



RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE MEDIATING ROLE OF TRUST, ATTITUDE AND SATISFACTION ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL SUPPORT AND SOCIAL COMMERCE INTENTION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN SAUDI ARABIA

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, social commerce intention has become increasingly attractive and enhance by users of social networking sites that often received social support from contemporary users. This study is designed to test the influence of social support (emotional and informational support) as well as mediating effect of trust, attitude and satisfaction on social commerce intention among university students in Saudi Arabia. Thus, a framework that seeks to test these relationships is developed. Equally, the study emphasizes that the utilization of complimentary social network sites by university students, exerts a robust consequence on their social commerce intention. Accordingly, the study establishes that this relationship is mediated by trust, attitude and satisfaction. This paper includes supportive literature to corroborate the conceptualized model in the context of Saudi Arabia.

INTRODUCTION

The ubiquitous nature of social media in this contemporary time cannot be denied. In the recent time global village, internet has afforded many consumers opportunity to use social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and etc, without necessarily interact with one another physically (Lu and Yang 2011; Tiwari, Lane and Alam, 2016). This milestone is achieved through Web 2.0 applications that have helped to transfer the internet to a social environment through the introduction of social media which makes it possible for individuals to interact and generate content online (Lai and Turban 2008). As at 2013, Facebook was hosting 1 billion monthly active users while Twitter users have reached 340 million per month in the same year (Cheston, Flickinger, and Chisolm, 2013). In 2018, the number of social media users is 2.62 billion (Statista, 2018a), and it is expected to reach 3.02 billion in 2021 (Statista, 2018a). Social Networking Sites (SNSs) a representative use of Web 2.0 is the most discussed topic today and the center-nerve of e-commerce in today's technology driven environment, as they allow consumers to participate in social activities and connect on the cyberspace (Lu and Hsiao 2010; Chinomona, 2013; Hu, Kettinger and Poston, 2015). In Saudi Arabia, the number of transactions through online have increased by 100 per cent, from \$278

million in 2002 to \$556 million in 2005 (Al Riyadh, 2006). Currently, the transaction value in digital payment has reached \$977.46 per user, while in Saudia Arabia the number of transaction values in digital payment reached to \$13,704 million for digital advert in 2018 (Statista, 2018b). In addition, the revenue in the Social Media Advertising segment amounts to US\$128 million in 2018 in Saudia Arabia (Statista, 2018c). Previously, social media tools have gained ground rapidly and have been used widely in online business by Saudi Arabia. For instance, in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia occupies second position with 13 million users of the Internet and the highest Facebook users (5.9 million). However, although Saudi Arabia occupies the largest position in the retail market of the Middle East, online sales comprise only a small percentage of total retail sales (Khalidi et al., 2014). Thus, the use of social media to transact e-commerce is still low. To discover the reasons causing the slow rate of growth of e-commerce in Arab world and Saudi Arabia, many studies have been conducted. The main reasons often cited for the slow growth include poor ICT infrastructure, cultural issues, trust and privacy issue, absence of clear legislation, rules and procedures and legislation on how to protect the rights of all parties that are involved (Agamdi, 2008; Alrawi and Sabry, 2009). However, the amount of studies concentrating on social commerce in Saudi Arabia is inadequate (AlGhamdi, Nguyen, Nguyen, and Drew, 2012). Therefore, few studies used Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) or extend it to cover social support variables by integrating the TAM with a customer experience model (e.g.

