The impact of interpersonal interaction factors on consumers’ purchase intention in social commerce: a relationship quality perspective

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Abstract
Purpose – Interpersonal interaction can influence consumers’ purchase intention in social commerce (s-commerce). This paper aims to identify interpersonal interaction factors as well as the mediating effect of relationship quality between interpersonal interaction factors and consumers’ purchase intention in s-commerce.

Design/methodology/approach – This study explores new dimensions of interpersonal interaction in s-commerce by integrating interaction between consumers and online vendors and that between consumers and online recommenders in s-commerce. An online questionnaire was used to collect the data, and partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed for data analysis.

Findings – The results indicate that interpersonal interaction factors of both online vendors and online recommenders positively affect swift guanxi and initial trust between consumers and online vendors. Swift guanxi and initial trust positively affect consumers’ purchase intention. Initial trust partially mediates between interpersonal interaction factors and purchase intention while swift guanxi does not mediate between perceived similarity of online recommenders and purchase intention.

Practical implications – The findings can be used to guide vendors in s-commerce platforms to make good use of platform features to improve interpersonal interaction. Meanwhile, s-commerce platforms should be enhanced with efficient interaction tools to help cultivate relationship quality between consumers and online vendors.

Originality/value – This study combines social exchange theory, trust transfer theory and relationship quality theory to investigate the factors that influence swift guanxi and initial trust between consumers and online vendors, which extends the study of interpersonal interaction and enriches the dimensions of relationship quality in the context of s-commerce.

Keywords Social commerce, Interpersonal interaction, Swift guanxi, Initial trust

Paper type Research paper

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Compliance with ethical standards
Ethical standard: The authors state that this research complies with ethical standards. This research does not involve either human participants or animals.

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1. Introduction

Social commerce (s-commerce) is a new development in electronic commerce (e-commerce) based on interpersonal relationship, which is frequently used by online vendors to establish consumer interaction to promote commerce, transforming traditional product-oriented environment to a customer-driven and social-centered one (Baghdadi, 2016; Chen et al., 2017; Nadeem et al., 2020). For example, in China, the number of the Internet users has reached 1.032 billion, with the coverage of 73.0% over the whole population by December, 2021 (CNNIC, 2022). Compared to traditional e-commerce, s-commerce involves lots of social interaction. How to use the social features of s-commerce to enhance the relationship between consumers and vendors, and transform social interaction into trading activities, has attracted extensive attention in the field of academic study as well as in practice.

Most of the existing literature studies follow the traditional research path of technical interaction in e-commerce, focusing on the intermediary variables such as experience, attitude, trust and perceived value and explore the impact of technical interactivity on purchase intention in s-commerce (Zhao and Lu, 2012; Chen et al., 2017). Curty and Zhang (2013) identified a total of 174 technical features to serve for transactional, relational and social emphases in s-commerce. Huang and Benyoucef (2013) proposed a set of principles for guiding design features, including the individual, conversation, community and commerce level. Hajli and Sims (2015) assumed that s-commerce constructs could facilitate online communication between consumers. Though the mechanism of technical interactivity in s-commerce was clarified by the above literature, the essence of s-commerce, that is, relational transaction based on social interaction, was not explored.

With the prevalence of s-commerce, consumers are more and more connected in online community, sharing and exchanging shopping-related information. Some scholars have moved towards the research path of social orientation, such as e-word-of-mouth and interactive communication, and proved that social interaction would improve purchase intention in s-commerce (Shen et al., 2010; Wang and Yu, 2017; Cui et al., 2022). Prior studies have mainly focused on interpersonal interaction of online community members, especially online recommenders, on consumers’ decision-making from the intermediaries of social influence (Shen et al., 2010), perceived shopping values (Hu et al., 2016) and flow experience (Liu et al., 2016). For example, Hu et al. (2016) consider interpersonal interaction factors such as perceived expertise, similarity and benevolence to study consumers’ purchase intention. Fu et al. (2020) found that perceived familiarity, closeness, similarity and expertise of social media members affected online social shopping intention. However, most of these studies only discuss the interaction between consumers and online recommenders, i.e. other consumers who give advice and suggestions, ignoring the interaction between consumers and online vendors, which is basically a very important part of s-commerce.

In s-commerce context, online vendors not only just adopt the traditional e-commerce way of selling products by designing tools to improve the interactivity of website but also interact with consumers directly via message boxes, videos and other media. Consumers’ interpersonal interaction with online vendors ranges from the machine reply to specific product and service-related question solutions. However, many studies concerning the interaction between consumers and online vendors in s-commerce focus on website interactivity (Zhang et al., 2014; Lin et al., 2019). Some studies try to discuss the interpersonal interaction between consumers and vendors, focusing on the features of vendors by expertise, similarity and likeability (Zhang and Gupta, 2018; Chen et al., 2022). All these interpersonal interaction factors are similar to the studies in social community member interaction. As the interaction between consumers and vendors focus on immediate sales and features transactional emphasis while that between consumers and online recommenders...
features social emphasis (Curty and Zhang, 2013), the interaction factors should be different, which gives rise to a research gap for this study. As consumers value adequate information and high-quality service from online vendors in the purchase process (Ahn et al., 2004; Song and Zinkhan, 2008; Alalwan, 2018), perceived informativeness and perceived responsibility will be adopted as interpersonal interaction factors between consumers and online vendors in s-commerce.

Additionally, considering relationship quality (Athanasopoulou, 2009) explains well the mechanism of social interaction on consumers’ purchase intention, some studies have regarded trust, satisfaction and commitments as dimensions of relationship quality (Crosby et al., 1990; Liang et al., 2011; Hajli, 2014) and focus on the long-term relationship quality, which is always status- and resource-dependent. The other studies focusing on swift guanxi as the quickly formed relationship between buyers and sellers help promote buyers’ purchase decision (Ou et al., 2014; Lin et al., 2018). However, few studies have explored the relationship quality in the initial transaction process in s-commerce.

Given above research gaps and the significance of social interaction, in particular, relationship quality, in s-commerce, an integrative perspective is explored to study the different factors of interpersonal interaction and the mechanism that will enhance consumers’ purchase intention. Social exchange theory can explain interpersonal interaction between consumers and vendors as well as that between consumers and online recommenders as it is applicable for both nonmonetary information exchange and monetary exchange. Meanwhile, trust transfer theory can help explain why trust from interpersonal interaction between social media members can be transferred to the initial trust between consumers and vendors in s-commerce. Therefore, interpersonal interaction factors between consumers and online vendors, perceived informativeness and perceived responsiveness, and that between consumers and online recommenders, perceived expertise and perceived similarity, are taken into account in this study. As this study is conducted in China, a country where guanxi, a close and pervasive interpersonal relationship, is considered to be a very important element in business transactions, swift guanxi and initial trust (Ou et al., 2014; Lin et al., 2018) are employed as important dimensions to measure the relationship quality between consumers and vendors in the initial transaction process. Further, the mediating effect of relationship quality on the relationship between interpersonal interaction factors and purchase intention is explored in this study.

