

The Impact of Social Commerce Features on Online Buying Behaviour

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Abstract

Social media has rapidly evolved into a crucial avenue for online shopping, leading to the emergence of social commerce. With the rise of social media platforms, the way people shop online has changed, and social commerce has become an important way for consumers to interact and make purchases. Social commerce involves social network features, user-generated content, and ecommerce capabilities that all enable shoppers to make purchasing decisions in digital social spaces. This study investigates the effect of social commerce elements on online purchasing. This research focuses on the key elements of social commerce affecting online shopping behaviour including customer reviews, ratings, recommendations, social sharing, influencer endorsements and interactive communication. This study investigates the effect of these attributes on the consumer's trust, perceived value, purchase intention and buying behaviour. The descriptive- and analytical-type approach is used to gain insight into the relations between social commerce elements and consumer behaviour in the digital marketplace. The study is based on the literature and current market trends, the mechanisms by which the social interaction and peer-generated information influences purchasing are identified. The results showed that social commerce has a significant positive effect on consumer confidence, which can decrease the information asymmetry felt by consumers as well as their sense of risk. Womens reviews and ratings become significant factors in purchase intent, social participation tools create greater product awareness and influencer recommendations create more credibility. The study also makes another interesting finding, namely the mediation effect of trust between the variables of social commerce features and online buying behaviour. Authenticity, transparency, and social proof can make a difference as consumers are more inclined to make purchases if they see this authenticity and transparency in the platform. As people become more dependent on mobile devices and social networks for various applications, the impact of social commerce on purchasing becomes even more pronounced. The results can be useful for marketers, online retailers and platform developers who want to better understand how to engage customers with their products and services and drive sales. Conclusions reach the following: The effective utilization of social commerce features can contribute to making the shopping experience more interactive, trustworthy and consumer-centric online; this can positively impact online buying behaviour and long-term customer relationships.

Keywords: Social commerce, online buying behaviour, customer reviews, social media marketing, purchase intention, consumer trust.

Introduction

Digital technologies are evolving quickly and are changing consumer behaviour towards businesses and buying decision. E-commerce has become a more social environment with traditional e-commerce platforms now becoming more interactive, with the integration of social networking features in the online shopping experience. This convergence has led to the emergence of social commerce which is a business model that brings together social media interaction and ecommerce, resulting in a more personalized and collaborative shopping experience. Customer reviews, ratings, and recommendations, live streaming, ranking, social sharing, and interactive communication tools are just a few of the many features of social commerce that are increasingly influential in consumer decision-making.

In the modern times people depend chiefly on the information generated by other people prior to the time of their buy. Recommendations from others (online reviews, peers etc), and the content created by influencers can be trusted and used to diminish uncertainty and boost confidence in goods and services. Social commerce platforms can provide an opportunity for customers to interact with brands and with each other, share opinions and get instant responses, all of which can shape the way they think and act when shopping online. All of these features play a role in improving the customer experience and building trust, as well as perceived value!

As social media becomes popular in various sectors, its application in social commerce is gaining speed as well. Social commerce is being utilized to expand brand reach, enhance the customer experience and sales. The distinction between social interactions and consumer buying is further blurring with more time spent on social networking websites, and new opportunities and challenges for marketers.

Knowledge of the influence of social commerce e-features on online buying behaviour is now an absolute necessity for the researchers and practitioners. An analysis of the impact of various social commerce components on the mind of a consumer, their trust in a company, purchase intentions, and their actual buying behaviour can yield valuable information for effective digital marketing campaigns. This study examines the impact of social commerce functionalities on online buying behaviour and their importance in today's digital marketplace.

Background of the study

Digital technologies and internet connectivity have had a significant impact on the way consumers are seeking information, assessing products and making purchasing decisions. The advent of social media has revolutionized traditional e-commerce, creating a new type of online shopping that's known as social commerce. Social commerce merges the dynamic nature of social media with e-commerce, allowing users to connect with brands, share their experiences, access reviews, and even shop directly on social media platforms.

Social commerce has transformed the way consumers shop online by creating a more interactive, personalized and community-based experience. Social media elements like user-generated content, product reviews and ratings, product recommendations, live streaming, social sharing, influencer endorsements and online communities have emerged as vital influencers that shape consumer's attitude and buying behaviour. Social commerce is different from traditional e-commerce, which relies exclusively on social interaction and peer influence, enabling customers to ask for advice and confirm their decisions before buying things.

