

A Study of Key Determinant Factors Affecting Impulse Buying Behavior Amongst Consumers

Ms. Ketki Kanitkar¹, Mrs. Madhurri D Patil²

^{1,2}Asst. Professor Bharati Vidyapeeth (Deemed to be University) Institute of Hotel Management & Catering Technology Pune

ABSTRACT

Impulse buying behavior refers to the tendency of consumers to make spontaneous and unplanned purchasing decisions driven primarily by emotions, psychological influences, and situational factors rather than logical reasoning. The present study examines the key determinants of impulse buying behavior among consumers across both offline and online retail settings. It highlights the influence of external factors such as store environment, promotional strategies, discounts, and visual merchandising, along with internal factors including personality traits, emotional states, and demographic characteristics.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes the growing role of digital platforms, social media, and technological advancements in intensifying impulse buying tendencies by providing convenience, personalized marketing, and easy payment options such as credit cards. Hawkins Stern's theory serves as a theoretical framework for understanding different types of impulse buying behavior.

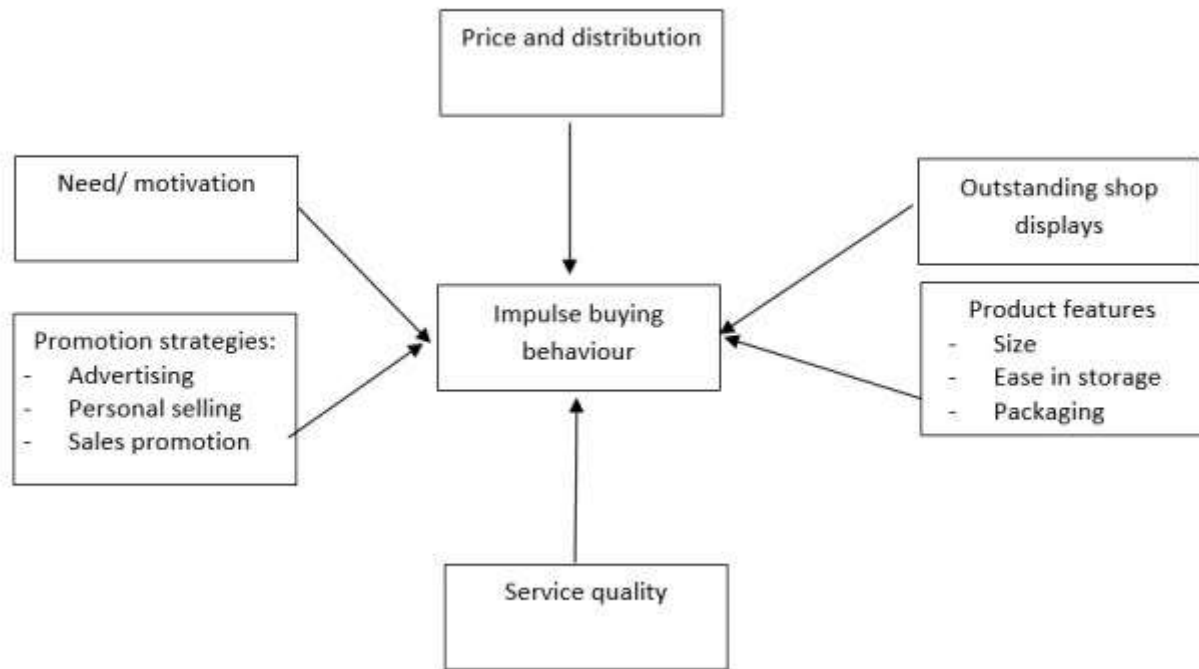
The review of literature indicates that impulse buying is a widespread phenomenon influenced by a combination of psychological, environmental, and technological factors. The findings suggest that marketers actively leverage these determinants to increase sales, making impulse buying a critical contributor to retail profitability.