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Hajli 2016). Hajli and Lin (2016) is amongst the pioneer studies that extend TAM to explain the role of social media. Their study is an attempt to cover this issue by developing a model that is comprehensive and can explain the factors influencing consumers' acceptance of and participation in social commerce within the Saudi Arabian context. Based on the previous arguments, this study proposes a conceptual model to understand the phenomenon of social commerce within the Saudi Arabian context. On another side, despite that social commerce has been widely discussed among many researchers, the studies that describe social commerce in terms of characteristics that stimulate its usage intention are limited (Stephen and Toubia, 2010; Weijun and Lin, 2011; Hajli and Lin, 2016). Additionally, many of the existing studies only focused on the analysis of the social commerce market (Kim, 2011), as well as the disparities that exist between social commerce and other forms of e-commerce, and the adoption of e-commerce (Hsiao, Chuan-Chuan Lin, Wang, Lu, and Yu, 2010; Lin and Lu, 2011; Bansal and Chen, 2011). Therefore, empirical evidence has revealed that only a limited amount of previous studies has examined trust within the social commerce context with special reference to important features of social commerce that can bring about trust performance, towards purchase intentions (Kim and Pak, 2013). Importantly, Gefen (2002) has argued that paucity of trust is one of the main issues inhibiting or making the customers to be reticent about the adoption of online purchases. This fact has been also reiterated by Jones and Leonard (2008). Since social commerce is a new form of IS and a growing set of activities, understanding those factors that can influence consumers' trust in this important platform is very essential (Kim and Pak, 2013). On another side, according to Friedrich (2015), of special interest to e-commerce companies today is determining which factors influence consumers' participation in social commerce. Because of lack of knowledge and dearth of studies that can aid the understanding of these emerging commerce technologies in social media, additional research efforts are urgently required to analyze and assess social commerce theoretically with the purpose of advancing the general comprehension of this expanding and important medium for both companies and individuals. The aim of this study is to identify the relevance of these factors in an online emerging market of Saudi Arabia. This study provide understanding in the phenomenon of social commerce in Saudi Arabia context by proposing conceptual framework of customers' intention to use social commerce, in trust, attitude, and satisfaction as mediating variables.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

**Social Commerce Intention:** With the global acceptance and recognition of SNSs and social media, social commerce is a new advancement in e-commerce which empowers consumers to generate content energetically on the Internet (Liang and Turban, 2011). Social commerce permits merchants to access various markets by taking advantage of social communication among customers (Hajli and Lin, 2016; Hajli *et al.*, 2017). Social media is an influential tool for content generation which distinguishes social commerce from e-commerce, and it introduces new business models in the electronic commerce area because of its extreme popularity (Liang and Turban, 2011). The attraction of SNS applications is a key factor in the advancement of social media (Liang and Turban, 2011; Hajli

and Lin, 2016). Effective social commerce aims to orchestrate a convincing customer experience where social communication are fully entrenched at every phase of the customer decision-making process, as argued by scholars (Huang and Benyoucef, 2013; Kim and Park, 2013). Since products have become technical in nature and increasingly complex, consumers are keen to gain recommendations (e.g., comments, ratings, and suggestions) and appropriate product information from others' experience and capability (Hajli and Sims, 2015). This kind of information is called user-generated content and is professed to be a more trustworthy source of information than conventional media (Hajli and Sims, 2015). To facilitate the consumer's timely and perfect buying decisions, user generated content can be produced and disseminated rapidly using several social interaction activities (Hajli and Sims; Hajli, Sims, Zadeh, and Richard, 2017). Consequently, the research of social commerce seems a significant frontier for consumer research.

**Linkages between Informational Support, Emotional Support and Trust:** The informational support is one of the dimensions of social support which at large could bring in warmth and understanding to the members of the community since such support is channeled towards satisfying the psychological needs of the members (Maslow, 1954). Informational support is regarded as the provision of messages in terms of advice, recommendations or knowledge that could assist the members of social community in solving their problems (Liang *et al.*, 2011). When such support is received, it does generate enthusiastic feedback and can assist individuals to feel relaxed by trusting other members and which could lead to continuous intention of using the social commercial media. Furthermore, when members of the community feel the socially supported, they reciprocate by sharing their own commercial information and recommendations as well (Crocker and Cranevello, 2008). Consequently, the frequency of information sharing has been found to enhance trust, (Liang *et al.*, 2011). On another side, emotional support is regarded as the provision of messages that involve emotional concerns such as empathy, caring, or understanding (House, 1981; Taylor, *et al.*, 2004). It is one of the dimensions of social support, which shows that members of the community are emotionally attached to one another by sharing their concerns and empathize with one another in certain situations and can solve the problems of members indirectly. As argued by Social exchange theory; when individuals perceived emotionally supported, they would reciprocate by developing some levels of trust, which could also lead to satisfaction and attitude (Blau, 1964; Kim, 2012). Therefore, if a user is supported by other users in this platform, the recipient of such support may feel obligated to reciprocate (Cheshire, 2007; Crocker and Cranevello, 2008). The reciprocating motivation resulting from the perception of emotional support encourages users to share their product knowledge, concerns and empathy in a social networking site (Liang *et al.*, 2011). Based on the above arguments, the hypotheses are hereby formulated as follows:

