THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE FACTORS INFLUENCING CONSUMER SATISFACTION IN SOCIAL COMMERCE

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ABSTRACT

Social commerce (SC) is an extension of Business to Customer (B2C) e-commerce where consumers can interact with each other to conduct online shopping activities and discuss their experiences and preferences on products and services. Virtually all of the previous research on SC focus on behavioural and purchase intentions. Although these studies have reviled promising findings, questions remain concerning what factors affect consumers’ satisfaction, which are yet to be answered. Therefore, this study aims to develop a theoretical framework using Trust and Social Influence theories to investigate the influencing factors on customer satisfaction in social commerce. Investigating the theoretical framework of this study would provide theoretical evidence and help businesses and individuals to better understanding the factors that affect consumer satisfaction in SC.

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INTRODUCTION

The twentieth century has seen enormous changes in the field of Information Communication Technology (ICT) and that change will continue into the future, as well. The growth of the Internet and the evolution of technology over the last several decades have led to the emergence of new ways of communicating, which are increasingly used as new forms of business transactions (Canavan et al., 2007). Most advances in communications and technology have been due to the advantages of the Internet, such as connectivity, interactivity, low cost and around-the-clock access. Harris and Dennis (2002) argued that the Internet has helped small size businesses compete with large corporations. With the development of the Internet, Web 2.0 appeared, enabling people to interact on the Internet (Hajli, 2013). Lai and Turban (2008) define Web 2.0 as a tool that transforms the Internet into a social environment and creates a platform, allowing people to interact and exchange information. Consequently, Web 2.0 creates a new stream for businesses to develop their interactions with consumers through Internet websites, which is referred to as ‘social commerce’ (Lai and Turban, 2008). Due to the development of Web 2.0 technology and social network operations, the new concept of SC emerged (Yang et al., 2013). The SC concept was first introduced in 2005 on the Yahoo website to represent the combination of shopping and social networking activities through social media (Rubel, 2005, Stephen and Toubia, 2010, Wang and Zhang, 2012). Furthermore, in 2011, Facebook developed the idea of SC and created F-commerce, which is a platform that uses Facebook’s facilities for purchase and sale transactions (Zhong, 2012). SC creates “pick lists” to allow users to review and comment on product lists (Wang and Zhang, 2012).

While there are different definitions for SC, there is no consensus on a single definition (Wang and Zhang, 2012). However, by reviewing the literature two distinctive terms, ‘social shopping’ and ‘social commerce’ can be identified. The difference between SC and social shopping is that SC connects sellers and social shopping connects customers (Stephen and Toubia, 2010). SC is the new wave of e-commerce, as it takes advantage of the interactive information technology structure. SC is an extension of business-to-customer (B2C) e-commerce, where consumers can interact with each other to conduct online shopping activities and discuss their experiences and preferences regarding products and services (Shen and Eder, 2009).

Liang and Turban (2011) claim there are some possible outcomes in SC that research intends to find, such as purchase intention, consumer attitude and consumer satisfaction. Many researches have focused on behavioural intentions and purchase intentions to provide a better understanding of how consumer behaviours are affected by SC (Liang et al., 2011, Hajli, 2012a, Hajli, 2013, Ng, 2013). Most of the existing SC literature focus on the consumer’s intention to buy and behavioural intentions (Liang and Turban, 2011).
Based on the above-mentioned arguments, there is a lack of research in the area of consumer satisfaction. Therefore, one of the suggested areas that requires more investigation is determining the factors affecting consumer satisfaction in SC (Liang and Turban, 2011). Thus, this research will step beyond behavioural and buying intentions of SC to investigate the factors that affect consumer satisfaction in SC.

LITERATURE REVIEW

THE ROLE OF CONSUMER SATISFACTION

Consumer satisfaction is defined as a post-evaluation regarding purchase decisions (Churchill Jr and Surprenant, 1982). Kotler (2000) has defined consumer satisfaction as a consumer’s feelings of either pleasure or disappointment resulting from a comparison between the perceived performance of a specific product or service and his or her expectations. Consumers usually seek a relationship between their needs and wants and their perceived evaluation (Parker and Mathews, 2001). Therefore, if the perceived performance is worse than expected, the consumer will be disappointed, and if the perceived performance is better than expected, the consumer will be satisfied. If the performance perceived by the consumer is equal to their expectation, they will be indifferent or in a neutral state (Lin, 2003).

