In the mood: Impulse buying's affective antecedents

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IN THE MOOD:
IMPULSE BUYING'S AFFECTIVE ANTECEDENTS

Dennis W. Rook and Meryl Paula Gardner

INTRODUCTION

An emerging body of consumer research reflects psychology's so-called "rediscovery of affect," and contributes to the recent "explosion of research" investigating individuals' moods states (Watson and Tellegen 1985). Prior to this, as several critics have noted, few published studies questioned how consumers' affective states influence their buying activities, ideas and attitudes (Belk 1975; Levy 1970). Findings from several recent lines of research demonstrate that mood states, despite their diffuse and short-lived nature, impact both consumers' mental and overt behaviors (Belk 1984; Gardner 1985, 1987). For example, consumers' moods have been found to influence how they evaluate service encounters (Cunningham 1979; Wener 1985); process marketing communications (Gardner and Wilhelm 1987; Goldberg and Gorn 1987); and respond to point-of-purchase stimuli (Donovan and Rossiter 1982; Obermiller and Bitner 1984).

Arguably, consumers' feeling states manifest themselves across a broad array of consumer experiences (Belk 1975; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Levy

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1978). This study is motivated by a belief that one arena in which mood states play a prominent and dynamic role is consumer "impulse buying." Findings from several studies support this general proposition. Relying on formal observation, Weinberg and Gottwald (1982) conclude that prior to making a purchase, impulse buyers are more emotionally aroused than non-buyers in the same retail setting. Several qualitative studies also provide glimpses into the mood-impulse buying relationship. Rook (1987) and Rook and Hoch (1985) found that some consumers explain their impulse buying as mood-related in motivation. Such buyers report how buying something on impulse helped them either express, enhance, or alter their antecedent mood states. One recent study examined the other side of impulse buying transactions, and described how impulsive purchases can affect, for better or worse, consumers' post-purchase mood states (Gardner and Rook 1988).

No research to date has, as its primary objective, explored the relationship between consumers' antecedent mood states and their impulsive purchase behaviors. This study seeks to do so but, first, we consider several key conceptual issues that guide our research. Although academic interest in both impulse buying and consumers' mood states has grown, both research streams currently face difficult conceptual and methodological issues. This paper, first, integrates a diverse and tentative body of theory and findings into a conceptual framework that motivates our exploratory study of impulse buying's mood antecedents, and provides a basis for interpreting our results. Next, we present our research procedures and findings; and finally, we offer a discussion of the study's implications and limitations.

BUYING IMPULSES AND IMPULSIVE PURCHASES

Consumers today often buy things "on impulse." One study estimates that between 27 and 62 percent of department store purchases fall into the "impulse" category (Bellenger, Robertson and Hirschman 1978). The steady diffusion of contemporary marketing innovations such as 24-hour retailing, telemarketing, "cash machines," "instant" credit, and home shopping networks makes it increasingly easy for consumers to make spontaneous purchases when the buying impulse strikes. Some current research also suggests that a significant percentage of consumers identify themselves as "impulse shoppers." Over the past 15 years, an average of 38 percent of the respondents in a large, annual national survey have described themselves as "impulse buyers" (DDB Needham Lifestyle Study, 1975-1989). Despite the pervasiveness of impulse buying, and the considerable research that has targeted it for over forty years, (e.g., Applebaum 1951; Clover 1950; *Consumer Buying Habits Studies* 1945-1965; Katona and Mueller 1955; West 1951), we are surprisingly uninformed about it.

The term "impulse buying" is used widely but without much precision today by marketing managers, researchers, and ordinary consumers. In the marketing literature, "impulse buying" has traditionally been defined in terms of the presence or absence of pre-purchase planning. For example, unplanned in-store purchases that were *not* on consumers' shopping lists were typically classified as "impulse products" (*Consumer Buying Habits Studies*, 1945-1965). Criticism of this too-broad conceptualization revived longstanding dissatisfaction with it (Kollat and Willett 1969; Nesbitt 1959); concluded that "unplanned" behavior is not necessarily "impulsive"; and, more recently, recommended that "impulse buying" be interpreted as rooted in internal psychological processes, rather than external shopping list behavior (Rook and Hoch 1985).

Rook (1987) redefined a "buying impulse" as a sudden, unexpected, often powerful...urge to buy something immediately; it materializes as a buying stimulus that is: (1) spontaneous; (2) kinetic; (3) psychologically arousing; (4) immediate; and (5) "primary." The latter term draws from psychodynamic theory that contrasts "primary" (pleasure-oriented) wishes with "secondary" (rational) thought (Freud 1956). Primary consuming impulses are often compelling, and they encourage immediate gratification. One current interpretation of the underlying process depicts buying impulses as representing "desires" that compete with individuals' "willpower" (Hoch and Lowenstein 1991). While all purchases presumably reflect some level of desire, a "buying impulse" is a distinctive type of consumer demand that is markedly different from more deliberate, less arousing, and less irresistible buying behavior.

These behavioral features of the buying impulse stimulus influence consumer's responses to them, that is, making (or not making) an impulsive purchase. An impulsive purchase has been characterized by: (1) relatively rapid decision-making, and (2) a subjective bias in favor of immediate possession (Rook 1987; Rook and Hoch 1985). This conceptualization of impulsive purchase behavior probably gives insufficient attention to behavioral variation. For example, buying that is extremely impulsive (I-see-I-want-I-buy-now), often resembles a spontaneous consumer "spasm" (Levy 1987). On the other hand, there appear to be more deliberate elements underlying some impulsive actions. This idea may sound oxymoronic, but empirical support for it exists. For example, consumers have occasionally described how they *plan* to go on impulse buying excursions (Rook 1987). In this situation, general shopping intentions are deliberate, while specific purchases may be impulsive. For these reasons, it is useful to think of "impulse buying" as an umbrella term that embraces common but highly variable behavioral states. Not only do state aspects of impulsive experience vary, but individuals differ in the psychological trait of impulsiveness.

These sources of variation generate a hypothetical impulse buying continuum that ranges from highly to moderately to slightly impulsive. In highly impulsive buying situations, spur-of-the-moment consumers may

experience their antecedent mood states as highly salient, stimulating and supportive of making a spontaneous purchase. On the other hand, any particular mood may have none of these effects. In order to provide a theory-based link between impulse buying behavior and its affective antecedents, the following discussion summarizes relevant findings from psychological research of moods' structural dimensions, and from experimental studies of moods' behavioral effects.

