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Social Media Commerce: Next Frontier in Online Shopping Focused on Chinese Consumers

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ABSTRACT

Chinese social media heavily influence consumers' purchasing decisions compared with other countries' social media use. Furthermore, Chinese millennials purchase products using social media commerce, a fast-growing, online commerce platform in China. This study tried to answer following questions to understand the new platform of online commerce: (a) how do different types of products influence Chinese social media users' perceptions of social media commerce? (b) Are there gender differences in perceiving risk and convenience of social media commerce? And (c) how do Chinese consumers' perception affect their trust and willingness to purchase products through social media?

This study employed a between-subjects' online experiment of a fictitious Weibo page to measure Chinese social media users' perceptions of social media commerce. A total of 149 Chinese university students were recruited from Jiangsu Province, China.

The results confirm the importance of product types and gender on consumers' perceptions of social media commerce and how their perceptions of the convenience of social media commerce strongly influence their purchase intentions in China.

Keywords: Social Media Commerce, Weibo, Chinese consumer, Online shopping, Gender Difference

China is the world's largest social media market with 596 million users ("Number of social network users," 2018). Chinese social media users are devoted to and actively engaged with social media; In fact, Chinese social media users' annual growth rate is 10%, while the growth rate of United States' social media users is 7%. Further, the mobile social media penetration rate (accessing social media via mobile phone) is 65% in China and 61% in the United States. On top of this, mobile social media growth is also

highest in China, as 10% annually compared with the rate (5%) of the United States (Kemp, 2018). A typical Chinese online user is a member of 3.4 social media sites on average. Major Chinese social media platforms, such as WeChat and Weibo, have 910 million active monthly users and 340 million active monthly users, respectively (CIW Team, 2017; "Number of active WeChat," 2017), while Facebook has 241 million active monthly users in North America (The U.S. and Canada) ("Number of monthly active Facebook," 2018). The explosive growth of Chinese social media is partially due to the fact that Western social media are blocked in China, and it is harder for the Chinese government to censor social media

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posts (Chiu, Ip & Silverman, 2012).

One distinguishing characteristic of Chinese social media that stands out is that Chinese social media heavily influence consumers' purchasing decision compared with other countries' social media use. Chinese consumers are more likely to search brands and product reviews on social media and share their experiences there. In particular, 87% of Chinese consumers aged 18 to 35 search for brand information on social media, and 93% of them have commented on their experiences on social media. Among them, 40% also consider social media as the top source of shopping information ("Why social media," 2015). Furthermore, an astonishing 86% of Chinese millennials have bought products through social media (Chiu, Lin & Silverman, 2012).

There have been several attempts to investigate Chinese consumers' purchasing behavior compared to those in western countries to explain why Chinese consumers' heavily rely on social media for online shopping. Due to counterfeited products and product quality issues of corrupted businesses, Chinese consumers lack trust in formal institutions (Tanner, 2014). They tend to trust people they know, such as friends and family, and to value their opinions, due to the collectivist culture, rather than the government's traditional propaganda information (Chiu, Ip & Silverman, 2012; Goodrich & De Mooji, 2014).

Although Asian consumers are generally risk averse and perceive a higher risk in online shopping than Western consumers do (Kacen & Lee, 2002), Chinese consumers, who live in a relatively low uncertainty avoidance culture, are more likely to try new technologies and to be less change resistant (Png, Tan & Wee, 2001). These cultural differences have resulted in Chinese social media taking the lead in social media commerce. Social media commerce, a hybrid of social media and e-commerce, is an e-commerce conducted within the social media site without the visitor leaving the site to purchase products and finalize payment transactions (Han & Kim, 2016).

For example, one of the popular Chinese mobile instant messaging app WeChat attracted western luxury brands to sell their products on the messaging

platform. French brand Dior became the first luxury brand to sell products on WeChat by offering its limited edition handbag through social media posts (King, 2017).

