Social Support for Social Commerce: An Empirical Study with Trust as a Mediator and Culture as Moderator

Md. Alamgir Hossain[†]

Department of Management, Hajee Mohammad Danesh Science and Technology University, Dinajpur-6720, Bangladesh

Nusrat Jahan

Department of Management Studies, Rabindra University Bangladesh, Sirajgonj-6770, Bangladesh

Minho Kim[†]

Department of International Trade, College of Commerce, Jeonbuk National University, Jeonju-561-756, South Korea

Most. Nirufer Yesmin

Department of Management, Hajee Mohammad Danesh Science and Technology University, Dinajpur-6720, Bangladesh

Raquibul Hasan

Department of International Trade, College of Commerce, Jeonbuk National University, Jeonju-561-756, South Korea

Abstract

Purpose – Social commerce (SC) is the growth of social media highlighting the e-commerce transactions and currently, the greatest challenges of e-commerce have attracted the influence of trust in social commerce intention (SCI). Based on the challenge, the study's purpose is to discover the effect of social support (informational and emotional support) on the SCI. The study also explores the mediation effect of trust and the moderation impact of culture between the USA and Korea.

Design/methodology – This study used a sample of 482 surveys filled out by online shoppers from the US and Korea, two countries with divergent cultural values. Structural equation modelling (SEM) is used to analyze the hypothetical paths. In addition, bootstrapping and multi-group analysis are perform to view mediation and moderation effects respectively.

Findings – The results of our study shows that both informational and emotional support significantly influences trust and SCI. Our results also supports the mediating effect of trust in social support and the moderating effect of culture in forming SCI.

Originality/value – Our empirical results provide important information to businesses formulating cross-cultural SC strategies. This will help SC companies to analyze the aspects of customer trust through social support, which in turn will increase SCI and thereby established a competitive position for SCs. Our results will also be holistic directions for SC vendors in cross-cultural settings, which will offer important social and economic contributions to the sustainable growth of SC's business.

[†] **First author:** shamimru@gmail.com, **Corresponding author:** kimmh@jbnu.ac.kr

1. Introduction

With the help of Web 2.0 infrastructure and its enduring benefits, SC has gained countless attention over the decades from both business and customer perspectives (Qin 2017; Liang et al. 2011). SC is a new manifestation of e-commerce that integrates social technology and encourages social media-supported commercial activities that influence purchase decisions (Chen and Shen, 2015). More than ever, businesses see social media as an e-commerce platform. Statista (2020) found that e-commerce exchanges globally accounted for $3.53 trillion in 2019, with revenues projected to develop to $6.54 trillion in 2022, and in the United States of America (USA) alone revenues were equal to $368.2 billion and projected to reach $600 billion by 2024. In Korea, which is a unique society known for its technological innovation, e-commerce is increasingly social, and e-commerce revenue is expected to generate $106.7 billion in 2024 and grow at a rate of 15% per year. SC makes a significant contribution to these large numbers. Moreover, SC communities have grown increasingly important when customers are made the decisions of purchase, and the number of SC users also growing day by day (Cheng et al., 2020). Indeed, the viral and word-of-mouth marketing capacities embedded in SC websites are the greatest powerful drivers of this explosion. Incentive-driven promotions may also be a significant reason for the popularity of SC (Ng, 2013).

This study is essential because it focuses the current literature on economics-based motivations which explaining the social support and effect of trust for SCI in a cross-cultural setting (e.g., Korea vs. USA). In the current social setting, the suitability of social support in social network sites is an important element that can influence the intentions of SC. Through social network sites, users receive informational and emotional support from their colleague customers and support them in their purchase decisions (Sheikh et al., 2017). Researchers recognize that trust is the main construct in SC (Hajli, 2014), as increasing consumer trust motivates customers to shop online instead of buying physically (Sheikh et al., 2019; Hajli, 2015). SC advancement is consumer trust, which includes how many group members or colleagues trust the views posted by the other group members in a given community (Lal, 2017). At the same time, the exponential growth of the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly changed the everyday lives of millions of people around the world and not only changed the way of life but also the purchasing behavior (Rodrigues, 2020). All countries' governments imposed the restrictions such as quarantine and the climate of uncertainty associated with the pandemic resulted in consumers finding alternative routes to more traditional physical shopping. Therefore, the uncertain environment and increasing acceptance of social network sites have led to the new concept of SC and also increased consumer confidence in the SC platform. This was a key factor in the consolidation of SC, which due to its intrinsic features of being virtual, has become a helpful resource to comply with the precautionary measures recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) and local government guidelines. McKinsey (2020) stated that most countries' people are currently willing to continue their shopping through SC platforms that may stand as a trend after the pandemic situation.

