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Investigating the Relationship Between Clothing Store Environment and Impulse Buying Behavior

Esha Kamaal¹, Muhammad Awais Mehmood², Qaiser Janjua³, Khalique U Zaman⁴,
Faisal Aftab⁵

¹MPhil Scholar, Bahria University Islamabad, Pakistan, eshamm897@gmail.com

²Associate Professor, Bahria Business School Islamabad, Bahria University,
Islamabad, Pakistan, mamehmood@bahria.edu.pk

³Assistant Professor, Air University School of Management, Air University,
Pakistan, qaiser.janjua@mail.au.edu.pk

⁴M Phil Scholar, Bahria University, Islamabad, Pakistan, khalique1993@gmail.com

⁵College of Business Administration, Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University,
Saudi Arabia, faaftab@iau.edu.sa

***Corresponding Author:** Muhammad Awais Mehmood, Email:
mamehmood@bahria.edu.pk

Abstract

This study explores impulse buying behavior and its correlation with elements in the store environment. The research employs the SOR (Stimuli-Organism-Response) Framework to comprehend how the store environment influences consumer emotions and subsequently triggers impulsive purchase. Using an interpretivist paradigm, a qualitative methodology was adopted to delve into consumer beliefs and feelings influenced by the store environment. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with selected consumers from fashion retail outlets. The findings demonstrate that customers exhibit a higher tendency for impulsive shopping in stores characterized by a pleasant and attractive environment. Key elements perceived to contribute towards such an environment, which influence impulse buying behavior, encompass attractive window displays, amiable salesperson interactions, well-organized store layouts, promotional sales, scented environments, cleanliness, optimal store temperature, subtle background music, appropriate lighting, and appealing themes. The study's implications extend to both theoretical and practical aspects, offering insights for store retailers, and proposing avenues for future research by scholars in this field.

Keywords: *Impulse buying behavior, SOR Framework, Store environment, Fashion retail*

Introduction

Central to every business operation is the customer. Understanding their buying behavior stands as a pivotal factor for any enterprise striving to thrive in today's fiercely competitive market (Sundström, Balkow, Florhed, Tjernström, & Wadenfors, 2013). This understanding seeks to unravel the mechanisms employed by individuals to choose, acquire, and discard items, services,

experiences, or concepts in alignment with their desires. Furthermore, it aims to discern the impact of these processes on their behavior (Pradhan, 2016). The objective is to grasp their decision-making mechanisms, whether individual or collective, and comprehend the emotions influencing their purchasing behavior. Consumer buying behavior encompasses four principal types: routine response, limited decision making, extensive decision making, and impulse buying

(Madhavan & Kaliyaperumal, 2015). While each type bears significance, impulse buying commands attention due to its ability to impact up to 80% of a business's profitability (Lewis, 2013; Yue & Razak, 2018).

Abbasi (2017) defines impulse buying behavior as an act where customers make unplanned purchases without prior deliberation, often without any inherent need. This phenomenon is characterized by sudden exposure to stimuli and spontaneous decision-making, followed by emotional and/or cognitive reactions post-purchase (Piron, 1991). This underscores the imperative for marketers to comprehend the triggers behind impulsive decisions within a store environment to augment their revenue.

The focus of this study lies within fashion retail outlets, which specialize in selling clothing, apparel, and accessories to consumers (Çadırcı & Köse, 2016). Apparel fashion serves as a symbolic representation of personality traits, social class, status, and gender (Craik, 2009), enabling individuals to express their self-identity through clothing choices (Tungate, 2008). In the contemporary landscape, the fashion apparel industry has gained global recognition as an emerging sector marked by intensifying competition (Yadav, Khandai, & Singh, 2019). To navigate this competitive landscape, fashion retailers are deploying innovative and entrepreneurial strategies within retail outlets to enhance the customer shopping experience, thereby enticing them towards impulse buying (Pantano, 2016). This underscores the critical importance of comprehending impulse buying behavior within the realm of the fashion sector (Mittal, Chawla, & Sondhi, 2016).