In summary, the purpose of this study is to identify the antecedents of consumers’ purchase intention in s-commerce by integrating interpersonal interaction factors and relationship quality. Therefore, this study aims to address the following questions:

1. What are the interpersonal interaction factors that affect the relationship quality between consumers and vendors in s-commerce?
2. What is the effect of relationship quality on consumers’ purchase intention?
3. Do swift guanxi and initial trust mediate between interpersonal interaction factors and purchase intention?

The contributions of the study are as follows. First, this study explores interpersonal interaction factors from the aspects of social interaction, which shed light on the importance of human interaction rather than pure technical interaction. Second, this study gives new dimensions of interpersonal interaction in s-commerce by integrating interpersonal interaction factors between consumers and online vendors and that between consumers and online recommenders. Third, this study explores relationship quality between consumers and vendors represented by swift guanxi and initial trust, which extends the relationship...
marketing study in s-commerce. Finally, this study explores the mechanism of how interpersonal interaction factors impact consumers’ purchase intention by integrating social exchange theory, trust transfer theory and relationship quality theory, which enriches the current theoretical study in s-commerce.

2. Literature review and theoretical background

2.1 S-commerce

S-commerce, a new stream in e-commerce, involves the delivery of business and commercial activities in online social environment (Baghdadi, 2016). Different from conventional e-commerce, consumers on s-commerce sites bond together in the form of social groups and make purchase decision based on the social sharing information, recommendations, comments, ratings, etc (Hajli and Sims, 2015). Social interaction is a vital feature of s-commerce (Huang and Benyoucef, 2013). Many consumers nowadays interact with group members on s-commerce sites and seek online recommenders’ opinions and feedbacks of certain products before making purchase decisions (Chen et al., 2017).

Social factors, such as word of mouth, customer reviews, social support, social media website characteristics, social interaction, etc. have been emphasized in prior research. Wang and Yu (2017) reported that electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and observational learning have a positive effect on consumer purchase intention. Liang et al. (2011) found that social support from online connections may lead to customers’ active participation in s-commerce interactions. Lin et al. (2019) pointed out the interactivity, stickiness and word of mouth can affect consumers’ purchase intention in s-commerce through the mediating effect of three dimensions in swift guanxi: mutual understanding, reciprocal favors and relationship harmony. Cheng et al. (2020) contended that familiarity, interpersonal similarity, interactivity and personal information are four antecedents of swift guanxi between members in s-commerce communities, which is crucial to promoting social word-of-mouth (sWOM) adoption behavior.

2.2 Interpersonal interaction

Interpersonal interaction has received much attention in s-commerce for providing opportunities for consumers to make better purchase decisions (Ng, 2013). Extant studies have pointed out that interpersonal interaction among members are important factors affecting members’ WOM behavior and purchase behavior in s-commerce (Liu et al., 2016; Cheng et al., 2019).

Interpersonal interaction has been discussed widely from dimensions such as perceived similarity, expertise, familiarity and closeness (Shen et al., 2010; Hu et al., 2016; Cheng et al., 2019). For example, Shen et al. (2010) demonstrated that perceived similarity, familiarity and expertise positively impacted an individual’s loyalty toward virtual community. Naylor et al. (2012) revealed that perceived similarity among Facebook members had a significant influence on consumers’ brand evaluation as well as purchase intention. Fu et al. (2019) reported that both external similarity and internal similarity between consumers affected consumers’ parasocial interaction relationship forming and trust transfer, which in turn significantly had a significant impact on consumers’ s-commerce behaviors. Hu et al. (2016) emphasized similarity, expertise and benevolence to be peer features that would affect consumers’ social shopping intention. These factors provide cues for online consumers to get valuable information, contributing to the decision-making (Fu et al., 2018).

However, existing studies in s-commerce have not involved the interpersonal interaction between consumers and online vendors. As s-commerce involves interaction with both online
vendors and online recommenders, an integrated study of interpersonal interaction factors is necessary. Therefore, this study will integrate both the features of online vendors and that of online recommenders as interpersonal interaction factors.

2.3 Relationship quality theory
Relationship quality, a symbol of the relationship strength, is the invisible bond between customers and enterprises (Palmatier et al., 2006; Casidy and Nyadzayo, 2019) and is very important for attracting, developing and retaining users (Nadeem et al., 2020). Prior studies have shown that the relationship quality between consumers and companies can lead to positive market performance, repurchase behavior and customer loyalty (Palmatier et al., 2006; Athanasopoulou, 2009). Studies in information system research have also proved that relationship quality had a positive effect on purchase and repurchase intentions in online shopping (Liang et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2011; Hajli, 2014).

Relationship quality was mostly conceptualized and operationalized as a multidimensional construct, consisting of satisfaction, trust and commitment (Crosby et al., 1990; Hennig-Thurau and Klee, 1997). In traditional market, Sanchez-Franco et al. (2009) investigated the effect relationship quality between customers and service providers on loyalty, focusing on trust and commitment. In s-commerce, scholars explored the impact of social factors on relationship quality, focusing on trust, satisfaction and commitment (Hajli, 2014; Liang et al., 2011). Relationship quality has mainly been studied as the mechanism for the relationship of social support and website quality on s-commerce intention and continuance intention (Liang et al., 2011). Both these traditional off-line and s-commerce studies regard relationship quality as a long-term relationship for customer retention.

As online relationship differs from traditional relationship in that it is based on weak relationship, which is not resource reliable and status-dependent, swift guanxi and trust can help facilitate the smooth transaction between consumers and vendors (Ou et al., 2014). Lin et al. (2018) demonstrated that swift guanxi and trust were two key elements of relationship quality in the context of Chinese s-commerce. Fan et al. (2019) also proved that swift guanxi and trust had played an important role in repurchase intention and social sharing intention in s-commerce.

Though relationship quality is of great significance in retaining customers, it is also important to build relationship with new consumers in the initial transaction. However, the relationship quality in this stage has not been well studied in the previous research. Hence, the concept of relationship quality could be extended in the initial transaction in s-commerce, and the mechanism for interpersonal interaction factors on purchase intention should be further explored.

