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“THE DARK SIDE OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOR:  
WHY IMPULSE PURCHASES ARE BAD FOR  
BOTH CONSUMERS AND BRANDS”

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## ***INTRODUCTION***

In the contemporary economy, where consumer attention is increasingly fragmented and marketing strategies are more personalized than ever, purchasing behavior has undergone a significant transformation. Among the most notable shifts is the rise of impulse buying, a form of unplanned purchasing driven not by necessity, but by emotion, situational triggers, or persuasive marketing stimuli. Once considered a marginal or irrational behavior, impulse buying has evolved into a normalized and even encouraged practice across e-commerce platforms, social media, and physical retail environments. It is no longer an exception to rational consumption; it has become a strategic objective embedded into the design of user interfaces, promotional campaigns, and algorithmic recommendations.

At first glance, impulse buying appears harmless, an indulgence in a moment of emotional spontaneity, often framed by marketers as a form of self-reward. For businesses, it offers an efficient way to boost short-term sales and engagement. However, beneath the surface lies a more complex and problematic reality. Impulse buying often leads to regret, financial stress, dissatisfaction, and overconsumption for consumers. Simultaneously, for brands, overreliance on impulsive strategies can damage customer trust, increase product return rates, and weaken long-term loyalty. While the short-term gains may be appealing, the long-term consequences for both sides of the transaction are often overlooked.

This thesis sets out to critically examine the phenomenon of impulse buying with a specific focus on its negative implications for consumers and brands. It aims to challenge the dominant narrative that treats impulsive purchases as merely profitable or emotionally satisfying events. Instead, it presents a dual perspective that considers both the psychological mechanisms that drive impulse behavior and the strategic marketing techniques that reinforce it. In doing so, this study reveals how impulsive consumption is shaped not only by internal emotional needs, but also by external forces.

To achieve this, the thesis is structured into three core chapters. The first chapter provides a conceptual and historical overview of the phenomenon of impulse buying, highlighting its evolution and its increasing relevance in modern markets. The second chapter reviews the main psychological and behavioral theories that explain why consumers buy

impulsively, with particular attention to motivation, self-control and cognitive dissonance. Finally, the third chapter presents the empirical research conducted through a survey, offering data-driven insights into the actual experiences, regrets and perceptions of consumers who engage in impulse buying.

By combining theoretical analysis with empirical findings, the objective of this research is to contribute to a more critical understanding of impulse buying, not only as a marketing opportunity, but as an ethically and economically significant issue. Ultimately, this thesis argues that a more responsible, balanced, and transparent approach to consumer engagement is needed if both brands and individuals are to benefit in the long term.

## CHAPTER 1: *IMPULSE BUYING IN MODERN MARKETS*

### 1.1 *Introduction*

Impulse buying represents a pervasive phenomenon in today's consumer behavior landscape. Characterized by unplanned and spontaneous purchases, often driven by emotional rather than rational decision-making, impulse buying behavior is a key driver of retail revenues. However, the effects of impulse purchases are not one-sided. Indeed, while businesses have historically thrived on the immediate profits from these purchases, recent research sheds light on the negative repercussions for both consumers and brands.

Impulse buying - long considered a profitable strategy for retailers - has evolved into a more complex and, in many cases, problematic aspect of modern consumerism. Fueled by sophisticated marketing techniques and digital technologies, this behavior now raises serious concerns regarding both consumer well-being and long-term consequences for brands.

As *Kaur and Sharma* (2024) emphasize in their systematic literature review, digital environments intensify impulsivity by enabling instant gratification, eroding reflection, and promoting hedonic motivations.<sup>1</sup> What once occurred sporadically within physical retail spaces, now takes place continuously across digital ecosystems such as mobile apps, e-commerce platforms, and, notably, social media.

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the concept of impulse buying, tracing its historical evolution, examining its current trends and how the digital age has reshaped this behavior, and ultimately evaluating its dual impact on consumers and brands.

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<sup>1</sup> Kaur, K., & Sharma, T. (2024). Impulse buying in the digital age: An exploration using systematic literature review approach. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 23(5), 2553–2584.

## 1.2 Evolution of the concept of Impulse Buying

The concept of impulse buying has undergone a significant evolution over the past seven decades, reflecting broader shifts in both marketing theory and the understanding of consumer behavior. Originally regarded as a deviation from rational economic decision-making, impulse buying has gradually been recognized as a complex and multidimensional phenomenon influenced by cognitive, emotional, and situational factors as well as growing technological advancements.

The first academic interest in impulse buying emerged in the mid-20th century, with early studies on consumer behavior characterizing impulsive purchases as merely irrational acts. *Clover* (1950) was among the first to study impulse buying systematically, defining it simply as any purchase made without prior planning, framing it as a deviation from the rational, utilitarian model of consumer decision-making prevalent in classical economic theories.<sup>2</sup> In these early models, consumers were expected to act as logical agents, methodically evaluating costs and benefits. Indeed, classical economics viewed consumers as rational agents who should, ideally, make deliberate and calculated choices based on maximizing utility, analytically weighting advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, impulse buying was seen more as a failure of rational control rather than an intrinsic part of the consumer experience.

Starting from *Clover's* work, *Sid Hawkins Stern* (1962), in his article titled “*The Significance of Impulse Buying Today*”, introduced a more nuanced classification of impulse buying, distinguishing between different types of impulsive behaviors<sup>3</sup>:

- 1) *Pure impulse buying*. The most easily distinguishable kind of impulse buying. It is entirely emotional.
- 2) *Reminder impulse buying*. Reminder impulse buying is triggered by product reminders. It occurs when the consumer sees a product and remembers

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<sup>2</sup> Clover, V. T. (1950). *Relative Importance of Impulse Buying in Retail Stores*. *Journal of Marketing*, 15(1), 66–70.

<sup>3</sup> Stern, H. (1962). *The Significance of Impulse Buying Today*. *Journal of Marketing*, 26(2), 59–62

information about the item and a previous intention or decision to buy it. Remembered prior experience with the product or knowledge of it is the key factor, consequently inducing to the impulse purchase.

- 3) *Suggestion impulse buying*. It is motivated by a product's usefulness upon discovery. The buyer in this case has no prior knowledge of the product. It occurs when the shopper sees a product for the first time and visualizes a need for it.
- 4) *Planned impulse buying*. It refers to planned purchases made in response to special deals or offers.

*Stern's* analysis highlighted that impulse buying was not entirely chaotic or irrational but could be strategically influenced by external stimuli within the retail environment. This classification revealed that impulse behavior could emerge from both internal emotional drives and external situational cues, and that not all impulsive purchases were entirely devoid of planning. *Stern's* work thus opened the door to a more sophisticated understanding of impulse buying as a spectrum rather than a singular, irrational act.

A turning point in the theoretical conceptualization of impulse buying occurred in the 1980s and 1990s. With the rise of behavioral economics and the increasing influence of psychology in marketing research, scholars began to focus more deeply on the emotional and cognitive mechanisms behind impulsive behavior.

Researchers such as *Rook* (1987) emphasized the emotional and hedonic aspects of impulse buying, defining it as a sudden, compelling, and hedonically complex purchasing behavior in which the rapidity of the decision-making process precludes thoughtful consideration<sup>4</sup>. *Rook's* conceptualization moved the discussion beyond simple irrationality and emphasized how significant is the role of affective states, such as excitement, pleasure and desire, in driving impulse purchases. According to *Rook's* research, impulse purchases often involve powerful emotional experiences, ranging from excitement and desire to anxiety and regret, occurring rapidly and often overwhelming rational and logical thought. *Rook's* work effectively shifted the focus of studies on

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<sup>4</sup> Rook, D. W. (1987). *The Buying Impulse*. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 14(2), 189–199.



impulse buying behavior, from external stimuli alone to internal psychological states, from the product to the consumer, suggesting that impulsive behavior could be both self-initiated and environmentally triggered.

Later, advances in psychology and behavioral economics provided richer insights into the mechanisms behind impulse buying. Indeed, impulse purchases were no longer conceptualized solely as irrational deviations from logical decision-making. One of the most significant shifts was the recognition that impulse buying may function as an affective regulation strategy.

Researchers such as *Dholakia* (2000) incorporated insights from theories of self-control, cognitive dissonance and emotional regulation, suggesting that impulse purchases can serve as a coping mechanism for negative emotional states such as stress, boredom, loneliness or sadness.<sup>5</sup> From this perspective, impulse purchases are not merely irrational but can be interpreted as attempts to manage emotional discomfort, which is a dynamic particularly relevant in environments of high uncertainty or personal insecurity. Consequently, the act of buying provides not only a material reward, but also a momentary sense of relief or distraction, reestablishing emotional equilibrium.

A further significant step in the evolution of the concept of impulse purchases concerns the formulation of new cognitive theories of impulse buying, emphasizing the role of dual-process models in consumer decision-making. *Daniel Kahneman's "Thinking, Fast and Slow"* (2011)<sup>6</sup> is regarded as one of the most important works on the psychology of judgment and behavioral economics ever published. In his work, *Kahneman* affirms that human thinking operates through two distinct but interrelated systems. System 1 is fast, automatic, intuitive, and emotional; and it is highly susceptible to external cues. In contrast, System 2 is slower, effortful, analytical, and deliberate, responsible for self-control and complex reasoning. According to this framework, impulse buying behaviors are largely the result of System 1 dominance, a state where intuitive and emotional

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<sup>5</sup> Dholakia, U. M. (2000). *Temptation and Resistance: An Integrated Model of Consumption Impulse Formation and Enactment*. *Psychology & Marketing*, 17(11), 955–982.

<sup>6</sup> Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

reactions guide behavior before System 2 has time to intervene. In contexts where consumers are bombarded with persuasive stimuli, impulsivity increases, leading to unplanned purchases.

The advent of internet, mobile technology and social media played an instrumental role in the evolution of the concept of impulse buying. In online environments, consumers face an unprecedented level of exposure to persuasive stimuli, often personalized through sophisticated algorithms which intensified impulsive behaviors. The nature of impulse purchases has changed significantly as a result of the implementation of features such as one-click purchasing, personalized recommendations, and scarcity-based marketing. Without the physical constraints that used to accompany in-store shopping, digital platforms promote impulsive consumer behavior by facilitating immediacy and lowering barriers to purchase. Moreover, the psychological triggers for impulse buying have been amplified in digital spaces. Social validation cues such as "X people are viewing this item", gamified loyalty programs, and real-time notifications all elicit emotional reactions that result in impulsive purchases.

To conclude, the evolution of the concept of impulse buying reflects a transition from viewing it as merely irrational behavior toward recognizing it as an emotionally charged, situational, and digitally amplified phenomenon, consequently reflecting the increasing complexity of modern consumer behavior landscape. Understanding this evolution is essential for analyzing how modern marketing strategies leverage impulsivity and for addressing the numerous concerns increasingly raised by scholars and policymakers as regards both consumers and brands.

### ***1.3 Impulse Purchases in the Digital Age***

The digital age has profoundly transformed the landscape of consumer behavior, particularly in the realm of impulse purchasing. Digitalization has not only expanded access to consumer goods but also redefined the mechanisms behind impulse buying, extending its reach from physical stores to e-commerce platforms, mobile applications, and social media. Today, consumers are immersed in algorithmically curated

environments that exploit emotional, cognitive, and social drivers to encourage impulsive purchases. In this context, impulse buying is no longer a peripheral behavior, but a core mechanism embedded within online retail architecture, a complex phenomenon influenced by the pervasive nature of the digital world. The introduction of artificial intelligence and features such as personalized feeds, influencer marketing, live-stream shopping events, limited-time offers and "swipe-to-buy" functionalities have created an environment where consumers are constantly nudged toward spontaneous consumption. Digital features, like those previously mentioned, represent strategic tools aimed at bypassing rational deliberation, exposing consumers to highly personalized stimuli, thereby reducing the cognitive barriers to impulsive purchasing decisions.

### ***1.3.1 Dark Patterns in Online Shopping***

Dark patterns, defined as design features or elements that covertly manipulate shoppers into making suboptimal decisions, are particularly prevalent in e-commerce websites. Today, the integration of manipulative design strategies raises significant ethical concerns. The most frequently employed dark patterns and manipulative design features include the following<sup>7</sup>:

- *Fake scarcity*. The display of false information about low stock levels or high demand. It creates a sense of limited supply or availability around a product or service, pushing shoppers to act and buy quickly out of fear of missing out.

One of the most evident cases is represented by the Shopify app called “Sales & Stock Counter”, created by a company named *HeyMerch*.

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<sup>7</sup> Brignull, H., Leiser, M., Santos, C., & Doshi, K. (2023, April 25). “*Deceptive patterns – user interfaces designed to trick you*”. *deceptive.design*. <https://www.deceptive.design/>

It allows store owners to show false messages of low stock or fake sales numbers (Figure 1). In addition, the company provides also a guide outlining how to use the app effectively (Figure 2).



Figure 1. Source: [Deceptive.Design](https://deceptive.design)

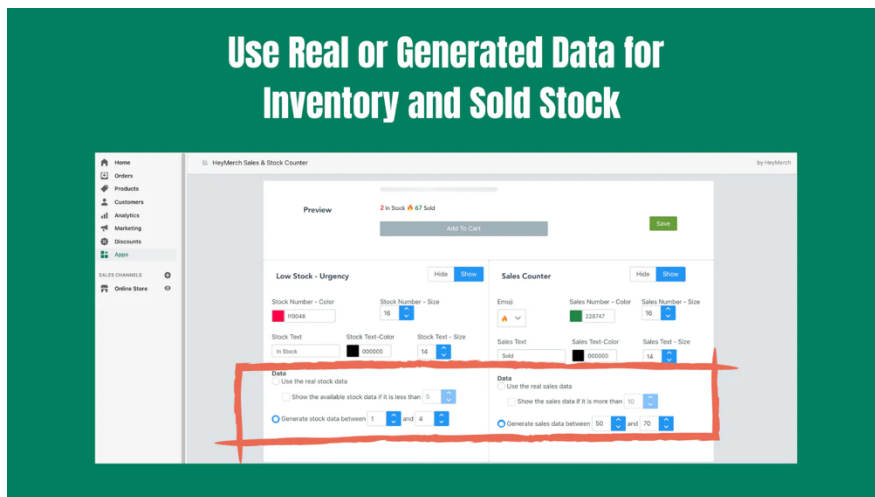


Figure 2. Source: [Deceptive.Design](https://deceptive.design)

- *Countdown timers.* Limited-time discounts with a countdown timer urging consumers to act and buy quickly, consequently inducing to impulsive purchases conducted in a state of time pressure and urgency, in which the consumer is less able to critically evaluate information. A perfect example is *Zalando*, which frequently employs countdown timers to accelerate purchasing decisions and reduce the time available for a thoughtful consideration, thus increasing the likelihood of impulse purchases.
- *Drip pricing.* A headline price is advertised at the beginning of a purchasing transaction, followed by the incremental disclosure of additional fees, taxes or charges. The objective is to attract consumers through a misleadingly low headline price without revealing the actual final price until the consumer has invested time and effort in the purchase process and decided to buy. In particular, drip pricing has been notably prevalent in industries such as sports and entertainment ticketing, air transportation and online retailing.
- *Confirmshaming:* The use of shame or guilt to induce users to act or buy impulsively, thus influencing their decision-making process. This specific type of deceptive pattern, implemented by a significant number of apps or website, aims at making shoppers feel guilty or bad about choosing not to engage with the offered product, service or feature. It is often applied through the use of manipulative language appearing in pop-ups or opt-out notifications.

