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Master Of Business Administration

Impulse Buying Behavior in Online Shopping within Saudi Arabia

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1 Introduction

Over the last few decades, the phenomenon of impulse buying has sparked widespread interest across multiple disciplines—including marketing, psychology, and consumer behavior research⁽¹⁾. Far from being a niche behavior, impulse buying has become a defining trait of modern consumer culture. Retailers have capitalized on this tendency, recognizing its potential to drive substantial profits⁽²⁾. One industry leader even claimed that spontaneous purchases account for nearly 70% of their company's total revenue⁽³⁾. In fact, studies show that more than 70% of purchases made in supermarkets are unplanned, highlighting the pervasive nature of impulse-driven decisions⁽⁴⁾. With impulsive spending contributing an estimated \$4 billion annually in the U.S. alone, it's clear that this behavior is not only widespread but also economically significant⁽⁵⁾.

Although impulse buying has been extensively documented in the United States⁽⁵⁾, its dynamics in other regions remain largely unexplored. This gap underscores the need for cross-cultural research into what drives consumers to make spontaneous purchases.

As impulsive purchasing continues to shape consumer behavior, it has become imperative for retailers to decode the psychological drivers behind these decisions. Gaining deeper insights into the consumer mindset is essential for maintaining a competitive edge in today's fast-paced retail landscape⁽⁶⁾.

Building on previously reported insights, this study aims to examine how situational and demographic factors—specifically gender and employment status—interplay and associate with impulsive purchasing behavior.⁽⁷⁾

There is a notable scarcity in the data related to impulse buying in KSA. Such a huge knowledge gaps remains yet to be addressed. While multiple studies report that, within the context of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), product advertisement and family influence may be significantly associated with impulse buying behavior, such a transient yet recurrent customer behavior is at best 50% understood by specialized scientists^(8,9). There is also a stress on the online shopping and e-commerce market, being a relatively new, developing, big, and under-investigated market in KSA⁽¹⁰⁾. The current study aims to help delineate the factors associated with online impulse buying behavior within KSA settings.

2 Study Problem

Impulsive online shopping has become increasingly prevalent with the rapid growth of e-commerce platforms and digital marketing strategies. In the KSA, where internet penetration and smartphone usage are among the highest in the region, consumers are frequently exposed to online advertisements and promotions that may trigger unplanned purchases⁽¹⁰⁾. Despite the growing trend, there is limited empirical research exploring the psychological, social, and technological factors that contribute to impulsive online buying behavior in the Saudi context. Understanding these factors is crucial for businesses, marketers, and policymakers aiming to develop effective strategies for consumer engagement and financial well-being.

3 Study Importance

The current study is aimed to make major contribution in a number of aspects. For example, filling the knowledge gap of online customer behavior regarding impulsive buying tendencies may be considered an important enough reason to conduct the study. Moreover, identification of the factors associated with arousal of KSA-located customers may help local authorities understand the population and help business owners tailor their marketing strategies to a more customer-tailored approach. On top of that, the study findings may help increase the public awareness regarding impulse buying in KSA, which is reportedly poor⁽⁹⁾.

4 Study Objective(s)

The main objectives of this study include:

- To identify the key psychological, social, and technological factors associated with impulsive online shopping in KSA.
- To examine the relationship between these factors and the frequency of impulsive online purchases.
- To assess the demographic variables (e.g., age, gender, income) that may be also associated with impulsive buying behavior.

5 Study Question(s)

- What are the main factors influencing impulsive online shopping behavior among consumers in KSA?
- How do psychological factors (e.g., self-control, mood) relate to impulsive online shopping?
- What role do social influences (e.g., peer pressure, social media) play in impulsive buying?
- How do technological factors (e.g., ease of access, mobile app features) contribute to impulsive purchases?
- Do demographic characteristics significantly affect the likelihood of impulsive online shopping?

