

The Impact of Storytelling Marketing in Short Videos on Consumer Impulse Buying Behavior

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ABSTRACT

Based on the SOR (Stimulus-Organism-Response) theory, this study examines storytelling marketing in short videos by considering characters, plots, and styles as research dimensions. A research model is constructed to explore the impact of these storytelling elements on consumer impulse buying behavior. Data were collected through a survey questionnaire and analyzed using SPSS and Amos for statistical analysis and hypothesis testing. The study concludes that: (1) characters, plots, and styles positively influence consumers' perceived pleasure and perceived trust. (2) Perceived pleasure and perceived trust positively influence consumers' impulse buying. Finally, the significance and limitations of this study are discussed.

Keywords: Storytelling marketing, perceived pleasure, perceived trust, purchase intention.

INTRODUCTION

With the further proliferation of mobile smart devices and the application of communication technologies, an increasing number of internet users can access short videos anytime and anywhere. On March 29, 2023, the "2023 China Online Audiovisual Development Research Report" was officially released at the 10th China Online Audiovisual Conference. The report shows that nearly a quarter of new internet users were introduced to the internet through short videos, with the ability of short videos to attract new users far surpassing that of instant messaging. Among newly connected internet users, 24.3% used a short video application the first time they accessed the internet. Short videos are widely used in the field of marketing and have a high level of audience engagement. Many short videos often incorporate storytelling to move consumers, giving rise to a new marketing model known as storytelling marketing. Storytelling marketing refers to the integration of a brand's core culture into a storyline during a product's mature stage to enhance consumers' emotional identification with the brand. In the process of product marketing, by releasing the core emotional energy of the brand and combining it with the product's functions and conceptual needs, marketers can touch consumers' deepest emotions, thereby enhancing the brand's influence and promoting continuous sales growth. Scholars have found that well-crafted storytelling in advertisements can leave a deep impression on audiences and achieve a high click-through rate. Li Aimei et al. (2017) suggested that during storytelling marketing, narrating brand stories related to product or brand experiences can shape the brand's image in consumers' minds and achieve emotional identification, eventually turning them into loyal brand fans. Authentic, touching, or thought-provoking stories help establish emotional connections between brands and consumers. For example, the online homestay booking platform Airbnb has won many loyal users and supporters by telling real and touching stories between hosts and guests. Nike, by telling various success stories of sports heroes and ordinary people, has successfully linked its brand image with positive and uplifting values, becoming a leading global sports brand. This illustrates that storytelling marketing, as a unique marketing model, can lead brands to success.

RESEARCH FOUNDATION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

SOR Theory

The SOR (Stimulus-Organism-Response) model originated in environmental psychology and was proposed by environmental psychologists Mehrabian and Russell in 1974. It is used to explain and predict the effects of different environmental stimuli on people's cognition, feelings, and behavior. In this model, "S" refers to external environmental stimuli; "O" refers to the psychological and cognitive responses triggered by these stimuli in individuals; "R" refers to the resulting behavior. The SOR theoretical framework has been widely applied in the field of marketing. Eroglu et al. (2001) were the first to introduce this model into the field of online shopping, studying the impact of online store

atmosphere on consumer behavior in conjunction with consumer personality traits. Jacob (2002) suggested that consumer behavior is triggered by external stimuli that induce certain emotional or cognitive responses in individuals, leading to approach or avoidance behaviors in consumption. Gatautis et al. (2016) used the SOR model to explain the impact of external stimuli on consumers' online purchase intentions. Wei Hua and Wan Hui (2020) based their research on the SOR model to examine the impact of online retail companies' responsibility on consumer purchase intentions. Zhang Jie et al. (2024) explored how the live shopping environment affects consumer purchase intentions using the SOR theoretical framework. The SOR theory provides a basic approach for consumer behavior researchers to explore the relationship between "external stimuli, internal perception, and purchasing behavior," offering insights into the factors that influence consumer purchasing behavior. This paper applies the SOR theory to empirically analyze how storytelling marketing in short videos influences consumers' perceived pleasure and perceived trust through story characters, plots, and styles, ultimately impacting consumers' impulse buying.

