

Full Length Research Paper

In-store shopping environment and impulsive buying

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The objective of the study was to investigate the influence of in-store shopping environment on impulsive buying among consumers. The impulsive decision making theory and the consumer decision making model were used to substantiate the study (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2007). A total of 320 shoppers conveniently sampled at a selected shopping mall served as the sample. A 5% test of significance showed that in-store factors of an economic nature such as price and coupons were more likely to influence impulsive buying than those with an atmospheric engagement effect like background music and scent.

Key words: Impulsive buying, determinants of impulsive buying, in-store shopping environment, consumer decision making, retailing.

INTRODUCTION

The retailing business is globally experiencing huge trends due to the ever-changing nature of consumer tastes, consumption patterns and buying behaviours. South Africa, in particular, has of late seen the growth of large supermarket conglomerates such as Pick 'n Pay, Spar, Checkers, Shoprite and OK. As Marx and Erasmus (2006) state "these retailers, have since made way for retail giants whose shops occupy 100 sq/m and draw thousands of customers, pushing gigantic trolleys through long alleys in seemingly never-ending shopping malls. The supermarkets are often located within close proximity of one another, although they stock more or less the same goods". Each retailer's ability to sustainably sell its merchandise, therefore, largely depends on the strategic strength of its marketing mix activities. Notwithstanding other marketing activities, in-store marketing activities such as point-of-purchase displays and promotions, through background music and supportive store personnel are all instrumental in both winning consumers and encouraging them to spend more. In-store promotions are usually aimed at digging deeper into the consumers' purses at the point of purchase through encouraging impulsive (unplanned) purchases. Given the power of impulsive buying in pushing revenue and profits up, most marketers have since tried to influence the in-store decisions of their potential consumers through creating enjoyable, attractive and modern state-of-the-art environments ranging from background music, favourable ventilation, freshened scent, attractive store layout, in-

store displays and persuasive shop assistants among other things.

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. 2 definitions seem to have tried to capture that complexity in their description of the concept and both of them had been adopted for the purpose of this study. The first definition comes from Chien-Huang and Hung-Ming (2005) who describe impulsive buying as a more arousing, unintended, less deliberate and more irresistible buying behaviour as compared to planned buying behaviour, with higher impulsive buyers being more likely to be unreflective, to be emotionally attracted to the object and to desire immediate gratification. In a closely related definition, Bayley and Nancarrow (1998) define impulsive buying as a sudden, compelling, hedonically complex buying behaviour in which the rapidity of an impulse decision process precludes thoughtful and deliberate consideration of alternative information and choices. Importantly, these two definitions not only concur on the notion that impulsive buying is an unplanned purchase that is a consequent of a spontaneous and unconscious, though not necessarily irrational deviation from a 'shopping list'. They also all emphasize the complex affective nature of impulsive buying.

THEORIES OF IMPULSIVE BUYING

The emotional/impulsive decision making theory and impulsive buying

Impulsive buying is grounded and theoretically underpinned

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within the emotional or impulsive decision making view to consumer decision-making by Schiffman and Kanuk (20-07). This view postulates that consumers are likely to associate some highly involving feelings or emotions such as joy, love, fear, hope, sexuality, fantasy and even some little magic with certain purchases or possessions. Rather than carefully searching, deliberating and evaluating alternatives before buying, consumers are just as likely to make many of these purchases on impulse, on a whim, because they are emotionally driven (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2007). Park et al. (2005) had even earlier concluded that unless a store has a distinct product offering or pricing strategy, retailers can distinguish their store by building on the relationship between the store's atmosphere and the consumer's emotional state. Even if consumers are in a negative emotional state upon entering a store, they may become emotionally uplifted and spend more than intended. All this implies that impulsive buying may largely be an unconscious buying behaviour driven by an affective force beyond the control of the individual.

The consumer decision making model

The consumer decision making model, by and large, reflects the cognitive consumer but to some degree, it also reflects the emotional consumer (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2007). Impulsive buying is influenced mainly by the inputs component as identified in the model. These inputs include the marketing activities of organizations and the socio-cultural inputs.