2.4 Social exchange theory
Social exchange theory regards interpersonal interaction as a process in which all participants exchange valuable resources through some activities. Individuals regard online interaction as a way to obtain benefits from exchange and sharing (Hsu and Lin, 2008). The adoption of social exchange theory for this s-commerce study is based on the belief that the roots of marketing are intrinsically found in social exchange theory (Bagozzi, 1975). S-commerce is based on the social interaction between s-commerce members, which is considered a process of social exchange. People usually share information on s-commerce community in exchange for recognition or social support they expect from their exchange partners (Szymczak et al., 2016) and to form harmonious relationship between consumers and vendors, which will help with the sustainable development of s-commerce.
Previous studies have explored the application of social exchange theory in online shopping. Chou and Hsu (2016) combined social exchange theory and information systems (IS) use theory to explore the effect of perceived benefit and investment on consumers’ repurchase intention using shopping habit as the moderator, in which social exchange theory is characterized by emotional evaluation (i.e. satisfaction with outcome and process quality) and rational evaluation (i.e. trust and learning). Urbonavicius et al. (2021) reported that involvement in social media significantly affected consumers' willingness to disclose personal data because of reciprocal exchange relations between social media members. Toth et al. (2022) investigated the role of eWOM in business exchanges through buyers’ signaling of observable and unobservable supplier characteristics on the Alibaba e-commerce platform and proved that bonding, the development of mutuality as well as relationship intimacy in buyer–supplier relationships can be formed without in-person contact. These studies show that social exchange in online shopping can help facilitate relationship quality between consumers and vendors.

Social exchange theory views exchange as a social behavior that may result in both economic and social outcomes (Lambe et al., 2001). In this study, two processes of social exchange exist between consumers and online vendors and consumers and online recommenders in s-commerce. In terms of the social exchange between consumers and online vendors, positive exchange interactions to get adequate information and high-quality service from online vendors can enhance their relationship quality. In exchange for the social help, consumers reward by economic outcomes, such as buying products from online vendors. In terms of social exchange between consumers and online recommenders, consumers will be benefited by the expertise of online recommenders and similar taste they share. Social outcomes such as trust and social recognition will arise. To reward for the helpful advice from online recommenders, consumers tend to form good relationship with recommended vendors and consequently buy products from the online vendors they recommend.

2.5 Trust transfer theory
According to trust transfer theory, trust transfer occurs when the “the unknown target is perceived as related to the source of the transferred trust” (Stewart, 2003). Trust transfer can be achieved through cognitive and communication process (Stewart, 2003). The cognitive process of trust transfer is based on an understanding of the relationship between the trustee and the trusted third party. For example, third-party information brokers can transfer consumer trust to sellers by providing certificates and payment guarantees (Bai et al., 2015). The communication process of trust transfer shows that trust can be transferred through communication and interaction (Kuan and Bock, 2007). For example, trust in a social network community may be transferred from trust among its members (Ng, 2013).

In s-commerce context, social community members communicate and interact with each other by sharing information concerning products and related vendors; consumers’ trust in those members could be transferred to initial trust in relevant vendors. Trust transfer theory can explain why interpersonal interaction factors of online recommenders can lead to consumers' initial trust in online sellers and form swift guanxi with online vendors in s-commerce.

3. Research model and hypothesis development
3.1 Research model
This study will take interpersonal interaction factors into consideration and integrate both the features of online vendors as well as that of online recommenders. The interpersonal
interaction between consumers and online vendors is more market-driven while that between consumers and online vendors is more social-driven. For example, consumers would interact with online vendors about the products and services they could provide in order to make purchase decision, while consumers usually interact with online recommenders to seek advice so as to facilitate their buying. Interpersonal interaction factors vary because of the different nature of interaction. Inspired by the online features of Internet shopping malls (Ahn et al., 2004), this study finds that information quality and service quality to be very important features for user acceptance of online websites, so they can be regarded as features for online vendors providing products and services for consumers. To emphasize the consumers' subjective evaluation of various types of information presented by online vendors, this study applies the concept of perceived informativeness (Alalwan, 2018) to refer to the information quality online vendors present with s-commerce tools when interacting with consumers. Inspired by Song and Zinkhan (2008)'s social interaction perspective, this study uses the concept of perceived responsiveness to show the service quality online vendors could provide for consumers, emphasizing the successful communication between consumers and vendors in online market. Existing studies have discussed interpersonal interaction factors of social community members such as perceived expertise, similarity, closeness and familiarity. As most studies concerning interpersonal interaction factors focus on perceived expertise and perceived similarity, this study adopts perceived similarity and perceived expertise as the two interpersonal interaction factors of online recommenders in s-commerce (Shen et al., 2010; Hu et al., 2016). Therefore, in this study, interpersonal interaction factors in s-commerce include perceived informativeness and perceived responsiveness of online vendors, perceived expertise and perceived similarity of online recommenders.

To explore the mechanism of interpersonal interaction factors on purchase intention, inspired by Ou et al. (2014) and Lin et al. (2018), this study regards swift guanxi and initial trust as two key dimensions of relationship quality in the context of initial transaction between consumers and online vendors.

Figure 1 gives the proposed research model. To understand the relationships among interpersonal interaction factors, relationship quality and purchase intention, this study proposed and tested several hypotheses.

3.2 Hypothesis development
3.2.1 The effect of relationship quality on purchase intention. Purchase intention in s-commerce refers to consumers’ willingness to purchase from online vendors. Intention is the decisive factor for behavior, so it is always considered people's willingness to conduct some behaviors (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1977). As vendors and consumers are unfamiliar with each other, product uncertainty (Dimoka et al., 2012) and transaction risks (Pavlou and Gefen, 2004) are major problems consumers face in online market. No matter in online or offline shopping, people like to build individual guanxi in the transaction (Ambler et al., 1999; Jiang et al., 2016). Swift guanxi, a quickly formed guanxi between online consumers and vendors, plays an important role in diminishing the uncertainty and risks with its three dimensions – mutual understanding, reciprocal favors and relationship harmony (Ou et al., 2014). Swift guanxi between consumers and vendors helps with consumers’ purchase intention (Lin et al., 2018). If consumers can perceive mutual understanding, reciprocal favors and relationship harmony with online vendors in their first purchase, they tend to make purchase from the online vendor. Thus, the following hypothesis is developed:

H1. Swift guanxi between consumers and online vendors has a positive effect on consumers' purchase intention.
This study focuses on the first transaction between consumers and online vendors, so initial trust between consumers and online vendors is explored. In online market, trust will lead to purchase intention, repurchase intention and actual purchase behavior (Gefen and Straub, 2004; Tajvidi et al., 2020). S-commerce is still in its infancy stage and needs lots of improvement in its supervision, thus establishing trust between consumers and online vendors is essential. Initial trust includes ability trust, benevolence trust and integrity trust. Ability trust refers to consumers’ confidence in the ability of online vendors in presenting high-quality products and services. Benevolence trust refers to consumers’ perception that online vendors show concern over their benefits. If consumers believe that online vendors will try their best to provide them with fit products, their purchase intention will be enhanced. Integrity trust shows that consumers would choose online vendors who are honest. Once consumers feel that the online vendors are honest, the risks in online shopping will be decreased, and they would expect a satisfying transaction. Following earlier findings of a positive relationship between trust and purchase intention (Doney and Cannon, 1997; Kim et al., 2008; Stouthuysen et al., 2018), the following hypothesis is developed:

H2. Initial trust between consumers and online vendors has a positive effect on consumers’ purchase intention.

