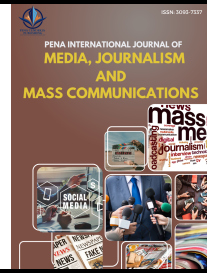




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A Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) Model of Impulse Buying in Social Media Advertising Among Digital-Native Malaysians

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the psychological factors that drive impulse buying among Malaysian Generation Y and Z digital consumers, particularly in relation to social media advertising. Utilizing a quantitative cross-sectional survey approach, data was gathered from 400 participants aged 18 to 35 through online platforms, including social media and university networks. The study investigates the effects of emotional triggers, mood influences, promotional offers, storytelling in advertisements, and the ease of online payment on impulse buying behavior. Based on the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) theoretical framework, it analyzes how external stimuli impact internal consumer emotions and subsequent actions. The results indicate that emotional states, limited-time promotions, and narrative-based advertisements play a significant role in fostering impulse buying. Additionally, the ease of online payment methods acts as a mediator in the relationship between these stimuli and purchasing behavior. These findings provide important insights for marketers looking to improve engagement strategies aimed at younger digital consumers in Malaysia.

1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of social media platforms has fundamentally transformed the way businesses communicate with consumers, particularly among younger demographics. Social media advertising has evolved from simple informational messages to highly interactive and psychologically driven content designed to capture attention, evoke emotions, and stimulate immediate purchasing decisions. As young consumers spend a substantial portion of their daily lives on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook, they are increasingly exposed to advertisements that leverage psychological cues to influence buying behavior.

Impulse buying behavior refers to spontaneous, immediate purchases made without prior planning and is often driven by emotional rather than rational decision-making processes. Previous studies have shown that impulse buying is especially prevalent among young consumers due to their higher susceptibility to emotional appeals, social influence, and novelty-seeking tendencies. Researchers such as Zhang and Verhagen discovered that younger consumers exhibit a greater

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vulnerability to impulse buying, attributed to their regular exposure to digital content and increased emotional sensitivity.

In the last ten years, the way people shop has changed significantly because of the rise of social media and internet advertisements. Social media is no longer just a way to talk to people; it has become an effective form of advertising that affects how people think, feel, and buy things. In Malaysia, around 28.68 million individuals were engaged as active social media users as of early 2024. The predominant age groups among these users were those aged 18 to 24 and 25 to 34, representing over half of the entire user demographic.

Advertisements on social media are meticulously crafted to incorporate psychological triggers aimed at igniting consumer desires. Ali and Khan demonstrated that situational and promotional stimuli have a substantial impact on impulse buying behavior among Generation Z consumers. Another important factor is the ease of online payment systems; Lee et al., showed that the use of e-wallets greatly encourages impulse buying among Malaysian young consumers by promoting quick decision-making and lessening the feeling of financial control.

Despite the growing body of literature, businesses still lack a clear understanding of how psychological triggers in advertisements specifically drive impulse buying among young Malaysian consumers. Most previous research has examined these factors separately, offering limited insight into how they work together. This leads to wasted advertising budgets and ineffective targeting. Therefore, this study aims to determine the impact of emotional mood triggers, promotional stimuli, storytelling advertisements, and online payment convenience on impulse buying behavior among young Malaysian social media users.

2. Methodology

The study utilized a quantitative research approach and a cross-sectional survey design to systematically gather data from a large number of respondents at a single point in time. This method allows for numerical data and statistical analysis to assess the strength and direction of relationships between factors. The conceptual framework was developed based on the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) model to view social media advertising cues as stimuli that affect internal feelings and result in impulse buying actions, as shown in Figure 1.

2.1 Research Design

A quantitative research approach was adopted using a cross-sectional survey design. This design was selected as it allows for the systematic collection of data from a large number of respondents at a single point in time, making it suitable for examining relationships between psychological triggers in social media advertisements and impulse buying behavior. The use of a structured questionnaire enabled objective measurement of respondents' perceptions and behaviors.

2.2 Population and Sampling Technique

The target population of this study comprised young consumers who actively use social media platforms and have prior experience purchasing products online. Young consumers were selected due to their high exposure to social media advertising and their greater tendency toward impulse buying behavior. A non-probability sampling technique, specifically convenience sampling, was employed to collect data efficiently within the available time and resource constraints.

Respondents were recruited through online platforms, including social media networks and messaging applications. To ensure relevance, only respondents within the specified age range and with prior exposure to social media advertisements were included in the final analysis.

2.3 Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of two main sections. The first section captured respondents' demographic information, including age, gender, and frequency of social media usage. The second section measured the key constructs of the study, namely psychological triggers in social media advertisements and impulse buying behavior.

Psychological triggers were measured using multiple items adapted from established studies, covering dimensions such as emotional appeal, social proof, and visual attractiveness. Impulse buying behavior was assessed using items that reflect spontaneous purchasing tendencies and lack of prior planning. All measurement items were evaluated using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

2.4 Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed online using a web-based survey platform to facilitate ease of access and wider reach among respondents. Prior to full-scale data collection, a pilot test was conducted with a small group of respondents to ensure clarity, reliability, and comprehension of the questionnaire items. Feedback obtained from the pilot study was used to refine the wording and structure of the survey instrument.

