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Triggering the Unplanned: The Role of Product Demos in Shaping Shoppers' Impulse Buying

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Abstract: In today's dynamic retail environment, impulse buying has become a widespread consumer behaviour, often driven by a mix of sensory and psychological triggers. This study examines the impact of product demonstrations as a key driver of impulse purchasing among shoppers. Grounded in consumer behaviour theories and principles of experiential marketing, the research investigates how live demonstrations influence unplanned buying decisions while shopping. Data were gathered through a structured questionnaire administered to 434 shoppers from organised retail outlets across randomly selected hypermarkets in 3 districts of Kerala. Quantitative analysis, including descriptive statistics and regression techniques, was used to study the relationship between exposure to product demonstrations and impulse buying frequency. The findings reveal a significant positive association, indicating that product demonstrations effectively stimulate impulse purchases. The study concludes that live demonstrations enhance consumer engagement, mitigate perceived risk, and instil a sense of urgency, all of which contribute to increased spontaneous buying. These insights provide practical implications for retailers and marketers seeking to refine product demonstration strategies and influence shoppers' purchase behaviour.

Keywords: *Impulse Buying, Product Demonstrations, and Shoppers' Psychology.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Organised retailers face unprecedented competition in today's rapidly changing retail landscape, driven by globalisation, digital transformation, and heightened consumer expectations. To differentiate themselves and drive sales, retailers are increasingly leveraging in-store marketing strategies that directly influence purchase decisions at the point of sale. Among these, in-store product demonstrations have emerged as a powerful tool, offering shoppers live, interactive experiences that enhance product engagement and stimulate spontaneous purchases.

Impulse buying is a phenomenon where consumers make unplanned, emotionally driven purchases, and continue to play a pivotal role in retail success. Recent studies indicate that impulse purchases account for 40% to 80% of all consumer spending in certain retail categories (Hausman, 2023). A 2023 report by the NielsenIQ Institute found that over 70% of grocery shoppers make impulse purchases, with nearly 30% of their total purchases being unplanned. Furthermore, in the post-pandemic era, omnichannel retailing has amplified impulse behaviour, with in-store promotions and sensory triggers significantly boosting spontaneous spending (Deloitte, 2024).

Recognising the financial impact of impulse purchases, retailers strategically deploy product demonstrations to create an immersive, emotionally charged shopping environment. These live interactions reduce perceived risk, heighten sensory appeal, and trigger curiosity and urgency, leading to higher conversion rates. Research by IRI Worldwide (2024) highlights that product demonstrations can increase unplanned purchases by up to 65%, particularly in categories like cosmetics, electronics, and gourmet food.

This study investigates how product demonstrations influence shoppers' impulse buying, examining the psychological and behavioural triggers that drive consumers toward unplanned purchases. By analysing shopper

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responses in real-time retail settings, the research aims to provide actionable insights for retailers seeking to optimise experiential marketing strategies and capitalise on impulse-driven revenue.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

➢ *Product Demonstrations*

Product demonstrations inside the store are a dynamic retail strategy grounded in experiential marketing theory, which posits that consumer behaviour is strongly influenced by direct sensory and affective experiences (Schmitt, 1999). These demonstrations create immersive touchpoints where consumers can engage with products in real-time, thereby reducing perceived risk and enhancing product familiarity (Kaltcheva & Weitz, 2006). From a stimulus–organism–response (S–O–R) framework, demonstrations act as environmental stimuli that trigger internal evaluative processes, such as emotional arousal and cognitive appraisal, ultimately influencing spontaneous purchase decisions (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Research suggests that such live interactions increase product visibility and credibility, often leading to heightened perceived value and urgency, the key psychological drivers of impulse buying behaviour (Mattila & Wirtz, 2001; Xiao & Nicholson, 2013). Thus, in-store demonstrations not only provide product information but also strategically appeal to hedonic motivations, thereby influencing unplanned purchasing behaviour.

➢ *Impulse Buying*

Impulse buying has been widely recognised as a significant aspect of consumer behaviour, particularly in the dynamic and sensory-rich environment of organised retailing. It is typically characterised by sudden, spontaneous, and unplanned purchases, often influenced by external stimuli and internal psychological states (Rook, 1987). One of the most widely applied models to understand such behaviour is the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974). This model posits that environmental stimuli (S) affect the internal states of individuals (O), which in turn lead to behavioural responses (R). In this context, in-store product demonstrations serve as powerful environmental stimuli that can trigger emotional arousal and cognitive evaluations, ultimately leading to impulse buying.

Moreover, Experiential Marketing Theory provides further insight into how sensory and emotional engagement within the store environment can shape consumer responses. According to Schmitt (1999), experiential marketing focuses on creating memorable and emotionally engaging experiences for consumers through direct interaction with products. In-store demonstrations, which allow consumers to see, touch, and sometimes try products, help reduce perceived risk and enhance perceived value, making consumers more susceptible to impulse purchases (Zhou & Wong, 2004). Thus, the interaction between marketing stimuli and emotional responses forms the theoretical foundation for examining the role of in-store demonstrations in influencing impulse buying behaviour.