6 Study Hypothesis

- *H1: Sales Promotion and price discounts are positively associated with online impulse buying behavior.*
- *H2: Money availability is positively associated with online impulsive buying behavior.*
- *H3: Perceived atmosphere of online store shopping experience is positively associated with online impulse buying behavior*
- *H4: Product country of origin is associated with online impulse buying behavior*
- *H5: Product brand reputation is associated with online impulse buying behavior*
- *H6: Social influence is associated with online impulse buying behavior*
- *H7: Time availability is associated with online impulse buying behavior*
- *H8: Other factors (such as gender, mood, and perceived urge) are associated with online impulse buying behavior*

7 Literature Review

7.1 Impulse buying

The conceptual roots of impulse buying trace back to Stern's seminal work in 1962, which categorized consumer purchases into three distinct types: planned, unplanned, and impulsive⁽¹¹⁾. Planned purchases are deliberate, involving careful research and logical evaluation, often taking considerable time. Unplanned buying, on the other hand, occurs without prior intention but lacks the emotional intensity of impulse buying. What sets impulse buying apart is the immediacy and emotional force behind it—it's driven by a sudden, compelling urge that overrides rational deliberation and leads to swift, often irrational, purchasing decisions⁽¹¹⁾.

Impulse buying was once confused with unplanned purchasing, as early theorists failed to distinguish between the two⁽¹²⁾. However, modern research has addressed this dilemma, revealing that impulse buying is a far more nuanced and layered behavior. It manifests in several distinct forms, each driven by different psychological triggers. One variant, known as planned impulse buying, occurs when consumers make seemingly spontaneous purchases that are actually prompted by external incentives like discounts or promotional deals. In contrast, reminded impulse buying is sparked by in-store stimuli that jog the shopper's memory about a forgotten need. Suggestion impulse is another form where buying emerges from internal persuasion—where the consumer, upon encountering a product, convinces themselves of its necessity. The most extreme form, pure impulse buying, is entirely unpremeditated and emotionally charged, representing a complete break from the shopper's usual decision-making patterns^(13,14).

Impulse buying has been defined in numerous ways over the years, but most descriptions converge on a few key traits: it is emotionally charged, irrational, and unplanned. It typically involves a swift decision made with little to no deliberation, driven by a powerful desire for immediate ownership^(15,16). Rather than being a calculated act, it erupts spontaneously—often without any prior intention to purchase the item in question. This behavior is marked by heightened emotional arousal, minimal cognitive control, and a sense of urgency that overrides rational thought. Compared to planned purchases, impulse buying is more reactive, less reasoned, and often feels irresistible in the moment⁽²⁾.

Impulse buying is closely tied to heightened emotional arousal, diminished cognitive restraint, and a tendency to act spontaneously when confronted with an enticing product or stimulus⁽¹⁷⁾. While this behavior may appear to originate internally, it is often sparked by external triggers—visual cues, environmental stimuli, or marketing tactics—that ignite the impulse. These external factors, which lie beyond the consumer’s conscious control, play a pivotal role in shaping impulsive responses. As such, understanding how these situational influences drive impulsivity has become essential for decoding the mechanics of impulse buying⁽¹⁸⁾.

7.2 Factors associated with Impulse buying

Impulse buying has been strongly linked to intense emotional arousal, diminished cognitive regulation, and reactive behavior triggered by the presence of an enticing product or stimulus⁽¹⁷⁾. While the impulse may feel internal, it is frequently set in motion by external stimuli—environmental cues that act as catalysts for spontaneous purchasing. This highlights the critical need to examine how situational factors beyond the consumer’s control influence impulsive tendencies⁽¹⁸⁾.

An expanding body of research has explored a wide array of contextual variables that shape impulse buying behavior. These include intrinsic elements such as mood and emotional state, as well as extrinsic factors like ambient lighting, background music, and store aesthetics. Broader environmental components—ranging from store layout and design to visual merchandising, point-of-sale displays, and both interior and exterior presentation—have also been identified as influential⁽¹⁹⁾. These dimensions are systematically highlighted in the current literature review.

7.3 Price and Promotions

A surprisingly low price can act as a powerful trigger for impulse buying, convincing shoppers that they're spending less than anticipated. This perception of value—often shaped by discounts, limited-time offers, or promotional deals—creates a psychological urgency to act. The opportunity to acquire a product at a reduced cost evokes a strong emotional response, compelling consumers to take the deal rather than risk missing out^(20,21).

Price discounts are a dominant force behind impulse buying and remain one of the most widely used promotional strategies in retail. These markdowns don't just lower the cost—they generate a surge of positive emotion that fuels spontaneous purchasing behavior. Consumers are significantly more prone to act on impulse when confronted with sales or promotional pricing. In many cases, the reduced price becomes the decisive factor, tipping the scale toward an unplanned purchase driven more by emotion than necessity^(22,23). Another study stated that there is a positive relationship between consumer's impulse buying behavior and promotional activities⁽²⁴⁾. These studies prove a positive and significant relationship between discount offering and impulsive buying.

