



## Conceptual Interface Between Sensory Marketing and Impulsive Buying Behaviour of Millennials in South Africa

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**Abstract:** Millennials, in recent times, have increased percentage participation in the retail market, which has been informed by diverse factors attributed to their socioeconomic exposures. It is also evident that the pattern of purchasing behaviour of millennials has its own consequences, which include buying out of their budget, making unplanned purchases, and even deviating from their fashion sense. These consequences engineered the objective of this study to systematically reveal the conceptual interface between sensory marketing and the impulsive buying behaviour of millennials in South Africa. To achieve this objective, an exploratory literature review approach to research was employed, where information and deliberations on impulsive buying behaviour, millennials, and sensory marketing were obtained from journals and publications of previous scholars, both local and international. The study's findings revealed that store environment, floor merchandising, and sales promotions significantly influence millennials' purchasing behaviour, which triggers impulsive buying. It was recommended that marketers who focus on millennial goods and services should employ the findings of this study to increase impulse purchases. Millennials should familiarize themselves with various marketing strategies to critically manage their purchasing patterns.

**Keywords:** Sensory Marketing; Impulsive Buying Behaviour; Millennials; Mthatha; South Africa

**JEL Classification:** M3; M30; M31

### Introduction and Background

In the dynamic landscape of consumer behaviour, the intersection of sensory marketing and impulsive purchases presents a fertile ground for exploration, particularly within the context of the millennial demographic in South Africa. Decisions made before and after an individual makes a purchase are within the purview of consumer behaviour. Therefore, it suggests that sensory advertising may have an emotional influence that prompts consumers to seek and decide to purchase a product. Emotional elements play a considerable part in the choice to make a purchase, as seen by the prevalence of customers who afterwards wonder why they made the purchase (Moreira et. al, 2017). Bratulescu and Vasilache (2014) propose the concept of “sensory marketing” as a method of appealing to the customer's senses. Sensory marketing is a strategic approach that leverages sensory stimuli to

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influence consumer behaviours and perceptions (Kumar et. al, 2020). Various strategies are used to manipulate consumers' actions in response to marketing and product presentation. Humans can observe and engage with their environments thanks to their five senses (Ghosh & Sarkar, 2016).

Public relations company 5WPR found that millennial consumers are more likely to buy impulse in their 2020 Consumer Culture Report (Quicanga & Ogbere, 2022). Due to their preference for sensory marketing, this demographic is more vulnerable to impulse purchases. A person makes an impulsive purchase if they buy anything without giving it much thought, as defined by the research of Redine, Deshpande, Jebarajakirthy and Surachartkumtonkun (2022). It occurs when consumers have an urgent desire to purchase and is often impulsive and thoughtless. Impulsive buying behaviour, characterised by spontaneous, unplanned purchases driven by emotions and immediate fulfilment, is a phenomenon of interest for marketers seeking to understand and influence consumer decision-making (Ntobela & Mbukanma, 2023)

According to Rodrigues, Lopes and Varela (2021), an impulsive buyer is someone who likes to buy things without considering them thoroughly. The store's atmosphere, the shopper's level of life satisfaction, the shopper's sense of self-worth, the shopper's current emotional state, and so on have all been linked to an increased likelihood of impulsive purchases (Mbukanma & Rena, 2021; Rodrigues et. al, 2021). Thus, the term "impulsive buying" refers to the practice of making unexpected purchases of products and services triggered by emotional responses to such things.

Ebeling, Dent and Kempenich (2020) state that despite the generation's reputation for materialism and temperance, millennials are notably fast spenders who prioritise experiences above possessions. People born between the years 1980 and 2004 are considered Millennials. Recent retail market centres have shown that the millennial generation has the greatest spending power, making them a prime marketing target (Heinonen, 2021). In South Africa, millennials make up 27% of the population, or 14 million individuals altogether (Cikes, 2020).

Researchers have shed light on the role of sensory marketing in influencing consumer behaviour, and some findings suggest that sensory strategies such as sight, sound, scent, taste, and touch can evoke emotional responses and shape purchasing decisions (Ntobela & Mbukanma, 2023). Moreover, a study by Rani and Sahu (2022) indicates that impulsive buying behaviour among millennials is influenced by various factors such as psychological, situational, and environmental stimuli.