A consumer’s buying decisions are measured by cultural, social, personal and psychological factors (Lin, 2003). In addition, three significant factors affect consumer satisfaction: consumer need, consumer value and consumer cost. A consumer need is the consumer’s desire to buy a product or service to satisfy a need (Parker and Mathews, 2001). Researchers found that consumers are driven by a desire to fulfill their needs and they are influenced by specific expectations (Parker and Mathews, 2001). Customer value refers to an individual’s judgement regarding what is necessary and essential for his or her life (Kenny, 1994). It shows an individual reflection of what is essential or valuable in life (Lin, 2003). The customer cost represents what the customer will pay for either a service or product that matches his or her desire and value (Best, 1997). Consumers are typically concerned with receiving something worth what they paid for, and that is a reflection of satisfaction (Lin, 2003).

ROLE OF TRUST AND CONSUMER SATISFACTION IN SC

Trust as a concept has been studied numerous times in different fields, such as economics, psychology and sociology (Kim and Park, 2013). For instance, in economics, trust studies have been focused on the expectations of interactions as well as weak exposure and acceptance (Beldad et al., 2010). In psychology, there are some studies focused on trust to identify personal characteristics, such as risk propensity and trust propensity, while in sociology, studies focused more on institutional aspects of trust, such as transaction safety and the use of new technologies (Das and Teng, 2004). There is no consensus on trust as a concept, as researchers from different fields define it from different angles (McKnight et al., 2002). For example, Mayer et al. (1995) defined trust as the expression for enduring beliefs from the opponent action. Doney and Cannon (1997) have claimed that trust is the confidence of someone against the other. Previous studies tested the effects of trust in online business (Doney and Cannon, 1997, Gefen, 2000, Jones and Leonard, 2008). In addition, Many companies have trouble gaining consumer trust (Kim and Park, 2013). Moreover, Some studies show that trust affects consumer online purchase decisions (Hajli, 2012b) and other studies show that trust plays the main role in consumer purchase intentions (Gefen, 2000, Kim et al., 2008). Therefore, trust is playing a main role in consumer’s purchasing intentions, buying behaviour, and purchasing decisions (Hajli, 2012b).

Trust involves some factors that might influence and affect a consumer in SC, such as a company’s reputation and transaction safety (Kim and Park, 2013). A company’s good reputation creates a strong relationship between consumers and SC companies by giving the consumers a high level of care and service quality (Landon and Smith, 1997, Jarvenpaa et al., 1999, Teo and Liu, 2007, Park et al., 2012). Furthermore, transaction safety plays a main role in trust by giving consumers a high level of security during their transactions in both e-commerce and SC, as there are no face-to-face interactions in online environments. (Cheung and Lee, 2006, Kim et al., 2008). Moreover, other studies found that word of mouth (WOM) and low prices affect trust in online businesses (Kim and Park, 2013, Kim, 2011, Mikalef et al., 2013). Kim and Prabhakar (2000) claimed that WOM communication among consumers has a great impact on consumer purchase intentions, which SCs present through social network sites (SNS).

There is a strong relationship between trust and satisfaction (Bauer et al., 2002). It is the company’s responsibility to satisfy its consumers’ needs and wants (Kennedy et al., 2001). Satisfaction is a favourable attitude shown by a consumer when he or she experiences desired expectations (Anderson and Sullivan, 1993). Anderson and Sullivan (1993) stated that satisfaction depends on the consumer’s initial expectation and the results obtained. Therefore, satisfaction is measured by what the consumer wants and whether he or she obtains
tangible aspects, such as web system security and delivery time, and intangible aspects, such as feelings of joy and the happiness or anger resulting from the purchase of a product or a service (Flavián et al., 2006). The consumer will be satisfied when high levels of trust, honesty and competence regarding the website are perceived (Flavián et al., 2006). Thus, trust is an essential element that affect the consumer satisfaction when they intend to buy from online website (Kim and Park, 2013).