H1: Sales Promotion and price discounts are positively associated with online impulse buying behavior.

7.4 Money availability

The availability of money plays a pivotal role in shaping impulsive buying behavior⁽¹⁵⁾. When consumers have greater financial flexibility, their original shopping intentions can quickly shift, opening the door to spontaneous purchases. A surplus of resources enhances perceived purchasing power, making it easier to justify unplanned spending^(25,26). consistently shows that income levels significantly influence the likelihood of impulse buying⁽²⁷⁾. Closely tied to this is the possession of credit cards, which further lowers the psychological barriers to spending. Together, these situational factors—cash on hand, access to credit, and income—create a fertile environment for impulsive decisions to take root^(28,29).

H2: Money availability is positively associated with online impulsive buying behavior.

7.5 Store Atmosphere

In physical shopping, several studies have demonstrated that factors related to The sensory atmosphere of a retail space—its sounds, visuals, and scents—acts as a powerful psychological trigger, often stirring the urge to buy on impulse⁽³⁰⁾. Strategic manipulation of these environmental elements through deliberate marketing design can significantly enhance the in-store experience, making navigation more intuitive and shopping more enjoyable⁽³¹⁾. High-quality service from sales personnel further amplifies this effect, not only increasing the likelihood of impulsive purchases but also boosting the chances of repeat visits⁽³²⁾. A well-crafted store environment—rich in appealing atmospheric cues—can elevate a shopper's mood, which in turn becomes a key driver

of impulsive buying behavior⁽³³⁾. In online shopping, these factors may be approximated by the website browsing experience, its layout and design, the visual flow of product appetizers, and the algorithms tailored to provide best recommendations for each individual shopper.

H3: Perceived atmosphere of online store shopping experience is positively associated with online impulse buying behavior

7.6 Country of Origin

The country of origin of a product significantly shapes consumer perceptions, often serving as a mental shortcut based on prior experiences or cultural associations with that nation's manufacturing standards. This perception acts as a powerful image cue in global marketing, offering firms a potential competitive edge in international markets. Research has consistently shown that country of origin influences how consumers evaluate product quality, reliability, and desirability. In essence, the country of origin functions as a critical informational signal—one that can heavily sway acceptance and success of a product across diverse global markets^(34,35).

H4: Product country of origin is associated with online impulse buying behavior

7.7 Brand reputation

Brand identity plays a vital role in triggering impulse buying, largely due to the emotional and informational signals embedded in brand messaging. Consumers often lean heavily on brand reputation to assess product attributes such as authenticity, quality, and trustworthiness—especially in situations where quick decisions are made. The message a brand communicates can shape consumer preferences, evoke emotional responses, and ultimately heighten the likelihood of

impulsive purchases. When a brand successfully cultivates positive affect, it creates a fertile ground for spontaneous buying behavior to emerge⁽³⁶⁾.

H5: Product brand reputation is associated with online impulse buying behavior

7.8 Social Influence/Family Influence

Research has shown that socially driven interactions—particularly those involving peer opinions, product reviews, and perceived credibility—can significantly fuel impulsive buying behavior⁽³⁷⁾.

When consumers observe a high number of others purchasing a product or deal, it sends a strong social signal that the item is desirable. This herd behavior effect can lead individuals to interpret popularity as a proxy for quality or value, prompting them to act quickly to secure the same benefit.

In essence, when a product gains visibility within a consumer's social circle or broader market, it can become a catalyst for impulse buying. Moreover, the presence of others—whether physically in-store or virtually through online engagement—has been found to elevate emotional arousal and pleasure, further intensifying the likelihood of spontaneous purchases⁽³⁸⁾.

Social dynamics play a critical role in shaping consumer behavior, particularly in the context of impulse buying. Studies have shown that interactions with friends, family, and acquaintances can significantly alter shopping patterns, with retail environments that attract groups—such as couples or friends—often yielding stronger sales performance⁽³⁹⁾. Shopping with companions tends to amplify emotional engagement, as peer feedback is highly valued and contributes to a more positive shopping experience, thereby increasing the likelihood of impulsive purchases^(40,41).

