Social Commerce from a Theory of Planned Behavior Paradigm: An Analysis of Purchase Intention

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ABSTRACT

Social commerce (s-commerce) is linked to social shopping, social sharing, and described as focusing on sharing information with affiliate shoppers. Due to the increased popularity of private and public social networking websites, this empirical study extends Ajzen’s (1991) theory of planned behavior (TPB) to explain and predict purchase intention after interacting with an s-commerce website. Results indicate significant support for the theoretical paradigm from an s-commerce perspective. No significant effects emerged from the multiple linear regression conducted to determine whether the current study’s theoretical paradigm confirmed to the applicability of the theory of planned behavior. Using a path model as outlined by Ajzen (2004), the path analysis produced good support for the model in which purchase intention had a positive relationship with attitudes, subjective norm, and perceived control behavior. Analysis of attitudes, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, and intentions revealed subjective norm had the greatest influence on purchase intention. Implications for theoretical and practical analysis are presented, along with recommendations for future research.

Keywords: Purchase Intention, Social Commerce (s-Commerce), Social Networking Websites, Social Shopping, Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

INTRODUCTION

The World Wide Web presents a unique environment for a business model that extends beyond e-commerce to a social media paradigm conceived in 2005 known as social commerce (s-commerce). Social media is a web-based application that builds on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and allows for the creation and exchange of user-generated content. S-commerce refers to the conduct of e-commerce activities using social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) to aid in encouraging online purchases. Social commerce has been identified as “community plus e-commerce” (Weijun & Lin, 2011) and a social media business model is used for collaboration, acquiring trusted information, and influencing purchase decisions (Shadkam & O’Hara, 2013). As a platform that uses social media and elec-
ronic commerce to support online interactions and user contributions, s-commerce provides the online customers an interactive layer to enhance the shopping experience (Marsden, 2011). Users can locate products, get product advice from trusted contributors, interact with business representatives, purchase products after collaborative efforts, and provide product reviews. Users want to follow brands on s-commerce websites since they enjoy the benefit of gaining access to product information and special offers, as well as a chance to ask questions and provide feedback (Yang, et al., 2012). Social commerce is linked to social sharing and described as focusing on sharing information with affiliate shoppers on social networking sites, as opposed to traditional customer reviews that are shared with unaffiliated online shoppers (Liang, et al., 2012). A 2012 Nielsen report highlighted that 90% of consumers trust the opinions of people they know and 70% trust anonymous ratings and reviews posted online compared to only 33% who trust online banner ads (Nielsen, 2012). Connecting social media technologies and social influencers to encourage conversations and improve the shopping experience categorizes s-commerce.

Social shopping is a subcategory of s-commerce (Wang & Zhang, 2012) and merges online shopping with social networking. Social shopping is a web-based form of social media that allow individuals to participate in the promotion of goods and services in online marketplaces and social networking websites. Stephen and Toubia (2010) distinguished s-commerce as connecting sellers and in contrast, social shopping as connecting customers. Stephen and Toubia’s definition implies that s-commerce is business-to-business (B2B) and social shopping is customer-to-customer (C2C). Other researchers have used the terms social commerce and social shopping interchangeably (Liang, et al., 2012). A new perspective has emerged that delineates, yet associates the two terms. Social commerce is socially-based commerce. Commerce is a component of business that includes all activities, functions, and institutions involved in transferring products from producers to consumers (Merriam-Webster, 2013). The traditional definition of commerce includes analog (traditional brick and mortar retail commerce) and digital (electronic commerce) shopping. Therefore, the newly accepted definition classifies social shopping as a category of s-commerce and a component of the business-to-customer (B2C) and customer-to-customer (C2C) business models. Business-to-customer (B2C) and customer-to-customer (C2C) business models are activities in which customers seek information and purchase products using Internet/Web technology (Olson & Olson, 2000).

Ajzen’s (1991) theory of planned behavior is used as the theoretical framework to examine shopper’s the influence of s-commerce shopping experience on purchase intention. The theory of planned behavior works most successfully when applied to behaviors that are under a person’s volitional control. Volitional control is the ability to use one’s own free will. The concept of volitional control applies to an individual’s mental capacity to act freely and with an understanding of the consequences. Engaging in s-commerce activities is primarily a volitional action and therefore, the theory of planned behavior can predict purchase intentions.

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1985, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c) is a well-researched model that has shown to predict human behavior. As presented in the original theory of reasoned action (TRA), a central factor in the theory of planned behavior is the individual’s intention to perform a given behavior. Behavior is determined by explicit plans or motives to perform a specific act (Ajzen, 1985; Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005). Intentions are assumed to capture the motivational elements that influence a behavior. Expression of behavior must be under volitional control. Voluntary decisions precede enacted behavior (Ajzen, 1985). TPB examines three types of beliefs: (1) behavior belief—attitudes about the likely consequences of the behavior, (2) normative beliefs – beliefs about the expectations of others, and (3) control beliefs – beliefs about the presence of factors that may facilitate or impede performance of the behaviors.
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