

UNDERSTANDING CONSUMER'S ONLINE IMPULSE BUYING BEHAVIOR IN SOCIAL COMMERCE

Research-in-Progress

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Abstract

This study proposes a model to understand how the different processes of social influence, individual needs, and social gratifications influence the online impulse buying behavior. It also examines the moderating role of impulsiveness on the relationship between the different processes of social influence and urge to buy impulsively. This study uses a quantitative approach and adopts survey as its research method. Drawing on the theories of social influence theory, and uses and gratifications theory, it is hypothesized that social influence processes (compliance, internalization, and identification), individual needs, and gratifications of using social networks (purposive value, entertainment, self-discovery, social enhancement and maintaining interpersonal interconnectivity) positively influence consumers' online impulse buying behavior in social commerce sites. It is also assumed that the effect of different processes of social influence on the online impulse buying behavior can be moderated by the trait of impulsiveness.

Keywords: Social commerce, impulse buying behavior, Social influence, uses and gratifications

Introduction

The rapid development in online web-based technologies has significantly improved social media tools and concepts, which led to substantial evolution in the field of E-commerce. According to this development, a novel phenomenon known as social commerce (S-commerce) has emerged (Huang and Benyoucef 2015). S-commerce is considered as the delivery of E-commerce activities and transactions via the social media environment, mostly in social networks and by using Web 2.0 software (Liang and Turban 2011). These sites rely on the social interaction among customers which makes the experience of a customer different from other contexts. In this era of the networked society, customers can easily interact with each other and with companies as well through social network sites (Lin et al. 2017). One of the important consequences of S-commerce is the emergence of significant user behavior, i.e., the customer's online impulse buying behavior (IBB) (Busalim and Hussin 2016). It has been recognized as an irrational behavior and defined as a sudden, unplanned purchase with no pre-shopping intention due to exposure to a stimulus (Vonkeman et al. 2017). Consumers on these platforms are prone to impulse buying behavior owing to the social interactions; most users' buying behavior on S-commerce sites viewed as IBB (Xiang et al. 2016). IBB has negative effects on consumers, including the perception of guilt, regret, and unnecessary spending (Chang and Tseng 2014). It also influences business side;

when consumers encounter low satisfaction s/he will spread negative word of mouth, switch to alternatives, and will have no purchase intention which will cause business damages (Lim et al. 2016). Despite the important role social interaction play in S-commerce, few studies have addressed the influence of social interaction in online IBB in this context. Chen et al. (2016) examined how information quality (IQ) of the advertisement, impulsiveness, and the number of “likes” influence consumers' urge to buy impulsively (UBI). They found that textual IQ of the advertisement, the number of “likes”, and the trait of impulsiveness positively influence UBI. Zhang et al. (2014) studied the effect of review quality, source credibility, and observational learning in UBI. Their results showed that review quality has a positive impact on perceived usefulness; while source credibility and observational learning positively influence both perceived usefulness and positive affect. Perceived usefulness is found to posit a significant effect on positive affect, which in turn influences UBI. Furthermore, Xiang et al. (2016) found that environmental features (information fit to task, visual appeal) and social related features (similarity, likability, and expertise) have indirect effect on UBI. Existing research also showed that consumers' perceived utilitarian and hedonic value from reading online reviews improve their browsing behavior which positively affects their UBI and IBB (Zhang et al. 2018). The previous study by Huang (2016) showed that there is an association between impulse buying, social capital, peer communication, UBI, and vividness. In addition to that, Xi et al. (2016) investigated the role of social influence in IBB and the factors that lead to social influence. Their findings showed that expertise and trustworthiness are significantly related to social influence (informational and normative influence); further, the s-commerce system's support for personalization and social interaction facilitate consumers' exchange of social support, and therefore, significantly facilitate social influence. However, the study failed to show how this influence occurs through the different processes of social influence. The previous studies consistently showed the significant role that social interaction plays on online impulse buying behavior but did not address how the different processes of social influence (compliance, identification, and internalization) affect online IBB. Meanwhile, it has been found by Kim and Kim (2018) that these social influence processes affect social deal purchases. It also has been found that individuals motives and social needs influence their behaviors, such as consumer adoption behavior on social networks (Ifined 2016). Nevertheless, no study investigated the influence of individual motives and social needs of using social networks in IBB. Despite that UBI differs from impulse buying (Huang 2016), and many previous studies focused on consumer's UBI and neglected the actual IBB. Furthermore not all UBI are linked to IBB (Chung et al. 2017) and it cannot be sure that consumers would actually buy a product when they encounter a strong UBI (Leong et al. 2018). Therefore, the main aim of this study is to investigate how the referent group (friends and family) affects consumer's online IBB in S-commerce via the different social influence processes. This study also investigates how individual motives and social needs of using online social networks affect consumer's online IBB in S-commerce context by considering both types of impulse buying responses (UGI and IBB). The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: In the next section, the theoretical background for the study was reviewed, followed by a discussion of the research model and the associated research hypotheses. After that, the research methodology was explained. Lastly, the implications for both research and practice were provided.

