

UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA
SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS

MASTER THESIS

ONLINE IMPULSE BUYING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Ljubljana, March 2022

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AUTHORSHIP STATEMENT

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SEU - subjective expected utility

INTRODUCTION

When the COVID-19 pandemic started in the early months of 2020, it shook the global economy. In March 2020 WHO declared COVID-19 to be a pandemic and instructed governments around the world to implement social distancing guidelines. These guidelines were meant to prevent the spread of the virus by forcing people to stay at home and by limiting in person interaction as much as possible. Numerous businesses had to close-down for the time of lockdowns, and millions of people had to follow the strict social distancing guidelines (Iriani, Nuswantara & Kartika, 2021). This meant that most of the population was instructed to spend more time at home and in isolation. Furthermore, such circumstances were a reason for an increased feeling of boredom and in some cases a decrease in the mental wellbeing among the general population (Boylan, Seli, Scholer & Danckert, 2021). The main subject and objective of this thesis is to research the connection between a global health crisis of COVID-19 pandemic and the changes in consumer behaviour, focusing specifically on impulsive purchases.

Impulsive purchases are in the broadest sense defined as unplanned purchases (Ling & Yazdanifard, 2015). According to Herabadi (2003), such purchasing behaviour may involve a feeling of instant gratification and excitement (the main driver behind impulsive purchases), an unforeseen and spontaneous need to buy the item that provoked such feelings, a lack of considering the alternatives and a dismissal of potentially unfavourable consequences – such as the feeling of regret and guilt (Lin & Yazdanifard, 2020). According to Moser, Schoenebeck and Resnick (2019) such purchases are not a rare occurrence and 84%-86% of more than 2200 participants (all from the US) have admitted to impulsive purchases offline and online. When a consumer impulsively purchases a product, they get a feeling of gratification and excitement. This offers a significant change from their everyday boredom even if this “rush” only lasts for a short time.

E-commerce retailers are aware of this and do, similarly, to their offline counterparts, have a motive to perpetuate impulsive buying behaviour in their consumers. The fundamentals to attracting customers are of course an optimized website, for all types of devices, an appealing design of the website, a vast assortment of products and a good navigation which makes it easy and enjoyable for the consumer to browse the website (Moser, Schoenebeck & Resnick, 2019). They also use various different tools to attract consumers, such as quick delivery, which gives the consumers a promise of “near-instant” gratification. Additional incentives for impulsive purchases online are company’s refund/return policies, products that are being promoted as being “on sale” or unexpected coupons and gifts (Moser, Schoenebeck & Resnick, 2019). Furthermore, online retailers use “on sale promotions”, limited time offers, highlighting popular products and recommended products (Dhar, Huber & Khan, 2007) and “only one left in stock” tactic to create a perception of shortage (Browne & Jones, 2017). Social media can also be a trigger for impulsive purchases, through provoking peer pressure (Zhang, Yuan, Zheng, Lian, Xie & Rui, 2015). The more time people spend online the more

they are exposed to these tools and the probability of them impulsively buying something increases (Moser, Schoenebeck & Resnick, 2019).

Because of long lockdowns, people were in a state of long-term boredom - in some cases in state of mental unwell being - and when that occurred, people started to look for ways to escape it. Because impulsive consumption is a way in which people can increase their emotional arousal, many people have experienced an increased impulsive buying tendency (Droit-Volet, Gil, Martinelli, Andant, Clinchamps, et al., 2020). According to Sundström, Hjelm-Lidholma & Radonb (2019), boredom is one of the main factors that contribute to consumer behaviour. When people are bored, as they are during lockdowns, they are an easy target for tools online retailers use (discounts, advertisements etc.) (Deng, Wang, Xie, Chao & Zhu, 2020). Additionally, people who are experiencing a period of low emotional arousal, will be looking for complex stimuli which in the years of COVID-19 pandemic led to an increased tendency to impulsively consume items, since impulsive consumption tends to bring feelings of gratification and excitement (Modin & Smith, 2020). In this thesis I will explore how the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown measures affected the spending habits of consumers. While studies about how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected consumers already exist, such as Modin and Smith's take on Impulsive buying behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic, no studies were conducted on the topic on online impulse buying during this period of time.

The main purpose of this thesis is to contribute to the body of knowledge on the connection between the COVID-19 pandemic and impulsive behaviour online. In order to achieve this purpose several research goals were formed:

1. To learn how consumers shop online and how they feel when they place an online order.
2. To learn what is the role of tactics used by online retailers in consumers' decision to buy impulsively.
3. To learn whether the consumers' behaviour has become more impulsive since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In order to be able to give answers to these goals, I formed research questions, which were as follows:

1. What are consumers' habits in online shopping?
2. How do consumers feel when impulsively buying online?
3. Which factors contribute the most to the consumers' impulsive buying?
4. How do consumers react to tools used by online retailers?
5. How do consumers who experienced lockdown measures understand the role of these measures in their urge to buy impulsively?

In order to create a reliable methodological framework, I relied on secondary as well as primary data sources. The theoretical part of the thesis was composed by reading and

summarizing secondary data sources. The empirical part of this thesis was formed by using qualitative data – in depth interviews. Due to a smaller number of respondents and the fact that interviews were conducted face to face or online I was able to adapt to each individual with specific questions. Therefore, by choosing a qualitative research method I was able to obtain more detailed information as was stated by Yeomans (2017) where they claimed that an interviewer can ask the participants to explain the motivation behind their actions to a larger extent than they would be able to with quantitative research method.

This master's thesis consists of 5 chapters. In the first chapter I look at the existing findings and theory behind impulsive purchasing behaviour. In the second chapter I shed some light on the differences between online and offline impulsive buying, with the help of pre-existing literature. In the third chapter, I give a rough outline of the COVID-19 pandemic and with the help of secondary sources connect the pandemic with the well-being of consumers. In this chapter I also give a description of used methodology and the structure of the interview. In chapter four I analyse the answers given by the interviewees and summarize the findings. Chapter five is meant for discussion and implications of the research as well as opportunities for future research.

1 IMPULSIVE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Ever since the 1990's, impulsive buying has been constantly and significantly increasing. According to Evans, Jamal & Foxall (2009), this is because consumers wish to be more time-efficient and therefore do not take the time to plan their purchases by creating shopping lists as much as they did in the past. Consumers are therefore accepting the economic risk of spending more money, that comes with impulse buying. (Evans, Jamal & Foxall, 2009). To understand what exactly impulsive behaviour is and why consumers partake in it, we first need to look at why and how consumers make their decisions and consequently form a behaviour.

1.1 Rational and less than rational consumer behaviour

There are various studies and models that depict consumer behaviour and are in broad divided between rational behaviour and less than rational behaviour (Herabadi, 2003). In the next part, we will first look at rational consumer behaviour and then move on to less than rational consumer behaviour.

1.1.1 Rational consumer behaviour

One of the first attempts of creating a consumer behaviour model was the so called subjective expected utility or SEU. The model presumes that the consumer will always make the rational behaviour that will lead to them getting the highest amount of subjective utility (Van der Pligt, 1996). The homo economicus model of human decision – making,

which was based on SEU also integrated the so-called C-A-B paradigm. In this paradigm C stands for cognition, A for affect and B for behaviour (Holbrook & Batra, 1987). The paradigm promotes the idea of a consumer being completely psychologically and economically rational when deciding. In other words, a consumer makes completely psychologically rational decisions, without any influence from their mood, prejudice or any other type of influences that would be considered irrational. Additionally, consumers gather all the relevant information before they make a purchase, while also comparing advantages and disadvantages of a product. Economically rational consumers will therefore find a perfect balance between a product which gives them the highest utility, for the lowest possible price. This model falls under the expectancy – value models (Herabadi, 2003).

The SEU theory also influenced the creation of the theory of reasoned action, developed by Fishbein and Ajzen, in which they claim that the main factor which affects consumer behaviour is the “intention to engage”. This intention or motivation leads a consumer to execute a task or perform a behaviour and is a conscious decision on the consumer’s part. The so-called intention to engage in a certain behaviour is formed by two components. The first one being the attitude that an individual has towards a certain behaviour and by the subjective norms that an individual hold. In other words, the intention to engage depends on how the consumer evaluates the behaviour and on how appropriate the individuals consider the behaviour and the consequences of said behaviour to be (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

Because the theory of reasoned action only included factors that were under complete control of the individual, an updated theory was developed – theory of planned behaviour. In this theory a new factor was introduced - perceived behavioural control. This stands for an individual’s comprehension of how strenuous or effortless the performance of a behaviour would turn out to be (Ajzen, 1991).

1.1.2 Less than rational behaviour and the rational behaviour models

Both theories of reasoned action and of planned behaviour are still rooted in the SEU model, which is a major limitation due to the assumption that consumers’ behaviour is rational. They ignore idea of behaviours that have become, through constant repetition, a routine, or habits. As something becomes a routine/habit, individuals stop making conscious decisions to act in that way. They also do not account for instances when people react somewhat impulsively to their perceived attitudes. (Bagozzi, Baumgartner & Yi, 1992).

Furthermore, neither of these theories could be applied when a behaviour was a result of an immediate response of various stimuli, e.g.: environmental stimuli (Bargh, 1990). Additionally, the models do not account for impulsive consumer behaviour, which is far removed from rational decision making by the consumers (Wood, 1998). In other words, it does not include the possibility of “irrational” behaviours (Herabadi, 2003).

Impulsive buying is according to Dittmar and Drury, 2000, defined as a mix of four

behaviours (Dittmar & Drury, 2000):

- 1.) Pleasure or excitement – these two feelings tend to be the feeling most often related to impulsive purchases and therefore the most important
- 2.) A desire to purchase a product, which has caught the eye, immediately
- 3.) A strong and difficult/” impossible to resist” type of force, which overrules all other thoughts a consumer has about making a purchase
- 4.) Ignoring the potential negative outcomes that come with the purchase – such as regret due to overspending money.

Furthermore, some authors believe that impulse buying is mindless buying and could be labelled as an “automatic” purchase, since a consumer does not have any conscious control over it. Additionally, this type of consumer behaviour is also strongly influenced by their emotions, since a purchase needs to involve an emotional response to a product, to be considered impulsive. Emotions, connected to a product can express themselves before the purchase, at the same time as the purchase or after it. Furthermore, to put it another way, the absence of planning as well as an important part that emotions play in impulsive buying, are the main two reasons why this type of consumer behaviour is difficult if not impossible to explain by the models which are rooted in rationality of consumers (Herabadi, 2003).

1.1.3 Model of consumer decision-making process

One of the most widely used models through which consumer behaviour explained is consumer decision – making process (Modin & Smith, 2020). The model consists of five different stages a consumer goes through before buying a product.

The first one being “*problem recognition*”, this is where a consumer is faced with an internally or externally triggered need, which initiates the thinking process. The second step is “*searching for alternative options and information*” and this stage commences when a consumer starts thinking about purchasing a product. They search for information in previous experience and advice they got/get from their close ones. If they need additional information, they will turn to external sources such as mass media, marketing messages etc (Kotler & Keller, 2012). The third step in “*evaluation of alternatives*”, this is where a consumer evaluates all the information from the previous step. After they have thought evaluated the alternatives, they will make a purchase, which is the fourth step of the model. After the purchase has taken place, the fifth step or “*post-purchase*” stage beings where the consumer proceeds to start evaluating the actual product (Kotler & Keller, 2012). In the case of the product being up to consumer’s standards, the consumer will be satisfied and will most likely continue to buy this product (Söderlund & Rosengren 2004).

However, this model has received various critics since it also does not account for impulsive buying. The critique is mainly aimed at the fact that when consumers buy impulsively, they tend to skip some of the before-mentioned steps (Evans, Jamal & Foxall, 2009). Additionally, Kacen & Lee (2002) claim that the phase where consumers look for information and then evaluate their options does not exist in the process of impulse buying.

1.2 Factors that influence impulsive buying behaviour

As mentioned in the previous part, for a purchase to be considered impulsive it needs to fit certain criteria. In this part, I will try to shed light on what factors influence the probability of a consumer buying impulsively.

1.2.1 The role of age

In studies that looked at limited age ranges, there was no significant relationship between age and impulse buying. However, when more than just one or two generations are being considered, the results show that age and tendency to impulsively purchase are negatively correlated. This means that the older people are, the more control they show and therefore buy less on impulse (Verma & Singh, 2019). Additionally, impulsive buying is the most prevalent amongst people in their 20's and starts to diminish with people in their late 30's (Wood, 1998).

1.2.2 The role of gender

In general, there are differences in how men and women shop as well as in their preferences and therefore behaviour. Men and women tend to process given information in different ways and additionally, they also value different items (Paul, Olson & Grunert, 1999). Due to these fundamental differences, there are of course differences in how they approach shopping and what items they buy. In general women tend to buy impulsively more frequently than men and they tend to experience stronger urges to purchase a product, they feel stronger emotions when buying. Moreover, they tend to use shopping more often as a way of improving their mood. Women often impulsively buy items such as clothes, accessories, shoes, beauty products etc. more frequently, while men tend to impulsively buy electronics, sports memorabilia etc. (Verma & Singh, 2019).

For women, the shopping atmosphere and shopping experience are crucial. Visual cues, creativity and other factors that might improve one's mood and emotions tend to be more effective on women since they are more receptive to emotions than their male counterparts. However, for men things are different since the way they shop differs from how women shop. Men tend to focus more on how functional the item is, additionally the items they buy hold a personal meaning to them and not so much of a social one (Coley & Burgess, 2003).

1.2.3 The role of culture

Different cultures will have a different effect on impulsive buying, however no matter what those effects are, they are very significant (Kacen & Lee, 2002). People who live in the West where a more individualistic point of view is prevalent have a stronger tendency to impulsively buy a product than people who live in Eastern cultures, where the mindset is more collectivistic. The theory of individualism-collectivism, developed by Triandis (1995), explains these differences. Triandis defined “*collectivism*” as a social pattern where people see themselves as one of many in a collective – family, work, school etc. On the other hand, “*individualism*” is defined as a social pattern where people see themselves as independent of groups (Triandis, 1995).

Additionally, theory of interdependent self-concept is another one that looks at how culture effects on an individual’s tendency to impulsively buy a product based on how they perceive their independence (Herabadi, 2003). “*Interdependent*” self-concept emphasizes the importance of reaching what is a proper place and acting in an appropriate way. In other words, it emphasizes external and public features, expected roles and relationships. On the other hand, there is “*independent*” self-concept which is based on the idea that internal motivations are necessary to be able to express yourself. In other words, “*independent*” self-concept emphasizes one’s internal abilities, thought and feelings as the most important (Miao, Jalees, Qabool, & Zaman, 2019).

When Herabadi, (2003) was comparing personality dimensions between Indonesians, Norwegians, and Dutch they found that in all these cases consumers, who are more prone to impulsive purchases, tend to plan poorly or do not plan at all and lack in reflection of their actions. Nevertheless, the difference amongst these three groups were in other traits that individuals had. In the Norwegian and Dutch sample, the personality traits that are connected to impulsive buying were the urge to act and searching for excitement as well as being unreflective in thinking. However, in the Indonesian sample the traits that were linked to impulsive buying were fear of not making the appropriate choice. In other words, for Eastern cultures, where collectivism is a prevailing mindset, anxiety, and fear of making the wrong decision tends to encourage impulsive buying. Furthermore, for Norwegians and Dutch the tendency to buy impulsively was correlated with extroverted personality traits, while for Indonesian sample was correlated with low agreeableness and the tendency to ignore the probable negative results of their actions (Herabadi, 2003).

To summarize, the personality traits that influence impulsive purchases in the West are most likely connected to how people in the West see themselves and they use impulsive buying as a way to reinforce their self-identity. On the other hand, the traits that influence impulsive buying in consumers from Asian cultures are most likely related to the Eastern collective view creating an appropriate version of self in social contexts (Herabadi, 2003).

1.2.4 The role of emotions

In the first few subchapters we discussed the theories of rational consumers, however the reality is that consumers will most often not behave in accordance with such theories. They will, in fact frequently act in an “irrational” way. SEU theory and models based on it tended to ignore affect or it was considered as a background/unimportant variable. Affect is defined as a pleasing or unpleasing feeling a consumer experiences. Furthermore, depending on what sort of a feeling consumers experience, it will lead to positive or a negative attitude (Park & Dhandra, 2017). In more recent models affect plays a much bigger role than it did in the past, Holbrook, and Hirschman (1982) claimed that affect is much broader than just “like” or “dislike”, it offers a considerably richer experience of emotions e.g.: love, joy, sadness, fear, hate etc.). Furthermore, they also argued about how consumption should be viewed as “experiential” – according to them, consumption consists of a flow of consumers’ fantasies and various other feelings. It is believed that mood, emotions as well as feelings have a strong influence on the behaviour of consumers (Herabadi, 2003). The theoretic basis for this belief stems from the two-component model of attitudes and the theory of anticipated affective states.

According to the two-component model of attitudes, the attitude of consumers can be separated into two groups: cognitive/evaluative and affective attitudes. Cognitive/evaluative attitudes include beliefs, judgements, and thoughts that a consumer has towards a product. On the other hand, affective attitudes include feelings and emotions (Edwards, 1990). Zajonc (1980) argued that affect can sometimes override cognition due to affective reactions being somewhat automatic in nature – they occur without any cognitive processes forming in the mind of consumers.

Various studies have found that affect significantly and independently impacts consumers’ attitudes towards products. Therefore, attitudes are not formed just based on consumers’ reason but also through what they believe they need, wish for, feel like as well as other factors that root from emotions (Van der Pligt, Zeelenberg, Van Dijk, De Vries, & Richard, 1998). Furthermore, according to Bagozzi (1981) cognition and affect can predict behaviours differently. Moreover, it is possible, that both cognitive and affective processes are revolving simultaneously in the minds of consumers and are therefore not as easily separable as they are in theory (Edwards, 1990).

Furthermore, decisions of consumers can be determined by affect originating from cognitive processes e.g.: making compromises between a product’s value/utility and how much cognitive activity they need to invest. It is also suggested that any element that leads to reduction of effective processing of various factors in the shopping environment (loud music, dimmed lights, strong smells etc.) will most likely lead to an increased probability of impulsive buying in consumers (Shiv & Fedorikhin, 1999). Additionally, consumers can have their decisions influenced by a stimulus rather spontaneously – with little to no implication by cognitive processes (Shiv & Fedorikhin, 1999). According to Rook (1987),

impulsive buying takes place when a consumer is encountered with a product and experiences a spontaneous positive affect. This then creates an urge to acquire a product that has triggered such a reaction in a consumer's mind. When this happens, the urge overrules any rational thoughts and preferences the consumer might have had up until that point. This type of behaviour is an attribute of automatic/mindless consumer behaviour (Hoch & Loewenstein, 1991).

Anticipated affective states, which are defined as “psychophysiological constructs”, are feelings which get formed after a person has taken action and can influence how they would behave, if these so called “post-behavioural” feelings can be predicted (Harmon-Jones, Gables & Price, 2013). In other words, a person/consumer can be motivated by the prediction or anticipation of how they will feel after they purchase a product (Bagozzi, Gürhan-Canli & Priester, 2002).

According to Manstead (1996), the feelings that consumers feel after they have partaken in a behaviour could be as crucial as the cost and utility, they anticipate obtaining because of the said behaviour. The two emotions that were mentioned most often are love and regret. Due to the feeling of regret being more intense than the feeling of love, when it comes to consumers decisions, various authors decided to include regret into their theories. In the field of consumer behaviour, regret is defined as a feeling of sorrow or loss that happens when a decision turned out worse as the consumer expected. This feeling tends to be more intense when they are a consequence of a behaviour or action that is not considered to be normal or typical – it is more severe when the decisions are abnormal (Park & Dhandra, 2017).

Furthermore, consumer psychology frequently shows that individuals will change the way they behave if they have had a negative experience while shopping, e.g.: consumer will switch to a different brand, if they have had a negative experience with the brand that was their primary choice. However, if the consumers have only had positive and/or neutral experience they will not feel the need to change the brand they are purchasing from (Zeelenberg, Van den Bos, Van Dijk & Pieters, 2002). Regret is therefore extremely relevant when it comes to predicting consumer behaviour, which is why a “*regret theory*” was created. The theory claims that besides the value and utility, a very relevant factor that will contribute to consumer purchasing or not purchasing a product are feelings a consumer feels when faced with the result that would have happened if they have chosen the alternative (rejected) option (Van der Pligt, Zeelenberg, Van Dijk, De Vries, & Richard, 1998). This theory is based on two prepositions (Zeelenberg, Van den Bos, Van Dijk & Pieters, 2002):

- a) Consumers compare the behaviour that did happen (e.g.: they bought product X) and an alternative action which did not happen (e.g.: if they did not buy product X) – consumers are therefore remorseful only if the forgone behaviour would have been more satisfactory. If the forgone behaviour would have been less satisfying, the consumer would have experience joy.

- b) Avoiding negative emotions post deciding (e.g.: regret, disappointment etc.) and aiming for positive emotions (e.g.: pride, happiness etc.) are crucial in the decision – making process.

Some examples of this type of consumer behaviour are buying a product on sale now, instead of waiting for a potentially better sale, trusting and consuming products from well-known brands instead of brands that are not as established. In both scenarios, to lower the risk of experiencing an outcome that is not satisfactory, consumers voluntarily pay a premium price (Kardes, 1994).

Additionally, the “*theory of anticipated emotions*” claims that positive as well as negative anticipated emotions influence consumers’ behaviour. In other words, it says that consumers create an anticipation of “*prefactual*” emotions that are linked to the results of their actions (Bagozzi, Baumgartner & Yi, 1992).

Before the development of the anticipated affective states, impulsive buying was emotional and therefore an irrational form of consumer behaviour. This was because consumers often experienced regret after buying impulsively. However, it turns out that even when consumers buy impulsively, they are aware, beforehand, of the possible regret if they bought a product. Despite that, they can still decide to buy it. This is a case of an internal conflict, where the consumer is challenged to choose between what they must do and what they desire (Dittmar & Drury, 2000). Furthermore, regret can be “multidimensional”, meaning that a consumer can experience regret about a purchase from a money viewpoint while also not regret it from other standpoints e.g.: owning a limited-edition product (Dittmar, 2000). As mentioned above, regret is not the only feeling that can be anticipated. Other, more positive feelings that can be anticipated are excitement, pride, joy etc. Additionally, other factors such as peer pressure, self-image issues can also exceed the anticipation of regret and make a consumer dismiss the risk connected to a purchase (Park & Dhandra, 2017).

