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Research Article

The Influence of Psychological Triggers, Content Engagement, and Self-Regulation on the Relationship Between Social Media Ads and Impulsive Buying

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ABSTRACT

Social media advertising has been extensively investigated as an influential factor to consumer behavior, but little research investigates how psychological triggers, content-driven factors, and self-regulation jointly influence impulsive buying. This gap is filled by an exploration of their joint influence. Experimental Design This study was quantitative, descriptive-correlational in nature, and comprised 392 university students in Cebu City, Philippines. An online survey that measured social media ad exposure, psychological triggers, content-driven influence, self-regulation, and impulsive buying was conducted. The reliability test resulted in Cronbach's alpha of 0.8542. We employed regression analysis to evaluate relationships among variables. Respondents generally agreed with the statements that they were exposed to social media ads (M = 3.59) and practiced self-regulation (M = 3.86), while impulsive buying tendencies were neutral (M = 2.85). Moderately influential factors were psychological triggers (M = 3.22) and content-driven factors (M = 3.36). The multiple regression showed that the influence of psychological triggers and content-driven factors were the most positive with regard to impulsive buying, while self-regulation was negatively correlated. Exposure to social media ads was found to be less strongly, but significantly, positively associated. The full model accounted for 57% of the variance in impulsive buying. Implication is that impulsive purchasing is determined more by persuasive cues and psychological factors than exposure only, and self-regulation is a protective factor. Marketers should drive engagement for content and ethical action, educators and policy makers should promote financial literacy and self-discipline in their purchases to avoid acts of impulse.

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Background

Social media has become an advertising vehicle that is increasingly shaping consumer behavior (Safeer, 2024) with strong impacts on impulse buying by emotionally stirring and visually appealing advertisements (Kulkarni, 2025). Brands are relying more and more on captivating, interactive marketing content to get people's attention, and to stimulate their impulsive consumption especially among younger audiences, even though there is concern about impulsive buying that is produced after being immersed (Goel & Sharma, 2025). The studies have demonstrated that digital advertising triggers some psychological factors among them emotional responses, perceived credibility, and trust that enhance the impulse purchase tendency (Kothari et al., 2025). In the case of youth who spend large amounts of time online, knowledge of such dynamics is more important to marketers when preparing ethical, effective campaigns and educational programs for responsible consumer behavior educators (Obadă & Țugulea, 2024). The salience of the present study stems from its examination of the nexus of the domain of digital marketing, consumer psychology, and financial literacy, three key components of modern purchasing behavior.

There are three main theoretical perspectives from which the study draws. For instance, the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) Model clarifies how external stimuli (e.g., visually rich and interactive ads) affect internal psychological states leading to impulsive buying behavior (Hongsuchon et al., 2025; Xia et al., 2024). More importantly, the SOR model is particularly suited to the present study as it explicitly allows for the interaction between external advertising stimuli, internal cognitive-affective mechanisms and behavioral outcomes in one integrative structure. Unlike intention-based frameworks such as the Theory of Planned Behavior or technology adoption models that focus on deliberate choice, the SOR framework reflects the spontaneous, affective and often non-deliberative nature of impulsive buying. This makes it particularly suitable for studying the means through which social media ad exposure and content traits influence impulsive buying behaviour in digitally immersed consumers via internal psychological mechanisms.

Social Proof Theory maintains, though, that likes, shares, and comments function as social validation cues that ultimately influence consumer decisions and reinforce purchasing intentions (Zhu et al., 2024). Self-Regulation Theory concludes with a focus on individual personal control and financial literacy in overcoming impulsivity, and the studies have found that high self-regulation is a barrier against the impulsive impulse buying behavior (Nyrhinen, 2023; Suyanto et al., 2024). Within the SOR framework, self-regulation is conceptualized as a central "Organism" component, representing the individual's internal capacity to monitor, evaluate, and control responses to persuasive advertising stimuli. In this sense, self-regulation operates as a cognitive–behavioral filter through which advertising cues are interpreted and either acted upon or restrained. By positioning self-regulation within the Organism domain, the model captures not only susceptibility to persuasion but also the psychological resistance mechanisms that attenuate impulsive buying responses. These frameworks, taken collectively, provide an insightful starting point to examine the role of ad exposure, content quality, and individual characteristics on the actions of customers.

The fields of social media advertising and consumer behavior are quickly gaining in research. Ad presence, visual attraction, and interactive properties also have good influence levels on engagement and intentions to buy (Chan et al., 2023; Kothari et al., 2025). Short-form videos and live-streaming commerce enhance instant buying impulsive behaviors where real-time communication and emotional engagement bring a sense of presence and urgency (Gao et al., 2022; Huo et al., 2023).

Simultaneously, financial literacy and self-control are perceived as protective factors against overspending, which also decrease their vulnerability to online shopping addiction and impulse buying (Erzincanlı et al., 2024; Nyrhinen et al., 2023). While there are some emerging data points, impulsive purchasing has remained a convoluted phenomenon that is subject to more than simple exposure and is governed by many factors in addition to psychological triggers and content-driven influences (Huang et al., 2025; Singh et al., 2023).

While past research has looked at how social media ads affect consumer behavior, most have focused on exposure or promotional tactics in isolation. There is little research that considers how psychological triggers, content-driven factors, and self-regulation interact to drive impulsive buying. Impulsive tendencies may be elevated or attenuated by triggers such as social proof, urgency cues, and relevant and appealing visual content, although self-regulation can decrease them (Huang et al., 2025; Chan et al., 2023; Erzincanlı et al., 2024). But integrated models that combine these parameters are few and far between. This research attempts to address this deficiency by considering the combined effects of these categories to acquire a broader insight into impulsive buying in the digital age (Yang et al., 2024).

