



BENEATH THE TREND

ONLINE IMPULSE SHOPPING

A deep-dive into the triggers for unplanned online purchases — or, what's the online equivalent of an end-cap?



WHAT WE DID

We set out to learn about why people make impulse online purchases. So we screened for those who were shopping online with a plan and ultimately made an unplanned purchase.



HOW WE DID IT

We just asked! They told us, in their own words. In a 15-minute qualitative interview with 164 people. And we probed their responses in an AI-delivered conversation.



WHAT WE ASKED

We talked about why they made the purchase, what triggered the impulse, and how they felt about all of it.



WHAT WE FOUND ...

Laying the groundwork ...

We just said it on the previous slide, but there were lots of words there and this bears repeating:

This sample was made up of people who recently started online shopping with a plan – but then “impulse” purchased a different/additional item



SOME NUMBERS ...

100

Purchased Apparel

From:

- 36% Amazon (in the least shocking news ever)
- 7% Walmart
- 6% Ebay
- 5% Kohl's
- 4% Macy's
- 3% Target (maybe this is a little shockingly low?)
- 1% each – every other retailer, ever (Zulily, J Crew, Nordstrom, etc.)

64

Purchased Groceries

From:

- 42% Amazon
- 28% Walmart
- Smaller mentions (Kroger, HyVee, Costco, etc.)

Some More Numbers

Are they just impulse-y people?

Not necessarily ...

53%

... say they are typically an impulse shopper (in the category)

Do they break the budget when they impulse buy?

Again, not necessarily ...

49%

&

32%

... say they did NOT exceed their budget

... say they did NOT HAVE a budget

A smaller, but important number ...

For those who do exceed the budget (which is) ...

19%

... “it was worth it”



The vast majority are not trading out other items – they are upping the budget

They rationalize the purchase

(more to come on that gem)

“Since I’m going on vacation to a warmer destination I justified that I needed a new swimsuit or two.”

And, frankly, they’re pretty unapologetic about it

“I decided to go ahead and spend more because I wanted it.”

“I found something I have wanted and have looked for ... so budget smhudget, I’m getting’ it.”

Why do they impulse purchase?

There is a consistent rationalization process:

**Ooooh, I really like this
(Cute! Fun! Delicious!)**



**The price is good
(or a deal, or discounted
or free shipping)**



**I need it anyway so I
should get it now***

**Language Nerd Note: 30% end up discussing the purchase as a need – which seems high for something they weren't planning to buy.*



“ Empire waist and sunflowers ... perfect for summer ... Omg, I need this dress. I better buy it before its sold out in my size. And wait, it's only 13.99. It was a nice dress and the price was great and plus free shipping. ”

And then there is the Wild Emotion of Impulse Shopping

One thing we, as Questers, do not love:
generality in emotion (e.g., happy, feel good, satisfied).

That was absolutely not an issue when we asked
people how impulse shopping made them feel ...



Language Nerd Note: To be honest, this was not a place where we expected to see SUCH emotional articulation, but impulse runs deep – both positively and negatively



GUILT AND REGRET – the negative consequences of spending



SMART – or accomplished, if they saved money or found a deal



A **“RUSH”** – the excitement, a **“thrill”** or **“exhilaration”** – there is intensity in the language here



REWARDED – I was able to treat myself; creating a self-gift or **“Christmas” moment** (because, honestly, who else does that for you when you’re a grown up?)



INSPIRED – Or **“empowered”** or **“freedom”** from making a purchase they love; even **“like I have my life together”**

Note: Quantified Qualitative: Based on language; percentages are not mutually exclusive

Quotes around emotion.

I know – more words – but read these! This is where you really see what “impulse” is ... and, more than anything, this may be the crux of why they do it ...



“It makes me feel like a risk-taker. I am both excited and nervous that I made a mistake. I get to explore and ... try something new. I could discover a new favorite.”

“It makes me feel excited. I feel an intense rush.”

“It’s basically a treat for me, with my hard working money, to purchase valuable things for myself. It means I earned the item I purchased because <of> all the effort I put in.”

“The impulse things are usually the things I end up really loving, like love at first sight. I don’t do a lot for myself ... I feel like I’m treating myself when it’s spur of the moment.”

“It makes me feel like I ‘m doing something nice and special for myself. I know I deserve it, I rarely buy myself things nice or expensive.”

“It’s like a new surprise you didn’t know you wanted.”

And here’s a fun one:

“I work and support myself ... I am a creative person and being curious and spontaneous is hugely important to me, and this is one of those experiences ... the value of money is in the enjoyment it brings and sometimes shopping is enjoyment.”

