

Developing the M-H-IB Model to Explain the Mediational Role of Hedonism on Materialism and Impulse Buying Relationship : Proposing a Research Framework

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Abstract

Purpose : The present study aimed to bring together the stimulus factors, which includes materialism and hedonism, in describing impulse buying. The dynamic nature of the shift in consumers' buying behavior prompts consumer researchers to respond to these changes, which becomes a key for marketers and practitioners to unlock the mist of need recognition among consumers and design effective marketing strategies accordingly. This study proposed a model where hedonism (H), which happens to be a precursor to impulse buying, is conceived as a mediator in the optimistic materialism (M) – impulse buying (IB) relationship.

Methodology : This study is an extensive literature review of nationally and internationally published papers in peer-reviewed journals. The study incorporated all the relevant papers' research findings that matched specific keyword search results. At the same time, this research paper undertook iterative search techniques to finalize the net-reviewed research papers. The study excluded articles that were not pertinent or did not fall under the abovementioned criteria.

Findings : The extensive literature review prompted structuring of the hedonism-mediated optimistic materialism-impulse buying (M-H-IB) research framework. We found that this model is logically valid and seeks future empirical investigation. This finding provides a microscopic view of the understanding of impulse buying.

Practical Implications : Studies in consumer behavior are essential because it helps consumer researchers understand the deep-rooted motivations that impose a change in consumers' characteristics and psychology. Understanding these changes becomes a key for marketers and practitioners to unlock the mist of need recognition among consumers and design effective marketing communications and advertisements accordingly to market their offerings successfully. This study proposed a model where hedonism, which happens to be a precursor to impulse buying, is conceived as a mediator in the optimistic materialism–impulse buying relationship.

Originality : Unlike prior research, this M-H-IB model is essential because it can establish a closed-loop estimation of the influence of materialism and hedonism on impulse buying. Further, this approach enriched consumer research by attempting to reduce the lack of defined marketing models in the research community.

Keywords : materialism, hedonism, impulse, impulse buying, mediation, consumer behaviour, consumer research, consumer marketing, advertising

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Prior definitions of impulsive or impulse buying described consumers' buying behavior as synonymous with buying without planning. Scholars define impulsive buying as purchases with pre-planned or pre-listed shopping items. However, this idea was challenged when Rook (1987) argued that all unplanned purchases

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are not an outcome of a consumer's impulsivity. The researcher further argued that impulsive buying occurs even when considerable planning is involved in a purchase process. Iyer (1989) simplified the context by stating all impulsive buying is a phenomenon without planning; however, all unplanned purchases are not necessarily impulsive in the application. The phenomenon of impulsive buying has drawn the research community's attention for over seven decades. Prior studies on consumer buying impulsivity were mainly conducted on consumers after entering a retail shopping environment.

In this context, several scholars have explored the impact of situational antecedents on impulse purchases (Beatty & Ferrell, 1998; Luo, 2005; Lin & Chen, 2013; Muruganantham & Bhakat, 2013; Rook & Fisher, 1995; Saptono et al., 2019) within a retail environment. The situational factors include store layout, light, and music in the shopping environment, the situation of a particular buyer – are they in a hurry or are relaxed while shopping, etc. Also, in the same context, research has been conducted on understanding the impact of external factors on impulse purchases (Applebaum, 1951; Atulkar & Kesari, 2018; Duarte et al., 2013; Hultén & Vanyushyn, 2011; Lucas & Koff, 2014; Stern, 1962) such as signage, display and packaging, flash discounts, etc. Further, in recent times, Sen and Nayak (2021) argued that the buying impulsivity of consumers is also driven by certain internal factors which are embedded within an individual, such as materialism (Sen & Nayak, 2019), hedonism (Sen & Nayak, 2021), and perceived risk (Sen, 2022). Therefore, the modern research continuum examines impulse buying among consumers through the lens of situational, external, and internal factors as predictor variables.

Although the interest in understanding the effects of internal factors on impulsive buying is increasing, the application of the same in designing research frameworks that will guide future quantitative research is scarce. Therefore, this study's objective is to propose only a predictive model for impulse buying within the purview of internal factors. Sen and Nayak (2021) proposed a direct relationship between impulse buying with hedonism and materialism. Further, Sen and Nayak (2019) empirically examined the relationship between materialism and impulse buying. Despite these studies, along with many others, rarely has any study reviewed the interrelation between internal factors in explaining impulse buying as the outcome variable. Hence, this study proposes a materialism-hedonism-impulse buying (M-H-IB) model, enabling us to explore hedonism's mediating role in explaining the materialism-impulse buying relationship. The present study is critical because it allows researchers to understand whether hedonism succeeds materialism when explaining the phenomenon of impulse buying among customers. This understanding will therefore empower marketing managers to understand better the line of their communication to boost the impulsive buying of their customers.

