

Psychological, Personal and Social Drivers of Impulse Buying in UK Fast Fashion E-Commerce: Implications for Sustainable Consumption

Hina Haseeb (Corresponding Author)

Master of International Business Administration,
Buckinghamshire New University, High Wycombe,
United Kingdom Email: hinahussain900@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

In just seconds, one can purchase a garment online, and fast fashion has made its garments cheap enough that many of them are virtually an after-thought. This is important for sustainability, since the bulk of environmental impact in the sector is associated with the number of unnecessary purchases. This paper is based on an online survey of UK fast fashion shoppers and examines the psychological, personal and social factors that relate to making impulse purchases. Forty-five consumers were interviewed using a cross sectional questionnaire in November and December 2024, descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and simple linear regression were applied during the analysis. The majority of respondents were on incomes of less than £40,000 (73.3%), aged 25-34 (57.8%) and female (62.2%), and were using the internet mainly for convenience, affordability and choice. All three hypotheses were supported by the data. Age, lifestyle and income explained 36.7% of the variance in impulse buying ($\beta = .606$, $p < .001$); family and social reference groups explained 36.0% ($\beta = .600$, $p < .001$); perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and motivation explained 24.1% ($\beta = .491$, $p = .001$). Of those who believed that sustainable and ethical products would make their online shopping experience better, affordable cost was overwhelmingly the best trait that brands should have (62.2%). It seems the peer and personal pressures that foster impulsive consumption might be harnessed to help reduce consumption. These include sustainability messages from trusted peers and micro-influencers, take-back and resale programme, more comprehensive information about the product and stricter guidelines on push selling.

Keywords: fast fashion; impulse buying; e-commerce; sustainable consumption; consumer behaviour; United Kingdom

1. Introduction

Fast fashion refers to low cost clothes, which are produced quickly and sent to the high street before they become out of fashion (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). It's often said that Zara and H&M first introduced the model in Europe in the late nineties and

early aughts, as they were the first to shorten the development cycle from design to delivery, allowing them to become multinationals from regional brands. The two are generally regarded as introducing the model into Europe in the late 90s and early 2000s. Then came Primark and then a host of retailers selling only online, and prices went lower still, and trends even quicker. Buying habits followed. Younger shoppers are especially transitioning from fewer and more durable garments to buying low quality, in-the-trend clothing frequently (Solomon, 2023).

The transition is costly in terms of the environment and society. According to Niinimäki et al. (2020), fashion represents 8–10% of global CO₂ emissions and more than 92m tonnes of textile waste annually, with two of the biggest contributors highlighted as short trend cycles and low utilisation of garments. Faster cycles prompt people to buy more and discard sooner (Liu, 2021), and Olivar Aponte et al. (2024) trace environmental damage through every stage of fast fashion consumption, from purchase to disposal. Workers bear part of the cost too, since low shelf prices depend on low pay in producing countries (Stringer et al., 2022). How often people buy clothes, and how much thought goes into it, is therefore a sustainability question in its own right, not merely a commercial one.

The United Kingdom is one of Europe's largest markets for online fashion. The UK fashion e-commerce market was valued at about US\$31.19 billion in 2023 and is forecast to reach US\$85.51 billion by 2030, a compound annual growth rate of 15.5%, with clothing, including fast fashion, accounting for the largest share (IBISWorld, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the move online. UK spending on clothing and footwear fell by 20.3% in 2020 as shops closed (Statista, 2023), and retailers turned to online channels and deep discounting to keep customers buying (Brydges et al., 2020). The fast fashion segment was projected to grow by 2.4% between 2023 and 2024, to around £22.4 billion (IBISWorld, 2023).

Impulse buying finds fertile ground online. One-click checkout, tailored recommendations, flash sales and lenient returns all shorten the step from seeing an item to buying it (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2021; Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). Yet most fast fashion research has dealt with supply chains, logistics and the footprint of production (Camargo et al., 2020; Olivar Aponte et al., 2024). Much less is known about how psychological, personal and social influences combine to produce impulsive online purchases, despite their direct link to overconsumption and waste. Retailers hoping to retain customers have an interest in this question; so do researchers and policymakers trying to shift demand towards more sustainable consumption.

The study therefore set out to examine the influences on impulse buying among UK fast fashion e-commerce shoppers, with five objectives in view:

- O1. Identify the main psychological, personal and social factors behind UK consumers' online fast fashion purchases.
- O2. Assess whether perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and motivation bear on impulsive online buying of fast fashion.
- O3. Determine whether age, lifestyle and income bear on impulsive online buying.
- O4. Evaluate the part played by family and social reference groups in impulsive

online buying.

O5. Draw out practical strategies for UK fast fashion retailers and policymakers. Two contributions follow from this. The paper adds survey evidence on psychological, personal and social factors considered together, rather than in isolation, for the UK online fast fashion market. It also reads that evidence with sustainability in mind, asking whether the pressures behind impulsive buying might be redirected towards more responsible choices. Section 2 reviews the literature and sets out the hypotheses; Section 3 describes the method; Section 4 reports the results; Section 5 discusses them against earlier work; and Section 6 concludes with recommendations and limitations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Consumer behaviour and impulse buying

Consumer behaviour is the way in which consumers select, purchase, use, and dispose of products, services or ideas to satisfy needs (Solomon, 2023). The examples of influences on these processes are separated and sorted into psychological influences, personal/social factors and marketing/situational stimuli by established models (Kotler & Armstrong, 2020). Purchases also vary in the degree of involvement they demand. Buying a car or a house is a high-involvement decision, carrying considerable perceived risk and calling for careful deliberation; everyday groceries and fast fashion, by contrast, are low-involvement purchases, made quickly, with little thought and little sense of risk (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010).

