

FACTORS INFLUENCING ONLINE BUYING INTENTION IN SOCIAL COMMERCE: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS HIGHLIGHTING THE ROLE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

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Abstract: The original purpose of social media has evolved to include retail. On a platform called social commerce, users can now engage in both social interaction and the purchase and sale of goods and services. Due to the arrival of Web 2.0 technology and the rising popularity of artificial intelligence, many consumers are choosing this platform to interact as well as do online shopping. The study uses a structured analysis to determine the factors influencing customers' buying intentions in social commerce. Moreover, there has been recent advances in technologies such as Artificial Intelligence which have paved a new way for the organizations to innovate and improve their businesses. Despite this, there is a severe lack of data on how AI influences the realm of social commerce. Thus, the paper also digs into the tangent of Artificial Intelligence in Social Commerce and how it can be used to accelerate the customers' buying intention. Finally, a framework has been proposed that will help future researchers better understand these concepts.

Keywords: Consumer Purchase/Buying Intention, Artificial Intelligence, Social Commerce, Web 2 technology, Social Commerce attributes

Introduction

The growing acceptance of social commerce can be attributed to the convergence of online shopping and social media. The introduction of web 2.0 technologies and the subsequent proliferation of UGC (User Generated Content) marked the beginning of social commerce [1]. According to various researchers, technology has had a significant impact on marketing techniques all over the world. Because of this technology, the internet is now more communicative and interactive. Users may like, share, comment and interact through social media. Users previously only shared information with unknown vendors, but now they may recommend products and services to their friends and family through social sharing [2]. In the current online world, businesses tend to take a proactive strategy rather than just waiting for clients to arrive. Businesses should take the initiative by connecting with their clientele and fostering a sense of community [3] Social commerce has played a critical role in influencing consumers' online purchasing intentions. Intention to buy is a key metric used by marketing managers to inform the development and continuation of products and services. The desire of customers to make a purchase through the website is reflected in online purchase intention [4]. Purchase intentions should be able to predict

what people will do in the future because they let each person take into account the things that are most important to them [5] Consumers' purchase intention depends on a number of factors, some of which have been examined in the past research in relation to Social Commerce

Companies are utilizing a variety of technology, such as artificial intelligence, to better understand customers' preferences and assist them during the purchasing process. The following section will explore these aspects while also taking into account the part that artificial intelligence plays in the process. Because of the availability of massive data, breakthroughs in machine learning techniques and models, cheaper computing hardware prices, and increasing processing power, artificial intelligence (AI) has grown in popularity [6]. It has been suggested that AI will significantly alter the future of marketing [7]

Social Commerce

Businesses are increasingly interested in using social media and its many associated platforms for promotional purposes [8]. Social Commerce may be defined as offering and conducting e-commerce operations and transactions within the framework of social media, particularly social networks [9]. It enables users to post, update, and delete content on social media that may be seen by other users and assist them in making purchases of goods or services. Consumers can communicate online, share knowledge about goods and services, and seek guidance from reliable sources to help them make more informed and precise purchasing decisions [10]. In addition to exploring how customers make purchases via social networking sites, the field of social commerce also examines how this trend influences their choices. It is an interdisciplinary subject that incorporates diverse areas of study, including consumer behavior, artificial intelligence, research modelling, and analytical investigations, among others.

Electronic retailers may have more options thanks to social commerce to enhance consumer connections, foster dialogue and trust [11]. The existence of web 2 technologies and a growing propensity for collaborative communication are the main reasons for this. According to the Statista report of the value of Social Commerce, online transactions via Social Commerce will grow in popularity in the future. According to projections, the value of social commerce sales will be over 2.9 trillion US dollars by 2026 [12].

