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Examining the Impact of Trust and Online Community Participation in Social Commerce

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ABSTRACT

The convergence of social networking and e-commerce is witnessing a surge in global popularity, particularly catalysed by the advent of Web 2.0 technologies. This confluence enables consumers to exchange their individual encounters with others via social interactions on platforms dedicated to social commerce. Notably, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, this facet has assumed heightened significance for safeguarding society. Within the milieu of social commerce (SC), trust stands as a pivotal linchpin influencing consumer inclinations toward making purchases. This research endeavour aims to consistently examining the impact of trust and online community participation in social commerce. Data for the study was acquired through a survey technique, garnering responses from 788 participants. The study adopted a Purposive sampling technique to select suitable individuals for the research. The target demographic encompassed members of various social networking sites, including but not limited to Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Analytical methods employed encompassed correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis. The findings of the study underscore the positive influence of trust on customers' inclination to make purchases. Moreover, factors such as age, gender, educational attainment, geographical location, occupation, monthly income, family size, and place of residence demonstrated a positive correlation with customer engagement within the social commerce landscape.

1. INTRODUCTION

The fusion of social networking and e-commerce, known as social commerce, has evolved as a significant advancement within the e-commerce landscape. This innovation seamlessly combines commercial and social interactions by incorporating social technologies into online shopping platforms

(Lu et al., 2016). Web 2.0 technologies, exemplified by platforms like LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter, form the bedrock of social media and social networking sites. They empower users to actively engage and contribute to the acquisition of products (Liang & Turban, 2011). Recent research conducted by Accenture projects a remarkable growth trajectory for social commerce, with its value expected to more than double from $492 billion globally in 2021 to $1.2 trillion by 2025. This indicates a growth rate three times faster than traditional e-commerce. In this context, consumers within the realm of social commerce possess the capacity to wield influence over the purchasing decisions of fellow consumers through social interactions (Shen, 2012). Notably, during events like the COVID-19 pandemic, social commerce platforms play a vital role in providing social environments that offer a sense of sociability to consumers.

Social commerce platforms provide a range of functionalities, including ratings, reviews, tags, recommendations, and user profiles, which contribute to bolstering social support and nurturing a dependable business environment. This becomes especially crucial amid the COVID-19 pandemic, as it fosters trust and dependability (Kim & Park, 2013). Consequently, consumers who rely on social commerce platforms often make purchasing choices guided by insights shared by their peers. Within the realm of social commerce, users explore a variety of channels to gather product information, such as peer endorsements, discussion forums, and online communities (Hajli & Sims, 2015). As the concept of social commerce gains traction, factors like social support and seller trust are elevated, with trusted reviews and ratings assuming a pivotal role in shaping consumer purchasing intentions and bolstering product sales. Various service providers and retailers, including industries such as insurance, airlines, banks, and companies like Samsung, have harnessed social commerce strategies to expand their businesses. However, some firms, like Walmart, have faced challenges in their social commerce endeavours, with concerns raised about privacy, trust, and information security (Liang & Turban, 2011; Kim & Park, 2013).

Trust is a fundamental element that allows customers to evaluate the reliability of information from diverse sources. It also serves as the bedrock for sharing information with others (Shi & Chow, 2015). Trust is nurtured through connections formed when information regarding products and services is exchanged within online forums and communities, thereby strengthening both trust and intentions to make purchases online. Prior research on brand trust has demonstrated that trust in a brand can extend from trust in other related entities, such as the brand community (Jung, Kim, & Kim, 2014). The theory of trust transfer posits that an individual's trust can be extended from a familiar and trusted source to an

unfamiliar one, provided there exists a discernible connection between them (Doney & Cannon, 1997; Stewart, 2003). This process operates through two key mechanisms: the communication process and the cognitive process (Stewart, 2003). The communication process entails direct influence from the trusted source during communication, whereas the cognitive process takes place when the trustor's confidence in the target stems from awareness of their association with the trusted source. However, existing research predominantly focuses on the cognitive process, leaving the communication process with limited empirical exploration.

