LEVERAGING THE POWER OF SOCIAL PROOF ON ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

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ABSTRACT

The degree to which social media influences our everyday lives is significantly associated with the extent to which it affects the way we go about our shopping. In particular, a potent driving force behind social commerce is the concept of "social proof," which refers to the notion that we are more inclined to purchase if we can see that other people have previously done so. Over the past few years, the popularity and frequency of the usage of social proof strategies to entice online shoppers have expanded significantly. Peer recommendations, customer ratings and reviews, celebrity endorsements, and the frequency of likes on a product's social media page are all examples of elements that might sway a consumer's choice to make a purchase. However, it is not quite obvious how the use of social proof techniques influences the likelihood that customers will make a purchase. This study was done to explore the influence of information attributes on information adoption while customers are considering online purchases and also Online businesses on social media are recommended to harness the strength of the social proof approach to increase purchasing engagement and online sales, either by boosting the number of followers or offering more social community recommendations. This paper empirically evaluates the influence of social proof on online consumer behaviour.

Keywords – Social Proof, Social Media, Social Commerce, Consumer Behaviour, Customer Ratings, Recommendations.

I.INTRODUCTION

In recent years, consumers of all ages and cultures have become increasingly technologically sophisticated, and social is engrained in their digital worlds. As it continues to break down social and cultural barriers, digital has become an increasingly normal part of our daily lives for all of us. The proliferation of social media is evidence of this assertion.

Our shopping behaviour has adjusted to reflect the new norms brought about by the pervasiveness of the internet in our daily lives. We can now order our favorite foods online, buy movie tickets online, get apparel that is tailored to our specific measurements online, and the list goes on. The ability to do our shopping online has simplified and streamlined many aspects of our lives (Rita, Oliveira, & Farisa, 2019). New information-gathering strategies have been made available because of the proliferation of online marketplaces and shopping platforms (Kim, Lee, & Jung, 2020). Despite these shifts, one thing that has remained constant is the propensity we have to let the actions of others shape us. In fact, in an environment like the internet, which makes it easier to monitor the purchasing decisions of others, we are more likely to be swayed by the decisions of others (Ding & Li, 2018).

As social media continue to grow in popularity, marketers are seeking a solid basis on which to make their strategic decisions about how to interact with and influence their customers via social media (Hoffman & Novak, 2012). In the same way that shops gravitate toward densely populated, heavily travelled regions in the physical world, they now follow the same pattern in the virtual world. They are going to where hundreds of millions of consumers are not just spending time, but also giving their views, recommendations, and (in certain circumstances) purchases. Social media enables businesses to communicate with their audiences through social channels and teaches them how to use their consumers' social behaviours to enhance conversion and, eventually, sales. Moreover, "social media give a unique venue for consumers to share their reviews of acquired items, so facilitating word-of-mouth communication" (Chen, Fay, & Wang, 2011).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumers of all ages and cultures have recently advanced technologically, and social is now ingrained in their digital lives. Digital is now a more commonplace aspect of all of our everyday lives as it continues to transcend social and cultural boundaries. Social media's widespread use is proof of this claim.

Our shopping habits have changed to mirror the new standards that the internet's widespread use in daily life has wrought. Today, we can order our favorite foods online, get movie tickets online, order clothing that is made specifically for us online, and the list goes on. Many elements of our life have been streamlined and made simpler by being able to shop online (Rita, Oliveira, & Farisa, 2019). The growth of online markets and shopping platforms has opened up new information-gathering opportunities (Kim, Lee, & Jung, 2020). Despite these changes, one thing that hasn't changed is our predisposition to allow other people's behaviour influence who we are. We are actually more likely to be persuaded by other people's choices in a setting like the internet, where it is simpler to keep tabs on their purchases (Ding & Li, 2018). Marketers are looking for a strong foundation on which to base their strategic decisions about how to engage with and influence their customers via social media as it continues to gain popularity (Hoffman & Novak, 2012). Shops now follow the same trend in the virtual world as they do in the real world, which is to migrate towards heavily populated, trafficked areas. They are going to an area where hundreds of millions of consumers not only spend time but also express their opinions, offer suggestions, and (in some cases) make purchases. Businesses may engage with their audiences through social media, and it teaches them how to take advantage of their customers' social behaviours to increase conversion and, ultimately, sales. Furthermore, according to Chen, Fay, and Wang (2011), "social media give consumers a unique venue to share their reviews of acquired items, thereby facilitating word-of-mouth communication."

