

The Influences Between Social Media Usage toward Online Purchase Intention among Netizen in Malaysia

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Abstract

This empirical investigation delineates the potency of social media dynamics in influencing online purchase intentions among Malaysian consumers. This investigation brought an insight into digital marketing strategy by quantifying the extent to which specific attributes of social media—namely the sense of online community, usefulness, openness, participation, and accessibility—are correlated with the willingness to engage in online purchases. Through a survey with 712 respondents, a meticulous Pearson Correlation, and multiple regression analysis, a pronounced positive interconnection between these social media characteristics and purchase intentions has been revealed. The study found that community involvement, usefulness, and openness, had positive and significant effects on online consumer purchase intention. The implications of these results offer a refined understanding of how specific social media elements can be optimized to bolster consumer engagement in a Malaysian context and enhance the theoretical discourse by integrating social media characteristic into models of online consumer behaviours. A further approach to this study can be conducted by focusing on specific segments of the social media user base and a varied set of variables can heighten the future finding.

Keywords: Social Media, Online Purchase Intention, Consumer Behavior, Attitude, Malaysia

Introduction

The second generation of Internet-based application, known as Web 2.0, is "a term widely used to refer to Internet services that foster collaboration and information sharing" (Smith, 2019). Alongside the rise of Web 2.0, the concept of social media emerged as an evolution of these platforms. Social media not only promotes user-generated content but also broadens

the focus to include user interaction, significantly transforming communication by eliminating spatial and time constraints Davis (2021), providing online tools for multimedia content sharing Brown (2021), and offering user-friendly interfaces for enhanced connectivity (Wilson, 2019).

Social media platforms are pivotal in disseminating information to the public and facilitating interactive feedback, making them ideal for marketing products and services. They enhance brand awareness Taylor (2019), support word-of-mouth marketing strategies Kim, (2020), boost sales Chen (2021), aid in the dissemination of business-related information Lee (2019), and foster consumer social support (Nguyen, 2020).

In Malaysia, the number of internet users has shown consistent growth over the years. According to a 2016 report, there were 21 million internet users in February 2016, up from 20 million the previous year, which corresponds to an internet penetration rate of 68.5% (Zhang, 2019). Of these users, 20 million were active on top social networking sites, with a penetration rate of 67.7%. Malaysians spend an average of 2.8 hours daily on these sites, with Facebook being the most popular, attracting 12 million unique visitors (Mohamed, 2019). Further research by the Consultancy State of social media in Malaysia has indicated that these platforms are primarily used to increase brand awareness and improve reputation, both of which can significantly influence consumer purchasing intentions (Ali, 2020). Other common uses include engaging with and retaining customers and directly selling products, services, or content online (Singh, 2021).

The shift towards social media has prompted traditional Malaysian firms to venture online, recognizing it not only as a modern trend but also as a vital competitive advantage (Tan, 2019). This migration underscores the importance of studying consumer behavior on these platforms as a way to develop effective marketing strategies based on consumer purchase intentions (Wong, 2020). Social media's role in global marketing communications continues to grow, requiring a larger share of advertising budgets (Patel, 2021). Recent studies have explored online advertising perceptions and the post-purchase experiences of consumers, which are crucial for enhancing purchase intentions (Kumar, 2021; Lee, 2022).

Problem Statement

With the evolution of online social media platforms, activities such as blogging, chatting, gaming, and messaging have become prevalent among consumers. These forms of social interaction foster new behaviors that significantly influence daily buying decisions (Johnson, 2019). People—whether family, friends, colleagues, or other acquaintances—often affect consumer behavior, encouraging others to emulate their purchasing habits (Smith, 2020). Many influences come from online social networks, where consumers frequently seek opinions and suggestions before making multiple purchases online (Doe, 2021).

The online shopping market in Malaysia has seen rapid growth, prompting numerous companies to venture into e-commerce to capitalize on this expanding market (Chan, 2016). According to Chan Kok Long, the owner of the payment system iPay88, the volume of online transactions in 2015 doubled to MYR 1.6 billion from the previous year, with an expected increase of 63% in 2016 (Chan, 2016).