The extent of how intense these emotions are, depends on how strong the emotional arousal an individual experience is.

1.2.4.1 Emotional Arousal

Emotional arousal refers to a person’s response to a particular circumstance. This kind of response is not in connection with the physical circumstances, it does however depend on the psychological appraisal that a person makes when they are evaluating and deciphering circumstances. Additionally, different people respond differently to the same kind of circumstance. This is because emotional meanings tend to be processed in one’s subconscious, while emotions are triggered automatically. Therefore, a reaction to those emotions is triggered automatically as well. Hence, emotional arousal is a crucial part of emotional functions in the human brain and is based on automatic responses (Bagozzi, Gürhan-Canli & Priester, 2002). Furthermore, the amount of experienced emotional arousal

depends on the overall mood of the consumer. If the consumer has recently been emotionally aroused, then they will respond strongly on a particular stimulus (being a positive response or a negative one) (Gorn, Pham & Sin, 2001). In addition, according to Hirschman and Holbrook (1982), a consumer's wish of searching for emotional arousal is one of the most motivating factors in consumption of specific product groups.

How strong the emotions of a consumer are, depends on the intensity of affect. People who have a high intensity of affect have stronger emotional reactions to stimuli than those who have a lower affect intensity (Park & Dhandra, 2017). Individuals with stronger affect intensity are "*arousal hungry*", which means that they seek out ways that allow them to maintain a higher average levels of arousal per day than those individuals who have a low affect intensity. In other words, "*arousal hungry*" individuals seek out activities in everyday life, that stimulate their emotions more and are therefore able to keep stable levels of emotional arousal (Moore & Homer, 2000). This was later also confirmed by Herabadi (2003), who claimed that individuals with higher level of emotional arousal and therefore higher tendency to buy impulsively, will purchase goods impulsively more often than their low emotional arousal counterparts (Herabadi, 2003).

According to Moore, Harris & Chen (1995), changes in attitude are directly impacted by the magnitude of one's experienced emotions. Additionally, attitude formation is directly affected by affect intensity. It is therefore possible to assume that consumers who have a higher intensity of affect depend more on their emotions to form an attitude towards a product (Herabadi, 2003).

According to affect-as-information model, created by Schwartz in 1990, individuals sometimes tend to depend on "*How-do-I-feel-about-it?*" (HDIF), since they believe their feelings – subjective experience because of a response to stimuli – hold important information to form an attitude towards a product/target (Pham, Cohen, Pracejus & Hughes, 2001). Additionally, people can consciously monitor their feelings faster than assess the same stimuli with reason, which means that affect does in fact come before cognition (Zajonc, 1980). Moreover, this also supports the idea that emotions have a direct effect on consumer's choices and are the ones to initiate action, while assessments based on reason tend to form slower as individuals mind needs to perform more cognitive operations (Pham, Cohen, Pracejus & Hughes, 2001). In other words, feelings that an individual or consumer has in a particular moment will have a direct effect on how they will evaluate a target or a product. However, depending on how relevant their feelings are to the decision, consumers choose which feelings to incorporate or to reject (Gorn, Pham & Sin, 2001). This means that consumers can regulate their emotional arousal and therefore their emotions. According to Moore and Homer (2000), individuals have a way of regulating their emotional arousal levels, depending on their preferences and their temperament. According to Larsen (1984), there are four dimensions of temperament. How high the levels of all the temperament dimensions have a direct effect on affect intensity in an individual. The four dimensions are as follows (Larsen, 1984):

- a) Emotionality – how intensely an individual responds to a certain emotional stimulus
- b) Sociability – how much does an individual look for emotional stimulation from others
- c) Sensory arousability – how easily is an individual emotionally aroused by a sensory stimulus (e.g.: light, touch, sounds etc.)
- d) Activity level – what kind of an energy does an individual display (e.g.: high-energy or low-energy)

According to these four dimensions, a person who had high affect intensity will score high on “*emotionality*” – they will react stronger when faced with an affectively charged stimuli; will score higher on “*sociability*” as they need more approval from others and will therefore look for emotional responses from them as well; additionally, they will score higher on “*sensory arousability*” since they respond strongly to sensory stimuli such as light, touch, sound etc. (Moore & Homer, 2000). This means that when an individual is in the role of a consumer, they will get stronger emotions when their senses will be triggered, e.g.: when entering a store with loud music, dimmed lights and strong fragrances (Bradford & Desrochers, 2009). Finally, they will also score higher on “*activity level*” since they tend to be more active than individuals with low affect intensity (Moore & Homer, 2000).

We cannot deny the role that emotions have in impulsive purchasing behaviour, as they seem to be one of the main drivers of such behaviour and of the whole impulsive buying experience. There also seems to be a strong connection between feelings and emotions connected to buying experience, which tells us that impulsive buying could in fact be classified as an emotional consumption experience. Some other variables such as attributes the product has (aesthetics, quality, features etc.) and other variables such as environment in the store, good sales staff, sales etc. tend to increase the emotional arousal of consumers and therefore increase the probability of impulse purchasing taking place. Additionally, people who shop in the company of others tend to have more and stronger urges to buy and are therefore more likely to give in to their urges and buy impulsively. This means that the way consumers behave can also be seen as a socially interactive experience (Park & Dhandra, 2017). This is because one’s behaviour influences us and our behaviour, meaning that if a person goes out shopping with a friend and that friend expresses or shows a certain behaviour, the probability of the other person to act in a similar way increases significantly (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999). This type of somewhat automatic behaviour is very representative of impulse buying, because in some cases just to see someone else buy or promote a certain product might spark an urge to mimic that behaviour, which is why impulsive buying can also be categorized as a “*chameleon*” effect on how consumers act (Herabadi, 2003). However, this arousal, no matter where it is coming from is not the sole drive for impulsive behaviour and does not always lead to an impulsive purchase (Herabadi, 2003).

1.2.4.2 Automaticity

According to the theory of perfect rationality, consumers make decisions about a product based on all the relevant information that they have. However, people only use a selection of information to decide how they feel about a product since using all the available information would be too time consuming. Therefore, as a sort of a mental shortcut, consumers tend to form rules according to which they form decisions (Walters & Hershfield, 2020). These types of shortcuts are not necessarily the most objective and free of personal bias, however they do simplify the decision-making process of individuals in day-to-day life. Such decisions do not take a long time and are made relatively easily as they are formed spontaneously and do not need a great amount of reflecting by the individual. This is due to practicality of everyday life, since making extensive analysis for small tasks would consume too much of our time and energy and would therefore slow down people's process of achieving their goals (Kardes, 1994).

Based on this type of reasoning, a "*model of spontaneous processing*" was developed by Fazio (1986), where he argued that since a lot of behaviour is somewhat spontaneous in nature, attitudes could affect one's behaviour in a rather automatic way. Spontaneous processing model is based on the idea that when an attitude is formed a behaviour manifests itself spontaneously. Fazio argues that it is essential for attitudes to be activated from memory to be able to influence one's behaviour. The probability of that happening just by observing a target product is based on how accessible the attitude or the association with the target product is. "*Attitude accessibility*" – preparedness of attitudes that are being accessed from memory – is a crucial part in the process of forming a behaviour based on attitude (Bagozzi, Gürhan-Canli & Priester, 2002). More easily accessible attitudes/attitudes which can be quickly activated are believed to be more relevant of determinants in forming a behaviour than those attitudes that take longer to activate. When consumers have attitudes that are quickly accessible and are relevant to a specific product, people are much more likely to purchase it if given the opportunity, than those whose attitudes activated slower (Petty, Ostrom & Brock, 1991).

Apart from attitudes effecting consumer's behaviour, more accessible goals and motives could also influence said behaviour, according to Bargh (1994) and his Auto-motive model. Before Bargh, it was thought, that mental processes could not be viewed as automatics, because they did not fit the existing criteria – unintentional, occurs outside of awareness, uncontrollable and efficient. However, Bargh, has with his model redefined what automaticity meant, and has divided it into four qualities. First one being "*intentionality*" which tells us to what point consumer's thought and behaviour are unintended or unforeseen. Secondly, "*control*" up to what point are the thought and behaviour uncontrollable, "*efficiency*" up to what point are attentional resources being effectively used through consumer's thought and behaviour. Lastly, there is "*awareness*" which tells us to what point do thoughts and behaviours happen outside of consumer's awareness. Bargh argued, that for a mental/thought process to be considered automatic, it does not need to fit all the above-

mentioned criteria (Bargh, 1994). Impulsive buying could be considered as an automatic behaviour according to the Auto-motive model since consumers are driven by a sudden urge to consume a target product and have little to no consideration whether they should in fact buy it. As it stands, impulsive buying behaviour would be low on “*intentionality*” and “*control*” scale since it is an unplanned purchase and since consumers experience an uncontrollable urge to purchase an item. However, it would score high on “*efficiency*” and on “*awareness*”, since a consumer effectively uses the resources given to them and because, to be able to purchase a product, a consumer must first be aware of its existence (Herabadi, 2003).

If similar motives and goals frequently end up in a similar behaviour, then the association between said motives, goals and a particular situation will strengthen, which can then lead to a behaviour becoming automatic. The auto-motive model is based on three postulates (Herabadi, 2003):

1. It is possible for both cognitive and behavioural goals to be activated at the same time, without any awareness on the consumer’s side
2. Once the goals are activated, they manage the processing of information as well as social behaviour.
3. Goals that have been activated are being run independently, without any need for conscious choice or selection on the part of consumer. However, when the goals are activated, they tend to result in different outcomes that would happen if the goal were not activated.

With this model Bargh expanded the idea of what effects non-conscious influences. They do not only influence hedonic impulses but can also affect various types of individual’s goals or motivations, such as improvement of self-esteem, protection of one-self and various other goals. One case of such behaviour is impulsive buying, where a consumer is guided by motives and goals which are triggered unconsciously. Additionally, impulsive buying is an extremely emotional type of consumer behaviour and does as such match the attributes of an automatic consumer behaviour (Herabadi, 2003).

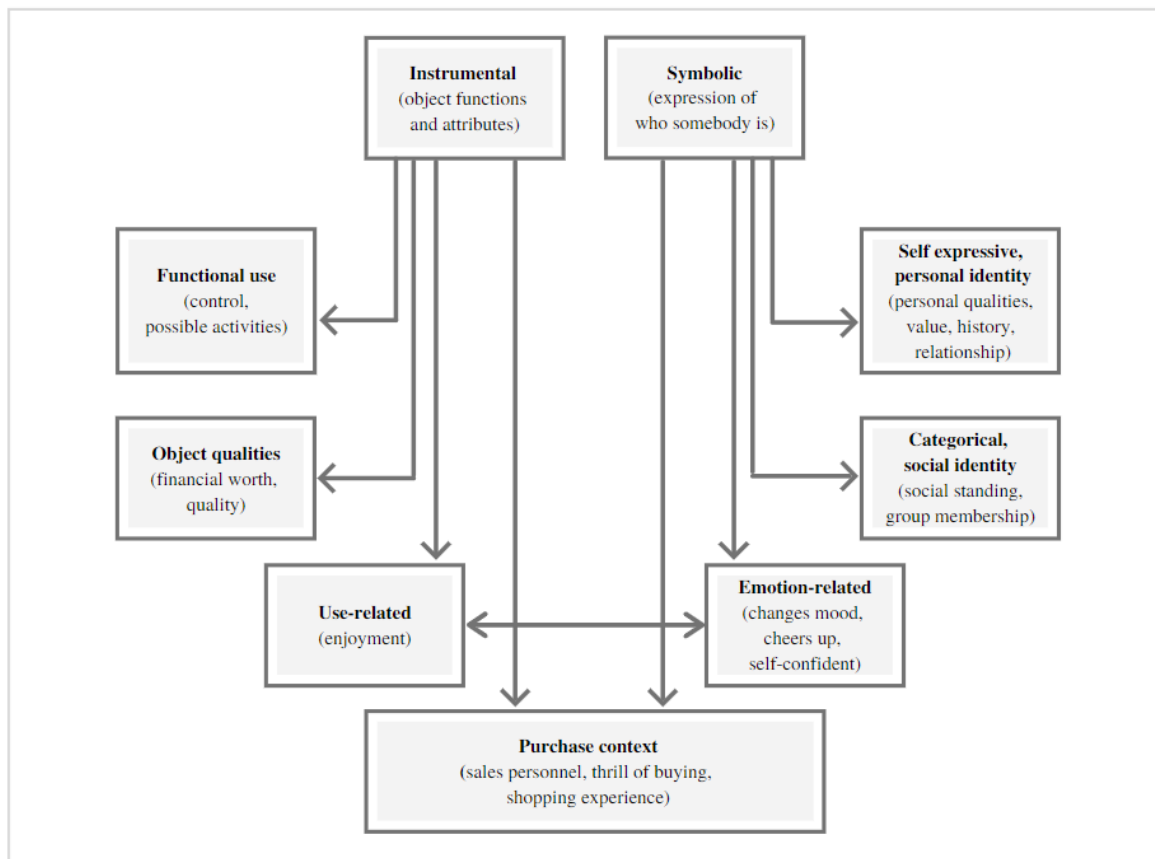
1.2.5 The role of personality and “self” in impulsive consumers

People do not shop only to acquire the bare necessities they need for survival; they shop as a form of leisure activity (Miao, Jalees, Qabool & Zaman, 2019). Because of this shift in recognition of shopping, the amount of unplanned and unnecessary purchases, i.e., impulse buying has increased considerably. In fact, contrary to the economic-based view of shopping, where it is believed that consumers only buy what is necessary for them; the socio-cultural view has always seen shopping as a cultural process. According to this belief, through consumption people can and try to form or improve a social identity (Baudrillard, 1988). Consumers can create and asserting their status in society through ownership of commodities and services that are considered as status symbols. The necessity and functionality are not

taken into consideration when purchasing such products. Furthermore, consumers have developed tastes for such products, where “*habitus*” had a big effect on the formation of said tastes. In sociology, *habitus* stands for social habits and skills that members of a particular culture have developed. Because of these skills and habits, people tend to see the social world that surrounds them in a particular way, and they react to it accordingly. However, taste is also a consequence of one’s individual choices, which have been formed through the culture of social class one belongs to. Because consumers are the ones that give products meaning, we can therefore say that consumption is as much of an economic act as it is a symbolic (Herabadi, 2003).

In 1996 Dittmar, Beattie & Friese developed a “social constructionist theory”. According to Dittma, Beattie & Friese (1996), impulse buying is more likely to happen with products that project self-image of the consumer and therefore improve their mental status or their mood. This means that impulsive buying is not necessarily an irrational buying decision that happens in random situations. In fact, it does in fact serve a purpose and has meaning to those who buy impulsively (Herabadi, 2003). Dittmar called this symbolic consumption (shown in Figure 1) which suggests that when consumers buy a product, they do not only buy the functional properties or qualities of said product but also buy the symbolic meaning the product carries. This type of symbolic meaning represents both social and personal sides of a consumer’s identity. Furthermore, consumers can express themselves and their identity and can also, in their mind, improve their social standing. In other words, to improve their mood, consumption of products is a crucial part of how consumer’s self-identity and social status are constructed, maintained, and asserted (Miao, Jalees, Qabool & Zaman, 2019).

Figure 1: The dimension of meaning in impulse purchases



Source: Herabadi (2003).

The theory of symbolic self-completion investigates the reasoning of why and when consumers choose to impulsively purchase a particular type of product. Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1982), argued that consumers buy certain types of goods to display them as material symbols. They do so to compensate for their self-identified shortcomings or inadequacies. This type of behaviour is also called symbolic self-completion. Furthermore, a crucial motivation that drives consumers to impulsively buy certain goods is the motivation to compensate so perceived differences between who they are and who they wish to be. This is especially true for people who tend to use consumption as a way of achieving self-completion. This was later confirmed by Solomon, Bamossy & Askegaard (2002), where they claim that impulsive buying could be used as a tool to form one's personal image. Therefore, certain types of products tend to be consumed impulsively more often than others (e.g.: clothes, accessories, jewellery, sports items etc) (Bayley & Nancarrow, 1998).

Moreover, when consumers are choosing between two or more products, they are not necessarily choosing between products that have a similar use or values, but between the meanings, social identity, and the pleasure that a particular product represents to a consumer (Fiske, 1987).

Through buying goods that are considered valuable consumers form a sense of identity, which originate from their concerns regarding their self-image. In other words, they try to fight against the difference between their true self and their ideal self (Richins, 1994).

Some individuals are more prone to impulsive purchases than others, despite them being in similar or identical shopping scenarios, therefore we can assume that characteristics contribute to the tendency of impulse buying. In fact, impulsive buyers tend to fit a distinguishing personality profile (Herabadi, 2003):

1. Lack of planning and deliberation
2. An urge to be dynamic and active, which is accompanied by a lack of reflection in thinking
3. Anxiety due to the fear of making an incorrect decision, which leads to impulsivity
4. The need for the feeling of being excited and seeking out novelties
5. Tendency to ignore potential negative results of their own actions.

Connecting back to the chapter where emotional arousal and affect were being discussed, we can assume that consumers who are more prone to buying impulsively have high affect intensity and are more likely to respond strongly to stimuli that provokes their emotions. Additionally, they also tend to indulge in activities that stimulate their emotions more severely (Moore & Homer, 2000).

Additionally, according to Rook and Fisher (1995), there are five different types of personal characteristics that lead to impulsive behaviour: 1) “sudden desire to purchase”, 2) “feeling hopeless”, 3) “feeling good”, 4) “purchase in response to moods” and 5) “feeling guilty”. Each of these characteristics triggers a corresponding impulsiveness: a) “feeling a spontaneous urge to act”, b) “not being in psychological balance”, c) “experiencing psychological struggle”, d) “reduction in cognitive ability to evaluate the target item” and e) disregard for the possible negative consequences (Modin & Smith, 2020).

This was furtherly confirmed when Shahjehan, Qureshi, Zeb & Saifullah (2012), noticed a strong connection between a lack of emotional stability and impulsive purchases. People who are less emotionally stable (anxiety, moodiness, sadness etc.) were a lot more likely to indulge in impulsive purchasing behaviour (Šeinauskienė, Maščinskienė & Jucaitytė, 2015). Additionally, they stated that impulsive buying could serve a form of break free from less-than-optimal psychological states. According to Moser, Schoenebeck & Resnick (2019), impulsive buying can be used as a coping mechanism when faced with difficult situations. However, as discussed in the previous chapters, this can still lead to financial difficulties, even worse emotional state, and feelings of regret (Moser, Schoenebeck & Resnick, 2019).

Furthermore, the tendency to impulsively purchase was found to have a strong correlation with long term low self-esteem as well as long term negative state of mind (Modin & Smith, 2020). The reason behind this type of purchases is to elevate their mood through rewarding one-self. Taking this into consideration, we cannot claim that impulsive buying is always

irrational, in cases such as mentioned above it is in fact a rational response to a less-than-optimal situation they are in. It is a way of dealing with stress, anxiety, and disappointment (Šeinauskienė, Maščinskienė & Jucaitytė, 2015). Such state of mind can result in a lack of self-control which then leads to acting up on urges and impulses (Vohs & Faber, 2007).

1.3 Types of impulsive buying

Up to this point we have talked about impulse buying as if it were a homogenous occurrence, however according to Stern (1962) more than one type of impulsive buying behaviour exists. He divided it into four types: a) pure impulse purchase, b) impulse purchase coming from memory, c) suggestion impulse purchase and d) planned impulse buying (Modin & Smith, 2020).

Pure impulse purchase is defined as a purchase where a consumer completely changes their usual shopping behaviour and buy the target product. For this type of purchases to occur a consumer needs to be motivated by an inspiration or escapism (Modin & Smith, 2020). The second type of impulse buying, that comes from memory, a consumer needs to be reminded about a product. This can happen if they see the product or if they see a promotion about the said product. That serves as a reminder of the need for that product or brand which results in a purchase. Suggestion impulse purchase is defined as a purchase that occurs when the consumer sees a product for the first time. If the price and perceived quality of the product are in line with the consumer's standards, they will buy the product. Planned impulsive purchase occurs when a consumer has an intention to buy some unknown good, in addition to some known products (Stern, 1962). In this type of cases, a consumer typically hopes for a sale or an inspiration to hit e.g.: when buying a coat, a consumer also sees a nice sweater they like. Even though they only planned on buying a coat, they also end up purchasing a sweater (Modin & Smith, 2020).

One of the slightly more recent differentiation between types of impulse buying comes from Bayley and Nancarrow (1998), who have stated the case for their four types of impulsive buying: a) acceleratory impulse, b) compensatory impulse, c) breakthrough impulse and d) blind impulse.

“Acceleratory impulse (self – conformation role)” occurs when a consumer believes then need to stock up on some products, as was the case in March 2020. *“Compensatory impulse (self – compensation role)”* takes place when a consumer does not feel great in their skin. Consumers perform such purchases to improve their mood, as a reward for completing a difficult thing or to compensate for their shortcomings and failures. In other words, this type of impulsive behaviour originates from self – esteem. *“Breakthrough impulse (self – redefining role)”* usually refers to a desire to obtain something a consumer has been longing for a long time or to solve an unconscious conflict. In this type of impulsive behaviour more expensive items such as real estate and cars are involved, or in other words, things that are functional but also provide social and psychological well – being. Acting on breakthrough

impulse can therefore actually be life changing. “*Blind impulse (dysfunctional)*” occurs when a consumer is overwhelmed by the item and feel the need that they absolutely must obtain it. This type of purchase is considered to be the most typical representative of impulse buying, where there are no needs to fulfil (Bayley & Nancarrow, 1998).

2 IMPULSIVE BEHAVIOUR OFFLINE VS. ONLINE

Retailers are well aware of how profitable impulsive buying is for them. They use different ways to try and trigger this type of behaviour in consumers. In brick-and-mortar stores gum, mints and chocolates are placed next to the checkout. Additionally, they also place certain products in their ideal locations on shelves. Some companies have also mastered the art of bundling products together, to make the bundle seem like a consumer is getting a great deal e.g.: McDonald’s menus. Furthermore, McDonald’s has been using a tactic where the employee asks you “Would you like fries with that?” in order to trigger impulsive buying (Hodge, 2004).

