SHOPPING ON A SOCIAL PLANET: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF TRUST

KUPOVINA NA DRUŠTVENOM PLANETU: POSREDNIČKA ULOGA POVJERENJA

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Preliminary communication

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to investigate the factors that influence social commerce (s-commerce) shopping intention employing the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). The determinants such social influence, electronic word of mouth (eWOM), and trust on the intention, and social influence and eWOM on trust, as well as the role of trust as a mediator, are examined.

Design/Methodology/Approach – This study makes use of a dataset containing 233 responses from an online survey, selected through non-probability sampling. The partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0 was employed to analyze the data and confirm the hypotheses proposed.

Findings and implications – The findings demonstrated empirically that social influence and eWOM significantly contribute to enhancing s-commerce shopping intention. Social influence and eWOM were also found to significantly influence trust. Also, trust was revealed to successfully mediate the association between social

Sažetak

Svrha Svrha je ove studije primjenom Teorije planiranoga ponašanja istražiti čimbenike koji utječu na namjeru kupovine putem društvene trgovine (s-commerce). Odrednice poput društvenog utjecaja, elektroničke usmene predaje (eWOM) i povjerenja ispituju se u odnosu na namjeru kupovine, društveni utjecaj i eWOM u odnosu na povjerenje kao i uloga povjerenja kao posrednika.

Metodološki pristup U istraživanju je korišten skup podataka koji sadrži 233 odgovora iz anketnog online istraživanja ispitanika odabranih metodom neprobabilističkog uzorkovanja. Za analizu podataka i potvrdu predloženih hipoteza korištena je metoda parcijalnih najmanjih kvadrata - modeliranjem strukturnih jednadžbi (PLS-SEM) u programu SmartPLS 4.0.

Rezultati i implikacije Rezultati su empirijski pokazali da društveni utjecaj i elektronička usmena predaja (eWOM) značajno doprinose povećanju namjere kupovine putem društvene trgovine. Društveni utjecaj i eWOM isto tako značajno utječu na povjerenje. Nadalje, otkriveno je da povjerenje uspješno posreduje između

influence and intention, as well as between eWOM and intention.

Limitation – The study focuses on shopping intentions in s-commerce but lacks an assessment of actual purchasing behavior, suggesting future research should explore the correlation between these intentions and actual shopping behavior.

Originality – The study substantiated the extension of the TPB framework by enhancing its predictive power in predicting consumer shopping intentions in s-commerce.

Keywords: social commerce, intention, trust, social influence, electronic word of mouth (eWOM)

društvenog utjecaja i namjere, kao i između eWOM-a i namjere.

Ograničenja Istraživanje je usmjereno na namjere kupovine putem društvene trgovine, ali ne uključuje procjenu stvarnog kupovnog ponašanja, što navodi na to da bi buduća istraživanja trebala istražiti povezanost ovih namjera i stvarnog ponašanja pri kupovini.

Doprinos Istraživanje je potvrdilo proširenje okvira TPB-a (Teorije planiranog ponašanja) jačajući njegovu prediktivnu snagu u predviđanju namjera kupovine potrošača putem društvene trgovine.

Ključne riječi: društvena trgovina, namjera, povjerenje, društveni utjecaj, elektronička usmena predaja (eWOM)

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1. INTRODUCTION

The wide use of the internet, which has been further boosted by mobile phones, has revolutionized the retail sector, reducing the need for physical stores and encouraging online shopping. Today, online shopping has evolved into many different forms, with social media being one such form. The growing popularity and dependence on social media have led businesses to expand their sales activities on these platforms. As a result, social media platforms have become valuable channels for shopping, paving the way for a new phase known as social commerce or s-commerce. S-commerce is a digital platform that integrates social media with online shopping, enabling users to discover, engage with, and purchase products or services directly within the social media environment.

Social media shopping originated in 2007 with the launch of Facebook Marketplace (Gatto, 2021). Other social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok soon followed, and it has since evolved into an important part of modern consumer behavior. Its rapid growth in a short period of time has challenged e-commerce giants such as Amazon and Etsy. S-commerce, as a market with a remarkable growth trajectory, is expected to triple the rate of traditional commerce from USD 492 billion in 2022 to USD 1.2 trillion by 2025 (Lammertink, 2022). Aside from its astounding revenue, global social media usage reached 4.59 billion in 2022, with projections that it will reach nearly six billion users by 2027 (Dixon, 2023). This figure indicates that s-commerce is thriving while also showing no signs of slowing down. With the rapid global expansion of both revenue and social media user database, the proclivity for online shopping on s-commerce platforms cannot be ignored.

Similarly, Malaysia's use of s-commerce is both prominent and flourishing owing to the country's high rate of social media usage. Throughout 2022, Malaysia had an average of 30.8 million active social media users, constituting 91.7% (OOSGA, 2023) of the total population of 33 million (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023). The digitally savvy generation of Malaysians is identified as those aged 18-54 (Ahmad et al., 2022), spending 3.03 hours per day on social media, who have accounts on 8.2 platforms on average (OOSGA, 2023). S-commerce is projected to grow 31.1% annually and reach a total revenue of USD 1,408.1 million in 2023 (OPN, 2023), demonstrating the sector's significant growth potential. Despite this, the Malaysian s-commerce market is fairly nascent and, being still in its infancy (Liu, 2021), presents opportunities for further research on the perceptions of s-commerce shopping intentions among Malaysians.

S-commerce is an emerging sector that is experiencing rapid growth, both in Malaysia and globally. Despite its rising prominence, the body of literature on this topic remains limited, as highlighted by several studies (Han et al., 2018; Jong et al., 2023; Trawnih et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2022). Specifically, researchers suggest that further research in s-commerce should explore trust building in s-commerce sites and platforms (Goyal et al., 2021; Wibisono et al., 2023), social influence on intention (Goyal et al., 2021), and the influence of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) on intention (Leong & Meng, 2022; Yang, 2022). Considering these perspectives and recommendations, the current study explores the impact of social influence, eWOM, and trust on consumer shopping intention in s-commerce in a bid to fill existing literature gaps by providing a comprehensive understanding of these predictors and their impact on s-commerce purchase intention.

