

Role of Social Media in B2C E-Commerce Users Adoption Behaviour among Students in Malaysia

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i12/24116> DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i12/24116

Published Date: 12 December 2024

Abstract

Social media enables interactive customer communication, fostering better engagement and customer loyalty in a B2C (Business to customers) e-commerce environment. Therefore, using the various social media platforms to facilitate B2C e-commerce activities is referred to as social commerce. However, the need for effective e-commerce among culturally diverse local and international students has been under research. This research investigates the role of social media in facilitating B2C e-commerce activities among students in Malaysia. Employing a simple random sampling method to collect 267 questionnaires from 300 distributed across student social media groups in Malaysia and constituting a response rate of 85.7%. With 67.4% male and the remaining 38.6% female, an age Mean \approx of 30.2 from February to March 2024. The objective is to discern how students from these regions leverage social media for e-commerce and identify the motivational factors behind their adoption. Results reveal varied preferences and influences on e-commerce activities shaped by distinct cultural contexts, providing a deeper understanding of the dynamic interplay. The major factors, such as product reviews, discounts, convenience, brand trust, and influencer recommendations, significantly influence consumers' intentions to engage in e-commerce. Specific product categories such as clothing, electronics, books, and groceries are popular among participants, indicating diverse consumer needs.

Keywords: Social Media, E-commerce, B2C E-commerce, Cultural Differences, Social Commerce

Introduction

Social media has emerged as a pivotal platform for personal and commercial interaction in the digital age. B2C is the behaviour of business-to-customer interaction that can be improved using social media. Social media influences stretch across various domains, significantly impacting how we shop and conduct business online. This influence is particularly relevant among university students, who represent a technologically savvy demography that frequently utilizes these platforms for many purposes, including e-commerce. Fundamentally, the diverse cultural backgrounds and technological landscapes of students from different

regions' shopping behaviour in Malaysia. Exploring how these factors intertwine to shape their e-commerce behaviours becomes crucial. Marketing in e-commerce through social media is the best way to improve marketing and business widely (Ramalingam et al., 2018).

Furthermore, Xie (2023) analyzed the current situation of B2C e-commerce platforms by introducing artificial intelligence technology into consumer behaviour recognition. In their contribution, other authors proposed a solution based on presence data (gathered through the Internet of Things [IoT] devices) to organize the delivery tours. This artificial intelligence introduction aims to minimize the distance travelled and maximize the probability of finding customers at home in B2C activities (Seghezzi & Mangiaracina, 2023). Therefore, Marketing e-commerce through social media, as proposed here, is highly effective. It is highly beneficial since it allows businesses to reach a large audience quickly and at a low cost. Social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter now X provide retail companies with tools to target specific groups of people, such as students, ensuring that their marketing messages get in front of those most likely to be interested in their products or services. This introduction lays the groundwork for a detailed examination of how social media platforms can catalyze e-commerce among African and Asian university students, highlighting the complexities and variabilities influenced by cultural differences.

Literature Review

The utilization of social media for e-commerce among students is significantly influenced by many factors, including social capital, perceived ease of use, information overloading, trust, and the propensity to engage in online purchasing (Ramalingam et al., 2018). These elements collectively shape the landscape of social commerce adoption and impact various outcomes such as technostress and online impulse purchasing. Notably, social capital emerges as a pivotal mediator, enhancing the positive impact of social commerce adoption and perceived ease of use on technostress and online impulse purchasing. Furthermore, information overloading is crucial, mediating between social commerce adoption, perceived ease of use, and outcomes like technostress and online impulse purchasing (Asanprakit & Kraiwanit, 2023).

In e-commerce, particularly in developing countries in Asia and Africa, social media platforms wield remarkable influence in fostering trust among users and nurturing a propensity to engage in online transactions. Junfeng Shang and Li (2017) emphasized that commercial activities were previously based on face-to-face interaction, which has now shifted to online transactions. This activity underscores the pivotal role of social media as a conduit for cultivating trust and bolstering the willingness to purchase online, especially in regions characterized by burgeoning e-commerce markets. Additionally, perceived usefulness and ease of use are significant determinants shaping recommendations and social commerce purchase intentions (Akram et al., 2019). The perceived utility and ease of navigating online platforms thus become critical factors in driving users towards engaging in social commerce activities.

