

ADOLESCENTS' IMPULSE BUYING: SUSCEPTIBILITY TO INTERPERSONAL INFLUENCE AND FEAR OF NEGATIVE EVALUATION

YI-HSIU LIN

Aletheia University

CHEN-YUEH CHEN

National Chung Cheng University

We examined the effects of susceptibility to interpersonal influence and fear of negative evaluation on adolescents' impulse buying tendency. A survey of 453 adolescents was carried out and we found the greater the susceptibility to interpersonal influence, the greater the tendency to buy on impulse. Likewise, the greater the fear of negative evaluation, the greater the impulse buying tendency.

Keywords: impulse purchase, fear of negative evaluation, susceptibility to interpersonal influence, social anxiety, adolescents.

Scholars focused on the significance of impulse buying during the 1990s. Beatty and Ferrell (1998) defined *impulse buying* as a *sudden and unplanned purchase on a planned shopping expedition*. Rook and Gardner (1993) similarly described impulse buying as “*an unplanned purchase that is characterized by relatively rapid decision making, and a subjective bias toward immediate possession*”. Unlike planned buying behavior, impulse buying behavior is unintended and irresistible (Rook & Fisher, 1995). During the 1990s in the United States, impulse buying accounted for up to 80% of all purchases in certain product categories (Abrahams, 1997), indicating that impulse buying has generated a huge sales volume. Additionally, the growth of e-commerce

Yi-Hsiu Lin, Department of Sport Management, Aletheia University; Chen-Yueh Chen, Department of Athletic Sports, National Chung Cheng University.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to: Chen-Yueh Chen, National Chung Cheng University 168, University Road, Min-Hsiung, Chia-Yi County 621, Taiwan, ROC. Email: chenchenyueh@hotmail.com

and an increase of consumer-orientation societies around the world offer more opportunities for impulse buying.

Although extensive data on impulse buying have been collected over the last decade, the focus of much of the research has been on the individual. For instance, Lin and Lin (2005) examined the relationship between personal characteristics and impulse buying tendencies. Lin and Chuang (2005) investigated the effects of individual differences on adolescents' impulse buying behavior. In an earlier study, Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel (1989) found that the influence of others is a primary determinant of an individual's behavior. Further, individuals' susceptibility to interpersonal influence (McGuire, 1968) and also fear of negative evaluation (La Greca & Lopez, 1998) are two other likely primary antecedents that affect an individual's behavior.

Scholars have defined individuals' *susceptibility to interpersonal influence* as "the need to identify with, or enhance one's image in the opinion of, significant others through the acquisition and use of products and brands, and the willingness to conform to the expectations of others regarding purchase decisions" (Bearden et al., 1989, p. 473). Individuals may use others' buying behavior as a justification for their own, and thus feel newly uninhibited about buying (Luo, 2005). Researchers have revealed that when teenagers shopped with friends, they tended to spend more (Mangleburg, Doney, & Bristol, 2004). Furthermore, shopping with friends may help ensure that adolescents make purchase decisions perceived by their peers as being "appropriate", for example, purchase of a smart phone. Peer groups may reward an appropriate purchase decision with enhanced standing in the group (Mangleburg et al., 2004). In addition, Luo (2005) suggested that shopping with others influences impulse purchasing. Consequently, individuals' susceptibility to interpersonal influence is considered to be an antecedent that impacts adolescents' impulse buying tendencies.

La Greca and Lopez (1998) depicted *fear of negative evaluation* as *fears, concerns, or worries regarding negative evaluations from peers* (p. 86). Fear of negative evaluation is a central feature of social anxiety, especially among adolescents (Chansky & Kendall, 1997). Teachman and Allen (2007) highlighted the importance and clear relevance of peer relationships during adolescence. Socially anxious adolescents may doubt that their friend truly likes them (Chansky & Kendall, 1997). Moschis and Moore (1979) found that adolescents will take peers' opinions into account when making consumption decisions. Kocovski and Endler (2000) noted that if an individual's behavior was not acceptable, then a change would occur to make her/his behavior closer to a reference value.

Because there is still a dearth of research on group-level determinants of adolescents' impulse buying tendencies (Luo, 2005) and because further research is warranted due to their increasing buying power, we proposed and tested the following hypotheses:

H1: The greater adolescents' susceptibility to interpersonal influence, the greater will be the impulse buying tendency that adolescents manifest.

H2: The greater adolescents' fear of negative evaluation, the greater will be the impulse buying tendency that adolescents manifest.

Method

Sample

Using a convenience sampling method, 453 (230 boys, 223 girls) Taiwanese adolescents, aged between 13 and 17 years, were selected to participate in the current study. All of them were high school students.

Data Collection

The survey used in the current study contained two items to assess participants' demographic characteristics, nine items to measure the degree of impulse buying tendency based on the work of Rook and Fisher (1995), 12 items to measure the degree of susceptibility to interpersonal influence based on the work of Bearden et al. (1989), and eight items to measure the degree of social anxiety based on the work of La Greca and Lopez (1998). All items except those in the first section were measured on a 5-point Likert scale. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from .81 to .90, indicating that there was a satisfactory level of reliability. Finally, a median split was used to divide the sample of students into high or low susceptibility to interpersonal influence and high or low fear of negative evaluation (Luo, 2005). We performed *t* tests to ensure the high-low grouping was effective for susceptibility to interpersonal influence ($t = 24.244, p < .05$) and fear of negative evaluation ($t = 25.536, p < .05$).

