

IMPACT OF EXTERNAL STIMULI, INTERNAL STIMULI, AND SITUATIONAL FACTORS ON IMPULSE BUYING BEHAVIOR CONCERNING CONFECTIONARY PRODUCTS IN RETAIL STORES IN KERALA

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ABSTRACT

Impulsive purchasers begin shopping without a specific item or store in mind. Stimulating impulsive purchases on the market for consumer goods may become a strategic priority when market rivalry is fierce and all businesses use marketing in their operations. The study investigates the influence of external and internal stimuli and situational attributes on the impulse purchases of confectionary products in the Kochi retail market in Kerala. The sample comprised 216 criteria-met participants who were gathered via distributing the questionnaire, and the findings were analyzed using the Structural Equation Model (SEM). The study discovered that all three variables positively and significantly influence the impulse buying behavior of customers. According to the study, these factors drove the ongoing trend of customers' changing impulse purchases, and they could be crucial for any merchant to yield and maximize market potential.

Keywords: Impulse Buying, Consumer Behaviour, Confectionary, SEM, India.

INTRODUCTION

Consumer impulse buying behavior has gained traction since the 1940s, as it embodies 40 to 80 percent of consumer purchases (Rodrigues et al., (2021). An act of impulse buying happens unconsciously without any buying intention formed prior to entering the store (Engel & Blackwell, 1982). Moreover, impulse buying is hedonically complex buying behaviour as its speed of decision-making impedes any deliberate consideration of alternative choices (Block & Morwitz, 1999). Hedonic behaviour constantly seeks pleasure in contrast to utilitarian behaviour, which seeks benefits both functional and emotional. Impulse buyers often aim for instant gratification in their decisions and are devoid of thoughtful actions. While impulse purchases are unplanned, not all unplanned purchases are impulsive. A consumer may pick a product to satisfy his unstated or secret need as he has not mentioned it in the shopping list. Such unplanned behaviour so not qualify to be impulsive behaviour (Sohn & Ko, 2021). Hence, the factors that trigger impulse buying must be of much importance.

Consumer demographics and characteristics are vital in impulse purchases (Kollat & Willett, 1967). Impulse buyers enjoy shopping and show greater emotions like amusement, joy, etc., than planned buyers (Weinberg & Gottwald, 1982; Rook & Hoch, 1985). Moreover, while men tend to buy entertainment and leisure products impulsively, women are more inclined to symbolic and self-expressive products (Dittmar et al., (1996). Furthermore, consumers are influenced by disposable income, credit availability, education, store employees, and other customers (Dittmar et al., 1996; Wood, 1998; Mattila & Wirtz, 2008).

Impulse purchases are often influenced by external stimuli such as shopping and store environment (Muruganantham & Bhakat, 2013). However, various other studies have considered internal factors such as feelings of joy, delight, enthusiasm, and amusement (Weinberg & Gottwald, 1982), lifestyle trait (Rook, 1987), etc. The involvement of consumers may also tend to vary when considering purchase situations such as store location, time of shopping, shopping habits, and season (Shapiro, 2014). While many of the dimensions consumers unconsciously use during impulse purchases, shreds of evidence in the literature on the combined effect of these are minimal.

Researchers lately have examined several factors that influence impulse buying behaviour. These investigations certainly have aided fruitful results (Prashar et al., 2016); however, research on the combined effect of external stimuli, internal stimuli, and situational factors on impulse behaviour is minimal. This research attempts to bridge this gap by identifying the combined effect of these factors. Moreover, in light of recent advances in retailing and vast differences in culture compared to developed economies, it is essential to examine impulse purchasing in developing nations such as India (Kacen & Lee, 2002).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Solomon (2018) defines consumer behavior as the process by which individuals and groups select, acquire, utilize, and dispose of goods and services to fulfill their desires. The recent study of consumer behavior has faced major transformations, particularly in the decision-making process, impacting purchase intent (Stankevich, 2017). Elhajjar (2023) reveals that emotional, social, and functional drivers motivate consumer purchasing behavior. In addition, it suggests that societal and cultural values also govern purchasing decisions. Stern (1962) divided purchasing behavior into two categories: planned purchasing behavior and unplanned/impulse purchasing behavior. Researchers define planned buyers as those shoppers who first identify the problem, search for information, and evaluate alternatives to make a final buying decision (Piron, 1991; Stern, 1962). Contrarily, impulsive shopping is an impromptu behavior decided on the spot and derived from spontaneous, unpredicted, and unplanned reactions (Jeffrey & Hodge, 2007).