MOOD STRUCTURE, MOOD EFFECTS AND IMPULSE BUYING

The recent revival of interest in it notwithstanding, the term "mood" has been the object of philosophical and literary discourse for hundreds of years. Yet today, "mood" is still an imprecise term in both everyday and scientific usage, and it is sometimes not sharply distinguished from the related term "emotion" (Nowlis 1977). However, contemporary thinking conventionally depicts emotions as relatively acute, even explosive, affective states (Derbaix and Pham 1990). Moods, on the other hand, are typically less intense, and generally of shorter duration (Clark and Isen 1982; Young 1968).

Moods' Dimensional Structure

One expression of psychology's renewed interest in moods is the large body of research that has studied the dimensional structure of affective experience. While the extant findings have much in common, some have also noted a "striking lack of consensus" (Watson and Tellegen 1985). Earlier work concluded that 5 to 11 factors are necessary for an adequate description of moods' structural dimensions (Borgatta 1961; Nowlis 1965; Thayer 1967). The most prominent debate today centers around whether mood states are best modeled by two or three primary dimensional structures: pleasure and arousal (Russell, Weiss and Mendhelson 1989); or pleasure, arousal, and dominance (Russell and Mehrabian 1977; Russell and Steiger 1982).

Much published research has frequently focused entirely on the "pleasurability" dimension, and investigated the effects of "negative" (or "bad") *versus* "positive" (or "good") moods. Even the most parsimonious structural analysis acknowledges that the total population of individual mood states is extensive. We believe it is useful to consider a larger and more diverse sample of basic mood dimensions and specific mood states. Toward that end, we have incorporated into our framework three structural dimensions around which most contemporary discussion centers: (1) pleasurability, (2) arousal, and (3) dominance. These three mood dimensions, their behavioral ranges, and examples of mood states from each dimension, are summarized in Figure 1.

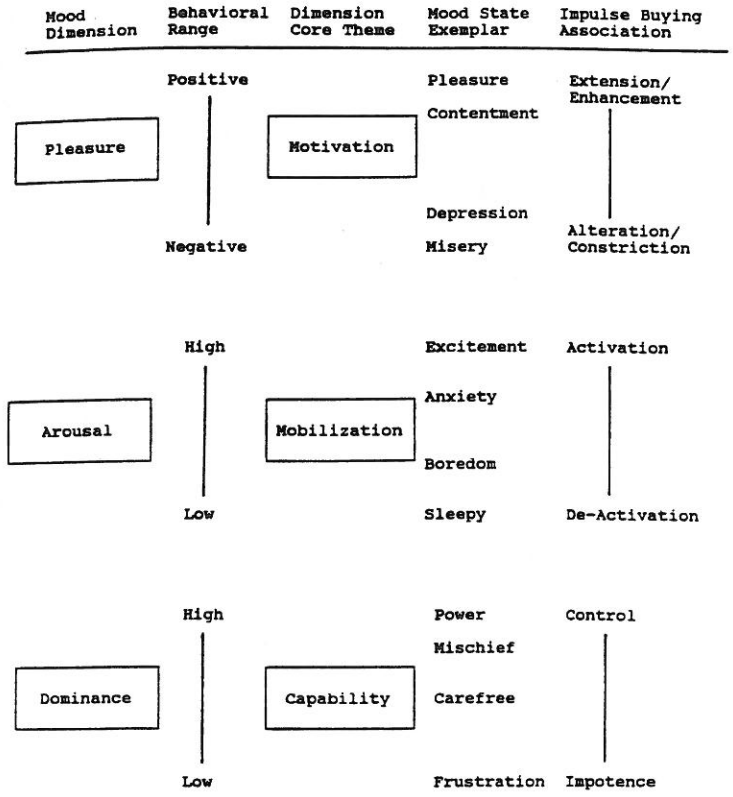

Figure 1. Antecedent Consumer Moods and Their Impulse Buying Associations

The *pleasure* mood dimension is typically characterized as a bipolar continuum that ranges from positive/good (pleasantness) to negative/bad (unpleasantness). The *arousal* dimension classifies moods according to the degree to which they provide psychological, or even psycho-kinetic stimulation; different moods are typically evaluated as being high or low in arousal. The arousal mood continuum ranges from excitement to sleepiness (Russell, Weiss and Mendelsohn 1989). The arousal and pleasure dimensions have found consistent empirical support (Russell, Weiss and Mendelsohn 1989). Evidence for the *dominance* dimension is somewhat weaker (Russell and Mehrabian 1977), although this may be attributable to the fact that research has investigated it less frequently. Conceptually, the dominance dimension is linked to the psychological "potency" factor identified by Osgood, Suci and

Tannenbaum (1957), and occurs along a continuum of subjective capability and control that ranges from high (aggression, power) to low (frustration, futility). Recent consumer research has found support for this third mood dimension (Holbrook and O'Shaughnessy (1984).

Mood Effects and Impulse Buying

Building on these structural studies, another stream of mood research has placed more emphasis on the induction, observation and interpretation of moods' behavioral effects. Although they are relatively diffuse and short-lived psychological states, moods have the potential to influence both mental and overt behaviors. Over 40 years ago, research discovered that moods function as affective pre-dispositions that encourage (or discourage) specific behaviors (Ryle 1949). More recently, considerable research has investigated the effects of various mood states on a variety of consumption-related behaviors (for a review, see Gardner 1985). Common theoretical interpretations of these effects conclude that moods are stored in memory, and associated with a general set of activities, thoughts and evaluations. When particular moods arise, they increase the likelihood that mood-congruent behaviors will occur (Bower and Cohen 1982; Clark 1982).

Mood Dimensions and Core Themes

The extent to which a specific mood encourages impulse buying depends, in part, on the perceived congruence between the mood state's thematic content and the various behaviors a consumer associates with impulse buying. We offer the concept of "core themes" to represent one aspect of the relationship between antecedent mood states and impulse buying. Admittedly, the term "theme" is somewhat broad, yet individuals' responses to their mood states are so idiosyncratic that a useful conceptualization must encompass this variation. Also, use of the core theme construct is adopted to avoid positing a direct, sequential, cause-and-effect relationship between mood states and impulse buying. The authors initially considered that moods might be described as triggering impulse buying scripts, but we rejected this as implying an unvarying ordering of behavioral events. The effects of moods appear to be more suggestive, and we believe the core theme construct captures this relationship.

