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BUY NOW, THINK LATER.

An insight on impulse buying behaviour on the Internet

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Abstract

Title:	BUY NOW, THINK LATER: An insight on impulse buying behaviour on the Internet.
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Keywords:	impulse buying, Internet, online buying behaviour, hedonism, utilitarianism.
Thesis purpose:	Investigate how impulse buying can be stimulated in physical retail stores and research whether these stimuli also apply in an online setting. Furthermore, the effects of demographic characteristics on impulse buying behaviour online are taken in consideration
Methodology:	The study follows a quantitative approach: through an online questionnaire empirical data was collected and analyzed through descriptive statistics.
Theoretical perspective:	The theoretical framework is comprised of central concepts related to consumer buying behaviour, hedonic and utilitarian shopping values, and the S-O-R model.
Empirical data:	An online questionnaire was used to collect empirical data. A qualitative interview was furthermore used to get a better understanding on online buying behaviour.
Conclusion:	Impulse buying on the Internet strongly differs from impulse buying in a physical retail setting. Furthermore, while demographic characteristics have a considerable impact on impulse buying behaviour in a physical retail setting, our findings show that these have little impact in an online environment.

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1. Introduction

In this first chapter a background on the area of interest will be presented and it will furthermore be highlighted why it is a research area worth investigating. This will be followed by an elaboration on the theoretical and practical relevance of this thesis. Finally, the research purpose will be discussed.

1.1 Background

It is a truth widely acknowledged that the Internet has changed the traditional ways of human interactions. Some authors even compare the development of the Internet to the findings of Newton, Einstein (Watson et al, 2002), or the changes caused by the Industrial Revolution (Sawhney & Zabin, 2002). Gay et al (2007) furthermore noticed that while the telephone took four decades to reach 50 million people, the Internet managed this feat within four years. The exponential growth of Internet users over the last decade has resulted in the fact that currently 1.4 billion people worldwide can be found online (www.internetworldstats.com).

Due to its popularity, Varadarajan & Yadav (2002) observed that there is an increasing shift taking place from a physical marketplace to an electronic marketplace within many industries. Many airlines for instance solely sell their tickets through the Internet these days, and video rental stores have virtually become extinct due to download possibilities online. In the United States alone consumers spent \$116 billion on online purchases in the year 2007, which is expected to increase with nearly 50% within the next four years. This means that online sales would form 40% of all retail sales by the year 2011 (Jupiter Research, 2007).

Although the Internet offers vast turnover potential for retailers, the constraints of the online environment should not be underestimated. One of the disadvantages of an electronic store compared to a traditional store is the limited possibility of appealing to all senses of the consumer. Where in a traditional retail setting the retailer can influence buying behaviour through e.g. smells and temperature (McGoldrick, 2002), the online retailer can only offer sights and sounds to stimulate the consumers' buying behaviour. Emotionally, the online shopping experience can therefore not be matched to that in a traditional outlet (Wolfenbarger & Gilly, 2001). The easiness and inexpensiveness of finding information about various suppliers and products is furthermore both a blessing and a curse to the online retailer. Although the online retailer has the potential of providing services to a global audience, the majority of the people visiting the site are only browsing (Boozt interview, 2008). This means that it is important for online marketers to pursue effective promotional tactics to convert web viewers into web customers (Zhang et al, 2007).

One of the approaches to increase sales of the online retailer is through focusing on the stimulation of unplanned, impulse purchases. Previous research has indicated that in a traditional retail setting, mall shoppers buy over 50% of their purchases on impulse; in grocery stores this has been even estimated at 70% (Nichols et al, 2001; Underhill, 1999; Coley & Burgess, 2003). Studies on the nature of impulse buying behaviour in a physical retail setting have been conducted ever since the 1960s (e.g.

Stern, 1962). These investigations have focused on areas such as the differences between impulse and non-impulse buying behaviour (e.g. Piron, 1991; Turley & Milliman, 2000) and how the direct positive or negative consumer experiences affect impulse buying behaviour (Bäckström & Johansson, 2006; McGoldrick, 2002).

According to Zhang et al (2007), anecdotal evidence suggests that the Internet is a suited medium for impulse spending; the potential economic consequences of stimulating these sales could be significant. Therefore, there is a need for online retailers to know how to stimulate these impulse purchases on their websites and hence increase turnover. Surprisingly enough, academic research on impulse purchases online has virtually been left untouched (Zhang et al, 2007). Prior investigations on online buying behaviour have mainly focused on the effects of technology acceptance in relation to online purchasing (Koufaris, 2002), attributes of the shopping experience and risk related to online buying (e.g. Stranahan & Kosiel, 2007) and the motivation for buying online (Moe & Fader, 2004). Yet, existing research fails to explain what factors stimulate impulse buying in an online environment.

Next to the impulse stimuli, demographics have been proven to have an affect on impulse buying behaviour: in a traditional retail setting, Dittmar et al (1995) for instance concluded that women tend to be more impulsive than men in their shopping behaviour. The effects of demographics on online buying behaviour have however been inconclusive: Zhang et al (2007) observed that once consumers are online, men are more likely to buy on impulse than women. Bhatnagar and Ghose (2004) however claimed that gender plays no role in online consumer behaviour. While some researchers furthermore claim that buying on the Internet is mainly appealing to younger people (Miller, 1996), others do not concur and state that older people are increasingly going online (Stores, 2001). Donthu & Garcia (1999) even claim that age has no effect on online buying behaviour. Due to the many contradictions, additional research is needed that relates demographic characteristics such as age and gender with impulse buying behaviour online.

1.2 Theoretical and practical relevance

After researching existing literature on online and offline buying behaviour as well as impulse buying in a traditional context we observed that present theories fail to explain how impulse buying behaviour can be enhanced in an online environment. Our search for previous theories gave us a basis for developing a framework for online impulse purchases. Easterby-Smith et al (2006:9) would classify this type of research outcome as reflection: "...where an existing theory, technique or group of ideas is re-examined, possibly in a different organizational or social context. This research offers two different theoretical contributions. First, it takes existing theories of impulse purchases from a traditional retail setting to a new context: the online retail environment. Second, it endeavours to bridge the theoretical gap between demographic characteristics and impulse buying behaviour online.

From a practical point of view this framework will be able to assist online retailers in increasing their impulse sales potential. Understanding impulse buying behaviour offers online retailers guidance in developing strategies that create shopping

opportunities. These marketing strategies may assist retailers encourage the consumers' purchase intentions. The benefits include an increased market share for online retailers and positive perceptions of impulse buying by consumers. Since we will also take demographic characteristics in consideration, this research can potentially offer online retailers guidelines on how to design their sites according to various consumer segments.

1.3 Research purpose

As defined above, the main research area will be within online impulse buying. The main purpose of the study is twofold. First, it is to evaluate how impulse stimuli such as website characteristics affect impulse buying behaviour online. Second, it will be investigated how demographic characteristics influence impulse buying online. Based on existing literature on both offline and online buying behaviour and impulse buying behaviour, a research framework will be developed. Through empirical data collection the framework will be tested and answers to the following research questions will be given:

- 1. To what extent are impulse stimuli in a physical retail setting valid in an online environment?*
- 2. To what extent do gender and age affect online impulse buying behaviour?*

We are aware that there is an array of other factors affecting online impulse buying behaviour such as income and level of education. However, as previous research on gender and age has been inconclusive and as it offers us to generalize results to a large extent, we decided to investigate these mentioned characteristics.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter will commence with introducing the concept of impulse buying and its different classifications. Thereafter an insight will be given on how consumer behaviour can be influenced in a traditional retail setting and discuss in detail how impulse buying can be triggered. These findings will then form a foundation for the discussion of how consumers behave online and how they can be affected by impulse buying stimuli. Finally, this chapter will conclude with an evaluation of discussed theories and identify gaps in existing knowledge that will lead to a research framework.

2.1 A look into impulse buying

Before initiating a discussion on impulse buying, we will first discuss several definitions of the term and reason for the definition that will be used in this thesis. Subsequently we will look into the different classifications of impulse buying that consumers can possess.

2.1.1 What is impulse buying?

The consumption of material goods in developed industrial countries has changed radically in the last century. A shift has taken place from buying provisions to satisfy one's physical needs to using goods as modern means of expressing a sense of self-identity (e.g. Dittmar, 1992). Levy (1959: 118) noted a development where "people buy products not only for what they can *do*, but also for what they *mean*", and implied that products possess a symbolic meaning next to a functional meaning. This development has changed the goal of shopping from the sole acquisition of necessities into a lifestyle activity. It also contributed to an increase in unplanned, non-necessity purchases, also known as impulse purchases (Dittmar, 1996).

Impulse buying and unplanned purchasing can be considered to have a parallel meaning. Occasionally a distinct difference is drawn between the two. Hausman (2002) for example notes that all purchases made without advance planning can be placed in the unplanned purchases category. Impulse buying is a type of unplanned purchase, but still differs because of the relative speed with which the buying decision is normally made (Hausman, 2002). However, as the majority of research papers use these terms interchangeably, the same will be done in this thesis.

Impulse buying takes place when a customer has a sudden urge to buy something at once and does not evaluate the decision much further, acting purely on the initial urge (Xiaoni et al, 2007). As a lot of research has been done on this topic, multiple definitions exist. While the different definitions contain the same main elements, small differences between them can lead to misinterpretation.

Jeffrey & Hodge (2007: 368) mention a definition of impulse buying from Piron (1991), which includes four main elements:

...the purchase is unplanned, it is the result of an exposure to stimulus, it is decided on the spot, and it involves an emotional and/or cognitive reaction

While this does incorporate the different factors of impulse buying, it does not give a definite explanation of what impulse buying actually is. Park et al (2006: 435) define impulse buying behaviour as:

...a sudden, compelling, hedonically complex buying behaviour in which the rapidity of an impulse decision process precludes thoughtful and deliberate consideration of alternative information and choices.

While this may sound rather negative, as the person that does the impulse buying does not look at alternatives and does not look up much information, it is noted that consumers do not think impulse buying is wrong. After the purchase they are generally content with their decision (Park et al, 2006).

Beatty and Ferrell (1998:170) propose a more detailed definition of impulse buying. They take a definition coined by Rook and expand on it:

Impulse buying is a sudden and immediate purchase with no pre-shopping intentions either to buy the specific product category or to fulfil a specific buying task. The behaviour 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.

Again, stress is placed on the fact that the shopper did not intend to buy this certain product when entering the store. It also incorporates the concept of impulsiveness, which means that the shopper acts spontaneously and without thinking much about the consequences (Beatty & Ferrell, 1998). This definition is more complete, captures the different elements of impulse buying well, and demonstrates how impulse buying is different from normal shopping behaviour. Therefore this definition will be used throughout this thesis.

2.1.2 Classifications of impulse buying

Cobb and Hoyer (1986) distinguish three kinds of impulse buying behaviour. These are based on the intention to buy from a product category and/or a specific brand: a planner, partial planner, and an impulse purchaser. A planner is someone who knows, before entering the store, that he/she will buy a certain brand from a certain product category. For example, someone wants to buy a soda and makes the decision to buy Coca Cola. A partial planner wants to buy from a certain product category, but does not know what brand he/she will choose. Finally, an impulse purchaser is someone who does not intent to buy from a certain product category or brand; the decision is unplanned. The following table illustrates this classification (Bayley & Nancarrow, 1998):

		Intent to buy the category	
		Yes	No
Intent to buy the brand	Yes	Planner	–
	No	Partial planner	Impulse purchaser

Table 2.1: Classification scheme to demonstrate impulse purchasing (Cobb & Hoyer, 1986, as referenced by Bayley & Nancarrow, 1998)

Although this approach is inclusive, it is too broad to classify impulse buyers. A more detailed approach of classifying impulse buying behaviour comes from Stern (1962) who distinguishes four types of impulse buying: pure; suggestion; reminder; and planned.

Pure impulse buying is done outside of the normal buying behaviour and is initiated by an emotional appeal. For example, a customer waiting at the check-out line in a supermarket decides to buy a magazine solely based on the pictures on the cover.

Suggestion impulse buying takes place when a customer sees a certain product, thinks about how to use it (visualizes it), and realizes a need. Here the shopper identifies an actual (rational) need, which is different from pure impulse because there a product is bought solely to satisfy an emotional need.

Pure and suggestion impulse buying are considered the least planned. The products that are bought are not part of the normal shopping pattern. This is different from reminder and planned impulse buying: here the products bought are part of the usual shopping list but, for whatever reason, just not this time.

Reminder impulse buying occurs when the consumer is reminded by something to make the purchase; this is a product that is frequently bought, but this time is not included on the shopping list. For example, a customer happens to spot the breakfast cereal aisle and remembers that he/she is almost out of cereals. Planned impulse buying is based on price and/or product specials. For example, orange juice may be part of someone's usual shopping list, but this time more is bought due e.g. a sales promotion. The orange juice was not the reason the shopper came to the store, but it was bought anyway because of the discount (McGoldrick, 2002; Jeffrey & Hodge, 2007).

2.2 Influencing Consumer Behaviour

In order for a retailer to stimulate impulse buying, an understanding of how consumer behaviour can be influenced is first needed. This paragraph will thus look at how previous theory explains consumer behaviour in a retail setting and will then identify and elaborate on what triggers impulse buying.

2.2.1 Consumer behaviour in a retail setting

Consumer behaviour can be seen as the process where people search, select, and purchase products and/or services to satisfy their needs and desires (Belch & Belch, 2004). This buying process begins when consumers identify an unfulfilled need. Typically, consumers are considered to go through five stages in a purchase decision process (Bettman, 1979):

1. *Need recognition*: occurs when internal/external stimuli trigger recognition of unmet needs.
2. *Active information search*: occurs when a consumer defines a set of products that could meet a certain need.
3. *Product evaluation*: formation of attitudes towards products that are under consideration, based on perceptions of product attributes.
4. *Actual purchase decision*: a decision of what product to purchase is made.
5. *Post-purchase evaluation*: the level of satisfaction with the performance of the product is established.

Levy & Weitz (2004) distinguish three ways in which consumers can go through a purchase decision process: extended problem solving, limited problem solving, and habitual decision making. Extended problem solving is a purchase decision process where consumers devote a lot of time and effort prior to the purchase. This process has a certain degree of financial, physical, and social risks attached to it. Limited problem solving occurs among quick purchase decisions where little room is left for information search and product evaluation. Finally, habitual decision making is a purchase decision process where little time and effort is involved because of a repeating buying pattern, which is commonly linked to brand and store loyalty. Impulse buying is seen as limited problem solving as the buying decision is made on the spot by the consumer and hence little/no time is spent on information search and product evaluation (ibid). In order to encourage (impulse) purchases, the recognition of a need has to be stimulated. How this can be achieved will be elaborated on in paragraph 2.2.2.

