforcement and peer validation interact with consumer cognition to influence persuasion.

The findings extend theoretical understanding by embedding risk within socio-technical processes and emphasize the importance of media literacy in digital advertising environments. Practically, the study calls for marketers to prioritize transparency, regulators to strengthen oversight, and educators to foster cognitive resilience. With obesity rates rising in Malaysia, these insights underscore urgent ethical and public health implications, ensuring that social commerce evolves responsibly in addressing consumer well-being.

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7. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

This article has not been published previously and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere. This publication has been approved by all authors for publication and will not be published elsewhere, printed or electronically, in the same form or in any other language without the written consent of the copyright-holder.

8. AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Author 1 contributed to the conceptualization, research design, and writing of the original draft.

Author 2 provided supervision, critical review, and editing of the final manuscript.

Author 3 provided supervision, critical review, and editing of the final manuscript.

Author 4 was responsible for data collection, analysis, and validation of the results.

All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

9. ETHICS STATEMENT

This research was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of Universiti Teknologi MARA and adhered to the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki. Ethical approval was obtained from the **Review Board** under reference number 551. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided written informed consent prior to participation. Participants' privacy and confidentiality were strictly maintained, and data collected were used solely for academic purposes.

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