Interestingly, the presence of others doesn't always lead to more impulsive behavior. While peer influence tends to heighten impulsivity, shopping with family members can have the opposite effect. Family members, often more financially cautious, may suppress impulsive tendencies,

leading to more restrained purchasing decisions⁽⁴²⁾. However, findings across studies are not entirely consistent. Some research suggests that shopping with children or companions can actually intensify impulse buying⁽⁴³⁾. This inconsistency points to the influence of cultural context. In collectivist societies, where family needs are prioritized over individual desires, shopping with family may actually encourage impulse buying—especially when the purchase is intended for loved ones^(6,44). In such environments, the emotional drive to fulfill familial expectations can override economic caution, fueling spontaneous purchases. These findings underscore the intricate and culturally contingent nature of social presence in retail settings, revealing how impulse buying is shaped by a complex interplay of relational, emotional, and cultural factors.

H6: Social influence is associated with online impulse buying behavior

7.9 Time Availability

As previously established, the longer a shopper remains in a store, the more likely they are to make unplanned purchases. Time availability has been consistently linked to increased impulsive buying, with studies showing that consumers who aren't rushed tend to deviate more from their original shopping intentions^(25,39). When the in-store environment is pleasant and engaging, it encourages customers to linger—creating more opportunities for spontaneous purchases to occur. In essence, time becomes a silent enabler of impulse buying, amplifying the effect of environmental and emotional triggers.

H7: Time availability is associated with online impulse buying behavior

7.10 Other factors

Other factors have also been reported to be found significantly associated with impulse buying. One of these factors is gender. Research suggests that men, who often view shopping as a task rather than a leisure activity, are less likely to engage in browsing—a behavior closely linked to impulsive purchases. This utilitarian approach to shopping may reduce their susceptibility to spontaneous buying decisions⁽⁴⁾. Another key driver is the perceived urge to buy—a sudden, compelling desire that can override rational restraint⁽¹⁵⁾. Mood also plays a critical role. From a psychological standpoint, individuals in a positive emotional state are more inclined toward approach-oriented behaviors, including rewarding themselves through purchases. Positive affect not only increases the likelihood of impulse buying but also reinforces behaviors aimed at sustaining that elevated mood^(15,45).

H8: Other factors (such as gender, mood, and perceived urge) are associated with online impulse buying behavior

7.11 KSA context

There is a notable scarcity in the data related to impulse buying in KSA. Such a huge knowledge gaps remains yet to be addressed. Only three relevant studies could be found upon our literature review.

The first study was titled *Measuring social media impact on Impulse Buying Behavior*. The study aimed mainly to analyze the influence of social media on Impulse Buying Behavior among customers in Saudi Arabia. The quantitative study included data from 342 respondents from KSA. Authors reported that Social media advertising has been shown to exert a strong influence on

consumers' impulse buying intentions. In contrast, participation in social media communities appears to have no significant effect on such behavior. However, the explanatory power of the proposed model remains limited—accounting for only 50% of impulse buying intention and just 33% of actual impulse buying behavior. These findings underscore a critical gap in understanding online consumer behavior in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, signaling the need for deeper investigation and more nuanced research into the digital drivers of impulsivity in this context⁽⁸⁾.

The second study was titled *Factors Influencing Impulse Buying Behavior Among Young Male Consumers in Saudi Arabia*. The study aimed to investigate the personal factors that affect impulse buying behavior among young men in Saudi Arabia in addition to investigating the effect of situational variables, including family influence, time availability, money availability, and hedonic shopping, on the impulse buying behavior of men in the Saudi Arabian context, focusing on the Western region. Authors report that time availability, financial flexibility, and hedonic motivations significantly drive impulse buying behavior among men in Saudi Arabia. Interestingly, the study also uncovered a counterbalancing force—family-related factors were found to suppress impulsive tendencies, suggesting that familial influence may act as a behavioral restraint in this demographic. However, the study's conclusions must be interpreted with caution due to notable limitations, including a restricted sample size and narrow geographic focus. To build a more comprehensive understanding of impulse buying in the Saudi context, future research should expand its scope by incorporating a larger, more demographically and regionally diverse sample⁽⁹⁾.