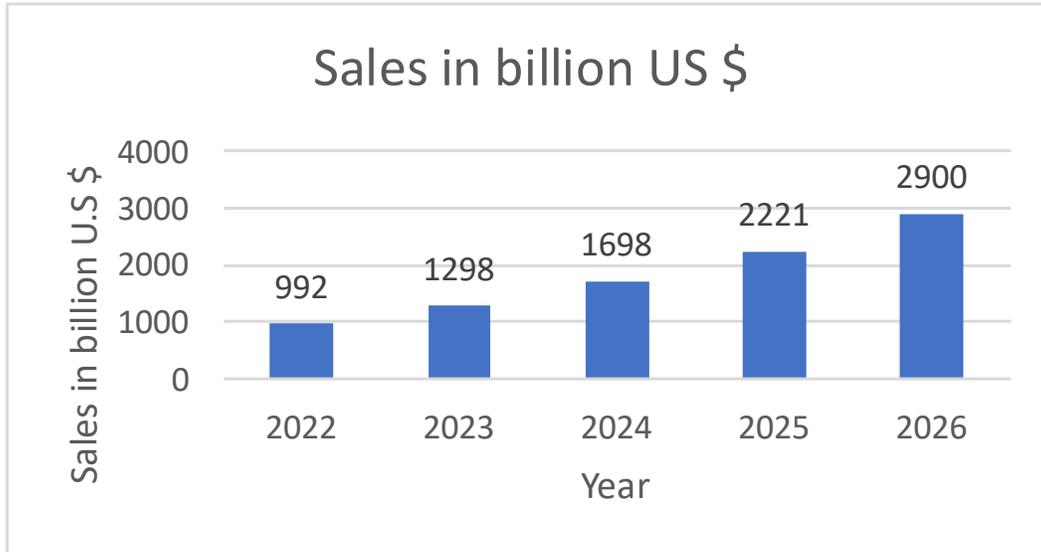


Fig: Forecasted value of social commerce sales worldwide from 2022 to 2026

Factors affecting Consumers buying intention in Social Commerce

Consumer behavior research examines how individuals or groups of consumers act when making purchases of goods or services. This research work seeks to comprehend online consumer behavior when utilizing social media. There are various factors that affect consumers buying intention in social commerce.

I Social commerce design attributes

Website quality

“Customers' perceptions of website quality as 'users' evaluations of a website's features meeting their expectations and reflecting the overall high quality of the website” [13]. It has been shown through various researches that quality and reputation of a website influence the consumers' trust and perception of risk, and ultimately their buying intention [14], [15], [16]. It has also been demonstrated that the quality of a website can influence customer satisfaction, which in turn can affect purchasing intent [17]. System quality, information quality, and service quality make up the three facets of website quality [18].

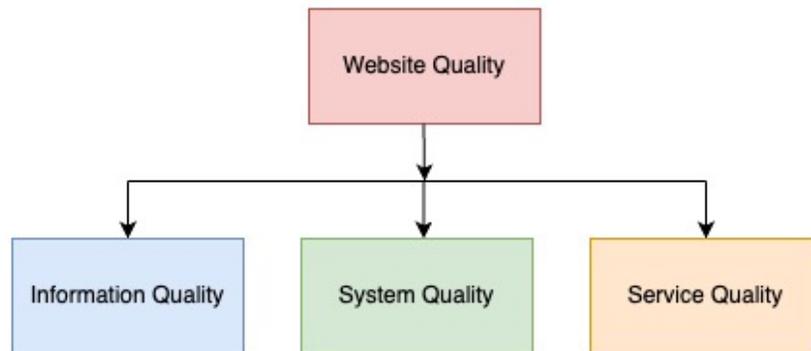


Fig.: The three facets of website quality

Information quality is another facet of website quality. Information Quality takes into account the content of the e-commerce or social media site. If potential customers or suppliers are going to conduct transactions over the internet and often visit a site, the content on that site needs to be customised, exhaustive, relevant, easy to comprehend, and secure [19]. If a web content is personalized, relevant and comes under all the previous categories, the customers perceive a product to be better than the others which generates trust in their minds. Hence Information Quality is an antecedent of trust in social commerce. Getting right information at the right time infuses trust in the customers for the social media platform. Customers assume that if the website is nice, the product will be good as well, and vice versa. Therefore, online vendors should create high-quality websites [20].