Despite the increase of social media advertisement, little is understood about its influence on impulsive buying behaviour particularly when psychological triggers, content quality, and self-regulatory mechanisms are thoroughly explored together. Organizations require empirically based tactics to create persuasive advertising strategies, but don't promote spending in excess or harmful way, and consumers need strategies for securing their financial well-being. Hence, this study seeks to investigate those factors compared to one another — specifically those for university students who are the most active social media users and hence often prone to impulsively purchase behavior. So this research would like to answer the questions: (1) What is the relationship between student social media advertisement exposure and impulsive buying in university? (2) How do affective and behavioural precipitating factors affect impulsive buying? (3) To what extent does presence of self-regulation moderate the connection between advertising exposure and impulsive purchase? (4) How strong is the role of content-based influence factors on impulsive buying behavior? (5) Which combination of these factors works best to predict impulsive purchasing?

These null hypotheses formed under this study namely H_{01}: Social media ad exposure has no significant effect on impulsive buying behavior; H_{02}: Psychological and behavioral triggers have no significant effect on impulsive buying behavior; H_{03}: Self-regulation factors have no significant effect on impulsive buying behavior; H_{04}: Content-driven influence factors have no significant effect on impulsive buying behavior; and H_{05}: The combined influence of social media ad exposure, psychological triggers, self-regulation, and content-driven factors does not significantly predict impulsive buying behavior.

The main variables and the main relationships between the variables are presented in Figure 1, following a conceptual framework. This article uses a vertical arrow, representing the direct influence of Social Media Advertisement Exposure on Impulsive Buying Behavior, to show the main causal pathway. Moreover, three horizontal arrows named Psychological and Behavioral Triggers, Self-Regulation Factors, and Content-Driven Influence intersect with this main path, indicating their moderating or contributing roles. Each construct is enclosed in a box, and arrows clearly indicate the expected direction and interaction between the variables mentioned above.

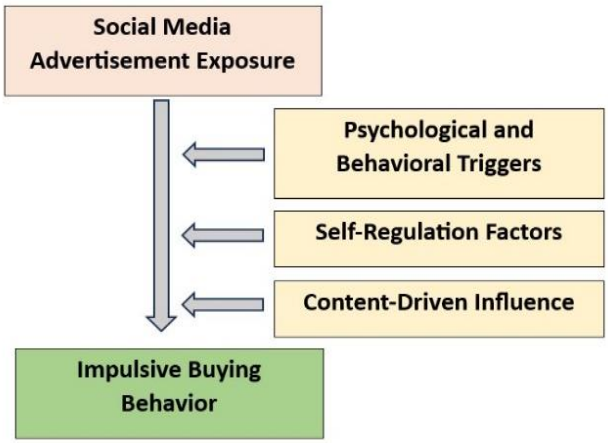

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Pathways Linking Social Media Advertisement Exposure, Psychological and Behavioral Triggers, Self-Regulation Factors, Content-Driven Influence, and Impulsive Buying Behavior

From the figure, it is clear that there is a direct positive relationship between exposure and impulsive buying. Psychological and Behavioral Triggers and Content-Driven Influence act as reinforcing forces. They enhance the likelihood of making impulsive purchases when persuasive cues are present and the content is engaging. As a counterforce, Self-Regulation Factors weaken the path to impulsive buying by helping people resist persuasive effects. Taken together, the relationships show that the quality of content and the triggers it activates carry stronger influence than exposure alone, with self-regulation serving as a protective brake.

Methods

Research Design

The present study used a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design in exploring the connections among exposure to social media advertisement, psychological and behavioral triggers, self-regulation, content-driven influence, and impulsive buying behavior among university students. It was accepted that this study design was suitable because it enabled systematic description of respondents' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors with a determination of the strength and direction of the statistical relations among the chosen variables. In this way, the research was capable of providing empirical evidence without changing the research setting.

Respondents

The participants in the study were students from some of the universities in Cebu City, Philippines. This population was selected because they were frequent users of social media and constituted a key demographic for research on social media advertising exposure. A total of 392 students participated in the survey. The researchers used a voluntary response sampling method, calling in those who would participate. All participation was completely voluntary and conducted with informed consent to uphold ethical standards and ensure confidentiality. They spent an average of three to five hours a day on social media.

Instruments

In this study, the questionnaire consisted of sections for social media ad exposure, impulsive buying behavior, psychological and behavioral triggers, self-regulation, and content-driven influence. In summary, four statements tested for social media ad exposure, four statements for impulsive buying behavior, three for psychological and behavioral triggers, three for self-regulation, and two for content-driven influence, which constituted a total of sixteen items in the complete instrument. Reliability test results for the datasets collected showed coefficients: .7846 in the case of social media advertisement exposure, .8345 for impulsive buying behavior, .7932 for psychological/behavioral triggers, and .7388 for self-regulation factors, implying good to very good internal

consistency for all four items. Since content-driven influence factors were subject to only two items, reliability testing according to the Spearman Brown coefficient formula was used to test its reliability. The result suggested an internal consistency of 0.6759, with a Spearman-Brown coefficient. The Spearman-Brown coefficient of 0.6759 reflects a reasonable consistency for exploratory contexts, yet not the required level for high reliability — which is a methodological limitation.

The statements listed in the first section regarding exposure to social media ads are based on recent research of advertising frequency, eye-catching visuals, and perceived persuasiveness that has influenced human consumer behaviors. In fact, studies demonstrate that users are frequently exposed to ads on social media platforms. This shows the importance of exposure in the effectiveness of advertising (Elsen et al., 2025). Captions and limited-time offers, as visually appealing features, can attract attention and improve message recall (Mondal, 2024). Curiosity-based engagement (for example, clicking on ads) also corresponds to evidence that emotional appeal and credibility have the effect of stimulating interaction (Chen et al., 2023). In addition, social media ads are believed to be more persuasive than traditional ads because social media advertisement offers interaction, authenticity and is viewed as more convincing (Kothari et al., 2025). These findings informed the development of the four statements used to measure exposure to social media ads in this survey.

