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University Students' Motivation and Impulse Buyer Behavior

Abstract

There are contradictive explanations in the literature on the impulse buying behavior. Some research shows that consumers view impulse buying normatively wrong, while other research reveals that consumers buy impulsively. The purpose of this study is to examine the motivations of impulse buying behavior and to investigate the relationship between each set of motivation and decisions which lead to university students' impulse buying behavior. Multiple regression analysis was used to determine the predictors of impulse buying behavior. The results show that hedonistic desires, perceived decision-making accuracy and perceived decision effort were the determinants of impulse buying. As a recommendation, business strategies targeting Malaysians in this university should be carried out by considering their potential motivations and university students should not over-rely on their impulsiveness traits as complimentary purchasing alternative.

Keywords: *motivation, impulse buyer behaviour, hedonistic desires, perceived decision-making accuracy, perceived decision effort, social needs, esteem needs*

Introduction

Although some studies show that normative evaluations reduce impulse purchasing behavior by moderating impulsive drives (Rook & Fisher, 1995), studies show that about 90 % of consumers make purchases on impulse occasionally (Welles, 1986) and 30 % to 50 % of all purchases made are by impulse (Bellenger, Robertson & Hirschman, 1978; Cobb & Hoyer, 1986; Han, Morgan & Kang-Park,

1991; Kollat & Willet, 1967). Therefore, it seem to be some circumstances which overcome the moderation effect. In 2009, Kong showed that there is a growing trend demonstrating that shoppers are less loyal and more inclined to store-hop, despite the fact that economic recession is turning consumers into more demanding, price-sensitive and cautious spenders.

As developed below, the concepts of impulse buying behavior are even more complex than formerly discovered because customers may regard impulse buying as rational and reasonable in particular perspectives and situations. Ritzer (1999) has referred to shopping malls as “cathedrals of consumption,” which have considerable financial significance and also become a way of life – a consumer paradise to some (Dawn, 2009). Thus, the underlying factors which counter-act negative normative evaluations can drive impulse buying.

In a study on malls by English and French speaking Canadians in Montreal (Michon & Chebat, 2004), the French were found less likely than English shoppers to use the mall for activities other than purchasing products and services, although French shoppers did score more highly on hedonism, but without significant differences in the consumption between the two groups. For our research, we investigate what the individual needs and wants are which constitute the impulse tendency, specifically in Malaysia.

From the cognitive perspective, complexities in the marketing environment sometimes encourage customers to respond impulsively. The Point of Purchase Institute of America has revealed that 75% of brand decisions are made in-store, and this was further reaffirmed by WPP’s Sir Martin Sorrell. The study claimed that shoppers are getting less loyal and decide on purchases impulsively, based on pricing, promotions, marketing collaterals and packaging (Sailendra, 2008). According to Kong (2009), in one news release by Richard Hall, low income shoppers are less loyal, with an explanation that they decline to shop around and tend to simply pick out any brands that are promoted. This suggests that consumers with limited resources are neither price-sensitive nor attracted by product attributes. Therefore, information processing overload and decision-making difficulties in expanded product lines make impulse buying behavior an alternative which is relevant.

Literature review

As proposed by Hausman (2000), there are five factors which are perceived to be motivations towards impulse shopping. They are hedonistic desires, social needs, esteem and self-actualization needs, perception of decision efforts and perception

of decision-making accuracy. Since this hypothesis still requires further testing, the variables provided are used in this empirical study.

Hedonistic Desires

Many studies provide conceptual support for the relationship between individual hedonistic shopping motives and impulse buying behavior. Need for novelty, variety and surprise are amongst the higher-order needs revealed in the literature (Hirschman, 1980; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Likewise, consumers report that several hedonistic desires are satisfied by impulse purchase (Piron, 1991; Rook, 1987; Thomson, Locander & Pollio, 1990). Apart from that, social interaction gained in the shopping activity may also satisfy the need for emotional support. According to consumers' testimonies from qualitative studies, they feel uplifted or thrilled after doing shopping. The fun or psychological lift is evident when consumers reveal the difference between the emotions evoked by the shopping experience and routine aspects of life. Novelty is shown when shopping is rather a replacement for a primitive sort of hunting and the exploration of items is not any purchase value, but the reward instead.

Social Needs

Common feelings that the shopping experience satisfies social needs were perhaps the most regularly expressed reasons given for impulse buying behavior in previous studies. In terms of the expression of social needs, potential purchases appear to trigger impulse buying behavior unintentionally. Normative events such as season festivals and significant others' celebrations, are examples of the sources of urges towards satisfying social needs. Thus, the motivation is somehow different from desires to fulfil personal safety and physiological needs that propel consumers towards specific buying for individual consumption.

