# Impulse Buying

## Introduction

In the last few years, shopping has become an important leisure activity which defines people’s lifestyles and activities. Impulse buying involves unplanned buying where the customer buys products without evaluating the product. Consumers tend to buy products spontaneously and unreflectively. Mathai & Haridas (2014, p. 49) observed that the items bought on impulse are not in the list of the things that need to be bought before the consumer starts the shopping spree. Consumers involved in impulse buying experience a sudden urge to make an unplanned purchase after seeing the product in the retail outlet. Impulse buying is irrational and does not involve much thinking about the product or purchase behavior. Companies are experiencing increased impulse buying due to the unplanned and unnecessary purchases that people are involved in caused by the high number of promotions, personal selling behavior, advertising and public relations inside and outside the company environment. Mathai & Haridas (2014, p. 51) stated that various internal and external factors trigger impulse buying such as personal, economic, cultural and spatial factors. Impulse buying is spontaneous and takes less time to make the purchase decision and buying the item. The products bought on impulse are usually cheap. The factors that affect individual decision to engage in impulse buying vary between shoppers who consider buying the same item and when one shopper is considering purchasing the same item in different situations.

## The importance of impulse buying to marketers

Impulse buying is an important factor to buyers since it increases the sales in the company. Advertisers and promoters play an essential role since they are aware of the various characteristics of purchasers within their target market. Bhuvanaswari & Jaysree (2015, p. 85) suggests that marketers devise ways in which they can exploit the weaknesses of the purchasers to encourage impulse buying behavior. Increased sales in the firm mean high profits which is the focus of all organizations. Besides, high sales means that the organization has gained a competitive advantage against other firms in the industry hence fostering its sustainability in the market. This also reflects a bigger market share in the industry due to the increased sales.

The decision of consumers to engage in impulse buying can be explained through the limited information processor model which shows that consumer decisions usually violate the most fundamental principles of normative decision making. Verplanken & Ayana (2011, p, 200) reveals that through the advertisements and promotions used by the marketers, consumers do not get to understand the internal factors related to the product but are only involved in making simple decisions. Impulsive decisions are facilitated by the consumer heuristic processes since they want to be involved in the most uncomplicated decisions. In this case, consumers make impulsive purchases since specific factors in the product elicit joy, excitement and the urge to buy the product.

Impulse buying results from consumer loyalty and commitment to specific brands. Loyalty develops from consumer preference of certain products as compared to others. Consumer loyalty increases organizational sales hence high profitability within the firm. The brand is an important asset to the company which enhances the company’s strategic positioning and equity. Unique brand names increase consumer loyalty due to the repeat impulse buying behavior. This aspect can be explained by the consumer decision-making model which portrays the impulse buyer as the emotional consumer. Marketing strategies by the retailers include the product itself, the type of advertising and promotion used, pricing policy and distribution of products. Product advertising takes place in the macro and micro levels. Well planned and established marketing strategies increase the number of sales through impulse buying. In this case, the advertiser markets the products in a socio-cultural environment hence increasing the likelihood of capturing community members with the same tastes and preferences. The loyal customers further increase company sales through enhancing the goodness of the product to their family and friends through word of mouth.

Marketers targeting impulse buyers advertise and promote their products to specific sections of the society. The target audiences are the people who have the highest chance of buying their products. In most cases, the characteristics of the products define the target audience. Muruganantham & Ravi (2013, p. 151) stated that the income capacity of the target audience defines the target audience of specific products. This aspect can be explained through Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory. Maslow stated that people are driven to engage in specific activities in order of their priority. When targeting consumers using a pricing strategy, marketers involved in offering products for impulse buying target consumers with readily disposable cash. Such people are not very sensitive about the balance on their credit cards hence they can easily engage in impulse buying. Besides, they can also engage in repeat impulse buying behavior due to consumer loyalty and commitment to a specific brand.

## The questions and the group findings

### The relation between impulse buying and happiness

Most of the participants in our study stated that they make impulse buying decisions when they are happy or when seeking an activity that would increase their happiness. The first factor we needed to understand is the effects of happiness on impulse buying behavior. The happiness which involves a state of subjective wellbeing consists of positive affect, lack of negative affect and life satisfaction. Seinauskiene et al. (2015, p. 288) define impulse buying as an extraordinary and exciting consumer experience that is marked by a powerful and persistent urge to buy products immediately. A sudden and immediate purchase decision characterizes impulse buying without pre-purchase intentions or deliberations. Since the impulse buying behavior occurs rapidly, consumers cannot make conscious considerations of the alternatives they have or the future consequences of the purchase decision.

The decision to make impulse decisions is emotionally and cognitively driven and is characterized by an irresistible desire to purchase an appealing item. Amos et al. (2014, p. 88) stated that this happens due to the internal conflict between the increased desire to make an impulse decision and the lack of self-control to resist the urge to buy the product. Impulse buying also results from the strong urge of people to escape from their negative psychological states. People who usually make impulse buying decisions experience periods of long-term negative mood and low self-esteem. As such, these consumers may end up making more impulse buying decisions in future as a way of self-gift or reward to feel better. Badgaiyan & Verma (2014, p. 539) noted that impulse buying is therefore associated with the need to reduce the negative feelings related to stressful life events. This is the reason why positive emotional cues characterize consumer appeal behaviors such as advertisements and promotions.