Moreover, the pervasive influence of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) cannot be overstated, as it emerges as a potent predictor of both social commerce purchase and recommendation intentions (Asanprakit & Kraiwanit, 2023). The power of recommendations disseminated through digital channels significantly impacts consumer behaviour, underscoring the importance of leveraging eWOM in driving social commerce initiatives.

Interestingly, while trust in social network sites is instrumental in fostering user engagement, it does not significantly influence social commerce purchase and recommendation intentions (Zhou et al., 2020). It suggests that while trust remains a fundamental aspect of social media interactions, its impact on specific e-commerce outcomes may be nuanced and contingent on other factors.

Significantly, these findings underscore the intricate interplay of various factors in shaping the use of social media for e-commerce among students from all over the world in Malaysia. By elucidating how these factors influence user behaviour, researchers and practitioners gain valuable insights into optimizing social commerce strategies and enhancing user experiences in the digital marketplace. Similarly, a study conducted by Asanprakit and Kraiwanit (2023) highlights how online social commerce empowers consumers to make informed decisions, influencing businesses and reshaping market dynamics. Additionally, the authors suggest that their findings could assist policymakers in developing regulations that promote innovation, protect consumers, and support the growth of the social commerce sector. The authors discuss various factors influencing the adoption of social commerce platforms, such as social media reviews, social support, and social capital, underscoring the importance of these elements in consumer engagement. Furthermore, the authors delve into the essential characteristics of these platforms, including information quality, word-of-mouth communication, two-way communication, reputation, and transaction security. They emphasize that these features are critical for building user trust and credibility.

User adoption behaviour varies across different e-commerce platforms at the time due to factors such as cultural differences, trust perceptions, and product preferences. Research indicates that users exhibit loyalty to preferred platforms. Hence, they make quick purchase decisions. This adoption behaviour is distinct based on socioeconomic status and residential location (Huang et al., 2018). Cross-cultural studies highlight differences in adoption factors like perceived trust, hedonic motivation, and comparison Lee (2022). Moreover, variations in their shopping behaviour were observed between developed and developing nations. B2C e-commerce users differ in demographic characteristics and product purchase propensity, and they focus on used product transactions, reflecting unique consumer patterns.

Users' Adoption Behaviour of Social Media for E-commerce

Students use social media for e-commerce in various ways. Due to the pandemic and lockdown measures, African traders in Guangzhou and Yiwu have shifted their commercial relationships with Chinese traders to online platforms, using communication applications to mobilize networks and conduct transactions outside of Chinese authorities' control, as identified by Junfeng Shang and Li (2017). In developing countries such as Malaysia, social media has been found to enhance trust and increase willingness to buy online, influencing consumer behaviour and shaping perceptions (Akram et al., 2019). Young Chinese students studying abroad use WeChat, a popular mobile social platform, to resell overseas products to customers in China, leveraging its convenience, ubiquity, and ability to facilitate new businesses (Zhou et al., 2020). In China, Beidian, Sina Weibo, and Taobao are popular e-commerce platforms that use social media for marketing. Beidian allows users to sell products through social networks (Cao et al., 2020). At the same time, Sina Weibo and Taobao are used by e-commerce celebrities to gain followers and sell products directly, showing how influential they are in Chinese online marketing (Nor et al., 2022). The rise of e-commerce in China has

transformed online shopping behaviours among Chinese students, driven by brand consciousness and technological adoption (Islam, 2021). This shift is underscored by initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative, fostering cross-border e-commerce and influencing urbanization trends by reducing reliance on physical stores, particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. Online discourses in the Chinese online space also shape perceptions of Africa and the African diaspora in China, with both positive and negative portrayals in social media and online forums (Li, 2017). My personal experience with the Facebook market reveals that it also provides an easy way for international students in Malaysia to buy household equipment and sell theirs without living in comfortable accommodations. In Malaysia, there are two major e-commerce online shops. These are Shopee and Lazada e-commerce online shops. They advertise on Facebook and WhatsApp, which makes their presence felt and allows their products to be seen by millions of users all over Malaysia. This advertisement ascertains the fact that social media platforms have a significant impact on e-commerce activities. They can enhance customer experiences, shape perceptions, and influence buying intentions (AlWazzan, 2023). In the case of African and Asian students in Malaysia, social media platforms play a role in their e-commerce activities. For African students living in China, studying their influence on Chinese cultural values is relevant (Akram et al., 2019). However, there is no specific information about the impact of social media platforms on their e-commerce activities.

