Understanding Social Commerce Intention: A Relational View

Jun Chen
School of Information Management, Wuhan University
christina_cj@whu.edu.cn

Xiao-Liang Shen
Economics and Management School, Wuhan University
xlshen@whu.edu.cn

Zhen-Jiao Chen
School of Management and Economics, Beijing Institute of Technology
sharon2009@bit.edu.cn

Abstract
With the growing popularity of social media, consumers often rely on the recommendations obtained from online sources when making the purchase decision. Social commerce in this regard represents a shift in consumer’s thinking from inefficient individual consumption to collaborative sharing and shopping. In this study, we investigate social commerce intention from two different but interrelated angles, i.e., social shopping and social sharing. Built on commitment-trust theory and trust transfer theory, a research model was developed and empirically examined. The results demonstrated that community commitment and trust towards community exerted significant impacts on both social shopping and social sharing intention. Trust towards members can be transferred to trust towards community, which in turn leads to community commitment. In addition, trust towards members posits a direct effect on social shopping, and an indirect effect on social sharing via trust towards community. Limitations and implications for both research and practice are discussed.

1. Introduction
In recent years, the increasing popularity of social networking has opened up a new era of electronic commerce, called social commerce, which changes the way we think of the traditional online shopping. Social commerce platform promotes online transactions with the support from a large network of online peers in assisting the acquisition of products and services information [1]. Compared to the traditional virtual community, the unique features of social commerce context lies in two aspects. First, it is based on various channels of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter or Groupon. Recent work has demonstrated that social media platform has four core features (i.e., digital profile, search and privacy, relational tie and network transparency), which differentiate it from other similar communities [2]. Second, social commerce focuses on commercial activities with the use of social media platform. Users can freely share their consumption experience on product and service, get advice from other users, and search the recommended goods to purchase. Obviously, this is also different from the traditional e-commerce which mainly employs product categorization, search engine or preference-based recommender systems to enhance the efficiency of online purchase behavior.

Social commerce is also believed to have a huge potential to be one of the biggest revenue generators for businesses in the near future. According to a recent report by Booz & Company Inc. [3], the global social commerce revenue is expected to reach the amount to 30 billion U.S. dollars in 2015, at an exciting 56% CAGR (Compound Annual Growth Rate). In addition, a report released by McKinsey in 2012 reveals that 70% of the companies are utilizing social technology to assist their business and 90% among them gain benefits [4]. Although social commerce represents a considerable evolution of e-commerce, and brings significant benefits to both business and society (as we discussed above), it is believed to be “one of the most challenging research arenas in the coming decade” [1]. In fact, current empirical studies on this topic are still limited [5]. Some recent studies in this area placed a great emphasis on social influence (both informational and normative), website quality and interaction ties from the information recipients' perspective, without considering both recipients and senders [6-8].

In this study, we try to fill this gap with insights from both sides. A recent social commerce survey has found that nearly 83% of online shoppers tend to share shopping information with other consumers, and 67% of the respondents would make their purchase decision based on recommendations from online friends [9]. As social media can support both users’ contributions (social sharing) and the acquisition of product/service information (social shopping), it is thus necessary to investigate the two components of social commerce. Social sharing in this study refers to sharing shopping experience or product/service information with one's online friends through social networking sites. This is different from online reviews which have been
2. Theoretical background

The theoretical foundation of this study is reviewed in this section. Specifically, we first discuss the concept of social commerce, followed by a brief review of commitment-trust theory and trust transfer theory.