Literature Review

Bashar & Ahmed (2012) defined impulse buying as a purchase that instantly happens without any intention to buy the product or to fulfill any specific purchase requirement. According to Piron (1991), it is an unplanned purchase that is a result of an exposure to a stimulus and decided on-the-spot. Usually, the impulse purchase is followed by emotional and/or cognitive reactions, which a customer experiences. This is consistent with S-O-R framework represented by Mehrabian & Russell (1974) suggesting an intermediate state as result of some stimulus that leads toward consumer response. Stern (1962) explained four basic types of impulse purchase:

- i. Pure Impulse Buying
- ii. Reminder Impulse Buying
- iii. Suggestion Impulse Buying
- iv. Planned Impulse Buying

Pure impulse buying seems to be the most obviously distinguishable type of impulse buying. It's known as "escape buying," and comes from a spontaneous need to purchase something, but not necessarily anything new or stylish. In reminder impulse buying the buyer recalls a previous decision or experience, prompting an impulse purchase on the moment (Han, Morgan, Kotsiopoulos, & Kang-Park, 1991). Reminder impulse buying occurs when a consumer sees a product and realizes that their inventory is low or running out, or when they notice a promotion or other details about the product and remember making a purchase decision in the past. The important aspect is memorizing prior experience or knowledge of the object that "triggers" the impulse purchase. Suggestion impulse buying happens when a marketing effort suggests a product to the consumer that they had not previously considered, leading to an immediate purchase decision (Stern, 1962). It is different from reminder impulse shopping as there is no prior knowledge about the product to guide the decision. At the point of purchase, marketing skills of the firm or the salesman, quality of products, functionality, and other such factors may suggest consumer to buy a specific product. The difference between suggestion and pure impulse purchases is that products purchased on a suggestion urge could be perfectly reasonable or practical, as contrasted to the emotional attraction that drives pure impulsive purchases. Planned impulse buying is a purchase in which a buyer deviates from the typical shopping plan (Muruganatham & Bhakat, 2013). This kind of purchase happens without any prior consideration or planning (Han, Morgan, Kotsiopoulos, & Kang-Park, 1991). Although the term "planned impulse purchase" may seem strange but it is correct. When a customer visits the store with specific items in mind, however, with the hope and aim of making additional purchases based on price discounts, coupon deals, and similar incentives (Stern, 1962).

Past studies have identified various factors playing the role of stimulus towards the impulse purchase decision. According to Tinnie (2010), these factors can be classified into four types

including consumer characteristics, situational features, product features, and store characteristics. While all factors have an important role to play in impulse purchase, store characteristics are believed to be a more controllable factor by the firms, along with product features. Consumers nowadays demand additional benefits while choosing retail stores for their shopping. One of the features that is highly desired is the attractive ambiance of retail stores (Nishanov & Ahunjonov, 2016). Store environment includes the ambient features (lighting, scent, music), design features (layout and arrangement), and social factors (presence and effectiveness of salespersons) (Hussain, Khan, & Khan, 2021; Pallikkara, Pinto, Hawaldar, & Pinto, 2020). Impulse buying is believed to increase when the store environment is perceived more stimulating with regards to excitement or enjoyment (Mohamad, 2015). A store has the power to create a unique ambiance that can impact a customer's choice of purchase (Hassan & Khan, 2020). Retailers therefore can use suitable factors of store environment to attract customers (Mohamad, 2015). This study will therefore try to identify those store environment factors in fashion retail outlets of Pakistan, perceived to contribute towards impulse purchase behavior.

