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Social value and online social shopping intention: the moderating role of experience

Social value and online social shopping intention

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore how the shoppers' social value perception affects their purchase intention in online shopping context through its distinct role and relationships with other value dimensions. The moderating effect of the characteristics of other members on the relationship among value dimensions and the difference of value perception between experienced and inexperienced members were also tested to identify the boundary conditions of the proposed model.

Design/methodology/approach – The survey included 272 consumers from a well-known social shopping website in China to test the hypotheses.

Findings – The results indicate that hedonic and utilitarian value fully mediate the relationship between social value and purchase intention. Perceived expertise positively moderates the relationship between social value and the other two values. In particular, the results found that while inexperienced members can acquire both higher utilitarian and hedonic value from social value and their purchase intention relies more on the hedonic value, experienced members place greater emphasis on the utilitarian value.

Practical implications – The results may help vendors regain confidence in the social shopping business mode and offer specific policy implications on how to leverage shoppers' social value perception to generate their purchase intention in a social shopping context.

Originality/value – This study focuses on the legitimacy of the independent role of social value and sheds light on the relationships among social value and other value dimensions based on social capital theory, which was under-explored by previous studies. Besides, this study clarifies the moderating role of experience, which highlights the previously unnoticed changing role of consumers' value perception.

Keywords Empirical study, Community, Online shopping, Social capital theory

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Social shopping, as an extension of traditional e-commerce (Zhang and Benyoucef, 2016), has become an industry that enjoys high user growth rates and receives considerable venture capital (Olbrich and Holsing, 2011). The potential value that social shopping brings to marketing has aroused great interest among researchers in recent years (Shen, 2012; Hsiao *et al.*, 2010). Nevertheless, compared to the enthusiasm from academia and capital markets toward this business mode, social shopping websites (SSW) are not running



Information Technology & People © Emerald Publishing Limited 0959-3845 DOI 10.1108/TTP-10-2016-0236 smoothly in China. Both Mogujie.com and Melishuo.com, as the most popular Chinese SSWs, are struggling through painful structural adjustments and experiencing a hard time in reaping expected profits from investment in creating a social environment embedded within online shopping. This leads to a call for a better understanding of how the social components of online shopping can gain a foothold.

Among the many influencing factors that were identified by prior studies, value perception has been recognized as the most important one that influences shoppers' online shopping decision (Coker et al., 2014; Verhagen et al., 2011). Value perception is crucial and is suggested to be multi-dimensional (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). Although different classification has been put forward by prior studies to clarify its dimensions, two value perceptions (hedonic and utilitarian) emerged as the basis for the study of the multi-dimensional nature of consumer's value perception (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). Taking utilitarian and hedonic value as the major higher-level value category, specific sub-dimensions were further put forward to capture these two in the online shopping context (To et al., 2007). Among those sub-dimensions identified by the scholars, the role of social value was still in an ambiguity. Prior research usually treats the satisfaction of shoppers' socialization need either as a lower level construct contributing to hedonic motivation or as one of the sub-dimensions of hedonic value (Chiu et al., 2014; Rintamäki et al., 2006; Turel et al., 2010). Yet, the traditional pure hedonic perspective toward social value may fail to capture the full picture of its innate nature and the real purpose of shoppers' socialization need. The socialization need can also be oriented toward utilitarianism as people also socialize to realize their self-referent utilitarian benefit (Wright, 1984). Besides, previous studies on the relationship between social value and purchase intention yield a mix of positive, negative, and null results (Kang and Johnson, 2015; Ozen and Engizek, 2014; To et al., 2007). Combined with the conflicting reports on the influences of social value in consumers' online shopping decision, the enhanced awareness of satisfying users' socialization need in the online world (Kang and Johnson, 2015) causes concern about whether it is essential and legitimate to treat social value as an independent major value dimension. Therefore, a further exploration of the role of social value and its relative position in the network of value perception dimensions is needed to avoid overestimating or underappreciating its importance.

Besides, the passage of time can greatly shape individuals' community experiences and beliefs toward shopping on SSWs as new information sequentially comes in. It is noteworthy that the relationship between value dimensions and consumers' behavioral decision may change as they become more experienced and mature (Gupta and Kim, 2007). A different group of shoppers may give different weights to each value dimensions. So far, very few studies have investigated further about how experience influences the effects of value perception on purchase intention in the context of social shopping. As the creation of competitive advantages to grow new consumers and retain long-term consumers simultaneously may offer an avenue for survival, it is of dramatic importance to explore different groups of consumers' perception of the social shopping experience.

To address the above concerns, on the one hand, the present study relies on the tripartite nature of consumer perceived value to support the independent role of social value. This classification is in light of the inherent characteristic of different value dimensions as social value is group-referent while utilitarian value and hedonic value are self-referent which can be irrelevant to other individuals (Zhou *et al.*, 2011). Besides, Sweeney and Soutar (2001) proposed that value dimensions are expected to be interrelated. To shed light on this relationship in the context of social shopping, the present study relies on the social capital theory as it captures any social structure that generates value and promotes individual actions within it (Coleman 1988). Evidence can also be found in Wright's (1984) study that interpersonal interaction helps to facilitate the fulfillment of self-referent motivation.

Furthermore, other members' characteristics are not negligible in the context of social shopping, as it would naturally affect consumers' evaluation of the socializing process (Al-Natour *et al.*, 2008). In other words, the realization of self-referent benefits from socializing activities will be contingent on the characteristics of members that the shoppers interact with on the SSW. Other members' domain expertise and similarity with oneself are two important factors that people use to evaluate interaction partners (Van Dolen *et al.*, 2007; Smith *et al.*, 2005). Thus far, these moderating effects have been neglected by prior studies that focus on the socializing process on the SSW. Besides, based on the belief adjustment model, it is believed that consumers would update their beliefs with the succeeding pieces of new information received over time (Mathwick *et al.*, 2008; Bolton, 1998). Shoppers in an initial stage of using the SSW may be attracted mainly by the fun of chatting and social activities on the SSW. However, beliefs that are salient for consumers at a low level of experience would be updated with increasing exposure to community activities. Therefore, the present study tests the moderating role of experience developed over time to understand the intricate relationship between value dimensions and shoppers' purchase intention.

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To sum up, the present study aims to address three research questions:

- RQ1. How would social value as an independent value dimension influence consumer purchase intention on the SSW?
- RQ2. What is the effect of consumers' perception of other members' characteristics on the relationship of social value, utilitarian value, and hedonic value?
- RQ3. How would the value perception of SSW and the relationship among value dimensions differ between the group of inexperienced members and experienced members?

