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The Impact of Sales Promotion on Impulse Buying Behaviour:
A Case Study of Zara Customers in the United Kingdom

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of sales promotion on impulse buying behaviour among Zara customers in the United Kingdom. The study will look at the impact of promotional tactics on consumer attitude, perception and buying behaviour in the fast-fashion retail setting.

A research philosophy and inductive approach of interpretivism were used. A qualitative case study was used as a research design, and the primary data were gathered by means of semi-structured interviews with 15 Zara customers. Reflexive thematic analysis was used as a method of analysing the data to find recurring patterns and behavioural influences.

The findings showed that there were five important themes: promotional awareness, urgency and scarcity, perceived value and price sensitivity, emotional and psychological triggers and store and digital environment influence. Findings reveal that flash sales and notifications of discounts attract customer interest and stimulate browsing behaviour. The promotional messages based on urgency and unlimited stocks make one feel a sense of missing out and encourage quicker buying choices. Unintended consumers often rationalize the reason of making unplanned purchases based on apparent savings and value in promotions. It was also determined that emotional reactions, such as excitement and pleasure, were influential in impulse buying behaviour. Besides that, visual merchandising, store display and online notifications provided more exposure to products and enhanced impulsive buying.

The results are consistent with the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) paradigm and Impulse Buying Theory, illustrating that promotional stimuli elicit emotional and cognitive reactions, which result in impulse buying. The research helps to gain insights into consumer behaviour within the UK fast-fashion industry and has some useful implications to guide retailers in the industry to create a balance between the effectiveness of promotional activities and responsible marketing.

Keywords: Sales Promotion; Impulse Buying Behaviour; Zara; Fast-Fashion Retail; Consumer Behaviour; Perceived Value; Emotional Triggers; Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) Model.

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Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation

Declaration Form

I, **Shakil Morad**, declare that this dissertation has been composed by myself, that the work contained herein is entirely my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or qualification, in whole or in part, except as specified.

Signature:*Shakil*.....

Date: 07 June 2026

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List of Acronyms

Acronym	Full Form
FOMO	Fear of Missing Out
SOR	Stimulus–Organism–Response
UK	United Kingdom

Glossary

Term	Definition
Consumer Behaviour	The process by which consumers select, purchase, use and evaluate products and services.
Fast Fashion	A retail business model that rapidly produces fashionable clothing at affordable prices to respond to changing market trends.
Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)	A psychological feeling that an individual may miss a valuable opportunity, often encouraging immediate action.
Flash Sale	A short-term promotional event offering products at reduced prices for a limited period.
Impulse Buying Behaviour	An unplanned and spontaneous purchase made without prior intention.
Perceived Value	The consumer's assessment of the benefits received from a product relative to its cost.
Promotional Awareness	The extent to which consumers recognise and respond to promotional activities.
Sales Promotion	Short-term marketing activities designed to encourage product purchases through incentives such as discounts and special offers.
Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) Model	A behavioural theory explaining how external stimuli influence internal emotional or cognitive states, leading to behavioural responses.
Thematic Analysis	A qualitative data analysis technique used to identify, analyse and interpret recurring patterns or themes within data.
Visual Merchandising	The presentation and arrangement of products within a retail environment to attract customers and influence purchasing behaviour.
Zara	An international fast-fashion retailer that serves as the case study organisation in this research.

Table 1: Glossary of Terms

Source: Self-made

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction and Background

The dissertation discussed how sales promotion influences impulse buying behaviour among customers of Zara in the United Kingdom in the fast-fashion retail setting. The objective of the study was to learn about the role of promotional activities, like discounts, flash sales, app notifications, seasonal offers and limited-time offers, in shaping consumer purchasing behaviour. The study not only explored the psychological issues related to impulse buying behaviour but also explored the behavioural issues associated with impulse buying behaviour, as well as how promotional messages in Zara influence consumer-based decision-making.

This paper has delved into the roles played by contemporary fast-fashion retailers in an intensely competitive market where customers' attention is scarce, and purchasing behaviour is highly influenced by marketing efforts and exposure to promotions. Zara has been chosen as a case organisation due to its unique business model fast-fashion that is based on fast, few, product turnover and responsiveness to customers. The study specifically looked at the urgency that these strategies bring about in consumers within the UK retail market in terms of emotional excitement and unplanned purchasing behaviour.

The prominence of consumer behaviour was also discussed in the dissertation. The results indicated that the presence of discounts, flash sales and digital notifications had a very strong appeal to the customers and improved browsing behaviour. Promotional cues regularly prompted customers to make a purchase decision, and thus promotional awareness has been proposed to have a role in providing a key behavioural prompt in a fast-fashion retail context. The paper has also examined how Zara online advertisements and app alerts increased their marketing reach beyond the brick-and-mortar stores and kept customers constantly interested.

Urgency and scarcity in promotional marketing were another issue that the dissertation has explored. The study investigated the effects of low-stock messages, limited-time offers and fear of missing out on customer ideations and decision to purchase. The results showed the urgency-based promotional process minimised thought and facilitated impulse buying behaviour. Consumers usually put a great deal of effort into preventing the lost opportunities rather than giving a second thought or second consideration to the product necessity.

The dissertation also discussed the contribution of perceived value and price sensitivity towards impulse buying behaviour. Customers were often encouraged by discounts and all manner of promotional prices to rationalise unplanned purchases on the grounds of an illusion of savings and cheapness. The result indicated that promotional offers had an effect on stimulating both the emotional and cognitive decision-making process through the appearance of products as financially appealing.

The emotional and psychological triggers were also identified as an area that was studied significantly in the study. The study observed that excitement and enjoyment in shopping pursuits, emotional pressure and fear of missing out are key emotional elements that lead to spontaneous purchasing behaviour. Moreover, the dissertation examined how Zara uses physical and online world of retail by focusing on visual merchandising, physical store layout, online advertisement and mobile notification as the key elements. These environmental factors had the effect of enhancing customer attention, product desirability and browsing behaviour.

All in all, the dissertation examined the impact of promotional tactics, emotional responses, environmental and psychological forces altogether in the development of impulse buying behaviour among adult customers of Zara in the UK fast-fashion retail market.

