



Acceptance of social commerce framework in Saudi Arabia



Zaryab Sheikh^{a,*}, Tahir Islam^a, Shafaq Rana^b, Zahid Hameed^a, Usman Saeed^c

^a School of Management, University of Science and Technology of China, Hefei, PR China

^b Department of Management Sciences, COMSATS Institute of Information Technology, Lahore, Pakistan

^c Department of Mathematics and Statistics, King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals, Dhahran, Saudi Arabia

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the current study was to examine the factors of online purchase intentions through social media websites in Saudi Arabia. The extended unified theory of acceptance and usage of technology (UTAUT2) with the addition of social support, social commerce constructs, and cultural moderators was applied. The data was collected from 310 university students in Saudi Arabia. Using PLS 3.0-SEM, the results revealed that performance expectancy, hedonic motivation, habit, price saving orientation, social support, and social commerce constructs have a positive association with behavioral intentions. These results further validate that facilitating conditions, habit, and behavioral intentions have a positive relationship with the use behavior. The moderating results of cultural dimensions (individualism/collectivism and uncertainty avoidance) have also shown the strong impact of behavioral intentions on use behavior. Technology acceptance has gained much attention in different areas but few studies have applied the UTAUT2 model in the social commerce context. The theoretical and managerial implications of this research are explained.

1. Introduction

The addition of Web 2.0 characteristics in electronic commerce websites, like content generation tools for the enhancement of user interaction, is called social commerce (Liang et al., 2011). E-commerce (e.g. Alibaba) and social commerce (e.g. Starbucks Facebook and Toms' Twitter) are distinguished in that the earlier includes conversation among members and communities, while the latter mostly puts emphasis on one-to-one interactions and on individuals to generate value (Huang and Benyoucef, 2013). Social networking sites (SNSs, e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter) and social media have basic Web 2.0 technologies which promote the acquisition of products through user communications (Liang et al., 2011). Buying is a social experience for many people, and they frequently want to get their friends' suggestions before purchasing. Social commerce is assisting people to purchase where they interact socially. Social commerce is the integration of social media in e-commerce websites, and it also integrates e-commerce functionality into SNSs. For online retailers, social commerce has become a serious concern affecting online business transactions (Li et al., 2013).

In this social environment, prospective consumers have access to information shared by other consumers through social interaction, thereby using social media to support them in their buying decisions, and this produces online social support (Hajli, 2014). Social support is defined as "the social resources that persons perceive to be available or that are actually provided to them by non-professionals in the context of both formal support groups and informal helping relationship (Gottlieb and Bergen, 2010). The

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: justzaryab@hotmail.com, zaryabsh@mail.ustc.edu.cn (Z. Sheikh), tahir@mail.ustc.edu.cn (T. Islam), shafaq_rana@hotmail.com (S. Rana), zadi124@gmail.com (Z. Hameed), usman.saeid@gmail.com (U. Saeed).

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escalation of online social support has been seen because of the supportive climate through social commerce constructs (SCCs) such as reviews, ratings, communities, forums, recommendations, and referrals (Hajli, 2015). The social interaction of consumers in a social platform about products and services form a rational view (Füller et al., 2009). A platform can be a place where consumers review others' opinions, rate products, communicate with others, share positive feelings based on interaction with others, recommend products and services, and participate in forums (Wang and Hajli, 2015). Social commerce plays its critical role via SCCs because a SCC provides a platform where consumers interact, and other consumers are affected by their social influence (Hajli et al., 2014).

The previous research on social commerce acceptance constructs is scarce with insufficient theoretical basis as argued by Hajli (2012) and Hajli (2014), the UTAUT2 model is more suitable in the context of the present study. This is because UTAUT2 is an extension of UTAUT, which has been ascribed as the most parsimonious, and comprehensive, predictive technology acceptance model (Venkatesh et al., 2003, 2012). Also, the UTAUT2 model explained 74% and 52% of the variance in behavioral intention and usage respectively in the work of Venkatesh et al. (2012). Moreover, UTAUT2 is proposed specifically for elucidating technology acceptance from the customer's perspective instead of organizational use (Venkatesh et al., 2012). In addition, the UTAUT2 has investigated the factors influencing user's acceptance of mobile learning acceptance (Huang et al., 2013; Kang et al., 2015; Slade et al., 2014), internet banking (Khan et al., 2017), mobile banking (Baptista and Oliveira, 2015), and electronic commerce (Escobar-Rodríguez and Carvajal-Trujillo, 2013) which shares related technological features with social commerce.

