

# Consequences of Impulse Buying Cross-Culturally: A Qualitative Study

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## Abstract

*This study explores how normative influences impact impulse buying across cultures. This qualitative study is conducted using Korean and American respondents to represent culture differences. Previous literature suggests that individuals from collectivist societies place more value on the normative judgments of others. This increased emphasis on the normative values of others coupled with the consequences of impulse buying may seriously impact impulse buying behavior and across cultures. The authors are exploring these possibilities through in-depth focus interviews. In addition, the authors will formulate a multi-cultural model of impulse buying behavior based on the qualitative results. Finally, the authors will discuss the limitations of this study and conclude with some implications for the marketers and researchers.*

**Keywords:** *impulse buying, buying behavior, cross-cultural study, qualitative study*

## 1. Introduction

More and more companies have adopted a global outlook through which the world becomes their market. Numerous major corporations, such as Coca-Cola, IBM, P&G, Honda and Sony, receive over half of their earnings from foreign operations. Such situations require the marketer's appreciation of both cultural differences among international markets and the influence of these differences on consumer behavior [42, 37, 36].

The rapid growth of international business in general and international marketing in particular, has created a need for cross-cultural consumer research [12]. Following research traditions in other comparative social sciences, such as comparative sociology, comparative political science, and cross-cultural psychology, the fundamental purpose of cross-cultural consumer research should be to test whether the consumer theories and concepts that are developed in one culture are also valid in and applicable to other cultures [50].

Impulse buying represents one such area. Impulse buying is an area of great profitability for marketers. Impulse buying represents up to 80 percent of all purchases in certain product categories and over four billion dollars of annual sales in the U.S. [2, 1, 51, 52]. A 1997 study found that an estimated \$4.2 billion annual store volume was generated by impulse sales of items such as candy and magazines [39].

However, much of the research done in this area focuses on American consumers, while little is known about the impulse buying habits of other non-western cultures. Another issue not receiving much attention in the impulse buying literature is the area of consequences. We

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found no study in the impulse buying literature that directly examined the effects of the consequences of impulse buying fully or from a cross-cultural perspective.

Although cross-cultural research is clearly important in the consumer buying behavior area, the volume of research in this area is quite limited. In a review of papers between 1970 to 1990, Sojka and Tansuhaj (1995) found that only 118 articles, or less than five percent of the total articles examined, focused on cross-cultural consumer research [53]. In their recent study, Lee and Kacen (2007, 1999) suggest that different national cultures significantly influence consumer's impulsive buying behavior. Specifically, several dimensions of cross-cultural influences, like individualism and collectivism, may hold important insights about consumer behavior that can give us a better understanding of consumers' impulsive buying behavior [33].

The purpose of this study is to conduct a cross-cultural study of the impact of normative evaluations on impulsive buying behavior and its possible consequences through the use of qualitative procedures. In order to achieve these objectives, we pose the following two important questions: 1) what types of individual differences influence impulsive buying behavior and its consequences? and 2) are there any differences between the two cultures?

To answer those questions, we will briefly review the previous literature of impulsive buying behavior and will suggest more specific research questions. Based on those research questions, we will examine this topic across Korean and American cultures, using qualitative methods based on the idea of grounded theory [56].

## 2. Literature Review

In this part of the paper, we reviewed the previous literature on impulsive buying behavior. We will discuss the concept of impulsive buying behavior and its determinants (*e.g.* impulsive buying tendency and felt urge) and outcomes (*e.g.* positive and negative results). This discussion is then used to develop specific research questions about how Korean and American cultural differences may influence a consumer's impulsive buying behavior and the consequences of that behavior.

### 2.1. Impulsive Buying (IB)

Impulsive behavior has a long history of being associated with immaturity, primitivism, foolishness, and other social deviance and criminality [15, 38]. Serious research of impulse buying began in the early 1950's. At this point impulse buying was seen simply as an unplanned purchase [47]. Later, research began focusing on how demographic and lifestyle characteristics affected impulse buying susceptibility [31].

