

# Social Commerce: Consumer Attitudes & Trends

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## Conceptualizing Attitudes Toward Social Commerce

Attitudes toward social commerce represent a complex psychological construct reflecting an individual's overall evaluation--whether favorable or unfavorable--of engaging in purchasing, selling, or information gathering activities mediated through social media platforms. Unlike traditional e-commerce, social commerce leverages the interactive features inherent in social networking sites, integrating transactional capabilities directly into the social environment. This integration fundamentally alters the consumer experience, introducing elements of peer influence, shared knowledge, and direct communication with vendors and fellow consumers. Therefore, an individual's attitude is not merely directed at the transaction itself, but encompasses the entire socio-technical ecosystem, including the platform's usability, perceived security, and the quality of social interactions embedded within the shopping journey. A positive attitude is crucial, acting as a primary precursor to intention and actual adoption behavior, driving the sustained success of platforms like Instagram Shopping, Facebook Marketplace, and live stream selling features.

Defining this attitude requires careful consideration of its multi-dimensional nature, distinguishing it from general attitudes toward technology adoption or traditional online shopping. Specifically, attitudes toward social commerce often capture the perceived utility of the social features--such as the ability to read user-generated content, receive personalized recommendations from friends, or participate in group buying dynamics--in enhancing the shopping process. Scholars frequently employ the tripartite model of attitudes, suggesting that the overall evaluation is synthesized from **cognitive** (beliefs about features and outcomes), **affective** (feelings and emotions generated by the experience), and **conative** (behavioral intentions related to use) components. Understanding the relative weight of these components is vital for businesses seeking to optimize their social commerce strategies, recognizing that emotional appeal and community belonging might outweigh purely rational cognitive assessments of product features or price in this unique environment.

Furthermore, the conceptualization must account for the dynamic evolution of social commerce technologies. As platforms introduce new features--such as augmented reality try-ons, decentralized blockchain verification, or enhanced personalization algorithms--the object of the attitude shifts, necessitating ongoing research into how consumers adapt their evaluations. The attitude structure is highly sensitive to external factors, including media coverage, regulatory changes regarding data privacy, and the prevailing societal norms surrounding digital consumption. Consequently, maintaining a favorable attitude requires platforms not only to provide seamless transactional functionality but also to actively manage the social environment, ensuring authenticity, minimizing spam, and fostering a sense of community trust that reinforces positive cognitive and affective evaluations among users.

## Theoretical Foundations of Social Commerce Attitudes

The investigation into attitudes toward social commerce is heavily anchored in established theoretical frameworks borrowed from information systems, psychology, and consumer behavior. Most prominently, the **Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)** and its extensions serve as foundational structures, positing that attitudes are primarily driven by two core beliefs: **Perceived Usefulness (PU)** and **Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU)**. In the social commerce context, PU relates to the degree to which a user believes that using the social platform for shopping will enhance their performance or enjoyment, perhaps through access to unique products or better information. PEOU, conversely, addresses the belief that interacting with the platform's shopping features will be free of effort, including navigation, checkout processes, and interaction with chatbots or sellers. The stronger the perception of both utility and simplicity, the more favorable the resulting attitude toward the adoption of social commerce practices.

Beyond TAM, the **Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)** provides a crucial expansion, integrating social factors that are particularly salient in the social commerce domain. TPB suggests that attitudes combine with **subjective norms** (perceived social pressure to engage in the behavior) and **perceived behavioral control** (the ease or difficulty of performing the behavior) to predict behavioral intention. Subjective norms become exceptionally powerful in social commerce, as recommendations, endorsements, and shared purchases by friends or influential figures directly shape an individual's perception of what constitutes appropriate and desirable shopping behavior. This integration highlights that social commerce attitudes are inherently socialized, deeply embedded within the user's online network and influenced by the consensus and opinions expressed within their digital community, often overriding individual rational assessments.

Other relevant theories include the **Diffusion of Innovation (DOI)** theory, which explains the rate at which social commerce is adopted based on perceived characteristics such as relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability. For early adopters, attitudes are strongly influenced by the novelty and perceived relative advantage over traditional e-commerce. Furthermore, the **Social Exchange Theory (SET)** is often applied to understand the balance of costs (e.g., privacy risk, time investment) and benefits (e.g., social rewards, personalized deals) associated with participating in social commerce, suggesting that positive attitudes emerge when the perceived benefits significantly outweigh the perceived costs, thereby ensuring a mutually beneficial relationship between the consumer, the seller, and the platform that encourages continued engagement.

## Key Antecedents Shaping Social Commerce Attitudes

A multitude of factors, both intrinsic and extrinsic, contribute to the formation and modification of attitudes toward social commerce. Intrinsic factors often relate to the user's psychological

disposition, such as their level of **Innovativeness**, their inherent need for social interaction, and their general propensity for online shopping. Users who are highly innovative are often the first to develop positive attitudes, driven by curiosity and a desire to experiment with new retail formats. Similarly, individuals with a strong need for relatedness may find the communal aspects of social commerce highly appealing, leading to favorable affective evaluations of the platform, as the experience fulfills psychological needs extending beyond mere transaction completion.

