

# ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECT OF PARA-SOCIAL INTERACTIONS ON IMPULSE BUYING BEHAVIOR IN SOCIAL COMMERCE: CASE STUDY OF BABY CLOTHING STORES

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## ABSTRACT

*Today, the activities and capabilities of the cyberspace is a promoting inseparable part of life quality. It has led to the identification and analysis of the performance of individuals in commercial interactions of this space to become an important part of the marketing activities. In the current study, which was aimed at investigation of the role of online shopping sites in the daily life, it has been tried evaluate the effects of the motivational factors on cognitive reactions of the consumers and emergence of the practical behaviors by them. The behaviors which are manifested in the form of tendency to online unplanned buying or insisting on online shopping without any plans. One of the new cognitive reactions which has been addressed in the current study is the para-social interaction behaviors.*

*This applied study has investigated these behaviors with a descriptive-correlational approach. The statistical population of this study included all the customers of online clothing stores. The data have been collected by the aid of a questionnaire and they have been analyzed from the descriptive and inferential aspects. The results of analysis of the research hypotheses shows that improving the product appeal through the shape and color increases people's pleasure in buying that product. The similarities between the users also positively affect the formation of para-social interactions between them within the social commerce space. Therefore, the closer the customers are in terms of the age, education, income, and characteristics, the higher and more appropriate para-social interactions occurs between them. Based on these results, the online service and goods providers can have a better performance in sale and obtaining a share of the market through provision of products in specified age groups and categorization of the market based on its functions.*

**Keywords:** Para-social interactions, impulse buying behavior, social commerce, perceived enjoyment.

## INTRODUCTION

Due to fast development of social website such as the twitter and Facebook, the attention of the customers and companies has been focused on social commerce. The social commerce is a combination of social media and online commerce, and its essence is directing all the commercial activities through application of online social capital in the social media (Liang et al., 2011).

The customers benefit from social commerce in which the online interactions and dispersion of other customers in accessing the products and services is realized through the technologies related to the social networks (Kim & Park, 2013). The firms highly benefit from the social network since they can have a close relationship with the customers or increase the sale or their loyalty. In addition, the social commerce may be one of the most important domains of information system and marketing research in the future century (Hajli, 2014).

Moreover, one of these buying behaviors which plays a fundamental role in maintaining the balance in the markets is the buying without planning that is a behavior based on impulse decision-making in terms of buying a specific product. On the other hand, with the increasing development of the websites and the social networks, we can see the emergence of online baby clothing stores. In this space, both the customers and the firms pay a great attention to provision of commercial interactions with the aid of these modern platforms. In this regard, and based on Zhiang et al. (2016) study, more than 40% of the money exchanged in the e-commerce is consumed for unplanned purchase. It denotes the fact that in comparison to the traditional purchase, the unplanned purchase behaviors can be seen in plenty in the online space and it is one of the most stable behaviors among the customers. The current study has been conducted based on the study by Zhiang et al. (2016) and the main problem pursued by it is to investigate why the unplanned purchases occur and how the factors derived from the related literature can affect the online unplanned purchase by the customers of online baby clothing websites.

The e-commerce operating system (SCPs) is in fact the very online purchase service which has connected the customers and enables them to buy the products, rank them, and share them. The online stores owners believe that sharing the pictures has led to success in sale and it has deeply affected the consumer. The evidence indicates that sharing the pictures has an effect deeper than other methods, on the customer, and increases their motivation to buy (Trusov et al. 2009). Meanwhile, the commerce based on the online purchase websites has become a new framework for e-commerce, due to popularity of this category of sites (Liang et al. 2011).

Therefore, the social interactions between people through the internet, especially in online stores, has initiated a new trend in e-commerce. This trend is known as “the social commerce”. In this regard, the online stores attract a lot of customers since they make the individuals closer (Olbrich et al. 2011). In addition, many of the online stores invite the famous people to participate in social commerce activities. Also, they provide the customers with extra services in order to increase the purchase motivation in them. For example, the audience may establish a close relationship with a TV-based purchase program and it may lead to negative effect on the impulse buying behavior (Park and Lenon, 2006).

The main problem of the study is that although the impulse buying behavior of the customer in the traditional e-commerce websites has been shown well in the previous models, their ability in manifesting the users’ behavior in social websites is too limited. The current study’s model intends to draw the structure of the social relationships in e-commerce websites (baby clothing stores).

