



IMPULSIVE BEHAVIOUR OF CUSTOMERS IN LARGE-FORMAT GROCERY SHOPS IN POLAND – A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

The growing wealth of the Polish population noted in the recent years has led to a significant change in the behaviour of Poles as consumers. Increasingly often, the type and volume of purchases are dictated not only by real and objective reasons but also by impulse buying. In consequence, any retail outlet frequented by consumers to make purchases is no longer a place where thoroughly planned purchases are made, but a site where consumer needs are created by marketing activities. They are therefore a significant instrument of creating some influence on the consumer at the point of sale and multiplying the entrepreneur's revenue, which is particularly important in large retail grocery shops, where an average Pole buys most groceries. The study showed that the most significant determinants of impulse buying are the age and sex of consumers. Young people display quite a high level of impulse consumption. Because of their age, they do not attach much importance to planning expenses, which frequently leads to irrational spending. Impulse purchases are more often made by women, who most often do grocery shopping. Women also spend more time in shops than men do. As a result, they are more exposed to merchandising activities carried out in retail outlets. It has been noticed that the atmosphere in a shop and the consumer's mood while shopping have a significant impact on how much the consumer will buy. The amounts of products bought tend to increase when the consumer's mood is extreme (very good / very bad). It was also observed that a higher level of unplanned and impulse purchases is achieved by households with higher income, which in general allows them to buy more. The volume of unplanned and impulse purchases is distinctly higher in supermarkets and hypermarkets, which implicates much greater opportunities to use marketing strategies stimulating this type of purchases in such large shops than in small local shops.

ZACHOWANIA IMPULSYWNE KLIENTÓW WIELKOPOWIERZCHNIOWYCH SKLEPÓW SPOŻYWCZYCH W POLSCE – STUDIUM PRZYPADKU

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Abstrakt

Wzrost zamożności polskiego społeczeństwa obserwowany w ostatnich latach doprowadził do istotnej zmiany zachowań konsumpcyjnych Polaków. Coraz częściej rodzaj i wolumen realizowanych zakupów nie jest zdeterminowany jedynie na podstawie realnych i obiektywnych przesłanek, lecz także wynika z „potrzeb chwili”. Tym samym placówka handlowa, w której są realizowane zakupy, przestaje być tylko i wyłącznie miejscem, gdzie możliwa jest realizacja zakupów przemyślanych i planowanych, ale coraz częściej staje się miejscem, w którym potrzeby są kreowane przez działania marketingowe. Stają się więc one istotnym narzędziem oddziaływania na klienta w miejscu sprzedaży oraz instrumentem wpływającym na zwielokrotnienie zysku przedsiębiorcy, co ma bardzo duże znaczenie, szczególnie w wielkopowierzchniowych sklepach handlu detalicznego, w których jest realizowanych większość zakupów przeciętnego Polaka. Przeprowadzone badania wskazują, że najistotniejszymi determinantami zachowań impulsywnych jest wiek oraz płeć. Osoby młode prezentują dość wysoki poziom konsumpcji impulsywnej. Takie jednostki ze względu na wiek nie przykładają dużej wagi do planowania wydatków, co skutkuje często nieracjonalnym wydawaniem pieniędzy. Skala zakupów pod wpływem impulsu w dużo większym stopniu dotyczy kobiet niż mężczyzn, które najczęściej zajmują się zakupami spożywczymi. Kobiety spędzają więcej czasu w sklepach niż mężczyźni. Konsekwencją jest to, że właśnie one są najbardziej narażone na działania merchandisingowe prowadzone w placówkach handlowych. Zauważono, że istotny wpływ na poziom zakupów (szczególnie nieplanowanych i dokonywanych pod wpływem impulsu) ma nastrój i samopoczucie klienta podczas wizyty w placówce handlowej. Ich poziom wzrasta szczególnie, gdy nastrój konsumenta przyjmuje skrajne pozycje (bardzo dobry/bardzo zły). Zauważono także, że więcej zakupów nieplanowanych i dokonywanych pod wpływem impulsu jest realizowanych przez gospodarstwa domowe lepiej sytuowane, których budżet pozwala na większe zakupy w ogóle. Wielkość zakupów nieplanowanych i impulsywnych jest zdecydowanie większa w przypadku sklepów wielkopowierzchniowych, co wskazuje na dużo większe możliwości stosowania działań marketingowych stymulujących sprzedaż bardziej w takich placówkach niż w małych sklepach osiedlowych.

