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Emotional and Marketing Triggers of Impulse-Buying Urges: A Cross-Sectional Consumer Study

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Abstract

Impulse buying reflects sudden purchasing urges shaped by internal states and external marketing cues. This study examined emotional and marketing-related triggers of self-reported impulse-buying urges, post-purchase guilt, and subsequent resistance in a cross-sectional survey of 258 consumers. Eleven trigger items assessed emotional states and marketing/digital cues alongside demographic and shopping characteristics. Marketing-trigger susceptibility exceeded emotional-trigger susceptibility, $t(257) = 6.50$, $p < .001$, $dz = .40$, and preferred-brand offers were the strongest individual trigger. Both emotional and marketing susceptibility correlated with guilt, but only marketing susceptibility remained an independent predictor in adjusted regression. Shopping enjoyment was associated with higher emotional and marketing susceptibility, whereas shopping mode, age, income, and dependents showed little evidence of association. Guilt was not related to reported resistance. Exploratory factor analysis supported two factors, separating discount/value promotions from a broader psychosocial/digital cue factor. The findings highlight the salience of value-oriented promotions in self-reported impulse-buying urges.

Keywords: impulse buying, sales promotion, consumer psychology, discounts, digital marketing, post-purchase guilt

1. Introduction

Impulse buying is commonly understood as a sudden, compelling urge to purchase that arises with relatively little prior planning or deliberation. Rook (1987) distinguished the buying impulse from routine or merely fast purchasing by emphasising the spontaneous and psychologically forceful character of the urge. Later work further separated a person's general impulse-buying tendency from the immediate situational urge that may or may not culminate in a purchase (Beatty & Ferrell, 1998; Dholakia, 2000; Weun et al., 1998). This distinction matters for the present study because the questionnaire primarily measures respondents' self-reported urge to buy more under specific conditions rather than verified purchase behaviour.

Impulse purchasing is shaped by both internal and external antecedents. Internal antecedents include affective states, impulsivity, self-control, shopping enjoyment and other person-level characteristics, while external antecedents include promotions, retail environments, digital interfaces, advertising and social influence. A large meta-analysis synthesising 231 samples and more than 75,000 consumers concluded that both internal psychological variables and market-related stimuli are important to impulse buying, although their effects depend on context (Iyer et al., 2020). A more recent systematic review similarly characterised impulse buying as a fragmented but increasingly digital field in which emotional, situational, social and marketing cues interact across traditional and online retail settings (Redine et al., 2023).

The expansion of app-based commerce and social media has made these interactions especially important. Online consumers may encounter push notifications, targeted advertisements, influencer recommendations, brand-specific offers, banking discounts and free-delivery thresholds within a single shopping episode. Research on online impulse buying frequently uses the Stimulus-Organism-Response framework: environmental or marketing stimuli influence consumers' internal cognitive or affective states, which then shape an urge or behavioural response (Chan et al., 2017). Website cues such as navigability and visual appeal have been shown to influence the urge to buy impulsively (Parboteeah et al., 2009), while social-media research has identified advertisements, opinion leaders and user-generated content as potential impulse-purchase stimuli, particularly among younger consumers (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021; Shamim et al., 2024).

At the same time, impulse buying is not solely a marketing phenomenon. Negative emotions, social belonging motives and reduced self-regulation can make consumers more receptive to immediate gratification. Research has linked affective states and situational pressures to impulsive purchasing, while normative evaluations can determine whether consumers translate impulsive tendencies into behaviour (Rook & Fisher, 1995; Sneath et al., 2009). Shopping enjoyment is another recurring predictor: shoppers who find the process itself pleasurable tend to browse more, experience stronger urges and show greater impulse-buying behaviour (Beatty & Ferrell, 1998; Mohan et al., 2013).

Post-purchase consequences are also relevant. Impulse purchases can generate pleasure, but they can also produce regret, guilt, financial concern or cognitive dissonance. Research with young Indian consumers has connected impulse purchasing with post-purchase dissonance and regret (Jain et al., 2018), while experimental evidence suggests that negative post-purchase experiences and regret can reduce subsequent impulse buying for some consumers (Spiteri Cornish, 2020). A recent review of post-purchase outcomes identifies regret, guilt and financial issues as recurring consequences in the impulse-buying literature (Beikverdi, 2024). Whether guilt actually translates into longer resistance to future impulse purchases, however, is less certain and may depend on coping style, measurement timing and the strength of the original impulse.

The present study developed from an initial interest in discount-based impulse shopping. During the research process, the scope broadened to compare emotional triggers with marketing and digital triggers and to explore whether susceptibility differs across consumer demographics and shopping characteristics. The final survey therefore captures five emotional or psychosocial conditions, six marketing or digital cues, post-purchase guilt, self-reported resistance after an unnecessary or unaffordable purchase, and a range of demographic and shopping variables. Because the survey is cross-sectional and measures self-reported buying urges rather than verified purchases, the study is framed in terms of associations and susceptibility rather than causal effects.

1.1 Research Objectives

1. To compare the relative strength of emotional and marketing-related triggers of self-reported impulse-buying urges.
2. To examine whether emotional and marketing-trigger susceptibility are associated with post-purchase guilt and subsequent resistance to impulse shopping.
3. To test whether shopping enjoyment, shopping mode, age, income and dependents are associated with trigger susceptibility.
4. To explore the latent structure and internal consistency of the 11 trigger items.

5. To identify exploratory demographic patterns that may inform future research without overstating generalisability.

1.2 Hypotheses

H1. Respondents will report higher average impulse-buying susceptibility to marketing triggers than to emotional triggers.

H2a. Greater emotional-trigger susceptibility will be positively associated with post-purchase guilt.

H2b. Greater marketing-trigger susceptibility will be positively associated with post-purchase guilt.

H2c. Marketing-trigger susceptibility will explain additional variation in post-purchase guilt after accounting for emotional susceptibility and selected consumer characteristics.

H3. Higher post-purchase guilt will be associated with a longer reported period of resistance to subsequent impulse shopping.

H4a. Respondents who report enjoying shopping will show higher emotional- and marketing-trigger susceptibility.

H4b. Digital/social marketing susceptibility will differ across online, offline and mixed-mode shoppers.

H5. Age will be associated with digital/social marketing susceptibility.