3.2.2 The effect of interpersonal interaction with online vendors on relationship quality. Factors of interpersonal interaction with online vendors in s-commerce include perceived informativeness and perceived responsiveness. Informativeness was first articulated by Rotzoll and Haefner (1990) as the extent to which a firm can provide adequate information so as to help customers’ better purchasing decisions. The construct is closely related with the senders’ ability to rationally attract the customer’s response as it empowers customers to cognitively assess the adoption of information and messages provided (Lee and Hong, 2016). In this paper, perceived informativeness of online vendors refers to extent to which online vendors can provide adequate information for consumers in the interaction so as to help with consumers’ purchase decision. The most commonly used items for assessing the adequacy of
information are accuracy, currency, completeness, timeliness and understandability, which could increase the intrinsic and extrinsic beliefs of consumers in online shopping (Ahn et al., 2004). The contents for interaction between consumers and vendors range from basic product information, payment methods and the logistics to consumers’ personalized needs. High-quality interaction between consumers and online vendors can enhance their relationship (Ou et al., 2014). Perceived informativeness can form mutual understanding between consumers and online vendors. Meanwhile, vendors can also provide some discounts or recommend suitable products to consumers, which in turn stimulates consumers’ purchase intention or gets positive reviews after the purchase, achieving reciprocity. Perceived informativeness can also lead to relationship harmony between consumers and vendors.

Perceived informativeness affects consumers’ initial trust towards the vendors as vendors’ information exchange and social interaction with consumers help with the formation of trust (Doney and Cannon, 1997). Trust can replace some cooperation mechanism to reduce uncertainty or opportunistic risks and enhance efficiency in transaction (Gefen and Straub, 2004). Owing to product homogeneity and low switching cost in online shopping, consumers can switch from one vendor to another very conveniently. Establishing consumers’ initial trust is of great importance in s-commerce. When consumers first visit the online vendor’s website, apart from the existed information on the website, interpersonal interaction between consumers and vendors is essential for building initial trust. On the one hand, online vendors can display their knowledge about products by interaction, thus improve consumers’ trust in their ability. On the other hand, the given information can overcome the asymmetry of information so that online vendors can get benevolence trust. In addition, online vendors will give consumers guarantees to show their integrity. Prior research has shown that interactivity could enhance consumers’ initial trust (Zhang et al., 2019).

Thus, the following hypotheses are developed:

**H3a.** Perceived informativeness of online vendors has a positive effect on swift guanxi between consumers and online vendors.

**H3b.** Perceived informativeness of online vendors has a positive effect on initial trust between consumers and online vendors.

Perceived responsiveness of online vendors refers to the immediacy of online vendors’ response to the inquiry of consumers, the quickness in solving consumers’ problems as well as the improvement of consumers’ efficiency in purchasing. Consumers will perceive increased interactivity in a medium where vendors can quickly respond to their requests (Song and Zinkhan, 2008). When consumers perceived the responsiveness from online vendors, they would sense the equality in social interaction because the time they spent in the interaction process had been compensated (Zhao and Lu, 2012). The more response consumers get in the interaction, the better their shopping experience. Therefore, perceived responsiveness can enhance the strength of social interaction and make consumers and vendors achieve mutual understanding. At the same time, relationship harmony can easily arise when vendors show quick response in replying to consumers’ inquiries. Perceived responsiveness can also arouse consumers’ sense of gratitude to reciprocate vendors by enhancing their purchase behavior or give good comments after the purchase.

Gupta et al. (2009) pointed out that online interaction between consumers and vendors was the most important source of initial trust as it could show the efficiency of vendors’ solving problems. The immediacy of vendors’ response and the polite attitude shown in the process of quick response will improve consumers’ trust of the vendors’ benevolence. Vendors’ giving special guarantees about the products will also increase consumers’ trust of the vendors’
integrity. Morgan and Hunt (1994) have proved that the trustor and trustee’s frequent interaction would lead to trust between them. Consequently, the following hypotheses are developed:

H4a. Perceived responsiveness of online vendors has a positive effect on swift guanxi between consumers and online vendors.

H4b. Perceived responsiveness of online vendors has a positive effect on initial trust between consumers and online vendors.

3.2.3 The effect of interpersonal interaction with online recommenders on relationship quality.

Interpersonal interaction with online recommenders in s-commerce can be reflected by factors of perceived expertise and perceived similarity. Perceived expertise of online recommenders refers to the ability of consumers who give recommendation after purchase according to their knowledge and experience. Though vendors’ expertise about a certain product has always been helpful for successful transaction (Leung et al., 2005; Shen et al., 2010), the expertise of online recommenders can be more persuasive and effective than vendors in that they do not represent the vendors’ interest and can easily win the trust from other consumers. The interaction between consumers and online recommenders can help with consumers’ perception of product quality and product fitness, which quickens the process of mutual understanding between consumers and vendors (Yadav and Pavlou, 2014). Thus, it would be easier for vendors to build harmonious relationship with consumers and achieve the reciprocal favors in the social exchange process.

Perceived expertise is also considered the basis for trust (Shen et al., 2010). In online market, perceived expertise of online recommenders could reduce consumers’ perceived risk and enhance the trust (Bansal and Voyer, 2000). Zhang et al. (2011) pointed out that perceived expertise would significantly affect consumers’ trust. According to trust transfer theory, trust toward a person or an organization could be transferred to some other strangers or organizations (Shi et al., 2013). In s-commerce platform, people rely on expert sources in the evaluation of the quality and performance of both products and services (Filieri et al., 2018). Recommendees’ expertise of product knowledge can easily arouse potential consumers’ trust, which in turn could be transferred to the ability trust and integrity trust of online vendors they recommended. Online recommenders’ enthusiasm in sharing the purchase experience to some extent signifies online vendors’ benevolence for caring much about consumers’ interest. Previous studies have also demonstrated that the social media influencers’ expertise can lead to the followers’ relational trust, leading to desirable marketing outcomes (Kim and Kim, 2021).

Thus, the following hypotheses are developed:

H5a. Perceived expertise of online recommenders has a positive effect on swift guanxi between consumers and online vendors.

H5b. Perceived expertise of online recommenders has a positive effect on initial trust between consumers and online vendors.