In this part I will present the different ways brick-and-mortar stores use and what online retailers use. Additionally, I will point out the differences between the two channels.

2.1 Factors influencing impulsive buying offline and online

Both online and offline channels need to efficiently communicate characteristics of products, value, price, and other information relevant to consumers. Additionally, both channels guide their customers through their purchase process, which includes selecting a product, paying for it, and packing it or delivering it (Ling & Lawler, 2001). However, there are some differences between offline and online environment, which will be discussed below.

2.1.1 Offline Environment

There are nine factors that can trigger impulsive behaviour in consumers in Brick-and-Mortar stores. They are as follows: 1) prices, 2) mass distribution, 3) self-service, 4) mass advertising, 5) store displays, 6) low marginal need for an item, 7) short product life, 8) lightweight items, 9) ease of storage. These retail environments were then further divided into industry-oriented (mass distribution and mass advertising), store-oriented (self-service, displays) and product-oriented (price, marginal need, product life, weight and size, ease of storage) (Stern, 1962).

Price can affect a consumer behaviour through potential savings. This is why sales and promotions are so effective in persuading a consumer to act impulsively (Laroche, Bergeron & Goutaland, 2003). This is a typical example of a planned impulse purchase, which I presented in the previous part of this thesis. An example of this would be if a consumer is buying socks, where each pair costs 4€ (Hodge, 2004). They have already put two pairs of

socks into their cart, when they see a promotion 3 pairs of socks for 10€. Meaning that for an extra 2€ spent a consumer gets an additional pair of socks for the price of 2€ per pair instead one 4€ per pair. In this case the third pair of socks is classified as a planned impulse purchase, because the consumer bought it only because of the promotion.

Consumers are more likely to buy a product if it is easily available to them and if they are constantly being faced with it. This is why mass distribution influences impulsive buying.

In stores where an employee hands you the items, e.g.: the bakery, consumers are a lot less likely to buy impulsively due to a few factors. First one being, that if someone else is handing you the product a consumer cannot look at the product, touch the product etc. before they decide if they will buy it. Additionally, in such a store, a consumer needs to wait for someone to approach them, if no one is there to help them with their shopping, consumers might get tired of waiting and just leave without buying anything. Furthermore, if a consumer is relying on an employee to hand them the goods and if there are other people waiting in line behind them, the consumer might feel pressured to finish their shopping as soon as possible and therefore cutting down on the probability of buying something on an impulse. In self-service stores, the situation is different, the consumer gets to touch, read about, and gather all the necessary information about the product without having the feeling of being rushed. This is why a possibility for impulsive buying significantly increases in self-service stores (Aragoncillo & Orus, 2017).

When consumer is aware of a product or brand's existence and has some knowledge on it, it is more likely that they will impulsively buy it when they come across it (Kotler, 1991). For example, if a consumer sees an advert for the new premium flavours of Argeta, be it online or on TV, and then notices it while they are at the store, they might decide to buy it. If they do purchase this product, that would be seen as an impulsive purchase as a consumer did not plan on buying it until they saw the product which reminded them of an advertisement they saw. The reason why mass marketing has such influence on impulsive buying tendencies is because it helps the consumer understand the product. Consumers need to be aware of what the marginal need of the product they are buying is, meaning that they need to understand what it is, what it is used for etc. and marketing ensures just that (Hodge, 2004).

Furthermore, products that have high marginal need are considered to be essential products such as bread, milk, eggs etc. Such products will most likely not be impulsively bought since the purchase of such products is usually planned. Example of this would be a family where all of its members eat toast for breakfast, which means that toast is a product which holds a high marginal need. It will most likely always be included on the shopping list and will therefore not be bought on impulse. This means that only products with low marginal need are not necessities and are as such not always present on a shopping list. Consumers will purchase them when they are reminded of their existence, be it through displays in store or at checkout e.g.: gum, chocolate etc.

Moreover, products with short life span are better candidates for impulsive buying, since they are consumed quickly, and consumers often purchase them. Consumers are therefore relying on seeing the product in store and being reminded to buy it, in this case we are talking about impulse buying from memory (Stern, 1962). For example, if a consumer decides to go to Lesnina to buy some cutlery and in the store, they see a kitchen cabinet that they really like. However, because the transportation of the kitchen cabinet is considerably more difficult than transportation of a cutlery set, they decide to skip on buying the cabinet.

In brick-and-mortar stores, large and heavy products are not very likely to be bought on impulse due to the difficulties of transporting them to one's home. In other words, the expected benefits of the item are overshadowed by the effort a consumer needs to put in to get the item to the desired destination. Therefore, smaller, and lighter items are more likely to be impulsively bought than big and heavier items (Hodge, 2004).

The last factor that influences the probability of impulsive purchases according to Stern (1962) is ease of storage. Similarly, to the previous point, if a product is difficult to store, a consumer will most likely not indulge in impulsive purchase of that item. For example, if a consumer sees their favourite frozen patties, but there is no room in their freezer, they will not buy the item, since the effort to store it would overshadow the benefits of the item (Hodge, 2004).

2.1.2 Online Environment

Both online and offline channels need to efficiently communicate characteristics of products, value, price, and other information relevant to consumers. Despite the similarities, transactions online are significantly different than those that happen in brick-and-mortar stores. In online stores there are not any salespeople that could aid with a purchase decision, the consumer cannot feel, smell, or touch the product (Hodge, 2004).

Since there are quite some similarities how consumers act in brick-and-mortar store and how they act online, it is not surprising that eight out of the above-mentioned nine factors can be applied to online environment as well (Hodge, 2004).

Prices affect consumers offline as well as online. If a consumer sees an online retailer is having a sale, then they are more likely to impulsively buy from their website.

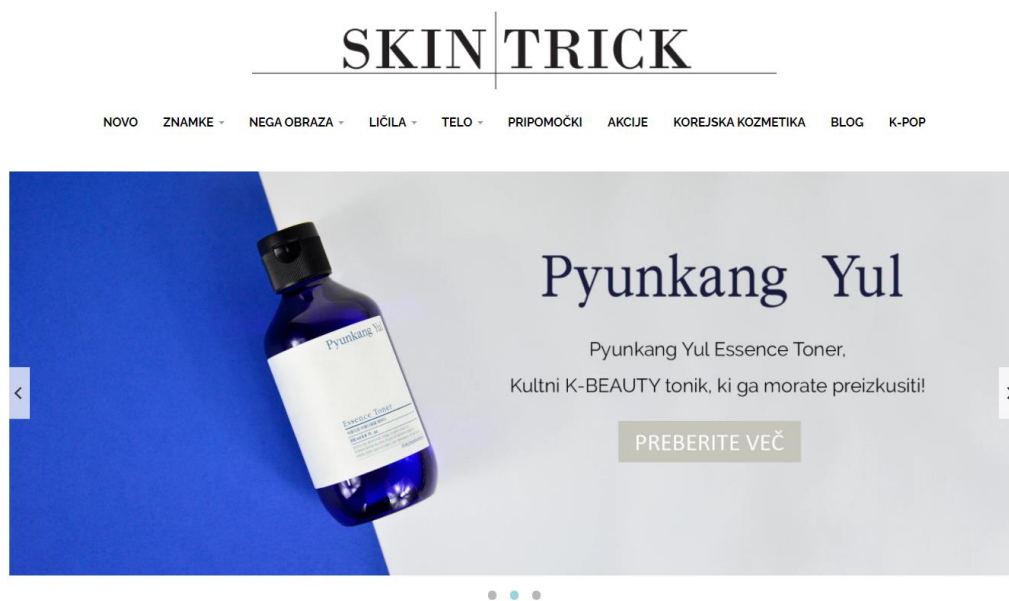
All online stores are self-service stores since there is no clerk. Consumers can look at a product for an unlimited amount of time and then add it to their cart and purchase the product. Additionally, an online store has a big advantage over brick-and-mortar stores, because they operate 24 hours a day, every day, even on the weekend and on holidays. (Hodge, 2004). This is also one of the reasons why online shopping has increased so much in 2020, when all traditional shops were closed due to lockdown. Because consumers can spend an unlimited amount of time in online stores and can browse the site whenever they want to,

the probability of impulsive purchasing increases. The reason behind this is that since consumers spend more time looking at products, they are more likely to see something they like even though they did not come to the website with the intention of buying that item (Hodge, 2004).

Additionally, online retailers are also relying on creating awareness and knowledge about their products, through digital marketing. In order for consumers to purchase a product they need to know of its existence, and if consumers see a particular item being advertised multiple times through different channels, they are more likely to purchase the product impulsively. In this case we would be talking about a planned impulse purchase (Hodge 2004). In order to create awareness, companies use various channels through which they advertise: social media marketing (Facebook, Instagram), email marketing, banners on websites etc (Zhang, Yuan, Zheng, Lian, Xie & Rui, 2015).

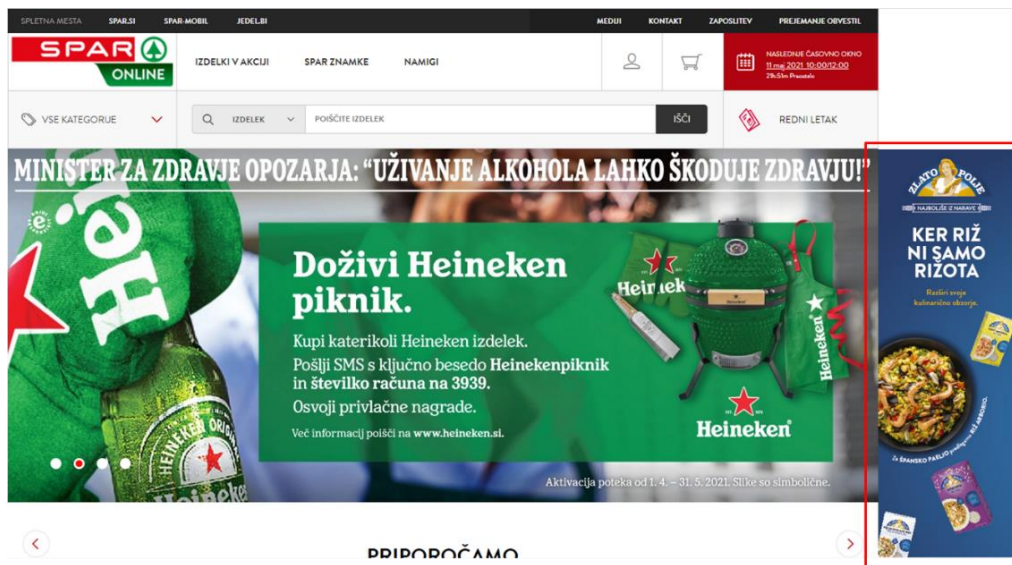
Furthermore, displays are equally as important in online stores. In online stores we are not talking about physical displays, but rather their online equivalence such as homepage banners, side banners, recommended products bar, in cart recommended items, “people who bought X product also bought Y product” etc. (as shown in Figures 2, 3 and 4) (Zhang, Yuan, Zheng, Lian, Xie & Rui, 2015).

Figure 2: Homepage banner – Skintrick.si



Source: Skintrick.si (2021)

Figure 3: Side banner – Spar online



Source: Spar online (2021)

Figure 4: Recommended bar – Spar online



Source: Spar online (2021)

Moreover, items with low marginal need will still be more likely bought impulsively than products with high marginal need. The reason is the same as in brick-and-mortar stores: if a product has a high marginal need to a consumer, then the purchase of such items will always be planned, whereas items with low marginal need are more likely to be bought impulsively, since a consumer does not plan ahead to buy them. Similarly, products with short life span will likely be impulsively bought online as well because consumers tend to be less sensitive about purchasing products that they regularly consume (Hodge, 2004).

Ease of storage works similarly offline and online. If a consumer doesn't have the needed space to store an item, the likelihood of impulsively buying that item will decrease significantly (Hodge, 2004).

Size and weight of a product is where online stores differ from their real-world counterparts. In brick-and-mortar stores, consumers tend to shy away from impulsively purchasing products that are big and heavy. They do so because of one simple reason: transport. It is

inconvenient to try and transport a kitchen cabinet from the store to one's home. However, when shopping online, the probability of consumers impulsively buying heavier and bigger items increases, because they will not need to take care of the transportation themselves, and the products will still be delivered directly to their door (Hodge, 2004).

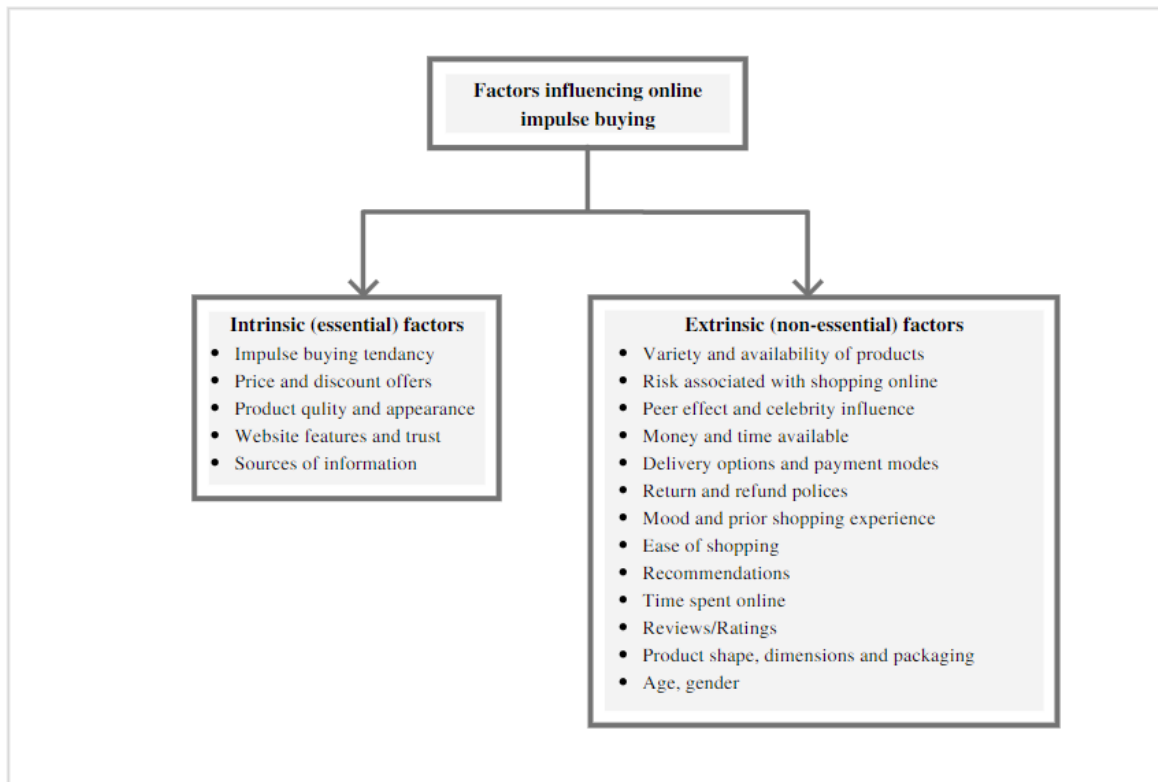
However, there is one factor that does not translate from offline into the online world and that is mass distribution. Online stores tend to sell items that are not easily accessible in real-world stores (Hodge, 2004). For example, Slovenia's biggest online make up retailer Ličila.si does sell some products that are accessible in drugstores such as Essence, Catrice, Real Techniques etc. however, they mostly focus on brands and items that are not accessible in drugstores, brands such as NYX Professional Makeup, BarryM, Nabla etc. Another example are websites such as All4skin.net and skintrick.si who are exclusively selling Korean cosmetics since these types of products are nearly impossible to obtain in any other way.

Another extremely important factor as to why people are inclined to buy impulsively online is because of the choice of payment. Additionally, to shopping whenever consumers wish to shop, consumers also get the chance of paying with a credit card. What this means is that consumers get the satisfaction of buying impulsively immediately, while they do not have to face with the costs until the end of the month. Because of this, consumers are a lot more likely to buy impulsively and go over their budget. Furthermore, people who pay with their credit card, are also less conscious about the prices of items, which can lead to impulsively buying items which they cannot necessarily afford (Karbasivar & Yarahmadi, 2011).

2.2 Tools used by E-commerce retailers to encourage impulse buying

Whereas the feeling of "instant gratification" is easier to achieve in an offline world, where consumers can touch and/or try on products, online retailers can incentivize consumers through the usage of various tools and tactics (Verma & Singh, 2019). Many different factors have an impact on online impulse buying, some are coming from consumers and some from the environment. All different categories of factors are shown in the figure 6.

Figure 5: Factors influencing online impulse buying



Source: Verma and Singh (2019).

2.2.1 Website optimisation

E-commerce retailers, similarly, to their offline counterparts, have a motive to perpetuate impulsive buying behaviour in their consumers. The fundamentals to attracting customers are of course an optimized website, for all types of devices, an appealing design of the website, a vast assortment of products and a good navigation which makes it easy and enjoyable for the consumer to browse the website (Moser, Schoenebeck & Resnick, 2019).

Every website is formed by a combination of high task-relevant and low task-relevant cues. High task-relevant cues are defined as site descriptors that allow for consumers goal achievement – to purchase. Website security and how easy it is to navigate the website both fall under the umbrella of high task-relevant cues. They are crucial for a website to be effective. Low task-relevant clues, on the other hand, do not ensure that a website works properly, but make sure that shopping experience on the website is pleasant – design of the website, the colour schemes, themes etc. (Wells, Parboteeah & Valacich, 2011).

2.2.2 Dark patterns

According to Moser, Schoenebeck & Resnick (2019), there has been a surge in “dark patterns” on many online stores. These dark patterns are features that are present on a website and whose intent is to trick and trap consumers until they give in and impulsively purchase an item. Some of these features are nagging the consumer, obstructing the option to compare prices, sneaking products into their carts, interfering, and forced action (Chromik, Völkel, Eiband & Buschek, 2019).

“*Nagging*” refers to constant interruptions that confuse a consumer while they are performing an action. An example of this would be when sites use popup windows, that cannot be permanently closed. “*Obstruction*” refers to features that make a process more difficult than it is, in the case of online shopping price comparison could be an example. Consumers could compare prices if they clicked on different products, but that takes time and effort, and online stores do not tend to make that process easier (Chromik, Völkel, Eiband & Buschek, 2019).

“*Sneaking*” refers to attempts of hiding or disguising information that is relevant to consumers. An example of this is when an online store recommends a product after a consumer has looked at or added a similar item to cart. Furthermore, online retailers also used a dark pattern known as “*forced action*”, where consumers need to do a particular action to access their goal destination e.g.: a consumer needs to close a pop-up window in order to get to the site they are interested in (Chromik, Völkel, Eiband & Buschek, 2019).

2.2.3 Perceived physical and temporal proximity

According to Hoch and Loewenstein (1991), the closer the product is to a consumer, the higher is the probability they will purchase it. In other words, if “*perceived physical proximity*” of an item is enhanced then a consumer will feel as if they somewhat own the product already. Once this feeling of ownership has been evoked, a consumer will feel a sense of loss if they do not buy the item. An example of this would be that a consumer who goes to a shop and tries on a dress is a lot more likely to purchase that dress than a consumer who was just window shopping (Moser, Schoenebeck & Resnick, 2019). Online retailers are aware that they cannot guarantee the consumer to try on a dress, but they take a different approach. They enhance the presentation of their products through different pictures in order to make a consumer feel physically closer to the desired item. They do so through uploading various different pictures of an item, for example a shirt on their website (Vonkeman, Verhagen, & van Dolen, 2017). (see Figure 5) This is one of the most commonly used impulse purchase features used by online stores (Moser, Schoenebeck & Resnick, 2019).

In addition, how quickly consumers believe they can get an item – “*perceived temporal proximity*” also tends to have an effect on impulsive buying. The faster the delivery the higher the probability of an impulsive purchase. This is because consumers tend to prefer

immediate rewards over rewards for which they have to wait a while. Because same or next-day delivery gives a promise of near-instant gratification it is an incredibly tool in influencing impulsive purchases (Youn & Faber, 2000).

Figure 6: Levi's body shirt – AboutYou



Source: AboutYou (2021)

2.2.4 Lowering perceived risk of shopping

When consumers believe their risk of shopping is low, they are more likely to impulsively purchase. Online retailers are well aware of this, which is why they use various tools and offers in order to further minimize perceived risk in hopes it will lead to (impulse) buying. One of such tools are refund/return policies. Consumers are more likely to impulsively purchase items – especially clothes – when the company they are buying from offers full refund in case they decide to return the product (Kacen & Lee, 2012). In other words, when buying clothes online, consumers cannot be sure if the chosen items will fit them and will therefore not be able to risk the purchase if there are no generous return/refund policies in place. It would be the equivalence of going to a shopping mall and buying clothes without trying them on (Verma & Singh, 2019).

Savings can also be used as a way of lowering the perceived risk of shopping in consumers eyes. Items which are on sale have a better chance of being bought on impulse, than items which are not on sale, due to the fact that consumers consider them as a “*good deal*”. In order to even increase to possibility of impulse buying, when a consumer sees a good deal, online retailers, create a page dedicated to on sale products (Verma & Singh, 2019).

Both discounted prices and generous return/refund policies are some of the most commonly used impulse purchase features used by online stores. Similarly, to sales, another tool that is often used are unexpected coupons. When a consumer first visits their website, they are offered a 10% or 15% discount coupon in exchange for their email. If consumers are given a coupon, they might spend more money and buy more impulsively as they would if they did not get the coupon (Moser, Schoenebeck & Resnick, 2019).

2.2.5 Recommendations

The more time consumers spend on the site, the bigger the possibility for an urge to emerge and impulse buying to take place. This happens because they are exposed to more products and marketing stimuli. It is similar to what happens in a grocery store, if a consumer does not know how the store is organized, they will have to walk and look around more in order to find products they need. While doing that, they will be exposed to more products and more marketing stimuli such as displays, gondola end etc. (Verma & Singh, 2019). The same thing happens when a consumer browses through an online store, they will see more and more recommended products, that will be based on what they looked at previously. Furthermore, online retailers also highlight popular products in order to create a feeling of urge. In such environment, consumers can very easily get the urge to buy something on impulse (Moser, Schoenebeck & Resnick, 2019).

