



The Impact of Discount Marketing on University Students' Buying Decisions in Online Shopping

Zubaer Mahmud Apurba¹, Md Nujmul Huda²

^{1,2}Nanjing University of Information Science and Technology, Nanjing, China.

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Corresponding Author:
Zubaer Mahmud Apurba

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how students at universities are influenced in their online buying by discount marketing, paying special attention to impulse buying, what prompts them and how sensitive they are to price. The research investigated these subjects by questioning 180 university students about their preferred discounts, when they shop online and the psychological and behavioral factors they consider when shopping. The research has shown that urgency, the fear of not getting something in time and FOMO make people buy impulsively under the pressure of flash sales and coupons. Difficulties like mental accounting, reference pricing and the Elaboration Likelihood Model show why some students think with their feelings and others use logic when seeing discounts. The way someone sees the risk and their trust in an environment help decide how they react to online offers. The research shows that giving discounts can encourage consumers, but their use should be controlled to keep the brand trusted and popular for a longer period. Recommendations are given to retailers to design marketing strategies that are suitable for students, ethical and psychologically conscious.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social commerce is becoming more popular with each passing day. Because of social media and smartphones, young people—mainly Gen Z and Millennials (ages 18-34)—prefer to shop online. Social networks are used for shopping by 34% of U.S. consumers per week, while 65% purchase products through online sources regularly. [1] This generation is driving changes, as 95% have a smartphone and more than 96% use it every month to shop online. [2] It is projected that their spending will hit \$44 billion by 2025 in the United States. [3] There is no doubt that TikTok is having a major impact. The U.S. has the third-highest number of people using TikTok and almost 60% of these people are between 18 and 34 years old. The company aims to achieve \$17.5 billion in sales by the end of this year. Now, social commerce accounts for 19.4% of all e-commerce sales and has the potential to reach \$1 trillion in revenue by 2028. [4] Products can catch the attention of young people when they see them on social media accounts. More than one-third (41%) discover new items by following influencers and nearly two-thirds (61%) trust their advice. [5] Videos, live streams and easy checkout options inside the app make the shopping experience enjoyable. Social media platforms will see more young people shopping on them in the near future. The message is clear: Today, Gen Z and Millennials are shopping mainly on their phones and using social networks.

In China, Singles' Day (11/11) begun as a humorous alternative to Valentine's Day. And then rapidly became the most significant shopping event due to Alibaba. Since 2009, their model revolves around deep discounts, event sales, and livestream launches that generated \$156 billion (1.14 trillion yuan) in sales by 2023. [6] While the growth rate is dropping (2% in 2023), the importance of discounts has not changed, especially in the livestream shopping environment where both influencers and AI enhance the urge to shop. [7] Smart discounts are utilized in advertising luxury and sustainable goods to attract younger rich consumers. China started Singles' Day, but now it is becoming popular around the world. Now if we talk about students, they buy more on sale mostly because of their tight budget and tendency to be impulsive. When students receive low incomes from their part-time jobs or allowances, they depend on discounts, since they allow them to pay less for things. Students often decide what to buy based on how much of a discount is offered, deciding whether or not to buy based on this factor. [8] Furthermore, students tends to make individuals buy

things fast when they see discounts, notably if they are only available for a short period. All things considered, discounts help students feel more comfortable with their purchases by making them cheaper and exciting to use.

The objective of this study is to discover *"How do discounts impact university student's buying decisions in online shopping?"*

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Some recent studies have looked at the ways special offers on the Internet impact online shopping among young buyers. The study by Rafsanjani et al. (2025) proved that discounts can promote impulsive buying in students, often more so when the offer is for a flash sale. [9] Likewise, Erika (2024) points out that discounts can strongly influence Gen Z buyers, sometimes causing them to disregard the real merits of a purchase. [10] Findings from Setiadi (2023) added that students at universities will often make spontaneous buys when they see frequent price promotions. [11] Yet, many of these studies concentrate only on a few types of discounts, certain e-commerce marketplaces or single influences on shopping behavior.

