



## Visual Merchandising a Driver of Impulse Buying: A Literature Analysis

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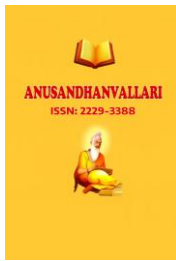
**Abstract:** Impulse buying is a highly hedonistic and pleasurable experience, giving the customer immediate satisfaction from fulfilling their buying need. Visual merchandising is a key component that drives the emotions of a consumer to engage in impulse buying behaviour. Empirical literature finds no single standardized attitude towards impulse buying, but rather explains the why's and how's behind an impulse purchase. In this paper, the author tries to explore the various factors that drive impulse purchases by shoppers. This paper gives a complete literature review on a range of extrinsic factors that affect impulsive purchasing. Components of visual merchandising like- mannequin displays, window displays, promotional signs, colors and lighting, cleanliness, layout, and interactive displays are effective for attracting consumers together with other extrinsic drivers. SOR theory was employed to build the conceptual framework of the study. Systematic review of literature method is used in this study. This paper provides valuable information to retailers to focus on these components of visual merchandising. Such elements tend to catch the eyes of walk- in customers to influence impulsive purchasers and grow their business. Based on content analysis, it may be concluded that an optimal blend of visual merchandising and other store elements pull consumers' interest in good sales. The research paper will act as a guiding tool for future researchers to comprehend the underlying causes and essential features of impulsive buying behavior by consumers.

**Keywords:** Impulsive buying behavior, External influences, Promotional indicators, Store environment, Cleanliness, Visual merchandising, Mannequin presentation, Store design.

### Introduction

In today's competitive landscape of modern retail, visual merchandising acts as a powerful extrinsic factor in impulsive buying decision in capturing consumer attention and driving sales. Marketers seek to differentiate themselves in competitive crowded markets, strategically displaying the goods in store environments has become very essential in influencing consumer buying decision. Visual merchandising comprises of wide range of external elements such as window displays, mannequin displays, cleanliness, promotional signs, colors and lighting, interactive displays and store layout. These factors play a crucial role in shaping consumers' judgment and decision making. The study aims to explore how these extrinsic elements affect consumer attraction and trigger them to make impulsive buying decisions within the retail sector.

**Visual Merchandising:** Visual merchandising is an art of displaying or presenting goods in a way that is visually appealing and stimulating for the customers to buy impulsively. It involves the careful arrangement of goods, the use of perfect lighting and colors, the ambience of store, in-store displays, and the overall layout of the store. Visual merchandising focusses on creating a shopping experience that not only allures the customers but also encourage them to spend more time in the store that often pulls them to make spontaneous and unplanned purchases. By strategically designing the retail space, visual merchandising can trigger customer's emotion, create a sense of urgency or FOMO, and ultimately influences their purchasing decisions. Previous studies indicate that visual merchandising positively impacts consumer buying decision by enhancing the overall shopping experience