A consumer exhibits impulsive behavior when feeling an intense and overpowering need to buy (Prashar et al., 2016). "Impulse buying" describes unplanned, unreflective, and hedonistic behavior triggered by exposure to an enjoyable consumption scenario (Kacen & Lee, 2002). The Dupont Consumer Buying Habits research (1948-1965), referenced by Rook (1987) and Applebaum (1951), is among the earliest studies on impulsive purchases.

Although decades of studies have attempted to unlock the mysteries of an impulse purchase, marketers are still baffled by its precise form and causes. Impulse shoppers start looking around without planning to buy anything or go to a specific store. Customers are exposed to the stimuli while they browse, stimulating their propensity to make impulsive purchases. When an urge to buy strikes, impulsive buyers decide without gathering information or considering their options. After making an impulsive purchase, buyers may then have good or negative effects depending on the post-purchase analysis. This impulse buying process is influenced by consumer emotion, hedonic pleasure, promotional signage, product display, advertising factors, etc. Several other factors also influence impulse buying, according to earlier studies. Barakat (2019) discovered that materialistic attributes significantly and positively impacted impulse purchasing. Prior store-based studies have shown that character traits, cultural environment, product displays, and promotional strategies influence consumers' impulse purchases (Miao et al., 2019).

Because of its complexity, impulse purchasing has challenged market researchers. Buying on impulse is a multidimensional concept that estimates an enormous quantity of goods sold annually (Hausman, 2000). Previous research solely analyzed purchases, not consumer attributes. The majority of customers, according to Coley and Burgess (2003), make occasional impulsive purchases. Clover (1950) was the first to identify that specific product categories are sold on impulse. According to Kollat and Willet (1967), consumer behavior and demographics impact impulse purchases. The concept of consumer impulsion was introduced by Rook (1987) as a lifestyle trait associated with materialism and entertainment. When Rook and Fisher (1995) introduced impulsivity as a character trait, they defined it as customers' propensity to make quick, non-reflective, and energetic purchases.

Wood (1998) stated that socioeconomic status could influence customers' impulse buying. Youn and Faber (2000) found that customers' adverse emotional states may trigger impulsive purchases. Jones et al. (2003) experimented with demonstrating that product involvement has a significant impact on product-specific impulse purchases and is a crucial component in promoting impulsive buying tendencies. After a few years, Luo (2005) observed that peer influence increases the urge to purchase, but family presence decreases it. Also, indulging in impulsive purchases could alleviate a negative mood (Verplanken et al., 2005). Research by Kaur and Singh (2007) discovered that shopping pleasure and sensory stimulants significantly affect the impulse purchasing of Indian youths. Other factors positively affecting impulse buying are store environmental stimuli, customer emotions, and hedonic shopping value (Mattila & Wirtz, 2008; Silvera et al., 2008; Yu & Bastin, 2010; Chang et al., 2011). Therefore, over the years, researchers have discovered that several factors influence impulse purchases. Muruganatham and Bhakat (2013) have categorized these various factors that impact impulse buying behavior into three broad groups, which are External stimuli, internal stimuli, Situational and product-related factors, and demographic and socio-cultural factors.

As the literature suggests, very few previous studies address the combined effect of external stimuli, internal stimuli, and situational and product-related factors on impulse buying behaviour. Moreover, studies about emerging markets like India are limited. By virtue, impulse buying is expected for confectionery products. However, consumer impulse buying in this product category is under-researched. Furthermore, the literature gives less emphasis on the managerial implications of the combined effect of external stimuli, internal stimuli, and situational factors. Hence, this research intends to fill these gaps in the literature.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

Human social behavior is explained, according to the theory of reasoned action, by the knowledge or beliefs individuals already have (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). According to the theory, people are often quite logical, using available knowledge systematically, and that purpose precedes action. Though the theory of reasoned action has been given credit for an exceptionally high level of predictive capability (Bentler & Speckart, 1979), as Hale et al. (2002) point out, it primarily explains voluntary behaviours, and its explanatory scope excludes a wide range of behaviours. Such actions are ruled out because they may not be voluntarily performed, or the purchaser may not have deliberately chosen to engage in them (Hale et al., 2002). This is the primary explanation for why the conceptual framework does not assume that impulsive activity would be preceded by impulsive purchasing intent. The conceptual framework is depicted in Figure 1.