## **Motivation and Objective of the Study**

It is no secret that millennials, like other shoppers, are prone to impulse buying. What is less clear is why this is the case. Mittal, Deepak, and Neena (2016) state that impulsive purchasing is another kind of consumption that has become more common in recent years. It is important to use caution while making lifestyle choices on consumption since they might have both positive and negative effects. Millennials are renowned for their tendency towards impulsive buying, which may wreak havoc on their budgets (Swarnalatha & Soundhariya, 2015). Retailers use sensory marketing (Osakwe, 2019) to entice customers to purchase by appealing to all five senses via in-store design, visual displays, and unique offers.

The opposite is evident, consumers, especially millennials, are influenced by the sensory marketing technique, which may lead to overspending, unplanned purchases, and even a shift in personal style. As a result, millennials who utilise credit cards to make purchases may find themselves in debt and

unable to save enough for the future. They might remorsefully return an item they bought on impulse of the moment since their newfound sense of style did not mesh with their old one. Considering this, the objective of this study was to systematically reveal the conceptual interface between sensory marketing and the impulsive buying behaviour of millennials in South Africa. The results of this study are expected to provide credibility to claims that sensory marketing may influence the impulsive purchasing habits of millennials in South Africa.

## **Research Methodology**

Kumar (2019) defines research methodology as the procedures and philosophical concepts used when undertaking research. The strategy defines the tools utilised in the investigation (Yang & Tate, 2012; Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). The instruments are the tools used by the researcher for gathering, analysing, and interpreting data (Manganye & Mbukanma, 2021). As King and He (2005) mentioned, conceptual-based research incorporates several research methodologies, including narrative review, vote counting, meta-analysis, exploratory review, and descriptive review. An exploratory literature study was carried out for this study. This necessitated collecting and synthesising easily available research on a certain issue. Bennison, Miller, Summers, Minnis, Sussman, and McGuinness (2017) and Burns (2017) stressed the importance of this sort of literature review in presenting to the reader the findings of earlier research that is directly relevant to the current topic. Therefore, this research undertook a review of the existing literature, conferring with and acknowledging the contributions of both local and international scholars within the ambit of impulsive buying behaviour, millennials, and sensory marketing. Thus, the exploratory literature review technique used in this research helped to establish complete, logical thoughts on the conceptual interface between sensory marketing and the impulsive buying behaviour of millennials in South Africa.

## **Theoretical Foundation to the Study**

A theoretical foundation is a basic assessment of accepted theories that serve as a guide for developing the arguments you will use in your own study (Watson, 2020). This study will employ two theories (S-O-R Model and Howkins Stern's impulse buying theory), which provide backgrounds to consumer impulse buying behaviour.

### **S-O-R Model**

The S-O-R model, which Mehrabian and Russell created in 1974, became a popular theoretical framework for analysing consumer behaviour (Jaini et. al, 2022). In this theory, the stimulus (S) is a factor that influences the organism (O), which sometimes causes the behavioural responses(R), in consumers. The S-O-R model was initially created to address the impact of store atmosphere on consumer behaviour and was later refined by Sherman in 1997 to adapt to the retail environment by including factors that influence consumers' buying decisions (Karim et. al, 2021). According to the nature of the S-O-R framework for customer behaviour, Russell and Mehrabianand (1974) posit that a stimulus is any environmental indication that causes people to feel a certain way about their surroundings.

Millennials are thought to be the most energetic group and economically engaged within the market hubs (Rodriguez et. al, 2019). This cohort in South Africa has grown as a focus group for marketers and retailers due to their high disposable income and higher discretionary purchasing. They are intensely drawn to clothing items by stimulus factors that influence them as organisms to respond by making a purchase.

### **Howkins Stern’s Impulse Buying Theory**

Hawkins Stern developed this theory and proposed it in 1962. The theory offered a fascinating perspective on customers’ purchasing behaviour, in contrast to the majority of contemporary theories of consumer behaviour, such as Maslow’s motivation theory of need (1943) and Engel, Kollat and Blackwell’s (1968) assertion that consumers always make knowledgeable and deliberate purchasing decisions. Stern supported this point of view and claimed that under the influence of outside circumstances, people make hasty purchases. Theoretically, marketers can influence consumers to buy more items than they had initially planned to (Vishnu & Raheem, 2013).