Theoretical background

The consumers' social interaction using social networks platforms has become an important part of s-commerce (Hajli et al. 2014). This social interaction among consumers makes their experience in S-commerce different from the other contexts. The previous studies on S-commerce research showed that the behavior of consumer changes due to other consumers connected in social networks. In this setting, impulsive buying could be further stimulated, because s-commerce encourages social networking, and offers more occasions for consumers to influence each other (Huang and Benyoucef 2013). Therefore, it is important to investigate how social influence affects IBB in S-commerce context. Hence, social influence theory (SIT) is appropriate since it clearly illustrates how individual attitudes and behaviors change due to social influence.

SIT has long been recognized as an important force shaping an individual's consumer behavior. SIT is a classical socio-psychological theory that explains an individual's socially induced opinion formation and behavior change (Zhao et al. 2018). It was developed by Kelman (1974) who proposed that an

individual's attitudes, beliefs, and subsequent actions or behaviors are influenced by others through three processes: compliance, identification, and internalization. Different levels of change correspond to differences in the process, whereby individuals accept the influence. Compliance occurs when an individual accepts influence from another person or a group to attain a favorable reaction from the other—either to gain a specific reward or avoid a specific punishment controlled by the other or to gain approval or avoid disapproval from the other. Whereas identification occurs when an individual accepts influence from another person or a group to establish or maintain a satisfying self-defining relationship to the other. On the other hand, when an individual accepts influence from another to maintain the congruence of actions and beliefs with his or her own value system, it can be said that social influence occurred through the internalization process (Kelman 2006). All three processes represent three qualitatively different ways of accepting influence. SIT was used by Xi et al. (2016) to examine the impact of peers in consumers' impulsive purchases in S-commerce. Their results showed that both informational and normative social influence significantly influence the consumer's online IBB. However, this study failed to show the processes (compliance or identification) through which the normative influence occurred, and the different levels of change correspond to those processes. It also neglected the urge to buy impulsively which precede the actual IBB and play an important role via reflecting the strong desire that the consumer experiences before the actual purchase. Furthermore, social influence was widely used and applied to explain different individual or group behaviors in the virtual community such as participation behavior (Dholakia et al. 2004), intentional social action (Cheung and Lee 2010), adoption behavior (Ifined 2016) and deal purchase (Kim and Kim 2018).

On the other side, the popularity of social media technologies enabled customers to increasingly engage in online social communities and actively share their experiences and opinions on products and brands with other customers and friends (Cheung et al 2014). Thus, S-commerce incorporates commercial features into social networking sites to allow transactions, advertisements and to influence consumers (Busalim and Hussin 2016). Furthermore, it has been found that individuals use online social networks to fulfill their needs and social gratifications which form their behavioral intention and actual behavior (Ifined 2016). Since S-commerce sites depend on online social networks to influence the consumers, it is important to study how the individual needs and social gratification of using social networks affect their behaviors in buying impulsively in S-commerce sites.

Therefore, this research applied uses and gratifications theory (UGT) to investigate how the individual needs and social gratifications influence the consumer's online impulse buying behavior in S-commerce. UGT is a media use paradigm from mass communications research that focuses on individual use and choice of media (Katz 1959). The main purpose of this paradigm is to explain the reasons that people choose a specific medium over alternative communication media and to elucidate the psychological needs that motivate people to use a particular medium. It assumes that users are goal-directed in their behavior and are aware of their needs (Cheung et al. 2011). UGT also suggests that cognitive and affective needs to motivate people's choices when consuming media reveals the consequences that follow from needs, motives, and behavior (Pai and Arnott 2013). A previous study by Husnain et al. (2016) applied UGT to study IBB. They explored the moderating role of big five personality traits in the relationship between electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and IBB in S-commerce. Their findings revealed that IBB is significantly associated with eWOM, and the big five personality traits have important moderation role in the relationship between them. Nevertheless, this study also neglected UBI as the researchers did not specify the individual needs and social gratifications of using online social networks and how this needs and gratifications influence the consumer's IBB.