The current study, through focusing the role of online purchase stores in the routine life of the people, has tried to investigate the effect of the motivational factors on cognitive reactions of the customers and emergence of practical behavior by them in the form of tendency to online unplanned purchase and insisting on online purchase without planning. Thus, the main question of the study is as follows: “what are the effective factors on emergence of online unplanned purchase form the online baby clothing stores? And how do such factors affect developing the unplanned purchase behaviors?

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Today, the e-commerce uses the picture sharing system. Sharing the products pictures is dominant characteristic of the online stores. The online stores owners believe that sharing the pictures has led to success in sale and it has deeply affected the consumer. The evidence

indicate that sharing the pictures has an effect deeper than other methods, on the customer, and increases their motivation to buy (Trusov et al. 2009). Stephen and Toubia (2010) has defined the social commerce as a form of internet-based social media which enables people to actively participate in the marketing and selling of the products and services in the online communities and markets. They have distinguished social purchase (which connects the customers to each other) from the social commerce (which connects the sellers to each other). In this environment, the customers have access to a type of social awareness and experience which supports them in better understanding of the purchase goals and decision-making for a more accurate and informed purchase. In the online world, the customer's decision for purchasing a product is affected by his friends, family, and colleagues (Fathian and Molanapour, 2013), and that is why the social networks are one of the best places for conducting the commercial affairs.

The social commerce is a combination of the social media and e-commerce and its basis is conducting several kinds of commercial activities by the use of online social capitals in the social networks. In the social commerce, the consumers share with others their awareness, information, and experiences about the products and services. Also, the companies exploit the social commerce to make closer relationships with the consumers, and to improve the quality of the relationships and subsequently, increase the sale and loyalty of the customers (Hajli, 2014). Therefore, the social commerce might be one of the most important domains of the information systems and marketing research in the future decade.

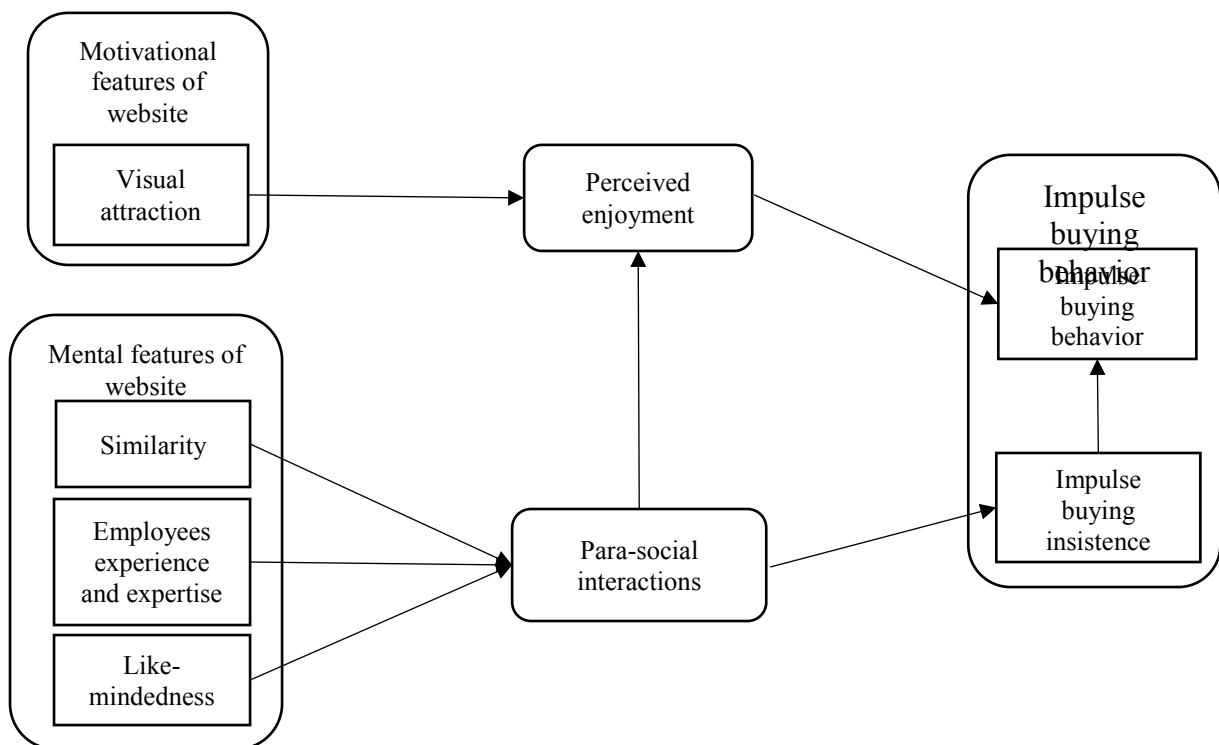
Meanwhile, the para-social interactions is a type of social interaction that occurs in the social commerce environment. The interactions in this environment can be similar to a friendship the individuals make based on their need to people. In fact, the social interaction is a one-way relationship a user establishes with other users, in the social commerce environment, especially with the famous people or the experts, which is derived from the imaginations. In fact, in this type of relationship, the people imagine that they have a face-to-face relationship with the people in cyberspace. Powell et al. (2011) used the social interactions theory to investigate the relationship made between a voter and the political candidates, in the social networks.