This research is different from prior ones since it focuses on more types of discounts such as coupons, special offers and bundles, along with incorporating mental accounting, impact from reference prices, sudden desires for purchases and trust-risk ideas. Furthermore, it concentrates on university students, since they are not well-represented in most studies. The study uses emotional, cognitive and risk-based approaches to provide a detailed picture of how discounts shape students' buying decisions online.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research approach

For this study, a quantitative approach was used to study how university students react to discount marketing while online shopping. A questionnaire was our main instrument for gathering information.

3.2 Participants

The participants numbered 180 university students. Because of convenience sampling, we distributed the questionnaire to students who were relatively easy to access. All participants answered that they were currently enrolled in a university.

3.3 Collecting Data

A survey was used online to get the information in two modes.

1. The survey was held through Google Forms.
2. A WeChat questionnaire using the same questions.

We let students know about the survey in groups on university chat platforms, through WeChat private messages and via social networks. Students had one week to complete the questionnaire, enough time for them to fill it in. There were 22 questions in the survey about various topics.

- The essential demographic data are age, gender and whether someone is a university student.
- Ways in which students shop online and where they shop
- The way students react to 11.11 and 6.18 sale events
- Types of discounts students like most (such as coupons and flash sales)
- How students make quick purchases and what types of spending they do
- Satisfaction over getting things at a lower price
- What role do discounts play in how they shop?

3.4 Data Analysis

We used Microsoft Excel to order and analyze the gathered data. Our findings were shown using pie charts, bar graphs and tables to help readers understand at a glance. The analysis allowed us to see common patterns in student shopping, how students were affected by discounts and how different discount approaches influence buying behavior.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Online Shopping Frequency

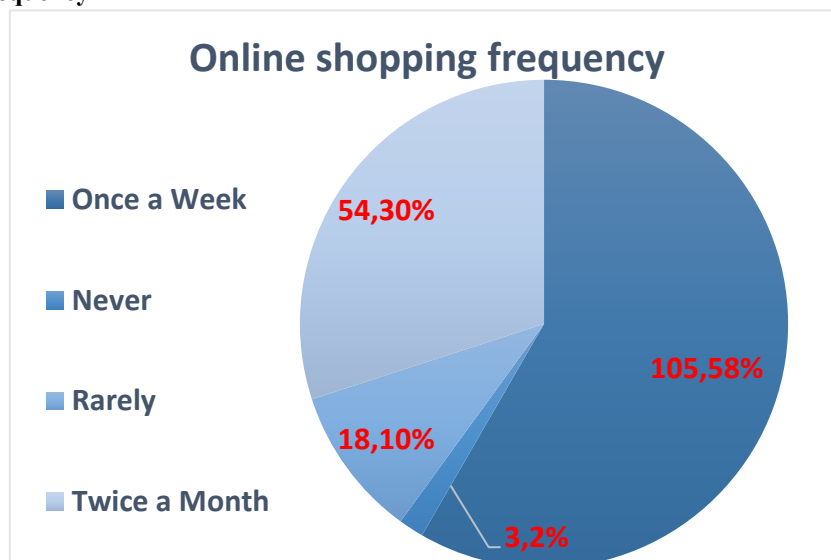


Figure 1.

To find out how engaged university students are with online shopping, they were asked about their online shopping habits. As seen in the Figure 1, most of the students (105 or 58.3%) reported that they do shopping at least once a week. 30% of students (amounting to 54 students) said they shop online around once or twice a month. On the other hand, 18 students (10%) rarely shop online and only 3 students (1.7%) said they never shop on the internet. Most university students take part in e-commerce, as the figures show that 9 out of 10 students shop on the web from time to time. This means they mainly use digital tools in their daily activities. Online shops looking at student consumers can reach them by promoting sales, especially around important shopping holidays like 11.11 and 6.18.