Introduction

Everyone feels certain needs that they want to satisfy. According to economic theory, such needs are unlimited, while the resources which can be the basis for meeting the demand are limited (Solow, 1974, p. 257-276; Sobczyk, 2018, p. 172; Pasek, 2019, p. 62-63; Rudzewicz *et al.*, 2021, p. 15). Needs arise from an individual hierarchy of what each person needs, which

was underlined by Abraham Maslow in the 1940s (1943, p. 370-396). Maslow's model of a hierarchy of needs is composed of five levels, from physiological needs at the bottom to self-actualization at the top of the pyramid. Satisfying the needs of a lower level leads to the creation of new, higher-level needs (Maslow, 1943, p. 370-396; Szykuła-Piec, 2018, p. 282). The lowest rung on this ladder of needs refers to basic physiological needs, such as to satiate hunger or thirst, to have enough sleep, etc. These are the conditions that enable the survival of a human organism. Having satisfied these needs, an individual begins to feel higher-order needs, of which the need to ensure safety and security comes next (having a roof over one's head, permanent employment, comfortable remuneration system, health insurance, etc.). Ensuring security reduces fear and anxiety, which are a source of confusion in life and interfere with one's proper functioning. The needs of belonging and love are shared by nearly everyone from birth to adulthood, and are a consequence of living in society. Social contacts are essential for man, who needs acknowledgement and respect. The wish to satisfy these needs is rooted in one's desire to be accepted in a group. Satisfying the needs of this level means that one can feel wanted and useful. As a result, self-confidence increases and so does the motivation for further actions. If these needs are not satisfied, this situation has a destructive impact of an individual, leading to the sense of low self-esteem, helplessness and inferiority. The uppermost order of needs in Maslow's hierarchy is assigned to the need of self-actualization. This need appears in a range of different forms and intensities among people. The self-actualization need is a drive to act. It not only leads to greater independence and self-confidence, but also entails one's willingness to help others, which means that all society benefits from people being able to satisfy their needs of this order (Maslow, 1943, p. 370-396; Pasterski, 2016, p. 76-78).

Clayton Alderfer's (1969, p. 142-175) ERG theory is based on a concept similar to that of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Both authors claim that people are motivated to act by the needs they have not yet satisfied. According to Alderfer, people feel needs constantly and dynamically. In contrast to Maslow's theory, which presumes the hierarchical order of needs, the essence of the ERG theory is that it allows for simultaneous occurrence of various needs. Alderfer also maintains that not being able to satisfy higher-order needs motivates an individual to make greater efforts to satisfy lower-order needs, thus emphasizing the return to satisfying more basic needs. The ERG theory identifies three groups of needs: existence needs, relatedness needs, and growth needs. The existence needs encompass physiological and material needs, such as food, water, security or permanent employment. Relatedness refers to the desire to make and maintain interpersonal contacts, which enables one to gain respect. The growth needs include the desire to progress to one's ideal self – and these needs were defined by Maslow as higher-order ones, placed on the two uppermost levels of his hierarchy (Acquah *et al.*, 2021, p. 25-29; Furnham, 2008, Gao 2022, p. 1106-1112; Miller-Zawodniak, 2012, p. 110, 111; Szykuła-Piec, 2018, p. 281, 282).

A detailed analysis of high-order needs was carried out by David McClelland (1961), who distinguished three groups: achievements, affiliations and power. The first group encompasses the needs of an individual to distinguish from others, to make progress and achievements. In that case, work can be a value in itself and becomes more important than remuneration. People who feel such needs tend to assume more responsibility for their actions. According to McClelland, a given need can be instilled in an employee through a set of influences and experiences. Another need identified in this theory is affiliation, which refers to the sense of belonging to a group. The key is to gain approval. Emotions of the loved ones are important enough for an individual to make concessions. In order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of an employee, it is recommended to promote cooperation between all employees, e.g. group work, in addition to which tasks delegated to employees should call for creativity and flexibility. The third type of needs defined by McClelland is called the need of power. One can attempt to satisfy this need by making decisions, directing or supervising the work of others (Arnold *et al.*, 2005; McClelland, 1961; McClelland & Johnson, 1984; Miller-Zawodniak, 2012, p. 113-115).

