

CONSUMER EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PRESSURE IN FACING TIME-LIMITED DISCOUNT PROGRAMS

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Abstract

This literature study examines consumer experiences in facing flash sales, focusing on emotional dynamics, psychological pressure, and coping strategies developed during participation in time-limited discount events. Through a qualitative literature review approach, this study synthesizes findings from various disciplines including consumer psychology, behavioral economics, and digital marketing. The analysis reveals that flash sales create intense psychological pressure through the combination of time constraints, quantity scarcity, and social influence, triggering acute stress responses and shifting decision-making from analytical to intuitive processing. Consumers experience ambivalent emotional dynamics, simultaneously or alternately feeling positive and negative emotions throughout the participation process. Individual differences in self-control, sensation seeking, and emotional tendencies significantly influence how consumers experience and respond to flash sale pressure. Consumers develop diverse coping strategies ranging from complete avoidance to active participation with various self-protection mechanisms, including limit setting, emotion regulation, cognitive restructuring, behavioral strategies, social support, and technology utilization. The effectiveness of coping strategies depends heavily on individual characteristics and situational factors. Repeated participation in flash sales can shape shopping habits and have long-term implications for psychological and financial well-being. This study contributes to theoretical understanding of consumer decision-making under time pressure and provides practical implications for consumer education, ethical interface design, and consumer protection policy development in the digital retail environment.

Keywords: flash sale, consumer emotion, time pressure, coping strategy, impulse buying, psychological pressure, consumer experience.

Introduction

Consumer shopping behavior has undergone a fundamental shift alongside the penetration of the internet and the massive growth of e-commerce platforms across many countries. This digital transformation has not merely changed transaction channels but has also reshaped the psychological relationship between consumers and the activity of shopping. Amid an increasingly competitive digital retail landscape, businesses develop various promotional strategies to capture the attention of consumers who are exposed to thousands of offers every day. One of the most aggressive and widely adopted strategies is the flash sale, a large-scale discount program with a very limited duration. This strategy relies on the principles of time and quantity scarcity to push consumers to make purchase decisions within minutes or even seconds (Rachmania et al., 2025). The presence of this feature in various online shopping applications has changed public consumption patterns, from planned shopping habits to more spontaneous behavior that responds readily to promotional stimuli. Flash sales are designed to create a sense of urgency and encourage rapid decision-making, which distinguishes them significantly from conventional promotional models. These unique characteristics make flash sales an interesting object of study for consumer behavior researchers, because the strategy deliberately exploits basic human psychological mechanisms in responding to time pressure and economic incentives. The changes in shopping patterns triggered by flash sales cannot be

understood through a rational economic approach alone, because purchase decisions made in this situation often involve strong emotional dimensions and cognitive processes that are strained by time constraints. According to Darmawan and Gatheru, (2021) the ease and practicality of online shopping systems can also increase the likelihood of impulse buying.

The shopping experience in a flash sale situation presents a distinctive psychological condition that differs from ordinary shopping experiences. Consumers entering a flash sale session are confronted with a series of stimuli designed to trigger immediate responses: a ticking countdown timer, dwindling stock indicators, notifications that other users are viewing the same product, and large discounts available only for a short time. The combination of these stimuli creates a decision environment laden with pressure and uncertainty (Babu et al., 2026). In such situations, consumers often experience an internal conflict between the desire to gain economic benefits from large discounts and the need to rationally consider whether the product is truly needed or fits within their budget. This conflict is aggravated by the constant threat of missing the opportunity. Martaleni et al. (2022) showed that flash sale strategies have a direct effect on increasing consumer emotions, and the higher the intensity of flash sale promotions, the stronger their influence on consumers' emotional state. This finding indicates that a flash sale is not merely a discount instrument but an emotional trigger that can significantly alter consumers' psychological state within a very short time. The subjective experience that consumers undergo while shopping in a flash sale situation is therefore the focus of a study that is relevant to understand further.

Emotions play a central role in shaping consumer experience when facing flash sales. Various studies have identified that flash sales trigger diverse emotional responses, ranging from joy and enthusiasm when successfully obtaining a product at a low price, to anxiety and stress when facing time pressure and competition with other consumers (Arrofiq et al., 2026). Time limits create urgency and psychological pressure that encourage rapid decision-making and emotionally driven purchases. Price discounts do influence emotions, but their effect becomes stronger when paired with time-limited offers. Consumers often experience fear of missing out (FOMO) and perceive urgency as a signal of value and scarcity. Duy and Nguyen (2016) revealed that limited quantity pressure, time pressure, information, and economic benefits all influence the emotional state of buyers on e-commerce platforms, with all of these factors affecting arousal, while only some of them significantly affect pleasure. Furthermore, consumer emotions significantly influence their impulse buying intention. These findings suggest that the emotional experience in flash sales is multidimensional and cannot be reduced to a mere feeling of pleasure or disappointment. Consumers can experience a complex combination of emotions simultaneously, which ultimately shapes purchase decisions and post-purchase evaluation.

