

## PATTERNS AND MOTIVATIONS FOR USING BUY NOW PAY LATER (BNPL) FOR NON-ESSENTIAL PURCHASES AMONG BUSINESS STUDENTS

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**Abstract** – The rapid growth of Buy Now Pay Later (BNPL) services has raised concerns about impulsive and non-essential purchases, particularly among young people who are still developing their financial literacy. This study aims to explore the motivations and usage patterns of BNPL for non-essential purchases among business students. This study employs a qualitative approach. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with seven business students who actively use BNPL for non-essential items. The findings reveal four motivations: cash flow management, frictionless consumption, sensitivity to promotions, and justified purchases. Three usage patterns identified are price perception distortion leading to bill shock, impulsive purchases during flash sales, and the business student paradox—the gap between sound financial knowledge and persistent consumptive behavior. This study concludes that business students actively seek functional, hedonic, and cognitive satisfaction from BNPL, and that high financial literacy alone is insufficient to prevent consumptive behavior in a digital environment designed to encourage spending.

**Keyword:** Buy Now Pay Later (BNPL), Consumptive Behavior, Non-Essential Purchases, Financial Literacy, Impulsive Buying.

### INTRODUCTION

Consumer payment behavior has changed in recent years with the development of financial technology (fintech), which has led to several innovations in the field of finance. One such fintech innovation is the BNPL (Buy Now, Pay Later) system, a digital credit system that allows consumers to obtain products instantly but with a short-term payment process (Waliszewski et al., 2024). BNPL is directly integrated into e-commerce platforms and mobile applications, making online shopping payments faster and easier. For this reason, the BNPL system is widely used by many people, especially young people. The BNPL (Buy Now, Pay Later) payment system was initially designed to be an alternative payment method on e-commerce platforms. However, according to Di Maggio et al. (2022), the existence of BNPL has changed the psychological perspective of consumers because of the BNPL system eliminates the pressure on customers to pay large amounts immediately. With this shift in psychological perspective, BNPL has actually increased customers' purchasing power (Alt & Huch, 2022).

The increasing popularity of BNPL due to its interest-free nature and short repayment periods allows customers to underestimate and disregard the long-term financial consequences and repeated use of BNPL (Chien, 2023). Therefore, despite the advantages it offers, BNPL still raises concerns about a surge in impulsive or non-essential purchases, especially among young people (Juita et al., 2023) who are still in the process of developing their financial literacy and whose average income stability is still dynamic. Research by Keil & Burg (2023) also previously stated that buyers who use the BNPL system tend to be more impulsive than non-users. This phenomenon is closely related to psychological influences, especially in terms of instant gratification and mental accounting, where consumers mentally separate payment obligations from actual financial resources (Relja et al., 2023).

In response to these concerns, the relationship between consumer behavior and digital finance needs to be discussed, especially in relation to the trend of using BNPL (Buy Now, Pay Later) payment systems in e-commerce. This study was written with a specific focus on

the patterns and motivations for using BNPL for non-essential items among business students. Although business students generally study financial literacy and financial management knowledge, this does not eliminate the possibility of them using BNPL systems to purchase non-essential goods impulsively. Previous research has also mentioned that the use of BNPL is often associated with impulsive buying habits and increased consumption, especially among young people (Keil & Burg, 2023). Therefore, this topic remains relevant and important because most students are a group that is still learning about financial literacy and has low income stability, but is very familiar with technological developments. According to Raj et al. (2023), the flexibility and convenience offered by BNPL make users more tempted by its benefits, causing them to ignore the risks they will face. The reasons for the widespread use of BNPL include age, background, ease of accepting new technology, perceived benefits, and impulsive shopping habits (Waliszewski et al., 2024; Keil & Burg, 2023). After that, by examining the use of Pay Later in situations like this, we can better understand how a person's financial decisions are sometimes influenced more by feelings or habits than by urgent needs. Understanding the reasons behind these habits is very important so that students can be wiser in managing their money. In addition, the results of this study can also be taken into consideration when drafting rules or policies on digital credit in the future.

