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No to Uncertainty in Online Commerce with Social Commerce Constructs: Can Uncertainty Be Eliminated?

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ABSTRACT

Uncertainty reduction mechanisms have attracted considerable attention since the emergence of online commerce. However, social commerce constructs have increased the potential of these mechanisms in recent years. The aim of this study is to systematically investigate the reduction of uncertainty in online transactions over the past two decades. To that end, 113 relevant references were identified by developing a systematic review protocol during the planned search. In addition, 171 uncertainty mechanisms were identified in these references. Through a systematic review of the literature, we identified all dimensions of uncertainty in online commerce, including types of factors, theoretical perspectives, timeframes, cognitive maps, and key topics of focus. In this review, we study and examine in detail the role of social commerce constructs. This study serves as an important reference and provides a detailed and practical roadmap for researchers intending to conduct any type of study on uncertainty in online commerce.

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1. Introduction

More than two decades have passed since the advent of online commerce. The issue of uncertainty is among the most critical concerns of accepting and using online commerce (Chen et al., 2020; Dimoka et al., 2012; Hallikainen & Laukkanen, 2018). The uncertainty stems from information scarcity (Mavlanova et al., 2016), information asymmetry (Horvath et al., 2021; Li et al., 2019; Mavlanova et al., 2016), non-self-disclosure (Stubb & Colliander, 2019), opportunism (Minkov & Hofstede, 2014), temporal and spatial separation of buyer and seller (Chen, Lu et al., 2019; Chiu et al., 2018; Dimoka et al., 2012; Fernando et al., 2018; Horvath et al., 2021), and ambiguity, all of which arise from hidden information or intentional or unintentional hidden action (Nikoofal & Gümüs, 2020). Several studies have addressed the uncertainty over two decades.

The first part of these studies focuses on the conceptualization and classification of different types of uncertainty including product, seller, buyer, process, platform, product adoption, and lifestyle adoption uncertainty which have been utilized in several studies. Each of the above-mentioned categories has sub-categories, as well. Based on some studies, product uncertainty includes the uncertainty of product description and description of product features (Chiu et al., 2018; Dimoka et al., 2012; Kim & Mugwe, 2017; Weathers et al., 2015), product performance, quality, and efficiency (Dimoka et al., 2012), the application of the product (Lu & Chen, 2021), sales process, and after-sales service of the product (Bai et al., 2015; Shokouhyar et al., 2020). Uncertainty of product compatibility includes product mismatch with intended use (Lu & Chen, 2021), buyer's preferences, taste (Kim & Krishnan, 2015), and lifestyle (Chen, Cenfetelli et al. 2019), non-compliance of the product with the original one presented online (Weathers et al., 2015), and non-compliance of the product with the buyer's needs (Hong & Pavlou, 2014). The uncertainty of the seller includes the uncertainty of their characteristics (Bai et al., 2015; Dimoka et al., 2012; Ghose, 2011; Tang et al., 2023; Qiu & Benbasat, 2005) and professional behavior during online transactions (Fernando et al., 2018; Hong & Pavlou, 2014; Parasuraman et al., 2005; Pavlou et al., 2007). The buyer's uncertainty includes the uncertainty of their preferences, tastes, desires (Chen et al., 2022; Kim & Krishnan, 2015), needs (Shah et al., 2019), characteristics (Van Nguyen et al., 2020), and professional behavior during the transaction. Platform uncertainty includes platform design uncertainty (Chen, Lu et al., 2019), platform quality uncertainty (Kolotylo-Kulkarni et al., 2021; Ter Huurne et al., 2017), information security uncertainty (Horvath et al., 2021), privacy uncertainty (Horvath et al., 2021; Kolotylo-Kulkarni et al., 2021), authentication uncertainty (Lee & Koo, 2012), encryption and integrity on the platform (Ter Huurne et al., 2017), platform interaction uncertainty (Hussain et al., 2021), and platform content uncertainty (Chao et al., 2014). Process uncertainty means the uncertainties which can occur during the transaction process (Isa et al., 2016), such as that of the packaging and mail status, transportation and logistics (Giuffrida et al., 2021; Hermawan et al., 2021), payment (Guo et al., 2021; Hermawan et al., 2021), transaction time, and after-sales service (Zeithaml et al., 2002). Some studies focused on attitude uncertainty in online business (Chen et al., 2024; Techinakarawin & Sun, 2023). As observed, uncertainty is reported in all of the components in the online transaction due to the time and place separation of the buyer and seller (Horvath et al., 2021).

The second part of uncertainty studies seeks to identify approaches by which the uncertainty in an online transaction can be checked. Some studies directly focused on uncertainty, applying the aforementioned categories and their subgroup indicators as measures of uncertainty. A number of studies with concepts such as trust development, trust transfer, and risk reduction examined the concept of uncertainty (Lee et al., 2018). In these studies, trust indicators were considered as a matter of reducing uncertainty (Bauman & Bachmann, 2017), and the literature of the field of uncertainty was expanded to that of the concept of trust (Al-Adwan, Alrousan et al. 2022). In addition, the risk due to the existence of uncertainty in online transactions was sometimes included in uncertainty studies (Kiran et al., 2020). Based on this relationship, the trust and risk were somehow included in uncertainty studies. Therefore, their metrics and indices can be employed to measure uncertainty. The topic of attitude was investigated in relation to uncertainty, and a concept called uncertainty of attitude was proposed in recent studies (Techinakarawin & Sun, 2023). The role of uncertainty as a mediating or dependent factor on the acceptance of online business was addressed (Al-Adwan, Al-Debei et al. 2022; Chen, Cenfetelli et al. 2019; Guo et al., 2021). Furthermore, electronic word-of-mouth, as another factor affecting uncertainty, was reviewed in several studies (De Pelsmacker et al., 2018; Filieri et al., 2015; Soleimani, 2022).

The third part of the studies sought to identify uncertainty reduction mechanisms. Here are some pointers to help online shoppers reduce their uncertainty. Some of these mechanisms have existed since e-commerce such as credibility and quality of information (Al-Adwan & Yaseen, 2023; Lei et al., 2023; Prendergast et al., 2010), source credibility (Filieri et al., 2015; Sussman & Siegal, 2003; Zhang et al., 2014), brand awareness (Fan et al., 2021; Guo et al., 2021; Kolotylo-Kulkarni et al., 2021; Lu et al., 2014), seller benevolence (Benbasat & Wang, 2005; Gefen, 2002; Lu et al., 2016; Pavlou, 2002; Qiu & Benbasat, 2005; Pavlou & Dimako, 2006), platform reputation (Hsiao et al., 2010; Hussain et al., 2021), popularity and seller reputation (Al-Adwan & Yaseen, 2023; De Vries et al., 2012; Du et al., 2019; Kanani & Glavee-Geo, 2021; Lahuerta-Otero et al., 2018; Lardo et al., 2017; Read et al., 2019; Tang & Chen, 2020; Wu et al., 2019), soft return policies (Al-Adwan, Al-Debei et al. 2022; Kanani & Glavee-Geo, 2021; Mavlanova et al., 2016), and third-party guarantees (Fan et al., 2021; Dimoka et al., 2012; Kim & Mugwe, 2017; Ter Huurne et al., 2017). To reduce uncertainty, new mechanisms emerged, which were regarded as social commerce constructs (Hajli, 2015). These structures, which originated from the concept of Web 2, as central (main) or peripheral (peripheral) signs, help reduce information asymmetry, resulting in affecting various types of uncertainty (Horvath et al., 2021; Kanani & Glavee-Geo, 2021). The new trend of uncertainty studies focuses on this new paradigm of online commerce. A critical part of the signs created by the Web 2 structure can reduce various types of uncertainty (Li et al., 2019). Social commerce constructs include ratings, reviews (Li, 2019; Lin et al., 2018; Van Nguyen et al., 2020), recommendations (Sukrat & Papasratorn, 2018), referrals, communities, and forums (Al-Adwan, Alrousan et al. 2022; Friedrich et al., 2021), which reduce the types of uncertainty.