Language Nerd Note: Never attempt to state this particular rationale out loud if you are married to an accountant. Just trust me.

Fine.

So Impulse Shopping is prevalent, expertly rationalized and wildly emotional.

BUT

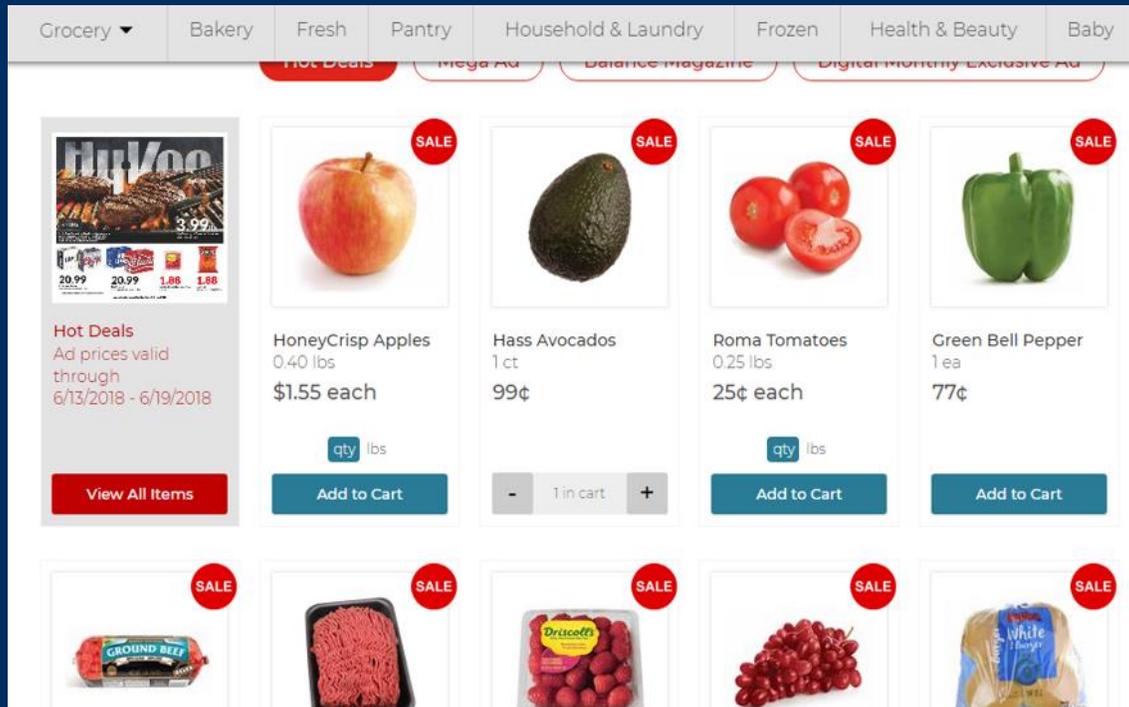
What makes any of that any different from Impulse Shopping at, say, Target (or whatever your Brick-and-Mortar-Happy-Place might be)?



What Triggers the Online Impulse?

Let's just get price out of the way ...

DEALS OR SALES



I know, I know – everything is always about price and that's boring – but in the online context there are some really interesting impulse – trigger nuances



“I think it's more thinking that I'm getting a better deal online. You can see the discounts and deals easier because they just apply it right away to the cart.”

**THERE IS AN
EXPECTATION
THAT THE
DEALS ARE
THERE FOR THE
FINDING**

And to that quote's point – think about the cart ... it's just so easy to add things to evaluate later