The study objective is to discover the connection between social support (informational and emotional support), trust, and intention to engage in SC from a cross-cultural perspective. Extending these research objectives, the following research questions (RQ) are proposed, (RQ1) does social support positively associate with trust and SCI? (RQ2) how does the mediating effect of trust in social support and the moderating effect of culture is forming SCI? In general, online customers are more probably to resort the SC when they receive social support. Researchers have expended a great deal of effort to uncover the positive association between trust and the intention to involve in SC (Hajli, 2014; Liang et al., 2011). Trust is a

significant element for driving online customer transactions and it is important to ascertain trust from a multi-dimensional aspect in assessing its influence on customer behavior (Lin et al., 2019). Trust in an online society strengthens the interactive relationship between buyer and seller in a manner that is likely to increase SCI, and mediates these relations over a cultural base (Al-Tit et al., 2020; Ng, 2013). Therefore, we hypothesize that there is an important connection between social support, trust, and SCI. We also hypothesize that SCI will be mediated by trust and moderated by culture. To test these hypothesized relationships, we collected survey data from the US and Korea, which are analyzed it using a structural equation model.

This study is organized as follows. First, an overview is given of the conceptual model and literature on the factors that explain social support, trust, and SCI across various cultures. Essentially, this review contributes to the existing literature in different ways. Next, the theoretical development of the hypotheses is presented followed by the methodological design with the data and hypothetical results of the research. Finally, this study's discussion part provides the practical implication and theoretical contribution with the limitation and future study guidelines.

2. Literature review and conceptual research model

2.1. Social Commerce (SC)

SC is a modern trend within e-commerce that involves the dissemination of information about online commercial transactions and actions via social media (Liang et al., 2011). When combined with Web 2.0 technologies and other information system advancements, SC offers new possibilities for businesses to add value through customer-generated text (Hajli, 2014). SC is related to the online platform that applied the social network function to allow consumers to share and obtain reviews, experiences, and information about services or products of a precise provider (Handarkho, 2020; Lal 2017; Farivar et al., 2017). Generally, SC assembles the social experience and transaction-related endeavors, and the main contribution of the social site is to gather the social experience rather than the transaction (Esmaeili and Hashemi, 2019; Ko, 2018). With the emergence of social media, various online platforms and online boards have emerged which provides lively interactions and allows potential shoppers to socialize with each other (Hajli and Sims, 2015). SC incorporates different business functions that facilitate customer assessment before buying, buying decision and post-buying stages (Lin et al., 2017). In particular, SC not only incorporates the buying into social media, but also offers interactions at any stage of buying; pre-buying information searching, recommendations and subsequent evaluation. However, SC is the user-generated content that reinforces the social aspect of the website and empowers consumer intent; currently, the sharing economy and peer-to-peer trading have obtained increasing interest (Birinci et al., 2018). As an SC strategy, the business may develop an online community, and encourage customers to share their experiences, knowledge, or information about the products or services. Businesses may also use popular social media platforms to promote their products or services. These platforms provide customers with interactive communication, information, support, and beneficial relationships through social sharing and shopping, and have become a vital feature of e-commerce (Chen and Shen, 2015; Hajli, 2014). Notably, there is an important association between social support, trust, and SCI across various cultures (Chen and Shen, 2015; Hajli, 2014; Ng, 2013).

2.2. Social Commerce Intentions (SCI)

SCI is a pre-step of social commerce (SC); additionally, the direct outcome of SCI is inextricably related to SC. Hence, this study uses SCI to perceive consumer decision-making, shopping, and information sharing intention in SC. SCI is the continued willingness of consumers to seek and share commercial information from an SC platform (Chen and Shen, 2015). Previous researches have examined several impacting elements of SCI. Hajli and Sims (2015) have offered the SCI model, in which social networks develop social support and provide information to lead customers on the network to develop decisions when consuming (Lee and Chen, 2020). The impact of technological elements focuses on facilitating the SCI, like ratings, reviews, or social media advertising (Li and Ku, 2018). Hossain and Kim (2020) have discovered SCI through usage intention of social media, perceived trust and the dimensions of social capital. Furthermore, Liang et al (2011) noted that "we designed items to assess a user's intention to recommend shopping information and products and the intention to receive shopping information and products on social networking sites", where two different sides of SCI are clearly mentioned, giving shopping information and receiving shopping information. However, the current study adopts SCI as an aggregate of these two forms. This study applied SCI instead of actual SC, because it is hard to measure actual behavior and SCI is a proven to be a rational predictor of actual SC.