This study aims to identify the uncertainty reduction factors in online commerce platform by focusing on social commerce constructs. Influencing the uncertainty in online commerce is considered as the most vital potential of social commerce (Li et al., 2018). Social commerce platforms exist in two different forms. In the first design, there is an e-commerce site with social one and Web 2 structures. In the second case, there is a social media site where exchange and trading mechanisms are established (Huang & Benyoucef, 2015). Web 2 structures contribute to the business process in both types of social commerce implementations.

The present study seeks to conduct a systematic review for the uncertainty in online transactions to identify the mechanisms, approaches, and factors which have reduced uncertainty during the last two decades. To this aim, the intended sources are found and uncertainty reduction mechanisms are identified by creating a systematic review protocol. Then, a cognitive map is drawn by reviewing the studies to reduce uncertainty in online transactions. Finally, the studies, which focus on each of the uncertainty mechanisms in terms of the theories, social commerce constructs, dependent-independent and mediating factors, as well as the discussed time frames, are presented in the form of graphic diagrams and text analysis instruments.

2. Method

Based on the evidence-based software engineering (EBSE) policy, three phases were proposed for the systematic review of literature, including planning, implementing, and reporting the results (EBSE, 2007). All steps of the SLR methodology in this research are shown in Figure 1. An official protocol was created during the planning to conduct a systematic review of the literature. The protocol contained the details related to the research strategy, which was based on intended questions, inclusion/exclusion criteria, quality assessment criteria, data extraction strategy, along with data synthesis and analysis guidelines (Bano & Zowghi, 2015). The protocol was pilot tested for discussing the perfectness of the search string, correctness of inclusion/exclusion criteria, and data extraction guidelines of the present study (Pouti et al., 2020). Then, the updated version of the protocol was sent to two external reviewers who were regarded as experts in the field. The reviewers recommended some changes regarding the research question, followed by incorporating inclusion/exclusion criteria related to the scope of SLR into the protocol. In the next procedure, the steps of the protocol were redefined during the implementation. The following subsections explain the planning of the review.

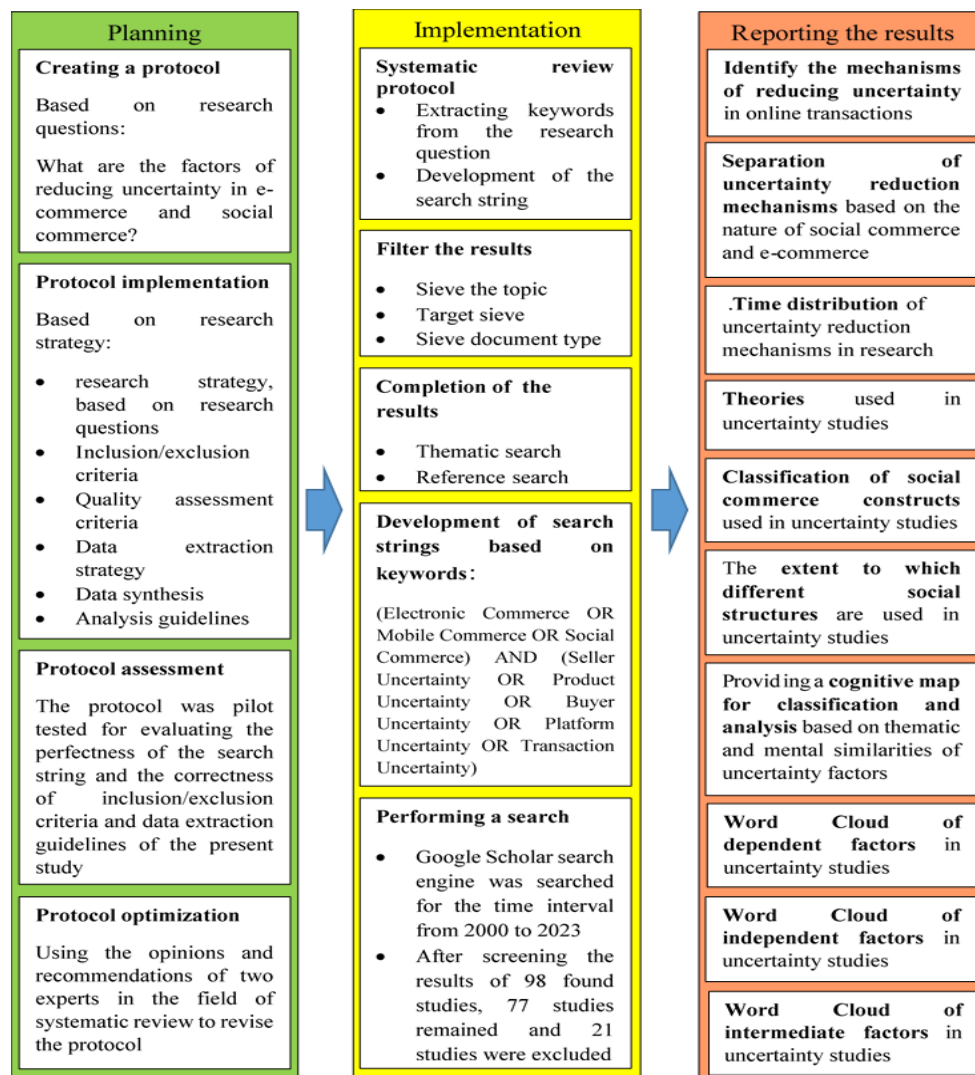


Fig. 1. Methodological Steps of the SLR Based on EBSE Policy

2-1. Systematic Review Protocol of Literature

This study aims to analyze the factors of reducing uncertainty in electronic and social commerce. Key words were extracted based on the research questions.

• Development of the search string

Keywords and their synonyms were used to develop the search string. To identify the key factors, the main ones, which create uncertainty in online transactions, were utilized and combined with the types of online transactions in the form of a search string (Table 1):

Table 1. Development of Search Strings Based on Keywords

All Kinds of Online Transactions	Types of Uncertainty
Electronic commerce	Uncertainty of the seller
Mobile commerce	Product uncertainty
Social commerce	Uncertainty of the buyer
Online commerce	Platform uncertainty
	Transaction uncertainty

(Electronic commerce or mobile commerce or social commerce) and (seller uncertainty or product uncertainty or buyer uncertainty or platform uncertainty or transaction uncertainty)

The above-mentioned field was searched in the Google Scholar search engine for the time interval 2000-2023, and the results were checked until the density of related ones on the page was zero, resulting in obtaining 98 studies.

2-2. Filtering the Results

- **Sieve the topic**

Some of the studies in the field of electronic, mobile, and social commerce were not related to the uncertainty, leading to their exclusion.

- **Target sieve**

The studies, which were conducted on uncertainty reduction mechanisms theoretically or practically and directly or indirectly, were expected to be found. Therefore, other studies were excluded from the results

- **Sieve document type**

The results excluded from the review included articles and headlines of news publications such as forbs, economist, and trade, book introduction pages of websites, such as Amazon, commercial or analytical articles on personal or company blog pages, a list of journal archives, theses, articles by consulting groups, such as the Boston Consulting Group, project reports, national business reports and analyses, articles by experts in Deloitte business publications, e-commerce trend reports, and statistical reports of e-commerce companies.