Nevertheless, there is a lack of research on Chinese social media users' perspectives on social media commerce and what factors contribute to Chinese consumers' attitude toward social media commerce as well as intention to purchase products on social media. Although Han and Kim's study (2018) demonstrated that Chinese social media users show higher acceptance for social media commerce than the U.S. social media users, room still exists to delve into Chinese social media users' perceptions and attitudes towards social media commerce. Thus, this study examines how perceptions of risk and convenience play a role regarding consumers' trust in social media commerce and purchase decisions by different types of products (digital vs. non-digital) to provide better insight into Chinese social media commerce and to learn social media marketing lessons.

Hence, this study answers these important research questions: (a) how do different types of products influence social media users' perceptions of social media commerce (e.g., risk, convenience)? (b) Are there gender differences in perceptions of social media commerce risks and convenience? And (c) how do Chinese consumers' perceptions affect their trust and willingness to purchase products through social media?

This research is structured as follows: First, this study provides a theoretical background of consumer perceptions and reviews the relevant literature on product types and gender in online shopping. The next section introduces the theoretical background and hypotheses, then it discusses the research methodologies and findings. Finally, it presents the conclusion and managerial implications.

I . Theoretical Background

Although globalization and the Internet have created

a rather homogenized online commerce environment as a new shopping norm throughout the world, Chinese online consumers possess and show distinctive characteristics that differentiate them from the rest of the world (Liao, Proctor & Salvendy, 2009; Sangran, Siguaw & Guan, 2009).

Collectivism, one of the cultural dimensions suggested by Hofstede (1984), describes a tightly-knit society in which people expect their family, friends and in-group members would look after and support each other. Countries that are considered collectivistic include China, Japan, South Korea, and Indonesia. Chinese consumers' collectivist cultural background with skepticism towards big corporations due to pervasive counterfeit and shoddy products has led them to value the advice and review of people in social media. For instance, when purchasing moisturizer, 66% of Chinese consumers relied on their family's and friends' recommendations, while only 38% of consumers in the U.S. did so (Chiu et al., 2012). Unsurprisingly, many Chinese consumers purchase products only after they received approval from their peers through social media (Stein, 2014). Half of Chinese online consumers used social media to research products and receive recommendations (Wang et al., 2016); this pattern is also seen among other collectivistic countries' consumers (Goodrich & De Mooji, 2014).

Chinese collective culture influences consumers' online shopping behavior and how consumers perceive risk in the process of online shopping. Any type of online commerce poses inherent risk to some extent due to its non-face-to-face transactions, and consumers perceive the level of risk differently. Ample research exists that indicates that risk perception is one of the key factors that bar consumers' online purchasing (Huang, Schrank, & Dubinsky, 2004; Kim, Ferrin & Rao, 2008) and is related to cultural differences (Park, 1993; Png, Tan, and Wee, 2001). That is, when consumers perceive potential risk highly towards online shopping, they are more likely to avoid purchasing products. Consumers' perceived risk is defined as their belief regarding potential negative consequences of using products, service, and online commerce due to the uncertainty (Featherman & Pavlou, 2003; Kim,

Ferrin & Rao, 2008). The main elements of perceived risk are this 'uncertainty' in regards to buying products or the process itself and the possible 'consequences' from the uncertainty (Cunningham, 1967; Kogan & Wallach, 1964).

According to Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1984), uncertainty avoidance describes feeling uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity. People in high uncertainty avoidance cultures tend to resist accepting changes and are less tolerant of uncertainty and ambiguity. This tendency is prominent in most Asian countries (Hofstede, 1994). People in high uncertainty avoidance cultures desire more structure, such as rules and regulations, to accept new changes, and e-commerce still lacks those to some extent (McKnight et al., 2002). Thus, people in high uncertainty avoidance cultures are often reluctant to accept new technologies such as e-commerce and show high perceived risk of online shopping (Png, Tan, & Wee, 2001; Choi & Geistfeld, 2004; Kacen & Lee, 2002).

