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The Role of Impulse Buying in Mediating the Influence of Self-Reward on Financial Behavior in Generation Z

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Abstract:*This study examines the role of impulse buying as a mediating variable in the relationship between self-reward and financial behavior among Generation Z in Indonesia. In today's digital environment, self-reward has become a common practice among young consumers, yet it may encourage spontaneous purchasing that harms long-term financial management. Using a quantitative cross-sectional survey of 127 Generation Z respondents aged 18–28 years, the study analyzed data collected through a Likert-scale questionnaire and processed using SEM-PLS with bootstrapping mediation testing. The results show that self-reward has a significant positive effect on impulse buying, while impulse buying has a significant negative effect on financial behavior. The direct effect of self-reward on financial behavior is not significant when impulse buying is included, indicating full mediation. These findings suggest that self-reward affects financial behavior only through impulse buying, highlighting the importance of managing impulsive consumption in financial literacy programs.*

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Introduction

The term "self-reward" has become part of the everyday vocabulary of Generation Z, especially on social media, where purchasing goods or services is often justified as a form of self-appreciation after completing assignments, facing academic pressure, or simply getting through a tough day (Atulkar, 2020; Rahmawati & Mahargyantari, 2022). This phenomenon is inseparable from the characteristics of a generation born and raised in a digital ecosystem, where access to e-commerce, flash sales, and instant payment systems allows purchasing decisions to be made in seconds without careful planning (Septila

et al., 2021). Self-reward, which is essentially a healthy emotional regulation mechanism, in practice often shifts into psychological justification for making unplanned purchases (Sun & Wu, 2021).

This situation is a serious concern, given that Generation Z in Indonesia is in the process of forming long-term financial habits. A survey by the Financial Services Authority (OJK) shows that the level of financial literacy among Indonesians has not yet fully matched the level of inclusion and healthy financial behavior, and this gap is relatively wider among younger age groups (OJK, 2022). When the drive for self-reward meets the ease of access to digital transactions, the result is an increased vulnerability to impulse buying, namely purchases made spontaneously, without careful consideration, and driven by momentary emotional stimuli (Rook & Fisher, 1995; Verplanken & Sato, 2011). Repeated impulse buying ultimately has the potential to form unhealthy financial behavior patterns, characterized by low savings capacity, high use of paylater or consumer credit, and weak long-term financial planning (Pradhan et al., 2018).

Previous literature has extensively examined the relationship between self-reward and impulse buying (Atulkar, 2020; Kacen & Lee, 2002), as well as the relationship between impulse buying and financial behavior (Pradhan et al., 2018; Rha et al., 2016) separately. However, research explicitly examining impulse buying as a mediating variable bridging self-reward and financial behavior, particularly in the context of Generation Z in Indonesia, is still very limited. Most previous studies treat self-reward solely as an emotional motive behind impulse buying without drawing further causal lines to the realm of long-term financial behavior, while research on financial behavior in Generation Z has focused more on the determinants of financial literacy and self-control as direct predictors (Chavali et al., 2021; Rizkiawati & Asandimitra, 2018), without positioning self-reward as the starting point of the behavioral chain.

This gap becomes even more relevant given that the self-reward narrative popularized through social media is often not accompanied by an awareness of its financial consequences. Recent research shows that digital platforms contribute to the normalization of self-reward as a form of social validation, which in turn blurs the line between legitimate emotional needs and harmful consumer behavior (Septila et al., 2021; Iyer et al., 2020). Thus, there is a clear research gap: few studies have empirically tested whether impulse buying truly functions as an explanatory mechanism (mediator) linking self-reward motives to the quality of Generation Z's financial behavior, particularly using quantitative approaches that test the significance of the mediation pathway statistically, rather than simply through correlation.

Based on these gaps, this study aims to: (1) analyze the influence of self-reward on impulse buying in Generation Z; (2) analyze the influence of impulse buying on financial behavior in Generation Z; and (3) test the role of impulse buying as a mediating variable in the relationship between self-reward and financial behavior in Generation Z. This study is expected to provide theoretical contributions by clarifying the path mechanism that explains how self-reward motives can lead to unhealthy financial behavior, as well as providing practical contributions to the development of financial literacy programs that are more targeted at managing emotional consumption impulses, rather than simply transferring financial knowledge.