The system quality of websites is the total aggregate of consumer perceptions regarding website accessibility, adaptability, and response time. The client feels satisfied and trustworthy if the system is available when needed and responds quickly to end users. The system quality of websites is the total aggregate of consumer perceptions regarding website accessibility, adaptability, and response time. The client feels satisfied and trustworthy if the system is available when needed and responds quickly to end users. This trust ultimately increases the consumer buying intention in Social Commerce [21]. This trust ultimately increases the consumer buying intention in Social Commerce. Customers are extremely particular about the readability and navigational simplicity of a website. A website's system quality can be determined specifically by its search skills, responsiveness, and multi-media ability [22].

Customer service quality is how much the customer values the help and services that the seller gives [23]. When faced with uncertainty, customers may try to lessen that uncertainty by checking out the company's social media pages or getting in touch with the seller directly via phone, email, instant chat, or direct messaging to learn more about the product and other services. Thus, the degree of certainty felt by the consumer is influenced greatly by the quality of the service provided [24]. Since the purpose of social commerce websites is to act as a marketplace for buyers and sellers, they must promptly respond to requests from customers for cancellation or refunds [25]. The superior quality of website services can boost user satisfaction and likelihood of continued use [26].

Usability

The concept of web usability is defined by ISO(1998) as the concept that focuses on internet use. Its purpose is to ensure that the experience is efficient, effective, and satisfying [27]. According to [28] usability involves perceived simplicity, readability, consistency, learnability, interaction, navigability, content relevancy, supportability, credibility, and telepresence. Usability has different meanings according to different researchers. Making a website simple to navigate and utilise is part of it [29]. It also signifies making content easily understandable [30]. Participation intensity, i.e. to encourage frequent and continuing participation can be termed as usability [31].

Perceived Playfulness

Perceived playfulness is defined as “the perception that the activity of using a particular system is pleasurable in and of itself, regardless of any performance consequences resulting from system

use” [32]. The effect of playfulness or fun on customer behaviour has been studied extensively. An example of a specific hedonic experience is perceived playfulness, which is the enjoyment and pleasure that occur from utilising a product [33]. Playfulness is strengthened if the experience of use validates the desired pleasurable emotion; if not, such enjoyment is diminished or lost [34].

II Social Commerce platform attributes

Perceived Interactivity

The development of relationships is very important in social commerce communities. Interactivity is one such attribute that develops relationships [35]. Interactivity allows for better sharing of information among the customers [36]. There may be consumer-seller interaction as well as consumer-consumer interaction [37]. As a consequence of interacting with other users and the company, consumers become emotionally and financially invested in the e-commerce website [38]. Studies have shown that interactivity affects trust which ultimately increases the buying intention of the consumers [39]. But it's crucial to understand that social commerce websites vary in their support for user interaction and social transparency [40].

Perceived Personalization

“Perceived personalization in social commerce implies that content on social media will effectively articulate a customer’s personal preferences and needs” [41]. Personalization is a customer-specific marketing strategy which has gained increased prevalence in the social commerce era. Marketers have become all the more alert in providing the customers what they need. For e.g. If a user opens a social media site and is greeted with his/her name and gets recommendations according to his/her purchase history, he/she feels a sense of connection with the site and eventually buys from that particular online place.

Hence, based on the search history, likes and dislikes of a customer, they make use of personalized content in order to increase commerce. It may be observed that whenever one searches for a particular product or service online, similar recommendations are present in the social media sites which is nothing but personalization of content which creates a motivating environment for the customer. “In social commerce, personalization strategies can provide users with tailored product or service information in line with their needs, preferences, and social habits” [42]. This provides a better shopping experience for the customers and ultimately assists in purchasing decisions.

Perceived Personalization not only helps in better business but also helps in keeping the consumers fixed to a particular social networking site. There are “n” number of social media sites that provide good information quality with good quality products, but what differentiates the leading ones with those left behind is the art of personalization. This is an era of personalization and only those sites will persist which have greater personalization features.

The following report by McKinsey shows various statistical inputs on personalization [43].

