

ONLINE IMPULSE BUYING BEHAVIOR MODEL FOR SOCIAL COMMERCE  
IN MALAYSIAN CONTEXT

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my father soul. Although he is no longer here with us, his memories continue to inspire me. I also dedicate this thesis to my beloved mother, who has been a source of encouragement and inspiration to me throughout my PhD journey. Last but not the least, I dedicate the thesis to my sisters, brothers, and friends who tolerated tough times with me and gave me support.

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## ABSTRACT

The rapid development in Web 2.0 technologies and social media has given rise to a new business model—social commerce (S-commerce)—that emphasizes social aspects. Consequently, the consumer's online impulse buying behavior (IBB) increases and contributes significantly to S-commerce revenues. In line with this, an understanding of such behavior is critical for E-retailers to strengthen competitiveness, enhance revenue, and ensure business sustainability in today's challenging business environment. Most of the previous studies have utilized urge to buy impulsively (UBI) as a proxy to examine the consumer's online IBB instead of the actual IBB. As a result, the number of research that distinguishes between UBI and IBB is minimal. These limited studies have only focused on the impact of consumer characteristics, websites-related factors, and marketing factors. However, they neglected the important role of social-related factors on IBB. Furthermore, because the majority of the previous studies adopted the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) framework, building a model based on a theoretical foundation to investigate online IBB in the context of S-commerce is another challenge. The main aim of this study is to examine the impact of social-related factors on triggering online IBB in S-commerce websites. To investigate the social elements influencing online IBB, this study integrated the Social Influence Theory (SIT) and the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT). A quantitative approach was applied to test fifteen hypotheses of the proposed model by surveying 365 consumers from four Malaysian S-commerce websites. The Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation modeling (PLS-SEM) technique was employed to analyze the survey data. The findings indicate that compliance, identification, internalization, entertainment, purposive value, and maintaining interpersonal connectivity significantly influence IBB. It was also discovered that UBI has significant moderating effects on the relationships between compliance, identification, internalization, and IBB. Moreover, it was also identified that impulsiveness has served as a moderator in the relationships between compliance, internalization, and UBI. Theoretically, this study has enriched the understanding of online IBB in S-commerce. It also has practical implications on S-commerce designers, marketers, and managers in terms of regulating online IBB.

## ABSTRAK

Pembangunan pesat teknologi laman sesawang 2.0 dan media sosial pada masa kini telah memberi peluang kepada perniagaan model baharu—perdagangan sosial (S-commerce)—untuk berkembang. Ini secara tidak langsung memberi penekanan dalam aspek sosial. Berikutan itu, peningkatan sikap pembelian secara impulsif (IBB) pengguna dalam talian ini telah memberi impak positif terhadap sumber pendapatan perdagangan sosial. Oleh hal yang demikian, langkah sewajarnya perlu diambil untuk mengkaji kesan kritikal tingkah laku ini terhadap perniagaan dalam talian supaya para peruncit dapat membentuk daya saing secara sihat, meningkatkan keuntungan dan memastikan kemampuan perniagaan masa kini. Kebanyakan kajian terdahulu mengguna pakai terma pembelian secara dorongan (UBI) sebagai proksi untuk meneliti pengguna dalam talian berbanding terma asal IBB dan natijahnya kajian perbezaan di antara UBI dan IBB adalah terhad. Kajian terdahulu juga terbatas kepada memfokus kesan ciri-ciri pengguna, faktor laman sesawang dan faktor pemasaran, namun mengabaikan faktor penting berkaitan isu sosial dalam IBB. Tambahan pula, kebanyakan kajian terdahulu mengguna pakai kerangka rangsangan-organisma-tindak balas (S-O-R). Ini merupakan salah satu cabaran dalam membangunkan teori asas model berdasarkan IBB dalam talian perdagangan sosial. Tujuan utama kajian ini dijalankan untuk mengkaji kesan faktor sosial yang menjadi penyebab tercetusnya IBB dalam talian perdagangan sosial. Kajian ini menggabungkan Teori Pengaruh Sosial (SIT) dan Teori Kegunaan dan Gratifikasi (UGT) untuk mengenal pasti faktor sosial yang menjadi punca dalam mempengaruhi IBB dalam talian. Pendekatan secara kuantitatif telah dijalankan untuk menguji 15 hipotesis yang dicadangkan ke atas 365 pengguna dari empat jenis laman sesawang perdagangan sosial di Malaysia. Teknik Persamaan Sebilangan-Struktural Separa (PLS-SEM) digunakan untuk menganalisis hasil data tinjauan. Hasil kajian mendapati faktor seperti pematuhan, pengenalan diri, penghayatan, hiburan, nilai tujuan dan pengekalan hubungan interpersonal banyak mempengaruhi IBB. Selain itu, UBI juga mempunyai kesan sederhana terhadap hubungan antara faktor pematuhan, pengenalan diri, penghayatan dan IBB. Seterusnya, sifat impulsif menjadi pengantara yang mempengaruhi hubungan antara faktor pematuhan, penghayatan dan UBI. Secara teorinya, kajian ini dipercayai dapat memberi pemahaman yang lebih jelas mengenai IBB dalam talian perdagangan sosial. Selain itu, kajian ini mempunyai implikasi praktikal bagi pereka, pemasar dan pengurus untuk memantau dan mengatur IBB dalam talian.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Overview