We propose that each of the three basic mood dimensions (pleasure, arousal, and dominance) is associated with a primary core theme that variously supports or dissuades a consumer's buying impulses. These core themes are: (1) motivation (pleasure moods); (2) mobilization (arousal moods); and (3) capability (dominance moods). Their selection reflects the assumption that prior to buying something—on impulse or otherwise—consumers need to achieve some threshold level that is psychologically congruent with making

a purchase. A mood state that sufficiently motivates consumption, mobilizes a transaction, or induces a subjective sense of capability to do so, generates psychological associations that increase the likelihood of making a purchase. Conversely, moods that are de-motivating and de-mobilizing pull in the opposite direction and discourage impulsive purchase behavior.

A considerable body of research supports the idea that moods arrayed across the pleasure dimension potentially provide *motivation* or direction either to engage in mood-congruent behavior (Bower and Cohen 1982; Clark 1982), or to behave in ways that offer a more pleasurable mood state (Helregel and Weaver 1989). Because pleasurable moods range from positive to negative, their core themes can either motivate or de-motivate a buying impulse.

Arousal is conceptually distinct from pleasure, and the congruence between arousing moods and impulse buying centers around the theme of activation, or *mobilization* of the mental and physical resources a particular impulse purchase requires. Moods that are highly arousing should theoretically be associated with behaviors that quickly activate the purchase process. An opposite, de-mobilizing effect would be predicted of mood states that are low in arousal.

Finally, although research on dominance moods has been less extensive, we suggest that mood states that vary along this dimension are more or less congruent with impulse buying according to the sense of subjective *capability* they induce. Moods that rank high in dominance may encourage feelings of control and consumer capability that are congruent with impulsive spending. In contrast, low dominance moods may have an opposite effect, and stimulate a sense of relative impotence in a buying situation.

Mood States and Impulse Buying

In addition to providing varying degrees of general motivation, mobilization and psychological capability, mood states can encourage impulse buying in more specific ways. Individual mood states vary in the degree to which they are congruent with making impulsive purchases. Over time, consumers are likely to associate particular moods with an evolved set of ideas, activities, objects and evaluations that may suggest (or preclude) impulse buying. These mood-related associations function as behavioral heuristics that guide the consumer toward (or away from) impulse buying. For example, earning an "A" on exam might induce a state of excitement; this experience potentially activates a number of possible associated responses that are more or less impulsive: calling family and friends, "partying," buying something. We believe that antecedent moods' effects on impulse buying are more suggestive than directly causal, but we also anticipate that some mood states are more explicitly and forcefully suggestive of impulse buying behavior than others.

Previous research and theory suggest that consumers' mood states also influence the extent to which their impulsive shopping trips and purchases

involve deliberation. Three factors appear to contribute to the degree of deliberation that precedes an impulsive purchase. First, as noted in earlier discussion, when a buying impulse arises in the context of a mood state whose meaning is highly congruent with impulse buying, the actual purchase may occur with little deliberation, and appear relatively automatic. On the other hand, mood states may only mildly suggest impulse buying as an appropriate behavioral response.

A second factor derives from variation in impulse buying's behavioral features. When a buying impulse is particularly strong (kinetic, arousing and primary); and when it is preceded by a highly congruent mood state, an automatic purchase is more likely. Weaker buying impulses may either be less salient, or they may encourage more consumer deliberation. The degree of spontaneity also has an effect; immediate temporal proximity suggests that less information processing transpires in an impulsive purchase than in a planned one. This does not imply that there is no cognitive activity in impulse buying; rather, it suggests that there is simply less opportunity for it. It also suggests that mood states are especially salient behavioral cues in spontaneous purchase situations.

Third, psychological research has discovered that individuals purposefully engage in mood management behaviors. Impulse buying may result from relatively deliberate attempts to sustain or alter a particular mood state. Various studies have observed that individuals can control their own moods, and perform behaviors designed either to maintain or alter specific mood states. Negative moods increase the likelihood that individuals will engage in behaviors that promise a more pleasurable mood state, (Helregel and Weaver 1989). Impulse buying in negative antecedent moods may originate initially from a relatively deliberate consumer decision to alter a non-pleasurable mood state. In such situations, the actual decision to go shopping is consciously planned ("I will feel better if I get out of the house"); yet, the subsequent purchase may be quite impulsive ("Oh, that's just what I need; I'll buy it"). Highly pleasurable moods are likely to encourage automatic behavior because favorable associations are more readily retrieved from memory, and stimuli are evaluated more positively (Isen, Shalker, Clark and Karp 1978). On the other hand, pleasurable moods may also encourage deliberate behaviors to the extent that a consumer consciously seeks to extend a pleasurable mood experience through, for example, impulse buying activities (see Figure 1).

Impulsive and Non-Impulsive Shoppers

Finally, whether and how consumers respond to mood-related buying impulses is likely to be moderated by a variety of individual difference variables, one of which are examined in this study. Psychological theory and research has long considered "impulsiveness" per se to be a fundamental personality

trait (Freud 1949; Goldenson 1984; Kipnis 1971; Mead 1981; Phypers 1979; Reich 1925; Winshie 1977). Extending this notion to the buyer behavior domain, it seems reasonable to speculate that consumers vary in their levels of "buying impulsiveness." This idea also draws support from recent exploratory studies in which respondents reported different levels of impulse buying frequency (Rook 1987; Rook and Hoch 1985). Relying on a much larger and more representative sample, the DDB Needham Annual Lifestyle Study (1975-1989) similarly reports that while slightly over a third of the respondents in this sample identify themselves as "impulse buyers," almost two thirds do not.

The clinical profile of an impulsive personality (Kipnis 1971; Winshie 1977), makes it reasonable to speculate that impulsive individuals are more immediately responsive to their mood states than non-impulsive personalities. In this study, we examine differences between impulsive and non-impulsive buyers in terms of their likelihoods of making a purchase in different antecedent mood states.

METHOD

This study explores the relationships proposed in our conceptual framework. The following discussion outlines our research objectives and design; research instrument and measures; sample and data collection; and data analytic procedures.

Research Objectives and Design

The specific objectives of the research are: (1) to discover how consumers experience a variety of mood states as antecedents to impulse buying episodes; (2) to investigate aspects of buying on impulse in positive/good *versus* negative/bad moods; and (3) to examine differences in associations between various antecedent mood states and the buying behavior of "impulsive" *versus* "non-impulsive" shoppers.

