

# **Role of Visual Merchandizing, Sensational Seeking, and Collectivism in Consumers' Impulsive Buying Behavior at Shopping Malls**

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Consumers' trend of shopping at malls and retail outlets has increased in the last five years. Since, the bulk of the sales in these outlets were based on impulsive buying; hence, aim of this study was to measure the effect of visual merchandising, sensational seeking, and collectivism on impulsive buying behavior. Visual Merchandising Scale (Kim, 2003; Faber, 2000), Sensation Seeking Scale (Kacen & Lee, 2002), Collectivism Scale (Kacen & Lee, 2002), and Impulsive Buying Scale (Kim, 2003; Faber, 2000) were administered on sample. Mall intercept method was used for data collection from a convenient sample ( $N = 300$ ) and data was analyzed with multiple step procedure inclusive of validity analyses and confirmatory factor analysis for all the constructs and model through structural equation modeling. Results revealed that a strong and positive relationship existed between sensational seeking and impulsive buying. On the other hand, visual merchandising and collectivism had nonsignificant relationship with impulsive buying. Inference of the present study indicated that retailing outlets in Pakistan had been in initial stages of development and the visual merchandising strategies used in local stores had not been adequate enough to make an impact on consumers. The major contribution of this study was the exploration of relationships of collectivism and sensational seeking with impulsive buying which was relatively newer arena of consumer behavior in Pakistan.

*Keywords.* Impulsive buying, sensational seeking, innovation, visual merchandising, collectivism, consumer behavior

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Shopping in Asian countries used to be a monotonous routine activity, but now not any more. It is now considered as a leisure, social, and hedonic activity (Riaz & Raman, 2015). Factors such as increase in consumer's affluence, emergent of new and modern shopping malls have contributed towards the dramatic change in consumer's behavior. The shopping malls have now become highly competitive and they are positioning more towards impulsive buyers knowing that a significant portion of their aggregate sales in most of the product categories depends on them (Kacen & Lee, 2002).

### **Impulsive Buying Behavior**

Earlier literature suggests that impulsive buying is a synonym to unplanned purchasing (Hoffner, 2009). In view of this conceptual relevance, earlier studies have not paid attention to the behavioral and attitudinal components of impulsive buying. However, this trend shifted in later years and the researchers restarted examining the behavior and attitudinal aspects of impulsive buying (Lloyd, 2014). Impulsive behavior refers to buying spontaneously, unreflectively due to physical proximity and emotional attachment to the desired product which results in personal gratification (Li, 2015). Impulsive buying; thus, satisfies both, the hedonic and emotional desires (Hausman, 2000). Novelty, fun, and surprises satisfy hedonic desires, whereas social interaction, which is an integral part of shopping experience cater to emotional needs (Saad & Metawie, 2015).

Physical proximity and positive emotions evoke impulsive buying. For example, consumers' proximity to a product increases their purchase intention significantly. In the same context consumers' good mood and feeling induce purchase, as they intend to prolong this mood and feeling. In both the cases, consumer's behavior change because of physical proximity and positive emotions (Lloyd, 2014).

Some authors are of the opinion that impulsive buying is a complex purchase behavior in which consumers react instantly and rapidly without considering other options and future implications (Amos, Holmes, & Keneson, 2014). Although impulsive buying and unplanned purchase has been used interchangeably in the earlier literature but others have reservation on this generalization (Li, 2015). They are of the opinion that impulsiveness and unplanned could be classified in one category, however, unplanned is not always impulsive purchase and hence cannot be substituted with unplanned purchase (Lloyd, 2014). The rationale behind this explanation is that in case of unplanned purchase consumer might be in a need of the product but might not have included in the shopping list. Thus,

unplanned purchase behavior may not necessarily be a sudden and compelling urge to buy a product, which is generally associated with impulsive buying (Amos et al., 2014). But unplanned purchase, unlike impulsive, is not a reactive action based on hedonic temptation of immediate satisfaction without considering consequences (Saad & Metawie, 2015). Thus, as compared to unplanned purchase, the temptation and urge is sudden, strong, and irresistible (Park, Kim, Funches, & Fox, 2012). Thus, the process through which impulsive buyers goes through has three steps. First, impulsive buyers' reactions are spontaneous leading to positive emotions. Second, while reacting (that is, making purchase decision) they are least bothered about the cost and future consequences. Finally, after actual purchase consumers immediately feel self-fulfillment and accomplishment (Amos et al., 2014).

