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The Mediating Role of Trust in Understanding Factors Influencing Chinese Consumers' Continuous Intention to Use Social Commerce

Wang Liyu[1], Associate Professor Dr. Ooi Chin Lye[2]

[1]School of Business, University of Wollongong Malaysia, Utropolis Glenmarie, Malaysia
Email: 13683603371@139.com
[2]School of Business, University of Wollongong Malaysia, Utropolis Glenmarie, Malaysia
Email: cl.ooi@uow.edu.my

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Abstract**—***Social commerce, which integrates social media with online marketplaces, is highlighted as a rising trend in the study. Customers can now shop online while interacting with one another via social media and user-generated content. By investigating what keeps Chinese customers interested in social commerce, this study hopes to close a knowledge gap. Among the relevant theories examined in the literature study are TAM and TPB. In order to get a comprehensive understanding of the determinants that influence users' continuous intention to use social commerce platforms, this study intends to generate prior research on social commerce, technology adoption, and trust. This research shows how important it is to learn more about how Chinese consumers' unique cultural, social, and economic backgrounds impact their social commerce attitudes and behaviors. Perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and perceived enjoyment are the three determinants this research finds to have the most impact on Chinese consumers' long-term intentions to use social commerce. Furthermore, the research seeks to investigate the mediating effect of trust in these relationships. The study technique utilizes a quantitative approach by using questionnaires to obtain data from a sample of Chinese customers who actively participate in social commerce. The research expects to discover favorable relationships between perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, perceived enjoyment, and the continuous intention to use social commerce. Additionally, the findings of this research will provide valuable insights for both academic understanding and practical applications for firms seeking to improve user engagement and loyalty in the Chinese social commerce sector.*

Keywords**— Customer engagement, Continuous intention, Social commerce, Social media, Trust in technology***

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, social commerce, which involves the integration of e-commerce and social media, has experienced significant expansion (Anabir, 2023). The platform enables users to participate in online purchasing endeavors while taking advantage of social interactions and user-generated content. Gaining insight into the determinants that impact individuals' continuing intention to use social commerce platforms is of paramount importance for both enterprises and scholars (Zhao et al., 2023). This research aims to examine the determinants that influence users' continuous intention to use social commerce, with particular highlighting on the mediating effect of trust.

1.1 Background of Research

The advent of Web 2.0 and the subsequent explosion in ICT has given corporate organizations and consumers newfound agency while radically altering the nature of

business and trade (Recanati, 2023). Due to advancements in ICT and Web 2.0, customers may now make queries and make purchases online whenever and wherever they like (Jia et al., 2022). In other words, e-commerce was born with the rise of online purchasing and has since gained widespread acceptability across sectors and economies (Pererva et al., 2021). Lin et al. (2017), worldwide e-commerce sales would have increased from USD 1.3 trillion in 2014 to USD 4.5 trillion. By 2022, the e-commerce market in China is expected to generate $1,156.00 billion in revenue. By 2027, the market is forecast to be worth US$1,649.00 billion, an increase in revenue of 7.36% from 2022-2027. By far, China is the largest source of income, with a forecast market volume of US$1,156.00bn in 2022. By 2027, the number of anticipated e-commerce consumers is projected to reach 1,334.7 million. A projected 71.9% of users will be active in 2022, rising to 90.8% by 2027. The expected Average Revenue Per User (ARPU) is USD 1,100 (Statista, 2022).

In China, the trend of continuous intention to use social commerce platforms has been steadily increasing in recent years (Dincer & Dincer, 2023). China's expanding e-commerce business, along with extensive smartphone use and rising internet access, has contributed to the expansion of social commerce and its continued consumer usage (Zhu et al., 2023). Social commerce has expanded to become a major force in China's e-commerce environment. WeChat, Weibo, and Pinduoduo, among others, have emerged as social commerce platforms in China. These systems integrate social networking components, content sharing, and e-commerce capabilities to provide a single purchasing experience (H. Wang et al., 2023). Moreover, the availability of mobile technology has had a significant impact, since a significant segment of the population accesses the internet and engages in online activities through smartphones. Consequently, social commerce transactions cannot be done without mobile applications. Users can browse items, make purchases, and even have product discussions all from the convenience of their phones (Attar et al., 2022).