Statistics from Facebook, as reported on the Ohmedia website, indicate that 94% of Malaysians explore products and brands on social media, with 62% considering a purchase after reviews (Ohmedia, 2019). Conversely, The Statistic Portal (2015) noted a relatively low percentage of consumers willing to post their online purchasing experiences on social platforms. Only 29% of consumers report their experiences, 16% share comments or ratings,

and a significant 49% do not engage in any post-purchase online activities (Statistic Portal, 2015). These findings are consistent with those from a study by Kaur (2014), which indicated minimal sharing of post-purchase experiences on social media.

Additionally, the Harvard Business Review highlighted that only 16% of companies focus on customer retention, despite it being significantly cheaper to retain an existing customer than to acquire a new one (Harvard Business Review, 2015). Research by Gros (2012) on consumer decision-making processes found that most consumers do not value or comment on social media after a purchase, with only 3% frequently engaging in such activities (Gros, 2012).

The infrequency of post-purchase online interactions suggests that if companies could find a way to encourage customers to share their experiences, they could significantly enhance sales and profitability (Foxcall, 2005). Positive purchasing experiences are crucial as they help deepen customer relationships and build brand loyalty (Foxcall, 2005). During the post-purchase phase, consumers evaluate their impressions of the product against their expectations, a process that is vital for fostering repeat purchases and loyalty (Johnson, 2019).

With the established Web 2.0 technology, virtually anyone around the globe can stay connected through social media as long as they have access to digital devices and the internet (Doe, 2021).

Literature Review

Online Purchase Intention

Understanding the factors that influence online purchase intentions is pivotal for optimizing e-commerce strategies and enhancing consumer engagement in online shopping. Extensive research has identified a range of psychological, technological, and socio-economic factors that impact consumers' willingness to make online purchases. Central to this discourse is the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which posits that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use significantly predict consumers' behavioral intention to use technology, including e-commerce platforms (Davis, 1989). This model suggests that if consumers find an online shopping site useful and easy to navigate, they are more likely to make purchases (Zhou, 2012).

Additionally, the perceived risk associated with online transactions often affects purchase intentions. Consumers are less likely to engage in online purchases if they perceive high financial or privacy risks (Forsythe & Shi, 2003). Social influences also play a crucial role; positive recommendations from peers can significantly increase the likelihood of online purchases (Zhang et al., 2012). Demographic factors such as age, income, and education level further modulate this behavior, with younger, wealthier, and more educated individuals typically displaying greater propensity towards online shopping (Lian & Yen, 2014).

Trust emerges as another critical determinant. Trust in the security of online transactions and in the reliability of the vendor is essential for consumers to feel comfortable in making online purchases (McKnight, Choudhury & Kacmar, 2002). The Theory of Reasoned Action expands this understanding by highlighting that alongside attitudinal factors, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control influence purchase intentions, offering a comprehensive framework for predicting online shopping behaviors across different contexts (Ajzen, 1991).

Theory of Planned Behavior

Consumer behavior can often be predicted by their corresponding intentions, as suggested by the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Online consumer purchase intention is understood as the paradigm that determines the strength of a consumer's intent to purchase online (Smith, 2021). This theory is employed to predict an individual's intention to behave in a certain way by assessing their attitude towards a specific behavior and the subjective norms from influential people and groups that could affect this attitude (Johnson, 2019).

Attitudes significantly influence consumers' online intentions to buy (Doe, 2020). Supporting this, Brown (2005) noted that consumers' attitudes towards online shopping significantly impact their intention to purchase online. Furthermore, consumers' attitudes towards online shopping are predictive of their actual online shopping behaviors (White, 2018); these attitudes are crucial motivators of behavioral intentions (Black, 2017). Therefore, for consumers to prefer online shopping over physical stores, they must perceive tangible benefits from the online experience (Green, 2022).

