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Yun Wang

Carleton University, yun.wang3@carleton.ca

Michel Rod

Carleton University, michel.rod@carleton.ca

Shaobo Ji

Carleton University, shaobo.ji@carleton.ca

Qi Deng

Carleton University, qi.deng3@carleton.ca

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APPLYING BOURDIEU’S PRACTICE THEORY TO SOCIAL COMMERCE: TOWARD A DYNAMIC PROCESS-ORIENTED RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Yun Wang
Carleton University
yun.wang3@carleton.ca

Michel Rod
Carleton University
michel.rod@carleton.ca

Shaobo Ji
Carleton University
shaobo.ji@carleton.ca

Qi Deng
Carleton University
qi.deng3@carleton.ca

Abstract

In this paper, we introduce an analytical lens for studying the process and social dynamics of social commerce. By critically reviewing social commerce literature, we propose a dynamic process-oriented approach to complement the traditional one-way prediction-based research approach. Moreover, we introduce a theoretical framework that brings together economic, social and cultural perspectives to fully understand individual’s practices in social commerce. Drawing on Bourdieu’s practice theory, we attempt to reveal the different benefits pursued by the diverse types of individuals who participate in social commerce and elaborate on their practices for achieving particular benefits. For ease of discussion, we elaborate on our research approach and framework under the context of dietary supplements (DS) social commerce. We expect to uncover the differential social distinctions and the logic of practice in social commerce. Our paper may contribute to our knowledge of the impacts of social and cultural factors on social commerce business model. It may help extend and adapt Bourdieu’s practice theory to the social media age. More importantly, our research may have implications for the design of social commerce platforms. By understanding the social status distinctions in social commerce, designers of platforms could attract and retain the targeted audiences by providing corresponding status markers that appeal to these groups of people and by actively participating in formulating the logic of practice in the field.

Keywords

social commerce, process-oriented, social dynamics, status, capitals

1. Introduction

Social commerce refers to the delivery of e-commerce activities and transactions via the social media environment (Liang & Turban, 2011). During the last two decades, we have seen a rapid development of social commerce by either adding commercial features to social networking sites (SNS) or adding social media features like user-generated-content (UGC) and networking into e-commerce websites (Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016). To date, business process in social commerce is still a new and complex phenomenon since it is built on a non-traditional online structure enabled by the everchanging social media technologies, and it covers dynamic sociological aspects surrounding multi-stakeholder’s practices and interactions. This paper intends to explore the social dynamics in social commerce. To do that, we establish our investigation in a particular context – dietary supplements (DS) social commerce, due to the popularity of DS in social commerce. In recent years, with the development of a healthy lifestyle culture, dietary supplements, defined as a group of products intended to supplement the diet, has become the fastest growing category of

complementary and alternative medicines (Homer & Mukherjee, 2018). At the same time, aided by Internet and Web 2.0 technology, consumers' information searching behavior moves towards the "self-educated" approach (Peters, Shelton & Sharma, 2004) – instead of relying on health professionals for advice, consumers prefer to seek information, purchase products and share their consumption experiences with others all through social media platforms (Jordan & Haywood, 2007). In addition to the informational support, the networking capability of social media enables consumers to become the new "connected consumers" who can actively build health communities and share health knowledge on social media (Thompson & Troester, 2002).

Social commerce has become one of the main channels to distribute and sell DS globally. Sellers, buyers and other stakeholders co-exist in the field of social commerce and leverage a range of skills and networks to meet their differential needs (Adkins & Corus, 2009). Thanks to the unique capabilities of social media – UGC and social networking (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012; Chen, Chau & Gupta, 2014), social commerce encompasses a large variety of activities including economical (i.e., transactions), social (i.e., networking), and cultural activities (i.e., UGC creation and consumption). Further, DS social commerce specifically exemplifies the social and cultural features as the health-related consumption involves much knowledge generation and sharing. In this paper, by extending Bourdieu's practice theory to the field of social commerce, we are interested in answering the following questions: 1) what is the dynamic process of achieving social distinctions in social commerce; 2) how are the economic, social and cultural capitals exchanged and transformed during that process? Contrary to the traditional mainstream social commerce research that is grounded in prediction-oriented cognitive theories like TPB (i.e., Theory of Planned Behavior) and TAM (i.e., Technology Acceptance Model), our study undertakes a more exploratory and explanatory approach and applies Bourdieu's practice theory to account for the multifaceted and dynamic nature of social commerce.

