

THE MEASUREMENT MODEL OF ACCEPTANCE AND USE OF SOCIAL COMMERCE AMONG SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

The recent development of the internet and social media has had a great impact on Small and Medium Enterprises by presenting them with various opportunities to introduce their products or to increase the sales of their products and services. The emergence of various social networking sites has currently turned the social media into a platform for the marketing and buying and selling of products. This, in combination with e-commerce, has given rise to what is better known as social commerce (s-commerce). This study, which was carried out among 37 SME entrepreneurs in Malacca, was aimed at obtaining their initial feedback in relation to the items in a prepared questionnaire to ensure that the items concerned were clear, understandable, and complied with the constructs of the research. These items were prepared based on nine research variables, namely, attitude, self-efficacy, performance expectation, effort expectation, social impact, facilitation, Precipitating events, intention and use of s-commerce. The results of the analysis showed that the respondents agreed with the prepared items based on reliability and validity criteria to measure each research variable, where the variable concerned will be used to develop a Measurement Model on the Acceptance and Use of S-Commerce among SMEs in Malaysia using SmartPLS.

Keywords: *Social Commerce, Small and Medium enterprises, UTAUT.*

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Introduction

The global phenomenon of online social networks has had a major impact on Internet users in Malaysia. This is due to their diverse functions that facilitate unrestricted communication among users and the global dissemination of information. Social networking

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sites are used extensively by various user groups such as academics, politicians, corporate organizations, government agencies, students and so on for a variety of purposes including for business, teaching and learning, political ideologies, communication, public relations and advertising (Mustafa & Hamzah, 2010).

The various social sites that have appeared in Malaysia have helped to expand communication between communities. A variety of issues and topics can be discussed without need to meet face-to-face. This situation has opened up opportunities for vendors and consumers to openly discuss a product or service. Consumers can even obtain feedback from other consumers who have used the product concerned.

Based on this advancement in ICT, several researchers have argued that SMEs should seek to harness ICT more effectively because it is vital to maintaining relationships with customers and will have a beneficial effect on business performance (Alonso-Almeida & Llach, 2013; Fulantelli & Allegra, 2003). A study by Ramlan and Ahmed (2010) found that ICT is not a restriction to be feared by SMEs but is an incentive to develop their business.

There are many factors as to why Malaysian SME organizations are quite backward compared to SMEs in other countries. One reason is the level of awareness and the mentality of the entrepreneurs themselves (Chapman, James-Moore, Szczygiel & Thompson, 2000). Although ICT is recognized as having great potential, entrepreneurs in Asia are still reluctant to use it compared to entrepreneurs in Western countries (Hussin & Rafidah, 2005).

Nevertheless, most SMEs are often modelled after other successful businesses in the market, especially in relation to the use of the Internet, but they are emulating something without learning and studying the use and advantages of the Internet and without taking into consideration the implications (Shiels, McIvor & O'Reilly, 2003). As a result of the lack of skills, knowledge and staff, SMEs are unable to maintain the technology that has been used, and ultimately they fail to reap the full benefits. This can be seen in cases where SMEs have opened accounts on social networking sites but have not been able to maintain them properly.

ICT has the valuable potential of developing SMEs through more effective usage and better integration. ICT has the potential to generate a more positive development among SMEs, making them more competitive and innovative, while producing growth (Barba-Sánchez, Martínez-Ruiz & Jiménez-Zarco, 2007). SMEs that use ICT in their business transactions are said to have more potential to generate higher profits as their businesses operate non-stop 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (Dholakia & Kshetri, 2004).

The use of ICT among SMEs varies from one country to another. According to Duncombe and Heeks (1999), between 90% and 99% of SMEs in developing countries do not use ICT. Among the reasons cited, which can be said to be almost universal, are lack of capital, skills and suitable infrastructure. The results of a literature review conducted by Hussin and Rafidah (2005) revealed that the acceptance of ICT among SMEs in Malaysia is still in the initial stage and the government is expected to continue providing assistance in terms of related incentives and grants.

However, many SMEs still do not view social media as an opportunity to improve their business performance due to the constraints of their limited resources, such as equipment or capital, to start using the Internet and social media (Dahnil, Marzuki, Langgat & Fabeil, 2014).