*Sin et al. (2022)*<sup>8</sup> found that these patterns exploit cognitive biases and are especially effective at triggering impulse purchases during states of low self-control or emotional vulnerability. The group of researchers conducted an experimental study in which participants were exposed to common scarcity messages such as “*Only 3 left!*” and “*In*

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<sup>8</sup> Sin, R., Harris, T., Nilsson, S., & Beck, T. (2022). *Dark patterns in online shopping: Do they work and can nudges help mitigate impulse buying?* Behavioural Public Policy, 9, 61–87.

*high demand!*”, and their purchasing impulsivity was compared to the one of a control group not subjected to dark patterns. Results obtained highlighted how all dark pattern conditions led to significantly higher levels of impulse buying compared to the control condition. Scarcity messages appeared to be particularly powerful in creating urgency, thus accelerating decision-making and reducing reflection time. Therefore, individuals under the influence of dark patterns resulted to be more likely to make unplanned purchases.

However, even if for companies implementing on their websites and apps such tactics it may results in gains in revenues or engagement in the short-term, long-term consequences, including user dissatisfaction, reputational damage and legal penalties, must be taken into consideration.

### ***1.3.2 The Role of Social Media and Parasocial Interactions***

Social media platforms have become central players in shaping the contemporary form of impulse buying, especially among digital-native consumers. Through their integration of entertainment, communication, and commerce, platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Twitch and Pinterest have blurred the boundaries between browsing, social interaction, and consumption. Central to this phenomenon is the rise of influencers, who function as hybrid figures, both content creators and brand intermediaries, capable of exerting significant influence on consumer decision-making.

Unlike traditional advertisements, influencer content is often perceived as authentic, relatable and personal, facilitating the development of “*parasocial interactions*”, a concept introduced by the two American sociologists *Donald Horton* and *Richard Wohl* in 1956 <sup>9</sup>. The term refers to situations in which viewers or listeners start to consider

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<sup>9</sup> Horton, D.; Wohl, R. (1956). "Mass communication and para-social interaction: Observation on intimacy at a distance".

media personalities as friends, even without direct or significant interaction with them. A parasocial interaction, if amplified, becomes a “*parasocial relationship*”, one-sided emotional bonds in which followers feel connected to individuals such as influencers and celebrities, as if they are engaged in a reciprocal relationship with them. In reality, this relationship is merely an illusory experience<sup>10</sup>. However, these bonds create a sense of trust, intimacy, and familiarity that makes consumers more receptive to product recommendations, which are perceived by followers more as personal suggestions than actual sales tactics.

A study conducted by *Chandra and Kurniawati (2024)*<sup>11</sup> confirms that emotional attachment to influencers significantly affects impulse buying behaviors. Influencers considered to be sincere and relatable tend to elicit stronger persuasive effects, particularly among Generation Z, thus influencing purchasing decisions of young followers. Therefore, influencers act not merely as endorsers but as social actors, shaping consumers’ perception and behavior through curated identities.

Further evidence is provided by the study conducted by *Muhammad et al. (2024)*<sup>12</sup> who used the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model, to explain how influencer content, platform design and product presentation on Instagram generate strong affective responses that increase the likelihood of spontaneous purchasing. The SOR framework was introduced by *Mehrabian and Russell (1974)*<sup>13</sup> to explain how external stimuli influence internal psychological states, which then lead to specific behaviors. In the context of Instagram, stimuli such as influencer promotions and targeted advertisements

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<sup>10</sup> Chung, S., & Cho, H. (2017). Fostering parasocial relationships with celebrities on social media: Implications for celebrity endorsement. *Psychology & Marketing*, 34(4), 481–495.

<sup>11</sup> Chandra, T. H., & Kurniawati, K. (2024). Impact of influencers as interactive marketing influencing impulse purchase behavior. *Riwayat: Educational Journal of History and Humanities*, 6(2), 123–135.

<sup>12</sup> Muhammad, A., et al. (2024). *Stimulus–Organism–Response Model in Social Commerce: The Role of Influencers in Impulse Buying*. *International Journal of E-Commerce Studies*, 9(1), 22-37.

<sup>13</sup> Mehrabian, A. and Russell, J.A. (1974), *An Approach to Environmental Psychology*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.

act as powerful triggers for impulse buying. The "organism" component in this study refers to internal emotional and psychological responses, factors such as pleasure, arousal, and impulsiveness that mediate the effects of these stimuli. The "response" then manifests in consumer actions, such as clicking on ads, adding items to a cart, or completing a purchase.

Among contemporary digital platforms, TikTok has rapidly positioned itself as one of the most influential apps and a massive sale channel. Hashtags such as *#TikTokMadeMeBuyIt* have become a symbol of the persuasive power that TikTok has on its users. The strength of these hashtags lies in their ability to create a sense of social proof and community, consequently driving impulse purchases. Users actively share their purchases by posting videos on the platform while unboxing, trying and reviewing products, extending the reach of an ecosystem of user-generated marketing that enhance trust in viewers and encourages others to do the same.

Moreover, recent studies have highlighted the significant role of TikTok's recommendation algorithm in shaping consumer behavior. *Ren Zhou (2024)*<sup>14</sup> demonstrated that TikTok's advanced integration of collaborative filtering and content-based filtering effectively personalized content distribution, hence increasing user engagement and democratizing content visibility. This increased engagement creates a fertile environment for impulse buying, as users are frequently exposed to highly tailored product content, even from creators they do not follow or have never heard of.

According to the research of *Melgarejo-Espinoza, Gonzales-Cruz, Chavez-Perez, and Iparraguirre-Villanueva (2025)*<sup>15</sup>, content creators have become essential allies for brands in promoting products and services on TikTok. Unlike traditional advertisements, which are often seen as direct sales attempts, content created by influencers feels more personal

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<sup>14</sup> Zhou, Ren. (2024). Understanding the Impact of TikTok's Recommendation Algorithm on User Engagement. *International Journal of Computer Science and Information Technology*. 3. 201-208

<sup>15</sup> Melgarejo-Espinoza, R., Gonzales-Cruz, M., Chavez-Perez, J., & Iparraguirre-Villanueva, O. (2025). Impact of the TikTok algorithm on the effectiveness of marketing strategies: A study of consumer behavior and content preferences. *International Journal of Advanced Computer Science and Applications (IJACSA)*, 16(2). 147–156.



and genuine. Furthermore, followers often engage directly with influencers through comments, likes, and shares, which fosters a sense of community and belonging.

To conclude, it is undeniable that a significant shift has occurred from traditional advertising to a more authentic and relatable form of influence, in which individuals, rather than brands, function as the primary drivers of purchasing decisions.

### ***1.3.3 Ethical Challenges in Influencer Marketing***

Influencers undoubtedly play a key role in driving sales and engagement. However, the ethical and psychological implications of this marketing model are increasingly being questioned. A growing concern is represented by the promotion of skincare, wellness, or dermatological products by influencers without appropriate knowledge or qualifications. As stated by Dr. Cheng and Dr. Galamgam<sup>16</sup>, board-certified dermatologists and pediatric dermatologists of UCLA Health<sup>17</sup>, many children request visits themselves to get advice on their skincare routine, largely driven by what they have heard and seen on social media. In many cases, followers purchase items unsuitable for their skin type or health condition, merely because a trusted influencer recommended them, thereby increasing the risk of developing skin irritations or allergic dermatitis. This phenomenon reflects a broader trend of performative expertise, where influencers adopt roles they are not qualified to fulfill. On TikTok and Instagram the hashtag *#SephoraKids* reveals children recorded while going to the popular cosmetics store *Sephora* to buy makeup or skincare products. Children represent a significant portion of social media users, and their extensive engagement with these platforms is in turn, exposing these young users to influencers paid by brands to use

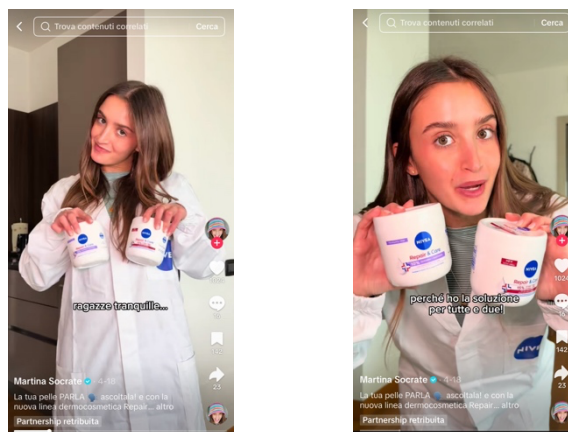
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<sup>16</sup> UCLA Health. (2024, January 25). “Kids exploring skincare may be at risk from influencers hyping incorrect products”. <https://www.uclahealth.org/news/article/kids-skincare-dermatologists-advice>

<sup>17</sup> The public healthcare system affiliated with the *University of California, Los Angeles*, located in Los Angeles, California.

and promote beauty and skincare products<sup>18</sup>. Moreover, alarming examples have emerged on platforms like TikTok, where several brands have reportedly encouraged influencers to wear white lab coats in sponsored videos to create the visual illusion of medical authority and reliability. These campaigns are designed to transmit a false sense of professional credibility, thereby increasing consumer confidence in the promoted products. However, many of the individuals featured in such content are not licensed professionals, and these tactics raise serious ethical concerns about deception and consumer manipulation, especially in health-related domains.

A notable example can be found in a recent partnership between *Nivea* and a famous Italian content creator, in which the influencer presents new products of the brand to users on the platform while wearing a white lab coat featuring the logo of the brand, despite having no formal qualification in the field (Figure 3 and Figure 4). These practices undermine the authenticity that initially made influencer marketing effective and blurs the boundary between honest recommendation and transactional promotion. Consequently, these strategies not only contribute to impulsive purchasing behaviors, but also propagate misinformation and erode consumer trust.



**Figures 3 and 4. Source:** *Martina Socrate*, Official TikTok account

<https://vm.tiktok.com/ZNdjnwpc/>

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<sup>18</sup> BBC. (2024, January 22). “Sephora Kids” and the booming business of beauty products for children. <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20240119-sephora-kids-and-the-booming-business-of-beauty-products-for-children>

## 1.4 Trends

Several emerging trends in consumer behavior are significantly reshaping the landscape of impulse buying in modern markets. Analyzing these evolving patterns is crucial to better comprehend the complexity and dynamics of impulse-driven consumption in the contemporary world.

The increasing prevalence of impulse buying among younger individuals, especially consumers belonging to the Gen Z, represents a significant trend in modern consumer behavior. Studies indicate that digital natives are more susceptible to spontaneous purchases, driven by constant exposure to curated content, targeted advertising, and the immediacy of mobile commerce platforms. According to the *European Consumer Payment Report 2024*<sup>19</sup>, more than half of Gen Z consumers (53%) report making unplanned purchases directly through social platforms such as TikTok and Instagram. In addition, recent studies show that 43% of Generation Z members prefer to search products on TikTok, rather than traditional research engines such as Google, underlining a significant shift in purchasing patterns of young consumers<sup>20</sup>.

In addition, users increasingly demonstrate a greater preference for short and visually engaging content<sup>21</sup>. Numerous studies have shown that members of Generation Z exhibit a significantly shorter attention span compared to previous generations. According to data from *Golden Steps ABA* <sup>22</sup>(2025), the average attention span of a Gen Z individual is approximately 8 seconds. For context, in the year 2000, the average adult attention span was estimated at 12 seconds, representing a decline of roughly 33% over the past two

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<sup>19</sup> Intrum. (2024, November 18). “*European Consumer Payment Report 2024*”. <https://www.intrum.com/insights/publications/ecpr-2024/>

<sup>20</sup> F. Campines, “*Impacto del mercadeo en Tik Tok en el comportamiento de compra del consumidor*,” *Revista Colón Ciencias, Tecnología y Negocios*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 20–33, Jan. 2024.

<sup>21</sup> Melgarejo-Espinoza, R., Gonzales-Cruz, M., Chavez-Perez, J., & Iparraguirre-Villanueva, O. (2025). Impact of the TikTok algorithm on the effectiveness of marketing strategies: A study of consumer behavior and content preferences. *International Journal of Advanced Computer Science and Applications (IJACSA)*, 16(2). 147–156.

<sup>22</sup> Golden Steps ABA. (2025, March 4). “*Average Human Attention Span (Statistics)*”. <https://www.goldenstepsaba.com/resources/average-attention-span>

decades. Furthermore, research indicates that only 17% of page views last more than 4 seconds, indicating how quickly individuals today lose interest in content that fails to grab their attention. This notable reduction in attention span has profound implications for consumer behavior, particularly in the context of impulse purchasing. The preference for short and visually stimulating content aligns with the design of digital platforms such as TikTok and Instagram. In such environments purchasing becomes a reactionary process, thereby increasing the frequency and intensity of impulsive consumption. Data from *Adobe Express*<sup>23</sup> (2024) indicates that nearly 1 in 4 consumers have made a purchase within three minutes of viewing a product on TikTok. Indeed, short-form video content currently represents one of the strongest drivers of impulse purchasing. According to the research conducted by *Adobe Express*, 3 out of 8 users have made a purchase based on the content they saw on a short-video platform. Moreover, 20% of these purchases were impulse purchases made within an hour of viewing the short-form content. More than half of participants (51%) considers TikTok's short-form videos as the main cause of impulse purchases. Additionally, the influence of such platforms on impulse purchasing spans across income segments, with 84% of consumers declaring that platforms like TikTok and Instagram influence at least one of their purchasing decisions each week. However, this influence was found to be more pronounced among users with lower income. This suggests that lower-income consumers are particularly vulnerable to the persuasive power of impulse-buying triggers on social media platforms, potentially leading to unsustainable spending patterns.

Moreover, numerous product categories are notably affected today by impulse buying tendencies.

Fashion is one of the leading areas for impulse purchases. The constant exposure to new trends, popular influencers, and limited time offers fuels consumers' desire to make quick purchasing decisions. Data from *GWI*<sup>24</sup> indicates that Gen Z members are 64% more

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<sup>23</sup> Adobe Express. (2024, August 9). "Short-form video: Top platforms, preferences, and purchasing patterns". <https://www.adobe.com/express/learn/blog/top-short-form-video-platforms#purchase-behavior-analysis>

<sup>24</sup> GWI. (2024). "US Gen Z shopping habits & retail trends for 2024". <https://www.gwi.com/blog/3-us-gen-z-retail-trends>

likely than other generations to want others to notice and like what they are wearing. Fast fashion retailers have capitalized on these dynamics by leveraging social media to promote time-limited sales, flash deals and competitive pricing to encourage impulse purchases especially among young consumers.