The literature also suggest that antecedents to impulsive buying in broad terms could be classified in three categories which are products, individuals, and situation factors (Lloyd, 2014). Low priced, heavily promoted, and prominently displayed items fall in product classification (Zhou & Gu, 2015). Antecedents such as impulsiveness, roaming in a store, enjoying shopping, self-concept, and need to feel and touch fall in individual factor category (Amos et al., 2014); whereas, situational factors category is inclusive of time and money availability (Saad & Metawie, 2015). This study has used three antecedents to impulsive buying, which are merchandising, sensation seeking, and collectivism. Merchandising falls in product category, whereas sensation seeking and collectivism fall in individual category.

Despite the gravity of impulsive buying behavior world over, it is considered as inappropriate behavior; but, still it accounts of the bulk of sales in all the product categories (Amos et al., 2014). It is also considered as irrational, and a wasteful activity, and a sign of immaturity, and if possible most of the consumers would like to control or decrease this behavior (Zhou & Gu, 2015)

. Contrarily, others are of the opinion that impulsive buying cannot be considered inappropriate because it is an act of freedom, and it could be rationalized by the consumers (Park et al., 2012). In the support of impulsive being rational, it has been argued that it is a process in which the level of impulsiveness and normative judgment interacts, and those consumers short in normative judgments fell victim to impulsive buying (Amos et al., 2014). However, others have criticized this process, as they believe that it is uncommon for most of the consumers to systematically and rationally process the information when making the purchase decision (Zhou & Gu, 2015). Further, the research shows that majority of the times consumers realize the

impulsiveness after their purchase decision, therefore, they try to rationalize or justifying their impulsive behavior (Saad & Metawie, 2015). While supporting the impulsive being appropriate it has also been argued that if consumers get the opportunity to assess the information, they plan the impulsive buying and as a consequence its incidences increases substantially (Amos et al., 2014).

### **Visual Merchandising and Impulsive Buying**

Visual merchandising is a popular technique for encouraging multiple sales. Through this strategy, retailers communicate their value proposition to consumers and also use it for attracting customers and enhance the image of their outlets (Moayery, Zamani, & Vazifehdooost, 2014). Visual merchandising is not restricted to exterior of windows, but is inclusive of all form of internal and external display of merchandise, décor and company's logo and promotional advertising (Moayery et al., 2014).

Studies while supporting this relationship found that a pleasant visual environment generate pleasure and arousal emotions due to which consumers stay for longer period and hence they become more susceptible to impulsive buying (Mafini & Dhurup, 2015). Others, while supporting this relationship, also contended that a pleasant and exciting environment of a retail outlet also promotes differentiations and attract consumers (Wu, Kim, Koo, & Towers, 2015). Still others in this context concluded on an overall basis visual merchandising effect impulsive buying but its components individually have different effects on impulsive buying. For example there is strong relationship between in-store form, floor display and promotional signage, but no relationships of window display and floor merchandising (Moayery et al., 2014).

### **Sensation Seeking and Impulsive Buying**

Both impulsive buying and sensation seeking behaviors occur due to psychological motivation without thinking and considering functional benefits offered by the products, thus both of them are also considered as hedonic behavior (Shailer, 2008). In both the cases, the consumers buying behavior are based on feeling without the involvement of cognitive process (Hoffner, 2009).