Literature Review

Social Media

Social media is an important platform that has emerged to attract the interest of users from various fields to actively communicate with each other (Wamba & Carter, 2014), and it has changed the way communities or organizations interact today (Ngai, Tao & Moon, 2015). Meanwhile, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) defined social media as a group of Internet-based applications that was developed on the ideology and technology of Web 2.0, which enables the creation and exchange of ideas to take place.

One of the most significant development trends in the last 10 years has been the increasing use of the Internet as a medium for conducting business activities and creating new business opportunities. This can be observed particularly in SMEs, where it provides many benefits such as reduced costs, streamlined business processes, market expansion, increased operational efficiency, access to new customers, the building of relationships with suppliers and trading partners as well as the advantages of greater competitiveness (Ahmad, Abu Bakar, Faziharudean & Mohamad Zaki, 2014).

Current developments in use of Internet have brought about major changes to the business world because wide opportunities to expand businesses are now open with the existence of social media (Erickson, Komaromi & Unsal, 2010). This has drastically changed the attitude of consumers from one that is passive to one that is active with regard to information, with consumers sometimes becoming the disseminators of information on social networking sites (Hajli, 2014a). Social media is the new communication medium between the vendors and consumers of today, where it can improve the competitiveness of a business (Bell & Shirzad, 2013). At first it was developed for users to socialize with friends and family members or even to increase the number of new contacts, and finally, it has become one of the most important platforms in global marketing. After the emergence of social media, which became a trend among populations throughout the world, a change occurred with regard to the use of e-commerce among vendors and buyers with the appearance of a new mechanism, known as social commerce (s-commerce), which is a subset of e-commerce.

Social Commerce

S-commerce is a combination of e-commerce and social media (Kim & Park, 2013). It is implemented by the interaction between customer and vendor or even between vendor and vendor, through social media. Smith, Zhao and Alexander (2013) defined s-commerce as e-commerce activities that use social media platforms such as *Facebook* and *Twitter* to encourage online purchases. Online purchasing is fast becoming the choice of social media users because it is easier to obtain product information directly from the vendor or even other

users. This proves that the power of the word of mouth among buyers and vendors can have an effect on the volume of sales of a product (Baghdadi, 2013).

Sophisticated technology has opened up opportunities for consumers to not only purchase products and services online but also to leave their comments or rate the services and products that have been purchased (Hajli, 2014b). This situation has indirectly caused vendors to be more careful and cautious in conducting transactions and, at the same time, to maintain the quality of their products.

In s-commerce, consumers are not just engaged in buying and selling activities but they can be involved in sharing their experiences in the use of a product (K. F. Hashim, Affendi, Yusof & Rashid, 2012). Thus, in this context, the role played by the customer and also the quality of a product are important because s-commerce is viewed as being able to help buyers make informed decisions before purchases are made on the basis of the information provided by other buyers (Zhou, Zhang & Zimmermann, 2013). This was supported by Gatautis and Medziausiene (2014) who stated that the s-commerce era is an era where communities determine the products and services that should be offered in the future.

Although the revolution that is taking place in s-commerce is considered to be beneficial from a marketing aspect, it still creates uneasiness among consumers because the issue of trust and confidence is involved when there is an exchange of money and goods and where the seller and buyer do not meet face-to-face (Erickson et al., 2010). Nevertheless, the use of s-commerce in Asian countries, especially in Japan and China, is driven by economic concerns and is not due to the fun of socializing, as in the case of the Western countries (Wang & Zhang, 2012).

In reality, there has not been much research into how to optimize social media and the social networking environment for the marketing and sale of products and services (Yadav, De Valck, Hennig-Thurau, Hoffman & Spann, 2013). This is a very important issue because the little that is known about “social business” can take a business a long way. It should be noted that while the phenomenon of s-commerce has not been fully studied by researchers in the field of information technology, it is capable of having a big impact on the individuals concerned, especially on businessmen (Wang & Zhang, 2012b).