The beauty and skincare market represents another major category for impulse buying, given the strong interest of especially young generations in the use of beauty products. The growing popularity of skincare trends, together with the expansion of the cosmetic product market, are significantly influencing consumer behavior. Even in the absence of an actual necessity for these products, the presence of discounts and trends that happening on social media encourages consumers to make purchases<sup>25</sup>.

Moreover, the food and beverages area continues to be one of the product categories in which impulsive consumer behaviors are more evident. In supermarkets, the most significant triggers for impulse buying include in-store promotions, strategic product placements, and visually engaging displays, particularly near the checkout counter. However, what was once limited to physical retail environments, today is strongly present also on e-commerce platforms like *Amazon Fresh*, and food delivery services such as *UberEats*, *JustEat*, *Glovo* and *Deliveroo*. According to data from the *Rome Business School* (2024)<sup>26</sup>, food delivery reaches more than 71% of Italians, mainly through *Just Eat* (51%), *Glovo* (41%) and *Deliveroo* (39%). The convenience of these platforms, combined with the allure of limited time offers, discounts, and visually appealing product images, has made food and beverages increasingly susceptible to impulse buying.

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<sup>25</sup> Najla, Khansa & Hardi, Kurnia & Hidayat, Zahra & Oktaviani, Siti & Purnama, Indah. (2025). Impulse Buying Behavior Of Skincare Products On The Marketplace In Gen Z. International Student Conference on Business, Education, Economics, Accounting, and Management (ISC-BEAM). 3. 1910-1924. 10.21009/ISC-BEAM.013.143.

<sup>26</sup> Rome Business School. (2024, August 1). "Food sector in Italy. Consumption trends and business models." <https://romebusinessschool.com/blog/food-sector-in-italy-consumption-trends-and-business-models/>

In addition, health and fitness-related products, including activewear, wearable fitness technology and home workout equipment, have also become a growing target for impulse buying. With the rise of fitness influencers and wellness culture, consumers are more likely to make impulsive purchases based on recommendations or product promotions made by fitness influencers, athletes and lifestyle coaches. Visually appealing content showing transformations, “what I eat in a day” clips, or “must-have” gym essentials reinforces a sense of urgency in consumers. Brands such as *Puma*, *Nike* and *Lululemon* have strategically capitalized on the rise of health-conscious consumerism and impulse buying behavior driven by social media. By regularly launching limited-edition collections and collaborations, these brands successfully create a sense of exclusivity and scarcity, generating excitement among consumers.

Particular attention should be given also to the electronics category. Traditionally, electronics products have been viewed as high-involvement purchases, typically requiring extensive research, comparison, and thoughtful decision-making due to their cost and technical complexity. However, recent trends reveal a significant shift in this pattern, with impulse buying behavior increasingly affecting this sector. One of the primary drivers of this change is the widespread use of aggressive promotional tactics, including flash sales, time-limited discounts, and algorithm-driven personalized offers on major e-commerce platforms like *Amazon*. These tactics are strategically designed to create a sense of urgency, encouraging consumers to make quick, emotion-driven decisions without the usual deliberation. For instance, events like Amazon Prime Day have become significant drivers of impulse purchases, with electronics often topping the list of unplanned buys.

### ***1.5 Impact on Brands and Consumers***

The phenomenon of impulse buying has reshaped the relationship between brands and consumers. However, the perception of impulse buying as a beneficial practice for businesses is increasingly being challenged by evidence highlighting its adverse long-term consequences for both brands and consumers.

As regards consumers, the short-term satisfaction of making an impulse purchase is often followed by feelings of regret, remorse and guilt. According to *Charles Nicholls*, CEO of *SimplicityDX Inc.* <sup>27</sup>, 56% of consumers express regret over their most recent online impulse purchase, and the 45% of consumers kept the product despite experiencing regret after the purchase. This implies that more than half of consumers live with products they regret buying, whether because they no longer consider them desirable or necessary, could not afford them or view them negatively in relation to the brand. As highlighted by *Nicholls*, impulse purchases are often made without the research, comparison or careful consideration needed, thus diminishing consumer trust in their own decision-making processes.

Furthermore, frequent impulsive purchases may lead to financial strain, especially if made online, since most platforms encourage the discovery of new products and services rather than need-based shopping. Consequently, individuals may accumulate products they do not need or use, contributing to poor budgeting, overspending and even debt accumulation in extreme cases. As a result, consumers may find themselves caught in a cycle of short-term satisfaction followed by long-term dissatisfaction, damaging their financial and psychological well-being.

On a superficial level, brands seem to only benefit from impulse purchasing behaviors of consumers. However, while impulse buying can lead to an immediate increase in sales, the long-term consequences can be less favorable.

Impulse buyers tend to exhibit a higher propensity for returning products, which ultimately undermines the profitability of brands. The process of handling returns incurs substantial costs, not only due to logistical expenses but also because of the additional strain placed on customer service operations, lowering also the overall efficiency of the supply chain. For numerous brands, returns represent a hidden expense that significantly diminishes profit margins.

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<sup>27</sup> Forbes. (2024, November 13). “*Why Impulse Purchases Are Bad For Both Consumers And Brands*”. <https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbesbusinesscouncil/2024/11/13/why-impulse-purchases-are-bad-for-consumers-and-brands/>

Similarly, given the unpredictable nature of viral content on social media, sudden increases in demand might lead brands to experience delayed deliveries, stock shortages or overextended customer support, damaging both the experience of the customer and the reputation of the brand. Moreover, when individuals make purchases driven solely by urgency or perceived scarcity, such purchases might fail to meet consumers' expectations. As a result, instead of fostering brand loyalty, impulse buying often leads to customer dissatisfaction and shoppers less likely to become repeat customers. Indeed, brands that fail to foster deeper emotional connections with their consumers may see these customers become less loyal and more prone to seeking out competing brands. This has been observed in industries such as fast fashion, where limited-time promotions and influencer-driven campaigns generate rapid sales but often fail to retain customers beyond the initial impulse.

Additionally, brands that encourage impulse buying through manipulative tactics risk alienating their target audience, who may perceive these strategies as deceptive or exploitative. Over time, such approaches can erode consumer trust and damage the brand's reputation. In particular, brands operating in industries like fashion, electronics and beauty, where impulse buying is most prevalent, must strike a careful balance.



## **CHAPTER 2: *REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON IMPULSE BUYING***

### **2.1 *Introduction***

Impulse buying has emerged as a critical area of interest within the fields of consumer psychology, marketing, and behavioral economics. Traditionally perceived as spontaneous, emotionally driven, and mostly irrational, impulse purchases challenge conventional models of rational decision-making and instead highlight the significant role of affective and contextual variables in shaping consumer behavior. However, impulse buying has often been viewed as a harmless or even beneficial behavior in the short-term, especially as regards retail sales and promotional effectiveness. Nevertheless, recent literature increasingly emphasizes the complex and potentially harmful consequences of impulsive purchasing, both for consumers and for the brands that promote such behavior.

This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive review of the existing academic literature on impulse buying, placing particular emphasis on the psychological foundations, influential factors, and long-term consequences associated with this phenomenon. The literature suggests that impulse buying is not merely the result of weak self-control or external temptation, but rather the outcome of complex psychological processes that involve emotional regulation, cognitive dissonance, and situational triggers. A variety of individual and environmental factors significantly influence the likelihood and frequency of impulse buying behavior. These include personality traits such as impulsivity and materialism, situational elements like store layout and online shopping interfaces, and social and cultural influences that shape consumer behavior and expectations. Understanding these variables is essential not only for academic purposes but also for developing ethical marketing strategies that avoid exploiting consumer vulnerabilities.

Moreover, the chapter will address the short-term and long-term implications of impulse buying for both consumers and brands. While impulse purchases may generate immediate revenue and stimulate sales growth, they are often associated with negative consumer outcomes such as post-purchase regret, financial stress, and diminished well-being.

From a business perspective, repeated reliance on impulsive buying strategies may lead to higher return rates, reputational damages and lower customer retention, consequently reducing brand loyalty and fostering a transactional rather than relational approach to customer engagement.

By reviewing and critically assessing the current body of knowledge, this chapter lays the groundwork for a deeper understanding of the darker dimensions of consumer behavior.

## ***2.2 Psychological Theories on Impulse Buying and Consumer Behavior***

Impulse buying, defined by Rook (1987)<sup>28</sup> as a *sudden, powerful and hedonically complex urge to buy immediately*, has been examined through multiple psychological lenses. Unlike rational and need-based decision making, impulse purchases are frequently driven by internal emotional states and external stimuli, making psychological theories essential for understanding this phenomenon. This chapter reviews the principal theoretical frameworks that illuminate the cognitive, affective and motivational mechanism behind impulsive purchasing.

### ***2.2.1 “The Psychoanalytic Theory” (1923)***

*Sigmund Freud’s Psychoanalytic Theory* <sup>29</sup> laid the foundation for research on consumer behavior. Freud’s structural model depicts human behavior as the result of unconscious drives and internal psychic conflict, negotiated among three core components of the psyche:

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<sup>28</sup> Rook, D. W. (1987). *The buying impulse*. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 14(2), 189-199.

<sup>29</sup> Freud, S. (1923). The Ego and the Id. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIX (1923- 1925): The Ego and the Id and Other Works, 1-66

- The *Id*. It constitutes the most primitive component of the human psyche. Driven by basic instincts and desires, it operates entirely in the unconscious, seeking immediate gratification and pleasure without considering the consequences of actions.
- The *Ego*. It acts as the mediator between the instinctual desires of the *Id* and the limitations imposed by external reality. It tries to satisfy the impulses of the *Id* in realistic and socially acceptable ways, delaying gratification when necessary.
- The *Superego*. It functions as the moral conscience of the mind, embodying the internalized values, ethical principles and societal rules that guide an individual's behavior. It works in opposition to the *Id*, which seeks pleasure, and often in tension with the *Ego*, which tries to balance desires and reality.

Impulse buying reflects a moment in which the *Id*'s instinctual desires overpower the self-regulation imposed by the *Ego* and *Superego*. In the context of consumer behavior, the *Id* drives individuals toward impulsive purchases motivated by the pursuit of immediate gratification. The *Ego*, by contrast, serves as a regulatory mechanism, assessing the practicality and feasibility of potential purchases in relation to external realities. Meanwhile, the *Superego* influences consumer decisions through internalized moral standards and societal expectations, encouraging choices that align with ethical and social norms<sup>30</sup>. In impulse buying, the *Superego* often reacts after the purchase, producing guilt, regret or moral disapproval once the impulsive act has already occurred, thus leading to emotional conflict and remorse.

In conclusion, by framing decisions as a dynamic interplay between instinct, rationality and morality, Freud's model remains a valuable tool for understanding psychological complexities behind consumption. The *Psychoanalytic Theory* continues to influence marketing strategies and consumer behavior research, particularly in exploring emotional triggers and post-purchase reactions.

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<sup>30</sup> The MBA Institute. (2022, March 25). "The Psychoanalytic Theory of Freud". <https://themba.institute/consumer-behaviour/the-psychoanalytic-theory-of-freud/>

### 2.2.2 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943)

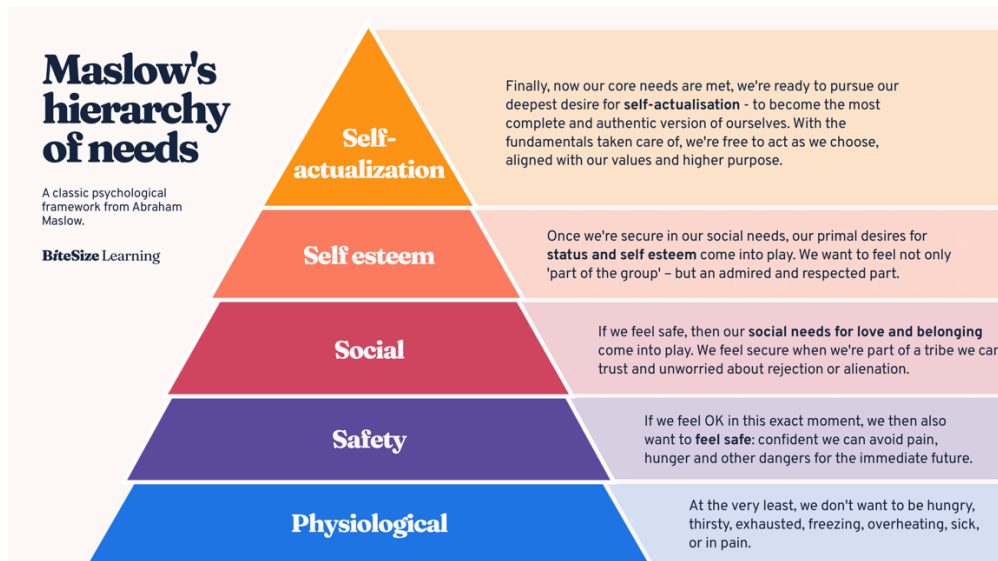
*Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs* (1943) was first proposed in his article titled "*A Theory of Human Motivation*", published in the journal *Psychological Review*<sup>31</sup>. Maslow's theory of needs provides a foundational motivational framework that has been widely applied across various disciplines, including consumer psychology. The American psychologist argued that human behavior is directed by a sequence of needs, arranged in a hierarchical order from the most basic physiological requirements to higher-order psychological and self-fulfillment goals. According to its original formulation, the model consists of five levels, each representing a specific category of fundamental human needs classified as:

- *Physiological Needs*. It refers to primitive and biological needs. Examples are basic survival necessities such as water, food, warmth and sleep.
- *Safety Needs*. It includes needs for security, order, predictability and protection from harm.
- *Social Needs*. Human needs for interpersonal relationships, intimacy, affection and social affiliation.
- *Esteem Needs*. It refers to the need for achievement, competence, recognition, and respect from others.
- *Self-actualization needs*. The drive toward realizing one's full potential, creativity, and personal growth.

The hierarchical structure of the pyramid format reflects *Maslow's* idea that needs are not pursued randomly, but in a progressive order. More precisely, the fulfillment of human needs follows a sequential order, in which the satisfaction of fundamental needs serves as a foundation for pursuing more abstract and higher-order needs. This progression implies that individuals are unlikely to be motivated by social recognition or personal growth if their basic physiological or safety needs remain unmet (Figure 5).