Literature review

1. Self-Reward and Self-Regulation Theory

Self-reward is understood as the act of rewarding oneself, usually in the form of purchasing goods or services, in response to certain achievements or as a coping mechanism for stress and fatigue (Kivetz & Zheng, 2017). Theoretically, self-reward is rooted in self-regulation theory, which explains how individuals manage limited psychological resources. When self-regulatory resources are depleted due to academic or work pressures, individuals tend to seek instant compensation through consumption as a form of emotional recovery (Baumeister et al., 1998; Vohs & Faber, 2007). In this context, self-reward serves a dual function: on the one hand, it is an adaptive strategy for maintaining mental health, but on the other hand, it can be a gateway to less rational consumption decisions when undertaken without adequate self-control (Sun & Wu, 2021).

2. Impulse Buying and the Stimulus-Organism-Response Theory

Impulse buying is defined as a purchase that occurs suddenly, without prior planning, and is generally accompanied by a strong emotional drive and minimal rational evaluation of the consequences of the purchase (Rook & Fisher, 1995). A relevant theoretical framework to explain impulse buying is

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the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), in which external stimuli (e.g., promotions, ease of digital transactions, or internal emotional pressures such as the need for self-reward) influence the organism's internal state (feelings of pleasure or relief), which then elicits a response in the form of a purchasing decision. Research by Verplanken and Sato (2011) confirms that impulsivity in purchasing is closely related to affect regulation, so that the emotion-based self-reward motive is theoretically one of the strong triggers of impulse buying.

3. Financial Behavior and the Theory of Planned Behavior

Financial behavior refers to an individual's behavioral patterns in managing personal finances, including saving habits, budgeting, controlling expenses, and long-term financial planning (Xiao, 2008). The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) is often used as a basis for explaining financial behavior, where behavioral intentions are influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. However, a number of researchers argue that a purely rational approach is insufficient to explain the financial behavior of the younger generation, because daily financial decisions are heavily influenced by momentary psychological and emotional factors, including impulsive consumption habits (Rha et al., 2016; Strömbäck et al., 2017). Thus, financial behavior cannot be separated from the underlying consumption patterns, including repeated impulse buying.

4. The Relationship Between Self-Reward, Impulse Buying, and Financial Behavior: A Comparison of Previous Research

Several studies have examined parts of this relationship, but with varying focuses and conclusions. Atulkar (2020) found that hedonic motives, including self-reward, were positively correlated with impulse buying among young consumers in retail settings. However, this study stopped at the purchase stage and did not examine its subsequent impact on financial behavior. Similarly, Septila et al. (2021) confirmed that social media content normalizing self-reward increases impulse buying tendencies among Indonesian college students. However, this study was descriptive-correlational and did not include financial behavior as a follow-up variable in the model.

In different lines of research, Pradhan et al. (2018) and Rha et al. (2016) consistently found that impulse buying is negatively related to healthy financial behavior, as impulsive purchases disrupt budget consistency and reduce savings capacity. However, both studies treated impulse buying as a stand-alone independent variable, without further exploring the drivers of impulse buying, thus failing to explain the psychological roots behind it. On the other hand, research on financial behavior among Generation Z by Rizkiawati and Asandimitra (2018) and Chavali et al. (2021) focused more on financial literacy, locus of control, and income as the main determinants, while the role of emotional consumption motives such as self-reward was relatively neglected in these models.

This comparison shows a fragmentation in the literature: research on self-reward-impulse buying stops at the purchase stage, while research on impulse buying-financial behavior does not explore its emotional roots, and research on financial behavior in Generation Z tends to ignore the emotional consumption pathway. There has been no research that unites these three constructs in a single statistically tested mediation model, specifically by placing impulse buying as an explanatory mechanism between self-reward motives and the quality of financial behavior in Generation Z. This study attempts to fill this gap by proposing a mediation model that integrates all three variables simultaneously, as formulated in the following framework and hypotheses: (H1) self-reward has a positive effect on impulse buying; (H2) impulse buying has a negative effect on financial behavior; and (H3) impulse buying mediates the effect of self-reward on financial behavior.

