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COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

SOCIAL COMMERCE AND VALUE CO-CREATION:

EVIDENCE FROM A DEVELOPING COUNTRY

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DEPARTMENT OF OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT

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SOCIAL COMMERCE AND VALUE CO-CREATION: EVIDENCE FROM A DEVELOPING COUNTRY

BY

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THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON, IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF A DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN INFORMATION SYSTEMS DEGREE

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this work is the result of my research done under supervision and has not been presented by anyone for any academic award at this or any other university.

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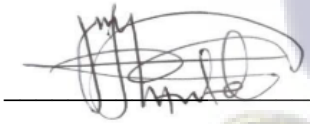

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ABSTRACT

The economic potential of social commerce, an ecosystem of services facilitated by social media and other digital technologies, is apparent, with an estimated 2.46 billion social media users globally and a projected market opportunity of US$ 100 billion by 2030. Despite social commerce's immense financial potential, much more is still uncovered about how value is co-created. Social commerce is critical in Africa because it provides African youth with various jobs and value-creation opportunities. Unfortunately, there is a paucity of academic literature on social commerce value co-creation. Problematising previous social commerce and value co-creation literature reveal three interrelated gaps that need urgent research attention. First, there is arguably a skewed theorisation or lack of theorisation in social commerce research that explains the essential value outcomes of social commerce applications. Second, social commerce research lacks an explanation of the roles that various actors play in the social commerce ecosystem in co-creating value. Third, there is a lack of explanation about the mechanisms that generate value outcomes.

Consequently, this study formulates three research questions. (a) *What are the actors' resources and roles used and played during value co-creation within the social commerce ecosystem of Ghana* (b) *What is the value co-creation mechanisms within the social commerce ecosystem of Ghana?* (c) *What are the forms of value co-created within the social commerce ecosystem of Ghana?* Answering these questions contributes to achieving the research purpose of *developing a framework that explains how value is co-created within Ghana's social commerce ecosystem.*

This study utilises the Service-Dominant Logic to explain the resources and roles of actors, value co-creation mechanisms, and forms of value co-created within the social commerce ecosystem of a developing economy to achieve the research purpose. Furthermore, based on information systems value literature, this study conceptualises the outcomes of value co-creation in social commerce as symbolic value and functional value. The conceptualisations culminate in a research framework explaining how social actors integrate their resources during value co-creation. This study uses a Critical Realism-based qualitative case study of a Ghanaian company in the fashion industry to illustrate how social commerce is used in the co-creation of value. The use of a single case study afforded an in-depth examination of the phenomena that led to the development of a new theoretical framework on value co-creation in the social commerce ecosystem. As an example of a developing economy, Ghana presented an opportunity to look at flexible innovations that can improvise new solutions to fit changing situations rather than sticking to long-term plans.

Concerning the first research question, the findings indicate that social commerce actors performed two distinct roles during social commerce value co-creation; a collaborator role and an affiliate role. These roles are somewhat different from their formal roles and may be classified as Adaptive (i.e., actors who can adjust to changing conditions) or responsive (i.e., actors who perform actions in response to other actors' actions). The findings on the resources used during social value co-creation reveal that different resources are unique and specific to an actor in a social commerce ecosystem. The findings also show how previous studies have assumed that resources are held entirely by the social actor of a service ecosystem, ignoring the resource potential of service platforms, which is the medium of interaction and held by all actors.

Concerning the second research question, previous studies assumed that mechanisms occur at monodic levels and seem to overlook the possibility of value co-creation mechanisms to develop co-creative activities with networked actors. However, this thesis establishes that social commerce value co-creating mechanisms occur at three levels, namely, *Monodic levels, Dyadic levels and Triadic levels.* The monodic levels encompass how a single actor influences the functional processes underlying resource integration in social commerce value co-creation. Secondly, the dyadic levels entail how two social commerce actors influence the functional processes underlying resource integration in social commerce value co-creation. Lastly, the triadic levels concern the causal structures that underpin the functional processes of resource integration by three or more social commerce actors in value co-creation.

Concerning the third research question, this thesis identifies three dynamic and multidimensional co-created value categories: functional, symbolic, and platform value. This categorisation is not mentioned in the value co-creation literature because they assume that value is consistent across purchase, consumption and evaluation for all actors. First, functional value is the benefit of converting assets into tangible (and intangible) value. In this study, three forms of functional value are co-created. These are interactional value, economic value, and physical value. Second, symbolic value (e.g., positive brand image, online social capital, and reputation) is realised from the "signalling effect" of each actor's presence on or affiliation with social commerce platforms. Symbolic value is achieved through experiences that help social commerce actors achieve social integration. The study uncovered three forms of symbolic value: exposure, social, and relationship building. Third, platform value, hitherto absent in the literature, is the unique value offered by the social commerce platform. In precis, the study reveals that, after social commerce actors decide to co-create value, the social commerce platform fosters collaboration and venue for co-creation activities.

This study's originality and contribution to research and practice are as follows. First, this study conceptualises and empirically illustrates a framework that explains various actors' roles in co-creating value within the social commerce ecosystem. Identifying these roles generates a deeper explanation of how actors interact to co-create value. More importantly, this study's explanation of social commerce roles is the discovery of two new actor roles, i.e., collaborator and affiliate, which is unique in social commerce literature.

Second, this study uncovers three value co-creation mechanisms, i.e., co-innovation, value co-seeking, and platform scaling. Hitherto, these remained unexplained. Furthermore, these unearthed mechanisms were identified at three levels: monodic, dyadic, and triadic. Further, this study unearths various forms of how social commerce platforms offer a unique value as "platform value" as a new co-created value beyond the functional and symbolic value reported in IS value literature. Hitherto, existing studies had conceptualised co-created value as either functional or symbolic. Platform value emanating from social commerce platforms is unique because it captures how actors coordinate their collaboration and interactions that facilitate innovation. Further, co-created value can be either be collective or customised. Additionally, there are value creation dependencies which mean value does not just happen it depends on the existence of certain actors and specific resources and processes and sometimes events. Finally, value expands because the social commerce ecosystem, by nature of its integration of actors, resources, and processes, creates a continuous flow of opportunities for the discovery of ideas and relationships which can yield new forms of co-created value.

These contributions have been published in two book chapters conference paper. One manuscript is also under preparation for submission to the International Journal of Information Management, an A* journal in the information systems discipline.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the
Almighty God who saved me,

to
Barbara, my wife,

and to our lovely children
Nicole, Chantelle and Adele

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

There are approximately 2.46 billion social media users globally, with more than 71% of Internet users having some kind of social media account (Statista, 2018). Customers often rely on the reviews and recommendations of social media friends when making purchase decisions (Williams, 2021), the commercial potential for social commerce is apparent. Indeed, recent surveys (eMarketer, 2017) indicate that 8 out of 10 small businesses and 99 per cent of large companies have social media pages, revealing the increasing acceptance and usage of social media by companies. This widespread use of social media means companies have low-cost access to customers (Wang, Greenword, & Pavlou, 2020). As a result, social media has become a significant commercial element in business-to-consumer markets and is increasingly relevant in business-to-business markets. This trend has opened grand opportunities for novel business models such as social commerce.

Presently, social commerce, which is briefly defined as "a form of commerce that is mediated by social media and is converging both online and offline environments" (Wang & Zhang, 2012, p.2), is of global interest, especially in developing countries (DC). For example, in the first quarter of 2018, social commerce orders worldwide averaged $98.66 million, an increase of 200% over the previous year (Statista, 2018). These figures indicate that social commerce is gradually gaining traction, a trend likely to continue over the coming years. Indeed, the Global Social Commerce Market size is projected to reach $948.5 million by 2026 (Wood, 2021).

In response, companies are holding active accounts on social media and conducting social commerce-based transactions (Hu, Dai, & Salam, 2019). Despite the tangible benefits of social commerce, many businesses have reservations about its potential to generate a sufficient return on investments (Li, Wang, & Zhang, 2020; Williams, 2021). Most of these companies cannot generate long-term revenues from their social commerce platforms. Consequently, some of these companies have resorted to viral marketing or advertising on social media sites to generate initial awareness of their products and encourage people to use them (Shareef, Mukerji, Dwivedi, Rana, & Islam, 2019). The possible effect is the potential negative impact on credibility, trustworthiness and lack of value (Chu, 2011; Pelling & White, 2009).

Encouragingly, social commerce through co-creation activities such as resource integration can provide companies with consistent revenue sources and value and spill-over effects for other stakeholders (Yu, Tsai, Wang, Lai, & Tajvidi, 2020). These social commerce value co-creation activities reinforce relationships among stakeholders (suppliers, consumers, and service providers) if effectively managed. As a result, social commerce platforms may assist businesses in leveraging their services to give more value to their customers while also including them in value co-creation (Wang & Zhang, 2012) and allow firms to gain competitive advantage (Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

This potential is a ripe area for future IS research. Already, it has attracted researchers' attention focusing primarily on themes such as social commerce definitions and conceptual models (Busalim & Hussin, 2016; Menon, Sigurdsson, Larsen, Fagerstrøm, & Foxall, 2016; Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016), adoption (Erdoğmuş & Tatar, 2015; Farivar, Yuan, & Turel, 2016; Yahia, Al-Neama, & Kerbache, 2018), risk (Farivar, Turel, & Yuan, 2017), trust and trust performance (Cheng, Gu, & Shen, 2019), biases (Farivar, Yuan, & Turel, 2016) and factors

that influence customer engagement (Busalim, Hussin, & Iahad, 2019; Wongkitrungrueng & Assarut, 2018). These studies though valuable, also highlight several knowledge gaps, three of which are addressed in this study.

There is a proliferation of social commerce sites (Huang & Benyoucef, 2015). As more of these sites emerge, perhaps with various services and different business models, established firms are compelled to enter the area to reap the benefits. Such emerging technologies can disrupt existing business processes, hence the need to carefully align specific organisational goals and strategies. From the preceding, social commerce is very important. More importantly, it is forcing businesses to consider their options carefully. With this background as the backbone of this study, it has become necessary to explain the essential value outcomes of social commerce application. A prime unanswered question is: *What are the actor's resources used and roles during value co-creation within the social commerce ecosystem?*

1.2 Research Problem

Previous social commerce research has focused on themes such as definitions and conceptual models of the social commerce (Busalim & Hussin, 2016; Menon, Sigurdsson, Larsen, Fagerstrøm, & Foxall, 2016; Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016), adoption of (Erdoğmuş & Tatar, 2015; Farivar, Yuan, & Turel, 2016; Yahia, Al-Neama, & Kerbache, 2018), risk (Farivar, Turel, & Yuan, 2017), trust and trust performance (Cheng, Gu, & Shen, 2019), biases (Farivar, Yuan, & Turel, 2016) and customer engagement (Busalim, Hussin, & Iahad, 2019; Wongkitrungrueng & Assarut, 2018). These studies, while relevant, also raise a number of knowledge gaps, three of which are addressed in this study.

First, existing reviews of social commerce research suggest either a skewed theorisation towards adoption or arguably a lack of theorisation in strategic issues in social commerce research (see Han, Xu, & Chen, 2018; Lin, Li, & Wang, 2017). On the one hand, the reviews reveal that theorisation in social commerce has been fixated on arguably non-strategic issues such as user behaviour and web design (see Baethge, Klier, & Klier, 2016; Wang & Zhang, 2012). On the other hand, other reviews call for future research into how social commerce creates value (Lin, Li, & Wang, 2017). Both types of review suggest the need to theorise the strategic issues concerning social commerce. Unfortunately, to date, research continues to theorise social commerce issues using approaches that do not explain the related strategic outcomes of using social commerce. The needed theorisation should explain the essential value outcomes of social commerce applications (Han et al., 2018) and cover all the levels that manifest within the social commerce ecosystem (Gomez-Morantes, Heeks, & Duncombe, 2021).

Second, in explaining the general strategic outcomes of social commerce, and more specifically, the value outcomes, we need research that explains how actors interact to co-create value using social commerce. In other words, we cannot study the outcomes in isolation from the inputs that generate the value outcomes of social commerce. In the social commerce domain, these actors include the organisation, its customers, suppliers, and other relevant business partners. Furthermore, previous studies analyse social commerce as dyadic exchange encounters (Lu, Fan, & Zhou, 2016) in which one firm who is a supplier of service subsequently provides value to a "customer" (Mikalef, Pappas, & Giannakos, 2017a; Yu et al., 2020). These perspectives are consistent with previous assertions that value is created through social and socio-technical actors (Schüritz, Wixom, Farrell, & Satzger, 2019; Wilden et al., 2019). Hence, the organisation needs to manage the various actor roles in a balanced manner to achieve

strategic outcomes that also benefit the organisation and its partners. This reciprocity amongst actors emanates from exchanges between the different actors in the social commerce ecosystem and under diverse conditions (Frow et al., 2014). Unfortunately, no prior studies have attempted to examine how a balanced relationship between actors can be established (Priharsari, Abedin, & Mastio, 2020). Further, as social commerce is mainly technology-driven, future research should consider "*technology* as an actor with its own capabilities" (Priharsari et al., 2020, p.78) to contribute to a better understanding of technology's role in value co-creation. Therefore, future research needs to explain the roles of various actors in the social commerce ecosystems in co-create value.

Third, the interactions of both the social and technological actors in the social commerce ecosystem create an emergence of mechanisms that generate value outcomes. Unfortunately, existing studies have been inconclusive on the latent value creation mechanisms that emerge from the co-creative interactions among ecosystem actors. Thus, there is the need to theorise value co-creation mechanisms. In this regard, Lusch and Nambisan's (2015) question of *how value co-creation occurs* becomes germane, especially within the current social commerce domain. Future studies should thus seek to unearth the mechanisms that emerge from the co-creative actor roles in the social commerce ecosystem.

Fourth, research on developing countries' social commerce is gaining traction in management studies in general and in specific disciplines like strategy, information systems, and marketing (see George et al., 2012). More recent studies of social commerce in developing countries (Jack & Jackson, 2017; Lubua & Pretorius, 2019a; Schoemaker et al., 2022) have drawn attention to the use of social commerce as economic tools and fertile grounds for start-ups by young people because of its ability to create social relationships and maintain existing ones (Zhou, Faulkner,

Wu, & Disalvo, 2020). Hence, offering businesses the opportunities to collaborate with multiple stakeholders to co-create value. Developing countries refer to economies with low absolute, but fast growing gross national per capita income and with generally micro and small businesses (Boateng, 2016; Roztocki & Weistroffer, 2009). Developing countries have two distinct characteristics that distinguish them from developed countries. First of all, these countries are beset with severe resource constraints across board (Prahalad, 2012; Radjou et al., 2012). Finance, skilled labour, technology, water, and energy are all in short supply. A sizable percentage of their citizens are in the informal economy: they are unbanked, have poor, fluctuating incomes, and lack access to clean energy (electricity), excellent education, and healthcare (Ernst et al., 2015). Second, these economies are often deficient in infrastructure and institutions, such as well-functioning capital, labour, and technology markets and courts and efficient bureaucracies (Kahle et al., 2013). Because of these disparities, emerging-market innovations such as social commerce are frequently fundamentally different from those in established economies, which are more frugal, flexible, and inclusive (Radjou et al., 2012).

Furthermore, innovators in emerging markets excel at cost-cutting and resource efficiency because of the scarcity of resources. In addition, innovators have to adapt and devise new solutions to meet changing circumstances rather than clinging to fixed, long-term plans. Finally, because many people live and work outside the formal economy, innovators must constantly consider how their ideas can be inclusive enough to reach such people. While we may have generally perceived service innovation as a phenomenon in developed economies and then spreads to developing ones, we believe that knowledge and insights about service innovation might also move the other way (Barrett, Davidson, Prabhu, & Vargo, 2015). Hence, future research needs to study how firms in emerging economies such as Ghana co-create value using innovations such as social commerce in their resource-poor contexts. This call resonates

with existing calls for research into technology platforms in the existing field of developing economies (Gomez-Morantes et al., 2021).

In summary, this study identifies three knowledge gaps. The first gap is the need to explain the roles and interactions of social commerce ecosystem actors to co-create value (Priharsari et al., 2020, p. 780). The second gap concerns the need to unearth the value creation mechanisms that emerge from the value co-creating interactions between social commerce ecosystem actors (Lusch and Nambisan, 2015). Moreover, future research should unearth such mechanisms within resource-poor contexts (Barrett, Davidson, Prabhu, & Vargo, 2015). The third gap is the need to theorise the strategic issues in social commerce, such as the forms of value co-created in the social commerce ecosystem (Lin, Li, & Wang, 2017). These gaps underlie this study's research propose to explain how value is co-created within the social commerce ecosystem of a developing country.

1.3 Research Purpose

To address the knowledge gaps argued in the research problem, this study employs the Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) to explain the roles and resources of actors, the value co-creation mechanisms, and forms of value co-created within the social commerce ecosystem of a developing economy. These explanations aggregate into a framework that explains how value is co-created within the social commerce ecosystem. Hence the research purpose is as follows.

> *To develop a framework that explains how value is co-created within Ghana's social commerce ecosystem.*

To achieve this purpose, this thesis outlines the research objectives and their related gaps in the next section.

1.4 Research Objectives

Based on the research purpose, and more importantly, to address the research gaps identified, this study formulates three research objectives.

a. *To explain actors' roles and resources during value co-creation within the social commerce ecosystem.*
b. *To explain the value co-creation mechanisms within the social commerce ecosystem.*
c. *To explain the forms of value co-created within the social commerce ecosystem*

The first research objective addresses the need to explain the roles and interactions of social commerce ecosystem actors to co-create value (Priharsari et al., 2020, p. 780). To achieve this research objective, this study draws on Service-Dominant logic to conceptualise a theoretical framework proffering explanations of how social commerce actors act and exchange resources within the ecosystem to co-create value for each other.

The second research objective responds to the need to unearth the value creation mechanisms that emerge from the value co-creating interactions between social commerce ecosystem actors (Lusch and Nambisan, 2015), especially within resource-poor contexts (Barrett, Davidson, Prabhu, & Vargo, 2015). To achieve the second research objective, this study draws on the Service-Dominant logic, which posits three mechanisms, namely *accessing*, *adapting*, *and integrating*, generated during the interactions between ecosystems actors in general and, in this study, between social commerce actors. This pre-conceptualisation further guides the coding and analysis of case study data collected to empirically illustrate this study's research framework.

The third research objective responds to the need to theorise the strategic issues concerning social commerce. Specifically, this response seeks to explain co-created value, a strategic outcome of using social commerce. This focus on co-created value outcomes directly responds to the need for the theorisation of strategic social commerce issues, explaining the essential value outcomes of social commerce applications (Han et al., 2018). To achieve this research objective, this study draws on Grover et al.'s (2018) conceptualisation and categorisation of value into functional and symbolic value. This initial categorisation informs the proposed relationships in this study's theoretical foundations and research framework in Chapter Three. It will be used to guide the coding and analysis of data to unearth the value co-created in the social commerce ecosystem.

1.5 Research Questions

The ensuing research questions are related to the research objectives presented in Section 1.4. to achieve the first research objective, this study poses the first research question, which is:

a. *How do actors in Ghana's social commerce ecosystem co-create value using their resources and roles?*

Similarly, to achieve the second research objective, this study poses the second research question, which is:

b. *How do the forms of co-created value emerge from the interactions among Ghana's social commerce ecosystem actors?*

Finally, to achieve the third research objective, the third research question is posed as follows:

c. *What are the forms of value co-created within the social commerce ecosystem of Ghana?*

1.6 Significance of the study

This study has implications for research, policy, and practice. In terms of research, this study uses the concepts of Service-Dominant Logic to explain how actors in a social commerce ecosystem co-create value. This study proposes a framework for gaining additional insights to aid the understanding of value co-creation by social commerce platforms. The relevance of context-specific theorising in information systems has been highlighted as a critical endeavour in the field of IS (Hong, Chan, Thong, Chasalow, & Dhillon, 2014). With reference to Figure 7.1, this study identifies "affiliate role" as a new form of actor role in social commerce value co-creation activities distinct from ideator, designer, and intermediary roles documented in IS literature. Existing studies had previously focused on actor roles on a dyadic level, concerned with individual customers and their interactions with the firm (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015). Second, with reference to Figure 7.3, this study unearths three value co-creation mechanisms within the social commerce context which were identified at three levels: Monodic, dyadic, and triadic. Thus far, value co-creation mechanisms remained at one level. Furthermore, unearthing this value co-creating mechanisms contributes to the theorisation of the social commerce phenomenon, and completes the process component of the S-D dominant Logic. This significance cannot be overlooked as the study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge in the field of social commerce studies and respond to research gaps, given the sparsity of studies that employed the use of theories

The significance of this research can be viewed from academic, practitioner and policy perspectives. In scholarship discourse, the development of social commerce research, like other fields of study, requires theorization and development of a conceptual framework.

This study's practice contribution lies in the identification of mechanisms and resources that will aid actor collaboration and integration during co-creation of value. The unregulated social media platforms enable transactional businesses without any effort to engage in repeat purchases. This research will also provide adequate findings for Governments as well as other regulatory bodies to formulate policies and laws to govern the use of the internet and also use that as a means of job creation.

1.7 Chapter Outline

Chapter One is the introduction of the research. In this chapter, the background of the research, research problem, and research purpose, objectives of the study, research questions and the organization of the research. Chapter Two presents a review of relevant literature on cybercrime as well as defining key concepts. The gaps in existing research and gaps to be filled by this study is also highlighted in this section. Chapter Three discusses the theoretical foundation of the research as well as the justification for the choice of using the selected theory. The chapter also highlights the assumptions, revisions and criticisms of the theory theory/framework. Chapter four delineates the selected framework in relation to this study and how it addresses the research questions and objectives of the study.

Chapter Five discusses the research methodological approach which highlights the research strategy, paradigm and research design. The instrument for data collection and method used as well as data processing and analysis are discussed in the chapter. Chapter six projects an overview of social commerce in Africa as well as present the findings of the selected cases for this study. Chapter seven deals with the analysis in order to unearth dominant themes arising from the findings in Chapter five as well as discussion of findings to answer the research questions posed in chapter one. Chapter eight discusses the summary of the research,

implications (and recommendations) to research, practice and policy and the future research directions.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Chapter Overview

The previous chapter introduced the background, research problem, objectives, and significance of this research. This chapter begins by exploring the conceptualisation of social commerce and presenting a literature review on social commerce research. The chapter further provides an overview of value co-creation. It ends by indicating gaps that informed the selection of theory, development of the conceptual framework and knowledge contribution to this research.

2.2 Overview of Social Commerce Ecosystem

Our understanding of social commerce as a phenomenon is scattered and limited and sometimes biased by particular views and perspectives (Wang & Zhang, 2012). Consequently, as a nascent phenomenon, social commerce presents scholars with opportunities to study and corroborate various issues to extend theoretical understanding. Social commerce is the use of the internet to exchange, compare, and share information about products and services in the online marketplace and communities (Zhou, Zhang, and Zimmermann, 2013). Further social commerce could be classified as a subset of e-commerce but with emphasis on the use of social media to facilitate online social interaction (Hajli, 2013; Laudon & Traver, 2016; Smith, Zhao, & Alexander, 2013).

The foregoing social commerce conceptualisation, and other summarised in Table 2.1, resonate with Zhang and Benjamin's (2007) I-model for understanding the components of information systems, namely, people, technology, organisation and society, and information. Firstly, Zhang

and Benjamin (2007) posit that people are the principal force and reason for information creation, interaction, commerce and technological advancement. People include users and designers of a given technology. Secondly, organisation and society component of the I-model consists of policies, strategies, management, structures, and cultures. Thirdly, the technology component concerns hardware, software, infrastructure, platforms, and resources. Finally, the information component is concerned with content creation, search processing, dissemination and use.

Within social commerce, first, people include vendors, customers, and members of online communities who engage in commercial exchanges with each via online social media platforms. Second, organisation and society concern the broader community to which these people belong. Some people e.g., vendor belong to institutions or firms and have vested interests within their geographical catchment areas. Third, technology in social commerce concerns the hardware (e.g., servers), software (e.g., programming languages, application programming interfaces, and web browsers) and networks (e.g., the Internet) that allow the capturing, processing, storing and distribution of data and information about commercial exchanges by people on social media. Fourth, information is a direct accompaniment of social commerce exchange activities. People's orders, delivery address information, and billing information.

Beyond the identification of these components, is a noteworthy explanation of how people, information, technology, organisation and society, form an ecosystem characterised by broader goal-oriented interactions. The essence of the ecosystem perspective is the inclusiveness of different actors in the creation of value and the convergence of different interests to pursue the well-being of both individuals and the overall system (Caridà, Colurcio, Spena, &

Kandampully, 2019; Pellicano, Troisi, Tuccillo, & Vesci, 2017). Therefore, social commerce ecosystem refers to a "relatively self-contained, self-adjusting system of resource-integrating actors connected by shared institutional logics and mutual value creation through service exchange" (Vargo & Akaka, 2012, p.207). The ecosystem perspective forms the bedrock of this study.

Table 2. 1 Summary of Existing Definitions of Social Commerce

No.	Reference	Definitions	Suggested I-model Component
1	Curty & Zhang (2011)	The activities by which consumers shop or intentionally explore shopping opportunities by participating and or engaging in a collaborative online support	People, technology
2	Liang & Turban (2011)	E-commerce activities and transactions delivered through social media environment, principally on social networks and by means of web 2.0 software.	Organisation, society, technology
3	Kim (2013)	Social commerce is a subset of e-commerce but uses social media and online media that allows social interaction and user generated content to enhance online purchase experience.	Technology, information
7	Hajli (2013)	A new stream in e-commerce, which encourages the social interaction of consumers through social media.	People, technology
8	Yamakami (2014)	A multi-user-based e-commerce that involves multiple people during an e-commerce transaction.	People, technology
9	Shen & Chen (2017)	Social commerce focuses on social media – supported commercial activities	Technology
11	Stephen & Toubia (2008)	Social commerce is a form of Internet-based "social media" that allows people to participate actively in the marketing and selling of products and services in online marketplaces and communities.	Technology, people, organiation and society
13	Sturiale & Scuderi (2013)	Social commerce is a special kind of e-commerce that allows the interaction between merchants and consumers in a social environment such as Facebook..	People, technology

No.	Reference	Definitions	Suggested I-model Component
14	Smith, Zhao & Alexander (2013)	S-commerce refers to the conduct of e-commerce activities using social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) to aid in encouraging online purchases	Technology
15	Munawar, Head & Hassanein (2017)	Social commerce platforms are e-commerce websites that add social tools to encourage social interactions and sharing	People, organisation and society
16	Hajli, Sims, Zadeh & Richard (2017)	Social commerce is a type of commerce that emerges from the combination of commercial and social activities, being facilitated by Web 2.0 technologies in order to facilitate customer interactivity and content generation	People, technology
17	Laudon & Traver (2016)	Social commerce is e-commerce that is enabled by social networks and online social relationships	Technology, organisation

Source: Author's construct

These conceptualisations of social commerce and the various components raise the need to explore the issues and conceptual approaches used to understand social commerce as an information systems phenomenon. In other words, there is a need to review existing literature to close over-researched areas, and open up new areas for future research. An essential activity of every academic research is the review of relevant literature on the topic (Sofiadin, 2014). A literature review is a procedure that results in knowledge building and expansion (Hui Han, Xu, & Chen, 2018). A literature review is also an effective means to identify gaps, current theoretical developments, potential applications for existing theory, and directions for future research (Eksioglu, Vural, & Reisman, 2009; Lin, Li, & Wang, 2017). The next section shows the methodology used for undertaking this review of social commerce research.

2.3 Methodology for the Review

An inclusion and exclusion criterion ensures that the articles picked are relevant to the study's objectives. Therefore, the keywords "social commerce, s-commerce" and "social commerce value co-creation" were given consideration. Thus, an article was included if, first, it was peer-reviewed (conference papers, doctorate and master thesis, textbooks, and magazine articles were excluded). Second, if it was written about social commerce, both empirically and conceptual papers were considered as long as they met the initial two conditions. Other related terms like social shopping, social e-commerce, social media commerce, collaborative shopping/ commerce and social media marketing were excluded. Table 2.2 below depicts the criteria for this review.

Table 2. 2 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Full text	Incomplete studies
Literature written in English	Not English
Publication between 2006 and 2018	Outside the selected period
Scope of Social Commerce	Duplicated literature

Source: Author's construct

Further, articles included in this review should have been published between 2009 and 2019. This range afforded comparison of this review's findings with those of existing social commerce reviews (see Table 2.4). Data collection was in two stages: the automatic and manual stages. The automatic stage of the review was to classify all primary studies on social commerce. By recommendations of Webster & Watson (2002), articles were obtained from several online academic databases including ScienceDirect, Emerald, EBSCOhost, Online Wiley, Taylor and Francis, and the Association of Information Systems (AIS) Electronic

Library. These databases for part of the top fifty information systems journals sources (Levy and Ellis, 2006).

A total of 150 papers were identified and downloaded during the initial search of the electronic databases. These papers were saved into a folder and uploaded into Mendeley's electronic citation management software. After screening the titles, abstracts and introductions of all the papers using the selection criteria, a total of 120 were found to have met the standard for selection and were used in the study. These papers were summarised according to dominant usage in the social commerce research section, dominant conceptual or theoretical framework and dominant methodological approaches to studying social commerce.

Table 2. 3 Data extraction and Synthesis

Extracted Data	**Criteria**
Year of publication	the year of publishing the paper e.g., 2009
Source	e.g., conference proceedings, Journals
Research Theme	Description of the study, e.g., user behaviour, adoption strategy
Geographic sources	Continents, countries of publications
Data collection Method	e.g., Survey, case study, observation etc.
Methodology	Quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods

Source: Author's Construct

2.4 Previous Social Commerce Reviews

The search for previous social commerce academic research produced four prominent reviews as illustrated in Table 2.4. These reviews reveal that theorisation in social commerce has been fixated on non-strategic issues such as user behaviour and web design (see Baethge, Klier, & Klier, 2016; Wang & Zhang, 2012). Consequently, they call for future research into how social

commerce creates value (Lin, Li, & Wang, 2017), how social commerce actors co-create value, and the essential value co-creation mechanisms that characterise the social commerce ecosystem (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015; Lin, Li, & Wang, 2017)). These calls suggest the need to theorise the strategic issues concerning social commerce. The next section reviews peer-reviewed articles about social commerce with respect to their issues, conceptual approaches and methodologies to discover new areas where research is needed.

Table 2. 4 Summary of Existing Social Commerce Reviews

Number	Review Title and Citation	Publication Outlet	Themes and Suggested Future Research Areas
1	The evolution of social commerce: the people, management, technology, and information dimensions (Wang & Zhang, 2012)	Communications of the Association for Information Systems	How can firms manage co-creating and crowdsourcing strategies to manage the huge amount of content and information in social commerce
2	Social commerce – state-of-the-art and future research directions (Baethge et al., 2016)	Electronic Markets	Research themes include user behaviour, website design, enterprise strategies, social process, adoption strategy, business model, security and privacy policy, network structure, and firm performance
3	Social commerce research: definition, research themes and the trends (Lin, Li, & Wang, 2017)	International Journal of Information Management	Three major themes in social commerce research include organisation, advertisement and word-of-mouth. How social commerce is managed to create generate value.
4	Social commerce: a systematic review and data synthesis (Han et al., 2018)	Electronic Commerce Research and Applications	What are the essential drivers in social commerce applications? How should companies successfully engage in social commerce? Which factors may be more critical for influencing for influencing different consumers' activities in social commerce?

Source: Author's construct

2.5 Dominant Issues in Social Commerce Research

The review classified social commerce into four major themes; *Social, Management, Technology and Information.* Each theme was further classified into sub-themes. Considering challenges associated with classifying schemes in literature because all aspects must be addressed (Senyo, Addae, & Boateng, 2018). Hence, this classification was primarily adopted from four studies with some revisions to represent changes in the literature (Baethge, Klier, & Klier, 2016; Liang & Turban, 2011; Senyo et al., 2018; Wang & Zhang, 2012).

The *social* theme refers to users' adoption space of studies concerning social commerce. The sub-themes on the social are **adoption** which refers intention to use or engage in commercial activities through the social media (Zhang, Lu, Gupta, & Zhao, 2014); **motivational factors**, which relate to what drives participation in the social commerce (Ko, 2018; Lin & Lu, 2011); **cognitive and affective factors**, cognition is the activity of knowing, this implies, the acquisition, organisation and use of knowledge. Furthermore, cognition encompasses both knowledge structures (organisation) and processes (acquisition and use) (Davern, Shaft, & Te'eni, 2012), while Affective, on the other hand, relates to moods, feelings, and attitudes (Chen, Lu, Wang, & Pan, 2019); and **knowledge and expertise,** which refers to papers that investigated the intellectual structure, development, and evolution of social commerce (Cui, Mou, & Liu, 2018). In total, 80 papers (67%) were based on adoption, 21 (18%) were based on motivation, 14 (12%) were based on cognitive and affective), and 5 (4%) were on knowledge and expertise. The social theme indicates the importance of the growing use of social media platforms that empowered users, and the related issues to the adoption and use of social commerce as a new form of e-commerce.

The *technology* theme relates to infrastructure, platforms, applications, resources, and services. The sub-themes are **infrastructure and platforms** that refer to social networking sites such as social media and e-commerce sites (Featherman & Hajli, 2015; Hajli & Featherman, 2017); **resources** refer to resources needed for social commerce to function (Turban, Strauss, & Lai, 2016). In total, 100 papers (83%) were based. On infrastructure and platforms, and 20 (17%) were focused on resource-based. The technology illustrates the evolution of social commerce and its future potential.

The *management* theme relates to structure, strategies, operation and cultures, processes and opportunities for vendors, customers, and other entities generally perceived to benefit from the social commerce (Wang & Zhang, 2012). There are three sub-themes: user behaviour, intention to use, and business strategies**. User behaviour** refers to various social and technical parameters that influence users' roles in social commerce platforms (Angeletou, Rowe, & Alani, 2011; Preece, 2001). **Intention to use** refers to a customer's intention to engage in online buying in the social commerce (Hajli, 2015). **Business strategies** refer to the comprehensive decisions, actions, or plans designed to achieve social commerce goals (Chandler, 1962). As exhibited in Table 2.5 we found 73 papers (61%) to be user behaviour, 35 (29%) to be Intention to use and 12 (10%) to be business strategies. To visualise the development of social commerce studies, the management theme describes the economic value implication of social commerce and the concern of users beyond their need for having fun.

The *Information* theme inclines toward a social purpose with a lifecycle that includes the acquisition or creation, processing, dissemination, and use, emphasising the user-generated content (Wang & Zhang, 2012). The sub-themes include literature reviews and general issues, i.e., articles that do not subscribe to any specific but aim to give a general overview, trends,

and convergent content strategy- this includes different social networks in various social media. In light of our review, ten papers (8%) were related to Literature Review, 78 (65%) were related to general issues, 14(12%) were related to trends, and 18 (15%) were related to convergent content strategies.

Table 2. 5 Dominant Issues in Social Commerce studies

Themes	Sub-Them	Number of Papers	Percentage (%)
Social	Adoption	80	67
	Motivational factors	21	18
	Cognitive and Affective factors	14	12
	Knowledge and Expertise	5	4
	Total	120	100
Management	User Behaviour	73	61
	Intention to use	35	29
	Business strategies	12	10
	Total	*120*	*100*
Technology	Infrastructure and Platforms	100	83
	Resources	20	17
	Total	*120*	*100*
Information	Literature Review	10	8
	General Issues	78	65
	Trends	14	12
	Convergent Content Strategies	18	15
	Total	*120*	*100*

Source: Author's construct

2.6 Dominant Conceptual Approaches in Social Commerce Research

Our analysis of the selected papers reveals that various theories, frameworks, models, and concepts have been used in extant research. A proportion of studies used more than one theory, framework or model; others did not state any identifiable theory, framework, model or concept.

This section discusses the dominant theories/conceptual frameworks used in various social commerce research themes. The knowledge contributed by these frameworks is evaluated, and gaps for future research are identified. The Uses and Gratifications theory (see Osatuyi & Qin, 2018) was a theory employed to study context-specific gratification social commerce users' post-adoption behaviours, including continuance intentions and addictive use. Frameworks included the four-component by Wang and Zhang (2012), used to analyse the various stages of social commerce evolution since 2005. This four-component framework was the basis of an integrated view (see Zhou et al. (2013)) that sought to help understand the development of social commerce research and practice.

Several studies used more than one theory, framework, or model. For example, Farivar, Turel, and Yuan (2018) used the prospect theory and social identity theory to examine the factors that may demotivate or deter the use of social commerce, and examine potential biases in decision-making in social commerce. In another study, Han and Trimi (2017) combined Liang and Turban's (2011) six perspectives of social commerce research, Wang and Zhang (2012)'s four-component framework and Zhou et al. (2013)'s integrated view to propose a comprehensive framework as a guide to the design and evaluation of social commerce. The study particularly, examined how academics and practitioners could design social commerce and assess its performance.