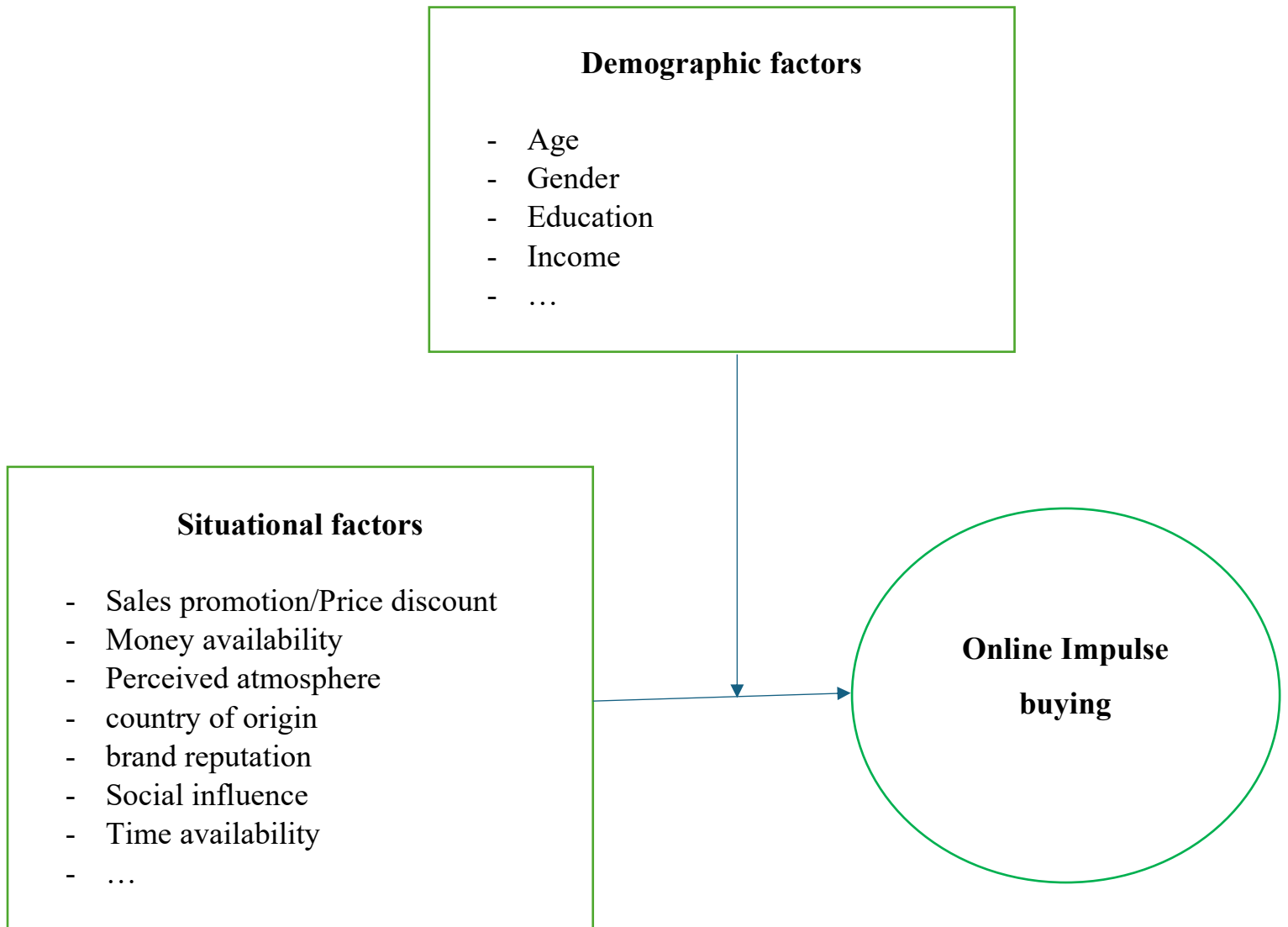
The third study was focused on electronic shopping. The paper was titled *Impulse Buying Model for Business-to-Consumer E-Commerce in Saudi Arabia*. Authors directly recommended the incorporation of strategies dedicated for increasing the magnitude of impulse buying in the Saudi

e-commerce. Although study participants were familiar with e-commerce and the definition of impulse buying, the majority had a minimum knowledge regarding the effect that impulse buying can create to their purchase decisions. Authors reported that advertisement, impulsiveness as a personality trait, and promotion of products are the main factors that positively influence impulse buying in Saudi Arabia. In contrast, financial income showed no evidence of association with impulse buying⁽¹⁰⁾.