Perceived similarity of online recommenders refers to the similarity between consumers and online recommenders in demographic or mental characteristics (Smith et al., 2005). The similarity in demographic can be reflected in age, gender, etc., while that in mental characteristics is embodied in the life style and personality traits. This study discusses the similarity between consumers and online recommenders in interest, taste, style, etc. Similarity between consumers will intensify their affective bonds and strengthen their relationship tie (Hu et al., 2016). Similarity attraction theory has shown that people would be attracted by others who are similar to themselves and love to establish relationship with similar others (Shen et al., 2019). Similarity between consumers intensifies their affective bonds and helps compensate for the ambiguity of the information sources in a virtual
environment (Smith et al., 2005). A s-commerce survey showed that 73% of shoppers agreed that “people like me” were the most trusted sources for advice seeking (Marsden, 2009), consumers will also be easy to understand and have smooth interaction with these vendors whom similar others recommend, leading to the relationship harmony and reciprocal favors between consumers and vendors.

Perceived similarity also has a significant impact on online trust building process (Cheng et al., 2019). In virtual community environment, perceived similarity positively influences trust in other members in the community (Lu et al., 2010). And in online market, similarity is considered as the recommender-related signal to determine consumers’ affective trust in vendors (Cheng et al., 2019). As such, consumers’ trust toward online recommenders’ opinions because of sameness in preference or taste can be shifted to the initial trust toward the vendors they recommend (Chu and Kim, 2011).

Therefore, the following hypotheses are developed:

\[ \text{H6a.} \] Perceived similarity of online recommenders has a positive effect on swift guanxi between consumers and online vendors.

\[ \text{H6b.} \] Perceived similarity of online recommenders has a positive effect on initial trust between consumers and online vendors.

4. Research methodology

4.1 Measurement development

With the data collected, this study used the partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS 3.0) to test the proposed research model. PLS is a component-based structural equation modeling technique, which is suitable for estimating complex causal models and addressing statistical identification and convergence problems with formative constructs (Ringle et al., 2012). As this study concerns formative second-order constructs swift guanxi and initial trust, PLS is a good choice (Ou et al., 2014). In this study, Smart PLS 3.0 was used to perform the analysis, and the results are reported in the following section. The measurements for each construct were adopted from prior studies but were modified for the context of this study. For all measurements, a seven-point Likert-type scale was employed, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.”

4.2 Data collection

The questionnaire adopts the random sampling technique, which can provide every s-commerce consumer with the same probability in participating in the survey so as to improve the generalizability of the findings. Our questionnaire is based on a pretest. Consumers who have bought products from the s-commerce platforms were investigated, including traditional e-commerce websites with social interaction tools such as Taobao, Tianmao, JD and s-commerce platforms, like Wechat, Xiao Hongshu, etc. Data were collected based on consumers’ recalling their interaction experience with online vendors and recommenders in their first purchase from a new vendor and the measurement items were shown in Appendix. Wenjuanxing [1], a very popular and professional online data collection website in China, was used to collect the data. The questionnaire was collected from December 8 to December 27, 2021, and a total of 482 responses were collected; of which, 39 responses were invalid, and 443 responses were valid.

4.3 Respondents’ demographic characteristics

Respondents’ demographic characteristics are shown in Table 1. A total of 443 valid responses were collected. Male respondents represented 39.30%, and female accounted for...
60.70% of the total samples. The majority of the respondents was 18–40 years old (91.40%). With respect to their education, 93% of them were above college. In terms of duration of using s-commerce platforms, the majority of them used s-commerce for shopping for more than four years (56.40%), and almost all of the respondents had experience in using s-commerce platforms for more than one year (91.10%). The sample distribution is consistent with the data from the China Internet Network Information Centre (CNNIC, 2022).

4.4 The measurement model
To ensure that the measurements in this study are valid and reliable, the confirmatory factor analysis is given, following the recommendations of Hair et al. (2014) and Wu and Chuang (2010). First, the indicator reliability of the data was assessed by checking indicators’ factor loadings (Hair et al., 2014). Table 2 shows that all factor loadings exceed the required value

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Factor loading</th>
<th>Cronbach’s α</th>
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<th>CR</th>
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<tr>
<td>Perceived informativeness (PI)</td>
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<td>0.601</td>
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<td>PI2</td>
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<td>Perceived responsiveness (PR)</td>
<td>PR1</td>
<td>0.813</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.663</td>
<td>0.887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PR2</td>
<td>0.812</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PR3</td>
<td>0.843</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PR4</td>
<td>0.788</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceived expertise (PE)</td>
<td>PE1</td>
<td>0.807</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.629</td>
<td>0.871</td>
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<td></td>
<td>PE2</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PE3</td>
<td>0.787</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PE4</td>
<td>0.788</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived similarity (PS)</td>
<td>PS1</td>
<td>0.874</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.725</td>
<td>0.888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PS2</td>
<td>0.834</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>PS3</td>
<td>0.845</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Purchase intention (PUI)</td>
<td>PUI1</td>
<td>0.846</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.712</td>
<td>0.881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PUI2</td>
<td>0.848</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PUI3</td>
<td>0.837</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.
Results of confirmatory factor analysis
The Cronbach’s alpha for each factor ranged from 0.798 to 0.834, far exceeding the required value 0.7 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The values of composite reliability ranged from 0.871 to 0.888, which exceed 0.7, indicating high reliability of the data. The average value extracted (AVE) values of all constructs, ranging from 0.601 to 0.725, exceeded 0.5 and confirmed the convergent validity (Wu and Chuang, 2010).

Table 3 shows that a construct’s correlations with other constructs are all smaller than the construct’s AVE square root (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), confirming the discriminant validity.

4.5 Common method bias

As the data are self-reported, there is possibility of common method bias (Chin et al., 2012). Several methods have been proposed for testing common method bias (Harman, 1976; Podsakoff et al., 2003). Two methods were used to test common method bias in this study. First, Harman’s single-factor test was used on the complete dataset (Harman, 1976). The results confirmed that no single factor was able to emerge alongside the single factor accounting for 41.77% of the variance, which was below the 50% threshold as recommended by Podsakoff et al. (2003). Second, the method by Liang et al. (2007) was adopted. A common method factor with the indicators of all principal constructs was added in the partial least squares model, which calculated every indicator’s variance explained by the substantive constructs and the method factor. The results in Table 4 showed that the majority of the method factor loadings were insignificant. The indicators’ substantive variances were greater than that of the method variances. Thus, common method bias in this study is acceptable.

4.6 Multicollinearity

High collinearity between constructs should be avoided for it may lead to an exaggerated estimation of path coefficients (Henseler et al., 2016). The variance inflation factor (VIF) values between the constructs are used to measure the level of collinearity. To verify the validity of the formative second-order constructs, the VIF value of all formative constructs was examined, which ranged from 1.616 to 2.485, all below 3.3, showing that it was unlikely to have the issue of collinearity (Hair et al., 2014). All weights for formative measures are significant at the $p < 0.05$ level (Table 5).

