

# **Impulse Buying Behaviour of Young Males in an Airport Environment**

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<p>Abstract:</p> <p>The aim of this study is to conclude different areas and factors of impulse buying behaviours at the airport environment. The most important factors and research papers are researched on to find out how the topic has been regarded in the past. Impulse buying behaviour is a topic that has not been researched much on factors such as temporal factors and the effect of different environments. Air travelling is constantly increasing in popularity thus it was an interesting research topic for the author. In addition impulse buying in airport environment has not been researched almost at all and moreover there is very limited, if any, data on airport impulse buying behaviour of business travellers. What is more, impulse buying behaviour makes a great amount of sales that happen in a retail environment, which makes it an important field of study for the business world.</p> <p>As the topic has not much been researched on with such a focus, research questions are as follows: 1.How do people impulse buy at airports? 2. How do the situational factors influence consumers' impulse buying behaviour in an international airport environment? Literary sources are reviewed for this research, both previous research papers and business course books, emphasis being on research papers, such as Volkova and Wu &amp; Huan's.</p> <p>The limitation is to focus on impulse buying behaviour instead of all buying behaviour and specifically impulse buying behaviour in an airport environment. The focus groups show results of the importance of the airport stores' location to be after security check and that the store environment of the airport stores does not have an effect on their impulse buying behaviour at airports whereas the product rules.</p>	
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# 1 INTRODUCTION

The topic of the thesis is impulse buying in international airport environments. In the thesis it is researched how temporal factors affect the impulse buying behavior of business travelers and how the airport as an environment affects their impulse buying behavior.

The thesis begins with definitions of rational buying and impulse buying and then continues with a review of which personal factors of consumers affect their impulse buying behaviour. A chapter is given to the effects of impulse buying tendency, self-control, culture, shopping orientation and economic behavior. It is discussed how situational factors influence the buying behavior, more specifically what kind of impact the mood of the consumer, temporal factors, store atmospherics, co-consumers, appropriateness and promotions on it. Then, airport retailing and airport as a shopping environment is discussed.

As for the research, two focus groups of five people are interviewed on the matter. Each focus group consists of people of same age and who are otherwise similar. Then conclusions are done of what findings the interviews to each focus group brought and they are compared to the secondary research from theory. Finally, there is discussion and conclusion of the thesis.

## 1.1 Motivation

Impulse buying behavior is a topic that has not been researched much on factors such as temporal factors and the effect of different environments. Air traveling is constantly increasing in popularity thus it was an interesting research topic for the author. In addition impulse buying in airport environment has not been researched almost at all and moreo-

ver there is very limited, if all, data on airport impulse buying behavior of business travelers. What is more, impulse buying behavior makes a great amount of all sales, which makes it an important field of study for the business world.

## **1.2 Research questions**

1. How do the focus groups impulse buy at airports?
2. How do the situational factors influence focus groups' impulse buying behavior in an international airport environment?

## **1.3 Limitations**

The research is limited to airport impulse buying behavior of educated males, aged from 22–25. Each focus group consists of five men, and ten people are researched altogether. Every individual in the focus groups has medium to medium-high income and is highly educated.

## **2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 Impulse buying**

A rational purchase decision is made after four stages of consumer behavior - starting with problem or need recognition, and then followed by information search, continuing to alternative evaluation and ending with purchase decision, which is followed by post-purchase evaluation. Need recognition arises when a consumer notices a difference be-

tween his current state and his ideal state. Such episode may occur when a consumer begins to lack a common need, such as a bed for sleeping. Opportunity recognition may occur when he gets exposed to external stimuli. Information search is followed. In this stage the consumer is trying to find information of his desired product through different channels, such as the internet and friends. After that the consumer evaluates the alternatives considering the information he has gathered about them. Then, the consumer makes the purchase decision, as in most cases decides on buying his preferred alternative and then buys it. After the purchase has been done, the consumer evaluates whether he is happy or not with the product. (Kotler, 2001 pp. 214-222)



Figure 1. Buying decision process (Source: the author)

Impulse buying does not follow such a consumer behavior model. Unlike the planned buying process, the impulse buying process starts with product awareness. "Impulse buyers begin browsing without having an intention to purchase a certain item or visiting a certain store. As consumers browse, they are exposed to the stimuli, which triggers customers' urge to buy on impulse." (Kim & Jiyeon 2003 p.8)

Impulse buying stands for purchasing items that the customer does not need, did not know they wanted and for which they did not budget. Impulse buying is the act of spontaneous and immediate purchasing in situations where the consumer does not have prior plans to buy and is not actively searching for a certain product, and where the buying decision is done after the consumer has been exposed to stimuli in the buying situation. Furthermore impulse buying is followed after an intense, exciting urge to buy without concerning the consequences of the buying decision. (Gutierrez, 2004 p.1061) The consumer is concentrated on the instant satisfaction of following the urge to purchase rather



than on finding a solution to a pre-existing problem or on fulfilling their predetermined need for an item. (Jones et al., 2003)

The purchasing decision is made at a fast speed while shopping, and the time to purchasing the product from seeing it for the first time is really short. Thus, the consumer is unlikely to postpone the purchase with the purpose of getting more information, searching for advice or doing evaluation shopping. (Hansen & Olsen p.2200) The consumer is unlikely to evaluate the product he is about to buy on impulse. (Jones et al., 2003)

In the United States, almost 60 % of supermarket purchases and 80% of all purchases in some product categories are impulse purchases. (Lee & Yi, 2008 p.68)

## **2.2 Personal factors on impulse buying**

### **2.2.1 Impulse buying tendency**

“Almost all unplanned buying is a result of touching, hearing, smelling or tasting something on the premises of the store” (Underhill, 1999 p.158). The tendency for impulse buying is the degree where consumer is likely to make immediate, unintended and thoughtless purchases (Sun et al., 2004) and highly impulsive consumers are more likely to do impulse purchases than consumers who plan their purchases. Consumers who are more independent have a greater behavior towards impulse buying than consumers that are interdependent. Moreover, consumers who are on the regular basis more impulsive, have a higher tendency for impulse buying behavior. (Kacen & Lee, 2002 p.164–165)