2.3. Social Support

Social support is introduced by Cobb (1976, p. 300) as "informational leading to the individual to believe that he is cared for and loved, esteemed, and a member of a network of mutual affinity". Liang et al. (2011) note that social support is taken care of, responded to and helped by individuals in the social group. Social support mostly refers to the attempt and support adopted from the family, friends, communities, and others which can reduce people's anxiety levels during stressful life events (Ao et al., 2020; Ratajska et al., 2020). Social support has several constructs, and it satisfies a person's psychological, physical, and cognitive demands (Huang et al., 2019). In SC, generally complies with two dimensions: informational and emotional (Hu et al. 2019). To increase social support in the pandemic situation of the COVID-19 outbreak, different countries have committed to provides informational and emotional social support (Rubin and Wessely, 2020). Informational social support is connected to the construction of information, suggestions, intentions, and consultation that might be beneficial to the individual, for example, government and pertinent divisions are providing the COVID-19 related information and updates by using different social platforms. On the contrary, emotional social support is an exposure of internal experiences (like understanding, care, and concern), for example, the media reports of medical staff, social workers, and their work to prevent and monitor the COVID-19 epidemic, which increases public conviction and trust levels against the virus (Rubin and Wessely, 2020; Hu et al., 2019). Social support plays a central role in SC and SCI (Liang et al., 2011; Chen and Shen, 2015). Therefore, we decided to adopt social support theory to answer our projected research questions, because it has a significant role in stimulating motivations between users and in social media. In general, when a person gets help from other members of the online community to exchange experiences, knowledge, and emotional support with others members, in return, other members will be motivated to return assistance to them (Algharabat and Rana, 2020).

2.4. Trust

Trust has been studied as an essential predictor of customer behavior in the environment of SC. In addition, trust is the confidence, efficiency, and compliance of the transaction shareholders to support their assurance (Shirazi et al., 2020). In the context of online, particularly in trust of SC is always visible how the group members communicate or help each other in the case of any issues and technical malfunctions during the decision-making period. The lack of face-to-face interaction with the seller may accentuate the sense of insecurity and thus the perceived trust of consumers can be decisive to make online transactions (Rodrigues, 2020). Several studies have shown that users' intention to employ in SC sites depends on trust (Shin, 2013; Teh and Ahmed, 2012; Hajli, 2012). Additionally, Hajli (2014) mentioned that trust has an essential influence on the e-commerce sites in the consumer's purchasing intention, and Kim and Park (2013) reported that consumers who trust the SC platforms are more likely to shop on SC sites. Lal (2017) reports that forming and maintaining a good relationship relies on trust, especially in an online context. In SC, individuals normally seek advice from other members of online communities whom they truly trust to provide the appropriate information and shopping experiences (Chen and Shen, 2015). Furthermore, trust has important mediating effects in SC (Al-Tit et al., 2020) and with the direct effect of trust in SC, it has a notable mediating effect between usage intention of social media and SC (Hossain and Kim, 2020).

2.5. Conceptual research model

The literature review mentioned above revealed that social support can be the root cause of trust and SCI (Al-Tit et al., 2020; Chen and Shen, 2015). Based on their arguments, we include informational and emotional social support in our model, corroborating with Liang et al. (2011) who report that informational and emotional supports are the prime dimensions for capturing online social networking. Trust is seen to having a direct impact (Qin, 2017), and mediating impact (Al-Tit et al., 2020) on SCI. Furthermore, we include culture as moderator variable with the suggestions of Ng (2013), who notes that cultural differences have a significant influence on SCI. Therefore, we designed these relationships for proposing a conceptual model shown in Fig. 1.

Fig. 1. Conceptual research model
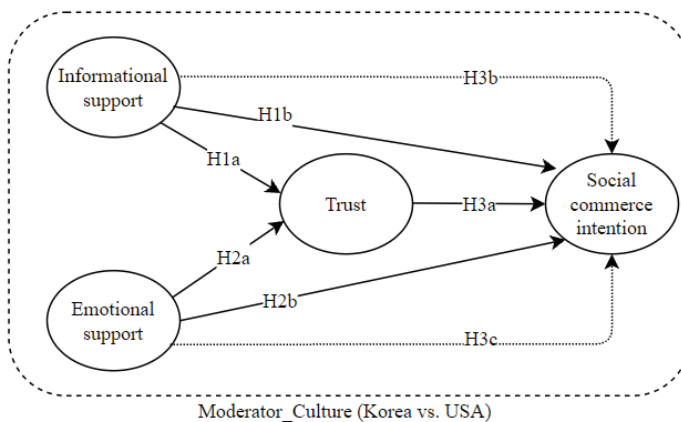
3. Hypothesis Developments

