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Branding Factors that Influence Impulse Buying

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Branding Factors That Influence Impulse Buying

An Honors College Thesis

by

Talia Fioretti

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Business Administration

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Date

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12/10/18.

Date

Abstract

In my thesis paper, I begin by discussing research on branding, such as research on brand personalities, factors that make for a powerful brand, and effects of strong brands. I then discuss research on impulse buying, such as research on internal factors within consumers that can affect impulse buying, external/situational influences that can affect impulse buying, and the effects of product category on impulse buying. I then discuss an original study I ran that explores the relationship between branding and impulse buying. My research suggests that there is indeed a relationship between branding and impulse buying. For instance, the results of my original study showed that respondents thought they are more likely to impulsively buy a product when it is a brand they simply know or when it is a brand they love even if they do not know much about the specific product itself.

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Overview

In my thesis paper, I begin by discussing research on branding, such as research on brand personalities, factors that make for a powerful brand, and effects of strong brands. I then discuss research on impulse buying, such as research on internal factors within consumers that can affect impulse buying, external/situational influences that can affect impulse buying, and the effects of product category on impulse buying. I then discuss an original study I ran that explores the relationship between branding and impulse buying.

Branding

Definition of a Brand

Martin (2018) explained the concept of a brand plan. "The brand plan acts as an umbrella under which functions such as marketing, sales, and product development are united, detailing what each group needs to do for the brand to be successful, while setting objectives that operations and finance need to support." (pg. 2-3). A successful brand plan begins with an idea about what the brand should embody. The brand should have a mission, which is a specific plan-of-attack that will help launch the brand. The plan should include goals, and the strategy or plan to achieve those goals.

Martin (2018) argued that a brand plan should also identify its target audience in order to understand how to successfully support the brand. The plan should have a main message explaining why it is superior to other products. The brand plan should also have strategies for promotion so that the target consumers want to purchase the product. One of the most important aspects to a brand is being able to connect with its consumers emotionally. "In today's climate, how you make people feel can make or break your business."

Veloutsou and Moutinho (2007) noted that currently, consumers purchase products based on their symbolic meaning that represent images, not necessarily for the product's utility. Ourusoff (1992) stated that many companies seek out growth opportunities by acquiring existing brands because the cost of bringing a new brand to the marketplace can reach $100 million. Crawford (1993) noted there is a 50 percent probability of failure for newly created brands.

Brand Personality

Just like people have personalities, brands do, too. For instance, Aaker (1997) set out to study the relationship between the "Big Five" human personality dimensions and brand personality. The author defined brand personality as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (347). She defined the five dimensions of brand personality as sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness.

Aaker (1997) described the brand personality dimension of sincerity as down-to-earth, honest, wholesome, and cheerful. The brand personality dimension of excitement was defined as daring, spirited, imaginative, and up-to-date. Further, the brand personality dimension of competence was considered reliable, intelligent, and successful. The brand personality dimension of sophistication was described as upper-class and charming. Lastly, the brand personality dimension of ruggedness was stated to be outdoorsy and tough.

Aaker (1997) set out to develop a framework of brand personality dimensions and a scale by which they could be measured. She found that the concepts of agreeableness and sincerity captured the idea of warmth and acceptance. The personality dimension of excitement demonstrated ideas of sociability and activity. Competence demonstrated responsibility, dependability, and security. Sophistication and ruggedness were ideas that many consumers desired, but did not necessarily have. Some advertisers use sophistication and ruggedness to promote higher-end brands that consumers associate with high-class and glamour. For example, Mercedes Benz is seen as a sophisticated brand, and Harley Davidson is an example of a brand with ruggedness.

While assuming that brand personalities are important, Aaker (1997) posed that the next question to be answered was: how does a brand develop brand personality? It has been suggested that the brand personality can be created by marketing to any one of the five personalities. For example, a product marketed as wholesome and down to earth would have the brand personality of sincerity. The author also stated that further research was needed to determine how consumers process brand personality information. Less is known about how consumers form attitudes about various brand personalities. The author suggested that it would be important to know whether brand personalities should match the personalities of the target consumer. Additionally, the author stated that brand personalities could have different impacts in different cultures, and further study in this area was warranted. Moreover, she noted that it was possible that the brand personalities may need to be altered depending on cultures and geographic locations of consumers.

Aaker (1997) stated that the set of human characteristics associated with a brand is known as brand personality. Belk (1988) studied how consumers can express themselves through the personality of a brand. Plummer (1985) stated that brand personality can be used to market a brand across cultures. Biel (1993) found that brand personality was a central driver of consumer preference and usage. Sirgy (1982) stated that the topic of how brand personality influences consumer preference has remained elusive. Aaker (1997) set forth the opinion that no research was performed to develop a valid scale to measure brand personality and therefore planned to develop a theoretical framework of brand personality dimensions.

Andruss (2012) stated that Coca-Cola made the list based upon the fact that it focused on selling happiness to consumers. This brand works promoting, developing, and creating happy and emotional advertising. The company was started over 100 years ago, so the brand is well recognized and highly trustworthy. The company's focus on happiness creates their strong corporate identity based on longevity and heritage.

Hausman (2000) began with a number of theories. She proposed that hedonic or indulgent, pleasure-oriented motives such as the needs for novelty, social interaction, and fun contributed to impulse buying. She also suggested that the need for social interaction and to gain approval can lead to impulse purchases. Further, the author suggested that impulse buying resulted from the desire to satisfy self-esteem, as measured by style-consciousness.

Kim et al. (2001) noted that the significance of brand personality to consumers' brand loyalty and repurchasing behavior has not been generally recognized. The authors stated that the importance of brand personality in developing competitive advantage and brand loyalty has only been noted by a few researchers, including Plummer (1985) and David Aaker (1996). Currently, Jennifer Aaker (1997) introduced the results of her examination on brand personality.

Kim et al. (2001) sought to study how brand personality relates to brand loyalty of consumers. They found that many researchers underestimated the importance of brand personality in building competitive advantage and brand loyalty. They studied how consumers identify themselves with brands, similar to social identification. The authors defined social identification as "a person identifying him/herself as a member of a society" (pg. 197). For example, people will classify themselves as belonging to specific groups based on ethnicity, community, or social class.

Kim et al. (2001) had three research objectives. Their study uses the methodology created by Aaker (1997) to measure the issues of why and how brand personalities affect consumers' brand loyalty. First, the authors studied brand personality in the cellular phone market in Korea, where research showed that self-expressive value and distinctiveness of a brand influenced the attractiveness of a brand personality. Second, the study looked to see if there was a link between brands and consumers through social identification, meaning a consumer's sense that he or she belonged to a certain group. Third, the study examined the effect of brand identity and brand loyalty, and whether positive consumer reviews and word-of-mouth statements about the brand had any effect on brand loyalty.

Veloutsou and Moutinho (2007) stated that consumers form relationships with brands based upon the characteristics of the brands and their perceptions of the image that the brand gives to them. In other words, many people consume products for the image they give to the purchaser, as though the product creates the image. The authors stated that, at the time of the article, the available research did not analyze consumers' views on mass market brands through their reputation, and the social influence they experience in terms of "brand tribes" when they are forming relationships with brands.

Malar et al. (2011) stated that it was important for companies to create strong emotional brand connections with consumers. The authors noted that some companies promoted products by advertising that their use by consumers would bring them closer to an ideal vision of themselves, or an "ideal self," whereas other companies used advertisements containing a diverse group utilizing their products to resemble how most consumers see themselves, or an "actual self."

Park et al. (2010) found that emotional brand connections can increase profits as a result of customer brand loyalty. Gilmore and Pine (2007) found that many consumers want authenticity in marketing, resulting in a growing trend towards "actual self" advertising.

Chapin and John (2005) and Park et al. (2010) noted that self-congruence plays an important role in creating emotional brand attachments. Malar et al. (2011) set out to research how emotional brand attachment is affected by actual and ideal self-congruence, and how it varied when applied to different consumer groups.

Malar et al. (2011) concluded that marketers could use this information to decide when to emphasize an ideal self or actual self brand personality to consumers to increase emotional brand attachment. The study showed that consumer characteristics must be considered, but that overall self-congruence can increase emotional brand attachment, especially when the consumers were involved with the product or had a high level of self-esteem or public self-consciousness. The authors noted that, in contrast to the common practice of aspirational branding, this study revealed that brands with ideal self-congruence in general were less successful in increasing emotional brand attachment, although they found that aspirational branding may still work when involvement, self-esteem, or public self-consciousness is low.

Factors that Make for a Powerful Brand

There are many factors that make for a powerful brand. For instance, Martin (2018) examined why a brand plan is extremely important for a business to thrive. In the past, most consumers were only aware of brands managed by large corporations, such as IBM, Coca-Cola, and BMW. However, today, with the internet and social media, just about all businesses have the opportunity to build a brand and enhance credibility to increase sales and profits. Consumers can easily research a brand before deciding to visit a store, buy certain products, or hire someone to perform a service. Having a strong, powerful brand matters. Building a successful brand plan gives tremendous opportunities for entrepreneurs to expand their businesses.

Martin (2018) set forth his definition of a brand plan. “The brand plan acts as an umbrella under which functions such as marketing, sales, and product development are united, detailing what each group needs to do for the brand to be successful, while setting objectives that operations and finance need to support.” (pg. 2-3). A successful brand plan begins with an idea about what the brand should embody. The brand should have a mission, which is a specific plan-of-attack that will help launch the brand. The plan should include goals, and the strategy or plan to achieve those goals.

