

# Impulsive buying behaviour and the influencing factors

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**University of Zagreb**  
**Faculty of Economics - Zagreb**  
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**IMPULSIVE BUYING BEHAVIOUR AND THE  
INFLUENCING FACTORS**

**Undergraduate thesis**

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**Zagreb, July 2021**

## STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

I hereby declare and confirm by my signature that the final thesis is the sole result of my own work based on my research and relies on the published literature, as shown in the listed notes and bibliography.

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I also declare that no part of the thesis has been used for any other work in any other higher education, scientific or educational institution.

In Zagreb, \_\_15.07.2021. \_\_

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 The object and purpose of the paper

"When the going gets tough, the tough go shopping (anonymous)." This is an old American saying and it has sense even today. Whether we buy because we like something, it's on sale, or our friend has it, impulsive buying is all around us. Over the years researchers have started to be more and more curious about what happens in our minds when we see something we want. It necessarily doesn't even have to be what a want or a need, it can be something we will never touch again but it was on sale and we will get it! This paper aims to analyse impulsive buying behaviour and explore some of the most important aspects influencing it. This will be done by looking at various everyday factors that influence customers' decision process. This behaviour will be analysed based on emotions, preferences, wants, and needs of potential customers throughout the paper. The purpose of this paper is to explain the impulsive buying behaviour process and show how our brain is stimulated by various determinants influencing us.

## 1.2 Sources of data and collection methods

As the aim of this paper is to analyse the impulsive buying behaviour and its influencing factors, the primary data was collected through books and journals of famous authors that have dedicated their life to marketing strategies and different buying behaviours. Secondary data was collected through researching the internet and already existing scientific papers.

## 1.3 Structure of the thesis

The thesis starts with an introductory part where the aim, purpose, sources, and structure of the thesis are portrayed. The second part of the thesis brings the definition of the main topic-impulsive buying behaviour alongside the types of consumers behaviour and different consumers. Here the role of emotions and post-purchase behaviour is shown as well. In the third part, we discuss the factors affecting impulsive buying behaviour and analyse external and internal determinants.

## 2. Impulsive buying behaviour

### 2.1. Definition of impulsive buying behaviour

Many swear that consumer behaviour is one of the most complex issues of marketing theory and practice because of the numerous factors influencing it. However, one of the most undefined and specific buying behaviours is impulsive buying behaviour that results in unplanned purchases. Impulsive buying behavior is defined as an “unplanned” action without any product evaluation characterized by both relatively rapid decision making, and a subjective bias for immediate possession (Rook, 1987). When thinking about this type of without plan purchasing we do not consider this as something completely negative as the feeling of having something new diminishes the economical loss. Buying something spontaneously and impulsively excites the consumer either by for example improving his/hers mood. Because of this instant euphoria, consumers are less committed to evaluation and post-purchase consequences. As Verplanken and Sato, 2011wrote: ”Impulsive buying grossly violates the assumptions of *homo economicus*.” With this being said it is safe to say that the rational part of the brain is turned off during impulsive buying behaviour. Buying unnecessary products because of the emotional rush provided is something that undermines the prefrontal cortex, the brain’s rational part.

Piron, 1991 described the impulsive buying behaviour using the three main criteria it must fulfill:

1. The purchase must not be planned in any way, i.e. there was no buying intention before entering the shop
2. There is some kind of a stimuli that triggers impulse buying, for example, a sale sign, marketing trick, or just the consumer's own thoughts.
3. The decision is brought on the spot and is completely spontaneous and unexpected.

Stern, 1962 on the other hand, described four types of impulse buying:

1. Pure impulse buying: having absolutely no connection with the old patterns of buying, completely different from the regular shopping plan
2. Reminder impulse buying: occurs when a shopper sees an item or recalls an advertisement or other information and remembers that the stock at home is low or exhausted.

3. Suggestion impulse buying is introduced when a customer instantly want the product and believes he/she needs it.
4. Planned impulse buying happens when the consumer makes a planed purchase and goes through all stages of decision making.

