Influence of Social and Economic Factors on Impulse Buying: A Research Framework

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Riya Sugla¹ and Shaon Sen¹

Abstract

The research aims to identify several social and economic factors expected to influence consumers' impulsive buying. This research has adopted a scoping literature review approach to reach its findings and conclusions. The author has used keywords related to the area of study to shortlist various articles published by researchers. Also, an extensive iterative search approach is adopted to identify various research works published in established peer-reviewed national and international journals. All the research articles that pertain to this study's specific aim are included; the rest are excluded from the study. The authors have performed an in-depth study of these papers to understand all the parameters. The authors have performed analysis of the results and findings of the reviewed research articles to identify economic and social factors that influence consumers' impulse buying.

Keywords

Impulse buying, consumer's buying behaviour, social factors, economic factors, research framework

Introduction

It is common for consumers to buy something unplanned whenever they are exposed to a buying stimulus during their visit to a supermarket, a convenience

Corresponding author:

Shaon Sen, Institute of Management Technology, Survey No. 38, Cherlaguda Village, Shamshabad Mandal, Hyderabad, Telangana 501218, India.

E-mail: shaonsen.88@imthyderabad.edu.in



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¹ Institute of Management Technology, Hyderabad, Telangana, India

store, a hypermarket or a mega mart. Rook and Gardner (1993) identified this unplanned behaviour of purchasing involving a quick decision-making process as impulse buying. Such behaviour can be attributed to consumers' tendency to gain immediate gratification through at-this-moment product acquisition. Researchers opined that consumers' impulse buying is driven by a sudden and intense urge to acquire a product or avail of a service (Block & Morwitz, 1999). Further, Kacen and Lee (2002) described customers' impulsive buying behaviour as more arousing and irresistible but less deliberative than planned purchasing behaviour. For more than seven decades, consumer behaviour researchers have contemplated the impulsive buying behaviour of consumers and have described this as a buying process that lacks planning (Applebaum, 1951; Clover, 1950). Later, researchers put forward various reasons that govern individuals' impulse buying activity. The notable factors identified by researchers include hedonic motivations (Rook, 1987; Rook & Hoch, 1985), materialistic aspirations (Atulkar & Kesari, 2018a; Chancellor & Lyubomirsky, 2011; Podoshen & Andrzejewski, 2012) and emotions (Piron, 1991). In addition to these factors, researchers have posited various stimulus factors that influence consumers' impulsive buying behaviour. Through the research continuum, multiple researchers have identified and studied the external, internal and situational stimulus factors that influence impulse buying (Belk, 1985; Moore & Berger, 2015; Sen & Nayak, 2021). Although impulse buying is approached and studied in light of several psychological and behavioural factors, research on identifying various social and economic factors that can influence an individual's impulse buying process is rare.

In the modern day of business, practitioners are witnessing substantial dynamic changes in consumers' buying habits, the reason for which is primarily attributed to social and economic factors.

The primary objective of this study was to provide a thorough analysis of the literature on impulse buying, highlighting any gaps or opportunities for future research. This analysis aims to offer readers and marketers a fresh perspective on impulse buying and encourage them to explore new ideas. Additionally, the study aimed to identify the social and economic factors that influence unplanned purchases among consumers to assist both practitioners and the research community. It would allow the practitioners to understand the importance of certain social and economic factors that affect consumers' impulsivity during the buying process. Hence, it would be possible for marketers to devise marketing strategies keeping these factors in mind. Further, this study's findings address the research gaps where studies on the involvement of social and economic factors in influencing a consumer's impulsive buying are rare.

The significance of this study is that it takes up the task of identifying the relevant social and economic factors that influence impulse buying, research that is either not undertaken or is very scarce. The significant outcome of this study is the proposition of a research framework that paves the avenues for consumer researchers in the future to test the model and reach generalisable results empirically.

This study adopts a scoping review of the literature approach in identifying the gaps in the research continuum. Subsequently, it proposes a research framework based on the propositions that are posited in this study.

