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Language, Trust and Social Commerce: Understanding Consumer Purchase Intentions in Digital Markets

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Abstract:

As such, the role of language (information quality), social proof (reviews and recommendation) on trust, thereby impacting consumer purchase intention in the context of social commerce is investigated by this study. This was a sequential explanatory mixed methods study with quantitative survey data (n=250), followed by qualitative data from ten semi-structured interviews. It used descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and multiple regression to analyses quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative data. Three hypotheses were tested: H1 (the positive effect of language quality on trust), H2 (the positive effect of trust on purchase intention), and H3 (the positive effect of social proof on trust). The results show trust had a positive and statistically significant effect on consumers' purchase intention, thus confirming the previous studies regarding the importance of trust in social commerce decision-making. We based the analysis of information quality, whereas language was operationalized as accuracy, clarity, completeness and currency. These dimensions were believed to result in higher trust in the consumer; however, summary statistics show a small and statistically non-significant association between language and trust. Communities, and/or forums (social proof) and ratings & reviews and referrals & recommendations (social proof)) were surrogates to trust as operationalized through the lens of. The qualitative analysis supported the quantitative results. They distinguished between linguistic support to clarify what was unclear and social proof, which guided their judgment of the product. While participants acknowledged the role of language in clarifying product information and the role of social proof in evaluating product quality,

neither construct was found to independently generate trust in the seller or platform. The findings suggest that consumer trust in social commerce is increasingly anchored in experiential and relational factors rather than information-based cues. The research contributes to social commerce theory through empirical support for trust as the primary mediating construct and challenges other long-held assumptions including information quality or user-generated content that mediate trust. Practical implications Businesses need to know that their focus should be on transparency, backed accountability and consistency of service quality than mere promotional language and quantity social proof.

Keywords: Social Commerce; Trust; Purchase Intention; Social Proof; Information Quality; Language.

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اللغة والثقة والتجارة الاجتماعية: فهم نوايا الشراء لدى المستهلكين في الأسواق الرقمية

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ملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة دور اللغة (جودة المعلومات) والدليل الاجتماعي (التقييمات والتوصيات) في بناء الثقة، وتأثير ذلك على نية الشراء لدى المستهلكين في سياق التجارة الاجتماعية. اعتمدت الدراسة منهجية بحثية مختلطة متسلسلة، شملت بيانات استقصائية كمية (عدد المشاركين = 250)، تلتها بيانات نوعية من عشر مقابلات شبه منظمة. استُخدمت الإحصاءات الوصفية، ومعامل ارتباط بيرسون، والانحدار المتعدد لتحليل البيانات الكمية، والتحليل الموضوعي للبيانات النوعية. تم اختبار ثلاث فرضيات: الفرضية الأولى (التأثير الإيجابي لجودة اللغة على الثقة)، والفرضية الثانية (التأثير الإيجابي للثقة على نية الشراء)، والفرضية الثالثة (التأثير الإيجابي للدليل الاجتماعي على الثقة). أظهرت النتائج أن للثقة تأثيرًا إيجابيًا وذا دلالة إحصائية على نية الشراء لدى المستهلكين، مما يؤكد الدراسات السابقة حول أهمية الثقة في عملية اتخاذ القرار في التجارة الاجتماعية. استند تحليل جودة المعلومات بينما تم تعريف اللغة إجرائيًا من خلال الدقة والوضوح والشمولية والحداثة. كان يُعتقد أن هذه الأبعاد تُؤدي إلى زيادة ثقة المستهلك؛ إلا أن الإحصاءات الموجزة تُظهر ارتباطًا ضعيفًا وغير ذي دلالة إحصائية بين اللغة والثقة. وقد اعتُبرت المجتمعات والمنتديات (الدليل الاجتماعي)، والتقييمات والمراجعات، والإحالات والتوصيات (الدليل الاجتماعي أيضًا) مؤشرات بديلة للثقة. وقد دعمت التحليلات النوعية النتائج الكمية، حيث ميّزت بين الدعم اللغوي لتوضيح ما هو غامض والدليل الاجتماعي الذي يُوجّه تقييمهم للمنتج. وبينما أقرّ المشاركون بدور اللغة في توضيح معلومات المنتج ودور الدليل الاجتماعي في تقييم جودته، لم يُثبت أن أيًا من هذين العاملين يُولّد ثقة مستقلة