3.1. Nexus Between Informational Support, Trust, and SCI

Previous research shows that there is a significant association between dimensions of social support, trust and SCI. For instance, Liang et al. (2011) argue, customer-to-customer trust is highly dependent on social support theory. Online users participate in SC to gain social support (informational and emotional) (Hajli, 2014). Social support dimensions; informational support and emotional support have been instrumental in building user trust (Zhou, 2017). Algharabat and Rana (2020) argue that social support is highly precedence with social commerce constructs (e.g., forums and comminutes, recommendation and referrals, ratings and reviews) and has a notable impact in building community trust in online. Informational support provides customers with important information, guidance, and advice that assists them in reaching a purchase decision (Liang et al., 2011). Informational support is a significant factor in building trust within online communities (Shanmugam et al., 2016) and it has an essential and direct influence on SCI (Al-Tit et al., 2020). Besides, informational social influence is principally important when a person faces difficulties or simply has no interest in making a decision on their own (Lee et al., 2011). When informational influence is strong, people intend to escape from full deliberation, rather they intend to use read-made recommendations and reviews as proof of truth without question (Hu et al., 2019). They also report that informational social influence and normative social influence are the prime variable for driving impulsive buying behavior. Similarly, Ng (2013) shows, closeness and familiarity directly have a significant influence on SCI. However, neither informational nor emotional support was found to be significant in building trust in social media in a study on drivers of social commerce usage by Ventre et al. (2020). Therefore, we hypothesized that informational support is positively associated with trust (*H1a*) and SCI (*H1b*).

3.2. Nexus Between Emotional Support, Trust, and SCI

Emotional support provides consumers with love, care, empathy, and encouragement and also has an important influence on trust and SCI (Al-Tit et al., 2020; Chen and Shen, 2015). Emotional support has notably contributed to build user trust in online community (Zhou, 2017). In this regard Lin et al. (2018) report that emotional and informational support, which are enhanced by relationship quality, have a noteworthy influence on the behaviors of social media users. Ng (2013) argues that the form of relationship where intimacy is emotional being built by perceived support received from other in a specific context, such as SC. Emotional support refers to the emotional feeling and bond derived from others empathy, encouragement and comfort in the platform (Handarkho, 2020), which makes the individual feel like a part of the community and creat bonding (Chen and Shen, 2015), thereby leading the SCI (Hossain and Kim, 2020). Emotional support is a strikingly important dimension of social support with a substantial positive impact on social sharing and shopping intention via trust (Chen and Shen, 2015; Liang et al., 2011) and is an important antecedent to the intention to include in SC and trust (Al-Tit et al., 2020). Therefore, we hypothesized that emotional support was positively associated with trust (*H2a*) and SCI (*H2b*).

3.3. Nexus Between Trust and SCI

As of the development SC, trust has been considered an important phenomena in the SC discussion, including intention to buy, consumer behavior, decision making etc. Trust is a function of the degree of risk inherent to a particular situation and depends on competence, integrity, and benevolence. Trust has a durable relationship with SCI (Qin, 2017; Shanmugam, 2016), improves customer-seller interactions, enhances commitments, and thus contributes to an SCI (Liang et al., 2011). Community members' interaction increases the trust of members and that facilitates their flow experiences and therefore potentially has an impact on community engagement in terms of affective, cognitive and behavioral aspects (Algharabat and Rana, 2020). Social sharing and shopping intention are highly predicated on trust towards a particular online community and its members (Chen and Shen, 2015). Al-Tit et al. (2020) explain that trust is a significant predictor of SCI and is a notable mediator between informational and emotional support and SCI. Moreover, in the context of SCI, the mediation effect of trust is validated through closeness and familiarity between customers. In this regard, Liang et al. (2011) suggest that the relationship between social support and SCI is mediated by the relationship quality, which is measured by trust, satisfaction and commitment. It is also argued that trust is an important variable in enhancing customer satisfaction and building intention to buy (Shirazi et al., 2020; Shekhar and Jaidev, 2020), and is a significant mediator in building satisfaction (Shirazi et al., 2020). Accordingly, we hypothesized that trust has a positive association with SCI (*H3a*) and a mediating effect on SCI via informational support (*H3b*) and emotional support (*H3c*).

3.4 Collectivistic vs. individualistic culture as moderator

Furthermore, cultural diversity between the US and Korea has resulted in differences in the factors that inform the intention of the customer in each country to engage in online shopping (Choi and Geistfeld, 2004). Kim et al. (2011) note that Korean users put more emphasis on receiving social support from existing relationships, were as the US ones emphasis entertainment in their social network. They also suggest to consider cultural differences in developing and managing social relationships, because US college students' networks in an online social venue are far larger than Korean counterparts. Cultural values affect customer decisions in SC settings, as reflected by the fact that trust is less important in cultures with higher uncertainty avoidance (Ng, 2013). Hossain et al. (2020) argues, the US customer shows a greater value on social support in determining the relationship quality and engaging in SC than Koreans, and suggests value-based aspects such as problem solving, supporting, caring and empathetic stance in individualistic culture. Studies of East Asians reveal that they mostly focus on closeness in forming an SCI with trust being a strong mediator, whereas Latin Americans are much more likely to consider familiarity in forming SCI, with trust being a less important mediator. In building trust, those from collectivistic cultures tend to adhere to the familiarity value, while those from individualistic cultures tend to adhere to the shared value (Qin, 2017). Therefore, we believe that variations in cultural orientation may be reflected in social support, trust and SCI, due to the wider social nature of social media. Accordingly, we hypothesized that whether a culture is collectivistic or individualistic will have a moderating effect on our hypothesized paths (*H4*).