and influencing their purchasing patterns. For instance, Khanna et al., (2015) highlight that elements like, lighting and color schemes, product placements are crucial in creating an inviting atmosphere that uplift consumer's mood and engage with the products and the brand which they did not intend to buy. Similarly, Sen et al., (2002) highlighted that in-store layouts, window displays play a crucial role in inspiring consumers and fostering impulse buying decisions, as this creates an immediate connection between the consumer and the goods. In recent years, the importance of visual merchandising has grown as consumers have become more selective, wise and tasteful in their shopping patterns. With the rise of e-commerce platforms, physical retail stores must aim to offer more than just products; they must provide extraordinary experiences that cannot be replicated online. Visual merchandising turns out to be great strategy for a marketer, to attract the customer to enter the store, engage with different products, and ultimately make a purchase even if it was not planned. The author focuses on understanding how visual merchandising elements contribute to captivate consumers and drive them into impulsive buying decisions. Consumers habit and shopping enjoyment is what makes potential customers to real consumers in a retail environment. The first factor affecting visual merchandising is window displays, these are often the first point of contact between a consumer and the retail store. An effectively designed window display can build curiosity, convey the brands message, and draws attention of a passersby to enter. Similarly, mannequin display works as silent salesperson, showing how the product would look when it is worn, thus helping customers to imagine on themselves. Next factor is the lighting and the colors which attract the consumers to visit the store. The right color combinations can trigger emotions and set the tone for the shopping, while a well-placed lighting can highlight the key products of the store. Cleanliness and Store layout further adds on to the overall vibe of the store environment. A well-organized store layout not only makes it consumer friendly but also helps to guide and navigate through a journey that maximizes exposure to variety of goods. Cleanliness is a significant element that enhances the store's image, makes it look more professional and helps in giving it an edge over other stores. Interactive displays and salespeople add another interesting layer of engagement, thus allowing consumers to interact with variety of goods, receive personalized recommendations from sales staff, which can significantly enhance their shopping experience and motivate them to actually buy the products. The effectiveness of these visual merchandising elements directly impacts the store's ability to generate good footfall and convert mere visitors into impulsive buyers. Park and Farr, (2007) stated that the effective use of lighting and color schemes in store environments significantly impacts consumers' emotional responses, which in turn affects their shopping decisions and overall contentment levels. Bell and Ternus, (2017) concluded that a neat, clean and an organized store layout is very important for creating a positive shopping experience for customers to lure them to actually buy. An organized and a clean store not only helps in easy navigation but also builds the store's image and gives a professional vibe. Impulse buying behavior refers to a spontaneous and an unplanned purchase decision that is often driven by emotions and sudden desire to just own the product. Visual merchandising acts as a catalyst in triggering such behavior by creating conducive environment that stimulates immediate buying. Factors like promotional discounts, strategically placed merchandise, and attractive displays creates a sense of scarcity and urgency of buying without much deliberation. Discounts and Promotional schemes catch consumer's eye and create a fear of missing out (FOMO), leading consumers to make impulsive purchases that might not have considered otherwise. Interactive and the unconventional displays engage consumers in a playful and informative way which makes the shopping experience more enjoyable therefore increases the likelihood of impulsive buying decision. Mannequin displays and the use of good lighting and colors encourage customers buy impulsively by creating an aspirational image in their minds. When customers see the goods displayed attractively on mannequins and highlighted under the flattering lights, they are likely to be inclined to buy those products. When the overall store layout is designed effectively it acts as a guide to customers which gives them a good exposure of the merchandise and encourages in spontaneous purchase. Impulsive buying is a blessing for marketer as it significantly boosts sales and improve the profitability of the business exponentially. Visual merchandising element allows retailers to optimize their store design and marketing strategies to capitalize on impulsive consumer tendency. According to a study by Bhatti and Latif, (2014), visual merchandising positively influences



impulsive buying behavior, with promotional discounts and product displays among the most effective triggers. Additionally, Tinne, (2010), highlighted the importance of emotional appeals in visual merchandising, indicating how strategic use of good colors, lighting and product placement can increase impulsive buying decisions in retail environments.

### Research Objectives

- 1) To gain insights of concepts, principles and elements of visual merchandising through in-depth literature review.
- 2) To study the relationship between visual merchandising and Impulsive buying behaviour.
- 3) To find out the research gaps and scope for future research directions in the study of impulse buying behaviour in relation to visual merchandising.

### Methodology

In this study, descriptive research methodology is used based on secondary data collection. Articles published within the last 15 years are analyzed. The research articles have been collected from various sources through keywords such as visual merchandising, fashion trends, apparel retailing, impulsive buying behavior. A few good articles were selected and evaluated taking into consideration the objectives and finally six parameters have been identified and selected.