The rapid development of Web 2.0 technology and the popularity of social media websites have changed the way individuals live, communicate, collaborate, and the way business is conducted (Busalim and Hussin, 2016). This development gave rise to social commerce websites (S-commerce) that lead to a huge evolution in electronic commerce (E-commerce) (Shang and Bao, 2020). This new paradigm has transformed E-commerce business from a product-oriented environment to a social and customer-oriented one (Huang and Benyoucef, 2013). S-commerce lays higher emphasis on the social aspect to attract consumers and influence their behaviors (Chen et al., 2020b; Shen and Khalifa, 2012). S-commerce is defined as a form of Internet-based “social media” allowing people to participate actively in the marketing and selling of products and services in online marketplaces and communities (Pour *et al.*, 2020; Stephen and Toubia, 2010). It leverages social media to enable social interaction among individuals and encourage their participation (Kim, 2013).

In the context of S-commerce, consumers not only communicate but also rate products, review others’ opinions, participate in forums, share their experiences, and recommend products and services (Molinillo *et al.*, 2020). Accordingly, consumers have an advantage over the influence of other consumers, which supports them in their decision-making (Shanmugam et al., 2016). The distinctive features of S-commerce provide enterprises with opportunities to strengthen their relationships with consumers, obtain valuable feedback on products and services, encourage loyalty, and develop successful marketing strategies that help them to accomplish their desirable economic value (Lin et al., 2017). S-commerce websites such as Groupon have been valued at more than \$3 billion, and it has been anticipated that IT

businesses would invest almost \$50 billion annually in S-commerce by 2020 (Busalim and Hussin, 2016). Thus, this newly emerged phenomenon has attracted the interest of not only E-retailers but also Information Systems (IS) researchers and researchers in other disciplines such as marketing.

The profits of S-commerce are mostly attributed to impulse buying behavior (IBB) of consumers, which is described as unplanned, sudden, on the spot, and hedonic purchase (Wu et al., 2016). The consumers' experiences on social commerce platforms (SCPs) are different from other contexts. In these environments, consumers have social interactions with each other (Xiang et al., 2016). Thus, most of the online shoppers buy the products impulsively on these interactive platforms (Xiang et al., 2016). Therefore, the essential economic value of consumer's online IBB has been recognized very important to S-commerce business. Understanding such behavior is a cornerstone for E-retailers, enabling them to strengthen their competitiveness, increase their profit, and ensure their business sustainability in today's digital business environment (Lo et al., 2016).

## **1.2 Problem Background**

S-commerce has become a significant research area since it has a significant impact on business practices. Thus, it has attracted the interest of E-retailers and researchers working in IS and other disciplines (Lin *et al.*, 2017). Previous studies conducted on S-commerce have addressed different research themes, including firm performance, business model, website design, adoption strategy, research framework, social process, network analysis, security and privacy, and user behavior. Most of the previous studies have focused on user behavior (Busalim and Hussin, 2016; Esmaili and Hashemi G, 2019; Han *et al.*, 2018). It is essential for the business and academic community to understand the different behaviors of users in this newly emerged business paradigm. Understanding consumers' behavior in this interactive environment enables E-retailers to strengthen their competitiveness and enhance their profits (Zhang and Benyoucef, 2016).