4. Research Methodology

4.1. Research Design

This research is quantitative in nature and collected survey data from the online survey through online questionnaires. The target participants are residents of the US and Korea that are particularly distanced countries in cultures. Initially, we discuss with scholars regarding the appropriateness and wording of the questions, necessary modifications and changes were made accordingly. In particular, we organized a focus group discussion of five researchers including two professors, a doctoral fellow and two survey design specialists. We reworded some wording and alter few questions according to the focus group discussions. We the piloted 22 samples from the two national contexts to ensure that the questionnaire was understood by participants. Minor changes were made after piloting. Finally, the required data was collected from an electronic question in April 2020. To be compatible with the present research, all respondents had to have experience in SC transactions. We distributed the study online via Dooit and Mturk for Korea and USA data respectively. In appreciation of the participants, some financial motivation was provided. We deemed the online survey method is appropriate for data collection as it helps maintain anonymity of the participants.

The data were resolved through a statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) and structural equation modeling (SEM) using the Amos-24 software. SEM was applied because it deals with the authenticity of the reliability and validity of the data. Further, it shows the theoretical relationships between the variables (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988).

4.2. Measurement Development

The measurement questions are all generated from previous pieces of literature (such as Al-Tit et al., 2020; Chen and Shen, 2015; Hajli, 2014; Liang et al., 2011; Sheikh et al., 2019). Based on the existing literature regarding SC, informational and emotional support, and trust, were measured using 20 items, 5 for each. A self-administered questionnaire was used, and an online survey was conducted for data collection. Initially, we asked respondents to answer the question of whether they had any online business or purchase experiences or not. If the answer was yes, they are suggested to fulfill the questionnaires according to their responses on a seven-point Likert scale (7 = strongly agree, 1 = strongly disagree). This study applied multi-item measurement scale in order to ensure the richness of constructs, increased reliability and reduced measurement errors of the questionnaire.

4.3. Data

Online surveys with convenience sampling were used to collect data, and after successful data cleaning and removal of missing values, our final sample size was 482 surveys, collected from the US (232) and Korea (250). Table 1 shows participants profile of our data, gender is mostly equally distributed in the both group. The leading age distribution of Korean participants are 31-40 years (36.4%) and 41-50 years (25.6), while 20-30 years (43.53) and 31-40 (39.22) for the USA samples. The Korean sample shows that they spend around an hour on SNS each day, while the USA samples show around two hours a day. Both samples show that they primarily use Facebook.

Table 1. Participants profile

Characteristics	Korea group	USA group
Gender		
Female	54%	44.4%
Male	46%	55.6%
Age group		
20-30	27.6%	43.53%
31-40	36.4%	39.22%
41-50	25.6%	14.22%
Above 50	11.6%	3.01%
Time spent on SNS per day		
< 30 minutes	39.5%	15.5%
30 min to 1 hour	38.4%	43.1%
1-2 hours	15.2%	32.3%
More	7.2%	9.1%
Mostly used SNS		
Facebook	59.9%	66.4%
Twitter	8.4%	10.3%
Instagram	28.5%	19.4%
Snapchat	0%	2.2%
Others	3.6%	1.7%

Source: survey results.

5. Empirical results

To explore the proposed research model, this paper engaged with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and SEM, which has been extensively applied in theoretical tests and validations. It meaningfully supports to affirm the reliability and validity of the measurement model, as well as to illuminate the theoretic relations with the structural model variables (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988; Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

5.1. Measurement model analysis

The measurement model is examined using Amos-24 in accordance with the total model fit. To calculate the general fit of the measurement model, the analyzes have been involved with the ratio of the x^2/ d.f. = ratio of chi-square / degrees of freedom; CFI = comparative fit index; AGFI = adjusted goodness of fit index; IFI = incremental fit index; and RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation. To obtain a good model fit, the value of x^2/ d.f. must be less than 3, the CFI, AGFI, and IFI must be equal to or more than 0.9 (Bentler, 1990). Moreover, the RMSEA should be equal to or less than 0.08 (Hu and Bentler, 1998). This study model fit outcomes indices (x^2/d.f. = 2.63, CFI = 0.97, AGFI = 0.90, IFI = 0.97 and RMSEA 0.058) show a good model fit (see Table 2). The model fit statistics of the measurement model contended with the standard value and introducing an appropriate fit for the model.

