

Perceptions of E- Marketing, Social Media, Individuals and Purchase Intention – What Can We Learn From Research?

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Abstract: – Social media began as a tool for people to communicate, engage socially and play. Although the enthusiasm in social media initially began with the younger age group, the interest has expanded to others as well. In the last two or three years, the role of social media has given rise to social commerce phenomenon. It has been pervasively associated as electronic marketing (e-marketing). Besides, it has been regarded as a powerful tool to enhance brand presence. Examples of social media presence at Websites include “visit us on Facebook” or “Follow us on Twitter”. In the next five years, retailers may expect further explosive growth of social media contributed through users’ use and view. Given the notion that social media has been the subject of much zeal to both researchers and practitioners, the research undertakes to examine the contexts of e-marketing perceptions and individuals’ characteristics in the context of social media. This in turn clarifies the e-marketing perceptions and aspects of individuals’ characteristics. Built on prior literature, the present research proposed, developed, tested and validated a theoretical model to explain purchase intention at social media. The results and implications for researchers and practice are discussed herein.

Key-Words: – electronic marketing, e-marketing, social media, Theory of Planned Behavior, purchase intention

1 Introduction

Social media began as a tool for people to communicate, engage socially and play. Although the enthusiasm in social media initially began with the younger age group, the interest has expanded to others as well. In the last two or three years, the role of social media has given rise to social commerce phenomenon. It has been pervasively associated as electronic marketing (e-marketing). Besides, it has been regarded as a powerful tool to enhance brand presence. Examples of social media presence at Websites include “visit us on Facebook” or “Follow us on Twitter”.

In 2010, the volume of goods sold through social media reached \$5 billion, and this number is expected to rise six-fold by 2015 [1]. Industry reports and academic researches consistently indicate that an organization’s marketing activities through social media are essential in creating meaningful consumer-brand relationships [2]. In the next five years, retailers may expect further explosive growth of social media contributed through users’ use and view.

2 Problem Formulation

Prior literature shows that marketing factors (e. g. brand trust, word-of-mouth and relationship quality) and individual characteristics (e.g. subjective norm and attitudes on intention to purchase) were investigated in isolation of each other. For instance, brand trust was investigated in the context of customer commitment [3], brand equity [4] and brand loyalty [5]. Word-of-mouth was examined in relation to trust [6] and buyer’s buying intention [7]. Relationship quality, another important marketing factor, has been a subject of interest particularly in purchase intention [8] and in customers’ loyalty and customer satisfaction [9].

Individual characteristics have been the subject of interest in the literature. For instance, subjective norm was examined in terms of its influence on adoption intention of e-brokerage [10], on job satisfaction [11] and on customers’ acceptance of airline B2C ecommerce sites [12]. More recently, Al-Jabari [13] examined the effect of attitude towards behavior, and subjective norms and perceived behavioral effect on behavioral intentions of Jordanian customers shopping via the Internet. Choo et al. [14] studied the effect of attitude and subjective norm in the context of environmental friendly product purchase intention while Peslak et

al. [15] explored the effect of attitude toward social networking and subjective norms on intention to use social network among students at several small northeast United States (US) universities.

Based on the above discussion, a research that combines the effects of electronic marketing factors, individual characteristics and social media in explaining purchase intention appears not visible. Electronic marketing (or e-marketing) factors in this paper refer to electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM), brand trust, trust of the Internet seller and electronic interaction quality. Individual characteristics are represented by individuals' subjective norm and attitude toward social media. Therefore, the research aims at filling the void by examining the e-marketing contributors (E-WOM, trust of Internet seller, brand trust and perceived interaction quality) and individual characteristics to purchase intention at social media. The research is question is set out: *What are the effects of e-marketing and individual characteristics on purchase intention at social media?*

3 Problem Solution

This section discusses the related theory, variables, hypotheses and research model, research context, population and sampling, research instrument and findings.

3.1 Related Theory

The work is built on the Theory of Planned Behavior [16]. It covers five variables: behavior, intention, attitude toward behavior, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control.

