

A Study on the Influence of Conformity Psychology on Impulsive Purchasing Behaviour in Social Commerce Contexts

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Abstract: The profound development of mobile internet has given rise to the emerging business model of social e-commerce, which deeply integrates social interaction with online shopping, thereby reshaping consumers' decision-making pathways. Within this context, the conformity mentality stemming from group pressure significantly influences individual purchasing decisions, often leading to unplanned impulse purchases. This study focuses on the social e-commerce environment, aiming to explore the operational mechanisms through which different dimensions of conformity (informational conformity and normative conformity) influence impulsive purchasing behaviour. It further examines the mediating effect of perceived value and the moderating role of self-control. By constructing a theoretical model and conducting empirical tests, this research not only contributes to enriching consumer behaviour theory but also provides practical guidance for social e-commerce platforms to optimise marketing strategies and foster rational consumption.

Keywords: Social E-Commerce; Conformity; Impulse Buying; Perceived Value; Self-Control

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Problem Statement

In recent years, social e-commerce platforms such as Xiaohongshu, Douyin, and Kuaishou have rapidly emerged. Through content-driven recommendations, live-streamed sales, and community group-buying models, these platforms tightly intertwine social relationships with consumer behaviour. Compared to traditional e-commerce, the core characteristics of social e-commerce lie in its potent social attributes and the driving force of user-generated content (UGC). This exposes consumers' purchasing decision-making processes to complex social information environments. Individuals are highly susceptible to the influence of their social networks, fostering a tendency towards conformity – the phenomenon where personal decisions are altered to align with group behaviour or gain social acceptance. This psychological effect is amplified within the interactive, sharing, and display-oriented atmosphere of social e-commerce, frequently triggering impulse purchasing: a sudden, emotionally driven buying behaviour lacking thorough deliberation. Consequently, investigating the underlying mechanisms through which conformity influences impulse buying within the specific context of social e-commerce represents a significant research topic of both theoretical significance and practical urgency.

1.2 Research Significance

Theoretically, this study integrates classical conformity theory and impulse buying theory with the rapidly evolving social e-commerce context, thereby expanding and deepening our understanding of consumer behaviour patterns within new media environments. By introducing perceived value as a key mediating variable and self-control as a boundary condition, we construct and test an integrated theoretical model. This approach clarifies the causal pathway of “social stimulus – cognitive evaluation – behavioural response,” enhancing the explanatory power of the theory. Practical Significance The findings offer insights for social e-commerce platforms and merchants in precision marketing, such as effectively leveraging informational conformity (e.g., authentic reviews) and normative conformity (e.g., group pressure) to stimulate purchase intent. Simultaneously, it prompts platforms to prioritise consumer wellbeing by employing interface design or prompt mechanisms to assist highly impulsive consumers in self-regulation, thereby fostering a healthy and sustainable consumption ecosystem.

2.Literature Review

2.1 The Essence and Characteristics of Social Commerce

Social e-commerce denotes a business model that leverages social media platforms to facilitate the sale of goods or services through user social interactions (e.g., sharing, commenting, liking), content creation (e.g., short videos, illustrated notes), and community management. Its defining characteristics include: firstly, being relationship-driven, where transactions are embedded within users' trust networks, with recommendations from acquaintances or KOL (Key Opinion Leader) influence proving pivotal; secondly, content serving as the product itself, where vivid, engaging content showcases product value to spark user interest and purchasing desire; thirdly, high interactivity and immediacy, such as live-stream Q&A sessions and flash sale atmospheres creating intense immediacy and urgency; fourthly, pronounced community effects, where groups formed around shared interests or identities generate potent collective identification and peer pressure, significantly influencing members' consumption behaviour ^[3].

2.2 Theoretical Foundations and Dimensions of Conformity Psychology

Conformity refers to the phenomenon where individuals alter their attitudes or behaviours under real or perceived pressure to align with group standards. Deutsch and Gerard classically distinguished between informational conformity and normative conformity. Informational conformity arises when individuals, facing uncertainty, perceive the group as a reliable information source, seeking to make better decisions by following group choices. In social commerce, this manifests as reliance on user reviews, sales rankings, and influencer recommendations. Normative conformity, conversely, stems from an individual's desire for group acceptance and approval, or to avoid exclusion for deviating from the collective. Within social commerce, this manifests as purchasing popular items to gain social recognition or avoid being perceived as out of touch ^[4]. The public nature and interactivity of social commerce significantly amplify both these conformity mechanisms.

2.3 Concept and Influencing Factors of Impulsive Purchasing Behaviour

Impulsive purchasing behaviour denotes sudden, spontaneous, and pleasure-driven buying decisions. Consumers typically lack detailed planning or thorough deliberation during such purchases, which are often accompanied by strong emotional responses. Influencing factors can be categorised into internal individual factors (e.g., personality traits, emotional state) and external situational factors (e.g., marketing stimuli, shopping environment). Within social commerce, external situational factors are particularly prominent. Examples include time-limited flash sales, the fervent atmosphere cultivated in live-streaming sessions, and friends' real-time purchase showcases, all of which effectively stimulate consumers' impulse buying desires. Such purchasing behaviour often delivers immediate emotional gratification, though it may also be accompanied by post-purchase regret ^[2].

