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Buying the Forthcoming: The Effect of Value Congruence on Consumer Pre-Order Decisions

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Abstract

This study identifies the psychological factors that influence consumers' pre-order decisions and the underlying mechanism. Building on the literature on value congruence in consumer behavior and cognitive consistency theory, we examine how value congruence affects information-seeking engagement and pre-order intentions in the context of information technology (IT) products. Using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), we find that when consumers perceive value congruence with IT products, they are more likely to seek additional product information, which in turn increases their pre-order intentions. Contrary to prior research that has primarily focused on the operational factors or consumers' individual aspects in pre-order decisions, our study highlights the importance of value alignment between consumers and products in affecting pre-order decisions. Given the increasing prevalence of IT product pre-order phenomenon in e-commerce, this study contributes to the literature on pre-ordering behavior and consumer judgment and decision-making. It also provides valuable insights for effectively promoting and developing pre-order strategies when launching new products.

Keywords: value congruence; information seeking engagement; IT products; Pre-order; purchase behavior

1. Introduction

Recent advances in digital technology have accelerated product obsolescence and replacement in the marketplace [1]. This trend has changed consumers' behaviors, such as information search behaviors and the timing and decisions of their purchases. For example, consumers often seek product information and make purchase decisions before products are officially released (i.e., pre-launch period). In other words, consumers have the opportunity to purchase a product prior to its market release, which is referred to as pre-ordering [2–4]. For example, in the technology industry, consumers can preorder new smartphones, smartwatches, or video games from companies such as Apple, Samsung, or SONY. Similarly, pre-orders are common for new books through authors or sellers such as Amazon, as well as for exclusive, limited-edition apparel or designer shoes in the fashion industry. In this regard, pre-order strategies have emerged as a mainstream approach to launching new products, benefiting both consumers and companies. Specifically, pre-orders satisfy consumers' desire for exclusivity and early ownership, increasing excitement around new product launches [5]. Pre-orders allow companies to better predict consumer demand, increase sales, and enhance customer loyalty through exclusive access [3].

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Pre-orders have become prevalent for information technology (IT) products in e-commerce [6] for the following reasons. IT products typically (1) have short product life cycles, (2) are highly technology-driven, and (3) are categorized as high-involvement products. With the rapid turnover of IT products, older models become obsolete and are quickly superseded by newer models with more advanced technologies. New features and improved quality of forthcoming IT products invoke consumer excitement, leading to active engagement in new technologies or products [7,8]. In addition, consumers often invest considerable time in searching for information about high-involvement IT products to make informed decisions, as erroneous purchase decisions may yield significant financial consequences and lead to prolonged use of unsatisfactory products [9,10]. Thus, considering the financial and long-term consequences of IT product purchases [9,10], consumers tend to engage in more deliberate, information-driven decision-making and are more likely to seek out and carefully evaluate product information before its official release. Taken together, given the high-involvement nature of IT products and consumers' need for obtaining product information, IT products provide an appropriate context for examining pre-order decisions [2,4,11].

Despite the growing popularity of consumer pre-orders for IT products in e-commerce and the strategic significance of pre-orders in enhancing customer satisfaction and driving firms' sales and growth, academic research on pre-orders remains limited. Existing research on new products has predominantly focused on post-launch consumer behavior, leaving pre-order behavior relatively underexplored. Although a growing body of research has begun to examine pre-order behavior, prior studies have largely been limited to firm-level optimal pricing and ordering strategies [12–15] or to consumer-level characteristics that influence pre-order decisions [16,17]. Given the complexity of consumers' pre-order decision processes—particularly in the absence of direct product experience and complete information [18]—the current research aims to address this important gap by investigating the psychological factors and the underlying mechanisms that shape consumers' pre-order decisions. By doing so, this study offers valuable managerial insights for designing and implementing effective pre-order launch and promotion strategies for new products.

Building on the literature on value congruence in consumer behavior [19,20] and cognitive consistency theory [21,22], we propose that consumers' perceived value congruence with a product increases their information-seeking engagement, which in turn enhances pre-order intentions. Value congruence refers to the perceived alignment between consumers' values and the value embedded in the product or its typical users [20,23]. When consumers perceive such alignment, value congruence provides internal consistency and validates their core values [21,22], thereby increasing interest in and connection with the product. This heightened interest motivates consumers to further engage with the product through information-seeking behavior, which strengthens their pre-order intentions.

This paper is organized as follows. We begin by reviewing the relevant literature to develop our hypotheses. Next, we present our conceptual model and test it using partial least squares structural equation modeling. Lastly, we discuss the theoretical and practical implications of our findings, along with the limitations and directions for future research.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Pre-Order Marketing Strategy

Technological advancement has made the pre-order strategy increasingly prevalent in marketing, especially in e-commerce [15]. Pre-ordering—a product launch tactic that allows consumers to purchase products before their official market release [2]—has been popular for IT products. This new product strategy provides benefits to both firms and consumers. For firms, pre-ordering helps them forecast consumer demands by reducing a mismatch

between supply and demand. By updating demand information during the pre-launch period, firms may optimally manage their inventory and minimize associated risks [24,25]. Securing consumer demands during this period also boosts sales through early consumer commitment [3,26]. For consumers, pre-ordering secures early ownership, while avoiding the risk of stock-outs [4,27]. It also increases psychological satisfaction and excitement by offering exclusive access, thereby fostering brand loyalty [26,27]. Notwithstanding these advantages, pre-ordering requires consumers to make decisions under uncertainty and with limited product information, as purchase timing is separated from the actual product experience [28]. Therefore, it is critical to identify and examine what factors are likely to facilitate consumers' pre-order decisions, along with why.