In general, social networks, influenced by socialization, have a significant impact on s-commerce due to the irresistible nature of consumer interactions, providing a secure and socially supportive environment (Shadkam & O'Hara, 2013). It enables users to connect with friends and acquaintances while also providing valuable information on and influencing their behavior, feelings, attitude, and thoughts before making a purchase. Sharing information and experiences

on social network platforms among friends or indirect acquaintances appears to be more accurate and real than doing so as sellers (Rashid et al., 2022). As a result of efficient information sharing, online commerce is shifting from seller-focused to user-focused (Lin et al., 2019), with consumers more likely to be influenced by ratings, tags, user profiles, online recommendations, and reviews in developing their purchase intention (Ahmad & Laroche, 2017). These types of feedback are known as eWOM; they are primarily used by consumers to assess the trustworthiness of e-retailers. Those who consider eWOM information to be credible and trustworthy have lower risk perceptions and greater trust in e-retailers (Amarullah et al., 2022). Social influence and eWOM are fundamental for the success of s-commerce platforms, as compromise significantly impacts trust, thus influencing purchase intention. This study also incorporates trust as a mediator in the relationship between social influence and intention and between eWOM and intention, as trust is an imperative factor in studying systems and technology, in line with earlier research (Kurniawan et al., 2022; Leong & Meng, 2022; Solihin & Ahyani, 2022).

While research in this area is still sparse, several scholars have endeavored to investigate the antecedents that shape s-commerce shopping behavior, particularly focusing on consumer intention. Key factors identified include social influence, eWOM, and trust. However, the findings of these studies show notable discrepancies, largely stemming from variations in measurement items, sampling methods, research designs, and other factors. For instance, Aprianto et al. (2023) identified social influence as a significant predictor of s-commerce shopping intention. In contrast, Sheikh et al. (2017) found that it had an insignificant effect on intention within the s-commerce context. Similarly, while Gvili and Levy (2023) reported that eWOM had an insignificant impact on purchase intention in s-commerce, Mensah et al. (2023) found evidence of a significant influence, underscoring the complexities and differing perspectives in the field. Also, trust has been identified as a significant antecedent to s-commerce purchase intention (Hajli et al., 2017). However, contrasting findings suggest that trust may not consistently affect purchase intention in this context (Laradi et al., 2024). These inconsistencies point to the urgent need for further investigation to harmonize understanding in this dynamic field and address any gaps present in the existing research.

Using the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as the underpinning theory, the current study's overarching goal is to examine the impact of social influence, eWOM, and trust on s-commerce shopping intentions from consumers' perspectives for the purpose of enhancing knowledge in this field. The study provides insights into the factors that influence s-commerce shopping intention, which is vital for scholars and practitioners in implementing social media strategies effectively to boost s-commerce purchases and the country's economic revenue from s-commerce.

The sections of this paper are structured as follows: Section two following the introduction includes a review of the literature, discussion of the underlying theory, and description of the research model. Section three describes the research methodology. Section four summarizes the findings while section five discusses the tested hypotheses. Section six concludes the study by discussing the paper's contributions as well as future research directions. Section seven presents the study's limitations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theory of Planned Behavior

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), an enhancement of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), developed by Ajzen (1991), is a model used to predict behavioral intentions. The TPB model is utilized extensively in the literature to identify factors influencing purchase intention, including internet buying intention, as demonstrated in numerous studies (Cuong,

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2023; Leong et al., 2023; Sharma Mishra & Nandre, 2022; Sutisna & Handra, 2022; Vijayan & Oo, 2022). Ajzen's TPB study on intention identifies three key elements: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, as the core components that influence intention. However, he further suggested that, in addition to the three core components, other background factors may influence intention (Khan et al., 2019). Therefore, following Ajzen's suggestions, researchers are incorporating different constructs, such as trust, into the TPB model to better understand consumer purchasing behavior in online shopping (Albanna et al., 2022; Hammouri et al., 2021; Leong & Meng, 2022). However, the use of the TPB framework resulted in inconclusive research findings due to various predictors, triggering this study to fill a knowledge gap.

Integrating new variables, specifically social influence, eWOM, and trust, into this study within the framework of the TPB holds the promise of significantly enriching and enhancing the model. Previous research has similarly shown that the inclusion of additional variables in the TPB can deepen the understanding of consumer behavior (Di Virgilio & Antonelli, 2018; Gunawan et al., 2023), thereby capturing its dynamic nature more effectively. Hence, the incorporation of these new variables into the TPB model in this study could significantly enhance intervention strategies aimed at influencing intentions, making them more targeted and impactful.

Given that the TPB is employed in this study to analyze and understand the factors influencing behavior, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations associated with its use. A primary criticism of the TPB is its assumption of a rational decision-making process, which oversimplifies the complexities of human behavior (Miller, 2017). To address this, the study integrates variables such as eWOM and trust in a bid to capture both rational and emotional dimensions of decision-making. Additionally, the TPB is said to limit the connection between behavioral intentions and actual behaviors (Halder et al., 2016), with research indicating that intentions do not always translate into actions (Armitage & Conner, 2001). In the current study, the focus is exclusively on using the predicted variables to forecast intentions rather than behaviors, thereby minimizing this limitation and enhancing the clarity of the analysis. While the three psychological constructs in the TPB can partially predict behavioral intentions, these intentions are also significantly influenced by other factors (Armitage & Conner, 2001). Consequently, this study introduces additional variables and omits standard constructs to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the determinants of behavioral intentions. In light of these limitations, it is crucial to interpret the findings within the context of the TPB while considering the potential impact of external factors that may influence the results.