5.2. Reliability and Validity Measurements

Table 2 shows the reliability and validity results of the measurement model. Suggested reliability and validity measures, factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extricated (AVE) are within their acceptable limits of 0.70, 0.70, 0.70, and 0.50 respectively. The AVE square roots are greater than their inter-correlation

value, and model fit indices are within their suggested value. These reliability and validity results express that the measurement model is reliable and valid.

Table 2. Reliability and validity statistics

Constructs	Factor loadings	Alpha	CR	AVE	1	2	3	4
1. Informationalsupport	0.85-0.88	0.90	0.90	0.75	0.83			
2. Emotional support	0.74-0.86	0.85	0.84	0.64	0.77	0.80		
3. Trust	0.78-0.85	0.91	0.90	0.66	0.76	0.78	0.82	
4. Social commerce intention	0.73-0.89	0.92	0.91	0.69	0.70	0.76	0.70	0.83

Notes: 1. Model fit: x^2/d.f.= 2.63, CFI = 0.97, AGFI = 0.90, IFI = 0.97 and RMSEA 0.058.
     2. Bold-italic diagonals are the square root of the AVE value.

5.3. Structural model analysis

After exploring the measurement models, this research performs structural model analysis to evaluate hypothetical relationships between informational support, emotional support, SCI, and trust. Results confirm (shown in Table 3) that informational support has an essential positive influence on trust ($\beta = 0.35$) and SCI ($\beta = 0.20$). The influence of emotional support on trust ($\beta = 0.50$) and SCI ($\beta = 0.34$) is also validated. Consistent with our expectations, trust was determined to be an important element in the formation of SCI ($\beta = 0.29$). By analyzing the bootstrap, we investigate the mediation impact of trust on the intention of SC via informational support ($\beta = 0.31$) and emotional support ($\beta = 0.26$) and found it to be significant.

Table 3. Hypothesis analysis

Paths	Estimate	t-value	Decision
H1a: Informational support _ trust	0.35	4.48***	accept
H1b: Informational support _ social commerce intention	0.20	2.31**	accept
H2a: Emotional support _ trust	0.50	6.16***	accept
H2b: Emotional support _ social commerce intention	0.34	3.78***	accept
H3a: Trust _ social commerce intention	0.29	4.07***	accept
H3b: Informational support _ trust _social commerce intention	0.310***		accept
H3c: Emotional support _ trust _ social commerce intention	0.261***		accept

Note: *** <0.001, ** < 0.05.

5.4. Moderation Model

Furthermore, the current study performs the moderating effect of culture between the US and Korea samples by following the suggestions of Steenkamp and Baugartner (1998), which was examined by a chi-square difference test for moderation analysis. An essential chi-square difference between the constrained and unconstrained models concerning the degree of freedom exposes that the path coefficient among the two groups is statistically different. The result shown in Table 4 reveals that among five direct paths, three paths were different among these two groups. Thus, this research finds a moderation impact of culture in the two country samples in the paths of H1a, H1b, and H2b.

Table 4. Cross-cultural analysis

Paths	US model		Korea model		Chi-square difference		
Paths	Estimate	t-value	Estimate	t-value	p-value	Decision	H4:cultural differences
H1a	0.59	2.67***	0.23	2.67***	**	accept	US > Korea
H1b	0.46	2.35**	0.16	1.95**	**	accept	US > Korea
H2a	0.17	0.78n.s.	0.60	6.08***	n.s.	reject	US = Korea
H2b	0.10	0.53n.s.	0.45	3.75***	**	accept	US > Korea
H3a	0.33	4.16***	0.18	1.70n.s.	n.s	reject	US = Korea

Note: *** <0.001, ** < 0.05, n.s. not significant.

6. Discussion and implications

Having a red-hot issue in online commerce, our study proposes a notable connection between social support (e.g., informational and emotional support), trust, and intention to engage in SC from a cross-national context, thereby empirically validated these perceived relationship by survey data analysis. The results confirm that our research model (e.g., structural model) perfectly explains the proposed relations, particularly it explain 66% of the variance in trust and 58% of the variance in SCI. Additionally, structural model accounts a good model fit. The results of this research are reflected directly or indirectly in the previous studies (Qin, 2017; Al-Tit et al., 2020; Chen and Shen, 2015; Ng, 2013), which concluded that there is a strong and positive association between social support, trust, and SCI. Trust and culture have proven to be important mediators and moderators of SCI, which are also corroborating with earlier studies (Al-Tit et al., 2020; Ng, 2013; Qin, 2017). Therefore, all proposed hypothetical direct paths (H1a, H1b, H2a, H2b, H3a) and indirect paths (H3b, H3c) are accepted, and several moderation on the link of H1a, H1b and H2b accepted. Based on our empirical results, this study reached in several conclusions. First, informational support and emotional support (e.g., social support) are the vital building blocks of trust and SCI, and these social supports can be used to build mutual trust in social media, which in turn is likely to strengthen customer intentions toward SC. When composing whether to create a purchase, social media and blog users seek relevant information, and resources that indicate that problems will be met with care and sympathy, and in return, they share their own experiences. SC businesses should be aware of these issues on online marketing platforms, where customers meet and exchange experiences, comprise trust in the product or service, and ultimately affect SCI.

