

Factors Influencing Purchase Intention on Social Commerce – A Preliminary Study

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Abstract: This preliminary study seeks to explore the factors influencing purchase intention on social commerce platforms among young Portuguese consumers. Understanding these factors is essential, as social commerce continues to grow rapidly, particularly among younger demographics who increasingly rely on social media for purchasing decisions. Portugal serves as an ideal context for this investigation due to the lack of relevant research in social commerce and to its flourishing digital economy and the high social media engagement among its youth population. To gain deeper insights into these consumer behaviours and preferences, a focus group was conducted with nine participants who actively engage with social media platforms, aiming to get insights on the key elements that shape consumer behaviours in online shopping environments. The discussion, recorded in participants' native language, was later transcribed and translated for analysis. Key findings revealed that trust is a critical factor, with participants emphasizing the importance of customer reviews, clear return policies and secure payment options. Additionally, personalised shopping experiences, leveraging social media's customisation capabilities, were highlighted as significant drivers of purchase intention. Participants also suggested that social commerce platforms could boost visibility for small and local businesses through discoverability features. The use of interactive tools, such as live videos, was identified as the main way to build trust and engagement. These insights offer valuable implications for social commerce platforms and sellers aiming to enhance user trust and increase purchase intention. The findings offer valuable insights into consumer behaviour in social commerce, informing platform design strategies to optimize consumer involvement and improve purchase intentions.

Keywords: Social Commerce; Consumer Behaviour; Purchase Intention; Focus Group

1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of social commerce represents a significant transformation in the shopping landscape, essentially changing how consumers engage with brands and make purchase decisions. Defined as the use of social media platforms to facilitate online shopping through various tools—such as product reviews, social shopping features, and influencer marketing—social commerce integrates social interaction with e-commerce (Lin and Wang, 2022). Social media platforms like Facebook, X, and Instagram have gained recognition as highly interactive online platforms in recent years (Lin *et al.*, 2019). And moreover, the extensive integration of Web 2.0 technologies to facilitate online interactions has led to the emergence of social commerce as a popular consumer tool for sharing socially oriented commercial information about goods and services (Hu *et al.*, 2019).

Social commerce platforms offer a unique shopping experience that combines social interactions and entertainment with the convenience of shopping opportunities (Wang and Huang, 2022). A positive online customer shopping experience (OCSE), characterized by elements such as pleasure, addiction, and satisfaction, can contribute to increased customer immersion in the shopping activity. This immersion, as suggested by Anshu *et al.* (2022), can then have a profound influence on customers' online buying behaviours. Research conducted by Barari *et al.* (2020) and Novak *et al.* (2000) supports the notion that a positive OCSE has an enhancing effect on buying behaviours in the online context. With this emergence of social media platforms, technology has transformed the way people shop online, being social commerce an increasingly popular trend (Niemann, 2023).

In recent years, social commerce has emerged as a significant player in the retail landscape, integrating social media platforms with e-commerce activities. In 2024 the market size is expected to hit 1.7 trillion US dollars (\$), which represents a 30.8% increase from the previous year, when social commerce sales worldwide surpassed the \$1 trillion mark for the first time, with a total of \$1.3 trillion (Chevalier, 2023). As more consumers turn to platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok to make purchases, understanding the motivations, behaviours, and concerns of these users is crucial for businesses aiming to optimize their social selling strategies (Doan and Lee, 2023).

However, despite the increasing relevance of social commerce globally, Portugal has seen a significant gap in academic research within this domain, which constitutes a considerable limitation in analyzing and understanding social commerce practices in the Portuguese context.

Addressing this gap is essential for conducting meaningful comparisons with findings from other countries, allowing for a broader understanding of social commerce dynamics (Silveira, 2018). From a global perspective, Europe provides the least amount of academic contributions on social commerce, further complicating cross-cultural comparisons. The biggest amount of academic information is coming from Asia, 77%, and North America, 18%, with Europe only representing 5% of the overall social commerce research (Zhao *et al.*, 2023). To address this limitation, it is crucial to increase the production of research both in Portugal and across Europe, in order to generate reliable data that ensures more accurate and meaningful results for comparative studies (Păuceanu *et al.*, 2023).

While there are numerous valid empirical studies on factors influencing purchases on social commerce (Chun *et al.*, 2023; Doan and Lee, 2023; Hoang and Khoa, 2022; Hyun *et al.*, 2022; Silalahi and Heruwasto, 2022; Tuncer, 2021), there are relatively few qualitative analyses addressing the issue of s-commerce, like the one presented in this article. Which aims to reveal factors influencing the purchase intention on social commerce platforms, serving as a preliminary investigation within the larger research framework.