Despite the fact that consumers hardly search for information or evaluate a product when making an impulse purchase, they still need to get motivated before making the actual purchase decision. Donovan et al (1994) were pioneers in explaining consumer behaviour through emotional states. Their framework is based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) paradigm by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), which implies that the environment (S) can influence an individual's emotional state (O) and lead to a certain behaviour (R). Mehrabian and Russell (1974) argued that an individual's emotional state can either lead to approach (positive behaviour) or avoidance (negative behaviour). Donovan et al (1994) implied that in a retail setting, an approach response would encourage a consumer to spend more time in the store whereas an avoidance response would give the customer a desire to leave the store (Babin and Attaway, 2000).

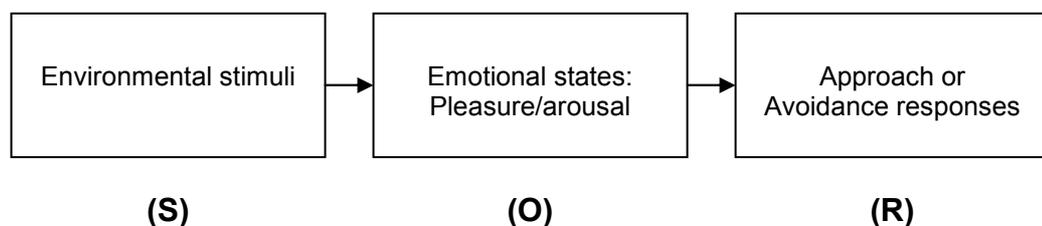


Figure 2.1: The S-O-R Model as proposed by Mehrabian & Russell (1974)

It is believed that consumer response is not solely influenced by emotional states: Greenland and McGoldrick (1994) argue that efficiency of the retail environment contribute to consumer behaviour as well. Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) made a parallel observation and suggested that consumers are motivated by shopping values. These can be divided into a task-oriented (utilitarian) view where a consumer merely finds an intended item, and an experiential (hedonic) view which involves immediate personal gratification. Hedonic values are especially triggered when consumers are positively affected within a store environment as this creates a joyful/fun experience and a pursuit of pleasure (McGoldrick, 2002). Utilitarian consumer behaviour on the other hand is affected by whether a mission was completed and whether it was done efficiently and effectively (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). An empirical study conducted by Babin et al (1994) verified the existence of hedonic and utilitarian shopping values and concluded that it indeed influences consumer behaviour.

2.2.2 Influential factors of impulse buying behaviour

Donovan et al (1994) observed that pleasure was positively associated with a likelihood of overspending in the shopping environment. Weinberg and Gottwald (1982) furthermore noted that impulse buyers possess more positive feelings such as amusement, enthusiasm, and joy. This hedonic explanation for impulse buying is supported by Hausman (2000) who states that products are bought on impulse for varying non-economic reasons, including fun, fantasy, and social or emotional gratification. Babin et al (1994) have even gone as far as claiming that while hedonic shopping values can influence unplanned shopping behaviour, utilitarian shopping values cannot. While many researchers agree that hedonic values have a greater impact on impulse buying (e.g. Hausman, 2000), utilitarian values should however certainly not be neglected in an attempt to persuade the impulse buyer. Stern (1962) for instance noted that a cognitive factor such as price indeed has an affect on impulse purchases. In an attempt to discuss what influences impulse buying we shall therefore consider both hedonic and utilitarian stimuli.

Several authors such as McGoldrick (2002) have endeavoured to list factors that retailers can use to trigger impulse buying in a physical retail setting, mentioning such properties as product characteristics, household structure, use of shopping lists, available time/money and impulse buying tendency. Other significant factors such as the retail environment are however neglected. Based on a research comparison, a general tendency was discovered to classify all variables into three categories (Verplanken, 2001; Dholakia, 2000; Abratt & Goodey, 1990): store characteristics, product characteristics, and promotion characteristics. These are categories that the retailer can directly influence and shall now be discussed in further detail.

Store characteristics: the store setting has proven to influence impulse buying behaviour. The influential factors can be divided into three levels: store layout (Crawford and Melewar, 2003), store atmospherics (Turley and Milliman, 2000), and the active presence of a salesperson (Crawford and Melewar, 2003):

Bost (1987) suggests that a successful store layout depends on whether the store has a clear concept, easy findability and a clear department distinction. Cox (1970) found a general tendency that the amount of shelf space given to impulse products has a positive influence on sales. This however varies by product, category, in-store location and store. The on-shelf position also matters as consumers tend to primarily

focus on shelves that are located on eye-level. Point-of-purchase displays can therefore increase the amount of unplanned purchases as it can distract consumers from their conventional shopping behaviour (Quelch, 1983). As it relates to task-related views of the consumer, the store layout serves utilitarian goals.

Store atmospherics can generally be seen as the intangible aspects of the store environment (Bäckström & Johansson, 2006) and can be experienced through the human senses: visual (colour, brightness), aural (volume, pitch), olfactory (scent, freshness) and tactile (softness, temperature) (Kotler, 1973). In-store browsing has shown to increase the likelihood of an impulse purchase as the consumer spends more time in the store and is thus more likely to end up buying on impulse (Beatty & Ferrell 1998). The retailer can increase in-store browsing by creating a nice atmosphere. The atmospherics tend to work on the hedonic values of consumers.

Finally, the presence of a salesperson can increase the mood state of the consumer by providing assistance and hence the willingness to buy on impulse (Piron, 1991). The salesperson can serve both utilitarian and hedonic values as he/she can make the store visit more effective but also more pleasurable.

Product characteristics: the extent of impulse buying differs considerably between types of product and retail setting. McGoldrick (2002) for instance notes that a research showed that more than 60% of jewellery purchases in a department store were unplanned, while this figure is less than 30% for lingerie. Another research showed that more than 60% of discount store shoppers buy something unplanned, compared to about 40% in a department store (ibid). It is however hard to generalize product research outcomes within the field of impulse buying as results over the last 50 years have proven to be inconsistent (ibid). Generally, impulse buying is influenced through two properties within the characteristics of a product: price and product line. Stern (1962) identified that product price has an influence on the willingness to purchase an item on impulse. Furthermore small, lightweight and easy to store products were found to be bought on impulse more frequently (McGoldrick, 2002).

Promotion characteristics: Retailers often have in-store promotional tools to stimulate need recognition and hence increase impulse purchases. These tools include price-off promotions, sampling, coupons, and in-store demonstrations (Abratt & Goodey, 1990). Price-off promotions and coupons can rationalize a purchase decision for a consumer and lead to impulse buying (Blattberg et al, 1981), whereas sampling can work on the hedonic values of a consumer by stimulating the sense of taste and hence also lead to impulse buying (McGoldrick, 2002).

A salesperson can also have an active role in encouraging impulse purchases: through such methods as suggestive selling, a salesperson can recommend a complementary item in addition to the intended product purchase. An example might be the purchase of a printer in addition to a new computer.

2.2.3 Consumer characteristics

In addition to variables that retailers can use to stimulate impulse buying, consumers themselves possess characteristics that have an influence on impulse buying

behaviour. Consumer characteristics in this context contain both personal factors and environmental factors that are present at the time of purchase. Environmental properties that could be considered are available time, available money (Beatty & Ferrell, 1998), and social influence (Silvera et al, 2008). Personal factors on the other hand take demographics, the consumers' mood state and impulse buying tendency in consideration.

The time available influences the probability of shoppers buying on impulse. Shopping in a rush decreases the time available to browse, which implies less exposure to products and a lesser likelihood of making unplanned purchases. The amount of available funds is another encouraging factor to buy on impulse: the feeling of having more money will allow someone to purchase without having second thoughts. The feeling of having more money also creates a better shopping mood, hence a positive mood state increases and thus the chance of impulse buying (McGoldrick, 2002). The presence of other people in a retail setting can also have variable effects on impulse purchases: contact with others has an informational element and influences the cognitive aspect of impulse buying (Silvera et al, 2008). Consulting a friend about the purchase of a camera for instance leads to more reflection, thus decreasing the probability of buying on impulse.

When considering personal factors, demographics (gender, age, ethnicity, education) have different effects on impulse buying (Wood, 1998; Mai et al, 2003). Bellenger et al (1978) for instance found that younger people face fewer risks when spending money, and Dittmar et al (1995) concluded that women tend to be more impulsive than men in their shopping behaviour. A consumers' mood state is furthermore another factor in the willingness to buy on impulse: if an individual is in a good mood, he/she tends to be more generous and less reluctant towards impulse purchases (Beatty and Ferrell 1998). Impulse buying tendency relates to the customers' attitude about unplanned purchases. If someone believes impulse buying is unnecessary or unacceptable then he/she will consciously buy less unplanned. Most people, however, are found to like impulse buying because it generates positive feelings (McGoldrick, 2002).

2.3 Impulse buying on the Internet

The following paragraph will look into how impulse buying takes place on the Internet. First we shall look into different classifications of online consumer behaviour and see what motivations consumer may have to make a purchase. Thereafter we shall look into and identify how impulse buying can be triggered in an online environment.

2.3.1 Online Consumer Behaviour

Due the efficiency of the Internet, the assumption had been made that online shopping would solely evoke rational behaviour through easiness of price comparisons and information search (Jayawardhena et al 2003; Koufaris 2002). The emergence of broadband Internet connections and the rapid development of web technology have however resulted into consumer behaviour that goes beyond rationalism. Mummalaneni (2005) applied the previously discussed S-O-R model to

an online environment and found that website characteristics also stimulate the pleasure/arousal level of the browser. Wolfenbarger & Gilly (2001) furthermore stated that utilitarian and hedonic values also exist in an online environment. This has led to a division of goal-directed and experiential online consumers (e.g. Bridges & Florsheim, 2008; Eroglu et al 2003). The main differences between these two categories are summarized in table 2.3 below.

Goal-directed	Experiential
Extrinsic motivation	Intrinsic motivation
Instrumental motivation	Ritualized orientation
Situational involvement	Enduring involvement
Utilitarian benefits / value	Hedonic benefits / value
Directed (pre-purchase) search	Non-directed (ongoing) search; browsing
Goal-directed choice	Navigational choice
Cognitive	Affective
Work	Fun
Planned purchases; repurchasing	Impulsive/compulsive purchases

Table 2.2: Distinctions between goal-directed and experiential behaviour (Novak et al 2003, 4)

Goal-directed consumers have a more utilitarian approach to their shopping than experiential consumers. Having a specific outcome in mind during the buying process and analytically processing information about the product, is typical behaviour for the goal-directed consumer (Mathwick et al, 2002). In an online context the goal-directed consumer appreciates flexible navigation, the convenience of the site and a chance to examine the product in great detail (Bridges & Florsheim, 2008; Jayawardhena et al, 2003; Constantinides, 2002). According to Mathwick et al (2002) 64% of all online purchases could be considered as goal-directed.

For the experiential buyer the shopping experience is more about the process itself than the outcome. These types of shoppers usually do not have a specific purchase objective. Instead, they process the shopping data more perceptually than analytically and the actual purchase decision is a relatively spontaneous reaction to the stimuli in the retail environment (Mathwick et al, 2002). In addition to the convenience of a website, the experiential buyer is greatly affected by the hedonic stimuli offered by the online retailer. Adding animated images, using various colours and sounds, and creating a website that is fun to use is a way to affect the experiential buyer's purchase decisions (van der Heijden, 2004).

Moe & Fader (2004) found that not all purchase activities neatly fit under the goal-directed and experiential classifications. They expanded these classifications into four categories, depending on the shopper's motivation to buy online: directed buyers; search/deliberation visitors; hedonic browsers; and knowledge building visitors:

Search behaviour		
Purchasing horizon	Directed	Exploratory
Immediate	DIRECTED BUYING	HEDONIC BROWSING
Future	SEARCH/DELIBERATION	KNOWLEDGE BUILDING

Table 2.3: Online Search Behaviour as proposed by Moe & Fader (2004)

The first group, the directed buyers, can be seen as the equivalent of the goal-directed consumers. With a specific purchase in mind, these buyers know what they want and are unlikely to leave the site without buying. Search/deliberation visitors are not as determined as the directed buyers in their purchase behaviour. According to Moe & Fader (2004) these types of buyers have a general category in mind but are still actively looking for information about various online retailers. The third group, the hedonic browsers, is the complete opposite of the two previous groups. With no product or product category in mind the hedonic browser is basing his/her buying decisions solely on the hedonic stimuli created by the online retailer. The last group, knowledge building visitors, is the online equivalent of the window shopper. With no intention to buy, these types of consumers are just browsing the sites for information about the products available. Neither utilitarian nor hedonic stimuli will create a purchasing decision for this group (Moe & Fader, 2004).

Eroglu et al (2003) and Childers et al (2001) suggest that hedonic values influence the buying behaviour of the online consumer, whether browsers are goal-directed or experiential. For example, an online grocery retailer can increase sales by implementing experience enhancing aspects, such as recipes and product preparation videos, to this rather goal-directed shopping experience (Childers et al, 2001). Specifically for impulse purchases, the hedonic aspects could make or break a sale.

2.3.2 Influential factors of impulse buying behaviour online

Although impulse buying is a topic that has been researched vigorously during recent decades, the amount of studies focusing on impulse purchases in the online context is still limited (e.g. Moe & Fader, 2004; Koufaris, 2002). The following section will summarise the key-findings from previous studies on online impulse purchases and relate these findings to the three, previously discussed, impulse buying elements in a traditional retail setting (store characteristics, product characteristics, and promotion characteristics).

Store characteristics: As discussed in the last paragraph, the traditional retail environment contains store characteristics which consist of store layout, store atmospherics and the presence of a salesperson. By store layout in the online environment one would refer to the usability, logic and ease-of-use of the e-tailing site. Eroglu et al (2001) identify these types of factors as high task-relevant cues, which refer to all site descriptors that stimulate the consumers' shopping goal attainment. Included are merchandise descriptions, navigation aids, return policies

and all other variables which are oriented towards the efficient and effective execution of consumer tasks. Having sufficient high-task relevant cues is of importance for the online retailer in order to be successful as they affect both the goal-directed and experiential consumer (Bridges & Florsheim, 2008; Jayawardhena et al, 2003).

Atmospherics in the traditional retail setting refer to the non-tangible aspects in the retail environment that serve to create a positive mood state to the customer and thus stimulate in-store browsing. Due to the fact that online buyers can solely sense the visual and aural cues of a website (Koufaris, 2002), the traditional atmospherics are not directly transferable to the online environment. Eroglu et al (2001) recognize the equivalent of atmospherics in low task-relevant cues. These are defined as stimuli that can potentially make the shopping experience more pleasurable. These include appeals such as website colours, background patterns, fonts, sounds; but also website awards and indicators of secure connections. Low task-relevant cues are relatively inconsequential to the completion of the shopping task but encourage the consumer to purchase through positive cues.