Literature Review

Impulse Buying

The dilemma of studying impulsive buying is that, although the phenomenon is viewed as normatively wrong by researchers and social scientists; still, its importance in business is immense and cannot be neglected. The considerable volume of sales across product categories that happens through impulse buying attracts the attention of consumer researchers (Cobb & Hoyer, 1986; Jain et al., 2018; Kollat & Willett, 1967; Rook & Fisher, 1995; Weinberg & Gottwald, 1982). In the early stages of research, although it was assumed that impulse buying occurs for specific products or product categories, the modern conceptualization agrees that buying anything under impulsive cognition is possible. The contemporary notion of the study of impulse buying was primarily formulated when Rook and Hoch (1985) opined that both people and products are to be brought under the same purview to explain the phenomenon of impulse buying. As discussed earlier, researchers had previously conceived the phenomenon of impulse buying as a display of unplanned buying behavior. Later, the literature on impulse buying argued that not all unplanned purchases are impulsive. In this context, researchers, over time, have categorized impulse buying and defined each category (Stern, 1962) as follows :

✦ **Pure Impulse Buying.** This is characterized by the buying activity, which is an outcome of fun and joy by the customer while shopping.

✦ **Reminder Impulse Buying.** This is characterized by the event where a shopper suddenly recalls the need to replenish a particular item (at home) under the trigger of certain internal or external stimuli.

✦ **Suggestion Impulse Buying.** This is characterized by the event where a buyer gets exposed to a specific product for the first time and has no prior knowledge about the product but still agrees to buy the same then and there at that particular moment.

✦ **Planned Impulse Buying.** This is characterized by the event where a customer arranges for the shopping but does not keep any predispositions on what to shop for; therefore, he/she ultimately ends up buying impulsively.

In today's world, impulse buying is gaining traction across the globe. Erstwhile, it was only restricted to the developed western countries in the world. However, it is also common in the Eastern developing emerging economies (Sen & Nayak, 2021, 2019); research on impulse buying still lacks proper research models to test empirically. This study is, therefore, undertaken to provide an M-H-IB model or research framework in the research continuum.

Materialism

Understanding materialism becomes essential for consumer researchers because of its idiosyncratic association with customers' buying and consumption behavior (Moore & Berger, 2015; Preet & Ahluwalia, 2019). Broadly, materialism in social studies was conceptualized in two distinct forms. First, Belk (1984) conceived materialism as a prominence that people attach to possessing material goods. This conceptualization of materialism encircled three significant dimensions – possessiveness, non-generosity, and envy – suggesting that materialistic individuals put a high value on worldly possessions and are unwilling to share their possessions with others. Also, they envy others' possessions (Belk, 1985). Therefore, according to this concept, materialism was viewed as some intrinsic factor that an individual possesses and is reflected through their personality. A materialistic customer should display different buying behaviors and patterns from their counterparts. Second, the conceptualization of materialism revolves around value centrality. Richins and Dawson (1992) proclaimed materialism as a bundle of an individual's centrally held beliefs describing the importance of possessions in life. This concept of materialism hovers around three essential dimensions – centrality towards possession, happiness derived through possession, and possession as an indicator of success in one's life. Therefore, this concept upholds the value that possession adds to a materialistic individual's perception and life. Hence, the difference between these two conceptualizations can be summarized by stating that the first concept views materialism in the light of emotional reactions. In contrast, the second captures the cognitive beliefs of an individual. Although both conceptualizations hold, the second is more directed towards understanding buyer's behavior and thus becomes more relevant in measurable terms.

Cognitive Dimensions of Materialism

✦ **Materialism as Acquisition Centrality (MC).** Researchers posited that acquisitions and possessions of material goods are pivotal for materialists. At an elevated stage, this value of materialism becomes a lifestyle where a high level of material possessions is perceived to be the goal of life.

✦ **Material Acquisition as a Pursuit of Happiness (MH).** In continuation to the centrality theory, Belk (1984)

described that the reason for placing material acquisition as a central goal of life arises within an individual because the individual derives happiness from their possessions. Richins and Dawson (1992) further stated that the pursuit of happiness is ordinary in human beings; however, the difference between materialists and their counterparts is that materialist individuals resort to possession and acquisition rather than other things as a means to derive happiness.