SOCIAL INFLUENCE

The term social influence refers to the changes that occur in an individual’s attitudes, thoughts, actions, feelings and behaviours, resulting from interactions with a group or another individual (Ajzen, 1991; Friedkin, 2006). One of the characteristics of social influence is internalisation, and that occurs when someone accepts another belief and behaviour (Kelman, 1958). This is relevant to social networking and SC, as consumers participate online together to share reviews and recommendations (Ng, 2012). There is a strong relationship between online interaction and social influence in creating relationships between consumers regarding reviews and shared experiences (Wu and Wang, 2011). One of the measurements for social influence is to quantifying the social impact of the sender on the receiver (Latane, 1981). There are two types of social influence when a new product is introduced: normative social influence and informational social influence (Bearden et al., 1986). Normative social influence creates pressure on people to accept the new product because if they do not accept it, they will be considered “old fashioned”, regardless of personal preferences (Kim and Srivastava, 2007). Informational SC is a learning process that people can use before they intend to purchase, particularly when they know the experiences, recommendations and reviews of others (Kim and Srivastava, 2007). Numerous studies have focused on social influence in e-commerce (Kim and Srivastava, 2007) and few studies has focused on satisfaction in SC. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, it is important to determine how social influence affects consumer satisfaction in SC to have a better understanding of what factors affect SC satisfaction.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This research draws from trust and social influence theories. The trust theory studies the behavioural and computational trust among people, organisations, computers and networks (Gligor and Wing, 2011, Fehr et al., 2005). Castaldo (2002) found that there are four constructs related to the trust theory, and they are expectation, belief, attitude and willingness. A consumer’s trust level builds upon these four constructs, as it is essential for conformity to his or her behaviour. Previous studies in SC have emphasised the importance of trust as well as how it can influence consumer behaviour. Kim et al. (2005) argue that various constructs, such as reputation, cost benefits and safety controls, have great impacts on consumers regarding trust. Gefen and Straub (2004) tested several aspects of trust in online environments, such as trust in buyers and sellers, trust in websites and trust in products, to have a better understanding of individual behaviours.

In this study trust theory is used as a framework to investigate the relationship among consumers’ trust in SC, and Kuan and Bock (2007) claimed that a higher level of a customer’s trust leads to an increased intent to purchase products and services, especially online. In an empirical study (Hajli, 2012b) show that trust affects consumer purchase intentions and attitudes. In addition, Pavlou and Gefen (2004) claimed that trust has a strong relationship with an individual’s purchase intentions and WOM in online shopping. Therefore, trust can be used as a construct that affects consumer satisfaction. According to (Mutz, 2005), a consumer who has a successful online shopping experience usually has a high level of trust, and he or she will likely repeat the experience. Similarly, a lower level of trust makes a customer less likely to shop online. Since consumers need to interact under these changeable conditions, which are more numerous in online environments, they might apply different approaches to reduce this overwhelming density using methods such as trust (Gefen, 2000). For this reason, trust needs to be considered a priority for consumer satisfaction after using SC sites, as trust plays a key role in online interactions. In the research model of this study, trust is used as a factor to test the elements affecting consumer satisfaction. Based on the literature, it is believed that there is a significant relationship between trust and satisfaction in SC. The emergence of Web 2.0 can help customers to reduce their risk and increase social trust. Applications on Web 2.0, like customer ratings and reviews, would be a good solution to overcome this barrier. Evidently, interactions among the connected users on SNSs increase trust (Swamynathan et al., 2008).

The social influence theory studies individual social interactions with others from a behavioural and a technological perspective (Kelman, 1974). The social influence theory merges the social information processing theory and researches on the adoption and diffusion of communication technologies. Kim et al. (2011) argue that the social influence has an impact on individual social networking, and they discuss how it helps them recognise new information technology. Taylor and Todd (1995) classified social influence as an essential theory in understanding the use of information technology. There three main constructs for this theory, which are compliance, identification and internalisation (Kelman, 1974). Compliance is the act of an individual influenced by the opinions of the nearest people’s around him or her. Identification reflects an individual’s feelings of acceptance in society, and internalisation is the individual’s acceptance influenced by a group of members.
The social influence theory posits that groups have a great impact on individuals when they communicate together (Dholakia et al., 2004). Depending on the structure of the message and the context between groups, two characteristics affect individual behaviour (Loraas and Wolfe, 2006). First, it involves the belief that the individual thinks a specific behaviour is important and it involves when the individual is motivated to make a decision, resulting from another’s beliefs. Lewis and Feinman (1991) explain that others might influence an individual if they share the same level of beliefs and similar ideas.

Social relationships are a key element that differentiates SC from other forms of online commercial activities. Traditionally, the study of the social element has focused on social influence (Venkatesh, 2000), that is, how other people’s attitudes or opinions may affect an individual’s decision-making. Consumers need to test the sources they are going to use before they buy from social network sites to gain satisfaction. Consumers gain social support from different factors, such as recommendations, referrals, ratings and reviews. Therefore, social influence plays an important role in consumer satisfaction. In this study, the research model will include social influence as a factor affecting consumer satisfaction.

