2024-05-01

Will Consumer-Generated Reviews and Electronic Word-of-Mouth Communications Affect Subjective Norm Perceptions, Attitudes Toward Social Commerce, and Social Shopping Intensions Among Gen Z Consumers?

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THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at El Paso

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Communication

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

May 2024

Acknowledgments

I begin by expressing gratitude to Almighty God for his infinite grace, mercy, and compassion, enabling me to complete this study. I would also like to acknowledge and honor my thesis advisor, Dr. Kenneth C.C. Yang, who has given attention to the supervision of this project and made it scholarly. I am grateful for his entire academic guidance from day one to the overall success of this project.

I am also grateful to my thesis committee members, Dr. Yannick Atouba and Dean John Hadjimarcou, for sharing their extensive knowledge, experience, and unwavering support throughout the research process. Their guidance and insights have been instrumental in shaping this project.

Lastly, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to my parents, siblings, friends, and families for their unwavering love and support while writing this project. Your encouragement and support have been a source of strength and motivation throughout this journey. Thank you all.

Abstract

Social commerce has become a global phenomenon in recent years. Its convenience and accessibility have revolutionized how consumers shop and interact with brands and merchants. Gen Z consumers make up the majority (55.5%) of social buyers, and they are likely to be influenced by consumer-generated reviews (CGRs) and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on social media. This thesis draws on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and employs a quantitative online questionnaire to determine whether CGRs and eWOM influence subjective norms (SN) perceptions, attitudes toward social commerce (ASC), and social shopping intention (SSI) of Gen Z consumers. The theoretical framework also included three message dimensions of eWOM and CGRs (i.e., believability, credibility, and trust) as antecedents.

The multiple regression results showed that credibility significantly predicts consumers' SN. However, believability and trust did not influence the SN of consumers. After controlling the preceding variables, the multiple regression analysis found that SN is a positive and significant predictor of ASC, and ASC was also a positive and significant predictor of SSI. Discussions, implications, and future research directions were provided.

Keywords: Consumer-Generated Reviews (CGRs); Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM); Gen Z Consumers; Regression Analysis; Social Commerce; Subjective Norms; Survey; Theory of Planned Behavior

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Gen Z is the world's most influential and powerful consumer cohort (Spitznagel, 2020). Their sheer size and purchasing power make them a force to be reckoned with approximately 2 billion members (nearly 27% of the global population) (Spitznagel, 2020). Gen Z takes up 25% of the population in the U.S. alone (Davis, 2020). This generation cohort typically refers to individuals born between the mid-1990s and the mid-2010s, which means they are between 17 and 26 years old (Pop et al., 2021). Gen Z was born before Generation Alpha (born from 2009 until the mid-2020s) and after Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980) (see Figure 1.1. below). This age cohort was born right after the Millennials were born between 1981 and 1996, and this generation cohort grew up with the internet and social media becoming increasingly prevalent in their lives (Dimock, 2019).

Generation Z Age

Age cohort	Silent Generation	Baby boomers	Generation X	Millenials/Generation Y	Zoomers/Generation Z	Generation Alpha
Years	1928-1945	1946-1964	1965-1980	1981-1996	1997-2012	2009-2020

Figure 1.1: Gen Z Age Distribution

Source:

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/3/3e/Generation_timeline.svg/1200px-Generation_timeline.svg.png

Social media has also become an indispensable source of entertainment for Gen Z. In a Morning Consult poll, about 82% of Gen Z consumers used social media for amusement, including viewing videos, following influencers, and skimming through feeds (Tran K., 2023). They interact with their favorite celebrities and influencers, converse with their peers, and view creative content, as 45% follow more than 10 influencers or celebrities on social media (Baer, 2019). As a result, social media has become an integral part of Gen Z's life, and it is likely to remain so in the future, as seen in the present average growth rate of 12.5% year-over-year feeds (Tran K., 2023). The thesis explains in the following sections how the rise of social media has contributed to the growing social commerce activities among Gen Z consumers.

1.1 THE RISE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND COMMERCE AMONG GEN Z CONSUMERS

Gen Z consumers have grown up in a highly connected, technologically sophisticated contemporary society, influencing their purchasing habits and tastes (Davis, 2020). Social media use among Gen Z has grown astoundingly (Vogels et al., 2022). In the past ten years, young adults have become much more active on social media (Vogels et al., 2022). Over the past decade, Gen Z consumers have witnessed a substantial increase in the adoption of social media platforms (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). They have embraced platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and YouTube as primary means of communication, self-expression, and content consumption (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). In 2014, just 74% of Americans between 18 and 29 utilized social media; however, the proportion had increased to 90% by 2022 (Vogels et al., 2022). Social media

has become an integral part of the lives of young adults, who now rely heavily on it for communication, news, and entertainment, with 68% of those between the ages of 30 and 49 and 72% of those between the ages of 18 and 29 regularly using digital technology (Shearer, 2021).

Social media is an invaluable tool for the Gen Z cohort, allowing them to stay connected with friends and family and stay informed on current events (Kastenholz, 2021). With the advent of platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok, Gen Z has embraced digital platforms for social interactions (Parker & Igielnik, 2020). These platforms allow them to share updates, photos, and messages, bridge geographical gaps, and foster a connection with their loved ones (Parker & Igielnik, 2020). Whether staying updated on a friend's life events or engaging in virtual group chats, social media enables Gen Z to maintain relationships even when physically separated (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). Gen Z consumers often use these platforms to instant message and share photos, thoughts, and experiences. It is easy to stay in touch with those you care about (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). While 70% of Gen Z utilize YouTube and Instagram (Parker & Igielnik, 2020), which are well-liked platforms for posting and discovering new trends, music, and movies, it also enables them to stay up to date with the newest fashions, discover new music and movies, and investigate novel ideas in a secure and comfortable setting (Auxier & Anderson, 2021).

The Gen Z cohort is composed of digital natives who have a great love for technology and social media, with an estimated 2 billion members (Fromm, 2022). This cohort is becoming increasingly crucial to businesses since they comprise a sizeable section of the worldwide population (Fromm, 2022). Gen Z's market size and influence make them a crucial target for businesses seeking to remain competitive (Amed et al., 2019). As digital natives, Gen Z has grown up surrounded by technology, making them highly adept at navigating digital platforms and

engaging with online content (Amed et al., 2019). This familiarity has given them a unique perspective on consumer trends and preferences, shaping their expectations and behaviors in the marketplace. According to a McKinsey & Company survey, Gen Z accounts for approximately $143 billion in direct spending power in the United States alone (Amed et al., 2019). A Bloomberg survey also estimated that young professionals and students had $360 billion in discretionary income in 2021 (Fromm, 2022). Moreover, as they mature, Gen Z is expected to become even more influential, with estimates suggesting that they will account for 40% of global consumers by 2025 (Fromm, 2020).

Gen Z consumers rely heavily on social media for numerous daily activities, from communication, entertainment, and news to online shopping (Kastenholz, 2021). Gen Z has seamlessly integrated social media platforms into their routines, making it an essential part of their lifestyle and shaping their consumer behaviors (Davis, 2020). According to a survey by Hootsuite and *We Are Social*, Gen Z spends an average of 2 hours and 10 minutes daily on social media platforms (Kemp, 2019). Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and YouTube are popular social media sites that Gen Z likes most (Kemp, 2019). Eighty-one percent of Gen Z say they watch at least an hour of online video content daily (Kastenholz, 2021).

Social media is becoming a crucial resource for Gen Z to learn about things, research, and buy items. For example, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube influence eighty percent of Gen Z's purchasing decisions (Davis, 2020). Additionally, 60% of Gen Z consumers in the U.S. use social media to research products before purchasing (Kastenholz, 2021). Furthermore, other market research has confirmed that Gen Z consumers rely on product reviews to purchase (King, 2018).

Social commerce is one of the most promising applications of social media platforms and networks. It facilitates online commerce transactions and enables merchants to leverage their social

media presence to create a dynamic and engaging customer experience (Liao et al., 2021). The popularity of social media has led to the exponential growth of commercial activities on social media among Gen Z consumers. According to Auxier and Anderson (2021), social commerce sales are expected to reach $600 billion globally by 2027, highlighting the significant potential of this emerging trend. In the United States alone, social commerce sales are projected to reach $40.08 billion by the end of 2023, reflecting a 38.8% increase from the previous year (Shearer, 2021).

The emergence of social commerce has been driven by the meteoric rise of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest, which have become an integral part of the digital marketing landscape (Sinha et al., 2022). Instead of solely relying on dedicated e-commerce websites, consumers can browse, discover, and purchase products directly through social media platforms (Sinha et al., 2022). Integrating e-commerce functionalities within social media channels has significantly streamlined the purchasing process, allowing a seamless transition from product discovery to transaction completion (Ogunmola & Kumar, 2019).

Social commerce has become an increasingly popular way of shopping for young adults, allowing them to explore products, compare prices, and make purchases quickly and easily (Brzezicki, 2021). Social commerce simplifies shopping by providing price comparison tools and displaying competing offers within the same platform. It empowers young adults to find the most competitive prices for desired products. Social commerce saves them time and effort and ensures they make cost-effective purchases. Social commerce provides young adults access to various products and services, allowing them to find what they want without the hassle of traditional shopping (Vieira et al., 2020). It also allows them to see what their friends and other people in their social networks have purchased, giving them a greater chance to find something that suits their needs and interests (Sinha et al., 2022). In addition to convenience, social commerce also

allows young adults to save money (Dabbous et al., 2020). By leveraging these features, young adults can make well-informed decisions and feel confident they are getting the best value for their money, enhancing their overall shopping experience (Vieira et al., 2020).

The convenience and accessibility of social commerce platforms have revolutionized the way Gen Z consumers shop and interact with brands (Tran M., 2023). Social media has become a powerful tool for young people, especially among college students who research products and services before purchasing (Kastenholz, 2021). The seamless integration of product information, user-generated content, and customer reviews within social media feeds allows Gen Z consumers to make informed, one-stop purchasing decisions (Baer, 2019). The ability to discover new products, explore different options, and complete transactions in a few simple clicks has made social commerce an attractive and efficient shopping avenue for this age cohort (Baer, 2019). Furthermore, social media's interactive and visually appealing nature significantly drives social commerce activities among Gen Z shoppers (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Platforms like Instagram and TikTok offer highly engaging content formats, such as videos, stories, and interactive features, which captivate and immerse users (Tran K., 2023). Brands and influencers leverage these features to display products creatively and compellingly, making the shopping experience more interactive and enjoyable (Baer, 2019).

The rise of social commerce among young adults, particularly Gen Z, has been remarkable in recent years (Kymäläinen et al., 2021). Gen Z consumers make up the majority (55.5%) of social buyers in the U.S. (about 44.0% of the total population) (Petrock, 2021). As shown in Figure 1.2, 48.7% of social buyers are between the ages of 25 and 34, while those between the ages of 35 and 44 make up 44.3 % (Petrock, 2021). The 45 to 54 age range accounts for 39.2% of social buyers, and 55 to 64 accounts for 37.5%, while those aged 65+ and above make up the smallest share at

34.3% (Petrock, 2021). Finally, those between the ages of 14 and 17 make up 47.5% of social

buyers (Petrock, 2021).
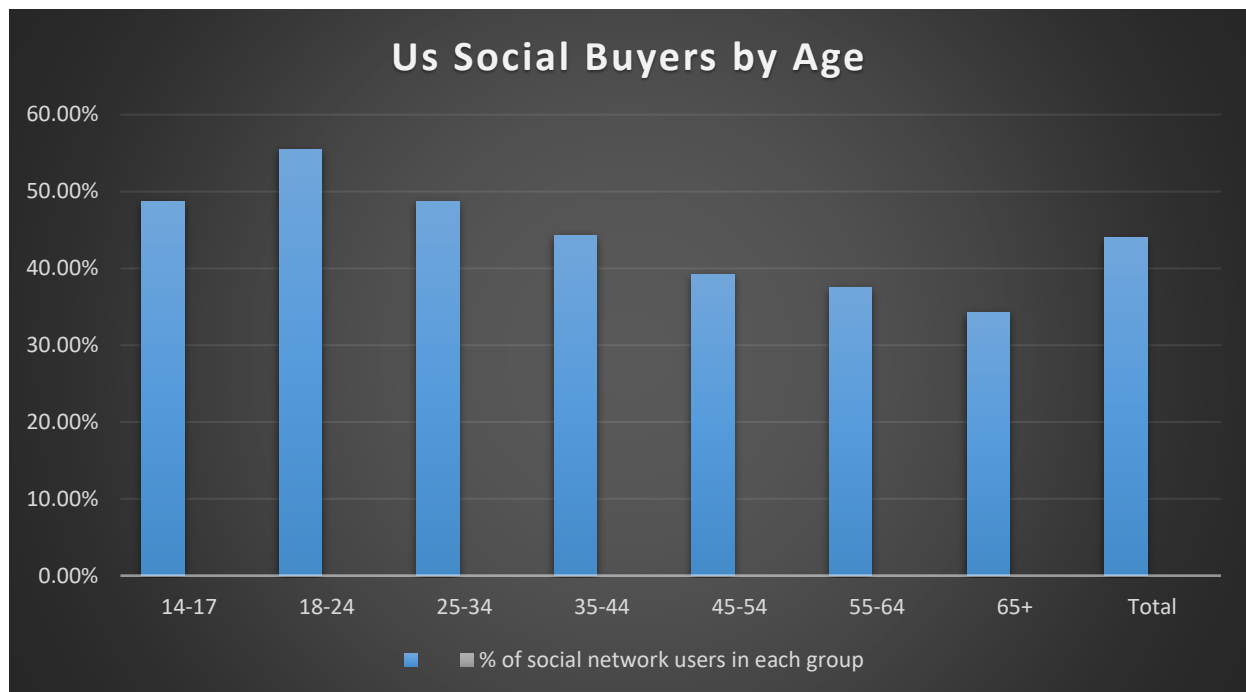
Figure 1.2: U.S. Social Buyers by Age (Petrock, 2021)

Source: https://www.insiderintelligence.com/content/us-generation-z-shopping-behaviors

Social media platforms promote brand recognition and product discovery among this

audience (Tran K., 2023). Ninety percent of Gen Z consumers use social media platforms daily

(Tran K., 2023). This high level of usage frequency supports the importance of social media as a

primary channel for reaching and connecting with Gen Z. With their dependence on social media,

Gen Z consumers are highly receptive to brand messaging and actively engage with content that

aligns with their interests and values (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). These platforms offer diverse

content formats, such as images, videos, and stories, allowing brands to showcase their products

visually, appealing, and creatively (Dwivedi et al., 2023). By crafting compelling content that

speaks directly to the preferences and aspirations of Gen Z, brands can capture their attention and

leave a lasting impression (Ahmed, 2023) and enhance brand recognition as Gen Z consumers

encounter and engage with brand content across their social media feeds (Shaw, 2023). Social media platforms offer powerful targeting and advertising capabilities, enabling brands to reach specific segments within the Gen Z audience. Through data-driven algorithms and advanced targeting options, brands can deliver tailored advertisements to Gen Z consumers based on their demographics, interests, and online behaviors (Dwivedi et al., 2023). This personalized approach ensures that brand messaging reaches the intended audience at the right time, increasing the likelihood of brand recognition and product discovery (Auxier & Anderson, 2021).

Social commerce enables businesses to create unique customer experiences by leveraging the power of social media (Ogunmola & Kumar, 2019) by providing customers with personalized product recommendations, offering interactive content, and providing access to exclusive discounts and promotions (Vieira et al., 2020). Social commerce also allows companies to connect with their customers personally and interact with them in real-time (Gazzola et al., 2020). Companies can use social media to answer customer questions, provide feedback, and build customer relationships (Appel et al., 2020). Social commerce is an effective way for companies to increase sales, build customer loyalty, and increase brand awareness (Alzaidi & Agag, 2022).

Therefore, as Gen Z's adoption of social commerce grows, it emphasizes the significance of unlocking user-generated content and reviews on social media networks to drive sales. The proliferation of social media likely leads to an explosion of online sales and user interaction (Buchholz, 2020). This major behavioral trend highlights why companies must take the plunge and harness the power of social media, as it is an integral part of any modern-day marketing or brand strategy.

1.2 CONSUMER-GENERATED REVIEWS AND ELECTRONIC WORD-OF-MOUTH IN SOCIAL COMMERCE

Social media platforms have made it easier for companies to connect with potential and current customers (Djafarova & Bowes, 2020). They allow customers to share their experiences with friends and followers who may be interested in the same products or services (Djafarova & Bowes, 2020). Social media has enabled businesses to tap into the power of influencers and shoppable posts, allowing young adults to find and purchase products quickly and easily (Pop et al., 2021). Because of the platforms' social connectedness, Gen Z consumers can be easily influenced by word-of-mouth messages online (Pillay, 2021). As a result, social media can be a powerful tool for generating word-of-mouth marketing for online goods and services (Geyser, 2022). When customers share their positive experiences with a product or service on social media, it can encourage their friends and followers to check out the company for themselves (Rani & Shivaprasad, 2021).

