Not Without you: Role of Shopping Pal and Store Atmospherics in Impulse Buying

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Retailers acknowledge the importance of the retail store environment as a tool for differentiation and valuable for positioning the retail store. It makes the buyer's decision to visit the store easier. Further, a pleasing retail environment improves the customer's purchasing experience and satisfaction. This paper aims to; investigate the influence of store atmospherics and marketing stimuli on impulse buying behavior among females. Shopping pal provides a boundary condition between the influence of store environment, emotional response, and impulse buying.

Methodology: This is a quantitative study and data was collected using surveys. The investigation was conducted using Amos and SPSS version 21, and the results were within an acceptable range.

Findings: The findings of the study suggest that an impressive store environment with marketing stimuli such as price discount leads to positive emotions and impulse purchase behavior. Further, a shopping pal provides boundary conditions between the influence.

Implications: Retailers must focus on creating a retail experience that is clean, relaxing pleasant, and has an excellent interior design, and they must encourage to group shopping. They might concentrate on promotional activities that encourage group shopping, such as group purchasing coupons and family prizes.

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Introduction

Impulse buying has been recognized as a significant contributor in enhancing sales volume in the retail setting (Husnain, Rehman, Syed, & Akhtar, 2019). The relationship between a company and a firm can be enhanced using interactive experiences (Molinillo, Navarro-Garcia, Anaya-Sanchez, & Japutra, 2020). More than 67% of large online companies are opening their online store to facilitate shopping (Chapman, 2017). Amazon has recently expanded to physical store retailing (Schaverien, 2018). This statistic shows...
that people still prefer to purchase offline. Therefore, it is important to understand the in-store experience (Roschk & Hosseinpour, 2020).

There is increasing competition in the retail market. Therefore, retailers are making continuous efforts to make their offerings unique (Lee & Kim, 2019). They are persistently looking for ways to provide a total shopping experience with unique offerings. Differentiation is the way that can provide a customized shopping atmosphere that meets the needs of the purchaser (Helme Falk & Hultén, 2017; Lee & Kim, 2019). Further, they also need to provide store atmospherics that is enjoyable and stimulating (Chang, Yan, & Eckman, 2014). So, differentiation is important for retailers to be competitive.

This paper aims to study the S-O-R model in the physical store environment with the moderating impact of situational factor shopping pal. Mehrabian and Russell (1974) discussed conditions of emotions that mediate approach and avoidance behavior in the retail store environment. These are known as PAD; pleasure (displeasure), arousal (non-arousal) D, and dominance (submissiveness) (Tai & Fung, 1997). Approach behavior is associated with the intent to stay, examine, and connect with others in the environment. Avoidance behavior is related to avoiding and ignoring communication efforts made by others in the environment (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Ramlee & Said, 2014).

Atmospherics have both tangible and intangible features. Further, atmospherics can be classified into three features; ambiance, functionality, and signs (Baker, Grewal, & Parasuraman, 1994). The ambiance is the non-physical feature of the atmospherics and influences the senses of the purchaser such as light, aroma, background music. Functionality and spatial layout are the second features of atmospherics which are linked with the arrangement of furniture, outlet, and machinery setup. This feature aims to facilitate customers. Artifacts, symbols, and signs are the third attribute that facilitates providing customers with implicit and explicit information (Ramlee & Said, 2014). These features influence shopping behavior (Vilnai-Yavetz, Gilboa, & Mitchell, 2021).

In a consumption environment, marketing stimuli increase the chances that people buy impulsively (Chen & Yao, 2018). The greater discount (Park, Sullivan, & Noh, 2015) unexpected promotions (Nusair, Yoon, Naipaul, & Parsa, 2010) store environment (Iyer, Blut, Xiao, & Grewal, 2020), scarcity message (Aggarwal, Jun, & Huh, 2011; Song, Choi, & Moon, 2021) causes to purchase impulsively. So, this study adopts the perspective that store environment and marketing stimuli such as discounts and scarcity influence purchasing impulsively.

The development of the self-standing classification malls, made them focus on soft goods such as clothing (Michon, Yu, Smith, & Chebat, 2008). So, the product chosen for this study is apparel. Since, there are limited studies available on impulse purchasing in the context of clothing (Iyer, Blut, Xiao, & Grewal, 2020). Females tend to purchase impulsively more than men. There are three reasons for this impulse purchasing. First, women have greater hedonic use than men (Tifferet & Herstein, 2012). Second, women are more likely than men to suffer from depression. So, to improve their mental state females have a greater propensity to purchase impulsively (Tifferet & Herstein, 2012; Wade, Cairney, & Pevalin, 2002). So, females tend to shop more as compared to men.

