

The Emotional Impact of an Impulse Purchase

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Abstract

Impulse buying is a widespread consumer behaviour driven largely by emotional rather than rational processes. This paper explores the role of emotional factors such as fear of missing out (FOMO), pleasure, and regret. Showing how these emotional factors drive impulsive purchasing decisions, and examining how social media intensifies these emotional influences. Prior research indicates that impulse buying occurs when emotional desires for immediate gratification override powerful cognitive control, especially under heightened emotional states, such as stress or excitement. Social media platforms further amplify impulsivity by stimulating emotional arousal, reinforcing social comparisons and creating a perceived urgency to avoid missing out. Evidence from platforms like Pinterest shows that a significant proportion of users make purchases shortly after exposure to online content, highlighting the power of the digital environment in triggering spontaneous buying. The review also differentiates between positive emotional drivers, such as pleasure and arousal, which increase impulse and negative post-purchase emotions like regret and guilt, which commonly arise when product performance fails to meet their expectations. Regret is associated with cognitive dissonance, reducing satisfaction and decreasing the likelihood of repurchase. Collectively, the findings show that emotional experiences intensified by social media, exposure, and moderated by emotional intelligence, play a central role in both motivating impulsive purchases and shaping their psychological consequences.

Keywords: emotional factors, fear of missing out (FOMO), pleasure, regret, social media, purchasing decisions, Emotional regulation, cognitive dissonance, affective decision-making.

1. Introduction

In the current times, the influence of emotions has shown a multifaceted approach towards impulse purchases. Impulse purchase is a phenomenon that is characterised by spontaneous and emotionally driven decision-making, where individuals succumb to immediate desires or whims, rather than rational deliberation (Verplanken & Herabadi, 2001). The influence of impulse purchases is categorised into multiple emotional factors, including FOMO (fear of missing out), anxiety, guilt, sadness, pleasure, regret, and pride. Furthermore, impulsive buying may be fuelled by psychological factors, such as the need for instant gratification or the desire to alleviate negative emotions (Baumeister et al. 2002). Moreover, one of the variables that triggers the emotions is media formats such as Instagram, Pinterest, and YouTube. Emotional intelligence is a significant factor that influences impulsive behaviour. Impulse buying, often driven by sudden emotional urges rather than thoughtful consideration, is closely tied to how individuals process and regulate their emotions (Rook, D. W. 1987).

Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to the ability to perceive, understand, use, and manage one's own emotions in positive ways to achieve one's goals and navigate social relationships (Bar-On, 1997).

2. Background

Previous research has shown that emotional experiences play a major role in driving impulse purchases. Rook and Hoch (1985), along with Youn and Faber (2000), suggested that impulse buying occurs when emotional desires for immediate gratification overpower cognitive self-control. When emotions are intense—especially under stress or distraction—people are more likely to make unplanned purchases. Likewise, Beatty and Ferrell (1998) found that positive moods increase the probability of impulse-caused acquisition, even if there is no prior intention of purchasing. These studies present how emotional conditions can influence weakened self-regulation, which leads to unprompted consumption. In addition, several psychological studies have explored how social media intensifies emotional influences on behaviour. Sheldon et al. (2011) found that social media affects users' basic



psychological needs, which in turn impacts emotional well-being. Friggeri et al. (2014) showed that emotionally charged misinformation spreads faster than neutral content because users often respond impulsively, driven by emotion rather than reflection. This suggests that emotional arousal on social platforms can override rational thinking and encourage impulsive behaviours like unplanned purchases. Similarly, Przybylski et al. (2013) found that Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is closely linked to negative emotions such as anxiety and dissatisfaction. People with high FOMO often overuse social media to stay connected, which can lead to impulsive actions. Collectively, these findings reveal how emotions—especially in the context of social media—can significantly influence impulsive purchases.

3. Methodology

Hypothesis

1. Emotional factors, including fear of missing out (FOMO), pleasure, and regret, intensified by social media exposure, have no significant effect on impulse buying behaviour.

4.1 FOMO (fear of missing out)

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) refers to an anxiety-driven emotional state characterised by urgency and concern about missing rewarding opportunities, which can reduce deliberative thinking and increase impulsive purchasing behaviour (Przybylski et al., 2013). Understanding the concept of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and its link towards impulse behaviour is shown through the influence of social media on consumer decisions. Social formats have transformed consumer behaviour, driving impulse purchases among users. With the use of “shoppertainment” models, social media has encouraged unplanned

purchases. By fostering the concept of FOMO and integrating the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), behaviours are influenced by intentions, which are determined by three factors: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1985,1987). Fomo fuels attitudes, social pressure and perceived ease of action, which raises behavioural intention. As a result, individuals are more likely to engage in impulse purchases. This provides a comprehensive understanding of the emotional strain on the consumer while purchasing. Media applications such as Pinterest demonstrate this Impulsivity in relation to viewing a product pin.

The “Buying Action” timing shows 27% individuals buy within 5 minutes, 46% within an hour, 64% within 12 hours, and 72% within 24 hours (KDD study, by Jure Leskovec et al.2016). The data shows that it leaves very little time for careful evaluation or planning, suggesting that the urgency to avoid missing out encourages spontaneous purchases. The rapid decision-making characteristics test the relationship between impulsivity and buying behaviour.

