

Does Information Sharing Matter for Gen Z Social Media Users? Effects of Motivations on Purchase Intentions through Social Commerce

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Introduction

Social commerce applies Web 2.0 features that supports one-to-one social interactions and user contributions in the context of e-commerce transactions (Liang, Ho, Li, & Turban, 2011). As distinct from e-commerce, social commerce involves consumers in a network of interactions among users (Hajli, Sims, Zadeh, & Richard, 2017). It becomes increasingly popular to use social networking sites in online buying and selling of products and services. According to a national survey conducted in 2018, social networking sites have become major influence on US consumers' product purchase decisions (Garcia, 2018). Importantly, Gen Z engages in product purchases more frequently through social networking sites (i.e., Instagram and Snapchat) than the other older generations do (Wertz, 2019). Pew Research defined Gen Z is anyone born after 1997 and the oldest are just turning 23 years old in 2020 (Dimock, 2019). This tech-savvy group will become the largest US consumer population followed by millennials in 2026 (Business Insider, 2019). Given Gen Z's heavy social media use and rise of their spending power, it is important to investigate their motivations for purchase intentions through social commerce. By applying uses and gratification (U&G) theory, this study aims to provide motivational factors behind adoption to the social media use among Gen Z.

Theoretical Framework

The U&G theory explains that individuals deliberately adopt different communication media to meet their needs (Katz, Hass, Gurevitch, 1973). Within media content, individuals find different gratifications which affect their media consumption (Kaye & Johnson, 2002). Studies of social media show that U&G theory is an effective theoretical framework with which to examine attitudes and purchase intentions through social media (Aggrawal, Ahluwalia, Khurana, & Arora, 2017; Corrada, Flecha, & Lopez, 2020). Drawing on the U&G theory, studies investigate factors that influence purchase, re-purchase, and satisfaction of social media use (Aluri, Slevitch, & Larzelere, 2016; Corrada *et al.*, 2020). Whiting and Williams (2013) identified motivational factors that explain social interaction (i.e., interaction with others, expression of opinions to others), entertainment (i.e., pass time, enjoyment, and relaxation) and information seeking and sharing through the use of social media. Aluri *et al* (2016) also highlighted three key factors such as information search, social interaction, and entertainment in explaining gratification sources generated by the use of social media. Accordingly, this study adopts three motivational factors (i.e., entertainment, social interaction, information sharing motives) that explain attitudes and behavioral intentions of social media users. Thus, we propose the following four hypotheses:

Page 1 of 5

- H1:* Entertainment motive will positively influence attitudes toward social commerce.
H2: Social interaction motive will positively influence attitudes toward social commerce.
H3: Information sharing motive will positively influence attitudes toward social commerce.
H4: Attitudes toward using social commerce will positively influence purchase intentions of fashion products through social commerce.

Method

A total of 526 college students attending a large university in the US was used for the data analysis (27.8% of males and 71.3% of females). The majority of respondents were Caucasian American women. All participants were Gen Z consumers aged from 18 to 23. An online survey using a self-administered questionnaire collected data. In the survey, participants were asked to answer questions adopted from the literature (Kim & Ko, 2012; Lee, Fiore, & Kim, 2006; Spears & Singh, 2004). To test the four hypotheses, this study employed structural equation modeling using AMOS.

Results

Two models for confirmatory factor analysis ($CFI = .98$, $GFI = .95$, $RMSEA = .05$, $CMIN/DF = 2.22$, $\chi^2 = 241.57$) and path analysis ($CFI = .94$, $GFI = .97$, $RMSEA = .05$, $CMIN/DF = 2.41$, $\chi^2 = 271.87$) fit the data well. With regard to path results, entertainment motive positively explained attitudes toward social commerce ($H2$; $\alpha = .40$, $p > .001$). Social interaction motive also positively explained attitudes toward social commerce ($H3$; $\alpha = .26$, $p > .001$). However, information sharing motive did not have an effect on attitudes ($H2$; $\alpha = -.17$, $p = .12$). Attitudes toward using social commerce positively explained purchase intentions of fashion products through social commerce ($H4$; $\beta = .74$, $p < .001$). To further understand the effects of three motivations on purchase intentions through attitudes, the bootstrapping method was used to analyze the indirect effect. Through the attitudes, entertainment motive ($\beta = .27$, $p < .01$, 95% CI: $.07 \sim .68$) and social connectedness motive ($\beta = .17$, $p < .05$, 95% CI: $.07 \sim .68$) had in-direct effects on purchase intentions.

Discussions & Implications

Findings of the study suggest that the feelings of entertainment and social interaction are key motivational factors that augment Gen Z consumers' apparel purchase through social commerce. The results explain that when young social media users have positive attitudes toward social commerce they are more likely to purchase fashion products through social commerce. However, findings revealed that the effect of information sharing motivation did not explain the attitudes toward social commerce. These findings suggested that information search or sharing would not significantly impact young social media users' attitudes toward social commerce. Our findings opposite from previous research which suggest an importance role of information search in predicting behaviors of general social media users (Corrada *et al.*, 2020; Hajli *et al.*, 2017; Whiting & Williams, 2013; Youn, 2019). The current research suggests strong possibilities that

Page 2 of 5

motivations of Gen Z consumers are different from those of other generations. Consequently, to increase Gen Z consumers' adoption of social commerce for purchasing apparel products, marketers should increase feelings of entertainment and emotional connectedness.

These findings suggest that fashion brand retailers need to develop a new form of social commerce as a form of entertainment that creates shared feeling of friendliness and togetherness on social media. A practical example is offering free digital designer fashion in Animal Crossing New Horizons. Players will feel close to the brand and have fun and excitement by dressing up their avatars with the designer outfits. Another example is using a storytelling platform that features a collection of curated content such as playlists, workout lists, and meditation guide.

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