2. Literature review

2.1 Social commerce – definitions, features, and taxonomies

A closer look at the social commerce literature reveals that this concept is associated and used with many inconsistencies (Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016; Liang & Turban, 2011). Various definitions of social commerce are given by researchers (see Lin, Li & Wang, 2017; Liang & Turban, 2011; Zhou, Zhang & Zimmermann, 2013). Despite the various definitions, researchers agree that it differs from other e-business like e-commerce and group buying in process and mechanism (Rad & Benyoucef, 2011). In a broader sense, three types of social commerce are identified: 1) SNS (social networking sites) that incorporate commercial features to allow transactions and advertisements; 2) traditional e-commerce websites that add social tools to facilitate social interaction and sharing (Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016; Lin et al., 2017); and 3) the increasing use of social media by traditional offline firms to improve business performance (e.g. customer service) (Lin et al., 2017). This taxonomy suggests that social commerce has been infused into almost every aspect of marketing in the age of social media. In this research, we adopt the perspective of Yadav et al. (2013) and Zhang & Benyoucef (2016), which refers to social commerce as "individual's social network in computer-mediated social environments, where the exchange-related activities occur in, or influenced by" (Yadav et al., 2013, p. 312). It emphasizes the key features of social commerce: exchange-related activities, computer-mediated social environment, and meaningful personal connections and sustained social interactions (Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016). More concisely,

we refer to the fundamental capabilities of social commerce as: commercial activities and social activities (Liang & Turban, 2011). Accordingly, this paper rules out e-commerce sites such as Amazon and Groupon, which have no explicit social networks among their users (Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016). Instead, we focus on individuals' SNS to better highlight the social nature of social commerce. Previous research signals that there still is room for further exploration of the social emphasis (Curty & Zhang, 2013).

2.2 Prior research on social commerce – theories and themes

A variety of theories have been applied to social commerce research. Four major streams are identified: 1) prediction-oriented cognitive theories like theory of reasoned action (TRA), theory of planned behavior (TPB), and technology acceptance model (TAM); 2) motivation-oriented theories like consumer value theory and uses and gratifications theory; 3) social-related theories like social capital theory and social influence theory; and 4) culture-related theories like Hofstede's five cultural dimensions (Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016). However, these four streams do not attract research attention evenly – most studies are grounded on the first group, especially on TAM, TPB, and TRA (Busalim & Hussin, 2016). Motivation-based theories and social-related theories rank as the second tier while culture-related theories are rarely applied (Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016). Researchers prefer the prediction type of theory because this stream provides business with testable propositions and causal explanations (Busalim & Hussin, 2016). However, we have seen increasing criticisms regarding TPB and TAM by pointing out that those models fail to take sufficient account of the role played by social factors. Many important social behaviors are not 'reasoned' or 'planned' but rather are 'habitual', and therefore fall outside the purview of the models (Manstead, 2011). Further, not only social behaviors but also consumers' beliefs and goals are sometimes un/subconscious and unplanned.