Literature asserts that customers in individualistic countries tend to ignore the consequences of impulse purchases and buy more impulsively when they are alone. Moreover, collectivist culture studies indicated that collectivism has a strong impact on impulse purchase since buyers’ thinking and willingness to purchase are influenced by others (Cakanlar & Nguyen, 2019). The motivation behind this study is Pakistan’s culture is collective (Hofstede, 1980); in which social connections among people are strong, more dependent on each other, and prefer groups (Ali & Hasnu, 2013). The focus on existing literature was on impulse buying at an individual level and ignored the aspect of group shopping such as coworkers and family members (Borges, Chebat, & Babin, 2010). So, based on the discussion above this study aims
to investigate impulse purchasing behavior with a shopping pal. A shopping pal is a friend or family member who joins the buyer during shopping. (Hart & Dale, 2014).

**Purpose of the study**
- This study aims at measuring the influence of store atmospheric features and marketing stimuli of apparel stores and consumers’ emotional response on impulse buying behavior.
- Second, it aims to study the mediating role of emotional response between store atmospheric features and impulse buying behavior.
- The third aim of the current paper is to find the moderating role of situational variables which is shopping pal between emotional response and impulse buying behavior.

**Literature Review**
The literature is reviewed in this section on past studies of store environment which is categorized into an ambient feature, design feature, and social feature focusing only on salespersons. Then it reviews the literature on positive emotional response. Further, it reviews the literature on the moderator situational factor which is shopping pal. Then it inquires the literature on the dependent variable which is impulse purchasing.

**Impulse Buying**
A process of purchasing goods spontaneously can be referred to as an impulse purchase. It is unplanned purchases of customers (Ahmad & Vays, 2011; Pattipeilohy, 2013). The decision for impulse purchasing is taken in very little time and the decision is activated by exposure to the product (Azim, 2013).

Internal stimuli and external stimuli influence impulse purchase significantly (Sen & Nayak, 2021). An Individual’s emotional feelings and desire can be termed as internal features of an impulse buy such as an educational experience. The shopping experience is linked with external factors of impulse purchase (Ju & Ahn, 2016; Shahpasandi, Zarei, & Nikabadi, 2020).

Impulse buying has received significant attention in consumer research (Iyer, Blut, Xiao, & Grewal, 2020). Impulse buying is extensively studied in business as well as academia. Moreover, it is studied in marketing in the identification of factors influencing impulse buying including consumer characteristics, store features, product features, and situational factors (Chan, Cheung, & Lee, 2017; Muruganantham & Bhakat, 2013). This paper aims to find the influence of store atmospherics and marketing stimuli on impulse purchase behavior and emotional response to strengthen this relation.

**Store Environment**
It is further divided into ambient features, design features, and social features.

**Ambient Features**
The invisible experience of the store environment can be termed as ambient features of the store. It comprises lighting, aroma, background music, and temperature of the facility (Kumar & Kim, 2014; Milliman, 1982). These ambient features make the environment please to shop and can be served as a competitive tool to attain competitive advantage (Ju & Ahn, 2016). Background music is an ideal environmental characteristic since it is less costly to execute. Further, it is a controllable feature that can be customized easily (Ju & Ahn, 2016; Kim & Lennon, 2012). Music makes purchasers stay more and spend money. This layout of money may be without plans and may result in impulse purchasing (Parsad, Prashar, & Tata, 2017). Lighting systems in the store of organized properly cause positive changes in the mood which in turn leads to the purchase decision. It will help the purchasers to involve (Mohan, Sivakumaran, & Sharma, 2013; Smith, 1989). A pleasant ambient scent in the retail setting changes the mood of the purchase (Roschk & Hosseinpour, 2020). So, well-planned music, light, temperature, and fragrance have a notable influence on the mood which leads to buying behavior.
Design Features
The visible attributes of store atmospherics can be termed as design elements (Singh, 2016). Store design facilitates the development of perception about the store environment (Floor, 2006). Purchasers' cognitive evaluations of the store's perceived quality, price, and efficiency can be influenced by certain design aspects such as layout, color, and signage (Mohan, Sivakumaran, & Sharma, 2013). The design feature is the topmost feature in environmental attributes (Chen & Hsieh, 2011). Thus store design with proper layout, explicit and implicit signals, and attractive feature areas have a significant impact on customers’ emotions.

