



A structural equation model of impulse buying behaviour in grocery retailing



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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Environmental changes, specifically the economic crisis and the growing penetration of digital technologies, have produced significant changes in shopping habits designed to create new paradigms for impulse buying behaviour. A new scenario seems to be opening up where customers enter the store much more prepared than in the past searching for products they had planned to buy. The purpose of this paper is to explore the determinants of impulse buying in a context of more planning and preparation for shopping.

Design /methodology/approach: The data were obtained using a structured questionnaire from 316 respondents interviewed instore thanks to the cooperation of a leading Italian retail chain. We conducted a two-stage approach mall-intercept survey method to collect data. Firstly, we interviewed customers before entering the store, enquiring them about the pre-shopping preparation and shopping enjoyment tendency. Secondly, we interviewed the same customers at the end of their shopping trips, asking them to indicate which purchases were unplanned. Then, shoppers answered to questions regarding their general tendency to engage in impulse buying, the urges experienced to make impulse purchases, the level of positive and negative affect experienced during the shopping trip.

Findings: In the structural model tested with LISREL 8, we found that pre-shopping tendency influences directly impulse buying: confirming our hypotheses, a higher pre-shopping preparation lead to lower levels of impulse buying. Results also showed that the personality variables (shopping enjoyment tendency and impulse buying tendency) influenced impulse buying through positive affect and urge to purchase. Our research did not find support for the relationship between negative affect and urge. Finally, higher levels of urge to buy impulsively lead to higher levels of impulse buying

Originality/value: From the review of past and recent literature, we have not found a model that considers the influence of pre-shopping tendency on impulse buying behaviour. This paper addresses this major gap in extant literature by including pre-shopping tendency among the individual characteristics (impulse buying tendency and shopping enjoyment tendency) taken into consideration by past contributions.

1. Introduction

Impulse buying in grocery retailing is of interest to manufacturers as well as retailers. Starting from the 90's, several authors have started to investigate the role of the point of sale in consumers' decisions (Bucklin and Lattin, 1991; Donovan et al., 1994; Beatty and Ferrel, 1998; Bell et al., 2011) on the belief that it was possible to stimulate purchases not planned before towards profitable products and/or categories (Inman et al., 2009). During the past two decades, manufacturers have gradually shifted their strategic focus from the traditional marketing levers (e.g. advertising) oriented to create awareness, to instore marketing levers (e.g. promotion) hoping to influence consumers' decisions in store. At the same time, many retailers have

invested a lot of resources on in-store marketing to stimulate unplanned purchases.

In Italy at least two out of three purchase decisions are made in store (IGD, 2012) and this data would strengthen the growing strategic importance of the point of sale and all those levers which are operated in store to influence the buying behaviour of the consumer.

However, over the last few years there have been significant changes in shoppers' behaviour due to modifications in the economic and technological landscape. In a context where the unemployment rate grows, the family income decreases, the taxes incidence increases, consumers begin to adopt strategies to reduce the incidence of food expenditure (IGD, 2011). Moreover, the diffusion of new shopping tools has enabled consumers to search for product and pricing

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information anywhere at any time, both outside and inside the store (Silveria and Marreiros, 2014). As a consequence, consumers today enter the store much more prepared than in the past, and they are able to shop quickly only looking for products they had planned to buy.

Consumers' behaviour in-store appears to be more influenced by preparatory activities than generally assumed. A recent study (Bellini et al., 2016) found that the degree of grocery shopping preparation influences shopper behaviour inside the store in terms of planned/impulse buying. In particular, the higher is the degree of preparation, the greater is the tendency to plan purchases and the lower is the propensity to make impulse purchases. This means that decisions do not necessarily occur in-store, in front of the display, but they can occur also out-of-store, during the pre-trip activities.

Such trends in shopping habits are designed to create new paradigms for impulse buying behaviour. However, from the review of past and recent literature (Weun et al., 1998; Sharma et al., 2010; Jones et al., 2003; Mishra et al., 2012; Beatty and Ferrel, 1998; Zhou and Wong, 2003; Peck and Childers, 2006; Stillely et al., 2010; Ghani and Kamal, 2010; Mohan et al., 2013), we have not found a comprehensive model that considers the preparatory activities among the factors that could influence impulse buying behaviour. Our paper intends to address this gap in existing literature by adding the "pre-shopping tendency" among the variables found to affect impulse buying.

Starting from these considerations, our work focuses on shopping behaviour in grocery retailing in order to explore which factors drive impulse purchases in-store in the new retail landscape. The main purpose is to come out with a model that considers pre-shopping variables among the antecedents of impulse buying behaviour.

This paper is organized as follows: we first summarize prior research, introduce our perspective and hypotheses. Next, we describe the methodology with the sample procedure and measures. Then, we specify our structural model and report the findings. The last sections are devoted to discuss the main findings and implications for managers and researchers, limitations and future research.