From a psychological perspective the high task-related cues are more aimed at utilitarian values whereas low task-related cues relate to the hedonic appeals of the consumer. This is not to say that the low task-relevant cues do not matter in creating a sale. Eroglu et al (2003) even state that the hedonic aspects can shape the behaviour of the online consumer as much as the utilitarian cues. Koufaris (2002:210) links this to the findings from a traditional retail setting:

If online consumers enjoy their shopping experience, they might engage in more exploratory browsing in the web store, leading to more unplanned purchases.

As a way to combine all of the impulse purchase aspects mentioned above, Bridges & Florsheim (2008) use the term *flow*. This refers to the state where both utilitarian (e.g. feeling control while scrolling the site) and hedonic aspects (e.g. feeling adventurous) of the site create a natural flow through the online purchase experience. The ideal situation for the online retailer would be to have a site where the consumers generate a flow which maximises both planned and impulse purchases. However, for our study we keep the focus solely on high and low task-relevant cues in order to evaluate their individual effects on impulse purchases.

Product characteristics: Previous research has been unable to explain what types of products are more likely to be bought on impulse than others online. Jeffrey & Hodge (2007) however assumed that heavy weight items may be more effective as online impulse items as these purchases are delivered to the consumer, and thus would not have to worry about weight issues. Transportation costs might however demotivate impulse purchases.

In conventional marketing research, researchers have divided products into two categories based on the level of required information prior to the purchase decision: search goods and experience goods (Nelson, 1970). Search goods can be bought confidently without experiencing the product first, such as books and DVDs. Experience goods on the other hand commonly need a thorough inspection by the

buyer before a purchase is done, as is the case with clothing and housing (Klein, 1998). Kotler (2003) furthermore used product characteristics as a basis for classifying products into three categories: durability, tangibility and use goods. However, within the context of the Internet a more relevant classification system is necessary for classifying products. Gay et al (2007) suggest three product categories that can be sold online: tangible products (e.g. music players), intangible products or services (e.g. airline tickets), and digitised products (e.g. downloadable music). This classification however fails to take such factors as product value into consideration. A more comprehensive online product classification is given by Hahn & Kaufman (2001) who use a similar classification as Gay et al (2007), and also take the level of involvement and purchase frequency into account.

Hahn & Kaufman (2001) make a distinction between high and low involvement goods. The difference between the two can be found in the amount and intensity of stages that a consumer goes through prior to making a purchase, as earlier described in paragraph 2.2.1. When purchasing high involvement goods (e.g. cars, TVs), consumers tend to go carefully through all five stages, whereas when purchasing low involvement goods (e.g. books, DVDs), several stages might be skipped. It is therefore assumable that low involvement goods are most bought on impulse. Hahn & Kaufman (2001) furthermore take the repetitiveness of a product need in consideration (one-time purchase vs. frequent purchases). Hence they propose three product categories: convenience goods (low involvement, one-time purchase), researched goods (high involvement, one-time purchase), and replenishment goods (low involvement, frequent purchase). These are linked to three different product characteristics: information goods (digital media, such as mp3s, videos, e-books), physical products (books, DVDs, clothing, furniture) and services (online subscriptions, bank/insurance services).

According to the American Marketing Association (www.marketingpower.com), an impulse product is a *convenience* product that is bought on the spur of the moment. This observation however stems from research on a traditional retail setting. On the Internet, such factors as anonymity (Rook & Fisher, 1995), easy access (Koufaris, 2002), greater variety of goods available (Chen-Yu & Seock, 2002), and marketing promotions (Koufaris, 2002) might encourage consumers to shop for research goods on impulse as well. As replenishment goods can however be defined as frequent and planned purchases (Hahn & Kaufman, 2001), only convenience goods and researched goods shall be taken into consideration. This has thus led to the following classification:

	Information goods (digital media)	Physical products (tangible items)	Services
Convenience goods (low involvement, one-time purchase)	- Downloadable music - Videos	- DVDs - Books - Apparel	- Site membership - Online subscription
Researched goods (high involvement, one-time purchase)	- Software - Online documentation	- Computers - Furniture	- Bank/insurance services - Airline tickets

Table 2.4: A deduced framework as proposed by Hahn & Kaufman (2001) of product categories on the Internet

This framework will be used in the remainder of this thesis to research which product category is most likely to be bought on impulse.

Promotion characteristics: Promotion plays an important role in enhancing impulse purchases both in the traditional retail environment as well as in the online context. Compared to traditional promotion, online promotion is targeted to a more active audience (Jayawardhena et al, 2003). Online consumers search information more actively and will leave the online store without purchasing more easily than a traditional retail store (Wolfenbarger & Gilly, 2001). However, online promotions can be targeted according to the potential buyer's interests to a level that is not possible in the offline environment. For example, the site can send customised notices about new products according to the search history of the browser (ibid). In the context of this research we shall discuss two key promotional factors that can lead to impulse buying once a visitor is already on a website: sales promotion and suggestive selling.

Gay et al (2007: 392) describe sales promotions as “short term incentives to stimulate quick sales”, and can include such online techniques as price reductions, e-coupons and sampling (trial software, short samples of downloadable music) (Bickerton et al, 2000). As mentioned earlier, price reductions and coupons can rationalize a purchase decision for a consumer and lead to impulse buying (Blattberg et al, 1981), whereas sampling can work on the hedonic values of a consumer by stimulating the senses and hence also lead to impulse buying. In the context of this research it was chosen to solely focus on price reductions, as coupons also eventually lead to a price reduction and research on sampling is complicated to generalize.

Suggestive selling, which is often used to both describe cross-selling and recommender systems, has long been used to turn single-buyers into multi-buyers, for example by use of catalogues or sales persons. However, whereas the print catalogue only has limited space available and the salesperson is not always around, the Internet is dynamic and has many more cross-selling opportunities (Zhang et al, 2007). An example of cross-selling might be when a consumer purchases a sweater online; the online retailer can remind the shopper that there are certain jeans in the assortment that could nicely match the intended purchase item. Another tool of suggestive selling is a recommender system. These recommender systems show products that the consumer might be interested in, based on similar purchases. A recommender system can also be based on product ratings and consumer behaviour. In that case, the system will match the shoppers taste to that of previous shoppers, and provide suggestions accordingly. In recent years these recommender systems have become more intelligent by providing more information (through data mining) and creating better business opportunities (increased cross-selling and customer loyalty, and shoppers browse around more leading to a higher impulse purchase rate) for online retailers (Leavitt, 2006). Chen et al (2007) put stress on the fact that the consumers' needs go first. The recommender system has to come up with suggestions that fit the consumers' needs, in order for the recommender system to be profitable. Inaccurate recommendations will not pay off (Interview Boozt, 2008).

2.4 Conceptualization of a research framework

In this paragraph the discussed findings of this chapter will be reflected on, which will lead to the conceptualization of a research framework and suitable hypotheses.

2.4.1 Evaluation of discussed findings

We have concluded that impulse buying can be described as a sudden and immediate purchase with no pre-shopping intentions. This behaviour occurs after experiencing an urge to buy and tends to be spontaneous. Impulse buying has furthermore been described as a limited problem solving buying process, implying that consumers hardly search for information and evaluate the product prior to the purchase. In order to stimulate impulse selling, retailers should not only stimulate the recognition of a need through e.g. visual merchandising or a salesperson, but should also motivate consumers through shopping values. The discussed S-O-R model for instance explained how emotional states influence shopping behaviour. Thereafter, both hedonic and utilitarian shopping values were discussed and it was found that these can generally be found within store characteristics, product characteristics and promotion characteristics. Consumer characteristics also play a role in the impulse buying decision process but these cannot, or solely indirectly, be influenced by the retailer.

A look at impulse buying in a traditional retail setting provided a foundation for a discussion on impulse buying in an online environment. Store characteristics on the Internet showed to be translatable into website characteristics where high-task relevant cues could be related to utilitarian values and low-task relevant cues to hedonic values. When considering promotion characteristics, websites showed to have more opportunities in terms of suggestive selling and personalized promotion offerings, which could potentially lead to a higher impulse turnover. Product characteristics related to impulse buying on the Internet had not been found, forcing us to only make assumptions.

Previous findings have shown that the Internet can potentially encourage impulse purchases through easy access, product availability, and anonymity. It can however also discourage impulsivity through such factors as delayed gratification, price & product comparisons and the perceptually poor environment. Our research will assess whether these combined factors have an influence on the prior mentioned impulse stimuli.

2.4.2 Conceptual Framework

While separate variables (website, product and promotion characteristics) have been identified to potentially encourage impulse buying online, the effectiveness of these characteristics online has yet to be proven. The effects of demographics on online impulse buying have also been inconclusive so far. Empirical research is thus needed to draw reliable conclusions.

As discussed, the online equivalent of a store layout and atmospherics has been found in high task and low task relevant cues are proposed by Eroglu et al (2001). Previous research has been conducted on whether high task and low task relevant cues can influence consumers in their consumer behaviour (Eroglu et al, 2003).

Whether these cues can also influence impulse purchases have however not been empirically researched. Furthermore, product characteristics in an online environment have also been investigated (e.g. Lian & Lin, 2008) but again fail to provide evidence whether these characteristics apply for impulse purchases. The same applies for promotional factors such as suggestive selling and sales promotions, which have been neglected by researchers to date. As little research has been conducted on the effect of demographics on impulse buying as well, we will take these characteristics in consideration as well. We will therefore attempt to empirically investigate the effectiveness of identified stimuli and effects of demographics through the following research framework:

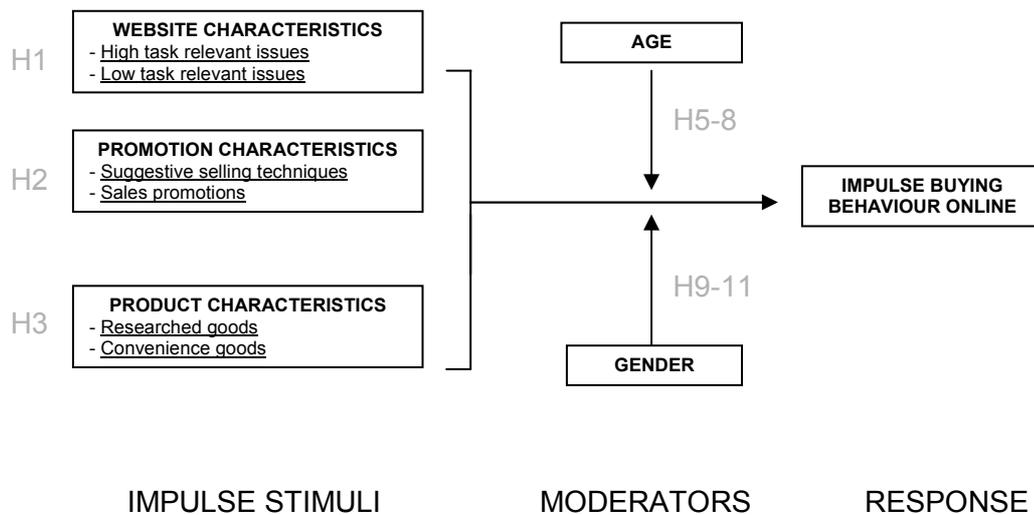


Figure 2.2: Proposed research framework

Considering the S-O-R Model by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), the discussed theory has led to a similar framework that endeavours to visualize how impulse stimuli can influence an impulse purchase. Three distinct characteristics will individually be researched to measure their effectiveness. These will then be tested against two consumer demographics: age and gender.

2.5 Proposition of hypotheses

In order to draw conclusions from our research we decided to propose hypotheses rather than propositions, as the latter are the less concrete and operational statements, and are built from constructs rather than specific variables (Bacharach, 1989). To answer the research question we have therefore proposed the following hypotheses, which are based on previous studies on impulse purchases and online buying behaviour.

2.5.1 Hypotheses related to impulse stimuli

Previous research has indicated that consumers are primarily stimulated by hedonic values when making an impulse purchase in a physical retail setting (e.g Hausman, 2000); Babin et al (1994) even claimed that utilitarian values cannot affect

consumer's impulse buying behaviour. Stern (1962) however observed that cognitive factors such as price do indeed affect impulse purchases. In an online context, where hedonism and utilitarianism equal low- and high-task relevant issues, Wolfenbarger & Gilly (2001:51) found that consumers are more likely to buy online when "they can find the selection they want, make the transaction easily, and have it delivered in a timely fashion". These can all be classified as high task relevant issues. Bridges & Florsheim (2008) made a similar observation and suggested that online buying can be increased by providing website characteristics with high-task relevant issues, such as updated technology with high speed performance. We assume that high-task relevant issues will also be more important when stimulating impulse purchases by proposing the following hypothesis:

H1: *High task relevant issues are stronger impulse stimuli than low task relevant issues.*

In an online environment, suggestive selling and sales promotion techniques have been identified as potential methods to stimulate impulse buying. As little research has been done on these promotion characteristics on the Internet, it is difficult to make grounded assumptions. Sales promotions however offer a utilitarian value (a lower price), whereas suggestive selling techniques do not. We will therefore assume that sales promotions are a more effective impulse stimulus and propose the following hypothesis:

H2: *Sales promotions stimulate impulse buying behaviour more than suggestive selling techniques.*

As mentioned earlier, the American Marketing Association has associated impulse products with convenience goods in a physical retail setting. On the Internet, such factors as anonymity (Rook & Fisher, 1995), easy access (Koufaris, 2002), greater variety of goods available (Chen-Yu & Seock, 2002), and marketing promotions (Koufaris, 2002) might encourage consumers to shop for research goods on impulse as well. However, as convenience goods involve low-involvement goods where generally less consideration is needed before the actual purchase, we believe that these are still more likely to be bought on impulse on the Internet than researched goods. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: *Convenience goods are more likely to be purchased on impulse than researched goods.*

2.5.2 Hypotheses related to gender

Dholakia & Uusitalo (2002) suggested that the male-female buying behaviour differences that in the traditional retail setting may not exist in an online environment, but also mention that it is still too early to draw these conclusions.