The pressure experienced by consumers during flash sales is a psychological phenomenon that deserves serious attention. This pressure arises not only from strict time limits but also from various interface design elements deliberately designed to heighten the sense of urgency (Zamfir, 2024). Ever-ticking countdown timers, dwindling stock notifications, and information about the number of other buyers accessing the same product collectively create an environment that triggers acute stress responses. Under such pressure, consumers' ability to process information comprehensively declines significantly. Consumers become more vulnerable to external cues such as discounts or promotions and are more likely to rely on emotional impulses rather than rational analysis. Özatar and Varan (2026) showed that limited offers in online shopping reduce decision-making time, restrict cognitive evaluation, and can trigger impulsive responses. Both quantity scarcity and time scarcity have a positive influence on consumer attitudes toward flash sales and compulsive buying. This pressure condition carries broad implications, not only for immediate purchase decisions but also for post-purchase evaluation and consumers' long-term financial well-being.

Consumer strategies for coping with flash sale pressure show an interesting diversity worth examining. Some consumers respond to pressure with quick and spontaneous purchase decisions, often without careful consideration. This kind of response can be understood as a coping mechanism oriented toward relieving momentary pressure by taking immediate action. However, this strategy often leads to post-purchase regret when consumers realize that the product they bought was not truly needed or did not

match their expectations. Ong (2024) revealed that both time scarcity and quantity scarcity have a positive impact on consumer attitudes toward flash sales, and that positive attitudes toward flash sales are associated with increased impulse buying behavior, which in turn leads to higher levels of post-purchase regret. Some consumers develop more controlled strategies, such as making a shopping list in advance, setting a budget limit, or consciously avoiding participation in flash sales to protect themselves from psychological pressure. These differences in strategy are likely influenced by factors such as personality characteristics, previous shopping experience, level of financial literacy, and emotional state when entering a flash sale session. Understanding the range of these strategies is important because it can provide insight into how consumers can be protected from the negative effects of aggressive marketing strategies without losing access to the economic benefits of discount programs.

Consumer experience in facing flash sales harbors a number of complex problems that have not been fully mapped in the consumer behavior literature. The first problem concerns the dual nature of the emotional experience that consumers undergo while participating in flash sales. Flash sales offer the potential for significant joy and satisfaction when consumers successfully obtain a coveted product at a price far below the normal price. This sensation of victory can create a positive shopping experience and strengthen consumers' attachment to a particular e-commerce platform (Nguyen-Van et al., 2024). However, the time pressure and competition inherent in flash sales can trigger anxiety, stress, and a sense of being rushed that disrupts the enjoyment of shopping. Consumers often report feeling compelled to make decisions before having enough time to carefully consider their options. The tension between the enjoyable and the pressuring aspects of flash sales creates an ambivalent experience, in which consumers can feel positive and negative emotions simultaneously or alternately within a very short time. Consumers often experience FOMO and perceive urgency as a signal of value, which indicates that positive and negative emotions can be present simultaneously in the flash sale experience. The complexity of this emotional experience raises questions about how consumers navigate this ambivalence and which factors determine whether a flash sale experience is ultimately felt as satisfying or, conversely, suffocating. Understanding these emotional dynamics is crucial given the ever-increasing frequency of consumer participation in flash sales.

Another problem concerns the imbalance between short-term incentives and the long-term consequences of purchase decisions in flash sales. The structure of flash sales, which prioritizes speed and spontaneity, systematically pushes consumers to prioritize momentary economic gains over long-term rational consideration. The large discounts offered create an illusion of significant savings, but this illusion often obscures the questions of whether the product is truly needed, whether the post-discount price still matches the product's value, and whether the purchase fits the consumer's budget and financial priorities. This concept is in line with the statement by Sinambela and Halizah (2023) that the middle class has access to more affordable imitation luxury goods or global brands, thereby creating the illusion that they are enjoying an upper-class lifestyle at a lower cost. This rushed decision-making process increases the risk of impulse buying, which is then followed by regret and dissatisfaction. Martaleni et al. (2022) found that flash sales do not have a significant effect on increasing impulse buying directly, but have a positive and significant indirect effect through emotions as a mediating variable. This finding indicates that the mechanism linking flash sales to impulse buying operates through an emotional pathway rather than through rational consideration. Consumers trapped in a cycle of impulse buying caused by flash sales may face serious financial consequences, including overspending, credit card debt, and an inability to meet basic needs. This problem is becoming increasingly urgent with the proliferation of installment payment features and buy now pay later services that make it easier for consumers to make purchases beyond their financial means. The gap between purchase decisions made under time pressure and rational post-purchase evaluation lies at the heart of the consumer problem in facing flash sales.

Not all consumers respond to flash sale pressure in the same way or have an equal capacity to manage emotions and impulsive urges. Some consumers appear able to maintain self-control and make relatively rational decisions despite being under significant time pressure. Consumers in this group may have developed effective coping strategies, such as setting strict shopping rules, researching products beforehand, or using distraction techniques to reduce the impact of psychological pressure.

However, other consumers appear highly vulnerable to the influence of flash sales and often make impulsive and detrimental purchase decisions. This vulnerability may be caused by various factors, including low levels of self-control, a tendency toward sensation seeking, traumatic experiences related to missed opportunities, or an unstable emotional state. FOMO and flash sales have a positive influence on impulse buying behavior, while self-control tends to have a negative influence. These individual differences in vulnerability and coping strategies raise the question of which factors distinguish consumers who can manage flash sale pressure adaptively from those who are susceptible to its negative effects. Understanding these protective and risk factors is important for developing interventions that can help consumers make healthier decisions when facing flash sales.