✦ **Materialism as a Possession-Defined Success (MS).** Materialist individuals in a consumer society evaluate themselves and others regarding the volume and quality of material possessions they have (Rassuli & Hollander, 1986). Researchers also opine that for materialist individuals, well-being derived from material possessions is not only a means to find happiness but is also perceived as evidence of success in life (Du Bois, 1955).

The research framework in this study conceptualizes the construct of materialism at an individual level and so incorporates the cognitive dimensions of this construct. This study finds that consumer researchers better explain materialism when viewed from the mental lens because this closely governs a customer's buying behavior. Since this study revolves around customers' impulsive buying, the prominence of materialism is better when analyzed from a cognitive lens of reference.

Hedonism

The idea of hedonism arises from the pursuit of pleasure by human beings (Agarwal & Raychaudhuri, 2019; Bocheliuk et al., 2019). Scholars have evaluated the phenomenon of hedonism from the lenses of values and moral textures of human beings. Evaluative hedonism posits that hedonism represents the intrinsic values of human beings where they strive for pleasure and break loose from pain, while decadent hedonism, on the other hand, explains hedonic motivations as a moral decay where individuals succumb to self-pleasure and luxurious self-indulgence. Greek thinker, Epicurus, categorized pleasure into kinetic and katastematic. Kinetic pleasure describes the never-ending desire for the happiness of human beings. In contrast, katastematic joy explains the state of an individual where he/she experiences the pleasure of fulfillment – not aspiring for anything more.

The construct of hedonism, in this study, aims to capture the influence of pleasure-seeking motivations of customers on their buying impulsivity. In buyers' buying behavior, hedonism captures the value it induces into the shopping motivations – hedonic shopping values. Therefore, consumer researchers evaluate hedonism as the value generated during a customer's shopping experience independent of the purchase and other task-related activities (Yu & Bastin, 2010). If a buying experience generates a sense of pleasure and fun within the shopper, it should impact the buyers' buying behavior. Batra and Ahtola (1991) described the buying process under hedonistic motivation as a consummatory sensory gratification generated from the customer's sensory routes.

The research framework in this study conceptualizes the construct of hedonism at an individual level as a value that governs buyers' buying behaviors and, in turn, their impulse buying. Since this study revolves around customers' impulsive buying, the prominence of hedonism is better when analyzed from the lens of hedonic shopping value.

Propositions

Materialism and Impulse Buying

Materialism upholds the idea of pleasure-seeking among individuals. Prior research posited that materially motivated consumers gain deep gratification and positivity from buying a product and that they perceive these acquisitions to increase their self-esteem and social status (Atulkar & Kesari, 2018). This never-ending pursuit of

possession through acquisition leads materialist buyers to impulsive actions while buying. Thus, impulsivity is expressed during the buying process derived from the value of materialism embedded within the customer. Chancellor and Lyubomirsky (2011) described the never-ending pursuit of gratification through a hedonic treadmill concept. Therefore, the constant quest for acquisition should push individuals to indulge in unplanned shopping – leading to impulsive buying. Therefore, this study proposes the following :

✎ **Proposition 1 :** The materialistic values of human beings positively influence impulsive buying.

Hedonism and Impulse Buying

Babin et al. (1994) posited that the impulse buying activity of customers is an outcome of their hedonic motivations. Hence, research on impulse buying across the globe considers hedonism as an antecedent of impulse buying, that is, hedonism can describe the phenomenon of impulse buying. Further researchers also opined that consumers' hedonic predisposition to seeking pleasure and fun strongly influenced their impulse buying behavior (Herabadi et al., 2009; Prashar et al., 2015). So, it is seen that prior researchers established the influence of hedonism on impulse buying over time. Therefore, it rules out whether there is any relationship between these constructs in consumer research. The question that needs to be asked to understand the hedonism and impulse buying relationship is why consumers indulge in impulse buying. Is it due to their hedonic propensity, which means seeking to understand what prompts them to seek hedonistic motivations in their buying context? Verplanken and Sato (2011) proposed two probable reasons for this question. First, they posited that hedonism leads an individual to ascribe to positive emotions (Rook & Gardner, 1993) and that positive emotions generate a vigorous drive toward impulse buying among customers. Hence, hedonism can be identified as a significant influencer of impulse buying. Second, researchers posited that not only positive emotions find a way into impulse buying but also negative mood states, such as low self-esteem, etc., which can also trigger impulse buying. Individuals seek pleasure and joy and eliminate the adverse effects (Silvera et al., 2008), resulting in customers indulging in impulse buying (Holbrook & Gardner, 2000).

