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Self-Reward as a Pretext for Consumptive Behavior: A Consumer Psychology Literature Review

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Abstract: The self-reward phenomenon has become an integral part of everyday life, especially in today's fast-paced and consumption-driven digital era. Giving oneself a reward is often viewed as a healthy way to appreciate personal effort and achievement. However, it may also serve as a justification for unplanned or excessive spending. This study employs a narrative descriptive approach to explore the relationship between self-reward, self-regulation, hedonic consumption, and consumptive behavior by reviewing 15 scholarly articles published between 2015 and 2025. The findings reveal that self-reward plays a dual role: it can promote emotional well-being, yet it may also lead to consumptive behavior when self regulation weakens. Factors such as hedonic motivation, positive emotions, and digital advertising exposure intensify these tendencies, particularly among social media and e-commerce users. Conversely, strong self-regulation enables individuals to manage their emotions and make more thoughtful purchasing decisions. This review highlights the importance of maintaining a balance between emotional needs and self-control in understanding modern consumer behavior.

Keywords: Self-Reward, Self-Regulation, Consumptive Behavior, Hedonic Consumption, Impulsive Buying, Social Media.

Introduction

Phenomenon self-reward increasingly popular among modern society, especially in today's digital era. This phenomenon self-reward has become part of a growing consumer lifestyle, driven by easy digital access and intense promotions spread across social media (Putri et al., 2025). Self-reward It is generally used as a way to appreciate and respect oneself for the efforts and life journey one has undertaken. This practice is considered effective in maintaining mental balance and fostering self-compassion. The importance of self-reward. Among other things, it lies in its ability to help individuals appreciate themselves more, love life, raise enthusiasm and motivation, maintain mental health, maintain positive thinking, reduce stress, and foster a sense of self-love (Nafilah et al.,

2025).

Although in essence self-reward has a positive side because it can improve emotional well-being, in practice this behavior often becomes an excuse for excessive consumption that is not accompanied by real needs. This phenomenon can be further explained through the perspective of consumer psychology, which highlights the role of emotions in purchasing decision making. From the perspective of consumer psychology, purchases based on emotional motives such as self-reward often related to theory hedonic consumption (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982) and compensatory (Mandel et al., 2017). Both theories explain that consumption is influenced not only by rational needs, but also by an individual's efforts to regulate emotions and improve self-image. Individuals can use consumption as a means to soothe themselves, increase self-esteem, or distract from negative feelings. However, when self-reward done without good self-control, this behavior can lead to impulsive purchases, post-purchase regret (post-purchase regret), financial problems, and causes consumer behavior. A number of previous studies have shown that self-reward has an important role in shaping consumer behavior, especially when individuals have low self-control. Nabila and Astuti (2025) found that consumer behavior practices self-reward significantly increases consumer tendencies, while Puteri et al. (2022) emphasized that strong self-regulation can suppress impulsive buying behavior. In addition to self-control factors, research by Mariyana et al. (2023) also showed that positive emotions act as a mediator that strengthens the relationship between hedonic motivation and impulsive behavior. On the other hand, Ciocodeică et al. (2025) identified that social media exposure also strengthens consumer behavior through cultural normalization. self-reward among digital consumers. Based on these findings, there is still a research gap to understand how self-reward plays a dual role as a form of self-esteem as well as a trigger for consumer behavior in the context of modern consumer psychology.

Consumptive behavior is the act of purchasing goods that are always in short supply or not considered to be available, so that the utility of the goods becomes excessive (Korisin, 2023). In addition, the tendency to use self-reward as a justification for consumer behavior, it is often associated with a momentary positive emotional impulse that triggers impulsive buying behavior (Emerald et al., 2025). This suggests that self-reward practices, initially intended to reward oneself, can turn into uncontrolled consumption patterns if not balanced with good self-regulation. However, despite the phenomenon self-reward has been widely discussed from the perspective of psychological well-being, there are still limited studies that examine this practice in the context of Consumer psychology, particularly regarding how emotions and self-regulation play a role in shaping consumer behavior. Therefore, this study was designed to provide an overview of the relationship between these concepts and strengthen understanding of consumer behavior from a consumer psychology perspective (Emerald et al., 2025; Nafilah et al., 2025; Putri et al., 2025).

