

The Influence Of Marketing Stimuli On Impulsive Buying Behavior In Airport Duty-Free Stores: Insights From A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Background: This study examines how marketing stimuli influence impulsive buying behavior in airport duty-free stores. Airports represent transient, emotionally charged environments where travelers are particularly susceptible to spontaneous purchases. Understanding the psychological and environmental triggers of such behavior is essential for optimizing retail strategies in these unique settings.

Materials and Methods: Fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with international travelers to explore their perceptions, emotions, and decision-making processes during duty-free shopping. The collected data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach to identify recurring patterns and relationships among marketing stimuli and impulsive buying tendencies.

Results: The analysis revealed that impulsive buying is significantly influenced by sensory cues—such as lighting, scent, and background music—as well as by promotional tactics, including exclusive discounts and limited-time offers. Travel-related emotions, particularly excitement, stress, and urgency, were found to intensify these effects by lowering self-control and fostering immediate purchasing behavior.

Conclusion: The findings underscore the critical role of sensory marketing and experiential store design in enhancing the attractiveness of airport retail spaces. Integrating these elements effectively can stimulate unplanned purchases and improve overall customer engagement in duty-free environments.

Keywords: Impulsive buying, Marketing stimuli, Sensory marketing, Duty-free retail, Traveler behavior.

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I. Introduction

Airports have evolved far beyond their traditional role as transit hubs, becoming dynamic commercial environments where travelers are exposed to a wide range of marketing stimuli. Duty-free stores, in particular, represent unique retail settings characterized by an international clientele, limited time availability, and a heightened emotional context associated with travel. In these spaces, consumers often find themselves in a relaxed yet transient state of mind, which can significantly influence their purchasing behavior. Existing research in consumer psychology and retail marketing highlights that environments combining sensory appeal, promotional incentives, and emotional triggers can increase the likelihood of unplanned purchases (Mattila & Wirtz, 2008; Hausman, 2000).

Over the past decade, the strategic importance of duty-free retailing has increased considerably, as airport revenues increasingly depend on non-aeronautical income. However, despite the strong commercial potential of these outlets, impulsive purchasing behavior within airport stores remains an underexplored area of academic research. Most prior studies on impulse buying have focused on traditional retail environments (e.g., supermarkets, shopping malls) or online contexts (Dawson & Kim, 2009; Verplanken & Herabadi, 2001), whereas the distinctive psychological and environmental characteristics of duty-free spaces have received relatively little empirical attention.

The airport setting introduces several contextual variables that may amplify impulsive tendencies—such as time pressure, excitement related to travel, and the perception of exclusivity or scarcity. Moreover, the multisensory design of duty-free stores (lighting, scent, music, visual merchandising) and their promotional practices (discounts, limited editions, bundled offers) can create powerful stimuli that trigger spontaneous decision-making. Understanding how these stimuli operate and how travelers perceive them is therefore essential both for advancing theoretical knowledge and for informing effective managerial strategies.

This research seeks to explore how marketing stimuli and environmental factors influence impulsive buying behavior in duty-free stores, drawing on qualitative insights from passenger interviews. The study aims to identify the psychological and experiential mechanisms underlying such purchases, as well as to highlight the specific situational features that enhance or inhibit spontaneous buying in airport contexts. Accordingly, the main

research question guiding this study is: **How do marketing stimuli and sensory factors within duty-free stores influence travelers' impulsive buying behavior and perceptions of store attractiveness?**

By addressing this question, the research contributes to the broader understanding of experiential and sensory marketing in transient retail environments, offering practical implications for duty-free managers seeking to optimize store design, customer engagement, and promotional strategies.

II. Literature

The experiential approach to impulsive buying

Impulsive buying behavior provides a powerful lens through which to understand how affective states influence individuals' thoughts and actions. In this sense, impulsive purchases are not merely random or irrational acts but part of a broader experiential process where emotions, sensations, and cognitions interact to shape consumer decisions (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). The experiential paradigm, introduced in the early 1980s, shifted the focus of consumer behavior research away from purely utilitarian motives toward the hedonic, emotional, and sensory experiences derived from shopping and consumption. For many individuals, shopping represents not only a means to obtain goods but also a source of pleasure, escape, and self-expression—an activity akin to leisure or entertainment, comparable to cinema or concerts.