By addressing the above questions, the present study makes several important theoretical and practical contributions. First, by exploring the role of social value and its relationship with hedonic value and utilitarian value based on the social capital theory, the results can not only contribute to the understanding of the distinctive role of social value in online shopping context but also clarifies its relative position in the networks of consumers' value perception dimensions. This adds further conceptual clarity to the shoppers' value perception. Meanwhile, the present study also extends the social capital theory by illuminating its impact in the context of social shopping. Second, the moderating effect of perceived expertise and similarity offer insights into the boundary conditions that facilitate the generation of personal benefits from the realization of socialization need in the online shopping context. Third, consumers with various degrees of experience have distinct beliefs and behavioral intentions; knowing more details about this issue can help us improve our understanding of consumers' behavior on SSW. Practically, a comprehensive understanding of social value would resume online vendors' confidence in the social shopping business mode and offer clues to fine-tune their retailing strategy because the social value may be the differentiating factor in the exceedingly competitive retail markets. From the perspective of the designers of SSW, awareness on the nature of social value dimensions can help them better understand its function mechanism so as to better embed it within the design of online shopping environment. Finally, yet importantly, by exploring the difference between inexperienced and experienced members, this study would give hints to the different strategies that the websites could take in dealing with different groups of consumers to create their long-lasting advantage.

2. Theoretical background

- 2.1 Consumer value perception in a social shopping context
- 2.1.1 SSW. SSW is a type of online community that combines exchange-related activities with computer-meditated social environments (Zhang and Benyoucef, 2016). Four-layer

design model of social commerce was put forward by Huang and Benyoucef (2013) which includes the individual layer, conversation layer, community layer, and commerce layer. For the individual level, members of SSWs can establish their own profile that comprised of demographic information and their personal preferences for products. For the conversation level, features are available for commenting on others' postings, reviews, and mutual communication that serve to enhance interactions among shoppers. For the community level, socializing activities are encouraged in the SSW to allow shoppers feeling connected. For the commerce level, collaborative shopping and group buying are embedded within the SSW to encourage purchasing behavior.

While it merges SNS with traditional e-commerce, SSW differs from both of them. While traditional e-commerce mainly focuses on effective business transactions, SSW promotes shopping-centered computer-mediated socializing experience through which to promote shoppers' purchase intention. The socialization experience, which revolves around purchasing, migrates shoppers from social shopping with their own limited offline ties to an enlarged online social circle (Hsu *et al.*, 2017). Besides, SSW differs from traditional SNS in that it leads to real transactions and reaps profits from commercial activities.

2.1.2 Utilitarian value and hedonic value. Utilitarian value refers to the instrumental, functional reasons concerned with the shopping experience and is associated with cognitive aspects of perception, such as time saving, efficiency, and convenience (Overby and Lee, 2006). Utilitarian value is rationality-based and task-related because it depends on whether the particular shopping needs are effectively and efficiently accomplished or not (Zhou et al., 2011). However, a purchase may not be indispensable for obtaining utilitarian shopping value, although completing the shopping task is of primary importance. Consumers may collect necessary information for their future purchase decision in the process, which would let them feel that their shopping trip is not a waste of time (Babin et al., 1994). Utilitarian value is identified as the major factor that induces consumers to migrate their shopping experience from bricks-and-mortar shops to online shopping engagement (To et al., 2007).

Hedonic value refers to consumers' perception of pleasure, fantasy, sensuality, and arousal during the shopping process (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982). Hedonic value can be gratified in various ways by the usage itself, whether the task is accomplished or not (Babin *et al.*, 1994). Consumers may use the SSW for enjoyment and recreation through random browsing product pictures or engaging in socialization activities like group chat. It is suggested that consumers may obtain as much hedonic value in online shopping domain as in offline shopping (Bridges and Florsheim, 2008).

The utilitarian and hedonic dimensions of value perception have been recognized as the basis for studies about the multi-dimensional nature of consumer value (Liu and Arnett, 2000).

2.1.3 The emerging role of social value. Social value is defined as the value of developing, extending, and maintaining relationships with other consumers and of communicating and interacting with others (Dholakia et al., 2004; To et al., 2007). Shoppers appreciate the chance to be able to socialize with others and affiliate with reference groups while shopping online (Arnold and Reynolds, 2003). Virtual interaction in online communities can generate intimate social support that can nearly be equal to offline relationships (Mathwick et al., 2008). Moreover, the satisfaction of socialization needs can help to transform online shopping into an experience that is as social as shopping. Consequently, the social value can be mirrored by friendship, social support, and intimacy, which are acquired by one's involvement and communication with other members (Vock et al., 2013).

The role of social value in individuals' attitude, purchase intention, and other behavioral intentions have attracted growing attention from scholars (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001; Thomas and Carraher, 2014; Ozen and Engizek, 2014). The concept was first put forward as one of hedonic shopping motivation in the offline shopping context, while later studies

extended it to the online shopping context. Accordingly, most previous studies have modeled social value as a lower level construct contributing to hedonic motivation or as a sub-dimension of hedonic value in online shopping context (Chiu et al., 2014; Turel et al., 2010). However, social value stems from consumers' relationships and interactivity on the specific platform, which is group-referent; hedonic value and utilitarian value hinge on personal response for its own sake, which can be without relation to other users (Sanchez-Fernandez and Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007; Ahtola, 1985; Zhou et al., 2011). Consequently, social value as the possible differentiating factor in competitive retail markets should be treated as a meaningful and independent aspect that supplements the traditional utilitarian and hedonic value perspective (Rintamäki et al., 2006). Although selected scholars have validated this classification, their studies were mostly at the product, brand, or store shopping experience level and not at the online shopping experience level (Rintamäki et al., 2006; Davis and Hodges, 2012).

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Besides, previous reports on the impact of social value on consumer online purchase intention are inconsistent which may due to the lack of a clear definition of its role. Scholars argue that social value would help to influence consumers' purchase intention because it fulfills consumers' social motivations, such as familiarizing themselves with like-minded members, interacting with others, and reference group affiliation (Chiu *et al.*, 2014). Meanwhile, other scholars posit that although the online community is useful, people prefer shopping online to avoid social interaction and consumers motivated by social interactions usually prefer shopping within a conventional retail store format than shopping within an online context (Ozen and Engizek, 2014). These discrepancies (see Table I) call for our attention and further exploration.