S-commerce relies on social media to enable social interaction among individuals, which makes their shopping experience different from other contexts and influences their behavior (Lin *et al.*, 2017). In this interactive environment, individuals can communicate, rate products, review others' opinions, participate in forums, share their experiences, and recommend products and services (Shanmugam *et al.*, 2016). Consequently, the consumer's online IBB has increased extremely in SCPs (Chan *et al.*, 2017). When individuals browse S-commerce websites, they get exposed to a huge volume of information from vendors, news, friends, celebrities, or experts, which induce them to buy products impulsively (Huang, 2016). Thus, most of their purchases in SCPs have been viewed as impulsive buying behaviors (Xiang *et al.*, 2016), and a significant portion of S-commerce revenue is related to it (Wu *et al.*, 2016).

Moreover, McKinsey (2020) report revealed that S-commerce websites are providing the highest ROI. Due to the popularity of social media platforms, S-commerce websites have been rapidly increased in recent years, and it became an important business channel. McKinsey further reported that 70% of business organizations use SNSs to boost their business and 90% of them are able to attain benefits (Leong *et al.*, 2017). Smatinsights (2020) report showed that (i) almost 55% of online shoppers conducted their shopping via social commerce websites. (ii) 87% of social commerce shoppers rely on social media to aid their shopping decisions; (iii) 30% of consumers would make their purchase decisions directly via social commerce websites.

The number of social media users worldwide reached 3.80 billion, and the number of users of Facebook around the world was 2,449 million (DataReportal, 2020). Individuals are influenced by the opinions of friends and family in social media; thus, they are more susceptible to impulse buying (McKinsey, 2015). Consequently, S-commerce market size value reached USD 584.9 billion in 2021, and it anticipated to reach USD 3,369.8 billion in 2028 (Grand-View-Research, 2021).

Impulse purchases represent almost 40% of all the money spent on S-commerce. Impulse buying provides businesses with a great opportunity to generate profits. Businesses need to gain insights into impulse buying to adjust their strategies and store layouts accordingly (Invesp, 2021). 88.6% of Americans have succumbed to the temptations of impulse shopping; with an average spend of USD 81.75 per session or USD 17.78 billion per year. Americans also make up to 156 impulse purchases every year, spending up to USD 5400 annually or USD 324,000 over their lifetime (ADC, 2021).

Furthermore, based on the social commerce market share digital report of (Grand-View-Research, 2021), the Asia Pacific region accounted for the largest revenue share of 68.47% in 2020. Malaysia was ranked the third country in the Asia Pacific region by clocking 3 hours and 24 minutes spent daily on social media (go-globe.com, 2016), and 94% of Malaysians buy products using S-commerce websites and 62% buy products impulsively. Based on 67 % of Malaysian consumers saying that they still don't know what they want to purchase before shop online, and 66% said they learn about new products and brands via social platforms (Bain&Company, 2020).

As most enterprises adopted S-commerce in Malaysia and S-commerce revenue directly related to impulse buying behavior, businesses need to gain insights into such behavior. To harness the power of S-commerce, it is important to study how consumers behave in this setting. Thus, they can formulate their marketing strategies and policies to boost their profits and strengthen their competitiveness in a today competitive digital environment (Leong *et al.*, 2018a; Leong *et al.*, 2018b).

Despite the significant economic value of the consumer's online IBB to S-commerce business, most of the previous studies have focused merely on the traditional buying behavior (i.e., planned buying); as a result, some researchers have called for further research into the consumer's online IBB in S-commerce (Busalim and Hussin, 2016; Chen *et al.*, 2016; Xiang *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, due to the fact that S-commerce is a newly-emerging area with insufficient empirical evidence, studies conducted on IBB in the S-commerce context suffer from a limitation.

Therefore, there is a need to better understand IBB in S-commerce and the influential factors that trigger it. Accordingly, the present study focuses on investigating the consumer's online IBB in S-commerce.