2.2.6 Perceived scarcity and limited time offer

Similarly, to “on sale promotions”, ecommerce retailers also use “limited time offers”, where websites will have a countdown clock, to increase the perceived urgency of consumers even further. These types of offers tend to be the most successful at triggering impulsive purchase behaviour. It is also a tool that is most often recognized by consumers as a trigger for impulsive buying (Lo, Lin & Hsu, 2016).

Furthermore, one of the most effective way to make a consumer act impulsively is to create product scarcity. Online stores do this through stock pointers. In case of online clothing stores this is communicated through messages such as “only 2 left” and in case of websites such as Booking.com it is communicated through messages such as “5 people are currently looking at this offer”. When a consumer sees these pointers, they are more likely to buy a product because if they do not purchase it now, they might not be able to do it at all (Brown & Jones, 2017).

2.2.7 Loyalty programs

A lot of online retailers use tactic similar to what offline retailers use, and that is loyalty programs. When consumers become a member, they can unlock discounts, and usually how these programs work is the more a consumer spends in a certain time period e.g.: one year, the better rewards or discounts they qualify for (Lin & Bowman, 2022). An example of such program would be Sephora's Beauty Insider program. Sephora is a US based company that sells high end beauty products. For each dollar, a consumer spends on their website (or in their retail stores), they get a point. Through collecting these points consumers can get rewards – samples or small sizes of deluxe products. Depending on how many points a consumer collects in one calendar year, they achieve one of the two statuses – VIB (Very important beauty insider) or Rouge. In order to get to VIB, a consumer needs to spend 350\$, while to get achieve Rouge status, they need to spend 1000\$ in a year. These statuses guarantee their members exclusive rewards, such as full-sized products etc. (Sephora, 2020).

Through such programs consumers are motivated to spend more money in order to be able to unlock these rewards (in case of Sephora) or discounts (in cases of other companies). This leads to impulse buying of products just so they can reach the point where they can benefit of these programs. Apart from discounts, sales pages and returns/refunds this is one of the most commonly used impulse purchase features used by online stores (Verma & Singh, 2019).

2.2.8 “Free gifts”

Another tool used by online retailers to create an urge in consumers is the use of “free gift” gimmick. The idea is that if a consumer buys items that exceed a certain amount of €, then they qualify for a free gift - “with every purchase above X€ you get a free X product”. If the gift is a “good deal” in the eyes of the consumer, it creates a psychological impulse, which might lead to them making an additional purchase of a product they weren't indenting to buy, in order to qualify for the “free gift” (Dhar, Huber & Khan, 2007). In other words, if a consumer is buying something online and their total is below the amount needed for a free gift, they might buy an additional product (this would be the impulsive purchase) in order to reach the needed amount of € to get a “free gift” (Moser, Schoenebeck & Resnick, 2019).

2.2.9 Social media

Social media can also be a trigger for impulsive purchases, since posts of other people and especially influencers, act as a type of “peer pressure”. Additionally, these kinds of posts can cause users of social media platform to start comparing themselves to others, which can lead to them making similar purchases of products to which they were exposed to. Users might get influenced by what their friends who are posting the items they bought, restaurants or places they went to (Zhang, Yuan, Zheng, Lian, Xie & Rui, 2015).

In the case of influencers, users look up to them and trust their opinion. Therefore, consumers are a valuable marketing tool. Companies, especially online retailers are aware of the hold influencers have over their followers, which is why they then often decide to collaborate with them in order to increase their sales. Since influencers are individuals who have, through the years, gained knowledge on a certain topic e.g.: makeup and are seen as experts on the topic consumers trust their judgement. If an influencer stands behind the product or has even participated in developing a product, their followers will be more likely to purchase it than if the product was not connected to the influencer (Kaulbars-Staudinger, 2019). Additionally, influencers know how to create an urge in their followers by using phrases such as “holy grail”, “you have to have it”, “this is a must have”, “go out there and buy it” etc. Influencers do this, because they get profit if their followers purchase the recommended products – often times they have affiliate links (they get a commission every time someone purchases a product through their link) or they are directly connected to creating a product e.g.: an eyeshadow palette and get a percentage of total sales (Gunawan & Iskandar, 2019).

2.2.10 Ratings

Similarly, as to how influencer’s opinions and friend’s opinions on a product can influence impulsive buying, ratings and/or reviews from other people who have already bought an item a consumer is thinking of buying, tend to have a big effect on their purchasing decision. If a consumer is scrolling through an online store and they see a recommended product that has a five-star rating and positive reviews, the probability of impulse purchase is significantly higher than if that product had a low rating or no rating at all. In addition to membership programs, discounts, sales pages and returns/refunds, this is one of the most commonly used impulse purchase features used in online stores (Moser, Schoenebeck & Resnick, 2019).

According to Browne and Jones (2017), features that bring the most uplift in sales are stock pointers, that communicate scarcity of the product, creating urgency through countdown timers and product recommendations. On the other hand, attributes such as the colour/theme of the website have little to no uplift in sales.

3 THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND IMPULSE BUYING RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

When the COVID-19 pandemic started in the early months of 2020, it shook the global economy. In March 2020 WHO declared COVID-19 to be a pandemic and instructed governments around the world to implement social distancing guidelines. These guidelines were meant to prevent the spread of the virus by forcing people to stay at home and by limiting in person interaction as much as possible. Numerous businesses had to close-down for the time of lockdowns, and millions of people had to follow the strict social distancing guidelines (Iriani, Nuswantara & Kartika, 2021).

Between the fear of getting the virus, the government-imposed regulations, and the lack of supply from offline retailers, millions of consumers have begun to change the way they shop (Zhang, Leng, & Liu, 2020). During the pandemic, we have noticed a few changes in consumer behaviour. In the first few weeks of the pandemic, there was a considerably large wave of panic shopping in many countries, this however only lasted a few weeks in most countries. (Ahmed, Streimikiene, Rolle & Duc, 2020) Additionally, to minimize contact with others, people started to rely more heavily on online retailers for their groceries as well as other products (Bhatti, Akram, Basit, Khan, Naqvi et al. 2020).

Because of these very notable changes in consumer behaviour, businesses were forced to change their tactics as well. Since people were constantly at home, they were spending more time on their computer and cell phones than ever. The more time people spend online, the more digital marketing tools they are getting exposed to and the probability of them making a purchase increase. Digital marketing has been developing very well in the past few years and big businesses have been investing a lot of resources into it, however the pandemic forced even smaller businesses to move their marketing online (Iriani, Nuswantara & Kartika, 2021).

3.1 Lockdown boredom and impulsive buying during the COVID-19 pandemic

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdowns that followed, most of the population spend more time at home and in isolation. According to Green and Murphy (2014), one's reality and future anticipations are influenced by perceived severity of the situation, in this case, the perceived severity of COVID-19 and its effect on human health. People who perceive the situation extremely seriously, have a high perceived severity, are more likely to follow the governmental instructions of washing and disinfecting your hands regularly, wearing face masks when around others and socially distancing (Deng, Wang, Xie, Chao & Zhu, 2020). A majority of people followed these instructions and in the first few months, when the disease was relatively new, a lot of people were scared. In addition to fear, because people were limited to activities within their homes, psychological pressure has substantially increased (Zhang, Leng, & Liu, 2020). Due to limited activities, a lot of people were faced with quarantine boredom (Deng, Wang, Xie, Chao & Zhu, 2020).

Boredom is defined as an experience where an individual wants to engage in satisfying activities but is unable able to do so (Eastwood, Frischen, Fenske & Smilek, 2012). Additionally, boredom also occurs when an individual does not experience novel stimulus for a certain period of time, in this case during lockdowns. Such low level of arousal is the main reason why boredom occurs (van Hooft & van Hooff, 2018).

According to arousal theory, as discussed in previous chapters, in order for individuals to maintain certain activities, they need a certain amount of external stimulation. It is optional for a person to have a moderate level of stimulation. If a person is experiencing a high level of emotional arousal over a certain period of time, they will feel excitement, but also anxiety

and irritability, while if they are experiencing a low level of emotional arousal, they will feel relaxed at first, but will start to feel depressed and bored with time (Picard, Fedor & Ayzenberg, 2016).

Because of long lockdowns, people were in a state of long-term boredom and when that occurs, people tend to start looking for ways to escape it. They actively start seeking out stronger novel and exciting external stimulations that will bring them high emotional arousal (Reisenzein, 2017). Because consumption, especially impulsive consumption, is a way in which people can increase their emotional arousal, many people are experiencing an increased impulsive buying tendency (Droit-Volet, Gil, Martinelli & Andant, 2020). According to Sundström, Hjelm-Lidholma & Radonb (2019), boredom is one of the main factors that contribute to consumes behaviour. When people are bored, as they are during lockdowns, they are an easy target for tools online retailers use (discounts, advertisements etc.) (Deng, Wang, Xie, Chao & Zhu, 2020). Additionally, people who are experiencing a period of low emotional arousal, will be looking for complex stimuli which could lead to an increased tendency to impulsively consume items, since impulsive consumption tends to bring feelings of gratification and excitement (Deng and Gao, 2015).

This offers a significant change from their everyday boredom even if this “rush” only lasts for a short time. Furthermore, consumers who have been experiencing longer periods of boredom, will purchase items that are not in line with their current emotional arousal level. They will buy an item that excites them, such as clothes, accessories, shoes, cosmetics, sport attire etc (Deng, Wang, Xie, Chao & Zhu, 2020).

Items that are bought on impulse quite often are fashion items and groceries. As discussed in the previous chapter, impulse buying can lead to excitement, joy, and a break from the usual shopping experience. This is one of the main reasons why some consumers turn to shopping in order to break the feeling of boredom. Consumers realize that with the correct type of stimuli they can change their negative state of mind – boredom, to a positive one – excitement/happiness. This excitement was more easily accessible in brick-to-mortar, however during the pandemic more and more people are turning to online retailers for this type of stimuli (Sundström, Hjelm-Lidholma & Radonb, 2019). Because strong emotions are more likely to lead to impulsive buying it was not surprising to find out that some consumers turned to online shopping in order to break away from their boredom (Li, Zhao, Huang, & Li, 2020).

According to Li, Zhao, Huang, & Li (2020) it is not unusual that people seek comfort in impulsive consumption during times of public health emergencies. According to their study, the perceived severity of the pandemic is positively correlated with people’s tendency to impulsively buy. Li and others claim this is due to a lack of perceived control on consumer’s part and due to materialism. In situations such as the pandemic of COVID-19, people lose a big part of control over their lives. There are restrictions about the number of people in one place, restrictions about when you can move around – curfew, restriction about which places

one can visit and how they can move around the country. Because of this loss of control, consumers start to buy impulsively as a way of compensating for the loss of control, since acquisition of products in itself is a form of having control (Li, Zhao, Huang, & Li, 2020). Furthermore, materialism also plays a role in impulsive buying since people who are materialistic tend to equate consumption to success and see it as one of the main drivers of happiness. Since COVID-19 completely changed everyone's lives and has shown how fragile they are, people who have materialistic tendencies would try to increase their self-esteem in order to cope with the "*new normal*". Moreover, the more consumers perceive COVID-19 as a threat to their health and to their way of life, the stronger materialistic tendencies become, which can result in impulsive buying (Li, Zhao, Huang, & Li, 2020).

During lockdown people also spent more time online, meaning that they were exposed to various ads on their social media, marketing stimuli etc. for longer periods of time, which as mentioned in previous parts of this thesis, does lead to more impulsive purchases (Moser, Schoenebeck & Resnick, 2019). Due to the combination of consumers spending more time online and a common feeling of lockdown related boredom, the number of impulsive purchases has increased compared to pre- COVID-19 times (Modin & Smith, 2020).

3.2 Research goals and research questions

The main purpose of this research is to contribute to the body of knowledge on the connection between the COVID-19 pandemic and impulsive behaviour online. Through my research I wish to find out the connection between COVID-19 pandemic and consumer behaviour – specifically impulsive purchases. I hope that my research helps to understand the behaviour of consumers in such unprecedented times and to help companies adapt their strategies accordingly. To understand the changes in the purchasing behaviour, we need to ask the questions if, their behaviour has changed, how the consumers are going about their purchases, where the purchases take place and why their behaviour has changed. To achieve the main goal of this thesis, I have formed some sub-goals, which are as follows:

1. To learn how consumers feel when they place an online order.
2. To learn how tactics used by online retailers incentivize consumers to buy impulsively.
3. To learn whether the consumers' behaviour has become more impulsive since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

To reach the goal of this thesis I will seek answers to the following research questions:

RQ1: What are consumers' habits in online shopping?

RQ2: How do consumers feel when impulsively buying online?

RQ3: Which factors contribute the most to the consumers' impulsive buying?

RQ4: How do consumers react to tools used by online retailers?

RQ5: How do consumers who experienced lockdown measures understand the role of these measures in their urge to buy impulsively?

3.3 Methodology

Since the purpose of this thesis is to gain a deeper understanding of consumer's view on impulsive buying, the research method chosen is in-depth interviews. Due to choosing a qualitative research method – in depth interview, fewer respondents are needed than in quantitative research. However, due to a smaller number of respondents and the fact that interviews will be conducted face-to-face/online, I will be able to adapt to each individual with specific questions. Therefore, by choosing a qualitative research method I will be able to obtain more detailed information. In other words, an interviewer can ask the participants to explain the motivation behind their actions to a larger extent than they would be able to with a survey – quantitative research method (Bryman & Bell, 2017).

Additionally, according to Modin & Smith (2020), impulsive buying behaviour is a somewhat of a sensitive topic, as it is strongly rooted and connected with one's emotions. Due to the topic of this thesis, I believe it is beneficial to conduct a one-on-one in-depth interview as the environment will be more relaxed compared to surveys. Additionally, it will allow me to gain more knowledge of people's emotions and feelings (Boyce & Neale, 2006).

The alternative approach would be choosing quantitative research method. This type of approach includes more respondents, whose answers are then being analysed through statistical software such as Stata or SPSS (Modin & Smith, 2020). However, the questions cannot be adapted to every individual and the respondents would therefore answer in a more impersonal way. However, as mentioned above, since consumer's spending habits – specifically impulsive purchases – can be somewhat of a sensitive topic, it would be difficult to gain a deeper understanding of such behaviour through impersonal surveys (Modin & Smith, 2020).

3.3.1 Structure of the interviews

The questions were formed in a way that helped to obtain consumer's thoughts and feelings in a more detailed way. Each question is related to the literature, which was described in the first part of the thesis, more specifically, the focus is on: consumer's spending habits, decision making process and pandemic related questions.

In the table 1 below, the majority of the questions that were asked are listed. However, during the interview there were some leading up to questions such as asking the interviewees to tell something about themselves. Additionally, another question was asked where I was able to gain an understanding of what interviewees believed impulsive buying was.

Table 1: Structure of the interview

	RESEARCH QUESTIONS	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
1.	What are consumers' motives and habits in online shopping?	1. Do you shop online? If yes, why? 2. How frequently did you shop online (in the past year)? 3. Which products/goods did you purchase online in the last year? 4. Which were the most recent products/goods you have purchased online 5. How often do you buy this type of product in a month? 6. Can you recall your last impulsive purchase online? 7. How long did the whole decision-making/purchasing process take 8. Do you plan your purchases before going online? 9. How would you describe most of your purchases? Are they planned/not
2.	How do consumers feel when impulsively buying online?	10. How did you feel when purchasing the product? 11. Did impulsive buying elevate your mood at the time of your purchase? 12. Did your self-image change at the time of making impulsive purchase?
3.	Which factors contribute the most to the consumers' impulsive buying?	13. What made you see that you needed to purchase that specific product? 14. How did you acquire the needed information about the product which you bought? 15. Which were the characteristics of the product that you considered when you were deciding to purchase it?
4.	How do consumers react to tools used by online retailers?	16. Were you in any way influenced to purchase a product? (Peer pressure, saw an ad online, recommended, last in stock etc.) 17. Did any tools used by online retailers ever effect your purchasing decision? (e.g.: last in stock, sale, free gift, free shipping for limited time, ratings etc.)

(Table continues)

(Table 1: Structure of the interview continued)

5.	How do consumers who experienced lockdown measures understand the role of these measures in their urge to buy impulsively?	18. Has your buying pattern changed since the beginning of pandemic? If yes, how? 19. Has your buying pattern changed significantly during lockdowns? 20. Did you purchase more products online over the past year? How much? 21. Can you describe your general state of mind or mood during lockdowns? Explain. 22. Have you ever turned to online shopping as a way to improve your mood during lockdown?
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Source: Own work

3.3.2 Sampling methods

There were many different factors that contributed to the choice of interviewees. In order to gain good answers to the questions asked I have used the purposive sampling technique. This is a technique where the interviewer relies on their judgement when choosing who will partake in the interview (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). Before making the final decision on whom I would ask to participate I made a list of possible interviewees. I made sure that all interviewees do partake in online shopping and that their ages differ, so I could get a better insight of spending habits between different age groups. I also made sure, to interview men and women, to see how different or similar their behaviours are. Additionally, I made sure was that interviewees came from different countries, such as Slovenia, Russia, and Belgium. Not only did I decide to include people outside of Slovenia due to cultural differences but also due to different lockdown measures. Additionally, before they have agreed on doing the interviews, I guaranteed them that the information will only be used for the purpose of this thesis. The interviews were carried out in the span of two-months September – October 2021. In the table 1 below is a list of participants with the information about their gender, age, city, country, and occupation.

Figure 7: List of interviewees

Identity	Sex	Age	City	Country	Occupation
A	Female	26	Ljubljana	Slovenia	Assitant to the director
B	Male	28	Ljubljana	Slovenia	Young researcher
C	Female	26	Kamnik	Slovenia	User Acquisition Specialist
D	Male	23	Omsk	Russia	Student
E	Female	25	Rogatec	Slovenia	MSc of Psychology
F	Female	35	Izola	Slovenia	Legal consultant
G	Male	32	Koper	Slovenia	Copywriter
H	Male	30	Brussels	Belgium	Accountant
I	Female	40	Ljubljana	Slovenia	Brand Operations Manager
J	Female	47	Logatec	Slovenia	Key Account Manager
K	Male	32	Domžale	Slovenia	Private small businessman
M	Female	60	Domžale	Slovenia	Teacher

Source: Own work.

3.3.3 The course of the interview

As mentioned previously, I have made a list of appropriate interviewees before I started conducting interviews. In order to do an interview, the interviewee and myself agreed upon the time and place of the interview. Due to geographical distance with some of the contestants and the time restrictions of some of the interviewees, most of the interviews were held via Zoom. I had prepared 26 questions, which were divided into three sections: The first section was formed by general questions about participants' purchasing behaviour. The second section focused of their decision-making process and the third one aimed at gaining understanding about how the pandemic effected their purchasing behaviour as well as their general well-being.

Before conducting the interviews, I conducted a test interview to see whether all of the questions were understandable and whether I should add more questions. Additionally, this gave me the opportunity to see which were the questions and topics I needed to pay additional attention to.

Before starting the interviewing process all the relevant information regarding the research and use of obtained information was given to the interviewees. I start the interview with a question whether they ever shop online. If the answer is yes, I ask them to elaborate as to why they shop online. This gives an insight into the perceived benefits of online buying and the motivation behind it. Furthermore, the interviewees are asked about the frequency of their purchases online. Additionally, they are also presented with a question of which products they have been buying online in the past year. A follow up question to that is what their lasted product purchases was online. The answers to those two questions give an insight as to which type of products the interviewees tend to buy online. The sixth question continues and is formed to get an answer about how often the interviewee purchases the

product (they said they last bought) in a month. I then follow up with a question while the last purchase where they bought that product was planned. I continue with asking them whether most of their online purchases were planned. I end the first part of the interview with a question about what they believe impulsive buying to be. After they gave their definition, I presented them with what impulsive buying is according to various studies. The first part of the interview gives a rough outline of what type of a consumer a person is.

The second part of the interview is focusing on the decision-making process which leads interviewees to buy or not buy certain products. The first question in this part of the interview relates to interviewees recalling their last impulse purchase. The interviewees are asked to recall back on the definition and types of impulse buying there are, which they were presented with in the first section of the interview. I then dig deeper with a question about their needs and problems that have identified before impulsively buying that product. Furthermore, the third question focuses on how interviewees gather information (online, TV, newspapers etc.) about products they purchase. After getting an answer to that, I then move on to which characteristics are the most important to them when buying a product – whether they put more emphasis on the appearance, brand, flavour etc. I continue with questions about how they felt after impulsively buying a product – whether it was excitement, regret, nothing at all etc. Additionally, a question that is asked is whether they had, at any point, used online shopping to uplift their mood. Furthermore, an additional question is asked of whether their sense of self/their self-image has changed when they were impulsively buying. Furthermore, they are questioned about their feeling after the purchase, about a day or two later. The aim of this question is to give insight as to how long the feelings last or whether, they might change e.g.: whether the consumer was excited when placing the order, but later started to regret it. The next question in this part of the interview targets whether interviewees were influenced in any shape of form to buy a product – did they see in on their friend's social media, their favourite influencer's profile, were they exposed to targeted advertising online etc. Additionally, they are also questioned about the duration of their purchasing process. The last question of the decision-making process part of the interview looks for the effectiveness of online tools retailers use to convince consumers to impulsively buy a product. With this question it also becomes clear whether interviewees are even aware of such tools being used on them.

The third and last part of the interview focuses on the pandemic and how the interviewees perceived it and all regulations that came along. Firstly, they are questioned whether their buying pattern has changed since the pandemic. If the answer is yes, they are asked to elaborate. Additionally, I ask them whether their behaviours have changed significantly during lockdowns. In the next question they are asked whether they completed more online purchases than they did before the COVID-19 pandemic started. In the next question the focus shifts to their mental well-being, whether they were in good spirits, felt bored, anxious etc. They are asked to further elaborate on that. I follow it up with a question of whether their state of mind has changed in any way through impulse buying during the pandemic.

This question is then followed up, with a question of whether they have ever used impulsive buying to uplift their mood during the pandemic/lockdowns. The interview is concluded with a question about the interviewee's demographics.

During the interview I was mindful whether the interviewee felt comfortable, additionally I also focused on their tone of voice and mimics of the face, in order to move the interview in a direction they felt more comfortable with, which is why I decided to do in-depth interviews. This type of interview also allowed me to add some questions or ask the question in a different way, so the participants could fully understand them.