5. Conceptual Framework of the Research

Based on the theoretical and empirical review above, this study constructs a conceptual framework that positions self-reward as the independent variable (X), impulse buying as the mediating variable (M), and financial behavior as the dependent variable (Y). The logic of this framework is rooted in the assumption that emotional motives alone do not automatically determine the quality of a person's financial management, but rather work through the realization of concrete behavior in the form of impulse buying. In other words, self-reward functions as a psychological trigger (antecedent), impulse buying functions as a behavioral pathway, and financial behavior functions as the final consequence

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(outcome) that reflects the quality of financial management as a whole. This framework is consistent with the mediation approach that positions behavioral variables as a bridge between psychological motives and long-term outcomes (Nitzl et al., 2016), and forms the basis for the formulation of the SEM-PLS structural model tested in the methodology and results sections of the study.

Research methods

1. Types and Design of Research

This study used a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional survey design, which aims to examine causal relationships between variables at a specific point in time (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). This design was chosen because the research objective was to test hypotheses regarding the causal relationship between self-reward, impulse buying, and financial behavior in a structured and numerically measurable manner, as is commonly used in consumer behavior and financial research in similar studies (Pradhan et al., 2018; Atulkar, 2020).

2. Population, Sample, and Data Sources

The study population was Generation Z individuals in Indonesia aged 18 to 28 years. The questionnaire was distributed online and successfully collected 129 responses; after a screening process that excluded 2 responses that did not meet the 18–28 age criteria, 127 respondents who met the criteria were obtained and used in the final analysis. The sample was determined through a purposive sampling technique with the following criteria: (1) aged 18–28 years at the time of filling out the questionnaire; (2) having experience making independent purchases using personal funds, whether from pocket money, salary, or other income; and (3) willing to fill out the questionnaire completely and voluntarily. This sample size is considered adequate for SEM-PLS analysis with three latent constructs, referring to the minimum sample size guidelines of PLS-SEM based on the ten-times rule of the largest number of indicators leading to one construct (10 indicators in financial behavior), which in this study indicates a minimum sample size of 100 respondents to detect path coefficients with adequate statistical power (Hair et al., 2019). Primary data were collected online through a questionnaire distributed using Google Forms to respondents who met the criteria.

3. Operational Definitions and Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using a closed-ended questionnaire with a Likert scale of 1–5 (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The self-reward variable was measured using 8 items adapted from Kivetz and Zheng (2017) and Sun and Wu (2021). The impulse buying variable initially consisted of 8 items adapted from Rook and Fisher (1995) and Verplanken and Sato (2011). However, one item was eliminated during the outer model evaluation due to its outer loading below 0.70 (0.548), resulting in the final analysis using 7 items. The financial behavior variable was measured using 10 items adapted from Xiao (2008) and Rizkiawati and Asandimitra (2018). Indicators for each variable are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Operationalization of Research Variables

Variables	Dimensions/Indicators	Adaptation Source
Self Reward (X)	Self-reward frequency; emotional justification for purchase; association of purchase with achievement/stress relief; post-purchase emotional satisfaction; repeated self-reward habits (8 items)	Kivetz & Zheng (2017); Sun & Wu (2021)

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Variables	Dimensions/Indicators	Adaptation Source
Impulse Buying (M)	Unplanned purchases; impulses that are difficult to resist; impulses due to promotions/flash sales; minimal rational evaluation before purchasing; post-purchase regret (8 items measured; 1 item removed due to outer loading = 0.548, so 7 items were retained)	Rook & Fisher (1995); Verplanken & Sato (2011)
Financial Behavior (Y)	Saving habits; budgeting; recording expenses; discipline in paying financial obligations; spending control; prioritizing needs vs. wants; matching spending to budget; seeking financial management information; considering long-term impacts (10 items)	Xiao (2008); Rizkiawati & Asandimitra (2018)