Impulse buying is usually understood as a sudden, unplanned purchase made with little deliberation. Stern (1962) distinguished four kinds (pure, reminder, suggestion and planned impulse purchases), and Barcelona et al. (2022) have since applied his typology to short shopping videos on TikTok, finding that persuasive social media content prompts each of them. Nguyen and Ha (2021) usefully qualify impulse purchases as being always unplanned, while unplanned purchases are not always impulsive. Both internal (emotion, hedonic value, and fashion involvement) and external (promotions, sensory cues) stimuli explained impulse buying, with emotion and hedonic value being the best predictors in the sample of fast fashion shoppers. Similarly, the meta-analysis by Iyer et al. (2020) highlights the interplay between consumer characteristics and situational factors as factors that underpin impulse buying. Stern was discussing bricks-and-mortar retail, and ecommerce is pushing the envelope on his ideas. Scarcity messages and low-stock warnings online stimulate shoppers to make fast decisions (Song et al., 2021; Cengiz & Şenel, 2024). When it comes to ragging, there is nothing better than free returns. Instagram and TikTok on the other hand, do this by providing personalised recommendations, discount codes and trend-driven posts (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021).

2.2 Fast fashion, e-commerce and sustainability

Low prices and quick trend turnover are what let consumers buy fashionable clothing without much hesitation (Solomon, 2023). Newness is a large part of the appeal: people want to stay current while still expressing something of themselves, and wider internet access and heavy social media use have made consumers more fashion-aware and harder to satisfy (Özbölük & Akdoğan, 2022).

Retailers take advantage of this by offering promotions to evoke emotions. Deals that make a purchase seem like something that will never happen again, such as buy-one-get-one-free, discount codes, countdown sales and free delivery, negatively impact self-control (Akbar et al., 2020; Bandyopadhyay et al., 2021). Such measures have been taken even further during the pandemic. One online retailer in the UK was widely criticised for offering such a low price for dresses during the Black Friday promotional period in 2020, and Brydges et al. (2020) explains how selling at steep discounts helped the sales to continue, despite the drop in demand.

The virtual marketplace also encourages its users to make hasty purchases. Gulfraz et al. (2022) suggest that impulse buying is positively mediated by attitudinal loyalty, but that self-control negatively affects functional and psychological quality of the shopping experience. Widagdo and Roz (2021) discovered that the characteristics of a good website can increase hedonic shopping motivation, which leads to impulsive shopping. The unsettling idea that the fun of clothes shopping online is a lot like that of over-buying things.

The depth of the literature on sustainability also reveals that, "what consumers say" is not necessarily "what consumers do. A study by Zhang et al (2021) revealed that the attitudes of UK consumers to the sustainability of fast fashion varied between segments, with low levels of emotional engagement and not necessarily leading to action. Magwegwe and Shaik (2024) state that among the factors that influence sustainable fast fashion purchases, one of the most important is the perceived behaviour control, that is, if consumers believe they have the power to act on their awareness of sustainability, this awareness will affect their purchasing. Magwegwe and Shaik (2024) argue that perceived behavioural control, meaning the belief that consumers can act upon their awareness of sustainability, is one of the most influential factors when it comes to sustainable fast fashion purchases. Papasolomou et al. (2023) noted that consumers recognise the environmental harm caused by fast fashion and keep buying it regardless, and Busalim et al. (2022) arrive at a comparable conclusion in their review of sustainable fashion consumption. Price widens this gap. When garments are very cheap, consumers show less concern for the welfare of the workers who make them (Stringer et al., 2022), and young consumers who suspect greenwashing become less willing to buy products promoted as environmentally friendly (Lu et al., 2022). Work on circular fashion suggests that consumers will take up resale, rental and recycling if these options are convenient and affordable (Papamichael et al., 2024). E-commerce brings an additional environmental cost through delivery and returns, though consumers rarely take this into account when deciding how to shop (Nogueira et al., 2021).

2.3 Psychological factors

Motivation, perception, learning, beliefs and attitudes all influence how consumers respond to products (Solomon, 2023). Motivation sets the buying process in motion by converting a perceived lack into a felt need, and fast fashion caters to motives such as style, prestige and self-esteem through a continuous supply of new, inexpensive items. Perception filters incoming information through expectations and previous experience, which is why one shopper may see a product as a bargain while another sees it as wasteful. Attitudes, formed from beliefs, feelings and intentions towards a

product, may be favourable because fast fashion is cheap and stylish, or unfavourable because of its environmental and ethical record (Pérez et al., 2022). Values are also added. Adeola et al. (2024) differentiate between terminal values (happiness, satisfaction) and instrumental (saving money, saving time) values, and demonstrate that both influence online fashion purchases, with a stronger effect for individuals who are interested in fashion. In fact, this literature suggests that impulse buying of fast fashion is as much an emotional payoff as a consideration of costs and benefits.

2.4 Personal factors

Age, income, occupation and lifestyle all shape what consumers like and how they spend (Kotler & Armstrong, 2020). Bishnoi and Guru (2023) reported that age, family income and family size had significant effects on fast fashion consumption, and that younger consumers, who frequently combine limited disposable income with a keen interest in trends, were the group most attracted to fast fashion brands. Income determines purchasing power. Students and people early in their careers tend to choose budget options, whereas those on higher incomes have more freedom to buy premium or sustainable clothing. Occupation affects the image consumers want to convey, so that a student's casual wardrobe differs from the work-appropriate clothing expected of a professional. Lifestyle, understood as the way people live, spend and relate to others, influences both product choice and brand loyalty, and consumers who place a high value on sustainability are more inclined to choose eco-conscious brands (Busalim et al., 2022).

Personal circumstances bear on the emotional side of shopping as well. Many consumers choose to purchase clothing as a way to alleviate stress or enhance their mood, and online shopping may extend that feeling of pleasure: there's still a parcel to look forward to (Iyer et al., 2020; Madhavaram & Laverie, 2004). Sometimes the lift isn't sustained. This is typically followed by feelings of regret or guilt and was noted by Djafarova and Bowes (2021) particularly by younger females who have learned more than ever before about the environmental impact of fast fashion. Shopping ambivalences can exist side by side and interventions for sustainable behaviour should not forget that ambivalence.