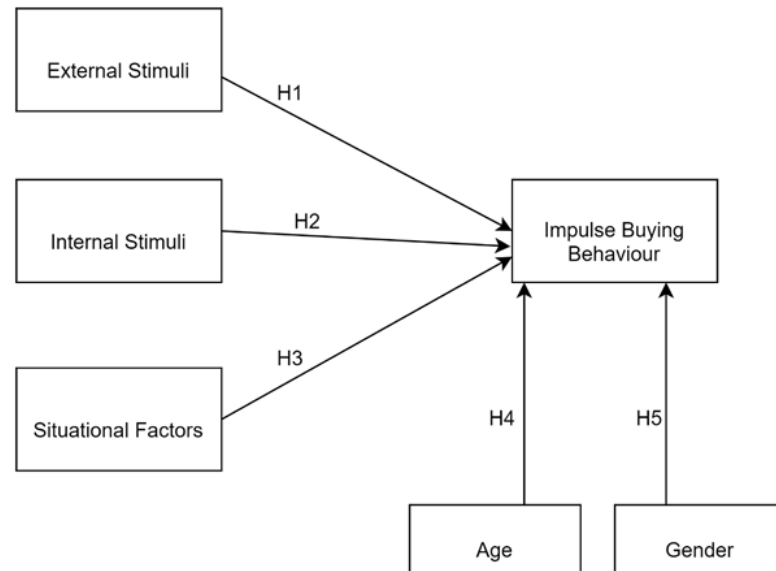


FIGURE 1
FIGURE SHOWING THE CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The retail and marketing environment act as the external stimuli. While the retail environment is usually explained by the size, ambiance, and layout, the marketing environment consists of different sales promotional practices. With advanced promotional strategies and the judicious use of technology in physical outlets, impulse buying is relevant in the current shopping environment (Schiffman et al., 2010). Consumers may urge to make a hasty purchase when confronted with visual cues such as promotional incentives (Dholakia, 2000). The shop's environmental factors positively affect impulse purchasing behavior, particularly when the store environment is overstimulating (Sharma et al., 2010). Harmancioglu et al. (2009) and Dawson and Kim (2009) discovered that impulse purchases are associated with store upselling, cross-selling, and promotional strategies. Moreover, Kaur and Singh (2007) investigated the purchasing habits of Indian adolescents. They discovered that sensory stimuli such as background music, fragrance, or the feel of the items play a crucial part in shaping these people's shopping experiences and may trigger impulsive purchases. Owing to these literature suggestions on developing H1 we postulate that external stimuli impact impulse buying behaviour positively.

H1: *External stimuli impact impulse buying behavior positively.*

Internal elements that affect customer tendency for impulsive purchases include personality traits like hedonism, fashion, enjoyment, variety seeking, self-identification, product participation, etc. Numerous scholars contend that the consumer's emotional state mediates the impact of the retail environment on impulse buying behavior. These emotions play a significant role as mediators of in-store shopping behaviors, which include pleasure from the shopping experience and other situational factors like time spent exploring the store's merchandise, interaction with sales staff, the propensity to spend more money than was initially intended, and chances of returning to the store (Gogoi, 2020). Since most Indians fall into the category of working-class people with affluent lifestyles, they prioritize enjoyment from purchases over

practicality when they shop (Sinha, 2003; Nassar & Battour, 2020). The following hypothesis has been put forth based on these studies:

H2: *Internal stimuli and impulse buying behavior are positively related*

Situational factors encompass personal and environmental factors that the customer is coping with during the impulse purchase (Dholakia, 2000). Money, time, nearby people, and in-store browsing are a few examples. The longer the clients remain in the store, the more they purchase. (Foroughi et al., 2014; Mafini & Dhurup, 2015). Situational factors like time and money frequently moderate the relationship between external and internal stimuli and impulsive buying (Xu, 2007; Kalla & Arora, 2011). Consequently, the below hypothesis has been developed in light of this literature.