Second, trust has a significant and direct impact on SCI, which reveals that interpersonal trust as to the competence, benevolence, and integrity of a business, makes the buyer-seller mutually beneficial. Besides, it increases trust in the online platform and offline context that enhances reasonable relationships and stimulates repeat purchases. With this in mind, businesses should design their site carefully to avoid a feeling of 'amateurishness,' set and meet user expectations, and satisfactorily address the common concerns of users.

Third, while social support has a long-established relationship with SCI, trust is found to be an essential mediator between these two factors. Indeed, trust is the basic component of the seller-buyer relationship and the relationship between media users. To enhance social

support, commitment to the e-commerce platform, and group bonding, and strengthen the SCI, a trustworthy and comfortable atmosphere should be encouraged in SC.

Fourth, with respect to the moderation effect of culture, our results show that US customers place greater value on informational support in building trust and forming SCI, and on emotional support in forming SCI than their Korean peers. As the level of individualism increases, individuals spend more time in browsing social media, exploring relevant information and problem-solving options, trusting other consumers and online vendors, and generating SC. With their uncertainty-avoidance tendencies, they tend to become actors in the challenge of building trust in online communities and commerce. In addition, those from individualistic cultures place more value on their feelings, which is associated with the emotional facets of the decision to involve in SC. Businesses with an SC platform should take this information into account. Overall, trust is impacted by culture, and businesses should focus their efforts on building relational support that will increase commitment among, and have reciprocal benefits for customers and sellers.

6.1. Theoretical implications

The present study has originated some important theoretical contributions. First, it increases the existing literature on SCI through testing and validating the proposed model constructs for instance, informational social support, emotional social support, and mediating effect of trust along with a culture as moderator between two distanced culture of Korea and the USA. These integrated research may extend the SC literatures particularly when focusing on cultural differences in recent times.

Second, the research findings express that social support, estimated by emotional and informational support, is an illustrious element in establishing trust and increasing SCI. Moreover, social support provides a supportive environment in which customers are willingly interacting intending to benefit each other and build long-term relationships. In terms of informational support, the SC community is constructed and developed by enhancing commercial knowledge and analyze shopping-related problems, on the contrary, emotional support increases community assurance and members' trust by community sympathy that consequences in fixing dynamic connections in the community.

Third, as a moderator, culture discloses an essential dissimilation between the US and Korea samples. This research reveals that SC is on the rising platform in the US and Korea, whereas Korean customers have less trust on online shopping via social network sites compared to physical shopping of customers, on other side, US customers have some strong effect of social support and also have effective trust on the social shopping and sharing intentions. Since the US is culturally an individualistic country, it is the goal of consumers to accumulate value in their social cooperation on a mutual basis; whereas Korean consumers are already related to sharing values and their focus is moderately on that. From the uncertainty abstinence aspects, US consumers simply focus on trust in SC environments because they have proficient knowledge of information technology and monitored their experiences that are impacted them to superior dependency on SC implications.

Finally, this research describes a modern theoretical framework for future researchers to examine the rising area of SC which is an essential topic of this cross-cultural study and it offers insight into SC that examines the basis of modern emerging marketing theories to predict customer trust. In addition, the study focuses on the significance of social support for SCIs that build trust in an online context and assist customers with their purchasing decisions.

6.2. Managerial implications

In addition to the theoretical contributions and supports to the scholars, the practitioners would be benefited from this research. The contributions of this paper to the managers are several folds; managers can enable to learn from the results of direct and mediating effects simultaneously. First, the present research provides various managerial implications which are explored the benefits of online social support, SCI, and trust for the US and Korean business managers. This research suggested that managers should exhibit their online communities so that consumers can assemble by applying the social network sites to acquire social support. Practitioners should highlight the development of sustaining a reliable and favorable association for enhancing SCI, whereas faithful and enthusiastic services would increase trust amongst consumers online for obtaining satisfaction. For instance practitioners should take affirmative actions on friendly, fare, credible and pleasant environment on the chat board, where each user can share their opinion freely without fear or hesitation. Any kind of content that may stimulate harassment, personal attack or even create controversy should be tracked and removed from the discussion board. In addition, trust building mechanism such as lively interaction, immediate response to any customer query, frequent problem solving, arranging discounts or vouchers, affirmative participation in discussions, etc.

