

The Social Behavior Ecosystem in Influencing Impulsive Buying Among University Students

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Sections Info	ABSTRACT	
Article history:	Objective: The phenomenon of impulsive buying often occurs in modern social life,	
Submitted: June 10, 2025	especially as a response to social exclusion. Those who are excluded tend to adopt	
Final Revised: June 23, 2025	impulsive consumption behavior as a strategy to gain a sense of belonging and	
Accepted: July 11, 2025	improve social relationships. In addition, the rapid development of online shopping	
Published: July 18, 2025	platforms further strengthens this tendency. Therefore, it is important to understand	
Keywords:	the internal mechanisms that connect the two. Method: This study used SPSS 25.0	
Impulsive buying	and WarpPLS 5.0 to analyze data from 385 respondents collected through	
Social exclusion	questionnaires. Results: The focus of this study is to explore the internal mechanisms	
Relative deprivation	between social exclusion and impulsive buying behavior, with the following results:	
Need to belong	(1) Social exclusion has a positive correlation with impulsive buying behavior. (2)	
Self-control	Relative deprivation acts as a mediator in the relationship between social exclusion	
	and impulsive buying behavior. (3) The need to belong also functions as a mediator in	
	the relationship. (4) Self-control acts as a moderator in the relationship between social	
	exclusion and impulsive buying behavior. Novelty: The conclusion in this study aims	
	to clarify the internal mechanism of impulsive buying behavior and provide	
	recommendations for students to improve their self-control.	

Dhian Puspita^{1*}

¹Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of impulsive buying has become an important research topic in the fields of marketing and consumer behavior. Advances in technology and the increasing use of e-commerce platforms have facilitated purchasing behavior without careful planning. Research conducted by Y. Chen et al (2015) shows that factors such as positive emotions and promotions on social media play an important role in driving impulsive buying. Furthermore, research by Nyrhinen et al (2024) It was found that experiences of social exclusion can increase an individual's tendency to engage in impulsive buying as a compensatory mechanism to cope with feelings of isolation.

The rapid development of e-commerce platforms, has made online shopping an integral part of daily life in Indonesia. According to We Are Social (2024), 178.9 million Indonesians shopped online in 2023–2024, with over 70% of them from Generation Z. These users, primarily aged 18–25 and often university students (Databoks, 2024), are frequent digital consumers. This context highlights the urgency to understand how digital environments amplify consumer behavior patterns, especially in response to social exclusion.

For university students, impulse buying can serve as a mechanism to alleviate negative emotions resulting from social exclusion and as a way to enhance their selfimage among peers. (Joireman et al., 2020). Social exclusion refers to a condition in which individuals feel alienated or isolated from their social groups, leading to a decreased sense of belonging and support from their environment. This form of social exclusion, particularly related to lifestyle, can affect the psychological aspects of



university students, which in turn impacts their consumption behavior patterns (Wu, 2022). For example, research on university students in China shows that social exclusion often influences impulse buying behavior, particularly due to emotional factors such as self-esteem and risk preference. (Luo et al., 2021). Within the internal mechanism linking social exclusion and impulsive buying, several mediating variables may play a role. One such factor is relative deprivation—an individual's perception of lacking or being entitled to something when comparing themselves to others (XIONG & YE, 2016).

This is supported by research conducted by Zhang et al (2024) supports the role of relative deprivation as a mediator in the relationship between social exclusion and impulsive buying. University students with heightened feelings of relative deprivation tend to compensate for their emotional imbalance through excessive purchasing. (Garg & Lerner, 2015). Another key mediating variable is the need to belong Research by R. P. Chen et al (2017) shows that social exclusion increases this need. When direct social connections are unavailable, individuals may turn to possessions as symbolic substitutes to alleviate discomfort and fulfill their sense of belonging (Xia et al., 2020).

In contrast, self-control plays a moderating role in this process. According to Pradhan et al (2018) students with high self-control are more capable of resisting impulsive buying tendencies. At this developmental stage, self-regulation allows them to engage in rational thinking and make informed purchasing decisions. The Compensatory Consumer Behavior Theory (CCBT) posits that consumption serves as a coping mechanism for psychological or social deficiencies (Mandel et al., 2016). While CCBT provides valuable insights into compensatory consumption, this study seeks to expand the theory by examining specific psychological mediators (relative deprivation and need to belong) and a moderator (self-control) within a digital consumer context. This model not only affirms but also refines the explanatory power of CCBT by integrating nuanced internal mechanisms into its framework

Although numerous studies have examined the influence of social exclusion on impulsive buying behavior, most of this research has been conducted in foreign contexts, such as China and the United States. Research on this phenomenon in Indonesia—particularly among university students as active digital consumers—remains very limited. Most prior studies have focused on impulsive buying in conventional contexts, while research exploring how social exclusion affects consumption behavior within digital ecosystems and e-commerce is still scarce, especially among students.