4.2 Student Responses to Discount Offers

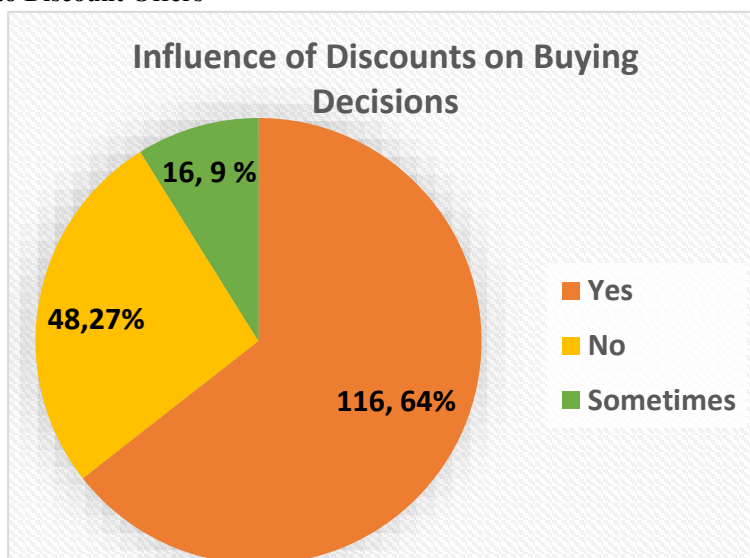


Figure 2

To explore the effect of discounts on student's decisions to purchase online, participants were asked if they felt discounts impact their buying decision. As can be seen from Figure 2, around two-thirds 116 out of 180 (64.4%) of the students said "Yes", meaning that discounts mostly influence how they shop online. Also, 48 students (26.7%) said "Sometimes" which means they might use discounts selectively when shopping. Just only 16 students (8.9%) said that special offers did not impact their buying habits. From these data, it is obvious that university students are mostly swayed by discounts. More than nine in ten of them (91%) show a strong response to lower prices in both their thinking and money matters. This shows online sellers should use sales and offers to make students notice them and shop from them during fierce sales situations.

4.3 Most Attractive Discount Types

In the survey, questions asked were similar to see what types of discounts influence university students most when choosing to make purchases online. Students were questioned about what kind of discount they would go for and then the survey examined how large the discount needs to be in order to influence them to shop. Both questions let people choose more than just one option. Because of this, the total of the responses exceeds the number of students in the study (180 students). With this way of rebates, teachers could discover more student preferences since incentives can vary from one student to another.

4.3.1 Types of Discounts Students Prefer

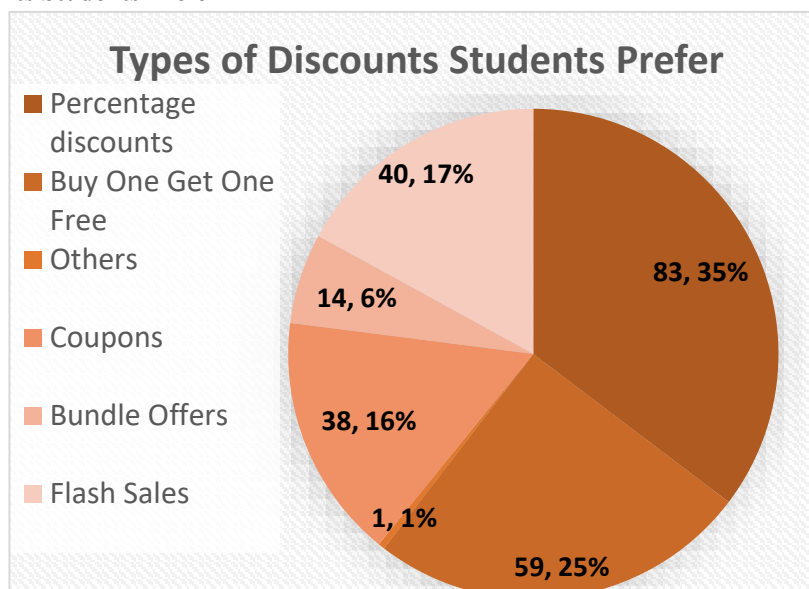


Figure 3:

There were different views from students about the reasons they shop online more often. According to the results in Figure 3, 83 people chose percentage discounts since it is easy to see the amount of money you save. Buy One Get One Free (BOGO) offers were chosen by 59 students, whereas only 40 picked flash sales. Coupons were selected by the largest number of students (38), whereas very few students stated that bundle offers affected their decision (just 14). Someone marked "Other" and said they are not bound by set choices because their emotions can change their purchases at any moment. It seems that people prefer to save money right away, for instance by using percent offer or buy-one-get-one-free and these kinds of deals attract them most.