H1: Informational support positively relates to trust

H2: Emotional support positively relates to trust

**Linkages between Trust, Satisfaction and Attitude:** In consumer behavior studies, a lot of discussion has ensued about the causal-relationship of trust and satisfaction. Many authors believe trust is the precursor of satisfaction in an exchange relationship (e.g. Armstrong and Yee 2001; Flaherty

and Pappas 2000). For instance, Ratnasingham (1998) and Kim (2012) opined that trust determines satisfaction and which eventually leads to loyalty in electronic commerce. The trust has direct and indirect effects on a consumer's purchase decision and has a long-term impact on consumer e-loyalty through satisfaction (Kim, Kim, Kandampully 2009). It has also been empirically proved to impact on attitude towards behavior in e-commerce and this is likely impact in social commerce like SNSs. Moreover, several studies have proved that trust from online social activities can be transferred to attitude in terms of transactions on social networking sites (Han and Windsor, 2011; Leonard, 2012). Consequently, the hypotheses are hereby formulated as follows:

H3: Trust mediates the relationship between emotional support and attitude.

H4: Trust mediates the relationship between emotional support and satisfaction.

**Linkages between Satisfaction and Attitude:** Satisfaction must do with the ability of service provider to meet expectation of the customers in terms of product or service performance. When the expectation is met, the customer is satisfied, and versa. (Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman, 1996). In an online context, Eid (2011) proved that e-satisfaction is an antecedent of loyalty, and it is confirmed by several researchers (Chen *et al.*, 2010). In social commerce, the studies of Carlson and O'Cass (2010) and Yusliza and Ramayah (2012) found that consumers' evaluations of satisfaction with a web site have a significant positive influence on attitudes towards the site. Consequently, the hypothesis is hereby formulated as follows:

H5: Satisfaction positively relates to attitude

**Linkages between satisfaction, attitude and social commerce intention:** A large amount of literature has explained that satisfaction which may come in different forms such as recommendation may amplify intention to continue to use the sites (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006; Watts and Dodds, 2007). In fact, comprehending the intentions and the purpose why the consumers use the service or network on sites has become an important assignment for marketers since the attitude of consumers are linked with these perceptions (Gursoy, Spangenberg, and Rutherford, 2006). In a traditional platform, behavioral intention is regarded as the likelihood that an individual will engage in certain behavior, and it has been proved to be influenced by the level of satisfaction both in traditional and online settings (Ajzen&Fishbein, 1980). Hereby, it is logical to assume that when a person is satisfied with services rendered and formulate positive attitude towards social commerce, the possibly of developing intention to use the site will increase (Kim, 2013). Consequently, the hypothesis is hereby formulated as follows:

H6: Attitude mediates the relationship between trust and social commerce intention

H7: Satisfaction mediates the relationship between trust and social commerce intention.

Figure 1 illustrates the proposed framework of this study.

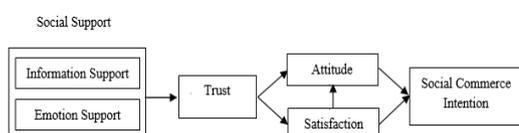


Figure 1. The Proposed Framework

## METHODOLOGY

This is a conceptual paper which is carried out based on extensive review of literatures, articles, thesis and books. The proposed research will be a cross sectional study in which data will be collected through questionnaires. The respondents of the study will constitute the university's students from four universities in Saudi Arabia.

## Conclusion

In the past, literatures reviewed has shown that both information support and emotional support have been instrumental in enhancing a robust social network sites especially among non-educational institutions. The proposed framework further shows that university student in Saudi Arabia will be among the greatest beneficiaries of a robust and efficient social network sites. This hypothesizes that trust, attitude and satisfaction mediate the relationship between social support and social commerce intention. Further, data will be collected to examine the hypothesized relationships. In ensuring systematic and scientific value of this research, the brief procedures and sampling techniques as discussed in the Methodology section are followed.

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