Based on this background, the present study aims to clarify the internal mechanisms of impulsive buying behavior and its relationship with social exclusion. First, this research explores the relationships among the variables from a theoretical perspective, examining the mediating roles of relative deprivation and the need to belong, as well as the moderating role of self-control, and proposes relevant hypotheses. Second, the study conducts empirical analysis to verify these hypotheses. Finally, based on the



empirical findings, recommendations and intervention strategies are proposed to support university students

Based on the theoretical framework and research background, this study proposes the following hypotheses to be empirically tested: (1) Social exclusion has a direct effect on impulsive buying behavior. (2) Relative deprivation mediates the relationship between social exclusion and impulsive buying behavior. (3) The need for influence also mediates the relationship between social exclusion and impulsive buying behavior. (4) Self-control acts as a mediating variable in the relationship between social exclusion and impulsive buying behavior. These hypotheses aim to explore the internal psychological mechanisms that link social exclusion to impulsive consumer behavior among university students, particularly within the digital consumption environment.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a quantitative explanatory design to test hypotheses and examine both the direct and indirect relationships among variables, namely social exclusion, relative deprivation, need to belong, self-control, and online impulsive buying behavior among university students. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to 385 students who have experience in making impulsive online purchases. The sampling technique used was random sampling. Each construct was measured using multiple items adapted from previously validated scales, and responses were recorded using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha, and all constructs demonstrated acceptable reliability levels, with values exceeding the 0.70 threshold. Data analysis was performed using SPSS 25 and WarpPLS 5.0, applying the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach based on Partial Least Squares (PLS) to assess causal relationships among variables, including direct effects, mediating roles, and moderating effects. Ethical procedures were followed throughout the study; participants provided informed consent, were assured of the confidentiality of their data, and participated voluntarily. The study protocol was reviewed and approved by the institutional ethics committee to ensure compliance with research ethics involving human participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION Results

The analysis of the structural correlations among the variables yielded significant findings. The results indicate strong correlations and significant path coefficients between social exclusion, relative deprivation, need to belong, self-control, and impulsive buying behavior. The following table presents the detailed statistical outcomes, including correlation values, path coefficients, p-values, and significance levels for each tested hypothesis.

Correlations				
Correlation	Path Coefficient.	P-value	Notes	
$X \rightarrow Y$	0.274	0.001	Significant	
$X \rightarrow M1$	-0.436	0.001	Significant	
$M1 \rightarrow Y$	0.690	0.001	Significant	
$X \rightarrow M2$	-0.332	0.001	Significant	
$M2 \rightarrow Y$	0.175	0.001	Significant	
$Z \rightarrow Y$	-0.290	0.001	Significant	

Table 1. Correlation, Path Coefficient, P-value, and Significance of Hypothesized Correlations

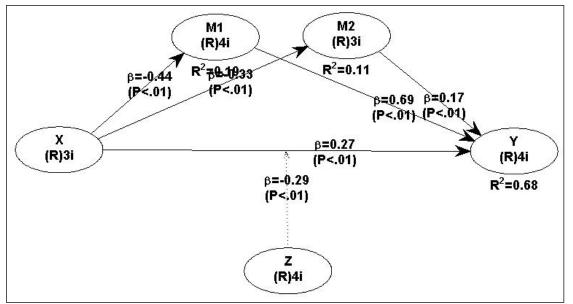


Figure 1. Structural model showing path coefficients and R² values for the tested hypotheses.

The results of the structural model analysis using WarpPLS indicate significant relationships among the studied variables. Specifically, variable X has a significant positive effect on M1 (β = 0.44; p < 0.01) and M2 (β = 0.33; p < 0.01), suggesting that X positively predicts both mediators. Furthermore, M1 significantly predicts M2 (β = 0.69; p < 0.01), showing a sequential mediation path.