The items in the second part of the impulsive buying behavior were originated from recently published research on social media and online promotions and how such has affected consumer behavior. Some study show that consumers tend to purchase immediately after seeing advertisements on social media making purchases right from where consumers are exposed (social media)- which indicates the tight connection between exposure and impulsive buying (Qi, 2025). Also common is unplanned shopping on line, due to the fact that digital platforms facilitate the ease of purchasing products as well as the spontaneity (Qi, 2025). According to research, excitement from marketing items (brief offers) often triggers instant purchase (Kathuria & Bakshi, 2024). Finally, social media adverts often push buyers toward staying in touch with the latest trends, because visually and personally relevant ads foster more aspirational buying (Kulkarni, 2025). This results lay the foundation of the 4 formulations for evaluating the impulsivity of purchasing behavior of our subjects.

In the third section on Psychological and Behavioral Triggers, it is mentioned that psychological and behavioral triggers statements come from the latest empirical studies. According to research, limited-time discounts and promotional offers trigger a sense of urgency and pressure, leading to action driven purchasing decisions (Suvarna & Malagi, 2025). Social media advertisement focused on lifestyle, the aspirational imagery and contextual relevance of ads, can stimulate impulsive buying as they are consistent with self-concept and the desired identity of users (Kathuria & Bakshi, 2024). Moreover, the use of social proof — in the form of likes, shares, and comments — can be quantified and influence purchase behavior, as it increases credibility and promotes conformity (Rosli et al., 2024).

The statements in the fourth section of self-regulation were formulated based on recent research stating that self-control and financial literacy can play a key role in curbing impulsive buying. Resisting unnecessary buying, even when ads are tempting, is associated with greater self-control and mindful consumption (Erzincanlı et al., 2024). This relates to the research indicating that financial knowledge has a positive impact on impulsive buying by reducing the impulsivity of buying on the internet (Nyrhinen et al., 2023). In addition, the consideration before spending, despite attractive advertisements, points to the fact that effective self-regulation and financial attitudes were revealed as protective factors against both online shopping addiction and impulsive buying behaviors (Erzincanlı et al., 2024; Nyrhinen et al., 2023). These findings informed the development of the three statements which were employed for self-regulation measurement in this study.

The statements on content-driven influence mentioned in the previous section were made on the basis of recent research that revealed a

positive effect of visual and interactive ad formats on consumer behaviour. Visual ads, such as images and videos, are effective in capturing consumer attention and increasing purchase intention thanks to vivid mental imagery and emotional involvement (Chan et al., 2023; Vazquez et al., 2023). Interactive advertising (i.e. polls, games and live selling) has also shown promise in promoting impulse purchasing through increased social presence and real-time interaction that instigates immediacy and excitement (Wu et al., 2023; Huo et al., 2023). These findings influenced the construction of the two statements in this study assessing content-driven influence.

Data Collection

The survey was used to collect data (an online survey was administered using Google Forms) that was distributed among the college students at various universities in Cebu City. Informed consent was sought from participants and the study purpose, voluntary nature, and confidentiality of their responses emphasized before responding. The questionnaire consisted of five sections aligned with the study variables and utilized a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). All responses were collected automatically by Google Forms and then arranged for statistical processing.

Data Analysis

Data collected from respondents were examined using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics, particularly mean scores, were computed to summarize the levels of agreement for social media ad exposure, impulsive buying behavior, psychological and behavioral triggers, self-regulation, and content-driven influence. Regression analysis was used to explore the relationships among these variables, and the predictive effect of social media ad exposure on impulsive buying behavior, as well as to examine how psychological triggers, self-regulation, and content-driven factors influence this relationship. Regression was suitable to test the hypotheses in the study and it offered evidence-based insights into the dynamics between the variables.

Ethical Considerations

Before participation, all participants were assured about the study objectives, scope, and risks associated with it. This was anonymous data collection, so no personally identifiable information was recorded when the participant entered the survey. Participation was strictly voluntary and participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without incurring any consequences. The research process was conducted following the APA Ethics Code (2017), which placed key attention to informed consent, confidentiality, and responsibility in handling & protecting the research data related to this study.

Results and Discussions

Social Media Advertisement Exposure

The mean scores of each statement regarding Social Media Advertisement Exposure and the level of agreement for each of these statements are presented in Table 1. The table presents participants' self-reported frequency of exposure to social media ads, responses to advertising components including visuals and captions, and engagement behaviors such as clicking on ads. Mean scores were obtained by means of answers in a Likert-scale questionnaire and were also presented together with predefined verbal interpretations so as to yield a systematic description of the data collected.

Table 1. Means and Levels of Agreements of Social Media Advertisement Exposure

Social Media Advertisement Exposure	Means	Interpretation
1. I often see ads on social media.	4.02	Agree
2. Visuals, captions, and limited time offers in ads catch my attention.	3.57	Agree
3. I click on social media ads out of curiosity.	3.05	Neutral
4. Social media ads seem more persuasive than traditional ads.	3.74	Agree
Average	3.59	Agree

Note. Interpretation of mean scores: 1.00-1.80 = Strongly Disagree; 1.81-2.60 = Disagree; 2.61-3.40 = Neutral; 3.41-4.20 = Agree; 4.21-5.00 = Strongly Agree.

In the "Agree" category, the average score for Social Media Advertisement Exposure is 3.59. It is a sign that people tend to agree that they see social media ads. For the items, the highest mean is 4.02 for "I often see ads on social media," indicating common ad encounters. Respondents can also affirm that visuals, captions, and limited-time offers capture their attention (3.57) but in general, the social media ads appear more persuasive compared to traditional advertising (3.74). However, responses of 3.05 to the statement "I click on social media ads out of curiosity" showed evidence that curiosity-driven engagement is less common than attention and perceived persuasiveness.

They agree that they are exposed to social media advertisements, specifically paying attention to visuals, captions, and time-limited promotions. That is, data revealed that marketers should focus more on providing premium visual content (i.e., high-quality, but also with clear messaging), as visual appeal tends to be one of the most powerful tools that enhance user engagement and purchase intention in social commerce (Chan et al., 2023). Social media has also shown that time-bound promotions provide a sense of urgency and enhance perceived scarcity to increase buying behaviour (when applied ethically) (Broeder & Wentink, 2022). But curiosity-induced clicks were rated as neutral, suggesting that marketers should create curiosity-based strategies that offer actual utility in lieu of engaging them in clickbait that damages trust (Chen et al., 2021). In addition to that, transparent and balanced personalization is necessary if trust in the consumers is to be maintained since invasive targeting can cause privacy worries and engagement will decrease (Voorveld et al., 2023).