2.5 Social factors

Family, reference groups, and roles and status are all factors that shape the consumer from childhood through their lives (Kotler et al., 2022). Family establish initial preferences and attitudes towards products; the force of this diminishes when people become independent, but it does not usually disappear. Friends, peers, celebrities and online communities are used as a point of comparison and people tend to compare themselves to the groups they aspire to or belong to. With fast fashion, social media influencers are more powerful reference groups that initiate trends and validate purchases (Özbölük & Akdoğan, 2022). Clothing also communicates role and status, such as student, parent or professional (Kotler & Armstrong, 2020). All of this is magnified by social media. Users can read and see what peers and influencers are wearing in real time and the unwritten rule of "no repeating an outfit in photos" creates a continual incentive to purchase (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021).

2.6 Research gap, conceptual framework and hypotheses

Research on fast fashion consumers has looked at marketing tactics, emotions and attitudes to sustainability, but usually one at a time, and ultra-fast fashion, with its still shorter cycles, has received little attention (Camargo et al., 2020). A good deal of recent work also centres on the environmental dimension of fast fashion and its bearing on purchase intentions, rather than on the routine drivers of impulsive buying. The joint contribution of psychological, personal and social factors to impulse buying in the UK online market has rarely been tested. The present study responds to this gap. Its conceptual framework (Figure 1) connects the three groups of factors to impulse buying in UK fast fashion e-commerce, and three hypotheses are tested:

H1. Psychological factors (perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and motivation) significantly influence consumers' impulse buying in UK fast fashion e-commerce.

H2. Personal factors (age, lifestyle and income) significantly influence consumers' impulse buying in UK fast fashion e-commerce.

H3. Social factors (family and social reference groups) significantly influence consumers' impulse buying in UK fast fashion e-commerce.

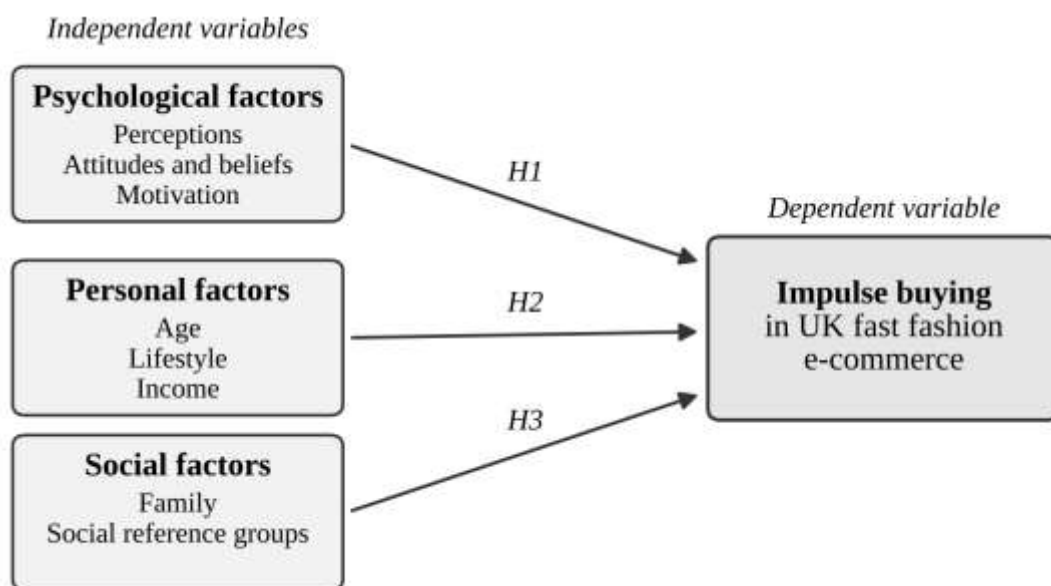


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

Source: developed by the author from the literature reviewed.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research philosophy, approach and design

The study takes a positivist position, treating consumer behaviour as something that can be observed and measured and looking for patterns that can be tested statistically (Saunders et al., 2019). An interpretivist approach using qualitative data would have yielded fuller accounts of individual experience; however, because the aim was to estimate the influence of specified factors on impulse buying, quantitative evidence was required. The approach was deductive, with hypotheses drawn from the literature

and then tested against survey data. A cross-sectional design was used, meaning that data were gathered at a single point in time. This offers a snapshot of consumer attitudes and behaviour and suited the time and resources available, but it cannot reveal how these change over time (Saunders et al., 2019).

3.2 Sampling and data collection

The target population consisted of UK consumers who purchase fast fashion online. Convenience sampling was chosen because it allowed respondents to be reached quickly and cheaply, although this came at some cost to representativeness. The questionnaire was set up in Google Forms and circulated by email and social media, mostly among personal contacts, colleagues and friends, with additional respondents recruited face to face. Nobody was obliged to take part. The aim had been 100 responses, but by the close of data collection (November–December 2024) only 45 complete questionnaires had come in; none was excluded. Books, journal articles, market reports and trade publications were consulted when designing the study and again when making sense of the results.

3.3 Survey instrument

The questionnaire (Appendix A) contained 20 closed-ended items in six parts: demographics; general psychological, personal and social factors; perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and motivation; age, lifestyle and income; family and social reference groups; and suggestions for improving fast fashion platforms. The majority of questions had responses that were ordered, with a maximum point value of 5. Numerical codes were assigned to the answers and then summed up to get composite scores, one for the impulse buying and one for each set of factors; these composites are the variables analysed in Section 4 (see Table 3). The answers were given in a fixed format that was self-completed, thus minimizing the influence of the interviewer.

