IT AFFORDANCES, USER EXPERIENCES AND PURCHASE INTENTION IN SOCIAL COMMERCE

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ABSTRACT

Social commerce, the use of social networking capabilities for commercial transactions and activities that are primarily driven by social interactions and user contributions, has evolved quickly and attracted much research attention. Drawing on the stimulus–organism–response framework and the affordance theory, this paper develops a research model to examine the impacts of IT affordances and users' virtual experiences on users' purchase intentions in social commerce platforms. More specifically, a research model is developed to explore how the IT affordances (product visibility, interactivity, personalization and social connections) of social commerce platforms affect users' virtual experiences in terms of their cognitive experiences (information support, preference fit, social presence, and flow) and affective experiences (product affection, emotional support, familiarity, and closeness), which in turn influence users' trusting intention in social commerce and their intention to purchase products from the social commerce platforms. The model also highlights the mediation role of user's virtual experiences in the relationship between IT affordances and users' trusting intention and purchase intention in social commerce platforms. This conceptual paper not only emphasizes the importance of understanding the implications of IT affordances and user experiences for social commerce but also provides theoretical guidance to assist online vendors in designing effective social commerce platforms for optimal user experiences and successful product promotion.

INTRODUCTION

Social commerce, a relatively new phenomenon involving the convergence of e-commerce and social media, has attracted much research attention (Hajli, 2015). Social commerce takes advantage of social networking capabilities and provides features to support commercial transactions and activities primarily driven by social interactions and user contributions (Liang, Ho, Li & Turban, 2011; Wang & Zhang, 2012; Zhang, Lu, Gupta & Zhao, 2014). It involves e-commerce websites that are equipped with Web 2.0 tools to facilitate user content generation and user interactions (such as Amazon.com) as well as social networking sites that integrate e-commerce features (such as Facebook and Instagram) (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013). Realizing the economic value of social commerce depends on customer participation and purchase behaviors (Wang & Zhang, 2012) in social commerce platforms. So, an understanding of the factors driving customers' purchase behaviors in social commerce can help businesses to develop successful social commerce platforms. The purpose of this paper is to develop a research model to examine how the technological characteristics of social commerce platforms influence users' virtual experiences and subsequently their intentions to purchase products and services from the social commerce platforms. This conceptual paper applies the lens of IT affordances (Gibson, 1977; Tuncer, 2021) to characterize the technological environments of social commerce and draws on the stimulus–organism–response (S-O-R) framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) to investigate the roles of IT affordances of social commerce and users' virtual experiences in driving users to develop trusting and purchase intentions in social commerce platforms.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Model

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model of environmental psychology (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974) suggests that various aspects of the environment (S), such as the technological features of a social commerce platform, can influence individuals' internal states and organismic experiences (O) that involve the affective and cognitive internal processes, which in turn affect their behavioral responses (R). According to S-O-R model, the internal affective and cognitive processes of organisms play a mediating role between their behavioral responses and the environmental stimuli (Bagozzi, 1986). These affective and cognitive processes generally consist of the perceptual, physiological, feeling, and thinking activities (Bagozzi, 1986; Bagozzi & Youjae, 1988). Behavioral responses represent psychological reactions consisting of passive or active attitudinal and behavioral reactions (Sautter, Hyman & Lukosius, 2004), such as satisfaction, trust and purchase intention.

The existing literature indicates that the S–O–R model has been applied extensively in a number of studies to examine the effects of online shopping environmental characteristics on customer behavioral responses (Animesh, Pinsonneault & Yang, 2011; Zhang, Lu, Gupta & Zhao, 2014; Tang & Zhang, 2018). Animesh et al.'s study used the S–O–R model to explore the impacts of virtual worlds' technological features on users' virtual experiences and purchase behaviors (Animesh, Pinsonneault & Yang, 2011). Zhang et al.'s study also applied the S-O-R model to investigate the effects of technological features of social commerce on user's virtual experiences and subsequently their participation intention in social commerce (Zhang, Lu, Gupta & Zhao, 2014). Their findings suggest that the S-O-R model is appropriate for explaining the effects of technological features as environmental stimuli on individuals' virtual experiences as internal reactions and their subsequent behavioral responses in social commerce. So, this conceptual paper employs the S-O-R model to link the technological environments of social commerce platforms to users' purchase behaviors via the mediating effect of virtual experience.

