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**Beyond COVID-19: Factors Influencing Purchase Decision of Cosmetics Within
S-Commerce in Emerging Markets: A Study Conducted in Egypt**

Doctor of Business Administration

Thesis

Marketing

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Abstract

This paper investigates the relationship between consumer's purchase decision of cosmetics in social commerce in an emerging market and relevant factors namely: Social commerce constructs, social support, social media influencers, consumer's perceived risk, and consumer's trust as well as examining consumers' trust drivers in the same context. Exploratory research was conducted in terms of in-depth interviews with online consumers and s-commerce business owners along with conclusive causal research that was pursued through conducting a survey with upper-middle class online consumers relying on non-probability judgment sampling technique which resulted in collecting 149 observations that were analyzed using regression analysis. The findings showed that social commerce constructs, social support, social media influencers, consumer's trust, and consumer's perceived risk are significant factors that directly influence consumer's purchase decision. They also showed that information quality, perceived security, perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and privacy concerns are significant drivers of consumer's trust. This research contributes to literature through filling the empirical gap related to purchase decision in social commerce in emerging markets beyond the pandemic via highlighting and investigating factors that have direct influence on consumer's purchase decision as well as examining the effect of perceived risk in terms of eight dimensions combined as one construct for the first time on consumer's purchase decision. In addition to participating in the improvement of the Egyptian cosmetics sellers' performance in social commerce via emphasizing on the factors that affect the purchase decision of consumers in order to enhance sales taking into consideration customers' insights and feedback.

Keywords

Social commerce, social commerce constructs, social support, social media influencers, perceived risk, trust, purchase decision.

1. Introduction

The adoption of Web 2.0 capabilities created an evolution in the e-commerce sector through enhancing customer participation and achieving greater economic value (Hajli & Sims, 2015; Huang & Benyoucef, 2013; Salvatori & Marcantoni, 2015). Huge changes have been brought to the e-commerce industry as well as consumers' shopping behavior through the development of social networks (Li & Ku, 2018). The advantages of this interactive information technology infrastructure (Wang & Zhang, 2012) and the commercial influence of the social media (Sohaib, 2021) lead to the birth of a "referral economy" creating a new category of e-commerce through social media platforms. This category is called social commerce (Hajli, 2013; Huang & Benyoucef, 2013; Li & Ku, 2018; Lim et al., 2019) and is regarded as a key development model in the field of e-commerce (Wang & Zhang, 2012). It evoked the merger of two major digital trends of e-commerce and social media (LAI, 2010; Sarker et al., 2020). It blends e-commerce and social media best practices as an exciting lucrative evolution in retail marketing as it allows the use of social media, in the context of e-

commerce, to support buying and selling of products and services from places to which people are connected (Li & Ku, 2018).

And with the spectacular rise in the number of social networking sites, users' accessibility for marketers and companies to extract more business opportunities have been increased considerably (Hussain, 2021). More businesses started to introduce social commerce to their marketing mix (Hussain, 2021) and started to invest in logistics and supply chains and widened their product ranges. Small businesses, startups, and entrepreneurs were tempted to penetrate this low- entry barrier market due to having limited resources (Maia, 2020) and even the bricks-and-mortar shops were forced to attain online presence (Abou Ali et al., 2020). Thus, creating a cluttered s-commerce landscape that makes it more challenging for a business to stay competitive and more varieties for consumers to choose from. And currently in Egypt, online presence has become a necessity not a luxury, where having and maintaining an online business operation is the key for continuity and sustainability of business.

Moreover, since the advent of the pandemic in 2019 and the shift it embarked on the nature of business, global trends have drastically altered as well as the behavior of humans, nature of trading, and even the way of life. It had a profound impact on the entire world of e-commerce where it became a substitute source and considered top in this condition. Not only the virus has compelled customers to use the internet and make it habit in their daily routine (Bhatti et al., 2020) accelerating the adoption of online shopping especially in emerging economies (Warganegara & Babolian Hendijani, 2022), but also has shifted the attention of consumers towards certain products particularly those that enhance the appearance, wellbeing, strength, and condition of face and body internally and externally (El-zoghby et al., 2021). The pandemic has altered consumer behavior and spanned all areas of life, from how people work to how they shop to how they entertain themselves. It had a worldwide impact on consumer needs, preferences, and behavior, thus creating rapid shifts that have pronounced implications for business managers. And while some of these changes were temporary, others might have endured beyond this pandemic. COVID-19 reshaped industries and rapidly accelerated long-term underlying trends, it is more important than ever for businesses to understand the new consumers' attitudes, behaviors, and purchasing habits and unravel the factors that influence them.

Literature shows that multiple research projects were concerned with studying the purchase behavior of consumers as it helps in understanding what influences consumer buying decisions, thus allowing marketers to identify gaps in the market and compete more effectively. Scholars are often focused on investigating purchase intention and select it as the basis for the majority of purchasing behavior studies. They usually refer to the intention as the key predictor of the actual behavior. According to Ajzen (1991), the intentions of the consumers are an indicator of the extent to which people are willing to carry out a specific behavior. Although purchase intention is the prime input in the purchasing process (Abou Ali et al., 2020), but purchase decision is the key to the final output of the process as it is considered the actual behavior (Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016). Accordingly, this study focuses

on investigating the factors that directly influence consumers' purchase decision of cosmetics on social commerce platforms in Egypt as an emerging market after COVID-19 crisis in addition to examining the drivers of consumer's trust in the same context. As capturing the motivations and social trends of the novel consumer buying decision is vital for s-commerce businesses to be capable to plan effective policies regarding content, allocation of budget, and its segmentation strategies to enhance their competitive status and increase the actual buying patterns, sales volumes, and values.