Sensation seeking refers to a personality trait in which individuals by taking physical, social and final risks develop a

positive feeling and sense of excitement (Hoffner, 2009). Individuals with high level of sensation seeking tendencies are susceptible to boredom vulnerability, and they have a high interest towards horror movies. These individuals generally opt for adventurous career such as armed forces and are susceptible to high sex and gambling habits. On the other hand individuals low in sensation level opt for career that are less adventurous (Hoffner, 2009).

Highly sensation seekers generally have higher inclination towards excitement and comparatively lesser towards self-control. Most of the researchers agree that that sensation seeking and impulsiveness have a significant and positive relationship (Kacen & Lee, 2002). Sensation seeking is more related to extraversion, and has not been used extensively in assessing its relationship with impulsive buying. Some researchers have indirectly inferred the relationship of sensation seeking and impulsive buying. In this context they argue that sensation seeking has a link with materialism and money conversation, which are thrilling and exciting experience. Since sensation seeking is also thrilling and exciting experience therefore it will also lead to impulsive buying (Shailer, 2008).

While validating this relationship it has been contended that individuals who get bored with the monotonous environment turn to overspending and finally to impulsive buying. In fact research on this issue confirms that sensation seekers turn to impulsive buying as they find it to be fun and they get opportunity to spend freely (Hoffner, 2009).

### **Collectivism and Impulsive Buying**

Collectivism refers to a social pattern in which individuals see themselves as a close knitted members of family coworkers, tribe or nation (Toffoli & Laroche, 2015). Individualism refers to a social pattern comprising of individuals who are loosely linked and are influenced by their own needs, rights and the networking they have developed for themselves. They are least bothered about the norms and values of society (Hagger, Rentzelas, & Koch, 2014).

Since, individuals in a collectivist society are willing to sacrifice their personal goals over the goals of the in-group; therefore, they are generally more matured and have more control on their emotions than the individuals belonging to individualist society. In view of this maturity and control on emotions, individuals in collectivist context are expected to be less susceptible to impulsive buying (Thompson & Prendergast, 2015). Contrarily others also found that also found that

neither individualism nor collectivism affects impulsive behaviors (Hagger et al., 2014).

### **The Present Study**

The significance of present study is that it has empirically tested the impact of collectivism and sensation seeking on impulsive buying which have not been adequately explored earlier in Pakistan and even in South Asian context. Rationale for this objective is that people in Asian region are generally collectivists; therefore, understanding this impact on impulsive buying is an important field to explore in Pakistani context. Further, this research is significant to consumers as well as retailers. If impulsive buying is carried out frequently, it would lead to addictive behavior. Since the bulk of the retail outlets sales are dependent on impulsive buying; therefore, this study would help the retailers as well in developing better product display strategy. Thus, aim of the study is to identify right target market and right strategies for the retailers. Specifically, it will measure the effects of visual merchandising, sensation seeking, and collectivism on impulsive buying behavior. The following hypotheses were formulated for present study:

1. Visual merchandising has positive association with impulsive buying behavior.
2. Sensational seeking is positively associated with impulsive buying behavior.
3. Collectivism is negatively related with impulsive buying behavior.

### **Method**

#### **Sample**

Five enumerators were hired who visited the selected malls of Karachi in evening and weekends. They approached 325 consumers; while, 300 filled the questionnaires; hence, response rate was 94%. The sample size was adequate for the studies based on Structural Equation Modeling (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). In terms of gender, 180 (60%) respondents were men and 120 (40%) were women and their age ranged from 19 to 60 years ( $M = 32.25$ ,  $SD = 2.78$ ). Of the total respondents 120 (40%) were single and 180 (60%) were married. Profession wise, respondents included 90 (30%) students and 210 (70%) were full time employees of private and public organizations. In terms of education, 90 (30%) had education up to secondary school

certificate; while, 105 (35%) had a higher education certificate, 75 (25%) had bachelor's degrees, and 45 (15%) had at least master's degree.