According to Frederic Herzberg's (1969) two-factor theory, an individual strives to satisfy needs from two areas. One group comprises so-called hygiene factors, connected to the environment in which one carries out tasks and fulfils one's duties. These factors include relationships with employees, honesty and competence of employers, interpersonal relations, remuneration, intangible benefits, work versus personal life, physical surroundings of the job. When these needs are satisfied, a person feels greater motivation to perform their duties. The other group encompasses internal factors, which define one's positive or negative interpretation of activities or tasks. When a given activity is perceived positively, it yields the sense of satisfaction, pleasure and fulfilment. A person who feels such motivational factors experiences self-actualization and their actions become purposeful. When some activities are perceived negatively, the functioning of a person in the environment becomes distorted. The set of motivational factors includes: recognition, achievements, responsibilities, promotions, development opportunities, skills and competences, and work. Both groups of factors are closely correlated (Herzberg, 1969; Hitt *et al.*, 2017; Szykuła-Piec, 2018, p. 280, 281).

Douglas McGregor, who created Theory X and Theory Y (1960), pointed to two types of human personality and consequently different weights attached to particular needs by the different types of people. Type X stands for a lazy person, who avoids work, is unambitious, dependent on others, denounces any responsibility and needs supervision. One who identifies oneself as type X will work solely to satisfy basic needs. Type X performs their duties passively and tries to avoid punishment. On the other hand, type Y refers to ambitious people, willing to work and having a set goal, which is achievable owing to their employment. Work for type Y is not seen as an obstacle; on the contrary, it is perceived as a natural process. A type Y employee can make decisions independently,

organize their work duties, and supervise their performance. In reality, the division of people's behaviour as falling into the two types proposed by McGregor is highly unlikely to occur. Employees can naturally display characteristics of both types over different time periods (McGregor, 1960; Miller-Zawodniak, 2012, p. 111-113; Ciekanowski, 2017, p. 136).

Consumer behaviour encompasses the entirety of actions and perceptions, including one's preparation for making a choice, the actual moment of decision making, and consumption. Consumer behaviour as well as decisions are shaped under the influence of a multitude of factors, and therefore their choices are highly varied. Considering the pace of making a purchasing decision, these are divided into four types, i.e. based on extensive decision making, limited decision making, routine response, and impulsive buying (Rudzewicz, 2018, p. 21).

Extensive decision making entails a long time over which choices are made. The consumer participates in all phases of a decision-making process. The subject of the process are the goods that the prospective buyer has little purchasing experience with. The decision-related risk is high but the time for making a decision is relatively long. The goods typically bought this way are real estate, cars, etc. Limited decision making takes less time than extensive one. Same as before, the consumers progresses through all decision-making steps. However, the purchasing experience is greater because such goods have been acquired before, hence the risk is lower. Such choices are made when someone buys a TV-set or another car. Routine response relies on one's routine behaviour and experience. The decision maker does not pass through all decision-making phases. The time for making a decision is short and the risk low. Examples are decisions to buy a newspaper, groceries, etc. The factors shaping one's decision are a low price or intensive advertising. A characteristic of routine purchases is where these decisions are made, and most often it is the point of sale, which means the purchase is made without prior planning (Rudzewicz, 2018, p. 21, 22).

Purchases made on impulse are to be understood as buying products with certain characteristics: low price, mass produced, sold by self-service, promoted via comprehensive advertising and precise presentation at the point of sale, small size, and trouble-free storage. Impulse buying depends on both the marketing activities and individual characteristics of a consumer. Rook believes that "impulse buying occurs when a consumer experiences a sudden, often powerful and persistent urge to buy something immediately. The impulse to buy is hedonically complex and may stimulate an emotional conflict. Also, impulse buying is prone to occur with diminished regard to its consequences" (Rook, 1987, p. 190).

Impulse buying is often considered synonymous with unplanned buying. However, this is a gross oversimplification. Unplanned buying occurs when a consumer had previously decided what they wanted to buy and then would buy something else. This may or may not be due to an impulse decision. Unplanned purchases are commonly associated with negative activities. However, considerable profits can be achieved from unplanned purchases if the consumer controls their

behaviour. In many cases, the consumer does not receive precise information on products until they arrive at the point of sale, which can lead to making a decision to buy a particular product based on that insight. The lack of interest in an alternative range of goods can prevent the consumer from learning about other products, which may satisfy specific needs better (Falkowski & Tyszko, 2009, p. 275).

