

## THE MATERIALISTIC URGE: EXPLORING ITS INFLUENCE ON IMPULSE BUYING BEHAVIOR

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### **Abstract**

*This paper explores the intricate association between materialism and impulsive purchase behavior within the context of contemporary consumer culture, based on empirical evidence from Punjab, India. Drawing from extensive literature, it examines how materialistic tendencies influence consumers' propensity for spontaneous and unplanned purchases. The study illuminates on the multidimensional nature of materialism and its implications for consumer behavior. Utilizing PLS-SEM (4.0) the research empirically tests hypotheses regarding the impact of materialism facets—success, centrality, and happiness—on IBB. The findings reveal significant relationships between materialism as happiness and materialism as centrality with IBB, while materialism as success does not exhibit a significant effect. These results underscore the role of underlying psychological motivations in driving impulsive purchase decisions. By elucidating these dynamics, the study enhances a deeper comprehension of consumer behavior and offers valuable insights for marketing professionals and retailers seeking to capitalize on spontaneous purchase tendencies.*

**Keywords:** Materialism, Impulse buying behavior, Consumer behavior, Retail marketing, PLS-SEM

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In the dynamic landscape of consumer behavior research, impulse buying stands as a fascinating phenomenon that has garnered substantial attention from scholars and practitioners alike. Defined as the spontaneous purchase of goods or services without premeditation or thorough evaluation of consequences (Verplanken & Sato, 2011), impulse buying behavior represents a complex interplay of psychological, social, and situational variables impacting buyers' decision-making processes. This behaviour often reflects deeper emotional and cognitive triggers that drive consumer action.

The allure inherent in impulse buying lies in its spontaneous and often emotionally-driven nature, which distinguishes it from planned purchases. Over the years, researchers have attempted to delineate the various dimensions of impulse buying behavior, emphasizing its multidimensional nature. For instance, Rook (1987) identified two categories of impulse buying: pure impulse buying,

characterized by sudden and unplanned purchases prompted by situational cues, and recall-driven impulse buying, where a trigger prompts the recall of a requirement or desire, leading to purchase behaviour. This distinction helps in understanding the nuanced motivations behind different types of impulse purchases.

Materialism, as conceptualized by Richins and Dawson (1992), is a multidimensional construct encompassing dimensions of centrality, happiness, and success, providing insights into consumer values and behaviors concerning material possessions. This construct has garnered significant attention in consumer psychology due to its implications for various consumer behaviors, including impulse buying. Impulse buying, characterized by spontaneous purchases driven by immediate desires or emotional triggers, is a significant area of research within consumer behavior, often influenced by materialistic tendencies. (Vohra, 2016).

Numerous studies have explored the intricate connection amid materialistic inclination and impulse buying behavior. Several studies have found that individuals with pronounced materialistic inclinations tend to exhibit heightened susceptibility to impulsive buying tendencies, driven by a desire for self-expression and social status. (Mukhtar et al., 2021). Similarly, Dittmar (2005) emphasized the role of materialism in fostering a consumer culture that prioritizes instant gratification and hedonistic consumption, thereby fuelling impulsive buying behavior. In light of these insights, understanding the interplay between materialism and impulse buying behavior becomes essential for marketers and retailers. By discerning the motivations and psychological processes underlying impulsive purchase decisions among materialistic individuals, marketers can tailor strategies to effectively capitalize on consumer preferences and drive sales.

This paper aims to synthesize the theoretical foundations and empirical evidence linking materialism to impulse buying behavior. By conducting an extensive literature review and integration of recent research findings, the study seeks to offer an understanding into the factors driving impulsive purchase decisions among materialistic consumers. Furthermore, it aims to explore the implications of these findings for consumer welfare and societal well-being in an era characterized by material abundance and consumption-driven lifestyles. In summary, the intersection of materialism and impulse buying behavior represents a rich area of inquiry within consumer psychology. By unravelling the motivations and psychological processes underlying impulsive purchase decisions among materialistic individuals, this research endeavor aims to deepen the knowledge of buying behavior in contemporary societies.