2.2. Social commerce shopping intention

Consumer behavior is constantly evolving, influencing purchase intention, thus prompting ongoing research on this aspect. Therefore, understanding consumers' purchase intentions is crucial for comprehending consumer behavior (Coyle & Thorson, 2001). Intention refers to the level of effort and commitment individuals are willing to put into a behavior to achieve it (Ajzen, 1991). In this study, intention is described as a person's willingness to purchase or recommend a product or service through an s-commerce platform. In response to the need to investigate purchase intention, including for online shopping, numerous studies have been conducted to comprehend the predictors that can affect and increase consumers' intention to do so (Sutisna & Handra, 2022; Vijayan & Oo, 2022). The results, which are based on various factors, are unfounded, leaving room for further investigation. Therefore, the current study investigates s-commerce purchase intention by looking into social influence, eWOM, and trust, all of which have been recommended by previous researchers (Goyal et al., 2021; Leong & Meng, 2022; Wibisono et al., 2023; Yang, 2022).

2.3. Social influence

In general, social influence refers to the alteration of opinions, beliefs, or behaviors by individuals due to their interactions with others (Moussaïd et al., 2013). This study defines social influence in s-commerce as an individual's beliefs, thoughts, feelings, attitudes, behaviors, or opinions concerning the recommendations of others on the use, purchase, and response of a new technology system, as per Venkatesh et al. (2003).

Research indicates that social influence, such as that originating from friends or the social community, is the most influential factor in driving purchase intention (Chua et al., 2018; Kumar et al., 2010). In terms of online shopping, Park et al. (2018) confirmed that social engagement among online community users enhances intra-community trade. Global studies provided further support for the claim that social interactions and product reviews significantly influence purchase intentions in the s-commerce context (Albanna et al., 2022; Andijani & Kang, 2022; Rahman et al., 2020; Setiyani et al., 2023). Therefore, the increasing influence of significant others leads to an increase in their intentions to purchase through s-commerce technology.

Trust is a cornerstone that can foster positive customer relations in online systems, including s-commerce, with social influence having a significant impact on trust (Aprianto et al., 2023; Beyari & Abareshi, 2019; Kandoth & Shekhar, 2022; Soeta et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2021). Customers gain trust in s-commerce when they receive trustworthy information from family, friends, or social networking sites, leading to increased engagement and trust in s-commerce (Beyari & Abareshi, 2019). Similarly, according to Wu et al. (2021), social influence can provide valuable and professional information or suggestions that can potentially gain a buyer's trust.

Based on the extant literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between social influence and s-commerce shopping intention.

H2: There is a significant positive relationship between social influence and trust.

2.4. Electronic word of mouth (eWOM)

Electronic word of mouth (eWOM), a new online form of WoM, has gained popularity and significance in recent years owing to the rise of e-commerce. eWOM is any comment on a product or service that is widely available and accessible to a large number of people via internet-mediated platforms (Gvili & Levy, 2018). E-commerce enables businesses to engage in two-way conversations with their target audience, as online users frequently share comments, thoughts, and experiences about products or services on online shopping websites (Bilal et al., 2021), thus leading them to intentionally visit diverse platforms to gather necessary information about products or services.

Past research has pointed to the fact that eWOM positively impacts shopping intentions on social media platforms (Solihin & Ahyani, 2022; Rahaman et al., 2022; Yusuf, Che Hussin & Busalim, 2018). Solihin and Ahyani (2022) suggested that positive eWOM about products increases buyers' likelihood to make purchases, indicating that more effective eWOM leads to greater purchase intention. A study by Yusuf et al. (2018) on Malaysian customers supports the significance of eWOM in influencing s-commerce intention.

In addition, previous studies have shown that eWOM significantly enhances trust in online purchases (Amarullah et al., 2022; Tien et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2016; Zhao et al., 2020). It is claimed to significantly enhance reputation and trust among online shoppers (Wang et al., 2016), particularly those with good credit, as consumers are more likely to make informed purchasing decisions. In addition, the quality of eWOM is a necessary factor for consumers before making e-commerce purchases as it influences prospective buyers and increases their trust in e-retailers, thus affecting their decision to make e-commerce purchases (Zhao et al., 2020). Tien et al. (2019) further asserted that high-credibility eWOM boosts buyer confidence in e-retailers'

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quality and trustworthiness, thus boosting potential buyers' confidence in e-commerce.

Based on the aforementioned literature, we hypothesize as follows:

H3: There is a significant positive relationship between eWOM and s-commerce shopping intention.

H4: There is a significant positive relationship between eWOM and trust.

2.5. Trust

Schnall et al. (2015) defined trust in a technology as an individual's belief that the other party will act responsibly and not exploit the user. Trust is the foundation of interaction, including information exchange, that requires significant time and effort to connect customers with similar preferences and hobbies (Kang et al., 2016). The lack of face-to-face interaction significantly enhances trust in online purchasing (Lăzăroiu et al., 2020), which influences consumer acceptance or rejection of online transactions (Pavlou & Gefen, 2004), prompting users to engage in online shopping activities (Hajli et al., 2017). People often avoid online activities due to a lack of faith in the online system (Roca et al., 2009), making user trust significant in determining their intent to use as well as usage habits associated with any online service (Hoffman et al., 1999).

Numerous studies have highlighted the strong predictive ability of trust when it comes to social media purchase intention (Hajli et al., 2017; Kandoth & Shekhar, 2022; Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017; Othman et al., 2019). Kudeshia and Kumar (2017) found that the quality and quantity of reviews on company websites significantly and positively influence purchase intention. Likewise, in their study on artificial intelligence Kandoth and Shekhar (2022) showed that trustworthiness in a system increases its perceived safety, security, and reliability, thus influencing intention to adopt it.