An impulse-driven consumer can be defined as one who enjoys shopping and who makes purchases on the spur of the moment. They feel benefits from shopping and tend to buy more than planned. People who are inclined to impulse buying feel a close bond to the proximity of goods, which influences their decisions. Such consumers also like new products, hence their shopping lists are not strictly controlled. Impulsive behaviour manifests itself differently in each person. It depends on every consumer's individual characteristics, his or her self-control, or on the intensity of stimuli (Gašiorowska, 2003, p. 13-20; Gašiorowska, 2013, p. 9). The factors that influence impulse buying can be divided into:

- individual variables, which create the buyer's propensity to buy on impulse;
- individual and situation-related factors, which influence the way a stimulus is perceived by a consumer;
- moderating factors, also stimulating the consumer's satisfaction.

People who are driven by emotions are often willing to buy more expensive or useless goods so as to satisfy their desires. The inclination to make purchases under the influence of emotions is considered to be a reflection of an individual's overall impulsiveness. A person who is highly likely to act on impulse often makes thoughtless, reckless decisions, disregarding consequences. Such people can also be seen as immature and irrational, who are prone to taking risk. Their decisions are characterised by high probability of being burdened by error.

High sensitivity to stimuli and the propensity to act on the spur of the moment characterise in particular the people who go shopping for relaxation and pleasure. For them, shopping is a form of entertainment, pleasant pastime and frequent activity. They often go shopping regardless of their material needs, and devote much time to this activity. Practice shows that these are more often women. Furthermore, women more often than men do daily shopping. As a result, they are more likely to come into contact with goods one can buy on impulse. When shopping, they often stroll slowly through a shop, compare products, pay attention to special offers and frequently enjoy shopping. Men are far less likely to do shopping. Also, they behave differently in shops. They most often pass through a shop quickly and decisively, looking for a specific product which they have previously decided to buy.

The consumer's emotions and mood have a significant impact on creating a situation in which impulse buying happens. Positive emotions lead to such impulse buying decisions far more often. However, negative emotions can also influence a consumer's decisions. By buying a product, the consumer may expect

to improve their mood. On the other hand, if negative emotions flare up, any desire to make purchases can be stifled.

The consumer can also be influenced by the atmosphere in a shop. It is perceived by such senses as sight, hearing, smell and, sporadically, taste. Hence, the layout of a sales area and arrangement of product play an important role, as it can evoke positive emotions, which encourage consumers to buy more. These are known as merchandising activities, the aim of which is to present the products and highlight their features in such a way as to attract the consumer's attention and encourage purchase decisions.

Research Aim and Object

Higher likelihood of unplanned or impulse buying is observed when larger shopping is done, for example weekly or monthly purchases. Spending extra money is less obvious when someone is buying more goods at a time (Gąsiorowska, 2003, p. 13-20). When someone goes to the shops in order to buy a few missing products, they are less vulnerable to marketing activities and thus more unlikely to make unplanned or impulse purchases. Therefore, it seemed reasonable to conduct a study regarding impulsive behaviour of customers in supermarkets and hypermarkets, where consumers most often make large purchases. This study was carried out in large-format grocery shops in the warmińsko-mazurskie province in Poland. The principal tool was a survey addressed to inhabitants of this province. Additionally, secondary data which characterised the households submitted to the study were derived from Statistics Poland. The respondents were divided into six age categories. Most were between 20 and 25 years of age (57%), followed by those between 26-35 (20%), and 36-45 years old (5%). Most live in a city with the population of over 100,000 (35%), or towns with up to 50,000 inhabitants (31%). Among the respondents, the dominant share of households consisted of two persons (41%), declaring the monthly net income of PLN 1,000 – 2,000 (33%) or 2,000 – 3,000 (26%) per person.

Results

The study showed that the population of the warmińsko-mazurskie province saw themselves as people largely succumbing to emotions (86%). 80% of the respondents admitted to making unplanned purchases. It is worth emphasising that the volume of purchases made on impulse is larger among women, who more often than men do grocery shopping (94%). Female consumers also more often consider shopping as a form of entertainment. Women spend more time in the shops than men, and more often perceive shopping as a pleasure rather than a duty. They are also more inclined to go shopping in order to improve

mood or to indulge themselves. In consequence, women are more exposed to merchandising activities carried out in retail outlets.