Impulsive Buying Behavior

Table 2 provides the average scores and corresponding levels of agreement on Impulsive Buying Behavior topics from respondents. This table provides the general impression participants had toward buying things they were exposed to through social media advertisements, online promotions, or emerging fashions. The figures displayed are from the responses received through a structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale. This table will serve to organize and present the numerical results for each indicator of impulsive buying behavior in a clear and systematic manner.

Table 2. Means and Levels of Agreements of Impulsive Buying Behavior

Impulsive Buying Behavior	Means	Interpretation
1. I buy products right after seeing them in social media ads.	2.57	Disagree
2. I often shop online without planning.	2.77	Neutral
3. Excitement from online promotions makes me buy instantly.	3.12	Neutral
4. Social media ads make me want to keep up with trends.	2.92	Neutral
Average	2.85	Neutral

Note. Interpretation of mean scores: 1.00-1.80 = Strongly Disagree; 1.81-2.60 = Disagree; 2.61-3.40 = Neutral; 3.41-4.20 = Agree; 4.21-5.00 = Strongly Agree.

The findings of the survey have revealed that there is no significant association between the high frequency of impulsive buying behaviour on social media platforms and the respondent as the responses of the items are in the neutral range. The lowest mean score of buying products immediately after seeing advertisements indicates disagreement among the respondents. Exciting neutral items in terms of online promotion and impulse buying. There is a moderate general tendency for impulsive buying which is not a strong tendency for purchase. The neutral mean score of impulsive buying behaviour (M = 2.85) could suggest a more complex consumer orientation of university students in Cebu City that goes beyond lack of strong impulsive tendencies. One possible reason is financial constraint, because students usually have a limited discretionary budget, which naturally moderates impulse buying despite the frequent exposure to advertisements. Furthermore, this neutrality might also suggest a higher level of advertising literacy whereby students are becoming more

aware of the persuasive marketing techniques and thus behave in a more conscious restraint when faced with impulse inducing cues. There may be cultural reasons for this too. Filipino collectivist values tend to stress financial responsibility for family obligations, which may prevent excessive or spontaneous spending. The overall neutral rating may be a deliberate balancing act between the wish to buy and the need to be financially prudent rather than a sign of indifference, indicating that impulse buying for this group is more situational than habitual.

While respondents approached impulsive purchases neutrally, the ability to influence is there. As we noted earlier, exposure to engaging visual content—especially short-video forms—can greatly increase impulse buying by causing emotional arousal and stimulating customer inspiration (Gao et al., 2022; Huang et al., 2025). Engaging, near-physical elements within social commerce platforms, such as livestream shopping and real-time comments, reinforce the perception of seller intimacy and thus drive cognitive and affective trust, ultimately driving impulse buying (Wu et al., 2023). In the case of spontaneous purchases, social proof cues such as likes, shares, and popular sentiment support the impulse, indicating social norms and confirmation (Zhang & Shi, 2022). The marketers must, therefore, integrate emotionally evocative visual ads with various social engagement features and incorporate social proof to support consumers in their decision-making process, while leveraging the neutral impulse tendencies and turn them into an actual purchase behavior.

Psychological and Behavioral Triggers

Table 3 shows the mean scores of psychological and behavioral triggers influencing purchasing decisions and the corresponding levels of agreement for these statements. The table summarizes respondents' perceptions of promotional pressure, lifestyle-oriented advertising, and social engagement metrics such as likes, shares, and comments. The data were gathered using a structured survey questionnaire measured on a five-point Likert scale. Mean scores for each item are shown to give a numerical overview of how frequently these triggers were reported by the respondents.

Table 3. Means and Levels of Agreements of Psychological and Behavioral Triggers

Psychological and Behavioral Triggers	Means	Interpretation
1. Discounts and promos make me feel pressured to buy quickly.	3.16	Neutral
2. Lifestyle ads on social media trigger my impulse to buy.	2.92	Neutral
3. Likes, shares, and comments on ads influence my buying decisions.	3.57	Agree
Average	3.22	Neutral

Note. Interpretation of mean scores: 1.00-1.80 = Strongly Disagree; 1.81-2.60 = Disagree; 2.61-3.40 = Neutral; 3.41-4.20 = Agree; 4.21-5.00 = Strongly Agree.

Triggers of psychological and behavioral nature are in general neutral with a mean of 3.22. The overall neutral response to psychological and behavioral triggers (M = 3.22) suggests that these triggers are noticed, but do not necessarily lead to immediate purchases by students. This neutrality may indicate selective susceptibility, where respondents respond to certain triggers, particularly social proof, while remaining resistant to others such as urgency-based promotions or lifestyle imagery. It may also be that frequent exposure to similar promotional strategies has resulted in a kind of desensitization, reducing the psychological impact of discounts and aspirational advertising. Moreover, the simultaneous endorsement of strong self-regulation by students suggests that cognitive control mechanisms may be used actively to counterbalance these triggers. Thus, the neutral mean does not suggest the absence of effectiveness of psychological cues; instead, it should be interpreted as the demonstration of the filtering of their influence by awareness, experience and self-control, in line with the Organism component of the SOR model. Discounts and promos (M = 3.16), and lifestyle ads (M = 2.92) were rated neutrally, suggesting that this category of stimuli does not have a strong influence over respondents to make a

purchase. However, social proof cues like likes, shares and comments scored higher (M = 3.57), suggesting a consensus that social proof cues are more impactful than other triggers in making a purchasing decision.