4.3.2 Discount Percentage That Motivates Students

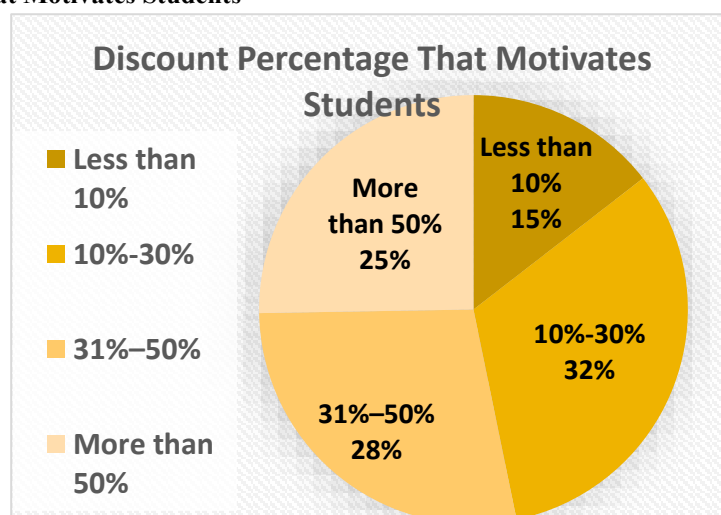


Figure 4:

Students were also asked to state how much discount would tempt them to purchase. With a look at Figure 4, we can deduce that having a 10%–30% discount works out the best for 60 out of our total 180 students. In the next phase, 52 students opted for the 31%–50% discounts and 47 students picked the discounts at over 50%. A smaller group of 27 students felt that discounts under 10% had little importance in influencing them. All things considered, students may pick several groupings showing that motivation is

not the same in all places or for every type of product. Based on the data, more customers are influenced to buy by discounts, but small offers can also be quite effective. Retailers could try to give students flexible discounts that fit with their preferences in comfort.

4.4 Impulse Buying Due to Discounts

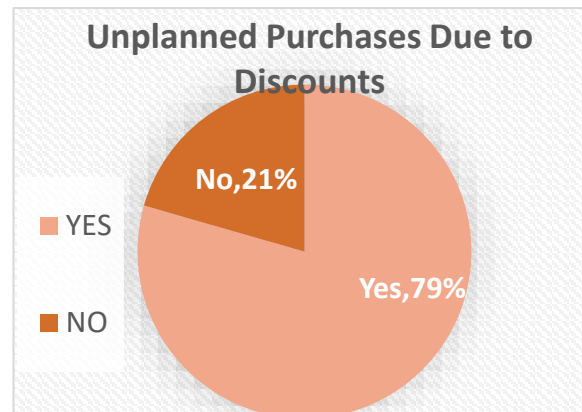


Figure 5:

To examine if discounts cause students to buy things they hadn't planned for, so students were asked: *"Have you ever bought something you didn't plan to buy just because it was discounted?"*

Looking at Figure 5, it is evident that most students or 143 out of 180 (79.4%), answered "Yes," which means they may purchase products inspired by discounts even if they did not plan to earlier. In fact, only 37 students (20.6%) responded "No" to the question which might show they keep their spending in check despite marketing campaigns. It appears from these findings that discounts encourage university students to buy things on an impulse. The end date of the offer, the fear of missing out (FOMO) and the belief that they are getting a good deal can brief students into instantly choosing these deals. People tend to shop more during events like Double 11 (Singles' Day) and 6.18, when discounts and sales are more popular. For those in marketing, this shows an important point: using discounts can affect consumers mentally, not only their checkbook. However, students may also have worries about being satisfied in the future and regretting their decision which are discussed next.