Problem Statement

The fast-fashion retail industry depends on sales promotion techniques like discounts, flash sales, and limited-time offers to lure customers and boost sales. Though these promotional activities are useful in creating short-term demand, they can also induce impulse buying behaviour among consumers. Past research has looked at the impulse buying behaviour and promotional efforts in a general retail and online shopping setting, but there has been little research on the fast-fashion sector in the United Kingdom. Specifically, no literature has been conducted to explain the effects of sales promotions on the buying impulse behaviour of Zara customers. Thus, additional study is needed to understand consumer decision-making behaviour by investigating the correlation between sales promotion and impulse buying behaviour within the context of UK fast-fashion retail.

Research Aim

This research paper seeks to establish the connection between sales promotion and the impulse buying behaviour of customers in Zara stores within the United Kingdom, with an emphasis on how promotional activities affect the consumer decision processes in the fast-fashion retail market.

Research Objectives

- To analyse the sales promotion methods applied by Zara in the UK fast-fashion retail market and appreciate how these promotions impact consumer buying behaviour.
- To examine how sales promotions influence impulse buying behaviour and at what psychological level the customers of Zara in the UK are driven to make spontaneous purchases.

Research Questions

1. Which kinds of sales promotion strategies are usually employed by fast-fashion retailers like Zara in the United Kingdom?
2. What effect do sales promotional activities have on customers in fashion retail stores as they make purchase decisions?
3. What are the psychological forces that determine impulse buying behaviour among Zara customers?
4. What is the impact of promotional offers on the decision to make an unplanned purchase within the UK fast-fashion market?
5. What is the correlation between sales promotion tactics and the impulse buying behaviour of United Kingdom Zara customers?

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

Literature Review

Marketing Strategies Used by Fashion Retailers

Overview of Marketing Strategy in Retail

Marketing strategy can be defined as a systematic approach which organisations employ to define the target markets, create value, and attain a competitive advantage (Grewal et al., 2021). Competition and change in preferences among consumers make marketing strategies necessary in the retail sector, which is highly competitive and volatile. Sellers need to keep changing their approach in order to gain the attention of customers and affect their buying behaviours. According to Lemon and Verhoeff (2016), the customer journey is one of the key factors in defining consumer behaviour, and a variety of touchpoints should consistently be engaged. Furthermore, the marketing approaches not only impact the purchasing decisions but also affect the perception and loyalty of customers towards the brands. Iyer et al. (2020) highlight that the reaction of the consumer is usually subject to outside stimuli (marketing communication and store environment), which may cause spontaneous purchase behaviour. Hence, marketing methods used in retail are not bound to promotion alone but extend to whole customer experience management as a way for firms to stay competitive and relevant in dynamic market setups (Varadarajan, 2020).

Traditional vs Modern Retail Marketing Strategies

Retail marketing practices have gone a long way in terms of two-sided, conventional, as compared to more sophisticated and technologically advanced marketing practices (Pappas et al., 2023). The major traditional strategies were mainly in terms of price, advertisement and in-store offers that targeted mass audiences. These methods were frequently standard methods and not individualised. Digital marketing, personalisation, and omnichannel integration are, however, the focus of modern retail approaches. According to Canio et al. (2021), customer engagement has been revolutionised by mobile applications and gamification, as it has made the shopping experience more interactive and personalised. Moreover, Huang and Rust (2022) point out that retailers can use artificial intelligence to analyse consumer data to provide them with targeted marketing messages, which can also increase customer satisfaction and improve decision-making. Digital transformation also enables retailers to combine online and offline experiences, producing flawless experiences for consumers. Pappas et al. (2023) claim that these digital strategies not only enhance efficiency but also get customers involved. Consequently, contemporary marketing campaigns are more open and driven by customer needs and data than traditional marketing.

Fast-Fashion Marketing Strategies

The unique marketing strategies used by fast-fashion retailers are aimed at providing quick, responsive and affordable products to respond to the ever-changing demands of customers. One of the defining characteristics of fast fashion is the ability to quickly translate fashion trends into products and deliver them to the market in a short time frame (Bick et al., 2018). The significance of effective logistics and supply chain mechanisms employed by Liu et al. (2020) to promote the timely availability of products facilitates fast market responsiveness. Moreover, production at low costs allows retailers to provide trendy products at reasonable prices, making them more accessible to consumers.

Creation of urgency and scarcity is another critical strategy. Retailers tend to supply small amounts of goods, and this stimulates consumers to make immediate decisions to make purchases. According to Hwang (2020), customer experiences might be manipulated through in-store environments and the display of products and can create confusion and lead to impulse buying behaviour. Moreover, a constant stream of product launches and the introduction of new collections keep consumers interested and motivate them to visit the store again and again. The authors of Luo et al. (2021) suggest that online promotions also increase the intention to buy impulsively since consumers are exposed to marketing stimuli negatively. Another fact Aziz et al. (2025) emphasise is that brand positioning and perceived value are also very important to the intention to purchase in the context of fashion retail. In general, fast-fashion marketing techniques are aimed at triggering a response in the consumer and ensuring optimal sales with constant interaction.

Critical Evaluation

Although these are effective, marketing strategies employed by fashion retailers come with a number of limitations. The fast-fashion trend promotes quick consumption that questions sustainability and impact on the environment (Dhir et al., 2021). Moreover, overdependence on online marketing and advertising techniques can result in impulsive buying behaviour as opposed to long-term customer loyalty. Wolf (2023) points out that online spaces have the potential to over-inspire customers, leading them to make irrational purchases. Moreover, available literature is mostly based on the overall retail setting, as opposed to a particular brand or market, which restricts the externalisability of results. Consequently, more concentrated studies are necessary to

find out how marketing techniques affect consumer behaviour in the fast-fashion setting (Cachon and Swinney, 2011).

Zara's Marketing Strategy in the Fast-Fashion Industry

Overview of Zara's Business Model

Zara is commonly known as one of the biggest fast-fashion retailers, and its business model is based on the principles of speed, flexibility, and responsiveness to the market. Zara has a vertically integrated supply chain, unlike other traditional fashion brands, because the approach helped the firm regulate the design, production and distribution of its products efficiently. According to Camargo et al. (2020), through this integration, Zara is able to react fast to the evolving consumer trends and can deliver new products to their stores in a short period of time. According to Liu et al. (2020), effective logistics and delivery systems on time are critical in facilitating this type of responsive retail model.