The conceptual framework for this study is grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model. It suggests that in-store product demonstrations (Stimulus) influence shoppers' internal states, such as emotional arousal and perceived product value (Organism), which in turn drive impulse buying behaviour (Response). This framework integrates key variables from consumer psychology and experiential marketing to explain how live demonstrations can act as catalysts for unplanned purchases in retail settings. The conceptual framework of this research study is illustrated below:

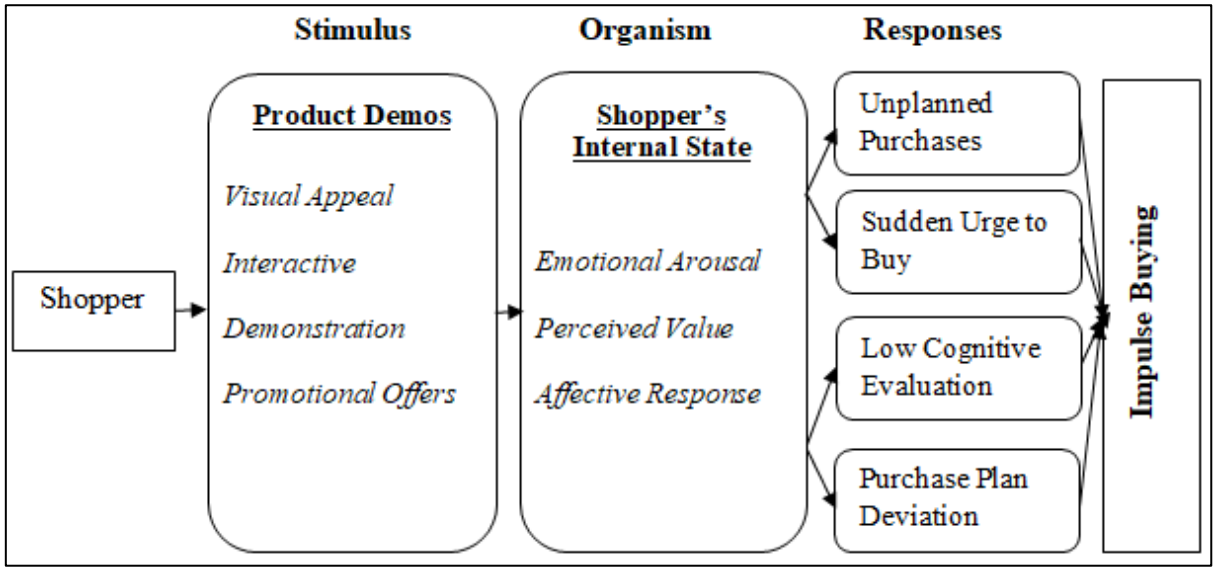

Fig 1 Conceptual Framework
Source: Author

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III. RESEARCH PROBLEM

Impulse buying is a major trend in modern retail, often caused by emotional and situational factors. Retailers use various tactics to encourage unplanned purchases, and one common method is product demonstrations inside the store. These demos engage shoppers and prompt them to buy on the spot. However, there is still not enough research on how exactly these demonstrations trigger impulse buying, especially for different types of products and consumer groups. Additionally, little is known about the psychological and behavioural processes that lead to unplanned purchases during these demos. As consumer preferences change and retail competition grows, it is important to determine whether product demos are still an effective marketing tool. This study will examine how product demos influence impulse buying and identify the key factors that affect this relationship. The findings will help retailers improve their marketing strategies.

IV. OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

The principal objective of the study is to examine the effect of product demos on increasing impulse buying among retail shoppers. To study this objective, the researchers have set the following hypothesis.

H0 - Product demos do not have a significant positive effect on impulse buying among organised retail shoppers.

H1- Product demos have a significant positive effect on impulse buying among organised retail shoppers.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quantitative research approach with a descriptive and causal design to investigate the influence of product demos on the impulse buying of organised retail shoppers. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 434 retail shoppers in organised retail stores across selected districts in Kerala, such as Kottayam, Palakkad, and Kozhikode, using multi-stage random sampling. The questionnaire included closed-ended demographic questions, and 5-point Likert scale items designed to assess emotional responses and impulse buying tendencies. Before full-scale data collection, a pilot test with 37 respondents was conducted to ensure reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha \geq 0.7$) and validity (content validity via expert review and factor analysis). The data collected were analysed using SPSS (Version 28), beginning with descriptive statistics to summarise respondent profiles. A simple linear regression was used to test hypothesised relationships between product demos and impulse buying. Ethical considerations include obtaining informed consent, ensuring anonymity, and adhering to guidelines for non-invasive consumer research.

VI. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The collected data were analysed using SPSS, and the results were interpreted in line with the objectives and hypotheses.

➢ *Demographic Profile of the Shoppers*

The researcher has collected the demographic profile of the respondents, which is given in the following table.