Impulse buying is abrupt and unplanned purchases. The impulse buying behavior is usually based on the existence of a stimulus and motivation and it is accompanied by excitement, enjoyment, or great need to buy. Like other indolent behaviors, the impulse buying in the weak to average levels, can be a joyful pastime in the pursuit of sensational objectives. However, the high levels of this behavior can be harmful and potentially, destructive. These behaviors may be manifested with avoidance of negative psychological states such as low self-confidence or negative attitudinal feelings.

The tendency to buy is also defined as a spontaneous reaction shown at a semi-conscious level due to tendencies towards new stimuli (Sharma et al., 2010). This can be due to the fact that such people have lower self-control compared to others (Foroughi et al., 2013). In this field, another reason behind high tendencies to impulse buying among people is the reckless and hastily thinking unique to this moral trait that is stimulated by the desire for instant gratification (Siorowska, 2011). The results of the related literature have shown that people with greater tendencies for impulse buying are more probably affected by market orientation stimuli such as the commercial advertisements, visional factors and components, or the promotional gifts, and show more store walks and higher tendency to show a reaction to enthusiasm for impulse buying (Beary & Ferrell, 1998).

Rook & Fisher (1995) stated that tendency to impulse buying among people can be considered as one of the consumer traits. Generally, the people inclined to impulse buying probably have more tendency to impulse buying of a specific group of products. Based on the studies by Rook (1987), the tendency to impulse buying varies in different people. The tendency to impulse buying in the consumers can be different and it can be affected by their lifestyle. This variable is measured in the two forms of tendency to impulse buying and insisting on impulse buying. Meanwhile, the motivational features of the website and the mental features of it can affect the impulse buying behavior of the customers through tendency to impulse buying.

The social media have created drastic changes in people relationships and interactions between the people, organization, and societies, and its high popularity has changed the advertising methods and marketing promotion. It has challenged the processes of the traditional business (Ngai, Tao, and Moon, 2015). The social commerce has been formed by the social media platforms and is based in a social environment with focus on the effects of social penetration which shapes the interaction between the customers (Shaupp & Belaner, 2016).



**Figure 1: derived from nth conceptual model of Zhiang et al. (2016) study**

The results of the related studies indicate that the psychological factors such as the tendency to impulse buying in the customers and the extent of buying joy are effective on the impulse buying behavior. The customer's psychological factors are out of the scope of the marketer's control, however, the recognition of these factors and the impulse buying behavior can help the marketers in justification and explaining different behaviors of the customers. Another variable effective on the impulse buying is the product type which is similar to the previous literature. As was mentioned in the review of the related literature, some products, compared to others, are somehow more designed for impulse buying. In this case, the products are more purchased that are related to the customer's appearance or create a feeling of excitement in

them. It should be noted that the psychological intentions to purchase are more important than the product price or its usage.

The current study, focusing on the role of the online stores in the routine life of people, has sought to investigate the effects of the motivational factors on the cognitive reactions of the consumers and emergence of the practical behaviors by them in the form of tendency to online unplanned buying and insisting on online purchase without planning. One of the new cognitive reactions which has been addressed in the current study is the para-social interactional behaviors. The behaviors driven by the sense of one-way intimacy closeness to the media popular and credited figures. Based on this emotional intimacy, their recommendations and suggestion are hastily accepted. This important factor is so important in the advertisements and can be extended to para-social purchase. Also, the motivational factors are addressed in the form of proper informational variables for purchase, the visional attractions and motivational factors, similarity, expertise, and the satisfaction, while the cognitive factors include the perceived joy and usefulness besides the para-social interactions.