في البائع أو المنصة. وتشير النتائج إلى أن ثقة المستهلك في التجارة الاجتماعية ترتكز بشكل متزايد على العوامل التجريبية والعلاقاتية بدلًا من المؤشرات المعلوماتية. يُساهم هذا البحث في نظرية التجارة الاجتماعية من خلال تقديم دعم تجريبي للثقة باعتبارها العامل الوسيط الرئيسي، ويتحدى افتراضات أخرى راسخة، بما في ذلك جودة المعلومات أو المحتوى الذي يُنشئه المستخدمون والذي يُؤثر على الثقة. الآثار العملية: يجب أن تدرك الشركات أن تركيزها ينبغي أن ينصب على الشفافية والمساءلة المدعومة بالبيانات واتساق جودة الخدمة، بدلاً من مجرد اللغة الترويجية والكمية التي تُثبتها الأدلة الاجتماعية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التجارة الاجتماعية؛ الثقة؛ نية الشراء؛ الدليل الاجتماعي؛ جودة المعلومات؛ اللغة.

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The research

Introduction

The proliferation of social media platforms has fundamentally transformed the e-commerce landscape, giving rise to what scholars now refer to as social commerce — a form of online shopping that integrates social interaction, user-generated content, and peer influence into the purchasing process (Liang & Turban, 2011). There seem to be three topics that have been studied over time in this domain, namely: language (or information quality), social proof (reviews, ratings, recommendations, community forums etc.) and trust. Communications-oriented determinants are already introduced in previous studies as critical antecedents of trust, and therefore purchase intention. Now, as digital spaces become even more cluttered with advertising and often manufactured user-generated content, should the communication signals we recognize (and trust) still count towards consumer trust or does it prove less effective over time? there is a growing need to reassess the extent to which these communication-based signals continue to function as effective mechanisms for building genuine consumer trust.

As such, this study fills the lack of empirical cache around social commerce by examining these relationships in an integrated model which uses language-based messages and draw between them from social proof trappings to trust and purchase intention. The research is based on two theoretical bases. The first of these is the comprehensive model of user satisfaction and technology acceptance developed by Wixom and Todd (2005). It lays a conceptual foundation to operationalized quality of information. The second model is the Hajli (2015) social commerce adoption model which identifies forum/community, ratings and reviews, referrals and recommendations as core social commerce constructs (SCCs), having trust and intention to buy impact. This study tests the following hypotheses: H1 (Language → Trust), H2 (Trust → Purchase Intention and H3 (Social Proof→Trust.

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design with data from a survey of 250 respondents as quantitative data and ten semi-structured interviews for qualitative data. Theoretically, it contributes to the literature by challenging established beliefs on communication-based trust signals and through practical implications providing guidance for firms on how to invest resources in fostering trust.

I. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

1 Social Commerce and Social Commerce Constructs

According to Hajli (2015); Liang and Turban, 2011, the social commerce refers specifically to a branch of e-commerce in which web 2.0 technologies and social media platforms facilitate consumer content creation, experience exchange and buyer collaboration. Hajli (2015) proposed an integrated model of social commerce adoption that was based on three primary SCCs forums and communities, ratings and reviews, and referrals and recommendations. Hajli, drawing on social interaction theory and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989), argued that SCCs enable consumers to co-create value with sellers and platforms by reducing uncertainty perceptions and building trust towards sellers and platforms. His empirical research found support for the positive direct effects of social commerce constructs on consumer trust and purchase intention, and trust as the dominant mediating mechanism by which data exchanges translate into purchasing behavior in social networks.