Previous research on pre-orders has primarily focused on developing optimal pre-order pricing strategies and the factors that influence their effectiveness. For example, some studies have investigated how alternative pricing mechanisms influence consumers' product choices during the pre-launch period [12] and the profitability of different marketing channels, such as manufacturers and retailers [13]. Firms may adopt various pricing strategies—ranging from no advance selling to moderate advance selling with modest discounts, and to deep advance selling with substantial discounts—depending on consumers' loss aversion, risk preference [4], or the degree of heterogeneity in consumer valuation of new products [14]. The innovative attributes of new products may influence consumers' pre-order purchase decisions [29]. Beyond traditional online pre-ordering, firms may also implement omni-channel retail strategies to mitigate consumers' product value uncertainty and encourage pre-order decisions. However, the effectiveness of omni-channel pre-ordering strategy depends on contextual factors, such as return cost and the expenses associated with mitigating product uncertainty [15].

In addition to firm-level strategies, prior studies have examined consumer-level factors that influence pre-order decisions [16,17]. For instance, highly innovative consumers are more inclined to seek novelty and take risks and thus adopt new products earlier [30]. Consumers with playfulness may pursue hedonic values—pleasure and enjoyment derived from engaging activities—and demonstrate stronger pre-order intentions, particularly when pre-launch information originates from credible sources [16]. Jiang and Qi (2023) [17] examined the role of consumers' regret sensitivity, suggesting that high price-regret sensitivity discourages the acceptance of higher product prices, while out-of-stock regret sensitivity may reduce retailers' profitability. Consumers' pre-purchase beliefs, which are the anticipated value or worth of the products, can impact firms' pricing and ordering strategies [18].

Although prior research has examined the effectiveness of pre-order strategies, much of it has focused on operational considerations, such as pricing, retail channels, and production capacity, or on consumer factors that influence pre-order decisions [15,27]. However, consumers engage in complex psychological processes when evaluating products under uncertainty [27]; therefore, focusing solely on firm-level strategies or individual factors may not fully capture the nuanced dynamics of pre-order decisions and the underlying consumer psychology. Moving beyond firms' operational perspectives and individual-level factors, this study examines the effect of perceived value congruence between consumers and new products on pre-order decisions. Specifically, drawing on the concepts of value congruence in consumer behavior and cognitive consistency theory, we propose that perceived value congruence plays an important role in shaping consumers' information-seeking engagement, which, in turn, leads to stronger pre-order intentions.

2.2. Value Congruence and Pre-Order Decision

Before consumers can directly observe or experience products, they may make purchase decisions during the pre-launch period [4]. During this period, limited knowledge and a lack of direct experience with new products lead consumers to rely on available market information—such as product features, release dates, expert reviews, and price details provided by manufacturers or infomediaries. While such information may help reduce uncertainty, it is often incomplete and insufficient for accurately assessing a product's quality or performance. As a result, consumers may turn to alternative evaluative bases, such as value congruence, in guiding their pre-order decisions.

Value congruence, originating in social psychology, refers to the alignment between an individual's personal values and those associated with an object, such as a product or service [20]. In prior studies [31–33], the concept of value congruence has often been blurred with related constructs, such as self-congruence or brand congruence, because it shares conceptual roots with them. However, these constructs are theoretically distinct [34]. While value congruence concerns the alignment between a consumer's internal value system and the values embedded in a product, self- or brand congruence concerns the alignment between the consumer's self-concept (e.g., actual, ideal, or social self) or identity and a product or brand image [31,33,35]. Thus, value congruence operates at a deeper, more abstract level of value compatibility, guiding cognitive evaluations and judgments rather than identity- or image-based alignments. This distinction is particularly critical in pre-order contexts where direct product experience and objective information are limited. Since pre-ordering involves high uncertainty and limited experiential or diagnostic information, consumers are likely to rely on abstract evaluative criteria rather than concrete image-based evaluations [36]. Under such conditions, alignment between consumers' core values and product values provides a meaningful basis for cognitive and affective judgment as well as psychological justification [20,37]. Accordingly, value congruence is more theoretically appropriate in our study context.

Value congruence has been regarded as a well-established driver of consumer attitude and behavior [20,37]. For example, when evaluating products, consumers consider not only functional attributes but also whether the product's values align with their personal or core values [20]. Products consistent with consumers' values elicit feelings of psychological comfort and symbolic affirmation, thereby increasing consumer preference for those products [38,39]. Consumers who value high status or sophistication are more likely to be attracted to luxury or high-status signaling products, as these offerings reflect and reinforce the value that they wish to project to themselves. Previous research has demonstrated that value congruence enhances consumer satisfaction, the quality of consumer–brand relationship, and behavioral intentions, such as brand advocacy and product choice [23]. In the context of new product adoption, value congruence has been shown to increase consumer preference for new products and consumer receptivity to innovative market offerings [23,37]. Extending this reasoning to the pre-launch period, we predict that value congruence will play a critical role in shaping pre-order decisions. In particular, considering consumers often lack sufficient experiential or diagnostic information in pre-order contexts, value-based assessments may exert a stronger influence on their pre-order decisions. The cognitive consistency theory [21,22] supports this prediction, which argues that individuals are motivated to maintain harmony among their beliefs, perceptions, and emotional responses. Hence, when consumers perceive a new product as congruent with their values, this alignment is likely to foster internal consistency and psychological comfort, thereby increasing their preference for the product. Thus, we hypothesize as follows.