Participation in the survey was voluntary, and respondents were informed of the purpose of the study. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured to minimize response bias and encourage honest responses.

2.5 Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data were analyzed using statistical software. Descriptive analysis was first conducted to summarize respondents' demographic profiles and general response patterns. Reliability analysis was performed to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales.

Subsequently, inferential statistical analyses were employed to examine the relationships between psychological triggers in social media advertisements and impulse buying behavior among young consumers. The results of these analyses provided empirical evidence to address the research objectives of the study.

3. Results

This section presents the results obtained from the data analysis conducted to examine the influence of psychological triggers in social media advertisements on impulse buying behaviour among young consumers. The findings are organized into descriptive analysis, reliability analysis, and inferential analysis to address the research objectives of the study.

3.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Descriptive analysis was conducted to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The analysis included variables such as age, gender, and frequency of social media usage. The results indicated that the majority of respondents were active social media users, with frequent exposure to online advertisements. This confirms the suitability of the sample for examining impulse buying behavior in the context of social media advertising. The demographic distribution of respondents is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1
Demographic respondents summary

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
18–24	16	51.6%
25–30	8	25.8%
31–35	7	22.6%
Total	31	100%

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	24	77.4%
Male	7	22.6%
Total	31	100%

3.2 Reliability Analysis

Reliability analysis was performed to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales used in this study. Cronbach’s alpha coefficients were calculated for all constructs, including emotional appeal, social proof, visual attractiveness, and impulse buying behavior. The results demonstrated that all constructs achieved Cronbach’s alpha values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.8, indicating satisfactory reliability and internal consistency of the measurement items. The reliability statistics for each construct are presented in Figure 1.

➔ **Reliability**

Scale: ALL VARIABLES

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	30	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	30	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.808	4

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Ifeeemotionallyconnectedtobrandssthattellstoriesinthei	10.37	6.378	.677	.733
Adsthatincludestorytellingmakemetrustthebrandmore	10.27	6.892	.587	.778
Whenanadvertisementshareastoryirelatetofeeltheurg	10.17	6.902	.654	.746
Storytellinginadvertisementmakesmemorelikelytopurchasei	10.50	7.017	.584	.778

Fig. 1. Reliability statistic

3.3 Descriptive Analysis of Study Variables

Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation values, were computed to examine respondents' perceptions of psychological triggers in social media advertisements and their impulse buying behavior. The findings revealed that emotional appeal and visual attractiveness received relatively higher mean scores, suggesting that respondents generally perceived social media advertisements as emotionally engaging and visually appealing. Social proof elements, such as likes and influencer endorsements, also demonstrated a positive perception among respondents. The descriptive statistics for all variables are summarized in Figure 2.

➔ **Descriptives**

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
impulse	404	1.00	5.00	4.3428	.85343
emotion	404	1.00	5.00	4.1764	.88076
promotion	404	1.00	5.00	4.3012	.82242
story	404	1.00	5.00	4.2277	.82313
purchasec	404	2.00	5.00	4.4389	.60770
Valid N (listwise)	404				

Fig. 2. Descriptive statistic

3.4 Relationship between Psychological Triggers and Impulse Buying Behavior

Inferential statistical analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between psychological triggers in social media advertisements and impulse buying behavior among young consumers. Correlation analysis indicated positive and significant relationships between emotional appeal, social

proof, visual attractiveness, and impulse buying behavior. These results suggest that stronger psychological triggers in advertisements are associated with higher levels of impulsive purchasing tendencies.

To further examine the predictive effects of psychological triggers on impulse buying behavior, regression analysis was performed. The results demonstrated that emotional appeal and social proof were significant predictors of impulse buying behavior, while visual attractiveness also showed a positive contribution. The regression model explained a substantial proportion of variance in impulse buying behavior, indicating that psychological triggers play an important role in influencing young consumers' impulsive purchasing decisions.

4. Conclusions

This study examined the influence of psychological triggers embedded in social media advertisements on impulse buying behavior among young consumers. Specifically, the effects of emotional appeal, social proof, and visual attractiveness were investigated to address the research objectives outlined in the Introduction section.

The findings indicate that psychological triggers in social media advertisements have a significant influence on impulse buying behavior among young consumers. Emotional appeal emerged as a strong predictor, suggesting that advertisements capable of evoking positive emotions and excitement are more likely to stimulate spontaneous purchasing decisions. Social proof, including elements such as likes, shares, and influencer endorsements, was also found to significantly affect impulse buying behavior by enhancing perceived credibility and reducing purchase uncertainty. Visual attractiveness contributed positively as well, highlighting the importance of aesthetic presentation in capturing attention and encouraging immediate responses.

These findings contribute to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence on the combined effects of multiple psychological triggers within a single research framework. From a practical perspective, the results offer valuable insights for marketers and advertisers in designing more effective social media advertising strategies that align with consumer psychology while maintaining ethical responsibility. Future research may extend this study by incorporating additional psychological factors, employing longitudinal designs, or examining different consumer segments to further enrich understanding of impulse buying behavior in digital environments.

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