H3: *Situational factors and impulse buying are positively related.*

Demographic factors such as age and gender have been taken as control variables since they are expected to be related to impulse buying behaviour. Kollat & Willett (1967) observed that demographic factors of consumers influence impulse buying behaviour. Previous research has shown that, in general, younger people are more prone to impulsive purchases than older people (Wood, 1998; Verplanken & Herabadi, 2001). Research on trait impulsiveness indicates considerably higher scores for young consumers than the older ones (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1985). Bellenger et al. (1978) showed that customers under 35 were more prone to impulsive purchases than those over 35. A possible explanation for this is that older consumers have better emotional regulation than their younger counterparts (Kacen & Lee, 2002). Wood (1998), Gutierrez (2004), and other researchers have shown an age correlation between impulsive purchasing behaviour. Hence, the hypothesis is developed below

H4: *Age is significantly related to impulse buying behavior.*

Kollat & Willett (1967) and Dittmar et al. (1996) observed that gender influences consumer impulse buying behaviour. Research has also shown that men are less likely to make impulsive purchases than women (Rook & Hoch, 1985; Coley & Burgess, 2003; Gilboa, 2009; Verplanken & Herabadi, 2001; Gutierrez, 2004). Moreover, Isler & Atilla (2013) found that women were more likely to engage in impulse purchases than men. This may be due to the fact that men and women show emotions differently (Fisher & Dubé, 2005). However, some research has found the opposite—that men are more prone to impulsive purchases than women; for example, Ghani et al. (2011) and Mihic & Kursan (2010) have shown no significant difference between the sexes when it comes to impulsive behaviour. Consequently, the following hypothesis was developed

H5: *Gender is significantly related to impulse buying behavior.*

The model predicts that the three independent variables directly affect the impulse buying behavior of customers. Here the independent variables are external stimuli, internal stimuli, and situational factors, and the dependent variable is impulse buying behavior. The literature shows that impulse purchasing results from interactions of internal and external stimuli, and situational factors

METHODOLOGY

The goal of this study is to find out how external stimuli, internal stimuli, and situational factors affect people's impulse buying behaviour. The research plan aimed first to identify a few busy retail outlets in Kochi, India. "More," Lulu Hypermarket, Reliance Hypermarket, and Bismi Hypermarket, all of which sell almost every kind of candy, were chosen for the study because they are busy retail outlets in Kochi, India. Customers with shopping bags in their hands were asked for information as a part of a convenience and mall capture sample method. This study is only about buying things on the spot.

The data was collected from consumers older than sixteen years of age who visited the retail outlets. Firstly, consumers are asked to share their shopping lists or what they intend to purchase during the current shopping trip. If a consumer planned to buy confectionery, he or she was excluded from the study. Secondly, consumers who have completed their purchases are requested to complete the survey. There were more than 400 survey forms distributed, but only 290 consumers returned them. Thirdly, once they returned the survey, a confirmation was made as to whether they had purchased any confectionery.

After deleting the uncompleted forms, 216 people qualified for the research. The survey was done across two months, with the first 15 days of each month being considered for the survey. Unless otherwise noted, all answers in the survey form were on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The survey questions were adapted from research by Chao et al. (2014).

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The proposed model was analyzed using a PLS-SEM-based technique. In marketing research, PLS-SEM is the most popular analysis method. It is optimal for "small samples," "abnormal data," "formative measures," and "complex models" (Ringle, 2012). Numerous consumer research studies examining the cause-effect relationship employ PLS-based SEM (Albers, 2009; Volckner, 2010). As mentioned previously, PLS is extensively used in consumer behaviour research, and so is the complex model on which our study is based. PLS-SEM appears to be an effective instrument for analysing the proposed model. The software WARP PLS 7 was used for the analysis.