Extrinsic antecedents are typically categorized into platform-related characteristics, vendor characteristics, and social environmental factors. Platform characteristics include features such as **system quality** (speed, reliability), **information quality** (accuracy, relevance of product data), and **service quality** (responsiveness of customer support). High quality in these areas directly enhances the perceived usefulness and ease of use, which, in turn, strengthens positive attitudes. Conversely, platforms plagued by broken links, confusing interfaces, or unreliable payment gateways quickly foster negative cognitive evaluations, regardless of the underlying social benefits, creating friction that outweighs the potential gains of social interaction.

Crucially, the perceived characteristics of the products and vendors play a significant role. Attitudes are more favorable when consumers perceive the products sold via social channels to be unique, exclusive, or offered at a significant value, justifying the shift away from established retail methods. For vendors, characteristics like **reputation**, perceived expertise, and responsiveness are paramount. A vendor who actively engages with user comments, provides transparent information, and quickly resolves issues fosters trust and reduces perceived risk, reinforcing a positive attitude toward engaging in transactions facilitated by that specific social commerce ecosystem. The combination of high platform quality and trustworthy vendors creates a synergistic effect, maximizing the likelihood of a strong, positive and enduring attitude.

## The Critical Role of Trust and Risk Perception

In the context of social commerce, trust is perhaps the single most influential determinant of positive attitudes and subsequent behavioral intentions. Trust operates on multiple levels: **trust in the platform** (e.g., security features, data handling), **trust in the vendor** (e.g., reliability, fulfillment capability), and **trust in the community or influencers** (e.g., authenticity of reviews, honesty of recommendations). Because social commerce often involves transactions with less formalized sellers or relies heavily on user-generated content, the level of perceived uncertainty and risk is inherently higher than in established e-commerce environments, requiring higher levels of trust to initiate behavior.

Perceived risk encompasses several dimensions, including financial risk (potential for monetary loss), performance risk (product failure or dissatisfaction), and perhaps most critically in this domain, **privacy risk**. Users are acutely aware that their shopping activity is intertwined with their

social identity, raising concerns about data sharing, targeted advertising intrusion, and the potential misuse of personal information collected during the transaction process. When perceived risk is high, it acts as a powerful inhibitor, leading to cautious or negative attitudes, even if the perceived usefulness of the platform remains high. Platforms must actively invest in signals of trustworthiness, such as robust data encryption, clear privacy policies, and verified seller badges, to mitigate these risks and alleviate consumer anxieties regarding data security.

Conversely, trust serves as a primary mechanism for risk reduction. When consumers trust the platform and the sellers, they are more willing to overlook minor inconveniences or uncertainties. This trust is often built not through formal contracts, but through repeated positive interactions and the vicarious experiences shared by peers. **Social proof**--the evidence of many others successfully using the platform--is a potent trust builder, transforming skepticism into acceptance. Therefore, cultivating a positive attitude often necessitates prioritizing the establishment of robust, multi-layered trust mechanisms that reassure the consumer about the security and reliability of the entire social commerce ecosystem, thereby lowering the psychological barrier to transaction completion.

## Behavioral Consequences of Positive Attitudes

A positive attitude toward social commerce is not merely an academic measure; it is a critical psychological state that drives tangible behavioral outcomes essential for the platform's commercial success. The most immediate and widely studied consequence is the **Intention to Purchase**. Users who hold favorable attitudes are significantly more likely to express an intent to buy products or services through the social platform, serving as the direct link between psychological evaluation and economic activity. This intention often transitions directly into actual usage behavior, including initiating transactions, participating in group deals, or engaging with live shopping streams, establishing the platform as a viable retail channel.

Beyond immediate purchasing, positive attitudes foster long-term loyalty and sustained engagement. Users with favorable evaluations are more likely to exhibit **Repurchase Intention** and become habitual consumers within the social commerce environment. This loyalty is often amplified by the social nature of the platforms; continuous engagement strengthens community ties, making the user less likely to switch to competing platforms that lack the established social network and shared history. Furthermore, positive attitudes contribute to a higher willingness to share personal data, provided the user perceives a fair exchange of value, facilitating better personalization and targeted offerings which further reinforce the positive feedback loop between platform utility and user satisfaction.

Perhaps one of the most valuable consequences in the social commerce context is **Word-of-Mouth (WOM)** behavior. A highly satisfied user with a strong positive attitude is significantly more

likely to become an advocate for the platform and the vendors operating within it. This advocacy takes the form of sharing product links, leaving positive reviews, recommending sellers to friends, or creating user-generated content that implicitly or explicitly promotes the platform. This organic WOM marketing is immensely valuable because it bypasses traditional advertising skepticism, leveraging the inherent trust embedded in social networks to attract new users and solidify the attitudes of existing ones, transforming consumers into active participants in the platform's growth trajectory.