The flash sale phenomenon has become an inseparable part of the digital shopping ecosystem in many countries, including Southeast Asian countries, which constitute one of the largest e-commerce markets in the world. Major e-commerce platforms routinely hold flash sales with increasing frequency, not only on special occasions such as Harbolnas (Indonesia's National Online Shopping Day) or New Year, but also almost every day through daily promotional programs. This intensification of flash sale strategies reflects increasingly fierce competition among e-commerce platforms to capture market share and increase consumer engagement. However, behind the popularity and effectiveness of flash sales as a marketing instrument lies a fundamental question about their impact on consumers' psychological and financial well-being. Digitalization of transactions does provide convenience for consumers, but this convenience can also be accompanied by various risks for users (Negara & Darmawan, 2023). Consumers who are continuously exposed to a shopping environment full of pressure and short-term incentives may experience changes in their decision-making patterns, preferences, and even their relationship with money and consumption more broadly. These changes are not always immediately visible but can accumulate over time and form shopping habits that are potentially harmful. An in-depth literature study on consumer experience in flash sales is important for understanding how this aggressive marketing strategy affects consumer behavior in the long term and whether there is a need for regulation or better consumer education.

The development of e-commerce technology and interface design continues to push the limits of consumers' ability to process information and make informed decisions. Features such as pulsing countdown timers, real-time notifications about dwindling stock, and indicators that hundreds of people are viewing the same product create a decision environment designed to trigger emotional responses and override rational consideration. Such design deliberately draws on findings from cognitive psychology and behavioral economics about how humans respond to scarcity and time pressure. Flash sales, characterized by substantial price discounts offered for a limited duration, are designed to create a sense of urgency and encourage rapid decision-making. However, applying psychological principles in commercial interface design raises ethical questions about the extent to which consumers are protected from cognitive and emotional exploitation. In a digital transaction, the consumer's position tends to be weaker than that of the business actor, so information transparency and oversight are needed to prevent consumer losses (Purnomo et al., 2025). Consumers who are unaware of the psychological mechanisms at work within them may become victims of designs that deliberately exploit psychological vulnerabilities. Studies of consumer experience in flash sales can provide a foundation for developing consumer protection policies that are more responsive to the realities of an increasingly complex digital shopping environment. The importance of transparency and protection mechanisms in digital transactions also shows that e-commerce platforms have a role in ensuring that consumer rights remain protected when problems arise in a transaction (Anugroh et al., 2022). The strength of oversight mechanisms determines the effectiveness of protection, because consumers who understand transaction risks poorly will be more vulnerable to losses (Sumito et al., 2024). Without an adequate understanding of how consumers actually experience and respond to flash sales, consumer protection efforts will always lag behind the continuously evolving innovations in marketing strategy.

The urgency of studying consumer experience in flash sales also arises from a significant gap between industry practice and academic understanding of this phenomenon. Although flash sales have been a

standard practice in the e-commerce industry for more than a decade, the academic literature on consumers' subjective experience of facing this pressured shopping situation remains relatively limited. Most existing research focuses on the relationship between flash sales and impulse buying, with emotions often treated as a mediating variable measured quantitatively through psychometric scales. This approach, while valuable, may not capture the richness and complexity of consumer experience in its entirety. The flash sale experience involves dimensions that are difficult to measure with standard quantitative instruments, such as shifting emotional nuances, situational coping strategies, and the subjective meanings that consumers attach to their shopping experiences. Duy and Nguyen (2016) showed that limited quantity pressure, time pressure, information, and economic benefits influence buyers' emotional states, with consumer emotions significantly influencing impulse buying intention. Studies of this kind provide an important foundation but still leave room for deeper exploration of how consumers experience and make sense of psychological pressure in flash sales, as well as what strategies they develop to manage that experience. The gap between massive industry practice and limited academic understanding makes the topic of consumer experience in flash sales an area of study that deserves greater attention.

This study aims to comprehensively examine consumers' subjective experience of facing flash sales, focusing on two main aspects: the emotional dynamics and psychological pressure that arise during participation, and the coping strategies that consumers develop and apply to manage that experience. Through a systematic literature study, this research seeks to map the range of emotional experiences that consumers undergo, understand the psychological mechanisms underlying responses to time pressure and scarcity, and identify the factors that influence the effectiveness of various coping strategies.

Method

This study uses a qualitative literature study approach as its primary method to examine consumer experience in facing flash sales. A qualitative literature study was chosen because it allows the researcher to synthesize and interpret diverse findings from various relevant disciplines, including consumer psychology, behavioral economics, and digital marketing, without having to collect primary data through interviews or field observations. This approach is in line with Snyder (2019) view that a literature study can function as a stand-alone research method for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing the available evidence in a field of study. In the context of this study, a literature study allows an in-depth exploration of the flash sale phenomenon from various theoretical and empirical perspectives, as well as the identification of both consistent and contradictory patterns in the findings of previous research. This method also provides the flexibility to reach literature from various research traditions, ranging from quantitative studies that measure relationships between variables to qualitative studies that explore the subjective meanings of consumer experience. The use of a qualitative literature study in this research rests on the assumption that consumer experience in flash sales is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon, whose understanding requires the integration of various perspectives and research approaches.

