

**A REVIEW OF FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED THE INTENTION OF  
ACCEPTANCE AND USE OF SOCIAL COMMERCE AMONG SMALL  
MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES IN MALAYSIA**

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**Abstract**

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are the backbone of the economic development in Malaysia. The contribution of SMEs to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) keeps increasing each year. Therefore, in order to remain \ and competitive in the market, SMEs have to keep up with the rapid pace of information and communications technology (ICT). The recent emergence of social media has led to many changes in the methods of marketing and buying and selling among consumers and even vendors. These, coupled with the integration of e-commerce and social media, which is known as social commerce (s-commerce), can assist SMEs to grow further. This study will explore the factors that influence the acceptance and use of s-commerce among SMEs in Malaysia based on the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT).

**Keywords:** Social Commerce, E-Commerce, ICT, Adoption of Technology, SMEs, UTAUT.

**Topic Groups:** Entrepreneurship, Social Sciences and Business, Technology and Innovation Management.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Information and communications technology (ICT) is viewed as a long-term investment with the potential to improve the productivity and profitability of a business. According to Wen and King (2008), ICT is an important technology that has been used by organizations, including businesses, to shape the competition within organizations over the last decade.

In a competitive global environment, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) need to launch a strategy in order to survive in commercial industries by taking into account various opportunities from the angle of technology (Papastathopoulos, Anastassopoulos, & Beneki, 2010). One of the main objectives of SMEs is to take advantage of development opportunities in the international market, and that market can be penetrated by means of e-commerce (Koreans & Lin, 2013). The government is also beginning to recognize the importance of SMEs, which are strongly linked to ICT, as their innovativeness and creativity will be evaluated through ICT (Ritchie & Brindley, 2005).

Therefore, it is essential for organizations to continue with their efforts to develop and implement technology by keeping abreast with current technological advancements (Yang, Lee, & Lee, 2007). Companies that have successfully used ICT effectively are said to have a positive strategic advantage that can have an impact on their competitiveness (Raravi, Bagodi, & Mench, 2013).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The Use of ICT**

ICT is a platform for competition in the business world of today. Extraordinary advances in ICT have had a profound impact on the economic activities and work methods of populations throughout the world (Ramlan & Ahmed, 2010; K. S. Tan, Chong, Lin, & Eze, 2009). To succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, all countries are encouraged to develop business ideas based on the needs of the economy and the local community because it is a factor for the birth of ideas for new business opportunities (Barba-sánchez, Martínez-ruiz, & Jiménez-zarco, 2007).

Nowadays, ICT has become a strategic asset that can help improve business processes and alter the functions of the market. Companies that have successfully used ICT effectively are said to have a positive strategic advantage that can have an impact on their competitiveness (Raravi et al., 2013).

However, technical expertise is seen as an obstacle to the use of ICT as it has to be constantly upgraded for a variety of ICT uses including social media and social commerce (s-commerce). The lack of awareness and skills concerning ICT are internal barriers to the use of ICT among SMEs (Bazini, Ph, & Qarri, 2011).

Therefore, to ensure that SMEs are not left behind when it comes to ICT, the latest and appropriate training should be given so that the available ICT tools can be used accordingly. In their study, Shah Alam, Fauzi Mohd Jani, Asiah Omar, Hossain, and Ahsan (2012) suggested that more training in relation to technology and innovation be given to SME executives in Malaysia in order to encourage the use of ICT in business.

There are SMEs that believe that ICT cannot possibly improve their business performance (Middleton & Byus, 2011). Nevertheless, Bressler and Oklahoma (2011) observed that most small business owners are constantly trying to find new ways to increase profits and to remain competitive in the market. Meanwhile, ICT is being emphasised as it is said to provide substantial support in business processes (Hayes, 2012).

### **The Use of E-Commerce**

The use of the internet is one branch in ICT that has greatly helped to expand businesses at the global level (Bazini, Ph, & Qarri, 2011). According to Hashim (2009), ICT, especially e-commerce, is considered to be vital to SMEs, and the government is playing an active role in its development in Malaysia.