Some studies preferably used models which are less theoretically inspired frameworks instead of theories or theoretical frameworks. For example (Erdoğmuş & Tatar, 2015) used the stimulus-organism- response Model (S-O-R Model) to develop a model explaining how social commerce stimuli affect consumer's cognition, affection and engagement with brands, and ultimately lead to brand trust and purchase intention on social media. It is worth bearing in

mind that other studies sought to conceptualise new models useful in studying social commerce. The first one found in this category is the social commerce adoption model which be useful in investigating the relationships of customers on the Internet and social platforms and customer behaviour (Hajli, 2012). The second one is stages Model which was proposed to help detail the stages in social commerce and to help understand social commerce (Rad & Benyoucef, 2010). Other studies used no framework. For example, Saundage and Lee (2011) summarized the activities of social commerce and suggesting a taxonomy of social commerce strategies. Huang and Benyoucef (2013) also proposed new model and a set of principles to guide social design. It is quite instructive that most of the theories used in social commerce studies are socially related thus stressing the importance of the social character of social commerce relating to people and the outcomes of their decisions on purchases. Additionally, behavioural and Technology Adoption Frameworks such as Technology Adoption Model (TAM), Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), and Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) were the dominant theories used in some of the studies. These studies aim to explain the relationship between social commerce users' attitude and behaviours. Consequently, we argue that many of the studies done in social commerce do not use theories on co-creation. Therefore, is little or no theories in this regard. We posit that there is a need for more theorisation in social commerce value co-creation. Table 2.6 shows the use of theories, frameworks, concepts, and models used in existing research.

Table 2. 6 Dominant Research Frameworks, Models, Theories and Concepts Used

Research Framework	No. of papers	Percentage (%)
Conceptual	8	7
No Framework	10	8
Social Support Theory	4	3
Social Capital Theory	8	7
Uses and Gratification Theory	7	6
S-O-R Model	8	7
Theory of Planned Behaviour	15	13
Technology Acceptance Model	21	18
Social Exchange Theory	12	10
Observational Theory	3	3
Social Network Theory	12	10
Signalling Theory	6	5
New models	6	5
Total	120	100

Source: Author's construct

2.7 Dominant Methodological Approaches to Studying Social Commerce

This section of the review presents the dominant methodologies used in studying social commerce. It is worth noting that the reviewed papers employed known methodologies including quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. 33 papers used a qualitative approach, 10 papers used a mixed method approach, 8 papers used no methodology, 4 papers used Design science while 65 used a quantitative approach. A number of papers adopted a quantitative approach. For example, Mikalef, Giannakos, and Pappas (2017) who built on a theoretical framework to elucidate how user intention to purchase and to spread word-of-mouth (WOM) are influenced by characteristics present on social commerce platforms. Another study who

used a quantitative approach is by Lu, Fan, and Zhou, (2016) who drew on the social presence theory to theorises the nature of social aspect in online SC marketplace. Studies that adopted a design approach include those of Wu, Xu, Mo, and Liao (2015), who studied the factors of social commerce design with application environment and human capabilities. Another example is Friedrich, Overhage, Schlauderer, and Eggs (2015) who proposed a new method to support the selection of multiple complementary social commerce technologies.

Some studies employed a qualitative approach including Cuomo, Mazzucchelli, Chierici, and Ceruti (2020) who investigated the growth of social commerce and the rapid adoption of online communities, and Yu, Tsai, Wang, Lai, and Tajvidi, (2018) whose study proposes a value co-creation circle and explores the key factors for developing a successful value co-creation circle. The study also explores a new perspective of the value co-creation circle in the social commerce environment that allows practitioners to develop a value circulation network externality and value co-creation with customers. It is worth noting that there was a lack of qualitative studies. One reason for this may be due to the nature of the phenomenon where access to users may be limited.

Other studies did not employ any identifiable methodology. For example, Zhou et al. (2013) proposed a research framework for social commerce with an integrated view that is made up of four components: business, technology, people, and information. The frameworks help in understanding the development of social commerce research and report on the preliminary findings from a bibliometric study of academic and industry publications to reveal current trends and research topics. Another study with no identifiable methodology is by Hassan and Toland (2013) who investigated the nature of value creation and co-creation practices in consumer-to-consumer (C2C) and the role of ICT. The study's framework concentrates on four

main elements in co-creation of value; the role of ICT, relationships, actors, and the types of values A probable cause for why these studies are not underpin by research methodology could be that the studies are still conceptual and are only providing insights. Finally, studies which adopted a mixed-method approach (see Wang & Yu, 2017) conceptualized social interactions in social commerce environment in two forms; Word of Mouth (WOM) communication and observing other consumers' purchases, and examined their impact on consumer purchase intention and actual behaviour.

2.8 Research Gaps and Future Research Priorities

The previous section provided evidence of research issues, conceptual approaches and methodologies used in extant social commerce research. This section thus discusses the available evidence in the context of emerging phenomena about social commerce to propose new research areas and theorisation efforts. The proposed gaps relate to two main themes - the adoption of social commerce and the design of social commerce platforms.

2.8.1 Adoption of Social Commerce

There are several studies about consumer intentions, adoption and use of the social commerce (Huang & Benyoucef, 2017; Ko, 2017; Shen et al., 2017). Though these studies are insightful, current phenomena also demand future research to take a new direction. At variance with the fundamental assumptions of these studies that the adoption and use of social commerce are because of personal features and quality of technology could be inaccurate as new adoption factors emerge from other disciples, e.g. service economy (Lai & Luo, 2019). Besides a study of such new factors are along the paths of renowned technology adoption researchers such as Bagozzi (2007), Venkatesh, Davis, and Morris (2007), and Venkatesh, Thong, and Xu (2016), who have called for alternative theoretical exogenous, endogenous, moderating and outcome

mechanisms in information technology adoption research. Future research questions on this topic include the following:

i. *How do users leverage social commerce as a service economy in developing countries?*

ii. *How and why do organisations adopt social commerce?*

2.8.2 Development of Social Commerce

Existing research about social commerce design appears to conform to traditional information systems development. For example, studies such as Lin, Luo, Cheng, & Li (2019), Tang & Zhang (2018), and Wang, Lin, & Spencer (2019) focus on individual organisations as units of analysis, abandoning the larger ecosystems in which these organisations operate. Further, these studies focus on the characteristics of social commerce facilitated by Web 2.0 without considering other entities outside Web 2.0. As posited by Wang and Zhang (2012), the concept of social commerce is broad. It can include activities such as the exchange of ideas, opinions, services, or commodities and pre-, during, and post-transaction activities. It can consist of both online and offline activities. A narrow view of social commerce is problematic, especially in the context described by Wang and Zhang (2012).

Moreover, the concept of service ecosystem and value co-creation (Vargo & Lusch, 2008b) are emerging concepts in IS (Parker, Alstyne, & Jiang, 2017) that challenge existing IS paradigms (Kautz, 2021). In this regard, there is the need for future studies to explore how social commerce transcends organisational boundaries and emphasise concepts such as ecosystems.

Specific future research questions on this theme may include

i. *What are the affordances and constraints of social commerce ecosystem that contribute to value creation?*

ii. *How does social commerce ecosystem disrupt traditional markets?*

2.8.3 Actor Roles in Value Co-creation in Social Commerce

The preceding evidence also suggests that we need research that explains how actors interact to co-create value using social commerce. In other words, we cannot study the outcomes in isolation from the inputs that generate the value outcomes of social commerce. In the social commerce domain, these actors include the organisation, its customers, suppliers and other relevant business partners. Furthermore, previous studies analyse social commerce as dyadic exchange encounters (Lu et al., 2016). On the one hand, this set of multiple actors requires a configuration of value co-creation actions.

On the other hand, actors participate in the value co-creating process (Ceccagnoli, Forman, Huang, & Wu, 2012; Smedlund, 2012). This expectation is consistent with previous assertions that value is created through interactions of both social and socio-technical actors of information systems developments and digital platforms (Schüritz, Wixom, Farrell, & Satzger, 2019; Wilden et al., 2019). The social actor offers significant insights into how human behaviour influences service provision and resource integration. Simultaneously, the socio-technical actor provides insights into the nature of interaction within the service ecosystem. Hence, the organisation needs to manage the various actor roles in a balanced manner in order to achieve strategic outcomes that also benefit the organisation and its partners. This reciprocity amongst actors emanates from exchanges between the different actors in the social commerce ecosystem and under diverse conditions (Frow et al., 2014). Unfortunately, no prior studies

have attempted to examine how a balanced relationship between actors can be established (Priharsari et al., 2020, p. 780). Further, as social commerce is mainly technology-driven, future research should "consider *technology* as an actor with its own capabilities" (Priharsari, Abedin, & Mastio, 2020) to better understand technology's role in value co-creation. Therefore, future research needs to explain the roles of various actors in the social commerce ecosystems in co-create value.

2.8.4 Value Co-creation Mechanisms in Social Commerce

The interactions of both the social and technological actors in the social commerce ecosystem create an emergence of mechanisms that generate value outcomes. Unfortunately, existing studies have been inconclusive on the latent value creation mechanisms that emerge from the co-creative interactions among ecosystem actors. Thus, there is the need to theorise value creation mechanisms. In this regard, Lusch and Nambisan (2015)'s question of how value co-creation occurs becomes germane, especially within the current social commerce domain. Future studies should thus seek to unearth the mechanisms that emerge from the co-creative actor roles in the social commerce ecosystem.

2.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter has given an overview of social commerce and its components and outlined the various definitions to conceptualise it correctly for this doctoral research. The chapter continued by undertaking a review of literature on extant social commerce research to facilitate the advancement of knowledge, reveal new research areas, and explain value co-creation. Based on the review presented in the chapter, the dominant research issues, theoretical approaches, and research methodologies were uncovered. Concerning research issues, four themes were found – social, technology, management, and information. Further, some research

gaps and questions that came to mind were discussed. This study thus selects three gaps to offer empirical and theoretical responses. In summary, this study identifies three knowledge gaps.

The first gap is the need to explain the roles and interactions of social commerce ecosystem actors to co-create value (Priharsari et al., 2020, p. 780). The second gap concerns the need to unearth the value creation mechanisms that emerge from the value co-creating interactions between social commerce ecosystem actors (Lusch and Nambisan, 2015). Moreover, there is a need for future research to unearth such mechanisms within resource-poor contexts (Barrett, Davidson, Prabhu, & Vargo, 2015). The third gap is the need to theorise the strategic issues in social commerce such as the forms of value co-created in the social commerce ecosystem (Lin, Li, & Wang, 2017). These gaps underlie this study's research propose to explain how value is co-created within the social commerce ecosystem of a developing country.

The next chapter presents the theoretical foundations of this doctoral study and also formulates a research framework.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

3.1 Chapter Overview

The previous section revealed a number of research gaps. That being said, it is important that research efforts to fill these gaps must be guided by theoretical foundations that motivate the organisation of the social commerce ecosystem, the venue for the service exchange, the very process of the value co-creation, also explain the mechanisms and how digital technologies shape the process. This chapter, therefore, begins with a discussion of the inadequacies of previous theoretical approaches used in social commerce value co-creation, to justify the need for a new framework that explains the value co-creation in a social commerce ecosystem. The study draws on the S-D Logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) to develop a framework that explains how value is co-created within Ghana's social commerce ecosystem.

3.2 Overview of Value Co-Creation

Value co-creation is a participative process between multiple actors integrating their resources (Mikalef, Pappas, & Giannakos, 2017b; Diah Priharsari, Abedin, & Mastio, 2020). In S-D logic, all actors are both service beneficiaries and value proposers (Kjellberg, Nenonen, & Thome, 2018). As a result, service exchange is viewed as an actor-to-actor exchange (Vargo & Lusch, 2011). Consequently, Wieland, Koskela-Huotari, and Vargo (2016) assert that all social and economic actors are primarily engaged in the same activity: integrating resources to co-create value. This conception of actors implies they do not have pre-fixed roles such as sellers or customers (Vargo & Lusch, 2011b). This actor conceptualisation creates opportunity for a diverse group of actors including inanimate objects such as service platforms (Storbacka, Brodie, Böhmann, Maglio, & Nenonen, 2016).

The central premise of S-D Logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2016) is that value co-creation takes place when actors integrate their resources and exchange services, which is enabled and constrained by shared institutions among multiple actors (Corsaro & Mattsson, 2019). The role of institutions and institutional arrangements in S-D logic seeks to provide insights into the mechanisms of coordination, collaboration, and cooperation among actors involved in value co-creation processes in a service ecosystems (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). Vargo & Lusch (2016) observes that as a result of this a dynamic, nested, and overlapping service ecosystems emerge, providing the context for further value co-creation.

The process of value co-creation is coordinated through institutions - not referring to organisations, but to actor-generated rules, norms or regulations (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). These institutional arrangements enable resource integration. Resource integration and reciprocal service exchange cocreate value, always experienced uniquely and determined by the beneficiary (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). In other words, when the service ecosystem is adopted as the unit of analysis, all actors are both providers and beneficiaries.

3.3 Theoretical Review of Value Co-Creation in Information Systems

Existing research provides a myriad of approaches to value co-creation. In an attempt to determine the essence of the concept with some degree of certainty, these approaches embrace diverse characteristics, while others are implied (Saarijärvi, Kannan, & Kuusela, 2013). The pluralism of contributions has led to the complexity of definitions, perceptions, and conceptualisation of the concept. A general characteristic of most current approaches to value co-creation is the shift towards a broader perspective on value creation. Conventionally, there is a prevalence of goods-dominant logic or product orientation approaches (Vargo & Lusch,

2004a, 2016). However, Normann and Ramirez (1993) had espoused the shortfalls of the existing marketing theory to explain value creation. They intimated that "traditional thinking about value is grounded in the assumptions and the models of an industrial economy" and defined by the view that marketing is a value-adding activity as espoused by Porter (1985). Hence, they postulated that value should be considered with respect to the value-creating system itself, where different actors (suppliers, partners, and customers) work together to co-create value (see Chapter 2.6 for the definition of value co-creation).

Value co-creation has become a promising theoretical direction for the IS discipline (see Kohler, Fueller, Matzler, & Stieger, 2011; Nambisan & Nambisan, 2008) because of the increasing interest in value facilitating properties of digital technologies and infrastructures (Autio & Thomas, 2019). In IS research value co-creation is defined by the processes and activities that underlie resource integration and incorporate different actor roles in the service ecosystem. Current IS research provides a multitude of approaches to value co-creation. While these studies have predominantly focused on the effect of information technology (IT) on value co-creation (Schreieck, Wiesche, & Krcmar, 2017), they have also highlighted the various characteristics fundamental to understanding an immensely varied yet cohering domain (Zwass, 2010). These theoretical approaches inform the measurement of co-created value. From Table 3.1, three themes are common to various studies of value cocreation in IS research; customer experience and competence, S-D Logic, and service innovation.

Table 3. 1 Summary of Theoretical Approaches in Existing Value Co-Creation Research

Focus	Context/ Technology	Perspective	Source
New product development	Social media	Organisational Learning and social capital	Zhang, Gupta, Sun, & Zou (2019)
Real value creation	Data – driven services	Joint spheres	Schüritz et al. (2019)
Value co-creation in established companies	IT Platform	Openness and collaboration	Schreieck & Wiesche (2017)
Service Innovation	Tripartite framework of service innovation	Service-dominant logic	Lusch & Nambisan (2015)
Information systems effectiveness	Information technology service management	Service dominant logic	(Winkler & Wulf, 2019)
Value co-creation in Business-to-business	ERP systems	Resource-based View	(Sarker, Sarker, Sahaym, & Bjørn-Andersen, 2012)
Leveraging social media	Social media	Technology affordance theory	(Wang et al., 2016)
Branding co-creation	Social media	S-O-R	(Kamboj, Sarmah, Gupta, & Dwivedi, 2018)
Purchase Intentions	Social Commerce	Trust and Value co-creation	(Mikalef, Pappas, et al., 2017b)
Business value of IT supply chain	Supply chain management systems	Resource-Based view	(Jiang & Zhao, 2014)
Enablers and constraints in value-cocreation	Online communities	Value co-creation	(Diah Priharsari et al., 2020)
Co-creation behaviour	Social networks	Grounded in SDL, Informed by S-O-R	(Bidar, Watson, & Barros, 2016)
Cyber security	Social media	S-D Logic/ Belief-behaviour framework	(Hu, Wang, Chih, & Yang, 2018)
Service design and open innovation	Business ecosystems	Mapping study	(Annanperä & Markkula, 2016)

Source: Author's construct

The *user experience and competence* theme (e.g. Kohler et al., 2011; Mikalef, Pappas, et al., 2017) relates to studies whose foundational perspectives relate to the work of Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2000a, 2004b), who advocates for a rethink of the role of the customer in value creation and employing a co-opting customer competence as a competitive strategy (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000). In this regard, customers are not regarded as "passive audience" but "active co-producers". The studies captured in this theme are categorised into three streams.

The first stream consists of studies on why customers should participate in the provision of service, albeit from the firm's perspective (Dong, Evans, & Zou, 2008); examples include the work of Kohler et al. (2011). The rationale for these streams are exclusively economic (Bendapudi & Leone, 2003). The second stream focuses on managing customers as a "partial employees" (Dong et al., 2008). This second stream is in the context of customer socialisation postulated by Claycomb, Lengnick-Hall, and Inks (2001), who proposed that organisational socialisation increases as customers participate more actively in service provision. The third stream relates to customer motivation to co-create a service (Dong et al., 2008). Examples in such streams include the work of Kamboj et al. (2018) examined the antecedents of branding co-creation, including social networking sites (SNS) participation motivations, customer participation, and brand loyalty in social media communities.

The second theme focuses on *S-D Logic*. There are three streams under this theme that call for a changing marketing management theory's perspective from products to services and from customers to co-creators (Lusch & Vargo, 2014; Vargo & Lusch, 2004a). The first stream under this theme is the role of the customer evolving to an S-D Logic which means a shift from designing relevant products to understanding the potential for co-creating relationship experiences (Payne, Storbacka, & Frow, 2008). Examples include Xie, Wu, Xiao, and Hu

(2016). Further, Norman and Ramirez (1993) argued that "the key to creating value is to co-produce offerings that mobilise customers" in others, letting customers get the customer involved with the offerings. In the context of S-D Logic, the customer is an active player who can co-develop and personalise their relationships with suppliers and adopt many different roles. The second stream is the process and resources for consumption experience; this can be characterised as the customer involvement (Matthing, Sandén, & Edvardsson, 2004), which consists of activities or processes of customer involvement in new product and service development (see Zhang et al., 2019).

The third theme, service innovation (e.g. Annanperä & Markkula, 2016; Lusch & Nambisan, 2015), hinges on the ability of the firm to migrate into the sphere of the "customer experience management" (Dong et al., 2008). The implication of this migration is the creation of long-term emotional bonds with their customers. In summary, value co-creation is informed from various theoretical perspectives.

The S-D Logic perspective seems to be dominant based on the studies reviewed. The studies using the S-D Logic perspective emphasise the importance of value co-creation for the growth of all businesses, whereby the customer creates value using resources provided by companies (Galvagno & Dalli, 2014). The interaction between the firm and the customer is considered the basis of these studies. Further, from the Information systems perspective, the interaction between the firms and customers, mediated by technological platforms, leads to innovation (Barrett, Davidson, Prabhu, & Vargo, 2015).

However, these studies rarely problematised how digital technologies shape value co-creation in an ecosystem, the interaction triggers, the type of resources and functions of the resources.

Further, they ignore the specific context of social commerce as an ecosystem an important element that enables companies, customers, and other stakeholders to interact. These are relevant knowledge gaps.

3.4 Service-Dominant Logic

Service-Dominant Logic (S-D Logic) is a metatheoretical framework that identifies service (typically singular) - the process of using one's resources to benefit another actor – as the premise of economic (social) exchange, rather than goods (Vargo & Lusch, 2019). Thus, goods are service-delivery mechanisms (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). The core tenet of S-D Logic is about value co-creation, a multi-actor process that occurs in networks where resources develop and originate from multiple actors (Böhm, Neumann, & Gassmann, 2017; Vargo & Lusch, 2016).

The overarching summary of S-D Logic is about actors integrating resources with the purpose of co-creating value through the exchange of service in embedded and overlapping ecosystems that are coordinated through institutions generated by the actors (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). Aside from this summary, an essential quality of S-D Logic is that it seeks to identify and understand distinct commonalities between concepts rather than differences (Koskela-Huotari & Vargo, 2019).

Further, Koskela-Huotari and Vargo (2019) suggest four attributes of the S-D Logic research viewpoint: *transcending*, *unifying*, *accommodating*, and *transformative*. The authors argue that these attributes may make S-D Logic valuable in fostering transdisciplinary research by providing a shared, generalisable language that may reconcile diverse notions and models and inspire new ideas in academics and practitioners. First, S-D Logic is *transcending*, which

means it can resolve some of the conflicts and contradictions associated with the goods-dominant logic, such as the goods-services split. Second, S-D Logic has the potential to be *unifying* in that it gives a vocabulary and a metatheoretical framework that promotes a focus on the common denominators of concepts rather than their distinctions and, therefore, connects previously disparate conversations. Third, S-D Logic is *accommodating* in its approach, allowing for collaboration with and continued development from various research streams. Fourth, S-D logic has *transformative* potential because it enables understandings that a G-D logic perspective would not allow (Koskela-Huotari and Vargo 2019).

3.3.1 Foundational Concepts of S-D Logic

Proponents of the S-D Logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) have pointed out that the S-D Logic's basic principles address five foundational concepts: actors, service, resources, value, and institutions (Vargo & Lusch, 2019).

3.3.2 Actors

S-D Logic avoids generally accepted descriptors such as 'consumers', 'producers', 'suppliers' and other role-specific terms. Instead, the more neutral, generic term 'actor' is preferred (Vargo & Lusch, 2011). Conceptualising actors in S-D Logic literature has been changed from an earlier distinction between 'the customer' and 'the firm' (Kjellberg, Nenonen, & Thomé, 2019). The conceptualisation has moved on from various categories to the present S-D Logic's actor-to-actor viewpoint of service exchange (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015; Vargo & Lusch, 2011). This viewpoint perceives all actors as generic (Vargo & Lusch, 2011a). In other words, actors do not have predefined roles like consumers or producers in S-D Logic. This is because all stakeholders are generally concerned with value co-creation activities, i.e., service provisioning

and resource integrating (Fujita, Vaughan, & Vargo, 2018). Essentially, actors are associated with their roles and the situations in which they find themselves within the ecosystem.

Although classical conceptualisation envisages actors performing the same value co-creation activities (Satoru Fujita et al., 2018), actors, in general, do have the capability to engage in other activities aside from what they do in the service ecosystem (Lusch & Vargo, 2014). Therefore, they can adapt to new environments and extend the service ecosystem. Notably, the actors' capabilities become apparent from the interactions of the actors. Furthermore, actors in a particular service ecosystem do not have similar interests, and an ecosystem may not be controlled or understood by one actor (Löbler, 2019). The term 'actor' implies that entities can act independently, i.e., actors have agency. However, institutions (e.g., norms, values, laws, and conventions) can constrain their actions (Vargo & Lusch, 2011b; Vargo & Akaka, 2012).

3.3.3 Value

Value is the reason for exchange (Polese, Pels, Tronvoll, Bruni, & Carrubbo, 2017). Lusch and Vargo (2014) assert that value is a measure of benefit or an increase in an actor's well-being. An indication that value is actor specific, and each occurrence of value creation are contextually unique. As a result, value is experiential, holistic, and influenced by the availability, integration and use of other resource combinations, exchanges and interactions with other actors (Vargo & Lusch, 2019). This means that value is always co-created (Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Vargo & Lusch, 2016).

3.3.4 Service

During value co-creation, service (usually singular) is generally exchanged (Vargo, Maglio, & Akaka, 2008). Service in S-D Logic is not the same as services (plural) in the traditional G-D Logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Thus, service from the perspective of S-D Logic is conceptualised as the application of resources, such as knowledge and skills, by one party for the benefit of another or oneself (Lusch & Vargo, 2014; Vargo & Lusch, 2019).

3.3.5 Institutions

Institutions are rules, norms, meanings, symbols, and similar aids of communication, collaboration, and decision-making established by actors that enable value co-creation (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). Institutions from the perspective of Logic are mainly observed as part of broader institutional arrangements that are interconnected assemblages of institutions that support coordination mechanisms for resource integration, service exchange as well as value creation activities (Edvardsson, Skålén, & Tronvoll, 2012; Tronvoll, 2017; Vargo & Lusch, 2016).

3.3.6 Resources

S-D Logic proponents contend that resources are the source of service provision. Activities in the service ecosystem include allocation and engagement of resources. Resources are anything an actor can draw on to increase value (Lusch & Vargo, 2011; Vargo & Akaka, 2009). The resources can be tangible or intangible and classified as *operand or operant* according to S-D Logic (Lusch & Vargo, 2006). Operand resources are considered as potential resources that require other resources to act on them to produce value. In contrast, operant resources can act on operand resources to create value (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015). Therefore, operand resources are enablers or facilitators, while operant resources are the initiators or actors. Furthermore,

Operand resources are often considered tangible and static. Operant resources, on the other hand, are often dynamic and intangible and are also regarded as the most defining resource, often difficult to transfer, therefore a source of competitive advantage (Edvardsson, Kleinaltenkamp, Tronvoll, McHugh, & Windahl, 2014; Lusch & Nambisan, 2015). Examples of operant resources include human skills, physical and mental.

Furthermore, the most basic operant resource is knowledge and the technology it develops (Capon & Glazer, 1987; Lusch & Nambisan, 2015). Lusch and Nambisan (2015) opine that technology is the practical application of knowledge. Hence, technology, innovation and service are closely connected; this assertion is developed from the socio-material practice perspective of service espoused by Orlikowski and Scott (2015). Technology enables the creation of value networks such as social commerce ecosystem which facilitates the sharing and integration of resources.

3.5 The Meta- theoretical Foundations of S-D Logic

Based on the purpose of this doctoral thesis, we aim to incorporate three elements of the meta-theoretical foundations of S-D Logic; firstly, as an emergent A2A structure that social commerce actors construct and employ, service ecosystems provide an organising logic for the actors to exchange service and co-create value. Secondly, *service platforms* as social commerce platforms are a platform for service exchange whose efficiency and effectiveness are enhanced through resource liquefaction and increased resource density. Finally, value co-creation signals the mechanisms that support the underlying roles and processes, as viewed by both the service provider and the consumer through resource integration. Next section discusses the meta-theoretical foundations and indicates related concepts in IS discipline.

3.5.1 Service Ecosystem

To fully understand the complex nature of value co-creation, S-D Logic introduced the concept of the service ecosystem (Vargo & Lusch, 2011b, 2014a). As actors specialise in service exchanges, the systemic dependencies and interdependencies among them generate the emergence of complex exchange systems (Chandler & Vargo, 2011; Vargo & Lusch, 2011a). This development has led to the introduction of the service ecosystem perspective (Ng & Wakenshaw, 2018). S-D Logic uses the term "ecosystem" to identify these systems because it characterises the interaction between actor-environment and energy flow. Specifically, the term service ecosystem is applied to identify the particular kind of critical flow-mutual service provision (Vargo & Lusch, 2016).

Service ecosystems are, therefore, defined by Vargo and Lusch (2017, p 48) as a "relatively self-contained self-adjusting systems of resource-integrating actors connected by shared institutional logics and mutual value creation through service exchange". This definition emphasises the importance of rules, norms, and beliefs that enable or constrain interaction encapsulated in the word institutions and a group of interrelated institutions encapsulated in the phrase *institutional logic* (Williamson, 2000). In IS research, service ecosystems have been defined as a logical collection of services in which several parties or actors ensure the livelihood of the ecosystem (Khadka, Saeidi, Jansen, Hage, & Helms, 2011) and sets of principles to facilitate resource integration and ultimately co-creation of value. The ecosystem elements are: first, structural flexibility and structural integrity. Structural flexibility relates to the numerous ways of grouping participants in a network to adapt to various chances (Britto, 2001) and the ease with which different compositions of actors can act in the ecosystem amidst new environmental stimuli and competitive pressure to create value opportunities. For instance,

value co-creation can happen between two actors without the implicit involvement of a lead actor.

While Structural integrity relates to the linkages or relationships that hold the many actors together in a network (Kujala, Lehtimäki, & Pučėtaitė, 2016; Lewicki & Brinsfield, 2009) from the perspective of the S-D Logic, the social and economic actors are bound together by a trinity of resources: competencies, relationships, and information (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015). Second, the ecosystem has ***structural integrity*** because each social or economic actor has competencies (used to provide service to others), relationships (with other others), and information that is shared through common standards and protocols (Lusch et al., 2007; Normann & Ramirez, 1993; Vargo & Lusch, 2004a). In the social commerce ecosystem, both structural flexibility and structural integrity are essential because while structural flexibility allows social commerce actors to have agency, structural integrity enables the structures to that are created to make the actors more engaged and tied to one another to function correctly (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015).

Third, a service ecosystem's cognitive distance and common worldview must be self-adjusting (Lusch et al., 2010). This usually happens when actors, on their own accord, sense and respond to their continued market relevance and viability. This situation results from more content being digitised, enabling easier sharing of information among actors, which helps them gain a competitive advantage. However, it is always a challenge to achieve such capabilities in an ecosystem because of the cognitive distance among actors (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015). Therefore, the diverse actors need a shared institutional logics (Storbacka et al., 2012; Wang & Zhang, 2012) which will allow them to attain a shared perspective of their environment, i.e. adopt a shared worldview. Thus, a shared worldview ensures that actors in the service

ecosystem can interpret resource integration opportunities coherently and collaborate quickly to exchange or integrate resources (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015).

Fourth, concerning the ***architecture of participation***, a service ecosystem provides an architecture of participation that clarifies how collaborative value co-creation occurs (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015). In other words, the architecture of participation describes the method and procedure by which various actors converge and engage in service exchange, as well as the mechanisms by which participants' contributions are coordinated, integrated, and synchronised in a consistent manner (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015; Nambisan & Sawhney, 2007).

Lusch and Nambisan (2015) stated that there are two essential aspects of the architecture of participation. The first is to put in place transparent rules of trade to facilitate the contributions of actors and their interactions. The second has to do with defining how actors will derive value from the transaction (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015). Available options could include establishing different types of incentive schemes or communal schemes of sharing the value among the actors.

3.5.2 Service Platform

A service platform is a modular structure made up of tangible and intangible components that facilitate interactions of actors and resources, exploit resource liquefaction and improve resource density (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015). Hence, service platforms facilitate daily service exchanges of actors. Service platforms originally from product research have been primarily based on the productisation of the service (Bask, Lipponen, Rajahonka, & Tinnilä, 2010; Löfberg & Åkesson, 2018; Pekkarinen & Ulkuniemi, 2008). Consequently, firms divide service platforms into modules for their benefit rather than co-created value. This

conceptualisation of service platforms created a means for firms to develop, organise, and provide modularised service offerings (Pekkarinen & Ulkuniemi, 2008). From the viewpoint of S-D logic, service platforms serve as a structure that shapes the ease with which actors can access various resources for resource integration and, as a result, value co-creation. Therefore, service platforms encompass two components; (i) the architecture of participation, which is also known as the modular architecture - the nature of which shapes how well service platforms leverage resource liquefaction and enhance resource density for value co-creation, (ii) the rules (protocols) of exchange.

Three types of modular architecture exist in literature (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015). First, in simple modular architecture, all the components are from a single functional design hierarchy and, as such have a fixed product boundary that is product-specific (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015). Second the layered architecture, in which each layer corresponds to a distinct design hierarchy, resulting in various components spanning several levels not being restricted by a single product, i.e. they are product agnostic (Gao & Iyer, 2006; Yoo, Henfridsson, & Lyytinen, 2010). Third, layered-modular architecture is a hybrid between the simple modular architecture of a physical product and the layered architecture of the digital technology (Adomavicius, Bockstedt, Gupta, & Kauffman, 2008; Hylving & Schultze, 2013; Yoo et al., 2010). As a result, each layer is linked to a different design hierarchy (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015).

Exchange rules (protocols) provide a set of rules for the indirect exchange and integration (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015). Value co-creation is affected by the rules or protocols (i.e. how the actors interface). In other words, in the design of the service platform, if the rules of engagement are clearly specified and the ability to interface is open, the service platform will support a greater degree of resource integration. The role of IT here is basically to implement

the acceptable behaviours and guide the interactions between actors and resources for service exchange.

3.5.3 Co-creation of Value

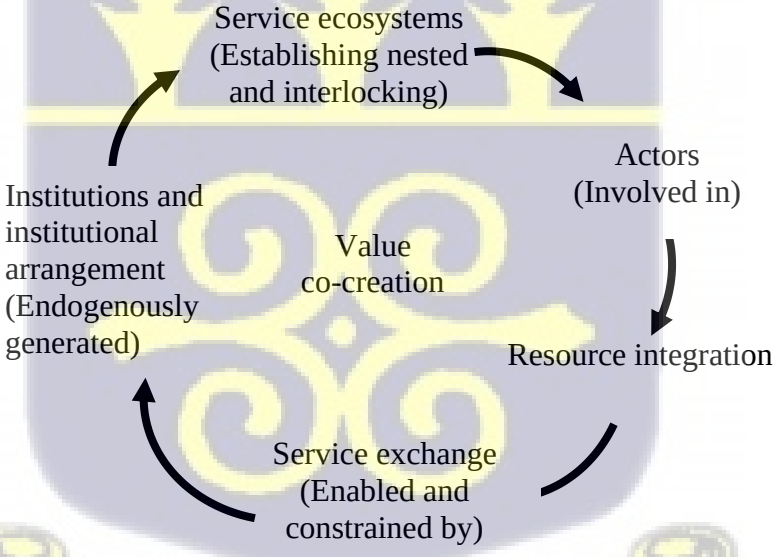
The service ecosystem view helps communicate an S-D logic narrative of value co-creation, which is the main focus of service-dominant logic. The term "value co-creation" was coined by Kambil, Ginsberg and Bloch (1996) to highlight customers' role in business strategy and marketing. Subsequently, there have been various definitions by authors. For example, Grönroos (2012) defined value co-creation as a function of interaction when customers create value in use. On the other hand, Field Lusch, Vargo and Wessels (2008) note that value co-creation occurs when a "potential resource is turned into a specific benefit". These definitions do not seem to mention the role of multiple stakeholders in the creation of value. This doctoral study adopts the definition of Barile and Saviano (2013), in which value co-creation suggests that multiple actors engage in the same process for mutual benefit from different perspectives.

The narrative of multiple stakeholders is important because it emphasises the critical concept of 'co' in value co-creation. Thus, value co-creation implies a temporal cycle of actors integrating resources, providing mutual services and co-creating holistic value. These mechanisms are meaning-laden experiences nested within and overlapping service ecosystems, governed and evaluated through their institutional arrangements (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). This perspective of value creation is premised on the notion that value is inherently derived and determined through an experience created in tandem with or use of an offering or value proposition in a particular context (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004b; Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008a; Vargo et al., 2008). In other words, value is collaboratively created through integrating resources (both tangible and intangible) and uniquely determined through customers'

experiences (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004b; Vargo & Lusch, 2004a). Thus, a firm does not control and define value; instead, customers do as they use products and services. The firm can only propose value and participate in bringing it to fruition (Akaka, Vargo, & Lusch, 2012).

The preceding contributes to the development of a value co-creation narrative. The story, on the other hand, is not a one-time event; instead, it is a continuous story of actors interacting and exchanging that unfolds over time as actors integrate their resources, reciprocally provide service, and co-create value through holistic meaning-laden experiences on nested and overlapping service ecosystems, governed and evaluated through their institutional arrangement. The narrative and process of S-D Logic are represented in Figure 3.3.

Figure 3. 1 Value Co-creation Ecosystem



Source: Vargo and Lusch (2016)

The elements of the loop can be described as follows. Actors can be social or economic (Lusch & Vargo, 2006) who do not have predesignated roles such as customer, supplier etc. (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). Actors are also considered as resource integrators in S-D logic (Vargo & Lusch,

2008). Resources are conventionally seen as the "inputs" to the "production process"; however, the services rendered by the resources are considered as the "input" of the value co-creation process (Hunt, 2000b). The fundamental processes at this phase are learning decisions and resource integration.

From the view of S-D Logic **resource integration** refers to how actors integrate and transform micro-specialised competencies into complex services needed in the marketplace to perform a particular service ecosystem function that benefits a specific actor in the service ecosystem (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). In addition, Payne et al.(2008) intimate that resource integration describes a continuous process, a process described as " a series of activities performed by an actor" for the benefit of another, which is conceptually aligned with a service; that is, the application of specialised competences (knowledge and skills) through deeds, processes, and performances for the benefit of an entity or the entity itself. Actors get resources through service exchange from companies, private (families, friends, etc.) or public.

Service exchange refers to the exchange of application of competencies by actors (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015). Further value co-creation is coordinated through actor-generated institutions and institutional arrangements (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). Institutions here refer to rules, norms, meanings, symbols, and practices that help with collaboration, while institutional arrangements refer to interdependent assemblages of institutions. Institutions and institutional arrangement let the actors perform activities.

3.6 Justification for Choosing Service-Dominant Logic

This section discusses the suitability of S-D Logic to examine how value is co-created in a social commerce ecosystem. First, the concept of S-D Logic is fit to examine how social

commerce platforms co-create value in the social commerce ecosystems because various researchers have suggested it for providing a comprehensive and broader perspective than traditional theories about service and exchange (Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Vargo & Akaka, 2012), this is because S-D Logic views services as the basis of all exchange. Furthermore, the S-D Logic approach to service ecosystems includes exchanging tangible and intangible resources, and value creation processes are highlighted instead of the output (Vargo & Akaka, 2012).

S-D Logic has an ecosystem view that considers the service system as an emergent, dynamic network of interacting actors. This view of S-D Logic bodes well with various systems theories (see Badinelli et al., 2012; Ng et al., 2012), which offers a conceptual foundation for the service ecosystem to be perceived as a "network of agents and interactions that integrate resources for value co-creation (Ng et al., 2012). This view permits researchers to theoretically frame social commerce as a service ecosystem, which comprises different actors with different resources who integrate these resources to co-create value.