3.4 Reliability and validity

A preliminary version was tested by 12 people and some of the terms were rephrased and restructured as a result of their feedback. A test for internal consistency was carried out in SPSS and Cronbach's alpha coefficients were obtained which were 0.70 or higher, the established criterion for acceptable reliability. Content validity was ensured by the alignment of each section to a research objective and hypothesis and the use of language that was not so complicated as to be beyond the comprehension of a general consumer audience.

3.5 Data analysis

Google Forms data was downloaded into excel for cleaning and then analysed in IBM SPSS. Sample and study variables are described by their frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations. To examine the relationship among the variables, Pearson's r was used. Each hypothesis was tested in a separate regression analysis of the impulse buying score on each of the factor scores separately, using simple linear regression and the conventional 0.05 level of significance.

3.6 Ethical considerations

Prior to the data collection, ethical approval has been gained by consulting the research ethics checklist of the Buckinghamshire New University. The opening page of the survey explained what the study was about and that respondents could stop at any point; only those who agreed went on to answer. Names and contact details were not kept in the data file, responses were held confidentially on secure storage, and no question asked about sensitive or intrusive matters. Every respondent was 18 or older.

4. Results

4.1 Respondent profile

Table 1 gives the breakdown of the 45 respondents. More than half were aged 25–34 (57.8%), followed by those aged 18–24 (20.0%), 35–44 (17.8%) and 45 or over (4.4%); none were under 18. Just under two-thirds were women (62.2%), the rest men (37.8%). Incomes were concentrated at the lower end: 37.8% earned under £20,000 a year and 35.6% between £20,000 and £40,000, while 22.2% earned £40,001–£60,000 and 4.4% £60,001–£80,000. Full-time employment was the most common source of income (28.9%), followed by part-time employment (26.7%), study (22.2%) and self-employment (20.0%). Almost half of the respondents bought fast fashion online every month (46.7%), and a further 26.7% did so every few months. Convenience (46.7%), affordability (44.4%) and product variety (42.2%) were the main reasons for shopping online, ahead of access to discounts and sales (28.9%). The sample is therefore dominated by young adults on low to middle incomes who buy fast fashion online regularly.

Table 1. Respondent profile (N = 45)

Characteristic	Category	n (%)
Age group	18–24	9 (20.0)
	25–34	26 (57.8)
	35–44	8 (17.8)
	45 and above	2 (4.4)
Gender	Female	28 (62.2)
	Male	17 (37.8)
Annual income	Under £20,000	17 (37.8)
	£20,000–£40,000	16 (35.6)
	£40,001–£60,000	10 (22.2)
	£60,001–£80,000	2 (4.4)
Primary source of income	Full-time employment	13 (28.9)
	Part-time employment	12 (26.7)
	Student	10 (22.2)

Characteristic	Category	n (%)
	Self-employed	9 (20.0)
	Other	1 (2.2)
Frequency of online fast fashion purchasing	Weekly	1 (2.2)
	Monthly	21 (46.7)
	Every few months	12 (26.7)
	Rarely	11 (24.4)
Reasons for buying online (multiple responses)	Convenience	21 (46.7)
	Affordability	20 (44.4)
	Better variety of options	19 (42.2)
	Access to discounts and sales	13 (28.9)
	Other	3 (6.7)

Source: survey data. Percentages for multiple-response items do not sum to 100.

4.2 Purchase influences and sustainability preferences

Table 2 reports responses to selected items on what influences purchases and what respondents want from fast fashion platforms. Recommendations from friends or family were the most common main influence on buying decisions (44.4%), well ahead of social media trends (24.4%), brand advertising (15.6%) and influencers (13.3%). Asked who influenced their purchases most, 37.8% named friends, 31.1% family and 17.8% social media influencers, while 13.3% said no one. Two-thirds (66.7%) considered it moderately or very important that their fashion choices matched those of their social circle. Personal circumstances also mattered: 82.2% said that their income affected how often they bought fast fashion online, 86.7% said that their lifestyle had a moderate or significant influence on their purchases, and budget-friendly options were the main reason for buying fast fashion at their stage of life (60.0%).

Discounts and offers were the leading motivation for shopping online (46.7%), followed by convenient delivery (44.4%) and easy returns (44.4%). Sustainability featured in respondents' wishes, though not at the top. Sustainable and ethical product options were the second most frequently chosen improvement (42.2%), after better product quality (60.0%), and better transparency on product details was the factor most often said to encourage more frequent shopping (31.1%). When asked which strategies brands should adopt, however, respondents chose affordable pricing (62.2%) far more often than ethical sourcing and production (26.7%).

Table 2. Purchase influences and preferences for platform improvement (N = 45)

Item	Response	n (%)
Main influence on buying decisions	Friends or family recommendations	20 (44.4)
	Social media trends	11 (24.4)
	Advertisements by brands	7 (15.6)
	Recommendations from influencers	6 (13.3)
	None of the above	1 (2.2)
Motivations for shopping online (multiple responses)	Discounts and offers	21 (46.7)
	Convenience of delivery	20 (44.4)
	Easy return policies	20 (44.4)
	Availability of trendy items	16 (35.6)
Improvements wanted on platforms (multiple responses)	Improved product quality	27 (60.0)
	Sustainable and ethical product options	19 (42.2)
	Faster delivery	13 (28.9)
	Personalised recommendations	13 (28.9)
Factor that would encourage more frequent shopping	Better transparency on product details	14 (31.1)
	Collaborations with popular influencers	13 (28.9)
	Regular discounts and sales	10 (22.2)
	Enhanced user experience on websites or apps	5 (11.1)
Strategies brands should adopt (multiple responses)	Affordable pricing options	28 (62.2)
	Ethical sourcing and production	12 (26.7)
	Enhanced return or exchange policies	12 (26.7)
	Frequent trend updates	10 (22.2)

Source: survey data. “Other” responses are omitted; percentages for multiple-response items do not sum to 100.

