

The Influence of Culture on Consumer Impulsive Buying Behavior

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Impulse buying generates over \$4 billion in annual sales volume in the United States. With the growth of e-commerce and television shopping channels, consumers have easy access to impulse purchasing opportunities, but little is known about this sudden, compelling, hedonically complex purchasing behavior in non-Western cultures. Yet cultural factors moderate many aspects of consumer's impulsive buying behavior, including self-identity, normative influences, the suppression of emotion, and the postponement of instant gratification. From a multi-country survey of consumers in Australia, United States, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia, our analyses show that both regional level factors (individualism–collectivism) and individual cultural difference factors (independent–interdependent self-concept) systematically influence impulsive purchasing behavior.

Impulsive consumer buying behavior is a widely recognized phenomenon in the United States. It accounts for up to 80% of all purchases in certain product categories (Abrahams, 1997; Smith, 1996), and it has been suggested that purchases of new products result more from impulse purchasing than from prior planning (Sfiligoj, 1996). A 1997 study found that an estimated \$4.2 billion annual store volume was generated by impulse sales of items such as candy and magazines (Mogelonsky, 1998). Paco Underhill, author of *Why We Buy: The Science of Shopping* (1999), affirms that many purchases are being made on the premises of stores themselves as customers give in to their impulses. Furthermore, technologies such as television shopping channels and the Internet expand consumers' impulse purchasing opportunities, increasing both the accessibility to products and services and the ease with which impulse purchases can be made.

Impulsive buying behavior is a sudden, compelling, hedonically complex purchasing behavior in which the rapidity of the impulse purchase decision process precludes

thoughtful, deliberate consideration of all information and choice alternatives (Bayley & Nancarrow, 1998; Rook 1987; Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1990; Weinberg & Gottwald, 1982). This description is largely based on interviews and surveys of Westerners.

The growth of e-commerce and the increasing consumer-orientation of many societies around the world offer expanding occasions for impulse purchasing, but little is known about impulsive buying behavior in non-Western societies. Most of the research on impulse buying focuses on consumers in the United States. A few studies have looked at consumers in Great Britain (Bayley & Nancarrow, 1998; Dittmar, Beattie, & Friese, 1995; McConatha, Lightner, & Deaner, 1994), and South Africa (Abratt & Goodey, 1990) and have found that United States consumers tend to be more impulsive than comparable British and South African samples. However, none of these studies examined explicitly the effect of cultural factors on impulse buying behavior.

A recent special issue of the *Journal of Consumer Psychology* dealt with cultural issues demonstrating the growing interest in cultural differences in consumer behavior and highlighted the importance of understanding the cultural context of consumer behavior in an increasing globalized marketplace (Maheswaran & Shavitt, 2000). We believe that

cultural factors significantly influence consumers' impulsive buying behavior. Specifically, the theory of individualism and collectivism holds important insights about consumer behavior that can help us to gain a better, more complete understanding of the impulsive buying phenomenon. Consistent with this interest in cultural differences, this article examines the effect of regional level (individualist–collectivist) and individual difference level (independent–interdependent self-concept) cultural factors on consumers' impulsive buying behavior. Utilizing a multi-country sample of over a thousand consumers from both Western and Eastern cultures, we investigate how culture systematically moderates impulse buying behavior. This is especially important as shopping is a major leisure activity in many East Asian countries (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998), including Singapore, Hong Kong, and Japan.

IMPULSE BUYING

Impulse buying is defined as “an unplanned purchase” that is characterized by “(1) relatively rapid decision-making, and (2) a subjective bias in favor of immediate possession” (Rook & Gardner, 1993, p. 3; see also Rook, 1987; Rook & Hoch, 1985). It is described as more arousing, less deliberate, and more irresistible buying behavior compared to planned purchasing behavior. Highly impulsive buyers are likely to be unreflective in their thinking, to be emotionally attracted to the object, and to desire immediate gratification (Hoch & Loewenstein, 1991; Thompson et al., 1990). These consumers often pay little attention to potential negative consequences that may result from their actions (Hoch & Loewenstein, 1991; Rook, 1987; see also O'Guinn & Faber, 1989).