## 2.2 Types of consumer behaviour

Buying decisions vary depending on the type of products the consumer wants to buy at some point in time. The amount of time and effort needed to buy a plane ticket or a car will normally be much higher than buying coffee at a coffee shop. Depending on different scenarios and levels of involvement consumers are divided into four groups:

### **Complex buying behavior**

Complex buying behaviour occurs mostly in cases where a customer is looking to buy something that will last longer and is willing to invest a larger amount of money for this purchase. The consumer could be buying an apartment, a car, or a washing machine but the process behind this purchase can be characterised as almost the same. During these less frequent transactions consumers are exceedingly included in the purchase. They will involve themselves in a thorough investigation of the product planning to buy before committing to this kind of investment. Because of the high economic risk it brings, buyers will not invest without a thorough investigation of the product they are planning to buy.

### **Dissonance-reducing buying behavior**

In this buying behavior pattern, consumer involvement is high, and this comes from the low availability of choices with minor differences between brands. Hereby, the product that is easiest to attain is the most desirable one. Consumers buy their products depending on the product availability, time restrictions and the income or the budget they plan on spending and without a lot of research. The example of this would be buying a toaster or a pancake maker. Marketers should be ready to convince customers to continue with the same brand with some incentives like discounts or coupons.

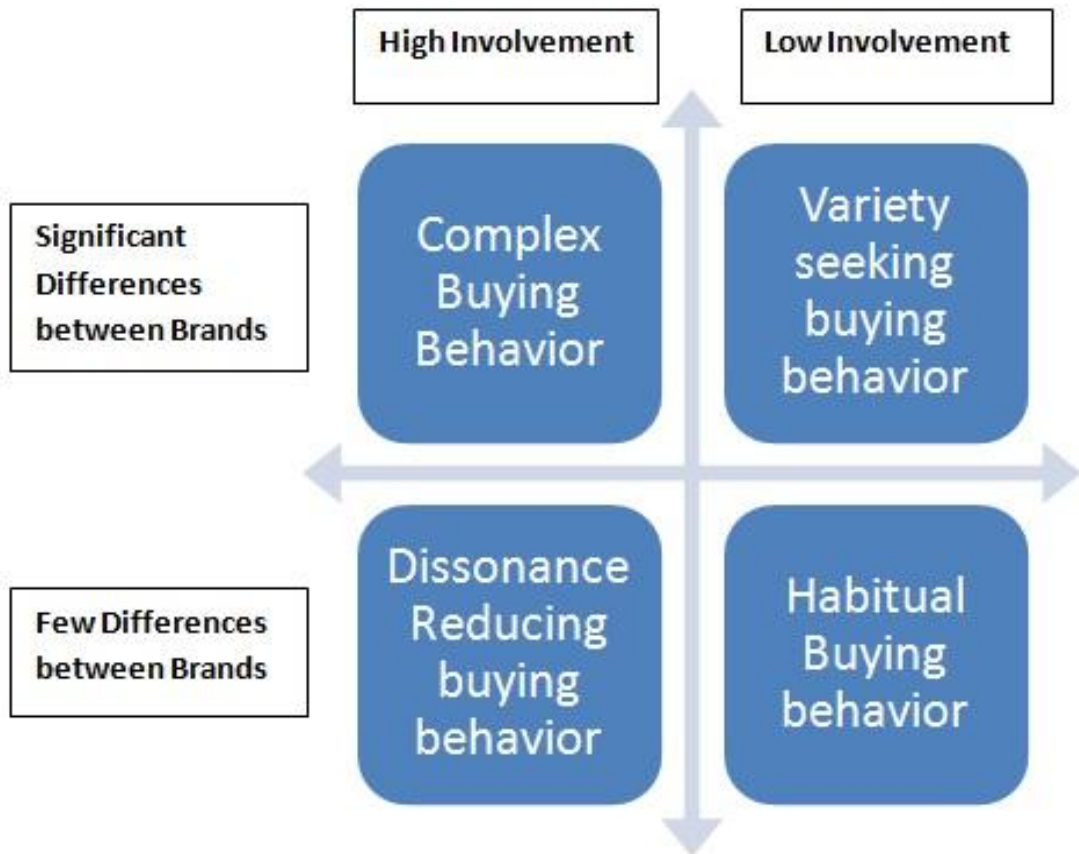


## **Habitual buying behavior**

Habitual Buying Behavior is seen when consumer has low involvement in the buying decision. The buyer can depict only a few differences between brands. This happens while purchasing everyday life items, the chain of thoughts doesn't require any special research and it doesn't need to spend time on choosing the better option. The consumer will most likely buy from their favourite brand, the item that is on sale or the one that looks inviting. For example, buying a soda when thirsty, many of us will simply reach for the soda we are used to, like the taste and the price. This buying behaviour doesn't need any further examination of the product and saves time. Many everyday products like flour, sugar, salt, pepper, toilet paper show us that here there is no brand loyalty - you simply grab what seems the most useful at that moment.