## METHODOLOGY

**Table 1. the values of Factor Loading, Significance Statistics, Cronbach's alpha, Composite Reliability, and Mean of Variance of Research Questionnaire**

Construct	Item	Factor loading	Significance statistics	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	AVE
Users similarity (SIM)	<i>SIM1</i>	0/75	13/71	0/798	0/804	0/578
	<i>SIM2</i>	0/78	14/50			
	<i>SIM3</i>	0/75	13/73			
Users expertise (EXP)	<i>EXP1</i>	0/82	16/97	0/901	0/907	0/766
	<i>EXP2</i>	0/95	21/36			
	<i>EXP3</i>	0/85	18/09			
Like-mindedness (LIK)	<i>LIK1</i>	0/84	17/14	0/854	0/866	0/684
	<i>LIK2</i>	0/84	17/15			
	<i>LIK3</i>	0/80	15/86			
Visual attraction (VA)	<i>VA1</i>	0/88	19/05	0/909	0/928	0/810
	<i>VA2</i>	0/89	19/54			
	<i>VA3</i>	0/93	21/07			
Unplanned buying insistence (UBI)	<i>UBI1</i>	0/86	16/27	0/739	0/787	0/556
	<i>UBI2</i>	0/73	13/34			
	<i>UBI3</i>	0/63	11/16			
Impulse buying tendency (IBT)	<i>IBT1</i>	0/86	16/64	0/807	0/825	0/613
	<i>IBT2</i>	0/79	14/87			
	<i>IBT3</i>	0/69	12/70			
Para-social interactions (PIN)	<i>PIN1</i>	0/74	14/80	0/911	0/924	0/711
	<i>PIN2</i>	0/77	15/81			
	<i>PIN3</i>	0/90	20/17			
	<i>PIN4</i>	0/92	20/73			
	<i>PIN5</i>	0/87	18/80			
Perceived enjoyment (PE)	<i>PE1</i>	0/79	15/42	0/846	0/861	0/673

The current study is of descriptive-correlational type. In order to create the stability, in addition to the existing sources, a questionnaire has been used as the data collection instrument (in Likert scale). The gathered data were analyzed by the SPSS. In the current study, the statistical population included 1500 active customers of the online baby clothing stores who had made at least one successful purchase. The sampling method was random sampling. From among these samples, 305 questionnaires which were filled in, were collected. The validity of the questionnaire was assessed by expert opinion (face validity) and



factor analysis. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to determine the reliability of the questionnaire (results are shown in Table 1).

## DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

In this chapter, the conceptual model of the study is drawn in the form of path diagram, and by the use of different methods, its fitness would be measured. A complete structural equations model is in fact a combination of path diagram and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA).