H6. Income and number of dependents will be associated with discount/value trigger susceptibility.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Impulse Buying, Buying Urges, and Self-Control

A useful conceptual distinction is the difference between impulse-buying tendency, the momentary urge to buy, and actual impulse-purchase behaviour. Rook (1987) described the impulse as sudden and compelling, while Weun et al. (1998) and Verplanken and Herabadi (2001) developed validated measures of a more stable tendency toward impulsive purchasing. Beatty and Ferrell (1998) modelled the shopping process more dynamically, showing how situational resources, shopping enjoyment, affect and browsing contribute to an urge that may ultimately become an impulse purchase. Dholakia (2000) further argued that consumption impulses can either be enacted or resisted depending on cognitive and volitional processes. These models imply that an urge is a proximal psychological state rather than identical to the final purchase.

This distinction directly constrains the interpretation of the present questionnaire. Statements such as ‘I feel like buying more when...’ capture situational susceptibility or urge, but do not verify whether a purchase occurred, how much was spent, whether the purchase was unplanned, or whether the respondent has a stable impulse-buying trait. Accordingly, the study treats the 11 items as trigger-susceptibility indicators rather than as a validated behavioural impulse-buying scale.

2.2 Emotional and Psychosocial Triggers

Emotions can alter self-control, attention and the perceived value of immediate rewards. Beatty and Ferrell’s (1998) model includes positive and negative affect as part of the impulse-buying process, and Dholakia (2000) positions affective reactions within the formation and resistance of consumption impulses. Sneath et al. (2009), studying consumers exposed to the stress of Hurricane Katrina, found that depressive states were associated with impulsive and compulsive buying, illustrating how consumption may sometimes function as a coping response. In an Indian context, research has also linked self-esteem, negative affect and normative influence with impulse buying, reinforcing the relevance of psychological and social states to consumer susceptibility.

The present emotional items include hunger, boredom, loneliness, feelings of worthlessness and a desire to fit into a new group. These items are heterogeneous. Hunger is a bodily state, boredom and loneliness are affective experiences, worthlessness reflects negative self-evaluation, and fitting in is fundamentally social. Their inclusion is therefore best viewed as a broad set of psychosocial triggers rather than a pure clinical or emotional scale. No diagnostic interpretation is appropriate.

2.3 Sales Promotions, Discounts, and Value Cues

Sales promotions are particularly relevant because they lower the perceived cost of acting on an impulse and can add a sense of immediate gain. Bandyopadhyay et al. (2021) found that immediate monetary and non-monetary promotions increased urges to buy impulsively, whereas delayed promotions were less consistently effective. Redine et al. (2023) likewise conclude from the broader literature that immediate rewards, price reductions and free-shipping mechanisms are recurring external antecedents of impulse buying. Discount promotions may also generate both utilitarian value, through perceived savings, and hedonic value, through the feeling of obtaining a good deal.

The current survey operationalises this domain through preferred-brand offers, bank discounts and free-delivery thresholds. These cues share a common value proposition: the consumer is encouraged to interpret an additional or accelerated purchase as economically advantageous. The design therefore permits a specific comparison between value-oriented promotions and other digital or social marketing cues.

2.4 Digital and Social Marketing Cues

Digital commerce allows retailers to deliver cues at high frequency and with personalised timing. Parboteeah et al. (2009) showed that website characteristics can influence the urge to buy impulsively, while Chan et al. (2017) synthesised online impulse-buying research using the Stimulus-Organism-Response model. Dawson and Kim (2009) similarly distinguished external and internal trigger cues in online shopping. These findings support examining push notifications and social-media advertisements as immediate digital stimuli.

Influencer marketing adds a social layer. Djafarova and Bowes (2021) found that Instagram content could stimulate impulse purchases among Generation Z participants through advertisements, opinion leaders and user-generated content. More recent work has shown that trust in influencer-branded posts can increase the urge to buy impulsively in social-commerce settings (Shamim et al., 2024). Nonetheless, influencer effects are likely to vary by product category, credibility, identification and platform context. A single influencer item therefore captures only a narrow part of the underlying process.

2.5 Shopping Enjoyment and Consumer Differences

Shopping enjoyment has repeatedly emerged as a meaningful antecedent of impulsive purchasing. Beatty and Ferrell (1998) linked shopping enjoyment to browsing, affect and impulse buying, while Mohan et al. (2013) found that shopping enjoyment tendency and impulse-buying tendency influenced impulse buying through positive affect and urge in an Indian mall sample. Badgaiyan and Verma (2015) also found that several situational and personal variables affected impulse buying, although the pattern for urge and actual behaviour was not identical.

Demographic effects are less consistent. Age, gender and economic circumstances may shape exposure to different retail environments and constraints, but demographic variables often show smaller or context-dependent effects than psychological or situational predictors (Iyer et al., 2020). This motivates testing age, income and dependents in the current study while avoiding strong directional claims in the absence of a preregistered demographic theory.

2.6 Post-Purchase Guilt, Regret, and Resistance

Impulse buying can create a conflict between short-term gratification and longer-term goals. Post-purchase guilt or regret may emerge when consumers judge a purchase as unnecessary, financially imprudent or inconsistent with their standards. Jain et al. (2018) documented the relationship between impulse purchase factors and post-purchase dissonance among young Indian consumers. Spiteri Cornish (2020) found experimentally that negative post-purchase experiences can generate regret and curtail future impulse buying, although coping responses determine whether behaviour is actually reduced. Beikverdi's (2024) review further identifies regret and guilt as common negative outcomes across the literature.

The current survey asks directly about guilt and separately about how long consumers avoid impulse shopping after buying something they did not need or could not afford. This makes it possible to test whether guilt is associated with self-reported resistance. Because both measures were collected at the same time and each uses a single item, the analysis can establish association only, not temporal causation.