## **Variety seeking behavior**

Variety seeking consumer behavior shows low consumer involvement. Consumers tend to try new products as the cost of switching to another product is low or not existent. Consumers generally, are not showing dissatisfaction by switching to another brand but simply seek variety and change. A perfect example of this would be buying something like chewing gums or maybe crisps. Buying Orbit chewing gums can be changed for buying Airways gums the other, without meaning that Orbit is worse.



(Cloutrack, 2021)

## 2.3 Consumers according to impulsive buying behaviour

Solomon (2002) characterises this type of behaviour as the one that occurs when "consumer has a sudden irresistible urge to buy." This act, in most cases, feels completely appropriate to a consumer if there is at least one good reason behind this purchase. Reasons could be numerous such as a sale sign, new promotion, 2+1, buying a present and many other mind games used to believe this product is something we need. Mowen (1993) explains impulsive buying behaviour as "hedonically complex impulses to buy that may stimulate emotional conflict. By saying this, it is clear that our impulses take over our logical side when purchasing something we don't need and did not intentionally come to buy." Impulse buying disrupts the normal decision making models in consumers' brains. The logical sequence of the consumers' actions is replaced with an irrational moment of self-indulgence" (Pradhan, 2018)

According to Salai and Kovac-Znidarsic, 2012 based on Solomon, 2002 there are three types of consumers:

Firstly there are consumers who always plan their purchases. They decide in advance what, in which quantities, and from which brand they will purchase their products. These consumers are the ones that are the hardest to infiltrate in an impulsive buying scheme. Secondly, there are consumers who only partially plan their purchases. When planning they only choose the amount of product or the category they want to buy. They are a little easier to persuade than the first consumer group. Lastly, there are the impulsive buyers who do not have any purchasing plan. They might just accidentally find themselves in a store where they can easily be lured by sale signs and promotions, as well as the article position in the store.