### Theoretical Framework

The Stimulus-Organism-Response Model also called the SOR Theory was developed by Mehrabian and Russell in 1974. This model explains how stimulus trigger the emotions of people, then this emotion later transforms into specific buying behaviour of customers (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). Stimuli is defined as factors that influence or prompt the internal emotion of a person (Eroglu et al.,2001). Stimuli may include external or internal factors that consist of marketing mix, individual personalities, or environmental inputs (Bagozzi,1986). In the context of retail stores, stimulus include visual merchandising arranged by the retailers. The organism comprises the outcome or the internal thought process coming from stimuli. The organism consists of affective and cognitive reactions (Bagozzi,1986). In the study, organism represents positive emotional reactions like hedonic/ affective reactions by customers when they are exposed to visual merchandising factors. Lastly, response is the outcome of the SOR theory. It shows the final decision or the outcome by the customers. Response is the behavioral response that can be classified as favorable or unfavorable based on the positive or negative experiences by customers (Donovan and Rossiter 1982; Sherman et al., 1997). The author explains the ways where, visual merchandising acts as stimuli that direct customer's emotions to make spontaneous, unplanned purchase. Previous studies have used the SOR theory to explain impulsive buying behaviour in various contexts like clothing, footwear, media, social commerce, mobile commerce (Chang, 2017; Zheng et al., 2019; Huang, 2016).

### Literature Review

**Bhatti and Latif (2003)** studied how intense competition in the modern retail environment has encouraged businesses to adopt unique visual merchandising tactics to attract customers. The research examined the relation of visual merchandising on impulse buying behavior using data from 350 consumers in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, out of which 344 responses were valid. This study analyzed four factors- floor merchandising, store brand name, forum display and window display. The results showed that all factors significantly influenced impulse buying, although forum display had a negative effect, while the other three factors had a positive impact.

**Mehta and Chugan (2013)** analyzed the importance of visual merchandising in influencing impulse buying in India's apparel industry, particularly in Central Malls. The study focused on window displays, mannequin displays, floor merchandising, and promotional signage. The findings indicated that these elements play an



important role in encouraging impulse purchases. The study found that that visual merchandising is a key strategy for increasing sales and gaining a competitive edge.

**Balaji (2016)** explored how different elements of visual merchandising impact impulsive buying decisions among customers of physical stores in Tirupati, India. Data collected from 350 respondents (344 usable responses) showed that all four visual merchandising factors significantly affect impulsive buying decisions. However, forum display had a negative relationship, whereas floor merchandising, brand name and window display positively influenced the impulsive buying decisions of consumers.

**Thomas (2018)** studied the effect of visual merchandising on impulsive buying using Reliance Trends as a case study. The study used data from 100 respondents in Cochin and Kottayam and analyzed it using scatter diagrams. The findings revealed that impulse buying contributes significantly to store sales. All visual merchandising elements influence impulse buying, with promotional displays at the store entrance having the strongest impact.

**Siddhu (2018)** studied how visual merchandising helps attract customers and increase purchases in retail stores. Using survey data, the study found that attractive window displays, proper store layouts, and appealing themes are essential for drawing customers. Lighting and creative display themes were founded as the most important factors. The study concluded that strategic and artistic use of visual merchandising can convert visitors/ shoppers into active buyers.

**The Halim et al. (2020)** studied the relationship between visual merchandising, customer value, and purchase intention in relation to private label products in Indonesia. According to the findings, it was concluded that visual merchandising increases customer value, which subsequently leads to increased purchase intention. The need to enhance visual merchandising is underscored in previous studies.

**Cordova (2020)** study looked into the impact of visual merchandising on consumer purchase behavior in retail stores in Peru. Adopting a quantitative methodology and surveying 384 consumers, it emerged that visual merchandising, particularly exterior design, interior design, and ambiance, had a significant impact on consumer purchasing decision-making process.

**Adam (2020)** studied the various factors of visual merchandising impacting impulsive buying behavior in brick and motor stores of Sudan. Data of 168 respondents were analyzed, which showed a significant relation of visual merchandising on impulsive buying behavior. Among the elements studied window displays had the highest effect, followed by floor merchandising, in-store displays, and promotional signs.

**Sonkar et al. (2023)** studied the significant role of visual merchandising in promoting the fashion clothing brands. Using both primary and secondary data, the research concluded that visual merchandising is important for highlighting changing fashion styles and maintaining brand image. It helps brands to communicate effectively with consumers and build long-term relationship with them.

**Bastianpillai et al. (2023)** examined the effect of visual merchandising on impulsive purchase behavior in supermarket chains in Sri Lanka. 250 respondents' data were analyzed for their influence on impulsive buying behavior in supermarkets. Store design, window displays, promotional signs, and product displays were studied. The results showed significant impact of product display and window display on impulsive buying behaviour.

