

₹ 100

ISSN - 2249-555X

Volume : 1 Issue : 4 January 2012



Journal for All Subjects

www.ijar.in

Listed in International ISSN Directory, Paris.



ISSN - 2249-555X

Indian Journal of Applied Research

Journal for All Subjects

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Impulsive buying and In-store shopping environment

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ABSTRACT

The impulsive buying occurs when an individual makes an unintended, unreflective, and immediate purchase. The objective of present study was to investigate the influence of in-store shopping environment on impulsive buying among Indian consumers. A total of 100 shoppers at a selected shopping mall in Patiala served as the sample. Descriptive data analysis was done to compute frequencies for each of the variables under study. A 5% test of significance was used in the study which shows that in-store factors of an economic nature such as price, behavior of shop staff and coupons were more likely to influence impulsive buying than those with an atmospheric engagement effect like background music, in-store displays, salespeople, shopping situations and scent. Retailers may use the findings of the study to improve their merchandise assortment and improve the shopping environment.

Keywords : Impulsive buying, determinants of impulsive buying, in-store shopping environment.

Introduction

Gutierrez (2004) described a planned purchase as a deliberate, thoughtful search and evaluation that normally results in rational, accurate and better decisions. Contrary to a planned purchase, the concept of impulsive buying is both complex and paradoxical. Impulsive buying behavior is a widely recognized phenomenon. It accounts for up to 80% of all purchases in certain product categories. It has been suggested that more purchases result from impulse than from planning. Impulsive buying behavior is seen as a sudden, spontaneous act which precludes thoughtful, consideration of all available information and choice alternatives.

Review of Literature

Rook (1987) sought to explore impulse buying, stating that it was still not well understood. He stated that most models "do not explain the situation where arousal leads directly to action." Rook took the definition to encompass sudden, powerful and persistent urge to purchase immediately...with disregard for its consequences. Hallsworth (1991) suggested that convenience and access to transportation constrain search behavior.

Prus (1991) found an important type of browsing, which is mainly casual or recreational, where the consumer has no intention of making a purchase. Babin (1995) proposed a scale that identifies shoppers in terms of hedonic and utilitarian (epistemic) shopping values. Consumers high on the hedonic shopping value scale find shopping as a pleasurable experience. Here, the shopping experience is enjoyable and is viewed as an "escape" or adventure. Wood (1998) found a non-linear relationship between age and impulsive buying in his United States adult sample. The relationship suggested that impulsive buying should increase slightly from ages 18 to 39, and decline thereafter Jones (2003) in his studies pointed out that a variety of factors affect

impulsive buying decisions, including the consumer's mood or emotional state (Rook, 1987; Rook & Gardner, 1993), self-identity (Dittmar, 1995), and personal characteristics, in particular "age" (e.g., Bellenger, 1978; Wood, 1998). Hoyer & MacInnis (1997) and Jones (2003) stated in their research that marketers have recognized the significance of impulsive buying. Retailers are continually trying to increase the number of impulsive purchases through product displays and store and package designs.

The above researches considered impulsive buying as an irrational consumer behavior. In earlier researches impulsive buying decisions were described only as a psychological trait where consumers varied in terms of their impulse-buying tendencies. The present paper has tried to study the relationship of impulsive buying behavior of the consumer and in-store environment.

In-Store Shopping Environment

The in-store shopping environment is constituted by micro variables which are specific to particular shopping situations and confined to a specific geographic space. Factors such as in-store background music, store display, scent, in store promotions, prices, shop cleanliness, shop density or congestion and store personnel all make up the in store shopping environment, among others. In present study the in store shopping environment has been categorized into two effects. The first is the promotional effect, which includes such stimuli as promotional discounts (coupons, multiple-item discounts and gifts) and cheaper prices. The second is termed the atmospheric engagement effect which includes such stimuli as background music, store display, scent, in store promotions.

Objectives

In view of the tremendous importance attached to the role of fast changing patterns of consumption, consumers' decision making styles and their influence on strategies relating to marketing the present study attempts to investigate the relationship between in-store shopping environment and impulsive buying among Indian consumers.

Hypothesis

1. With promotional discounts (like coupons, multiple-item discounts and gifts) and cheaper price consumer adopts more impulsive buying behavior.
2. The presence of atmospheric engagement such as background music, store display, scent, in store promotions increases the chances of impulsive buying among consumers.

Research Methodology

A quantitative design was used for this study. It generally involves the collection of primary data from large numbers of individuals with the intention of projecting the results to a wider population. Since the aim of the study was to generalize on the impulsivity of shoppers based on the representative sample, a quantitative method was deemed suitable.