From this experiential perspective, consumption holds emotional and symbolic dimensions that extend beyond functional benefits. Consumers anticipate the emotional and sensory gratifications that a product or service may provide, integrating these anticipated experiences into their decision-making processes. Thus, product evaluation becomes holistic, encompassing the imagined experience of use rather than an analytical assessment of isolated attributes (Damasio, 1994). Emotions, in this sense, guide decision-making when objective differences between alternatives are minimal, revealing their essential role in human choice.

The notion of a *buying impulse* lies at the heart of impulsive purchasing behavior. Rook (1987) defines it as an “irresistible urge to buy something immediately,” a complex hedonic state often accompanied by emotional conflict and diminished awareness of consequences. Similarly, Beatty and Ferrell (1998) describe impulsive buying as characterized by a strong and sudden desire, spontaneous in nature, and associated with intense emotional activation. Ortony et al. (1990) conceptualize buying impulses as affective reactions of attraction toward an object, where the emotional pull of desire overrides cognitive restraint. This affective attraction can result in a temporary sense of unity between the consumer and the product (Thompson et al., 1990), creating the psychological conditions for unplanned purchase decisions.

The desire underlying an impulse can take different forms. Some impulses are linked to the anticipation of consumption itself—what Dittmar et al. (1995) refer to as *consumption-related desire impulses*. Here, the pleasure derives from the imagined experience of using or owning the product, which appears particularly suited to the individual's tastes or identity. Certain categories, such as fashion, cosmetics, and leisure products, tend to elicit stronger impulsive responses due to their symbolic and emotional meanings. Dittmar et al. (1995) showed that women's impulsive purchases are often tied to self-expression and appearance, while men's are more likely to relate to utilitarian or recreational items, though this may partly reflect social desirability biases in reporting.

Other impulses are less object-centered and relate instead to the *act of buying itself*. The mere transition from non-ownership to ownership can generate emotional gratification, independent of subsequent consumption (Kahneman, cited in Mellers, 2000; Tran, 2019). In such cases, the pleasure resides in the acquisition process—the excitement of purchase, the sense of achievement, or even the anticipation of future enjoyment. This explains why consumers may experience relief or satisfaction immediately after purchasing an item, even if they never use it. For many individuals, shopping becomes an experiential act in itself—a moment of hedonic enjoyment, self-gratification, or mood regulation (Zheng et al., 2019; Thompson et al., 1990).

Dawson et al. (1990) distinguished between experiential motivations, driven by emotional pleasure, and utilitarian motivations, aimed at goal completion. Westbrook and Black (1985) identified several emotional motives for shopping, such as role fulfillment, the thrill of obtaining a bargain, affiliation with others, or sensory stimulation in retail environments. These emotional triggers—pride, excitement, or satisfaction—often precede unplanned purchases (Donovan et al., 1982, 1994; Babin & Darden, 1995). The so-called *smart shopper feeling* (Schindler, 1989), experienced when making a perceived advantageous purchase, further enhances the hedonic reward of impulsive buying.

Impulsive buying can thus be understood as a multidimensional experiential behavior encompassing affective, cognitive, and reactive components (Weinberg & Gottwald, 1982; Riad et al., 2022). Emotionally, it is characterized by high arousal and pleasure; cognitively, by reduced deliberation and limited foresight; and behaviorally, by spontaneity and immediacy (Piron, 1991). Consumers often describe such purchases as spontaneous, unplanned, and accompanied by a feeling of loss of control (Leblanc-Maridor, 1989; Rook, 1987). The act typically satisfies psychological rather than functional needs, providing emotional regulation, self-reward, or sensory stimulation (Akram et al., 2018).

From a psychological standpoint, impulsive purchases illustrate how emotional impulses override cognitive control. Grayson and Tolman (1950) emphasized four core features of impulsive acts—lack of control, deliberation, planning, and high spontaneity—all of which apply to impulsive buying. This emotional immediacy leads to decisions taken without full awareness of consequences, reinforcing the view of impulsive purchases as affect-driven rather than reason-driven behaviors (Wingrove & Bond, 1997; Bessouh et al., 2018). For Rook (1987), such behavior reflects a “hedonically complex” urge—a desire that is simultaneously exciting, pleasurable, and conflictual.

