

# Intention to Engage in Social Commerce: Uses and Gratifications Approach

*Completed Research Paper*

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## Abstract

As businesses are seeking to leverage the benefits of social networks, social commerce has emerged to achieve greater economic value by combining the power of online social networks with online shopping. Whereas the importance of social commerce is widely recognized in current literature, there are limited studies on factors that affect the intention of individuals to engage in social commerce. The online consumer behavior typology suggests that people engage in online activities to fulfill transactional, informational and social needs. Previous social commerce studies have investigated each of these needs separately. Thus, this study uses Trust theory and Users and Gratifications theory to develop a research model that covers all the online consumer behavior typology to explain intention to adopt social commerce. The study found that trust related factors such as privacy, security, word of mouth quality and competency of referees encourages individuals to engage in social commerce. Also, information quality, familiarity, the cool and new trend of social commerce, and subjective norms positively influence intention to engage in social commerce.

## Key Words

Social Commerce, Trust, Uses and Gratifications Theory, Subjective Norm, Information Quality, Enjoyment

## Introduction

The increasing popularity of social networking sites (SNSs) has given opportunity for businesses to explore new buying and selling methods to capture the economic value from online social interaction. Social commerce combines eCommerce with SNSs to facilitate the buying and selling experiences of customers and businesses by using Web 2.0 technologies (Kim and Srivastava 2007). Web 2.0 empowers consumers to receive information about product reviews, friend's preferences, and current trends (Hajli 2012) which influences the purchasing decision of a majority of buyers.

Despite rapid growth and the potential of social commerce, it is still an unexplored field (Huang and Benyoucef 2013). There are a number of studies that discuss the concept of social commerce and its application (Stephen and Toubia 2010; Marsden and Chaney 2013), examine the role of Web 2.0 in the development of eCommerce (Kim and Srivastava 2007; Liang et al. 2011), explore the differences between social commerce and eCommerce (Bansal and Chen 2011), and investigate design features required for the success of social commerce (Huang and Benyoucef 2013). However, there are limited studies about factors that influence the adoption and use of social commerce.

Previous studies related to the adoption of social commerce are either focused on trust in product recommendations (Hsiao et al. 2010), trust in social shopping websites (Hajli and Khani 2013), or the role of motivation and the ability of customers (Teh and Ahmed 2011). Extending the online consumer behavior typology (Mathwick 2002), previous studies have categorized online consumer behavior into transactional, informational, and social. However, studies related to social commerce do not offer a

systematic analysis of all three aspects of consumer shopping while studying adoption and use of social commerce (Shen 2012). Thus, we utilize theories of trust and uses and gratifications theory (UGT), a theory that explains why people choose a certain social media, to investigate the impact of these three needs on intention to adopt social commerce. As such, the research questions for our study are as follows:

RQ1: How do variables related to trust affect intention to engage in social commerce?

RQ2: How do different factors related to uses and gratification approach affect intention to engage in social commerce?

## Literature Review

Liang et al. (2011) analyzed how social factors such as social support, presence, and relationship quality affects user's intention to participate in social commerce. Such sense of human contact is required in a social commerce transaction (Hajli 2012) as people expect social activity and a friendly environment. The impact of subjective norms on online behaviors and intention to engage in social commerce transactions has been documented in previous literature (Cheung and Lee 2010; Cho and Yang 2012; Shin 2013). Also, trust in a social shopping website influences intention of users to adopt social commerce (Hajli 2012). Such trust in social shopping websites is heavily dependent on the level of perceived security and privacy of personal information shared to such sites (Bansal and Chen 2011). Kim and Park (2013) analyzed the impact of social commerce characteristics such as word of mouth (WOM) referrals and a transaction's safety on trust, with trust further leading to purchase intentions. Stephen and Toubia (2010) analyzed how social commerce websites provide extra information to the customers regarding products and services.

Despite recent attention to the social commerce, some of the dimensions of social commerce remain untested empirically, while others have been tested in different contexts such as of eCommerce and social networking. While previous studies have focused either on the transactional, informational, or social aspect of social commerce individually, this study goes beyond that by combining all the three aspects of social commerce.

## Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses Development

The research model for this study, as shown in Figure 1, employs two theories: Trust theory and Uses and gratifications theory (UGT). Despite lacking any specific theory clarifying customers' behaviors in terms of trust, Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) provides a context for explaining the relationship between intention, behaviors, subjective norms, and trust (Kim and Park 2013). Previous studies have relied on trust and thus TRA, to understand the relationship between trust and purchase intentions in a social commerce environment (Hajli 2012; Kim and Park 2013; Hajli and Khani 2013). The use of TRA explains the influence of security, privacy, and trust in the development of intention to engage in social commerce transaction. Also, TRA claims that behavior is the result of numerous variables such as subjective norms along with the result of one's intention (Ajzen, & Fishbein 1980).

The second theory, "uses and gratifications" suggests an approach to understanding why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs (Severin and Tankard 1997). Different researchers have utilized different predictors such as information quality, perceived enjoyment, familiarity or social presence to explain the motivation behind use of web technologies (Lim and Ting 2012). While UGT theory has been often used to explain the choice of social network (Raacke and Bonds-Raacke 2008; Park et al. 2009), it has not been used to explain why customers choose social commerce as their source of purchases and product information. As individuals use social commerce for hedonic, social as well as utilitarian gratification, the use of UGT to explain intention to engage in social commerce is reasonable (Li et al. 2013).

While, TRA suggests how subjective norms, and trust predict behavior, UGT asserts that uses and gratifications motives predict the media use. Thus, both the theories appear to provide conceptual variables that define the motives or intention of people's behavior (Curnalia and Mermer 2013) to engage

in social commerce transaction. Previous research has employed the theory of uses and gratifications in conjunction with the theory of reasoned action to study how trust, motivational variables and subjective norms influence, intention and behavior of creating social media content (Ham et al. 2014).

This study is about web-based social commerce site that runs through social networks. Since there have been very limited research on social commerce and antecedents to information disclosure intention in social commerce, we have used literature from the eCommerce and social network fields to further develop this field of social commerce. However, as can be seen from our research model, social commerce has more ingredients of Web 2.0 as it includes further interactions among customers than in eCommerce and has gratifications factor as in social networking sites. Unlike social networking sites, social commerce field is an interactive market that engages in purchase and sale of products and services. Thus, while it is crucial to go back and study eCommerce and social networking literature to understand social commerce field, they are different context altogether and need separate study (Sharma and Crossler, 2014). Thus, the constructs tested, though may be borrowed from previous literature requires further testing in this newer context of social commerce.

### **Factors related to Trust**

#### **Trust**

Trust helps to reduce the social complexity and uncertainty involved in the multiparty transaction (Lewis and Weigert, 1985). Many studies that have examined the effect of trust based on TRA have found a significant impact of trust on purchase intention (Pavlou and Gefen 2004; Gefen et al. 2003). As in any other online transaction, social commerce requires trust from consumers to perform the economic transaction (Hajli 2012). Trust reduces consumer's uncertainty and anxiety concerning the social shopping websites and enhances intention to engage in a social commerce transaction (Kim and Park 2013). While IS literature have competing conceptualization regarding dimension of trust construct, it is for the major part viewed as unidimensional construct as trust as a possibly multidimensional construct may introduce cross-loading issues (Gefen, 2002). Thus, trust has been used as unidimensional construct that influence behavioral intention to engage in social commerce.