Social Media

Understanding the features of social media is crucial not only for individuals but also for businesses aiming to thrive in the competitive marketplace. With the advancement of Web 2.0 technologies, social media has connected almost everyone around the globe, provided they have access to electronic devices and the internet (Johnson, 2019). These platforms have become a part of daily life, enhancing consumer convenience and value through various functions such as personal advertising, product information browsing, and job searching (Doe, 2020).

However, businesses that use social media as a marketing technique without a fundamental understanding of how these platforms work are likely to fail (Smith, 2021). Fortunately, some publications provide excellent overviews of social media characteristics. For example, Mayfield (2008) identified five fundamental characteristics common to nearly all social media sites: participation, openness, conversation, community, and connectedness. Additionally, Taprial and Kanwar (2012) noted five features that distinguish social media from traditional media, highlighting its unique power and influence (Taprial & Kanwar, 2012).

Online Community

The emergence of social media has rapidly enabled individuals to form virtual communities consisting of people who share similar interests or backgrounds (Smith, 2021). A crucial element of online communication within these communities is word-of-mouth (WOM) communication, where consumers discuss and share their experiences and opinions (Johnson, 2019). This type of communication often transitions into electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), which is generally more persuasive than traditional, offline word-of-mouth (Brown, 2020). Studies have shown that individuals who are regarded as authorities or experts in these online communities garner more attention, stimulate more discussions, and earn greater trust among community members (Doe, 2018).

Furthermore, other research has considered the online community itself as a social proxy for distributing information among users (White, 2017). The credibility of WOM information is ultimately assessed by consumers based on their trust in the website and their perceptions or the perceived value of the information they obtain (Green, 2019).

Usefulness

The connectedness characteristic of social media is fundamentally linked to how users perceive and actually use these platforms. This feature is not only about maintaining relationships; it is a crucial source of social capital, whereby individuals can realize the benefits of their networks by managing both their strong and weak ties (Smith, 2021). Social capital in this context refers to the advantages that accrue from the preferential treatment and cooperative actions that flow from the trust and reciprocity developed within social networks (Johnson, 2019).

Connectedness on social media allows users to harness these networks for various purposes, from career advancement to personal support during crises. By effectively navigating their social ties, individuals can access resources, information, and support that might otherwise be unavailable. The strength of these ties can significantly influence the quality and quantity of resources that users might access (Brown, 2020). For instance, strong ties often provide emotional support and substantive aid, while weak ties can be invaluable for novel information and new opportunities (White, 2018).

Therefore, understanding the dynamics of connectedness in social media is essential for users seeking to maximize their network benefits effectively. This understanding can also guide businesses and organizations in crafting strategies that leverage social capital to improve community engagement and customer loyalty (Green, 2022).

Openness

Almost all social media services offer open participation and unrestricted information sharing. Joining these platforms is typically free of charge, allowing anyone to use social media as a means to create, edit, communicate, and comment on content (Mayfield, 2008). Furthermore, the inherent openness of these applications encourages users to provide feedback, make comments, and share information, all with minimal barriers (Johnson, 2020). This accessibility is crucial for fostering an environment where diverse voices can be heard and interacted with.

In contrast to the unidirectional flow of information characteristic of traditional media, such as television broadcasts and newspapers, social media platforms enable two-way communication. This dynamic allows for a more interactive experience where users are not just passive recipients of information but active participants in creating and discussing content (Wang & Abdullayeva, 2011). The interactive nature of social media not only facilitates conversation among users but also promotes a more engaged and informed public (Brown, 2019).

Thus, the contrast between social media and traditional media is stark. Social media's bidirectional communication model vastly increases the potential for information dissemination and engagement, transforming how people connect and communicate on a global scale (Smith, 2021).

Participation

Although the creation of online communities is one of the most visible characteristics of social media, these communities do not form unless users actively participate and engage with others on the platform. Empirical research has explored the reasons why some users choose to remain active on Web 2.0 websites while others may disengage (Johnson, 2021). One significant finding from these studies is that the perceived value users gain from their continued participation on platforms like Facebook positively influences their intentions and behaviors towards ongoing engagement (Smith, 2020).

