

# Impact of Store Atmosphere on Impulse Shopping Behavior of Supermarket Customers in the Colombo district

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## ABSTRACT

Supermarkets are experiencing a rapid growth in this competitive world. Due to the homogeneity of the merchandises and intensified rivalry, supermarkets are more focused on their store atmosphere in order to differentiate on each other. Supermarkets subtly guide customers toward impulse purchasing by creating its store atmosphere and thereby building shoppers' mind set to purchase whatever the products spontaneously. Therefore, this particular research endeavors on determining how the store atmosphere of supermarkets affects customers' impulse shopping behavior with special reference to the Colombo District. By following the deductive approach, the researchers distributed a self-administered questionnaire to a sample of 385 customers by convenience sampling technique where the research method falls under the quantitative method. The 'store atmosphere' served as the independent variable and that has been evaluated by four sub variables; 'store layout, store ambiance, store employees, and in-store advertisement.' The findings of the research concluded that store layout, store ambiance, and in-store advertisements had a positive impact on the impulse shopping behavior of supermarket customers. However, the variable 'store employees' had a negative impact on the impulse shopping behavior of supermarket customers. The retailers can gain more insights on the store atmosphere that triggers the impulse shopping behavior. Comparative analysis between various retail settings shall be beneficial in determining the context-specific influences on impulse buying.

**Keywords:** Store atmosphere, Impulse shopping behavior, Store layout, Store ambiance, Store employees, In-store advertisements.

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## **Introduction**

The supermarket industry is enormously competitive, and vendors are constantly considering extending and remodeling their stores. These tactics are driven by the industry's ongoing changes as well as the requirement for a better store atmosphere (also known as atmospherics; in which the customers' feelings are being created based on the specific design and, layout of the retail space) to uphold client pleasure. Customers used to be primarily interested in the features, benefits, and qualities of products. They often seek out more perks inside the shopping environment in addition to the traditional shopping experience (Mfundi et al., 2021). Retailers themselves recognize that store's environment has a critical role in both consumer satisfaction and market distinctiveness. The retailers therefore produce and reinforce pleasant sentiments and a great experience while designing their store atmospheres (Esbjerg et al., 2012). Notwithstanding, shopping is not only an activity for purchasing; shopping is a recreational activity and choosing a specific shop depends on the value of “entertainment” (Woodside et al., 1992). Customers' propensity to visit the supermarket will decrease if a store has a bad store atmosphere, which will lower their likelihood of making a purchase. (El Hedhli et al., 2013).

The improvement of store environment and thereby boosting the impulse buying behavior are the outstanding attempts on increasing the rivalry among retailers (Gooneratne & Wimalasiri, 2021). The impulse purchasing is a concept that rooted in the consumer's inner psychology to purchase whatever the products spontaneously. Supermarket retailers must consider on recognizing their consumer preferences and factors that affect impulse purchasing behavior of the consumers who are in modern trade outlets (Gooneratne & Wimalasiri, 2021). The physical stimuli set inside the store can influence a customer's purchasing experience and can induce impulse purchasing behavior which is also affected by demographic, cultural, individual, and environmental factors. Therefore, supermarket retailers should focus on identifying and improving in-store

factors to attract customer's impulse purchases in the supermarkets (Hu & Jasper, 2006a). Nevertheless, overall, store arrangement, public display signs, showcases, promotional campaigns, doorway, retail floor planning and store surroundings (fragrance, color, lighting), and conduct of store employees tend to stimulate consumers' impulse purchases (Gooneratne & Wimalasiri, 2021). Individuals prefer to spend their time at stores where they can have a pleasant experience. They desire convenient locations and times for their purchases. Therefore, people select explicitly to a supermarket rather than a local Mom & Pop store (Ragel & Nirushan, 2017). In Sri Lanka, Colombo is the most outstanding financial district and the commercial hub (Jayanetti et al., 2017). The supermarkets are increasingly being chosen by patrons in the Colombo district for their shopping needs but the exploration of those insights is uneven. But the proper awareness of store atmosphere and the factors affecting store atmosphere to build the impulse buying are the timely effective strategies for the supermarket retailers in order to be edge in the competitive world. Since, the surroundings or environment of a place is an essential component influencing a customer's behavior (Kumar & Aggarwal, 2021), this research has been structured on determining the impact of Store Atmosphere on Impulse Shopping Behavior of Supermarket Customers in the Colombo district. The store atmosphere has been measured by four factors stemming as 'store layout, store atmosphere, store employees and in-store atmosphere.' Though, the store atmosphere is an essential feature that grab the consumers towards the retail stores especially the supermarkets, the supermarkets having a lack of orderliness and pleasantness make customers dissatisfied thus leaving the business place. Existing literature have been focused on which elements of retail environment are influenced customers' attitudes towards purchasing and service quality (Hu & Jasper, 2006a). Due to the uneven exploration on how store atmosphere affects on impulse buying, this particular research will contribute to this empirical gap by exploring the factors building store atmosphere and how these relate to customers' impulse shopping behavior in the supermarkets of Colombo District.

