



## Investigating the drivers for social commerce in social media platforms: Importance of trust, social support and the platform perceived usage



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### ABSTRACT

This study sheds light on the drivers of social commerce in social media platforms. First, it explores the perceived characteristics of the social commerce vendor and investigates their influence on users' trust. Second, it tests the influence of trust and the platform perceived usage (using the Unified Technology Acceptance and Use of Technology Model 2) on social commerce intent. Data from a survey of Instagram users, within the Gulf Corporation Council countries, were collected online. Results show that reputation and price advantage have the strongest influence on trust, although those effects are weakened by habits. Contrary to expectations, social interactions with the social commerce vendor decrease trust. Similarly, product differentiation reduces trust. Nevertheless, this effect is negatively moderated by social support. Perceived ease of use of the platform, facilitating conditions, hedonic motives and habits increase social commerce intent. The findings of this research offer some insights on the mechanisms through which the s-vendor characteristics influence social commerce intent on social media platforms. Findings help businesses better understand the social commerce landscape and improve their marketing strategies.

### 1. Introduction

The use of social media has seen a tremendous increase in the last few years. Social media platforms have played a major role in content marketing by sharing information and opinions about products and services (Cha, 2009). Users are motivated by fulfilling emotional, social, functional, self-oriented and relational needs (Davis et al., 2014). These social media platforms are based on openness, cooperation, co-creation, trust and commitment between users (Constantinides, 2014).

Progressively, the use of social media evolved and many social media-based businesses have emerged, giving rise to social commerce. Social Commerce refers to “the delivery of e-commerce activities and transactions via the social media environment, mostly in social networks and by using Web 2.0 software. Thus, social commerce is a subset of e-commerce that involves using social media to assist in e-commerce transactions and activities” (Liang and Turban, 2011, p. 6). It enables businesses to reach global and distant customers and to build a good relationship with them (Park and Kim, 2014).

In spite of the infatuation for social commerce, the use of social media by businesses is still in its nascence. Only a few social commerce vendors (s-vendors) have made an excellent business out of it. The lack

of face-to-face interactions has resulted, indeed, in customers' suspicion of the truthfulness of the s-vendor and an increase of the perceived risk of online shopping (Kaiser and Müller-Seitz, 2008). The rapid growth of social media has made it also challenging to follow the trend and understand the operating of the different social media platforms to perform business tactics. For instance, there is a lack of information on how the perception of the platform usage, influences the purchase behavior, whereas there are endless social media platforms for different usages and unique characteristics (Hajli et al., 2017; Peters et al., 2013). Thus, there is an urgent need to understand social commerce shoppers' perceptions, trust and outcomes while considering the specificity of the social media platform.

In the literature review, it has been shown that trust plays a crucial role in stimulating online purchases (Wang et al., 2016; Cyr et al., 2010; Quelch and Klein, 1996). However, modest effort is made regarding the users' perceptions in a social commerce context and impact on trust. Much research has focused on social support and importance for social commerce (Lu et al., 2016; Zhu et al., 2016; Hajli, 2014a, 2014b; Liang et al., 2011). Nevertheless, few studies have shed light on the s-vendor characteristics perception (Kim and Park, 2013) and none has considered the platform perception by users mainly the acceptance to

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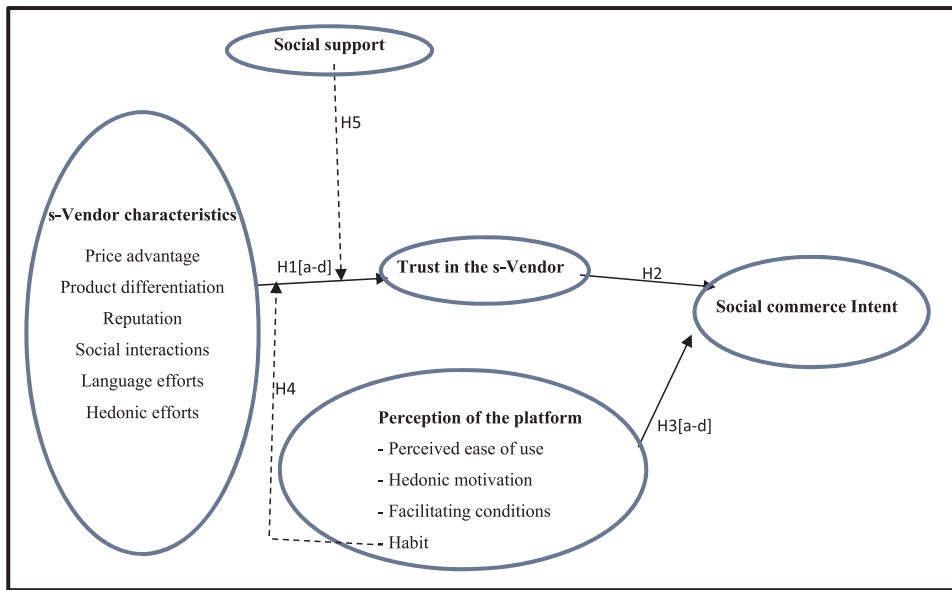


Fig. 1. The proposed research model.

adopt and use the platform for online shopping.