Because there is still little research that delves deeply into the reasons behind consumer shopping habits, especially for non-essential goods among business students. This study will focus on the use of BNPL during the period of rapid FinTech expansion among business students and focus on an analysis of habits and motivations for using BNPL to purchase non-essential goods. This study was conducted in the digital environment, where people shop in online markets and e-commerce using digital payment. This study will use data collected from business students through questionnaires about usage patterns and motivations for using BNPL and this study will use a qualitative approach with a method called Gioia to build new understanding based on data, starting from the direct experiences of participants, then grouped into themes, and finally into broader conclusions (Gioia et al., 2013). This method is particularly suitable because, until now, research has mostly used numbers to examine the factors that influence the use of BNPL, but few have explored in depth how students feel, experience, and perceive this service. Using in-depth interviews and structured thematic analysis, this study aims to uncover motivations and habits that may not be apparent when using ordinary questionnaires.

The concerns and research gaps mentioned earlier prompted this study to be conducted using a more exploratory approach. To answer the question, "What are the main motivations and patterns of BNPL use by business students for non-essential purchases?", we used Gioia's qualitative analysis method, with a structure that includes a review of literature related to BNPL adoption and consumer behavior, an explanation of the research methodology designed with qualitative research and the application of Gioia's methodology, the findings section presents first-level concepts, second-level themes, and aggregate dimensions followed by a discussion linking the findings to existing theory, and finally, the paper concludes with theoretical and practical implications. This research is expected to provide new and deeper insights into the study of digital consumer finance. Specifically, this research explores how financially literate young people interpret and justify the use of BNPL for non-essential purchases.

## METHODOLOGY

This study was designed and written to gain an in-depth understanding of business students who use BNPL for non-essential purchases. Therefore, this topic requires an in-depth exploration of how patterns are formed and the underlying motivations, which cannot be examined through statistical figures.

For this reason, this study chose to use a qualitative approach with reference to Gioia's framework (Gioia et al., 2013). Gioia et al. (2013) stated that their approach is particularly appropriate when the research aims to reveal new concepts from phenomena that are not yet understood theoretically, while maintaining scientific rigour through a balance between participant voices and conceptual abstraction.

The need for this approach is reinforced by the existence of a research gap. Previous quantitative studies have found a correlation between the use of BNPL and impulsive behaviour, but have not been able to explain the processes and meanings behind it in depth, especially in the context of business students. Thus, the Gioia framework-based qualitative approach will generate rich textual data from in-depth interviews to build a theoretical understanding rooted in the participants' experiences.

## RESULT

### 1. Overview of Findings

This chapter presents the results of an analysis of interview data from seven business students regarding the patterns and motivations behind the use of Buy Now Pay Later (BNPL) for non-essential purchases. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with purposive sampling. Findings were categorised into three levels: First-Order Analysis (concepts emerging from the informants' language), Second-Order Analysis (themes identified by the researcher), and Aggregate Dimensions (key theoretical constructs).

Overall, the findings indicate a duality of perception among business students: on the one hand, they understand financial risks and the principles of capital allocation; on the other hand, they remain driven by psychological marketing factors such as discounts, ease of checkout, and the perception of manageable installments.

### 2. Data Analysis

#### 1) First-Order Analysis

Based on the interview findings, the researchers identified initial concepts directly from the participants' statements. These concepts were grouped into two categories in line with the research objectives: motivation for using BNPL and patterns of BNPL usage for the purchase of non-essential goods.

Category	First-Order Concepts (Informant Statements)
<b>Motivations for using BNPL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• "I didn't have enough cash to pay upfront." (N1)</li><li>• "The allowance hadn't arrived yet." (N2)</li><li>• "As an efficient short-term financing solution." (N5)</li><li>• "I only tried it on a whim because I was curious." (N2)</li><li>• "Because it's easier and faster at checkout." (N4)</li><li>• "In flash sales, checkout speed determines the conversion rate." (N5)</li><li>• "An extra discount of Rp20-30k is a significant saving for a student." (N6)</li><li>• "From a study group discussion about fintech lending."</li></ul>

