

AN INVESTIGATION OF ADOPTION BEHAVIOR FOR
SOCIAL COMMERCE IN THE KINGDOM OF
SAUDI ARABIA

BY

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Information Technology

Kulliyyah of Information and Communication Technology
International Islamic University Malaysia

MARCH 2021

ABSTRACT

Social media has made a profound impact on the way goods and services are traded through online platforms. This new phenomenon has shifted power from sellers to the community of buyers, who rely on testimonies of other consumers prior to engaging in s-commerce transactions. Despite the buzz created by this virtual marketplace phenomenon, in countries such as Saudi Arabia, the growth of s-commerce usage is lagging behind the growth of Internet and mobile device users. The extant literature indicates that there is a dearth of sufficient empirical studies that present a nuanced understanding of the most significant external variables that influence behavioral intentions of users of s-commerce. Based on research gaps identified in this study, a conceptual framework was developed by leveraging support from the technology acceptance model (TAM). This framework posits that six factors: Trust (TR), Perceived Usefulness (PU), Recommendations and Referrals (RR), Website Quality (WQ), Perceived Risk (PR), and Social Pressure (SP) come together to influence behavioral intentions of s-commerce users. To test the hypotheses, survey data was collected from 411 respondents that are s-commerce users in various regions of Saudi Arabia. The data were analyzed using AMOS (v.23). The results revealed that trust ($\beta = 0.450$, $p < 0.000$), perceived usefulness ($\beta = 0.273$, $p < 0.000$), and social pressure ($\beta = 0.249$, $p < 0.000$), have a direct and positive relationship with behavioral intention. While, recommendations and referrals ($\beta = 0.214$, $p = 0.002$), and website quality ($\beta = 0.530$, $p < 0.000$), have a positive relationship with trust. Finally, perceived risk ($\beta = -0.096$, $p = 0.028$) was found to have a negative relationship with trust.

خلاصة البحث

أحدثت وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي تحولاً في المجتمع البشري الحديث. على وجه الخصوص، كان لها تأثير عميق على طريقة تداول السلع والخدمات من خلال المنصات عبر الإنترنت. ليس فقط في البلدان المتقدمة، ولكن حتى الدول النامية سريعة النمو، مثل المملكة العربية السعودية، تشهد أيضاً نمواً سريعاً في تبني التجارة الاجتماعية. أدت هذه الظاهرة الجديدة إلى تحويل القوة من البائعين إلى مجتمع المشترين، الذين يعتمدون على شهادات المستهلكين الآخرين قبل الانخراط في معاملات تجارة التواصل الاجتماعي. على الرغم من الضجة التي أحدثتها ظاهرة السوق الافتراضية هذه، في بلدان مثل المملكة العربية السعودية، فإن نمو استخدام تجارة التواصل الاجتماعي يتخلف عن نمو مستخدمي الإنترنت والأجهزة المحمولة. تشير الأدبيات والدراسات السابقة الموجودة إلى أن هناك ندرة في الدراسات التجريبية الكافية التي تقدم فهماً دقيقاً لأهم المتغيرات الخارجية التي تؤثر على النية السلوكية لمستخدمي تجارة التواصل الاجتماعي. بناءً على فجوات البحث المحددة في هذه الدراسة، تم تطوير إطار عمل مفاهيمي من خلال الاستفادة من دعم نموذج قبول التكنولوجيا (TAM). يفترض إطار العمل ستة عوامل هي: الثقة، والاهتمام المتصور، والتوصيات والإحالات، وجودة موقع الويب، والمخاطر المتصورة، والضغط الاجتماعي تتضافر لإثارة النية السلوكية لمستخدمي وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي. ولاختبار الفرضية، تم جمع ٤١١ إجابة باستخدام نذج العينات المجمع من مستخدمي تجارة التواصل الاجتماعي في مناطق مختلفة من المملكة العربية السعودية. تم تحليل البيانات باستخدام AMOS (الإصدار ٢٣,٠). وكشفت النتائج أن الثقة ($\beta = 0.450$)، السياسة المتصورة ($p < 0.000$)، $\beta = 0.273$, $p < 0.000$)، والضغط الاجتماعي ($\beta = 0.249$)، لها علاقة مباشرة وإيجابية. وفي حين أن الإحالات ($\beta = 0.214$, $p = 0.002$)، وجودة الموقع ($p < 0.000$)، لها علاقة مباشرة وإيجابية. وأخيراً، تبين أن المخاطر المتصورة ($\beta = -0.096$, $p = 0.028$) لها علاقة سلبية بالثقة.