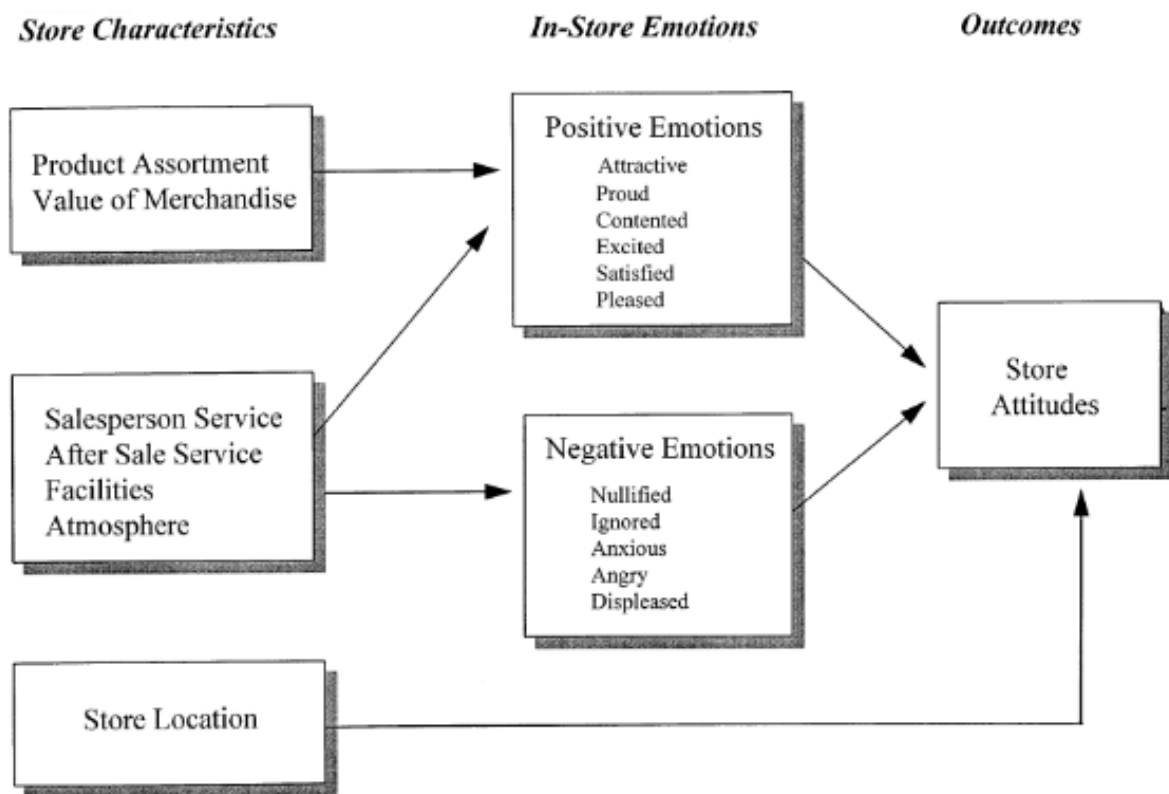
## 2.2 The role of emotions in the decision process

Mood states are a vital set of affective factors, having influences on consumer behavior in a number of contexts. (Grace Yuna Lee and Youjae Yi, 2008) Moods constantly change which impacts the impulsiveness of purchase decisions. Looking at the diagram below, we can see that there are two main dimensions that determine whether a consumer will react positively or negatively. This indicates different combinations of feelings that either make person enjoy or feel stressed in a given situation. This happens because an arousing situation can be interpreted both as distressing and exciting. The range of emotions stated by Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982 relevant to consumption includes feelings of love, hate, fear, joy, boredom, anxiety, pride, anger, sadness, greed, guilt, shame, and awe. A great example of a positive arousal was given by Clarke, 2002. He pointed out that Disney is a company that understands its customers feelings and gets the best out of it. The real reason for Disney's success is trying to "provide consistent doses of carefully calculated stimulation to patrons". Mood often influences the judgement created towards the product/service in either a positive or negative way.



James Russell and Geraldine Pratt: "A description of the affective quality attributed to environment: *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 38 (August 1989) 311-22.

Generally speaking, there is a tight relationship between a consumer in a good mood and his/hers purchasing behaviour. Consumers mood can be influenced by the most banal things like weather, product placement or store design and for this reason the whole setting from the salesperson and the service, atmosphere, facilities through product assortment needs to be perfect.