This research study delves deeper into the importance of trust as a mediator. Mediation analysis is a method used by researchers to identify the intervening mechanism between antecedent and subsequent dependent variables, and their resulting effect (Leong et al., 2019). Previous research has explored the role of trust as a mediator in the relationship between social influence and intention and between eWOM and intention, but with conflicting results. Therefore, this study is conducted to further confirm the mediating role of trust between these variables.

Several previous studies have looked into trust as a mediator between social influence and intention (Gong et al., 2019; Kandoth & Shekhar, 2022; Khawaja, 2017; Kurniawan et al., 2022), with Gong et al. (2019) finding that social actor influence first influences trust in providers, which in turn indirectly influences adoption through trust in providers. A similar result was reported by Kurniawan et al. (2022) in their study on digital zakat application, highlighting that social influence significantly enhances intention to use through trust.

A large number of positive reviews for a certain brand would likely elevate buyers' trust towards it, also driving their purchasing decision (Solihin & Ahyani, 2022). A study conducted among Jordanians by Hammouri et al. (2021) confirmed the mediation role of trust in the link between eWOM and buying intention. Several studies, on the other hand, found that trust does not mediate that relationship (Leong & Meng, 2022).

Therefore, drawing on the preceding literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H5: There is a significant positive relationship between trust and s-commerce shopping intention.

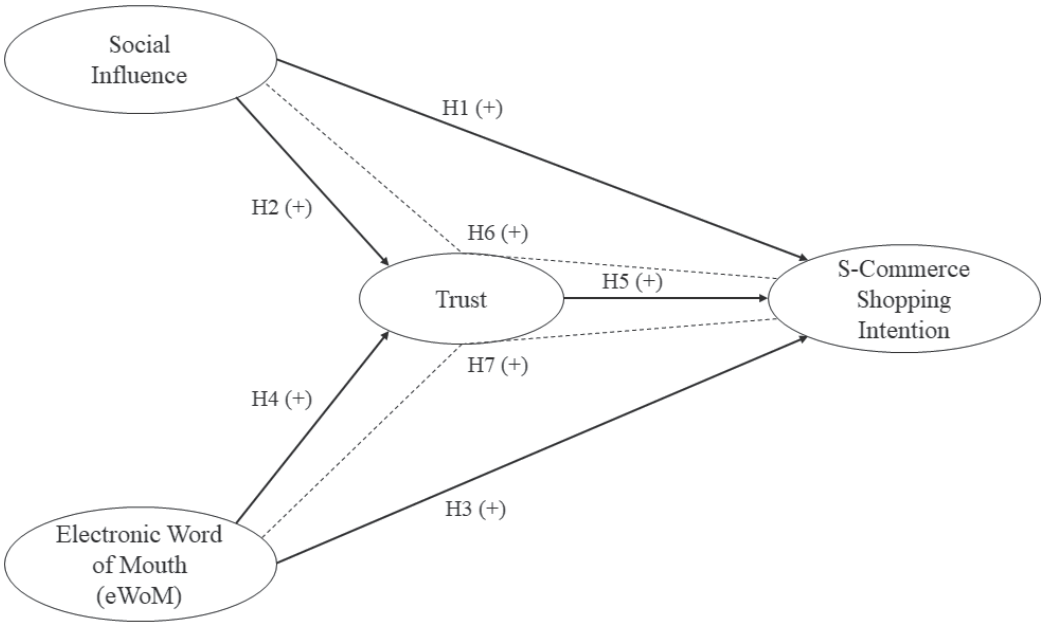
H6: Trust mediates the relationship between social influence and s-commerce shopping intention.

H7: Trust mediates the relationship between eWOM and s-commerce shopping intention.

2.6. Research framework

Figure 1 shows the proposed research framework, which was developed based on the foregoing discussions in the literature review, with the aim to improve comprehension of s-commerce shopping intentions.

FIGURE 1: Research model



Source: Authors' own research.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Data collection and sample

This study fulfils its objectives via the quantitative method of online survey, which was carried out on numerous social media platforms, including Facebook and WhatsApp, using a uniform resource locator (URL) link for responses. The questionnaire was divided into three sections, with the first one dedicated to the authors' unconditional commitment to research ethics. The respondents' demographic and economic data were collected in the second section, while the third section focused on the variables under study.

The population and sample are Malaysians who are familiar with online shopping via s-commerce platforms, irrespective of whether they have used these platforms or not. Prior to distributing the questionnaire to a larger group of targeted respondents, a pilot test was carried out. As part of it, the questionnaire was administered to academic experts and randomly selected respondents were to ensure understanding and rectify inadequacies before distributing the final version in order to reduce biases (Sekaran & Roger, 2016). This step led to certain modifications to the questionnaire to improve face and content validity, as well as reliability (Devisakti & Ramayah, 2019). But no major changes were introduced to the questionnaire for this study based on feedback from the panel of experts and respondents. The updated questionnaire was then distributed to 30 respondents who met the criteria (Johanson & Brooks, 2010). The reliability test was performed, and all the constructs achieved a Cronbach's alpha value above 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978; Hair et al., 2010), indicating their good reliability.

The final questionnaire was then distributed to the intended respondents using convenience sampling, as the most prevalent sampling method in marketing and management research (Vomberg & Klarmann, 2022). This technique was chosen for this study on account

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of its numerous advantages, including cost-effectiveness, efficiency, and ease of implementation (Jager et al., 2017). Additionally, it allows for geographical proximity, accessibility at specific times, and a willingness among participants to volunteer (Dornyei, 2007). Nonetheless, recognizing the potential drawbacks associated with this sampling technique is paramount in research. Convenience sampling is often perceived as having a higher likelihood of bias (Fricker, 2008) and limited external validity (Andrade, 2021), which can restrict the generalizability of the findings to a broader population. Hence, acknowledging these limitations is crucial for accurately interpreting the results and understanding their implications within the context of the study.