Martin (2018) argued that a brand plan should also identify its target audience in order to understand how to successfully support the brand. The plan should have a main message explaining why it is superior to other products. The brand plan should also have strategies for promotion so that the target consumers want to purchase the product. One of the most important aspect to a brand is being able to connect with its consumers emotionally. “In today’s climate, how you make people feel can make or break your business.” (pg. 3)

Martin (2018) looked to Elon Musk as an example of an entrepreneur who understands the emotional aspects of branding. He has branded himself as an expert who is going to save the planet by inventing environmentally-friendly products. He comes across as authentic and sincere, and he has taken personal responsibility for his brand.

Effects of Strong Brands

Brand Equity

Aaker (1991) stated that because purchasers are willing to pay more for “brand names,” the brand names add value and the added value is referred to as “brand equity.” Farquhar (1989) and Crimmins (1992) noted that brand names add value to the investor, the manufacturer, the retailer, or the consumer, but only if there is value to the consumer. Cobb-Walgren et al.

(1995) noted that the cost of corporate leveraged buyouts includes not only the physical factories and products, but the value of the brands.

Cobb-Walgren et al. (1995) used Peter Farquhar's definition for a product and brand to exemplify the difference that many consumers do not understand. He defined a product as "something that offers a functional benefit," and a brand as "a name, symbol, design, or mark that enhances the value of a product beyond its functional value" (pg. 24). The reason consumers are willing to pay top dollar for a brand name is because it adds value, also known as brand equity. "It is important to understand how brand value is created in the mind of the consumer and how it translates into choice behavior." (pg. 26)

Cobb-Walgren et al. (1995) analyzed the effect of brand equity on consumer preferences and purchase intentions by using perceptual components of Aaker's (1991) definition of brand equity, positive and negative brand associations, and regression analysis. They conducted two tests measuring two sets of brands: one from a service category characterized by fairly high financial and functional risk (hotels), and one from a generally lower risk product category (household cleansers).

Cobb-Walgren et al. (1995) performed the first test, in which they compared the equities of two hotel brands: Holiday Inn and Howard Johnson. The authors looked at the perceived value, which is the value of the brand which cannot be explained by price and promotion, and they also looked at brand dominance ratio, which is the value of the brand's ability to compete on price. It was significant to note that Holiday Inn's advertising budget was six times greater than the advertising budget for Howard Johnson, which greatly affected consumer perceptions of the brands and their brand equities. In order to measure a brand equity, the authors looked at the perceived value; Holiday Inn's brand equity was significantly greater than that of Howard Johnson. The results of the first test provide convincing evidence of the effect of brand equity on brand preferences and usage intentions.

In the second test, Cobb-Walgren et al. (1995) compared the equities of two household cleanser brands: Soft Scrub and Bon Ami. Soft Scrub's brand equity was significantly greater than that of Bon Ami. Again, it is clear that the brand with the higher equity generated the higher usage intentions. The brand with the higher advertising budget yielded substantially higher levels of brand equity. In turn, the brand with the higher equity in each category generated significantly greater preferences and purchase intentions.

Andruss (2012) stated that it is important to have a can-do attitude. For instance, the author stated that Nike is extremely consumer-focused, making the brand relevant to not only elite athletes, but also to the everyday person. The company's innovation by introducing new technologies established consumers' trust. Its "Just Do It" campaign promoted self-empowerment. The co-founder of Nike, Phil Knight, is still involved with operations. Having the co-founder still associated with the company keeps the brand closely connected to the consumer.

Esch et al. (2006) noted that the key goals of brand management were establishing brand awareness and image. The authors stated that relationship-based ideas, such as trust and bonds with a brand, should be included as part of brand management. They discovered that a comprehensive model that includes both perceptual/cognitive and relationship variables, and shows how these variables are interrelated and contribute to the ultimate goal of brands, was missing from prior research models. The authors noted that while the "brand relationship" perspective has been guided by an interpretative paradigm, combining sociological, anthropological and cultural theory with qualitative data collection, research regarding "brand knowledge" is conceptualized and tested using experiments and empirical modeling, with no attempt to bring these two perspectives together.

Esch et al. (2006) argued that building a strong brand is an extremely important goal of brand and product management because it results in increased revenue streams, both short-term and long-term. Creating a brand that will last for decades will give a company an extensive advantage. While it has been important for a brand management department to focus on brand awareness, image, and personality, more recently, researchers believe it is important to consider how consumers build brand relationships and form brand communities. The authors devised a model to determine how purchase behavior is influenced by a person's brand knowledge and brand relationship. For brand knowledge, they assessed how customers evaluated brands. For brand relationships, they looked to measure the bond between the purchaser and the brand. The study sought to determine how brand knowledge and brand relationships ultimately affected consumer decisions.

Esch et al. (2006) conducted a study involving 400 business students filling out a questionnaire that measured brand knowledge, brand relationship, and behavioral outcome. The study found that "current purchases are affected by brand image mostly directly and by brand awareness mostly indirectly. In contrast, future purchases are not affected by either dimension of brand knowledge directly; rather, brand knowledge affects future purchases via a brand relationship path that includes brand satisfaction, brand trust, and attachment to the brand. Thus, brand knowledge alone is not sufficient for building strong brands in the long term; brand relationship factors must be considered as well." (p.g. 98)

Research by Veloutsou and Moutinho (2007) focused on investigating the relative influence of the brand reputation of soft drinks, a fast-moving product, in forming strong consumer–brand relationships, and how brand communities or tribes have a role in the formulation of brand reputation.

Veloutsou and Moutinho (2007) explained that brand reputation refers to how consumers evaluate and view a brand, and it can take years to develop a positive brand reputation. Companies create a concept of a brand image and identity, and then work to drive the reputation through continued marketing of the brand. The authors stated that brand reputation contributes to how consumers view the quality of the product, and therefore a consistent brand message is necessary to maintain credibility.

Sarwar et al. (2014) examined the impact of branding on consumer behavior and the various factors that guide an individual to make a particular purchase decision. For a brand to be lucrative, brand recognition and identity are essential. Individuals recognize brands as their identification, triumph, as well as a status symbol. Many companies hire famous celebrities as brand ambassadors because a consumer will be more likely to buy the brand due to a desire to be equivalent to that celebrity.

Kim et al. (2001) confirmed that there was a positive relationship between customers and brand personality. Further, the study showed that brand identification had a positive effect on consumer word-of-mouth reviews, but did not have a significant effect on brand loyalty. Similarly, the attractiveness of the brand also affected positive word-of-mouth consumer reports. The positive effects would lead to increased purchases of the products that had positive results.

Leighton et al. (2012) argued that branding can affect consumer choices in a number of ways. It can influence whether the purchaser notices a product and how much attention is given to the item since the product must be seen to be sold. Branding can influence how quickly customers recognize a product from memory retrieval (a memory "cue"). These areas, attention and recognition, are important predictors of decision making. Studying the impact of branding on these two areas can help us learn how branding works to guide purchase decisions.

Leighton et al. (2012) sought to investigate the impact of branding on consumer recognition by looking at three issues: what impact does decreased branding have on consumer decision making, what impact does non-branded information (e.g., nutrition information) have on consumer choice, and what impact does copycat branding have on consumer choice.

The study by Leighton et al. (2012) used product photographs, some of which were changed to vary the size of the logos or the nutritional information shown on the product. The authors used eye tracking and visual search tasks to measure consumers' attention and recognition in a scientifically validated and rigorous manner as part of their study on the impact of copycat branding on decision-making.

Leighton et al. (2012) noted that the study revealed that reducing the branding on products can reduce the attention given to the product and decrease recognition of the brand. The ability of the consumer to recognize and find the brand they wanted was impaired when the logo size was reduced. Thus, reducing the branding can have a detrimental effect.

Leighton et al. (2012) found that increasing the size of nutritional labels did increase the attention paid to the product, but it reduced the ability to recognize a brand. However, the authors felt that this finding was not statistically reliable and that the impact of nutritional information may not have been significant.

Leighton et al. (2012) also found that copycat branding decreased the ability of consumers to recognize an established brand when the copycat brand was displayed next to it. The impact of the copycat brand was lessened when it was not near the established brand. Thus, copycat brands were able to confuse consumers, causing some to choose the wrong brand.

Leighton et al. (2012) concluded that branding has important effects on consumer attention and memory. They found that reducing the branded elements on packaging can have a negative effect on the ability of consumers to find and choose the brands they desire. Further, they found that copycat branding had a detrimental effect on the consumer's ability to locate the desired brand.

<u>Brand Community</u>

Fournier (1998), Grossman (1998), McAlexander et al. (2002) and Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) have stated that it is important to compare the ways that consumers build relationships and communities in their personal lives with how consumers build brand relationships and form brand communities.

Veloutsou and Moutinho (2007) stated that based on several characteristics of brands forming certain perceptions and behaviors, consumers are likely to form relationships with brands. They noted that most published research concentrates on consumers who perceive their association with a group of consumers and are additionally keen in a brand are associated with a brand community.

Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), McAlexander et al. (2002), Algesheimer et al. (2005), Muniz and Schau (2005), and Schouten and McAlexander (2005) stated that most research examining brand communities targets extravagant brands, as well as products buyers are intimately involved with, such as computers, personal digital assistants, cars, motorbikes, and Jeeps. Cova and Pace (2006) found that products that focus on the mass market, such as chocolate spread, have rarely been studied.

