

# **Impact of Visual Merchandising Elements on Consumer Impulse Buying Behaviour: An Analysis**

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## **Abstract**

Modern retail is undergoing rapid transformation, driven significantly by the rise in online sales, a trend further accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this shift, physical retail spaces—particularly grocery stores—continue to play a central role and are expected to remain vital in the near future. As competition among retailers intensifies, consumers now demand more engaging and personalized shopping experiences. Retailers must therefore employ creative strategies to attract customers into their stores and encourage repeat visits. Once inside, the objective is to maximize customer purchases. In this evolving landscape, visual merchandising has emerged as a key supply-side strategy, contributing to a pleasant in-store atmosphere and guiding consumer behavior. This study explores the effectiveness of various visual merchandising elements in stimulating impulsive buying behavior. Through a comprehensive literature review and a primary survey of 226 respondents—shoppers in large-format grocery stores such as hypermarkets—the research identifies the visual merchandising factors that significantly influence impulsive consumer purchases.

**Keywords:** visual merchandising strategies, grocery retail, impulse purchasing behavior, off-shelf displays, in-store ambiance, promotional pricing labels,

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Despite evolving consumer habits, physical stores—particularly in grocery retailing, which focuses largely on food products—continue to dominate as the primary purchasing channel. In an era marked by intense competition and shifting consumer expectations, especially among omnichannel shoppers, brick-and-mortar stores remain the most influential touchpoint for shaping consumer purchasing behavior, particularly impulsive buying. To leverage this advantage, retailers increasingly rely on visual merchandising and store environment strategies to drive unplanned purchases. As outlined by Berman and Evans (2018), visual merchandising encompasses a wide range of elements, including store layout, fixtures, window displays, aisle width, merchandise arrangement, lighting, signage, background music, wall colors and graphics, flooring, and the use of digital screens. These components are strategically designed to create a pleasant and engaging in-store experience, encouraging customers to spend more time and ultimately increase their total spend. Given the broad array of visual merchandising tools and the constraints of limited budgets, it is essential for retailers to evaluate the effectiveness of each element and apply them strategically. Understanding which visual merchandising techniques most effectively influence consumer behavior is crucial for maximizing return on investment and enhancing the overall shopping experience.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This table outlines key visual merchandising elements and their impact on impulsive buying. Factors like store layout, product displays, price promotions, colors, music, and staff interactions influence shoppers' emotions and purchase decisions. While many elements encourage impulsive buying, some—like out-of-store promotions—may reduce it by promoting planned shopping. Overall, these elements play a crucial role in shaping the in-store experience and impulsive purchases.

Visual Merchandising Element	Description	Key Findings	Influence on Impulsive Buying	Key References
Store Layout	Strategic arrangement of departments and aisles to attract customers and increase sales.	Mixed evidence: Some find positive effects on impulsive buying; others find no effect.	Can encourage longer visits and browsing, potentially increasing impulsive buying.	Davies & Tilley (2004); AMA (2022); Saad et al. (2015); Nishanov et al. (2016)
Impulsive Buying Definition	Spontaneous, emotionally driven purchase behavior with little rational evaluation.	Characterized by quick decision-making, triggered by immediate stimuli, and emotional or cognitive response.	In-store stimuli targeting emotions can trigger impulsive purchases.	Beatty & Ferrell (1998); Bayley & Nancarrow (1998); Piron (1991)
Store Design & Cleanliness	Store atmosphere shaped by cleanliness and lighting.	Clean environments convey luxury and comfort; proper lighting enhances product appeal and store value perception.	Creates a welcoming environment that encourages consumers to spend more time and purchase impulsively.	Yun & Good (2017); Bell & Ternus (2002, 2022)
Promotional Signage	In-store labels and signage highlighting offers and products.	Enhances product visibility and empowers independent purchase decisions; targets browsing shoppers.	Generally increases impulsive buying by drawing attention to promotions, though some conflicting evidence exists.	Štulec & Petljak (2016); Mehta et al. (2013); Sorensen (2016); Anić & Radas (2007); Hubrechts & Kokturk (2012)
In-store Product Displays	Manufacturer-funded displays that optimize product visibility.	Effective at capturing attention; up to 50% of grocery purchases influenced by displays.	Strongly stimulates impulsive buying by highlighting standout offers.	Goworek & McGoldrick (2015); Grewal et al. (2017); Ramandeep et al. (2015); Davies & Tilley (2004)
In-store Price Promotions	Price discounts and promotional labels within the store.	Price sensitivity varies; discounted prices trigger unplanned purchases; labels without price info increase likelihood.	Significant driver of impulsive buying, especially when combined with personal and situational factors.	Lichtenstein et al. (1993); Sinha & Batra (1999); Zhou & Gu (2015); Huddleston et al. (2015); Weerathung & Pathmini (2015)
Out-of-store Price Promotions	Price-based advertising via internet, catalogs, and TV to inform about discounts.	Attracts shoppers but planned trips around discounts may reduce impulsive buying.	Can reduce impulsive buying by encouraging pre-planned purchases.	Voss & Seiders (2003); Ziliani & Ieva (2015)