Totally, 77 studies remained and 21 were excluded. The resulting studies were assessed after the initial screening to find uncertainty reduction mechanisms. Then, the introduction, model, hypotheses or questions, and results were reviewed and recorded, separately. The uncertainty reduction is either evaluated as a dependent or as a mediating factor, which affects the acceptance, attitude, trust, risk, willingness to buy, sales volume, and satisfaction.

2-3. Completing the Results

- **Thematic search**

Based on the results, the trust, willingness to buy and accept, risk, attitude, and social business structures were affected indirectly or by uncertainty in online business. Therefore, the issues were searched again by combining each of the above-mentioned keywords with the previous string. Here, the most thematic connections were related to trust and willingness to buy, which usually applied uncertainty reduction mechanisms as dependent or mediating factors, or social business structures, which depended on the mechanism and reduced uncertainty. Finally, 27 studies were added to the previous references.

- **Reference search**

Based on the results, a number of studies were found and their references were examined. Totally, nine related references were not found in the previous methods.

It is worth noting that the initial screening was conducted based on the aforementioned method.

3. Results

This section seeks to identify uncertainty reduction mechanisms in online business as the main question of the study. Based on the systematic review, 171 mechanisms were identified. To this aim, the introduction, model, hypotheses, and results were identified in addition to abstract. Some of these mechanisms are common between electronic and social commerce, such as return policy or brand awareness, while some are specific to social commerce with the web 2 structures and user-generated content. Table 1 indicates the identified mechanisms and their reference numbers which are provided in Appendix 1. These divers and extensive mechanisms cover the entire purchasing process and entities which play a role in this process.

3-1. Uncertainty Reduction Mechanisms

This study aims to identify the mechanisms of reducing uncertainty in online transactions during the last two decades. To this aim, 171 different mechanisms were identified. Some of these uncertainty reduction mechanisms, which are specific to social commerce based on social structures, create the ability to reduce uncertainty such as online consumer reviews, seller ratings, and ratings, as well as the display of terms of use with live streaming. Some others are common between electronic and social commerce, such as return policy, brand awareness, source credibility, and seller reputation or commercial contracts, representing their classification and frequency of use over two decades. Figure 2 shows the factors employed more than three times due to their multiplicity.

As illustrated, some uncertainty reduction factors are specific to social commerce, while some others are common between social and electronic commerce.

3-2. Time Distribution of Studies

Studies related to the mechanisms of reducing uncertainty in terms of time include different time periods, indicating the amount of attention to each factor during the above-mentioned time period. Figure 3 demonstrates the time periods of interest related to each uncertainty reduction factor. As displayed, the blue and red marks represent the beginning and end of the factor study period, respectively. Among the specific factors of social commerce, the widest study period in terms of time is related to online consumer reviews.

3-3. Theories Used in Uncertainty Studies

The utilized theories are among the significant topics in uncertainty studies in online transactions. Totally, 79 different theories were applied in 113 studies. However, a few studies did not employ any fundamental basic theory, while some used more than one theory. Figure 4 shows the theories utilized more than once such as signaling, dual processing, uncertainty reduction, trust transfer, rational action, planned behavior, uncertainty, customer behavior, documentation, social support, and social exchange, as well as technology acceptance and elaboration likelihood model.

The diversity of theories scope is considered as a critical point in their application, indicating the complex and multidimensional nature of the uncertainty factor. A large number of theories are related to accepting and applying innovation such as technology acceptance model and theories like planned behavior and rational action. Some others focus on the social support, exchange, presence, learning, capital, and identity theory. Some others assess behavioral and processing models, such as AIDMA (attention, interest, desire, memory, and action), AISAS (attention, interest, search, action, and share), and utilitarian and hedonic motivations framework, as well as theories like dual processing, human information processing, consumer behavior, stimulus-organism-response, and affective response-satisfaction. Probability and uncertainty theories include uncertainty reduction, uncertainty, trust transfer, and trust formation, as well as models such as online trust creation, trust, and elaboration likelihood. Theories related to transaction and business include agency, economic, public relations, purchase effort,

Specific to social commerce										Common with e-commerce										
Online Consumer Review, 27					Matching individual needs with recommendations and reviews, 17					Display the product in live stream , 16										
Display terms of use, 14	Platform interaction, 9			Review or recommendation rating, 9			Resolving the uncertainty of customer service expectations, 9			Emotional state of familiarity, 9										
	Sponsorship recommendations, 7			Referral to other brands, 7			Emotional state of intimacy, 7			The way the seller responds to feedback, 7			Number of feedbacks or reviews checked, 6							
	Comments, 13			Site stickiness, 7			Similarity of individual preferences with recommendations, 6			Referral to other people's opinions, 5			Interaction with the seller, 5			Security risk efficiency and performance, 4			Attitudes for privacy concerns in online self-disclosure, 4	
Cognitive status of social support, 11	Credibility of review, 7			Solving the issue of demand uncertainty, 6			Credibility and reputation of the...			Occurrence of positive and negative emotions in review, 5			Proportion of positive and negative reviews, 4			Balanced reviews, 4				
Number of negative and positive reviews, 10	Cognitive state of social presence, 7			Reviewer rating, 5			Social capital of the seller, 5			Seller rating and evaluation, 4			Similarity of individual values...			Word of mouth, 4				

Platform credibility, 19			Brand awareness, 18			Source credibility, 12														
Credit and reputation of the seller, 12			Quality of argument, 10			Popularity of the platform, 10			Return Policy, 10			Third Party Informants, 9								
Sponsor type			Third-party guarantee, 8			Privacy protection, 7			Resolve uncertainty of delivery, 7			Similarity of characteristics, 6			Addressing external uncertainty, 6					
Third-party verification of the platform, 9			Trust the platform, 8			Product or package damage management, 6			Resolve customer concerns, 5			Willingness to trust, 5			Management of international and local...					
Resolving uncertainty of inventory, 9			Resolving the uncertainty of the conformity of the procedures, 8			Customer service quality, 5			Commercial contracts, 4			Culture, 4			Security of price risk and non-availability, 4			Time risk security, 4		
Popularity of the seller, 8			Seller's benevolence, 7			Transaction information security, 5			Experience using the Internet and...			Management of international and local...			Ethnicity and religion, 4			Business rules and standards, 4		