Addressing this research gap, this study identifies consumer engagement as a pivotal variable impacting the communication process of trust transfer from credible third parties (such as fellow customers) to the brand. Consumer engagement encompasses the psychological experience of a consumer's interactions with the brand, its employees, other customers, and the broader business environment. Within the context of social media brand communities, consumer engagement reflects a strong inclination to partake in activities like information sharing, social interactions, word-of-mouth recommendations, and co-creation of value. Increased consumer engagement heightens the likelihood of encountering brand-related information from trusted sources, thus enhancing direct communication between consumers and these trustworthy entities (Habibi et al., 2014). Therefore, customer engagement emerges as a pivotal factor in the trust transfer communication process, where trusted entities exert a direct influence on consumers.

The primary objective of this study is to delve into examining the impact of trust and online community participation in social commerce. The ensuing sections of this paper provide an overview of prior research on social commerce and trust, followed by a description of the research methodology and its outcomes. Ultimately, the study offers recommendations and conclusions based on its findings.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Numerous studies have been conducted worldwide to investigate the interplay of trust and online community engagement within the realm of social commerce. These studies have shed light on various facets of this complex relationship. For instance, Shi and Chow (2015) explored the dynamics of trust in social commerce, its influence on company trust and electronic word-of-mouth intentions, and the impact of customers' prior transaction experiences on trust development. Their findings revealed that customers' prior experience did not affect trust development in Social Commerce Websites (SCWs).

However, consumers with more prior experience with a company were less reliant on information-based social commerce trust when forming company trust.

In a different study, Lu et al. (2016) explored the functions of social presence, trust, and the intention to make purchases in the context of social commerce. They emphasized that social presence, rooted in social technologies, plays a pivotal role in cultivating trustworthy relationships for online exchanges. They suggested that online marketplace administrators should closely monitor data outcomes from other online shoppers to create a more social environment in e-commerce. Sharma et al. (2017) delved into trust-driven constructs and context-specific antecedents affecting individuals' engagement in social commerce for online purchases. Their research highlighted that trust in the Internet and confidence in enterprises significantly impacted customers' trust and their inclination towards social commerce engagement.

In their study from Hajli et al. (2017), the authors examined the correlation between users' intentions to make purchases and their trust in social commerce. The results demonstrated that customers were inclined to engage in purchases when seeking information on social commerce platforms. The study suggested that enhancing the information-seeking process through improved search engine accessibility could boost purchase intent. Liu et al. (2019) probed into customers' reasons for social commerce purchasing intentions and whether social presence acts as a moderator. Their results indicated that customers' social presence moderates the connection between trust in website users and purchase intent.

Algharabat and Rana (2020) aimed to enhance understanding of social commerce in developing economies and its impact on online community involvement. Their research revealed that social commerce frameworks had a positive impact on enhancing social support, fostering trust among community members, and increasing social presence. Their recommendations included creating online communities on social networking sites to foster trust, social presence, and social support. Nadeem et al. (2020) studied factors influencing consumer commitment and loyalty in brand communities on social media. Trust was identified as a complete mediator between social presence, commitment, and loyalty. They suggested incorporating security features, trust-building measures, and clear policies to enhance trust within social commerce online brand communities.

Alkhalifah (2022) explored the connection between behavioural intention, social commerce trust, and antecedents. The study found that overall trust in social commerce platforms significantly improved

customers' positive behavioural intentions. This underscored the need to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach in trust-building strategies. Wang et al. (2022) discovered that trust significantly influences customers' purchasing intentions, with social constructs moderating this relationship. Trust positively affected consumer buying intentions, particularly within forums and groups. Their study emphasized leveraging social media as a strategy to enhance customer engagement in e-commerce.