S-D Logic describes the concept of value co-creation as the value created through interaction and beneficial relationships, enabling us to describe and investigate the perceived interaction and relationship within and among the ecosystem. Consequently, it should guide the type of resources and how these resources are integrated and exchanged for service. Further, within S-D Logic, a different service system engages in exchange with other service systems to improve its own situation by improving the status of others. However, value co-creation is not just about the activities and resources but also about the process, rules and protocols of value creation. Therefore, S-D Logic will enable us to understand the diverse and dynamic sets of rules and protocols in a service ecosystem like a social commerce ecosystem.

3.7 Extending Service-Dominant Logic

Despite the S-D Logic's potential fit with the study's objectives; six major limitations have to be acknowledged but discussed as grounds for potential contributions from the study. The first limitation is that previous scholarly studies that use S-D Logic to understand value co-creation in the IS field (e.g. Scherer, Wünderlich, & Von Wangenheim, 2015; Ye & Kankanhalli, 2020) have an inherent deterministic assumption that accurate identification and delineation of the technological requirements will lead to the co-creation of value. Such an assumption may suffice in a study of organization-based artefacts (e.g., Enterprise Resource Planning System), but it is quite deficient in sociotechnical systems where both the human and technological factors are combined and affect and cannot predetermine the outcome.

The second limitation is the presentation of service ecosystems in S-D Logic. S-D logic positions economic activity as a service-for-service exchange and considers all interacting actors as co-creators of value co-creation. S-D Logic also introduced the service eco-system concept and defined it as "systems (s) of resource-integrating actors connected by shared institutional logics and mutual value creation through service exchange (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). This definition of the service ecosystem and its underlying characteristics of self-containment and self-adjustment that was mentioned by Vargo and Lusch (2017) present the interacting actors as formalised, structured with formalised rules and protocols. Such a presentation may hold in complex business-to-business (B2B) service ecosystems (Breidbach & Maglio, 2016a) but is quite limited in Business-to-consumer (B2C) with diverse and dynamic sets of rules and protocols.

The third limitation is that previous studies in IS using S-D Logic used some of the elements of the foundational premises of S-D Logic propounded by Vargo and Lusch (2004a). Further,

most of these focus on studying an ecosystem approach to studying service innovations in traditional firms (Ye & Kankanhalli, 2020) and service innovations in digital ecosystems (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015). This limitation implies that there is no comprehensive study that uses all the foundational premises of the S-D Logic. So, we do not know how well organisations implement these principles and whether they even do. Fourthly, beyond the foundational premises of S-D logic, IS studies using the S-D Logic as a theoretical lens have used variance-based models (e.g. Turetken & Grefen, 2017) to explain value co-creation. These studies are limited in the process of value co-creation in a service ecosystem. Future research should consider conceptualising process models to explain how value co-creation occurs in a service ecosystem. The effects of these process models will explain how the sequence of events or the underlying generative mechanisms that has the power to cause value co-creation to happen (Van de Ven, 2007).

The fifth limitation concerns the presentation of both operand and operant resources. In the logic of S-D Logic, resources are integrated, and value is co-created (Vargo & Akaka, 2012) and key to obtaining competitive advantage (Vargo & Lusch, 2004a). However, the attributes of the resources are not discussed in S-D Logic literature. The study of the attributes is critical because we can analyse what enables actors to develop and use resources by taking part in the value co-creation (Mele & Corte, 2013). The sixth limitation concerns the use of S-D Logic in developing countries (DC). S-D Logic was originally proposed as a theoretical lens focused on marketing. However, its usage has spread to the functioning of markets, general management, including its sub-disciplines, economics, and society in general (Pels, Barile, Saviano, Polese, & Carrubbo, 2014). Further, S-D logic understands that the fundamental exchange upon which the traditional exchange of goods and money is based is actually on the exchange of service for service (Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Vargo & Lusch, 2017; Vargo & Akaka, 2012). With regards

to DCs, service can be understood as "interaction between entities in a reticular system to improve value co-creation outcomes under win-win logic inside interrelated process" (Polese, 2009) and Social commerce as a form of commerce that is mediated by social media and is converging both online and offline environments (Wang & Zhang, 2012) is seen as a service (Yu et al., 2018). Nonetheless, strategic studies about social commerce in DCs are lacking (e.g. Lubua & Pretorius, 2019), and S-D Logic literature has not been adopted in these contexts.

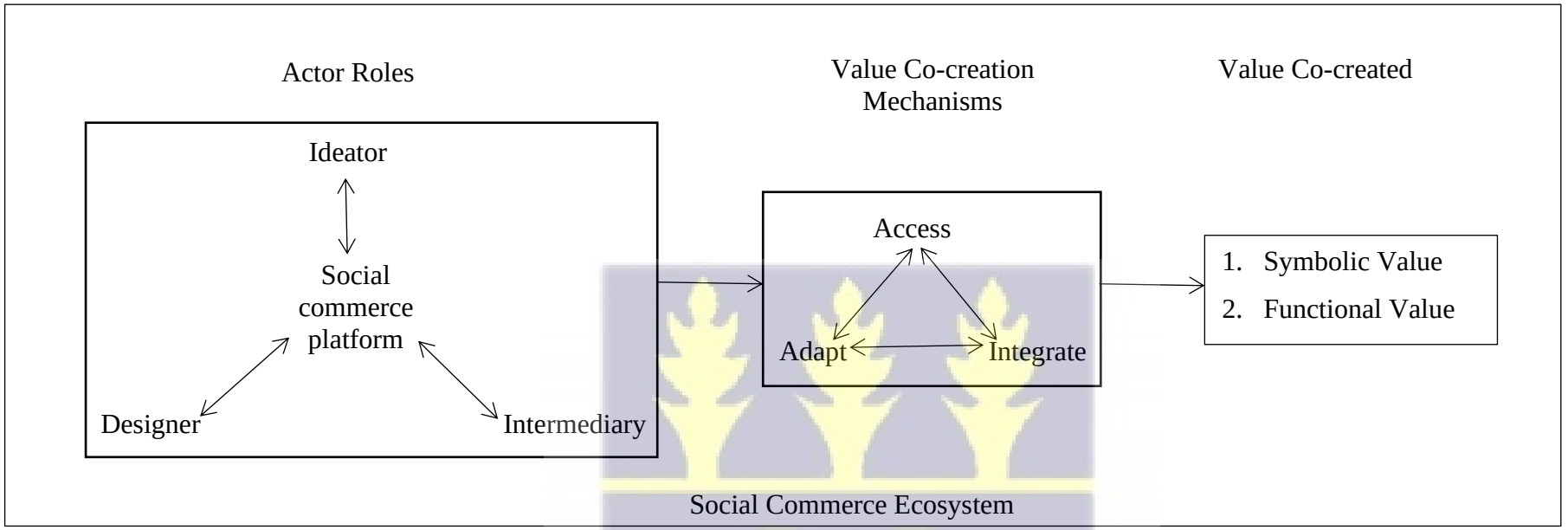
This study addresses the aforementioned second, third, fourth, and fifth limitations. First, in this study, social commerce is considered from a socio-technical perspective. This study conceptualises and illustrates how social commerce platform is seen as a digital service ecosystem that actualises the concept of value co-creation among actors and networks with different technological services. Second, regarding the third limitation, this study focuses on using all the FPs of the S-D Logic to examine value co-creation in a social commerce ecosystem. Third, regarding the fourth limitation, this study, based on Van de Ven's (2007) recommendation, identifies and explains the process, underlying generative mechanism and outcome of value co-creation in a social commerce system. Fourth, regarding the fifth limitation, this study will identify the resources used to co-create value in a social commerce ecosystem. These resources identified as either operant or operand resources are based on the Resource Advantage Theory (Hunt, 2000a). Fifth, concerning the sixth limitation, this study, following the recommendation of Sukrat, Mahatanankoon, and Papasratorn (2018), considers social commerce within the perspective of firms in DCs to co-create value amidst the constraints of their context, such as integrated payments option on social commerce platforms. Because S-D logic's approach to value co-creation includes the exchange of tangible and intangible resources and an emphasis on the process of value creation, it is theoretically and

practically valuable in providing a more comprehensive and inclusive approach than traditional theories related to service and exchange.

3.8 Research Framework

This section conceptualises the constructs of service-dominant logic for social commerce. The purpose of this conceptualisation is to formulate a research framework to guide this study toward answering its research questions. The research framework will cover the actor resources and actor roles, value co-creation mechanisms, and co-created value outcomes.

Figure 3. 2 Research Framework



Source: Adapted from Akaka et al. (2012); Grover et al.(2018); Lusch and Nambisan (2015)

3.8.1 Actor Resources and Roles in Social Commerce

Generally, a service ecosystem is "a relatively self-contained, self-adjusting system of loosely coupled social and economic actors connected by shared institutional logic and mutual value creation through service exchange" (Lusch et al., 2015, p. 161). These actors are often led by a keystone organisation that, together with members, develops the necessary processes and resources for value co-creation. These are also characterised by service platforms that enable members to interact and coordinate their exchanges (Agarwal, Soh, & Yeow, 2016). Within the social commerce ecosystem, actors play the role of ideator, intermediary, or designer. Ideators brainstorm and share potential value-generating ideas with other actors, like a designer who creates a mock-up of the idea for further refinement, development and execution towards the final achievement of the value. The idea generation and design roles may occur under the intermediary or facilitator (Priharsari et al., 2020). Further, in addition to ideas, actors may exchange other resources to contribute to creating the intended value.

Resources are not limited to materials but, in particular, include human skills and knowledge to act (S. Fujita, Vaughan, & Vargo, 2018). S-D logic divides resources into two categories: operands, such as natural, material resources and operant resources, such as knowledge and skills. Importantly, operant resources are primary, while operand resources are secondary in S-D logic. Members join ecosystems to access critical resources such as knowledge and skills (Lusch and Nambisan 2015). Members bring in resources that can complement or supplement the keystone organisation's resources. For example, Sarker et al. (2012) specifically examined the resource exchanges in an enterprise resource planning (ERP) system ecosystem formed between the ERP company and several partners and found different mechanisms underly different resource integrations in B2B alliances.

Customer resources can be individual resources, including knowledge, skills, and experience relevant to service consumption (Im and Qu, 2017; Quach and Thaichon, 2017). Customer resources can also be the social network resources of customers (Xie et al., 2016). This resource reflects through social media platforms through network size (numbers of friends and followers) and their social roles (Fernandes and Remelhe 2016; Laud and Karpen 2017). Similarly, firm resources include knowledge about the market and customers and financial, human, and technological resources (Mikalef et al., 2020; Storbacka et al., 2016). Financial resources are incentives or monetary rewards that service providers offer (Dam, Le Dinh, & Menvielle, 2020).

3.8.2 Value Co-creation Mechanisms

The basic concepts in S-D logic are interdependent; they are related to each other through cyclic value co-creation processes. Resource integration and service exchange are thus entangled in a process cycle of value co-creating mechanisms (Fujita et al., 2018). These mechanisms include accessing, adapting and integrating resources (Akaka, Vargo, & Lusch, 2012). Access concerns attaining resources via the relationships in the social commerce ecosystem, while adapting is ensuring a fit between resources and available assortment. Integration is also about providing a fit between available resources and their unique context.

3.8.3 Co-created Value Outcomes

Prior research suggests that members derive value by participating in ecosystems (Adner and Kapoor 2010; Ceccagnoli et al. 2012; Han et al. 2012; Rai et al. 2012; Sarker et al. 2012). For example, Ceccagnoli et al. (2012) examined members' performance (independent software vendors in this case) participating in the SAP ecosystem. Their findings suggested that while all members increased their performance, members with better capabilities and had ownership of resources appropriated more value. Similarly, Han et al. (2012), in another study on open

innovation alliances, found that organisations realise significant market returns when they participate in the innovation ecosystem. In this case, benefits accrued by the organisation increased because market participants coordinated their activities. While these studies are relevant in studying the outcome of actors' interactions, these studies posit dyadic interactions between customers and firms.

It is worth noting that while S-D Logic postulates that all social and economic actors (e.g., firms, organisations and consumers) are engaged in service provision and value cocreating exchanges (Vargo & Lusch, 2011a), these activities go beyond the dyad produce an outcome in an ecosystem. Even though value co-creation has been studied in various forms beyond the dyad, for example, service ecosystem (Lusch & Vargo, 2014), an extensive evaluation of the literature found that the dyadic approach to value co-creation where one firm is a supplier of a service and subsequently co-creates value with a 'customer" is prevalent. In other words, the consideration of multiple actors as active participants in creating value is limited, especially in technological service-oriented research such as social commerce.

In light of the preceding discussion, it is critical to note that value co-creation, an organising principle of ecosystems (Meynhardt, Chandler, & Strathoff, 2016), and resource integrations determine the co-created value. Extant literature has identified three types of value economic, cultural, and social. These three value types can further be classified as either functional or symbolic (Grover, Chiang, Liang, & Zhang, 2018). Functional value (e.g., market share, increased revenue) is performance improvement directly resulting from participating in social commerce co-creating activities. In contrast, symbolic value (e.g., positive brand image, online social capital, and reputation) is obtained from the "signalling effect" of one's presence on or affiliation with social commerce co-creation.

From the strategic fit perspective, this study perceives functional value as the fit between co-creating activities and an actors' goals and symbolic value as the fit between the social commerce platform and actors' environment or context. The functional value within social commerce occurs by converting a firm's resources into a form that other actors, e.g., consumers, would find beneficial. Firms can configure or combine their products and services with other complementary resources to create unique abilities to target income-generating sources like customers, decisions and processes. For firms, such configuration manifest in traditional productivity and financial metrics and is achieved through improved efficiency, coordination, and decision making (Grover et al., 2018). Furthermore, concerning symbolic value, actors' use of social commerce, irrespective of their roles, signals innovation and modernity. As more people use social commerce, customers will know when and where to buy products and services they need. The preceding discussions are illustrated in Figure 3.4, which is the research framework for this study.

3.9 Chapter Summary

The chapter reviewed the meta-theoretical foundations of the S-D logic. Further, it explained the broadened foundational premises of the S-D logic as a precursor to its use as the general theoretical foundation of this study. The next chapter discusses the philosophical and methodological approach to the empirical examination of the proposed research framework.

CHAPTER FOUR
METHODOLOGY

4.1 Chapter Overview

The previous chapter discussed the research framework deduced from the review of social commerce literature. The conceptual framework was developed from the theories that make up value co-creation, resources, and social commerce business, which help determine the business's productivity. This chapter elaborates on the methodology employed to undertake the study. Section 4.2 gives an overview of the research paradigm, while section 4.3 discusses why the critical realism paradigm was chosen for the study. Section 4.4 details the general research design and addresses the criteria for selecting the case study. Section 4.5 is dedicated to the data analysis and approaches for answering the research questions. Finally, the chapter concludes with the ethical consideration of the study and a summary of the chapter.

4.2 Research Paradigm

Sarantakos (1998) defines methodology as "a model, which entails theoretical principles and a framework that provides guidelines about how research is done in the context of a particular paradigm." A paradigm, therefore, is a "set of beliefs, values and techniques which is shared by members of a scientific community, and which acts as a guide or map, dictating the kinds of problems scientists should address and the types of explanations that are acceptable to them" (Kuhn, 1970). Bunniss and Kelly (2010) also assert that a paradigm consists of the beliefs and activities that guide research among members of a particular research community. Paradigms form the fundamental philosophical assumptions that define what good research is and the suitable methods applied in that research through its set of beliefs, values, and techniques (Avison & Myers, 2002).

Various taxonomies have delineated the distinctions between paradigms (e.g. Creswell, 1994; Guba, 1990; Schnelker, 2006). Taxonomies usually share three fundamental elements: ontology, epistemology, and methodology. The elements define the basic distinctions of the

philosophical assumptions that form paradigms. Guba and Lincoln (1994) clarify that ontological assumptions hint at the nature and form of reality and determine valid researchable questions. The ontological assumptions also assess the heart of the phenomena under investigation, determining whether it is objective and independent of the researcher or if it is the researcher's invention.

Qualitative researchers endorse the view of multiple realities and hence are subjective, while quantitative, on the other hand, support the idea of a single reality and hence are objective. On the other hand, Epistemological assumptions refer to the nature of knowledge and what counts as a knowledge (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2014). Epistemological assumptions also relate to the researcher's degree of proximity with his respondents in his inquiry. Therefore, epistemology refers to how knowledge is best acquired through inductive or deductive logic.

Inductive logic implies building knowledge from the bottom up by observing the world, consequently being the basis for developing theories and laws. In contrast, deductive logic assumes a top-down approach to building knowledge. Therefore, deductive logic starts with a theory wherefrom propositions are obtained and applied to observations about the world. Finally, methodological assumptions relate to researchers' procedures to examine what they believe can be known and justified. The methodological assumptions may include quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011).

Although several paradigms exist, three dominant paradigms have evolved in information systems. These paradigms are the positivist, interpretive and critical paradigms (Mingers, Mutch, & Willcocks, 2013a; Myers & Avison, 2002). First, Positivists typically postulate that reality is objectively given and can be described by measurable properties independent of the researcher (Myers & Avison, 2011). Positivists also hold that objective reality exists but is

single and concrete (Kaplan & Duchon, 1988). Positivist researchers instrumentally predict or describe reality; they capture social reality through formal propositions, predictions and control (Lee, 1991).

Positivists generally employ a deductive process to carry out research. Positivist studies typically attempt to test theory to increase the predictive understanding of a phenomena (Myers & Avison, 2011). Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991) characterise information systems research as positivist if there is a presence of formal propositions. Facts and values are objective but separate, while value-free inquiry is possible. According to Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991), the pursuit of universal laws has birthed the neglect of historical and contextual issues that form a phenomenon and human participants who are part of the studies. Second, in its attempt to explain and predict external reality as independent of humans and deterministic approaches, it does not attempt to explain the political complexities in the social world.

Second, the ontology of the interpretive paradigm emphasises the importance of subjective meanings (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991). Hence, to the interpretivist objective knowledge is absent. Myers and Avison (2011) assert that interpretivist assume reality can be accessed only through social constructions like conscious language and shared meanings. The interpretive paradigm is also premised on the epistemological belief that "Social process is not captured in hypothetical deductions, covariances, and degrees of freedom. Instead, the understanding social process involves getting inside the world of those generating it" (Rosen, 1991). Hence, knowledge is based on 'understanding', which comes from reflecting on happenings, not just prior experiences. Knowledge is, therefore, produced by exploring and understanding the social world from the perspective of the studied people.

Finally, the interpretive approach towards the relationship between theory and practice is that 'the researcher cannot assume a value-neutral stance, and is always implicated in the phenomena being studied. Researchers' prior assumptions, beliefs, values, and interests always intervene to shape their investigations" (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991).

Third, the critical paradigm researchers assume that social reality is historically constituted and people produce that reality. An essential concept of the critical paradigm is that of totality. This means things cannot be treated independently of each other (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991). The authors further explain that "A particular element exists only in the context of the totality of relationships of which it is a part, and the element and the whole are bound by an essential rather than a contingent interdependence". In addition, one of the main tasks of critical research is being a social critic; thus, the restrictive and alienating conditions of the status quo are revealed. Similarly, Myers and Avison (2011) say critical research focuses on contemporary society's oppositions, conflicts, and contradictions.

According to Chua (1986) regarding knowledge, the epistemological belief is that knowledge is grounded in social and historical practices. Thus, data collection can't be independent of theory and the interpretation of the evidence to prove or disprove a theory conclusively. Regarding the methodological assumptions of the critical paradigm, critical paradigm researchers use the ethnographic study to analyse and compare events, both past and present, to identify the influencing forces between events (Myers & Klein, 2011; Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991).

4.3 Choice of Critical Realism for this Study

Regarding the discussion in previous chapters and the underpinning research questions, the critical realist (CR) approach was chosen as the *philosophical assumption* of this research.

Critical realism provides an interesting perspective of taking the attention of the researcher from data and methods of analysis to focusing on real-world problems and their underlying causes (Mingers et al., 2013a). Hence, CR proposes a robust framework that utilises various methods to understand better the meaning and significance of information systems in the contemporary world. Critical realism was borne out of criticisms against both the positivist and constructivist or interpretivist paradigms (Bhaskar, 1998).

Critical realism supports the existence of different types of objects of knowledge – Physical, social, and conceptual – which have different ontological and epistemological characteristics. Hence a range of different research methods and methodologies is accepted. For instance, a research inquiry may well have different features. Therefore, a mixed-method research strategy will be necessary, supported by critical realism (Archer, Bhaskar, Collier, Lawson, & Norrie, 2013; Mingers, Mutch, & Willcocks, 2013b).

The ontology of the CR suggests an objective reality that does not rely on a researcher's knowledge (Dobson, 2001). Dobson further explains that *Reality* lies in the "intransitive and relatively enduring" dimension, and the *representation of reality* relatively subject to value-laden observations lies in the "transitive and changing" size. Critical realist, therefore, seeks to expose the reality of social phenomena and examine and explain the events and discourses that exist within them (Carlsson, 2003). This reality is shown as layered and in two divisions (Roberts, 2014).

There is a realm of reality in the first division, which comprises three distinct levels: the real, actual and empirical (Bhaskar, 1978). All of reality exists in the real domain. The real domain depicts the whole of nature and comprises both known and unknown objects, which may be abstracted (beliefs and thoughts), natural (inorganic substances and organisms) and social

structures (associations and processes). Hence, reality cannot be reduced to what we know. Consequently, Bhaskar (1998) asserts that any attempt to replace reality with knowledge is an epistemic fallacy. Ontological beliefs influence how knowledge is experienced. Hence, beliefs about the world are affected by ontological beliefs. CR believes that knowledge is socially constructed (subjective) and may be truthful though it can also be predisposed to error due to human limitations; hence it can be a fallible (Bhaskar, 1998). The actual domain comprises the forms of actions and occurrences that may or not be visible and are assisted by mechanisms within the real. The empirical domain includes naturally felt experiences that can be detected artificially.

The realists adopt a methodological approach based on their beliefs about reality which ensures regularity in realist research. This methodological approach is called retroduction, which entails going beyond an effect to identify its cause. Sayer (1992) explains retroduction as a way of interpreting situational outcomes (events) premised on activities (mechanisms) that are capable of generating them. Further, retroduction is "advancing from one thing (empirical observation of events) and concluding with something different (a conceptualisation of transfactual conditions)" (Danermark, Ekstrom, Jakobsen, & Karlsson, 2002).

Danermark et al. (2002) refer to transfactual conditions as conditions for a social phenomenon to be "what it is and not something completely different." Retroduction allows the CR researcher to ascertain the fundamental conditions of a phenomenon, such as for value co-creation in social commerce to exist. Using retroduction as a research strategy involves three main steps. First, the CR researcher begins by studying the observed events and connections between the phenomenon. In this study, this condition led to a thorough review of extant studies on social commerce to explore the various theoretical and conceptual underpinnings which explain observed events in social commerce. The review aimed to (a) analyse the nature, and

dimensions of social commerce in existing literature (b) provide a framework that will appropriately position this study for new research (c) identify research gaps in the literature to be addressed.

Second, the CR researcher postulates the existence of real structures and mechanisms and how they describe and explain observed relationships if they exist (Easton, 2010). The CR researcher "theorises a model of underlying mechanism which might have produced patterns seen in the data, and then works backwards from the data towards verifying or otherwise that model (Mason, 2002). Hence, this study developed a conceptual framework based on the S-D logic (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a; Vargo & Lusch, 2008).

Third, the CR researcher seeks to reveal the existence and operation of the structures and mechanisms postulated in the conceptual model. Thus, the researcher needed to choose the appropriate data collection methods suitable for the research paradigm and backs the research purpose. Critical realism supports methodological pluralism – quantitative or qualitative data collection methods – it acknowledges the various objects of knowledge exist, and each requires a different method to unearth them (Carter & New, 2004). Similarly, Downward and Mearman (2007) accentuate the use of mixed-methods triangulation in CR. The multiple methods of enquiry afford the CR researcher the ability to investigate various parts of the phenomenon and thus reveal different peculiarities of the same layered reality without being exhaustive (Downward & Mearman, 2007). Quantitative methods in CR are generally descriptive, given that correlations and generalisation between variables cannot explain the causal mechanisms that generate an observed event (Mingers et al., 2013). Similarly, Mingers et al. (2013) also assert that qualitative methods in CR offer an intelligent way to describe a phenomenon, construct propositions, and identify structured interactions between complex mechanisms in the phenomenon. The mixed method of triangulation, as suggested are:

1. Data triangulation: data collection at different times and situations from different subjects
2. Investigator triangulation: the use of more than one field researcher to collect and analyse the data pertinent to a specific research object.
3. Theoretical triangulation – involves referencing different theoretical traditions or disciplines to analyse data.
4. Methodological triangulation: comprises the use of a number of different research methods, either variety of the same method or the use of different methods.

4.4 General Research Design

4.4.1. Research Strategy

Research approach is the procedure for research that outlines the methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). A researcher's paradigm or worldview and the nature of the research problem usually influence the choice of the research approach. Creswell (2009) documents three main approaches to conducting social science, namely Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed Methods; every one of them can be appropriately employed in any research paradigm (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). Concerning the preceding discussions, this study adopts a qualitative approach to address the research purpose and questions. The choice to use qualitative approaches stems from the fact that they allow us to assess the phenomenon's rich complexity and expand our understanding of how things function (Trochim, 2006b), which is in line with the study's research framework. Furthermore, qualitative approaches allow researchers to investigate how participants understand and feel about the phenomena and how it interacts with other issues and circumstances that impact them (Bakarada, 2014; Yin, 2015).

4.4.2 Case Study as A Research Method

Yin (2014) asserts that employing a case study depends on when a *"how" or "why" question is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little or no control*. We consider value co-creation in a social commerce ecosystem in developing countries as a current set of events or phenomena that we seek to examine. This phenomenon is relatively indistinguishable from the number of contextual influences embedded in it; hence, it must be seen within its context. Consequently, of the nature of the phenomenon being studied and the underpinning research question, a case study is emphasised to be particularly suited for this research study (Boateng, 2014; Yin, 2015).

4.4.3 Case Study Design

First, case design refers to the well-organized structure connecting gathered data, research questions, and conclusions (Yin, 2009). This study sought to use a multiple case design; however, only one social commerce enterprise met the selection criteria (see Appendixes B and C). As a result, this study used an explanatory case study design. An explanatory case is used in causal studies where pattern-matching can be used to analyse specific phenomena in extremely complex and multivariate such as value co-creation (see Baghdadi, 2016).

Second, case design directs the gathering of sufficient data to answer research questions. The use of a single case study afforded an in-depth examination of the phenomena that led to the development of a new theoretical framework on value co-creation in the social commerce ecosystem. Single case studies have been argued to produce better theory than multiple case studies, as the researcher gets more deeper understanding of the subject under question whiles questioning old theoretical relationships and exploring new ones (Dyer, Wilkins, & Eisenhardt, 1991; Gustafsson, 2017). To investigate the importance of a social commerce ecosystem in its traditional context, a descriptive case method was used.

4.4.4 Case Boundary

The boundary of a case is defined by the case's border, which excludes outliers from examination (Sein, Henfridsson, & Rossi, 2011). The boundary of a case study also assists in the establishment of inclusion and exclusion criteria to avoid deviating from the primary goals of a research. In case study research, boundaries divide what is a case from what is not.

A case boundary may be specified in three ways. The first way is based on definition and context (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The second way is based on time and place (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The third way is based on time and activity (Stake, 2008). In this study, the case boundary comprised the definition (i.e., of social commerce), activity (value co-creation), and the presence of multiple actors.

4.4.5 Case Selection

To address the research objectives of this study, a qualitative case study was conducted. To find a valuable sample of social commerce enterprises, a search was conducted on popular social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. The search was conducted from January 31st 2019, to February 28th, 2019. Keywords such as "buy in Ghana", "sell in Ghana", and a combination of "buy and sell in Ghana" were used. Each page included in the search results was opened to ensure that it was an active account and not a parody account. In total, 52 social commerce enterprises were discovered. The study employed the categorisation used on popular e-commerce platforms such as *Amazon.com, Zooba* shop, *BestBuy, Melcom Ghana and Jumia Ghana* to identify the retail types. The enterprises were further grouped into four categories (see Table 4.1). In addition, the study used the themes (the essence, the architecture, the finality, and the efficiency, (see Appendix B) captured in the definition of

social commerce by Baghdadi (2016) to further categorise the identified retail groups. The resulting categorisation is shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4. 1 Categories of Social Commerce Enterprises

Electronics/Accessories	**Fashion**
Nafass Electronics My cellphone repair -Ghana	JoJo's Place Yaayira Collection Nasana Drip_zhone Real_manarchy Everything_ladies Ahwenepa DesVen Bags Regal Stitches
Food	**Personal Care**
Den&Co. 's Mukasechic Enyo's Kitchen Baked Gh Auto Type Graphics	Auto Type Graphics Bolt Ghana

Source: Author's construct

Employing theory-based sampling (Paré, 2004), a criterion was used to select the social commerce enterprise from Table 4.1 (Benbasat, Goldstein, & Mead, 1987). Theory-based sampling occurs when sampling for case information in a focused manner, based on a prior theory that is being evaluated or modelled. Using this study's research framework as a guide, the study's case criteria dictated that the social commerce enterprise must have recognisable actors, e.g., buyers and sellers. Such that the actors interact and have processes that result in an output.

Second, the social commerce enterprise should aim at enhancing actor participation and collaboration that results in more excellent economic value for the actors in the ecosystem. Third, the case enterprise had to have been in business for at least three years. This criterion was to ensure the availability of longitudinal data to reflect value co-creation over time. Fourth, the social commerce enterprise had to be Ghanaian-based; previous scholars advocated further research into African technological solutions to indigenous solutions (see Etoundi, Onana, Eteme, & Ndjodo, 2016), (see Appendix B for selection criteria for case firm).

Overall, fashion enterprises and one food retailer were contacted using formal letters, personal visits, social media messenger apps, and phone calls. However, only DesVen Bags and Accessories (pseudonym) responded and showed interest in taking part in this study. DesVen Bags is also an explanatory case useful for this study because it is a keystone enterprise characterised by "relations of exteriorities" of actors with resources that are integrated for value co-creation (Bygstad, 2010). Further, this study's literature review and theoretical foundations recognised a lack of detailed case studies that examine the explanatory power of causal mechanisms underlying interactions between the actors. This observation justified the use of an explanatory case study design. An explanatory case study is a source of identification and detailed explication of the causal mechanisms underlying a phenomenon's occurrence. For instance, Bygstad (2010) used an explanatory case study on innovation in information infrastructures when he observed "the relationship between innovation and infrastructures is less well known", their strategy was to "study in detail in one unexplained case" (p.164).

4.4.6 Sampling and Sampling Strategy

Upon selection of the case enterprise, a purposive sampling technique was employed to select the respondents. Purposive sampling is a qualitative method for indicating and choosing the suitable participants in resource-constrained studies (Emmel, 2013). Additionally, purposive

sampling targets individuals and/or groups with expertise regarding an issue of interest (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Trochim, 2006) who are willing and available (Trochim, 2006b).

4.4.7 Reliability

To improve the case study's reliability, a case study protocol was created and implemented. A data collection interview guide was included in the protocol. Semi-structured interviews, artefact analysis, and non-participant observation were used to gather data. Following Yin's (1994) suggestion to increase the reliability of case studies, an initial draft of the interview guide was developed and given to a consultant and an information systems academic who patronises social commerce to assess the comprehensiveness of the questions. As a result of their input, the interview guide was modified.

The questions were grouped into four sections arranged according to the research objectives. Sections 1 asked about the background of the each and the respondents; Section 2 asked about the different roles of the actors in the social commerce ecosystem and the resources used in value co-creation. Section 3 sought to explore the mechanisms that trigger resource integration in the value co-creation process. Section 4 sought to explore the outcomes of value co-creation.

The CEO of the social commerce company was asked questions from all four sections. Partners and ecosystem actors were asked further questions in additions to items from sections 3 and 4. The interview guide is shown in Appendix D. During the interview, notes were taken, which were then documented and transcribed. Data analysis followed standard procedures for qualitative data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

4.4.8 Construct Validity

Construct validity refers to the operationalisation of a construct, i.e. how well a researcher translated or transformed a construct (concept, idea or behaviour) into a functioning and operating reality (Trochim, 2006). To improve the construct validity of this study, two strategies were adopted. First, evidence was gathered from various sources to allow data triangulation (Wynn & Williams, 2012; Yin, 2014). Evidence from artefact examination and non-participant observation were used to back up the information collected through interviews. The commission gained by the local courier/delivery companies was used to estimate the functional value accrued to them by being a member of the social commerce ecosystem. Data validity was ascertained by the consistency between data and another source, for example, another interview of another actor. Second, the findings were submitted as a case study and a scholarly book chapter. The reviewers' feedback confirmed the validity of this study's results.

4.4.9 Internal Validity

Internal validity refers to the rigour with which a study was conducted and the extent to which researchers have considered alternative explanations for any causal relationships they explore (Trochim, 2006b). This study used two strategies to improve the internal validity of the case study: First, the S-D Logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) was used to establish causal links between actors' roles and resources and the process of value co-creation in a social commerce ecosystem. The S-D logic enabled explaining the generative mechanisms that affect resource integration resulting in value co-creation. This explanation is illustrated in section 3.5. Second, the correlation between patterns predicted by the theory and those in the case was observed. For instance, this study found that *triadic interactions* of actors generate *endorsement value* as a new form of value. Previously, information systems research posits functional and symbolic value.

4.4.10 External Validity

External validity is how research findings from a case study can be generalised to or fit into other contexts (Miles et al., 2014). This study used a predefined selection criterion to obtain a theoretical sample to improve external validity (see section 4.4.5). While this list focuses on Ghanaian social commerce enterprises, the typology can be applied to other countries to help choose the right social commerce enterprise for a similar case study. As a result, social commerce helps to ensure the external validity of the data in this study. Similarly, this study employed Miles and Huberman's qualitative data analysis process, which entails three levels of coding. i.e. open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Miles et al., 2014). This coding and analysis method's general usability also adds to the external validity of this study's findings

4.4.11 Data Collection Methods

As required by case study research, primary data was gathered from various sources (Benbasat et al., 1987), i.e. face-to-face interviews with the CEO of the social commerce enterprise, two group interviews with the CEO and three business partners. Five customers who patronise the case firm's products were interviewed separately and artefact examination (Yin, 1994, p.78).

The first part of the data collection contains a pilot study scheduled in groups from 22nd April to 30th May 2019. Twenty-five (25) participants were recruited from graduate students from the University of Ghana Business School, ten broadcast journalists from Ghana's Top four radio and TV companies, and 15 shoppers randomly selected from a popular shopping mall in Accra. The participants comprised 59% females and 41% males. The pilot study was carried out at the University of Ghana. The pilot study assisted the researcher to explore the relevance of the research questions and realise a conceptual clarification for the study's research design. Second, identify, screen and select potential case firms for the main study. Third, to obtain data on social commerce enterprises in Ghana and the conduct of social commerce in Ghana through

informal discussions (O'hEocha, Wang, & Conboy, 2012; Parent, Gallupe, Salisbury, & Handelman, 2000). Ninety enterprises were identified through this first phase.

One hundred fifty enterprises were identified in the next stage of the data collection process through the search engine of popular social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Keywords such as "buy-in Ghana", "sell in Ghana", and a combination of "buy and sell in Ghana" were used. Out of the total number of enterprises obtained, 50 were selected based on a set of criteria (see Appendix A) adopted from Naghavi (2019). In addition, the study also depended on categories (see Appendix B) of popular e-commerce platforms such as *Amazon.com, Zooba* shop, *BestBuy, Melcom Ghana and Jumia Ghana* to identify the retail types to choose from. The enterprises subsequently were grouped into ten categories based on the categories of the e-commerce platforms above. 10 of the 109 enterprises responded, mainly from the Food, Fashion, personal care and Beverage categories, out of which four were interviewed for the pilot study. The key findings of the pilot study were indicative that:

1. The interrelations between operant resources (trust, credibility, social capital, skills and knowledge) and operand resources (social media, infrastructure) in a social commerce ecosystem play a critical role in how Ghanaian social commerce actors co-create value.
2. Risk management offers opportunities for social commerce actors to differentiate themselves.

Though the findings did not change the initial research questions, they focused the study on exploring the actors' resources in the co-creation of value in the social commerce ecosystem. The aim was to select cases that would provide the following: a single group (for example, a group of firms or people) (Yin, 2003); enable us question old theoretical relationships between the various actors and explore new ones (Gustafsson, 2017); and provide the relevant and challenging tests and justify our theory and theoretical propositions when relating the results

to the strategic selection of the case for the main study. Case study researchers have noted this as a theoretical sampling (Conlon et al., 2020). We selected cases because they had the characteristics related to our theoretical propositions.

The following four companies were selected to be interviewed for the main study. The four enterprises have been renamed for confidentiality reasons (see below);

- **Desven Bags** – A bespoke bags manufacturing enterprise
- **KasCunst Auto works**- specialises in car aesthetics
- **Juicy K** – specialises in fruit juices.
- **Y-Phones –**specialises in Mobile Phone repairs.

However, the researcher could gain access to only DesVen Bags for the main study. The primary data source was obtained through in-depth interviews and documentation. From June 2019 to December 2019, 24 in-depth interviews were conducted with 18 key informants at DesVen Bags and in the broader ecosystem. Interviews varied in duration from 30 mins to 2.5h, depending on the importance of the interview and the informant's accessibility. Informants were identified using snowballing (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981), mainly involving discussions with the social commerce enterprise CEO. All the interviews were conducted face-to-face. As Miles and Huberman (1994) recommended, key informants were re-engaged to acquire more detailed accounts when new questions emerged. Interviewees were interviewed using the interview guide shown in Appendix D. The respondents include Managers, Social Media managers, Business Development Managers and Graphic Designers. Eight follow up interviews were also conducted with customers and business partners (see Table 4.2 for the interviewees' full breakdown).