2.2 Theoretical background

2.2.1 Social capital theory. Social capital theory offers insights into any aspects of a social structure that generates value and promotes the individual actions within that structure (Coleman, 1988). Shoppers' evaluation of the satisfaction of social motivation on the SSW can be taken as a representation of individual centrality and social interaction ties (as social value reflects the extension of their social relationships and interaction quantity on the SSW) which can be taken as a reflection of structural property of a social network. This structural property is important as it captures the core of social capital, which is often believed to be able to contribute to cognitive or relational capital (Hsiao and Chiou, 2012). It is noteworthy that social capital theory concerns not only on the sources that determines its formation but also its relations with a series of outcomes.

Gap	Role of social value/relationship with shopping intention	References
Inconsistent perspective on its role: scholars take different views on the role of social value/lack of understanding of its	Sub-dimension of hedonic value Antecedents of hedonic motivation	Chiu et al. (2014) To et al. (2007)
relevance and importance in online shopping context	Independent role/in the absence of hedonic value	Kang and Johnson (2015), Hu <i>et al.</i> (2016)
Conflicting results: a mix results of positive, null and negative exist in the	Positive	Kang and Johnson (2015), Hu <i>et al.</i> (2016)
relationship between social value and online purchase intention	Negative	Rohm and Swaminathan (2004), Ozen and Engizek (2014)
parenase mention	Null	To et al. (2007)

Table I. Identification of gaps

Based on social capital theory, interpersonal relationships (or affiliation with the groups and the networks) should be treated not only as a social structure, but also as resources for reaping benefits (Sobel, 2002). Based on this assumption, the social aspects in the SSW are expected to offer shoppers with both instrumental and experiential benefits (Hsiao and Chiou, 2012) which were frequently neglected by previous studies. Therefore, the social capital theory offers a meaningful perspective for the present study to understand the relationship between social value and the self-referent value dimensions (utilitarian value and hedonic value).

2.2.2 Belief adjustment model. The belief adjustment model assumes that consumers would adjust their beliefs in the light of a sequential anchoring-and-adjustment process (Janson and Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2005). Consumers' value perceptions in the beginning stage can usually serve as the initial anchors; and the strength of these anchors would gradually be changed as new information sequentially comes in. This belief adjustment model has already received considerable support from empirical studies conducted in different settings (Bolton, 1998; Mittal et al., 1999). Shoppers in a social shopping context could also go through the same adjustment process. This assumption mainly emerges from the fact that the passage of time can greatly shape consumers' perception of community experience (Mathwick et al., 2008; Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006). This accumulation of experience may offer an insight into the dramatic differences in consumer's attitudes and behaviors between new members and experienced ones. The reason for the adoption of the classification of consumers into new members and experienced ones is to help to offer a clearer view of the exact nature of the moderating effect.

3. Research model and hypotheses

- 3.1 The relationship among social value, utilitarian value, and hedonic value
- 3.1.1 Relationship of social value and utilitarian value. Social value captures shoppers' active involvement in socializing, which can be taken as a reflection of their social capital on the SSW. Social capital can broaden the sources of information and elevate information's quality and relevance (Adler and Kwon, 2002) and it is the resource available to the actors as a function of their location in the structure of their social relations. Shoppers on SSW are able to socialize with others, share their own experiences, and simultaneously get information and suggestions from others. The utility inherent to perceived social value, therefore, resides in the knowledge to be tapped in the entire community when the need arises, which gives substance to the relationships cultivated online and provides them with value that exceeds intimacy between individuals (Mathwick et al., 2008; Vock et al., 2013). Social shoppers can rely on the useful information and recommendations from the social network to reduce risk in their purchase decisions (Cole, 2007; Zhang et al., 2017). Consumption, therefore, has been turned into a process whereby consumers collaborate with each other to support the welfare of all community members as collective cognitive resources can be created and maintained in their socializing process (Sun et al., 2016). Hence, we expect:
 - H1. Social value is positively related to a consumer's evaluation of utilitarian value generated on SSWs.
- 3.1.2 Relationship of social value and hedonic value. The socialization need fulfilled from SSW forms a social core and creates camaraderie among shoppers on it, and this involvement in the socialization among consumers facilitated by SSW are expected to generate hedonic experiences (Palmer and Koenig-Lewis, 2009). To be more specific, social value, while reflects the extension of their social relationships and interaction quantity on the SSW, captures the core of social capital. Meanwhile, social capital, which fulfills shoppers' intrinsic need for relatedness (Ryan and Deci, 2000), can be a source of pleasurable experience (Hsiao and Chiou, 2012).

Hence, the social value realized on the SSW is supposed to facilitate the expression of intrinsic satisfaction that usually flourishes with higher possibility in contexts characterized by a sense of relatedness (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Therefore, we expect that:

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H2. Social value is positively related to a consumer's evaluation of hedonic value generated on SSWs.

3.2 Consumer perceived value and purchase intention

With an overwhelming range of choices of products and retailers available online, consumers may have to invest much effort to locate an appropriate seller and find the preferred product (Su, 2008). Such searching and locating efforts will greatly influence shoppers' purchase behavior and channel choice. Purchase intention will be generated when shoppers feel that SSWs fulfill their longing for efficiency in accomplishing task-related end (Kim and Han, 2011).

Despite task-related purpose, shoppers also expect to enhance their consumption experience through the hedonic aspects of consumption (Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2000). Positive attitudes generated from the hedonic feeling of using the SSW may encourage shoppers to spend more time on it and cultivate a higher affinity with the website, which suggests a stronger intention to purchase from it (Hsu *et al.*, 2014).

Dennis et al. (2010) suggest that consumers would choose to engage in social shopping rather than traditional shopping because it can fulfill the unmet social need among consumers, especially among young female consumers. Being able to socialize with other consumers is becoming increasingly important in buying behaviors as online stores provide consumers with an ever-expanding social interaction capability (Chiu et al., 2014). The social value therefore is assumed to have an important influence on their behavioral intention. Hence, we expect that:

- H3. Consumer perceived utilitarian value is positively associated with a consumer's purchase intention on SSWs.
- H4. Consumer perceived hedonic value is positively associated with their purchase intention on SSWs.
- H5. Consumer perceived social value is positively associated with their purchase intention on SSWs.