2. Literature review and hypotheses development

2.1 Purchase decision

A consumer purchase is considered as a response to a problem. And consumer decision making pertains to making decisions regarding product and service offerings (Prasad & Jha, 2014). Similar to any decision-making process, making a purchase decision usually runs through a decision-making model that consists of five stages, initiated with identifying a need, then searching for information, evaluating various alternatives, then making a decision, and ending with the post-purchase outcome (Elmasry, 2019; Gupta et al. 2004; Madhavan & Kaliyaperumal, 2015; Prasad et al., 2019; Turban et al., 2015; Yogesh & Yesha, 2014).

Purchase decision of consumers is defined as “the willingness or actual behavior of consumers' purchase behavior” where consumers are willing to purchase products and disclose financial information (Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016). It is the stage where consumers need to piece up the information and make the purchase decision (Liang and Lai, 2002). Consumers tend to integrate and combine the knowledge gained from pervious stages in the purchase decision-making process to help them choose between two or more alternatives (Sudarso & Suryati, 2018).

According to Osei and Abenyin (2016) the decision making is defined as “the selection of an alternative to solve a problem” where the time and effort needed by consumers to complete the process differ across buying situations. At this stage, consumers make important decisions of purchase such as choosing a product with specifications that meet their needs, selecting a certain seller, and determining the purchase timing (Elmasry, 2019). And when a product is chosen by a consumer, he or she needs to fill out certain payment, ordering, and delivery data (Liang & Lai, 2002). Social networks provide consumers with factors that help them decide which product they need, which seller to approach as well as the optimum time to purchase (Yadav et al., 2013). Therefore, its vital to take into consideration the factors that influence the purchase decision of consumers to enable businesses to compete and ensure their long-term survival (Hanaysha, 2018).

2.2 Social Commerce Constructs

The networking between online sellers and shoppers has been developing and new channels are emerging to connect them with the help of social media platforms. These online mediums offer a unique feature of interactivity that influences both behavioral intention and behaviors

of users (Huang & Benyoucef, 2017) by allowing customers to share their experiences and information and recommend their opinions to others through participating in online social communities (Hajli, 2015; Hajli et al., 2017).

According to Hajli et al. (2014), social commerce constructs are “measured using three dimensions: recommendations and referrals, ratings and reviews, and forums and communities” and they are commonly known as word-of-mouth (Maia et al., 2018). The creation of an electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) or social media constructs in online platforms is considered as an essential tool of social commerce due to its significance to business (Sheikh et al., 2019). The positive and negative statements provided through the social commerce constructs by current or former customers serve as means for potential customers to collect information about product and service quality (Danniswara et al., 2017).

In traditional commerce, information gained from the word of mouth strongly influences consumers purchase decision (Bansal & Voyer, 2000). And in the online environment, consumers usually rely on the opinion of their peers, such as product experts, acquaintances, or other users in general before they make their purchase decisions (Jang et al., 2012). From a social commerce perspective, e-WOM engagement positively influence purchase intention of consumers (Yusuf et al., 2018) where positive valence WOM and the content of WOM are the main drivers for improving consumers’ purchase intention (Wang & Yu, 2017). The online social network can be described as this large group of experts that support the decisions of users. The collective opinions obtained from friends support online purchases and can create significant opportunities for sales (Li & Lai, 2014). Consumers often rely on suggestions and recommendations from online peers to make buying decisions. They are driven from inefficient individual decisions toward collaborative decision-making with higher efficiency (Dashti et al, 2016). Consumers exhibit more willingness towards purchasing based on recommendations that comes from people they are familiar with (Wang et al., 2022). Also, reviews help customers who are interested in purchasing a product by viewing the experience of former customers. Positive reviews make the product more guaranteed, reliable, and price worthy. While negative reviews make the product less likely to be purchased (Sridevi & Mathivanan, 2020).

In research from Prasad et al. (2019), results established that online communications (e-WOM) significantly influence the purchase behavior of consumers in social media environment. As the exchange of information achieved by reviews, ratings, forums, communities, and recommendations, assist potential customers in their buying decision (Sheikh et al., 2019). Individuals have the ability to be affected by others’ behavior and this influence can be in the form of adoption of actions, trends, beliefs, preferences, or ideas owned by others. Therefore, they try to imitate the behavior of their peers affecting their decision to purchase through the s-commerce platform (Handarkho, 2020). Subsequently, this study hypothesizes the following:

H1a: There is a significant and positive influence of social commerce constructs on consumer's purchase decision in social commerce.

Moreover, Hajli (2015) indicated that social commerce constructs are essential to influencing customer trust, and in turn, increase the willingness to buy. The information generated by social commerce site consumers influences trust towards such site, thus positively impacting their purchasing behavior (Liu et al., 2019). WOM plays a vital role in building trust and helps in increasing buyer propensity and intention to search for products on social commerce platforms (Gibreel et al., 2018). In terms of information richness, information relevance, and customers' browsing purposes, forums and communities as well as ratings and reviews have a more competitive advantage on building trust before making purchases (Chen et al., 2017). Additionally, Sarker et al. (2020) in a meta-analysis of social commerce adoption found that social commerce constructs (rating and reviews; forums and communities; recommendation and referrals) had a significant and positive influence on trust. Social commerce constructs provide consumers with a sense of security generating trust towards social commerce sites. Interactions and information posted by other customers shape social trust across social commerce platforms and accordingly encourage the buying behavior of consumers (Sohaib, 2021). Thus, this study hypothesizes the following:

H1b: There is a significant and positive influence of social commerce constructs on consumer's trust in social commerce.

Furthermore, social commerce constructs have functions to facilitate the sharing of information and establishing social support platforms for consumers (Hajli, 2015). Several studies related to social commerce revealed the influence of social commerce constructs (rating and reviews; forums and communities; recommendation and referrals) and found it to be significant and positive on both informational support and emotional support (Sarker et al., 2020). Beyari and Abareshi (2018) stated that communication is a component of the social experience and may influence the purchasing decision of consumers on social commerce platforms. It grants the transfer of support and influence from one individual to another which can be either informational or emotional support regarding online products or services. Thus, allowing individuals to be agents of word-of-mouth as they are able to provide information that can be used to assist others in making their decision (Chen & Shen, 2015). In social commerce, consumers' influence on other consumers' purchase decisions is stronger than the sellers. Online consumers tend to wait to see the opinions of early adopters before making a purchase to reduce the risk of buying a new unknown product. And social commerce allows people to share their experiences and exchange product related knowledge and information, thus, lowering the risk for potential consumers (Salvatori & Marcantoni, 2015). Accordingly, the study hypothesizes the following:

H1c: There is a significant and positive influence of social commerce constructs on social support in social commerce.