Storytelling Features in Short Videos

Short videos typically revolve around brief and engaging stories, with a storytelling approach that effectively resonates with the audience, thereby influencing their emotions and purchasing behavior. Researchers have studied the storytelling characteristics of short videos and found that short videos with strong narratives are more effective at capturing the audience's attention. The emotional appeal of these stories makes it easier for viewers to develop an interest in the product or brand, thus increasing their purchase intentions (Wang Jing & Chen Liang, 2021). Escalas (2004) demonstrated that when consumers are exposed to brand information, they often understand and remember this information through storytelling. This narrative processing allows consumers to connect brand information with their own life experiences and emotional responses, forming deeper emotional resonance and psychological identification with the brand. Through this process, the brand can occupy a more prominent position in consumers' minds and is more likely to be preferred in purchase decisions. Green and Brock (2000) found that when individuals are highly immersed in a narrative, they are more likely to accept the perspectives and attitudes conveyed in the story. This immersion reduces critical thinking, making the audience more easily persuaded by the information in the story. These studies emphasize the crucial role of storytelling in consumer behavior, showing that storytelling has a significant impact on brand recognition and purchase intention. However, research specifically targeting storytelling in short videos is still in its early stages and requires further exploration. Additionally, the underlying mechanisms in shaping user attitudes and behaviors need to be uncovered to provide more targeted recommendations for marketing strategy development.

Dimensions of Storytelling Marketing

Storytelling marketing refers to the process of conveying the experiences that a product, service, or brand can provide to consumers through storytelling, thus making the experiential value more tangible. In brand promotion, storytelling marketing is a commonly used technique. First, consumers are immersed in the plot twists of the story; next, they empathize with the story's characters, subconsciously developing an identification with the core values conveyed by the brand, which subtly creates an emotional connection with the brand. Finally, the accumulation of emotional connections and brand identification may lead to changes in the recipients' attitudes or behavioral tendencies. Carefully designed storylines and characters can leave a lasting impression on consumers, making it a highly necessary marketing method to enhance brand recognition. Vincent (2002) argued that the elements constituting a brand story should include theme, characters, plot, and aesthetics. Fog et al. (2005), based on previous experiences with brand storytelling marketing, suggested that a brand story should include characters, plot, conflict, and moral. Chen Pinyu and Huang Guangyu (2009) summarized previous studies on the components of brand stories and proposed that brand stories should include characters, events, objects, conflicts, moral, narrative style, and structure. König and von Borcke (2016) considered that, as a marketing tool, stories have three essential elements for their creation: plot, characters, and timeline. Based on the research needs of this paper, the dimensions of storytelling marketing are divided into characters, plots, and styles.

Impulse Buying

Chen Xu and Zhou Meihua (2010) suggested that impulse buying often refers to a purchaser's uncontrollable psychological reaction triggered by certain elements while browsing a shopping website, leading to a strong desire to purchase within a short period, aiming to obtain the maximum utility from the specific product. Impulse buying is driven by a sudden, strong, and irresistible force, often resulting from emotional conflict, with emotions playing a significant role in the process. This indicates that consumers may exhibit impulse buying behavior when stimulated by a shopping environment. Chang et al. (2008) confirmed the impact of the shopping environment on consumers' purchase intentions. Liu et al. (2013) found that the characteristics of online shopping significantly affect consumers' emotional responses and purchasing behavior. Zhang Jie et al. (2024) discovered that the live e-commerce environment can influence consumers' impulse buying. In the context of storytelling marketing in short videos, consumers may experience strong emotional responses, which in turn may trigger impulse buying behavior.

MODEL CONSTRUCTION AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Based on the SOR (Stimulus-Organism-Response) theory, this study constructs a research model to explore the impact of storytelling marketing in short videos on consumers' impulse buying behavior. The storytelling in short videos is divided into three dimensions: story characters, story plot, and story style. These three dimensions stimulate consumers to produce emotional responses of perceived pleasure and cognitive responses of perceived trust, which in turn influence their impulse buying behavior. The research model is illustrated in Figure 1.

