

## **Cues on Apparel Websites that Trigger Impulse Purchases**

Sandy Dawson and Minjeong Kim

Oregon State University

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Research has found an upward trend in impulse buying in general, and impulse buying is frequently foreseen among mall shoppers. Impulse purchases account for over \$4 billion in annual sales in the U.S. (Mogelonsky, 1998). Retailers have found that over 50 percent of mall shoppers purchase on impulse (Nichols et al., 2001). More than one third of all department store purchases were bought on impulse (Bellinger et al., 1978) which makes impulse purchases very important to a retailer's profits.

The internet serves as a convenient shopping channel, and can be seen as an alternative impulsive channel (Phau & Lo, 2004). In a study conducted by Shop.org (2005), convenience was one of primary reasons for shopping online. While the increased convenience in online shopping compared to traditional brick and mortar shopping is advantageous to many shoppers, such convenience may also encourage impulse buying. The internet serves as a convenient shopping channel that allows the consumer to shop at their leisure, offering 24 hour/7 days a week shopping, and in the comfort of their own home.

Online shopping has been the fastest growing channel of shopping for more than a decade with sales growing at an annual rate of 25%. In 2006, online sales reached \$136.2 billion, almost a 26% increase from 2005 (Brohan, 2007a). The future of online retail sales is very optimistic. By 2010, it is predicted that online sales will account for 15 to 20% of all retail sales in the US (Shopping Around the Web, 2000). Online apparel products consistently rank among the most popular product categories sold over the internet (Desmarteau, 2004). Sales over \$3.7 billion in apparel purchases made up just the holiday season in 2003 (Shop.org & Nielsen Net ratings, 2004). One study linked attributes of a website such as promotion to impulse buying behavior of apparel merchandise (Rhee, 2006). Given the rapid growth of online shopping and the characteristics of online shopping that encourages impulse buying (e.g., open 24/7), impulse buying online is likely to be prevalent.

A typical online shopper spends about 30 seconds viewing a website before they decide to click away or view the merchandise on a website (Brohan, 1999). This makes creating an enticing website ever important in drawing shopper's buying attention. Also, impulse buying behavior is primarily stimulus driven (Rook and Fisher, 1995). Thus the effective use of marketing strategies on retail websites are likely to promote impulse buying. Many online retailers are implementing impulse buying strategies that employ an array of promotional and personalization strategies to entice shopper's impulse purchases (Brohan, 1999). For example, Eve.com, a San Francisco based online beauty store for example, implemented an integrated database system that automatically offered suggested coordination items to the product being viewed. Related items that the customer also might like were presented. After implementing this system, Eve.com experienced a 20% increase in sales (Brohan, 1999). In a different example, FigLeaves.com, a U.K. based apparel retailer also saw increased conversion rates as well as increased sales after offering suggested coordination and/or related items displayed with the particular product being viewed (Internet Retailer, 2003). FigLeaves.com is part of Internet Retailer's top 99 online apparel retailer (2005) rank. Perfumia Inc., a Miami based specialty fragrance store, also experienced a significant increase in impulse purchases after offering frequent sale specials, free gifts with purchase, free samples, and featured items on their website. Impulse purchases accounted for one-third of its annual sales of \$175 million (Brohan, 1999).

Other leading online retailers realize the influence and increased profit potential of such marketing cues and therefore have increased such stimuli on their sites. According to the E-Tailing group's 11th Annual Mystery Shopping Survey, leading merchants are optimizing many of the same sales cues, promotional cues, idea oriented cues and suggestion cues analyzed in this survey. Many of these leading merchants in fact increased certain cues on their sites in 2008 from 2007. For example, the percentage of e-tailing's top 100 merchants who offer an online outlet or clearance section on their sites increased 10% in 2008 (a jump to 82%). Online retailers offering sweepstakes/contests on their sites increased by 10%, free gift with purchase increased 9%, and customer reviews increased 8% (Loechner, 2009). The E-Tailing Group in 2007 reported that 77% of surveyed consumers said their online purchases were significantly influenced by customer reviews, top consumer rated-products, and top-selling products presented on a retailer's website (Internet Retailer, 2007).

Practitioners and scholars have also been investigating ways to implement techniques in site promotion (Berthon, Pitt, and Watson, 1996; Ducoffe, 1996; Coyle and Thomson, 2001), as well as website design (Palmer and Griffith, 1998; Huizingh, 2000). According to an *Internet Retailer* survey on e-commerce technology spending intentions, more than half the online retailers surveyed set adding customer reviews and personalization features that encourage impulse buying as their highest priority in 2008 (Brohan, 2007b). According to a survey conducted in 2005, most successful website features in a holiday shopping period included free shipping, gift idea centers, suggested items, and featured sale item pages, which also promote impulse purchases (Shop.org, 2005). It is important for online retailers to implement such marketing strategies because such external cues on retail websites can encourage impulse purchases and subsequently increase profits (Brohan, 1999).