## **Research Questions**

1. What is the impact of store layout on supermarket consumers' impulse shopping behavior?
2. What is the impact of store ambiance on supermarket consumers' impulse shopping behavior?
3. What is the impact of store employees on supermarket consumers' impulse shopping behavior?
4. What is the impact of in-store advertisements on supermarket consumers' impulse shopping behavior?

## **Research Objectives**

1. To ascertain the impact of store layout on supermarket consumers' impulse shopping behavior.
2. To ascertain the impact of store ambiance on supermarket consumers' impulse shopping behavior.
3. To ascertain the determine the impact of store employees on supermarket consumers' impulse shopping behavior.
4. To ascertain the impact of in-store advertisements on supermarket consumers' impulse shopping behavior.

## **Literature Review**

### **Store Atmosphere**

Good retail environments are defined by their ability to draw people in through atmosphere, design, and customer service (Dokcen et al., 2021). Even if a store is not involved in the retail sector, its atmosphere or look still has an impact on customers (Madhuhansi, 2017). The feelings elicited can also affect consumers' satisfaction with their purchases and their future behavior in the store (Lusch, 2007). The in-store environment deserves careful consideration since it influences customers' decisions

greatly (Madhuhansi, 2017). Discovered that interior atmospheric elements including color, light, and music significantly affect consumer behavior. These elements also have an impact on customers' spontaneous, interior-stimulated impulse purchases (Ali et al., 2017). In this research, store atmosphere has been measured by four main sub-variables as store layout, store ambiance, store employees, and in-store advertisements.

### **Store Layout**

The good store layout communicates the values of supermarkets, improving comfort, inventory capacity, product quality, price, and display as well as search efficiency (Dokcen et al., 2021). The interior store environment is made up of several visible and invisible components to the customers such as features, layout, facilities, and product display (Terblanche, 2018). An efficient structure would enable manufacturers to showcase their goods effectively, facilitate customer shopping, and increase productivity (Makal & Pangemanan, 2014). The customers frequently have mental schematics of the store's layout. The locations of certain products, categories, and check-outs are all marked on the well-organized and unambiguous mental maps. This information can positively impact shoppers' perceptions of shopping convenience and raise the likelihood of impulse purchases (Zentes et al., 2007). Customers view a convenient and easy-to-find product layout as a favorable shopping experience, and they frequently search for a logical store layout with enough signage (Ragel & Nirushan, 2017). Customers are easily persuaded to make a purchase, particularly whether they are waiting in line or passing through to check out. Overall, the store's design succeeds in not only making customers feel good about themselves and creating a welcoming environment that encourages impulse purchases, but also in setting it apart from rivals (Jiang & Liu, 2014). Therefore, the first hypothesis has been generated as below.

**H1 : There is an impact of store layout on supermarket consumers' impulse shopping behavior.**

## **Store Ambiance**

Store ambiance is largely driven by the color, lighting, music, and scent as per the literature. Color is a critical and omnipresent aspect of retail environments, significantly influencing customer perception, emotions, mood, and the overall identity of a store. Retailers strategically employ color, often drawing on color psychology, to shape their brand image and encourage in-store purchases (Mfundu et al., 2021; Lovelock & Wirtz, 2011; Zentes et al., 2007). Specific colors can evoke distinct responses: white and blue are associated with tranquility and cleanliness, while red, orange, and yellow trigger strong emotions, warmth, and activity (Solomon, 2006). Beyond immediate emotional responses, color can also trigger memories and specific feelings (Dash, 2018).