4.5 Price Comparison Behavior

To know how rational university students are during these sales, they were queried if they check prices from other sellers before purchasing the discounted product. Statistics in Figure 6 indicate that price comparison is widespread among students. According to the survey, 89 students (49.4%) said they always check prices from different sellers, whereas 86 students (47.8%) said they check prices sometimes. Only 5 students (2.8%) of students said they never compare prices. It appears that a majority of students carefully check things before making online purchases.

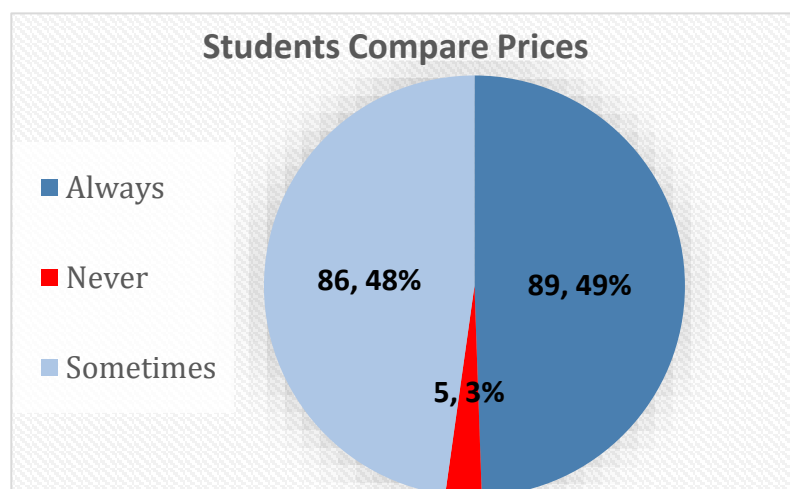


Figure 6:

Discounts are widely available, but most individuals still like to compare different products, suggesting they like to take their time choosing what to get.

4.6 Satisfaction with Discounted Purchases

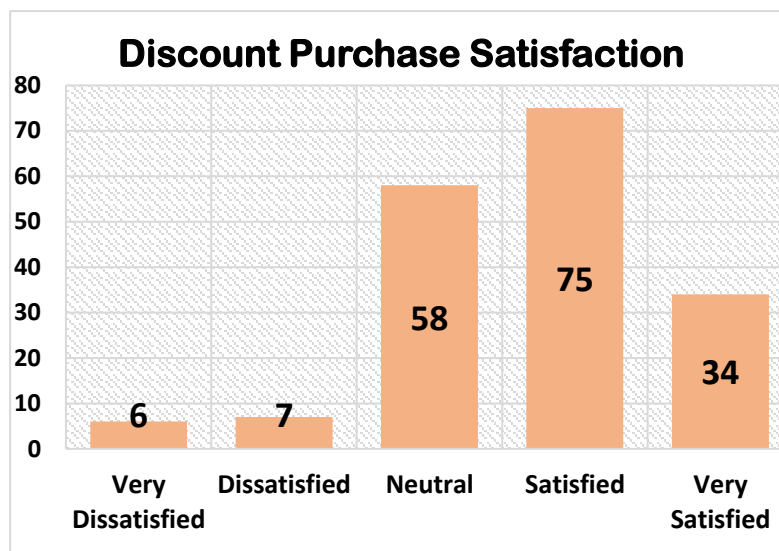


Figure: 7

Students were asked to rate how pleased they were with their online shopping on a scale that went from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). Based on the scores in Figure 7, many students said they had a good experience. Around half of students (41.7%) said they were satisfied and 34 students (18.9%) shared that they were very satisfied. Therefore, the majority of people (around 60%) viewed their discounted purchases positively. Nearly a third of the students (32.2%) marked “neutral,” suggesting they are neither positive nor negative about their buying experiences. A few students reported not being satisfied with their purchase — 7 respondents (3.9%) were dissatisfied and another 6 (3.3%) were very dissatisfied. The research shows that many university students are happy with their discounted goods which might motivate them to seek more deals in the future. But the fact that some answers are neutral or critical indicates that some students are not fully happy after buying on discount, maybe because the product wasn’t what they hoped for or it didn’t meet their standards.