Social media has become a powerful tool for influencing the purchasing decisions of Gen Z's peers (Kastenholz, 2021). According to the Morning Consult survey, 85% of Gen Z consumers use social media to investigate products and services before purchasing (Tran K., 2023). YouTube is the most popular social media platform among college students for product research, with 87% using it, followed by Instagram at 76%, TikTok at 68%, Snapchat at 67%, Facebook at 49%, and Twitter at 47% (Roberts, 2023).

The pervasive presence of social media in the lives of Gen Z consumers, coupled with their inclination towards peer influence and social validation, has created a fertile ground for the impact of social media on their purchasing behaviors (Sweet, 2019). Vogels et al. (2022) found that Gen Z consumers are more likely to purchase based on social media research than adults aged 18-34 (41% vs. 29%). In the Pew Research Center survey, 81% of Gen Z respondents said they trust their friends' recommendations when purchasing (Vogels et al., 2022). Similarly, Tsimonis and

Dimitriadis (2014) observed that by researching and consulting with trusted information sources, one could be sure they are making the best purchase decision possible. Yang (2021) also found that peer influence on social media significantly predicted Gen Z consumers' purchase intentions when they were more likely to purchase products recommended by their peers on social media. Businesses have a huge chance to interact with younger customers through social commerce thanks to this high degree of involvement with online reviews (Sweet, 2019). Social media has also become a great platform for self-expression to showcase personal style and interests, as 72% of Gen Z consumers state that they use social media to express themselves creatively (*Businesswire,* 2021).

Gen Z consumers can easily access these reviews and recommendations on various platforms, including social media, e-commerce websites, and online forums (Pillay, 2021). Easy accessibility of consumer-generated reviews (henceforth, CGRs) and electronic Word-of-Mouth (henceforth, eWOM) encourages Gen Z consumers to rely on them when making purchasing decisions (Rouibah et al., 2021). Additionally, the interactive nature of social media allows for a more engaging and participatory experience, allowing consumers to share their opinions and engage with others in a way that was impossible with traditional advertising (Rouibah et al., 2021).

Online reviews as product recommendations carry significant influence, particularly over Gen Z consumers, who place a high value on the opinions of others. One of the reasons online reviews hold such sway over Gen Z is their inclination to seek validation and make informed choices (Nielsen, 2015). A study by Nielsen found that 92% of consumers trust recommendations from people they know, and 70% trust the opinions of unknown users on the internet (Nielsen, 2015). According to Influencer Marketing Hub, 80% of Gen Z customers claimed they had bought something following an influencer's recommendation (cited in Geyser, 2022). In comparison, 86%

of marketers have utilized influencer marketing to reach Gen Z audiences (Geyser, 2022). Around 85% of first-time purchases by Gen Z consumers are preceded by reading reviews, with 67% reading at least three reviews (Sweet, 2019). Ninety percent of Gen Z shoppers trust recommendations from their peers, and 71% rely on social media for shopping decisions. Additionally, 77% of Gen Z consumers follow at least one brand on social media (Baer, 2019).

Gen Z consumers trust consumer-generated word-of-mouth more than traditional advertising methods (Kastenholz, 2021). Wang et al. (2022) also found that social connectedness on social media platforms significantly influences purchasing intentions among Gen Z consumers. Trust in eWOM, measured through the perceived credibility and expertise of those sharing information on social media, is a significant mediator between social connectedness and purchase intentions (Wang et al., 2022). It can be reasoned that Gen Z consumers not only value the opinions of their peers but also trust their expertise and credibility when making purchasing decisions (Pillay, 2021).

Compared with traditional marketing campaigns, consumer-generated reviews can create a sense of authenticity and transparency in their interactions with companies highly valued by Gen Z consumers (Freedman, 2023). Gen Z consumers value authenticity by seeking genuine connections and brand experiences (Kastenholz, 2021). They are skeptical of overly polished and staged marketing campaigns, preferring brands that showcase their true values and beliefs. They believe that reviews from their peers are more reliable and trustworthy (Kastenholz, 2021). The customers are believed to be impartial and not attempt to mislead the readers (Dwidienawati et al., 2020). Reviews from clients boost the confidence of the decision-maker and provide them with additional justification for their choice (Rehman et al., 2022). Potential clients can benefit from the additional information, professional opinions, and tailored counsel from these customer

reviews (Dwidienawati et al., 2020). The quality and length of reviews are important factors in influencing consumer behavior (Dwidienawati et al., 2020). Studies have shown that longer reviews with specific details about the product are perceived as more informative and trustworthy by other consumers (Dwidienawati et al., 2020).

Gen Z consumers are also more likely to share their experiences with others online (Francis & Hoefel, 2019) to align with their preference for authenticity and transparency, as they want to inform others about their experiences with products or services (Dagostino, 2021). They believe sharing their experiences can help others make informed purchasing decisions (Pillay, 2021). They use social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook to post about purchased or used products, leaving reviews and recommendations for others (Chen et al., 2022). They also rely on online communities and forums to get advice from other users before making a purchase (Francis & Hoefel, 2019). If the generation cohort sees their friends and peers using and enjoying a particular product or service, they may be more likely to believe it is also a good option (Francis & Hoefel, 2019). Social media can provide information and reviews about online goods and services (SI, 2023). Students can read reviews and learn about other users' experiences before deciding whether to use a particular service (SI, 2023).

Moreover, the influence of CGRs and eWOM extends beyond direct sales. They also contribute to brand awareness, reputation, and customer loyalty (Rani & Shivaprasad, 2021). Positive reviews and recommendations shared through CGRs can enhance a brand's visibility, attract new customers, and foster a sense of trust and loyalty among existing customers (Rani & Shivaprasad, 2021). Gen Z consumers actively participate in online communities, share their experiences, and contribute to collective knowledge. The engagement strengthens their

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connections with the brand and amplifies the reach and impact of CGRs and eWOM (Rani &
Shivaprasad, 2021).

Research indicates that 68% of Gen Z consumers suggest online reviews influence their
purchasing decisions, and 43% said they would not buy a product without reviews (Chen et al.,
2022). Their reliance on online reviews can be attributed to their desire for informed decision-
making and to seek guidance and validation from the experiences of others in an era inundated
with endless choices and information (Francis & Hoefel, 2019). Online reviews provide them with
a valuable source of information, enabling them to gather insights, assess product quality, and
evaluate the overall satisfaction of previous customers (Francis & Hoefel, 2019). By leveraging
the collective wisdom of online reviews, Gen Z consumers can make more confident and informed
purchasing decisions (Francis & Hoefel, 2019). As a result, companies need to pay attention to the
number of reviews and content, as they can greatly impact consumer behavior (Dagostino, 2021).

In conclusion, many factors might have contributed to adopting CGRs and eWOM,
including a sense of authenticity and openness (Tabassum et al., 2020). CGRs and eWOM are
created by real people, not just marketers or advertising agencies (Castano & Barbosa, 2022). Their
authenticity and transparency might cause Gen Z consumers to perceive these sources as more
trustworthy and genuine. Consumers who believe that reviews and recommendations from other
customers are more likely to provide an honest and unbiased evaluation of a product or service
(Ismagilova et al., 2020).

1.3   RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND JUSTIFICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The thesis investigated whether CGRs and eWOM could affect perceptions of subjective
norms, attitudes toward social commerce, and shopping intentions among Gen Z consumers. This
thesis project also focused on believability, credibility, and trustworthiness as antecedents of CGRs

and eWOM that could affect consumers' decision-making process in social commerce. Findings from this study could enable marketers and advertisers to tailor their social commerce message strategies better to create the most positive and engaging experience in increasing customer trust and loyalty. This study also helps marketers and advertisers identify potential areas of improvement in content design, customer service, and product descriptions to create a more trustworthy and credible social commerce website.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1   THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOR AND SOCIAL COMMERCE

The Theory of Planned Behavior (henceforth, TPB) is a widely used social psychological framework developed by Icek Ajzen in 1985. TPB built on the earlier work of his mentor, Martin Fishbein, who developed the Theory of Reasoned Action (henceforth, TRA) in 1975 (Kan & Fabrigar, 2017). TRA proposes that an individual's behavior is determined by their intention to perform that behavior, which is influenced by their attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control (Leong et al., 2022). Ajzen and Fishbein also postulate that consumers' intentions to act are the best predictors of behavior (Bosnjak et al., 2020). TPB explains various human behaviors, including health-related, environmental, and consumer, in various contexts, such as education, business, and social media (Leong et al., 2022).

Kan and Fabrigar (2017) suggest that the TPB can be useful in understanding how marketing strategies can be designed to influence consumer behavior. They proposed that marketers can alter consumer attitudes toward a product or service by manipulating the associated beliefs, such as highlighting its benefits (Leong et al., 2022). These beliefs can also influence subjective norms by using social influence tactics, such as celebrity endorsements or testimonials from satisfied customers (Leong et al., 2022). Additionally, marketers can provide consumers with information and resources to overcome these barriers by offering easy-to-use online platforms, providing clear and concise product information, and ensuring ease of purchasing (Bosnjak et al., 2020).

Social commerce is a sub-category of e-commerce and refers to exchanging goods and services (Lam et al., 2019). While social commerce and e-commerce both include online buying, some differences exist in platform integration, user involvement, product discovery, trust-building

strategies, checkout procedures, purchase contexts, and continuing consumer engagement (Giao et al., 2020). Social commerce makes use of the social aspects of social media platforms. TPB has been extended to study factors influencing consumers' intentions to engage in social commerce, such as purchasing products or services through social media platforms (Giao et al., 2020). Pavlou and Fygenson (2014) argued that TPB could also explain and predict the process of e-commerce adoption by consumers. They reasoned that attitude and subjective norms influence an individual's intention to engage in social commerce (Pavlou & Fygenson, 2014). Other significant predictors of e-commerce adoption include trust and technological adoption characteristics (e.g., perceived usefulness and simplicity of use) (Pavlou & Fygenson, 2014). Additionally, factors such as technological characteristics (e.g., download delay, website navigability, and information protection), as well as consumer skills, time and monetary resources, and product characteristics (e.g., product diagnosticity and product value, add to the explanatory and predictive power of the model) (Pavlou & Fygenson, 2014).

TPB theorizes how beliefs, arbitrary rules, and perceived behavioral control influence consumers' intention to engage in social commerce (Conner & Norman, 2019). TPB can be extended to explain how social commerce consumers purchase products or services. TPB postulates that consumer behavior is influenced by three main theoretical constructs: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Conner & Norman, 2019).

2.2 CONSUMERS-GENERATED REVIEWS AND ELECTRONIC WORD-OF-MOUTH COMMUNICATIONS IN SOCIAL COMMERCE

CGRs have gained immense popularity in shaping the behavior of Gen Z consumers (Kim, 2021). CGRs refer to any content created and shared by customers on a product, service, or brand that reflects their experiences, opinions, and evaluations. CGRs refer to the reviews, comments,

and ratings about products or services on social media platforms or e-commerce websites (Salma Irelli & Chaerudin, 2020). CGRs refer to "peer-generated evaluations of products published on a brand's official website" (Mudambi & Schuff, cited in Diwanji & Cortese, 2021, p.23). CGRs are a valuable tool in shaping consumers' purchasing behavior, providing valuable information about the quality, usability, and overall value of products and services (Diwanji & Cortese, 2021).

CGRs can be written text, images, and videos and shared on various platforms such as social media, review sites, and e-commerce websites. CGR can be classified into explicit and implicit (Lou & Yuan, 2018). Explicit CGRs are deliberately written or produced to convey a particular message or opinion, such as product reviews or social media posts (Ezechukwu, 2020). Implicit CGRs, on the other hand, are those that are not necessarily intended to convey a message or opinion but can still have an impact on consumer behavior, such as product ratings or likes on social media (Ezechukwu, 2020).

A similar term, and often used interchangeably with CGRs, is eWOM, fueled by the emergence of social media platforms and other online forums that enable consumers to share their experiences with a wide audience (Kim, 2021). eWOM is the electronic transmission of recommendations or criticisms from one individual to another, typically through social media or online communities (Ali et al., 2020). Mudambi and Schuff described eWOM as "user-generated evaluations of products, which are created and posted by them on an online retailer's website to help other users in their purchase decisions" (cited in Diwanji & Cortese, 2021, p.23). eWOM is defined as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions for commercial and non-commercial activity" (Hennig-Thurau, 2004, cited in Rouibah et al., 2021, p.138). eWOM is a form of communication that takes place online, where individuals share

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information about products, services, or brands through various digital channels such as social media, online forums, and review sites (Bosnjak et al., 2020). eWOM can be positive or negative and influence consumers' attitudes, perceptions, and purchase decisions (Salma Irelli & Chaerudin, 2020). Like CGRs, eWOM can take various forms, such as written reviews, comments, ratings, and social media posts (Salma Irelli & Chaerudin, 2020).

Increasingly popular among electronic and social commerce marketers, both CGRs and eWOM have been employed in advertising and marketing communications campaigns. Marketers have developed social commerce tactics to affect customer attitudes and subjective norms over their goods and services, eventually increasing sales (Rouibah et al., 2021). The wide usage of many Gen Z consumers supported their effectiveness. For example, when making purchase decisions, 66% of Gen Z consumers are particularly influenced by CGRs, including consumer reviews and eWOM communications (Abid et al., 2023). A Deloitte survey revealed that 40% of US respondents watch more user-generated videos than movies and television programs on video streaming services (cited in Kim, 2021).

Consumers are empowered by CGRs and eWOM to access a variety of experiences and views given by other customers, providing a more varied and thorough viewpoint on certain goods or services (Ngarmwongnoi et al., 2020). CGRs and eWOM are often focused on certain goods or services made accessible via social commerce platforms. People who browse eWOM and CGRs often have social commerce purchases on their minds. These testimonials and word-of-mouth referrals act as helpful tools by supplying perceptions, evaluations, and firsthand accounts of certain social commerce offers (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017). To make informed selections regarding their purchases, consumers depend on CGRs and eWOM to tap into the collective knowledge of their peers inside the social commerce ecosystem. CGRs and eWOM also help

consumers assess the quality, reliability, and value of the product or service and identify potential issues or concerns that may affect their decision to purchase (Ngarmwongnoi et al., 2020). In addition, CGRs and eWOM can serve as a form of social proof, providing evidence that others have had positive experiences with the product or service (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017).

Second, CGRs and eWOM can also affect consumers' buying intentions (Demba et al., 2019). Positive reviews and recommendations from other customers can increase consumers' confidence in the quality and reliability of a product or service to increase their purchase intention (Chen et al., 2022). Lee and Choeh (2023) claimed that SNS and online comments enable users to collaborate digitally and share opinions, knowledge, and sentiments regarding certain goods and services (Lee & Choeh, 2023). eWOM from both the micro-perspective (i.e., a single individual) and meso-perspective (i.e., a group of individuals) were found to influence purchase decisions directly (Ali et al., 2020). Positive reviews and recommendations can serve as social proof, demonstrating to potential customers that others have had positive experiences with the product or service (Chen et al., 2022). In addition, CGRs and eWOM could also serve as social proof to assure the quality and reliability of products or services, influencing consumers' trust and beliefs about the brand or seller (Lee & Choeh, 2023). The concept of social proof concurs with the subjective norms embedded in CGRs and eWOM, and post-exposure confirmation or disconfirmation of their social commerce shopping may concur with their subjective norms. Positive reviews and recommendations from other customers significantly impact consumers' purchasing decisions (Demba et al., 2019). Positive CGRs or eWOM could increase consumer confidence in the quality and reliability of a product or service, leading to a higher likelihood of purchase (Chen et al., 2022).

Social networking sites and online comments allow users to collaborate digitally and share opinions, knowledge, and sentiments about various goods and services (Lee & Choeh, 2023).

These platforms facilitate the dissemination of CGRs and eWOM, crucial in shaping consumers' purchase decisions. Research suggests that both individual- and group-level) eWOM influences consumers' buying intentions (Ali et al., 2020). Consumers consider the experiences and opinions others share as valuable information for making informed purchase decisions.

Positive CGRs and eWOM serve as social proof, demonstrating to potential customers that others have had positive experiences with a particular product or service (Chen et al., 2022). Social proof is a powerful psychological concept influencing consumers' trust and beliefs about a brand or seller. When consumers perceive a high volume of positive CGRs and eWOM, it reinforces their subjective norms regarding the desirability and acceptance of the product or service in society (Stasi, 2019). Post-exposure confirmation or disconfirmation with social norms refers to consumers' evaluation of their shopping experience after exposure to CGRs and eWOM (Stasi, 2019). If the experience aligns with the positive feedback they encountered, it confirms their SN and reinforces their SSI (Lee & Choeh, 2023). On the other hand, if there is a disconfirmation where the experience contradicts the positive CGRs or eWOM, it may lead to a reevaluation of their SN and potentially impact their future SSI (Lee & Choeh, 2023).

An important question arises: What aspects of CGRs and eWOM as a marketing communication message can better explain their possible impacts on consumer behaviors? Rouibah et al. (2021) found that CGRs and eWOM generate greater trust in purchasing decisions, enhance customer satisfaction, strengthen customer loyalty, increase customer referrals, and positively influence purchase intention in social commerce. Compared to other brand marketing messaging, CGRs and eWOM are frequently seen as more credible (Alareeni & Hamdan, 2022) because consumers believe them to be honest and objective reviews (Alareeni & Hamdan, 2022). A subsequent study also found that eWOM is as effective as its face-to-face counterpart when

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creating a brand's reputation (Rouibah et al., 2021). eWOM is effective because people trust recommendations from their friends over advertisements (Ariely et al., 2013). Furthermore, CGRs and eWOM can increase customer satisfaction and loyalty (Rouibah et al., 2021).