Businesses looking to thrive in the social commerce landscape must understand these dynamics and tailor their strategies accordingly. By enhancing trust through transparency, leveraging social media features effectively, and focusing on personalized experiences, brands can cultivate stronger connections with consumers. Furthermore, recognizing the ethical and local considerations that influence purchase decisions can position brands favourably in a competitive market.

As social commerce continues to evolve, ongoing research is needed to deepen our understanding of consumer behaviours and preferences. By exploring the nuances of social commerce further, researchers and practitioners alike can develop more effective strategies to engage consumers and drive sales in this rapidly changing environment.

2. Methodology

Given the exploratory nature of this preliminary study, a qualitative approach was considered more suitable for this specific context, given the ability to provide detailed answers (Bernard, 2005; Ghauri and Gronhaug, 2010). Specifically, a focus group method was selected to examine the determinants influencing purchase intention on social commerce. This approach facilitated in-depth exploration by bringing together a group of individuals to discuss a relevant topic of interest (Kotler *et al.*, 2019), in this case, their use of social media.

The focus group, which took place in 2024, had nine participants - six women and three men - that were selected based on their social media usage, which aligns with the recommended group size of six to ten members set by Ghauri and Gronhaug (2010). This sample represented a diverse range of genders, ages, and occupations, and also encompassed varied backgrounds and shopping experiences on social media, enabling a rich, varied exploration of social commerce behaviours. The session took place in the participants' native language, Portuguese, and was subsequently transcribed and translated into English. A rigorous translation process was employed, including back translation to ensure the meaning was preserved across languages, and bilingual experts reviewed the final text to maintain cultural and contextual accuracy. This careful process ensured that both the literal content and intended meaning were faithfully conveyed.

The focus group format encouraged active engagement, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing purchase intentions in social commerce, see *figure 1*. Observing non-verbal cues, such as body language and facial expressions, provided additional depth to the qualitative data collected (Fern, 1982). The discussions, held in a collaborative environment, enabled knowledge-sharing and ultimately enhanced the understanding of participants' experiences and perceptions surrounding social commerce, as well as their attitudes toward future research needs.

The main objective of utilising a focus group approach was to leverage its strengths in interpreting findings from prior studies and generating practical insights (Ghauri and Gronhaug 2010). Furthermore, the focus group was a cost-effective method, enabling efficient qualitative data collection while fostering valuable insights into participants' preferences, behaviours, and challenges associated with social commerce (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2014). The findings revealed both opportunities and challenges within social media shopping, with particular concerns arising around trust issues and the need for personalised experiences as barriers to purchase.

Participants were not compensated for their involvement, and discussions took place in an environment supportive of extensive knowledge-sharing about social media, ultimately contributing to a deeper recognition of the value of further research on this topic.

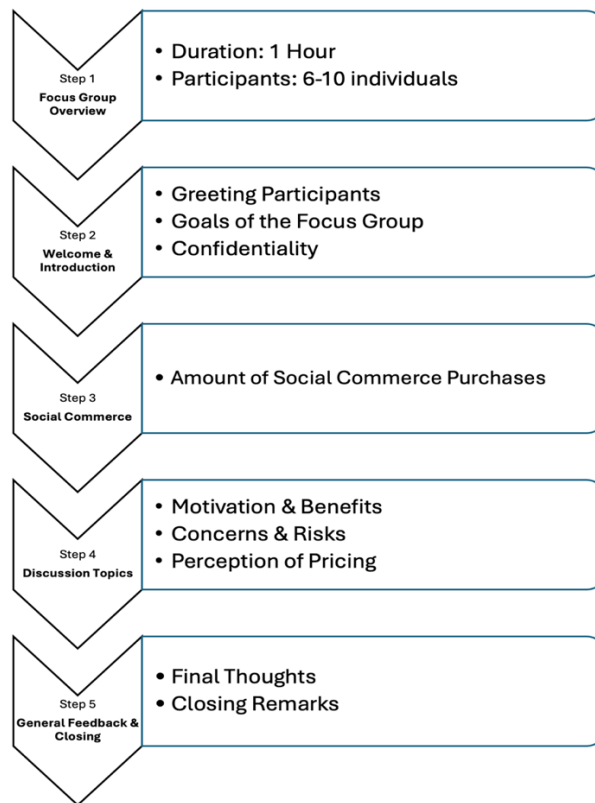


Figure 1: Focus group process

2.1 Data Analysis

The focus group discussions were recorded and manually transcribed to ensure the accuracy of participants' contributions. The qualitative data was analysed using a combination of thematic analysis and content analysis, each selected to fulfil specific analytical needs and provide a comprehensive understanding of the data.