3.3 The moderating effect of perception of other members' characteristics

3.3.1 The moderating effect of perceived similarity. Perceived similarity is defined as members' similarity in terms of preferences and tastes toward products (Shen, 2010). People usually evaluate those who are similar to them more highly (Byrne et al., 1967). They are more likely to seek advice from like-minded people to ease the product finding process and establish confidence in their shopping choices. Therefore, shoppers usually attribute more value from interacting with like-minded members. Consumer perceived similarity with their interaction partners can also generate positive emotional feelings since they would be more united and the interaction will not encounter many conflicts (Insko and Schopler, 2013). The shopping experience in which people can interact with and establish relationships with like-minded people will be more reassuring and enjoyable. Hence, we expect:

- H6a. The relationship of social value and utilitarian value is stronger when perceived similarity is high.
- H6b. The relationship of social value and hedonic value is stronger when perceived similarity is high.

3.3.2 The moderating effect of perceived expertise. Perceived expertise is associated with the skills, competencies, and characteristics that could make a party capable of influencing others within a particular domain (Mayer et al., 1995). Shoppers tend to take shopping cues from influential people before they make purchase decisions (Hsiao et al., 2010). When consumers perceive other participants on the SSW as having a high level of expertise, they would regard relationships and interactions on the website as advantageous due to the potential professional advice and useful information that they can receive. This reliance on influential or expert others is considered a shortcut for decision-makers (Grange and Benbasat, 2008). Besides, previous studies indicate that the information quality of the site could also greatly influence consumers' affective evaluation of the site (Liang and Chen, 2009). Correspondingly, the relationships and interactions with expert members contribute to shoppers' perception of both usefulness and enjoyment on the SSW. Hence, we expect:

- H7a. The relationship of social value and utilitarian value is stronger when perceived expertise is high.
- H7b. The relationship of social value and hedonic value is stronger when perceived expertise is high.

3.4 Role of experience

Given the nature of social shopping, online shoppers usually start their journey with establishing their own social networks on the SSW (Li et al., 2013). As community experience accumulated, they would become more familiar with the website features, form their own preferences and maintain their own circle of friends. Under this circumstance, shoppers would be more likely to obtain useful information from socializing activities that could contribute to their purchasing decision making, as they know more about whom to turn to. Hence, it is expected that social shoppers at this stage would be more able to realize their utilitarian purpose from socialization need satisfaction. In addition, in comparison to experienced members, inexperienced members are more likely to be indulged in socializing activities per se (such as making new friends, engaging in community activities, etc.). The exploration of the socialization activities may lead shoppers to extract more hedonic value from the SSW (Huang, 2003). Therefore, inexperienced members' hedonic perception is expected to be dramatically strengthened through the socializing capability provided by the SSW. Accordingly:

- H8a. The relationship of social value and utilitarian value is stronger for experienced members.
- H8b. The relationship of social value and hedonic value is stronger for inexperienced members.

Shoppers' purchase intention, to the degree that it exists among inexperienced members, is likely to be framed in terms of social fun components on the SSW (Wang and Zhang, 2012). However, consumers participating in social shopping activities may eventually change from a social fun perspective to a utilitarian perspective. While this conjecture was put forward by Wang and Zhang (2012), it has not yet been empirically validated. For those inexperienced consumers, the hedonic components of the SSW can exert a more salient effect. However, as they become more experienced, they would form a better understanding of their own needs and would be more likely to accomplish a match between what they need and what the SSW can offer. At the same time, experienced users' perceived hedonic value might decrease because of the familiarity due to repeat stimulation from the websites (Hammond *et al.*, 1998). Accordingly, online consumers may eventually shift from hedonic usage to functional usage of the SSW. Hence, we expect:

H9a. The relationship of utilitarian value and purchase intention is greater for experienced than for inexperienced consumers. H9b. The relationship of hedonic value and purchase intention is greater for inexperienced than for experienced consumers.

The research model is shown in Figure 1.

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4. Research methodology

This study adopted the survey method to test our hypotheses because it is a well-adapted approach to reveal the personal and social beliefs and attitudes, and it could help generalize research findings (Fang *et al.*, 2014).

4.1 Measurement development

The instruments of constructs were developed as follows: the relevant literature was assessed to identify the scales that have already been validated; the instruments were thoroughly reviewed. All items adopted in the survey were drawn from existing research, although we have also adapted the wording to fit the current research context. In discussion with those familiar with both the research context and the survey research method, we identify if the factors will accurately represent the meaning of the constructs on the SSW. All measurement items were measured with a seven-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." These items are shown in Table AI. Moreover, the previous literature suggested that the age, gender, level of education, and income of consumers may affect their own intention to purchase a product online (Lee *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, these demographic variables were incorporated into our model as control variables to ensure that the empirical results of this study would not be affected by covariance with other variables.

4.2 Sampling and survey procedures

A leading and representative SSW (Mogujie.com) in China was selected as the research context of this study. Mogujie.com was established in 2011 and it has more than 100 million of registered users by 2014. They claim their business strategy as "social networking + shopping"

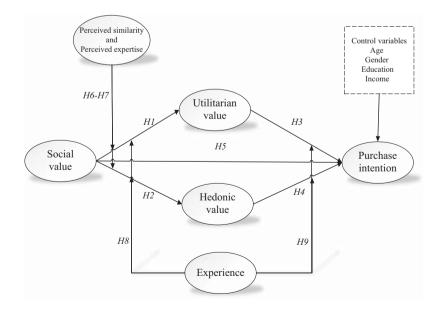


Figure 1.
Research model

and set their own goal as to improve shoppers' shopping decisions. Shoppers are able to establish their own profile and post their own purchases. Meanwhile, shoppers can also track others' updates, commenting or clicking "like" on it and establishing friendships with others through "follow" mechanisms. The link of the purchase page is available with the posts. Many other social networking mechanisms (such as group chat) have also been embedded within Mogujie.com to help to smooth consumers' shopping experience. Therefore, we think that Mogujie.com can be the right platform for us to conduct the research.

The present study involved the registered users of the SSW as its target sample, and we administered an online survey to collect the data. The questionnaire was generated in an online survey servicing website in China (www.wenjuanxing.com). We directly invite shoppers on the Mogujie.com through sending them the hyperlink of our online questionnaire and we offered 300 points to those who partake and complete our survey. We received 293 responses, with a response rate of 42 percent. However, 21 of these responses were considered invalid because they were incomplete or were complete in less than 8 minutes given the length of our questionnaire. Table II shows the demographics of the entire sample.