Literature Review

Impulse Buying

Researchers have defined impulse buying as an action without conscious recognition or an expressed buying intention (Engel & Blackwell, 1982). Later, Bayley and Nancarrow (1998) described impulse buying as sudden, hedonically complex and compelling buying behaviour. The researchers further opine that the velocity of the action or set of activities involved in the impulse buying process fends off a contemplative and conscious consideration of alternative searches.

The phenomenon of impulse buying, therefore, can be ubiquitously described as an unplanned or spontaneous buying process. Rook and Fischer (1995) opined that almost anything could be bought out of impulse. An impulse purchase can include anything from brand-new goods to well-known products offered at surprisingly low prices (Tinne, 2010).

Consumer researchers further state that a consumer gets involved in a sudden unplanned purchase because the individual is not actively looking for a particular product, has the intention of purchasing it or has no pre-shopping plan before the purchase (Lee, 2008; Rook, 1987; Sharma et al., 2010).

Before Rook's (1987) study, descriptions of impulse buying were primarily concerned with the product type in question during a purchase. Later, consumer researchers became curious in understanding personality traits of individuals that influence them to impulse buying.

Rook (1987) drew attention to the several behavioural aspects of individuals that lead to impulse buying. The researcher describes the phenomenon of impulse buying as an unintentional, non-reflective reaction triggered when a customer is exposed to specific external, internal or situational stimuli. Later researchers, in accordance with that, identified and investigated various stimulus factors that act as influencers of impulse buying among individuals (Ünsalan, 2016).

Although extensive research is done to understand impulsive buying behaviour among consumers in the light of various personality traits, stimulus factors, etc., studies on the social and economic factors responsible for impulse buying are rare.

Social Factors that Influence Consumers' Buying Behaviour

Reference Groups

Richins and Fournier (1991) argued that the reference groups impact a person's behaviour, which is not uncommon regarding buying behaviour. The researchers referred to all the groups that have direct or indirect power to influence an individual's attitude or behaviour in one way or another. According to consumer researchers, reference groups can include families, friends, classmates, neighbours or co-shoppers (Xiurong & Chenglei, 2010). Family members such as spouses, kids and parents significantly influence an individual. Further, scholars have also identified that pressure from peers or peer groups heavily influences a consumer's purchase decisions. Luo (2005) opined consumers strongly tend to

impulse buy when shopping with peers or reference groups. However, Rook and Fisher (1995) argue that shopping in anonymity increases the chances of impulsive buying.

The researchers in this study propose a strong positive relationship between the influence of reference groups and consumers' impulsive buying. Hence, the following—

Proposition 1: There is a strong positive association between peer group's influence and consumers' impulse buying.

Cultural Practices

The buying behaviour of consumers is influenced by the cultural norms of society by and large. Researchers have described culture as a collective memory of the society (Solomon et al., 2006), which is operationalised as a set of shared meanings, rituals, norms and traditions among the members of a society or an organisation. Consumer behaviour theorists opined that an individual's consumption habits, including food, clothing, personal care and gifts, are influenced by the individual's cultural practices. Culture significantly impacts how people communicate, manage their organisations and approach problems (Hofstede, 2001). Eventually, cultural practices influence a consumer's shopping and buying behaviour (Nayeem, 2012; Spiers et al., 2014; Yakup et al., 2011). Broadly, cultural practices are compartmentalised into individualism and collectivism (Hofstede, 2001). The prior study suggests that impulsive buying is more common in countries with individualistic cultural practices (Lee & Kacen, 2008). Researchers described individualists as individuals who consider themselves autonomous and independent (Kacen & Lee, 2002). These individuals' carefree attitude makes them more hedonic and therefore indulge in impulsive purchases (Sen & Nayak, 2021).

The researchers in this study propose a strong positive relationship between cultural practices and consumers' impulsive buying. Researchers here propose that consumers who exhibit individualistic cultural practices—as a cultural or individual norm—are more likely to display impulse buying. Hence, the following—

Proposition 2: There is a strong positive association between individualism and consumers' impulse buying.

