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Factors influencing impulse buying in retailing: An exploratory study

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Abstract---This article is an exploratory study. The objective is to get theoretical understanding about impulse buying, gain insight into factors influencing impulse buying in retailing context in reference to fashion retailing & understand the strategies carved by retailers to increase impulse buying. The methodology used was review of relevant literatures. It was found that pleasurable shopping experience, quality merchandise, price, in store promotions, availability of credit card/debit card, brand, celebrity influence, social status are most relevant factors in stimulating impulse purchase in Indian fashion retailing context.

Keywords---Impulse buying, fashion retailing, strategy, shopping experience.

Introduction

Impulse buying refers to acquiring products that are not part of the shopping list of customers. The decision to obtain the product is made spontaneously in the store itself, because the customer feels a bond towards the product or the offer. Impulse purchases have higher occurrence in contemporary formats as these are larger in size and customer is free to go around and surf the merchandise as compared to over-the-counter conventional formats. For the retailer, the first step in motivating impulse purchase involves making the customer conscious of the product, customer should see the product and hence best is charged to brands for more prominent locations in stores. Since the product is not part of the customers shopping list, the product should remind the customer of a need or create an excitement or urge to buy. Sometimes the need factor is communicated by placing the product adjacent to complementary categories which may be on customer's shopping list. In some cases retailers build a sense of necessity or superiority to coerce the purchase e.g. limited offers.

Marketing divisions exist exclusively to develop ways to support impulse purchases. They make point-of-sale advertising plans that are planned to increase

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the likelihood of unplanned purchases. Many of these campaigns can be experienced within the checkout lines at various stores, indicative sales made by advertisers or food sellers, or pop-up advertisements on websites.

The philosophy following the marketing for unplanned buys is centred on a concept called immediate satisfaction. This feeling is considered a more illogical line of thinking than a logical one. During an impulse purchase, emotions may be relied upon more deeply, if not totally, than the buyer's practical needs and budget. There are many ways to classify factors influencing impulse buying behaviour in retailing context. One of the classifications consists of product related factors, situational factors, shopping environment related factors & person related factors.

Some of the factors which are important under product related are short product life cycle, low price, varieties offered and quality. Under situational factors the important ones are short term promotions, availability of cash, debit card/credit card facility. Surveys shows that large percentage of consumers do not look at ads before shopping, and make fully unplanned purchases. Candy, cosmetics, snack foods, magazines and other items are sold as impulse goods. The important factors under shopping environment related factors are in-store browsing, special display, shelf signs, tempting graphics, etc. The chief executive of P&G, the vast consumer products manufacturer, said: "More and more of our communication is moved to store. And the reason it's moving to store is that more and more of our consumers are saying that they're making their purchase decisions in the store".

Under person related the factors like love towards shopping, personality of an individual, attitude, perception, etc. are also going to persuade impulse buying. According to recent research from Ogilvy action, a little more than 39 percent of US shoppers actually wait when they're in the store to decide what brand to purchase. About 10 percent change their decisions about brands in the store, twenty nine per cent buy from categories they didn't mean to buy from (Barry Berman, J. R. Evans and Mini mathur; 'Retail Management-A Strategic Approach', Eleventh Edition-Pearson). The consumer often buy impulsively because of unplanned and strong urge to buy, a kind of emotional and unreasonable purchase often for reasons like fun, fantasy and social and economic pleasure.

Fashion apparel retail designers lay a significant impact on the success or failure of fashion apparel and accessories. It has been observed that the demographic (e.g. gender and generational group) and psychographic (e.g. fashion fans, attitudes and impulse buying) drivers influence occurrence and levels of expenditure on buying fashion apparel. The consumer attitudes towards fashion has higher bearing on female buying tendency than male that is more often and significantly different from males on yearly expenditure, fashion fan ship, attitudes and impulsive buying. Departmental stores and Lifestyle Centres develop their apparel store brands to produce store loyalty among consumers. The store brands are displayed in these stores next to the fashionable apparel brands. The varying dynamics of the fashion industry have affected retailers to aim at low cost marketing strategies and flexibility in design, and improving speed of diffusion in market to gain competitive benefit.

Objectives

This study is aimed at following objectives:

- To get theoretical understanding about impulse buying.
- To explore the factors affecting impulse buying in retailing context in specific to fashion retailing.
- To understand the strategies carved by retailers to increase impulse buying.