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<sup>31</sup> Abraham Maslow, "*A Theory of Human Motivation*," *Psychological Review* 50, no. 4 (1943): 370-396



**Figure 5. Source:** [BiteSize Learning](#)

The hierarchical order proposed by *Maslow* conveys a rigid image of the theory and a strict separation among the different levels of needs. However, progression is not always linear or rational. The theorist himself clarified that it is not necessary for a specific need to be fully satisfied before higher-order needs begin to emerge. Rather than functioning as discrete, all-or-nothing steps, the various levels of need often coexist. In practice, individuals typically experience partial fulfillment and partial deprivation across multiple categories of need simultaneously.

Moreover, the expression and prioritization of human needs are not fixed but are significantly shaped by factors such as cultural norms, historical periods and psychological conditions of individuals. For example, in several psychological conditions such as major depressive disorders, the hierarchical progression of needs does not follow the order proposed by *Maslow*. Individuals experiencing depression may neglect basic self-care behaviors, such as regular nutrition or personal hygiene, not because these needs are fulfilled, but because their motivational focus shifts towards unmet social needs for love and belonging. Consequently, the pursuit of higher-order social or emotional fulfillment can persist even when foundational physiological or safety needs remain unmet or disregarded.

Furthermore, the application of the model to the context of impulse buying behaviors reveals additional deviations from the hierarchical order of the theory. Consumers often make unplanned purchases not to address physiological or safety needs, but rather to fulfill psychological aspirations related to identity formation, social belonging, or status enhancement.

*Maslow's* definition of the man as a “*perpetually wanting animal*”<sup>32</sup> reflects a fundamental aspect of his theory: human needs are never fully satisfied, and as soon as one level of need is even in part met, attention shifts to the next. This perpetual cycle of desire aligns closely with patterns of modern consumption, characterized by the constant pursuit of new products, experiences or symbols of status. *Maslow's* description highlights the insatiable nature of human wants and provides valuable insights for understanding consumer behavior, especially as regards societies marked by abundance and symbolic consumption.

To conclude, *Maslow's* framework represents a useful perspective for understanding impulse buying as both an emotional coping strategy and a symbolic attempt to fulfill unaddressed psychological needs.

### **2.2.3 “*The Cognitive Dissonance Theory*” (1957)**

*Leon Festinger*, considered to be one of the most influential social psychologists ever existed, introduced the *Cognitive Dissonance Theory* in his seminal work titled “*A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*” (1957)<sup>33</sup>. *Festinger's* theory represented a turning point in the study of human behavior, proposing that individuals are driven not only by external rewards or biological needs but also by the internal drive for consistency between their beliefs, attitudes, and actions. According to *Festinger*, when people engage in behaviors that conflict with their existing cognitions, they experience a psychological discomfort

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<sup>32</sup> Abraham Maslow, “*A Theory of Human Motivation*,” *Psychological Review* 50, no. 4 (1943): 370-396

<sup>33</sup> Festinger, L. (1957). *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. Stanford University Press.

known as dissonance, which motivates them to reduce this tension and restore internal harmony often through behavior modification or rationalization.

*Festinger's* theory stands as a foundational concept in social psychology and has been extensively applied in the field of consumer behavior to explain post-purchase emotions and decision-making inconsistencies. The theory offers important insights into the psychological tension experienced before and after an impulsive purchase.

*Festinger* affirms that when consumers act in a way that contradicts their values or rational expectations, for example purchasing something unplanned or unaffordable, consumers experience psychological discomfort. To resolve this dissonance, consumers may rationalize the purchase or seek justification through social validation. For instance, a consumer may impulsively purchase a luxury product despite previously intending to save money or avoid unnecessary purchases. Consequently, the internal conflict between the action taken, in this case a purchase, and the individual's financial responsibility generates a state of dissonance. In order to reduce such dissonance, individuals can:

- *Rationalize.* After an impulse purchase, the consumer can rationalize the purchase made emphasizing the positive aspects of the products, for example how discounted the item was.
- *Change behavior.* Consumers convince themselves that the purchase made aligns with their needs after all.
- *Avoid information and situations that would likely increase dissonance.* The consumer seeks information that supports the decision and avoids contradictory evidence.

For instance, *Festinger* illustrates the case of a smoker who is aware of the health risks associated with smoking. To reduce the psychological discomfort caused by dissonance, the individual may choose to quit smoking, thus changing behavior; reframe the health consequences to minimize the perceived harm of smoking; or search for information that

justifies the behavior, for example highlighting potential benefits of cigarettes such as stress relief and weight loss<sup>34</sup>.

Moreover, *Festinger* emphasized that the degree of dissonance is influenced by the importance of the conflicting beliefs and the extent to which they are inconsistent. Research has demonstrated that dissonance is more likely to arise in high-involvement purchases, especially those characterized by symbolic value, social visibility or significant financial outlay.<sup>35</sup> Impulse purchases, often made under social pressure or emotional stimulation, may create stronger dissonance when the outcome fails to align with the consumer's expectations and values. Conversely, in cases of low-involvement purchases, the level of cognitive dissonance might be significantly lower.

According to *Henri Zukier*, professor at the New School for Social Research, cognitive dissonance can be defined as “*social psychology most notable achievement*”<sup>36</sup>. The theory highlights *Festinger*'s significant role in modern social science and acknowledges him as one of its most innovative thinkers. The cognitive dissonance concept has permanently reshaped approaches to studying human behavior and social processes, profoundly broadening our capacity for understanding and analysis.

In summary, *Festinger*'s cognitive dissonance offers a crucial framework for understanding the psychological aspects of impulse buying. The theory shifts attention from the act of consumption itself to the internal conflicts it may trigger, thereby enriching the study of consumer behavior, decision-making and behavior correction.

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<sup>34</sup> Festinger, L. (1957). *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. Stanford University Press. P. 5-6

<sup>35</sup> Sweeney, J. C., Hausknecht, D., & Soutar, G. N. (2000). Cognitive dissonance after purchase: A multidimensional scale. *Psychology & Marketing*, 17(5), 369–385.

<sup>36</sup> Zukier, H. (1989). ["Introduction."](#) In Schachter, S., & Gazzaniga, M. S. (Eds.), *Extending Psychological Frontiers: Selected Works of Leon Festinger* (pp. xi–xxiv). New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.



#### 2.2.4 “Self-Regulation Theory” (1994-2007)

*Roy Baumeister*, considered to be one of the world’s most influential social psychologist, has significantly shaped the contemporary understanding of self-control, decision-making and free will.

The theory of *Self-Regulation*, first articulated by *Baumeister, Heatherton* and *Tice* (1994)<sup>37</sup>, provides a critical framework for understanding impulsive behavior, especially in contexts where immediate desires conflict with long-term goals. At its core, self-regulation refers to the capacity of individuals to exert control over their thoughts, emotions, and actions in order to achieve desired outcomes. Failures in self-regulation are thus seen as central to many forms of impulsivity, including impulse buying.

*Baumeister* conceptualized self-control as a limited psychological resource, akin to a muscle, that can be depleted over time, a phenomenon defined by the famous psychologist as “*ego depletion*”. Evidence suggested that self-control tends to decline over time with sustained exertion, resembling muscular fatigue caused by repeated strain<sup>38</sup>. When individuals are under stress, fatigued, emotionally overwhelmed or cognitively burdened, their ability to self-regulate diminishes, increasing the likelihood of succumbing to short-term temptations. In the context of consumer behavior, this translates to a higher propensity to engage in impulse buying, especially when consumers are exposed to emotionally charged environments or persuasive advertising.

In its most comprehensive formulation, the theory identifies four essential components of self-regulation<sup>39</sup>:

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<sup>37</sup> Baumeister, R. F., Heatherton, T. F., & Tice, D. M. (1994). *Losing Control: How and Why People Fail at Self-Regulation*. Academic Press.

<sup>38</sup> Baumeister, Roy & Vohs, Kathleen & Tice, Dianne. (2007). *The Strength Model of Self-Control*. Current Directions in Psychological Science. 16. 351-355.

<sup>39</sup> Baumeister, R. F., & Vohs, K. D. (2007). *Self-Regulation, Ego Depletion, and Motivation*. Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 1(1), 115–128

- *Standards*. Goals, norms or ideals individuals use to evaluate their behavior. As regards consumer behavior, it includes budget constraints, ethical values and personal aspirations.
- *Motivation*. The desire or commitment to meet certain standards. Without sufficient motivation, individuals may disregard their long-term goals in favor of immediate gratification.
- *Monitoring*. The ability to track and assess one's behavior in real time. It is critical for recognizing discrepancies between one's actions and one's standards.
- *Willpower*. The energy or strength needed to override automatic impulses and resist temptations. This capacity is limited and can become exhausted, increasing the likelihood of self-regulatory failure.

Impulse buying, in this context, is seen as a breakdown in the self-regulatory system. The seminal experiments conducted by *Vohn & Faber (2007)*<sup>40</sup> showed that when individuals are cognitively depleted, emotionally overwhelmed, or distracted, they may lack the resources needed to monitor their behavior effectively or to exert sufficient willpower. As a result, they are more likely to engage in spontaneous, unplanned purchases that contradict their broader financial or personal goals.

Moreover, the theory highlights the dynamic and situational nature of self-regulation. For instance, after a day of exerting self-control at work or in social settings, consumers may experience reduced regulatory strength, leaving them more vulnerable to marketing cues or hedonic temptations while shopping.

To conclude, by conceptualizing self-control as a limited psychological resource that can become depleted, the model provides insight into why individuals may act against their long-term interests in high-stimulation environments. The *Self-Regulation Theory*

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<sup>40</sup> Vohs, K. D., & Faber, R. J. (2007). *Spent Resources: Self-Regulatory Resource Availability Affects Impulse Buying*. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 33(4), 537–547.

deepens our understanding of impulsive consumption by emphasizing the dynamic and vulnerable nature of self-control in everyday decision-making.

### 2.3 Factors influencing Consumer Purchasing Behavior

Consumer buying behavior is shaped by a complex interplay of internal and external factors that drive decision-making processes. Drawing from psychology, sociology, and marketing, this section explores the primary factors that motivate, shape, and sometimes distort consumer choices. Understanding these determinants is essential not only for academic analysis but also for practical application in consumer-targeted strategies.

Among the foundational models used to conceptualize consumer purchasing behavior is the “*Simplified Stimulus-Response Model*”<sup>41</sup>, also known as the “*Black Box*” model (Figure 6).

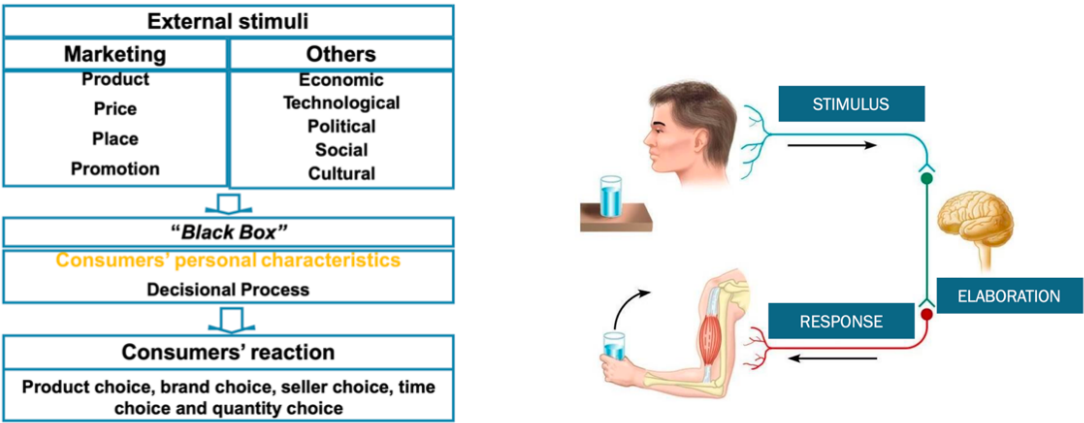


Figure 6.

<sup>41</sup> Philip Kotler, “Simplified Stimulus-Response Model”, Marketing Management, 15th Edition, Pearson, 2016

Introduced by *Philip Kotler*, the *Simplified Stimulus-Response Model* describes consumer behavior as largely a reaction to external stimuli, such as marketing efforts or environmental cues, which trigger internal responses leading to purchasing actions. Marketing stimuli, such as product features, pricing and promotion, and environmental stimuli, such as the cultural, social and economic context, serve as inputs that affect the buyer's *black box*. The expression "*black box*" is a metaphor used to describe the complex and largely invisible cognitive and emotional processes that occur between receiving external stimuli and producing a behavioral response. Consumer's characteristics are what influence how the buyer perceives the stimuli, while the decision-making processes determine what buying behavior is undertaken. Lastly, the outputs of the *black box*, representing consumers' reactions, are observable behaviors such as product choice, seller choice and brand preference.

Despite its simplicity, the model laid the groundwork for more advanced theoretical developments by introducing the notion that observable consumer behavior is largely shaped by external inputs. For this reason, it continues to represent a relevant analytical tool in understanding the mechanisms underlying consumer choice.

The first step in order to understand consumer behavior is to focus on the factors that determine the consumer's characteristics in the *black box*. The main psychological factors affecting purchasing behavior are four: motivation, perception, emotions, learning and memory. However, factors influencing consumers' responses are not limited to the psychological context. Indeed, factors affecting consumer purchasing behavior include also social and cultural factors, personal and demographic factors, and situational factors. Nevertheless, these represent only a subset of the broader range of variables that may shape the purchasing behavior of individuals. The complexity of consumer behavior arises from the interplay of numerous dynamic influences, many of which fall outside the scope of this discussion. This section provides a foundation for understanding some of the primary influences, though a comprehensive account would require a broader and more nuanced exploration.

### 2.3.1 Motivation

The perpetual emergence of needs constitutes an essential feature of human existence. Human needs can be divided into two main categories: *biogenic* needs and *psychogenic* needs. The term “*biogenic*” refers to needs that arise from physiological imbalances, such as thirst or hunger, while “*psychogenic*” needs derive from emotional or psychological conditions such as the pursuit of approval or recognition. A need becomes a motive when it reaches a level of intensity strong enough to prompt action. Additionally, motivation is characterized by two essential elements: direction, defined as the preference for one goal over another, and intensity, described as the degree of effort exerted to pursue that goal.

Motivation plays a central role in shaping consumer behavior. In this context, three major theories have significantly advanced the understating of motivation, respectively formulated by *Sigmund Freud*, *Frederick Herzberg* and *Abraham Maslow*.

*Freud’s motivation theory* posits that, unconscious psychological forces such as hidden or repressed desires and impulses, shape human behavior, including a person’s purchasing patterns. Unconscious forces refer mainly to desires related to power, status or self-image. Consequently, products and brands can serve as a symbolic representation of these inner drives. However, according to *Freud*, the individual is not able to fully understand the motivation behind such behavior.