## 2.5 Post-purchase behaviour

Post-purchase behaviour combines all of the buyers thoughts, feelings and actions that occur after a purchase. Positive post-purchase emotions take place when a consumer is satisfied with the product as it meets or even exceeds their expectations. On the other hand, a negative post-purchase behaviour is followed by guilt and anxiety after a purchase and mostly happens when a consumer feels he/she overspent. (Rook, 1987) According to Rook there is a connection between the level of impulsiveness of the buyer and the way he/she feels post-purchase; thrilled or depressed. The negative post-purchase feeling has also been explained through the feeling of inconsistency of oneself attitude and their behaviour. When a person feels like they are breaking a pattern its not rare to feel tension and anxiety called cognitive dissonance or post-purchase doubt. (Kurtz and Clow, 1998) What is important for marketers is to monitor buyers post-purchase behaviour, whether they are satisfied or dissatisfied. According to this feedback they can evaluate, improve or even discontinue a certain product. Swartz and Iacobucci, 2000 state that the value perceived by the customer after the purchase is in the main focus of post-purchasing evaluation. This is why Cassel, 2001 argues that if consumer had any negative experience in the past with a certain brand, the possibility that they will make the purchase at the same brand are undeniably reduced. As impulsive purchases are always present and the post-purchases feelings are mostly negative whether it is because of the money spent, the unnecessarity of the product or simply the customers wants and needs were not met customers often end up regretting the whole decision. By being aware that people are more keen on sharing a bad review than a good one it is important to reach out to customers before it's too late. Mitchell, 2003 acknowledged that the best possible outcome of a post purchase behaviour would be satisfied customers who want to share their experience. By getting feedback, a company commented knows whether the strategy they have is working or they need guidance and some corrective action. It is well known that customers satisfaction or dissatisfaction is the end result of the experience. (Snipes, 2005)

### 3. Factors influencing impulsive buying

The factors creditable for this behaviour has been a subject of many studies for decades now. Stern (1962) identified nine factors that according to him that affect the impulse buying the most:

1. Low price
2. Marginal need for the item
3. Mass distribution
4. Self service
5. Mass advertising
6. Prominent store display
7. Short product life
8. Small size or light weight
9. Ease of storage

On the other hand, researchers Husman (2000); Rook and Gardner (1993); Youn and Faber (2000) agreed that the biggest role of the impulsive buying behaviour and the buying behaviour in general, goes to emotions and feelings.

For the future impulsive buying behaviour references the factors will be divided in two groups; Internal and External factors.

#### 3.1 Internal factors

Internal or personal factors connect all the factors associated with a consumer and his/hers background, traits and beliefs. Internal factors of impulsive buying behaviour focuses solemnly on the customer, exploring the internal values, needs and wants of the individual. As the goal of this shopping is to merely satisfy the hedonic needs, the products are purchased in the same manner- without any pre-planned action.

### 3.1.1. Age

The most basic factor affecting the consumer behaviour is the age of a consumer. Many researchers confirm the change in need for some commodities as a consumer gets older. Along with this changes, the buying impulses are changed as well. (Nanda, 2013) For example shopping for clothes changes from when you were a teenager, a young adult and an adult. While a teenager will buy everything that says sale on and has a cool print, a young adult will be a little more cautious but an adult will be saving for better deals, buy sustainably and less frequently. The same goes for going out- older generations will switch unnecessary spending with some healthier option and by doing that will less likely spend impulsively. Marketing segmentation according to age is still very important for both impulsive purchase analysis as well as for market researches to appeal to the customers. Based on Bellenger's, 1978 research shoppers under 35 were more prone to impulse buying compared to those older than 35 years. This indicates a positive correlation between older people and higher impulsivity resistance. A consumer demonstrates more self control as he/she gets older. However, there is also a connection between the age and the mood the person is in. Older consumers tend to feel more oppressed with their life obligations while younger ones feel more relaxed and happier.

