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THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL COMMERCE ON CONSUMER DECISION MAKING: A CASE STUDY OF PERISHABLE PASTRY PRODUCTS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between social commerce adoption determinants, perceived trust, and purchase behavior among pastry product consumers. Data from 409 consumers were collected via an online survey and analyzed using Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings reveal that consumers perceive social commerce as effortless, engaging, enjoyable, trustworthy, simple to use, and time-saving, motivating them to purchase pastry products through social commerce platforms. The study offers insights for social commerce researchers and marketers, particularly regarding perishable products. It contributes to the understanding of technology acceptance theory by elucidating the determinants of social commerce adoption among consumers in the pastry products domain.
Keywords: Social commerce, Pastry products, Technology adoption, Purchase behavior

INTRODUCTION

In today's fiercely competitive business environment, sustaining and improving business practices presents an ongoing challenge. Entrepreneurs are continually seeking innovative strategies to enhance sales and engage with consumers in a crowded marketplace. Social media platforms have emerged as essential tools for entrepreneurs, facilitating direct marketing of products and services and driving the adoption of integrated online marketing communication platforms. Recent research underscores the effectiveness of online platforms as rapid avenues for business expansion, particularly with the rise of social commerce, which has revolutionized online marketing (Pantano et al., 2018; Srivastava & Sharma, 2013).

The emergence of social commerce arises from the rapid expansion of social networking sites (SNSs), introducing a novel form of electronic commerce (Al-Adwan & Kokash, 2019). Social commerce platforms leverage the capabilities of social media by extending consumers' shopping experiences beyond traditional e-commerce boundaries (Cutshall et al., 2020). These platforms enable consumers to engage in various purchasing activities, including comparison, curation, and sharing of products and services across online and offline marketplaces (Hettiarachchi et al., 2018; Maia et al., 2018). The term "social commerce" encapsulates the influence of social media on digital commerce endeavors (Valerio et al., 2019). According to Yadav et al. (2013), social commerce encompasses activities related to self-esteem, purchasing, usage, and repurchasing facilitated through technology platforms within social media networks. Other scholars define social commerce as a commerce activity leveraging social media platforms to bridge offline and online environments (Al-Adwan & Kokash, 2019). Additionally, researchers use various terms interchangeably, such as social shopping, collaborative commerce, and social media marketing (Han et al., 2018).

Social commerce, facilitated by various social media platforms, has not only transformed business operations but has also triggered significant shifts in consumer behavior during online shopping experiences. The widespread presence of social media has cemented social commerce as a global trend, enabling consumers to make instant purchases and access products and services beyond their geographical boundaries. Particularly noteworthy is its impact on small home-based entrepreneurs, providing them with business opportunities previously inaccessible through traditional retail channels. Despite the promise of social commerce, challenges persist, especially concerning consumer acceptance and trust in this relatively new concept. Trust, along with attributes such as security, safety, privacy,

and reputation, plays a critical role in fostering consumer acceptance and usage of social commerce (Liu et al., 2018). However, there is still a lack of validation regarding trust as a significant predictor of social commerce acceptance, highlighting the urgent need for empirical research, particularly in niche business sectors like the pastry industry.

The pastry industry, acknowledged as a vital global commodity, offers an attractive avenue for business growth. However, budget constraints and a lack of familiarity with electronic commerce have hindered its full utilization of online platforms for sales and promotion. Nevertheless, recent advancements in electronic commerce and social media have encouraged pastry entrepreneurs to explore online business platforms, attracted by their minimal initial investment requirements (Roesler, 2019). Social commerce has gained popularity among entrepreneurs in the perishable food product sector, particularly small and medium-sized businesses, enabling them to establish new brands and interact with consumers. Despite its potential, empirical research on consumer acceptance and usage of social commerce, especially concerning pastry products, remains limited. Addressing this gap is crucial, as understanding consumer behaviour towards social commerce can significantly benefit the Malaysian pastry products industry and overall economic growth.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate consumer acceptance and usage of social commerce in purchasing online pastry products. By examining the relationship between trust and other influencing factors, the study seeks to provide valuable insights for pastry entrepreneurs, enhancing their comprehension of social commerce's operational dynamics and competitive edge. Ultimately, this research strives to bridge the existing gap in empirical research and contribute to a deeper understanding of social commerce in the Malaysian context.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The study aimed to establish evidence regarding cause-and-effect relationships outlined in the research framework. Therefore, a causal research design was employed. Non-probability sampling, specifically the purposive sampling method, was adopted. Sample size calculation using GPower software suggested a minimum of 133 respondents, with the study targeting 400 responses to accommodate potential incomplete feedback (Wai et al., 2019). A total of 43 instruments were utilized, sourced from previous research (Palau-Saumell et al., 2019; Venkatesh et al., 2003), employing seven-point Likert scales for refined response options. The survey underwent pre-testing to gather expert panel feedback on questionnaire credibility, clarity, user-friendliness, and measurement accuracy. Pilot testing confirmed satisfactory reliability, with values exceeding 0.90, indicating excellent scale accuracy. Hypothesis testing employed Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS version 3.3.1 software. PLS-SEM, chosen for its suitability in verifying theoretical causal models and predictive ability, has been widely used across social science studies, including tourism and hospitality management.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first step in testing the reflective measurement model involves examining indicator reliability. It is recommended that indicator loadings exceed 0.70, indicating that the construct explains more than 50% of the indicator's variance (Hair et al., 2019). In this study, indicator loadings ranged from 0.706 to 1, surpassing the recommended threshold. The second step is to assess internal consistency, measured through composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha. Both measures should exceed 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019). The CR values ranged from 0.817 to 1, surpassing the recommended threshold. Convergent validity is evaluated through the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), with a desirable value of 0.50 or higher, indicating that the construct explains at least 50% of the variance in its indicators (Hair et al., 2019). The AVE in this study exceeded the permissible threshold of 0.50, indicating satisfactory convergent validity. The heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) correlation ratio, recommended by Henseler et al. (2016) and Voorhees et al. (2016), was utilized to assess discriminant reliability. A more restrictive threshold value, such as 0.85, is recommended for constructs that are conceptually distinct. The HTMT result, with a value of one, demonstrates excellent discriminant validity between constructs, confirming the model's discriminative validity.