This thesis addresses the theoretical gaps in extant TPB research in social commerce that do not include message-related factors such as perceptions of believability, credibility, and trust. By integrating TPB with other theoretical constructs, researchers can develop a more comprehensive model of social commerce adoption and behavior and provide more insights into the factors influencing consumers' social commerce intentions and behaviors (Leong et al., 2022).

2.3 BELIEVABILITY, CREDIBILITY, AND TRUST IN CGRS AND EWOM IN SOCIAL COMMERCE

The believability, credibility, and trust in CGRs and eWOM can significantly influence consumers' attitudes and subjective norms, affecting their intention to buy and promote the adoption of social commerce platforms (Smith et al., 2013). The following sub-sections discussed message-related dimensions of CGRs and eWOM.

2.3.1 Believability of CGRs and EWOM

Poturak and Turklilmaz (2018) found that online reviews were more credible than traditional advertising, and consumers were more likely to trust and act on positive recommendations from other customers. Lou and Yuan (2018) also found that consumers perceive CGRs as more believable than traditional advertising because sixty percent of consumers trust CGRs, while only 20% trust brand advertising. Similarly, Othman et al. (2019) found that consumers perceive eWOM as more trustworthy and honest, with 80% of respondents trusting eWOM as a reliable source of information.

Believability is conceptually defined as the extent to which an object is perceived by others as credible and reliable (Merriam-Webster, 2023). The concept implies a message's ability to generate trust and confidence in the audience by making the data or the speaker seem trustworthy, sincere, and true in information source and actual substance (Aslam et al., 2020). A source's perceived correctness, dependability, and trustworthiness can be used to operationalize believability (Aslam et al., 2020).

In social commerce, believability is a comprehensive concept encompassing the trustworthiness and credibility of user-generated material (Cavusoglu & Atik, 2021). It refers to how other consumers perceive online reviews as credible and trustworthy in social commerce (Algharabat & Rana, 2020; Zloteanu et al., 2021). Cavusoglu and Atik (2021) argued that perceptions of authenticity and reliability enhance consumers' confidence in the content and reduce their perceived risks in social commerce transactions (Cavusoglu & Atik, 2021). As a result, consumers develop a positive, reliable, and trustworthy ASC (Wang et al., 2022). Believability also affects consumers' information processing and evaluation of user-generated content (Wang et al., 2022). When consumers perceive content creators as credible and trustworthy, they are more likely to engage in cognitive elaboration, giving greater attention and effort to understanding and evaluating the content (Zhang et al., 2021). This deeper information processing leads to more informed decision-making and the formation of stronger ASC (Zhang et al., 2021). Based on the literature review, RH1 was proposed:

H1: Believability of CGRs and eWOM positively predicts consumers' attitudes toward social commerce (ASC).

2.3.2   Credibility in CGRs and EWOM

Credibility refers to "the quality or power of inspiring belief" (Merriam-Webster, 2019, p.16). It is defined as the extent to which the audience perceives a message or a source as trustworthy, reliable, and knowledgeable (Cavusoglu & Atik, 2021). Credibility is also defined as the perceived believability, trustworthiness, and reliability of the information and opinions shared through CGRs and eWOM to influence their attitudes and intentions in social commerce (Ismagilova et al., 2020).

Credibility is also attributed to the source characteristics: competence and dependability. While trustworthiness pertains to the ethical character and credibility of the source, reliability underscores the enduring consistency and dependability of the information (Cavusoglu & Atik, 2021). The combined influence of these factors has a significant role in shaping customers' evaluations of the quality and authenticity of CGRs and eWOM. Credibility refers to the perceived expertise, trustworthiness, objectivity, knowledge, competence, perceived honesty, and impartiality of the eWOM sources (Daowd et al., 2021). Credibility also refers to the degree to which user-generated reviews are perceived as trustworthy and reliable after consumers evaluate the reviewers' credibility and consider their reputation, past contributions, and consistency (Verma & Dewani, 2020).

Credibility can influence customer engagement because customers are more likely to engage with a reliable and competent business (Guo & Li, 2022; Ismagilova et al., 2020). Credibility positively affects customers' attitudes toward the business, its products, and its services (Ismagilova et al., 2020). Credibility also reduces consumers' perceived risk of purchasing products or services online (Khwaja et al., 2020). When consumers perceive CGRs and eWOM as accurate, reliable, trustworthy, and unbiased, they feel more confident in purchasing decisions

(Khwaja et al., 2020). Reduced perceived risk could enhance consumers' willingness to engage in social commerce (Khwaja et al., 2020).

On the other hand, low credibility in CGRs and eWOM can negatively affect consumers' ASC because their skepticism and hesitation may prevent them from engaging with social commerce (Daowd et al., 2020). Consumers may become more cautious about purchasing based on unreliable or biased reviews (Khwaja et al., 2020). The lack of trust can undermine consumers' attitudes toward social commerce, decreasing purchase intention (Khwaja et al., 2020). Based on the literature review, RH2 was proposed:

H2: Credibility of CGRs and eWOM positively predicts consumers' attitudes toward social commerce (ASC).

2.3.3 Trust of CGRs and EWOM

Trust refers to a firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of someone or something (Merriam-Webster, 2023). Khwaja et al. (2020) defined trust as the willingness of a consumer to rely on the information, recommendations, opinions, and evaluations of products and services. Trust in CGRs and eWOM is defined as consumers' confidence and reliance on the credibility, honesty, and dependability of the information shared through electronic word-of-mouth and consumer-generated reviews (Pyle et al., 2021). Moreover, trust in eWOM and CGRs can be defined as the consumer's subjective assessment of the reliability, credibility, and authenticity of the information (Phương & Trần, 2022).

Trust could be closely related to subjective norms, as consumers may be influenced by the opinions of their peers regarding the trustworthiness of a particular social media platform or seller (Giao et al., 2020). When consumers trust the credibility and reliability of CGRs and eWOM, they can develop confidence in the platform and its offerings (Wang et al., 2022). This confidence could

be transformed into a positive ASC as consumers feel more comfortable engaging in social commerce activities (Tarawneh et al., 2020). Trusting the competence of other consumers to provide accurate and unbiased evaluations of products or services leads to a stronger alignment of attitudes and behaviors with the recommendations in CGRs and eWOM (Sullivan & Kim, 2018). Trust in the platform, sellers, and information others share creates a positive experience and builds a long-term relationship, increasing the likelihood of repeat purchases and positive ASC (Sullivan & Kim, 2018). Based on the literature review, RH3 was proposed:

H3: Trust of CGRs and eWOM positively predicts consumers' attitudes toward social commerce (ASC).

2.3.4 Subjective Norms

Subjective norms (henceforth, SN) refer to an individual's perception of what others think they should do or what is socially acceptable (Ham et al., 2015). These norms can be influenced by various social factors, such as family, friends, and cultural beliefs (Ham et al., 2015). Conceptually, SN is defined as an individual's perception of social expectations, opinions, and pressures regarding a specific behavior (Ajzen, 1991). SN represents the influence of family, friends, cultural beliefs, and significant others on an individual's decision-making process (Ham et al., 2015). SN reflects the perceived social pressure and the degree to which individuals are expected to behave (Kan & Fabrigar, 2017).

Extant literature has often categorized SN as descriptive and injunctive (Van de Bongardt et al., 2014). Descriptive norms refer to an individual's perception of how others typically behave in each situation (Van de Bongardt et al., 2014). Descriptive SN reflects an individual's belief about the prevalence or frequency of behavior within their social group (Kan & Fabrigar, 2017). On the other hand, injunctive norms refer to an individual's perception of what significant others

think they should or should not do (Niemiec et al., 2020). Injunctive SN represents the perceived social approval or disapproval regarding a behavior. In social commerce, injunctive SN reflects an individual's beliefs about whether important others, such as family, friends, or influential figures, support or discourage engaging in social commerce (Niemiec et al., 2020). Positive injunctive SN would indicate that significant others approve or encourage social commerce, while negative injunctive SN would suggest disapproval or discouragement (Niemiec et al., 2020).

Changing consumers' SN involves altering an individual's perception of what others think about the behavior, and changing perceived behavioral control involves providing individuals with the necessary resources and skills to perform the behavior (Smith et al., 2013). For example, a person is more likely to purchase a product if it is socially acceptable among their peer group or community (Ham et al., 2015). A purchase widely supported by the social commerce communities through their favorable CGRs and eWOM will influence other buyers to make socially approved purchases, such as green purchases.

The influence of CGRs and eWOM in shaping subjective norms and perceived behavioral control operates through various mechanisms (Leong et al., 2022). Firstly, positive reviews and recommendations from social commerce communities create a sense of social proof. When individuals observe that a specific purchase, such as a green purchase, is widely supported and endorsed by others, it strengthens the perceived social norm surrounding that behavior (Leong et al., 2022). The social proof effect can increase individuals' compliance with SN by signaling that the behavior is socially acceptable, desirable, and commendable.

Secondly, CGRs and eWOM can provide valuable information and insights that enhance individuals' perceived behavioral control. Positive reviews may include details about the availability of eco-friendly products, sustainable purchasing options, or guidance on making

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informed and environmentally conscious choices (Ruangkanjanases et al., 2020). By equipping individuals with the necessary resources, knowledge, and skills, CGRs and eWOM could contribute to enhancing individuals perceived behavioral control. This mechanism, in turn, increases their confidence in engaging in socially approved purchase decisions, such as green purchases, as they feel empowered to overcome potential barriers and navigate the purchasing process effectively (Leong et al., 2022). Moreover, the interactive nature of social commerce platforms enables consumers to engage in conversations, ask questions, and seek advice from others, facilitating social learning and sharing experiences (Leong et al., 2022). Through CGRs and eWOM, individuals can learn from others' experiences, gain insights into the social expectations and norms surrounding specific behaviors, and acquire practical information on effectively performing the behavior (Masur et al., 2021).

SN could influence consumer attitudes and behaviors in social commerce by changing consumer attitudes and intentions (Peña-García et al., 2020). SN can shape consumer attitudes by providing individuals with information about the attitudes and opinions regarding social commerce activities (Peña-García et al., 2020). When consumers perceive that their peers have favorable attitudes toward social commerce (ASC), it can positively influence their attitudes toward social commerce (Ham et al., 2015). For example, suppose individuals observe their friends or online connections regularly engaging in social commerce and expressing satisfaction with their purchases through CGRs and eWOM; they would perceive social commerce as good and accepted behavior.

Moreover, SN can also affect consumer attitudes through social influence tactics. Social influence tactics, such as social proof, authority, and scarcity, can shape consumer attitudes toward social commerce (Talib & Saat, 2017). Customers' attitudes and faith in the platform and the items

sold can improve when they observe that others in their social network have positive experiences and thoughts about social commerce (Dincer & Dincer, 2023). The perceived trust of CGRs and eWOM can also mediate the relationship between SN and customer sentiments (Dincer & Dincer, 2023). When consumers trust and depend on the reviews and ratings from their social network, their attitudes toward social commerce (i.e., ASC) could be favorable (Yahia et al., 2018).

2.3.5 Attitudes

Attitudes refer to an individual's positive or negative evaluations of performing a specific behavior (*APA Dictionary of Psychology*, 2014). Attitudes also play a crucial role in shaping an individual's intention to engage in a particular behavior, such as purchasing products or services in the case of social commerce. Attitudes are conceptualized as a multidimensional construct that comprises cognitive, affective, and behavioral components (*APA Dictionary of Psychology*, 2014). The cognitive component of attitudes involves beliefs and thoughts about the behavior, such as judgments about the benefits, risks, or effectiveness of engaging in the behavior (Eaton & Visser, 2008). The affective component encompasses the emotional responses and feelings associated with the behavior, including likes or dislikes, pleasure or displeasure (Tyng et al., 2017). The behavioral component of attitudes is related to the individual's past experiences or observations of the behavior and their behavioral tendencies in similar situations (Pavlou & Fygenson, 2014). Individual's attitudes toward social commerce shopping will influence their intention to perform those activities (Pavlou & Fygenson, 2014). Suppose an individual holds positive attitudes toward social commerce (such as perceiving it as convenient, enjoyable, trustworthy, and with countless benefits); they are more likely to have a higher intention to engage in social commerce (Pavlou & Fygenson, 2014). On the other hand, negative attitudes, such as perceiving social commerce as

risky, time-consuming, or lacking in value, can decrease consumers' intention to engage in social commerce (Pavlou & Fygenson, 2014).

Attitudes are shaped by a person's beliefs about behavior, which can be influenced by numerous factors such as past experiences, personal values, and social influences (Conner & Norman, 2019). Changing an individual's attitude toward behavior involves changing their beliefs about the associated behavior and the outcomes (Ajzen, cited in Smith et al., 2013). In other words, it can be reasoned that if consumers have a positive attitude toward social commerce and perceive it as socially acceptable, they are more likely to purchase via social media platforms (Conner & Norman, 2019). CGRs and eWOM are instrumental in changing consumer behavior by modifying consumers' beliefs, attitudes, and perceived behavioral control (Kan & Fabrigar, 2017).

TPB posits that consumers' positive attitudes toward online shopping could influence their attitudes toward the behavior. Favorable attitudes toward online shopping could increase the likelihood of engaging in the behavior, while an unfavorable attitude will likely decrease it (Sheikh et al., 2019). Attitudes toward social commerce (henceforth, ASC) are defined as how a person feels about shopping via social media platforms (Salma Irelli & Chaerudin, 2020). ASC broadly refers to consumer attitudes toward whether people prefer to shop from their home or the physical store and how much they trust an online retailer. In other online shopping situations, ASC can also be influenced by various factors, such as ease of use, convenience, perceived risk, trust, enjoyment, and social influence (Rahman et al., 2018).

2.3.6　Social Shopping Intention

Consumer social shopping intention (henceforth, SSI) refers to the actions and activities users engage in when interacting with e-commerce websites, mobile apps, and social commerce platforms to purchase products or services (Rahman et al., 2018). SSI refers to consumers' psychological state and inclination to engage in various shopping activities through these digital channels (Rahman et al., 2018). Leong et al. (2022) stated that attitudes and subjective norms significantly influence customers' intentions to engage in social commerce. Specifically, consumers with positive ASC are more likely to engage in social commerce, and those who perceived greater subjective norms were also more likely to engage in social commerce (Bosnjak et al., 2020).

SSI captures the consumers' mindset and inclination toward online shopping activities within social commerce (Xu et al., 2020). SSI refers to consumers' actions and intentions when purchasing products or services in social commerce (Peña-García et al., 2020). SSI also reflects consumers' motivation and willingness to explore, interact, and transact in social commerce (Xu et al., 2020). Consumers with a higher SSI are more likely to actively seek out products or services, participate in social commerce activities, and eventually purchase (Guo & Li, 2022). Xu et al. (2020) investigated how trust, social support, and perceived enjoyment could positively predict SSI to engage in social shopping activities. Additionally, Dincer and Dincer (2023) examined the role of individual differences (e.g., the need for uniqueness and innovativeness) in shaping consumers' SSI. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that SSI can be predicted by personal, social, cultural, and situational factors, as well as perceived risk and trust. SSI will influence consumers' behavior and intention in online shopping (Guo & Li., 2022).

TPB postulates that behavioral intention is the most immediate and reliable predictor of subsequent behavior (Leong et al., 2022). Consumer attitudes and subjective norms affect how they intend to behave and purchase behavior (Pillay, 2021). Customers are more likely to make an actual purchase if they strongly intend to do so, which is influenced by their attitudes and subjective norms (Poturak & Turklilmaz, 2018). Consumers' desire significantly predicted their online purchase behavior (Diwanji & Cortese, 2021). Consumers' intentions to make purchases online were highly impacted by their perceptions of the utility and usability of online shopping websites, which affected their purchasing behavior (Diwanji & Cortese, 2021).

The above discussions justified the hypothesized relationships between SN, ASC, and SSI below:

H4: Consumer subjective norms (SN) predict their attitudes toward social commerce (ASC).

H5: Consumer attitudes toward social commerce (ASC) positively predict their social shopping intention (SSI).

Consumers could be influenced by CGRs and eWOM when making purchase decisions in social commerce. The following section will be broken into the following sub-sections: 1) the definitions of CGRs and eWOM; 2) the roles that CGRs and eWOM could play in social commerce; 3) the definitions of perceived credibility, trustworthiness, and believability of CGRs and eWOM in social commerce.