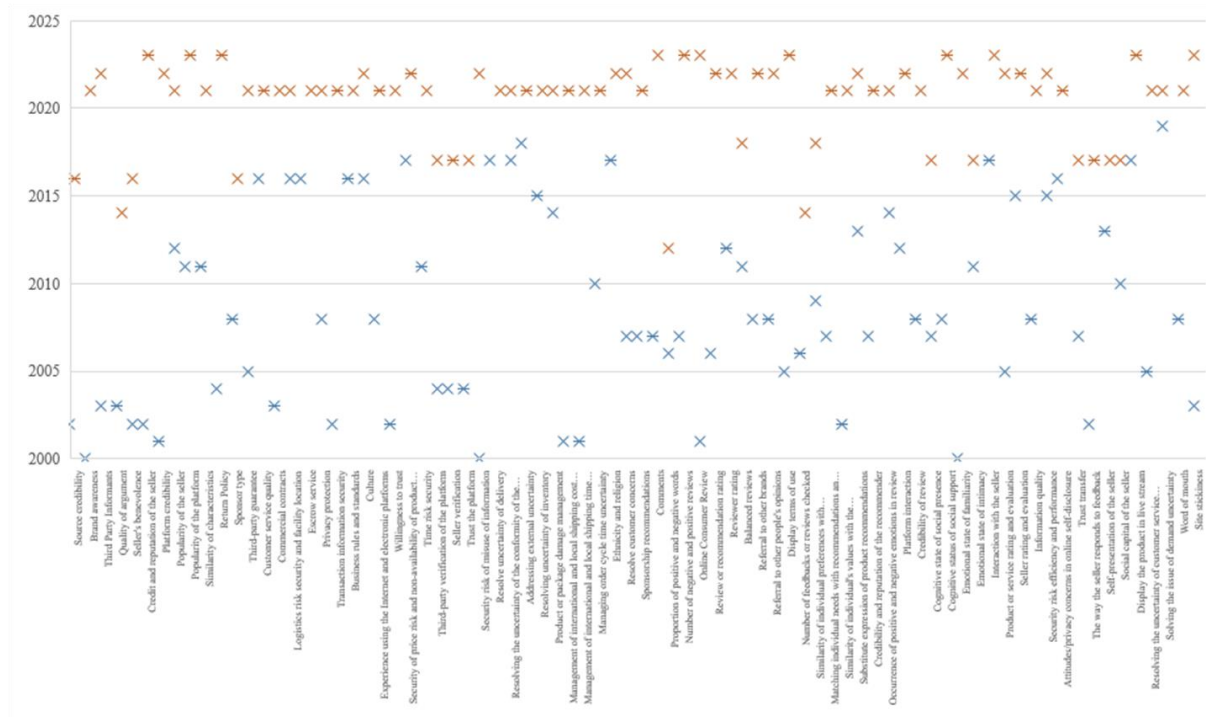


Fig. 3. Time Distribution of Uncertainty Reduction Mechanisms in Research

marketing systems, actor network, social agency, and expected utility, as well as models such as econometric modeling, sharing economy, and group buying. Culture-related theories include Hofstede's cultural dimensions and national culture theory. Theories related to customers include emotional responses based on consumption, swift guanxi, valence framework, mean-ends chain of lifestyle (MECL), expectation confirmation, effort in purchase, Gossen's marginal utility, expected utility, and risks in consumer behavior, as well as chance-constrained model. Theories related to conditions and environment include attribution, contingency, socio-cognitive, choice, e-WOM, and signaling.

3-4. Social Commerce Constructs

Applying social commerce constructs to reduce uncertainty is among the significant points in examining the uncertainty in recent studies. A review study was conducted on the type of structures due to their number. Totally, 70 different social constructs in social commerce platforms were identified in the studies (Figure 5). The most commonly used structures related to online consumer reviews include consumer recommendations, e-WOM, product ratings, virtual communities, third-party recommendations, review ratings, comments, and the live streams. Web 2 structures help potential customers minimize ambiguities and information asymmetry by enabling content creation by third parties, including consumers and previous buyers of the intended product or service. Different platforms offer diverse structures. Some of these structures are usually combined with each other in each platform. The proposed groups for social structures in the context of business activities included evaluation, rating, discussion, opinion, live interaction, and group structures, as well as sharing, feedback, recommendation, referral, and popularity constructs. Table 2 shows the structures achieved from the systematic review.

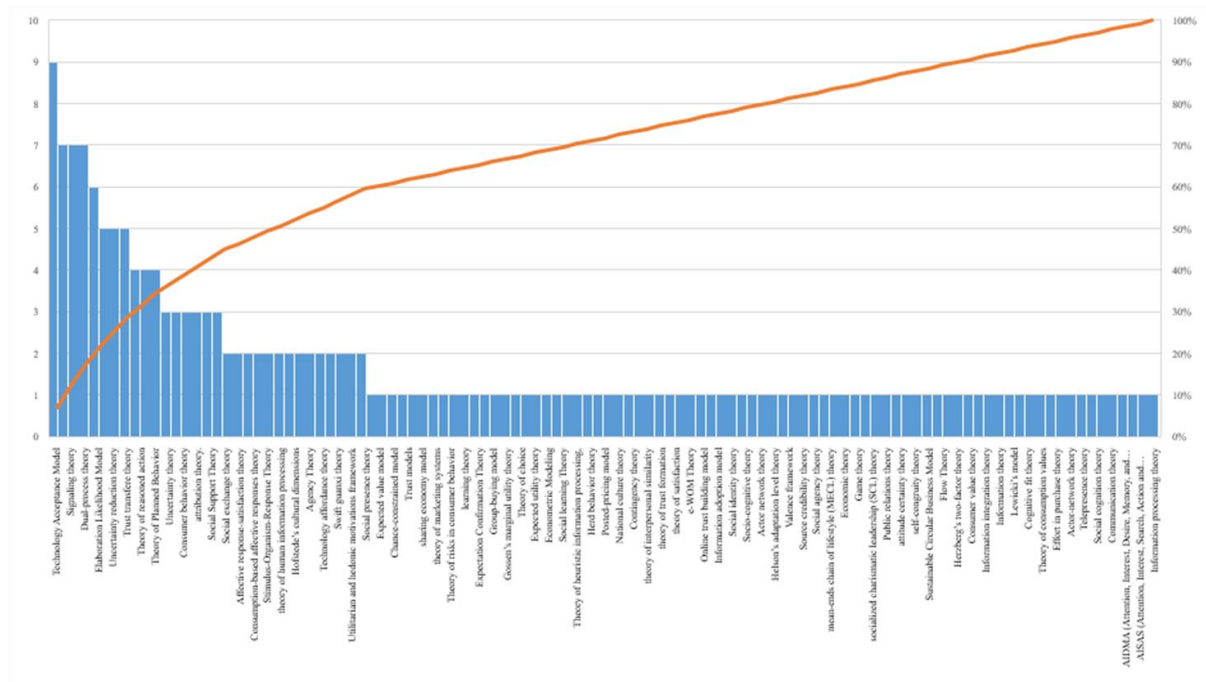


Fig. 4. The Extent of Application of Different Theories in Uncertainty Studies

Table 2. Social Commerce Constructs Employed in Uncertainty Studies

Social Constructs Titles	Social Constructs Types
1 Evaluation structures	Online consumer review, product review blogs, and endorsements
2 Rating structures	Reviewer rating, product ranking, and review rating
3 Discussion structures	Judgment, consultation, online discussions, e-WOM, and FAQs
4 Opinion structures	Customer opinions, consumer testimonials, and comments
5 Live interaction structures	Live helps, information flows, online helps, social interactions, livestreams, visible communication, real time interactivity, live chats, and listening to talk
6 Group structures	Online forums, channels, virtual community, campaigns, and discussion groups
7 Sharing constructs	Text sharing, profile sharing, image sharing, voice sharing, multimedia product description sharing, contact details sharing, identity descriptive information, idea sharing, video sharing, preference sharing, attitude sharing, information sharing, scores sharing, interest sharing, sharing emotions, experience sharing, and multi-group knowledge sharing
8 Feedback constructs	Feedback and responses
9 Recommendation constructs	Consumer recommendations, advice, third party recommendations, and suggestions
10 Referral constructs	Affiliations, referrals, social referents, and group of reference
11 Popularity constructs	Like, following, comfort, and encouragement
12 Signal constructs	Information signals, cues, 3D avatars, and information guidebooks
13 Tagging constructs	Part of speech tagger and annotate each word
14 Expression constructs	Storytelling with specific usage experience, bulletin boards, express interest and concern, information disclosure, self-disclosure, and vicarious expression

3-5. Cognitive Mapping of Uncertainty Reduction

The multiplicity of factors and uncertainty reduction mechanisms make it difficult to investigate and categorize these factors. The present study seeks to provide a cognitive map for classification and analysis based on thematic and mental similarities of the aforementioned factors. This cognitive map helps understand the focus of uncertainty in the studies during the last two decades and can draw a road map for the future of uncertainty studies (Figure 6).