Empirical research has sought to measure the psychological underpinnings of impulsive buying through models and scales assessing personal impulsivity and hedonic orientation. Rook and Hoch (1985) developed one of the first scales to quantify impulsive buying tendencies, capturing spontaneous behaviors triggered by situational stimuli. Weun, Jones, and Beatty (1998) later refined this approach, linking impulsivity to sensation-seeking and low future orientation. Puri (1996) conceptualized impulsivity in two opposing dimensions: *hedonism*—the pursuit of immediate pleasure and temptation—and *prudence*—the cognitive control that restrains such urges. These dimensions illustrate the duality within consumer decision-making: between emotional surrender and rational regulation.

Subsequent studies confirmed that impulsive buying is positively correlated with sensation-seeking (Zuckerman, 1979) and negatively correlated with future-oriented thinking (Jones et al., 1998). Youn (2000) further observed a positive association between impulsivity and stress, suggesting that impulsive purchases can function as short-term coping mechanisms to alleviate negative moods. Thus, the impulsive buying experience represents a dynamic interplay between internal emotional states, external stimuli, and individual traits, culminating in a form of consumption where the act itself—rather than the product—becomes the primary source of satisfaction.

Marketing stimuli and the impulsive buying experience

Impulsive buying is a multidimensional phenomenon in consumer behavior, heavily influenced by marketing stimuli that shape perception, emotion, and decision-making. These stimuli—whether external or internal—affect consumers’ cognitive and affective processes, often leading to unplanned purchases (Youn & Faber, 2000). By creating sensory and psychological environments conducive to spontaneity, marketers can trigger emotional responses that result in immediate and unreflective purchase decisions (Schiffman, 2010).

External stimuli refer to environmental and marketing cues deliberately designed to elicit impulsive reactions. Elements such as store ambiance, lighting, product display, background music, window presentation, and promotional messages act as triggers that stimulate consumer senses and emotions (Piron, 1991). Early research by Applebaum (1951) highlighted how in-store exposure to visual and sensory stimuli can spark impulsive behavior. Later studies confirmed that attributes such as color, music, or scent contribute to shaping an atmosphere that encourages impulsive purchases (Hoyer & MacInner, 1999; Verplanken & Herabadi, 2001).

Mattila and Wirtz (2008) demonstrated that stimulating retail environments heighten emotional arousal, reduce self-control, and thus increase impulsive tendencies. Baumeister (2002) similarly noted that heightened excitement and overstimulation can impair self-regulation, making individuals more prone to impulsive acts. As Muruganatham and Kaliyamoorthy (2005) emphasized, visual merchandising functions as a “silent salesperson,” subtly influencing spontaneous purchasing decisions.

Among these external stimuli, window displays play a crucial role in attracting consumers’ attention and creating desire. Chang et al. (2011) found that window displays communicate a store’s value proposition while stimulating curiosity and hedonic emotions. Likewise, Tendai and Crispen (2009) confirmed that appealing visual displays encourage consumers to enter the store and engage in unplanned purchases.

Music is another environmental factor that influences impulsive buying. The tempo and harmony of background music can alter shoppers’ emotional states and perceptions of time (Lucas & Koff, 2014). Milliman (1982) showed that slow-tempo music induces relaxation, encouraging consumers to stay longer and make more spontaneous purchases, a finding later supported by Dubé and Morin (2001). Morrison et al. (2011) also confirmed that musical atmosphere positively affects shopper satisfaction and impulsive buying.

Salespeople further shape the impulsive buying experience through interpersonal influence. By establishing a friendly and trustworthy rapport, they create emotional bonds that reduce perceived risk and increase spontaneous buying behavior (Pelham & Kravitz, 2008). Techniques such as emphasizing product scarcity, offering free trials, or providing money-back guarantees have been shown to enhance impulsive tendencies (Chandon et al., 2000; Wanjugi, 2012).

Sales promotions also play a decisive role. Techniques like discounts, coupons, and samples create a sense of urgency and value that encourages impulsive decisions (Liao et al., 2009; Xu & Huang, 2014). Research has consistently shown a positive link between promotional activities and impulsive buying, particularly among consumers with high impulsivity (Badgaiyan & Verma, 2015). However, excessive use of discounts can reduce their long-term effectiveness and damage brand perception (Liao et al., 2009).