2.1. Definition of social commerce

The term “social commerce” was first introduced in 2005 on Yahoo!’s search blog. It refers to a form of electronic commerce which takes advantage of social media to support social interactions as well as user contributions to promote online commercial activities and transactions. In social commerce, shared pick lists and prior posted ratings are utilized to assist buyers’ online transactions. Some other social tools such as forum and communities are also encompassed to support online shopping. Buyers and sellers are encouraged to discuss their online shopping experiences and compare transactional information with each other. In academia, multiple disciplines have their own understandings on social commerce. In marketing, social commerce is defined as a form of Internet-based “social media” [14]. People are allowed to participate in marketing and sell products/services in online marketplaces/communities. Following IBM’s definition, social commerce is the concept of word-of-mouth that applied to e-commerce. Retailer’s product and online shopper’s generated context are tightly integrated[15]. With respect to psychology, Marsden [16] addressed that in social commerce, users are influenced by salient information cues from others within a networked community when they purchase online. He also pointed out several properties of social commerce, including word of mouth, trusted advice and buying with the help of friends. As to the sociology, social commerce focuses on the impact of social influence. Social influence shapes the social interactions among consumers in virtual communities which supported by the e-commerce firms. Based on the discussion above, we defined the social commerce as business and commercial activities, which exploits social media to support social interactions and promote user contributions in assisting online transactions in this paper. The main purpose of social commerce is to take advantage of relationships in social networks to gain commercial benefits.

2.2 Commitment-Trust theory

The commitment-trust theory is an important theory in relationship marketing research, and was originally developed by Morgan and Hunt [17], focusing on the joint impacts of relationship commitment and trust in building and maintaining long-term successful cooperation between relationship parties. Relationship commitment is defined as “an exchange partner believing that an ongoing relationship with another is so important as to warrant maximum efforts at maintaining it” (p.23), while trust is conceptualized as “existing when one party has confidence in an exchange partner's reliability and...
integrity” (p.23) [17]. Except for the joint roles of commitment and trust in relationship development, trust also exerts a positive impact on relationship commitment. This theory was widely used and applied to different research contexts, such as inter-organizational relationship [18], buyer-seller relationship [19], interpersonal relationship [20], and it has paramount importance in examining relationships formed on the Internet [21, 22]. In particular, it is important to investigate both website-user relationship [23] and relationships among website/community users [7] in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the benefits and impacts of online relationship exchange. In this study, we will employ this theory to further understand the determinants of social shopping and sharing intention from a relational view.

2.3 Trust transfer theory

Trust transference occurs when the trust in a known personal/entity is shifted to another relatively unknown person/entity through associations among them [24, 25]. The underlying theoretical basis for trust transference is derived from attribution theory [26], which helps individuals to make attribution of an event based on the inference drawn from the existing knowledge. Trust transfer process involves three different parties, namely trustor, trustee and a trusted third party [27]. If a trustor has a strong belief in the trustworthiness of the third party [28], such trust can be transferred to the trustee when there is a close relationship between the trustee and the third party. In particular, the trustee and the third party is often called as the target and the source of trust transfer respectively [29], and trust can be transferred from different kinds of sources, such as individuals or a context, using communication or cognitive processes [27]. Recent studies also demonstrated that mutual trust among community members and the trust in social networking site fellows can be transferred to trusting the website/community [13, 25]. In this study, we will draw on this theory to examine how user-user trust can be transferred to website-user trust in the social commerce context.

3. Research model and hypotheses

Based on the literature reviewed in the previous section, we develop a research model as shown in Figure 1 to investigate the factors which may predict an individual’s social commerce intention in a social networking-based website. We use social sharing intention and social shopping intention as the dependent variables to depict two sides of an individual’s behavioral intention to participate in social commerce activities. In this section, the key components of the research model and their interrelationships are addressed.

3.1 Commitment

Commitment is one of the powerful predictor that drives persistent relationships [21, 30]. Commitment reflects a desire to maintain a long-term relationship between parties [17, 21, 31]. Prior studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between commitment and user retention [21, 10]. The higher commitment towards a virtual community website, the more a user wants to contribute and interact with the community [22, 32]. In the social commerce context, social networking community is not only a place for social interaction, but also a place for sharing consumption experiences and obtaining useful product information and recommendations. Thus, in this kind of virtual community, members with high level of community commitment may want to participate in kinds of social commerce activities. The above discussion leads to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a: Community commitment is positively related to social shopping intention.
Hypothesis 1b: Community commitment is positively related to social sharing intention.