H1d: There is a significant and negative influence of social commerce constructs on consumer's perceived risk in social commerce.

2.3 Social Support

The concept of social support has been driven from the social support theory (Tajvidi et al., 2021) to elaborate how social relationships influence emotions, behaviors, and perception of individuals. Social support plays a vital role in facilitating online commerce as the supportive interactions between members of a social network bring them closer, ease the process of information exchange, make them willing to use a social network site, and ensure continuity of usage in such a supportive climate (Liang et al., 2011). Social support is a multidimensional construct that involves several components for various contexts (emotional, instrumental, appraisal, and informational) (Hajli et al., 2015; Schwarzer et al., 2004). However, in social commerce, social support mainly involves emotional and informational support (Hajli, 2014; Hidayatulloh, 2018; Liu et al., 2019b; Riaz et al., 2021; Sarker et al 2020; Shanmugam et al., 2016; Sheikh et al., 2019; Tajvidi et al., 2021) as the interactions on the internet have virtual nature. Thus, online social support offered to social media users usually takes an intangible form such as giving emotional and informational support (Hajli, 2013; Hajli et al., 2015; Turban et al, 2015).

In the virtual environment, people are encouraged to be more open towards business strategies when they sense social support from other users (Yahia et al., 2018). In social commerce, social support has a positive association with social commerce intentions and supports consumers in their buying decisions (Sheikh et al., 2019). Riaz et al. (2021) found that emotional and informational support helps individuals to connect with other members in the online community to make well-informed purchase decisions. Consumers can attain their required information on social platforms as well as communication with one another to gain recognition and feel valued (Liu et al., 2019b). Online brand communities with a supportive climate harbor the development of relationships among users as they feel they will be given care and help (Molinillo et al., 2020). Accordingly, the study is proposing the following hypothesis:

H2a: There is a significant and positive influence of social support on consumer's purchase decision in social commerce.

Furthermore, Lin et al. (2018) and Shanmugam et al. (2016) found that social support namely, emotional support and informational support contributes to trust building in the social commerce context. When consumers receive information and support in social commerce platforms, this increases their level of trust and indirectly would lead them to purchase intention (Makmor et al., 2018). Social support and sharing of supportive information enhance friendships and builds trust among users in social commerce (Liang et al., 2011). The enthusiastic feedback can help individuals feel better even if the support

provides no assistance in solving their problem (Liu et al., 2019b). It creates a friendly supportive environment where people can interact for the sake of mutual benefit, thus facilitating trust belief and sustaining in social commerce (Cheng & Lin, 2022). Consequently, the research is representing the following hypothesis:

H2b: There is a significant and positive influence of social support on consumer's trust in social commerce.

2.4 Social Media Influencers (SMIs)

Recently, with the ceaseless growing use of social media, a worldwide marketing phenomenon has emerged to the forefront termed as "influencer marketing" (De Veirman et al., 2017) where popular social media figures are used by business and brands to target their audience. These figures are called "social media influencers" who gained their popularity by creating and sharing content through social media platforms (Hajli, 2015). These SMIs use their talent and appealing personalities with their social networking following on different platforms to shape the perception of their followers regarding brands and products (Wu et al., 2022). They indulge their audience with their personal life and daily activities as well as sharing their opinions, recommendations, and experiences with them (Alotaibi et al., 2019). Subsequently, followers consider influencers as like-minded peers whom they trust more than traditional celebrities and demonstrate considerable appreciation to their product sharing information compared to the regular brand promoted advertising (Wu et al., 2022). Thus, consumers perception of trustworthiness, attractiveness, as well as perceived similarity to the consumers themselves – have a positive influence on consumer trust in relation to the influencer's branded posts (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Accordingly, social media influencers can assist businesses in the acquisition of real followers who will potentially convert to potential or actual buyers in the long run (Abou Ali et al., 2021). Consequently, businesses pay an increasing proportion of their marketing budget (Abou Ali et al., 2021) to integrate the role influencers into their marketing strategies and influencers approve to adopt corporate marketing for the sake of financial benefits (Alotaibi et al., 2019). And for startups specialized in beauty products, SMIs comprise a low-cost marketing channel owing to the power they have on followers through the content they distribute which exerts a direct effect on consumer purchase decision, and the sales success of the endorsed product (Sondhi & Dhote, 2021). Thus, the study hypothesizes the following:

H3a: There is a significant and positive influence of social media influencers on consumer's purchase decision in social commerce.

H3b: There is a significant and positive influence of social media influencers on consumer's trust in social commerce.

2.5 Consumer's Perceived Risk

Bauer (1960) introduced the concept of "perceived risk" to the marketing literature (Dowling & Staelin, 1994; Mitchell, 1999) in his seminal work which acknowledged that the behavior

of consumers was expected to conduce inscrutable and even undesirable outcomes. He recognized that all consumer behaviors involve the uncertainty of the outcome which contributes to the decision-making process through risk aversion or propensity, thus, the initial concept of perceived risk was formed (Zhang et al., 2015). And with the exponential growth of the internet services, Featherman and Pavlou (2003) introduced another explanation for perceived risk and it was defined as “the potential for loss in the pursuit of the desired outcome of using an e-service”. And because of the diverse nature of risks that serve as an obstacle in the way of performing online transactions as well as influencing behaviors towards purchasing of products (Tandon et al., 2017) several dimensions of perceived risk have been identified (Abou Ali et al., 2020).