Methodology

The methodology used for this study is to review relevant literatures. There are enough literatures available to study Impulse Buying behaviour in retailing context, wherein an attempt has been made to get insight about some of the aspects with regard to fashion retailing in Indian scenario. Based on that, it was emphasised to devise purported strategies.

Literature review

Impulse buying occurs when a buyer experiences an unexpected, often influential and persistent urge to buy something instantly (Rook, 1987). Impulse buying may be consequential to customer perceived environmental cognitions or experienced internal states or traits, which can suggest positive reactions from shoppers that lead to yield gains (Andrew J Newman & Patel, 2004).

Early studies focus on its definitional distinguishableness from non-impulse buying, or developing and validating scales to measure the impulse buying propensity (e.g., Francis Piron, 1991). Later research focuses on providing a theoretical outline for examining impulse buying (Adelaar, Chang, Lancendorfer, Lee, & Morimoto, 2003; Beatty & Ferrell, 1998; Zhou & Wong, 2003). Prior research reports that merchandise related cues are crucial in determining customer's satisfaction (Raajpoot, 2002) as well as emotional states (Jang & Namkung, 2009) in the service context.

Researchers in environmental psychology know the importance of buyers affective reactions in the retail and services area and assert that the emotional responses lead to a series of consumer behaviours such as spending levels (Chebat & Michon, 2003) and loyalty (Caro & Garcia, 2007). When consumers experience positive emotions, they are more likely to take up approach behaviour (Yalch & Spangenberg, 2000).

Cha (2001); Han et al., (1991); Ko (1993) in their studies reported that impulse buying behaviour concerning fashion products are related with patterns like faithful, repeated emotions as well as fashion-oriented impulse buying behaviours. These facts were also quoted by Park et al. (2006). The definition of fashion association mostly relates to apparel associated with fashionable clothes. The findings of Han et al. (1991) quoted in reply to fashion involvement of consumers, that it might develop fashion-oriented impulse buying behaviours among those who routinely wear fashion outfits. Fairhurst et al. (1989) and Seo et al. (2001) found a direct relationship among fashion involvement and apparels

purchase. Positive emotions are defined as affects and moods, which determine strength of consumer decision-making reported by Watson and Tellegen (1985). Park (2006) found a positive relationship of positive emotions, fashion attachment and fashion-oriented impulse buying by and large impulse buying behaviour of the consumers.

The factors are characterized as environmental and personal factors. Environmental factors are store atmosphere, shelf location, packaging, image, smell and colour etc of product. And as personal factors; the person's desire to show his own identity, frame of mind, to cope with the anxiety, to reward himself, to socialize or do shopping as pastime, lack of control etc (Youn and Faber, 2000). Addition to these, the material of store, point of sale stimuli (visual show, display, event etc), nice smells and music's in stores effects mood of consumers and urge consumers to make abrupt decisions linked to shopping (Beatty, and Ferrel, 1998). Examining personal factors shows us that mood of consumer is very important in consumer's tendency to buy impulsively. Consumer's aspiration of rewarding himself, enhancing self-belief or extreme socialization heads him to enthused buying more (Beatty and Ferrell, 1998). When Verplanken and Herebadi (2001) studied impulsive buying behaviour in the facet of characteristic, they identified that people making extreme unplanned purchasing have a poor self-sufficiency and awareness.

Fashion participation and positive emotion had affirmative effects on consumers' fashion-oriented impulse buying behaviour with fashion attachment having the greatest effect. Eun Joo Park, Eun Young Kim, Judith Cardona Forney, (2006) found that Hedonic consumption inclination was an important mediator in shaping fashion-oriented impulse buying. The purchase objective for fashion and designer apparel is encouraged among consumers in the social contexts.

According to Optimal Distinctiveness Theory, individuals try hard to maintain equilibrium between the need to be assimilated by the nobles and family, and the need for independence and delineation (Sorrentino et al, 2009).

Discussion

A careful analysis of the above literature reveals that the factors responsible for impulse buying can be grouped into two broad categories namely external factors and internal factors. The internal factor consists of various psychological aspects including personality of the consumer and his/her economic condition. On the other hand external factor comprises of various marketing efforts of the marketers and situational aspects. A detailed account of all these factors is given in bellow lines.

Internal factor

Internal factor responsible for impulse buying is that factor which is related to the internal construct of the consumer. It comprises of psychological aspects on one hand and the economic aspects of the consumer on the other.