While replies indicated neutrality for almost all triggers, the powerful leverage of social proof underscores its importance to consumers' choice experience. Recent investigations validate that the use of social proof cues, such as likes, shares and comments, strengthen perceived popularity and trust and consequently purchase intention (Huang et al., 2025; Zhang & Shi, 2022). Likewise, scarcity effects created by discounts and promotional urgency may increase impulse buying in association with interactive ad programs (Broeder & Wentink, 2022). These lifestyle-oriented ads are still relevant given that personalized content associated with aspirational lifestyles builds emotional involvement and brand attachment and influences buying behavior indirectly (Chan et al., 2023). Hence, marketers must make use of social proof signals prominently, utilize scarcity-driven promotions ethically, and design lifestyle ads that fit the goals of identity aspirations of consumers to be effective.

Self-Regulation Factors

Table 4 has the computed mean values and corresponding levels of agreement for statements about Self-Regulation Factors among participants. It describes respondents' perceived control over spending behaviour in the presence of attractive internet ads, including aspects such as not spending money that they don't need, using financial knowledge, and being careful before buying. Responses were collected using a structured survey method based on a five-point Likert scale and averaged scores were summarised to obtain a relatively brief numerical summary per self-regulation measure.

Table 4. Means and Levels of Agreements of Self-Regulation Factors

Self-Regulation Factors	Means	Interpretation
1. I resist buying unnecessary things even when ads look appealing.	3.61	Agree
2. Financial knowledge helps me avoid impulse buying online.	3.86	Agree
3. I think carefully before spending, even if ads are attractive.	4.09	Agree
Average	3.86	Agree

Note. Interpretation of mean scores: 1.00-1.80 = Strongly Disagree; 1.81-2.60 = Disagree; 2.61-3.40 = Neutral; 3.41-4.20 = Agree; 4.21-5.00 = Strongly Agree.

The findings suggest that participants generally appear to self-regulate when confronted with social media ads. They report resisting unnecessary purchases (M = 3.61), relying on financial knowledge to avoid impulsive buying (M = 3.86), and carefully considering spending despite attractive ads (M = 4.09). That indicates a very intentional desire to make purchases in moderation. The results indicate strong participant agreement on self-regulation when interacting with appealing social media ads (average M = 3.86). Participants reported actively avoiding unnecessary purchases, leveraging their financial knowledge, and thoughtfully considering spending decisions.

While people usually keep their expenditures to a minimum, new research is suggesting that self-control in online environments is of more importance. According to the Finnish research, low self-regulation, and in particular, difficulties with the control over smartphone usage, is a strong factor that predicts a tendency towards addiction to online shopping among young adults (Nyrhinen et al., 2023). Furthermore, an investigation by Frontiers in Public Health shows that people who have increased self-control show lesser cases of online shopping addiction and better financial beliefs (Erzincanlı et al., 2024). Promoting these self-regulatory skills and education about finance, on the other hand, can only facilitate responsible buying behavior and decrease impulsive behaviors.

Content-Driven Influence Factors

Table 5 shows the computed scores including the corresponding degrees of agreement for content-driven influence factors in social

media advertising. It presents a summary of the assessment of advertisement content characteristics (visual components, interactive features) that respondents may use for decision making in their purchase preferences. The information was obtained through a structured survey instrument, with the five-point Likert scale, and the calculated mean scores provide a brief numerical summary of how often these content-based advertising elements were perceived or encountered by the respondents.

Table 5. Means and Levels of Agreements of Content-Driven Influence Factors

Content-Driven Influence Factors	Means	Interpretation
1. Visual ads (images, videos) easily catch my interest to buy.	3.65	Agree
2. Interactive ads (polls, games, live selling) make me buy impulsively.	3.08	Neutral
Average	3.36	Neutral

Note. Interpretation of mean scores: 1.00-1.80 = Strongly Disagree; 1.81-2.60 = Disagree; 2.61-3.40 = Neutral; 3.41-4.20 = Agree; 4.21-5.00 = Strongly Agree

Respondents appear generally neutral about influencers, overall mean 3.36 for Content Driven Influencing factors. The visual ads were rated 3.65, "Agree"; thus images and video are good ways to catch your eye to buy. Interactive advertisements (interactive and interactive based features like polls, game and live-sale) scored 3.08 (Appended to as "Neutral"), suggests that these features do not encourage impulsive purchasing among the respondents.

Results indicate that visual ads continue to wield strength in generating consumer interest and interactive ads produce a diminishing effect on impulsive purchase behavior. Most recent studies support the influence of visual content (especially high-quality images as well as videos) on consumer engagement and purchase intention with social commerce (Chan et al., 2023). However, with real-time interaction and social presence, interactive features, such as polls and live selling can still lead to impulse purchases (Wu et al., 2023). Moreover, visual and social proofing features are effective in short-form video platforms, and have been demonstrated to encourage impulsive buying behavior. That means that marketers must combine visually appealing content with interactivity to enhance the activity (Huang et al., 2025). These insights suggest that brands need to highlight good visual storytelling without sacrificing interactive features to build engaging shopping experiences.

Social Media Ad Exposure and Impulsive Buying Behavior

Table 6 provides the results of the regression analysis performed on the association between Social Media Advertisement Exposure as predictor variable and Impulsive Buying Behavior as dependent variable. Table presents important statistics as follows: unstandardized regression coefficient (β), standard error (SE), t-value, p-value, 95% confidence interval for β, and partial correlation (partial r). Furthermore, a model summarization, highlighting the R^2 and adjusted R^2 values, the overall F-test of model significance and sample size for the analysis, gives another view of the model's explanatory power and statistical validity.

Table 6. Relationship Between Social Media Ad Exposure and Impulsive Buying Behavior

Predictor	*β*	*SE*	*t*	*p*	95% *CI for β*	Partial *r*
Social Media Ad Exposure	0.4753	0.0496	9.58	< .001	[0.3778, 0.5728]	≈ 0.436

Note. Model Summary: $R^2 = 0.191$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.188$, $F(1,390) = 91.81$, $p < .001$, $N = 392$.

Influential social media advertisement exposure has a significant positive relationship to impulsive buying behavior. The coefficient of the relationship (β = 0.4753) shows that higher exposure is associated with higher impulsive buying scores. The influence is clear (SE =

0.0496) and robust (t = 9.58, p < .001), in which the confidence interval [0.3778, 0.5728] is completely greater than zero. Its partial correlation is moderate (≈ 0.436). The model explains approximately 19% of the variance in impulsive buying (R^2 = 0.191), which is meaningful to behavioral data.