The existing literature gap in India's context prompted researchers to investigate the role of trust and online community engagement in social commerce. Through their study, they aimed to validate the significant impact of these factors in this domain (Alkhalifah, 2022; Wang et al., 2022). This study sought to contribute to the limited research available and advance understanding in this area.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The aim of this research was to investigate the examining the impact of trust and online community participation in social commerce. To accomplish this objective, the study relied on primary data collection. The participants in this data collection were individuals aged 18 and above, who were regular users of platforms like Facebook, along with other social commerce users. Utilizing a survey methodology, data was gathered from a total of 788 respondents. These participants were selected using purposive sampling techniques. The primary data was acquired through a meticulously designed questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into three distinct sections. The first segment focused on capturing the socio-economic background of users engaged in social commerce. The subsequent sections delved into aspects related to trust and online community engagement. Respondents were prompted to provide their feedback on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 indicated strong disagreement and 5 indicated strong agreement. Out of the 800 individuals initially interested in participating in the survey, a substantial number of 788 respondents successfully completed the online questionnaire, furnishing valid responses. Subsequently, the collected data underwent analysis using statistical techniques. Both correlation and regression analyses were conducted with the aid of SPSS version 22.0, enabling the researchers to gain insights into the relationships and predictive effects within the dataset.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Online shopping is a fundamental human activity that addresses basic needs while fostering social and financial connections among individuals. It's important to note that gender does not play a dominant role in online shopping preferences. Both males and females exhibit heightened interest in online shopping, influenced by their specific requirements and shopping habits.

The demographic breakdown indicates that 47.21% of users were male, while 52.79% were female. Age is a crucial social factor, impacting a person's physical, mental, and experiential development, as well as their level of economic independence. The age distribution of social commerce users is as follows: 36.17% were between 18 and 30 years old, 48.86% were between 31 and 40 years old, 7.49% were between 41 and 50 years old, and 7.49% were over 50.

Education is a significant indicator of one's qualifications and is steadily increasing in prominence. In terms of educational attainment, 2.28% of respondents completed their schooling, 5.46% achieved a diploma, 13.32% completed undergraduate studies, 51.78% held postgraduate degrees, and 27.16% held professional degrees.

Income plays a pivotal role in shaping one's background and serves as a measure of their standard of living. The income distribution of respondents is as follows: 29.06% had an annual income below 10,000, 26.52% fell within the 10,000-20,000 range, 7.99% earned between 20,000-30,000, 3.43% had incomes between 30,000-40,000, and 32.99% had incomes exceeding 40,000.

The COVID-19 quarantine provided individuals with more time to engage with social commerce platforms. This period also led to significant shifts in social media behavior and usage patterns. Specifically, 27.7% of respondents spent less than one hour on social media, 45.4% spent between one to three hours, 14.6% spent between three to four hours, and 12.3% spent more than four hours on social media.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Sample Characteristics	No of respondents	Percentage%

Gender		
Male	372	47.21%
Female	416	52.79%
Age		
18 - 30 years	285	36.17%
31 – 40 years	385	48.86%
41 – 50 Years	59	7.49%
50 years Above	59	7.49%
Educational Background		
School level	18	2.28%
Diploma	43	5.46%
UG Level	105	13.32%
PG Level	408	51.78%
Professionalist	214	27.16%
Monthly Income		
Below 10000	229	29.06%
10000 – 20000	209	26.52%
20000 – 30000	63	7.99%
30000 – 40000	27	3.43%
Above 40000	206	32.99%
Time spent in social media		
Less than 1 hr	218	27.7%
1 – 3 hrs	358	45.4%
3 – 4 hrs	115	14.6%
More than 4hrs	97	12.3%

3.2 GENDER AND LEVEL OF CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT IN SOCIAL COMMERCE

The gender of the respondents and level of customer engagement in social commerce mean score, standard deviation and covariation are shown in Table 2 It is inferred from the table, 372 (47.2%) gender of the respondents was maximum which belong male respondents with the mean score of 75.14

and standard deviation of 14.92, next to 416 (52.8%) of the female respondents with a respective mean score of 72.83 and the standard deviation of 15.29.