- **Behavior** – individual's response to situation.
- **Intention** – individual's readiness to perform a behavior and is used as a proxy evaluation of behavior.
- **Attitude toward a behavior** – individual's overall assessment of the behavior.
- **Subjective norm** – individual's own estimates of the social pressure to execute the target behavior.
- **Perceived behavior control** – the extent to which an individual seems capable to enact the behavior.

Fig. 1 shows the Theory of Planned Behavior model.

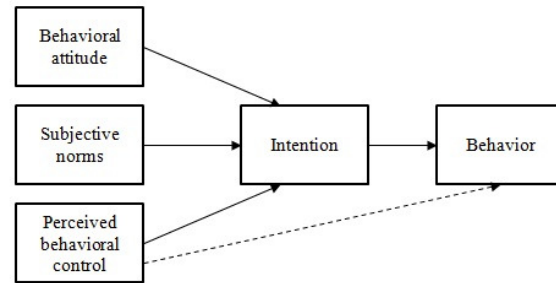


Fig. 1 Theory of Planned Behavior [16]

3.2 Variables, Hypotheses and Research Model

3.2.1 Variables

- **Purchase intention** – Intention has been regarded as individuals' plan to conduct a specific behavior. Based on Ajzen [16], purchase intention in this research refers to individual's readiness to perform buying while at social media.
- **Subjective norm** – Individuals engaging in a behavior may be influenced by their social environment. In this research, subjective norm refers to individuals' perceived social pressure to engage or not to engage in behavior [16], in particular purchase behavior at social media. Individuals with positive social influence who give support for their buying behavior may be likely to have purchase intention at social media. Similarly, those who have negative social influence may not have purchase intention at social media.
- **Attitude toward social media** – Individuals may have positive or negative assessment of purchasing behavior as they interact with social media. Those with positive attitude toward social media may likely have purchase intention. Alternatively, those with negative attitude toward social media may not have purchase intention.
- **Interaction quality between buyer and Internet seller** – Interaction quality refers to client's experience during his/her contact with the human element of a service company [24]. Perceived high quality of interaction between buyer and seller may bring about positive attitude toward social media. In the same vein, perceived low quality of interaction may trigger negative attitude toward social media.
- **Trust of Internet seller** – trust of Internet seller refers to the confidence a party puts in the Internet seller based on the expectation

that the Internet seller will perform a particular action [25]. Pavlou [26] concluded that higher trust in seller’s credibility results in higher price premiums for an identical service or product.

- **Brand trust** – brand trust refers to customer’s desire to rely on the capability of a brand [17]. Brand trust has been found to contribute favorably to product commitment, which in turn preserves a good connection with product equity [4] and produce favorable effects on product loyalty [5].
- **Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM)** – refers to informal interaction between private parties regarding the assessments of products and services [18] over the Internet. Prior studies show that word-of-mouth contributes to trust on customer buying intention [6] and box office income [19].

3.2.2 Hypotheses

Based on the variables discussed above, therefore it is posited that:

H1. There is a significant relationship between individuals’ subjective norm and purchase intention.

H2. Individuals’ positive attitude toward social media relates to higher intention to purchase at social media.

H3. Individuals’ perceived interaction quality of buyer and seller on social media relates to higher intention to purchase at social media.

H4a. Individuals’ trust of Internet seller relates to perceived interaction quality of buyer and seller on social media.

H4b. Individuals’ brand trust of Internet seller relates to perceived interaction quality of buyer and seller on social media

H5a. Individuals’ positive perception of e-WOM relates to their trust of Internet seller.

H5b. Individuals’ positive perception of e-WOM relates to their brand trust.

3.2.3 Research Model

Fig. 2 shows the research model.

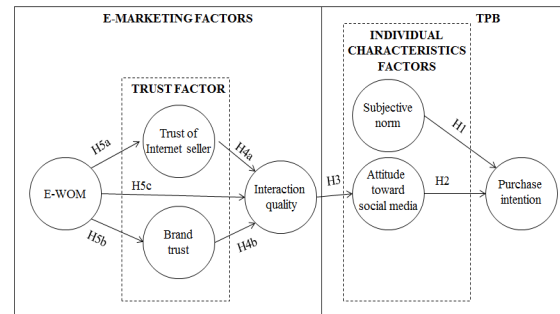


Fig. 2 Research Model

3.3 Research Context, Population and Sampling

The population for the research is active postgraduate Master of Business Administration (MBA) students at an institution of higher learning in Malaysia. The population is estimated at 500. The sample is defined as students in selected courses for MBA courses and is drawn on convenience basis. To avoid duplication of unit of analysis, the courses are chosen as distinct in terms of students’ study plan. There are 150 students in the sample. Data was analyzed using SPSS version 17 and SmartPLS [20].