Based on previous studies (Abou Ali et al., 2020; Al-Rawad et al., 2015; Ashoer & Said, 2016; Featherman & Pavlou, 2003; Gazali & Suyasa, 2020; Grewal et al., 1994; Kamalul Ariffin et al., 2018; Tandon et al., 2017), the study proposes eight perceived risk dimensions that contribute to consumers' perceived risk in social commerce. Financial risk is defined as the possibility of financial loss associated with the initial price of the product, internet-based fraud, and additional costs. Product performance risk is described as receiving undesirable results regarding the purchase and therefore, failing of the product to deliver its expected benefits (Featherman and Pavlou 2003). Security and privacy risk is defined as the possibility of loss associated with personal data that will be abused or misused without the owner's permission (Ashoer & Said, 2016). Time risk is defined as perceived wasted time or uselessness waiting spent during the online shopping experience (Tandon et al., 2017). Social risk is defined as the potential loss of status in a social group caused by the adoption of a certain product or service resulting in looking nonsensical or inelegant (Featherman & Pavlou, 2003; Tandon et al., 2017). Delivery risk is defined as the possibility of delivery loss as a result of product loss, damage, or being sent to a wrong place after shopping (Masoud, 2013). After-sale risk is defined as the possibility of loss suffered by customers after purchasing, such as damaged product, fraud, and service guarantee claim (Abou Ali et al, 2020; Ashoer & Said, 2016). Finally, psychological risk which is described as the possible loss of self-respect as a result of frustration due to not achieving a purchasing goal (Kamalul Ariffin et al., 2018).

In traditional shopping, consumers are allowed to face sellers directly, while online buying only offers a remote marketing environment where consumers are not allowed to physically see or touch products or services they intend to buy (Gazali & Suyasa, 2020). Product uncertainty (Bai et al., 2015) and perceived commerce risk complicate the process of social commerce deterring conduction of purchases (Farivar et al., 2017). Rosillo-Diaz et al. (2019) emphasized the perception of risk as a factor influencing consumers' purchase behavior. Further, they revealed that purchasing behavior of individuals is negatively influenced by their uncertainty-avoidance due to the presence of information asymmetry in e-commerce mediums and the fact that consumers are incapable of physically assessing the products before purchases. Additionally, Sarker et al. (2020) through their meta-analysis research

regarding social commerce found that risk inhibits consumers intention to adopt social commerce. This came in line with Lazaroiu et al (2020) who highlighted the impact of perceived risk on the adoption of social commerce and its effect on buying decisions. Thus, a proper understanding of perceived risk will allow online sellers to comprehend the online shopping experience from the consumers' perspective as the higher the perceived risk, the higher the probability of consumers to back out from a purchase (Tandon et al., 2017). Accordingly, this study hypothesizes the following:

H4: There is a significant and negative influence of consumer's perceived risk on consumer's purchase decision in social commerce.

2.6 Consumer's Trust and its Drivers

Trust is considered a critical factor in most commercial and social interactions where doubt exists. It plays a significant role for firms in developing relationships with their customers. All exchanges obligate a constituent of trust especially those conducted through a virtual online environment (Alzaidi & Agag, 2022; Pavlou, 2003). It is considered as a multifaceted concept that holds many definitions (Esmaeili et al., 2015). It exists when one party has confidence in the reliability and integrity of the exchanger partner (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Mayer et al. (1995) defined Trust as "the willingness of a party to become vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that another party will perform a particular action impact to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party". Suh and Han (2003) explained trust as "one party can rely on another and that another is anticipated to act in goodwill and benign fashion under any expected circumstances". It is simply considered as a customer's belief that the exchange process will turn out as planned where the sellers are capable and willing to establish business adherence to their promises (Alzaidi & Agag, 2022).

Currently, trust is one of the most important issues for marketing that contributes to purchasing in social commerce (Alzaidi & Agag, 2022). Thus, based on the TAM model and prior research on consumer trust in the online context (Alzaidi and Agag, 2022; Hajli, 2015; Shekhar & Jaidev, 2020), the study managed to identify five drivers of consumer's trust in social commerce namely, information quality, perceived security, privacy concerns, perceived ease of use, and perceived usefulness. Information quality was described as consumers' perceptions towards accuracy and completeness of information provided (Alzaidi & Agag, 2022). When consumers perceive that online sellers provide reliable information regarding products or services, their trust increases correspondingly. The relationship between information quality and consumer trust has been examined and found to be significant (Khan et al., 2021, Khan et al., 2022). According to Dedeoglu (2019), consumers consider the availability of information to be one of the most important advantages of social media sites. Therefore, sellers should provide reliable data to enhance consumer trust in their operations.

Perceived security was conceptualized as consumer's perception of the level of online security they possess (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013). Providing safety measures to consumers can relate to their confidence in an online seller, and it is considered vital for sellers to address the security concerns of consumers to enhance their trust (Alzaidi & Agag, 2022). According to Vasic et al. (2019), a sense of security raises consumers' level of trust towards online sellers as well as increasing their willingness to rely on their services. Furthermore, the term "privacy concerns" refers to users' subjective views of fairness toward information privacy (Wang & Hajli, 2014). It was found that privacy assurance positively influences trust, which in turn, affects online social interactions, and consequently increases the likelihood of product purchases on s-commerce sites (Wang & Herrando, 2019). Reducing consumer's privacy concerns during the online shopping experience influences their trust level (Saeed & Riaz, 2021). Thus, providing consumers with privacy policy can ease their privacy concerns and eventually promote their trust (Alzaidi & Agag, 2022).