2.7 Research Gap

The study contributes a compact comparison of internal and market-facing cues within the same consumer sample. Rather than testing only one platform or one promotional mechanism, it contrasts emotional states, social cues, digital stimuli and direct value incentives. It also extends the analysis beyond the initial urge by examining guilt and self-reported resistance. The design is exploratory in important respects: the trigger inventory is study-built, the sample is non-probability based, and the factor structure was not validated before data collection. These limitations are addressed through reliability analysis, exploratory factor analysis, robust hypothesis testing and explicit separation of planned and exploratory findings.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study used a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design. Data were collected between 13 May and 3 July 2026. The research log indicates that responses were sought through the research centre/office, South Extension market, personal networks, neighbours, relatives, cafés, society markets and other convenience channels. The resulting sample is therefore best described as a convenience and field-intercept sample rather than a probability sample. The design supports estimation of associations within the observed sample but does not justify population prevalence estimates or causal claims.

3.2 Participants

A total of 258 responses were available for analysis. Seven records had unusable age information because the date of birth was missing or produced an impossible near-zero age; these records were retained for non-age analyses because their other questionnaire responses were complete. Age-based analyses therefore used 251 cases. Among the full sample, 137 respondents (53.1%) were coded male, 118 (45.7%) female and three (1.2%) other/prefer not to say. Half were employed, 49.6% reported using both online and offline shopping, and 87.6% said that they enjoy shopping. The income distribution was concentrated in the lowest recorded band, with 60.1% selecting annual income up to ₹3 lakh.

3.3 Instrument and Measures

The questionnaire collected demographics, shopping characteristics and 11 trigger ratings. Each trigger was recorded on a five-point numerical response scale from 1 to 5, with larger values representing a stronger stated tendency to 'feel like buying more' in that situation. Five items were classified a priori as emotional/psychosocial triggers: hunger, boredom, loneliness, desire to fit into a new group and feeling worthless. Six items were classified a priori as marketing/digital triggers: push notifications, offers on

preferred brands, bank discounts, being below a free-delivery threshold, influencer recommendations and social-media advertisements.

Two theory-defined composites were calculated by averaging the relevant items: Emotional Trigger Susceptibility (five items) and Marketing Trigger Susceptibility (six items). Additional exploratory sub-composites were calculated for Discount/Value cues (preferred-brand offers, bank discounts and free-delivery threshold) and Digital/Social cues (push notifications, influencer recommendations and social-media advertisements). The study also measured guilt after buying unnecessary items on a five-point item. Reported resistance was coded ordinally from 0 to 3: the purchase could happen again at any time (0), hours (1), days (2), or weeks (3). Higher values therefore represent longer self-reported avoidance.

Demographic and consumer variables included age, sex, qualification, employment status, income band, number of dependents, shopping mode, shopping enjoyment, preferred shopping times, product categories and intended beneficiaries. Researcher-created buyer archetypes in the workbook were treated as exploratory descriptors only because they were deterministic classifications based on selected product categories rather than validated psychological scales.

3.4 Data Cleaning and Quality Control

The raw form-response sheet was treated as the source record. Personally identifying fields such as name, email address and exact date of birth were not used in the inferential analysis. Age was recalculated from date of birth and response timestamp. Seven records lacked usable age values and were set to missing for age-based analyses. The duplicate shopping-mode field in the form was not used because it contained very few populated responses; the complete shopping-mode item was retained.

All 11 trigger items and the guilt item had complete 1–5 responses. The resistance item was complete for all 258 respondents. Twenty-two respondents selected exactly the same response across all 11 trigger items and were flagged as straight-line patterns. These cases were not automatically deleted because a uniform response can be genuine. Instead, the main analyses were repeated after excluding them as a sensitivity test. The direction and substantive interpretation of the principal findings remained stable.

3.5 Statistical Analysis

Analysis proceeded in five stages. First, descriptive statistics summarised the sample and ranked trigger items by mean score. Second, internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and corrected item-total correlations. Third, exploratory factor analysis used principal-axis factoring with oblimin rotation because the underlying dimensions were expected to correlate. Sampling adequacy was evaluated using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin statistic and Bartlett's test of sphericity; parallel analysis was used to help determine the number of factors.

Fourth, the preregistered-style hypothesis set described in Section 1.2 was tested using paired t-tests, Wilcoxon signed-rank sensitivity tests, Pearson and Spearman correlations, Welch independent-samples t-tests, Welch one-way ANOVA and regression. Because guilt is a five-point ordinal item, hierarchical ordinary least squares regression with heteroskedasticity-consistent (HC3) standard errors was used as a transparent adjusted model, and ordinal logistic regression was run as a robustness check. Resistance was analysed primarily with Spearman correlation and ordinal logistic regression. Fifth, exploratory demographic comparisons were examined with Welch ANOVA and false-discovery-rate adjustment for pairwise tests. All significance tests were two-tailed with $\alpha = .05$. Effect sizes and confidence intervals were prioritised over significance alone.

4. Results

4.1 Sample Characteristics

Table 1 summarises the principal demographic and shopping characteristics. Valid age data were available for 251 respondents, with a mean age of 27.75 years (SD = 8.33; median = 26.20). The sample was predominantly composed of bachelor's-level respondents and consumers in the lowest recorded income band. Most respondents enjoyed shopping, and almost half used both online and offline modes.

Table 1

Sample Characteristics (N = 258)

Variable	Category	n	%
Sex	Male	137	53.1
Sex	Female	118	45.7
Sex	Other/prefer not to say	3	1.2
Qualification	10th pass	17	6.6
Qualification	12th pass	60	23.3
Qualification	Bachelor's	115	44.6
Qualification	Master's	62	24.0
Qualification	Doctorate/PhD	4	1.6
Employment	Employed	129	50.0
Employment	Unemployed	58	22.5
Employment	Self-employed	38	14.7
Employment	Dependent	33	12.8
Shopping mode	Both	128	49.6
Shopping mode	Online	76	29.5
Shopping mode	Offline	54	20.9
Enjoys shopping	Yes	226	87.6
Enjoys shopping	No	32	12.4
Annual income	Up to ₹3 lakh	155	60.1
Annual income	Up to ₹6 lakh	38	14.7
Annual income	Up to ₹9 lakh	15	5.8
Annual income	Up to ₹12 lakh	24	9.3
Annual income	Up to ₹24 lakh	15	5.8
Annual income	Up to ₹50 lakh	11	4.3

Note. Percentages are based on N = 258. Age had 251 usable values because seven date-of-birth entries were missing or invalid.