Second, social sharing and shopping intentions are identified as the essential dimensions of SC; consequently, practitioners need adequate deliberation for both of these dimensions. In this regard, managers should incorporate features such that will collect shoppers feedback in a very convenient way so that shoppers do not get irritated, thus providing potentially favorable feedback that ultimately works as a motivational stance for future buyers. In addition, manager should treat the information provider the same as the customer because they helps others to make a purchase decision, or even they can purchase directly from them.

Third, social support with informational and emotional support dimensions affirm the construction of a quality relationship and enhance SCI, so, practitioners should think about it cordially. In this regard, managers should particularly focus on valid, relevant, and credible information that customers are really looking for. In addition, a content filtering program is advisable to remove controversial content and promote personalized content that may emotionally appeal to certain specialized groups.

Fourth, the mediating effects of trust has also some implications, the companies could learn that trust can mediate the stronger connection between social support and SCI. In this regard, it can be noted that although there is a significant contribution of social support on SCI, trust cannot be ignored. Trust not only builds a relationship between seller and buyer but also binds it for the future, thus it never be less prioritized. Rather, trust itself can steer the customer towards shopping behavior and also stimulate the relationship between social supports to SCI. Once there is mutual trust, a sustainable relationship would be expected and a comparative advantage would gained by both parties. Therefore, special attention should be paid to the trust mechanism in SC.

Finally, the researches could additionally be benefited from the cross-cultural context, as it explores the importance of collectivistic and individualistic cultures. Our results show that the moderation effect of culture is essential for both countries but US consumers place greater value than Korean peers. The US customers placed a greater value on informational support for building trust and making purchasing decisions. It reveals that as an individualistic culture, their prime concern is having relevant and valid information, which potentially helps

them make friends and initiate SCI, while Korean customers can somehow relay on their peers, family or social settings in collecting information. Surprisingly, the US customers placed a higher value on emotional support to form SCI, this might happen because the US customer may heavily focused on their own product (e.g., the origin of the production), that emotionally attached them to form SCI. Therefore, the practitioners will receive the guidelines to undertake the cultural backdrop of individualism or collectivism plays essential to conduct in building the trust necessary to form SCI. These online communities assist companies to enhance their relevance, build trust with consumers and stimulate SCI formation. This study empirically proved that each country's company should be careful about the collectivistic or individualistic culture originated by customers and formulate their strategies according to SC.

7. Conclusions

This study's purpose is to explore the association between social support (informational and emotional), trust, and SCI, as well as the mediation and moderation effects of trust and culture. The results suggest that informational and emotional supports are both important predictors of trust and SCI. Trust has an independent and significant mediating impact on SCI, and culture was also shown to be a salient moderator of social support, trust, and SCI. Accordingly, the projected research questions are acknowledged: (RQ1) does social support positively associate with trust and SCI? (RQ2) how does the mediating effect of trust in social support and the moderating effect of culture is forming SCI? Therefore, our research should encourage SC researchers and practitioners to incorporate this model, which could receive into prediction the psychosomatic traits of consumers to increase trust, informational social support, emotional social support, and SCI.

7.1. Limitations and Future Research Scope

Despite the efforts to establish an appropriate research structure, methodology, and data collection, the study has few limitations that may be aimed in future studies; therefore, caution should be advised in interpreting our results. The first viable limitation is that the evaluation was based on the survey data and online questionnaires were accustomed to collect the data; due to some respondent's identification with their community and profession, they have necessitated to entered into the questionnaire, which led to a bias in self-selection that could adopt the exterior validity of the results. Second, this research sample was collected from the cross-sectional data and the evaluation consequences only express the use of online shoppers or SC users in the US and Korea. Future studies should investigate why people from various nations or cultural backgrounds select various social media and whether these people have distinctive motivations for social media require global and multi-website research for additional exploration. Additionally, this research only investigated the benefits of SCI, dimensions of social support, and mediating effects of using trust. Therefore, the third potential limitation is that only informational and emotional supports were involved in this paper, so the end outcome was only illustrated on these two selected forms of support. Thus, we recommend the future researchers test the various dimensions of social support and multiple types of trust in a real social network; additionally, future studies could collect longitudinal data to perceive consumers' trust and engagement. Finally, this study conducted

an empirical validation of the proposed research model. To confirm the research findings, further research may be needed to test this model by using additional factors and dimensions (like social media language preferences, social presence, social capital, and other forms of social support) from different geographical areas.

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