As per literature, the direct association between store environment and impulse buying behavior seems to be mediated through human feelings (Chang, Eckman, & Yan, 2011; Floh & Madlberger, 2013). This is in line with the S-O-R model proposed by Mehrabian & Russell (1974). The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model originates in the field of environmental psychology and states that various aspects of the environments serve as stimulus (S) that ultimately drive the behavioral responses (R) of individuals by intervening in their internal states (O) (Cheng, Tsai, Chuang, & Ho, 2020). This framework includes separate cognitive and emotional characteristics of the customers that differ from one another. The emotional or psychological state of mind was highlighted as the mediator, managing the relationship between the stimulus and consumer response. Customers with positive feelings are more inclined towards impulse purchase because they feel less constrained, possess a desire to reward themselves and have a high arousal level (Mohamad, 2015). Store-related factors are recognized to generate such positive feelings and stimulate a strong desire to purchase. Some of the positive feelings that are triggered by stimuli include pleasure, satisfaction, glad, soothing, relaxation, admiration, excitement, overwhelmed, and astonished (Roy & Tai, 2003; Zalta, 2005; Samo, et al., 2019; Palacios, López, & Redondo, 2017; Patel, 2021; Lewis, Xian, Lewis, & Zhao, 2021; Park, Macinnis, & Eisingerich, 2016; Eisingerich, 2017; Pham & Sun, 2020).

According to the S-O-R model, consumer feelings are believed to be an important element in responding to the revealing environmental stimulus. Using the same framework, this research has explored the relationship of store environment elements with impulse buying behavior by

identifying the store environment elements, which are believed to influence the feelings/mood of the consumer and learn how they may lead towards impulse purchase.

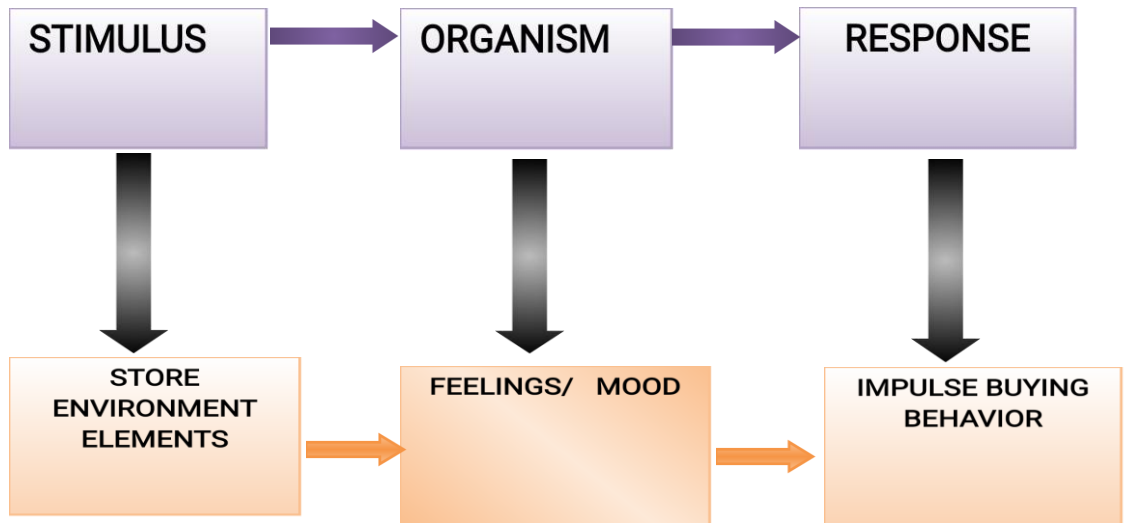


Figure 3: Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

In this study an interpretivist paradigm has been used to understand the belief and feelings of the consumers affected by fashion store environment, using an inductive research approach. The data was collected and analyzed qualitatively, through semi-structured in-depth interviews designed to give deeper insight on the phenomenon of impulse buying. The sampling technique used for this study was purposive, comprising of participants who were considered critical and more relevant for the purpose of this research (Dickson & Hossain, 2017). The semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted from the selected consumers of fashion retail outlets in Islamabad. This was with a view to understand perceived reality from the perspective of those who are living it. In Islamabad, there are several fashion outlets to meet

the growing requirements of the population. However, focus was primarily given to consumers from the fashion stores, which are considered more famous among the general consumers including Khaadi, Sapphire, Beechtree, Ethnic, Limelight, Sana Safinaz, Al Karam Studio, Bonanza Satrangi, Nishat Linen and Generation (Kay, 2021).