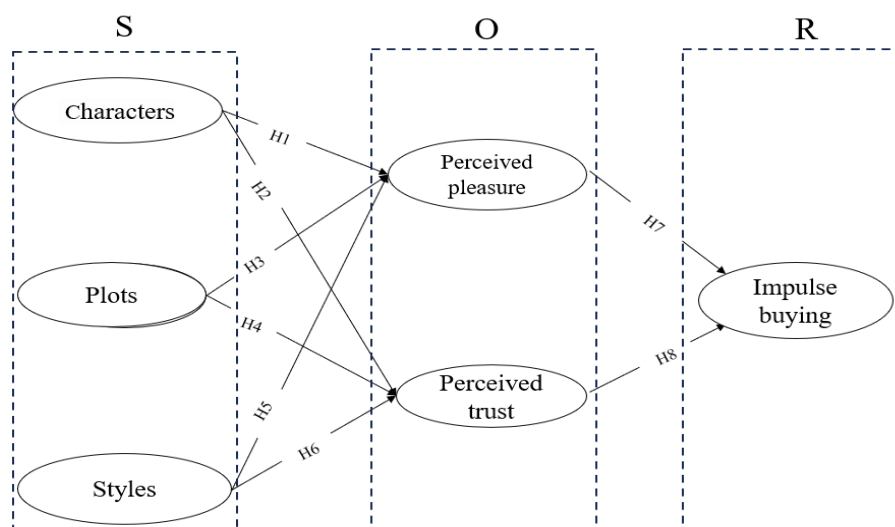


Figure1 Research Model

Hypotheses on the Impact of Characters, Plots, and Styles

Characters are the most critical aspect of storytelling marketing. Green & Brock (2000) explained the process of narrative transportation, where audiences, upon encountering a story, may immerse themselves to a certain extent in the scenario depicted by the story, experiencing the protagonist's journey and emotions, and are more likely to be influenced by the protagonist afterward. Therefore, when watching short videos, consumers' emotions are influenced by the characters in the story. Characters in authentic stories can evoke a sense of trust. Based on this, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Characters positively influence perceived pleasure.

H2: Characters positively influence perceived trust.

Escalas (2004) argued that elements such as plot (beginning, middle, end) and plot structure (initial event, psychological state, goal formation, actions, outcomes) are crucial to a story; the more complete these elements are, the more likely they are to be memorable and resonate with the audience. Li Aimei (2017) suggested that the more vivid the plot, the more it encourages the audience to use their life experiences to imagine the scenes in the story, making them feel as though they have personally experienced these events, thus provoking reflection on the story. The development of the plot often involves many conflicts or contradictions. When there are more conflicts within the plot, it creates more suspense, keeping the audience in a state of hope and fear, which makes the story more dynamic. This heightened level of arousal allows the audience to perceive greater creativity, increasing their enjoyment and pleasure from the content. Peng Chuanxin (2011) believed that authenticity is the primary characteristic of a good story; the authenticity of the plot can evoke a sense of trust in people. Based on this, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: Plots positively influence perceived pleasure.

H4: Plots positively influence perceived trust.

Story styles primarily refer to the way a story is told or the perspective from which it is narrated. Niu Hongying (2019) suggested that when the proximity and realism of the story's style and theme directly bridge the gap between virtual aesthetic activities and experiential subjects, it creates an aesthetic psychological foundation without barriers, facilitating emotional interaction and cohesion. Therefore, a unique storytelling style can bring consumers a special experience. Li Shengnan (2022) proposed that different storytelling styles can create varying atmospheres and emotional tones before the marketing process, which helps to reduce the psychological distance between consumers and the brand, thereby fostering a sense of trust. Based on this, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H5: Styles positively influence perceived pleasure.

H6: Styles positively influence perceived trust.

Perceived Pleasure, Perceived Trust, and Impulse Buying

Emotional responses have a significant impact on consumers' impulse buying behavior. Koo et al. (2010) confirmed that pleasure significantly influences consumers' purchase intentions. Liu Yang et al. (2018) demonstrated that

pleasurable emotions can lead consumers to engage in impulse buying. Chang et al. (2008) confirmed that perceived trust has a significant impact on consumers' purchase intentions. Characters, plots, and styles in storytelling can evoke perceived pleasure and perceived trust in consumers, which in turn influence their purchasing behavior. Tsai and Hung (2019) pointed out that consumers with a high level of emotional trust are more likely to remain loyal to online platforms they find satisfying, positively affecting their purchase intentions. Based on this, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H7: Perceived pleasure positively influences impulse buying.

