Vol. 3 No. 5 (2025)

Journal of Social Signs Review

Online ISSN 3006-4651

Print ISSN 3006-466X

Personality Traits influence the relationship between In-store Environments and Urges to Purchase

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Article Details:

Received on 14 April 2025
Accepted on 10 May 2025
Published on 12 May 2025

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Abstract

This study examine in-store environments trigger urge to purchase and did personality traits alter this connection. Using the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, where data were collected through surveys of 278 University faculty in district Mardan. Findings show store elements like lighting, music, and crowding strongly increase purchasing urges ($\beta = 0.88$, $*p* < 0.001$). However, personality traits notably self-esteem and excitement significantly shape this effect ($\beta = 0.06$, $*p* < 0.05$). Neurotic individuals felt stronger urges, while conscientiousness reduced clutter-driven impulses. By centering on a developing economy, the research challenges Western retail assumptions, showing how cultural contexts reshape behavior. Practical strategies include tailoring store layouts to traits, such as creating calming "neuroticism zones" or lively "social hubs" for extraverts. The study repositions personality as a dynamic filter, not a fixed trait, urging retailers to design psychologically inclusive spaces. While limited by its single-region sample and snapshot data, the findings call for cross-cultural, long-term studies to refine adaptive retail strategies.

Keywords: In-Store Environment; Urge to Purchase; Personality traits; Moderated analysis

Vol. 3 No. 5 (2025)

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Print ISSN 3006-466X

Introduction

The relationship between consumer behavior and personality traits has garnered significant scholarly attention, yet the nuanced interplay between individual differences and retail environments remains inadequately explored. While prior research establishes that personality influences purchasing habits (Ingram, Yue, & Rao, 2010), limited work examines how store atmospherics such as ambient music, lighting, and spatial design interact with these traits to amplify or suppress purchasing urges. Consumer psychological profiles render consumers more vulnerable to such stimuli in an era where retailers utilize sensory environments as strategic tools.

In conventional frameworks, neurotic individuals are viewed as risk-averse shoppers, but emerging evidence challenges this. According to Rick et al. (2014), emotionally unstable consumers actively sought out stores with calming, structured layouts to mitigate post-purchase regret. It suggests that store design actively negotiates with preferences, offering reassurance to some while overwhelming others. It has also been found that openness to experience, which has been associated with novelty-seeking, reveals unexpected patterns as well. A sense of sensory overload can trigger withdrawal despite holographic displays or AI-driven aesthetics (Matz, Gladstone, & Stillwell, 2016). Personality traits do not operate in isolation. Conscientiousness, often associated with self-control, illustrates this complexity. According to Baker, Bentley, and Lamb (2020) organized store layouts reduced the urge to purchase. Nevertheless, for others, retail strategies are challenged by strategically placed temptations, making environmental order futile. Rather than dictating shopper psychology unilaterally, store environments should collaborate with it.

It is also important to keep in mind that personality traits can also serve as latent amplifiers or dampeners of the effects of the environment itself. In luxury settings with status symbols such as marble floors or exclusive signage, narcissistic individuals show elevated spending (Otero-López, Santiago, Castro, & Education, 2025). As a result of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, consumer behavior is effectively scripted by the environments. Despite these advances, significant gaps persist. Research focuses on Western, developed contexts, leaving out regional contexts like Pakistan, where economic and cultural dynamics are unique. Furthermore, while the "Big Five" traits dominate literature, narrower constructs such as self-esteem and excitement key drivers of impulsive purchasing (Harmancioglu, Finney, & Joseph, 2009) remain understudied. This study addresses these voids by examining faculty members in Mardan, Pakistan, a population emblematic of transitional economies. It investigates:

1. Is there any relationship between in-store environments (e.g., lighting, crowding, music) with urge to purchase?
2. Does personality traits (self-esteem, excitement) moderate the relationship between in-store environments with urge to purchase?