All interviews were semi-structured and face-to-face. Permission was sought from each participant for the interviews to be recorded. Each recorded interview was later transcribed,

and copies of transcribed interviews were sent to interviewees to be reviewed and resolve discrepancies. Secondary data sources include documentary materials - to understand how the enterprises present their services to their customers. Investigator triangulation – the researcher used other researchers to discuss and compare documentary materials obtained from data sources. Multiple data sources were employed to develop a comprehensive view, while the integrity of the data was ensured through comparisons and triangulating of the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Table 4.2 represents the breakdown of Interviewees, Timelines and Duration.

Table 4. 2 Breakdown of Interviewees, Timelines and Duration

Organisation (pseudonyms)	Brief Description	Interviewee Position/Role	Date and Duration of Interview
DesVen Bags	Started as a small-scale bags and accessories enterprise that offers bespoke and ready to use products.	CEO in-charge of business development and marketing communications (DesVen_M#1).	5th June, 2019; 240 minutes
		Deputy CEO in-charge of finance (DesVen_M#2)	8th June, 2019; 120 minutes
		Partner Relationship Manager in-charge of relationships with partners	8th August, 2019, 54 minutes
		Company Secretary in-charge of order taking.	11th August, 2019; 30 minutes.
		Production manager in-charge of production	11th August, 2019 30 minutes
		Distribution Manager in-charge of distribution	13th August, 54 minutes
		Design Executive in-charge bags and accessories designs	September 1st, 2019
		Former senior executive in charge of order taking	3rd September, 2019; 35 minutes.
		Tracking Manager – in charge of tracking purchased products	3rd September, 2019; 65 minutes
Partner #1	Local courier partner of Desven with 25 employees; serving customers in Kumasi and other regional capitals in Ghana.	Distribution Manager – in channel of distribution	21st August, 2019; 32 minutes
		Tracking Manager- In charge of tracking	21st August, 2019; 20 minutes
		CEO, who undertakes business development himself	20th August, 2019; 45 minutes

Organisation (pseudonyms)	Brief Description	Interviewee Position/Role	Date and Duration of Interview
Partner #2	Multinational courier company, among the largest global courier companies. Headquartered in Germany, with operations in 220 countries and territories worldwide.	Marketing Manager in charge of marketing and partner relationships	28th September, 2019; 25 minutes
Partner # 3	Intra-city courier (Okada). A motorcycle taxi. Also used in delivering products to customers. DesVen Bags uses them mainly in Accra.	Rider- gets a commission on each delivery.	30th September, 2019 45 minutes
Partner #4	Small Scale local leather supplier. Serving local customers in Accra and Kumasi.	Shop Owner	1st October, 2019, 25 minutes
Partner #5	Large scale leather *supplier* based in Lagos.	Business owner interviewed via Phone.	3rd October, 2019, 15 minutes
Customers	Customer #1 Male, 27 years works in a financial institution.	Buys bespoke men's toiletries bag (once).	4th November, 2019, 30 minutes
	Customer #2, Female, university student.	One two occasions bought a backpack and men's wallet.	5th October, 2019, 30 minutes
	Customer #3, Female, works in a Media house.	Bought a backpack.	5th October, 2019, 35 minutes
	Customer #4, Female, works as a nurse.	Bought an African-patterned bag.	6th October, 2019, 15 minutes
	Customer #5, male, PhD student In Ghana.	Bought an African-patterned backpack.	7th October, 2019. 35 minutes
	Customer #6, Male, Works as a foreign service officer, in one of Ghana's embassies abroad.	Bought bespoke African-pattern wallet, men's toiletries bag, wallet and a Ghana-flagged designed shoulder bag, Interviewed via phone.	30th November, 2019. 10 minutes
	Customer #7, Female, works with as a lecturer in one of Ghana's leading universities.	Bought a bespoke African-patterned shoulder bag.	3rd December, 2019, 35 minutes

Organisation (pseudonyms)	Brief Description	Interviewee Position/Role	Date and Duration of Interview
Pilot Study	50 participants; comprised of 30 females and 20 males.	Focus Group discussion	22nd may, 2019- 30th June, 2019 4hours total
Artefact examination	Social commerce platform: Mobile, graphic designs, and chats		5th December, 2019: 30 minutes
Non-participant Observation	Actual social commerce by a customer		5th December, 2019
Participant Observation	Ordered a bespoke backpack through social commerce platform		7th December, 2019

Source: Author's construct

4.5 Data Analysis Approaches to Answer Research Questions

The most basic unit of investigation in a study is the unit of research, which determines what is being investigated. Individuals, communities, or organisations may be the unit of study. Since this study involves explaining causal links within an assemblage, the unit of analysis was the social commerce ecosystem, the role of the actors, resources and mechanisms in the co-creation of value for actors in the social commerce ecosystem. Further, the analytic steps for each research question are discussed in the following sub-sections.

4.5.1 Approach for Research Question One

Data provide the foundation for a research study (Yin, 2015). Thus, the objective of data analysis is to answer research questions. The first research question examined actors' resources and roles during value co-creation within the social commerce ecosystem. The resulting roles and resources were then categorised according to each of the social commerce ecosystem's various actors. This next step was undertaken because of the dynamic nature of actor roles and the multiple exchanges occurring within the ecosystem. Some of the roles identified include "distinctiveness" and "commercial opportunities" for the collaborator role and "allied

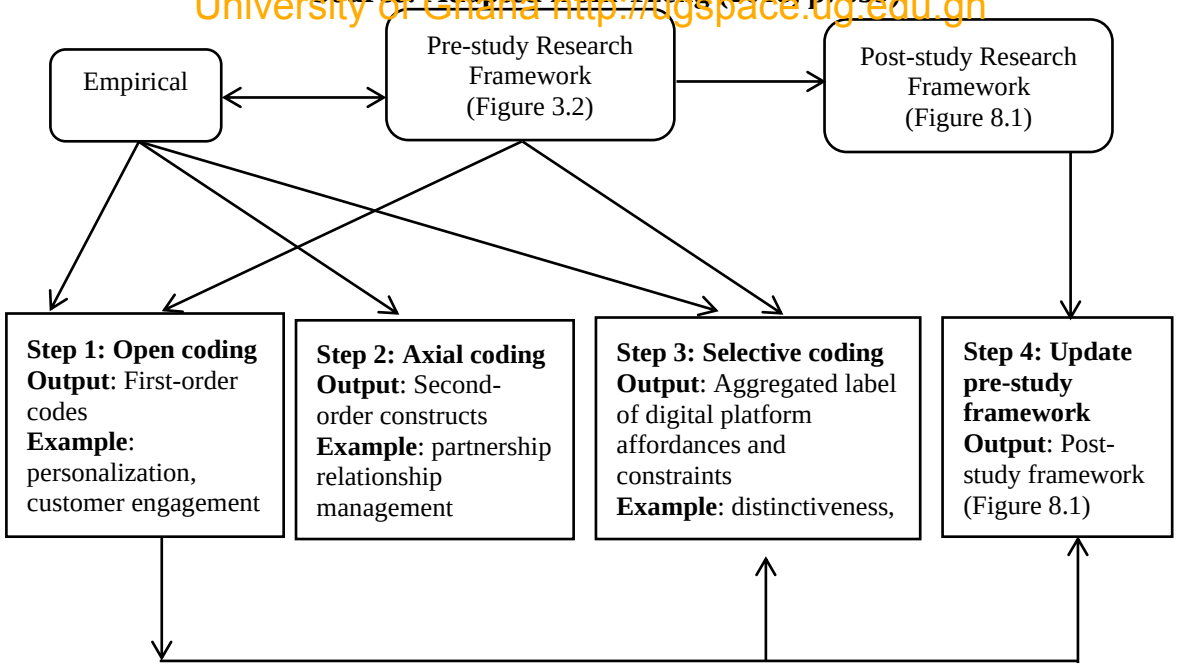
activities" and "business associating" for the affiliate role. Similarly, some of the resources identified during value co-creation in the social commerce ecosystem include "financial resources", "Physical resources", "Interactional resources", "organisational resources", and "platform resources", which were available to the various actors.

As illustrated in Figure 4.1, the study followed established procedures to analyse the qualitative data resulting from the interviews. The first step involved open coding, consisting of breaking and naming interview data into discrete conditions (Miles et al., 2014). The main output of this step is first-order codes, which offer descriptive labels for a variety of interview responses about why they interacted with the social commerce platform. Some of the conditions identified from the interview responses include "personalisation" and "customer engagement". The second step involved axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), an inductive, recursive process through which similar first-order codes were combined into a set of more abstract second-order constructs. For instance, "sales potentials" and "partnership relationship management" were collectively labelled as "emerging market". The third step was selective coding which involved combining similar second-order constructs to obtain aggregate theoretical dimensions. Thus, "allied activities" and "business associate" were collectively named "Affiliate". Figure 7.1 illustrates the actual results for research question one.

One crucial and unexpected finding that emerged from analysing the findings of Research question one was the *Affiliate role in the* social commerce ecosystem. This affiliate role empowers and allows social commerce actors to promote and develop subsystems that spontaneously sense and respond to each other to co-create value. This role initiated by allied activities and business associates ensures that each actor is also a resource provider and a beneficiary of economic transactions services.

Figure 4. 1 Data Analysis Method for Research Question One

Source: Adapted from Tzeng (2018, p. 639)



4.5.2 Approach for Research Question Two

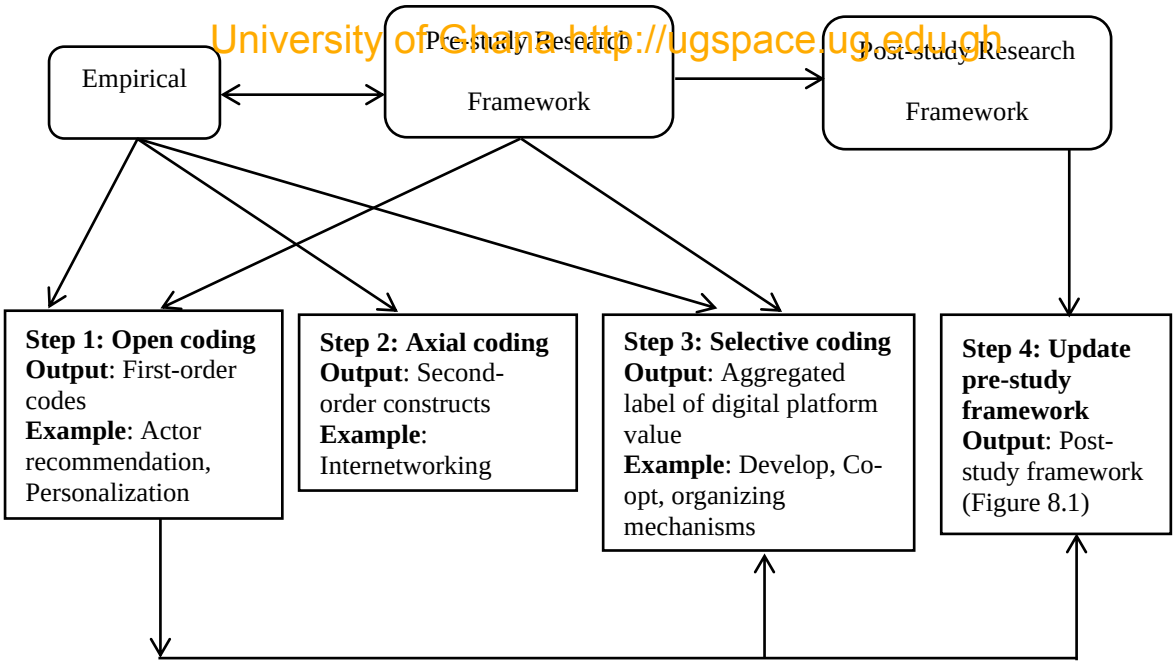
The second research question attempts to explain the value co-creation mechanisms within the social commerce ecosystem. Mechanisms were conceptualised in section 2.5 and empirically demonstrated in Chapter Seven, which presented and analysed a real-world social commerce ecosystem that facilitates value co-creation. The respondents listed in Table 4.3 were asked questions that prompted them to explain the mechanisms that cause resource integration with other actors in the social commerce ecosystem to explain the mechanisms that trigger resource integration in value co-creation. As illustrated in Figure 4.2, the study followed established procedures to analyse the qualitative data resulting from the interviews.

The first step involved open coding, consisting of breaking and naming interview data into discrete conditions (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The step's key output is first-order codes, which offer descriptive labels for various interview responses about why they interacted with each other in the case social commerce ecosystem. Some of the conditions identified from the interview responses include "service-giving", "Actor recommendation", "personalisation",

"Customer expectation", "Actor interaction", "Actor contacting", "Account management", "Platform usage", "Platform switching", "Platform evaluation", and "Platform affiliation". Axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was the next step, an inductive recursive method in which identical first-order codes were combined into a collection of more abstract second-order constructs. For instance, "Platform switching", "Platform evaluation", and "Platform affiliation" were collectively referred to as "Platform decisions"; Similarly, "Actor interaction" and "Actor contacting" were also referred to as "Internetworking".

The third step involved selective coding which entailed grouping together related second-order constructs to produce aggregate theoretical dimensions. Thus, "servicing provisioning" and "customerisation" were collectively named as "Develop Mechanism". Figure 7.2 illustrate the actual outcomes for research question two. Analyzing the results of Research question two yielded one significant and unexpected finding. One essential and unexpected finding emerged from analysing the findings of Research question two. Though the primary intent of the social commerce ecosystem was to generate economic benefits for the platform developer, it turns out that to co-create the economic benefits, the various actors needed to organize their respective resources to trigger the integration.

Figure 4. 2 Data Analysis Approach for Research Question Two



Source: Adapted from Tzeng (2018, p. 639)

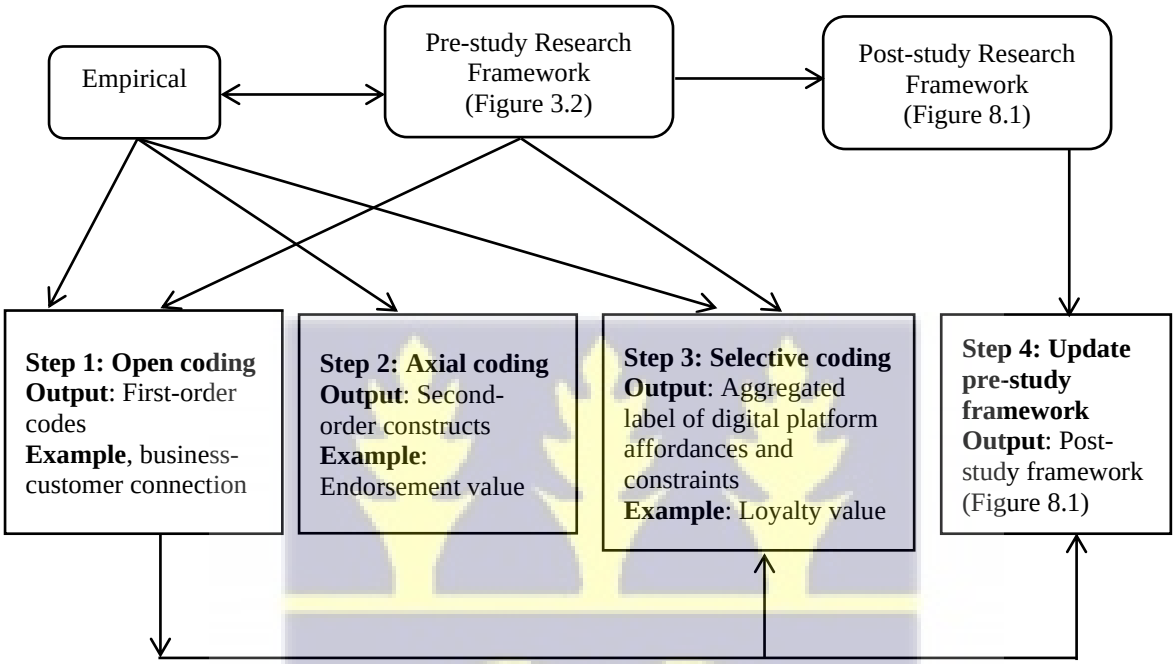
4.5.3 Approach for Research Question Three

The third research question explained the forms of value co-created within the social commerce ecosystem. To understand the types of value co-created, the respondents listed in Table 4.3 were asked questions that elicited answers that clarified the benefits they obtain from engaging with the various actors in the social commerce ecosystem. As illustrated in Figure 4.3, the study followed established procedures to analyse the qualitative data resulting from the interviews.

The first stage involved open coding, which consisted of breaking and naming interview data into discrete conditions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The step's key output is first-order codes, which provide descriptive labels for various interview answers about why they interacted and engaged with each other. Some of the conditions identified in the interview responses for dyadic interactions "establishing contacts for future deliveries", "SP gaining new insights", and "Actors are responsible for each other's growth" for triadic interactions. The second step involved the axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In this inductive, recursive method, similar

first-order codes were merged into a collection of more abstract second-order constructs. For instance, "business-customer connection" and "information requests" were collectively labelled as "customer contact". The third step was selective coding, which involved combining similar second-order constructs to obtain aggregate theoretical dimensions. For instance, "Endorsement value" and" Credibility value" were collectively named as "Loyalty value."

Figure 4. 3 Data analysis method for Research Question Three



Source: Adapted from Tzeng (2018, p. 639)

4.6 Ethical Considerations

Concerning the primary data sources, permission was requested from each selected institution before engagement with potential participants (see appendix A). Prospective participants were briefed on the essence of the research to appeal to their good intentions. Participants' readiness was their discretion. No coercive measures were applied. Anonymity of the identity of respondents concerning the information provided was assured. To prevent unbiased responses, convenient time periods of the respondents were adhered to in a relaxed ambience during

interviews sessions. Data collected were presented and analysed objectively within the tenets of critical realism research. Findings were neutral. In addition, all extant studies that provided insight, clarification and support for this study have been cited in compliance with the regulations of the University of Ghana. The aim is to comply with standards that will ensure quality research conduct and outcomes.

4.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter established the research paradigm and research approach used for this research. The chapter first presented an overview of and justified the choice of the qualitative case study methodology, followed by a comprehensive account of data collection and analysis procedures employed in this study. Figure 4.4 summarises the account of data collection and analysis in conjunction with other sections of this research study. The next chapter presents the case description.

CHAPTER FIVE

GHANA'S SOCIAL COMMERCE ECOSYSTEM CONTEXT

5.1 Chapter Overview

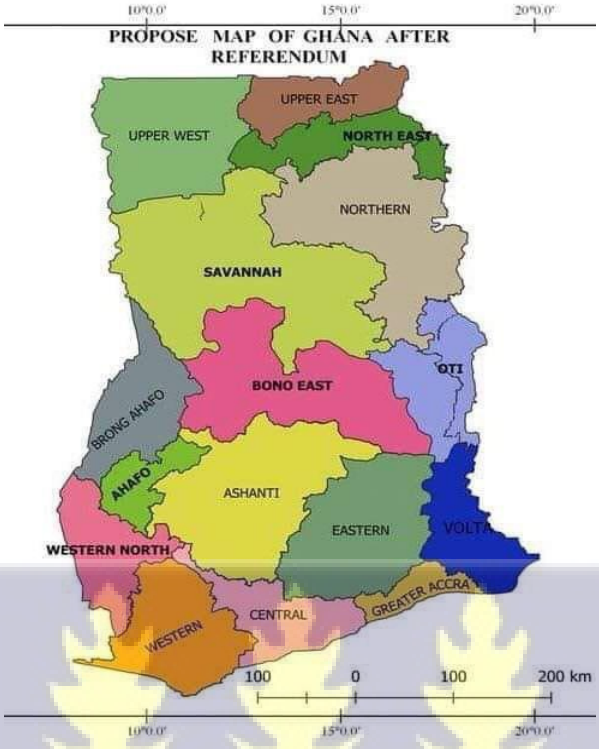
The previous presented the methodology of the study in seven sub sections. This chapter is organised into seven sections with various sub-sections. These sections address the context of the study. In section 5.2, the study presents a general overview of Ghana as the context of the research. In section 5.3 the study considers the nature of social commerce in Ghana while section 5.4 presents social commerce ecosystem and the elements of an ecosystem. Section 5.5 presents the social commerce actors while its sub-sections introduce the partners of the keystone case firm and who are members of the social commerce. In section 5.6, we present some fundamental ideas underlying social commerce value co-creation and, conclude with a summary of the chapter in section 5.7.

5.2 Ghana – A Brief Description

As represented in Figure 5.1, previously known as the Gold Coast, Ghana became independent from British colonial rule on the 6th of March, 1957. The first country south of the Sahara to gain independence. In 1966, its first president and the pan-African hero was overthrown in a coup, ushering in years of military rule. However, in April 1992, a referendum allowed the approval of a constitution that enabled a period of democracy. Ghana sits on the Atlantic Ocean and borders Togo in the East, Cote d'Ivoire in the west and Burkina Faso in the north. It has a population of about 29.6 million (2018). Ghana's economy continued to expand. As of the first quarter of 2019, gross domestic product (GDP) was estimated at 6.7%, compared with 5.4% in 2018. Non-oil growth was at 6.0%. The quarterly increase was attributed to the services sector, including financial, mobile telecommunication, and tourism services, which grew by 7.2% against 1.2% in the previous year. The total mobile subscription at the end of second-quarter 2016 stood at 36.1 million, with mobile penetration at 131.9%, while total data usage at the

end of the same quarter stood at 2.65 million gigabytes and the average monthly data usage per Broadband Wireless Access (BWA) was 24.27 gigabytes (NCA, 2016).

Figure 5. 1 Map of Ghana



Source: (Maps on Line, 2020).

5.3 Social Commerce in Ghana

The rapid growth of social commerce due to widespread Web 2.0 and Web 3.0 applications in electronic commerce has led to much valuable scholarship. Appreciating the complexity of the broader context requires expounding what influences are at work and an attempt to understand how they generate observed systemic outcomes—history matters. The connection between the present and the past is vivid as actors engage with past influences and current unforeseen circumstances and strategies and activities to keep or advance their desired position in the world. We propound that a realist viewpoint would be helpful to analyse the connection between the broader context, historicity, actor positions and actions, and the rise of systemic outcomes.

Online retailers incorporate different technologies into their e-commerce platforms to engage their customers. Social commerce is the most widely discussed practice, where customers can transact business directly through a retailer's social media page. It is estimated that about 92% of companies registered in Ghana are SMEs; 75% of this number contributes to the annual GDP (Nyarko, 2014). These high numbers associated with SMEs indicate the significant role SMEs play in the economic development of Ghana. Despite the substantial role in these SMEs, they face several challenges, including financial and managerial.

This is an indication of the role of SMEs in the economic development of Ghana (Abor, 2004). These challenges constrain expansion and reach and hence affect levels of profitability. However, the emergence of social media appears to be an opportunity for SMEs to overcome their constraints. A report in 2019 by We Are Social, and Hootsuite indicates that Ghana has 5.60 million active social media users representing 19% of the total population (Kemp, 2019). The report also suggests that 18% of the total population are mobile social media users. The average number of times per day spent using social media is 3 hours, while WhatsApp appears to be the most active social media platform, followed by Facebook (Kemp, 2021; Statista, 2021).

On the other hand, Facebook reports that the number of people that can be reached with adverts on Facebook is 5.50 million (McLachlan, 2020). These statistics represent the desire to appreciate and stay linked to local connections. Similarly, empirical studies on the commercial use of mobile in the informal sectors (Boateng, 2010) show that cost reduction and the benefits derived from convenient channels are the primary reasons for mobile adoption. This is strongly tied to the high number of mobile social media users in Ghana and the informal business economy (Sey, 2011).

This reinforces the view as captured in the pilot study (refer to section 4.6) that many social commerce enterprises operate in the informal business economy. The results from the pilot study also indicate that a significant number of social commerce enterprises engage in the Fashion industry, followed by those operating food and restaurants sectors. Figure 5.1shows the graph of enterprises in the various categories. A study by Hootsuite (McLachlan, 2020) in 2020 shows that based on Facebook's total addressable advertising audience, a total of 5.50 million Ghanaians can be reached with Facebook ads . Out of this total 6 out of 10 are males. While based on combined advertising audiences of Facebook, Instagram, and Facebook Messenger seven out of every ten people are between the ages of 18-34 year old range (Kemp, 2019). This is indicative of the strong penetration of social media and also an "emerging market middle class" with a per capita daily consumption of between $4 and $20. That is a reasonable purchasing power to afford consumer goods and services.

5.4 Social Commerce Ecosystem

This study aims to develop a model that explains how value co-creation takes place in a social commerce ecosystem. This ecosystem consists of human actors and digital technologies that establish a dynamic set of rules that enable the exchange of resources and the co-creation of value (Melissa Archpru Akaka & Vargo, 2015). To achieve this objective, one of the objectives is to examine the resources and the role of actors during value co-creation within the social commerce ecosystem. In examining the role of actors, we must emphasise the role of IT in holding together the various actors together and enabling collaboration in the ecosystem. To explore this role of IT in the ecosystem, Lusch and Nambisan (2015) recommend consideration of three underlying aspects of a service ecosystem: (1) a set of mostly loosely coupled value-proposing social and economic actors who form relationships with each other for service exchange and the resultant tension between structural flexibility and structural integrity; (2) maintaining shared institutional logics, which allows for a shared worldview and cognitive

distance among the various actors; (3) architecture of participation in the ecosystem that coordinates actors and their service exchanges.

5.4.1 Structural integrity

According to S-D Logic, structural integrity explains the nature of the linkages or relationships that bind the diverse participants in an ecosystem together (Lewicki & Brinsfield, 2009). Further, structural integrity describes the relationships that connects individual actors and how they can participate in the creation and offering of value propositions (Breidbach & Brodie, 2017; Vargo & Lusch, 2016). Structural integrity, therefore, is an essential issue because although the actors are loosely coupled with advantages, the relationship can also result in costly changes to business relationships (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015), such as bad deals. Previous literature posits that what holds actors together in a service ecosystem from an S-D Logic perspective are not standards or technologies but "a trinity of resources: competencies, relationships, and information" (Barrett et al., 2015; Lusch & Nambisan, 2015). Hence, the structural integrity of a service ecosystem exists because each actor in the ecosystem has the following: competencies (used to offer and provide service for others), relationships (with other actors), and information that is shared through common standards and protocols (Evans & Wurster, 1999; Lusch & Nambisan, 2015; Lusch et al., 2007; Normann & Ramirez, 1993; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). This trinity of resources allows the actors to propose and engage in value exchanges.

Furthermore, structural integrity provides the structures that affect actors to become more engaged and glued to each other (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015). In the context of the social commerce ecosystem in Ghana, in the example above (see Figure 5.1), the value propositions for the actors are the ability to generate extra income and the convenience of easy shopping and easy access to information from the comfort of their offices. The structure that affects them

to engage more is that most of them are colleagues and are also friends and the WhatsApp platform.

5.4.2 Cognitive Distance and Shared Worldview

According to previous research, a service ecosystem should be a self-adjusting system of resource-integrating actors linked by shared institutional arrangements and reciprocal value generation through the service exchange (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). This self-adjustment occurs when actors spontaneously sense and respond to their market relevance and viability (Lusch et al., 2010). As such, every ecosystem contains diverse actors with different levels of knowledge and skills. These actors are cognitively distant from each other. Cognitive distance is the differences in knowledge and skills or cognitive frames between two entities (Hendriks-Jansen, 1996; Weick, 1995). The institutional arrangement of a service ecosystem help brings together the actors that are cognitively distant (Breidbach & Brodie, 2017; Lounsbury & Crumley, 2007; Lusch & Nambisan, 2015). It also enables them to achieve a common perspective of their environment, a shared worldview (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015). A shared worldview implies that the actors collaboratively appreciate integrating resources simultaneously and harmonising the resource exchange (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015).

Shared worldviews include common business and cultural assumptions, evaluation methods, and mental frameworks. A shared worldview is critical in the social commerce ecosystem in Ghana. For example, users usually ask for recommendations and reviews from their network of friends on a social media platform before purchasing. Other users generally offer their professional opinions, while others proffer advice based on their experience. An example is during the delivery of purchased products. The seller usually alerts the courier services of the customer's location, expected time of delivery and cost estimates. These discourses typically occur on social media platforms or engagement platforms such as WhatsApp. The ability to

better understand the social commerce ecosystem is enhanced by sharing information among the various interdependent actors. The shared worldview includes how sellers and buyers on a social media platform share their knowledge and recommendation about a product before purchase.

5.4.3 Architecture of Participation

A service ecosystem provides a "road map" (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015a) for value co-creation among actors through the architecture of participation. The service ecosystem provides the mechanisms for coordinating, integrating, and synchronising the service exchange (Nambisan & Sawhney, 2007). The architecture of participation is mainly determined by the institutional arrangement or the means and rules the actors use to coordinate their actions. These rules enable them to operate without a robust command and control structure in typical bureaucratic institutions (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015). Lusch and Nambisan (2015) opine that there are two critical aspects of the architecture of participation: First, introducing transparent rules of exchange to facilitate service exchange.

The introduction of such rules affects the adoption of business processes and standards in the service ecosystem. Second the definition of the means through which the participants in the exchange realise value. This definition includes establishing different incentives that drive participation and sharing proceeds or value among the participants. In the context of social commerce in Ghana, the architecture of participation is highlighted by incorporating transparent rules of exchange during a transaction. For example, sellers usually ask for part payment to order products that are not custom-made; the rest is made on completion and after delivery. The cost is generally through payment platforms, and in some cases, delivery is free. Other sellers have payment policies on delivery either by cash or through a mobile money payment platform and confirmed by the courier service. Alternatively, the courier pays for the

delivery, and the customer reimburses the courier service on delivery. In the definition of the means through which is value is realised, social commerce firms in Ghana incorporate monetary rewards for those who buy and are within specific locations like waivers on delivery cost or part payment of the delivery cost in the exchange process facilitated by social media platforms.

5.5 Social Commerce Ecosystem Actors

Service providers, customers, and infrastructure providers are part of the social commerce ecosystem. Service providers are self-contained actors of the ecosystem that provide services to other ecosystem members or customers. The service providers include enterprises and retailers who sell or advertise their services and products via social media channels (see Figure 5.2).

Figure 5. 2 Advertising on Social commerce platform

Source: Barnhart (2021)

On the other hand, service consumers use the services and define the usage goals for the services, such as tasks that require support. Service consumers provide feedback for service validation and report on service usage problems. Finally, infrastructure providers offer services that help the ecosystem achieve its goals and capabilities, such as payment and delivery operations. The description of actors in Desven Bags' ecosystem comprises the following:

Table 5. 1 Summary of Actors and Their Roles

Actor	Primary Role	SCE Role
Express Delivery Services	Delivery Service	Intermediary
LDH GLOBAL	Delivery Service	Intermediary
Anuja Holdings	Supplier	designer
KayB Enterprises	Supplier	Ideator
Razak Mo	Delivery	Intermediary
Emmanuel	Customer	Ideator
Regina	Customer	Ideator
Cynthia	customer	Ideator

Source: Author's Construct

5.5.1 Actor 1 – Express Delivery Services

Actor 1, hereafter known as Express Delivery services (ED services), is a Ghanaian sole proprietorship specialising in transportation, e-commerce, and commercial services. It is based in Accra, Ghana's capital city. The initial mandate of the firm, ED Services, was utilised from 2004 to 2010. The moniker "ED" is a syllabic abbreviation of that mandate. The motorcycle delivery service provided by ED Services is the company's most well-known service today. ED Services is one of Ghana's leading delivery services, assisting in transferring parcels for some of the country's most prestigious businesses.

James Berko (a pseudonym), a graduate of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), began Express Delivery Services on the university campus in 2003, where he was a student. According to accounts given by James, there were several courier services already in the Kumasi area, a number of them he had personally patronised their services, but none operated from the university campus. At KNUST, he developed the company's concept, which called for a system created exclusively for urgent delivery. To meet this need, 22-year-old James borrowed the equivalent of $100 from his two friends, and with his savings, he established Express Delivery Services. He first bought one run-down motorcycle from a repairer close to the university and, after two months, bought a second bike also from the same repairer.

While his friends didn't think much of the idea, James insisted it was a viable proposition and persisted in his planning. He began formal operations in 2004 when he changed his *hall of residence* on the University campus. James cited his initial goal for starting the business to cater to the university campus population, like students whose parents live outside Kumasi and lecturers. During the start-up phase, James intended to hire two contract riders. These riders will help start and grow the business. Because it was a start-up courier service, the company will need to win new clients. These clients can only be won either through word of mouth or sales by himself as a salesperson, referrals from friends, and using the drivers.

5.5.1.1 ED Services Today

In 2006, there was a need to relocate to Accra because James had completed school. In Accra, James the out-house in his parents' house as his base of operations and started recruiting drivers using the profits accrued from Kumasi operations as the seed capital. With the change of location came along a name change. The first name was well-suited to a new company's business interests since people needed to associate the name with the company's operations.

Accra had its peculiar dynamics, so James sought to change the name to a shorter version to make it easily pronounced and identifiable since other big competitors were around. And also, for the fact that the company had left the confines of a more comfortable space like a university campus where it was easy to assimilate into the system. However, in response to telephone calls from their Kumasi operations, the name Express Delivery was maintained for a while in Kumasi till 2008. In Accra, the company moved to a rented space after two years (2008) and also recruited a Front-desk executive who acted as the office manager. Concerning the riders, six were recruited, and one of them was appointed as the lead driver.

At the dawn of 2009, individuals started to change their lifestyles and focus more on their health. That change brought about healthy eating, increasing the number of retailers who cooked healthy meals and opted to deliver to their customers in offices around the capital. In response, ED Services ventured toward delivering consumables by acquiring a car with same-day delivery and excellent service. In December 2009, the company looked to develop its regional presence and expand its services across the country by using the Kumasi operations as the hub for the northern part of the country. By March 2010, ED Services provided services to all ten regional capitals from two hubs, Kumasi and Accra. Delivering to Cape Coast was to serve the large student population in the city. Because the city has approximately fifty secondary schools, it is considered the epicentre of secondary education in Ghana. For ED Services, delivering parcels to students in Cape Coast was like being faithful to its humble origins in Kumasi, serving the student population. To further increase regional delivery, the company acquired 12 motorcycles each to cater for a region; revenues were in excess of $10,000, but profits were falling, so James decided to sell all old motorcycles for more fuel-efficient ones.

ED Services frequently accessed a broader and diverse customer base through word of mouth and recommendations. However, with the advent of social networking sites, James decided to join in and create a Facebook profile after receiving repeated promises from friends that it was

the way to go. Turning to social media in 2012 has considerably expanded the operations of ED services. Consequently, ED Services' relationship with its customers is far more than essential transportation services. The company had to hire a few more staff like a tracking manager, an accountant and a client's service manager to manage client expectations and acquire new corporate clients. There was also the need to hire a social media manager who would engage clients on social media and post content on the Facebook page.

5.5.1.2 Proximity to its Customers

James says, "*we didn't set out to build the world's leading delivery company; we were simply trying to help our customers"*. James intimated that success stems from having "a proximity to its customers that its competitors lacked". He elaborated that because ED Services was a small business, it understood what individuals and small businesses needed by getting closer to the customer. Facebook was able to get ED Services closer to their customer than its competitors, which also means the company was open to its customers 24/7. ED services identified three key areas on Facebook to gain an advantage; A lovable brand, Freemium, and customer delight.

5.5.2 Actor 2 - LDH GLOBAL

Actor 2, referred to in this study as LDH Global, is a multinational courier delivery business based in Germany. LDH Global is the market leader and provides various services, including door-to-door, shipment, and rapid delivery.

LDH Global began as a corporation that shipped documents between two states in one of the most populated states in the United States of America. One of the founders obtained work as a courier for an insurance business in the state of California while studying law at the university in the late 1960s. Up to five times a week, he began performing courier duties between Oakland International Airport and Los Angeles International Airport, picking up items for the day's

final flight and returning on the first aircraft. The law student met with the salesperson of the insurance business after graduation, and the two agreed to promote the insurance company's notion of speedy delivery to other companies. They flew between Honolulu and Los Angeles, delivering bills of lading for Seatrain Lines, their first client.

Hillblom put up a portion of his student loans to start the business, enlisting the help of two friends, Adrian Dalsey and Robert Lynn, as partners and naming the firm after the initials of their surnames. They shared a Plymouth Duster and drove about San Francisco to collect documents in luggage before rushing to the airport to book flights using another new invention, the company credit card. As the business grew, they hired more couriers to join the team. Max and Blanche Kroll, whose flat in Hawaii sometimes served as a temporary flophouse for their couriers, were their first recruits.

Surprisingly, LDH Global did not start expanding within the United States right immediately, opting instead to grow to the Philippines, Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Australia, followed by expansions to Europe in 1974, the Middle East in 1976, Latin America in 1977, and Sub-Saharan Africa in 1978. LDH Global did not begin growing in the United States until 1983. LDH Global began providing international service to Eastern Bloc Europe the same year, followed by service to Vietnam, the People's Republic of China, and Kuwait during the Gulf War. LDH Global had a presence in 170 countries and employed 16,000 people by 1988.