Reliability

In PLS, the reliability of individual factors was determined by evaluating their loadings on their respective latent constructs (Hulland, 1999). The greater loadings indicate that there is a greater variance shared between the construct and its measures is greater than the error variance. In this investigation, the 0.50 criterion recommended by Hulland (1999) for the retention of factors was utilized. Nonetheless, Malhotra, N. K., & Peterson, M. (2006) suggest a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.6 as the criterion for factor retention. In both instances, the factors are permissible. The factor loadings are depicted in Table 1.

	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
External stimuli	0.755	0.732	0.824	
Internal stimuli	0.748	0.603	0.792	

Situational factors	0.749	0.702	0.818	
Impulse buying behavior	0.690	0.704	0.819	0.613

Source: Survey Data.

Fornell & Larcker's (1981) composite reliability was also used to evaluate the reliability of each variable in addition to Cronbach's (1951) alpha. Using the item loadings inside the nomological network, this metric is favoured over Cronbach's alpha because it provides a more accurate assessment of the variance shared by the various indicators. Fornell & Larcker (1981) proposed a standard of 0.70 on the composite factor reliability coefficients of the construct, and those values were satisfied in this investigation Table 1.

Sampling Profile

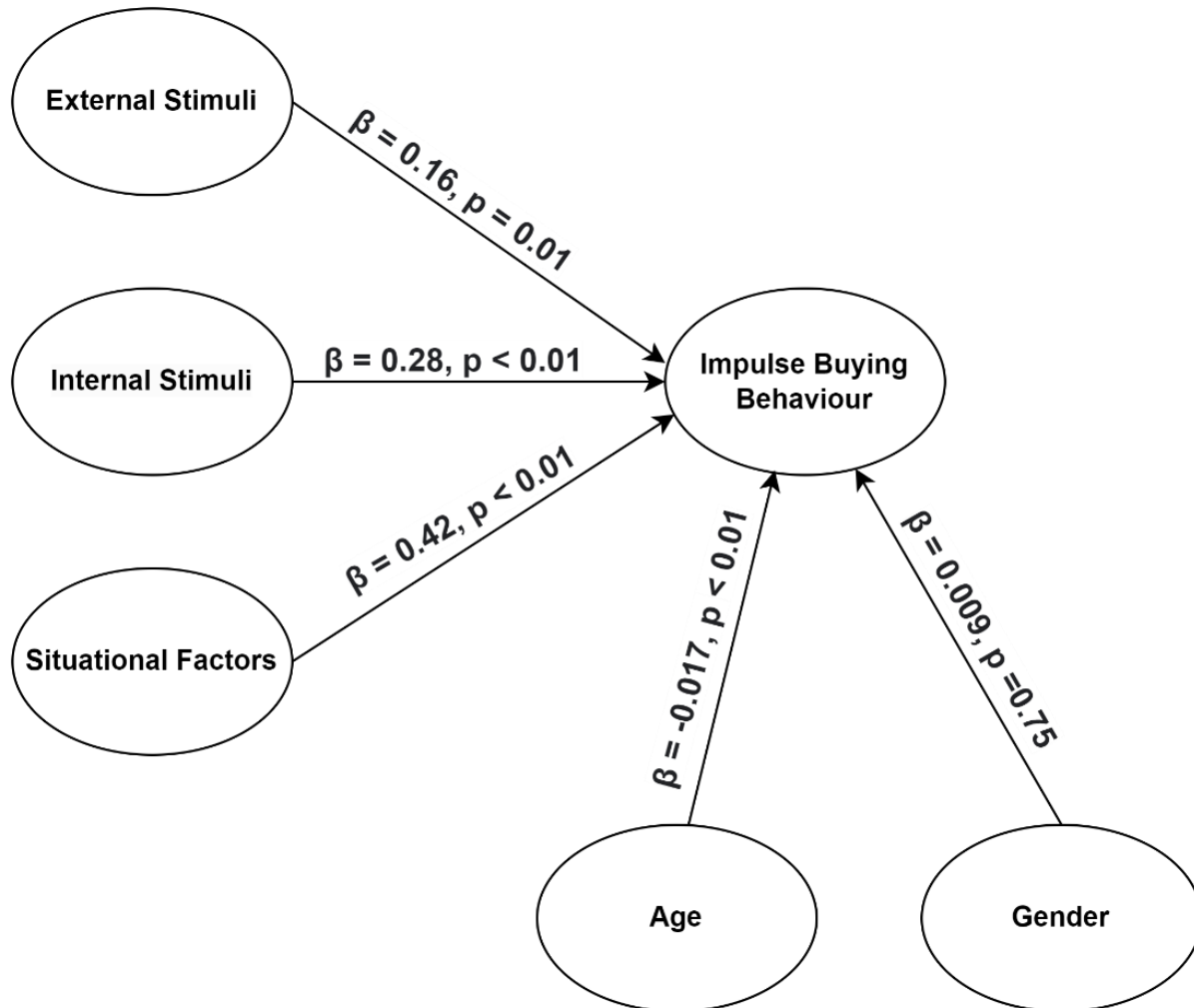
The profile of the sample collected is depicted in Table 2.

		Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative %
Gender	Female	120	55.6	55.6
	Male	92	42.6	98.2
	Others	4	1.8	100
Age (in years)	16-25	100	46.1	46.1
	26-35	67	30.9	77
	36-45	38	17.5	94.5
	45- above	11	5.5	100
Income levels	None	47	21.6	21.6
	Less than 10k	40	18.4	40
	10k-30k	67	30.9	70.9
	30k-50k	34	15.7	86.6
	Above 50k	28	13.4	100

Source: Survey Data.

Hypothesis Testing

The Partial Least Squares Method is used to test the hypothesis. The first element of a PLS path model is the measurement model, which establishes connections between the observable variables and their respective latent variables, and the second part is the structural model, which establishes connections between certain endogenous latent variables. (Tenenhaus et al., 2005) The measurement model is also known as the outer model and the inner model's structural model. The model values and P-value are provided in Figure 2 & Table 3, respectively.



**FIGURE 2
MODEL VALUES**

Hypotheses	P - value	β	Result
H1 External stimuli -> Impulse buying behavior	=0.01	0.156	Accepted
H2 Internal stimuli -> Impulse buying behavior	<0.01	0.276	Accepted
H3 Situational factors -> Impulse buying behavior	<0.01	0.416	Accepted
H4 Age -> Impulse buying behavior	<0.01	-0.017	Accepted
H5 Gender -> Impulse buying behavior	=0.75	0.009	Rejected

Source: Survey Data.

Results

As predicted, the relationship between external stimuli and impulse buying behaviour is positively correlated with $\beta = 0.156$ and $P = 0.01$ (Table 2), indicating that external stimuli have a direct and significant positive influence on impulse buying behaviour. In conclusion, we

endorse our hypothesis H1. The relationship between internal stimuli and impulse buying behaviour is statistically significant, with $\beta = 0.276$ and $P < 0.01$. Hence, H2 is accepted. (Refer to Table 2).

The relationship between situational factors and impulse buying behaviour is significant with β coefficient $\beta = 0.416$ and $P < 0.01$, indicating that the situational factors have a direct positive significant influence on impulse buying behaviour. Hence, H3 is accepted (See Table 2). All the proposed paths used to measure the model were accepted. However, with a $\beta = 0.416$, situational factors have a major impact on consumer impulse buying behaviour.

Regarding the control variables, the results showed that the construct of impulsive buying behaviour was significantly negatively related to age ($\beta = -0.017$ and $P < 0.01$) and unrelated to gender ($\beta = 0.009$ and $P = 0.75$).

DISCUSSIONS

The objective of this study is to analyze the impact of external stimuli, internal stimuli, and situational factors on impulse buying among consumers in Kerala with respect to confectionary products. Demographic variables such as age and gender are considered control variables. The results show that all three variables have a significant positive impact on impulse buying behaviour. While age has a significant negative association with impulse behaviour, gender showed an insignificant association with impulse buying. This is in confirmation with the study by Badgaiyan, & Verma, (2015).

The first variable, external stimuli, is the least influential predictor of impulse buying. However, marketing stimuli such as advertisements and sales activities initiated by the marketer can impact impulse buying. This is because marketing activities activate sensory stimulation (Youn & Faber, 2000; Mattila & Wirtz, 2008). Moreover, family or peer presence (Geetha, M., & Bharadhwaj, 2016) and retail merchandising (Muruganatham, & Kaliyamoorthy, 2005) influence consumer behaviour. The outcome is consistent with previous research.