Direct effects from X to Y are also significant ($\beta = 0.27$; p < 0.01), indicating that X has a direct influence on the outcome variable Y. Additionally, M1 and M2 significantly affect Y, with path coefficients of $\beta = 0.17$ (p < 0.01) and $\beta = 0.29$ (p < 0.01), respectively. This supports the mediation role of both M1 and M2 in the relationship between X and Y.

Moreover, the moderating variable Z significantly interacts with X ($\beta = -0.29$; p < 0.01), indicating a moderation effect that reduces the impact of X on Y. The R² values show that 19% of the variance in M1, 11% in M2, and 68% in Y can be explained by the model. These findings confirm that the proposed structural model fits well and supports all hypothesized paths.

Discussion

Social exclusion has a highly significant effect on impulsive buying behavior, with a p-value less than 0.05. Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted. The path coefficient value of 0.274 indicates that the higher the level of social exclusion experienced by an individual, the greater their tendency to engage in impulsive purchases. This positive coefficient aligns with the fundamental assumptions of the Compensatory Consumer Behavior Theory (CCBT), which posits that individuals tend to use consumption, including impulsive buying behavior, as a compensatory strategy to cope with emotional distress or psychological imbalance, such as feelings of social rejection or the need for self-validation.

In this context, impulsive buying serves as a quick way to alleviate the discomfort caused by social exclusion, while also acting as a temporary escape from feelings of social rejection. These findings are consistent with previous research (Juanchich et al., 2018; Lee & Shrum, 2015; Dubois et al., 2021; Oh, 2021) which state that social exclusion influences impulsive buying behavior. The rational explanation of how social exclusion can affect impulsive buying behavior among university students is that social exclusion can trigger various negative emotions, such as feelings of anger, anxiety, sadness, and social pressure. These emotional responses may subsequently lead to cognitive dysfunction or impairments in an individual's decision-making processes.(Thi Phan et al., 2020).

Based on data collected from university students in Indonesia, it was found that social exclusion has a highly significant positive influence on impulsive buying behavior, particularly among students. Impulsive shopping activities especially online provide momentary satisfaction that can help alleviate negative emotions resulting from social exclusion. (Lee & Shrum, 2016). Therefore, students who feel alienated from their social environment are more vulnerable to impulsive buying behavior. Moreover, the ease of access to e-commerce platforms, social media, and flexible digital payment systems exacerbates this tendency. When individuals feel isolated, they are more likely to seek escape through activities that are immediate and can be done privately, such as online shopping. (Xiang et al., 2016). This process reinforces the tendency to engage in impulsive buying as a means of seeking social validation or self-actualization through the acquisition of goods obtained via impulsive purchases.(Wang et al., 2022)

The negative direction of the relationship between social exclusion and relative deprivation can be explained through a coping mechanism approach. When individuals experience social exclusion, they may cope by lowering their social standards or reducing social comparisons, which in turn can lead to a decreased perception of relative deprivation. (Smith et al., 2014). Research by Zoogah, (2017) also found that in certain contexts, negative social experiences do not always heighten feelings of deprivation; instead, they may trigger emotional adaptation that reduces sensitivity to social comparisons. However, when relative deprivation does occur, its influence on impulsive buying behavior remains significant and strong. Relative deprivation generates feelings of dissatisfaction and injustice, which drive individuals to seek

compensation through consumption, particularly impulsive purchases.(Kim et al., 2016).

This study examined two mediating variables, namely relative deprivation and the need to belong, in explaining the relationship between social exclusion and impulsive buying behavior. The analysis results indicate that the mediating effect of relative deprivation (path coefficient = 0.690) is substantially greater than that of the need to belong (path coefficient = 0.175). This means that students who experience social exclusion are more likely to feel deprived when comparing themselves to others, and this feeling of deprivation strongly drives their tendency to engage in impulsive purchases. In practical terms, this implies that feelings of "unfairness" or "lacking" in comparison to peers a common experience in today's digital student culture serve as a powerful psychological trigger for impulsive consumption. In the context of Indonesian students, who are constantly exposed to social media showcasing curated lifestyles and material success, this sense of deprivation becomes more intense and directly translates into consumption behavior as a way of compensating for perceived inequality.