The Chinese social commerce landscape has seen the rise of influencer marketing and live streaming as formidable strategies. Influencers and key opinion leaders promote and sell things using live streaming platforms. They show prospective customers live demos, answer questions, and make them feel like they need to act quickly. This interactive marketing strategy has become quite popular and has had a big impact on purchase choices (Ng et al., 2022). Another notable characteristic of Chinese social commerce platforms is group purchasing. Platforms such as Pinduoduo have popularised the notion of "team buying," in which users may join forces with friends, family, or like-minded people to get bulk discounts on purchases. This method promotes social interaction, creates a feeling of community, and increases sales volume (Kam & Rimmer, 2022). User-generated information, such as reviews, ratings, and product suggestions, is critical in Chinese social commerce. Users actively share their purchasing experiences, publish product evaluations, and participate in debates on social commerce sites. This user-generated material substantially impacts purchase choices and fosters customer trust (Peter et al., 2023). The integration of numerous payment providers is a significant feature of Chinese social commerce platforms. WeChat Pay and Alipay, among others, effortlessly interface with these platforms, enabling users to perform purchases inside the social applications. The simplicity and security of these integrated payment systems have considerably aided the fast expansion of social commerce in China (Han, 2023).

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite its rapid development, social commerce in China has significant problems that need to be addressed (Li et al., 2023). The widespread use of counterfeit goods is one serious issue. It is simpler for fake items to enter the market due to the sheer volume of vendors and the absence of strict quality control procedures. This not only erodes consumer confidence but also results in unpleasant experiences and even financial losses for unwary customers (Chen et al., 2022). Furthermore, there are significant problems with social commerce in China that affect consumers' trust, perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and perceived enjoyment. The fact that consumers do not trust the platforms is one of the major problems in social commerce. The presence of counterfeit items, fraud, and con artists raises serious concerns about trust. These problems undermine user confidence, which lowers users' intentions to use social commerce platforms going forward. To solve these trust-related problems, actions including tightening quality control, increasing fraud detection techniques, and fostering openness are required (J. Wang et al., 2023).

Another important element that might have a significant influence on consumers' continuous intention to use social commerce platforms is perceived ease of use (Deng & Yu, 2023). Barriers and a lack of perceived ease of use may be caused by complicated user interfaces, challenging navigation, and time-consuming procedures. These issues may be solved, and users' perceptions of the platforms' usability can be improved, by optimizing navigation, simplifying user interface design, and giving clear instructions (Selem et al., 2023b). Moreover, in the perceived usefulness, users' intentions to keep using social commerce platforms are significantly influenced by how valuable they believe such networks to be (X. Hu et al.,

2022). Users could, however, feel that these platforms are not valuable or useful, which would reduce their desire to utilize them often. The purpose of this issue statement is to highlight and improve social commerce platform's perceived usefulness. Users' ongoing desire to utilize social commerce platforms is also influenced by their perceived usefulness (B. Hu et al., 2023). Users' incentive to continue utilizing the platforms may decrease if they do not believe they are useful or successful in addressing their demands. Social commerce platforms should put their attention on providing personalized features, customized suggestions, and practical services in order to solve this problem. Platforms can increase users' perceptions of their usefulness and encourage ongoing use by offering them with relevant and valuable experiences (Saprikis & Avlogiaris, 2023).

Next, users' continuous intention to use social commerce platforms is significantly influenced by perceived of enjoyment, which is a critical factor (Selem et al., 2023a). However, a lack of interactive elements, repetitive material presentation, and restricted entertainment options may all lower consumers' perception of enjoyment. Platforms should vary content to provide diversity, including interactive features that encourage user involvement and pleasure, and include engaging and amusing components to address this difficulty (Akram et al., 2021).

1.3 Research Gaps

There is a lack of research regarding these factors in the context of Chinese consumers, despite the fact that numerous studies have investigated the determinants that influence the intention to continue using social commerce in general (Gong et al., 2013; J. Lin et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2023). As a result of its distinctive digital environment and consumer habits, China has become a global champion in social commerce. Hence, a dearth of knowledge exists concerning Chinese consumers' attitudes, motivations, and experiences concerning their continuous intention to use social commerce platforms, thus, research concentrating on this target group is essential.