Variables

i) Attitude

Ajzen (1991) defined attitude as an assessment, whether good or not, towards a particular behaviour. In the study conducted by Abidin & Md. Idris (2009) they stated that attitude is bound to cognitive, affective and behavioural elements.

ii) Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is the level of confidence of entrepreneurs in their ability to use s-commerce in business, where, as mentioned by Bandura (1978), a person will carry out something if he/she knows what the results will be of his/her actions. Meanwhile, DeVellis

(1983) stated that self-efficacy is the inner belief of an individual in relation to his/her ability to do something if he/she is confident of success.

iii) Performance Expectation

Performance expectation is an individual's belief that a system that is being used is capable of improving their work performance (Venkatesh, Morris, Davis & Davis, 2003). Meanwhile, in this study, the performance expectation factor is defined as the level of confidence of SMEs that the use of s-commerce can help them to improve their business performance.

iv) Effort Expectation

Effort expectation refers to the level of ease of use of a system (Venkatesh et al., 2003). This study defines effort expectation as the assumption of entrepreneurs that it is not difficult to use s-commerce in business.

v) Social Influence

Social influence is defined as the extent to which an individual feels that he/she needs to use a system based on the responses of other individuals (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Meanwhile, in this study, social influence is the level at which SMEs perceive that customers believe they have to use s-commerce and can benefit from its use.

vi) Facilitating Condition

Facilitating condition is the level at which individuals believe that the organization and the existing technical infrastructure can support the use of a system (Venkatesh et al., 2003). In this study, facilitating condition is seen as the level at which entrepreneurs believe that their business has the infrastructure and equipment that can be used for s-commerce.

vii) Precipitating Event

The precipitating event factor in this study refers to the awareness of entrepreneurs with regard to s-commerce after an unexpected occurrence such as a currency crisis, changes in consumer purchasing patterns, threats from competitors or even changes in government policies (Krueger & Brazeal, 1994). A precipitating event is defined as the awareness of SME entrepreneurs with regard to s-commerce after going through an event that had an effect on the business.

viii) Intention to Use S-Commerce

The intention meant in this study is the extent to which entrepreneurs feel that s-commerce is needed to improve the position of existing businesses. Intention will normally precede action and deeds (Krueger, Reilly & Carsrud, 2000). The intention in this study also serves as a moderator to see whether without the intention factor within entrepreneurs and the

perception of entrepreneurs towards technology, the behaviour of entrepreneurs can be influenced with regard to the use of s-commerce among SMEs in Malaysia.

Research Methodology

This study was conducted to obtain preliminary feedback in relation to the items in the prepared questionnaire to ensure that the items concerned were clear, understandable, and appropriate for the study variables. Apart from that, it would indirectly help the researchers to estimate how much time would be required by the respondents to answer the questions. This was important because the researchers needed to ensure that the SME entrepreneurs did not spend too much time answering the questions because the researchers intended to distribute the questionnaires at courses involving SME entrepreneurs so as not to disrupt the time management of the organizers. Having too many items or questions that are too long in a questionnaire will cause the respondents to answer without reading the questions carefully.

To determine the reliability of the questionnaire survey, an internal consistency method was implemented to find the correlation between the score of each item in the questionnaire and the total score for all the items in the survey questionnaire. In this method, if the correlation value of an item is high, then the index score of the questionnaire has a high reliability, and vice versa (Chua, 2012).

The validity and reliability of the questionnaire should be determined in advance before it is used in the actual study to ensure the quality of the study instrument that is going to be used (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008). Validity refers to the extent to which the instrument measures what it is meant to measure, while reliability means a consistent and stable score from an instrument (Creswell, 2012). An ideal situation would exist if the scores are valid and reliable. This means the higher the level of reliability of the score from a credible instrument, the higher the level of validity of the instrument.

The questionnaire used a 5-point Likert Scale (strongly disagree, disagree, less agree, agree, strongly agree). The items in this questionnaire were adapted from previous studies as well as related theories (Bandura, 1991 ; Ajzen, 1991 ; Vrana, Fragidis, Zafiroopoulos, & Paschaloudis, 2005 ; Krueger & Brazeal, 1994 ; Venkatesh et al., 2003 ; Khong et al., 2010 ; Sedigheh Moghavvemi & Salleh, 2014).

Findings Of The Study

Demographics of the Respondents

The respondents in this study comprised 19 men (51.4%) and 18 women (48.6%). The majority of those involved in this study were entrepreneurs who had been running their businesses for less than 10 years (67.7%), while the rest of them had 10 years or more of experience in the business field. On average, the respondents in this study had academic qualifications that consisted of diplomas (43.2%), the Malaysian Certificate of Education (29.7%), Degrees (18.9%) and Masters/ PhDs (8.9%).

