



## Research Note

## The influence of peer characteristics and technical features of a social shopping website on a consumer's purchase intention

Xi Hu<sup>a</sup>, Qian Huang<sup>a,\*</sup>, Xuepan Zhong<sup>a</sup>, Robert M. Davison<sup>b</sup>, Dingtao Zhao<sup>a</sup><sup>a</sup> School of Management, University of Science and Technology of China, Hefei, Anhui, PR China<sup>b</sup> Department of Information Systems, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

## ARTICLE INFO

## Article history:

Received 19 February 2016

Received in revised form 25 July 2016

Accepted 24 August 2016

Available online 10 September 2016

## Keywords:

Social shopping website

Social commerce

Stimulus-organism-response model

Purchase intention

Shopping values

Socio-technical perspective

## ABSTRACT

This paper aims to reveal the influence of peer-member characteristics and technical features of a social shopping website (SSW) on consumers' purchase intentions. Following the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) model, this study operationalizes "stimulus" as website features and peers' qualities, "organism" as experiential shopping values, and "response" as the purchase intention of users. The research model is empirically tested with survey data from 313 real SSW consumers. The results suggest that similarity, benevolence and expertise of peer members in the community and the website's support for recommendations positively impact shoppers' perceived utilitarian value of the SSW. Moreover, users' perception of peers' similarity and benevolence positively affect their sense of social value of using the platform. Finally, both perceived utilitarian and social value predict individuals' consumption intentions.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

Social commerce (s-commerce), an evolution of electronic commerce (e-commerce) that highlights the role of online social networking in facilitating business, has gained popularity recently (Wang & Zhang, 2012). For consumers, s-commerce brings about a novel method to shop online, namely social shopping (s-shopping). It implies that consumers being connected by their personal online social network ties, via which they could discover, share, recommend and rate products, exchange shopping information, knowledge and opinions and gain access to making transactions (Olbrich & Holsing, 2011). The commercial value of s-shopping is widely recognized and new systems have been created that provide dedicated support for such activities, namely social shopping websites (SSW). An SSW is a type of online community that connects consumers and revolves around shopping-related interests (Olbrich & Holsing, 2011). Real examples are Mogujie.com (see Appendix B), Kaboodle.com and Polyvore.com.

The ongoing fever of social media indicates that s-shopping represents the core of future e-commerce opportunities. For academics, it should be one of the most crucial and challenging research subjects (Liang & Turban, 2011), which bears values of

great theoretical and practical significance (Wang & Zhang, 2012). However, studies undertaken to date have only covered a small number of issues in this regard (Curty & Zhang, 2013; Wang & Zhang, 2012; Zhang, Lu, Gupta, & Zhao, 2014). In the s-commerce field, research has centred on the issue of definition (Wang & Zhang, 2012) and consumers' intention to use or participate in general s-commerce activities (Liang, Ho, Li, & Turban, 2011; Zhang et al., 2014). Scholars are now appealing for researchers to investigate the more detailed aspects of s-shopping more deeply (Wang & Zhang, 2012; Zhou, Zhang, & Zimmermann, 2013). Particularly, little is known about how the activities that take place in an s-shopping environment contribute to effective commercial outcomes, i.e. transactions (Olbrich & Holsing, 2011; Yadav, Valck, Hennig-Thurau, Hoffman, & Spann, 2013). This issue is critical because it concerns the initial intention of creating such a business model: to facilitate buying and selling of products and services (Kim & Park, 2013). Stimulating transactions is a key feature of SSW that marks its identity and separates itself from general social networking sites (SNS) (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013; Liang & Turban, 2011). Moreover, practitioners share the concern of the economic value of s-commerce applications (Kim, 2013; Yadav et al., 2013). Take SSW operators for instance, the profits and incentives rely on the real transactions to which s-shopping activities lead (Olbrich & Holsing, 2011). Positive commercial outcomes of SSW cannot be realized if participants are merely sharing shopping information instead of engaging in actual purchases.

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [huangq@ustc.edu.cn](mailto:huangq@ustc.edu.cn) (Q. Huang).

Therefore, given the significance of s-shopping participants' transaction-based activities and the lack of theoretical and empirical insights on the issue, in this paper we explore the factors embedded in an SSW that may affect consumers' purchase intentions and the corresponding mechanism. Specifically, we adopt an environmental psychology perspective (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) and employ the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) model which offers a parsimonious yet structured method that allows us to examine how the SSW features affect consumers' internal value perceptions and contribute to their purchase intentions. The S-O-R paradigm has been extensively applied in online consumer behaviour research to reveal how human-computer interactions lead to purchase intentions (Zhang et al., 2014), thus it would allow us to capture the peculiar elements of SSW and build an integrated model to reflect how using this artefact lead to increased purchase intentions.

To develop the components of stimuli, we adopt a socio-technical perspective which was used in a stream of virtual community and social media research (Phang, Kankanhalli, & Sabherwal, 2009; Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2003). An SSW-based shopping environment is composed of social and technical components, with the former referring to the characteristics of participants and the latter relating to technical affordances of the system (Kling & Courtright, 2003). Thus both systematic cues and peer quality cues can affect an individual's inner perceptions.