I carried out 12 interviews. At this point I noticed that the answers to most questions were beginning to sound similar to one another, and that is how I knew I have reached a point of sufficient data saturation (Fusch & Lawrence, 2015). I believe that with these 12 interviews I have gained sufficient valuable insights about impulsive buying online during the COVID-19 pandemic.

I analysed the interviews with a help of transcription and cross-case analysis. This type of analysis enables us to compare answers given by the interviewees and to what extent they differ or are similar to each other. In cross-case analysis, the answers are divided into sections and then compared to one another (Basil, 2003). In my case, I divided the interviews into five sections, which are listed in the next chapter.

The data I obtained through these interviews helped me to put together suggestions for possible strategies for online retailers in the times of pandemic as well as strategies for the post-pandemic times.

4 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

I conducted 12 interviews out of which all were transcribed. Among these 12 interviews the answers to the posed questions were similar. After transcribing I divided the interviews into sections.

Section 1: Motives for online shopping – the section is formed by questions which look for reasons as to why people shop online and which items they tend to buy online.

Section 2: Understanding of impulsive buying – this section is formed by a single question, which asks participants of their understanding of impulsive buying.

Section 3: Most effective marketing tools used by online retailers – encompasses questions about the tools that are the most convincing to them as well as the influence various marketing tactics have on the interviewees' desire to shop online (influencer marketing etc.)

Section 4: People's general mood when (impulsively) buying products online – formed by questions which inquire about the effect online shopping has on interviewees' mood.

Section 5: Using online impulse buying as a coping mechanism for going through lockdown – this section focuses on the general well-being of interviewees during lockdown and whether they have ever turned to online impulse buying to uplift their mood.

4.1 Results by sections

4.1.1 Motives for online buying and consumer behaviour online.

All of the participants said that online shopping is extremely convenient since they don't have to go out, waste time on transportation, additionally they also don't have to carry the items by themselves – everything is delivered to their door. For most interviewees the benefits of shopping online are saving time, as they do not have to lose time on transportation. Most of them also agreed that online shops provide a better offer of products. Additionally, a few interviewees buy items that are not accessible in Slovenia, which makes online shopping their only way of acquiring the needed products. Furthermore, some interviewees (H, J and K) also pointed out that they are able to save money by shopping online, since online retailers often offer higher discounts than their real-life counterparts. Interviewee K said: "...if I don't like the product, I just send it back and they deposit the money back to my account, which is the complete opposite of when you try to return a product in a regular store. They usually don't want to refund you but are only willing to exchange the item." Approximately half of the participants also pointed out that going to regular stores and being in the crowd made them nervous and anxious. Online shopping removed that factor, so they find shopping more enjoyable now.

Majority of the interviewee's shops online at least once a month, while a lot of them shop online a few times per month. The products they buy vary between interviewee's depending on their interests. In general, there are a few groups of products interviewees buy online: household items, electronics, trading cards, console games, clothes, shoes, accessories, groceries. However, the group that most interviewees said they bought online are clothes and shoes.

When asked whether they plan their purchases only a minority participants claimed that they always plan their purchases before going online. A few of the participants claimed that they do not plan any purchases before going online, but decide as they scroll through the app. However, the majority of interviewees admitted to planning some purchases and not planning others. Specifically, participant I said they plan their groceries shopping (which they do online), however they do not plan when buying clothes. Similarly, interviewee K said: "I plan bigger purchases, for example if I need a new dining table, I will research what all the stores have to offer online, and I will compare. But when it comes to clothes and accessories my purchases aren't planned." Quite a few participants admitted to enjoying scrolling through apps and online stores and then buying items that grab their attention.

4.1.2 Understanding of impulse buying

Most of the participants are not aware of the whole extent of impulse buying. They are, however, aware of what pure impulse purchase is. Most of them describe it as an instant need a consumer gets when they see the product and they immediately buy it, without giving it a second thought. Most of them also pointed out the lack of control when asked what they believe impulsive buying is. Additionally, a large minority of participants said that impulsive purchase involves a strong need to buy a product even though a consumer realizes they do not need it. Participant K was the only interviewee that focused more on the reasons why consumers buy impulsively, specifically they called attention to using impulsive as a way to cope with stressful situations – to improve one's mood. Additionally, they said: "I believe the other kind of impulse buying is when a company informs you of a big sale and you go and buy items that you normally wouldn't, because you have a fear of missing out such a great deal."

In general, impulsive buying, according to the interviewees, is connected to low self-control, quick actions, and a strong need. This is a good definition of pure impulse buying. Such answers were expected as they are the most standard way people view impulsive behaviour and impulsive buying.

When I introduced the other three types of impulsive buying, those being impulsive buying coming from memory, suggestion impulse buying and planned impulse purchases, some participants, who previously claimed that they plan their purchases found themselves in these definitions. They especially admitted succumbing to pure impulsive purchases.

4.1.3 Most effective marketing tools used by online retailers

All of the interviewees got information about their last impulsive purchase online. Approximately half were scrolling through the site's web shop or their apps, some got an ad on social media websites such as Instagram and Facebook or got emails that informed them of sales, which then led them to browse through the company's app.

When asked about the needs, a large majority of participants had a different answer. Interviewees B and D said that they bought the product because of the specific circumstances in their lives at that moment. Participant D said: "I was travelling a lot at the time, and I bought new console games so that I wouldn't be bored when travelling." A few interviewees said the main need they satisfied with their purchase was need of clothes as well as the need for aesthetics. Interviewee G, who impulsively bought camping equipment stated that they satisfied the need of a more comfortable way of living with purchasing camping items.

A small minority of participants said the price was the main factor that contributed to their impulsive purchase. Other characteristics that were often mentioned were also brand, materials, design, and colour when buying clothes, shoes, and accessories. For participants

whose last impulsive purchase were games, they were convinced by gameplay as well as the price. Additionally, interviewee E who bought designer clothes impulsively because a big sale was happening on an app stated: “I thought I would be missing out if I didn’t purchase these designer clothes.”

Half of the interviewees said they were influenced to buy a product by a targeted ad or an email they received. Additionally, a small minority interviewees were influenced by a recommendation from a friend to buy a product, while interviewees B and C said they were not influenced in any way.

A majority of interviewees of them said that they are most often convinced to buy products if an online store has a sale going on. Furthermore, half of the interviewees said they are also convinced to buy from a store if they offer free shipping and free returns. Interviewee H said: “Sometimes when I am buying something and I am 10€ away from getting free shipping I will browse the store and find something to add to my order, to qualify for free shipping.” Additionally, interviewee D and J said that they enjoy loyalty programs that offer additional discounts for their loyal customers, while interviewees C, F, H, and I like to receive loyalty coupons from online retailers. However, half of them said coupons alone are not enough to make them buy something from the store, but they always go and browse through the app, and they tend to find something they like quite often.

4.1.4 Feelings and emotions when purchasing impulsively

All of the participants can recall their last impulsive purchases online, half of those being clothes/accessories/shoes, while the other half bought games, camping equipment, music, and children’s toys.

All participants said they felt some level of excitement when they impulsively purchased something online. A majority interviewees reported feeling extremely excited, a large minority felt slightly excited while participant F said: “Mostly I felt good, but at the same time I did feel a bit guilty, because I knew I didn’t actually need the bag...” Apart from guilt felt by participant F, some other emotions participants felt were satisfaction and anticipation.

All interviewees said that impulsive purchase elevated their mood at the time of their purchase, while a large minority of interviewees said that their last impulsive purchase had an effect on their self-image. Interviewee B said: “...it is extremely difficult to get a PS5 at this point in time. So, the fact that I was able to get it made me feel very good, almost proud in a way.” Interviewees E and K both reported a similar improvement in self-image when they bought designer items, that can be considered a status symbol. Interviewee E said: “Yes, I would say it did. Because these were designer items and as such serve as a type of a status symbol, it definitely did improve my self-image for a short period of time.” While interviewee K said: “Yes, because I just bought a designer item that I got for a very good price. I felt pride in my ability to get such an item for such a good price.” All participants

admitted that the pride and improvement of self-image they felt only lasted for a short while. Participant D said that their self-image did not change when they impulsively bought games but have said: “I believe my self-image could have changed if I bought some products that carry more of a social status.”

When asked how they felt after purchasing their last impulsive purchase a majority of interviewees reported that their feelings have not changed, specifically, nine of them said they still felt happy and in anticipation of getting the product. A small minority of participants did report a change in their feelings, among them being participant F who felt slightly guilty when placing an order for a new bag. However, after a few days that feeling went away and they only felt happiness and excitement. The biggest change was reported by interviewee B, who also had the biggest impulsive purchase and they said: “A few days after the purchase I started to realize that I spent a lot of money on this product. I was still happy that I got it, but I felt uneasy when I looked at my bank account.” They reported a combination of feelings such as pride, excitement to play the new console and guilt for spending a lot of money on it. However, similarly to the positive feeling, they reported their guilt also went away rather quickly.

4.1.5 Consumers’ buying patterns and COVID-19 pandemic

All interviewees reported that their buying pattern has changed since the beginning of the pandemic. All of them also report that they shop a lot more online than they did before. Additionally, even their real-life shopping has changed, as interviewee L reports: “My family and I go to the groceries once every two weeks, before we went once a week. And now only one person goes to the store. I started buying flowers online and clothes as well. A large minority of participants reported that before March 2020 they were sceptical of online buying, but when lockdown happened and everything was closed, they were forced to start buying items such as clothes and electronics online. Now, a majority of them report that they cannot imagine going back to their old ways of shopping in normal stores. Interviewee G stated: “...for things such as electronics I started buying them online. And now I cannot imagine going to Big Bang for a set of headphones anymore.” Interviewee J said something very similar: “...now I buy clothes, shoes, and accessories strictly online. I cannot imagine going to stores to buy such items anymore.” Interviewee K also said: “...I don’t believe I will return to buying such items (clothes, shoes and accessories) in regular stores.”

Interviewees gave similar answers to the question whether their buying patterns during lockdowns have changed. Since the pandemic in Slovenia started with a lockdown that was to be expected. However, some interviewees did give some additional information. a majority specified that lockdown was the time when they started buying more items online. A small minority of participants said that was also the time when they started buying groceries online, as reported by interviewee B: “...during lockdowns I also started buying groceries online more often than I did before. It felt a lot safer to me and I felt that was the

best way to minimize my chances of getting the virus.” Apart from groceries, interviewee H reports ordering more take-away during lockdowns through UberEATS.

A large majority of interviewees reported their online purchases increased by a significant percentage in the past year and a half – since the pandemic started. Interviewees E and J admitted to never shopping online before the pandemic, so their online purchases increased by 100%. Six other interviewees estimated that their online shopping has increased for more than 50% while only two interviewees estimated their online shopping increased by less than 50%.

A large majority said they felt anxious during lockdown. Reasons for that anxiety was different, but in general participants reported being anxious about getting the virus, anxious because they could not indulge in their hobbies and hang out with friends, anxious because they had to stay inside at all times. Interviewee G expressed they felt anxious about their future plans regarding travelling. Additionally, interviewees H and L reported working longer hours than before and that the line between their job and their personal life got blurred. Interviewee L said that such work-to-life balance “took a toll on the relationship I had with my family.” Another reason for anxiety as was the curfew that happened in Slovenia. Interviewee K said: “I was very annoyed by the curfew and the fact that we had to be at home by 9 p.m. I felt trapped and felt like I was constantly being watched for no reason, so that did give me quite a bit of anxiety.” However not all interviewees reported feeling anxious during lockdown. A minority of interviewees also reported feeling depressed during lockdown, while participant B reported feeling bored as well as becoming quicker tempered as they were before.

Interviewee C reported feeling great during lockdown: “I actually felt great during the lockdown. Before the lockdown I was extremely busy, and I wasn’t able to do everything I wanted to do. But when the country “closed down” I finally had time to do those things.” Furthermore, interviewee E reported feeling okay with the lockdown as they like to spend time on their own and when lockdown happened, their lifestyle did not change a lot. Interviewees D and J reported having some bad days but all in all they did not feel particularly bad during lockdowns.

When asked whether they turned to online shopping as a way to improve their mood, half of the interviewees said yes. Interviewee D reported scrolling through apps when they were bored during lockdown and when they saw something they liked they decided to buy it. Interviewees F and G both reported that they used online buying as a way to distract themselves from what they were feeling. Additionally, interviewee I said they used online shopping as a way to relief their anxiety. Interviewee E admitted to scrolling through AboutYou app when they were bored because they couldn’t go anywhere. They said: “During lockdowns, when I had bad days, I did open AboutYou app and started scrolling through it, to see what they were offering. Sometimes I would also add an item onto my wish

list, but I haven't bought anything in such cases. It was a type of online window-shopping experience."

A large minority of the interviewees said they never used online shopping as a way to uplift their mood during the pandemic.

4.2 Analysis of research questions

In this part of the thesis, I will present the findings I have come to by conducting interviews. All of the findings are based on the cross-case analysis in the previous part of the thesis.

1. RQ: What are consumers' habits in online shopping?

With section 1 I was able to get an answer to my first research question. Interviewees who reported buying online more than once per month also reported to plan their purchases less than those who purchase less regularly online. They are also more likely to click on a targeted ad when come across or open an email that is informing them of items that might be of interest to them. Additionally, they also spend more time browsing through apps and are therefore exposed to more marketing tools such as advertised sales, targeted ads, suggested items, and others, that increase the probability of them making an impulsive purchase. Additionally, if they buy often from one retailer, they might get into their loyalty programme or they get loyalty coupons, which also increase the probability of placing an impulsive purchase online. To conclude, interviewees who shop online often, are more likely to buy an item impulsively online than those interviewees, who buy less regularly online. These findings are furthermore in line with the idea presented by Moser, Schoenebeck & Resnick, (2019) where they claimed that the more time people spend online the more, they are exposed to these tools and the probability of them impulsively buying something increases.

2. RQ: How do consumers feel when impulsively buying online?

All of the interviewees felt excited when they were placing an order for an impulsive purchase and mostly that feeling did not change even after the purchase. Some participants mentioned a bit of regret when they purchased the product, however the feeling of guilt disappeared after a few days, but the excitement lasted longer. After establishing how they felt after placing an impulsive purchase, the interviewees were asked whether they think they will partake in a similar behaviour in the next 2 months. All participants with the exception of interviewee B said yes. With the help of section 4 I was able to get an answer for my second research question. We can conclude that when consumers feel excitement, they will continue to partake in online impulse buying in the future. Additionally, if they feel guilt, they might also continue to purchase impulsively online as long as the feeling of excitement outlasts guilt. This is in line with the theoretical part described in chapter 1.2.5. where the findings of Park & Dhanda (2017) were used. They claimed that there are many feelings that can affect the probability of impulse buying. Furthermore, they claimed that while regret

is one of the possible feelings' consumers might feel, there are more positive ones that will overweight the feeling of guilt. These are feelings such as excitement, pride, joy etc. which can, and as shown by the research of this thesis, do exceed the feelings of regret and make consumers dismiss the risk connected to an impulsive purchase.

3. RQ: Which factors contribute the most to the consumers' impulsive buying?

There are multiple factors that contribute to the consumer's impulsive buying. I was able to get an answer to the third research question with the help of questions in section three, four and five. In order for a consumer to buy impulsively the item they see needs to provoke a need, in the case of the interviewees, the most common need was a need of clothes and aesthetics. Additionally, characteristics of the product are immensely important. All of the interviewees agreed that the most important characteristics for them was price of the item they were looking at. Other characteristics such as brand, materials, colour and design followed. Furthermore, according to some of the interviewees, they were more likely to purchase something on impulse, if that item was advertised to them through targeted ads on Instagram, Facebook or via email. The more time the interviewees spent online, the more ads they were exposed to and the likelihood of clicking on an ad and browsing through the designated online store increased. Moreover, when talking about impulsive buying we cannot omit the surge of excitement that happens when consumers place an order. Due to this surge, interviewees who reported feeling anxious, bored and/or depressed were more likely to use impulsive buying as a way to elevate their mood. These findings are in line with what Šeinauskienė, Maščinskienė & Jucaitytė (2015) claimed in their paper. They believed that people who are less emotionally stable are a lot more likely to indulge in impulsive purchasing behaviour.

4. RQ: How do consumers react to tools used by online retailers?

Tools such as sales, loyalty programs, coupons, free shipping, and free returns play a positive role in encouraging consumers buying on impulse. As stated by the majority of interviewees, the above-mentioned tools are the ones that convince them to purchase impulsively the most often. Only one participant claimed that such tools have no effect on them, while all others said that the promotion sales (discounts) is the tool that convinces them most often to go and browse through the app/online store. Once they are browsing through the probability of buying something on impulse is quite high. With the help of section three I was able to get an answer to my fourth research question. To conclude, tools that online retailers use are an extremely effective way to get the attention of consumers, once they start browsing through the app, they likelihood of an impulse purchase occurring increases immensely according to the interviewees. These finding furthermore are in line with what Verma & Singh (2019) depicted in their diagram (Figure 6), consumers are more likely to indulge in impulsive

buying online if the retailers use tools such as sales, loyalty programs, coupons, free shipping, and free returns.

5. RQ: How do consumers who experienced lockdown measures understand the role of these measures in their urge to buy impulsively?

Most of the interviewees admitted to their mental health deteriorating during lockdowns. A lot of them felt bored, anxious, and even depressed. Interviewees reported to browse through online stores and apps when they felt down. A few participants even said that they went online shopping in order to distract themselves from how they were feeling and from the reality of lockdown. When they were browsing through the app and adding items into their cart, they already felt excited. One interviewee said they never bought anything, but they enjoyed the act of online “window shopping” when they were feeling down. Others, however, admitted that when they impulsively bought an item online, they felt a surge of excitement and happiness, which interrupted their feeling of anxiety and/or boredom. In a way, online impulse buying became a coping mechanism for them, a way to distract themselves from reality. With section 5 I got an answer to my 5th research question. Half of the interviewees admitted to using impulsive online shopping as a tool to uplift their mood when they were feeling down because of lockdowns. These were all of the interviewees that also reported feeling anxious and/or depressed during lockdown. To conclude, when there are lockdowns and people feel anxious, they are more likely to indulge in activities such as impulsive online shopping to uplift their mood. Participants who did not report feeling anxious and/or depressed in lockdown did also not report buying on impulse online as a way to uplift their mood, even when they did have a bad day.

These findings are in line with what Moser, Schoenebeck & Resnick, (2019) claimed in their paper. As stated by the interviewees impulsive buying was used as a coping mechanism to help them cope with difficult situations which is exactly what Moser, Schoenebeck & Resnick, (2019) claimed in their paper, where they wrote that impulsive buying can be used as a coping mechanism when faced with difficult situations.

5 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The main purpose of this research is to contribute to the body of knowledge on the connection between the COVID-19 pandemic and impulsive behaviour online. Through my research I tried to find out whether there was any sort of a connection between COVID-19 pandemic and consumer behaviour in hopes that my research would help to understand the behaviour of consumers in such unprecedented times and to help companies adapt their strategies accordingly. In the next section, I try to give some implications for research and practice based on review of the literature and my findings.:

5.1 Implications for research and practice

With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the world has changed and with it so have the consumers. All of the interviewees admitted to changing their purchasing behaviour since March 2020. Their behaviour changed in more ways than just one. The obvious change was that consumers stopped going to the stores as often as they did before e.g.: if a family went groceries shopping two or three times a week before the pandemic, they reduced their visits to once a week or even less, as a way to minimize their chances of catching the virus.

However, the biggest change in consumers' behaviour was the shift from shopping in regular stores and shopping malls to shopping online. When the pandemic started, most of the countries were in lockdowns, which meant that all stores, but grocery stores were closed down, which meant that consumers had to adapt. Consumers started to shop for various categories of items online. Through the interviews we found out that the most common items bought online were clothes, shoes, accessories, electronics etc. Those might have been the most commonly bought items, however, items such as home decor, furniture, camping equipment etc were also referenced by the interviewees. This tells us, that consumers will not discriminate when it comes to categories of items to purchase online.

By conducting the interviews, I also got an insight into how strong the change in the interviewee's purchasing behaviour was. Despite lockdowns ending, their purchasing behaviour did not revert back and the majority reports that they cannot imagine going back to their old purchasing habits. This gives us a clear picture of what consumers want, which is convenience, and what companies need to do in order to adapt to these changes.

All of the interviewee's report that their online spending has increased since the beginning of the pandemic, with some admitting that they have never bought anything online before March 2020. By now, we have established that consumers' purchasing habits have drastically changed, however, can we also say that their behaviour has become more impulsive?

Because consumers spend more time online than ever before, they are exposed to a larger number of targeted ads, that they were not exposed to when they were doing their shopping in the malls. By being exposed to more advertisements, the odds are, one will get their attention sooner or later. As the interviewees reported, targeted ads on social media such as Instagram, Facebook and even email has led them to impulsively buy products in the past. The ads that are the most effective are the ones that advertise sales. Participants reported that when a sale was advertised to them, they would in most cases at least open the app or the website and browse through the selection. If they happened to see something they liked, that often led to an impulsive purchase. This is in line with the findings of Moser, Schoenebeck & Resnick (2019) where they claimed that the more time people spend online the more, they are exposed to these tools and the probability of them impulsively buying something increases.

Additionally, other tools that seem to work, according to the interviewees are loyalty coupons. In the case of AboutYou, once you purchase something from their app, they will send you a 15% -25% coupon off of the whole purchase, after some time of not placing another order. Many interviewees said that such coupons always convince them to go and browse through the store, in some cases they felt obligated to purchase something, as they saw that they would be “wasting” the coupon if they didn’t. In many cases that led them to place an impulsive purchase. This are in line with the finding of Moser, Schoenebeck & Resnick (2019), where they said that if consumers are given a coupon, they might spend more money and buy more impulsively as they would if they did not get the coupon (Moser, Schoenebeck & Resnick (2019)).

Furthermore, loyalty programmes also seem to be a very effective tool for online retailers. When the consumers are rewarded by getting “points” for every “X” € spent, they are incentivised to purchase more. This is because, they unlock special deals when they spent above a certain amount. One interviewee reported that having the status of VIP at Best Secret store, gets them additional discounts, so in order to remain in the VIP, they are incentivised to spend more and many of those purchases are impulsive. These findings are in line with Lin & Bowman (2022) who claim that a lot of online retailers use this tactic so when consumers become members, they can unlock discounts, and the more a consumer spends in a certain time period e.g.: one year, the better rewards or discounts they qualify for

Another extremely effective tool for online retailers to use is free shipping over “X” € order. Interviewees reported that they will actively go and browse through the store to buy an additional item, if they are e.g., 10€ away from free shipping. This seems to be a very good tool to incentivise impulsive purchases.