Table 1. Demographics

Variable	Attributes	Number	(%)
Gender	Male	226	52.1
	Female	208	47.9
Age	18-25	109	25.1
	26-35	98	22.6
	36-45	85	19.6
	46 -55	77	17.7
	56 +	65	15.0
Shopping Frequency	Once	70	16.1
	1-2	135	31.1
	3-4	131	30.2
	5+	98	22.6

Source: Primary data

The demographic data shows a nearly equal gender distribution (Male: 51.5%, Female: 48.5%), with respondents spanning all adult age groups. The largest age groups were 18-25 (25.3%) and 26-35 (22.7%), while older shoppers (56+: 14.8%) were the smallest group. Most participants were frequent shoppers, with 61.6% visiting stores 1-4 times per month and 23.2% shopping 5+ times monthly. This distribution suggests the findings are particularly relevant for younger and middle-aged adults who shop regularly, though the results may be less representative of older, less frequent shoppers. The balanced gender representation supports generalizability across both male and female consumers.

➢ *Effect of Product Demonstrations*

A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the effect of product demos on impulse buying behaviour among organised retail shoppers. In this model, shoppers' impulse buying was treated as the dependent variable, and product demonstrations served as the independent variable.

Table 2. Regression Model Summary

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	R	R Square	Adj. R Square
Shoppers' Impulse Buying	Product Demonstrations	.751	.564	.563

Source: Primary Data

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The regression analysis reveals a strong positive correlation (R = 0.751) between the independent and dependent variables, indicating a substantial relationship between product demonstrations and impulse buying behaviour. The R^2 value of 0.564 suggests that 56.4% of the variance in impulse buying decisions can be explained by the influence of product demos, exhibiting a robust predictive capacity of the model. Furthermore, the adjusted R^2 value (0.563) closely aligns with the R^2, indicating that the model generalises well to the population with minimal overfitting. This consistency between R^2 and adjusted R^2 reinforces the reliability of the findings, confirming that the predictors significantly contribute to impulse buying tendencies. The high explanatory power of the model ($R^2 > 0.5$) supports the hypotheses, suggesting that retailers can strategically leverage product demonstrations to enhance unplanned purchases by targeting emotional and product-specific influences.

The summary table of the regression model provides a good result to proceed with further analysis with the help of the ANOVA table.

Table 3. Regression Model – ANOVA

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Level of significance	F-Value	P-value
Shoppers' Impulse Buying	Product Demonstrations	.05	549.77	.000

Source: Primary Data

The significance level for this study was set at 5% ($\alpha = 0.05$), meaning that a p-value (Sig.) below 0.05 would indicate statistical significance. The ANOVA results show a p-value of .000, which is well below the threshold of 0.05, confirming that the regression model is statistically significant. The F-value of 549.77 is substantially greater than 1, suggesting a strong improvement in predicting the shoppers' impulse buying when considering the influence of product demonstrations. This high F-value indicates that the model effectively explains the variation in the dependent variable compared to a model with no predictors. Since the p-value is below the acceptable significance level, we can proceed to reject the null hypothesis, supporting the alternative hypothesis that Product demos have a significant positive impact on shoppers' impulse buying. The next step involves examining the coefficients table to assess the individual contribution of the predictor variable.

Table 4. Regression Model – Coefficients

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Std. Beta Co-efficients	t-Value	P-value
Shoppers' Impulse Buying	Product Demonstrations	.751	23.45	.000

Source: Primary Data

The standardised beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.751$) indicates a strong positive influence of product demonstrations on impulse buying. Since standardised beta values range between -1 and +1, a coefficient of 0.751 suggests a substantial effect, meaning that as 'product demos' exposure increases, impulse buying tendencies among shoppers also rise significantly. The t-value of 23.45 (far greater than the typical threshold of ±1.96 for $p < 0.05$) confirms that this predictor is highly statistically significant. Additionally, the p-value of .000 ($p < 0.001$) reinforces that the relationship is not due to random chance, allowing us to confidently reject the null hypothesis.

These results support H_1, confirming that product demos have a significant positive effect on the impulse buying of shoppers. The high beta weight suggests that retailers can strategically use product demonstrations to drive unplanned buying behaviour, particularly when combined with emotional triggers.

VII. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that product demonstrations have a significant positive effect on impulse buying among organised retail shoppers. The findings reveal that when shoppers encounter live product demos during their visits to organised retail stores, the different product demonstrations effectively capture their attention and trigger impulse buying. Previous research (e.g., Hui et al., 2013) has established that in-store environmental stimuli play a crucial role in shaping consumers' impulsive purchase decisions. In this context, product demos serve as powerful sensory and interactive stimulants, making this study highly relevant for both academic research and retail marketing strategies. The insights from this research provide valuable guidance for retailers to enhance impulse buying behaviour by strategically implementing live demonstrations, thereby increasing sales with minimal additional effort. To maximise effectiveness, retailers should focus on designing high-impact demonstrations, placing them in high-traffic zones to attract more shoppers, and training demonstrators to engage customers emotionally and psychologically. These measures can significantly amplify the influence of product demonstrations on shoppers' impulse buying.

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