#### *What is IB and why does it matter?*

One of the biggest developments in impulse buying research was the realization that internal motivations led to impulse buying behavior rather than the idea that certain products were more prone to impulse purchases [47]. Previously, researchers thought that only specific product categories, like candy or magazines, were susceptible to impulse purchases. In addition, the idea that all unplanned purchases were impulsively decided was abandoned, as the complexity of impulse buying behavior became more apparent [55]. In Table 1, we show that impulse buying has been defined in various ways. Overall, impulse buying is characterized as "an unplanned purchase" that is characterized by 1) relatively rapid decision-making, and 2) a subjective bias in favor of immediate possession [48, 47].

**Table 1. Definitions of Impulsive Buying Behavior**

Author(s)	Definitions of Impulsive Buying
Bellenger et al (1978)	Impulse purchasing can best be defined in terms of whether or not the purchaser makes the decision to purchase the product before or after entering the store.
Weinberg and Gottwald (1982)	Impulse buying is characterized as encompassing purchases with high emotional activation, low cognitive control, and largely reactive behavior.
Etzioni (1986)	The economic behavior based on the assumption that it is essentially nonrational.
Cobb and Hoyer (1986)	Impulse or unplanned purchasing is when one makes the decision to buy the item(s) while in the store.
Gerbing, Ahadi, and Patton (1987)	Impulsiveness is defined as “a tendency to respond quickly to a given stimulus, without deliberation and evaluation of consequences”
Rook (1987)	Impulse buying happens when a consumer experiences a sudden and often powerful and persistent urge to buy something immediately.
Iyer (1989)	Unplanned purchasing behavior is related to knowledge of the store environment and time pressure. Unplanned purchases are over and above routine purchases, which are fulfilled invariably.
Rook and Gardner (1993)	“An unplanned purchase” that is characterized by 1) relatively rapid decision-making, and 2) a subjective bias in favor of immediate possession.

Until recently, researchers have been satisfied with defining impulse buying behavior based only on the behavior of western shoppers. As a result, in this study, we examine the differences in impulsive buying behaviors of consumers from two different cultures. It is possible that consumers from different cultures engage in impulse buying differently. Therefore, we pose the following research question:

***RQ1. Are there any differences between impulse buying of American and Korean consumers?***

Beatty and Ferrell (1998) extended Rook’s definition, “Impulse buying is a sudden and immediate purchase with no pre-shopping intentions either to buy the specific product category or to fulfill a specific buying task [5]. The behavior occurs after experiencing an urge to buy and it tends to be spontaneous and without a lot of reflection (*i.e.*, it is “impulsive”). It does not include the purchase of a simple reminder item, which is an item that is simply out-of-stock at home.”

In their definition, Beatty and Ferrell (1998) insured that the shopper did not intend to buy the item before entering the shopping area and that fulfilling a planned task, such as buying a gift for someone, is not an impulse purchase [5]. Also, it includes the idea of impulsiveness, which involves acting spontaneously without full consideration of the consequences [16]. Finally, they focused on the act of buying, while seeing the felt urge to buy impulsively as a precursor to the act.

***RQ2. Are there any differences in the felt urge and its effects on actual buying behavior between American and Korean consumers?***

Previous research has shown that many factors influence the relationship between impulse buying tendency trait and impulsive buying behavior [33]: such as, situational variables, time pressure, money available [26, 5]; the consumer’s mood or emotional state [11, 47, 48]; trait buying impulsiveness [27, 43, 47, 49, 63]; product category [27, 63]; demographic factors,

gender [10]; and age [65, 6]. All of these factors moderate the relationship between impulse buying tendency and impulse buying behavior. However, previous research does not consider the effects of normative evaluations about the appropriate-ness of engaging in impulsive buying.

In their recent study of impulsive buying process, Beatty and Ferrell (1998) provide insights about which variables influence shoppers' impulse buying urges and actions [5]. In this study, we look at three relatively unexplored factors 1) Normative evaluations 2) Consequences 3) The effects of cultural on both.