On the other hand, the impact of social media platforms on e-commerce activities in Kuwait was discussed in a paper by Abodohou et al. (2020). The paper highlights the potential of social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram to contribute to the growth of e-commerce in Kuwait. It also mentions the efforts of the Kuwaiti government to enhance e-commerce and adopt laws in line with international regulations. Hence, social media can increase e-commerce sales by leveraging its role in communication, marketing, and profit generation (Hafif et al., 2023). Businesses increasingly use social media to compete in the digital age, as the youth heavily uses it for online purchases. E-commerce companies actively construct web-based social networks to enable users to share their experiences and direct them to other shopping sites (Amit et al., 2022). By analyzing the patterns of interaction between companies and customers on social media through social network analysis, B2C e-commerce businesses can gain insights into product marketing and understand the key players in the social network (Lv et al., 2020). This understanding can help improve customer relationship management and boost sales. Globalization and changes in technology and the business environment have significantly altered the tastes and preferences of Indian consumers. In response to these shifts, marketers must grasp how customers are adapting. Notably, e-commerce has emerged as a critical strategy for companies looking for long-term success, proving more sustainable than traditional business methods. This shift underscores the importance of businesses understanding and embracing new consumer behaviours to thrive in the evolving market landscape (Sur, 2018). The findings of this research contribute to a practical understanding of the intersection between social media and the e-commerce adoption behaviour of users in Malaysia, offering insights into practical strategies for leveraging social media platforms to promote e-commerce activities among diverse student populations. Ultimately, this study aims to inform marketing professionals, e-commerce businesses, and educators how best to engage students in the digital marketplace, enhancing their online shopping experiences and facilitating more significant participation in e-commerce transactions.

Research Methodology

Data was gathered from local and international students in Malaysia, employing a questionnaire distributed through WhatsApp groups using Google Forms. The investigation utilized quantitative methodologies to evaluate the students' utilization of social media for e-commerce. The questionnaire comprised demographic information, social media usage, e-commerce engagement, and open-ended questions. Participants were asked about their age, gender, education level, and occupation; how often they use social media platforms; the factors influencing their decision to use social media for e-commerce; their satisfaction with these platforms; the primary challenges they face in using social media for e-commerce; suggestions for improvements; and their likelihood of recommending social media for e-commerce to others. Additionally, participants were invited to provide any further comments or suggestions. Two hundred sixty-seven (267) questionnaires were completed out of 300 distributed among student cohorts in Malaysia, yielding an impressive response rate of 85.7%. Predominantly, the participants were male (67.4%) with an average age of 30.2 years. The data collection occurred between February and March of 2024. The survey responses were analyzed using primary descriptive methods, with the outcomes detailed in the subsequent section. The quantitative dataset was analyzed using Microsoft Excel and Google Forms as the primary analytical tools.

Results and Discussions

Demographic Profile of Respondents

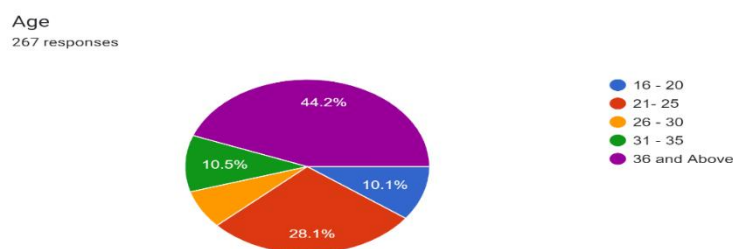


Figure 1. Showing Age of Participants in the Survey

The age demographics of respondents in this survey data are segmented into five distinct age groups. Most participants fall into the '36 and above' age category, making up 44.2% of the total responses, indicating a significant representation of older adults in the sample. The next largest group is the '21-25' age bracket, comprising 28.1% of respondents, suggesting a strong presence of young adults. The '31-35' age group accounts for 10.5%, while those aged '16-20' and '26-30' are less represented at 10.1% and 7.1%, respectively. This distribution highlights that the survey predominantly attracted responses from the older and younger adult populations, with middle-aged adults (26-30) being the minor-involved participants who successfully filled out and submitted the Google Forms questionnaire.