The term "Social Commerce" first occurs in the literature in 2005 to refer to e-commerce's new technique of doing business. It's more than a phrase or neologism for the convergence of social media and e-commerce; it's an emerging phenomenon fueled by the web 2.0 wave (C. Wang, 2009). Weijun and Lin (2011) define social commerce as "community plus e-commerce"; they feel that the community is important to the achievement of value e-commerce Social commerce is a subset of electronic commerce that uses social media or online media that facilitates social interaction and user contributions, to improve the online purchasing experience (Marsden, 2011c). In this innovative method of social media-mediated trade, both consumers and businesses profit. Consumers make educated judgments based not just on information provided by companies, but also on feedback from other consumers. Social networks may help businesses increase profitability by recruiting and enticing new customers (Curty & Zhang, 2011). Due to the increased usage of social media in business, both researchers and practitioners started to focus on social commerce. Numerous studies seek to analyse various aspects of social trade.

Self-expression, engagement, discussion, and the development and maintenance of virtual communities, which Shin (2008) identifies as Web2.0's core concepts, enable users to get valuable insights, conduct efficient product searches, and ultimately make purchases. Rad and Benyoucef (2010) examine the various phases of purchasing decision-making in social commerce and conclude that user engagement is the primary driver of social commerce. In a comprehensive study, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) provide a classification of social media that divides applications currently grouped under the umbrella term into more specific categories based on their defining characteristics: collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, social-networking sites, virtual games worlds, and virtual social worlds. They strive to guide businesses that opt to employ social media for commercial purposes. According to

Weijun and Lin (2011), social media is the best way for businesses to satisfy consumers because it leverages the community to increase the stickiness of websites and quickly focuses on the target through the power of people, thereby reducing consumers' time in search, inquiry, and product comparison. Fijakowski and Zatoka (2011) Analyse an online recommender system based on social network user profiles and conclude that collaborative data filtering may enhance the efficiency of tailored recommendations. A study of 292 individuals who participated in peer communications about goods through social media reveals that online consumer socialization via peer communication influences purchases choices in two ways: directly (compliance with peers) and indirectly by reinforcing product participation (X. Wang, Yu, & Wei, 2012). Vries et al. (2012) investigate the popularity of brand postings on brand fan pages on social networking websites. They discover that placing the brand post at the top of the brand's fan page increases the post's popularity. Different factors impact the number of likes and the number of comments, according to the data. Specifically, dynamic and engaging brand post qualities increase the number of likes. Additionally, the proportion of favourable comments on a brand's post is proportional to the number of likes.

Regarding the electronic marketplace, marketing research is in its infancy, both in terms of how customers engage with each other online and how enterprises might use the Internet to drive value-creation activities. The investigation of customer experience and attitudes about involvement within online communities is of primary relevance to marketers (Brown, Broderick, & Lee, 2007).

III. RESEARCH GAP

Although some businesses have used social proof, many organisational managers are unable to formulate and implement successful socialproof plans. The plans are only starting to take form, and some technologies are still in the process of development. This may be due to a lack of knowledge of social media's potential for company development.

Consequently, Businesses must comprehend how to employ social media to engage customers wherever the share personal information, experiences and word-of-mouth.

This problem is significant since social commerce is on the rise and online consumers are increasingly used to expressing their comprehensive observations and personal thoughts on a particular product.

IV. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objective of this study is to extensively review and categorizes the literature on social commerce and to help in the generation and collection of social proof-related information by summarizing what we know about it. The specific aims of this research are as follows:

1) To investigate the content of relevant works on social commerce and to propose a classification framework based on the recognized literature.

2) To identify various aspects of social proof through a thorough examination of the literature.
3) To provide recommendations and guidelines for businesses' utilization of the social proof potential for their company strategy.

4) To provide suggestions for future research in various areas of social proof.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative exploratory technique has been selected for this study. According to Zikmund et al. (2010), qualitative-exploratory research is an effective step when a researcher seeks to build a better knowledge of a phenomenon in great detail and depth. In addition to examining accessible data and the present level of knowledge on social proof, the research investigates emerging e-commerce solutions inside social media.