One more peculiarity of the business model designed by Zara is the limited use of traditional advertising. To appeal to customers, the brand is not doing too much in promotional campaigns, instead concentrating on the store experience, product stocked and strategic locations to appeal to the customers. According to Hwang (2020), in-store experiences are important in consumer experiences and determining buyer behaviour. Consequently, the Zara business concept is to establish itself on efficiency and interaction with customers as opposed to traditional marketing spending.

Key Marketing Strategies Used by Zara

Zara has some of the distinctive marketing strategies, which make it different from other fashion retailers. Among the most important strategies is the limited stock, which is also known as the scarcity strategy. The manufacturing of minimal volumes of products per product makes Zara generate an urgency among its consumers, prompting them to make urgent purchases. According to Iyer et al. (2020), scarcity and external stimulus may play a large role in impulse buying behaviour, and such tactics work well in the retail context.

According to Cengiz and Senel (2023), frequent product turnover is another important strategy. Zara comes out with collections frequently and ensures that their stores have new collections,

which are updated regularly and in line with the prevailing fashion trends. This ongoing renewal attracts the revisiting and more involvement of the customers. As Luo et al. (2021) point out, when consumers are constantly exposed to new products and promotional materials, their purchase intentions increase, especially in a fast-moving retail environment.

Another key factor at Zara is store location as well as visual merchandising. The stores are usually found in areas with high traffic and are constructed in such a way that they are attractive to shoppers. As Lemon and Verhoff (2016) state, the customer experience throughout the shopping process has a major impact on the buying decision, and Zara strives to use it by paying attention to the look of stores and the display of products.

Moreover, Zara combines online and offline to promote interaction with customers. According to Canio et al. (2021), digital engagement means that mobile applications enhance customer engagement and satisfaction. This assimilation enables Zara to keep a high level of communication with the customers and enhance brand interactions on various platforms.

Zara vs Competitors

The recent marketing approach of Zara is very different compared with its competitors like H&M and Uniqlo. Competitors usually place a high emphasis on advertising and promotion campaigns, and Zara uses a low-advertising approach and emphasises the products and shop experience. Huang and Rust (2022) point out that customer-centric and data-driven strategies are growing in significance in retailing today, but Zara focuses more on operational responsiveness than on massive advertising efforts. Moreover, the speed at which items turn and the low stock levels strategy by Zara enable it to develop high urgency levels relative to its rivals. This enables Zara to stand out and have a competitive edge in the fast-fashion market (Arrigo, 2021).

Critical Evaluation

The marketing approach of Zara has a number of benefits, such as great customer interaction, improved brand loyalty and greater urgency towards their buying decisions. Nevertheless, a fast-fashion approach also brings about harsh sustainability issues as it implies timely production and excessive consumption rates (Dhir et al., 2021). In addition, the focus on scarcity and the regular changeover of products could potentially stimulate impulsivity in buying behaviour, which does not necessarily coincide with long-term consumer satisfaction. Wolf (2023) observes

that online and retail spaces have the power to perform research by overwhelming the consumer, who is then prone to making decisions irrationally. Moreover, little scholarly research has been done that specifically addresses the customers of Zara, which is an area of gap that is intended to be filled in this study (Mukendi et al., 2020).

Specific Promotional Strategies Influencing Consumer Behaviour

Types of Promotional Strategies

Retailers have a long history of promoting their products to get customers to buy them and to increase demand and purchasing behaviour. Some of the most widely used promotional methods include price cutting, vouchers, flash sales, limited-time offers and online promotions. Discounts lower the perceived prices of products, making them less expensive to consumers and motivating them to buy the products immediately. Additional financial incentives can be given through coupons, and coupons can be used to focus on a particular segment of customers.

Fast-moving products enhance sales: flash sales and limited-time offers work best in busy retail settings as it creates a strong sense of urgency and persuade people to take action. According to Luo et al. (2021), online promotions are highly instrumental in creating impulsive buying intentions through subjecting consumers to time-bound promotions. Equally, online promotions, such as targeted advertising and personalised offers, enable retailers to interact with customers on various platforms. Canio et al. (2021) emphasise that mobile apps and gamification contribute to even more interaction and engagement with customers, and promotion strategies are more dynamic and personalised.

In general, all these promotional tactics can be summarised as trying to shorten the time that is taken in making a decision and enhancing the chances of making a purchase decision by addressing both the rational and emotional views of consumer behaviour.

Psychological Triggers of Promotion

The effectiveness of promotional strategies is that they initiate different psychological stimuli that result in consumer behaviour. Urgency is just one of the most important triggers, stimulating consumers to make immediate choices in order not to miss the chance. Flash sales and

limited-time offers put time pressure on the decision-maker, as they are less likely to evaluate carefully.

Other influential aspects are the fear of missing out (FOMO), where consumers feel the need to buy products out of the fear that they may benefit because someone might be enjoying the offer. This emotional effect is especially prevalent within the online sphere, where advertisements are constantly shown. Ngo et al. (2025) emphasise that FOMO is increased through social media and online platforms because they introduce consumers to the perpetual advertising stimuli.

The value perceived is also a key factor, because promotional offers may be perceived by consumers as a chance to get more out of their money. This illusion may prompt buying a product when it is not yet required. Polman et al. (2021) state that consumers are more likely to have an overestimation of the advantages of products under the impact of promotional cues. Also, there are emotional stimuli, like excitement and satisfaction, which also promote impulsive buying behaviour. A combination of these psychological triggers justifies why promotional tactics are very effective in influencing consumer decision-making.

Effectiveness of Promotional Strategies

Advertising offers great success in boosting short-term sales and customer acquisition. Retailers can easily create urgency and demand with the help of financial incentives and thereby stimulate people to make purchases immediately. Abdelkhair et al. (2023) show that sales promotions have a strong effect on increasing consumer interest and purchase intentions, especially in a competitive consumer retail setting. Additionally, promotional tactics enable the retailer to capture new customers and maintain the old ones as it creates a sense of perceived value and friendly shopping experiences. Nonetheless, although such strategies have proven successful in ensuring short-term customer behaviour and brand loyalty, they are yet to be properly examined in terms of their long-term effects, hence the need to conduct further research.