We hypothesized that internal stimuli and impulse buying are positively related. The results show a positive relationship between internal stimuli and impulse buying. Moreover, it is the second most influencing predictor of impulse buying. This implies that the emotional and enjoyment state of the consumer influences confectionary impulse buying among consumers in Kerala. Moreover, consumers tend to buy impulsively if they enjoy positive emotions. This corroborates the findings of Weinberg and Gottwald (1982), Chang et al. (2011), and Geetha, M., & Bharadhwaj, (2016).

Situational factors have a significant positive influence on consumer impulse buying in Kerala. Moreover, it is the most influencing predictor of impulse buying confectionary products. It implies that the more conducive the purchase situation is higher the chance of impulse purchase. Furthermore, the availability of time and money and the characteristics of the product can influence the impulsivity of purchase. This is in confirmation with the studies by Jeffrey & Hodge (2007), Crawford & Melewer (2003); Geetha, & Bharadhwaj, (2016).

Considering the control variables, age is negatively associated with impulse buying, while gender has an insignificant relationship with impulse buying. This implies that as age increases, people tend to spend money judiciously, and hence they restrict buying impulsively. Moreover, males and females tend to behave the same when considering impulse buying. These findings confirm the studies by Badgaiyan, & Verma, (2015), Cho, et al. (2014).

Practical Implications

Impulse buying is a consumer behaviour ubiquitous cutting across boundaries. However, Asian companies can take some insights from this study. Firstly, the study found that gender is unrelated to impulse buying. Hence, while selling candies gender-based segmentation is not practical. Secondly, in the Asian context especially in India, situational factors have the highest influence on impulse buying. Hence, companies should focus on providing more stimuli in the store environment to attract more consumers.

Crawford & Melewer (2003) discovered that confectionery is the most commonly purchased impulse item, which has outscored other categories and experienced remarkable yearly growth in the retail market. In the context of confectionary products, the study attempts to explain whether factors like external stimuli, internal stimuli, and situational factors are predictors of impulse buying. The current research concludes that external stimuli, internal stimuli, and situational factors positively impact impulse purchasing of confectionary products in Cochin, where the study was focused. Thus, external stimuli like in-store setups, shelf placement, vouchers, sales promotions, and other factors impact impulse purchases of confectionary products in Cochin. The study is in accordance with the analysis of Omar & Kent (2001), Hultén & Vanyushyn (2011), and Ramaswamy & S Namakumari (2009). In support of the investigation by Rook and Hoch (1985), Chang et al. (2011), and Youn and Faber (2000), this study demonstrates that during a shopping spree, impulse purchases occur due to the individuals and not the product. Therefore, it has been concluded that the hedonic behavior of the customer, rather than the cognitive and functional benefits, results in impulse purchases (Sharma et al., 2010). Situational indicators of impulse purchases include the outlet's location, shopping time, weather conditions, and other preferences. The current study illustrates a positive relationship between situational factors and impulse buying, as in the case of Jones et al. (2003), Haemanciooglu (2009), Atulkar & Kesari (2018), and Jeffrey and Hodge (2007). From a managerial perspective, we can conclude that while designing in-store activities, the sales merchandisers should focus more on creating external stimuli, internal stimuli, and situational factors to trigger more impulse buying of confectionary products.

CONCLUSION

The current study concentrated primarily on a few aspects, such as age and gender, external cues, internal stimuli, and situational variables influencing customers' impulsive purchases. Future study models may include personal attributes, sociocultural features, and their direct and indirect interactions, as well as other moderating characteristics that affect impulse purchases. The current study is confined to a specific geographical location, i.e., Cochin. Future research could include additional cities as well. Another drawback is that the study focused only on one category of groceries, confectionery goods. Research opportunities exist for a wide range of product categories in both offline and online retail settings. Retailers and marketers stand to gain if numerous elements influencing impulse purchases are properly combined and have a synergistic effect. The study is thus significant for marketers since it will aid them in formulating proper tactics for gaining customers and establishing a competitive advantage.

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