Impulsive buyers have a tendency to buy products spontaneously and according to their emotions. They are more likely to not to have shopping lists or to have shopping lists that are more open. They are consumers who are more open to respond to sudden and unexpected buying ideas and who are unreflective in their thinking (Kacen & Lee, 2002 p.164–165). They are activated by being physically close to a certain good and con-

trolled by the instant satisfaction. High impulse buyers respond more to point-of-purchase stimuli. Some consumers have a high tendency to react to unexpected buying stimuli while others do not react to this kind of impulse. (Sun et al. 2004)

The age of the consumer additionally affects the tendency for impulse buying. In the ages from 18 to 39 a consumer's impulse buying tendency rises faintly and after that it decreases. Moreover, earlier research suggests that younger persons have a higher degree of impulsivity than older persons and they show less self-control. (Kacen & Lee, 2002 p.164)

### **2.2.2 Self-control and weakness of will**

As stated before in the thesis, impulse purchase is the result of an irresistible urge to buy a certain item. However, if the urge was literally irresistible, resisting them would be impossible in any situation. Surely the consumers would not make their impulse purchases if someone would threaten their lives for it, as the urge to purchase a product rarely or never reaches such strength. There over, as most of the urges to buy are resistible, the impulse purchases are caused by a failure in self-control. An operative self-control depends on three main factors; standards, monitoring process and operational ability to change own behavior. Self-control can be weakened if any one of these three factors miscarries.

The first factor of self-control is a person's standards, meaning aims, models, norms, and other strategies that specify the preferred state of an individual. A standard could for example be a certain level of performance, a preferred emotional state or ideal body shape. Consumers who exactly know what they want are less likely to do impulse purchases and are less exposed to influences from sales staff and advertisements. If a consumer is not sure of their goals, his self-control is affected and he is more vulnerable. Moreover, consumers with no buying goal are more prone to failure in their self-control. In addition, consumers may have goals that are in conflict with buying a certain item

which would make their mood lift, such as in a situation where a consumer has a goal to save money but he also wants to have an item that makes him feel delighted. Furthermore, he does not know which option would make him happier and it is difficult for him to choose one. In normal situations persons control their behavior in order to reach standards and long-term goals, but when they are emotionally distressed, self-control fails to work, making the persons more likely to engage in actions that are bad for their goals. These actions are done in order to make people feel better.

The second factor of self-control is monitoring, which means being aware of the relevant behavior of oneself. In a state of self-monitoring, people become more conscious of their behavior and begin to keep a track on it according to their goals, which could be by straightforwardly noticing any temptations or actions they are going to take that would take them further from their goals and noticing actions that are taking them hither to their goal. Monitoring could for instance keep a money-saving consumer from taking a closer look of clothes they know they would like to buy in a shop. (Baumeister, 2002 p.672–673) This would indicate that consumers who are cautiously monitoring their expenditures have a smaller tendency to do impulse purchases.

The third factor self-control depends on is a person's ability to change his behavior according to their goals. In many cases, it is the action of prohibiting oneself from proceeding actions that would affect the reachability of their goal negatively. In a buying situation it could mean the ability of off-putting impulses and resisting the urge to buy, when a person is trying to save money. The ability to change one's behavior is a crucial factor of self-control, as of it depends whether the person is ever likely to reach their goals. For this reason, it is also an important part of an individual's impulse buying behavior. In a previous theory it is implied that an action of prohibiting oneself from a negatively affecting action for once consumes the person's energy in a level that makes them less effective than normal for the second act of self-control and so on. This state is called ego depletion, as it suggests that the necessary resources of the self have been depleted and are no longer available for the individual for a following task that demands self-controlling. Consumers, that are already using their resources for other things, such as dieting or a job that demands decision-making, have less self-control left for all the other actions they are making or trying not to make. The willpower will then be ex-

hausted after a series of self-control demanding tasks in a short period of time, but operate again with new power after rest. Consumers who are ego depleted are less able to change their behavior according to their goals and very likely to do impulse purchases when being in a shop. (Baumeister, 2002 p.674)

### **2.2.3 The effect of culture on impulse buying behavior**

In collectivist cultures, importance is given among individuals to in-group norms and duties and the benefit of the community, and the persons see themselves as part of an in-group, such as work community, whereas in individualist cultures, persons are motivated by their own well-being and success, and regard themselves as independent. Individuals from collectivist cultures are also likely to hide their emotions, while individuals from individualist cultures are not. In addition, persons from collectivist cultures are encouraged to defeat their personal hedonic desires in support of the well-being of the in-group.

Persons from individualist cultures regularly overlook the possible negative consequences of their impulse buying behavior. There is a greater chance that persons from collectivist cultures study these negative consequences before their impulse purchases, possibly making them less prone to making them.

Previous research also suggests that culture has an effect on the relationship between trait buying behavior and impulsive buying behavior both at the cultural and individual difference levels. The impulse buying behavior of persons from collectivist cultures is less dependent to trait buying impulsiveness than the impulse buying behavior of persons from individualist cultures. The independence of a person did not show to influence collectivists' impulsive buying behaviour when again it did influence the impulse buying behaviour of individualists. Individualists were shown to do more impulse purchases if they were independent in their self-concept.

Age has a negative effect on the collectivists' impulse buying behavior starting from younger people than individualists', as the collectivists are early on strongly influenced by their collectivist cultures to control their hedonistic emotions and consider the consequences on their behavior. However, affective feelings towards impulse buying are more important a factor for impulse buying among collectivists, whose engagement in impulse buying is significantly affected by their feelings of excitement or arousal, whereas affective feelings do not have an effect on the impulse buying behavior of individualists.