The hypothesis testing results revealed that the need to belong decreases due to social exclusion; however, in reality, students remain driven to fulfill this need through consumption as an indirect means of social fulfillment(Lee & Shrum, 2016). Despite being statistically significant, the mediating influence of the need to belong appears to be less impactful compared to relative deprivation (Ferraro et al., 2021). The lower coefficient suggests that while students may still seek symbolic connection through buying behaviors, this motivation is more situational and not as psychologically intense. For instance, university students may act on this need during flash sales, trending product moments, or social media challenges, but it is the emotional discomfort of feeling "less than" others that ultimately carries greater weight. Therefore, while the need to belong does play a role, it serves more as a secondary mediator, amplifying impulsive buying only under specific social triggers.

Self-control plays a significant moderating role in the relationship between social exclusion and impulsive buying behavior among university students. As demonstrated b Perchtold-Stefan et al., (2022), Although social exclusion drives a tendency toward impulsive buying as a form of emotional compensation, this effect is substantially weakened in individuals with high levels of self-control. University students who are able to regulate their emotional impulses resulting from social exclusion show a lower tendency to engage in impulsive consumption behavior, indicating that self-control can mitigate the negative impact of social pressure (Watson & Spence, 2017).

The interaction between social exclusion and self-control on impulsive buying behavior in this study reveals a distinct pattern. Among students with low self-control, increased experiences of social exclusion are strongly positively correlated with a heightened tendency to engage in impulsive buying(Lučić et al., 2021). Conversely, students in this category are able to manage negative emotions resulting from social exclusion through more adaptive strategies, preventing the impulsive buying urge from developing substantially(Zia & Shahzad, 2017). Thus, the moderating effect of selfcontrol in this context demonstrates that strong self-control serves as a psychological protective factor, reducing the risk of impulsive buying behavior triggered by experiences of social exclusion(Akram et al., 2018).

Based on the results of the moderation test and the discussion of the Compensatory Consumer Behavior Theory (CCBT) relevant to this study, it can be concluded that selfcontrol functions as a significant moderator in the relationship between social exclusion and impulsive buying behavior. This study confirms that among university students, those with high levels of self-control tend to adopt more adaptive coping strategies, which minimize the negative effects of social exclusion on impulsive buying tendencies. Therefore, although social exclusion can trigger negative emotions that typically drive impulsive buying behavior, strong self-control enables students to manage these pressures without resorting to impulsive purchases as a form of compensation.

While these findings align with prior research, the data collected from Indonesian university students also highlight specific cultural dynamics. In Indonesia's collectivist society, where social connectedness and peer acceptance are highly valued, exclusion can lead not only to emotional discomfort but also to heightened social comparison. When students are unable to participate in popular consumption trends like flash sales, limited edition drops, or influencer-endorsed items they may feel left behind. This often results in compensatory buying behavior as a way to "keep up" or reclaim social belonging. The digital landscape, particularly social media, further intensifies these pressures by constantly displaying others' consumption choices, which can aggravate feelings of inadequacy. Thus, within Indonesia's youth consumer culture, relative deprivation becomes a particularly dominant driver of impulsive buying.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding: 1.) social exclusion significantly contributes to impulsive buying behavior among university students; 2.) this effect occurs directly as well as indirectly through the psychological mediators of relative deprivation and the need to belong, and; 3.) the results support the Compensatory Consumer Behavior Theory (CCBT), which explains how individuals turn to consumption as a coping mechanism in response to social or emotional distress. Implication: 1.) tackling social exclusion on campus is essential for reducing impulsive financial behavior; 2.) counseling services should incorporate modules that raise awareness about the impact of social pressure on financial decisions and strengthen students' self-control, and; 3.) inclusive campus policies can help prevent social exclusion and its psychological consequences. Limitation: 1.) the sample is limited to university students, which may affect the generalizability of the results; 2.) the mediating effects of relative deprivation and the need to belong were found to be weak to moderate, and; 3.) other unmeasured factors may also influence impulsive buying behavior. Future Research: 1.) explore similar patterns across broader and more diverse populations; 2.) investigate additional mediators and moderators such as emotional regulation, peer dynamics, or online behavior, and; 3.) deepen the understanding of how digital contexts might shape compensatory consumer responses to social exclusion.

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*Dhian Puspita (Corresponding Author) Afilliation: Universitas Negeri Surabaya Address: Jl Ketintang Kampus Unesa Surabaya, 60231, Indonesia Email: <u>dhian.21026@mhs.unesa.ac.id</u>