The following theoretical model summarizes the above discussions. Refer to Figure 2.1 below.
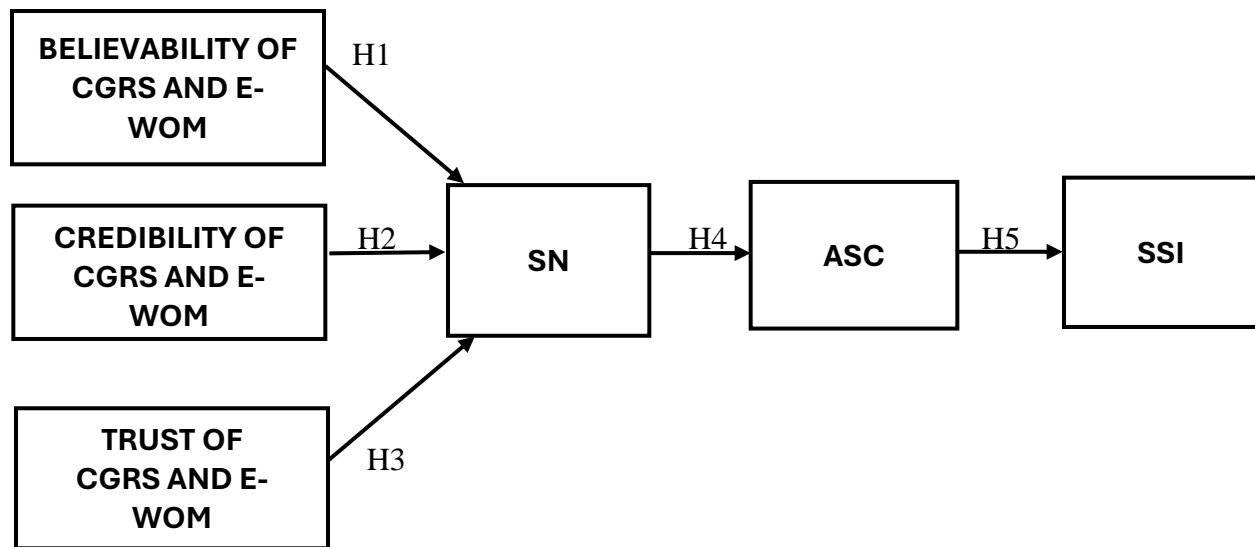
Figure 2.1: The Theoretical Model

Chapter 3: Research Method

3.1   THE JUSTIFICATION OF AN ONLINE SURVEY METHOD

A survey method is appropriate because it allows quantitative data from many participants to be collected to investigate Gen Z consumers' perceptions of the believability, credibility, and trust of CGRs and eWOM in social commerce. An online questionnaire is a suitable research methodology for several reasons. First, the online survey approach allows for quickly gathering quantitative data from various participants anonymously (Wolf et al., 2016), cost-effectively, and efficiently (Nayak & K A, 2019). Second, this data collection approach can be sent to participants through email, social media platforms, or other online tools, and responses can be collected quickly and easily through online survey software (Nayak & K A, 2019).

Thirdly, the online survey method can also maximize the potential sample size and reduce the likelihood of selection bias by recruiting a larger and more diverse pool of participants than traditional survey methods (Ball, 2019). With a larger sample size, the study results represent the Gen Z population being studied more, which can increase the external validity of the findings (Zeleke et al., 2021). Fourth, the survey approach is a systematic and effective method for studying research questions and hypotheses, providing a structured framework for data collection and analysis (Nayak & K A, 2019). The method gives researchers a thorough grasp of the study variables and their relationships by identifying data patterns and trends (Ball, 2019). When research questions and hypotheses can be examined systematically (Poturak & Turkyilmaz, 2018), standardized data collection procedures can help increase the validity and reliability of the study findings and facilitate data analysis using statistical procedures (Nayak & K A, 2019).

QuestionPro was employed to recruit participants. *QuestionPro* includes customization features such as skip logic, multiple question types, and response validation to provide accurate and relevant information. *QuestionPro* can also export the raw data into statistical analysis

software programs, such as SPSS or R, for further analysis (Bhat, 2018). The choice is further justified by its free accessibility, convenience, and cost-effectiveness.

3.2   SAMPLING METHOD AND SAMPLING CHARACTERISTICS

3.2.1   Sampling Method and Participant Recruitment

The study used convenience sampling to select the respondents without extensive time, resources, or money (Campbell et al., 2020). The study recruited 394 UTEP students from diverse departments, including Communication, Business Administration, Science, and Accounting. The participants were mostly freshmen to senior-level undergraduates and a few graduate students.

Before the commencement of the analysis, the collected data were screened. First, the analysis did not include respondents who failed to complete the online survey. The incomplete responses and non-U.S. residents were deleted from the data file. All the students who participated in the study were 18 years and above; therefore, none of the respondents were screened out concerning age. Additionally, to ensure the quality of the data, two attention-checking questions were implemented: "1+1=3" and "El Paso is in the 910 area code". Those who agreed with the statements were removed from the data.

Secondly, there was a need to check for respondent misconduct, and in doing this, Microsoft Excel was used. The standard deviations of the responses on the Likert scale were all above 0.25 (S.D. >0.25); hence, there were no further deletions of responses. Thirdly, there was screening for impermissible values in the dataset to ensure that the codes given to the list of options were accurate. Lastly, there were a couple of missing values in the dataset; therefore, engaging in imputing missing data was imperative. With the imputation of missing data, the linear interpolation method was used because this method does not reduce the variance of the variables, unlike the

series mean method. A total of 85 invalid and incomplete surveys were removed from the database. Ultimately, the valid survey was 310, with a valid percentage of 78.5%.

Before the commencement of data collection, the researcher established rapport with a vast majority of students of UTEP, particularly those within the Gen Z age, and informed them about the study. The students' contacts, email addresses, and social media handles were obtained. The researcher further joined a couple of groups on social media, particularly *WhatsApp*, and informed the group members about the study. Professional networks were also established with professors in the Communication Department and Graduate/PhD students teaching assistants (TA) in various departments within the University. The graduate/PhD students' teaching assistants also helped communicate information about the study to the students. All these efforts contributed to having a large sample size for the study.

The link and barcode to access the online survey were generated from the *QuestionPro* platform and distributed to the participants using diverse means. The link to the online questionnaire was distributed using social media platforms such as WhatsApp. Emails with the link attached were sent to some respondents to answer the survey. Moreover, due to the rapport built with some professors and teaching assistants, they granted the researcher permission to use their classes for data collection. The QR codes generated from the *QuestionPro* platform were available to the students. They scanned the QR code and had access to the survey. It took the students between 10 and 15 minutes to answer the questions. Data collection commenced on September 15, 2023, and ended on October 15, 2023, which is 1 month. After data collection, the responses were downloaded to Microsoft Excel, and the file was exported to Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27 for analysis.

3.2.2 Characteristics and Usage Behaviors of Participants

Concerning participants' gender, 146 of the participants were males (47.1%), 159 were females (51.3%), and the rest, which is 5 (1.6%), did not disclose their gender. (Refer to Table 3.1 below). The survey participants were Gen Z students, and there were more female than male participants. This result agrees with Duffin (2019), who indicated that Gen Z females are more likely to enroll in universities than Gen Z males. Moreover, at the end of the 2020/2021 academic year, 59.5% of university students in the USA were females (Belkin, 2021).

Table 3.1: Participants' Gender

	N	%
Male	146	47.1%
Female	159	51.3%
Prefer not to say	5	1.6%

Concerning participants' highest level of education, 33.9% of the participants have attained a high school degree or its equivalent but have yet to further their education. 39.7% have completed college but do not have a degree, and 22.6% have attained an associate degree but haven't furthered their education. Moreover, only 2.6% of the participants have bachelor's degrees and have yet to further their education. Lastly, 1.3% have attained master's degrees and above (Refer to Table 3.2). The sample characteristics partially corroborate Eldridge (2021), who states that Gen Z is more likely to go to high school and graduate and is more likely to go to college.

Table 3.2: Participants' Highest Level of Education

	N	%
High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)	105	33.9%
Some college but no degree	123	39.7%
Associate degree	70	22.6%
Bachelor's degree	8	2.6%
Master's degree and above	4	1.3%

For participant's marital status, many of the participants (91.0%) were single at the time of the study, 6.5% were married or had a partner, 1.3% were either divorced or separated, and the same number of participants did not close their marital status (Refer to Table 3.3 below). The participants' marital status was like Eldridge (2023) conducted in the USA, which shows that the oldest persons of Gen Z were single or delaying marriage. The statistics showed that a meager 4% of those between 18 and 21 are getting married.

Table 3.3: Participants' Marital Status

	N	%
Single	282	91.0%
Married/Partnered	20	6.5%
Divorced/Separated	4	1.3%
Prefer not to say	4	1.3%

Regarding the participant's employment status, 156 of the respondents are employed and are working 1 – 39 hours weekly (50.3%), and 17 are employed and are working 40 or more hours weekly (5.5%). On the other hand, 76 are unemployed but are making conscious efforts to gain employment (24.5%), whereas 60 are unemployed but are not looking for jobs (19.4%). Last, just one participant who is disabled is unable to work (0.3%) (Refer to Table 3.4 below).

Table 3.4: Participants' Employment Status

	N	%
Employed, working 1 - 39 hours a week	156	50.3%
Employed, working 40 or more hours a week	17	5.5%
Not employed, looking for work	76	24.5%
Not employed, not looking for work	60	19.4%
Disabled, not able to work	1	0.3%

With regards to participants' level of income, 91 participants do not have any income (29.4%), 110 respondents have between $1 and less than $10,000 (35.4%), and 55 participants have between $10,000 and less than $25,000 (17.7%). Moreover, 16 participants have between $25,000 and $75,000 (5.2%), 2 participants have more than $75,000 (0.6%), and the remaining 36 participants did not disclose their level of income (11.6%) (Refer to Table 3.5 below). Employed participants slightly dominated the study.

Table 3.5: Participants' Income Levels

	N	%
No income	91	29.4%
$1 - less than $10, 000	110	35.4%
$10,000 - less than $25, 000	55	17.7%
$25,000 - $75,000	16	5.2%
Above $75,000	2	0.6%
Prefer not to say	36	11.6%

3.2.3   Social Media Usage and Shopping Behaviors

Concerning participant's usage of social media platforms in the past 30 days, 292 of the participants used Instagram, followed by YouTube (N=275), TikTok (N=244), Twitter (N=156), Snapchat (N=135), Pinterest (N=133), and Facebook (N=132). Reddit has 64 of the responses, and

the remaining 21 responses were accorded to other social media platforms (Refer to Table 3.6 below)

Table 3.6: Participants' Usage of Social Media Platforms in the Past 30 Days

	N	Rank
TikTok	244	3rd
Pinterest	133	
YouTube	275	2nd
Facebook	132	
Snapchat	135	
Twitter	156	
Reddit	64	
Instagram	292	1st
Other	21	

With regards to experience with social media platforms, the top three platforms were Instagram (N=108), followed by TikTok (N=48) and Facebook (N=38). Reddit and Snapchat were the least-used social media platforms (Refer to Table 3.7 below).

Table 3.7: Participants' Past Experience from Social Media Platforms

	N	Rank
TikTok	48	2nd
Pinterest	9	
YouTube	26	
Facebook	38	3rd
Snapchat	2	
Twitter	7	
Reddit	1	
Instagram	108	1st
Other	64	

Concerning participants' frequency of social commerce, over 50% of the participants never (N=84, 27.1%) or rarely (N=79, 25.5%) purchased because of CGRs and eWOM. While 4.5% of

the participants (N=14) were influenced, over 40% of them said they were often (N=52, 16.8%) or sometimes (N=133, 42.9%) affected by CGRs and eWOM (Refer to Table 3.8).

Table 3.8: Participants' Frequency of Social Commerce due to CGRs and eWOM

	N	%
Always	14	4.5%
Often	52	16.8%
Sometimes	81	26.1%
Rarely	79	25.5%
Never	84	27.1%

3.3   PILOT TEST AND PRETEST PROCEDURES

A pilot test was conducted by recruiting 20-30 people t on September 7, 2023, at the Cotton Memorial Building (Room 201). The pilot test was conducted before the main data collection due to a plethora of benefits outlined by Fraser et al. (2018). Firstly, the pilot test allows researchers to identify problems with the questionnaire, such as ambiguities or biases, and make the necessary corrections before distributing it to the study participants. Secondly, a pilot test can help minimize the chances of receiving incomplete or inaccurate responses, ensuring that the data collected is high quality. Lastly, the pilot test helps to determine if the questions are clear and understandable to the participants and if the survey administration process is effective (Fraser et al., 2018).

The pilot study found that it took the participants 10 -15 minutes to complete the survey. Generally, participants did not make major complaints about the survey questions. Despite the lengthiness of the survey questions, they did not express any form of frustration. However, a few participants suggested that it should be slightly reduced. Moreover, they were comfortable with the wording of the survey items. Moreover, the participants did not raise concerns about the two attention check questions: "1+1 = 3" and "El Paso is in the 910-area code."

After the pilot study, a pretesting was conducted using the same procedure to identify any potential issues with the wording or structure of the questions (Tsang et al., 2017). Moreover, the pretest enhances the questionnaire's quality, reduces the likelihood of misinterpretation or confusion among respondents, and ultimately increases the overall validity and reliability of the data collected when a large-scale data collection is launched (Hu, 2014).

Findings from the pretest showed that participants did not face challenges when answering the questionnaire. There were no confusing questions, ambiguities in answer choices, technical difficulties, and complaints about the survey length. The participants indicated that the language of the questions was easy to comprehend and not complicated. Moreover, most participants agreed with the mixed questions format, including multiple choice and Likert scale questions. Table 3.9 has more on the findings from the pretesting of the online survey questionnaire.

Table 3.9: Summary Findings of the Pre-Test

Aspect Assessed	Feedback and Findings
Question Clarity	Participants found most questions clear and easy to understand. No major issues with question phrasing were reported.
Response Format	The majority of participants were comfortable with the response format (e.g., Likert scale, multiple-choice). No significant problems were identified.
Question Flow	The sequence of questions was generally logical and coherent, leading to smooth survey navigation. Participants did not suggest question adjustments.
Length of the Survey	Most participants considered the survey length reasonable and did not express fatigue or frustration. A few participants recommended shortening it slightly.
Technical Issues	No technical issues were reported after each participant submitted the survey; everything went smoothly.

| Suggestions | Participants provided valuable suggestions for improving the survey's clarity and relevance, which were incorporated into the final version. |
| **Overall Feedback** | Overall, the pre-test participants expressed satisfaction with the survey's content and structure, indicating that it was well-designed and easy to follow. |

3.4 INSTRUMENTATION

The questionnaire items were selected after a comprehensive review of existing literature (Simpson et al., 2015). The questionnaire includes a UTEP-approved IRB consent form, followed by a screening question, "I am above 18 years old" to ensure that all participants meet the legal age requirements. The demographic section includes several nominal items from the *Hollywood Reporter* (2023). These items were also selected based on established practices in extant literature (Jílková & Králová, 2021). Demographic questions will include the participant's age, gender, educational background, marital status, employment status, income level, and "How often do you purchase through social media platforms" (Allen, 2017).

Participants' gender was measured using a nominal scale with response options such as "Male" and "Female". This demographic item was selected based on its simplicity and common usage in similar surveys. The classification of gender into "male" and "female" aligns with traditional gender categories widely used in research (Allen, 2017). However, the gender question was adapted for inclusivity and diversity concerns that Gen Z participants emphasized as below: "Sex assigned at birth: 1) male, 2) female, 3) intersex, 4) prefer not to say, 5) additional gender category/identity not listed." These demographic questions were selected based on their relevance to the research objectives to understand the sample's characteristics better.

Participants' age was measured using an open-ended question for their birth years to provide a more precise age measurement than predefined age brackets (Simpson, 2015) and allow

for more detailed subgroup comparisons (Allen, 2017). This approach captures the variability in participants' ages. It eliminates potential bias that may arise from using predefined age brackets, which may not accurately represent the age distribution of the sample (Allen, 2017). The participants' education level was measured using a nominal item with response options such as "Less than a high school degree," "High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)," "Some college but no degree," "Associate degree," "Bachelor degree," "Graduate degree" (*The Hollywood Reporter*, 2023).

Participants' income and marital status variables were also studied to gain insights into their life situations and potentially influence their attitudes, behaviors, and consumer preferences (*The Hollywood Reporter*, 2023). Marital status was assessed using a nominal item with response options such as "Single," "Married/Partnered," "Divorced/Separated," "Widowed," and "Prefer not to say". On the other hand, participants' income level was also assessed as a key demographic variable by asking participants to indicate their income within predefined ranges or categories ("No income," "1-less than $10,000," "$10,000- less than $25,000," "$25,000-$75,000," "Above $75,000," "Prefer not to say") (*The Hollywood Reporter,* 2023).

Subjective norms (abbreviated as SN) were measured with twelve 5-point Likert statements adapted from Andrade (2021). These statements range from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5). Some examples of the statements include "My *friends* engage in shopping via social media", "My *family* engages in shopping via social media", "My *favorite influencer/star* engages in shopping via social media", "My *friends* consider shops via social media regularly", "My *family* consider shops via social media regularly", "My *favorite influencer/star* consider shops via social media regularly", "My *friends* consider shopping via social media to be a normal activity", "My *family*

consider shopping via social media to be a normal activity", "My *favorite influencer/star* consider shopping via social media to be a normal activity", "My *friends* encourage me to engage in shopping via social media", "My *family* encourage me to engage in shopping via social media", "My *favorite influencer/star* encourage me to engage in shopping via social media", "The opinions of my *friends* are important in shaping my decision to engage in shopping via social media", "The opinions of my *family* are important in shaping my decision to engage in shopping via social media", "The opinions of my *favorite influencer/star* are important in shaping my decision to engage in shopping via social media", "When it comes to shopping via social media, it is important for me to do what my *friends* think I should do", "When it comes to shopping via social media, it is important for me to do what my *family* think I should do", "When it comes to shopping via social media, it is important for me to do what my *favorite influencer/star* think I should do" (Refer to Appendix A).