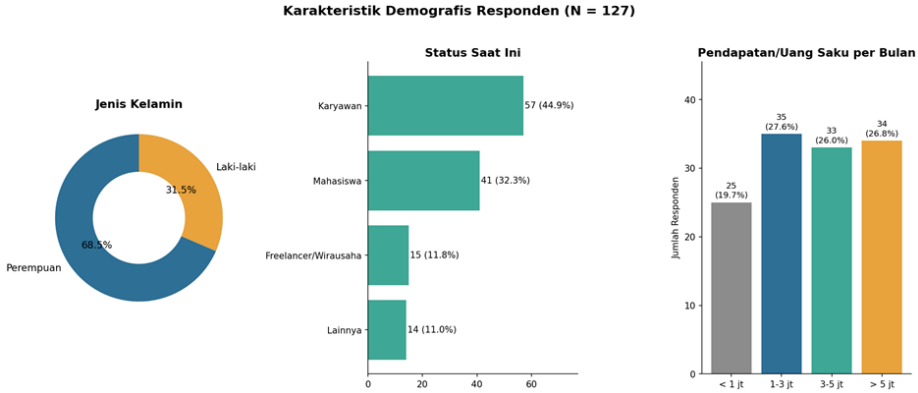
Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling based on Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) because it is suitable for testing relationships between constructs in relatively small sample sizes without requiring a multivariate normal distribution (Hair et al., 2019). The analysis included evaluation of the outer model through convergent validity tests (outer loading > 0.70; AVE > 0.50), discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker and HTMT < 0.90), and reliability using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (≥ 0.70). Evaluation of the inner model was carried out by assessing the coefficient of determination (R^2), predictive relevance (Q^2predict through PLSpredict), and effect size (f^2).

Hypothesis testing was conducted using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples. The relationship between variables was declared significant if the t-statistic value > 1.96 or p-value < 0.05. Impulse buying mediation testing was conducted through specific indirect effect analysis with a 95% bootstrap confidence interval; the mediation effect was declared significant if the confidence interval did not cross zero. The type of mediation was determined based on the typology of Zhao et al. (2010) and Nitzl et al. (2016), while the Variance Accounted For (VAF) value was used as supplementary information.

Results and Discussion

1. Respondent Characteristics



As shown in Figure 1, the composition of respondents dominated by employee groups with a relatively even income distribution is an important context in interpreting the results of this study, because the findings obtained do not only reflect the behavior of students with financial limitations, but

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also the patterns of self-reward behavior, impulse buying, and financial behavior in Generation Z more broadly, including those who already have a steady income (Pradhan et al., 2018).

2. Results of Instrument Validity and Reliability Tests

Table 2. Results of Instrument Validity and Reliability Tests

Variables	Item	Outer Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Information
Self Reward	SR1–SR8 (8 items)	0.715–0.803	0.895	Valid & Reliable
Impulse Buying	IB1–IB7 (7 items, 1 item excluded)	0.734–0.902	0.927	Valid & Reliable
Financial Behavior	FB1–FB10 (10 items)	0.629–0.794	0.892	Valid & Reliable*