All in all, Asian consumers, being from collectivist cultures, have a habit of doing less impulse purchases than individualist consumers from Caucasia, even though shopping is a major free-time activity in many East Asian countries, such as Japan, Singapore and Hong Kong. (Kacen & Lee, 2002 p.165–166)

#### **2.2.4 Consumer shopping orientation**

Previous research differentiates shoppers into utilitarian and hedonic ones. Utilitarian shoppers are task-oriented and they are focused on locating and purchasing a certain item. Hedonic shoppers are not focused on finding a specific product and they shop for pleasurable reasons. Pleasurable reasons for shopping are for instance value shopping, where a consumer is looking for discounts and so called bargain items; idea shopping, where a consumer shops to see new products and innovations; and social shopping, where a consumer enjoys socializing during shopping. (Solomon et al., 2006 p.344–345)

Prior research suggests that the kind of hedonic shoppers that enjoy browsing in a shop have a greater tendency to engage in impulse buying. Moreover, it has been shown that the actual behaviour of this kind of shoppers matches with "their self-assessed motivations, reflecting either a lax or strict criterion in purchase decisions". Furthermore, hedonic shoppers are more inaccurate on the whole in accurately finding desired items.

The reason for this is the differences in the approach towards shopping between utilitarian and hedonic shoppers. (Liu et al., 2007 p.63)

### **2.2.5 Consumer spending and economic behavior**

Certain additional external factors particular to an individual, for instance their socio-economic status, lifestyle, family background and gender also have an effect in their impulse buying behavior. “Consumers who are single, of a low socio-economic status, materialistic and/or female tend to exhibit impulse buying.” (Wu & Huan, 2010. p.3531)

Materialism is a person’s experience of value for personal possessions and it directs the person’s purchasing behavior in form of types and volumes of items he purchases. Previous research has shown that materialistic consumers have a bigger tendency to spend money than less materialistic consumers and that they show more positive attitudes towards buying luxury products on debt.

Non-spenders, as in consumers who are less materialistic and who only have little money to spend desire to keep a hold of their money and do not yearn for the ownership of items. They have an especially negative attitude toward purchasing with borrowed money. A person who takes debt is financially put into obligation of directing his future income towards shortening the debt, which non-spenders do not find convenient. In addition to that, by purchasing on debt, a person is using money he does not yet have the possession of, which is opposing to what non-spenders believe in. This, then, has a decreasing effect on their impulse buying behavior.

Then again, consumers who are less materialistic but have a great deal of money to spend are especially willing to experience. These kinds of consumers are called experiencers. They regard the act of spending money as an access to non-concrete possessions to such things like knowledge and memories, rather than as an access to actual material belongings. This fact makes them more prone to impulse buying.

On the whole, a consumer's will to protect and hold on to his money has a decreasing effect on his impulse buying behavior. A consumer's materialism has an additive effect on his impulse buying. (Troisi et al., 2006)

## **2.3 Situational factors on impulse buying behaviour**

### **2.3.1 Mood of the consumer**

A consumer's mood or physiological state when they are in a buying situation can have a great impact on their decisions of what they purchase and how they evaluate their consumptions. Stress as a physiological condition can damage the consumer's information-processing and their ability to solve problems.

The mood of a consumer is a mixture of pleasure and arousal. It defines whether a consumer reacts to the consumption situation in a positive or negative fashion. The consumer may or may not enjoy the situation, and it results in many emotional conditions. (Solomon et al., 2006 p.345)

Earlier studies have shown that positive moods have a link to spending levels of the consumers. Pleasure and arousal were shown to affect intended shopping behaviors such as the amount of time spent in the shop, interpersonal communication tendencies and the amount of money the consumer was expected to use. Pleasure state of mind is shown to have a strong influence on the level of the formerly mentioned shopping behaviors while arousal has shown to increase the level of these behaviors, making consumers spend more time in the store, make them more willing to talk with the staff and increase the risk of overspending in a pleasurable environment. The earlier studies have furthermore suggested that the positive moods of consumers have a close relationship

with their urge to do impulse purchases. (Lee & Yi, 2008 p.68) Consumers' positive mood is shown to be more important to the impulse buying behaviour than negative, while impulse buying happens under both positive and negative moods. (Kacen & Lee, 2002 p.169–170) The research of Lee and Yi however suggests that “pleasure did not have a main effect on impulse buying behavior”, whereas “arousal was a significant predictor of impulse buying”. Pleasure and arousal both were found to be a significant predictor of the intention to buy impulsively. (Lee & Yi, 2008 p.81)

### **2.3.2 Temporal factors**

The fact of how much time there is available to spend, has a direct effect on consumers' buying behavior. Consumers are more likely to be in a mood for consuming at some times than others. (Solomon et al., 2006 p.345) Time pressure is a significant factor in situations where there is less time available for consumers, or where they are starting to feel impatient with the consumption situations. In these situations consumers engage in impulse buying and just grab something to buy without consideration and evaluation of the item. This might be because the consumers do not have an adequate amount of time to consider several things. (Wu & Huan, 2010 p.3534)

Another type of time during which consumers are more likely to engage in impulse purchasing is when they for some reason have time to kill. This could happen for the reason that the consumer is waiting for a certain event to happen, such as an airplane to depart or a doctor to call their name in a waiting room. This kind of time is extra time and therefore consumers experience they have the luxury to concentrate on irrelevant things. Therefore in such situations, consumers respond better to commercial messages, even for products they normally do not use or pay attention to. (Solomon et al., 2006 p.345)



### **2.3.3 Atmospherics**

As mentioned earlier, a single store's atmospherics have a definite importance in the consumption situation. The décor, smells, colours, sounds and visual stimulation are all part of the dimensions that evoke certain effects in buyers and lead their purchasing behavior to a negative or positive direction.

Several store atmospherics have an important role in a consumer's buying behavior, colours being one of them. Light colors, such as white and light yellow convey a feeling of a lot of space and peacefulness and red tends to make consumers nervous, whereas blue conveys a calmer feeling and signs in bright colors have an ability to create excitement in consumers. (Solomon et al. 2006 p.346)

The store image also has a lot to do with what kinds of customers are likely to visit and/or end up visiting the store. Part of the stores have a very defined look and feel to them whereas a lot of stores are not after such statement with their image. The latter ones may not have anything special to make them stand out for the consumers, making it possible for them to ignore these stores. "The image of a store defines what kind of consumers it attracts. Some stores have a more distinct image while others are more of the type that blends into the crowd. These types of stores may not have any distinct features which can make them be ignored in the eyes of the consumers. The store image is then the sum of different features including location, merchandise suitability and the knowledge and congeniality of the sales personnel." (Solomon, 2006, p.355)

Particular consumption situations affect both in-store consumer behavior and consumers' store choices in the future, as the nature of preferences, behavior and expectations is altering and adoptive. Previous study suggests that a consumer chooses a store based on its physical appearance and attractiveness rather than its product quality, overall price level and assortment. Thus, visual merchandising and store image are a crucial part of a consumer's selection of a store. Consumers stay away from or leave stressful and disruptive consumption environments.