5. Results

5.1 Measurement model

The content, convergent, and discriminant validities of the measurement model were examined. The results are shown in Table III. Content validity was assessed by testing Cronbach's α , composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE). The Cronbach's α scores ranged from 0.843 to 0.919, which were above the benchmark value of 0.70. The values of composite reliability varied between 0.828 and 0.944, which were higher than the recommended 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978). The AVEs of all constructs were above 0.5. Moreover, all loading scores were higher than the desired threshold of 0.7. These findings confirm that the convergent validity of the measurements is acceptable.

	Items	%
Gender	Male	22.43
	Female	77.57
Age range	Below 18	0.74
	19-24	29.04
	25-31	37.13
	32-40	29.78
	40 or above	3.31
Educational level	Below high school	2.21
	High school	10.29
	Undergraduate	77.57
	Master's degree or above	9.93
Personal income in RMB (monthly)	Below 1,000	12.50
, , ,	1,000-1,999	8.09
	2,000-3,999	21.32
	4,000-5,999	29.41
	6,000-7,999	15.81
	8,000 and above	12.87
Length of usage	Less than six months	52.57
	Six months to two years	29.78
	More than two years	17.65
Note: $n = 272$	•	

Table II.Demographics of respondents

Construct	Item	Loading	AVE	Composite reliability	Cronbach's α	Social value and online
Social value	SV1	0.910	0.807	0.944	0.920	social shopping
	SV2	0.896				
	SV3	0.914				intention
	SV4	0.873				
Utilitarian value	UV1	0.827	0.694	0.901	0.853	
	UV2	0.833				
	UV3	0.868				
	UV4	0.803				
Hedonic value	HV1	0.707	0.564	0.885	0.843	
	HV2	0.798				
	HV3	0.718				
	HV4	0.838				
	HV5	0.729				
	HV6	0.705				
Perceived similarity	PS1	0.851	0.694	0.900	0.853	
	PS2	0.841				
	PS3	0.830				
	PS4	0.810				
Perceived expertise	PE1	0.885	0.737	0.918	0.881	
	PE2	0.855				
	PE3	0.887				
	PE4	0.806				
Purchase intention	PU1	0.906	0.813	0.929	0.884	Table III
	PU2	0.918				Results of convergen
	PU3	0.881				validity tes

Fornell and Larcker (1981) asserted that discriminant validity could be assessed with the relationship between the correlations among constructs and the square roots of AVEs. Table IV shows the correlations between constructs. Cross-loadings for measures are shown in Table AII. Via confirmatory factor analysis, the cross-loading method revealed that the measurement items had a higher loading score on their own construct than those for others. The square roots of AVEs of all constructs achieved a higher score than the correlations between constructs, which indicates sufficient discriminant validity.

The problem of multicollinearity may influence the results of the multiple regression analysis. Multicollinearity is usually checked by examining the variance inflation factors (VIFs) and tolerance values of the independent values. In studies, VIFs should generally be lower than 10 and tolerance values should be higher than 0.1 to ensure that multicollinearity

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Social value	0.898									
Utilitarian value	0.476	0.833		_						
3. Hedonic value	0.581	0.637	0.751		_					
Perceived expertise	0.469	0.470	0.591	0.833		_				
Perceived similarity	0.456	0.510	0.610	0.534	0.741		_			
Purchase intention	0.418	0.548	0.530	0.452	0.474	0.902		_		
7. Age	0.083	0.067	0.147	0.193	0.055	0.032	_		_	
8. Gender	0.124	0.115	0.090	0.085	0.069	0.045	0.045	_		_
Education	0.06	0.226	0.168	0.143	0.203	0.089	0.093	0.018	_	
10. Income	0.256	0.143	0.272	0.239	0.223	0.118	0.586	0.021	0.265	_

Notes: Age, gender, education, and income are single-item measures. Diagonal elements are square roots of AVE

Table IV. Correlations between constructs

would not be a crucial issue (Mason and Perreault, 1991). The results of the current research demonstrated that the VIF values ranged from 1.733 to 2.523, indicating that multicollinearity is not a serious concern for this study.

5.2 Structural model

We employed SmartPLS to analyze the proposed main model. This statistical software package has minimal demand on measurement scales, sample distribution, and size, and it yields a satisfactory performance in the causal-predictive analysis (Adler and Kwon, 2002). All items in the study were standardized. The R^2 indicated that social value explains 23.0 and 50.8 percent of the variance in the utilitarian and hedonic values, respectively. These results signify that the level of explanation power is desirable. Figure 2 shows the relationships among the constructs in this study.

The path coefficients indicate that social value strongly influences utilitarian value ($\beta = 0.479$, p < 0.01) and hedonic value ($\beta = 0.359$, p < 0.01). However, we find that social value does not significantly influence purchase intention ($\beta = 0.099$, p > 0.05). Moreover, we found that the four control variables (i.e. age, gender, education, and income) do not significantly affect the purchase intention of consumers.

Besides, to rule out the endogeneity concerns on the results between the relationship of value dimensions and consumer purchase intention, we performed an endogeneity test based on the two-step econometric procedure which was put forward by Heckman (1979). First, we calculate the medium of the three value dimensions and then divide the respondents into two groups, respectively: individuals with scores above the mean coded as one and with scores that below the mean coded as zero (dummy variables). We then compute the LAMBDA (i.e. the inverse Mill's ratio) value with SPSS probit model by regressing different groups on all control variables, respectively. Second, we retest the hypotheses with LAMBDA_UV ($\Delta \beta = -0.104$, t = 1.092), LAMBDA_HV ($\Delta \beta = -0.076$, t = 0.440), LAMBDA_SV ($\Delta \beta = 0.055$, t = 0.366) as the additional control variables for predicting consumers' purchase intention. The results show that they are not statistically significant which indicate the absence of endogeneity.

