

Impulsive Buying Behaviour Factors Generalisation and How to Improve

Meiyi Ren^{1,a,*}

¹*Department of Psychology, University of Manchester, 8 Nobel Way, Manchester, M1 7AU, UK
a. meiyi.ren@student.manchester.ac.uk*

**corresponding author*

Abstract: Consumer impulsive behaviour involves three components: individual, situation and sensory. All three components can influence people's impulsive buying behaviour. It helps people to understand a more comprehensive picture of the factors that contribute to impulsive consumption and try to control such behaviour. For retailers, the lure of these aspects can be improved to attract consumers better. Past research has focused on a single set of factors that shape impulse spending better to understand the relationship between factors and impulse spending behaviour. However, these factors still need to be well summarised in this context. Therefore, this article provides a conceptual understanding of consumer impulse shopping behaviour, the factors that influence consumer impulse buying behaviour and how this behaviour can be improved. In addition, this article has focused primarily on exploring behaviour in an individual context. Questions about collective influences on individuals have not yet been addressed.

Keywords: Impulsive buying, Impulse spending behaviour, Consumer behaviour

1. Introduction

With the continuous development of society, people's consumption gradually changed from meeting the needs of survival to the pursuit of product aesthetics and diversity. The prevalence of impulse buying behaviour in recent years and the increasing number of impulse purchases manifest this shift in social demand. Impulse purchase is one of marketing's revenue streams. Further, it has been talked about for decades and is widely used by businesses. Past studies have shown that impulse spending accounts for a large proportion of all purchases, approximately 40 percent [1] [2]. Moreover, in a study by POPAI [3], 76 percent of purchasing decisions were made on impulse in shopping malls.

It is not just retailers who are interested in this behaviour, but researchers. They define *consumer impulse buying behaviour* as buying a product without consideration and deciding to buy it on the spot. People like to guess the outcome of things. Impulse spending is an experience of uncertainty, and it is this uncertainty that gives consumers a sense of novelty and fun [4]. This behaviour has also been described as a sign of immaturity and lack of self-control [1]. Research and grounded theory on impulse consumption has long been established in the context of Western culture. The applicability of research and theory in this cultural context to non-Western societies has been questioned by numerous scholars. In the cultural context of Eastern civilisations, especially China, which has the

second highest GDP in the world, it is essential to improve the understanding of research on impulse shopping in Eastern countries.

In 1962, Stern [5] laid the foundation for defining impulse buying behaviour by classifying the behaviour as planned, unplanned or impulsive. Unplanned contains two more types: reminders and suggestions. Planning an impulse buy may sound strange, but it exists. It means there is a need to buy based on price reductions, but no specific shopping list exists. Unplanned impulse buying is a need to buy something because of the excitement of seeing it. Pure impulse buying is a temporary impulse that is motivated by emotional impact. Rook [6] also mentions that his definition of impulse behaviour is similar to Stern's definition of 'pure impulse behaviour' when distinguishing between impulsive and unplanned behaviour. Impulse-buying behaviours can often be classified as unplanned purchases, but unplanned purchases cannot always be classified as impulse purchases [7]. For example, a person sees fruits in a shopping mall supermarket and suddenly remembers that he has run out of fruits at home, so he buys some to take home. This behaviour is known as 'reminder impulse behaviour' and is a form of unplanned buying [5]. Although impulse buying is not a planned behaviour, it represents an out-of-control and more emotional behaviour. Unplanned purchases, in contrast, are more rational and under control. Dittmar and Drury [8] also support the idea that impulse buying and unplanned behaviour are distinct and governed by different motivations.

While there have been many studies on single factors for this behaviour, few articles have gone on to synthesise the findings related to impulse buying behaviour. The purpose of this article is to summarise the factors that influence consumers' impulse buying decisions. It is essential for people to understand and control impulse shopping behaviour. Therefore, this study aims mainly to identify factors contributing to the development of such behaviour and how to minimise the impact of impulse buying behaviour. Many factors influenced this behaviour. Through reading the literature, the factors were grouped into three main sections: individual, situational, and sensory.