Based on the survey results, it is possible to conclude that impulse buying decisions are more often made by people aged 20-25 years. Unplanned purchases are least often made by consumer over 35 years old. A possible reason is that older consumers have more life experience and appreciate the value of money. Younger adults tend to cherish a high level of impulse consumption. Because of their young age, they do not pay much attention to planning their expenses, which frequently leads to some unreasonable spending.

Although women most often make unplanned purchases and are far more exposed to the risk of buying goods on the spur of the moment, they are also the ones who most often plan their expenses by making shopping lists. The survey revealed that it is the consumer's sex that is the only statistically significant factor in this respect (Tab. 1). Usually, women are responsible for buying groceries, and at the same time tend to have better knowledge of the household's current needs. 33% of the respondents buy only the products from their shopping list, while 70% claim that they make shopping lists but buy some other products. The respondents who do not make shopping lists and do not use such lists of necessary products prepared in advance composed 22% of the whole population surveyed.

Table 1
Statistics of relationships between the group of respondents making shopping lists and basic variables characterising respondents

Specification	A person doing the shopping			
	χ^2	df	P	Cramér's V
Sex	13.93127	3	0.00300	0.3625287
Age	7.476727	12	0.82457	0.1533353
Education	11.77715	9	0.22617	0.1924449
Place of residence	15.59148	9	0.07592	0.2214267
Occupation	7.954169	9	0.53877	0.1581553
Position/status in a household	4.579869	6	0.59871	0.1469801
Number of persons in a household	13.68437	18	0.74942	0.2094282
Number of own or foster children in a household	13.89291	12	0.30760	0.2173816
Monthly (net) income	12.46923	15	0.64322	0.1980187

Source: the author, based on the study results.

Making a shopping list does not exclude unplanned purchases. Adhering closely to the previously drawn list is predominantly typical of men. Despite planning ahead, women very often either buy products outside the shopping list or buy more products than planned. This, however, does not indicate that they are spendthrift or inconsistent; in fact, women are flexible in their search

for special offers or price discounts, which help them save money, although consequently the shopping basket may contain other products than planned.

It is also worth noting that women spend much longer in the shop when making purchases, they stroll more slowly along the aisles, and this enables them to gain better knowledge of the arrays of products available in a given shop and to spot more attractively priced alternative products. It also allows them to find the products which, although not on their shopping list, can be indispensable in the household, which means that they were absent from the shopping list not because they should have been added to it but because they were forgotten when that list was being drawn.

Women staying longer in the shop also means that salespeople have greater opportunities to manipulate their behaviour as shoppers. Because of the longer time of exposure to the merchandising instruments (e.g. smells, music, etc.), the likelihood of making unplanned purchases by women is greater. For this reason, the strategy of stimulating sales of groceries by increasing the share of unplanned purchases in total purchases, using appropriate marketing techniques, should be to a much larger extent orientated towards women than men.

Impulse buying is also influenced by the income achieved by consumers. As the income increases, so does the frequency of buying products on impulse. Households with a monthly income of over PLN 3,000 per family member buy more than they have planned in comparison to other, less wealthy households. Respondents with an income below PLN 2,000 per person make more rational purchases, looking for savings. This observation is important because if the shop owner knows what target customers the shop serves, if it is dominated by more or less wealthy customers, they can adequately shape the range and extent of the sales stimulating activities. In general, shops which are predominantly visited by less wealthy customers can be expected to use merchandising techniques less efficiently, which can have an impact on the decision by the shop owner if the use of such techniques, due to the costs it incurs, is economically justified at all.

This research proves that regardless of one's place of residence, the frequency of doing shopping (except bread) is most often once a week. This frequency was indicated by 73% of respondents. Consumers are far less likely to buy groceries less often. This frequency is synonymous with the number of visits to the shops, and this in turn determines the number of possible situations when the consumer's behaviour can be affected by merchandising tools. However, it should also be mentioned that when shopping is done less often, the customer will spend more time in a shop so as to be able to make large purchases, which means that the effectiveness of stimuli present in the shop will increase.

Respondents highlighted that the most important factor influencing the choice of doing the shopping is the availability of all products (67%). Other factors, such as proximity to one's home/place of work (42%), prices of products (39%), or the quality/freshness of products (38%) are less important. In consequence, consumers most often buy groceries in supermarkets or hypermarkets.