Price reductions are among the most powerful tools for stimulating impulse purchases. Xu and Huang (2014) found that both bulk offers and price discounts positively influence impulsive buying, though bulk offers tend to have a stronger effect. Carlson (2017) noted that online consumers respond particularly well to simple price reductions, which are easy to access and interpret. Moreover, such discounts help retailers clear excess inventory while triggering spontaneous purchase intentions among shoppers (Chen & Wang, 2016).

Beyond external factors, internal stimuli also play a crucial role in explaining impulsive buying behavior. These refer to individual psychological and personality traits that predispose a person to act impulsively. Rook and Hoch (1985) were among the first to show that impulses originate within the individual rather than the product itself. Emotional states such as excitement and joy have been linked to impulsive buying (Weinberg & Gottwald, 1982). Rook (1987) described impulsivity as a lifestyle trait, associated with materialism and sensation seeking, while Rook and Fisher (1995) introduced the concept of the “impulse buying tendency,” highlighting stable individual differences in spontaneous buying.

Other scholars have emphasized the link between impulsive buying and hedonic motivation. Hausman (2000) argued that impulsive purchases are driven by hedonic rather than utilitarian needs, fulfilling desires for excitement, pleasure, and emotional relief. Beatty and Ferrell (1998) supported this by noting that impulsive buying behavior is closely tied to sensory stimulation and hedonic enjoyment. Negative emotions can also stimulate impulsive behavior as a coping mechanism. Sneath et al. (2009) and Verplanken and Herabadi (2001) observed that individuals may engage in impulsive buying to escape stress, anxiety, or low self-esteem.

Overall, marketing stimuli shape impulsive buying through an interaction between external and internal influences. External factors such as store design, music, promotions, and salesperson interactions create an environment conducive to emotional arousal and reduced self-control, while internal traits determine consumers’ susceptibility to these cues. The impulsive buying experience is thus the result of a dynamic interplay between marketing strategy and individual psychology—an affective, spontaneous, and often irrational decision process (Rook, 1987; Zhou & Wong, 2003).

III. Material And Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach based on fifteen semi-structured interviews with travelers passing through an international airport (see Table 1 for sample characteristics). The aim was to gain a deeper understanding of how marketing stimuli shape impulsive purchasing behavior in duty-free retail spaces. Airports offer a particularly relevant research setting, as duty-free zones combine unique situational factors—such as time constraints, sensory stimulation, and promotional abundance—that can intensify spontaneous buying tendencies. By engaging participants directly in the transit environment, this method allowed for rich, contextual insights into how travelers perceive, experience, and respond to marketing cues in real time.

Table 1: Data sample

Date of interview	Interview duration (min)	Gender	Nationality	age	Purpose of travel
29/11/2024	64	Women	Frensh-Moroccan	34	Tourism
19/10/2024	47	Women	Moroccan	27	Studies
22/10/2024	33	Women	Moroccan	24	Tourism
17/12/2024	57	Women	Frensh	32	Studies
12/01/2025	46	Women	Moroccan	28	Business
09/12/2024	66	Women	Moroccan	25	Studies
29/01/2025	58	Men	Moroccan /Espagnol	30	Family visit
03/09/2024	44	Men	Frensh	26	Family visit
11/12/2024	40	Men	American	39	Tourism
24/11/2024	74	Women	Algerian	23	Studies
10/11/2024	54	Men	Tunisian	29	Business
05/12/2024	34	Women	Spanish	35	Tourism
19/11/2024	33	Men	Italien	31	Tourism
06/12/2024	40	Women	Moroccan	22	Family visit
04/12/2024	32	Women	Frensh	30	Tourism
12/10/2024	30	Men	Moroccan	52	Business

Source: Author

The interviews generated rich qualitative insights into travelers’ perceptions, emotional responses, and the spontaneous decision-making processes elicited by various in-store stimuli. Special attention was given to sensory elements, including ambient music, scents, lighting, and product layout, as well as to promotional cues such as time-limited discounts, bundle deals, and visually striking displays.

All interview transcripts were systematically analyzed using thematic analysis to uncover recurring patterns and the underlying structures of participants’ experiences. This approach facilitated the identification of central themes that illuminate the psychological mechanisms driving unplanned purchases in duty-free retail environments. The findings underscore the influence of factors such as travel-related excitement, the perceived

exceptional value of offers, and the sense of scarcity or opportunity, all of which appear to diminish self-regulatory capacity and heighten susceptibility to impulsive buying.