Visual Merchandising Element	Description	Key Findings	Influence on Impulsive Buying	Key References
In-store Colors	Use of color in store atmosphere, merchandising, lighting, and displays.	Colors influence mood, perception, shopping time, and satisfaction.	Color positively impacts impulsive buying by enhancing mood and time spent in-store.	Bellizzi & Hite (1992); Babin et al. (2003); Bhalla & Anuraag (2010)
In-store Music	Background music tempo, familiarity, and volume affecting customer mood and pace.	Slow tempo linked to higher sales; unfamiliar music increases browsing time; music also affects employees.	Music influences shopping duration, satisfaction, and indirectly impulsive purchases.	Milliman (1982); Berkhout (2016); Yalch & Spangenberg (2000)
Store Employees	Interaction and service quality of store staff.	Accessible, friendly, well-trained employees increase impulsive buying; positive relationships strengthen tendency.	Staff can motivate impulsive purchases through service quality and interaction.	Gwinner & Bitner (2005); Baker et al. (1992); Mattila & Wirtz (2008); Mihić & Kursan (2010); Saad & Metawie (2015)

### 3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the research are:

1. To examine whether various visual merchandising tools have a statistically significant impact on impulsive buying behavior in grocery retail settings.
2. To identify which specific visual merchandising tools positively influence impulsive buying and which have a negative or negligible effect in grocery store environments.

### 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study focused on supermarkets and hypermarkets within the Croatian retail sector. A structured questionnaire—available both on paper and online via Google Forms—was used to collect data from a convenient sample of 226 respondents, all of whom were main or occasional household buyers. Respondents were asked to identify their preferred retailer and base their answers on that store. Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS 23.0, employing regression analysis.

The research model treats impulsive buying as the dependent variable, with store layout, store design and cleanliness, promotional signage, in-store product displays, in-store price labels, out-of-store price promotions, store colors, in-store music, and store employees as independent variables. These variables were measured through 5-point Likert scale statements. All constructs demonstrated acceptable reliability with Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.7, the lowest being 0.712 for store design and cleanliness. Reliability and descriptive statistics are detailed in Table 2.

### 5. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The study included 226 respondents, with a higher proportion of females (63.3%) than males (36.7%). Most participants were young adults, primarily between 18 and 30 years old (68.6%). Regarding education, the majority had completed high school (36.3%) or higher education such as faculty degrees (26.1%). Employment status showed that nearly half were employed (45.1%) or students (35.4%). Most households consisted of 3 to 4 members (58%). Monthly household income varied, with the largest group earning between Rs. 30,001 and Rs. 50,000 (51.3%), while a smaller portion reported incomes

above Rs. 70,000 (14.2%). This diverse sample provides a broad representation of Croatian supermarket and hypermarket shoppers for analyzing impulsive buying behavior.

**Table 1: Sample description**

	Variables	N	%
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>226</b>	<b>100</b>
	Male	83	36,7
	Female	143	63,3
<b>Age</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>226</b>	<b>100</b>
	18-24	86	38,1
	25-30	69	30,5
	31-40	34	15,0
	41-50	17	7,5
	51-60	13	5,8
	61-70	7	3,1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>226</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Education</b>	Primary school	7	3,1
	High school	82	36,3
	Higher education	41	18,1
	Faculty	59	26,1
	Scientific masters or doctoral degree	37	16,4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>226</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Employment status</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>226</b>	<b>100</b>
	Student	80	35,4
	Employed	102	45,1
	Unemployed	35	15,5
	Retired	9	4,0
<b>Members of household</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>226</b>	<b>100</b>
	1	9	4,0
	2	42	18,6
	3	66	29,2
	4	65	28,8
	5 and more	44	19,5
<b>Household monthly income</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>226</b>	<b>100</b>
	not answered	1	0,4
	less than Rs. 30000	24	10,6
	Rs. 30001 – 40000	52	23,0
	Rs. 40001-50000	64	28,3
	Rs. 50001 -60000	34	15,0
	Rs. 60001-70000	19	8,4
	Rs. 70001 and more	32	14,2

**Table 2: Reliability analysis and descriptive statistics of the constructs**

Scale	N of items	Cronbach Alpha	Mean	Variance	Std. deviation	Scale source

Impulsive buying (IB)	6	0.833	15.66	26.562	5.154	Hubrechts and Kokturk (2012); Mehta and Chugan (2013)
Store layout (SL)	8	0.780	27.77	29.953	5.473	Hubrechts and Kokturk (2012); Henry (2014)
Store design and cleanliness (SDC)	4	0.712	13.73	9.238	3.039	Grewal and Baker (1994); Bouzaabia et al. (2013)
In-store product displays (IPD)	6	0.894	18.48	28.429	5.332	Hubrechts and Kokturk (2012); Henry (2014)
Regular promotional signage (RPS)	5	0.863	15.68	22.140	4.705	Hubrechts and Kokturk (2012)
In-store price promotional signage (IPP)	7	0.917	25.95	34.611	5.889	Hubrechts and Kokturk (2012); own
Out-of-store price promotion (OPP)	3	0,755	11.18	7.482	2.735	Hubrechts and Kokturk (2012); own
In-store colours (IC)	4	0.783	13.63	9.763	3.125	Henry (2014); Jamnani (2015)
In-store music (IM)	4	0.888	9.83	15.216	3.901	Henry (2014.), Jamnani (2015)
Employees staff (ES)	4	0.890	15.12	9.960	3.156	Baker et al. (1994); Ngobo and Coutelle (2014)