Previous research conducted in the United States and Great Britain (individualist cultures) has shown that many factors influence impulsive buying behavior: the consumer's mood or emotional state (Donovan, Rossiter, Marcolyn, & Nesdale, 1994; Rook, 1987; Rook & Gardner, 1993; Weinberg & Gottwald, 1982), trait buying impulsiveness (Puri, 1996; Rook & Fisher, 1995; Weun, Jones, & Beatty, 1998), normative evaluation of the appropriateness of engaging in impulse buying (Rook & Fisher, 1995), self-identity (Dittmar et al., 1995), and demographic factors, such as age (e.g., Bellenger, Robertson, & Hirschman, 1978; Wood, 1998).

Several studies demonstrate the effect of consumers' moods and affective states on impulsive buying behavior. Rook and Gardner (1993) found that consumers' positive moods were more conducive to impulsive buying than negative moods, although impulse buying occurred under both types of moods. Beatty and Ferrell (1998) also found that a consumer's positive mood was associated with the urge to buy impulsively, while the impulse buyers in Weinberg and Gottwald's (1982) study were more “emotionalized” than nonbuyers. Donovan et al. (1994) discovered a positive association between consumers' feelings of pleasure in the shop-

ping environment and impulse buying behavior. In each of these studies, pleasurable feelings led to increased unplanned spending.

Cognitive, clinical, social, developmental, and consumer psychologists have studied the general trait of impulsiveness and impulse control (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1978; Eysenck, Pearson, Easting, & Allsopp, 1985; Helmers, Young, & Pihl, 1995; Hilgard, 1962; Logue & Chavarro, 1992; Logue, King, Cavarro, & Volpe, 1990; Mischel, 1961; Puri, 1996; Rawlings, Boldero, & Wiseman, 1995; Rook & Fisher, 1995; Weun et al., 1998). Trait impulsiveness is characterized by unreflective actions (Eysenck et al., 1985) and is significantly correlated with thrill-seeking (Weun et al., 1998), and the psychological need to maintain a relatively high level of stimulation (Gerbing, Ahadi, & Patton, 1987). Rook and Fisher (1995) recently developed a nine-item measure of trait buying impulsiveness that was significantly correlated with impulse buying behavior. In addition, they found that consumers' normative evaluation of the appropriateness of engaging in impulse buying in a particular situation moderates an individual's trait impulsiveness. Specifically, when consumers believe that impulse purchasing is socially acceptable, they act on their impulsive tendencies, but when it is socially unacceptable these tendencies may be thwarted.

The literature on compulsive shopping (Elliot, 1994), self-gifts (Mick, DeMoss, & Faber, 1992), and impulse purchases (Dittmar et al., 1995) highlights the role of perceived social image and the expression of self-identity in the purchase decision. Dittmar et al. (1995) hypothesized that impulse purchases were more likely to be items that symbolize the preferred or ideal self and as such should be affected by social categories such as gender. They argued that women value their possessions for emotional and relationship-oriented reasons, whereas men value their possessions for functional and instrumental reasons. The results of the study supported their hypothesis: Men reported more personal (independent) identity reasons for their purchases whereas women reported more social (relational) identity reasons.

An individual's impulsive behavior tendencies have also been related to demographic characteristics such as a consumer's age. Based on a national sample of adults in the United States, Wood (1998) found an inverse relationship between age and impulse buying overall. However, the relationship is non-monotonic — between the ages of 18 and 39 impulse buying increases slightly and thereafter declines. This is consistent with Bellenger et al. (1978) who found that shoppers under 35 were more prone to impulse buying compared to those over 35 years old. Research on trait impulsiveness indicates that younger individuals score higher on measures of impulsivity compared to older people (Eysenck et al., 1985; Helmers et al., 1995; Rawlings et al., 1995) and demonstrate less self-control than adults (Logue & Chavarro, 1992). Because impulsiveness is linked to emotional arousal, this finding concerning the relationship between age and impulsiveness is consistent with studies of emotions and emo-

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