3.4 Research Instrument

The researchers developed a survey questionnaire as the research instrument. There are eight sections for the survey questionnaire labeled A through H.

The first section requests respondents to answer questions about themselves. The second section requests respondents to provide evaluations of statements about their trust of Internet seller on social media. The third section is on brand trust. The fourth section measures e-WOM. Section five has statements that are used to measure subjective norm. Section six provides statements for respondents to evaluate interaction quality between buyer and seller at social media. Section seven has statements to elicit responses on users’ attitudes toward social media. The final section contains statements that measure purchase intention at social media.

Section two (trust of Internet seller), three (brand trust), four (e-WOM) and six (interaction quality buyer-seller) use a five-point Likert-scale; 1 denoting unimportant and five denoting very important. Section five (subjective norm), seven (attitude toward social media) and eight (online purchase intention) use a five-point Likert-scale with 1 denoting strongly disagree and five denoting strongly agree.

In ensuring validity, the research adapted prior measures. Table 1 shows the measures used for this research.

Table 1. Measures

Construct	Measures	Source
Trust of Internet seller	For me to purchase a product through social media, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the seller is honest. • the seller is trustworthy. • the seller will deliver to me the product I purchase according to the published delivery terms and conditions. • the seller does not take advantage of consumers. • the seller provides assistance and support after sales. 	[17; 26]
Brand trust	For me to purchase a product through social media, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the brand name offers constant quality level. • the brand name meets my expectations. • the brand name guarantees satisfaction. • the brand name will not disappoint me. • the brand name instills confidence in me when using it. 	[3; 4; 27]
e-WOM	For me to purchase a product through social media, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I discuss the user-friendliness of the seller's page at social media. • I discuss the price of the product offered at social media. • I discuss the variety of the products offered at social media. • I discuss the quality of the products offered at social 	[28]
	media. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I discuss the ease of transactions with the seller at social media. • I speak of the rapid delivery of the seller at social media. 	
Perceived buyer-seller interaction quality	For me to purchase a product through social media, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions about products displayed on social media are answered as honestly as possible. • The language used in social media discussion is good. • There are discussions about consumers' likes and dislikes on social media. • Questions posted on social media are given prompt response. 	[29; 30]
Subjective norm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most people who are important to me think I should purchase products through social media. • Close friends and family think it is a good idea to purchase products at social media. • People whom I listen to could influence me to purchase products at social media. 	[15]
Attitude toward social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media are good places for people to share opinions and information about purchasing products. • Social media allow me to make better purchasing decisions. • Social media is useful to get ideas about purchasing of products 	[31; 32]
Purchase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I would purchase 	[32]

intention	products as advertised at social media.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I would consider purchasing products as advertised at social media in the next three months. For my next product purchase, I will buy it through social media.

3.5 Findings

A pilot test was conducted. Table 2 shows the results of pilot test.

Table 2. Pilot Test Results

Constructs	No. of items	Cronbach's alpha (α)
Trust of Internet seller	5	0.840
Brand trust	5	0.838
Word of mouth (e-WOM)	6	0.877
Perceived buyer-seller interaction quality	4	0.687
Subjective norm	3	0.594
Attitude towards social media	3	0.641
Purchase intention	3	0.828

Except for subjective norm, the Cronbach's alpha is greater than 0.6 suggesting that measures were reliable [21]. Further examination indicates that by removing one item in the subjective norm increases the Cronbach's alpha to 0.643. Therefore, for the final analysis, there were only two items used for analysis in subjective norm. The item (*people whom I listen to could influence me to purchase products at social media*) was removed from final data collection.

Table 3 shows the results for profile of respondents.