Andruss (2012) stated it is important to forge connections. For instance, the author found that Starbucks focuses on creating connections and bringing people together. The company's store is designed for customers to interact with, including free wifi, in-store music, and large tables with room for groups and meetings. The focus for this brand is to promote connection, discovery, inspiration, and creation.

Hausman (2000) observed that by adding the emotional components of self-esteem and indulgent desires to an assessment of impulse buying, the buying behavior and shopping experience can be viewed as a valued pastime rather than just a means to acquire goods. Many shoppers enjoy the social interaction that takes place while shopping, and state that it can help with stress relief after a long day at work. Sometimes an impulse purchase results from a desire to reward one's self after completing a difficult task. Other consumers state that they find the shopping experience to be fun.

Martin (2018) looked to Elon Musk as an example of an entrepreneur who understands the emotional aspects of branding. He has branded himself as an expert who is going to save the planet by inventing environmentally-friendly products. He comes across as authentic and sincere, and he has taken personal responsibility for his brand.

Kim et al. (2001) argued that marketing firms can use this information to develop better communication methods to launch a distinct and attractive brand personality. This will involve not only communication strategies, but also other activities such as consumer support services and community service. The effective use of brand personality can increase brand loyalty through an increase of positive word-of-mouth reports and consumer reviews. Although this study focused only on cellular phones, it could be used to test other product categories to see the connection between brand personality and social identification.

As previously stated, Veloutsou and Moutinho (2007) found that consumers form relationships with brands based upon the characteristics of the brands and their perceptions of the image that the brand gives to them. In other words, many people consume products for the image they give to the purchaser, as though the product creates the image. The authors stated that, at the time of the article, the available research did not analyze the consumers' views on mass market brands through their reputation and the social influence they experience in terms of "brand tribes" when they are forming relationships with brands.

Veloutsou and Moutinho (2007) argued that consumers with strong brand loyalty and an emotional connection to a brand can build relationships with other admirers of the same brand to form a brand community or tribe. The desire to be part of a group is strong, and so the formation of "tribes" can occur with others that share the same values or a shared passion. These "tribes" can become advocates of a brand. Some of these groups are formalized. They can work together as a group to pressure a brand to reverse course or change a decision that the group does not like (for example, when a U2 album was automatically downloaded to all users of Apple's iTunes despite the fact that the users did not necessarily want the album). The use of the internet and social media helps the consumers to form tribes and as a group, they can lobby corporations to take action. Individuals can belong to more than one tribe.

Veloutsou and Moutinho (2007) set out to study whether consumers have a stronger relationship to brands that had a positive brand reputation, and whether brand tribalism is stronger than brand reputation. The authors stated that the results suggested that brand tribalism is more important than brand reputation in the formation of relationships. Because brand communities can have a strong influence in the development of the brand image, it was noted that brand marketing teams will have to find ways to influence brand communities in an attempt to maintain some control of their brand in an indirect manner. Companies cannot lose sight of the importance of customer groups and the interaction between brand tribes. Nevertheless, the authors concluded that this study revealed a new era in brand management, where the relationships that the consumers build with brands are more influenced by other consumers, because sharing the experience of consumption with others has become an important component of the brand experience.

Other Effects

Sarwar et al. (2014) found that another factor that drives consumer buying behavior is how a consumer perceives a brand according to their preferences and past experiences. The authors recognize that consumers view brands differently according to their individual preference, which is based upon past experiences with the brand. Consumers make purchase decisions through their individual evaluation and knowledge of the brand. The authors defined consumer buying decisions as “a process that involves different steps like the recognition of need, search for the information, evaluation of alternatives, selections and in the last post purchase behavior.” (pg. 54)

Sharma (2015) explained the different ways that branding impacts consumer purchase decisions. The author began by explaining how there is an aspirational element to brands and consumers are drawn to these types of brands. For example, the author mentions how an iPhone is more desirable than a different smartphone, even though the iPhone is much more expensive and does the same tasks any smartphone can carry out in general. The authors stated that “consumers attach a social token to products and services” (pg. 1). Consumers usually pay more for a brand name. Consumers like to reflect their self-concept through the brands they purchase. A brand must understand its target audience and emulate its audience’s personality.

Sharma (2015) also explained how building a brand can sway consumer behavior and can create consumer loyalty. Brands have backstories about the founders, and consumers know the history of the brand. A customer is more likely to buy a brand they trust rather than a brand they have never heard of before. Many consumers use the same brand that they used as a child because they have developed an emotional connection with that brand. Establishing a well-known logo also contributes to creating brand awareness. Consumers will recognize a logo and instantly associate it with a brand, and will recall other products from that brand that they have previously used. A powerful brand can influence consumer behavior and earn consumer loyalty. Any small business that wants to develop a brand should focus on the quality of the consumer experience with the product and with employees, as well as develop quality content in the story about the brand that is authentic.

Impulse Buying

Basic Ideas Behind Impulse Buying

Bhasin (2017) defined impulse buying as the purchasing of items that you may or may not need or that your budget cannot afford. The author provided examples of such purchases, from the inexpensive candy at the convenience store to the expensive electronic gadgets that can exceed the buyer's budget. Because excessive impulse purchases can lead to credit card debt, the author also refers to this as the "Shopaholic syndrome." He believed that his readers needed to recognize the factors that lead to impulse purchases so that the number of impulse purchase can be limited.

Alireza and Hasti (2011) discussed that over the last five decades, it has been a struggle for many researchers to give an accurate definition for impulse buying behavior. Bayley & Nancarrow (1998) noted that the creation of attractive marketing strategies is necessary for a company to successfully maintain a relationship with consumers, and others have noted that maintaining this relationship should be the major aim of businesses. Banyte (2008) stressed that most researchers have comprehensively studied consumers impulse buying behavior and believe that it is a crucial part of a successful marketing plan. Other authors, such as Vohs and Faber (2003) and Parboteeah (2005) defined impulse buying behavior as an unplanned purchase made without evaluating the product.

Rook (1987) defined impulse buying as occurring when "a consumer experiences a sudden, often powerful and persistent urge to buy something immediately. The impulse to buy is hedonically complex and may stimulate emotional conflict. Also, impulse buying is prone to occur with diminished regard for its consequences." (p.g. 189)

National Consumers League (2011) and Yeager (2012) stated that because research groups have a keen interest in impulse buying by consumers, a number of organizations, such as the National Consumers' League and American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), have taken steps to warn consumers about the perils of impulse buying behavior.

Bellenger et al. (1978) stated that the significance of impulse purchasing has been acknowledge by marketers for several years. It was found that 38.7% of department store purchases were purchased on impulse. Inman and Winer (1998) and Mattila and Wirtz (2008) discovered through their research that 60% of all purchases are unplanned by the consumer. Hausman (2000), Kacen et al. (2012), NEFE (2012), and West (1951) found that 40% to 80% of purchases would be considered an impulse purchase.

Clover (1950), Kacen et al. (2012), Pentecost and Andrews (2010), and Puri (1996) noted that because retailers want to appeal to consumers' impulsive tendencies, they are interested in the impulse buying phenomenon. Kervenoael et al. (2009), Park et al. (2012), Verhagen and van Dolen (2011), and Wells et al. (2011) stated that online businesses are interested in learning how to attract and encourage impulse buying behavior that has helped traditional brick-and-mortar retail stores.

Beatty and Ferrell (1998), Kacen et al. (2012), and Puri (1996) noted that regardless of whether the business is in-store or online, the primary goal of all retail merchants is to increase impulse buying to optimize sales. Dholakia (2000), Kervenoael et al. (2009), and Roberts and Manolis (2012) stated that most retailers are focusing their time and effort to promote impulse purchasing.

Bhasin (2017) advised that impulse or compulsive buying is influenced by internal, external, or situational factors. Some examples of internal factors that influenced impulse buying are the emotional state of the buyer (e.g., if the consumer expects that the impulse purchase will improve the buyer's mood, the consumer is more likely to make an impulse purchase) and whether the consumer enjoys the shopping experience (e.g., if the buyer is enjoying the shopping experience, the consumer is more likely to make an impulse purchase). Some external factors that can increase impulse buying are the use of visual merchandizing techniques to display products to show their quality and value. Situational factors, such as the consumer's availability of more time and more money to spend, can increase the number of impulse purchases. In addition, the availability of store discounts and coupons may increase the likelihood of an impulse buy. Further, the influence of friends and family can also result in an increased number of impulse purchases when they encourage you to buy an item. The author concluded that impulse buying is not bad, but it can become a point of concern if it negatively affects the buyer's finances.

Blattberg et al. (1995), Blattberg and Neslin (1990), and Narasimhan et al. (1996) were of the opinion that retailers have developed in-store promotion activities intended to optimize short-term sales, and they are also aware impulse purchases will result in increased sales. Beatty and Ferrell (1998) stated that during recessions, decisions regarding promotional activities become challenging for retailers. That is because one motivating factor of impulse purchase behavior is the availability of money. Kacen et al. (2012) stated that retailers should increase their promotional activities during difficult economic times because it is suggested that consumers become more price-sensitive.

Inman et al. (2009) stated that consumers who make use of a shopping list make fewer unplanned purchases. However, Hampson and McGoldrick (in press) found that about 50% of customers are unaffected during a recession and do not become more price-sensitive. Kacen et al. (2012) noted that carefully developed store images and customers' loyalty risk being damaged when retailers increase promotional activity too much. The authors also stated that developing appropriate promotional strategies during economic crises requires a good understanding of the influences of product and store factors on impulse buying.