While evidence suggests that impulse purchases are likely to be prevalent in online shopping, there is a limited amount of impulse buying research conducted in the context of online shopping however much of the research done on impulse purchases has focused on in-store purchases (Bayley and Nancarrow, 1998). With the tremendous growth and importance of online retailing, and the prevalence of impulse buying today, more research is needed to understand consumer impulse buying behaviors online.

Therefore, the purpose of this exploratory study was to investigate impulse buying cues available on apparel websites. The research objectives were three-fold: (1) to identify website cues that encourage impulse buying (external impulse trigger cues) from consumers' point of view, (2) to assess the extent to which external impulse trigger cues are used on apparel websites, and (3) to examine the relationship between online retailers' financial success and the amount of external impulse trigger cues available on apparel websites. The findings of this study are expected to provide insight into what external trigger cues of impulse buying exist on a retailer's website (which research there of is lacking). Furthermore, this study can help online retailers understand what they can include on their websites to promote impulse buying and ultimately improve financial profitability.

## Review of Literature

### Impulse buying

Impulse buying can be defined as "a sudden, often powerful and persistent urge to buy something immediately" (Rook, 1987, p.191). Unplanned or unintended purchasing has been commonly associated with impulsive purchasing by many researchers, and an unplanned purchase is necessary for categorizing a purchase as impulsive (Rook, 1987; Rook and Fisher, 1995). Unplanned buying refers to purchases that were not planned in advance, and includes impulse buying (Stern, 1962). How fast the impulse purchase

decision was made distinguishes the two (Hausman, 2000) where impulse purchases occur in a shorter time span than unplanned purchases (Dholakia, 2000). The impulsive decision is made quickly and hastily (Rook, 1987) and is made after being exposed to the product (Hock and Loewenstein, 1991).

A consumer's impulse to buy may occur once or recur more than once for the same consumer (Dholakia, 2000). Impulse buyers are more willing to accept spontaneous buying ideas (Hock and Loewenstein, 1991) and are less likely to thoroughly evaluate their purchase decisions than a typical informed shopper (Jones *et al.*, 2003). They instead want immediate gratification from a purchase, and therefore purchase without consideration to consequences. A mysterious attraction of the product draws the impulse buyer in and motivates them to make an impulse purchase (Rook, 1987).

A limited amount of impulse buying research has been conducted in an online shopping context. Donthu and Garcia (1999) found online shoppers to be more impulsive than non-online shoppers. LaRose (2001) identified features of a website like product recommendations, suggested items, price point categories, notice of sales, etc. that would encourage unregulated buying (which includes impulse buying). Then in 2002, LaRose and Eastin confirmed that impulse buying was indeed present online among college-aged consumers. Costa and Laran (2003) further identified that the retailer's online environment affects a consumer's impulse purchase behavior. After analyzing impulse buying literature, Koski (2004) identified five features of online websites that encourage impulse buying. One, shopping online provides anonymity; consumers can shop impulsively without embarrassment (Koufaris, 2002; Rook & Fisher, 1995). Two, the internet provides easy access, consumers can make a purchase 24/7 (Burton, 2002; Koufaris, 2002; Moe & Fader, 2004; Rook and Fisher, 1995). Third, the internet provides a greater variety of goods (Chen-Yu & Seock, 2002; Huang, 2000). Fourth, direct marketing and personalized promotions lead consumers to impulsively buy (Koufaris, 2002). And fifth, consumers can use credit cards online which encourages impulse purchases (Dittmar & Drury, 2000; Rook & Fisher, 1995). In a more recent study on impulse buying online, Rhee (2006) found that online impulse buyers showed significantly higher involvement with apparel and a more positive evaluation of the website attributes in terms of website design, product presentation, promotion and product search/policy information.