4.2 Trigger Descriptives

The strongest individual trigger was seeing offers on brands already preferred or purchased (M = 3.26, SD = 1.47); exactly half of respondents rated this item 4 or 5. Bank discounts (M = 2.84, SD = 1.44) and being below a free-delivery threshold (M = 2.83, SD = 1.45) followed. All other trigger means were below 2.50. Feeling worthless and push notifications produced the lowest mean ratings (both approximately 2.22).

This pattern indicates that direct value-oriented cues were more salient than most emotional or digital-social cues in the sample.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for Trigger Items

Trigger	M	SD	% 4–5	% 1–2
Preferred-brand offers	3.26	1.47	50.0	31.8
Bank discounts	2.84	1.44	36.0	43.8
Free-delivery threshold	2.83	1.45	38.4	43.8
Social-media advertisements	2.41	1.35	23.6	55.0
Boredom	2.38	1.40	23.6	57.4
Influencer recommendations	2.33	1.38	22.5	59.7
Hunger	2.32	1.38	22.1	61.2
Loneliness	2.27	1.39	23.3	59.7
Fit into a new group	2.26	1.40	21.3	62.4
Push notifications	2.22	1.34	20.5	65.1
Feeling worthless	2.22	1.41	20.5	62.8

Note. Higher values represent stronger self-reported buying urge. Items are ordered by mean score.

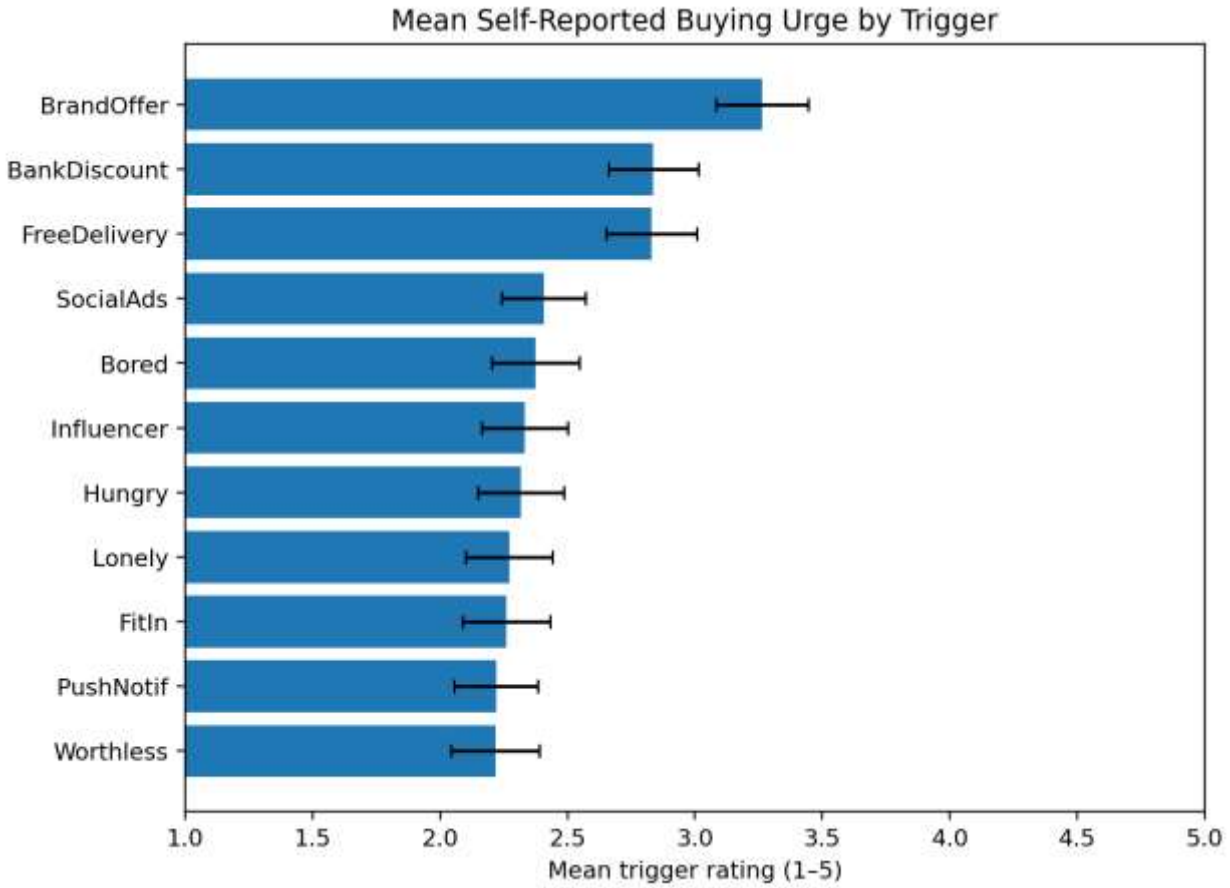


Figure 1. Mean self-reported buying urge by trigger; error bars show 95% confidence intervals.

4.3 Reliability and Exploratory Factor Structure

The five-item emotional composite showed acceptable internal consistency, α = .761. Corrected item-total correlations ranged from .367 (hunger) to .642 (loneliness). The six-item marketing composite showed good internal consistency, α = .844, with corrected item-total correlations from .578 to .661. Across all 11 items, α = .872. These results indicate coherent response patterns, although internal consistency alone does not establish that the a priori emotional-versus-marketing structure is the best latent representation.

Table 3
Internal Consistency of Trigger Measures

Measure	Items	Cronbach's α	Corrected item-total r
Emotional trigger susceptibility	5	.761	.367–.642
Marketing trigger susceptibility	6	.844	.578–.661
All trigger items	11	.872	—
Exploratory psychosocial/digital set	6	.852	—

Measure	Items	Cronbach's α	Corrected item-total r
Exploratory discount/value set	3	.821	—

Note. The exploratory psychosocial/digital set contains loneliness, fitting in, worthlessness, push notifications, influencer recommendations and social-media advertising. The discount/value set contains preferred-brand offers, bank discounts and free-delivery threshold.