VI. TRENDS IN SOCIAL NETWORKING

In recent years, there has been an exponential increase in the use of social media, particularly social networking. There are several data that demonstrate the exponential growth of social network users. For instance, Facebook has more than 845 million active members who are linked by 100 billion friendships, and more than half of these people use the site on a daily basis (Facebook, 2012). Facebook users create 2.7 billion likes or comments every day and post 250 million photographs daily (Hoffman & Novak, 2012). Twitter, another famous social network, with more than 100 million active members (Compete, 2012), of whom 20% use the site many times each day (eMarketer, 2011), with over 200 million tweets posted daily (Hoffman & Novak, 2012). While Facebook and Twitter are adding over 700,000 and almost 500,000 users per day, respectively (Awareness, 2012). Moreover, many users have developed an addiction to social networking sites. According to statistical study, 48% of young individuals (18 to 34 years old) check Facebook as soon as they wake up, and 28% of them do it on their mobile devices before getting out of bed (Online School, 2011). Swedowsky (2009) attempts to determine why social network users are so interested in them. He contends that social networks are widespread because:

- fulfils the psychological need to be heard
- provides the opportunity to interact with one another
- It permits us to promote the things and those we love, and
- with minimal barriers to accessing technology

It seems that these features are attracting an increasing number of users to social networks daily, and it is precisely this fact that encourages businesses to participate in social media.

SOCIAL COMMERCE

Today, direct commercial activity initiated by marketers selling to consumers via social platforms is in its infancy. This phenomena influences the development of a new business model known as social commerce. Social commerce is only starting to flourish, but it is expanding quickly. In 2011, the worldwide income from social commerce was around 5 billion U.S. dollars, and according to Booz & Company, this number will increase to $30 billion by 2015. (Anderson, Sims, Price, & Brusa, 2011). In reality, the growth and mainstreaming

The rise of social media over the last several years has spawned a wider variety of social commerce tools and prospects. Numerous brands agree with this optimistic evaluation.

Wang and Zhang (2011) introduce a paradigm for comprehending social commerce from four perspectives: individuals, corporate strategies, technology, and information.

Individuals, customers, communities, and societies, which are vital to the social side of social commerce, are represented by the people viewpoint. The business viewpoint encompasses strategies, business models, and

prospects for merchants and other organisations that are believed to gain from social proof or earn a profit from them.

The technological aspect refers to the infrastructure and applications of information and communication technology responsible for the technological viability of social commerce. The information perspective exemplifies the uniqueness of this tremendously content-driven world in which a vast quantity of business-related, product- or service-related, or just social material is continually created. Even though technology facilitates social commerce, the motivation is social (Marsden, 2011c): to let people connect where they purchase and buy where they connect.

In reality, this implies that social commerce can be summed up in two main activities: integrating social media tools into an e-commerce website and/or integrating e-commerce into social media platforms.

- Adding and connecting social media tools and content (such as a corporate blog, social-bookmarking, product reviews, chat capability, and forum/community) to e-commerce websites in order to let customers connect where they purchase. Amazon, for instance, encourages users to rate and review items on its e-commerce website, as well as debate them in customer forums.
- Integration of e-commerce with social media platforms: Embedding social media shops and storefronts on prominent social media platforms to assist consumers in making purchases on these sites. For example, prominent electronics shop Best Buy's Facebook storefront.

These two social commerce technologies may improve the experience of the buying cycle in three major areas: product discovery, product selection, and product referral.

Social commerce solutions are "Awareness Boosters" when they are applied to improve product discovery. Social commerce largely functions as a "Decision Accelerator" for product selection, and as a "Advocacy Activator" for product referrals (Marsden, 2011c).

SOCIAL PROOF ASPECTS

Social proof is a business concept that takes place in social media where consumers can connect, seek recommendations from trusted individuals in order to find suitable products or services, and then buy those (Weijun & Lin, 2011). This business strategy incorporates a rapidly developing and changing collection of tools. In this context, academics are continually attempting to investigate the many facets of social commerce (Curty & Zhang, 2011; Hensel & Deis, 2010; Hsiao, Lin, Wang, Lu, & Yu, 2010; Janrain, 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Teh & Ahmed, 2011; Weijun & Lin, 2011). Most of the social commerce solutions presented by researchers may be classified into one of six main dimensions, based on a common set of tools.

SOCIAL SHOPPING

Social shopping seeks to replicate the social interactions observed in real malls and businesses via the use of technology. Social buying solutions enable individuals to engage in online purchasing together (synchronous shopping).