The logic of our research design is based in the belief that a semi-exploratory approach is consistent with the impulse buying and mood literatures. Impulse buying research is relatively immature, and conceptually-driven exploratory studies are still appropriate (cf. Anderson 1983; Deshpande 1983; Peter and Olson 1983). Psychological investigations of individuals' mood states have been more numerous, but theory and findings are still developmental and tenuous. Consistent with an exploratory approach, our data collection instrument is moderately structured, and is designed to gather both qualitative verbatim, and statistical data. The questionnaire combines both of highly structured measures and open-ended response items. Open-ended questions were used to provide

sufficient response freedom to obtain consumers' natural-language descriptions of their mood-related impulse buying experiences and motivations.

Underlying our research design is the assumption that both consumers' mood states and their impulse buying episodes are memorable with reasonable accuracy. Several sources provide support for this position. First, individuals appear able to recall some impulse buying episodes with frequently vivid detail; they also occasionally make reference to both impulse buying's affective antecedents and consequences (Rook 1987; Gardner and Rook 1988). Second, much psychological research concludes that individuals' feeling states can be highly memorable. Third, impulse buying is—for the average consumer—a relatively novel experience; most household purchases are routine and planned, rather than merely whimsical. Therefore, impulsive purchases should be retrievable in memory. Finally, because "impulse buying" per se appears to intrigue and involve contemporary consumers, respondents are likely to be motivated both to retrieve and elaborate their experiences with it. On the other hand, consumers may be inclined to recall either extraordinary mood states, or atypical big-ticket impulse purchases, rather than more common events. We address this issue later when discussing our findings.

Sample-size needs forced our research design to balance depth of inquiry against breadth of coverage. In order to increase the likelihood of obtaining anecdotal data on all twelve of the mood states included in the study, we opted for a larger sample. A smaller number of in-depth interviews would provide more detailed information than self-completed questionnaires, but this benefit would not compensate for the less predictable coverage of our focal mood states. Also, our desire to obtain data from a demographically diverse population further encouraged us to field a larger respondent sample.

Instrument and Measures

Respondents were asked, first, to think about the last time they bought something "on impulse." Relying on Rook's (1987) conceptualization, "impulse buying" was defined for the respondents as a purchase made when a consumer experiences "a sudden, unexpected urge to buy something immediately." Following this, they were asked a series of open-ended questions about the origins and effects of the mood state that preceded their most recent impulsive purchase. They then examined a list derived from the psychological literature of 12 different mood states (Polivy 1981; Russell 1980; Russell and Steiger 1982). These were selected to represent all three structural mood dimensions: pleasure, arousal and dominance; and also, to reflect the behavioral range associated with each mood dimension. Extreme levels of any dimension are rare, and fall beyond the scope of this paper. For example, we are interested in pleasurable (rather than euphoric), exciting (rather than hysterical), and powerful (rather than megalomaniacal) mood states. Nonetheless, we attempted to include moods that do vary in presumed frequency (e.g., pleasure *versus* power).

The respondents were asked to: (1) select the *one* mood in which they would be most likely to make an impulse purchase, and (2) to rate all 12 moods on a 6-point scale according to their relative likelihood of encouraging an impulse buy. They were also asked to explain narratively why the *one* mood they associated most strongly with impulse buying would have this effect on them. Following this, they answered a series of questions about the relative likelihood of their buying on impulse in "negative" *versus* "positive" moods, and about the kinds of impulse purchases they have made in such bipolar mood states. Respondents were asked if they had ever purchased something on impulse when they were "in a really bad, negative mood" (yes/no). Affirmative responses were followed by a request to cite an example, and to identify the "impulse" item and its cost. Then, respondents were asked if they had ever purchased something on impulse "in a very positive mood" (yes/no). Again, affirmative responses were followed by listing the item and its cost.

Respondents' buying impulsiveness was measured using a scale that builds on Rook's (1987) conceptualization of impulse buying. The items asked the respondents to indicate, using a six-point scale, how much they identified ("just like me=1; not at all like me=6") with the following statements: (l) I often buy things spontaneously; (2) I am a very cautious shopper; (3) I often buy things without thinking; (4) I often get sudden urges to go out and buy things; (5) I carefully plan most of my purchases; (6) I often run into things I can't resist buying; and (7) I like to shop quickly. These items were constructed to represent the common features of buying impulses and impulsive purchase behavior. Finally, a measure of respondents' impulse buying frequency was obtained by asking: "How often do you buy things on impulse?" Six response categories were provided, ranging from "almost every day" to "almost never."

Sample and Data Collection

A small convenience sample (N=15) was gathered in Los Angeles to pre-test the questionnaire, and ensure that all questions were interpreted by the respondents as intended. Subsequently, 155 respondents were recruited in a variety of field settings (offices, street corners, coffee shops, beaches, and lobbies), and in approximately equal proportion from three geographic locations: the Los Angeles, New York, and Washington, D.C. metropolitan areas. Respondents were selected from three areas to minimize a regional bias that might arise from the use of only one location. The respondents occasionally completed the questionnaire at the time of their recruitment, but most returned them within 36 to 48 hours. Respondents participated without financial compensation, but were promised copies of the study's findings if they expressed interest.

Recruiter assistants (mostly students) were assigned sampling quotas so that the respondents would represent a broad age spectrum, proportionate representation of the sexes, and economic and cultural diversity. Forty-six percent of the sample are male and 54 percent female. The respondents range in age from 19 to 82 (mean average = 37 years). Finally, annual household income ranges from below $15,000 to over $75,000. The largest income group (38% of the sample) is concentrated in the $25,000 to $60,000 range. Despite considerable demographic variation, the sample is not presumed to be statistically representative of the overall U.S. population; in fact, it is relatively upscale in income. This is probably an artifact of our reliance on private university students for respondent recruitment.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Statistical and interpretive approaches were employed in analyzing different parts of the data. Statistical analyses relied on conventional procedures that are detailed in the appropriate findings sections. Interpretive analysis of open-ended responses was employed because it is consistent with the study's exploratory objective to obtain a range of ideas about how consumers' antecedent mood states are associated with their impulse buying behavior.

The interpretive analysis proceeded through the following activities. First, the data were sorted into groups on the basis of respondents' selections of the single mood state that would be *most* likely to encourage making an impulsive purchase. Then the researchers examined and recorded the respondents' verbatim explanations of how and why a specific mood state would have this effect. Respondents' written responses to this and several other open-ended questions ranged from quite short (1 or 2 sentences), to longer paragraphs. In the following discussion, the interpretation of specific mood states' associations with impulsive purchase behavior is based primarily on the most common reasons that the respondents provided. These findings are interpreted in the context of the theoretical framework presented earlier.