Owing to the dominance of the prediction model approach, mainstream social commerce research centers on themes like website feature identification and user behavior prediction, while other themes like social process and network analysis receive little attention (Busalim & Hussin, 2016). Lin et al. (2017) summarized that social commerce research mainly focused on issues like innovation, corporate reputation and the impact of e-WOM on organizational performance, all of which reflect an organizational-level perspective of analysis, rather than individual consumer perspective. However, by looking at the evolution of social commerce practices, we find that this industry has evolved from focusing on the adoption issues to co-creation and continuing participation (Busalim & Hussin, 2016). At the same time, the marketing strategies for social commerce are evolving from transactional marketing to relationship marketing, and to social media marketing (Curty & Zhang, 2013). Consumers are already at the center of social commerce business models (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013). Indeed, in the Web 2.0 and social media age, consumers can very easily get access to a large amount of information in their daily life. They are more than ever actively participating in business processes by responding to and innovating with business. Therefore, we argue for an investigation from an individual level of analysis.

Furthermore, research shows that only applying one single theory like TPB or TAM cannot fully explain the variance in consumers' purchasing and using behaviors (Nichter & Thompson, 2006). Context-specific factors like individual and situational factors are increasingly advocated as important influencers in individual behavior prediction. Specifically, researchers highlight the role of culture as an important moderator that differentiates individual's social commerce behavior

(Yadav et al., 2013). Despite this, there is a lack of attention to the contingency view or research on cultural aspects of social commerce. A unidimensional research approach may lead to the isolated and limited investigations on social commerce phenomenon. That is, researchers only focused on one consumption stage – normally the pre-purchasing or purchasing stage (Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016), or they only targeted one party/stakeholder in the marketplace – normally the purchaser (Busalim & Hussin, 2016). It is insufficient given that social commerce is a highly dynamic marketplace that builds on practices of a variety of players in a series of consumption stages, like pre-purchasing, occasional purchasing, continuing adoption and committed use, and disposal stage (Lin et al., 2017).

3. Critiques and theoretical foundations

3.1 Critiques and gaps

Based on the review of social commerce literature, we firstly suggest that the research approach that is solely based on prediction-oriented cognitive theories like TPB and TAM is not sufficient enough for understanding individual's behavior in social commerce. Firstly, according to Ajzen & Fishbein (1980) themselves, the TRA/TPB models work best for behaviors that are completely under the individual's volitional control (Kashima, Gallois & McCamish, 1993). However, within the Web 2.0 information environment, which is extremely dynamic and involving multi-players, many user behaviors are dependent upon the cooperation of others to a large extent. Secondly, these models consider the consumption behaviors from a temporal and isolated perspective. Indeed, for a non-habitual/ non-routine 'one-time' decision making, consumers may engage in the more elaborate processing of information implied by the models like TPB. However, in the real circumstances, consumers usually have "past behaviors" and these past behaviors sometimes interact with intention in the prediction of future behaviors (Verplanken et al., 1998). Factors like automatic behaviors or habitual behaviors should be taken into account (Aarts & Dijksterhuis, 2000). Lastly, research using these models regard the variables included in the models as having additive effects on intentions and behavior (Manstead, 2011). The assumption that the influences of the predictor variables are linear has been criticized; under some circumstances they demonstrate significant interaction effects (Weinstein, Rothman & Sutton, 1998).

Building on this critique, we introduce our first position: *we propose a dynamic process-oriented approach to complement the traditional one-way prediction-based approach*. By stating "dynamic", we intend to highlight the context-dependent feature of social commerce due to the everchanging nature of social media technology and the socio-cultural components that are involved in social commerce. By taking on a process-oriented approach, we will explore various stakeholders' practices, interactions and relationships in the online marketplace. It exemplifies the impact of social factors on user behavior and enables us to take habitual and non-cognitive behaviors into account. Guided by this approach, instead of drawing 'a line with arrow' (i.e., predicting individual behaviors), we intend to draw 'a circle within which various nodes and edges exist' (i.e., explaining the organisms underlying their behaviors). That is, the purchase intention or purchase behavior is not the end of the story; rather, they are only some of the nodes on the intertwined chains of social processes that affect the various stakeholders' social distinctions in the field and holistically determine the logic of practice of the marketplace.