RESULTS

Impulse Buying Tendency

Items associated with impulse buying tendency are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Impulsive Buying Tendency

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. I often buy things spontaneously.	2.57	1.07
2. "Just do it" describes the way I buy things.	2.06	.99
3. I often buy things without thinking.	2.00	.97
4. "I see it, I buy it" describes me.	1.71	.88
5. "Buy now, think about it later" describes me.	1.99	1.03
6. Sometimes I feel like buying things on the spur of the moment.	3.24	1.18
7. I buy things according to how I feel at the moment.	3.25	1.08
8. I carefully plan most of my purchases. (reverse coded)	2.63	1.04
9. Sometimes I am a bit reckless about what I buy.	2.18	.97

Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence

Items regarding susceptibility to interpersonal influence are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. *Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence*

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. I rarely purchase the latest fashion styles until I am sure my friends approve of them.	3.34	1.07
2. It is important that others like the products and brands I buy.	2.29	1.05
3. When buying products, I generally purchase those brands that I think others will approve of.	2.64	1.07
4. If other people can see me using a product, I often purchase the brand they expect me to buy.	3.19	1.12
5. I like to know what brands and products make good impressions on others.	2.92	1.08
6. I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing the same products and brands that others purchase.	2.67	1.04
7. If I want to be like someone, I often try to buy the same brands that they buy.	3.60	.99
8. I often identify with other people by purchasing the same products and brands they purchase.	2.98	.98
9. To make sure I buy the right product or brand, I often observe what others are buying and using.	3.00	1.00
10. If I have little experience with a product, I often ask my friends about the product.	3.21	1.04
11. I often consult other people to help choose the best alternative available from a product class.	2.45	.95
12. I frequently gather information from friends or family about a product before I buy.	2.32	1.02

Fear of Negative Evaluation

Items concerning fear of negative evaluation are listed in Table 3.

Table 3. *Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Social Anxiety*

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. I worry about what others say about me.	3.60	1.03
2. I worry that others do not like me.	3.61	1.03
3. I am afraid that others will not like me.	3.46	1.06
4. I worry about what others think of me.	3.55	1.05
5. I feel that others make fun of me.	3.14	.95
6. I worry about being teased.	2.81	1.09
7. I feel that peers talk about me behind my back.	3.05	1.04
8. If I get into an argument, I worry that the other person will not like me.	3.19	1.19

Associations among Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence, Fear of Negative Evaluation, and Impulse Buying Tendency

Two-way factorial analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were performed to test the hypotheses (see Table 4). A significant effect of susceptibility to interpersonal influence on adolescents' impulse buying tendencies was revealed ($F = 12.106$, $p < .05$). That is, individuals with high susceptibility to interpersonal influence were significantly more likely to buy impulsively ($M = 2.601$, $SD = .364$) than were those with low susceptibility to interpersonal influence ($M = 2.407$, $SD = .344$). Moreover, our results revealed a significant effect of fear of negative evaluation on adolescents' tendency to buy impulsively ($F = 13.293$, $p < .05$). Individuals with an intense fear of negative evaluation were significantly more likely to buy impulsively ($M = 2.605$, $SD = .370$) than were those with little fear of negative evaluation ($M = 2.402$, $SD = .337$). Thus, both Hypotheses 1 and 2 were supported.

Table 4. *Results of ANOVA*

Source of variation	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	Mean squares	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Susceptibility (H/L)	328.906	1	328.906	12.106	.001*
Fear of negative evaluation (H/L)	361.155	1	361.155	13.293	.000*
Susceptibility \times Fear of negative evaluation	4.452	1	4.452	.164	.686
Error	12199.101	449	27.169		
Total	12893.641				

Note: * $p < .05$.

Discussion

The results of our investigation indicate a significant effect of susceptibility to interpersonal influence on adolescents' impulse buying tendencies; that is to say, adolescents who were more susceptible to interpersonal influence manifested greater impulsive buying tendencies. This finding is consistent with the findings gained by Luo (2005).

The results also show a significant effect of fear of negative evaluation on adolescents' impulse buying tendencies. This finding is similar to those gained by Chansky and Kendall (1997). They demonstrated that in order to avoid negative evaluation from peers, socially anxious adolescents would exhibit greater impulse buying tendencies.

Adolescents' impulse buying behavior is important because, increasingly, marketing activities are aimed at this age group. Additionally, shopping has been identified by researchers (Lin & Chuang, 2005) as a daily routine for adolescents and adolescents like to shop with peers. The findings we gained in the present study show the effects of susceptibility to interpersonal influence and fear of

negative evaluation on adolescents' impulse buying tendencies. Accordingly, teachers and parents should be cognizant of this in order to help them spend their money wisely (Lin & Chuang, 2005).

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