The study considers statistical power when determining the minimum sample size, requiring a minimum of 150 samples for a medium effect size of 0.30 and 0.80 statistical power (Leong & Meng, 2022). A total of 274 samples were collected after the data screening and outlier elimination, resulting in 233 responses for further statistical analysis, which is sufficient for analysis using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM).

3.2. Instruments

The measurement items for this study were derived from previous research, with modifications to align them with the current context of s-commerce shopping. Specifically, the social influence constructs, comprising four items, were adapted from Alshehri and Meziane (2015). Trust measures, also consisting of four items, were sourced from Gao et al. (2011) and Saprikis et al., (2018). eWOM measures, which include six items, were derived from Kunja and Gvrk (2020). Finally, the intention to purchase in s-commerce, featuring four items, was tailored from Husnain and Toor (2017). The items were assessed using a five-point Likert scale, allowing respondents to rate items on a spectrum ranging from 1 to 5 to indicate their strong disagreement to strong agreement. The scaling system enabled precise measurement and interpretation of the respondents' views and opinions, thereby improving the data quality. Detailed descriptions of each statement for all constructs are presented in section 4.2.

3.3. Data analysis

The measurement and structural model were tested using PLS-SEM via SmartPLS 4.0, examining the interconnection between the variables. PLS path modelling is a variance-based structural equation modelling method suitable for structural measurement models, even with limited sample sizes, as demonstrated in this study. It confirms and assesses proposed models, making it a valuable tool for confirming and evaluating the model (Hair et al., 2011; Henseler et al., 2015). According to Hair et al. (2012), the analytical technique incorporates a two-step process for evaluating the model, with a focus on the measurement and structural models.

3.4. Common method bias

In behavioral research, common method bias (CMB) is often seen as a potential issue arising from the measurement method rather than the constructs being measured (Podsakoff et al., 2003). CMB occurs when responses differ systematically due to the use of a uniform scaling method from a single data source. Despite various statistical methods, none fully address CMB measurement errors (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Authors such as Fuller et al. (2015) argue that CMB does not significantly threaten study validity although it may lead researchers to incorrectly infer relationships between variables. CMB involves both random and systemic error components. Common approaches to mitigate CMB include Harman's Single Factor Test, marker variables, and the variance inflation factor (VIF) (Fuller et al., 2015; Podsakoff et al., 2003; Podsakoff et al., 2012). This study used the VIF method to address CMV concerns with PLS-SEM measurement. According to Hair et al. (2011), a tolerance value of 5 or higher may indicate potential collinearity issues. Kock (2015) further supported this by stating that VIF values below 5 are acceptable, particularly when algorithms

account for measurement errors. In this study, the VIF results indicated values of 1.796 for social influence, 1.796 for eWOM, and 1.000 for trust. These values are significantly below the threshold of 5, suggesting that CMB is not a significant concern in this research. This finding reinforces a robust framework for examining the relationships among the variables, free from the complications of multicollinearity.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Demographic profile

The respondents' demographic profile is presented in Table 1. It shows that 39.9% out of the 233 respondents were males and 60.1% were females. Almost half of the respondents were aged 23 to 38 years (46.4%), followed by 18 to 22 (31.8%), 39 to 54 (14.2%), under 18 (6.4%), and 55 and older (1.3%). Regarding ethnicity, the majority of respondents were Malays, accounting for 88.4%, followed by a small percentage of Indians (6.4%), Chinese (4.3%), and others (0.9%). In terms of employment and education, more than half of the respondents were students (60.1%), and the majority (64.4%) were pursuing or achieved a Bachelor's degree. With regards to marital status and monthly income, over half of the total respondents earned less than RM1,500 per month (58.8%) and were single (67.4%).

TABLE 1: Demographic profile of respondents

Variables		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	93	39.9
	Female	140	60.1
Age	Below 18	15	6.4
	18–22	74	31.8
	23–38	108	46.4
	39–54	33	14.2
	55 and above	3	1.3
Ethnic	Malay	206	88.4
	Chinese	10	4.3
	Indian	15	6.4
	Others	2	0.9
Marital Status	Single	157	67.4
	Married	76	32.6
Education	Primary & secondary level	7	3.0
	Certificate/STPM/Foundation/Matriculation/A-Levels	18	7.7
	Diploma	27	11.6
	Bachelor's degree	150	64.4
	Masters/PhD	25	10.7
	Others	6	2.6
Employment	Government sector	34	14.6
	Private sector	36	15.5
	Self-employed	22	9.4
	Unemployed	1	0.4
	Student	140	60.1
Monthly Income	Below RM1,500	137	58.8
	MYR 1,501–3,000	29	12.4
	MYR 3,001–6,000	47	20.2
	MYR 6,001 and higher	20	8.6

Source: Authors' own research.

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4.2. Measurement model

Hair et al. (2011) and Hair et al. (2019) emphasized the importance of confirming the reliability and validity of target variables in evaluating measurement models. The reliability assessment includes determining indicator reliability by analyzing indicator loadings and establishing internal consistency reliability via the measurements of Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR). Table 2 indicates that all the constructs met the reliability standards, with factor loadings exceeding 0.5 (Byrne, 2016), CR higher than the 0.70 threshold (Hair et al., 2019), and Cronbach's alpha greater than 0.70 (Hair et al., 2018).