#### Literature Review Table

S. No.	Author(s) & Year	Study Area	Objective	Sample / Method	Variables Studied	Major Findings
1	Bhatti and Latif (2003)	Rawalpindi, Pakistan	To examine relationship between visual merchandising and impulse buying	350 questionnaires (344 valid); survey method	Window display, forum, floor merchandising, brand name	All factors significant; forum display negative, others positive
2	Mehta & Chugan (2013)	India (Central Malls)	To analyze impact of visual merchandising on impulse buying in apparel sector	Survey-based study	Window display, floor merchandising, mannequin display, promotional signage	Visual merchandising influences impulse buying; important for sales
3	Balaji (2016)	Tirupati, India	To study relationship of visual merchandising on impulse buying	350 respondents (344 valid); structured questionnaire	Window display, forum, floor merchandising, brand name	All variables significant; forum display show negative effect
4	Thomas (2018)	Cochin & Kottayam, India	To assess impact of visual merchandising on impulse buying	100 respondents; scatter diagram analysis	Window display, floor merchandising, store display, promotional signage	All factors influence impulse buying; entrance promotions strongest
5	Siddhu (2018)	Not specified	To study role of visual merchandising in attracting customers	Survey using convenience judgmental sampling	Window display, store lighting, themes	Attractive displays & lighting most impactful; converts visitors into buyers
6	Halim et al. (2020)	Indonesia	To explore relationship between visual merchandising, customer value & purchase intention	Literature review	Visual merchandising, customer value, purchase intention	Visual merchandising increases customer value and purchase intention
7	Cordova (2020)	Peru	To analyze impact of visual merchandising on purchase decisions	Survey of 384 consumers; quantitative study	Exterior design, interior layout, store atmosphere	These factors significantly affect purchase decisions

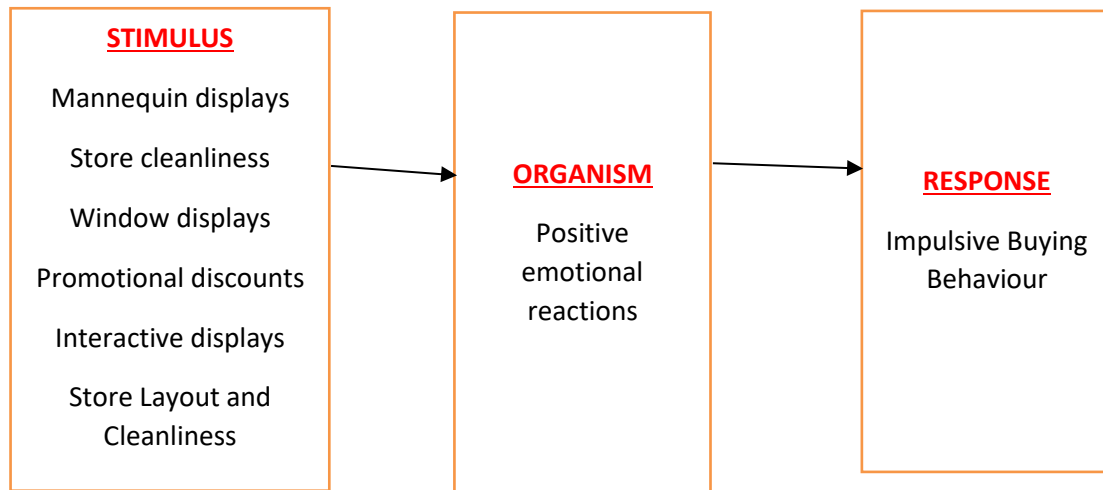
S. No.	Author(s) & Year	Study Area	Objective	Sample / Method	Variables Studied	Major Findings
8	Adam (2020)	Sudan	To examine effect of merchandising on impulse buying	168 respondents; correlation & regression	Window display, floor merchandising, store display, promotional signage	Strong positive in-relationship; window display most influential
9	Sonkar et al. (2023)	Not specified	To study role of visual merchandising in fashion retail	Exploratory descriptive; online survey	Visual merchandising, fashion trends, brand image	
10	Bastianpillai et al. (2023)	Central Province, Sri Lanka (Kandy, Matale, Nuwara-Eliya)	To examine impact of merchandising on impulse buying behavior in supermarket chains	250 respondents; self-administered questionnaire; convenience sampling; SPSS analysis	Window display, store layout, promotional signage, product display	Product display and window display have a significant positive impact on impulse buying behavior