Since China is a country that has a lower uncertainty avoidance culture, Chinese consumers are likely to see online shopping more favorably than consumers in other Asian countries that have high uncertainty avoidance cultures (Lim et al., 2004). Furthermore, Chinese consumers' active information-gathering tendencies for online shopping help mitigate their perceived risk levels (Huang, Schrank, & Dubinsky, 2004). Chinese consumers demand strong assurance and direct connectivity with sellers, such as instant messaging chat or social media message exchanges, so they can ask questions about products in real time to avoid counterfeit and shoddy products.

Collectivistic cultures also act as a "cushion." People tend to consult with those they trust such as family members or friends for advice and help to reduce making risky choices. In collectivistic cultures like China's, people step in and help their in-group members if they are in trouble from the negative consequences of the choice. Thus, collectivism acts as a cushion against possible risks and risky choices (Hsee & Weber, 1998; Weber & Hsee, 1998).

Online shopping became popular worldwide because of its convenience and efficiency (Park, 2018). How

people perceive convenience could be different based on their experience and culture. For example, most people find left-to-right flow of text reading easy to read, while a right-to-left text flow is natural to some cultures (Evers & Day, 1997). Although Chinese consumers also cite convenience as one of their motivations for using online shopping, Chinese consumers demand more than simple time saving in terms of convenience. In the past, price was the most important factor that Chinese consumers cared about. However, as Chinese consumers have become more sophisticated and wealthier, product variety took importance in purchasing considerations (“Chinese Consumer Behavior,” 2018).

According to a survey conducted by Oracle (Spelich, 2017), 82% of Chinese online consumers believe availability of diverse products is a major factor when deciding to shop online. Thus, Chinese consumers prefer online marketplace where they can see numerous small vendors’ products versus a standalone shopping site (Spelich, 2017). Furthermore, Chinese online consumers demand advanced technologies, such as a third party online payment system (e.g., Alipay), to make their online purchases easy and convenient. Chinese consumers prefer third party online payment systems over online credit card payments (“Online payment in China,” 2015).

II. Research Model and Hypotheses

Chinese consumers’ online shopping behaviors differ from Western shoppers’ due to the institutional (Chinese website counterfeit issues), environmental (inherent risks of online shopping) and cultural differences (Han & Kim, 2018). Chinese consumers love online shopping, and they do it more often than Western consumers. The lower uncertainty-avoidance Chinese culture allows online consumers to favor online shopping more than Western consumers do. At the same time, Chinese consumers are far more demanding, seek additional information from vendors,

and depend heavily on customers’ reviews and recommendations in social media due to prevalent product counterfeit issues. Previous studies of Chinese customers’ online shopping behaviors have mainly focused on online shopping websites and have paid little attention to Chinese social media commerce, although it is a fast-growing, e-commerce platform. We believe it is important to delineate Chinese online consumers’ perceptions of social media commerce to prepare U.S. companies to successfully penetrate the Chinese market and also to gain a sense of social media commerce evolution and direction in the U.S. market. We are particularly interested in discovering the effects of different products on Chinese consumers’ perceptions when the commerce is conducted on social media platforms.

A. Product types

A significant number of previous online commerce studies have found that consumers favor certain types of products in online shopping. Low touch products that typically require less examination before purchasing, products such as CDs and books, were the most sought after products online (Gefen et al., 2003).

In fact, the Internet’s best-selling products are often digitalized items or search items, whose quality can be easily assessed without actually using the products, whereas experience goods require direct contact with the products for assessment. The best-selling items on Amazon’s Prime Day are memory cards, wireless headphones, and digital music streaming services (Leighton, 2017; Rosen & Howard, 2000). Previous studies have discovered that, overall; consumers are more inclined to purchase intangible products, such as music, than tangible products, such as toys (Phau & Poon, 2000; Vijayarathy, 2003). Han and Kim (2016) found that Facebook users in the U.S. showed a higher intention to purchase digital products than non-digital products. Moreover, digital products help consumers possess products instantly, unlike non-digital products that require a few days or weeks to receive the items.