Many studies have recently used UGT to study needs and gratifications in the context of computer-mediated communication (Cheung et al. 2011; Cheung and Lee 2009; Dholakia et al. 2004; Kua et al. 2013). Previous studies have consistently shown that purposive value, self-discovery, and entertainment are the most adopted individual motives or needs, whereas social enhancement and maintaining interpersonal connectivity are the most significant social gratifications of using social networks. These factors have been used widely to study different individual behaviors in the virtual community, such as the user adoption behavior (Ifined 2016), 'we' intention behavior (Cheung et al. 2011), participation behavior (Dholakia et al. 2004), and intention to use (Cheung and Lee 2009). Therefore, this study adopts purposive value, self-discovery, entertainment, social enhancement, and maintaining interpersonal connectivity because they are important key values (or needs) of using online social networks that are widely used.

Theoretical Model Development

This study aims to examine how social influence (compliance, internalization, and identification), individual needs or motives, and social gratifications of using social networks affect the two responses of impulse buying, namely UBI and IBB. It also examines the moderation role of impulsiveness personality traits between social influence and UBI. It is drawn on the social influence theory (SIT) and uses and gratifications theory (UGT) which complement each other due to commonality of socialization constructs in both theories. In this section, the research model and their interrelationships are addressed. Table 1 shows the constructs, operational definitions and previous studies that adopted those constructs.

Table 1. Constructs, Operational Definitions and Previous Works

Construct	Operational definition	Previous works
Compliance	Reflects that an individual acts to comply with the opinions of friends and family who are important to him/her to earn rewards such as strong friendship or avoid punishment excluding from group.	(Ifined 2016; Tsai and Bagozzi 2014)
Internalization	Reflects that an individual accepts the influence due to similarity of his/her values, preferences with friends, family and those of other group members in S-commerce.	(Kim and Kim 2018; Tsai and Bagozzi 2014)
Identification	Reflects that an individual accepts influence because he/she wants to establish or maintain a satisfying self-defining relationship with another friend, family or a group member in S-commerce.	(Kim and Kim 2018; Tsai and Bagozzi 2014)
Purposive value	Refers to values that an individual derives from accomplishing something with a pre-determined informational and instrumental (helpful) purpose in S-commerce.	(Cheung et al. 2011; Cheung and Lee 2009)
Entertainment	Refers to fun and relaxation through surfing or interacting with friends and family members on S-commerce.	(Gao and Feng 2016; Ifined 2016)
Self-discovery	Refers to the understanding and deepening salient aspects of one's self through social interactions with friends and family members.	(Cheung et al. 2011; Dholakia et al. 2004)
Social enhancement	The values that an individual derives from gaining acceptance and the approval of friends and family as well as enhancing his/her social status.	(Cheung et al. 2011; Ifined 2016)
Maintaining interpersonal interconnectivity	Social benefits derived from establishing and maintaining contact with friends and family such as social support, strong friendship, and intimacy.	(Cheung et al. 2011; Ifined 2016)
Impulsiveness	Is a tendency to experience unplanned, sudden desires to make an on-the-spot purchase and to act on these felt desires with little deliberation or evaluation of purchase consequences.	(Chen et al. 2016; Floh and Madlberger 2013)
Urge to buy impulsively	Is a state of desire that an individual feels to buy something immediately when exposures to an object in the S-commerce context.	(Leong et al. 2018; Zhang et al. 2018)

Social Influence Theory (SIT)

According to the compliance process of social influence, individuals conform to the opinions of other people who are important to them when they perceived social pressures (Tsai and Bagozzi 2014). S-commerce relies on social interaction among consumers to influence them. S-commerce enables

consumers to share their experience and knowledge about products and brands through recommendations and posts with their friends and family members. In this setting, individuals are exposed to social pressure and may choose to buy a product to comply with the opinions of their friends and families even if they are not comfortable with such behavior or its consequences (Pookulangara and Koesler 2011). Thus, it can be hypothesized (H1) that individuals in S-commerce may feel the urge to buy a product recommended by important referents (family and friends) so as to comply with them.

H1: Compliance has a positive influence on consumer's urge to buy impulsively

Based on the internalization process of social influence, individuals get involved in certain behaviors when they become conscious of the common shared values or goals with other members (Dholakia et al. 2004; Kim and Kim 2018). S-commerce sites comprise of communities of customers with similar interests, passions, or goals which influence their behavior (Ng 2013). Thus, H2 hypothesizes that when individuals receive product recommendations from friends or family members who share similar values and preferences with them, they see this product as more attractive and feel compelled to buy it.