This framework is extended and critically developed in the present study. While Hajli (2015) developed his model in a relatively earlier social commerce environment, the current study is contextualized within an existing environment characterized by mounting consumer awareness of fake reviews, manipulated ratings and algorithmically curated content. The key question is whether the trust-generating potential for social commerce constructs and communication-based signals more broadly remains under these conditions.

2 Language, Information Quality, and Trust (H1)

In this study, language refers to the information given by sellers and platforms on its quality for consumers. Information quality is operationalized following Wixom and Todd (2005) into four dimensions: accuracy, clarity, completeness and currency. The theory is that clear and consistent product description and platform communication enables consumers to better assess what can be purchased, which should then make them trusting of the source. In the context of data warehousing, it was suggested by Wixom and Todd (2005), but is applicable to consumer-facing digital platforms as indicated in the wider e-commerce literature (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016). Since social commerce interactions are largely text-based and not face-to-face, the quality of language is one of few signals available to consumers

to evaluate seller credibility, we propose the following: H1: Language Quality positively relates to consumer trust in social commerce.

This framework here is not only extended but also best analyzed. Since Hajli (2015) initially conceived his model in a different social commerce context, the present study re-examines his framework within a contemporary consumer landscape marked by heightened awareness of fake reviews, inflated ratings, and algorithmically curated content. The overall question is whether or not social commerce constructs, and communication-based signals more broadly, are still capable of establishing trust in this context.

3 Social Proof and Trust (H3)

Social proof (Cialdini, 2009) is user-generated content which provides information about product quality and seller credibility to potential buyers. Social commerce constructs specifically ratings, reviews, and peer referrals from online forums and communities represent a primary source of trust signals on social networking sites (Hajli, 2015). He found that consumers will trust e-commerce sites more when they see positive reviews and peer endorsements. This is consistent with prior research by Ba and Pavlou (2002), who found that user ratings generate trust premiums in electronic markets. In the same way Hsu and Lin (2016) and Cheung & Thadani (2012) discovered that e-WOM* as a whole, has a significant effect in consumer attitudes.

Older research, however, has emphasized the growing public discomfort with UGC. The rise of misleading and unattractive content leads to an additional pressure on consumers for questioning proportions in the online space according to Filieri (2016). Mudambi and Schuff (2010) make the case that reviews influence assessments of product quality more than higher-order judgments like trust in sellers. Empirical evidence of common review fraud (Luca and Zervas 2016) that then erodes the credibility of UGC. This leads to social proof and the H3 is formulated as: Social proof has a positive influence on consumer trust in social commerce.

4 Trust and Purchase Intention (H2)

E-commerce and Social commerce: Trust is consistently the most important antecedent of purchase intention regardless of research context. Hajli (2015) ensured with control for context that trust as the dominant mediating mechanism influences social commerce adoption process and has

larger direct effect on purchase intention than social commerce constructs. Overall, Pavlou (2003) studied that trust reduces the transaction risk and uncertainty thereby reducing consumer reluctance to buy online under information asymmetry (Ajzen, 1991).. Likewise, Gefen et al. What other studies (Reichheld & Schefter, 2000).) confirmed is that this relationship does exist in the multiple e-commerce contexts as trust has always been shown to be vital antecedent of consumer purchase behavior. Kim et al. that trust served as the mediating influence between perceived risk and purchase intention (Mayer et al., 1995). Trust is the basic element of relationship marketing, this allows more repeated interaction which generates constant commitment from the consumer (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Taken together, the body of literature reviewed above converges on a consistent finding, which forms the basis of H2: consumer trust has a positive influence on purchase intention in social commerce.

II. Research Methodology

1 Research Design

First, the present study adopts an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) comprising two phases (i.e., quantitative phase first and qualitative phase follows). We opted for this design because not only does this division enables robust statistical testing of hypothesized relationships but also provides rich contextual interpretation. The quantitative phase is how we can generalize about the relationships between different variables. The qualitative aspect allows us to make sense of the how and why behind those statistical trends.

