

Social Commerce Adoption Among Generation Z: The Role of Influencer Credibility and Trust

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ABSTRACT

Social media has created a social commerce (S.Com) era, especially for Gen. Z shoppers that has revolutionized m-Commerce. This research explores how factors such as influencer credibility (IC) and consumer trust (CT) contribute to the adoption of S.Com. The study was conducted with a quantitative research design and 400 Gen.Z respondents were chosen for this study. Indeed, the results showed that the credibility of influencers can positively impact CT, which ultimately positively affects the S.Com platform purchase decision process. The regression analysis result revealed that the variable IC and influencers trust had significant positive relationship with consumer buying behaviour and intention to S.Com. The analysis shows that the creation of genuine influencer marketing and credible S.Com platforms are crucial to making consumers feel engaged in the social media world and fostering long-lasting digital marketing strategies aimed at Gen.Z.

Keywords: Social Commerce, Gen.Z, influencer credibility, Consumer Trust, Purchase Intention, Social Media Marketing, Digital Consumer Behaviour.

INTRODUCTION:

Social media has revolutionized the e-commerce landscape by allowing consumers to shop, communicate, interact with others within the social network. S.Com is social or collaborative instead of online shopping, which aims to build participative and interactive shopping atmosphere based on collaboration, user content, peer recommendations, live interaction and influencers' endorsement (Hajli, 2015). Consumers are no longer just turning to the company for information, but are looking to social media users and influencers they think are smart, reliable and trusted to provide them with product recommendations and buy information.

S.Com has seen tremendous growth in recent times and this has spurred many people to adopt it in their operations throughout the world. Such platforms have become more than just a means of communication and connections to the brand □ users can find products, communicate with the brand, see live demos, browse around and make a purchase within an ecosystem (Liang & Turban, 2011). Overall, this integration has profoundly changed how consumers make purchasing decisions in favor of social interaction, online engagement, and digital influence.

One of the most influential consumers groups that are contributing to the growth of S.Com are called Gen.Z and refer to the generation born between 1997 till 2012 (Priporas et al., 2020). The Gen.Z knows life without a TV and is incredibly adept at using the internet and technology in their lives. They grow up looking at images, hearing about information from EWOM (electronic word of mouth), reading comments on online communities, following referrals from social media influencers □ NOT hearing traditional advertising. This generation is looking for authenticity, transparency, personalization and interactive communication and they are highly receptive to influencer marketing.

Social media influencers have become movers and shakers in the world of brands and customers connection. Influencers build relationships with their audience as opposed to typical celebrities. They create content that is relatable to their audience and foster two way communication. They are largely successful if the influencers are credible, meaning that they have dimensions of expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness and authenticity (Ohanian, 1990). When consumers see a clear and honest communication by an influencer that has professional knowledge, lists to his or her peers, and has first-hand knowledge of the products, he or she is more

likely to be taken seriously for recommendations (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

CT is an integral aspect of IC and is a crucial component to diminish uncertainty in online shopping. In S.Com, trust assumes special importance since the products cannot be directly examined by the customers before it is bought and third party recommendations have an added weight. When consumers confidently trust social media influencers, online communities, brands, and digital platforms, perceived risk decreases, which further facilitates purchasing behavior (Gefen et al., 2003). Other research indicates that trustworthy influencers create deeper relationships with their audience, which leads to greater confidence in buying and fostering loyal connections.

Although there is a lot of research that has been done on Influencer marketing and S.Com, there are still some gaps in the research. In addition, the more commercialisation has been embraced by the influencer marketing industry, the greater it has encouraged commentators to question the authenticity and the sponsored content of those promoting, leading to a need to rethink the issue of credibility in CT-building. Such considerations are especially critical in markets where S.Com is being embraced rapidly, such as emerging markets.

Based on these background, the current research inspects the influence of IC and customer confidence on customer acceptance of S.Com among Gen Z customers. By combining the Source Credibility Theory and trust-based aspects, the study adds to the current body of research on digital behaviour of the consumer, aiming to understand how characteristics of influencers affect consumer adoption of S.Com. These results could offer meaningful and worthy theoretical perspectives and practical applications for marketers looking to strategically leverage influencers and create trust and lasting interactions with consumers.

Literature Review

S.Com is an emerging business model that merges SNT and e-commerce, which allows users to have an active role in buying goods and services in social ways and collaborative action. S.Com is different than E-commerce because it allows users to be involved in the buying process through product reviews, ratings, recommendations, discussions and real-time shopping (Liang & Turban, 2011).

S.Com has been found to improve customer engagement by fostering information sharing and social interactions among customers. The two variables of social support and community participation showed to be important factors in consumers' purchasing intentions and consumer confidence in S.Com environments (Hajli, 2015). In the same way, Zhang and Wang found that interactive platform features, fellow influence and perceived usefulness could positively affect consumers' intention to use S.Com platforms (2022). These results suggest that social interaction plays an important role in the process of online purchases by alleviating the perceived uncertainty and boosting purchase confidence.