## Measures

All the adapted constructs used in this study were to be rated on 7-point Likert scale, where 1 = *very low agreement* and 7 = *very high agreement*. The following measures have been used to assess the major constructs of the study.

**Visual Merchandising Scale.** The questionnaire to assess visual merchandising constituted of 7 items; wherein 4 items based on Kim's model (2003), and 3 items were derived from the recommendations of Young and Faber (2000). Potential score on this scale could fluctuate from 7-49; where high score indicate high level of visual merchandising tendency. The reliability of this scale ranged from .82 to .87 which has been tested in previous studies (Chang, Stansbie, & Rood, 2014); while in the present study alpha coefficient of .74 was acquired.

**Sensation Seeking Scale.** The scale (Kacen & Lee, 2002) to assess sensation seeking comprised of 4 items; while, scores on this scale could range from 4-28. A high score on this scale reflect higher level of sensation seeking tendency. The reliability of this scale as reported by Hoffner (2009) was .85; while, alpha coefficient of .72 was achieved for the present sample.

**Collectivism Scale.** To assess this construct, a 4 item Collectivism Scale based on the recommendations of Kacen and Lee (2002) was used. Possible score on this scale could range from 4-28 and elevated score on this scale indicate high level of collectivism tendency. The reliability of this scale has which has been reported in earlier studies (Kim, 2003; Toffoli & Laroche, 2015) was .85; while, reliability index of .72 was found in case of present study.

**Impulsive Buying Scale.** The questionnaire to measure impulsive buying was based on the recommendations of Kim (2003) and Young and Faber (2000). In the present study, 5 items were used where 3 items were acquired from the model of Kim (2003) and 2 items were derived from the model of Young and Faber (2000). Possible score on this scale could ranged from 5-35 and high score reflecting a high level of impulsive buying tendency. The reliability of this scale ranged from .83 to .97 which has been tested in previous studies (Kim, 2003; Young & Faber, 2000); however, alpha coefficient of .73 was achieved for the current sample.

## Procedure

Prior to administering the questionnaire, a pilot test was carried to on a sample of 20 students. The aim of the pilot test was to see if the respondents have issues in understanding the wording and content of the questionnaire. The respondents had no such issue, therefore it was administered in the leading shopping malls of Karachi at different timings including week days, and weekends. In order to ensure the ethical considerations of research, the subjects' name and identity such as name, mobile numbers, and email addresses were not collected. They were informed in advance that their participation is on voluntary basis and data collected would only be used for academic purpose and demographic results would be displayed in aggregate.

## Results

Primarily, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was carried out to test the fitness of the hypothesized model. In the context of SEM fit, it is the ability of a model to reproduce the data. Initially, model fitness was ascertained through Chi Square, but its limitation was that it did not take account of sample size and complex models. Thus different fit indices over a period of time have been developed (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988).

**Construct validity.** Since the instruments used in this study has been adopted; therefore, construct validity has been ascertained through convergent and discriminant validity (Meyers, Gamst, & Guarino, 2006; Shammout, 2007). CFA results (see Table 1) show that most of indices outputs exceed prescribed criteria. Additionally the factor loading of all indicator variables loading are at least .40 (see Figure 1). Thus, it is inferred that the data fulfill convergent validity requirements (Shammout, 2007). Additionally, square root of the average variance extracted is lesser than square of all possible pairs of constructs therefore the variables used in this study are unique and distinct and fulfill the requirement discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

**Confirmatory factor analysis.** In CFA the factors and items (indicators) are tested based on theory; therefore, it is also known as a test for measuring theories (Hair, 2015). Summarized CFA results of the four constructs are presented in Table 1 showing a good model fit as the fitness indices are within the prescribed limits.



