

Social commerce: A systematic review and data synthesis

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

E-commerce
Literature survey
Research directions
Research synthesis
Social commerce
Social media
Taxonomy
Web 2.0

ABSTRACT

Social commerce contributes multi-disciplinary knowledge concerning psychology, sociology, computer science, and marketing in business. Its development complicated due to various fields involved that range from arithmetic patterns to marketing management. In this study, we conduct a systematic review of social commerce research by synthesizing 407 papers from academic publications between 2006 and 2017. This study focuses on three overarching questions: (1) What is current social commerce research? (2) Which research methods have been used in social commerce? (3) What are some potential areas for social commerce research in the future? We delineate the various facets of social commerce – definitions, differences, types and technologies, challenges and benefits, models and frameworks – in an all-encompassing taxonomy that enables us to answering the first question. To solve the second question, we applied different methods and techniques. Finally, we offer guidelines on the directions for future research, and intend that this work will serve as a roadmap for understanding the research literature within the field of social commerce.

1. Introduction

Social commerce developed in tandem with the e-commerce evolution. It was introduced by Yahoo in 2005, and quickly became a means for adding value to commercial services through the use of customer engagement by major web companies, such as Amazon, Groupon and eBay (Wang and Zhang, 2012). In 2006, the first academic article appeared that explicitly used the term *social commerce*. In practice, the formal launch of social commerce was in 2009 when *Flowers.com* opened the first Facebook store (Busalim and Hussin, 2016). Statista (2017) reported that online orders referred through social media had an average value of US\$89 in the second quarter of 2016. By 2019, enterprise social networks are predicted to generate more than US\$3 billion in revenue worldwide (Statista, 2016).

Despite rapid growth and important influence of social commerce, academic studies of these phenomena are in an early stage (Huang and Benyoucef, 2014). Social commerce research needs a systematic way to classify the various contributions. Efforts to synthesize the social commerce research in an integrated broad-based body of knowledge have been limited, however (Shanmugam and Jusoh, 2014). To fill the gap, we synthesized current research on social commerce as a basis for creating a theory-based taxonomy in several related areas and propose a research agenda. We also propose a systematic method by adopting a synthesis and a taxonomy appropriate to study social commerce (Koufteros, 2015).

A synthesis with a wide-angled lens helped us to establish a better

understanding of social commerce. A synthesis from as many fields as possible can clarify issues and pinpoint the position of each domain on an integrative map of social commerce (Williams, 2014). Therefore, this article contributes to the social commerce literature by synthesizing past research to provide a comprehensive and structured list of elements: research theme, theories, research methods, and outcome measures.

A taxonomy is not only a neat way of leading to knowledge building and expansion, but is also a tool for dynamic and systematic storage, recall, sorting, and statistical analyses. It identifies gaps, current theoretical developments, and potential applications for existing theory (Eksioglu et al., 2009). There is thus a need for a social commerce taxonomy to be developed, employing a systematic approach, with a theoretical grounding that can be empirically tested for practical applications (Emamjome et al., 2014). Therefore, we contribute to research by developing the social commerce taxonomy with different facets: definition, types and technologies, challenges and benefits, models, frameworks, and the differences from other traditional concepts. These can be used by both researchers and practitioners.

Accordingly, the primary objectives are:

- (1) to synthesize the relevant articles from multiple elements that generate an overall understanding of social commerce; and
- (2) to present a taxonomy of the literature from several fields of study in order to identify the major knowledge gaps in the area of social commerce.

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To achieve the main objectives of this study, we propose three key *research questions* (RQs). Answering these questions can help the reader understand social commerce including its definition, types and technologies, the influence (challenges and benefits), models, frameworks, and the differences from other traditional concepts, explain research methods and mathematical techniques that have been used in social commerce, and detail potential areas for future research.

This research serves as a roadmap for research exploration on social commerce. It aims to improve the understanding of the state of the art of social commerce-related phenomena and to provide guidance to social commerce practice. This systematic review may offer directions for future research that will stimulate further interest in researchers and practitioners related to this emerging area.

2. Identification and collection of the literature

When employing a systematic and structured approach to identify relevant articles for literature reviews, two methods to collect academic publications have been used. One method was applied to the article which reviews the literature on *electronic word of mouth* (e-WOM) communication (Cheung and Thadani, 2012). The authors first selected a few academic databases using keywords. Then, they checked important journals to ensure there were no missing relevant articles. The other method is the conventional literature review approach to cross-check and validate the relevance of the initial set of articles (Webster and Watson, 2002).