This study also provides a comprehensive understanding of impulse spending behaviour. Since impulsive spending is currently a high percentage of consumption in the market, it is crucial to understand better the factors that influence impulsive spending. As retailers can use these factors to promote more impulsive spending, consumers can also use them to curb their irrational, impulsive behaviours. Research in this direction has practical implications.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Individual Factor

2.1.1. Impulsive Behaviour Trait

Impulsive behaviour trait is a dominant factor. Similarly, impulsive-sensation seeking (ImpSS) is an irrational high-risk behaviour. Often associated with gambling, such as buying lottery tickets, Zukerman [9] defines ImpSS as behaviour that seeks the sensation of excitement and challenge. Impulse buying involves two mechanisms: the desire to buy goods and the level of self-control [10]. Therefore, impulsivity stems from a failure of self-regulation. People with low self-regulation will be more likely to form impulse buying behaviour since their desire is more significant than their ability to control it. A study surveyed 309 shoppers in a large shopping centre on consumer impulsiveness (CI), optimum stimulation level (OSL), and self-monitoring (SM). The choice of location ensured a variety of products and high foot traffic. The study results showed that CI and OSL affect impulse buying behaviour, but CI has a more substantial effect. Additionally, a high self-monitoring level reduces impulsivity [9]. Ozer and Gultekin's [11] experiment gives the same conclusion that impulse buying tendencies have a positive effect on impulse buying.

2.1.2. Age and Gender

In recent years, attention has been focused on the impact of age and gender on consumption. Regarding sociability, sociable people like to be part of a group and avoid loneliness. Therefore, the primary purpose of this type of person to go out shopping is to socialise. The service provided by the receptionist influences them, and they are likely to spend money if the social interaction is satisfactory. The opposite is true for people who dislike socialising and are shy. They may choose to spend impulsively in order to reduce their inner anxiety, but the impact is small [12]. Based on sociability, older people are less likely not to plan their shopping because they have better control over their social skills. Dhaundiyal and Coughlan's [12] experiment concludes that the interaction of sociability and age reduces the likelihood of impulsive spending. Another evidence study on impulse spending provided a meta-analysis, which results in age being negatively correlated with impulse buying [3].

In terms of gender, although men are susceptible to impulsive, many experiments have proved that women are more prone to impulse spending than men [8] [13]). Mothers are accustomed to checking the safety of their food, which makes women accustomed to touching products on the shelves with their hands, susceptible to sensory cues from the items they touch, and making higher brand promises [13]. They consider the shopping experience as a way to express their love [14]. Moreover, male consumers prefer low levels of engagement and make quick purchase decisions, a tendency that reduces the length of shopping trips and the likelihood of impulse spending. Another study suggests that while men's increased emphasis on appearance and products in recent years has led to more overspending behaviour and more overspending among men in general, the convenience of credit has led to more impulsive spending among women [8].

2.1.3. Power Distance Belief (PDB)

The term PDB is different for poor or rich. It means the acceptance level of an unequal distribution of power by the part of the group that holds less power. Typically, countries with high acceptance of PDBs have a clear hierarchy and are more accustomed to tolerating rather than resisting inequality. Zhang, Winterich and Mittal's [15] investigation tested the relationship between PDB and impulse spending in great detail. People with a high PDB have better self-control than those who contain a low PDB, so they usually have less impulse shopping behaviour. Furthermore, they point out that PDB has a more significant effect on impulse consumption than other cultural factors. Nevertheless, most of the participants in this experiment were Westerners, and it is difficult to generalise this conclusion to non-Westerners. Seeley and Gardner's [16] research also points to this issue, demonstrating the differences between Western and Eastern cultures. Easterners have a higher PDB and are more inclined to control their purchasing desires. Meanwhile, Westerners have a lower PDB, leading to more impulse shopping.