H8: Perceived trust positively influences impulse buying.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA ANALYSIS

Questionnaire Design and Variable Measurement

This study collected data through a questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part included basic information about the respondents, such as gender, age, education level, and monthly income. The second part focused on variable measurement. Based on previous research findings and adjusted to meet the specific needs of this study, the measurement items were appropriately modified. This section included a total of 6 variables and 24 measurement items. A 7-point Likert scale was used for the measurements. The data obtained were processed using SPSS 25.0, and the reliability and validity of the scale were tested, followed by exploratory factor analysis. Confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling were conducted using AMOS 24.0 to assess model fit.

Data Collection and Sample Description

The survey questionnaire for this study was distributed through an online platform. To ensure the quality of the data, each participant received compensation upon completing the questionnaire. A total of 318 questionnaires were collected. After excluding those that were clearly filled out carelessly or had excessively short response times, 287 valid questionnaires remained, resulting in an effective response rate of 90%. As shown in Table 1, the majority of respondents were female, with most being 35 years old or younger, which aligns with real-world demographics. The majority of respondents had at least a college education and a moderate or higher monthly income, indicating that they possess a certain level of economic capability and proficiency in online shopping.

Table 1: Samples Description

Variables	Options	Totals of Sample	Percentage
Gender	Male	92	32%
	Female	195	68%
Age	Less than 25	125	43.6%
	26-35	117	40.8%
	36-45	30	10.4%
	Above 45	15	5.2%
Education	Highschool	16	5.6%
	Collage	30	10.4%
	Undergraduate	197	68.6%
	Above master	44	15.4%
Income	Less than 1500yuan	41	14.3%
	1501-3000yuan	72	25.1%
	3001-4500yuan	34	11.8%
	4501-6000yuan	30	10.4%
	Above 6000yuan	110	38.4%

Data Analysis

Reliability Test

In this study, SPSS 25.0 was used to conduct reliability analysis on each variable in the questionnaire to assess the stability and reliability of the scale. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for each variable was found to be 0.908, confirming that the scale has good reliability.

Table 2: Reliability of survey data (n=287)

Variables	Items	Cronbach's α
Characters	3	0.908
Plots	3	
Styles	3	

Test	Perceived pleasure (PP)	6	Validity
	Perceived trust (PT)	4	
	Impulse buying (IB)	5	

Exploratory factor analysis was conducted using SPSS 25.0 in this study. As shown in Table 3, the KMO value of the scale was 0.926, and the Bartlett's test $P < 0.001$, indicating strong correlations among the variables and suitability for factor analysis. Principal component analysis extracted six factors, with a cumulative variance explanation greater than 60%, suggesting that the overall validity of the scale is high.

Table 3: KMO and Bartlett's Test (n=287)

KMO		0.926
Approx. Chi-square		4365.067
Bartlett	df	276
	P	0.000

The discriminant validity of the questionnaire, as shown in Table 4, indicates that the square root of the AVE value for each variable is greater than the correlation coefficient of its latent variables, demonstrating that the questionnaire has good discriminant validity.

Table 4: Analysis of Discriminant Validity Between Latent Variables (n=287)

	characters	plots	styles	PP	PT	IB
characters	0.587					
plots	0.267	0.632				
styles	0.477	0.200	0.547			
PP	0.431	0.459	0.435	0.735		
PT	0.299	0.289	0.320	0.582	0.843	
IB	0.303	0.288	0.331	0.589	0.830	0.841