All Cronbach's Alpha values in Table 2 are above the threshold of 0.70, with the highest value in the impulse buying variable (α = 0.927) and the lowest value in the financial behavior variable (α = 0.892). This result is supported by the composite reliability value (rho_c/CR) which is also above 0.70 for all three variables, namely self-reward (CR = 0.915), impulse buying (CR = 0.942), and financial behavior (CR = 0.911). The average variance extracted (AVE) values for the three variables are 0.575; 0.698; and 0.509, respectively, all above the threshold of 0.50, so the instrument's convergent validity is met (Hair et al., 2019). It should be noted that one item in the financial behavior variable (indicator FB4) has an outer loading of 0.629, slightly below the ideal threshold of 0.70. However, because the AVE and CR values for the financial behavior construct remained above the threshold, the item was retained in accordance with Hair et al.'s (2019) recommendation that indicators with loadings in the range of 0.40–0.70 only need to be removed if their removal significantly increases the AVE or CR. Discriminant validity testing using the Fornell-Larcker criterion showed that the AVE root of each variable (0.758 for self-reward; 0.836 for impulse buying; 0.713 for financial behavior) was greater than its correlation with other variables (correlations between constructs ranged from -0.423 to 0.348), and all heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) values between variables were well below the threshold of 0.90 (ranging from 0.133–0.449), thus discriminant validity was also met (Henseler et al., 2015). These results confirmed that the instrument used had good measurement quality, so that the resulting data were suitable for use in testing the structural model in the next stage.

3. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min	Max	Category
Self Reward	3.78	0.82	1.00	5.00	Tall
Impulse Buying	2.98	1.07	1.00	5.00	Moderate
Financial Behavior	3.75	0.80	1.00	5.00	Tall

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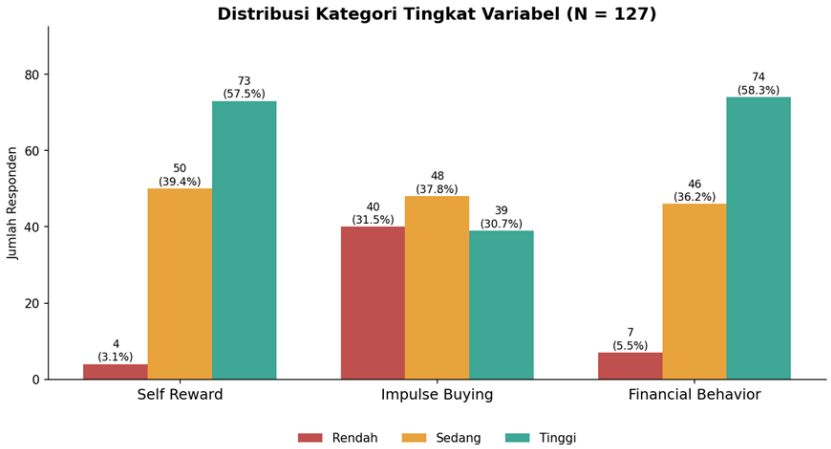
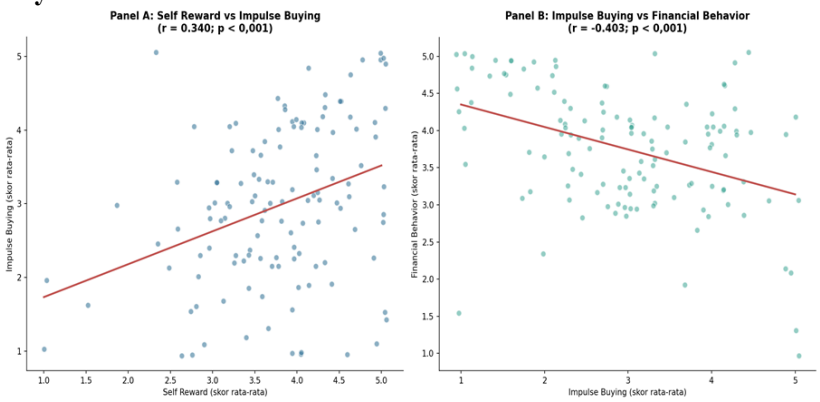


Figure 2 shows an interesting pattern: in the self-reward variable, more than half of the respondents (73 people, 57.5%) were in the high category, and a similar pattern was also found in financial behavior (74 people, 58.3%), which actually had the largest proportion of the high category among the three variables. In contrast, the distribution of impulse buying was much more even across the three categories (Low 31.5%; Medium 37.8%; High 30.7%). This pattern indicates that although self-reward motives are widely held by Generation Z, not all of them translate into high impulse-buying tendencies, and in general the quality of financial management of the respondents in this study is quite good, so the impact of self-reward on financial behavior needs to be explored further through the mediation pathway of impulse buying, not solely from descriptive score patterns.