PLEASURABLE MOODS AND IMPULSE BUYING MOTIVATION

The findings suggest that positive mood states are more conducive to impulse buying than negative ones. The results that support this proposition are summarized in Table 1. In addition to exploring *which* moods are most strongly associated with impulse buying behavior, this research also sought to discover *how* consumers associate their antecedent mood states with their impulse buying behavior. In the context of the Hoch and Lowenstein (1991) framework, some moods seem to increase consumers' buying desires and decrease their willpower to resist them. Findings regarding specific moods are organized according to the structural dimensions with which each is most strongly associated.

Table 1. Antecedent Mood States and Impulse Buying Likelihoods

Mood	*Ranking: Most to Least Likely to Encourage Impluse Buying* (N = 155)	
	Rank *	*Score* **
Pleasure	1	(2.35)
Carefree	2	(2.48)
Excitement	3	(2.65)
Power	4	(3.07)
Mischievous	5	(3.25)
Contentment	6	(3.40)
Boredom	7	(3.53)
Depression	8	(4.01)
Frustration	9	(4.30)
Anxiety	10	(4.64)
Misery	11	(4.93)
Sleepy	12	(5.49)

Notes: * Rank ordered from most to least likley.
** Score based on 1 = very likely to buy on impulse in this mood; 6 = not at all likely.

Respondents selected the one mood that would be most likely to encourage them to make an impulse purchase, and then explained why and how this would occur. Anecdotes from those who selected moods states arrayed along the pleasure dimension illustrate how both pleasurable and non-pleasurable antecedent moods can facilitate impulse buying in two distinguishable ways: by motivating either mood extension or mood alteration.

Mood Extension through Impulse Buying

The mood state *pleasure* is considered to define the positive end of the pleasure mood dimension (Russell, Weiss and Mendelsohn 1989; Watson and Tellegen 1985). Respondents described this mood state as motivating impulse buying by tipping the pleasure principle (Freud 1911/1956) in favor of the immediate gratification a spontaneous purchase provides. In these moods consumers allow themselves, if only briefly, to be self-indulgent "pleasure seekers." As these two representative comments suggest, the barriers to buying are low in such sybaritic mood states:

> When I'm feeling that way (pleasure)... buying little items for myself gives me a lot of pleasure (female-36).

> Hey! I just like to feel good (male-27).

Impulse buying is self-gratifying, and its meaning is congruent with a pleasurable mood state. Pleasure-motivated impulse buying promises to extend

a currently enjoyed positive mood state. This notion is consistent with reported findings that positive moods increase the performance likelihood of behaviors with positive expected outcomes (Forest et al. 1979; Isen and Simmonds 1978).

Another antecedent mood state—*contentment*—also makes the retail world seem more friendly and inviting. Respondents echoed the finding reported in the literature that pleasurable mood states can bias evaluations and judgments in mood-congruent directions (Gardner 1985). As one respondent states: "When you're feeling that good (contentment), everything else seems good" (male-56). Highly pleasurable moods encourage the formation of more favorable attitudes toward commercial products; even shopping itself seems more enjoyable. Because of the high congruence in meaning between pleasurable moods and impulsive buying, the impulsive purchase in these situations is likely to resemble an automatic process that involves little deliberation following the stimulation of the impulse to buy.

Mood Alteration through Impulse Buying

Moods that lie on the opposite end of the pleasure continuum appear to be capable of either encouraging or discouraging an impulsive purchase. Respondents who indicated that they would be likely to buy something on impulse when in a negative mood, explained that they do so hoping that they will feel better through shopping. One recent study observed how planned purchases of self-gifts make one "feel better" (Mick and DeMoss 1990). Whether a particular negative mood is motivating or demotivating seems to be a function of its degree of negativity, or nonpleasurability. When mildly depressed, consumers may want to lift their spirits, and take their mind off their problems. In these situations, impulse buying is therapeutic. It also may occur with some deliberate intent. The respondents' descriptions of negative-mood impulse buying antecedents suggest that some mildly *depressed* consumers consciously decide to remedy the situation through impulse buying in general, or impulsive purchases of particular products. The explanation provided by one respondent suggests that impulse buying motivated by depressed feelings may be quite conscious and controlled:

> I was really bummed (depressed). I had just bombed a midterm in calculus, so I got in my car and drove over to Santa Monica Place (shopping mall) for a shopping fix. I bought about four albums and a new pair of Ray-Bans... Yeah, it made me feel a little better, at least I could forget about that stupid test for awhile (male-21).

These findings converge with popular notions about the psychologically ameliorative effects of shopping and buying, as represented in the saying: "When the going gets tough, the tough go shopping." They also suggest that individuals may actually plan to engage in impulsive behavior, and that not

all impulse buying is the kind of completely spontaneous buying described earlier by Stern (1962) as "pure impulse" or more recently by Levy (1987) as a buying "spasm." Here the decision to go shopping is planned, perhaps even learned, but the act of purchasing is impulsive.

Moods that are more intensely negative were described as having an opposite effect. Freud (1956) and others have suggested that extremely negative moods derive from a decline in self-esteem. When individuals experience this type of affect, they are unlikely to feel that they deserve the gratification of a spontaneous purchase. Acutely negative moods are constrictive and encourage internal withdrawal. Also, such mood states are so internally preoccupying that individuals' energies are drained by them. Respondents explained that when they feel this way, they often want simply to be "left alone"; they have little surplus energy for whimsical shopping. As one respondent related:

> When I'm feeling that way (misery) I don't feel like doing anything. Shopping takes too much energy... I wouldn't even consider it (female-36).

Misery is unambiguously non-pleasurable, and generally debilitating, while depression appears more mutable. Respondents who reported they would be likely to make impulse purchases when depressed, described relatively mild depressive states that motivated mood alteration through buying "just anything." On the other hand, more severely depressed moods were selected as very unlikely to motivate impulse buying.

AROUSING MOODS AND IMPULSE BUYING MOBILIZATION

Moods arrayed along the arousal dimension range from high to low in intensity. High-arousal moods help mobilize a consumer's energies to respond positively to the buying impulse; moods that are lower in arousal may be insufficient to do so, and may even be de-mobilizing.