Our second critique focuses on the unidimensional approach employed in previous studies. We argue that simply transmitting from prediction theories to other streams of theory is not enough. Rather, we argue for an integrated use of different theoretical streams. The reason lies underneath the phenomenon of social commerce itself. First of all, we have observed that “social” and “commerce” are the two fundamental features of social commerce (Liang & Turban, 2011), which pushes consumers to give significant weights to both cognitive and social concerns. Additionally, social commerce is building on the creation and sharing of UGC. For example, in the case of DS social commerce, sellers and buyers are (re)posting and sharing nutrition and health related UGC through social commerce platforms (Ngai et al., 2015). Hence, it is also facilitating cultural productions, e.g. the formation of healthy lifestyle culture. And the sellers and purchasers who engage in DS social commerce are also the health culture content producers or consumers. The content producers will compete for distinction within particular social spaces to appeal to customers; the taste of customers will determine the performance of those producers in the competition. Hence, we propose that, in addition to the cognitive concerns caused by transactional activities and the social concerns resulted from networking activities, users of social commerce are living in a cultural production environment which prompts them to distinguish themselves to show their tastes and gain certain positions (Levina & Arriaga, 2014). To support, some cultural values like “making connections” (transformative insights) (Thompson & Troester, 2002), “gaining peace of mind” (Peters et al., 2004) and “a philosophy of holism” (Spence & Ribeaux, 2004) are expressed by consumers as the major values attained from DS social commerce. Hence, we propose our second position: *we propose to introduce a theoretical framework that brings together economic, social and cultural perspectives to fully understand individual’s practices in social commerce.*

3.2 Bourdieu’s practice theory

In the 1980s a new theory called ‘practice theory’ was proposed by Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1984). This theory focuses on the major question of how individuals’ routine practices are influenced by the external structure of their social world and how these practices, in turn, contribute to the maintenance of that structure (Jenkins, 2002). Three key concepts are developed: Habitus, Capital and Field. *Habitus* is defined by Bourdieu (1984) as “systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structures predisposed to operate as structuring structures”. It shapes individuals’ activities in the field through socially learned schemata of perception and inclinations to action (Levina & Arriaga, 2014). Habitus links objective, social conditions to people’s behaviors and often finds its expressions in particular lifestyles (Cockerham, Rütten & Abel, 1997). In turn, agents, through their collective actions – the transfer and transformation of different *Capitals*, shape the structures of the field, change their positions (status), and adjust their own old “habitus”. Bourdieu’s work identifies and distinguishes three forms of capital: economic, social and cultural. *Economic capital* comprises income, property and other financial assets. *Social capital* refers to the actual and potential resources that can be mobilized through social contacts and connections. *Cultural capital* refers to resources that are related to differentiated value systems.

Lastly, we introduce another two key concepts in Bourdieu’s practice theory. *Fields* are mapped out by patterns of relations among actors that share a common aim or vested interest and that usually compete with each other over resources or in defining need and supply (Martin, 2003). The social dynamics in fields are centered on the generation of distinctions (i.e., status) among agents, who “constantly work to differentiate themselves from their closest rivals” (Bourdieu & Wacquant,

1992, p.100). *Status* refers to the degree of accumulated prestige, consecration, or honor (Bourdieu 1984). It is also called *symbolic capital*. *Power* refers to “asymmetric control over valued resources” (Magee & Galinsky, 2008, p.361) and accumulated by the continuing transformations and transfers of capitals. Power and status are similar in that both serve to form social differentiations, and both are context specific, but they are distinct in the sense that power pertains to control over capitals, whereas status exists only in the eyes of others (Magee & Galinsky, 2008, p.363-364). Status begets power (i.e., status can be used to increase one’s stock of the three primary forms of capital), and vice versa, power begets status (e.g., money, skill, degrees, and cultural objects can be used to gain admiration).