The research procedure in this literature study follows a systematic and transparent framework to ensure the quality and credibility of the findings. The first stage involves identifying and formulating clear research questions and establishing inclusion and exclusion criteria for the literature to be reviewed. The inclusion criteria cover publications that discuss flash sales, time pressure, consumer emotions, or coping strategies in the context of online shopping, with a preference for publications from indexed journals and other credible academic sources. The second stage is a comprehensive literature search using academic databases such as Google Scholar. The third stage involves evaluating the quality and relevance of each source found through a process of critically assessing the methodology, findings, and theoretical contributions of each publication. This process is in line with the recommendations of Jesson, Matheson, and Lacey (2011) regarding the importance of critical appraisal in literature studies to ensure that only high-quality sources are used as the basis of

analysis. The fourth stage is data extraction from the selected sources, which includes collecting information on empirical findings, the theoretical frameworks used, and the implications proposed by previous authors. The fifth stage is the synthesis and interpretation of findings from the various sources to develop a coherent understanding of consumer experience in flash sales.

Data analysis in this literature study was carried out through a thematic approach that allows the identification of recurring patterns, main themes, and relationships among concepts emerging from the reviewed literature. The thematic approach was chosen because it suits the research objective of understanding consumers' subjective experience comprehensively, rather than merely aggregating statistical findings from various studies. The thematic analysis process began with open coding of each reviewed source to identify concepts and categories relevant to the research questions. These initial categories were then grouped into broader themes through a process of constant comparison and critical discussion among researchers. The themes that emerged from this process include emotional dynamics during flash sales, mechanisms of psychological pressure, and the range of coping strategies applied by consumers. The validity of the findings in this literature study was maintained through several strategies, including the use of sources from various research traditions and geographical contexts to ensure the transferability of the findings, as well as transparent documentation of the literature selection and analysis process. This approach enables the study to produce a rich and nuanced understanding of consumer experience in flash sales, which can serve as a basis for developing theory and practice in the fields of consumer behavior and digital marketing.

Results and Discussion

Psychological Pressure and Consumers' Emotional Dynamics in Flash Sales

Consumer experience in facing flash sales begins with exposure to a series of stimuli designed to trigger immediate psychological responses. The most dominant element of these stimuli is the strict time limit, which is typically displayed as a continuously ticking countdown timer. System designs that steer behavior through automatic mechanisms can also narrow the space for decision-making and increase the time pressure perceived by individual (Darmawan, 2024). The presence of this timer creates a constant awareness of the limited time remaining, which directly triggers an acute stress response in the consumer's nervous system. This stress response manifests in various forms, ranging from an increased heart rate and sensory alertness to a sense of being rushed and psychological discomfort. Consumers exposed to flash sale timers often report experiences similar to responses to a threat, in which the body and mind prepare to take immediate action. This mechanism is essentially an evolutionary response to situations perceived as emergencies or crises, which in the modern context is triggered by e-commerce interface designs that deliberately exploit the natural human stress response system (Brochado & Shynkarenko, 2025). The experience of this pressure is not uniform for all consumers, because the intensity of the response to time pressure is strongly influenced by factors such as personality, previous experience, and emotional state when entering a flash sale session.

The emotional dynamics that emerge during flash sales show a complex and often contradictory pattern. Consumers can feel waves of emotion that change rapidly within seconds, moving from anticipation and excitement upon seeing a desired product at a large discount to anxiety and tension upon realizing that time is running short and stock is dwindling. If consumers successfully complete the transaction, feelings of relief and satisfaction often follow, which can develop into euphoria if the purchased product truly meets expectations. However, if consumers fail to obtain the desired product because it is out of stock or time has run out, the resulting emotional response can take the form of disappointment, frustration, or even anger. This fluctuating emotional pattern creates a highly intense and memorable experience, which explains why flash sales are often the most remembered shopping experience for consumers, in both positive and negative senses. This emotional intensity also explains why flash sales are effective as a marketing strategy, because strong emotional experiences tend to strengthen consumers' attachment to the platform and encourage repeated participation (Srinidhi, 2025).

The role of positive emotions in the flash sale experience cannot be ignored, even though negative emotions are often more prominent in consumers' narratives about their experiences. Positive emotions such as joy, anticipation, and satisfaction arise from various aspects of flash sales. Joy can arise from the thrill of hunting for low-priced goods, similar to the experience of hunting or searching for treasure. Anticipation arises from the uncertainty about whether consumers will succeed in obtaining the desired product, which creates a pleasant tension. Satisfaction arises when consumers successfully obtain a product at a price far below the normal price, which gives the feeling of having won a competition or beaten the system (Lamis et al., 2022). These positive emotions function as behavioral reinforcers, encouraging consumers to keep participating in flash sales even though they also experience negative emotions such as stress and anxiety. The interaction between positive and negative emotions creates an ambivalent experience, in which consumers simultaneously enjoy and suffer during their participation in flash sales. This ambivalence is key to understanding why consumers continue to participate in flash sales even though they are aware of their potential negative impacts.