The preference for certain types of products is explained by the fact that consumers perceive risk and convenience differently, depending on the type of products. When consumers consider buying tangible goods, their purchasing decision is more influenced by perceived risk, whereas when considering purchases of intangible goods, their buying decision is more related to perceived convenience (Liu & Wei, 2002; 2003).

Because social media commerce is a subset of online commerce, it is plausible to assume that Weibo, one of the most popular Chinese social media platforms, which is often called the Chinese Twitter, users would feel more comfortable purchasing digital products than non digital products through Weibo. Thus, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

- H1. Chinese online consumers will have a lower level of perceived risk (H1a) and a higher level of perceived convenience (H1b) when they consider purchasing digital products, compared to purchasing non-digital products through social media commerce.

B. Gender difference

Although both men and women are very active in online shopping, many differences exist in their shopping behavior. Men might shop online more often than women, but women spend more time shopping online than men ("Men vs. Women," 2017).

The effect of gender differences on online shopping has been interesting to marketing scholars and practitioners since the introduction of online shopping. Sangwan et al. (2009) discovered that men and women have different motivations for using online commerce. Van Slyke et al. (2002) indicated that men trust online shopping and like to shop online more than women do. Rodgers and Harris (2003) also noted similar findings that reveal men trust online shopping more than women.

In general, women are more risk averse than men (Byrnes et al., 1999; Bajtelsmit et al., 1999), and this pattern is observed in their online shopping behavior.

For example, Garbarino and Strahilevitz (2004) identified that women perceive a higher level of risk regarding purchasing products online than men do. Consistent with this argument, Bae and Lee (2011) also reported that women hesitate to purchase online, because they perceive a higher level of risk in online shopping than men do. Forysthe and Shi (2003) also reported a similar finding that women perceived higher risks in online shopping than do men.

According to the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), a system's ease of use has proved to be an important factor in accepting the technology (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh et al., 2003). Prior studies also discovered gender differences in consumers' perceptions of convenience and its influence on behavior intention and acceptance. Since men show higher self-efficacy in terms of new technologies, they also show higher perceived ease of use when accepting new technologies than women do (Durndell & Haag, 2002; Moon & Kim, 2001). For instance, airline consumers in the U.S., Switzerland, and Japan showed gender differences when accepting an e-mail system from airline companies. That is, men showed a higher level of perceived ease of use of e-mail than women did (Gefen & Straub, 1997). Ong and Lai (2006) also found that men's rate of perceived ease of use was higher than women's for e-learning systems among Taiwanese corporate employees.

Although the previously discussed studies that have examined the gender effect were mostly focused on technology acceptance in western markets like the United States, Stafford et al. (2004) discovered that the gender gap exists across different cultures and countries. Based on the previously mentioned findings, we assume that men would consider perceived convenience to a greater extent than women in making their purchasing decisions through social media commerce. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed.

- H2. Female Chinese online consumers will have a higher level of perceived risk (H2a) and a lower level of perceived convenience (H2b) compared to male Chinese consumers when they consider purchasing products through social media commerce.

C. Consumers' perception

Consumers do not like surprises when purchasing products online and would like either to avoid purchasing products online or turn to reliable sources to reduce the risks before making a purchase.