### 3.1.2. Gender

Even in product preferences, we see a difference between male and female gender. There is also a unspoken rule on spending more on some asset depending which gender is purchasing. Between genders the desire for specific items vary depending on their lifestyle, fashion trends and generally different interest fields. (Desai, 2020) For example a shaving cream for men will be painted in masculine colors with an intensive scent while the same product for females will be pink, cute and with a flowery note. Being so different in some needs, Ciunova-Shuleska states that there are some cases where the buying pattern is extremely similar, for example spending money on food or leisure. Another difference noticed would be the decision making process as a person that worries about their family wellbeing will less likely engage in impulsive buying. Desai, 2020 also stated in his journal that women tend to purchase items in order to attain a social identity while men are seeking for personal identity. In a study carried by Agarwal, female interviewees showed more reckless behaviour in shopping opposed to the male



ones. It was seen that women buy instinctively while men tend to rationalize the purchase by thinking in detail about it. Some of the female respondents admitted that the joy of shopping is in picking up items they didn't plan to buy.

### 3.1.3 Education

Another personal factor mentioned influencing would be the educational background. Desai, 2020 states that the education is the determinant of a person's class and the social status it will as well influence the buyer's preference greatly. The conclusion taken by Desai says that in most cases a higher educated person will be more careful when choosing a product to buy. Educational level and the buying habits are closely related. Being economically literate saves money and regulates spending. This can finally lead to planned shoppings and reduce the level of spontaneous purchases. According to Desai most people do want to save money and purchase only the necessary things without any distractions. (Nanda, 2013) Educated people tend to fall less for traps like commercials as they do not only rely on information provided by the seller but they look up the important information about the product. For example a less educated person might after seeing an ad for a cheap washing machine purchase it, while a more educated person will ask themselves why is this product cheaper. To summarize, being inquisitive buyer is a great feature.

### 3.1.4. Feelings

Impulse buying behavior is motivated by a powerful urge (Verplanken & Herabadi, 2001) An urge to impulsively buy is characterized as a feeling coming from consumers mind. A feeling of rush and excitement a person gets when purchasing something for the first time, on sale or simply because the design appeals to them can not be explained. As was already mentioned, a person in a good mood will more likely purchase impulsively. However, there is a possibility that a consumer who is not in his/hers best mood will engage in a purchase in order to compensate the bad mood.

### 3.1.5. Income

A factor that probably influences the habits of buying the most would be income. It is easy to say that regarding the income levels, different buying patterns will be present. For example, higher class people will apart from the functionality judge the product also by the design and features of it while the middle class will assure their assesment purely on utility. A person looking for a functional phone will just buy according to features and affordability while the higher class person will want the outer appearance of a mobile phone to appeal to the masses. The advertising for different product is as well different, for exampe high-end products like designer bags and shoes will be featured in a luxury magazine while more affordable products will be promoted somewhere where it targets broader audience like in a shopping mall or on social media. However, money availability plays a big role in impulsive buying as well. According to several researches, carrying a larger amount of money makes people feel more powerful and lures them into shopping sprees they didnt expect nor plan. (Nanda, 2013) This is also seen with teenagers, to them a large amount of money to spend comes with a feeling of power and happiness. Many parents give their kids money for a reward which leads to impulsive buying behaviour and unplanned purchases. On the other hand, consumers with a lower income will spend only on essentials they need for living. These consumers plan their shoppings and most likely will not buy something out of their budget.

## 3.2 External/situational factors

External factors are factors influencing the consumers from the environment with a particular visual stimuli in a form of a product or a promotion to realise an unplanned purchase. This happens when the consumers attention is drawn to a certain product. (Mihic, 2010)

### 3.2.1. Physical surrounding

When talking about the physical surrounding Mihic, 2010 is talking about the internal factors of the physical store. First and the most basic one stated would be the general interior design. From the colors used, lightings, scents, through music and equipment everything must match the topic of the store entered. For example Lush, a natural cosmetics shop, provides you with a feeling that you are in a natural environment, it smells like candles, music is soft and you impulsively want to buy everything. Second important determinant according to Mihic, 2010 is the arrangement of equipment and merchandise within the store. For example Ikea- Ikea makes you wander through the whole store making it impossible not to buy at least a new doormat or a new doorknob. Ikea is usually a whole day trip to most customers just because of this variety of products offered. Another important indicator would be the display of merchandise. For instance, in a grocery store every brand wants to position their products in the eyesight of the customers. This is especially important in the impulsive buying process as the consumer doesnt dwell on which product to take, he takes the nearest one.