Psychological pressure in flash sales comes not only from time limits but also from the quantity scarcity element that is often paired with time-limited offers. Information that product stock is limited and will soon run out creates additional pressure that pushes consumers to act faster. This scarcity element triggers what is known in psychology as psychological reactance, an emotional response to a threat to the freedom of choice. When consumers feel that the opportunity to obtain a product will be lost if they do not act immediately, they tend to respond with a stronger desire to obtain the product, regardless of whether they truly need or want it. This mechanism explains why flash sales often succeed in driving purchases of products that consumers had not previously considered (Khetarpal & Singh, 2023). The combination of time pressure and quantity scarcity creates a synergistic effect that is far stronger than either element alone. Consumers exposed to both types of pressure simultaneously show a higher level of urgency and a greater tendency to make impulsive purchase decisions.

Cognitive processes during flash sales undergo a significant change due to time pressure and intense emotions. Under normal conditions, consumers tend to use an analytical and deliberative decision-making system, in which product information is evaluated systematically before a purchase decision is made. In flash sale situations, however, this decision-making system is displaced by a more intuitive and emotion-based one. Ali, Dirgantara, and Darmawan (2024) showed that consumers in online transactions may face misleading product information, which further increases consumer vulnerability in making purchase decisions. Consumers become less able or less willing to process information in depth and rely more on heuristics or simple rules of thumb to make decisions. The most common heuristics used in flash sale situations are "a big discount means a good opportunity" and "if not now, then never." These heuristics, while efficient in situations that demand speed, often produce suboptimal decisions from a long-term perspective. Consumers may buy products they do not need, pay more than they should compared with the normal market price, or overlook broader budget considerations. This shift from analytical processing to intuitive processing is one of the main psychological mechanisms that explain the effectiveness of flash sales as a marketing strategy.

The emotional experience in flash sales is also significantly influenced by social factors, particularly through the phenomenon of fear of missing out (FOMO). Consumers who see others participating in a flash sale or hear about others successfully obtaining products at low prices tend to experience social anxiety about the possibility of missing a similar opportunity (Ayyasy et al., 2025). This FOMO is reinforced by social features on e-commerce platforms, such as notifications that a product is being viewed by many people or that stock is nearly sold out because many have purchased it. This social information functions as social proof that convinces consumers that the product is worth buying and that they will lose something valuable if they do not act immediately. Beyond serving as social proof, this social information also facilitates interaction among consumers, which can in turn influence purchase decisions (Darmawan, 2022). FOMO can trigger strong emotional responses, including anxiety, discomfort, and a feeling of being pressed for time, all of which push consumers toward faster and less carefully considered purchase decisions. This phenomenon explains why flash sales are often

more effective when paired with social elements showing that others are also participating in and benefiting from the program.

Individual differences play an important role in determining how consumers experience psychological pressure and emotional dynamics in flash sales. Consumers with a high level of self-control tend to be better able to resist impulsive urges and maintain more rational decision-making despite being under time pressure. They may have developed strategies to protect themselves from the influence of flash sales, such as setting strict shopping rules or avoiding exposure to flash sale offers altogether. Consumers with low self-control are more vulnerable to the influence of flash sales and more likely to make impulsive and detrimental purchase decisions. Other relevant individual differences include the level of sensation seeking, the tendency to experience negative emotions, and beliefs about money and consumption. Consumers with a high level of sensation seeking may enjoy the competitive and pressured aspects of flash sales more, while consumers with a high tendency toward anxiety may experience flash sales as a highly stressful and unpleasant experience. Understanding these individual differences is important for developing targeted interventions to help the consumers who are most vulnerable to the negative effects of flash sales.

The long-term impact of repeated participation in flash sales on consumers' psychological well-being is an aspect that deserves attention. Consumers who frequently participate in flash sales may experience changes in their decision-making patterns, becoming more impulsive and less patient in various aspects of life, not only in shopping. Repeated experiences of decision-making under time pressure can strengthen the neural pathways associated with fast, emotion-based responses, which in turn can make consumers less able to engage in deliberative and reflective decision-making. In addition, repeated participation in flash sales can lead to emotional exhaustion and a decline in overall life satisfaction. Consumers may feel worn out by the constant pressure to make quick decisions and worry about whether they have made the right choices. The feelings of regret and dissatisfaction that often accompany impulse buying can accumulate over time and contribute to a decline in psychological well-being. These long-term impacts are often unnoticed by consumers, who may regard their participation in flash sales as a harmless or even enjoyable activity. However, the accumulation of negative impacts from repeated participation can become significant and requires the attention of researchers, practitioners, and policymakers.

The link between the flash sale experience and the formation of shopping habits is another important aspect to understand. Consumers who frequently participate in flash sales may develop a habit of always checking flash sale offers, even when they have no specific shopping need. This habit is reinforced by the variable reward system inherent in flash sales, in which consumers never know when they will find a highly advantageous offer (Guerra et al., 2023). This variable reward pattern is one of the most powerful mechanisms for forming habits, because the uncertainty about when and how large the reward will be keeps the brain constantly alert and motivated to seek. Consumers who have developed a habit of regularly checking flash sales may find it difficult to stop, even when they realize that their participation often ends in unnecessary purchases or regret. This habit can become a source of additional stress and anxiety, because consumers feel driven to keep checking flash sale offers even though they know that the activity is unproductive or even harmful. Understanding how flash sales shape shopping habits is important for developing intervention strategies that can help consumers break the cycle of compulsive participation.