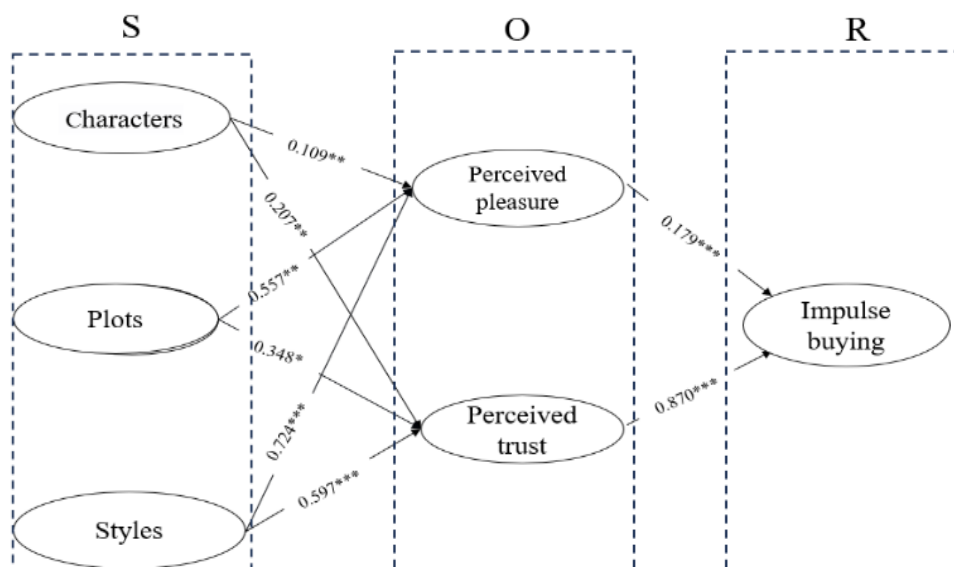
Note: The diagonal line represents the square root of AVE

Model Fit and Hypothesis Testing

Model fit and hypothesis testing were conducted using Amos 24.0 in this study. As shown in Table 5, all model fit indices met the reference value standards, indicating that the overall model fit is satisfactory. The results of the hypothesis testing, as illustrated in Figure 2, confirmed that the hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, and H6, which propose that characters, plots, and styles have a positive impact on perceived pleasure and perceived trust, were supported. Additionally, hypotheses H7 and H8, which suggest that perceived pleasure and perceived trust positively influence purchase intentions, were also validated.

Table 5: Model Fit Indices for the Structural Model

<i>Model fit indices</i>	<i>Reference value</i>	<i>Value of this model</i>
<i>CMIN/DF</i>	<i><3</i>	<i>2.974</i>
<i>RMSEA</i>	<i><0.10</i>	<i>0.083</i>
<i>TLI</i>	<i>>0.8</i>	<i>0.872</i>
<i>IFI</i>	<i>>0.8</i>	<i>0.899</i>
<i>NFI</i>	<i>>0.8</i>	<i>0.841</i>
<i>CFI</i>	<i>>0.8</i>	<i>0.888</i>
<i>PNFI</i>	<i>>0.5</i>	<i>0.735</i>



Note: *: $P < 0.05$, **: $P < 0.01$, ***: $P < 0.001$.

Figure2 Structural Model

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Impact of Characters, Plots, and Styles

The significant impact of characters, plots, and styles on perceived pleasure and perceived trust is consistent with the research hypotheses. When consumers watch short videos, their emotions are easily influenced by the characters, plots, and styles presented.

Characters can touch the deepest emotions of consumers, leading them to adopt a positive attitude towards life. The characters in a story determine how people experience and perceive the narrative, influencing their behavioral tendencies and response patterns. Pera et al. (2016) suggested that the behaviors exhibited by story protagonists are symbolic representations of archetypal behavior. Woodside et al. (2008) argued that experiencing archetypes is a way for people to seek pleasure and a sense of accomplishment. Therefore, allowing consumers to experience the characters in a story and touch their deepest emotions can more easily enrich and enhance their overall experience. When consumers have a positive experience with a product or service and their deepest psychological needs are met, they are likely to experience pleasure. Wakefield et al. (2008) noted that affection and identification with story characters can lead to empathy, which, in turn, fosters a positive attitude and strong identification with the brand or product, naturally building trust.

The twists and turns of a plot can cause people's emotions to fluctuate, ultimately leading to changes in behavior. Green (2008) suggested that becoming immersed in the world of a story and gradually experiencing an intrinsic sense of pleasure within it can eventually lead to changes in attitudes and behavior. Xu Jinan and Yu Kefan (2014) emphasized that to ensure the effectiveness of storytelling, it is important to highlight tense conflict within the plot during the narrative. Advertising is a marketing tool, and many advertisements achieve their goals by telling a story. Edell (2003) found that a well-developed storyline in a television commercial can effectively capture the audience's attention. Guo Wenbo (2011) argued that intricate and unpredictable storylines can be used to attract the audience's attention, thereby influencing their emotional resonance. When consumers are drawn to a plot, they are more likely to explore the brand in depth and establish a trusting relationship. Li Shu's (2024) research findings indicate that the plot in storytelling marketing plays a significant role in enhancing consumers' brand awareness, increasing their trust and goodwill towards the brand, and further influencing their purchase intentions.