4. Multicollinearity Test and Intervariable Correlation



Panel A of Figure 3 shows a consistent positive trend between self-reward and impulse buying, indicating that the higher a person's propensity for self-reward, the higher their impulse buying tendency. Panel B shows a negative trend between impulse buying and financial behavior, where increased impulse buying is associated with decreased financial management quality. These two patterns serve as the initial empirical basis before formally testing the mediation pathway, given that the direct relationship between self-reward and financial behavior itself is not significant at zero-order.

5. Hypothesis Testing Results: Structural Model (Inner Model)

Table 4. Results of Structural Model Testing (Inner Model) with SmartPLS Bootstrapping

Structural Path	Path Coefficient (β)	Std. Error	t-statistic	p-value
Self Reward → Impulse Buying (a)	0.348	0.087	3,974	0,000*
Self Reward → Financial Behavior, total effect (c)	-0.040	0.136	0.294	0.769

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Structural Path	Path Coefficient (β)	Std. Error	t-statistic	p-value
Self Reward → Financial Behavior, direct effect (c')	0.122	0.118	1,028	0.304
Impulse Buying → Financial Behavior (b)	-0.465	0.086	5,409	0,000*

**significant at α = 0.05; Source: PLS-SEM analysis results, bootstrapping 5,000 resamples (2026)*

The structural model estimation results in Table 4 show that self-reward has a significant positive effect on impulse buying (β = 0.348; p < 0.001), with an R^2 value of 0.121 (adjusted R^2 = 0.114), which means that self-reward is able to explain 12.1% of the variation in impulse buying (effect size f^2 = 0.137, classified as small-medium according to Cohen's criteria). The results of the PLSpredict procedure (Shmueli et al., 2016) support this finding: all seven impulse buying indicators show positive Q^2predict values (ranging from 0.008–0.104, with an average of ≈ 0.064), indicating the model has adequate out-of-sample predictive relevance for the impulse buying construct (Hair et al., 2019). This finding supports the acceptance of H1 and empirically confirms that the more often Generation Z makes purchases as a form of self-reward, the higher their tendency to make impulsive purchases, although the proportion of explained variation is moderate, indicating that there are other factors outside of self-reward that also encourage impulse buying.

The Impulse Buying → Financial Behavior path in Table 4 shows that impulse buying has a significant negative effect on financial behavior (β = -0.465; p < 0.001) after controlling for the influence of self-reward, with the R^2 of the structural model for financial behavior of 0.192 (adjusted R^2 = 0.179), and the effect size f^2 of 0.235 (medium), so H2 is accepted. The PLSpredict results for the ten financial behavior indicators show a consistently slightly negative Q^2predict value (ranging from -0.012 to -0.021, with an average of ≈ -0.015); however, the RMSE value of the PLS-SEM model is lower than the RMSE of the linear regression (LM) model as a benchmark for all ten financial behavior indicators, so according to Shmueli et al.'s (2016) criteria, the model still has limited-to-medium predictive power for this construct, consistent with the moderate R^2 value. The estimation results also confirm that impulse buying is a much stronger predictor of financial behavior than self-reward itself (the f^2 of self-reward on financial behavior is only 0.016), consistent with the findings of Pradhan et al. (2018) and Rha et al. (2016) which state that impulse buying disrupts budget consistency and reduces savings discipline.

6. Testing the Mediating Role of Impulse Buying

Table 5. Results of Testing the Mediation Effect of Impulse Buying (SmartPLS Bootstrapping)

Testing Parameters	Mark	Interpretation
Indirect effect ($\alpha \times b$)	-0.162	Negative
SE & t-statistics of indirect effects (Bootstrapping)	0.053; 3.051	Significant (p = 0.002)
Bootstrap 95% CI bias-corrected (5,000 resamples)	[-0.254; -0.041]	Does not pass through zero → significant
Direct effect (c'), with mediator	0.122 (ns)	Not significant (p = 0.304)
Total effect (c), without mediator	-0.040 (ns)	Not significant (p = 0.769)
Types of mediation	Full/indirect-only mediation	Full Mediation (Zhao et al., 2010; Nitzl et al., 2016)