Participants' attitudes toward social commerce (abbreviated as ASC) were measured by a list of eight 5-point Likert statements adapted from Pavlou and Fygenson (2014) and Rouibah et al. (2021). The statements included "I think shopping on social media saves time", "It is a great advantage to be able to shop at any time of the day on social media", and "Social media shopping is more difficult than shopping at traditional retail stores (such as shopping malls)", "I prefer shopping on social media over shopping at traditional retail stores", "Shopping on social media is risky.", "I believe shopping on social media will eventually replace retail stores ", "Delivery of products and services on social media takes a long time", and " The selection of products and services on social media is broad" (Refer to Appendix A).

Social shopping intention (abbreviated as SSI) was measured by a list of four 5-point statements, ranging from "Highly unlikely" (1) to "Highly likely" (5). Adapted from Guo and Li (2022) on social shopping intention, these items included "How likely are you to buy products from social media in the near future?", "To what extent do you consider purchasing products from social media in the near future?", "How probable is it that you will make a purchase from social media in the near future?" and "In your opinion, how likely are you to recommend social media shopping to your friends and family in the near future?" (Refer to Appendix A).

The believability scales of CGRs and eWOM were adapted from Berry et al. (2018) and Wang et al. (2022) and based on eight 7-point semantic differential scales with bipolar adjectives. To ensure a consistent scaling pattern, a list of five 5-point Likert statements with "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5) was used instead. These statements include adjectives such as "Accurate", "Error-free", "True", "Authentic", "Fake", "Reliable", "Authoritative", "Reputable", and "Credible" (Refer to Appendix A).

The credibility of CGRs and eWOM was measured by a list of six 5-point Likert statements adapted from adjectives selected from Castano and Barbosa (2022). These statements included the following adjectives: "Plausible", "Easy to follow", "Consistent", "Complete", "Missing Information", "Convincing", "Conclusive", "Genuine" and "Believable" (Refer to Appendix A).

The trust scales of CGRs and eWOM included a list of five 5-point Likert and were adapted from Alzaidi and Agag (2022) and Fan and Miao (2012). These items included the adjectives below "Honest", "Trustworthy", "Dependable", "Verifiable", "Useful", and "Helpful". (Refer to Appendix A).

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3.5 RELIABILITY TESTS

3.5.1 Reliability Coefficient of Believability

Believability initially consisted of 9 items (α = .76); however, one item (B7R) was deleted to improve the internal consistency. The deletion of the B7R from the scale increased Cronbach's alpha to .82 (Refer to Table 3.10)

Table 3.10: Item-Total Statistics of Believability

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
B1[1]	20.32	11.551	.61	.42	.79
B2	20.87	13.057	.31	.19	.83
B3	20.39	11.632	.63	.45	.79
B4	20.36	11.182	.63	.41	.79
B5R	20.50	12.986	.32	.11	.83
B6	20.30	11.597	.62	.42	.79
B8	20.22	12.022	.56	.42	.80
B9	20.36	11.224	.65	.54	.78

Note:

[1] Refer to Appendix C for details.

3.5.2 Reliability Coefficient of Credibility

Credibility initially consisted of 9 items (α = .69). To improve the internal consistency to .7 (Taber, 2018), C5 was removed to increase the Cronbach's alpha level to 0.77 (Taber, 2018) (Refer to Table 3.11).

Table 3.11: Item-Total Statistics of Credibility

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
C1[1]	22.33	10.542	.41	.22	.75
C2	22.04	10.022	.44	.27	.75

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
C3	22.30	9.956	.44	.25	.75
C4	22.44	9.819	.48	.29	.74
C6	22.25	9.612	.50	.30	.74
C7	22.39	9.991	.47	.25	.74
C8	22.61	9.590	.49	.34	.74
C9	22.43	9.707	.51	.37	.74

Note:

[1] Refer to Appendix C for details.

3.5.3   Reliability Coefficient of Trust

The trust construct consists of 6 items, and Cronbach's alpha level is good at .87 (Taber, 2018) (Refer to Table 3.12).

Table 3.12: Item-Total Statistics of Trust

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
T1[1]	15.69	8.879	.73	.58	.84
T2	15.70	9.059	.69	.57	.85
T3	15.58	9.255	.64	.47	.85
T4	15.50	9.283	.54	.32	.87
T5	15.16	8.614	.70	.66	.84
T6	15.14	8.589	.73	.68	.84

Note:

[1] Refer to Appendix C for details.

3.5.4   Reliability Coefficient of SN

The 18-item SN scale has a Cronbach's alpha value of .89, representing a good internal consistency (Taber, 2018). None of the items of SN was deleted because the deletion wouldn't have improved Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.89$) (Taber, 2018) (Refer to Table 3.13).

Table 3.13: Item-Total Statistics of SN

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
SN1[1]	48.14	111.622	.49	.43	.89
SN2	48.42	110.864	.47	.49	.89
SN3	48.03	109.532	.54	.54	.89
SN4	48.38	109.974	.59	.57	.89
SN5	48.74	108.020	.61	.66	.89
SN6	48.15	108.464	.62	.63	.89
SN7	48.26	109.773	.59	.65	.89
SN8	48.60	108.478	.57	.66	.89
SN9	47.96	109.422	.55	.62	.89
SN10	48.81	108.001	.64	.60	.89
SN11	49.10	107.725	.66	.68	.88
SN12	48.25	106.984	.59	.52	.89
SN14	48.75	110.451	.49	.58	.89
SN15	48.70	111.051	.45	.55	.89
SN16	49.03	110.635	.49	.51	.89
SN17	49.37	112.824	.44	.61	.89
SN18	49.13	112.557	.40	.54	.89
SN19	49.54	113.651	.43	.58	.89

Note:

[1] Refer to Appendix C for details.

3.5.5 Reliability Coefficient of ASC

ASC was initially measured with 10 items (α = .63); however, due to its questionable internal consistency, three items were deleted to improve Cronbach's alpha (ASC5R, ASC3R, and ASC7R). After the deletion of the items, ASC was assessed with 7 items (α = .70), and this shows an acceptable internal consistency (Taber, 2018) (Refer to Table 3.14).

Table 3.14: Item-Total Statistics of ASC

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
ASC1[1]	18.79	11.932	.51	.34	.64
ASC2	18.53	11.886	.53	.36	.64
ASC4	19.58	11.849	.45	.27	.66
ASC6	19.22	12.201	.37	.15	.68
ASC8	18.44	14.098	.17	.07	.72
ASC9	19.39	12.906	.34	.12	.69
ASC10	18.40	12.211	.55	.33	.64

Note:

[1] Refer to Appendix C for details.

3.5.6 Reliability Coefficient of SSI

The 4-item SSI scale has a high Cronbach's alpha value of .93 and shows excellent internal consistency (Taber, 2018) (Refer to Table 3.15).

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
SSI1[1]	9.30	9.655	.87	.76	.90
SSI2	9.32	9.990	.87	.79	.90
SSI3	9.26	9.404	.88	.79	.90
SSI4	9.54	10.454	.75	.55	.94

Note:

[1] Refer to Appendix C for details.

3.6 SCALE VALIDITY

The discriminant validity was used to assess the questionnaire's validity "when each measurement item correlates weakly with all other constructs except for the one to which it is theoretically associated" (Gefen & Straub, 2005, p. 92). Discriminant validity for these study variables should be unique and not overlap with other constructs (Schwab, 2013). The study relied

on the standard cut-off value of .70 to assess if a scale has acceptable discriminant validity (Hodson, 2021). The coefficients of the correlations among the variables under study are below the threshold, which is .70. Second, most of the correlations are weak ($r < .50$). It is therefore concluded that discriminant validity exists among all the scales ($r < .70$). (Refer to Table 3.16)

Table 3.16: Discriminant Validity

	SN	ASC	SSI	C	B	T
SN[1]	1	-	-	-	-	-
ASC[2]	.48	1	-	-	-	-
SSI[3]	.50	.62	1	-	-	-
C[4]	.23	.26	.24	1	-	-
B[5]	.11	.16	.22	.53	1	-
T[6]	.20	.24	.28	.58	.64	1

Notes:

[1]SN represents Social Norms

[2]ASC represents Attitudes toward Social Commerce

[3]SSI represents Social Shopping Intention

[4]C represents Credibility.

[5]B represents Believability.

[6]T represents Trust.

Chapter Four: Findings

4.1   INTRODUCTION

Regression analyses were performed to establish the relationships among the study variables in the theoretical model. Scores were computed for all the study variables to establish individual latent variables and were used to perform the regression analysis. Believability (B), credibility (C), and trust (T) were measured on a five-point Likert scale. The 8-item Believability scale has a mean score of 2.92 and *SD* of .48. Credibility with 8 items has a mean score of 3.20 and SD of .39. Trust with 6 items has a mean and SD of 3.09 and .69, respectively (Refer to Table 4.1).

The 18-item Subjective Norms (SN) scale was measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree". SN has a mean score of 2.86 and *SD* of .62. Attitudes toward the social commerce construct (ASC) were measured using five-point Likert scales. ASC has a mean score of 3.15 and *SD* of .57. Social Shopping Intention (SSI) was measured by five-point statements with Highly Unlikely, Unlikely, Neutral, Likely, and Highly Likely and has a mean of 3.12 and *SD* of 1.04 (Refer to Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics of Variables

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Believability (B)	310	2.92	.48
Credibility (C)	310	3.20	.39
Trust (T)	310	3.09	.59
Subjective Norms (SN)	310	2.86	.62
Attitudes toward Social Commerce (ASC)	310	3.15	.57
Social Shopping Intention (SSI)	310	3.12	1.04

The correlation matrix table below shows the relationship between the study variables. The correlation matrix is a useful diagnostic tool that demonstrates the bi-variate correlations between the study variables (Wagavkar, 2023). The regression analysis model found Statistically significant correlation coefficients among the study variables. Particularly, between the three message dimensions of CGRs and eWOM, correlation coefficients range from .605 to .628. Despite potential collinearity concerns (Gregorich et al., 2021), I employed Tabachnick and Fidell's (1996) cut-off criteria to include independent variables with a bivariate correlation of less than 0.70. Additionally, I used VIF to ensure that multi-collinearity is not a concern in my model. According to Allison (2021), VIF larger than 2.50 poses a concern.

Table 4.2: Correlation Matrix of the Study Variables

	SN	ASC	SSI	C	B	T
SN[1]	1					
ASC[2]	.404[7]**	1				
SSI[3]	.409**	.581**	1			
C[4]	.150**	.263**	.221**	1		
B[5]	.112*	.230**	.235**	.615**	1	
T[6]	.209**	.306**	.288**	.605**	.628**	1

Notations: * p<0.05   ** p<0.01   *** p<0.001

Notes:

[1]SN represents Social Norms

[2]ASC represents Attitudes toward Social Commerce

[3]SSI represents Social Shopping Intention

[4]C represents Credibility.

[5]B represents Believability.

4.2   REGRESSION ANALYSIS

4.2.1   The Effects of Believability, Credibility, and Trust on Subjective Norms

Multicollinearity tests were performed to ensure the predictors were not highly correlated in the regression models (Mansfield & Helms, 1982). The variance inflation factors (VIF) in the regression model assessed the presence of multicollinearity. A threshold of VIF values above 5 indicates the existence of multicollinearity (Bernstein, 2001). In the three regression models, all VIFs ranged between 1.60 and 1.96 and were below the threshold of 5. Despite potential multi-collinearity concerns, none of the VIFs exceeds 2.5 (Allison, 2021). The results did not show a severe multicollinearity problem in the multiple regression model (Refer to Table 4.3) (Allison, 2021).

The effects of dimensions of CGRs and eWOM (i.e., believability [RH1], credibility [RH2], and trust [RH3]) on SN were assessed by three statistically significant regression models (F=6.93, $p<.001$). The predictors (i.e., believability, credibility, and trust) accounted for 6.0% of the variance in SN. A negative and statistically insignificant association between believability and SN (β = -.09, t = -.19, p=.239 >.05), demonstrating that believability of CGRs and eWOM did not affect SN. RH1 was not supported by the empirical data (Refer to Table 4.3). On the other hand, the credibility of CGRs and eWOM had positive and statistically significant effects on consumer SN (β = .19, t = 2.68, p <.01). The empirical data supported RH2 (Refer to Table 4.3). Last, the empirical results provided support to RH3 that shows a positive and insignificant association between trust and SN (β = .15, t = .05, p=.053> 0.5) (Refer to Table 4.3).

Table 4.3: Regression Results on the Effects of Believability, Credibility, and Trust on Subjective Norms

		F (3/306)=6.93*** Sum of Squares=116.89 Mean Square=2.48/.36 R=.25 R^2=.06 Durbin-Watson=2.16 VIF=1.60 to 1.96		
Predictor Variable	Outcome Variable	Unstandardized ß	Standardized ß	t-Value
Believability	Subjective Norms (SN)	-.11	.-.09	-.19
Credibility		.30	.19	2.68**
Trust		.16	.15	.05

Notations: * p<0.05   ** p<0.01   *** p<0.001

4.2.2   The Effects of Subjective Norms on Attitudes Towards Social Commerce

A multicollinearity test was performed to ensure no multicollinearity problem in the regression model. The regression model's variance inflation factor (VIF) assessed the presence of multicollinearity. The multiple regression model has a VIF between 1.48 and 1.93 and does not exceed the stringent 2.5 threshold (Allison, 2021), demonstrating the non-existence of a severe multicollinearity problem (Refer to Table 4.4).

A multiple regression model tested the relationship between SN and ASC while three message dimensions were used as control variables. The multiple regression model (with three control variables) was statistically significant (F=23.68, p<0.001). SN accounted for 22% of the variance in ASC ($ß$ = .36, t=7.12, p<0.001) and positively influenced consumers' ASC. In other words, the more Gen Z consumers think social commerce shopping is an acceptable social norm, the more favorable their attitudes toward social commerce will become. The empirical data supported RH4 (Refer to Table 4.4).

Table 4.4: Multiple Regression Results on the Effects of Subjective Norms on Attitudes Towards Social Commerce

Predictor Variable	Outcome Variable	F (4/330)=23.68*** Sum of Squares=15.08 Mean Square=3.77 R=.47 R²=.22 Durbin-Watson=2.22 VIF=1.04 to 1.92		
		Unstandardized β	Standardized β	t-Value
Subjective Norms (SN)	Attitudes toward Social Commerce (ASC)	.26	.35	7.12***
Believability		.04	.52	.60
Trust		.11	2.24	.03*
Credibility		.11	1.48	.14

Notations: * $p<0.05$ ** $p<0.01$ *** $p<0.001$

4.2.3 The Effects of Attitudes Toward Social Commerce on Social Shopping Intention

The multiple regression model was checked for multicollinearity using the variance inflation factor (VIF). The VIF statistics ranged from 1.21 (ASC) to 1.964 (trust), and they are all below 5, meaning the regression model has a severe multicollinearity problem (Refer to Table 4.5). The linkage between ASC and SSI was empirically tested by a multiple regression model that confirmed the statistically significant between two variables (F=48.98, $p<0.001$). ASC accounted for 43% of the variance in SSI (β = .43, t=9.09, $p<0.001$), suggesting that ASC positively influences consumers' SSI after controlling SN and three message factors. The empirical data supported RH5. The more favorable Gen Z consumers' attitudes toward social commerce, the more likely they will shop via social commerce (Refer to Table 4.5).

Table 4.5: Multiple Regression Results on the Effects of Attitudes Toward Social Commerce on

Social Shopping Intention

		$F(5/329)=48.98$*** Sum of Squares=152.54 Mean Square=30.51 $R=.65$ $R^2=.43$ Durbin-Watson=1.87 VIF=1.00		
Predictor Variable	Outcome Variable	Unstandardized β	Standardized β	t-Value
Attitudes toward Social Commerce (ASC)	Social Commerce Shopping Intention (SSI)	.99	.43	0.09***
	SN	.50	.30	.6.49***
	Believability	.18	.08	1.39
	Trust	.10	.06	.95
	Credibility	-.05	-.02	-.35

Notations: * *p*<0.05   ** *p*<0.01   *** *p*<0.001

Chapter Five: Discussions and Conclusion

5.1. THE EFFECTS OF BELIEVABILITY, CREDIBILITY, AND TRUST ON SUBJECTIVE NORMS

The first three hypotheses attempt to examine the effects of message-related dimensions such as believability (RH1), credibility (RH2), and trust (RH3), and on consumer subjective norm (i.e., SN) perceptions. RH1 hypothesized that the believability of CGRs and eWOM predicts consumer SN perceptions. RH2 postulated that the credibility of CGRs and eWOM predicts consumer SN perceptions. Last, RH3 proposed that trust in CGRs and eWOM also predicts consumer SN perceptions.

Unexpectedly, the believability (RH1) and trust (RH3) of CGRs and eWOM did not significantly impact consumers' SN perceptions. Among the three message-related hypotheses, only credibility is a significant predictor. The empirical findings only supported RH2, but not RH1 and RH3. This study measures the credibility of CGRs and eWOM by focusing on message accuracy, error-free, being true, authenticity, reliability, authority, and reputation. Accuracy, error-free, being true, authenticity, reliability, authority, and reputation are likely to affect how consumers perceive the opinions and experiences of their friends, family members, and favorite influencers around them when conducting social commerce shopping.

