

The Impact of Negative Emotions on Consumer Behaviors

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Abstract: The hallmarks of impulse buying are abrupt, impulsive behaviors motivated by intense emotional reactions to external cues. When presented with specific things, consumers frequently have a strong want to buy; yet, this behaviour might result in regret after the purchase. Conformity buying is driven by the demand for social belonging or the fear of social exclusion, when customers purchase popular things to align with others. Anxiety, panic, and envy are examples of negative emotions that can exacerbate impulsive consumption, especially during difficult times like the COVID-19 pandemic. Research has indicated that social influences, like peer comparison and peer pressure, might lead to impulsive or conformist purchasing behaviour among consumers. Emotional fulfillment—whether it comes from making friends or feeling better—is a major factor in determining how customers behave in both situations. This study sheds insight on the social and emotional elements that influence compulsive and impulsive purchasing. It highlights the significance of strong feelings and social forces, such peer pressure, in influencing the choices that consumers make, especially in trying times like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Negative emotions, impulsive consumption, conformity consumption.

1. Introduction

1.1. Impulsive Buying

Most modern scholars believe that impulsive buying is a type of purchasing behavior which is characterized by sudden, unintentional and unexpected purchasing desires when consumers see the products. To be specific, Rook defined impulse buying from the perspective of consumer psychology as immediate, unplanned purchasing behavior which is driven by strong emotional responses to environmental stimuli [1]. Subsequently, there are two other scholars who have considered to define impulsive buying from both external factors and internal factors — Xiao and Nicholson. According to a systematic literature review, they have shown that impulsive buying might be stimulated by some certain factors when consumers do not make any plan before they go to shop and make final decisions [2]. In their words, this kind of behavior is abrupt and imprudent. Consumers are likely to regret their decisions after a period of time from that.

1.2. Risk Aversion

Risk aversion is a variable of the relationship between herd behaviour and purchase intention [3]. The risk aversion is defined as a personal judgment about someone's tendency of his or her following

actions (how someone will perform actions). The herd behaviour is defined when people consent to others in behavior in general, or purchase behavior particularly. Risk aversion is not only a common thinking patterns, but also a feature in each individual's personality and level of popularity [3]. It is typically defined as existing in situations where consumers make decisions based on limited information and uncertain outcomes. Consumers are more inclined to choose low returns to minimize risk according to this regular pattern.

1.3. Conformity Buying

Conformity buying is usually stimulated by positive or negative factors, respectively. Positive emotional factors such as people's emotional belonging-need are often considered the essence of conformity behavior. Nevertheless, negative factors like social exclusion are also affecting consumers' conformity consumption. Consumers are naturally social in nature [4]. They are born with the need for a sense of social belonging — this is a human potential. Thus, the emotional satisfaction made by conformity behavior is quite appealing for consumers since people can feel consistent when wearing the same brand of clothing as those around them, for example. To be more specific, the concept of social exclusion should be introduced. Social exclusion is not rare in people's modern daily lives. It happens when a small number of specific individuals or groups are ignored or refused by other individuals or groups. Moreover, it will have immeasurable negative effects psychologically on those who were excluded from the other [5] and facilitate them to make conformity buying.

2. The Impact of Negative Emotions on Consumer Decision-Making

2.1. Impulsive Consumption

Many negative emotions can actually be attributed to one of the reasons that lead to impulsive consumption. Negative emotions such as jealousy, anxiety and panic. can trigger people's unplanned consumption desires, which is consistent with the basic definition of impulsive buying. Moreover, those factors or events that incite these negative emotions can actually be considered as a marketing strategy for businesses by merchants.

In this article, the author draws the following conclusions through literature review. The two experiments selected from these literature to support the views of this paper used data and information from the COVID-19 epidemic.

The dominant factors of impulsive consumption include characteristics (e.g. sensation, abrupt purchasing desire), advantages (e.g. usefulness, emotional value) and cost (e.g. monetary cost, time cost). In other words, it is often not the product itself that triggers consumers' impulsive desires of consuming, but rather the people around them or the consumers themselves. Social comparison can be considered as one of these factors.

Social comparison theory is based on the concept that people have internal needs to assess themselves by comparing with others [6]. People often subconsciously compare themselves to those around them in their daily lives. In this way, they are able to clarify their social positioning and self-worth more clearly, which are beneficial for their future development. However, if scholars view social comparison from a negative perspective, there is a high possibility for this behavior to promote the generation of negative emotions such as anxiety and jealousy in the compared individuals. The psychological imbalance caused by negative emotions will prompt consumers to make impulsive purchases that may even be beyond their affordability. Nevertheless, this is indeed the psychological mechanism behind why consumers act impulsively due to negative emotions.

Despite the jealousy caused by social comparison, negative emotions such as panic can also be a very influential mediator. Here is an example to be mentioned to make this concept more definite.

The lack of COVID-19 vaccine and the limited reliable information of the disease make people feel more vulnerable and helpless in the face of this unknown disease. As a consequence, people in many countries have been found to engage in panic purchasing, which had caused chaos in the national economic system and society [7]. The study conducted in Malaysia in 2020 utilized the theory of behavioral inhibition systems, response theory, and expectation theory to explore how negative emotions (some psychological factors) such as uncertainty, severity perception, scarcity perception, and anxiety affect consumers' impulsive buying behavior. Researchers in this study found that consumers bought a large number of health protection products, such as hand sanitizer, thermometer and mask, during the prevalence of COVID-19. Many of these essentials were even sold out in many countries at that time. Consequently, this study shows that the concentration of consumers' panic and anxiety emotions is positively correlated with their probability of making impulsive consumption. The essence of this behavior may be the sense of security that consumers can derive from hoarding goods, according to researchers. Conducting similar empirical research is conducive for developing more flexible and adaptable retail strategies, thereby improving consumer services [7].