Kacen et al. (2012), using the premise that impulse buying accounted for nearly 80% of in-store retail sales, studied how in-store factors such as merchandizing, off-shelf displays and product features influence impulse purchases. They reviewed the purchase of 3979 grocery items during three separate shopping trips by a panel of 51 shoppers, using survey responses and store receipts. They considered an impulse purchase as "an in-store decision that occurs without prior recognized need" (pg. 579) to distinguish it from an unplanned reminder purchase (i.e., a purchase that is not on the planned grocery list, but the consumer recalls that the item is actually needed and should have been on the grocery list when the shopper passes the item in the store). An impulse purchase begins with awareness of the impulse object, followed by an immediate desire for the product, and the decision to purchase the product. The authors concluded that retailers who want to encourage impulse buying should utilize promotional activities and merchandising tactics that attract attention to emotionally appealing products.

Hoch and Loewenstein (1991) and Thompson et al. (1990) noted that buyers who often impulse buy are more likely to encounter spontaneous buying stimuli; their shopping lists tend to be loosely made, they are influenced by the proximity of the product, and they are susceptible to unanticipated purchase ideas.

Rook (1987) stated that impulse buying occurs when "a consumer experiences a sudden, powerful and persistent urge to buy something immediately" (pg. 191), which can be a strong urge that results in acting without deliberation and with little to no regard of any financial consequences. It is more spontaneous than cautious, and is described as urgent. Some may perceive impulse buying as more negative than positive. Those that reported negative consequences from impulse buying stated that they felt feelings of guilt and disappointment, and others reported some financial hardship. Rook (1987) noted that impulse buying should be a focal point of marketing management activity, and is an important aspect of American consumer life. Bellenger et al. (1978) noted that a recent study revealed that almost all product lines were affected by impulse buying behavior and that between 27 and 62 percent of department store purchases fell into the impulse category.

Albee (1977), Longman (1985), and Meninger (1973) researched how impulse purchases have increased due to innovations such as credit cards, cash machines, 24-hour retailing, telemarketing and home shopping networks, as well as the fact that spending was not viewed as negatively as it had been in the past. Rook (1987) also believed that the availability of credit cards, cash machines, "instant credit," the Internet, 24-hour retailing, home shopping networks, and telemarketing make it easier than ever before for consumers to purchase things on impulse. It is the opposite of contemplative buying, which is more cautious and rational. Contemplative buying requires self-regulation, which is a complex process that involves a consumer's persistence, strength, motivation, and commitment in order to be able to override impulse purchases. Kollat and Willett (1969) and Rook and Hoch (1985) found that there were unresolved issues regarding the dynamics of impulse buying tendencies, and through research they sought to review the social science interpretations of impulsive behavior and prior research on impulse buying as part of the investigation of consumers' impulse buying episodes.

Rook and Fisher (1995) hypothesized that buying impulsiveness was a unidimensional composition that expressed shoppers' propensities to think and act in identifiable and particular ways. They stated that a consumer's habit to purchase spontaneously, unreflectively, immediately, and kinetically is known as buying impulsiveness. Rook and Fisher (1995) noted that impulse buying can be viewed negatively (e.g., a "foolish" purchase), neutral, or positively (e.g., a spontaneous gift for an ill friend). They further stated that the "probability that consumers actually engage in impulse buying presumably depends both on the degree to which they possess impulsive buying trait tendencies (IBT) and on their normative judgments that may proscribe or permit a particular impulsive purchase" (p. 305). In their paper, the authors first reviewed the theoretical bases for IBT, along with the normative aspects of impulse buying, and then presented two studies that evaluated the moderating role of normative evaluations in the relationship between IBT and subsequent buying behavior.

Eysenck et al. (1985) and Hilgard (1962) stated that education researchers, criminologists, developmental psychologists, clinical psychologists, and developmental psychologists have extensively studied the general trait of impulsiveness, or impulsivity. Gerbing et al. (1987) stated that although there are presently over a dozen psychological measures of general impulsiveness that exist, there were no current theory-driven nor validated measure of buying impulse at that time.

Cobb and Hoyner (1986) stated that impulse purchasing is still an insufficiently understood idea despite 40 years of research. Engel and Blacklell (1982) stated that traditionally, an impulse purchase has been defined as "a buying action undertaken without a problem previously having been consciously recognized or a buying intention formed prior to entering the store." Bellenger et al. (1978) and Cobb and Hoyner (1986) noted the previously recognized definition of impulse buying as an unplanned purchase behavior and that prior studies dealt with unplanned purchases relying on this definition.

Shapiro (2015) examined research on generalized impulsive behavior, unplanned purchasing, and impulse buying. After reviewing impulsive behavior in general (defined as a sudden urge to act without deliberation), the author noted that the prior definition of an impulse purchase (a buying action undertaken without a prior need or unplanned purchase) was too simplistic and vague. The author looked to review and build upon previous studies which discussed consumer cognitive states that contributed to impulsive behavior.

Shapiro (2015) explained that prior studies included four classifications of impulse buying including pure, reminder, suggestion, and planned impulse buying. A pure impulse purchase was described as a novelty purchase that did not fit normal buying patterns. A reminder impulse purchase was made when prior experience with the product triggered the purchase. Suggestion impulse buying was described as one that occurs when the buyer sees the product for the first time and rationally recognizes a need for it. Planned impulse buying occurs when the consumer has a plan to buy a specific item, but buys a different product that is on sale instead. In this study, the author attempted to relate impulse intensity to the degree of planning that a consumer undertakes. The author believed that this would allow researchers to relate the consumer's behavioral, cognitive and environment findings to a useful, uniform matrix. It compared impulse intensity to the degree of planning and found that as the degree of planning increased, there was an increase in higher involvement (i.e., less impulsive) purchases.

Shapiro (2015) concluded that future research should focus on how unplanned purchasing is related to impulse intensity. Further, the author suggested that impulse buying and its relationship to affect, materialism, and ritualism should also be studied in order to help provide a more in depth understanding of impulse buying propensities.

Hausman (2000) proposed that impulse buying behavior arises from the consumer's desire to satisfy multiple emotional needs, such as self-esteem and pleasure. In such cases, the shopping act itself satisfies certain needs and the products purchased during these trips, since their purchase was unanticipated, fall into the realm of impulse buying behavior. This would include products viewed during shopping trips that were not anticipated, but are nevertheless purchased because the consumer sees that the product will satisfy a particular need. Thus, the author submitted that some consumers use the shopping experience and resulting impulse buying behavior to satisfy needs that are separate from the economic utility of the purchase.

Hausman (2000) suggested that consumers shop to satisfy a variety of hedonic or indulgent needs, and the specific products acquired during these shopping trips was secondary to the action of shopping and therefore constituted an impulse buying event. Some of the hedonic needs consumers seek to satisfy during their shopping experience were fun, novelty, and surprise. After testing this theory, she concluded that consumers that were more impulsive were more likely to shop for indulgent reasons than those consumers who possessed a small or moderate score on the impulsiveness scale.

Hausman (2000) stated that a desire to satisfy self-esteem has been shown to increase impulse buying behavior. Some shoppers expressed that they used the shopping experience as a means of self-reward or as a way to establish identity. She found that this theory was supported by data that showed a significant correlation between style-consciousness and impulsiveness. Her research also showed a significant increase in impulsiveness among increasingly style-conscious consumers.

Jones et al. (2003) stated that impulse buying occurs when "an individual makes an unintended, unreflective, and immediate purchase, whereas impulse buying tendency is the degree to which an individual is likely to make unintended, immediate, and unreflective purchases" (pg. 506). The authors noted that prior studies looked at impulse buying as a generalized consumer trait that was consistent across all product categories. In this article, the authors wanted to study whether the type or category of a product can also influence the number of impulse purchases. The authors defined product-specific impulse buying tendency as "the degree to which consumers are likely to make impulse purchases of products of a particular product category" (pg. 506). The authors created a hypothesis that individuals who have a habit to purchase products on impulse are more likely to possess a greater tendency to buy goods of a specific category on impulse. The authors tested their hypothesis by looking at two categories of products, clothing and music (including CDs and tapes). The authors concluded that a product-specific concept of impulse buying behavior was a better predictor of actual impulse purchasing when compared to a generalized impulse buying tendency.

Rook (1987) stated that impulse buying was historically defined as a sudden, unplanned purchase during which the consumer describes a strong urge to buy along with feelings of excitement and pleasure. Kollat and Willett (1969) noted that early researchers used the terms unplanned buying and impulse buying interchangeably, but as time went on, Beatty and Ferrell (1998) and Rook (1987) redefined impulse buying as a sudden and powerful urge that arises within the consumer to buy immediately.

Rook (1987), Rook and Fisher (1995), and Verplanken and Herabadi (2001) all noted that impulse buying was now thought to be a spontaneous purchase made by the consumer without contemplating why he or she needs the product. Beatty and Ferrell (1998), Rook (1987), Rook and Gardner (1993), and Wood (1998) all agreed that there were two core elements of impulse purchases: an emotional response and lack of planning or deliberation.