According to Jehangir, Dominic, Naseebullah and Khan (2011), the rapidly increasing use of ICT will increase the use of e-commerce in Malaysia but it poses a big challenge to organizations. E-commerce is recognized as a corporate weapon, which, if used properly, will lead to long-term success in terms of profitability and competitive advantage in the market.

However, many SMEs are reluctant to use e-commerce as they are concerned with issues in relation to security and privacy in the use of the internet (Chitura, Mupemhi, Bolongkikit, & Pagar, 2008). It has also been observed that SMEs lack the expertise and staff to handle e-commerce, and this is one of the factors that is obstructing the use of s-commerce among SMEs.

### **SOCIAL COMMERCE**

The growth in the use of the internet nowadays has introduced big changes to the business world because extensive opportunities are available over social media to expand businesses (Erickson, Komaromi, & Unsal, 2010). Social media has greatly altered the attitude of consumers, from one that is passive to one that is active with regard to information, and sometimes it acts as a disseminator of information on social websites (Hajli, 2014). Social media is the new medium of communication between vendors and consumers nowadays, where it has the capacity to increase the competitiveness of a business (Bell & Shirzad, 2013). It was initially developed for users to socialize with their friends, family members or even to increase the number of new contacts, and ultimately it has become the most important marketing platform worldwide. Following the advent of social media, which has become a worldwide, a change is taking place in the use of e-commerce among sellers and even buyers with the emergence of a new mechanism known as social commerce (s-commerce), which is a subset of e-commerce.

S-commerce is a combination of e-commerce and social media (Kim & Park, 2013). It involves interactions between customers and vendors, customers and customers, or even between vendors and vendors, through social media. Smith, Zhao and Alexander (2013) defined s-commerce as e-commerce activities that use social media platforms such as *Facebook* and *Twitter* to promote online purchases.

Online purchases are rapidly becoming the choice of social media users because it is easier for them to obtain information about the product directly from the vendor or even from other users. This proves that the power of word-of-mouth among buyers or even sellers can affect product sales (Baghdadi, 2013).

In s-commerce, consumers are not only engaged in buying and selling activities, but they can also be involved in sharing their experience in using a product (K. F. Hashim, Affendi, Yusof & Rashid, 2012). Therefore, in this context, the role played by customers and also the quality of a product are important because s-commerce can help buyers to make informed decisions prior to a purchase based on information provided by other buyers (Zhou, Zhang, & Zimmermann, 2013). This was supported by Gatautis and Medziausiene (2014) who stated that the s-commerce era is an era where the community determines which products and services should be offered in the future.

Although the revolution that is taking place in s-commerce is regarded as lucrative from a marketing aspect, nevertheless consumers are wary of it as issues of trust and confidence are involved when there is an exchange of money and goods without a face-to-face meeting between the seller and the buyer (Erickson et al., 2010). However, the use of s-commerce among Asian countries, especially in Japan and China, is driven by economic concerns and is not due to the fun of socializing, as is the case in western countries (Wang & Zhang, 2012).

## **FACTORS INFLUENCING THE INTENTION TO USE S-COMMERCE**

### ***Attitude***

The influence of attitude on the intention to implement a particular habit has been widely discussed in behavioural models. Ajzen (2005) defined attitude as an individual's assessment of the impact of implementing a particular behaviour or habit that will result in either a favourable or an unfavourable belief. A favourable assessment will enhance the probability that a behaviour will be performed while an unfavourable assessment will hinder that intention (Ram Al Jaffri, Kamil, & Zainol, 2009).

Based on studies conducted by Fulantelli and Allegra (2003), it was found that SMEs have a very weak positive attitude when it comes to the use of any ICT-related technology in their business because they still have misgivings about the security issues associated with ICT.

It is important to grasp the significance of a new technology in business before it is approved for use. Thus, the attitude and perception of SME managers toward ICT

need to be enhanced so as to diversify activities and to cooperate with various parties through the use of broadband Internet (Bazini et al., 2011).