Consumers are affected by both internal and external factors of impulse buying (Wansink, 1994). Because impulse buying behavior is exclusively stimulus driven (Rook and Fisher, 1995), increased exposure to certain stimuli increases the likelihood of impulsive buying (Iyer, 1989). Such factors decipher how retailers play a part in encouraging impulsive buying behavior. External factors of impulse buying include external trigger cues associated with shopping or buying (Wansink, 1994). These cues (also referred to as marketing stimuli) involve "marketer-controlled environmental and sensory factors" and are controlled by the marketer in attempt to lure consumers into purchase behavior (Youn and Faber, 2000, p. 180). Atmospheric cues of a retail environment (such as smells, sights, and sounds), marketing innovations (such as 24-hour retailing, credit cards, cash machines, etc.), and marketing mix cues (such as "point-of-purchase displays, promotions, and advertisements") are all external cues that can trigger impulse buying (Youn and Faber, 2000, p.180). Visual encounters or promotional incentives can induce an urge to impulsively buy (Dholakia, 2000; Rook, 1987). Shop.org/Biz rate study (2005) found that online retailers experienced a 30% increased sales growth by implementing aggressive promotions. Some of these promotions included direct email promotions, paid search engine marketing, free shipping, gift idea centers, suggested items, and featured sales item pages.

In addition to attracting new customers to a retail site, external marketing cues promote both up-selling and cross-selling to existing (and new) customers, encouraging them to make impulse purchases of

complimentary items or better items. According to Chicago's E-tailing Group Inc., a growing number of online retailers are implementing cross-selling and up-selling product recommendations on their websites as to encourage impulse buying online (Internet Retailer, 2002). Many of Internet Retailer's (2002) top 99 retail sites implemented automated cross-selling and up-selling features on their sites. Subsequently, these retailers experienced increases in online sales after implementing these marketing strategies (Shop.org, 2005).

## **Theoretical Framework**

The Consumption Impulse Formation Enactment Model (CIFE) developed by Dholakia in 2000, states there are three antecedents that form a 'consumption impulse' defined as the "irresistible urge to consume" (Dholakia, 2000, p.960). These three antecedents include marketing stimuli, a person's impulsivity trait, and situational factors. This study focuses on the amount of marketing stimuli (or external impulse trigger cues) present on the apparel websites. According to the CIFE Model, it is important for online retailers to provide an adequate amount of marketing stimuli on their websites to entice consumers to impulsively buy online. These factors are called marketing stimuli because the marketers can control the presentation of the product and thus can trigger the consumption impulse. Applied to an online shopping context, marketing stimuli in the CIFE model refer to the external stimuli that are present on the website to trigger impulse buying behavior.

## **Research Questions**

Based on the review of literature and theoretical framework, the following research questions were developed:

- (1) What are the external impulse trigger cues on apparel websites from the consumers' point of view?
- (2) What is the extent to which external impulse trigger cues are available on apparel websites?
- (3) What is the relationship between the amount of external impulse trigger cues and online retailers' financial performance?

## **Methodology**

This study focused on apparel websites because apparel is a common impulse purchase item and apparel also consistently ranks among the most popular product categories sold over the internet (Desmarteau, 2004). According to a study conducted by Forrester Research, online shoppers purchased \$9.6 billion worth of apparel online in 2006 (Tedeschi, 2007).

This study consisted of 2 phases. In phase 1, focus group interviews were conducted to determine what external cues currently exist on apparel websites that lead consumers to make impulse purchases. Very little is known about external cues of websites that trigger impulse buying from previous literature. Thus, focus groups helped generate useful information to identify potential impulse trigger cues on apparel websites. The findings from focus group interviews were used to develop a coding guide for a content analysis in phase 2.

In phase 2, a content analysis of 60 online apparel websites was conducted to assess the amount of external impulse trigger cues available on each retailer's website. A content analysis is the "the objective,

systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Berelson, 1952, p. 18). As a non-reactive research strategy, a content analysis reflects ideas thought to be important by the creators of the media. Therefore, a content analysis of apparel websites will provide information about the current use of marketing strategies deemed important by online retailers to promote consumer purchases online.

## **Sample Selection**

For the focus group interviews in phase 1, college students were recruited from a large Northwestern university. College students are a good representative sample of online shoppers, and impulse buying behavior has been found to be prominent in younger adults (LaRose and Eastin, 2002; Retail World, 2002).

Each focus group session was conducted using semi-structured questions about impulse trigger cues on apparel websites. First, the participants were asked general questions about their online shopping experience and their previous impulse purchases online. In the second part of the focus group session, the participants viewed several apparel websites and were asked to identify any aspects on the website that might encourage them to make an impulse purchase. Five to six online apparel websites were visited at random and the website's introduction page, specific product category pages, and specific product item pages were viewed. The focus group sessions each lasted approximately 30 minutes. The focus group sessions were audio recorded and transcribed to verbatim later.