*Herzberg’s “Two-Factor Theory”*, also known as the “*Dual-Factor Theory*” or “*Motivation-Hygiene Theory*”, was originally developed to explain job satisfaction. The theory separates factors that cause dissatisfaction, called *dissatisfiers*, from factors that cause satisfaction, *satisfiers*, all of which act independently of each other. *Hygiene factors* are those elements that if absent or inadequate, cause dissatisfaction. For instance, a fridge or a computer that come without a warranty is a dissatisfier. However, their presence does not necessarily create satisfaction. Contrarily, *motivational factors* such as the ease of use

of a product, promote satisfaction and motivate the consumer to choose a specific product or service.<sup>42</sup>

In addition, even though *Abraham Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs"* was already discussed at the beginning of the chapter, it remains pertinent to consider it in this section. *Maslow* tried to explain why individuals are driven by certain needs at specific points in time. His theory proposes that human needs are organized in a hierarchical order, starting from basic physiological requirements and progressing towards higher-level psychological and self-fulfillment needs. While there is limited empirical evidence supporting *Maslow's* theory, the model's logical simplicity makes it a valuable tool for understanding how individuals prioritize their needs and, consequently, why consumer purchase certain products.

### **2.3.2 Perception**

Motivation is only one part of the equation. Indeed, another key psychological factor affecting the purchasing behavior of consumers is *perception*. Defined as the process through which individuals select, organize and make sense of reality, perception plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' buying behavior. In marketing, perceptions are considered to be even more important than reality, because of their direct influence on the actual behavior of consumers. Individuals, through the use of their five senses (taste, touch, smell, hearing and sight) perceive many different types of information. However, perception is influenced not only by physical stimuli but also by the context in which those stimuli appear and by internal factors unique to each individual. The same external stimulus can be interpreted in many different ways depending on the observer, and such variations in perceptions arise from three key perceptual processes: *selective attention, selective retention and selective distortion*.

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<sup>42</sup> Philip Kotler, "Herzberg's Theory", Marketing Management, 15th Edition, Pearson, 2016

*Selective attention* is defined as the filtering process through which only a small portion of stimuli are actually perceived. In today's saturated media environment, it is estimated that the number of advertising messages the average person receives per day is between 4,000 and 10,000<sup>43</sup>. Given the limits of human cognitive capacity, it is impossible to attend to all of these inputs. Indeed, the selective attention mechanism presents a significant challenge for marketers, as it requires them not only to capture but also to hold consumers' limited attention. Research has identified several factors that increase the likelihood of a stimulus being noticed:

- Relevance to current needs: consumers are more likely to notice stimuli related to their current needs or goals. For example, an individual actively seeking to purchase a car is more likely to notice advertisements for cars than for unrelated products.
- Expectation: individuals tend to notice stimuli they anticipate encountering in a specific context. In a computer store, for instance, a consumer is more likely to notice laptops than portable radios, simply because the latter are unexpected in that environment.
- Deviations: stimuli that stand out significantly from the norm are more likely to attract attention. For example, a promotional offer of €100 off the price of a laptop is more likely to capture attention than a modest discount of €5, as the larger deviation from the expected price creates a stronger impact.

The second perceptual process is known as "*selective retention*". Most individuals retain only a small part of the information they are exposed to. However, people are more likely to remember information that aligns with their existing attitudes and beliefs. Therefore, consumers tend to recall favorable attributes of a brand they prefer, while disregarding equally positive aspects of competing brands. This cognitive bias often benefits well-established or strong brands, as their messages are more likely to be retained and recalled.

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<sup>43</sup> Digital Silk. (2024, December 25). "*How Many Ads Do We See A Day – Top Trends & Statistics*". <https://www.digitalsilk.com/digital-trends/how-many-ads-do-we-see-a-day/>

Moreover, selective retention underlines the importance of repetition in marketing communication, as repeated exposure increases the chances that key messages will be noticed, processed, and ultimately remembered.

*Selective distortion* refers to the tendency to interpret information in a manner that confirms one's existing beliefs, knowledge and expectations. As a result, consumers often perceive information in a way that supports their established attitudes, rather than objectively evaluating it. Consequently, the selective distortion mechanism can benefit strong brands as consumers often reinterpret unclear or neutral information to align with their favorable view of the brand.

To conclude, the three mechanisms of selective attention, selective retention and selective distortion limit consumers' perception. Human perception is often less objective than it may appear. Individuals typically do not consciously register the majority of the visual stimuli they encounter, as much of what is seen is filtered out through selective attention. Moreover, perception is not a direct reflection of reality but is instead shaped by prior knowledge, expectations, and cognitive hypotheses. What individuals perceive is heavily influenced by what they already know or believe to be true. Additionally, the manner in which information is presented significantly affects how it is processed, remembered, and recalled. Presentation format, framing, and context all play a critical role in shaping not only perception but also the cognitive treatment and retention of information.

### **2.3.3 Emotions**

Emotions can be defined as strong and relatively uncontrolled feelings that affect human behavior. They are strongly linked to fundamental psychological constructs such as needs, motivation and personality. Unmet or unsatisfied needs often generate motivation, which is inherently connected to the arousal component of emotional experience. Moreover, also individuals' personalities influence emotional responses. For example, people differ in the extent to which they experience emotions with intensity, a characteristic known as "affective intensity". Consequently, consumers with high



affective intensity are more likely to react strongly to emotional stimuli, making them particularly responsive to emotionally charged marketing messages.

The role of emotions in consumer behavior has been extensively studied by experts, with research consistently demonstrating the powerful influence of affective states on cognitive and evaluative processes (*Isen et al., 1978; Revelles, 1998; Bagozzi et al., 1999*). Evidence demonstrates that emotions can also significantly impact how individuals process information, particularly in terms of codifying and retrieving information from memory. Affective states can alter the way consumers evaluate product alternatives, form attitudes, and ultimately make purchase decisions. Moreover, emotional states affect also human behavior directed toward goal achievement, shaping how consumers pursue and assess the fulfillment of their needs. Additionally, emotions significantly influence judgments of satisfaction, with studies indicating that emotional responses during and after consumption experiences can affect overall satisfaction evaluations (*Oliver, 1993; Nyer, 1997*).

The following emotions are widely recognized for their significant impact on consumer behavior:

- *Fear*. In marketing, fear appeals are often used to curb undesirable social behaviors such as smoking and drug use. However, if the fear appeal is too intense or not paired with a clear solution, it can lead to avoidance behavior or message rejection. Consequently, lasting effects of such campaigns are not guaranteed. Moreover, research suggests that fearful experiences can have a positive impact on brand attachment (*Dugg & Hoegg, 2014*). When consumers encounter fear-inducing situations in the presence of a brand they tend to experience an increased need for affiliation. In such cases, the brand present during the experience may be perceived as a shared companion in that emotional moment, thus increasing brand attachment. Additionally, the fear of exclusion is one of the main drivers of impulse purchases. When consumers perceive that others are participating in a trend, owning a popular product, or benefiting from a time-limited offer, they may experience fear about being left out. In response, they are

more likely to engage in impulsive buying as a way to maintain social inclusion and avoid feelings of isolation.

- *Sadness*. Negative emotional state associated with a state of deactivation and lack of motivation. Inactivity is desired and consumers prefer events that do not require action. It is commonly linked to a perceived lack of personal control over one's environment. Individuals experiencing sadness are more likely to interpret outcomes as being determined by external circumstances or chance, rather than by their own actions or decisions. One of the main implications for marketing regards shopping, that can be seen by consumers as a mean to restore a sense of personal control, thereby helping to alleviate lingering feelings of sadness. Consequently, this emotional coping mechanism increases the propensity to make impulse purchases aimed at providing immediate relief.
- *Anger*. Negative emotional state accompanied by a state of heightened activation. It can lead to retaliatory post-purchase behaviors. When consumers attribute a service failure directly to the brand or the company, they are more likely to experience anger, which in turn increases their intention to retaliate through actions such as complaints, negative word-of-mouth or negative reviews. However, research also indicates that timely and effective interventions that reduce consumer anger can significantly lower these retaliatory intentions.
- *Guilt*. Emotional state experienced when an individual believes to have violated a moral standard or caused harm to others either through action or inaction. Advertising campaigns often employ guilt appeals as a persuasive strategy to motivate consumer behavior. These appeals tap into consumers' emotions by highlighting how their actions or inactions may negatively impact others or broader social causes. Advertisements for nonprofit organizations often show distressing images or stories to evoke guilt and compassion, motivating viewers to contribute financially or volunteer their time. Similarly, commercial brands sometimes use guilt appeals to promote products associated with social responsibility, such as eco-friendly goods, by suggesting that choosing their product helps alleviate harm or supports ethical causes. However, guilt appeals

must be used carefully; overly intense or manipulative guilt can lead to consumer resistance or avoidance.

- *Disgust*. It is often triggered by stimuli perceived as impure, contaminated, or morally offensive. The impact of disgust can be better understood through the lens of the two laws of sympathetic magic: similarity and contagion. According to the law of similarity, objects that resemble each other are believed to share fundamental properties. The law of contagion instead suggests that objects which have come into physical contact are perceived to transfer properties between them, even after the contact has ended. Implications for product placement, packaging design and in-store presentation are numerous.

#### ***2.3.4 Learning and Memory***

The final psychological factor influencing consumer purchasing behavior involves the processes of learning and memory. The term “*learning*” refers to the process by which individuals acquire new knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, through study and experience. Much of what consumers do is learned, whether intentionally or incidentally. Therefore, consumers tend to generalize their reactions to stimuli that resemble previously encountered ones. Conversely, discrimination enables individuals to perceive differences between similar stimuli and adapt their reactions accordingly.

Learned information is then encoded, stored and retrieved, when needed, in our “*memory*”. Essentially, memory determines whether a brand comes to mind in a buying situation. Marketers stimulates memorization through the use of symbols, such as corporate identity logos, badges and signs, fostering associations in the mind of the consumer. Thus, marketing plays a central role in ensuring that consumers’ interactions with a brand lead to the development of positive and lasting brand associations stored in memory.

To conclude, the processes of learning and memory significantly impact consumers' purchasing decisions by affecting both their capacity to recall brands and products and the emotional associations that guide their buying behavior.

### ***2.3.5 Other Factors affecting Consumer Buying Behavior***

In addition to the psychological factors already examined, there are many other important elements affecting the purchasing behavior of consumers. Given the extensive range of factors influencing consumer behavior, this study will limit its focus to the most significant ones addressed in the following section.

- *Personality.* Defined as the aspect of human psyche that determines how individuals respond to their environment in a relatively stable way over time. It reflects individual consistent and enduring differences. There are several theories regarding personality traits. Consumers with different personality traits may respond differently to marketing stimuli, perceive brands in unique ways, and exhibit varying degrees of loyalty or risk-taking in their purchases. One of the most famous models is the “*Big Five*”<sup>44</sup> model, which identifies five main dimensions of personality: extraversion, openness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and agreeableness. For instance, individuals with high levels of openness may be more inclined to try new products, while those who score high in conscientiousness may prefer detailed product information and make more deliberate purchasing decisions.
- *Cultural factors.* Culture is considered to be the most basic cause of an individual's wants and behaviors. It can be defined as the system of shared values, beliefs, customs, behaviors and artifacts that the members of a society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning. Subcultures are an important component within

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<sup>44</sup> L. Goldberg, *An Alternative "Description of Personality": The Big-Five Factor Structure*, in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1981

culture. Based on factors such as nationalities, religions, geographical regions and racial groups, subcultures represent groups of people with shared value systems based on common life experiences. Implications for marketers are many. For example, consumers from collectivist cultures may value group harmony and be influenced more by family and peer opinions in their purchasing decisions, while those from individualist cultures might prioritize personal preferences and self-expression. In addition, social classes affect significantly product choices, brand preferences and consumer's access to goods and services. Determined by factors such as income, education, wealth and occupation, social classes can be defined as society's relatively permanent divisions whose members share similar values, behaviors, interests and possibilities.

- *Social factors.* Reference groups such as colleagues and friends can exert both an indirect or direct influence by shaping perceptions of what is desirable or acceptable. Family represents the most important buying organization and one of the most powerful influences on buying behavior. Indeed, parents play a crucial role in shaping consumption habits of individuals from their very young age. Moreover, also social roles and status must be considered in this analysis. The term “*role*” refers to the behavior individuals are expected to have according to the rest of the society around them, and each role carries a status reflecting the general esteem given to it by society. Research shows that people tend to choose products and brands that reflect or enhance their social identity and communicate their perceived status to others.
- *Lifestyle.* It refers to activities, interests, values and opinions that influence consumer behavior and buying decisions. For example, an individual who leads an active, health-conscious lifestyle may be more inclined to purchase fitness equipment, organic foods, or athleisure wear. These lifestyle choices are not only reflected in product selection but also in brand loyalty and responsiveness to specific marketing messages. Marketers often use lifestyle segmentation to group consumers based on shared ways of living, allowing for more targeted communication strategies and product offerings.

Understanding the multitude of factors that influence consumer behavior is essential for developing effective marketing strategies. From psychological drivers such as motivation, perception, learning, and memory, to broader influences like culture, social dynamics, personality, and lifestyle, each element plays a critical role in shaping how consumers make decisions. These factors do not operate in isolation; rather, they interact in complex and dynamic ways, guiding consumers' preferences, purchase intentions, and brand perceptions.

#### ***2.4 Short-term and Long-Term implications for brands and consumers***

Impulse buying, while often celebrated for driving immediate sales and enhancing retail performance, has complex and multifaceted implications for both consumers and brands. Several studies in the literature have explored the short-term and long-term consequences of impulse buying behavior. These implications can be divided into short-term and long-term effects, each of which reveals critical insights into the sustainability, profitability, and ethical considerations surrounding consumer behavior.

In the short-term, impulse buying often results in immediate sales gains for brands. Marketers frequently utilize emotional triggers, visual stimuli, and promotional cues, such as point-of-sale discounts or limited-time offers, to elicit spontaneous purchases (Betty & Ferrell, 1998)<sup>45</sup>. These marketing tactics are designed to exploit consumers' reduced cognitive control in high-arousal situations (Kacen & Lee, 2002)<sup>46</sup>, and their effectiveness lies in their ability to provoke immediate responses aligned with emotional gratification. As pointed out by Harmancioglu, Finney, and Joseph (2009)<sup>47</sup>, the

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<sup>45</sup> Beatty, S. E., & Ferrell, M. E. (1998). Impulse buying: Modeling its precursors. *Journal of Retailing*, 74(2), 169–191.

<sup>46</sup> Kacen, J. J., & Lee, J. A. (2002). The influence of culture on consumer impulsive buying behavior. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 12(2), 163–176.

<sup>47</sup> Harmancioglu, N., Finney, R. Z., & Joseph, M. (2009). *Impulse purchases of new products: An empirical analysis*. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 18(1), 27–37.

spontaneous nature of impulse purchases often leads to increased basket sizes and higher per-visit spending, particularly in environments that deploy strategic promotional tactics.