Previous research has shown that men and women relate differently to their material possessions (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Dittmar, 1995): whereas women are more drawn by emotional and symbolic values of products, men are in

more favour of functional and leisure items. Additionally, Bellenger & Korgaonkar (1980) observed that women rate hedonic values in a traditional retail setting more positively than men and viewed women as more recreational shoppers. As mentioned earlier, low task relevant issues affect the hedonic values of the consumer. These are less connected to the completion of the shopping task but are merely there to positively influence the emotional state. We assume that once online, women will be affected similarly as in an offline setting by hedonic values and therefore propose the following hypothesis:

H4: *Women are more positively affected by low task relevant issues than men, when considering impulse purchases.*

Dittmar et al (1995) concluded that women tend to be more impulsive than men in a traditional retail setting. Zhang et al (2007) however observed that when online, men are more impulsive online shoppers than women. To verify Zhang's findings we propose the following hypothesis:

H5: *Once online, men have a higher impulse buying tendency than women.*

Although not proven, Zhang et al (2007) furthermore assume that online promotional activities aimed primarily at stimulating more spontaneous buying behaviour would be more effective towards men. We will make a similar assumption by proposing the following hypothesis:

H6: *Men are more likely to be stimulated by online sales promotions than women.*

Dittmar (1995) suggested that women are trying to relate to their self-expression and identity when making an impulse purchase, whereas men take the quality of the object and the functional use in consideration. He furthermore observed that women were more likely to buy convenience (low-involvement) goods such as body care products on impulse, whereas men were more likely to buy researched (high-involvement) goods such as furniture on impulse. This study was conducted in a traditional retail setting, and we assume that these buying tendencies will be similar when transferred to an online environment. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H7: *Women have a higher tendency of buying convenience goods on impulse than men.*

2.5.3 Hypotheses related to age

The affect of age on online shopping behaviour has been inconclusive in previously conducted research. Initially, the Internet was described as a medium for young men, who were also seen as the typical profile of an online buyer. However, as the medium has been adopted increasingly over the last ten years, the profile of the online shopper has come to resemble that of the general population (Stores, 2001). Korgaonkar & Wolin (1999) found that older males were most likely to make online

purchases. This is also consistent with the results of Donthu & Garcia (1999) who found that older Internet users were more likely to buy online, even though younger users had a more positive attitude towards Internet shopping. Previous research on age and impulse buying has on the other hand been contradicting. Wood (1998) observed that the overall relationship of age to impulse buying is inverse: increasing age is associated with decreasing impulse buying. However, a study conducted by New Media Age (2004) revealed that almost a third of people above the age of 65 often tend to buy items online on impulse.

Dholakia and Uusitalo (2002) found that younger consumers were more affected by hedonic values than older consumers once online. We assume that this finding will translate into younger consumers rating low-task relevant issues more positively and therefore propose the following hypothesis:

H8: *Younger people are more positively affected by low-task relevant issues than older people.*

Although younger consumers have shown to browse more for products online, older consumers are more likely to actually make a purchase on the Internet (Sorce et al, 2005). Guiry et al (2006) however note that it seems plausible that younger consumers might be more likely to engage in recreational shopping online due to their higher confidence rate of making online purchases. Hence we propose the following hypothesis:

H9: *Once online, younger people have a higher impulse buying tendency than older people*

As older consumers generally have a higher disposable income, we assume that they are more likely to buy additional products online and thus are more positively affected by suggestive selling methods online than younger consumers. This leads us to the proposal of the following hypothesis:

H10: *Younger people are less affected by suggestive selling than older people.*

Sorce et al (2005) found that younger consumers find online shopping more convenient than older consumers. Some product categories were more likely to be bought by younger consumers, whilst others were more attractive to older consumers. As younger people generally have lower disposable income, we assume that they are less likely to buy online researched (high-involvement) goods on impulse and hence propose the following hypothesis:

H11: *Younger people are less likely to buy researched goods on impulse than older people.*

3. Methodology

The following chapter will discuss and reason for philosophical considerations of the study as well as the chosen research design. Then, the discussion will focus on the methods of data collection. Furthermore a justification will be given for the determination of the sample size. Finally, the chapter will conclude with an evaluation of the quality of the research.

3.1 Overall Approach

As mentioned before, the aim of this thesis is to research whether the factors that influence the amount of impulse purchases in an offline context have similar results on the Internet. The effect of independent variables (in our case age, gender, website design, promotion and product characteristics) to the dependent variable (impulse purchase online) will be tested through an online survey. This type of a study, in which the relationship between variables is tested, is called a causal study (McDaniel & Gates, 2001). The framework used in the study is illustrated below.

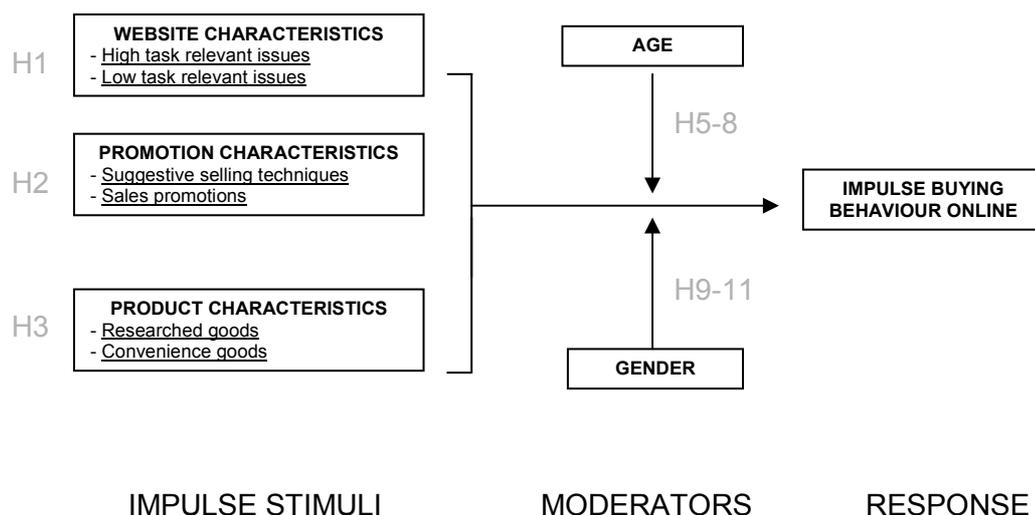


Figure 3.1: Proposed research framework

3.2 Philosophical considerations

The philosophical aspects of academic research include ontological and epistemological assumptions where ontology can be defined as “assumptions that we make about the nature of reality” and epistemology as “general set of assumptions about the best ways of inquiring into the nature of the world” (Easterby-Smith et al, 2006:31). Looking at the philosophy for our study it can be noted that the study has a positivistic approach from an epistemological perspective. Easterby-Smith et al, (2006:28) describe the thought behind positivism as follows:

...the social world exists externally, and that its properties should be measured through objective methods, rather than being inferred subjectively through sensation, reflection or intuition.

In our study it means that we, as the researchers, are independent from what is being observed. We are able to measure facts quantitatively in a way that can be generalized to a wider population. From an ontological (how we see reality) point-of-view the study has an objectivistic form. Bryman & Bell (2007:22) define objectivism as a “position that implies that social phenomena confront us as external facts that are beyond our reach of influence”. In our case we realise that impulse buying is an activity that happens independently and we can only research it through observation and measurement.

3.3 Research design

Before actually choosing the data collection method and collecting the data, scholars have to develop a distinct design for their research (Bryman & Bell, 2007). By research design Bryman & Bell (2007:40) refer to “a framework for the collection and analysis of data.” Easterby-Smith et al (2006:43) add more details to this: “research designs are about organizing research activity, including the collection of data, in ways that are most likely to achieve the research aims.” Examples of different types of research designs include case studies, cross-sectional studies and longitudinal designs. Whatever the type of a design the researcher chooses, it has to create data that offers reliability, replication and validity (Bryman & Bell, 2007). These factors will be examined in more detail in later paragraphs.

In order to find the most suitable research design for our study we first needed to assess what the research questions entailed and how we were going to answer them. The research strategy that we considered to be the most suitable for answering the research questions was a deductive study. According to Bryman & Bell (2007) a deductive study starts with looking at existing theories, creating hypotheses based on the theories and then testing the hypotheses’ validity through empirical research. In practice this means that we looked at existing theories of online buying behaviour, buying behaviour in general and offline impulse buying behaviour to create hypotheses linking these theories to the online context. The method for testing the hypotheses was quantitative surveys. Qualitative interviews with online buyers were considered but that option was neglected due to the limitations of generalizing findings on a larger scale (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Keeping in mind our research questions, the deductive approach and the quantitative data collection method we found the cross-sectional research design was the most suitable for our needs. Cross-sectional design refers to a collection of quantitative or qualitative data from multiple cases at a single point of time. This data is used to examine patterns of association between various variables (Bryman & Bell, 2007). In our case we collected quantitative data through a web-based questionnaire in order to see how demographics (age and gender), impulse buying tendency, design of the website, type of product and the promotional aspects affect impulse buying behaviour in an online context. Other research designs were also considered but we felt that the cross-sectional study was the most valid in this case. We did not choose to focus on any particular online retailer due to the fact that this type of a case study would have limited our ability to generalize our findings to a larger scale. The

longitudinal research design was dismissed due to the time constraints of our Master's thesis.

3.4 Data Collection

Both quantitative and qualitative research has been used to collect primary data. Hollerson (2003:736) defines primary data as "information that is collected first hand, generated by original research tailor-made to answer specific research questions". The qualitative data was collected through a semi-structured interview while the quantitative data was gathered through a self-completion, online questionnaire. The questionnaire was posted to various online forums. A forum is defined as a web application for holding discussions and posting user-generated content. Forums can potentially attract over millions of unique visitors per year and are considered an inexpensive and effective way to gain respondents (Couper, 2000).

3.4.1 Qualitative research

To get a better understanding of what measures online retailers are taking in practice to stimulate impulse buying, qualitative data collection was chosen as the most effective research method. In order to collect the data a meeting with a representative from Boozt AB was arranged. The company, located in Malmö, Sweden, is specialized in designing and hosting online shops for clothing stores. Their clients include clothing chains such as Tiger of Sweden and InWear. The person interviewed was one of Boozt's managers, Mr. Jesper Arvidsson. This semi-structured interview was used to test the validity of the proposed framework and get an insight of possible stimuli that have thus far been neglected in the research.

3.4.2 Quantitative research

Due to the philosophical and design considerations for our research we saw a quantitative study as the most suitable method for collecting primary data. In order to maximize the efficiency of our study we decided to collect the quantitative data through a self-completion questionnaire. In practice it entails a questionnaire that the respondents complete by themselves. Compared to interviews this format is less expensive, quicker to administer and interviewers do not affect the answers. Self-completion questionnaires might however miss some important question and issues that could be raised in an interview setting (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Because our research takes the online environment in consideration, we found an online survey as the most appropriate form of self-completion questionnaire to use: people who are not active on the Internet would then automatically be excluded. There are however some disadvantages with an online survey (Bryman & Bell, 2007):

- In general a low response rate
- Restrictions to online populations
- Requires motivation from the participants
- Confidentiality and anonymity issues
- Multiple replies

In our study we tackled these issues by taking the following measures. The response rate was increased by posting the survey to various forums that consisted of users from a variety of countries and age groups. The list of the forums used can be found in Appendix B.

The issue of restriction to online populations has no effect on our study due to the fact that our research is directly aimed at the online population. The answers used in the analysis only include people who are willing to purchase items online, thus, they can be regarded as a part of the online population.

The motivation for the participants was increased by designing the questionnaire as easy-to-use and visually pleasant as possible, as suggested by Bryman & Bell (2007). It was emphasized that the amount of time needed to fill the questionnaire was only a few minutes in order to ensure that the survey would not be avoided due to time constraints. The questionnaire was pre-tested numerous times with various respondents in order to adjust the questions and the design. Confidentiality and anonymity issues were approached by ensuring the respondents both at the forums as well as in the beginning of the survey that only the authors of the thesis used their answers. Neither the names nor the e-mail addresses were asked in the survey in order to provide anonymity.

To avoid multiple replies from the same respondents we used an IP-address filter in the survey. In practice this means that the survey can only be filled once from the same computer.

3.5 The Sample

In this paragraph we will discuss the sample for our study, and the various considerations we had to make. We will describe how we decided on issues related to age, gender, and nationality, and we will conclude with general sample remarks.

3.5.1 Age

Previous studies have been contradicting on the effect of age on Internet use and online buying: while early research agreed that Internet was mostly used by the younger population, recent studies have shown that middle aged people are catching up (Bhatnagar & Ghose, 2004). Gervy and Lin (2000) note that younger people spend more time online than older people, but mostly spend their time looking up information on products and services. The situation is reversed with middle-aged people: although they spend less time online they still spend more money on online purchases.

For our research we divided the respondents into two categories: young (ages 18-29) and old (30 and older). In the early phase of our study we considered the categorization by Miller (1996) who categorizes age groups in young, middle-aged and old. However, after receiving too little responses from older Internet users we decided to regroup the middle-aged people and the old people together. This

provided us with a sample that had a higher potential for generalizing the findings to a larger population.

3.5.2 Gender

Previous research has been inconclusive regarding the effect of gender in impulse buying behaviour. This study will hence investigate the difference between men and women as it endeavours to be explorative. According to a recent study, men and women are almost as equally as likely to purchase products online (49/51%, respectively) (Pew Internet & American life project, 2008). In order to ensure that both sexes were well represented in our study, both female- and male-aimed forums were considered when posting our message.

3.5.3 Nationality/culture

Several considerations were made regarding which nationalities to include in the sample. The initial idea was to include all nationalities or to limit it to countries within Europe. These ideas were abandoned after considering how the various cultures might perceive websites and online buying differently (Burgmann et al, 2006). The thorough cultural research conducted by Geert Hofstede offered us an appropriate way to categorize cultures and decide on the sample determination (Ghauri & Cateora, 2006).

Hofstede came up with several dimensions to measure cultural differences among nationalities. The dimensions described are individualism/collectivism, power distance, masculinity/femininity, and uncertainty avoidance. Lim et al (2004) argue that only uncertainty avoidance and individuality/collectivism affect online buying. This is because of the link to accepting potential risks of online buying and trusting of unknown online retailers.

