

Chapter 4

An Examination of Factors Associated with User Acceptance of Social Shopping Websites

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ABSTRACT

Social commerce is the latest development in e-commerce to combine the power of online social networking with shopping. While the adoption of information technology is well studied, new theoretical development is needed to account for the specific characteristics of social commerce applications and their interactions with the user. This study examines factors that are associated with user acceptance of social shopping websites, which are sites designed specifically to support social interactions while users shop. This paper augments the Technology Acceptance Model with constructs that enhance the specificity of the model to the social shopping application of social commerce, including social comparison, social engagement, enjoyment as well as perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness. The model was empirically tested, and the results provided strong support. Implications and directions for future research are also discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Social networking and Web 2.0 technologies continue to gain popularity under the media spotlight. Seeking to tap into the potentials of such technologies for e-commerce, business managers have begun to explore ways to com-

bine the power of social networking with online and offline shopping for better service and new business opportunities. Social commerce emerges as the latest innovation in e-commerce by combining online social networking with shopping. The distinctive feature of social commerce is its focus on supporting the social aspect of an online

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shopping experience, although there are emerging applications that support the integration of online social networking with offline shopping as well. In contrast, traditional e-commerce technologies tend to focus exclusively on improving the efficiency of online shopping, providing features such as product search, product categorization, and personalized recommendations based on previous purchases.

In 2007, Econsultancy published its “Social Commerce Report 2007” based on an online survey to Web-based retailers (Gregoriadis, 2007). While eighty percent of the 800+ respondents stated that customer rankings and ratings of products and services were a high or medium investment priority, two thirds of the respondents also stated that investing in social networking was of equal importance. The perceived benefits associated with these online activities among consumers included greater sales and customer retention and loyalty.

A variety of social commerce applications have been developed since 2006. Companies such as Procter & Gamble began enhancing their websites to allow consumers to share their experiences of products with other consumers online, and to create online shopping communities (Vranica, 2008). Additionally, the social shopping website emerged as a new e-commerce model, designed specifically as an online social networking community devoted exclusively to online shopping. Social shopping sites such as Kaboodle and ThisNext were developed to enable consumers to share shopping advice and recommendations with likeminded individuals. Another application example included Facebook’s 2007 introduction of a feature that allowed a user’s purchases on a participating website, such as Overstock.com, to automatically appear as an RSS feed on the user’s friends’ Facebook pages. This feature was later modified due to privacy concerns (Vara, 2007). Facebook has since moved to a revised model in which users can choose to opt-in to engage in social commerce activities such as sharing RSS

feeds or purchasing recommendations with their friends on Facebook.

It is worth noting that social commerce applications have not been limited only to traditional two-dimensional websites. While outside the scope of this research, it is useful to recognize that there is also a growing commercial interest in developing social commerce applications for three-dimensional, virtual environments such as Second Life, where an avatar (virtual representation of oneself user) can shop together with other avatars for virtual or real goods (Hemp, 2006).

SOCIAL COMMERCE AND APPLICATIONS

In this study, social commerce is defined as technology-enabled shopping experiences where online consumer interactions while shopping provide the main mechanism for conducting social shopping activities. These activities may include discovering products, aggregating and sharing product information, and collaboratively making shopping decisions.

Research in the marketing literature suggests that consumers have two distinct types of orientations when visiting Business-to-Consumer (B2C) websites: transactional and social (Mathwick, 2002). The transactional orientation focuses on completing the shopping tasks, while the social orientation focuses on relationship building. The provision of customer reviews and personalized recommendations (such as on Amazon.com) has been shown to be a significant feature that improve the online shopping experience (Kumar & Benbasat, 2006). Similarly, electronic word-of-mouth websites (such as epinion.com) where consumers can read the opinions and experiences of other consumers and provide their own comments and ratings on a wide range of products online have become popular (Lee & Lee, 2009; Park, Lee, & Han, 2007). Although these technologies enhance the online shopping experience, the focus of these technologies is primarily on efficiency.

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