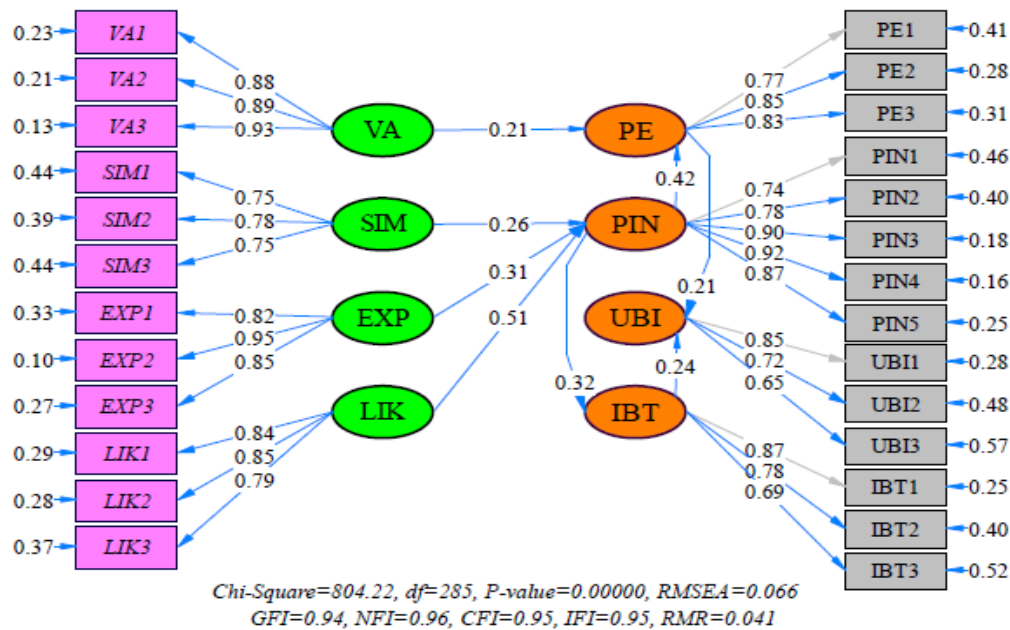


Figure 2: Standard path coefficients of the structural model

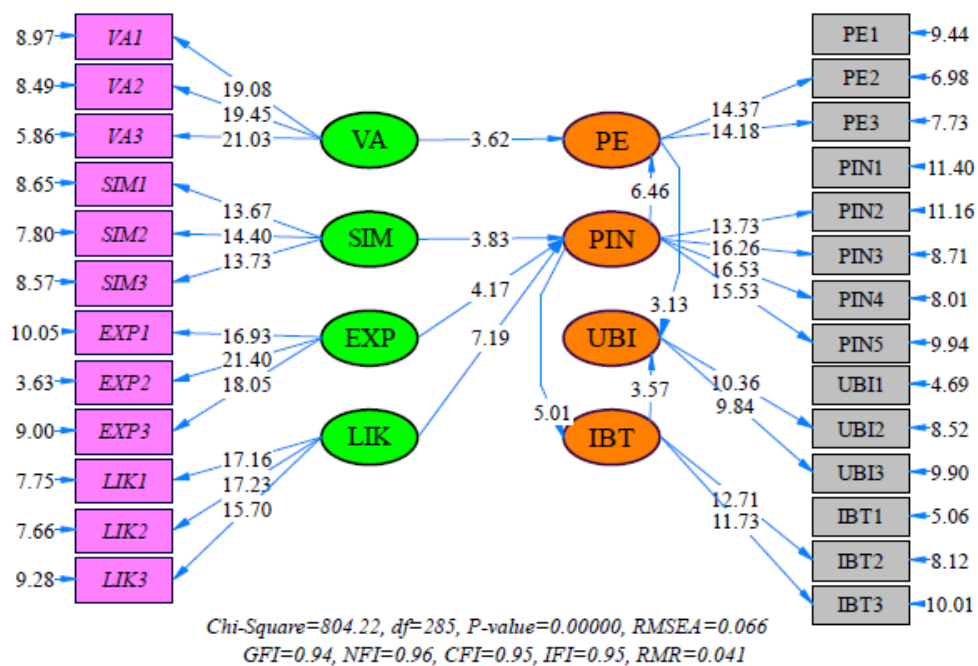


Figure 3: Significance values of the structural model

For significance test, the path coefficients between the variables output from the software, would be used. The path coefficients and the results of their significance are provided in the below table.

**Table 2. Results of structural equations analysis for research hypotheses**

Hypothesis	Path		Path coefficient ( $\beta$ )	Significance value (t-value)	Result
	From variable	To variable			
1	Visual attraction	Perceived enjoyment	0/21	3/62	Confirmed
2	Attraction		0/26	3/83	Confirmed
3	Experience and expertise	Para-social interactions	0/31	4/17	Confirmed
4	Like-mindedness		0/51	7/19	Confirmed
5	Para-social interactions	Perceived enjoyment	0/42	6/46	Confirmed
6	Perceived enjoyment	Unplanned buying insistence	0/21	3/13	Confirmed
7	Para-social interaction	Impulse buying tendency	0/32	5/01	Confirmed
8	Impulse buying tendency	Unplanned buying insistence	0/24	3/57	Confirmed

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the results of the analysis done, it can be inferred that the higher the attraction of the offered product in terms of shape and color quality, the more the people joy of buying that product will be. The similarities between the users also positively affect the formation of para-social interactions between them within the social commerce space. Therefore, the closer the customers are in terms of the age, education, income, and characteristics, the higher and more appropriate para-social interactions occurs between them. Based on these results, the online service and goods providers can have a better performance in sale and obtaining a share of the market through provision of products in specified age groups and categorization of the market based on its functions.