Keywords: Impulse buying, consumer behavior, marketing stimuli, online shopping, psychological factors

INTRODUCTION

Impulsive buying refers to a consumer's tendency to purchase goods or services without prior planning, typically driven by emotions. Such purchases are not limited to any single category; they can range from inexpensive items like chocolates and clothing to high-value products such as jewellery and cars. An impulsive purchase is unplanned and often governed by irrational reasoning. Marketers exploit this behavior to boost sales—for example, shoppers who enter a hypermarket with no intention to buy often leave with purchases, and mobile-phone makers frequently capitalize on impulse tendencies by offering complementary devices like smartwatches and fitness bands. The rise of online shopping has streamlined the buying process but also intensified competition among digital marketers, prompting constant experimentation with tactics to attract and retain customers. Hawkins and Stern's (1962) impulse buying theory helps explain the circumstances under which consumers are most likely to make impulsive purchases.

Hawkins Stern's impulsive buying theory



The theory presented a new viewpoint on consumer purchasing behavior, contrasting with many modern theories such as Maslow's Need Hierarchy Theory of Motivation and Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell's model which suggest that consumers always make rational and carefully considered purchasing decisions (Dutta and Mandal, 2018). Stern challenged this view, asserting that consumers often engage in impulsive buying influenced by external factors. The theory posits that marketers can persuade consumers to purchase more than they initially intended. This was supported by a recent survey of American consumers, which found that 80% of participants make spontaneous purchases while shopping online (Johnson, 2018). Digital marketers are effectively integrating technology with their marketing strategies to promote impulse buying among their target audience.

External factors influencing impulse buying are the marketing stimuli and cues strategically designed and controlled by marketers to encourage consumers to make unplanned purchases (Youn and Faber, 2000). Consumers often feel a sudden desire to buy when they encounter visual triggers such as discounts, promotional offers, or attractive displays (Dholakia, 2000; Rook, 1987). These external marketing cues not only help attract new customers to retail websites but also encourage existing customers to engage in additional purchases through up-selling and cross-selling techniques.

The in-store shopping environment plays a significant role in influencing impulse buying behavior. It consists of several situational factors that are specific to a particular shopping setting and location. Elements such as background music, attractive store displays, pleasant scents, promotional offers, pricing strategies, cleanliness, crowding, and the behavior of store personnel together shape the overall shopping atmosphere. These factors can strongly affect consumers' emotions and purchasing decisions.

Among these, unexpected low prices, discounts, sales, and special offers are major triggers of impulse buying. According to Janakiraman et al. (2006), sudden price reductions can create positive emotional responses in consumers, encouraging them to spend more. Similarly, Millman (1986), as cited by Janakiraman et al. (2006), explained that unexpected price increases may discourage spending, while

unexpected price decreases can increase consumers' willingness to consider and purchase additional products. Furthermore, the concept of consumer mental accounting also helps explain how price discounts can stimulate impulse buying behavior.

Internal factors of impulse buying mainly focus on the personal characteristics and psychological conditions that influence consumers to make unplanned purchases. These factors include personality traits, emotional states, personal attitudes toward impulsive shopping, and demographic characteristics that determine an individual's impulse buying tendency (Kacen and Lee, 2002). Researchers have developed several theoretical frameworks to explain impulse buying through psychological aspects such as personality and self-control, hedonic experiences like shopping enjoyment and mood, and situational factors including the availability of time and money during shopping (Beatty and Ferrell, 1998; Burroughs, 1996; Rook and Fisher, 1995).

The use of credit cards is considered an important factor that can increase impulse buying behavior. Credit cards make purchasing easier and more convenient, reducing the immediate perception of spending. Consumers are more likely to spend freely because payment is delayed, which lowers the psychological burden of purchase. Technological developments and easy access to revolving credit facilities have further encouraged credit card usage. Since consumers do not need to carry cash while shopping, they may overspend and make impulsive purchases more frequently.

Researchers have identified different forms of impulse buying, especially in apparel shopping. Han et al. (1991) classified apparel impulse buying into four categories: planned impulse buying, reminded impulse buying, fashion-oriented impulse buying, and pure impulse buying. Ko (1993) differentiated impulse buying from reasonable unplanned buying by emphasizing emotional preferences and objective evaluation instead of rational decision-making. Based on this, unplanned apparel buying was divided into reasonable unplanned buying, emotional impulse buying, and objective impulse buying. Later, Cha (2001) expanded this concept and categorized unplanned apparel purchases into rational unplanned purchase, emotional unplanned purchase, gender impulse purchase, and cautious impulse purchase.