A systematic literature review (SLR) was conducted to investigate the prior studies on IBB in S-commerce. The findings of SLR revealed that most of the studies previously conducted on the online IBB had studied urge to buy impulsively (UBI), which is recognized as a state of desire that an individual feels to buy something immediately when browsing S-commerce websites, as a proxy for IBB, and they have not considered the actual IBB (Arviansyah *et al.*, 2018; Chen *et al.*, 2016; Chen *et al.*, 2020a; Chen *et al.*, 2018; Chen *et al.*, 2019; Chung *et al.*, 2017; Farivar and Yuan, 2017; Handayani *et al.*, 2018; Li *et al.*, 2016; Liu *et al.*, 2013; Xiang *et al.*, 2016; Zafar *et al.*, 2020; Zhang *et al.*, 2014b; Zhang *et al.*, 2018a). As individuals tend to buy impulsively, if they experience an urge to buy, they may or may not act on this strong feeling and purchase impulsively (Leong *et al.*, 2018a). Furthermore, some studies have neglected the important role of UBI and considered only the actual IBB (Akram *et al.*, 2018b; Akram *et al.*, 2019; Hostler *et al.*, 2011; Husnain *et al.*, 2016; Ju and Ahn, 2016; Kim and Johnson, 2016; Wang and Tsai, 2017; Xi *et al.*, 2016). However, the main characteristic that distinguishes IBB from other buying behaviors is the strong feelings accompanying with it. Thus, there is a need to consider both UBI and IBB in a single study to provide precious and accurate results regarding the consumer's IBB.

Furthermore, the SLR also indicated that although the main idea behind the S-commerce websites is to integrate social aspect to influence their consumers, most of the prior studies emphasized the impact of consumer characteristics, website-related factors, and marketing factors and neglected the important impact of social-related factors on IBB. Previous studies provided guidelines for an online business to trigger the consumer's online impulse buying behavior through websites design cues, marketing cues, and consumer characteristics. However, they did not give guidelines to induce the consumer's online impulse buying behavior through social cues.

The main focus of S-commerce is the social aspect that enables social interaction among consumers. This social aspect has given rise to S-commerce and distinguished it from other online contexts (Busalim and Hussin, 2016). The social aspect makes the individual's shopping experience different from other contexts and exerts a significant influence on their behaviors (Zhang and Benyoucef, 2016). Thus, as the social aspect is the backbone of S-commerce, there is a need to study the influence of social-related factors on consumer's online IBB.

Moreover, according to the SLR results, the theoretical foundation of online IBB research is limited. Most of the previous studies have adopted stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) as their underlying theory to investigate online IBB in S-commerce (Arviansyah et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2018; Handayani et al., 2018; Huang, 2016; Ju and Ahn, 2016; Kim and Johnson, 2016; Leong et al., 2018a; Liu et al., 2013; Xiang et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2014b). On the other hand, some other studies have not used any theory to examine online IBB (Akram et al., 2019; Hostler et al., 2011; Leong et al., 2017; Li et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2018a). Therefore, there is a limitation of research investigating the consumer's online IBB based on strong theoretical foundations.

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

As mentioned in the research problem background, the literature lacks adequate research into the consumer's online IBB in S-commerce contexts. Prior studies carried out on online IBB have mainly used UBI to investigate the consumer's online IBB. Furthermore, they merely focused on consumer characteristics, website-related factors, and marketing-related factors. Although the social aspect is the main idea behind S-commerce to enable social interaction among consumers and influence their behaviors, prior studies have not considered the role of social-related factors on triggering the consumer's online IBB in S-commerce. Therefore, the main problem of this current study is that “despite the significant role of social factors in S-commerce, researches in online IBB emphasize on the impact of the consumers' characteristics, website-related factors, and marketing-related

without taking into consideration the role of social-related factors in triggering the online IBB”. Therefore, it is important to study the impact of social-related factors on online IBB in the context of S-commerce.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

The research problem stated in the previous section is anticipated to be solved by answering the following main research question:

*How do social-related factors induce the consumer’s online impulse buying behavior in the social commerce context?*

The main research question is divided into two sub-questions to solve the research problem:

Q1: What are the social-related factors that influence the consumer’s online impulse buying behavior in S-commerce?

Q2: How can a theoretical model for the consumer’s online impulse buying behavior in S-commerce be developed based on the identified factors?

#### **1.5 Research Objectives**

This study aims to develop a theoretical model to examine the social factors that influence the consumer’s online IBB in S-commerce. Hence, the following set of research objectives was defined to guide the direction of the present research:

Research Objective (1): to identify the social-related factors influencing the customer’s online impulse buying behavior in S-commerce context.

Research Objective (2): to develop a theoretical model for the consumer's online impulse buying behavior in S-commerce context.