## **2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### ***Impulse Buying Behavior***

Impulse buying behavior, marked by spontaneous and unforeseen purchases has been extensively

researched within consumer psychology and behavioral research. It involves the sudden decision to buy goods and services without thorough evaluations of consequences or necessity. (Dholakia, 2000). This behaviour is marked by its unpredictability and can be influenced by a number of factors. Understanding antecedents of impulse buying is crucial for comprehending the psychological processes underlying this phenomenon. Scholars have investigated different elements that lead to spontaneous purchases, shedding light on its determinants and triggers.

One prominent determinant of impulse buying is mood states. Rook (1987) proposed that individuals experiencing positive emotions are more susceptible to impulsive purchases. Similarly, Verplanken and Sato (2011) found that emotional arousal can result in impulsive purchase behavior. Negative moods, such as stress or sadness, have also been associated with increased impulse buying tendencies. Situational factors have a significant impact in triggering impulse purchase. Promotional offers, such as discounts or limited-time deals, have been shown to stimulate impulsive purchases. Environmental cues, such as store layout and product placement, can also influence impulsive buying behaviour.

Individual differences, including personality traits and self-regulatory abilities, contribute to variations in susceptibility to spontaneous purchases. Kacen and Lee (2002) identified that individuals with high levels of trait impulsivity are prone to make impulse purchases. Moreover, consumers who exhibit limited self-control may succumb to spontaneous purchase decisions (Sengupta & Zhou, 2007). Furthermore, cognitive factors such as decision-making processes and information processing styles influence impulse buying tendencies. Additionally, individuals who rely heavily on affective judgments rather than deliberative reasoning may exhibit higher levels of impulsivity in their purchase decisions.

### ***Materialism***

Materialism, a fundamental construct in consumer behavior and psychology, has been extensively studied since its conceptualization by Richins and Dawson (1992). The authors proposed that materialistic individuals emphasize the accumulation of possessions as a means to achieve success and happiness, while also attributing significant centrality to material goods in their lives. This conceptualization aligns with findings from other researchers such as Belk (1985) and Kasser (2002), who have highlighted the diverse aspects of materialism and its effects on people and community.

The dimension of success reflects individuals' beliefs that material wealth is instrumental in attaining personal goals and societal recognition. This dimension encompasses aspirations for financial prosperity, social status, and achievement. Belk (1985) similarly emphasized the role of possessions in signalling success and social standing. A materialistic mind set often equates personal success with the quantity of one's belongings.

The dimension of happiness within materialism pertains to the belief that possessions contribute

significantly to one's overall well-being and life satisfaction. Individuals high in materialism often equate the accumulation of goods with feelings of pleasure, contentment, and fulfilment. Kasser (2002) further explored the link between materialism and well-being, highlighting the potential negative outcomes of prioritizing material possessions over intrinsic values.

Finally, centrality refers to the extent to which material possessions occupy a central and indispensable role in an individual's identity and self-concept (Richins & Dawson, 1992). For individuals high in materialism, possessions serve as not only symbols of success but also integral components of their sense of self-worth and social identity. This notion is echoed in research by Dittmar (2005), who examined the psychological implications of materialism on identity formation. Richins and Dawson's (1992) comprehensive framework provides a robust foundation for understanding materialism and its implications for consumer behavior, psychological well-being, and societal values. By integrating insights from various scholars, their work underscores the significance of taking into account the multidimensional aspects of materialistic attitudes and behaviors in research and practice.

### **3. RESEARCH GAP**

Although impulse buying behavior and materialism have been widely examined in consumer behavior research, existing studies have largely approached materialism as a broad or unified construct. Consequently, limited attention has been given to examining how its individual dimensions, namely happiness, success, and centrality, relate differently to impulse buying behavior. In addition, there is a noticeable lack of region-specific empirical evidence from the Indian setting, particularly from Punjab, where socio-cultural and consumption patterns may shape materialistic values and impulsive buying tendencies in distinct ways. Addressing these gaps, the present study examines the impact of materialism dimensions on impulse buying behavior.