Previous studies (Park et al., 2005; Vijayasarathy and Jones, 2000) have shown that consumers' perceived risk negatively influenced their purchase intentions when shopping online. For example, Kwon and Noh (2010) identified that perceived risk has a significant influence on purchasing apparel items among American online shoppers. Molesworth and Suortti's (2002) study noted similar findings that perceived risk prevents consumers from purchasing products online when considering high-involvement and high-cost products. Consistent with this argument, Lian and Yen (2014) also discovered that risk works as a barrier for Taiwanese consumers when purchasing products online. Furthermore, Han and Kim (2017) reported Chinese consumers' perceived product risk negatively related to consumers' trust toward online shopping websites. Kim et al. (2014) also divulged that consumers' perceived risk negatively affected their trust of both online shopping malls and commercial transactions.

Research also has shown consumers' perceived convenience of online shopping website drives their purchasing intention (Liu & Wei, 2003; Ramayah and Ignatius, 2005; Van der Heijden et al., 2003). Vellido et al. (2000) discovered convenience as one of the main discriminators regarding whether or not people buy online. Gefen et al. (2003) found that experienced repeat online shoppers' trust is very important for conducting online commerce, and the ease-of-use perception is the antecedent of the trust. Top managers of small and medium-size companies in the U.S. showed that perceived ease of use is the most influential factor in adopting e-commerce (Grandon & Pearson, 2004). Perceived ease of use was demonstrated to positively influence both the intention to use online shopping and actual online shopping (Klopping & Mckinney, 2004). Moreover, an easy-to-use and well-explained process creates trust in making business transactions (Kumar, 1996), and

consumers' perceptions of ease of use positively influence trust in e-vendors (Gefen et al., 2003). Viewed in this light, Flavián (2006) also reported that users' trust increases when they perceive the system is usable, while Koufaris and Hampton-Sosa (2004) revealed those consumers' perceptions of how easy and convenient the website is to use is an antecedent of initial trust in the online company.

Based on the preceding discussion, it is reasonable to expect that perceived risk negatively affects purchase intention and trust toward social media commerce, while perceived convenience positively influences purchase intention and trust in social media commerce. Hence, the author proposes the following hypothesis:

- H3. Perceived risk (H3a) (Convenience (H3b)) will negatively (positively) affect the intention to purchase products and the attitude towards social media commerce.

A research model is proposed and depicted in Figure 1 to investigate product type and gender effect on Chinese consumers' perception and its impact on purchase intention and attitude toward social media commerce.

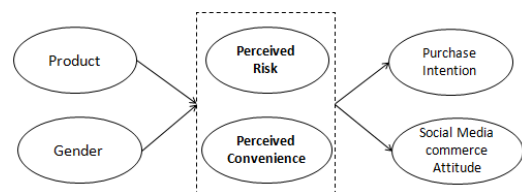


Figure 1. Research Model

III. Research Methodology

A. Procedure and Subjects

This study employed a 2 (Product type: Digital Product vs. Non-Digital Product) x 2 (Gender: Male vs. Female) between subjects in an online experiment

to measure Chinese social media users' perceptions (e.g., risk and convenience) of social media commerce and their willingness to participate in social media commerce (e.g., purchasing intention). Two different versions of Weibo mock-up pages were created to randomly show two different products (digital vs. non-digital). The Chinese social media platform Weibo was chosen for the online experiment. Weibo, often dubbed the Chinese Twitter, is a micro-blogging website that was founded in 2009 and remains the most prominent platform for corporations and brands for influencing consumers' brand choices ("Why social media," 2014).

The fictitious product pages did not include any specific brand name to avoid potential bias from previous brand knowledge and experiences. Online streaming movies were chosen for the digital product, because movies are one of the most popular items sold online in China ("E-commerce super shoppers," 2014). This study picked blue jeans for the non-digital product, because apparel is one of the highest online purchase intention items in China ("online purchase intention," 2014), and 60% of Chinese consumers have bought clothing online in the last three months ("E-commerce super shoppers," 2014). Participants were instructed to assume that there is new function to buy products on Weibo page by simply clicking the button.

This study sample ($N=149$) comprised Chinese social media users in China. The participants were recruited from university in Jiangsu Province in the eastern part of China. All participants joined the online experiment voluntarily and signed an informed consent at the beginning of the experiment.