2 Quantitative Phase: Instrument, Sample, and Analysis

Methods: A self survey questionnaire was designed into 4 sections of variables. This was adapted with five quality items from Wixom and Todd (2005) (language). These items correspond to clarity, accuracy, timeliness, completeness and overall quality of platform-provided information. Social proof was measured using 4 items adapted from Hajli (2015) related to the extent that reviews, ratings and recommendation are considered useful or trustful. Trust was measured using five items adapted from Hajli (2015) and McKnight et al. (2002). To assess purchase intention, we adopted four items based on Pavlou (2003), which focuses consumer willingness to transact through social media platforms while measuring Platform Reliability, Honesty and Perceived Safety. Items were rated on 5-point Likert scales (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

The data was collected using Google Form from 250 responders with the help of convenience sampling method(social media). Analysis of the data were carried out using IBM SPSS Statistics (Chicago, IL) for descriptive statistics, Cronbach's Alpha reliability testing, Pearson correlation analysis and hypothesis testing by multiple linear regression.

Table N°1. Variables Operationalization and Measurement Instruments

Variable	Operationalization	Items	Scale	Source
Language	Accuracy, clarity, completeness, currency of platform information	5	5-pt Likert	Wixom & Todd (2005)
Social Proof	Reviews, ratings, referrals, recommendations (SCCs)	4	5-pt Likert	Hajli (2015)
Trust	Platform reliability, honesty, safety (benevolence & credibility)	5	5-pt Likert	Hajli (2015)
Purchase Intention	Willingness to buy via social media platforms in future	4	5-pt Likert	Hajli (2015)

Source: Adapted from Wixom & Todd (2005), Hajli (2015), and Pavlou (2003).

3 Qualitative Phase: Interview Design, Participant Selection, and Analysis

They used data collected during the ten semi-structured with purposefully selected active social commerce users. The interview questions were framed according to the three overarching themes of the study (1); how do language and style of communication shape your trust towards a brand or seller; (2); what effect does level of trust have on purchase behavior. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim and analyzed following. This was done through member-checking, reflexivity and thick description confirming trustworthiness. Phase 1: The quantitative part worked via data collected (obtained from surveys) over the given time to analyze and statistically plot

some results; Phase 2: Qualitative was study describing the statistical findings through contextualization.

III. Results and Discussion

1 Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

Descriptive analysis indicated moderate-to-high mean scores for all constructs: Language (M = 3.62, SD = 0.71), Social Proof (M = 3.58, SD = 0.68), Trust (M=3.71, SD=0.74) and Purchase Intention M=3.54; SD=0.69). Reliability tests based on the Cronbach's Alpha showed satisfactory-to-good reliability for Language (α = 0.78), Social Proof (α = 0.74) and Trust (α = 0.81), indeed consistent with or above the minimum levels recommended by Nunnally (1978) that were fixed as $\alpha \geq 0.70$, while a lower one was reached by the Purchase Intention scale (α = 0.549), which is below those recommended levels This has an innate limitation that becomes apparent when interpreting H2 results.

Table N°2. Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha
Language	3.62	0.71	0.78
Social Proof	3.58	0.68	0.74
Trust	3.71	0.74	0.81
Purchase Intention	3.54	0.69	0.549*

*Source: SPSS output. * Below the 0.70 threshold — interpreted with caution.*

2 Correlation and Regression Analysis: Hypothesis Testing

As expected, Pearson's correlation between trust and purchase intention was strong and statistically significant ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.001$). Correlations between language and trust ($r = 0.11$, $p > 0.05$) and between social evidence and trust ($r = 0.15$, $p > 0.05$) were positive but did not reach statistical significance.

These patterns were confirmed by a multiple regression analysis. For H2 (Trust → Purchase Intention), the hypothesis was supported. It should be noted, however, that the Purchase Intention scale returned a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.549, which falls below the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978). This weakens the reliability of the construct measurement, and the H2

finding should therefore be interpreted with some caution despite its statistical significance: Trust emerged as a statistically significant predictor of purchase intention ($\beta = 0.58$, $t = 9.21$, $p < 0.001$). The overall regression model with language, social proof and trust as predictors explained approximately 37% of the variance in purchase intention ($R2 = 0.37$). Trust explained the largest proportion of the explained variance. H1 (Language → Trust) was not supported. The bivariate correlation between Language and Trust was weak ($r = 0.11$, $p > 0.05$), and this pattern was confirmed in the regression model ($\beta = 0.09$, $t = 1.43$, $p = 0.154$), indicating no statistically significant relationship between the two constructs.