H2: Internalization has a positive influence on consumer's urge to buy impulsively

S-commerce consumers satisfy their social needs by socializing and communicating with others. In identification, an S-commerce consumer is influenced by purchases of another person or a group because he/she wants to establish or maintain a satisfying self-defining relationship with the other (Cheung et al. 2011; Kim and Kim 2018). H3 hypothesizes that S-commerce enables individuals to observe what their friends and family recommend, and hence have a strong desire to buy a product to achieve social identification.

H3: Identification has a positive influence on consumer's urge to buy impulsively

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)

S-commerce relies on social networks to enable the consumers to share knowledge and information about services and products. Hajli (2015) found that recommendation, ratings, and reviews significantly influence consumer's behavior and increase the intention to buy. Therefore, when an S-commerce consumer browses online networks to get information (purposive value) about a product, he/she is exposed to significant information from friends and others, which makes the individual feel urged to buy the product.

H4: Purposive value has a positive influence on consumer's urge to buy impulsively

Moreover, individuals use social media not only for their information needs but also for entertainment. It has been found that individuals use social media because they feel entertained (Ifined 2016). H5 hypothesizes that as S-commerce enables interaction among consumers, individuals feel fun and relaxed when reading and interacting with friends and family recommendations about products, which makes the product more interesting to them and they feel urged to buy the products.

H5: Entertainment value has a positive influence on consumer's urge to buy impulsively

Self-discovery is another value or motive for using social networks. When individuals in S-commerce interact with others and observe their recommendations, this helps them understand and define their own and referred preferences, tastes, and values. During this self-discovery, individuals are exposed to massive information about products or brands from friends or family, which compels them to buy impulsively.

H6: Self-discovery has a positive influence on the urge to buy impulsively

Research has consistently shown that socializing needs, including maintaining interpersonal interconnectivity and social enhancement, are important social gratifications derived from SNS. The desire to connect with others and enhance one's own social worth motivates online network engagement (Ifined 2016). In S-commerce, an individual may adopt recommendations from referent groups in order to gain social acceptance from them, initiate new relationships, and strengthen existing ties. Thus, both H7 and H8 were developed.

H7: Social enhancement positively influences urge to buy impulsively

H8: Maintaining interpersonal interconnectivity positively influences urge to buy impulsively

Individuals are not just influenced by others; their personality traits also influence their behavior. Individuals who rate high in impulsiveness are more influenced by and respond quickly to environmental cues, triggering them to be more likely to be involved in IBB (Chen et al. 2016). In the

traditional retail context, it has been found that consumers with higher levels of impulsiveness are more likely to experience UBI (Beatty and Ferrell 1998). Prior evidence also found that impulsiveness has a strong relationship with online impulse buying intention (Floh and Madlberger 2013), as well as consumers' UBI (Wells et al. 2011). Accordingly, when an individual with higher levels of impulsiveness browses S-commerce sites and read/receive positive product recommendations from others who have strong social influence (such as friends or family member), s/he will feel urged to buy that product. Thus, these hypotheses were proposed.

H9a: There will be an interaction effect of consumers' impulsiveness on the relationship between compliance and consumers' UBI.

H9b: There will be an interaction effect of consumers' impulsiveness on the relationship between internalization and consumers' UBI.

H9c: There will be an interaction effect of consumers' impulsiveness on the relationship between identification and consumers' UBI.

Strong emotion, hedonic temptation for the sake of instant fulfillment of someone by consumption, and consequences of being carefree are the main key features that characterize impulse buying behavior (Leong et al. 2018). Thus, it has been found that UBI proceeds and plays a significant role in IBB (Huang 2016; Zhang et al. 2018). Consistent with prior researches discriminating UBI and actual IBB, this study notes their differences and suggest a positive relationship between them, i.e., when consumers in S-commerce feel compelled to buy a product, and are more likely to buy the product impulsively.