A thematic analysis approach was applied to identify recurring patterns and key themes within the data, enabling an in-depth examination of participants' experiences and perceptions regarding social commerce (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This method allowed for the extraction of significant insights into the factors influencing social commerce purchases, revealing both explicit and subtle participant concerns. The analysis process began with a thorough review of the data to gain familiarity, after which data points were grouped into broader themes that captured the core issues discussed. NVivo software supported this process, helping to organise and structure the data rigorously through recurrence tracking, which ensured accuracy and consistency in identifying themes. In addition to thematic analysis, a content analysis was conducted to quantify the frequency of key terms and topics raised by participants, providing a structured way to interpret the qualitative data. Content analysis was particularly suitable for this study as it enabled a systematic approach to capturing the prevalence and distribution of central themes across participant responses (Krippendorff, 2019). By measuring specific, recurring elements within the data, content analysis complemented the thematic analysis, adding a quantitative layer that provided insights into the most prominent concerns and motivations expressed. This dual approach allowed for the exploration of both prominent patterns and more nuanced details within the data.

The integration of thematic and content analysis methods ensured both depth and breadth in interpreting the qualitative data collected from the focus groups. This combined approach enabled the study to address its aims comprehensively, yielding a nuanced understanding of participants' perspectives about purchases on social commerce.

3. Results of the Focus Group

The focus group consisted of a diverse group of individuals, with different backgrounds, very active on social media and with different levels of experience regarding purchases on social commerce. Some individuals reported frequent use of social media for purchasing decisions, while others engaged only occasionally. These variances in engagement levels highlight broader trends in consumer behaviour and preferences across demographic lines (Hajli, 2015; Santos *et al.*, 2022; Xue *et al.*, 2020).

The diversity in gender, age, and backgrounds among participants significantly enriched the discussion, see *table 1*, fostering a comprehensive exploration of the dynamics within social commerce. This varied representation allowed for multiple perspectives, which are crucial for understanding the complex interplay between social media and consumer purchasing behaviour (Solomon and Tuten, 2017).

This section categorises the findings into two key themes that emerged during the session: behaviours and motivations. Both themes reflect the participants' insights and experiences, providing valuable implications for understanding social commerce in contemporary consumer environments.

Table 1: Diversity of participants

Individual	Gender	Age	Occupation	Shopping experience on social media
1	Female	38	Professor	Yes
2	Female	30	Designer	Yes
3	Female	19	Student	Yes
4	Male	32	Doctor	Yes
5	Female	25	Translator	Yes
6	Female	31	Veterinarian	Yes
7	Male	22	Student	Yes
8	Male	21	Student	Yes
9	Female	29	IT Officer	No

3.1 Behaviours on Social Commerce

Behaviours reflects participants' social commerce usage patterns, covering both the frequency with which they make purchases and the platforms they prefer.

Purchase Frequency and Social Commerce Platform Usage: Participants exhibited a wide range of behaviours when it came to purchasing through social media. Some reported frequent purchases, while others indicated very rare engagement with social commerce. For instance, Participant 1 mentioned, "Maybe 1 or 2 times a year on social media, OK? On social media, it will be 1-2 times a year." In contrast, Participant 6 stated, "Probably once a month, every 2 months at least I shop on social media." This variability suggests that social commerce is not uniformly adopted across different individuals, and various factors may influence how often consumers choose to buy through these platforms.

One participant expressed caution, noting, "I rarely buy anything directly from social media, maybe once or twice a year. I'm more cautious." This sentiment underscores the importance of understanding individual attitudes towards online purchasing and the potential barriers to engagement. The diverse purchase frequencies observed in the focus group emphasize the need for businesses to tailor their marketing strategies based on the purchasing habits of different consumer segments.

Common Platforms: When discussing the platforms most frequently used for social commerce, Instagram and Facebook emerged as the top choices among participants. Some also mentioned using TikTok and Facebook Live as avenues for making purchases. Participant 2 noted, "Yes, I have made a purchase in my entire life through social media; in this case, it was on Instagram." Another participant added, "Mainly on Facebook, not through the Marketplace, but through Facebook Lives," highlighting the significance of live selling features in fostering consumer interest.