Gender of Participants

Out of the 267 participants, 180 were male, constituting 67.4% of the overall group. In contrast, 87 participants were female, making up 32.6%. This data indicates a significant gender disparity within the respondent group, with males representing more than two-thirds of the survey participants, while females account for just over one-third. This uneven

distribution suggests that future efforts might need to focus on achieving a more balanced representation of genders to reflect broader societal demographics better.

Nationality of Participants

According to the detailed information presented in Table 1, many participants hailed from the continent of Africa, with 230 individuals accounting for 86.1% of the total sample. This observation highlights a notable focal point of the survey within African nations like Egypt, Ghana, Nigeria, Sudan, and Somalia. Conversely, a few respondents originated from China, comprising 10 individuals or 3.7% of the total cohort. This disparity could be attributed to language barriers and the regulatory framework in China concerning utilizing Western platforms such as Google Forms, which were employed in this study for data-gathering purposes. The residual 10.1% of participants, constituting a cohort of 27 individuals, were drawn from other countries, such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and India.

Table 1

Nationality of Participants

S/N	Country	No of Participants	Percentage %
1	Africa	230	86.1
2	China	10	3.7
3	Others, Malaysia, Indonesia, and India	27	10.1

Educational Level of Respondents

The survey reveals that most of the participants, about 57.3%, are postgraduates from various African and Asian countries, including Malaysia, China, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, Egypt, Sudan, Somalia, and others. Due to their advanced education, these students usually have a sophisticated understanding of digital platforms. This expertise probably leads to their higher engagement with e-commerce, utilizing it frequently for diverse needs. Their education informs their choice of platforms and their ability to navigate them effectively, making them discern online shoppers who take advantage of the variety and convenience offered by global digital marketplaces.

Meanwhile, undergraduates, who constitute 42.3% of the respondents, while still well-educated, might approach online shopping with different priorities, such as budget constraints. Despite these differences, their participation indicates a robust inclination towards digital purchases, which aligns with the trends seen among young, tech-savvy consumers. Generally, the educational levels of participants suggest that both groups are informed and active users of B2C e-commerce, reflecting broader trends in online shopping behaviour across highly educated demographics.

Types of Social Media Used by Participants

When the participants were asked about their social media usage, the survey data showed that WhatsApp is the most used social media platform for participants. It has a significant 95.1% usage rate, indicating its widespread popularity for communication. Facebook also has a strong presence, which 57.7% of respondents use. However, other platforms like YouTube and Instagram are also popular, and they are used by 39% and 30.3% of participants. In contrast, platforms like WeChat, Twitter, Snapchat, and other less-known platforms like

Weibo, X, Pinterest, Likee, and Douyin have minimal usage rates, each below 5%. This result suggests that while a few social media platforms dominate usage among the survey participants, many others remain relatively niche or underutilized in this group. Table 2. It shows the statistical representation of social media usage among the participants.

Table 2
Type of Social Media Used by Participants

S/N	Social Media Platform	No of Participants	Percentage %
1	Facebook	154	57.7
2	WhatsApp	254	95.1
3	TikTok	66	24.7
4	WeChat	13	4.9
5	YouTube	104	39
4	Instagram	81	30.3
5	Telegram	63	23
6	Twitter	5	1.9
7	Snapchat	3	1.1
8	Weibo	1	0.4
9	X	1	0.4
10	Printrest	1	0.4
11	Likee	1	0.4
12	Douyin	1	0.4

Users E-commerce Adoption Intention

The findings derived from the investigation reveal a substantial degree of involvement in electronic commerce within the cohort, with 85.8% (229 individuals) affirming their active participation in online purchasing. This significant proportion implies that this demographic widely embraces electronic commerce, underscoring its convenience and availability. In contrast, 14.2% (38 individuals) acknowledged not engaging in electronic commerce. This reluctance may stem from constraints like inadequate access to technology, security apprehensions, or a preference for conventional shopping modalities. The prevalent inclination towards electronic commerce among the majority emphasizes its importance as a prevalent shopping avenue in the examined student populace across Asia and Africa.