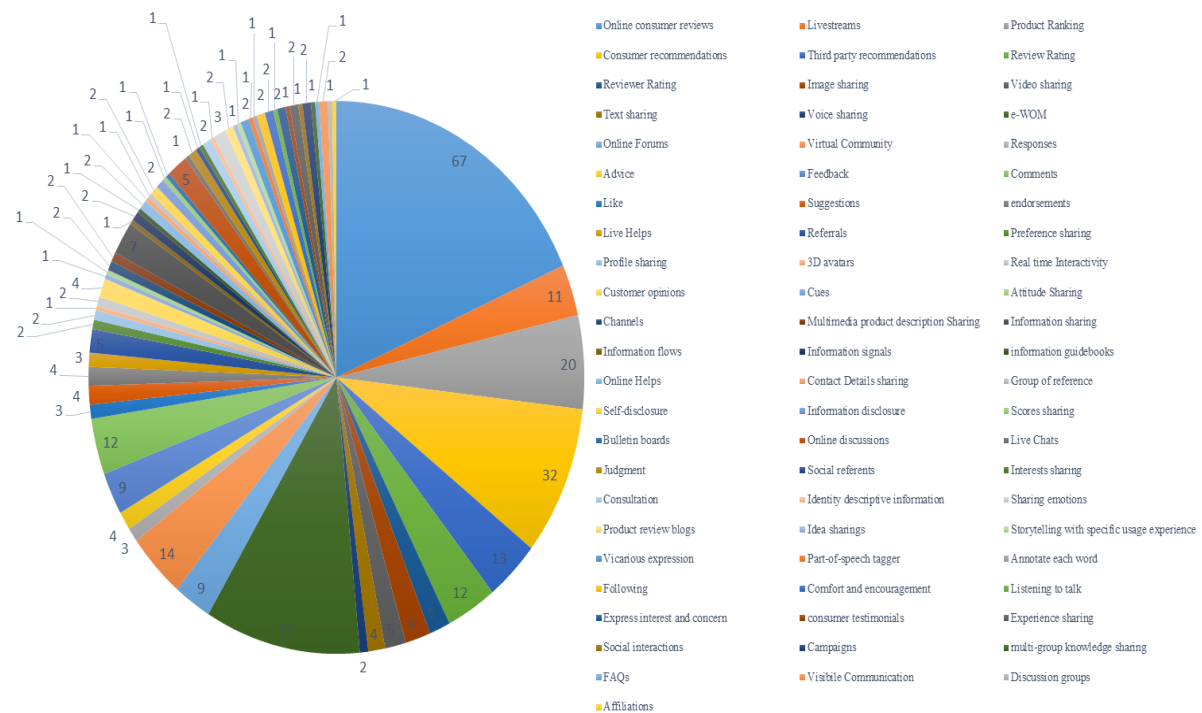


Fig. 5. The Amount of Use of Various Social Structures in Uncertainty Studies

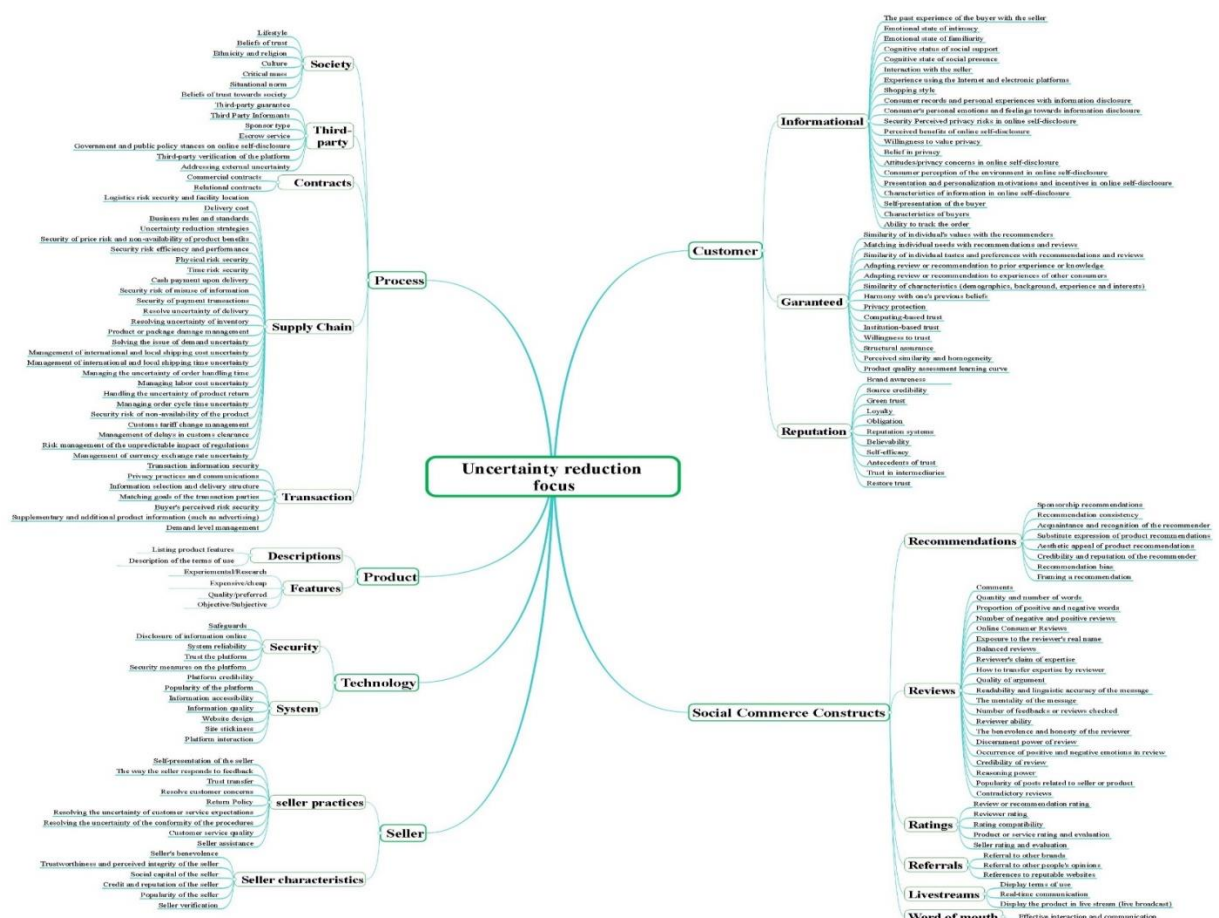


Fig. 6. Cognitive Mapping of Uncertainty Reduction Mechanisms in Online Commerce

In the case of dependent factors, the variety of words decreases, while the presence of some others is more obvious. Words such as purchase, intention, review, behavior, product, and consumer have attracted more attention. Intermediate words occur in the case of models with three layers and more. Some words show a high density although their variety is less. Words such as trust, product, perceived quality, usefulness, consumer, information, and attitude are among the most used ones.