Social Features
The quantity, types, and behavior of customers and selling persons inside the retail store are known as social features. In simple words, it is the number of people in the store (Mohan, Sivakumaran, & Sharma, 2013). For this study, other customers inside the store were eliminated and the salesperson was included. Past literature affirms that other customers influence the perception of crowdedness over positive emotion (Koo & Kim, 2013). Further, the literature confirmed the positive influence of the interaction between retailers and purchasers (Chang, Yan, & Eckman, 2014).

It has been concluded that salespersons with proper uniforms, more in numbers, and greeting the customers have a positive influence on generating positive emotions (Chang, Eckman, & Yan, 2011). Sales staff with the unprofessional dress and disorganized store environment leads to service failure and dissatisfaction (Sultan, Jan, Basit, & Rafiq, 2018). It has been recognized that the social interaction of the salespersons and customers is always critical and most important topic of discussion about store ambiance (Silvera, Lavack, & Kropp, 2008). So, helpful salespersons enhance positive emotions. Based on the above discussion we can form the following hypothesis.

H1: There is a positive and significant influence of store environment on impulse buying behavior

Marketing Stimuli
Marketers design external stimuli in a way to influence senses such as store environment and price discounts (Iyer, Blut, Xiao, & Grewal, 2020). Unexpected promotion and scarcity messages influence purchasing impulsively (Chen & Yao, 2018). Retailers often limit the product supply or promotion time to create a sense of urgency to purchase on discount and increase impulse purchases (Lee, Jeon, Li, & Park, 2015). Lowering the price is a promotional strategy to attract customers. Discount influences impulse buying (Kim & Johnson, 2016). When the store environment is impressive, the consumer has a positive normative response towards the store and its promotional campaign (Parker & Lehmann, 2011).

H2: There is a positive influence of perceptions of female consumers about the marketing stimuli and impulse buying to apparel stores.

Consumer's Emotional Response
A condition of mental preparedness, which emerges from cognitive assessment or thinking or events can be termed as emotions. They are typically obtained by individuals, events, and objects. There are two dimensions of emotions which are positive and negative (Isen, 1984). Human involves directly with the environment with some behavior. This behavior depends on how the environment stimulates them (Ramlee & Said, 2014).

(Kotler, 1973) States that, the store environment is a vital component for making the final purchase decision. The store environment arouses the interest of the consumers’ emotions which affect their behavior. Kotler presented the terminology atmospherics and gave the implication that retailers can take advantage of atmospherics to create consumers’ positive emotions which can increase the chance of buying. The atmosphere is the quality of types of equipment and conditions around a person. It is also perceived using the sensations, therefore it is described with the help of senses. Seen features of the atmosphere include brightness, color, size, and shape. Audial features of the atmosphere include volume and pitch. Sense of smell includes scent and freshness. The sense of touch includes temperature, softness,
and smoothness. Finally, a sense of taste is excluded here since it does not apply to the atmosphere directly (Kotler, 1973).

Consumers’ emotional condition influences impulse purchase behavior (Jung Chang, Yan, & Eckman, 2014). Found the impact of atmospheric features including store environment, promotional attributes, and display of window on impulse buying behavior with partial mediation effect of consumer emotional response (Sultan, Jan, Basit, & Rafiq, 2018). Research confirmed that a pleasant store environment leads to pleasant customers’ mood and this mood contribute to a tendency to seek variety that causes impulse buying behavior (Azim, 2013).

**H3:** Emotional response provides mediation influence between the relation store environment, marketing stimuli, and impulse buying

**Shopping Pal**
People who go along with the purchaser for shopping and facilitate them in their purchase decision are known as shopping pal. The literature has used different terms for the shopping pal such as purchase pal, co-shopper, and shopping companion (Mangleburg, Doney, & Bristol, 2004; Mora & González, 2016).

People prefer to socialize to reduce solitude and go shopping with friends. Further, if the purchaser has someone to talk to during the wait will affect the wait as short. Similarly, when two females buy together, they talk with each other, give suggestions(Chebat, Haj-Salem, & Oliveira, 2014; Liyanage & Wijesundara, 2020). A substantial amount of literature confirmed shopping companion influences the decision-making about a product (Chebat, Haj-Salem, & Oliveira, 2014; Mangleburg, Doney, & Bristol, 2004; Sommer, Wynes, & Brinkley, 1992).