Critical Evaluation

Although effective, the promotional strategies have a number of drawbacks. Their influence usually has immediate effects because they are more concerned with immediate sales instead of a lasting relationship with the customer. Consumers can also be price-sensitive due to over-reliance on promotions, and this decreases brand loyalty in the long run. According to Huo et al. (2023),

persistent advertising stimuli may prompt impulsive purchasing behaviour, which might not lead to customer satisfaction over the long term. Furthermore, the previous studies are predominantly related to the general retail and internet setting, with fewer studies devoted to a particular brand like Zara. This makes it clear that additional studies focusing on the effects of promotional approaches that should be applied to consumer behaviour in fast-fashion contexts are needed.

Sales Promotion in Retail Marketing

Definition and Importance

Sales promotion is another important element of the marketing mix, which is concerned with short-term incentives that are aimed at enhancing immediate buy behaviour (Fam et al., 2019). It is also common in the retail industry to boost the volume of sales, attract new clients and generate repeat business. In contrast to advertising, which works to establish long-lasting brand recognition, sales promotion is mainly aimed at long-term need generation. According to Abdelkhair et al. (2023), the strategy of sales promotion can also contribute considerably to customer interest and an urge to purchase, especially in the competitive retail setting.

Sales promotion helps retailers generate a sense of urgency that encourages consumers to quickly buy a product. Such strategies are especially relevant to sectors where fashion retail is one of the areas, as consumer preferences evolve fast and companies are forced to keep demand going. Atokolo (2024) also notes that through sales promotions, coupled with customer perceived value, sales are not only boosted but strong relationships with customers are also enhanced. Sales promotion, therefore, is a vital strategic instrument that determines consumer behaviour as well as the performance of a business (Santini et al., 2016).

Sales Promotion Tools in Retail

There are numerous sales promotion tools that retailers use to change consumer purchasing behaviour. Some of the best examples of tools used include price discounts, coupons, bundling, and seasonal offers. The lower price of goods through price discounts are more appealing and make consumers desire to buy the goods they might have avoided. Coupons offer extra savings and can be utilised to address a particular group of customers or to prompt repeat purchases.

The other effective promotion strategy is bundling or offering two or more products at a low price. This would add value and persuade consumers to purchase more products at a time. Offers: Seasonal offers like discounts around the time of the year or special sales at the end of the day are sometimes common in retail, where the retailer is clearing stock and wants to get customers shopping at the most appropriate time of the year.

Over the last few years, sales promotion has been moving more towards the online arena. Langen and Huber (2022) note that digitalised coupons and personalised promotional campaigns make marketing activities more efficient since they are in closer contact with the consumers. Moreover, Zhang et al. (2022) note that visual display of commercial messages, such as the price of goods and demonstrations of products, is important to attract consumer attention and make a purchase choice. Consequently, the modes of sales promotion have been developed in such a way that they are more personalised and technological.

Sales Promotion and Consumer Response

Sales promotion plays a crucial role towards consumer responses in terms of influencing attention, perception and decision-making. Promotional offers can capture the interest of consumers because they emphasise the perceived savings and give them the impression that they are being offered something. Abdelkhair et al. (2023) express that these incentives add excitement to customers and promote instant interaction with products.

The second implication of sales promotion is that of urgency. LTOs and discounts leave less time to make a decision, and consumers are likely to make a purchase as fast as possible. Such hurry usually causes rushiness in the buying process and low chances of making an evaluation. Moreover, promotional tactics also hasten the process of decision-making, making things simpler through the perceived value of products. As consumers feel that they are getting a good deal, they are more likely to buy.

In general, sales promotion can help shape consumer behaviour as it shortens the decision time, builds perceived value, and motivates impulsive buying behaviour, which is why it is a potent marketing tool in retail.

Critical Evaluation

As effective as it is, there are a number of limitations to sales promotion (Han et al., 2022). Most promotional strategies may not be effective in the long run, due to overuse, since consumers might get used to discounts and wait until it is time to buy again. This can negatively affect brand value and profitability. Moreover, sales promotion may be context-dependent, and it may be effective or ineffective depending on market conditions and characteristics of the consumer. According to Atokolo (2024), promotions can be beneficial to customer satisfaction, but they do not necessarily correspond to long-term loyalty. Moreover, the available literature seems to concentrate on retail settings overall, with scarce attention to particular situations like the UK fast-fashion sector and the necessity to conduct more specific research.

Impulse Buying Behaviour

Definition and Characteristics

Impulse buying behaviour is defined as a purchase decision made at the moment without any planning or thoughtful decision. Impulse buying, as opposed to rational purchasing, is predominantly motivated by emotional reactions to situations and situations. There is usually a sudden urge to buy that makes consumers involved in impulse buying, overriding their logical judgment of their needs or finances. According to Escobar-Farfán et al. (2025), impulse buying is a quick decision process that is prompted by external factors which create excitement or a sense of urgency in the course of shopping.

One important aspect of impulse buying is the absence of planning, wherein consumers make decisions without planning or based on purchasing intentions (Rodrigues et al., 2021). The role of emotional responses like excitement, pleasure or curiosity plays a key part in this behaviour. Lee et al. (2023) emphasise the importance of emotions in the process of consumer decision-making, which often results in making irrational purchasing decisions. Thus, emotional involvement and situational factors are more closely involved with impulse buying behaviour as opposed to cognitive appraisal.

Drivers of Impulse Buying

There are a number of internal and external variables that influence impulse buying behaviour, and they include marketing stimuli, store environment and digital exposure. Promotional offers, discount messages, or promotional messages also constitute marketing stimuli that have a great

impact in causing impulse purchases. These stimuli capture the attention of the consumer and develop urgency in actions, urging them to act instantly. Huo et al. (2023) propose that interactive and promotional climates enhance consumer interest and have a definite effect on impulse buying behaviour.

The store environment also factors into the impulse buying decisions. Product placement, layout of the stores, lighting and visual merchandising can also make products more appealing and encourage impulse shopping. Consumers tend to buy a product more as a result of both attractive product displays and interactive shopping experiences.

Moreover, digital power has become a significant driver of impulse buying behaviour. Consumers receive a stream of marketing information, recommendations and targeted ads on online platforms. Widido and Yusiana (2024) also emphasise that online platforms enhance impulse purchases because online purchases are more convenient and less rational. Generally, it can be concluded that environmental, promotional and technological factors interact to influence impulse buying.

