



Influence of Social Connectedness on Apparel Purchases through Social Commerce

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Background. A recent consumer survey forecast that 70% of the U.S. population will soon be social media users, and it revealed growing consumer willingness to purchase products from a brand followed on social media (eMarketer, 2017). Given the popularity and increased use of social media, many apparel brands are incorporating social commerce, which is a merger of consumer shopping and social media experiences. For instance, Kate Spade & Co. featured a “Shop Now” banner on Facebook and Instagram that directed consumers to the brand’s website for efficient transactions (Kats, 2017). Academic literature has focused on content of social media pages (Ashley & Tuten, 2015) as well as motivations of social media users (Anderson, Knight, Pookulangara, & Josiam, 2014); however, antecedent factors leading to motivations (i.e., utilitarian and hedonic value) for social commerce have not been examined to date. Therefore, the present study expands the scope of social media research by investigating whether social connectedness influences the motivations for using social commerce and consequent attitude toward and purchases of apparel products through social commerce (i.e., apparel shopping through social media platforms).

Theoretical Framework. A new conceptual framework was proposed by incorporating variables from self-psychology theory (Kohut, 2009) and the technology acceptance model (TAM; Davis, Bagozzi, & Warshaw, 1992). Self-psychology theory explains that individuals who feel socially connected perceive people in the group to be friendly and actively engage in social activities. Lee and Robbins (1995) developed a measure of interpersonal social connectedness that captured constructs of emotional connectedness, affiliation, and companionship. Their scale has been used to examine online social connectedness (Grieve, Indian, Witteveen, Tolan, & Marrington, 2013). In addition, social interactions have been found to be associated with utilitarian (i.e., information acquisition) and hedonic (i.e., play) based sense of empowerment, leading to positive behavioral intentions (Yuksel, Milne, & Miller, 2016). According to TAM (Davis et al., 1992), perceived ease of use, usefulness, and enjoyment influence attitude toward using information technology, which in turn, enhances intention to adopt the technology. TAM has been used to investigate consumer technology adoption in apparel shopping (e.g., Kim, Ma, & Park, 2009). Combining the two theories, the present study focuses on how social connectedness may influence the TAM variables. When consumers feel socially connected, they may perceive social commerce to be easy, useful (i.e., utilitarian value), and enjoyable (i.e., hedonic value). Thus, we hypothesized that (H1) social connectedness positively influences perceived (a) ease of use, (b) usefulness, and (c) enjoyment of social media, leading to (H2) positive attitude toward social commerce. Finally, we postulated that (H3) positive attitude will increase intention to purchase apparel products through social commerce platforms.

Method. An online survey was used to collect data from college students at a university in the U.S. A convenience sample of 531 respondents between the ages of 18 and 24 completed the survey. The majority of respondents (71%) were Caucasian American women. Reliable and valid scale items were adopted and modified to measure the six variables (i.e., social connectedness, ease of use, usefulness, enjoyment, attitude, and intention). For example, Grieve et al.'s (2013) social connectedness scale and Kim, Ma, and Park's (2009) ease of use, usefulness, and enjoyment measures were adapted. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed in Mplus 7.0 to test the measurement and structural models, the latter reflecting the seven proposed hypotheses in the conceptual model (see Figure 1).

Results. Confirmatory factor analysis confirmed the factor structure of each variable. All factor loadings were greater than .55 and were highly significant ($p \leq .001$). Cronbach's alpha values were above .83 for each measure, which supports acceptable internal consistency ($> .70$; Netemeyer, Bearden, & Sharma, 2003). The six-factor measurement model yields a satisfactory fit to the data: [$\chi^2 = 243.27$ ($df = 120$), $p < .000$], CFI = .99, RMSEA = .04, and SRMR = .03. The structural model had good fit (see Figure 1). Results provide support for H1; social connectedness positively influenced (a) perceived ease of use, (b) usefulness, and (c) enjoyment. Results also confirmed that the three TAM variables influenced attitude toward social commerce (H2), which influenced the purchase of apparel products through social commerce (H3).

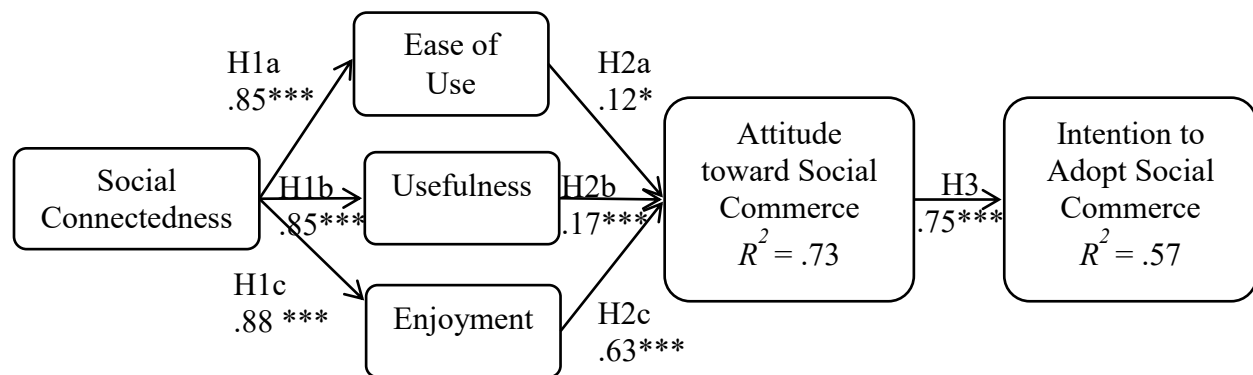


Figure 1. Structural model path coefficients and model fit for the proposed model.

Note: $\chi^2 = 427.06$, $df = 128$, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .07, SRMR = .06, * $p \leq .05$, *** $p \leq .001$.

Discussion and Conclusions. Aligned with previous social media research (Yuksel et al., 2016), the results confirmed social connectedness positively influences consumers attitude toward and intention to adopt social commerce. The present study provides new insight—TAM variables mediate the relationship between social connectedness and attitude toward social commerce. Consequently, to increase consumers' adoption of social commerce for purchasing apparel products, marketers should increase feelings of emotional connectedness, affiliation, and companionship among its patrons. Along with broadcasting news, deals, or events on social media pages, sites should include elements that foster customer engagement, such as Snapchat's geofilters. Future research could examine a more representative sample of the U.S. or other countries.

References available upon request