3.3 Applications of Bourdieu’s practice theory

A fundamental characteristic of Bourdieu’s notion of the field is that it is built on relations among agents that define the structure of the field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). This notion makes Bourdieu’s concepts fully compatible with social media and online community research. Moreover, Bourdieu’s work came to prominence in his series of studies on taste and cultural production that demonstrated how cultural products such as art, writing, food and films are produced, evaluated, consumed and reproduced (Bourdieu, 1984). This observation provides support for applying his theory to online field given that many UGC (user-generated-content) platforms constitute prime grounds for the (re)production of cultural goods and the enactment of tastes (Zeng & Wei, 2013). Levina & Arriaga (2014) are the pioneer researchers who have significantly contribute to the application and extension of Bourdieu’s practice theory to online fields. Prior to their work, diverse streams of research have directly or peripherally discussed the issues of how users achieve social status in online fields and how this distinction, in turn, influences their behavior, such as online social network analysis, online communities, reputation systems, and blogspheres. However, the various research streams do the investigation in an incompatible way or only address a certain type of online status (e.g. reputation gained from online transactions). Motivated by unpacking the dynamics of social process, Levina & Arriaga (2014) applied a cohesive theory – Bourdieu’s practice theory – to not only understand how users distinguish themselves online, but also to account for the multifaceted and dynamic nature of the acquisition process. Based on the practice theory, they explained how diverse types of producers and consumers of content jointly generate unique power relations online and elaborate on what role the capitals and habitus may play in shaping social dynamics in online fields (Levina & Arriaga, 2014).

Our paper further extends Levina & Arriaga’s (2014) approach to a specific online field – social commerce. In our research, social commerce refers to adding commercial features into social media communities in which relations and social distinctions play a big role. Hence, we are discussing a more complicated online field which involves not only the UGC generation and sharing but also the online economic activities (e.g., transactions). The link between social commerce and social media offers additional advantages in applying Bourdieu’s theoretical lens to our phenomenon of interest. Even on the commercial side, Bourdieu’s practice theory has been applied. By applying to e-commerce research, it helps explain the role of culture in the variance in e-commerce use across countries (Dinev et al., 2006); it helps understand the difficulties that e-commerce faces in establishing trust in the internet as a system (Morrison & Firmstone, 2000); it helps uncover the importance of the key decision maker’s entrepreneurial orientation (i.e. incorporated cultural capital) on e-business development (Fillis, Johansson & Wagner, 2004); and

it helps explore the role of capital exchanges in creating and maintaining high quality business relationships in China (Wong et al., 2007).

4. Our research framework

Figure 1 demonstrates our proposed research framework. Building on Bourdieu's theory, our research attempts to illustrate the process of capital accumulation and status distinction in social commerce as well as how this process is influenced by the technological features of social commerce platform (see Figure 2). Specifically, we aim to uncover the different motivations for individuals' behaviors in social commerce, and to explore the inter-dependent relationships between habitus and social status, and between power accumulation and status distinction. We will also discuss the social structural changes brought by social media technologies with a hope to extend Bourdieu's approach to social media age. To facilitate the illustration of our framework, in the following paragraphs, we will describe our framework in detail with the case of DS (dietary supplement) social commerce.

First, we summarize that there are three major forms of capital in DS social commerce. They are: economic, social, and cultural capitals. Specifically, economic capital comprises material resources like income, property and other financial assets that can be directly transformed into money and used for the exchange of goods and values. As Figure 2 demonstrates, in our DS social commerce context, economic capital is either in the form of money needed to buy health promoting goods (i.e. DS products), or the advertising revenue and brand endorsement implanted in social media influencers' posts (Levina & Arriaga, 2014). As we already know, social capital refers to the actual and potential resources that can be mobilized through social contacts and connections (Bourdieu, 1986). Applying this to the social commerce environment, we include resources developed in building contacts (e.g., friends making, following, subscribing) and connecting activities with others (e.g., commenting, re-posting, "thumbs-up", "likes") as examples of social capital (see Figure 2). As for cultural capital, we further divide it into three states: incorporated, institutionalized, and objectivized. Incorporated cultural capital refers to the highly invisible capitals like health knowledge, Web 2.0 technical skills or UGC competence that are in-built in an individual's mind through lifelong learning experiences. Institutionalized cultural capital is in the forms of educational degrees and professional certificates, which are the most visible state of cultural capital. Objectivized state represents the materialized cultural capital, e.g. health books, nutritional articles and DS booklets.