	(N5)
<b>Patterns of BNPL use</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Textbooks, skincare, phone case, keychains." (N1)</li> <li>• "Household items." (N2, N3)</li> <li>• "Formal shoes for a business presentation." (N5)</li> <li>• "Light exercise equipment, self-development books." (N6)</li> <li>• "Lipstick, cushion bundle, perfume sample sets." (N7)</li> <li>• "Aromatherapy candles and desk decor." (N7)</li> <li>• "I focus more on the monthly payment." (N4)</li> <li>• "Yes. I focus more on the monthly installment than the total cost." (N5)</li> <li>• "I often experience bill shock at the end of the month." (N7)</li> <li>• "Late by 2 days once. Fined Rp15,000." (N5)</li> <li>• "Forgot about a 1-month tenor once. Disposable income was negative." (N7)</li> </ul>

The table above shows that business students have a variety of motivations for using BNPL services. Some motivations relate to liquidity needs, such as a lack of cash or pocket money not yet being available, whilst others are psychological in nature, such as curiosity, the speed of the payment process, and discounts. Patterns of usage are also clearly evident, ranging from the types of goods purchased—which tend to be non-essential items such as skincare products and home décor—to how students view payments, such as focusing on instalments, overlooking the total price, and ultimately facing bill shocks and late payment penalties.

## 2) Second-Order Analysis

From the first-order concepts, the researcher grouped them into second-order themes that directly answer the research questions about motivations and patterns.

Second-Order Theme	Category (Motivation/ Pattern)	Description
Cash flow management	Motivation	BNPL is used because cash is not available or allowance has not arrived, not because of a complete lack of money
Frictionless consumption	Motivation	The ease and speed of checkout remove psychological barriers, especially during flash sales
Promotional sensitivity	Motivation	BNPL-specific discounts are a primary driver of the decision to use BNPL
Justified Purchases	Motivation	Students buy non-essential items but have specific reasons that make such purchases seem justified.

Perceived affordability distortion	Pattern	Students focus on the small monthly installment rather than the total price, often leading to bill shock
Impulsive buying during flash sales	Pattern	Spontaneous purchases occur due to time pressure and limited promotions
Business student paradox	Pattern	Students are aware of risks and consider BNPL for non-essentials unwise, yet they still do it

Of the seven themes above, the first four fall into the category of motivation, both functional and psychological. These themes include cash flow management, Frictionless consumption, sensitivity to promotions, and justified purchases. The remaining three themes represent usage patterns, namely distorted perceptions of affordability, impulsive purchases during flash sales, and the business student paradox. The business student paradox is the most striking finding. One participant clearly stated that using BNPL for non-essential items is “a misallocation of capital”, whilst another acknowledged that “from a cost-benefit analysis, this practice is objectively unwise”. However, this same participant continued to use BNPL for various non-essential purchases such as skincare products, phone cases, and self-help books. This paradox reveals a clear disconnect between what business students know to be financially sound and what they actually do. These seven themes will be further summarised into aggregate dimensions.

### 3) Aggregate Dimensions

From the second-order themes, the researcher distilled three aggregate dimensions that summarize the motivations and patterns of BNPL use for non-essential purchases.

Aggregate Dimension	Components	Description
Dimension A. Liquidity motivation and Justified Purchases	Cash flow management, Justified Purchases	Students are using ‘Buy Now, Pay Later’ (BNPL) services to manage their cash flow due to irregular pocket money, whilst also justifying the purchase of non-essential items.
Dimension B. Psychological motivation from digital design	Frictionless consumption, Promotional sensitivity	The ease of checkout and BNPL-specific discounts psychologically drive students to choose BNPL over other payment methods
Dimension C. Distortion and paradox	Perceived affordability	The emerging patterns include focusing on small installments which leads to bill shock,

patterns	distortion, Impulsive buying, Business student paradox	spontaneous purchases during flash sales, and the contradiction between financial knowledge and consumptive behavior
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These three aggregate dimensions provide a concise answer to the research question. The primary motivations for business students to use BNPL for purchasing non-essential goods are short-term liquidity needs, the justified purchases, and the allure of digital convenience and promotions. The patterns that emerge include a distorted perception of affordability leading to bill shock, impulsive shopping habits during flash sales, and the paradox where sound financial knowledge fails to prevent consumptive behaviour.