3.2 Trust

Similar to commitment, trust is recognized as an essential element for building successful relationship [17]. Confidence and reliability is the central of trust. The relationship between trust in product/service providers and consumer’s online purchase intention is intensively investigated in recent e-commerce studies. Trust in website vendor directly affects the consumers' intention to purchase products online [33]. A report from Yahoo! shows that most consumers use trusted websites when shopping online [34]. Meanwhile, evidence shows that trust in individual is also an important factor leads to e-commerce success [21, 22, 35, 36]. With the proliferation of e-commerce, the Internet throws massive commercial information into
consumer’s face. Under such situation, consumers tend to adopt the recommendations/advice from the one whom they trust before making an online purchase. Therefore, we will investigate the effect of two kinds of trust, namely, trust towards members and trust towards community in social commerce context.

**Trust towards members**

Trust towards members in this study is defined as an individual’s willingness to rely on the words, actions, and decisions of the other member in social networking sites. Trust among members in virtual community positively affects members’ behaviors such as obtaining or contributing information [37, 38]. In a trusting environment, members would be more willing to engage in social exchanges such as help others and ask for others’ help, while in a less trusting environment, members tend to shun away from providing help [39, 40]. Furthermore, Internet consumer tends to take shopping cues from reviewers or bloggers that he/she trusted before making a purchase [41]. Therefore, we have the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2a: Trust towards members is positively related to social shopping intention.

Hypothesis 2b: Trust towards members is positively related to social sharing intention.

**Trust towards community**

Trust towards community depicts a relationship between virtual members and the community. It refers to one’s perception of the community as a reliable and predictable place for social interaction.

In a virtual community, evidence shows that there exists a trust transfer from members to the community. First, high level of interpersonal trust with other members [42, 43] would facilitate information sharing related to the community service. This helps the members to form an unbiased impression of the community. Hence, members tend to believe that the community would keep on improving the service quality for social interaction and offering effective management to build the healthy community environment [7, 13]. Second, several studies also pointed out that interpersonal trust tendencies directly influence user’s level of trust toward a given website service provider [44]. The existence of interpersonal trust provides fertile soil for the generation of trust in their common institution [13]. Thus, the establishment of trust with other members is likely to be transferred to the community. Hence, we have the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Trust towards member is positively related to trust towards community.

Many evidences indicate that consumer’s trust in a website gives direct impact on his/her intention to purchase from this website or his/her loyalty to the website [33, 45-47]. When high level of trust between members and the community is developed, it reduces the uncertainty of virtual interactions [21, 48]. Members are more confident in carrying out various social interactions with their friends in a community [49]. In addition, scholars suggested that trust is an essential antecedent of commitment in virtual community [22, 32]. When members develop a good relationship with the community, they will be more likely to depend on and bond to this community. Hence, we proposed the following three hypotheses:

Hypothesis 4a: Trust towards community is positively related to social shopping intention.

Hypothesis 4b: Trust towards community is positively related to social sharing intention.

Hypothesis 5: Trust towards community is positively related to community commitment.

4. Research methodology

This study presents an initial attempt to investigate the determinants of social commerce intention from the relationship perspective. Data collection method, measurement and demographics of the respondents are reported in this section in detail.

4.1 Data collection

This study chooses the users of Douban.com, one of the most famous social commerce sites in Mainland China, as the main objects in discussion. Launched on March 2005, Douban allows its users to create content on film, books, music and local events in more than 816 Chinese cities. In this regard, this site is a good place for the potential consumers to seek reviews of latest movies, books and music. Different from other transaction-oriented virtual communities, Douban is built on digital profiles and shared connections. Users thus can create their unique profiles, and share their contributions with their online friends. In addition, users' contributions can be visible to the public or to their friends only, depending on the privacy settings. As of December 2012, Douban ranks the 20th most popular website in China and has more than 66 million registered users, with the number of monthly unique visitors reaching 100 million.

As a major and earliest function included in this site, Douban Book offers thousands of book reviews and hobby groups, leading to more than 200 million RMB revenue for book market each year. In this study, we choose Douban Book as a representative example for investigating social commerce. We first evaluated
the clarity and propriety of the questionnaire using a pilot test. Overall, the questionnaire was regarded as concise and easy to complete. An online survey was then conducted and invitation messages were sent to the potential respondents. A screening question was used to ensure that all the respondents have read and written at least one book review on Douban Book. The respondents were also required to recall their recent experiences in Douban Book before filling out the questionnaire. Finally, a total of 376 valid responses were obtained.