Revolving around the transformations and transfers of capitals, individuals engage in DS social commerce and accumulate different capitals (see Figure 2 for examples). The bold black arrows in Figure 1 represent two types of their motivations (i.e., two directions for practice). Individuals are either seeking social distinction or attempting to change their lifestyle. To distinguish themselves from others, they would determine the ideal position they want to be in the community (i.e., the specific type of social status/ symbolic representation), and then practice accordingly to attain the differential accumulated power (i.e., the asymmetric control over their capitals). As we stated earlier, the power begets status because the resources like money, cultural objects and skills, and social supports are used to gain admiration, while status also begets power because status can be used to increase one's stock of the three primary forms of capital (Levina & Arriaga, 2014). Alternatively, we have a second proposition for the motivation. That is, the unsatisfied health

condition and health lifestyle (i.e., the habitus). The two directions of motivation may be independently formed or co-exist with each other.

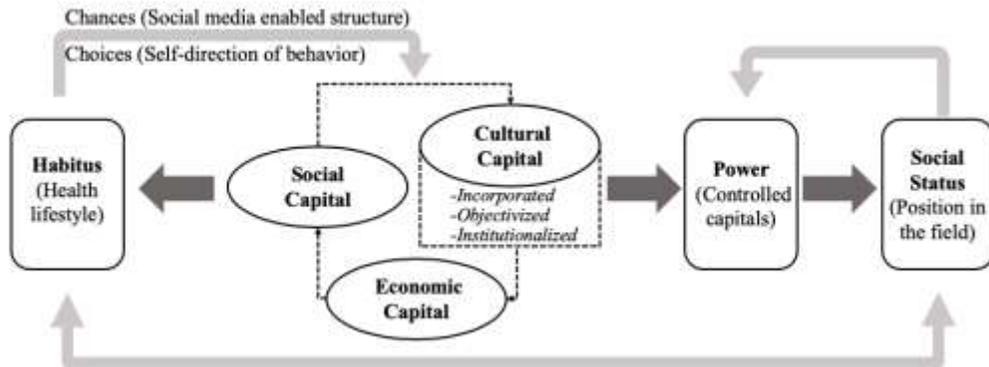


Figure 1. Our research framework based on Bourdieu’s practice theory

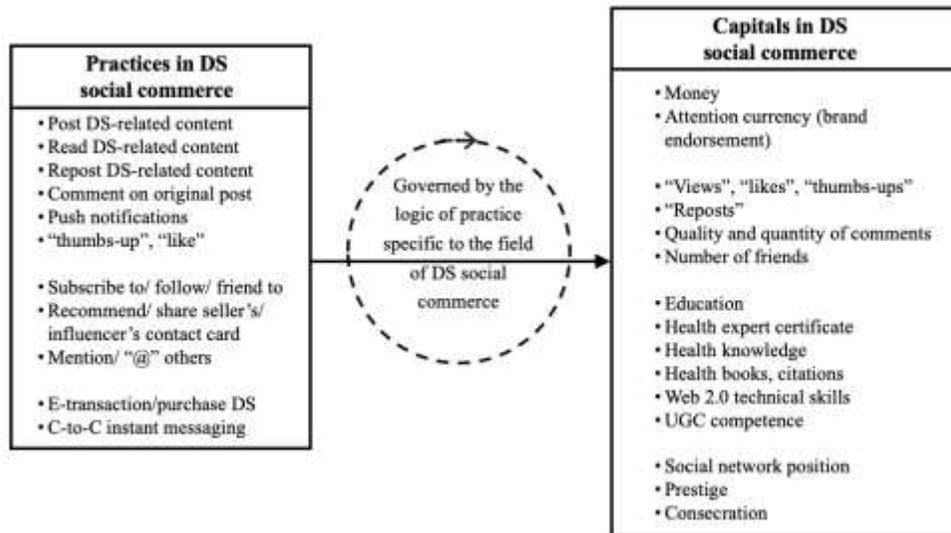


Figure 2. Practices and capital accumulations in DS social commerce

We further elaborate on the arrow from “habitus” to the “capital transformations” (the upper left corner in Figure 1). According to health consumption researchers, the interest or incentives for personal investment in health (e.g., by means of lifestyle changes) is socially learned and often part and expression of a broader *habitus* (Abel, 2007). In Bourdieu’s practice theory, the *habitus* determines the social stratification to which an individual belongs, and results in the “life chances” (i.e., the self-direction of one’s behavior) and “life choices” (i.e., the resources and constraints an individual may face in their social structure) (Cockerham et al., 1997). Consequently, the higher a person’s position in a class hierarchy, the better the person’s life chances (probabilities for satisfaction) are. However, we would argue for some changes when applying Bourdieu’s theory to the social commerce. Aided by Web 2.0 technological features, social media has become a social environment in which structural influences are heavily discounted. In social media, the participants’ offline demographics, personal identities and social positions are losing their visibility and importance to a large extent. Many UGC platforms tend to reduce the power of external economic capital and deemphasize the symbolic values brought by user’s real-life social class. Under such