Impulse Buying Activating Moods

Mood states that are highly arousing supply the psycho-physical energy that helps lower resistance to spontaneous spending. The mood studied here that ranks highest in arousal—*excitement*—helps consumers overcome their usual level of reluctance to spend. Excited consumers are stimulated both by being excited and by the arousing elements of the buying impulse.

The respondents often described excitement as almost physical, and they explained how it helps them overcome their usual reluctance to spend. It provides the psycho-kinetic energy surge that mobilizes them quickly to gather and deploy their buying resources. As one respondent explains:

> When I feel like that (excited)...it's a real rush of energy. If someone was watching, I bet they'd say my eyes get bigger! It's like I'm on automatic pilot...I see it, rush over and grab it, and take it to the check-out line...I wish I had this much energy around the house (female-45).

For most consumers, a state of excitement is a relatively novel condition, and it encourages the atypical, whimsical behavior that impulse buying tends to represent. To the extent that excitement is also perceived as a pleasurable mood, its meaning is highly congruent with the pleasurability of a spontaneous impulse purchase, and it tends to facilitate relatively automatic impulsive buying.

As an impulse buying antecedent, the impact of *anxiety* appears to be more mutable. Anxiety is experienced as a "vague, subjective feeling of distress" (Kelman 1957). In psychodynamic theory, anxiety is described as a response of the ego to dangerous situations (Freud 1965). Although it can be debilitating, anxiety may also act as a mobilizing or creative force (Kelman 1957). When individuals feel anxious, they are likely to initiate cognitive or behavioral operations to reduce or minimize the discomfort (Spielberger 1977). Anxiety's relationship to impulse buying may be quite specific and direct, as one respondent explains her reactions to feeling anxious about an upcoming social situation:

> I was becoming pretty anxious about Jim and Helen's party that was just a few days away. I wasn't really sure why, but then one day when I walked out of Sears, I saw some new fall dresses in Madigan's window, and it hit me: I've got nothing to wear. Everybody has seen me in my best cocktail dress a hundred times. So I waltzed in on impulse and bought a brand new outfit (female-33).

Impulse buying can also relieve anxiety in more general ways. Several respondents described how the act of buying "something" or "just anything" helps make them feel less anxious. In contrast to a highly arousing mood with positive overtones (e.g., excitement), anxiety, an arousing mood with negative overtones, appears to encourage more deliberate decisions to engage in impulsive buying in order to improve one's mood state.

Boredom is conventionally considered to be less arousing than either excitement or anxiety. Being bored may encourage impulse buying because buying "something" provides the bored consumer with an activity agenda. Boredom is an undesirable state for some people, so it may encourage the deliberate decision to shop in order to make a transition toward a more desirable mood state. This conscious decision may then lead to spontaneous purchasing behavior. As one respondent succinctly explains:

> I love to be busy and I hate boredom. (Impulse buying) is an escape (female-28).

Impulse Buying De-Mobilizing Moods

Moods that are low in arousal drain rather than energize the buying impulse. *Sleepy* moods are at the opposite end of the arousal continuum from excitement. They are insufficiently energetic to encourage an impulsive purchase; sleepiness would, in fact, tend to be de-mobilizing. When consumers experience sleepy moods, they are more likely to head for the bedroom than the shopping mall.

DOMINANCE MOODS AND CONSUMER CAPABILITY

The dominance mood dimension ranges from high to low in subjective feelings of control over one's immediate situation. The mood states sampled from this dimension range from power (high dominance) to frustration (low dominance); mischievous and carefree moods fall in-between the two extremes. While moods associated with the pleasure dimension provide varying degrees of motivation for impulse buying, and moods that fall along the arousal dimension supply varying degrees of psycho-kinetic mobilization to follow through on one's buying impulses, dominance moods affect one's sense of subjective capability.

Capability, Control and Impulse Buying

Experiencing a *powerful* mood tends to stimulate feelings of individual capability and control. A powerful mood provides the psychological support that encourages consumers to think they can buy whatever they spontaneously want. In some extreme cases, respondents described themselves as "power buyers" who equate power with having money, and view spending it on impulse as a reflection of their perceived superior consumer status. The subjective perception of power can be real or imagined, as one respondent's comments illustrate:

> I went to the mall to get some sweat pants but I ran across these new (stereo) speakers I'd heard about. I knew I could dump it on my Visa card without going over the limit. I have to admit I was feeling pretty powerful right then, even though I knew it would probably take me six months to pay it off (male-29).

This anecdote illustrates the difficulty of temporally ordering the mood state-impulse buying relationship. Here it seems that the buying impulse and powerful mood occurred almost simultaneously. Feeling powerful also lowers the real or imagined buying constraints imposed by consumers' significant others. As one respondent describes this mood-driven sense of autonomy:

> If I am feeling powerful, I don't have to answer to anyone. Therefore, I'll be inclined to buy (female-32).

Finally, a powerful mood's force is enhanced by its relative uniqueness, as one fifty-eight year old woman explained: "I don't feel powerful very often...so when I do, I'm more likely to do something different." Like those moods that rank high in pleasurability and arousal, high dominance moods are likely to be perceived as so congruent with making a spontaneous purchase that the act of buying on impulse may appear almost automatic.

Although it ranks somewhat lower on the dominance continuum, a *carefree* mood temporarily makes individuals' conventional buying constraints seem distant and irrelevant. The meaning of a carefree mood also is consistent with impulse buying behavior. It fosters a devil-may-care attitude, as one respondent explains, "...the mood is extremely unconservative, so I'm likely to buy something a little wild" (female-22). There is a temporary feeling that nothing really matters. Respondents described how they stop thinking or worrying about things—especially money, at least for a moment:

> This feeling—carefree—has no guilt attached to it. I am not concerned about money or other motivations for shopping, so I am most likely just to purchase something for fun (female-32).

> I don't worry about getting the bill at the end of the month. I am more concerned with immediate gratification (male-27).

This attitude may encourage respondents to disregard potential consequences of their impulsiveness, to cast off "little inhibitions," or as one fifty-year-old woman describes it, to "abandon myself to the purchase." Carefree moods' strong association with impulse buying may be a function of their "hybrid" nature: ranking high in pleasurability and (sometimes) arousal, as well as dominance.

A *mischievous* mood is carefree with a vengeance, and it suggests the power to transcend convention and perform behaviors that are consciously "naughty" or even inappropriate. Consumers "know" they really shouldn't buy, but do so anyway. In most cases, impulse buying stimulated by mischievous moods represents a relatively innocuous form of being "bad." Like powerful moods, the subjective meaning of mischievous mood states is so congruent with impulse buying, that the purchase may occur almost automatically.