IT Affordances of Social Commerce

Some IS researchers suggest that a social commerce platform should be designed in such a way that its technological features create certain affordances that can engage users, thereby leading to active participation and purchase behaviors (Chen, Liu, Wei & Liu, 2021; Tuncer, 2021). The notion of affordance originated from ecological psychology, which suggests that animals are not concerned with what a particular object is but with what it can afford (Gibson, 1986). Gibson (1977) indicates that affordances are properties conceived of in relation to an animal in the environment, which is independent of the animal's ability to perceive them. The concept of affordance was then introduced into the technology field to explain the relationship between technologies and actors (Hutchby, 2001). Norman (1998) proposes that an affordance is a combination of actual and perceived properties of a thing, primarily those that determine how the thing can be used. Recent IS research has suggested that technology affordance is rooted in the relationships between the physical properties of technologies, the capabilities of users, the goals and intentions of users, and the environment with which they interact (Chen, Wei, Davison & Rice, 2020; Wang, Wang & Tang, 2018). So, the central tenet of affordance theory in IS research is that specific technological

functions or features alone do not determine technological capabilities, which instead exist as part of the relationships between users and technological artifacts in specific situations (Leonardi, 2011). In other words, the usability of technological features lies in what a technology affords and whether the affordances allow individuals to perform specific actions that may satisfy certain needs in particular situations (Norman, 1998).

Some recent IS research has indicated that the affordance theory can be used to understand user behaviors in technology-driven environments, such as social commerce platforms (Dong & Wang, 2018; Chen, Liu, Wei & Liu, 2021; Tuncer, 2021). Adopting an affordance lens can overcome the limitation of a technological determinism approach that only develops an argument of specific technological components, which may soon be replaced or altered (Chen, Wei, Davison & Rice, 2020). The IT affordances of social commerce are essentially a set of actionable properties between the technological features of social commerce platforms and users (Gibson, 1977). Thus, the theory of affordance provides an analytical link between the technological features of a social commerce platform and user experiences as well as users' subsequent behavioral reactions (Tuncer, 2021).

In this conceptual paper, the IT affordances of a social commerce platform refer to the possibilities for social shopping actions provided to users through the technological features of the social commerce platform (Leonardi, 2011; Tuncer, 2021). According to prior social commerce studies, a social commerce platform generally provides the following IT affordances: product visibility affordance, interactivity affordance, personalization affordance and social connections affordance (Zhang. Lu, Gupta & Zhao, 2014; Chen, Liu, Wei & Liu, 2021; Tuncer, 2021). The product visibility affordance refers to making the product information and users' knowledge of products visible on the social commerce platform (Tuncer, 2021). Social commerce platforms provide product visibility affordance by allowing users to present visual information about products/services (e.g., photos, videos and texts). Based on the functional view of interactivity as "the extent to which users can participate in modifying the form and content of a mediated environment in real time" (Steuer, 1992, p.84), the interactivity affordance of a social commerce platform is defined as the degree to which a user can control the social commerce environment in modifying its form and content in real time (Zhang. Lu, Gupta & Zhao, 2014). The interactivity affordance typically consists of two-way communication, synchronicity, and controllability (Mollen & Wilson, 2010). It reflects users' perception that the social commerce platform can facilitate the interaction between them and the technology (Hui & Nadda, 2015). The personalization affordance refers to a user's perception that a social commerce platform can customize its content to meet his or her personal needs/interests (Zhang. Lu, Gupta & Zhao, 2014). It involves the process of customizing web offerings to satisfy individual users' needs and preferences (Benlian, 2015). The mechanism for personalization affordance consists of two steps: first, it enables individual users to present "the self" and obtain identification from others by allowing them to input rich personal information to generate profiles (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013; Olbrich & Holsing, 2011); second, it offers content and layout personalization by delivering appropriate content to a specific user at the right time (Benlian, 2015). Social connections affordance reflects that a social commerce platform can be considered a medium for building and maintaining social ties among members through social interactions on the platform (Chen, Liu, Wei & Liu, 2021). Social commerce platforms support communications and develop social ties before, during, and after purchases in a variety of ways. Users of social commerce platforms can connect and interact with one another through reviews and ratings, comments, repost, "likes",

instant messages, live broadcasts, and etc. The collections of these social connections aggregate into interconnected network structures (Himelboim & Golan, 2019), which are central to social commerce (Wang & Zhang, 2012). As users are given opportunities to interact and connect freely, social connections among them are often self-determined based on relevance and thus are distributed unequally, with a few enjoying disproportionately large numbers of connections initiated with them while most others having very few ties (Himelboim & Golan, 2019). Users with many connections with others are central in the network structure of social commerce platforms, and they tend to stand out through recognitions from fellow users, attract a larger size of audience and maintain higher levels of activities, because they stand a much greater chance of being observed and receiving accreditation with rich accessibility to more user traffic (Yang, Liu & Davison, 2012). Digital influencers are such focal users that gain higher visibility and have greater influence on others with this advantageous position (Yang, Liu & Davison, 2012). They are digital opinion leaders who have amassed connections with large numbers of followers through their knowledge and expertise in a given area and/or attractiveness to consumers (Wang, Huang & Davison, 2020; Kapitan & Silvera, 2016). Through their contents and communications on social commerce platforms, digital influencers attract larger sized audiences who browse their posts on products/services and/or watch their livestreams (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016), which in turn influence the audiences' attitudes towards products/services to encourage purchase decisions (Meilatinova, 2021).