Table: 2. Gender and Level of Customer Engagement in Social Commerce

Gender	Mean Score	Std. Deviation	Level of Customer Engagement			Total	Skewness	Kurtosis
			Low	Medium	High			
Male	75.14	14.92	92	155	125	372	-.239	.082
			52.3%	38.9%	58.4%	47.2%		
Female	72.83	15.29	84	243	89	416	-1.714	2.973
			47.7%	61.1%	41.6%	52.8%		
Total	**70.77**	**15.33**	**176**	**398**	**214**	**788**	**-1.025**	**2.034**
			100.0%	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**		

Source: Primary Data

Table 3. ANOVA

Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Remark
Between Groups	3761.035	1	3761.035	16.401	.000	
Within Groups	180246.174	786	229.321			**Significant**
Total	184007.208	787				
The Table F Value of 1, 786 degrees of freedom is = 3.853						

Showed from the above table that the percentage of a high level of customer engagement is the highest (58.4%) among the respondents are male and the same is the least (41.65%) among the respondents are female. The percentage of medium-level of customer engagement is the highest (61.15%) among the respondents are female and the least (38.9%) of the respondents are male. On the other hand, the percentage of low level of customer engagement is the highest (52.3%) among the respondents are male and the same least (47.7%) of the respondents are female.

It is shown from the ANOVA table, the calculated F value (16.401) is greater than the table value (3.853) with a degree of freedom (1,786) at a 5 per cent level of significance, therefore the result of the F test is significant. Thus, the null hypothesis (H_o) is rejected. It is inferred that there is a significant mean difference between gender and level of customer engagement in social commerce.

3.3 MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS

For this study, Multiple Regression Analysis was used to explain the relationship between customer engagement in social commerce. Customer engagement is the dependent variable and is used as the constant team in the model. The independent variables are used as the predictor variables which are fixed in the model system.

The below table shows a summary of the model, which provides information about the ability of regression lines to explain the total variation in the dependent variables.

Table 4. Regression model summary

Model Summary

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | Change Statistics | | | | | Durbin-Watson |
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	0.546	.298	.289	12.895	2.415	43.008	9	779	.000	2.415

a. Predictors: (Constant), Annual Family Income, Marital status, Number of members in your family, Nature of your family, Number of earning members in your family, Occupation, Age, Educational Background, Monthly income.

b. Dependent Variable: Impact of customer engagement in social commerce

The results of the multiple regression analysis are shown in table 3. The predicted variables combinedly explained about 54.6% of the total variance in the respondent's engagement behaviour in social commerce. The addition of the customer engagement factor increased the R^2 coefficient to 0.298. The analysis of variance for the model including all variables was F (10, 777) = 32.963 with a significance at P < 0.001.

Below Table is an analysis of variance (ANOVA) table showing how the regression equation explains the variability of the response variable. The result indicates that the relationship between the independent and dependent variables is highly significant. Thus, the regression model forecasts the outcome variables statistically. The table shows the regression coefficients and collinearity statistics of the model

Table 5. ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	54809.403	10	5480.940	32.963	.000b
	Residual	129197.805	777	166.278		
	Total	184007.208	787			

a. Dependent Variable: customer engagement in social commerce

b. b. Predictors: (Constant), Place of Residence, Gender, No of Family members, Age, State, Educational Qualification, Monthly Income, Occupation, Nature of Occupation, Marital Status.

Table 6. Regression Coefficients

Model	Coefficient	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	52.783	5.843		9.033	.000
	Age	3.743	.810	.207	4.619	.000
	Gender	-2.480	1.089	-.081	-2.278	.023
	Educational Qualification	-3.629	.669	-.216	-5.421	.000
	State	4.376	.464	.314	9.442	.000
	Occupation	2.552	.297	.336	8.600	.000
	Marital Status	4.807	1.338	.150	3.594	.000
	Nature of Occupation	2.579	1.300	.082	1.984	.048
	Monthly Income	2.590	.373	.281	6.941	.000
	No of Family members	1.885	1.174	.052	1.605	.109
	Place of Residence	-2.926	.610	-.177	-4.799	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Impact Covid 19 of Customer Engagement

Age was found to be a significant predictor of customer engagement in social Commerce (β= 3.743, t=4.619, p<0.001). The stated hypothesis is validated that "Age is positively associated with the impact of customer engagement in social Commerce. Gender is negatively associated with the impact of customer engagement in social Commerce and the regression coefficient is found to be a significant predictor (β=-2.480, t=-2.278, p<0.001).