APPROVAL PAGE

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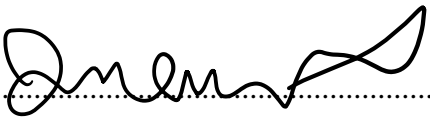
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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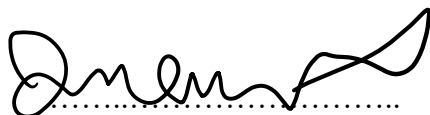
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude and thank all who helped and supported me during my Ph.D.

First of all, I thank ALLAH the Almighty from the core of my heart for guiding and inspiring me. All good and nice things that I have had in my life are due to His Help, Love, and Mercy.

I am forever indebted to all my family members for their unreserved love, sacrifice, and encouragement during my Ph.D. studies. I would like to pay my sincere thanks and also express my love to all of them.

I owe a deep debt of gratitude to my supervisor Prof. Dr. Mohamed Ridza Wahiddin, for his kindness, generosity, guidance, and encouragement throughout my study. This thesis would not have been completed without his unending support and patience.

I also thankful to Departments members and colleagues who supported me when I need. Colleagues in college are very helpers that push me on track. The Kulliyah of ICT also has given me a good environment as students to do my research smoothly.

Finally, I deeply appreciate the prompt services provided from International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). Additionally, I am extremely indebted to all participants who responded to my survey. Last, but not very least, I would like to thank everyone said a positive word that encouraged me. Without those people I could not reach this level.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CFI	Comparative Fit Index
CR	Composite Reliability
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
PEOU	Perceived Ease of Use
GFI	Goodness Fit Index
H1	Hypothesis 1
H2	Hypothesis 2
H3	Hypothesis 3
H4	Hypothesis 4
H5	Hypothesis 5
H6	Hypothesis 6
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IS	Information System
IT	Information Technology
KMO	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Test
PU	Perceived Usefulness
BI	Behavioural Intention
RR	Recommendations and Referrals
WB	Website Quality
PR	Perceived Risk
SP	Social Pressure
TR	Trust
SEM	Structure Equation Modeling
TAM	Technology Acceptance Model
TRA	Theory of Reason Action
TPB	Theory of Planned Behaviour
UTAUT	Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology
3G	3 rd Generation
4G	4 th Generation
AMOS	Analysis Moment of Structures Software
WWW	World Wide Web
US	United State
UK	United Kingdom
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
SNS	Social Networking Sites
e-commerce	Electronic Commerce
s-commerce	Social Commerce
Web 2.0	The second stage of development of the internet
Cronbach's α	Tests to see if multiple-question Likert scale surveys are reliable
SPSS	Software package used for interactive

LIST OF KEY TERMINOLOGIES

Percived Usefulness	Perceived usefulness of the s-commerce System
Trust	Trust of users regarding s-commerce systems
Behavioral Intention	Individual disposition towards usage of s-commerce
Recommendations	Influence of testimonies of other users
Website Quality	Perceived influence of the impressions about the website
Perceived Risk	Perceptions about usage of s-commerce with regards to privacy
Social Pressure	Influence of other individuals known to the user

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Social media websites such as Facebook, Youtube, LinkedIn, Orkut, Flickr, Twitter, Instagram, etc., are popular among internet users, especially in recent times with the availability of high-bandwidth access and seemingly infinite volumes of content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Yu, 2020). A significant portion of the human population across the globe are making frequent use of these social websites to learn, to seek entertainment, and to bridge relationships with people of similar opinions and taste (Singh, 2020). Recently, an interesting and a new stream of electronic commerce (e-commerce) has emerged as a dominant phenomenon, namely; *Social Commerce* (also referred to as *s-commerce*). This new phenomenon has grown exponentially in its' popularity, particularly in the deployment of social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook, Twitter, Wikis, LinkedIn, blogs, vlogs, and numerous other social platforms (Wang & Zhang 2012; Zhou et al. 2013; Hajli et al., 2015; Singh, 2020).

