RELATIVE AND INTERACTION EFFECTS OF SITUATIONAL AND PERSONAL FACTORS ON IMPULSE BUYING

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Introduction

With growth in disposable income and credit availability, the incidents of impulse buying have increased and impulse buying has become a prevalent consumer behavior (Dittmar & Drury, 2000). The purpose of this study was to develop an explanatory model of impulse buying that addresses antecedents of impulse buying. To achieve this purpose, situational influences on impulse buying were combined with personal characteristics of impulse buyers and examined for their relative effects on impulse buying.

Significance of the Study

The foremost contribution of this study was the development and testing of a theoretically grounded model to explain the complex processes of impulse buying. As situational influences on impulse buying and personal characteristics of impulse buyers were typically investigated in isolation from each other, unknown was the relative and interaction effects of these influences. Another contribution of this study was the practical implications of findings. By revealing the relative importance of situational influences on impulse buying, it was possible to recommend effective marketing strategies and store design practices to retailers to attract impulse buyers.

Theoretical Framwork

The stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) proposes that humans (R) are indirectly influenced by the physical environment (S) because emotional states (O) mediate the relationship between environment and people. We utilized this framework to hypothesize that environmental stimulus (e.g., promotion, store aesthetics, sales associate, store layout) would influence an incident of impulse buying concerning either apparel, shoes, or accessories. Within this framework we also hypothesized that personal characteristics (e.g., extroversion, lack of control, innovativeness, impulse buying tendency) would moderate the relationship between environmental stimuli (S) and impulse buying (R).
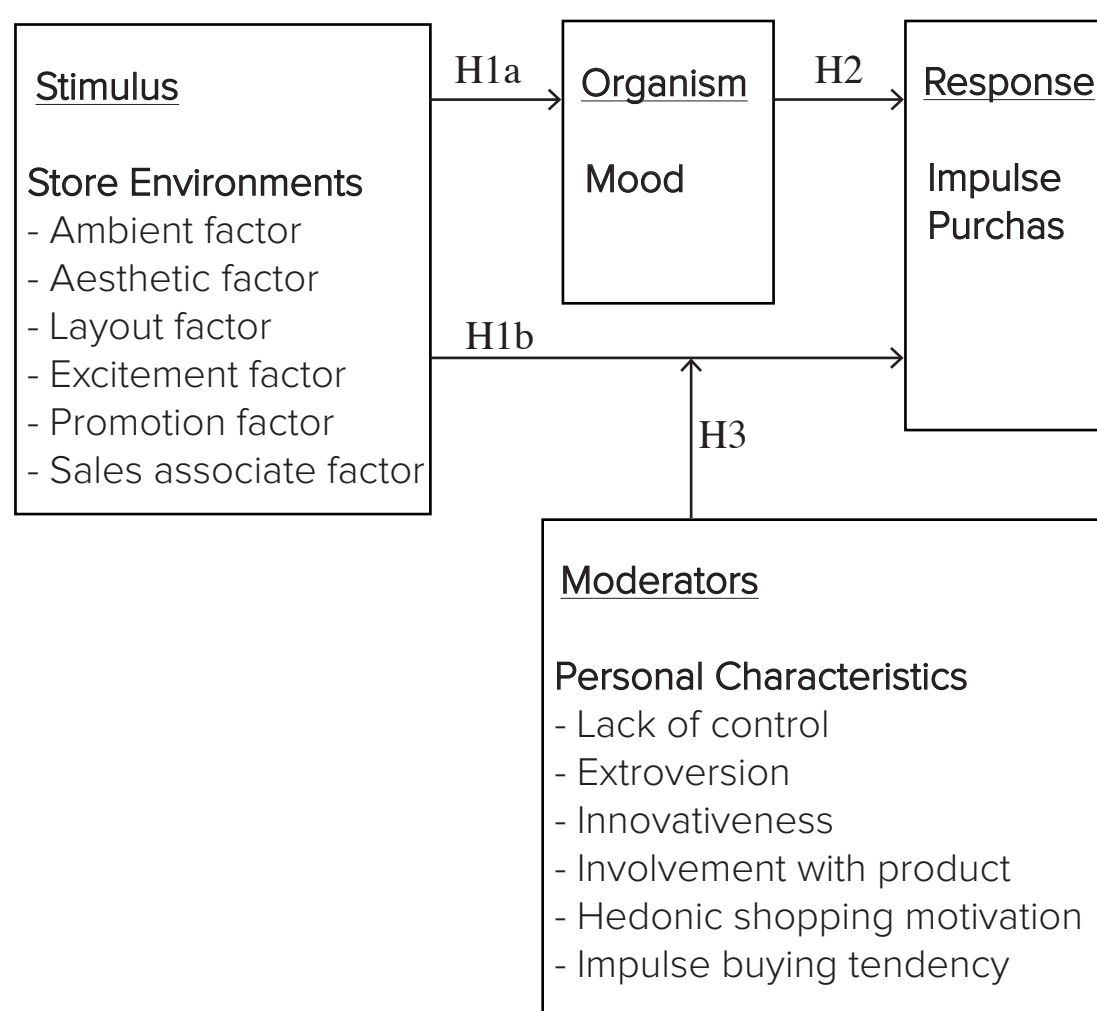

Figure 1. Proposed model of impulse buying

Method

Volunteer participants were given a questionnaire during classes offered in the college and asked to complete it immediately after a shopping trip for apparel, shoes or accessories. They were given two weeks to return the questionnaire. The questionnaire included a total of 13 scales. These scales included measures of impulse buying, store ambience, store aesthetics, store layout, store promotion, sales associate credibility, emotional state, product involvement, impulse buying tendency, extroversion, innovativeness, lack of control, and hedonic shopping tendency. Reliabilities of these scales ranged from .75 to .95. Participants responded to the measures using a Likert-type response format.