4.3 Descriptive statistics

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics for the study variables. The mean impulse

buying score was 9.69 ($SD = 1.58$), indicating a moderate tendency towards impulse buying with fairly consistent responses. Perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and motivation had the highest mean ($M = 12.91$, $SD = 2.90$), followed by family and social reference groups ($M = 12.62$, $SD = 2.49$). The general measure of psychological, personal and social factors showed the widest spread of responses ($M = 11.82$, $SD = 3.57$), whereas age, lifestyle and income showed a moderate spread ($M = 11.76$, $SD = 2.53$). Overall, respondents reported strong perceptions and motivations and a notable degree of social influence on their purchases.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics

Variable	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Impulse buying	45	4.00	13.00	9.69	1.58
Psychological, personal and social factors	45	2.00	16.00	11.82	3.57
Perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and motivation	45	2.00	16.00	12.91	2.90
Age, lifestyle and income	45	3.00	16.00	11.76	2.53
Family and social reference groups	45	5.00	16.00	12.62	2.49

Source: author's analysis.

4.4 Correlation analysis

Table 4 shows that impulse buying was positively and significantly correlated with every factor. The strongest associations were with age, lifestyle and income ($r = .606$, $p < .001$) and with family and social reference groups ($r = .600$, $p < .001$), followed by perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and motivation ($r = .491$, $p = .001$) and the general measure of psychological, personal and social factors ($r = .381$, $p = .010$). The factors were also strongly related to one another, from $r = .559$ between perceptions and family influence to $r = .785$ between personal factors and family and social reference groups. Psychological, personal and social influences therefore overlap considerably in shaping consumer behaviour.

Table 4. Pearson correlation matrix

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Impulse buying	1				
2. Psychological, personal and social factors	.381**	1			
3. Perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and motivation	.491**	.572**	1		
4. Age, lifestyle and income	.606**	.659**	.690**	1	
5. Family and social reference groups	.600**	.767**	.559**	.785**	1

Note: N = 45. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed). Source: author's analysis.

4.5 Hypothesis testing

Table 5 summarises the three regression models. For H1, perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and motivation explained 24.1% of the variance in impulse buying ($R^2 = .241$, adjusted $R^2 = .223$). The model was significant ($F(1, 43) = 13.63$, $p = .001$), and each one-unit increase in the psychological factors score was associated with an increase of 0.267 in impulse buying ($\beta = .491$, $t = 3.69$, $p = .001$). H1 was supported.

For H2, age, lifestyle and income explained 36.7% of the variance in impulse buying ($R^2 = .367$, adjusted $R^2 = .352$). The model was significant ($F(1, 43) = 24.93$, $p < .001$), and each one-unit increase in the personal factors score was associated with an increase of 0.378 in impulse buying ($\beta = .606$, $t = 4.99$, $p < .001$). H2 was supported.

For H3, family and social reference groups explained 36.0% of the variance in impulse buying ($R^2 = .360$, adjusted $R^2 = .345$). This model was also significant ($F(1, 43) = 24.18$, $p < .001$), with each one-unit rise in the social factors score corresponding to a 0.380 increase in impulse buying ($\beta = .600$, $t = 4.92$, $p < .001$). H3 was supported. In all three models the adjusted R^2 is only slightly lower than R^2 , as would be expected for models with a single predictor, so the explained variance is not inflated by model complexity.

Table 5. Results of the simple linear regressions for impulse buying

Hypothesis and predictor	Constant (SE)	B (SE)	β	t	R^2	Adj. R^2	F(1, 43)	Result
H1: Perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and motivation	6.240 (0.957)	0.267 (0.072)	.49 1	3.69* *	.241	.223	13.63**	Supported
H2: Age, lifestyle and income	5.251 (0.909)	0.378 (0.076)	.60 6	4.99* **	.367	.352	24.93** *	Supported
H3: Family and social reference groups	4.886 (0.995)	0.380 (0.077)	.60 0	4.92* **	.360	.345	24.18** *	Supported

Note: Dependent variable = impulse buying; N = 45. Standard errors of the estimate: H1 = 1.392, H2 = 1.271, H3 = 1.278. ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. Source: author's analysis.

5. Discussion

5.1 Personal factors and the affordability barrier

Personal factors came out as the strongest predictor, accounting for 36.7% of the variance in impulse buying. Bishnoi and Guru (2023) reached a similar conclusion about the role of age and income in fast fashion consumption, and the result is unsurprising given who answered the survey: mostly young adults on modest incomes, 60.0% of whom said budget-friendly options were their main reason for buying fast fashion. A cheap top is easy to justify on a whim. That is precisely the

difficulty from a sustainability standpoint. Respondents wanted lower prices far more than ethical sourcing, which is in line with Stringer et al.'s (2022) finding that rock-bottom prices blunt concern for garment workers, and with Magwegwe and Shaik's (2024) evidence that people act sustainably only when they feel able to. Sustainable alternatives sold as a premium range are unlikely to reach shoppers like these. Second-hand, rental or well-made basics at familiar price points stand a better chance.

5.2 Social influence as a lever for change

Family and social reference groups explained 36.0% of the variance, which fits the long-standing view of consumption as a social activity (Kotler et al., 2022). What stands out is where that influence came from. Friends and family were named as the main influence on buying decisions by 44.4% of respondents, against 15.6% for brand advertising and 13.3% for influencers, and two-thirds of respondents cared about matching the fashion choices of those around them. For this group, it seems like there are more people they're not following than they are following. If these networks are the routes by which trend disseminates, then there doesn't seem to be any logical reason why more responsible habits can't too. Social norms has been correlated with intentions to purchase less clothing (Joanes et al., 2020), and peer-led efforts (such as 'swap events' and community repair sessions, and endorsement from 'micro-influencers' to which people hold a real rapport) may prove more convincing than brand-led campaigns. There is a double-edged sword in this case: social media. It also encourages impulsive purchasing (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021) but it is also where many consumers first learn the conditions under which their clothes are produced; this knowledge can lead to hesitation when they are about to check out.