The study subjects' ages ranged from 19 to 47 years (Median Age=23); female respondents were 58.8% and male respondents were 41.2% of the total participant population ($F=90$, $M=59$). According to an industry report (Perrin, 2015), 90% of people aged 18 to 29 and 77% of people aged 30 to 49 use social media. Among women, 68% use social media, while 62% of men use it. Given that, this research sample is deemed to reasonably represent social media users.

This study employed a two-way between-subjects

ANOVA (analysis of variance), as two-way ANOVA is useful for comparing the mean differences between groups. Multiple regression analysis is also used to understand the relationships between independent variables and dependent variables.

B. Measures

All the items of measure for this study were adopted from previous literature and measured on the seven-point Likert scale of "1" meaning "strongly disagree" to "7" meaning "strongly agree."

Subjects were given two Weibo mock-up pages displaying a digital product (streaming online movie; Group 1) and a non-digital product (blue jeans; Group 2). Seven items from Hsin Chang and Wen Chen's (2008) study were adopted to measure perceived risk. For example, "I am concerned that the products delivered may be inferior" and "I am concerned that the products delivered may lead to financial loss for me" were used. This study adopted items from Davis (1989) and Van der Heijden (2001), because assessing the perceived convenience of social media commerce depends on the product type. Three items were used to test perceived convenience: for example, "I think it is easy to use." Three items to measure purchase intention and five items to measure trust towards social media commerce were adopted from Kalyanaraman and Sundar (2006) and Awad and Rgowsky (2008), respectively. For instance, "I intend to buy the product that I just saw on Weibo" was used to measure purchase intention, and "I know Weibo is trustworthy" was used to measure users' trust toward Weibo social media commerce.

IV. Results

Responses from 149 participants were tested after incomplete answers were removed, although a total of 154 Chinese social media users initially participated

in the online experiment.

A reliability test was conducted on all dependent variables to measure internal consistency of the measurement items. All dependent variables with more than two items were tested by Cronbach's alpha, one of the widely used reliability statistics (Santos, 1999). The ratings across these survey items were averaged to yield perceived convenience ($\alpha=.680$), perceived risk ($\alpha=.845$), purchase intention ($\alpha=.787$), and trust toward social media commerce ($\alpha=.945$). Further, all showed high Cronbach's alpha, thus confirming their reliability.

This study employed a two-way between subject ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) for testing hypotheses 1 and 2 to examine the impact of gender and product type on Chinese social media users' perceptions.

Hypothesis 1 assumed that Chinese social media users would have a lower level of perceived risk (H1a) and a higher level of perceived convenience (H1b) when considering purchasing digital rather than non-digital products. The result (Table 1) shows a strongly significant main effect of product type on perceived convenience ($p=.009$), while there is a marginally significant main effect of different product type on perceived risk ($p=.069$).

Chinese social media users showed (Table 2) a higher level of perceived risk when considering purchasing a non-digital product ($M=4.94$) than a digital product ($M=4.54$). However, Chinese social media users exhibited a higher level of perceived convenience when they considered buying a non-digital product ($M=5.09$) rather than a digital product ($M=4.80$), which opposes the hypothesis. This means that Chinese consumers consider digital products as lesser risky products and deem buying non-digital products on social media commerce as more convenient. Thus, H1a is supported meanwhile H1b is not supported.

Hypothesis 2 assumed that female Chinese social media users would show a higher level of perceived risk and a lower level of perceived convenience when they purchase products through social media commerce than male Chinese social media users. The result (Table 1) shows no significant gender difference when purchasing products through social media commerce in terms of perceived risk and perceived convenience. Table 2 shows that the level of perceived risk and convenience for males and females are not different enough, therefore Hypothesis 2 is not supported.