TABLE 2: Measurement model

Constructs and Items	Statements	Loadings >0.70	AVE >0.50	CR >0.70	Cronbach's Alpha >0.7
Social Influence			0.632	0.872	0.803
SI1	I am more likely to purchase from social commerce sites that come highly recommended by a family member.	0.859			
SI2	I am more inclined to shop at social commerce sites recommended by a friend.	0.836			
SI3	I am more likely to purchase from social commerce sites if the company is part of a reputable group of businesses.	0.733			
SI4	I am more likely to shop online if the company has a third-party endorsement.	0.744			
eWOM			0.734	0.917	0.879
eWOM1	I often read other consumers'/ friends' posts on social commerce sites to make sure I buy the right product/brand.	0.849			
eWOM2	I often read other consumers'/ friends' posts on social commerce sites to know what products/ brands make a good impression on others.	0.861			
eWOM3	I often read other consumers'/ friends' posts on social commerce sites to gather information about products/brands.	0.855			
eWOM4	I often read other consumers'/ friends' posts on social commerce sites to have confidence in my buying decision.	0.861			
Trust			0.701	0.934	0.915

Constructs and Items	Statements	Loadings >0.70	AVE >0.50	CR >0.70	Cronbach's Alpha >0.7
Trust1	This social commerce site is authentic and dependable in its claim.	0.816			
Trust2	I have a clear conception of the functionality of social commerce sites.	0.839			
Trust3	I feel monetary transactions on e-commerce sites are safe.	0.848			
Trust4	I feel the terms of use are strictly followed while buying via social commerce sites.	0.848			
Trust5	It is safe to use social commerce sites to buy products.	0.831			
Trust6	I feel social commerce sites are close to my expectations.	0.840			
Social Commerce Shopping Intention			0.669	0.890	0.835
Int1	Using social commerce sites helps me better make decisions before purchasing their products and services.	0.804			
Int2	Using social commerce sites increases my interest in buying their products and services.	0.796			
Int3	I will definitely buy products as marketed on the social commerce sites I follow.	0.805			
Int4	I intend to purchase products as marketed on the social commerce sites I follow.	0.865			

Source: Authors' own research.

Next, the validity test was performed after the reliability of data was confirmed. Validity is evaluated by measuring the convergent validity based on the average variance extracted (AVE) value and discriminant validity based on the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) of correlations (Henseler et al., 2015). Table 2 shows the AVE values ranging from 0.627 to 0.701, that is, above the 0.50 requirement (Chin, 2010; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Meanwhile, in Table 3, all the construct pairs with the exception of trust and intention, which had a value of 0.923 or slightly higher than the required threshold, can be seen to be less than 0.90. The HTMT value was tested using bootstrapping to determine if it significantly differed from 1.00, which indicates the absence of discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). The bootstrapping test found that none of the upper bounds of the 95% confidence interval of HTMT contained a value of 1.00, indicating discriminant validity.

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TABLE 3: Assessment of discriminant validity

Constructs	1	2	3	4
1. Social influence				
2. eWOM	0.794			
3. Trust	0.853	0.703		
4. S-commerce shopping intention	0.873	0.824	0.923	

Source: Authors' own research.

4.3. Structural model

After the measurement model assessment was completed and the values were confirmed to satisfy all standards, the study proceeded to analyze the hypothesized relationships in the structural model assessments utilizing the bootstrapping procedure. The procedure was conducted using a recommended sample size of 5,000 sub-samples from 233 observations, a 0.05 significance level, and a confidence interval method of bias-corrected and accelerated (Hair et al., 2022). The structural model's results include those for significance testing, effect size (f^2), and explanatory power (R^2).

Based on the results in Table 4, all hypotheses garnered support, as evidenced by the fact that *t*-values were over 1.645 and *p*-values below 0.10. H1 proposes that social influence is positively and significantly related to intention, with the results (β=0.457, t=7.568, p=0.000) providing credence to H1. The results also indicate that social influence is positively and significantly linked to trust (β=0.560, t=7.729, p=0.000), validating the legitimacy of H2. Similarly, the results support the positive and significant relationship between eWOM and intention (β=0.214, t=3.164, p=0.002), hence validating H3. Similarly, the findings confirm H4 by indicating a positive and significant correlation between eWOM and trust (β=0.263, t=3.242, p=0.001). Finally, H5 asserting a positive and significant connection between trust and intention is also validated (β=0.533, t=7.051, p=0.000).

TABLE 4: Direct relationships for hypothesis testing

Hypotheses		Std Beta	Std Error	t-values	p-values	5.0% (LLCI)	95.0% (ULCI)	Decision
H1	Social influence → s-commerce shopping intention	0.457	0.066	2.157	0.000	0.034	0.253	supported
H2	Social influence → trust	0.560	0.073	7.729	0.000	0.430	0.669	supported
H3	eWOM→ s-commerce shopping intention	0.214	0.068	3.164	0.002	0.153	0.387	supported
H4	eWOM → trust	0.263	0.262	3.242	0.001	0.131	0.399	supported
H5	Trust → s-commerce shopping intention	0.816	0.028	28.670	0.000	0.402	0.652	supported

Source: Authors' own research.

4.4. Testing mediator effects

The study examined two mediation hypotheses (H6 and H7). The mediating role of trust was investigated in the links between social influence and intention, and eWOM and intention. Using the PLS algorithm and bootstrapping procedure, the study examined 233 cases and 5,000 samples, following the methodology of Hair et al. (2014). A confidence interval below zero indicates the significance of the indirect effect (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Table 5 displays the results of the bootstrapping procedure for the mediation hypotheses. The analysis revealed the following paths as being statistically significant: social influence → trust → intention (β=0.298, p=0.000) and eWOM → trust → intention (β=0.140, p=0.003). Additionally, after correcting for bias, the 95% confidence intervals did not include zero, demonstrating the validity of these results.

TABLE 5: Mediation testing results

Hypotheses		Std Beta	Std Error	t-values	p-values	5.0% (LLCI)	95.0% (ULCI)	Decision
H6	Social influence → trust → s-commerce shopping intention	0.298	0.057	5.219	0.000	0.208	0.396	supported
H7	eWOM → trust → s-commerce shopping intention	0.140	0.047	2.984	0.003	0.066	0.219	supported

Source: Authors' own research.