Psychological factors:

The personality of an individual plays an important role in influencing impulse buying. Consumer innovators, who are open to new ideas and to be among the first to try new products, services, or practices tend to make more impulse buying in fashion/lifestyle products. In fashion merchandise the consumers who are low in dogmatism are more likely to go for impulse purchase. Variety or novelty seeking consumers are having exploratory purchase behaviour. They switch brands to experience new, different and possibly better alternatives, and thus are more likely to exhibit impulse buying behaviour.

An individual having positive attitude is usually optimistic about new offerings. Their attitudes are formed quickly and they are more likely to buy spontaneously. Some individuals are open to new offerings made by retailer and some are not. The continuous learners are one who finds something new in a product. Such consumers are more tempted to buy suddenly. An individual could be motivated by sales person's advice and hence could tend to discover something new in a product and buy spontaneously. The self motivated people may exhibit impulse buying behaviour.

Economic condition:

of the times, consumer is willing to buy, but he is not finding those things affordable which hinders impulse buying. On the other hand when the product is meeting the consumer's choice and is also affordable then consumer may make a spontaneous purchase decision. One more aspect is the availability of money in hand or credit card. This enhances the chances of impulse buying. In today's scenario most of the consumers don't want to carry money all the time, so if a retailer provides the facility to use credit card it will stimulate impulse purchase.

External factor

There could be factors which are external to the consumer and depend on marketing effort of retailer and situation that prevails at the time of purchase.

Product related factors:

Impulse buying is triggered by the very features of the product, newness of the product, or wide range of colours and sizes offered, style and fashionableness. Availability of variety of merchandise stimulates impulse buying. Availability of products with different features increases the chances of impulse buying. A proper merchandise assortment eases impulse buying. A proper merchandise assortment eases impulse buying.

Situation related factors:

Store related factors are the cleanliness, soothing music, lighting, fragrance etc. constitutes store environment. The good environment enhances the chances of impulse buying. A well-planned retail store layout allows a retailer to maximize the sales for each square foot of the allocated selling space within the store. Store

layouts generally show the size and location of each department, any permanent structures, fixture locations and customer traffic patterns.

The layout of a retail apparel store helps customers to see products easily and makes browsing the store more comfortable. It can also help you protect your inventory. A good retail layout can attract foot traffic and make it easy for first-time customers to find what they are looking for. Some of the key points which retailer follows while designing store layout are security, foot traffic, lighting, dressing room, etc.

The foot traffic outside your store will respond to elements like a price special, your stock of a famous designer or a particular outfit or piece that you have in stock. For example, there may be a leather jacket that is popular that many customers are looking for. Items placed near the front of the store get the attention of foot traffic. Spotlights on clothing displays and mannequin helps in drawing attention of consumers on the item of display. A customer may become more likely to make purchase after having paid thorough attention to such items. A comfortable dressing room area that has its own central seating area for customers or a large dressing room area not only makes it easier for clients to get their friends' opinions on the clothes they are considering, but also help in developing spot decision in favour.

Visual merchandising includes everything from store display windows to the width of aisles to the materials used for fixtures to merchandise presentation. The fashion stores use visual merchandising, to provide magnetic power to pull the customers. Visual merchandising along with an ambience increases the chances of impulse buying.

POP display provides shoppers with information, adds to store atmosphere and serves a substantial promotional role. Window, floor and counter displays that remind customers about products and stimulate impulse buying. A mannequin may be dressed in a matching combination of shoes, socks, pant, shirt and these items would be available in one department. Customer like the ease of purchase, envisioning an entire product bundle, enhances the chances of impulse buying. A theme setting display depicts a product offering in a thematic manner and sets a specific mood.

Situation related factors:

Promotional measures like contests, coupons, discount etc. Has greater role in enhancing the chances of impulse buying. Special events such as fashion shows, exhibits and holiday activities engage youth for a longer period of time in a store and increases the chances of impulse buying. Another situational factor the advice from sales person is important when customer is reluctant to buy. The advice about product features, utility, price etc Instils confidence in a customer and he/she may decide spontaneously.

The price of product is also an important factor in determining impulse buying. Usually when an attractive and affordable price of a low involvement product triggers impulse buying. The advice of shopper group regarding product if any,

and motivates him/her to buy suddenly. The information given by shopper group regarding product features, utility adds to the knowledge of consumer and increases the chances of spontaneous buying. All the factors discussed above are shown in the figure 1.