The selection of participants interviewed was based on a general survey to identify those who were believed to have been involved in an impulse purchase. Sample size for qualitative study below twenty (25) is considered to be sufficient, depending on the saturation point where you get no new or additional information (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2015; Saunders & Townsend, 2016; Vasileiou, Barnett, Thorpe, & Young, 2018). Keeping in view the same principle, interviews were held with twenty (20) participants who were generally considered more relevant and knowledgeable regarding impulse buying behavior. The data gathered was analyzed to identify themes and sub-themes to address the purpose of this research.

FINDINGS

Based on the results of the interviews held with the consumers of selected fashion retail outlets of Pakistan; several store environment elements were identified, which are believed to contribute towards impulse purchase decision. All these factors were analyzed through the lens of S-O-R framework to identify, stimuli, feelings(organism) and response in the context of this study. Stimuli were the sub-factors, within the identified store environment factors; organism depicted the consumer feelings generated because of identified store environment factors/sub-factors; and response depicted the type of impulse purchase generated based on the four-types of impulse purchase identified by Stern (1962). Summary of the main findings is depicted in the table below:

Table 1

Stimulus		Organism	Response
Factors	Sub-factors	Feelings	Types of Impulse Buying
Window Display	Mannequins	Pleasure; Satisfied; Excited	Planned Impulse Buying; Reminder Impulse Buying
	Promotional Display	Overwhelmed; Astonished; Excited	Planned Impulse Buying
Store Layout	Ease to touch	Glad; Satisfied	Pure Impulse Buying
	Visibility	Satisfied; Pleasure	Pure Impulse Buying
	Well organized way	Glad; Relaxed; Pleasure	Reminder Impulse Buying
Salesman Behavior	Friendly Employee	Satisfied; Comfortable	Pure Impulse Behavior
	Provide Suggestions	Gladness; Satisfied	Suggestion Impulse Buying
Background Music	Slow music	Relaxed; Soothing	Reminder Impulse Buying
	Fast music	Excited	Pure Impulse Buying
Store Theme	Simple Bright theme	Excited	Pure Impulse Buying
	Colorful theme	Pleasure; Excited	Pure Impulse Buying
	Luxury theme	Satisfied; Excited	Planned Impulse Buying
Lighting	Warm tone	Comfortable; Soothing	Planned Impulse Buying; Reminder Impulse Buying
	White toned	Energetic/Excited	Pure Impulse Buying
Temperature of the Store	Moderate temperature	Relaxed; Comfortable	Reminder Impulse Buying; Planned Impulse Buying
Sales and discounts	Flat Discounts	Glad; Excited; Astonished; Pleasure	Planned Impulse Buying
	Buy one get one free	Excited; Astonished	Planned Impulse Buying
Cleanliness	Cleanliness and Tidy store	Satisfaction; Relaxed; Pleasure	Pure Impulse Buying Behavior
Scents	Strong Notes	Excited	Pure Impulse Buying
	Soft Scents	Relaxed	Pure Impulse Buying

Window Display:

Window display has been highlighted as one of the critical in-store environment factors, which is believed to positively contribute towards impulse purchase by consumers. In terms of window display, use of mannequins and promotional display were identified as the most common sub-factors generating an impulse purchase. Several participants highlighted that attractive and well-placed mannequins at Window Display positively influence their feelings and develop an urge to purchase a product, which they had not planned earlier. These attractive mannequins generate a feeling of pleasure, satisfaction, and excitement and suggest to them to purchase a product which they had not considered before. As stated by some participants:

“...mannequins styling shows how I would look if I also got dressed that way. It gives me a general idea on how I would appear if I wore that item, which makes me feel excited.”

“The way mannequins are styled in a window display really fascinates me. I get a good understanding of how I would look if I wore that dress on display. I feel good and excited.”