Table 1

Model Fit Indices of CFA of all the Study Variables (N = 300)

Variables	Absolute		Relative		Parsimonious	
	$\chi^2$	$\chi^2/df$	RMSEA	CFI	NFI	PNFI
Sensational	0.81	0.40	.00	.99	.99	.33
Visual	1.45	2.09	.06	.97	.96	.48
Collectivism	0.74	0.37	.00	.99	.99	.33
Impulsive	3.15	1.60	.06	.99	.98	.32
Criteria	Low	< 5	< .08	> .90	> .95	> .50

Note. RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; NFI = Normed Fixed Index; PNFI = Parsimonious Normed Fixed Index

**Hypothesized Model**

The overall SEM model comprises of three exogenous models including self-esteem, influence of others, materialism and one endogenous model impulsive buying behavior. The overall final model is depicted in Figure 1.

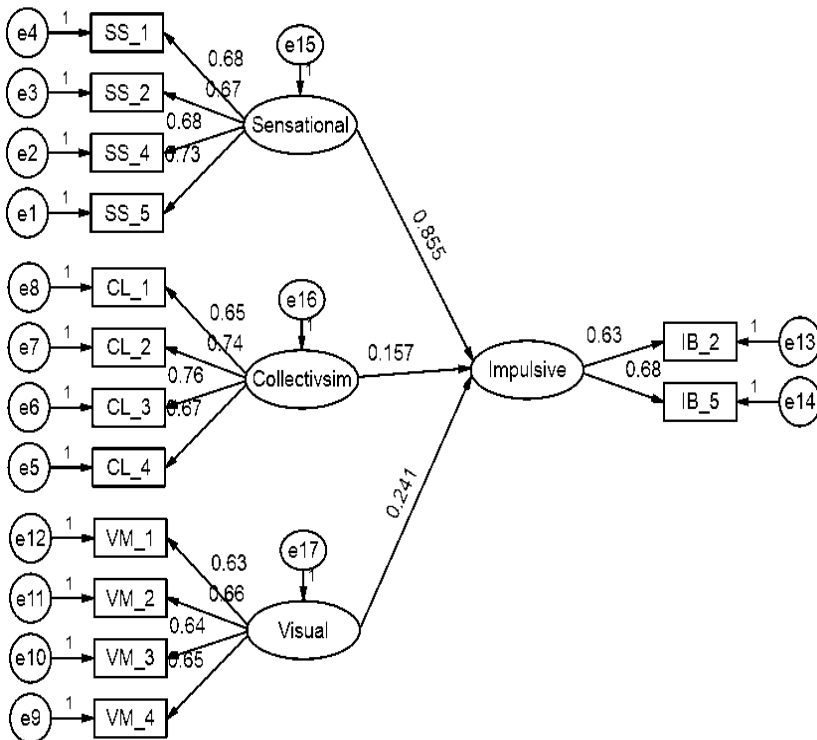


Figure 1. Final SEM Model.

All the fit measures are within the prescribed limits where Chi Square value is significant ( $\chi^2 = 110.549$ ,  $df = 73$ ,  $p = .00$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 1.51$ ). Fit indices including The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (.04), Goodness of Fit Index (.95), Comparative Fit Index (.94), and Normed Fixed Index (.95) meet relative fit measures. Whereas Parsimony Adjusted Normed Fit Index (.68) and Parsimony Comparative Fit Index (.75) meets parsimonious fit measure. Thus, the CFA results indicate that the overall hypothesized model is a good fit.

The SEM model discussed above shows that first hypothesis assuming the positive association between visual merchandising ( $M = 5.85$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ) and impulsive buying behavior ( $M = 5.35$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ) does not to receive empirical support (SRW = 0.24, CR = 0.70,  $p = .48$ ). However, second hypothesis stating the positive association between sensational seeking ( $M = 5.84$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ ) and impulsive buying ( $M = 5.35$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ) receive substantial support (SRW = 0.85, CR = 2.63,  $p = .00$ ). Finally, hypothesis three specifying negative relationship between collectivism ( $M = 5.16$ ,  $SD = 0.90$ ) and impulsive buying behavior ( $M = 5.35$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ) does not receive substantial support (SRW = 0.16, CR = 0.70,  $p = .48$ ).