Fig. 9. Word Cloud of Intermediate Factors in Uncertainty Studies

4. Conclusion

In the conclusion section, a summary of the results obtained from the systematic review will be presented in the form of the infographic. First, a time category for uncertainty reduction factors was considered and the factors used in uncertainty reduction in online transactions are shown over five time periods (Figure 10).

Another issue of debate was the use of different theories in the studies, which was discussed in detail in the relevant section; out of the 79 theories identified, 13 were the most widely used (Figure 11). Some of the theories are related to the technology acceptance literature, such as the technology acceptance model, the theory of reasoned action, and the theory of planned behavior.

Another notable topic, which is also the main focus of this systematic review, is the social commerce constructs that lead to uncertainty reduction. A comprehensive classification based on studies was presented in the relevant section; however, in brief, the 10 social constructs in Figure 12 were most commonly used in uncertainty reduction studies in online transactions.

Given the diversity of topics that can be investigated as uncertainty reduction mechanisms in online transactions, a cognitive map was created in this study based on a systematic review of studies. If we briefly consider the output of this cognitive map as the thematic focus of the studies, six main themes are noteworthy, as shown in Figure 13. In this study, 171 uncertainty reduction mechanisms were identified. In order to identify the most important keywords in this study, word cloud analysis was used. Based on the results obtained, the most important keywords can be shown in three categories based on their type of use in uncertainty reduction studies: dependent factors, independent factors, and intermediate factors (Figure 14).

The oldest uncertainty reduction factors (between 2000 and 2005)	The older uncertainty reduction factors (between 2005 and 2010)
• Source credibility • Brand awareness • Third party informants • Quality of argument • Seller 's benevolence • Credit and reputation of the seller • Platform credibility • Return policy • Third party guarantee • Relational contracts • Commercial contracts • Transaction information security • Willingness to trust • Third party verification of the platform • Seller verification • Trust the platform • Security risk of misuse of information • Management of international and local shipping cost uncertainty • The past experience of the buyer with the seller • Management of international and local shipping time uncertainty • Online consumer review • Similarity of individual's values with the recommenders • Emotional state of familiarity • Product or service rating and evaluation • Harmony with one's previous beliefs • The way the seller responds to feedback • Resolving the uncertainty of customer service expectations • Recommendation consistency • Computing-based trust • The mentality of the message • Trust transfer • Display terms of use • Supplementary and additional product information (such as advertising) • Safeguards • Self-efficacy • Management of delays in customs clearance • Antecedents of trust • Effective interaction and communication • Situational norm • Customs tariff change management • Reviewer's claim of expertise • Site stickiness	• Sponsor type • Sponsorship recommendations • Comments • Proportion of positive and negative words • Number of negative and positive reviews • Review or recommendation rating • Exposure to the reviewer's real name • Adapting review or recommendation to prior experience or knowledge • Adapting review or recommendation to experiences of other consumers • How to transfer expertise by reviewer • Referral to other brands • Referral to other people's opinions • Description of the terms of use • Number of feedbacks or revisions checked • Reviewer ability • The benevolence and honesty of the reviewer • Acquaintance and recognition of the recommender • Similarity of individual tastes and preferences with recommendations and reviews • Matching individual needs with recommendations and reviews • Aesthetic appeal of product recommendations • Credibility and reputation of the recommender • Rating compatibility • Recommendation bias • Critical mass • Platform interaction • Credibility of review • Reasoning power • Framing a recommendation or review • Cognitive state of social presence • Cognitive status of social support • References to reputable websites • Privacy protection • Information quality • Experience using the internet and electronic platforms • Shopping style • Characteristics of buyers • Seller characteristics • Social capital of the seller • Beliefs of trust towards society • Demand level management • Managing order cycle time uncertainty • Security risk of non-availability of the product • Resolve customer concerns • Restore trust • Word of mouth • Reliable system • Product endorsements

Figure 10. Summary of the Temporal Classification of Factors Reducing Uncertainty in Online Transactions

New factors of uncertainty reduction (between 2010 and 2015)	Newer factors of uncertainty reduction (between 2015 and 2020)
• Fit with lifestyle • Website design • Management of currency exchange rate uncertainty • Risk management of the unpredictable impact of regulations • Ability to track the order • Handling the uncertainty of product return • Managing labor cost uncertainty • Managing the uncertainty of order handling time • Product or package damage management • Resolving uncertainty of inventory • Buyer's perceived risk security • Product quality assessment learning curve • Security measures on the platform • Self-presentation of the seller • Reputation systems • Trusting beliefs • Product description • Characteristics of information in online self-disclosure • Presentation and personalization motivations and incentives in online self-disclosure • Attitudes/privacy concerns in online self-disclosure • Belief in privacy • Time risk security • Security risk efficiency and performance • Seller rating and evaluation • Seller assistance • Emotional state of intimacy • Popularity of posts related to seller or product • Discernment power of review • Similarity of characteristics (demographics, background, experience, and interests) • Popularity of the platform • Popularity of the seller • Substitute expression of product recommendations • Listing product features • Readability and linguistic accuracy of the message • Balanced reviews • Reviewer rating • Quantity and the number of words	• Recommendations • Trust in intermediaries • Ethnicity and religion • Imitation • Solving the issue of demand uncertainty • Addressing external uncertainty • Resolving the uncertainty of the conformity of the procedures • Resolve the uncertainty of delivery • Display the product in live stream (live broadcast) • Believability • Perceived similarity and homogeneity • Loyalty • Green trust • Government and public policy stances on online self-disclosure • Characteristics of information in online self-disclosure • Disclosure of information online • Consumer perception of the environment in online self-disclosure • Willingness to value privacy • Security Perceived privacy risks in online self-disclosure • Consumer records and personal experiences with information disclosure • Consumer's personal emotions and feelings towards information disclosure • Perceived benefits of online self-disclosure • Physical risk security • Time risk security • Security of price risk and non-availability of product benefits • Structural assurance • Culture • Information accessibility • Real-time communication • Business rules and standards • Escrow service • Interaction with the seller • Logistics risk security and facility location • Customer service quality
The latest uncertainty reduction factors (after 2020)	
• Delivery cost • Computing-based trust • Institution-based trust • Contradictory reviews • Uncertainty reduction strategies • Cash payment upon delivery • Privacy practices and communications • Information selection and delivery structure • Matching the goals of the transaction parties • Security of payment transactions • Trustworthiness and perceived integrity of the seller • The need to touch the product	

Continued Figure 10

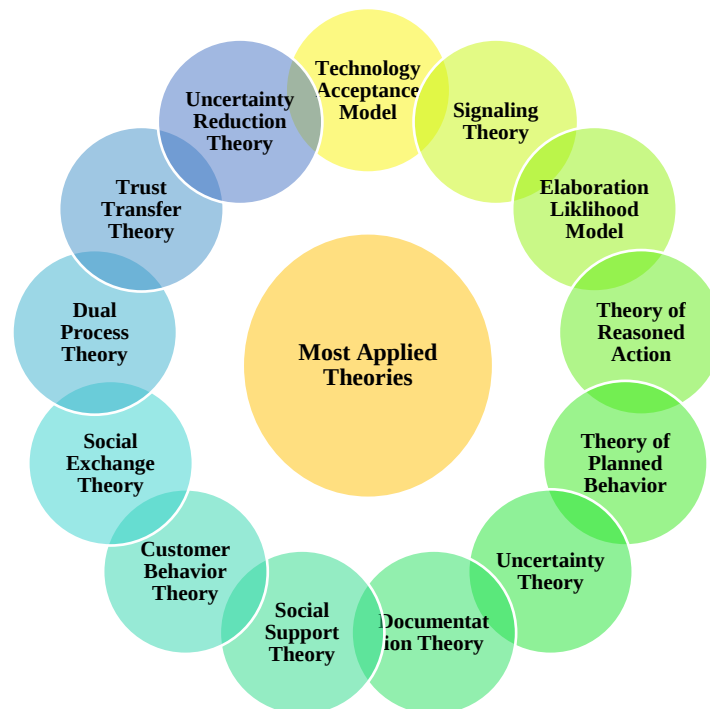


Fig. 11. Most Applied Theories



Fig. 12. Most Used Social Commerce Constructs

Most keywords as an independent factor	Most keywords as an dependent factor	Most keywords as an intermediate factor
•Purchase •Product •Online •Consumer •Behavior •Intention •Reviews •Trust •Annotation •Buy	•Uncertainty •Product •Perceived •Reviews •Information •Risk •Security •Quality	•Perceived •Attitude •Trust •Information •Reviews •Quality •Participation •Uncertainty •Usefulness •Involvement •Helpfulness