S-commerce is basically a broad term for a plethora of social media activities conducted through social media, that take place both offline and online environments (Wang & Zhang, 2012). S-commerce has combined activities that involves e-commerce together with social media enabling its users to interact, communicate, advertise, and participate in the online buying and selling of services and products (Bhattacharyya & Bose, 2020; Curty & Zhang 2011; Zhou et al. 2013). According to Zhou et al., (2013), s-commerce uses features that support users' participation in the sharing, selling, buying, marketing, comparing, and curating of products and services in online and offline communities and marketplaces.

When compared with basic e-commerce, whereby consumers use it to interact with online shopping websites as an individual stand-alone site, s-commerce usually involves the social interaction of online communities to enhance the online shopping experience (Marsden, 2010). The introduction of s-commerce has transformed the world of e-commerce from its' traditional form into a more user-driven and community-centered environment (Wigand et al. 2008). Liang and Turban (2011) assert that s-commerce has redefined and challenged traditional marketing strategies and vendor-push business models. On the other hand, Parise and Guinan (2008) considered s-commerce as a more social, collaborative, and innovative ways of performing a business. Therefore, s-commerce enables consumers to collaborate online, get advice from (trusted) peers, thereby sharing their shopping experiences to custom-made products or receiving price discounts (Friedrich, 2015; Leitner and Grechenig 2009). Moreover, s-commerce has also empowered individuals to be active in creating content on social media (Hajli, 2014a).

Considering the increasing importance and rapid evolution of the online market place driven by s-commerce, academic researchers have been drawn to the investigation of antecedents and outcomes of this phenomenon (Wang and Zhang 2012; Zhou et al. 2013). Most of the scholarly endeavors on this subject are found to be descriptive and primarily focused on its' theoretical foundations (e.g., Saundage and Lee 2011; Turban et al. 2010), its' historical evolution (e.g., Wang and Zhang 2012; Zhou et al. 2013), technological features (e.g., Curty and Zhang 2013; Huang et al. 2012), business models (e.g., Leitner and Grechenig 2007b; Leitner and Grechenig 2008), and design principles (e.g., Huang and Benyoucef 2013).

Some of the prominent names in the world of e-commerce such as Alibaba, eBay, Amazon, etc., have turned their attention to using social media web sites such as Youtube, Flickr, MySpace, Facebook, blogs and other social networking sites to help them extend their e-marketing footprint (Hajli et al., 2015). Some researchers argue that today's potential consumers are not merely attracted through the product information generated by the online vendors, rather, they are more cognizant of other people's recommendations posted on social media, before making their purchase decisions.

Although a few research studies have been conducted to empirically examine s-commerce adoption factors, yet, the findings of these studies are insufficient in presenting a nuanced understanding of s-commerce adoption behavior of users. For example, a few of these studies have focused on exploring the role of trust or website trust (Hsiao et al. 2010), trust towards the industry (Chow and Shi 2014), or community trust (Chen et al. 2014). Similarly, different sets of studies, looked at constructs such as consumers' intention of buying (Kwahk and Ge 2012; Lu and Fan 2014), sharing intention (Chen et al. 2014; Liu et al. 2013a), or intention to continue using social media for commerce (Jang et al. 2013; Liang et al. 2011). Due to a dearth of sufficient empirical studies related to s-commerce adoption behavior of individuals, relatively little is known about their intentions and usage behavior (Algharabat & Rana, 2020; Friedrich, 2015).