Most of these tools are present in regular stores, such as loyalty programmes and sales etc. however, when the consumer leaves the store, that marketing doesn’t have as much effect on them anymore, since they are physically removed from it. However, the story is different when shopping online, where a consumer can be made aware of these tactics/tools 24/7. And since people are spending more time than ever online, because of the Covid 19 pandemic, they are exposed to even more marketing tactics from online retailers.

Moreover, since lockdowns prevented people to do most of what were before, their everyday activities, such as spending time with their friends and doing their hobbies, quite a lot of people started feeling anxious, stressed and in some cases even depressed. An additional trigger for anxiety was the danger of catching the virus. Many interviewees admitted to using online shopping as a tool to improve their mood as they felt excitement when they placed an order.

Considering findings from the literature and the answers given by the interviewees about their online shopping behaviour, we can conclude that in general, consumer’s behaviour has become more impulsive since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite all of the changes mentioned above, that consumers made in their purchasing behaviour, one thing remains unchanged and those are the emotions consumers feel when placing an impulsive purchase. According to the Sundström, Hjelm-Lidholma & Radonb (2019) consumers feel excitement and joy when buying impulsively. This was also detected in the interviews, where all the interviewees reported feeling a certain level of excitement when placing an impulsive purchase online. Additionally, all of them also admitted to impulsive buying elevating their mood in the time of the purchase. Only two of the participants mentioned a feeling of guilt, which disappeared very quickly for one interviewee while it lasted a few days for the second one. However, during my research the feeling of guilt did not come up often when talking about feelings connected to impulsive buying online. Therefore, insights from my study indicate that excitement is a prevailing feeling, consumers feel when buying impulsively.

5.2 Limitations and opportunities for future research

We can face some limitations during the research itself, such as how we form and later ask the questions. Questions asked must not be too complicated (Lune & Berg, 2016). When conducting qualitative research limitations such as subjectivity and questions with which we suggest an “appropriate” or “correct” answer can arise. Additionally, there is a possibility that an interviewee will not feel comfortable due to being recorded. If this happens, the interviewee might not be prepared to reveal certain information about themselves (Bregar, Ogriješek & Bavdaž, 2005). In order to avoid such complications, I ensured anonymity to the interviewees. Additionally, I also explained why the interview needed to be recorded. It is my belief that by informing them of their anonymity, I have created a safer and a more relaxed environment for the interviewees.

Another limitation presents itself in the case of inexperienced interviewer. This was my first-time conducting interviews which is why some of the interviews were shorter and less detailed. However, I have omitted those from the analysis and have kept only those for which I believe give good answers to the asked questions.

The topic that I am researching can be sensitive for some people, especially the last part of the interview where I ask interviewees about their mental well-being during the pandemic. When such questions arise, some interviewees might refrain from answering as they can invoke a sense of shame, or they might just be too personal for some to share. In general, questions that people do not like to answer are usually related to their sexuality, money, drug use etc. (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001). Sensitive questions need to be asked at the very end of the interview when the interviewer has gotten most answers already. If such question is asked in the beginning and the interviewee closes off, then they might not wish to answer other questions either. Another reason as to why such questions need to be asked in the end is because a relationship between the interviewee and an interviewer is established by that time. Additionally, if the question is asked in the end of the interview, the interviewee is

already emerged in the topic and will be more likely to answer such question (Bregar, Ograjenšek & Bavdaž, 2005).

Moreover, limitations can occur at sampling. In my thesis I have used purposive sampling technique, which does not guarantee or allow for figuring out the accuracy of results (Bregar, Ograjenšek & Bavdaž, 2005). When creating my sample I chose specific candidates, that fit the criteria for my thesis – the interviewees had to shop online. I have acquired appropriate interviewees through personal connections. Additional limitation was that the majority of the interviews could not be done in person, therefore I had to rely on applications such as Microsoft teams and Zoom.

As for the possibilities of future research on this topic, I believe this thesis is a good foundation for additional quantitative research. Through the conducted interviews and analysis, we got a look at how a small number of the interviewees were affected by the Covid 19 pandemic in regard to their shopping behaviour online. I believe further and broader quantitative research which would include a larger number of people, would give an even better insight into the changes in consumers' shopping habits. Apart from including a larger number of people, I believe it would be optimal to explore not only the immediate effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on consumers' purchasing behaviour, but also how/whether their purchasing behaviour returned to pre-pandemic times or if it remained altered permanently. Additionally, a larger and more representative sample would give us a better insight into the connection between impulsive buying and mental wellbeing during lockdowns. Only half of interviewees claimed that they turned to online shopping as a way to improve their mood during lockdowns, when they weren't feeling good. I believe it would be beneficial to further investigate that and whether this type of behaviour continued after lockdowns ended. In other words, did consumers realize that they can uplift their mood with online shopping during lockdowns and now continue to do so when they are not feeling well.

CONCLUSION

When the COVID-19 pandemic started in March 2020, the world changed. Lockdowns started happening all over the world, it seemed like the world was put on pause. With such drastic changes happening, everyday life also took a toll. Lockdowns prevented people to do most of what were before, their everyday activities, such as spending time with their friends and doing their hobbies. During the times of lockdowns shops that were not considered "essential (everything but groceries and pharmacies) closed and consumers were forced to adapt to the new situation (Modin & Smith, 2020).

As a consequence, consumer behaviour has drastically changed in the past year and a half (Modin & Smith, 2020) and the purpose of my thesis was to find out more about how their behaviour has changed and whether it became more impulsive as a result of the pandemic.

Through the conducted interviews I have found out that consumers who spend more time online, tend to shop more and generally don't plan their purchases as much as the consumers who do not spend so much time online. Furthermore, consumers who buy impulsively feel excitement after the purchase. Due to this excitement, they are more likely to purchase items on impulse in the future. Additionally, in order for consumers to buy an item impulsively, that item needs to provoke a certain need, be it a need of clothes, electronics etc. Other important things are the quality of the product, the price and aesthetics of the product. However, characteristics are not the only thing that increases the probability of impulsive buying. Through conducted interviews, I have found out that numerous marketing tactics and tools work well in inducing the need for the product. The most effective tool seems to be sales/discounts, while other tools such as coupons and loyalty programs are also quite effective. Lastly, in cases such as lockdowns, mental well-being of consumers can decrease and some of the interviewees admitted to using online impulsive buying as a way to uplift their mood when they were feeling down. This is in line with results of previous studies regarding feelings involved in impulsive purchasing such as Park & Dhandra (2017).

The research I conducted suggests that the COVID-19 and lockdowns might have changed the purchasing behaviour of consumers for a longer period of time, not only for the times of lockdowns. Additionally, many of the interviewees report they do not believe they will go back to their old ways of shopping once the pandemic is over. Not only did the preferred channels of shopping change, according to conducted research, but consumers also have in general become more impulsive. In the scope of this study that can be linked to numerous factors such as being exposed to more marketing due to spending more time online, the convenience of online shopping in addition to using online impulse buying as a coping mechanism to escape the reality of the pandemic. However, because of the small scale of the research, we cannot state these findings as facts, however, a broader study could shed additional light on how COVID-19 pandemic effected purchasing behaviour.

Time will tell whether consumers will keep their habits acquired through the pandemics. Companies should therefore closely monitor changes in consumer behaviour and adapt their strategies accordingly.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Povzetek (Summary in Slovene)

V prvih mesecih leta 2020 je pandemija covid-19, pretresla svetovno gospodarstvo. Marca 2020 je WHO razglasil covid-19 za pandemijo in naročil vladam po vsem svetu, naj izvajajo smernice za socialno distanciranje. Te smernice so bile namenjene preprečevanju širjenja virusa. Številna podjetja so se morala zapreti za čas zaprtja države, ljudje pa so morali upoštevati stroge smernice za socialno distanciranje (Iriani, Nuswantara & Kartika, 2021). To je pomenilo, da je večina prebivalstva dobila navodila, naj preživi več časa doma in v izolaciji. Poleg tega so bile takšne okoliščine razlog za povečan občutek dolgčasa in v nekaterih primerih za poslabšanje mentalnega zdravja med splošno populacijo (Reuter, 2020).

Glavni namen magistrskega dela je prispevati k bazi znanja o povezavi med pandemijo covid-19 in spletnim nakupnim vedenjem potrošnikov. Cilj dela je raziskati povezavo med globalno zdravstveno krizo pandemije covid-19 in spremembami v vedenju potrošnikov, s poudarkom na impulzivnih nakupih.

Da bi to lažje dosegla, sem oblikovala tri raziskovalne cilje. Prvi se je nanašal na počutje potrošnikov, ko impulzivno nakupujejo na spletu. Drugi cilj je raziskoval vpliv taktik spletnih trgovcev na odločitve potrošnikov za impulzivni nakup. Tretji cilj pa je raziskoval povezavo med impulzivnimi nakupi potrošnikov in pandemijo covid-19. Da bi lahko podala odgovore na te cilje, sem oblikovala pet raziskovalnih vprašanj. Prvo vprašanje se je navezovalo na navade potrošnikov pri spletnem nakupovanju. Skozi opravljene intervjuje sem ugotovila, da potrošniki, ki preživijo več časa na spletu, večinoma nakupujejo več in na splošno ne načrtujejo nakupov toliko kot potrošniki, ki preživijo manj časa na spletu. Drugo vprašanje je raziskovalo počutje potrošnikov, ko ti nakupujejo impulzivno. Ugotovila sem, da potrošniki, ki kupujejo impulzivno, po nakupu občutijo navdušenje. Zaradi tega navdušenja je večja verjetnost, da bodo v prihodnosti kupovali impulzivno. Tretje vprašanje je bilo namenjeno ugotavljanju dejavnikov, ki najbolj pripomorejo k impulzivnem nakupovanju. Skozi intervjuje sem ugotovila, da sta to kvaliteta izdelka ter cena. Četrto vprašanje je raziskovalo, kako se potrošniki odzivajo na orodja, ki jih uporabljajo spletni trgovci. Z opravljenimi intervjuji sem ugotovila tudi, da številne marketinške taktike dobro delujejo pri spodbujanju potrebe po izdelku. Zdi se, da je najučinkovitejše orodje razprodaje/popusti, precej učinkovita pa so tudi druga orodja, kot so kuponi in programi zvestobe. Zadnje vprašanje se je nanašalo na to kako so potrošniki, ki so doživeli zaprtje države, razumeli vlogo ukrepov v njihovi želji po impulzivnem nakupu. Preko intervjujev sem ugotovila, da v primerih, kot so zaprtje države, se lahko duševno počutje potrošnikov zmanjša in nekateri intervjuvanci so priznali, da so se poslužili impulzivnega spletnega nakupovanja kot način za dvig razpoloženja, ko so se počutili slabo.

Appendix 2: Interview transcripts

I am a postgraduate marketing student from the School of Economics and Business, University of Ljubljana, and I am currently conducting research about impulsive purchases online during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research is a part of my master's thesis, through which I try to obtain deeper knowledge about consumer behaviour online during such unprecedented times. All personal information disclosed in the interviews will remain confidential and will only be used for the purpose of research within this master's thesis. Thank you for taking the time to partake in this interview with me.

1. Interviewee 1: female, 26 years old, lives in Ljubljana, works as an assistant to the director

Do you shop online? If yes, why?

Yes, I do shop online, but I do so very rarely mostly because I wish to see, feel, and try on the products before I decide to purchase them. For the food I wish to read the label and compare it to other products of the same kind in the store.

How frequently did you shop online (in the past year)?

In the past year I bought something online once. It was a gift for my boyfriend for Valentine's Day.

Which products/goods did you purchase online in the last year?

It was an electric shaver.

Which were the most recent products/goods you have purchased online?

An electric shaver.

How often do you buy this type of product in a month? How often did you purchase it in the past month? Was the purchase planned?

Not often, as it was a gift. So, it was a onetime only purchase.

Do you plan your purchases before going online? (If yes, how so...)

Since I only bought a gift for my boyfriend, it was in fact a planned purchase. I thought about what he could use and was within my budget. That is how I decided to buy an electric shaver.

How would you describe most of your purchases? Are they planned/not planned?

I would say most of my purchases are planned.

What do you believe impulsive buying is?

I think that impulsive purchase is a kind of purchase where you cannot control yourself. In the case of online shopping, I think it happens when people just add everything to cart and then purchase it. I also believe people tend to lose the perception of their money when buying online, compared to when they shop in physical stores.

Interviewer's explanation of what impulsive buying is.

Can you recall your last impulsive purchase online?

I have bought some pots for plants a year ago.

What made you see that you needed to purchase that specific product? (Hunger, in need of clothes etc.)

I needed pots for my new plants.

How did you acquire the needed information about the product you bought? (Internet, newspaper, TV etc.)

I saw an ad online.

Which were the characteristics of the product that you considered when you were deciding to purchase it? (Price, flavour, brand, colours)

The price, materials, and the size.

How did you feel (excited, regretful etc.) when purchasing the product?

I didn't feel extremely excited, but I felt good.

Did impulsive buying elevate your mood at the time of your purchase?

Yes.

Did your self-image change at the time of making impulsive purchase?

No.

How did you feel after you have purchased the product (regret, satisfaction) Do you think you will partake in such behaviour in the next 2 months?

I still felt good.

Were you in any way influenced to purchase a product? (Peer pressure, saw an ad online, recommended, last in stock etc.)

Not really.

How long did the whole decision-making/purchasing process take?

I would say it took me about a day.

Did any tools used by online retailers ever effect your purchasing decision? (e.g.: last in stock, sale, free gift, free shipping for limited time, ratings etc.)

I haven't bought anything yet because of such tools, however, I do believe that I would buy a product if I saw there was a good discount on it.

Has your buying pattern changed since the beginning of pandemic? If yes, how? (Did they spend more or less money?)

Yes, I go to the store less often. However, I haven't really started buying a lot online, I usually only go online if I need to buy gifts.

Has your buying pattern changed significantly during lockdowns?

Before lockdowns I would say I visited the store about 2-3 times a week, but ever since March 2020 I go to the store once a week or even once every two weeks. I made sure that I used up most of my food before I went to the store. Additionally, I have started writing down the products I needed to buy.

Did you purchase more products online over the past year? How much?

Not really.

Can you describe your general state of mind or mood during lockdowns? Explain.

I felt a lot more anxious, and I still am to this day. In the beginning, when I came back from the store I would put all my clothes into the washing machine, and I would disinfect the products I have bought. I have also stopped hanging out with people and I still ask everyone if they are healthy before I decide to meet up with them. Additionally, I also do not feel like travelling anymore.

Have you ever turned to online shopping as a way to improve your mood during lockdown?

No.

2. Interviewee 1: male, 28 years old, from Koper, lives in Ljubljana, works as a young researcher at Faculty of Electrical Engineering

Do you shop online? If yes, why?

Yes, I do. I shop online because it is the most convenient to me and sometimes, I also buy items that cannot be bought in Slovenia, and I can only get them online.

How frequently did you shop online (in the past year)?

Approximately two to three times per month.

Which products/goods did you purchase online in the last year?

Mostly electrical devices, trading cars and video games.

Which were the most recent products/goods you have purchased online?

Magic the Gathering trading cards.

How often do you buy this type of product in a month?

Usually once or twice per month.

How often did you purchase it in the past month? Was the purchase planned?

In the past month I bought it only once and yes, the purchase was planned.

Do you plan your purchases before going online? (If yes, how so...)

Yes, I do usually plan my purchases before going online. For example, before I bought a 3D printer I talked with my colleges and asked them where they bought it, what was the price and what I should look out for. At that point I already knew which product I want, so most of my time spent in different online shops was just so I could find the fastest/cheapest way to get it.

How would you describe most of your purchases? Are they planned/not planned?

I believe most of my purchases are planned.

What do you believe impulsive buying is?

When you go to a shop, and you see something and start questioning yourself whether you should buy it or not. When you make the decision rather quickly to buy it, I believe that is an impulsive purchase. I did this today, where I went to a shop and I planned to buy one item. But when I got there, I saw another thing that piqued my interest and I decided to buy it as well.

Interviewer's explanation of what impulsive buying is.

Can you recall your last impulsive purchase online?

PlayStation 5.

What made you see that you needed to purchase that specific product? (Hunger, in need of clothes etc.)

The reason I decided to buy it was because of the increasing number of COVID-19 cases. My speculation is that if the numbers continue to grow, we will end up in another lockdown and I wanted to buy something that will make lockdown easier to go through. Another reason was, so that my girlfriend and I can do something together while in lockdown. So, I bought a PlayStation 5, so that I will not be as bored and to have something for my girlfriend and I to do together as a couple.

How did you acquire the needed information about the product you bought? (Internet, newspaper, TV etc.)

Online.

Which were the characteristics of the product that you considered when you were deciding to purchase it? (Price, flavour, brand, colours)

I have always really liked gaming consoles and I had PlayStation 1 and PlayStation 2 when I was younger. It has always been a good gaming console, but the main reason I got it was the price. I got a good deal.

How did you feel (excited, regretful etc.) when purchasing the product?

I felt extremely excited.

Did impulsive buying elevate your mood at the time of your purchase?

Yes, absolutely.

Did your self-image change at the time of making impulsive purchase?

A little bit yes. Because it is extremely difficult to get a PS5 at this point in time. So, the fact that I was able to get it made me feel very good, almost proud in a way.

How did you feel after you have purchased the product (regret, satisfaction) Do you think you will partake in such behaviour in the next 2 months?

A few days after the purchase I started to realize that I spent a lot of money on this product. I was still happy that I got it, but I felt uneasy when I looked at my bank account. I wouldn't say I was regretful, but I did feel a small amount of guilt for spending so much money. And for the next few weeks I was really mindful of the things I bought; I think the phrase finance-

related anxiety would describe my feelings well. As for partaking in a similar behaviour in the next two months, I do not believe I will, due to the anxiety I felt.

Were you in any way influenced to purchase a product? (Peer pressure, saw an ad online, recommended, last in stock etc.)

No.

How long did the whole decision-making/purchasing process take?

About 2 minutes after I saw an ad and the price.

Did any tools used by online retailers ever effect your purchasing decision? (e.g.: last in stock, sale, free gift, free shipping for limited time, ratings etc.)

Yes. Usually advertised sales work well on me. If I see a game that I would like to try out on sale, I buy it even though I had no intention of buying it before I saw the discount.

Has your buying pattern changed since the beginning of pandemic? If yes, how? (Did they spend more or less money as before?)

Yes. When the pandemic started, I went to the supermarket less often. Before I would go 2-3 times a week but after March 2020, I only went when I really needed food.

Has your buying pattern changed significantly during lockdowns?

Yes, once the second lockdown started in October 2020, I started buying groceries online – Spar online.

Did you purchase more products online over the past year? How much?

Yes, I would say I did 30% more purchases online since the pandemic started compared to pre-pandemic times.

Can you describe your general state of mind or mood during lockdowns? Explain.

I was sick and tired of everything. I wanted things to go back to normal. At the same time, I was quite anxious about the virus and was doing everything in my power to avoid getting it. I was bored a lot of the time as well and I got upset quicker than I usually do. In general, I was very unsatisfied and anxious about everything – getting food, going to work etc.

Have you ever turned to online shopping as a way to improve your mood during lockdown?

Yes. During lockdowns I started buying subscriptions to games to uplift my mood.

3. Interviewee 3: female, 26 years old, from Domžale, lives in Kamnik, works as a User Acquisition Specialist at Outfit7

Do you shop online? If yes, why?

Yes, because it is faster and more convenient for me. I also never liked going in normal stores, because they made me nervous, and I usually know what I want to buy, and it is easier for me to look it up online (because of the filters) than to go from store to store and try and find that specific product.

How frequently did you shop online (in the past year)?

Probably every other week.

Which products/goods did you purchase online in the last year?

Mostly clothes, shoes, accessories and things for our apartment such as interior décor, towels etc. However, I don't think I am ready to buy bigger furniture pieces online.

Which were the most recent products/goods you have purchased online?

A coat and boots.

How often do you buy this type of product in a month? How often did you purchase it in the past month? Was the purchase planned?

Usually once per month. And in August I bought clothes once and the purchase was planned.

Do you plan your purchases before going online? (If yes, how so...)

I do usually plan my purchases before going online, but sometimes I just go to an app and start scrolling through it, to see if anything grabs my attention. If I see something I like, I usually buy it.

How would you describe most of your purchases? Are they planned/not planned?

If I take an overall look at my purchases, I will say most of them are planned, but I do buy things on impulse as well.

What do you believe impulsive buying is?

I would say that an impulsive purchase is a purchase that happens when a person is just randomly scrolling through an app and if they see something, they immediately buy it.

Interviewer's explanation of what impulsive buying is.

Can you recall your last impulsive purchase online?

Yes, I bought a blouse and a blazer.

What made you see that you needed to purchase that specific product? (Hunger, in need of clothes etc.)

I needed new autumn clothes to wear to the office.

How did you acquire the needed information about the product you bought? (Internet, newspaper, TV etc.)

On the app – About You.

Which were the characteristics of the product that you considered when you were deciding to purchase it? (Price, flavour, brand, colours)

Price and the material.

How did you feel (excited, regretful etc.) when purchasing the product?

I felt great, I was excited.

Did impulsive buying elevate your mood at the time of your purchase?

Yes, it did. I also sometimes go and buy myself something to improve my mood. I do this on the days where I am not feeling that great. I also do it when I did something demanding and reward myself with “gifting” clothes or accessories.

Did your self-image change at the time of making impulsive purchase?

No.

How did you feel after you have purchased the product (regret, satisfaction) Do you think you will partake in such behaviour in the next 2 months?

I felt good and was excited to get the package. And I feel like I will partake in such behaviour again.

Were you in any way influenced to purchase a product? (Peer pressure, saw an ad online, recommended, last in stock etc.)

No.

How long did the whole decision-making/purchasing process take?

Probably about 2 or 3 hours.

Did any tools used by online retailers ever effect your purchasing decision? (e.g.: last in stock, sale, free gift, free shipping for limited time, ratings etc.)