In 1998, A German national postal service began buying LDH Global stock, eventually gaining control in 2001. The national postal service had purchased all of LDH Global's remaining shares and incorporated the firm into its Express division by the end of 2002. Other divisions, business units, and companies were given the LDH Global moniker. Other business segments, such as LDH Global Forwarding, LDH Global Freight, LDH Global Supply Chain, and LDH

Global Mail, now use the LDH Global brand. In 2002, LDH Global introduced a new colour scheme and logo.

The worldwide headquarters of LDH Global is located in Bonn, Germany, and is part of the Deutsche Post headquarters. The company's headquarters for the Americas is in Plantation, Florida, with offices in Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, and China for Asia-Pacific and emerging markets. Leipzig, Germany, serves as the European centre. LDH Global International GmbH is the holding company for the majority of LDH Global Express' operations.

LDH Global provides services worldwide, including delivery to Iraq, Afghanistan, and Myanmar (formerly Burma). LDH Global is unaffected by US embargoes or sanctions because it is German-owned, and it will ship to Cuba and North Korea. Due to the country's unstable ties with the West, there are tight delivery standards for North Korea. Because LDH Global is no longer a US firm, it is not permitted to fly domestically between US airports. LDH Global outsources certain services to other companies.

In Ghana, LDH Global started as a franchise through Exel Logistics in November 2000. It later transitioned into LDH Global Logistics (Ghana) when the LDH Global Group bought controlling shares in May 2008, becoming a proud arm of the LDH Global Group. The Ghana operations focus on air and ocean freight and, most recently, warehousing and road freight. Specifically, LDH Global Ghana is also involved in sub-regional and road shipment and other cross-business unit initiatives.

5.5.3 Actor 3 Anuja Holdings

Actor 5, referred to in this study as Anuja Holdings, was founded by Chief Anuja Bello and was incorporated in March 1992 after operating as a small-scale producer of leather products

in 1990. The company focuses on producing quality leather products to satisfy its customers, primarily in Nigeria.

Anuja Holdings has 15 products categorised products. The company's products categories are presidential leather, Diplomat leather, Royal leather, and standard leather. The raw materials for the products and other related materials are sourced both locally and internationally. Local souring is done by telephone, email and frequent personal visits to the local districts and international or foreign sourcing via the internet, email, and occasional visits. The company also uses social media to locate new clients and communicate with existing ones. The company has developed a vast customer base nationwide and throughout the sub-region of West Africa. Some of these customers include the Presidency, State Governments, Banks, Royal houses, multinationals, and small-scale companies.

The company's traditional leatherworking approach may develop or construct products for big-scale productions and customised ones. The company also offers revolutionary leather to the fashion and interior design sectors via social media platforms and other technological means. Through an intra-organisational network system using its Abuja warehouse, the company uses only the finest raw materials from all around Nigeria, including the best from Sokoto and Kano State.

The leather process can be summarised in 5 basic steps: (1) preparation, (2) Tanning, (3) Splitting and shaving, (4) setting (5) Finishing. In step 1, the hide is flashed after being removed, eradicating any excess tissue or fat. Freshly fleshed hides are transported to a tannery in refrigerated trucks for quick processing into leather. Chemical digestion using a solution of lime and sodium sulphide is used to eliminate the hair, which is rotated every now and then.

After removing the hair, the hides are neutralised with acids and treated with enzymes to eliminate deposits and promote suppleness. Picking is the next step, which entails soaking the hides in a solution of water, salt, and acid. In Step 2, the final step in converting hides and skin into leather is tanning. There are various tanning procedures. However, Chrome and Vegetable Tanning is the most popular. Chrome is the most popular browser. Chrome tanned leather is used for most furniture, shoemakers, clothing, and bags. The procedure begins with a bath in a chemical containing trivalent chromium in revolving drums. The chrome usually takes eight hours to permeate through the hide. After that, the chromium is fixed with an alkaline chemical like sodium carbonate or bicarbonate. The hide is termed tanned after this treatment. Vegetable tanning is used to manufacture various products, including shoe soles, luggage, saddlery, etc.

In Step 3, splitting and shaving are the subsequent processes following tanning. The skins are divided into sheets of the desired thickness and processed further through a shaving machine to improve quality, depending on the eventual usage of the leather product. Chrome tanned hides are put in spinning drums with hot water, pigments, and synthetic tanning agents after shaving to get the required colour. To achieve the softness needed for the end product, they are lubricated with natural fat, synthetic fatty type compounds, or a mix of both. In Step 4 Setting, or removing extra water and spreading the hide out before drying is the next step. Depending on the sort of leather being produced, there are a variety of drying procedures. Staking is the mechanical softening of upholstery leather after it has been toggle dried (spreading the leather across expanding frames held by toggles or clips). Milling, which is dry tumbling with atomised moisture introduced into the tumbler, can help soften the skins.

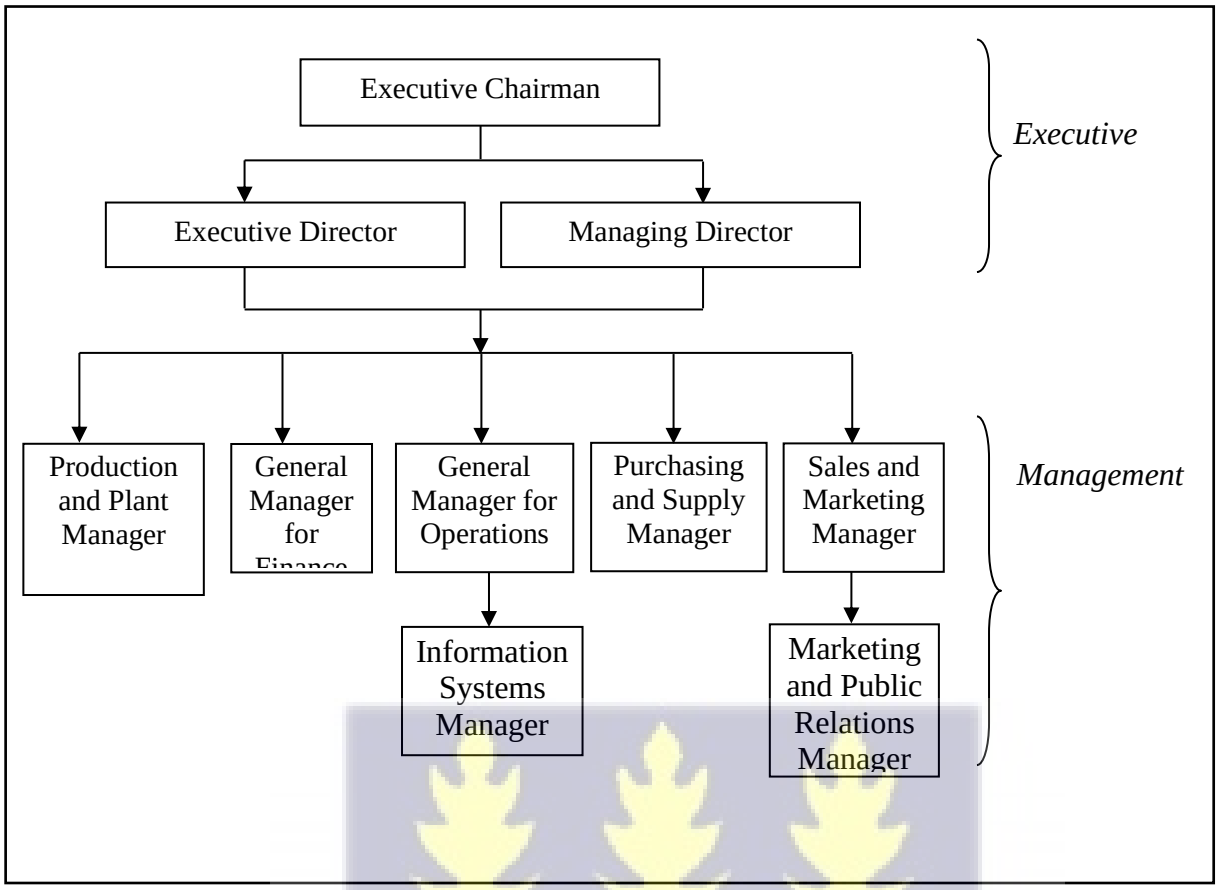
In Step 5, finishing comprises applying several coats to the leather's surface. These coatings are intended to preserve the leather while creating stunning visual and tactile effects. Today's finishing represents the most up-to-date technology in applying coating materials. To get the

intended result, several mechanical processes are required. Hydraulic presses, printing presses, embossing presses, automated spray applicators, and vacuum driers are just a few of the finishing machinery. The sort of finish procedure to be used depends on the intended usage of the leather. The finish must have different physical qualities for each kind. Flexibility and water resistance are only a few of the requirements.

Anuja Holdings has two offices in Abuja and Sokoto with three executive directors, who run the company with the support of seven managers who form the management team. The three executive directors comprise the executive chairman, executive director, and managing director, who is also the company's founder. The managing director (MD) is a graduate of the Entrepreneur Development Centre of the Lagos Business School. He is also an executive member of the CYO, an Abuja volunteer organisation. The executive chairman holds a Master's Degree in mechanical engineering from The Federal Polytechnic, Bida in the Niger State.

Anuja Holdings' executives are supported by a management team consisting of a sales and marketing manager, Production and plant manager, general manager for finance and accounting, purchasing and supply manager, general manager for operations, and information systems manager (see Figure 5.3 for Anuja Holdings' organogram). These managers have postgraduate degrees and professional qualifications related to their managerial functions. On the other hand, the executive director has a bachelor's degree in electrical and electronic engineering and a Master's degree in business administration. The IT unit comprises the IS manager, social media Manager and IT technician. The IT unit is responsible for all IS-related issues. Anuja Holdings has a permanent workforce of 120 who work in unison with approximately 200 casual labourers yearly.

Figure 5. 3 Organisational Structure of Anuja Holdings



Source: Anuja Holdings

Anuja Holdings is a registered member of several key professional bodies in Nigeria through which they participate in so many local and international trade fairs. Some of these bodies include the Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC), the Nigerian Association of Small and Medium Enterprises (NASME), and the African Arts and Cultural Heritage Association (AACHA).

5.5.3.1 Business Start-Up

Anuja Holdings began as a small-scale leather manufacturing firm in the home of the MD in 1990. As of that time, leather production was dominated by imports and synthetic products produced from plastics and petroleum-based chemicals. The company started in Sokoto state,

an ancient city in Northern Nigeria. The city is well-known for its long-standing commitment to the arts and crafts. In Sokoto, the culture of hides and skins is a famous embodiment of this heritage. This is demonstrated by the fact that a whole neighbourhood in the metropolis, Shiyar Madunka, is mainly populated by people who make a living from arts and crafts. According to the MD, this rich legacy sparked the concept for the firm.

'This insight was unique; ...we recognised the developing sophistication of the consumer—high expectations in terms of taste, quality, safety and packaging.

The MD founded the company with the help of several close friends, including a cattle herder who oversaw Production and two production assistants. The MD was in charge of consumer scouting, marketing, promotion, and gathering input from the community. When another friend joined the business as the operations manager (also the current general manager for operations) and doubled as the driver because he was the most familiar with the city, employees grew to five.

5.5.4 Actor 4 - KayB Enterprises

Kofi Boateng and Mary Brachie own 4 Enterprises, hereafter known as KayB Enterprise. Kofi Boateng is a retired Civil servant. Mary was a teacher in one of many private senior high schools in Kumasi but had to resign due to ill health. She currently works with her husband. KayB Enterprises has a workforce of 11 (in 2006), including an accountant, one cashier, four shop attendants, two drivers/ riders and 1cutter, and one store manager.

The company's directors are Kofi Boateng, the Managing Director (MD), and Mary Boateng, the Deputy MD. Out of the nine employees, 3 have a tertiary or professional education – the owners and the accountant. They form the management. Mary, Kofi and the accountant are all fluent in English, but Kofi speaks conversational French. The rest of the staff have obtained either a secondary or primary education. They have previous experience in shop floor

management while the cutter has worked as an apprentice or an attaché to another leather shop. The Couple (Kofi and Mary) work together to give the company its strategic direction and bulking purchasing of raw hides while the cutter produces different cuts for retailers. KayB Enterprises is a member of the Association of Ghanaian Industries (AGI), Ghana Manufacturers Association (GMA), and Small Business Association Ghana (SBAG), which has Kofi as the president.

The firm's IT resources consist of two laptop computers and 2 HP Desktop Pro M, Intel Core I5, 5th Gen. The couple uses the two laptops while the accountant and the store manager use the desktop computers. It also has one Hewlett Packard 1100 LaserJet printer1, one telephone line, two mobile lines and one fax machine. The firm subscribes to broadband Internet service from a local ISP at the cost of US$50 a month.

5.5.4.1 Firm Profile

KayB Enterprises is a sole proprietorship family business. KayB Enterprises was registered in May 2004 and commenced its operations in September the same year as an enterprise selling leather products. KayB Enterprises is a leading distributor of leather for upholstery, automotive seats, tarpaulins, and fashion in Ghana. The product lines of KayB Enterprises are as follows: a) Core spun yarn; b) Animal hide glue; c) Full grain leather; d) Top Grain leather; e) Genuine Leather (Corrected Leather); f) Bonded leather

The product lines are made available to customers in 4 different types of leather Grades: 1) Leather Hide Grade – Untannable. 2) Leather High-Grade numbers 1-3. Finished leather is generally acquired according to the cut type. This might be the entire hide or only a portion of it.

In Kumasi, where the couple had met and resided before Kofi relocated to Accra to join the civil service, Mary began petty selling as a low-profile leisure activity in 2000. While working as a trader importing and retailing various goods, she discovered that customers enquired about fashion products and decided to pursue them.

Kofi left his position as a public servant in April 2004. When determining what to do next, Kofi cites his love for leather and leather products and his previous expertise in garment manufacturing as significant motivators for starting the business.

5.5.5 Actor 5 – Razak Mo

Actor 3 referred to Razak Mo. Razak works as a delivery person with M&J Limited. The company is owned by Michael (Pseudonym) and registered as a sole proprietorship under the Companies Code of the Republic of Ghana, incorporated in January 2018, licensed by and in good standing with the Postal and Courier Service Regulatory Commission, Ghana.

Razak is 20 years married with a 3-year-old child. His wife works as a porter (Kayayo) in one of the busy city markets in Accra. Both Razak and his wife hail from the northern parts of Ghana and relocated to Accra to find profitable employment. He lives in a rented single bedroom in a large compound in Tudu, a suburb of Accra. The house has basic amenities with toilet and bathroom facilities outside the compound. Razak's home has relatively stable electricity and has a communal running water as their source of drinking water. Other sources of drinking water include sachet water. Razak has a 24-inch LG second-hand television which he purchased from a local second-hand electronics dealer close to his home. In addition, he has a radio also bought from the same dealer in his locality.

Razak has a Senior High School (SHS) certificate, which he acquired before migrating south to Accra searching for greener pastures. Like most people, his age and background, he can read

and write simple sentences in English and several Ghanaian languages with understanding. He has no plans to further his education but intends to acquire mechanical skills through apprenticeship. Razak's first employment when he migrated to Accra was to work as a driver's mate, and through that, he learnt how to drive himself. After a few months, he lost his work, so he tried his hand at being a mechanic and started as an apprentice, but he couldn't keep it up since there was no money and he had a child on the way, and he needed to prepare to care for him.

For Razak, 'okada' has become a lifeline since he dropped out of the apprenticeship because of his financial constraints. The business puts food on the table. He was introduced to the industry by a friend who recommended him to the company's proprietors where he now works. On each delivery, he receives a daily commission. Depending on the distance, the commission rate ranges from 5%-10%. He earns more than GH¢ 150 from the company on a good day. Through his earnings, he has acquired a Tecno Pop 5P smartphone at the cost of GH¢ 550 from a friend.

Aside from using the phone to call family and friends back home in the North, Razak uses the phone as his business contact. He has installed various social media sites on his smartphone for messaging and social networking; WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and LinkedIn. He draws attention to barriers that occur through verbal communication over the telephone, such as record-keeping and information delivery timeliness. Access to social media and the internet in general, on the other hand, fosters trust, which is critical for maintaining commercial ties. In this regard, Razak ensures that all deliveries are completed on time, and also, he follows up with important clients via WhatsApp messaging to assure their pleasure. Razak usually spends GH¢ 10 per week on data bundle and another GH¢ 10 on airtime per week.

5.5.6 Customers

5.5.6.1 Actor 6 – Emmanuel

Actor 6, Emmanuel, is a 29-year-old male customer of Desven Bags. He is a branch manager of a multinational financial institution. He has a Bachelor's degree in accounting and a master's degree in Banking and Finance from a private university. He has accounts on three social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. He signed up for his first social media account in 2014 on Facebook and followed up a few months later with an account on Twitter. The Instagram account followed two years later.

Of the three social media platforms, he is very active on Twitter and less active on Facebook. He checks his Twitter accounts several times a day to keep abreast with trending issues, update up to the minute on trending news, and interact with friends on the platform. He spends an average of 3.5 minutes per session on each visit.

He visits his Instagram account to look at friends' pictures and see the latest fashion items in town. When he is on the Instagram platform, he frequently looks out for fashion pages and often interacts with them. Sometimes, he buys from these accounts. Though he does not visit his Instagram account as often as his Twitter account, he spends a long time on each visit, averaging 10 minutes per session. He rarely visits his Facebook page unless his friends prompt him. When he does visit, he spends barely two minutes on each visit.

He lives in a rented apartment in a beautifully planned residential area in the city's capital and has a former president as a neighbour. He spends an average of US$10 a month on internet access from his telephone providers on his smartphone and has broadband internet access at his apartment from a local ISP.

5.5.6.2 Actor 7 – Regina

Actor 7 in this study is referred to as Regina, is a female university student; she is 21 years old and pursuing a bachelor of science degree in food and Nutrition. She is in her second year at the university and resides in one of the traditional halls on campus. Her parents take care of all basic needs. Her father is a medical doctor with his medical facility, while her mother is a senior partner in a prestigious law firm in Accra. She drives a 2018-year model Toyota corolla.

Regina is a straight-A student but also finds time to surf the internet. She uses the internet to research her courses. Like most young ladies her age, she loves to network on social media. She has four social media accounts: Instagram, Snapchat, Tik Tok and Twitter. Her favourite social media platform is Instagram, and she follows several accounts on the platform, mainly fashion and lifestyle accounts locally and internationally. She logins during the evenings and nights. She spends considerable time on Instagram, an average of about 20 minutes per session. She spends less time on the other platforms.

Regina owns an iPhone X, a gift from her parents. Though she has the latest Dell laptop computer, she prefers to use the phone to log in to her Instagram account. Although the school has campus-wide internet access available to all students, she likes using the bundle data purchased from her telecom providers. She uses an average of US$5 per month to purchase data. Regina usually buys clothes and other items on social media. She orders food from Jumia and which is delivered to her hostel. She frequently buys fashion items on Instagram. She usually spends an average of US$40 per month on various items she buys on the platform.

5.5.6.3 Actor 8 – Cynthia

Cynthia is the name of actor number eight. Cynthia is 35 years old, married, and the mother of a kindergarten-aged child. Cynthia and her family reside in a leased two-bedroom house in a

beautifully planned residential area catering to Accra's middle and upper classes. Like most residences in this neighbourhood, Cynthia and her family live in a walled compound and have hired private security guards. The area is also teeming with many businesses cutting across multiple industries: Law, retail, entertainment, beauty, and fashion.

She has a journalism degree, a certificate in Information Technology from a quasi-government institution, a post-graduate diploma in Project management, and several practical and Industrial training certifications in public relations and communications. She has enrolled in a Master's program to read Mass Communications at a private university in Accra. She attends school in the evenings because she is a part-time student.

After graduation, her first employment was as a public relations professional for a pharmaceutical company. She worked for two years in the firm's corporate communications department as a management trainee. After two years, she was promoted to head the department when the position became vacant, and she applied for it. After two years in that position, she resigned and joined one of Ghana's leading media houses as a Senior News Editor. Driven by an ambition to be the Managing News Editor, she worked hard and was on a 40 hours per week schedule. With a lifelong passion for entrepreneurship, Cynthia started a small business aside from her media work, selling rice and sugar from the trunk of her Nissan Rogue crossover SUV. She advertises her small business on her WhatsApp status. Her entire combined monthly income made up of her earnings from her formal employment in the media house and her petty trading amounted to an average of US$ 1500.

Cynthia uses a 2014 MacBook Pro given to her by the company. She purchased an iPhone X from a retailer in Accra's shopping centres and paid for it using her mobile money account. At home, Cynthia and her husband currently subscribe to broadband Internet service from a local

ISP – a speed of 256kps at the cost of US$50 a month. This subscription began after the ISP extended its broadband service to the location of the firm's office.

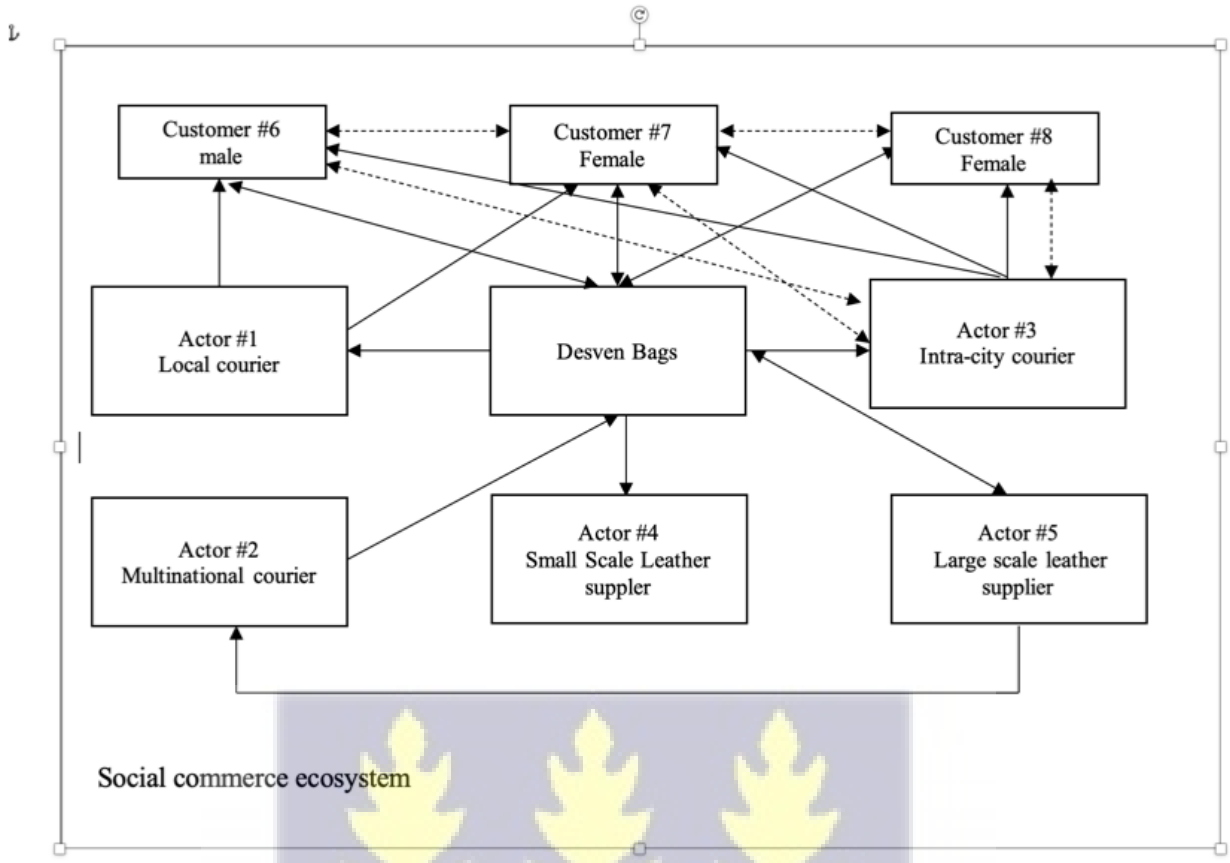
Cynthia is signed up on many social media sites, but she is not active on many. She is very busy on Twitter because of the platform's news-related content. She utilises Facebook to learn about friends' opinions and random connections on topical issues and obtain her news via Twitter. She uses Instagram to keep up with her friends' activities while she prepares to retire to bed. She spends an average of 45 minutes per visit on Instagram. During such visits, she also interacts with friends and makes inquiries about products and services, especially fashion products, beauty products, and health and wellbeing services. She has purchased products in response to inquiries on several occasions. She spends an average of $50 every month buying fashion and beauty products from social media companies.

5.6 Social Commerce Value Co-Creation Process

All actors are involved in creating value, which is interactive and collaborative. The social commerce ecosystem represents value co-creation that includes all players and resources linked by the value being presented. As a result, co-creating value is a paradigm for the symbolic relationship between a company and its primary partners. All the actors are involved in creating value, which is interactive and collaborative.

Delivering value to clients through Desven Bags' partners is important to the company's business approach. The partners act as a link between the company and its clients, and they may provide services such as sales support, consultation, customisation, and enhancement. In addition, Desven Bags' partners act as an extension of the company, adding to the core of the firm's offering.

Figure 5. 4 Desven Bags' Value Co-creation process



Source: Author's construct

5.7 Chapter Summary

Prior studies in strategic management and quality management have identified five roles for customers associated with value co-creation (Kaulio, 1998; Lengnick-Hall, 1996; Lusch & Nambisan, 2015). On the other hand, S-D logic identifies three broad roles dependent on the nature of service exchange and the type of resource integration. These roles include ideator, designer, and intermediary (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015).

CHAPTER SIX

VALUE CO-CREATION IN SOCIAL COMMERCE – THE CASE OF DESVEN BAGS

6.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the case description of Desven Bags, a social media-based fashion manufacturing and selling company. The chapter is divided into ten interrelated sections. The preliminary section is the chapter overview. In section 6.2 deals with the background information of the case firm. In section 6.3 the case firm's firm social media activities are considered. Section 6.4 presents the case firm's ecosystem. Section 6.5 details interactions on the social commerce platform. Section 6.6 gives a description of the social commerce actors. Section 6.7 describes the resources used in value co-creation. Section 6.8 provides a detailed description of the case firm's value co-creation. Section 6.9 details the outcomes of case firm's value co-creation activities. The chapter summary is then presented in section 6.10.

6.2 Desven Bags

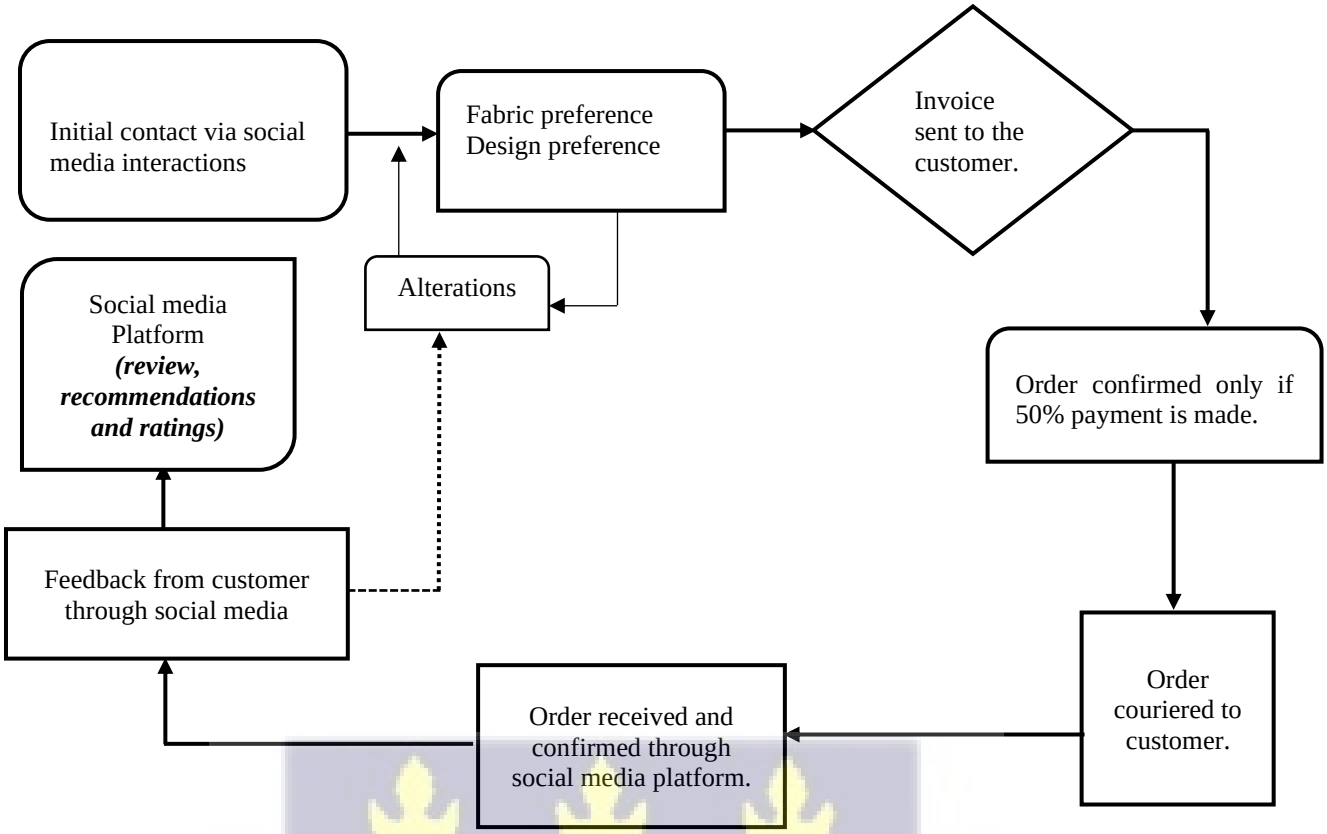
6.2.1 Company Background

Desven Company Limited (DCL) is a limited liability company. DCL commenced operations in 2018 as a small-scale bags and accessories enterprise with the initial aim of producing for the local market. In February 2020, the partners incorporated the business and expanded the target market and the product line. The company is located in a suburb of Accra. The location serves as its offices, production centre, and storage and packaging centre. From this location, DCL exports its products abroad to countries such as the United Kingdom, Parts of the United States, France and some countries in Africa. DCL initially commenced operations as a small-scale bags and accessories enterprise in 2018. DCL designs and manufactures African-patterned products. The product lines of DCL are as follows (1) Bespoke Back Packs for all gender, (2) Men's wallets, (3) Travelling bags, (4) men's Toiletries bags (5) Hats.

The product lines are made available to customers both abroad and locally through two product cycles; first, through a bespoke product ordering system (Figure 6.1) where products are pre-ordered and second, through the purchase of ready-to-use products (Figure 6.2) at the company's premises. The bespoke ordering system is where the products are designed and produced to suit the customer's preferences. The design preferences of the customer are subject to available designs. The company has a catalogue of African-patterned designs, covering various traditional Akan symbols like "gye nyame". Customer preferences are usually reflected in the use of the product. After agreeing on the orders, it takes at least seven working days to produce and a day to three days to deliver to a customer within Ghana, depending on location. Customers outside Ghana receive their products between five to ten working days, depending on the courier.

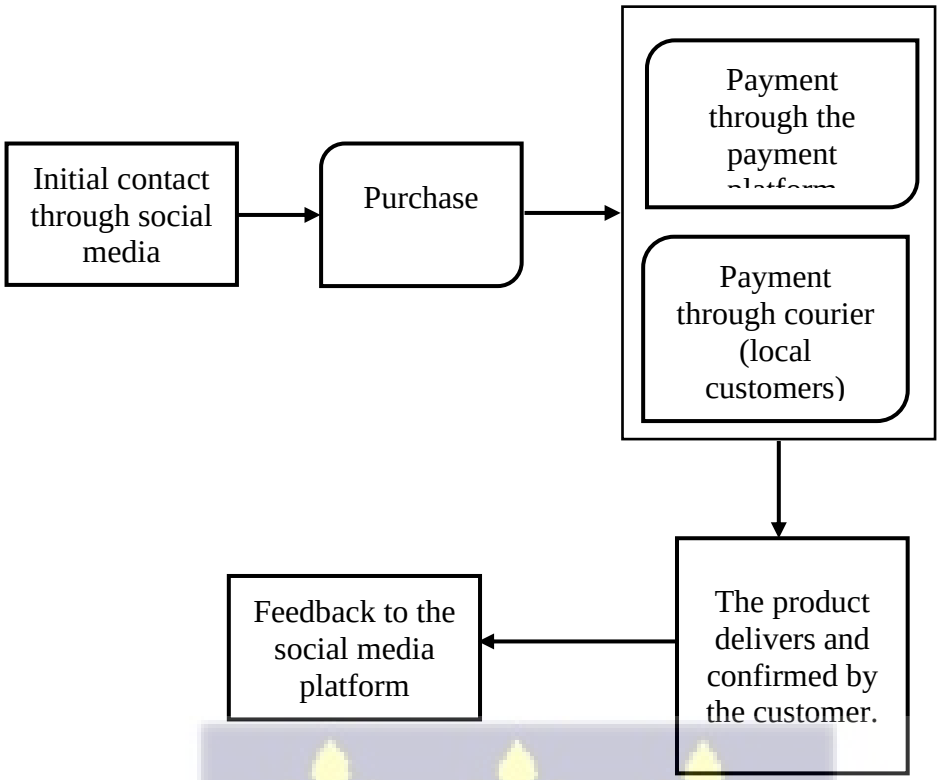
Concerning ready-to-use products, DCL designs, produces and manufactures some bags, wallets, tablet cases and toiletries bags in different fabrics, designs and styles available for their product lines. These products are showcased on social media platforms which can be purchased. DCL and its partners deliver value to its customers through a collaborative network system. Customers' orders are prepared and processed through an elaborate order and payment process consisting of six main stages; initial contact, fabric/design choice, order confirmation, production, shipment, and receipt and feedback. The order and production process are illustrated in Figure 6.3.

Figure 6. 1 Bespoke Product ordering system and Payment Process



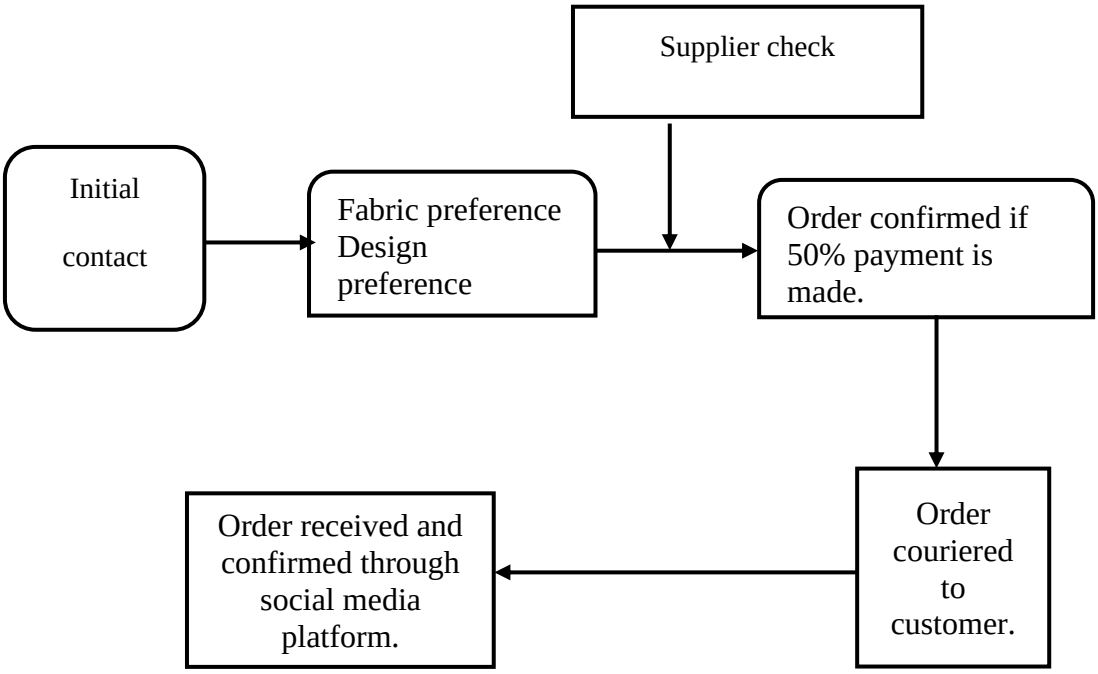
Source: Author's construct

Figure 6. 2 Ready-to-use products



Source: Author's construct

Figure 6. 3 Order and production process

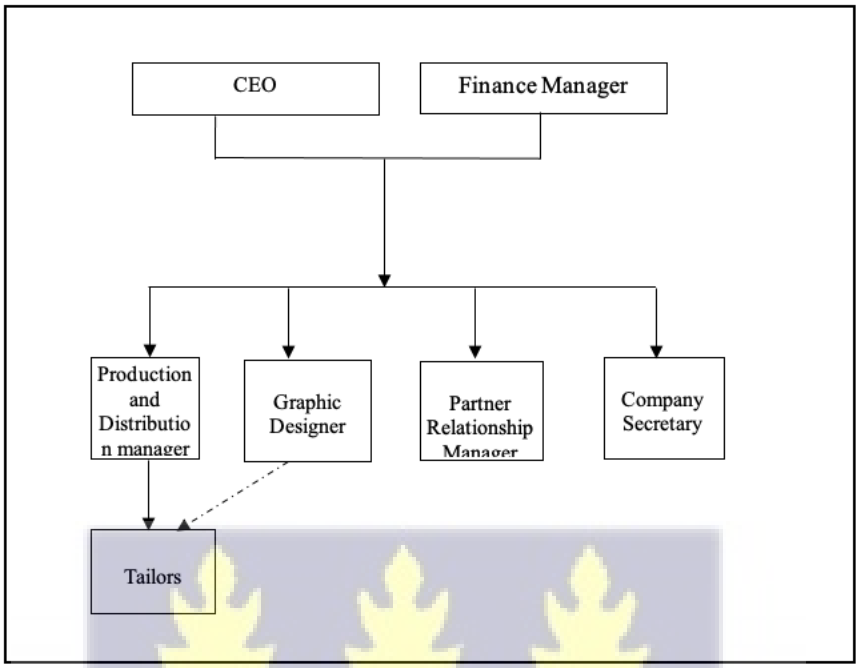


Source: Author's construct

DCL is owned by Desmond Ateh Larkai and Samuel Aboagye Mensah. The company's name Desven is a combination of "Desmond and Heaven" and reflects the owners' Christian faith in the sanctuary of God. Desmond is a University of Ghana graduate with an MPhil in Information Systems and learnt the art of designing and sewing while studying. His partner Samuel is also a graphic designer. DCL has a workforce of 30, including the CEO, Desmond, who doubles as the marketing and communication manager responsible for social media marketing and business development and is also the Chief Executive Officer (CEO); Samuel is the finance manager. There is also a production and distribution manager, company secretary, graphic designer, partner relationship manager (PRM), and 24 tailors and designers. Out of the 30 employees, 8 have a tertiary or professional education – the owners, the production and distribution manager, the company secretary, PRM and graphic designer (see Figure 6.4 for

Desven's Bags' Organogram). DCL is a member of the Ghana Association of Fashion Designers & Exporters (GAFDEX) and The Association of Ghanaian Industries (AGI).