Shopping pal enhances the experience, boost their confidence and make the shopping trip entertaining (Kim, Choi, Baron, & Russell-Bennett, 2016; Yi & Gong, 2013). Individuals from collectivist countries prefer to shop in groups and tend to buy impulsively when they are with someone important (Lee & Kacen, 2008). Moreover, Su and Lu (2018) found the positive impact of the reference group, extraversion, and social characteristics on impulse buying behavior. Therefore, shopping with someone helps in decision-making, minimizes waiting time, and leads towards impulse purchasing.

**H4:** There is moderating influence of shopping pal between female purchaser’s store environment, marketing stimuli, and impulse buying behavior.

Based upon the literature review, the theoretical framework can be formed presented in figure 1.

![Fig 1: Theoretical Framework](image)

**Research Methodology**
The study was conducted to test the existing theory; therefore, a quantitative method was proposed. To collect data and a structured survey was developed using pre-existing scale items as discussed in the following section. The target audience of the present study was female shoppers. Since literature suggests
that women tend to buy more impulsively (Tifferet & Herstein, 2012). The sample size of the study was 350, according to Osborne and Costello (2004), 300 is a reasonable sample size. As, it was not possible to have a sampling frame of the female shoppers; therefore, a non-probability technique was the only choice. The study used convenience sampling, which is less expensive and time-saving (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Data sets were collected through self-administered surveys using the mall intercept technique, which was the most suitable technique for the study at hand (Malhotra, Hall, Shaw, & Oppenheim, 2006). Further, 340 surveys were completed and returned. Then, in the data cleaning process, we removed 15 and there was a total of 325 questionnaires. Data analysis was performed using Amos and SPSS softwares.

Data Analysis
Table 1 describes the values of Cronbach’s Alpha and suggests that the constructs are reliable, since the values exceed 0.7, and are within the satisfactory range (Hair Jr, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010).

| Variables                  | Cronbach's Alpha | NO of Items |
|----------------------------|------------------|-------------|
| Store Environment          | 0.873            | 7           |
| Emotional Response         | 0.836            | 7           |
| Marketing Stimuli          | 0.863            | 7           |
| Impulse Buying Behavior    | 0.862            | 3           |
| Shopping Pal               | 0.805            | 3           |

After computing, the reliability of the constructs' convergent and discriminant validity was assessed. Convergent validity can be computed using average variance extracted and all values are above 0.5 and within the acceptable range (Sekaran, 2006). Then, Discriminant validity was assessed by taking the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) and examining that it should be larger than the correlation coefficient. Further, it can be obtained using the outcomes of the correlation among the constructs, which should be less than one (Malhotra & Dash, 2016). Table 3 presents the validity of the instrument and the results are satisfactory.

| CR            | AVE  | MSV  | Store Environment | Marketing Stimuli | Impulse Buying |
|---------------|------|------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Store Environment | 0.873| 0.496| 0.524             | 0.705             |                |
| Market stimuli       | 0.862| 0.474| 0.666             | 0.724***          | 0.689          |
| Impulse Buying      | 0.864| 0.68  | 0.666             | 0.719***          | 0.816***       | 0.825          |

Then model fitness was measured. Table 3 describes the values of the results obtained. The values of CFA depict good model fitness. The model fitness values are suggested in the literature (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

| Measure | Estimate | Threshold | Interpretation |
|---------|----------|-----------|----------------|
| CMIN    | 309.93   | --        | --             |
| DF      | 116      | --        | --             |
| CMIN/D  | 2.672    | Between 1 | Excellent      |
| F       |          | and 3     |                |
| CFI     | 0.93     | >0.95     | Acceptable     |
| SRMR    | 0.048    | <0.08     | Excellent      |
| RMSEA   | 0.072    | <0.06     | Acceptable     |
| PClose  | 0.02     | >0.05     | Acceptable     |

Structural Equation Model
The hypothesis of the study was tested using structural equation modelling through Amos. Table 4 presents the results. The results suggest that store environment ($\beta=0.27$, p=0.00), marketing stimuli ($\beta=0.62$, p=0.00) has a positive and significant influence on impulse buying.
Table 4: Hypothesis testing

| Hypothesis | Structural Path   | β    | p   |
|------------|-------------------|------|-----|
| H1         | IBB \(\leftarrow\) SE | 0.27 | 0.00|
| H2         | IBB \(\leftarrow\) MKT  | 0.62 | 0.00|

Figure 2

Mediation Analysis
Mediation analysis was performed using the Hayes process. The results are presented in the table. The outcome shows that emotional response provides mediation between the relation store environment, marketing stimuli, and impulse buying behavior. Table 5 presents the outcomes of the study.

