



## Catching the Pulses of Buyer the Conceptual Model of “In-store Browsing and Impulsive Buying”: The Situational Antecedents of Impulsive Buying Behavior in Retail Environment

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### **Abstract:**

*This research examines the influence of situational antecedents on impulse-buying behavior in retail setting. The effort is made to thoroughly investigate the effect of these antecedents on the urge of buying impulsively. Results from a field survey suggest that the antecedents in the retail settings i.e. interaction with sales people, impulsive buying tendency, shopping enjoyment, in-store browsing positively influence the felt urge to buy impulsively. This research has also proved that the interaction with sales person in retail setting negatively associated with the regret. Thus this research has confirmed six causal relationships among impulse buying, guilt and situational antecedents.*

**Keywords:** *impulsive buying behavior, impulsive buying tendency (IBT), shopping enjoyment, in-store browsing, consumption related guilt, positive interaction with sales person, felt urge to buy impulsively, opportunistic decisions.*

### **1. Introduction**

This research is aimed at two objectives one to contribute to marketing field - catching the pulses of buyers, and the other related to social awareness “beware of your impulses”.

Impulsive buying is a pervasive and distinctive phenomenon of an unplanned or otherwise spontaneous purchase made to satisfy the hedonic goals rather than the prudent. Marketers and retailers tend to exploit these impulses which are tied to the basic need for instant gratification. In day to day life we often purchase things which we never planned to or are never on our buying list. These instant buying decisions are often due to the situational influences which instantly and automatically arose the need of buying the product or services impulsively (Rook, 1987, p.191; Gerbing, Ahadi and Paton, 1987), e.g. in shopping malls, restaurants, exhibitions, food stalls, night markets, super markets, showrooms, promotions of entertainment services, departmental stores or e-shopping. There are many antecedences which lead us to our buying decision, like the pleasant environment, the attractive displays, the aggressive promotions, the influential approaches of sales persons all these situational in-store factors trigger the impulses of people to visit and re visit to buy. What they might not have otherwise considered necessary in their life (Peter E. Earl and Jason Potts, 2000)

Impulse buying disrupts the rational decision making mode in the shoppers’ brain. The logical sequence of the consumers’ actions is replaced with the irrational moment of self-gratification. Impulse items appeal to the emotional side of consumers (hedonic). (Bloch, Ridgeway, Sherrell, 1989). Some items bought on impulse are not considered functional or necessary in consumer’s life. It’s not always that impulsive buying leads to losses, sometimes it may offer the benefit of opportunistic decision but many times the hasty buying decisions lead to dissatisfaction, losses, guilt, and regret. (Hatice AYDIN and Sevtap ÜNAL, 2015)

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Impulse Buying

Early marketing literature stated that impulse buying occurs when shopper (we term it as consumer in shopping environment) experiences a sudden, often powerful urge to buy something immediately. The impulse to buy is hedonically complex and may stimulate emotional conflict- pleasure and or guilt. Also, impulse buying is prone to occur with diminished regard for its consequences (Dennis W. Rook, 1987). The urge felt suddenly and strongly is often irresistible. (Rook and Hoch, 1985; Rook and Gander 1993).

Rook (1987, p.191) defined impulse buying as, a sudden and immediate purchase with no pre-shopping intentions either to buy a specific product category or to fulfill a specific buying need. The behavior occurs after experiencing an urge to buy and it tends to be spontaneous and without lot of reflection (i.e. “impulsive”). It does not include the purchase of a simple reminder item, which is an item that is simply out-of-stock at home or is on the shopping list.

The early researches explained that impulsive buyer does not intent to buy before entering in shopping area or encounter a seller. It also includes the idea of impulsiveness which involves acting spontaneously without full consideration of the consequences (Gerbing, Ahadi and Paton, 1987),

After the thorough literature investigation, we decided to compile the situational influences which have strong impact on impulsive buying, the antecedents which enhance the urge to buy impulsively in retail setting and also the consequences of the impulse buying.

Efforts are made to understand the implications of the findings in the field of marketing as well as in social science by creating social awareness regarding buying on impulse.