## **1.6 Scope of the Research**

The present research focuses on the investigation of social-related factors that induce the consumer's online impulse buying behavior in the S-commerce environment. As the impulse buying behavior may occur in the traditional environments (e.g., shops and malls) and online platforms (e.g., E-commerce and S-commerce), the scope of the current research is confined only to the consumer's online impulse buying behavior on S-commerce websites (Zalora, Shopee, Carousell, and Lazada). Furthermore, the study focuses on the Malaysian context, whereby the data was gathered from individuals who have experience with Malaysia S-commerce websites, and more specifically, they have encountered impulse buying behavior in these websites. A survey research method was adopted using an online and paper-based questionnaire. Then the data were statistically analyzed using the Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS.v3 software. Additionally, the unit of analysis of the present study is concentrated on an individual level; thus, group buying S-commerce websites are not in the scope of the study.

## **1.7 Significance of Research**

Social media popularity has given rise to S-commerce websites, and many E-retailers have developed their S-commerce websites or have planned to adopt them. S-commerce relies on social media to enable social interaction among consumers, which is the main characteristic that distinguishes it from other platforms. Consequently, online impulse buying behavior has increased extremely in this interactive environment. A significant portion of S-commerce revenue is attributed to the consumer's online impulse buying behavior. Since S-commerce is recognized as an important business channel to generate profits and most enterprises have adopted it, online businesses need to gain insights into their consumers' behaviors in such

platform. Gaining insights into the influential factors of online impulse buying behavior help online businesses to strengthen competitiveness and ensure business sustainability in a today competitive digital environment.

The present study serves as guidelines for S-commerce designers, marketers, and managers who adopted S-commerce or have planned to adopt it to induce the consumer's online IBB in S-commerce. The S-commerce websites designers can use the findings of this study to integrate the identified influential factors of IBB into these websites to induce the consumers to buy products impulsively. The results also give some insights to the marketers and managers of S-commerce websites to formulate good marketing and business strategies for triggering the consumers' online IBB, and subsequently achieve their profitable marketing values and establish a sustainable business model.

## **1.8 Conceptual Model for Online Impulse Buying Behavior**

The main aim of the present study is to develop a theoretical model for finding the factors that can induce consumer's online IBB in S-commerce. Based on the critical analysis of the literature in Chapter 2, the conceptual research model for consumer's online IBB was drawn. This conceptual model was developed by integrating Social Influence Theory (SIT) and Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT). These theories were chosen based on their fitness to research objectives of the research current, as mentioned in Section 2.4. As illustrates in Figure 1.1, the conceptual research model of impulse buying behavior consists of eleven constructs, including entertainment value, purposive value, self-discovery, social enhancement, maintaining interpersonal connectivity, compliance, internalization, identification, impulsiveness, urge to buy impulsively, and impulse buying behavior. More details on these factors were given in Chapter 4.