The impact of color extends to customers' arousal and pleasant sentiments, the duration of their stay in the store, and their overall perception of the retail space (Ballantine et al., 2010). Complementing the use of color, appropriate store lighting is also crucial. It enables customers to clearly view merchandise and highlights key selling elements (Ragel & Nirushan, 2017). Effective lighting, such as product spotlights and soft ambient lighting, can create an enjoyable and playful atmosphere, enhancing customer pleasure during their in-store experience (Ragel & Nirushan, 2017). In essence, both color and lighting are powerful tools retailers utilize to strategically influence customer behavior and enhance the retail experience. Since the 1930s, background music has been a global retail strategy to extend customer stays (Mfundu et al., 2021). Relaxing music encourages longer stays and larger purchases (Biswas et al., 2019), while favorite music increases comfort and spending. Conversely, loud, fast, or uncomfortable music shortens visits. Music's arousal potential boosts enjoyment and shopper happiness (Mohan et al., 2013). Slow music promotes longer shopping, while fast music excites purchasing (Zentes et al., 2007). However, excessive volume can disturb customers and hinder purchases (Turley & Chebat, 2002). Lighting profoundly impacts consumer behavior, affecting brain activity and influencing conscious/subconscious

reactions (Horska & Bercik, 2014). Beyond mere illumination, effective store lighting highlights products, defines areas, and evokes emotions, fostering customer loyalty and positively impacting purchasing decisions (Levy & Weitz, 2008). Customers desire pleasant supermarket lighting for Browse enjoyment (Hilal, 2022). Businesses need balanced, attractive lighting for optimal customer visibility and store layout perception. A clean outlet can elicit pleasant feelings and mood in customers, which will influence positive or bad word-of-mouth about an outlet, spread by customers because of their experience. The store's clean aesthetic shouldn't be sacrificed, regardless of whether it serves a lower-, middle-, or upper-class clientele. Customers are more inclined to make larger purchases, stay longer, and return to a clean outlet because it is more aesthetically pleasing and well-organized (Manuahe et al., 2017). The scent is a nice aroma that affects a customer's mood and feelings, encouraging them to remain longer and feel more enthusiastic (Manuahe et al., 2017). Scents positively influence consumer patronage, though the degree of impact may vary (Ali et al., 2017). Scent marketing can uplift customers' spirits and help them feel at ease in the store, which may have a favorable impact on their decision to buy. Scent is a powerful emotional trigger (Hassan, 2015). Research has shown that pleasant ambient scents can positively influence customer evaluations, variety-seeking behavior, time spent in- store, and overall spending, especially when the scents are semantically aligned with the products being considered within the store's environment (Sachdeva & Goel, 2015). The second hypothesis for this research has been generated as below.

H2 : There is an impact of store ambiance on supermarket consumers' impulse shopping behavior.

### **Store Employees**

Store staff are crucial, directly influencing customer experience and spending (Madhuhansi, 2017; Donovan & Rossiter, 1982). High-quality interpersonal interactions, rapport, and responsiveness from employees increase customer satisfaction (Marques et al., 2013). Courteous and knowledgeable staff are essential for positive customer sentiment (Terblanche, 2018), and customer emotions improve with polite treatment

(Ing et al., 2019). Staff appearance, particularly informality during service failures, significantly impacts customer emotions (Jiang & Liu, 2014). Friendly staff and other social stimuli boost purchasing arousal (Jiang & Liu, 2014). Retailers must prioritize employee appearance, politeness, and attitude as they convey company values and influence customer behavior (Turley & Milliman, 2000). Well-behaved store employees enhance the shopping experience. Therefore, the third hypothesis has been built as below.

H3 : There is an impact of store employees on supermarket consumers' impulse shopping behavior.

### **In-store Advertisements**

A positive attitude toward advertising correlates with shopping enjoyment, especially for less-educated consumers (Mihic & Kursan Milakovic, 2017). In-store promotions attract recreational shoppers who enjoy exploring information (Dhara et al., 2023). Promotional focus enhances abstract information interpretation (Dhara et al., 2023). Social content posters improve perceived merchandise quality (Hu & Jasper, 2006a). In-store ads and promotions boost impulse buying, with discounts driving low-cost purchases and bonus packs increasing luxury sales (Gooneratne & Wimalasiri, 2021). Shopping provides joy and sensory pleasure (Jin & Sternquist, 2004; Arnold & Reynolds, 2003). Enjoyment, excitement, accessibility, ambiance, environment, and staff all contribute to satisfaction (Hart et al., 2007). Customer happiness influences Browse time (Purnama & Suprpto, 2022) and positive word-of-mouth (Ing et al., 2019). The fourth hypothesis has been built as below.