4.7 Assessment of the structural model

After the measurement model was examined, Smart PLS 3.0 was used to test the structural model. The significance and relevance of structural model relationships and the variance explained were assessed. Figure 2 shows the assessment results of research model. From Figure 2, it was found that swift guanxi ($\beta = 0.199$, $p < 0.05$) and initial trust ($\beta = 0.372$, $p < 0.01$) significantly affected purchase intention, explaining 0.583 of its variance; thus, $H1$ and $H2$ are supported. Furthermore, interpersonal interaction factors of online vendors and online recommenders could not be neglected in the s-commerce transaction. As predicted, perceived informativeness ($\beta = 0.316; p < 0.001$), perceived responsiveness ($\beta = 0.242; p < 0.001$), perceived expertise ($\beta = 0.201; p < 0.01$) and perceived similarity ($\beta = 0.189; p < 0.001$) significantly enhanced swift guanxi, with a total of variance explained of 0.550. Thus, $H3a$, $H4a$, $H5a$ and $H6a$ are supported. Initial trust was predicted by perceived informativeness ($\beta = 0.333; p < 0.001$), perceived responsiveness ($\beta = 0.251; p < 0.001$), perceived expertise ($\beta = 0.142; p < 0.01$) and perceived similarity ($\beta = 0.161; p < 0.001$), with a total of variance explained of 0.593. Thus, $H3b$, $H4b$, $H5b$ and $H6b$ are supported. Table 6 summarizes the results of hypothesis testing.
Table 3.
Results on discriminant validity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>PI</th>
<th>PR</th>
<th>PE</th>
<th>PS</th>
<th>SG</th>
<th>MU</th>
<th>RF</th>
<th>RH</th>
<th>IT</th>
<th>AT</th>
<th>BT</th>
<th>INT</th>
<th>PUI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived informativeness (PI)</td>
<td>0.775</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived responsiveness (PR)</td>
<td>0.665</td>
<td>0.814</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived expertise (PE)</td>
<td>0.531</td>
<td>0.464</td>
<td>0.793</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived similarity (PS)</td>
<td>0.571</td>
<td>0.528</td>
<td>0.617</td>
<td>0.848</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swift guanxi (SG)</td>
<td>0.664</td>
<td>0.619</td>
<td>0.565</td>
<td>0.58 *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mutual understanding (MU)</td>
<td>0.652</td>
<td>0.606</td>
<td>0.523</td>
<td>0.523</td>
<td>0.931</td>
<td>0.789</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reciprocal Favors (RF)</td>
<td>0.437</td>
<td>0.417</td>
<td>0.559</td>
<td>0.447</td>
<td>0.807</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.795</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship harmony (RH)</td>
<td>0.582</td>
<td>0.539</td>
<td>0.405</td>
<td>0.481</td>
<td>0.835</td>
<td>0.717</td>
<td>0.503</td>
<td>0.819</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial trust (IT)</td>
<td>0.692</td>
<td>0.643</td>
<td>0.578</td>
<td>0.599</td>
<td>0.831</td>
<td>0.799</td>
<td>0.628</td>
<td>0.719 *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability trust (AT)</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.594</td>
<td>0.531</td>
<td>0.555</td>
<td>0.723</td>
<td>0.713</td>
<td>0.495</td>
<td>0.638</td>
<td>0.892</td>
<td>0.814</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benevolence trust (BT)</td>
<td>0.481</td>
<td>0.509</td>
<td>0.505</td>
<td>0.466</td>
<td>0.714</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.618</td>
<td>0.555</td>
<td>0.824</td>
<td>0.589</td>
<td>0.841</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity trust (INT)</td>
<td>0.615</td>
<td>0.592</td>
<td>0.499</td>
<td>0.519</td>
<td>0.782</td>
<td>0.741</td>
<td>0.575</td>
<td>0.695</td>
<td>0.929</td>
<td>0.738</td>
<td>0.684</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase intention (PUI)</td>
<td>0.633</td>
<td>0.604</td>
<td>0.505</td>
<td>0.569</td>
<td>0.692</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.535</td>
<td>0.608</td>
<td>0.719</td>
<td>0.657</td>
<td>0.586</td>
<td>0.658</td>
<td>0.844</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note(s):** * marks the second-order constructs, and the second-order construct’s corresponding first-order constructs are shaded in grey
4.8 Assessment of mediating effects

Following Baron and Kenney (1986), the mediation effect of swift guanxi and initial trust was tested. In addition, the values of the variance accounted for (VAF) introduced by Shrout and Bolger (2002) was calculated to determine whether the mediation was full, partial or none.

The results are shown in Table 7. First, swift guanxi significantly mediated the relationship between perceived informativeness of online vendors, perceived responsiveness of online vendors, perceived expertise of online recommenders and purchase intention (partial mediation: the direct and total effects were significant; VAF = 0.326, VAF = 0.259 and VAF = 0.642, respectively). The effect of perceived similarity on swift guanxi appeared to be insignificant (the indirect effect was insignificant; $p > 0.05$), and VAF value was lower than 0.2 (VAF = 0.195). Therefore, swift guanxi did not mediate between perceived similarity

\[...\]
Hypothesis Path coefficient Results

H1: Swift guanxi → purchase intention 0.199*** Supported
H2: Initial trust → purchase intention 0.312*** Supported
H3a: Perceived informativeness → swift guanxi 0.316*** Supported
H3b: Perceived informativeness → initial trust 0.333*** Supported
H4a: Perceived responsiveness → swift guanxi 0.242*** Supported
H4b: Perceived responsiveness → initial trust 0.251*** Supported
H5a: Perceived expertise → swift guanxi 0.201*** Supported
H5b: Perceived expertise → initial trust 0.189*** Supported
H6a: Perceived similarity → swift guanxi 0.142** Supported
H6b: Perceived similarity → initial trust 0.161*** Supported

Note(s): ***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01 and *p < 0.05

Table 6. Results of hypothesis testing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Path coefficient</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1: Swift guanxi → purchase intention</td>
<td>0.199***</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2: Initial trust → purchase intention</td>
<td>0.312***</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3a: Perceived informativeness → swift guanxi</td>
<td>0.316***</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3b: Perceived informativeness → initial trust</td>
<td>0.333***</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4a: Perceived responsiveness → swift guanxi</td>
<td>0.242***</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4b: Perceived responsiveness → initial trust</td>
<td>0.251***</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5a: Perceived expertise → swift guanxi</td>
<td>0.201***</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5b: Perceived expertise → initial trust</td>
<td>0.189***</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H6a: Perceived similarity → swift guanxi</td>
<td>0.142**</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H6b: Perceived similarity → initial trust</td>
<td>0.161***</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note(s): ***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01 and *p < 0.05