This in turn means that the volume of unplanned purchases can be higher and the economic effectiveness of a variety of merchandising techniques will improve owing to lower unit costs.

It can be claimed that in small shops, due to a modest flow of customers, low volumes of purchases made by individual customers, and a short time they spend in the shop, the level of unplanned purchases will be low, and the opportunities to stimulate impulse buying very limited, which questions the sense of using merchandising as a way to affect the volume of sales, and hence the levels of revenues and profit. In small shops, what matters more is the direct contact with a customer, often based on being acquaintances, which further limits the applicability of mentioned marketing approaches. Because of much greater anonymity in supermarkets and hypermarkets, it is possible to launch far more aggressive marketing strategies, not only encouraging to buy and emphasising positive characteristics of products, but also manipulating and penetrating, often intending to exponentiate the actual qualities of products.

This study has demonstrated that the largest percentage of respondents (37%), having entered a shop will first try to locate and put into a trolley the products they have planned to buy. This, however, does not mean that they buy only the products they have previously decided to purchase and cannot be a target of merchandising activities. As many as $\frac{1}{4}$ of respondents admitted to spending more time in a shop than needed to make planned purchases, and 29% added that this usually happens when they feel no time pressure related to the length of their stay in the shop.

The survey participants declared that they most often go shopping alone (82%). Doing grocery shopping with a spouse is not always possible, for example due to the other person's engagements (58%). Although buying groceries in company of one's spouse/partner does not happen often, their presence considerably affects the range of products bought (62%). The company of a cohabiting person often enables one to make purchases better adjusted to the household's needs (less risk of forgetting some products needed at home). On the other hand, it can stimulate an increase in the number of purchased non-essential goods. An increase in the volume of products put into the basket is also stimulated by the presence of friends (53%). Households are run differently, and the goods purchased will differ significantly among different households. A chance to see what a friend is buying might entice one to buy new products, which they have not bought before, or can remind one what they need to buy. A spontaneous decision to buy some items does not preclude the purchase of previously planned products.

When doing their shopping in large-format grocery shops, the respondents declared that they first consider the price (86%), quality (80%) and shelf life of products (75%). The products most often bought on impulse are: snacks (82%), confectionaries (77%), sweet pastries (60%), alcoholic (52%) and non-alcoholic beverages (51%). In retrospect, the respondents evaluate the usefulness of their impulse purchases as moderate (42%), high (38%) and very high (16%). This means

that although some groceries were bought on impulse, they are not considered to be useless. It is also worth noting that the additional products put into the trolley on the spur of the moment did not normally meant that the customer was unable to purchase other essential products (47%); rather, they supplemented the range of purchases or, as the respondents suggested, enabled the optimisation of their structure.

It has been observed that the weight of the factors influencing impulse buying and unplanned purchases is not identical for all groups of submitted to the survey. One of the key determinants in this regard was the monthly income per person in a household (Tab. 2).

Table 2

Statistics of relationships between the determinants of unplanned purchases and monthly net income of respondents

Specification	Monthly (net) income			
	χ^2	df	P	Cramér's V
Current mood	11.06172	5	0.05017	0.4125292
Presence of accompanying people	4.902218	5	0.42793	0.2746247
Atmosphere in the shop	3.285500	5	0.65606	0.2248247
Range of products sold	2.943918	5	0.70863	0.2128169
Special offers	11.80992	5	0.03749	0.4262523
Social and other campaigns	5.555538	5	0.35189	0.2923522

Source: the author.

Impulse purchases by households with higher incomes very often increase in volume in response to the consumer's mood. It was noticed that the respondents from this group make more unplanned purchases when they are in a good mood while shopping, which they define as the feeling of "joy/fulfilment" (82% of respondents), or – quite the opposite – when they are in a bad mood, which they identify as "sulking/sadness" (52%). In the former case, because of their positive attitude and emotions consumers restrain from evaluating the rationality of buying additional products, as a result of which their volume increases. In the latter case, shopping is a way to unwind, to detach oneself from the gloomy reality and to improve the mood. In both cases, consumers stay longer in the shop and more often add to their trolleys products which they have not planned to buy. As for households with lower incomes, this variable does not have a decisive effect on the behaviour of consumers. In that case, the main variable that differentiates the level of unplanned purchases are price discounts. Decisions made by representatives of lower-income households should be considered as more rational, and the usefulness of the purchased goods is higher. The main reason is the budget constraints that force these consumers to set a precise limit of the amount of money they can spend on groceries.