Virtual Experiences in Social Commerce

There are two types of environmentally induced internal states: cognitive state and affective state (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974; Ward, Bitner & Barnes, 1992). Cognitive states are associated with information-processing and inference theories, whereas affective states are related to emotions and feelings (Kumar & Kim, 2014). Studies on social commerce define users' virtual experiences as comprising cognitive experiences and affective experiences and indicate their critical role in determining user behaviors (Li, 2019; Zhang, Lu, Gupta & Zhao, 2014). Table-1 lists the cognitive and affective experiences in social commerce.

Cognitive Experiences in Social Commerce

In social commerce, the cognitive experiences typically involve the experiences of information support, preference fit, social presence and flow (Benlian, 2015; Curty & Zhang, 2011; Liang, Ho, Li & Turban, 2011; Park & Cameron, 2014). First, users experience information support and feel being assisted by their peers' reviews, recommendations, comments, and advice (Hajli, 2014; Lin, Hsu, Cheng & Chiu, 2015; Romaniuk, 2012; Sheikh, Yezheng, Islam, Hameed & Khan, 2019; Yan & Tan, 2014) in social commerce. Second, social commerce provides a mechanism for increasing preference fit by constantly matching users' preferences with product/service recommendations informed by users' personalization activities (Ho, Bodoff & Tam, 2011). Thus, preference fit is improved when users recognize greater overlaps between their needs and the attributes of offered products or services in social commerce platforms (Schreier, 2006). Third, a social commerce platform that conveys a sense of personal, sociable and sensitive human contact via socially rich text and multimedia contents (Gefen & Straub 2004; Hassanein, Head & Chunhua, 2009) increases social presence by allowing users to experience other users as being psychologically present (Fulk, Steinfield, Schmitz & Power, 1987). Finally, since the activities of

social searching, shopping, recommendation and communication in social commerce platforms are highly interactive, enjoyable and involving (Animesh, Pinsonneault & Yang, 2011), the social commerce environment can evoke a flow experience in users, which involves a sense of control, attention focus, curiosity and intrinsic interests obtained from the interactions in social commerce (Zhang, Lu, Gupta & Zhao, 2014; Qiu & Benbasat, 2005).

Table-1. Virtual Experiences in Social Commerce

Virtual Experiences		Definitions
Cognitive Experiences	Information Support	A type of social support that provides users with useful information needed for purchasing decisions and helps them solve problems via peer advice, suggestions, guidance, recommendations, experience, and valuable information and knowledge (Chen & Shen, 2015; Liang, Ho, Li & Turban, 2011)
	Preference Fit	A user's subjective evaluation of the extent to which a product's or service's features match his or her preference system (Ho, Bodoff & Tam, 2011; Tam & Ho, 2005)
	Social Presence	The degree to which a user is perceived as a "real person" in technology-mediated communication (Gunawardena, 1995)
	Flow	An optimal experience that people reach when they act with total involvement in activities (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1988)
Affective Experiences	Emotional Support	A type of social support among peers centered on emotional communications such as empathy, encouragement, care, concerns and understanding (Liang, Ho, Li & Turban, 2011; Lin, Hsu, Cheng & Chiu, 2015).
	Product Affection	A user's positive affection toward the products presented in the social commerce platforms (Chen, Lu, Wang & Pan, 2019).
	Familiarity	A feeling of understanding among users of social commerce platforms, often based on previous interactions, experiences, and learning the why, who, and when of what others do (Lee & Kwon, 2011; Ng, 2013).
	Closeness	A feeling of intimacy and emotional bonding that involves intense liking and moral support among users of social commerce platforms (Lee & Kwon, 2011; Ng, 2013).