Fig. 13. The Most Thematic Focus of Uncertainty Reduction Studies



Fig. 14. Most Used Keywords in Uncertainty Reduction Studies

In the end, based on the systematic review conducted, several conclusions can be drawn:

1. Uncertainty is most commonly used in studies which aim to identify factors influencing customer purchase decisions and focus on pre-purchase stages.
2. An inextricable link is observed between the uncertainty and trust in the literature of online transactions. Risk, acceptance, and attitude are among the critical topics related to the uncertainty.
3. Uncertainty reduction mechanisms in online transactions utilize different approaches depending on the source of information which is supposed to solve the ambiguity and information asymmetry. Sometimes, the information is obtained from the seller, sometimes from consumers or potential customers, and sometimes, from a third party such as guaranteeing institutions, reviewers, and sponsors.
4. In all of the cases, social commerce constructs present new approaches to reduce uncertainty. In the case of the seller, image and video sharing, as well as live chat, help, and streaming can be applied to communicate with customers on social commerce platforms. Third-party organizations can provide potential customers with the needed information by creating virtual communities, forums, and campaigns. Some of these third-party organizations can achieve the customers' trust as neutral organizations by providing rating and recommendation systems, as well as dissection and description blogs. In addition, sponsors can play a critical role in completing the ambiguous information puzzle with blogs and recommendation systems. Reviewers offer various types of reviews with expertise and impartiality, leading to customer trust which attracts user generated content. Any user including potential customers, consumers, sellers, competitors, and suppliers can create content on these platforms and approve or reject the previous one. People can employ the learning curve of experiential evaluation to identify the correct content in such interactive spaces, despite probable biases or content generated by malicious people. Totally, 70 social structures were identified in 113 uncertainty studies, which were categorized and presented in 14 groups.
5. It is worth noting that reducing uncertainty is not only related to those of product distribution and sales. However, the entire supply chain should be analyzed and managed to reduce the uncertainty. In addition to the sales counter, as well as distribution and marketing of the product, several studies have been conducted to reduce uncertainty in the backstage stages, i.e., the initial stages of the supply chain, including the quality of product transfer, transportation and logistics time, customs tariffs, exchange rate stability regarding external products, location of facilities, inventory management of suppliers' warehouses, and personnel costs, all of which contribute to ensuring that the customer receives the product on time, intact, and at the exact cost specified.

6. A large number of theories ($N = 79$) have been used in uncertainty studies. Theories related to more than nine different conceptual and practical areas, including innovation acceptance, social and behavioral sciences, probability and uncertainty, trust, transaction and business, cultural structure, customer, and environment and conditions, as well as innovation acceptance and social theories, are utilized more than other ones.

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Table 1A. Uncertainty reduction mechanisms in online commerce

Factors	References
1 Sponsorship recommendations	R77; R301; R45; R190; R201; R171; R69
2 Source credibility	R148; R301; R30; R47; R177; R292; R72; R73; R67; R245; R291; R111
3 Comments	R36; R58; R160; R201; R131; R167; R137; R260; R90; R122; R114; R254
4 Quantity and number of words	R15; R122
5 Proportion of positive and negative words	R47; R15 ; R202; R49
6 Number of negative and positive reviews	R122; R201; R293; R167; R60; R260; R36; R160; R147; R4
7 Brand awareness	R259; R241; R178; R28; R266; R290; R171; R245; R90; R141; R69
8 Online Consumer Review	R24; R143; R44; R49; R185; R190; R83; R30; R47; R294; R302; R203; R15; R75; R245; R293; R19; R58; R137; R243; R6; R69; R4; R114
9 Review or recommendation rating	R15; R47; R76; R73; R59; R44; R49; R137; R5; R156
10 Reviewer rating	R15; R255; R73; R137; R5
11 Exposure to the reviewer's real name	R15; R76
12 Adapting review or recommendation to prior experience or knowledge	R15; R60; R294
13 Adapting review or recommendation to experiences of other consumers	R15; R47; R156
14 Balanced reviews	R272; R270; R147
15 Reviewer's claim of expertise	R270; R250; R76
16 How to transfer expertise by reviewer	R270; R102; R257
17 Referral to other brands	R131; R270; R290; R90; R6
18 Referral to other people's opinions	R188; R131; R57; R270; R5
19 Description of the terms of use	R269; R270; R90
20 Third Party Informants	R16 ; R81; R131; R105; R182; R115; R19; R255; R243; R264
21 Recommendation consistency	R47; R190; R292
22 Quality of argument	R250; R47; R48; R291; R11; R23; R46; R130; R150; R201
23 Readability and linguistic accuracy of the message	R158; R83; R15
24 The mentality of the message	R83; R197
25 Display terms of use	R172; R101; R133; R114; R90; R39; R303; R175; R200; R34; R158; R273; R218; R176
26 Listing product features	R270
27 Seller's benevolence	R80; R206; R20; R48; R218; R105; R210; R171
28 Credit and reputation of the seller	R14, R80; R132; R131; R136; R133; R121; R255; R4; R243; R141; R69
29 Number of feedbacks or revisions checked	R210; R293; R49; R61; R62; R201
30 The past experience of the buyer with the seller	R207; R255
31 Platform credibility	R112; R95; R105; R275; R183; R37; R132; R184; R228; R165; R299; R131; R255; R147; R242; R243
32 Reviewer ability	R166; R105
33 The benevolence and honesty of the reviewer	R166; R105; R115
34 Acquaintance and recognition of the recommender	R66; R305; R279
35 Similarity of individual tastes and preferences with recommendations and reviews	R170; R305; R66; R101; R279; R290; R304; R156
36 Matching individual needs with recommendations and reviews	R172; R101; R279; R211; R71; R54; R296; R298; R161; R306; R53; R198; R233; R38; R127; R219; R263; R156
37 Similarity of individual's values with the recommenders	R172; R158; R50; R240; R304
38 Substitute expression of product recommendations	R305; R158; R106; R158; R40; R6
39 Aesthetic appeal of product recommendations	R305; R204
40 Credibility and reputation of the recommender	R270; R288; R278; R255; R69
41 Popularity of the seller	R122; R252; R222; R59; R63; R146; R145; R277