A self-framed questionnaire divided into 2 sections was used to collect data from respondents. A close ended questionnaire was used. The first part of the questionnaire contained seven questions which were aimed at assessing material characteristics of impulsive buying in consumers. The second section contained 9 items to measure the likelihood of impulsive buying in retail supermarkets as a result of the various in-store factors on a five point Likert scale.

A total of 100 shoppers at selected shopping mall in Patiala, Punjab, served as the sample. Only shoppers selected from Omex Mega Mall, Easy Day and V-Mart were eligible for inclusion in line with the study objective of evaluating consumers' impulsive buying behavior. As the total number of the population sample (mall shoppers) was generally unknown, a convenience based sampling method was deemed appropriate. As shown Table 1, 15% respondents are below 20 years, the majority of respondents are aged between 21 - 40 years representing 70%, 13% are between 41-60 years and just 2% were above 61 years. As shown in Table 2, the majority of the respondents were low income earners. More than half of the respondents (66%), earned Rs.10,000 or less per month and only (34%) earning more than 10,000 per month.

Statistical analysis

Descriptive data analysis was done to compute frequencies for each of the variables under study. In order to test whether responses for each variable supported the stated hypotheses, test of significance using z -scores were done at 5% significance level.

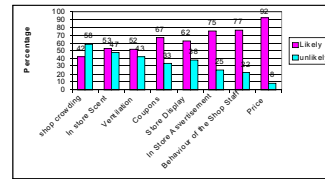
Table 1.Frequencies, percentages and cumulative percentages for age group distribution of the sample.

Age (yrs)	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
Below20	15	15	15
21-40	70	70	85
41-60	13	13	98
61-80	2	2	100

Table 2.Frequencies, percentages and cumulative percentages for Income distribution of the sample.

Income	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
0-10,000	66	66	66
10,000-20,000	20	20	86
20,000-30,000	6	6	92
30,000-40,000	4	4	96
40,000-50,000	3	3	99
50,000-60,000	1	1	100

Figure 1. Consumer responses to the influence of various in-store factors on impulsive buying in supermarket shops.



The Y- axis shows the percentage (%) scores of likelihood of influence whilst the X-axis shows the nine factors that were investigated. Number over the vertical bars indicates the percentage (%) score obtained for each variable.

Table 3. 5% test of significance for the research hypothesis. The results were obtained from a Z-test of significance for the percentage scores for each of the 9 factors investigated.

Research hypothesis	Computed z value	Significance
Crowding	-0.951	
In-store scent	0.634	
Background music	0.631	
Ventilation 1.645	0.636	
Coupons and vouchers	2.362	***
Store display	1.632	***
Advertisements and promotions	3.204	***
Behavior of shop staff	4.165	***
Price	12.105	***

Results and Discussions

The study investigated the relationship between the impulsive buying and in-store shopping environment. This study combined a multitude of factors to determine the influence of each. This allowed a comparative analysis on the relationship of various factors with impulsive buying. The results of the study had shown that coupons and vouchers, store display, advertisements and promotions, behaviors of shop staff as well as price were the only significant determinants of impulsive buying among the 9 factors investigated. Conversely the factors that failed to support the hypothesis were crowding, in store scent and background music.

From the demographic data of the study it can be drawn out that most of the respondents were youngsters (70% were below 40 years) mostly with very little income (66% earned less than Rs.10000 per month). It can be implied, therefore, that poor people were more likely to do impulsive buying for economic reasons rather than for hedonic reasons.

The overall conclusion of this study could therefore be that, the in-store shopping environment does have an influence on impulsive buying among consumers. However, a quite interesting result of the study was that among poor consumers, factors of an economic nature like cheaper prices, coupons and helpful shop assistants were more likely to influence impulsive buying. Factors with an atmospheric engagement effect like music, fresh scent and ventilation may have only been important in helping to keep consumers longer in shops, although they were unlikely to directly influence impulsive buying. Consumers who stay longer in a shop may be more likely to engage in price comparisons, search for promotions and to listen to shop assistants. Consequently, therefore, they are more likely to indulge in more impulsive buying. Wakefield and Baker (1998), suggested that spending is likely to increase as consumers stay longer in a retail environment.

The present study highlighted that to increase sales and profit the retailers must use in store environment stimuli. Retailers can attract economically weaker communities by deploying alternate advertising strategy like promotion and coupon to enjoy the benefit of impulsive buying decision. Since the behavior of shop staff emerged as the second most important factor after price in influencing consumers' decisions, staff training by retailers might be essential in ensuring that shop assistants strike a balance between being persuasive and helpful to shoppers and avoiding being overly bearing.

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