### *Normative influences*

Although consumer researchers have investigated impulse buying for nearly 50 years, very few studies have empirically examined the normative aspects [49]. Rook and Fisher (1995) defined normative evaluations as consumer's judgments about the appropriateness of making an impulsive purchase in a particular buying situation [49]. They suggest that normative evaluations on individual behavior provide both general and specific social guidelines for acceptable conduct in particular situations. They propose that the normative evaluations of a consumer's family and friends have the potential to influence a consumer's impulse buying behavior.

The more visible our impulse purchases and the more likely the purchases are to be viewed as inappropriate by our peers the less likely one is to engage in impulsive buying behavior [49]. Rook and Fisher (1995) found that the relationship between buying impulsiveness and impulse buying is moderated by consumers' normative evaluations of the behavior [49]. This leads to the following research questions:

***RQ3a. Are there any differences in the normative evaluation process of impulse buying behavior between American and Korean consumers?***

***RQ3b. What kinds of normative evaluations will influence impulsive buying and how? Are there any differences between American and Korean consumers?***

### *Consequences*

Even though impulse buying behavior has been extensively researched the impact of the consequences of impulse purchases has been relatively unexplored. An article by Dennis Rook (1987) [47] briefly raised the issue. In the article, respondents were asked whether they had ever incurred any negative consequences as a result of their impulse buying and over 80% responded positively. Consumers reported experiencing a litany of problems including financial problems, disappointment with the product, feelings of guilt, and disapproval among family and friends. Understanding how the perception of consequences impacts an individual's impulse buying behavior is an important research area that warrants further investigation.

Thus, we want to explore some of the concerns individuals have when making impulse purchases. Further, we believe that consequences can be both negative and positive. We especially want to focus on the perceived consequences individuals consider both before and after making an impulse purchase. Based on the above discussion, we propose the following research questions:

***RQ4. What kinds of consequences do consumers consider before making an impulse purchase?***

***RQ4b. What types of considered consequences stop consumers from acting on the felt urge to purchase impulsively?***

Although some researchers have expressed concern over the idea of consumers considering consequences prior to a supposed impulse purchase, according to the literature it is acceptable to consider the desire or urge to purchase impulsively separately from the impulse purchase behavior. “The felt urge to buy impulsively is a state of desire that is experienced upon encountering an object in the environment. It clearly precedes the actual impulse action.” [5]. In the middle of this experience the consideration of possible consequences occurs. An urge or desire is not always acted upon [49]. Hence, researchers are interested to determine why and under what circumstances do the considered consequences prevent impulse purchases.

### ***Cultural aspects***

There are several cultural dimensions, such as individualism and collectivism, which have an impact on consumer behavior. For example, several previous cross-cultural studies have found that the Korean culture is relatively high in collectivism and the American culture is based on individualism [3, 30]. In their 1999 paper, Lee and Kacen adapted theory from cross-cultural psychology and tried to identify several factors that are related to a consumer's impulsive purchase decisions [33]. They found that people from more collectivist countries (Malaysia and Singapore) had more strongly correlated independent and interdependent self-concepts than people from more individualist countries (US and Australia).

In their second paper, Kacen and Lee (2002) proposed that according to the western definition of impulse buying behavior that collectivist ideal of interdependence, emotional control, moderation, and focus on group needs would reduce the relationship between the impulse buying tendency trait and impulse buying behavior [28]. Kacen and Lee's findings suggest that individuals from collectivist cultures do indeed engage in less impulse buying behavior than individuals from individualist cultures.

In their third paper, Kacen and Lee (2007) examined differences in individualist consumers and collectivist consumers in terms of their impulse purchasing and presence of another person at the time of purchase [29]. They found that consumers from a more collectivist culture were more satisfied with an impulse purchase when another person is present at the time of purchase.

Although, the findings of this study are important, the study failed to consider other cultural differences which may have accounted for the differences in impulse buying behavior. It is possible that several cultural dimensions influence impulsive buying and its consequences. Two possible reasons are the negative consequences perceived by collectivist could be greater than that of individualist and the value placed on the normative evaluations of others by collectivist could be greater than that of individualist.