Affective Experiences in Social Commerce

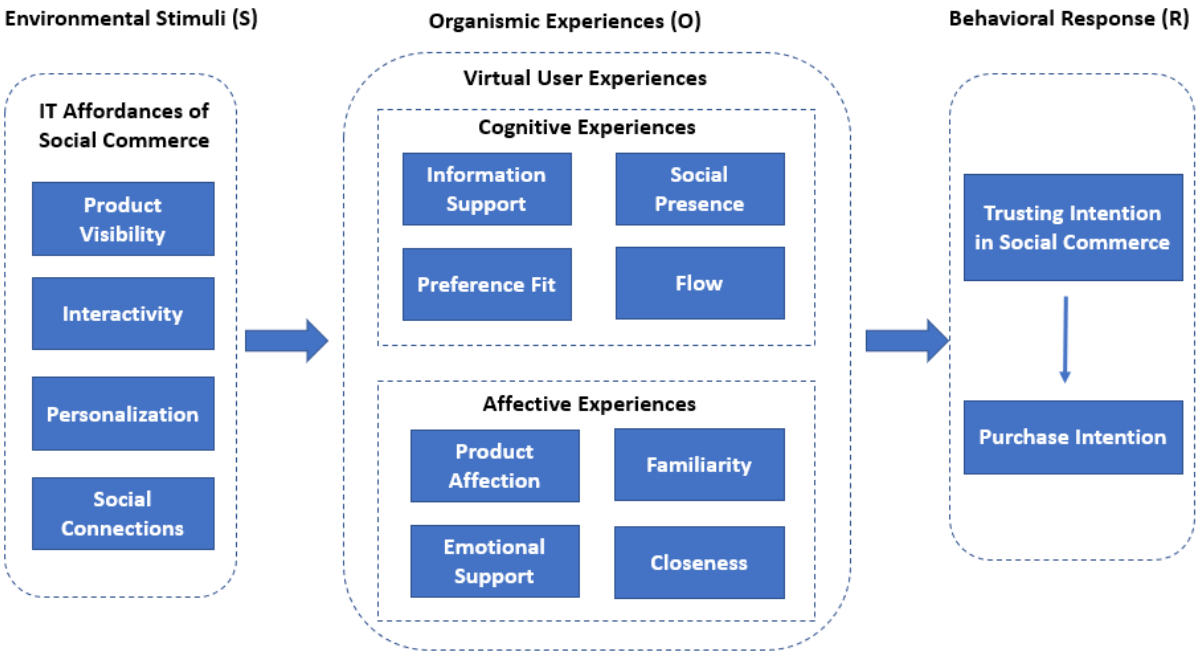
In social commerce, the affective experiences generally include the experiences of emotional support, product affection, familiarity, and closeness (Chen, Lu, Wang & Pan, 2019; Liang, Ho, Li & Turban, 2011; Ng, 2013). First, users experience emotional support when they feel being cared for by others in social commerce platforms (Liang, Ho, Li & Turban, 2011). Second, highly vivid presentations of products that fit users' tastes/interests in social commerce platforms are likely to elicit positive emotions and product affections in users. Finally, feelings of familiarity

and closesness can develop as a result of social interactions in social commerce platforms (Ng, 2013).

RESEARCH MODEL AND PROPOSITIONS

Based on the S-O-R model, the affordance theory, and prior research in social commerce, a research model (Figure 1) is developed to examine the impacts of IT affordances of social commerce platforms (product visibility, interactivity, personalization and social connections) on users' virtual experiences in terms of their cognitive and affective experiences, which in turn influence users' trusting intention in social commerce and their intention to purchase products from the social commerce platforms. Consistent with the S-O-R model, the proposed model highlights the mediation role of user's virtual experiences in the relationship between IT affordances and users' trusting intention and purchase intention in social commerce platforms. The theoretical propositions specifying relationships among the constructs in the research model are presented in Figure 2 and illustrated as follows.

Figure 1. Research Model of IT Affordances, Virtual Experiences, and Trusting and Purchase Intentions in Social Commerce