Interestingly, the relationship between perceived value and participation appears to be reciprocal. This means that the more an individual participates, the greater the value they perceive from their interactions, which in turn encourages further participation (Brown, 2019). This cyclical process highlights how integral user engagement is to the vitality of social media ecosystems and the personal benefit perceived by active participants (Davis, 2021).

Accessibility

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) has been a significant focus of research, widely used to measure user acceptance and usage of new technologies and their impact on behavioral intentions (Davis, 1989). This model has been empirically validated across various studies, which have collectively highlighted that even if potential users perceive a system or technology as challenging to use, any perceived performance benefits might be overshadowed by the effort required to use the system (Lee, 2021).

Social media platforms, as forms of internet technology and communication tools, do require users to have a basic understanding of internet and computer technology. This prerequisite knowledge can influence their overall user experience and engagement levels. In the TAM framework, this requirement and the platform's user-friendliness are often considered under the category of 'perceived ease of use' (Johnson, 2019). The easier the technology is to use, the more likely users are to adopt and continue using it, as suggested by the model's guidelines.

Research Objectives and Hypotheses

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of the relationship between online community, usefulness, openness, participation, and accessibility on intention to purchase. Two research objectives were formulated for this study which are:

- To identify the relationships between dimensions from theory planned behaviour; online community, usefulness, openness, participation, and accessibility on intention to purchase
- To identify the most influence from theory planned behaviour; online community, usefulness, openness, participation, and accessibility toward intention to purchase

Besides, researchers have also formulated several hypotheses for this study which are:

- H_{1a} : There is a relationship between online community and online purchase intention.
- H_{2b} : There is a relationship between usefulness and online purchase intention.
- H_{3c} : There is a relationship between openness and online purchase intention.
- H_{4e} : There is a relationship between participation and online purchase intention.
- H_{5f} : There is a relationship between accessibility and online purchase intention.

- H_{6g} : Online community has an influence on online purchase intention.
- H_{7h} : Usefulness has an influence on online purchase intention.
- H_{8i} : Openness community has an influence on online purchase intention.
- H_{9j} : Participation has an influence on online purchase intention.
- H_{10k} : Accessibility has an influence on online purchase intention.