Becker et al. (2023) explained potential consumers normally rate information about a product and service based on the credibility of the source of the information. Therefore, these credibility descriptors are important to consumers' perceptions of CGRs and eWOM, not generated by reputable brands, spokespersons, or gate-kept traditional media. Hovland and Weiss (1951) argued that the credibility of a source significantly influences the decision-making processes of targeted audiences. Belluccia et al. (2018) also pointed out that a credible CGR and eWOM can

motivate consumers to voluntarily follow and believe in socially approved behavior (such as shopping via social media in this study) (cited in Perera et al., 2020).

Social media enables users to share their thoughts, views, and experiences with friends, peers, and acquaintances (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Because social media users normally obtain eWOM information about products and/or services from their friends, peers, and acquaintances on various social media platforms, they perceive the eWOM messages as credible and of paramount importance (Erkan & Evans, 2016). People who obtain information from eWOM messages on social media shared by their friends will likely have a strong intention to purchase a product or use a service. Therefore, perceiving information shared via eWOM as credible is the premise for persuading customers to engage in social commerce. eWOM credibility is considered the initial factor in the persuasion process of individuals (Erkan & Evans, 2016).

Sijoria et al. (2019) argued that eWOM is a positive or negative comment by actual, former, or potential customers over the Internet regarding a product or service. eWOM is deemed a salient and indispensable information source where customers seek their friends' and peers' views and experiences, not those of online businesses (Sijoria et al., 2019). In India, an overwhelming majority (80%) of customers engage in social commerce after reading eWOM messages from friends, peers, and families with experience with a product or service. They make online purchases because they deem the eWOM messages from persons they know to be credible (Sijoria et al., 2019). When a customer shares their views and experiences about a hotel on e-commerce websites with potential clients, the potential clients become motivated to look for more messages from experienced customers on the websites.

Kaur and Kesharwani (2021) indicated that customers' decision-making process is normally influenced by message credibility. Customers perceiving messages to be credible are

more likely to use the messages in their decision to make a purchase. The higher the credibility of the messages, the higher the likelihood of using the messages in decision-making. Moreover, if e-commerce sites can provide a system that can evaluate the credibility of message providers, then they are likely to attract more potential customers. This will also elevate the credibility of the e-commerce platforms, motivating potential customers to depend heavily on them (Kaur & Kesharwani, 2021). People normally consider CGRs and eWOM credible when the information is shared by people they know and share similar interests, such as friends, peers, and family (Kaur & Kesharwani, 2021).

The theoretical importance of credible CGRs and eWOM messages can be attributed to the following:

First, Becker et al. (2023) found that message credibility positively predicts consumer SN perceptions. When CGRs and eWOM are credible, the brand message tends to strengthen the impact of social pressure on consumers (Becker et al., 2023). A high level of message credibility could reinforce some form of social obligation to act in a particular manner and people's wish to conform to perceived expectations of their friends, family, and favorite influencers to perceive shopping via social commerce (Becker et al., 2021) to be regular behaviors (SN1 to SN6), normal activities (SN7-SN9), can be influenced (SN14-19) and encouraged (SN10-12) by these closely related peers. The subjective norms of consumers in this current study were measured with friends, family members, and favorite influencers engaging in social commerce regularly, friends, family members, and favorite influencers considering shopping online as a normal activity, friends, family members, and favorite influencers encouraging the purchase of products via online, the opinions of peers, family members, and favorite influencers influencing the decision to engage in social

commerce and adhering to peers, family members, and favorite influencers' recommend concerning social commerce.

Second, the perceptions of CGRs and eWOM as subjective norms also heavily depend on the quantity and quality of the messages by other users. The high number of reviews signifies how popular the product or service is. Reading many comments and reviews minimizes the anxiety and fear of customers in the moment of making a purchasing decision. The reason is that it is believed persons who made the comments have purchased or used the product and service (Chatterjee, 2001). On the trajectory of quality, when the eWOM of a website starts gaining traction, consumers examine and conclude whether the eWOM messages are worth it. Consumers often consider the eWOM's accuracy; therefore, high-quality content persuades them to deem the eWOM credible (Awad & Ragowsky, 2008). Park et al. (2007) found that high-quality content and a high number of eWOM messages positively predict the perceived eWOM credibility of consumers. Quality CGRs and eWOM are logical and persuasive and provide facts and useful information about a product, and customers deem such messages credible. The quality of CGRs and eWOM heightens customers' purchase intentions. Moreover, a high number of CGRs and eWOM of a product shows the message's credibility, and the volume indicates that the product is known, increasing purchase intention (Park et al., 2007). Usually, customers with low involvement are influenced by the number of CGRs rather than the quality, whereas customers with high involvement are influenced by the quality and number of CGRs (Park et al., 2007).

Third, related to the message quality, the consistency of online recommendations results in reduced cognitive dissonance, which, in turn, influences consumers to perceive online reviews as credible (Luo et al., 2015). Consumers incessantly perceive CGRs and eWOM as credible when they gain endorsements from other users (Qahri-Saremi & Montazemi, 2019). The consistency in

recommendations denotes message objectivity, which, in turn, coerces consumers to deem the messages credible (Chakraborty, 2019). Verma et al. (2023) further discovered that recommendation consistency and ratings [normative factors] influence eWOM credibility, which is higher in a collectivistic culture than in an individualistic culture.

Fourth, combined with the social pressure from consumers' family, friends, and peers, credible CGRs and eWOM messages could suggest a higher level of consensus in the eWOM messages also denotes a higher level of agreement among consumers who have purchased and used a product or had an experience with a service online (Doh & Hwang, 2009). Once the perceptions or misperceptions of social norms are accepted, readers of CGRs and eWOM messages give more prominence to negatively framed messages than the positive ones (Baumeister et al., 2001). The negative CGRs and eWOM normally gain immense attention and result in strong attribution of product performance, heightening the credibility of negative messages (Chakraborty, 2019; Lo & Yao, 2019). Moreover, the inkling of consumers regarding a product or service restricts their ability to counter negative messages, elevating the credibility of the negative messages (Chiou et al., 2018). Negatively framed messages could also imply the consequence of non-compliance with the widely accepted social norms.

Regarding practical/managerial implications, Gen Z customers have increasingly embraced eWOM and CGRs as influential factors in purchasing decisions (Rani & Shivaprasad, 2021). The prevalence of CGRs and eWOM has significantly impacted businesses, driven increased website traffic, and ultimately generated more sales (Rehman et al., 2022). This reliance on CGRs and eWOM has far-reaching effects on businesses. Rehman et al. (2022) stated that positive eWOM and CGRs can increase website traffic as consumers seek additional information and validation before purchasing. This increased traffic can directly translate into higher

conversion rates and generate more business sales. The power of positive eWOM and CGRs lies in their ability to tap into the trust and influence that Gen Z places on the opinions and experiences of their peers (Rani & Shivaprasad, 2021). To foster a credible social commerce platform, Amazon has been cracking down on fake reviews using artificial intelligence (AI) (McCallum, 2023). Over the years, Amazon has gravitated toward using machine learning models to detect fraudulent behavior of fake reviews on its shopping website (McCallum, 2023).

Second, Fan et al. (2013) discovered that the perceived eWOM credibility of consumers positively influences them to adopt online information. Chen et al. (2011) similarly found that message credibility positively influences the adoption of the messages. Cheung et al. (2008) also found that the credibility of eWOM ignites the willingness of consumers to embrace and intention to use the messages. Therefore, it is highly likely that consumers will neglect and shun away non-credible eWOM messages. Therefore, perceived eWOM credibility is a major determinant of consumers' decision-making.

Third, Zhang et al. (2021) found that perceived value, in terms of price, quality, and service, significantly impacted purchase intention. CGRs and eWOM could significantly shape these perceptions by offering credible messages and subjective norms perceptions. Marketers can tailor their strategies and interventions to enhance consumers' motivation and confidence in online purchases (Zhang et al., 2021). The process may involve leveraging social influence tactics, fostering positive attitudes toward social commerce, and providing consumers with the necessary and credible resources and support to overcome barriers and enhance their perceived control over their online shopping experience (Zhang et al., 2021).

Fourth, adopting eWOM is considered a psychological action affecting consumers via subjective norms in an online space. It further minimizes uncertainties in social and business

communications (Awad & Ragowsky, 2008). A perceived credible eWOM is paramount as it minimizes information asymmetry and influences decision-making and intention to visit social commerce sites. Therefore, it is pertinent to manage eWOM effectively to lessen the effectiveness of marketing strategies in the tourism and hospitality industries. In the tourism industry, eWOM by users is regarded as a powerful instrument because purchasing intangible products and services comes with a high degree of risk (Teng et al., 2014). Previous empirical studies found a positive association between the perceived credibility of eWOM and information adoption, consumer attitudes, and purchasing intentions (Teng et al., 2014).

Last, consumer subjective norms influence how they perceive the brand equity of manufactured and service goods (Perera et al., 2020). Sijoria et al. (2019) argued that eWOM is "one of the most useful information sources where the customers seek peer opinions and experiences" (cited in Perera et al., 2020, p.4). As such, eWOM and CGRs with high credibility are likely to affect consumers' compliance with others' opinions and experiences. Perera et al.'s empirical findings (2020) confirmed that eWOM, CGRs, and subjective norms could enhance perceived brand credibility and enhance brand equity. This implies that if social commerce merchants can share credible eWOM and CGRs about a brand, the endorsed brand is likely to be perceived as credible and have strong brand equity (Perera et al., 2020).

5.2 THE EFFECTS OF SUBJECTIVE NORMS ON CONSUMER ATTITUDES TOWARDS SOCIAL COMMERCE

The fourth hypothesis examines the effects of subjective norm perceptions on consumer attitudes toward social commerce (ASC) [RH4]. RH4 postulated that subjective norms (SN) could predict consumer attitudes toward social commerce (ASC). After controlling three message-related factors, the multiple regression results found that SN continues to be a significant predictor of

ASC, and SN positively influences consumer ASC. The empirical data supports RH4. The study measures SN with regular behaviors (SN1 to SN6) and normal activities (SN7-SN9) and can be influenced (SN14-19) and encouraged (SN10-12) by these closely related peers, friends, and family members. The empirical findings of the study confirmed that when consumers perceive shopping via social commerce to be regularly done (SN1 to SN6), normally and commonly among peers, family members, and favorite influencers (SN7-SN9) and encouraged (SN10-SN12), consumers are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward social commerce of products and services.

Pudaruth and Busviah (2018) reported that social influence from family members, friends, etc., could directly or indirectly influence people's decision-making. Friends and families are indispensable in people's decisions (Pudaruth & Busviah, 2018). For example, a consumer may want to purchase a product, but their friends comment badly, influencing them to avoid it (Pudaruth & Busviah, 2018). Othman and Sudarmin (2022) found that SN positively and significantly influences consumers to utilize online platforms for shopping. This study argues that shopping online will reduce physical interactions regarding everyday necessities, and the Internet system won't be utilized to its full potential if consumers aren't interested. The findings highlight the significance of the impact on people passionate about information system technology and that people will use the method if their friends' and relatives' parents do as well. For example, if consumers' parents, relatives, and acquaintances purchase products and services from social media, they are likely to follow suit (Othman & Sudarmin, 2022).

Attitudes are normally learned and progress over time, but they are often difficult to alter (Lien & Cao, 2014). However, attitudes are likely to be altered by substantial psychological motivation externally imposed upon consumers (Lien & Cao, 2014). Perceived social influence or

pressure and encouragement from closely related peers, family members, and favorite influencers are equivalent to psychological motivation that could shape and alter consumer attitudes. To buttress this point, the study of Cho and Yang (2012) focused on SN related to social networking sites (SNS) to ascertain attitudes towards fashion products via social commerce (group purchasing and private shopping) and found SN to be a significant predictor of ASC of fashion products. Whether the above relationship is product-specific, SN perceptions could be similarly determined by the normative beliefs people feel about the opinions of reference groups that are paramount to them and their motivation to adhere to the reference groups (Cho & Yang, 2012). There is a higher possibility of information sharing among reference groups, including friends and acquaintances. Moreover, consumers' perceptions can be influenced by the views of the reference group.

Cho and Yang (2012) highlighted that social commerce platforms should provide value for the product and develop an easy-to-use design website to increase the likelihood of consumers purchasing fashion items online. For example, when customers must use group-type social commerce, it is imperative to create a user-friendly application that enables purchases to be made conveniently from any location, not just via a computer and the Internet but also via a smartphone. (Cho & Yang 2012).

Al-Maghrabi et al. (2011) said that social pressure results from consumers' subjective norms perceptions, and due to this social pressure, consumers are likely to be influenced by significant others to gravitate toward a specific technology. Social pressure, be it positive or negative, such as those expressed in CGRs and eWOM, can easily persuade consumers to increase or minimize their actions compared to advertisements. Al-Maghrabi et al. (2011) further explained that social pressure could boost Internet shopping intention, especially among younger consumers who rely on social networks like Facebook and Twitter, to enhance their opinions on website value

and reliability. Despite social pressure, young people are more likely to be influenced by the views and perspectives of significant others than older people (Al-Maghrabi et al., 2011). Older people often make decisions or act based on their experience, whereas their peers mostly influence young people (Al-Maghrabi et al., 2011). Young people tend to trust the opinions of their peers than older people. In a nutshell, social pressure is likely to affect the attitude of people at diverse levels in various societies based on their respective cultures (Al-Maghrabi et al., 2011).

Al-Jabari (2013) reported that people will be encouraged and informed of the benefits of using a specific technology or innovation through the views or comments of significant others like closely related peers, family members, and even the media. These opinions from closely related individuals in consumers' social networks could foster positive attitudes toward these technologies. Chang (1998) echoed that the attitude formation process, be it favorable or unfavorable towards a particular behavior, could also be influenced by how significant others are regarding the performance of that behavior. As measured in the ASC scales, the regular behaviors, normal activities, encouragement, and influence of closely related peers, family members, and favorite influencers are likely to persuade consumers to believe shopping on social media is less expensive (ASC9), convenient (ASC10), saves time (ASC1), and will eventually replace traditional retail stores (ASC6). Moreover, the actions and opinions of friends, family, and favorite influencers may influence consumers to believe that it is a great advantage to shop anytime on social media, delivery is fast, and consumers are faced with a wide range of products to select from.

The positive and significant association between SN and ASC comes with theoretical and practical/managerial implications.

First, the findings will solidify how consumers' attitudes toward social commerce result from the views and experiences of referents, including closely related peers, family members, and favorite influencers among Gen Z consumers in the emerging social commerce context. It is likely that often, the beliefs of friends, acquaintances, family members, and favorite influencers influence consumers to adopt those beliefs, echoing what has been found in the TBP model in other consumer behavior contexts (Aslam et al., 2020; Awad & Rogowsky, 2008). More specifically, when friends, family members, and favorite influencers have a positive attitude toward social commerce (ASC), consumers are likely to exhibit the same without hesitation, as previously predicted in TBP research. For example, Pavlou and Fygenson (2014) reported that TPB could also explain and predict the process of e-commerce adoption by consumers. Attitudes (ASC) and macro-level social influence (SN) could impact an individual's intention to engage in social commerce. Marketers positively impact consumers' attitudes toward a particular product or service by manipulating associated beliefs highlighting the benefits (Kan & Fabrigar, 2017). These beliefs can also influence subjective norms by using social influence tactics, such as celebrity endorsements or testimonials from satisfied customers (Leong et al., 2022). These tactics are likely to describe social commerce shopping as a great advantage to shopping any time of the day (ASC2), providing a plethora of products and services to choose from (ASC 8), and saving time (ASC1).

Second, studying the relationship between consumer subjective norms perceptions (SN) and attitudes toward social commerce (ASC) is also important in examining other mobile service adoption among the increasingly important Gen Z age cohort. For example, Nysveen et al. (2005) conducted a study on adopting mobile services in Norway. They found that SN is a strong predictor of adoption behavior because of the normative pressures from friends and superiors. Nysveen et

al. (2005) shed light on the study of social commerce because both are new technologies that may have similar adoption behaviors. The thesis lent empirical support to the relationship among Gen Z consumers.

In addition, Mehreen et al. (2021) found that in a conservative society, the views of closely related peers and family members influence the behavior of female consumers toward online buying. Although gender is not examined as a moderating variable in this study, an overwhelming majority of the female respondents normally shop for their products via Facebook and spend about 30 minutes shopping on the platform (Mehreen et al., 2021). However, a few of them spend an hour shopping on Facebook. They engage in online shopping due to valuing, cherishing, and relying on the views of their significant others, such as peers and family. Moreover, their friends and family have engaged in social commerce without any challenges or conundrums, influencing them to shop online (Mehreen et al., 2021). Shopping online makes them noticeable among relatives, resulting in social norm compliance behaviors.