For the content analysis of online apparel retailers in phase 2, the sample of websites was drawn from Internet Retailer's (2005) top 99 online apparel retailers based on annual e-commerce sales. From the top 99 retailers based on web sales, the top 30 and bottom 30 were used for the analysis.

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Take in Table I

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## **Results**

### **Phase 1: Focus Group Interviews**

To address research question 1, five focus group interviews were conducted with a total of 15 participants (14 female, 1 male). Following the recommendation by Glaser and Strauss (1967), participants were sought until no new information was obtained from additional participants. The mean focus group size was around 4 with a minimum of 2 participants per focus group. The median age of the participants was 21 years old and 60% said they made an online apparel purchase in the last 6 months; and 27% said they make an online purchase about once a month. Of these apparel purchases made online, a third said a few or almost all of them were unplanned purchases. Fifty-three percent of the participants said almost all of their in-store purchases made in general were unplanned purchases.

To interpret interviews, each transcript was read multiple times to gain a coherent, comprehensive interpretation and develop meaning categories from verbatim. Then, transcripts were read again multiple times to develop thematic categories and further identify holistic relationships among categories.

A comprehensive list of the external cues (on a website) mentions was developed. Similar external cues were grouped together and categorized into separate themes of external cues. Four mutually

exclusive categories were formed from the emerging themes; *promotions*, *ideas*, *sales*, and *suggestions*. For example, a category called "*promotions*" was developed from mentions that included (1) buy one-get one free deals, (2) coupons, (3) percentage off when spend a certain limit, (4) free gift with purchase, (5) free shipping or shipping discount, (6) ability to return online purchase in a physical store, (7) contests or sweepstakes, and (8) membership discounts. A second category called "*ideas*" included cues such as (1) whether the online shopper could shop by featured outfits, or (2) by new styles or fashions. Also included in this category are (3) featured items on a website, (4) top picks or favorites, (5) gift ideas, and (6) items presented in price points (e.g., "items under \$20). The third category developed was the "*sales*" category which consisted of (1) whether the web site offered items on sale such as clearance items, markdowns, or limited time only sales. Also included in this category was (2) whether the web site highlighted or bolded a sale description of the actual product on sale. "*suggestions*" made up the last category and included four different external cues; (1) whether the web site offered suggested coordination items when a shopper is already viewing a particular product. (2) whether the web site offered non-coordination items (refer to suggested items yet the purpose is not to be coordinated with the item already in view but merely just a suggestion of a similar item in some aspect) (3) customer favorites, reviews and recommendations, as well as (4) if the web site presented the last item a customer viewed. To build trustworthiness of the interpretation and representation of the meanings described by the focus group interview participants, the four emergent themes and corresponding external cues were reviewed by four marketing experts and deemed relevant.

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Take in Table II

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Among the 4 categories of external impulse trigger cues, the *promotions* category had the highest amount of responses, ( $f = 38$ ), making up roughly 37% of all responses (a total of 102 responses) given in the focus groups. Among the external cues mentioned under the *promotions* category, 20 responses which was by far the highest frequency amount, suggested that free shipping or a shipping discount would entice impulse buying behavior online. This alone made up about 20% of all focus group mentions. Also interestingly, the *ideas* category held the second largest frequency amount of responses, ( $f = 30$ ), making up about one third of all focus group responses. The sales category came in next ( $f = 18$ ) making up about 18% of responses. In contrast, responses pertaining to the *suggestions* category had the least amount of responses, ( $f = 16$ ), making up about 16% of all focus group responses. The four categories of external impulse trigger cues were then used to create a coding guide of external impulse trigger cues for a content analysis of apparel websites in phase 2.

## **Phase 2: Content Analysis**

To address research question 2, 60 apparel websites were then coded based on this coding guide. The information was coded on a 2-point scale: information not available (0), and information available (1). Two coders independently analyzed 10 websites to assess inter-coder reliability. Based on the inter-coder reliability (Cronbach's alphas = .87), the remaining websites were coded by one coder. Out of 60 apparel retailers, pure e-retailers made up 21.7 percent ( $n=13$ ), catalog companies (catalog & online) made up 6 percent ( $n=6$ ), brick and mortar retailers (store & online) made up 35 percent ( $n=21$ ), and multi-channel retailers (store, catalog, & online) made up 33.3 percent ( $n=20$ ). Table I provides a list of all websites analyzed.