No, these things don't usually convince me. The only thing that does convince me is when the stores send coupons to their loyal customers e.g.: when you get 20% off on your whole purchase. That is the only time I actively go and look for something I might like.

Has your buying pattern changed since the beginning of pandemic? If yes, how? (Did they spend more or less money as before?)

Yes. I shop even more online as I did before. I think the pandemic helped me get rid of the fear of buying online, because before I was quite sceptical when it came down to giving my credit card information. But so far, I have only had good experience and I am buying online even more than before.

Has your buying pattern changed significantly during lockdowns?

Yes, this was the time when I started buying things online more frequently.

Did you purchase more products online over the past year? How much?

Yes, I would say I increased my purchases by at least 50%.

Can you describe your general state of mind or mood during lockdowns? Explain.

I actually felt great during the lockdown. Before the lockdown I was extremely busy, and I wasn't able to do everything I wanted to do. But when the country "closed down" I finally had time to do those things. In the first lockdown my boyfriend and I were renovating our apartment and in the second one took the time to finish my master's thesis and to graduate. In general, I would say that the two lockdowns we had so far were not stressful to me.

Have you ever turned to online shopping as a way to improve your mood during lockdown?

As mentioned, before, I did buy things if I had a hard day or if I had accomplished something demanding, but I didn't go online shopping to improve my mood because of a lockdown. Because as I said, I actually felt great during both lockdowns.

4. Interviewee 4: male, 23 years old, from Russia - Omsk, lives in Ljubljana, student

Do you shop online? If yes, why?

Yes, I do from time to time. When I do shop online it's usually because it is much faster, sometimes I don't have the time to go to the store. It is also much more convenient to me.

How frequently did you shop online (in the past year)?

Once or twice a month.

Which products/goods did you purchase online in the last year?

Video games and groceries. I don't buy clothes online because I want to try them on before I commit.

Which were the most recent products/goods you have purchased online?

It was a video game for Nintendo.

How often do you buy this type of product in a month? How often did you purchase it in the past month? Was the purchase planned?

It depends on the month and on the sales. I usually buy one "high budget" video game per month, but if there is a sale or if there are more "low budget" games that I want, I will buy more of them.

Do you plan your purchases before going online? (If yes, how so...)

Yes, I usually do. I look at what I need and then I decide to purchase it.

How would you describe most of your purchases? Are they planned/not planned?

Planned.

What do you believe impulsive buying is?

I believe it is a purchase where you cannot control yourself and you buy it even though you cannot afford the item or have an actual need for it.

Interviewer's explanation of what impulsive buying is.

Can you recall your last impulsive purchase online?

Yes, I believe I can, and it relates to videogames. I believe there was a summer sale in Nintendo electronic shop where I bought a few games for my Nintendo Switch. When I went to the Nintendo store, I was planning on buying one game that I was after for a while. But when I added it to cart, there was a pop-up window which was showing further suggestions and I saw another game that grabbed my attention – I was not planning on buying this game when I entered the shop. I ended up buying that game as well.

What made you see that you needed to purchase that specific product? (Hunger, in need of clothes etc.)

At the time when I bought the two beforementioned games, I was travelling a lot. My reasoning for buying both was to make my journeys less boring, in other words I bought it for entertainment value.

How did you acquire the needed information about the product you bought? (Internet, newspaper, TV etc.)

I found all the necessary information on Nintendo's electronic shop.

Which were the characteristics of the product that you considered when you were deciding to purchase it? (Price, flavour, brand, colours)

The main driver for my purchase was a good price. As I mentioned before, when I bought the two games, there was a summer sale going on. Additionally, the element of surprise when the other game popped up. However, I do not believe that I would have bought the second game if it wasn't discounted.

How did you feel (excited, regretful etc.) when purchasing the product?

I felt really good. I think I almost some kind of a relief and satisfaction when I bought it. The reasoning being, that now that I had not just one but two new games, the fear of being bored while travelling was gone. I also felt like I was prepared for the future events where I might be bored.

Did impulsive buying elevate your mood at the time of your purchase?

Yes, definitely. I felt excited that I obtained new games and I couldn't wait to start playing them.

Did your self-image change at the time of making impulsive purchase?

No, not with this purchase. I believe my self-image could have changed if I bought some products that carry more of a social status. For example, in the past when I bought a Fred Perry bag, I did feel better about myself for a while, as it was a designer bag and it felt really nice to have it.

How did you feel after you have purchased the product (regret, satisfaction) Do you think you will partake in such behaviour in the next 2 months?

I felt good about my purchase even after it happened. Yes, I do believe I will act similarly in the near future, if there are circumstances that will allow such behaviour of course. If there will be good sales, I am almost sure I will purchase on impulse again.

Were you in any way influenced to purchase a product? (Peer pressure, saw an ad online, recommended, last in stock etc.)

As I said before, a pop-up window gave me an idea to buy the additional game, so I would say that yes, I was influenced by that.

How long did the whole decision-making/purchasing process take?

About 5 minutes. I saw the pop up, I clicked on the video game page, I read about the game and watched some short gameplay and then I decided to buy it.

Did any tools used by online retailers ever effect your purchasing decision? (e.g.: last in stock, sale, free gift, free shipping for limited time, ratings etc.)

Yes, most definitely. Usually when things are on sale that convinces me to buy something. Another incentive that I think is great are loyalty programs. For example, in the Nintendo e-shop, you get 5% of your purchase back in the form of bonus points – called Golden points. By buying more games you get more bonus points and if you gather enough of those you can actually get some games for free. That to me is a strong incentive to buy games via Nintendo shop.

Has your buying pattern changed since the beginning of pandemic? If yes, how?

I would say yes. When the pandemic started, I started planning most of my visits to the grocery shop. Before March 2020 I went to the store whenever I felt like it and I did more small purchases. After the pandemic started, I went to the store once a week and it was a bigger- purchase.

Has your buying pattern changed significantly during lockdowns?

Yes, definitely. During lockdown, I we had to stay at home and socially distance for months. Through videogames I was also able to stay in touch with my friends and we would play together online. In a way we were able to spend time together although we were apart. This is the main reason as to why I started buying games online more regularly than I did before.

Additionally, during lockdowns I also started buying groceries online more often than I did before. It felt a lot safer to me and I felt that was the best way to minimize my chances of getting the virus.

Did you purchase more products online over the past year? How much?

Yes, I believe I did. If I had to give an approximate percentage increase of my online purchases, I believe it would be between 30% and 40% increase.

Can you describe your general state of mind or mood during lockdowns? Explain.

I can't say I felt particularly bad or depressed during lockdowns, thanks to technology which would keep my occupied for a while. That being said, there were still moments and days where I did feel fed up with having to stay inside and with it came tension or anxiety if you

may. But I wouldn't say that those days were the majority of my time spent in lockdown. I kept myself busy with games and whenever I felt like I needed to talk to people I would simply call them, and that did help me to deal with this unique situation we all experienced.

Have you ever turned to online shopping as a way to improve your mood during lockdown?

Yes, I definitely did. Sometimes I was bored, and I went to check some online stores such as Nintendo e-store and if they had anything interesting and was discounted, I bought it.

5. Interviewee 5: female, 25 years old, from Rogatec, lives in Ljubljana, MSc of Psychology

Do you shop online? If yes, why?

Yes, I do. I feel like I have more choices when shopping online. I also find it a lot easier for me to shop online from the comfort of my home than to go out and browse through the stores. I feel that takes up too much of my time.

How frequently did you shop online (in the past year)?

I would say I approximately shopped once every two months online.

Which products/goods did you purchase online in the last year?

I usually ordered clothes, accessories, shoes etc. online for myself. But I also buy gifts for other people online – these are not limited to clothes.

Which were the most recent products/goods you have purchased online?

I bought myself a winter sweater just a few days ago. I bought it through an app – About You.

How often do you buy this type of product in a month? How often did you purchase it in the past month? Was the purchase planned?

Since most if not all of my purchases online are clothes, I will give the same answer as before and that is, that I buy such items once every two months.

The purchase of this sweater was planned since I needed an additional sweater for the upcoming season.

Do you plan your purchases before going online? (If yes, how so...)

I believe they are. However, I wouldn't say that all of my purchases online are planned but they are thought through. I do think whether I need or just really want a product before I buy it.

How would you describe most of your purchases? Are they planned/not planned?

I would say they are planned. When it comes to food, I usually look what I have at home and then make a list of what to buy.

What do you believe impulsive buying is?

In my opinion impulsive buying happens when you see a product you like, be it online or in a physical store, and you decide to purchase it without any second thought.

Interviewer's explanation of what impulsive buying is.

Can you recall your last impulsive purchase online?

Yes, I can. It was when About You had -50% off on everything in their online store. I believe it was in September 2020. When they had this promotion, I ordered 5 items that I would not have bought if the discount wasn't so good. I did think about whether I needed these items, but on the other hand I thought to myself that this is the best deal I will get in a long time. I was looking at some items that were more expensive so I really thought I would be missing out if I didn't place an order.

What made you see that you needed to purchase that specific product? (Hunger, in need of clothes etc.)

As mentioned before my thought process was that I would be missing out if I didn't purchase these designer clothes. But the basic need behind my decision was a need of clothes.

How did you acquire the needed information about the product you bought? (Internet, newspaper, TV etc.)

I got information through their posts on Instagram. They had a "competition" of some sorts where they gave people a challenge: if we get "x" number of followers by "y" date, we will have a 50% sale on everything in our shop. They really advertised this all over Instagram, which led me to downloading their app. Then I got all additional information about their sale (limitations, duration etc.) through their app.

Which were the characteristics of the product that you considered when you were deciding to purchase it? (Price, flavour, brand, colours)

I would say the price was the main characteristic together with a brand of the clothes I decided to buy. As mentioned before, I bought 5 designer items, that I would not have bought if there wasn't a 50% discount on them. The reason why I chose designer items was because

I could never afford them before that point. Additionally, because they were designer products, I assumed that the quality of the items will also be good. To sum it up, the deciding characteristics were price, brand, and perceived quality of the items.

How did you feel (excited, regretful etc.) when purchasing the product?

I felt really happy and excited about my purchase.

Did impulsive buying elevate your mood at the time of your purchase?

Yes, it definitely improved my mood. I felt a rush of excitement when I was ordering those items. I felt like items that were always out of reach for me until that point will finally be mine.

Did your self-image change at the time of making impulsive purchase?

Yes, I would say it did. Because these were designer items and as such serve as a type of a status symbol, it definitely did improve my self-image for a short period of time.

How did you feel after you have purchased the product (regret, satisfaction) Do you think you will partake in such behaviour in the next 2 months?

I was in anticipation while waiting for my parcel. And when I finally got the items, I was extremely happy with it. I do believe I will buy some items in the future in a similar way as I did back then. However, it obviously depends on whether I find a job and whether the price will be acceptable to me.

Were you in any way influenced to purchase a product? (Peer pressure, saw an ad online, recommended, last in stock etc.)

I saw an ad about this sale on Instagram, which made me download the app and then I placed my order.

How long did the whole decision-making/purchasing process take?

I would say I had those items in my cart for about 2 days before I decided to purchase them.

Did any tools used by online retailers ever effect your purchasing decision? (e.g.: last in stock, sale, free gift, free shipping for limited time, ratings etc.)

Sales is the tool that most often convinces me to buy something even though I realize that I don't necessarily need it. Additionally, one of the most important things to me when ordering clothes online is free postage and free returns. Without those two features I doubt that I would have ordered any clothes online.

Has your buying pattern changed since the beginning of pandemic? If yes, how? (Did they spend more or less money as before?)

Yes, it definitely did. Before the pandemic started, I have never ordered anything online. But because clothing stores were closed, I had no choice but to look at online retailers if I wanted to purchase a clothing item.

Once I had placed my order with About You, I saw how easy the whole process of shopping can be.

Has your buying pattern changed significantly during lockdowns?

It definitely has, mostly related to groceries shopping. I still didn't order groceries online, but I became a lot of conscious of my shopping. And instead of going to the store two or three times a week and buying less items, I started planning my trips to the store. I tried to avoid going in public as much as possible, so I only went to the store once a week and I had everything I needed written down in my notes.

Did you purchase more products online over the past year? How much?

Since I haven't bought anything online before the pandemic started, I can say that my expenditures online increased by 100%.

Can you describe your general state of mind or mood during lockdowns? Explain.

I can't say the lockdown affected my mental wellbeing in general. Of course, I had days where I wanted to see my friends and I felt sad because I could not but in general, cannot say that I was anxious or depressed during lockdown. Additionally, I am the kind of person who likes to spend their time on their own, so for me my lifestyle as a whole did not take a drastic turn.

I would also like to mention that because of lockdown my boyfriend and I actually created a stronger bond, because we were together 24/7. And I definitely think that our relationship would not be as strong without lockdown.

Have you ever turned to online shopping as a way to improve your mood during lockdown?

During lockdowns, when I had bad days, I did open AboutYou app and started scrolling through it, to see what they were offering. Sometimes I would also add an item onto my wish list, but I haven't bought anything in such cases. It was a type of online window-shopping experience.

6. Interviewee 6: female, 35 years old, from Izola, works as a legal consultant at Quality school International

Do you shop online? If yes, why?

Yes. My answer is actually related to the pandemic because I started shopping online when the pandemic started. Since I couldn't purchase things in stores, I started looking at what online retailers were offering. Once I started doing that I realized how much time I save and since I am really lucky with the products I get (they usually fit me well), I really do not see a point in going shopping to real life stores like I used to do.

How frequently did you shop online (in the past year)?

I would say approximately once every two weeks or once a month.

Which products/goods did you purchase online in the last year?

Mostly clothes, household items, accessories, shoes.

Which were the most recent products/goods you have purchased online?

It was a handbag.

How often do you buy this type of product in a month? How often did you purchase it in the past month? Was the purchase planned?

I do not buy accessories that often, I would say once every two months. But that is referring to all kinds of accessories and not just handbags. This purchase also wasn't planned.

Do you plan your purchases before going online? (If yes, how so...)

No, I do not.

How would you describe most of your purchases? Are they planned/not planned?

Depends on the items, I usually plan when buying household items, but most of my purchases regarding clothing are unplanned.

What do you believe impulsive buying is?

I believe impulse buying is either when you see something and it catches your eyes and you don't need it, but still decide to buy it, or a purchase that you don't really think about a lot, or that you convince yourself that you need it.

Interviewer's explanation of what impulsive buying is.

Can you recall your last impulsive purchase online?

It was a bright green handbag. I actually got it because apart from looking for it for a while, and stumbling on it, the shop also had free shipping that day and that convinced me to get it.

What made you see that you needed to purchase that specific product? (Hunger, in need of clothes etc.)

It was actually a completely aesthetic, because I believed it would improve my outfits and also my self-image, when wearing it.

How did you acquire the needed information about the product you bought? (Internet, newspaper, TV etc.)

I got all of the needed information from the store. The store had pictures of the products, measurements and information about the materials being used. The way I found this store is that Instagram was advertising another store, similar to this one, via Instagram ads, but it reminded me of this store, so I went to their site and bought the bag.

Which were the characteristics of the product that you considered when you were deciding to purchase it? (Price, flavour, brand, colours)

The colour, shape, and size of the bag as well as the materials of the bag, because that is very important to me whenever I am buying clothes or accessories.

How did you feel (excited, regretful etc.) when purchasing the product?

Mostly I felt good, but at the same time I did feel a bit guilty, because I knew I didn't actually need the bag, it was just nice to have.

Did impulsive buying elevate your mood at the time of your purchase?

Yes, it definitely did.

Did your self-image change at the time of making impulsive purchase?

Yes, it did, as mentioned before, I was imagining my outfits with the new bag, and I did feel a boost of confidence and a shift in my self-image.

How did you feel after you have purchased the product (regret, satisfaction) Do you think you will partake in such behaviour in the next 2 months?

I did feel a bit of regret when purchasing the product, but after a few days that went away, since I already placed the order and I wanted the item, so there was nothing to do anyways. Yes, I will definitely partake in such behaviour in the near future.

Were you in any way influenced to purchase a product? (Peer pressure, saw an ad online, recommended, last in stock etc.)

Yes, I saw an ad for a similar store as mentioned before, but I was also influenced by fashion trends, because I know this colour will be very fashionable in the next year – I follow fashion accounts on Instagram and also some fashion bloggers.

How long did the whole decision-making/purchasing process take?

Before I even found this product, I knew I wanted a bag in this colour, so when I saw it, I knew immediately I wanted it. So, the actual decision-making process after seeing the bag took me about 5 to 10 minutes.

Did any tools used by online retailers ever effect your purchasing decision? (e.g.: last in stock, sale, free gift, free shipping for limited time, ratings etc.)

Yes, the tool I believe convinces me the most is when items are on sale. However, this bag wasn't on sale, but they did convince me to buy it through offering me free shipping/postage. Another tool that always convinces me to look at what an online store has to offer is if I get their coupon for 15% or 20% off. This doesn't mean that I will buy something because of the coupon, but I will definitely browse the store/app and if I see something that catches my eye I will buy it, even though I don't need it or have never thought of buying it before.

Has your buying pattern changed since the beginning of pandemic? If yes, how? (Did they spend more or less money as before?)

Yes, most of my purchases have been online with the exception of groceries. I have shopped online even before the pandemic, but I have really increased the frequency of online shopping since March 2020.

Has your buying pattern changed significantly during lockdowns?

It's a similar answer than the previous one, because it didn't change the way I bought groceries, but it was the time when I started buying more things online – everything that I couldn't get in a store, because they were closed.

Did you purchase more products online over the past year? How much?

Yes, definitely. However, I did move a couple of times during the pandemic, so I was in a way forced to buy household items online because the actual stores were closed. With that in mind I would say that my online shopping increased by about 65-70% since the pandemic started.

Can you describe your general state of mind or mood during lockdowns? Explain.

Well to be completely honest it was quite depressing, and I was dealing with anxiety as well. Not just because of the pandemic, but also because of other personal issues going on in my life at the time, but the fact that I was isolated from people and could not participate in my

hobbies – dancing and climbing – was a hard hit as well and it definitely didn't help with my state of mind.

Have you ever turned to online shopping as a way to improve your mood during lockdown?

Definitely, I used online shopping as a way to distract myself from the thoughts/feelings that I did not want to think/feel. By going online and browsing through the apps, I was able to keep my mind off other things in my life.

7. Interviewee 7: male, 32 years old, from Koper, lives in Koper, works as a Copywriter at Marketing Zmagovalcev

Do you shop online? If yes, why?

I try not to, but ever since the pandemic started, it was sometimes necessary to shop online. I shop online because it saves me a lot of time and it is also a chance for me to avoid the crowds, because I do get quite anxious if I am in a crowd of people for more than 20 minutes.

How frequently did you shop online (in the past year)?

Once every three months.

Which products/goods did you purchase online in the last year?

Sustainable products, electronics, and camping/hiking equipment.

Which were the most recent products/goods you have purchased online?

It was camping equipment I am not exactly sure of the type of camping equipment, but I believe it was a tent, a sleeping bag and some pots.

How often do you buy this type of product in a month? How often did you purchase it in the past month? Was the purchase planned?

Depends on whether I travel and where I travel, but I would say approximately once every four months. These purchases are not exactly planned, because they depend on my plans, and I am quite impulsive when it comes to booking trips and traveling. So, if I plan a trip, I will then buy the necessary equipment I will need on that trip.

Do you plan your purchases before going online? (If yes, how so...)

No, I do not.

How would you describe most of your purchases? Are they planned/not planned?

Most of my purchases are not planned.

What do you believe impulsive buying is?

I think impulsive buying is when you feel a great need to purchase a product. I believe this happens a lot to people who scroll a lot on Facebook or Instagram and buy almost everything they see in the ads.

Interviewer's explanation of what impulsive buying is.

Can you recall your last impulsive purchase online?

It was a set of pots for my camping trip in France.

What made you see that you needed to purchase that specific product? (Hunger, in need of clothes etc.)

With buying these pots, I made sure that my camping experience would be easier. It ensured normal living conditions while camping.

How did you acquire the needed information about the product you bought? (Internet, newspaper, TV etc.)

I know a lot of sites that carry camping equipment. The way I came to know about them is through word-of-mouth and by researching things about camping online.

Which were the characteristics of the product that you considered when you were deciding to purchase it? (Price, flavour, brand, colours)

Price, materials, and brand.

How did you feel (excited, regretful etc.) when purchasing the product?

I felt very happy and excited, because I knew it was a part of preparations for my next adventure and I knew these items would make that experience even better for me.

Did impulsive buying elevate your mood at the time of your purchase?

Yes, it definitely did. I had a feeling that now I will have even more things that will make my life better, and that made me excited.

Did your self-image change at the time of making impulsive purchase?

No, I wouldn't say so.

How did you feel after you have purchased the product (regret, satisfaction) Do you think you will partake in such behaviour in the next 2 months?

I still felt the same, happy, and satisfied. I may partake in such behaviour in the next few months, especially since I am going to a skiing retreat in the end of the year so I will probably buy some things on impulse there as well.

Were you in any way influenced to purchase a product? (Peer pressure, saw an ad online, recommended, last in stock etc.)

In a way yes, because as I started googling about camping equipment, Instagram algorithm picked that up and they started showing me targeted ads. By seeing a lot of these ads, I did feel a bit pressured to buy the things I needed quickly.

How long did the whole decision-making/purchasing process take?

I would say it took me a few hours to decide whether I was going to buy the product or no.

Did any tools used by online retailers ever effect your purchasing decision? (e.g.: last in stock, sale, free gift, free shipping for limited time, ratings etc.)

Yes, the promise of free shipping with orders over X amount of € usually convince me to buy more things than I normally would, just so I can avoid the cost of shipping.

Has your buying pattern changed since the beginning of pandemic? If yes, how? (Did they spend more or less money as before?)

I still go to the groceries to buy my food, but for things such as electronics I started buying them online. And now I cannot imagine going to Big Bang for a set of headphones anymore.

Has your buying pattern changed significantly during lockdowns?

Yes, similar to my previous answer, during lockdowns all the stores apart from groceries were closed, so I did my shopping mostly online. I saw how much time I can save by buying online and additionally, I also started trusting online retailers more. Before lockdowns I did buy some things online, but I was a bit sceptical of whether I can fully trust online retailers. Now those doubts are gone, and I am much more relaxed when buying online.

Did you purchase more products online over the past year? How much?

Yes, I definitely did. I would say my online shopping increased by 50%-60%.