Retailers' marketing activities ranges from the product itself (its package, size and guarantees), media advertising and other promotional efforts, pricing policy (reductions and discounts) and the distribution (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2007). Marketing efforts can be at macro level (as for mass media) and can be at micro level (as for in-store adverts, point-of-purchase displays, in-store promotions and pleasant in-store shopping environments). A well planned marketing strategy can, therefore, help retailers to increase sales through impulsive buying. Park et al. (2005) even acknowledged the importance to retailers of stressing the relative rationality and non-economic rewards of impulsive buying in their advertising efforts.

The socio-cultural environment also exerts a major influence on the consumer. It consists of a wide range of non-commercial influences like family, peers or friends, some non-commercial sources, culture and subculture and social class (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2007).

THE IN-STORE SHOPPING ENVIRONMENT AS A DETERMINANT OF IMPULSIVE BUYING

The in-store shopping environment is a very important determinant of impulsive buying. It 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. Zhou and Wong (2004) categorised the in-store shopping environment into 2 separate effects of in-store point-of-purchase (POP) posters on shoppers' impulse behaviour in a supermarket setting. The first is the promotional effect, which includes such stimuli as promotional discounts (coupons, multiple-item discounts and gifts) and cheaper prices. The second was termed the atmospheric engagement effect (enjoyment and attractiveness) conveyed by the POP posters. This categorisation was quasi-adopted for the purpose of this current study.

Factors with a promotional, informative and economic effect

Coupons

The effect of coupons is very much closely linked to moods, emotions and psychological cognitions (Heilman et al., 2002). Of particular importance to this study were the effects of in-store instant coupons. Heilman et al. (20-02) referred to these coupons as 'surprise' coupons and described them as unanticipated coupons encountered while in the shop and that are intended to be used for that particular shopping trip. Windfall or unanticipated gains are spent more readily than gains that were anticipated according to Heilman et al. (2002). This tends to violate the fundamental economic assumption which posits that funds are fungible - that the source of money should make no difference in its consumption. The authors contend that the increased purchasing due to the coupon windfall gains was assumed to be a result of psychological income effect. By decreasing the amount of money a consumer had originally planned to spend in the store, the surprise coupon could have a psychological income effect that would allow for more unplanned purchases on that trip.

Unexpected cheaper prices and discounts/sales/specials

The effect of unexpected cheaper prices on impulse buying is almost similar to the effect of instant coupons since they also present a windfall gain to the consumer. One effect of unexpected price discounts is that of causing a generalized affective effect on consumers (Janakiraman et al., 2006). Therefore, Millman (1986) as cited by Janakiraman et al. (2006) had earlier argued that negative affect induced by unexpected price hikes might suppress spending by limiting purchase consideration of other goods, while positive affect induced by unexpected price drops might increase spending by expanding consideration of other goods. The consumer mental accounting activity concept can also explain price-induced accounting activity concept can also explain price-induced impulse buying according to Janakiraman et al. (2006). The concept is

of the idea that an increase or decrease in the amount spent for an essential item on a given shopping trip would increase or decrease the amount that is perceived to be available to spend on other goods, producing a congruent spillover effect. Arkes et al. (1994) as cited by Janakiraman et al. (2006) acknowledged that the unexpected price discount results in higher expressions of willingness to pay for unrelated discretionary items.

Factors with an atmospheric, entertaining, experiential and hedonic effect

Background music

Music is capable of evoking complex affective and behavioral responses in consumers, according to North and Hargreaves (1998), as cited by Mattila and Wirtz (2001). Music may impact on both how long consumers spend in a shop and also on how much they buy. In two separate studies by Millman (1982 and 86), shoppers in the first study spent more time and money in a slow music tempo retail environment and in the second study, customers in a slow music condition took more time to eat their meals compared to those in the fast-music condition (Mattila and Wirtz, 2001).