This reliance on popular social media platforms indicates that businesses should focus their efforts on enhancing their presence and marketing strategies on these channels to capture the attention of potential buyers. As social commerce continues to evolve, platforms like Instagram and Facebook will likely play a central role in shaping consumer purchasing behaviour. Therefore, businesses must remain agile and responsive to changes in platform algorithms, features, and user engagement trends.

3.2 Motivations on Social Commerce

Motivations covers a range of factors influencing purchases on social commerce.

Convenience and Practicality: A recurring theme among participants was the convenience and practicality of making purchases directly through social media. The ability to quickly communicate with sellers and complete transactions was seen as a significant motivator for engagement. Participant 8 stated, “It is literally sending a message to the page that we are interested, sending our MbWay or making a bank transfer, so I prefer to do it through social media platforms than to go to a store.” This ease of use suggests that streamlining purchasing processes on social media can enhance user engagement and drive sales.

The desire for convenience is particularly relevant in today’s fast-paced world, where consumers increasingly seek quick and efficient shopping experiences. By offering seamless transaction processes, businesses can better cater to the preferences of modern consumers who may prioritize convenience over traditional shopping experiences.

Personalization and Custom Orders: Another motivation for purchasing through social media is the opportunity for more personalized interactions with sellers. Participants expressed a desire for custom orders that may not be available through traditional e-commerce platforms. Participant 1 explained, “I customized, said what I wanted, they texted me the design, I accepted, and came home.” This illustrates the potential for businesses to foster closer relationships with consumers by offering tailored products and services.

Personalization extends beyond product customization; it also encompasses personalized marketing approaches. Businesses that leverage data analytics to understand customer preferences and behaviour can create targeted advertising campaigns that resonate with specific segments of their audience. By doing so, they can increase the likelihood of engagement and conversions.

Supporting Small Businesses: The focus group revealed a strong sentiment towards supporting local or small businesses. Participants felt that these companies were more accessible and relatable on social media. Participant 3 remarked, “To support a smaller company that is growing and, for example, also to value a little the fact that it is Portuguese.” This highlights the importance of building a community around local brands and emphasizing their unique offerings to attract consumers.

Supporting small businesses is increasingly becoming a priority for many consumers, who appreciate the personal touch and community connection these businesses often provide. As consumers become more aware of the economic impact of their purchasing decisions, brands that emphasize their local roots and commitment to community values can differentiate themselves in a crowded market.

Trust Issues: Despite the motivations to engage in social commerce, some participants expressed concerns about trust and security when making purchases directly through social media. Many preferred to visit the company’s website to complete transactions. Participant 9 stated, “What happens is that I see ads and jump directly to the websites to make the purchase there for the sake of trust and convenience; I never ended up making the purchase directly on these platforms.” This indicates that building trust through social media is a crucial factor for encouraging more direct purchases.

Trust is a critical component of any online transaction, and social commerce is no exception. Businesses must invest in strategies that enhance trustworthiness, such as displaying customer reviews, utilizing secure payment gateways, and ensuring transparent return policies. By doing so, they can alleviate consumer concerns and foster a sense of security that encourages engagement.

Verification Through Familiarity: Familiarity with a brand or previous positive experiences often influenced participants' trust in making purchases via social media. Participant 3 shared, “If I were to buy from this company again, I would already have greater confidence in the process.” This reliance on prior experiences highlights the importance of customer reviews and testimonials in building trust among potential buyers.

Additionally, creating a consistent brand presence across multiple channels can help reinforce familiarity and build trust over time. Brands that maintain clear and consistent messaging, visuals, and customer engagement strategies can enhance their credibility and foster long-term relationships with consumers.

Algorithm Recommendations: Participants noted that algorithmic recommendations on social media platforms were helpful in presenting relevant products, often influencing their purchase decisions. Participant 4 stated, “And it is always often products that the algorithm finds for me. And that helps me, therefore, in the choice; I do not seek.” This suggests that businesses should consider optimizing their content for social media algorithms to enhance visibility and engagement with potential customers.

Understanding how algorithms work can significantly influence a brand’s visibility on social media. Businesses that actively engage with their audience, create shareable content, and encourage user interaction can improve their chances of being favoured by algorithms, thereby increasing their reach and potential for conversion.

Live Selling: The interactive nature of features like Facebook Live was appreciated by participants for creating a more personal shopping experience. Participant 5 explained, “I prefer to buy through someone who is showing clothes or jewellery, then actually buying through, for example, Instagram.” This indicates that live selling can effectively bridge the gap between online shopping and in-person retail experiences, fostering a sense of connection between consumers and sellers.