From the consumer's perspective, impulse purchases can temporarily satisfy emotional or psychological needs, including stress relief or mood enhancement <sup>48</sup>. According to *Verplanken and Herabadi* (2001)<sup>49</sup>, impulse buying may serve hedonic purposes by fulfilling emotional needs or relieving psychological tension. However, these benefits are often accompanied by post-purchase regret, reduced satisfaction, or financial discomfort, particularly in consumers with lower self-regulation abilities <sup>50</sup>.

Longer-term effects reveal a more complex dynamic. According to *Dugg and Hoegg* (2014)<sup>51</sup>, when consumers have positive emotional experiences with a brand during an impulse purchase, these moments may enhance emotional attachment and contribute to long-term brand loyalty. Conversely, repeated negative experiences such as regret or dissatisfaction post-purchase, can erode brand trust over time and weaken relationships between brands and consumers. Moreover, habitual impulse buying has been linked to chronic issues, such as compulsive consumption and diminished financial well-being. Consumers may develop cognitive associations where brands or retail environments become automatic triggers for impulsive behavior, embedding those actions into long-term behavioral routines<sup>52</sup>.

From the brand's perspective, high return rates are a major long-term consequence of impulse-driven sales. Excessive returns harm brand reputation, as they signal strong

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<sup>48</sup> Dholakia, U. M. (2000). Temptation and resistance: An integrated model of consumption impulse formation and enactment. *Psychology & Marketing*, 17(11), 955–982.

<sup>49</sup> Verplanken, B., & Herabadi, A. (2001). *Individual differences in impulse buying tendency: Feeling and no thinking*. *European Journal of Personality*, 15(S1), S71–S83.

<sup>50</sup> Rook, D. W. (1987). The buying impulse. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 14(2), 189–199.

<sup>51</sup> Dunn, L., & Hoegg, J. (2014). The impact of fear on emotional brand attachment. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 41(1), 152–168.

<sup>52</sup> Kacen, J. J., & Lee, J. A. (2002). The influence of culture on consumer impulsive buying behavior. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 12(2), 163–176.

dissatisfaction of consumers, potentially deterring new customers. In addition, processing returns imposes logistical burdens and increases costs, thereby eroding profit margins. Beyond the direct financial impact, returns require additional labor, inventory management, restocking, and in some cases, result in unsellable merchandise. Frequent returns can distort inventory forecasting, making it difficult for brands to optimize stock levels and plan future orders. Moreover, this not only strains supply chain efficiency but also undermines sustainability goals, as returned items often contribute to increased waste and carbon emissions. The overconsumption encouraged by impulsive behaviors contributes to increased waste, unnecessary resource use, and environmental degradation. Companies that promote such practices may face growing scrutiny from environmentally conscious consumers and stakeholders.

To conclude, the literature indicates that while impulse buying can be strategically beneficial for brands in the short term, it also presents long-term risks if not managed responsibly. For consumers, although impulsive purchases may offer momentary relief or excitement, they also carry the potential for emotional dissatisfaction, regret, and maladaptive consumption habits. A nuanced understanding of these dynamics is crucial for both marketers and consumer researchers.



## **CHAPTER 3: *EMPIRICAL RESEARCH***

### **3.1 *Introduction***

The final chapter presents the empirical research conducted to explore impulse buying behavior among consumers. Building on the theoretical foundations established in Chapter 2, the aim of this study is to investigate how various psychological, social, and demographic factors influence impulsive purchasing decisions. The research adopts a quantitative approach through a structured survey designed to capture self-reported behaviors, attitudes, and motivations related to impulse buying.

The survey was developed to collect data on key dimensions such as frequency and triggers of impulse purchases, emotional and cognitive reactions to these purchases, post-purchase behaviors, brand loyalty, and the perceived influence of marketing stimuli. It also gathers socio-demographic information (e.g., age, gender, education, occupation, and income level) to facilitate segmentation analysis and explore potential generational or lifestyle-based differences, particularly focusing on younger consumers such as Generation Z. The insights gained from this empirical investigation aim to contribute to a better understanding of impulse buying dynamics from both consumer and brand perspectives.

### **3.2 *Research Objectives***

The main objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To measure the frequency and situational characteristics of impulse buying behaviors, identifying the product categories and environmental cues most associated with spontaneous purchases.

2. To investigate the emotional, psychological, and cognitive antecedents of impulse buying, with a focus on the roles of mood, self-perception, emotional regulation, and perceived loss of control at the moment of purchase.
3. To assess the impact of marketing stimuli, including personalized advertising, limited-time offers, and social influence mechanisms, on consumers' likelihood of engaging in unplanned purchasing behavior.
4. To identify socio-demographic and generational group-specific predispositions towards impulse buying, highlighting differences across age groups, genders, income levels, education, and generations, with a specific focus on Generation Z.
5. To analyze post-purchase reactions, including levels of satisfaction, regret, and brand perception, and how these emotional responses affect future consumer-brand relationships.
6. To identify perceived levels of self-control and planning in consumer decision-making, and to examine how these perceptions mediate the relationship between emotional triggers and actual purchasing behavior.
7. To explore consumers' awareness of their own impulse buying behavior and their perceptions regarding its consequences for both brands and individuals, including opinions on possible strategies to reduce impulsive spending tendencies.

By articulating these objectives, the study seeks to bridge the gap between theoretical models of impulse buying and their practical manifestations in contemporary consumer environments. In doing so, it aims to offer not only academic contributions to the field of consumer behavior but also actionable insights for brands and policymakers seeking to foster more conscious and responsible consumption. The following section will detail the methodological framework adopted to achieve these objectives.

### ***3.3 Methodology***

Guided by the theoretical framework established in Chapters 1 and 2, this study adopts a deductive, cross-sectional quantitative design. A structured, self-administered questionnaire was selected as the primary data-collection instrument, composed primarily of closed-ended questions in order to ensure comparability across responses, while a limited number of open-ended fields were included to capture additional qualitative insights.

A total of 21 questions were posed to each participant. Data collection took place over a four-week period, resulting in a final sample of 124 participants. In order to maximize reach and engagement, the questionnaire was distributed through multiple channels including social media platforms such as Instagram and Tiktok, University forums and group chats, as well as direct sharing via phone contacts and messaging applications.

The questionnaire was developed in a bilingual format (English/Italian) to maximize respondent comprehension and inclusivity. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time. No personally identifying information was collected. Responses were submitted anonymously, and all data were securely stored in compliance with institutional research ethics standards.

The following section will provide an overview of all questions presented in the questionnaire, highlighting the most prominent response trends. Moreover, particularly illustrative answers, where applicable, will be included to provide a more nuanced understanding of the behaviors and perceptions explored.

### ***3.4 Survey Design and Response Analysis***

The survey used in this study was specifically designed to capture the multifaceted nature of impulse buying behavior. It consists of four sections, each aimed at examining a distinct set of variables relevant to the phenomenon. These include socio-demographic characteristics, individual purchasing habits, attitudinal dimensions related to planning

and self-control, and participants' perceptions regarding the broader implications of impulse buying. The structure was intended to ensure logical progression, respondent clarity, and comprehensive data collection aligned with the study's objectives.

The survey is structured as follows:

**Section 1.** This section gathered general background data on the participants.

**1. “What is your age? / Quanti anni hai?”**

This question aimed to categorize respondents into predefined age groups to facilitate generational comparisons. The available age brackets were:

- ☐ 0 - 18
- ☐ 18 - 28
- ☐ 29 - 44
- ☐ 45 - 60
- ☐ 61+

The majority of respondents, specifically 86 participants (69.4%), belongs to the range 18-28 years old. As regards the segment 0-18 years old, 21 respondents selected the option (16.9%).

The age distribution indicates that the survey primarily captured the behavior of younger consumers, particularly those within the 18–28 age range, a segment generally identified as Generation Z. This high representation is consistent with the study's objective to focus in particular on Gen Z members. Respondents aged 29-44 years accounted for 3.2% of the total sample, those aged 45-60 years represented 5.6%, while 4.8% of participants were aged 61 and above.

The overrepresentation of younger users is not a limitation in this context but rather reinforces the relevance of the data to the intended focus of the research.

**2. *“Please indicate the gender you identify with. / Indica il genere con cui ti identifichi.”***

This question aimed to identify potential gender-based differences in impulse buying behavior, a factor commonly explored in consumer behavior literature. The majority of respondents identified as female (66.1%), followed by male (32.3%), with 1.6% selecting a non-binary or other gender identity.

**3. *“Where do you currently live? / Dove vivi attualmente?”***

This open-ended question aimed to collect geographic information to contextualize responses and explore potential regional influences on impulse buying behavior. While the majority of respondents reside in Italy, the sample also includes a small number of participants currently living abroad. Within Italy, responses were distributed across various regions, including Campania, Lazio, Lombardia and Veneto. However, the largest concentration of participants came from Campania and Lazio. Although the question did not directly measure geographic influence on impulse buying, the location data may be useful in interpreting trends in cultural or regional consumer behavior, especially in relation to income level, brand exposure, and access to retail or online shopping environments.

**4. *“What is your current occupation? / Qual è la tua attuale occupazione?”***

This question was included to assess the occupational status of respondents, a variable often linked to purchasing power, time availability, and overall consumer behavior. Understanding the respondents' employment situation allows for a clearer interpretation of impulse buying patterns in relation to income level, life stage, and consumer autonomy. Students comprised the majority of the sample, with 84 participants (67.7%) identifying solely as students, while individuals both studying and working represent the 12.1% of respondents. Full-time workers accounted for 16.9% of the sample, while only the 1.6% refers to individuals currently unemployed.

The high proportion of students reflects the recruitment methods used, such as university networks, social media platforms, and group chats, which naturally reach younger and academically active individuals.

This distribution also aligns with the study's emphasis on Generation Z and early-career consumers, groups often targeted by brands due to their impulsive and emotionally-driven purchasing tendencies. Moreover, the inclusion of student-workers and full-time workers enables basic comparisons based on work-life dynamics.

#### **5. *“What is your current level of education? / Qual è il tuo attuale livello di istruzione?”***

This question aimed to gather information on participants' educational background, an important demographic factor that may influence consumer awareness, digital literacy, and susceptibility to marketing stimuli, especially in the context of impulse buying. Understanding education levels provides useful context for interpreting participants' cognitive control, financial behavior, and decision-making processes.

The majority of respondents (52.4%) reported having completed secondary education (high school diploma), while 29% held a bachelor's degree and 15.3% had completed a master's degree. A smaller portion of the sample (8.9%) reported middle school as their highest level of education, while advanced academic degrees (PhD) and unspecified “Other” responses were minimal (each under 1%).

This distribution is consistent with the predominantly young sample (many of whom are university students or recent graduates) and offers a suitable base for exploring relationships between educational attainment and impulse buying tendencies. Higher education levels may correlate with increased awareness of marketing techniques, stronger financial literacy, and greater self-regulation in purchasing behavior.

**6. “Which of the following best describes your income level? / Quale delle seguenti opzioni descrive meglio il tuo reddito?”**

This question was included to assess participants' self-perceived income level, a variable often associated with purchasing power, financial self-regulation, and susceptibility to marketing influences. Understanding the economic background of respondents provides essential context for interpreting impulse buying behaviors and their short- or long-term consequences.

Participants were asked to self-assess their income level by selecting one of the following options: *Very low/Molto basso*, *Low/Basso*, *Middle/Medio*, *High/Alto*, *Very high/Molto alto*, or *Prefer not to say/Preferisco non rispondere*. The majority of respondents defined their income level as middle (44.4%), followed by high (24.2%) and low (17.7%). A small percentage declared very low (4.8%) or very high (1.6%) income levels, while 7.3% preferred not to disclose this information.

**Section 2.** This section of the questionnaire was designed to gather information on participants' actual experiences and tendencies related to impulse buying. It focused on the frequency of unplanned purchases, emotional and contextual triggers, types of products most commonly bought on impulse, and immediate reactions following such purchases. The questions in this section aimed to capture both behavioral patterns and psychological factors.

**7. “Do you ever buy something on impulse, without planning it? / Ti capita mai di acquistare qualcosa d’impulso, senza averlo programmato?”**

This question served as an entry point for evaluating respondents' direct experience with unplanned purchasing. It was phrased to capture the behavioral frequency of impulse buying, using a five-point scale commonly employed in consumer behavior research. Response options were: *Never/Mai*; *Rarely/Raramente*; *Sometimes/A volte*; *Often/Spesso*; *Always/Sempre*. The majority of respondents (51.6%) reported that they “*sometimes*” engage in impulse purchases, while an additional 11.3% indicated they do so “*often*” and 1.6% stated “*always*”. Consequently, approximately two-thirds

of the sample (64.5%) demonstrate at least moderate to frequent impulsive buying behavior. Conversely, 30.6% reported engaging in such behavior “rarely”, and only 4.8% indicated they “never” make impulse purchases. These results underscore the relevance of impulse buying as a prevalent consumer behavior, especially among the young and digitally active sample.

**8. “What types of products do you usually buy on impulse? / Quali tipi di prodotti acquisti solitamente d’impulso?**

***(You can choose more than one option / Puoi scegliere più di un’opzione)”***

Participants could select multiple options from a list of items commonly purchased impulsively, based on literature and industry studies. This question aimed to identify the product categories most frequently associated with impulse purchases. The responses reveal not only what consumers buy impulsively, but also which industries are more exposed to unplanned purchasing behavior.

Response options included:

- Clothes and accessories / Abbigliamento e accessori
- Electronics / Elettronica
- Beauty and cosmetics / Bellezza e cosmetici
- Food, snack and beverages / Cibo, snack e bevande
- Subscriptions / Abbonamenti (Netflix, Spotify, Disney Plus etc.)
- Travel / Viaggi
- Books / Libri
- Other / Altro

Results indicate that *clothes and accessories* are the most frequently impulsively purchased items, selected by 87.1% of respondents. This is followed closely by *food, snacks, and beverages* (75.0%), confirming the literature’s finding that low-cost, high-frequency products are especially prone to impulsive purchasing. Notably, *beauty and cosmetics* also scored highly (47.6%), particularly relevant in youth-targeted retail environments and e-commerce. Lower-frequency categories such as *electronics* and *travel* were selected less often, likely due to their higher cost or need



for planning. *Subscriptions* were selected by 11.3% of respondents while “*other*” items registered 9.7%, reflecting evolving consumption patterns in digital services and personalized spending. These results suggest that brands in fashion, food, and beauty are particularly well-positioned to benefit from impulse-driven buying behavior, especially when supported by targeted promotions or visual merchandising strategies.