**Table 3: Model summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,511 <sup>a</sup>	,263	,215	6,98131
a. Predictors: (Constant), Total_IC, Total_OPP, Total_ES, Total_RPS, Total_SL, Total_IM, Total_SDC, Total_IPD, Total_IPP				
b. Dependent Variable: IB				

Table 3 regression model shows a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.511, indicating a moderate positive relationship between the visual merchandising variables and impulsive buying. The R Square value of 0.263 means that 26.3% of the variation in impulsive buying is explained by the combined independent variables, including store layout, out-of-store price promotions, employee skills, promotional signage, in-store music, store design and cleanliness, product displays, and price promotional labels. The adjusted R Square of 0.215 accounts for the number of predictors in the model and suggests a moderate model fit. The standard error of estimate is 6.98131, which indicates the average distance between the observed and predicted impulsive buying values.

**Table 4. ANOVA**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3931,584	9	436,715	8,731	,000 <sup>b</sup>

Residual	10558,651	216	48,331
Total	14490,235	225	

a. Dependent Variable: IB

b. Predictors: (Constant), Total\_IC, Total\_OPP, Total\_ES, Total\_RPS, Total\_SL, Total\_IM, Total\_SDC, Total\_IPD, Total\_IPP

The ANOVA results in Table 4 indicate that the regression model used to predict impulsive buying behavior is statistically significant. With an F-value of 8.731 and a p-value of 0.000 (which is less than the standard significance level of 0.05), the model as a whole reliably explains variations in impulsive buying. The regression sum of squares (3931.584) represents the portion of the total variance in impulsive buying explained by the nine independent variables included in the model. Meanwhile, the residual sum of squares (10558.651) accounts for the variance not explained by the model. Overall, these results confirm that the set of visual merchandising elements considered in the study collectively have a significant impact on consumers' impulsive buying behavior.

**Table 5: Regression coefficient**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	24,353	3,290		7,403	,000
	Total_IPD	,352	,105	,274	3,335	,001
	Total_SL	,076	,110	,043	,587	,544
	Total_RPS	,023	,131	,011	,168	,854
	Total_IPP	,231	,104	,207	2,251	,026
	Total_OPP	-,469	,215	-,159	-2,181	,030
	Total_ES	-,058	,163	-,021	-,341	,711
	Total_IM	,450	,149	,216	2,841	,005
	Total_SDC	-,069	,210	-,026	-,330	,720
	Total_IC	-,025	,211	-,010	-,124	,800

The regression coefficients in Table 5 reveal the individual impact of each visual merchandising element on impulsive buying behavior. The model's constant term is 24.353, indicating the baseline level of impulsive buying when all independent variables are zero. Among the predictors, in-store product displays (Total\_IPD) have a significant positive effect ( $B = 0.352$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), suggesting that better product displays increase impulsive purchases. Similarly, in-store price promotional labels (Total\_IPP) positively influence impulsive buying ( $B = 0.231$ ,  $p = 0.026$ ), and in-store music (Total\_IM) also shows a significant positive impact ( $B = 0.450$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ), indicating that these factors encourage impulsive purchases.

Conversely, out-of-store price promotions (Total\_OPP) have a significant negative effect ( $B = -0.469$ ,  $p = 0.030$ ), implying that such promotions might reduce impulsive buying, possibly because consumers plan their purchases in advance. Other factors, including store layout (Total\_SL), regular promotional signage (Total\_RPS), employee service (Total\_ES), store design and cleanliness (Total\_SDC), and in-store colors (Total\_IC), do not show statistically significant effects on impulsive buying in this model, as indicated by their high p-values ( $>0.05$ ). These results suggest that specific visual merchandising elements like product displays, in-store price promotions, and music play a more critical role in stimulating impulsive buying than other factors examined in the study.

## 6.CONCLUSION

The study concludes that out-of-store price promotions tend to reduce impulsive buying by encouraging more planned and focused purchases, even though they play a key role in attracting consumers to stores. In contrast, in-store price promotional labels are identified as the most powerful merchandising tool to stimulate impulsive buying, followed closely by in-store product displays as the strongest off-shelf incentive. Additionally, in-store music, often overlooked, is shown to be an effective element for enhancing store atmosphere and promoting impulsive purchases. The findings highlight the importance for retailers to balance promotional activities between attracting consumers to the store and triggering impulsive buying once inside. Given the study's focus on grocery retail within Croatia, future research should broaden the geographical scope and explore deeper structural factors influencing visual merchandising and its impact on consumer behavior.

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