4.5. Effect size

Effect size entails the assessment of the exogenous constructs' impact on the endogenous construct (Ramayah et al., 2018), thus evaluating the significant impact of each proven variable. Cohen's (1988) f^2 is a unique yet highly informative standardized measure of effect size, whereby an f^2 value of 0.02 denotes a small effect size, 0.15 a medium effect size, and 0.35 a large effect size. Table 6 shows that all the relationships contribute to a small and large extent in explaining social influence, eWOM, trust, and intention.

TABLE 6: Effect size

Constructs	f^2	Effect size rating
Social influence → s-commerce shopping intention	0.029	small
Social influence → trust	0.411	large
eWOM → s-commerce shopping intention	0.135	small
eWOM → trust	0.090	small
Trust → s-commerce shopping intention	0.438	large

Source: Authors' own research.

4.6. Coefficient of determination

According to Hair et al. (2014), the coefficient of determination (R^2) is typically used for structural model assessment to indicating its predictive accuracy. It measures the variance explained by endogenous constructs in the model, with higher R^2 values indicating greater predictive accuracy. Establishing a definitive rule of thumb for an appropriate R^2 value can be challenging as it depends on the specific domain of the field of study and the complexity of the research. However, as a general guideline, a higher R^2 value typically indicates the model's higher predictive accuracy (Hair et al., 2017). The rule of thumb indicates that an R^2 value of 0.75 signifies substantial predictive accuracy, 0.50 moderate predictive accuracy, and 0.25 weak predictive accuracy (Hair et al., 2017). Figure 2 shows the study's R^2 values for intention and trust at 0.574 and 0.722, respectively, indicating a substantial R^2 value.

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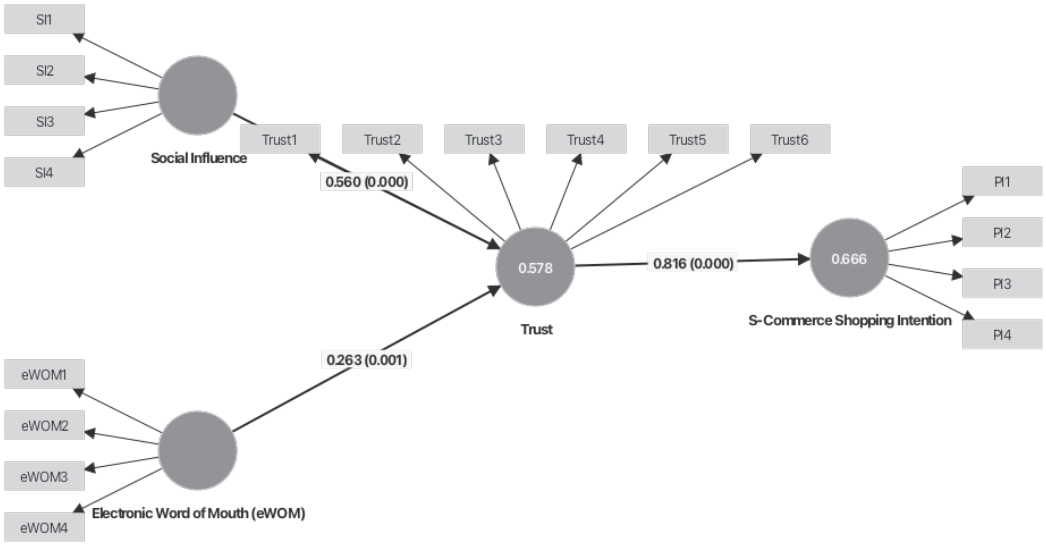
FIGURE 2: Results of the structural model assessment



Source: Authors' own research.

5. DISCUSSION

The study is primarily aimed at examining the determinants of Malaysians' decision to shop via s-commerce. Specifically, there are three goals. The first one is to investigate how s-commerce purchase intention is affected by social influence, eWOM, and trust. The second goal is to explore how trust is impacted by social influence and eWOM. The third goal is to determine the mediating effect of trust on the relationship between social influence and intention, and between eWOM and intention. Seven hypotheses were proposed, and all were confirmed.

The findings in this study emphasize the pivotal role of social influence, particularly from friends, family, online communities, and global interactions, in shaping individuals' intentions to participate in s-commerce shopping, thereby supporting H1. The study's findings, consistent with previous research (such as Albanna et al., 2022; Setiyani et al., 2023) suggest that online communities enhance community commerce by fostering positive user interactions and utilizing virtual social spaces. Also highlighted is the direct correlation between social influence and transaction likelihood, indicating that increased online community influence leads to increased shopping intentions through s-commerce.

The study confirms that social influence positively influences trust in s-commerce platforms, confirming H2. A likewise finding was reported by Beyari and Abareshi (2019) and Wu et al. (2021), showing that trust in s-commerce platforms is largely built on reliable information from trusted sources like family, friends, and social networks. This aligns with the broader understanding that trust is a key factor in online transactions and suggests that the social context significantly shapes the trust dynamics within the realm of s-commerce.

Additionally, a significant relationship was found between eWOM and s-commerce shopping intention, confirming H3. The study supports previous research which showed a significant correlation between eWOM and intention, indicating that positive eWOM significantly impacts buyers' propensity to engage in online purchases, as reported by Solihin and Ahyani (2022),

Rahman et al. (2020), and Yusuf et al. (2018). In brief, eWOM is highly reliant on when consumers intend to engage in s-commerce purchase.

Further, the results of this study show that eWOM significantly impacts individuals' trust of s-commerce shopping platforms, consequently supporting H4. Such results are in agreement with those of several previous studies, such as Tien et al. (2019) and Zhao et al. (2020), which showed that eWOM plays a major role in building trust among online shoppers. The study supports the notion that eWOM enhances trust in online transactions, emphasizing the significance of user-generated content in shaping perceptions and boosting confidence in s-commerce.