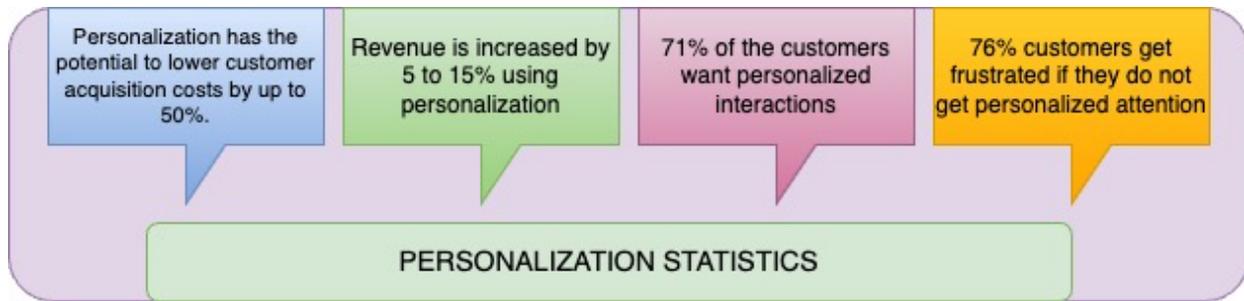


Fig: McKinsey report on personalization

Perceived Sociability

“Sociability is frequently seen as a characteristic of the environment that promotes online social interaction” [44]. In social commerce, customers interact with one another through recommendations and reviews of products and services from people who share their interests [45]. Customers develop online identities and networks through interactions in order to reap the psychological and emotional benefits of belonging to a community. Perceived sociability convinces customers that they are cared for, valued, and assisted by other customers in their social network, thereby satisfying their need for social support [46].

Perceived Interactivity, Perceived Personalization and Perceived sociability make up for the Social Commerce platform attributes [47].

III Social Commerce Social Attributes

Relationship Quality

The intensity and tightness of a connection are what referred to as relationship qualities [48]. The communication between consumer and the business depends on the relationship between them [49]. The primary relationship quality dimensions that influence s-commerce intent are commitment, satisfaction, and trust [50]. This relationship helps build trust among the consumers [51]. In order to increase s-commerce intent, professionals must concentrate on how to build and maintain reliable and mutually beneficial relationships [52].

Social Support

Social support is the feeling that one is part of a community of people who care about them and who are willing to help them out when they need it [53]. Social support in social commerce focuses on providing both informational and emotional assistance. Informational support is a mental feeling that comes from the content of tips, advice, or knowledge that can help solve problems [54]. On the other hand, emotional support refers to situations that are influenced by emotional considerations such as care, compassion, and empathy [55]. Stronger social support leads to more mutual understanding and warmth in the relationship which inspires customers to interact with one another [56]. Greater social support facilitates relationship understanding and closeness which ultimately increases relationship quality [57]. Social network connections strongly influence purchase intention [58].

IV Social Commerce Community attributes

Forums and Communities

Forums and communities are helpful social media tools for social commerce because they provide a moderated environment centred on a specific theme, task, or category, all of which improve product discovery, selection, and referrals [59]. These forums and communities are of great importance to the businesses which allow the users to generate content about a product/service [60]. The communities are responsible for establishing trust in the minds of the consumers which ultimately develops buying intention [61], [62]. Moreover, these communities are the primary forces behind the shift from ecommerce to social commerce [63].

Ratings and Reviews

Reviews and ratings are unique social commerce tools that enable people to communicate about products and influence each other's decisions based on their own opinions and experiences [64]. Customer reviews posted on various social media platforms may have an effect on the image and reputation of service providers [65]. From a consumer's standpoint, the word of independent users and actual customers on social media is more legitimate as well as helpful when making a purchase decision [66]. The following figure shows a view of the respondents regarding ratings and reviews [67].



Fig: Respondents views on ratings and reviews

Recommendations and Referrals

Consumers in the online environment have a greater inclination towards recommendation of others while purchasing online. This may be because of the intangible nature of social commerce [68]. This factor serves an important role in social commerce intentions [69]. In an online setting, the absence of physical pre-purchase physical interaction is a big barrier, reflecting the importance of the recommendations dimension [70]. So, to increase social commerce intentions, online sellers can encourage customers to socialise and share their product-related experiences via various social platforms [71].