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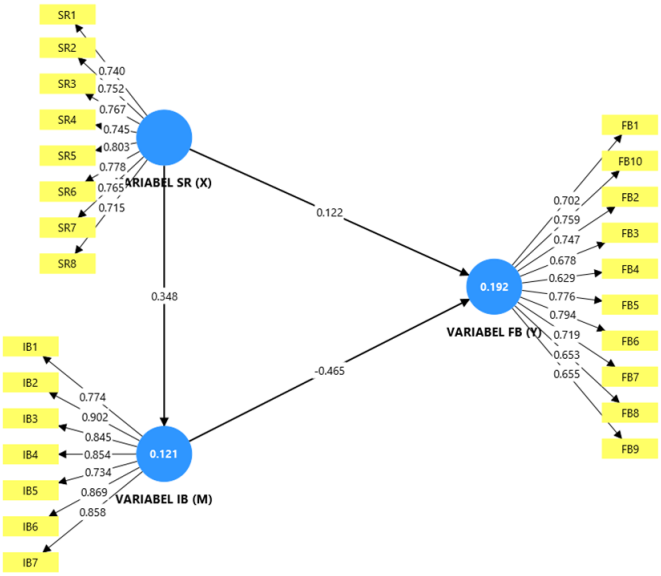

As shown in Table 5 and Figure 4, the indirect effect of self-reward on financial behavior through impulse buying is -0.162 (SE = 0.053) with a 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval between -0.254 and -0.041 (t = 3.051; p = 0.002). Because this interval does not cross zero, the mediation effect is declared statistically significant (Hair et al., 2019; Nitzl et al., 2016). Furthermore, because both the direct effect (c') and the total effect (c) are insignificant while the indirect effect is significant, this pattern falls into the category of full mediation or indirect-only mediation according to the typology of Zhao et al. (2010) and Nitzl et al. (2016). This means that the influence of self-reward on financial behavior in Generation Z in this study only occurs if it works through the impulse buying mechanism; without this pathway, self-reward has no significant association with financial behavior, either directly or in a zero-order manner. The variance accounted for (VAF) value was not reported in this study because the total effect approaching zero causes the ratio to be mathematically unstable (division by a number close to zero); the significance of the indirect effect along with the pattern of non-significance of the direct/total effect is the basis for determining the most appropriate type of mediation to use in this case (Hair et al., 2019). Thus, H3 is accepted.

7. Theoretical Discussion and Interpretation

The full mediation findings in this study provide an important contribution to understanding the mechanisms behind the relationship between self-reward and financial behavior. While some popular narratives have treated self-reward as something that directly "damages" finances, the results of this study reveal a more nuanced picture: self-reward alone, both in terms of its direct relationship (path c') and its zero-order relationship (total effect c) with financial behavior, is completely insignificant. The impact of self-reward on financial behavior only emerges when the motive is realized in impulse buying actions, as indicated by the significant and substantial indirect effect (β = -0.162). This finding aligns with the self-regulation perspective (Baumeister et al., 1998; Vohs & Faber, 2007), where self-reward is essentially an adaptive mechanism for restoring psychological resources, and only becomes maladaptive when realized without adequate self-control in the form of impulse buying.

These findings simultaneously expand and refine previous fragmented research. Atulkar (2020) and Septila et al. (2021) demonstrated a relationship between self-reward and impulse buying, but stopped at the purchase stage. This study demonstrates that the relationship continues significantly, ultimately influencing financial behavior. Conversely, Pradhan et al. (2018) and Rha et al. (2016) demonstrated a relationship between impulse buying and financial behavior but treated impulse buying as a starting point without exploring its psychological triggers. This study complements these findings by demonstrating that self-reward is a significant driver. By integrating these two lines of research into a single, statistically tested mediation model, this study offers a more comprehensive understanding than studies that examine the relationship partially.