Significance of the Study

This research advances theoretical and practical understanding of consumer behavior by illuminating how personality traits shape responses to retail environments, offering critical insights for academia, industry, and policymakers. The study refines the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework by demonstrating that traits like self-esteem and excitement act as dynamic filters, mediating how sensory stimuli translate into purchasing urges. By centering on Pakistan a culturally distinct, transitional economy it challenges

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Journal of Social Signs Review

Online ISSN 3006-4651

Print ISSN 3006-466X

Western-centric retail models, revealing how local economic realities and social norms reshape trait-environment interactions. For marketers, the findings provide actionable strategies to design psychologically inclusive spaces, such as creating calming zones with minimal crowding to reduce anxiety-driven purchases or deploying interactive displays to engage novelty-seeking shoppers. In emerging markets where modernization is accelerating, retail experiences that are tailored to the needs of consumers can drive competitiveness.

It is the aim of the study to demystify how store layouts and sensory cues can influence impulses in order to empower consumers. By labeling promotional tactics transparently, for instance, vulnerable groups may be better protected to the extent that they are protected. As part of Hayes' Process model, qualitative interviews are integrated with statistical trends and human narratives to bridge the gap between statistical trends and human narratives. These insights can help policymakers advocate for ethical retail practices, such as mandating "impulse-free zones" or restricting aggressive sensory tactics. To enhance global competitiveness and create jobs, Pakistani retailers can use the research to align product placement with traits-specific preferences.

In addition, this study suggests cross-cultural replications in markets such as India or Nigeria to test its universality, as well as exploring the effect of digital aesthetics on online purchasing. Retail spaces are redefined as collaborative partners in consumer decision-making, balancing profitability and ethical engagement. Personality as a fluid mediator of environmental influences rather than a fixed predictor. Human-centered strategies must be prioritized in an increasingly standardized retail environment.

Literature Review

In-store environments, personality traits, and urges to purchase have been explored. Based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, the purpose of review is to synthesize existing knowledge on these variables and their interactions.

Store Environment

Consumer behavior is influenced by store atmosphere, including lighting, music, crowding, and layout (Sachdeva, Goel, & Management, 2015). A store environment goes beyond just physical space; it functions as a sensory experience that shapes consumers' emotions and behaviors in a fundamental way (Baker, Grewal, & Parasuraman, 1994; Calvo-Porral & Lévy-Mangin, 2021). It has been found that ambient lighting and music can directly increase the urge to purchase a product by elevating emotional arousal (Michon, Chebat, & Turley, 2005). For instance, Gorji, Grimmer, Grimmer, Siami, and Management (2021) demonstrated that warm lighting and slow-tempo music prolong dwell time, indirectly boosting unplanned purchases. Conversely, overcrowded spaces often trigger stress, yet paradoxically, chaotic environments can heighten urgency, pushing shoppers toward quick decisions (Eroglu & Machleit, 1993).

Employee friendliness and aesthetics further modulate outcomes. Staff interactions can enhance trust or provoke discomfort depending on their approach (S. Lee & Dubinsky, 2003), while organized product displays reduce cognitive load, encouraging unplanned purchases (Mohan et al., 2013). Crowding, conversely, elicits mixed responses: while some perceive it as lively, others experience claustrophobia, reducing satisfaction (Gössling, McCabe, & Chen, 2020; Michon et al., 2005). Depending on contextual factors, store environments can both enhance and inhibit purchasing urges.

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Journal of Social Signs Review

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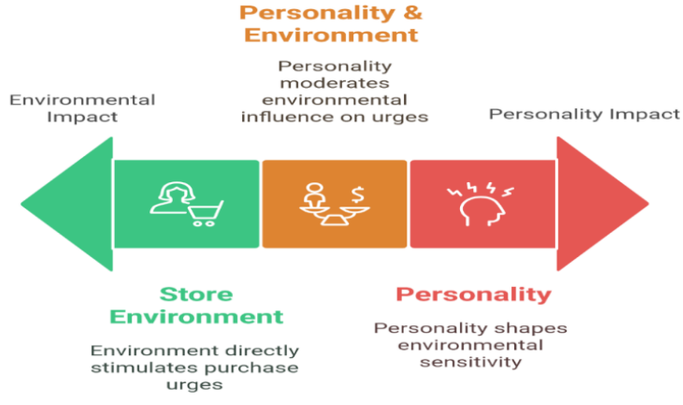
Urge to Purchase as a Response