Trust

Trust refers to “confidence in the ability and willingness of an opponent to establish and maintain a faithful business relationship and the reliability of an opponent's promises or appointments” [72]. Trust is a major factor which influences consumer decision in social commerce. The degree of success of an online business depends majorly on how well the business can infuse trust in the

minds of their customers. Trust may be classified into two categories: “trusting beliefs and trusting intentions” [73]. Trusting belief signifies that if a customer has confidence in an e-business’s credibility, he/she would buy from that particular online place. Trusting intention signifies the willingness of a customer to engage in a buyer-seller relationship. Trust is known to be built through social interactions. This means when consumer(s) interacts with friends, family and others about a particular product or service, it helps in building trust and going forward with the purchase. It can be seen practically that when people hear good about a particular product from their friends or family, it ultimately affects their purchasing decisions.

Trust can also be understood with respect to the online transactions while doing e-business. If there is trust in consumers’ minds, only then they will purchase online. Due to cyber-crimes, there is still hesitation in the minds of the consumers while making payments. There needs to be trust in the minds of the consumers for a particular site as well as in case of making payments online.

Just like consumers tend to buy more from a reputed firm in an offline store, a social media sites reputation greatly effects whether a customer will buy the product online or not. This is because there is lesser risk while doing online transactions. It can be practically seen that a person will have greater confidence in buying from social sites such as Instagram or Facebook, which has a higher reputation than any other non-reputed sites. Larger organizations are more trusted by the consumers than the smaller ones. This is because larger firms have more resources which help them strengthen their website and the overall design. “In s-commerce, large firms are much more likely than small and medium-sized ones to provide consumers with a diverse range of products and services through well-organized websites” [74].

Role of Artificial Intelligence in Social Commerce

I Artificial Intelligence and Website Quality

With the aid of Artificial Intelligence, it is possible to collect a vast array of information and data in order to provide the best possible services to potential clients [75]. Information quality of social networking sites may be increased by providing right information at the right time, completeness and timeliness of the information, having feedback facilities so that consumers may check the feedback by other consumers about a particular product or service and providing them with access security, i.e. their data is safe and cannot be leaked. Websites now have recommendation engines that provide relevant ideas based on an AI algorithm that predicts which products are appealing to a consumer and places them on a personal page, facilitating users in quickly discovering the product [76]. Software that uses AI can spot scams that might happen when doing business online. So, it helps create a safer and more secure platform, which builds customer trust [77].

II Artificial Intelligence and Usability/Interactivity

Artificial Intelligence is quite often used with regards to the usability factor. Image search is one such element of AI which allows shoppers to find what they're looking for without having to type anything (through images) [78]. There are certain prediction algorithms of AI that can be used to overcome queries and concerns of the customers which are known as emotion AI [79]. AI can be used to extract good feedback in order to recover from a bad service feedback [80]. Artificial Intelligence is quite often used for better service quality with the help of Chatbots. By boosting

happiness, increasing connections, tailoring help, and offering recovery in the event of service failures, AI has the potential to take the reins in customer service and support [81]. Chatbots are the type of Artificial Intelligence assistant used in various e-commerce sites in order to enhance interactivity. Using a natural language processing system, this chatbot's main purpose is to automatically respond to customer queries, respond to basic voice commands, and provide product recommendations [82].

III Artificial Intelligence and Personalization

The incorporation of artificial intelligence (AI) acts as a crucial innovation tool for personalization and customization of products to satisfy specific customer needs [83]. Artificial intelligence enables e-commerce to generate novel concepts for satisfying consumers' requirements and to adapt to their evolving preferences and preferences [84]. The "recommended for you" sections of popular websites like Amazon, Pandora, and Netflix are prime instances of digital customisation [85]. E-commerce saw a surge in both customer retention and traffic thanks to the recommendation system [86].