H4 : There is an impact of in-store advertisements on supermarket consumers' impulse shopping behavior

### **Impulse Buying**

Impulse buying is an unplanned purchase driven by emotional or cognitive responses to stimuli, influenced by customer, store, product, and environmental factors (Herath, 2014; Virvilaite et al., 2009). In Sri Lankan



supermarkets, the store environment significantly shapes customer purchase inclination and perceptions (Hilal, 2022). Both impulse and unplanned purchases result from an overwhelming desire (Jiang & Liu, 2014). Shoppers who enjoy the experience derive more satisfaction from impulse buys than pre-planned purchases (Wiwoho, 2021). A positive correlation exists between shopping enjoyment and impulse buying; a more pleasant shopping environment fosters a positive purchasing attitude (Dwikayana & Santika, 2021). Ultimately, heightened shopping pleasure and confidence in purchase satisfaction directly contribute to increased impulse buying. Impulse buying is an unplanned purchase often triggered by emotional or cognitive reactions to in-store stimuli (Herath, 2014; Virvilaite et al., 2009). The store environment significantly shapes customer perceptions and purchase inclination, particularly in Sri Lankan supermarkets (Hilal, 2022). Unplanned and impulse purchases occur when customers succumb to overwhelming desires (Jiang & Liu, 2014). Shoppers who find enjoyment in the process derive greater satisfaction from impulse buys than planned ones (Wiwoho, 2021). Stern categorized impulse buying into pure, reminder, suggestion, and planned types (Madhuhansi, 2017). Crucially, shopping enjoyment positively correlates with impulse buying; a more enjoyable environment fosters a positive purchasing attitude (Dwikayana & Santika, 2021). Ultimately, increased shopping pleasure and perceived satisfaction directly lead to higher impulse buying behavior.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

### **Data Analysis**

#### **Demographic Profile of the Sample**

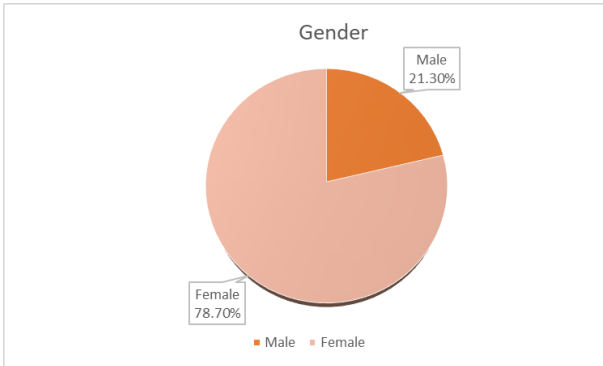
Out of 385 respondents; 82 respondents represented the ‘male’, and 303 respondents were female. This was divided into percentages of 21.3% for male and 78.7% for females respectively. The high responses were received from the female respondents since, the female respondents heavily engaged

in their different shopping requirements during the time period of the questionnaire distribution. There were five age categories made for all 385 respondents. Majority of the respondents were from the age group of 26-35 which is 81.8 % of the total respondents. The age group of 16-25 were represented by a percentage of 14.5% and the ages of 36-45 and 46-55 were represented by 2.1%, and 1% respectively. 0.5% was for the 55 & above category. The respondents' income levels were measured using five income groups. Majority of the respondents were in the income group of Rs. 41,000 - Rs. 60,000 representing 48.8% of the total respondents.

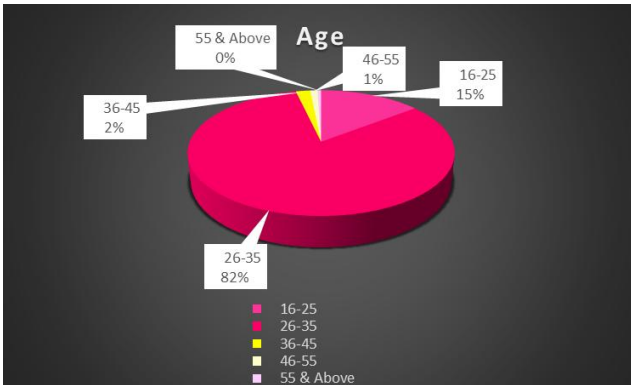
Table 1 - Demographic Profile of the Sample

Demographic	Frequency	Percent
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	82	21.3%
Female	303	78.7%
<b>Age</b>		
16-25	56	14.5%
26-35	315	81.9%
36-45	8	2.1%
46-55	4	1.0%
55 & Above	2	0.5%
<b>Income level (Rs.)</b>		
Below 20,000	54	14.0%
21,000 - 40,000	118	30.6%
41,000 - 60,000	188	48.8%
61,000 - 80,000	9	2.3%
81,000 & Above	16	4.2%