In order to increase the number of impulse purchases, retailers have to make the store environment such that the consumers do not feel negative perceptions on their impulse purchasing behavior. In addition to that, the store surroundings should serve information on excess, leading consumers to information burden and decision fatigue. (Crawford & Melewar, 2003 p.97)

#### **2.3.4 Effect of co-consumers**

The presence or absence of other customers is likely to have a positive or negative normative influence on the decision to make a purchase. However, the type of this influence depends both on awareness of the normative expectations of the individuals who utilize the influence and the motivation to fulfill these expectations. (Solomon et al., 2006 p. 344)

Consumers may identify that peers, who are probable to compensate spontaneous behavior and to search for immediate, hedonistic goals, regard impulse buying to be appropriate. In circumstances where consumers have company to their consumption situation, they might feel desired to achieve group identity and fulfill the expectations of others and thus act or think similarly as the other group members. (Wu & Huan, 2010 p.3531)

The individual's conformity grades from the impact of members of a society to them. Conformity is divided into public obedience and private acceptance. Public obedience means that individuals act in accordance with the group with the aim of getting rewards or staying away from punishments and think appropriately. Private acceptance then again means that the group affects an individual's beliefs and behavior. An individual thus accepts the group's attitudes, beliefs, values and expectations and modifies his own thoughts according to them.

People wish to be accepted and liked, and thus are accustomed by social impacts. The two types of social influences are normative and informational. Normative influence means the stress to fit in the positive anticipations of others. It can be accomplished through obedience and identification. Identification means the upkeep of good relations with the group members and making the same choices as the group to accomplish conformity with the group. Informational influence means the “tendency to accept information from others as guidance” (Wu & Huan, 2010 p. 3531) in situations where persons come across problematical or complex information and feel desirable to make their decision-making process simpler. (Wu & Huan, 2010 p.3531).

Finally, the density of people and furthermore crowds in the buying environment can have an effect on consumers’ buying behaviour by making the shopping feel too intense. Crowding of people can have negative effects to a consumer’s mood and therefore also the word crowding is used solely in situations where density in the buying environment makes his mood shift negatively. (Solomon et al. 2006 p.344–345)

### **2.3.5 Appropriateness**

A consumer’s impulsive buying behavior is affected by internal factors, such as their values and traits in accordance to existing social normative factors. In such case that a consumer regards impulse buying as a positive act, the link between impulsivity and behavior reinforces, and the consumer is more likely to do an impulse purchase. Then again if a consumer would regard impulse buying to be inappropriate in a situation, the link between impulsivity and his actual behavior fades and his impulse purchasing behavior increases. In such situation, even a highly impulsive consumer has a smaller probability to follow his urge to buy. In addition, an individual who longs materialism expresses more impulse buying behavior. (Wu & Huan, 2010 p.3531)

### 2.3.6 Tax free and sales and promotions

In purchasing situations where the consumers cannot judge quality because they do not have the knowledge to do so, price acts as a significant signal of quality. This kind of psychological approach to the pricing of items plays a special role evidently in airport tax-free stores where consumers purchase costly items in categories unfamiliar to them. In stores such as these, for instance superior malt whiskies are many times sold with a rather cheap price but buyers, who lack experience, feel attracted by overpriced blended whiskies in flashing packages.

A further feature of psychological pricing is reference prices, which consumers have in their heads in the moment of seeing a certain product. The reference price can be created by reminding existing prices, recalling former prices or evaluating the consumption situation. Retailers can manipulate consumers' reference prices by placing cheaper products beside expensive products. Such placement of the cheaper product implies that it is from the same price group as the more expensive one.

Even small differences in price can suggest product differences. Consider a stereo priced at 400 compared to one priced at 399. The actual price difference is only 1, but the psychological difference can be much greater. For example, some consumers will see the 399 as a price in the 300 range rather than the 400 range. Whereas the 399 is more likely to be seen as a bargain price, the 400 price suggests more quality. Complicated numbers, such as 347,41, also look less appealing than rounded ones, such as 350. Some psychologists argue that each digit has symbolic and visual qualities that should be considered in pricing. Thus, 8 is round and even and creates a soothing effect, whereas 7 is angular and creates a jarring effect. (Kotler, 2001 p.607)

Retailers can emphasize the rationality of impulse buying from the point of view of saving money. Tax free and sales or promotions reduce the prices of items, thus it is economically wise for consumers to purchase such items rather than regular priced ones. These items can then be for example presents for other people such as to the greeters in the traveling destination when air traveling, or Christmas or other occasion presents. For value driven consumers this might be an important factor, especially when they see the original price in comparison to the reduced one. (Crawford & Melewar, 2003 p.94)

### **2.3.7 Impulse-buy items and in-store stimuli**

Consumers' brains are not able to process everything instantly. In a store environment a consumer's eyes are continually browsing (Soars, 2003 p.635–636) and thus usually not every item can be noticed, and therefore an item should be distinctive in order for a consumer to notice it. Moreover, previous research suggests that visual merchandising promotes the consumers' impulse buying behavior. (Kim, 2003 p.18–20)

Consumers sometimes engage in in-store browsing, which means that they scan through a retailer's commodities for self-entertaining and informational reasons with no instant meaning to purchase something. Such action is an important part of impulse purchasing behavior. It is also the connection between internal and external factors of impulse buying behavior. Consumers who browse in stores make more impulse purchases than those who do not. While a consumer browses for a greater amount of time, he will be inclined to come across more stimuli. This, then again, is likely to enlarge the possibility of him experiencing urges for impulse buying. (Kim, 2003 p.14)

In-store stimuli functions as a tool for gathering information for consumers who go to a store without a shopping list or intention to buy. As soon as these consumers enter the store they get ideas to buy from around them. Thus, consumers engage in impulse buying behavior after being exposed to and influenced by in-store buying stimuli that both appeals to and creates a buying impulse in them. The likelihood for impulse buying increases with the amount of in-store stimuli, such as visual merchandising. (Kim, 2003 p.19–20)