H1. *Consumers' perceived value congruence with a forthcoming IT product will have a positive impact on their pre-order intentions.*

2.3. Mediating Role of Information-Seeking Engagement

When tangible product information and direct experience with products are scarce, consumers' motivation to seek additional information becomes particularly important in shaping purchase decisions. In other words, information-seeking behavior—which denotes consumers' involvement or interest in searching for product information (e.g., Ref. [40])—constitutes a critical step that leads to subsequent purchase decision processes as it reduces uncertainty and increases decision confidence [41–45].

Prior research in marketing has identified value congruence as an essential factor guiding consumer behavior, such as information-seeking behavior [20,23]. Given the importance of value congruence in consumer behavior, when consumers perceive an alignment between their personal values and product-related values, this fit should increase their interest in and attraction toward the product, thereby facilitating further engagement through active information search [46]. Specifically, the degree of congruence that consumers perceive between their self-values and a product fosters a deep psychological connection with the product [47], as this alignment expresses and validates their personal values and specific self-concept [48]. Such deep connections with value-congruent products may foster a sense of psychological ownership—that is, a state in which consumers feel the product belongs to them [49]. Because value-congruent products enable consumers to express, maintain, and reinforce their value systems [49], consumers develop psychological ownership and connection with the product and are more likely to invest in it and seek additional information [50].

H2. *Consumers' perceived value congruence with a new IT product will have a positive impact on information-seeking engagement.*

Research has found that exposure to product information enhances consumers' purchase intentions through both cognitive and affective processes [51]. Information seeking reduces uncertainty and increases decision confidence, positively influencing purchase decisions [44]. Specifically, consumers' information-seeking behavior mitigates both product-related uncertainties (e.g., performance, quality, features) and behavioral uncertainties (e.g., whether pre-ordering is the right decision), leading to more informed purchase decisions. For example, consumers who engage in extensive information search when considering new automobiles may feel more satisfied with their purchase decisions once they recognize benefits—such as cost savings—that arise from their search efforts [44]. Thus, information-seeking engagement that enhances decision confidence about a product is likely to strengthen their commitment to forthcoming products [40], elevating their willingness to purchase. Taken together, we predict that perceived value congruence will positively influence information-seeking behavior which, in turn, will increase pre-order intentions. That is, consumers' information-seeking engagement will mediate the relationship between perceived value congruence and pre-order intentions. Figure 1 displays our research model.

H3. *Consumers' information-seeking engagement will positively lead to their pre-order intentions.*

H4. *Consumers' information-seeking engagement will mediate the relationship between perceived value congruence and pre-order intentions.*

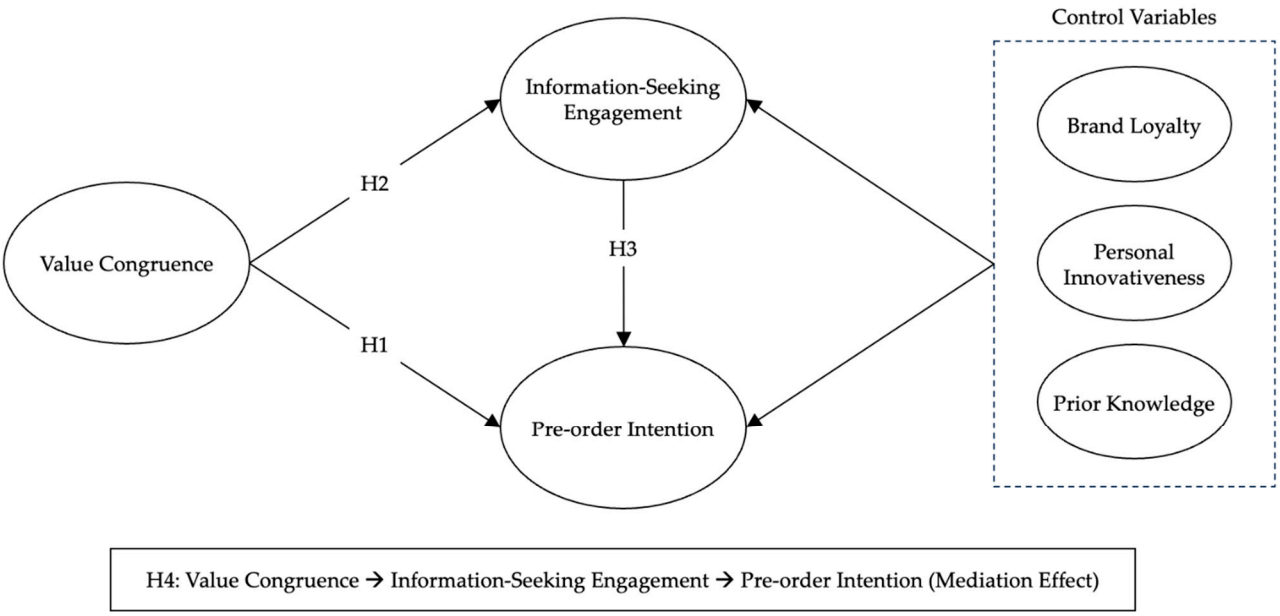


Figure 1. Research model.