4.2 Measures

All measures used in this study have been validated and used in prior studies (see Appendix A). Minor changes in the wordings were made so as to fit the current research context. Community commitment was measured with items adapted from [32]. We have adapted items for trust towards community from [10], and items for trust towards members from [50, 51]. In addition, social shopping and social sharing intention were measured using items adapted from [10]. As this study was conducted in China, the questionnaire was translated into Chinese first, and then a backward translation method was used to ensure the consistency between the Chinese and the English version of the questionnaire. Measurements for all the constructs were phrased on a seven-point Likert scales, anchored from “1=strongly disagree” and “7=strongly agree”.

4.3 Demographic analysis

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1. Among the respondents, 47.34% of them were male and 52.66% were female. A large majority of the respondents (78.72%) were aged between 21 and 30. Approximately 89.63% of respondents have completed university education at the undergraduate level or above. In addition, most of them (81.12%) have used Douban for more than 1 year, with more than 5 hours (71.81%) spent on and more than 4 visits (75.27%) to this site per week. Non-response bias was examined by comparing the early respondents and the late respondents, no significant differences were found.

5. Results

SmartPLS Version 2.0 was used for data analysis. Partial Least Squares approach was employed in this study as it is a component-based statistical technique for causal modeling [52]. As a structural equation modeling technique, PLS analyze the measurement model and the structural model simultaneously in one operation. Why we have chosen PLS was also due to the fact that PLS has less stringent sample size and indicator distribution requirements than the traditional SEM, such as LISREL approaches [53]. Following the two-step analytical procedures [54], the measurement model was first examined to evaluate reliability and validity of measures, and then the structural model was tested to estimate the hypothesized relationships among theoretical constructs. To assess the common method bias, we performed the Harman's single-factor test [55]. The results suggest that no single factor explained most of the variance, indicating the common method bias is not a serious threat in this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Freq.</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≤25</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>60.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>21.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;30</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>17.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>47.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>52.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≤High School</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior College</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>8.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>61.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥Postgraduate</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>27.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usage experience with Douban</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≤12 Months</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>18.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 Years</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>25.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4 Years</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>25.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;4 Years</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>29.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the past three months, how many reviews you have posted on Douban?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≤1</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>45.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>31.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>10.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥6</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>13.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the past three months, how many reviews you have read from Douban?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≤10</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>23.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>22.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-30</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>26.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;30</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>27.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.1 Measurement model

The measurement model was examined in terms of convergent validity and discriminant validity. Convergent validity can be assessed by examining the composite reliability and the average variance extracted[54]. In particular, composite reliability refers to the internal consistency of the indicators measuring a given factor and average variance.
extracted indicates the amount of variance captured by a construct as compared to the variance caused by the measurement error. A composite reliability of 0.70 or above and an average variance extracted of more than 0.50 are deemed acceptable [56]. As shown in Table 2, all measures exceed the recommended thresholds, with the composite reliability ranges from 0.915 to 0.958, and the average variance extracted ranges from 0.781 to 0.884.

Discriminant validity of the reflective constructs was assessed by a criteria: the square root of the average variance extracted for each construct should be greater than the correlations between that construct and all other constructs [56]. Table 3 presents the correlation matrix of the constructs and the square root of the average variance extracted for each construct. The results demonstrate satisfactory discriminant validity of the measurements.

### Table 2. Construct Reliability and Validity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Loadings</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>CR</th>
<th>AVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trust towards Members</td>
<td>TTM1 0.883</td>
<td>37.696</td>
<td>0.935</td>
<td>0.827</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TTM2 0.937</td>
<td>66.776</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TTM3 0.907</td>
<td>61.309</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust towards Community</td>
<td>TTC1 0.859</td>
<td>39.357</td>
<td>0.915</td>
<td>0.781</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TTC2 0.872</td>
<td>37.312</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TTC3 0.920</td>
<td>61.985</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Commitment</td>
<td>CC1 0.910</td>
<td>64.932</td>
<td>0.948</td>
<td>0.821</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CC2 0.908</td>
<td>50.278</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CC3 0.903</td>
<td>57.449</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CC4 0.903</td>
<td>49.140</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Shopping Intention</td>
<td>SHOP1 0.877</td>
<td>32.628</td>
<td>0.919</td>
<td>0.791</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SHOP2 0.871</td>
<td>36.390</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SHOP3 0.919</td>
<td>56.640</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Sharing Intention</td>
<td>SHAR1 0.934</td>
<td>60.437</td>
<td>0.958</td>
<td>0.884</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SHAR2 0.950</td>
<td>63.199</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SHAR3 0.936</td>
<td>67.175</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: CR=Composite Reliability; AVE=Average Variance Extracted