Previous research implies that impulse buying behavior reaches to numerous product categories. (Kim, 2003 p. 20–21) In airport environment, impulse buy items are many times ordinary items which the consumer has forgotten to pack in his luggage. On the other hand they can be items which the consumer is lacking after his luggage has gone missing during the handling procedure. Also, the items offered in the stores may be such that are only available at airports, forcing consumers to delete their considering time. In travel retail it has been estimated that most impulse purchases are confectionery. 70 %

of sales in that category are approximated to result from buying impulses. (Crawford & Melewar, 2003 p.93)

“Retailer can help customers to find the right products through focused merchandising, intelligent store design and layout, and other merchandising practices, such as product displays, packaging, and signage.” (Kim, 2003 p.1) Many stores depend on impulse buyers for profit and arrange their products to make an impulse purchase more likely. (Solomon et al. 2006 p.344)

A distinctive packaging of an item can help a consumer to impulse purchase it. Packages, that are different from ordinary, can promote consumers to pick up a product from shelf and take a look on it. Tactically planned package for a product is a significant factor for making the customer buy the exact product impulsively in many cases. Distinctive shape, texture or colour can affect the consumer’s impression of a product and connect the consumer to it, acting as a pushing factor for them to impulsively buy it. (Chiappetta,2011)

## **2.4 Airport retailing**

Over 1.6 billion people take a flight every year. 33% of them take international flights. Air traveling is not regarded as a luxury for a small group of the wealthy anymore, but it has stretched out to the mass market, being financially available for more and more people. Millions of people take a flight daily and it has been predicted that air traveling will increase by 6.2 % each year in the time period of following 10 years. (Huang & Kuai, 2006 p.207)

It is a recognized fact that many purchases at airport are impulse buys, and it has been estimated that to the extent of 70 per cent of sales at airports are the result of impulse buying behavior. (Volkova, 2009 p.3) Thus, impulse buying behavior is a very important factor of airport retailing.

Previous research suggests that big-size tourist airports draw a larger number of international passengers than airports of smaller size. The commercial profits of the airports enlarge corresponding to the number of international passengers. It has been shown that business travelers use less money than travelers who are going for a vacation. In contrast, however, in cases where the boarding time does not exceed 45 minutes, business travelers are inclined to use more money. Therefore the probability for a traveler to purchase is also influenced by the amount of time he has on hand. (Volkova, 2009 p.2–3)

Airport shopping is a certain type of in-store shopping, where grocery products and apparel are positioned alongside a number of other kinds of items. The stores and other commercial businesses that are most located at the airports are shops that offer tax-free buying possibilities, stores that carry essential products for everyday use, stores that are specialized in something, restaurants and other related businesses, passenger services, free-time amusements and advertising. “The most common commercial outlet and activities found at the airport are convenience stores, specialty stores, duty-free shops, food and beverage services, passenger service facilities, leisure facilities and airport advertising or telephone services.” (Geuens et al., 2003, p.4) Thus, airport shopping can be regarded as a combination of different types of shopping, such as grocery and clothing shopping, creating different kinds of stimuli and motivations. (Geuens et al., 2003 p.4)

## **2.5 Airports as special buying environments**

Airport-shopping is regarded as a form of refreshment, offering the traveler feelings of relaxation and pleasure. In particular holiday voyagers are interested to do shopping as they have been waiting in queues for a long time and want to have a contrast to their everyday routine.

While merchants are presented with an abundance of selling opportunities at airport terminals, their special environment brings considerable challenges as well. The main

function of staying in an airport (terminal) is to catch a flight or accompany someone to his flight. The main function thus is not shopping. The consumers there might also be sensing time pressure, as they have to work in sync with their flight schedules and they are obliged to be seated in their planes upon the time of the flight's departure. In addition, the travelers' feelings may be heightened, as their journey from entering the terminal to their plane departure may contain arousing elements. (Bowes, 1999 p.209)

Airports have increased in size and the distance between check-in and boarding has extended. This has made travelers more aroused, as their intention is to reach their departure gates directly. Merchants are thus obliged to make the environment such that it reduces stress and removes difficulties to buy, while emphasizing the states of excitement and reducing boredom.

Previous research has revealed that in the airport surroundings there are two emotional swings influencing the consumers' buying behavior. First is rising stress levels, as the "consumers are out of their daily routine". The second one is rising amounts of expectation and excitement. Stress levels reduce after travelers collect their boarding passes. Simultaneously, the amount of excitement they feel stays high. (Volkova, 2009 p.4)

Previous research from Crawford and Melewar in 2003 has indicated that the passengers are most vulnerable to marketing stimuli in the area right after check-in. At this point a passenger is in the most relaxed part of his trip and usually willing to look around in the stores. Thus, stores in this area are potentially popular spots for impulse buying behavior. The marketing then again needs to be suited for many nationalities, as the passengers are from diverted backgrounds. (Crawford & Melewar, 2003 p.91)

An airport environment can generate several practical motivations for shopping, like the valuable or tax-reduced price of the products, handiness of shopping, product variety, and the quality of the products being sold. Because of the good prices of the products and the tax free offered at the shops in an airport, the consumers may be driven by price. What is more, it is very convenient for a traveler that the shops are easily accessible because of their existence near or next to the gates, allowing the consumers to shop with short notice, without the need for consideration or planning. In addition, the shops at



the airport offer many buying possibilities, as the product assortments are wide and offer both international brands and local specialty products. Generally, the quality of the products is guaranteed, as most of the products are from well-known, international brands. Consumers are more trusting towards products sold at airport shops than products sold at local souvenir shops, as the products sold at airports have to go through a quality scale. Also, in airport shops the service the customers are being offered is exceptional; it is fast and professional and the personnel is able to communicate in several languages.

Experiential motivations are an important reason for airport shopping for consumers who are shopping because of the atmosphere and the environment. In these cases, the purchase decisions are made more based on the atmosphere than the product, which they are buying, itself. Moreover, shopping and ambling around the airport can be sort of a ritual that gives travelers a feeling of being part of the cosmopolitan flair that is present in the international airport environment.