This study also has the following practical and managerial implications:

First, strong consumer perceptions of subjective norms, particularly from friends and family, will likely coerce them to develop a positive attitude toward social commerce. Negative views and experiences from these groups will ignite consumers' negative attitudes toward social commerce (ASC). For example, Taylor and Todd (1995) observed that people normally act based on their perceptions of others and intentions. Therefore, during the implementation phase of innovation, subjective norms have a significant role to play in developing certain attitudes toward a particular product or service. Consumers are likely to embrace others' attitudes, particularly from the persons they trust, elevating their zeal and willingness to engage in that attitude (Hasbullah et al., 2016).

Second, Al-Jabari (2013) further suggested that e-commerce companies should consciously direct their respective marketing strategies towards creating anticipated subjective norms (SN) about social commerce shopping behaviors among consumers. Implementing marketing strategies that convince or persuade consumers to tell their peers or invite them to share pictures and videos can be exceptionally effective in encouraging social commerce adoption among Gen Z consumers. For example, e-commerce companies can offer a free trial of their products and services and introduce some gifts for customers (Al-Jabari, 2013). Another effective strategy is using online forums where consumers can convince others to shop from a particular e-commerce company. Online shopping companies should take advantage of the interactivity of the Internet and build a site with social telepresence. They should also fully concentrate on conversations with consumers to minimize the unpredictability of consumers' purchasing behaviors (Al-Jabari, 2013).

Leong et al. (2023) found that consumer subjective norms perceptions (SN) are pivotal in influencing attitudes toward social commerce (ASC). Online vendors can optimize publicity on various social media platforms to emphasize customers' testimonials regarding their experiences and success stories concerning the usage of social commerce, which can be projected as subjective norms in society. This strategy can heighten subjective norms perceptions (SN) related to social commerce (Leong et al., 2023). Another effective and efficient method to modify consumer subjective norms perceptions (SN) about social commerce is by providing forums and discussion groups in diverse social commerce platforms to influence other consumers to sense the presence of unspoken subjective norms about social commerce shopping. Last, managers of online businesses can make conscious efforts to promote social influence through disseminating

information to generate incessant positive eWOM and simultaneously adopt optimal countermeasures to invalidate negative comments (Leong et al., 2023).

McLean et al. (2020) found that the influence of significant others, such as peers, parents, and idols, persuades people to show positive attitudes toward mobile commerce during the initial adoption phase. Online businesses should consider incentivizing existing users to make incessant positive eWOM about mobile commerce via diverse channels such as social media, emails, and social messaging (McLean et al., 2020). In addition, online businesses can engage in promotional offers when customers share a distinct and accepted behavioral code with their friends and peers. This strategy has proven successful for Uber and Monzo mobile banking apps. Online businesses can use social media as leverage to provide sharing links in the mobile app to boost recommendations and word of mouth among potential users. Lastly, businesses can capitalize on the testimonials of idols, including social media influencers and micro-influencers, with mass appeal and recommendations made by peers to persuade customers to adopt the mobile app and show positive attitudes toward the app (McLean et al., 2020).

5.3 THE EFFECTS OF ATTITUDES TOWARD SOCIAL COMMERCE ON SOCIAL SHOPPING INTENTION

The last hypothesis attempts to examine the effects of consumers' attitudes toward social commerce (ASC) on social shopping intention (SSI) [RH5]. RH5 proposed that ASC could be a significant predictor of SSI. The multiple regression results show that consumer ASC positively predicts SSI after controlling SN and three message-related dimensions. The present study measures ASC with social commerce saving time (ASC1), being a great advantage of shopping at any time of the day (ASC2), convenient, and less expensive (ASC9 to ASC10). Additional measures include preferring social commerce, which offers various products and will eventually

replace conventional retail stores (ASC4, ASC6, and ASC8). The empirical findings of the study confirmed that when consumers develop positive ASC as believing social commerce saves time (ASC1), provides an advantage of shopping any time of the day (ASC2), and broad products and services to select from (ASC8), provides convenience (ASC10) and it is less expensive (ASC9), they are likely to develop the intention to shop for products and services on social media.

Consumer attitudes refer to their beliefs and feelings (like or dislike) towards purchasing products and services over the Internet (Islam, 2015). Islam (2015) indicated that consumers' attitudes towards online shopping could influence their intentions (Islam, 2015). Attitudes influence the intention of consumers to act in a particular manner to obtain and utilize a product or service (Islam, 2015). Empirical findings reported in this thesis concurred with the predictions of the Theory of Reason Action (TRA) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) that elucidate and emphasize that behavioral intention is a significant predictor of actual behavior and attitude significantly predicts behavioral intention (Mpinganjira, 2016). The study found that attitudes toward online shopping significantly influence customers' intention to purchase from online vendors or businesses (Mpinganjira, 2016). Moreover, consumers' attitudes toward online shopping or online vendors are influenced by factors such as store offerings, security features, assistance with navigation, and fulfillment reliability.

Delafrooz et al. (2011) similarly found that people with positive attitudes toward online shopping have high levels of intention to shop for products from online retailers. Stronger positive attitudes towards online shopping increase consumers' behavioral intention, whereas a stronger negative attitude towards online shopping contributes significantly to the lower behavioral intention of consumers and acceptance of online shopping (Delafrooz et al., 2011). CGRs and eWOM from those closely related to consumers will help share attributes of online shopping,

including reliability, safety, entertainment, and usefulness, to foster favorable attitudes toward online shopping. Having an improved attitude toward online shopping will eventually increase the online purchase intention of consumers (Delafrooz et al., 2011). Furthermore, the learned attributes can convince consumers to have a positive attitude toward online shopping, influencing their intention to shop online (Delafrooz et al., 2011).

Using mobile phones and visiting diverse social networking sites has recently become a norm in diverse societies. An overwhelming majority of people spend a lot of time on social media platforms and have ample opportunity to shop via social media (Rahmanian et al., 2023). Social commerce, which is an aspect of e-commerce, aids social media users in influencing their purchasing decisions and experiences via the creation of new channels. Consumer attitudes toward social commerce (ASC) could similarly play a major role in their willingness or intention to purchase. Consumers' attitudes directly affect their decision to engage in online shopping (Rahmanian et al., 2023). Through perceived competence, consumers can have confidence in social commerce, be attracted to social commerce, and choose social commerce over traditional retail stores while using diverse social networking sites. Consumers also learned the degree of risks associated with shopping on social commerce (Sarkar et al., 2023). If online retailers operate appropriately, the number of risks normally declines, affecting consumer attitudes toward social commerce (ASC), which could increase their willingness to engage in social shopping (Rahmanian et al., 2023).

The positive and significant relationship between ASC and SSI has important theoretical implications.

First, consumer attitudes toward social commerce (ASC) are the cardinal and major factor for the intention to embrace social shopping behavior. It is the outcome of an individual's

perceptions of either positive or negative aspects of behavior. Furthermore, attitudes describe an individual's views, emotions, and behavioral intention changes when reacting to pleasure or disgruntlement with the external environment (Azjen, 1991). Concerning online shopping, attitude defines a consumer's favorable or unfavorable assessment of online shopping, and the inherent feelings of an individual characterize their attitude toward online shopping (Azjen, 1991).

Second, Mathur et al. (2022) discovered that consumer attitudes could convince them to purchase online products and services. Positive reviews and recommendations such as CGRs and eWOM could inspire consumers to develop positive attitudes, influencing them to try new product brands (Mathur et al., 2022) and increasing their intention to purchase products online. Concurred with existing literature, positive attitudes will encourage, motivate, inspire, and influence online consumers to develop the intention of trying out a new product brand pattern, as Mathur et al. (2022) reported.

Last, positive or negative consumer attitudes measure the possibility of an individual gravitating toward a specific behavior. They could influence the desire of the individual to engage in that particular behavior. Most people will likely adopt behaviors they prefer if they consider their attitudes favorable (Tran, M., 2023). Tran, M. (2023) found that attitude significantly impacts consumers' purchase intention. The intention of making a purchase is normally activated by the desire to purchase a product highly cherished by consumers (Tran, M., 2023). Moreover, consumers normally hold social media influencers in high esteem; therefore, they rely on their instincts and intend to purchase the products and services they recommend (Tran M., 2023). They are likely to constantly follow the advice of social media influencers concerning online shopping, and they will develop the intent to make a purchase (Tran M., 2023).

The study also has the following managerial and practical implications.

First, Bounkhong and Cho (2017) argued that marketers should ensure having a shopping platform that is easy to use and useful for navigating information or features to create a positive consumer journey (Bounkhong & Cho, 2017) to increase favorable attitudes toward social commerce (ASC). Positive consumer attitudes could help develop the intention to make a purchase (Wang et al., 2023). Social commerce platforms can be integrated into a more comprehensive cross-border e-commerce ecosystem to increase consumer purchase intention (Wang et al., 2023) when targeting Gen Z in different parts of the world.

Second, El Moussaoui and Benbba (2023) found that consumer attitude predicts their future online shopping intention significantly. To cultivate favorable attitudes toward social commerce (ASC), businesses should concentrate more on fostering a more satisfying user experience by having a smooth process so that consumers can easily navigate the website and make orders via the social commerce platforms. Further, businesses should incessantly engage in media and non-media communication to create a positive attitude among users of their websites (El Moussaoui & Benbba, 2023) and social commerce platforms (Yang, 2024). Creating an elated purchasing experience is salient and pivotal to the success of social commerce (Yang, 2024).

5.4   LINKING CGRS AND E-WOM WITH EMERGING INFLUENCER MARKETING PRACTICES

The popularity of social commerce has expanded past eWOM literature by examining the narratives and endorsement of social influencers in the marketing communication process (Zhou et al., 2021). Unlike CGRs and eWOM generated by other peer customers, reviews and comments by social media influencers (i.e., SMI) are perceived to be more credible, trustworthy, and authentic than other marketers' messages (Zhou et al., 2021). Existing influencer marketing literature has confirmed influencers' expertise, similarity, and trustworthiness positively affect

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users' intention to engage in eWOM messages (Dhun & Dangi, 2023). The present study offers useful insights into emerging influencer marketing practices by examining CGRs and eWOM as part of the "narrative strategies" (Zhou et al., 2021, n.p).

5.5   RESEARCH LIMITATION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Despite the numerous insights into both theoretical and practical implications gained from this study, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations to provide a comprehensive understanding of its scope and potential areas for further research.

First, this study primarily relied on a quantitative online survey to collect data from a limited sample of 310 Gen Z consumers in a Hispanic-dominant Southwest university in the United States. While surveys offer valuable insights into consumer perceptions, they may not capture the full depth and nuance of individual experiences and perspectives when considering social commerce as a shopping platform. Future studies should complement the quantitative approach with other qualitative approaches (such as focus groups or interview methods) to gain in-depth information from respondents regarding their perceptions of social commerce, attitudes toward it, and intention to engage in it. A mixed-method approach will help to gain elevated insights that will contribute significantly to the extant literature on social commerce. Additionally, expanding sampling frames from other ethnic groups in the U.S. and Gen Z consumers from other parts could attest to the consistency of the proposed and validated research hypotheses reported in this thesis.

Second, the study mainly investigated consumer perceptions of believability, credibility, and trust of CGRs and eWOM in social commerce. The thesis study relies on existing theoretical frameworks, primarily the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), to analyze consumer behavior in social commerce. While TPB offers valuable insights, it may not capture the full complexity of consumer decision-making in the rapidly evolving social commerce ecosystem (Porcelli, 2021),

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including augmented reality technologies. Future research should consider the development of new or adapted theoretical frameworks that better reflect the unique dynamics of social commerce, such as Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) and Technology Acceptance Model (TAM).

Last, the thesis employed a series of multiple regression analyses to examine the relationships among the study variables. More advanced statistical analytical techniques, such as mediation and moderation analysis or structural equation modeling, should shed light on the effects of these variables. Additionally, in subsequent multiple regression analyses with participants past social commerce usage behaviors and demographics, only participants' gender was found to be useful moderators when female Gen Z consumers affected the above relationships in the multiple regression models.

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Appendix A: The Survey Instrument

> **The main purpose of this study is to examine what you think of other users' comments, evaluations, ratings, reviews, recommendations, and word-of-mouth about products and services and whether your opinions affect your attitudes and shopping intention via social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok, etc.). This study DOES NOT concern your use of E-commerce sites such as AMAZON, eBay, Shopify, Alibaba, etc. Your answers will be kept confidential and used for research purposes only.**

SECTION 1
Before proceeding to answer the rest of the questionnaire, please answer the screening questions below:

Q1: I am above 18 years old.

    □ No. Please stop. (The study only recruits participants above 18 years old)

    □ Yes. Please proceed.

Q2: How often do you purchase through social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok, etc.)?

    □ Never (The study only recruits' participants who have ever purchased through social media platforms)
    □ Always
    □ Often
    □ Sometimes
    □ Rarely

SECTION 2
Please share your background with us.

Q3: What is your birth year: _____ **(Please fill in the year you were born, not your actual age)**

Q4: Please select the most appropriate option about your gender:
  □ Male
  □ Female
  □ Intersex
  □ Prefer not to say

Q5: **What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?**
  □ Less than a high school degree
  □ High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
  □ Some college but no degree
  □ Associate degree
  □ Bachelor degree
  □ Graduate degree

Q6: Please select your current marital status:
  □ Single
  □ Married/Partnered
  □ Divorced/Separated
  □ Widowed
  □ Prefer not to say

Q7: Which of the following categories best describes your employment status?
  □ Employed, working 1-39 hours per week
  □ Employed, working 40 or more hours per week
  □ Not employed, looking for work
  □ Not employed, NOT looking for work
  □ Disabled, not able to work

Q8: Please select your income level:
  No income
  1-less than $10,000

$10,000- less than $25,000
$25,000-$75,000
Above $75,000
Prefer not to say.

Q9: In the past 30 days, what social media platforms have you used? [Select all that apply]

    □ TikTok
    □ Pinterest
    □ YouTube
    □ Facebook
    □ Snapchat
    □ Twitter
    □ Reddit
    □ Instagram
    □ Other

Q10: Have you ever purchased products or services from the following social media platforms? [Select all that apply]

    □ TikTok
    □ Pinterest
    □ YouTube
    □ Facebook
    □ Snapchat
    □ Twitter
    □ Reddit
    □ Instagram
    □ Other

Q10. How often do you purchase through social media platforms because of others' comments, opinions, reviews, ratings, and recommendations?
    □ Never
    □ Always
    □ Often
    □ Sometimes
    □ Rarely

SECTION 3

Please indicate your agreement with the following statements regarding the influence of others on your shopping via social media.

Instructions: (Please circle a number that best matches your assessment) SD [1]: Strongly Disagree D [2]: Disagree N [3]: Neutral A [4]: Agree SA [5]: Strongly Agree	SD [1]	D [2]	N [3]	A [4]	SA [5]
My *friends* engage in shopping via social media.	1	2	3	4	5
My *family* engages in shopping via social media.	1	2	3	4	5
My *favorite influencer/star* engages in shopping via social media.	1	2	3	4	5
My *friends* shop via social media regularly.	1	2	3	4	5
My *family* shops via social media regularly.	1	2	3	4	5
My *favorite influencer/star* shops via social media regularly.	1	2	3	4	5
My *friends* consider shopping via social media to be a normal activity.	1	2	3	4	5
My *family* considers shopping via social media to be a normal activity.	1	2	3	4	5
My *favorite influencer/star* considers shopping via social media to be a normal activity	1	2	3	4	5
My *friends* encourage me to engage in shopping via social media.	1	2	3	4	5
My *family* encourages me to engage in shopping via social media.	1	2	3	4	5
My *favorite influencer/star* encourages me to engage in shopping via social media.	1	2	3	4	5
1+1=3	1	2	3	4	5
The opinions of my *friends* are important in shaping my decision to engage in shopping via social media.	1	2	3	4	5
The opinions of my *family* are important in shaping my decision to engage in shopping via social media.	1	2	3	4	5

The opinions of my *favorite influencer/star* are important in shaping my decision to engage in shopping via social media.	1	2	3	4	5
When it comes to shopping via social media, it is important for me to do what my *friends* think I should do.	1	2	3	4	5
When it comes to shopping via social media, it is important for me to do what my *family* thinks I should do.	1	2	3	4	5
When it comes to shopping via social media, it is important for me to do what my *favorite influencer/star* thinks I should do.	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION 4

Please indicate your agreement with the following statements about what you think of shopping on social media.

Instructions: (Please circle a number that best matches your assessment) SD [1]: Strongly Disagree D [2]: Disagree N [3]: Neutral A [4]: Agree SA [5]: Strongly Agree	SD [1]	D [2]	N [3]	A [4]	SA [5]
I think shopping on social media saves time.	1	2	3	4	5
It is a great advantage to shop at any time of the day on social media.	1	2	3	4	5
Social media shopping is more difficult than shopping at traditional retail stores (such as shopping malls).	1	2	3	4	5
I prefer shopping on social media over shopping at traditional retail stores.	1	2	3	4	5
Shopping on social media is risky.	1	2	3	4	5
I believe shopping on social media will eventually replace retail stores.	1	2	3	4	5
Delivery of products and services on social media takes a long time.	1	2	3	4	5
The selection of products and services on social media shopping is broad.	1	2	3	4	5

I think shopping on social media is less expensive.	1	2	3	4	5
I think shopping on social media is convenient.	1	2	3	4	5
El Paso is in the 910 area code.	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION 5

Please indicate your intention to shop via social media in the near future.