## DISCUSSION

### 1. Restatement of Key Findings

This study aims to investigate the motivations and usage patterns of Buy Now Pay Later (BNPL) for non-essential purchases among business students. Based on the results of the data analysis in Chapter III, several key findings have been identified which will be discussed further in this chapter.

In terms of motivation, there are four factors that drive students to use BNPL. Firstly, cash flow management. Students use BNPL because they do not have sufficient cash available or their pocket money has not yet arrived, so BNPL serves as a tool to bridge the gap between shopping needs and the receipt of income. Second, frictionless consumption. The ease and speed of checkout, particularly during flash sales, are the main attractions that lead students to prefer BNPL over other payment methods. Third, sensitivity to promotions. Special discounts offered to BNPL users are considered significant enough for students' budgets, making them a key consideration in purchasing decisions. Fourth, justified purchases. Students buy non-essential items but have specific reasons that make the purchase feel worthwhile.

In terms of usage patterns, three trends have been identified. The first pattern is a distortion of price perception. Students focus more on the small monthly instalments than on the total price of the item, so they often experience a shock—or 'bill shock'—when bills pile up at the end of the month. The second pattern is impulsive purchasing during flash sales. Time pressure due to limited stock and countdowns, combined with the ease of BNPL checkout, triggers spontaneous purchasing decisions without careful planning. The third pattern is the business student paradox. Students explicitly recognise that using BNPL for non-essential items is financially unwise; indeed, they refer to it as a misallocation of capital. Yet, they continue to do so. This highlights a disconnect between sound financial knowledge and the consumptive behaviour that persists.

These seven findings are subsequently summarised into three aggregate dimensions: liquidity motivation and justified purchasing, psychological motivation stemming from digital design, and patterns of distortion and paradox. These dimensions will be further interpreted using the Uses and Gratifications Theory in the following sub-section.

### 2. Interpretation of Findings

The findings of this study can be explained using the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT). This theory assumes that users actively choose a service to meet their needs and

obtain specific forms of satisfaction. In this context, business students use BNPL because the service provides various types of gratification they seek, whether functional, hedonic or cognitive. The following is an interpretation of each motivation and pattern identified.

#### 1) Cash Flow Management

Within the UGT framework, the motivation for cash flow management falls under functional gratification. Students use BNPL because they actively choose this service to resolve a real-world problem, namely the timing mismatch between spending needs and the receipt of pocket money or income. This does not mean they have no money at all, but rather that they require a tool to bridge short-term liquidity gaps. BNPL is chosen because it provides a practical solution not available through other payment methods. This finding aligns with Waliszewski et al. (2024), who state that income instability drives the adoption of BNPL, as well as Ji et al. (2023), who note that BNPL expands credit access for those who cannot access traditional loan products.

#### 2) Frictionless Consumption

This motivation can be understood as hedonic gratification within UGT. The ease and speed of checkout are key reasons students choose BNPL, especially during flash sales. In behavioral finance, every payment transaction triggers the “pain of paying” because money is actually deducted from an account or wallet. Conventional payment methods like bank transfers or debit cards make this pain felt immediately because the balance decreases tangibly. Meanwhile, BNPL reduces this psychological barrier because students do not need to spend money at the time of the transaction. They only see a small installment amount to be paid later, making the transaction feel light and almost effortless. This fast and pain-free payment process provides a unique satisfaction not found in other payment methods. Raj et al. (2023) also found that the flexibility and ease of BNPL make users increasingly tempted. This study reinforces these findings by showing that checkout speed is even cited as a determining factor for transaction success during flash sales.

#### 3) Promotional sensitivity

Still within the realm of hedonic gratification, sensitivity to promotions indicates that students derive economic satisfaction from using BNPL. The special discounts offered to BNPL users are considered quite significant for students’ budgets, making them an important factor in purchasing decisions. Alt and Huch (2022) state that BNPL increases consumer purchasing power by altering psychological perspectives through price incentives. With these discounts, students actively prefer BNPL over other payment methods.