2.1.4. Hedonic Motivation

People assign different values to different things, seeking pleasure and avoiding things that cause pain. This preference is also called hedonic value. Hedonism is recognised by Baumgartner [14] as the main motivation for impulse spending. In Hazarika, Mousavizadeh and Tarn's [17] study, hedonically motivated consumers focus on having fun and looking for novelty in shopping to satisfy their curiosity. As mentioned in the emotion section, there is a positive correlation between emotions and hedonism. They are inextricably linked. In addition, the results of one study suggest that impulsive spending can leave cognition and emotion in a state of contradiction [4]. On the one hand, hedonic motivation can make people feel relaxed; on the other hand, they can feel ashamed of their lack of self-control. This mixed emotion affects how people perceive their behaviour. The more socially compliant people are, the more guilty they feel. Hedonic motivation is more of a moderator between the sales environment

and mood than an independent factor. It interacts with the environment to influence consumers' emotions [18].

A controversial issue regarding hedonic motivation is the emotional feedback after consumption. In Rook's [6] study, 80 percent of the sample said they had had a negative experience with an impulse buy, with 37 percent saying they were disappointed with their impulse to buy. Another experiment also supports Rook's opinion that most customers regret this impulsive behaviour and find out after receiving the goods that they did not like them or that the products were not worth the money [19]. After that, cognitive dissonance occurs. The customer will try to find reasons to convince himself that the goods he bought are meaningful. However, Dittmar and Drury [8] considered the causes of regret from a multidimensional perspective. They found that consumers regret spending money or buying unnecessary things but not the experience of buying them.

2.2. Situational Factor

2.2.1. Emotion

The influence of emotions on impulse buying behaviour is one of the most commonly studied factors in this field. The goal of humanity since the beginning of time has been the pursuit of happiness, which has continued to the present day, resulting in human behaviour being influenced by emotions. It is considered that internal motivation influences human behaviour more than the environment in which it is placed [8]. A study by Parsad and her colleagues [14] concluded that emotion is a critical factor in impulsive shopping behaviour in terms of mood, shopping value and impulsive shopping tendencies on five different scales.

A range of studies have demonstrated the impact that pre-purchase emotions can have on impulse buying behaviour. However, there are different findings on whether the effect is positive or negative. In the findings of Ozer and Gultekin [11], people with positive pre-purchase moods had more impulse purchases than those with bad moods. This finding is in line with Saling and her partners [20], who show that making customers feel satisfied significantly impacts the purchase decision. In addition, this study's limitation is that the study's participants were customers of 3-4-star hotels and cannot be generalised to other hotel residents. The researcher who held this view argued that impulse buying does not improve consumers' mood after shopping. Nevertheless, other researchers have concluded that negative mood prefers impulse spending to relieve stress and repair emotions, thus enhancing temporary well-being and satisfaction. At the same time, positive emotions can motivate people to spend money impulsively. For instance, they reward or keep themselves in a positive mood [8]. From a retailer's perspective, they are also keen to create a favourable consumer environment and service attitude to arouse positive emotions among consumers, increasing purchasing behaviour [18]. Therefore, the current literature can only prove that emotions have an impact on impulsive behaviours, but which specific emotions have a more significant impact on impulse spending needs to be studied more in-depth through different dimensions (e.g. individual differences).

2.2.2. Online Shopping

Online spending has become one of the most dominant ways of shopping in the modern world. This way has been developed until now, establishing a mature online shopping system. The growth of online shopping has also attracted the attention of many academics. During the coronavirus period, people have become more and more enthusiastic about online shopping.

Akram and his colleagues [21] analysed that through previous literature, many researchers believe that impulsive behaviour is physically driven. Therefore, many believe that it is difficult for impulsive spending behaviour to occur when shopping on the Internet, where cognitive demands are high. However, he found online transactions are also easy to impulse purchase through the survey.

Moreover, website quality and promotions are the critical factors for consumers to make impulsive purchases online. The use of credit cards also indirectly increases the likelihood of impulse spending. Similarly, the article by Pradhan et al. [22] mentions an increase in online impulse buying influenced by credit cards. In addition, the technology of the Internet provides exposure to advertising, as well as gives people a greater variety of choices, expanding purchasing opportunities and increasing the ease of purchasing. As a result, the development of such networks also offers the possibility of more impulsive buying behaviour. However, the study found it difficult to say which one contains more impulsive buying behaviour, physical or online shopping. The strategy to increase impulse buying was effective for both online and offline shops, and there was no significant difference in the occurrence of impulse buying behaviour [3].