Esteem Needs

Esteem needs can be expressed by shoppers by giving credence to their desires to stay fashion-conscious. Esteem-motivated shoppers emphasise the importance of buying the right outfits because other people judge them by their appearance. Self-esteem needy consumers may sometimes buy an outfit without determination of the selection criteria, due to an uncommon event to attend. Needs of a sense of self-identity are also part of the esteem needs to be fulfilled during shopping exposure. There are some who treat the act of impulse buying as a reward for having to consider a trade-off in their routine activities in order to achieve a long-term oriented purpose. Although some researchers may find it close to or even an

example of self-actualisation, it is only labelled here as esteem needs due to the absence of profound nature of the inspiration. For instance, some may reward themselves by impulse buying because a difficult period of enduring a task is over, or simply as a result of, e.g., success of losing weight.

Perceived Decision-Making Accuracy

Purchase decision involves complexes with no single criterion which suffices to be a measure of accuracy (Hausman, 2000). For instance, price and product attribution factors are no longer significant to manifest as a measure of accuracy while intangible criteria, which are subjective in nature, are probably the better surrogate measurement. From customers' perspective, impulse buying is seen as the most accurate decision-making tool above all means of measurement, by just pondering on the satisfaction gained from the process itself. In evidence, one study reported that 41 % of consumers were satisfied with their impulse buying (Rook, 1987).

Perceived Decision Efforts

Bettman and Payne (1991) found that consumers may start to feel overwhelmed and frustrated in trying to handle the volume of complex information they experience. The situation, which is termed information processing overload, raises worry and unpleasantness among consumers related to the decision-making process (Baron, 1994; Herbig & Kramer, 1994). Other research (e.g., Bettman & Payne, 1991; Kahneman, 1973) suggests that joint effects of decision-making complexity and information processing overload may weaken judgement quality or accuracy. Under such circumstances, decisions may be worsened despite the focus on making the "right" choice (Kahneman, 1973).

Methodology

Malaysian respondents of a public university situated in the southern region of Malaysia were subjects of the study. Questionnaires were used as the method of data collection. Items were developed to measure the variables of this study: impulse buying behavior, hedonistic desires, social needs, esteem needs, perceived decision-making accuracy and perceived decision effort based on Hausman (2000), etc. Factor analysis was performed to assess the validity of the constructs and Cronbach's alpha was carried out to gauge the reliability of each dimension. Multiple regressions were used to identify the predictors of impulse buying behavior.

Data Analysis

302 questionnaires were distributed to the respondents as encountered by survey distributors. From the total of the questionnaires distributed, 235 respondents managed to return the questionnaire in a stipulated period and answer it completely. As a result, the response rate for this research was 77.81%. Therefore, the sample size that was used for the analysis of this research was 235 respondents.

Regression analysis was used because the order of their importance in predicting the outcome was unknown. Backward method was utilized due to its lower risk of missing predictors that in fact predict the outcome, impulse buying behavior (Field, 2005). The coefficients of the selected regression model were tested and the results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Coefficients of the Regression Model

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	1.457	1.093		1.333	.184		
Hedonistic Desires	.181	.053	.197	3.437	.001	.743	1.346
3 Perceived Decision-making Accuracy	.426	.083	.285	5.146	.000	.795	1.257
Perception of Decision Effort	.391	.062	.358	6.252	.000	.746	1.341

Dependent Variable: Impulse Buying Behavior

All the dimensions in this model showed a significance level of lower than 0.05. VIF values of the current model were all well below 10 and the tolerance statistics all well above 0.2. Besides, the average VIF is very close to 1. These findings show that the collinearity problem is negligible. Three dimensions were used to form the equation shown below:

$$\text{Impulse buying behavior}_i = 0.243 + 0.325 \text{ Perceived decision effort}_i + 0.284 \text{ Perceived decision-making accuracy}_i + 0.181 \text{ Hedonistic desires}_i$$

Discussion & Implications

A number of implications of our findings are worth mentioning. One of those is the boundary of the definitions between hedonistic needs and social needs. Hedonistic desires are simply motives for self-pleasure, regardless of the way of shopping. Even if a shopper intends to buy some things in favour of others, there is hedonistic desire whenever he/she enjoys the experience during the purchase. By contrast, social needs in shopping are needs which require interaction with friends or family in order to be satisfied. This satisfaction, however, is not gained by physiological or safety fulfilment per se, but through the fulfilment of significant others' needs. This statement is supported by factor analysis, where "I usually end up shopping for myself when helping people to buy things" loaded on the hedonistic desires factor, separate from the social needs factor.

Drawing from the results of the analysis, buying things impulsively can contribute to a sense of freedom and a way to display shoppers' playfulness and innocence. Those who are feeling even the slightest pressure of it would like to escape from the discomfort by enjoying shopping pleasures, which are readily available in most cities in Malaysia. These findings implied that social needs do not play a significant role in their mind to engage in impulse buying. A possible explanation for this situation is that their impulsive intentions to shop may be moderated by the presence of significant others, even though others are not judging them. This may be induced by their own negative normative evaluations about impulse buying behavior. Another explanation is that sharing the cognitive evaluation of purchase selection with each other may be a common habit among those who are shopping with significant others, thus making the impulsiveness trait of shopping not appealing.