An approach that can be taken to fill this research gap is to examine the influence of China-specific cultural, social, and economic variables on users' intention towards and use of social commerce (Akkaya & Tanriver, 2019). This study aims to offer valuable insights into the factors that shape Chinese consumers' continuing intention to participate in social commerce activities by analyzing the distinctive attributes of the Chinese consumer market, including the prevalence of mobile commerce, high levels of social media engagement, and the impact of guanxi (interpersonal relationships). Moreover, although users' intention to use social commerce platforms has been recognized as being significantly impacted by trust, the precise facets and determinants of trust in the Chinese context have received comparatively less attention (Han, 2023). To fill the research gap regarding trust as a mediating variable in Chinese consumers' continuing intention to use social commerce, it is likely that an examination of cultural aspects of trust, including guanxi-based trust and the impact of social relationships, could be beneficial.

Examining the factors that influence trust and its mediating function in the realm of social commerce, with a particular focus on Chinese consumers, can yield distinctive perspectives and fill the gap in the literature. This, in turn, could contribute to a more comprehensive comprehension of Chinese consumers' adoption and utilization patterns within this exponentially expanding digital market.

1.4 Research Questions

What is the impact of perceived usefulness on the continuous intention to use social commerce?

What is the impact of perceived ease of use on the continuous intention to use social commerce?

To what extent does perceived enjoyment affect the continuous intention to use social commerce?

What is the role of trust in mediating the relationship between the determinants and the continuous intention to use social commerce?

1.5 Research Objectives

To assess the impact of perceived usefulness on the continuous intention to use social commerce among Chinese consumers.

To examine the influence of perceived ease of use on the continuous intention to use social commerce among Chinese consumers.

To explore the impact of perceived enjoyment on Chinese consumers' continuous intention to use social commerce.

To analyze the mediating role of trust in the relationships between perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, perceived enjoyment, and the continuous intention to use social commerce among Chinese consumers.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing research on social commerce, technology adoption, and trust will be comprehensively analyzed in the literature review. Significant theoretical frameworks that will be examined include the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). With a particular emphasis on the mediating function of trust, the review will emphasize prior research findings

regarding the determinants that influence users' intentions to implement and use social commerce. As a result, the present study is necessary to identify potential gaps and inconsistencies in the existing body of literature.

2.1 Social Commerce

The term "social commerce" refers to a business model that combines aspects of social networking with e-commerce, where online platforms incorporate social interactions, user-generated content, and peer recommendations into the procedure of buying and selling goods and services (Geibel & Kracht, 2023). To make it easier for people to find, promote, and buy goods and services in a social setting, social commerce incorporates the use of social media platforms, online communities, or specialized platforms for social commerce (X. Lin & Wang, 2022). Users may participate in group purchases or flash deals, share product evaluations, ask friends or influencers for suggestions, and communicate with vendors or other customers through comments, likes, or direct messages when they utilize social commerce. The platform's social component improves user engagement, trust, and the entire buying experience (Boustani & Sayegh, 2023). Regarding online trade, "social commerce" is a recent innovation. The core concept behind it is that businesses use social connections to improve the user experience while selling goods and services online. It originates from the rise of Web 2.0 technology and social media, which have made online shopping a more personable and collaborative experience. In contrast to traditional e-commerce, social commerce emphasizes interpersonal connections between buyers and sellers (Jia et al., 2022).

2.2 Continuous Intention to Use

The term "continuous intention to use" describes people's propensity or readiness to continue using or engaging with a certain product, service, or piece of technology over a prolonged period of time. It symbolizes the person's continued drive or desire to make use of the product or service in the future (El Barachi et al., 2022). The idea of continuous intention to use has its roots in the study of user behavior and the adoption of technology, especially in relation to information systems. It focuses on understanding the variables that motivate people to use a product or service consistently over time, going beyond early acceptance or trial use (Foroughi et al., 2023).

It was defined by Martono et al. (2020) as the regularity with which customers used their preferred social networking platform. Lal (2017) described it similarly, saying that it is a habit that develops due to continued usage after the adoption process. Jun and Kang (2013) offered a different definition of continuous usage, which focused on the potential of repeat use of online services to make transactions. Similarly, Jia et al. (2022) described it as a desire to keep utilizing online services. As with initial acceptance, Zhou et al. (2013) continued usage was defined as a decision to keep using the system after it was first accepted.