According to the TAM model which was introduced by Davis (1989), perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are considered influential to users' intention to use new technology (Gibreel et al., 2018). The model was regarded as beneficial for studying consumer behavior concerning technology adoption in social media context (Friedrich, 2015; Rehman et al., 2019). Perceived usefulness is defined as the extent to which a person is convinced that using a particular product or service would enhance his/her life in general (Doha et al., 2019), and perceived ease of use can be described as the extent to which customer believes that social commerce services are easy to use. The willingness of consumers to use online shopping services increases when they find them easy to use (Alzaidi & Agag, 2022). Moreover, prior studies revealed a significant positive link among perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and consumer's trust (Alzaidi & Agag, 2022; Butt et al., 2022; Ha & Nguyen, 2019). Accordingly, the study hypothesizes that:

H5a: There is a significant and positive influence of information quality on consumer's trust in social commerce.

H5b: There is a significant and positive influence of perceived security on consumer's trust in social commerce.

H5c: There is a significant and negative influence of privacy concerns on consumer's trust in social commerce.

H5d: There is a significant and positive influence of perceived ease of use on consumer's trust in social commerce.

H5e: There is a significant and positive influence of perceived usefulness on consumer's trust in social commerce.

H5f: There is a significant and positive influence of perceived ease of use on perceived usefulness in social commerce.

Furthermore, online platforms are always risky for consumers to buy a product or share their information, knowledge, and experiences about a product or service. In social commerce, it was found that perceived trust negatively influenced perceived risk of consumers (Mendoza-Tello et al., 2018). Consumers with higher sense of trust toward s-commerce sites are likely to feel comfortable with other peers' or sellers' requests, which can reduce the perception of risk to a controllable level (Wang & Herrando, 2019). Kim et al. (2008) proposed a framework describing a trust-based decision-making process and found that consumer's trust and perceived risk have strong impact on purchase decisions in e-commerce environment where consumers' trust also exhibit a strong negative effect on consumers' perceived risk. Consumers' trust is considered as a decisive antecedent of consumers' decision making in social commerce (Lazaroiu et al., 2020). It drives users to use social commerce for both purchasing and participation (Alzaidi & Agag, 2022; Farivar et al., 2016) and considered as a significant motivator to consumers in making online purchasing payments (Hammouri et al., 2021). Thus, the study hypothesizes the following:

H5g: There is a significant and negative influence of consumer's trust on consumer's perceived risk in social commerce.

H5h: There is a significant and positive influence of consumer's trust on consumer's purchase decision in social commerce.

2.7 Conceptual Model

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of this paper, which originated from the hypothesized relationships between various constructs from diverse studies explained in the previous chapter.

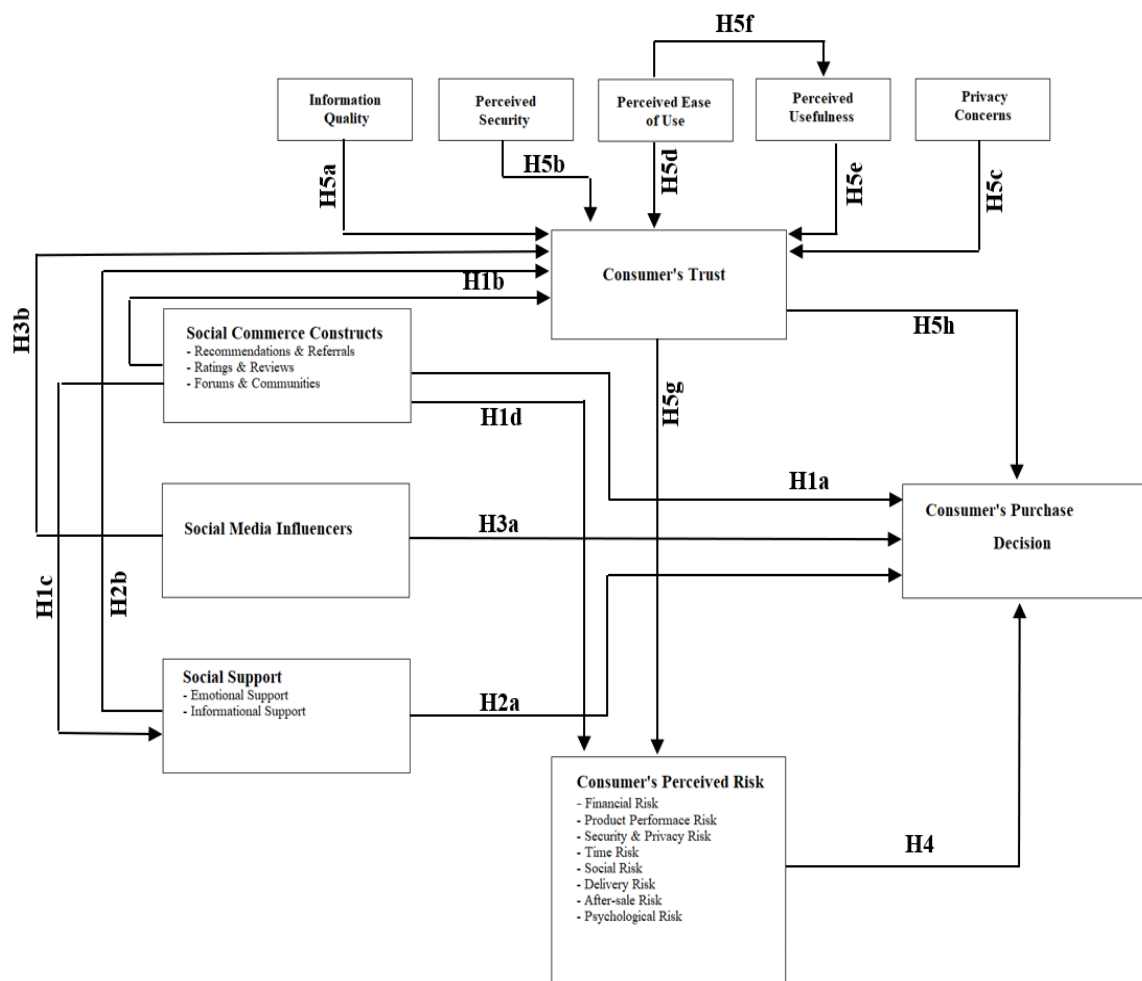


Figure 1: Research Conceptual Model.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted the exploratory research approach that was conducted through analytical reviewing of the most relevant literature along with a qualitative research in terms of “in-depth interviews” with the concerned parties who actually exposed to the phenomena under study (online consumers who purchase products through social media platforms and business owners adopting social commerce) which formulated the guide for defining the research problem, constructing the research conceptual model, and identifying the research hypotheses. Then, conclusive causal research design was pursued in terms of conducting a survey with upper-middle class Egyptian online consumers, while gathering 151 observations via single cross-sectional data collection design.