Overall, the analysis provides nuanced insights into the emotional and cognitive processes associated with impulsive purchasing in duty-free contexts, where consumers—often in transitional or waiting states—exhibit heightened responsiveness to marketing stimuli and situational cues.

IV. Results Discussion

The influence of emotions and external stimuli on impulsive buying

The qualitative analysis revealed that impulsive buying in airport duty-free environments is largely driven by emotional arousal and external sensory or promotional stimuli. Participants consistently described impulsive purchases not as deliberate decisions, but as spontaneous, emotionally charged reactions to situational triggers. One traveler explained, *“It’s an instant decision, influenced by a good offer, a special discount, or simply a friendly gesture from the salesperson. It’s really something irrational, you just feel it and buy it”* (Interview 2). Another participant shared, *“An impulsive buyer is someone who gives in to a sudden urge, buying an item they didn’t plan for, sometimes even something they already have”* (Interview 8). Similarly, a respondent summarized, *“For me, an impulsive purchase is one that’s forced by your emotions”* (Interview 9).

Across narratives, participants emphasized that impulsive buying was rarely tied to an actual need but emerged from a momentary affective state. As one traveler put it, *“You don’t think about whether you need it or not—you just feel like buying it because it looks good, or it makes you feel something”* (Interview 4). This pattern reflects Dittmar et al.’s (1996) findings that impulsive purchases are typically motivated by immediate desire rather than functional necessity. Emotional states—whether positive or negative—were found to weaken rational evaluation and increase susceptibility to impulsive decisions. One respondent observed, *“When you’re in a good mood, you just want to treat yourself; everything seems more appealing”* (Interview 11). Conversely, another admitted, *“Sometimes when I’m stressed before the flight, I buy something to calm myself down or distract myself”* (Interview 6).

These experiences resonate with Silvera et al. (2008), who demonstrated that both positive and negative affect can fuel impulsive purchases—positive emotions by reinforcing hedonic pleasure, and negative emotions by acting as psychological compensation. The airport setting appears to amplify these tendencies: excitement, anticipation, and stress coexist, creating fertile ground for spontaneous buying. As one participant noted, *“Before flying, you’re in a special mood—excited but also nervous. Buying something feels like part of the experience”* (Interview 13).

Beyond emotional states, participants frequently pointed to the powerful influence of external stimuli. The duty-free space was often described as *“inviting,” “bright,”* and *“full of temptations.”* One traveler recalled, *“The music, the lighting, the smell of perfume—it all makes you want to stop and look around”* (Interview 1). Another mentioned, *“Even if you don’t plan to buy anything, the way products are displayed makes it hard to resist. It feels like everything is calling for your attention”* (Interview 7).

Participants also highlighted the role of promotions and marketing cues in triggering unplanned purchases. Temporary discounts, special bundle offers, and limited editions were frequently cited as decisive factors. *“When I see a 20% discount for today only, I don’t want to miss out. I buy quickly without thinking,”* said one interviewee (Interview 5). Another added, *“You tell yourself it’s a good deal, and before you realize it, you’re paying at the counter”* (Interview 10). These testimonies align with Wood (1998) and Sharma et al. (2009), who emphasize the capacity of marketing cues—especially scarcity and time-limited offers—to generate urgency and encourage impulsive decisions.

Retailers’ sensory strategies were also frequently mentioned. Several respondents noted that *“the smell of luxury perfumes,” “the relaxing background music,”* and *“the well-lit product displays”* created a sense of pleasure and curiosity that encouraged them to engage with products they had no intention of buying. One traveler explained, *“It’s not just about the product—it’s the whole atmosphere. You feel like you’re in a different world, and that makes you want to buy something as a souvenir of the moment”* (Interview 3).

A recurring theme across interviews was the feeling of reduced self-control in such emotionally and sensorially rich environments. Some participants described this as a temporary *“loss of rationality”* or *“automatic reaction.”* As one put it, *“It’s like your emotions take over—you know you shouldn’t, but you still do it”* (Interview 9). This experience echoes the findings of Vohs and Faber (2007), who argue that impulsive buyers exhibit diminished self-regulatory capacity when emotionally aroused. Similarly, Loewenstein (1996) suggests that intense emotional stimulation narrows the temporal focus, leading individuals to prioritize immediate gratification over future consequences. Several respondents admitted to later regretting their purchases: *“After the flight, I often wonder why I bought it—I didn’t even need it”* (Interview 12). Such reflections support Hausman’s (2000) argument that impulsive buying can generate post-purchase dissonance once emotional intensity subsides.