Table 7. Mediation effect test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Path</th>
<th>Total effects</th>
<th>Direct effects</th>
<th>Indirect effects</th>
<th>VAF value</th>
<th>Mediation effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PI→SG→PUI</td>
<td>0.292***</td>
<td>4.668</td>
<td>0.128*</td>
<td>1.967</td>
<td>0.062*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI→IT→PUI</td>
<td>0.292***</td>
<td>4.668</td>
<td>0.128*</td>
<td>1.967</td>
<td>0.102***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR→SG→PUI</td>
<td>0.258***</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>0.136*</td>
<td>2.493</td>
<td>0.047*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR→IT→PUI</td>
<td>0.258***</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>0.136*</td>
<td>2.493</td>
<td>0.075**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE→SG→PUI</td>
<td>0.117*</td>
<td>2.477</td>
<td>0.022 ns</td>
<td>0.438</td>
<td>0.039*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE→IT→PUI</td>
<td>0.117*</td>
<td>2.477</td>
<td>0.022 ns</td>
<td>0.438</td>
<td>0.057**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS→SG→PUI</td>
<td>0.192***</td>
<td>3.992</td>
<td>0.115*</td>
<td>2.405</td>
<td>0.028 ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS→IT→PUI</td>
<td>0.192***</td>
<td>3.992</td>
<td>0.115*</td>
<td>2.405</td>
<td>0.048**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note(s): PI stands for perceived informativeness; PR stands for perceived responsiveness; PE stands for perceived expertise; PS stands for perceived similarity; SG stands for swift guanxi; IT stands for initial trust and PUI stands for purchase intention. VAF > 0.8 indicates full mediation, 0.2 ≤ VAF ≤ 0.8 indicates partial mediation and VAF < 0.2 indicates no mediation.

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001; "ns" indicates “not significant”
of online recommenders and purchase intention. Second, initial trust significantly mediated the relationship between perceived informativeness of online vendors, perceived responsiveness of online vendors, perceived expertise of online recommenders, perceived similarity of online recommenders and purchase intention (partial mediation: the direct and total effects were significant; VAF = 0.438, VAF = 0.356, VAF = 0.72 and VAF = 0.296, respectively).

5. Discussions
This study examined the impact of interpersonal interaction factors on swift guanxi and initial trust and consequently the influence on consumers’ purchase intention in the context of s-commerce. The findings answer the research questions raised at the beginning of the paper.

First, this study shows that perceived informativeness and responsiveness of online vendors are positively associated with swift guanxi between consumers and vendors. The more appropriate and adequate information consumers get from online vendors, the easier consumers form swift guanxi with them. Meanwhile, perceived responsiveness of online vendors has a positive effect on swift guanxi. Perceived responsiveness can provide consumers with a sense of presence and shorten the distance from online vendors, leading to mutual understanding, reciprocal favors and harmonious relationship between consumers and vendors.

Second, perceived expertise and perceived similarity of online recommenders have a significant and positive effect on swift guanxi. On the one hand, the expertise shown by online recommenders will improve consumers’ knowledge of the products sold by the recommended vendors, and this will be shifted to consumers’ willingness to interact with those vendors. The interaction makes consumers understand the recommended vendors easily and achieve mutual understanding and harmonious relationship with them. When consumers intend to buy from the recommended vendors, reciprocity can always be achieved. This finding is in accordance with the study of Zhang et al. (2011). On the other hand, consumers tend to believe those recommenders who show similarity in interest and taste. They tend to build swift guanxi with the vendors recommended by similar others so that they can perceive less uncertainty in their shopping process.

Third, perceived informativeness and responsiveness of online vendors are positively associated with initial trust between consumers and vendors. When consumers first interact with new online vendors, rich and adequate information provided by the online vendors can capture the function aspect and the value of experience to customers; thus, consumers’ initial trust is formed towards the vendors. Meanwhile, vendors’ prompt response will lead to consumers’ perception of vendors’ ability, benevolence and integrity.

Fourth, perceived expertise and perceived similarity of online recommenders have a significant and positive effect on initial trust between consumers and online vendors. This result is partially similar to Lin et al. (2018), which also shows that trust between consumers and vendors will enhance consumers’ purchase intention. Different from Lin et al.’s study, the current study examines initial transaction experience of consumers on online vendor’s website; thus, initial trust can give insights on how it attracts new customers.

Finally, swift guanxi partially mediates between perceived informativeness, perceived responsiveness, perceived expertise and purchase intention. Swift guanxi does not mediate between perceived similarity of online recommenders and purchase intention. This means that similarity between consumers and online recommenders will not affect consumers’ swift guanxi with online vendors significantly. Initial trust partially mediates all interpersonal interaction factors and purchase intention. This implies that initial trust is a very important construct in determining consumers’ purchase intention.
6. Theoretical and practical implications

6.1 Implications for theory

This study explores interpersonal interaction factors in s-commerce adopting social exchange theory, trust transfer theory and relationship quality theory. To be specific, this research has some contributions for theories.

First, this study extends interpersonal interaction factors in s-commerce from both the online vendors’ and online recommenders’ perspective. Prior studies have highlighted interpersonal interaction factors among members in social community that lead to purchase intention (Shen et al., 2010; Liu et al., 2016). This study offered a new avenue by integrating interpersonal interaction factors of both online vendors and online recommenders on the relationship quality between consumers and vendors, leading to consumers’ purchase intention.

Second, this study sheds new light on the concept of relationship quality in s-commerce, dividing it into swift guanxi and initial trust in the context of consumers’ first transaction with online vendors. Previous studies of relationship quality mostly focus on satisfaction, trust and commitment, which might be very useful in customer relationship management, requiring a longer time to build and more efforts to maintain. This study adopts the concept of swift guanxi, which focuses on the rapidly formed relationships. This study fills the literature gap on how relationship quality represented by swift guanxi and initial trust could be enhanced by perceived interactivity of both online vendors and online recommenders on s-commerce platform.

Third, this study enriches the understanding of the mechanism of interpersonal interaction factors on purchase intention by combining relationship quality, social exchange and trust transfer theory. Social exchange theory and trust transfer theory help to explain how consumers make purchase decision in s-commerce sites by improving the relationship quality with online vendors in a direct and indirect way. This study extends prior studies by examining different roles swift guanxi and initial trust play in the relationship between interpersonal interaction factors and purchase intention. The results show that both swift guanxi and initial trust play an important role in the relationship between interpersonal interaction factors and purchase intention. Swift guanxi does not mediate between perceived similarity of online recommenders and purchase intention. This means that through consumers’ interaction with online recommenders, transaction is easier to be successful when online vendors could win consumers’ initial trust.

6.2 Implications for practice

This study gives practical implication for s-commerce vendors as well as s-commerce platforms.

S-commerce vendors should make good use of platform features to improve interpersonal interaction. To improve perceived informativeness, online vendors should provide varieties of information for consumers. To improve responsiveness, vendors should give immediate response to consumers’ inquiry so as to improve their service. This could be solved in two ways: one is to update the answers to frequently asked questions so as to answer consumers’ questions more efficiently. The other is to improve customer service by solving customers’ personalized questions. S-commerce vendors should give their staff adequate training to form good communication skills so as to provide good service to customers.