The theories of trust and social influence are applied to investigate the factors affecting consumer satisfaction. From previous studies, both theories show that an individual’s beliefs resulted from his or her behaviours in assigning specific attitudes. This research investigates trust and social influence as aspects affecting consumer beliefs and, therefore, his or her satisfaction. The research model of this study highlights the most important constructs that represent the characteristics of SC (communication, information quality, reputation, transaction safety, WOM and culture) in terms of trust and social influence towards consumer satisfaction in SC. It is claimed that communication is an important construct in SC, playing an important role in building consumer trust in e-commerce (Park and Kang, 2003, Moorman et al., 1992). In addition, information quality is an essential factor influencing consumer trust in online environments (Kim et al., 2008, Kim, 2011). Also, Jarvenpaa (2000) and (Doney and Cannon, 1997) claimed that an organisation’s reputation is a factor that influences consumer trust. Moreover, Hai-Hua and Du Xiaoyong (2008) claimed that transaction safety influences consumer trust in social shopping. Additionally, WOM has a great impact on consumer trust in online environments, such as SNSs (Kim and Prabhakar, 2000, Kuan and Bock, 2007). Finally, cultural differences affect consumer trust and the influence to purchase from e-commerce sites (Kim et al., 2011). Therefore, the research model represented the characteristics of SC factors influencing consumer satisfaction in SC.

**CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

The proposed research model (as depicted in figure 1) provides an operational relationships between the different variables. The current model is considered as an extension of Kim and Park (2013) study who employed Trust theory in delineating the relationship between social commerce and trust. Also, the model has greatly inspired by the social influence theory which is built to have an impact on how satisfied customers are with using social commerce sites. Such impact is supposed to be driven by both cultural aspects as well as the so-called word of mouth.

**FIGURE 1. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**
Oliver (1980) indicated that trust has a significant impact on consumer satisfaction. Geyskens et al. (1996) define consumer satisfaction as the measure of how satisfied a consumer is with a provided product or service. A higher level of consumer satisfaction is an indicator of a higher level of trust (Anderson et al., 1994; Zins, 2001). Companies must be aware of some factors to build consumer satisfaction, such as perceived value and trust (Anderson and Srinivasan, 2003). Gaining trust in SC sites will ensure consumers are satisfied with their purchase decisions. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- **Hypothesis 1.** A higher level of trust among consumers will result in a higher level of consumer satisfaction in SC.

There are three types of communication after the purchasing process, identified by consumers as either positive or negative, and they are represented by complaints or compliments, WOM and recommendations or warnings. Consumer satisfaction is usually related to positive communication (Swan and Oliver, 1989). Bhattacherjee (2000) indicated that social influence is an important factor that affects consumers when they use e-commerce sites. In SC research, the consumer’s post-purchasing experience evaluation needs more investigation, while more research was focusing on purchase intentions. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- **Hypothesis 2.** A higher level of social influence among consumers will result in a higher level of consumer satisfaction in SC.

There is a strong relationship between social influence and trust (Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998). Trust can build up in social network sites via social interaction between users, such as on Facebook (Dwyer et al., 2007). Consequently, the consumer will have a high level of trust when he or she receives the correct information from the surrounding people or from the people with whom he or she interacts on SNSs. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- **Hypothesis 3.** A higher level of social influence among consumers will result in a higher level of trust in SC.

Communication is one of the important key factors in enhancing trust. It is the process of creating and sharing information between consumers, either through formal or informal methods (Moon and Lee, 2008). SC sites provide various ways for consumers to share information, such as reviews, recommendations and ratings. Therefore, the proper form of communication improves the relationship and the level of trust between consumers and companies (Moorman et al., 1992). One of the features that the Internet can facilitate is communication between buyers and sellers, which can save time in an online shopping environment (Kim and Joo, 2001). In addition, communication plays a main role in online communities, and consumers who are likely to share their experiences and information, trust online shopping and online companies (Park and Kang, 2003). In SC, communications trust is essential for consumers to trust the organisations as they are exchanging experiences and information. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- **Hypothesis 4.** An increase in the level of communication among consumers has a positive impact on the level of trust in SC.