3. Methodology

All major constructs were measured using 7-point Likert scales. The study also included measures of brand loyalty, personal innovativeness, and prior knowledge as control variables (see Figure 1). Following prior work, we included these variables as covariates in our analysis, due to their influence on attention to the product information and on information seeking and pre-order intentions [52,53] and their conceptual relationships with the dependable variable of interest [54]. In detail, brand loyalty may have a tendency for consumers to favor a focal brand regardless of value congruence perceptions, which inflates consumers' behavioral intentions [31]; personal innovativeness reflects consumers' inherent tendency to adopt new products earlier than others [30], which may increase both information-seeking engagement and pre-order intentions [16]; and prior knowledge may reduce perceived uncertainty and shape the extent of information search [44], thereby influencing purchase decisions. Therefore, by statistically controlling for brand loyalty, personal innovativeness, and prior knowledge, our model ensures that the observed effects of value congruence on information-seeking engagement and pre-order intention are not spuriously driven by pre-existing consumer tendencies.

3.1. Participants and Procedure

Two hundred fifty-two undergraduate participants engaged in this study in exchange for extra course credit. To recruit participants, we used non-probabilistic convenience sampling, which involves selecting participants based on ease of access and willingness to participate [55]. Participants were drawn from a pool of undergraduate students enrolled in business classes. In this study, we employed a scenario-based survey design.

Upon consent, all participants were provided the scenario about the pre-order condition, for example, "This coming September, the new Apple iPhone will be released. However, its information has not been officially announced or confirmed by Apple. You may need to search for relevant product information, even if it is a rumor. Then, you decide to pre-order it or wait until it is released." Next, participants were required to search for product information for 20 min. Then, participants answered five questions about (1) value congruence, for example, "The value of this new smartphone would be highly consistent with my personal values" and "People similar to me would own this new smartphone," [20,35] and reported on (2) their pre-order purchase intentions, such as "I would

like to preorder this smartphone" all on 7-point Likert scales (1 = not at all, 7 = very much). Participants answered the four items that measured (3) information-seeking engagement, such as "I plan to search for more information about this new smartphone" on 7-point Likert scales (1 = not at all, 7 = very much; [44]). In particular, consistent with our conceptual definition, the value congruence scale captures consumers' perceptions of compatibility between their personal core values and the values symbolically embedded in the forthcoming product or its typical users. The items emphasize perceived value compatibility and shared evaluative principles rather than identity-based image matching. Although some items reference similarity with typical users, this phrasing reflects perceived commonality in underlying values rather than identification with idealized or socialized self or brand image. Thus, the operationalization aligns with value congruence as a value-level evaluative construct rather than as a form of self- or brand congruence. Additionally, participants reported on (1) brand loyalty, which measures a consumer's emotional attachment to a brand, (2) individual innovativeness, such as "If I heard about a newly introduced smartphone, I would look for ways to experiment with it," and (3) prior knowledge about smartphones. Those variables were included as control variables because they influence attention to and evaluations of smartphone information [53], as stated earlier (for all measurement items, see Appendix A). Lastly, participants completed their demographic questions. Of these, 25 responses were excluded due to inappropriateness or incompleteness, resulting in a final sample of 227 completed responses (response rate is 90.1%). Of the 227 participants, 62.9% identified as male and 37.1% as female, and the mean age was 20.58 years. As prior research indicates that young adults aged 18–24 are highly engaged in digital technologies and exhibit frequent smartphone usage [56], our sample serves as a reasonable representation of the consumer population for examining IT product pre-order behaviors [57].

3.2. Measurement Model

For this study, we conducted partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) to test our hypotheses. Specifically, we focused more on the predicted variance of the dynamics among value congruence, information-seeking engagement, and pre-order intentions rather than the goodness of fit between model parameters and observed correlations. Thus, we used a component-based PLS-SEM for our analysis. We conducted our analysis in two stages. First, we evaluated the measurement model to confirm that the constructs demonstrated adequate psychometric validity. We then conducted a structural model to test the proposed hypotheses. To ensure the robustness of the model developed for hypothesis testing, we applied the PLS bootstrap resampling technique, using an iteration of 5000 sub-samples drawn with replacement from the original dataset to generate percentile-based bootstrap *p*-values. The summary of factor analysis for testing the validity of our constructs is shown in Table 1.

When assessing the measurement model, this study first examined the indicator loadings. As detailed in Table 1, all loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.708, indicating that the latent construct accounts for over 50% of the indicator's variance, which demonstrates acceptable item reliability [58]. Second, we evaluated internal consistency reliability, which is typically measured using composite reliability [59]. Table 2 shows that the composite reliabilities for all constructs ranged from 0.70 to 0.95, indicating strong internal consistency without redundancy [58]. Additionally, all Cronbach's alpha (α) values, except for personal innovativeness, were above the 0.70 threshold, which confirms the reliability of the scales [60,61]. While the alpha for personal innovativeness was slightly lower, its value was still above 0.60, a level considered acceptable for exploratory research.