On the other side of the table, a publication titled *New Emerging Buying Trends in KSA Customers* highlighted another side of the story. Authors reported that in the evolving Saudi market, consumers are becoming increasingly resistant to superficial marketing tactics. Shoppers in the Kingdom are no longer easily swayed by flashy packaging, catchy slogans, or polished advertisements. Instead, they are demanding substance—expecting transparency, authenticity, and real value from the products they consider. This shift in consumer mindset underscores the core objective of this research: to raise awareness among Saudi shoppers that surface-level marketing is no longer sufficient. Purchasing decisions must be grounded in a deeper understanding of product quality and worth. However, fostering this awareness is not without its challenges. Cultural habits, market inertia, and limited consumer education remain significant barriers⁽⁴⁶⁾.

8 Theoretical Framework

Figure A: *Theoretical framework of the current study.*



9 Methods

Design of the Study. The current study is proposed to adopt a cross-sectional, prospective, and quantitative design. Sampling will be based on convenience sampling and snowball sampling techniques with the aim of recruiting as many KSA-located customers as possible. Data collection tools will be disseminated through social media platforms as well as via physical booths where passer-by individuals will be asked to fill the online questionnaire on-site. To avoid bias, only one member of each family passing by will be asked to fill the questionnaire. An informed consent to participant in the current study will be obtained before-hands from all recruited individuals.

It was previously reported that sample size may be classified into three categories: $n < 100$ small; n between 150 and 200 medium; $n > 200$ large⁽⁴⁷⁾. We aim to recruit a minimal sample size of 200 complete responses from KSA-located customers.

9.1 Data Collection Tool

The following questionnaire will be used to collect data from study participants:

Sociodemographic data:

1. Age (in years)
2. Gender: Male Female
3. Employment status: Employed Not-employed
4. Mean monthly income: <5000 SAR 5000-14999 SAR 15000-24999 SAR 25000 or more
5. Highest level of education: High school or lower College Post-graduate studies

Different constructs: All ranked from 1 (Almost never) to 7 (Nearly always)

A. Impulse online buying online:

- While I surfing online, I buy new items right away
- I feel a sense of excitement when I make an online impulse buying
- I involve in impulse buying regularly
- It is fun to buy things spontaneously
- I don't plan most of my buying
- When see something that really interests me, I buy it without considering the consequences
- I have difficulty controlling my urge to do impulse buying when I see a good offer
- When I go shopping, I buy things that I had not intended to purchase.
- I buy some things without new I really want; I purchase it immediately, even if I had not planned to buy it.

B. Advertisement:

- When I visit website based on internet advertisement (e.g. Banner ads) that make me do an impulse buying
- Visiting a website based on an email advertising make me involve in an impulse buying
- I often surf the Internet looking for an attracted advertisement to do impulse buying

C. Promotion:

- Promotion with free gift attract me to an unplanned buying
- When I see a special promotion, I involve in impulse buying immediately
- Clearance sale make me to buying immediately

D. Social influence:

- Customers reviews help me decide to make an unplanned buying decisions when shopping online
- Comments from other customers makes me do a buying not planned
- Knowing the quantity left of an item helps me make my impulse buying decision.
- I become more likely to buy things without a specific plan when browsing online shopping sites with my family.
- Recommended items, brands, and online stored from my friends make me consider buying somethings for my self.

E. Income:

- My involving in impulse buying depends on my monthly income
- The more money means more buying not planned
- If I have money I will buy immediately

F. Hedonic shopping value:

- It seems that I explore a new world when I go shopping
- Compared to others, spending time on shopping is so enjoyable
- During shopping, I feel excited

G: Perceived urge:

- The urge to buy something just comes over me all at once and I am overwhelmed.
- I feel the desire to buy an item as quickly as possible so as to terminate the pain of not buying.
- I have difficulty getting control over my buying impulses.

H. Positive mood:

- I tend to buy things impulsively when I'm happy.
- Satisfied mood is associated with having occasional impulsive purchase.
- Making an impulse buying decision makes me feel pleased.

K. Other factors:

- If I come across a product manufactured in a high-profile country I tend to buy it right away.
- Products of certain brands make me just want to get them.
- If the online store feels compelling I may be deeply allured by its beautiful products and buy something for myself

10 Limitation(s)

Applying a probability sampling method to recruit a sample representing whole KSA population is not feasible so we would approximate this via convenience sampling. Moreover, being not able to conduct interviews with our study participants would limit the hypotheses generated by the current study for future research investigations.

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