IV Artificial Intelligence and Ratings and Reviews

Artificial Intelligence's sentimental analysis employs methods to assist businesses in evaluating the significance of online content and developing strategies to increase customer loyalty [87]. Sentimental analysis is an automated process that helps consumers extract emotions from their online content by processing unstructured data and developing models to extract information from it [88].

V Artificial Intelligence and Playfulness

There has been great innovations while enhancing the playfulness of a social commerce site using AI. One such application is of Augmented Reality Interactive technology. This technology enables online shoppers to have an offline store like experience which will guide customers in their online buying process. Nykaa's "Modiface" is a great example of such a technology, since it allows online beauty customers to virtually try on several hues of makeup before making a purchase [89].

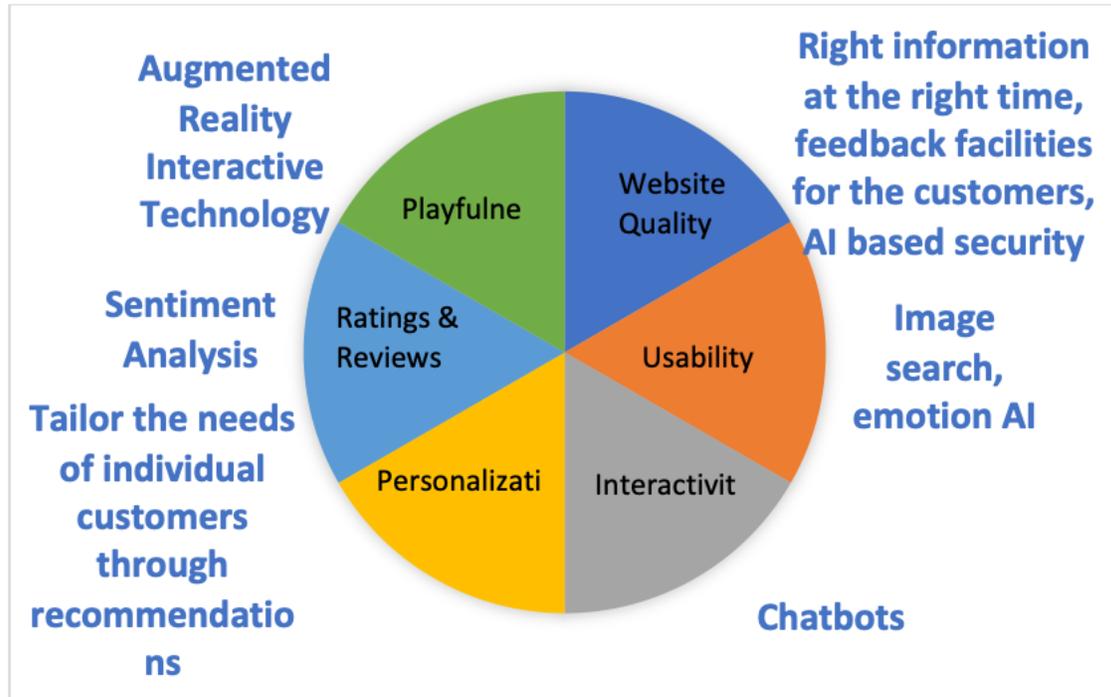


Fig : AI Application in Social Commerce

Proposed framework

After the extensive literature review, the researcher provides the following framework showcasing all the factors affecting consumers buying intention and the role of Artificial Intelligence in social commerce.