### 3.2.2 Social surrounding

The presence of other people can also be an affecting factor. It is not uncommon that a person refuses to buy at some store because the staff was not polite, informed or simply not interested. As well as the staff, customers impulsive buying could be influenced by a shopping companion like a family member or a friend who encourages an impulsive purchase. A special occasion like a birthday, holidays or vacations as well can affect the purchase, making it all about that occasion a consumer forgets that he/she is spending money. Although it is believed that fatigue

during shopping reduces the impulsiveness, there has been some evidence that the fatigue doesn't necessarily have a negative effect on impulsive buying.

### 3.2.3 Time

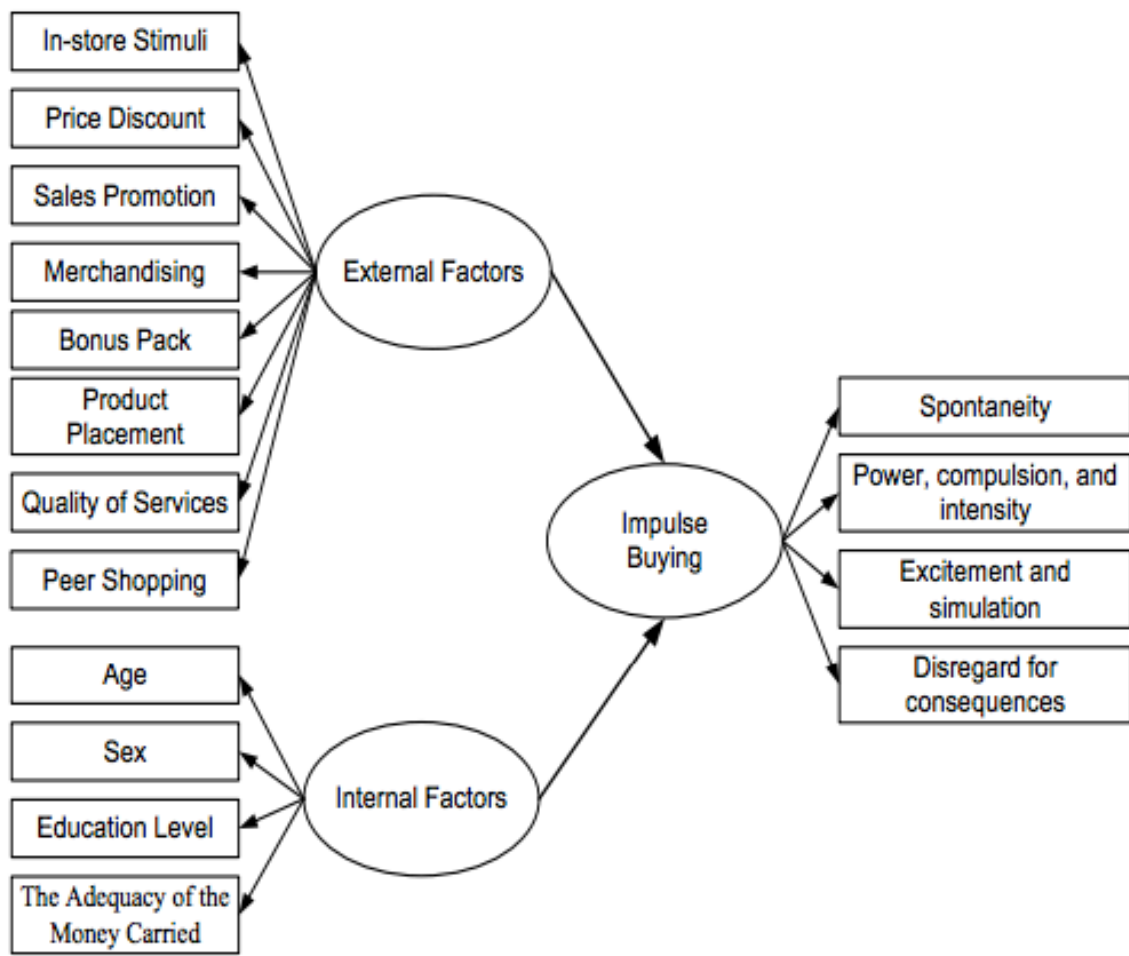
Simply put, the more time a consumer has without any deadlines it is more likely he/she will be spending money impulsively. This is why Beatty and Ferrell, 1998 suggested that managers should always invest in improving store layouts, as it allows future shoppers to spend more time in stores and experience the products, which may trigger impulsive buying.