Furthermore, two-way ANOVA analysis (Table 1) showed the significant interaction effect of gender

Table 1. ANOVA result

DV	Perceived Risk			Perceived Convenience		
	df	F	Sig.	df	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	3	3.061	.030**	3	5.733	.001**
Product Type	1	3.346	.069*	1	6.945	.009**
Gender	1	1.995	.160	1	.160	.689
Product Type*Gender	1	5.474	.021**	1	13.341	.000**
Error	146			146		
Corrected Total	149			149		

Note. ** $p<.05$, * $p<.10$

Table 2. Main effect of product type and gender on social media commerce perception

DV	Product Type		Gender	
	Digital Product	Non-digital Product	Male	Female
Perceived Risk	4.54(1.93)	4.94(1.57)	4.52(1.96)	4.90(1.60)
Perceived Convenience	4.84(1.01)	5.09(0.87)	4.93(1.08)	4.97(0.85)

Note. Mean value (Standard Deviations)

Table 3. Multiple regression analysis

DV	Purchase Intention				Trust			
	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	R ²	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	R ²
Risk	-.068	-.929	.354	.202	.035	.469	.640	.168
Convenience	.448	6.145	.000**		.406	5.458	.000**	

Note. ** $p < .05$, * $p < .10$

and product type on Chinese social media users' perceived risk ($p = .021$) as well as significant interaction effect on perceived convenience ($p = .000$). The product type's effect on Chinese consumers' perceptions of social media commerce appears more apparent for males than females. The difference in perceived risk and perceived convenience between digital and non-digital products is greater among male respondents than among females.

Hypothesis 3 was expected to show that perceived risk would negatively affect purchase intention and trust, while perceived convenience would positively influence purchase intention and trust toward social media commerce. The result (Table 3) indicates that consumers' perceived convenience positively influence their trust in ($p = .000$) and purchase intention ($p = .000$) for social media commerce. However, consumers' perceived risk did not generate any influence on purchase intention or trust. Thus, H3a is not supported while H3b is supported.

V. Discussion

This study attempted to unveil the factors influencing Chinese social media users to participate in social media commerce, because social media commerce is a fast-growing, online commerce platform in China compared to other countries. Considering that Chinese social media heavily influences consumers' purchasing decisions, this study examined Chinese consumers' perceptions of social media commerce and what factors affect their intention to use social media as an e-commerce platform. In particular, this study investigated whether different types of products and

gender influence consumers' perceptions of social media commerce and their willingness to use it.

First, as we expected in the hypothesis, this research found that Chinese consumers exhibited a higher level of perceived risk when purchasing a non-digital rather than a digital product. However, Chinese consumers indicated a higher perceived convenience when considering a non-digital over a digital product purchase, contrary to the hypothesis. Prior research argued that experience goods (product quality is hard to evaluate prior to purchase) can be transformed to search goods (product can be easily evaluated before purchase) through the Internet by providing product information and lowering the search cost (Klein, 1998). This study employed a pair of jeans as a non-digital product that has experience attributes such as fit, texture and material. Although illustrating clothes in digital format is still difficult, most online shopping malls provide multiple photos, videos and consumer reviews to reduce the issues. Thus, it is reasonable that Chinese consumers found purchasing a non-digital product through social media commerce more convenient than purchasing a digital product.

Second, Chinese consumers showed no gender gap in terms of perceptions of social media commerce risk and convenience. Although extant research of online commerce asserted men and women are different when they shop online (Sangwan et al., 2009; Slyke et al., 2002; Rodgers & Harris, 2003), Lian and Yen (2014) claimed Taiwanese online users showed no gender difference for risk barriers to shopping online. Bae and Lee (2011) affirmed that gender differences do not exist in consumers' online purchase intentions. In addition, Simanjuntak and Musiyfah (2016) found no gender difference in online shopping behavior. Furthermore, Weiser (2000) argued that the gender

differences in Internet use came from differences in age and Internet experience. This finding indicates that gender gaps in online shopping behaviors are diminishing, because female online users are more comfortable today with the Internet compared to its early days (Ono & Zavodiny, 2003).