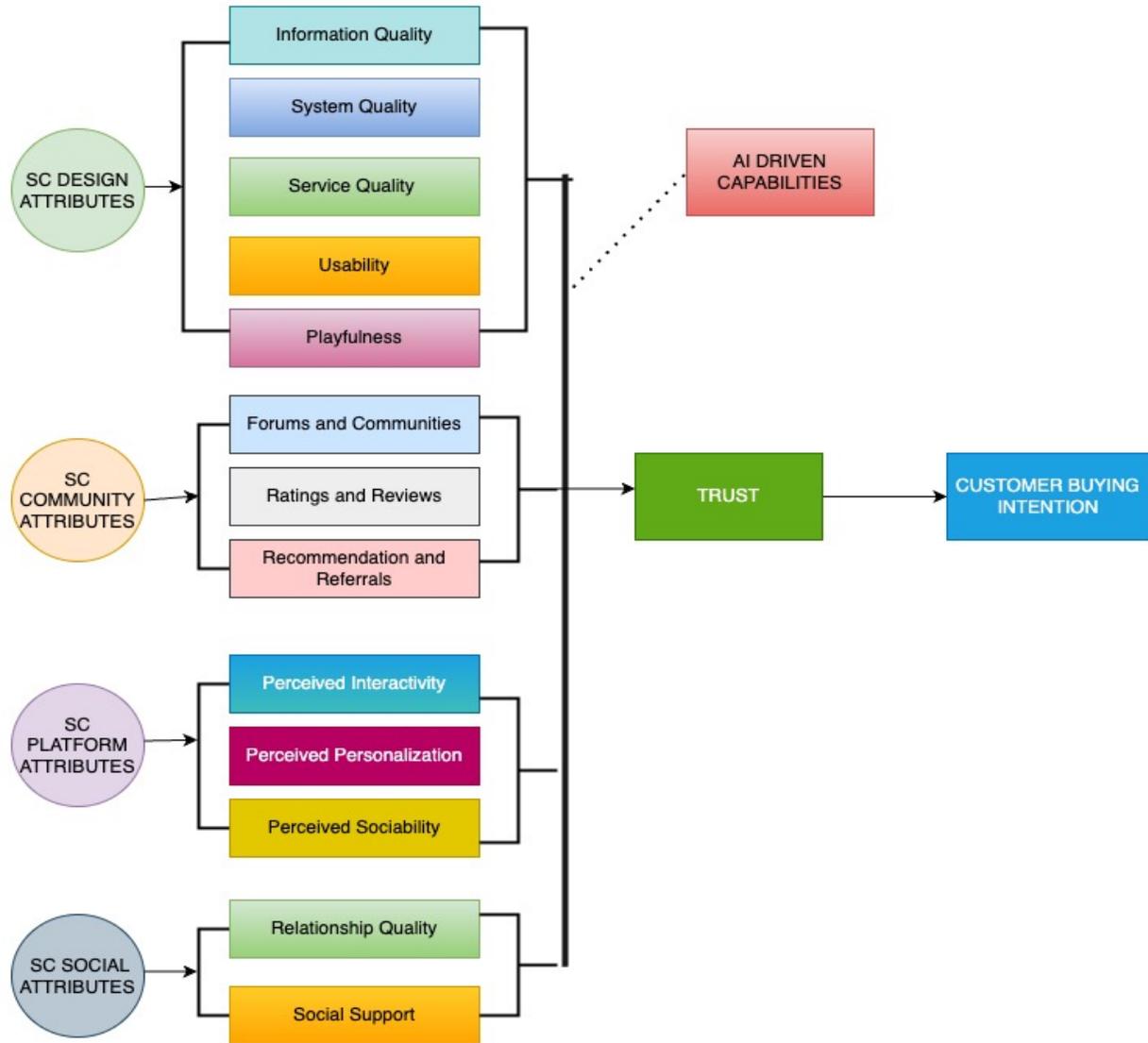


Fig: Proposed Framework for consumers buying intention

Conclusion and Recommendations

This research paper gives a comprehensive view of social commerce factors which have been segregated into four broad categories. These categories are a combination of technical and social characteristics. All these factors contribute to effecting the customer’s buying intention. It must be noted that trust acts as a mediating factor. However, artificial intelligence has a smaller impact on social characteristics than on technical characteristics. Website quality and perceived personalization are the two primary areas in which artificial intelligence is most evident with respect to Social Commerce.

The future scope of this study may include considering how the social aspects of Social Commerce such as sociability and relationship quality can be enhanced by using Artificial Intelligence. The use of AI in social commerce is an intriguing area of study that has the potential to benefit both academics and businesses by fostering closer ties with customers.

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