Emotional and cognitive factors influence impulse buying, often referred to as impulse buying Rook (1987). Beatty and Ferrell (1998) linked urge to purchase to situational triggers such as promotions. Harmancioglu *et al.* (2009) identify excitement and self-esteem as key motivators, arguing that impulse purchases serve as emotional regulators. Research tends to focus on Western contexts, neglecting how economic constraints or cultural norms in developing economies like Pakistan might suppress or redirect these urges.

The urge to purchase represents a tension between hedonic desire and rational restraint, often culminating in urge to purchase a spontaneous, context-driven behavior (Rook & Fisher, 1995). Flash sales and vibrant atmospheres amplify emotional arousal, weakening self-control (Verplanken & Herabadi, 2001; Verplanken & Sato, 2011), while serene environments foster guilt-free indulgence. Materialism exacerbates this urge, as consumers equate possessions with self-worth, particularly in status-signaling settings like luxury boutiques (Dittmar, Beattie, & Friese, 1996). Yet, high self-control individuals resist even potent stimuli, emphasizing the interplay of internal and external factors (Moye, Kincade, & Research, 2002).

Personality Traits as Moderators

Personality traits critically moderate how individuals process environmental stimuli. Personality traits, particularly the Big Five (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism), serve as stable predictors of consumer behavior. First is Openness which is Drives attraction to novel designs (e.g., VR fitting rooms) but risks overwhelm in chaotic settings (Taşkın & Bozbay, 2023). Second is Conscientiousness which Enhances budget adherence, though organized layouts paradoxically aid impulse resistance (J. Baker et al., 2020). Third is Neuroticism which Linked to "retail therapy" in calming environments, where structured layouts mitigate anxiety. Next is Self-Esteem and Excitement which High self-esteem correlates with rational decisions, while excitement-seeking fuels novelty purchases (Harmancioglu et al., 2009; Nayebzadeh & Jalaly, 2014).



Understanding the influence of personality and environment on purchase urges, ranging from direct environmental effects to trait-driven perceptions.

The Big Five model dominates literature, but narrower constructs like self-esteem and excitement offer sharper insights into impulsive behavior. For example, neurotic individuals, characterized by emotional instability, exhibit contradictory responses: Rick et

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Journal of Social Signs Review

Online ISSN 3006-4651

Print ISSN 3006-466X

al. (2014) found they gravitate toward chaotic stores for distraction, despite heightened anxiety. Additionally, narcissistic shoppers, who seek self-esteem, respond disproportionately to luxury cues like marble floors. In orderly environments, conscientiousness can falter in the presence of "planned splurges," indicating that trait-environment interactions are nonlinear and context-sensitive. Traits do not operate in isolation. Agreeable individuals may prioritize eco-friendly purchases in social settings, illustrating how external pressures interact with intrinsic tendencies.

Personality traits act as moderators, reshaping how environments influence urges. For example, Extraverts thrive in socially vibrant settings, where staff interactions amplify spending (J. A. Lee & Kacen, 2008). Neuroticism heightens sensitivity to clutter, yet structured layouts paradoxically boost spending by alleviating anxiety. Narcissists overspend in luxury environments that mirror their self-image (Khan, Qayyum, & Hanif, 2022; Otero López, Santiago Mariño, & Castro Bolaño, 2008). These interactions challenge linear cause-effect models, positioning retail environments as dynamic collaborators rather than dictators of behavior (Otero-López et al., 2025).