Consequently, this research aims to align the business strategy with the social media platform strategy to understand the mechanism of social commerce. For this purpose, it investigates the effects of the perceived characteristics of the s-vendors on trust and social commerce while drawing attention to the platform perceived usage and to the presence of others. The perception of the platform is approached through the UTAUT2 (Unified theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology 2) Model (Venkatesh et al., 2012). Accordingly, the research topic statement is as follows: *To what extent do the s-vendors characteristics influence trust and social commerce intent? What are the impacts of social support and the platform perceived usage?*

By investigating the mechanism of how the s-vendor characteristics influence social commerce, this research can help scholars to understand the role of social media for consumer behavior and marketing and help businesses improve their current social commerce operations.

To answer our research questions, this paper is organized as follows. First, it begins with a brief literature review of trust. Second, it develops the conceptual framework and details the research methodology. Third, it deals with the analysis and discussion of the findings. Finally, the conclusion covers the implications, limitations, and future research options.

### 1.1. Trust in online contexts

Trust is a concept studied in different disciplines such as philosophy, economics, sociology, management, and marketing (Corritore et al., 2003; Blois, 1999; Rousseau et al., 1998). Trust is a crucial issue in online shopping environments, but it is more important in social commerce platforms where uncertainty is higher due to the lack of face-to-face communications and the high level of user-generated content (Featherman and Hajli, 2015). Schurr and Ozanne (1985) defined trust as one's confidence on the exchange party's capability and willingness to establish the business' adherence to the relationship norms and keeping promises. According to Suh and Han (2003, p. 137), trust is the sense of trusting beliefs, referring to the beliefs that "one can rely upon a promise made by another and that the other, in unforeseen circumstances, will act toward oneself with goodwill and in a benign fashion". Ba and Pavlou (2002) posited that *trust is an individual's belief that an exchange will occur in a manner consistent with one's confident expectations*. In online contexts, trust is based on beliefs in the trustworthiness of an exchange party (McKnight et al., 2002). According to Lin (2011), trustworthiness is related to the perceptions of competence, benevolence,

and integrity. Compared to trustworthiness, trust involves other additional personality- and environment-related factors (McKnight et al., 1998). However, in marketing research, trust and trustworthiness are used interchangeably (Blois, 1999).

Trust is viewed as a unidimensional or a multidimensional concept (Gefen, 2002). Some authors conceive this latter as a multidimensional construct (Aiken and Boush, 2006; Bart et al., 2005). However, most researchers opted for a unidimensional perspective that seems to be quite satisfactory (Hajli et al., 2017; Pappas, 2016; Hajli, 2014a, 2014b; Pavlou and Fygenson, 2006; Everard and Galletta, 2005; Jarvenpaa et al., 2000).

### 1.2. Conceptual framework

Social commerce refers to "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 of recognition, pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages of a focal exchange" (Yadav et al., 2013, p. 312). To Kim and Park (2013), social commerce is "a subset of e-commerce and it uses SNSs for social interactions and user contributions to facilitate the online buying, and selling of various products and services. Researchers have identified customers as the main driving force in the social commerce movement. These customers are opinion seekers (Kang and Johnson, 2013). They are looking for more customized, informative and engaging shopping experiences (Zhou et al., 2013). They seek the best prices by engaging with social media platforms to make informed purchasing decisions (Kim and Park, 2012). That is where social commerce comes into play. Customers can seek and find the information they need in a social commerce platform through posted ratings and reviews, recommendations and referrals (Hajli, 2015). This additionally promotes a higher level of trust between the users (Ba and Pavlou, 2002).

As explained by prior research on interpersonal trust (Gefen, 2000), trust arises from the attributes associated with the trustee (Mayer et al., 1995). It is determined by the trustor's perception of the characteristics of the trustee. The proposed conceptual model relies upon those studies to postulate that trust has a mediating role between the s-vendor characteristics and social commerce intent. The following paragraphs describe in detail the suggested conceptual framework (Fig. 1).

### 1.3. S-Vendor characteristics

Kim and Park (2013) identified several social commerce

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