Descriptive statistics including frequency counts and percentages from the website content analysis are also presented in Table II. While the focus group responses showed the highest frequency of

responses pertaining to the *promotions* category, results from the content analysis showed that external cues pertaining to the *ideas* category had the highest frequency amount,  $f = 161$  with 35.5% of the total apparel websites containing "ideas" external impulse trigger cues. The second largest frequency total came from the *sales* category,  $f = 117$ , with about 26 % of the websites containing sales cues. Similar to the focus group findings, the smallest frequency amount came from the *suggestions* category,  $f = 74$ , with only about 16% of the apparel websites containing external impulse trigger cues from the *suggestions* category. Regarding individual external cues, the free shipping or shipping discount cue (under the *promotions* category) that had the highest frequency amount from the focus group interviews also scored highly in the content analysis of the top apparel websites,  $f = 20$ . About a third of the apparel websites contained a free shipping or shipping discount cue. Other large frequencies of external cues found on the top online apparel websites included "on sale" (13% of total cues) "bold sale prices" (12.8%), "featured items (9.3%), and "new styles/fashions" (8.6%).

To examine the relationship between the amount of external impulse trigger cues and online retailer's financial performance (research question 3), a correlation analysis was conducted. For the amount of external impulse trigger cues, scores from coded items (0=unavailable, 1=available) were summed to represent a total amount of impulse cues available on the website. Higher numbers indicated that more external impulse triggers were available on the website than lower numbers. For online retailer's financial performance, Internet Retailer (2005) provided web sales of each company in the list as shown in Table I.

Results showed that web sales of the online apparel retailers were significantly correlated with the amount of external impulse trigger cues available on apparel websites,  $r = 0.528$ ,  $n = 99$ ,  $p < .00001$ . This positive relationship shows that as the amount of external impulse trigger cues available on apparel websites increased, so too did their web sales.

A Chi-square test with Cramer's V was then conducted to determine specific external impulse trigger cues that significantly differed in terms of their availability between the top and bottom 30 online apparel retailers. Chi-square results revealed several significant differences between the two groups. The *ideas* category showed the most differences in the availability of external impulse trigger cues between the top and bottom 30 companies. The top 30 online apparel retailers provided the "shop by outfit", "new style", "featured item", "gift idea", "price point" cues on their websites significantly more often than the bottom 30 online apparel retailers (all  $ps < .05$ ). For the *promotion* category, the availability of the "return purchase in store" cue significantly differed between the two groups. For the *suggestion* category, the availability of the "suggested un-coordination item" cue significantly differed between the two groups. For both cues, the top 30 retailers provided cues more often than the bottom 30 online apparel retailers (all  $ps < .05$ ). Overall results showed that the top 30 online apparel retailers provided more external impulse trigger cues than the bottom 30 of the top 99 online apparel retailers. This supports the findings from the correlation analysis described above. Cramer's V revealed all fairly moderate effect sizes.

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Take in Table III

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### Implications and conclusions

This study examined the external factors of impulse buying in online retailing; externally looking at what trigger cues the online retailer can include on their website to encourage impulse buying. Focus group interviews were first conducted that identified possible external trigger cues of impulse buying on apparel

websites. Two main categories emerged as important indicators of impulse buying online and were the *promotions* and *ideas* categories. According to online shoppers, it is these two categories of external impulse buying cues present on apparel websites that entice people to impulsively buy. Such cues include various sales promotions, gift with purchase, free shipping, contests or sweepstakes, easy return policies, or idea cues including new styles, featured items, top picks, and gift ideas to name a few. The findings of the study suggest that online shoppers may value different types of external cues on a website more than others. Promotional offers and purchase ideas were desired the most.

The findings from the focus group interviews were then used to create an appropriate coding guide consisting of external trigger cues of impulse buying that could be found on apparel websites. A content analysis showed that the *ideas* category was most commonly available on apparel websites to encourage impulse buying followed by the *sales* category. Comparison of frequencies of external impulse trigger cues between the focus group interviews and the content analysis also provide useful insights for retailers. While the *promotions* and *ideas* categories were most frequently mentioned from the focus group interviews, the *ideas* and *sales* categories were most frequently observed. Online retailers perhaps have paid more attention to *sales* (e.g., on sale, bold sale price on product) in particular, while other types of *promotions* (e.g., free shipping, return purchase in store) may be more effective in encouraging impulse purchases. Specifically, while free shipping has been frequently noted by focus group participants as an impulse trigger cue when shopping online, it was not frequently implemented by online retailers analyzed for the study. According to the *Top 40 Online Retail Satisfaction Index* survey conducted by ForeSee Results in 2008, free shipping was found to be a major selling point for e-tailers. Three out of five online customers reported that their choice of whether to shop at one store or another was influenced by whether or not the retailer offered free shipping (Internet Retailer, 2009). The finding of the study and the industry's anecdotal evidence together suggest that online retailers may want to consider free shipping as a promotional tool to increase impulse sales. The decision to implement free shipping is expected to be a complicated one considering financial ramifications, but seems worthwhile exploring.