Results

Participants for this study were 150 college students. Most of the participants were females (94.7%), aged between 18 and 23 (92%), never married (97.3%), and Euro American (78.7%). Approximately 40% of participants classified their purchase as either very impulsive or impulsive. Approximately 70% of the participants indicated their purchase was an item of apparel while 20% of the participant's purchases were shoes.

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to analyze the fit of our model to the data and relationships between variables in our model. The model had a good fit for the data (2/df =.70, GFI = .99, AGFI = .97, NFI = .989, RMSEA = .00). Store ambience, store excitement, and sales associate credibility had significant relationships with participants' mood (p < .01). The path coefficient was .21 for the relationship between store ambience and participant's mood, .32 for the relationship between store excitement and participant's mood, and .20 for the relationship between sales associate and participant's mood. The relationship between store layout and impulsiveness of purchase was significant (p < .05) with a path coefficient of .20. There was a significant relationship between participant's mood and the impulsiveness of purchase (p < .01) with a path coefficient of .30. Participant's lack of control moderated the relationship between store layout and the impulsiveness of purchase, presenting a critical ratio of 1.98 (p < .05).
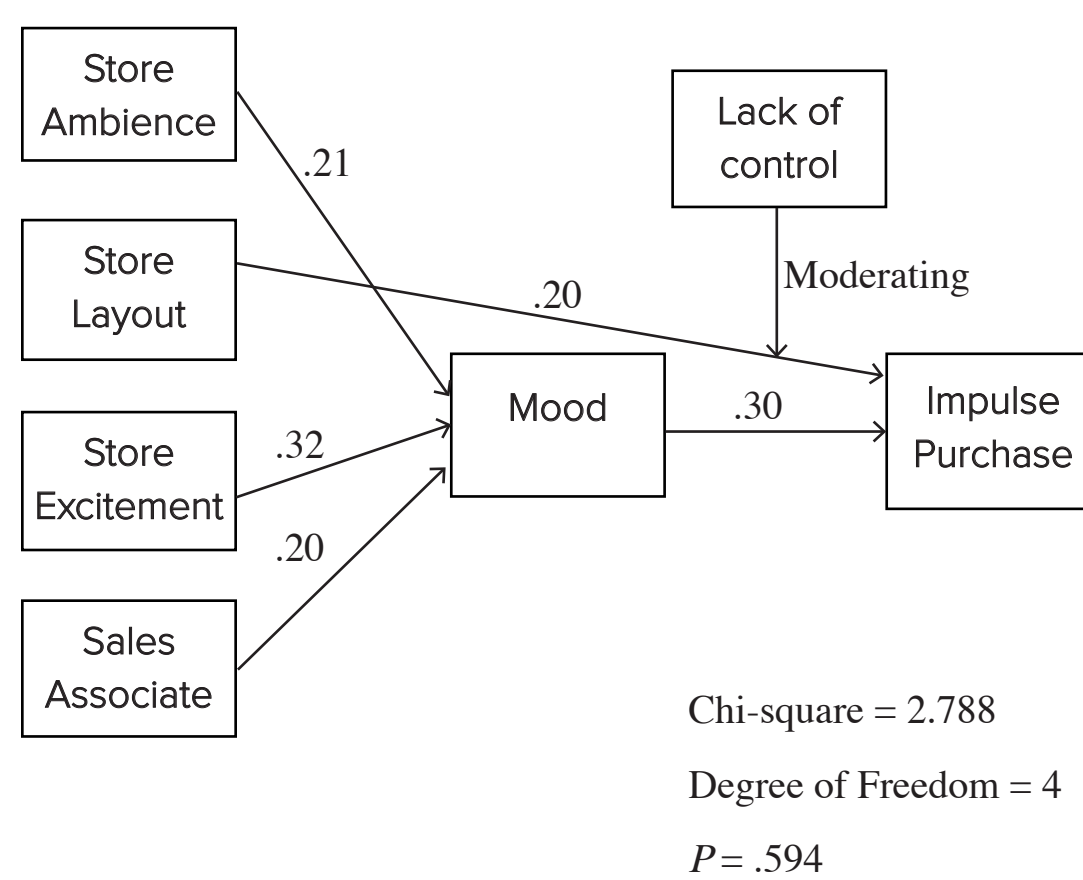

Figure 2. The final model of impulse buying.

Conclusion and Implications

The findings of this study supported the S-O-R framework by revealing that aspects of the store environment (S) created a positive mood in participants (O) and that positive mood increased the perceived impulsiveness of their purchases (R). Specifically, it was stores with appropriate ambiance, excitement, and credible sales associates that significantly influenced participants' mood during their shopping. If participants perceived that the store layout was easy to navigate, they were likely to indicate their purchase was an impulsive one. Participant's ability to self-regulate altered the effect of store layout on impulse buying behavior.

Clearly our findings point to the importance of store layout. There are several ways to achieve an effective store layout including co-locating complementary products or organizing product categories according to consumers' expectations. In addition, retailers can pay attention to providing entertainment that enhances the hedonic and the experiential value of the store experience. Since consumers' mood at the point-of-purchase might be influenced by interactions with sales associates, retailers should pay attention to training sales associates to enhance the consumer experience.

Resource list

Dittmar, H., and Drury, J. (2000). Self-image – Is it in the bag? A qualitative comparison between "ordinary" and "excessive" consumers. *Journal of Economic Psychology, 21*(2), 109-142.

Mehrabian, A., and Russell, J. A. (1974). *An Approach to Environmental Psychology.* Cambridge, Ma: Massachusetts Institution of Technology.

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