3.2 Data Collection Instrument

The scales of measurement utilized to measure the model constructs were obtained from previously validated scales in literature summarized in the following tables:

Table 1: Social commerce factors adapted measurement scales.

Construct	Source
Ratings and Reviews	(Hajli, 2015; Sheikh et al., 2019)
Recommendations and Referrals	(Hajli, 2015; Sheikh et al., 2019)
Forums and Communities	(Hajli, 2015; Sheikh et al., 2019)
Emotional Support	(Sheikh et al., 2019; Tajvidi, 2020; Wang & Hajli, 2014)
Informational Support	(Sheikh et al., 2019; Tajvidi, 2020; Wang & Hajli, 2014)
Social Media Influencers	(Alotaibi et al., 2019)
Trust	(Abou Ali et al., 2020; Pappas et al., 2017)
Financial Risk	(Ashoer & Said, 2016)
Product Performance Risk	(Ashoer & Said, 2016)
Security and Privacy Risk	(Ashoer & Said, 2016)
Time Risk	(Ashoer & Said, 2016)
Social Risk	(Ashoer & Said, 2016)
Delivery Risk	(Ashoer & Said, 2016)
After-sale Risk	(Al-Rawad et al., 2015)
Psychological Risk	(Kamalul Ariffin et al., 2018)

Table 2: Drivers of trust adapted measurement scales.

Variable	Source
Information Quality	(Kim & Park, 2003; Maia et. al, 2018)
Perceived Security	(Chang & Chen, 2009)
Perceived Ease of Use	(Gefen et al., 2003; Maia et. al, 2018)
Perceived Usefulness	(Hajli, 2012; Maia et al., 2018)
Privacy Concerns	(Wang & Hajli, 2014; Tajvidi, 2020)

The measurement scale of the “purchase decision” variable was constructed through the adaptation of the purchase intention scale from Ashoer & Said (2016) to include 3 items using a five-point Likert-scale ranged from 5= strongly agree to 1= strongly disagree, where it was adjusted and modified to refer to the purchase decision rather than intention. Furthermore, items of the rest of the measurement scales mentioned in tables (1 & 2) were adapted to refer to social commerce to better fit the purpose of the study using an interval scale represented in a five-point Likert scale which was ranged from 5= strongly agree to 1= strongly disagree to know the degree of respondents’ agreement or disagreement with the proposed statements (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). Moreover, two questions were

added using the same scale to evaluate consumer's participation in social shopping experience on Facebook and Instagram platforms. Finally, another two questions were added related to the profile of respondents such as gender and age group.

3.3 Data Collection and sample

The research population is upper-middle class Egyptian online consumers. A sample of 151 respondents were requested to fill in a questionnaire based on "non-probability judgement sampling technique". The sample included males and females with an age range of 20 to 60+ where the respondents shop online and are familiar with the concept of social commerce. The adoption of the non-randomized judgmental sampling technique fills the purpose of the study due to the novelty of social commerce among Egyptian consumers and the geographical dispersion of the population. It is considered as the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses. This type of sampling allows the researcher to select individuals who are proficient, willing to participate, and well-informed with the phenomenon of interest by virtue of knowledge or experience of the researcher using the available resources (Etikan et al., 2016).

The data collection process took place from mid-October to mid-December 2022. The data was collected through structured questionnaire with easy and obvious English words for phrasing the questions, which resulted in clear as well as explicit sentences. It consists of 5 sections representing five close-ended questions with 77 items. 131 questionnaires were distributed online, and the rest were handed directly to the respondents and collected within one day. However, a data cleaning procedure was deployed to eliminate the excessive missing data that resulted in dropping 2 observations reducing the sample size to 149 observations.

4. Results

Regression analysis was adopted with the aid of IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 25.0. The psychometric properties of the measuring scales were assessed using reliability and validity of the model constructs. For content validity, the study managed to run an extensive literature review consisting of renowned and carefully selected, academic articles and books regarding the factors contributing to purchase decision in social commerce along with the drivers of consumers' trust. In addition to exploratory research based on online consumers and social commerce businesses owners. Furthermore, the survey questions were adapted from previously tested studies within the same areas of research to ensure sufficient validity of the statements. And to be able to display the reliability of the factors that are measured in the study, Cronbach's alpha analysis was carried out in the software program

SPSS. The study is adapting multi-item scales which comprise subsets of items that measure different facets of a multidimensional construct where each factor is measured using different sets of items. Thus, consistency has to be evaluated separately (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2019). All constructs included in the study showed acceptable values of alpha above 0.7 (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011), however, only one construct displayed a poor value of alpha of 0.270. Thus, the authors decided to test the inter-item correlation to detect poor correlations contributing to the low value of alpha (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011) of the psychological risk construct which resulted in discarding one item to yield a Cronbach's alpha score of 0.627 indicating an acceptable level of internal consistency (Surucu & Maslakci, 2020).

