

Cultural influences on consumer satisfaction with impulse and planned purchase decisions

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Abstract

This study examines factors thought to influence consumers' planned and impulse purchase decisions including subjective culture (individualist or collectivist consumers) and the presence of another person at the time of purchase. Data was collected in four countries — the USA, Australia, Singapore, and Malaysia. The results indicate that overall, consumers are differentially influenced by others in planned and impulse purchase situations, even after controlling for price. These differential influences can be explained by culture. Compared to more individualist consumers, more collectivist consumers are likely to be more satisfied with an impulse purchase when another person is present at the time of purchase.

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1. Introduction

Impulse purchasing has been recognized as a significant phenomenon in the United States. In 1997 alone, it was estimated that consumers spent \$4.2 billion on impulse items, including candy and magazines (Mogelonsky, 1998). Traditional retailers use techniques such as store design, product displays and package design to try to increase the number of impulse purchases (Hoyer and MacInnis, 1997). Furthermore, technologies such as television shopping channels, mobile phones 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.

Previous research has shown that numerous factors influence impulsive purchasing behavior, including the presence of others (Luo, 2005), the consumer's mood (e.g., Beatty and Ferrell, 1998; Rook and Gardner, 1993), trait impulsiveness (e.g., Jones et al., 2003; Rook and Fisher, 1995; Weun et al., 1998), product category impulsiveness (Jones et al., 2003), evaluation of the

appropriateness of engaging in impulse buying (e.g., Rook and Fisher, 1995), individual and environmental touch (Peck and Childers, 2006), self-identity (e.g., Dittmar et al., 1995; Lee and Kacen, 1999), cultural orientation (e.g., Kacen and Lee, 2002; Lee and Kacen, 1999), as well as demographic characteristics such as gender (e.g., Dittmar et al., 1995; Rook and Gardner, 1993) and age (e.g., Helmers et al., 1995; Wood, 1998). While some research has focused on the consequences of impulse purchasing to the individual and society, including the appropriateness of impulse purchasing and potential negative effects like financial problems, guilt, or social disapproval (e.g., Rook, 1987; Rook and Fisher, 1995; Rook and Hoch, 1985; O'Guinn and Faber, 1989), few studies have examined potential consequences to a firm, in terms of consumer satisfaction (e.g., Ariely and Levav, 2000).

Research illustrates that impulsive purchases are a significant phenomenon in the United States (e.g., Mogelonsky, 1998), yet little is known about the phenomenon in other countries. A few studies have examined aspects of impulse purchasing in other countries, including Australia, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore (Kacen and Lee, 2002), China (Li et al., 2004), Great Britain (Bayley and Nancarrow, 1998; Dittmar et al., 1995; McConatha et al., 1994), Singapore (Shamdasani and Rook, 1989), South Africa (Abratt and Goodey, 1990) and

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Vietnam (Mai et al., 2003). To date, no studies have been found to examine influences on customer satisfaction with impulse purchasing across cultures.

This study develops and tests the normative influences on consumers' satisfaction with their impulse and planned purchases across two Individualist (USA and Australia) and two Collectivist (Singapore and Malaysia) countries. This cross-cultural comparison is especially important as shopping is a major leisure activity in many Asian countries (Wong and Ahuvia, 1998).

The objective of this research is to investigate (1) whether impulsive purchasing behavior is more susceptible to normative situational influences than planned purchasing behavior and whether this susceptibility has implications for post-purchase product evaluation, and (2) whether culture moderates the influence of normative situational factors in an impulse purchase situation.

2. Impulse versus planned purchases

Impulse buying is defined as “an unplanned purchase” that was not anticipated or planned before the shopper entered the store (see Kollat and Willett, 1967; Prasad, 1975). It is characterized by “(1) relatively rapid decision-making, and (2) a subjective bias in favor of immediate possession” (Rook and Gardner, 1993, p. 3; see also Rook, 1987; Rook and Hoch, 1985). It is less deliberate, more arousing, and more irresistible buying behavior compared to planned purchases. Highly impulsive buyers are likely to be unreflective in their thinking, to be emotionally attracted to the object, and to desire immediate gratification (Hoch and Loewenstein, 1991; Thompson et al., 1990). Impulse purchasing is more spontaneous than cautious and more carefree than contemplative.

The major differences between impulse and planned purchases are the amount of information that can be sought prior to the purchase decision and the length of time that is spent on the decision process. D'Antoni and Shenson (1973, p. 68) have described these differences, explaining that with an impulse buying decision fewer “bits of information” are processed by the consumer and thus the time taken to decide upon purchase is relatively less compared to the “normal decision time lapse” for a similar non-impulse purchase decision. Because the impulse purchase decision is an in-store process (see Kollat and Willett, 1967; Prasad, 1975), information and choice alternatives are limited to those present in the immediate environment, which often precludes thoughtful, deliberate consideration of *all* information and choice alternatives (cf. Rook, 1987).

For an impulse purchase then, the only available information, aside from internal or memory-based information, is the external information available at the time of purchase (e.g., product displays and people in the store). This differs from a planned purchase in which all sources of information are available (e.g., internal and external sources including media, interpersonal and expert advice [see Dowling and Staelin, 1994]). Thus, it is likely that the information available inside a store will have a greater overall impact on an impulse purchase than a planned purchase.

Of the types of information available within a store, personal or neutral sources are likely to be perceived as more credible than marketer-driven point-of-purchase information. The dominance of word-of-mouth over other forms of advertising influence has been well documented in the literature (see Gilly et al., 1998 for a review). As such, it is worthwhile to examine the influence of others who are present at the time of purchase on consumers' purchasing behavior and post-purchase satisfaction.

Some studies have shown that the mere presence of others can influence an individual's purchase decisions (e.g., Ariely and Levav, 2000; Argo, Dahl and Manchanda, 2005). For instance, in a study of shoppers' behavior in a University bookstore, Argo et al. (2005) found that undergraduate students managed their self-presentation behaviors more when there were other shoppers present compared to when they were alone. Participants chose to interact with a “nerdy” display less when others were near. The presence of others also impacted brand choice; participants were more likely to choose an expensive high-quality brand when other shoppers were nearby compared to when they were distant. In addition, Ariely and Levav (2000) found that American consumers changed their choice behavior when they were in the presence of others, resulting in more variety-seeking behavior and less personal satisfaction with the outcome. They argued that these changes were a result of consumers trying to balance their individual goals with the group goals. As both these studies focused on North American (i.e., individualist) consumers, it would be interesting to examine possible differences in purchasing behavior and post-purchase satisfaction among consumers from individualist and collectivist cultures.

3. Individualism and collectivism

The theory of individualism and collectivism is likely to impact the relative influence of important others on a consumer's shopping behavior. Triandis (1995) defines collectivism as a social pattern that consists of individuals who see themselves as an integral part of one or more collectives, such as family and friends, and individualism as a social pattern that consists of individuals who see themselves as autonomous and independent of collectives. These social patterns manifest themselves in a variety of ways. People from more collectivist societies are more likely to be motivated by norms and duties imposed by the collective, to give priority to the goals of the collective and to try to emphasize their connectedness to the collective. People from more individualist cultures are more likely to be motivated by their own preferences, needs, and rights, to give priority to their personal goals and to emphasize their uniqueness and distinction from others. As one example of how these differences impact consumption choices, Aaker and Schmitt (2001) found that Americans have more positive attitudes toward brands with differentiation associations, i.e., brands that set one apart as an individual. Conversely, the Chinese have more positive attitudes toward brands with group assimilation associations, i.e., brands that demonstrate one's connection to others (Aaker and Schmitt, 2001).

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