The role of interface design in shaping consumers' emotional experience during flash sales cannot be underestimated. Design elements such as color, typography, animation, and layout all contribute to consumers' emotional experience. The colors red and orange, which are often used in flash sale elements, are known to trigger physiological responses associated with urgency and excitement. Pulsing animations on the "Buy Now" button or a fast-moving countdown timer create a sensation of motion that heightens the sense of urgency (Broeder & Wildeman, 2020). A layout that displays information about dwindling stock and the number of other buyers visually creates a perception of scarcity and competition. All of these design elements work together to create an environment that is psychologically pressuring and pushes consumers toward quick action. E-commerce interface

designers often consciously apply psychological principles in their work, although not always with full awareness of the ethical implications of those practices. Understanding how design elements influence consumers' emotional experience is important for developing more ethical design guidelines that protect consumers from psychological exploitation while still allowing them to enjoy the economic benefits of discount programs.

The flash sale experience also has an important temporal dimension, in which the experiences before, during, and after a flash sale shape the overall meaning of participation. Before a flash sale, consumers may experience anticipation and preparation, including planning which products to buy and setting a budget (Vichiengior et al., 2023). During a flash sale, consumers experience a peak of pressure and intense emotions. After a flash sale, consumers enter an evaluation phase in which they assess the decisions they have made and experience the emotional consequences of their participation. This post-flash-sale phase is often overlooked in research but is essential for understanding the overall consumer experience. Consumers may experience regret if they realize that the purchases they made did not match their needs or budget. Conversely, they may experience lasting satisfaction if the purchased product turns out to meet expectations and provide good value. This post-purchase evaluation phase also influences consumers' decisions to participate in future flash sales. Consumers who frequently experience regret may become more selective in their participation, while consumers who frequently experience satisfaction may become more motivated to keep participating. Understanding the temporal dimension of the flash sale experience is important for developing a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon.

Overall, the analysis of psychological pressure and consumers' emotional dynamics in flash sales reveals a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. Consumers who participate in flash sales experience a series of psychological pressures stemming from time limits, quantity scarcity, and social influence, all of which trigger intense and often ambivalent emotional responses. Consumers' cognitive processes during flash sales shift from analytical processing to intuitive processing, which increases the likelihood of impulsive and poorly considered purchase decisions. Individual differences in self-control and other personality characteristics influence how consumers experience and respond to flash sale pressure. Repeated participation in flash sales can have long-term effects on shopping habits and consumers' psychological well-being, which requires attention from various stakeholders. E-commerce interface design plays an important role in shaping consumers' emotional experience, and the temporal dimension of the flash sale experience adds further nuance to the understanding of this phenomenon. A comprehensive understanding of psychological pressure and emotional dynamics in flash sales serves as a foundation for exploring the coping strategies that consumers develop in facing this pressured experience.

Consumer Coping Strategies in Managing Pressure and Emotions during Flash Sales

Consumers who face psychological pressure and emotional dynamics in flash sales develop various coping strategies to manage the experience. These coping strategies can be classified into several categories based on their orientation and function, ranging from strategies focused on avoiding pressure-inducing situations to strategies focused on managing emotional responses during participation. Consumers who adopt avoidance strategies tend to avoid exposure to flash sales altogether, whether by not opening e-commerce applications during the flash sale period, turning off promotional notifications, or limiting access to online shopping platforms in general. This strategy is effective in protecting oneself from psychological pressure, but it also means that consumers forgo the opportunity to obtain the economic benefits of large discounts. Consumers who choose to continue participating in flash sales develop more active strategies to manage pressure and emotions during the shopping process. The range of coping strategies that consumers apply reflects their efforts to balance the desire to gain economic benefits with the need to protect their psychological and financial well-being. Dittmar et al. (2014) showed that consumers' coping strategies in stressful shopping situations are strongly influenced by their materialistic values and identity orientations.

One of the most common coping strategies consumers apply is limit setting before entering a flash sale session. Consumers who apply this strategy typically make a list of products they genuinely need before the flash sale begins, set a maximum budget they are willing to spend, and commit to not purchasing products outside that list (Sharma et al., 2024). This limit setting functions as a self-protection mechanism that helps consumers maintain control over their purchase decisions despite being under time pressure and emotional influence. Consumers who are disciplined in applying these limits tend to report lower levels of post-purchase regret and higher satisfaction with their flash sale experience. However, the effectiveness of this strategy depends heavily on the strength of consumers' commitment to the limits they have set. In situations of intense pressure, this commitment can easily be eroded by the temptation of large discounts or by social influence indicating that others are buying a particular product. Consumers who are aware of this vulnerability often reinforce their limit-setting strategy with external accountability mechanisms, such as informing friends or family about their shopping plans or using financial management applications that monitor their spending in real time.

Another widely applied coping strategy is emotion regulation during participation in flash sales. Consumers who adopt this strategy consciously try to recognize and manage their emotional responses when facing the pressure and temptation of a flash sale. Commonly used emotion regulation techniques include deep breathing to calm the nervous system, positive self-talk to remind oneself of priorities and long-term goals, and distraction to divert attention from stimuli that trigger intense emotions. Consumers who are skilled at emotion regulation tend to be better able to maintain rational decision-making despite being under pressure, and are less likely to make impulse buying decisions that they later regret. Gross (2015) showed that emotion regulation is a skill that can be learned and improved through practice, which implies that consumers can develop their ability to manage emotions in stressful shopping situations over time. However, the effectiveness of emotion regulation strategies depends heavily on consumers' awareness of their own emotional processes and the availability of sufficient cognitive resources to carry out regulation, which may be limited under extreme time pressure.