Figure 6. 4 Desven Bags Organogram



Source: Desven Bag's Company Interviews

6.3 Desven's Social Media Activities

Desmond and Sammy believed that having a social media presence to assist business opportunities was crucial to taking advantage of the market potential. They explained that

'Social media in every business opportunity opens the business to successfully sell the firm and its operations,'.

Informational and interactional capabilities informed the company's social media strategic directions. The strategic directions consisted of four key activities: a) building a social community that entails building the company's brand, increasing customer relationships, promoting the company's presence online, and also low-level market research; b) social

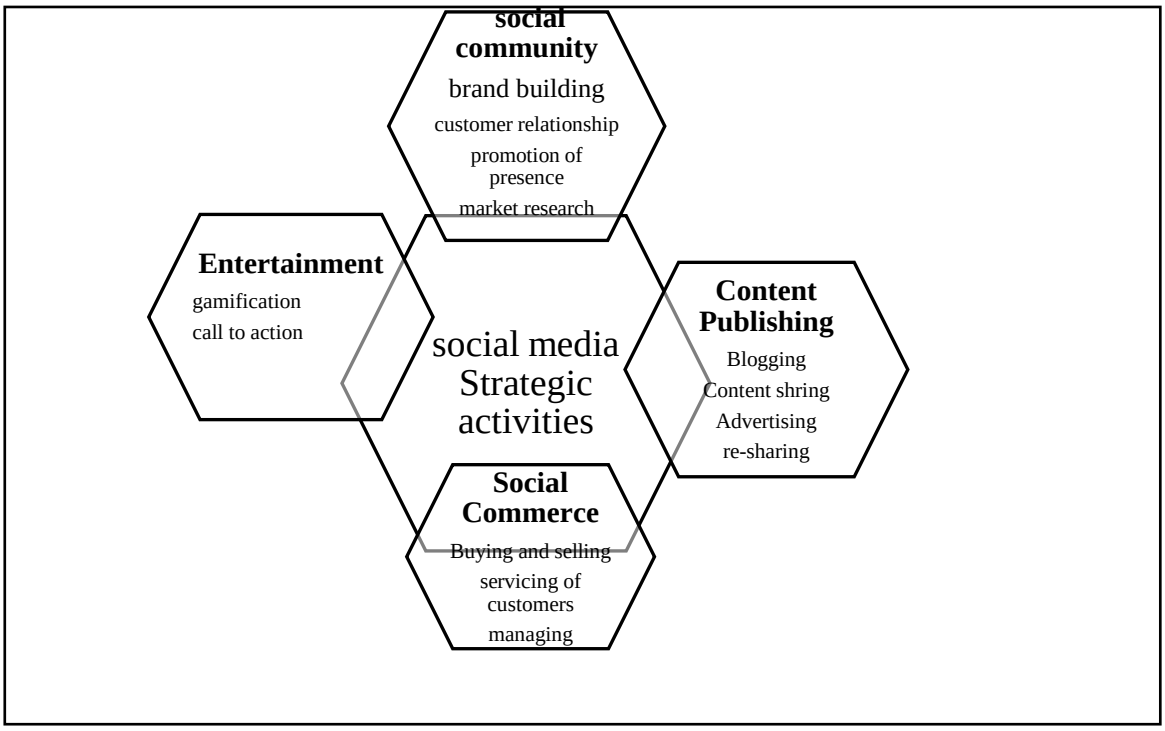
publishing comprising of blogging, sharing of company's branded content, advertising and re-sharing of perceived valuable content; c) social entertainment this includes gamification and call to action contents, and d) social commerce this includes buying and selling to clients and from customers, servicing customers, managing existing customers. Figure 6.5 depicts the company's strategic social media activities. Desmond designed the first social media page in January 2019. Desmond used his skills in information systems and extra tuition from the masterclass to develop the pages on Instagram and Facebook. It consisted of four pages: a) About us page; b) Our values pages; c) Services page; d) Contact page.

Due to customers' scepticism, Desmond was always online, focusing on social interaction to facilitate business development, encourage trial of their services, and develop personal business relationships.

In summary, a few key actions which were used to develop the company's strategic benefits. These actions are:

a) Leverage acquired skills
b) Use social media to gain social capital
c) integrate social media into core activities
d) integrate knowledge from past experiences

Figure 6. 5 Desven Bags Strategic Social Media Activities



Source: Desven's Bags Ltd (2020)

6.4 Desven's Service Ecosystem

Following the objectives of this study (see Chapter 1.4) and our access to key partner organisations.

The long-term aim of DCL has always been to develop a system where the company, customers, suppliers and partners interact with each other, exchange services and collaboratively create new services, thereby adding value. Desmond summed up the business model of DCL in this quote "*We are experts in our bags and other accessories and always strive to provide superior customer experience. That means we have to go all out so that everyone who comes into contact with our brand or company leaves with last memories and will be desiring to come back.*"

DCL was aware of the expensive nature of the quest and had to find a cheaper means of achieving its aim of creating a superior customer experience. The directors had a plan to always

converge their partners, customers and others at a central point so that there is a collaboration among them. The company tasked the Partner Relationship Manager (PRM) to develop a plan and a cost-effective means of achieving their goal. The PRM, on completion of the project, said this:

"*The plan was then to use social media as the central medium for engaging with its customers, suppliers and partners. There were various reasons for using social media, but when we decided on using social media, we thought of its ubiquitous nature and the fact that it was cheap".*

The next step was to create an ecosystem of customers and partners where they could collaboratively work on custom orders. The easiest way was to form a social media group where customers' orders and specifications were posted. The moment an order is posted, each member of the group becomes aware of the specification, including pick-up, delivery date, customer location and other details that will enhance the smooth operations of the business. Each partner could also interact with the customer if clarification is needed.

Samuel reminisces how they compelled some companies to join them to form a WhatsApp group. "*We met at the LDH Global offices (pseudonym) and gave the marketing manager one of our men's wallets to use. So, with that, we are pushing our products. The goal for us is to get him to be convinced that our products are of the highest quality and hence to agree to join us so that we can deliver our products to customers, and also to bring in our supplies from outside Ghana, by that we give him a ready market every time*". Razak, a motorbike delivery agent who recently delivered for them, said: "*First, it is ready sales, unlike other businesses where you have to wait and roam for a long time before you get one delivery to do. As for this one, you know the customers exist, and they are buying every day."*

Regarding the adoption of social media, the company has multiple approaches to using social media for specific tasks to obtain benefits and achieve particular goals. For example, the business relies on messaging platforms such as WhatsApp to communicate with its customers, suppliers, and partners. It encourages the use of WhatsApp communication between its partners and customers. Two other platforms, Facebook and Instagram, are used as marketing and advertising channels for the business and also as interaction platforms. The CEO had this to say:

> *"I use WhatsApp basically for communication, but when I am actively marketing or advertising a product, I use Instagram the more and less than Facebook"*- (Desmond – CEO).

In terms of how actors forge their relationships with each other, exchange services and coordinate their activities, there was the need to organise in specific varied ways to take advantage of the opportunities that arose.

6.5 Facilitating interaction on the social commerce platform

The way companies communicate with their clients or consumers is significantly evolving thanks to social media sites. For many of these businesses, the role of social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram boost their brands, especially from millennials' perspectives ("digital natives").

Even though the company primarily interacts with clients "online" via its social media handles, there is still room for interactions "offline" since not all of its clients or prospective clients are tech-savvy. Such persons are considered "non-digital natives". For such persons, the preference is to use voice calls or physically visit the company's premises. Desmond recollects that:

"*As I indicated earlier, some people still do not know how to use social media, so they call. Some also prefer to come here to our premises". Even though we wish our clients would deal with us via our social media platforms, especially WhatsApp, when communicating with us to place an order, we have no choice but to consider such people. They are not many, though*" - (Desmond, CEO of DCL).

Regarding the nature of the online interaction, the company uses messaging, comments, pictures, and videos to interact with its clients per the features of the social media handles. It is also worth noting that this "Aside Interaction" is mutual. Samuel has this:

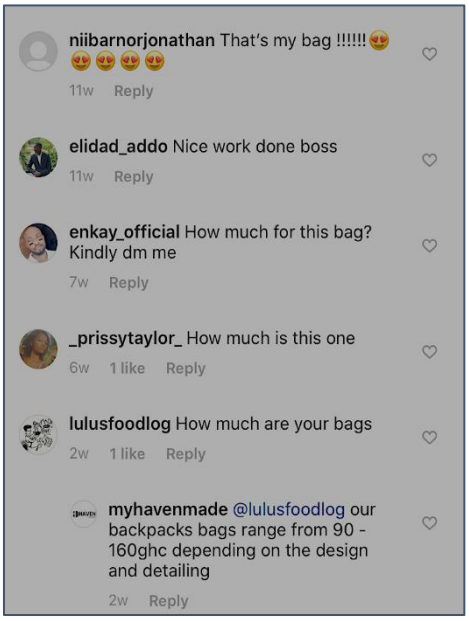
"*Among the three social media platforms that we have adopted, we mostly use WhatsApp to chat with clients regarding their orders and stuff. Then we use Instagram and Facebook for marketing ...like posting pictures of our products and designs. Moreover, one thing too is that social media is not one way because our clients comment on our posts when we post. So, for example, when we post a design of a bag on our WhatsApp status, they can comment, and then the conversation continues from there*" - (Desmond, CEO of DCL).

Clients and suppliers' comments regarding the nature of interactions on the social media platforms with the company include picture commenting, picture sharing, chatting and social media voice calls (see Figure 6.3). Below are some comments from customers and suppliers

"*They post their bags on social media, so there are comments under it*" - (Edem, customer)

"*…I wanted a bag, so I contacted them on WhatsApp, but I saw their design on Facebook* – (Seth, customer)

Figure 6. 6 DCL Social Media Platform interaction



Source: DCL Instagram account (2020)

"We use WhatsApp to communicate a lot when we have to deliver materials to them…. for chatting and voice calls - (Andy works with the suppliers of raw materials to DCL).

The online interactions are, however, not without issues. Having maximum user engagement since the social media platforms have different features and serve other purposes remains an issue. The audience may be subconsciously utilising their social media handles for specific reasons. Hence, the company finds it daunting to align their posts with what the audience may want to see, considering the various platforms' different features. Desmond recollects that;

> "*Because we use different platforms with different features, it is sometimes difficult to post one way. We often have to modify our intended posts to suit every platform" - (Desmond, a Director of DCL)*

Regarding issues of poor internet connectivity, and lack of memory space on mobile devices. Desmond indicates that;

" I had to upgrade my phone because the memory on it was no longer sufficient to support the new versions of some of the platforms. For example, I stopped using the Facebook app because the phone I was using did not have enough space. I think almost 200 megabytes of the Facebook app. So, I decided to just run with the Instagram app "...and sometimes to the internet connective gets poor so it takes time for me to get on the platforms to engage my clients" - (Desmond, a Director of DCL)

Despite the issues encountered, the benefits acquired from online interactions driven by social media are characterised by three key themes: learning new ideas, providing client leads and buyers, and reviving interactions. Desmond said;

"*In another masterclass, the organiser shared the names of some free photo-editing tools start-ups can use to obtain high-quality pictures for professional-looking social media pages. I have learnt following that masterclass that I get higher demand for products whose photos I take with studio-quality. During the COVID-19 period, I realised that things were quite slow, so I did a bit of research on Instagram, and then I saw that the new trend was going to be nose masks. We produce, I think, the first 200…then we started saying okay, then let us give to people who will reach out because we have people calling in to do. Some of them posted themselves wearing the mask and adverting on their status for us. From there, people started sending me to request to design for them"* - (Desmond, CEO of DCL)

The manager further indicated that;

"*Most of the things we are even working on now were due to a few broadcasts message we sent. Furthermore, I realise that once you interact with them, even though the WhatsApp broadcast, some people will want to order, but because out of sight, out of mind, but once they see you, they can get in touch. Some people even tell us that send me and let me repost on my status. And then the reposting on the status is even much more viable than Instagram. Because in Ghana, I have realised that people trust personal referrals, so once that goes on, it helps.*

Furthermore, for them, once they come interested, they are interested". - (Samuel, a Director of DCL).

6.6 Description of Actors

In the S-D Logic context, all actors are referred to as social and economic actors and variously described as resource integrators and regarded as co-creators of value (FP9) (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). These actors include firms, consumers, individuals, households, business enterprises, organisations, and nations. And in this case study, actors include service providers, the keystone company, the courier services or delivery companies, the payment platform provider, the suppliers, the social media platform provider, and the customers who patronise the service providers' services. The following quotes from Desmond reveal an actor such as courier services.

For example, when we are ready for a delivery, we contact the delivery company….

The actor's role, in this case, refers to the activities and actions from a system's view, based on the nature of the interaction. A typical role in a social commerce ecosystem emphasises the need to support knowledge conversion and facilitate sharing the knowledge output. The quotes below illustrate.

> *"I use WhatsApp basically for communication, but when I am actively marketing or advertising a product, I use Instagram the more and less than Facebook"* (Desmond-CEO)

> *"I choose Instagram because we have a lot of presence there. Our following there is more than our Facebook following. We have busily focused on growing Instagram more than our Facebook and inviting people to follow the page. So that was more or less the starting point for me".* (Samuel- Deputy CEO).

Another role identified in social commerce is how the various actors facilitate non-obvious connections across the ecosystem that provide value for everyone. In this role, the emphasis is on facilitating accessing knowledge across ecosystem boundaries and discovering non-obvious relationships among diverse resources. The following quote illustrates the role.

> *"..... that is where I saw the post about the bags…I got to know about DCL on Instagram, and that is where I saw the post about the bags and also saw their designs on Instagram ...*" – (Emmanuel – Customer)

Desmond, the CEO, made the following comment emphasising the non-obvious connection facilitated by integrating resources across ecosystem boundaries.

> "*Because I started with my number, people normally messaged me directly via text that they want a bag, and once you message, I will respond to you, but I will tell you to revert to WhatsApp, and then I will send you a "hi". Nevertheless, many people will prefer calling than WhatsApping or even coming to where we are because they do not trust dealing with you via social media. The fact that they have heard your voice or seen you give them some assurance that you are real."*

6.7 Actor Resources

Resources in this study are operationalised as tangible and intangible entities (see Table 6.1) available to the actors involved with social commerce to co-create value. The study also makes a distinction between operand and operant resources. Operand resources are viewed as economic resources made up of material objects and physical spaces. Operant resources are a combination of skills, knowledge and competencies which act on operand resources to create value.

DCL was inclined to work with individual customers and partners with unique creativity and exceptional market insights. These unique customers usually brought their designs or product creations and had unique personal experiences with DCL social media pages. On the other hand, the partners suggested feedback, unique designs from their interactions with customers, or their contacts within their environments. Despite owning an abundance of heterogeneous resources, the customers and partners cannot build their products or brand relying on their personal resources because that is not their field.

Therefore, DCL and its customers and partners integrated their heterogeneous resources consistently to form new resources for designing new products and services collectively. We conceptualised the collective behaviours as a resource integration; that is, the participants reorganised resources to create new resources for breaking through their respective resources' limitations. DCL would carefully listen to a cooperating customer's suggestions regarding product design and offer expert advice minimally. Hence, DCL would adjust resources such as fabric type, leather colour and third-party logistic to match customer expectation. The Officer in Charge of Partner relationship, Oko, said this about personalising customer products "*we can work on your orders to give it the exact taste you want, we are in the business to provide you with a delightful experience". He* gave the following example:

> *"We cooperated to build a successful original men's wallet. This product sold well because he (customer) used fabric and designs matching his car interior, colour and design modified by himself. He spent two weeks choosing colours, creating and designing and invented what he called "IJona".*

Table 6. 1 Operand and Operant Resources used in Social Commerce.

Operand resources	Operant resources
WhatsApp messenger	Tacit Knowledge
Facebook messenger	Customer relationships
Mobile phones	Social networking communities
Payment platforms	skills
Cash	Knowledge about industry
Machinery, Equipment	Relationship with suppliers and partners
Courier services	Feedback, reviews and recommendations
Social media technology (Instagram, Facebook)	Trade Associations

Source: Author's construct

The following quotes further reveal other types of resources used by the business in social commerce;

> "*Social media platforms connect the business with its customers, and also increases awareness about the brand, and boosts the leads with sales. For me, I am even able to communicate with my delivery team"* (Desmond- CEO)

> "*I choose Instagram because we have much presence there. Our following there is more than our Instagram following. We have busily focused on growing Instagram more than our Facebook and inviting people to follow the page. So that was more or less the starting point for me.* (Desmond- CEO).

Further, the customers of the business had their resources, which were used as well. An example is illustrated in the quote below;

> *If you are a business and are not on social media, you will lose out. I saw DCL designs on Instagram, but I wanted something a little different from what I saw, so I contacted them. They said they could make a bag of my choice and also give a discount because I contacted through Instagram. Then*

I also looked at the comments section of their IG post to see what others are saying. They had a lot of positive reviews and comments. Actually, I read the comments of a friend I know, that gave me some assurances. To me, that means they are who they say they are and can do what they claim to do on IG. I showed them how I want it...initially, I commented on the bag, and they gave me a WhatsApp number to contact, so I did"– (Regina, customer).

Emmanuel the customer who works in the financial institution had this to say about the recommendations and reviews:

"I needed a clutch bag urgently, but I needed it customised with Ghanaian local fabrics and also infused with adinkrah symbols. I put it on my IG handle and asked for recommendations among my contacts as to the best company to handle it. straight away, I had a couple of friends recommending DCL and also showing me what they have done for them in the past. We also chatted about their other designs. They offered to even call the owner and for me." (Emmanuel – Customer)

From the business's trading partners, one had this to say about the type of resources used.

"*When the materials that we order arrive, we first send Desmond some pictures on WhatsApp, then we continue communication with him on when to deliver…oh' as for the communication it is through WhatsApp, it is cheaper that way and saves us a lot of money, but sometimes if we cannot discuss via WhatsApp, we call him on the phone…, we either call on WhatsApp call or regular voice call*" – (Kwasi Boateng, CEO of KayB Enterprises Supplier of leather products to DCL).

"I *make more money when I deliver products to the customers because they give small money aside what I charge them. This may as a result of they not having change or they think I did a*

good job and delivered on them. These tips I use to service the bike and also buy things for myself. Also, I get to know a lot of people through this delivery job. Sometimes I meet with these "celebs" who then become my customers and can call me at any time to deliver or send me on errands. Knowing them and they becoming my clients sometimes is more than money because, they also connect me to their friends and they also become my customers. I take pictures with these famous people and use them to build my profile on Instagram. This gives me a lot of chance in the market because now customers can trust me". - (Razak – Motor bike delivery Agent.

6.8 Value Co-creation Mechanisms

To the company, being online plays a vital role in value-creation. The business needs to be online to engage clients (both new and existing). Desmond had this to say about how actively online helps the business co-create value.

> *"So apart from the camera, the excellent followership and consistency. I will consider the time spent consistently being on social media to engage clients as a resource because the more consistent we stay on social media, the more followers we have. So, for the past week, we posted about four times, we got more than ten followers and also people who will say send me your picture and post on status, they become a lot and those who send us pictures of designs they want, so that produce it for them. Some can even send us samples, designs, new design types, and other usual designs, but they want it tweaked to suit the taste. So, for such people, we engage them to deliver what they want "...* (Desmond, a Director of DCL).

Aside from clients or customers, there are also many engagements with the company's partners to design and deliver a quality product experience. Even though they are not necessarily

customers or clients, the company still considers the suggestions. However, such considerations have been occasional because the business is more interested in meeting clients' needs. Desmond recollects that;

> "*We even get suggestions from some of our suppliers. Sometimes they get different types of materials and suggest designs that we can make that customer may like…we have considered suggestions like that though, but they are not many".* (Desmond, a Director of DCL).

According to the company's suppliers, suggesting designs and recommending emerging raw materials to DCL further builds their DCL relationship. Below are the remarks from one of DCL's suppliers:

> *"Sometimes we get new products and different types of material, so we send them the pictures and chip in some suggestions that they can do with the material…. As a business person, I think that it is not just about making money; you should also be able to provide solutions and suggestions to your clients, so that is why we do that. When you do that, the relationship between you and your clients increases…the clients see that you have them in mind"* – (Chief Anuja Bello, founder of Anuja Holdings)

The company primarily engages its customers on social media for new orders, updates on orders, and suggestions on new ideas and designs. However, in cases where clients are not tech-savvy enough to use social media or do not have access to social media, the company receives orders over the phone. It uses the same channel to provide input on the service or product. Desmond said;

> *"As I said, we mostly use social media for interacting with our clients...I would say about 95% of our interactions happen on social media. Some of them still do not use*

social media, so they call us or come over to where we are because they want to see the design and make a choice". With the nature of the business, you need to see the design ...and social media is the best way to get you to see it. Also, we are moving to YouTube because it also has a different market target. Social media has been great for us. Because we were reaching out to newer clients, newer customers, new joints, and new everything, I will say Instagram has been the best so far. Furthermore, YouTube is also picking up gradually."

Social media platforms' interactions or dialogue largely contribute to the value co-creation process. It enables the company to learn more about the customer's reaction to the service or product experience. This value co-creation process is significantly facilitated by social media's ability to show pictures privately and publicly and allow comments on such photos, including chats where potential customers can suggest their preferences and tastes. Desmond said;

"*During the COVID lockdown period, we decided to let our followers and potential customers engage our followers and potential customers in order. One of the things we did was undertake a review where we took feedback from our clients regarding their experience with our products. So, we prepared a survey; I can share that survey with you if you do not mind, and some of the responses were quite interesting; some people were telling us how long they have used the product and what we can do to make it better". As the main face of the company, I also occasionally send clients messages privately just to check on them and to get feedback regarding their orders*". - (Desmond, a Director of DCL)

The value co-creation process is also executed from the customers' perspective; this is primarily identified as picture sharing on intended designs, as customers can make suggestions regarding customised designs. Below are some customer remarks;

> "*I have been looking for someone to designs on Facebook a tote bag for me, so When I saw his designs, I knew he could do it. So, I "PMed" him my own design with the colour of the materials to use and all that, and he did it for me*" – (Cynthia, customer).

Figure 6. 7 Sample Products Co-Created with A Customer

Source: Desven Bags Instagram page

Another remark from another customer was;

> *"I needed a clipper bag…the one I use was a store one, but I needed a more durable one. Then I saw a post and contacted the manager to find out if he could design one for me, and he did… it was so cool. Initially what he did not have enough side pouches, so I got back to him with a picture on how I wanted it, and he took it back, and he reworked on it*"- (Regina - customer)

6.9 Value Co-creation Outcomes

DCL value co-creation processes generated various outcomes, ranging from generating income for the business and its partners, customer loyalty, satisfaction with the brand, the product, empowerment of customers and partners, trust and increased commitment. Desmond revealed that customers who had a transactional relationship with them became their ambassadors. "Some *of them posted themselves wearing the mask and adverting on their status for us. From there, people started sending me to request them".* For Samuel, engaging their customers and other partners was beneficial. For instance, he said of their engagement with their delivery team and suppliers via WhatsApp, "*it provides me with a feeling of safety, knowing that the details of a customer are on his phone and will not get things mixed up". Secondly, I am confident that I control the raw materials' quality before they are shipped when it comes to the suppliers. From the cost of travelling to their countries just to go and buy raw materials. I save much money, and I have enough time on my hands to do other things."*

Regina, a customer, also intimated that DCL has been "*good, I mean great because when I first saw their designs on Instagram, I was a little sceptical and doubted their ability. I wanted something different from what I saw, but I couldn't trust them to deliver. Nonetheless, I contacted them, and they said they could make a bag of my choice for me. Reluctantly, I showed*

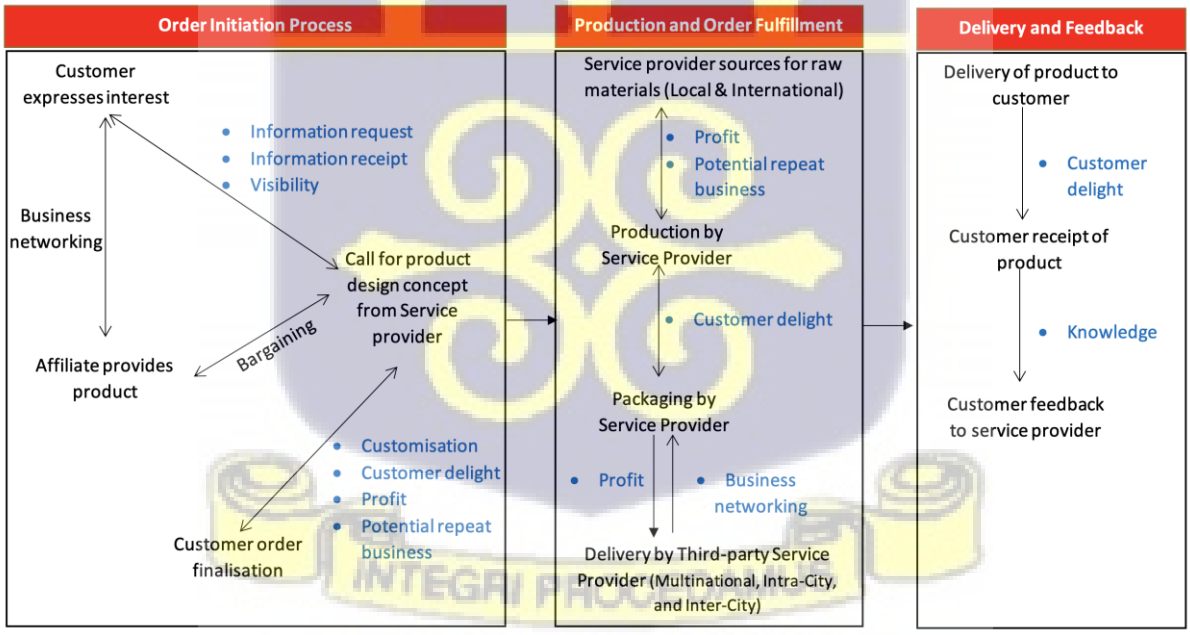
them how I wanted it.. initially, I commented on the bag, and they gave me a WhatsApp number to contact, so I contacted them; I got a relatively lower price." Also, Emmanuel, another customer who bought a bag from DCL, had this to say on how her expectation was met "*I needed a clipper bag, the one I use was a store and more durable. Then I saw his post and contacted him to find out if he could design one for it, and he did… it was so cool. Initially, it did not have enough side pouches, so I got back to him with a picture via WhatsApp of how I wanted it, and he took it back and fixed it. After that, it was perfect, excellent. Also, I realised that engaging with them on social media was fast".* For Emmanuel, DCL had a lengthy interaction with him on social media, specifically on WhatsApp, and that increased his confidence to engage them to produce the bag for him. He intimated, "*… and I realised that once you interact with them longer and especially on social media, they can assure you of their expertise. That will put away your fears of getting the wrong designs".* This assertion was corroborated by Desmond, who said, "*customers tend to trust you the more when you interact with them. Sometimes through the WhatsApp broadcast, some will want to order because I think they see that as personal, as such I say that out of sight, out of mind, but once they see you and can get in touch on WhatsApp, it makes it easier".*

On any benefits derived since they partnered with DCL, Andy responded that "*dealing them via social media, first of all, helps me develop some closeness with them. Second, I am happy that I can share my knowledge and skills with other people. Again, using social media to deal with DCL saved me a lot of money because there is no moving around. Aside from that, I can predict what they need next time because I have saved all requests on my phone and can easily refer to them by dates and time, no hassle."* According to the delivery team, the benefits gained since their association with the DCL has been phenomenal. When asked to expound, AJ said, "*there is increase sales because this company alone can give me about 30% of my daily sales. I also enjoy the fact that I get to meet new customers every day and now that we use technology*

such as using google maps to locate the customers and then when they pay me through mobile money it is like a bank, so my savings have gone up. Also, I am happy that I am helping to grow the company because when their customers are satisfied, they always buy, and when they do that, I get to deliver to them so every time I am there with them".

For Desmond, the most important benefit of co-creating products via social media has been understanding customers and partners behaviour and providing solutions that satisfy them. He surmised this understanding in his quote," *I enjoy the fact that I get new information that helps my business grow through repeat purchase. I learn new things either through new designs or brilliant business ideas from both partners and customers. My foreign distribution partner, for example, proposed building a database of all of my customers and the reasons they buy. This is a brilliant idea because I can now predict their purchasing habits and preferences."* Figure 6.8 shows the typical value creation interaction observed

Figure 6. 8 Value Co-creation Process and Potential Co-created Value



Source: Author's construct

6.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a case description to depict the various actor roles and resources used in social commerce value co-creation. The case description covered a firm that actively participates in the social commerce ecosystem to co-create value with other actors. The main findings are summarised in Table 6.2. The next chapter will analyse the empirical data gathered from the case description regarding the research framework.

Table 6. 2 Summary of Case Findings

Themes	Lessons learnt
Core business activities	• Regular and customized production • Exports • Local Markets
Years of existence	• 2 years
Staff strength	• 30
Partners	• Suppliers • Delivery partners • customers
Social Media Platforms	
Social Media Platform adopted	• WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook
Description of Actors	
• Actors in this case study include service providers; the keystone company, the courier services or delivery companies, the payment platform provider, the suppliers, social media platform provider, and the customers who patronize the services of the service providers.	
• Actor's role refers to the activities and actions from a system's view, based on the nature of the interaction. A typical role in a social commerce system emphasizes the need to support knowledge conversion and also to facilitate the sharing of the knowledge output.	
• In this role, the emphasis is on the need to facilitate accessing knowledge across ecosystem boundaries and the ability to discover nonobvious connections among diverse resources.	
Resources	
• Resources identified are in the study are re operationalized as tangible and intangible entities available to the actors involved with social commerce in order to co-create value.	
Service Platform	
• The business relies mostly on WhatsApp, for communication with its clientele. The other two platforms, which are Instagram and Facebook, have been adopted as the for marketing and advertisement channels for the business.	
Value Co-creation Mechanisms	
• To the company, being online plays an important role for value-creation. The business needs to be online to engage clients (both new and existing).	
• The company engages its customers mostly on social media on new orders, updates on orders, and also suggestions on new ideas and designs.	
• Interactions or dialogue on the social media platforms largely contributes to the value co-creation process as it enables the company to learn more about the customer's reaction to the service of product experience. This value co-creation process is significantly facilitated by the ability of social media to show pictures privately and	

publicly and allow comments on such pictures, including the ability for personal chats to share experiences.
• The value co-creation process is also done from the aspect of customers; this is primarily identified as picture sharing on intended designs, as customers can make suggestions regarding customised designs.
Clients and suppliers' comments regarding the nature of interactions on the social media platforms with the company incudes, picture commenting, picture sharing, chatting and social media voice calls.
Value Co-creation Outcomes
• DCL's value co-creation processes generated various outcomes, ranging from generating income for the business and its partners, customer loyalty, satisfaction with the brand the product, empowerment of customers and partners, trust and increased commitment. Jones revealed that customers who hitherto had a transactional relationship with them became their ambassadors.
• Despite the issues encountered, the benefits acquired from online interactions driven by social media can be characterized by three key themes: to learn new ideas, provides client leads and buyers and revives interactions

Source: Author's construct

CHAPTER SEVEN

DISCUSSIONS AND FINDINGS

7.1 Chapter Overview

Chapter six of this study presented the case description and analysis to illustrate how social commerce enterprises co-create value with their customers in a social commerce ecosystem. This chapter discusses findings towards answering the research questions and demonstrating the achievement of research objectives. The discussion is based on the analysis approaches described in Chapter 4 and compared with extant literature. The discussions address each aspect of the research framework. Hence, the chapter encompasses findings concerning roles and resources, value co-creation processes, and outcomes of value co-creation. The chapter is divided into seven sections, beginning with a chapter overview. Section 7.2 details empirical verification of the social commerce phenomenon understudy. Sections 7.3, 7.4, 7.5, and 7.6 discuss the related results to answer each of the three research questions (see Chapter 1). Finally, the chapter summary is presented in section 7.7.

7.2 Phenomenon Verification

This section presents a recap of social commerce and social commerce ecosystem concepts and definitions. The recap acts as a structure to guide the verification of empirical evidence collected during the field study conducted as part of this study to show the presence of social commerce. The verification is carried out in two parts; definitional and thematic verification. First, definitional verification shows the concepts in existing definitions of social commerce. Second, the thematic verification shows the key characteristics and meanings of social commerce based on empirical evidence collected.

7.2.1 Definitional verification – Social Commerce

In section 2.3, the concept of social commerce revealed three main definitional perspectives, i.e., technology, social, and socio-technical. The technology perspective considers social commerce as the use of technology (social media) to support the management of business information and electronic commercial transactions (Wang & Zhang, 2012). While from the social perspective, social commerce is seen as the actions of the social actors, such as interaction and exchanging information that results in commerce. We see evidence of social commerce related to empirical evidence presented in Chapter six. First, concerning the technology perspective, the actors' presence on and use of social media platforms as the medium of exchanges and transactions are evidence of the technical component of social commerce (see Table 7.1). Second, there is evidence of social actors interacting and exchanging information and ideas (see Table 7.1). Third, in terms of socio-technical perspective, the social actors interact, exchange and integrate resources through technology (social media) to produce outcomes (see Table 7.1). Table 7.1 summarises the perspectives above of social commerce and illustrative evidence obtained from this study's field data collection activities.

Table 7. 1 Empirical Illustration of Perspectives in Social Commerce Definitions

Definition of Social Commerce	**Empirical Illustration with Case Study**
Technical Perspective	
The use of social media in commercial exchanges and transactions.	The decision of the business to rely on Instagram according to the owner of the business allows the business to reach a wider audience and to interact more with them.
Social Perspective	There are personalised interactions with clients that results in the creation of customised designs.
There are social actors interacting and exchanging ideas.	
Socio-technical perspective	Meeting its customers' needs is achieved through the interactivity on the social media platforms it has adopted.
the social actors interact, exchange and integrate resources through the medium of technology (social media) to create value.	

Source: Author's construct

7.2.2 Thematic Verification

The previous section illustrated the definitions and perspectives using snippets of evidence from the empirical case study. This section is a continuation of the illustration based on meanings of social commerce posited by various scholars. These meanings also form the themes in social commerce research (see Table 2.6). The identified themes are *Social, Management, Technology, and Information.* The *Social* theme refers to users' adoption space of studies concerning social commerce. The sub-themes on the social theme are adoption which relates to the intention to use or engage in commercial activities through social media (Zhang, Lu, Gupta, & Zhao, 2014); motivational factors, which relate to what drives participation in social commerce (Ko, 2018; Lin & Lu, 2011); cognitive and affective factors, cognition is the activity of knowing, this implies, the acquisition, organisation and use of knowledge. Furthermore, cognition encompasses both knowledge structures (organisation) and processes (acquisition and use) (Davern et al., 2012). Affective factor, on the other hand, relate to moods, feelings, and attitudes (Chen, Lu, Wang, & Pan, 2019); knowledge and expertise factors, relate to studies that investigated the intellectual structure, development, and evolution of social commerce (Cui et al., 2018).

The *technology* theme relates to infrastructure, platforms, applications, resources, and services. The sub-themes are infrastructure and platforms refer to social networking sites such as social media and e-commerce sites (Featherman & Hajli, 2015; Hajli & Featherman, 2017); resources refer to operant resources such as capabilities and competences of the actors which enable social commerce to function efficiently and effectively (Madhavaram & Hunt, 2008; Turban et al., 2016).

The *management* theme relates to structure, strategies, operation and cultures, processes and opportunities for vendors, customers, and other entities who are generally perceived to benefit from social commerce (Wang & Zhang, 2012). There are three sub-themes: user behaviour, intention to use, and business strategies. User behaviour refers to various social and technical parameters which influence the roles actors hold on social commerce platforms (Angeletou et al., 2011; Preece, 2001). Intention to use refers to a customer's intention to engage in online buying in social commerce (Hajli, 2015). Business strategies refer to the comprehensive decisions, actions, or plans designed to achieve social commerce goals (Chandler, 1962).