*H1: Trust will positively influence behavioral intention to engage in social commerce.*

#### **Word of Mouth Quality**

WOM quality refers to the degree to which the WOM system on the retailer website is deemed relevant, trustworthy and useful (Davison 1997). Previous studies have shown that WOM systems have a positive impact on trust as it reduces the sense of fear among buyers (Awad and Ragowsky 2008; Kim and Prabhakar 2000). As WOM acts as a communication channel among users in a social shopping website, the WOM referrals quality positively enhances trust on that social shopping website in a social commerce setting (Kim and Park 2013). Thus, we posit:

*H2: Word of mouth quality will positively influence trust in social commerce websites.*

#### **Perceived source competency**

Competency is one of the factors that make the message acceptable (Berlo et al., 1969). In the communication literature, it is widely recognized that perceived competence of the source largely determines if the message can be trusted to be true or important in any sense (Hovland and Weiss 1951). A user who is perceived to be knowledgeable of that good or service is considered more seriously when considering advice related to it. Previous literature has shown that perceived source competence positively influences trust (Selnes 1998). Thus, we hypothesize:

*H3: Perceived source competency will positively influence trust in social commerce websites.*

#### **Perceived Security and Privacy**

Perceived security is the user's belief that his personal information will not be viewed, captured, and manipulated by unauthorized parties (Flavián and Guinaliu 2006). In social commerce transactions a number of security concerns can be present as numerous third parties wait to collect personal

information. While a higher security concern in a website lowers trust (Bansal and Chen 2011), higher perceived security increases the trust (Shin 2010). Thus, we hypothesize:

*H4: Perceived security will positively influence trust in Social commerce.*

Privacy is the ability of the user's to have control over how their personal information would be used by others (Metzger 2004). In social networks and media, perceived privacy implies the perception of the user that his information would be limited to the selected recipients and the confidence about its possible uses (Dwyer and Hiltz 2008). A user who perceives that the information provided on social commerce would remain private is more willing to transact with the social commerce websites. This perception of privacy increases the level of trust the users have on the social media and online website (Bansal and Chen 2011; Shin 2010). Thus, we posit:

*H5: Perceived Privacy will positively influence trust in social commerce.*

## **Uses and Gratifications Approach**

### **Social Presence**

Social presence allows individuals to feel warmth, connection and human sensitivity and thus, are an influential factor predicting individuals intention towards various Information Systems (IS) usage such as social networks (Cheung et al. 2011), and online shopping (Shen 2012). When a user believes that a social commerce website has social presence, it increases the level of gratification in using such social media (Shen 2012). Thus, we suggest:

*H6: Social Presence will positively influence behavioral intention to engage in social commerce.*

### **Familiarity**

The increasing knowledge about the surrounding and the system reduces the level of uncertainty about the environment (Luhmann 2000). When a social network is familiar to users, they perceive themselves to have the confidence about the environment. UGT posits that familiarity allows people to scan their environment and makes them goal oriented (O'Donohoe 1994; Lain 1986) which affects their confidence to engage in social media. A familiar situation encourages individuals to engage and use social commerce. Thus, we posit:

*H7: Familiarity will positively influence intention to engage in social commerce.*

### **Perceived Enjoyment**

Perceived enjoyment, in the social media context, can be defined as the degree to which a user believes that using a social media and network to communicate with other users will increase his sense of enjoyment and pleasure (Han and Windsor 2011). Perceived enjoyment is considered an important variable for individuals to use hedonic IS (Ryan and Deci 2000), such as SNSs (Xu et al. 2012). Perceived enjoyment brings fun and gratification to interactive commerce and thus, it positively influences intention to engage in it (Yu et al. 2005). Thus, we hypothesize:

*H8: Perceived enjoyment will positively influence intention to engage in social commerce.*

### **Cool and New Trend**

Cool and new trend is another UGT approach that defines why people choose a certain social media over another (Gareth 2013). Individuals choose a certain website, game, or media because it is "the thing to do" and because "everyone else is doing it" (Papacharissi, and Mendelson 2011; Smock et al. 2011). Thus, when an individual has a tendency to follow cool and new trends, they are more committed to the social media and thus, have intention to engage in it (Gareth 2013). As such, people may find social commerce cool and fancy as it is a newer trend among the younger generation to shop through social websites and social media. Thus, we posit:

*H9: Cool and new trend will positively influence intention to engage in social commerce.*