42	Popularity of the platform	R108; R139; R308; R109; R134; R19; R242; R243; R69; R4; R64
43	Similarity of characteristics (demographics, background, experience and interests)	R261; R8; R307; R172; R290; R69
44	Discernment power of review	R270; R73; R156
45	Return Policy	R122; R145; R265; R224; R191; R182; R229; R98; R5; R4; R48
46	Rating compatibility	R15 ; R190; R137
47	Harmony with one's previous beliefs	R47; R292
48	Recommendation bias	R47
49	Occurrence of positive and negative emotions in review	R192; R307; R262; R147; R141; R153
50	Critical mass	R105; R235
51	Platform interaction	R18; R193; R195; R280; R297; R286; R242; R112; R90; R6
52	Sponsor type	R171; R181; R226; R246; R186; R212; R305; R115
53	Credibility of review	R270; R153; R201; R271; R112; R148; R255; R156
54	Third-party guarantee	R132; R59; R172; R101; R134; R182; R255; R19
55	Customer service quality	R122; R205; R41; R134; R182
56	Commercial contracts	R112; R117; R208; R99
57	Relational contracts	R112; R25; R26
58	Reasoning power	R47; R4
59	Popularity of posts related to seller or product	R1; R59; R146
60	Framing a recommendation or review	R47; R147; R156
61	Cognitive state of social presence	R160; R124; R199; R143; R255; R97; R19; R307
62	Cognitive status of social support	R131; R160; R164; R94; R291; R10; R255; R69; R90; R254; R6; R307
63	Emotional state of familiarity	R160; R131; R79; R55; R151; R199; R255; R247; R243; R69; R307
64	Emotional state of intimacy	R160; R108; R166; R12; R163; R151; R96; R307
65	Logistics risk security and facility location	R234; R182; R84; R98; R69
66	Delivery cost	R234
67	Seller assistance	R114; R225; R92; R304
68	Interaction with the seller	R114; R243; R255; R174; R173; R282
69	References to reputable websites	R182; R131; R5
70	Escrow service	R182; R69; R19; R255
71	Privacy protection	R182; R131; R141; R104; R19; R98; R69
72	Transaction information security	R182; R131; R87; R104; R98
73	Business rules and standards	R182; R90; R115; R98
74	Real-time communication	R90; R173; R174; R281
75	Product or service rating and evaluation	R132; R121; R137; R5
76	Safeguards	R132
77	Information accessibility	R243; R242
78	Culture	R243; R242; R19; R115; R9
79	Computing-based trust	R81; R243; R264
80	Institution-based trust	R243; R264
81	Seller rating and evaluation	R121; R137; R6; R141
82	Information quality	R131; R74; R255; R69
83	Experience using the Internet and electronic platforms	R131; R27; R19; R69
84	Shopping style	R131; R39
85	Willingness to trust	R131; R147; R255; R183
86	Contradictory reviews	R254, R156
87	Uncertainty reduction strategies	R78
88	Structural assurance	R147; R255
89	Security of price risk and non-availability of product benefits	R137; R141; R255; R35
90	Security risk efficiency and performance	R137; R309; R255; R35; R98
91	Physical risk security	R137; R255

92	Time risk security	R137; R244; R104; R255
93	Cash payment upon delivery	R5; R104
94	Consumer records and personal experiences with information disclosure	R141; R255; R249
95	Consumer's personal emotions and feelings towards information disclosure	R141; R255; R249
96	Perceived benefits of online self-disclosure	R141; R255; R249
97	Security Perceived privacy risks in online self-disclosure	R141; R255; R249; R40
98	Willingness to value privacy	R141; R126
99	Belief in privacy	R141; R162
100	Attitudes/privacy concerns in online self-disclosure	R116; R141; R310; R162; R303; R249; R247; R40
101	Consumer perception of the environment in online self-disclosure	R141; R255; R140; R249; R40
102	Presentation and personalization motivations and incentives in online self-disclosure	R141; R155; R126
103	Privacy practices and communications	R141
104	Information selection and delivery structure	R141; R98; R289
105	Characteristics of information in online self-disclosure	R141; R249; R247
106	Disclosure of information online	R141; R249
107	Government and public policy stances on online self-disclosure	R141; R249
108	Product description	R134; R59
109	Matching the goals of the transaction parties	R104
110	Trust transfer	R19; R28; R142; R152
111	Green trust	R243; R19; R255
112	Loyalty	R115
113	Perceived similarity and homogeneity	R255
114	Third-party verification of the platform	R255; R207; R120; R170; R123;
115	The way the seller responds to feedback	R255; R179; R248; R258
116	Seller verification	R255; R91; R123; R207
117	Trusting beliefs	R7; R43; R255
118	Reputation systems	R256; R255; R169
119	Self-presentation of the buyer	R255
120	Characteristics of buyers	R255; R144; R251
121	Self-presentation of the seller	R255; R7; R43; R180; R311
122	Seller characteristics	R255; R251; R187
123	Trust the platform	R255; R123; R154; R189; R312; R230; R291; R88
124	Social capital of the seller	R255; R89; R21; R22; R68
125	Security measures on the platform	R255; R69; R312
126	Beliefs of trust towards society	R255; R51; R45
127	Security risk of misuse of information	R35; R43; R194; R103
128	Security of payment transactions	R98
129	Trustworthiness and perceived integrity of the seller	R69
130	Product quality assessment learning curve	R133
131	Buyer's perceived risk security	R133
132	Supplementary and additional product information (such as advertising)	R133; R138; R209
133	Believability	R182
134	The need to touch the product	R114
135	Display the product in live stream (live broadcast)	R114; R253; R313; R32; R159; R285; R90; R39; R303; R175; R200; R34; R157; R273; R176; R283; R33
136	Resolve uncertainty of delivery	R128; R134; R159; R220; R223; R263; R84
137	Resolving the uncertainty of customer service expectations	R84; R85; R86; R217; R287; R70; R216; R223; R263
138	Resolving the uncertainty of the conformity of the procedures	R17; R85; R86; R119; R159; R284; R295; R84
139	Addressing external uncertainty	R86; R84; R159; R263; R284; R107
140	Resolving uncertainty of inventory	R82; R86; R110; R128; R237; R119; R223; R263; R84

141 Product or package damage management	R86; R110; R84; R221; R84
142 Solving the issue of demand uncertainty	R86; R237; R216; R267; R263; R84
143 Management of international and local shipping cost uncertainty	R215; R213; R84; R2; R107
144 Management of international and local shipping time uncertainty	R215; R221; R213; R65; R84; R98; R107
145 Demand level management	R232; R2; R84
146 Imitation	R42; R64; R93; R236
147 Managing the uncertainty of order handling time	R274; R84
148 Managing labor cost uncertainty	R276; R84
149 Handling the uncertainty of product return	R118; R84
150 Managing order cycle time uncertainty	R221; R65; R2; R84
151 Ability to track the order	R90; R84
152 Security risk of non-availability of the product	R56; R84
153 Customs tariff change management	R231; R118; R84
154 Management of delays in customs clearance	R231; R118; R84
155 Risk management of the unpredictable impact of regulations	R118; R84
156 Management of currency exchange rate uncertainty	R82; R276; R84
157 Self-efficacy	R132
158 Ethnicity and religion	R242; R19; R115; R243
159 Resolve customer concerns	R3; R131; R52; R239; R243
160 Effective interaction and communication	R243; R110; R268
161 Antecedents of trust	R81
162 Trust in intermediaries	R147
163 Restore trust	R214; R19
164 Word of mouth	R19; R13; R149; R69; R113
165 Website design	R125; R19; R147
166 Recommendations	R69; R161
167 Reliable system	R69; R314
168 Situational norm	R81; R243
169 Fit with lifestyle	R39; R31
170 Site stickiness	R254; R196; R315; R238; R227; R129; R100
171 Product endorsements	R77; R200; R300

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