Table 1. Factor analysis results.

Construct	Item	VC	ISE	INT	BL	PI	PK
Value Congruence (VC)	VC1	**0.788**	0.395	0.563	0.104	0.252	0.116
	VC2	**0.850**	0.488	0.624	0.072	0.386	0.160
	VC3	**0.906**	0.438	0.641	0.099	0.320	0.181
	VC4	**0.855**	0.411	0.601	0.052	0.316	0.134
	VC5	**0.814**	0.375	0.539	0.201	0.387	0.264
Information-Seeking Engagement (ISE)	ISE1	0.458	**0.917**	0.550	−0.107	0.344	0.194
	ISE2	0.451	**0.901**	0.554	−0.090	0.336	0.229
	ISE3	0.459	**0.905**	0.534	−0.129	0.318	0.139
	ISE4	0.461	**0.921**	0.612	−0.132	0.390	0.219
Pre-order Intention (INT)	INT1	0.626	0.542	**0.860**	0.043	0.367	0.159
	INT2	0.579	0.611	**0.867**	0.008	0.334	0.175
	INT3	0.640	0.468	**0.864**	0.082	0.310	0.163
	INT4	0.639	0.533	**0.862**	0.006	0.365	0.192
	INT5	0.485	0.449	**0.771**	−0.044	0.319	0.133
Brand Loyalty (BL)	BL1	0.117	−0.097	0.051	**0.892**	−0.021	0.268
	BL2	0.093	−0.155	−0.011	**0.947**	−0.106	0.233
	BL3	0.160	−0.039	0.065	**0.895**	0.017	0.322
Personal Innovativeness (PI)	PI1	0.381	0.390	0.398	−0.120	**0.917**	0.169
	PI2	0.284	0.244	0.275	0.047	**0.797**	0.245
Prior Knowledge (PK)	PK	0.201	0.215	0.196	0.283	0.229	**1.000**

Table 2. Reliability and validity results of constructs.

Construct	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability	Inter-Construct Correlations *					
			VC	ISE	INT	BL	PI	PK
Value Congruence	0.898	0.925	**0.844**					
Information-Seeking Engagement	0.932	0.943	0.502	**0.911**				
Pre-order Intention	0.900	0.926	0.706	0.618	**0.845**			
Brand Loyalty	0.905	0.936	0.122	−0.126	0.025	**0.912**		
Personal Innovativeness	0.659	0.849	0.394	0.382	0.401	−0.061	**0.859**	
Prior Knowledge **	1.000	1.000	0.201	0.215	0.196	0.283	0.229	1.000

* The diagonal elements (in bold) represent the square root of the AVE. ** Since prior knowledge included a single item, all values except for correlations were 1.000.

Third, we tested convergent validity. This was assessed for each construct using the average variance extracted (AVE) [58]. The AVE values for all constructs surpassed the 0.50 threshold, indicating that each construct successfully explains at least 50% of the variance in its corresponding items. Lastly, we assessed discriminant validity. This was evaluated by comparing the AVE of each construct to its squared inter-construct correlation [62]. Our measurement model met this criterion because the shared variance among constructs did not exceed their respective AVEs. All statistics related to the reliability and validity of our measures are summarized in Table 2.

As with all self-reported data, this study is susceptible to potential common method bias, which may arise from factors such as consistency motives or social desirability [63]. Common method bias is defined as "variance that is attributable to the measurement method rather than to the constructs the measures represent" [63] (p. 879). To assess the presence of such bias, we first conducted Harman's one-factor test [63]. In this procedure, all measurement items were entered into an unrotated exploratory factor analysis to examine whether a single factor emerged or whether one factor accounted for the majority of the variance. The analysis yielded 20 factors, with the largest factor explaining 40% of the variance. Additionally, we performed a full collinearity test, which showed that all variance inflation factor (VIF) values ranged between 1.126 and 1.512, well below the recommended threshold of 3.3 [64]. Taken together, these results suggest that common method bias and multicollinearity are unlikely to pose significant concerns in this study.

4. Results

In the PLS-SEM, the factor loadings of the indicators for each construct can be interpreted similarly to loadings in a principal component factor analysis, while the structural paths represent standardized beta weights in a regression analysis. Figure 2 displays the PLS path coefficients, including the estimates obtained from PLS-SEM analysis, including the control variables. The model explains approximately 34% of the variance in information-seeking engagement and 60% of the variance in pre-order intention. Specifically, the inclusion of control variables ensures that these relatively high R^2 values are not inflated by omitted-variable bias [65]; as a result, we suggest that the model provides substantial explanatory power and can be employed to predict the hypothesized effects of the focal constructs alongside control variables.