Yet, in order to generate something dynamic, entrepreneurs should have a positive and innovative attitude towards economic and business development, including the introduction and implementation of new ideas as well as product innovation, process innovation, market innovation and organizational innovation to enable the generation of new products to meet the needs of customers today (Xavier, Vieira, & Rodrigues, 2009)

In studies in relation to s-commerce, most researchers touch on attitude from the perspective of the users, including looking at how their previous experience in using technology has influenced the link between attitude and intention to purchase through s-commerce (S.B. Kim, Sun, & Kim, 2013). In addition, the experience of buying from other users has also been made a basis for users to carry out transactions using s-commerce (K. F. Hashim et al., 2012). The attitude of users towards s-commerce is also often seen from the angle of the user's trust in the seller via the two-way interaction that takes place with the seller (Unsal, Komaromi, & Erickson, 2011).

### ***Self-Efficacy***

Self-efficacy is an individual's belief in his or her own abilities in relation to a matter (Bandura, 1978). The basic principle in the theory of self-efficacy is that the achievements and motivations of individuals are determined by their self-confidence, where individuals are more inclined to engage in activities where they have a high level of self-efficacy compared to other activities. In that context, the aim of this study was to examine the effect of the self-efficacy of SME entrepreneurs on their intention to use s-commerce.

In looking at the relationship between self-efficacy and ICT, Hsu dan Chiu (2004), discovered that self-efficacy is positively linked to the general intent to use the internet, and this is consistent with previous studies which stated that self-efficacy is an important determinant of behavioural intent. Meanwhile, Hocevar et al. (2014) found that the concept of self-efficacy with regard to social media showed that it is a strong predictor of the perception of internet users on the reliability of online information and how online information can be used by them for the confirmation of credibility. The results of the study showed that there is a positive relationship between self-efficacy over social media and the reliability of online information.

In addition, the influence of self-efficacy on the intention of entrepreneurs to use something new in their business was also investigated. In fact, Mohd, Kirana, Kamaruddin, Zainuddin, and Ghazali (2014) made the assumption that individuals who are brave (as well as honest), disciplined and have a high level of self-efficacy have the potential to be innovative and to take risks.

For most models involving the behavioural intent of entrepreneurs, attitude and self-efficacy are the two main components that are often used because these are

capable of influencing the behavioural intent concerned (Fini, Grimaldi, Marzocchi, & Sobrero, 2009 ; Mohd et al., 2014 ; Huang & Liaw, 2005).

### ***Performance Expectancy***

Performance expectancy is defined as the extent to which an individual believes that a system (new technology) that is in use is capable of improving his/her business performance (Venkatesh et al., 2003). The aim of this study was to see the extent of the confidence and belief of SMEs that s-commerce can enhance business performance and whether this can influence the intention of SMEs to use s-commerce.

A study conducted by Salim (2012) in relation to the factors that influence the use of social media in Egypt found that performance expectancy has a great impact on behavioural intent and, at the same time, that there is a significant relationship between the two. A similar finding was obtained in a study on the tendency to use internet marketing among communities in Malaysia and South Korea, where the communities in both countries view performance expectancy as being able to influence the intention of the community to use internet marketing (Koreans & Lin, 2013).

However, Ratten (2013) found that performance expectancy does not affect the behavioural intent of a person, where that person has concluded that consumers will not know the importance of something new until they actually use it.

Generally, however, performance expectancy is a strong predictor of usage and behavioural intent (Venkatesh, Thong, & Xin, 2012; Jeng & Tzeng, 2012; Moghavvemi & Akma Mohd Salleh, 2014). Hence, most of the studies that used performance expectation as a variable found that performance expectancy has a significant impact, influence and relationship with behavioural intent.

### ***Effort Expectancy***

Effort expectancy was earlier defined as the level of ease in using a system (Venkatesh et al., 2003) and was later taken to mean the level of ease in using a technology (Venkatesh, Thong, & Xin, 2012a). Nevertheless, its original meaning remains, namely the extent to which the degree of ease in using a technology or system can influence the behavioural intent of consumers. This was proven in a study by Escobar-Rodríguez and Carvajal-Trujillo (2014), which stated that effort expectancy influenced the intention of consumers in Spain to use websites to purchase cheap flight tickets.