circumstances, we propose that users of social commerce are less constrained by the social structure and are empowered to make their own “life choices” more actively and independently.

5. Discussion

5.1 Application and extension of Bourdieu’s practice theory

Our research framework emphasizes a need to dynamically and holistically apply economic, social, and cultural perspectives all into social commerce investigation. This approach highlights the importance of an integrated use of theories that particularly suits the “social” and “commerce” features of social commerce as well as its capability as a cultural production site. To illustrate, we introduce the next step in our research project – we will apply our research framework to the particular DS social commerce platform, *WeChat* in China, and conduct an interpretive qualitative research by interviewing both DS sellers and buyers in that platform. Based on our framework, we will be able to understand why Chinese consumers are willing to buy and sell western-branded nutritional supplements through social commerce and to uncover the cultural productions accompanied by economic and social activities. This is an interesting research considering that DS in China has become the second largest market in the world and the importance of internet retailing in China is much higher than that in other countries (Euromonitor International, 2018), and that China is well-known for its emphasis of “Guan Xi” (i.e., the relationship) in business (Ou et al., 2014).

In addition to the application of the practice theory, we may contribute to its extension to social media. In the traditional offline social world, habitus is the central concept in Bourdieu’s approach that determines the interplay between individual’s perceptions and behaviors and their socially structured environments and objective living conditions. Due to the social stratifications and the subsequent uneven distribution of resources, individuals critically evaluate and choose their course of action (i.e., the practices in the field). However, we argue that, by extending to Web 2.0 age, the impact of real-world social stratification may be discounted in a way that social media technologies reduce the power of external economic and social capital and de-emphasize the symbolic values produced by user’s real-life identity. Social media platforms may not require the users to provide real socio-demographic information, and instead, the users could even pretend to be the ideal self they want to show other people. Hence, in the online field, individuals are much less constrained by the social structure and are empowered to gain a larger probability for satisfaction. We encourage more social media related research applying and extending Bourdieu’s practice theory since different types of social media platforms may provide different resources and constraints that differentially affect individual’s practices.