The findings by Lim et al (2004) aided us in determining which nationalities to include in our sample. The first graph illustrates that countries with low uncertainty avoidance (UAI) are also highly individual (IDV) and have a significantly higher shopper rate online:

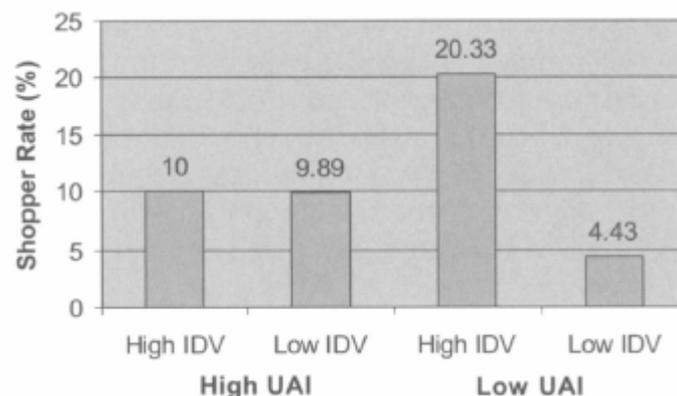


Table 3.1: Internet shopping rates according to Hofstede's cultural classification (Lim et al, 2004)

The second graph depicts what countries fall in this low UAI/high IDV category:

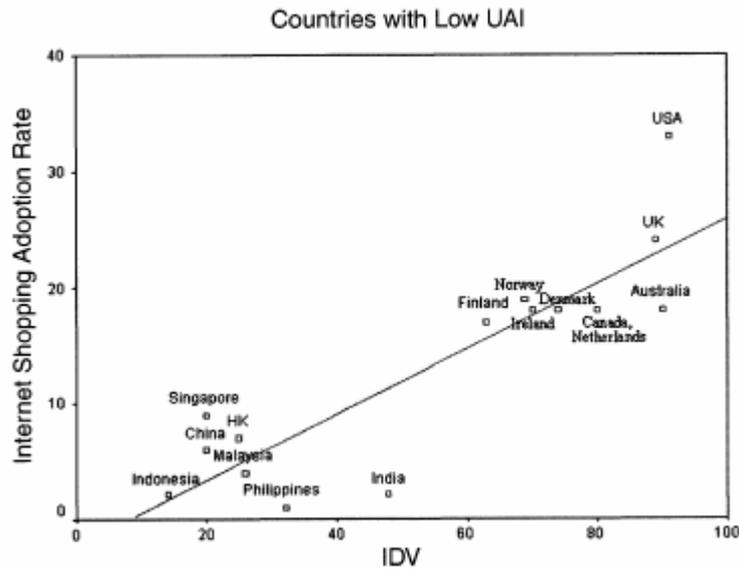


Table 3.2: Scatter plot for countries with low UAI (Lim et al, 2004)

Based on the findings by Lim et al (2004), we decided to take the following countries in consideration for our sample: United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, The Netherlands, Ireland, Denmark, Finland, Norway, South Africa, Sweden, and Switzerland. These countries also have a relatively similar online buying behaviour patterns (Nielsen Online Research, 2008). After the answers of all respondents have been collected, only answers from the countries mentioned will be considered.

In summary, only respondents from the above mentioned countries will be included in our research. These were found to be culturally similar when it comes to online buying. While it does restrict the generalizability of our study, it does give us a proper research sample. Within the sample we assume that the respondents are cultural identical regarding online buying. Therefore we will not discriminate based on nationality within our sample, it is solely meant as a filter method.

3.5.4 General sample considerations

McDaniel & Gates (2001: 328) define population in a research context as “The total group of people from whom information is needed.” Relating this to our research, we can say that the total population consists of men and women of the age 18 and older, from the prior mentioned countries. The reason for dismissing the people under 18 years of age is due to the fact that these younger people do not have the rights to do online purchases, mainly due to the limited access to credit cards. As mentioned earlier, this study will employ a non-probable, self-select web survey. Main advantages include the fact that we are sure we have a representative cross section of the population, and the survey results are representable to the total population. The main disadvantage is that it takes more time and effort to design and execute. Taking a somewhat broad sample and by using an online survey allowed us to avoid this disadvantage to quite some extent (McDaniel & Gates, 2001).

We will distinguish between age and gender, as well as online buying frequency and nationality. Other demographic factors, such as e.g. income, were not focused on because we did not want to have too personal questions in order to ensure a high enough completion rate for the questionnaire.

3.6 Hypotheses and the questionnaire

As discussed in the previous chapter, the following hypotheses have been proposed:

- H1: *High task relevant issues are stronger impulse stimuli than low task relevant issues.*
- H2: *Sales promotions stimulate impulse more than suggestive selling techniques.*
- H3: *Convenience goods are more likely to be purchased on impulse than researched goods.*
- H4: *Women are more positively affected by low task relevant issues than men, when considering impulse purchases.*
- H5: *Once online, men have a higher impulse buying tendency than women.*
- H6: *Men are more likely to be stimulated by online sales promotions than women.*
- H7: *Women have a higher tendency of buying convenience goods on impulse than men.*
- H8: *Younger people are more positively affected by low task relevant issues than older people.*
- H9: *Once online, younger people have a higher impulse buying tendency than older people.*
- H10: *Younger people are less affected by suggestive selling than older people.*
- H11: *Younger people are less likely to buy researched goods on impulse than older people.*

As our aim was to research online impulse purchases through quantitative data, open-ended questions were avoided in order to get a more measurable set of answers. We have composed 32 closed questions altogether in the survey. The first three questions were aimed to measure the demographics (gender, age and nationality) of the respondent. Question 4 measured the respondent's buying online frequency. Out of the first four questions the age, nationality and online buying frequency acted as screening questions: only over 18-year old respondents, who buy products online at least rarely, from the countries previously mentioned in paragraph 3.5.3 will be used in the analysis.

Questions 5-10 aim to find out the online impulse buying tendency of the respondent:

To what extent do you agree with the following statements when applied to an **online environment**:

	strongly disagree	disagree	undecided	agree	strongly agree	<i>I don't know</i>
When I go shopping, I buy things I had not intended to purchase.	<input type="radio"/>					
It is fun to buy spontaneously.	<input type="radio"/>					
I am a person who makes unplanned purchases.	<input type="radio"/>					
I carefully plan most of my purchases.	<input type="radio"/>					
When I see something that really interests me, I buy it without considering the consequences.	<input type="radio"/>					

Questions 5-10

These questions enable us to identify persons who have a high impulse buying tendency. To measure this, an impulse buying tendency scale by Weun et al (1997) was used on a five-point Likert scale. This scale was chosen over other scales because of the internal consistency, discriminant, and convergent validity that outperformed similar scales as proposed by e.g. Rook and Fisher (1995) (Bearden & Netemeyer, 1999). H5 and H9 were tested through these questions.

Questions 11-16 targeted the effect of the website design in relation to impulse buying behaviour. The questions were divided into high and low task-related aspects and aimed to test H1, H4, and H8:

The following characteristics of a website stimulate my willingness to make a purchase impulsively:

	strongly disagree	disagree	undecided	agree	strongly agree	<i>I don't know</i>
Website layout (e.g. fonts, colours)	<input type="radio"/>					
Ease of navigation	<input type="radio"/>					
Visual appeal	<input type="radio"/>					
Safety and reliability	<input type="radio"/>					
Product information	<input type="radio"/>					
Additional information (e.g. tips, FAQ)	<input type="radio"/>					

Questions 11-16

H3, H7 and H11 were tested through answers from Questions 17-28. These questions were aimed to find out what products are likely to be bought on impulse. The product categories include examples from six convenience and six research products. Within these categories a distinction was also made between information goods, physical products and services.

BUY NOW, THINK LATER: An insight on impulse buying behaviour on the Internet

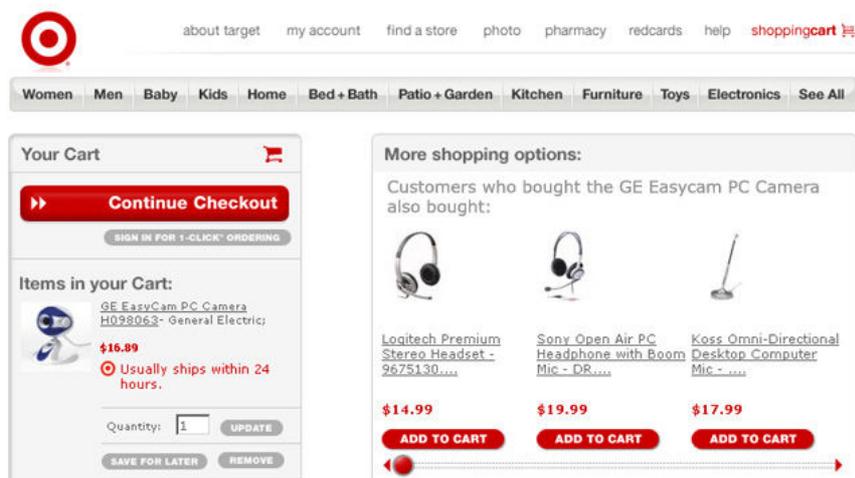
I am likely to buy from one of the following product categories online without prior planning:

	strongly disagree	disagree	undecided	agree	strongly agree	<i>I don't know</i>
Entertainment (e.g. DVDs, CDs, books)	<input type="radio"/>					
Bank/insurance services	<input type="radio"/>					
Software	<input type="radio"/>					
Downloadable videos (e.g. movies)	<input type="radio"/>					
Online services (e.g. internet calling credit)	<input type="radio"/>					
Clothing	<input type="radio"/>					
Website membership (e.g. dating sites)	<input type="radio"/>					
Electronic equipment (e.g. TVs, computers)	<input type="radio"/>					
Furniture	<input type="radio"/>					
Downloadable music (e.g. mp3s)	<input type="radio"/>					
Online documentation (e.g. reports)	<input type="radio"/>					
Tickets (e.g. concerts, airlines)	<input type="radio"/>					

Questions 17-28

Questions 29-32 investigated how the promotional characteristics (cross-selling, free delivery, time-limited discounts and related products) affect the impulse buying behaviour. The respondents were shown a picture of a modified website and were asked a question related to the picture. H2, H6 and H10 were tested through the findings from these questions.

Please take a look at the following screenshot:



In this example a product is about to be purchased. Before proceeding to the checkout, the website recommends products that could complement the intended purchase item.

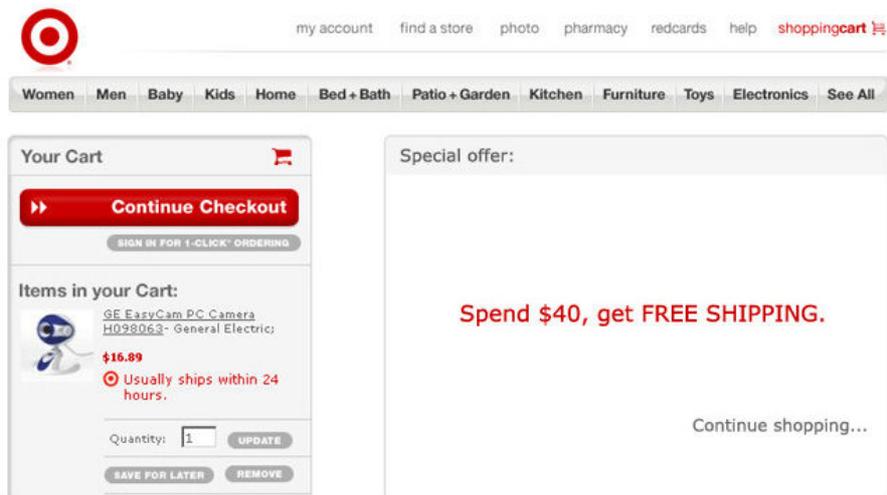
In general (regardless of the product type), how likely are you to make an additional purchase after being exposed to such a situation?

- very unlikely
- unlikely
- undecided
- likely
- very likely
- I don't know*

Question 29

BUY NOW, THINK LATER: An insight on impulse buying behaviour on the Internet

Please take a look at the following screenshot:



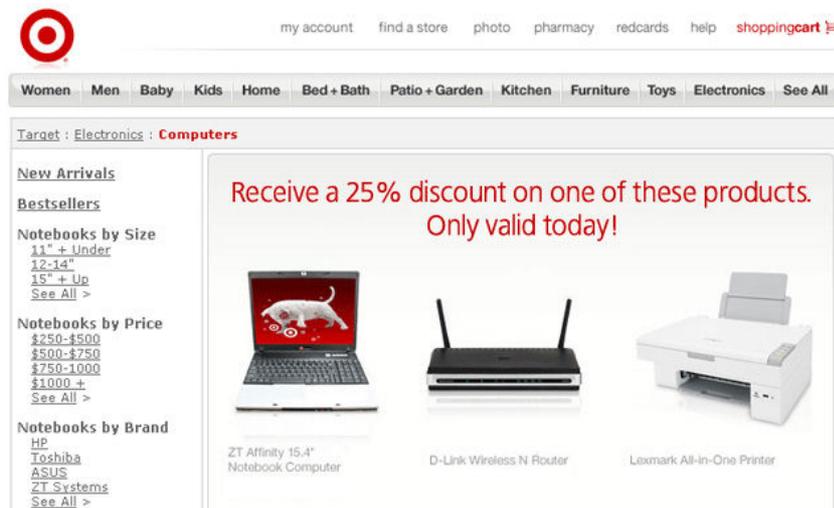
In this example a product is about to be bought. An offer suggests that no shipping costs will be included if more products will be added to the purchase.

In general (regardless of the product type), how likely are you to make additional purchase after being exposed to such an offer?

- very unlikely
- unlikely
- undecided
- likely
- very likely
- I don't know

Question 30

Please take a look at the following screenshot:



In this example random products are offered at a discount, which are only valid for the same day.

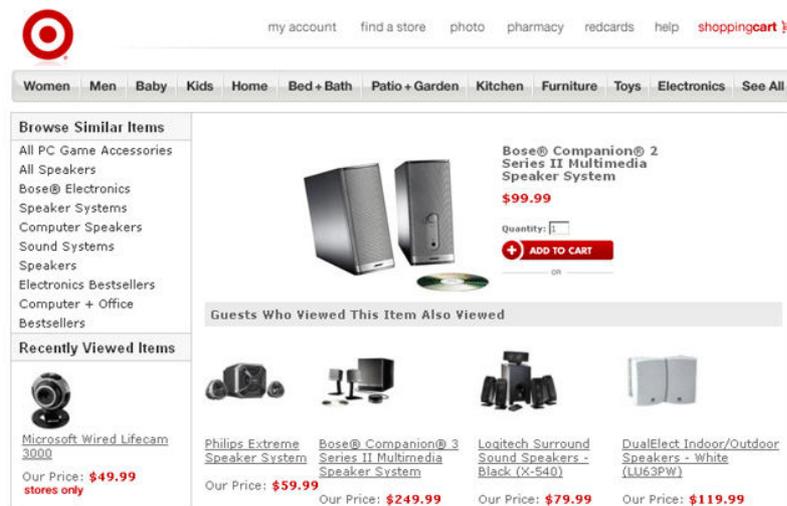
In general (regardless of the product type), how likely are you to make a purchase after being exposed to such a sales promotion?

- very unlikely
- unlikely
- undecided
- likely
- very likely
- I don't know

Question 31

BUY NOW, THINK LATER: An insight on impulse buying behaviour on the Internet

Please take a look at the following screenshot:



The screenshot shows a retail website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for 'my account', 'find a store', 'photo', 'pharmacy', 'redcards', 'help', and 'shoppingcart'. Below this is a category menu with options like 'Women', 'Men', 'Baby', 'Kids', 'Home', 'Bed + Bath', 'Patio + Garden', 'Kitchen', 'Furniture', 'Toys', 'Electronics', and 'See All'. The main content area features a 'Browse Similar Items' section on the left with a list of categories including 'All PC Game Accessories', 'All Speakers', 'Bose® Electronics', 'Speaker Systems', 'Computer Speakers', 'Sound Systems', 'Speakers', 'Electronics Bestsellers', and 'Computer + Office Bestsellers'. The central focus is a product listing for the 'Bose® Companion® 2 Series II Multimedia Speaker System' priced at '\$99.99'. To the right of the product image is a quantity selector and an 'ADD TO CART' button. Below the main product, a section titled 'Guests Who Viewed This Item Also Viewed' displays four related products: 'Microsoft Wired Lifecam 3000' (price: \$49.99), 'Philips Extreme Speaker System' (price: \$59.99), 'Bose® Companion® 3 Series II Multimedia Speaker System' (price: \$249.99), and 'Logitech Surround Sound Speakers - Black (X-540)' (price: \$79.99). A fourth product, 'DualElect Indoor/Outdoor Speakers - White (LU63PW)', is also shown with a price of \$119.99.