Vohs & Faber (2007) stated that some research failed to recognize that most consumers will make an occasional impulse purchase, and that those identified as impulse buyers will sometimes control the impulse to purchase. Hoch and Loewenstein (1991) noted that some researchers found that impulsive buying involves the competing urges of the desire to buy and exercising control over the desire to purchase, and consumers shift between desire and will power when making impulse buying decisions.

Cobb and Hoyer (1986), Piron (1991), and Rook (1987) all stated that earlier examinations on impulse purchasing have generally concentrated on definitional components recognizing impulse from non-impulse purchasing. Bellenger et al. (1978), Kollat and Willet (1967), and Stern (1962) all concluded that early studies on impulse buying used a limited approach, using the broad definition of an unplanned purchase as an impulse purchase and defined classified products into just two categories: impulse items and non-impulse items.

Youn and Faber (2000) stated that, due to problems in defining what constitutes an impulse purchase, researchers began to concentrate on recognizing the internal psychological states behind consumers' impulse purchasing episodes. Hoch and Loewenstein (1991) noted that impulse buying is a battle between mental powers of wants and self-discipline. Verplanken and Aarts (1999) stated that although some purchases may seem unplanned, in reality, they may have been planned long before, but are just recently executed, or the purchases may be habitual purchases and therefore were not deliberated on.

Verplanken and Herabadi (2001) conducted a study to examine impulse buying tendencies. In that study, a scale was developed to measure impulse buying tendency. This scale was connected with measures of need for structure, need to evaluate, need for cognition, and action versus state orientation. The results indicated that the 20-item impulse buying tendency scale is a reliable tool. Cognitive aspects were negatively associated with personal need for structure and need to evaluate, while affective aspects were positively associated with action orientation.

Internal Factors (Within Consumers) That Can Affect Impulse Buying

Personality Traits

Ackerman (2017) stated that the most widely recognized approach to measuring personality traits is the "Big Five" model of personality (also known as the Neo-Personality Inventory). Initially identified by researcher Lewis Goldberg, the "Big Five" are a set of dimensions that form the basis of personality: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (OCEAN). The five factors are not necessarily traits in and of themselves, but factors in which many related traits and characteristics fit. Openness to experience concerns an individual's willingness to try to new things, to be vulnerable, and the ability to think outside the box. Conscientiousness is the tendency to control impulses and act in socially acceptable ways. Extroversion concerns how an individual interacts with others. Agreeableness concerns how well people get along with others. Neuroticism measures a person's emotional stability and looks at traits such as insecurity, nervousness and anxiousness. The author stated that the Big Five model of personality still holds sway as the prevailing theory of personality.

It can help people learn more about their unique personalities and help us decide where our strengths lie, so we can focus our energy in those areas.

Ackerman (2017) also gave a brief history of some theories of well-known psychiatrists and psychologists. Carl Jung believed that people could be classified under two personality types: introverts and extroverts. Abraham Maslow believed that an individual's personality is driven by a set of needs. He organized the list of needs into a hierarchy, and a person would have to achieve fulfillment at one level before moving up to the next one. The most basic level was physiological needs, such as food, water, warmth, and rest. The second level was safety needs, including security. Level three encompassed belongingness and love needs (e.g., friends and intimate relationships). The fourth level was esteem needs (e.g., prestige and feelings of accomplishment). The top level was self-actualization needs (i.e., achieving one's full potential, self-fulfillment). Maslow believed that the motivations to achieve these needs resulted in behaviors that made up a personality. Psychologist Hans Eysenck believed that there were two defining personality traits: extroversion and neuroticism. He also connected personality to the physical body, and pushed the field toward a more scientific exploration of personality based on objective evidence rather than solely philosophical ideas.

Rook and Fisher (1995) defined normative evaluations as "consumers' judgments about the appropriateness of making an impulsive purchase in a particular buying situation" (pg. 306). In theory, when a generally impulsive consumer experiences an impulse buying stimulus, and subsequently evaluates the prospective purchase as appropriate, both trait and normative influences are in agreement, thereby making an impulsive purchase likely. In contrast, if negative normative evaluations arise in a purchase situation, the consumer's trait tendencies may be thwarted, and even a highly impulsive buyer will be less likely to act on impulse. An example stated in the article set forth that using rent money to make an impulse purchase would not be socially acceptable, and thus the normative evaluation would discourage an impulse purchase in this scenario, even if the consumer had a high impulse buying tendency.

Rook and Fisher (1995) observed that even though impulsive buyers had a general tendency to make more impulsive purchases, their normative evaluations moderated or decreased the likelihood of subsequent impulse buying behavior. By studying the normative evaluations that took place in the consumer's decision as to whether an impulse purchase would be made, the authors stated that they achieved a greater understanding about the conditions under which the trait of buying impulsiveness would translate into actual impulsive buying behavior. In fact, they noted that impulsive buyers were able to reject making an impulsive purchase when negative normative evaluations reach some critical level. The authors concluded that more research was needed to better understand how, when, and to what extent normative evaluations actually occur.

Verplanken and Herabadi (2001) found that impulse buying tendency was associated with a measure of the Big Five personality dimensions. Participants were asked to explain which product they had purchased on impulse in the last two weeks, and then completed the Five-Factor Personality Inventory, which evaluated the Big Five factors of personality. The results indicated that impulse buying tendency has a strong basis in a person's personality structure. The results suggested that those who are higher in autonomy and conscientiousness were less likely to purchase products on impulse. In contrast, consumers that were higher in extroversion were more likely to make impulse purchases. The authors concluded that the studies strongly suggested that the tendency to make impulse purchases is based upon personality.

Vohs and Faber (2007) performed an experiment in which the subjects participated in a task that required mental control. Specifically, the participants in the mental control group were told not to think of a white bear. If they did think of a white bear, they needed to write a checkmark on their survey paper. This study also showed that the group that had their mental resources depleted had a higher rate of impulse purchases. In other words, spontaneous buying behavior was predicted by self-regulatory resource depletion and increased the amount spent on impulse purchases. It was also shown that dispositional buying impulsiveness and self-regulatory resource depletion could be used to predict impulsive spending. Among people who are prone to buying impulsively, "temporary lapses in self-control ability signal a strong possibility that impulsive, unplanned, and perhaps unwanted spending may occur" (pg. 541).

Youn and Faber (2000) studied the factors that underlie the tendency to buy impulsively. Their study looked at the relationship between impulse buying tendencies and three general personality traits: lack of control (impulsivity), stress reaction, and absorption. The authors defined lack of control as a person's impulsiveness, spontaneity, and possible recklessness. The authors defined stress reaction as the intensity of a person's response to situations with negative emotional states, such as anxiety, anger, distress and guilt. Highly stress reactive people seem to be more likely to engage in impulse buying. Absorption was described as the tendency of a person to become immersed in self-involving experiences triggered by engaging external and image-related stimuli. These people may be considered to be unconventional thinkers. The authors thought that absorption is an interesting construct for consumer research because of the role it can play and how people respond to environmental and sensory cues. The authors found that the study identified external and internal cues for impulsive buying. External cues involved marketer-controlled stimuli (i.e., marketing mix stimuli), such as environmental and sensory factors (e.g., sights, sounds, and smells). Internal cues referred to consumers' own feelings, moods and emotions, including positive and negative feeling states.

Amos et al. (2014) found that their meta-analysis confirmed that the dispositional characteristics of the consumer appeared to be the most prominent influence that increased impulse buying among consumers. In other words, the meta-analysis study validated prior literature stating that this dispositional impulse buying trait, or the tendency to buy goods without advanced planning, seems to be specific to the individual, and drives a sizable portion of increased impulse purchases. Those consumers that enjoy thrill-seeking activities, were decisive, and were susceptible to outside influences tended to make more impulse purchases.

The meta-analysis by Amos et al. (2014) classified impulse buying tendencies, generally described as the tendency to buy goods without advanced planning, into three categories. The first category was called dispositional characteristics, such as how those who enjoy thrill-seeking activities, are decisive, and are susceptible to outside influences tend to make more impulse purchases. The second category was situational or external events, which are things encountered during a shopping event, such as whether the store is empty or crowded, the product displays, the merchandising floor plan, and other items in the store that provide sensory cues to the consumer. The third category was sociodemographic characteristics, such as ethnicity, age, gender, and income. The authors identified 117 empirical studies that had a primary or secondary focus on impulse buying. The goal of the meta-analysis was to obtain the results of all the previous research, analyze it, and determine generalizations from that data to guide future marketing plans and further research.

Amos et al. (2014) reviewed prior studies discussing the many factors that have influenced impulse buying, such as age, gender, income, and social influence. However, they were unable to locate any research that tried to quantitatively analyze these factors. Therefore, the authors decided to review and investigate the factors said to influence impulse purchases to see whether they could find any generalized patterns that would allow them to quantify the results to rank the factors that had the highest influence. They found that consumers that enjoy thrill-seeking activities tended to make more impulse purchases, and that age, gender, and ethnicity played a smaller role in determining impulse buying tendencies.

Sociodemographics

As noted above, Amos et al. (2014) stated that sociodemographic factors such as age, gender, and ethnicity played a smaller role in determining a tendency to make an impulse purchase. However, the authors did confirm that increased age had a negative effect on impulse purchases and that increased income may have had a positive effect on impulse purchases. The authors noted, though, that the overall research was inconclusive as to whether impulse buying is affected by these sociodemographic factors. Dittmar et al. (1995, 1996), and Dittmar and Drury (2000) believed that gender plays a role in the incidents of impulse purchases.