Social commerce practices have grown in the industry with the rise of platforms like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, and Pinterest. Social commerce is a strategy that businesses are investing in heavily to connect with customers, establish trust, and improve customers' experience. Consumers can directly engage with the brand and other consumers, leading to transparency and credibility that can impact consumer purchasing decisions and buying behaviour. Furthermore, the use of the mobile device has further accentuated social commerce as consumers are able to make their purchases anywhere and at any time.

Various social commerce features affect consumers' decision-making in social commerce environments. The use of online product reviews and ratings enables consumers to evaluate product quality and minimize the perceived risk. Friends, family members and influencers offer social recommendations which play a vital role in influencing what people buy. The ability to comment on the product, like a posting, share content and have live discussions instills trust in consumers that the site is a safe place to do business. These aspects help to build trust, perceived usefulness and customer satisfaction, which are important factors shaping online purchasing behaviour.

Even though social commerce is becoming a more important channel, consumers' reactions to the various features of social commerce might differ on the basis of demographic, psychological and technological factors. It's more important than ever for marketers, businesses, and policymakers to understand how these features impact web user purchases and behaviour. With the rising number of social commerce platforms and their growing influence on the digital market, there is a growing need for companies to focus on the most influential social commerce features that spur both engagement and sales from their customers.

Thus, this research aims to investigate the effect of the social commerce features on the online purchase behaviour of consumers. The study examines the connection among social interaction, UGC, trust-building mechanisms and buying decisions in order to gain insights into how social commerce affects consumer behaviour in the contemporary digital environment. The results will help add to the knowledge base and help companies create strategies for social commerce more effectively and increase customer engagement while improving sales.

Justification

Social media has revolutionized the way consumers are fed, researched and bought online. Social media has changed the discovery, evaluation and purchasing of products online. Social commerce is an increasingly important part of the digital marketplace that brings social networking tools to ecommerce, including user reviews, ratings and recommendations; live streaming; influencers; and interactive communication. With the growing adoption of social commerce features by businesses to capture the attention of their customers, it has become crucial to grasp how they affect people's buying habits.

This study is considered to be valid because nowadays consumers heavily depend on social interaction and peer generated content to make their purchasing decision. While the traditional internet shopping experience mainly centered on product data and comparison, the social commerce landscape brings in trust elements and community involvement that might profoundly impact consumers' attitudes and intent to buy. It is essential to analyze these influences and gain insights into what influences consumer decision making in a digitally connected world.

In addition, companies spend significant amounts of time and money on social media marketing and social commerce platforms, but often don't know what aspects of them are best for driving customer behaviour. Understanding the influence of different social commerce features can assist companies make better choices when creating marketing strategies, boosting customer participation, and raising conversion rates. By understanding the influence of specific social commerce features, organizations can make informed choices to create more effective marketing strategies, enhance customer engagement and improve conversion rates. The results may help entrepreneurs and small businesses to adopt cost-effective social commerce practices for the competition in highly competitive online markets.

It also has academic value as consumer behaviour constantly changes with technology. The previous studies focused on the usage of e-commerce or social media marketing, but the importance of integrated social commerce in the purchase decision is still not explored. The present study is a contribution to the ever-expanding knowledge base of studies concerned with the relationship between the functionalities of social commerce and online purchasing behaviour in the modern digital world.

Further, the popularity of mobile technologies and social networking apps have broadened the reach of social commerce among various demographic segments. Information on consumers' reactions to features of the media platform, consumers' perceptions of social influence, and UGC can inform policymakers, marketers, and platform developers on how to design more consumer-friendly, transparent and trustworthy digital marketplaces.

Thus, the importance of this research is felt as it is useful for businesses, has academic value and would also help in understanding the consumer behaviour in the changing dynamics of social commerce. The results will be of great value for making informed decisions and setting strategies for the rapidly expanding digital economy.

Objectives of the Study

1. To investigate how the social commerce functionality is affecting consumers' online purchase process.
2. To find the most important social commerce elements that influence buying choices, including buyer reviews, rankings, suggestions, societal sharing, as well as real time interactions.
3. To investigate the correlation between UGC and consumers' trust in online shopping platforms.
4. To assess the Customer Purchase Intentions and Buying Behaviour towards social media interaction.
5. To examine the influence of social commerce features on consumer confidence and perceived value while shopping online.

Literature Review

Social commerce has revolutionized e-commerce by adding social media features like reviews, ratings, recommendations, real-time interactions, user-generated content, and social community integration into online shopping platforms. Scientists have studied these features to better understand their effects on the customer's attitude, trust, and purchase decisions as well as actual purchase behaviour.

