

# **The impact of visual and auditory senses on impulse buying during festive seasons**

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Impulse buying is a complex topic for marketing researchers due to its complexity within an individual's psyche (Rook, 1987), and its pertinence across a wide range of products and services, ranging from low-involvement to high-involvement (Sharma et al., 2010). It is defined as "a sudden and irresistible urge to buy something immediately" (Yi & Jai, 2020, p.664), often disregarding any decision process or thoughts for the consequences but instead focusing on the immediate gratification of purchasing said item (Khorrami et al., 2015). In other words, impulse buying involved hedonic motivations rather than rational thinking process (Sharma et al., 2010). Previous studies have demonstrated that almost all consumers will have, or will be involved in impulse buying of some form (Khorrami et al., 2015; Parsad et al., 2019), as most individuals have the capacity to switch off reason and act on impulse when necessary (Iyer et al., 2020) further proving the complexity of such subjective topics as impulse buying where the human psyche cannot always be pigeonholed for the purposes of marketing research (Peck & Childers, 2008).

The effect of sensory marketing on in-store impulse buying has been widely recognised in the literature, but rarely in the context of the festive seasons. Previous research rarely acknowledged festive seasons as a unique moment when emotions are primed and can often be heightened, giving retailers a distinctive opportunity to take advantages of nostalgia, memories, and emotions through sensory stimuli to encourage spur-of-the-moment purchases. This research, therefore, aims to explore the extent to which sensory marketing, visual and audio in particular, may affect consumers' motivations to shop spontaneously and impulsively during the festive seasons.

The study adopted a qualitative research approach through in-depth interviews with ten millennial (24-40) and Gen X (41-56) aged participants. Mehrbrian and Russell, 1974's Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework was utilised and thematic analysis was implemented, resulting in the identification of three key themes. These themes are:

Theme 1: associations with the festive seasons

Theme 2: effect of in-store sensory stimuli on shopping experiences

Theme 3: impulsive motivations when buying gifts vs. self-gifting

One of the key findings confirms that positive experiences with audio and visual stimuli in-store encourage impulse buying, as consumers have heightened emotions and feelings, and are much more likely to browse, and therefore, given more opportunities to impulse buy. Christmas-themed window displays were identified as a the most important visual sensory stimuli that entice consumers into stores they may not have planned to visit.

In addition, consumer behaviour tends to alter during the holiday seasons. Traditions and values may predispose consumers to indulge themselves and engage less with rationale decision making process, resulting in increased impulse buying both for oneself and for gifts.

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