## Discussion

This model, based on impulsive buying behavior, empirically tested through structural equation modeling would help in understanding attitude and behavior towards impulsive buying, which has become a problematic issue world over. This behavior is an early symptom to compulsive behavior and addiction which is harmful for individual and society. The relevance of the major findings of the study is discussed as follows in the context of relevant literature.

This study found nonsignificant role of merchandising in impulsive buying behavior, which is inconsistent to earlier studies. Earlier studies found that a pleasant visual environment generate pleasure and arousal emotions due to which consumers stay for longer period and hence they become more susceptible to impulsive buying (Mafini & Dhurup, 2015). Earlier studies in this context also concluded that on an overall basis visual merchandising effect impulsive buying but its components individually have different effects on impulsive buying. For example, there is strong relationship between in-store form, floor display and promotional signage, but no relationships of window display and floor merchandising (Moayery et al., 2014).

The results showed that there is significant positive relationship between sensation seeking and impulsive buying behavior which is consistent to the earlier literature. For instance, earlier studies found that sensation seekers generally have a higher inclination towards excitement and comparatively lesser towards self-control, therefore they are more susceptible towards impulsive buying (Kacen & Lee, 2002).

Findings further showed that there is nonsignificant relationship between collectivism and impulsive buying behavior. This finding is consistent to earlier studies that found individuals in a collective society have a weaker relationships of attitude-intentional, and intention-behavior, therefore they are less susceptible to impulsive purchase (Dameyasani & Abraham, 2013; Thompson & Prendergast, 2015).

### **Limitations and Future Recommendations**

This study was restricted to one city. Future studies could extend the scope to the whole country. This study only explored one aspect of the culture that is individualism and collectivism, future studies could explore the effect of other cultural aspects such as power distance, feminism on impulsive buying. Effects of different ethnicity may vary on impulsiveness which can also be explored in future studies. Multicultural studies always contribute towards to the body of literature which could be explored in future studies.

### **Implications**

The developed model empirically tested in Pakistan brought further insight on the variables that affect impulsive buying behavior. Contrary to earlier researches, the finding of this study is that visual merchandising does not affect impulsive buying. This contrary result indicates a gap on which the retailer in Pakistan and other Asian s could concentrate. The retailing in Pakistan and other developing Asian countries have not yet fully matured therefore have to focus merchandising aspect while developing their positioning strategies. The significance of merchandising further increases as it has become social pass time for the families to visit retail outlets and shopping mall. Additionally, it has also been found that shopping with or without peers and family members' helps in relieving the stress. Thus the retailers must focus on creating a pleasant environment in their retail outlets so that customers spend more time there and feel good and enjoy the experience, which will also help in getting rid of the customer's negative emotions (Banerjee & Saha, 2012).

However, the study found that sensation seeking customers have a positive impact on impulsive buying behaviors. Thus creating and maintaining a pleasant environment will not be sufficient. The retailer not only need to create pleasant environment but must be innovative and keep changing the environment to attract customers in general, and sensation seeking in particular.

The study found that the collectivism has no effect on impulsive buying. Asian countries in broad terms are collectivist which could have serious implication for the marketers. But the research shows that even in collectivist societies there are segments which are individualist in nature. Additionally, the collectivism varies from one product category to other. Thus the marketers need to target the individualism segment of collectivist society. And also need to identify those product categories in which the collectivist individuals are more vulnerable.

This study is a general study from single cultural perspectives, while it has been observed that impulsive buying behavior varies by gender and subculture, which could be considered in future studies. Besides, some evidences are available that impulsive and compulsive buying behavior is related to the western world which could be tested in Pakistan's context in future. Relationship of impulsive buying with the product categories can also be an interesting area of research in the field of consumer behavior as impulsive buying varies by product categories. Individuals while shopping should not get carried away, as impulsive buying over a period of time may lead to compulsive buying which is not only addiction but is harmful for themselves and their families.

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