Store Experience

A store shop's physical appeal is another factor influencing a customer's buying decisions. Scholars have identified certain factors that could influence an individual's buying behaviour in retail settings (Bellizzi & Hite, 1992; Hashmi et al., 2020; Milliman, 1986; Yalch & Spangenberg, 1990). These factors include the music played within the store, the colour of the store inlay and the merchandising approach, some of which can lead to impulsive buying. Researchers posit these factors as external factors that influence impulse buying. Further scholars have operationalised the external factors as store atmospherics or store environments (Applebaum, 1951; Atulkar & Kesari, 2018a; Stern, 1962), product characteristics

(Duarte et al., 2013; Harmancioglu et al., 2009; Lucas & Koff, 2014) and promotional activities (Duarte et al., 2013; Hultén & Vanyushyn, 2011). Therefore, it can be deduced that an enhanced in-store experience of a consumer is capable of driving the individual into impulse buying.

The researchers in this study propose a strong positive relationship between store appeal and consumers' impulsive buying. Researchers suggest that if the store's atmosphere attracts consumers, then the customers are more likely to buy impulsively. Hence, the following—

Proposition 3: There is a strong positive association between store experience and consumers' impulse buying.

Economic Factors that Influence Consumers' Buying Behaviour

Buying Power or Income

The economic conditions of the market or a country largely influence consumer preferences and decisions. The market's money supply and consumers' purchasing power increase proportionally to how prosperous and stable a country's economy is. Personal income, family income, income expectations, savings, consumer credit, etc. influence a consumer's purchasing power and, thus, impulse buying tendency (Analytics Steps). Consumers' ability to make impulsive purchases is also strongly influenced by their financial situation. According to Rana and Tirthani (2012), respondents' gender has no bearing on their propensity for impulsive purchases; what matters are their monthly income and education levels, which significantly impact their impulse buying behaviour. Further studies support the argument that high-income customers behave more impulsively while purchasing.

Modern researchers have commented that an individual's or family income has no impact on moderating a materialistic individual's propensity to impulse buying (Sen & Nayak, 2019). But this finding is not sufficiently evident to disregard the positive influence of income on an individual's impulsive buying behaviour.

Therefore, the researchers in this study propose a strong positive relationship between a consumer's income or family income and a consumer's impulsive buying. Researchers here propose that if consumers exhibit increasing impulsive buying tendencies with the increase in their disposable income levels. Hence, the following—

Proposition 4: There is a strong positive association between a consumers' disposable income levels and impulse buying.

Price Sensitivity

Sales promotion acts as an effective tool to influence consumers' buying tendencies, especially for price-sensitive customers. Marketers frequently use sales promotion to compete, maintain their competitive advantage and ultimately increase sales by motivating consumers to make more purchases over and above

their shopping list. Sales promotions in the form of rebates and discount offers are an essential and effective tool for influencing the impulse buying behaviour of customers on apparel (Nagadeepa et al., 2015). According to Banks and Moorthy (1999), sales promotion led to a sudden increase in sales experienced by retailers by attracting the price-consciousness of consumers.

The researchers in this study propose a strong positive relationship between sales promotions offered to consumers and impulsive buying. Researchers here propose that if the consumers are exposed to an attractive sales promotional offer, they are more likely to indulge in impulsive buying. Hence, the following—

Proposition 5: There is a strong positive association between sales promotions offered to a consumer and the consumers' impulse buying.

A chronological advancement report of the research works reviewed in this research is documented in Table 1.

Table 1. Chronological Advancements in the Research Continuum.