The findings from this study suggest that the amount of external trigger cues of impulse buying may be a factor that affects a retailer's success in encouraging online impulse purchases, thus driving sales. Results of the study showed a positive relationship between retailers' web sales and the amount of external cues present on their websites. As the amount of external impulse trigger cues increased on a retailer's website, so too did their financial sales. The top 30 apparel websites also provided significantly more external impulse trigger cues than the bottom 30 websites. Because of the positive relationship between retailers' profits and the amount of cues available on a website, it is reasonable to suggest that the websites' marketing tactics contributed to their success, among other factors. Several online retailers have indeed experienced increased impulse sales by implementing such marketing tactics on their websites (Internet Retailer, 2003). Not as successful online retailers therefore should consider offering more external impulse trigger cues (e.g. sales, promotions, purchase ideas, and suggested items) on their websites to increase potential impulse purchases, thus increasing online sales.

Another interesting finding from the study is that the *ideas* category showed the biggest differences than other external trigger cues between the top and bottom 30 companies analyzed. The top 30 online apparel retailers consistently provided more external trigger cues related to the ideas such as shop outfit, new styles/fashions, featured items, gift ideas, and price point items (items under \$30). This finding suggests that online retailers need to provide external cues offering shopping ideas for their customers. Given low financial commitment to provide the *ideas* cues on a website, this will be a fairly easy one for online retailers to adopt.



A growing trend for brick and mortar stores is offering the option of returning an online purchase to a physical store. Returning online merchandise has been a major concern for customers and a realized factor for retailers in whether a customer is “wooded” in to making an impulse purchase, according to Bratton, vice president of marketing development for Envilen, an online advertising and marketing firm (Brohan, 1999). The option of returning an online purchase in the stores creates an advantage for the online customer by providing more return options and locations. This return option can make it that much easier for an online shopper to make an impulse purchase. This is one example of how a customer can benefit from shopping with a multi-channel retailer. Because these marketing tactics are advantageous to retailers’ online channel, retailers should recognize the opportunity of synchronizing these marketing tactics in all channels. For example, Wagner (2008) pointed out that in addition to offering customer reviews on the site’s product pages, retailers can also offer these customer reviews in customer email, in the retailer’s catalogs, on promotional circulars and on in-store signage. Multi-channel retailers can take advantage of implementing these marketing tactics in not just their online channel, but their brick and mortar store and catalog channel.

This study provided insight into what external trigger cues of impulse buying exist on apparel websites, which research there of is lacking. More specifically, this study identified what types of external impulse trigger cues were commonly being used on apparel websites. This study is also useful for marketers in understanding the importance of online marketing strategies used on their websites and how these factors could affect impulsive behavior online. Online retailers can use this information to assess their own marketing strategies on websites, and determine what external impulse trigger cues might be useful to employ on their websites to entice more impulse buying behavior.

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

Several limitations were present for this study. The first limitation is related to the sample websites used for the content analysis. Although Internet Retailer’s top online apparel retailers provided a reliable sample based on web only sales as well as insight into what the top successful retailers were providing on their website, this sample cannot be generalized to all apparel websites. Thus, a further study should analyze a larger sample size of apparel websites and other websites selling different types of products to affirm the results of this study. Skewed gender distribution in focus group interviews is another limitation. Far more women were represented in the focus groups interviews. Thus the coding guide developed from the focus group interviews may have overlooked the potential external impulse trigger cues appealing to men and not necessarily to women. Future research should incorporate men’s perception of external impulse trigger cues on apparel websites to complement the findings of the study. Another limitation is that the study only focused on functional qualities, and not psychological attributes such as the customer’s perceptions or feelings about website attributes. This study also only focused on external marketing cues offered across different apparel websites, while other factors may exist that affect an online retailer’s success. Thus, a further study should analyze these additional factors identified by focus group participants to affect an online retailer’s success, such as website design and web service quality.