Social Media Stores allow customers to shop on a social media platform where they may interact with millions of other users. For instance, merchants and companies may establish a Facebook storefront. Users are able to shop and complete transactions on Facebook storefront pages. On their Facebook pages, ASOS, JC Penney, HMV, and Express enable customers to explore, share, and make purchases. 35% of internet shoppers would purchase things on Facebook, according to a study (Marsden, 2011b). According to Kembrel's CEO, Cherif Habib, college students spend between two and three hours every day on Facebook. By bringing our store to where our consumers spend the most time online, we want to provide them the most convenient and relevant buying experience possible (Sung, 2010). With Facebook's upcoming deployment of its own integrated payment system, social media shops are poised to become a key growth area in social commerce.

Social Graphs enable users of social networks to bring their online social networks to e-commerce sites and communicate directly with their friends and followers while on the site. When customers join up for a retail site using their Facebook account, for instance, they have the option to provide the shop access to their member profile information and friend networks. This social network data allows e-commerce sites to improve social buying (Janrain, 2011). If merchants are aware of the needs, desires, and interests of brand-affiliated customers, the likelihood of placing the appropriate product in front of the appropriate client improves. The social graph enables merchants to locate target clients and provide customized suggestions. According to a poll, over 90 percent of U.S. and U.K. online consumers who have logged in to a retailer's website using Facebook are somewhat or very likely to get tailored suggestions based on their Facebook profile (Diner, Kimbrely, & Sucharita, 2011).

Group Buying enables individuals to leverage their combined purchasing power to get a better bargain, often by enlisting other buyers via social networks like Facebook and/or group-buying websites like Groupon. For instance, corporations such as Dell, Intel, and Adidas urge customers to join an online social network in order to purchase things in quantity and earn a discount. Using the group-buying website Groupon, the Gap was able to generate $11 million in sales in a single day (Awareness, 2012). Group purchasing provides incentives for individuals to spread the news about discounts.

Social Shopping Portals allow users to shop at several businesses simultaneously utilizing a variety of social shopping techniques, including ratings and reviews, suggestions and referrals, and social bookmarking (e.g. Kaboodle.com and Storeenvy.com). 32% of merchants polled use these sites to generate traffic to their shops or have planned implementation/enhancement for 2009, according to research (Mulpuru, 2010).

RATING AND REVIEW

Ratings and Reviews are the original social commerce toolkit that enable individuals to share product evaluations and influence each other's selections with independent ideas and experiences.

From a business viewpoint, rating and review systems enable businesses to seamlessly integrate consumer feedback and community activities into their websites. From the consumer's standpoint, however, the word of independent users and actual customers on social media is more reliable and valuable when making a purchase choice. In other words, there is a positive correlation between the ratings and reviews quality and online shopping mall trust, and between online shopping mall trust and perceived utility, perceived ease of use, and purchase intention (Shadkam, 2012). According to research, 71% of customers feel that consumer evaluations are very helpful when selecting and buying a product (Bausch & McGiboney, 2008). 90% of internet shoppers in this instance believe comments from known individuals, whereas 70% believe evaluations from unknown users (Nielsen, 2009).

RECOMMENDATIONS AND REFERRALS

In contrast to ratings and reviews, which are often accessible to everyone, recommendations and referrals are typically individualized social media endorsements for online products and services that are intended to maximize the referral value of consumers and advocates.

Social Recommendation refers to the practice of using social media to get and provide advice on what to purchase, read, eat, see, and do. When customers purchase a product, they often tell others about it and support the brand. Consumers may often do this for free, for as by clicking a "Like" button on a social networking site, which enables them to spread the word without incurring significant costs. When making shopping choices, millions of users are impacted by their friends' recommendations on social media (Liang, Ho, Li, & Turban, 2011). In research, more than half of respondents said that they often update their Facebook statuses on a product that excites them. In addition, 55% of respondents said they are more inclined to buy a product when a friend recommends it on Facebook or another social media platform. And 53% of respondents claimed they had sought Facebook friends for their input on a purchase (Diner, et al., 2011).

Referral Programs refer to a retailer's provision of monetary and non-material benefits for customer advocacy. Rewarding consumers and partners for suggesting new clients is an effective social commerce approach. According to research, in lieu of margin-eroding price promotions, incentivizing satisfied consumers to advocate with samples, awards, and discounts has shown to be a successful strategy (Marsden, 2011b).