In the development of the s-commerce phenomenon, it has also been found that more and more companies are beginning to assess the possibilities to be gained using s-commerce. Thus, effort expectancy has been found to have a moderate effect on the behavioural intent of a person towards the acceptance of s-commerce (Gatautis & Medziausiene, 2014).

Interestingly, effort expectancy has had a greater impact on the more developed countries. This shows that it is easier for people in developed countries to assess the ease of use of a particular technology (Im, Hong, & Kang, 2011). But in terms of

group purchases, the relationship between effort expectancy and behavioural intent is not important because the websites for group purchases are not much different when it comes to design and usage (Q. Wang, Yang, & Liu, 2012). Nevertheless, for Hamdan, Din, Zuraida and Manaf (2012), effort expectancy will continue to have a significant impact on behavioural intent.

### ***Social Influence***

Social influence is defined as the extent to which an individual feels that he/she needs to use a system based on the responses of other individuals (Venkatesh et al., 2003), and it is a direct determinant of behavioural intent. In the context of this study, social influence is the degree to which SME entrepreneurs consider the customers' belief that they should use s-commerce and benefit from its use.

On the other hand, social influence is not significant for the intention to use internet marketing among Malaysians and South Koreans. In other words, the influence of other people will not affect the intention of consumers to use internet marketing (Koreans & Lin, 2013).

This was supported by the clinical results of a study conducted among physicians in Taiwan, which showed that social influence has no impact on the intention to use a support system. The conclusion that was drawn was that social influence will never be able to influence those who specialize in decision making (Jeng & Tzeng, 2012).

However, according to the founder of the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology, the effect of social influence is most noticeable in the early stages of an individual's experience with technology, and it is more important in the context of compulsory use, more so among older women (Venkatesh et al., 2003).

### ***Facilitating Conditions***

Facilitating conditions is the extent to which an individual believes that the existing organization and technical infrastructures can support the use of a system (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Facilitating conditions are seen as the level where entrepreneurs are confident that their business has the infrastructure and the tools that can be used for s-commerce.

It is said that facilitating conditions will not affect behavioural intent but will have an impact on the use of technology (Venkatesh et al., 2003). The results of a descriptive analysis of facilitating conditions showed that users did not need any help in using Facebook but agreed that they needed the proper equipment to use Facebook, and this was found to be significantly related to the use of social media in Egypt (Salim, 2012).

Meanwhile, a study conducted by San Martín and Herrero (2012) among tourists in rural Spain found that performance expectancy and effort expectancy have an impact on the intention to make purchases online but have no significant impact on social influence and facilitating conditions. This has also been proven in studies in relation to the factors that influence s-commerce in Lithuania, which also found that facilitating conditions do not have much of an impact on the use of s-commerce (Gatautis & Medziausiene, 2014).

However, facilitating conditions still have a significant impact on the online purchase of cheap flight tickets. This means that consumers still need support resources to facilitate their access to the relevant websites (Escobar-Rodríguez & Carvajal-Trujillo, 2014).

## CONCLUSION

The factors that influence the adoption and use of s-commerce, as discussed in this study, are supported by the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT). The factors of attitude and self-efficacy are two variables that have been removed from this theory, but most of the studies related to the intention of SME entrepreneurs to accept a new technology consider attitude and self-efficacy as factors that need to be investigated (Izquierdo & Buelens, 2011; Shinnar, Hsu, & Powell, 2014; S Moghavvemi & Salleh, 2013).

Other than the factors that have been discussed, researchers can use other factors from the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) in future to support the factors that contribute to the acceptance and use of s-commerce among SMEs. In the future, researchers can also study the impact of the use of s-commerce on the business performance and brand performance of SMEs. Thus, it is hoped that the results of discussions in relation to the factors that influence the acceptance and use of s-commerce among SMEs in Malaysia can convince SMEs to consider the use of s-commerce in their business.

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