The *Information* theme inclines toward a social purpose with a lifecycle that includes the acquisition or creation, processing, dissemination, and use with an emphasis on user-generated content (Wang & Zhang, 2012). The sub-themes include literature reviews, general issues i.e. articles that do not subscribe to any specific but aim to give a general overview, trends, and convergent content strategy- this includes different social networks in various social media.

Table 7. 2 Empirical Illustration of Social Commerce Themes

Social commerce Theme	**Sub-Theme**	**Illustration from Empirical Case Study**
Social	Adoption - intention to use or engage in commercial activities through social media	*Social media platforms connect the business with its customers, and also increase awareness about the brand, and boost the leads with sales*
	Motivational Factor- what drives participation in social commerce	*For me, I am even able to communicate with my delivery team*
	Cognitive and affective factors- acquisition and organisation of knowledge; moods, feelings, and attitudes	*I have learnt following that masterclass that I get higher demand for products whose photos I take with studio-quality*
	Knowledge and expertise – intellectual structure, development and evolution of social commerce.	*Second, I am happy that I can share my knowledge and skills with other people. Again, using social media to deal with DCL saved me a lot of money because there is no moving around.*

Social commerce Theme	Sub-Theme	Illustration from Empirical Case Study
Technology	Infrastructure and platforms – social networking sites (social media and e-commerce sites).	*Social media platforms connect the business with its customers, and also increases awareness about the brand, and boosts the leads with sales. For me, I am even able to communicate with the delivery team.*
	Resources – resources needed for social commerce to function.	*For me, I am even able to communicate with my delivery team.*
Management	User behaviour - social and technical parameters which influence users' roles.	*Sometimes they get different types of materials and suggest designs that we can make that customer may*
	Intention to use- customers intention to engage in online buying.	*If you are a business and are not on social media, you will lose out. I saw DCL designs on Instagram, but I wanted something a little different from what I saw, so I contacted them.*
	Business strategies – decisions, actions, and plans designed to achieve social commerce goals.	*So, we devised a strategy where we will get some companies to help us. For example, we got a local delivery guy, what we call "okada", to help with deliveries when we have orders to deliver.*
	Literature reviews, trend and general issues.	*If you are a business and are not on social media, you will lose out.*

Source: Author's construct

7.2.3 Definitional verification – Social Commerce Ecosystem

In section 3.6 the concept of social commerce ecosystem was defined as an emergent A2A structure that social commerce actors create use and which provide an organizing logic for the actors to exchange service and co-create value. Further, in section 3.6 the elements of a service ecosystem were listed as structural flexibility, structural integrity, shared worldview, cognitive distance, and architecture of participation. Related to the empirical evidence presented in Chapter six, we see evidence of social commerce ecosystem (see Table 7.3)

Table 7. 3 Illustration from Empirical Case Study

Social commerce Ecosystem Element	Definition	Illustration from Empirical Case Study

Structural Flexibility	The different forms in which actors can be organised to better suit opportunities in a network (i.e. with regard to roles and responsibilities).	*There are "formal" deliveries from me where the delivery guy delivers my orders. However, they are many, many "informal deliveries which the delivery guy does for the customer, separate from what he is doing for me.*
Structural Integrity	Refers to the natures of the ties and relationships.	*We are not strictly tied to each other; everyone can do their businesses, for instance, if we have an urgent delivery to do we check on who can that urgent delivery and give it to him*
Shared Worldview	Shared institutional logics that allow diverse actors who are cognitively distant from one another to obtain common perspective of their environment.	"*Our relationship is just our delivery. It must be safe and quick."*
Cognitive Distance	Refers to the differences in knowledge and skills of diverse actors together in a network.	*despite the fact they are a multinational company and have more resources than us we are cool.*
Architecture of Participation	Provides a roadmap for different actors to come together and engage in service exchange.	*On the first contact with a potential customer through any of our social media accounts. We will migrate the customer to WhatsApp, sometimes to telephone calls. From there, we liaise with our suppliers to check on the availability of the fabrics.*

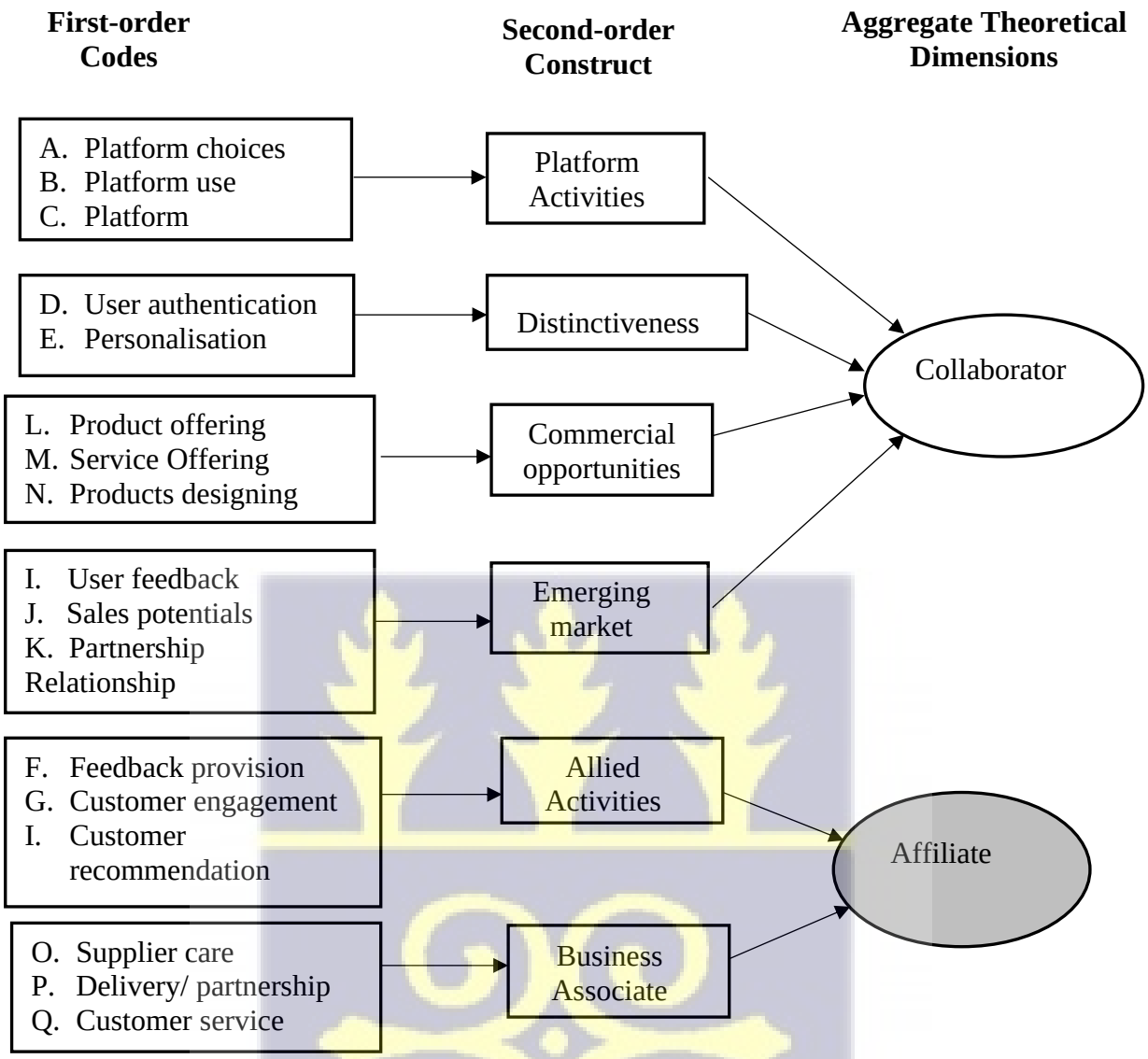
Source: Author's construct

7.3 Roles of Social Commerce Actors in Value Co-creation

Previous value co-creation research posits three roles, i.e. *ideator*, *designer* and *intermediary* (Lusch and Nambisan, 2015). The *ideator* role encompasses the role the customer plays to bring knowledge about their own needs and unique designs to the firm and provide input for service offerings (Ikävalko, Turkama, & Smedlund, 2018; Lusch & Nambisan, 2015; Xie et al., 2016). The *intermediary* role relates to the ability to distribute and share knowledge across many service ecosystems (Hein et al., 2019; Ikävalko et al., 2018; Lusch & Nambisan, 2015), while the *designer* role encompasses mixing and matching resources or knowledge to develop new services (Hein et al., 2019; Ikävalko et al., 2018; Lusch & Nambisan, 2015). These

previously uncovered roles seem to focus on the dyadic level of individual actors and their interaction with the firm and ignore the broader perspective of an ecosystem view.

Figure 7. 1 Structure of Data Related to Actor Roles



Source: Author's construct

With reference to Figure 7.1, this study uncovered two distinct actor roles during social commerce value co-creation processes. These roles were somewhat different from formal ones and consider how an individual actor interacts with multiple actors simultaneously. We defined the roles of *collaborator* and *affiliate* as either *adaptive function* (i.e., actors who can adjust to changing conditions) or *responsive function* (i.e., actors who perform the function in response to other actors' actions). First, the collaborator role is characterised by activities aimed at

synergising roles and activities. The collaborator role, an adaptive function, involves actors' platform activities, distinctiveness, commercial activities, and identifying emerging markets. This finding is similar to Lusch and Nambisan's (2015) labelling of roles as ideator, designer, and intermediary. In other words, ideation, designing and intermediation are collaborative roles in social commerce value co-creation.

Second, beyond the collaborator role, this study found the second set of roles which are unique and new within the social commerce context, i.e., *affiliate* roles. Affiliate role refers to actor activities within the social commerce ecosystem that cause them to be an unofficial extension of the other. The affiliate role is a *responsive* function in that actors are empowered to promote and develop subsystems that spontaneously sense and respond to each other to co-create value. Within social commerce, this affiliate role was initiated by allied activities and business associates. Thus, the actors are beneficiaries of economic transactions services, resulting in their mutual relationship, ensuring that each actor role is also a resource provider. For instance, allied activities cover activities such as providing feedback to each other, engaging with customers and relying on customers' recommendations. Similarly, business associates in a social commerce ecosystem can be seen as a set of actors that serve one another by integrating resources, including supplier care, delivery, and customer service, to co-create value.

The findings of this study's affiliates roles support Akaka and Chandler's (2011) theory that when actors in a value network identify a specific problem or target, each actor must figure out what types of activities and social roles are necessary to solve the problem or achieve the goal. From the discussions above, we draw the following finding:

> ***Finding 1:*** *Within the social commerce ecosystem, the roles performed by social commerce actors are not related to their formal organizational roles but are rather influenced by the service goal.*

Finding 1a: *The extent to which individual social commerce actors relied on social media to interact with others depended on their roles.*

Finding 1b: *In a social commerce ecosystem, actor roles promote and develop subsystems that spontaneously sense and respond to each other iteratively and simultaneously.*

Beyond the roles of the social commerce ecosystem actors, there is a need to acknowledge and explain the role of the social commerce platform itself. This acknowledgement is important because, without the platform, the actors would not have that online space to converge and undertake the value co-creating activities. To put this in context, the use of the platform generates the roles performed as either a collaborator or an affiliate.

7.4 Resources for Social Commerce Value co-creation

As previously indicated in Chapter Three, the resources of a firm are anything that enables capacity and are defined as the "tangible and intangible entities available to the firm that enable the firm to produce efficient and/or effective market offering that has value for some market segments" (Madhavaram & Hunt, 2008 P.68). Previous studies (Breidbach & Maglio, 2016b; Paredes, Barrutia, & Echebarria, 2014) identified resources categories from both the firm and customer perspectives and proposed that to co-create value, it is necessary to consider customer and firm resources as value drivers jointly.. For Instance, Agrawal and Rahman (2015) presented a schema of seven resource categories offered by the firm and customer in value co-creation: (1) financial, (2) physical, (3) Legal, (4) human cultural, (5) organisational cultural (6) informational (7) relational/social. First, financial resources include money and physical space held by the customer, while firm resources include cash offerings, equity, and access to the financial market. Second, Physical resources include customers' emotions, energy and strength, and firms' plant equipment, machine and technology.

Third, the human cultural resource includes customers' tacit knowledge, status, and other intangible resources. The firms' human cultural resources include employees' skills, ideas, and competencies. Fourth, the legal resource is comprising customers' IP rights and protection rights, while that of the firm is made up of trademark, copyrights, and licenses. The fifth, organizational cultural resource includes elements such as the customers' skills, knowledge and personal values and firms' capabilities and policies. Sixth, Informational resource includes firms' marketing intelligence and customers' feedback, blogs and reviews. Seventh, relational/social resource includes the customers' family and commercial relationships and firms' relationship with customer and supplier.

Further, in digital platform ecosystems resources such as software developments kits (SDK) (on the service provider side) have been identified to guide value creation and value capture (Hein et al., 2020). Resources such as preferences, problems, and business goals (customer side) and talent, expertise and knowledge, knowledge and access to the customer (supplier side) have been identified with service platforms such as solution networks (Jaakkola & Hakanen, 2013). Despite the value of these previously identified resources, this study identified five resource categories unique to social commerce ecosystem, which have been ignored in research.

This study, with a focus on multiple actors in a service ecosystem and social commerce, identified financial, physical, interactional, organizational culture and platform resources. This list of resources is consistent with the usual S-D logic lexicon on the distinction of operant and operand resources (Madhavaram & Hunt, 2008). Further, analysis of the case actors reveals different resources are unique and specific to an actor in a service ecosystem. This finding lends empirical support to Chandler and Vargo's (2011) argument that there is a need to differentiate among resources because different contexts inform the resources actors draw on.

> ***Finding 2:*** *Different actors in a social commerce ecosystem hold different resources which are unique and specific to the actor.*

Specifically, the study found that the financial resource (include money and any asset convertible to money such as discounts) (Bitner, Faranda, Hubbert, & Zeithaml, 1997), are held in different forms and used in different ways by different actors. For instance, financial resource held by the customer includes discounts and cash paid to obtain the tangible (operand resource) from the service provider or the intangible output of delivery from the third-party service provider. Second, physical resources (tangible and physical products that actors hold),

these include equipment, raw materials and technology for a service provider, Third-party service provider, supplier and customer. However, the suppliers' physical resources include intellectual property, trademark, and Licenses. Third, Interaction resource category which encompasses repeated activities and activity links that connect the actors. These include service providers' resources (such as commercial relationships, recommendations, network size), Third-party service providers' resources (like a relationship with the service provider and customer), Suppliers' resources (such as the relationship with the service provider) and customers' resources (such as feedback to the service provider, review, blogs, and shared information). Actors in social commerce ecosystem perceive that in co-creating value, there is a strong need for integrating interactional resources. This finding is consistent with the claim that in value co-creation, resources are not confined to the service provider, and that all actors are resource integrators (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008).

Similarly, actors in social commerce ecosystem held organizational culture resources refers to service providers specialized skills, time management, capabilities, market intelligence and knowledge of clients (Paredes, Barrutia, & Echebarria, 2014). Third-party service providers' organizational cultural resources refer to their condition relative to technology use and to those they serve and relates to how they leverage technology and status. In contrast, suppliers' organizational cultural resources relate to supplier's principles and conduct of what is acceptable to the well-being of their business and encompass their policies on doing business and competencies (Arnould, Price, & Malshe, 2006). Further, customer cultural resources related to customer's conception of what they want and refers to customer's imagination, personal tastes and personal (Paredes et al., 2014). The foregoing resources categories identified in this study inform the next finding:

Finding 2a: *Actors in a social commerce ecosystem hold financial, physical, interactional, and organizational culture resources.*

Finding 2b: *Resources held by actors in social commerce ecosystem vary in amount and usage.*

Finding 2c: *Overall, resources held by a service provider appear most diverse.*

Finding 2d: *organizational cultural resource of social commerce ecosystem is the most widely held resource.*

The study's findings also reveal how previous studies have assumed resources to be held entirely by the social actors of service ecosystems (Agrawal & Rahman, 2015; Madhavaram & Hunt, 2008; Paredes et al., 2014). They seem to ignore the resource potential of service platforms which offers the interaction medium for social actors to co-create value (Shu & Xiao, 2015). This study, therefore, found another set of a resource developed as a result of the use of social commerce platforms. Further, platform resources are held by all actors in the social commerce ecosystem. Platform resources are influenced by first actors' basic attitude and beliefs about the use of social commerce platforms, i.e., platform orientation. Second, social commerce actors' use of social commerce platform to their maximum advantage, i.e., platform leverage, and third, actors use of social commerce platforms as a venue for social engagements and interactions.

Table 7. 4 Typology of Social commerce Actors and their Resources

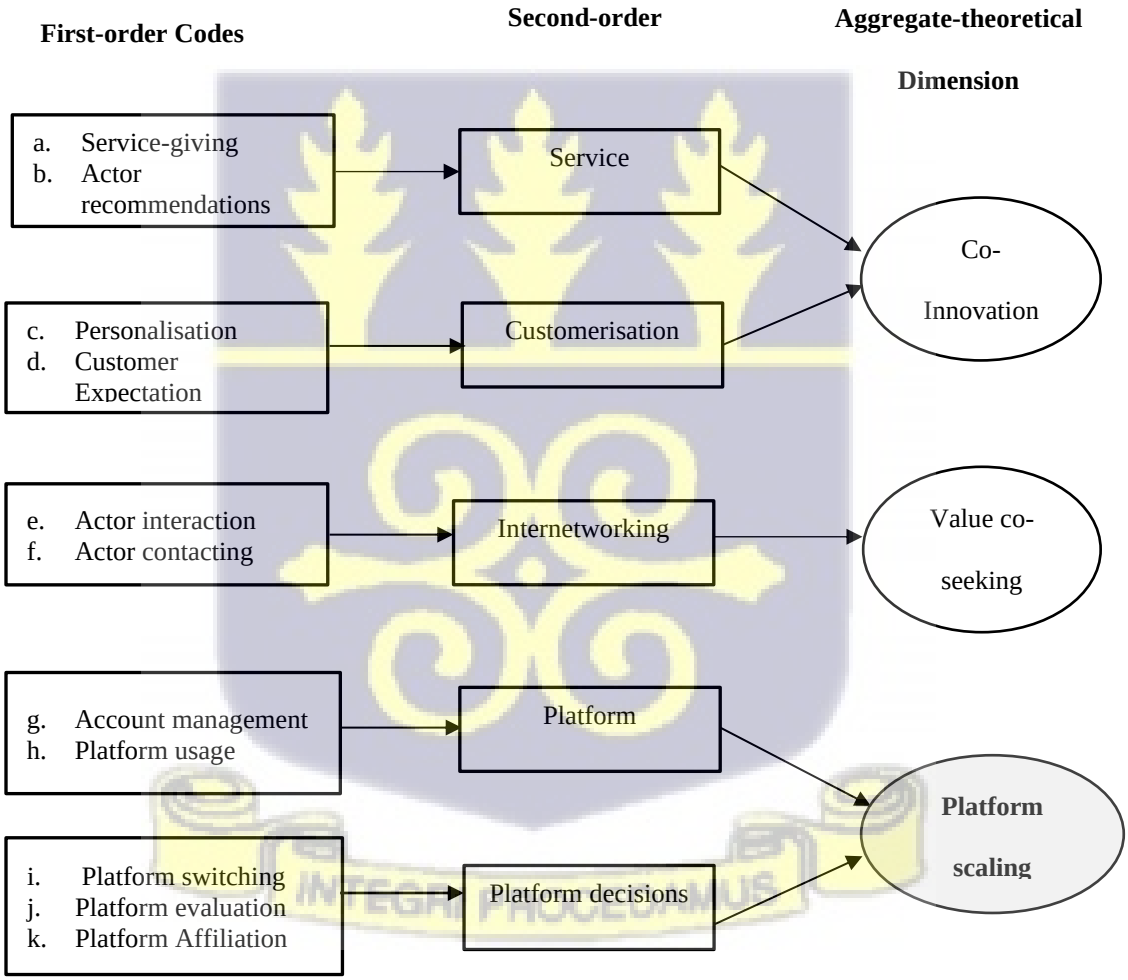
RESOURCE	ACTOR				
	Service Provider	**Third-Party Service Provider**	**Supplier**	**Customer**	**Social Commerce Platform**
Financial Resource	Money Access to Trade groups	Monetary rewards e.g., tips Access to actors	Material Objects Money	Money e.g., discounts, cash paid	Payment channel
Physical Resource	Equipment Raw Materials	Equipment	Equipment Trademark Licenses Intellectual property Right Raw Materials	Technology e.g. hardware and production equipment	Networking equipment, hardware
Interactional Resources	Commercial relationships Actor recommendations Network size Architecture – network work of contacts, relationships and alliances	Relationship with Service provider Relationship with customer	Relationship with Service Provider	Feedback to the service provider Reviews Blogs Shared Information	Online social network service
Organisational Culture Resource	Time management Capabilities Technology leverage Skills development Market Intelligence Knowledge of clients	Technology Leverage Status	Policies Knowledge of clients Competencies	Imagination Personal Tastes Personal Beliefs	Exposure to new network members e.g. customers and suppliers and other partners

Source: Author's construct

7.5 Social Commerce Value Co-Creation Mechanisms

The second question in this study was to explain the mechanisms that trigger value co-creation within the social commerce ecosystem. Mechanisms are described in this study as the performative precondition of actors' effort during resource integration to co-create social commerce value. These mechanisms have an extended effect on the outcomes of value co-creation in the social commerce ecosystem.

Figure 7. 2 Structure of Data Related to Social Commerce Value-creation Mechanisms



Source: Author's construct

Extant literature provides a wide variety of social commerce value co-creation mechanisms that illustrate the various resource integration process. These mechanisms that are often facilitated by technological advancement represent distinct ways to release additional resources to support the company's value creation. This study's findings have uncovered how previous studies have assumed that mechanisms occur at monodic levels, co-conception, co-design, co-maintenance, co-disposal, and co-outsourcing (Sheth & Uslay, 2007). They seem to overlook the possibility of value co-creation mechanisms to develop collaborative co-creative activities with networked actors. This study, therefore, found that social commerce value co-creating mechanisms occur at three levels, namely *mono, dyadic, and triadic*. First, the mono level entails how a single actor influences the functional processes underlying resource integration in social commerce value co-creation. In this study, the monodic level of mechanism is platform scaling. The platform scaling mechanism refers to a self-enhanced process in which the social commerce platform extends its scope by allowing actors to collaborate in co-creating value and facilitating value-creating mechanisms in the social commerce ecosystem. The following findings emerge:

> ***Finding 3:*** *Social commerce value co-creation mechanisms occur at three levels, namely, monodic, dyadic and triadic levels.*
>
> ***Finding 3a:*** *The mono level mechanism is triggered by a single actor that influences the functional processes underlying resource integration in social commerce value co-creation.*

This study finds that platform scaling has two forms, i.e., platform governance and platform decisions. These value-creating mechanisms are focused on resource integration that is both effective and convenient, making the social commerce platform a fertile ground for innovation. Furthermore, the social commerce platform serves as an intermediary by assisting actors in

locating and interacting with each other and exchanging value in a mutually beneficial manner (Evans, 2012). The foregoing mechanisms identified in this study inform the following finding that

> ***Finding 4:*** *Platform scaling mechanisms allow social commerce platform to extend their scope by allowing social commerce actors to connect and collaborate in value co-creation.*

Second, the dyadic level mechanisms entail how two social commerce actors influence the functional processes underlying resource integration in social commerce value co-creation. For instance, the notion of resource integration in a social commerce ecosystem means that the value creation process involves two actors, for example, the service provider and the customer. in social commerce interaction. Regarding figure 7.3, this study identified the value co-seeking mechanism as a dyadic mechanism. The value co-seeking mechanism concerns the causal structures that triggers two social commerce actors to seek mutual benefits by integrating their resources. This study finds that the value co-seeking mechanism has one form, i.e., internetworking. The actors consider the overall advantage of resource integration and its capabilities before contacting and interacting with each other. On the other hand, if actors perceive that resource integration cannot provide the value that actors seek, then those actors will not interact with each other. The foregoing mechanism identified in this study inform the next finding that

> ***Finding 5:*** *Actors contact and interact with each other if they perceive that resource integration will provide them with value*

Third, the triadic level concerns the causal structures that underpin the functional processes of resources integration by three or more social commerce actors in social commerce value co-

creation. This study identified co-innovation mechanisms at the triadic level. Co-innovation mechanisms are the causal structures that trigger a triad or group of self-motivated social commerce actors with a collective vision, enabled by a social commerce platform to collaborate to achieve a common goal by integrating their resources. For instance, the co-innovation mechanisms unleashed in support of social commerce value co-creation include social commerce actors' personalisation of their products and customer expectations. Similarly, co-innovation mechanisms allow social commerce actors to access new knowledge, share risk and resources. In addition, through service provisioning and customerisation co-innovation mechanisms induce innovation and thus co-create new sources of value by confrontation of ideas and practices. The foregoing mechanism identified in this study inform the next finding that

Finding 6: *Co-innovation mechanisms allow social commerce actors to access new knowledge, share risk and resources.*

Finding 6a: *Through Service provisioning and customerisation co-innovation induce innovation and co-create new sources of value.*

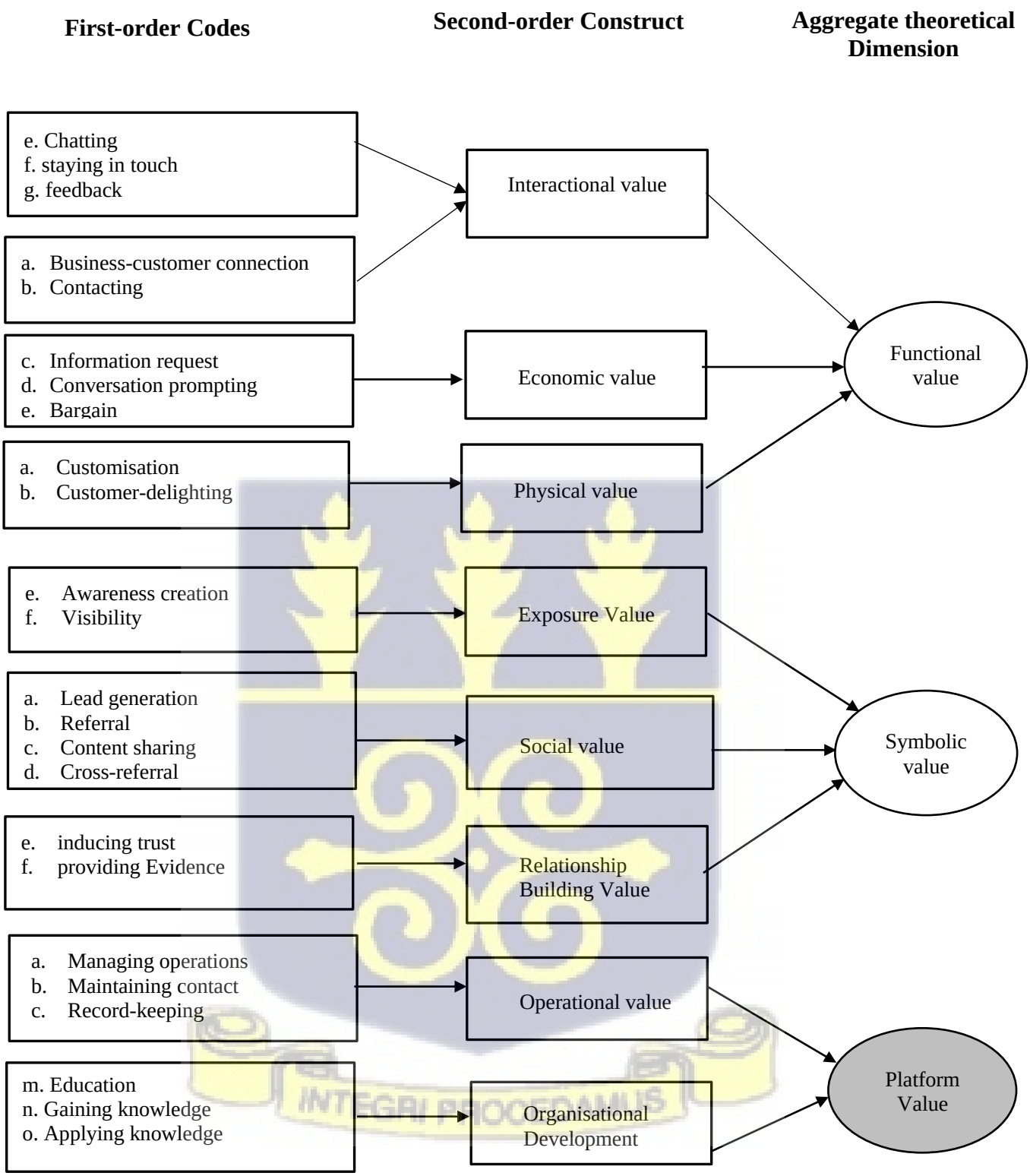
7.6 Social commerce value co-created

Table 7. 5 Typology of Co-created Value in a Developing Country Social Commerce Context

Forms of Co-created value	1. Functional Value	2. Symbolic Value	3. Platform Value
Sub forms of Co-created Value and Empirical Exemplars	A. Interactional value • Chatting • Staying in touch with partners, • Providing feedback • Receiving feedback • Business-customer connection	A. Exposure Value • Awareness creation • Visibility	A. Operational value • Managing operations • Maintaining contacts • Record-keeping
	B. Economic value • Information request • Conversation prompting • Bargaining	B. Social value • Lead generation • Referrals • Content sharing • Cross-referrals	B. Organisational development value • Education • Gaining knowledge • Applying knowledge
	C. Physical value • Customisation • Customer delighting	C. Relationship-building value • inducing trust with ecosystem actors • providing transactional evidence	

Source: Author's construct

Figure 7. 3 Outcomes of Social Commerce Value Co-creation



Source: Author's construct

Vargo and Lusch (2008) argue that all economic and social actors are resource integrators (Axiom 3/FP9), suggesting that value is created as actors integrate personal and group resources from market-facing and individual entities. Similarly, S-D Logic recognises that value is created through the "actions of multiple actors, often unaware of each other's wellbeing" (Vargo & Lusch, 2016); in other words, value is co-created (Axiom 2/FP6). As previously noted, (see section 3.5.3), value is co-created by many actors pooling and integrating their resources. The co-creation of value occurs through many actors drawing upon and integrating their resources. Furthermore, individuals are motivated to co-create value when the expected outcome benefits every actor in the service ecosystem (Roberts, Hughes, & Kertbo, 2014). Also, value is co-created through collaboration, and collaboration is the central focus of the S-D logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). In sum, it is apparent that value co-creation is a multi-actor phenomenon rather than a dyadic one. Consequently, different individuals can opt for or have the capability to partake in value co-creation in different ways (McColl-Kennedy & Lilliemay, 2018). This assertion is consistent with FP10: that value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary (Vargo & Lusch, 2008).

From the perspective mentioned earlier on value co-creation, value co-created in this study refers to an individual evaluation of a product or service based on what is contributed and achieved through co-creation (Busser & Shulga, 2018). This definition of co-created value considers its collaborative and reciprocal nature, actor-to actor interactions, and actors' roles as both beneficiaries and resource integrators.

With reference to Table 7.4 and Figure 7.4, this study identified three categories of value co-created: Functional Value, symbolic value and platform value. First, functional value is the benefit accrued from adopting social commerce. Furthermore, functional value happens

through processes that ultimately convert assets into tangible (and intangible) value (Varun Grover, Chiang, Liang, & Zhang, 2018). In this study, there are forms of functional value that are co-created. These are interactional value, economic value and physical value. Interactional value is the value created as the ecosystem actors interact through initial chats and staying in touch with others to build loyalty and give feedback via direct messages and reviews on services rendered and products purchased. Economic value is the value created by the actors seeking information about products and services; this initiates conversation among the actors, leading to bargaining on prices and delivery timelines. The third value is the physical value which is the actual artefact sold and delivered to the end-users. This is the benefit ecosystem actors enjoy as they engage in the customisation of products from the perspective of the customers while the service providers seek to delight their customers. This finding supports Vargo and Lusch's (2016) claim that value is co-created through collaboration which is the central focus of S-D Logic. The following findings emerge:

Finding 7: *Social commerce value co-created has three forms of co-created value, namely, functional, symbolic and platform.*

Finding 7a: *Functional value is achieved through performance improvement, cost reduction, product and service innovation and excellent business-customer relationships.*

Finding 7b: *Interactional value is co-created with actors through relational exchanges as they steer towards a common goal.*

Finding 7c: *Economic value is co-created as actors in the social commerce ecosystem engage each other for each other's benefit.*

Finding 7d: *Physical value is the co-created value enjoyed by actors in the social commerce ecosystem as they exchange the application of their capabilities.*

Second, symbolic value (e.g., positive brand image, online social capital and reputation) is realised from the "signalling effect" of each actor's presence on or affiliation with social commerce platforms. Symbolic value is achieved through experiences that help social commerce actors achieve social integration (Hewer & Campbell, 1997). Consequently, actors' social affiliation (for example, relationships) influences actors' assessment of products and services, which positively influences repurchase intention. Similarly, while social actors interact and share their thoughts about products and services, they can help infer the characteristics of other actors and the popularity of products.

In this study, three symbolic value outcomes were uncovered. First, exposure value which is the benefit realised due to increased visibility of an actor, product or resource. Exposure value is produced from activities such as awareness creation for actors and increasing visibility through various social media platforms. Second, social value is the benefit realised from activities that facilitates a sense of belongingness or community of social commerce ecosystem actors. These activities include lead generation and recommendation via the social commerce platform, referral of products and services, content sharing and cross-referral. Third, relationship building value is the value accrued from building close relationships with actors in the social commerce ecosystem. This value is produced from activities such as inducing trust; an essential part of every relationship ensures that each actor delivers on promises at each stage of their journeys. Similarly, relationship building value is produced through providing evidence of providing a unique and memorable customer experience. The foregoing discussions about symbolic value in the social commerce ecosystem inform the following findings:

> ***Finding 8:*** *Symbolic value is realised through social codes, relationships and social integrations in a social commerce ecosystem*

Finding 8a: *Exposure value is accrued from activities such as awareness creation and visibility in the social commerce ecosystem*

Finding 8b: *Social value is the value realised from social interactions such as lead generation, referrals, content sharing, and cross-referrals*

Finding 8c: *Relationship building value is the value realised from interactions such as inducing trust and providing evidence of creating the customer experience*

Finally, *platform value* captures the unique value offered by the social commerce platform and it is created on the 'venue' i.e., the platform, that offers the interaction or relationship between the actors. In other words, platform value encompasses the benefits ecosystem actors enjoy when they leverage the potential of social commerce platforms. Platform value stems from social commerce platforms' ability to foster collaboration and co-creation of value, and this new form of value differs from functional and symbolic values (Varun Grover et al., 2018). Platform value emanating from its ability to facilitate collaboration is unique because it captures how social commerce platforms enable and coordinate the interaction of ecosystem actors and resources, facilitating value co-creation and innovations. Similarly, social commerce platforms provide the stable core for continuous real-time connectivity of actors as they facilitate effective and efficient information exchange and integrate resources across boundaries. The use of the platform is valuable because it determines the set of possible actions available in social commerce interactions (Knote, Janson, Söllner, & Leimeister, 2021) and offers a use environment that shapes actions, practices and processes.

In this study, platform value stems from operational value and organisational development. Operational value is the value that emerges from the use and experience of social commerce

platforms for managing the operations of the firm, maintain contact with other actors and also for record keeping of transactions and interactions with actors. Second organisational development value is the value that emerges as a result of knowledge creation, application of knowledge gained and innovation.

Beyond the three co-created value identified, three interesting findings in relation to co-created values were uncovered in this study. These findings may be explained by the actions of the social commerce actors and their activities in the social commerce ecosystem. First, co-created value can either be collective or customised. The collective co-created value is in connection to the actual artefact that is produced when actors play different roles through various processes and specific resources to create a benefit for all of them. On the other hand, customised co-created value may be acquired through the initial dyadic interactions and engagements between actors before other ecosystem actors join in. For example, when a customer is engaged on the social media page of the service provider a value is co-created just between the two actors as stipulated in terms of the exchange. These findings corroborate the ideas of Holbrook (1994, 2006) who suggested that value is interactive, and it involves a relationship between some subject and object, and it is also relative because it is comparative, situational and personal.

Second, the study observed that there are value creation dependencies. This observation suggests that value does not just happen. Its creation is contingent on the existence of certain actors and specific resources and processes and sometimes events. This observation provides further support to the notion of value as processes and practices enacted within a dynamically constructed context (Vargo et al., 2008).

Third, the study found that the social commerce ecosystem by nature of its integration of actors, resources and processes, creates a continuous flow of opportunities for the discovery of ideas and establishment of new actor relationships. For instance, the local courier establishes a relationship with the customer, who engages his services (local courier) when the need arises. An implication of this phenomenon is that new forms of co-created value can be created. In other words, value co-created in social commerce ecosystem is not static but expands. This means value is not consistent across purchase and evaluation in the ecosystem. This finding is consistent with the previous view of Vargo et al. (2008) who note that ecosystems offer means of incorporating improved capabilities.

7.7 Chapter summary

This chapter sought to discuss the findings in light of the research framework. The chapter started with empirical verification of the social commerce phenomenon based on definition and themes. The discussion also covered interesting findings, both positive and negative, which culminated in the formulation of Sixteen (16) keys findings, summarised in Table 7.5.