### 2.2. Shopping Enjoyment

It is defined as the pleasure on obtains in the shopping process. The attractive, pleasant environment, attractive displays, pleasant music, attentive salesman, relaxation, pleasant experience of touching products, gathering information, exploring needs make consumer linger in the shopping place let it be super market or open market. As per Belenger and Korgaonkar (1980), the recreational consumers shop for longer time even after making purchase. According to Westbrook and Black (1985) consumer get more gratification from shopping process than that from merchandise purchased. As per the Peter E. Earl and Jason Potts, (2000), the design of shopping malls in terms of their abilities to prolong the consumer’s overall attention on shopping and to increase the time spent in the mall environment reported to increase the probabilities that the consumer will spend particular sums before leaving.

In an observational study, Weinberg and Gottwald (1982) found that impulse buyers exhibited greater feeling of amusement, delight, enthusiasm and joy. Whereas, Donovan and Rossiter (1982) found that the pleasure was positively associated with the likelihood of over-spending in the shopping environment.

### 2.3. In-Store Browsing

In-store browsing is the in-store screening or examination or evaluation of retailers merchandize for recreational or hedonic purposes without an immediate intent to buy. (Bloch, Ridgeway, Sherrell, 1989)

The research done by Sharon E. Beatty and M. Elizabeth Ferrell shows the study of the precursors of impulsive buying, 1998. They have investigated above two variables.

Based on the above mentioned studies, we propose that the enjoyment in shopping influences the time spent in store, which increases the in-store browsing. As per the Peter E. Earl and Jason Potts, (2000), the shopping centers are the physical form of the shopping environments and it has the potential to affect whether or not a consumer encounters particular promotional messages and flips from searching into browsing, or from browsing one kind of good to browsing something else.

Based on it we propose that the enjoyment in shopping leads to increase in time spent in store, which further leads to more in-store browsing.

- H1: The enjoyment in shopping is positively related to the in-store browsing.

### 2.4. The Felt Urge to Buy Impulsively

It is a state of desire that is experienced upon encountering an object in the environment. It clearly precedes the actual impulse action. It is spontaneous and sudden. (Sharon E. Betty and M. Elizabeth Ferrell- 1998)

Sudden, spontaneous urge or impulse felt to buy something. Consumers have most difficult time resisting the urge in the moments following their encounter with the object. Rook (1987) the relationship between browsing and impulsive buying is studied by Fihye Park and Sharron Lemon-2006, and S.E. Beatty and M.Elezabeth Ferrell in 1998.

#### 2.4.1. The Influence of In-store Browsing and Felt Urge to Buying Impulsively

In-store browsing is the in-store examination of a retailer’s merchandise for recreational and/or informational purposes without an immediate intent to buy (Bloch, Ridge Way, and Sherrell, 1989, p14). Babin, Darden and Griffin (1994) studied the hedonic value of shopping, which suggests that hedonic shopping, reflects shopping’s potential entertainment and emotional worth. It has been suggested that browsing or shopping without specific intent, is more significant motivation than the actual acquisition of products and can provide a highly pleasurable “vicarious buying” experience (McInnis and Price, 1987; Sherry.1990). Thus browsing tends to produce positive feelings for many shoppers. These positive feeling are conceptualized as a positive effect, (Sharon E. Betty and M.

Elizabeth Ferrell, 1998) which reflects the extent to which a person feels enthusiastic, active and alert. Jarboe and Mc Daniel (1987) found that the browsers made more unplanned purchases than non-browsers in regional mall settings.

Thus browsing leads to encounter with desirable product, which stimulates urge to buy, which then becomes irresistible due to proximity of the product. Hence, we propose that-

- H2: Greater the in-store browsing, the greater is the felt urge to buy impulsively.