Impotent Moods

Moods that rank low in subjective perceptions of dominance induce a sense of low capability or control. *Frustration* results, in behavioristic thought, when

"an organism is not rewarded in the presence of stimuli previously paired with reward" (Amsel 1958). When frustrated, individuals feel that their efforts have been thwarted, or are in vain. While the accompanying sense of disappointment may be inhibitory, frustration may also "energize any behavior occurring in its presence" (Amsel 1958). Buying something on impulse may help the frustrated consumer feel less ineffectual.

MOOD POLARITY AND IMPULSE BUYING

In their own (emic) language, individuals tend to classify their moods into two basic categories: "good" and "bad." While this simple dichotomy fails to account for the behavioral nuances of individual mood types (Belk 1984), it does incorporate everyday characterizations of the polar opposites of the mood dimension that has been researched most extensively: pleasure. After ranking and discussing the study's focal mood states, respondents were asked whether they would be more likely to buy something on impulse in a "positive" or in a "negative" mood. Eighty-five percent of the sample indicated that they would be more likely to buy on impulse when in a positive mood, while 15% said they would be more likely to do so in a negative mood. While the respondents overwhelmingly associated positive moods with impulse buying, the finding that almost over one sixth of the sample indicated they are more likely to buy on impulse in a negative mood suggests that a significant number of consumers may rely on impulse buying as a relatively deliberate, therapeutic mood alteration tactic.

As described in the Method Section, respondents were asked: (1) if they had ever purchased anything on impulse in a negative mood, (2) what the product was, and (3) how much it cost. Findings are summarized in Table 2. Thirty-seven percent reported that they had made a negative-mood impulse purchase; 67 percent indicated they had never done this. The reported purchase prices ranged from $1 to $9327 (median = $50; s.d. = $1674). Twenty-five percent of these purchases fell between $1 and $15; the second quartile between $20 and $40; the third between $50 and $120; and the final 25 percent between $130 and $9327.

Respondents were asked next if they had ever purchased anything on impulse in a positive mood, and almost all (94%) indicated that they had. Again, findings are summarized in Table 2. The reported range of purchase prices was similar to that for negative-mood impulse purchases (from $1 to over $10,000), but the distribution was skewed considerably higher (median = $131; s.d.= $2313). The lowest 25 percent of positive-mood impulse purchase prices fell between $1 and $40; the next 25 percent between $42 and $130; the third quartile between $135 and $350; and the top 25 percent between $400 and $9999.

Table 2. Mood Polarity: Impulse Buiying in Positive and Negative Moods

	Positive Mood Buying	*Negative Mood Buying*
Percent reporting impulse buying in this mood type	94%	37%
Median amount spent	$131	$50
Range	$1-$9999	$1-$9327
Standard deviation	$2313	$1674
Distribution of purchase prices:		
Bottom quartile	$1 to $40	$1 to $15
Second quartile	$42 to $130	$20 to $40
Third quartile	$135 to $350	$50 to $120
Top quaratile	$400 to $9999	$130 to $9327

To examine whether these results are associated with demographic variables, gender, age, individual income and household income characteristics of three sample sub-groups were conducted: (1) respondents who indicated that they had made an impulse purchase in a negative mood (N=58), (2) those who reported they had done so in a positive mood (N=145), and (3) those who said they had bought on impulse in both positive and negative moods (N=56). None of the three groups differed significantly from each other on any of the four demographic variables examined.

The observed differences between the purchase prices of items bought on impulse in positive *versus* negative moods reflects respondents' earlier comments that pleasurable moods encourage expansive attitudes about spending, which in turn help overcome resistance to buying such big ticket items as VCRs, computers, major wardrobe additions and even automobiles. The median amount spent in positive-mood impulse purchases ($131) is more than two and a half times that reported for those made in negative moods ($50). A free-spending attitude tends not to be as strong in negative mood states. In negative mood situations, impulse buying often operates as a palliative; just "a little something" will do. On the other hand, consumers in a negative mood might also be likely to think that a "big something" would do even better; the top quartile of negative-mood impulse buyers reported spending over $130 on the purchases they reported. Another interpretation might view these results as reflecting Weber's law. A consumer in a negative mood might feel an affective lift from a relatively minor purchase; while a consumer in a positive mood needs to make a bigger purchase in order to experience incremental mood elevation.

IMPULSIVE SHOPPERS AND MOOD-RELATED BUYING

The data reported thus far illustrate various associations between different mood states and impulsive purchase behavior. It is likely that the dynamics of these relationships are mediated by individual differences. Past research has found that consumers vary considerably in the degree to which they identify themselves as "impulse buyers" (DDB Needham Worldwide, Lifestyle Study 1975-1989). This raises the question: do "impulsive" shoppers differ from more contemplative, "non-impulsive" shoppers in terms of the associations between various mood states and their respective buying behaviors? The logic underlying this question rests on the longstanding conceptualization of impulsiveness per se as a personality trait (Goldenson 1984; Kipnis 1971; Winshie 1977); and also, on the assumption that this trait manifests itself in consumers' levels of buying impulsiveness.

The findings here assume two hypothetical consumer groups ("impulsive" and "non-impulsive" shoppers) whose membership is based on respondents' buying impulsiveness scores. Total scores are based on responses to the seven scale items identified earlier in the Method section. Theoretically, a respondents' total score on the buying impulsiveness scale could range from 7 to 42. The observed scores ranged from 8 to 40 (mean = 27.12; s.d. = 9.73). Correlational analysis measures the strength of association between respondents' buying impulsiveness scores and their likelihood of buying on impulse in each mood state studied. The impulsive shopper scale achieved a Chronbach alpha score of .82, which suggests that it is an internally consistent measure.

The findings suggest that mood factors play a more extensive role in the buying behaviors of impulsive shoppers than they do among non-impulsive shoppers. On the one hand, the two groups are not significantly different in their likelihoods of buying on impulse in moods that rank high in pleasurability (pleasure and contentment). This suggests that these moods are sufficiently motivating to encourage both impulsive and non-impulsive consumers to make spontaneous purchases. However, impulsive shoppers are more likely to buy on impulse in non-pleasurable moods such as depression and misery. The statistical results summarized in Table 3.