### ***RQ5. How do the consequences considered vary based on cultural differences?***

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1. Qualitative Methods**

Our focus is to use exploratory qualitative research to discover how peers' normative evaluations may impact one's impulse buying behavior and its perceived consequences. We hope to uncover the full range of normative evaluations and consequences considered during the impulse buying process and compare how these evaluations and consequences differ according to culture. During our research we hope to determine if normative evaluations play a greater role in regulating consumer behavior in collectivist based cultures.

Our study will consist of unstructured, in-depth interviews with Koreans and Americans. The interviews will then be analyzed with grounded theory data analysis techniques. Many

important concepts, theoretical relationships, and themes could be discovered, but here we will only present findings relevant to consumer's impulsive buying behavior. We choose the interview method in order to facilitate respondents' ability to be reflective and open in expressing their feelings and emotions without self-censure or inhibition as to how others may perceive them

In-depth interviews are a powerful technique for exploring the participant's perspective in an open ended manner. Responses are often probed for clarification to understand the participant's perspective. Non-directive probes (such as "can you tell me more about that?" or "what exactly do you mean by that?") are often used to avoid leading the participants. The interviews will be held at the conference room of church and other convenience places to maintain the context of a natural environment. With the participant's permission, each interview will be audio taped and then transcribed for data analysis purposes.

### **3.2. Subjects**

We conducted twenty one in-depth interviews of individuals from Korea (11) and the U.S. (10). Their ages range between 20 through 30. We also limited participation to Korean respondents' living in America less than one year. Thereby, allowing us to capture information concerning their shopping habits in their home country with minimal influence of western ideals and shopping behavior. The respondents in this study are students and non-students from both countries. They include both male and female respondents. We gathered a pool of respondents who are single and married. We anticipate each interview were approximately 20 to 60 minutes in length.

### **3.3. Interview Guide Line and Schedules**

Each author conducted at least 10 interviews including 2-3 preliminary interviews. A structured depth interview consisting of 13 questions and 5-items scale of buying impulsiveness provides a framework for the interview process. First nine questions are about impulsive buying behavior, especially focused on the influences and consequences of impulse buying (e.g. are you generally satisfied with the items you buy impulsively?) and last four questions are about general shopping behaviors (e.g. where is your favorite shopping area?). Given discovery-oriented nature of this research, all 13 questions are not context-specific. We, sometimes, changed the order of questions and asked more detail about certain issues. We discussed and considered the changes for further interviews. Also, we included the buying impulsiveness scale to examine the consumer's impulsive orientation, which is developed by Rook and Fisher (1995) [49]. Each informant will be interviewed privately, Americans by the first author and Koreans by the second author, so that conversation would not be overheard by other family members or friends. Informants are promised complete confidentiality.

### **3.4. Analysis**

Grounded theory techniques are used to analyze the qualitative data. Such techniques allow the re-researcher to uncover and develop theory that emerges from the data. This is often called a "constant comparative method" because it closely examines concepts and scrutinizes relationships between them [56]. During analysis, specific working hypotheses are developed and then provisionally tested within and across different interviews. The researcher moves back and forth between deductive and inductive modes of analysis in a systematic fashion. The result is a tightly woven theory that emerges from and is "grounded" in the data.

Throughout the process, the authors' immerse themselves in the transcripts. In the beginning, each transcript was read and analyzed numerous times in order to become familiar with the phenomena being discussed [56]. Grounded theory techniques - including open, axial, and selective coding – were employed.

Triangulation across sources was used to search for redundancy among interviews [56]. The findings to be presented here emerge in many interviews. Negative case analysis whereby the researcher provisionally tests and challenges working hypotheses are used throughout the data analysis.

Once preliminary findings are generated, a confirmability audit was conducted. Two independent auditors were given several transcripts and the preliminary findings from data analysis. Each assessed the reported findings and the linkage to the transcripts. Overall, they confirmed the findings presented in this article. Finally, member checks were conducted with a sample of participants, who confirmed the findings and theoretical conclusions. These various techniques help to ensure our confidence in the validity and reliability of the research findings.