In-store displays

The most important aspect of successful in-store displays is for retailers to understand their customers and their habits according to Terrazas (2006). Strategic displays can then be devised that help to increase sales especially through unplanned purchases by consumers. One strategy may be to identify the commonality of goods bought by list-buyers and then attractively display complementary products next to these common products. Displaying the most popular products purchased by your clients in the back of the store could be another strategy - this forces the client to walk past and be confronted by as many other items first. It is also common practice to separate popular items (strategic display). Bread and milk, for instance, will most likely be displayed at the 2 most opposite ends of the store which will force the consumer past a host of products encouraging impulsive buying en route to the other essential product (Terrazas, 2006). Shopping trolleys designed to accommodate kids require strategic trolley height displays that will catch the children's attention because children play a big role in shopping trends (Terrazas, 2006).

Sales people

Consumers tend to enjoy a shopping experience with supportive and friendly shop assistants. Salespeople can really make the shopping experience fun and enjoyable by providing extraordinary service. Consumers enjoy shopping more without the presence of an overbearing salesperson although they do, however, appreciate when a salesperson is nearby and helpful (Jones, 1999).

Shop congestion/crowding/shop density

Crowding is generally perceived as an unpleasant experience in shopping situations (Bateson and Hui, 1987) as cited by Michon et al. (2005). Consumers adjust to higher retail densities by reducing shopping time, deviating from their shopping plans, buying less to enter express check-out lanes, postponing purchases, relying more on shopping lists, reducing interpersonal communications and refraining from exploratory behaviours (Michon et al., 2005). All these behaviours might militate against consumer impulsive buying.

OBJECTIVE

To investigate the relationship between in-store shopping environment and impulsive buying among consumers.

HYPOTHESIS

The presence of an enjoyable, pleasant and attractive in-store shopping environment increases the chances of impulsive buying among consumers.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research approach

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 (Tustin et al., 2005). It includes experiments, surveys and content analysis (Vos et al., 2005). Since the aim of the study was to generalise on the impulsivity of shoppers based on the representative sample, a quantitative method was deemed suitable. Moreover, the findings were subjected to some mathematical and statistical manipulations to produce broadly representative data (Tustin et al., 2005).

RESEARCH METHOD

Research participants

A total of 320 shoppers conveniently sampled at selected shopping mall in King Williams town, South Africa, served as the sample. Only shoppers selected from Spar, Shoprite and Pick n Pay supermarkets were eligible for inclusion in line with the study objective of evaluating consumers' impulsive buying. Respondents were conveniently selected from these shops in 10 days of data collection. As the total number of the population sample (mall shoppers) was generally unknown, a convenient sampling method was deemed appropriate. As shown Table 1, the majority of respondent are aged between 21 - 30 years representing 55%, 17.5% are 31 - 40 years, 15% are over 50 years and just 7.5% were below 21 years. As shown in Table 2, the majority of the respondents were low income earners. More than half of the respondents, 192 (60%), earned R3000 or less per month with only 88 (27.5%) earning at least R6000 per month.

Table 1. Age distribution for the 320 participants. Frequencies and valid percentages for each corresponding age group are given as they appear from the questionnaire survey. Cumulative percentages are also shown.

	Age (yrs)	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Below 21	24	7.5		7.5
	21-30	176	55.0		62.5
	31-40	56	17.5	17.5	80.0
	41-50	16	5.0	5.0	85.0
	Above 50	48	15.0	15.0	100.0
	Total	320	100.0	100.0	

Table 2. Income distribution for the 320 respondents who participated in the study. Frequencies and valid percentages are given for each income category together with the corresponding cumulative percentages.

Valid	Income	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
	0-R1500	152	47.5	47.5	47.5
	R501-R3000	40	12.5	12.5	60.0
	R3001-R4500	8	2.5	2.5	62.5
	R4501-R6000	32	10.0	10.0	72.5
	Above-R6000	88	27.5	27.5	100
	Total	320	100.0	100.0	

Measuring instruments

A questionnaire divided into 2 sections was used to collect data from respondents. To standardize responses, a close ended questionnaire was used. Using this close ended questionnaire also ensured easy analysis of data. 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.

RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha is an index of reliability associated with variation accounted for by the true score of the underlying construct. Alpha coefficient range in value from 0 to 1 and may be used to describe the reliability of factors extracted from dichotomous (that is, questions with two possible answers) and /or multi-point formatted questionnaires or scales (Struwig and Stead, 2001). Although there is no lower limit to the coefficient, the closer the Cronbach's coefficient alpha is to 1, the greater the internal consistency of the items of the scale. According to Guari and Gronhaug (2005), coefficient of less than 0.6 is considered poor, those greater than 0.6, but less than 0.8 are considered acceptable and coefficient greater than 0.8 are considered good. This study's questionnaire had an acceptable Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.69.

Validity

Babbie (2004) defines validity as the extent to which an empirical measure accurately reflects the concept it is intended to measure. In other words, as stated by Gravetter and Forzano (2003), 'the vali-

dity of a measurement procedure is the degree to which the measurement process measures the variable it claims to measure". These definitions point to 2 issues, that the instrument actually measures the concept in question and that the concept is measured accurately. De Vos et al. (2006), Saunders and Thornhill (2003), Struwig and Stead (2001) describe the various forms of validity that should be used by researchers to ensure accuracy of their research instruments.

In view of the aforementioned discussion on validity, special care was taken in the present study to formulate a content valid instrument in particular. According to Rubin and Babbie (2001) content validity refers to the sampling adequacy of the items of an instrument. It has to do with whether a measuring device covers the full range of meanings or forms that would be included in a variable being measured. The research instrument in this study was subjected to 'jury opinion' using 3 senior retail marketing management subject experts and two retail marketing management industry experts to try and increase the instrument's content validity. Their expert opinions were used in the design of the research instrument before it was used in the survey. The decision was based on the suggestion by Rubin and Babbie (2001) that content validity is established on the basis of judgments, that is, researchers or other experts make judgments about whether the measure covers the universe of facets that make up the concept.

RESEARCH PROCEDURE

A mall intercept method was used. This method involves the administration of questionnaires on respondents conveniently selected as they come out of each of the supermarket. The questionnaires had to be completed in the presence of the questionnaire administrators and returned immediately. This was decided upon in order to increase the response rate and also in order to clarify questions to the respondents as and when necessary.

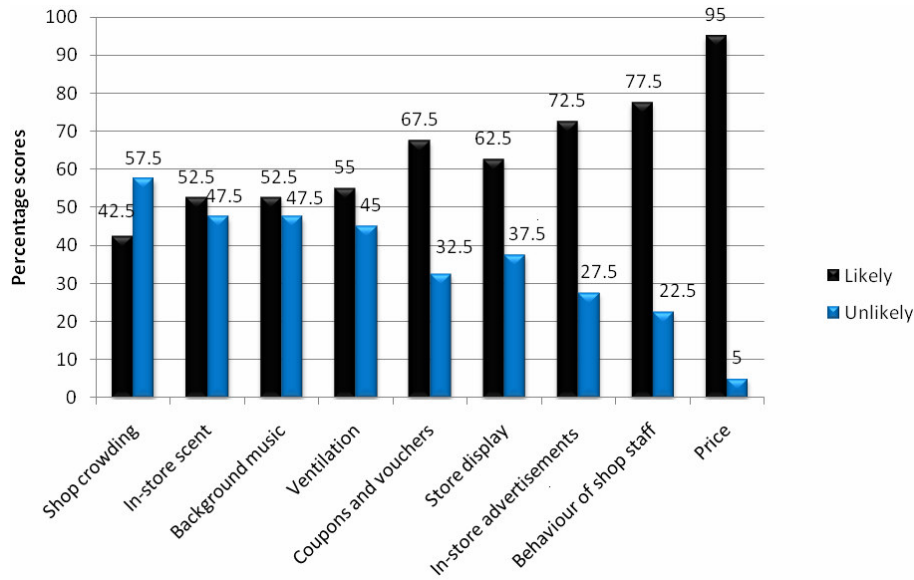


Figure 1. Consumer responses to the influence of various in-store factors on impulsive buying in supermarket shops. The vertical axis shows the percentage (%) scores of likelihood of influence whilst the horizontal axis shows the nine factors that were investigated. Number over the vertical bars indicates 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	Critical z value	Computed z value	Significance
Crowding	-1.645	-0.951	
In-store scent	1.645	0.633	
Background music	1.645	0.633	
Ventilation	1.645	0.636	
Coupons and vouchers	1.645	2.363	***
Store display	1.645	1.632	***
Advertisements and promotions	1.645	3.187	***
Behaviour of shop staff	1.645	4.165	***
Price	1.645	13.059	***

***Significant result.

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.