### 2.5. Positive Interaction with Sales People

Desire to receive attention or to meet people to alleviate loneliness may be important shopping motives (Tauber, 1972). He found that people were likely to go to shopping when they needed attention or wanted to communicate with others. People liked to chat with sales people in the store about their interests. This may be more true for elderly shoppers who may have limited social activities due to lack of physical capability. As women get older, they may seek social interaction with sales people in retail setting. (Nordlund, 1978)

### 2.6. Impulsive Buying Tendency (IBT)

Addresses to differential proclivity of individuals to buy on impulse (Rook, 1987). It is a tendency to respond quickly to given stimulus without deliberation and evaluation of consequences. (Gerbing et al., 1987)

The relationship between the interaction with sales people and IBT is studied in the multichannel context by FihyePark and Sharron Lennon.

In the materialistic world, the social interactions are shrinking day by day which creates loneliness and need to be heard and to listen, i.e. people seek social interactions. It may result into the positive impact of the interaction with sales people on the impulsive buying. Based on this I propose my third hypothesis.

- H3: The positive interaction with sales people positively influences the impulse buying tendency (IBT).

### 2.7. In-Store Browsing and IBT

Bellenger and Korgaonkar (1980) learned that recreational shoppers were more likely to go shopping trips without pre-planned purchase in mind. Rook and Hoch (1985), suggests that some people 'plan on being impulsive' as shopping approach. High IBTs are likely to use browsing as a shopping strategy (Sharon E. Beatty and M Elizabeth1998).

The relationship between IBT and in-store browsing is studied by Fihye Park and Sharron Lemmon, as well as Sharon E. Beatty and M. Elezabeth Ferrell. There were contradictory constructs in both the papers, but as (Sharon E. Beatty and M. Elezabeth 1998) strongly proved the positive influence of IBT on in-store browsing.

Thus people having more intensive buying tendency will tend to prefer unplanned shopping which will enhance the "In-store browsing" as they don't have shopping list or a fix plan about what to buy, why, which brand, at what price, from which section or even from which store and when.

- H4: Impulse buying tendency is positively related to the in-store browsing.

### 2.8. IBT and the Felt Urge to Buy Impulsively

By the definition of IBT, shoppers are likely to experience more urges to buy impulsively and will tend to act more frequently on those urges. The IBT influences the impulse purchase which is an outcome of felt urge to buy impulsively ((Sharon E. Beatty and M Elezabeth 1998).

As very few researches have made efforts to explore this relationship, we made efforts to explore this relation and find the combine effect of the interaction with sales person and in-store browsing on the IBT and the influence of IBT on the felt urge to buy impulsively.

- H5: The impulse buying tendency is positively related to the felt urge to buy impulsively

### 2.9. Consumer Guilt

It refers to an individual's "unpleasant emotional state associated with possible objections to his or her actions, inactions, circumstances, or intentions" (Baumeister et al., 1994). Guilt is negative self-consciousness emotion, which occurs after consumer buying behavior especially after impulsive buying. Impulsive buying is strongly associated with guilt. (Hatice AYDIN and Sevtap ÜNAL,2015)

Guilt is feeling of regret a consumer develops for buying something which should not be bought or not buying a particular product, which should be bought. (Tracy et al, 2007).

Past studies described, various forms of guilt related to self, other, or perceived others (societal guilt) (Barrett 1995, Kilter and Haidt, 1999).

The of self-reported guilt associated with consumption is reported by Darren W. Dahl, Heather Honea and Rajesh Manchanda (2003), which includes the guilt related to control self-behavior or failure to meet standards they had set for themselves. The guilt may be spontaneous just after the impulsive decision, or just after the purchase or at some later point of time. For e.g. a person goes to see exhibition and buys too many things impulsively and later coming home she feels it was not necessary or at some later point of time realizes that she is not using it, or it is not useful, or was substandard or not suitable to them or was not necessary etc.