5.3 Moderation analyses

In this study, we compare the research model across the two sub-samples (i.e. experienced vs inexperienced social shopping members). Following Mathwick *et al.* (2008), we expect that

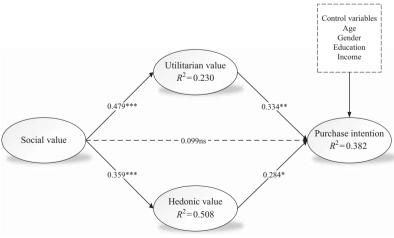


Figure 2. PLS results main model

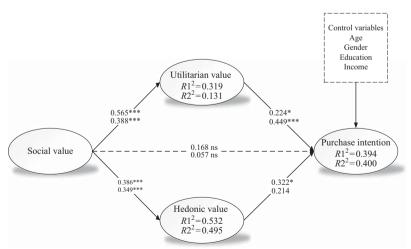
Notes: **p*<0.05; ***p*<0.01; ****p*<0.001

consumers are more experienced when their visitation history has exceeded six months. The experience pattern in this study is classified into three groups; nearly 52 percent of the respondents report being new members of the site, with a visitation history of fewer than six months; 17.65 percent of them report having visited the site for more than two years; and the remaining portion of the respondents was categorized between these two extremes, We compared the first group with the last two groups by using a multi-group PLS analysis. Results of the comparison are shown in Figures 4 and 5. In particular, we found that the path coefficient from social value to the utilitarian value of the inexperienced model is significantly stronger than the experienced model ($\Delta\beta = 0.177$, t = 15.94, p < 0.01). Hence, H8a was not supported. On the contrary, the path coefficient from social value to hedonic value of the inexperienced model is significantly stronger than of experienced model ($\Delta \beta = 0.037$, t = 4.01, b < 0.01), supporting H8b. Furthermore, the path coefficient from utilitarian value to purchase intention of the inexperienced model is significantly weaker than the experienced model $(\Delta \beta = 0.225, t = -18.31, p < 0.01)$, supporting H9a. The path coefficient from hedonic value to purchase intention of the inexperienced model is significantly stronger than of the experienced model ($\Delta \beta = 0.108$, t = 7.07, p < 0.01), supporting *H9b* (Figure 3).

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The moderating effect of perceived expertise and perceived similarity on the relationship among the social, utilitarian, and hedonic values was tested via regression analyses. The interaction term between two respective interacting variables was added to the main model to develop the moderating effect model. The moderating effect was directly examined by conducting the multivariate regression analysis in SPSS.

The results shown in Table V indicate that perceived expertise significantly affects the relationship of social and utilitarian values ($\Delta\beta = 0.142$, t = 2.703, p < 0.05) as well as the link between utilitarian and hedonic values ($\Delta\beta = 0.136$, t = 2.965, p < 0.05). Contrarily, perceived similarity does not exert a significant influence on the relationship among all values. Figures 4 and 5 show the significant moderating effects, which were determined with the graphical procedure. When shoppers perceive other members as with low expertise on the SSW, the slope of the relationship between social value and utilitarian value is 0.175 (p < 0.05) and of the relationship between social value and hedonic value is 0.214 (p < 0.001).



Notes: $R1^2$ means the R^2 of the model based on the data of the first group (the inexperienced consumers); $R2^2$ means the R^2 of the model based on the data of the second group (the more experienced consumers). *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.01

Figure 3.
PLS results of experienced and inexperienced users' samples

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		Utilitaria	ın value		Hedonic value			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 1'	Model 2'	Model 3'	Model 4'
Main effects Social value (SV) Perceived similarity (PS) Perceived expertise (PE)	0.307** 0.370 **	0.311** 0.367**	0.328** 0.316**	0.334** 0.354**	0.382** 0.436**	0.378** 0.440**	0.390** 0.408**	0.396** 0.444**
Interactions effects $SV \times PS$ $SV \times PE$ R^2 value Adjusted R^2 value F change Notes: *p < 0.05; **p < 0.05;	0.335 0.330	-0.026 0.336 0.328 0.265	0.305 0.300	0.142* 0.323 0.316 7.307**	0.488 0.484	0.027 0.489 0.483 0.384	0.467 0.463	0.136* 0.484 0.478 8.792**

Table V. Hierarchical moderated regression results

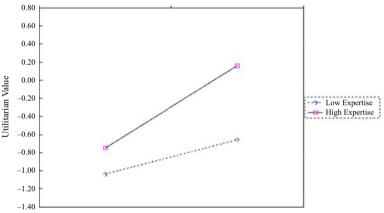


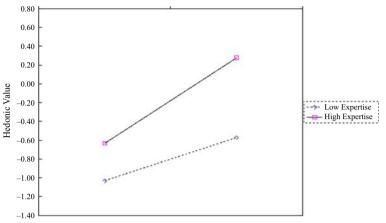
Figure 4.
The moderating effects of perceived expertise on the relationship between social value and utilitarian value

Notes: When perceived expertise is high, the slope of the relationship between social value and utilitarian value is 0.445 (p<0.001), and when perceive expertise is low, the slope of the relationship between social value and utilitarian value is 0.175 (p<0.05)

5.4 Post hoc analyses

We conducted *post hoc* analyses to further assess the nomological network of the proposed model. We examined whether utilitarian and hedonic value would mediate the relationship between social value and consumer purchase intention, following the bootstrapping method suggested by prior literature (Chapman *et al.*, 1996). The bootstrapping method could simultaneously test multiple mediators and has more precise confidence intervals (CI) (Zeithaml, 1988).

The bootstrapping test results shown in Tables VI and VII indicate that in step 1, social value is significantly related to the purchase intention of consumers ($\beta = 0.418$, p < 0.001). Moreover, this value dimension significantly influences both the utilitarian ($\beta = 0.438$, p < 0.001) and hedonic values ($\beta = 0.459$, p < 0.001) in step 2. However, when the utilitarian and hedonic values were adopted as mediators of the relationship between social value and purchase intention in step 3, the effect of social value on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.111$) could not be observed. Therefore, we conclude that utilitarian and hedonic values fully mediate the relationship between social value and purchase intention.