Vishnu and Raheem (2013) explained that income level is a factor that influences impulse buying behaviors. Individuals with higher income levels are more likely to make impulse purchases because they can afford to, and are less sensitive to the price of a product. From the point of view of the seller of consumer goods, consumers' increased income levels tend to have a beneficial influence on consumers' buying behaviors, with the desired result of increased profits.

Amos et al. (2014) concluded that their research demonstrated that positive social influences can increase impulse buying tendencies of consumers. Therefore, their meta-analysis indicated that retailers may benefit from potential, marketing strategies that communicate to consumers that it is socially acceptable to splurge. Also, retailers can create a social environment where consumers feel rewarded when they make impulse purchases.

Motivation/Evaluation Factors

Andruss (2012) stated that it is important to get personal with potential purchasers. For instance, the author found that Amazon does a superb job at promoting personal relationships with consumers. Amazon helps consumers with purchase decisions by providing product reviews created by other users, giving product suggestions based upon previous purchases and recommending complimentary purchases. The website's product accessibility and free shipping on orders over a minimum price total is seen as offering value and saving shoppers' time.

Andruss (2012) stated that is important to focus on the customer. Nordstrom prides itself on its extraordinary customer service that goes above and beyond a typical service experience which has gained customers' trust. Consumers don't mind paying a little more at Nordstrom because the exceptional service makes it worthwhile. The company really cares about its customers and demonstrates its commitment to exceptional service by having a liberal return policy, emailing digital photos of new items to regular customers, and even sending thank you notes after purchases.

Vohs and Faber (2007) recognized that new technology, such as the ability to shop online and on television home shopping networks, has increased the rate and frequency of impulse buying. As a result, they sought to review the situational factors that determined impulse buying. They wanted to review the role that self-control (compared to willpower) plays in impulsive spending. They proposed that factors that lead to the depletion of self-regulatory resources may help to explain when and why specific episodes of impulse buying will occur. They tested the hypothesis that exerting regulatory resources in an initial self-control task subsequently leaves people less able to resist the impulse to buy. The authors stated that self-regulation had three core ingredients: establishment of goals or standards, monitoring one's distance from current status to the desired end point, and operations that move the self from current to desired state.

Vohs and Faber (2007) noted that in their first experiment, some participants were given additional instructions that placed a demand or restriction on their regulatory resources. Specifically, they were told not to read or look at any of the words that appeared at the bottom of a screen they were watching. These were the “attention-controlled” participants. The authors found that when the participants were temporarily robbed of self-regulatory resources by the attention control, their valuation of goods was higher. In addition, the point at which a product became prohibitively expensive was also higher for the attention-controlled participants.

Vohs and Faber (2007) sought to demonstrate their belief that the control of impulsive behavior (specifically in regards to spending) is dependent on more than just attention control. The authors studied the effect of emotional behavioral issues as a depletion of self-regulatory control. The participants in the emotional control group were told to read passages while smiling and to convey happiness and enthusiasm using facial expressions and hand gestures while reading aloud. The study seemed to confirm that people whose behavioral resources were depleted bought more items and spent more money than the participants who were not given the additional instructions on how to read the passages (i.e., those with their emotional resources intact). Once again, the pattern emerged that the stronger a person’s trait impulsive buying tendencies, the more likely that his or her spending was influenced by a depletion of a mental or emotional resource.

Vohs and Faber (2007) concluded that self-regulation was a significant deterrent to situational impulsive spending. Study participants whose attention, mental resources, or emotional resources were depleted (relative to participants whose resources were not depleted) felt stronger urges to buy, were willing to spend more, and actually did make an increased number of impulse purchases. Participants having depleted resources reported being influenced equally by affective and cognitive factors, and purchased products that were high on each factor at equal rates.

Youn and Faber (2000) concluded that lack of control was the most likely contributor to impulse buying, leading to increased impulse buying. Also, those consumer that were sensitive to advertisements, visual elements and promotional gifts were more susceptible to impulsiveness. Occasions such as birthdays, holidays and vacations also lead to a higher incidence of impulse buying. Overall, their study attempted to further develop our understanding of the causes of impulse buying by looking at several different causes, including broad personality characteristics, as well as specific short-term states and environmental stimuli.

External/Situation Factors that Can Affect Impulse Buying

Wood (1998) set forth that impulse purchases can be influenced by person-related variables. Weun et al. (1998) looked at prior research on the topic of impulse buying, including articles discussed by Sharma et al. (2010) on impulse buying tendency and optimum stimulation level, product category variables discussed by Jones et al. (2003), and situational factors such as time and money availability discussed by Beatty and Ferrell (1998). Zhou and Wong (2003) also looked at research regarding in-store advertisements, in-store signage researched by Peck and Childers (2006), in-store slack researched by Stilley et al. (2010), use of displays researched by Ghani and Kamal (2010), and type of food consumed researched by Mishra et al. (2010).

How Other People Affect Consumers

Amos et al. (2014) looked at the impact of situations or outside events on impulse purchases, and found that positive social influence can increase impulse buying. For example, a shopping companion can influence a consumer to make an impulse purchase by encouraging impulse buying. With regard to product categories, impulse buying was the greatest for fashion merchandising. Although resource depletion (e.g., fatigue while shopping) was traditionally thought to decrease the incidence of impulse purchases, this current study found that fatigue did not necessarily have a negative effect on impulse purchases.

As previously stated, Bhasin (2017) advised that impulse or compulsive buying is influenced by internal, external, or situational factors. Some examples of internal factors that influence impulse buying are the emotional state of the buyer (e.g., if the consumer expects that the impulse purchase will improve the buyer's mood, the consumer is more likely to make an impulse purchase) and whether the consumer enjoys the shopping experience (if the buyer is enjoying the shopping experience, the consumer is more likely to make an impulse purchase). Some external factors that can increase impulse buying are the use of visual merchandising techniques to display products to show its quality and value. Situational factors such as the consumer's availability of more time and more money to spend can increase the number of impulse purchases. In addition, the availability of store discounts and coupons may increase the likelihood of an impulse buy. Further, the influence of friends and family can also result in an increased number of impulse purchases when they encourage a consumer to buy an item. The author concluded that impulse buying is not necessarily harmful, but it can become a point of concern if it negatively affects the reader's finances.

As previously stated, Amos et al. (2014) concluded that their research demonstrated that positive social influences can increase impulse buying tendencies of consumers. Therefore, their meta-analysis indicated that retailers may benefit from potential marketing strategies that communicate to consumers that it is socially acceptable to splurge.

Store Atmosphere/Environment

Beatty and Ferrell (1998) stated that impulse purchases can be triggered by product displays, music, or pleasant fragrances that attracts attention and leads to positive mood states, and from the perspective of the seller, an urge to buy. Amos et al. (2014) noted that retailers can create an environment where consumers feel rewarded when they make impulse purchases.

Youn and Faber (2000) noted that environmental factors and internal states or traits of the consumers can influence impulse purchasing. The authors proposed that internal states and environmental cues serve to trigger the motivation to buy.

Vishnu and Raheem (2013) explored the factors of impulse buying behavior for fast moving consumer goods (FMCGs), such as packaged foods, beverages, and other items that generally sell quickly. The dependent variable used in their study was consumers' impulse buying behavior, and independent variables included promotional approaches, store environment, window display, visual merchandising, income level, and credit cards.

Vishnu and Raheem (2013) collected quantitative data by distributing survey forms to obtain the opinions of the study group with regard to their topic. The authors gave an example of the use of celebrity endorsements as a way to increase impulse buying behavior among teenagers and young adults with regard to the purchase of FMCG products. They found that offers of free products along with purchased goods and discounts increased the incidence of impulse purchases. Income level was also a factor that influenced impulse purchase decisions. With regard to the purchase of FCMGs, customers tended to increase their number of impulse purchases when they were confronted with a colorful and pleasing store environment. A well-researched merchandising floor plan that creates a modern, trendy environment can add excitement and help increase the desire of the consumer to buy these products, thereby increasing the number of unplanned purchases and increasing profits.

Mohan et al. (2013) looked at four store environmental characteristics (music, light, employees, and layout), and two individual characteristics (shopping enjoyment tendency (a personality trait where the consumer derives pleasure from the act of shopping) and impulse buying tendency (generally described as the tendency to buy goods without advanced planning)) to see how each characteristic influenced impulse purchases. The authors stated that store environment consisted of ambient factors, such as lighting, scent, and music; design factors, such as layout and assortment; and social factors, such as the presence and effectiveness of salespersons. They found that among all the store environment elements, store layout (which describes the way that the aisles and products are arranged in the store) had the largest effect on impulsive buying. This included looking at the spatial relationship between the products as they are arranged in the store, the size and shape of the products, and the actual product assortment. As a result of this finding, it was suggested that managers should continue to invest in improving store layouts, as it would allow shoppers to spend more time in stores and browse the merchandise, which may trigger impulsive urges (Beatty and Ferrell, 1998). However, the authors noted that retailers should not ignore the other environmental elements like employees, music, and lighting since shoppers evaluate the store's environment in general terms. If budgets are a constraint, retailers should focus on layout first. Interestingly, store environment had a much larger effect on impulse buying than the personality variables. To the best of the authors' knowledge, their research was the first to study the impact of store environment (in conjunction with trait variables) on impulse buying.

Donovan et al. (1994) found that sales could be increased in a store with a pleasing atmosphere. Spies et al. (1997) found that a proper store layout and floor plan could possibly result in increased sales due to the fact that consumers can easily find products to purchase.