Year	Researcher	Evolution of the Study	
1962	Stern	Describes impulse mix, suggesting the different forms and types of impulse buying	
2009	Dawson and Kim	A significant positive correlation was found between a person's normative evaluation and actual online impulse buying behaviour.	
2003	Crawford and Melewar	Airports are unique retail environments due to the environmental and psychological issues linked with the travel process, enhancing impulse buying.	
2010	Xiurong and Chenglei	The findings test and verify that normative evaluation has a moderating effect between impulse buying intention and behaviour.	
2012	Hadjali et al.	Research suggests that gender, appropriate environment and targeted promotional tools significantly affect impulse buying behaviour.	
2015	Nagadeepa et al.	This study showed that the two important sales promotional schemes, namely rebates and discount offer and the retailers' loyalty programs, are more effective in the impulse buying behaviour of customers on apparel.	
2015	Luo	Found that the presence of peers increases the urge to purchase and that the presence of family members decreases it.	
2008	Mattila and Wirtz	Found that employee friendliness in stores positively affects impulse buying behaviour.	
2020	Hashmi et al.	The results state a positive influence of store environment on consumer's enjoyment, pleasure and arousal, directly influencing consumer's spontaneous purchase.	

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Year	Researcher	Evolution of the Study
2021	Billore and Anisimova	Defined panic buying among consumers and proposed that tactics must be directed towards increasing sales through online promotions because of the pandemic-induced transition from offline to online.
2021	Zafar and Qui	Found the impact of celebrities' posts, mood polarity, observational learning and impulse purchasing propensity on the desire to purchase spontaneously in Pakistan.

Cues from the Past Research

As mentioned before, the research continuum on impulse buying has broadly experienced the consideration of the external, internal and situational stimulus factors that influence impulse buying (Belk, 1985; Moore & Berger, 2015; Sen & Nayak, 2021). Further, impulse buying is approached and studied in light of several internal and behavioural factors. Atulkar and Kesari (2018a) have incorporated various internal and behavioural elements, such as materialism and impulse buying tendencies, to describe impulse buying. The researchers have also considered emotional factors such as emotional attachments and shopping enjoyment as antecedents to impulse buying. However, the main attraction of the present study is that Atulkar and Kesari (2018a) have also considered the role of interpersonal influence on customers' impulse buying. In this study, the researchers went on to identify peer influence, which is a result of interpersonal influence, as a social factor influencing impulse buying.

Further, Kollat and Willett (1969) and West (1951) propose that the presence of peers can increase a person's inclination to buy, while the company of family members can have the opposite effect. This finding indicates that diverse promotion and advertising strategies are necessary for different shopping groups. For instance, promotions like coupons and price discounts aimed at customers who shop in a cohesive peer group can augment store sales. Still, such tactics may not be as effective for customers who prioritise family values.

In addition, Sen and Nayak (2019) have established a strong positive relationship between materialism among Indian millennials and impulse buying but have found no impact of income as a moderator to the relationship. The question now arises: income, as an economic factor, is commonly agreed to impact impulse buying positively. But will this proposition hold under varied economic conditions? For example, an individual with a higher income will indulge in impulse buying or look forward to increasing savings during a recession. Although this study proposes a strong positive relationship between income and impulse buying, this requires further tests for generalizability.

Apart from the above-mentioned factors, there are several factors that modern researchers are exploring that would describe the phenomenon of impulse buying. The factors include an individual's situation, product attributes, motivational activities, variety-seeking behaviour, cultural practices, etc. (Atulkar & Kesari, 2018b; Luo, 2005; Sen & Nayak, 2021).

The present research is based on the cues of previous research on impulse buying, intending to identify gaps and developing a research framework. The detailed chronological advancement in *t* research on impulsive buying is postulated in Table 1.

The Research Framework

The present study has identified several social and economic factors that potentially influence individuals' impulse buying behaviour. The social factors include reference or peer groups, individualism and the store experience of the consumer. These factors are conceptualised as potential antecedents of the construct of impulse buying. These factors are expected to impart a strong and positive influence on customers' impulsive buying behaviour. As mentioned in the previous section, the propositions running from proposition 1 to proposition 3 capture this core ideation.

Further, this study also identifies several economic factors, including a consumer's disposable income level and the sales promotions offered to customers during the buying process. These economic factors, which are potential antecedents of the construct of impulse buying, are expected to have a strong and positive influence in governing the customers' impulsive buying behaviour. As mentioned in the previous section, the propositions running through proposition 4 and proposition 5 capture this core ideation.

Based on these above propositions, the researchers in this study have developed the proposed research framework depicting the relationship between the various social and economic factors as antecedents of the impulse buying behaviour of consumers (Figure 1).