5.3 Psychological factors and the attitude-behaviour gap

Perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and motivation explained 24.1% of the variance. This was the least strong of the three relationships – but not a minor one. The fast fashion marketing is related with the self-esteem, confidence, and the slight excitement of newness, which is one of the strongest motivations to impulse buying in previous research, as cited by Nguyen & Ha (2021) and Widagdo & Roz (2021). The survey also echoes the attitude-behaviour gap reported in literature (Zhang et al., 2021; Papasolomou et al., 2023), as more than a fourth of the respondents desired to buy online in ways that were sustainable and ethical, but the primary reasons for buying online were discounts, convenient delivery, and easy returns. It's worthwhile to take a closer look at returns. The risk of ordering impulsively is significantly reduced when they know that it can be returned for free and the additional transport and handling costs are unquantifiable in terms of environmental impact, which is not something customers take into account when they are purchasing goods (Nogueira et al., 2021). The biggest driver for shopping more was respondents' perceptions that greater transparency would help them better understand the products they would buy. If consumers perceive it as accurate and have trust in it, then it could help bridge this gap, but only when claims are not greenwashing. Accurate and transparent information about materials, origin and environmental impact can then help bridge the gap, provided consumers believe it; otherwise, it may create a backlash (Lu et al., 2022).

5.4 Implications for business and policy

The results indicate openness regarding the production of clothes is emerging as a competitive advantage for retailers. Brands could share their supplier networks, working conditions and environmental impact, as well as the story of responsible sourcing and how it addresses the emotional needs that are now being met by impulse buying. The buy-back, rental and recycling programs promote waste reduction and are attractive to environmentally conscious customers (Papamichael et al., 2024). There are other ways: Augmented reality fitting software could reduce returns, recommendation software algorithms may be designed to promote products that last longer, and blockchain records could help to make supply chains more transparent. Clear “made nearby” labels could also help to mitigate the price of long supply chains, but customers would need to balance these costs with their expectations for price.

The results pose questions for policy makers regarding the techniques for selling that take advantage of impulsive behavior. Guidelines on how hard they push, particularly targeting younger buyers, such as countdown clocks and flash sales, could be part of the restrictions. On the incentive front, there could be rewards for brands that are more sustainable, assistance to SMEs to make the transition and taxes on wasteful production and unnecessary packaging to finance public education on responsible consumption. Improved labelling and consumer protection would provide consumers with the information they need to make a well informed choice.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore consumer motives for impulse purchases of fast fashion products in the UK. The relationships of these three sets of factors to impulse buying were significant and positive. The variance in each of the personal factors (age, lifestyle and income) and social factors (family and reference groups) accounts for just over a third of the variance, while the psychological factors account for just under a quarter. The average person who responded was a young adult with low or middle income, who bought things online regularly because it was convenient, inexpensive and had many choices, and who relied heavily on friends and family for information when deciding what to purchase. Respondents had an interest in sustainable and ethical, and the price mattered. The message is that impulse buying is so easy because there are forces to overlook, but if directed, these same forces can help to facilitate more sustainable consumption.

Six recommendations follow. (1) Cooperation with micro-influencers and trusted community members who are actively involved with sustainability and who can demonstrate commitment to recycling and longevity of clothing, using social proof to encourage such behaviours. (2) There should be a mix of incentives for sustainable brands with clear, yet flexible, restrictions on aggressive branding, evaluated as the market evolves. (3) Retailers need to use technologies like blockchain traceability or virtual fitting, but should not exclude customers who are price sensitive. (4) Jointly implement responsible consumption programmes with educators, marketers and government, e.g. repair and upcycling workshops, and short online content for younger generations on the environmental impact of fast fashion. (5) Brands need to scale up circular designs: buy-back programmes offering credit to the customer for

future purchases; renting products for special use; partnerships with recycling and resale platforms. (6) Brands should encourage the clothing swaps, repair events etc. and be working with schools, community groups, local councils and other community groups over the long-term.

6.1 Limitations and future research

There are definite limitations of the study. Less than half of the planned sample of 100 participants (45 were recruited by convenience) and the sample was skewed with the majority of respondents female aged 25-34, which limits the ability of the results to be representative of the UK fast fashion consumers in general. All measures were self-reports and were obtained at one time, which precludes inferring cause and effect. Simple regression was also performed for each hypothesis. Because the three groups of predictors were highly intercorrelated, none of these models is able to capture the individual contribution of the three groups of predictors holding the others constant. That would require larger and more diverse samples to be analysed using multiple regression or structural equation modelling.

There are a number of other lines of further work that suggest themselves. Longitudinal designs can be used to examine the effects of impulse buying on psychological well-being, self-esteem, finances and post purchase regret over time. A comparison between the two societies, such as between a collectivist and an individualist society would emphasize how much the situation can vary. As AI becomes more prevalent in online retail, so do the questions surrounding consumer autonomy and algorithmic recommendations/hyper-personalised marketing. An experiment could be conducted to determine if nudges or gamification or financial incentives get people to make sustainable choices. Qualitative interviews in addition to survey data would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the feelings that were experienced, and studies of attitudes after the pandemic and ultra-fast fashion would enrich the current findings.

DECLARATIONS

Acknowledgement: This article is based on the author's Masters of International Business Administration dissertation from Buckinghamshire New University. Thanks are due to the dissertation supervisor for advice throughout and to everyone who took the time to complete the survey.

Funding: No funding body in the public, private, or nonprofit sectors provided a particular grant for this research.

Availability of data and material: The authors guarantee that the data reported in the manuscript are anonymous and can be made available on reasonable request from the corresponding author.