Many experts like studied the guilt related responses. And reported that consumers' reactions to guilt experiences, include amendment and commitment, acknowledgment and rationalization (Denial and Denigration, also see H. Dittmar, J. Drury (2000); Dahi, Honea and

Manchanda (2003); Ferguson and Stegge (1995), Lindsay-Hartz (1984); Tangney (1995), Tangney and Dearing (2002), Wicker et al., (1993). Consumers use coping strategies to get out of the negative feelings of guilt. They mostly use two types of strategies, mainly the strategy to make up for loss and reduce impulse buying. For this they use strategies like mental disengagement, blaming others, resignation, mental undoing, rationalization, and seeking social support for coping with shame. While coping with guilt they mostly use strategies like disengagement, resignation, mental undoing, and rationalization, blaming others and seeking social support.

Dedeoğlu and Kazançoğlu (2012) studied the effects of feelings like self-control failure, norm violations, regret, and hedonic consumption on guilt. The results revealed that the regret, hedonic consumption and self-control failure had greater impact on consumer guilt.

According to Hatice AYDIN and Sevtap ÜNAL (2015), Social support strategy is positively associated with repurchase intention. In all most all researches on guilt till today, they have considered guilt emotion which is associated with after impulse buying and is incidental. But we have considered the guilty feelings permanently associated with impulse buying as mental representation. With respect to this guilt concept, we propose that, the scenario in shopping context, where the interaction with sales person who is selling the product for which shoppers have aroused impulsive intentions to buy the product will reduce the stress of guilt associated with buying the product impulsively as the convincing words of sells person will support their buying decision and will reduce the stress of uncontrolled behavior or stress of risk of buying product in hurry and it will also help them to rationalize their decision. It might also be related to the diffusion of responsibility (Kassin, Fein, Markus, Burke, 2013). According to Kassin, Fein, Markus, Burke, diffusion of responsibility is a socio-psychological phenomenon, which states that people in presence of others, are less likely to take responsibility of their action or inaction, and put blame on others, it suggests that, the convincing views or sales person will give comfort to buy the product as they get reason to buy from sales person, they get confirmation from sales person, they get excuse and can lower the guilt by putting responsibility of the impulse purchase on sales person, (Kassin, Fein, Markus, Burke, 2013).

Hence we propose that, interaction with sales person in buying context will reduce the negative emotion associated with guilt.

- H6: The positive interaction with sales people is negatively associated with the guilt.

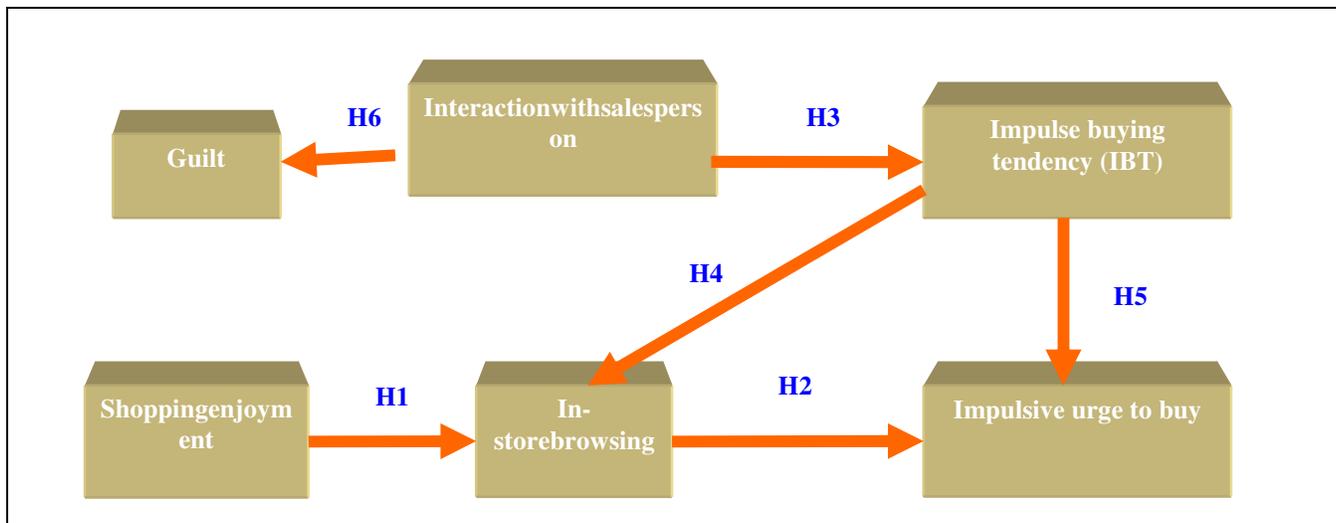


Figure 1: The Conceptual Model of Situational Antecedents of Impulsive Buying Behavior in Retail Setting and Hypotheses