Exploratory factor analysis was appropriate: KMO = .877 and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant, $\chi^2(55) = 1147.78$, $p < .001$. Parallel analysis supported two factors. After principal-axis extraction and oblimin rotation, preferred-brand offers (.843), bank discounts (.768) and free-delivery threshold (.649) loaded strongly on a discount/value factor. A broader psychosocial/digital factor was defined most strongly by worthlessness (.809), fitting in (.739), influencer recommendations (.672), loneliness (.631), push notifications (.579) and social-media advertisements (.560). Boredom (.393) and hunger (.273) were weaker indicators. After aligning factor signs, the two factors correlated approximately .53. Thus, the empirical structure did not cleanly mirror the planned emotional-versus-marketing split; instead, immediate value promotions formed a distinctive cluster.

Table 4
Exploratory Principal-Axis Factor Loadings

Item	Psychosocial/digital	Discount/value
Hunger	.273	.204
Boredom	.393	.174
Loneliness	.631	.077
Fit into a new group	.739	-.041
Feeling worthless	.809	-.152
Push notifications	.579	.245
Preferred-brand offers	-.066	.843
Bank discounts	.049	.768
Free-delivery threshold	.157	.649
Influencer recommendations	.672	.072
Social-media advertisements	.560	.172

Note. Oblimin-rotated loadings. The sign of the second factor was reversed for interpretability. Loadings ≥ |.40| are substantively emphasised in the text.

4.4 Hypothesis Tests

H1 was supported. The marketing composite (M = 2.65, SD = 1.05) was higher than the emotional composite (M = 2.29, SD = 1.00). The mean paired difference was 0.36 points, 95% CI [0.25, 0.47], $t(257) = 6.50$, $p < .001$, paired Cohen's $dz = .40$. A Wilcoxon signed-rank sensitivity test led to the same conclusion, $p < .001$.

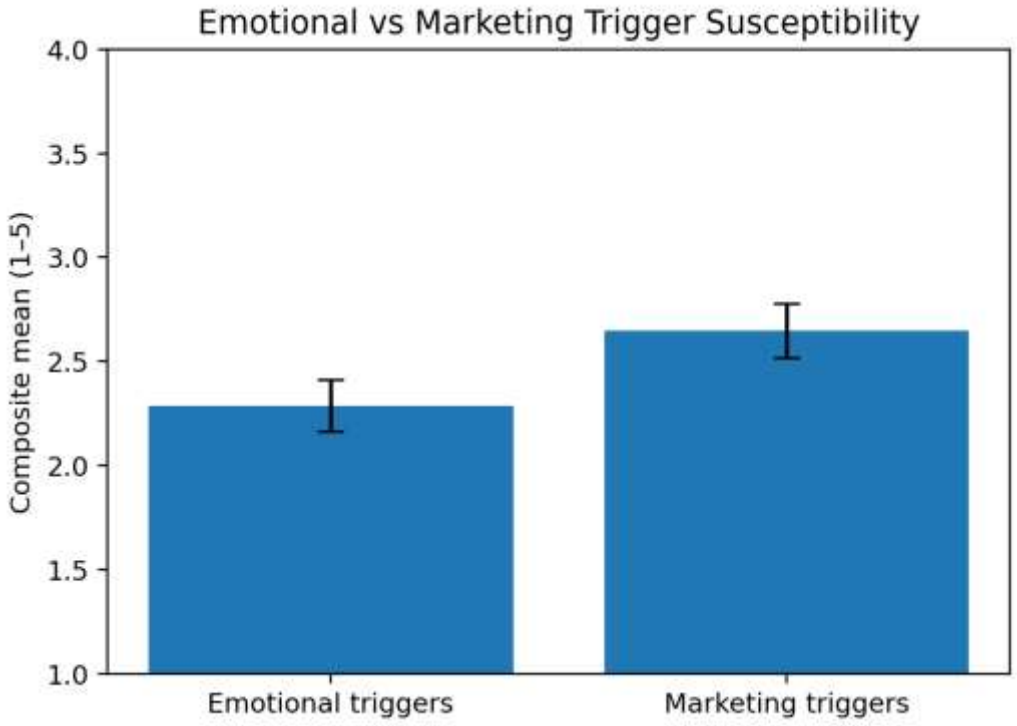


Figure 2. Mean emotional and marketing trigger susceptibility; error bars show 95% confidence intervals. H2a and H2b were supported at the bivariate level. Emotional susceptibility correlated positively with guilt, Spearman's $\rho = .263$, $p < .001$, while marketing susceptibility showed a stronger positive association, $\rho = .378$, $p < .001$. Pearson correlations were similar ($r = .277$ and $r = .411$, respectively). The two trigger composites were themselves strongly related, $r = .624$, $p < .001$.

H2c was supported. In hierarchical regression, demographic and shopping controls alone explained little variation in guilt, $R^2 = .007$. Adding emotional susceptibility increased R^2 to .083, $\Delta R^2 = .076$, $F_{change}(1, 251) = 20.92$, $p < .001$. Adding marketing susceptibility increased final R^2 to .177, $\Delta R^2 = .094$, $F_{change}(1, 250) = 28.43$, $p < .001$. In the final model, marketing susceptibility remained a significant predictor, $B = 0.559$, HC3 SE = 0.106, 95% CI [0.351, 0.767], standardized $\beta = .393$, $p < .001$, whereas emotional susceptibility was no longer independently significant, $B = 0.063$, $p = .601$. Variance-inflation factors were below 1.8, indicating no problematic multicollinearity. An ordinal logistic robustness model produced the same substantive result: each one-point increase in marketing susceptibility was associated with approximately 2.26 times the odds of being in a higher guilt category, OR = 2.26, 95% CI [1.69, 3.02], $p < .001$.

Table 5
Final Adjusted Regression Predicting Post-Purchase Guilt

Predictor	B	HC3 SE	p	Standardized β
Income band	.017	.061	.778	—
Dependents	.033	.052	.527	—
Enjoys shopping	-.125	.313	.689	—
Online vs offline	-.265	.238	.266	—
Both vs offline	-.265	.221	.231	—

Predictor	B	HC3 SE	p	Standardized β
Emotional susceptibility	.063	.121	.601	.042
Marketing susceptibility	.559	.106	< .001	.393

Note. N = 258. R^2 = .177, adjusted R^2 = .154. Offline shopping is the reference category. Standardized β is shown for the two focal continuous trigger composites; categorical coefficients remain unstandardized.