#### 4) Justified Purchases

Within the UGT framework, this motivation falls under cognitive gratification. Students purchase non-essential items but have specific reasons that make the purchase seem worthwhile and rational in their own eyes. They tend to seek justifications so that purchases that are not actually urgent appear beneficial, such as for self-development, academic needs, or social activities. These reasons allow students to gain cognitive satisfaction—the feeling of having done something useful or of avoiding guilt—even though, objectively speaking, the purchased items remain non-essential. Previous research has not extensively highlighted this self-justification mechanism as part of the satisfaction sought by BNPL users.

#### 5) Perceived affordability distortion

This pattern is not directly classified as UGT gratification, but can be explained as a result of the dominance of overly strong hedonistic gratification. Students tend to pay

more attention to the monthly installment amount than to the total price of the item. BNPL is designed to highlight the small installment amounts, so that buyers feel the item is affordable even though the actual price is not cheap. As a result, many students experience a shock or “bill shock” when they see their bill at the end of the month.

Relja et al. (2023) explain this phenomenon using the concept of mental accounting. This concept refers to the tendency of individuals to treat money differently depending on the context of its use, rather than treating all money as having equal value. In the context of BNPL, students focus only on the obligation to pay a small monthly installment, for example, Rp50,000. However, they tend to overlook that the accumulation of several BNPL transactions can result in a total bill that is much larger, for example, Rp300,000 at the end of the month. In other words, they mentally separate the money for monthly installments from the total debt. It is this mental separation that causes them to lose sight of the full picture of the amount that should be paid.

Di Maggio et al. (2022) refer to this phenomenon as the psychological relief from making a large upfront payment. This study complements those findings with direct evidence from participants who reported frequently experiencing bill shock.

#### 6) Impulsive Purchases During Flash Sales

This pattern is also a consequence of short-term hedonistic gratification. In flash sale situations, there is time pressure due to limited stock and a clearly visible countdown on the screen. The combination of this time pressure and the ease of checkout offered by BNPL encourages students to make spontaneous purchases without prior planning.

From a UGT perspective, students actively seek momentary gratification. This gratification takes the form of the sensation of not missing out on a promotion and the joy of quickly securing the desired item. Rational thinking tends to be sidelined because speed becomes the determining factor for the success of the transaction.

Keil and Burg (2023) and Juita et al. (2023) have linked the use of BNPL to increased impulsive behavior among young people. This study reinforces those findings while also demonstrating that flash sales are a key trigger that exacerbates impulsivity among BNPL users.

#### 7) The Business Student Paradox

The business students who participated in the study openly acknowledged that using BNPL to purchase non-essential items is unwise. Some even called it wasteful or poor money management. They were able to judge for themselves that, from a cost-benefit perspective, this habit should be avoided.

However, despite being aware of this, they still make purchases using BNPL. Good financial knowledge does not necessarily prevent them from using BNPL; this is because they tend to underestimate the risks. Chien (2023) argues that BNPL users tend to underestimate long-term consequences because the service feels convenient, interest-free, and has a short repayment period. This study aligns with that view: business students do understand financial theory, but that understanding does not prevent them from thinking that risks will not happen to them personally or that small installments will not cause major problems. Thus, knowledge and risk underestimation can coexist.

In addition, there is another, more compelling explanation. Within the UGT framework, the satisfaction they derive from BNPL turns out to have a greater influence than logical considerations of risk. That satisfaction stems from the ease of checkout, the benefits of discounts, and the justifications they create for themselves to rationalize their purchases. All of these sources of satisfaction collectively encourage them to continue

using BNPL, even though common sense suggests it is unwise.

Thus, this gap between knowing and doing is what is referred to as the business student paradox. These findings indicate that improving financial literacy alone is not enough. Young people also need help managing psychological impulses and being mindful of how digital platforms are designed to encourage spending.

### 3. Comparison of Findings

The findings of this study share several similarities and differences with previous research on BNPL usage. The comparison is summarized in the table below.

