Social Commerce Design

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INTRODUCTION

The increasing popularity of social media applications, such as blogs, wikis and social networks has created opportunities for developing new business models in electronic commerce (e-commerce). This is commonly equated with the birth of social commerce. In general, social commerce refers to leveraging web 2.0 in e-commerce, particularly core web 2.0 features such as customers generated content and sharing of content. It allows customers to participate actively in the marketing and selling of products in online marketplaces and communities. Within such an environment, customers are able to access to social knowledge and experiences to support them in better understanding their online purchase purposes, and in making more informed and accurate purchase decisions. At the same time, online businesses can capture customers' behaviours, giving them insights into customers' shopping experiences and expectations, and helping them develop successful business strategies. Since such reciprocal advantages have been recognized by business organizations, major web companies such as Amazon.com, Groupon.com and eBay.com started taking advantage of user participation as a way of adding value to commercial services, hence contributing to the rapid proliferation of social commerce.

Even though there is a rapid development of social commerce and its enormous potential, social commerce needs to be explored further. Among them, social commerce design aspect is one of major issues influencing social commerce development. Particularly, online vendors, today, face significant challenges in making their websites socially rich, as well as in developing a variety of social features to accommodate their customers' needs. It can be argued that the lack of understanding of social commerce design issues may obstruct the development of effective and efficient social commerce platforms. Therefore, it is critical to explore social commerce design, offering a systematic understanding of social commerce and its customer-centered design. In response to these challenges, this article primarily describes the design features required for social commerce. More specifically, the objectives of the articles are presented as followed: 1) to better understand the concept of social commerce; 2) to consider what design features need to be addressed in social commerce design.

BACKGROUND

The concept of social commerce was first introduced by Yahoo in 2005. It can be simply defined as word-of-mouth applied to e-commerce or a combination of e-commerce and web 2.0 (Dennison et al. 2009). It can be also explained by a more comprehensive definition where social commerce is a an Internet-based commercial application, leveraging social media and web 2.0 technologies which support social interaction and customer generated content in order to assist customers in their decision making and acquisition of products and services within online marketplaces and communities (Huang and Benyoucef, 2013). However, these are not the only definitions since the term "social commerce" can be explained from marketing, retailing, computer science, sociology and psychology perspectives. For instance, in

marketing, social commerce is about a noticeable trend in online marketplaces where businesses leverage social media or web 2.0 as a direct marketing tool to support customers' decision making processes and buying behavior (Constantinides & Fountain 2008). In computer technology, social commerce can be described as an online mediated application combining web 2.0 technologies, such as Ajax and RSS with interactive platforms, such as social networking sites and content communities in a commercial environment (Lee et al. 2008). With respect to sociology, social commerce is about utilizing web-based social communities by e-commerce companies, focusing on the impact of social influence which shapes the interaction among consumers (Wang & Zhang 2012). In psychology, social commerce is a type of social shopping, where people are affected by salient information cues from people within a networked community when they shop online (Marsden, 2009). Although social commerce has been explained differently, the abovementioned definitions give a broad understanding of its concepts.

From a design point of view, social commerce is mainly developed in two major categories. One is e-commerce on social network platforms; the other is social media applications on e-commerce websites. The essence of social media applications on e-commerce is to support people to connect where they buy, whereas, the key characteristic of e-commerce on social media platforms is to help people buy where they connect. The differences between e-commerce and social commerce can be found in terms of marketing, customer control and system interaction. Specifically, with regards to the marketing paradigm, e-commerce focuses on maximizing shopping efficiency by providing advanced search, product catalogs and one-shop buying. Social commerce however is oriented toward social activities, such as sharing and networking with a secondary attention on shopping. Regarding customer control, customers generally interact with e-commerce websites individually and independently from other customers. Social commerce nevertheless involves real time participation, which empowers customer control and reduces the distance between customers and companies. For system interaction, e-commerce usually provides one-way browsing, where information from customers is rarely sent back to businesses or other customers. Social commerce however provides a more social, interactive, and collaborative experience, where collective intelligence can be aggregated and leveraged for supporting customers' decision making.

E-COMMERCE DESIGN ELEMENTS

Having indicated that social commerce is a combination of e-commerce and web 2.0, a first thing about understanding social commerce design is to separately review the design factors on e-commerce and web 2.0. Regarding e-commerce, as the goal of design is to encourage customer interaction, support customer task performance and provide pleasure experiences, a set of features from customers' perspective, including usability, information quality, website quality, service quality and playfulness for designing effective e-commerce platforms are identified from the fields of Information System and Human Computer Interaction (see Table 1).

Usability refers to the effectiveness, efficiency and satisfaction with which specific customers achieve specific goals in a specific context of use. Since websites serve as the interface to the e-commerce system, usability particularly focuses on ease of use and customer-friendliness (Li & Li 2011). Specifically, the former relates to the degree to which customers perceive that using the particular system can achieve their performance, while the latter is about the perception of aesthetic design in aspects of website interface.

Information quality generally refers to relevance, accuracy, understanding and usefulness of information provided by the e-commerce website (Hasan & Abuelrub, 2011). It plays as a key feature influencing customer satisfaction with and loyalty towards e-commerce. Customers' perception of information

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