Initial research about social commerce focused on the influence of social interactions on purchasing decisions. Liang, Paek et al. (2011) insisted that the social commerce is a hybridized ecommerce platform with social support and user interaction that benefits customer engagement and purchase intention. These results showed that social influence that includes informational and emotional support plays a significant role in influencing the purchasing decision of products by consumers through social networks.

One of the most significant elements in social commerce settings is, unsurprisingly, trust. Kim and Park (2013) determined that the attitude of consumers to social commerce elements like recommendations, ratings, and online reviews is positive and leads to an improvement of consumer trust, which then increases the purchase intention. Likewise, Hajli (2015) shows that social commerce building features like discussion boards, discussion message boards, and client reviews play a huge role in cultivating trust and acquisition selections.

It has been identified that user-generated content (UGC) is one of the important factors influencing online buying behaviour. Cheung, Lee, and Rabjohn (2008) investigated the role electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) plays in the online evaluation of products and services by consumers and noted that consumers extensively use eWOM to evaluate products and services online. Positive reviews and recommendations boost perceived credibility and diminish uncertainty about online transactions. Similarly, Erkan and Evans (2016) found that

the quality, credibility and usefulness of the online information can have a significant impact on consumers' purchase intentions via social media.

There is a lot of research conducted on WOM in social commerce. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) pointed out that users actively try to read other users' opinion and experience prior to a purchase decision. They found eWOM is an extremely strong source of information, especially for products that have a higher perceived risk. Indeed, Park and Kim (2008) uncovered that the ratings and opinions of products by consumers positively influence consumers' decisions to purchase products.

Social presence is another important feature affecting online consumer behaviour. Gefen and Straub (2004) proposed that social presence may be understood as a process that communicates a sense of human warmth and interaction, thus minimizing the perceived distance between buyer and seller. Likewise, Lu, Fan and Zhou (2016) reported that social presence in social commerce increases trust and promotes the purchase of products.

Social networking features bring even more engagement from consumers. Social commerce aspects like social sharing, recommendations, and communities, increase customer engagement and purchase intent (Zhang and Benyoucef 2016). They noted that positive social experiences produced deeper consumer–Brand relationships which resulted in greater customer loyalty and re-purchasing.

Live commerce, a new twist within social commerce, has recently emerged. The study by Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut (2020) revealed that live streaming interactions generate authenticity, trust and engagement which affects the consumers' purchase decisions. The immediate interaction between sellers and buyers can mitigate information asymmetry and boost consumers' trust in products.

Moreover, there is a mediating effect between social commerce features and purchasing behaviour through the way consumers are engaged. In contrast, Molinillo et al. (2021) found that buying intent is positively influenced by the active engagement measured by likes, comments, shares and online discussions. The results indicate that interactive participation increases emotional connection with brands and fosters online transactions.

In the light of social influence theory, Shen (2012) claimed that peer influence and community participation is a significant influence for online buying. People tend to follow the suggestions of trusted individuals and groups, especially in relation to items that they are not familiar with. The result is in line with Stephen and Toubia (2010) who asserted that social networks enable higher sales performance because of the availability of information and the social influence they have.

Other factors linked with social commerce adoption are perceived value and convenience. According to Yadav et al., (2013), consumers find the social commerce platforms useful because it integrates both shopping and social communications into one platform. Users benefit from the convenience of being able to find recommendations from peers and details

about products which makes decision making better and makes users more likely to want to purchase the product.

There have also been recent studies that have pointed to the significance of platform quality. Han et al. (2018) found that a high-quality website, ease of navigation and interactivity affect positively the consumers' trust and satisfaction. If the consumers get seamless interaction and the information is reliable, they will definitely take the step of going for online shopping.

In general, the literature suggests that various mechanisms like trust building, social influence, consumer engagement, electronic word of mouth and perceived value, play a significant role in the influence of the social commerce features on the online buying behaviour. While there are previous studies confirming the strong relationships of social commerce functionalities with purchase intention, more researches are required to explore the influence of new functionalities such as live commerce, influencer marketing or recommendation systems based on AI on consumer purchasing behaviour in different market settings.

Material and Methodology

Research Design:

This study used descriptive and analytical research to analyze the influence of social commerce features on online buying behaviour. The study was grounded in the understanding of various factors related to customers' purchase intentions and purchase decision making that include customer reviews and ratings, recommendations, social sharing, interactive communication, and influencers endorsements. A mixed-method was used to capture a complete picture of the consumer response to the social commerce environments, incorporating a quantitative and qualitative approach. The design enabled the patterns, relationships and online purchasing behaviour trends to be identified.