Stern (1962) proposed four major types of impulse buying based on the balance between emotional and cognitive involvement in decision-making. Pure impulse buying is highly emotional with very little cognitive involvement. Suggested impulse buying occurs when consumers see a product for the first time and instantly develop a desire to buy it without prior knowledge. Planned impulse buying happens when consumers intend to purchase something but the final decision depends on discounts, offers, or coupons. Reminder impulse buying occurs when consumers remember a need after seeing a product while shopping. Impulse buying has become increasingly important due to higher spending power, multiple payment methods, and the growth of online and virtual shopping. Studies indicate that a large proportion of consumers make impulse purchases regularly. Dawson and Kim (2009) found that more than half of mall shoppers buy impulsively, while over one-third of department store purchases are made on impulse, making such purchases highly significant for retailers' profits.

According to a 2014 survey by Creditcards.com reported in USA Today, three out of four Americans engage in impulse buying. Another study revealed that consumers in the United Kingdom and United States of America citizens spend approximately £24 billion annually on such purchases. In Britain, impulse purchases accounts for 45% to 100% of retail turnover, while in the United States they contribute to nearly 62% of supermarket sales and 80% of luxury goods sales. POPAI (2012) also reported that 76% of purchase decisions in America are made inside stores. Similar studies conducted in Turkey showed that 70% to 80% of respondents engage in impulse buying (Dursun et al., 2006; Ünal, 2008).

Applebaum (1951) was among the first to argue that impulse purchases occur when shoppers enter a store and are influenced by the store environment. Around the same time, West (1951), building on Clover (1950), described impulse buying as purchase decisions made in the store that were not planned beforehand. Nespitt (1959) suggested that impulse purchasing can be efficient and rational: shoppers may have no fixed shopping plan but actively seek and exploit in-store promotions to maximize value. Kacen and Lee (2002) identified two key features of impulse buying—sudden decision-making and immediate possession—and noted that, compared with planned purchases, impulse purchases are more arousing and harder to resist, and involve less deliberation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Impulsive buying behaviour (Nyrhinen, 2024) is defined as the act of purchasing an item unconsciously, without any prior intention or plan to do so, and without taking into account its eventual consequences. The research examined how consumer variables and digital platforms encourage impulsive buying. Low self-control promotes impulsive buying by encouraging a favourable attitude toward targeted ads and social media impulsivity. Positive attitudes about targeted ads make people more receptive to social media's impulsivity, including recommendations and product displays. The researcher concluded that training self-control and digital media awareness can increase online persuasion resistance and decrease impulsive purchase.

(Taushif, 2013) The study examined Delhi Mall customers' impulsive purchasing tendencies, evaluating how in-store stimuli like price, merchandise, promotions, displays, and ambiance influence their behavior across Delhi-based retailers.

(Aragoncillo, 2018) Investigated impulsive purchases in the fashion sector, comparing online and physical channels. It found that social networks significantly influence impulse buying, with the offline channel being slightly more conducive than the online one. Characteristics promoting online impulse buying were found to be more influential than those discouraging it.

social media influence.

(Kshatriya, 2021) Researched into compulsive and impulsive buying and discovered six underlying characteristics that were significantly correlated with these behaviors. The best predictor of impulsive buying and hedonic satisfaction for compulsive shopping, according to the study, was social media influence. Furthermore, the COVID-19 epidemic exacerbated impulsive and compulsive buying in the apparel and accessory industry.

(Rani, 2023) The study reviewed the literature on impulsive buying, determined what causes impulsive online shopping, and investigated the effects of psychological and demographic variables. Significant correlations were found between earnings and careless spending, as well as between various product types and impatient behaviors. Additionally, special offers and promotions were identified as significant factors.

Additionally, online shopping for instant gratification and mental health enhancement was a major factor. (Zhang, 2022) This study suggested a research plan for a sharing model of impulsive purchases based on user characteristics and key factors from a reviewed article. It found that social presence was enhanced by vividness, media richness, and interactivity, which in turn directly influences impulsive purchasing behavior. These findings contribute to marketing theory and have practical implications for business marketing strategies.