Table 5: Mediation influence of Emotional response between store environment, marketing stimuli with impulse buying behavior

| Relation                                | β  | p   | LLCI | ULCI |
|-----------------------------------------|----|-----|------|------|
| Direct Effect                           |    |     |      |      |
| Store environment x Impulse Buying      | 0.15| 0.07| 0.322| 0.015|
| Marketing Stimuli x Impulse Buying      | 0.178| 0.03| 0.008| 0.34 |
| Indirect Effect                         |    |     |      |      |
| Store environment x Emotional Response x Impulse Buying | 0.93| 0.00| 0.71 | 1.13 |
| Marketing Stimuli x Emotional Response x Impulse Buying | 0.68| 0.00| 0.49 | 0.899|

Moderation
Moderation analysis was performed through Hayes (2012) using model 1. It's a simple approach for calculating mediation and moderation. Academics from all around the world admire this method. It uses bootstrapping and upper and lower levels to investigate the significance of the indirect effect (Haq & Abbasi, 2016; Hayes, 2013). According to the results provides the boundary condition between the store environment and marketing stimuli and impulse buying behavior. Table 6 presents the outcomes of the moderation effect.

Table 6: Moderation effect of shopping pal between store environment, marketing stimuli, and impulse buying behavior

| Relation                                | β  | p   | LLCI | ULCI |
|-----------------------------------------|----|-----|------|------|
Outcome Impulse Buying

| Store environment x Shopping Pal | 0.65 | 0.04 | -0.11 | -0.20 |
| Marketing Stimuli x Shopping Pal | 0.77 | 0.03 | -0.25 | -0.34 |

**Discussion**

Large e-commerce companies are opening their physical stores such as Amazon. We can’t deny the importance of physical retailing even in this digital age. There are three objectives of the study. First, it studies the influence of atmospheric features of apparel stores and marketing stimuli on impulse buying behavior. Second, it aims to study the mediating role of emotional response. Third, it aims to study moderating impact situational variables with positive emotional responses in influencing impulse purchase behavior. Retailers recognize the importance of store atmospherics as a tool of differentiation and customer satisfaction (Vieira, 2013). They create a positive emotional response which in turn influences impulse buying behavior. Further, this study concluded that there is a positive and significant impact of shopping pal with an impulse buy. Females like to shop with friends instead of going alone. So, it is proved that in Pakistan a country with collective culture, females tend to shop with someone not alone.

The outcomes of the study are matched with past studies such as; Chang, Eckman and Yan (2011) conducted a study to find the influence of store environment, emotional response, and impulse buying behavior with moderating influence of hedonic motivation and found the positive results. Next, Chang, Yan and Eckman (2014) found a positive influence of store environment, emotional response, and impulse buying behavior with moderating influence of situational characteristics. Further, positive emotional response leads to impulse purchase behavior which was our second hypothesis. These results are confirmed by Joo Park, Young Kim and Cardona Forney (2006) and (Rook & Gardner, 1993).

**Theoretical Contribution**

The present study facilitated the conceptualization of a theoretical framework of impulse purchasing behavior for apparel products. It incorporated three sets of variables recognized as a significant factor in consumer behavior. This study advances the literature by understanding female purchasers’ impulse buying behavior of clothing by applying the SOR model and incorporating important features of environment and moderation.

Second, in the past, a large body of research has been conducted on this model which is based on stimulus-response theory, but none have measured situational factors in terms of shopping pal. The findings of the study conclude that ambient and design features of retail store atmospherics have more influence.

**Practical Implication**

Managers are interested in consumers' impulse buying for a long; because impulse purchase influences annual sales (Iyer, Blut, Xiao, & Grewal, 2020). Therefore, it is important to know for the managers which factor influences impulse buying. This study is beneficial to clothes retailers. They must work on making the retail store environment a clean, peaceful place to shop and well designed if they want to stimulate impulse purchases. They could also come up with some events that inspire them to go shopping with their pals. They may, for example, design activities for the best family or best buddy award. They can create a promotional message that urges people to shop with them. They could devise special offers, such as discounts for group purchases.

**Limitations of the Study and Future Recommendations**

Despite academic, managerial, and contextual contributions this study is not free from limitations. The data collection is cross-sectional, the behavior can be studied over some time to know their behavior. This study has focused only on females. Future studies may be conducted on males with the same framework. There are additional variables of store atmospherics such as merchandise cues that can be incorporated with the store environment in the future. Lastly, there is a need to classify shopping pal, as either best friends or co-workers.
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