The S-O-R Framework and Trait-Environment Interactions

The S-O-R model posits that environmental stimuli (e.g., store design) activate organismic states (e.g., emotional arousal), which then drive behavioral responses (e.g., purchasing urges). However, personality traits reshape this chain. Donovan, Rossiter, Marcoolyn, and Nesdale (1994) demonstrated that extraverts respond more strongly to vibrant atmospherics, while introverts prefer subdued settings. Extending this, Hayes' process model has been used to quantify moderation effects, revealing that traits like excitement amplify the impact of sensory-rich environments ($\beta = 0.06$, $*p* < 0.05$), whereas self-esteem buffers against promotional traps (Harmancioglu et al., 2009). These findings challenge universal retail strategies, suggesting that effectiveness hinges on aligning environments with psychological profiles (Khan et al., 2022).

Cultural and Contextual Gaps

Most studies originate from Western, individualistic societies, where retail strategies prioritize novelty and autonomy. In collectivist, transitional economies like Pakistan, economic precarity and social norms may suppress impulsive tendencies or redirect them toward socially sanctioned purchases. For instance, luxury displays might evoke guilt rather than desire in frugality-oriented cultures, altering trait-environment dynamics. Yet, no study has systematically examined these nuances, leaving a void in global In-Store Environment literature.

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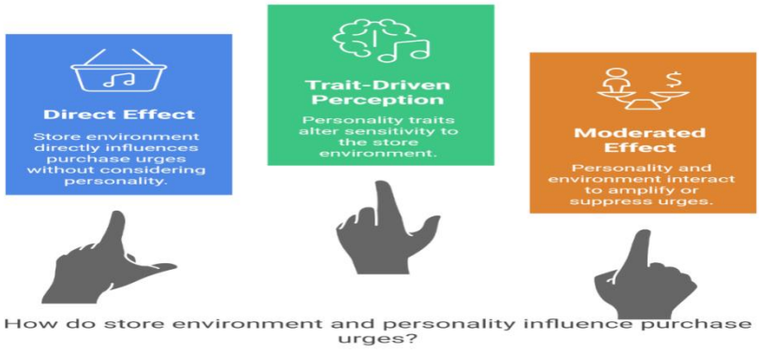
Online ISSN 3006-4651

Print ISSN 3006-466X

Conceptual Framework



The proposed framework (Figure 1) integrates three core interactions:
Direct Effect: In- Store environment (e.g., music, lighting) → Urge to purchase.
Trait-Driven Perception: Personality (e.g., neuroticism) → Altered environmental sensitivity.
Moderated Effect: Personality × In-store Environment → Amplified or suppressed urges.
An in-store environment influences urge to purchase using the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework with personality traits acting as moderators (Figure 1). The stimulus component includes lighting, music, and crowds. In addition to creating sensory-rich environments, they elicit emotional and cognitive responses. The organism dimension includes self-esteem and excitement as elements that affect how individuals process environmental stimuli. Urge to purchase, defined as the spontaneous desire to buy unplanned items. In addition, the framework situates these relationships in Pakistan's cultural context, where economic constraints and collectivist norms may uniquely temper or amplify trait-environment interactions (Husnain, Rehman, Syed, & Akhtar, 2019).

Hypotheses

H_1: In-Store environments positively correlate with heightened urges to purchase.
H_2: Personality traits significantly moderate the in-store environment and urge to purchase.

Methodology

This study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional design to examine how store environments influence purchasing urges and the moderating role of personality traits, grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework. A structured survey measured direct and moderated relationships between store environments (stimuli), personality traits (organism), and purchasing urges (response). The design prioritizes generalizability and statistical rigor, using validated scales and regression analysis to test hypotheses (Khan, Ahmad, & Ali, 2023).

Examine the effects of store environment, urge to purchase, and personality traits on impulsive buying. A survey was used to collect data from respondents. The target population comprised faculty members from universities in Mardan, Pakistan, representing middle-class consumers in a transitional economy. A convenience sample of 202 participants was recruited (response rate: 84%), with 55% female and 45% male respondents aged 25–50. According to Krejcie and Morgan, (1970) and Ryan (2020), 278

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Journal of Social Signs Review

Online ISSN 3006-4651

Print ISSN 3006-466X

samples selected through simple random sampling the study's target population. SPSS will be used to analyze the data collected.