2.1. Data collection

We searched for literature published between 2006 and 2017. The collected articles focused on academic contributions, such as books, theses, magazines, conference proceedings, as well as academic journals. We retrieved them from the following databases: Emerald, Elsevier, Wiley, Springer, EBSCOhost, Scopus, ScienceDirect, Inderscience, Google Scholar, IEEE Xplore, ProQuest, and Sage. Initially, the digital libraries, Web of Knowledge, Ingenio (university digital libraries), ACM Digital Library, and AIS Electronic Library, were used to find articles dealing with different aspects of social commerce. In this way, our literature search covered a broad range of academic publications. We retrieved those publications that contained the keywords “social commerce” and “s-commerce.”

To select all relevant articles, we manually examined each contribution regarding its title, abstract, subject terms where applicable, and full text with respect to its relevance for our research questions. The collected data were exported and parsed into a relational database for analysis. After removing duplicates, we obtained 407 unique records in total. Fig. 1 depicts the frequencies and trends of publications relating to social commerce.

After 2006, the term *social commerce* started to appear in publications (Rubel, 2006). As shown in the figure, the analysis of the overall publications revealed an upward trend from 2006 to 2017. Based on this increasing trend, the interest of the academic community in social commerce topics seems to be continuing to grow, contributing to its maturity and development.

2.2. Search process

The process involved a manual search of books, theses, magazines, conference proceedings and journal papers since 2006. The selected journals and conferences are shown in Table 1. The standard academic outlets of top journals, conferences were selected because they were known to be related to social commerce.

The table lists the main sources that have published two or more papers. By these procedures, a total of 155 journals and 69 conferences were selected for this research study. Among the journal publications, the journal containing most of the articles is the International Journal

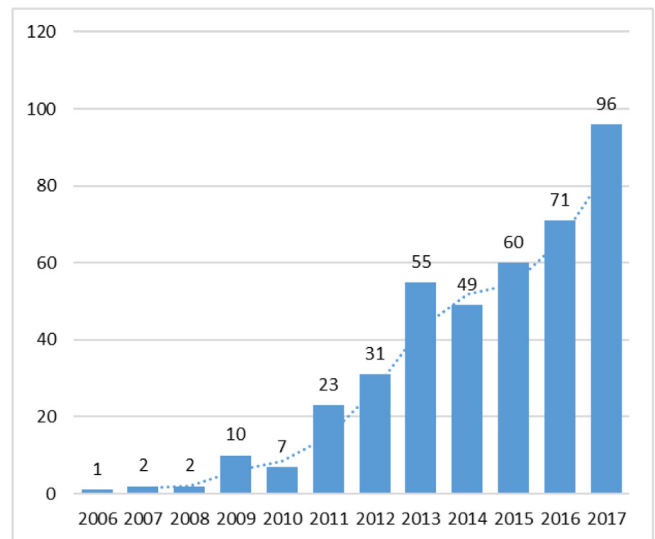


Fig. 1. Social commerce contribution trend from 2006 to 2017.

Table 1

Top journals, conferences related to social commerce publications.

Journal/Conference	Number
Proceedings of Pacific Asia Conference on Information Systems	20
Proceedings of Americas Conference on Information Systems	16
International Journal of Information Management	16
Electronic Commerce Research and Applications	14
Proceedings of Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences	10
Proceedings of International Conference on Information Systems	10
Proceedings of International Conference on Electronic Commerce	8
International Journal of Electronic Commerce	6
Technological Forecasting and Social Change	6
Decision Support Systems	6
Computers in Human Behavior	5
Proceedings of Australasian Conference on Information Systems	5
Information Journal	4
Internet Research	4
Information and Management	4
Journal of Business Research	4
Proceedings of European Conference on Information Systems	3
Proceedings of Wuhan International Conference on e-Business	3
Proceedings of Special Interest Group on Human-Computer Interaction	3
Digital Intelligence Today	3
Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research	3
Information Sciences	3

of Information Management (16 articles), following by Electronic Commerce Research and Applications (14 papers), 6 articles in the International Journal of Electronic Commerce, and 6 papers in Technological Forecasting and Social Change, as well as Decision Support Systems and the Pacific Asia Conference on Information Systems ($n = 20$) is very popular among these conferences referring social commerce, followed by Americas Conference on Information Systems ($n = 16$), Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences ($n = 10$) and International Conference on Information Systems ($n = 10$).

2.3. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The choice of these keywords *social commerce* and *s-commerce*, was to highlight publications of direct relevance to social commerce. However, other traditional social commerce-related terms (e.g., *social shopping*, *collaborative commerce*, *c-commerce*, *collaborative shopping* and *social media marketing*) were exclusive. In addition, we only considered those publication outlets that have the full body of their text in English. Duplicate reports of the same study were excluded, while several

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