According to Sterns’ theory impulse buying occurs in four distinct levels. The primary level is the rapid, genuine impulsive purchase, like anything picked up right before leaving a clothing store, like buying a T-shirt while the customer was at the store to buy a dress. The second level of impulsive purchasing is said to as the “reminded” level and it includes forming relationships between different products like, putting a necktie and formal shirts in the same section to remind you that you might need the other if you are about to buy one. The suggested impulse buying in third level is when a purchaser first sees a product and gets the urge of buying it (Stern, 1962) for an example, the customer is used to buying Nike sneakers but suddenly sees an Adidas sneaker brand then decides to try it. The fourth stage is the scheduled impulse purchase, which is on purpose in that consumers are aware they want to buy a certain type of goods but are unsure of the specifics, for instance customers are more inclined to make impulsive purchases of more than they actually need when a store offers “buy one, get one free” on specific clothing item. The customer had a need, but because of the deal, he bought more than he really needed to. This theory speaks more of the behaviour of Millennials when they are in retail stores.

### **Empirical Literature Review**

According to Aragoncillo and Orus (2018), the phrase “impulse buying behaviour” describes a buyer’s sudden, intense, and resolute desire to acquire something that he or she had not originally planned to buy. The complicated hedonic predisposition to desire to acquire might lead to anxiety. Similarly, people often make purchases without considering them, and they often end up spending money that was not planned for. It is possible that certain factors, such as advertising, are what set off this buying habit or activity. Hussain (2019) proposes the term “sensory marketing” to describe the practice of appealing to a customer’s five senses (seeing, sound, touch, taste, and smell). To influence consumer behaviour, sensory marketers use an array of sensory-based tactics that appeal to different senses (Wörfel et. al, 2022). Thus, the three domain variables of shop environment, floor merchandising, and in-store promotions are used to assess the five senses of sensory marking strategy.

The store environment is essential in determining impulsive buying in the in-store shopping environment. It comprises micro factors limited to a certain geographic area and distinct shopping

scenarios (Bhatt et. al, 2020). These factors include but are not limited to store background music, store cleanliness, and employee behaviour. These factors stimulate the hearing senses of the customer (Wörfel et. al, 2022). It is evident that colour and texture are design characteristics and aesthetic components, whereas arrangement, comfort, signage, and accessories are practical design features (Sindhu & Kloep, 2020). Indeed, the layout of the store is essential because it promotes the good and efficient appearance of product collections. A good arrangement might also increase the enjoyment of shopping by lowering the sense of stress associated with it (Asrinta, 2018).

The layout of the stores, their shelving designs, their divisions, the scent, and the brands they carry are all included in floor merchandising. These factors stimulate the smell and touch senses of the customer (Wörfel et. al, 2022). The goal of floor merchandising, according to Widyastuti, (2018) is to inform and direct customers as needed, as shown by signs, graphics, or other media, in place of salespeople, it seeks to introduce products in terms of design and colour, educating consumers so they can make decisions about purchases quickly. It is anticipated that doing so will improve consumer interest in a brand or product on a shelf and persuade them to purchase more, boosting sales and profits for retailers (Widyastuti, 2018).

Since quick coupons likewise offer a windfall profit to the consumer, their impact on impulsive purchases is identical to that of unexpectedly lower prices (Akram et. al, 2016.). When the customer enters the store and sees a discount on some item this stimulates their vision sense and could end up purchasing the promoted item (Kaushik & Gokhale, 2021). According to Jhawar and Kushwaha, (2018) when people receive vouchers that can be used to make purchases, whether the product is on their shopping list, they are more likely to buy it, these unexpected price reductions cause consumers to be more ready to add extra purchases. Price adjustments have a corresponding spillover impact by either increasing or decreasing the amount budgeted for a shopping excursion.

### **Millennials in South Africa and their Buying Behaviour**

Millennials are important consumers in the South African market since they are gradually becoming more economically active and are spending more money (Redine et. al, 2022; Mbukanma et. al, 2020). They are viewed as impulsive shoppers who strive to keep up with the most recent fashion trends and designs; the saying “hot today, boring tomorrow” (Yarrow & O’Donnell, 2009) perfectly sums up millennials’ enthusiasm for fashion merchandise (Kekana, 2020). Arguably, millennials are expressive people who dress as they like, and they often delicately strike a balance between their need to belong to a group and their need to maintain distinct, separate identities (Fielies & Mbukanma, 2022). According to Hwang and Griffiths (2017), millennials desire positive feelings from their purchases. In the research she conducted, she discovered that 60% of millennials like purchases that are a representation of their personalities. She went on to suggest that the brand had to connect with them and give them a positive feeling. Moreira et. al. (2017) in their study found that millennials are more attracted to virtual advertising as coupons and discounts.