Online vs Offline Impulse Buying

There is a difference between online and offline retail settings with respect to impulse buying behaviour, though the same psychological processes influence the impulse buying behaviour. This is because in a physical store, impulse buying can be prompted by corporeal stimuli like store layout, display of various products and sensory stimulation of the shopper. Products are referred to as products that are touched by the consumers, which can lead to higher levels of emotional involvement and a propensity to be done impulsively.

Conversely, digital stimuli are key drivers of online impulse buying, such as social media pressure and algorithm-driven annotations. Ngo et al. (2025) emphasise the role of social media in the development of the feeling of the fear of missing out (FOMO) to persuade consumers to immediately purchase a product. Bespoke recommendations and target ads also increase the customer's chances of making impulse purchases by offering pertinent products when convenient. Online shopping makes it even easier to make purchases and has led to impulsive purchases continuing to increase in frequency.

Therefore, offline impulse buying is a factor that is affected by the physical surroundings, whereas online impulse buying is one that is conditioned by the cyber environment and technology.

Critical Evaluation

In spite of all the studies carried out regarding impulse buying behaviour, there are various limitations. The current literature tends to reveal varying results on the effect of various variables on impulse buying since consumer behaviour is different in different situations and among different people. The issue of cultural difference is also a major factor because the buying behaviour is affected by the social context and the state of the economy. Additionally, existing studies are often general retail or online, with little consideration of individual brands or industries. Specifically, studies that analyse impulse buying behaviour of customers in the fast-fashion industry of the Zara group and influence the UK are scarce, which is why there is a gap in research that the study seeks to fill.

Consumer Behaviour and Psychological Factors

Emotional and Cognitive Factors

Both cognitive and emotional factors heavily influence and shape consumer behaviour, especially in retail settings where consumers are known to make purchase decisions in haste. When the consumer unintentionally does not buy, emotional stimuli like excitement, pleasure and curiosity can motivate them to react favourably to stimuli created by the marketing approaches. Simultaneously, cognitive influences shape consumer interpretation, value evaluation and justification towards their purchases. Promotional cues usually tend to create a biased perception of product value, according to Polman et al. (2021). This indicates that not all decision-making is as rational as most consumers might depend on the emotional response to certain mental shortcuts in their reaction to marketing messages. Emotional and cognitive forces are even stronger in the fashion retail industry, where products are visualised and considered as trend-sensitive. Thus, it is relevant to study such psychological aspects since they allow us to define why consumers can respond differently to similarities in promotion strategies.

Role of Perceived Value and Pricing

Pricing and perceived value have significant effects on consumer reactions towards marketing. When people feel that the offer offers them more benefits than the price, then there is a high chance that they would buy the product. A sense of value may often be enhanced through such promotional opportunities as discounts and special offers, and it may be considered as making the products look more attractive when there is actually little need to purchase them. As Polman et al. (2021) reveal, external cues can make the consumer overestimate the utility or advantage of the product and contribute to the increased risk of unintended purchasing. Moreover, pricing policies influence the way consumers assess equity, affordability and expediency. A product that is promoted as a price cut in the meantime is likely to lead to the sense of a bargain being made, which hastens the decision-making process. Perceived value is particularly a vital factor in consumer behaviour and purchase intention in the fast-fashion retail sector, where prices are generally low and promotional initiatives are high (Yu et al., 2021).

Influence of Visual Merchandising and Branding

Consumer behaviour is also influenced by visual merchandising and branding, which shape attention, perception, and turnover. The way products are presented, the design of promotions, the way products are displayed in stores, and the way a brand is presented are all parts of how consumers perceive products, and they may motivate them to purchase them. Hong et al. (2024) observe that the visual attraction of a product and promotion design can boost the impulsive buying behaviour considerably by rendering products more likeable. Equally, branding is known to generate a sense of identity and emotional connection, which might enhance consumer loyalty and trust in making a purchase. Visual and branding effects are particularly vigorous in the business of fashion retail, where image and presentation are the focal issues.

Critical Evaluation

Despite the fact that there are existing studies that are useful in understanding consumer behaviour and psychological factors, there are still limitations. Most literature is about broad retail or online settings and does not comprehensively address the functioning of these aspects in specific fast-fashion settings. As demonstrated by Ologunbe et al. (2024), digital spaces influence quick decision-making, yet this evidence might not constitute the complete understanding of behaviour in a brand-specific atmosphere, like that of Zara. Moreover, the ways people spend, emotional control, and personality differences can result in different consumer

reactions. Thus, further specific studies are required to comprehend the impact of psychological aspects on consumer behaviour within the UK fast-fashion industry, specifically the customers of Zara.

Fast-Fashion Retail Context and Research Gap

Fast-Fashion Industry Characteristics

The industry of fast fashion is distinguished by quick patterns of production, fashion-related consumption, and a high level of competition in the marketplace (Niinimäki et al., 2020). Product retailers in this industry have a shorter replication time to the emerging fashion trends into affordable products, owing to their ability to respond ad hoc to the dynamic consumer preferences. This fast production model can give companies opportunities to launch new collections regularly, motivating customers to shop in stores more regularly. Moreover, trends play a major role in fast-fashion consumption, with consumers being driven to buy fashion items that mirror contemporary fashion instead of their long-term necessity. This makes retailing a dynamic and fast-paced environment.

Moreover, the market is extremely competitive, and there are several international and local brands competing to attract the attention of consumers. Retailers need to keep their marketing strategies innovative and be fast in reacting to the demands of consumers to stay in the market. Consequently, fast-fashion retailers are exposed to high demands of speed, flexibility, and interactivity with their customers to maintain growth and competitiveness.

Role of Promotion in Fast Fashion

The efforts used in the delivery of promotions are essential in the fast-fashion industry to drive up demand and affect consumer behaviour. Retailers have frequent flash sales, seasonal discounts, and limited-time deals to capture the interest and prompt purchases among customers. These tactics are aimed at causing urgency, which would decrease the time needed to make a decision and make consumers buy in a hurry. According to Agrawal et al. (2026), time-based promotions can cause a great sense of urgency among consumers, and this is likely to substantially enhance the chances of impulse buying behaviour.