The stated hypothesis is validated that "Gender is positively associated with customer engagement in social Commerce". Educational qualification is negatively related to customer engagement and the regression coefficient is found to be a significant predictor (β=-3.629, t= -5.421,

p<0.001). The stated hypothesis is validated that "Education qualification is positively associated with customer engagement in social Commerce". The state was found to be a significant predictor of customer engagement in social Commerce (β=4.376, t=9.422, p<0.001).

The hypothesis is predicted that "State is positively associated with the customer engagement in social Commerce". Occupation is positively associated with customer engagement in social commerce and the regression coefficient is found to be a significant predictor (β=2.552, t=8.600, p<0.001). The stated hypothesis is validated that "Occupation is positively associated with customer engagement in social commerce. Marital Status was found to be a significant predictor of the impact of covid-19 and customer engagement (β=4.807, t=3.594, p<0.001).

The hypothesis suggested that "Marital Status is positively associated with customer engagement in social commerce. Nature of Occupation is positively associated with customer engagement in social commerce and the regression coefficient is found to be a significant predictor (β=2.579, t=1.984, p<0.005). The stated hypothesis is validated that the "Nature of occupation is positively associated with customer engagement in social commerce. Monthly income was found to be a significant predictor of customer engagement (β=2.590, t=6.941, p<0.001).

The hypothesis is validated that "Monthly Income is positively associated with customer engagement in social commerce". No.of. Family Members are positively associated with customer engagement and the regression coefficient is found to be not a significant predictor (β=1.885, t=1.605, p<0.001). The stated hypothesis is not validated that "No. of Family members is positively associated with the customer engagement in social commerce. Place of residence is negatively associated with the impact of covid-19 and customer engagement and the regression coefficient is found significant predictor (β=-2.926, t=-4.799, p<0.001). The stated hypothesis is validated that "Place of residence is positively associated with customer engagement in social commerce".

4. RECOMMENDATION

Encouraging customers' intention to repurchase in social commerce hinges on two main strategies. Firstly, e-vendors operating in social commerce should actively promote factors that drive repurchase intention. Secondly, they should also work to mitigate the pull of alternative options presented by their competitors. While online vendors cannot directly control how customers perceive and interact with their website, the social aspects of social commerce platforms empower customers

with new capabilities. This study recommends that brand marketers and companies aiming to promote or sell products through image sharing on social commerce platforms should place emphasis on both design elements and providing pertinent information. By doing so, they can build trust with consumers. This is crucial, as consumers are often inclined to make purchases based on the visual appeal of products.

5. CONCLUSION

When users are deeply engaged and experience a sense of joy and excitement while using social media, coupled with receiving personalized advertisements tailored to their preferences, it significantly boosts the likelihood of them making online purchases. The recent surge in active social technologies and the widespread adoption of online social networks have made socialization a central activity on the Internet. The largest social platform boasts over 1 billion users, and this number continues to grow. Despite the emergence and popularity of new platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter, the trend towards socialization remains robust. Within this burgeoning social landscape, the phenomenon of social commerce has emerged. More and more companies are exploring the potential of leveraging online social networks for their commerce and sales endeavours. While socialization activities are primarily seen as sources of entertainment, the integration of commerce elements has been relatively gradual. However, when a user experiences complete immersion and delight while using social media, combined with receiving personalized advertising that aligns with their preferences, it can lead to impulsive buying behavior. The surge in social commerce usage has demonstrated its impact on engaging customers in this evolving phenomenon. This study seeks to conduct a comprehensive review of existing research on the pivotal role of trust and online community engagement in the realm of social commerce.

In addition, gender exerts a significant influence on behavioral intention, affecting various dimensions of trust, including trust in social commerce platforms and community members. Regression analysis further reveals that age, geographic location, occupation, marital status, source of income, and family size are all positively correlated with customer engagement in social commerce.

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