2. Conceptual framework and hypotheses

2.1. Impulse buying

Over the last decades, several authors started to recognize that many decisions are not made until consumers enter the store (Agnew, 1987; McIntyre, 1995; Inman et al., 2009). The literature defined this phenomenon as "impulse buying" (for a review of impulse buying behaviour see Muruganatham and Ravi, 2013). According to Iyer (1989) impulse purchases can be divided into four categories: pure impulse buying (purchases characterized by a complete absence of planning); suggestion impulse buying (which occurs when the store suggests new product alternatives to meet a need); reminded impulse purchases (which occurs when consumer remembers to buy a product that is needed only in front of the shelf) and planned impulse purchases (purchases partially planned before entering the store, e.g. the category has already been decided).

Starting from this classification, ten years later Beatty and Ferrel (1998) provided a simpler categorization distinguishing impulse buying from unplanned buying. Impulse buying is "a sudden and immediate purchase with no pre-shopping intentions either to buy the specific product category or to fulfil a specific buying task", whereas unplanned reminder buying may simply be "out of stock" reminder buying. Impulse buying is thus a spur-of-the-moment purchase with little thought (a shopper sees some candy and decides to buy on a sudden urge) while unplanned reminder buying is buying since the shopper forgot to put an item on her list (a shopper sees sugar in the store, remembers she is out of stock and buys it).

In line with these contributions, our definition of "impulse buying" would include only genuinely "impulsive" purchases.

2.2. Impulse buying antecedents

Prior researches on impulse buying found its antecedents in three main categories: individual characteristics (Weun et al., 1998); product category variables (Jones et al., 2003; Inman et al., 2009; Mishra et al., 2012) and situational factors (Belk, 1975; Beatty and Ferrel, 1998).

Among individual characteristics can be cited demographical variables, such as gender and age (Kollat and Willett, 1967; Cobb, 1986; Blaylock and Smallwood, 1987) and personality traits. This latter subcategory includes "impulse buying tendency" e "shopping enjoyment tendency". The first can be defined as the degree to which an individual is likely to make unintended, immediate, unreflective and impulse purchases (Jones et al., 2003) or a tendency to respond quickly to a given stimulus, without deliberation and evaluation of consequences (Gerbing et al., 1987). The second is defined as a consumer's personality trait that finds shopping more enjoyable and experiences greater shopping pleasure than other consumers (Kim and Kim, 2008) or the pleasure one obtains in the shopping process (Beatty and Ferrel, 1998).

As regards to product characteristics, it has been studied that the level of hedonicity of the category bought and the inter purchase cycle (defined as time that elapses between the purchase of a product and the repurchase of the same) affect the probability to buy on impulse (Inman et al., 2009).

Finally, the last variables found to affect impulse buying are situational factors, composed by five main subcategories (Belk, 1975): physical surrounding, social surrounding, temporal perspective, antecedent states and task definition. With reference to grocery shopping, physical surroundings may include in-store stimuli such as quantity and quality of the space attributed to the category, display arrangement (Ghani and Kamal, 2010), in-store communication, in-store advertisements (Zhou and Wong, 2003), in-store signage (Peck and Childers, 2006), colours (Muruganatham and Shankar, 2013), store environment (Mohan et al., 2013), in-store slack (Stillely et al., 2010), services, store layout and in-store promotion (Fam et al., 2011). Social surroundings refer to other persons present during the shopping trip, their characteristics and their apparent roles (Belk, 1975), while temporal perspective regards the time available for the shopping trip (Beatty and Ferrel, 1998) and the time of the day dedicated to the shopping. Antecedent states are momentary moods (such as acute anxiety, pleasantness, hostility, and excitation) or momentary condition (such as fatigue and illness) experienced during the shopping (Belk, 1975). Finally, task definition can include money available for the shopping trip (Beatty and Ferrel, 1998) and shopping intent to purchase a specific product (Belk, 1975). This latter factor could be considered a sort of "pre-shopping factors", that are variables which influence consumers' decisions before the shopping expedition.

2.3. The role of pre-shopping factors on impulse buying behaviour

To better understand the role of pre-shopping factors on impulse buying behaviour we have to start from the literature on involvement that explains how much time, thought, energy and other resources people devote to a purchase process (Zaichkowsky, 1985; Beatty and Kahle, 1988; Das, 2015a, 2015b). Highly involved individuals, who devote time and energy to search for information before shopping, are likely to be more stable in their preconceived cognitions that lead to purchase (Mittal, 1989). This suggests that impulse buyers may be less involved in their purchase decision-making process than those who make planned purchases.

Nevertheless the obvious linkage between preparatory activities and impulsiveness, most of the studies on impulse buying antecedents have focused the attention on the in-store factors' influence.

Recently, some authors have studied the influence of out-of-store factors on unplanned buying (Bell et al., 2011; Geetha and Bharadhwaj, 2016).

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