## Moderating Effects of Social Influence and Community

Social commerce distinguishes itself from traditional e-commerce primarily through the pervasive influence of social factors, which act as powerful moderators on the formation and translation of attitudes into behavior. **Social influence**, encompassing both informational influence (seeking advice and information from others) and normative influence (conforming to group expectations), significantly shapes how individuals evaluate and adopt social commerce platforms. For example, if a user's close social circle frequently discusses purchases made through a particular social channel, the normative pressure can quickly elevate the individual's positive attitude toward the platform, even if their initial rational assessment was neutral, demonstrating the power of conformity in consumer choices.

The structure and strength of the online community also play a critical moderating role. Active, cohesive communities characterized by high levels of interaction, shared identity, and mutual support tend to generate more robust and widely shared positive attitudes toward the associated commerce activities. Within such communities, the perceived credibility of user-generated content--such as reviews, ratings, and shared experiences--is significantly higher than external marketing communications. The community acts as a reliable filter, reducing information asymmetry and minimizing perceived risk, thereby strengthening the link between a positive attitude and actual purchasing behavior by providing trusted, peer-validated signals.

Furthermore, the role of **Influencers and Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs)** is central to attitude formation. These figures act as powerful social referents, and their endorsements carry significant weight, particularly for products that require subjective evaluation (e.g., fashion, cosmetics). When consumers perceive an influencer as authentic and trustworthy, the recommendation translates directly into a favorable attitude toward the featured product and the platform hosting the interaction. However, the effectiveness of this moderation is fragile; if influencers are perceived as overly commercialized or inauthentic, it can rapidly erode trust and lead to widespread negative attitudes across the consumer base, highlighting the delicate balance required in managing social interactions within a commercial context.

## Measurement and Methodological Challenges

Measuring attitudes toward social commerce accurately presents several methodological challenges due to the complexity and rapidly evolving nature of the domain. Researchers typically rely on psychometric scales, adapting established measures from TAM, TPB, and E-commerce Acceptance models. A core challenge lies in ensuring that the measurement instrument adequately captures the unique social dimensions of the experience, rather than simply measuring standard perceived usefulness or ease of use. Scales must incorporate items related to **social presence**, community trust, perceived enjoyment of social interaction, and the credibility of user-generated content, reflecting the multi-faceted nature of the social commerce evaluation.

A further complexity arises from the need to differentiate attitudes toward the platform itself (e.g., Instagram) versus attitudes toward the commerce activity conducted on that platform. A user might have a highly positive attitude toward Instagram as a social networking tool but a negative attitude toward using it for high-value transactions due to security concerns. Measurement instruments must be carefully designed to isolate the specific object of the attitude under investigation, ensuring conceptual clarity and avoiding conflation between general platform affinity and specific commercial intent. Researchers often employ multi-item scales utilizing Likert formats, ensuring high internal consistency (reliability) and careful validation (validity) against behavioral outcomes like purchase intention or actual usage.

Methodologically, studies often employ structural equation modeling (SEM) to test hypothesized relationships between antecedents (e.g., system quality, social influence), mediating variables (e.g., trust, perceived risk), and the ultimate attitude construct. Longitudinal studies are increasingly necessary to capture the dynamic nature of these attitudes, examining how evaluations change following the introduction of new platform features, exposure to negative social reviews, or shifts in consumer privacy expectations. The cross-sectional nature of much current research provides a snapshot but often fails to illuminate the causal mechanisms and long-term evolution of consumer sentiment toward social commerce, necessitating more robust temporal designs.

## Cross-Cultural Variations in Social Commerce Acceptance

Attitudes toward social commerce are not universally uniform; they exhibit significant variations across different cultural contexts, driven by deep-seated societal values and varying levels of technological maturity. Cultural dimensions, particularly those derived from Hofstede's framework, offer valuable insights into these differences. For instance, in high **Uncertainty Avoidance** cultures, consumers may express less favorable attitudes toward the novelty and inherent risk associated with social commerce, preferring established, formal e-commerce channels with clear guarantees and formalized processes. Conversely, low Uncertainty Avoidance cultures might embrace the experimentation and flexibility offered by these new platforms more readily, viewing

the risk as manageable or exciting.

The dimension of **Individualism versus Collectivism** plays a paramount role. In highly collectivistic societies (often prevalent in Asia, where social commerce models like Pinduoduo thrive), attitudes are strongly influenced by subjective norms and the recommendations of the in-group. The perceived utility of group buying, shared deals, and community validation significantly boosts positive attitudes, as the social benefit reinforces the transactional benefit. In contrast, in more individualistic cultures, attitudes may be driven more by personal cognitive evaluations of convenience and usefulness, with social influence playing a less dominant, though still important, role in the decision matrix.

Furthermore, infrastructural differences and regulatory environments impact attitudes. In markets where mobile penetration is high and internet infrastructure is robust, attitudes toward mobile-centric social commerce are generally more positive, reflecting higher perceived ease of use and accessibility. Regulatory frameworks concerning data protection and consumer rights also shape risk perception; regions with strict privacy regulations may foster higher trust and, consequently, more favorable attitudes, assuming platforms comply effectively. Understanding these cross-cultural nuances is essential for global platforms, requiring them to tailor their social features, communication strategies, and trust signals to align with local psychological and societal expectations regarding online commercial interaction.