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1. Preliminary Efforts

After a number of initial literature review, we conducted initial exploratory interviews of Indian and Taiwanese buyers to understand the impulsive buying experience in retail setting and also the positive and negative consequences of such impulsive buying. The most common emotions expressed by most of the participants include positive emotions like excitement, pleasure, feeling good, and negative emotions like guilt, regret, anger, shame. There was no gender difference or age difference or nationality difference in these responses.

#### 3.2. Data Collection

##### 3.2.1. Internet Based Survey

- 200 people were contacted directly and indirectly through telephone and internet. Described the research purpose and objectives, and were requested to email the filled questionnaires on or before the dead line, they were also informed about the

estimated time to read, understand and fill the questionnaire. 153 people responded with complete filled questionnaires before dead line.

- Virtual Shopping trip:

To activate the shopping environment experience, we introduced recall sentences describing the shopping incidences.

### 3.2.2. Questionnaire

We asked them to imagine the shopping scenario, where they will imagine a shopping trip and during the trip they will imagine following incidences like interaction with sale person or their emotional experiences during the trip. We guided them to explore their emotions by asking them following questions- The impulsive buying tendency was measured by 3 item scale- (i) when I go shopping, I buy things that I had not intended to purchase. (ii) I am a person who makes unplanned purchases. (iii) It is fun to buy spontaneously. Shopping enjoyment was measured on 4 items scale, all items were reverse coded, (i) Shopping is a waste of time. (ii) Shopping is not a way I like to spend my leisure time. (iii) Shopping is not entertaining to me. (iv) Shopping is not one of my favorite activities. Interaction with sales people was measured by using 6 items – (i) sales people are almost like friends I see every day, (ii) when sales person shows s/he feels about the product, it helps me to make up my mind about the product, (iii) I like to compare my feeling for the product with what the salesperson has to say about it. (iv) When the sales persons joke around with one another, it makes shopping even more enjoyable. (v) I feel sorry for the salespeople when they make mistakes. (vi) The sales person shows you what products are really like. In-shop browsing was measured by 3 items – (i) the percent of time I spent just looking around is fairly high. (ii) I would say that I primary “just look around”. (iii) I devote most of my attention to the items I planned to buy (R). Urge to purchase was measured by 4 items- (i) I experienced a number of sudden urges to buy things I had not planned to purchase on this trip. (ii) On this trip I saw number of things I wanted to buy even though they were not on my shopping list. (iii) I experienced no strong urges to make unplanned purchases on this trip. (R) (iv) On this trip, I felt a sudden urge to buy something. Whereas guilt associated with impulsive purchase was measured by 3 items using 7-point semantic scale- (i) not at all guilty to very much guilty, (ii) No remorse to A lot of remorse, (iii) Felt very bad to did not feel bad at all.

All variables were measured on 7-point Likert scales except ‘guilt’, which was measured by using 7-point semantic scale.

### 3.3. Data Analysis and Results

Independent variables: Shopping enjoyment, interaction with sales person, in-store browsing, impulsive buying tendency, guilt; Dependent variable- impulsive urge to buy. Total 153 participants including 101 males and 52 females participated in online survey. The online questionnaire included the introduction, in which we asked participants to recall their recent impulsive purchase experiences. Then were asked to fill up the questionnaire which included questions related to each variable. The reliability test revealed significant reliability of all questions for each variable viz. shopping enjoyment (Cronbach alfa= 0.878), interaction with sales person (Cronbach alfa=0.782), impulsive buying tendency (Cronbach alfa=0.819), In-store browsing (Cronbach alfa=0.555, Guilt (Cronbach alfa=0.666) and impulsive urge to buy (Cronbach alfa=0.708). The lower values of Cronbach alfa for in-store browsing and guilt were repaired by eliminated some non-reliable questions from in-store browsing and guilt and the Cronbach alfa improved to 0.722 and 0.81 respectively.