**9. “If you regret an impulse purchase, what do you usually do? / Se ti penti di un acquisto d’impulso, cosa fai di solito?  
(You can choose more than one option / Puoi scegliere più di un’opzione)”**

This question explores the coping strategies consumers adopt when they experience post-purchase regret. Understanding these behaviors is crucial for assessing the effects of impulse buying on brand loyalty, returns costs and personal well-being. Response options included:

- Return it. / Lo restituisco.
- Try to resell it. / Provo a rivenderlo.
- I keep it, but it often remains unused collecting dust. / Lo conservo, ma spesso rimane inutilizzato a prendere polvere.
- Try to justify it to myself. / Provo a giustificarlo a me stesso.
- Other / Altro

The two most common responses were “*I keep it, but it often remains unused collecting dust*” and “*Try to justify it to myself*”, together accounting for well over one-half of the sample. These findings suggest that most participants do not take active steps, such as reselling or returning, to reverse an unwanted impulse purchase. Instead, they either rationalize the expense or allow the item to remain unused, behaviors consistent with the concept of cognitive-dissonance discussed in literature<sup>53</sup>. Approximately one quarter of respondents indicated that they *return* the

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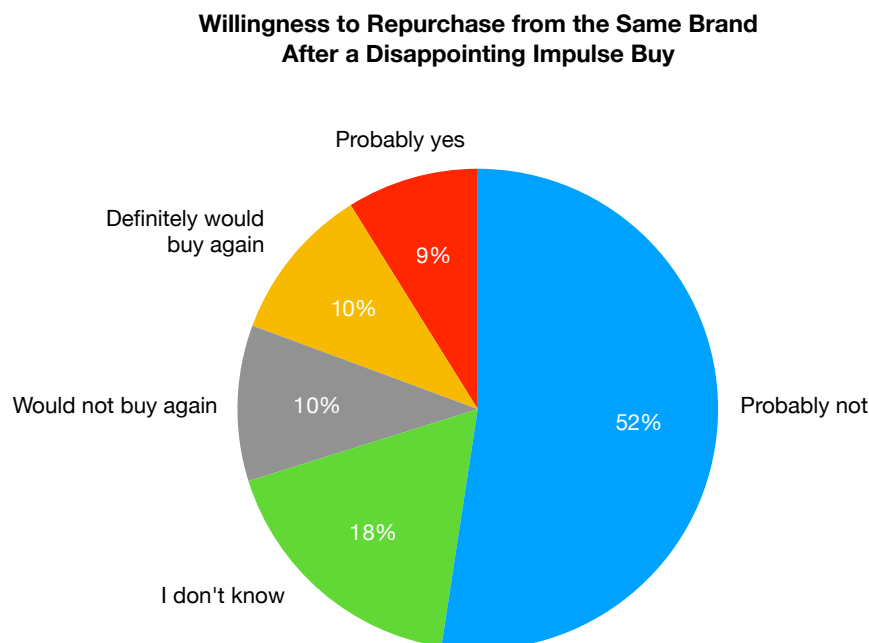
<sup>53</sup> Festinger, L. (1957). *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. Stanford University Press.

product, highlighting a tangible cost for brands in terms of reverse logistics and potential margin erosion. These patterns underscore that the negative aftermath of impulse buying is often absorbed privately by consumers, through unused products and self-justification, rather than being fully externalized to brands via returns.

**10. “If you buy a product impulsively from a brand, and the product disappoints you, would you buy from that same brand again? / Se acquisti un prodotto impulsivamente da un brand e il prodotto ti delude, acquisteresti nuovamente da quel brand?”**

The majority of respondents indicated that they would “*probably not*” make another purchase from a brand following a disappointing impulse buy, suggesting a high-sensitivity to post-purchase dissatisfaction. This highlights the potential long-term impact of impulsive consumer behavior on brand loyalty. Notably, only a small portion of participants expressed a willingness to *definitely repurchase*. Results suggest that while impulse purchases may offer short-term gains for brands, poor post-purchase experiences can have lasting negative implications on customer retention.

*The graph below illustrates the willingness among the 124 participants to buy again from the same brand after a disappointing purchase.*

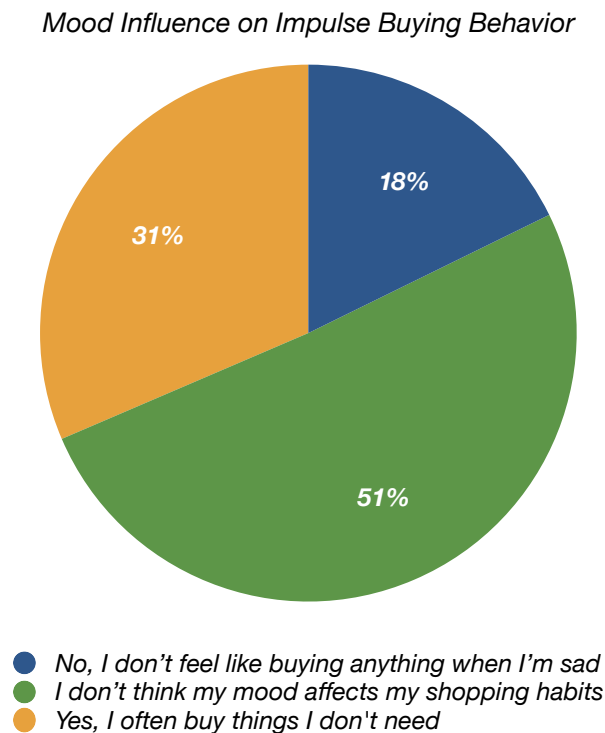


**11. “When you are feeling down or sad, do you find yourself making more impulsive purchases? / Quando ti senti giù o triste, tu capita di fare più acquisti impulsivi?”**

This question aimed to explore the psychological dimension of impulse buying by examining the perceived influence of emotional states on unplanned purchasing behavior. The majority of respondents reported that they “*do not believe their mood influences their shopping habits*”. This suggests a dominant self-perception of rational, mood-independent purchasing behavior, which may either reflect genuine emotional detachment or, more probably, a lack of awareness regarding mood-driven impulses.

Nearly one third of the sample admitted to “*often buy things they don’t need*”, implying a susceptibility to emotional triggers. The remaining share reported that “*they do not feel like buying anything when they are sad*”, thus withdrawing from consumption when experiencing negative affect.

*The graph below illustrates mood influence on impulse buying behavior among the 124 participants.*



**12. “What was your last impulse purchase? / Qual è stato il tuo ultimo acquisto impulsivo?”**

This open-ended question aimed to capture the *specific nature* of the respondents' most recent impulse purchases, providing insights into the categories of products that most frequently elicit unplanned buying behavior.

Data illustrates that *clothing and fashion-related* items are by far the most common targets of impulse buying. Responses include fast-fashion clothing (several respondents specifically mentioned purchases on Shein), sunglasses, bags, shoes, vintage clothes and jewelry.

Immediately after, *food, snacks and beverages* such as street food, alcohol, soft drinks, candies and any type of junk food especially purchased at the supermarket. Another category significantly mentioned by respondents is *cosmetics & skincare*. Responses include eye patches, face masks, and make-up products such as lip gloss, mascara and blush. These categories align with previous literature highlighting that impulsive behavior often satisfies immediate emotional gratification, aesthetic appeal, or sensory pleasure.

Moreover, a smaller number of responses revealed higher-involvement purchases such as concert tickets, flights and expensive electronics products.

**13. “How would you rate your satisfaction with your last impulse purchase? / Come valuteresti la tua soddisfazione riguardo al tuo ultimo acquisto impulsivo?”**

Participants were asked to rate their satisfaction on a Likert scale from 1 (*Not satisfied at all*) to 5 (*Extremely satisfied*). The distribution of responses reflects a generally positive sentiment toward recent impulse purchases. Over 80% of participants rated their satisfaction at 3 or higher, suggesting a predominantly favorable perception of their most recent impulsive purchases.

The graph below illustrates respondents' level of satisfaction with their most recent impulse purchase.



#### 14. *“Would you buy again from the same brand? / Compreresti di nuovo dallo stesso brand?”*

Participants were asked to select one option among: “No”, “Yes” and “I don’t know”. Results suggest that despite the impulsive nature of the purchase, a significant majority of participants expressed a willingness to repurchase from the same brand, specifically 65% of the sample. This indicates that impulsive purchases do not necessarily lead to dissatisfaction or a break in brand trust. The fact that nearly one-third of respondents were uncertain reflects a degree of ambivalence, which may stem from mixed feelings about the purchase or insufficient experience with the brand. Meanwhile, the small proportion of negative responses (3%) indicates that only a minority experienced regret strong enough to affect future buying intentions.

**Section 3.** Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements related to emotional and cognitive aspects of impulse buying. Responses were measured on a Likert scale ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'.

**15. “I only purchase things that I truly need”. / “Acquisto solo ciò di cui ho davvero bisogno”.**

Results indicate that a majority of respondents do not consistently restrict their purchases to necessities. Only 18.5% of participants “*strongly agree*” with the statement, suggesting a relatively low level of strong conviction in purchasing only what is needed. Data support the notion that a significant portion of consumers exhibit ambivalence or weak commitment to necessity-based purchasing, aligning with broader patterns of impulsive or emotionally driven consumption behavior.

**16. “I usually end up buying products I don’t need because I see them on sale”. / “Di solito finisco per comprare cose che non mi servono perché le trovo in offerta”.**

A majority of 44.4% of respondents *slightly agree* with the statement, indicating a common but moderate tendency to purchase unnecessary items because of sales. Moreover, 14.5% of the sample *strongly agree*, highlighting a considerable subgroup with a strong predisposition towards buying on sale, even when the product is not needed. On the other hand, 28.2% of participants *slightly disagree* and 16.1% *strongly disagree*, together representing 44.3% of respondents who tend to resist the impulse to buy unnecessary products on sale. This distribution suggests that while promotional sales influence a significant portion of consumers to buy products they don’t need, nearly an equal portion exercises caution or restraint against such purchasing behavior.

**17. “I carefully plan all of my purchases”. / “Pianifico attentamente la maggior parte dei miei acquisti”.**

A total of 72.5% of respondents agreed with the statement, including 29.0% who *strongly agreed* and 43.5% who *slightly agreed*. Only 18.5% of the sample expressed disagreement (14.5% *slightly disagree*, 4.0% *strongly disagree*). Results suggest that, at least in terms of self-perception, most participants tend to approach their purchases in a deliberate and organized manner. However, it is important to remember that these

responses are based on self-assessment, thus participants may lack full awareness of their purchasing habits or may overestimate their level of planning.

**Section 4.** This section investigates participants' attitudes and beliefs related to impulse buying, the influence of marketing strategies and intergenerational differences in purchasing behavior.

**18. *“Impulse purchases are bad for both consumers and brands”, what do you think about this statement? / Gli acquisti impulsivi sono dannosi sia per i consumatori che per i brand”, cosa pensi di questa affermazione?***

Most participants agree, at least in part, that impulse purchases are harmful for consumers, while less for brands. Common reasons mentioned include: financial consequences for consumers, potential negative first impressions of a brand based on mismatched purchases, and feelings of regret, guilt and lack of satisfaction after an impulsive purchase.

A significant portion of respondents take a balanced or case-dependent stance. According to many participants, the impact of the purchase depends on the product quality and price, brand positioning and consumer self-awareness. Moreover, many respondents argue that impulse purchases can be beneficial for brands in the short-term but harmful in the long-term if they lose customer loyalty. Additionally, several participants note that not all impulsive purchases are bad because some offer emotional comfort or satisfaction.

A recurring view is that the real damage is on the consumer side, often due to emotional spending (caused by sadness, boredom or social influence), overconsumption and environmental concerns. Moreover, some respondents affirmed that brands actually benefit, and even encourage impulse buying, sometimes at the expense of consumer well-being.

Views on the consequences for brands are more mixed. Some respondents argue that brands are not harmed, but that instead benefit from impulse purchases of consumers. Others point out that poor impulsive experiences can reduce trust or future

engagement with brands. In addition, some respondents note brand reputation risk or missed chances of customer loyalty if purchases are unsatisfactory.

Moreover, some respondents also linked impulse buying to mental health or emotional regulation issues, and environmental and ethical concerns.

The most noteworthy findings include:

- Female 1 (18 – 28 years old) emphasized that greater attention should be paid to the consequences of impulse buying on the environment, as it promotes excessive spending and consumption, thereby fostering a culture of consumerism and wastefulness.
- Female 2 (18 – 28 years old) believes that *“many brands explicitly encourage impulsive purchasing behaviors”*.
- Male 1 (18 – 28 years old) affirmed that *“what we often consider rational purchases are, in fact, retrospective rationalizations of impulsive decisions”*.
- Female 3 (18 – 28 years old) believes that *“impulse purchases, when made in moderation, are not harmful to either brands and consumers”*.
- Male 2 (18 – 28 years old) affirmed that *“he could not identify any brand that could potentially be harmed by this phenomenon”*.
- Male 3 (18 – 28 years old) indicated that there is *“undoubtedly harm on both sides”*. While for consumers impulsive purchases often lead to dissatisfaction and financial strain, for brands, impulse buying can significantly damage customer loyalty.

**19. “Do you think Gen Z buys more impulsively compared to older generation? / Pensi che la Gen Z acquisti più d’impulso rispetto alle generazioni più adulte?”**

The majority of respondents (70.2%) believe that Generation Z tends to make more impulsive purchases than older generations. Notably, over half of the participants (50.8%) feel that this difference is slight, while 19.4% believe the difference is



significant. On the other hand, 21.8% of respondents perceive no significant difference between generations, and a smaller part of the sample (8.1%) believe that older generations are more impulsive in their purchasing behavior. The data suggests that impulsive buying is widely perceived as more prevalent among Generation Z, though most respondents describe the generational gap as moderate rather than extreme. This perception may reflect the influence of factors such as increased digital engagement, targeted advertising on social media, and the ease of mobile shopping.

**20. *“Do you ever feel that marketing strategies (such as advertisements, promotions or product placement) have influenced your past purchases, leading you to buy something you didn’t really need? / Ti è mai capitato di pensare che le strategie di marketing (come pubblicità, promozioni o posizionamento dei prodotti) abbiano influenzato i tuoi acquisti passati, portandoti a comparare qualcosa che non ti serviva davvero?”***

The majority of respondents acknowledged some degree of influence by marketing strategies on their purchasing behavior. The 34.7% of participants answered “Yes, definitely”, indicating a clear recognition of marketing’s role in prompting unnecessary purchases. The option “Yes, to some extent” was selected by 46.8% of the sample, suggesting a moderate awareness of marketing influence. A smaller segment, accounting for the 15.3% of respondents, answered “No, I don’t think so”, denying that marketing strategies affected their buying decisions, while few uncertain participants (3.2%) selected the option “I’m not sure”.

This question effectively probes the perceived impact of marketing techniques on consumer behavior, particularly regarding impulsive or non-essential purchases. The responses indicate that marketing strategies, such as advertisements, promotions, and product placements, are widely acknowledged to influence consumer choices, at least to some extent. This reflects the pervasive role of marketing in shaping buying patterns and highlights consumers’ awareness of external factors affecting their decision-making processes.