Authors' contributions: Each author participated equally in the creation of this work.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declare no conflict of interest.

Consent to Participate: Yes

Consent for publication and Ethical approval: Data collection started after the study had been approved by the research ethics procedure at Buckinghamshire New University. The participants were all adults and took part voluntarily and anonymously and gave informed consent.

REFERENCES

- Adeola, O., Moradeyo, A. A., Muogboh, O., & Adisa, I. (2024). Consumer values, online purchase behaviour and the fashion industry: An emerging market context. *PSU Research Review*, 8(1), 68–83. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PRR-04-2021-0019>
- Akbar, M. I. U. D., Ahmad, B., Asif, M. H., & Siddiqui, S. A. (2020). Linking emotional brand attachment and sales promotion to post-purchase cognitive dissonance: The mediating role of impulse buying behavior. *The Journal of Asian Finance, Economics and Business*, 7(11), 367–379.
- Bandyopadhyay, N., Sivakumaran, B., Patro, S., & Kumar, R. S. (2021). Immediate or delayed! Whether various types of consumer sales promotions drive impulse buying?: An empirical investigation. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 61, Article 102532. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2021.102532>
- Barcelona, A. B., Angeles, R. J. G., Clemente, C. A., Cruz, S. R. B. D., Malimban, R. L. O., Santos, J. E. G., & Tan, J. C. D. (2022). #Budolfinds: The role of TikTok's Shopee Finds' videos in the impulsive buying behavior of Generation Z consumers. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary: Applied Business and Education Research*, 3(11), 2316–2328.
- Bhardwaj, V., & Fairhurst, A. (2010). Fast fashion: Response to changes in the fashion industry. *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, 20(1), 165–173. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09593960903498300>
- Bishnoi, S., & Guru, R. (2023). Study on effect of consumer age, family income and family size on fast fashion consumption pattern. *Tekstilec*, 66, 148–159.
- Blackall, M. (2020, November 27). Critics attack Pretty Little Thing's 8p Black Friday dress deal. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/nov/27/critics-slam-pretty-little-things-8pblack-friday-dress-deal>
- Brydges, T., Retamal, M., & Hanlon, M. (2020). Will COVID-19 support the transition to a more sustainable fashion industry? *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy*, 16(1), 298–308. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15487733.2020.1829848>
- Busalim, A., Fox, G., & Lynn, T. (2022). Consumer behavior in sustainable fashion: A systematic literature review and future research agenda. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 46(5), 1804–1828. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12794>
- Camargo, L. R., Pereira, S. C. F., & Scarpin, M. R. S. (2020). Fast and ultra-fast fashion supply chain management: An exploratory research. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 48(6), 537–553.
- Cengiz, H., & Şenel, M. (2024). The effect of perceived scarcity on impulse-buying tendencies in a fast fashion context: A mediating and multigroup analysis. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 28(3). <https://doi.org/10.1108/JFMM-03-2023-0082>
- Djafarova, E., & Bowes, T. (2021). 'Instagram made me buy it': Generation Z impulse purchases in fashion industry. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 59, Article 102345. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102345>
- Gulfraz, M. B., Sufyan, M., Mustak, M., Salminen, J., & Srivastava, D. K. (2022). Understanding the impact of online customers' shopping experience on online impulsive buying: A study on two leading e-commerce platforms. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 68, Article 103000. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2022.103000>
- IBISWorld. (2023). UK fashion e-commerce market report. IBISWorld.
- Iyer, G. R., Blut, M., Xiao, S. H., & Grewal, D. (2020). Impulse buying: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 48(3), 384–404.

Online ISSN

3007-3197

Print ISSN

3007-3189

<http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about>

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-019-00670-w>

Joanes, T., Gwozdz, W., & Klöckner, C. A. (2020). Reducing personal clothing consumption: A cross-cultural validation of the comprehensive action determination model. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 71, Article 101396. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2020.101396>

Kotler, P., & Armstrong, G. (2020). *Principles of marketing* (18th ed.). Pearson.

Kotler, P., Keller, K. L., & Chernev, A. (2022). *Marketing management* (16th ed.). Pearson.

Liu, C. (2021, May 18). Fast fashion's increasingly rapid trend cycles are driving major overconsumption. *The California Aggie*. <https://theaggie.org/2021/05/18/fast-fashions-increasingly-rapid-trend-cycles-are-driving-major-overconsumption/>

Lu, X., Sheng, T., Zhou, X., Shen, C., & Fang, B. (2022). How does young consumers' greenwashing perception impact their green purchase intention in the fast fashion industry? An analysis from the perspective of perceived risk theory. *Sustainability*, 14(20), Article 13473. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su142013473>

Madhavaram, S. R., & Laverie, D. A. (2004). Exploring impulse purchasing on the internet. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 31, 59–66.

Magwegwe, F. M., & Shaik, A. (2024). Theory of planned behavior and fast fashion purchasing: An analysis of interaction effects. *Current Psychology*, 43, 28868–28885.

McCollough, J. (2020). The impact of consumers' time constraint and conspicuous consumption behaviour on the throwaway society. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 44(1), 33–43. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12542>

Nguyen, S. T., & Ha, T. M. (2021). Predictors of fast-fashion-oriented impulse buying: The case of Vietnamese millennials. *Management Science Letters*, 11, 2021–2032. <https://doi.org/10.5267/j.msl.2021.3.007>

Niinimäki, K., Peters, G., Dahlbo, H., Perry, P., Rissanen, T., & Gwilt, A. (2020). The environmental price of fast fashion. *Nature Reviews Earth & Environment*, 1(4), 189–200. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43017-020-0039-9>

Nogueira, G. P. M., de Assis Rangel, J. J., & Shimoda, E. (2021). Sustainable last-mile distribution in B2C e-commerce: Do consumers really care? *Cleaner and Responsible Consumption*, 3, Article 100021. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.clrc.2021.100021>

Olivar Aponte, N., Hernández Gómez, J., Torres Argüelles, V., & Smith, E. D. (2024). Fast fashion consumption and its environmental impact: A literature review. *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy*, 20(1), Article 2381871. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15487733.2024.2381871>

Özbölük, T., & Akdoğan, K. (2022). The role of online source credibility and influencer identification on consumers' purchase decisions. *International Journal of Internet Marketing and Advertising*, 16(1–2), 165–185.