Instructions: (Please circle a number that best matches your assessment) HU [1]: Highly Unlikely U [2]: Unlikely N [3]: Neutral L [4]: Likely HL [5]: Highly Likely	HU [1]	U [2]	N [3]	L [4]	HL [5]
How likely are you to buy products from social media in the near future.?	1	2	3	4	5
To what extent do you consider purchasing products from social media in the near future.?	1	2	3	4	5
How probable is it that you will make a purchase from social media in the near future.?	1	2	3	4	5
In your opinion, how likely are you to recommend social media shopping to your friends and family in the near future.?	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION 6

In the following #MyCalvins campaign on Instagram (see below), consumers are encouraged to share their comments, evaluations, photos, reviews, and recommendations about Calvin Klein products. This example is commonly known as consumer-generated reviews (CGRs) and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM).

Please indicate your agreement with the following statements regarding your opinions about similar brand/product CGRs and e-WOM produced by other consumers or influencers.

Instructions: (Please circle a number that best matches your assessment) SD [1]: Strongly Disagree D [2]: Disagree N [3]: Neutral A [4]: Agree SA [5]: Strongly Agree	SD [1]	D [2]	N [3]	A [4]	S A [5]
I always read CGRs and e-WOM before I purchase via social commerce platforms.	1	2	3	4	5
In the past 30 days, I have relied on CGRs and e-WOM to help my purchase decision.	1	2	3	4	5
In general, I think CGRs and e-WOM about a brand or product are:					
Accurate	1	2	3	4	5
Error-free	1	2	3	4	5
True	1	2	3	4	5
Authentic	1	2	3	4	5
Fake	1	2	3	4	5
Reliable	1	2	3	4	5
Authoritative	1	2	3	4	5
Reputable	1	2	3	4	5
Credible	1	2	3	4	5

Instructions: (Please circle a number that best matches your assessment) SD [1]: Strongly Disagree D [2]: Disagree N [3]: Neutral A [4]: Agree SA [5]: Strongly Agree	SD [1]	D [2]	N [3]	A [4]	S A [5]
In general, I think CGRs and e-WOM about a brand or product are					
Plausible	1	2	3	4	5
Easy to follow	1	2	3	4	5
Consistent	1	2	3	4	5
Complete	1	2	3	4	5
Missing information	1	2	3	4	5

	1	2	3	4	5
Convincing	1	2	3	4	5
Conclusive	1	2	3	4	5
Genuine	1	2	3	4	5
Believable	1	2	3	4	5

Instructions: (Please circle a number that best matches your assessment) **SD [1]: Strongly Disagree** **D [2]: Disagree** **N [3]: Neutral** **A [4]: Agree** **SA [5]: Strongly Agree**	**SD [1]**	**D [2]**	**N [3]**	**A [4]**	**SA [5]**
In general, I think CGRs and e-WOM about a brand or product are					
Honest	1	2	3	4	5
Trustworthy	1	2	3	4	5
Dependable	1	2	3	4	5
Verifiable	1	2	3	4	5
Useful	1	2	3	4	5
Helpful	1	2	3	4	5

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix B: IRB Consent Form

University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) Institutional Review Board
Informed Consent Form for Research Involving Human Subjects

Protocol Title: Will Consumer-Generated Reviews and Electronic Word-Of-Mouth Communications Affect Social Norm Perceptions, Attitudes Toward Social Commerce, and Social Shopping Intention Among Gen Z Consumers?
Principal Investigator: Adebusola A Adewale
UTEP: Department of Communication

Introduction

You are being asked to participate voluntarily in the research project described below. You are encouraged to take your time in making your decision. You must read the information that describes the study. Please ask the researcher or staff to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand.

Why is this study being done?

You have been asked to participate in the above study that examines whether consumer-generated reviews and electronic word-of-mouth communications could affect social norm perceptions, attitudes toward social commerce, and social shopping intention among Gen Z consumers.

Approximately 300 participants (aged 18-26 years old) who are Gen Z consumers in the United States will enroll in this study.

You are being asked to participate in the study because you met the sampling criteria.

What is involved in the study?

If you decide to participate in this study, your involvement will last about 20 minutes to answer an online questionnaire.

What are the risks and discomforts of the study?

There are no risks or discomforts associated with participation in this study.

Are there benefits to taking part in this study?

You are not likely to benefit from taking part in this study. This research may help us understand if consumer-generated reviews and electronic word-of-mouth communications affect social norm perception and attitudes toward social commerce and social shopping intention among Gen Z consumers.

What are my costs?

There are no direct costs.

Will I be paid to participate in this study?

You will not be compensated for taking part in this research study.

What other options are there?

You have the option not to take part in this study. No penalties will be involved if you choose not to participate in this study.

What if I want to withdraw or am asked to withdraw from this study?

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to take part in this study. If you do not participate in the study, there will be no penalty or loss of benefit.

If you choose to participate, you have the right to skip any questions or stop answering the survey at any time. However, we encourage you to talk to a research group member so that they know why you are leaving the study. If there are any new findings during the study that may affect whether you want to continue to take part, you will be told about them.

The researcher may stop your participation without your permission if they think being in the study may cause harm.

Who do I call if I have questions or problems?

You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions, contact **Adebusola Adewale** at (915) 5052531 and aaadewale@miners.utep.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about participating as a research subject, don't hesitate to contact the UTEP Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 915-747-6590 or irb.orsp@utep.edu.

What about confidentiality?

Every effort will be made to keep your information confidential. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law.

Your participation in this study is confidential. None of the information will identify you by name.

All records will be entered with an assigned case identification number that cannot be associated with you. We will use Participant #1, Participant #2, Participant #3, etc. when quoting and reporting your experiences.

No individual information will be released in the presentation and publication of the survey results. Only aggregate data will be reported to ensure the anonymity of your participation.
The results of this research may be presented at meetings or in publications; however, your name will not be disclosed in those presentations.

Every effort will be made to keep your information confidential. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Organizations that may inspect and copy your research records for quality assurance and data analysis include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- Department of Health and Human Services
- UTEP Institutional Review Board

Because of the need to release information to these parties, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. The results of this study may be presented at meetings or in publications; however, your identity will not be disclosed in those presentations.

The researcher will maintain all records in a secured and locked UTEP location and will be used only for research purposes. No other people will have access to these records.

Mandatory Reporting

If information is revealed about child abuse or neglect, or potentially dangerous future behavior to others, the law requires that this information be reported to the proper authorities.

Authorization Statement

I have read each page of this paper about the study (or it was read to me). I will be given a copy of the form to keep. I know I can stop being in this study without penalty. I know that being in this study is voluntary, and I choose to be in this study.

_____
Participant's name (printed)

_____   _____
Participant's Signature   Date

_____   _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date

QUESTIONNAIRE

> **The main purpose of this study is to examine what you think of other users' comments, evaluations, ratings, reviews, recommendations, and word-of-mouth about products and services and whether your opinions affect your attitudes and shopping intention via social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok, etc.). This study DOES NOT concern your use of E-commerce sites such as AMAZON, eBay, Shopify, Alibaba, etc. Your answers will be kept confidential and used for research purposes only.**

SECTION 1
Before proceeding to answer the rest of the questionnaire, please answer the screening questions below:

Q1: I am above 18 years old. [AGE]

    □ [0] No. Please stop. (The study only recruits participants above 18 years old)

    □ [1] Yes. Please proceed.

Q2: How often do you purchase through social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok, etc.)?
[PURCHASE_FREQUENCY]

    □ Never (The study only recruits participants who have ever purchased through social media platforms)
    □ Always
    □ Often
    □ Sometimes
    □ Rarely

SECTION 2
Please share your background with us.

Q3: What is your birth year: _____ (**Please fill in the year you were born, not your actual age**) [BIRTH_YEAR]

$$AGE=2024-[BIRTH\_YEAR]+1$$

$$GEN\ Z=18\text{-}27\ YEARS\ OLD$$

Q4: Please select the most appropriate option about your gender: [GENDER]
    □ Male [1]
    □ Female [0]
    □ Intersex [2]
    □ Prefer not to say [3]

Q5: **What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?** [EDUCATION]
    □ Less than a high school degree
    □ High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
    □ Some college but no degree
    □ Associate degree
    □ Bachelor degree
    □ Graduate degree

Q6: Please select your current marital status: [MARITAL]
    □ Single
    □ Married/Partnered
    □ Divorced/Separated
    □ Widowed
    □ Prefer not to say

Q7: Which of the following categories best describes your employment status?
    [EMPLOYMENT]
    □ Employed, working 1-39 hours per week
    □ Employed, working 40 or more hours per week
    □ Not employed, looking for work
    □ Not employed, NOT looking for work
    □ Disabled, not able to work

Q8: Please select your income level: [INCOME]

     No income
     1-less than $10,000
     $10,000- less than $25,000
     $25,000-$75,000
     Above $75,000
     Prefer not to say.

Q9: In the past 30 days, what social media platforms have you used? [Select all that apply] [USE_SM]

□ TikTok   [1=SELECTED. 0=NOT SELECTED]
□ Pinterest
□ YouTube
□ Facebook
□ Snapchat
□ Twitter
□ Reddit
□ Instagram
□ Other

Q10: Have you ever purchased products or services from the following social media platforms? [Select all that apply] [PURCHASE_SM]

□ TikTok [1=SELECTED. 0=NOT SELECTED]
□ Pinterest
□ YouTube
□ Facebook
□ Snapchat
□ Twitter
□ Reddit
□ Instagram
□ Other

Q10. How often do you purchase through social media platforms because of others' comments, opinions, reviews, ratings, and recommendations? [INFLUENCE]

□ Never
□ Always
□ Often

☐ Sometimes
☐ Rarely

SECTION 3

Please indicate your agreement with the following statements regarding the influence of others on your shopping via social media.

Instructions: (Please circle a number that best matches your assessment) SD [1]: Strongly Disagree D [2]: Disagree N [3]: Neutral A [4]: Agree SA [5]: Strongly Agree	SD [1]	D [2]	N [3]	A [4]	SA [5]
My *friends* engage in shopping via social media. [SN1]	1	2	3	4	5
My *family* engages in shopping via social media. [SN2]	1	2	3	4	5
My *favorite influencer/star* engages in shopping via social media. [SN3]	1	2	3	4	5
My *friends* shop via social media regularly. [SN4]	1	2	3	4	5
My *family* shops via social media regularly. [SN5]	1	2	3	4	5
My *favorite influencer/star* shops via social media regularly. [SN6]	1	2	3	4	5
My *friends* consider shopping via social media to be a normal activity. [SN7]	1	2	3	4	5
My *family* considers shopping via social media to be a normal activity. [SN8]	1	2	3	4	5
My *favorite influencer/star* considers shopping via social media to be a normal activity [SN9]	1	2	3	4	5
My *friends* encourage me to engage in shopping via social media. [SN10]	1	2	3	4	5
My *family* encourages me to engage in shopping via social media. [SN11]	1	2	3	4	5
My *favorite influencer/star* encourages me to engage in shopping via social media. [SN12]	1	2	3	4	5
1+1=3 [SN13]	1	2	3	4	5
The opinions of my *friends* are important in shaping my decision to engage in shopping via social media. [SN14]	1	2	3	4	5

The opinions of my *family* are important in shaping my decision to engage in shopping via social media. [SN15]	1	2	3	4	5
The opinions of my *favorite influencer/star* are important in shaping my decision to engage in shopping via social media. [SN16]	1	2	3	4	5
When it comes to shopping via social media, it is important for me to do what my *friends* think I should do. [SN17]	1	2	3	4	5
When it comes to shopping via social media, it is important for me to do what my *family* thinks I should do. [SN18]	1	2	3	4	5
When it comes to shopping via social media, it is important for me to do what my *favorite influencer/star* thinks I should do. [SN19]	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION 4

Please indicate your agreement with the following statements about what you think of shopping on social media.

Instructions: (Please circle a number that best matches your assessment) **SD [1]: Strongly Disagree** **D [2]: Disagree** **N [3]: Neutral** **A [4]: Agree** **SA [5]: Strongly Agree**	SD [1]	D [2]	N [3]	A [4]	SA [5]
I think shopping on social media saves time. [ASC1]	1	2	3	4	5
It is a great advantage to shop at any time of the day on social media. [ASC2]	1	2	3	4	5
Social media shopping is more difficult than shopping at traditional retail stores (such as shopping malls). [ASC3]	1	2	3	4	5
I prefer shopping on social media over shopping at traditional retail stores. [ASC4]	1	2	3	4	5
Shopping on social media is risky. [ASC5]	1	2	3	4	5
I believe shopping on social media will eventually replace retail stores. [ASC6]	1	2	3	4	5

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	1	2	3	4	5
Delivery of products and services on social media takes a long time. [ASC7]	1	2	3	4	5
The selection of products and services on social media shopping is broad. [ASC8]	1	2	3	4	5
I think shopping on social media is less expensive. [ASC9]	1	2	3	4	5
I think shopping on social media is convenient. [ASC10]	1	2	3	4	5
El Paso is in the 910 area code. [ASC11]	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION 5

Please indicate your intention to shop via social media in the near future.

Instructions: (Please circle a number that best matches your assessment) HU [1]: Highly Unlikely U [2]: Unlikely N [3]: Neutral L [4]: Likely HL [5]: Highly Likely	HU [1]	U [2]	N [3]	L [4]	HL [5]
How likely are you to buy products from social media in the near future.? [SSI1]	1	2	3	4	5
To what extent do you consider purchasing products from social media in the near future.? [SSI2]	1	2	3	4	5
How probable is it that you will make a purchase from social media in the near future.? [SSI3]	1	2	3	4	5
In your opinion, how likely are you to recommend social media shopping to your friends and family in the near future.? [SSI4]	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION 6
In the following #MyCalvins campaign on Instagram (see below), consumers are encouraged to share their comments, evaluation, photos, reviews, and recommendations about Calvin Klein products. This example is commonly known as consumer-generated reviews (CGRs) and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM).

Please indicate your agreement with the following statements regarding your opinions about similar brand/product CGRs and e-WOM produced by other consumers or influencers.

I always read CGRs and e-WOM before I purchase via social commerce platforms. [READING]
1=SD, 2, 3, 4, 5=SA

In the past 30 days, I have relied on CGRs and e-WOM to help my purchase decision [RELY]
1=SD, 2, 3, 4, 5=SA

Instructions: (Please circle a number that best matches your assessment) SD [1]: Strongly Disagree D [2]: Disagree N [3]: Neutral A [4]: Agree SA [5]: Strongly Agree	SD [1]	D [2]	N [3]	A [4]	S A [5]
I always read CGRs and e-WOM before I purchase via social commerce platforms.	1	2	3	4	5
In the past 30 days, I have relied on CGRs and e-WOM to help my purchase decision.	1	2	3	4	5
In general, I think CGRs and e-WOM about a brand or product are:					
Accurate [C1]	1	2	3	4	5
Error-free [C2]	1	2	3	4	5
True [C3]	1	2	3	4	5
Authentic [C4]	1	2	3	4	5
Fake [C5]	1	2	3	4	5
Reliable [C6]	1	2	3	4	5
Authoritative [C7]	1	2	3	4	5
Reputable [C8]	1	2	3	4	5
Credible [C9]	1	2	3	4	5

Instructions: (Please circle a number that best matches your assessment) SD [1]: Strongly Disagree D [2]: Disagree N [3]: Neutral A [4]: Agree SA [5]: Strongly Agree	SD [1]	D [2]	N [3]	A [4]	S A [5]
In general, I think CGRs and e-WOM about a brand or product are					
Plausible [B1]	1	2	3	4	5

Easy to follow [B2]	1	2	3	4	5
Consistent [B3]	1	2	3	4	5
Complete [B4]	1	2	3	4	5
Missing information [B5]	1	2	3	4	5
Convincing [B6]	1	2	3	4	5
Conclusive [B7]	1	2	3	4	5
Genuine [B8]	1	2	3	4	5
Believable [B9]	1	2	3	4	5

Instructions: (Please circle a number that best matches your assessment) **SD [1]: Strongly Disagree** **D [2]: Disagree** **N [3]: Neutral** **A [4]: Agree** **SA [5]: Strongly Agree**	**SD [1]**	**D [2]**	**N [3]**	**A [4]**	**S A [5]**
In general, I think CGRs and e-WOM about a brand or product are					
Honest [T1]	1	2	3	4	5
Trustworthy [T2]	1	2	3	4	5
Dependable [T3]	1	2	3	4	5
Verifiable [T4]	1	2	3	4	5
Useful [T5]	1	2	3	4	5
Helpful [T6]	1	2	3	4	5

Thank you for your participation!

Curriculum Vitae

Adebusola Azeezat Adewale earned her bachelor's degree in mass communication from Lagos State University (LASU) in Lagos, Nigeria in January 2016. She went on to pursue a master's degree in communication at The University of Texas at El Paso, which she completed in May 2024. Her research interests lie in online marketing, social media advertising, entrepreneurship, e-commerce, and social commerce. Adebusola's specific focus is on studying consumer-generated reviews and electronic word-of-mouth communication to understand the various factors that shape consumer evaluation of believability, credibility, and trust in social commerce. She also examines how these factors influence the decision-making process among Gen Z consumers. During her master's program, Adebusola served as a Teaching Assistant at the College of Liberal Arts Social Justice Initiative in the communication department.

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