## **Information Quality**

Information quality gratification is another major determinant that affects the use of a particular media under UGT theory (Luo 2002). One of the main reasons why people visit an online platform is to gather various kinds of resourceful information that help them satisfy their particular requirement (Maddox 1998; Chen and Wells 1999). Consumers develop intention to engage in social shopping websites when they believe that the website provides accurate and timely information (Siau and Shen 2003; Barkhi et al. 2008). Hence, we hypothesize:

*H10: Information quality will positively influence intention to engage in social commerce.*

## **Subjective Norms**

One of the components of TRA that affects behavioral intention is subjective norm (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980). Users are affected by the perception of what other people think of them if they use a given system or engage in a social network (Cheung and Lee 2010). Indeed, subjective norm is a strong factor that influences purchase intention for fashion related social commerce transaction (Cho and Yang 2012). In a social commerce environment, where people share their preferences and purchase history, an individual may be influenced to participate in social commerce. Thus, we suggest:

*H11: Subjective norms will positively influence intention to engage in social commerce.*

## **Methodology**

This study uses an online survey (on Qualtrics.com) to collect data, upon which the proposed relationships as presented in this paper are empirically tested. This section will present the details about the demographic details of our sample, instrument development process, and survey administration process.

### ***Participants/Sample***

The participants in this research were Undergraduate students over the age of 18 at a large university situated in southern United States. The use of students as a generalizable sample for research projects have been supported by Niederman and DeSanctis (1995). As internet users and online shoppers are usually young and educated college students (Lenhart et al. 2010), the use of undergraduate students for this survey seems appropriate and generalizable to our population. A total of more than 200 responses were collected out of which only 131 were usable. We discarded responses that failed attention checks or were incomplete.

### ***Panel Testing – Administration of the Instrument***

Despite these items being previously validated by other authors, an expert panel review was performed with the help of seven faculty and Ph.D. students to make sure that it fits this research context. The expert panel review provided suggestions regarding ambiguous use of words, dropping of one item for another, and wording of the items. The survey did not collect any sensitive information regarding respondents' personal life or finance to avoid any biases.

### ***Instrumentation***

To increase the validity and reliability of the results of this study, all the items used for this study have been adapted from previously validated studies (Straub 1989). A total of twelve constructs were used in our research model with each constructs having multiple items. Each of the items were reflective in nature and were measured in a 5 point Likert scale that ranged from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" towards the given statement.

## Data Analysis

### Instrument Validation

We used Partial Least Squares (PLS) through SmartPLS (Ringle et al. 2005) to measure the instrument validation and test the structural model of this study. The instrument was validated by testing for convergent validity, discriminant validity and reliability. All estimated loadings are well above the acceptable magnitude of 0.7 which suggests good convergent validity (Chin and Marcolin 1995). Also, as shown in table 1, the average variance extracted (AVE) exceeds the threshold of 0.5 for all the constructs used in the study (Fornell and Larcker 1981).

	BINT	SN	PSC	CN	FAM	IQ	PE	PP	WOM	PS	SP	TR	AVE
BINT1	0.801												0.680
BINT2	0.838												
BINT3	0.835												
SN1		0.897											0.717
SN2		0.849											
SN3		0.831											
SN4		0.809											
PSC1			0.874										0.700
PSC2			0.777										
PSC3			0.856										
CN1				0.904									0.732
CN2				0.811									
CN3				0.849									
FAM1					0.846								0.672
FAM2					0.805								
FAM3					0.807								
IQ1						0.767							0.624
IQ2						0.771							
IQ3						0.830							
PE1							0.794						0.634
PE2							0.796						
PE3							0.794						
PE4							0.801						
PP1								0.817					0.704
PP2								0.843					
PP3								0.857					
WOM1									0.796				0.651
WOM2									0.834				
WOM3									0.790				
WOM4									0.808				
PS1										0.854			0.726
PS2										0.868			
PS3										0.833			
SP1											0.761		0.656
SP2											0.763		

	BINT	SN	PSC	CN	FAM	IQ	PE	PP	WOM	PS	SP	TR	AVE
SP3											0.861		
SP4											0.849		
TR1												0.826	
TR2												0.763	
TR3												0.788	
TR4												0.769	0.619