Effects of IT Affordances of Social Commerce Platforms on Virtual Experiences

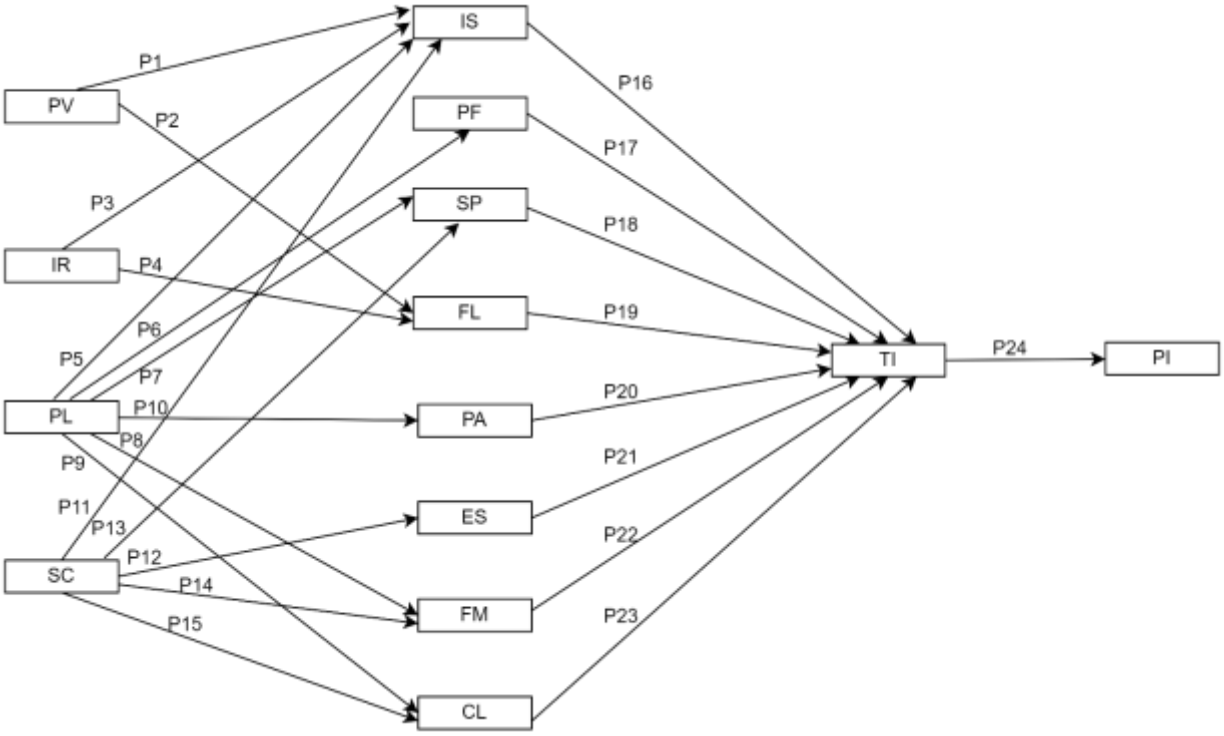
The product visibility affordance, interactivity affordance, personalization affordance and social connections affordance, which constitute the dimensions of IT affordances in social commerce platforms, represent the environmental stimuli in the framework of the S-O-R model. Product visibility affordance offers easy access to product information and other users' knowledge of products (Dong, Wang & Benbasat, 2016). Social commerce platform provides product visibility affordance by presenting vivid and visual information about the product and sharing users'

knowledge of and experiences with products, thus conveying information about product features and quality for better purchase decisions. Furthermore, the need for detailed product information before making a purchase decision drives buyers to focus on product visuals as well as ratings and reviews of product usage on social commerce platforms, thus eliciting a feeling of immersion and a state of flow in the buyers (Sun, Shao, Li, Guo & Nie, 2019; Tuncer, 2021). Thus, the following propositions are formulated.

Proposition 1: Product visibility affordance in social commerce is positively associated with perceived information support.

Proposition 2: Product visibility affordance in social commerce is positively associated with flow experience.

Figure 2. Theoretical Propositions of the Effects of IT Affordances on Virtual Experiences and Trusting and Purchase Intentions in Social Commerce



PV = Product Visibility, IR = Interactivity, PL = Personalization, SC = Social Connections, IS = Information Support, PF = Preference Fit, SP = Social Presence, FL = Flow, PA = Product Affection, ES = Emotional Support, FM = Familiarity, CL = Closeness, TI = Trusting Intention, PI = Purchase Intention

Interactivity affordance enables users to interact with social commerce platforms through content creation and sharing, such as posting product images and messages, rating and reviewing product qualities, and presenting product usage experiences (Zhang, Lu, Gupta & Zhao, 2014). Such interactions with the social commerce platforms provide informational support for purchase decision-making by offering advice and recommendations (Liang, Ho, Li & Turban, 2011). Prior research also suggests that websites with higher levels of interactivity create a sense of flow in

users (Novak, Hoffman & Yung, 2000). Interactivity affordance allows a user to portray a desired self-image in social commerce platforms (Animesh, Pinsonneault & Yang, 2011). The self-presentation theory suggests that people desire to project a social self-image among others (Gofiman, 1959). Being highly motivated to fulfill such desire, users tend to fully immerse themselves in the social media interactive process of projecting desired self-image in social commerce platforms. The deep engagement in the explorations and interactions with the social commerce platforms make them completely absorbed in the positive self-image projection process without noticing the passage of time, which is likely to induce a flow experience (Zhang, Lu, Gupta & Zhao, 2014). Therefore, the following propositions are suggested.

Proposition 3: Interactivity affordance in social commerce is positively associated with perceived information support.

Proposition 4: Interactivity affordance in social commerce is positively associated with flow experience.