H3 was not supported. Guilt was essentially unrelated to resistance duration, Spearman's ρ = .036, p = .564. Emotional and marketing susceptibility were also not meaningfully related to resistance (ρ = .080, p = .201; and ρ = .017, p = .786, respectively). In an adjusted ordinal logistic model, neither emotional nor marketing susceptibility significantly predicted a longer resistance category. These results indicate that feeling guilty does not necessarily translate into sustained self-reported avoidance in this sample.

H4a was supported for trigger susceptibility. Respondents who enjoyed shopping reported higher emotional susceptibility (M = 2.39, SD = 1.00) than those who did not (M = 1.60, SD = 0.66), Welch's t(53.49) = 5.84, p < .001, Hedges' g = .81. They also reported higher marketing susceptibility (M = 2.72, SD = 1.06) than non-enjoyers (M = 2.17, SD = 0.84), Welch's t(46.51) = 3.32, p = .002, g = .52. Guilt itself did not significantly differ between the two groups, p = .407.

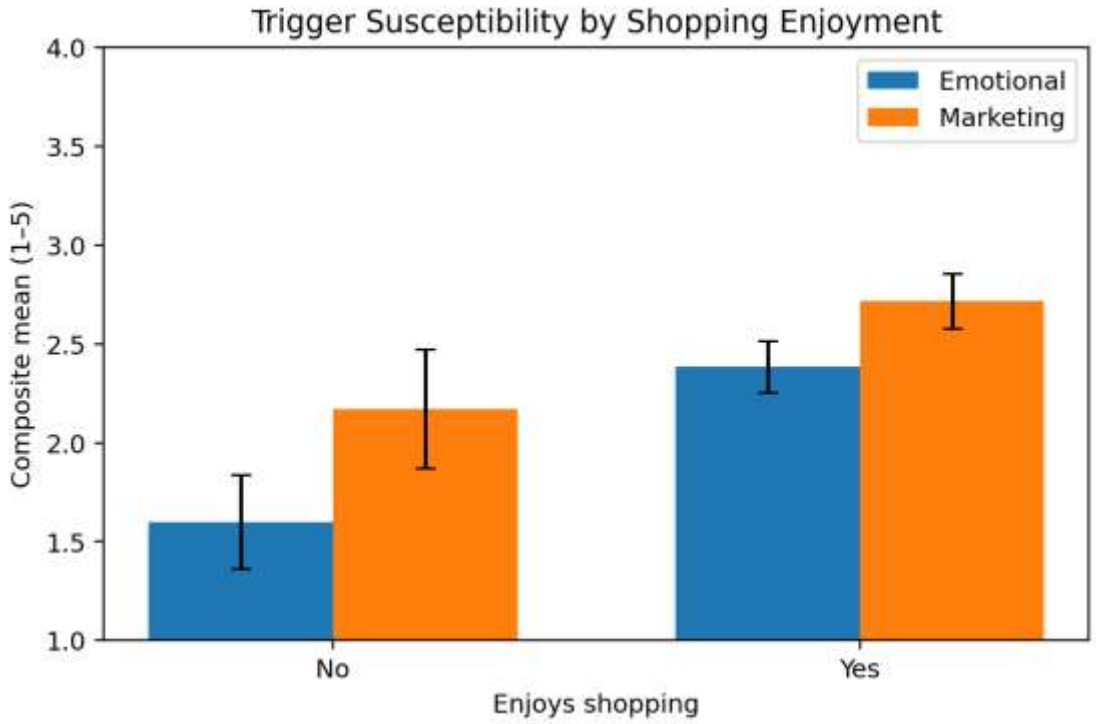


Figure 3. Trigger susceptibility by shopping enjoyment; error bars show 95% confidence intervals.

H4b was not supported. Digital/social susceptibility was highest among online-only shoppers (M = 2.56), compared with offline (M = 2.25) and mixed-mode shoppers (M = 2.21), but the difference did not reach conventional significance, Welch's F(2, 122.53) = 2.33, p = .102, $\eta^2 \approx .018$. Overall marketing susceptibility also did not differ across shopping modes, p = .758.

H5 was not supported. Among the 251 respondents with usable age values, age was not significantly associated with digital/social susceptibility, Spearman's $\rho = -.039$, $p = .536$. The result was similarly weak using Pearson correlation. Thus, the present data do not support a simple younger-equals-more-digitally-susceptible conclusion.

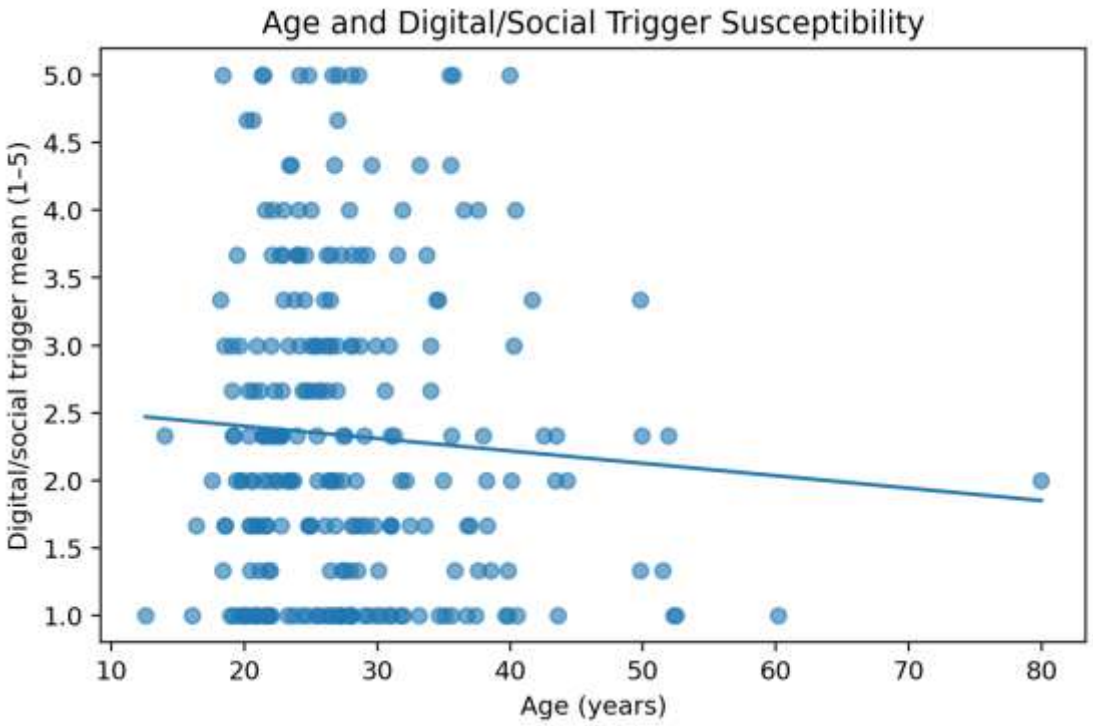


Figure 4. Age and digital/social trigger susceptibility. The observed association was not statistically significant.