Table N°3. Regression Results and Hypothesis Testing Summary

Hypothesis	Path	β	p-value	Decision
H1	Language → Trust	0.09	0.154	Not Supported
H2	Trust → Purchase Intention	0.58	< 0.001	Supported ✓
H3	Social Proof → Trust	0.07	0.263	Not Supported

Source: SPSS regression output.

3 Qualitative Findings: Thematic Analysis

Qualitative analysis of the ten transcripts yielded three higher themes, directly aligned with one hypothesis each.

Theme 1 — Language and Trust (H1): Participants remarked that professional structured language aids in the understanding and gives a feeling of comfort with their sellers. But none of them believed that language by itself could establish authentic trust. Many of the respondents talked about over-polished communication as a red flag marketing technique rather than serious commitment to quality. This finding supports Wixom and Todd (2005)'s argument that information quality has a direct impact on satisfaction but not on behavioral intentions due to its conceptual gap; thus, mediators are needed. Trust, in the context of social commerce, looks like just such a construct and quality that language cannot fill without it.

Theme 2 — Trust and Purchase Intention (H2): The first key theme was overwhelmingly trust, which we found in all of the ten interviews. Regardless of how appealing a product appeared, participants were

unanimous in their position: without prior grounds for trusting the seller or platform, the purchase would not take place. Several added that even past positive experiences or third-party credentials could make the decision to buy feel almost automatic, proof of credentials from a trusted party or guarantee for the item/platform itself meant deciding to buy reflexive. This aligns with Hajli's (2015) empirical finding that trust exerts a stronger direct effect on purchase intention than social commerce constructs, with a reported path coefficient of 0.375 ($p < 0.001$).

Theme 3 — Social Proof and Trust (H3): Participants tended to use reviews and ratings as indicators of the quality of a product, yet did so without ever integrating this usage into the consideration of trusting the seller or platform. The opportunity that the ratings may have been a sham created an uncertainty in participants which is coherent with what Hajli (2015) showed – evaluations about fake reviews and uncertain sellers are almost always jeopardizing trust in social commerce meta structures. But in contrast, participants expressed confidence at the item level (what is this item like) and trust at the seller level (is this seller legitimate), a delineation which not only accounts for the non-significant H3 finding but carries Mudambi and Schuff's (2010) argument one further notch deeper: reviews primarily function on product- as opposed to seller-level judgments.

4 Integrated Discussion

The quantitative and qualitative results tell a similar story: trust is the only persistent driver of purchase intent in social commerce, while language and so-called social proof although intuitively important are actually more contextual facilitators than real engenderers of Trust. These results both support and greatly expand the theoretical frameworks of Hajli (2015) and Wixom and Todd (2005).

Therefore this confirmation of H2 is fully compliant with Hajli (2015) social commerce adoption model and corroborate the findings of Pavlou (2003), Gefen et al. is trusted in a central mediating position between the 'other'. (2003), and Kim et al. (2008). However, rejecting H1 is not in line with Wixom and Todd's (2005) findings that information quality, thus satisfaction and behavioral intentions, is expressed in a positive or negative aspect. It is understandable that Wixom and Todd were looking at data warehousing systems, which are relatively closed environments that we can typically be controlled for institutions; while social commerce occurs in a more open environment populated with peers an environment where information quality might be manipulated. The data find what you might

think, that easily-replicated signals (quality of language) would be contentless, as Signal Theory predicts (Spence, 1978).

On the contrary, the non-support for H3 further qualifies Hajli (2015)'s findings and suggests that SCCs need only focus on service outcomes which are rewarding enough for consumers to take an action. Hajli (2015), in his original study, reported a fairly strong positive effect of SCCs on trust; however, as we have established, the current study is conducted in a much more mature market regarding awareness around fake reviews and algorithmic manipulation: hence this relationship is reduced to insignificance. Social proof is a strong trust signal, but its strength varies across contexts and its temporal dynamics are also very sensitive to shifts in consumer digital literacy.