The expertise of other users positively affect the formation of para-social interactions of the users. As a result, the more gets the information shared by these people, the more the para-social interactions will be. The goods and service sellers active in the internet can create this interaction with their customers through creation of specialist sections in their website and provision of information on their products. The perceived enjoyment positively affect the formation of para-social interactions in a social commerce environment. The fun and leisure aspect of the use of this website does not spontaneously increase the use of the website by the people, but it leads to the ease of using it by them. In other words, the perceived enjoyment indirectly affects the website acceptance. Therefore, if a user enjoys seeing the provided product or service, the tendency towards impulse buying would be increased. The para-social positively affect the unplanned purchase by the users in the social commerce environment, since the more the people interact with each other, the higher their tendency to impulse buying will be. The tendency to unplanned purchase positively affects insisting on unplanned purchase in this website, and the high tendency to purchase in the customers would increase their insistence on impulse buying.

**Table 3. Comparison of the research results with other research**

Row	Researcher	Comparison
1	Zhiang et al.	Similar to the present study, quasi-social interactions had a significant and positive effect on the tendency to impulse buying , positive features of social trading platforms were determinants of appropriate quasi-social interactions, and perceived usefulness and quasi-social interactions had both significant effects on perceived enjoyment.
2	Chen et al.	The study also examined the impact of visual factors on social commerce shopping, the extent of users 'experience in the quality of advertising information provided by other users in order to sell a product, the quality and quantity of customers' impulse buying behaviors, and the number of likes received by posting descriptions and photos of a product has a significant impact on impulse and unplanned buying of a product.
3	Badgaiyan & Verma	In this study, the effect of environmental factors and perceived enjoyment on impulse buying is investigated. The results showed that, except for store music, all of the selected situational variables significantly affected the impulse buying behavior.
4	Liu et al.	Similar to the present study, in this paper, perceived visual signs of the website, ease of use of the website, and product accessibility are the most important identified antecedents.
5	Liang	The results showed that the higher the customer's attachment to the product, the stronger his knowledge of the product as well as his impulse buying behavior.

Generally, effective traits must be designed to improve the emotional, sensational, and cognitive responses of the consumers to the social commerce environment. First, the sensational-emotional responses to the social commerce must be strengthened through promotion of motivational and mental characteristics. As was analyzed in the current study, the main determiner of decision for online shopping by the users has been changed by sharing the pictures. The social commerce environment (the websites and social networks) share beautiful images of their products with the famous people, so that the users can have a good visual purchase experience. In comparison to general purchase in the social commerce environment such as the Facebook and the Amazon, buying through the images and colors would be easier and more enjoyable.

The social commerce environment designers have adapted themselves with their changes and they should create mental features to provide for the users. Some of the features of social commerce environment such as the figures and product lists may have an important role in creation of enjoyable buying environment and promotion of visual attraction. In addition, encouraging the users to para-social interactions with other users effectively increases the tendency to impulse buying. The social commerce environment designers must create interactional features in their websites so that the users would imagine that their relationship with other users would be the same as a friendship.

Moreover, the social commerce environment designers must increase the quality of motivational features of their website. Based on the results obtained from the current study, a big motivation can increase the tendency to relationships in social commerce. Therefore, the designers should create high motivational features to help the users find other proper comments. The comments by other users is a fundamental part of social commerce business



model. Also, they should promote sharing high quality information. These promotions can be monetary and non-monetary.

The sellers can also analyze the comments by other users on the similar products to obtain a proper perception of the users interests and preferences. Second, the social commerce environment is a place in which the consumers show their preferences and interests to consumption. The users get involved in social commerce activities since they enjoy finding interesting products. Thus, a compact sale method would not be appropriate for social commerce. In other words, the sellers should show users their unique features to stimulate their curiosity and interest. In addition, the icon of other social networks for sharing the interests of each consumer should be shown next to each product.

In addition to the icons, they can put tags on the products. Based on the findings, the visional attractions would lead to the increase in customer's enjoyment and the tendency to the unplanned buying. Therefore, it is recommended to pay especial attention to the attraction and provision method of the products in the worldwide web and provide the images of the products should have a good graphical quality, as much as possible. Based on the findings, the similarity and expertise of the customers lead to formation of social interactions between the customers and ultimately, the increase in tendency to unplanned buying. Thus, it is recommended to categorize the products and services provided on the web, so that any person can easily enter to the section his product of interest is provided in, and also, a section must be provided for specialist comments of the customers about the provided product, so that they can read the comments and anybody can express his agreement or disagreement, so that the interactions can be increased through this method.

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