This suggests that repeated exposure to advertising on social media can lead to increased impulsive buying behavior in individuals, probably through means of inspiration, social presence, and real-time interaction mechanisms described in other recent studies. Empirical studies have shown that ad features that promote consumer inspiration drive impulse purchases due to social media advertising in driving consumer engagement (Yang et al., 2024). In short-form video and livestream contexts also, presence and flow—from visuals and comments to immediate reaction—increase the impulse buying tendency (Gao et al., 2022; Huo et al., 2023). More generally, research by conducting surveys and structural models show that social media exposure drives impulse buying by influencing engagement and value perception (Singh et al., 2023), while ad credibility and authenticity influence persuasive power by consumer trust (Kothari et al., 2025). This translates into practically that brands need to maximize ethical visual narrative and interactive format to leverage the engagement and social presence (with the right transparency) in order to generate interest to convert into purchase while not undermining credibility.

Social Media Ad Exposure, Psychological & Behavioral Triggers, and Impulsive Buying Behavior

Table 7 shows the findings of our multiple regression analysis investigating the combined effect of Social Media Advertisement Exposure and Psychological and Behavioral Triggers on Impulsive Buying Behavior. Key regression statistics for each predictor (β, SE, t-value, p-value, 95% confidence interval, partial correlation) are presented in the table. Finally, a model summary summarizing the R^2 and adjusted R^2 and overall F-test for model significance and total sample size in a wide coverage of robustness is also provided

Table 7. Relationships Among Social Media Ad Exposure, Psychological & Behavioral Triggers, and Impulsive Buying Behavior

Predictor	*β*	*SE*	*t*	*p*	95% *CI for β*	Partial *r*
Social Media Ad Exposure	0.0972	0.0470	2.07	0.039	[0.0049, 0.1896]	≈ 0.104
Psychological & Behavioral Triggers	0.6181	0.0413	14.95	< .001	[0.5368, 0.6993]	≈ 0.604

Note. Model Summary: R^2 = 0.4860, Adjusted R^2 = 0.4833, F(2, 389) = 183.88, p < .001, N = 392.

Psychological & Behavioral Triggers show a strong, positive, and statistically significant association with impulsive buying (β = 0.6181; t = 14.95; p < .001), with a large partial correlation (≈ 0.604). Social Media Ad Exposure also has a positive association but with a smaller effect size (β = 0.0972; t = 2.07; p = .039) and a small partial correlation (≈ 0.104). The overall model explains about 49% of the variance in impulsive buying (R^2 = 0.4860; adjusted R^2 = 0.4833), suggesting good explanatory power for behavioral data.

Given that triggers make up much of the explained variance, exposure alone will not have the same effect on impulsive purchase behaviour unless it is supplemented by persuasive mechanisms that elevate social presence, customer inspiration, and flow. Evidence indicates that presence and inspiration dynamics amplify impulse buying in short-form video and livestream contexts (Gao et al., 2022; Huo et al., 2023). Meanwhile, ad credibility and perceived authenticity add to persuasive power through trust—a critical bridge from advertising to consumer behavior outcomes (Kothari et al., 2025; Voorveld et al., 2024). From a practical standpoint this means you may consider optimising campaigns for high-quality visual storytelling

and real-time social interaction to activate triggers while keeping it transparent and ethical in design to safeguard trust. More exposure may yet support these trigger-based pathways, so that incremental contribution to impulse buying may still be possible when it supports these trigger routes (Singh et al., 2023).

Social Media Ad Exposure, Self-Regulation, and Impulsive Buying Behavior

The findings of a multiple regression analysis using Social Media Advertisement Exposure and Self-Regulation Factors as predictors and Impulsive Buying Behavior as the outcome variable can be seen in Table 8. Key regression statistics for each predictor are given in the table by examining the unstandardized coefficient (β), standard error (SE), t-value, p-value, a 95% confidence interval, and partial correlation. Furthermore, we show a model summary which outlines the R^2 and adjusted R^2 values, as well as the overall F-test of significance of the model, as well as the sample size to provide a comprehensive assessment of the model's predictive ability.

Table 8. Relationships Between Social Media Ad Exposure, Self-Regulation, and Impulsive Buying Behavior

Predictor	*β*	*SE*	*t*	*p*	*95% CI for β*	*Partial r*
Social Media Ad Exposure	0.5721	0.0506	11.30	< .001	[0.4726, 0.6716]	≈ 0.497
Self-Regulation Factors	−0.2853	0.0499	−5.72	< .001	[−0.3834, −0.1872]	≈ 0.278

Note. Model Summary: $R^2 = 0.2533$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.2495$, $F(2, 389) = 65.98$, $p < .001$, $N = 392$.

There is a positive, statistically significant effect of social media advertisement exposure on impulsive buying (β = 0.5721; t = 11.30; p < .001), suggesting a positive association between more exposure and higher impulsive buying scores. Self-regulation factors in a negative and significant manner (β = −0.2853; t = −5.72; p < .001), that is, increased self-regulation is linked to lower impulsive buying. The model accounts for about 25% of impulsive buying variance ($R^2 = 0.2533$), which is meaningful for behavioral data.

These findings suggest exposure elements of social media such as visual, short-form video and livestream formats can raise impulsive consumption tendency with presence, flow and inspiration activation, and self-regulation as a protective factor. According to short-video and livestream studies, social presence, immediate feedback and customer inspiration substantially increase impulsive purchase behaviors (Gao et al., 2023). Simultaneously, advertising credibility and authenticity increase persuasive effect through trust, hence the role of ethical, transparent design for high-exposure setting (Kothari et al., 2025; Voorveld et al., 2024). Improving self-regulation and financial attitudes—via training in media/financial literacy and self-control—has been associated with decreased online impulse buying and shopping addiction, aligning well with your model's protective role (Nyrhinen et al., 2023; Erzincanlı et al., 2024).