3.Theoretical Model and Research Hypotheses

3.1 Theoretical Model Construction

This study constructs its research model based on the S-O-R theory. The Stimulus (S) in the model refers to the conformity psychology induced by the social e-commerce environment, encompassing two dimensions: informational conformity and normative conformity. The Organism (O) denotes the consumer's internal cognitive evaluation process, with perceived value serving as the core mediating variable. The Response (R) represents impulsive purchase intention. Additionally, consumers'

self-control ability is introduced as a moderating variable to examine its attenuating effect on the path from “perceived value → impulse purchase intention”. This model aims to systematically reveal the underlying cognitive pathway through which conformity influences impulse purchasing, along with the boundary conditions of individual traits.

3.2 Research Hypotheses

H1: Conformity in social e-commerce contexts exerts a significant positive influence on impulse purchase intention. H1a: Informational conformity exerts a significant positive influence on impulse purchase intention. H1b: Normative conformity exerts a significant positive influence on impulse purchase intention. H2: Perceived value mediates the relationship between conformity and impulse purchase intention. H2a: Informational conformity indirectly and positively influences impulsive purchase intention by enhancing perceived value. H2b: Normative conformity indirectly and positively influences impulsive purchase intention by enhancing perceived value. H3: Self-control negatively moderates the relationship between perceived value and impulsive purchase intention, such that stronger self-control weakens the promotional effect of perceived value on impulsive purchase intention.

3.3 Variable Definitions and Measurement

The operational definitions of this study's core variables are as follows: Conformity behaviour draws upon the scale revised by Beversley and Li Xian-guo^[1] for the Chinese context, distinguishing informational and normative influences; Impulsive purchase intention employs the scale developed by Rook and Fisher^[5] and widely adopted by scholars; Perceived value, tailored to the characteristics of social e-commerce, is measured using the multidimensional scale referenced from Sweeney and Soutar^[6]. All scales employed a 5-point Likert scale. Data were collected via an online questionnaire platform and analysed using SPSS and AMOS software for reliability and validity assessments, correlation analyses, structural equation modelling, and Bootstrap mediation effect testing.

4. Empirical Analysis

4.1 Data Collection and Sample Description

This study distributed questionnaires via a professional online research platform to users with social e-commerce experience. A total of 435 questionnaires were retrieved. After excluding invalid responses, 401 valid questionnaires were obtained, yielding a valid response rate of 92.2%. The demographic characteristics of the sample revealed: 55.6% were female and 44.4% male; ages were predominantly concentrated between 18 and 30 years (85.3%); educational attainment predominantly at bachelor's degree level or above (71.8%); the vast majority of respondents frequently used social e-commerce platforms (88.5% at least weekly), indicating the sample possessed good representativeness. Common method bias was assessed using Harman's single-factor method. The unrotated first factor explained 26.8% of variance, below the 40% critical threshold, suggesting common method bias was not a significant concern.

4.2 Reliability and Validity Analysis

First, the scales underwent reliability and validity testing. Cronbach's α coefficients for all variables exceeded 0.82, with composite reliability (CR) values above 0.78, indicating high internal consistency reliability. Regarding validity, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) revealed that standardised factor loadings for each measurement item on its corresponding latent variable exceeded 0.6, with average variance extracted (AVE) exceeding 0.5 for all items. This indicates good convergent validity for the scale. Discriminant validity was assessed by comparing the square roots of AVE for each latent variable against their respective correlations with other latent variables. Results showed all AVE square roots exceeded corresponding correlation coefficients, indicating satisfactory discriminant validity. Overall model fit indices were $\chi^2/df=2.08$, GFI=0.90, AGFI=0.88, CFI=0.96, RMSEA=0.052. All indices met acceptable standards, indicating good model fit.

4.3 Hypothesis Testing and Results Analysis

Structural equation modelling (SEM) was employed to examine direct effects. Results revealed that both informational conformity ($\beta=0.35$, $p<0.001$) and normative conformity ($\beta=0.29$, $p<0.001$) exerted significant positive influences on impulsive purchase intention, supporting hypotheses H1a and H1b. The Bootstrap method (5000 samples) was employed to examine the mediating effect of perceived value. Results indicated that the indirect effect value of informational conformity on impulse purchase intention via perceived value was 0.16, with a 95% confidence interval of [0.09, 0.24]; The indirect

effect value for normative conformity was 0.13, with a 95% confidence interval of [0.07, 0.20]. Both intervals excluded zero, confirming significant mediating effects and supporting H2a and H2b. Hierarchical regression analysis was employed to examine the moderating effect, incorporating perceived value, self-control, and their interaction term into the regression equation. The interaction coefficient was negative and significant ($\beta = -0.09$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that self-control mitigates the positive influence of perceived value on impulsive purchase intention. Thus, H3 is supported.

5. Conclusion

This study confirms that in social e-commerce contexts, conformity (whether driven by information acquisition or normative compliance) serves as a key antecedent to consumers' impulsive purchasing behaviour. Perceived value plays a crucial mediating role in this process, meaning conformity primarily catalyses impulsive purchasing decisions by enhancing consumers' perception of multifaceted product values, including emotional experience and social recognition. Concurrently, consumers' self-control capacity effectively buffers the driving effect of perceived value on purchase impulses, indicating that individuals' intrinsic regulatory abilities constitute important boundary conditions influencing behavioural outcomes. These findings reveal the intrinsic mechanism of "social influence \rightarrow value cognition \rightarrow behavioural impulse" within social e-commerce.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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