4.7 Perception of Discounts Affecting Product Quality

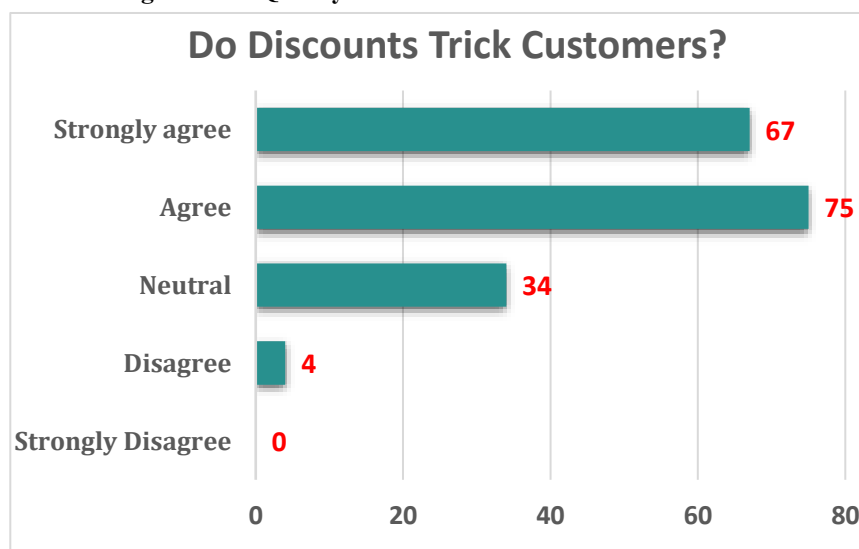


Figure 8:

Students were asked if they think discount offers sometimes trick people into buying something and if discounts might negatively impact the product. Figure 7 indicates that 75 students (41.7%) agreed and 67 students (37.2%) strongly agreed that there might be false advertising or quality can go down with discounts. 34 students (18.9%) felt unsure or have had conflicting experiences. Only 4 students (2.2%) said they disagreed and none of them strongly disagreed. Even though discounts drive a lot of purchases made by university students, most of them still act carefully and critically. They understand that not every discount means a good deal which demonstrates that they approach online buying rationally and responsibly.

4.8 Student Opinions on Discount Influence (Open-Ended Response)

In the last section of the survey, students answered on their own words how discounts impact their choices when they shop online. More in-depth open ended answers shared the emotional and mental effects of discounts on students. A lot of students acknowledged that discounts steer their buying choices significantly, mostly because they have tight budgets. Individuals regularly see discounts as possibilities to get products they have a real interest in. A number of shoppers confessed that seeing savings early on can encourage them to buy things without first planning to do so. One student reflected, *"Whenever I open Pinduoduo and see any product with a discount, I try to purchase it. Most of the time, if I have money, I buy it."* Another student wrote, *"Discounts tempt me to buy more, even if I don't need it."* Others emphasized how discounts help them stretch their budget: *"When I buy something discounted, I save money and can use it to buy another item. Even if I don't need it, the deal feels too good to miss."* A few expressed caution, pointing out that not all discounts are trustworthy: *"Sometimes I get discounts, but the product quality is very bad. It feels like a trap."* Some respondents showed a more thoughtful view: *"Discounts influence me, but I try to make sure it's actually a good deal. Sometimes 'discounted' prices are still more expensive than alternatives."* Generally, these responses demonstrate that financial discounts are appealing to students, mainly those with less income and students are also considering their spending habits. Not only do discounts provide a monetary benefit, but they often make individuals feel a certain way which can affect how they choose.

4.9 Summary of Key Findings

The findings of the survey reveal several important insights about how discounts influence university students' online shopping behavior.

