

Word-of-Mouth Communication and Impulsive Buying Behavior: The Moderating Effect of Product Attributes

Chin-Hui Yang*

*Department of Health Business Administration, Hungkuang University, Taichung 433304, Taiwan;

wenlin0522@sunrise.hk.edu.tw

*Corresponding Author: wenlin0522@sunrise.hk.edu.tw

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of word-of-mouth communication (WOM) on consumers' impulsive buying behavior and examines the moderating effect of product attributes. A survey of 352 Chinese consumers was conducted, and structural equation modeling was applied to analyze the data. The results show that WOM exerts a significant positive influence on impulsive buying, with luxury products more likely to trigger impulsive behavior. Product attributes significantly moderated the relationships between WOM dimensions and impulsive buying, particularly in specific WOM–impulsive buying relationships. The findings provide theoretical contributions to consumer behavior research and practical implications for marketing strategies.

Keywords: Word-of-mouth communication, Impulsive buying, Product attributes, Moderating effect, Consumer behavior

1. Introduction

Impulsive buying is a central topic in consumer behavior research [1], [2]. Word-of-mouth communication (WOM) is recognized as a critical factor shaping consumer decision-making, especially in the digital era where social media accelerates the dissemination of consumer experiences [3]. However, prior studies are largely Western-centric, leaving their applicability in emerging markets underexplored [4]. Furthermore, product attributes may moderate WOM's influence on impulsive buying, particularly for luxury or high-value products [5]. This study addresses these gaps by investigating Chinese consumers.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Impulsive Buying Behavior

Impulsive buying refers to unplanned purchases triggered by external or internal stimuli, resulting in immediate purchase decisions [6]. Recent studies highlight the roles of emotional states, cognitive evaluation, and social interaction in driving impulsive purchases [7].

2.2 Word-of-Mouth Communication (WOM)

WOM is persuasive because it allows recipients to immerse themselves in the consumption

experiences of others [8]. Prior findings suggest that WOM fosters interpersonal trust and enhances eWOM adoption, thereby positively influencing purchase intentions [10], [11].

2.3 Product Attributes as Moderators

Attributes such as price, category, and brand recognition can shape how WOM influences consumer behavior. Recent research indicates that WOM is more effective for luxury or high-priced products [12], [13], with product features moderating WOM's effects [14].

3. Method

3.1 Hypotheses Development

- **H1:** WOM information quality positively affects impulsive buying.
- **H2:** WOM source credibility positively affects impulsive buying.
- **H3:** WOM interactivity positively affects impulsive buying.
- **H4:** WOM emotional value positively affects impulsive buying.
- **H5:** Product attributes moderate the relationships between WOM dimensions and impulsive buying.

3.2 Research Model

The proposed research model examines how four dimensions of WOM communication jointly influence consumers' impulsive buying behavior. Each WOM dimension is conceptualized as an independent predictor contributing to the overall likelihood of impulsive purchasing.

First, information quality reflects the extent to which WOM messages provide accurate, complete, and useful consumption-related information. Higher informational value is expected to enhance consumers' confidence in unplanned purchases.

Second, source credibility captures the perceived trustworthiness and expertise of the WOM communicator, which can reinforce consumers' positive evaluations and stimulate impulsive decisions.

Third, interactivity represents the bidirectional communication and perceived engagement between consumers and WOM sources, potentially amplifying emotional involvement and increasing impulse-driven reactions.

Fourth, emotional value denotes the affective benefits derived from WOM, such as enjoyment, excitement, or emotional resonance, which may trigger spontaneous purchasing tendencies.

These four WOM dimensions are hypothesized to exert direct positive effects on impulsive buying. In addition, the model incorporates product attributes as a moderating variable. Product attributes are posited to alter the strength of the relationships between WOM components and impulsive buying. Specifically, WOM effects are expected to be stronger for luxury or high-priced products, whose perceived value heightens consumers' susceptibility to persuasive communication. The moderating mechanism implies that the impact of WOM is contingent upon the nature of the product, with certain product characteristics intensifying or attenuating impulsive responses.

Overall, the research model conceptualizes impulsive buying behavior as the outcome of multiple WOM drivers, while acknowledging the conditional role of product attributes in shaping these effects.

3.3 Sample and Procedure

Data were collected from Chinese consumers via a questionnaire survey using convenience sampling. A total of 352 valid responses were obtained.

3.4 Measures

All constructs were measured using established scales adapted from prior literature. WOM information quality was measured using items adapted from Cheung et al. [9], assessing the accuracy, completeness, and usefulness of WOM messages. Source credibility was assessed using items adapted from Ohanian [15], reflecting the trustworthiness and perceived expertise of the information source. Interactivity was measured using items adapted from Wu [16], capturing perceived two-way communication and engagement. Emotional value was adapted from Babin et al. [17], evaluating the affective and experiential benefits associated with WOM.

Impulsive buying tendency was measured using items derived from Rook and Fisher [6]. Product attributes (price perception, brand perception, and product category) were adapted from Liu et al. [12].

Sample measurement items include:

1. "The WOM information I received was complete and reliable." (Information Quality)
2. "I trust the person who shared this WOM message." (Source Credibility)
3. "I can easily interact and exchange opinions with others about this product." (Interactivity)
4. "This WOM message made me feel excited about the product." (Emotional Value)
5. "I often make unplanned purchases when I see interesting products." (Impulsive Buying)

All items were assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Reliability and validity assessments indicated that all constructs demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS and AMOS to conduct reliability and validity assessments, as well as structural equation modeling (SEM).

4. Results

4.1 Direct Effects

SEM results indicated significant positive effects of WOM on impulsive buying. Information quality ($\beta = .42, p < .001$) and source credibility ($\beta = .38, p < .001$) exerted the strongest influences. Interactivity ($\beta = .27, p < .01$) and emotional value ($\beta = .29, p < .01$) also significantly predicted impulsive buying.

4.2 Moderating Effects

Z-tests revealed significant moderating effects of product attributes. Luxury and high-priced products intensified impulsive buying behavior. The strongest moderating effect was observed for the relationship between WOM interactivity and impulsive buying. No significant moderating effect was observed for the relationship between source credibility and impulsive buying.

Table 1. presents the standardized path coefficients and significance levels.

Table 1. Modeling Results

Path	β	p-value
Information quality → Impulsive buying	.42	< .001
Source credibility → Impulsive buying	.38	< .001
Interactivity → Impulsive buying	.27	< .01
Emotional value → Impulsive buying	.29	< .01

4.3 Discussion and Implications

The results confirm WOM's positive influence on impulsive buying, with product attributes serving as significant moderators. From a managerial perspective, firms should focus on enhancing WOM quality and credibility, especially for luxury or high-value products. Encouraging consumer interaction and fostering emotional value can further stimulate impulsive buying. Moreover, product attributes provide an effective basis for market segmentation and differentiated WOM strategies.

5. Conclusion

This study enriches consumer behavior literature by validating WOM's role in impulsive buying and identifying the moderating role of product attributes. From a practical standpoint, businesses are advised to leverage WOM strategies tailored to product types and market segments. Future research should explore additional moderators such as cultural factors and digital platform design.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author confirms that there are no conflicts of interest.

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