FORUMS AND COMMUNITIES

Popular, helpful, and efficient social media tools for social commerce, forums facilitate product discovery, selection, and recommendations by offering a controlled environment centred on a certain job or topic. Forums and communities enable merchants to give customer-engaging, sale-driving user-generated content.

Forums are often separated into two categories. People may give one other help and solve each other's issues in "discussion forums" that take the form of interactive space. And "Q&A" forums that often feature a FAQ (frequently asked questions) format that may be searched. In these forums, members answer frequent queries (such as Yahoo's question-and-answer section).

Retail Blogs give information and debate on e-commerce events, as well as solicit user feedback and improvement ideas. The primary advantage of blogging is often the ability to engage brand fans.

Online Consumer Communities are often connected to an e-commerce website for loyalty, advisory, or social CRM (Social Customer Relationship Management) purposes.

Customer communities may be hosted on social media platforms like Facebook or on websites with specialised community management software.

VII. IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETERS

This research attempts to map the present status of social commerce technologies and provides eight guidelines for effective social commerce to aid online shops in planning their social commerce.

The following recommendations will guide marketers through a step-by-step process for developing a successful social commerce campaign.

The objectives of social media integration and its function within an organization's broader strategy will vary. Marketers must consider the role of social media integration in their entire brand strategy. Too often, corporations believe that the only way to gauge the success of a social commerce programme is to analyse the number of Facebook purchases or Facebook "likes," but what about influence? Clearly stated objectives, targets, and programme metrics might include the following:

- The total amount of impressions
- The acquisition of new clients
- The newly acquired data points
- Loyalty programme expansion
- Website referrals
- Customer satisfaction measurements
- The sales are produced by social media platforms such as Facebook.

INTEGRATION AND SYNCHRONIZATION

When developing a social commerce programme, marketers should have a customer-centric mindset. Customers demand a uniform experience throughout a retailer's website, mobile applications, and Facebook. Integrating social commerce firmly with a retailer's current tools, initiatives, and procedures will increase consumer consistency and organisation visibility**.**

LEVERAGING CUSTOMER RATINGS AND REVIEWS

Implementing a suitable rating and review system facilitates feedback collection and increases customer confidence. Much of this advantage is attributable to the fact that customers may provide direct feedback on the offers that are most relevant to them, giving fast and vital insights for a vast array of brands, goods, and merchants (Mulpuru, 2010).

Marketers must determine if this feature is accessible to all customers or just registered users. When users submit evaluations, will they be shown instantly on the site, or will they be subject to prior approval by marketers?

UTILIZING SOCIAL RECOMMENDATION

The "social" in social networks may facilitate the transmission of information about exclusive merchandise, brand and product preferences, and eventually increase sales. Utilizing social recommendations and product ideas, marketers could use the power of social proof to encourage customer purchases. Different incentives may be used, for instance, to encourage new visitors to like their product on Facebook and current visitors to share information about it.

PROVIDING CONSUMER COMMUNITIES

Social proof tools such as forums, blogs, and social networks boost customers' relationship with retailer data sources and their time spent there. This will increase the business's potential worth. By employing a forum, a company blog, or a guestbook, merchants demonstrate to their customers that they are accessible and present, therefore building their connection with their customers (i.e. customer retention).

VIII. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE STUDY

Today, social commerce is progressively maturing and gaining widespread acceptance. We should be certain that it will become a fundamental Internet business model in the future. However, social commerce is still in its infancy, and explorers are still attempting to identify an efficient operating approach. This study explores the substance, qualities, and dimensions of social proof in an effort to examine current research and its historical context. This study confirms six main facets of social commerce based on social media platforms and technologies, and it gives marketers with guidelines for mapping their social proof approach. Results indicate that marketers should recognise the rising popularity of social media among consumers and develop marketing strategies to meet their demands, therefore enhancing the customer experience. By presenting items to a group of people, social proof functionality not only increases the overall efficacy of social media as a marketing channel but also helps businesses to convert talks into actions and purchases. As breakthrough mobile technology and smartphones enter the market, merchants will have a greater opportunity to exploit social media. Numerous social media applications and websites are now mobile-optimized, and marketers may give mobile-based solutions that make it simpler for consumers to connect to the online market. In this respect, future research may concentrate on mobile social commerce since mobile technologies enable the development of new business solutions and strategies. (Nielsen/Mckinisey, 2011)

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