RESULTS

Research hypothesis

The presence of an enjoyable, pleasant and attractive in-store shopping environment increases the chances of impulsive buying among consumers.

Figure 1 show, in terms of percentage scores, a 50% likelihood of influence on impulsive buying for all but one

of the nine variables.

Tests for significance at 5% level for the research hypothesis

As shown in Table 3, a 5% significance test for each variable indicates that shop crowding, in-store scent, background music and ventilation were unlikely to directly influence impulsive buying with z values of -0.951, 0.633, 0.633 and 0.636, respectively. However, 5 of the items, that is, coupons and vouchers, store display, in-store advertisements, behaviour of shop staff and price were all likely to influence impulsive buying with z scores of 2.363, 1.632, 3.187, 4.165 and 13.059 respectively. The hypothesis was therefore partially supported.

DISCUSSION

The study sought to investigate the relationship between the in-store shopping environment and impulsive buying. Unlike much of the previous research studies that focused on the influence of single variables on impulsive buying, 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, behaviours of shop staff as well as price were the only significant determinants of impulsive buying among the 9 factors investigated. Importantly, these factors fall under what Zhou and Wong (2004) identified as factors with a promotional and economic effect. Conversely the factors that failed to support the hypothesis were all in the category of factors with an atmospheric, entertaining, experiential and hedonic effect.

Taken in light of the demographic data from the study, an important deduction can be made. Most of the respondents were young blacks (62.5% were below 30 years) mostly with very little income (60% earned less than R30-00/month). It can be implied, therefore, that poor people were more likely to do impulsive buying for economic reasons rather than for hedonic reasons. As already highlighted, such price induced impulsive buying can be explained by the mental accounting activity concept of Janakiraman et al. (2006), which posits that an increase or decrease in the amount spent for an essential item on a given shopping trip (e.g., an unexpected increase in the price of milk) would increase or decrease the amount that is perceived to be available to spend on other goods, producing a congruent spillover effect.

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. This assumption actually finds support from Donovan et al. (1994), as cited by Wakefield and Baker (1998), who suggested that spending is likely to increase as consumers stay longer in a retail environment.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The study highlighted the strategic importance of using the

in-store environment to stimulate impulsive buying decision among shoppers to increase sales and profit. Retailers serving less economically affluent communities could deploy alternate advertising strategy like promotion and coupon to enjoy the benefit of impulsive buying decision. Since the behaviour 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 as was suggested by Jones (1999). As Gutierrez (2004) pointed out, given the increasing incidence of mall shopping most of it accompanied by browsing activity, retailers may use the findings of the study to improve their merchandise assortment and improve the shopping environment including store displays to trigger impulsive purchases. It is also of equally paramount importance for retailers to mix their in-store promotional factors well, as economic and atmospheric engagement factors might holistically complement each other to produce positive sales outcomes. In a highly competitive environment, only those retailers who exceed the expectations of their customers in terms of providing an enjoyable shopping experience can survive and become successful (Gutierrez, 2004).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The sample of the study was mainly constituted by low income young people and in that regard it might not be very representative of consumers of other age and income groups. Furthermore, although the study focused mainly on supermarket consumers, it was not specific on any particular products that are likely to be mainly bought on impulse as a result of the in-store environment. In that regard, the study fails to account for the possible differences in elasticity of different products to different promotional strategies. A research that comparatively investigates in-store environment induced impulsive buying across different and specific product ranges; portfolios or brand categories can have an important contribution to the understanding of consumer impulse buying and may contribute to the knowledge of retailing strategies in a more specific manner.

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