Purchase of a product without any prior knowledge, triggered because of an articulated effort by marketers, reflects suggested impulse buying (Stern, 1962). This shows that well designed mannequins positively influence the suggested impulse purchase decision of consumers by making them feel excited, pleased, and satisfied. Some respondents also highlighted the ability of mannequins to remind them of a need or desire they had for a product. This could be a reminder to buy warm clothes when winter is about to start or purchase a specific-colored bag that goes with a dress they have already bought. Such recollection of a use situation of a product they see makes them feel excited and leads towards an impulse purchase.

Promotional signs at window display were also considered to capture the attention of customers at fashion retail outlets. As shared by some respondents; when they saw ‘flat off’ or ‘buy one get one free’ offers, they felt overwhelmed, astonished, and excited and got drawn towards making a purchase. In this case, while there was a plan to make a purchase in advance, but the products showcased as available on discount, or any other promotional incentive, encouraged them to purchase additional items. This shows sign of planned impulse purchase where a customer had prior plans to purchase a product, but ended up buying more items, not planned earlier, because of some marketing incentive (Stern, 1962). The promotional signs of flat sales on a window display increased the arousal level of the customers, making them more excited (Russell, 1980) and encouraged them to check the items on sale. As stated by some of the participants:

“Even if it is something you don’t intend to buy... when you see those signs of fifty percent off on window display, it attracts me at once and I think I should get it for later use.”

“Discounts really influence. I feel that this is the best thing and time to buy even its not needed currently. I feel excited.”

It was also observed that while sales and discounts strategies may excite customers, in certain cases it may also have a negative effect on them. As expressed by one of the respondents:

“When I see “UPTO % off” it makes me annoyed because I know that the stated figure of discount will only be available on least desired and less costly items. The actual discount on most items will be much less. But ‘Flat discount’ signs at window display really attract me, pushing me to visit the store out of utter excitement.”

Store Layout:

Elements associated with the store layout showed a strong positive influence on impulse purchase decisions of consumers. Within store layout, ease of access to touch a product was considered extremely important towards impulse buying. As said by a participant that “if the products are in access to her, she finds it easy to touch them and experience them, which may lead towards an impulse purchase”. The clear visibility of the articles also made customers feel satisfied and pleased, triggering an emotional response towards buying without any previous plan. Such types of purchase decisions are explained as pure impulse buying behavior in literature (Stern, 1962; Han, Morgan, Kotsiopoulos, & Kang-Park, 1991). As stated by some of the participants:

“Store layout or design matters because if the product is placed in a way that I can test it and feel it, I am much at ease and feel more comfortable to make a purchase.”

Results showed that an attractive and well organized in-store layout made customers feel glad, comfortable and at ease to purchase. The respondents pointed out that their behavior was positively influenced in a well-organized fashion outlet, increasing the likelihood of staying longer in store. The findings of the study revealed that a well-organized store layout generates a feeling of gladness, relaxation, and pleasure in customers. When they feel happy and relaxed, they are more easily able to recall any important requirements at home, which otherwise were forgotten in the daily hustle of life. This is reflection of positive influence of well-organized store lay out on reminder impulse purchase, as suggested by Stern (1962). According to some interviewees, the store must be well-organized to make customers feel good, relaxed, and calm, and lead them to spontaneous purchase of items they may need:

“If the articles are placed in a well-organized way it would be easy to buy as it provides more ease and makes us feel comfortable and relaxed.”

Salesmen Behavior:

A salesperson is responsible for making initial contact with consumers, assessing their needs, and discovering products to meet those needs, as well as achieving and maintaining sales targets. Literature highlights that salesmen's behaviors can go far beyond the obvious requirements while offering services to customers (Hussain, Khan, & Khan, 2021). A friendly and good behavior of salesmen was identified to favorably impact consumers' impulse purchase behavior. Several respondents highlighted a feeling of satisfaction and comfort if the fashion store staff were more friendly and kind to them. On several occasions, this would make them buy things they had not planned earlier, as in case of pure impulse purchase. Some of the respondents explained this as an act driven by social pressure of responding positively to the positive behavior of an individual. As stated by the participant:

“If the behavior of salesmen is nice and friendly and they provide good recommendations I feel oblige to shop at that store.”