Conclusion

Based on a sequential explanatory mixed-method study design, the research examines the relationships between language, social proof, trust and consumer purchase intention in the framework of social commerce. The hypothesizes were estimated on the basis of Wixom and Todd (2005) and Hajli (2015). The results provide strong empirical support for H2: trust was the most powerful and statistically significant predictor of purchase intention a finding that is consistent with decades of research across online shopping contexts. In contrast, neither H1 nor H3 was supported: the information quality and social proof, in relation to trust, had no statistically significant effect contrary to existing literature.

Based on these findings, two theoretical contributions are drawn. Their first contribution to Hajli (2015) on social commerce adoption demonstrates that in an era of mistrust, the capacity for SCCs to drive trust is often far diminished. Second, they deepened the constructs in information quality determinants by Wixom and Todd (2005) claiming that the mediating relationship between information quality and behavioral intention may be erased if consumers have doubts about authenticity around these quality signals. These findings point to a macro-level change in trust formation, such that consumers appear to rely more on experiential evidence (prior interactions, platform history) rather than communication-based signals.

The results suggest instead that companies should focus on verifiable trust infrastructure – transparent policies, third-party review verification, better fulfilment and customer service rather than grandstanding marketing messages or almost spurious social proof. Communication is never without

its practicality, but it must be one based on visible credibility if there is any hope of that translating into purchasing behavior.

Limitations

Here are a few limitations of this study worth mentioning: First, data were collected using a non-probability convenient sampling which inherently restricts how widely the results can be generalised to all social commerce users. Second, as a cross-sectional design, the study cannot provide longitudinal development of trust. A longitudinal study on how potential buyers evolve their trust profile with experience could strengthen the claim about the fluid nature of trust and its relationship to purchase intention. The third is the risk of response bias inherent to self-report data, such as socially desirable responding and retrospective inaccuracy. Fourth, and most crucially, the Purchase Intention scale exhibited a Cronbach's Alpha (α = 0.549) lower than the conservative cut-off of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978) which likely attenuated relationships involving this construct and should be considered in interpretations. On the four limitations mentioned above, this will lead to several recommendations for future research The qualitative sample used was only ten participants, and although this is considered adequate for achieving thematic saturation, the qualitative sample does not allow us to provide a comprehensive account of consumer perspectives across varied demographic characteristics or different social commerce platforms

Recommendations for Future Research

Some of the future research ideas come from the limitations and scope in social commerce context. First, future research should incorporate probability sampling and expand the size and diversity of their samples in order to allow for more population-level generalizability. Longitudinal designs, in particular, examined how trust grows with repeated interactions between consumers and sellers or platforms over time.

Second, when conducting research in the future, researchers should include additional relevant antecedent and moderating variables beyond language, social proof and trust (e.g., brand reputation, perceived risks, platform credibility, influencer marketing) as well as other variables related to the increasing role of AI-generated content—such as consumer perception or purchase intention. These weighted factors are primarily the modern social commerce influencers and perhaps explain greater variance in consumer trust than intention to purchase.

Third, the trust dynamics explored in this paper namely that social proof has a weaker influence on soliciting trust than an absence of social proof should be further examined via cross-cultural and cross-market comparative studies to elucidate whether these phenomena are universal or contextual. The associations that we honed in on may be substantially moderated — positively or negatively — by factors such as consumers' digital literacy, the nature of regulatory environments, and widespread cultural proclivities toward avoidance of uncertainty.

Fourth, based on the advanced analytical method like Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) or Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), Hajli (2015) should be employed for testing direct and/or indirect paths between constructs to discover how these interactions integrate into a chain of causation flowing from communication signals related to your environment and brand purchasing behavior.

And lastly, the effect of AI-generated reviews and artificial media on consumer trust or its greater erosion is a timely but so far unexplored stream of future research within social commerce research .

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