Hoyer and MacInnis (1997) noted that product displays, store design, package design, and sales can influence the increase in the amount of impulses purchases made by consumers. Guenzi et al. (2009) explained that other researchers found that when consumers encounter a pleasing store environment, they are more likely to view the products and the retailer in a positive light and report an exciting shopping experience.

Andruss (2012) stated that it is important to design an experience. For instance, the author found that Target routinely delivers a phenomenal retail experience. They collaborate with high end, recognizable designers to provide quality products at discount prices. They use a familiar, consistent store design, which is easy to maneuver which draws customers in to shop. Target customers are considered guests. The company provides a warm, human experience which creates consumer trust.

Andruss (2012) stated that it is important to “serve up the quirky.” For instance, the author found that Southwest Airlines has differentiated itself through unusual approaches, such as open passenger seating, flight attendants who sing the safety demonstrations, and not charging for baggage. Many consumers like that Southwest Airlines is unique, creates an energetic atmosphere, and is low cost.

Hausman (2000) found that retailers should consider focusing on entertainment, interest, and excitement as much as they focus on getting the mix of merchandise and pricing right when many shoppers do not have a specific objective or purpose in mind during their trip. Thus, the advice to retailers is to improve the consumers’ in-store experience so that impulse shoppers will come to shop because the store provides a pleasurable experience.

As previously stated, Amos et al. (2014) concluded that their research demonstrated that positive social influences can increase impulse buying tendencies of consumers. Therefore, they advised that retailers may benefit from potential marketing strategies that communicate to consumers that it is socially acceptable to splurge. Also, retailers can create a social environment where consumers feel rewarded when they make impulse purchases.

Effects of Product Category/Characteristics on Impulse Buying

Jones et al. (2003) proposed to extend the research with regard to impulse buying tendency by looking at impulse buying tendency as a product-specific variable, and exploring how product development can increase impulse buying behavior. The authors noted that prior studies looked at impulse buying as a generalized consumer trait that was consistent across all product categories. Thus, the authors sought to study whether the type or category of a product can also influence the number of impulse purchases. The authors defined product-specific impulse buying tendency as "the degree to which consumers are likely to make impulse purchases of products of a particular product category" (pg. 506). They created a hypothesis that individuals who have a habit to purchase products on impulse are more likely to possess a greater tendency to buy goods of a specific category on impulse. The authors tested their hypothesis by looking at two categories of products: clothing and music (e.g., CDs). The study took place over a four-week period, during which the participants wrote in a journal with a diary entry for every shopping trip. The requested information included store name, time spent in each store, actual number of purchases, dollar amount of purchases, and type of each purchase (e.g., planned or impulse). At the end of the four weeks, the participants filled out a survey that contained measures of impulse buying tendencies, including the impulse purchases (if any) of clothing and music.

Jones et al. (2003) found that the results suggested that a product-specific conceptualization of the impulse buying behavior was a better predictor of actual impulse purchasing behavior when compared to general impulse buying tendency for the two product categories of music and clothing. The participants who had a tendency to make impulse purchases of a specific product (clothing) actually made impulse purchases of that product (clothing) when compared to those who just had a general (non-product specific) tendency to make impulse purchases or had a tendency to make impulse purchase of another product (e.g., music). Thus, the study supported the authors' initial theory that the type of product was relevant when studying impulse buying tendencies.

Kacen et al. (2012) found that product characteristics had a greater influence on the likelihood of an impulse purchase than do retailing variables. From the product characteristics investigated, they found that the hedonic nature of the product had the greatest influence on impulse buying. For example, products that are ready to use without delay can satisfy a need for immediate gratification, and may be a more likely choice for an impulse purchase. The authors also looked at three retail factors: the use of special in-store displays, promotional (sale or high-low) pricing, and everyday low pricing. Of the three retail factors, a store environment with a high–low pricing strategy seemed to have the most influence on increasing impulse buying behavior. The findings of the study suggested that retailers who want to encourage impulse buying behavior should utilize promotional activities and merchandising tactics that attract consumers' attention to emotionally appealing products.

Relationship Between Branding and Impulse Buying

Based on previous research, there are many reasons to predict that brands may have an effect on impulse buying behavior due to established relationships between brands and consumer factors, such as loyalty, trust, and emotional connections with the brand.

For instance, as previously stated, Sharma (2015) explained the different ways in which branding impacts consumer purchase decisions. The author explained how there is an aspirational element to brands and consumers are drawn to these types of brands. For example, the author mentioned how an iPhone is more desirable than a different smartphone, even though the iPhone is much more expensive and does the same tasks in general that any smartphone can carry out. As stated by the author, "consumers attach a social token to products and services" (pg. 1). Consumers usually pay more for a brand name. Consumers like to reflect their self-concept through the brands they purchase. A brand must understand its target audience and emulate its audience's personality.

Esch et al. (2006) stated that building a strong brand is an important goal of brand and product management and will give a company an extensive advantage. They further noted that brand knowledge can increase future purchases through a brand relationship path that includes brand satisfaction, brand trust, and brand attachment.

Sarwar et al. (2014) conducted a study by distributing a questionnaire among 80 participants and divided the results by two age groups, education level, and income level. The independent variables included were reference groups, brand knowledge, age, gender, emotional exploitation, and personal values. The dependent variables included brand loyalty status consumptions, status conspicuousness, and social factor ad quality. According to the results, gender was the only variable that was not very important and does not affect consumer behavior to the extent at which the other variables do. The authors concluded that branding impacts consumer behavior based on the variables they explored.

Leighton et al. (2012) noted that in retail environments, such as supermarkets, consumers are presented with an overwhelming number of choices for purchase, yet do not have the time to look at all of the items on display. Therefore, shoppers use mental cues or shortcuts to make decisions. One mental shortcut is branding, which draws the attention of the customers, allows them to recognize it as a familiar product and to select it from the large array of other similar products.

Andruss (2012) has discussed examples in which branding has impacted various aspects of consumer perception and behavior. For instance, the author stated that consumers expect branded companies and products to live up to their advertised promises. Fedex is known for being able to achieve what it promises, and for having reliable, efficient operations. The brand has also gained consumer trust through it's "We Understand" campaign. In this campaign, FedEx's approach to business growth and financial savings for smaller companies is emphasized through over-the-top situations and drastic cost-cutting. The company states they think of their customer as a person, not just a number.

Andruss (2012) also stated that it is important for a brand to keep it cool and fun so that customers look forward to every new product release with the expectation that it will be smart and innovative. Apple iPhones, iPads, watches and Macbooks have sleek designs and help to enhance communication during work and leisure time. The brand's retail store promotes an emotional relationship with consumers by creating a transparency between customers and sales staff. The store has large, open tables with well-trained associates available with handheld checkout scanners to allow customers to make purchases without having to stand in a long line.

Andruss (2012) stated that it is important for a brand to stay consistent. For instance, the author found that Ford's consistent branding has identified the company as being extremely reliable. The company really listens and acts on its customer's needs and the CEO interacts with consumers through social media. Creating this emotional relationship helps build consumers trust within the brand. The author also found that it is important for a brand to forge connections with consumers. For instance, the author found that Starbucks focuses on creating connections and bringing people together. The company's store is designed for customers to interact, including free wifi, in-store music, and large tables with room for groups and meetings. The focus for this brand is to promote connection, discovery, inspiration, and creation.

Malar et al. (2011) stated that marketers want to know whether consumers will make an emotional brand attachment with an advertisement that inspires them to reach an ideal self, or if they will make that attachment to a product with a more authentic advertisement celebrating their actual self. The authors stated that one key to answer this question is the concept of "self-congruence," which is the fit between the consumer's self and the brand's personality or image. Because other researchers have established that the consumer's self-concept must be involved for an emotional brand attachment to occur, the authors wrote that "self-congruence" should be an important part in creating emotional brand attachment.

Malar et al. (2011) set out to investigate which consumer's self (ideal or actual) is best to target in particular situations to increase emotional brand attachment. The objectives of the study were to understand the impact of consumers' actual versus ideal self-congruence on emotional brand attachment and to learn how the effect of actual versus ideal self-congruence on consumers' emotional brand attachment varied or modified by product involvement, consumer self-esteem and public self-consciousness.

Malar et al. (2011) conducted two large scale studies. In the first study, the authors addressed the general and relative impact of actual and ideal self-congruence on emotional brand attachment and explored the effect of product involvement as the moderating variable. In the second study, the authors wanted to validate the results from the first study involving the basic model and explore the effect of self-esteem and public self-consciousness as a moderating variable.

Malar et al. (2011) discovered that, with regard to the product involvement moderator, there was a moderating effect on the relationship between actual self-congruence and emotional brand attachment, especially with those with a high level of product involvement. However, ideal self-congruence had a positive effect on emotional brand attachment when consumers had a low level of product involvement.

Malar et al. (2011) found that with regard to the second variable, self-esteem, the study showed a stronger impact of actual self-congruence on emotional brand attachment among consumers with a high level of self-esteem. The effect of ideal self-congruence on emotional brand attachment was greater in those consumers with low self-esteem.

Malar et al. (2011) also found that the results regarding the third moderator, the consumer's public self-consciousness, revealed that actual self-congruence had a greater positive effect on emotional brand attachment among consumers with high public self-consciousness. Ideal self-congruence, however, had a positive effect on emotional brand attachment only among consumers with low public self-consciousness.