### **4. HYPOTHESES FORMULATION**

The association of materialism as happiness with impulse purchase behavior is a dynamic and multifaceted one, characterized by intricate psychological processes and consumer behaviors. Materialism, often driven by the pursuit of material possessions as sources of happiness and fulfilment, can influence individuals' propensity towards impulsive purchasing decisions. Research suggests that individuals high in materialism may be more susceptible to impulse buying tendencies, as the pursuit of possessions is considered a way to satisfy their desire for immediate gratification and enhance their perceived happiness (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Furthermore, the pursuit of material wealth and status may fuel impulsive buying behavior by reinforcing consumerism and consumption-driven identities (Kasser et al., 2004). Conversely, impulse buying behavior, driven by spontaneous and unplanned purchases, may provide temporary feelings of pleasure and satisfaction, aligning with

materialistic values of seeking happiness through possessions (Rook, 1987). However, this relationship is not without its complexities, as impulsive buying can also result in adverse consequences such as financial strain and buyer's remorse, which may ultimately undermine individuals' long-term happiness (Amos et al., 2014). Understanding the interplay between materialism as happiness and impulse buying behavior is crucial for unravelling the underlying motivations and psychological mechanisms driving consumer consumption patterns in modern societies.

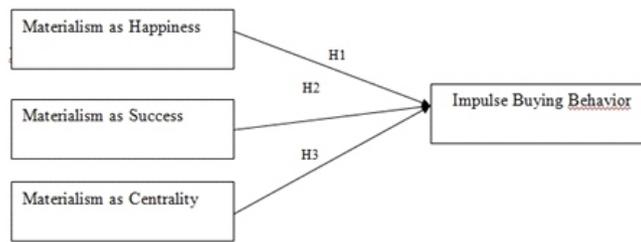
**H1: Materialism as happiness will positively impact Impulse Buying Behavior**

The association between materialistic tendency as success and impulsive purchase behavior constitutes a complex nexus of psychological factors and consumer tendencies. Materialism, often synonymous with the pursuit of success and achievement through the acquisition of material possessions, shapes individuals' inclinations towards impulsive purchasing decisions. Scholars such as Belk (1985) have underscored that individuals valuing material wealth as a marker of success may exhibit heightened susceptibility to impulsive buying, viewing the accumulation of goods as a means to signal their accomplishments and social standing. Impulsive buying behavior, driven by the immediate gratification and pursuit of momentary pleasure, may serve as a manifestation of individuals' materialistic ideals of success and attainment (Sengupta & Zhou, 2007). A nuanced insight of the intricate relationship between materialism as success and impulse purchase behavior is crucial for elucidating the underlying motivations and psychological mechanisms that govern consumer consumption patterns in contemporary societies.

**H2: Materialism as success will have a positive relationship with Impulse Buying Behavior.**

The association between materialism as centrality and spontaneous purchase is a topic of significant interest in consumer behavior research. Materialism is characterized by the value an individual assigns to material possessions in their lives, has been found to influence impulsive buying tendencies. Dittmar (2005) found that individuals who view material possessions as central to their identity are more inclined to partake in impulsive purchase behavior as a means to reinforce their self-concept. Moreover, studies have shown that individuals who prioritize materialism as a central aspect of their identity are susceptible to impulsive purchase behavior. Furthermore, it is suggested that cultural differences may influence the link between materialism and impulsive purchase behavior, but specific studies were not found in this context. However, it is crucial to recognize that impulsive buying behavior can result in adverse outcomes such as financial strain and psychological distress. Thus, understanding the link between materialistic tendency as centrality and impulse purchase behavior is crucial for comprehending consumer behavior and its implications for well-being.