### Research Gap

While previous studies have studied the effect of visual merchandising on consumer buying behavior, this research examined how visual merchandising influence the impulsive buying decisions. There is a dearth of literature that evaluate the collective effect of the factors of visual merchandising elements like such as window displays, promotional discounts, mannequin displays, lighting and colors, store layout, interactive displays and cleanliness on impulsive buying behavior specifically within the retail sector of Delhi NCR. Furthermore, previous researches largely overlooked the collective interplay between these factors and their differential impact on customer attraction versus impulse buying behavior. This gap in the literature emphasize the need for integrated analysis that examines how these different elements, work together to influence impulsive decision making in specific retail environment.

### Conceptual Framework

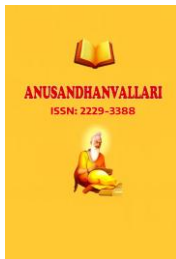
The author identified six different variables of visual merchandising that strongly impacts a customer's emotion which results in their impulsive buying decisions. The study used the Stimulus-Organism-Response Theory also called the SOR Model. The conceptual model used in this study is shown below:



### Discussion

The identification of collective visual merchandising elements reveals its importance in shaping consumer buying behavior and their significant impact on impulsive buying.

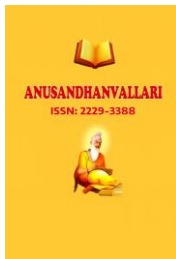
- Mannequin displays are the most influential visual merchandising element. The literature suggests that mannequins are a powerful tool to showcase how those clothes looks on a human form which encourages customers to visualize themselves and thereby significantly influencing their purchase decisions (Sen et al., 2002; Kerfoot et al., 2003). The use of these mannequins effectively bridges the gap between the thought process of the customer and the product thus, enhancing the likelihood of buying impulsively.
- Store cleanliness is seen as a crucial element, indicating that store hygiene and a well maintained store enhances the customer perceptions and the overall shopping experience. Studies show the significance of store hygiene in creating a conducive shopping environment, which leads to customer loyalty and satisfaction (Hines & Bruce, 2007; Turley & Milliman, 2000). Cleanliness not only reflects a good store's image but also enhances the overall experience of the customer by adding comfort and ease thus make them come again.
- Window displays another significant element that attracts customer attention, is often seen limited to the initial attraction phase, while other in-store elements have a more significant and considerable influence on the impulsive buying decisions (Diamond & Diamond, 2007; Berman & Evans, 2013).
- The promotional discounts have the strongest and the most positive impact on consumers' impulse buying decisions as Indian customers are a price sensitive audience. The literature shows, promotional discounts effectively triggers customer's impulse buying by highlighting flashy deals and limited-time offers, creating a sense of FOMO and urgency among shoppers (Inman et al., 1990; Kacen & Lee, 2002). The strategic use of promotional discounts act as a powerful motivator for consumers to make unplanned spontaneous purchases.
- Interactive displays are strongly influencers in impulsive buying, demonstrating their strong effectiveness in engaging and encouraging consumers. Interactive elements amplify the shopping experience of customers with hands-on opportunity to visualize and engage with the goods, thereby increasing the possibility of impulsive buying (Kim & Lennon, 2010; Roggeveen et al., 2016). Interactive displays build immersive shopping environment that enhances and lures the customer to make spontaneous impulsive decisions.



- Store Layout and Cleanliness contribute negatively to impulse buying, these factors may discourage spontaneous purchases if the environment is overly structured. This observation aligns with the findings of previous studies, which suggest that a highly organized and clean environment might reduce the chances of impulse buying by making the shopping experience feel too controlled and predictable (Vohs et al., 2008; Babin et al., 2003). It Studies highlights the delicate balance needed in store design to encourage both planned and impulsive purchases.

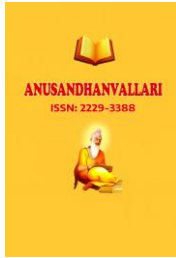
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