Therefore, we proceeded to examine the hypotheses. As indicated in table 4, the results show that the five factors are statistically significant influencers of consumer's purchase decision of cosmetics in social commerce and consumer's trust is derived by the five antecedents. All of the hypotheses showed significant *F*-test values with coefficient of determination (R^2) above 0.1 indicating that models are fit (Falk & Miller, 1992). Social commerce constructs showed a significant positive impact on consumer's purchase decision ($\beta = 0.737, p < 0.001$), supporting H1a. The results also support H1b, H1c, and H1d. Social commerce constructs had significant effect on consumer's trust ($\beta = 0.721, p < 0.001$), social support ($\beta = 0.755, p < 0.001$), and perceived risk ($\beta = -0.461, p < 0.001$). Social support exerts a significant positive influence on consumer's purchase decision ($\beta = 0.727, p < 0.001$), and on consumer's trust ($\beta = 0.746, p < 0.001$), thus H2a and H2b are supported. Social media influencers had a significant positive impact on consumer's purchase decision ($\beta = 0.757, p < 0.001$), and on consumer's trust ($\beta = 0.875, p < 0.001$), supporting H3a and H3b. The negative impact of consumer's perceived risk on consumer's purchase decision (H4) is supported ($\beta = -0.542, p < 0.001$). The results also showed the significant positive impact of information quality on consumer's trust ($\beta = 0.770, p < 0.001$), perceived security on consumer's trust ($\beta = 0.703, p < 0.001$), perceived ease of use on consumer's trust ($\beta = 0.655, p < 0.001$), and perceived usefulness on consumer's trust ($\beta = 0.663, p < 0.001$), supporting H5a, H5b, H5d, and H5e respectively. The negative impact of privacy concerns on consumer's trust (H5c) is supported ($\beta = -0.581, p < 0.001$). Perceived ease of use had a significant impact on perceived usefulness ($\beta = 0.691, p < 0.001$), supporting H5f. The negative impact of consumer's trust on consumer's perceived risk (H5g) is also supported ($\beta = -0.510, p < 0.001$). H5h is supported, as consumer's trust exerted a positive significant influence on consumer's purchase decision ($\beta = 0.803, p < 0.001$).

Table 3 Cronbach's alpha (α) internal consistency

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
Information Quality	0.931
Perceived Security	0.947

Perceived Ease of Use	0.925
Perceived Usefulness	0.890
Privacy Concerns	0.903
Ratings and Reviews	0.924
Recommendations and Referrals	0.914
Forums and Communities	0.934
Emotional Support	0.948
Informational Support	0.944
Social Media Influencers	0.932
Trust	0.948
Financial Risk	0.882
Product Performance Risk	0.920
Security and Privacy Risk	0.869
Time Risk	0.729
Social Risk	0.911
Delivery Risk	0.885
After-Sale Risk	0.872
Psychological Risk	0.627
Purchase Decision	0.941

Table 4 Hypotheses testing results.

Hypothesized paths	Std. Beta β	R-Squared	Results
H1a: Social Commerce Constructs → Purchase Decision	0.737**	0.543	Supported
H1b: Social Commerce Constructs → Trust	0.721**	0.520	Supported
H1c: Social Commerce Constructs → Social Support	0.755**	0.570	Supported

H1d: Social Commerce Constructs → Perceived Risk	- 0.461**	0.213	Supported
H2a: Social Support → Purchase Decision	0.727**	0.528	Supported
H2b: Social Support → Trust	0.746**	0.556	Supported
H3a: Social Media Influencers → Purchase Decision	0.757**	0.574	Supported
H3b: Social Media Influencers → Trust	0.875**	0.765	Supported
H4: Perceived Risk → Purchase Decision	-0.542**	0.294	Supported
H5a: Information → Quality Trust	0.770**	0.593	Supported
H5b: Perceived Security → Trust	0.703**	0.494	Supported
H5c: Privacy Concerns → Trust	-0.581**	0.338	Supported
H5d: Perceived Ease of Use → Trust	0.655**	0.429	Supported
H5e: Perceived Usefulness → Trust	0.663**	0.440	Supported
H5f: Perceived Ease of Use → Perceived Usefulness	0.691**	0.478	Supported
H5g: Trust → Perceived Risk	-0.510**	0.260	Supported
H5h: Trust → Purchase Decision	0.803**	0.645	Supported

Note: Sig. at ** P < .001.

5. Conclusion and discussion

The pandemic managed to alter people' needs, preferences and even behaviors. And with social commerce gaining substantial momentum along with the shift of consumers towards online purchases, more businesses are shifting to online platforms creating fierce competition. Thus, the research is identifying five factors that contribute to consumer's purchase decision in social commerce beyond the pandemic namely, social commerce constructs (in terms of recommendations and referrals, ratings and reviews, and forums and communities) , social support (in terms of emotional support and informational support), social media influencers, consumer's trust, and consumer's perceived risk (in terms of financial risk, product performance risk, security and privacy risk, time risk, social risk,

delivery risk, after-sale risk, and psychological risk). The results showed that trust has the strongest influence followed by social media influencers, social commerce constructs, and social support, respectively. While perceived risk is the least influencing factor contributing to purchase decision in social commerce.

The study confirmed that positive e-WOM generated, shared, and exchanged by individuals on social commerce platforms through social commerce constructs regarding a particular product or service, influence the purchase decision of potential consumers (Hettiarachchi et al., 2018). Social commerce constructs are the main elements that contribute to building consumer's trust in social commerce (Hajli, 2015). Positive e-WOM produced from recommendations and referrals, ratings and reviews, and forums and communities facilitate sharing of information and support across social commerce platforms allowing individuals to be agents of e-WOM who provide informational and emotional support assisting their peers in the decision-making process. Furthermore, information and feedback gained by consumers from their peers through social commerce constructs minimize their risk perception regarding a particular product or service mainly due to clarification and gain of knowledge (Salvatori & Marcantoni, 2015). Social interactions are valuable for consumers affecting their shopping intentions and behavior. The support and information produced as a result of online social activities enhances the trust of consumers and assist them in making purchasing decisions (Liu et al., 2019b).