Personalization affordance in social commerce generates relevant and better-customized contents on social media platforms that closely match users' idiosyncratic preferences and needs (Komiak & Benbasat, 2006). It allows an individual user to input rich personal information to generate a profile and deliver appropriate content in the right format to a specific user at the right time (Benlian, 2015; Huang & Benyoucef, 2013; Olbrich & Holsing, 2011; Tam & Ho, 2005). So, in social commerce platforms with personalization affordance, recommended items to users are uniquely personalized recommendations tailored to users' own needs. Through continuous interactive feedbacks and recommendation adaptations, personalization affordance can reduce information overload and facilitate greater information support for users by providing more relevant information about products/services that they are interested in (Huang, 2000; Liu, Li, Dai & Guo, 2021). Social commerce platforms providing personalization affordance also produce higher preference fit. The underlying mechanism for personalization affordance allows users to reveal their personal preferences and needs and then operates to constantly match between users' individual preferences and product/service recommendations informed by users' personalization activities (Ho, Bodoff & Tam, 2011). Thus, preference fit is improved when users recognize greater overlaps between their own needs and the attributes of recommended products/services (Schreier, 2006). Prior research indicates that the personalization level of a website is positively related to the perceived social presence of the site (Kumar & Benbasat, 2006). Personalization affordance in social commerce platforms also involves the practice of presenting social recommendations to target users using social network information (such as a list of friends who have similar tastes/interests) (Choi, Lee & Kim, 2011), which in turn creates a high social presence environment for the users (Tam & Ho, 2006). The provision of highly personalized social recommendations in social commerce platforms leads users to develop a high level of social identification with other users in the platforms, and thus will generate a sense of social presence among the users in social commerce (Liang, Ho, Li & Turban, 2011). Additionally, the increased social identification with the other users in a social commerce platform may also generate a stronger sense of familiarity with them (Animesh, Pinsonneault & Yang, 2011) and thus may induce warm and close personal relationships among the users (Kumar & Benbasat, 2006). Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that personalization affordance would also lead to greater feelings of familiarity and closeness among the users in social commerce. According to the preference fit theory (Simonson, 2005), a closer fit between users' preferences and product/service

attributes produces greater benefits for the users. Thus, the responsive functions of personalization affordance are expected to draw users' attention, stimulate their sensory experiences, and subsequently lead to positive emotional responses in users. As such, personalization affordance that interactively responds to users' preferences through visual representations of personal adaptations can provide users with greater pleasures and elicit users' positive emotions toward recommended products/services, thus resulting in feelings of product/service affection in users. With these considerations, the following propositions are formulated.

Proposition 5: Personalization affordance in social commerce is positively associated with perceived information support.
Proposition 6: Personalization affordance in social commerce is positively associated with perceived preference fit.
Proposition 7: Personalization affordance in social commerce is positively associated with perceived social presence.
Proposition 8: Personalization affordance in social commerce is positively associated with feeling of familiarity.
Proposition 9: Personalization affordance in social commerce is positively associated with feeling of closeness.
Proposition 10: Personalization affordance in social commerce is positively associated with feeling of product affection.

Social connections affordance enables users to establish and maintain social ties with one another as well as involve users in the reciprocal relationships on social commerce platforms by effectively supporting social interactions among users, including communicating with others, rating and reviewing products and services, reviewing others' opinions, seeking others' opinions, sharing their experiences and recommending products and services (Chen, Liu, Wei & Liu, 2021; Hajli, 2013; Li, 2019; Tang & Zhang, 2018). In social commerce, receiving and reviewing product/service information provided by other users can assist buyers in solving their problems and making better purchase decisions, thus providing them with information support (Li, 2019). Furthermore, through social interactions with others in a social commerce environment, users may present themselves socially, form their own social identities, and provide not only information support but also emotional support to others (Zhang, Lu, Gupta & Zhao, 2014). Obtaining unbiased information and getting useful recommendations from others who share their knowledge and personal experiences make users feel that they are helped, valued and cared for by others in the platform, which satisfies users' need of receiving care and emotional support from others (Amblee and Bui, 2011; Liang, Ho, Li & Turban, 2011). Social connections affordance also increases users' perceptions of social presence in social commerce platforms (Li, 2019; Zhang, Lu, Gupta & Zhao, 2014). By bringing users together through technology-enabled social interactions, social connections affordance enables users to experience others as being psychologically present, thus inducing a sense of social presence among (Li, 2019; Zhang, Lu, Gupta & Zhao, 2014). A social commerce platform that affords social connections may also create a sense of familiarity by facilitating interpersonal relationships and increasing mutual understanding among users. Familiarity is a sense of understanding based on interpersonal interactions (Gefen, 2000). Social connections affordance can foster users' self-expressions, contribute to users' social identities, and strengthen users' recognition of their common interests and characteristics shared with other users in social commerce platforms (Chen, Liu, Wei & Liu, 2021), thereby enhancing the feeling of

familiarity in the social interactions among users. In addition, social connections affordance facilitates the development of close, warm and personal relationships through social interactions and emotional bonding, thus invoking feelings of affection, warmth and closeness among users in social commerce platforms (Animesh, Pinsonneault & Yang, 2011; Li, 2019). In line with the above reasoning, the following propositions are suggested.

Proposition 11: Social Connections affordance in social commerce is positively associated with perceived information support.
Proposition 12: Social Connections affordance in social commerce is positively associated with feeling of emotional support.
Proposition 13: Social Connections affordance in social commerce is positively associated with perceived social presence.
Proposition 14: Social Connections affordance in social commerce is positively associated with feeling of familiarity.
Proposition 15: Social Connections affordance in social commerce is positively associated with feeling of closeness.