Therefore, the UTAUT2 theory has been selected as the theoretical framework for investigating the social commerce acceptance in the context of present study (Saudi Arabia). This follows Venkatesh et al. (2012) recommendation that future studies should apply UTAUT2 in different countries with different cultural backgrounds. This also follows the suggestion of Venkatesh et al. (2012) for future research investigations to examine the UTAUT2 model on different technologies. Moreover, other external variables (social support and social commerce constructs) have also been incorporated in UTAUT2 model, following the recommendations of Venkatesh et al. (2012) to incorporate other variables in the UTAUT2 model to check its explanatory power. Thus, the foremost contribution of the present study is the application of UTAUT2 framework on social commerce.

In this study, culture is introduced as a moderator in the conceptual framework to assess the cultural dimension of social commerce acceptance. Due to the exponential increase in globalization in business, culture has a significant role in business operations (Straub et al., 1997) and it affects people's technological adoption behavior. Scholars argued that studies that apply cultural values as moderators are analytically better to those that test only for country value effect (Baptista and Oliveira, 2015; Kirkman et al., 2006). The two dimensions of Hofstede's cultural variables, that is, individualism and uncertainty avoidance, are applied as moderators between behavioral intentions and use behavior as these two dimensions are highly related with our study. Also the UTAUT2 specific construct *price value* has been substituted with *price saving* as social commerce does not entail any cost for technology usage instead it provides series of benefits and cost saving options to consumers.

The purpose of this study is to examine the social commerce intentions of customers by validating the conceptual framework UTAUT2 in the social commerce context. Also, this is an investigation of how price saving can impact the behavioral intentions and the actual usage of SMWs for online purchases. The effect of social support and SCCs is also evaluated. The moderating role of culture is also investigated.

The growth of diffusion of social media platforms has been observed in Saudi Arabia at a larger scale, which is the strongest empowering feature to e-commerce acceptance in Saudi Arabia (Orloff, 2012). Several small as well as large companies and new ventures in Saudi Arabia have established their businesses and organizational profiles on social media websites such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter or other similar sites. In Saudi Arabia, as of May 2016, the number of monthly active social media accounts (i.e., those accessed within the past month) was 11 million, the number of monthly active Facebook users was 7.96 million, the number of monthly active Twitter users was 6.37 million, and the number of monthly active Instagram users was 5.41 million (Insight, 2016). Also, in Saudi Arabia, YouTube became the second most visited website with 2.9 billion views by the end of July 2015, trailing only Google. Before that, in 2012, Google revealed that Saudi Arabia ranked first globally in YouTube views per capita (Baghdadi, 2015). The latest statistics on YouTube shows that Saudis contribute more than 90 million views every day on YouTube (ALARABIA, 2016). Therefore, it is significant to study social commerce acceptance in Saudi Arabia.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses development

2.1. Overview of social media

The structure of the web has changed radically with the occurrence of Web 2.0 technologies to enable and extend the use of blogs, wikis, online communities, and social networks (Lai and Turban, 2008). As of 2016, there are 2.34 billion active social media accounts worldwide and the number is expected to reach some 2.95 billion approximately by 2020 (Statista, 2016). The worldwide revenue from social media in 2015 came to a total of US\$24.53 billion; whereas, the advertising revenue of social networks worldwide in 2015 reached US\$ 25.14 billion and is estimated to rise to US\$ 41 billion in 2017 (Statista, 2015). This reflects the importance of SMWs around the globe and their impact on e-commerce. The financial magnitude also signifies the importance of consumer social interaction with peers and sellers on SMWs. A variety of SMWs are available for individuals and companies; some of the most popular SMWs are discussed below.

Facebook is one of the world's most famous SNS, providing commercial features to their business users and their customers to take maximum advantage of online social capital (Liang et al., 2011). Facebook has approximately 1.71 billion monthly active users around the globe (Statista, 2016). Twitter, a micro-blogging website, is setting new records of daily users because of its innovative online and social commerce business model (Liang and Turban, 2011). As of June 2016, Twitter had 313 million monthly active users

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