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Figure 5.
The moderating effects of perceived expertise on the relationship between social value and hedonic value

Notes: When perceived expertise is high, the slope of the relationship between social value and hedonic value is 0.446 (p<00.001), and when perceive expertise is low, the slope of the relationship between social value and hedonic value is 0.214 (p<0.05)

	Step 1: IV to DV	Step 2: IV t	o Mediators	Step 3: Mediators to DV	
Age	-0.009	0.045	0.040	-0.038	
Gender	-0.012	0.057	0.021	-0.040	
Education	0.060	0.170**	0.082*	-0.029	
Income	-0.002	-0.042	0.057	-0.004	
Social value	0.418**	0.438**	0.459**	0.111	
Utilitarian value				0.372**	
Hedonic value				0.312**	
R ² value	0.1795	0.2724	0.3666	0.3675	
Adjusted R ² value	0.1640	0.2587	0.3547	0.3507	Table
F change	11.6349	19.9163	30.7942	21.9111	Regression results
Notes: *p < 0.05; **p	0 < 0.01				multiple mediat

	Boots	strapping wit	h 95% CI for indirect	effect (5,000	samples)		
		Utilitarian	value		Hedonic	value	
	Effect	SE	CIs	Effect	SE	CIs	
Social value	0.1628	0.0413	(0.0944, 0.2596)	0.1433	0.0439	(0.0637, 0.2354)	Boo

Table VII. Bootstrapping results

We further explored the significance of the indirect relationship among the value dimensions by determining whether zero was excluded within the 95% CI (van Riel and Pura, 2005). For the utilitarian value, the 95% CI of the mediating effect was (0.0944, 0.2596), denoting that this value did not contain zero. The 95% CI of the mediating effect for the hedonic value was (0.0637, 0.2354). These results imply that the indirect relationships of social value with the purchase intention of consumers via utilitarian and hedonic values are significant.

6. Discussion

6.1 Findings

This study aimed to explore how the shoppers' social value perception affects their purchase intention in online shopping context through its role and relationships with other value dimensions. The moderating effect of the characteristics of other members on the relationship among the value dimensions and the difference of value perception between experienced and inexperienced members were also tested. The findings are discussed below.

The present study enriches consumers' value theory through employing a social capital perspective to clarify the role of social value and the relationship among value dimensions. The unsupported direct relationship between social value and purchase intention is consistent with some of the previous studies (To *et al.*, 2007) while contrary to others (Sun *et al.*, 2016; Hu *et al.*, 2016). We further conducted the mediation analysis that unravels the full mediating role of utilitarian value and hedonic value in the relationship between social value and purchase intention. The results add evidence to the role of social capital in the social network on an SSW in generating benefits for shoppers (Hsiao and Chiou, 2012).

The moderating role of other members' characteristics sheds lights on the way of how social value is positively associated with utilitarian value and hedonic value. The moderating role of perceived similarity was not supported by our data, while the important moderating role of expertise was supported, which highlights the importance to understand the distinct role of different aspects of other members' characteristics. The possible explanation may be that people visit the SSW mostly for the fantasy and new fashion trends and for the shopping task. Shoppers expect that the other members who come from different backgrounds and who have more knowledge about the field could provide them with more diversified and useful information and recommendations. Therefore, while previous studies stress the importance of other members' similarity in triggering shoppers' response (Liu *et al.*, 2016), the present study shows that may not be an indispensable factor from the perspective of acquiring their self-referent benefits.

The belief adjustment model offers us new insights into the boundary conditions of the consumer value theory. The changing role of different value dimensions on purchase intention and the relationship among them was supported by our data analysis. This is in line with the belief adjustment model in that adjustment occurs in shopper's belief over a span of time during which the shopper experiences the community. It may because inexperienced members usually have a relatively higher demand for social relationship and exchange to accumulate useful information for decision. As for the more experienced shoppers, they would most likely have formed their certain circle of friends and relied less on new relationships; they may also passively follow their online friends' postings and new sharing. Under this circumstance, the contribution of the social value to the evaluation of the utilitarian value and hedonic value would both fade to a certain extent. Besides, the results also validated the assumption (H9a and H9b) that the consumers on the SSW may eventually change to being utilitarian oriented from being a social fun-seeker (Wang and Zhang, 2012).

6.2 Theoretical and practical implications

6.2.1 Theoretical implications. This study makes at least three major contributions to the literature. First, this study highlighted the importance of supporting the independent role of social value in the online shopping context. The results of the present study help to validate its importance through clarifying its distinctiveness from utilitarian value and hedonic value and highlighting the importance of juxtaposition of these three value dimensions in the online shopping context. Although some recent studies come to realize the importance of the independent role of social value, they still fail to present a complete view of this value perception in online shopping context. We explicitly clarified the independent role of social

value based on its inherent characteristic, which can well validate the legitimacy and necessity of its independent role. This can offer a robust theoretical basis for further studies on the role of social value and the social components in current online shopping context. In addition to informing the relationship among value dimensions, the present study also extend the application of social capital theory and illuminate its impact in the social shopping context, which answers to the call for a social capital perspective toward the interpersonal relationship in the online shopping context (Huang *et al.*, 2015).

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Second, the results of this study support the absence of a direct relationship between social value and shoppers' online shopping intention. However, instead of rejecting its role in shoppers' online shopping decision, the present study illuminates its real function mechanism through utilitarian value and hedonic value in shoppers' online shopping decision. By building the research framework on the social capital theory, the present study extends the effort to clarify the conceptual issues of value perception and the inner relationship among different value dimensions. The results assert that socialization in the context of online shopping should not only be known for its social fun aspects, but also for the utilitarian benefits it could vield. This unveils the usually neglected relationship between social value and utilitarian value, which can offer a theoretical basis for further studies on the utilitarian benefits that derived from social mechanisms. Besides, our findings indicate that perceived expertise could positively moderate the relationship of social value with utilitarian and hedonic values. Therefore, this study clarifies the boundary conditions that facilitate the generation of personal benefits from involvement in socialization. The results indicate that emphasis should be given to different aspects of other members' characteristics in different contexts that stress socializing activities. A further exploration of the moderators from the interpersonal perspective in future studies should be encouraged.

Last, while difference that brings by experience has been widely investigated in previous research works, this study extends this line of research by accounting for the distinctive characteristics of the SSW context. The two populations identified on the SSW have distinctly different value perceptions and behavioral intentions. The results indicate that experienced members mainly base their purchase decision on the utilitarian value that this buying channel can bring to them while inexperienced members would focus on the hedonic value it brings. In addition, inexperienced members can extract both higher utilitarian value and hedonic value from social value than experienced members can. While previous studies indicate that both utilitarian value and hedonic value can lead to purchase intention (Chang and Tseng, 2013), the present study further indicates that as shoppers getting more mature, the effect of hedonic value becomes less significant in the social shopping context. This can add further insights into the relationship between shoppers' value dimensions and their purchase intention.