Malar et al. (2011) concluded that marketers could use this information to decide when to emphasize an ideal-self or actual-self brand personality to consumers to increase emotional brand attachment. The study showed that consumer characteristics must be considered, but that overall self-congruence can increase emotional brand attachment, especially when the consumers had a high level of involvement with the product or had a high level of self-esteem or public self-consciousness. The authors noted that, in contrast to the common practice of aspirational branding, this study revealed that brands with ideal self-congruence in general were less successful in increasing emotional brand attachment, although they found that aspirational branding may still work when involvement, self-esteem, or public self-consciousness is low.

Bellenger et al. (1978), Cobb and Hoyer (1986), Han et al. (1991), Kollat and Willet (1967), Rook and Fisher (1995), and Weinberg and Gottwald (1982) each contributed to the idea that although many people view impulse buying as a negative behavior in psychological terms, it is a desired behavior by marketers, as it results in a significant increase in sales in many different project categories. Levy (1976) and Solnick et al. (1980) stated that psychological studies characterizing impulsiveness as a sign of immaturity and lack of behavioral control result in feelings of negativity with regard to impulse buying. Further, Ainslie (1975), Levy (1976), Rook and Fisher (1995), and Solnick et al. (1980) all discussed that other psychological studies view impulsivity as irrational, risky, and wasteful.

Rook and Fisher (1995) noted that they were the first marketing researchers to suggest that these negative psychological perspectives on impulsivity work to decrease individual impulsive traits and, thus, reduce consumer impulse buying behavior because consumers do not want to be viewed as irrational or immature. Cobb and Hoyer (1986), Piron (1991), Rook (1987), Rook and Fisher (1995), and Weinberg and Gottwald (1982) all noted that, after 1982, researchers looked at the behavioral dimensions of impulse buying, and most agreed that there was a hedonic or affective component to impulse buying.

Kassarjian (1971) wrote that determining whether a trait should be generalized across product categories, or if it should be measured on a product specific level, is an important task for consumer behavior personality research. Understanding this issue is useful to more accurately predict impulse buying.

As previously stated, Kacen et al. (2012) found that product characteristics had a greater influence on the likelihood of an impulse purchase than do retailing variables. From the product characteristics investigated, they found that the hedonic nature of the product had the greatest influence on impulse buying. For example, products that are ready to use without delay can satisfy a need for immediate gratification and may be a more likely choice for an impulse purchase. The authors also looked at three retail factors: the use of special in-store displays, promotional (sale or high-low) pricing, and everyday low pricing Of the three retail factors, a store environment with a high–low pricing strategy seemed to have the most influence on increasing impulse buying behavior. The findings of the study suggested that retailers who want to encourage impulse buying behavior should utilize promotional activities and merchandising tactics that attract consumers' attention to emotionally appealing products.

In sum, past research on impulse buying suggests that brands may have an effect on impulse buying behavior due to established relationships between brands and consumer factors, such as loyalty, trust, and emotional connections with the brand.

Original Study

Overview

For my thesis, my original study explored the relationship between branding and impulse buying. I hypothesize that brand names will be important to consumers (H1). I hypothesize that consumers will think they often impulsively buy products (H2). I hypothesize that consumers will wish brand name products (opposed to generic, "no name" products) are less important to them (H3). I hypothesize that consumers will wish that they made impulsive purchases less often (H4). I hypothesize that consumers are more likely to impulsively buy a product when it is a brand they know (H5). I hypothesize that consumers are more likely to impulsively buy a product when it is a brand they love (H6).

Method

Participants completed a survey that explored the relationship between branding and consumer's impulse buying tendencies. Participants were presented with six 5-point scale questions regarding their thoughts and behaviors related to branding and impulse buying.

The first question asked participants on a 5-point scale (1= Very unimportant, 5= Very important), "In general, how important is it to you to purchase "brand name" products (as opposed to generic, "no name" products)?" The second question asked participants on a 5-point scale (1= Very rarely, 5= Very often), "In general, how often do you think you buy products impulsively (without planning in advance to buy something)?" The third question asked participants on a 5-point scale (1= Much less important, 5= Much more important), "In general, do you wish brand name products (opposed to generic, "no name" products) were less or more important to you?" The fourth question asked participants on a 5-point scale (1= Much less often, 5= Much more often), "In general, do you wish that you made impulsive purchases (without planning in advanced to buy something) less or more often than you do?" The fifth question asked participants on a 5-point scale (1= Much less likely, 5= Much more likely), "In general, do you think you are less or more likely to impulsively purchase a product (without planning in advanced to buy something) when it is a brand you know than when it is a brand you do not know (even if you don't know much about the specific product itself)?" The sixth question asked participants on a 5-point scale (1= Much less likely, 5= Much more likely), "In general, do you think you are less or more likely to impulsively purchase a product (without planning in advanced to buy something) when it is a brand you love than when it is a brand you do not love (even if you don't know much about the specific product itself)?"

Findings

The first question asked participants on a 5-point scale (1= Very unimportant, 5= Very important), "In general, how important is it to you to purchase "brand name" products (as opposed to generic, "no name" products)?"

Results from a one-sample t-test with a test value of 3 (i.e., the neutral response of "Neither important nor unimportant") indicate that respondents tend to think that "brand name" products (as opposed to generic, "no name" products) are important to them at a statistically significant level ($M = 3.41$, $t(131) = 4.95$, $p < .001$). Thus, there was support for H1.

The second question asked participants on a 5-point scale (1= Very rarely, 5= Very often), "In general, how often do you think you buy products impulsively (without planning in advance to buy something)?"

Results from a one-sample t-test with a test value of 3 (i.e., the neutral response of "Neither often nor rarely") indicate that respondents tend to buy products impulsively at a statistically significant level ($M = 3.71$, $t(131) = 7.83$, $p < .001$). Thus, there was support for H2.

The third question asked participants on a 5-point scale (1= Much less important, 5= Much more important), "In general, do you wish brand name products (opposed to generic, "no name" products) were less or more important to you?"

Results from a one-sample t-test with a test value of 3 (i.e., the neutral response of "Neither less or more important") indicate that respondents tend to wish that brand names were less important to them at a statistically significant level ($M = 2.62$, $t(132) = -5.50$, $p < .001$). Thus, there was support for H3.

The fourth question asked participants on a 5-point scale (1= Much less often, 5= Much more often), “In general, do you wish that you made impulsive purchases (without planning in advanced to buy something) less or more often than you do?”

Results from a one-sample t-test with a test value of 3 (i.e., the neutral response of “Neither less or more often”) indicate that respondents tend to wish that they made impulsive purchases less often at a statistically significant level ($M = 2.44$, $t(132) = -5.90$, $p < .001$). Thus, there was support for H4.

The fifth question asked participants on a 5-point scale (1= Much less likely, 5= Much more likely), “In general, do you think you are less or more likely to impulsively purchase a product (without planning in advanced to buy something) when it is a brand you know than when it is a brand you do not know (even if you don’t know much about the specific product itself)?”

Results from a one-sample t-test with a test value of 3 (i.e., the neutral response of “Neither less or more likely”) indicate that respondents are more likely to impulsively buy a product when it is a brand they know at a statistically significant level ($M = 3.61$, $t(132) = 6.16$, $p < .001$). Thus, there was support for H5.

The sixth question asked participants on a 5-point scale (1= Much less likely, 5= Much more likely), “In general, do you think you are less or more likely to impulsively purchase a product (without planning in advanced to buy something) when it is a brand you love than when it is a brand you do not love (even if you don’t know much about the specific product itself)?”

Results from a one-sample t-test with a test value of 3 (i.e., the neutral response of “Neither less or more likely”) indicate that respondents are more likely to impulsively buy a product when it is a brand they love at a statistically significant level ($M = 3.95$, $t(131) = 10.62$, $p < .001$). Thus, there was support for H6.

Conclusion

My research suggests that there is indeed a relationship between branding and impulse buying. For instance, the results of my original study showed that respondents thought they are more likely to impulsively buy a product when it is a brand they simply know or when it is a brand they love even if they don not know much about the specific product itself.

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Appendix

Original Survey:

Please answer the following questions on a 5-point scale.

1. In general, how important is it to you to purchase “brand name” products (as opposed to generic, “no name” products)?
Very important
Somewhat important
Neither important nor unimportant
Somewhat unimportant
Very unimportant

2. In general, how often do you think you buy products impulsively (without planning in advance to buy something)?
Very often
Somewhat often
Neither often nor rarely
Somewhat rarely
Very rarely

3. In general, do you wish brand name products (opposed to generic, “no name” products) were less or more important to you?
Much less important
Somewhat less important
Neither less nor more important
Somewhat more important
Much more important

4. In general, do you wish that you made impulsive purchases (without planning in advanced to buy something) less or more often than you do?
Much less often
Somewhat less often
Neither less or more often
Somewhat more often
Much more often

5. In general, do you think you are less or more likely to impulsively purchase a product (without planning in advanced to buy something) when it is a brand you know than when it is a brand you do not know (even if you don’t know much about the specific product itself)?
Much less likely
Somewhat less likely
Neither less nor more likely
Somewhat more likely

Much more likely

6. In general, do you think you are less or more likely to impulsively purchase a product (without planning in advanced to buy something) when it is a brand you love than when it is a brand you do not love (even if you don't know much about the specific product itself)?
Much less likely
Somewhat less likely
Neither less nor more likely
Somewhat more likely
Much more likely