These findings also complement the literature on financial behavior in Generation Z, which has been dominated by the perspective of financial literacy and locus of control as the primary determinants

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(Rizkiawati & Asandimitra, 2018; Chavali et al., 2021). This research shows that emotional-consumptive determinants, in this case self-reward mediated by impulse buying, play an equally important role and have received less attention in financial behavior models for the younger generation. The implication is that improving financial literacy alone may not be effective enough without interventions that target the management of emotional consumption impulses themselves.

Additional Insight: Variation in Student Groups

Additional descriptive analysis showed that the student respondent group had a descriptively higher average impulse buying score (M = 3.38; n = 41) compared to the employee (M = 2.80; n = 57) and freelancer/entrepreneur (M = 2.94; n = 15) groups, although the difference was not tested inferentially in this study due to the primary focus on mediation testing. This exploratory pattern indicates that students, as a group with relatively unstable incomes but high exposure to digital consumption culture, remain a group more susceptible to the self-reward-impulse-buying sequence tested in this study, even though the employee group is more dominant in the sample composition. This finding opens up opportunities for further research to test employment status as a moderating variable.

8. Research Contributions and Implications

Theoretically, this study contributes by integrating three constructs that have been studied separately into a single empirically tested mediation model, while also confirming that impulse buying is a crucial explanatory mechanism, not merely a supporting variable, in understanding the impact of self-reward on financial behavior. Practically, this full mediation finding implies that the most effective intervention to improve Generation Z's financial behavior is not to prohibit or stigmatize the practice of self-reward itself, but rather to target the critical point in the middle, namely the tendency for impulse buying. Financial education programs for Generation Z need to include components of impulse control training, such as techniques for delaying purchase decisions (cooling-off periods) or creating a dedicated budget for planned self-reward, so that emotional needs can still be met without compromising long-term financial health. For digital financial service providers and e-commerce platforms, this finding is also relevant as a basis for ethical considerations in designing features that do not take advantage of consumers' emotional moments, especially Generation Z, to encourage impulsive transactions.

It should also be noted that the R^2 value in the structural model (inner model) in this study (ranging from 0.12 to 0.19) indicates that self-reward and impulse buying are not the sole determinants of financial behavior, but rather two of many factors contributing to the formation of Generation Z's financial behavior. This finding is in line with the view that financial behavior is a multi-determinant construct that is also influenced by financial literacy, social support, and macroeconomic conditions (Strömbäck et al., 2017). Therefore, the statistical significance found in this study should be interpreted as confirmation of the existence and direction of the tested relationship, rather than as a claim that the self-reward-impulse buying chain is the sole pathway that determines the overall quality of Generation Z's financial management.

Conclusion

This study concluded three main findings that answered the research objectives. First, self-reward had a significant positive effect on impulse buying in Generation Z ($\beta = 0.348$; $p < 0.001$), indicating that self-reward motives empirically encourage unplanned purchases. Second, impulse buying had a significant negative effect on financial behavior ($\beta = -0.465$; $p < 0.001$), confirming that higher impulse buying is associated with lower financial management quality. Third, and the most substantive finding, impulse buying is proven to fully mediate (full/indirect-only mediation) the influence of self-reward on financial behavior, with a significant indirect effect ($a \times b = -0.162$; 95% CI bootstrap bias-corrected [-0.254, -0.041]; $p = 0.002$), while both the direct effect ($c' = 0.122$; $p = 0.304$) and the total effect ($c = -0.040$; $p = 0.769$) of self-reward on financial behavior are insignificant.

Thus, it can be concluded that self-reward has no significant direct or zero-order impact on Generation Z's financial behavior; its negative impact emerges and operates entirely through the mechanism of impulse buying as the primary connecting channel. This finding confirms that self-reward is not inherently detrimental, but becomes risky when not accompanied by adequate self-control, leading to impulse buying. Consequently, efforts to improve Generation Z's financial behavior will be more

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effective if focused on strengthening control over impulse buying tendencies, rather than solely targeting the self-reward motive itself.

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