6.2.2 Practical implications. The results of this study provide practitioners with a set of insights into the mechanisms of the SSW. First, this can help vendors regain confidence in the social shopping business mode in China. The understanding of the importance of the satisfying shoppers' socializing need and its function mechanism can help vendors to fine-tune their strategies in creating the computer-mediated social environment that helps them reap commercial profits. Social value is important but it only functions through its facilitation of fulfillment of utilitarian value and hedonic value. Therefore, to not only focus on improving the socializing process, but also on the outcome of this satisfaction of socialization need. To let shoppers actually capture personal benefits from socialization should become the core of the social shopping mode. For example, the website can utilize gamification to organize socialization activities to create higher hedonic value and enable shoppers to form groups to discuss topics that related to the products that they are interested in to enhance utilitarian value.

Second, this study confirms that the expertise level of users of the SSW is important for retaining the shoppers. The reason may be that people turn to the SSW mostly to improve their own shopping outcome. Hence, members on SSWs may want to acquire support from the other members of the site who have a higher level of expertise to improve their socialization experience and shopping efficiency. In other words, SSWs may need to make sure the presence of expert members on it either through attracting or cultivating them. Many successful SSWs actually have already adopted this strategy by inviting famous stars or snappy dressers to share their shopping experience and buying choices to other buyers on it. The websites can also open special columns to enrich members' knowledge about product and shopping.

Third, the results also suggest that there is no "one-size-fits-all" strategy for the management of shoppers on the SSW. The results indicate that experienced and inexperienced members differ in terms of to what extent value perception influences their purchase intentions. Accordingly, we suggest that when leveraging social value to increase utilitarian value and hedonic value in order to enhance purchase intention, managers should adopt different strategies for experienced and inexperienced members. Incorporating entertainment features into the website would be an effective strategy, especially for attracting and sustaining inexperienced members who are mainly stimulated by hedonic value in their usage of the SSW. However, the same strategy might be less useful for more experienced members. In order to persuade experienced members to commit to a purchase decision, we suggest that managers should put more emphasis on the utilitarian value that the platform can offer. For example, the SSWs can make it easier for the experienced members to keep track of purchase behavior of their established circle of friends.

6.3 Limitations and future research

The present study collected data from only one SSW in one country with shopper's self-report data, which can only be utilized to explicate the relevance between constructs. To validate the casual relationship, longitudinal data may need to be employed. Future studies may need to extend more effort in this aspect.

The products on the SSW are mostly clothes and other accessories. Future studies may consider the exploration of SSW that involves different product categories, such as electrical appliance, traveling product, etc.

Males and females can behave differently in the shopping context. While our sample mainly involves female shoppers, further studies may consider the behavior of male shoppers since they also occupy a significant role in online shopping community.

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Further reading

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Appendix 1

Appendix 1 Constructs	Item	Measures	Social value and online social shopping intention
Social value (To et al., 2007)		By using the SSW, I can	
. , ,	SV1 SV2 SV3 SV4	exchange information with my friendsshare experiences with othersbe friends with other online shoppersextend my personal relationships	
Utilitarian value (Ou and Sia, 2010)	UV1	By using the SSW, I canimprove my shopping performance (e.g. save shopping time or buying cost) in searching for and buying products	
	UV2	improve my shopping productivity (e.g. acquire good deals and products) in searching for and buying products	
	UV3	improve my shopping efficiency in searching for and buying products	
Hedonic value (Jones <i>et al.</i> , 2006; Rintamäki <i>et al.</i> , 2006)	UV4	efficiently search for and purchase products Shopping on the SSW	
2000)	HV1 HV2 HV3 HV4 HV5	is truly a joy for meis a pleasant way to use my leisure timegive me sense of enjoyment for its own sake, not just because I am able to purchase the products I wantis truly enjoyable, compared with other things I could have donenot only helps me shop for products, but also entertains me	
Perceived similarity (Shen, 2010)	HV6 PS1	offers me a sense of exploration I think is similar to that of the other users of the SSWmy fashion sense	
received diminarity (check, 2020)	PS2 PS3	my taste toward fashion and beauty productsmy likes and dislikes regarding fashion and beauty products (e.g. color, design, and material)	
Perceived expertise (Shen, 2010)	PS4	my preference for fashion and beauty products I think the other users of the SSW	
Totol on perturb (one., 2019)	PE1 PE2 PE3 PE4	are highly knowledgeable about fashion and beauty productsare experts on fashion and beauty productsare highly experienced in fashion and beauty productsprovides substantial information regarding fashion and beauty products	
Purchase intention (Ming-Sung Cheng et al., 2009)	PUI1	If I need to buy certain products, I intend to purchase them on the SWW	
<i>,</i> ,		If I need to buy certain products, I plan to purchase them on the SWW I predict that I would purchase products on the SWW	Table AI. Measurement items

Table AII. Cross-loadings for measures

ITP Appendix 2

	SV	UV	HV	PS	PE	PUI
SV1	0.908	0.412	0.522	0.432	0.447	0.364
SV2	0.896	0.479	0.575	0.458	0.476	0.395
SV3	0.914	0.425	0.525	0.395	0.399	0.392
SV4	0.875	0.395	0.464	0.355	0.362	0.353
UV1	0.359	0.827	0.526	0.436	0.437	0.495
UV2	0.378	0.833	0.505	0.451	0.423	0.421
UV3	0.448	0.864	0.547	0.409	0.339	0.455
UV4	0.402	0.808	0.545	0.404	0.366	0.453
HV1	0.368	0.492	0.711	0.453	0.434	0.372
HV2	0.403	0.570	0.793	0.470	0.436	0.392
HV3	0.396	0.474	0.721	0.406	0.445	0.426
HV4	0.516	0.511	0.829	0.574	0.490	0.498
HV5	0.484	0.372	0.729	0.415	0.430	0.372
HV6	0.446	0.447	0.712	0.426	0.419	0.321
PS1	0.475	0.442	0.511	0.848	0.457	0.401
PS2	0.388	0.467	0.521	0.837	0.469	0.400
PS3	0.320	0.397	0.503	0.832	0.433	0.405
PS4	0.338	0.393	0.499	0.813	0.419	0.374
PE1	0.385	0.423	0.511	0.476	0.884	0.410
PE2	0.377	0.356	0.491	0.437	0.858	0.394
PE3	0.379	0.410	0.502	0.459	0.888	0.367
PE4	0.468	0.424	0.523	0.461	0.802	0.382
PUI1	0.368	0.455	0.453	0.386	0.421	0.905
PUI2	0.396	0.515	0.494	0.452	0.390	0.916
PUI3	0.368	0.511	0.486	0.445	0.412	0.884
NT / CDI	1 1 1 1 1	the indicator of t	1 11	c		

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