**H3: Materialism as centrality will positively impact Impulse Buying Behavior**



**Figure 1: Proposed Theoretical Framework**

*Source: Authors' Own Compilation*

## 5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a structured questionnaire containing 22 items to systematically investigate the phenomenon of impulse buying among customers of apparel outlets in the shopping malls of Punjab. Data collection was conducted in the major urban cities of Amritsar, Jalandhar, and Ludhiana, utilizing the Mall Intercept Method to intercept and engage potential participants within the retail environment

A seven-point Likert scale was incorporated into the survey questionnaire design for assessing respondents' propensity for impulsive purchasing behavior. Of the 655 questionnaires distributed, 612 were returned with complete responses, indicating a high level of participation and ensuring a robust dataset for analysis. The demographic profile of the sample population, encompassing various socio-economic categories, was delineated and displayed in Table 1. This demographic segmentation serves to facilitate a nuanced understanding of potential associations or differentiations in impulse buying tendencies across diverse demographic strata.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Demographic Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	285	46.6
	Female	327	53.4
Marital Status	Married	316	51.6
	Unmarried	296	48.4
Educational Qualification	Undergraduate	111	18.1
	Graduate	187	30.6
	Postgraduate	272	44.4
	Doctorate	20	3.3
	Others	21	3.4

Occupation	Service	159	26
	Self Employed	92	15
	Business	46	7.5
	Student	195	31.9
	Retired	11	1.8
	Homemaker	90	14.7
	Farming	5	0.8
	Any Other	14	2.3
	Up to 50,000	149	24.3
	50,001-75,000	249	40.7
	75,001-1,00,000	113	18.5
	1,00,001 & Above	101	16.5

Source: Author's Compilation from data collected

## 6. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

In this study, PLS-SEM using Smart PLS (4.0) software is employed as the primary analytical tool to investigate the relationship between various constructs in the analysis. PLS-SEM is particularly appropriate for analyzing interactions among latent variables, making it well-suited for this research objective (Hair et al., 2017). The initial phase of the assessment involves establishing measurement model, where the relationships between the measured indicators and underlying constructs are assessed. This process allows for the evaluation of the reliability and validity of the measurement tool employed in the research (Henseler et al., 2016). Through the measurement model, the extent to which these indicators accurately capture the underlying constructs is determined, laying the foundation for subsequent structural model testing.

Subsequently, the structural model is analysed to investigate the causal interactions among the latent constructs. This stage allows for the assessment of the direct effects among the variables of interest (Hair et al., 2017). Overall, PLS-SEM offers a robust framework for analyzing the complex interplay between various factors (Henseler et al., 2016)

Table 2: Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability and Average Variance Extracted

Constructs	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)

Impulse Buying Behavior	0.936	0.937	0.955	0.842
Materialism as Centrality	0.915	0.935	0.931	0.661
Materialism as Happiness	0.891	0.905	0.919	0.696
Materialism as Success	0.938	0.976	0.949	0.755

Source: Authors' Calculation using Smart PLS

Table 3: Discriminant Validity (HTMT criterion)

Constructs	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance
Impulse Buying Behavior				
Materialism as Centrality	0.319			
Materialism as Happiness	0.222	0.419		
Materialism as Success	0.141	0.513	0.401	

Source: Authors' Calculation using Smart PLS

## 7. ASSESSMENT OF MEASUREMENT MODEL

The analysis of the measurement model in this study was comprehensive, beginning with a convergent validity test that analysed items' loadings, AVE, and CR. Table 2 demonstrates the values of reliability and convergent validity. The findings indicated that all items surpassed the recommended loading threshold of 0.6, and AVE values ranged between 0.557 and 0.756, surpassing the acceptable threshold of 0.5. Additionally, CR values were within the range of 0.769 to 0.880, aligning with established standards (Hair et al., 2017).

Subsequently, as described by Table 3, discriminant validity was evaluated by utilizing HTMT ratio, as suggested by Henseler et al., (2016). HTMT values below 0.85 or 0.90 demonstrate adequate discriminant validity. The study presumably found that the HTMT values met these criteria, confirming the adequacy of measurement model concerning both convergent and discriminant validity.