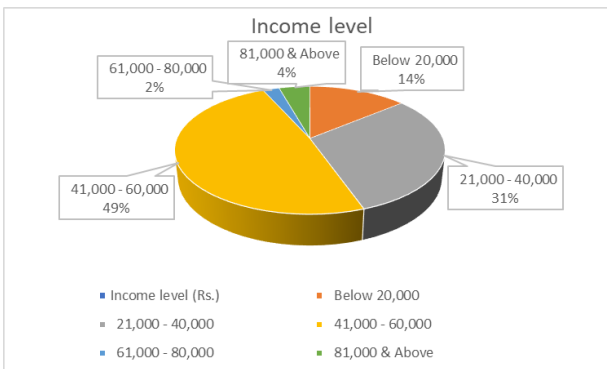
Source : (Authors' constructed, 2024)



*Figure 2 - Gender Distribution*



*Figure 3 - Age Distribution*



*Figure 4 - Income level Distribution*

**Reliability Analysis**

Analysis of reliability is used to examine the consistency of the variables (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). In this research, the reliability of each variable was tested by Cronbach's Alpha. The values more than 0.7 are the required acceptancy criteria levels for Cronbach's Alpha (Nunnally, 1978). Cronbach's Alpha values for Store Layout, Store Ambiance, Store Employees, In-store Advertisements and Impulse Shopping Behavior were represented the internal consistency.

*Table 2 - Reliability Analysis*

	Cronbach's Alpha
Store Layout	.892
Store Ambiance	.827
Store Employees	.799
In-store Advertisements	.862.
Impulse Shopping Behavior	.798

Source : (Authors' constructed, 2024)

**Regression Analysis**

Table 03 shows the model summary table whereas R is correlation between observed and expected values of the dependent variables. According to the findings, R square was 36.7%. This indicates that 36.7% of the variance in impulse shopping behavior can be predicted from the variables of store layout, store ambiance, store employees, and in-store advertisements. R squared stands for the coefficient of determination, which can be used to assess the amount of variance in the dependent

variable that can be accounted by the variables that are independent in the regression model.

*Table 03 - Model summary*

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
.605 <sup>a</sup>	.367	.360

*Source : (Authors' constructed, 2024)*

*Table 04 - Coefficients Table*

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	
1 (Constant)	.951	.186		.000
Layout	.116	.046	.135	.012
Ambiance	.145	.061	.139	.017
Employees	.053	.056	.056	.345
Advertisements	.396	.049	.422	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Impulse Shopping Behavior

*Source : (Authors' constructed, 2024)*

According to the Table 04, it was highlighted the individual role played by the independent variable. Standardized coefficients were represented the predicted change of the dependent variable in relation to the independent variable of the study. Beta value has been provided an indication of the relative importance of independent variables uniquely accounting for the variance of dependent variables. The regression

equation of the study has been built as below.

$$Y = 0.116X_1 + 0.145X_2 + 0.053X_3 + 0.396X_4$$

Y = Impulse Shopping Behavior

X<sub>1</sub> = Store Layout

X<sub>2</sub> = Store Ambiance

X<sub>3</sub> = Store Employees

X<sub>4</sub> = In-store Advertisements

## Hypotheses Testing

Based on the outcomes of the analysis, the findings concluded that there was a significant positive impact of store atmosphere factors including store layout, store ambiance, and in-store advertisements on impulse shopping behavior. In contrast, there was a significant negative impact on store employees as one of the factors of store atmosphere on impulse shopping behavior.

*Table 05 - Summary of the Results*

	Hypothesis	Impact	P<0.05	Status
H1	There is an impact of store layout on supermarket consumers' impulse shopping behavior	Positive	0.012<0.05	Accepted
H2	There is an impact of store ambiance on supermarket consumers' impulse shopping behavior	Positive	0.017<0.05	Accepted

H3	There is an impact of store employees on supermarket consumers' impulse shopping behavior	Negative	0.345>0.05	Rejected
H4	There is an impact of in-store advertisements on supermarket consumers' impulse shopping behavior	Positive	0.000<0.05	Accepted

*Source : (Authors' constructed, 2024)*

### **Conclusion of the Study**

The impact of store atmosphere on supermarket consumers' impulse shopping behavior within stores in the Colombo District has been tested by identifying four independent variables; store layout, store ambiance, store employees, and in-store advertisements. The researchers obtained the related independent variables after reviewing the literature. According to the regression analysis, store layout, store ambiance, and in-store advertisements were identified as factors affecting the impulse buying behavior of consumers because the significance value (p-value) was less than 0.05. However, the variable, store employees has not had a great impact on impulse buying behavior due to a higher P - value than 0.05. There is a positive impact on store layout, store ambiance, and in-store advertisements as the factors of store atmosphere on impulse shopping behavior.