Despite having a reputation for being a rich market participant, their purchasing habits and reasons are frequently unstable (Mbukanma, 2019; Solka et. al, 2011). According to a 2017 GFK study conducted in South Africa, 65% of millennials felt that experiences are more valuable than belongings and that marketers should provide them with an unforgettable experience. According to Rodriguez et. al. (2019) research, millennials are most likely to tweet about the clothing they admire. He further stated

that millennials are motivated by the desire for marketers to reciprocate with them in an atmosphere of engagement, trust, sincerity, and respect, which results in their happiness and patronage.

### **Hypothetical Relationship Between Sensory Marketing and Impulsive Buying Behaviour of Millennials in South Africa**

A hypothesis is an explanation for a phenomenon or a prediction about the proper relationship between variables. When researching, a hypothesis is crucial for determining the link between variables and making reasonable deductions.

#### **Relationship between Store Environment and Millennial Impulsive Buying Behaviour**

Millennial consumers, characterised by tech-savviness and a preference for experiential shopping, are highly influenced by the ambience and layout of stores. Pinto, Hawaldar and Pinto (2020) explore how factors such as music, lighting, and store layout impact impulse buying behaviour among millennials. Their findings suggested that a carefully curated store environment can evoke emotions and trigger impulsive purchases, especially when combined with interactive displays and engaging sensory elements. Additionally, a study by Amelia and Ronald (2021) supported the positive correlation between store environment and millennial impulsive buying behaviour. They highlighted the significance of factors such as scent, colour schemes, and spatial arrangements in influencing purchasing decisions. By creating an immersive and aesthetically pleasing environment, retailers can captivate the attention of millennials and stimulate impulsive purchases; Smith et al. emphasised the importance of understanding the unique preferences and behaviours of the millennial cohort to tailor store environments effectively, ultimately enhancing their shopping experience and driving sales. Moreover, the layout and design of the store play a crucial role in facilitating impulsive purchases. Retailers can strategically arrange products and use signage to guide customers through the store, creating a seamless flow that encourages exploration and discovery. Endcap displays and product demonstrations strategically placed throughout the store can capture the attention of millennials and stimulate impulse purchases. Based on the above scenario, the following hypothesis was established.

*H1: Store environment has a positive relationship with millennial impulsive buying behaviour.*

#### **Relationship between Visual Merchandising and Millennial Impulsive Buying Behaviour**

Visual merchandising, encompassing store arrangement and presentation of products in retail spaces, has emerged as a crucial factor in influencing millennial impulsive buying behaviour. A study by Aragoncillo and Orús (2018) explored the impact of visual merchandising techniques such as window displays, products and signage on millennials' purchasing decisions. Their research indicated that visually appealing displays and creative presentations can captivate the attention of millennials, leading them to make unplanned purchases. Accordingly, Amelia and Ronald (2021) in their findings it is presented that interactive elements such as touchscreens and virtual reality experiences within the store environment can enhance engagement and drive impulse behaviour.

Furthermore, Amelia and Ronald (2021) provided insight into the positive relationship between visual merchandising and millennial impulsive behaviour, their study highlighted the importance of aesthetic appeal and brand storytelling in influencing millennials' purchase intentions. By effectively utilising colours, textures, and visual strategies, retailers can create an immersive shopping experience that

resonates with millennials' preferences for authenticity and individuality. Aragoncillo and Orús (2018) emphasised the need for retailers to continuously innovate and adapt their visual merchandising strategies to align with the evolving tastes and expectations of millennial consumers. Based on the above scenario, the following hypothesis was established.

*H2: Visual merchandising has a positive relationship with millennial impulsive buying behaviour.*

### **Relationship Between In-Store Promotions and Millennial Impulsive Buying Behaviour**

Research in consumer behaviours has shown that in-store promotions indeed have a significant positive relationship with consumer purchasing behaviour. Asrinta (2018) has examined the impact of in-store promotions such as discounts, BOGO (Buy one. Get one), and limited-time offers on millennials' purchasing decisions. Their findings revealed that millennials are particularly responsive to these promotions, often succumbing to the allure of perceived bargains and making impulsive purchases as a result. Promotions stimulate immediate buying and foster a sense of urgency, prompting consumers to act quickly and take advantage of the promotional offer before it ends.