H10: Urge to buy impulsively positively influences impulse buying behavior

Figure 1 presents the proposed model applying SI theory and UGT

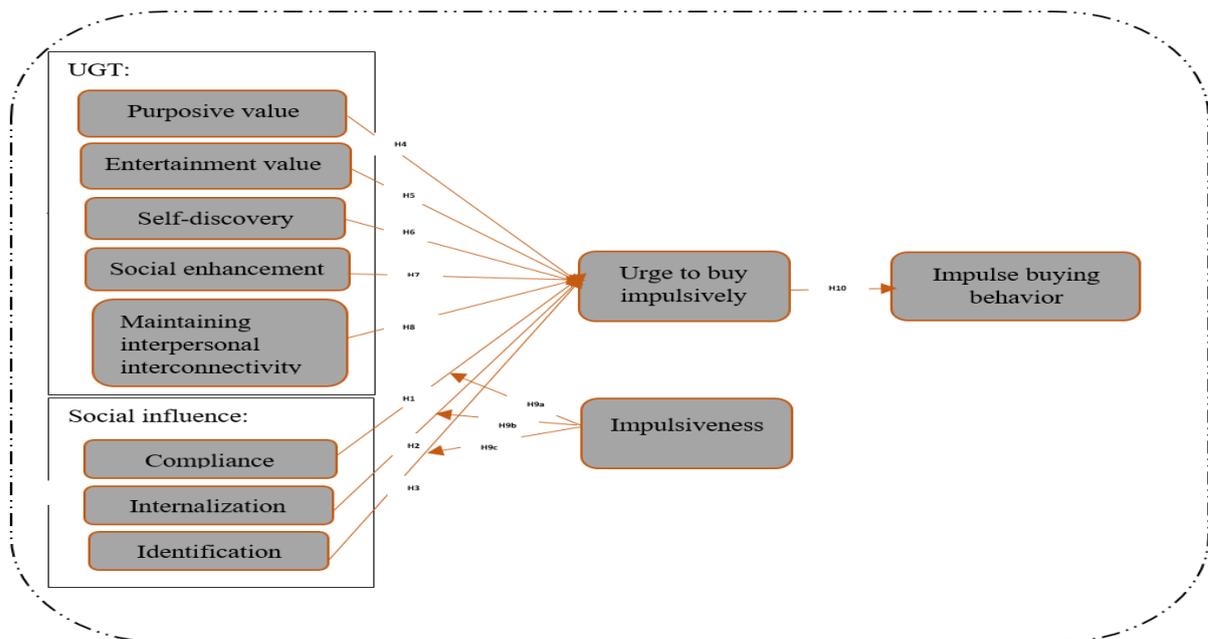


Figure 1. Proposed Research Model

Research Methodology

Since the aim of this research is to investigate how social influence, individual needs, and gratifications influence consumer's IBB in S-commerce, the positivist paradigm was chosen to test the dependent and independent variables, as well as the relationships and interdependence between these variables. This research adopts a quantitative approach to test the proposed hypotheses and uses survey for data collection. After the model has been developed based on both UGT and SIT theories, the research instrument will be developed and validated through content validity and pilot study. The research instrument includes demographic information about the respondents such as age, gender, education, and impulse experience. All items of the instrument will be adapted from previous studies and the five-point

Likert scale (1= strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree) will be used. Furthermore, as this study focuses on the online IBB in S-commerce context, the target population for the survey is the online shoppers who satisfied the criteria for participation (the participant has experience of using S-commerce sites and has encountered IBB during the last six months). To select the representative sample, purposive sampling method will be used, where elements will be selected from the target population on the basis of their fit with the purposes of the study and specific inclusion and exclusion criteria. This research also focuses on individual level as a unit of analysis. Data will be collected from four most popular retail sites in Malaysia, namely Shopee, Carousell, Zalora, and Lazada. They also fulfilled many of the S-commerce design features developed by Huang and Benyoucef (2013). Two methods will be used for data collection: (i) online survey will be posted on Facebook pages, and (ii) paper questionnaire will be distributed among university students who constitute the majority of online shoppers in Malaysia. A paper questionnaire will also be used to overcome the drawbacks of the online survey, which include: data errors, questions complexity issues, technical issues, and limited respondents. Following that, Partial Least Square (PLS) technique of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) will be used for data analysis using Smart PLS software v3.

IMPLICATIONS

Due to the advanced development in social media, impulse buying behavior has been merged in S-commerce in parallel to its appearance in an offline environment and electronic commerce. This research identifies the factors that influence online IBB in S-commerce context. It particularly aims to investigate how the social influence, individual needs, and social gratifications affect consumer's IBB in social commerce sites, and on the moderating role of impulsiveness between UBI and social influence. The findings of this study have both practical and theoretical implications. This research will add value to the business and provides insights to improve sales and allow making good strategic decisions regarding social networks integration with E-commerce applications. It also helps system designers who create the functionality, design, and application of S-commerce sites to overcome the negative consequences of IBB. Furthermore, it helps the business to formulate good market strategies and reshape this unplanned buying behavior into planned buying. In addition, it will increase the consumer's self-awareness of the factors that affect IBB and make them more rational in their future buying decisions. By integrating UGT and SIT theories, it provides IS researchers with a deep understanding of how social interaction in S-commerce sites contributes to customer's IBB. Overall, the study will contribute to the understanding of S-commerce and online shoppers' behavior.

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