Price discounts are also important for households with higher incomes. However, the reason why they take advantage of special offers is different. For less wealthy consumers the main motivation to buy products at discount prices is the wish to achieve optimisation of expenses, in view of their limited budget, which often leads to a change in the structure of the previously planned shopping basket. On the other hand, respondents who do not face the challenge of a limited budget perceive price discounts as contributing to the higher level of consumption without forcing them to change decisions on planned purchases, that is without changing the structure of the basic basket. Consequently, the aforementioned sales strategies (including merchandising techniques) should be adjusted to the target group of consumers. Grocery retail outlets situated in locations with large populations, residential estates densely filled with blocks of flats, where the majority of local shoppers are people with low or average incomes should base their sales strategy primarily on price discounts. However, when most of customers are people with a higher level of income, apart from price discounts, and possibly first and foremost, the sales strategy should rely on more intensive merchandising activities. It has been observed that such customers are more sensitive to a wider spectrum of stimuli, which can affect the level of their unplanned purchases. Among these stimuli, the appearance of the place of sale and the display of products have the strongest impact on the consumer's behaviour while doing shopping.

Merchandising activities such as playing music in a retail outlet are particularly common during festive seasons. However, depending on the nature of the sales, such activities can be carried out daily. Nevertheless, it has been determined that affecting the consumer's sense of smell rather than hearing is more effective (75%). For example, when there is a bakery in a large-format grocery shop, the smell of freshly baked bread stimulates the taste buds of customers, which encourages them to buy more groceries. It is therefore possible to increase sales by using various techniques that will affect consumers' sense of smell, e.g. offering hot meals, using air fresheners or scented candles.

According to the respondents, the strongest impact on their behaviour in a shop is produced by what they see there (83%). If a customer sees that the shop is tidy, they feel more comfortable. And as their feeling of comfort intensifies, consumers are more likely to indulge in impulse buying. Thus, retail outlets should focus on the best possible management of work at the point of sale, for example to display products on right shelves promptly and in a visually appealing manner, to keep the shop tidy, and to take care of the overall harmony in the shop.

The study did not reveal any statistically significant dependences in the evaluation of factors influencing purchases made at the checkout counter (Tab. 3).

Table 3

Statistics of relationships between purchases in the checkout area and basic variables characterising the respondents

Specification	Making purchases at the checkout			
	χ^2	df	P	Cramér's V
Sex	0.0684718	1	0.79358	0.0254075
Age	5.084549	4	0.27873	0.2190147
Place of residence	2.036444	3	0.56488	0.1386064
Occupation	1.625626	3	0.65359	0.1238390
Position/status in a household	5.700691	3	0.12712	0.2319054
Number of persons in a household	0.9397248	2	0.62509	0.0941559
Number of own or foster children in a household	3.589629	6	0.73201	0.1857839
Monthly (net) income	2.446261	4	0.65428	0.1579932
Place of residence	3.771093	5	0.58282	0.1886169

Source: the author, based on the study.

The respondents most often declared that they rarely buy products at the checkout counter (47% of the respondents), or only sometimes (25% respondents), regardless of the variables applied to distinguish different categories of the surveyed population (i.e. level of income, age, sex, etc.). On the one hand, such a low level of purchases at “the aisle of temptation” may be disappointing; on the other hand, it may indicate that all groups of customers are reached there to a similar degree. In consequence, although products in the checkout area are bought relatively unfrequently, the total sales in this part of the sales floor can be significant for the whole shop. The major variables which stimulate unplanned purchases while waiting at the checkout, according to the respondents, are low prices of products displayed there (37% of the respondents), having to wait in a queue (36%), and the uniqueness of products that cannot be found anywhere else in the shop (32%). The respondents also admitted that they are sometimes enticed by the cashier, especially when they are encouraged to buy products included in some competition campaigns, loyalty programmes, etc. To recapitulate, it would be unwise to question the usefulness of merchandising activities in “the temptation aisle” leading to checkouts, but it is worth bearing in mind that any effects on consumers through this channel should be considered just as just an element adding to the overall strategy of influencing shoppers, implemented for the whole sales floor of the shop, arising from an analysis of the target consumers and based on the selection of most effective tools, stimulating both planned and impulse buying decisions.