**21. “What do you think would be the most effective way to reduce impulsive buying?/ Quale pensi sia il metodo più efficace per ridurre gli acquisti impulsivi?”**

This is the last question of the survey. Options proposed to participants were the following:

- Teaching financial literacy from a young age / Insegnare l’educazione finanziaria fin da piccoli
- Setting spending limits using apps or budgeting tools / Impostare limiti di spesa utilizzando app o strumenti di budget
- Creating and sticking to a budgeting plan / Creare e seguire un piano budget
- Implementing stricter advertising regulations to reduce temptations / Implementare regolamenti pubblicitari più rigorosi per ridurre le tentazioni
- Other (open-ended) / Altro (aperta)

Respondents overwhelmingly identified “*teaching financial literacy from a young age*” (44.3%) as the most effective strategy to curb impulse buying, highlighting the importance of foundational knowledge in developing responsible spending habits. According to the majority of the sample, education is the key. The strong preference for teaching financial literacy early supports initiatives in schools and communities to incorporate money management skills from a young age.

“*Creating and sticking to a budgeting plan*” (21.4%) and “*setting spending limits using apps or budgeting tools*” (18.6%) were also considered valuable practical approaches, while only 8.6% of respondents selected the option regarding “*stricter advertising regulations*”.

Additionally, 7.1% of the sample answered the question through the open-ended option, highlighting the necessity of integrating ethical consumer education, emotional control techniques, and environmental awareness to holistically address impulsive purchasing tendencies.

These insights suggest that multi-faceted interventions combining early financial education, behavioral tools, and societal measures could effectively reduce impulsive buying, fostering more conscious and sustainable consumption patterns.

Among the open-ended responses, the most noteworthy findings include:

- Female 1 (18 – 28 years old) affirmed that awareness campaigns on the consequences of impulse buying should be implemented, with particular focus on environmental sustainability and personal responsibility, encouraging reflection on whether a purchase is genuinely necessary or simply driven by impulse.
- Female 2 (18 – 28 years old) believes that individuals should be educated about environmental awareness and the importance of creativity too. According to the participant, with just a bit of inventiveness and product deconstruction, it is possible to create multiple outfits from only a few items, for example transforming trousers into a bag, or a skirt into a top. While this approach may not be simple, especially for those who are not particularly interested, it promotes a more sustainable and imaginative way of consuming fashion.
- Female 3 (0 – 18 years old) suggests that an effective approach for online impulse purchases is simply to place the item in the shopping cart and revisits the potential purchase at later time. By taking the opportunity to reflect, wait and reassess the desire to buy, the consumer can better determine whether the item is truly necessary or if the impulse to purchase has diminished over time.

### 3.5 Results and Discussion

The empirical findings of this study offer a comprehensive view into the phenomenon of impulse buying, especially among young consumers. Overall, results confirm the theoretical assumptions introduced in previous chapters while also revealing practical insights into the psychological, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of impulse purchasing in contemporary contexts.

Results affirm that impulse buying is a highly prevalent behavior, particularly among members of Gen Z. Over two-thirds of respondents admitted to engaging in impulse purchases at least occasionally, and more than half reported that they “sometimes” buy without planning. This aligns with the literature that positions younger consumers as particularly susceptible to impulsive behaviors, given their high exposure to digital environments and persuasive marketing tactics. Notably, the product categories most frequently purchased on impulse (fashion, food and beauty) correspond with those that dominate the visual content on platforms like Instagram and TikTok.

The survey further highlights the emotional triggers underlying impulse purchases, supporting theoretical models such as *Rook’s Hedonic framework* and *Baumestier’s Self-Regulation Theory*. While one third of participants directly linked their mood to shopping habits, nearly an equal share acknowledged purchasing things they didn’t need, indicating a possible gap between perceived and actual emotional influence. This self-awareness gap is consistent with *Festinger’s Cognitive Dissonance Theory*, as many respondents rationalize regretted purchases instead of returning them, demonstrating internal justification strategies used to reduce post-purchase dissonance.

Moreover, a large portion of participants stated that they would be hesitant to buy again from a brand after a disappointing impulse purchase, underlying a critical long-term risk for brands. While impulse buying may boost short-term revenues, poor post-purchase satisfaction can erode trust, reduce loyalty, and generate higher return rates, echoing concerns raised in Chapter 1 about the dual-edged nature of impulse buying for businesses.

Interestingly, although most participants claimed they “carefully plan” their purchases, a significant number also acknowledged buying unnecessary items when on sale. This contradiction between stated planning and actual behavior underscores the influence of cognitive biases, sales triggers, and the “fast” intuitive thinking described in *Kahneman’s* dual-process model.

Additionally, responses to open-ended questions reflected a nuanced view of impulse buying: many participants acknowledged its emotional benefits, such as temporary satisfaction or mood improvement, while also recognizing the financial, psychological and environmental consequences. This dual perspective supports the idea that impulse purchases may function as emotional regulation strategies but are not without cost.

In terms of solutions, respondents emphasized the importance of financial education, self-imposed budgetary controls, and mindfulness-based strategies to reduce unnecessary consumption. Surprisingly, few participants saw stricter advertising regulation as an effective deterrent, suggesting a preference for individual empowerment over institutional restrictions. These responses align with calls in the literature for promoting responsible consumption without restricting autonomy.

A key point of divergence emerged when comparing younger and older respondents, particularly in relation to frequency, motivation, and attitudes toward impulse buying. Generation Z participants (ages 18–28), who constituted the majority of the sample, reported significantly higher engagement in impulsive purchases. This is consistent with existing literature emphasizing that digital natives, exposed daily to algorithm-driven content, influencer marketing, and one-click purchase environments, are more prone to make spontaneous buying decisions. In contrast, older participants (ages 45 and above) displayed more caution, with higher self-reported levels of planning and less susceptibility to emotional triggers or marketing tactics. Notably, younger respondents were also more likely to cite social media influence, aesthetic appeal and emotional mood states as justifications for impulsive behavior, while older respondents emphasized practical needs and value assessment. Additionally, younger participants more frequently admitted to buying items they didn’t need simply because they were on sale, indicating a stronger response to promotional stimuli. These generational distinctions suggest not only

behavioral differences but also varying cognitive and emotional frameworks when approaching consumption, reinforcing the need for age-specific marketing strategies and educational interventions.

Moreover, differences based on self-reported income levels also yielded meaningful insights into impulse buying behavior. Participants with lower income levels (classified as “*low*” or “*very low*”) were more likely to express regret after impulse purchases and reported that items were often kept unused or later rationalized rather than returned. This suggests that for individuals with limited financial flexibility, impulse purchases may lead to more pronounced post-purchase dissonance and emotional strain. In addition, lower-income respondents showed higher susceptibility to discounts and sales promotions, supporting prior research indicating that scarcity and affordability cues are especially effective among more price-sensitive consumers. Interestingly, although higher-income participants (classified as “*high*” or “*very high*”) were more likely to justify their impulse purchases as “deserved treats” or expressions of personal taste, they also exhibited higher satisfaction rates with those purchases, potentially due to more flexible budgets and lower psychological costs. However, participants of all income levels acknowledged the influence of marketing tactics, though those in middle and high income brackets expressed greater confidence in managing those influences. These results underscore the asymmetrical consequences of impulse buying, where similar behaviors can result in very different emotional and financial outcomes depending on a consumer’s economic context.

In conclusion, the empirical results confirm the multifaceted nature of impulse buying. These findings pave the way for the next section, which will explore actionable managerial implications.

### ***3.6 Managerial Implications***

The findings of this study on impulse buying behaviors reveal significant implications for managers, marketers, and brand strategists across industries. As shown throughout the research, impulse purchases are not random or irrational behaviors; rather, they are often predictable, emotionally-driven responses to a complex interplay of internal and external stimuli. For companies seeking to capitalize on impulse buying without undermining long-term brand equity, customer loyalty, or ethical responsibility, several managerial strategies emerge as particularly relevant.

One of the central implications for managers is the need to recognize the emotional dimension that underpins impulsive purchasing. Consumers often make impulse purchases not out of need, but in response to emotional states such as stress, boredom, sadness, or excitement. As the data show, a substantial proportion of respondents admitted to making purchases they did not need, and many acknowledged mood-based influences, even when they were not fully aware of them. This highlights the importance of empathy-driven marketing, which speaks to the emotional needs of consumers without manipulating their vulnerabilities. Brand messaging should foster emotional connection and authenticity while avoiding exploitative tactics that target low self-control moments. Moreover, companies could integrate mechanisms with online stores to support reflective purchasing, such as optional “cooling-off” timers before finalizing an order or personalized messages prompting users to review their carts after a delay. These subtle interventions show consumers that the brand cares about their well-being and not just the transaction, reinforcing trust and long-term loyalty.

Additionally, the research revealed distinct generational and income-based differences in impulse buying behavior. For example, younger consumers (especially those aged 18 - 28) are significantly more prone to impulse purchases, particularly in categories such as fashion, food, and beauty. These consumers are highly responsive to visual content and influencer marketing, making platforms like TikTok and Instagram key channels for engagement. Managers targeting Gen Z must therefore prioritize mobile-first, short-term content strategies that are visually compelling and emotionally resonant. However, caution must be exercised: promotional content should not appear as overly aggressive or

perceived as inauthentic. In contrast, older consumers (45+) show greater resistance to impulsivity and prioritize practicality, value, and planning. Campaigns targeting this demographic should therefore emphasize product quality, reliability and long-term value, rather than urgency and scarcity. Indeed, educational content, comparisons and guarantees may be more effective than emotional appeals.

Furthermore, income levels were found to shape both the experience and aftermath of impulsive behavior. Lower-income participants reported higher rates of regret and unused purchases. For brands serving more price-sensitive audiences, this indicates a need for value-focused messaging, that avoids unnecessary upselling. For higher-income consumers, strategies that promote exclusivity, self-reward, and lifestyle alignment can enhance the perceived value of impulse purchases.

Rather than attempting to suppress impulse purchases, brands should aim to channel them ethically and responsibly. The survey results show that many consumers justify or regret their unplanned purchases, with a sizable proportion admitting they never use the items they bought. From a managerial standpoint, this represents both a reputational risk and a logistical burden, particularly if dissatisfaction results in high return rates or negative word-of-mouth. To address this, brands can proactively improve the post-purchase experience. Offering simple and transparent return processes, clear product descriptions and proactive follow-up (e.g., satisfaction surveys or product-use suggestions) can mitigate regret and reinforce brand credibility. Returns, while costly, can also be framed as opportunities to restore trust and demonstrate customer-centric values. Additionally, for products likely to be bought on impulse (e.g., cosmetics, fashion) integrating sustainable packaging, reusable items or product trial kits may reduce consumer guilt and support more sustainable behavior.

The study's findings further emphasized the need for ethical transparency in marketing strategies. The role of manipulative design features (such as fake scarcity or urgency tactics) and parasocial dynamics with influencers must be managed with integrity. Brands that exploit these tactics excessively may enjoy short-term gains but face long-term risks in terms of consumer backlash, regulatory scrutiny, and declining brand trust. To mitigate this, managers should work with ethically aligned influencers, ensure transparency in



advertising partnerships, and clearly label sponsored content. In sectors such as skincare or wellness, where health-related claims are made, brands must avoid encouraging unqualified individuals to portray themselves as professionals. Providing educational content, collaborating with verified experts, and encouraging informed decision-making among consumers can foster ethical differentiation in saturated markets.

Impulse purchases, if managed well, can become gateways to stronger consumer-brand relationships. As the data suggest, not all impulsive purchases result in regret, many respondents reported satisfaction and a willingness to buy again. This presents an opportunity for brands to convert spontaneous buyers into loyal customers by reinforcing positive experiences. Follow-up engagement, loyalty rewards, personalized communication, and user-generated content can all help extend the emotional resonance of an impulse buy into a lasting connection.

Moreover, brands can position themselves as partners in conscious consumption, rather than passive beneficiaries of consumer impulsivity. By promoting informed decision-making, offering reflective shopping experiences, and showcasing values such as sustainability or mental wellness, companies can show consumers that they understand and respect the complex reality behind modern consumer behavior, thus transforming impulsive interactions into long-term value.

To conclude, the future of marketing lies not in pushing for more purchases, but in understanding the deeper motivations behind them.

## ***CONCLUSIONS:***

This thesis set out to examine the phenomenon of impulse buying, analyzing its psychological foundations, behavioral patterns, and marketing strategies, while critically evaluating the consequences for both consumers and brands. Through a combination of theoretical analysis and empirical research, the work has illuminated the dual nature of impulsive purchasing behavior: a source of short-term gratification and business revenue, but also a trigger of long-term dissatisfaction, financial strain, and reputational risks.

The initial chapter introduced and contextualized the concept of impulse buying, tracing its evolution from a minor, irrational behavior to a central component of modern marketing strategies and consumer behavior. Through an analysis of how digital tools and platforms have reshaped the consumer journey, the chapter demonstrated how impulse purchasing has become embedded in contemporary retail environments. This analysis provided a foundational understanding of the external forces, that drive impulsive consumption today, setting the stage for the psychological exploration and empirical investigation that followed in the subsequent chapters.

The second chapter examined the main psychological theories and the principal factors shaping consumer impulsive behavior. Several theories were examined to understand how impulse buying arises from deeper internal conflicts, unmet needs, and weakened self-control. This analysis provided a deeper understanding of the psychological mechanisms and numerous factors that drive impulsive behavior, explaining why such consumption patterns often lead to negative outcomes for both sides of the transaction. This literature review provided critical insight into the underlying mechanisms of impulsive buying and clarified why its effects extend beyond individual choices.

The third chapter presented the empirical research conducted through a structured survey aimed at validating the theoretical assumptions introduced earlier. The data collected from a sample of 124 participants confirmed that impulse buying is a widespread behavior, particularly among younger consumers and in product categories such as fashion, food, and beauty. The findings revealed consistent patterns of unplanned purchasing, post-purchase regret, and the influence of external stimuli such as sales

promotions and social media content. Moreover, the research highlighted important differences across age and income groups, showing that vulnerable demographics are more prone to emotional or situational triggers and more likely to suffer negative consequences. For brands, this indicates a risk of decreased satisfaction, weakened loyalty, and long-term reputational damage when marketing strategies prioritize immediate conversions over sustainable engagement.

The analysis developed across the three chapters of this thesis supports the central argument: impulse buying, though profitable in the short term, poses serious risks when it becomes a systematic feature of marketing and consumer culture. For consumers, it can result in poor financial decisions, emotional discomfort, and a diminished sense of control. For businesses, it can lead to returns, customer dissatisfaction, and loss of trust, ultimately undermining the long-term value of the consumer-brand relationship.

In conclusion, this work contributes to a deeper understanding of impulse buying as a multidimensional and ethically relevant phenomenon. The findings of this thesis call for a more balanced approach to marketing, one that values transparency, responsibility, and consumer well-being as part of long-term brand success. As impulsive consumption continues to evolve in digital spaces, fostering ethical awareness and promoting reflective consumer behavior will be key to mitigating its negative impact and creating a more sustainable relationship between business and society.

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