**Table 1. Loadings, Cross-loadings, and AVEs**

To examine discriminant validity, we further analyze the loadings and cross-loadings. Some of the items cross load higher than threshold of 0.4 (Chin and Marcolin 1995). However, the loadings of the items on their respective constructs were found to be at least an order of magnitude larger than any other loading (Gefen and Straub 2005). As the square root of the AVE for each construct, as shown in diagonal in Table 2, are greater than the inter-construct correlation corresponding off diagonal correlations of the construct to their latent variables (Loch et al. 2003), this study has discriminant validity. As seen in Table 3, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability for all the constructs are above the threshold of 0.7 (Chin and Gopal 1995).

	BINT	SN	PSC	CN	FAM	IQ	PE	PP	WOM	PS	SP	TR
BINT	<b>0.825</b>											
SN	0.684	<b>0.847</b>										
PSC	0.545	0.444	<b>0.837</b>									
CN	0.689	0.667	0.392	<b>0.855</b>								
FAM	0.664	0.575	0.517	0.560	<b>0.819</b>							
IQ	0.654	0.473	0.713	0.413	0.565	<b>0.79</b>						
PE	0.603	0.516	0.611	0.517	0.578	0.621	<b>0.796</b>					
PP	0.549	0.423	0.660	0.434	0.501	0.525	0.705	<b>0.839</b>				
WOM	0.577	0.457	0.692	0.422	0.546	0.644	0.682	0.651	<b>0.807</b>			
PS	0.630	0.590	0.612	0.561	0.510	0.587	0.635	0.736	0.643	<b>0.852</b>		
SP	0.531	0.454	0.544	0.606	0.462	0.467	0.536	0.559	0.533	0.637	<b>0.81</b>	
TR	0.608	0.405	0.715	0.427	0.518	0.753	0.706	0.665	0.689	0.629	0.502	<b>0.787</b>

**Table 2. Inter-Construct Correlations**

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Behavioral Intention	0.7652	0.8645
Subjective Norm	0.8691	0.9102
Competency	0.7864	0.8749
Cool and New trend	0.8156	0.891
Familiarity	0.7578	0.8597
Information Quality	0.7027	0.8325
Perceived Enjoyment	0.8072	0.8737
Perceived Privacy	0.79	0.877
WOM Quality	0.8218	0.8819
Perceived Security	0.8117	0.888
Social Presence	0.8245	0.8835
Trust	0.7957	0.8666

**Table 3. Reliability Analysis**

### Testing of Structural Model

Table 4 and Figure 1, present the results of the proposed hypotheses in this paper. The results show that we have a substantive model as the R-squares are greater than the threshold of 0.10 (Falk and Miller 1992). Figure 1 shows that 62% of the variance in trust and 70% of the variance in intention to engage in social commerce was explained by factors integrated in our research model. Also, with the exceptions of H6 and H8, all other hypotheses were supported.

Hypotheses	Path Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	T Statistics	P-Value	Supported?
H1: Trust - BINT(+)	0.125	2.52	0.006	Supported
H2: WOM - Trust(+)	0.2545	3.33	0	Supported
H3: PSC - Trust(+)	0.3448	6.62	0	Supported
H4: PS - Trust(+)	0.1198	1.919	0.029	Supported
H5: PP - Trust(+)	0.183	3.182	0	Supported
H6: SP - BINT(+)	-0.001	0.0256	0.49	Not Supported
H7: FAM - BINT(+)	0.1726	4.523	0.0008	Supported
H8: PE - BINT(+)	0.0029	0.0764	0.469	Not Supported
H9: CN - BINT(+)	0.2884	6.23	0	Supported
H10: IQ - BINT(+)	0.2339	4.7	0	Supported
H11: SN - BINT(+)	0.2298	5.15	0	Supported