Taken together, these findings highlight a complex interplay between emotional states, environmental cues, and cognitive control. In the unique atmosphere of airport duty-free zones—marked by sensory abundance,

temporal pressure, and emotional arousal—travelers appear particularly vulnerable to impulsive purchasing triggers. The convergence of these factors transforms shopping from a functional act into an experiential one, where emotional gratification outweighs rational assessment. As several participants put it, “*Buying in the airport feels different—it’s part of the journey*” (Interview 14), and “*You buy because it feels good, not because you need it*” (Interview 8).

Participants’ recommendations to enhance marketing stimuli and store attractiveness

The qualitative findings reveal that participants view the attractiveness of duty-free stores as the outcome of a carefully orchestrated combination of marketing, environmental, and experiential factors. Their recommendations emphasize several strategic levers to strengthen the impact of marketing stimuli and foster impulsive buying—namely, the design of promotional offers, store layout and visual merchandising, quality of customer service, engaging in-store experiences, and the optimization of the shopping journey. These insights echo the principles of experiential marketing and sensory stimulation (Mattila & Wirtz, 2008; Xu & Huang, 2014), which underline the central role of environmental cues and in-store interactions in shaping consumer behavior.

A dominant theme in participants’ recommendations concerns the importance of exclusive promotions and perceived scarcity as catalysts of impulsive buying. Many respondents highlighted that “*putting forward exclusive promotions can attract travelers and make them want to buy*” (Interview 12), and that “*offering attractive discounts, limited editions, and well-known brands*” increases the sense of urgency (Interview 4). Another participant added that “*seeing a crowd often means there’s a good deal, so I’m more likely to go in*” (Interview 2). These insights support Ramaswamy and Namakumar’s (2009) and Xu and Huang’s (2014) findings, which show that promotional framing and limited-time offers amplify consumers’ perception of scarcity, thereby accelerating decision-making and enhancing impulsive purchases.

Participants also stressed the decisive role of store layout and product presentation in encouraging unplanned purchases. The spatial organization of the duty-free environment was described as crucial to creating an enjoyable and fluid shopping experience. One traveler suggested that stores “*should take inspiration from the IKEA model to optimize the customer journey*” (Interview 2), while another emphasized the need for “*a welcoming atmosphere with good lighting and an attractive layout*” (Interview 4). Visual merchandising was perceived as a key factor in drawing customers in and sustaining attention. “*A nice display with good lighting and music makes me stay longer—and often, I end up buying something*” (Interview 5). These reflections align with research by Tendai and Crispen (2009), who demonstrate that the visual organization of products and ambient design strongly influence consumers’ browsing time and propensity to buy impulsively. Dynamic displays and regularly renewed window designs enhance product attractiveness and stimulate curiosity (Gandhi et al., 2015), while well-calibrated sensory cues—lighting, sound, fragrance—reinforce pleasure and engagement (Mattila & Wirtz, 2008).

Another crucial lever mentioned by participants is the quality of customer service and the interpersonal dimension of the shopping experience. Travelers consistently noted that staff behavior plays a pivotal role in creating trust and encouraging purchases. “*The service and attitude of the sellers really matter. A smiling and attentive employee, not too pushy, makes a big difference*” (Interview 6). Others suggested “*training knowledgeable and approachable staff who understand the products and can quickly identify customer needs*” (Interview 10). One participant even insisted that “*salespeople should be able to detect what the customer wants and respond effectively, while staying fast and polite*” (Interview 14). These recommendations are consistent with Pelham and Kravitz (2008), who highlight that interaction with well-trained personnel enhances consumer confidence, and with Wanjugi (2012), who finds that demonstrating product value and emphasizing scarcity can increase impulse buying.

Beyond traditional marketing and service aspects, several participants emphasized the potential of interactive and immersive experiences to boost store appeal. Suggestions included setting up “*a photo booth where travelers can take a branded souvenir picture*” (Interview 1) or “*organizing in-store events and product demonstrations to catch attention and extend the visit*” (Interview 4). These ideas are in line with Schmitt’s (1999) experiential marketing framework, which emphasizes the role of sensory, affective, cognitive, behavioral, and relational experiences in building brand engagement. As one participant observed, “*Duty-free shopping should be fun and memorable, not just about buying products*” (Interview 3). Similarly, another proposed “*offering free samples at the entrance to encourage people to try and discover*” (Interview 1), a strategy shown by Rook and Hoch (1985) to reduce psychological resistance and prompt spontaneous purchase behavior.