### 5.2 Structural Model

The results of the analysis are depicted in Figure 2, which presents the overall explanatory power, the estimated path coefficients (all significant paths are indicated with asterisks) and the associated t-value of the paths. Test of significance of all paths were performed using the bootstrap re-sampling procedure. A large proportion of the variance in social shopping intention (44.4%) and social sharing intention (31.8%) were explained by commitment-trust theory. In addition, this model accounted for 35.7% of the variance in community commitment, 36.4% of the variance in trust towards virtual community.

The results demonstrated that trust towards virtual community exerts the strongest impact on social shopping intention and social sharing intention, with a path coefficient at 0.336 and 0.334, respectively. This is followed by community commitment, with path coefficients at 0.185 and 0.261, respectively. As we expected, an individual’s trust towards community members would improve his/her trust towards the virtual community as a whole (β=0.603), which further lead to the community commitment (β=0.597). Trust towards community members shows its influence on social shopping intention with path coefficients at 0.261. However, the relationship between trust towards community members and social sharing intention is not significant. In addition, we also tested the mediation effect of trust towards virtual community on the relationship between trust towards members and social sharing intention. An interesting finding has been found indicating that a full mediation effect was presented.

### Table 3. Correlations between Constructs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Trust towards Members</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Trust towards Community</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Community Commitment</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Social Shopping Intention</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Social Sharing Intention</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The bold numbers in the diagonal row are square roots of the average variance extracted.

![Figure 2. PLS Analysis Results](image)

6. Discussion and conclusion

The advent of social commerce brings important business opportunities for companies in a wide range of industries. This study represents an initial attempt to explore social commerce intention from a relational perspective. A research model built on commitment-trust theory and trust transfer theory was empirically tested. The measurement model was confirmed with
adequate convergent and discriminant validity for all the measures. The results also supported most of the proposed hypotheses. Discussion of the key findings, limitations of this study, as well as the implications for both research and practice are presented in the following sections.

6.1 Discussion of key findings

This study investigates the role of relational factors on user’s intention to participate in social commerce. The results suggested that trust towards community and community commitment were two most important predictors of social commerce intention (both social sharing and social shopping). In addition, the results indicated that trust towards community would enhance community commitment, and also fully mediate the relationship between trust towards members and social sharing intention. This finding is interesting because users’ intentions to share depend on their relationships with the community as a whole, instead of the general others. Overall, the results of this study suggested that cultivating a positive relationship was important for social commerce community to develop and prosper.

6.2 Limitations and future research

Before highlighting the implications for research and practice, the limitations of this study are first discussed. First of all, our data was collected in Mainland China where social commerce continues to expand but is still at the early stage of development. Therefore, the generalization of the findings to other economic and cultural contexts should be made with caution. Second, we have not examined users’ actual behavior in this study. Social shopping and social sharing intention were regarded as the main focus of interest. However, the relationship between intention and behavior is definitely worthy of investigation in future research. Third, as this study focused on the relational variables that may lead to social commerce intention, some other important factors, such as social cohesion, and factors that predict relational variables, e.g. website quality, may be omitted here. Fourth, demographic variables such as age and gender may also affect the relationship between relational factors and social commerce intention. Last but not least, one’s intention/behavior may further affect his/her future behavioral beliefs. A longitudinal study thus is highly recommended here as it will help us understand how the beliefs evolve over time.

6.3 Implications for research

This study may contribute to the existing literature in the following three important ways. First, we have examined social commerce intention with insights from both social sharing and social shopping. Social shopping and social sharing can be regarded as two different but highly-interrelated commercial activities in social commerce. Empirical findings from the two aspects would present a more comprehensive picture, and further improve our current understanding of the emerging social commerce phenomenon.