Papamichael, I., Voukkali, I., Economou, F., Liscio, M. C., Sospiro, P., Naddeo, V., & Zorpas, A. A. (2024). Investigation of customer behaviour regarding circular fashion.

Online ISSN

3007-3197

Print ISSN

3007-3189

<http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about>

Sustainable Chemistry and Pharmacy, 41, Article 101675.

Papasolomou, I., Melanthiou, Y., & Tsamouridis, A. (2023). The fast fashion vs environment debate: Consumers' level of awareness, feelings, and behaviour towards sustainability within the fast-fashion sector. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 29(2), 191–209. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2022.2154059>

Pérez, A., Collado, J., & Liu, M. T. (2022). Social and environmental concerns within ethical fashion: General consumer cognitions, attitudes and behaviours. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 26(5), 792–812.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2019). *Research methods for business students* (8th ed.). Pearson.

Solomon, M. R. (2023). *Consumer behaviour: Buying, having, and being* (14th ed., global ed.). Pearson Education.

Song, M., Choi, S., & Moon, J. (2021). Limited time or limited quantity? The impact of other consumer existence and perceived competition on the scarcity messaging–purchase intention relation. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 47, 167–175. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2021.03.012>

Statista. (2023). Fashion e-commerce in the United Kingdom (UK): Statistics and facts. <https://www.statista.com/topics/8759/fashion-e-commerce-in-the-united-kingdom/>

Stern, H. (1962). The significance of impulse buying today. *Journal of Marketing*, 26(2), 59–62. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224296202600212>

Stringer, T., Payne, A. R., & Mortimer, G. (2022). As cheap as humanly possible: Why consumers care less about worker welfare. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 26(4), 717–737. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JFMM-06-2021-0158>

Widagdo, B., & Roz, K. (2021). Hedonic shopping motivation and impulse buying: The effect of website quality on customer satisfaction. *The Journal of Asian Finance, Economics and Business*, 8(1), 395–405. <https://doi.org/10.13106/jafeb.2021.vol8.no1.395>

Zhang, B., Zhang, Y., & Zhou, P. (2021). Consumer attitude towards sustainability of fast fashion products in the UK. *Sustainability*, 13(4), Article 1646. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13041646>

Appendix A. Survey Instrument

Items were presented in Google Forms. Items marked (M) allowed more than one response.

Section	Item	Response options
1. Demographics	1. What is your age group?	Under 18; 18–24; 25–34; 35–44; 45–54; 55 and above
	2. What is your gender?	Male; Female; Non-binary/Other; Prefer not to say

Online ISSN

3007-3197

Print ISSN

3007-3189

<http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about>

Section	Item	Response options
	3. What is your annual income?	Under £20,000; £20,000–£40,000; £40,001–£60,000; £60,001–£80,000; Over £80,000
	4. What is your primary source of income?	Full-time employment; Part-time employment; Student; Self-employed; Other
	5. How often do you shop for fast fashion items online?	Weekly; Monthly; Every few months; Rarely; Never
2. Psychological, personal and social factors	6. Why do you prefer online fast fashion purchasing? (M)	Convenience; Affordability; Better variety of options; Access to discounts and sales; Other
	7. What influences your decision to buy fast fashion online the most?	Social media trends; Recommendations from influencers; Friends or family recommendations; Advertisements by brands; None of the above
	8. What do you prioritise when purchasing fast fashion online?	Price; Style and trendiness; Quality; Sustainability and ethics; Other
3. Perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and motivation	9. How do you feel about the variety of fast fashion products online?	Excellent variety; Good variety; Average variety; Poor variety; No opinion
	10. What motivates you to shop for fast fashion online? (M)	Discounts and offers; Easy return policies; Convenience of delivery; Availability of trendy items; Other
	11. How satisfied are you with the value for money provided by fast fashion e-commerce platforms?	Very satisfied; Satisfied; Neutral; Dissatisfied; Very dissatisfied
4. Age, lifestyle and income	12. How does your lifestyle influence your fast fashion purchases?	Significant influence; Moderate influence; Little influence; No influence
	13. What is your primary reason for buying fast fashion considering your age group?	Keeping up with trends; Budget-friendly options; Convenience of online purchasing; None of the above
	14. Does your income level affect how often you shop for fast fashion online?	Yes, significantly; Yes, moderately; No, not much; No, not at all
5. Family and social reference groups	15. Who influences your online fast fashion purchases the most?	Family; Friends; Social media influencers; No one

Online ISSN

3007-3197

Print ISSN

3007-3189

<http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about>

Section	Item	Response options
	16. How important is it for you to match your fashion preferences with your social circle?	Very important; Moderately important; Neutral; Not very important; Not important at all
	17. How often do you discuss fast fashion purchases with your family or friends?	Always; Often; Sometimes; Rarely; Never
6. Recommendations	18. What would improve your experience on fast fashion e-commerce platforms? (M)	Improved product quality; Sustainable and ethical product options; Personalised recommendations; Faster delivery; Other
	19. What factors would encourage you to shop more frequently on fast fashion platforms?	Regular discounts and sales; Collaborations with popular influencers; Better transparency on product details; Enhanced user experience on websites/apps; Other
	20. Which of the following strategies should fast fashion brands adopt for better customer satisfaction? (M)	Ethical sourcing and production; Affordable pricing options; Frequent trend updates; Enhanced return/exchange policies; Other