Further, the theory of time-inconsistent preferences argues that the short-lived joy that impulse buying generates within a shopper plays a more critical role in an individual than the rationale-driven long-term assessments of benefits over the costs incurred (Hoch & Loewenstein, 1991). In addition, the theory of psychological distance emphasizes the importance and the influence of the proximity of objects on individuals' understanding of the present situation (Laran, 2010). This theory argues that the proximity of the buying objects to a buyer excites the buyer and thereby influences the buyer's buying behavior, that is, the proximity of the bright things generates hedonic motivations, and thus the action of impulse buying becomes very obvious. Therefore, based on the above arguments, this study proposes the following :

✎ **Proposition 2 :** Hedonism positively influences impulse buying among customers.

Materialism and Hedonism

As mentioned in the previous section, the never-ending pursuit of gratification is termed the 'hedonic treadmill' by Chancellor and Lyubomirsky (2011). It is argued by researchers in modern days that materialistic values are connected with the hedonic motivations of customers and that one complements the other. The strong and irresistible urge for material possessions describes the importance of materialism and that this urge generates a hedonic treadmill within an individual, leading to impulsive buying. Earlier in this study, it was stated that materialism is viewed as a set of intrinsic factors (Belk, 1984) residing within an individual or a group of values governing an individual's life (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Also, this study has described hedonism as an

experience of pleasure and fun during shopping (Yu & Bastin, 2010) independent of purchasing activities. Therefore, these two statements combined hint toward a positive effect of materialism on the hedonic motivations of customers. Therefore, this study proposes the following :

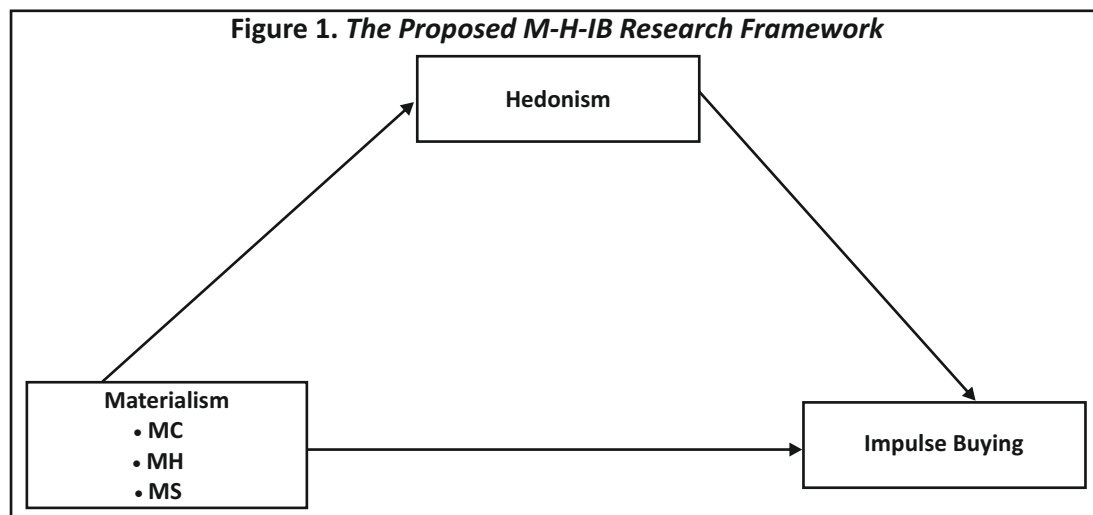
⇒ **Proposition 3** : Materialism positively influences hedonism among individuals.

Prior research, as mentioned above, has viewed materialism and hedonism as social and psychological phenomena. The incorporation of these constructs in consumer research is scarce. Further, the extensive literature review suggested a positive relationship between materialism and impulse buying and a positive relationship between hedonism and impulse buying. However, although previous research has identified hedonism as an antecedent of impulse buying, fewer attempts have been made to incorporate hedonism as a mediator in the materialism-impulse buying relationship. The lack of the abovementioned attempt inspires us to explore the research gap. In this context, logically establishing a hedonism-mediated materialism-impulse buying relationship becomes vitally important. It is already proposed that based on the pieces of evidence from past research, it is suggested that hedonism influences a customer positively and thus encourages the individual to engage in impulse buying. Therefore, combining the argument of proposition two and proposition three, it can be postulated that, in certain situations, hedonism acts as a mediator between the materialism and impulse buying relationship. Thus, this study argues that materialism positively influences hedonism, which leads an individual to impulse buying. Therefore, this study further proposes the following :

⇒ **Proposition 4** : Hedonism mediates the positive relationship between materialism and impulse buying.