(Reddy, 2022)'s study investigated the impact of various internal and external factors on impulsive purchasing behavior. It examines how consumers perceive impulsive purchases and the variables

influencing them, including controllable and uncontrollable urges, mood, shopping environment, gender, personality, and psychological behavior. The aim is to capture different emotions and elements affecting impulsive purchases and uncover the overlooked relationship between consumer behaviour and decision-making processes.

(Muthukattu, 2018) This study showed that Facebook has grown into a potent promotional medium for retailers that attracts and encourages impulse purchase. Each consumer's buying behavior is unique. This study examined the association between F-commerce-based impulsive purchase and age, gender, and employment. The study employed a well-designed questionnaire and collected data from 156 Bengaluru residents. SPSS was used to tabulate, code, and analyze data. The study found that Facebook commerce impulsive purchase behavior differs by age, gender, and employment.

(Chhabra, 2018) This study examined impulse and women's purchasing habits individually and combined. The researcher employed qualitative methods to study the primary factors influencing these behaviors. Communication and emotion affect women's buying behavior, according to studies. Store atmosphere and visual merchandising differ.

(Shrestha, 2024) This study synthesized retail and buyer behavior studies to explain impulsive purchase. This study helped marketers and academicians build consumer impulsivity tactics. Impulsive purchase is influenced by psychological triggers, environmental circumstances, and individual traits, according to content analysis. These findings illuminate the impulsive purchase concept and related behaviors.

(Lakshmi, 2012)

The researcher claims that consumer behavior theories and associated studies have developed a novel idea that can impact customers' cognitive processes while buying a product.

The latest consumer trend is "impulsive buying." Unplanned purchases may now be studied through consumer behavior research. Consumers' financial health is greatly affected by unplanned and emotional purchases. Impulse buying's affordability prevents planned product purchases.

This stimulates additional product purchases and changes the consumption cycle.

(Sharma, April- June, 2021) The objective of this investigation was to investigate the correlation between consumer impulsive purchasing behaviour and personality traits. This investigation was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic and was founded on a quantitative, correlational research design. The investigation demonstrated that there is a substantial correlation between personality traits and the impulsive purchasing behaviour of Indian consumers.

(Sharma M. , 2020) The research study studied impulsive purchasing behaviour in relation to age, gender, and marital status. Additionally, descriptive measures and t-tests were employed to analyse the data. The investigation identified substantial disparities in terms of marital status, gender, and age (up to 30 versus over 30). Impulsive purchasing was identified by the researcher among unmarried women under the age of 30. This investigation investigated the impact of age, gender, and marital status on impetuous purchasing behaviour, as there was inadequate empirical evidence regarding marital status.

(Munjal, 2020) The investigation investigated the impact of celebrity endorsements on the impulsive purchasing behaviour of FMCG consumers in Delhi/NCR. It investigated the impact of personalities' popularity, competence, trustworthiness, and attractiveness on the impulsive purchasing behaviour of Delhi/NCR residents. The survey also revealed that celebrity endorsement was the second most significant factor in impulse purchase, following brand. The investigation demonstrated that the purchasing intentions of fast-moving consumer products are influenced by the qualities of celebrities. The investigation investigated the purchasing habits of consumers in relation to their age, gender, income, occupation, and

other variables.

CONCLUSION

Impulse buying is a type of consumer behavior that has become a major aspect of modern-day shopping, with complex emotional, psychological and environmental factors that make it a significant part of contemporary consumer behavior. Attractive store layout, promotional offers, social media influence, and easy access to credit facilities all contribute to impulse buying, which may benefit marketers and retailers by increasing sales and profitability, but often has negative financial consequences for consumers such as overspending, reduced saving and financial stress. Consumers should learn to practice self control and develop responsible financial practices to minimize impulse buying tendencies. For example, preparing and sticking to a budget, delaying a purchase, avoiding exposure to tempting shopping environments, and setting clear financial goals can all reduce impulsive spending behavior. In summary, impulse buying is a complex behavior influenced by emotional, psychological and environmental factors, and although it is beneficial for marketers and retailers, it often has negative financial outcomes for consumers.

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