Results also attest to the importance of the role of social media influencers on purchase decisions. Social media influencers have the power to influence, to persuade, and to shape consumers attitudes, opinions, and behaviors through creation and sharing of content and on-going interactions on social media (Antunes, 2022). Relations built with influencers enhance consumer's trust in their product recommendations or branded posts related to the product as they feel connected and related to the influencer, thus enhancing their trust in social commerce. Consumers base their purchase decision on information gained from influencers as they mostly go through their reviews and opinions prior to making their buying decisions, thus avoiding purchasing risks (Javed et al., 2021). In the context of online shopping, consumers' perceived risk has been regarded as a fundamental concern of the decision-making process (Masoud, 2013). However, enhancing consumer's trust can address the risk problem in shopping online by reducing risk perceived by consumers (Kim et al., 2008). Trust allows consumers to feel a sense of safety that encourages them to make purchases where the higher the level of trust, the higher the possibility to make online purchase decision (Akbar et al., 2020).

Thereof, the study managed to identify five drivers of consumer's trust in social commerce and tested their contribution to the consumer's trust factor after the incident of the pandemic namely, information quality, perceived security, perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and privacy concerns. The results showed that information quality exerts the strongest impact on trust followed by perceived security, perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and privacy concerns respectively. Information quality is considered as a vital trust-building

mechanism in online interactions. The higher levels of information quality are associated with higher levels of initial trust (Wang, 2017). The consumer's level of trust is also reinforced when they feel that their data is safe and secure and have confidence that their information won't be exposed. The privacy concerns of consumers negatively related to trust (Alzaidi & Agag, 2022) as consumers may feel lack of control over their personal information and have doubts regarding the integrity and capability of a social commerce platform to ensure information privacy. This finding came in line with the findings of Wang & Herrando (2019) who stated that when consumers perceive effectiveness of the privacy policy, their level of trust towards s-commerce sites increases.

6. Implications

6.1 Theoretical Implications

Referring to consumer purchases in social commerce, purchase intention was the focus of research in previous studies, and purchase decision often assessed using purchase intention as a mediator. Thus, this study contributes to the marketing literature through filling the gap related to the scarcity of purchase decision related research in social commerce via highlighting and investigating five factors namely, social commerce constructs, social support, social media influencers, consumer's trust, and consumer's perceived risk and their direct influence on purchase decision of consumer's.

Furthermore, the study is introducing consumer's perceived risk for the first time in terms of eight dimensions (financial risk, product performance risk, security and privacy risk, time risk, social risk, delivery risk, after-sale risk, and psychological risk) combined together as one construct and its direct effect on consumer's purchase decision in social commerce, and how it is affected by consumer's trust and social commerce constructs.

Moreover, as a result of the pandemic, a new cultural context for retailing has emerged, where social commerce has gained momentum, and consumers behaviors and attitudes have been altered. Our goal is to explore this new context. This study is filling the gap in literature on the purchase decision of consumers that was found in the lack of research on what makes individuals purchase products in social media as technology platform for online shopping after COVID-19 crisis. Besides, it offers regional contributions to knowledge, since there is not much research on the factors that directly influence consumer's purchase decision in social commerce in an emerging economy like Egypt in the MENA region.

Additionally, the empirical context that is chosen for this research is related to the cosmetics marketed and sold in Egypt to Egyptian consumers, which gives new insights to the literature because of its differentiated nature than most published academic articles which usually address foreign cosmetics marketed and sold in foreign countries.

6.2 Managerial Implications

The main objective of the study is to provide social commerce retailers operating in the cosmetic sector with academic research that holds a scientific base which can be applied in real life business to improve their sales in a highly competitive market depending on customers' perception and judgements rather than the marketers' sole insights. Consequently, based on the study results, some managerial implications are suggested for the social commerce retailers operating in an emerging economy and targeting upper-middle class consumers to enable them to design and develop strategic plans aimed at encouraging consumers to make purchases through technology mediated channels.

According to the results of the study, trust significantly influences the purchase decisions of consumers. Thus, s-commerce managers can take steps to improve the quality of information because it enhances consumer's level of trust. Also, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are predictors of trust, accordingly, managers of s-commerce shops should focus their marketing strategies on creating and maintaining the highest benefit for their customers in social media mediated transactions and choose to operate on platforms that are easy to use with enhanced navigation tools and options. Additionally, managers should include efforts to protect consumers privacy in order to make consumers believe that their personal information is being handled properly, which in turn, will mitigate their privacy concerns and eventually raise their level of trust .

Moreover, consumers tend to retreat from purchasing when they have doubts or uncertainties regarding a particular product. Thus, managers should develop strategies that focus on reducing risk related to the s-commerce environment. Additionally, the study suggests that building trust is also a major factor that helps in minimizing consumers perceived risk in s-commerce as it provides a sense of safety and assurance for consumers when making a purchase, thus, cultivation and maintenance of consumers' trust as well as decreasing perceived risk level is important for s-commerce businesses.

Furthermore, consumers in s-commerce are likely to rely on information, opinions, and feedback of their peers to make a purchase decision. Positive e-WOM related to a particular product whether from recommendations, ratings, referrals, reviews, or produced as result of consumer' engagement in forums and communities in s-commerce, help potential buyers make their purchase decision more easily. Thus, managers should make sure that their business is in touch with the local community they serve and build e-WOM that speaks highly of the products they are offering, accordingly, their will manage to enhance sales and consumers' trust as well .

Besides, the result of the study suggests that consumers are apt to purchase products in social commerce when they feel a sense of social support whether informationally or emotionally. Furthermore, social support enhances consumers' trust belief and trust in sellers, which is a necessary precursor of purchasing in s-commerce. Thus, managers should consider harboring

a supportive virtual s-commerce environment that allows consumers to communicate to attain the required information, gain recognition, and feel valued .

Finally, the study found that social media influencers encourage consumers to make their purchases as consumers tend to make their decision under the impact of influencers' experiences and recommendations. Thus, the study suggests that managers should incorporate the use of influencers in their marketing strategy in order to generate more sales as well as increasing the level of consumers' trust.

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