

## Psychological Triggers of Impulse Purchases in Grocery Stores: Evidence from Northern Province of Sri Lanka

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### Abstract

This study explores how behavioural psychology influences impulse buying behaviour at grocery stores. Studying impulse purchases in Northern Sri Lanka is important due to unique cultural, economic, and retail-specific factors that remain underexplored. This study aims to identify psychological triggers influencing impulse buying behaviour in mini-marts in Northern Sri Lanka. It focuses on university students who shop at mini-marts in Northern Sri Lanka. A qualitative approach was used, collecting data through three interviews with a grocery store owner and two employees. The study also included four focus group discussions, including two with undergraduate students, one with local community members and one with loyal regional customers. Purposive sampling was used to ensure participants had relevant experience and insight into the business context. The collected data were thematically analysed to identify recurring patterns and psychological triggers. The analysis involved familiarisation with the data through repeated reading, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes for coherence, defining and naming themes, and finally producing the report. The findings show three main psychological triggers, such as convenience and familiarity with the store, trust and friendly relationships with employees and the visual appeal of well-organised products and attractive displays. These emotional and environmental cues strongly influence impulsive buying, especially among young people. In practice, these findings offer ideas for grocery store owners to improve store layout, design effective promotions, and strengthen customer relationships to boost loyalty and sales. Socially, the research enhances understanding of student buying behaviour and encourages more mindful, need-based shopping. Although limited to mini-marts and a short study period, future research could explore rural areas and include long-term behavioural monitoring. This study advances the field by applying behavioural psychology to grocery retailing in Northern Sri Lanka, addressing a clear gap on impulse buying.

*Keywords:* behavioural psychology, familiarity, grocery retailing, impulse purchases, qualitative approach