Aspect	Finding of This Study	Previous Studies	Similarity	Difference
Cash flow management	BNPL is used to bridge the time gap between shopping needs and allowance receipt	Waliszewski et al. (2024), Ji et al. (2023)	Both identify income instability as a driver of BNPL adoption	This study emphasizes that students still have money, but the timing does not match
Frictionless consumption & promotional sensitivity	Ease of checkout and BNPL-specific discounts are main attractions	Raj et al. (2023), Alt & Huch (2022)	Both recognize the role of convenience and price incentives	This study shows that the two factors reinforce each other, especially during flash sales
Justified purchases	Students create reasons to make non-essential purchases feel worthwhile	Largely unexplored in previous studies	-	This is a new contribution of this study
Price perception distortion & impulsive buying	Focus on small installments leads to bill shock; spontaneous purchases during flash sales	Di Maggio et al. (2022), Relja et al. (2023), Keil & Burg (2023)	Both identify mental accounting mechanisms and impulsivity	This study provides direct evidence (bill shock) from participants

Business student paradox	Students understand the risks but still use BNPL for non-essentials	Chien (2023), Juita et al. (2023)	Both acknowledge that BNPL users tend to underestimate risks	This study adds that high financial literacy does not prevent consumptive behavior
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In summary, this study supports most previous findings while offering one new contribution, namely the identification of self-justification (justified purchases) as a distinct motivation for using BNPL

#### 4. Implication of Findings

The findings of this study have important theoretical implications for the study of consumer behavior in the digital finance era. First, this study extends the application of the Uses and Gratifications Theory to the context of Buy Now Pay Later services. The results indicate that BNPL users actively seek three types of gratification: functional satisfaction from cash flow management, hedonic satisfaction from convenience and discounts, and cognitive satisfaction from justifying their purchases. These three types of gratification operate simultaneously and can reinforce one another.

Second, this study identifies the “business student paradox”—the gap between strong financial knowledge and persistent spendthrift behavior. This finding challenges the common assumption that improved financial literacy automatically leads to wiser behavior. Consequently, future theoretical models of financial decision-making must incorporate psychological factors such as risk underestimation, self-justification, and the appeal of short-term gratification from digital services.

#### 5. Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the sample size was only seven participants, so these findings cannot be generalized to all business students in Indonesia. Second, data were collected through self-administered interviews, which raises the possibility of social bias—that is, participants may have tended to respond in a way they perceived as socially acceptable. Third, this study collected data over a single time period, whereas BNPL usage behavior may change over time.

For future research, it is recommended to conduct quantitative validation through a larger-scale survey so that the findings can be generalized. Longitudinal research is also needed to observe how BNPL usage patterns change as students graduate and begin working. Additionally, a comparative study between business students and students from other disciplines could test whether the identified paradox is unique to business students or occurs more broadly.

### CONCLUSION

This study aims to identify the motivations and usage patterns of Buy Now Pay Later (BNPL) for non-essential purchases among business students. Based on a qualitative analysis of interviews with seven business students, several conclusions can be drawn.

1. The motivations for using BNPL for non-essential purchases consist of four factors. These factors are cash flow management (bridging the gap between shopping needs and the arrival of spending money), frictionless consumption (ease and speed of checkout, especially during flash sales), sensitivity to promotions (the appeal of special discounts

for BNPL users), and justifiable purchases (creating a reason to make non-essential purchases feel worthwhile).

2. Patterns of BNPL usage encompass three trends. These patterns are price perception distortion (focusing on small monthly installments rather than the total price, leading to bill shock), impulsive purchases during flash sales (spontaneous decisions triggered by time pressure and limited-time promotions), and the business student paradox (the gap between sound financial knowledge and continued consumptive behavior).
3. The findings of this study indicate that business students actively choose BNPL because this service provides functional, hedonic, and cognitive satisfaction. However, good financial literacy does not automatically protect them from impulsive spending. The combination of digital convenience, promotional incentives, and self-justification often outweighs rational considerations of risk.

Theoretically, this study extends the application of Uses and Gratifications Theory to the context of BNPL services and introduces the concept of justified purchasing as a distinctive motivation. This study also challenges the assumption that higher financial literacy directly leads to wiser financial decisions.

Practically, these findings suggest that financial education programs should not only teach principles but also train self-control and awareness of the design of digital choice architectures. Regulators may consider requiring the clear display of total payment obligations at the point of purchase. BNPL service providers are also advised to offer financial wellness features such as spending trackers and payment reminders.

This study has limitations regarding the number of participants and generalizability. Future research is encouraged to conduct quantitative validation with a larger sample size and to use a longitudinal design to examine how BNPL usage patterns change over time.

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