It was also highlighted by several respondents that good salesman in fashion stores not only provide basic information about the products but also give good suggestions, enabling clients to make speedy shopping decisions and even change their initial thoughts and preferences. Salespeople who provide accurate and useful information about a product make customers feel happy and satisfied, encouraging them to make an unplanned purchase, based on their suggestion (suggestion impulse purchase). As expressed by one of the participants:

“When I enter the store, I am fascinated by many products. I always consult them [salesmen] to find out how good a product is, it's worth vis-à-vis its cost and benefits and functions it has to offer. There suggestions on several occasions encourage me to make purchase, which I had not thought earlier.”

Background Music:

Music was highlighted as a major store environment factor, evoking pleasant emotions in consumers. It was found to have a direct impact on several impulse purchase decisions, playing a key role while integrating with other ambient elements to create a consistent, and in some circumstances, fantastic experience. Slow instrumental music soothes consumers and encourages them to stay longer, so they continue to look around the store and eventually buy. Customers usually enjoy shopping if the background music is light and pleasant. It relaxes people to the point where they can shop more comfortably and spend more time in stores with a calm mindset. As per one participant:

“Background music plays vital role in enhancing the emotions when I go into the store. It leaves a soothing and a calm effect on me and I tend to spend more time and purchase more products even if I have no prior plans to buy.”

Different people respond differently to different types of music. While slow music makes several customers feel more comfortable and relaxed, some customers were driven by their feelings of excitement to make quick and spontaneous decisions. Based on the interviews, slow and soothing music seemed more prone to generating reminder impulse purchase, as customers were able to recall any immediate or future requirement in a calm and relaxing environment. Whereas fast music motivates customers towards pure impulse purchase, mainly driven by the feeling of excitement resulting in an unplanned spontaneous response.

“Background music matters to my state of mind... I like joyful and fast music in store as it excites me.”

Store Theme:

It's a well-known quotation that “First Impression is the last impression”. The same seemed appropriate for fashion retail stores. When people arrive at any store, they must determine whether to stay. According to some respondents, it all depends on the themes and overall presentation of the store to capture their immediate interest. Themes should be impressive and beautiful in appearance. Some participants highlighted their preference for a simple bright theme, which makes them feel more excited and energetic. According to them, a store with a bright theme normally maintains more cleanliness as everything is visible. Few participants highlighted their preference for a bold colorful theme of a fashion store featuring vibrant colors and eye-catching graphics. These outlets have more visually stimulating designs and give a feeling of excitement and pleasure all together. These respondents recalled several pure impulse purchase decisions because of such colorful themes, making them feel more comfortable with new ideas and acting out of routine behavior. Some respondents also showed preference for a luxury theme. Such stores normally depict sophisticated and elegant designs, providing them a premium shopping experience. According to these respondents, a luxury environment makes them feel good about themselves and encourages them to overspend on items, which they normally may not do. This portrays a situation of planned impulse purchase where the customer had plans to purchase but will end up spending or buying more based on spontaneous need emerged due to the store environment.

The above insight clearly highlights the importance of store theme towards purchase decision of the customer of fashion outlets. As said by a respondent:

“Theme of the stores attracts me very much. I like Khaadi’s theme. It really creates positive customer behavior. If the theme or environment is boring, then I won’t give attention to the store and their products.”

Lighting:

Lighting plays an important role to boost the store environment and aids in attracting customers' attention to items, sales promotions, and enhance overall shopping experience. Lighting and music were collectively found to have a significant impact on customers' in-store feelings. Customers, who visit a retail store, perceive the store lighting, music, and salespeople as part of a coherent world, which they relate to the store environment (Pallikkara, Pinto, Hawaldar, & Pinto, 2020). Good lighting strategies can help in creating the ideal atmosphere in a store. The findings revealed that lighting in a store can support customers' buying decisions, provide a pleasurable feeling, and may eventually produce an urge to buy impulsively. It captures customers' attention to key sales points, creates an exciting ambiance that evokes pleasant feelings, and makes important places more visible.