The findings also indicated that esteem needs were not a predictor of impulse buying behavior among the Malaysians in the public university. It could be concluded that most of the local communities in the university have a limited amount of disposable income for shopping, because more than 50% of the respondents have disposable shopping income equal to or less than RM 200.00. Therefore, they may not feel readily exposed to overall product and service offering development due to their restrained buying power, thus making their style consciousness less important in purchase decision-making compared to other features like price and durability.

Although the global economic downturn which began in 2007 has begun to recover, the recession is still felt by the Malaysians, and they are still being cautious in handling expenditures. When they decide to give up brand loyalty and go for something more economical, they face an array of unfamiliar products. With the

product differentiation of each brand in terms of price, quality and quantity nowadays, direct comparison was quite impossible, and cognitive evaluations would lead to product information overload. According to Kahneman, (1973), information overload potentially triggers the moderating effect by lowering perceived or actual decision-making accuracy. Therefore, it may be common to have people selecting items impulsively rather than taking detailed comparisons in order to have better selection choices.

In fact, perceived decision effort may be a greater concern. As recessions come into effect, people ensure that the items they buy will be worth more and therefore lower priced. One finding was that 59% of the Malaysians spent extra time dealing with price comparisons during the recession in 2008 (Nyee & Bhattacharjee, 2008). However, the complex store environment and numerous items of purchase may cause information overload and frustration to decide on better selection. Therefore, it is believed that local communities in the university most probably buy things on impulse because of the discomfort of information processing overload.

As for recommendations, it is advisable for retailers around the university to enhance the retail environment stimulation. Hyper stores and supermarkets may be able to compete with mall retailing by creating ambient and spacious surroundings, as well as changing the frontal settings and decorations in a stipulated season. By doing so, the communities would better create the shopping experience of involvement in impulse buying. In order not to neglect the importance of creating a healthy retail environment, stocking a variety type of merchandises in an appealing quantity and settings would encourage people to buy on impulse as the model of the rational decision-making is no longer suitable to such complexity of product displays.

In order to generate more revenues other than price leadership, marketers should create on-brand experience among staff to ensure that an enlivening brand personality message can be spread to delight customers. Aveling (2007) found that there were some companies that promoted the brand internally to employees, which improved profitability by over 50%, but there were some cases where 40% of marketing was wasted due to undermining of promotional promises to employees. Since the local university communities are in doubt of making good purchase judgements, maintaining deliverance of brand promises among employees would help to induce impulse buying. Besides, development of product packaging, especially in aesthetical and product feature aspects, would encourage point-of-purchase in a range of similar products displayed in the retail stores.

As marketing personnel become enlightened about ways of attracting customers, local communities in the university are also given advice on how to curb regretful

and unpleasant purchase decisions. Despite the complexity of brands on display nowadays, rational judgement can be made by filtering based on general criteria impulsively, and then constraining choices into measurable numbers of items. It could help to reduce the use of product packaging as a demand stimulating strategy as well. When making a purchase decision, avoiding emotional distractions, such as advertisements, would help to generate information processing efficiently. For those who are having problems in planning credit purchases, debit cards are an alternative rather than credit cards. Besides, they are advised to observe symptoms of overspending, such as the tendency to rely on certain heuristics or shopping sprees, rather than enjoying window shopping. These methods could help the communities improve their mood in shopping while making good purchase judgements.

Due to the complexity of psychology constructs and time constraints, this study was carried out using quantitative tools and it only targeted the Malaysian communities of the university to provide information on what were the positive motivations of impulse shopping in Malaysia. Therefore, it is strongly suggested that researchers carry out qualitative studies and narrow the scope down to a particular group of population in a representative region (particular state, country, etc.) in order to expand and solidify the psychology constructs of the interest group.

Furthermore, certain processes of statistical study were impossible to carry out in this study, such as casewise diagnosis and assumption checking from graph plotting, due to some complexity of statistical techniques. It is suggested that further studies be conducted with other techniques to compliment the reliability and validity of this study.

Conclusion

The results of this study show that hedonistic desires, perceived decision-making accuracy and perceived decision effort matter in impulse buying behaviour. Certainly, buying things impulsively can contribute to a taste of freedom and a way to display shoppers' playfulness and innocence. The findings also conclude that social needs do not play a significant role in their mind to engage in impulse buying. As a whole, the developed framework has provided a plausible explanation for the effect of hedonistic desires, perceived decision-making accuracy and perceived decision effort on students' impulse buying behavior.

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