Airport shopping may cause motivations that are connected to the traveling process. These motivations may be the fact that the traveler fancies to get away from their day-to-day routine, leading their buying behavior to notably differ from their buying behavior in their everyday life. (Geuens et al., 2003 p.5)

The hypotheses therefore go

1. Temporal factors have an effect on consumers' impulse buying behaviour in an international airport environment
2. Promotions in prices attract impulse purchases at airports

### **3 METHODS**

### 3.1 Chosen method of research

The chosen method of research was to use focus group interviews, where the participants of two focus groups of five people were asked 12 questions about their impulse buying behavior at airport environment. In this qualitative research method the participants could freely provide any type of answers to the questions and the answers were not limited to certain options. Free discussion was also encouraged in order to find new and surprising opinions about the topic. The decision of using focus group interviews to gather results for the study came naturally, as usually focus groups provide more and more detailed information than quantitative research, such as surveys. The participants could also be asked follow-up questions and they could ask for clarification in situations where they did not understand the question completely. This all was perfect, as not only the topic of research still had a lot to be discovered about, but also the participants remained energetic and responsive throughout the whole interview, which might not have been the case if they had taken a survey, which provides no interaction and is not responsive.

The results of the research were gathered using focus group interviews of two groups which in total had 10 people, 5 in each group. All of the participants were chosen because of their similarity in order to validate results. All of the participants were previously known to the author and were contacted between casual interactions to ask whether they would like to participate in one of the two focus group interviews regarding a study about impulse buying behaviour at airports. It was stated that participation was voluntary but none of the contacted persons said no and it seemed to be quite the opposite as all of the participants showed interest and excitement in being part of the study. All of the participants to the focus group interviews are single men aged 22–25, academically educated in similar areas of work and have a medium to high income. The participants are from similar cultural backgrounds, all of them from individualist cultures – in focus group 1, four participants were from Finland and one from England and in focus group 2 all of the participants were from England. The participants of the focus groups were chosen to be from individualistic cultures, because as discussed on pages 12–13 of this thesis, Kacen & Lee (2002) suggested that people from collectivistic cul-

tures make less impulse purchases and consider the in-group in their decision-making, making people from the individualistic cultures a more sensible choice for this research. The participants were chosen to be male in order to research the topic on a gender specific aspect as well. The participants were chosen to be men instead of women because women are often regarded as more impulsive and the author was interested to see how impulsively men behaved with their purchasing behavior when the environment was airports. The participants' income was important not to be too low, as that could significantly reduce both their travelling frequency and buying power. Furthermore it was required the participants visited airports regularly. Previous research also suggests younger people are more prone to impulse buying behavior than older people, which makes it ideal to have the medium age of the focus groups relatively low.

The focus group interviews were held on two different days in a closed meeting room and they both lasted for 1.5 hours. The 12 interview questions were prepared by the author prior to the interviews and were tested on 2 separate voluntary test persons before the focus group interviews to make sure the questions worked the way they were supposed to. The 12 questions were prepared regarding the previous research about impulse buying behavior and airport shopping, mentioned previously in the theory part of this thesis. Moreover the questions aimed to study how the focus groups impulse shop at airports and how situational factors influence their impulse buying behavior at airports. The participants showed clear pattern with their answers while it has to be mentioned none of the participants dominated the discussions. The discussion was recorded with a cellular phone recording device and main points were written down on a laptop word editing program. Results were then analyzed and written out.

## **3.2 Questions for focus groups**

### **Questions for focus groups**

Research groups were asked to think about their impulse buying behavior at airports and then asked the following questions.

Q1. From which product categories do you impulse purchase at airport? (Confectionery, liquors, cosmetics etc.) From which most? *This question was asked to see what the consumers actually purchase by impulse. Impulse-buy items/airport retailing.*

Q2. Do you impulse purchase at airport for yourself or for others as gift? If for others, please define your relationship to them. (e.g. child, parent, significant other, friend...) *This question was asked to see what the focus groups buy and who they buy for from airports.*

Q3. If you have extra time/waiting time at airport, what do you most likely do? Do you impulse buy at airports to avoid boredom? *This question was asked to see whether the focus groups do impulse purchases at airport in order to avoid boredom. Temporal factors.*

Q4. When experiencing time pressure at airport (if you are in a hurry to catch a flight) do you make impulse purchases or do you only make planned purchases, if any? *This question was asked to see whether the focus groups do impulse purchases when experiencing time pressure at airport. Temporal factors.*

Q5. Do promotions (in prices) have an increasing effect on your impulse purchasing behavior (at airport)? *Promotions and tax-free/in-store stimuli.*

Q6. Please describe in what kind of stores you impulse purchase in airport environment. Are they soothing or exciting? What makes you enter a store? (Soothing means light colours, relaxing music, exciting is bright colours and fast music) *Atmospherics.*

Q7. How do you shop at airports: a. before check-in b. right after check-in c. next to my departure gate d. on my journey to my departure gate? *Airport as a special buying environment*

Q8. Does the sales staff at airport stores make you impulse purchase (in ways such as by providing information overload or by creating pressure to buy)? In what way? *Airport as special buying environment, Situational factors*

Q9. Do you feel like your impulse buying behavior at airport differs from your impulse shopping behavior elsewhere? How? *Airport as a special buying environment*

Q10. Do you feel like you are supposed to buy something at airport (for reasons such as it would be common behavior or your companions are making purchases)? *Effect of co-consumers, Appropriateness, Airport as a special buying environment*

Q11. Do you go through (fly from/to) certain airports more than others? If yes, which airports and how does it affect your impulse buying behavior in those airports? *Airport as a special buying environment*

Q12. Does it affect whether you are going/coming?

The focus groups were then encouraged to add any additional comments and asked if they have any questions.

## **4 RESULTS**

Both focus groups showed clear patterns with their answers and were mostly united with their answers. The results from these focus groups differed from earlier research in this area of – the focus groups showed different results from earlier research with their reactions to temporal factors. The focus group participants gave similar answers regardless their nationality (Finnish or English), which was a significant finding. The results suggest that the similar cultural backgrounds and ages, not to mention their same sex, play a bigger part in the similarity of the answers. Results to each question will follow.