Promotion activities are also applied to retain the interest of customers to visit again. Before and after-sales promotions. Often, offerings and prices allow sellers to maintain customers by delivering value on a continual basis. Obiso et al. (2025) emphasise that younger consumers have been very sensitive to promotion and digital marketing campaigns, especially Generation Z, and hence are prone to impulse buying behaviour. Promotional strategies are thus the core aspect of fast-fashion retail since these are the ones that directly drive consumer interactions and buying behaviours.

Research Gap

Although much has been written about sales promotion and impulse buying behaviour, there is a significant gap in the literature. There are a lot of studies devoted to general retail conditions or websites devoted to e-commerce, which analyse consumer behaviour in response to the promotion strategies on a general level. Although these studies offer some useful information, such research falls short in academically representing the specific dynamics of the fast-fashion industry. Specifically, the influence of sales promotion in fast-fashion retail, where speed of product turnover and consumption powered by fads is the order of the day, is insufficiently investigated.

In addition, there is a deficiency in the literature on research that targets the Zara customers. The current literature on the analysis of consumer behaviour aims at comparing different brands and/or overall retailing environments, but not at the impact of a specific fast-fashion brand on the decision to purchase. This restricts the ability to modify the relationship between brand-specific strategies, on the one hand, and consumer behaviour.

The next gap is another fact: the lack of attention to the UK fast-fashion context. Depending on cultures, economies, and social aspects, consumer behaviour is different in various regions, and present studies are not adequate to cover such differences. Also, a lack of qualitative studies which delve into the understanding of consumer perception and experience exists (Ekasari and Fajaray, 2023).

This paper, therefore, seeks to fill these gaps by exploring the effects of sales promotion on impulse buying behaviour in Zara customers in the UK through a qualitative research method.

Theoretical/ Conceptual Framework

The theories used to rationalise the study concerning consumer behaviour and impulse purchasing in retail marketing, especially Stimulus meant to amplify Organism triggered Response (SOR) model, consumer decision-making theory, and impulse buying theory, are used. The SOR model indicates the effects of external stimuli on internal emotions and behavioural responses. In retail marketing, external stimuli like discounts, special offers, limited-time offers and deals are types of sales promotion that capture consumer interest and would trigger emotional responses, potentially leading to impulse buying behaviour (Huo et al., 2023). The model is appropriate in the context of this study because advertising techniques that Zara applies can be regarded as stimuli that influence the attitudes of customers and their buying behaviour.

Consumer decision-making theory also demonstrates how consumers make judgements on products, weighing them perceptually, in terms of value and personal judgment. Customers tend to think that promotional prices are worse, and it can raise the chances of impulsive and rushed purchases (Polman et al., 2021). Besides, impulse buying theory implies that spontaneous buying behaviour may occur due to emotional excitement, product attractiveness, and situational factors without thorough planning (Escobar-Farfana et al., 2025). Past studies also demonstrate that the intention to purchase can play a mediating role between the sales promotion and purchasing impulse, i.e. the promotional efforts have an impact on the intention, which subsequently translates into the decision to actually purchase (Abdelkhair et al., 2023).

According to these theories, this paper assumes that sales promotion is a stimulus, emotional response is the internal response, and impulse buying behaviour is the ultimate response, which constitutes the conceptual framework of breaking down Zara customers in the United Kingdom.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Research Philosophy

Research philosophy can be defined as a group of beliefs and assumptions about how knowledge is created and perceived in a study (Saunders et al., 2023). In this study, an interpretivist research philosophy is assumed, whereby the research seeks to illuminate the subjective perceptions and experiences of consumers of sales promotions and impulse buying behaviour, in the context of Zara in the United Kingdom. The interpretivist approach is especially suitable in those situations

when the study is concerned with human behaviour, emotions, and social interactions, not quantifiable and objective phenomena (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020).

In contrast to the positivist approach, which focuses on measurable data and statistical analysis, the interpretivist approach acknowledges that consumer behaviour is complicated, context-specific and an issue that relies on perceptions. In impulse buying behaviour, a buying decision is usually influenced by an emotional, situational, or psychological stimulus, as opposed to being made purely on rational analysis. As such, to comprehend such behaviour, it is essential to capture personal meanings and lived experiences, which are aligned with the interpretivist paradigm.

This philosophical position is also supported by the reasoning that the study examines the reaction of Zara customers to promotional stimuli, including discounts, scarcity and limited-time offers. Such reactions are not identical but are affected by what is perceived by an individual and by emotional involvement. Tenny et al. (2022) claim that qualitative research based on interpretivism enables the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of human behaviour through an analysis of subjective experiences. Interpretivism, therefore, offers an adequate background for analysing the psychological and behavioural aspects of impulse buying in the fast fashion retail setting.