Effects of Virtual Experiences on Trusting Intention in Social Commerce

Trust in social commerce refers to the extent to which a user has confidence in the reliability and integrity of using a social commerce platform to shop (Leung, Shi & Chow, 2019). It reflects one's willingness to depend on or be vulnerable to social commerce (McKnight, 2005). In virtual environments, such as social commerce platforms, trust is an extremely important factor (Hajli, Wang, Tajvidi & Hajli, 2017; Keen, Ballance, Chan & Schrump, 1999; Wang & Enurian, 2005) because the absence of face-to-face communication creates uncertainties (Featherman & Hajli, 2016) and trust involves a certain level of willingness to accept uncertainties and take risks (Keller, Mayo, Greifeneder & Pfattheicher, 2015).

The cognitive experiences of information support, preference fit, social presence and flow help to build trust in social commerce. Information support assists users to evaluate products and services by observing others' purchase experiences and obtaining knowledge of products and services, and helps them to overcome risk perception and uncertainty in the purchasing process (McKnight, Choudhury & Kacmar, 2002), hence resulting in increased trust in social commerce. High levels of perceived preference fit lead users to have high confidence that social commerce provides more relevant and better-customized product/service recommendations, and thus feel more comfortable in replying on social commerce platforms for their shopping needs. Therefore, greater preference fit will enhance trust in social commerce. Gefen and Straub (2004) considered trust to be an outcome of social interactivity and social presence. Hassanein and Head (2007) found that higher levels of perceived social presence generate greater trust in online shopping websites. In social commerce, users who experience social presence through warm and personal social interactions with others may feel more secure and comfortable (Lu, Fan & Zhou, 2016), and are likely to perceive less risks in reliance on others in social commerce platforms. Thus, a high level of social presence is conducive to trust formation (Ou, Pavlou & Davison, 2014). Flow is a deep involvement state that can create strong trust (Johnson, Bardhi & Dunn, 2008). Prior research has supported the notion that flow experience builds user trust in a virtual environment (Chandra, Srivastava & Theng, 2012). Flow experience can reduce the perceived risks of incurring negative

results associated with social commerce, based on the need for users to manage cognitive dissonance arising from spending too much of their time engaging with social commerce platforms (Agarwal and Karahanna, 2000). Thus, trust is created as users seek to rationalize their total involvement in social commerce by attributing positive results to it. These considerations suggest the following four propositions.

Proposition 16: Perceived information support is positively associated with trusting intention in social commerce.
Proposition 17: Perceived preference fit is positively associated with trusting intention in social commerce.
Proposition 18: Perceived social presence is positively associated with trusting intention in social commerce.
Proposition 19: Flow experience is positively associated with trusting intention in social commerce.

The affective experiences of product affection, emotional support, familiarity and closeness also help to improve trust in social commerce. Product affection reflects a pleasurable experience that can serve as a heuristic for trustworthy judgments. Prior research has shown that affect laden information infuses into an individuals' cognitive processes, which thereby affects their judgments and behaviors in a mood-congruent direction (Forgas, 1995; Forgas & George, 2001). People in positive affective states are likely to access and recall positive information from the memory, whereas a negative affective state facilitates the recall of negative information. This recall of positive or negative information will in turn influence judgments and behaviors. Positive affective states will lead to positive heuristic judgments and behaviors. Therefore, product affection is expected to positively influence the users' trusting intention in social commerce. When users have strong emotional support, they receive care and help from others, which reduces perceived risks and thus increases the level of trust (Hajli, 2013). Prior research suggests that feelings of familiarity and closeness in social interactions increase levels of trust in the social networking community (Ng, 2013). Familiarity is considered a subjective mechanism leading to trust (Gefen, 2000; Gulati, 1995). Familiarity can reduce uncertainty and foster a sense of belonging so as to increase users' confidence and trust in a website (Casalo, Flavián & Guinalíu, 2007). Moreover, the feeling of closeness reduces social distance and increases trust. When users feel close to others, they tend to tolerate others' mistakes and develop deep relationships with others (Marsden & Campbell, 1984), which contributes to the development of trust in social commerce platforms (Hajli, 2014). Based on the above arguments, the following four propositions are formulated.

Proposition 20: Feeling of product affection is positively associated with trusting intention in social commerce.
Proposition 21: Feeling of emotional support is positively associated with trusting intention in social commerce.
Proposition 22: Feeling of familiarity is positively associated with trusting intention in social commerce.
Proposition 23: Feeling of closeness is positively associated with the trusting intention in social commerce.