Information quality refers to the absolute, correct and most recent information presented by any website to different users. Kim et al. (2008) argue that in online shopping environments, consumers usually depend on the information provided by the website about a product or service due to limited information. Therefore, Fung and Lee (1999) claimed that information quality provided by companies has a direct impact on online consumer trust when websites provide correct and accurate information. In addition, when websites provide accurate and updated information about products and services, they become trustworthy organisations (Liao et al., 2006). (Kim, 2011) found that information quality is a key factor that influences consumer trust in SC. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- **Hypothesis 5.** The quality of information on SC websites has a positive impact on the level of trust in SC.

Doney and Cannon (1997) define reputation as when consumers believe in the company’s level of honesty and anxiety about other consumers. When a company has a good reputation or image, their consumers usually have a high level of trust in their operations (Doney and Cannon, 1997; Jarvenpaa, 2000; Park et al., 2012). In addition, companies that seek success must have a good reputation to gain consumer trust. In other words, consumers always share the reputation of a company and it plays a main role in increasing trust (Chen, 2006; Teo and Liu, 2007). SC site users are likely to consider the company’s reputation when evaluating his or her
level of trust before making any purchases of services or products. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- Hypothesis 6. An increase in the level of a company’s reputation has a positive impact on the level of trust in SC.

Transaction Safety: Cheung and Lee (2006) define transaction safety as the highest level of security that can be provided by SC sites in both transactions and the information related to it. Previous studies on e-commerce proved that transaction safety is an important element that increases consumer trust (Cheung and Lee, 2006, Kim et al., 2008). Koufaris and Hampton-Sosa (2004) claimed that e-commerce site users are commonly concerned about their online transaction safety. Moreover, online consumers always worry about their security and the privacy of their transactions because online shopping security problems are not the same as those involved in traditional shopping (Kim and Park, 2013). In the context of e-commerce, transaction safety is represented as a key factor that increases consumer levels of trust (Yoon, 2002). Consequently, the high-level transaction safety provided to consumers will increase their level of trust among SC sites and online shopping environments. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- Hypothesis 7. An increase in the level of transaction safety has a positive impact on the level of trust in SC.

WOM is defined as exchanging experiences and information between consumers to help each other in making purchasing decisions (Park et al., 1998, Kim and Prabhakar, 2000). Consumers are likely to hear about a product or a service rather than watching or listening to an advertisement (Park et al., 1998). Brown and Reingen (1987) indicated that consumers usually prefer to seek WOM before they purchase a product due to their trust in the people sharing the information. Kuan and Bock (2007) claimed that WOM is a key factor that influences a consumer’s trust in SNSs. SC sites facilitate WOM through SNSs in different ways, such as with Facebook, Twitter and blogs, and consumers are likely to trust the purchasing experiences of others regarding either products or services. Lee and Kwon (2011) indicated that consumers usually trust the experiences of others when considering a purchase decision. Therefore, the following two hypotheses are proposed:

- Hypothesis 8. An increase in the level of WOM has a positive impact on the level of trust in SC.
- Hypothesis 9. An increase in the level of WOM has a positive impact on the level of social influence in SC.

Culture: Swatos and Kivisto (1998) define culture as the shared characteristics of a specific group of people, such as behaviours, religion, food and way of thinking. As mentioned in (Hofstede et al., 2010), the six dimension of national culture are power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, masculinity, long-term orientation and indulgence. The most dimension related to trust and peoples recommendations in SC is long-term orientation (Ng, 2012). Hofstede et al. (2010) defined long-term orientation as the level of which member oriented to gain persistence, provision and rewards. Based on the definition, gaining persistence, provision and rewards depend on which culture consumers belong to. (Kim et al., 2011) suggested that users of SNSs from different countries have different attitudes towards these sites. Thus, consumers from different cultures has different social characteristics that affect their influence (Ng, 2012). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- Hypothesis 10. Culture has a positive impact on the level of social influence in SC.

CONCLUSION

The research framework developed for this study, especially when tested and refined by future work will help the academics who are studying the topic, and businesses using the social commerce sites and their customers satisfaction. From academic perspective, the study will add to the Social commerce research a framework that investigates the factors influencing consumer satisfaction. From the business perspective, businesses can implement the findings of this research in order to improve the consumer satisfaction which leads to improve the competitive advantages and achieve higher performance. This project explores the factors that affect consumer satisfaction in social commerce. The main objective of this study is to develop a theoretical framework to investigate the factors affecting consumer satisfaction in SC. Businesses can use the findings to improve the consumer satisfaction which can lead to improve the competitive advantages and achieve higher performance.
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