The store atmosphere itself affects the impulse shopping behavior of supermarket customers in the Colombo District. Consumer behavior in retail atmospheres is shaped by four important variables, namely store layout, ambiance, employees, and in-store advertisements. The store layout, store ambiance, and in-store advertisements have emerged as key contributors on impulse shopping behavior. On the other hand, the role of the store employees itself is not relevant in this context and

therefore offers new insights into retail management strategies.

An orderly and easy-to-move-around store layout makes the shopping environment comfortable. Regression analysis proved that store layout positively influences impulse buying behavior. Store ambiance can have a great impact on shoppers' emotional states. The good atmospheric condition in the store will lead to spending more time in the store, creating more possibilities for unplanned purchases. Attractive promotions and information displays encourage customers to browse around and make purchases that are not planned beforehand. Store employees, on the other hand, were clearly not influential enough, since the hypothesis concerning this variable was rejected.

### **Theoretical Contribution**

This study finds that the factors of store atmosphere influence impulse shopping behavior, thereby contributing to the broader field of consumer impulse shopping behavior by investigating precise factors of the supermarkets' store atmospheres, such as store layout, store ambiance, in-store advertisements, and store employee interactions with customers, influence shopping behavior. The study provides an overview of how different store atmosphere factors like store layout, ambiance, advertisements, and behavior of employees have a psychological influence on consumer psychology. It uses the backdrop of localized data from the Sri Lankan retail sector to help elevate theories and account for regional variations in existing knowledge. This helps researchers and practitioners worldwide to understand how retail strategies might have to be custom-made for different markets. This is important to scholars in its contribution to developing theoretical frameworks on previously unexplored variables and cultural contexts to make the theories sound and versatile enough for wider application. For practitioners, this translates these same theoretical insights into actionable strategies, linking the gap between academic research and real-world application.



## **Practical Contribution**

The survey comes up with practical suggestions for improving store layout and ambiance within the retail industry or, in this case, a supermarket in Sri Lanka. It prescribes strategic placement of high-demand products, coupled with an enticing shopping atmosphere with suitable light, music, and fragrances to promote impulse purchasing. The study gives some actionable suggestions regarding employee training and advertisements: improvement in customer service skills and friendliness. Findings like these also have key strategic implications for retail marketing and operations, such as how to position products based on customer flow or where to invest in store design or employee training. This could be useful in the development of standards or incentives by policymakers and industry stakeholders in efforts toward an enhanced shopping experience in retail that would drive customer satisfaction, loyalty, repeat business, and economic growth across the board. Hence, this research contributes to the competitiveness and economic outcomes of the retail industry in Sri Lanka, which ultimately would benefit supermarket managers, policymakers, and the retail sector.

## **Limitations of the Study**

There are 385 selected samples in the Colombo District. The results of this study can be further validated if another study includes more than that sample size. This study considers four dimensions of store atmosphere factors, including store layout, store ambiance, store employees, and in-store advertisements. If a study considers more dimensions of variables, including the study dimensions, the findings would be supported in detail. This study does not provide an understanding of how store atmosphere affects the impulse buying of supermarket customers in Sri Lanka as a whole. Because people in remote districts are less likely to visit supermarkets.

## Summary

These results reflect that impulse-buying behavior among supermarket customers is greatly influenced by store atmosphere in the Colombo District. Store layout, ambiance, employee interaction, and in-store advertisement are some of the key dimensions influencing consumer purchasing decisions. The well-designed and well-managed store atmosphere makes shopping easier and more entertaining, increases unplanned purchases, and hence revenue for the supermarket. The most influential factors are store layout and ambiance, drawing attention to an inviting, easily accessible, and visually stimulating environment. Store employees and in-store ads also have positive effects, pointing out the importance of customer service excellence and strategically effectively crafted promotional efforts. The current study develops both theoretical and practical implications for retail managers regarding the optimization of store designs, the training of their staff, and the devising of advertising strategies that best fit the expectations and behaviors of customers. However, this study has a limitation, as the research scope was confined to supermarkets in the Colombo District, considering only in-store factors, while excluding personal consumer characteristics and/or other market trend factors.

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