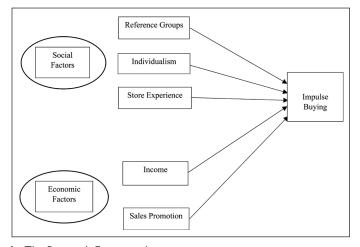


Figure 1. The Research Framework.

Practical Implications of the Study:

In today's market, impulsive or unplanned purchases are a common occurrence. Impulsive purchases account for a sizable portion of sales across product categories. This study provides sufficient evidence to support various social and economic factors influencing consumers' spontaneous or unplanned purchases. An increase in consumers' impulse purchases can be attributed to the upward potential of the effectiveness of the marketing strategies of marketers and practitioners. Future marketing strategists can take a cue from the propositions of this study to devise effective marketing strategies. Practitioners operating in a business-to-consumer market can align their marketing activities and communications with the social and economic factors identified in this to ensure formative gains out of their businesses. Researchers have strongly opined that it is possible to condition consumers to increase or decrease their impulsive buying behaviour. Therefore, this study's unique findings are deemed crucial for future marketers.

This study has found various social factors that influence consumers to buy products that are not pre-decided or bought impulsively. It is found that co-shoppers influence consumer purchasing. The consumer's reference group is a social factor that influences impulse buying. Among these reference groups, a significant factor influencing a consumer's purchase decisions is peer influence Luo (2005). Prior studies have also identified the celebrity endorsements as an alternative to or similar to peer influence that directly influences impulse purchases. Further studies drew attention to the importance of an authentic and trustworthy review on an online site. Researchers posit that such trustworthy reviews for a product can positively induce a consumer to buy it immediately. This study identifies all these factors as elements of peer influence that lead a customer to buy impulsively. In addition, the study also points out the influence of cultural practices on impulse buying. It is stated that individualists showcase more impulsive purchases (Lee & Kacen, 2008). Therefore, it is crucial for marketers to identify this segment and devise communication strategies that are significantly attractive to them. Attracting more and more individualists to a business can potentially ensure increased cash inflow or revenue generation for the businesses. Furthermore, the physical appeal of a store can boost a consumer's in-store experience, thereby leading to impulsive buying.

This study also identifies various economic factors like consumer income (consumers with savings or disposable income) and sales promotion as significant and positive antecedents for impulse buying. Income and education levels significantly impact these consumers' buying behaviour (Rana & Tirthani, 2012), likely leading to impulsive purchase. Marketers can churn out high sales volumes by targeting the high-income group and attracting them to make impulsive purchases above and over their pre-determined shopping list. Marketers can also look to bring more price-sensitive customers into their business and influence them to buy impulsively by reducing the perceived purchase risk through sales promotions. Although it is commonly agreed that decreased perceived risk leads to increased impulsive purchases, the reverse is often true under exceptional circumstances, such as panic buying situations (Sen, 2022). Researchers have pointed out that consumers tend to buy

impulsively when there is a fear or panic of missing out (Billore & Anisimova, 2021). Researchers have posited that time-bound promotions such as limited period offers, one-day free delivery options, happy hours, etc. increase consumers' urge to buy instantly. Rebate and discount offers significantly impact customers' impulsive purchases (Nagadeepa et al., 2015). Therefore, it would likely lead the business to attain better economies of scale and ensure a better position to sustain it.

However, the researchers here would like to raise a word of caution for marketers who would be willing to adopt both strategies simultaneously. The reason is that attracting price-sensitive customers to a business will likely discourage the high disposable income segment from associating themselves with it, or they will also look for similar benefits as the price-sensitives. Thus, on the one hand, there is a risk of losing revenues, and on the other, there is a likelihood of losing brand value.

Discussions and Future Directions

The findings in this study suggest that reference groups must be targeted to increase impulse buying among consumers. For products that are targeted to specific age groups, the advertisements must be designed in a manner that can influence the reference groups of the targeted consumers as well. This will ensure that these group members directly or indirectly affect consumers' purchase decisions. Another strategy to induce impulse buying is to design an attractive store environment that pushes the consumer to stay longer. Retailers can use visual merchandising, in-store music and clean and spacious pathways to attract buyers.