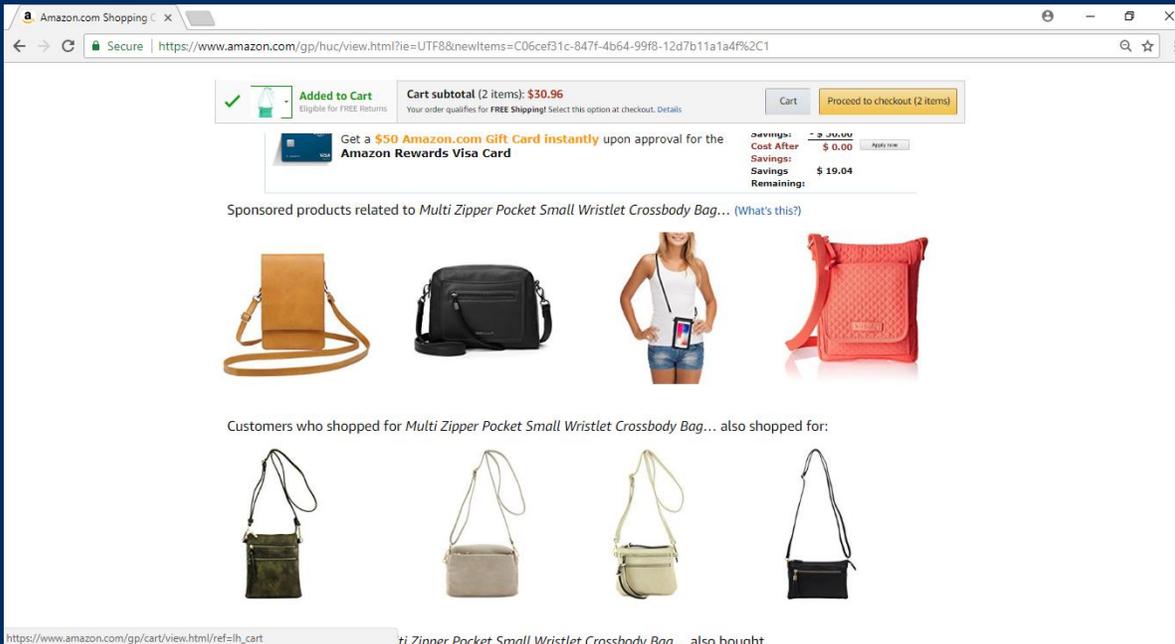
Items are easily compared – and even based on how they are positioned (in rows, next to more expensive items), they may check them out just because they are deal-triggered

As with any retail, limited-time sales also support impulse

What Triggers the Online Impulse?

SUGGESTED ITEMS WHILE YOU'RE SHOPPING

– customized and personalized –



You're rolling through and, simply, "something pops out in front of you to have"

The suggested items, related products, or items that other people have looked at, are really great at sucking you in:



"In Amazon there's the line of 'other people who looked at this item also looked at.' Those I always look at to see if there's an item that may suit me better than the item I'm looking at. Sometimes they trigger me to look at something completely different that I decide I need."

Depending on the search criteria used to shop, a wider range is likely to pop up – which means more to browse

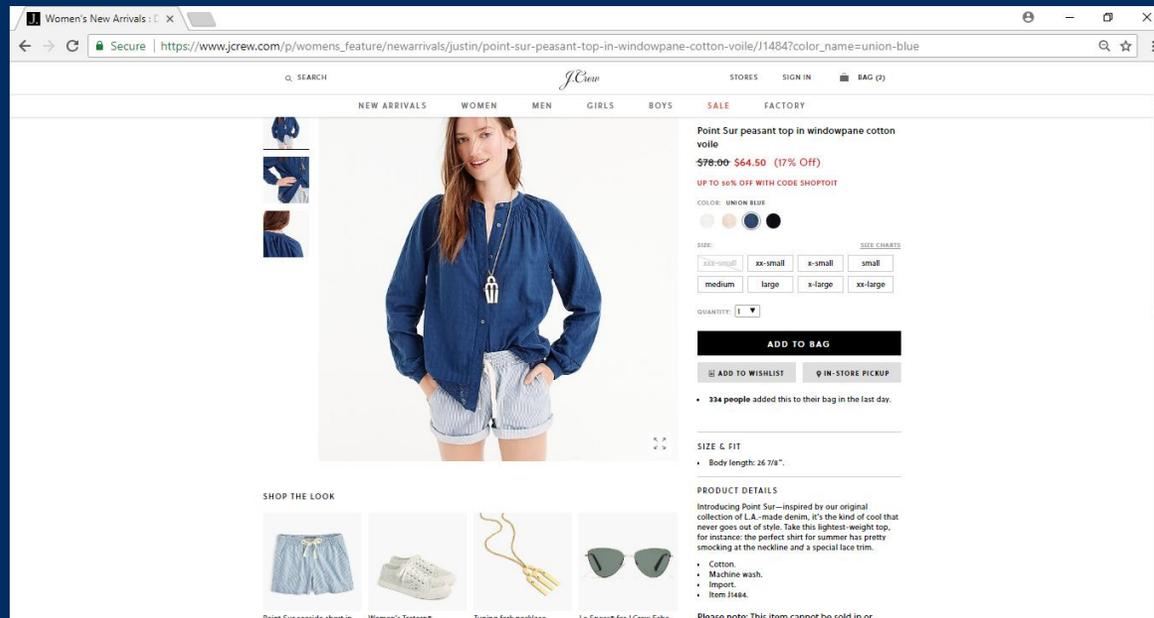
As we all know, your history is used to target you – but it can be a tool to impulse-browse (think past orders in grocery)

Pop up ads encourage additional browsing – and reviews support the purchase

**IMPULSES FLY
AT YOU
FROM
EVERYWHERE**

What Triggers the Online Impulse?