Types of E-commerce Product or Service

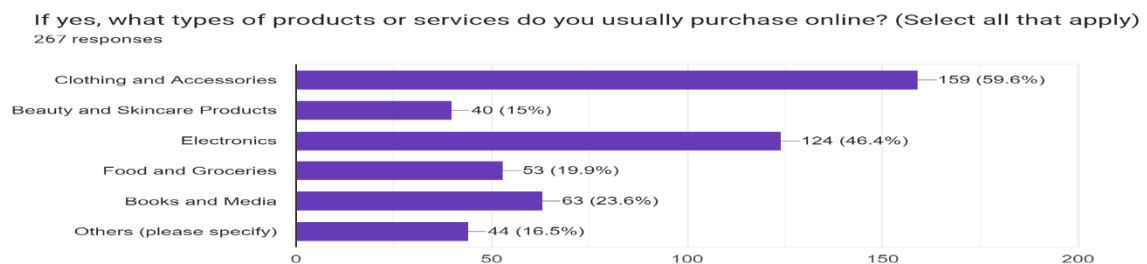


Figure 2. Types of E-commerce Product or Service

When the participants were asked about the type of content they engage with on the social media. The survey indicates that the most engaging types of content on social media for the participants are posts from friends and news updates, including entertainment, which capture the interest of 68.9% and 72.7% of respondents, respectively. Hence, it suggests that social interactions and staying informed are critical drivers for social media use within this group. Sports-related content also has a significant following, with 27.3% of participants engaged, revealing a healthy interest in athletic and football activities.

Meanwhile, content related to product advertisements and influencers attracted just over 21% of the respondents, indicating a more modest but noteworthy interest in commercial and lifestyle influencer posts. Lastly, a smaller segment of 10.1% of participants is interested in other types of content, which may include niche interests not explicitly categorized in the survey. This diverse array of content preferences highlights how individuals utilize social media to satisfy different informational and social needs.

Table 3

Types of Products and Services Purchased Online by Participants

S/N	Products and Services that are usually Purchased Online	No of Participants	Percentage %
1	Clothing and Accessories	159	59.6
2	Beauty and Skincare Products	40	15
3	Electronics	124	46.4
4	Food and Groceries	53	19.9
5	Books and Media	63	23.6
6	Others	44	16.5

Moreover, based on the data collected from the respondents regarding their frequency of e-commerce transactions, it was identified that a considerable proportion of participants exhibit a pattern of engaging in online shopping infrequently or sporadically. Approximately 44.6% of the participants indicated rare online shopping behaviour, while 45.7% reported occasionally shopping. These findings suggest that although many respondents utilize e-commerce platforms, their shopping activities are not characterized by high frequency. Conversely, a minor percentage of approximately 9.7% indicated regular online shopping habits. This observation implies that while e-commerce enjoys popularity among the respondents, many of them demonstrate a tendency to make online purchases less frequently, potentially influenced by factors such as financial constraints, necessity of the purchase, or satisfaction with their existing products, prompting them to resort to online shopping only when deemed necessary as illustrated in Table 3.

Factors Influencing User's Adoption and Intention to Purchase Via Social Media

The examination also delineated the determinants impacting the inclination to procure online commodities, unveiling numerous pivotal stimuli among the participants. The most notable stimulus is the testimonials of product reviews, with 41.6% of respondents indicating its significance in swaying their purchasing choices. This significance in purchase choice underscores the importance of peer evaluations and suggestions in shaping consumer conduct on the internet. Discounts or promotional offers also wield influence, with 35.6% of participants identifying them as a driving force for online transactions, emphasizing the allure

of cost-effectiveness and exclusive deals. Convenience emerges as another crucial determinant, cited by 31.8% of respondents, signalling a preference for the simplicity and efficacy of digital retail. Confidence in the reputation of the seller's brand is closely followed, with 29.8% of participants esteeming brand authenticity and dependability. Recommendations from social media influencers also exert an impact, albeit to a lesser degree, swaying 16.1% of respondents.