5.2 Understanding the business model of social commerce

Our research may have implications for understanding business process and mechanism of social commerce. By applying our research framework to empirical studies (e.g., in-depth interviews with DS social commerce users), we anticipate developing a process model of how social status is formed in social commerce field and to explain the “logic of practice” of social commerce. Based on our literature review, social commerce research is dominated by positivist approach of model development and hypothesis testing and is centered on themes of website feature analysis and user behavior prediction. Other themes like social process and network analysis gained little attention. Our research may help fill this gap. Grounded on Bourdieu’s practice theory, we may be able to

provide more sociological depth by taking on a process-oriented perspective and involving in multi-stakeholders. One of the key implications of our work may be that we recognize that social commerce can be seen under the general lens of the power dynamics. That is, when users start investing their resources into a shared area of interest, they also start differentiating among themselves.

We especially want to emphasize the importance of cultural capital accumulation in contemporary consumers' decision-making processes. Especially in the world of social media, individuals are willing to invest in their economic capital and social capital for an exchange of cultural capital (e.g., purchasing health maintenance supplements or following/subscribing to social media health influencers to show others or show themselves that they are in a particular healthy lifestyle). Hence, when promoting health-related products (e.g., homeopathy and herbal therapy) or other culture-related products/services (e.g., paint night), marketers may want to make use of the objectivized cultural capital and institutionalized cultural capital (e.g., booklets and professional/educational certificates) to show the audience about their incorporated cultural capital (e.g., health/artistic knowledge, skills and tastes). In this way, we would expect for a further development in social media marketing and content marketing.

5.3 Social commerce platform design

Our research may have implications for the design of social commerce and more widely, social media platform. As Aral et al. (2013) have observed, “understanding how social media design impacts interaction and social structure is critical because these social processes affect the very fabric of society” (p. 5). The design decisions are important to the UGC co-creation process of digital businesses. To get a sense of how important they are, we could have a look at the historical developments of major UGC platforms. For example, YouTube initially only indicated the times of views of a particular video (a content-based distinction) but now has developed a system combining both content-based and user-based distinctions (e.g., showing the times of views and “thumbs-up”, and the number of subscribers). Amazon started by simply allowing customers to write unstructured reviews but now developed with more distinction measures like allowing customers to indicate the helpfulness of a particular review. We can see many examples from the social media industry that try to help users distinguish themselves by the platform design, however, our understandings of how they stimulate or impede users' UGC contribution is limited (Aral et al., 2013). Our application and development of a unifying theory for understanding social dynamics responsible for user distinctions may help us answer questions like why platforms don't just immediately copy each other's status-related design choices. The designers of platforms can promote certain behaviors that they desire by making some status markers more prominent than others. Compared to e-commerce, which focuses on the efficiency maximization and one-way browsing and communication, social commerce, however, is oriented toward social goals such like networking and collaborating among multiple stakeholders, with a secondary focus on shopping (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013). To achieve that goal, designers of platforms could manipulate on the audiences they want to attract and retain by providing corresponding status markers that appeal to these groups of people and by actively participating in formulating the logic of practice in the field.

6. Conclusion and limitation

To conclude, our study applies Bourdieu's practice theory to account for the multifaceted and dynamic nature of social commerce phenomenon. By focusing on individuals' economic, social, and cultural practices, we anticipate understanding their motivations for participating in social commerce. More importantly, we aim to reveal the dynamic processes of capital exchange and transformation that underlie their practices and interactions, and to map out the consequence of that process – the social structure of social commerce. Our research may contribute to our understandings of individual behaviors in social commerce. It may also extend Bourdieu's practice theory by applying it to social media environment and have implications for social commerce platform design. That said, this proposed study and its anticipated implications are limited by the nature of conceptual study and the specific data source. The research (framework) is based on a single framework adapted from sociological field. Future research can further address the research topic by broadening the literature review by referring to more social media relevant theories like Qi et al.'s (2018) work, formulating a research model drawing on other theories, or testing the framework with primary data. It is our hope that this paper will foster more research into social commerce investigations undertaking a dynamic process-oriented view and adopting an integrated approach that involves cognitive, social and cultural perspectives.

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