Different participants stated impulse buying from different product categories, but a popular category for impulse buying seemed to be liquor products, books and food. The conclusion can be made that liquor products are a popular category for impulse purchases for the focus groups. The popularity of liquor products might be explained with the participants' sex and age, but because no females or different age groups were researched, no clear answer can be found. Whereas this finding will not direct the research into any direction. Unlike in Volkova's research (2007), where it was approximated that 70% of the purchases in confectionery at airports were result of buying impulses, none of the participants of this research impulse buy from that category. The reason may lie beneath the participants' age and also link to the participants' answers to question 2, where the participants reveal they only impulse buy for themselves from airports. Confectionery is a product category of which products are oftentimes bought as gift for others. The fact that the participants only impulse buy for themselves at airports would make a strong link to that and give a reason why this research gives a very different result to Volkova's finding.

As stated briefly in previous paragraph, all participants' answers unite for question 2, which enquires who they impulse buy items at airports for. All of the participants stated to only impulse buying for themselves. This shows they do not try to ease their guilt of travelling by buying souvenirs for their friends and family. This lead to conclusion their impulse buying behavior only links to their own desires. This might have to do with their age, and suggest they are at a selfish point at their lives, where they are not married and/or do not think of others when browsing through stores.

The results about the participants' reactions for temporal factors, and firstly, time pressure, at airports in relation to their impulse buying behavior, then, showed significant results. Both focus groups agreed that they do not engage in impulse buying behavior when experiencing time pressure at airports. Most of them said they do not make any purchases when experiencing time pressure, while only one participant from focus group 2 said that he only makes planned purchases when experiencing time pressure at airports. This was new, as Wu & Huan's (2010) earlier research suggests people are more likely to do impulse buying purchases at airport when experiencing time pressure,

for reason that their judgment wavers and they make rash buying decisions. The participants' thoughts however only linger around catching the plane when experiencing time pressure at airports, which suggests it would be more sensible to have longer waiting times at airports, when wanting to promote more impulse buying behaviour between the focus groups.

The answers are somewhat unexpected regarding waiting time at airports, as well. A lot of the participants of both focus groups mentioned sitting down when having time to kill at airports, rather than browsing through the stores. About half of each focus group however answered that they also browse through stores when experiencing boredom at airports, and also admit to engage in impulse buying behavior simultaneously. A large number of the participants specifically admitted to impulse purchasing food when experiencing boredom at airports. Participant of focus group 1 said: *"Food is my best vice regarding impulse buying definitely. At airport and also elsewhere."* A participant from focus group 2 then said: *"If I have a few hours I'm likely to impulse purchase."* The answers from both focus groups lead to the result that regarding temporal factors, lack of time significantly reduces or eliminates the focus groups' impulse buying behavior whereas waiting time has a moderate increasing effect on it.

Promotions in prices and tax free have an increasing effect on the impulse buying behavior of all the participants of the focus groups, and specifically promotions in prices of alcohol products get both focus groups hooked in impulse buying behaviour. A participant from focus group 2 stated: *"Yes. To a degree. I use what's left in foreign currency for impulse purchases, therefore I go for slightly cheaper options."* This is a new angle and reinforces the idea that promotions attract impulse purchases. What is more, the comment about going for cheaper options because of the desire to use up the remaining foreign currency, is interesting and provides a new point to think about.

The store environment of the airport stores does not prove to have an effect on the impulse buying behavior of the participants while the actual products of the store rule. A participant from focus group 1 said: *"It's nice if it has a nice environment but it doesn't really change my going if I see that they have for example some nice-looking buns being sold."* A participant from focus group 2 said similarly: *"I usually rather look for pro-*

*motions and the location of the store is more important than the store environment.*” It can be seen that the actual products and location actually matter that much more than the store environment of the stores at airport. In earlier research it was suggested that airport visitors actually long for soothing store environments, as airplane traveling, including queuing, is stressing for the travelers and for that reason they prefer soothing store environments at airport in order to calm their nerves. It might have to do again with the respondents’ age and sex, that they do not care about the store environment and it would be a logical explanation.

Regarding the location of the airport stores, expectedly none of the participants said that they impulse purchase before check-in. All of them said they impulse purchase after check-in, mostly near their departure gate or straight after check-in, but several of them wanted to specify that they actually impulse purchase after going through security, not only after check-in. A participant from focus group 2 showed a reason: *“I feel a lot more at ease after going through security, because the only thing I have left to do is to actually catch my plane. If I have stores other than for women near my gate I will go in and browse, probably impulse buying.”* There is also another reason for this behaviour, as provided by a participant from focus group 1: *“There are not even a lot of shops before security. And they don’t have tax free there so it doesn’t make much sense.”* This comment links to the answers of question five, where promotions show to be important for the focus groups’ impulse buying behaviour at airports. The reason from the participant of focus group 1 links to Volkova’s (2007) earlier research, where it was suggested that airport travelers are more likely to buy straight after check-in, even though in this case it is straight after completing security.

The behavior of sales staff does not show to have an increasing effect on any of the participants’ impulse buying behavior at airports. It seems to rather be quite the opposite, as one of the participants stated: *“Definitely not at least I don’t think so. I just get annoyed if they come to babble. Which in worst case scenario leads to me leaving even though I otherwise would’ve bought the item.”* Other participants agreed: *“I try to avoid sales personnel when going to stores.”* and *“The sales personnel don’t have any effect on my impulse buying behavior. I do not succumb to pressure from salesmen. I tell them I don’t need help.”* Earlier research from Baumeister (2002) supports the opposite



which makes this an opposing finding. The focus groups clearly do not give in to any sort of pressure or information overload given by the store personnel of airport stores, which shows the store personnel could create a negative effect on airport travelers' impulse purchasing behaviour at that environment.