Cognitive-based strategies also play an important role in consumer coping with flash sale pressure. These strategies involve cognitive restructuring, which is the process of changing the way consumers think about flash sales and the offers presented. Consumers who apply cognitive restructuring may consciously remind themselves that large discounts do not always mean good value, that products they do not need remain useless even when the price is low, and that there will always be other offers in the future, so there is no need to rush. This strategy helps consumers counter the heuristics and cognitive biases exploited by flash sale design, such as scarcity bias and urgency bias (Suvarna & Malagi, 2025). Consumers who successfully apply cognitive restructuring tend to make wiser purchase decisions and are less influenced by situational pressure. However, cognitive restructuring requires significant mental effort and high metacognitive awareness, which may be difficult to sustain in situations where consumers must also process product information quickly and make decisions within a limited time. The effectiveness of this strategy also depends heavily on consumers' knowledge of marketing tactics and the underlying psychological mechanisms.

Behavioral coping strategies involve concrete actions that consumers take to manage their flash sale experience. One of the most common behavioral strategies is access restriction, in which consumers deliberately limit the time they spend on e-commerce platforms during the flash sale period or access the platform only at certain times when they feel most able to exercise self-control. Another strategy is the use of platform features that support decision-making, such as wishlist or shopping cart features that allow consumers to save products and reconsider them before deciding to buy. Some consumers also apply a "delay purchase" strategy, in which they add products to the cart but wait for a while before completing the transaction to give their emotions time to subside and allow for more rational judgment. These behavioral strategies are effective because they create a physical or temporal barrier between the impulse buying urge and the act of purchasing, which gives the more reflective decision-making system an opportunity to engage. Simple behavioral interventions like these can significantly reduce impulse buying and increase consumer satisfaction with their purchase decisions (Pratama et al., 2025).

Social support is a coping strategy that is often overlooked but has significant potential in helping consumers manage flash sale pressure. Consumers who share their flash sale experiences with friends or family can benefit from external perspectives that help them evaluate purchase decisions more objectively. Social support can take the form of direct advice on whether a purchase is worthwhile, reminders about long-term financial goals, or simply a calming presence that reduces the emotional intensity of the flash sale experience. In the era of social media, social support for flash sale coping can also come from online communities, such as groups that share thrifty shopping tips or discussion forums about strategies for facing promotional pressure. However, social support can also have the opposite effect if consumers are surrounded by people who encourage excessive consumption or who compare their purchases with those of others. Social influence in the shopping context can be dual in nature, both encouraging and inhibiting impulse buying, depending on the norms and values held by the consumer's reference group (Du, 2025). The effectiveness of social support as a coping strategy depends heavily on the quality and orientation of the consumer's social network.

Technology utilization strategies are also increasingly relevant as technology develops to help consumers manage their online shopping experience. Financial management applications that monitor spending and issue warnings when consumers approach their budget limit can help consumers maintain control during flash sales. Browser extensions that block advertisements or promotional notifications can reduce exposure to stimuli that trigger impulse buying urges. E-commerce platform features that allow consumers to save products and compare prices across platforms can also support more informed decision-making. However, the effectiveness of these technology utilization strategies depends heavily on consumers' willingness to use them and their integration with everyday shopping habits (Kalliampakou & Antonopoulou, 2024). Consumers who are already accustomed to using technology to manage their finances tend to adopt these strategies more easily, while consumers who are less technologically literate may need additional support to use these tools effectively. In addition, the continuously changing nature of technology means that technology utilization strategies need to be updated constantly to remain relevant in the dynamic e-commerce landscape.

A combination of various coping strategies is often more effective than relying on a single strategy. Consumers who successfully manage flash sale pressure tend to use a multidimensional approach that combines cognitive, emotion regulation, behavioral, and social strategies according to their specific needs and situations. For example, a consumer might set a budget limit before the flash sale (behavioral strategy), use breathing techniques to calm down when feeling pressured (emotion regulation strategy), remind themselves that other offers will come in the future (cognitive strategy), and share their shopping plans with a partner to obtain support and accountability (social strategy). This combination of strategies creates a stronger defense system against psychological pressure and the temptation to buy impulsively than a single strategy, which may have weaknesses in certain situations (Karunia et al., 2025). Effective coping often involves flexibility in using various strategies according to the demands of the situation, rather than rigid attachment to one particular approach. Consumers who develop a broad and flexible repertoire of coping strategies tend to be more resilient to the negative impacts of flash sales and better able to maintain their psychological and financial well-being.

Factors that influence the selection and effectiveness of coping strategies are highly diverse and interrelated. Consumers' personality characteristics, such as level of self-control, self-awareness, and tendency to plan, influence which coping strategies are most suitable and effective for them. Consumers with high self-control may be better suited to limit setting strategies, while consumers with high self-awareness may be more effective with emotion regulation strategies. Previous experience with flash sales also influences the coping strategies chosen, because consumers who have experienced post-purchase regret tend to adopt more protective strategies in the future. Knowledge of marketing tactics and the underlying psychological mechanisms also affects the effectiveness of coping strategies, because consumers who understand how flash sales psychologically influence them are better able to develop targeted strategies to counter that influence. Financial literacy and an understanding of cognitive biases significantly improve consumers' ability to make wise financial decisions, including in stressful online shopping contexts.