Table 4: Findings of structural model

Constructs	Coefficient	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values	Hypothesis Acceptance
Materialism as Centrality -> Impulse Buying Behavior	0.281	0.041	6.829	0.000	Accepted
Materialism as Happiness -> Impulse Buying Behavior	0.111	0.043	2.620	0.009	Accepted
Materialism as Success -> Impulse Buying Behavior	-0.030	0.042	0.707	0.480	Rejected

Source: Authors' Calculation using Smart PLS

## 8. ASSESSMENT OF STRUCTURAL MODEL

Two hypotheses out of three were upheld based on the results obtained from a bootstrapping procedure involving 5,000 resamples, as detailed in Table 4. Notably, Materialism as Centrality ( $\beta = 0.281$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ) emerged as a significant determinant of Impulse Buying Behavior. Furthermore, it was observed that Materialism as Happiness ( $\beta = 0.111$ ,  $p < 0.009$ ), significantly influenced Impulse Buying Behavior. Nevertheless, Materialism as Success did not significantly influence Impulse Buying Behavior. ( $\beta = -0.030$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). These findings provide a nuanced understanding of how different dimensions of materialism have an impact on Impulse Buying Behavior.

## 9. DISCUSSION

In this study, the results demonstrate support for two out of the three hypotheses proposed. Materialism as Centrality emerged as a robust predictor of Impulse Buying Behavior, indicating that individuals who prioritize material items as key elements to their existence often exhibit a higher tendency towards spontaneous purchases. This finding is consistent with prior work by Belk (1985) and Dittmar (2005), who found similar associations between materialism and impulsive buying tendencies among various consumer groups. Additionally, Materialism as Happiness was also found to significantly influence Impulse Buying Behavior, suggesting that individuals who equate material possessions with happiness are more inclined to indulge in impulsive purchases. This finding corroborates the work of Richins and Dawson (1992), who proposed that materialism serves as a means for individuals to attain happiness through consumption. These insights add to an in-depth comprehension of the motivations underlying consumerism and suggest potential paths for prospective studies on the interaction between materialism and impulsive purchases.

However, the findings of the present study did not demonstrate a significant relationship between materialism as success and impulse buying behavior. This result contrasts with prior studies such as Kasser et al. (2004) and Roberts and Jones (2013), which reported a positive association between

success-oriented materialism and impulsive purchasing tendencies. One plausible explanation for this divergence may lie in the socio-cultural context of India, where success is often associated with long-term financial stability, social mobility, and responsible consumption rather than immediate acquisition of goods. In such a context, individuals who equate material possessions with success may exhibit more deliberate and goal-oriented purchasing patterns, thereby reducing impulsive spending tendencies. This finding suggests that materialism as success may not uniformly predict impulse buying across cultural settings, highlighting the importance of contextual factors in understanding materialistic consumption patterns.

## **10. IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND DIRECTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

This study delved into the realm of materialism and its impact on impulsive purchase behavior, shedding light on crucial determinants in consumer decision-making processes. We found that Materialism as Centrality and Materialism as Happiness exhibit a significant impact on impulsive purchase behavior, emphasizing the nuanced role of material possessions in shaping consumer tendencies. These findings bear significant implications for marketers and retailers, highlighting the importance of understanding and catering to consumers' materialistic inclinations to effectively stimulate impulsive purchases.

Moreover, this study enhances the existing literature by extending the investigation of materialism facets to the area of impulse buying behavior, providing insights into the intricate interplay between psychological motivations and consumer actions. While prior research has explored materialism in various consumer contexts, this study serves as one of the pioneering endeavors to specifically examine its influence on impulse buying behavior, thereby enriching the understanding of consumer behavior dynamics.

Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge the limitations intrinsic to this study. At the outset, the constructs examined in our model represent only a subset of the myriad antecedents that may impact impulsive purchase behavior. Factors such as Store Environment and Impulse Buying Trait, which have been shown to exert significant impacts on Impulse Buying Behavior were not included in this research. Subsequent studies should endeavour to incorporate these additional constructs to offer a broader comprehension of the factors affecting impulsive purchase behavior along with materialism. Moreover, this study was conducted in Punjab, potentially limiting the applicability of its findings to wider populations. Subsequent research efforts should seek to replicate our study in diverse cultural and geographical settings to ascertain the robustness and universality of the observed relationships.

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