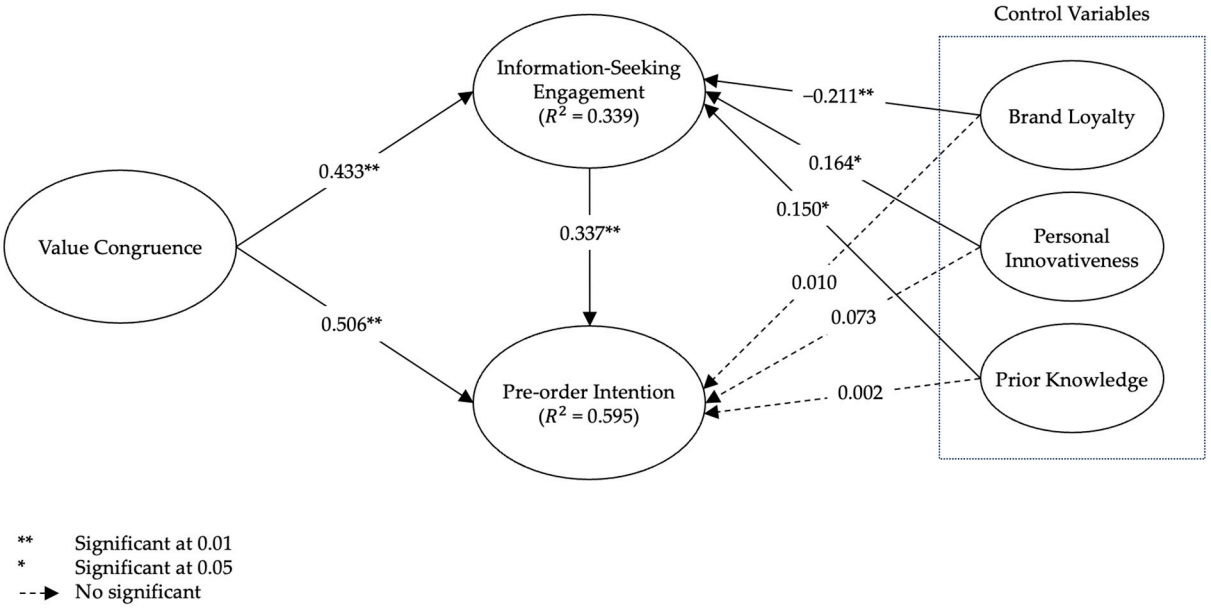


Figure 2. The estimated model: PLS results.

The Effect of Value Congruence on Pre-order Intentions and Information Seeking: The PLS results support H1 and H2, which indicate that consumers' value congruence has a significant impact on pre-order intentions and information-seeking. As predicted, the results showed that consumers' value congruence had positive impacts on pre-order intention and information-seeking engagement, respectively ($b = 0.528$, $p < 0.01$; $b = 0.494$, $p < 0.01$). Specifically, consumers' value congruence accounted for 33.9% of the variance in information-seeking engagement and 59.5% of the variance in pre-order intention with information-

seeking engagement. These medium and high R^2 values indicate that value congruence explained a relatively large amount of variance in consumers' behavioral patterns.

Information Seeking, Pre-order intentions, and Their Mediating Effect: The analysis results provided support for H3, which posits that information-seeking engagement will have a positive impact on pre-order intention ($b = 0.337$, $p < 0.01$). We also tested the mediating effect of information-seeking engagement on the relationship between consumers' value congruence and pre-order intention, as hypothesized in H4. To assess this mediation, we employed the bootstrapping procedure and calculated the variance accounted for (VAF), a method recognized for its robustness in mediation analysis [66]. The results demonstrated that value congruence had a significant indirect effect on pre-order intention through information-seeking engagement ($b = 0.146$, $p < 0.01$). The direct effect of value congruence on pre-order intention remained significant ($b = 0.652$, $p < 0.01$). To calculate the VAF,

$$VAF = \frac{Indirect\ Effect}{Total\ Effect} \times 100 = \frac{0.146}{0.652} \times 100 = 22.4\% \quad (1)$$

As a result, the bootstrapping results indicate that information-seeking engagement partially mediates the relationship between value congruence and pre-order intention, as both the indirect and direct effects are significant in our analysis [67], with a VAF of 22.4%, which falls within the 20% to 80% range. This finding confirms the partially mediating effect of value congruence on pre-order intentions via information-seeking engagement, supporting H4 [68]. Although the indirect effect size is modest, our finding is theoretically meaningful. It suggests that value congruence influences pre-order intention both directly, by providing immediate value-based justification, and indirectly, by stimulating information-seeking engagement that further strengthens decision confidence. In other words, consumers who perceive strong value congruence may not need to search for extensive information to justify their pre-order decisions, which explains the relatively moderate magnitude of the mediation pathway. Additionally, to further assess the substantive magnitude of the structural relationships, we examined Cohen's f^2 effect sizes, which indicate the change in an endogenous construct's explained variance (R^2) when a specific predictor is omitted from the model [69]. The results show that value congruence exerts a large effect on pre-order intention ($f^2 = 0.420$) and a medium-to-strong effect on information-seeking engagement ($f^2 = 0.232$); information-seeking engagement has a medium effect on pre-order intention ($f^2 = 0.186$). Taken together, these effect sizes suggest that value congruence is the primary driver of pre-order intentions in this context, while information-seeking engagement provides a secondary but meaningful contribution in the structural relationships. This is also consistent with the observed partial mediation, implying that perceived value congruence can motivate pre-order intentions even without extensive information search.

