



# Social desire or commercial desire? The factors driving social sharing and shopping intentions on social commerce platforms



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## ABSTRACT

In recent years, businesses are paying increasing attention to how to conduct commercial activities on social networking sites (SNS). This has also made social commerce an important issue for both scholars and practitioners. The aim of this study is to use the Model of Goal-Directed Behavior (MGB) as a theoretical foundation to empirically explore the role of social desire and commercial desire in driving users' social sharing and social shopping intentions on SNS as well as the antecedents to these two types of desires based on different goals of using social commerce. The results indicated that individuals tend to have a weaker desire to engage in commercial activities than to engage in social activities on SNS. However, compared to social desire, commercial desire is more influential to social sharing and social shopping intentions on SNS. Notably, the factors driving social desire and commercial desire may vary by goals of using social commerce. The results revealed that social-oriented factors, including anticipated positive emotion for social activities and perceived behavioral control for social activities, drive individuals to have a desire to engage in social activities on SNS. In contrast, commercial-oriented factors, including perceived behavioral control for commercial activities, anticipated positive emotion for commercial activities, and commercial attitude, are important drivers of commercial desire. The results also showed that social identity cannot arouse users' social and commercial desires on SNS. Finally, theoretical and practical implications were also discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

Recently, there has been a continuous growth in the number of users of social networking sites (SNS) and in their average SNS usage time. The high popularity and customer gathering potentiality of SNS has attracted firms' attention to the business models of SNS in commercial applications. The term "social commerce" has thus emerged. Social commerce has been listed by Globalwebindex.net as one of 16 major trends in 2016 (Mander, 2016) and defined as the most challenging field of research in the next decade (Liang and Turban, 2011). Social commerce involves using Web 2.0 social media technologies to support online interactions and user contributions to assist in the acquisition of products and services. There are two major models of social commerce. One is to add commercial functions into an existing SNS, and the other is to add social networking capabilities into an existing e-commerce site. Taking advantage of the power of social commerce, social-oriented SNS can offer new services to assist businesses in creating more profits from SNS. For instance, Facebook introduced a "Buy

Now" button to help businesses boost their product sales through news feeds, fans page, and instant messenger (Goodwin, 2016).

Although many SNS have begun to test or implement the "Buy" button, several reports indicated that most SNS users seem to have little interest in this feature. For example, an eMarketer's report published in Apr, 2016 showed that nearly 50% of Internet users had no intention to make purchases on SNS, and nearly 25% of Internet users had never heard of the "Buy" button on SNS (eMarketer, 2016). Moreover, several prior commercial services launched by Facebook have failed (Lo, 2014). Therefore, exploring factors affecting SNS users' social commerce behavior is of high importance. In fact, prior scholars have pointed out that user behavior is a topic worth exploring in the social commerce field (Baethge et al., 2016; Busalim and Hussin, 2016; Liang and Turban, 2011). Because social commerce has been a new trend in the development and application of e-commerce, it is difficult to measure users' actual behaviors of social commerce (Liang and Turban, 2011; Chen and Shen, 2015). As a result, many scholars have used social commerce intention as a proxy variable for the actual social commerce behavior (Chen and Shen, 2015; Hajli, 2014; Hajli, 2015; Hajli and Sims, 2015; Hollenbaugh and Ferris, 2014; Jun et al., 2014; Kang et al., 2014; Liang et al., 2011–2012;

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Zhang et al., 2014). They defined social commerce intention as “the degree to which a user is willing to share and request commercial information on social networking sites.” Chen and Shen (2015) further used social sharing and social shopping intentions to measure social commerce behavior based on the definition of social commerce intention introduced by Liang et al. (2011–2012). The former refers to the degree to which a user is willing to share shopping experience or word of mouth on SNS, while the latter represents the degree to which a user is willing to search for comments or word of mouth and making shopping decisions on SNS. Chen and Shen (2015) asserted that both social shopping and social sharing are commercial-oriented and can be regarded as two most important dimensions of social commerce. They also argued that it is crucial to investigate what factors may motivate SNS users to engage in social sharing and social shopping. Therefore, this study used social sharing and social shopping intentions to represent social commerce intention and explored the determinants of both types of intentions.

Liang and Turban (2011) identified three important attributes of social commerce, including social media technologies, social interactions, and commercial activities. Social interactions and commercial activities are two major elements of social commerce. Zhang et al. (2014) pointed out that one’s media choice depends on how media can satisfy individual needs, and one may choose to use a different SNS because of a different goal. In fact, studies have confirmed that consumers’ goals of using e-commerce sites or SNS vary greatly (Hollenbaugh and Ferris, 2014; Huang and Benyoucef, 2013). The goal of using e-commerce sites is to maximize shopping efficiency. However, the primary goals of using SNS are more social-oriented. Social commerce sites are integrated with the social features of SNS and the commercial features of e-commerce sites. This implies that users’ goals behind the use of social commerce sites may also include social purposes, commercial purposes or both types of purposes. Therefore, investigating the effects of different goals of using SNS on social sharing and social shopping intentions is necessary.