Assuming most consumers in emerging economies are price-sensitive, sales promotion is an essential tool marketer can use periodically. A retailer can also introduce a loyalty program to ensure consumers' repeat purchases. Another strategy to generate impulse purchases is to design retail outlets based on target groups. Since high-income consumers can be potentially high-impulse buyers, retailers can separately target higher- and lower-end markets.

This research article proposes several practical implications and directions for marketers and practitioners. It identifies various factors that can help them develop strategies to increase profit and sales by inducing impulse purchases. The practical implications of this study provide a roadmap for marketers and retailers to encourage such purchases. However, this aspect is not captured in many pieces of research, indicating a research gap that requires attention. Another research gap identified is the lack of mention of scarcity promotions, which create urgency and immediacy of purchase by using timers for promotions like limited-period offers. Such sales promotions can significantly aid in inducing impulse purchases. Social media influencers have also become increasingly important, yet most reviewed articles do not mention their influence on consumer purchase decisions. Marketers and retailers can use the cues from this study to increase consumer purchases through impulsive buying.

For future researchers, the research framework developed in this study can act as a pathway for future tests. Researchers can develop operationalisable constructs and create or adopt measurement scales using this research model. The findings would have further implications for the practical business world.

Limitations of the Study

Similar to every research work, this study too entails certain limitations. The first issue is that this research lacks empirical evidence and is based on an extensive literature review. This research article is an amalgamation of papers that meet specific predefined criteria. Because of this, the findings of the study cannot be generalised to the entire study of impulse buying, as many other relevant articles are not included in the study. Second, since this research is a blend of various studies, it does not define the specific markets where the findings can be implemented. This research focuses on identifying the gaps in the research continuum; it does not include the particular needs or marketplaces within its scope. However, this research framework can be adopted in different markets or geographies for empirical investigations. Third, this research focuses on social and economic factors and thus does not consider psychographic factors or demographic factors like age and gender, thereby having a limited scope. Fourth, although the study has posited various constructs in the form of social and economic factors that influence consumers' impulse buying, it did not attempt to assert operationalisable constructs. Further, the findings of this study lack the quality of generalisability due to the lack of empirical investigation associated with them. However, it paves a scope for future consumer researchers to adopt the proposed research framework and empirically test it with operationalised constructs across various markets and geographies. Finally, another limitation of the research is its language. The research work is an amalgamation of papers published in English and therefore has not included relevant articles published in other languages.

Conclusion

The objective of this study was to perform an extensive review of the literature on impulse buying and identify gaps, potential research avenues and directions for future inquiry in this domain. The study's primary aim was to consolidate the existing literature on impulse buying and investigate its development over time. Therefore, we synthesised the available literature on impulse buying, analysing the theories, contexts, constructs and methodologies employed in this field.

Impulse buying drives a considerable chunk of sales in retail outlets. This research has found that reference groups (even co-shoppers), cultural practices and store experience are social factors that highly influence consumers' impulse purchases. Social factors directly affect consumers. The economic factors identified were the consumer's income level and price sensitivity. These economic factors have a significant influence on unplanned purchases. The higher the consumer's income, the higher the chance of impulse buying and vice versa. The more the consumer is price-sensitive, the more promotional tools are likely to influence impulse purchases.

This research article recommends strategies for retailers and marketers to leverage these factors and increase the likelihood of impulsive buying among customers, ultimately leading to increased revenue and sales volume. The article also provides future directions and a pragmatic view for marketers to take cues from to increase growth potential in the future.

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The corresponding author's affiliation is with IMT Hyderabad as an Assistant Professor in Marketing area. The first author was a PGDM student at IMT Hyderabad when the article was written. She has passed out successfully of IMT Hyderabad as of now.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors of this study declare that the article neither has been published nor is/will be under consideration for publication elsewhere until the editorial decision from BIMTECH Business Perspectives has been communicated.

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