H6 was not supported. Income band was not significantly related to discount/value susceptibility, Spearman's $\rho = .087$, $p = .162$. Number of dependents was also unrelated to discount/value susceptibility, $\rho = .003$, $p = .967$. Collapsing income into three broader categories did not reveal a significant mean difference, Welch's $p = .813$ for overall marketing susceptibility and $p = .593$ for emotional susceptibility.

Table 6
Hypothesis Outcome Summary

Hypothesis	Prediction	Outcome	Key evidence
H1	Marketing > emotional susceptibility	Supported	$t(257) = 6.50$, $p < .001$, $dz = .40$
H2a	Emotional susceptibility ↔ guilt	Partially supported	$\rho = .263$, $p < .001$; not independent after marketing control
H2b	Marketing susceptibility ↔ guilt	Supported	$\rho = .378$, $p < .001$

Hypothesis	Prediction	Outcome	Key evidence
H2c	Marketing adds adjusted explanatory value for guilt	Supported	$\Delta R^2 = .094$, $p < .001$; $\beta = .393$
H3	Guilt ↔ longer resistance	Not supported	$\rho = .036$, $p = .564$
H4a	Shopping enjoyment → higher trigger scores	Supported	$g = .81$ emotional; $g = .52$ marketing
H4b	Shopping mode differences in digital/social susceptibility	Not supported	Welch $p = .102$
H5	Age ↔ digital/social susceptibility	Not supported	$\rho = -.039$, $p = .536$
H6	Income/dependents ↔ discount/value susceptibility	Not supported	Income $\rho = .087$; dependents $\rho = .003$

Note. "Partially supported" for H2a indicates a significant bivariate association that did not remain independently significant after marketing susceptibility was entered into the adjusted model.

4.5 Exploratory Demographic Findings

Most demographic differences were small. Female and male respondents did not differ significantly in emotional susceptibility, marketing susceptibility, digital/social susceptibility, discount/value susceptibility, guilt or resistance. Qualification groups did not significantly differ in emotional susceptibility; marketing susceptibility showed only a marginal omnibus difference. Guilt differed modestly across grouped qualification levels, with postgraduate respondents reporting higher guilt than school-level respondents in an exploratory pairwise comparison after false-discovery-rate adjustment, adjusted $p = .044$.

Employment status showed a more consistent exploratory pattern. Self-employed respondents reported lower marketing susceptibility ($M = 2.23$) than employed respondents ($M = 2.74$), FDR-adjusted $p = .033$. They also reported lower guilt ($M = 2.21$) than employed, dependent and unemployed respondents, with adjusted pairwise p values ranging from .003 to .039. Because these comparisons were exploratory, involved unequal group sizes and were not central to the original hypotheses, they should be treated as hypothesis-generating rather than definitive demographic effects.

4.6 Sensitivity Analysis

The principal findings were re-estimated after removing the 22 respondents who used the same response across all 11 trigger items. The marketing-versus-emotional difference remained significant, $t = 6.55$, $p < .001$, $dz = .43$. Marketing susceptibility remained positively associated with guilt, Spearman's $\rho = .286$, $p < .001$, and emotional susceptibility retained a smaller positive correlation, $\rho = .156$, $p = .017$. Guilt remained unrelated to resistance, $\rho = .012$, $p = .849$. Shopping enjoyment continued to distinguish both emotional and marketing susceptibility. The overall interpretation is therefore not driven by straight-line response patterns.

5. Discussion

5.1 Marketing Cues Were Stronger Than Emotional Cues

The clearest result is that respondents reported stronger buying urges in response to marketing cues than emotional conditions. The average difference was moderate rather than trivial, and the item ranking showed that the pattern was driven especially by direct value propositions. Preferred-brand offers were the only trigger for which half of the sample selected a rating of 4 or 5. Bank discounts and free-delivery thresholds also ranked well above most emotional, social and interface cues.

This pattern is consistent with research showing that immediate sales promotions can accelerate impulsive decision-making and intensify the urge to buy (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2021; Redine et al., 2023). The important nuance is that not every form of marketing appears equally powerful. Push notifications, influencer recommendations and social-media advertisements were comparatively weak in the present sample. Marketing should therefore not be treated as one homogeneous exposure. The immediacy and economic relevance of the cue may matter more than its digital format alone.

5.2 The Factor Structure Suggests a Distinct Value-Promotion Mechanism

The exploratory factor analysis deepens this interpretation. Although the planned scale divided items into emotional and marketing groups, the empirical structure separated the three value-oriented promotion items from a broader psychosocial/digital cluster. Preferred-brand offers, bank discounts and free-delivery thresholds formed a coherent factor with $\alpha = .821$. Influencer recommendations, social-media advertisements and push notifications instead clustered with social and negative-affect items.

One interpretation is that consumers may process direct value promotions through a relatively distinct mechanism: they reframe an additional purchase as economically justified or as a missed-saving opportunity. By contrast, social-media cues, influencers and emotional states may operate through attention, belonging, affect or self-regulation. This resembles the broader literature's distinction between external retail stimuli and the internal organism states through which those stimuli are experienced (Chan et al., 2017). Because the study was not designed to validate a new scale, however, this two-factor structure should be replicated with a new sample before being treated as a formal measurement model.

5.3 Marketing Susceptibility Was the Strongest Predictor of Guilt

Both emotional and marketing susceptibility correlated with guilt at the bivariate level. However, when the two were considered together with income, dependents, shopping enjoyment and shopping mode, only marketing susceptibility remained independently predictive. The final regression explained approximately 17.7% of the variance in guilt, and marketing susceptibility added about 9.4 percentage points of explained variance beyond the emotional model.