Social Media Ad Exposure, Content-Driven Influence, and Impulsive Buying Behavior

Table 9 shows the findings, through the multiple regression analysis, regarding Social Media Advertisement Exposure and Content-Driven Influence Factors as predictor variables and Impulsive Buying Behavior as the dependent variable. For every predictor, the table displays some important regression statistics, namely the unstandardized coefficient (β), standard error (SE), t-value, p-value, and 95% confidence interval (CI) for β, and partial correlation. Moreover, the table summarises the model with the R^2 and adjusted R^2, the overall F-test of the regression model, and the total number of samples included to provide a complete evaluation on the model's explanatory and predictive capacity.

Table 9. Relationship Between Social Media Ad Exposure, Content-Driven Influence, and Impulsive Buying Behavior

Predictor	*β*	*SE*	*t*	*p*	*95% CI for β*	*Partial r*
Social Media Ad Exposure	0.1630	0.0490	3.32	0.001	[0.0666, 0.2593]	≈ 0.166
Content-Driven Influence Factors	0.5548	0.0448	12.40	< .001	[0.4668, 0.6428]	≈ 0.532

Note. Model Summary: $R^2 = 0.4198$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.4168$, $F(2, 389) = 140.71$, $p < .001$, $N = 392$.

Content-Driven Influence Factors have a strong, positive, and statistically significant association with impulsive buying (β = 0.5548; t = 12.40; p < .001), with a large partial correlation (≈ 0.532). Social Media Ad Exposure also shows a positive, statistically significant association (β = 0.1630; t = 3.32; p = .001), but with a smaller partial correlation (≈ 0.166). The overall model explains about 42% of the variance in impulsive buying (R^2 = 0.4198; adjusted R^2 = 0.4168), indicating solid explanatory power for behavioral data.

These findings indicate that what the ad has, and in what form the ad engages, matters more for impulsive buying than exposure alone. Image and video visual quality and social presence enhance intention to purchase on the basis of vivid mental imagery and affective involvement (Vazquez et al., 2023). The short-form video context encourages purchase due to presence and customer inspiration which are heightened when content merges arresting imagery and interactive elements (Gao et al., 2022). With live-streaming commerce, real-time interaction and sales promotion enhance flow and perceived immediacy, which enhances impulsive purchases (Huo et al., 2023). And, social proof effects of short-form platforms may steer spontaneous purchase with credibility and herd behavior signals (Huang et al., 2025). In practical terms, high-quality visual storytelling and interactive formats, based on creating social presence and trust, should be prioritized by brands; otherwise, they will simply rely on the addition of more ad exposure.

Social Media Ad Exposure, Psychological & Behavioral Triggers, Self-Regulation, Content-Driven Influence, and Impulsive Buying Behavior

Table 10 shows a multiple regression model, showing how Social Media Ad Exposure, Psychological & Behavioral Triggers, Self-Regulation Factors, and Content-Driven Influence Factors combine in terms of Impulsive Buying Behavior. For each predictor, the table reports the unstandardized coefficient (β), standard error (SE), t-value, p-value, 95% confidence interval, and partial correlation. The model summary includes R^2, adjusted R^2, the overall F-test, and the sample size.

Table 10. Relationship Among Social Media Ad Exposure, Psychological & Behavioral Triggers, Self-Regulation, Content-Driven Influence, and Impulsive Buying Behavior

Predictor	*β*	*SE*	*t*	*p*	*95% CI for β*	*Partial r*
Social Media Ad Exposure	0.1151	0.0467	2.46	0.014	[0.0233, 0.2070]	≈ 0.124
Psychological & Behavioral Triggers	0.4282	0.0450	9.51	< .001	[0.3396, 0.5167]	≈ 0.435
Self-Regulation Factors	−0.2285	0.0380	−6.01	< .001	[−0.3032, −0.1537]	≈ 0.292
Content-Driven Influence Factors	0.3122	0.0456	6.84	< .001	[0.2225, 0.4019]	≈ 0.329

Note. Model Summary: $R^2 = 0.5744$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.5700$, $F(4, 387) = 130.60$, $p < .001$, $N = 392$.

The four predictors are all statistically significant. Psychological & Behavioral Triggers (β = 0.4282; t = 9.51; p < .001) and Content-Driven Influence Factors (β = 0.3122; t = 6.84; p < .001) show strong positive associations with impulsive buying. Self-Regulation Factors have a significant negative relation for impulsive buying (β = −0.2285; t = −6.01; p < .001), which suggests that high levels of self-regulation are related to low impulsive purchasing. Social Media Ad Exposure remains a positive but smaller predictor (β = 0.1151; t = 2.46; p = .014). About 57% of variance in impulsive buying is explained through the model (R^2 = 0.5744; adjusted R^2 = 0.5700), demonstrating good explanatory power.

The idea is that impulsive buying is driven less by exposure alone and much more by the social presence, inspiration and flow encouraged by content and psychological triggers, with self-regulation counteracting these forces. Visual quality and social presence increase purchase intention, and may result in unplanned purchases (Vazquez et al., 2023; Gao et al., 2022). Live-streaming, sales promotions, and immediate feedback increase the flow and perceived immediacy, which in turn enhances impulsive behaviour (Huo et al., 2023; Gong & Jiang, 2023). Simultaneously, ad credibility and perceived authenticity amplify influence through trust, underscoring the need for ethical, transparent campaign design (Kothari et al., 2025; Voorveld et al., 2024). From a practical perspective, brands must focus on visual storytelling and interactive formats tapping into inspiration and social presence, and encourage consumers' self-regulation to harmonise persuasion and consumers' well-being (Voorveld et al., 2024; Kothari et al., 2025).

Summary of Findings

The findings showed respondents agree to be exposed to social media advertisements with a mean 3.59. They see ads all the time and find images, captions, and limited-time offers attention-grabbing. Similarly, social media ads are rated as being more persuasive than conventional ads, but curiosity-driven clicks got a neutral response indicating that they are not as prevalent in terms of curiosity engagement, suggesting exposure is relatively high and click-through-driven engagement is not that common.