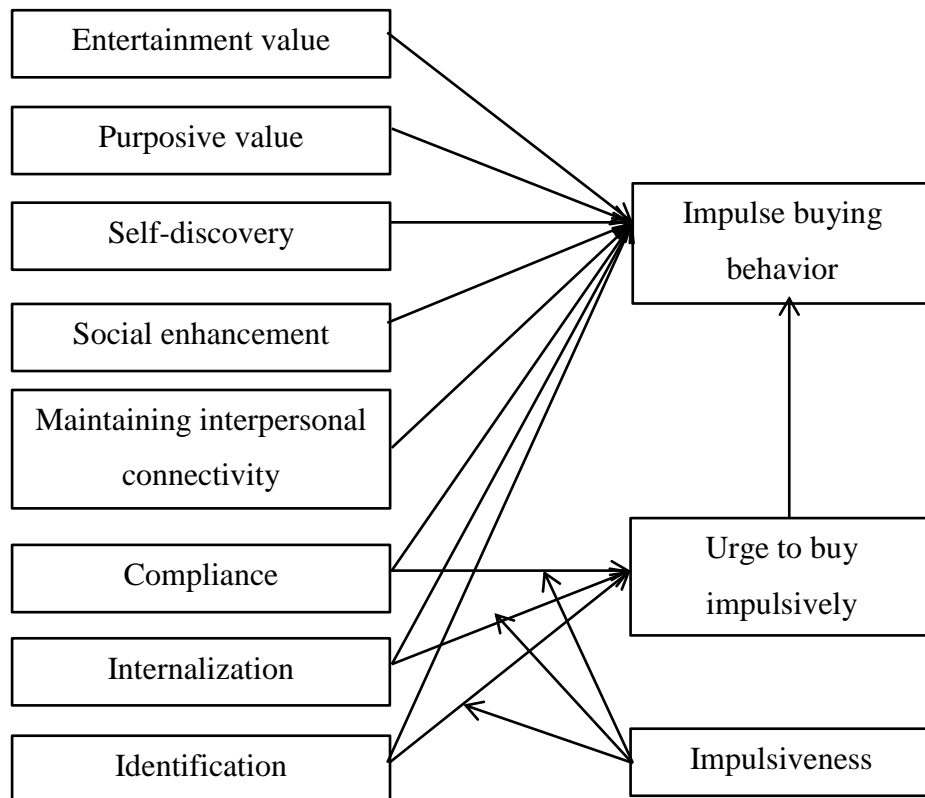


Figure 1.1 Conceptual Model for Online Impulse Buying Behavior

## 1.9 Definitions of the Terms

This section provides a clear definition for all the terms that have been used in the present study to simplify their understanding throughout the study. All the terms and their abbreviations, as well as their definitions are presented in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Definitions of Terms

Term	Abbreviation	Definition
Social Commerce/Platforms	S-commerce, SCP	A business model that uses social media for social interaction and user contributions to enhance their online purchase experience (Kim, 2013).
Impulse Buying Behavior	IBB	An unplanned purchase, the result of exposure to a stimulus and decided on-the-spot (Vonkeman <i>et al.</i> , 2017).



Social Network Service	SNS	Web-based service allows like-minded individuals to be in touch with each other by using websites and web-based applications such as Facebook (Wodzicki <i>et al.</i> , 2012).
Electronic Word of Mouth	e-WOM	Any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet (Yoo <i>et al.</i> , 2013).
Compliance	COM	Reflects that individual acts to comply with the opinions of other people who are important to him/her to earn rewards/approval or avoid disapproval in S-commerce (Kim and Kim, 2018).
Internalization	INT	Reflects that an individual accepts the influence due to the congruence or similarity of his/her values, preferences, and tastes with those of other individuals in S-commerce (Kim and Kim, 2018).
Identification	IDE	Reflects that an individual accepts influence because s/he wants to establish or maintain a satisfying self-defining relationship with another person in S-commerce (Kim and Kim, 2018).
Entertainment value	ETV	Refers to fun and relaxation through browsing or interacting with other members on S-commerce sites (Cheung <i>et al.</i> , 2011).
Purposive value	PUV	Refers to values that an individual derives from accomplishing something with a pre-determined informational and instrumental (helpful) purpose in S-commerce sites (Cheung <i>et al.</i> , 2011).
Self-discovery	SFD	Refers to the understanding and deepening salient aspects of one's self through social interactions with others in S-commerce sites (Dholaki <i>et al.</i> , 2004).
Maintaining interpersonal connectivity	MIC	Refers to the social benefits derived from establishing and maintaining contact with other people in S-commerce, such as social support, friendship, and intimacy (Dholaki <i>et al.</i> , 2004).
Social enhancement	SEV	Refers to values an individual derives from gaining acceptance and the approval of others as well as enhancing his/her social status (Cheung and Lee, 2009).
Impulsiveness	IPN	A tendency to experience sudden desires to make on-the-spot purchases and to act on these felt desires with little deliberation or evaluation of purchases consequences (Chen <i>et al.</i> , 2016)
Urge to buy impulsively	UBI	A state of desire an individual feels to buy something immediately upon browsing S-commerce websites (Leong <i>et al.</i> , 2018a).
Impulse buying behavior	IBB	Refers to a sudden, unplanned, immediate, and unreflective online purchase with no pre-shopping intention and the purchase is decided on the spot in S-commerce sites (Huang, 2016).

## 1.10 Thesis Structure

This section provides an overview of the thesis structure. As shown in Figure 1.2, the present thesis includes six chapters. The first chapter provides an introduction to the study. Then the second chapter reviews the literature. The third one presents the research methodology. The fourth chapter discusses the research model development. The fifth chapter discusses the analysis and the results. Finally, the sixth chapter concludes the whole research and presents the implications of the study.