### 3.2.4. Promotional techniques

Since the markets are saturated with products, companies are fighting for customers by sales promotion. By using various techniques they are forming both long lasting success and relationships with their customers. To break a well known brand it is important to think about everything. Sales promotion is the most important feature of any marketing campaign as it is designed to catch the attention of a consumer quicker. Some of the sales promotion techniques would be loyalty programs, discounts, free samples and 1+1 promotions. Sales promotions main goals are to stimulate short term demand, create loyal customers and encourage brand switching from competitors. (Weerathunga and Pathmini, 2016) Customers are more keen to spending money on cheaper items as this makes them feel like they didn't lose much if the product doesn't meet the expectations. It is also important to point out the urgency and pressure a consumer feels when some kind of sale is introduced. Some types of sales promotion according to Weerathunga and Pathmini, 2016 would be:

- rebate (price is lowered after the purchase)
- price packs (a way to attract consumers looking for the cheapest option)
- loyalty programs (rewarding and keeping loyal customers)
- premiums/gifts (offers at a low cost or free to attract new customers)
- free samples (offers a smaller amount of product for free to encourage products trial)

Almost all studies believe that the most used sales promotion techniques to stimulate consumers are price discounts, free samples, buy one get one and loyalty programs.



Source: Ganawati, N., Sudarmini, K. and Sarjani, N., 2018. *International Journal of Economics, Commerce and Management United Kingdom*, Vol. VI, December 2018(12).

## 4. Conclusion

To conclude, Impulsive buying behaviour is a form of unplanned purchase that happens on the spot without any former intention. It is most commonly triggered by some kind of stimuli in a form of external or internal factors. This buying behaviour has no buying pattern and no decision-making process which is why it is impossible to dissect this type of behaviour. It is described by Piron through three criteria: the purchase must be completely unplanned, some kind of stimuli triggers the buying process and the decision is made on the spot.

According to the involvement in the purchase and the number of differences between brands, there are four types of consumer behaviour types: complex buying behaviour, variety-seeking behaviour, dissonance reducing buying behaviour, and habitual buying behaviour.

Without a doubt, emotions have a huge impact on this kind of behaviour. A good mood is positively correlated with a purchase, however people sometimes engage in impulsive buying out of sheer boredom or for example curiosity. Money and time a buyer is available to spend plays a crucial role in this as well. Because this types of purchases happen so sudden, the post-purchase feelings can easily be expressed as a negative. However, in many cases this doesn't stop consumers to engage with this impulsive behaviour once again. Since the markets are saturated with products and competition, companies are fighting for customers by using lots of different stimuli, discounts, sales promotions, one plus one offers etc..

Talking about the factors influencing the impulses there are internal and external factors influencing the purchase itself. From the mood a consumer is in that day, through the weather outside it all affects the sale while the rational part of the mind is turned off. Internal factors influencing these purchases are age, sex, education level, and income while external factors are stimuli used by brands like the quality of the service, cosy atmosphere, vibrant colors, smells and many other marketing tricks used like sales promotions. Some of the most used sales promotions are loyalty programs, price discounts, free samples and buy one-get one promotions. When engaging in this process, a consumer doesn't use his rational brain and becomes an impulsive buyer easier.

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