Story styles primarily include realism, romanticism, fantasy, and science fiction, among others. When the style of a story aligns with consumers' preferences and emotional needs, it can evoke strong emotional pleasure. Xu Jinan and Yu Kefan (2014) noted that realistic stories are more easily accepted by consumers, as they resonate more deeply and can evoke a sense of empathy and emotional impact. An appropriate story style not only captures consumers' attention but also enhances their sense of identification with and trust in the brand. Guo Shanshan's (2015) research demonstrated how specific brands can shape and strengthen consumer trust through particular storytelling styles.

The Impact of Perceived Pleasure and Perceived Trust

Perceived pleasure and perceived trust have a significant impact on impulse buying, consistent with previous research findings. For example, empirical studies by Weinberg, Liu Yang, and others have confirmed that perceived pleasure and

perceived trust significantly influence consumers' impulse buying behavior. This indicates that storytelling marketing in short videos, through characters, plots, and styles, evokes emotional pleasure and cognitive trust in consumers, thereby positively influencing their impulse buying behavior.

RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS, SIGNIFICANCE, AND LIMITATIONS

Research Conclusions

Based on the SOR theory, this study constructs a research model to examine the impact of storytelling marketing in short videos on consumers' impulse buying behavior. The dimensions of storytelling marketing in short videos are divided into characters, plots, and styles. This research represents a new exploration of storytelling marketing strategies in short videos, utilizing empirical research methods. The study finds that characters, plots, and styles in storytelling marketing have varying degrees of stimulating effects on consumers' perceived pleasure and perceived trust. Additionally, the emotions of pleasure and trust exert a positive influence on consumers' impulse buying behavior.

Research Significance

Theoretical Significance

This study confirms the significant impact of characters, plots, and styles as external stimuli on consumers' emotional and cognitive responses, as well as their behavior, thereby enriching the research on storytelling marketing and expanding the application scope of the SOR theory. It lays the foundation for further research into storytelling marketing. By categorizing the emotional and cognitive responses triggered by characters, plots, and styles into perceived pleasure and perceived trust, the study demonstrates the positive influence of storytelling marketing in short videos on these perceptions, thus enriching the research on emotional and cognitive responses. The empirical research confirms the crucial role of perceived pleasure and perceived trust in the relationship between characters, plots, styles, and impulse buying behavior, providing a foundation for further research into consumer behavior within storytelling marketing.

Practical Significance

In practice, storytelling marketing in short videos should be tailored to specific brands and products to create suitable characters that consumers can like and identify with, thereby enhancing emotional responses and perceived trust. During the storytelling marketing process, platforms and businesses should strategically design engaging plots to convey information effectively, capturing the audience's attention and making the content more vivid, interesting, and easy to understand. This approach also helps immerse consumers in the narrative, maximizing emotional stimulation and increasing trust. Carefully selecting an appropriate storytelling style can enhance the story's impact, thereby eliciting emotional resonance and increasing consumer trust. Suitable characters, engaging plots, and appropriate storytelling styles can fully stimulate consumers' emotional responses and strengthen their trust, which is of great practical significance for enhancing the effectiveness of storytelling marketing in short videos. This can increase consumer attention to short videos, promote brand awareness and product sales, and boost the number of followers.

Research Limitations

Due to the influence of objective factors, this study has the following limitations: First, the research was conducted using a questionnaire survey method. Although the conclusions can explain the issues to a certain extent, the reliability may be somewhat limited, as it is impossible to guarantee that every respondent answered each question completely truthfully and accurately, despite the inclusion of control questions and strict screening of the collected questionnaires. Future research could expand the survey's reach and collect more samples to ensure the study's scientific rigor. Second, the factors influencing storytelling marketing in short videos are multifaceted. Future research could introduce additional factors such as story settings and story characteristics to further explore consumer behavior. Lastly, while characters, plots, and styles in stories can influence consumers' cognition and emotions, leading to impulse buying, there may also be mediating and moderating variables involved in this process. Future research could delve deeper into these potential influences.

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