2.3. Sensory Factor

2.3.1. Marketing Stimuli

Spending is a reflection of self-worth and status in today's society. As credit cards (CCs) are widely used, more and more people are affected, and researchers are becoming interested in them. Soman [22] found that people using CCs spend more than those using other payment methods. Through a study on CCs and impulsive behaviour, it was found that the results were consistent with Soman's that credit card use increases impulsive buying behaviour because credit cards bring the pleasure of owning material possessions and the convenience of swiping the card [22]. However, as this was an experiment conducted in India and most participants were younger than 40 years old, there are some limitations to the generalisability of the results.

Rather than credit cards, two very effective business models can also promote impulsive consumer behaviour based on games. The first is to reward users based on specific behaviours, such as £10 for a top-up of 100. The second is to earn virtual achievements after completing a particular progress, generally applicable to online spending. Both of these mechanisms have been shown to increase impulsive consumer behaviour by increasing levels of pleasure and social interaction [23].

2.3.2. Time pressure

Airports are a very vulnerable place for impulse shopping behaviour because of time pressure. Airlines derive a significant portion of their revenue from passengers shopping and dining at airports, so they are committed to turning passenger dwell time at airports into shopping time. Tourists also enjoy shopping at airport malls to pass the time before their flights. This phenomenon was confirmed by the experiments of Lin and Chen [24], who found that impulsive shopping in a highly time-pressured environment such as airports is determined by the interaction between the environment and the impulsive tendency. In addition, impulse buying was more likely to occur when few items were left for sale.

2.4. Improvement of Impulse Spending

Impulsive buying behaviour is a double-edged sword. It can lead to over-consumption, waste of resources and loss of control over self. However, it can motivate and bring instant gratification [14]. From an economic perspective, impulsive buying stimulates consumers to grow retailers' incomes and expand production requirements. Above all, proper impulse spending can be beneficial, and it is necessary for people to understand and control their impulse spending behaviour.

Scientists believe that impulsive spending is due to insufficient reflection and short-term purchasing decisions. Amos et al.'s [3] article mentions that a longer decision-making time allows for a more adequate cognitive assessment. Rather than time extension, exercise can also help control

impulsive buying behaviour. In the short term, self-control decreases when dealing with many things, but in the long term, control can be strengthened through long-term exercise [10]. In Sultan's study, participants increased self-control and reduced impulse buying behaviour through repeated self-control exercises over a two-week period compared to those who did not receive repeated exercises [10]. However, this experiment did not track participants' spending behaviour over time. It only ensured that they were less impulsive within a short period of time at the end of the experiment. Similarly, companies can also take advantage of people's reduced self-control when they are fatigued to sell their products in the evening after a long day's work to achieve better marketing results.

3. Conclusion

This literature review summarises the findings of past decades and lays the foundation for future research directions. In the literature review of this paper, the results show that age, gender, impulsive traits, credit card usage, etc., affect impulse spending. Therefore, impulse buying is more prevalent among younger people than older people. Female consumers are more likely to make impulse purchases than male consumers. Credit card users are more impulsive than cash users. This research is beneficial for consumers to have a better understanding of and control over their spending behaviour and for marketers to understand the factors of impulse spending and stimulate it. People can also try to control this behaviour by taking longer to think about their purchases, practising more and trying not to buy things at night, especially during the working day.

While this literature review study can aid in understanding, some limitations still require further research. This article only discusses the factors contributing to impulse spending when an individual purchases. However, it lacks the influence of others on the individual—for example, the factors influencing impulse buying behaviour when shopping in different relationship groups. Future research could explore the collective influence on individuals' impulse buying behaviour from the social environment, herd mentality, and interpersonal relationships.

Impulse buying is a complex issue. Although many experiments have shown intuitively how it relates to various factors, people still need to be cautious in interpreting this behaviour. Most experiments that have studied impulse buying have used direct questioning, and these data are likely to be influenced by personal emotions or evaluation apprehension. Therefore, future research could appropriately use implicit tests to investigate people's perceptions of impulse buying. With all the negative evaluations of impulse spending, it is also a good question to investigate why this behaviour continues to grow.

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