Linear regression analysis revealed significant positive effect of shopping enjoyment, in-store browsing, IBT, in-store browsing, interaction with sales person whereas significant negative effect of guild on impulsive urge to buy. Specifically, there was significantly positive effect of shopping environment on in-store browsing (H1). It showed positive effect of IBT and in-store browsing on impulsive urge to buy (H2) (H5). The interaction with sales person also showed positive effect on IBT (H3). Whereas, IBT showed significant positive effect on in-store browsing (H4). Finally, we found that there was significantly negative effect of interaction with sales person on guilt (H6). Please refer following table.

## 4. Results

Sr. No.	Independent variables	Dependent variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t value	Significance
			B	Std. Error			
1.	Shopping environment	In-store browsing	0.336	0.047	0.503	7.143	0.000
2.	IBT*	Urge to buy	.265	.056	.369	4.737	.000
	In-store browsing	impulsively	.286	.080	.280	3.596	.000
3.	Interaction with sales person	IBT	.733	.106	.491	6.922	.000
4.	IBT	In-store browsing	.349	.050	.497	7.043	.000
	Interaction with sales people	Guilt	-.297	.099	-.237	-3.002	.003

Table 1

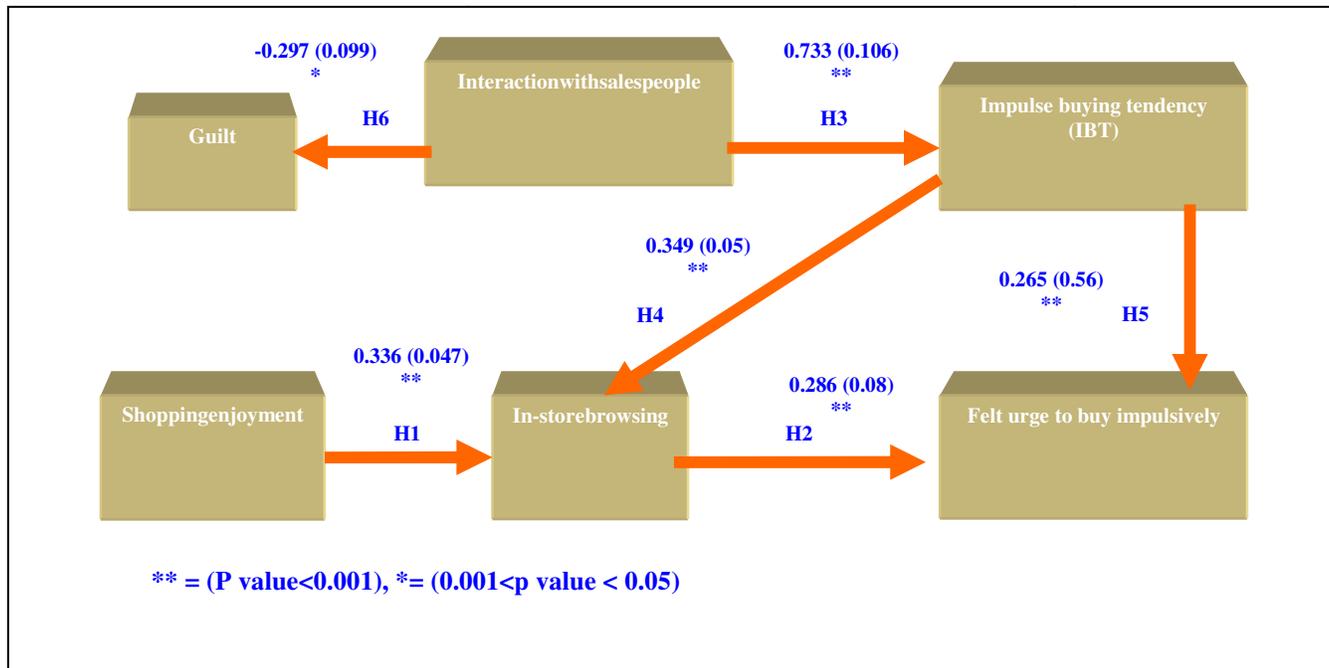


Figure 2: The statistical conformation of the conceptual model of situational antecedents of impulsive buying behavior in retail setting and hypotheses:

## 5. Conclusions

The findings of this research suggest that salesperson interaction is very influential in increasing impulsive buying tendency as well as reducing the guilt associated with impulsive buying. It also suggests the importance of shopping environment in increasing in-store browsing as well as on enhancing impulsive urge to buy.

## 6. Discussion

The findings of research have considerable contribution towards marketing, retailing field as well as in the social science as well. It has shown importance of in-store browsing on impulsive buying, greater the in-store browsing, greater will be the impulsive buying, as mentioned earlier, the design of shops or super markets which can enhance in-store browsing needs special attention. It can be done by making the in-store shopping trip longer and pleasant, may be by adding pleasure elements like music, product trials, better displays etc. The second important contribution of this research is that it has suggested the importance of positive interaction with salesperson, which leads to increase in IBT and thus impulsive buying as well as it supports shopper's purchase confidence in impulsive buying and reduces guilt associated with impulsive buying.

More research to be done in this effect to find out whether it encourages repurchase or not, whether it affects impulsive purchase satisfaction or not. It also warns salespersons, to be careful while interacting with customers, if the interaction is negative then it will obviously enhance guilt and then consumer will follow the guilt coping strategy.

The contribution of this research towards social psychology can be identified by understanding the guilt factor and consumers must know the consequences of impulsive buying, it not only ends up in financial losses but it also adds stress on mind in terms of guilt or shame. More research is required in the psychological effect of impulsive buying and the psychological aspects responsible for impulsive buying.

The unplanned purchases arise as a consequence of shoppers having their attention diverted from the search missions that provided the basis for their shopping expeditions. These purchases are the end result of browsing and parasocial interaction (Filye Park and Sharon Lemon, 2006, and Peter E. Earl and Jason Potts, 2000) that is contingent on particular promotional displays and the interaction with salespeople that cause the shoppers to examine a class of goods, even if, they had especially come to purchase particular items of particular brand at particular price from particular store without even engaging in search activity. This happens often with every one, that we go to buy something in the market and buy something else with or without the thing which we wanted to buy. Sometimes we want to buy one unit but we buy 3 pair of shoes, just because we hear salesman saying, don't miss the discount offer, or we wanted to buy 1 T-shirt and we buy two for some discount, or we wanted to go to buy juice in super market and purchase hair dryer or thermos or some plant or furniture item, which we never thought of buying that day. Such impulsive purchasing is done not just for satisfying product need but for some hedonic and emotional purposes. This tendency mostly observed in women and it drags attention of psychologist to know reasons behind it, whether emotional or something else. Sometimes impulsive buying habit may take shape of compulsive buying and is a great threat. Hence this conceptual model is important to understand and need more research to be done in this field.

At the commercial level, catching and keeping the attention of customers is the prime goal of stores. If shoppers were only engaging in planned search or knowledge –based activity then it would be harder to make sense of the huge investments the retail marketing is doing and charging it on price tags. The impulsive buying has great contribution in profits, hence retailers and manufacturers must know that consumer not only enjoy product but they also enjoy the shopping process.

Companies should effectively use their sales force and after sales service to increase consumer satisfaction and can avoid the incidences of guilt arising from wrong purchases as guilt has very strong negative effect on the repurchase as discussed earlier the coping with guilt and shame strategies have strong negative impact. Companies can also develop guilt and shame compensation like exchange offer or return policy, buy back outlets etc. it is not just enough to satisfy consumer demand but it is also social and professional responsibility of business to understand need of consumers and help them to make better purchase decisions.

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