YouTube claims Gen.Z has become the leading cohort in the digital economy because their affinity for and access to, social networking platforms and mobile technologies. Gen.Z consumers have grown accustomed to multitasking their entertainment, communication and shopping experiences in the same digital context as opposed to the generations before them. In making product and brand evaluations, they heavily depend on online communities, influencer recommendations and electronic word-of-mouth (Priporas et al., 2020).

Research findings indicate that Gen. Z'ers are less inclined to believe in traditional advertising and are at the same time more closer to believing the real content created by users. Personal values and lifestyles influence their purchase decisions and recommendations by influential people and social proof are very important for them, so that they do not feel transparent (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). This digitally savvy generation requires meaningful business-to-business connections, which is why influencers are gaining ground as a favored tool in their marketing arsenal.

The perceived competence, honesty, expertise, attractiveness, and authenticity of social media influencers are summed up in IC. The concept is mainly influenced by the Source Credibility Theory which suggests that information from credible sources necessitates it to be persuasive (Ohanian, 1990).

Lou and Yuan (2019) concluded that influencers with higher expertise/experiential authenticity will create more positive attitudes towards the brand and more trust among the consumers. Likewise, Sokolova and Kefi (2020) found that the credibility of influencers positively affects the purchase intent through making them more emotionally attached and reliable. Authenticity is particularly relevant today as today's consumers are savvy and differentiate between endorsements and simply commercial ones. As such, it's vital to be transparent about sponsored content in order to preserve credibility and consistent consumer engagement of the influencers.

Online consumer behavior is widely acknowledged to be influenced by one of the most significant factors, □trust□. In the realm of S.Com, trust involves sa confidence in the influencers, brands, online communities, payment methods and online platforms. It helps to diminish the perceived uncertainty as it assures customers that transactions, recommendations and product information are reliable (Gefen et al., 2003).

Kim and Park (2013) point out that there is a mediating effect between S.Com characteristics and the purchase intention, which is named as trust. Those consumers that believe the information they receive from digital platforms and influencers are reliable are more likely to believe their purchases are safe and therefore have higher buying intent. Moreover, trust helps to move towards lasting customer relationships, favorable electronic word-of-mouth and re-purchase behavior.

IC is strongly established as an important factor that leads to consumers' trust in the existing literature. Knowledgeable, transparent and authentic influencers are more apt to establish trustworthy relationships with their audience. This trust then impacts attitudes towards brand,

intent to purchase and customer loyalty (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

They found that multiple factors such as credibility of the influencers boost emotional bonding, further enhancing consumers' purchase intention of the recommended products through an indirect pathway (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Similarly, Djafarova and Bowes (2021) found that authenticity and trustworthiness had an impact on the influencers' recommendations to Gen. Z consumers. These results together indicate that in S.Com settings, credibility becomes the basis for the foundation of social trust.

Research Gap

While significant contributions from previous research has boosted knowledge and understanding of S.Com and influencer marketing, certain gaps are still to be addressed. The first is that previous research has been on Millennials or social media users in general, and significantly less research has been paid to specifically consider Gen. Z consumers. Second, there are several studies that have evaluated the credibility and/or trust of influencers individually without considering the combined impact on S.Com adoption. Thirdly, it has been noted that the quick commercialization of Influencer marketing has turned the tide in the consumers' view of what is real and transparent □ a topic that is new to research as well. Finally, there is still not a lot of evidence coming from emerging countries, despite the significant growth in the number of emerging countries participation in S.Com.

Thus, the present study aims at exploring the effect of IC on CT and how they can collectively affect the acceptance of S.Com among Gen.Z consumers. The results should help shape the theoretical aspects of digital consumer behaviour and practical advice to business entities adopting influencer marketing campaigns.

Objectives:

This study aims to analyze and evaluate how the level of CT and the credibility of influencers affect consumer's S.Com adoption. This also aims to analyze how credibility and trust are connected with the influence on purchase intent in S.Com sites to give marketers valuable inputs to improve consumer engagement and digital marketing performance.

Methodology:

The current study uses a quantitative, descriptive and explanatory approach to analyse the impact of IC and trust on the adoption of S.Com among Gen.Z shoppers. The collection of primary data will be carried out with the help of a structured questionnaire through Face to face interview from 400 consistent gen z users who consume social media and they are in online shopping by using face to face interview technique, and the collection of secondary data will be conducted on the published research articles, books, and reports available, relevant online databases will be used for the collection of secondary data. To ensure that the respondents are typical of the general population, only those who fall in line with the selection criteria are incorporated into the study that is, those conforming to the criterion of belonging to Gen.Z

and having experience with S.Com websites are only included. The collected data will be analysed based on the appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, which will be used to test out suitable relationships among the study variables proposed.

Result and Analysis

The total number of valid responses gathered was 400 from Gen.Z consumers with active social media habits for discovering products and online shopping. All obtained data were coded and analyzed in the SPSS programme.