5. Discussion

Pre-ordering has become an increasingly popular strategy to launch new products. Pre-order strategies provide financial and marketing benefits for firms by allowing them to better forecast demand and market interest and increase early sales. They also enhance customer loyalty by providing consumers with exclusive access and early ownership before official releases. The pre-order rate has risen from 5% in 2010 to 20% in 2025 [70]; revenues from pre-orders have increased from $2.8 million in 2021 to $31.6 million in 2024, accounting for nearly 40% of total sales [71]. Across various industries, pre-ordering has been popular in e-commerce, especially for IT products (e.g., Apple iPhone, Sony PlayStation, etc.) [72,73]. With the growing popularity of pre-ordering as a new product launch strategy, this research investigates how and why consumers' value congruence affects their pre-order intention for forthcoming IT products.

This study has key findings. First, consumers' value congruence positively influences both their pre-order intention and information-seeking engagement. Second, our findings indicate that consumers' information-seeking engagement has a positive impact on their pre-order intention and mediates the relationship between value congruence and pre-order intention.

5.1. Theoretical Contributions

This study makes several important contributions. First, this study contributes to the literature on pre-ordering. Pre-ordering has emerged as a mainstream strategy across different industries (e.g., IT, fashion, beauty, games, etc.), particularly with strong adoption in e-commerce and IT products. Despite its rapid growth and popularity in practice, academic research has not kept pace with the current practices. Furthermore, the scope of existing research has been mainly focused on the operational aspects of pre-order strategies (e.g., pricing strategies, retail channel strategies) [12–14,29] or individual factors that affect consumer decisions [16,17]. However, consumers' pre-order decisions involve complex judgment processes under the conditions of limited product information. By highlighting the importance of value congruence between consumers and forthcoming products and by testing the underlying mechanism that leads to consumer pre-order decisions, this study goes beyond operational and individual perspectives, thereby advancing pre-order research.

Second, this study contributes to the literature on consumer judgment and decision-making. Prior research has viewed information search behavior as a rational response to uncertainty, which leads to subsequent purchase decisions [74]. However, during the pre-launch period, consumers make purchase decisions without experiential or diagnostic product information, which differs from traditional decision processes and warrants further examination. Our findings suggest that perceived value congruence fosters consumers' information-seeking engagement, thus increasing their likelihood of pre-ordering. By examining information-seeking engagement as a mediator, this study sheds light on how consumers are motivated to search for additional information and make pre-order decisions, enabling practitioners to develop more effective pre-order strategies.

Third, by examining purchase decisions and their mediating mechanisms during the pre-launch period, this study contributes to the literature on new product launches and promotion by examining consumer decision-making in the pre-launch period. During this period, firms attempt to persuade consumers to make purchases before the product's official release [75]. However, because consumers have limited access to product information at this period, it is critical for firms to understand the factors that stimulate consumer interest in forthcoming products. This study demonstrates that value congruence between consumers and products increases consumer motivation to seek additional information about the products, enhancing their pre-order decisions. Given the significance of successful new product development in sustaining firms' competitive advantages in the marketplace [76] and substantial risks and costs associated with product failures [77], our research suggests that value congruence is an important psychological factor for firms to consider. In doing so, it provides important insights for product and brand managers seeking to optimize new product promotion campaigns [78,79].

5.2. Managerial Implications

This study offers several valuable and actionable insights for firms in developing and managing pre-order strategies. First, our findings demonstrate that consumers' perceived value congruence positively influences both information-seeking behavior and pre-order intention. Because firms control the type and positioning of information released during the pre-launch period, firms should capitalize on these findings by actively communicating how their products align with consumers' core values in their marketing campaigns.

For example, instead of merely emphasizing functional attributes or technical features, firms may consider developing value-based narratives (e.g., sustainability, exclusivity, self-expression) that resonate with target consumers and integrate them into communication channels, including pre-order launch websites, email campaigns, or social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok), or mission statements. By releasing information in a way that first affirms consumers' values and then offers specific product information, firms may facilitate consumers' information-seeking engagement, thereby strengthening consumers' likelihood of pre-ordering.

Furthermore, given the positive effect of perceived value congruence on pre-ordering, this study offers valuable insights for new product promotion strategies, as well as for consumer segmentation and positioning. Firms may pursue a multi-segment marketing strategy, targeting more than one segment to reduce business risks and tailor their offerings [80]. By designing marketing campaigns in which target consumers' values closely align with the product's positioning, firms can more effectively appeal to their target consumers. For instance, by carefully understanding target consumers' lifestyles and core values central to their identities, marketers may position forthcoming products as a means to express consumers' personal values or characteristics, thereby driving information-seeking engagement and pre-order decisions. Specifically, small businesses that pursue a niche market can also benefit from these findings: by carefully identifying a niche market's core values, they can effectively prioritize their limited resources to maximize the likelihood of consumers' pre-order decisions.