While viewing a product, the website makes suggestions of related products.

In general (regardless of the product type), how likely are you to buy a product suggested by a website?

- very unlikely
- unlikely
- undecided
- likely
- very likely
- I don't know

Question 32

The reason for using the Likert scale for the majority of the questions was due to the fact that this type of questions are quick and easy for the respondents to answer as well as they are easy to code and compare with previous research (Bryman & Bell, 2007). We also added an “I don’t know” option to all Likert scale questions in order to dismiss the answers that were not useful for our findings. In order to avoid misinterpretation the questions used common and easy words. All technology related terms used were explained in order to ensure the understanding of the respondent.

3.7 Quality of the research

According to Easterby-Smith et al (2006) the quality of a research is based on its validity, reliability and generalizability. What is meant by these terms depends on the philosophical viewpoint that the author of the research adopts (ibid.). As mentioned earlier, our study follows the positivistic epistemological approach; how this affects the validity, reliability and generalizability of our findings will be discussed in the following sections. Also the issues related to replication (Bryman & Bell, 2007) will be explored.

3.7.1 Validity and generalizability

From a positivistic standpoint validity answers the question whether “...the measures correspond closely to reality?” (Easterby-Smith et al, 2006:53). More specifically, are our questions really measuring the area that we are trying to measure (Bryman &

Bell, 2007)? Easterby-Smith et al (2006) make a distinction between three types of validity: construct, internal and external validity.

By construct validity Easterby-Smith et al (2006) refer to the similar validity factors as mentioned above: are the instruments accurate measures of reality. The authors refer to the findings by Yin (1994) while discussing how construct validity can be increased. If multiple sources of evidence are used when creating the measurement scale for the research it can be stated that the research has construct validity. In our study the questionnaire was developed after thorough examination of previous literature related to impulse purchase behaviour and both offline and online buying behaviour in general. This provides the construct validity to our research.

While construct validity refers to the reliability of the measurements in the research, internal validity is concerned with ensuring that there is no bias or external variables affecting these measurements (Easterby-Smith et al, 2006). Yin (1994) states that internal validity can be ensured through doing the research multiple times in order to see whether the findings are the same over time. Due to the limited time that we had for this project we could unfortunately not do this. However, in order to ensure that the questions were not biased in any way the questionnaire was pre-tested a number of times by multiple respondents, such as lecturers, friends, and family. The affect of the interviewer to the respondents was minimized by using an online questionnaire (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Easterby-Smith et al (2006) describe external validity as synonymous to generalizability: can the findings from the sample be generalized to the whole population. In our case the results can be generalized due to the fact that we do have a large enough sample that represents the Internet users' population well. Both genders as well as various age groups are well represented. However, the nationalities of the respondents cause a serious limitation to our study. Because we chose to include only certain nationalities in the answers we cannot say that our findings can be generalized to the whole Internet population.

3.7.2 Reliability

According to Bryman & Bell (2007:163) "reliability refers to the consistency of a measure of a concept". They further divide the concept into three categories: stability, internal reliability and inter-observer consistency. Stability refers to the consistency of the study, i.e. if we ask the same sample the same questions at a later stage the answers should not vary. Like mentioned earlier the time constraint for our research was tight so testing stability was an option we could not do. Internal reliability measures whether the questions themselves are consistent. One way to measure this is through Cronbach's alpha test. The results from this test will be explained in the empirical findings section later on. The last reliability issue that Bryman & Bell (2007) mention is inter-observer consistency. This refers to the consistency among the researchers: if e.g. the coding of the answers is skewed because of the inconsistency among the researchers doing the coding. In our case this was not an issue as all the phases of the research were done as a team-effort and everyone was well aware of the direction that we were going with the study.

3.7.3 Replication

Replication relates to what extent the study can be reproduced (Bryman & Bell, 2007). This is important so other researchers can redo the research if necessary, possibly on a different context. The possibility to replicate a study is ensured by clearly describing the research process and measures used (ibid.). In our case we have clearly indicated the type of the questions used, the sample used and later on the findings from our research. This means that our research could be replicated to measure e.g. the impulse buying behaviour in a different cultural setting that we used.

4. Empirical Findings

This chapter illustrates the questionnaire's descriptive statistics, which were processed through the software programme SPSS. First, overall demographics of the respondents are presented. Second, the results concerning the impulse stimuli are presented. Finally, the descriptive statistics regarding the hypotheses in the study will conclude the chapter.

4.1 Reliability of the Empirical Findings

In order to make the analysis more manageable the 32 questions were divided into seven groups: demographics, impulse buying tendency, low task-related elements, high task-related elements, convenience products, researched products and promotion. Except for the demographics, all questions were measured through a five-point Likert scale. For questions related to promotion the scale ranged from 1="very unlikely" to 5="very likely". The remainder of the Likert scale questions ranged from 1="strongly disagree" to 5="strongly agree".

To test the internal reliability of the questions, Bryman & Bell (2007) mention the option of using the Cronbach's alpha value. If the alpha value, ranging from 0 to 1, is higher than 0,6 the questions used have internal reliability between each other (Easterby-Smith et al, 2006). We calculated the alpha values to all questions groups mentioned earlier with the exception of demographics. This is due to the fact that the demographic questions consisted of four independent questions not linked to one another, thus, making the alpha value in their case useless. Table 4.1 summarizes the alpha values for the rest of the questions. These values are above 0,6 thus proving the internal reliability of the study.

Variable	Cronbach's alpha value
Impulse buying tendency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When I go shopping I buy things that I had not intended to purchase - It is fun to buy spontaneously - I am a person who makes unplanned purchases - I carefully plan most of my purchases - When I see something that really interests me, I buy it without considering the consequences 	0,847
Low task-related elements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Website layout - Visual appeal - Additional information 	0,667

<p>High task-related elements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ease of navigation - Safety and reliability - Product information 	0,751
<p>Convenience Products</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Entertainment - Downloadable videos - Clothing - Website membership - Downloadable videos - Online services 	0,735
<p>Researched Products</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Software - Online documentation - Computers - Furniture - Bank/Insurance services - Tickets 	0,756
<p>Promotion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How likely are you to buy on impulse due to cross-selling - How likely are you to buy on impulse due to free shipping - How likely are you to buy on impulse due to a limited time discount - How likely are you to buy a related product on impulse 	0,673

Table 4.1: Alpha value per question category

4.2 Demographics

467 people visited our website and viewed the survey. Out of these, 204 people completed the questionnaire, equaling a response rate of 43,68%. The average time for them to fill in the survey was six minutes. After sorting out the respondents that were younger than 18-year old and the nationalities that did not represent our sample criteria, we were left with 163 respondents.

Both genders were equally represented in the survey with a ratio of 50,3% (male) and 49,7% (female). Due to the fact that shopping online is usually limited to people over 18-years of age, we dismissed respondents who were younger than 18 years of age. Thus, our youngest respondent was 18 years of age whereas the oldest respondent was a 62 years of age. The average age was nearly 32.

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Male	82	50,3
	Female	81	49,7
	Total	163	100,0

Table 4.2: Gender

In order to answer the hypotheses related to age we grouped the ages into two different categories: young and old. By young people we refer to the ages between 18 and 29 while the old are people over 30. The majority of the answers fall under the young category with a 57,7% to 42,3% ratio.

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Young	94	57,7
	Old	69	42,3
	Total	163	100,0

Table 4.3: Age groups

Like mentioned in the previous chapter, we decided to only focus on the respondents who match certain nationality/culture criteria. Table 4.4 summarizes the nationalities that were presented in the final analysis. The majority of the answers came from Finland (51,5%). The United States and Canada were also well represented in the survey with answer percentages of 17,8% and 11,7%, respectively.

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Canada	19	11,7
	Sweden	2	1,2
	Finland	84	51,5
	Ireland	1	,6
	The Netherlands	16	9,8
	Great Britain	12	7,4
	United States	29	17,8
	Total	163	100,0

Table 4.4: Nationality

4.3 Buying behaviour

With the question regarding the overall online buying rate we dismissed the respondents who answered *never*. This was because we did not see the people who

never buy online as being capable to answer questions related to online impulse purchases. Out of the remaining options, *rarely*, *once in a while* and *often*, the majority (49.1%) chose the *rarely*-option. In practice this would mean 1-7 online purchases per year.

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Rarely	80	49,1
	Once in a while	47	28,8
	Often	36	22,1
	Total	163	100,0

Table 4.5: How often do you make a purchase online?

The next five questions measured the online impulse buying tendency of the respondents. The fourth question (*'I carefully plan most of my purchases'*) used a reversed scale, so this question had to be recoded in SPSS so it could be included in the average. The table below illustrates the means of the different impulse buying tendency questions.

		When I go shopping, I buy things I had not intended to purchase	It is fun to buy spontaneously	I am a person who makes unplanned purchases	I don't carefully plan most of my purchases	When I see something that really interests me, I buy it without considering the consequences
N	Valid	161	161	162	162	161
	Missing	2	2	1	1	2
Mean		2,2671	3,0497	2,4198	2,0926	2,3106

Table 4.6: Impulse buying tendency means (missing values representing the 'I don't know-option')

After reversing the scores to the "I do carefully plan most of my purchases", thus changing it to "I don't carefully plan most of my purchases", we were able to get a scale where a lower score implies that the impulse buying tendency is low. In other words, the higher the score, the more impulsive the buying tendency is. It is clear that respondents agreed with the fact that it is fun to buy spontaneously, hinting that they like to buy on impulse. However, the remaining impulse tendency related questions all had low values. It seems that people are not (or not admit to be) impulse buyers.

4.4 Website characteristics

While browsing through a website, the three most important factors affecting the respondents' impulse buying behaviour were found to be *product information*, *safety & reliability* and *ease of navigation*.

		Ease of navigation	Safety and reliability	Product information	Website layout	Visual appeal	Additional information
N	Valid	160	161	162	159	160	156
	Missing	3	2	1	4	3	7
Mean		3,8063	4,3665	4,3765	3,0000	3,4563	3,5705

Table 4.7: Impact of website characteristics to online impulse buying (missing values representing the 'I don't know'-option)

We divided the website characteristics into two groups: high task-related and low task-related. In high task-related elements we included *ease of navigation*, *safety & reliability* and *product information* while low task-related elements consisted of *website layout*, *visual appeal* and *additional information*. After calculating the means to these elements we found out that the high task-related cues have a stronger impact (mean of 4.44) on impulse buying behaviour than low task-related cues (mean of 3.66).

		Importance of Low Task Elements	Importance of High Task Elements
N	Valid	154	159
	Missing	9	4
Mean		3,6558	4,4403

Table 4.8: Importance of high and low task elements (missing values representing the 'I don't know'-option)

4.5 Product

Tables 4.9 and 4.10 below summarize the likelihood of an online impulse purchase according to the product group. Entertainment (books, DVDs etc.) and electronic tickets are the product types that are most likely to be bought on impulse with means of 3.39 and 3.14, respectively. The product groups least likely to be bought on impulse are bank/insurance services (mean of 1.72) and furniture (1.74). Due to our hypotheses we wanted to divide the product categories into researched and convenience goods. By convenience products we refer to the following categories: *downloadable music & videos*, *entertainment* (books, DVDs etc.), *clothing*, *website memberships* and *online services* (e.g. dating sites). Researched products consist of the following product groups: *software*, *online documentation* (e.g. reports), *electronic equipment*, *furniture*, *bank/insurance services* and *tickets* (hotels, airline tickets etc.).

		Downloadable music	Downloadable videos	Entertainment	Clothing	Website membership	Online services
N	Valid	161	161	160	163	160	158
	Missing	2	2	3	0	3	5
Mean		2,7081	2,3478	3,3938	2,8834	1,8438	1,8987

Table 4.9: How likely are you to buy the following convenience products on impulse (missing values representing the 'I don't know'-option')

		Software	Online documenta tion	Electronic equipment	Furniture	Bank/Insurance services	Tickets
N	Valid	157	156	161	161	161	163
	Missing	6	7	2	2	2	0
Mean		2,1401	2,0833	2,0932	1,7391	1,7205	3,1350

Table 4.10: How likely are you to buy the following researched products on impulse (missing values representing the 'I don't know'-option)

While comparing the means between researched and convenience goods we found out that on average people are more likely to buy a convenience good than researched good on impulse. The means were 2.55 for researched goods and 2.88 for convenience goods.

		Impulse buying tendency for researched goods	Impulse buying tendency for convenience goods
N	Valid	153	156
	Missing	10	7
Mean		2,5490	2,8782

Table 4.11: Impulse buying tendency for researched and convenience goods (missing values representing the 'I don't know'-option)

4.6 Promotion

Free shipping (mean of 2.90) and recommendations for related products (mean of 2.44) seem to be the most effective types of promotion to enhance online impulse buying. We then regrouped questions related to the *cross-selling of products* and *recommender systems* to a new group (suggestive selling) and combined the *free shipping* and *discount* questions to the sales promotion-group. After calculating the means of the groups we noticed that the mean for sales promotions (2.82) is slightly higher than for the suggestive selling group (2.50).

		How likely are you to buy on impulse due to cross-selling?	How likely are you to buy more on impulse due to free shipping?	How likely are you to buy on impulse due to a limited time discount?	How likely are you to buy on impulse due to a recommender system?
N	Valid	158	161	159	158
	Missing	5	2	4	5
Mean		2,2215	2,9006	2,2390	2,4430

Table 4.12: The effect of various promotional tools to online impulse buying (missing values representing the 'I don't know'-option')

		Effect of sales promotions on impulse behaviour	Effect of suggestive selling on impulse behaviour
N	Valid	157	157
	Missing	6	6
Mean		2,8153	2,5032

Table 4.13: Effect of sales promotions and suggestive selling on online impulse buying (missing values representing the 'I don't know-option')

4.7 Hypotheses Analysis

The following paragraph will relate the results of the research to the hypotheses and discuss whether they are supported or rejected.

H1: High task relevant issues are stronger impulse stimuli than low task relevant issues.

When taking a look at the means of both high and low task elements, it becomes clear that there is quite some difference between the two. Table 4.14 below illustrates this, and also shows that this difference is significant. If the significance value is below 0,05 in a paired-samples t-test, it means that the difference is indeed significant (as noted in the SPSS tutorial). We can say that this is the case here (sig. = 0,00). High task relevant issues have a significantly higher mean compared to low task relevant issues. Therefore, hypothesis 1 is supported.