## **4. Findings**

### **4.1. Consequences of Impulse Buying**

Based on the interview results, some interesting information becomes apparent. As indicated through our research questions, we hoped to identify some possible consequences consumers consider between feeling the urge to buy impulsively and actually engaging in the buying behavior. Several respondents from both countries reported later monetary shortfalls because of their impulsive buying behavior.

“Sometimes I can't pay my bills and so I have had to return the items. You know because we still have to eat.”(28, single female, American)

“In the past I have not been able to pay a bill after buying a DVD movie or some clothes. I just didn't have enough money left over to do more important things.” (21, single female, American)

“Because I purchased this item impulsively, I could not buy the product that I intended to buy and needed.” (29, single male, Korean)

“After reviewing the spending of the month, I found that I spent too much money for buying the unintended items, such as cooking tools, and kid's toys. Because of that, I didn't have enough money to buy some products that I really needed. (30 married female, Korean)

These types of negative consequences are supported in the literature (Rook, 1987). In Rook's (1987) research 56% of respondents admitted having financial problems as a result of making some impulse purchase [47].

In addition subsequent interviews revealed other previously mentioned negative consequences. Rook (1987) reported that 37% of respondents suffered a disappointment with an impulse purchase [47].

“Yeah you know the product just didn't do like I thought it would. It didn't perform like they said it would.” (40, married female, American)

“One time I purchased some hair glitter at Wal-Mart and it didn't work at all...so I wasted five dollars just to see if it would work.” (22, single female, American)

“I purchased several instant food items impulsively, and found those foods are still in the refrigerator. And I think why did I purchase this.” (30, married female, Korean)

“I purchased a baseball glove for 50 bucks, which was not on the shopping list. Whenever I see the glove I realize that I did not use it, I regret buying that. I am sorry to my parents to buy that expensive item.” (28, single male, Korean).

These results are in line with previous research. The memories of past negative consequences endured as a result of ill-timed purchases may reduce one’s likelihood of future impulse purchases. In fact consumers use many strategies to control this desire to purchase impulsively [20]. One respondent reported that experiencing some financial hardships upon entering college and realizing that her parents would not help her out, significantly reduced her number of impulse purchases. Several other respondents reported “psyching” themselves out of a purchase or engaging in prolonged browsing in order to give themselves more time to consider the possible consequences of a purchase.

“I spend so much time in the store going back and forth –should I buy it or not—because I am running the consequences in my head and it’s a toss up on whether I buy it or not.” (22, single female, American)

“When I found my daughter’s cloth, I was thinking and thinking repeatedly, because its price level is a little high, but I liked its design and color so much. Also, I was thinking about my husband’s response. Should I buy this? After looking in another store and wasting time, finally I purchased it.” (29, married female, Korean)

As far as uncovering new consequences, I don’t think we found anything new. The idea of making impulse purchases in order to feel good was a reoccurring idea in the interviews. According to Baumeister (2002) conflicting goals are a major reason for self-control failure and subsequent impulse purchases [4]. This is particularly the case when the goal of feeling better immediately conflicts with the goal of saving money.

The idea that much of the pleasure came from acquiring the item and not owning it was also stated repeatedly. Both ideas are present in the literature. O’Guinn and Faber’s (1989) research on compulsive buying concluded that compulsive shoppers derive more pleasure and satisfaction from the buying process than from actually owning the item [41]. People generally want to feel good, and when people are upset the goal of feeling better becomes increasingly central to their actions [4].

Another positive consequence was that once they got the item home they really liked it or used it a lot and so owning the item became just as pleasurable as acquiring it and was therefore a surprising (as reported by respondents) positive consequence.

#### **4.2. Normative Evaluations**

A lot of information gathered from the interviews simply confirmed other themes uncovered in previous impulse literature. However, one interesting finding was that individuals who have the ability to influence respondents to make impulse purchases seemed to be friends or peers but those who had the power to influence respondents not to make impulse purchases were indeed much closer to the respondents. For example, these influential people included wives, fiancée’s, parents, etc. These people had some personal knowledge of the respondent’s financial situation and their opinion was very powerful. In most cases American and Korean respondent reported that this person’s opinion was usually followed.