Effect of Trusting Intention on Purchase Intention in Social Commerce

Trust plays a critical role in reducing users' perceptions of risks and uncertainties toward social commerce, and in turn increases their tendencies to make purchases in social commerce platforms (Hajli, Sims, Zadeh & Richard, 2017). Previous studies have supported the significant effect of trust on users' intentions to purchase from websites or on their loyalty to particular websites (Gefen, 2000; Hajli, 2013; Kim & Park, 2013; Lu, Fan & Zhou, 2016; Rashid, Rashid & Pitafi, 2020; Weisberg, Te'eni, & Arman, 2011). When users have a high level of trust in social commerce, they are more likely to exchange shopping information and make purchases in social commerce platforms (McKnight, Choudhury & Kacmar, 2002). Trust reduces uncertainty in online transactions and enables complex decisions (Weisberg, Te'eni & Arman, 2011). When individuals believe that their exchange partners are trustworthy, they are likely to engage in economic transactions with them (Mutz, 2009). Moreover, a trustworthy social commerce platform will lead users to develop perceptions of less opportunistic behaviors, such as deceptive advertising (Chen & Shen, 2015). As a result, users tend to rely on other users' product recommendations and shopping experiences to make purchase decisions in the social commerce platform. Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that if a user has a strong trusting intention in social commerce, he/she is more likely to make purchase. Accordingly, the following proposition is suggested.

Proposition 24: Trusting intention in social commerce is positively associated with purchase intention.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This conceptual paper proposes a research model of the effects of IT affordances on users' virtual experiences and purchase intentions in social commerce platforms. Drawing on the S-O-R model, the affordance theory and IS research on social commerce, the model identifies four IT affordances of social commerce platforms – product visibility, interactivity, personalization and social connections, and suggests that these IT affordances influence users' virtual experiences in terms of their cognitive experiences (information support, preference fit, social presence and flow) and affective experiences (product affection, emotional support, familiarity and closeness), which in turn affect users' trusting and purchase intentions in social commerce platforms. Theoretically, this paper helps understand the underlying process connecting IT affordances to purchase intention in social commerce. Practically, a better and complete understanding of how such a process takes place is essential to provide guidance on how to design effective social commerce platforms for optimal user experiences and successful product promotion. So, this conceptual paper not only benefits the researchers in understanding the implications of IT affordances and user experiences for successful social commerce, but also assists practitioners in developing better technology strategy for social commerce. For example, managers can promote user trust and purchase intention in social commerce platforms through improving users' cognitive and affective experiences by providing IT affordance optimization for the platforms, such as affording highly interactive user interfaces, presenting target products/services in high-quality photographs and videos, increasing customized offerings based on users' preferences/needs, and enhancing reciprocal interpersonal connections via multimedia social interaction tools.

This conceptual paper makes several contributions to the research on social commerce. Firstly, it advances the technology affordances and social commerce literature by utilizing the affordance-based approach to conceptualize the technological environments of social commerce. Many existing studies have focused primarily on specific technical features of social commerce platforms (Al-Adwan, 2019; Li, 2019; Gibreel, AlOtaibi & Altmann, 2018; Han, Xu & Chen, 2018; Curty & Zhang, 2013) but ignored users' role in technology usage when exploring the effects of technical features. The IT affordances of social commerce platforms serve as the dynamic link between the technical features of social commerce and its users. By focusing on user-recognized action possibilities afforded by technical features, this paper enriches the theoretical foundation for the characterization of technological environments of social commerce and provides a novel theoretical view for understanding the underlying process of IT effects in the context of social commerce. Secondly, this paper contributes to the research on the drivers of trusting and purchase intentions in social commerce from the perspective of users' virtual experiences. It provides new insights into the determinants of social commerce purchase intention by examining the antecedents and outcomes of social commerce virtual experiences. Moreover, this paper stresses the mediation role of virtual experiences in the relationship between IT affordances and users' trusting and purchase intentions in social commerce platforms. Thus, it enriches the experiential perspective of social commerce and contributes to the literature on user experience in social commerce. Thirdly, this paper provides a comprehensive research framework to enable the development of user-centered social commerce platforms. It not only highlights the critical roles of user-driven IT affordances and users' virtual experiences in social commerce, but also explores social commerce user experiences in more detail by identifying both cognitive experiences and affective experiences with social commerce platforms. It responds to the suggestion that "social commerce needs to focus on user-centered design in order to become a mainstream phenomenon" (Shin, 2013, p. 54).

This conceptual paper also provides opportunities for future research. The future research could empirically test the research model and its associated propositions in the social commerce context using a survey. Data will be collected from people who are active in online shopping at social commerce platforms (such as Instagram, Facebook, and Amazon Live) about their perceived IT affordances of the social commerce platforms, their cognitive experiences and affective experiences with the platforms, as well as their trusting and purchase intentions in social commerce. The partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) will be utilized to test the measurement model and structural model.

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