		Mean	N	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Importance of high task elements	4,4351	154	,000
	Importance of low task elements	3,6558	154	
Pair 2	Effect of sales promotions on impulse behaviour	2,8117	154	,000
	Effect of cross-selling on impulse behaviour	2,5065	154	
Pair 3	Impulse buying tendency for researched goods	2,5467	150	,000
	Impulse buying tendency for convenience goods	2,8467	150	

Table 4.14: Differences between factors influencing impulse buying

H2: Sales promotions stimulate impulse more than suggestive selling techniques.

With a (rounded) mean of 2,51 it is clear that suggestive selling scored lower than sales promotions, which has a mean of 2,81. Table 4.14 shows that this difference is significant, as illustrated by the significance value of 0,00. Therefore, it can be concluded that sales promotions are indeed stronger promotional tools than suggestive selling techniques, and we can state that hypothesis 2 is supported.

H3: Convenience goods are more likely to be purchased on impulse than researched goods.

As can be seen in table 4.14, convenience goods have a higher mean compared to researched goods. Respondents were more positive about purchasing convenience goods on impulse online than they were about researched goods. The significance value is below 0,05, hence there is a significant difference. Therefore, hypothesis 3 is supported.

The remaining tables in this chapter are all based on *independent-samples t-test* analyses.

H4: Women are more positively affected by low task relevant issues than men, when considering impulse purchases.

There seem to be some differences on the effect of the website characteristics on impulse buying behaviour between men and women. The measurement shown in the table below, *importance of low task elements*, is an average score calculated from the different low task related questions.

	Gender	N	Mean	Sig. (2-tailed)
Importance of low task elements	Male	76	3,5395	,121
	Female	78	3,7692	

Table 4.15: Gender difference impact of low task website elements

This table shows that there is somewhat of a difference between how men and women behave towards low task elements. However, in order for the difference to be significant at a 95% confidence level, the significance value should be below 0,05. Here the value is 0,121, thus, not low enough for us to accept the hypothesis. Therefore, we reject hypothesis 4.

H5: Once online, men have a higher impulse buying tendency than women.

First, it should be noted again that we have already filtered out the (few) respondents that do not buy products online. We had to recode one of our questions (*I carefully plan most of my purchases*) as it had a reversed scale.

The *impulse tendency average*, seen in the table below, is the average out of the five different impulse buying tendency questions.

	Gender	N	Mean	Sig. (2-sided)
Impulse buying tendency average (Rounded)	Male	79	1,8101	,360
	Female	80	1,9250	

Table 4.16: Gender difference impulse buying tendency

The answers were very much alike between men and women, which is demonstrated by the close means that can be seen in the above table. With a significance value of 0,360, we will reject hypothesis 5.

H6: *Men are more likely to be stimulated by online sales promotions than women.*

	Gender	N	Mean	Sig. (2-tailed)
Effect of sales promotions on impulse behaviour	Male	81	2,7654	,491
	Female	76	2,8684	

Table 4.17: Gender difference impact of sales promotions

The mean of the question regarding online sales promotions was somewhat higher for female than for males. This already goes against the hypothesis. Looking at the significance level (0,491), we can say that this difference is not significant. Therefore it can be concluded that men and women are influenced by online sales promotions in a similar way, and we reject hypothesis 6.

H7: *Women have a higher tendency of buying convenience goods on impulse than men.*

T-testing the impulse buying behaviour based on the product against gender we came with the following table. The means, 2,83 for men and 2,93 for women, are really close to one another.

	Gender	N	Mean	Sig. (2-tailed)
Impulse buying tendency for convenience goods	Male	80	2,8250	,449
	Female	76	2,9342	

Table 4.18: Gender difference impulse buying tendency

There is no significant difference between men and women when looking at the effect of the product type to impulse buying. However, the score above is based on a combination of all convenience goods. Going more in depth with product type, we t-tested the various convenience goods and produced the following table.

	Gender	N	Mean	Sig. (2-tailed)
Downloadable videos	Male	82	2,2927	,572
	Female	79	2,4051	
Downloadable music	Male	81	2,5062	,060
	Female	80	2,9125	
Entertainment	Male	82	3,5854	,047
	Female	78	3,1923	
Clothing	Male	82	2,5976	,005
	Female	81	3,1728	
Website membership	Male	81	1,8395	,957
	Female	79	1,8481	
Online services	Male	81	1,8889	,906
	Female	77	1,9091	

Table 4.19: Gender differences convenience goods

The different means are in almost all cases very close together. The only significant differences are in clothing and entertainment, where men buy more entertainment products on impulse and women buy more clothing on impulse. The majority of products are however very similar, thus hypothesis 7 is rejected.

H8: *Younger people are more positively affected by low task relevant issues than older people.*

Website layout, visual appeal, and additional information are the three low task-related factors that we asked about in the questionnaire. Both age groups answered somewhat similarly to these questions. This becomes clear when looking at the averages, as illustrated in the table below.

The significance value (0,156) is not low enough. Therefore, hypothesis 8 is rejected. However, it is interesting to see that with high-task elements there is a significant difference between the impulse buying behaviour of old and young people. This will be elaborated more on the discussion-chapter.

	Age group	N	Mean	Sig. (2-tailed)
Importance of low task elements	Young	90	3,7444	,156
	Old	64	3,5313	
Importance of high task elements	Young	92	4,5870	,008
	Old	67	4,2388	

Table 4.20: Age group differences impact of website elements

H9: *Once online, younger people have a higher impulse buying tendency than older people*

As was done before, the impulse tendency mentioned here is an average of the five questions from our survey. T-testing this average with old and young people gives us the following table.

	Age group	N	Mean	Sig. (2-tailed)
Impulse buying tendency average (Rounded)	Young	91	2,0110	,008
	Old	68	1,6765	

Table 4.21: Age group difference impulse buying tendency

It is clear that younger people have a higher impulse buying tendency (mean of 2,01) than older people (mean of 1,68). With a significance value of 0,008 we can safely say that difference is significant. Thus, hypothesis 9 is supported.

H10: Younger people are less affected by suggestive selling than older people.

Suggestive selling, as mentioned before, consists of *cross-selling* and *recommender systems*. After combining these two factors to one variable (suggestive selling) and combining *discounts* and *free delivery* into one variable (sales promotions) we t-tested them against the age categories.

	Age group	N	Mean	Sig. (2-tailed)
Effect of suggestive selling on impulse behaviour	Young	91	2,5385	,564
	Old	66	2,4545	
Effect of sales promotions on impulse behaviour	Young	91	2,8901	,239
	Old	66	2,7121	

Table 4.22: Age group differences promotion effects

The means for the affect of suggestive selling to impulse buying between young (2,54) and old (2.45) are close to each other. The significance value of 0,564 verifies that there does not seem to be a significant difference between old and young people when it comes to suggestive selling. Therefore we can reject hypothesis 10. It is also interesting to note that the effect of sales promotions also did not differ significantly between young and old respondents.

H11: Younger people are less likely to buy researched goods on impulse than older people.

After calculating the means for the impulse buying tendency and comparing them through a t-test, we found that the means for impulse buying tendency were almost identical between old (2,58) and young people (2,52).

	Age group	N	Mean	Sig. (2-tailed)
Impulse buying tendency for researched goods	Young	88	2,5227	,645
	Old	65	2,5846	

Table 4.23: Age group difference impulse buying tendency

With a significance value of 0,645 we can clearly state that there is no significant difference between young and old people when it comes to impulse buying tendency for research goods. Hence, we can reject hypothesis 11.

Hypothesis	Sig.	Rejected / Supported
H1	,000	Supported
H2	,000	Supported
H3	,000	Supported
H4	,121	Rejected
H5	,328	Rejected
H6	,491	Rejected
H7	,449	Rejected
H8	,156	Rejected
H9	,008	Supported
H10	,564	Rejected
H11	,645	Rejected

Table 4.24: Summary of the outcome of the hypotheses

5. Discussion

In this chapter we will discuss and reflect on the findings of our research. First, we will elaborate on our research on a general level. Thereafter, we will look into the results in relation to the online impulse stimuli. Finally, we will expand on our findings concerning online impulse buying in relation to demographics (gender and age).

5.1 Introduction to the discussion

The aim of this study was twofold. First, to measure to what extent impulse stimuli findings from a physical retail setting are transferable to an online environment. Second, to research whether demographics (age and gender) affect online impulse buying behaviour on the Internet. To draw conclusions, we proposed hypotheses based on previous research conducted in similar fields. The proposed hypotheses in this research have been both supported and rejected, which forms the foundation for an interesting discussion.

5.2 Online impulse stimuli

In this paragraph we will reflect on the results of our research in relation to the effectiveness of identified impulse stimuli: website, promotion, and product characteristics.

5.2.1 Website characteristics

Hedonic and utilitarian values have both been identified as impulse stimuli in a traditional store setting, and have been translated into low-task relevant (hedonic) cues and high-task (utilitarian) relevant cues on the Internet (Eroglu et al, 2001). Hausman (2000) claimed that in a traditional retail setting, hedonic values have a greater impact on impulse buying than utilitarian values. Wolfenbarger & Gilly (2001) and Bridges & Florsheim (2008) however found that utilitarian values affect online sales the most. We assumed that these findings could also be used to explain how impulse purchases can be stimulated online.

The results of our research show that, within a five point Likert scale, respondents rate high-task relevant cues (mean = 4,40) significantly higher than low-task relevant cues (mean = 3,60) when considering online impulse purchases (significant value = 0,00). Hence, high-task relevant issues are more important to stimulate impulse buying behaviour than low-task relevant issues. These results show that the findings by Wolfenbarger & Gilly (2001) and Bridges & Florsheim (2008) can also be used to stimulate impulse purchase on the Internet. However, as low-task relevant issues still have an average mean of 3,60, it furthermore indicates that low-task cues should not be neglected and that consumers also need to be stimulated through pleasure and arousal (Donovan et al, 1994) in an online environment to engage in impulse buying. Eroglu et al's (2003) view, high- and low-task cues are of parallel importance when

shaping the behaviour of the online consumer, is however contradicted in our research.

5.2.2 Promotion characteristics

In an online environment, suggestive selling and sales promotion techniques were identified as potential methods to stimulate impulse buying. As sales promotions offer a utilitarian value, it was expected that sales promotions would also be more effective in encouraging impulse buying. When asking respondents which online promotion characteristics were most stimulating, they indeed indicated to be significantly more affected by sales promotions (mean = 2,80) than suggestive selling methods (mean = 2,49), with a significant value of 0,00. However, as suggestive selling techniques have no additional cost for the online retailer (whereas sales promotions do because of offered discounts), we would recommend online retailers to consider both promotion techniques to stimulate impulse selling.

5.2.3 Product characteristics

During our research we made a distinction between convenience (low-involvement) goods and researched (high-involvement) goods. According to the American Marketing Association (www.marketingpower.com) convenience goods are most likely to be purchased on impulse in a traditional retail setting. Factors such as anonymity, easy access, greater variety of available goods, and more effective marketing promotions, can make researched goods potentially more likely to be purchased on impulse in an online environment. However, we still assumed that convenience goods had a higher tendency of being sold on impulse online because of the smaller financial risks attached. The results of our research show that convenience goods (mean = 2,88) indeed have a significantly higher probability (significant value = 0,00) of being bought online on impulse than researched goods (mean = 2,55). The mean of researched goods however indicates that it is not impossible for online retailers to sell researched goods on impulse. We already observed this was being done in practice on such sites as walmart.com: when e.g. a webcam was about to be purchased, a laptop was suggested as a complementary item. According to our findings however, online retailers should be more successful with impulse selling when offering convenience goods.

5.3 Online impulse buying in relation to demographics

In this paragraph we will discuss the results of our research on how demographic characteristics, gender and age, influence the willingness to buy on impulse online.

5.3.1 Gender

As mentioned earlier, previous research revealed that while women tend to be more impulsive in a traditional retail setting (Dittmar et al, 1995), men tend to make more unplanned purchases in an online environment (Zhang et al, 2007). To verify this we proposed a hypothesis stating that men have a higher tendency to buy impulsively online than women. After comparing the results, we found that women have a

slightly higher impulse tendency online than men, which corresponds with Dittmar et al's (1995) findings in a traditional retail setting. However, the difference between men and women was found to be non-significant, which makes us believe that men and women have an equal impulse buying tendency online. These findings show similarities with observations by Dholokia & Uusitalo (2003) who suggest that there is virtually no difference in the online shopping behaviour between men and women. This is also acknowledged by the findings of Wallace (2000), who concludes that men and women do not appear to shop differently online. As differences in gender relations appear to be negligible, we suggest that the observations by Dholokia & Uusitalo (2003) and Wallace (2000) can also be used to explain online impulse buying gender relations.

Because men and women proved to relate differently to material goods in a traditional retail setting (women were more attracted by hedonic values than men) (Bellenger & Korgaonkar, 1980), we assumed this relation would also be valid in an online setting. Hence, we proposed that women were more affected by low-task relevant issues than men when purchasing on impulse. Our findings show that women are indeed slightly more likely to be affected by low-task issues, although this difference is again not big enough to be called significant. This might be explained by the fact that women are seen more as recreational shoppers in a traditional setting and are more easily triggered by emotional appeals. On the Internet however, a recreational shopping mood is more difficult to create as the retailer can merely stimulate two of the five human senses, making the shopping experience potentially less exciting. Because of this limitation, it is understandable that women become less recreational in their shopping behaviour and respond similarly to online hedonic values as men.

Relying on Zhang et al's (2007) suggestion that men are more likely to purchase products online after being exposed to online sales promotions, we proposed a similar hypothesis and related it to impulse buying. The findings show that women are more likely to buy on impulse after being exposed to online sales promotions, but the difference is not big enough to label it significant (sig. = 0,00). We can hence conclude that women and men are equally affected by online sales promotions when buying on impulse. Among suggestive selling cues, men were slightly more likely to be affected (mean men = 2,36 and mean women = 2,30). The significance value was found to be above 0,05, hence not significant.

As discussed earlier, Dittmar (1995) observed that women were more likely to buy convenience (low-involvement) goods such as body care products on impulse, whereas men were more likely to buy researched (high-involvement) goods such as electronic equipment on impulse. These findings were tested in a traditional retail setting and we proposed that similar tendencies would take place in an online environment. According to our findings, men (mean = 2,82) and women (mean = 2,93) are equally as likely to buy convenience goods online on impulse, which has led to a rejection of our hypothesis. It is however interesting to see that significant differences do exist within the product categories of convenience goods: entertainment, such as DVDs and books, are more likely to be bought by men on impulse with a significant value of 0,05. Women are however more likely to buy clothing online without prior consideration with a significant value of 0,01.