Situational factors, such as the consumer's stress level before entering a flash sale and the availability of cognitive resources, also influence the effectiveness of the coping strategies applied.

The development of coping strategies over time is an interesting aspect to examine, because consumers are not static in their approach to flash sales. Many consumers report that they become more selective and wiser in their flash sale participation as their experience grows and as negative experiences from impulse buying accumulate. This learning process involves developing an intuition about when an offer is genuinely good value and when it only appears attractive because of its psychological design (Zhu et al., 2023). Experienced consumers also tend to develop strategies that are more automatic and efficient, requiring less cognitive effort to apply. This learning process can be accelerated through conscious reflection on flash sale experiences, including evaluating purchase decisions that have been made and identifying patterns that lead to good or bad decisions. However, this learning process does not occur automatically for all consumers. Some consumers may become trapped in a cycle of impulse buying without ever developing more adaptive strategies, especially if they never reflect on their experiences or if they are constantly exposed to environments that encourage impulse buying. Educational interventions designed to accelerate this learning process can help consumers develop more effective coping strategies in a shorter time.

The implications of understanding consumer coping strategies in flash sales are far-reaching, for consumers themselves, for business actors, and for policymakers. For consumers, understanding the various coping strategies available can help them develop more effective approaches to managing flash sale pressure and protecting their financial well-being. Consumers who realize that they have a choice of coping strategies, and that different strategies may be more or less effective in different situations, can make more conscious choices about how they participate in flash sales. For business actors, understanding consumer coping strategies can help them design more ethical and sustainable flash sale programs that consider consumer well-being as part of long-term business strategy. A more ethical approach to flash sales can build stronger consumer trust and loyalty than an approach that exploits consumers' psychological vulnerabilities for short-term gain. For policymakers, understanding consumer coping strategies can serve as a basis for developing regulations that protect consumers from exploitative marketing practices, while still allowing innovation and healthy competition in the e-commerce industry. The absence of specific regulations causes legal uncertainty and increases the risk of financial loss for users (Rahman et al., 2024). Effective consumer protection policy requires a deep understanding of consumer behavior and the psychological mechanisms that underlie it, rather than merely administrative rules about information disclosure or price limits.

Coping strategies range from complete avoidance to active participation with various self-protection mechanisms, including limit setting, emotion regulation, cognitive restructuring, behavioral strategies, social support, and technology utilization. The effectiveness of coping strategies is strongly influenced by consumers' individual characteristics, previous experience, knowledge of marketing tactics, and situational factors. A combination of various coping strategies is often more effective than relying on a single strategy, and consumers who develop a broad and flexible repertoire of strategies tend to be more resilient to the negative impacts of flash sales. Understanding consumer coping strategies has important implications for consumers, business actors, and policymakers, all of whom have a role in creating a healthier and more sustainable online shopping environment. This analysis complements the understanding of consumer experience in flash sales by showing that consumers are not passive recipients of psychological pressure, but active agents who develop various strategies to manage their experience.

Conclusion

Consumer experience in facing flash sales is a complex psychological phenomenon, characterized by intense time pressure, fluctuating emotional dynamics, and diverse coping strategies that consumers apply to manage the experience. Psychological pressure in flash sales arises from a combination of time constraints, quantity scarcity, and social influence, which collectively trigger acute stress responses and shift decision-making from an analytical approach to an emotion-based intuitive

approach. The emotional dynamics that emerge during flash sales are ambivalent, with consumers experiencing positive and negative emotions simultaneously or alternately, creating an intense and memorable experience. Individual differences in self-control, sensation seeking, and emotional tendencies influence how consumers experience and respond to flash sale pressure. The coping strategies that consumers develop are highly diverse, ranging from complete avoidance, limit setting, emotion regulation, cognitive restructuring, behavioral strategies, social support, to technology utilization, with the effectiveness of each strategy depending heavily on individual characteristics and situational factors. Repeated participation in flash sales can shape shopping habits and have long-term implications for consumers' psychological and financial well-being, which requires attention from various stakeholders. A comprehensive understanding of consumer experience in flash sales provides a foundation for developing educational interventions, more ethical interface design, and more responsive consumer protection policies.

The findings of this literature study have significant theoretical implications for the development of consumer behavior theory, particularly in understanding decision-making under time pressure and emotional influence. This study extends the coping theory framework by identifying the specific strategies that consumers apply in stressful online shopping contexts, as well as the factors that influence the effectiveness of those strategies. Practically, the implications of these findings are highly relevant for various stakeholders. For consumers, understanding the psychological mechanisms at work in flash sales and the range of coping strategies available can help them develop a more conscious and effective approach to managing their online shopping experience. For e-commerce business actors, these findings indicate that marketing strategies that rely on exploiting consumer psychology, although effective in the short term, have the potential to damage consumer trust and loyalty in the long term. Developing more ethical flash sale programs that consider consumer well-being as part of business strategy can become a sustainable competitive advantage. For policymakers, these findings provide an empirical basis for formulating consumer protection regulations that are more responsive to the realities of the digital shopping environment, including regulation of exploitative interface design and obligations to provide adequate disclosure about the psychological mechanisms used in marketing strategies.

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