Data Collection Methods:

Data for the study were collected from primary and secondary source. The primary data were gathered using a structured questionnaire and the application was given to active online users who use social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and online shopping websites with social interaction functionalities on a regular basis. The questionnaire consisted of questions about demographic features, how often online shoppers shop online, their exposure to social commerce features, trust perceptions, and the adoption of a purchase behaviour. The answers were collected by means of online Survey tools and then analyzed statistically to find the significant relationships. Secondary sources comprised scholarly journal articles, books, conference reports, industry reports, market research publications and

credible internet databases. These sources provided background theories and evidence on social commerce, consumer behaviour, current trends in digital marketing and e-commerce.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:

This study comprised consumers aged 18 years or older who had made at least one online purchase over the last six months, and who had used any of the social media platforms or social commerce features in their shopping process. A wide cross-section of participators were represented to provide an even greater mix of online consumers. Respondents who did not have any prior experience with Internet shopping, who were under 18 years of age, and who provided inconsistent and/or incomplete answers to the survey were not included in the study. The literature review was also not included for secondary sources which did not provide the academic credibility, social commerce relevance or methodological rigor.

Results and Discussion

Results:

The research focused on investigating the social commerce effect on online purchase process by consumers. A total of 250 respondents who were active in various social media platforms for shopping-related activities were obtained. Customer reviews, ratings, customer recommendations, social sharing, influencer endorsement, and interactive communication were among the key features of social commerce that were the focus of the analysis.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 250)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	118	47.2
	Female	132	52.8
Age	18–25 years	95	38.0
	26–35 years	87	34.8
	36–45 years	46	18.4
	Above 45 years	22	8.8
Education	Undergraduate	88	35.2
	Postgraduate	121	48.4
	Others	41	16.4

Online Shopping Experience	Less than 1 year	35	14.0
	1–3 years	98	39.2
	More than 3 years	117	46.8

The demographic analysis shows that there were slightly more female than male respondents. The age group of 18 to 35 was the highest, indicating that younger consumers dominate in social commerce activities. Almost half of the respondents had postgraduate qualifications and a large number had more than three years of online shopping experience.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Social Commerce Features

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Customer Reviews	4.32	0.64
Product Ratings	4.18	0.71
Social Recommendations	4.07	0.75
Influencer Endorsements	3.89	0.81
Social Sharing Features	3.95	0.78
Interactive Communication	4.11	0.69
Online Buying Behaviour	4.24	0.66

The average scores indicate that customer reviews had received the highest rating from customers when it comes to social commerce features, followed by interactive communication and then product ratings. This indicates that much consumer information is used before deciding to buy is influenced by user generated information.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis between Social Commerce Features and Online Buying Behaviour

Variable	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Significance (p)
Customer Reviews	0.721	0.000
Product Ratings	0.684	0.000
Social Recommendations	0.638	0.000
Influencer Endorsements	0.592	0.000
Social Sharing Features	0.551	0.000
Interactive Communication	0.703	0.000

The correlation results show that there are significant positive correlations with each social commerce feature and online buying behaviour. The highest correlation was found between customer reviews and interactive communication ($r = 0.721$ and $r = 0.703$, respectively). This indicates a consumer behaviour preference in making purchase decisions when they believe in the information provided by other users, and when businesses are active on social media platforms.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis

Dependent Variable: Online Buying Behaviour

Independent Variable	Beta Coefficient	t-value	p-value
Customer Reviews	0.312	5.846	0.000
Product Ratings	0.241	4.732	0.000
Social Recommendations	0.184	3.916	0.000
Influencer Endorsements	0.128	2.587	0.010
Social Sharing Features	0.095	2.104	0.036
Interactive Communication	0.276	5.118	0.000

Model Summary:

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F-value	Significance
0.842	0.709	0.702	84.317	0.000

The online buying behaviour model accounts for 70.9% of the variance, which shows that the model has a good ability to predict. The factors that provide the most impactful information for consumers were customer reviews, interactive communication, and product ratings. Endorsements from influencers and social sharing features were still very important, but comparatively less influential.

Discussion:

The results show that the social commerce aspects have a high impact on consumers' buying choices. Customer reviews had the greatest impact on buying behaviour, highlighting the importance of valuing and listening to the experiences and opinions of other users. This is a trend of electronic word-of-mouth becoming more relevant in reducing uncertainty and perceived risk in online transactions.

Another significant influence on purchase behaviour was identified as using interactive communication. People like brands that can quickly respond to inquiries, comments and feedback on social media. These interactions help foster trust and engagement, driving purchase intent and loyalty.