There are also some suggestions for s-commerce platforms. First, s-commerce platforms should design more rich tools for the display of products so that online vendors could provide information of high quality on the website and improve consumers’ shopping experience. Tools to amuse the consumers could be designed to show friendliness when online vendors could not give consumers immediate response so that they would not leave immediately from
the website. Second, s-commerce platforms should design some tools for online vendors to select customers’ reviews with expertise easily. S-commerce platforms should also set up some online communities or help online vendors to build online communities in order to attract customers with similar interest, which helps a lot with the promotion of products. Third, s-commerce platform should provide more interaction tools for online vendors to reach consumers easily so that vendors could build relationship with consumers in their first purchase easily. Tools to detect whether consumers have joined the online communities or not could be provided so that online vendors may know how to communicate efficiently and effectively with consumers.

7. Conclusions, limitations and future directions
This study adopts social exchange theory, trust transfer theory and relationship quality theory to propose a theoretical model to investigate the effect of interpersonal interaction factors of both online vendors and online recommenders in s-commerce sites on consumers’ swift guanxi and initial trust with online vendors, thus contributing to consumers’ purchase intention. The mediation effects of swift guanxi and initial trust are explored to show the mechanism in affecting consumers’ purchase intention. The results indicate that perceived informativeness and responsiveness of online vendors and perceived expertise and similarity of online recommenders have positive effects on swift guanxi and initial trust in consumers’ first interaction with a new online vendor and consequently lead to consumers’ purchase intention. This study broadens our understanding of interpersonal interaction factors in s-commerce context and shows that swift guanxi and initial trust are crucial for the success of s-commerce vendors to attract new customers.

However, this study has some limitations, based on which future research can be extended. First, this is one of the exploratory studies to combine interpersonal interaction factors of both online vendors and online recommenders as the antecedents of relationship quality in the s-commerce platform. Further studies are needed to confirm the validity and generality of our findings. Second, the study examines the mediation of swift guanxi and initial trust between interpersonal interaction factors and purchase intention without considering other mediators. Further study can explore whether there exist other different mediations. Third, this study uses self-reported data to explore users’ behavior on s-commerce. Although the statistics have passed the recommended thresholds, the common method bias is a bit high, which needs to be paid great attention to in later research. Other research methods such as experiments or data mining can be applied in later research. Finally, there might exist cultural differences in different context as the questionnaire comes from the mainland of China. As guanxi is a typical Chinese concept, the study is adaptable in Chinese culture but not always applicable in other cultures. Further study should explore whether the mediation effects of swift guanxi could be different in other cultures.

**Note**
1. https://www.wjx.cn

**References**


Further reading


Appendix

Measurement items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived informativeness (PI) of online vendors: adapted from Ahn et al. (2004) and Alalwan (2018)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PI1</td>
<td>This s-commerce vendor provided the information that is rich in words, pictures, videos, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI2</td>
<td>This s-commerce vendor provided me with sufficient information which I expect to find</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI3</td>
<td>This s-commerce vendor provided me with information which is relevant to my requirement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI4</td>
<td>This s-commerce vendor provided information which is easy to understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI5</td>
<td>This s-commerce vendor provided complete and detailed information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived responsiveness (PR) of online vendors: adapted from Song and Zinkhan (2008)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PR1</td>
<td>This s-commerce vendor responded promptly to my questions and suggestions in time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR2</td>
<td>This s-commerce vendor gave me response to my request</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR3</td>
<td>This s-commerce vendor gave me response which is closely related to my questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR4</td>
<td>This s-commerce vendor was ready to communicate with me</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived expertise (PE) of online recommenders: adapted from Shen et al. (2010) and Hu et al. (2016)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PE1</td>
<td>Recommenders on this s-commerce site are very knowledgeable about some products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE2</td>
<td>Recommenders on this s-commerce site are experts on some products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE3</td>
<td>Recommenders on this s-commerce site are highly experienced about some products</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
Measurement items

PE4  Recommenders provide lots of information and knowledge regarding some products

Perceived similarity (PS) of online recommenders: adapted from Shen et al. (2010) and Hu et al. (2016)

PS1  Considering styles about some products, I am similar with recommenders on this s-commerce site

PS2  Considering tastes about some products, I am similar with recommenders on this s-commerce site

PS3  Considering likes and dislikes about some products, I am similar with recommenders on this s-commerce site

Initial trust: formative measure formed by ability trust (AT), benevolence trust (BT) and integrity trust (INT)

AT1  This s-commerce vendor is competent and effective in selling his/her products online

AT2  This s-commerce vendor performs its role of selling his/her products online very well

AT3  Overall, this s-commerce vendor is a capable and proficient Internet seller

AT4  In general, this s-commerce vendor is very knowledgeable about selling his/her products

Benevolence trust (BT): adapted from Morgan and Hunt (1994) and Ou et al. (2014)

BT1  I believe that this s-commerce vendor would act in my best interests

BT2  If I required help, this s-commerce vendor would do its best to help me

BT3  This s-commerce vendor is interested in my well-being, not just its own

Integrity trust (INT): adapted from Morgan and Hunt (1994) and Ou et al. (2014)

INT1  This s-commerce vendor is truthful in its dealing with me

INT2  I would characterize this s-commerce vendor as honest

INT3  This s-commerce vendor would keep its commitments

INT4  This s-commerce vendor is sincere and genuine

Swift guanxi (SG): formative measure formed by mutual understanding (MU), reciprocal favors (RF) and relationship harmony (RH)

Mutual understanding (MU): adapted from Ou et al. (2014)

MU1  This s-commerce vendor and I can understand each other’s needs

MU2  This s-commerce vendor and I can understand the point of view of each other

MU3  This s-commerce vendor and I can make ourselves heard

MU4  This s-commerce vendor and I can follow the flow of conversation

MU5  This s-commerce vendor and I show interest in each other’s opinions

Reciprocal favors (RF): adapted from Ou et al. (2014)

RF1  If I buy from this vendor, he/she would provide a discount to me

RF2  This s-commerce vendor and I provide a positive rating or comment to each other

RF3  This s-commerce vendor and I help each other

RF4  This s-commerce vendor and I proved to be friends by doing a favor for each other

Relationship harmony (RH): adapted from Ou et al. (2014)

RH1  This s-commerce vendor and I maintain harmony

RH2  This s-commerce vendor and I avoid conflict

RH3  This s-commerce vendor and I respect each other

Purchase intention (PUI): adapted from Pavlou and Fygenson (2006)

PUI1  I intend to purchase products or service from this s-commerce vendor

PUI2  I will probably recommend family members or friends to buy from this s-commerce vendor

PUI3  I am likely to purchase from this s-commerce vendor in the future

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