Furthermore, 16.1% of participants referenced additional determinants not enumerated in the survey, indicating various factors that impact online buying intentions. In sum, these conclusions offer valuable insights into the myriad stimuli steering consumers' choices during online shopping, underscoring the significance of peer endorsements, discounts, convenience, brand integrity, and influencer commendations. Participants highlighted diverse perspectives on how cultural factors influence online shopping decisions, revealing a complex interplay of tradition, societal norms, and technological influence. Cultural and religious beliefs often shape attitudes towards e-commerce, impacting engagement with advertisements and product preferences. For example, participants from Africa and India noted how cultural norms affect their trust in online transactions and their preference for physically examining products before purchase. Additionally, cultural values such as negotiation skills and face-to-face interactions influence online shopping behaviours. Despite the convenience and networking opportunities offered by social media and e-commerce platforms, concerns about security, reliability, and the authenticity of products persist among consumers globally.

Table 4

Factors Influencing User's Adoption and Intention to Purchase Via Social media

S/N	Factors Influencing Intention to Purchase Online Products	No of Participants	Percentage %
1	Product review testimonies	111	41.6
2	Discounts or Promotions	95	35.6
3	Convenience	85	31.8
4	Trust in the Seller's Brand	78	29.8
5	Social Media Influencer's Recommendations	43	16.1
6	Others	43	16.1

Conclusion

The study unveils significant revelations about the determinants impacting the online shopping conduct of international students on platforms such as B2C e-commerce and social media, as well as their educational histories. Crucial determinants like product evaluations, price reductions, convenience, brand reliability, and influencer endorsements substantially shape consumers' inclination to partake in electronic commerce. Additionally, specific product classifications such as attire, tech gadgets, literature, and groceries enjoy popularity among the respondents, reflecting various consumer requirements. Furthermore, the research identifies WhatsApp as the predominantly social media platform the respondents utilize. This analysis also accentuates the prevalent acceptance of digital shopping methodologies among postgraduate and undergraduate students, underscoring the significance of e-commerce in contemporary consumer behaviour. These discoveries provide

valuable perspectives for enterprises and policymakers striving to enhance e-commerce tactics through social media platforms to enhance consumer service capabilities.

Recommendations

Businesses and policymakers can consider the following strategies to enhance e-commerce platforms and cater to diverse shoppers effectively,

1. **Personalized Suggestions:** Implement advanced machine learning and AI algorithms to analyze user preferences and behaviour, providing personalized product recommendations. These suggestions enhance the shopping experience by suggesting items aligned with individual tastes and needs.
2. **Trust and Security:** Ensure robust review systems, secure payment gateways, and transparent communication channels. Building trust through reliable customer feedback mechanisms and safe transaction options fosters confidence among online shoppers.
3. **Education and Empowerment:** Offer educational resources such as online guides and workshops to educate consumers about safe online shopping practices. Empowering users with knowledge helps them navigate e-commerce platforms effectively and make informed purchasing decisions.
4. **Inclusivity:** Design platforms that are accessible and culturally sensitive to a global audience. This global inclusivity includes offering multilingual support, culturally relevant product displays, and inclusive advertising campaigns that resonate with diverse cultural backgrounds.
5. **Continuous Improvement:** Commit resources to ongoing platform enhancements to optimize user experience and stay competitive. Invest in innovative technologies, user interface improvements, and customer-centric features to evolve with changing consumer expectations.
6. **Policy Facilitation:** Advocate for policies that promote e-commerce participation across borders, relaxing restrictions that inhibit international trade due to political reasons. These policies foster a more inclusive and expansive global market, benefiting consumers from regions like Asia and Africa, as well as worldwide.

By implementing these strategies, businesses can create e-commerce platforms that are user-friendly, secure, culturally inclusive, and responsive to diverse consumer needs. Policymakers are crucial in facilitating an environment conducive to international e-commerce growth through supportive regulations and policies. Together, these efforts can significantly enhance the online shopping experience and contribute to a robust global marketplace.

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