Participants also proposed creative cross-promotional initiatives, such as “*partnering with airport cafés to distribute mini-coupons or tasting vouchers*” (Interview 1), reflecting Dawson and Kim’s (2009) findings that strategic alliances and reward mechanisms can attract foot traffic and stimulate purchases. Others emphasized the need to “*reduce waiting time by adding more checkouts*” (Interview 7) and to “*ensure product availability to avoid frustration*” (Interview 14), highlighting how logistical constraints can dampen impulsive behavior. These

suggestions are consistent with Beatty and Ferrell's (1998) research, which shows that time pressure and shopping convenience are crucial determinants of impulsive purchasing.

Finally, several respondents insisted on the importance of price perception and transparency. "Airport prices are often seen as high; if the prices were more reasonable, people would buy more" (Interview 9). This concern aligns with Gupta et al. (2009), who demonstrate that perceived fairness of price directly influences consumers' willingness to make spontaneous purchases in duty-free settings.

Overall, participants' recommendations converge toward a holistic vision of the duty-free shopping experience—one that combines promotional appeal, sensory stimulation, efficient design, and engaging service. By crafting immersive and emotionally resonant environments, enhancing staff-customer interactions, and facilitating a seamless shopping journey, duty-free retailers can strengthen their influence on consumers' impulsive tendencies. These findings underscore the relevance of experiential and sensory marketing strategies (Mattila & Wirtz, 2008; Schmitt, 1999) for optimizing both customer satisfaction and commercial performance in highly transitory contexts such as airports.

V. Conclusion

This study provides an in-depth understanding of how travelers experience, interpret, and respond to marketing stimuli in duty-free retail environments. Through thematic analysis of qualitative interviews, several key mechanisms were identified that explain impulsive buying behavior in these unique contexts. The findings show that promotional cues, sensory ambiance, and store layout strongly influence travelers' emotional states and decision-making processes, often reducing self-control and increasing purchase spontaneity. The perceived exclusivity of offers, scarcity of time, and travel-related excitement further enhance consumers' susceptibility to impulse buying.

From a theoretical perspective, the research enriches existing models of impulsive behavior by situating them within the specific context of airport retailing—an environment marked by psychological transience and sensory intensity. It extends experiential marketing theory (Schmitt, 1999) by illustrating how the integration of sensory, affective, and cognitive stimuli can shape purchasing behavior in situationally constrained settings. Moreover, it contributes to the growing literature on environmental psychology in retail by demonstrating the mediating role of emotions and situational perceptions in driving impulsive consumption.

From a managerial standpoint, the study offers several actionable recommendations. Duty-free retailers should leverage the power of exclusive promotions and limited-time offers to stimulate a sense of urgency. The store atmosphere—through lighting, music, scent, and visual merchandising—should be carefully designed to evoke pleasure and engagement. Well-trained, empathetic sales staff play a crucial role in creating trust and encouraging unplanned purchases without exerting excessive pressure. Furthermore, interactive experiences such as product demonstrations, tasting sessions, or branded photo booths can enhance memorability and prolong in-store engagement. Finally, simplifying the shopping process—by reducing waiting times, ensuring stock availability, and offering transparent pricing—can remove friction and further encourage impulsive decisions.

Nevertheless, the study has certain limitations. As it relies on qualitative data collected within a specific airport context, its findings cannot be generalized to all duty-free environments or cultural settings. Future research could adopt a mixed-methods approach, combining observational techniques and quantitative modeling to measure the direct impact of specific stimuli (e.g., lighting, scent intensity, or promotional framing) on consumer behavior. Comparative studies across international airports could also reveal how cultural and contextual factors moderate the influence of marketing stimuli on impulsive buying.

In conclusion, this research underscores the powerful interplay between environment, emotion, and behavior in duty-free retailing. By transforming functional shopping into a multisensory and emotionally engaging experience, airport retailers can not only increase sales but also enhance travelers' overall satisfaction, turning transitory moments into memorable experiences.

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