Second, we have employed the relational view in this study to construct the research model. Previous studies have demonstrated that relational ties can be regarded as the core feature of social media [2], and the foundation for social commerce to explode [10]. The relational view was also found to be an effective approach for examining online consumer behavior [21, 57]. Commitment-trust theory and trust transfer theory thus were used for model building. Our results showed that relational factors (both trust and commitment) are powerful in explaining the social commerce intention, with explained variance of 44.4% in social sharing, and 31.8% in social sharing. As a key dimension in social commerce, the social relationship perspective thus may offer a unique contribution to this field.

Third, we also examined two different targets (community vs. members) in relationship building. As to social shopping intention, relationships with both community and members exhibit similar importance, whereas social sharing intention is only affected by user’s relationship with the community. The effect of trust towards members on social sharing intention is fully mediated by user’s trust towards community. In this regard, our finding further contributes to current relationship literature, and trust transfer theory in particular.

6.4 Implications for practice

The finding of this research is also useful for social commerce site vendors in understanding their consumers’ behaviors. First, social sharing activities are as important as social shopping activities in social commerce. Most of the practitioners who conduct e-commerce pay much price and effort to promote online shopping activities, while they neglect the power of sharing activities. We argue that in social commerce, social sharing is an essential factor as well as social shopping that leading to success. On the one hand, practitioners should encourage consumers to share their consumption experiences with their friends. On the other hand, an online shopping platform that integrates the social technology should be provided.

Second, relational factors can play an important role in facilitating social commerce. When a community member establishes a long-term relationship with the community, more online commercial activities would be promoted. Hence, the practitioners should consider
how to develop and sustain good relationship with their community members. The present research suggests taking advantage of trust and commitment among community members to facilitate relationship building and maintenance in the community. A social commerce platform provider should pay sufficient attention to the management of members' social relationships in the community to cumulate members' confidence and sense of belonging to the community.

Third, promoting interpersonal trust among members may be helpful for the members to form a coherent trust towards the community and thus leading more online commercial activities. A trusted atmosphere should be encouraged in the community to facilitate interpersonal trust among members. On the one hand, the practitioners should be authentic and share information about themselves in the community. On the other hand, they should strive to create and maintain a positive community atmosphere with no abuse for the members.

Acknowledgement

The work described in this paper was supported by the grants from the Humanities and Social Sciences Foundation of the Ministry of Education, China (Project No. 10YJC630021, Project No. 13YJC630132), the National Natural Science Foundation of China (Project No. 71202120, Project No. 71301125) and 2012 Science & Technology Project Funds for Oversea Scholars. Xiao-Liang Shen is the corresponding author of this paper.

Reference

[23] Shin, J.I., Chung, K.H., Oh, J.S., and Lee, C.W., "The Effect of Site Quality on Repurchase Intention in Internet Shopping through Mediating Variables: The Case of..."


Appendix A

Trust towards Members[50, 51]
TTM1: Members in Douban will always try and help me out if I get into difficulties.
TTM2: Members in Douban will always keep the promises they make to one another.
TTM3: Members in Douban are truthful in dealing with one another.

Trust towards Community[10]
TTC1: The performance of Douban always meets my expectations.
TTC2: Douban can be counted on as a good social networking site.
TTC3: Douban is a reliable social networking site.

Community Commitment[58]
CC1: I have a real emotional attachment to Douban.
CC2: I feel a strong connection to Douban.
CC3: I feel a sense of belonging towards the Douban.
CC4: I feel like a part of the group at Douban.

Social Shopping Intention[10]
SHOP1: I will consider the shopping experiences of other members on the Douban when I want to shop.
SHOP2: I will ask other members on the Douban to provide me with their suggestions before I go shopping.
SHOP3: I am willing to buy the products recommended by other members on the Douban.

Social Sharing Intention[10]
SHAR1: I am willing to provide my experiences and suggestions when other members on the Douban want my advice on buying something.
SHAR2: I am willing to share my own shopping experience with other members on the Douban.
SHAR3: I am willing to recommend a product that is worth buying to other members on the Douban.