According to the Model of Goal-Directed Behavior (MGB) proposed by Perugini and Bagozzi in 2001, desire for attaining a particular goal is an important factor affecting one’s behavioral intention. A survey report released by Market Intelligence & Consulting Institute (MIC) shows that although 92.1% of Internet users would search for shopping information in online forums, only 26.1% of them would have an increased purchase desire after viewing product introductions in the forum (MIC, 2015). This indicates that desires play an important role in driving SNS users’ intention toward use of social commerce. As people’s use of social commerce may be driven by social or/and commercial goals, the influence of their desires to engage in social and commercial activities on their social sharing and social shopping intentions may vary. Moreover, given that developing effective marketing strategies to increase SNS users’ desires is considered important by businesses, exploring the factors driving an individual’s desires to engage in social and commercial activities on SNS is also a significant issue that needs investigation.

Previous studies have adopted several theories, such as social support theory, relationship quality theory, trust transfer theory, and stimulus-organism-response (SOR) model, to investigate the factors that influence social commerce intention (Chen and Shen, 2015; Hajli, 2014; Hajli, 2015; Hajli and Sims, 2015; Hollenbaugh and Ferris, 2014; Jun et al., 2014; Kang et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2014). Most of these studies focused on relational (Hajli, 2014; Lu et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2015) and trust related factors (Chen and Shen, 2015; Hajli, 2015; Hwang et al., 2014). Busalim and Hussin (2016) pointed out that in addition to application of technology acceptance model (TAM), social support theory, and theory of reasoned action (TRA), developing new theories to deepen and

broaden our knowledge about user behavior in social commerce context is an important challenge in the information systems and marketing disciplines in the coming decade. Based on this rationale, the aim of this study is to explore the relationship between the desires and SNS users’ social sharing and social shopping intentions as well as the factors would arouse their desires based on MGB theory. Given goal differences between social interactions and commercial activities, this study speculates that individuals’ desires to use SNS could be classified into “social desire” and “commercial desire”, and factors affecting use of social commerce, including attitude, anticipated positive emotions, and perceived behavioral control, may also be classified into two categories, namely social and commercial. This study also explores the possible different effects of social and commercial factors on both types of desires. In addition to the aforementioned factors, this study also evaluates the effect of social identity on social desire and commercial desire and further examines how social desire and commercial desire respectively affect social sharing and social shopping intentions on SNS. Finally, some theoretical and practical implications are proposed for scholars and practitioners.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Social commerce

#### 2.1.1. Definition

The term “social commerce” was first introduced by Yahoo! in 2005 (Curry and Zhang, 2011; Wang and Zhang, 2012). Yahoo! added a new “Pick Lists” feature into the functions of *Shopsphere*, allowing users to make and view product comments. So far, a number of definitions of social commerce have been proposed. Yadav et al. (2013) defined social commerce as “exchange-related activities that occur in, or are influenced by, an individual’s social network in computer-mediated social environments, where the activities correspond to the need recognition, pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages of a focal exchange” (p. 312). Liang and Turban (2011) identified three major attributes of social commerce, including social media technologies, social interactions, and commercial activities. Among these attributes, social media and commercial activities are the basic elements of social commerce. In sum, social commerce can be defined as any commercial activities completed in a social media environment where the consumer is able to connect and interact with others during the need recognition, pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages.

#### 2.1.2. Social commerce vs. traditional B2C e-commerce

Although most extant studies view social commerce as a subset of e-commerce, there are some differences between social commerce and traditional B2C e-commerce, especially in the aspects of commercial goal, customer connection, system interaction (Baghdadi, 2016; Busalim and Hussin, 2016; Chen and Shen, 2015; Huang and Benyoucef, 2013, 2015; Huang and Benyoucef, 2017; Turban et al., 2016), and marketplace (Turban et al., 2016). In terms of commercial goal, traditional B2C e-commerce is business process-oriented, mainly focusing on utilizing Web 1.0 technologies to support online transactions. The emphasis is on the maximization of shopping and transaction efficiency. Traditional B2C e-commerce websites are usually built with a powerful search mechanism, a one-click buying feature, specification-oriented virtual catalogues, and a history-based product recommendation mechanism, all of which can contribute to a higher shopping efficiency. Social commerce is social and customer-oriented. It builds on various types of Web 2.0 technologies to facilitate social interactions. Social commerce websites help consumers to participate in, collaborate, and engage in social activities, such as expressing

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