Additionally, research by Hussain (2019) has provided additional insights into the positive relationship between store promotions and millennial impulsive buying behaviour. Their study highlighted the role of social influence and FOMO (Fear of missing out) in driving millennials to make impulsive purchases during promotional events. They also found that millennials are heavily influenced by peer recommendations and social media posts highlighting promotional deals, leading them to engage in impulsive purchases to avoid feeling left out. In-store promotions are crucial in creating a sense of excitement and urgency among millennial shoppers, leading to impulsive purchases. Previous studies have shown that pricing tactics such as price anchoring can create a perception of value and persuade consumers to make unplanned purchases. Based on the above scenario, the following hypothesis was established.

*H3: In-store promotions have a positive relationship with millennial impulsive buying behaviour.*

### **Key Findings and Managerial Implications**

The aim of the study was to systematically reveal the conceptual interface between sensory marketing and the impulsive buying behaviour of millennials in South Africa. The findings of this study reveal the influence of sensory marketing on impulse purchases; three hypotheses were developed. It highlights the importance of aligning sensory marketing strategies with the preferences of the South African millennial demographic. Managerial implications emphasise the need for retailers to invest in training staff to effectively implement sensory marketing techniques to create immersive shopping experiences tailored to consumer preferences.

- Hypothesis 1 (H1) revealed a positive relationship between the Store environment and impulsive buying of Millennials. Therefore, sensory marketing impacts millennials' proclivity for impulsive purchases at most South African chain stores. This finding aligns with the literature in the study by Bhatt, Sarkar and Sarkar (2020) that when there is any planned or incidental connection between the interior and outside settings, customers "feel the freshness" of items through their sense of touch. This finding suggests that retailers should focus on creating an immersive and engaging store environment that appeals to the sensory preferences

of millennials. This could include investing in elements such as ambient scent, background music, and visually stimulating displays.

- Hypothesis 2 (H2) presented a positive relationship between Floor merchandising and millennial impulsive buying. According to the literature review, a good layout may also boost the pleasure of shopping by lessening the perception of tension connected with it (Widyastuti, 2018), and the results of this research confirm the association between store environment and millennial impulsive purchasing behaviour. This suggests that retailers should strategically place products, use eye-catching displays, and ensure clear signage to guide consumers through the store to increase impulse purchases. The association between floor merchandising and millennial impulsive purchasing behaviours is substantial. As a result, it demonstrates the purpose of floor merchandising: to educate and steer consumers as required, as shown by signage, graphics, or other media, in lieu of salespeople and inspire customers to purchase impulsively.
- Hypothesis 3 (H3) resulted in a positive relationship between In-store promotions and Millennial impulsive buying. It has been shown that sales promotions are beneficial to millennial's impulsive buying behaviours. As a result, the argument centred on the literature study shows that when consumers get vouchers and other promotional discounts that may be used to make purchases, regardless of whether the product is on their shopping list, they are more likely to buy it (Jhawar & Kushwaha, 2018). With this finding presented, retailers should capitalise on this by offering compelling promotions and limited time offers that resonate with the preferences of South African millennials.
- By understanding and implementing these managerial implications, retailers can effectively leverage sensory marketing strategies to influence impulsive purchases among millennials in South Africa, ultimately driving sales and enhancing customer satisfaction.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The objective of the study was to systematically reveal the conceptual interface between sensory marketing and the impulsive buying behaviour of millennials in South Africa. This study was conducted looking at the millennials that purchase out of the budget, changing or deviating from their fashion sense and not meeting their future financial plans. This means that the independent concepts identified in previous literature have a positive significant relationship with millennial impulsive buying behaviour. As such, this study has succeeded in achieving the objective of the study by establishing complete, logical thoughts on the conceptual interface between sensory marketing and the impulsive buying behaviour of millennials in South Africa. Thus, to manage the consequences resulting from the problem statement of the study, which include purchasing out of the budget, changing or deviating from their fashion sense and not meeting their future financial plans, millennials should familiarize themselves with different marketing strategies to manage their buying pattern critically. The store environment, floor merchandising and sales promotions were proved in this study's findings to have a positive relationship with millennial impulsive buying. It is, therefore, recommended by this study that it should be prioritised by marketers in retail stores to use these strategies to increase impulse purchases. Retailers should practise continuous research and analysis to stay updated with the ever-shifting consumer preferences and behaviours. It is recommended that there



should be innovative ways to integrate augmented reality, mobile apps, and social media platforms into the sensory marketing efforts to create interactive and personalised experiences.

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