The focus groups' impulse buying behaviour seems to be different at the airports than elsewhere because the airports have different products available. A participant from focus group 2 said: *"At airports I impulse buy products not available in the UK and use remaining currency that I have left from that trip."* Other participants in group 2 agreed: *"Yes, I try to use up currency."* A participant from focus group 2 provided an interesting opinion: *"Maybe I do it more elsewhere because the choice is better outside the airport. The shopping options at airport are in the end pretty limited."*

None of the participants of either of the groups admitted to giving in to peer pressure at airports, whereas earlier research suggests that airports as special buying environments tend to have a holiday feeling to it which might make the customers more likely to make impulse purchases because they would be feeling peer pressure to do so. This might be due to the generation and culture the participants of the focus groups are. In the specific generation of the focus group participants, flight traveling is not seen big a thing and people are familiar with it. Because of that, the respondents probably do not feel the need to observe the public at the airports in order to know how to behave and/or mimic the others. While that may be the reason, some respondents to the focus groups also provided other answers to the question: *"No. Peer pressure doesn't affect on me. I do not give in to peer pressure."*, which could mean all of the focus group participants like to think only about themselves when making decisions, as suggested in the results of question 2, where the participants were only seen to impulse purchase for themselves at airports.

The frequency of the participants' visits to a certain airport reduces their impulse buying behaviour at those airports, while they tend to make only planned purchases at those airports, if any. This would lead to show the participants to the focus groups do not browse in the stores of familiar airports and/or do not feel the desire to impulse buy at

those airports. They are familiar with the product assortment of those airports and only make planned purchases. This makes sense showing that newness plays a big part in increasing the focus groups' impulse buying behaviour at airport environment.

Finally, the participants of both focus groups showed a clear pattern what comes to whether they make impulse purchases on going or returning to/from their destination. Both focus groups agreed they only make impulse purchases at airports at the airport from where their return flight. A participant from focus group 2 summarised their thoughts: *"I would never buy anything when going, only when coming back because what's the point."* while a participant from focus group 1 also said *"I know then a bit then how much money I have left when I'm returning from a trip and I don't have to carry my impulse purchases for the whole duration of the trip."*

## **5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The claimed peer pressure at airport does not seem to have a persuading effect on the impulse buying behavior of the focus groups, as expected. In the theory part of this thesis it was mentioned that the general atmosphere at airports creates pressure to buy things but the focus groups do not feel such pressure, because of their generation and/or personalities. Also this might have to do with the persons from the focus groups being from individualist cultures, where not much attention is given to in-group opinions and norms. This is also interesting, because such a clear pattern can be seen from all of the focus group participants.

Temporal factors do not have a significant increasing effect on the participants' impulse buying behaviour at airports. The only time this happens is in situations where there is extra time available, whereas when sensing time pressure, none of the focus group participants make impulse purchases. That is contrasting to the research done before, as time pressure has seen to increase the level of impulse buying behaviour in consumers.

What comes to the expectation of the promotions in prices increasing the focus groups' impulse buying behaviour, that rings true. Promotions and tax free in the price of alcohol products attracts both focus groups for impulse purchases at airports. The age and/or sex could be the reason but it cannot be validated as all of the participants of the focus groups were similar between each other and thereas this research only applies to Finnish and English men from the age range of 22–25.

The participants of the focus groups only impulse buy for themselves from airports, which leads the author to the conclusion that because of their age and marital status the participants are still in a quite selfish point of their lives and because of that they only think about themselves when making impulse purchases at airports, which conclusion links to the fact that the focus groups do not give in to peer pressure at airports.

The store environment of the airport stores interestingly does not have an effect on the impulse buying behaviour of the focus groups, while the products of the stores rule their impulse buying behaviour. The location of the airport stores, however, is important to be after the security, either right after it or next to the departure gate of the participants. This is important as the participants feel more at ease after security and more secure with the time being left. The locations after security and next to their departure gates are convenient and make it easy for the participants to visit a store and browse.

The sales staff in the airport stores only has a repelling effect on the participants of the focus groups and they tend to avoid the help of the personnel. In worst case scenario a sure impulse purchase gets cancelled because the participant gets irritated by the sales assistant.

A way in which the focus groups' impulse buying behaviour at airports is also different from their impulse buying behaviour elsewhere is that they react to the fact airports

have different products available from the stores outside of the airport. It is popular to buy products not available in the home country and to use up any remaining currency to make impulse purchases, but also some of the participants state not to impulse purchase at airport as much as elsewhere because there are less products available at airports than in normal shops.

Finally, if the participants of the focus groups visit a certain airport more, they do not make impulse purchases at those airports. The familiarity of the stores of those airports makes the focus groups also familiar with the product assortments of those stores, making them not likely to browse in those stores and decreasing their impulse buying behaviour drastically.

It needs to be noted that the results only show patterns of the two focus groups of unmarried academically educated men in the age range from 22–25 in medium- to highly paid jobs from Finland and England and if results from other groups of people are desired a new research should be made. The results show habits of impulse buying behaviour of young males from individualist cultures in an airport environment.

The author was surprised to learn that the focus groups do not respond to different kind of store environments at airports and that the temporal factors do not have a bigger effect on their impulse buying behaviour. As the author expected, the focus groups show impulse buying behaviour when returning from their trips instead of when starting their trips. Expectedly, as well, promotions in prices and tax free have an increasing effect on the focus groups' impulse buying behaviour and the location of the airport stores seems to be popular after the security check. It was pleasant to notice how much the participants agreed in their opinions of their impulse buying behaviour at airport environment.

Furthermore, the hypothesis for the research were; 1. Temporal factors have an effect on consumers' impulse buying behaviour at international airport environment and 2. Promotions in prices attract impulse purchases at airport environment. Hypothesis 1 proved to be true, as when experiencing time pressure at airports, the focus groups' impulse

buying behaviour is eliminated completely, and when experiencing boredom with too much time to use, the focus groups show increasing impulse buying habits. This is an attractive finding and may make it more attractive for airline industry to try to make the waiting times longer at airports in order to promote higher amount of impulse buying behaviour. This finding might also be attractive for further research.

Hypothesis 2 rings true and especially regarding promotions and tax free prices in alcohol products. The airline stores certainly give a lot of promotions to alcohol products and this research gives more support for this behaviour. Surprisingly, a big reason for falling for promotions with impulse purchases, is that the focus groups have foreign currency left from their trip. This finding is really positive and continues to support the hypothesis.

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