“When my wife tells me I don’t need it...I don’t buy it.” (31, married male, American)

“My fiancé influences me the most. She makes me think twice about the purchase.” (22, single male, American)

“My mother will say ‘you don’t need to spend money on that’ and I generally listen to her.” (22, single female, American)

“If my husband argued that this is not in the list and we don’t need it, I always followed his opinion.” (29, married female, Korean)

“If my wife said the color and design is not fit for me, I don’t purchase the cloth. She knows better than I.” (25, married male, Korean)

“I always respect my parents. If they say, no, I will not buy that item.” (24, single female, Korean)

Surprisingly, Korean respondents did consider other people’s normative evaluations, but if they like that product, they always purchased the item anyway. Especially when those items were low priced products, they tended to value their own opinions over the opinions of others.

“When I found an interesting item for my daughter, my friend said that is not good for her. But it was on sale and the price is just 2 dollars. I purchased it without hesitation.” (29, married female, Korean)

“When I found the instant seafood, my wife said that I don’t know that item and I am not sure about the taste of that food, don’t buy that. However, it was on sale and the price was too low. So I purchased it without considering my wife’s argument. (25, married male, Korean)

#### **4.3. The Differences between American and Korean Respondents**

Also, there are some differences between Korean and American respondents concerning negative consequences. American respondents expressed the negative feeling directly, but Korean respondents tried not to express negative feelings. When they experienced negative consequences, Korean respondents said, this is not my fault or this is too cheap. They rationalized with themselves and made the negative results less stressful and the purchase less dissatisfying.

“If I purchased wrong item or item which has some problem, I always say that oh, this was too cheap, every cheap product has some problem, it’s ok, it’s not my fault.” (30, married male, Korean)

“I purchased my daughter’s clothes, because it was so pretty. But when she tried, it was not good for her. But I think it was on sale, so considering the price, I said, it’s o.k.” (29, married female, Korean)

Once shoppers decided to go ahead with a controversial impulse purchase, many reported consoling themselves with the knowledge that the product could be returned if they later changed their minds.

For the American sample, we could not find any gender differences, but in Korean sample, the differences are clear. Korean female respondents had more experience with impulse buying than Korean male respondents. Married females purchased a lot of children product impulsively and they were concerned with both price and quality trade-offs, but usually focused on price. Also, Korean married females are more concern about their husbands’ responses about the impulsive buying. Korean males’ were more focused on themselves and

they did not value other's normative evaluations. However, they did purchase low price items impulsively.

"I always purchase my kid's toys and clothes impulsively. They were on sale and the price was too cheap. Nothing to loose."(29 married female, Korean)

"I usually go shopping to look for my baby's clothes. If the clothes are on sale and I like the design, I purchased it." (30, married female, Korean)

"When I purchase my son's toys, I am concerned about my husband's response. So I hide it and show it to my husband when he is feeling good." (30, married female, Korean)

"My husband always blames me for purchasing impulsively. So, whenever I purchase unplanned items, I worry about my husband's response." (29, married female, Korean)

"My wife does a lot of impulse buying. I don't like it. You know, I don't make a lot of money, so I have to reduce the impulsive purchases." (30, married male, Korean)

Another difference between American and Korean respondents surrounds the attitude toward impulsive buying behavior. Koreans' responses are very negative about impulsive buying. Only one respondent said that "it is a fun to make a purchases impulsively" (30, male, Korean) or it helps to reduce the stress. But still he was concerned about his parent's opinion, because he said his parents taught him that impulsive buying behavior is not rational, and therefore is bad behavior. It is possible that this kind of attitude stems from the Confucian's perspective.