Overall, the respondents exhibited a neutral level of impulsive buying behavior (mean = 2.85), indicating that they were not particularly impulsive in many cases. As such, participants did not strongly perceive themselves as impulsive buyers, especially about purchasing something on the spot following exposure to social media ads. However, promotional excitement and unplanned shopping received neutral ratings, indicating some vulnerability to being impulsive now and again. Although the respondents may report impulsive buying behavior, in general it is not a common or sustained pattern of behavior.

Likewise, psychological and behavioral triggers are rated as neutral overall (mean = 3.22). There was no significant pressure to purchase from discounts and lifestyle advertisements, and social cues like likes, shares, and comments exerted a substantial influence, with a score of 3.57, which falls under “Agree.” This implies that purchase decisions are greatly influenced by social signaling. The self-regulation criteria had an overall mean of 3.86, “Agree.” Respondents indicated resistance to unnecessary purchases, use of financial information, and thought before they spend, even with attractive ads. This shows a powerful inclination toward controlled, mindful buying. Overall, content-driven influence factors were rated as neutral (mean = 3.36). Visual ads got a higher score (3.65, “Agree”) since they effectively generate interest, while interactive ads like polls and live selling were rated neutral at (3.08), so they have a less effective effect on people’s impulsive buying behavior.

This indicates that social media advertisement exposure significantly predicts impulsive buying behavior and accounts for about 19% of the variance in regression analysis. Yet, when using psychological triggers, content factors, and a variable called self-regulation, the model accounted for 57% of the variance. While psychological triggers and content-driven factors exerted the greatest positive effect, self-regulation had a significant negative effect reducing impulsive buying behavior. In other words, impulsive purchases are dominated by persuasive content and psychological cues rather than just

exposure alone, and self-control plays a protective role.

Hypotheses Testing Summary

The statistical analyses provided a clear test of the null hypotheses of the study. The H_{01}, which posited that social media advertisement exposure has no significant effect on impulsive buying behavior, was rejected as regression results consistently showed a positive and statistically significant relationship between exposure and impulsive buying ($p < .05$). H 0 2 , indicating no significant effect of psychological and behavioral triggers on impulsive buying. This is also rejected as there is strong and positive predictive effect of psychological and behavioral triggers in both partial and full regression models ($p < .001$).

The results showed that impulsive buying was significantly negatively associated with self-regulation, so H_{03} was rejected. This finding supports the assumption that self-regulation is a protective factor. The hypothesis H_{04}, stating that content-driven influence factors do not significantly influence impulsive buying, was also rejected, with visual and interactive content features being strong positive predictors ($p < .001$). Finally, H05, which indicated that the combined effect of social media ad exposure, psychological triggers, self-regulation and content-driven factors do not significantly predict impulsive buying behavior was rejected as the full regression model explained about 57% of the variation in impulsive buying behavior showing high statistical significance.

The current study validates the notion that the impulsive purchase of university students is a multi-factorial process. Persuasive content and psychological cues enhance the probability of purchase, and self-regulatory capacity moderates and restricts impulsive outcomes.

Implications of the Study

Accordingly, the results show that heavy use of social media ads may affect consumer behaviour, especially buying decisions under impulse condition. That's to say that business needs to establish social presence and ads need to look good to persuade consumers. But exposure is not sufficient; marketers have to couple it with tactics to build urgency and emotional connection — time-limited offers and authentic storytelling, for example. And it turns out that the psychological and behavioral triggers like social proof in the form of likes, shares, and comments, play a much bigger part in the impulse buying process when the exposure is taken over. This means brands need to employ the cues of social consensus to establish trust and perceived popularity. Strategic usage of scarcity tactics and lifestyle-focused ads can drive higher engagement, but these measures should be used judiciously to steer clear of manipulative behaviors.

Impulsive buying behavior is strongly influenced by content quality. Especially high-quality images and interactive formats affect positively, so companies should pay attention to high-quality advertisements that provide interactive engagement with live selling and polls to create an immersive experience. When combined with the visual aspect and the real-time engagement, it can greatly increase consumers' engagement and purchase intention. Consumers who manage their finances and are financially literate tend to be less likely to engage in impulsive buying. This has concrete practical implications for consumer education programs: raising financial literacy and self-control are just two ways to reduce the harmful consequences of persuasive ads. Brands and policymakers should look at measures that encourage sensible spending habits.

And finally, the integrated effect of multiple influences indicates that impulsive buying is not solely driven by exposure, but also by the way content and psychological stimuli foster social presence and inspiration, while self-regulation counteracts these forces. Marketers win when they are building ads that inspire and engage, and at the same time honour consumer autonomy. Regulators and educators will find it instructive here as it shows the importance of balanced strategies that offer consumers some protection from excessive persuasion.

Conclusion

According to the research, social media's advertisements also have a noticeable effect on the consumer's behavior, but exposure alone does not guarantee impulsive buying.

Psychological triggers of purchase such as social proof and content-based triggers such as high-quality visuals and interactive formats are more significant. Simultaneously, self-regulation and financial awareness are protective factors against impulsive tendencies. These results suggest marketers need to be committed to content creation and authentic behavior while respecting consumer autonomy and educators need to teach financial literacy in order to assist consumers in making more informed decisions.

However, the study has some limitations. One important limitation relates to the measurement of content-driven influence, which had a Spearman–Brown reliability coefficient of 0.6759. Although this value is acceptable in the context of exploratory research, it is slightly below the generally accepted threshold of 0.70 for good reliability.« This lower reliability can be explained by the limited number of items (two) used to operationalize the construct, which may not be representative for the multidimensional nature of content driven advertising influence. As such, findings related to this construct should be interpreted cautiously. Including items measuring dimensions such as quality of storytelling, emotional resonance, entertainment value, personalization and perceived authenticity might improve internal consistency and psychometric robustness, thus enhancing the reliability of the scale in future research. The study also used selfreport data, which may be affected by social desirability bias. The sample was a particular demographic group and so the findings may not be generalizable to larger populations . Also, the correlational design limits the ability to interpret causality.

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