HOW IT LOOKS – APPEALING PHOTOS



Sometimes the photo just draws you in ...



“The models that wear complete outfits, maybe pairs with something you wouldn’t expect.”

**EVERYTHING
IS A
DISPLAY**
(when well done)

This is true in both categories, but for Apparel – so many things are a display. You might be searching for a specific event or for a top, and it’s shown with that cute cardigan, or shoes that are just right ... “how things are put together on a model” can turn a planned item into an outfit

Photos linked to something tagged “new” also draw attention

What's the "So What," tactically?

LINK THE TRIGGERS TO THE IMPULSE DRIVERS

Consider the Hunt for the Deal

Deals are a big deal, even the slightest hint of a bargain (especially limited ones) could trigger the smart shopper impulse

Consider the Cart

Specifically the role of deals within the cart – a key differentiator for online

Consider the Language

Labeling suggested items "Do you also need" may trigger the impulse rationalization loop

Consider the Display

In apparel, "Other people looked at" offering coordinating items (along with variants of shirts, when you're shopping for shirts) may trigger an impulse, turning an item purchase into an outfit purchase



What's the "So What," conceptually?

**MAYBE ONLINE
IMPULSE SHOPPING
ISN'T REALLY IMPULSIVE
AT ALL ...**

The language suggests there is a tacit acceptance, when shopping online, that an unplanned purchase may be involved.

Triggers may be tied to the fact that shopping online is simply, fundamentally, super browse-y.

"I tend to see online as a browsing experience to begin with, a place to study what I want to buy, so I think the impulse trigger may already be there.

And the internet plays on it by re-sending you pictures and triggers and 'something you might likes.'"



Final Language Nerd Note:

Stay with me here ...

Can an Impulse really be called an Impulse if it isn't, you know, Impulsive?

Is it an impulse if you kind of feel like you're going to do it?

Hence, we would submit that online shopping is, by it's nature, "Plan-taneous."



WHO WE TALKED TO

- Online shoppers, rep click sample. And again – those who were shopping online with a plan, then made an impulse purchase.



164 Online interviews with AI moderator

TECHNIQUES APPLIED



- ✓ Customized probing
- ✓ In-depth language review
- ✓ Quantified qualitative language analysis

In the Weeds – Conversation & Detail

1

Now I really want to hear from you, in your own words. Earlier you mentioned that you've recently made an unplanned purchase for <grocery/apparel>. First of all, please tell me what site you were on and what your unplanned purchase was.

2

Moving forward, let's refer to that as an "impulse" purchase. So, talk to me about what you were doing before you selected that item. You mentioned that you were shopping, but talk to me more about what you were doing and what you were shopping for ...

3

So now, help me really understand what led you to add that impulse purchase to your virtual cart. I really want to understand that in detail – tell me that story.

4

Please tell me what – specifically – you saw that put the impulse purchase on your radar. What was it that really made it capture your attention?

5

This is such great detail! Now – imagine there were thought bubbles above your head once you noticed this item. Walk me through what those thought bubbles would have said as you were deciding to go ahead and purchase this impulse item.

6

Just out of curiosity, did that impulse purchase cause you to exceed your budget? So talk me through how you justified that – did you trade out another item from your cart, did you decide to spend more? Walk me through the way you made that decision.

7

Would you say that you are typically an impulse shopper when it comes to <grocery/apparel>? Tell me about the way that impulse shopping makes you feel.

8

To wrap up today, I'd like you to explain something else to me. When people "impulse shop" in stores, it's often because of displays (things like the ends of aisles and the checkout lane). That is, of course, totally different online. So talk to me about the things that you think are "cues" or "triggers" for impulse shopping online. What gets you?



If you're like us, you're obsessively curious about interesting trends. That's why we joined forces with SoapBoxSample to launch ***Beneath the Trend***. Each month we leverage our unique methodology to deep dive into a trend, and provide you the insights at no cost.

Beneath the Trend reports demonstrate the depth of information that can be gleaned from QuickQUESTs — Quester's abbreviated, customized solution that delivers rich, qualitative insights on tight deadlines.

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