High Online Engagement: The vast majority (over 90%) of students purchase items online occasionally, with half shopping regularly on the internet. Their use of digital platforms as everyday shopping tools is shown clearly here.

Strong Reaction to Discounts: Most students seem to be pleased by discounts. 116 out of 180 mentioned they notice these offers and make decisions based on them. Discount plays a crucial role in their online shopping decisions.

Popular Discount Types: Most people preferred percentage-based discounts, deals where they get 1 item free after you buy 1 and fast flash sale events. Students were strongly encouraged by discounts that ranged from 10% to 50% and the amount depended on the kind of product.

Impulse Buying is Common: Once a discount is offered, most students (approximately 79%) tend to buy something without planning which suggests high levels of impulsivity.

Students Shop Smart: Even when students act on sudden desires, 97% of them said they still check or compare prices before buying, showing a mix of emotional and practical decisions.

Overall Satisfaction is high: The overall scores for student satisfaction with discounts show that most students were quite positive during these events.

Trust Issues Exist: Even as students enjoy discounts, a lot of them remain suspicious of possible tricks related to the prices and how those goods are made or handled. Over three-quarters (78%) of respondents thought that discounts could give people a false impression.

Psychological Influence: Students often found that, because of discounts, they were triggered emotionally, experienced a sense of rush and at times regretted their decision. Even so, students believe discounts assist them in handling their budgets and they have a chance to sample new items.

These findings illustrate that discounts are a powerful marketing tool to attract university students, mainly when they are applied in a clear and ethical way. On the other hand, keeping students happy and loyal largely depends on trust, clarity and value.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Price Sensitivity and Perceived Value

As students budgets are not very big, students are very aware of prices and offerings and tend to be very responsive to them. Discounts create a perception of getting a good deal, which often motivates them to make a purchase. According to Prospect Theory, consumers focus more on potential gains (such as discounts) than on the money they spend, leading to a stronger desire to buy. [12] The theory also explains that the pain of losing money (paying full price) is felt more intensely than the pleasure of an equivalent gain, so avoiding a "loss" through discounts creates greater satisfaction. For this reason, students often want to make deals so they don't miss anything and may look for added benefits, even if the purchase is not required.

5.2 Impulse Buying and Promotional Triggers

Impulse buying describes making a purchase without planning and usually because you want something quickly. Such purchases often occur when consumers feel certain emotions, have psychological triggers or experience external cues and it often causes them to regret buying once the excitement fades. [13] Flash sales, package deals and time-limited "Buy One Get One" offers often trigger this behavior in consumers. Relying on the Fear of Missing out (FOMO), these strategies push for fast selling. The study indicates that university students often react emotionally to advertising, so they can easily be led by discount offers. Purchasing a discounted

product makes the brain feel rewarded, so we repeat the behavior instead of using a planned budget. This is why carefully designed [promotions] can greatly affect a student's decision to make a quick purchase.

5.3 Mental Accounting and Reference Price Effects

Mental accounting explains why student buyers are affected by learning what to expect to save. Mental accounting involves mentally splitting the budget into savings and entertainment categories which influences people's spending decisions. [14] When a price is below the usual, students tend to view it as something they gain instead of spend which makes the offer even more attractive. According to the reference price theory, people think that a product on sale seems better value than it really is, based on the original (anchor) price. Consumers check reference prices to see whether they believe the current price is good or not. [15] As a result of this effect, students tend to think deals are more appealing and consider buying things they didn't originally intend on buying.

5.4 Balancing Emotional and Rational Decision-Making

While lots of students rush into buying on impulse, they are often seen to look at prices before making the purchase, showing behavior from both their emotions and their rational decision-making side. This matches the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) of persuasion which describes how people deal with information depending on their motivation and ability. [16] For this, buyers sometimes analyze options fully and evaluate important things like price and quality and at other times depend on quick cues like sales signs, famous brand logos or their friends' advice. Because students often pick either route while shopping, this fact supports the idea that consumers can act on impulse as well as consider their purchases.