The Measurement Model

The measurement model used to test the measured variables was derived from a theory that was able to represent the hypothesized latent variables. In addition, the measurement model was also able to explain the correlation between the latent variables and the respective indicators. The structural model was obtained when the measurement model was constructed. The measurement model was evaluated according to the reliability and validity of each item (factor) in this study.

The validation of the factor analysis was carried out through the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method to assess the validity scale. According to Fornel & Larcker (1981) and Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson (2010), to meet the convergent and discriminant validity factor loadings of all the indicators, the standardized factor loadings > 0.5 or preferably > 0.7 ; the average variance extracted (AVE) of 0.5 or higher are considered adequate, and the square root of AVE should exceed that construct's correlation with other constructs; and the composite reliability (CR) should be at least 0.8.

In this study, there were 2 items with relatively low factor loadings, namely SE1 (0.59) and SE3 (0.67), but these were still within the acceptable range. Meanwhile, the other loading items exceeded the prescribed minimum value of 0.7. The AVE was within the scope of 0.68 to 0.96, and the composite reliability ranged between 0.91 and 0.99.

According to Table 1 below, all the values of Cronbach's Alpha for each variable was found to be more than 0.8, according to Pallant (2011), a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.7 and above is acceptable, while a value of 0.8 and above is even better. This was also supported by Kimberlin & Winterstein, (2008) who stated that a Cronbach's Alpha value should range from zero to one, where the closer the value is to one, the higher is the validity of the item in question.

On the whole, the proposed measurement model fulfilled all the established criteria based on the criteria adapted from Hair et al. (2010) and Fornel & Larcker (1981).

Table 1 : Validity, reliability and loadings

Construct	AVE	CR	Alpha	Item	Item Loading	Mean	SD
Attitude	0.85	0.97	0.96	A1	0.91	4.18	0.70
				A2	0.96	4.16	0.68
				A3	0.95	4.18	0.70
				A4	0.87	3.94	0.77
				A5	0.91	4.08	0.72
				A6	0.96	4.13	0.75
Self-Efficacy	0.68	0.91	0.89	SE1	0.59	3.70	0.99
				SE2	0.95	3.86	0.91
				SE3	0.67	3.75	0.92
				SE4	0.94	3.81	0.84
				SE5	0.90	3.89	0.93

Performance Expectancy	0.94	0.99	0.98	PE1	0.95	4.00	0.84
				PE2	0.97	3.97	0.89
				PE3	0.96	3.97	0.89
				PE4	0.97	4.00	0.84
				PE5	0.97	4.00	0.88
Effort Expectancy	0.76	0.93	0.90	EE1	0.80	3.83	0.86
				EE2	0.89	3.89	0.69
				EE3	0.92	3.75	0.83
				EE4	0.85	3.91	0.92
Social Influence	0.96	0.99	0.99	SI1	0.97	3.70	1.15
				SI2	0.98	3.78	1.10
				SI3	0.98	3.78	1.13
				SI4	0.97	3.89	1.04
Facilitating Condition	0.77	0.94	0.93	FC1	0.92	3.81	0.99
				FC2	0.91	3.83	0.83
				FC3	0.82	3.67	0.91
				FC4	0.90	3.75	0.86
				FC5	0.82	3.67	1.02
Intention	0.91	0.98	0.98	I1	0.92	4.00	0.91
				I2	0.96	3.94	0.99
				I3	0.96	3.89	1.02
				I4	0.96	3.91	1.01
				I5	0.94	3.78	1.10
Precipitating Event	0.88	0.97	0.95	PR1	0.94	3.64	1.11
				PR2	0.97	3.62	1.09
				PR3	0.92	3.59	0.95
				PR4	0.91	3.67	1.02
Acceptance and Use	0.87	0.95	0.92	AU1	0.95	3.05	1.10
				AU2	0.89	3.37	0.98
				AU3	0.94	3.02	1.16

Conclusion

S-commerce has opened up vast opportunities for SMEs to remain competitive in an increasingly challenging business world. The emergence of s-commerce has helped SMEs to increase revenue and competitiveness, while indirectly helping to reduce the cost of business operations.

The results of the study show that the indicators representing the nine variables of the study are suitable for examining the acceptance and use of s-commerce among SMEs in Malaysia and, at the same time, can be used to develop a measurement model as a medium to generate a structural model for the acceptance and use of s-commerce among SMEs in Malaysia in the near future.

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