Instruments

Store Environment: A 12-item scale (α = 0.89) assessed lighting (e.g., "The store's lighting felt inviting"), music ("The background music influenced my mood"), and crowding ("The store felt overcrowded") on a 5-Likert scale (S. R. Baker et al., 2020).

Personality Traits: Gosling's 10-Item Personality Inventory (TIPI) measured self-esteem and excitement (α = 0.78), with items like "I see myself as open to new experiences."

Urge to Purchase: Rook (1987) 5-item impulse-buying tendency scale (α = 0.82) included statements such as "I felt a sudden urge to buy something I didn't plan for."

Data Analysis

Data analysis commenced with descriptive statistics to profile the sample (N = 278 faculty members) and assess variable distributions. The response rate was 83%, with demographics reflecting a predominantly male (58%), married (51%), and highly educated cohort (46.5% PhD holders).

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics

Demographics	Frequency	% Total
Gender		
Male	118	58%
Female	84	34%
Marital Status		
Single	124	51%
Married	78	32%
Age		
20-25	15	7%
26–35	73	30%
36-45	70	29%
46–55	34	14%
>56	10	4%
Qualification		
Post-Doctoral	24	12%

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Online ISSN 3006-4651

Print ISSN 3006-466X

Demographics	Frequency	% Total
PhD	94	47%
MS or Equivalent	72	30%

Cronbach's alpha confirmed scale reliability ($\alpha > 0.70$). In-store environment ($M = 2.63$, $SD = 0.63$) and urge to purchase ($M = 2.54$, $SD = 0.83$) showed moderate means, while personality traits ($M = 2.54$, $SD = 0.67$) indicated balanced distributions.

The study confirms a significant positive relationship between store environments and purchasing urges. Retail atmospherics such as lighting, music, and layout directly influence consumers' impulse to buy, with additional indirect effects moderated by personality traits. To test these relationships, correlation and regression analyses were conducted.

As shown in Table 2, the In-store environment strongly correlates with urge to purchase ($r = 0.89$, $p < 0.01$). This aligns with Hypothesis 1, suggesting that sensory-rich settings (e.g., vibrant displays, pleasant music) heighten spontaneous buying desires. Personality traits, particularly self-esteem and excitement, also show strong linkages to both environmental perception and urges.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix & Reliability

Variable	In-Store Environment	Urge to Purchase	Personality Traits	Mean	SD
In-Store Environment	0.86			2.63	0.63
Urge to Purchase	0.89**	0.78		2.54	0.83
Personality Traits	0.95**	0.83**	0.72	2.54	0.67

**Significant at 0.01

Regression results Table 3 reveal that store environments explain **78.7% of the variance** in purchasing urges ($\beta = 0.88$, $p < 0.001$), highlighting their dominant role. For instance, a well-designed store with calming music and organized displays may reduce decision fatigue, indirectly encouraging unplanned purchases.

Table 3: Regression Results

Predictor	β	t-value	Significance
Store Environment	0.88	29.68	$p < 0.001$
Model Fit	$R^2 = 0.79$	Adjusted $R^2 = 0.79$	$F = 880.95$

Hayes' Process analysis confirmed personality traits significantly moderate the environment-urge relationship ($\beta = 0.06$, $p < 0.05$). Key interactions included the **Neuroticism** which amplified the impact of chaotic environments ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < 0.001$) and **Conscientiousness** Which Buffered against stimulation ($\beta = -0.10$, $p = 0.001$).