All of the aforementioned definitions shared the idea that persons who participate in continuous use are subject to or influenced by external factors. After making the "acceptance option," consumers who want to keep making purchases via e-commerce sites are said to have "continuous use intention." Due to the strong correlation between continuous use intention and volitional behavior, in which persons have control over their choice to engage in activities such as online shopping and IS, the current research focuses on continuous use intention rather than actual continuous use behavior (Afrasiabi Rad & Benyoucef, 2011). That is to say, the motivation to maintain e-commerce use directly influences user behavior (Zhao et al., 2023).

2.3 Trust

Trust is a psychological and emotional condition characterized by a person's desire to depend on, trust in, and have faith in another person, organization, or entity's honesty, reliability, and generosity (Islam et al., 2023). It entails trusting that the other person would behave reliable and trustworthy, keep their promises, and not purposefully injure or mislead (Ma et al., 2022). Trust is a key factor of human interactions and relationships, and it is essential in a variety of circumstances such as interpersonal relationships, corporate transactions, and internet connections. Based on views, experiences, and facts accessible, it entails a feeling of confidence, faith, and favorable expectations toward the trusted person (Ye & Ho, 2023).

In essence, trust has been studied in a wide range of circumstances and analyzed using several theoretical frameworks (Lam et al., 2019). Huang and Benyoucef (2013) defined trust as the conviction that the website's presentation is founded on good faith and honesty. The term "trust" was coined by Jia et al. (2022) to describe an individual's conviction that others in the virtual community are trustworthy. According to Morgan and Hunt (1994), trust is the conviction in someone honesty and dependability during a bargaining exchange. Despite the circumstantial evidence, Zhou et al. (2013) define trust as "the certainty and depth of sentiments of persons." To trust is to rely on the words, deeds, and judgments of others in an online community (Turban et al., 2012). According to Lin et al. (2017), the trust consumers have in a company is directly proportional to the quality of the information they get. According to (Jia et al., 2022), trust exists when "the

information receivers believe the information source to be credible, trustworthy, and reliable." For the sake of this discussion, this study will take the definition of "trust in s-commerce" as the level to which a user is willing to rely on the word and deeds of other users.

2.4 Perceived ease of Use

Perceived ease of use refers to an people's subjective impression or evaluation of the degree of effort, complexity, and simplicity involved in using a certain system, product, or technology (Al-Afeef et al., 2023). It reflects the user's view of how easy or complex the system or technology is to comprehend, learn, navigate, and engage with. In the subject of technology adoption and user behavior, perceived ease of use is an critical concept (Meske & Bunde, 2022). Included among other models that explain how people embrace and make use of technology, it is part of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). Users' attitudes, intentions, and behaviors about technology are greatly influenced by their impressions of how easy it is to use (Kasinphila, 2023).

The technology acceptance model is one of the most prevalent models for comprehending how people feel about embracing new technologies and systems (Davis, 1989). The TAM model identified two main factors for user adoption and acceptance: perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use (Rakhmawati et al., 2020). Studies that utilize TAM to explain why people accept new technologies and keep using ones they already know how to use abound in the vast literature on user adoption (Rakhmawati et al., 2020). All of these research agreed that an item's perceived ease of use is directly proportional to how well it is thought to perform its advertised purpose. The qualities of technology, such as its fixability, clarity, and the user's judgment of how easy it is, all contribute to its perceived ease of use (Davis, 1989).

In the Technology Acceptance Model, Davis (1989) argues that a technology's perceived ease of use is a significant component in deciding whether or not users would be receptive to and enthusiastic about incorporating that technology into their daily lives. Davis et al. (1992) elaborated on the TAM model in subsequent research by explaining the impact of user perceptions on technology adoption. They found that internal and external factors affect a user's decision to accept new technology. Davis et al. (1992) define "extrinsic motivation" as "the act of engaging in an activity because of the belief that doing so would lead to positive consequences that are inherently separate from the act itself." And yet, "intrinsic motivation refers to the execution of an activity for no apparent reward other than the process of executing the action per se." Perceived ease of use is categorized as an intrinsic motivator (Davis et al., 1992).

2.5 Perceived Usefulness

Perceived usefulness is a people's subjective impression or evaluation of the extent to which a specific system, product, or technology is perceived to improve their performance, productivity, effectiveness, or overall results (Siti Nurjanah et al., 2022). It expresses the user's opinion of the degree to which adopting the technology would result in real advantages, enhance work performance, or meet particular requirements (Jou et al., 2022). In technology acceptance models and theories, such as the TAM, perceived usefulness is an essential concept. It acknowledges that users' views of a technology's usefulness play a significant influence in defining their attitudes, intentions, and actions toward its adoption and use (Abu-AlSondos et al., 2023).