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Table I. List of Apparel Retailer Websites Analyzed

Rank	Type of Web Retailer	Product Category	Web Sales (2004)	
<b>Top 30:</b>				
1	Gap Inc.	Brick & Mortar	Apparel only	\$438,960,000*
2	Redcats USA	Catalog Co.	Apparel, home products	\$401,000,000
3	Neiman Marcus Grp Inc.	Multi-Channel	Apparel, home, other	\$240,000,000
4	Eddie Bauer	Multi-Channel	Apparel, other products	\$222,306,500
5	L.L. Bean Inc.	Multi-Channel	Apparel, home, other	\$219,796,200*
6	Nordstrom Inc.	Multi-Channel	Apparel, home, other	\$200,076,480*
7	Zappos.com Inc.	Pure E-tailer	Apparel only (shoes)	\$184,000,000
8	Coldwater Creek Inc.	Multi-Channel	Apparel, home, other	\$162,200,000
9	Victoria's Secret	Multi-Channel	Apparel only	\$157,690,800*
10	Saks Fifth Avenue	Multi-Channel	Apparel, home, other	\$135,000,000*
11	Hanover Direct Inc.	Catalog Co.	Apparel only	\$124,890,000
12	J. Crew Group Inc.	Multi-Channel	Apparel only	\$112,100,000*
13	Abercrombie & Fitch	Multi-Channel	Apparel only	\$110,000,000
14	Foot Locker Inc.	Brick & Mortar	Apparel only	\$109,089,000*
15	Blair Corp.	Multi-Channel	Apparel, home, other	\$91,700,000
16	The Talbots Inc.	Multi-Channel	Apparel only	\$82,700,000
17	The J. Jill Group Inc.	Multi-Channel	Apparel only	\$80,560,000
18	eBags.com	Pure E-tailer	Apparel, home, other	\$73,416,000*
19	Alloy Inc.	Pure E-tailer	Apparel only	\$62,607,600*
20	Norm Thompson Out.	Catalog Co.	Apparel, home, other products	\$61,000,000
21	The Orvis Co. Inc	Multi-Channel	Apparel, home, other	\$57,288,000*
22	Polo Ralph Lauren	Brick & Mortar	Apparel, home products	\$50,000,000
23	American Eagle Out.	Brick & Mortar	Apparel only	\$49,104,000*
24	ShoeBuy.com Inc.	Pure E-tailer	Apparel only	\$45,900,000*
25	Ann Taylor Stores	Brick & Mortar	Apparel only	\$44,640,000*
26	YOOX Spa	Pure E-tailer	Apparel, home, other	\$44,000,000
27	Bluefly Inc.	Pure E-tailer	Apparel, home products	\$43,800,000
28	Hanna Andersson Corp.	Multi-Channel	Apparel, other products	\$43,200,000*
29	The Finish Line Inc.	Multi-Channel	Apparel, home products	\$41,943,000*
30	BrideSave.com LLC	Pure E-tailer	Apparel, home, other	\$40,500,000*
<b>Bottom 30:</b>				
31	Hot Topic Inc.	Brick & Mortar	Apparel, other products	\$11,048,400*
32	Hat World Corp.	Brick & Mortar	Apparel only	\$10,284,029
33	Carabella Corp.	Multi-Channel	Apparel, home products	\$10,188,750*
34	Danskin Inc.	Brick & Mortar	Apparel, other products	\$9,281,250*
35	Dr. Jay's Inc.	Brick & Mortar	Apparel only	\$9,114,000*
36	Dresses.com	Pure E-tailer	Apparel only	\$8,370,000*
37	Boot Barn Inc.	Brick & Mortar	Apparel only	\$8,257,920*
38	The Men's Wearhouse	Brick & Mortar	Apparel only	\$7,812,000*
39	Sheplers Inc.	Multi-Channel	Apparel, home, other	\$7,246,932*

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Type of Web Retailer</b>	<b>Product Category</b>	<b>Web Sales (2004)</b>
40 The Buckle Inc.	Brick & Mortar	Apparel only	\$7,189,644*
41 Classic Closeouts LLC	Pure E-tailer	Apparel, home products	\$7,068,000*
42 World Traveler	Multi-Channel	Apparel, home, other	\$6,750,000*
43 DiscountDance.com	Pure E-tailer	Apparel, other products	\$6,723,234*
44 Dooney & Bourke Inc.	Brick & Mortar	Apparel only	\$6,510,000*
45 Avenue.com	Brick & Mortar	Apparel only	\$6,411,000
46 Limitedtoo Inc.	Brick & Mortar	Apparel only	\$5,989,200*
47 T-shirt King	Pure E-tailer	Apparel only	\$5,985,000*
48 Artbeads.com	Pure E-tailer	Apparel, home, other	\$5,800,000
49 Casual Male Retail	Multi-Channel	Apparel only	\$5,691,000*
50 Allheart.com	Multi-Channel	Apparel, other products	\$5,624,640*
51 Rocawear Inc.	Brick & Mortar	Apparel, other products	\$5,580,000*
52 Steve Madden Ltd.	Brick & Mortar	Apparel, home, other	\$5,200,000
53 Choice Shirts	Brick & Mortar	Apparel only	\$5,115,000*
54 Jasco Uniform Co.	Catalog Co.	Apparel, other products	\$4,642,560*
55 Loralie.com Inc.	Brick & Mortar	Apparel only	\$4,278,000*
56 Wilsons Leather Expert	Brick & Mortar	Apparel, other products	\$4,200,000
57 AmeriMark Direct LLC	Catalog Co.	Apparel, home, other	\$4,092,000*
58 Leather Tree Inc.	Pure E-tailer	Apparel, home, other	\$3,900,000
59 New York Dancewear	Catalog Co.	Apparel, other products	\$3,807,000*
60 FigLeaves.com	Brick & Mortar	Apparel only	\$3,580,000*