"I feel guilty, when I make impulsive purchases. I don't know why, but I think I learned from school and parents not to do." (29, married female, Korean)

"It is bad behavior. It is not rational and causes some financial problem." (30, married male, Korean)

"I think it is not good behavior, although it gives some fun. I don't know exactly, but I feel guilty when I do that." (28, single male, Korean)

"I was upset about making impulsive purchases. My feelings were not good and I feel guilty." (25, married male)

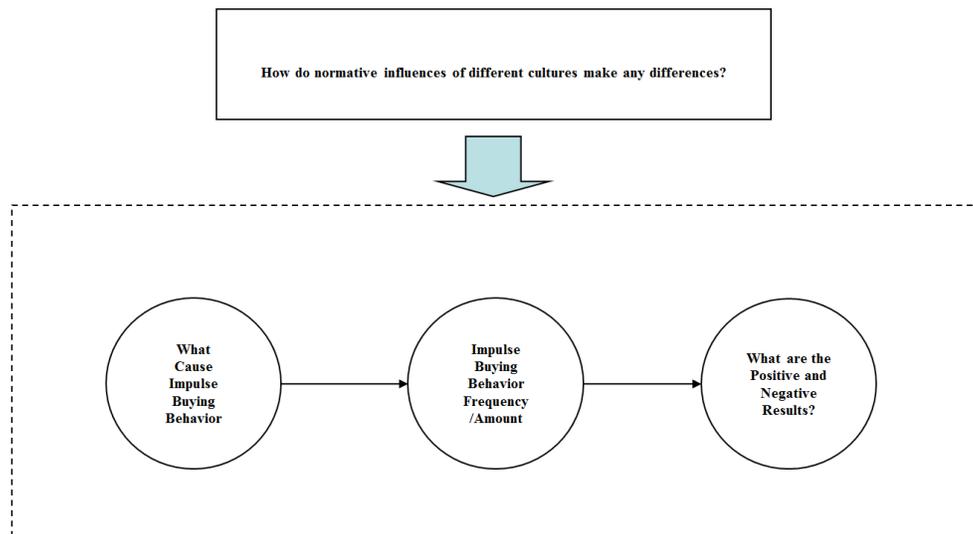
These findings are particularly interesting and beg for further research.

Lastly, the majority of our sample shopped differently (more controlled) during their grocery shopping trips. Seven out of ten American respondents and six out of eleven Korean respondents reported using a list of some sort to shop for groceries or toiletries items. Suggesting that perhaps product category plays a major role in impacting the strategies consumers use to prevent impulse purchases.

## 5. Discussion

We still have a lot to uncover about impulse buying behavior and its consequences. However, our limited sample and the apparent financial limitations of college students prevented us from uncovering more consequences. As money becomes less of an issue more varied consequences may emerge. The qualitative findings demonstrated that shoppers perceive impulse purchasing as distinctive from normal and intended purchases. Particularly, the Korean respondents thought that impulsive buying behavior did not represent good and rational behavior for a consumer. The findings of this qualitative study might provide a basis for future research as well as indicate appropriate marketing tactics. The findings support the

view that many impulse purchases arise from a shoppers' need to satisfy emotional well-being needs and continue social ties through shopping.



**Figure 1. Conceptual Framework**

The elation that accompanies the "impulse buy", however, is likely to be partially deflated as the functional/economic "model" kicks in once back home; not only "Does my son really need more toys or clothes?" but also "Why have I stocked up on another six cans of meatballs or eight packs of pasta ?" The latter may be easier to rationalize or justify in terms of the economic/functional model than the former. Marketers may need to provide the "supporting rationalization" in some instances (where justifiable) though shoppers have a number of mechanisms to minimize feelings of guilt caused by impulse purchasing.

As expected, shoppers think impulse purchasing is often seen by others in a negative light. It seems therefore to qualify as a "dark side" variable and, so, future research on impulse buying should consider how to handle possible socially desirable response bias. The qualitative approach and combination of enabling techniques in this study seemed to encourage disclosure and minimize SDR, though, as is so often the case with consumer research, this is a subjective judgment (Gabriel, 1990).

Finally, we concur with the school of consumer research that argues for more marketing research to be carried out in context, i.e. in a shopping environment (or its simulation). This would enable us to understand better how various stages of consumer readiness towards a category or brand are or might be transformed at point-of-sale. Given the increased tendency for shoppers not to plan and the potential socio-psychological benefits of shopping and impulse purchasing, marketers cannot afford to ignore this stage of buying behavior.

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