5.5 Trust and Risk Perception

Worries about a product's true quality, consistent delivery and secret costs from students are a sign of their concern about how risky online shopping may be, a major factor in online consumer behavior. According to the Trust-Risk Framework, if a buyer trusts the seller more, this often decreases the perceived risk involved and the buyer becomes more willing to purchase. [17] During the study, students still feel unsure and hesitate, mainly when the offer seems suspicious, pointing out that trust is important for them to commit to shopping. Such concerns, as found in the study, affect how brands are viewed and make students more hesitant to return, so developing trust is necessary with promotions to maintain interest in the business.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results show that offering discounts drives an increase in student spending, mainly because of impulse buys caused by deals like flash sales, bundles and limited periods of discounts. Many students view discounts as a way to save or get more and this fits their need to watch how they spend their money. At the same time, this research points out that although students make quick spur-of-the-moment purchases, they still compare prices and evaluate the quality of the items they want, so their choices are guided by both feelings and facts.

6.1 Identified Problems

From the results, a number of noteworthy problems were brought to light. Many students spent money spontaneously on items promoted, then regretted those spending decisions later. Furthermore, doubts about trust and the possibility of facing issues negatively impacted consumer behavior; concerns over the authenticity of products, delivery delays or fake promotions caused people to be cautious online. Students also relied heavily on sales and waited for prices to go down, rather than buying things they actually needed which showed an addiction to discounts. The study could not be applied to a large group because the example was taken from one university and only a small sample.

6.2 Recommendations

Using these understandings, some recommendations can be shared. Businesses should give special attention to students or loyal customers with special discounts to support their budgets without the risk of buying too much. To deal with trust and risk, e-commerce platforms can make sure customers know what they are buying, read reliable reviews and get quick responses when they have concerns. Also, brands should work on supplying reliable products at good daily prices to minimize their need for quick discounting. Future studies may work with students from greater numbers of schools, particularly a wide variety, to confirm and hone the findings from this project.

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APPENDICES

Survey Questions

1. Are you currently a university student? (Single) A. Yes B. No
2. What is your gender? (Single) A. Male B. Female C. Prefer not to say
3. What is your age group? (Single) A. Under 18 B. 18-22 C. 23-26 D. Over 26
4. How often do you shop online? (Single) A. Very Frequently (more than once a week)
B. Occasionally (once or twice a month) C. Rarely D. Never
5. Which platform do you use most for online shopping? (Multiple)
A. Taobao B. JD C. Pinduoduo D. Other (Fill)
6. Do you usually plan your purchases before a discount event (Like 11.11 or 6.18)? (Single)
A. Yes, I make a list in advance B. No, I decide on the spot
C. Sometimes I plan, sometimes I don't D. I don't usually shop during discount events
7. Do discounts influence your decision to buy something online? (Single)
A. Yes B. No C. Sometimes
8. What type of discount attracts you the most? (Multiple) A. Percentage discount B. Coupons
C. Flash sales D. Buy 1 get 1 free E. Bundle offers F. Other (Fill)
9. How much discount usually motivates you to buy a product? (Multiple)
A. Less than 10% B. 10%-30% C. 31%-50% D. More than 50%
10. Have you ever bought something you didn't plan to buy just because it was discounted? (Single) A. Yes B. No
11. Do you think discounts sometimes trick customers or affect product quality? (Single)
A. Strongly agree B. Agree C. Neutral D. Disagree E. strongly disagree
12. Do you check product reviews before buying a discounted item? (Single)
A. Always B. Sometimes C. Rarely D. Never
13. On average, how much do you spend during major discount events (like 11.11) in USD?
(Multiple) A. Less than \$30 B. \$30-\$70 C. \$71-\$150 D. Over \$150

14. How satisfied are you with your purchases made during discounts? (Single)
A. Very satisfied B. Satisfied C. Neutral D. Dissatisfied E. Very dissatisfied
15. Do you compare prices from different sellers before buying a discounted product? (Single)
A. Always B. Sometimes C. Never
16. In your own words, how do discounts influence your online shopping behavior? (Fill)