The primary aim of this research is to synthesize the role of different factors that affect the consumers' adoption of social commerce in a developing economy, Saudi Arabia. This empirical research is based on a hypothesized theoretical model showing the relationship between various independent variables (identified through a thorough systematic literature review) and dependent variable (s-commerce intention).

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The concept of social commerce is a relatively recent phenomenon that emerged from the increasing number of people who are engaged with social media as compared to other electronic and mobile commerce platforms (Wang & Zhang 2012). Since businesses have finally realized that their success in next-generation online businesses are rooted in their ability to leverage the benefits of social media; as a result, they are now revising their business models towards adopting the new concept of social commerce (s-commerce). To achieve greater economic value and enhance customer's participation, it is important to conduct significant research before formulating social commerce platforms (Huang et al., 2013). It is now recognized that, s-commerce provides an efficient platform where consumers can engage in online social interactions for buying and selling, allowing companies to reach out to multitude of community of consumers that promote their products often voluntarily through testimonies and feedback (Algharabat & Rana, 2020). Despite such phenomenal impact of s-commerce, there is relatively a scant amount of empirical evidence available that provides a finer-grained understanding of the factors that influence consumers' intention to adopt social commerce (Friedrich, 2015; Zhou et al. 2013). As a result, further investigation is warranted in determining the behavioral intentions of s-commerce consumers.

Social commerce is still in a nascent stage in the Arabian Gulf region, especially in Saudi Arabia (Abed et al., 2015). Although a few empirical studies have been dedicated towards investigating in the realm of e-commerce, such as the factors involved in the adoption of e-commerce (Al-Hudhaif and Alkubeyyer, 2011), adoption of e-commerce by organizations (AlGhamdi and Drew, 2012; AlGhamdi et al., 2013; Al-Somali, 2012), adoption of e-commerce by consumers (AlGhamdi and Drew, 2012; Al-Mowalad, 2012) adoption of e-commerce by SMEs (Abousaber, 2012; Adaileh,

2012; Al-Somali et al., 2011; Bahaddad et al., 2013), m-commerce (Al-Jabri, 2015) and internet usage (Simsim, 2011). However, there appears to be insufficient empirical research that focus on investigating the factors that influence the acceptance of s-commerce. With strong purchasing power, increasing social media and internet usage, approximately 400% increase in the past decade, and a fast-growing economy, there is huge potential for the success of s-commerce in Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, in the context of Saudi Arabia, there seems to be a dearth of empirical studies on s-commerce.

Considering the large-scale acceptance and social media usage, smart mobile, and social network sites, there appears to be a need to conduct an exhaustive empirical investigation into factors that influence s-commerce adoption in Saudi Arabia. Hence, the goal of this study is to investigate and determine the factors that influence the acceptance of s-commerce in Saudi Arabia.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Given the importance and widespread usage of social media around the world, there is a need to explore how significantly it influences an individual's online shopping behavior, and particularly in an emerging market such as Saudi Arabia. In light of the discourse presented in the problem statement, the following research questions and objectives are presented, that will form the foundation of this doctoral study.

1. What is the effect of Trust on Behavioral Intention to use s-commerce?
2. How does Perceived Usefulness of s-commerce influence Behavioral Intention to use s-commerce?
3. What is the relationship between Recommendations and Referrals and Trust towards adoption of s-commerce?

4. How does Website Quality influence Trust towards adoption of s-commerce?
5. What is the impact of Perceived Risk on Trust towards adoption of s-commerce?
6. How does Social Pressure influence Behavioral Intention to use s-commerce?

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Aligned with the research questions in the preceding section, the following research objectives are proposed:

1. To investigate the relationship between Trust and Behavioral Intention to use s-commerce.
2. To determine if Perceived Usefulness of s-commerce influences Behavioral Intention to use s-commerce.
3. To find out the impact of Recommendations and Referrals on Trust towards adoption of s-commerce.
4. To ascertain if Website Quality influences Trust towards adoption of s-commerce.
5. To determine if Perceived Risk influence Consumer Trust towards adoption of s-commerce.
6. To identify the relationship between Social Pressure and Behavioral Intention to use s-commerce.