This result can be interpreted as a tension between immediate promotional appeal and later evaluation. Consumers who report being readily influenced by offers, discounts, delivery thresholds and other marketing cues may also be more likely to recognise afterward that a purchase was unnecessary. The finding is consistent with literature linking impulse buying to post-purchase dissonance, regret and guilt (Beikverdi, 2024; Jain et al., 2018). It does not, however, show that marketing cues caused the guilt, because the predictor and outcome were measured concurrently and the study did not record a specific purchase episode.

5.4 Guilt Did Not Translate Into Sustained Resistance

The absence of a guilt-resistance association is theoretically informative. Research such as Spiteri Cornish (2020) suggests that regret can curtail future impulse buying, but the current sample showed virtually no monotonic relationship between guilt and the reported duration of avoiding another impulse purchase.

Several explanations are possible. First, guilt may be emotionally salient but short-lived. Second, consumers may rationalise or mentally disengage from the purchase rather than change behaviour. Third, the resistance measure was a single broad category referring to hours, days, weeks or 'any time', which may be too coarse to capture self-regulation accurately. Finally, a cross-sectional recollection of typical resistance is weaker than observing behaviour prospectively after a real purchase.

5.5 Shopping Enjoyment Matters More Than Basic Demographics

Shopping enjoyment showed one of the largest group effects in the study. Respondents who enjoyed shopping scored approximately 0.79 points higher on emotional susceptibility and 0.54 points higher on marketing susceptibility. The emotional difference corresponded to a large Hedges' g of .81, while the marketing difference was moderate at .52. This aligns closely with Beatty and Ferrell (1998) and Mohan et al. (2013), both of whom position shopping enjoyment as an important part of the pathway toward impulsive purchasing.

In contrast, age, sex, income, dependents and shopping mode were generally weak predictors. The data therefore caution against simplistic demographic targeting. For example, online-only shoppers had the highest digital/social score, but the difference across online, offline and mixed-mode groups was not statistically reliable. Similarly, younger age did not predict greater digital/social susceptibility. These null findings do not prove that demographic differences never exist; rather, they suggest that in this convenience sample, individual shopping affinity and value-cue susceptibility were more informative than broad demographic categories.

5.6 Implications

For consumer education, the findings suggest that the most important moments for reflective decision-making may be precisely those that appear financially advantageous. A consumer can ask whether a preferred-brand discount is changing the timing or quantity of a planned purchase, whether an additional item is being added solely to reach a free-delivery threshold, or whether a bank offer creates perceived savings on a purchase that would otherwise not occur. Simple friction mechanisms—such as a waiting period, cart review or pre-set discretionary budget—may be more useful than attempting to eliminate all exposure to digital advertising.

For marketers and retailers, value promotions appear more salient than generic digital prompting in this dataset. However, the association between marketing susceptibility and guilt highlights an ethical consideration: short-term conversion can coexist with negative post-purchase evaluation. Strategies that increase basket size by encouraging unnecessary purchases may damage trust or satisfaction when consumers later experience dissonance. Ethical promotion design should therefore consider transparency, relevance and long-term customer value rather than only immediate conversion.

For researchers, the factor results suggest that future studies should distinguish direct economic incentives from digital-social cues instead of treating all marketing triggers as a single dimension. A future confirmatory study could use validated impulse-buying tendency measures alongside separate scales for value promotions, digital interface cues, social influence, affect and actual behavioural outcomes.

5.7 Limitations

The study has several important limitations. First, the sampling strategy was based on convenience and field-intercept recruitment through markets, personal networks and other accessible channels. The sample cannot be treated as representative of Indian consumers, Delhi consumers or Generation Z. Second, the age range is broad and seven respondents had unusable age information. Third, the trigger inventory was

created for the study and is not equivalent to established impulse-buying scales such as those developed by Weun et al. (1998) or Verplanken and Herabadi (2001).

Fourth, the primary outcomes are self-reported urges rather than observed purchases. A person can feel an urge without buying, and the study does not measure purchase frequency, spending value, lack of planning or whether a specific purchase was genuinely impulsive. Fifth, guilt and resistance are each measured with a single item, limiting reliability and construct coverage. Sixth, the survey is cross-sectional, so temporal direction cannot be established. Seventh, the income variable uses broad upper-bound categories and is highly concentrated in the lowest band. Finally, multiple exploratory comparisons were conducted; although false-discovery-rate adjustment was used for pairwise follow-ups, the exploratory findings should be replicated.

5.8 Future Research

A stronger follow-up design would recruit a stratified or quota-based sample, use a validated impulse-buying tendency scale, separately measure urge and actual impulse-purchase behaviour, and record a recent real purchase episode. Repeated-measures or diary designs could capture the sequence from trigger exposure to urge, purchase, guilt and subsequent resistance. Experimental studies could directly manipulate discount magnitude, free-delivery thresholds, bank offers or push notifications to establish causal effects. Confirmatory factor analysis in a new sample could test the two-factor structure observed here, while moderation models could examine whether shopping enjoyment, deal proneness or self-control change the effect of value promotions on buying urges.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how emotional states and marketing cues relate to self-reported impulse-buying urges in a diverse convenience sample of 258 consumers. The strongest result was not a broad dominance of digital marketing, but the specific salience of value-oriented promotions. Offers on preferred brands, bank discounts and free-delivery thresholds produced the highest trigger ratings and formed a distinct factor in exploratory analysis. Marketing susceptibility was also the most consistent independent predictor of post-purchase guilt.

Emotional susceptibility remained relevant at the bivariate level, and consumers who enjoy shopping were substantially more responsive to both emotional and marketing triggers. By contrast, age, income, dependents, sex and shopping mode offered comparatively little explanatory value. Guilt did not predict longer resistance to future impulse shopping, suggesting that negative post-purchase emotion does not automatically produce behavioural self-control.

The findings support a cautious conclusion: in this sample, impulse-buying susceptibility appears to be shaped more strongly by immediate value cues and shopping affinity than by broad demographic categories. Because the study measures urges rather than verified purchases and uses a non-probability sample, the results should be treated as evidence of association rather than causation or population-wide prevalence. Future research should validate the emerging discount/value factor, use established impulse-buying scales, and follow consumers over time from trigger exposure through purchase and post-purchase response.

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