Table 7. 6 Summary of study findings

Social commerce components	**Related Empirically-supported Findings**	**Theoretical Artefact**
Actor roles (See section 7.3)	Finding 1: Within the social commerce ecosystem, the roles performed by social commerce actors are not related to their formal organizational roles but are rather influenced by the service goal.	Typology of Actor Roles and their Resources in a Developing Context
	Finding 1a: The extent to which individual social commerce actors relied on social media to interact with others depended on their roles.	
	Finding 2: In a social commerce ecosystem, actor roles promote and develop subsystems that spontaneously sense and respond to each other iteratively and simultaneously.	

Social commerce components	Related Empirically-supported Findings	Theoretical Artefact
Actor resources (See section 7.4)	Finding 3: Different actors in a social commerce ecosystem hold different resources which are unique and specific to the actor.	Typology of Social Commerce Actors and their Resources in A Developing Context
	Finding 4: Actors in a social commerce ecosystem hold financial, physical, interactional, and organizational culture resources.	
	Finding 5: Resources held by actors in social commerce ecosystem vary in amount and usage.	
	Finding 6: Overall, resources held by a service provider appear most diverse.	
	Finding 7: Organizational cultural resource of social commerce ecosystem is the most widely held resource.	
Value co-creation mechanisms (See section 7.5)	Finding 8: Finding 3: Social commerce value co-creation mechanisms occur at three levels, namely, monodic, dyadic and triadic levels	Typology of Social Commerce Value Co-Creation Mechanisms in a Developing Context
	Finding 8a: The mono level mechanism is triggered by a single actor that influences the functional processes underlying resource integration in social commerce value co-creation.	
	Finding 10: Platform scaling mechanisms allows social commerce platform to extend its scope by allowing social commerce actors to connect and collaborate in value co-creation.	
	Finding 11: *A*ctors contact and interact with each other if they perceive that resource integration will provide them with value.	
	Finding 12: Co-innovation mechanisms allow social commerce actors to access new knowledge, share risk and resources.	
	Finding 12a: Through Service provisioning and customerisation co-innovation induce innovation and co-create new sources of value.	
Outcomes of social commerce (See section 7.6)	Finding 13: Social commerce value co-creation has three forms of value co-created, namely, functional, symbolic, and platform.	Typology of Co-Created Value in Social Commerce in a Developing Context
	Finding 14: Functional value is achieved through performance improvement, cost reduction, product and service innovation and excellent business-customer relationships.	
	Finding 14a: Interactional value is co-created with actors through relational exchanges as they steer towards a common goal.	

Social commerce components	Related Empirically-supported Findings	Theoretical Artefact
	Finding 14b: Economic value is co-created as actors in the social commerce ecosystem engage each other for each other's benefit.	
	Finding 14c: Physical value is the co-created value enjoyed by actors in the social commerce ecosystem as they exchange the application of their capabilities.	
	Finding 15: Symbolic value is realised through social codes, relationships and social integrations in a social commerce ecosystem.	
	Finding 15a: Exposure value is accrued from activities such as awareness creation and visibility in the social commerce ecosystem.	
	Finding 15b: Social value is the value realised from social interactions such as lead generation, referrals, content sharing, and cross-referrals.	
	Finding 15c: Relationship building value is the value realised from interactions such as inducing trust and providing evidence of creating the customer experience.	
	Finding 16: In a social commerce ecosystem, Platform value is created when social commerce actors leverage the potential of social commerce platforms.	
	Finding 16a: In social commerce ecosystem, Loyalty value is the co-created value realized due to actors' devotion to each other's cause resources.	
	Finding 16b: In a social commerce ecosystem, Interaction value is the co-created value realized due to being a member of a network which is involved in collaborative and collective activities.	
	Finding 17: In social commerce value co-creation, there can be either collective or customised co-created values.	
	Finding 17a: Ins social commerce value co-creation, there are value dependencies, value is contingent on other factors.	
	Finding 17b: In social commerce value co-creation value expands. It is not consistent across consumption and purchase.	

Source: Author's construct

CHAPTER EIGHT

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, CONTRIBUTIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH POINTERS

8.1 Chapter Overview

The results of social commerce value co-creation for its actors were addressed in Chapter seven. The study findings' discussions were also discussed in the chapter, which led to conclusions. In this chapter, the doctoral thesis comes to a close. The chapter is divided into five sections, beginning with the chapter overview. Sections 8.2 and 8.3 refer to the research goals and summarises the main findings in response to the research questions. Section 8.4 details the study's contributions and explore their implications for research, practice, and policy. Section 8.5 discusses the limitations of the research and makes some suggestions for future research in the areas of social commerce ecosystem and information system value co-creation.

8.2 Summary of Research Activities

There are eight chapters in this research. The first chapter set the stage for establishing value co-creation in the social commerce ecosystem as an information systems phenomenon. It also presented the research problem, research purpose, research objectives, and research questions that guided this study's focus and the motivation and justification for the study. In the second chapter, previous social commerce literature was reviewed to identify their focus and assumptions and justify the need to explain how social commerce actors use their resources to co-create value, particularly in a social commerce ecosystem. The review found, for example, that there is a general lack of theorisation in social commerce research and the need for future research to theorise social commerce in a way that accounts for strategic issues. The third

chapter also reviewed value co-creation literature to understand the concept and advance theoretical contributions. The review also showed how previous studies assumed a dyadic co-creation of value. Social commerce ecosystems that bring together multiple actors challenge this assumption. After reviewing social commerce literature and value co-creation literature, this study identified three knowledge gaps. The first gap was a lack of theorisation in social commerce research (see Han, Xu, & Chen, 2018; Lin, Li, & Wang, 2017) and the need to theorise strategic outcomes of social commerce. The second gap was the lack of explanations of how social commerce actors interact to co-create value using social commerce (Lu et al., 2016). The third gap was the need to unearth the mechanisms that emerge from value co-creation interactions between social commerce actors (Lusch and Nambisan, 2015).

To address these gaps, this study drew on the Service-Dominant logic to conceptualise a research framework that explains the roles resources and of actors, value co-creation mechanisms, and forms of value co-created within a social commerce ecosystem of a developing economy. This research activity, presented in Chapter three, resulted in a proposed research framework of how value is co-created within a social commerce ecosystem. Chapter four followed with a detailed description of how this study was designed. It demonstrated, for example, why the researcher subscribes to the Critical research paradigm and how it influences the study's decisions. This justification was accompanied by the study's design relative to the choice and implementation of the case study design, the case boundary, sample and sampling technique, data collection methods and analysis. Based on the pre-study research framework, the study needed to understand the techno-organisational context. Hence, chapter five presented a detailed description of the social commerce industry, its actors and roles, how they interact with each other, and its potential implications for value co-creation. In that context, chapter six presented an explanatory case study description to illustrate value co-creation in a

social commerce ecosystem. The sixth chapter also includes an analysis of the case description to explain the mechanisms that trigger resource integration in value co-creation. Chapter seven further analyses the data to generate findings that answer this study's research questions. The final chapter, chapter eight, concludes this doctoral study with a summary of the research activities, an illustration of the main findings, a post-study, a discussion of research contributions, and pointers for future research

8.3 Responses to Research Objectives

Table 8.1 Summaries the findings of research objective

Table 8. 1 Summaries of Findings for Research Objectives

Research Objective	Findings	Theoretical Artefact Developed	Gaps Addressed	Core Contributions
To explain actors' roles and resources during value co-creation within the social commerce ecosystem.	Actors' role Actors within the social commerce ecosystem play two roles i.e., collaborator or affiliate. On the one hand, actors collaborate on platform activities, distinctiveness, commercial opportunities, within emerging markets. On the other hand, actors play the affiliate role in allied activities such as feedback provision, customer engagement and customer recommendation; and being business associates in supplier care, product deliver, and customer service.	Actor Roles in a Social Commerce Ecosystem in a Developing Context	This finding addresses the need to explain, actor roles in the social commerce ecosystem, and how actors interact to co-create value using social commerce. Previous studies analyse social commerce as dyadic exchange encounters (Lu, Fan, & Zhou, 2016a), and fail to examine how a balanced relationship between actors can be	This study's findings are arguably first in explaining the roles that various actors play in co-creating value within the social commerce ecosystem. The unique contribution about this study's explanation of social commerce actor roles is the discovery of two *new* roles i.e., collaborator and affiliate. These roles are new compared to the previously reported dyadic roles, which fail to explain how actors can achieve a balanced relationship with each other.

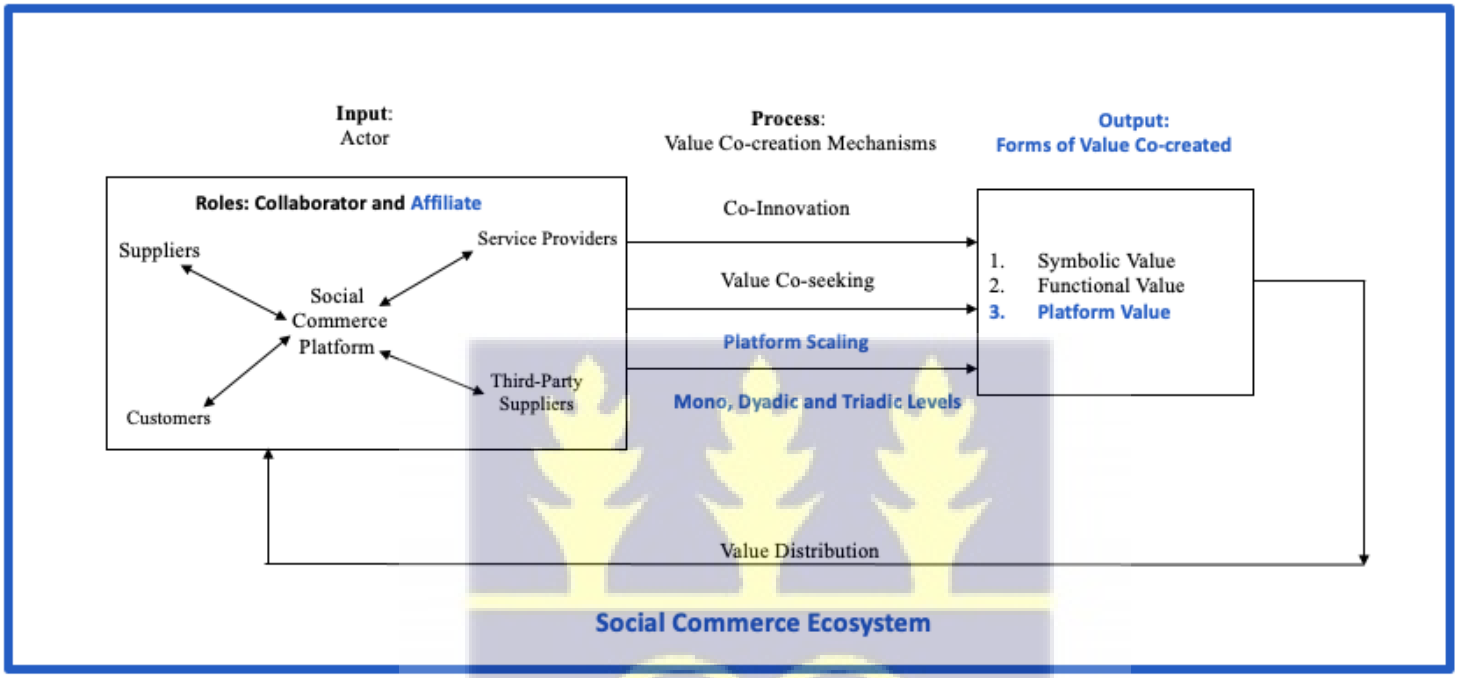
Research Objective	Findings	Theoretical Artefact Developed	Gaps Addressed	Core Contributions
	Actors' Resources Different actors in a social commerce ecosystem hold different resources which are unique and specific to the actor. Actors in a social commerce ecosystem hold financial, physical, interactional, and organizational culture resources. Resources held by actors in social commerce ecosystem vary in amount and usage. Overall, resources held by a service provider appear most diverse. Organisational cultural resource of social commerce ecosystem is the most widely held resource.	Typology of Social Commerce Actors and their Resources in a Developing Context	established (Priharsari et al., 2020, p. 780) This finding addresses the need to explain, actor resources in the social commerce ecosystem.	Identifying these resources contributes to a deeper explanation of what actors contribute in value co-creation exchanges with each other. These resources are necessary because they are the *inputs* to the co-created value outcomes.
To explain the value co-creation mechanisms within the social	Social commerce value co-creation mechanisms occur at three levels, namely, monodic, dyadic and triadic levels.	Social Commerce Value Co-Creation Mechanisms in	This finding addresses the need to unearth and theorize the latent mechanisms that emerge from the co-creative interactions	The findings responding to the related research gap suggests a contribution in four ways. First, this study is arguably first to explain the value co-creation

Research Objective	Findings	Theoretical Artefact Developed	Gaps Addressed	Core Contributions
commerce ecosystem.	The mono level mechanism is triggered by a single actor that influences the functional processes underlying resource integration in social commerce value co-creation. Platform scaling mechanisms allows social commerce platform to extend its scope by allowing social commerce actors to connect and collaborate in value co-creation. Actors contact and interact with each other if they perceive that resource integration will provide them with value. Co-innovation mechanisms allow social commerce actors to access new knowledge, share risk and resources. Through Service provisioning and customerisation co-innovation induce innovation and co-create new sources of value. The dyadic levels entail how two social commerce actors influence the functional processes underlying resource integration in social commerce value co-creation. The triadic levels concern the causal structures that underpin the functional processes of	a Developing Context	among social commerce ecosystem actors. Filling this gap responds to Lusch and Nambisan (2015)'s question of how value co-creation occurs becomes germane, especially within the contemporary social commerce domain.	mechanisms, generally, and especially within the social commerce context. This study unearthed three mechanisms i.e., co-innovation, value co-seeking, and platform scaling. Hitherto, these mechanisms remained unexplained. Second, the unearthed mechanisms were identified at three levels namely, monodic, dyadic, and triadic levels. Third, this study expressly answers Lusch and Nambisan (2015)'s question of how value co-creation occurs becomes germane, especially within the contemporary social commerce domain. Previous studies till date had not provided any answers. Fourth, unearthing these value co-creating mechanisms contributes to theorization of the social commerce phenomenon. It

Research Objective	Findings	Theoretical Artefact Developed	Gaps Addressed	Core Contributions
	resource integration by three or more social commerce actors in value co-creation			completes the *process* component of a process model explaining value co-creation in the social commerce ecosystem as illustrated in Figure 8.1.
To explain the forms of value co-created within the social commerce ecosystem	Social commerce value co-creation has three forms of co-created value, namely, functional value, symbolic value and platform value. Functional value is the benefit of converting assets into tangible and intangible benefits, and includes three sub-forms i.e., interactional value, economic value, and physical value. Symbolic value concerns the experiences of social actors as they seek to achieve social integration. Symbolic value includes exposure value, social value, and relationship-building value. *Platform value* captures the unique value offered by the social commerce platform. The platform offers the venue for interaction of the actors.	Typology of Co-Created Value in Social Commerce in a Developing Context	This finding responds to the need for more theorisation in social commerce research (see Han, Xu, & Chen, 2018; Lin, Li, & Wang, 2017). Further, it pioneers the theorisation of strategic issues to address the fixation on non-strategic issues such as user behaviour and web design (see Baethge, Klier, & Klier, 2016; Wang & Zhang, 2012). Moreover, this finding expressly responds to the calls for future research into how social commerce	This study's findings suggest two knowledge contributions concerning the outcomes of value co-creation. First, this study unearths various forms of value co-created for the different social commerce ecosystem actors i.e., symbolic value, functional value and platform value. Unearthing these value outcomes is a direct response to Lin, Li, and Wang (2017) call to study the value co-created in social commerce. Second, unearthing these value outcomes contributes to theorisation of the social commerce phenomenon. It completes the *output* component of a process model explaining value co-creation in the social

Research Objective	Findings	Theoretical Artefact Developed	Gaps Addressed	Core Contributions
			creates value (Lin, Li, & Wang, 2017).	commerce ecosystem as illustrated in Figure 8.1.

Figure 8. 1 Post-study Framework of Social commerce Value Co-creation



Source: Author's construct

8.4 Research Contributions and Implications

This study makes two contributions categorised in terms of research, policy, and practice. The specific contributions are further discussed below.

8.4.1 Contributions to Research

In terms of research, this study contributes a theoretical explanation of social commerce actor roles and resources used during value co-creation. Thus far, the analytical focus of actor roles in relevant previous research in information systems (e.g., Lu, Fan, & Zhou, 2016a) has predominantly been on the dyadic level, concerned with individual customers and their interactions with specific firms. This focus has perpetuated the existing limited assumptions of the nomological nature of the interaction, i.e., antecedents for and consequences for the customer or the firm, overlooking the broader context within which the actor operates. This study conceptualises and empirically illustrates a social commerce ecosystem, a broader context, that generates more insights to explain the roles that various actors play and the resources used in co-creating value within the social commerce ecosystem. These roles are necessary because they are the inputs to the final co-created value outcome. More importantly, this study demonstrates with empirical evidence the discovery of two new roles (i.e., collaborator and affiliate in this study). These roles explain how actors can achieve a balanced relationship with each other.

The second contribution is a set of responses related to the research gap identified in Lusch and Nambisan (2015)' question of how value co-creation occurs, especially within the current social commerce domain. First, this study is arguably the first to explain the value co-creation mechanisms, generally and especially within the social commerce context. This study

unearthed three mechanisms, i.e., co-innovation, value co-seeking, and platform scaling. Hitherto, these mechanisms remained unexplained. Second, the unearth mechanisms were identified at three levels: monodic, dyadic, and triadic levels. These levels of mechanisms are unique forms of mechanisms beyond the monodic level reported in IS literature. Hitherto, existing literature has assumed that mechanism occurs at the monodic level and seems to overlook the possibility of value co-creation mechanisms to develop collaborative co-creative activities with networked actors. Third, this study expressly answers Lusch and Nambisan (2015)'s question of how value co-creation occurs becomes germane, especially within the contemporary social commerce domain. Previous studies until date had not provided any answers. Fourth, unearthing this value co-creating mechanisms contributes to the theorisation of the social commerce ecosystem. It completes the *process* component of a process model explaining value co-creation in the social commerce ecosystem, as illustrated in Figure 8.1.

The third contribution suggests knowledge contribution. First, the ecosystem by nature of its integration of actors, resources, and processes creates a continuous flow of opportunities for the discovery of ideas and establishment of new actor relationships which can yield new forms of co-created value. Hence, this study unearths a new form of co-created value; *Platform value*, that benefits different social commerce ecosystem actors. Unearthing this value outcome directly responds to Lin, Li, and Wang's (2017) call to study the value created in social commerce. Second, unearthing this value outcome contributes to the theorisation of the social commerce phenomenon. It completes the *output* component of a process model explaining value co-creation in the social commerce ecosystem.

8.4.2 Contributions to Practice

The findings of this study have managerial implications for practitioners in justifying social commerce initiatives and opportunities, especially in the interplay of social commerce actor roles and resources, how value co-creation occurs, and the outcomes of social commerce value co-creation from S-D Logic perspective. First, this research highlights the benefits of the ecosystem view of social commerce from its predominately dyadic-level focus.

This ecosystem view has implications for firms that seek to encourage or rely on engaged customers to co-create value. Existing research (e.g. Adomavicius, Bockstedt, Gupta, & Kauffman, 2007; Ahuja & Chan, 2016; Lusch & Nambisan, 2015) provides a preliminary understanding of actor roles in co-creating value. Extending this notion to the realm of social commerce, actors tend to follow specific routinised or institutional arrangements in order to carry out their related interaction and exchange behaviours or activities, and in doing so, they tend to collaborate with other actors in order to meet their needs with the broader social commerce ecosystem. Service providers and other actors involved with value co-creation must consider their roles and recognise the various resources that make value co-creation possible. The case study (Desven Bags) shows how, once that dynamic is established and understood, it can also significantly benefit social commerce firms.

The second contribution to practice is the potential for organisations to unearth and better understand the mechanisms by which actors co-create value. By cultivating their own rules (institutions), social commerce actors not only interact with each other to co-create value, first for themselves and second for each other, but also at a broader level. The Desven Bags case study, for example, demonstrates how members of the social commerce ecosystem influence one another in terms of value co-creation. Hence, firms should be encouraged to pursue a more profound perception of the role of actors in their organisations and their respective returns and

motivations because of this broader ecosystem view of engagement. Further, this study categorised the various types of social commerce firms in Ghana in a new typology (see Appendix C). Hitherto, such a categorisation did not exist. Practitioners did not have any formalised method of categorising social commerce firms. Thus, this study's practice contribution lies in developing this categorisation, which shows that social commerce firms could be placed into Finance & Insurance, Communication, Education, Beverage, Office Equipment, Transport, Food, Fashion, Household items, and Personal care.

The third contribution to practice is the incentive for social commerce actors to use the social commerce categorisation as a litmus test of potential co-created value. This study's findings suggest how the interactions of social commerce actors can provide co-created value; for that matter, we recommend a two-step approach to assist firms in developing social commerce strategy. Firms may start by looking from the 'outside in' and determining which category of value to create and deliver to it. Using the categorisation as a starting point is welcomed. Firms may take a second step by reflecting on the types of value they would like to accrue to themselves as a second step as illustrated in the typology of value co-created in a developing country social commerce ecosystem. This typology is illustrated in Table 7.4 to show the specific activities and actions which may be undertaken to obtain the various forms of value.. They must do so by defining desired value co-created outcomes and leveraging the various actor roles and resources.

8.4.3 Contributions to Policy

This study has two contributions to policy. To begin with, the classification of social commerce firms built in this study is a valuable tool for policymakers in determining how to classify such

businesses. Defining such firms is to ensure that they comply with their tax obligations as businesses. However, policing social media in resource-constrained environments is nearly impossible. Understanding the various classifications would help tax officials better comprehend what they should expect from them regarding taxation.

Second, beyond value co-creation, social commerce demonstrates the ability to contribute to growth in resource-poor contexts like Ghana, where this research was conducted. This research shows that social commerce value co-creation has much value potential for goods and services generated in low-resource environments. As a result, policymakers implementing the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) must establish service ecosystems for various products and services to generate demand for the domestic market. As a result, more job opportunities for the youth will be made.

8.5 Future Research Directions

The findings suggest that value co-creation is a dynamic interaction. Value is co-created and co-dependent in a network system such as the social commerce (Autio & Thomas, 2019). Further, value co-creation is always a co-creational and systemic process driven by many actors with different needs, roles and resources, attempting to render "real" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Wieland et al., 2016). Hence, co-created value is dynamic and multidimensional. As such, co-created value may be deteriorating. In other words, what one finds valuable today may not be valuable tomorrow, so we need to find out how value is sustained or maintained. A promising research question would be "how do social commerce actors sustain social commerce value over time"?

Second, in social commerce, there is the interaction between various stakeholders. As they interact to create value, there is the potential to learn from each other. However, this could be an interesting area for future studies to explore. The learning is necessary to understand the expectation and needs of each actor. Hence, a promising research question is “how social commerce actors learn from each other and how such learning contributes to value creation"?.

Third, the forms of value we have explained assume uniformity of conditions within the environmental context. However, varied technological, organisational, and environmental configurations could moderate value outcomes. Therefore, it could be worth investigating the technical, organisational and environmental conditions that affect social commerce actors in value co-creation.

Fourth, this study derived two typologies which could be guide future social commerce studies. The first typology illustrates the roles and resources of social commerce actors, while the second illustrates the forms of value that actors co-create within the social commerce ecosystem. Despite their usefulness, researchers can further extend these typologies can since they were derived from data collected only in Ghana and only in fashion retail sector. Hence data from other industry and country contexts could extend the typologies’ coverage.

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Technology

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Ethical Clearance

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA
ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR THE HUMANITIES (ECH)
P. O. Box LG 74, Legon, Accra, Ghana

My Ref. No…ECH 173/19-20……

August 13th, 2020

Edward Entee
Department of Operations Management and
Information Systems
University of Ghana
Legon, Accra

ETHICAL CLEARANCE
(ECH 173/19-20)

The protocol tittle below has been reviewed and approved by the ECH Committee.

TITLE OF PROTOCOL: **RESOURCES AND VALUE CO-CREATION IN A SOCIAL COMMERCE ECOSYSTEM**

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: **EDWARD ENTEE**

Please note that the final review report must be submitted to the Committee at the completion of the study. Your research records may be audited at any time during or after the implementation. Any modification of this research project must be submitted to ECH for review and approval prior to implementation.

Please report all serious adverse events related to this study to ECH within seven (7) days verbally and in writing within fourteen (14) days.

This certificate is valid till August 12th, 2021. You are to submit annual reports for continuing review.

Please accept my congratulations.

Yours Sincerely,

Professor C. Charles Mate-Kole
ECH Chair

Cc: Professor Richard Boateng, University of Ghana Business School, UG
Dr. Anthony Afful-Dadzie, University of Ghana Business School, UG
Dr. Emmanuel Awuni Kolog, University of Ghana Business School, UG

Tel: +233-303933866 Email: ech@ug.edu.gh

Appendix B: Selection Criteria for Case Firm

The following six criteria were used to choose the keystone firm:

(1) The case-study firm must be a small to medium-sized enterprise (SME).

(2) the case-study must have been in operation for at least 5 years.

(3) the case-study firm must have been active on at least two social media platforms (its business operations must be heavily reliant on social media platforms).

(4) The case-study firm must be identified as a significant market player (their economic impact and market share are important for the domestic market).

(5) The case-study firm must be established in the home nation and owned locally (the selected case-study firm must have its own capital structure and is not a division of a worldwide corporation).

(6) The case-study firm has to be interested in taking part in the study.

Appendix C: Multifaceted Definition of S-Commerce

Social Commerce features	Description
Community shopping	*Customers can chat with other users or the merchant on a messaging platform[1] to get advice and share thoughts*
Group Buying	*Customers can buy products at lower prices when more users (friends and strangers) make the purchase together*
Shopping integrated into social media	*Customers can shop on social media sites, often via 'buy now' tags, from either merchants or other customers*
Consumer-to-consumer (C2C) trusted sales platforms	*Customers can sell products to other users and communicate with each other on C2C platforms*
Recommendations	*Customers can share comments, rate and recommend products*
User-curated shopping	*Customers can create lists of favourite items that other users, mostly friends, can shop from*

Appendix D: Interview Guide

Social commerce Firm owner

Background Information

1. Can you please tell me a bit about your background?
2. Kindly give me an overview of your company?
3. What is your experience with social media platforms?
4. What motivates/motivated you to use social media?
5. What types of firms are collaborating with? Can you give me an example?
6. Do you actively recruit firms to use your services, or do they approach your firm?
7. How would you describe the process? Can you give me a few examples?
8. Do you think that firms' executives understand what social commerce is and what it can do in terms of business strategies? Yes? No? Why?
9. Kindly tell me about your business processes?
10. Do you discuss information about customer purchases with them/ suppliers and other stakeholders?
11. How would you describe the processes that follow the development and delivery? How do you make sure that it complies with the customer's expectations?
12. In your experience, what are the main requirements for developing a successful product? Can you please elaborate? Do you mind giving me examples?

Customers

1. What is your background?
2. How did you get to know about the company?
3. How was your first interaction with them?
4. What would you say are the factors influencing how the company interacts with you and other customers?
5. Do you get to interact and collaborate with service providers?
6. What do you need during your interactions with the social commerce firm? Service providers?
7. What are do you use during your interactions with company? Service providers?
8. What benefits do you get from your interactions with the company/service providers?

Value co-creation

1. What communication channels do you use? And why?
2. what communication channels do you use, and why
    a. how often
3. what is your primary means of communicating with your customers?
4. how do you use SNS to communicate with your customers, and how often?
5. How do you describe its effectiveness?
6. What's the response of your customers to the communication cues?

Service provider

1. Do you discuss information about your purchases with the company?
2. What are some of the resources you use during your interactions with the company/customers/other stakeholders?
3. Do you participate in the service process? How?

4. What is your level of involvement with the service process? How?
5. What are some of the benefits you get from working with the company?
6. Are there other forms of value you get from social media?
7. What are the main communication channels with social companies/customers/other stakeholders.

Appendix E: Categorisation of Social Commerce Firms in Ghana

Category	Sample Firm	Platform used
Auto, Auto works	Andcorp	WhatsApp, Facebook
Food, Catering	Clean Eats Gh	Instagram, Facebook
Household, Décor	Nouoma Decor	Instagram, Facebook
Consultancy, Firm services, Advertising	Hyper Team, NDH media Consult	LinkedIn, Twitter.
Beverage	Wahala	Facebook
Fashion, Beauty	Bliss Hair, Haven Bags,	Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp
Electronics	Mycell Phone, Nafassel electronics, Laptop Palace	Facebook, Instagram
Finance	Busy sales Gh	LinkedIn, Twitter, WhatsApp
Arts, Entertainment	Sterling	Instagram, Facebook
Health, Health products	Shades and Brushes	Facebook, Instagram
Personal care	Mobile Chief,	Instagram, Facebook
Agriculture	NOVi_233	WhatsApp, Twitter

Appendix F: Qualitative evidence of actor roles: dimensions, constructs, codes, and representative data

First order codes, second order constructs and Aggregate theoretical constructs	Illustrative quotes	Respondent
Platform choices Platform Activities	I use WhatsApp basically for communication, but when I am actively marketing or advertising a product, I use Instagram the more and less of and Facebook	Director
Platform Choices	I am on Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp and Facebook and A lot happen on those platforms	Emmanuel - Customer
Platform use	and that is where I saw the post about the bags…I got to know about DCL on Instagram and that is where I saw the post about the bags…	Emmanuel – customer
Product offerings	I got to know about DCL on Instagram.	Regina-Customer
customer engagement	I saw the designs of DCL on Instagram,	Diana- customer
product offering	initially, I commented on the post of the bag, and they gave me a WhatsApp number to contact, so I contacted them	Diana – customer
customer engagement	I saw a friend using their bag, and I took their contact number from her	Desmond- Director
Platform administration	I wanted to sample their designs, so they sent it to me via WhatsApp, and I made a choice	Desmond – Director
	I choose Instagram because we basically have much presence	

Supplier engagement	there. Our following there is more than our Facebook following. Then we have busily focus on growing Instagram more than our Facebook and trying to invite people actually to follow the page. So that was more or less the starting point for me. Moreover, I was taking some webinars and some masterclasses on Instagram to understand how social media marketing works, especially marketing through an Instagram handle. So that boosted my interest in Instagram the more"	Desmond- Director
Platform administration		Desmond – Director
User engagement		Desmond-Director
User engagement		Desmond -Director
Timed Content	I use WhatsApp to get in touch with my delivery guys. I sent a text on WhatsApp with details of the delivery and they respond	Desmond- Director
Customer engagement	So, I decided to just run with the Instagram app especially WhatsApp, because that is what we use mostly for communicating with clients and prospective clients	Desmond – Director
Authentication		Andy- Supplier
Customer service	we usually have the oldies who contact us outside social media So subsequently I think we put in place a model where at least three times a day at different times let's say one is early in the morning, the second time is around ten, and the last time will be around in the afternoon 3 o'clock, where I will routinely monitor the platforms because I can't always be there.	Deputy CEO-
Platform choices		Desmond- Director
	Because I started with my personal number, people normally messaged me directly via text that they want a bag and once you message, I will	

Content creation	respond to you, but I will tell you to revert to WhatsApp	Edem, customer
contacting	For me, for reference and records sake, I will tell you that let's do WhatsApp. So that you don't come and tell me that is not what you ordered.	Seth – customer
Customer engagement	…because we mostly have to be sending our clients pictures of their orders and that takes a lot of data, almost every day we are on WhatsApp and Instagram Messenger	Andy- Supplier
Content generation		Desmond – Director
Customer advocacy	Among the three social media platforms that we have adopted, we mostly use WhatsApp for chatting with or clients in terms of their orders and stuff. Then we use Instagram and Facebook for marketing ...like posting pictures of our products and designs. And one thing too is that social media is not one way because when we post our clients comment on our posts. So, for example when we post a design of a bag on our WhatsApp status, they are able to comment, and then the conversation continues from there	Desmond –
Customer engagement		Desmond- Director
Partner Contact		Desmond- Director
Platform administration	They post their bags on social media, so there are comments under it" -)	Desmond – Director
Supplier contact	I wanted a bag, so I contacted them on WhatsApp, but I saw their design on Instagram	Desmond – Director
User feedback provision	We use WhatsApp to communicate a lot when we have to deliver materials to	Desmond – Director

	them…. for, chatting and voice calls –	Desmond – Director
Customer contact	Because we use different platforms that have different features, it is sometimes difficult to post one way. We often have to modify our intended posts to suit every platform	Desmond – Director
Content creation		
Personalization	Apparently, some of them posted themselves wearing the mask and adverting on their status for us. From there, people started sending me to request to design for them	Desmond – Director
Information searching	And I realize that once you interact with them even through the WhatsApp broadcast, some people will want to order, but because out of sight, out of mind, but once they see you, they are able to get in touch	Desmond - Director
Personalization	I even partnered with DHL courier service to be able to get my orders to people who order from outside the country	Cynthia - Customer
	We actually use it throughout our processes	
Contacting	before we design the product, we need to get the material, and to get the materials we use social media to communicate with the suppliers using pictures and all that. Then when we come to the aspect of the delivery, we use mostly use social media to communicate with our delivery partners…	Cynthia -Customer
Personalization		Daniel – customer
Partner engagement	we get feedback through social media through comments and chats	Emmanuel - Customer

Service offering	Okay, so I think for us, it is more about being able to convince people via our social media marketing platform. Let's say; I use my phone for all the pictures. I don't use a digital camera. Some of the training that I did online taught us actually how to use an iPhone, any iPhone that can do a portrait picture can actually take very good pictures, so I did that. Some can even they send us samples, of designs, some of them are unique designs, while others are traditional designs, but they want it tweaked to suit the taste. So, for such people, we engage them to deliver what they want" For example, when we are ready for a delivery, we just contact the delivery company…. we just WhatsApp them, with details of where we want to do the delivery, so they come over and pick the items up to deliver…the details of the delivery include the contact of the customer they have to deliver to Their designs were on Instagram, and they were very cool…they had provided a WhatsApp contact, so I WhatsApped them to get mor details, and that is when they told me the price" when it came to the delivery too the delivery rider called me on	Andy– supplier

	the phone to ascertain my location so delivery the item "When the materials that we order arrive we first send Desmond some pictures on WhatsApp, then we continue communication with him when to deliver I saw their bags on Facebook and commented on it for the price, but they responded with contact asking me WhatsApp …then I asked them about the pricing from there…as for the delivery	

Source: Author's illustration

Appendix G: Qualitative evidence of social commerce value co-created: dimensions, constructs, codes, and representative data

First order codes, second order constructs and Aggregate theoretical constructs	**Illustrative quotes**
Functional Value	
Interactional Value	
Business-customer connection	*Social media platforms connect the business with its customers*
Contacting	*so, I contacted them and they said they could make a bag of my choice for me I also showed them how I want it*
Chatting	*we mostly use WhatsApp for chatting with or clients in terms of their orders and stuff*
Staying in touch	*And I realize that once you interact with them even through the WhatsApp broadcast, some people will want to order, but because out of sight, out of mind, but once they see you, they are able to get in touch*
Feedback	*Then I saw his post and contacted him to find out if he could design one for me and he did…it was so cool*
Economic Value	
Information request	*initially, I commented on the bag, and they gave me a WhatsApp number to contact so I contacted them*
Conversation prompting	*So, for example when we post a design of a bag on our WhatsApp status, they are able to comment and then the conversation continues from there*
Bargain	*I commented on the bag, and they gave me a WhatsApp number to contact, so I contacted them, I got a relatively lower price*
Physical value	

First order codes, second order constructs and Aggregate theoretical constructs	**Illustrative quotes**
Customisation	*So, I "PMed" him my own design with the colour of the materials to use and all that, and he did it for me*
Customer-delighting	*Initially what he did not have enough side pouches, so I got back to him with a picture on how I wanted it, and he took it back, and he reworked on it*
Symbolic Value	
Social value	
Lead generation	*Apparently, some of them posted themselves wearing the mask and adverting on their status for us. From there, people started sending me request to design for them*
Referral	*Some people even tell us that send me and let me repost on my status*
Content sharing	*And then the reposting on the status is even much more viable than the Instagram*
Cross-referral	*They said they have seen my face masks on the status of some of my clients they knew and the person told them I was into the design of bags as well*
Relationship Building	
Inducing trust	*Because in Ghana I have realized that people trust personal referrals so once that goes on it helps*
Providing evidence	*Sometimes when they finish producing my order, they send me evidence*
Exposure value	
Awareness creation	*and also increases awareness about the brand, and boosts the leads with sales.*
Visibility	Now there are a lot of businesses there, and that's where I saw the post about the bags

First order codes, second order constructs and Aggregate theoretical constructs	**Illustrative quotes**
Platform Value	
Operational value	
Managing operations	*For me I am even able to communicate with my delivery team"*
Maintaining Contact	*I use WhatsApp to get in touch with my delivery guys. I send a text on WhatsApp with details of the delivery and they respond"*
Record-keeping	*For me, for reference and records sake, I will tell you that lets do WhatsApp. So that you don't come and tell me that is not what you ordered*
Organisational Development	
Education	*And I was taking some webinars and some masterclasses on Instagram to understand it how social media marketing works, especially marketing through an Instagram handle. So that boosted my interest in Instagram the more.*
Gaining knowledge	*In another masterclass, the organiser shared the names of some free photo-editing tools start-ups can use to obtain high quality pictures for professional-looking social media pages*
Applying knowledge	*I have learnt that I get higher demand for products whose photos I take with studio-quality*