Research Onion

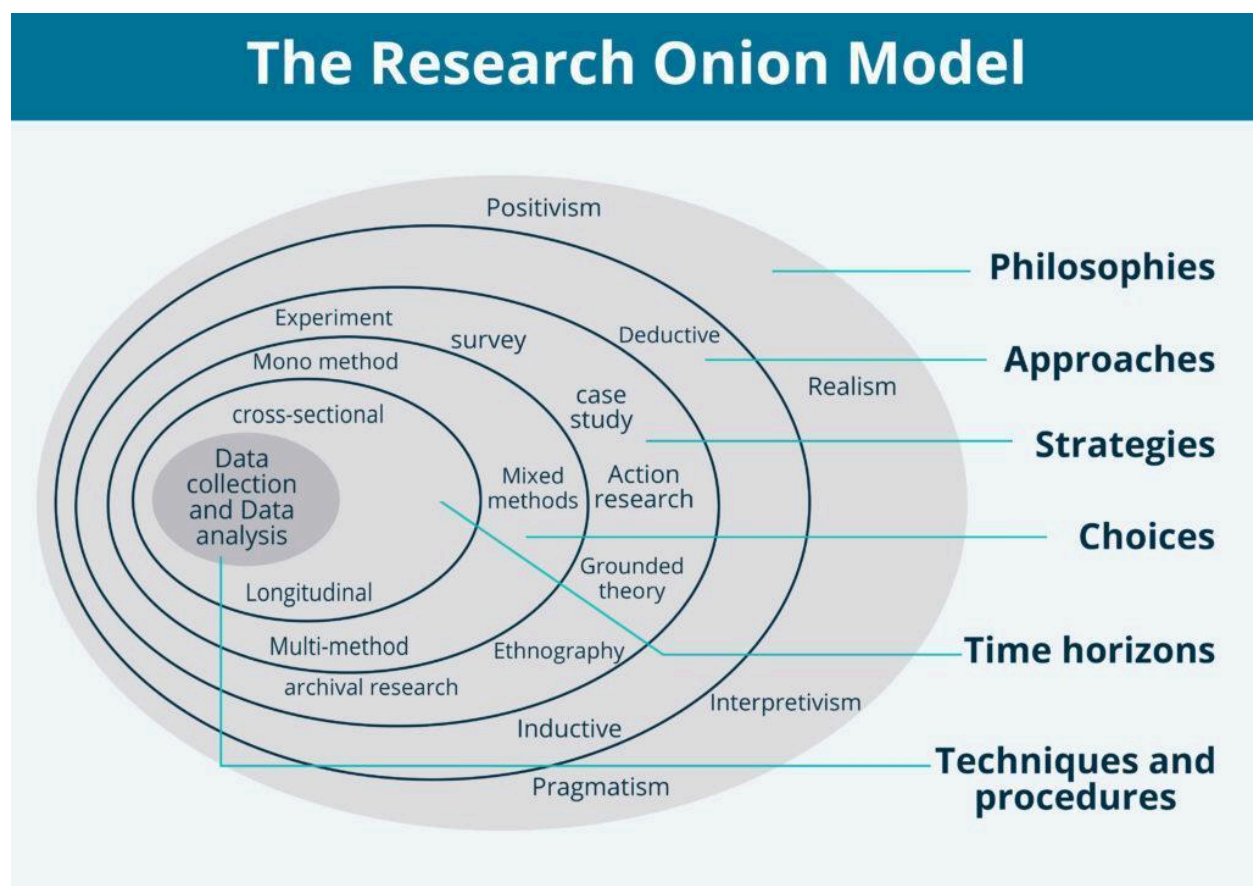
The research onion by Saunders et al. (2023) offers a systematic scheme of how research is planned, designed, and conducted. The model has multiple layers that can direct researchers to the right philosophical positions, approaches, strategies, methods, and techniques to use in a study. The research onion in this study helped in making sure that the methodological decisions made were consistent with the research aim and objectives of sales promotion and impulse buying behaviour of customers of Zara in the United Kingdom.

The study followed an interpretivist philosophy at the outermost layer of the onion since the research sought to comprehend subjective consumer experiences, feelings, and perceptions towards promotional strategies. As the impulse buying behaviour is closely related to personal feelings and a psychological reaction, interpretivism was regarded as more appropriate than a positivist approach.

The second layer entailed an inductive research approach. The focus was built on research and themes based on the responses of the participants as opposed to testing a predefined hypothesis. This was to enable trends based on consumer behaviour and promotional power to come out naturally through the data collected.

It employed the qualitative case study research strategy with a specific focus on Zara customers in the UK fast-fashion retailing market. The approach allowed conducting an in-depth study of consumer experiences in a real-life retail setting. A qualitative mono-method approach was taken since the study aimed to utilise only data obtained in qualitative interviews and not quantitative and qualitative data.

The study was cross-sectional, and no data were gathered over a long time. Finally, semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis were used as the main data collection and analysis techniques. These approaches helped in the elaboration of consumer perceptions and impulse buying behaviour in the retail setting of Zara.



Source: UKRI (2023)

Research Approach

This study is based on an inductive research design where knowledge is created as a result of empirical observations but without testing existing theories. An inductive approach encompasses gathering data, pattern identification, and impact creation that progress to developing theories (Woo et al., 2017).

The fact that the study intends to explore the impacts of sales promotions on impulse buying behaviour as opposed to testing a specific hypothesis warrants the use of an inductive approach. Since the reaction of consumers to promotional strategies may differ greatly depending on situations, it is crucial to be able to allow the emergence of themes and patterns in the data under any circumstance. This method is flexible and offers the researcher the opportunity to extract unsuspected ideas which might not have been detected using deductive approaches.

Moreover, the inductive method is highly similar to qualitative research, since the former permits the latter to dig deeper into the views and experiences of the participants. The aim of the researcher in this study is to get to know how customers of Zara would interpret the promotional strategies of Zara, as well as how these interpretations impact their purchasing decisions. As noted by Saunders et al. (2023), inductive reasoning is especially applicable in studies where the existing theories may not fully explain the phenomenon under investigation.

This research would help strengthen existing knowledge on sales promotion and impulse buying behaviour in the fast-fashion industry, specifically in the UK market, where very little research has been done thus far.

Research Design

The research design used in the study is a qualitative case study research design, and the research dwells specifically on Zara customers in the United Kingdom. When the research questions are to pursue a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life setting where the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly outlined, a case study design is suitable (Ridder, 2017).

Zara has been chosen as a case study since it has distinctive marketing features: limited advertising, short turnover of products, and scarcity promotion tactics. It is these features that render Zara an ideal environment to study the relationship existing between sales promotion and impulse buying behaviour.

In this study, a qualitative research design would be most appropriate since it would enable in-depth analysis of consumer perceptions, emotions, and experiences. Qualitative methods, in contrast to quantitative methods, which rely on numerical measurement, offer rich, detailed information about behavioural patterns (Priya, 2021). Since the behaviour of impulse buying is affected by the psychological and emotional aspects, qualitative research would provide a more comprehensive coverage of this aspect.

Also, the case study design enables a narrow analysis of a particular brand in a particular market, which increases the contextual relevance of the results. According to Li and Deng (2026), qualitative methods prove useful in examining consumer behaviour within dynamic retail settings where numerous factors interplay to affect customer behaviour.

Population and Sampling

The study target population refers to customers of Zara in the United Kingdom with experience in shopping for the products based on the promotion strategies. A non-probability sampling method, namely purposive and convenience sampling, is used in the study.

The purposive sampling method works to identify those study participants possessing pertinent experience and knowledge in reference to the research topic. As Campbell et al. (2020) say, purposive sampling enables researchers to target people who can provide valuable and informative information. Participants, in this scenario, would be selected based on their knowledge of Zara and their exposure to promotions.