Table 1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	184	46.0
	Female	216	54.0
Age	18–21 Years	162	40.5
	22–25 Years	168	42.0
	26–28 Years	70	17.5
Social Media Platform Mostly Used	Instagram	172	43.0
	YouTube	96	24.0
	TikTok	68	17.0
	Facebook	38	9.5
	Others	26	6.5

The demographic profile suggests that there were slightly more females (54.0%) than males (46.0%). The majority of respondents were in between the ages of 18 and 25 years (42.0%) with the 18 to 21 years (40.5%) group not far behind. Instagram proved to be the most favorite social media platform for S.Com-related activities, with its relevance as a S.Com platform among Gen.Z consumers.

Table 2 Perception of Influencer Credibility

Statement	Mean	SD
Influencers provide reliable product information.	4.18	0.71
Influencers possess adequate product knowledge.	4.12	0.75
Influencers promote authentic products.	3.95	0.82
Sponsored content is disclosed transparently.	3.89	0.86
I trust recommendations from credible influencers.	4.21	0.68
Overall Mean	4.07	0.76

The overall mean score of 4.07 shows that the people who use these apps generally believed that social media influencers are credible sources of information about products. During the on-line purchase decision making process the highest agreement was found for recommendations from credible influencers (Mean = 4.21), meaning that credibility seems to be an important element in the consumer's perception.

Table 3 Consumer Trust towards Social Commerce Platforms

Statement	Mean	SD
I trust products recommended through social media.	4.03	0.77
Social commerce platforms are reliable.	3.98	0.80
Online payment through social commerce is secure.	3.92	0.88
I believe influencer reviews are honest.	4.06	0.73
I feel confident purchasing through social media.	4.09	0.74
Overall Mean	4.02	0.78

Higher level of trust on S.Com platforms and mean score of 4.02, which the findings found that there is a high level of trust in S.Com platforms among Gen. Z consumers. Regarding consumer attitudes towards S.Com, respondents were more likely to trust their purchase of a product from a S.Com influencer, with trust having a

significant effect on positive consumer attitudes toward S.Com.

Table 4 Social Commerce Adoption among Generation Z

Statement	Mean	SD
I frequently purchase products through social media.	4.01	0.81
I intend to continue shopping through social commerce platforms.	4.16	0.70
Social media influences my purchase decisions.	4.24	0.66
I recommend social commerce to others.	3.97	0.79
Social commerce is convenient for shopping.	4.28	0.63
Overall Mean	4.13	0.72

On average, the respondents are highly adopting S.Com, with a result of 4.13 for Overall. The convenience and the perceived effect of social media on purchase decision were the two most important factors driving consumers to S.Com activities (Mean =4.28 and 4.24 respectively).

Hypothesis Testing

H₀: Among the Gen Z, the impact of IC and CT level on S.Com adoption remains insignificant.

Table 5

Multiple Regression Analysis

Dependent Variable: Social Commerce Adoption

Predictor	β	t-value	Sig.
Influencer Credibility	0.461	9.482	0.000
Consumer Trust	0.387	7.916	0.000

Model Summary

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	Sig.
0.789	0.622	0.620	326.47	0.000

Interpretation

The results of analysis show the model variance value of 62.2% or (R² value = 0.622). Overall regression model is statistically significant (F = 326.47, p < 0.001). The level of IC (β = 0.461, p < 0.001), as well as CT (β = 0.387, p < 0.001) significantly and positively influences the S.Com adoption among Gen. Z consumers. The significance values of these are less than 0.05, so that the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. The results indicate, that when customers believe the influencers to be credible and that they can rely on information and advice given on social media platforms, they are more likely to embrace such channels.

Discussion

The conclusion of the study shows that Gen.Z consumers' adoption of S.Com is influenced by the credibility of influencers and CT. The people who viewed the influencers as knowledgeable, authentic and transparent were highly confident in them which ultimately helped them in their buying decisions. Consumers highly trusted the S.Com platforms, which boosted their tendency to online shopping via social media. The regression analysis showed a significant positive correlation between the trust of influencers and trust in S.Com adoption, which seems to indicate that increased trust in an influencer translates

into greater trust in the S.Com adoption of Gen. Z. From these findings, it is evident that nurturing authenticity and trust is critical to unlock sustainable growth in S.Com ecosystem.

Conclusion

The findings of the study suggest that the trust and credibility of influencers are crucial factors building the trust of prospective Gen Z shoppers, which is directly linked to the S.Com adoption rate. The results suggest that if consumers are able to see influencers as knowledgeable, honest and trustworthy they are more inclined to engage in S.Com. Therefore, trust in social media platforms and influencers as a source of recommendation influence the perception of the risk involved in purchasing the product and motivates positive purchasing. In general, the research reveals that credibility and trust are important aspects of the effective implementation of influencer marketing and the advancement of S.Com by digitally-involved consumers.

Recommendations

For businesses, partnering with influencers who show a clear understanding and transparency of the products they market, as well as acting in an authentic manner, is a way they can foster CT. Brands would be better off to promote transparency about sponsored content, help more people to leave honest product reviews and be more active on social media and interact with the consumers. Also, deepening the data privacy, secure payment system, and customer support services of S.Com platforms will boost customer confidence. Ethical influencer marketing strategies and establishing trustworthy online shopping landscapes can lead to higher engagement rates with consumers, boost purchase intentions, and promote sustainable success in the S.Com landscape...

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