Third, this research learned that Chinese male consumers' perceptions of social media commerce were affected to a greater extent by the type of products than were female consumers. That is, male consumers showed a big difference in social media commerce perceptions between digital and non-digital products, while female consumers' perceptions showed fewer differences. Since women are more likely to care about buying products online than men, such as spending more time to search patiently for products and checking any offers available (Prabhu, 2015), female consumers may have fewer differences in perception although the products are different. Similarly, Sebastianelli (2008) observed that men and women have different preferences for the types of product to buy online.

Lastly, this study discovered that Chinese consumers' purchase intentions and trust in social media commerce are influenced not by perceived risk but by perceived convenience. Previous research has shown that Chinese consumers show less resistance to change, such as social media commerce, due to China's collectivistic and low uncertainty culture (Lim et al., 2004; Png, Tan & Wee, 2001; Weber & Hsee, 1998). Chinese consumers might be more likely to accept social media commerce despite the potential risk, because Chinese culture acts as a cushion to reduce risk.

Furthermore, previous studies claimed that consumers' satisfaction with prior Internet purchases is negatively related to the perceived risk of future purchases (Pires et al., 2004). Since all of the survey respondents were Weibo users, their previous shopping experience on Weibo might have counterbalanced the perceived risk when imagining shopping for the suggested product. This finding also supports the previous argument that risk and trust are not necessarily related (Corbitt et al., 2003), and perceived risk is not a predictor of purchase intention (Kanungo & Jain, 2004).

VI. Implications and Limitations

This research contains several managerial implications for marketing practitioners, particularly those who plan to enter the Chinese social media commerce market. It is important to understand Chinese consumers' perceptions in order to build a successful social media marketing strategy, because Chinese consumers' online shopping behaviors differ from Western consumers', and social media commerce has developed rapidly in China.

The results of this research suggest that marketers should focus on the convenience of social media commerce to attract Chinese consumers to use it. Chinese consumers especially showed a higher level of perceived convenience when buying a non-digital product. This implies that the convenience of purchasing products should be emphasized when selling non-digital product on social media commerce in China.

Another implication of this study is that, contrary to previous studies' contention, there is no gender gap regarding online consumers' social media commerce perceptions. It is interpreted that Chinese social media users' gender gap is rapidly diminishing as online shopping and social media become widespread. Thus, a gender-specific approach in social media commerce might not be as effective in the Chinese market as marketers previously anticipated.

This study's results indicate that a perceived risk in social media commerce influences neither their purchase intention nor their trust in social media commerce. It would be more effective for marketers to emphasize convenience rather than reducing social media commerce risks, as Chinese consumers are relatively more accustomed to social media commerce than other countries' consumers.

Like any other studies, this research has some limitations. First, the research sample was relatively small for reflecting all Chinese social media users. Although the sample's age range meets Chinese social media users' age range, it is difficult to generalize the result when the country has such a huge number of social media users. Additionally, the survey respondents

are all from same region, the affluent coastal area of China. These regional characteristics may have affected the survey results.

The sample group also had a gender imbalance. Although there are industry reports that females use social media more than men do (Perrin, 2015), the imbalanced gender ratio might have affected the results.

Finally, this study employed a fictitious Weibo page to investigate Chinese social media users' perceptions of social media commerce. Although this study tried not to include the Weibo name and specific product brand name, respondents might have had potential bias from prior knowledge and experience of Weibo.

The previously mentioned discussions and limitations suggest that more research is needed. As the research found that convenience is very important for Chinese consumers to accept social media commerce, the aspects of social media commerce that are considered convenient should be examined in any future research. Thus, future research may consider convenience in terms of time, cost, and accessibility to examine its influence on Chinese consumers' intentions to use social media commerce.

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