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Impulsive buying tendency: Measuring important relationships with a new perspective and an indigenous scale

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Abstract With the opening up of the economy and the proliferation of mall culture, the economic relevance of impulsive buying behaviour has assumed significance. Impulsive buying behaviour is better understood by examining the impulsive buying tendency that shapes such behaviour, and since consumer behaviour differs across cultures, by incorporating an indigenous perspective in understanding and measuring the tendency. Studies were conducted to develop an Indian scale for measuring impulsive buying tendency and to validate it by examining its association with other relevant variables. A two factor, 8-item scale was developed; a significant positive relationship was seen between impulsive buying tendency and impulsive buying behaviour, and the relationship between impulsive buying tendency and self-control was found to be inversely significant. Results also showed significant relationship between impulsive buying tendency and the two personality constructs of Conscientiousness and Extraversion.

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Introduction

The economic importance of impulsive buying is well established in the retail world (Verplanken & Sato, 2011). With an estimated \$4 billion being spent annually in an impulsive manner (Liao & Wang, 2009), and about 62% market sales in supermarkets, and around 80% sales in luxury goods being attributed to impulsive purchase (Ruvio & Belk, 2013), the phe-

nomenon is very important to the retail world. Researchers in the past have delved into many aspects related to impulsive buying behaviour. While some researchers have investigated the possible role of intrinsic factors such as impulsive buying tendency (Flight, Rountree, & Beatty, 2012; Foroughi, Buang, Senik, & Hajmisadeghi, 2013; Mohan, Sivakumaran, & Sharma, 2013), shopping enjoyment tendency (Bong, 2010; Chavosh, Halimi, & Namdar, 2011; Mohan et al., 2013), materialism (Garðarsdóttir & Dittmar, 2012), personality (Bratko, Butkovic, & Bosnjak, 2013; Herabadi, Verplanken, & Van Knippenberg, 2009), and culture (Dameyasani & Abraham, 2013; Pornpitakpan & Han, 2013), others have tried to unveil

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the role of external factors (Karbasivar & Yarahmadi, 2011; Lifu, 2012; Mehta & Chugan, 2013) in impulsive buying behaviour. On similar lines, there have been attempts to examine the impact of constraints such as the availability of time and money (Beatty & Ferrell, 1998; Dholakia, 2000), while some others have tried to capture the effect of aspects such as the stimulation level (Sharma, Sivakumaran, & Marshall, 2010); the mood and emotions (Foroughi et al., 2013); and in-store display (Ghani & Kamal, 2010). Needless to say, the importance of the phenomenon called impulsive buying has only grown with time.

Though several facets of impulsive buying behaviour have been researched in the past, according to the authors, it is important to develop an improved understanding of the inherent tendencies that guide and shape such behaviour in order to understand it better. Thus, the widely acclaimed driver of impulsive buying behaviour, the impulsive buying tendency (Flight et al., 2012; Foroughi et al., 2013; Yang, Huang, & Feng, 2011), needs deserved attention.

Though sometimes used synonymously, impulsive buying tendency, a precursor variable, is different from impulsive buying behaviour, as the former captures a relatively enduring consumer trait that produces urges or motivations for the latter (Sun & Wu, 2011; Zhang, Prybutok, & Strutton, 2007). Thus, though these urges sometimes culminate in actual purchases (Foroughi et al., 2013), there is a possibility that other mediating variables such as unavailability of money or time might put an abrupt end to the urge (Dholakia, 2000) and might not result in an actual impulsive purchase. Despite this, however, this manifestation of general impulsiveness called impulsive buying tendency (Dholakia, 2000; Punj, 2011; Sharma et al., 2010; Siorowska, 2011) has been found to have a definite positive relationship with impulsive buying behaviour (Flight et al., 2012; Foroughi et al., 2013).

There have been several attempts to measure impulsive buying tendency. Initial attempts considered it a one-dimensional trait (Beatty & Ferrell, 1998; Rook & Fisher, 1995), and later on a two-dimensional outlook (Puri, 1996; Verplanken & Herabadi, 2001; Youn & Faber, 2002) was developed and a second dimension was also explored. The most detailed approach in this regard was the robust scale by Verplanken and Herabadi (2001) who arrived at a 20-item scale measuring the cognitive aspects (e.g., lack of planning and deliberation) and affective aspects (e.g., feelings of pleasure, excitement, compulsion, lack of control, regret). Though the impulsive buying tendency measurement scale by Verplanken and Herabadi (2001) did seem to cover the essence of impulsive behaviour, yet, as per the research findings of Bosnjak, Bandl, and Bratko (2007) it suffered from a problematic convergent and discriminant validity. Similarly, a robust impulsive tendency measurement scale by Sharma, Sivakumaran, and Marshall (2011) argued that while measuring impulsive buying tendency (they called it impulsivity), the differences in cultural orientation should be considered. To give the cultural orientation due consideration, they presented a three-factor structure (prudence, self-indulgence, and self-control) for the collectivists and a two-factor structure (prudence and hedonism) for the individualists. Though a unique perspective—in the form of a third dimension—was provided by Sharma et al. (2011), their scale was validated through studies in countries such as the United States and Singapore, and thus,

though a robust proposition, it still awaits due validation in Asian sub-continental countries, such as India and Pakistan.

Thus, even though some robust scales for measuring impulsive buying tendency do exist in the literature, a need for a fresh and indigenous outlook was felt on account of the following reasons:

1. With the majority of the existing scales using the English language, it would be questionable whether they could capture the real essence of the phenomenon in cultures and contexts such as India or China where an overwhelming majority of the population converses in the regional language. If attempts were made to exclude the non-English speaking respondents from the survey, it would result in an obvious bias and would not produce reliable results. Alternately, mere translation of the items of the existing scales might create subjective biases and might also change the essence of the context.
2. Barring the consumer impulsiveness scale by Puri (1996) who administered the scale to both US as well as Indian respondents, almost all the previous scales have been developed in different developed countries (such as the US, Singapore, and Norway), where, not only the purchasing power of the consumers is expected to be different, but also the spending philosophy. In their study, Kacen and Lee (2002) observed that the nine-item Rook and Fisher (1995) scale which they administered in four countries, two individualistic (Australia and the US) and two collectivistic (Singapore and Malaysia), resulted in differences in the factor structures across different countries. Kacen and Lee (2002) found a single factor for their sample from the individualist countries but also found two factors for the collectivistic countries. Based on this evidence, Kacen and Lee (2002) noted that the scales developed in the United States were not valid for use in other countries and even suggested that the buying impulsiveness trait may have a different meaning across different cultures. Also, in the same context, Sharma et al. (2011) pointed out that consumers in collectivistic cultures such as China and Vietnam, being more focussed on their social goals, would probably be more in control of their impulses and emotions in comparison to individualistic cultures such as the US. Thus, the authors are of the opinion that given the distinct differences in the behaviour of consumers across cultures, the indigenous perspective assumes definite significance in measurement scales as well.
3. With the consumption focus shifting to the emerging economies of the sub-continent, such as India and Pakistan, where the opening up of the economy and proliferation of mall culture have provided opportunities to the global retail giants, the fact remains that the majority of consumers in these countries consist of a middle class population that is expected to be different in terms of behaviour from the developed world. As pointed out by Ahmed and d'Astous (2008), significant differences in market structure and consumer behaviour are prevalent between the developing and the developed countries, and hence the models from the developed countries may not necessarily be applicable to the developing world. Additionally, in comparison to the impulsive buying literature related to the Western world, there have been few studies in the context of a developing country such as India. Thus, a new

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