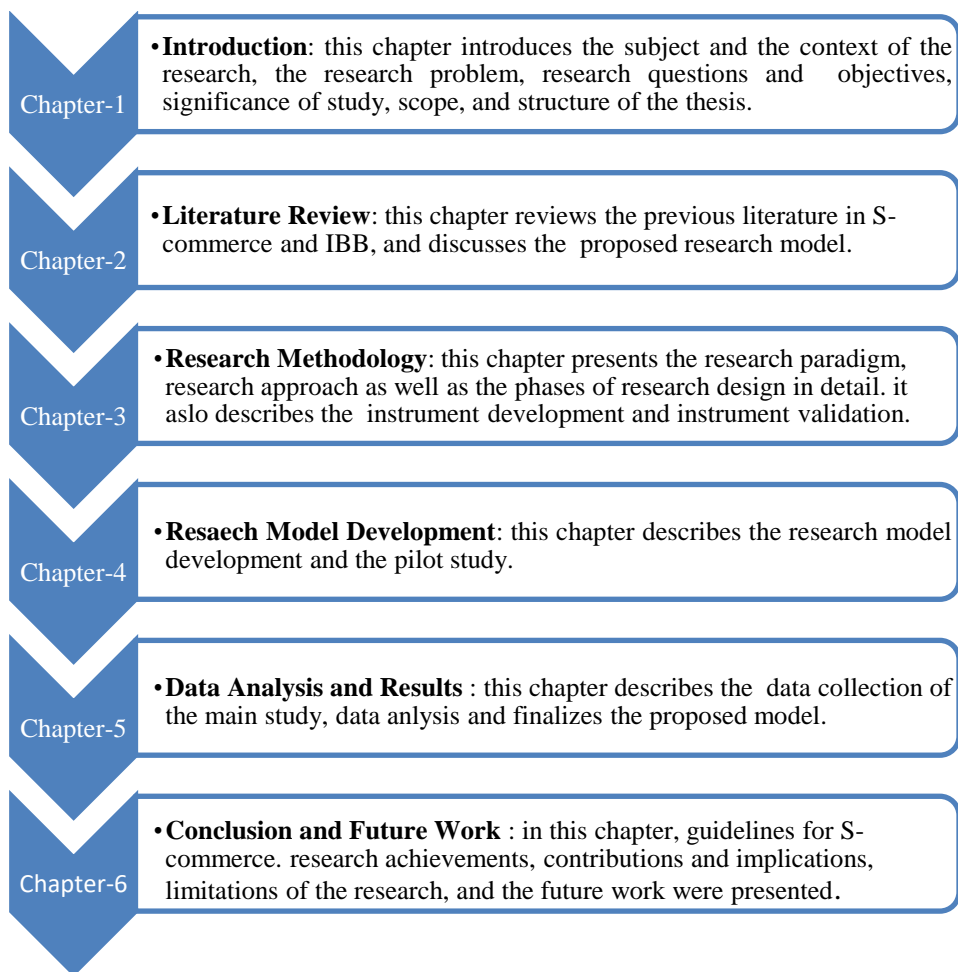


Figure 1.2 Organization of the Thesis

## **1.11 Summary**

This chapter provided an overview of S-commerce and impulse buying behavior. It started with the introduction and problem background. Then, the problem of the study was stated clearly in Section 1.3, followed by the research questions and research objectives that need to be achieved to overcome the problem dealt with in the current research. After that, it highlighted the scope of the research and its significance. Lastly, it presented the conceptual model of the research, definitions of terms, and the overall thesis organization.

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## LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

### Journal with Impact Factor

1. **Abdelsalam, S.**, Salim, N., Alias, R. A., and Husain, O. (2020). 'Understanding online impulse buying behavior in social commerce: a systematic literature review'. *IEEE Access*, 8, 89041-89058. (**Q1, IF:3.745**)
2. **Abdelsalam, S.**, Salim, N., Alias, R. A., Husain, O., Thurasamy, R., and Muhammed, H. (2021). 'Using theory integration to explain online impulse buying behavior in social commerce'. *Journal of Business Research*. (**Q1, IF:4.874**)(Under review)

### Indexed Conference Proceedings

1. **Abdelsalam, S.**, Alias, R. A., Salim, N., and Husain, O. *Understanding Consumer's Online Impulse Buying Behavior in Social Commerce* Paper presented at the Twenty-Third Pacific Asia Conference on Information Systems, China, 102. (**Indexed by SCOPUS**)