Table 4. Structural Model Testing

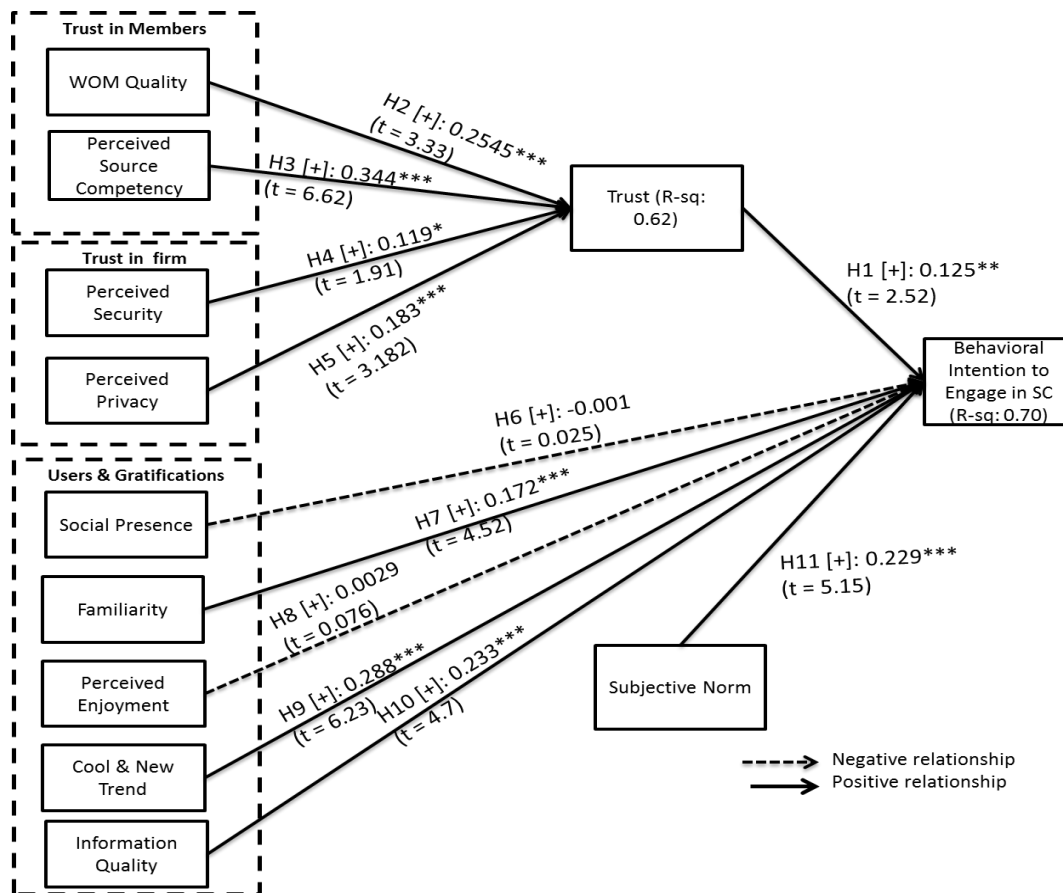


Figure 1. Structural Model

Note: \* significant at P < 0.05 level; \*\* significant at P < 0.01 level; \*\*\* significant at P < 0.001 level.



## Discussion and Conclusion

This study examines the effects of various factors that may affect customers' intention to engage in social commerce. The structural model shows that all the proposed path coefficients were significant except for that of social presence and perceived enjoyment. The results of this study are mostly consistent with the findings from previous studies (Bansal and Chen 2011; Shen 2012; Hajli 2012; Shin 2013; Hajli and Khani 2013; Kim and Park 2013). We have used users and gratifications theory to understand the hedonic and social aspects of social commerce. Thus, a contribution of our study is the development of a parsimonious social commerce model that uses UGT to identify factors that enhance intention to engage in social commerce.

### Limitations and Future Research

As any other research, this study also has certain limitations that open up the door for future research. First, the sample size used in this research is small and needs to be expanded. Second, this study utilized students as the sample. Future research could explore how these findings hold with an older population. Third, this study investigated behavioral intention to study social commerce rather than the actual behaviors. Also, future research can study the impact of some moderating factors such as past experience on online shopping on the relationship between trust and intention to engage in social commerce. Finally, the literature review is abbreviated due to word count limitations.

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