This study presents novelty by looking at self-reward as psychological phenomenon that has two sides. On the one hand, self-reward can be a healthy way to promote self esteem and maintain emotional balance. However, on the other hand, this practice also has the potential to encourage consumer behavior when individuals are unable to control their emotional impulses. This differs from previous research, which has focused more on the positive benefits. self-reward towards psychological well-being, this article emphasizes the ambivalent side of the phenomenon how self-reward can be transformed into a justification for consumer behavior driven by positive emotions and hedonistic desires. Through this

approach, this study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of self-reward in consumer psychology, particularly regarding the balance between emotional needs and self-regulation abilities amidst a digital consumption culture.

Literature Review

Based on the results of the analysis of 15 relevant articles, four main themes were obtained which represent the relationship between self-reward and consumer behavior. The following discussion is structured narratively to illustrate the patterns of interrelationships between the research findings.

Self-Reward as a Trigger for Consumptive Behavior

Phenomenon self-reward has become a central concept in modern consumer behavior, especially among the younger generation who are active on social media. Based on the findings of Nabila & Astuti (2025) and Putri et al. (2025) self-reward It functions as a form of self-reward, perceived positively after completing a task or achieving something. However, this culture has implications for increased consumer behavior, as individuals use purchasing goods as a way to express personal achievement. This aligns with the results of a study by Anggasta et al. (2024), which found that self-reward has become part of Gen-Z's consumption culture, especially in the context of a digital lifestyle that encourages impulsive purchases to obtain instant emotional gratification. This trend is also supported by the findings of Korisin (2023) and Nafilah et al. (2025) which show that self-reward often promoted through social media content, it "normalizes" excessive consumption. In the digital context, purchasing behavior is no longer simply a functional need, but a symbolic manifestation of self-esteem and identity. This means self-reward is not only a psychological reason, but also a social phenomenon that is reinforced by social media algorithms and emotional experience-based marketing strategies.

Role Self-Control in Regulating Consumptive Behavior

Different from the concept self-reward which is a trigger, self-control it acts as a mechanism to control consumer behavior. Based on research by Puteri et al. (2022) and Maharani & Adnans (2024), individuals with high levels of self-control tend to be able to resist the urge to shop impulsively even when faced with attractive promotions or offers. Conversely, low levels of self-control make someone more susceptible to the temptation of discounts, flash sale, and urgency based marketing messages (scarcity messages). This finding is consistent with the theory self-regulation which explains that the ability to manage internal drives plays an important role in directing rational consumption behavior. In the context of social commerce like TikTok Shop, individuals with high self-control can still enjoy shopping without falling into compulsive consumption. Self-control becomes a crucial mediating variable in explaining the relationship between hedonic motivation and consumer behavior.

Hedonic Consumption And Impulsive Buying as a Dominant Pattern

Most of the analyzed studies confirm that hedonic consumption is at the root of impulsive buying behavior. The classic study by Hirschman & Holbrook (1982), which is widely used as a reference, shows that pleasure-oriented consumption tends to involve emotional aspects rather than rational considerations. Further research by Mariyana et al. (2023) and Gusti et al. (2024) reinforces this view, stating that hedonic motivation and urge to buy impulsively significantly mediates the relationship between discounts and purchase

decisions. In addition, research by Ciocodeică et al. (2025) in the Journal Sustainability (MDPI) shows that social media reinforces hedonic and impulsive behavior through exposure to visual content that is self-rewarding. This phenomenon indicates that modern consumer behavior cannot be separated from the digital context and the psychological need for quick emotional gratification. Consumption is no longer driven by utility, but by affective impulse which is internalized in consumer identity.

Positive Emotions, Money, and Marketing Messages as Reinforcing Factors

Several studies, such as Yustam et al. (2025) and Lutviari et al. (2025) highlight the role of positive emotions, financial availability, and marketing strategies in reinforcing impulsive behavior. Financial availability increases a sense of control and allows individuals to make purchases without careful planning, while positive emotions (happiness or satisfaction) trigger the perception that consumer behavior is a normal form of self-appreciation. In addition, marketing messages such as scarcity message (product scarcity) has been proven to be effective in creating a sense of urgency and fear of missing out (FOMO) which accelerates purchasing decisions. The combination of hedonic motivation, positive emotions, and perceived product scarcity are dominant factors explaining the rise in impulsive behavior in the digital commerce era.