One of the most researched factors in how people feel about adopting new technology is how valuable they think it will be to them (Cordier et al., 2015). According to TAM, an information system's utility to users is the most critical factor in their decision to accept and use it. The confidence and assurance a user has in an information system's ability to improve their performance are what individual mean when individual talk about its "perceived utility" (Davis, 1989).

Users' adoption or rejection of a technology is often based on their perception of the utility of that technology (Davis, 1989). Recent studies have shown the importance of a technology's perceived utility in explaining its adoption and ongoing usage (Upadhyay et al., 2018). E-service, e-commerce, and s-commerce research have focused on the importance of perceived utility as an indicator of how people feel about using various digital interactions (X. Lin et al., 2017). Perceived usefulness has been considered a crucial factor in system utilization in another study (Upadhyay et al., 2018)

2.6 Perceived Enjoyment

Perceived enjoyment is a person's subjective perception or evaluation of the amount of pleasure, contentment, or good affect experienced when interacting with a specific activity, system, product, or technology (Won et al., 2023b). It is the user's assessment of the total pleasure, amusement, and emotional satisfaction gained from utilizing technology. Perceived enjoyment is a crucial concept within the fields of user experience and technological acceptability. It recognises that users' judgments of the pleasure and hedonic features of a technology have a substantial impact on their attitudes, intentions, and actions towards its adoption and continuous use (Salloum et al., 2023).

The term "perceived enjoyment" also refers to "how many fun people have while engaging in the act of utilizing a particular technology" (Sun & Zhang, 2006). In addition, Ramayah and Ignatius (2005) defined pleasure as "the degree to which the experience of utilizing a system is pleasant in and of itself." Therefore, perceived enjoyment is an essential motivator. The term "perceived enjoyment" was used to help explain why contented users are more likely to stay with the platform. Therefore, a system's likelihood of being accepted and utilized improves if it is seen as more enjoyable. In addition, individuals are more inclined to keep using a technological tool if they find it to be useful, easy to use, and entertaining (Zheng et al., 2023). Perceived enjoyment is a crucial component of consumer behavior and technology adoption results (Won et al., 2023a).

Hypothesis

H1: Perceived usefulness positively influences the continuous intention to use social commerce.

H2: Perceived ease of use positively influences the continuous intention to use social commerce.

H3: Perceived enjoyment positively influences the continuous intention to use social commerce.

H4: Trust mediates the relationship between the determinants (perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and perceived enjoyment) and the continuous intention to use social commerce.

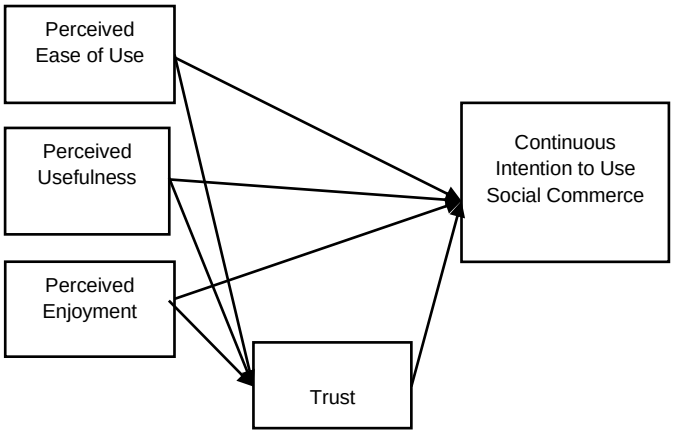

Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework

III. CONCLUSION

The primary aim of this study is to shed light on the determinants that influence Chinese consumers' continuing intention to use social commerce. Specifically, the research will examine the significance of perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, perceived enjoyment, and trust in this regard. In addition, the study intends to investigate the mediating effect of trust in influencing the attitudes and behaviors of consumers with regard to social commerce. The study's results will enhance comprehension of consumer behavior within the Chinese market and offer practical suggestions for policymakers and businesses seeking to encourage sustained usage and adoption of social commerce among Chinese consumers.

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