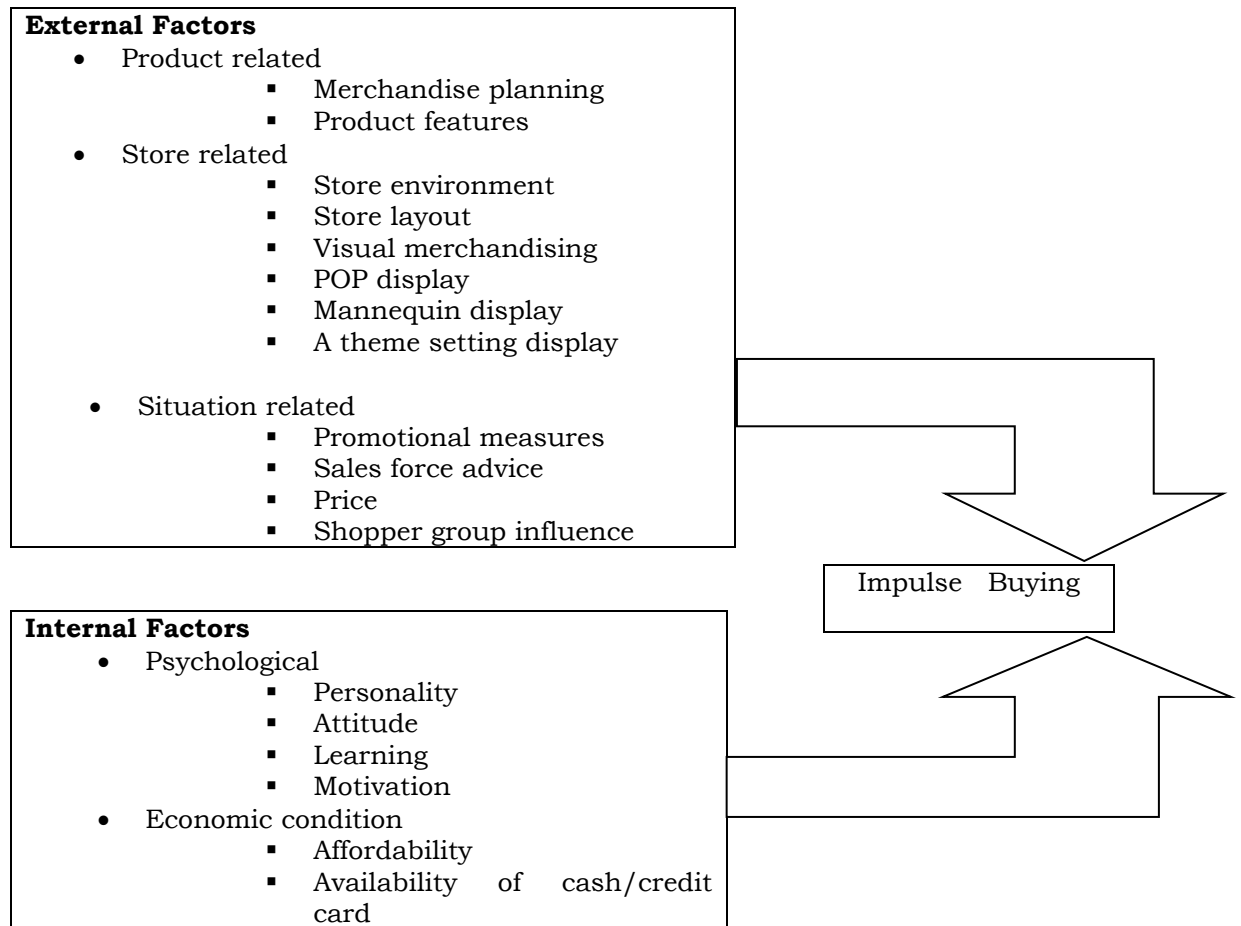


Figure 1
Source: Authors

A wide variety of strategic actions may be pursued by the retailers ranging from atmospheric cues such as lights and sounds; marketing mix cues such as POP display, promotional measure, prices etc. Retailers are using these strategies from time to time to increase the chances of on the spot purchase decisions. Fashion retailers use these strategies to enhance the chances of impulse buying, in the normal seasons as well as during various festivals such as Diwali, Ramzan (Eid), Christmas, Onam, Pongal etc.

Conclusion

Considering the amount of competition, store managers may decide to help consumers in making active shopping decisions by establishing price-value correlation to stress their purchase intentions. The retailer has to augment its store ambience so that customers can stay for a longer period in an outlet, where in the likelihood of impulse buying can be increased. The factors related to psychology, visual merchandising, price, affordability, store promotions, layout, facility to use credit card & sales person advice are important in encouraging impulse buying in Indian context. These factors can be studied further empirically to test the theoretical perspective discussed here.

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