Can you describe your general state of mind or mood during lockdowns? Explain.

Lockdowns were very difficult for me especially since I couldn't see my friends. I was also anxious because of my future plans regarding travelling, I was not sure if I could actually go to France when I was planning to and that gave me a bit of anxiety.

Have you ever turned to online shopping as a way to improve your mood during lockdown?

Yes, the act of shopping online distracted me from the reality of lockdowns. While I was shopping, I felt excitement and happiness and that would uplift my mood. However, this didn't last for a long time and soon I was back to reality.

8. Interviewee 8: male, 30 years old, from Brussels, lives in Brussels, works as an accountant at KellyDeli

Do you shop online? If yes, why?

Yes, it is more convenient, I have more choice and usually I get a better price online than I would in an actual store. By shopping online, I also don't have to go to stores which suits me because I don't like normal stores. The reason being, I am not sure whether the store carries the items I want and I also do not like crowds and interacting with people while shopping, they make me anxious.

How frequently did you shop online (in the past year)?

At least once a week.

Which products/goods did you purchase online in the last year?

Mostly music, CDs, and vinyl records. I also bought some merchandise of the bands that I like.

Which were the most recent products/goods you have purchased online?

A vinyl record from a band called Wolves in the throne room.

How often do you buy this type of product in a month? How often did you purchase it in the past month? Was the purchase planned?

It used to be at least once a week but now I am reducing my spending a bit so now I am purchasing such products once every two weeks.

I usually do plan my purchasing when deciding which vinyl to buy.

Do you plan your purchases before going online?

Usually yes, but not always. Sometimes when I see a pop-up window or an ad I go to the site, and they buy what was advertised to me.

How would you describe most of your purchases? Are they planned/not planned?

Most of them are planned, but sometimes they can also be unplanned.

What do you believe impulsive buying is?

A purchase where the consumer completes the purchase in less than 5 minutes after first encountering a product.

Interviewer's explanation of what impulsive buying is.

Can you recall your last impulsive purchase online?

Yes, it was the vinyl record that I mentioned before, from the band Wolves in the throne room.

What made you see that you needed to purchase that specific product? (Hunger, in need of clothes etc.)

I am a collector, so this purchase was made for collecting purposes.

How did you acquire the needed information about the product you bought? (Internet, newspaper, TV etc.)

I already knew the band and I knew I wanted to purchase a vinyl from them. I found their music through YouTube. When Amazon sent me an email about a discount, they had on that product I immediately decided to purchase the product.

Which were the characteristics of the product that you considered when you were deciding to purchase it? (Price, flavour, brand, colours)

I like their music, I also like the art that is on the cover and of course as I said before, the discounted price.

How did you feel (excited, regretful etc.) when purchasing the product?

I felt good, I was really happy about the price I got it for, and I was in anticipation of receiving the product.

Did impulsive buying elevate your mood at the time of your purchase?

Yes, it did. Because I am a collector of vinyl records, I also felt like my collector's need was fulfilled because I got another vinyl from a band that I like.

Did your self-image change at the time of making impulsive purchase?

No.

How did you feel after you have purchased the product (regret, satisfaction) Do you think you will partake in such behaviour in the next 2 months?

After purchasing this item, I still felt good, but sometimes when I buy more records, I do feel a bit of regret for spending a lot of money again. I will definitely partake in such behaviour in the next two months.

Were you in any way influenced to purchase a product? (Peer pressure, saw an ad online, recommended, last in stock etc.)

I got an email from Amazon, informing me of the discount.

How long did the whole decision-making/purchasing process take?

About 3 minutes.

Did any tools used by online retailers ever effect your purchasing decision? (e.g.: last in stock, sale, free gift, free shipping for limited time, ratings etc.)

Yes, definitely, the tools that convince me the most often are free shipping, sales, coupons. Sometimes when I am buying something and I am 10€ away from getting free shipping I will browse the store and find something to add to my order, to qualify for free shipping.

Has your buying pattern changed since the beginning of pandemic? If yes, how? (Did they spend more or less money as before?)

Yes, it has changed a lot. Before the pandemic I went to a lot of concerts, and I would buy music and merchandise there. But, since there were no concerts since the pandemic started, I started buying these items online, for my collection purposes and also to support the bands. My budget for concerts shifted to my budget for physical music.

Has your buying pattern changed significantly during lockdowns?

Yes, especially the first one in March 2020. Because I was stuck at home and the stores were closed, I would purchase things online way more often than I did before. I also started ordering a lot of takeaways through apps such as UberEATS.

Did you purchase more products online over the past year? How much?

Yes, I definitely did. I would say my online purchases increased by at least 80%-90%.

Can you describe your general state of mind or mood during lockdowns? Explain.

I was not feeling very good during lockdowns, I got really frustrated because I was supposed to go on a trip to Slovenia in April 2020, but that didn't happen. For the second lockdown, the weather was really bad so all I could do was work and it got quite depressing.

I was also quite anxious about getting the virus, so I followed all the COVID-19 restrictions and guidelines in order to minimize the probability of catching the virus.

Have you ever turned to online shopping as a way to improve your mood during lockdown?

Yes, I did go online shopping to improve my mood. But it wasn't the process of shopping that uplifted my mood, but it was the finished purchase and the excitement about spreading my collection.

9. Interviewee 9: female, 40 years old, from Ljubljana, lives in Ljubljana, works as Brand Operations Manager at Atlantic Trade

Do you shop online? If yes, why?

Yes, I do, the main reason for shopping online is the fact that it saves time, convenience of it all – I get parcels delivered to my door, online retailers also have a larger choice of products.

How frequently did you shop online (in the past year)?

Two to three times a week.

Which products/goods did you purchase online in the last year?

Food, cosmetics products, footwear, clothes, and furniture.

Which were the most recent products/goods you have purchased online?

I bought some sports shoes.

How often do you buy this type of product in a month? How often did you purchase it in the past month? Was the purchase planned?

Once every two months. In the last month I bought it once and the purchase was planned.

Do you plan your purchases before going online? (If yes, how so...)

I plan some of them but not all of them. When buying groceries online I usually plan what I will buy. I look at what I have in my home and what kind of food I plan on making in the following week. When it comes to clothes and accessories, I don't always plan everything I end up buying.

How would you describe most of your purchases? Are they planned/not planned?

I would say half of it is planned and the other half is not planned. As answered in the previous question, I plan my purchases when buying food, but not so much when it comes to clothing.

What do you believe impulsive buying is?

It is when I see something and if I like it, I buy it without giving it a second thought.

Interviewer's explanation of what impulsive buying is.

Can you recall your last impulsive purchase online?

Yes, I bought gloves just two days ago.

What made you see that you needed to purchase that specific product? (Hunger, in need of clothes etc.)

I needed clothes, more specifically nice winter gloves.

How did you acquire the needed information about the product you bought? (Internet, newspaper, TV etc.)

I was browsing the website and stumbled upon the gloves category. When I was browsing through it, I found these gloves and decided to buy them.

Which were the characteristics of the product that you considered when you were deciding to purchase it? (Price, flavour, brand, colours)

The price, the colour, and the material.

How did you feel (excited, regretful etc.) when purchasing the product?

I felt okay, but since it was such a small purchase, I didn't feel any excitement. When I buy items such as shoes or clothes that are more expensive, I do usually feel excited.

Did impulsive buying elevate your mood at the time of your purchase?

Yes, it did, buying things online always improves my mood. But this particular purchase didn't improve my mood drastically, because as I said, it wasn't a big purchase.

Did your self-image change at the time of making impulsive purchase?

Not for this particular purchase, but when I order an expensive bag or some other expensive item that I like, I do feel a bit better about myself.

How did you feel after you have purchased the product (regret, satisfaction) Do you think you will partake in such behaviour in the next 2 months?

It does happen to me from time to time, that I regret buying an item when I buy a lot of things and I exaggerate with my spending. In such cases I do feel regret, because I am worried how my financial balance will look like at the end of the month.

Yes, I absolutely will partake in such behaviour in the near future.

Were you in any way influenced to purchase a product? (Peer pressure, saw an ad online, recommended, last in stock etc.)

Not for the gloves, but I almost always buy everything from Best Secret. This website operates in a way, that you have to get a recommendation from someone who already buy from that website in order to be able to buy there as well. So, in that way I was influenced by the friend who recommended this website to me.

Additionally, ever since I made an account there and I started shopping, I am getting ads on Facebook and Instagram and sometimes, I buy the things that are being advertised to me.

How long did the whole decision-making/purchasing process take?

A few seconds.

Did any tools used by online retailers ever effect your purchasing decision? (e.g.: last in stock, sale, free gift, free shipping for limited time, ratings etc.)

Most of these tools are able to convince me to purchase a product, especially, sales, coupons, and free shipping.

Has your buying pattern changed since the beginning of pandemic? If yes, how? (Did they spend more or less money as before?)

Yes, I would say that it completely changed, I started buying everything, including groceries online.

Has your buying pattern changed significantly during lockdowns?

Yes, it definitely has, since the first lockdown my buying pattern completely changed, as said before and even when, the lockdowns ended, I didn't go back to the old way of shopping. I still prefer to buy everything online.

Did you purchase more products online over the past year? How much?

Yes, I would say I purchased about 90% more online than I did before the pandemic.

Can you describe your general state of mind or mood during lockdowns? Explain.

In the beginning I was very scared of what was going to happen, so I was quite anxious. But after a while when we saw that there won't be any food shortages, I relaxed a bit and after that the lockdowns were not as horrible anymore.

Have you ever turned to online shopping as a way to improve your mood during lockdown?

Yes, I did turn to impulsive online buying multiple times during lockdown. It helped me relief the anxiety I was feeling about the whole situation. In a way it helped me to distract myself from reality.

10. Interviewee 10: female, 47 years old, from Logatec, lives in Logatec, works as a Key Account Manager at Atlantic Trade

Do you shop online? If yes, why?

Yes, I do shop online, however I only buy clothes, footwear and accessories. When the pandemic started, I didn't have any other option than to shop online for such items. When I started ordering it online, I saw how convenient online shopping is. It saves me a lot of time; I have a bigger choice of products and I get better deals online than I would in a normal store.

How frequently did you shop online (in the past year)?

Once a month.

Which products/goods did you purchase online in the last year?

Clothes, footwear, and accessories.

Which were the most recent products/goods you have purchased online?

Underwear and Swarovski bracelets.

How often do you buy this type of product in a month? How often did you purchase it in the past month? Was the purchase planned?

Once a month. In the past month I bought it once and the purchase of the underwear was planned, but the bracelets were not.

Do you plan your purchases before going online? (If yes, how so...)

No, I don't plan my purchases before going online.

How would you describe most of your purchases? Are they planned/not planned?

My purchases online are not planned.

What do you believe impulsive buying is?

I believe it is a purchase that occurs when someone sees a product and they are immediately drawn to it. They may even realize that they don't need the product but because they like it in that moment, they decide to buy it.

Interviewer's explanation of what impulsive buying is.

Can you recall your last impulsive purchase online?

Yes, I believe my last impulsive purchase online was when I bought some Swarovski bracelets.

What made you see that you needed to purchase that specific product? (Hunger, in need of clothes etc.)

I actually didn't need any more bracelets than I already have, but I really loved how they look so I bought them.

How did you acquire the needed information about the product you bought? (Internet, newspaper, TV etc.)

I found them via a website that I use for all of my online shopping – Best Secret. I filtered the brand and browsed through the selection. When I saw the bracelets that I liked I added them to the cart and bought them.

Which were the characteristics of the product that you considered when you were deciding to purchase it? (Price, flavour, brand, colours)

Price and brand. Whenever I buy bracelets I buy them from Swarovski, so the brand is very important to me.

How did you feel (excited, regretful etc.) when purchasing the product?

I felt satisfied with the purchase, but I wouldn't say I was extremely excited.

Did impulsive buying elevate your mood at the time of your purchase?

Yes, it did, but the change wasn't that big. I didn't go from feeling sad to feeling excited. I was already in a good mood, and after I purchased a product, I was a bit more satisfied.

Did your self-image change at the time of making impulsive purchase?

Not really, no.

How did you feel after you have purchased the product (regret, satisfaction) Do you think you will partake in such behaviour in the next 2 months?

The only time I regret buying things is when they don't fit me, but I wouldn't say I ever feel regret just by placing an order.

Yes, I will definitely partake in such behaviour in the next two months, probably in the next few weeks already.

Were you in any way influenced to purchase a product? (Peer pressure, saw an ad online, recommended, last in stock etc.)

I don't necessarily get influenced by ads, but I shop on Best Secret and in order to be able to shop there you need to get an invitation from someone who already shops there. In that way I was influenced by my co-worker who sent me the invitation to the website.

How long did the whole decision-making/purchasing process take?

Between 2-3 minutes.

Did any tools used by online retailers ever effect your purchasing decision? (e.g.: last in stock, sale, free gift, free shipping for limited time, ratings etc.)

Yes, a lot of these tools make me consider purchasing a product but the most effective one in my case is the loyalty program that Best Secret offers. It works in a way, where you can climb the "hierarchy" of customers. You start of as a regular customer, but if you spend enough money, you can become a "VIP". And with the VIP status you get additional discounts.

Has your buying pattern changed since the beginning of pandemic? If yes, how? (Did they spend more or less money as before?)

Yes, it changed a lot. I still buy my groceries at the local supermarket, but as mentioned before, now I buy clothes, shoes, and accessories strictly online. I cannot imagine going to stores to buy such items anymore.

Has your buying pattern changed significantly during lockdowns?

It has because I couldn't go shopping for clothes when the borders between municipalities were closed. When the borders opened again, I was already hooked on the convenience of online shopping.

Did you purchase more products online over the past year? How much?

Before the pandemic I never shopped online, so my online purchases increased by 100%.

Can you describe your general state of mind or mood during lockdowns? Explain.

I was quite surprised with myself at how well I was handling the lockdown. In the beginning I was quite worried about what kind of effect it would have on me, but all in all I can say I felt quite okay.

Have you ever turned to online shopping as a way to improve your mood during lockdown?

No, I have never done that.

11. Interviewee 11: male, 32 years old, from Domžale, lives in Kamnik, works as a private small businessman

Do you shop online? If yes, why?

Yes, I do. I shop online because it is a lot more convenient to me, it saves me time and money, since I usually get better deals online than in regular stores. I also don't have to drive to the store and deal with crowds of people, which is very nice because they annoy me quite a bit. The offer is also better online, there are more items I get to choose from and if I don't like the product, I just send it back and they deposit the money back to my account, which is the complete opposite of when you try to return a product in a regular store. They usually don't want to refund you but are only willing to exchange the item.

How frequently did you shop online (in the past year)?

About once a month.

Which products/goods did you purchase online in the last year?

Clothes, shoes, accessories, electronics, and household items.

Which were the most recent products/goods you have purchased online?

I bought a detergent and softener for clothes and tablets for my dishwasher on Mimovrste. I got it for an extremely good price

How often do you buy this type of product in a month? How often did you purchase it in the past month? Was the purchase planned?

This was actually the first time that I bought such items online. I bought them because I saw an ad online and decided to buy it, so the purchase wasn't planned.

Do you plan your purchases before going online? (If yes, how so...)

I plan bigger purchases, for example if I need a new dining table, I will research what all the stores have to offer online, and I will compare. But when it comes to clothes and accessories

my purchases aren't planned. A lot of times I will simply browse through the app if they have a sale and buy whatever I like.

How would you describe most of your purchases? Are they planned/not planned?

I would say some of them are planned and some are not. Depending on the category of products as mentioned before.

What do you believe impulsive buying is?

I believe there are different kinds of impulsive buying, one of them being buying in order to feel better. For example, if you are going through a rough time and you are feeling down, you will shop online just to improve your mood and will buy products that you don't need or would never buy them if you felt good. The other one is when a company informs you of a big sale and you go and buy items that you normally wouldn't, because you have a fear of missing out such a great deal.

Interviewer's explanation of what impulsive buying is.

Can you recall your last impulsive purchase online?

It was a Versace watch.

What made you see that you needed to purchase that specific product? (Hunger, in need of clothes etc.)

I didn't need that watch I just wanted it, because I really like watches and that one was very beautiful and luxurious.

How did you acquire the needed information about the product you bought? (Internet, newspaper, TV etc.)

My girlfriend got an email from Zalando where it said that all of their designer items were 60% off.

Which were the characteristics of the product that you considered when you were deciding to purchase it? (Price, flavour, brand, colours)

I really like the brand and the look of the watch, but what convinced me was the price.

How did you feel (excited, regretful etc.) when purchasing the product?

I felt extremely excited.

Did impulsive buying elevate your mood at the time of your purchase?

Yes, it did.

Did your self-image change at the time of making impulsive purchase?

Yes, because I just bought a designer item that I got for a very good price. I felt pride in my ability to get such an item for such a good price.

How did you feel after you have purchased the product (regret, satisfaction) Do you think you will partake in such behaviour in the next 2 months?

I still felt very good, but I felt regretful because I didn't buy more watches like that – the store limited it on one watch per person. I think I will participate in such behaviour in the future.

Were you in any way influenced to purchase a product? (Peer pressure, saw an ad online, recommended, last in stock etc.)

I wasn't influenced as such, I knew I wanted a nice watch for a while, but the email my girlfriend told me about definitely convinced me to have a look at their selection.

How long did the whole decision-making/purchasing process take?

The decision to buy a Versace watch took me less than 5 minutes, but the process of selecting which model of the watch to take took me approximately 30 minutes.

Did any tools used by online retailers ever effect your purchasing decision? (e.g.: last in stock, sale, free gift, free shipping for limited time, ratings etc.)

What convinces me the most is when items are on sale. I also always check what a store has to offer when they send me a coupon for 20% off the whole purchase. Free shipping is also a tool that has convinced me to buy certain products in the past.

Has your buying pattern changed since the beginning of pandemic? If yes, how? (Did they spend more or less money as before?)

Yes, it has. Ever since the pandemic started, I started buying a lot of things online that I didn't before. Since the pandemic, I buy all of my clothes, shoes and accessories online. And because I see how convenient it is, I don't believe I will return to buying such items in regular stores.

Has your buying pattern changed significantly during lockdowns?

Yes, my buying pattern changed significantly during the first lockdown which happened in March 2020. And even after the lockdowns went away my buying pattern didn't reverse back to my old one.

Did you purchase more products online over the past year? How much?

I would say my online shopping increased by at least 70% compared to how much I bought before the pandemic.

Can you describe your general state of mind or mood during lockdowns? Explain.

I was very annoyed by the curfew and the fact that we had to be at home by 9 p.m. I felt trapped and felt like I was constantly being watched for no reason, so that did give me quite a bit of anxiety.

Have you ever turned to online shopping as a way to improve your mood during lockdown?

No, I don't believe I have.

12. Interviewee 11: female, 60 years old, from Domžale, lives in Domžale, works as a primary school teacher at OŠ Vencelja Perka

Do you shop online? If yes, why?

Yes, it is very convenient because it saves me a lot of time and the trouble of going to multiple stores to find that one particular product that I am looking for.

How frequently did you shop online (in the past year)?

Once or twice per month.

Which products/goods did you purchase online in the last year?

I buy a little bit of everything, such as flowers, clothes, cosmetics, toys for my granddaughter etc. But among these, flower seeds are one of my most common purchases.

Which were the most recent products/goods you have purchased online?

Sparks balls for my granddaughter to play with.

How often do you buy this type of product in a month? How often did you purchase it in the past month? Was the purchase planned?

Once a year. Yes, it was planned Luna (my granddaughter) needs them for playing.

Do you plan your purchases before going online? (If yes, how so...)

Most of the time I do. In the example of flowers and flower seeds, I look at the catalogues from different online retailers that carry these products and compare their offer and prices. Based on this comparison I buy the items I believe give the best product for the price.

How would you describe most of your purchases? Are they planned/not planned?

I would say that about 70% of my purchases are planned but the other 30% are not.

What do you believe impulsive buying is?

I believe impulse buying is the type of a purchase when a person sees an item and they buy it without any second thoughts.

Interviewer's explanation of what impulsive buying is.

Can you recall your last impulsive purchase online?

Yes, it was Bralni kuža – which is a rubber toy that a child reads to. I bought it when I was scrolling through online catalogue and when I saw it I decided to buy it, even though my granddaughter is only 3 and does not know how to read yet. But I thought it was extremely cute so I bought it.

What made you see that you needed to purchase that specific product? (Hunger, in need of clothes etc.)

As my granddaughter grows up, she will start learning to read and that's when this item will come in handy.

How did you acquire the needed information about the product you bought? (Internet, newspaper, TV etc.)

In an online catalogue.

Which were the characteristics of the product that you considered when you were deciding to purchase it? (Price, flavour, brand, colours)

The usability of the product and its design.

How did you feel (excited, regretful etc.) when purchasing the product?

Slightly excited to surprise my granddaughter with a new toy.

Did impulsive buying elevate your mood at the time of your purchase?

Yes, it did.

Did your self-image change at the time of making impulsive purchase?

No.

How did you feel after you have purchased the product (regret, satisfaction) Do you think you will partake in such behaviour in the next 2 months?

I didn't feel anything special. And yes, I will definitely partake in such behaviour in the next 2 months.

Were you in any way influenced to purchase a product? (Peer pressure, saw an ad online, recommended, last in stock etc.)

Recommendation from a friend.

How long did the whole decision-making/purchasing process take?

About a week.

Did any tools used by online retailers ever effect your purchasing decision? (e.g.: last in stock, sale, free gift, free shipping for limited time, ratings etc.)

No.

Has your buying pattern changed since the beginning of pandemic? If yes, how? (Did they spend more or less money as before?)

Yes, it did. We are going to the groceries once every two weeks, before we went once a week. And now only one person goes to the store. I started buying flowers online and clothes as well.

Has your buying pattern changed significantly during lockdowns?

Since the pandemic in Slovenia started with a lockdown, my answer is the same as before. After lockdown ended, we didn't go back to our old shopping habits.

Did you purchase more products online over the past year? How much?

Yes, I would say by approximately 20%.

Can you describe your general state of mind or mood during lockdowns? Explain.

It wasn't really bad for me, but I did work a lot more, the line between the job and free time got blurred. And that took a toll on the relationship I had with my family. Now I try to set clear boundaries between family time and work.

Have you ever turned to online shopping as a way to improve your mood during lockdown?

No.