### The relation between happiness and brand loyalty

The participants in our study also reported that they mostly made impulse decisions related to the brands they are committed to. Brand commitment involves a deep commitment towards items belonging to a specific brand. It is characterized by the repeated and continuous purchase of the same products despite the change in future situational factors and marketing efforts by other companies. Amos et al. (2014, p. 89) observed that brand loyalty is marked by attachment and results from an interplay between consumer behavioral and attitudinal loyalty. Attitudinal loyalty is characterized by the belief that the product is unique. It results from consumer brand loyalty and a positive attitude towards the brand.

When consumers have a strong attachment towards a specific brand, they will be more loyal to the products. Attitudinal loyalty is coupled with a behavioral loyalty which leads to repeat purchase behavior in future. The commitment towards high priced brands results from the fact that such brands boost the purchaser’s self-esteem hence leading to good feelings. Impulse buying results from the consumer need to identify with a specific brand and materialism. Seinauskiene et al. (2015, p. 289) point that impulse buying is a mild manifestation of compulsive buying where impulse buying occurs at the early stages while compulsive behavior represents the extreme upper ends in the behavioral continuum. Impulse buyers are involved in variety seeking behavior searching for excitement and novelty in their purchase decisions.

### The effect of income level and availability of credit cards on impulse buying decisions

Participants reported that high income levels increases one’s behavior towards impulse buying. This results since people with high incomes have readily disposable cash as opposed to people with low incomes. Vishnu & Ahmed (2013, p. 68) stated that individuals who can afford it mostly does impulse buying behavior. High-income levels are positively related to the desire to make impulse purchases. Purchasing products is dependent on consumer’s levels of income since those with high incomes are less sensitive to impulse buying as compared to the ones with low incomes. Alireza & Hasti (2011, p. 176) stated that people with high incomes are more exposed to impulse buying behavior as compared to the people earning low incomes. Impulse buying is also characterized by the increased use of credit cards since the credit card is the most efficient method of making purchases. In most cases, low-income earners do not have viable credit cards hence cannot engage in impulse buying behavior.

### The effect of specific store characteristics on impulse buying

Participants in the study revealed that certain characteristics such as inviting in-store displays, location and size of the store is an important determinant of impulse buying. Alireza & Hasti (2011, p. 179) posits that the store investment characteristics such as its size and location is an important determinant of consumer purchase behavior. The shopping patterns also appeal differently to different consumers. Stores that position their products in a way that they are easily reachable experience more impulse buying behavior from consumers. Regarding the window displays, the store outlook generates the need to engage in impulse buying among consumers. Consumers are usually attracted to stores that place exciting window displays that convert their window shopping escapades to purchase behavior. Besides, an inviting and attractive inside atmosphere fosters the impulse buying behavior. Vishnu & Ahmed (2013, p. 69) noted that a shopping environment with music, good customer care, promotions, broad shopping spaces and cleanliness triggers impulse buying behavior. These factors are related to consumer enjoyment as they purchase products from an outlet.

### The effect of unexpected discounts and lower prices on impulse buying

Participants reported that they were more triggered to engage in impulse buying when unexpected discounts and cheaper product prices met them. The availability of cheaper priced products and discounts persuades the consumers to purchase products. Karbasivar & Yarahmadi (2011, p. 176) observed that the surprisingly low prices trigger the impulse buying behavior among consumers. Impulse buying is also facilitated by the pairing of products where consumers are encouraged to buy due to the discounts offered in such arrangements. As such, consumers engage in impulse buying since they can get larger amounts of products at lower prices.

## Conclusion

Impulse buying defines the aspect of unplanned purchase behavior among consumers. The decision to make an impulse purchase is an important behavior that precedes the actual buying behavior. Impulse buying behavior is affected by the advertising strategies, sales promotions, public relations and personal selling decisions. Impulse buying is highly related to the emotional status of the buyer before the actual purchase. It is characterized by a sudden urge to buy an unplanned product immediately. Bhuvanaswari & Jaysree (2015, p. 93) observed that positive feelings of joy and happiness mark impulse buying. Impulse buying decisions are usually not thought over by the purchaser. As opposed to the decisions that are searched, deliberated on and an evaluation of the alternatives reached before making the purchase, impulse buying decisions occur suddenly and are facilitated by the emotional status of the individual at the time of purchase. Consumers experiencing negative emotional states make impulse buying decisions to uplift their moods. This portrays that impulse buying behavior is largely unconscious and is facilitated by specific affective forces that are beyond the control of an individual.

Impulse buying decisions are also facilitated by the external factors associated with the store. The external factors include the marketing cues and stimuli that are placed and controlled by the marketer to lure consumers into buying the product. These factors include the size of the store, space inside the store and how products are placed on the shelves. Karbasivar & Yarahmadi (2011, p. 179) stated that the marketing strategy involves the various sales and advertising strategies used to reach the target audience. An overly stimulating store environment is positively related to impulse buying behavior. The stimuli placed within the retail environment positively affects the consumer’s emotions hence leading to the decision to make a purchase. High arousal and overstimulation among the consumers reduce their ability for self-regulation hence increasing their impulse buying behavior.

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