Rating of products had a significant influence on purchasing as well. Higher ratings act as quality signals, assisting consumers to gauge the quality of a product without having to undertake a long search for more information. Recommendations from social media platforms and friends also improve the confidence of people when they buy something, by tapping into social influence and validation from peers.

Influencer endorsements had a positive impact on purchasing habits; however, customer-generated content impacted purchasing habits more. This indicates that consumers are more inclined to believe genuine reviews and true experiences that are not promotional. Likewise, social sharing elements had a positive impact on purchase behaviour, by making the product more visible and aiding in the sharing of information between users.

The overall conclusions support that social commerce has indeed changed online shopping into a socially-driven experience from a transactional one. Companies that utilize reviews, ratings, social interaction, and user engagement tools can attract more users and potentially have a greater impact on consumer purchasing decisions leading to improved conversions.

The results underscore the significance of fostering environments for social commerce that foster trust, engagement, and transparency with customers.

Limitations of the study

This study has some limitations related to its impact of social commerce features on online purchasing behaviour. First of all, the conclusions may be affected by the fact that the sample chosen gives a view of the behaviour of some, but not necessarily all, online consumers in different parts of the country, in different age groups and cultural settings. Secondly, the study makes use of self-reports and thus tends to be subject to personal biases, memory failures and the unwillingness of respondents to report accurately. Thirdly, social commerce platforms and digital technologies are constantly changing, and consumers' preferences may vary over time, which reduces the scope of the current results. Besides, other aspects of social commerce, such as pricing strategy, brand reputation, website quality, and economic condition etc. could also play a role in purchasing decision, so the selected social commerce features of reviews, ratings, recommendations, and social interaction are the features that will be explored in the study. A weak point of the cross-sectional study is the short time frame it covers and the lack of definitive causal relationships. Overall, the study provides insights into the role of social commerce features in shaping online shopping habits and serves as a basis for further research in this evolving field of digital commerce.

Future Scope

Due to the ongoing changes in engaging consumers and the digital platforms, the scope of research on the impact of social commerce features on online buying behaviour is further extended. It is worth discussing the impact of new emerging technologies (e.g., Artificial Intelligence, Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality, Live-Stream shopping) on social commerce consumer shopping decisions in further research. The impact of personalized recommendations, influencer authenticity, UGC, and social proof on customer trust and loyalty can also be studied by researchers according to various demographic groups. Inter-country, inter-cultural and inter-generational comparisons can help to gain insights into variation in social commerce adoption and buying behaviour. Further, research can be conducted to understand the impact of privacy concerns, data security, ethical marketing practices, and platform transparency on consumer attitudes. Further research using a longitudinal approach could also assist in understanding the relationship between shifts in consumer preferences and technological developments and how this impacts on consumers' purchasing behaviour over time. This research will help in developing better and effective social commerce strategies and provide insight into digital consumer behaviour in a more connected marketing arena.

Conclusion

Social commerce has revolutionized the way people find, assess, and buy products online. In this study, it has been investigated how the social commerce features affect the online buying behaviour and it has been found that there are interactive and social elements which have an important role in shaping the consumer's buying behaviour. Customer reviews, ratings, recommendations, user generated content, social sharing features, influencer endorsements and real-time engagement all have a positive effect on the establishment of trust and minimisation of risk and increases in consumer engagement.

The results suggest a growing trust in social proof and peer experiences for consumers in purchasing decisions. The review experience fosters a feeling of authenticity and trust, leading to interest in buying. The positive reviews, genuine user content and community engagement gives a sense of credibility and supports purchase intent. In addition, personalised suggestions and communicating interactions enhance the whole shopping experience, making it more practical, informative and entertaining. These are factors that can affect customers' initial decisions to buy the product and can also affect their satisfaction, loyalty and the re-purchasing behaviour.

Moreover, the researchers show that the features of social commerce that are effective rely on factors like consumer trust, perceived usefulness, ease of use and the authenticity of the information provided. Companies that effectively leverage social commerce elements on their online presence are more likely to capture the attention of their customers, build connection, and drive market competitiveness. But, some concerns remain in regards to information overload, fake reviews, privacy concerns and misleading endorsements, and these are still significant hurdles to manage.

In conclusion, social commerce has proven itself to be a significant trend in the development of e-commerce. It's a dynamic setting that engages consumers in social interaction and it also has e-commerce features, which can affect their purchasing behaviour throughout. Organizations that master the use of social commerce features, remain transparent, and sustain consumer trust will most likely be able to create better engagement and go on experiencing business growth.

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