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Online ISSN 3006-4651

Print ISSN 3006-466X

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Online ISSN 3006-4651

Print ISSN 3006-466X

Table 4: Moderated Regression Results (H3)

Predictor	β	SE	LLCI	ULCI
In-Store Environment (SE)	1.06	0.10	0.86	1.25
Personality Traits (PT)	-0.18	0.10	-0.38	0.02
SE × PT	0.06	0.03	0.00	0.12

Discussion and Conclusion

This study investigated the dual role of in-store environments and personality traits in shaping urge to purchase among faculty members in Mardan. Aligning with the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, the results confirmed that in-store atmospherics such as music, lighting, and layout significantly amplify purchasing urges. Personality traits, particularly self-esteem and excitement, reshape how environmental stimuli influence consumer behavior. As an example, neurotic individuals were more susceptible to chaotic environments, whereas conscientious individuals were more resistant to impulse triggers.

Based on the findings of this study, the S-O-R model is advanced by establishing personality traits as dynamic filters rather than static predictors. This research shows that traits such as neuroticism activate environmental effects, transforming mundane spaces into psychological triggers (Otero-López, Santiago, Castro, & Education, 2023). It challenges assumptions that anxiety suppresses spending universally by the paradoxical behavior of neurotic shoppers seeking structured stores as "security blankets". In contrast, it reveals that environments can paradoxically enable coping mechanisms.

Focusing on self-esteem and excitement instead of the Big Five offers a granular understanding of impulse drivers. Self-esteem mitigates impulsive tendencies, according to (Nayebzadeh & Jalaly, 2014). Conversely, excitement-seeking behaviors mirrored (Hausman, 2000) hedonic consumption model, where novelty overrides rationality. These insights bridge gaps in trait-specific consumer psychology, particularly in understudied contexts like Pakistan, where cultural collectivism may amplify social visibility's role in purchasing decisions (Husnain et al., 2019).

Retailers can leverage these findings to design trait-sensitive environments such as Neuroticism Zones, which Implement calming aesthetics (soft lighting, uncluttered layouts) to reduce anxiety-driven purchases. Second is Excitement Hubs which is Use interactive displays and limited-time offers to engage novelty seekers and next is Conscientiousness Corridors (Otero-López et al., 2023) Which Streamline aisles and minimize distractions to support disciplined shoppers. For emerging markets like Pakistan, where retail growth intersects with traditional values, these strategies can enhance competitiveness. For instance, incorporating cultural symbols (e.g., local art in displays) may resonate more deeply than generic Western designs. Moreover, training staff to recognize trait-driven behaviors such as extraverts' responsiveness to social proof can personalize interactions, boosting satisfaction and loyalty (Khan., Ali, Bashir, & Naz, 2021).

The study provides valuable insights; it is important to acknowledge several limitations. First, its cross-sectional design restricts the ability to establish causal relationships between traits and environmental factors, as the data represent a single

Journal of Social Signs Review

Online ISSN 3006-4651

Print ISSN 3006-466X

snapshot in time; longitudinal approaches would be necessary to observe how these dynamics evolve over extended periods. Moreover, the sample drawn from an academic cohort in Mardan is culturally and demographically specific, raising questions about generalizability, especially for nonurban and low-educational populations, whose experiences and behaviors might differ significantly. Self-reported surveys introduce social desirability bias, where participants may provide answers reflecting their perceived social standing rather than their true attitudes. Future research could mitigate this issue by incorporating objective biometric measures, such as eye-tracking or physiological sensors, to complement subjective data. It is important to emphasize that these limitations, while not diminishing the importance of the study's contribution, provide avenues for more robust and inclusive research.

The study's findings also suggest critical directions for future research. Comparative replications could shed light on the role cultural norms play in shaping trait-environment interactions across collectivist and individualist societies (Khan., Rasli, Yusoff, & Ahmad, 2015). Online store aesthetics offer a promising avenue to examine how personality traits interact with virtual design elements, such as website layouts or color schemes, an area underexplored compared to physical settings. Further investigation is needed to determine whether female respondents' preference for pleasant environments reflects societal gender roles, differences in trait expression, or both. These questions will refine theoretical models of personality-environment relationships and enhance their practical applicability.

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