Most of the individuals interviewed stated that the visibility of the product gets clearer in warm toned lights and the articles become more appealing. Warm-toned lighting also had a soothing impact on the mind of buyers and generated feelings of comfort and put them at more ease. As said by a customer:

“Lighting positively affects my mood by making products more visible. If the lighting inside the store is attractive, it compels me to go inside the store. My preference is warm tone lights as it makes the store look more appealing and gives a cozy feeling.”

According to some customers, warm-tone lights made them stay longer at the store, increasing the probability of unplanned purchase. As the customers spend more time in-store, they are more easily reminded of some products they require (reminder impulse buying), or purchase products, other than they planned earlier, to fulfill a need (planned impulse purchase).

Some participants claimed that white-toned lights are a better option for fashion store outlets in Pakistan as they make things look brighter and capture attention. On hot days, white tone gives you an impression of cold climate, which makes you feel more energetic. This type of lighting also makes it easier to identify and differentiate colors of items in-store. According to these respondents, their mood is lifted when the store looks more vivid and colorful as result of white toned lighting.

Temperature of the Store:

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The temperature of a retail outlet is one of the atmospheric elements that was highlighted to have a significant impact on respondents' impulse buying intention. Most survey participants claimed that severe temperatures, whether very cold or very hot, put them off. They spend less time in these stores as a result of their discomfort, which could also potentially spread negative word-of-mouth. Also, if the store is overcrowded or suffocating, they will leave as soon as possible and will not want to stay in such an environment, no matter how good the products are. During the summer, they will always prefer fashion retail outlets, having a cool environment. When it's hot outside, and customers aren't used to it, they feel compelled to enter the store to cool off. Such an environment makes them feel comfortable and relaxed and consequently stay longer. This results in viewing more articles and being reminded of a need not actively anticipated before (reminder impulse purchase) or buying more items related to their planned purchase (planned impulse purchase). As highlighted by a respondent:

“Temperature is important, it makes me stay longer and makes me feel relaxed and comfortable, especially during summers. I end up spending more time and money shopping around”.

Sales and discounts:

Among all other elements that influence impulse purchase intentions, sales and discounts were identified to have a significant and direct influence on respondents' impulse buying behavior. Most respondents stated that when they are exposed to any fashion store setting, they are more likely to make an impulse purchase if the sellers have chosen discounts or sales promotions. Discounted prices cause them to be more inclined to pay for additional products. Few participants agreed that buying would be more interesting if the margin between regular and discounted prices was more. Promotional plans, such as 'buy1 get1 free', and discounted offers create consumer interest, as unplanned purchases are totally viewed as an advantage, and result in a good post-purchase reaction. Most such buyers had an optimistic approach towards sales and discounts, where any discount on items was seen as an amount saved instead of reduced expenditure. This consequently made them feel more excited and pleased. Such discounts normally encouraged them to purchase more of what they had planned earlier, or items related to it. As said by few of the participants:

*“Even if it is something you don't intend to buy but when you see those signs of fifty percent off, it attracts me at once and I plan to get more for later use and save money.”
Discounts really influence. I feel that this is the best thing and time to buy even if it's not needed currently. I feel pleased.”*

Cleanliness:

Cleanliness is the appearance of a store that enhances the ambiance and influences how people feel about it. According to the respondents, they form good or negative opinions about an outlet based on its cleanliness. They highlighted that the cleanliness of a store, including clean floors and shelves, leaves a good impression on them and encourages them to spend more time, as they feel more relaxed, satisfied, and pleased in a clean store environment. They remain in retail stores longer and make more purchases because of the shops' cleanliness, as it creates an image of elegance in their mind. Some respondents suggested that they felt more pushed and obliged to purchase in an environment which looks clean. It could be more of the social pressure that is also there when you come across well prepared and dressed salesperson to convince you to buy. Such an outlook perhaps puts social pressure on you to purchase, even if it was not intended to, just as in pure impulse purchase. According to some respondents, they usually leave the store if the environment is dirty, regardless of sales and discounts available. This shows that store environment elements are not mutually exclusive. An ideal state of one stimulus may be shadowed by poor execution of some other critical stimulus of store environment. Managers must therefore consider the cleanliness of the surroundings to encourage and motivate customers to come back. As claimed by a participant:

“Cleanliness also matters. The store must be properly organized... I feel good, relaxed, and calm in a clean store, which triggers me towards impulse purchase.”

Scents:

The presence or absence of fragrance in stores was also found to have an influence on customer impulse purchase intentions. The proper use of scents enhances product evaluations that are unknown or disliked. Scents have a huge impact on how a customer assesses a product. It was also revealed that when there is a nice and pleasant aroma in the environment, customers spend longer time shopping. To make the theme appealing, the scent selection must be done in accordance with the targeted demographic, so that they spend more time and money at a fashion retail store. Some types of aromas, which were found to be pleasing, included citrus, fruity, floral/musky, or strong. However, these scents should not be too unpleasant or strong to cause a headache. Some participants indicated that they love being in relaxing floral musky aromas, whereas some mentioned soft notes and citric. While most of the participants strongly highlighted the critical role of scents towards impulse purchase, few also suggested its ineffectiveness or negative role, if not managed properly. As a result, it can be stated that fragrances have both enjoyable and repulsive effects on customers, emphasizing the importance of shops deliberately incorporating scents into their environment to attract customers based on their preferences. According to the interviews, it is a useful option to add and maintain a pleasant, scented environment to stimulate customers towards impulse purchase. As said by a respondent:

“Scent affects me as it adds positively to the overall fashion store atmosphere. I feel calm and relaxed if the scents are soft tone and enjoy that vibe. Even if the budget is not friendly, I still enjoy the vibe.”

CONCLUSION

This research has explored deeply into the complex chemistry of store environment factors and their consequential effects on impulse buying behaviors in fashion retail outlets. Central to these findings is the revelation of the pivotal role of comfort. Unlike many earlier studies, which didn't prominently underscore this aspect, our investigation emphasizes comfort as a foundation in influencing impulse purchases. Such an insight unravels an essential facet in the realm of the circumflex model of affect (Russell, 1980) within the SOR framework, reinforcing the need for its broader acknowledgment and implementation.

Fashion retail, as an industry, is both dynamic and fleeting. As trends oscillate and consumer preferences shift, understanding the subtle nuances of customer requirements becomes paramount. This research underlines the significance of crafting an environment that not only captivates the immediate senses but also resonates with the deeper emotional and psychological inclinations of the customers. While elements like window displays, store layout, and salesmen behavior remain instrumental, it is the ambiance, encompassing music, lighting, scents, and overall theme, that elevates the shopping experience from mere transactional to transformational.

Furthermore, the long-term implications of cultivating such an environment are manifold. Beyond the immediate impulse purchases, an inviting store ambiance fosters customer loyalty, ensures repeated visits, and acts as a catalyst for organic word-of-mouth promotions. Each positive in-store experience not only translates into immediate sales but also seeds the potential for future sales, making the investment in a holistic store environment both a strategic and lucrative decision.

In summation, while the fashion retail landscape continues to evolve, the essence of creating an immersive, comfortable, and responsive store environment remains evergreen. Retailers, whether nascent or established, must continually recalibrate their store environments to mirror the ever-changing tastes of their clientele, ensuring that their brand not only remains relevant but also cherished. In the competitive realm of fashion retail, the ambiance is not just an accessory but an imperative for sustained success.

The environment of the retail store should perform on a deeper level, allowing your products to take the spotlight without compromising the customer's experience. At the same time,

improper ambiance can drive customers away. Retailers should always try to establish an in-store environment that reflects their brand and meets the requirements of client it serves.

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