Structural Model Assessment to address bias issues, an assessment of the inner variance inflation factor (VIF) was conducted to ensure that no bias occurred due to correlation among

independent variables in the structural model. The VIF values ranged from 1.436 to 3.530, indicating no bias. Next, the assessment of structural model metrics included path coefficient (β), coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2) (Cuong & Khoi, 2019; Hair et al., 2016). The hypotheses were tested based on the path coefficient (β) and significance level (p-value) of the relationships between various constructs, including Performance Expectancy, Effort Expectancy, Social Influence, Facilitating Condition, Hedonic Motivation, Price Value, Habit, Trust, Purchase Behavior, and Usage Behavior, at a 95% confidence interval (CI).

The findings of the hypotheses testing revealed several significant relationships. For instance, Performance Expectancy (PE) was found to significantly influence consumer Purchase Behaviour (PB) (β = 0.313, $p < 0.001$), supporting hypothesis H1. Similarly, Effort Expectancy (EE) positively influenced Purchase Behavior (β = 0.236, $p < 0.001$), confirming hypothesis H2. Social Influence (SI) was also found to have a significant positive influence on Purchase Behavior (β = 0.307, $p < 0.001$), supporting hypothesis H3. Additionally, Hedonic Motivation (HM) positively influenced Purchase Behavior (β = 0.127, p = 0.007), supporting hypothesis H5. However, some hypotheses were not supported. For instance, Social Commerce Facilitating Conditions (FC), Price Value (PV), and Habit (H) did not significantly influence Purchase Behavior. Nonetheless, Trust (T) was found to significantly influence both Purchase Behavior (β = 0.085, p = 0.044) and Usage Behavior (β = 0.113, p = 0.014), supporting hypotheses H9 and H10, respectively.

The effect size (f^2) analysis indicated that constructs like Effort Expectancy, Hedonic Motivation, and Performance Expectancy had minimal impact on Purchase Behavior, whereas constructs like Social Influence had a substantial effect. The R^2 values showed that the model could explain 72.2% of consumer Purchase Behavior and 46% of Usage Behavior variance. Finally, the predictive relevance (Q^2) values for Purchase Behavior ($Q^2 = 0.413$) and Usage Behavior ($Q^2 = 0.451$) indicated a significant level of predictive ability for both constructs, surpassing the threshold limit.

Overall, these results suggest that the path model used in the study adequately measures the relationships between various constructs, providing valuable insights into consumer behavior in the context of social commerce adoption for pastry products.

CONCLUSION

This study effectively investigated the behavior of pastry consumers within the domain of social commerce purchase behavior, identifying significant variables influencing their actions. The variables examined in this study each displayed distinct impacts, as evidenced by the significant readings of four key dimensions: performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and hedonic motivation. These dimensions consistently emerged as predictors or precursors of purchase behavior. Conversely, three dimensions -facilitating conditions, price value, and habit - did not demonstrate significant influence on purchase and usage behaviors. Of particular note, performance expectancy emerged as the most influential predictor of purchase behavior. Consumers perceive that they can enhance their productivity when using social commerce, leading to an expectation of improved performance in their purchasing tasks. Additionally, consumers are swayed by their social circles when making purchasing decisions on social commerce platforms.

Effort expectancy also plays a significant role, as consumers perceive the efficiency, ease-of-use, and time-saving features of social commerce platforms as reducing the effort required for purchasing pastry products compared to traditional shopping methods. Moreover, this study expanded upon the UTAUT2 model by incorporating the trust dimension, which proved to be a robust predictor of both purchase behavior and usage behavior. Trust, encompassing elements of perceived privacy and security, significantly influences consumers' decisions to engage with social commerce platforms. The findings of this study bear practical implications for pastry entrepreneurs, especially given the rapid adoption of social commerce accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Understanding consumers' preferences and behaviors in the realm of social commerce can inform marketing strategies, reduce costs, and improve consumer trust, thereby enhancing purchasing opportunities. By leveraging the insights gained from this study, entrepreneurs can tailor their marketing approaches to better meet consumer needs and preferences, ultimately driving business success in the social commerce landscape.

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