Further, a key perception for customers which informs purchase intention is the value a consumer can gain from the shopping experience (Overby & Lee, 2006; To, Liao, & Lin, 2007). Since online shopping is mediated by a specific platform, the features of the system would shape consumers' value perceptions when using it. Normally, shopping value is assessed along two dimensions: utilitarian and hedonic (Childers, Carr, Peck, & Carson, 2002). Using an SSW for shopping, the utilitarian benefits that consumers are aware of depend on whether the efficiency, effectiveness and outcome of shopping are satisfying. Hedonic shopping value involves a diversity of non-functional evaluations, such as social, adventure, idea, role and gratification (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003; To et al., 2007). Specifically, SSW highlights additional socializing among consumers in their shopping process (Shen, 2012). Thus in such a condition, the crucial element of hedonism is social value, which derives from developing, extending and maintaining relationships with other shoppers and communicating and interacting with others (To et al., 2007). Hence, this study captures perceived utilitarian value and perceived social value to represent a consumer's critical cognitive perceptions of an SSW-based shopping experience.

As a result, a comprehensive research model reflecting the interrelations between social factors, technical factors, perceived utilitarian and social value and purchase intention was developed. The remainder of this paper will elaborate the empirical study in detail.

This research contributes to both literature and practice. Few s-shopping researchers have gone beyond usage or participation to investigate the purchase intention induced by a particular s-shopping system. Thus, we fill in this research gap by using the S-O-R framework to build a research model that explains the associations between s-shopping technical features, peer characteristics, users' value perceptions and purchase intentions. Moreover, to the best of our knowledge, this paper is among the first to tap into the critical experiential values that consumers perceive as being associated with using an s-shopping platform. In addition, the S-O-R model has been frequently applied in the traditional online shopping context. This work qualitatively extends the application boundary to the s-shopping scenario, a novel context that differs from previous shopping settings by nature, which we suggest is an instructive contribution. Besides, we add to extant understanding of the "S" and "O" dimensions by bringing in the particular

s-commerce elements and integrating their properties. In practice, our findings should be a reference for SSW managers to improve their operational strategies. Also, vendors and marketers can optimize their resource allocation according to the results of this empirical study.

## 2. Research background and theoretical foundation

### 2.1. Social shopping websites

An SSW is a type of online community that connects consumers and revolves around shopping-related interests (Olbrich & Holsing, 2011; Shen, 2012). It is dedicated to support social shopping activities ranging from product recommendation, shopping experience sharing to collaborative buying (Olbrich & Holsing, 2011; Shen, 2012). The appearance of an SSW's front page resembles that of an e-commerce website. It is filled with pictures of products carrying brief comments and hyperlinks to an information page with detailed consumer-generated product reviews. Table 1 lists the major features of an SSW based on the four-layer s-commerce design model proposed by Huang and Benyoucef (2013), including the *individual*, *conversation*, *community* and *commerce* levels.

A registered user of an SSW can create a graphical personal profile. It contains demographic information and more importantly, personality information regarding preference, taste and interest. After joining, users can post pictures and articles, similar to a blog, to share products and their shopping experiences. For example, "style" is an interesting and aesthetic model which allows a user to show a collection of items with a common theme, such as colour, pattern and occasion (Olbrich & Holsing, 2011). SSWs encourage relationship building among users. As a result of following and being followed, social networks are established and sustaining ties are ensured. Based on that, users can catch up with friends' updates about shopping and be involved in discussions. To foster conversations, the message box and board are embedded in the website, which could carry instant communications.

Beyond supporting interactions, an SSW additionally offers direct shopping assistance. For example, based on social data calculation for a specific client, the website is able to recommend matching products to the person (Rad & Benyoucef, 2010). In this way, discovering interesting things becomes convenient and effortless, especially for niche products (Phang, Zhang, & Sutanto, 2013). Most SSWs don't support direct transactions. Rather, they work as referrals by directing consumers to third party commercial websites, where the actual purchases occur (Curty & Zhang, 2011; Olbrich & Holsing, 2011). When consumers browse a product page, they can click on the hyperlink to reach the point of sale. Then the SSW benefits from the commissions (Kim, 2013).

SSW combines SNS and e-commerce but differs from both of them. E-commerce highlights effective business transactions, while SSW is oriented toward social networking, collaborating and information sharing, with shopping being a secondary focus (Wang & Zhang, 2012). Furthermore, e-commerce users are usually isolated, interacting with the platform and seller individually and using their own knowledge to make decisions. However, SSW promote connections and conversations among consumers, allowing for in-depth opinion exchange and bonding (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013). By leveraging the power of social media, consumers' shopping buddies are no longer restricted to their traditional social circles. Instead, they could meet a great many new partners who have shared shopping interests or tastes. Moreover, the essential commercial layer of SSW separates itself from general SNS activities (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013). Social activities on SSW are commercial in nature, which often lead to real transactions (Liang & Turban, 2011).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5110868>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5110868>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)