With a mean of 2,20 for men and 2,07 for women, we observed that men are more likely to buy researched goods on impulse online than women. However, as the difference is not significant, these differences should be neglected and it should be assumed that men and women buy researched goods similarly on impulse. Significant differences do exist within the product categories of researched goods: men are more likely to buy electronic equipment (significant value = 0,01) and software (significant value = 0,02) than women online without prior planning.

5.3.2 Age

Low task elements were found to have a similar influence on both old and young respondents. Looking at the individual factors, it can be noted that website layout and visual appeal had very close means. Additional information, however, did have a significant difference between old and young people. Out of the high task elements, product information proved to be the only factor with a significant difference. This contradicts with the view of Dholakia and Uusitalo (2002), who say that hedonic values were more important for younger people. Apparently, utilitarian values are more important to them.

Our hypothesis based on low task elements was rejected. However, together the high and low task elements do illustrate that young people have a different impulse shopping behaviour from old people. We therefore assume that young people need to know more about the product before they buy on impulse.

While pure impulse buying happens on the spot, a few stimulating factors need to be in place for young people to make an impulse purchase. As noted above, young people require general product information and additional information. In order to get them to make a pure impulse purchase online, they need to be able to access all information within one click. All available information should be readily available so they can quickly make a decision. One of the characteristics of an impulse purchase is, is that it occurs quick, hence websites should facilitate this (Beatty & Ferrell, 1998). It is also important to make sure there are no hidden costs or inconveniences, as this will prevent an impulse purchase from being made and can even lead to a situation where the shopper will no longer visit the site in the future (Boozt interview, 2008).

Additional information was noted as an important selling criterion for young people to make an impulse purchase. Linking this to existing classifications of impulse buying, this seems to be related to reminder impulse buying. Additional information is something that carries shoppers over the threshold, encouraging them to buy on the spot because they are reminded by a need they have. Online retailers have to ensure additional information (method of application, shipping rates, available sizes and colours, alternative products, producers website, etc.) is readily available so the need for this product comes up again the mind of the shopper (McGoldrick, 2002; Jeffrey & Hodge, 2007).

Our results suggest that young people need more information than old people before making an impulse purchase. Does that mean it is more difficult to get young people to buy on impulse? It seems like they are harder to convince. According to hypothesis 6, this is however not the case: young people buy more on impulse than old people. This could be related to the fact that they browse around more online, and

by doing that they are more exposed to different stimuli (Sorce et al, 2005). If an online retailer ensures the presence of information about the products, and any other additional information, it should have a positive influence on the impulse buying frequency of its young customers. This finding concurs with the research of Wood (1998), who found that an increasing age leads to a decrease in impulse buying.

Factors that do not seem to have a major difference between age groups are different promotional tools. Our hypothesis about suggestive selling was rejected as we could not prove a significant difference. Alternatively, looking at sales promotions will give us a similar conclusion. With a significance value of 0,24 it can be concluded that old and young people also do not react differently to free shipping and discounts. It does not seem that a higher income leads to more impulse buying because of suggestions or sales promotions. Additional research might be required to go into more detail and include more different aspects of promotion.

Different product types do not generate different reactions from the two age groups. In general, old and young people responded similarly to product-related questions. The only significant differences can be found within clothing and online documentation. Downloadable videos and music nearly had significant differences. Online documentation was more preferred by older people, while clothing and downloadable music and videos were preferred by young people. This finding corresponds with Sorce et al (2005), in that some product categories are indeed more suitable for different age groups. Online documentation can be considered as a product type that older people buy on impulse more easily. It is furthermore seen as a researched information good, and seems to be appealing to consumers with utilitarian needs. Clothing, on the other hand, is a physical convenience good that appeals more to the hedonic needs, and is significantly bought more on impulse by younger people.

Besides website characteristics, we can say that there is little difference between how old and young people buy on impulse online. In that way, Stores (2001) was right in saying that because of a continuously increasing adoption rate, the profile of an online shopper is starting to match that of a shopper in a traditional retail environment.

6. Conclusion

In this final chapter we will draw conclusions on the findings of our research and highlight both the theoretical and practical contributions of this thesis. Thereafter we will discuss our limitations and suggestions for future research.

6.1 Reflection

The most important conclusion that we can draw from this research is that findings in a traditional retail setting are not valid in an online environment. The most notable finding is the difference in store characteristics. While hedonic values predominantly shape and stimulate impulse sales in an offline setting, utilitarian values are the main drivers in an online environment to encourage impulse purchases. Consumers tend to be affected much more by such high-task cues as ease of navigation and safety than low-task cues such as the visual appeal and website layout.

Store characteristics are not the only factors that make up the difference between impulse buying in an on- and offline setting: product characteristics also differ. Convenience goods have shown to be the primary sellers on impulse in a traditional retail setting. However, our research has shown that while convenience goods are more easily sold on impulse online, researched goods do also qualify as potential online impulse purchases. Convenience goods such as clothing, entertainment and downloadable music qualify in particular; within researched goods, electronic equipment and tickets are most likely to be sold on impulse online.

Promotion characteristics in an on- and offline setting cannot easily be compared as the available promotion instruments differ: while a sales person can recommend a cross-sell offline, a recommender system has to take over this task in an online environment. Within the identified promotion impulse stimuli, sales promotions however proved to be more effective impulse stimuli than suggestive selling techniques. This was already assumed beforehand due to the utilitarian nature that sales promotions possess.

Findings on the influence of demographics on online impulse behaviour are very straightforward: age and gender have negligible effects on the impulse decisions made on the Internet. Men and women tend to rate shopping values, product characteristics and web promotions similarly. This shows a large contrast with a traditional retail setting, where women tend to buy more products on impulse as they are more seen as recreational shoppers. It should however be noted that significant differences were found among certain product categories such as clothing and electronic equipment.

In order for an online retailer to appeal to young people when it comes to website design, readily available information is of value. While impulse buying is a sudden urge to buy, certain facilitators need to stimulate this urge. To appeal to young people, information is important.

What can be concluded from our research is that there are no specific website elements that influence impulse buying in the same way as with young people. Older people prefer an all-round website that covers both high and low task, and websites that have older people as a target group should cater to this.

Young people buy more on impulse than old people. This can be related to the time spent browsing online. Young people tend to look around more than old people, and by doing that they are exposed to more stimuli. Retail websites have to facilitate this by offering plenty of links to look around in, where stimuli can be found on the different parts of the website. Old people seem to be more goal-directed. Websites targeting old people can play into this by use of banners and links, making sure the website is as efficient and effective as possible.

For the online retailer it is important that the products offered match the targeted market segment. Our research more or less confirms that certain products sell better on impulse to specific age groups. While clothing and downloadable music and videos sell better to younger people, only online documentation seems to appeal to older people more.

Our research did not provide any conclusive evidence of differences between how old and young people regarding promotional tools. Both age groups answered our promotion questions similarly, and it seems they share the same opinions. In other words, websites do not need to adapt their promotional tools to different age groups in order to influence impulse sales.

6.2 Theoretical and practical contributions

As of yet, research on online impulse buying has been very limited. The major theoretical contribution has been to examine the effectiveness of several impulse stimuli online. Secondly, the research examined what factors affect online impulse buying. By empirically testing the online impulse buying behaviour we have investigated how previous studies for offline impulse buying behaviour match the online impulse buying behaviour of consumers. Our study has created a foundation for research related to online impulse buying and could guide future research.

Since a great deal of businesses is moving into the virtual world of e-commerce it becomes evident that the competition between the companies is becoming more fierce. Both in the offline and the online world, the retailers who know their customers and their needs well are more likely to succeed in this competition. For the online retailer our study can offer guidelines for designing the e-commerce site in a fashion that appeal to the targeted market segment. We are not saying that our findings are the key to success for all online retailers but we strongly feel that the outcome of our research would benefit online retailers.

Our findings showed that the impulse buying process online is not heavily dependent on the demographics of the browser or the promotional activities of the online retailer. However, there are some other interesting findings that could benefit online retailers. For example, if the online retailer decides to target young women searching for e-commerce sites that sell clothing, it is good for the online retailer to know how to affect the impulse buying behaviour of the browsers. In this case providing more information about the products in a visually appealing way and offering free shipping could turn the browser into an impulse buyer. In other words, the findings from our

research can assist online managers to create and/or design their website in a way that would be as stimulating to impulse purchases as possible to the chosen market segment.

6.3 Limitations and future research

The main limitations of our study were time constraints. Our initial idea was to examine which of the identified variables affect online impulse buying the most. Because of limited time available we were unable to regroup these variables into a ranking order of impulse stimuli efficiency. According to Bryman & Bell (2007) this is a common problem with cross-sectional research designs. The amount of time also hindered our possibilities to retest the survey, thus limiting the internal validity of the research.

Because we did not find evidence to support our hypotheses, which were mainly based on studies of offline impulse buying behaviour, it can be stated that the previous consumer behaviour studies are not directly applicable to the online environment. Therefore more research on online buying behaviour is needed. The study conducted could be used as a theoretical basis to see if, e.g. respondents from different cultures would answer the questionnaire in a similar matter.

Due to the fact that the online questionnaire was available for the respondents only for 14 days the amount of responses was not as high as it could have been. For example, the ratio of young and old people was skewed towards the young respondents so much that we could not divide the respondents to more specific age groups. Future research could investigate in detail how age affects impulse purchases online.

Our research only took the effect of a few demographic factors in consideration. A more thorough study that would consider other demographics, such as the level of income and education, should be conducted in order to get a more in-depth understanding of online impulse buying. Likewise the fact that we have only focused on a few elements that the online retailer can affect can be considered a limitation. For example, our study discusses solely a few promotional factors and their effect on impulse buying so one direction for future research could be to extend the discussion to other promotional tools, such as up-selling.

Another future research area would be to expand our research into a longitudinal study, in order to see if the impulse buying behaviour changes when the respondents get older and/or are more familiar with an online buying context.

Like mentioned in the discussion about the sample we limited our respondents to only represent certain, culturally similar countries. Although this helped us to narrow down our study and to generalize the findings to the group of countries chosen, it can be argued that our findings are not generalizable to the whole online population. Due to the fact that online retailing is a global phenomenon it would be beneficial to expand this research to other culturally different countries. Understanding the effect of culture to online impulse buying behaviour would create value to both theorists as well practitioners.

A major limitation in our study is that is solely based on opinions about online impulse buying. For example, a question like “*How likely are you to buy on impulse due to a discount?*” might yield a different kind of a result in a real situation where the respondent is actually buying a product online. Our research would have been more reliable if we would have had the time and the resources to observe the respondents actually buying products online. This creates an interesting topic for future research: do our findings provide the same type of results as the actual online buying behaviour?

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Interview

Arvidsson, J. - Boozt AB (23.04.2008)

Appendix A: Interview outline

Interview with Mr. J. Arvidsson from Boozt AB. April 23rd 14:00.
Interviewers: André Stoorvogel & Martin Zinkweg.

It is known that in a traditional retail setting both utilitarian (task-oriented) and hedonic (experiential) values have a considerable affect on consumer buying behaviour: consumers seem to both appreciate an efficient (sales promotions) as well as a joyful (sensory stimuli) shopping experience. From your experience, how do these values translate into online shopping behaviour? Your company website for instance mentions social e-commerce, could you elaborate on this strategy?

How does Boozt generally stimulate potential online impulse buyers to make a purchase? What do you believe are the most important stimuli that lead to an online impulse purchase?

Your website mentions that you use cross-sell, up-sell and save the sale strategies to maximize profitability. Could you elaborate on these strategies in terms of proven effectiveness, which product items work best in these strategies and what target group is most likely to be persuaded by these approaches?

Could you elaborate on your other strategies, such as increased conversation rates and lost revenue capture?

How do you think about the effectiveness of such strategies as recommender systems (customers who bought, also bought...), bundle offers (buy this item with that item and get x% off), free shipping (with orders over e.g. 2000 SEK), time limited discounts (you just bought item A, if you order item B within the next 12 hours you will get a discount). Are there any other online impulse strategies available that you have any experience with?

Some researchers found that small, lightweight and easy to store products are most likely to be purchased on impulse in an offline setting. Which product characteristics do you believe lead to most impulse purchases on the Internet? Do size and weight also matter?

Furthermore we would like to go through our proposed framework and discuss whether you agree and/or have any suggestions for improvements.

Appendix B: List of used Internet forums

To gain respondents, we posted a message on numerous international forums and asked whether people would want to participate in our survey. The message used:

Hello!

We are a group of marketing students studying in Lund, Sweden. Currently we are working on our thesis and would greatly appreciate your help with our research.

We would like to ask a few minutes of your time to fill the following questionnaire concerning online consumer behaviour:

<http://www.questionpro.com/akira/TakeSurvey?id=951469>

Your survey responses will be strictly confidential and will be solely used in the context of our research.

Should you have questions regarding this survey, please do not hesitate to contact us (lunduniversity08@gmail.com).

Thank you in advance.

The used forums:

www.dvd.nl

A Dutch website that reviews dvd releases. The forum is active and is used to talk about movies, dvd's, online stores, and users sell dvd's to each other as well.

www.woot.com

A prime example of impulse buying. Every night at midnight a new product is posted. This product is only available for one day at a heavy discount, and only a limited amount is available. The forum allows members to talk about various related topics.

www.facebook.com

A social networking website that also has so-called 'groups', where users can talk about certain specific topics. Our message was posted in the *Addicted to ebay* group, as it relates to online buying.

www.ebay.com

Ebay is a popular online auction site. There is also a forum where members can talk about various topics, including online buying experiences.

www.penny-arcade.com

Penny Arcade is a popular online videogame comic. The forum has a lot of (mostly young male) users, who talk about a variety of topics, mostly relating to videogames, the Internet, technology, etc.

www.vrouwonline.nl

A Dutch website strictly for women. Several big Dutch magazines for women use this site as their homepage, and the forum is used by women of all ages to socialize and talk about different topics.

www.suomi24.fi

An overall Finnish discussion forum where the respondents represent a variety of ages

keskustelu.plaza.fi

An overall Finnish discussion forum where the respondents represent a variety of ages

www.antenniosasto.com

A Finnish forum where the majority of the users are technology-oriented males

www.arvostelut.net

A Finnish site for rating movies, games etc. Mainly young males are using this site

www.demi.fi

A Finnish forum for young women

www.dvdplaza.fi

Finnish discussion about DVDs. Majority of the respondents are male

chat.yle.fi

The Finnish national radio's chat forums. Older, both male and female users at this forum.

www.fok.nl

A Dutch forum targeted at both men and women between 15 and 30.

Furthermore eight American forums were addressed, which were all related to online buying and attract men and women between 18 and 55:

forums.moneysavingexpert.com

<http://www.bigbigforums.com>

<http://www.authenticforum.com>

<http://www.dealtaker.com>

<http://www.eshopforums.com>

<http://www.pennlive.com>

<http://forums.dealofday.com>

<http://www.freelunchroom.com>