Proposed Research Framework

The research framework is developed based on the above-posed propositions (Figure 1). This research framework helps decipher the relationships between the constructs, the direct and the mediational relationship.



This present research is a literature review and entails arguments for establishing a unique M-H-IB research framework. This study incorporates an extensive literature review of research articles published in national and international peer-reviewed journals between 2000 and 2023. However, to set the premise and bring in the

theoretical perspectives, this study referred to various seminal publications till today. The study includes all the relevant papers' research findings that matched specific keyword search results. At the same time, this research paper undertook iterative search techniques to finalize the net-reviewed research papers. It also excluded articles that were not pertinent or did not fall under the abovementioned criteria. Further, this study does not merely review the literature; based on prior research findings, and upon understanding the research gaps, this paper logically establishes a new research framework. The research framework is developed based on the following propositions :

- ✍ **Proposition 1 :** The materialistic values of human beings positively influence impulsive buying.
- ✍ **Proposition 2 :** Hedonism positively influences impulse buying among customers.
- ✍ **Proposition 3 :** Materialism positively influences hedonism among individuals.
- ✍ **Proposition 4 :** Hedonism mediates the positive relationship between materialism and impulse buying.

Managerial and Theoretical Implications

The practitioners or marketing managers follow a trial-and-error approach in devising strategies. This approach often leads to investments that turn out to be non-worthy. To understand modern consumers' behavior, particularly in the retail marketplace, it is vital to understand the importance of impulse buying. The growing materialistic practices coupled with indulging in hedonic methods make consumers of today and in the coming days much more volatile. The loyalty of consumers is critical for the sustainability of a business. Therefore, almost every business entity has devised some or other loyalty program strategies today. So, the question remains: why did every business not sustain and succeed? The immediate answer to this is the lack of understanding of the consumers. Studies like this research help managers understand the consumers' psychology that drives their buying behavior. Materialism and hedonism are critical drivers of impulse buying among millennials in India (Sen & Nayak, 2019, 2021). The proposed model in this study will be helpful for practitioners to identify the target segment with greater accuracy and devise advertisements and communication strategies accordingly.

Social researchers have pointed out that individuals' primary motivation source is to attain pleasure and avoid pain. However, they further argued it is not enough to understand this fact. Instead, knowing why individuals tend to do so is more crucial. Psychological tendencies explain an individual's behavior preferences (Podoshen et al., 2011); therefore, for consumer researchers, it becomes essential to transcend psychological factors into operationalizable constructs for studying consumer behavior. The present research aims at fulfilling this requirement. Further, the proposed model opens avenues for future researchers to test the research framework across several demographics and geographical boundaries. Since the research here adopts a comprehensive literature review approach to establish a research framework, it entails certain limitations while upholding the scope for future research.

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Future Research

Like every other research work, this study also has certain limitations. First, this research is limited to a literature review, so it lacks empirical evidence. Second, this research has not modified its scope to a specific market and its possibilities. Thus, combining the abovementioned points, the research findings cannot be generalized. This study is critical because it has attempted to produce a testable framework for future research, where the internal stimulus factors responsible for consumers' impulse buying are conceptualized to form a closed-loop model. This will be useful for researchers with similar interests to visualize the constructs in attestable form. Prior studies have proven that hedonism is an essential precursor to the impulsive buying behavior of customers; however, the question of

whether hedonism can arise from consumers' materialistic approaches is not addressed. This study attempts to answer this question through an extant literature review and proposes an empirically testable model for future research. Future studies can also try to include constructs like risk perception and impulsive buying tendency into this proposed model and test the same. This study is aimed to open further avenues in research in the domain of impulse buying.

Author's Contribution

Dr. Shaon Sen conceived and developed the research framework proposed in the study. He extracted all the research papers with high reputation and filtered those based on keyword search. He has also performed an iterative search for the selection of relevant research papers to be included in the study. Dr. Shaon Sen wrote the final manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The author certifies that he has no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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