Also, impulsive shoppers are significantly more likely to buy on impulse in two mood states that are low in arousal: boredom and sleepy. In addition, they are more likely to buy on impulse when experiencing anxiety, a mood state high in arousal but generally low in pleasure. Impulsive shoppers are also more likely to make impulse purchases when they experience low or mid-range dominance moods such as frustration and mischief.

These results suggest two alternative interpretations. First, the finding that impulsive shoppers are more likely to buy on impulse in mood states that rank lower in pleasurability, arousal and dominance, suggests that they are more

Table 3. Associations Between Shoppers' Impulsiveness and Likelihoods of Purchasing in Particular Mood States

Mood State	*Impulsive Shoppers More Likely to Buy than Non-Impulsive Shoppers (Correlations;* N = *155)*	
Boredom	r = .45	p < .001
Frustration	r = .33	p < .001
Depression	r = .32	p < .001
Misery	r = .26	p < .001
Anxiety	r = .36	p < .01
Mischievious	r = .25	p < .01
Sleepy	r = .23	p < .01
Excitement	r = .21	p < .01
Powerful	r = .19	p = .02
Pleasure	r = .10	n.s.
Carefree	r = .07	n.s.
Contentment	r = .00	n.s.

prone to act on impulse no matter what. As consumers, they are more susceptible than others to their spontaneous buying impulses. Alternatively, it may be the case that impulsive shoppers have constructed more behavioral heuristics for responding to their mood states. These two alternative explanations are not mutually exclusive; both, in fact may contribute to the results obtained in this study.

DISCUSSION

This paper has sought to develop a conceptual framework for investigating and interpreting the complex relationships between consumers' antecedent mood states and their impulse buying behavior. This framework and the findings in support of it are quite preliminary, and based on only one study. Also, because a variety of interpretations (cognitive, psychoanalytic and others) might plausibly account for our data, we have opted to offer alternative explanations where appropriate, rather than attempt to support a single theoretical position.

Our research encountered several specific obstacles that limit the generalizability of our findings. First, we did not collect respondent refusal rate data; as a consequence, we have no idea what proportion of consumers either do or do not engage in mood-related impulse buying. While there is theoretical support for the belief that such buying is relatively common today, this is a speculative proposition. Second, the temporal proximity of an antecedent mood state to an impulsive purchase is both conceptually and empirically problematic, because the onset of a mood's effects may be relatively

immediate or more delayed. This study assumed but did not focus precisely on temporal proximity; as a result, respondents' anecdotes described both occasions in which mood states activate relatively immediate purchases, and other instances where the effects of antecedent moods are observable but more diffuse. Also, because a mood state and an impulsive purchase *can* occur almost simultaneously, respondents' recall of temporal ordering may be imperfect. Some may, in fact, be recalling mood states that followed rather than preceded an impulse buying episode.

Several findings from this study suggest another memory problem: respondents appear more likely to recall extraordinary mood states and atypical impulse purchases. The relatively high median prices of products the respondents reported purchasing in both positive ($131) and negative moods ($50), suggest that it is easier to recall buying a sweater or small appliance than a candy bar. Also, because we asked respondents to recall either *very* positive or *very* negative antecedent moods, we probably encouraged the recall of extreme cases. Our sample's income characteristics may also have exaggerated these findings. The relatively upscale sample may be populated with a disproportionate number of consumers who can more easily afford to indulge their impulse buying moods.

These limitations notwithstanding, we believe this research and the framework that guides it have contributed several new ideas about impulse buying and its mood state antecedents. Although they are relatively mild, diffuse and short-lived affective states, consumers' moods appear to have a significant association with their impulse buying behaviors. First, our data support the theoretical notion that consumers' antecedent mood states vary in the extent to which they activate mood-congruent behavioral themes and associations that suggest impulsive purchase behavior. Some mood states (for example, pleasure, excitement, and power), enhance the availability of psychological heuristics that provide various elements of the general motivation, consumer mobilization, and the sense of subjective capability that encourages impulsive buying behavior. While not as explicit as the prescribed, sequential elements of a behavioral script, these core themes link consumers' antecedent mood states with meaning systems that are at least consistent with positive responses to impulsive buying attitudes, intentions, and activities.

Our findings further suggest that because of their apparently strong association with impulse buying, some mood states deserve more intensive investigation. Structural mood research should benefit from more direct, phenomenological investigation of the detailed behavioral contents of, for example, "pleasure," "carefree," "excitement," and "power" moods. Future research also needs to recognize that mood states are often both interactive and multi-dimensional. For example, a consumer could experience pleasure and excitement simultaneously. Also, while individual mood states tend to load on either the pleasure, arousal, or dominance dimension, any single mood may

have elements of all three. Excitement, for example, defines the high end of the arousal continuum, but it also ranks high in pleasure (Russell, Weiss and Mendelsohn 1989). Contentment, on the other hand, ranks high in pleasure but is relatively lower in arousal. With so many potential interactions, the empirical domain becomes frustratingly complex and untractable.

One direction that might provide some leverage on this problem is pursuit of more emic approaches to the problem. Focus would shift from relatively abstract issues such as how an "excitement" mood state encourages impulsive purchases, toward more naturalistic descriptions of impulse buying moods. More explicit emphasis on "real" consumer language should enrich and help refine theoretical propositions about mood states' impulse buying associations. Research could even pursue a particularistic, case-study approach that would sharpen the focus on product-specific moods, for example, a "sweater buying" mood or a "cookie buying" mood.

In addition to the findings presented about consumers' antecedent moods, this research also contributes two ideas to what we know about impulse buying. First, the data suggest that when a mood state's subjective meaning is congruent with impulse buying, an impulsive purchase may be almost automatic. Moods that are highly pleasurable, arousing, and dominant, have the potential to function in this way. While this seems to characterize the mood state-impulse buying relationship in many situations, the data here suggest that impulse buying may, also, be activated by more deliberate processes. When antecedent mood states are non-pleasurable, shopping per se may promises to transform an undesirable mood. Consumers might consciously plan to go shopping in order to feel better, but their actual product purchases may be quite impulsive. The finding that consumers respond to their moods in both automatic and deliberate ways supports our conceptualization of "impulse buying" as an umbrella term that involves varying degrees of automatic and controlled behaviors.

Finally, this study investigated the argument that some consumers are more impulsive than others, and that mood states differ in their purchase behavior impact between impulsive and non-impulsive consumers. Our exploratory findings provide some support for this general proposition. Whether highly impulsive shoppers are simply more likely to buy in any mood, whether they have more mood-congruent heuristics for doing so, or both, is an unsolved question.

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