Social media influencers use perceived value and enjoyment from users to drive purchasing. Another study (“Modelling User Actions on the Web: What Users Do and Why” Jure Leskovec et al. 2016), perceived value had the strongest positive relationship with purchase intention, with a Correlation with Purchase Intention of 0.759 and Significance (p-value) of $p < 0.001$. Additionally, the short-lived FOMO in relation to impulse purchases is a

positive effect, as purchases driven by FOMO often result in Pleasure or satisfaction because the act of buying provides a sense of relief and inclusion from the fear of being left out. This is linked to the brain’s dopamine response, which creates a temporary “feel-good” sensation. However, the long-term effect would result in a negative response often followed by regret, guilt and financial stress. According to Dhandra (2020), individuals experiencing higher levels of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) are more likely to engage in impulse buying because they seek to alleviate feelings of anxiety, inadequacy, or exclusion.



4.2 Pleasure

According to Sigmund Freud’s “pleasure principle?”, human behaviour is driven by the desire to seek pleasure and avoid pain, meaning we are motivated to satisfy our biological and psychological needs to restore balance and feel good. Humans are unintentionally forced to seek pleasure and neglect inconvenience. In this scenario, during the activity of an individual shopping, pleasure appears due to exploring and enjoying the action performed. As a result, pleasure satisfies psychological needs like



relaxation, mood enhancement, excitement, and boredom. It acts as a positive emotional reward, making the person feel good, and individuals develop the intention to impulsively purchase. The study by Grace Yuna Lee and Youjae Yi- “The effect of shopping emotions and perceived risk on impulse buying” stated that pleasure only acts as a tool to increase the intention for impulse purchase, but does not necessarily force consumers to purchase commodities impulsively. Further, it was noted that pleasure does not significantly predict actual impulsive buying behaviour, as shown in the logistic regression, where its effect had a p-value of 0.203. However, pleasure has a strong and highly significant effect on impulsive buying intention, with a standardised beta of 0.269, a t-value of 3.681, and a p-value of 0.0001, suggesting that pleasure increases the urge to buy impulsively. Overall, the statistical results confirm that pleasure acts as a powerful emotional driver of impulsive buying intention, but it does not directly lead to actual impulsive purchasing behaviour. The study also states that arousal causes excitement, leading to impulsive purchase because Arousal significantly increases actual impulsive buying behaviour, as shown by a logistic regression result of $B = 0.346$ with a p-value of 0.044, meaning that higher excitement makes shoppers more likely to physically make an impulsive purchase. Furthermore, research suggests that usually the shopping emotion is pleasure and arousal, but the post-purchase leads to mental conflict and therefore eventually causes regret and guilt.

4.3 Regret

Regret has been defined as a negative emotion predicated on an upward, self-focused, counterfactual inference (Gilovich & Medvec, 1995; Zeelenberg, 1999). Regret is an emotion that occurs after an impulse purchase, causing emotional distress to the individuals involved in the act. Regret is one of the most common emotions that consumers behavior will experience after impulse purchases. These kinds of decisions are made in a very short time, without evaluating enough and involving little cognition. Once the purchase has been made, people often reassess their decision and realise that there are differences between expectations and the real utility of the product, which results in them feeling uncomfortable from the emotional point of view, dissatisfied with their finances, or blaming themselves. To maximise satisfaction, consumers allocate their limited resources as efficiently and carefully as possible. However, Consumers may have the doubt to what extent their decisions are correct, even after justifying their buying decisions (Loomers & Sugden, 1982; Boles & Messick, 1995; Shankar, Cherrier & Canniford, 2006). Such comparisons often result in a state of grief and psychological pain known as post-purchase regret or

cognitive dissonance. This is when customers perceive that their buying decision was wrong and they regret their decision (Landman, 1987; Heitmann, Lehmann & Herrmann, 2007). This post-purchase regret not only reflects the perceived poor quality of the decision but also triggers a broader psychological distress that influences future buying behaviour and satisfaction.



Post-purchase also shows the gap between the expected performance of the product and its actual performance against the exchange of a certain amount of money creates post-purchase regret. Often, the post-purchase regret of impulse buying is related to the return of goods, financial issues, frustration, dissatisfaction with the good purchase, guilt and the objects of other individuals to such purchases. This feeling of discomfort resulted from the comparison between choosing one option against one left out during the process, which is expressed as the very opposite of joy or delight. Tsiros and Mittal (2000) suggested that the comparison between the chosen option and the unchosen option will have an effect on consumer behaviour. The customers who experience regret are connected with the behaviour of switching brands. The post-purchase behaviour of the customer will influence the long-term business activities. Therefore, Post-purchase regret will occur with low customer satisfaction, and low satisfaction then results in no repurchase intention (Inman, Dyer & Jia, 1997; Taylor & Schneider, 1998). Although regret in decision-making has been widely researched (Starmer & Sugden, 1998), there is relatively little empirical work specifically examining regret in impulse buying. One study found that 80% of customers reported negative consequences from their purchases—likely including, but not limited to, regret (Rook, 1987). However, these outcomes can vary depending on the context (Rook & Fisher, 1995).

5. Conclusion

The review demonstrates that FOMO arises from social media platforms' constructs, which initially caused emotional oppression, making individuals feel anxious and frightened about being left out. This pressure forces them to practice the act of impulse purchases as a way to decrease anxiety. As individuals begin to shop or make decisions to buy, pleasure arises because of enjoyment and emotional and stress relief. Pleasure acts as a tool to increase the intention to purchase commodities; therefore, the act of purchasing becomes a rewarding activity and a stress relief method. However, the evidence suggests the post-emotion of impulse purchase as a negative emotion- regret, which explains why individuals feel less excitement, and eventually they evaluate their actions and feel regret. The sense of regret leads to dissatisfaction, self-blaming and psychological suffering. Overall, the findings suggest that emotionally

charged digital environments play a significant role in both initiating impulse buying and influencing its psychological consequences.

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