Research Methods

This review uses a descriptive narrative approach, focusing on an in-depth exploration and analysis of the literature to describe the relationship between self reward, emotion, self-regulation, and consumptive behavior from the perspective of consumer psychology. The literature search was conducted through several online databases, such as Google Scholar, Perplexity AI, and ChatGPT Academic Search. The search process focused on Indonesian- and English-language articles published between 2015 and 2025, using the main keywords: self-reward, consumer psychology, hedonic consumption, impulsive buying, and self regulation.

The inclusion criteria consisted of articles that (1) discuss the phenomenon of self-reward, consumptive behavior, or impulsive buying in the context of consumer psychology; (2) have theoretical relevance to aspects of emotion, motivation, or self-regulation; and (3) are published in accredited national journals or reputable international journals. Meanwhile, the exclusion criteria included publications in the form of undergraduate theses, master's theses, dissertations, or non-academic popular articles.

From the initial search results, a number of relevant scientific articles were obtained. After a selection process and in-depth reading, 15 articles were chosen for analysis using a thematic categorization method. This approach was used to identify patterns and connections among the studies based on three main themes, namely:

1. Self-reward and positive emotional motivation,
2. The relationship between self-reward and consumptive and impulsive behavior
3. The role of self-regulation in controlling consumptive behavior. To clarify the results of the analysis, all articles used in this review are.

Presented in a table containing the research identity, focus of the study, and main findings.

Result and Discussion

The findings from this narrative descriptive review of fifteen scientific articles published between 2015 and 2025 reveal that self-reward has a dual psychological impact on individuals. On one hand, self-reward functions as a positive mechanism that enhances

emotional well-being by providing a sense of appreciation and validation for one's efforts and achievements. On the other hand, the review shows that self-reward can also serve as a justification for excessive or unplanned purchases, particularly when self-regulation is weakened. Hedonic motivations, the pursuit of pleasurable experiences, and heightened positive emotions are found to significantly increase the likelihood of impulsive and consumptive behaviors. Additionally, digital advertising, especially through social media and e-commerce platforms, further intensifies the tendency to use self-reward as a reason to engage in spontaneous buying. The results emphasize that while self-reward can be psychologically beneficial, it also has the potential to contribute to rising consumerism when not balanced with adequate self-control.

These findings highlight the importance of understanding self-reward not simply as a harmless act of self-care, but as a behavioral pattern that interacts closely with emotional processes and self-regulatory abilities. In modern digital environments where persuasive advertising and social media influence are pervasive, individuals are more vulnerable to interpreting self-reward as a normative or even necessary behavior. The dominance of hedonic consumption reinforces the idea that pleasure-seeking is both accessible and socially acceptable, which may blur the line between healthy self-appreciation and impulsive consumption. However, the review also demonstrates that strong self-regulation skills can act as a protective factor, enabling individuals to distinguish genuine emotional needs from momentary impulses induced by external cues. This suggests that balanced emotional awareness and deliberate decision-making are essential in preventing self-reward from evolving into harmful consumer habits. Overall, the discussion underscores the need for greater public awareness regarding the psychological mechanisms behind self-reward to promote healthier and more sustainable consumption patterns in contemporary society.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the review of the fifteen articles analyzed, it can be concluded that consumer behavior in the modern era is not only influenced by economic factors, but is also closely related to psychological and socio-cultural factors. Self-reward has emerged as a key concept explaining individuals tendency to make purchases as a form of self-reward. In the digital context, this culture is reinforced by social media exposure and marketing strategies that normalize consumption based on positive emotions. Self-reward which was originally interpreted as form self-care has now shifted to a symbolic consumption pattern that strengthens social identity and self-image. On the other hand, self-control plays a crucial role as a controlling variable that can suppress excessive consumer behavior. Individuals with high self-control are better able to manage emotional impulses and social pressure when faced with promotions, discounts, or scarcity messages. Empirical findings indicate that low self-control makes the effects of hedonic motivation and exposure to self-rewarding content stronger in triggering impulsive buying. This confirms the importance of a balance between affective needs and emotional well-being. Self-reward and self-regulation skills (self control) is a key factor in understanding the consumer behavior of today's digital society. In general, the analysis results show that hedonic consumption and impulsive buying reinforce each other and are mediated by emotional factors such as pleasure, satisfaction, and self-esteem. Social media and urgency-based marketing strategies (scarcity message and flash sale) speed up the purchasing decision-making process without rational planning. This situation presents new challenges in understanding consumer behavior in the digital economy era, when the line between psychological needs and emotional desires is increasingly blurred.

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