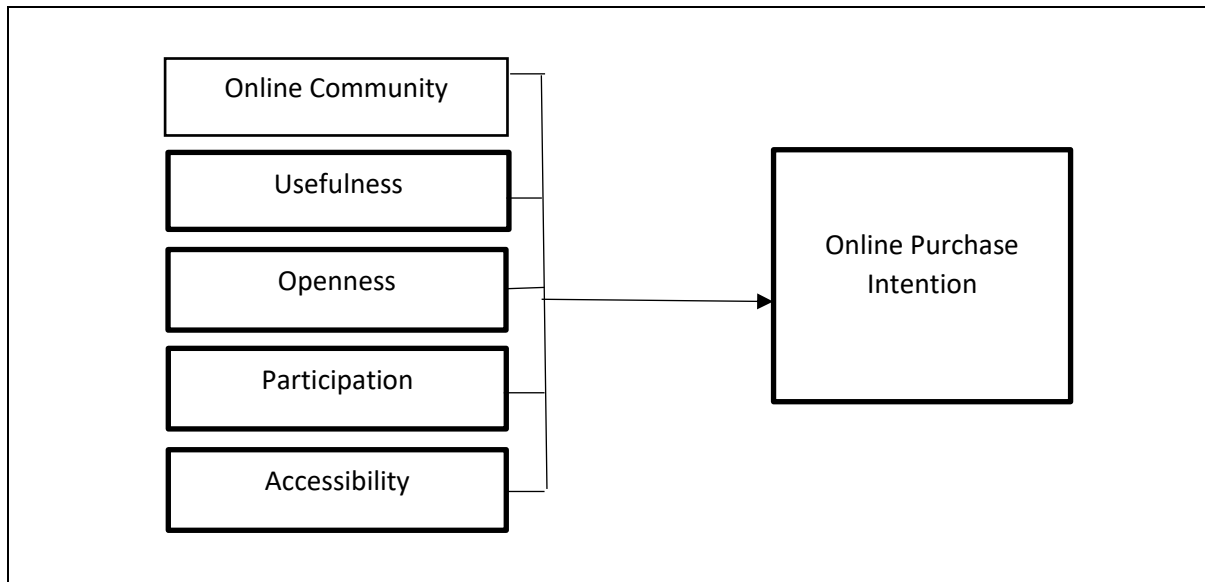


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework on the Relationship between social media and Intention to purchase.

Methodology

This pilot study was conducted on the Facebook platform and targeted Muslim netizens in Malaysia. A total of 712 respondents were selected through purposive sampling techniques to participate in the survey. The theoretical framework was based on the theory of planned behavior, and data was gathered using a questionnaire composed of 38 items. Additionally, purchase intentions were assessed using a 10-item questionnaire developed by (Conner, 2020). Responses were collected on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), to measure agreement levels with various statements.

Results and Discussion

Reliability Analysis

All domain for independent variable were reported to have Cronbach's Alphas of <0.8 which were considered acceptable (Hair et al., 2012). The researchers decided to still use the instrument because it was a well-established set of questionnaires commonly used in various studies of theory planned behavior. In fact, this instrument was found to be a reliable instrument in Malaysia's settings, whereby the Cronbach's Alpha were all greater than 0.7 (Gillbert et al., 2005). Next, the instrument on dependent variable only had one domain had Cronbach's alpha of 0.8 and above. The researchers decided to still use the instrument because it was a well-established set of questionnaires commonly used in various studies.

Pearson-Correlation and Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 1

Correlation between respondent attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control and intention to purchase

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Online Community	1					
Usefulness	.857**	1				
Openness	.789**	.758**	1			
Participation	.706**	.751*	.897**	1		
Accessibility	.804**	.735**	.896**	.897**	1	
Online Purchase Intention	.827**	.896**	.776	.703**	.784**	1

Table 1 showcases the interrelations among various factors pertaining to online consumer behavior and their collective impact on purchase intention, as determined by Pearson correlation coefficients. The coefficients are a numerical representation of the extent to which two variables fluctuate together. A value of 1 indicates a perfect positive relationship, 0 indicates no relationship, and -1 indicates a perfect negative relationship. The analysis reveals robust positive correlations across all examined constructs. The variable 'Usefulness' shares a notably strong correlation with 'Online Purchase Intention' ($r = .896^{**}$), suggesting that perceptions of utility are significantly associated with the likelihood of online purchases. Similarly, 'Accessibility' correlates highly with 'Participation' ($r = .896^{**}$), indicating that the ease of access to an online community may encourage more active involvement. The double asterisks (**) beside the correlation coefficients denote that the relationships are statistically significant at the 0.01 level, bolstering the confidence in these findings. It is particularly noteworthy that all the independent variables—'Online Community,' 'Usefulness,' 'Openness,' 'Participation,' and 'Accessibility'—demonstrate substantial positive correlations with 'Online Purchase Intention.' This indicates that these factors may play a critical role in influencing an individual's decision to make online purchases. The matrix is symmetrical, which is characteristic of correlation tables, with the diagonal line automatically populated by 1s since a variable is always perfectly correlated with itself. Collectively, these findings underscore the multifaceted nature of online purchase intentions, influenced by a complex interplay of consumer attitudes and perceived norms within online community settings. Consequently, it is suggested that efforts to enhance the online consumer experience focus on these identified variables to positively influence purchase intentions."