Consistent with the findings of previous studies (Kandoth & Shekhar, 2022; Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017; Othman et al., 2019), trust was found to significantly influence intention to shop via s-commerce. Therefore, H5 is supported. Accordingly, the study suggests that perceptions of safety, security, trustworthiness, and reliability towards s-commerce platforms would likely drive consumers to make their purchases using them.

The study also looks into trust as a mediator in the link between social influence and intention, as well as between eWOM and intention. The results prove all the mediation relationships to be robust. Based on the empirical results, H6 and H7 are therefore supported. Trust is a very important predictor, especially in s-commerce shopping intention, as shown in this study. In that its findings correspond to those of previous studies, such as Gong et al. (2019) and Kurniawan et al. (2022), which underscored the significance of trust in mediating the relationship between social influence and intention. In addition, the study also aligns with past research, which emphasized the importance of eWOM and the intention to shop online (Hammouri et al., 2021; Leong & Meng, 2022). The social influence of online platforms fosters trust, creating a favorable environment for consumers to engage in online shopping activities. Also, trust acts as a bridge between eWOM and s-commerce shopping intention. Trust enhances social influence and eWOM, increasing the likelihood of shopping intention using s-commerce platforms.

In summary, all hypotheses presented in this study have been validated, underscoring the robustness of the study's findings. Additionally, the incorporation of supplementary variables, specifically social influence, eWOM, and trust, as well as the role of trust as a mediator of intention, has significantly strengthened the TPB model. This advancement confirms the model's applicability and relevance beyond its original parameters.

6. CONCLUSION

The digital economy has transformed the internet into a critical tool for online purchasing, with retailers aiming to influence consumer attitudes and behavior by providing an enhanced shopping experience beyond time and space constraints. S-commerce has evolved into an e-commerce substitute, a rapidly expanding retail platform that offers more consumer options and business opportunities. This study formulates a research model based on the TPB and combines factors from previous studies to provide a more in-depth insight into the underlying factors that drive s-commerce shopping intention. In summary, given the findings, s-commerce purchase intention is influenced by social influence, eWOM, and trust. Trust is a key predictor of social influence and intention and mediates the impact of social influence and eWOM. The study's findings significantly contribute to both theory and practice.

6.1. Theoretical implications

The theoretical implications of this study are significant, as its findings enhance the understanding of the TPB by integrating additional variables – social influence, eWOM, and trust. By demonstrating the impact of these factors on intention, the study not only reinforces the fundamental principles of TPB but also expands its relevance in practical, real-world

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contexts. The inclusion of trust as a mediating variable provides valuable insights into the mechanisms behind intention, indicating that trust plays a pivotal role in shaping behavioral outcomes across different contexts. This advancement calls for a more refined theoretical approach that acknowledges the influence of interpersonal dynamics and the digital environment. Furthermore, the findings encourage a reassessment of how external factors, such as social interactions and online communications, are integrated into models of behavioral intention. By examining these elements, the study lays the groundwork for future research aimed at advancing and enriching theoretical frameworks, thereby deepening insights into consumer behavior and decision-making processes.

6.2. Practical implications

Practically, the study's findings offer important implications for businesses operating in the s-commerce sector, especially in Malaysia, where this form of online shopping continues to dominate. Trust is identified as a key factor influencing purchase intention, so companies must prioritize transparency and data security to foster it. By implementing strong data protection measures, such as encryption and secure payment gateways, and clearly communicating these practices to customers, businesses can build confidence. Additionally, credible eWOM plays a significant role in influencing consumer decisions. Encouraging authentic reviews and partnering with trusted micro-influencers can help create a more credible and trustworthy brand image. Social influence, particularly from friends and family, further reinforces purchasing decisions, which means that businesses should leverage referral programs and social sharing features to capitalize on this dynamic.

The quality of the shopping platform itself is another critical aspect. Websites should ensure a seamless user experience and feature easy navigation, as well as being mobile-optimized, all of which factors enhance trust and reduce friction during the shopping process. High-quality content, including accurate product descriptions and responsive customer service, also contributes to a positive experience. Also, businesses should focus on the responsible use of customer data for personalized recommendations, ensuring that personalization efforts are not intrusive. Content marketing through collaborations with social influencers can also effectively boost engagement and trust. To meet consumer expectations, companies must maintain transparency in their marketing efforts, making sure that their claims are realistic and in line with the actual experience of using their products or services.

6.3. Limitations and recommendations

A thorough evaluation of this study reveals several important limitations. Firstly, it primarily examines shopping intentions towards s-commerce without providing an assessment of actual purchasing behavior. Hence, any further studies should investigate the correlation between shopping intention and actual shopping behavior in the context of s-commerce. Secondly, the cross-sectional design of the study hinders its ability to establish causal relationships, as it does not account for how social influence, eWOM, and trust may evolve over time. Thirdly, the reliance on self-reported measures introduces potential biases, such as social desirability and recall inaccuracies, which can compromise the reliability of participants' responses. Fourthly, the study's focus on a particular geographic region also restricts the generalizability of its results, given that cultural and economic factors can significantly influence consumer behavior. Fifthly, the omission of demographic variables like age, gender, and socioeconomic status may limit the depth of analysis and understanding of consumer behavior in social commerce. Future research would benefit from additional analyses, such as moderation and multi-group analyses, which could examine how various factors interact across different contexts and demographic segments. Addressing these limitations

and incorporating these analytical approaches will be crucial for both furthering research and enhancing business strategies. In addition, future studies should explore alternative theories such as the stimulus-organism-response (SOR) theory and the social learning perspective to understand human behavior in response to s-commerce shopping.

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