After controlling and eliminating the potential impact of other external pressure, another study conducted among women has also found a positive correlation between *social appearance anxiety (which can be seen as a negative emotion) and impulsive online purchases of fashionable clothing, especially during the pandemic [8]. This study can clearly demonstrate how the consumers' impulsive consumption was influenced by the combined effects of fear and anxiety, two negative emotions.

Social appearance anxiety: Social appearance anxiety refers to an individual's overall dissatisfaction with their appearance compared to others. It includes but is not limited to the one's physique (e.g. height, weight) and appearance-related factors (e.g. dress, hairstyle).

2.2. Conformity Consumption

Social influence, as an external factor, plays an important role in influencing consumer decision-making. In this section of the article, the author will summarize how social influence stimulates consumers' psychology through external manifestations based on previous research. Undoubtedly, negative emotions still play a crucial driving role in this process.

The formation of people's social values is the most intuitive reflection of how individuals are influenced by society. Correspondingly, consumer awareness and value orientation are regarded to be driving factors of consumer behavior, as social norms and values are important determinants of consumer attitudes and behaviors [9]. Therefore the study can summarize that society influences consumers' behavior by influencing their values.

Humans are born with a pursuit of collectivism, so they will be easily influenced by herd behavior, which can be considered as a kind of risk aversion behavior. Compared to a less well-known new brand, most consumers tend to prefer a *masstige** brand that more people choose. Consumers trust *masstige* brands because they expect these brands to be more responsive to their needs [4].

Masstige comes from the phrase 'mass prestige', refers to those brands that are more affordable and accessible than luxury brands and emphasis more on catering to the needs of the macro market.

However, according to the survey, risk aversion is not the only reason why consumers are more inclined towards *masstige* brands. Moreover, consumers choose these brands to satisfy their emotional needs - a sense of belonging. When the majority of the population is using popular products from the same brand, there is a high likelihood that the remaining consumers will also choose to purchase products from that particular brand. This behavior is not because of the high evaluations of the product from the people around those remaining consumers who have already bought the product, but because of people's instinctive pursuit of belongingness - to make them less distinct from the public, or in other words, to avoid themselves from being isolated from society.

Social exclusion is common in modern social life. However, this phenomenon often brings significant negative effects to the excluded, such as feelings of inferiority and depression [10]. This will cause varying degrees of psychological trauma to those who are excluded. The psychological trauma and negative emotions caused by social exclusion to the excluded may lead to the conformity effect. Because of people's instinctive pursuit of belongingness, the excluded usually show a tendency of adopting impulsive consumption behaviors strategically in order to repair their social relationships. In the article, the author uniformly name this type of consumption as conformity consumption.

In some cases, people's innate pursuit of belongingness cannot fully explain consumers' conformity consumption behavior. Some consumers engage in this behavior just because they regard it as a manifestation of self-esteem. They may not really care about their social relationships, on the contrary, they may just not want to appear like the one who is excluded - which would hurt their sense of self-esteem. This phenomenon is extremely common among teenagers, especially for those who have just entered puberty.

Social presence can positively influence consumers' emotions, which, in turn, positively impacts their purchase intentions [10]. People are exposed to image advertising very frequently in their daily lives. However, what are the reasons for the brands to choose to use image advertising to promote their products to the public? The answer is to increase the visibility of their own branded products, in other words, to enhance their social presence.

Whether it is in traditional media or social media marketing, photos are often regarded as one of the most direct and effective forms of visual content dissemination by researchers, which can also enhance consumers' sense of participation to some extent. Enterprises can establish a positive brand image by providing visual cues such as human movements and expressions to consumers in pictures. For example, K. Zhang et al. state that those photos shared by travel bloggers on social platforms (e.g. Tiktok, Blogs) are able to trigger more positive perceptions (e.g. friendliness, safety) and emotional responses (e.g. pleasure) with human figures presenting [11]. Sequentially, these reactions positively influence consumers' behavioral intentions (e.g. visiting the same destination as the person in the photo), which is similar to the process of stimulating consumers' desire to purchase. If consumers are stimulated to make purchases by the human figure in image advertising, strictly speaking, this phenomenon also belongs to conformity consumption - indirectly caused by social influence.

Consequently, the essence behind the conformity consumption which are caused by negative emotions or the lack of emotional value is consumers' pursuit of emotional satisfaction. As mentioned earlier in this article, consumers are social in the nature. They always have the tendency of pursuing consensus with the majority and catching up with popularity; even though they are not sure about what they really want to get or need. Nevertheless, when consumers decide to make conformity consumption, their perspectives will be limited by the fleeting satisfaction brought by the conformity consumption since it is indeed very appealing.

3. Conclusion

The present study reveals that impulsive buying, risk aversion, and conformity consumption are key factors shaping consumer behavior. Impulsive buying is driven by emotional responses and often leads to unplanned purchases, with consumers potentially regretting their decisions. Conformity consumption, influenced by social belonging and the fear of exclusion, drives individuals to align their purchasing behavior with societal norms, often choosing popular brands to avoid isolation. This study emphasizes how important psychological and emotional elements are in determining consumer behaviour, especially impulsive and conformist purchasing. Businesses may create more successful marketing campaigns and raise customer satisfaction by knowing how negative emotions and social influences affect purchasing decisions.

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