Live selling not only allows for real-time interaction but also enables consumers to ask questions and receive immediate feedback, enhancing their overall shopping experience. Brands that utilize live selling can create a more dynamic and engaging shopping environment, thereby increasing consumer interest and encouraging purchases.

Types of Products: The focus group identified various types of products commonly purchased through social media, including art, handicrafts, jewellery, clothing, and second-hand items. Participants expressed a particular interest in unique, custom, or hard-to-find items. Participant 2 noted, “Knowing how the product is made, and we end up falling in love with it, let's say, the way it is made.” This suggests that storytelling and product transparency can play a vital role in driving consumer interest.

Brands that effectively communicate their stories and values can create a deeper connection with consumers, enhancing their likelihood of making a purchase. Moreover, highlighting the craftsmanship and unique attributes of products can differentiate offerings in a saturated market, appealing to consumers' desire for authenticity.

Seasonal Shopping: Participants indicated an increased tendency to use social media for shopping during holidays and special occasions. This reflects a periodic spike in social commerce activities tied to significant events. Participant 4 stated, “I think that I use more at the times of the holidays, therefore Christmas and the beginning of the year; that is also when family birthdays come together more.” This insight highlights the potential for businesses to create targeted marketing campaigns during peak shopping seasons.

Leveraging holiday-specific promotions, limited-time offers, and themed content can attract consumers and encourage spending during these high-traffic periods. Businesses should consider developing seasonal marketing strategies that align with consumer behaviours, maximizing their opportunities for sales.

Ethical and Local Considerations: Participants also considered ethical factors, such as the environmental impact and labour practices associated with products, when making purchasing decisions. Supporting local businesses and causes was mentioned as a motivating factor. Participant 6 said, “I just wanted to add that it is also possible to make sure that we are buying a national product. Instead of making an import, and another thing that came to mind is certain products that we buy through social networks; we can associate them with a cause.”

The growing awareness of ethical consumption is influencing how consumers approach their purchases. Brands that prioritize sustainability and ethical practices can tap into this growing consumer sentiment, positioning themselves as responsible choices in the marketplace. By transparently communicating their values and practices, businesses can connect with value-driven consumers who prioritize ethical considerations in their purchasing decisions.

4. Conclusion

The focus group discussions revealed important insights into consumer behaviour within social commerce, characterized by diverse experiences and engagement levels. Participants exhibited differing purchase frequencies, with some actively using social media for transactions while others engaged occasionally or

expressed caution regarding direct purchases on these platforms. This variability suggests that businesses should tailor their marketing strategies to address the unique predispositions and behaviours of different consumer segments.

The discussion highlighted Instagram and Facebook as the primary platforms for social commerce, indicating that brands should enhance their presence and user engagement on these channels (Statista, 2023).

Convenience emerged as a significant motivation for purchasing through social media, with participants appreciating the ease of communication and transactions. Additionally, the desire for personalized experiences and the inclination to support local businesses were prominent themes, underscoring the importance of building relationships and emphasizing community values in marketing strategies.

However, trust and security concerns were evident, as many participants preferred to complete purchases on official websites rather than through social media. This highlights the need for businesses to implement strategies that enhance trust, such as displaying customer reviews and ensuring secure payment options.

Moreover, participants noted the influence of algorithmic recommendations in their purchasing decisions, suggesting that businesses should optimize their content for social media algorithms to increase visibility and engagement. Ethical considerations also emerged, with a growing emphasis on sustainability and supporting local businesses, indicating a shift toward more conscious consumer behaviour.

Finally, the discussions revealed patterns of increased social commerce activity during holidays and special occasions, presenting an opportunity for businesses to create targeted marketing campaigns during these peak periods.

In summary, the focus group findings provide valuable insights into the complex dynamics of social commerce, highlighting the need for businesses to adopt flexible, consumer-centric strategies that address trust, convenience, and ethical considerations while leveraging the unique features of popular social media platforms.

5. Limitations and Future Research

This exploratory study was conducted at a single moment in time with a specific group of participants. The opinions expressed by this particular group are exploratory and do not adequately represent those of other individuals in similar contexts. To enhance the validity of the findings, future research should aim to involve a broader and more diverse sample of participants, facilitating a more comprehensive consensus on the insights derived from this study.

Another limitation pertains to the lack of extensive validation of the findings, given the small sample size. To address this, future work could draw on the recommendations of Venkatesh et al. (2012) and Martins (2014), who advocate for the integration of mixed methods in research. Conducting an empirical study that includes a survey distributed among a larger population of social media users would help validate the significance and relevance of the recommendations identified in this research. This approach would provide a more robust evaluation of the findings and contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of social commerce.

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