Conclusions

The growing wealth of the Polish population noted in the recent years has led to a significant change in the behaviour of Poles as consumers. Increasingly often, the type and volume of purchases are dictated not only by real and objective reasons but also by impulse buying. Thus, any retail outlet frequented by consumers to do shopping is no longer a place where carefully planned purchases are made, but a site where consumer needs are created by marketing activities. As a result, there is an increasing share of unplanned purchases and purchases made at the spur of the moment. Modern marketing activities are becoming an important instrument of influence on the customer at a site of sales, and a tool to exponentiate the entrepreneur's revenues. Because most grocery shopping takes place in large-format retail outlets, this is where significant opportunities for launching marketing and merchandising activities are opening up.

This study provided evidence supporting the following conclusions:

1. The main determinant of impulse buying are individual personality traits of consumers as well as the mood and emotions which accompany the buying process; 86% of the respondents, living in the warmińsko-mazurskie province, admitted that they are largely sensitive to emotions, which in their opinion is one of the main reasons for making unplanned purchases (80% of the respondents).
2. The basic variables differentiating impulsive behaviour of consumers in large-format grocery retail outlets are sex, age and income.
3. Impulsive behaviour is more often demonstrated by women, who also more often do grocery shopping (94%); women spend more time of shops than men, which makes them more exposed to merchandising activities carried out in shops; also, women quite often treat shopping as a pleasure rather than a duty.
4. It has been noted that more wealthy respondents achieve a higher level of unplanned expenses when they are in a good mood, identified by them as "joy/fulfilment" (82% of the respondents) while shopping, or – quite the opposite – when they are in a bad mood – "sulking/sadness" (52%); in the former case, because of their positive attitude and emotions consumers try not to evaluate the rationality of buying additional products, which makes the volume of impulse purchases rise considerably; in the latter case, shopping becomes a way to unwind, to break away from the gloomy reality and to improve the mood; in both cases, such customers spend more time in the shop and more often put into the shopping basket additional products that they have not planned to buy (this variable did not have a decisive effect on the behaviour of consumers from lower-income households); women more often than men do shopping in order to improve their mood.
5. Decisions to buy products on impulse are most often made by young adults, aged 20-25 years (52%); these consumers rarely attach importance to planning their expenses, which leads to irrational spending.

6. As the household's income increases, so does the frequency of impulse buying; households with over PLN 3,000 of the monthly net income per member of the family tend to buy more than they have planned in comparison with less wealthy households.

7. The level of unplanned or impulse buying of groceries is not lower in the case of consumers who make shopping lists; even though women most often make unplanned purchases and are far more exposed to the risk of buying products under the influence of emotions or on impulse, they are also the ones who most often plan their expenses by making shopping lists; 33% of the respondents buy only the products they have put on shopping lists, while 70% declare that they do use shopping lists but also buy other products; 22% of the surveyed population neither make nor use lists of products they need to buy; however, the fact that a consumer has made a shopping list does not preclude impulse buying; adhering strictly to one's shopping list is primarily typical of men; despite planning their shopping in advance, women very often buy products outside their shopping lists or else they buy more than planned; this however does not implicate extravagance or inconsistency; instead, it proves that women are flexible shoppers, looking for special offers and discounts, which enable them to make savings; as a result, the shopping basket may not necessarily contain exactly the products planned previously.

8. The level of unplanned and impulse buying in the case of grocery shopping is higher when consumers do the shopping in the company of others.

The study emphasises the prevalence of impulse buying as a form of shopping. In all the analysed groups of consumers, there are behaviours indicating that products are purchased on impulse. A consumer going to any shop (small or large one) is exposed to activities which aim to stimulate consumption. However, it should be underlined that the way unplanned purchases are stimulated depends on the type of retail outlets. In small shops, because of the modest flow of customers, low volumes of purchases made by individual consumers, and their brief visits in the shop, the level of unplanned purchases will be low, and opportunities to stimulate impulse buying are quite limited. In large-format shops, it is possible to take advantage of much more aggressive marketing, often not only encouraging purchases and highlighting values of products, but also manipulating and penetrating, where qualities of products are exponentiated relative to the actual properties.

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