Table 3. Profile of Respondents

Characteristics	Item	Frequency	%
Gender	Female	62	41.3
	Male	88	58.7
	Total	150	100
Age	20–29	82	54.7
	30–39	61	40.7
	40–49	6	4.0
	> 49	1	0.7
	Total	150	100
Purchase a product online before?	Yes	94	62.7
	No	56	37.3
	Total	150	100

	< 1	1	0.7
Number of hours accessing the Internet in a day	1–5	75	50.0
	6–10	49	32.7
	11–15	13	8.7
	16–20	8	5.3
	> 20	4	2.7
	Total	150	100
Years of work experience	< 1	24	16.0
	1–5	79	52.7
	6–10	38	25.3
	11–15	8	5.3
	16–20	1	0.7
	Total	150	100
Malaysian?	Yes	79	52.7
	No	71	47.3
	Total	150	100

The majority of respondents were male (58.7%). The age group between 20 and 29 forms the largest majority (54.7%). The majority of them have purchased a product online before. Most respondents (83.4%) spent 10 hours and fewer on the Internet. The majority (94%) of them have work experience that ranges below one year and 10 years. The larger proportion is Malaysian (52.7%).

In detecting the relationships among constructs, partial least square was applied. Determining convergent validity, the research used the guidelines in Bagozzi & Yi [22]. Convergent validity is fulfilled if loadings of the measures to their respective constructs are at least 0.60 [22]. Table 4 shows the range of loadings is between 0.700 and 0.922 thus establishing convergent validity. The composite reliability (CR) of all constructs were above 0.6 and average variance extracted (AVE) were above 0.5 thus further supporting convergent validity. The inter-variable correlations (Table 5) were examined and the square-root AVE were higher than correlations suggesting that the construct was more closely related to its own measures thus supporting discriminant validity [23].

Table 4. Loading, CR and AVE

Construct	Item	Loading	CR	AVE
Purchase intention	PI1	0.890	0.876	0.779
	PI2	0.875		
Subjective norm	SN1	0.922	0.852	0.744
	SN2	0.798		
Attitude toward social media	ATT1	0.793	0.817	0.598
	ATT2	0.796		
	ATT3	0.729		
Perceived interaction quality	IQ1	0.700	0.853	0.593
	IQ2	0.775		
	IQ3	0.855		
	IQ4	0.742		

Trust of online seller	TS1	0.875	0.893	0.623
	TS2	0.815		
	TS3	0.690		
	TS4	0.763		
	TS5	0.803		
Brand trust	TB1	0.758	0.885	0.607
	TB2	0.837		
	TB3	0.807		
	TB4	0.751		
	TB5	0.739		
Electronic word-of-mouth	EW1	0.688	0.90	0.60
	EW2	0.769		
	EW3	0.784		
	EW4	0.806		
	EW5	0.812		
	EW6	0.784		

Table 5. Inter-variable correlations

	PI	SN	ATT	IQ	TS	TB	EW
PI	0.883						
SN	0.410	0.863					
ATT	0.469	0.416	0.773				
IQ	0.138	0.411	0.560	0.770			
TS	0.00	0.179	0.262	0.331	0.789		
TB	0.637	0.274	0.234	0.406	0.319	0.779	
EW	0.180	0.270	0.250	0.390	0.230	0.436	0.775

The research model was then examined in terms of its structural model (Fig. 3).

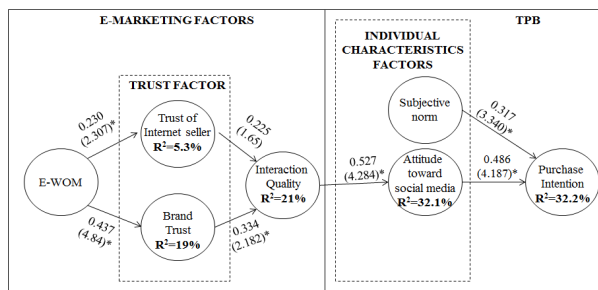


Fig. 3 Structural Model Results

Fig. 3 shows that all hypotheses were supported except for the relationship between trust of Internet seller and perceived interaction quality. As shown in Fig. 3, 32.1% of the variation in purchase intention can be explained by individuals' subjective norm and attitude toward social media. Of the two, attitude toward social media is a larger contributor.