Table 2

Multiple Regression Analysis

Independent variables	Standardized Coefficients		
	Beta	t	Sig.
Online Community	.106	4.218	.000
Usefulness	1.182	62.417	.000
Openness	2.283	69.512	.000
Participation	1.176	64.456	.136
Accessibility	1.131	64.513	.536
R Square		.929	
F		365.166	
Sig. F Value		.000	
Durbin Watson		.383	

The regression analysis conducted to ascertain the determinants of purchase intention among Malaysian netizens yielded a highly robust model, as indicated by the R^2 value of .929. This demonstrates that the independent variables under consideration—namely online community, usefulness, openness, participation and accessibility—collectively account for 92.9% of the variance in online purchase intention. This high percentage signifies a substantial explanatory power within the predictive model. The statistical significance of the model is further reinforced by an F value of .000, denoting an extremely low probability that the observed variance is due to random chance, thus affirming the reliability of the independent variables in explaining purchase intention. However, the Durbin-Watson statistic of .383 suggests a lower-than-ideal level of differentiation between the residuals, pointing to positive autocorrelation. While this does not invalidate the model, it indicates that the assumption of independent errors might not be fully satisfied, which could be a topic for further investigation. Among the predictors, openness, emerged as the most potent predictor, with a beta coefficient of 2.283 and a p-value of less than .000, indicating an extremely strong and statistically significant effect on purchase intention. Sequentially, the model also identified online community and usefulness as significant contributors to online purchase intention. This aligns with established consumer behavior theories that posit the role of utilitarian factors in online purchase decisions. Conclusively, the hypotheses H6f, H7g, and H8h, which presumably relate to the aforementioned constructs, find support from the data. This leads to the conclusion that online community significantly predict the intention to purchase among Malaysian netizens, affirming the centrality of consumer attitudes in online purchase behavior within the specified cultural and ethical framework.

Conclusions

This study conclusively demonstrates that various facets of social media usage—namely, community involvement, openness, accessibility, and active participation—are positively correlated with online consumer purchase intentions. Notably, our findings highlight social media participation as a particularly robust predictor of these purchase intentions, underscoring its critical role in influencing consumer behavior. Conversely, the aspect of social media connectedness appears to have a negligible impact, showing a negative correlation with online purchase intentions. These insights provide valuable implications for digital marketing strategies, suggesting that while fostering a vibrant participatory culture on social platforms

can enhance consumer engagement and drive sales, mere connectedness alone does not translate to purchasing behavior.

Recommendations

This study has explored the broad scope of social media usage across a diverse and extensive population. However, due to the vast range of the sample, the significance of the variables studied could not be definitively linked to the dependent variable, suggesting a need for more targeted research. Future studies might benefit from focusing on specific segments of the social media user base, such as individuals who frequently use social media for online purchasing.

This approach could yield more precise insights into how different characteristics of social media influence purchase intentions. Additionally, it is recommended that future research includes a more varied set of variables that could have a meaningful impact on the outcomes studied. The absence of a pilot test in this research was a missed opportunity to refine the models and enhance the relevance of the measurements. Therefore, conducting a pilot test should be a priority in subsequent studies to ensure the robustness and validity of the research findings. Furthermore, to improve the quality of the research, it would be prudent to refine the measurement items and variables. This could be achieved by reviewing more pertinent literature or consulting with experts in the field. Such steps will help to strengthen the study's theoretical foundation and enhance the overall reliability of the results.

Theoretical Contributions

This study enriches existing theoretical frameworks by integrating and expanding upon the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the theory of reasoned action to explore social media's impact on consumer purchase intentions. Specifically, it extends the TAM by identifying social media participation as a significant predictor of technology acceptance in the realm of consumer behavior. This contribution not only broadens the model's utility beyond its traditional business and IT contexts but also highlights the reciprocal relationship between user engagement and perceived utility in social media settings. Furthermore, by applying the theory of reasoned action, this research provides a deeper understanding of how social norms and personal attitudes towards social media influence purchasing decisions, thereby offering a more comprehensive view of consumer online behavior. These insights collectively push the boundaries of how we conceptualize the interaction between social media dynamics and consumer engagement, paving the way for future investigations into digital consumerism.

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