Lastly, the current research provides implications for employing influencer marketing to promote pre-ordering. Influencer marketing has emerged as an effective way to promote new products due to the perceived authenticity of influencers and the established trust between influencers and their followers [81]. Hence, firms may identify opinion leaders or social media influencers who embody the product's positioned values to strengthen information-seeking behavior among their followers. Specifically, when consumers observe that influencers who share similar values review product details or endorse the product prior to launch, the established trust and value fit between influencers and consumers is likely to encourage followers' information-seeking behavior and pre-order intentions. Thus, firms may consider leveraging value-aligned influencer collaborations to enhance pre-order intentions.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations warrant acknowledgment, which point to opportunities for future research. First, this study focuses on IT products, specifically smartphones, to examine how perceived value congruence influences pre-ordering decisions. While this product category provides a highly relevant context for exploring pre-ordering, future research may extend this focus to other product categories, such as hedonic products (e.g., luxury fashion goods, video games). Given that the primary driver of hedonic consumption is emotional and experiential in nature [82,83], different psychological mechanisms may operate, potentially leading to different pre-order outcomes. Exploring how consumers respond to value congruence in hedonic products, and whether information-seeking motivation increases or decreases in such contexts, could deepen our understanding of pre-order decision processes across product categories.

Second, while consumers' prior product experience is limited during the pre-launch period, their prior experience with similar products may serve as an additional source of information that interacts with information-seeking engagement to lead to different pre-order decisions. Specifically, attributes of similar product categories may provide additional explanation for early adoption behavior. Thus, future research may explore whether and how similarities or differences in attributes across comparable products influence pre-order

decisions. Moreover, future research could investigate increasingly important dimensions of consumer value, such as sustainability orientation, ethical consumption, and social responsibility, to examine whether such value congruence amplifies pre-order decisions.

Third, while this study highlights the positive role of value congruence in shaping consumers' information-seeking engagement and pre-order intentions, it does not explicitly examine potential negative psychological effects arising from AI-enabled decision-making environments (e.g., Ref. [84]). In contemporary e-commerce settings, consumers are increasingly exposed to algorithmic recommendations and automated product information, which may reduce perceived control, autonomy, and agency. Prior research suggests that such loss of control can undermine trust and induce negative company evaluations [84], even when consumers' decisions are aligned with their preferences or values. Thus, feelings of psychological discomfort associated with automated mechanisms may attenuate the positive effect of value congruence. Accordingly, future research could explicitly investigate how perceived loss of control over AI-enabled systems interacts with value congruence to shape consumers' engagement, trust, and early adoption behaviors. In doing so, it may provide a more comprehensive understanding of consumer decision-making in AI-mediated pre-launch contexts.

Fourth, although this study conceptually distinguishes value congruence from self-congruence, we acknowledge a limitation related to our empirical measurement. Building on the broader tradition in the congruence literature and its shared theoretical roots [20,31,33,85,86], the operationalization of value congruence often incorporates self-related aspects (e.g., ideal or social self); value congruence and self-congruence are often operationalized in an overlapping manner [33]. Although our measurement approach is theoretically consistent with prior value congruence research and appropriate for our study context (i.e., pre-order decisions), future research should more clearly disentangle value congruence from self-congruence by enhancing conceptual precision and developing and validating more distinct value-congruence measurement instruments.

Lastly, this study used an undergraduate student sample. Young adults, such as undergraduate students, are considered the most active users of IT products; thus, the student sample provides a reasonable representation of the current research context. However, we suggest that future research validate and extend these results by sampling more diverse consumer segments. For example, older consumers may differ in purchasing power, risk perceptions, and decision heuristics and pre-order IT products for different motivations (e.g., price affordability, risk aversion). To further enhance the generalizability of our findings, we encourage researchers to replicate our conceptual framework across different consumer segments and cultural settings, which may also yield valuable segmentation insights.

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Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all respondents involved in this study. Participation in the research was based on anonymity and on a voluntary basis; the personal data of the participants was not stored.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on reasonable request from the corresponding author.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Appendix A. Survey Measures

Measure	Scale Items	Reference
Value Congruence	VC1. The image of this new smartphone would be similar to the kind of person I am. VC2. The value of this new smartphone would be highly consistent with my personal values. VC3. The value of this new smartphone would be a good fit with my personal values. VC4. People similar to me would own this new smartphone. VC5. I would have something in common with people who use this new smartphone.	[20,35]
Information-Seeking Engagement	ISE1. I plan to search for more information about this new smartphone. ISE2. I would actively search for information about this new smartphone before its launch. ISE3. I would devote considerable effort to gathering details prior to making a pre-order decision. ISE4. I would engage with multiple sources to learn more about this new smartphone.	[44]
Pre-order Intention	INT1. I would like to pre-order this new smartphone. INT2. I would pre-order this new smartphone when it is launched. INT3. I would actively seek out this new smartphone online during the pre-launch period. INT4. I would pre-order this new smartphone from the product manufacturer (Apple). INT5. I would recommend my friends to pre-order this new smartphone.	[16]
Brand Loyalty	BL1. I am willing to continue buying Apple products even if other brands are available. BL2. Apple would be my first choice among competing brands. BL3. I prefer Apple products over other brands, even if they are similar. BL4. I rarely switch to other brands from Apple products when buying this type of product.	[87]
Personal Innovativeness	PI1. If I heard about a new product, I would look for ways to experiment with it. PI2. Compared to my friends, I frequently change my product with a new product.	[30]
Prior Knowledge	Please circle the number of alternatives that best describes your knowledge of smartphone as compared to the average person.	[88]

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