\*Internet Retailer Estimate

Source: Internet Retailer Top 400 Guide

Table II. External Impulse Trigger Cues on Online Apparel Websites: Focus Group Interviews vs. Website Content Analysis

Categories and external cues:	Focus Group		Website Content Analysis	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
<b><i>Sales:</i></b>	18	17.6	117	25.8
On sale (clearance, sales, markdowns)	15	14.7	59	13.0
Bold sale price on product	3	2.9	58	12.8
<b><i>Promotions:</i></b>	38	37.3	102	22.5
Additional purchase % off (ex. buy one get one)	2	2	8	1.8
Coupon	2	2.0	4	0.9
% off when spend certain limit	4	3.9	19	4.2
Gift with purchase	1	1.0	2	0.4
Free shipping or shipping discount	20	19.6	20	4.4
Return purchase in store	7	6.8	23	5.1
Contests/sweepstakes	1	1.0	14	3.1
Membership discount	1	1.0	12	2.6
<b><i>Ideas:</i></b>	30	29.4	161	35.5
Shop outfit	5	4.9	22	4.8
New styles/fashions	6	5.9	39	8.6
Featured items	7	6.8	42	9.3
Top picks/favorites	2	2.0	20	4.4
Gift ideas	5	4.9	24	5.3
Price point items (ex. items under \$30)	5	4.9	14	3.1
<b><i>Suggestions:</i></b>	16	15.7	74	16.3
Suggested coordination items	6	5.9	32	7.0
Suggested non-coordination items	5	4.9	30	6.6
Customer favorites/reviews/ recommendations	3	2.9	9	2.0
Last thing you looked at	2	2.0	3	0.7

Table III. Frequencies of External Impulse Trigger Cues Available on the Top 30 and Bottom 30 Apparel Websites

External Cues	Rank of Retailers			
	Top 30		Bottom 30	
	Unavailable	Available	Unavailable	Available
<b>Sales:</b>				
On sale (clearance, sales, markdowns)	1	29	0	30
	.313	.313	.313	.313
Bold sale price on product	1	29	1	29
	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
<b>Promotions:</b>				
Addit. purch % off (ex. buy 1 get 1....)	28	2	24	6
	.129	.129	.129	.129
Coupon	28	2	28	2
	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
% off when spend certain limit	19	11	22	8
	.405	.405	.405	.405
Gift with purchase	29	1	29	1
	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Free shipping or shipping discount	21	9	19	11
	.584	.584	.584	.584
Return purchase in store	13	17	24	6
	.003*	.003*	.003*	.003*
Contests/sweepstakes	21	9	25	5
	.222	.222	.222	.222
Membership discount	22	8	26	4
	.197	.197	.197	.197
<b>Ideas:</b>				
Shop outfit	14	16	24	6
	.007**	.007**	.007**	.007**
New styles/fashions	6	24	15	15
	.015*	.015*	.015*	.015*
Featured items	5	25	13	17
	.024*	.024*	.024*	.024*
Top picks/favorites	18	12	22	8
	.273	.273	.273	.273
Gift ideas	14	16	22	8
	.035*	.035*	.035*	.035*
Price point items (ex. items under \$30)	19	11	27	3
	.015*	.015*	.015*	.015*
<b>Suggestions:</b>				
Suggested coordination items	12	18	16	14
	.301	.301	.301	.301
Suggested non-coordination items	11	19	19	11
	.039*	.039*	.039*	.039*
Customer favs/reviews/ recommendations	23	7	28	2
	.071	.071	.071	.071
Last thing you looked at	28	2	29	1
	.554	.554	.554	.554

\* $p < 0.05$  \*\* $p < 0.01$