Further examination shows that 32.1% of individuals' attitude toward social media is explained by their perception of interaction quality between Internet seller and buyer. Both brand trust and trust of Internet seller contribute positively and significantly to perception of interaction quality. A total of 21% variation in perceived interaction

quality is explained by brand trust and trust of Internet seller. E-WOM explains 19% variation in brand trust and 5.3% variation in Internet seller.

4 Conclusion

The research began with the aim to examine the e-marketing contributors (E-WOM, trust of Internet seller, brand trust and perceived interaction quality) and individual characteristics to purchase intention at social media. The research question was set out: *What are the effects of e-marketing and individual characteristics on purchase intention at social media?* In this section, we discuss the summary of findings, contributions of the research and thus what we can learn from it and suggest future research areas.

4.1 Summary of Findings

In answering the research question, we developed seven hypotheses. Table 6 summarizes our findings:

Table 6. Summary of hypotheses

Hypotheses	Support/ Not supported
H1. There is a significant relationship between individuals' subjective norm and purchase intention.	Supported
H2. Individuals' positive attitude toward social media relates to higher intention to purchase at social media.	Supported
H3. Individuals' perceived interaction quality of buyer and seller on social media relates to higher intention to purchase at social media.	Supported
H4a. Individuals' trust of Internet seller relates to perceived interaction quality of buyer and seller on social media.	Not supported
H4b. Individuals' brand trust of Internet seller relates to perceived interaction quality of buyer and seller on social media.	Supported
H5a. Individuals' positive perception of e-WOM relates to their trust of Internet seller.	Supported
H5b. Individuals' positive perception of e-WOM relates to their brand trust.	Supported

Overall, individuals purchase intention at social media can be explained by attitude toward social media and subjective norm. Attitude is a higher contributor. Concurrently, individuals' attitude can be explained through how they perceive the quality

of interaction between buyer and seller on social media. Interaction quality is influenced by trust factor; in particular brand trust. Both trust factor i.e. trust of Internet seller and brand trust is contributed through electronic word-of-mouth. Below, we discuss the significant contributors:

Subjective norm – individuals who experience higher social environment influence are more likely to have purchase intention at social media. Likewise, those who experience lower social environment influence are less likely to have purchase intention at social media.

Attitude toward social media – individuals with positive attitude toward social media have higher intention to purchase at social media. Accordingly, individuals with less positive attitude toward social media have lower purchase intention at social media.

Perceived interaction quality between buyer and seller – individuals who place importance on interaction quality between buyer and seller have positive attitude toward social media. This in turn will spur purchase intention at social media. Likewise, those who do not consider interaction quality as important have less positive attitude toward social media. They are not likely to have purchase intention at social media.

Brand trust – those who place importance on brand name consider interaction quality between buyer and seller as equally important. Accordingly, those who do not think brand as important do not consider interaction quality as equally important at social media.

e-WOM – given the dynamics of social media, e-WOM is increasingly becoming influential in users' activities at social media. Positive e-WOM is more likely to spur individuals to have higher brand trust and trust of Internet seller. Likewise, less positive e-WOM may not encourage brand trust and trust of Internet seller at social media.

4.2 What Can We Learn From Research?

In this section, we discuss the contributions of research. From a theoretical standpoint, the research has contributed to new knowledge in that it has extended the Theory of Planned Behavior by incorporating the e-marketing aspects and individual characteristics. The research has developed a theoretical model, tested and validated the model. The research found that e-marketing factors (e-WOM, brand trust, interaction quality) important factors that will spur purchase intention among individuals at social media. Equally important are individuals' attitude toward social media and how they are influenced by their social environment.

From a practical standpoint, this research is important for Internet retailers who use social media as an advertising tool. They have to ensure that they create a positive environment at social media. This includes conveying quality interaction through discussion platform, carrying products that consumers trust and promoting among users positive word-of-mouth through social media.

4.3 Future Research Areas

The sample consists of students at a particular institution in Malaysia. Thus, this is representative of a country only and is not generalizable. Future research areas may consider sample from another country. Besides, considerations may be given to effects of cultural factors for the relationships.

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