Convenience sampling is also used because, in most cases, it is very convenient and time-saving. Although this approach can restrict the generalisability, it is suitable for qualitative research where emphasis is on depth instead of breadth.

The research is supposed to involve 15 participants, which is believed to be sufficient for qualitative research. According to Hennink and Kaiser (2022), it can be typical that relatively small sample sizes in qualitative studies can saturate the data. This size provides a detailed

investigation of one's own experiences as well as assures manageable data collection and processing.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions would be used to collect primary data. This method is widely used in qualitative research as it provides a balance between structure and flexibility (Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik, 2021).

Semi structure interview would allow the participants to present their thoughts, experiences, and perceptions in their own words, and this would allow the researcher to get a deeper understanding of consumer behaviour. Compared to structured interviews, which have limitations to the answers, semi-structured interviews allow the individual to answer the question in detail, making them especially useful when examining complex behaviours like impulse buying.

Moreover, this approach enables the researcher to delve deeper into interesting responses and, as a result, reveal underlying motivations and psychological triggers. DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019) point out that semi-structured interviews are well-suited when conducting behavioural research.

Interviews in the context of this study would address the experiences of the participants towards the promotions of Zara, the emotions that the participants experience over the promotions of Zara, and how they influence their buying decisions. This method is consistent with the philosophy of interpretivism, as well as the inductive building of insights. Furthermore, the findings of the previous study (Ngo et al., 2025) outline the significance of qualitative research in the context of analysing consumer decision-making processes and modifying them based on promotional stimuli.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis would be used to analyse the collected data because thematic analysis is a widely recognised methodological approach to identifying, analysing and interpreting patterns in qualitative data collected. Thematic analysis requires coding data, classifying similar ideas, and establishing themes explaining how variables relate to each other (Braun and Clarke, 2021).

The analysis process would be organised in a systematic manner:

- Familiarisation with the data.
- Generating initial codes
- Identifying themes
- Reviewing and refining themes
- Interpreting findings

Reflexive thematic analysis is especially suitable because it enables the researcher to engage with the data in this specific way and to interpret meanings within a contextual framework of the research study (Byrne, 2021). This method acknowledges the fact that the researcher has a significant influence on the analysis, which is in line with interpretivism's interpretive philosophy.

Thematic analysis facilitates the detection of significant patterns in connection with the effect of sales promotions on impulse buying behaviour. As an illustration, the themes can be urgency, perceived value, emotion triggers, and decision-making procedure. Such themes would then be connected to any of the existing theoretical frameworks, including the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model, to bring into view a cohesive understanding of consumer behaviour.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues are an essential part of research, especially when the study involves human subjects. This research would follow the set ethical principles to guarantee that the rights and well-being of the participants would not be jeopardised.

Necessary information would also be made clear to the participants regarding the purpose of the study, and informed consent would be obtained before data collection. Participation would be voluntary, and the participants would have the right to pull out at any point without any penalty. They would be maintained by ensuring that personal information is not disclosed.

The research would also adhere to ethics as defined by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2024), which sets the following ethics: respect, integrity, and responsibility. Moreover, the rules of the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI, 2023) are going to be followed to provide ethical research practices.

The information would be safely stored and accessed only for academic purposes. No confidential data would be exposed, and all feedback would be anonymised when analysing and reporting.

Moreover, trustworthiness would be sustained in the area of undertaking the study through credibility, transparency, and consistency. As Stahl and King (2020) speak of, trustworthiness in qualitative research is connected to the proper quality of the findings presented in the study to accurately reflect the experiences of the participants and is backed by a clear and systematic examination.

Chapter 4: Findings, Analysis and Discussion

Findings and Analysis

Introduction

The chapter describes and discusses the results of the semi-structured interviews conducted on 15 customers of Zara in the United Kingdom. This chapter will discuss the impact of sales promotion strategies on impulse buying behaviour in consumers in the UK fast-fashion retail environment. The results of the interview can be found in Appendix 3, where the participants were asked to tell their stories about their experiences related to discounts, flash sales, store design, urgency, emotional response, and impulse purchases.

The qualitative data collected were analysed through thematic analysis and presented recurring patterns and behavioural themes that were observed in the responses of the respondents. Applying the principle of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model, the promotional activities are interpreted as external stimuli, emotional and cognitive responses are treated as the organism, and impulse buying behaviour is regarded as the behavioural response. According to Li et al. (2022), promotional cues within a retail environment significantly influence consumer emotions and purchasing behaviour. According to the thematic analysis, 5 key themes were identified: promotional awareness, urgency and scarcity, perceived value and price sensitivity, emotional and psychological triggers and store and digital environment influence.

Participant Profile

In the study, 15 customers of Zara located in the United Kingdom were used, with a population range between 21 and 34 years. The sample consisted of male and female customers, possessing different shopping patterns and the opportunities of being exposed to promotional activities. Appendix 3 presents the detailed responses to the questions together with demographic information.

The results of the interview show that most of the interviewees visited Zara regularly, either monthly or multiple times, with a smaller portion of the interviewees reporting occasional shopping behaviour. Many of them told me that they used to visit Zara several times a month, in order to see new arrivals, view the seasonal collections, or to respond to the promotional

campaigns. Some of the respondents, including P5, P8, P11, and P14, replied that they are frequent or impulse buyers and therefore considered to have more contact with promotional stimuli and with the Zara marketing environment.

Moreover, the majority of the participants also admitted that they are aware of the promotional efforts of Zara, especially its discounts, flash sales, app alerts, and time-limited deals. Younger respondents, particularly those between the ages of 21 and 28, were more receptive to online advertisements as well as to online notices. This demographic trend indicates that younger consumers are increasingly oriented towards fast-fashion promotional settings and are more inclined to actualise impulsive purchasing behaviour. The profile of the participants thus proves the applicability of the study of the promotional influence in the context of the UK Zara customer.

Thematic Analysis Process

This paper used reflexive thematic analysis to interpret qualitative data from interviews with 15 Zara customers in the United Kingdom. Thematic analysis is considered to be an efficient qualitative method of analysis employed in the identification, analysis, and interpretation of recurring patterns in interview data (Braun and Clarke, 2021). The basis of the choice of method was that the research would investigate the relationship between sales promotion and impulse buying behaviour in the fast-fashion retail sector. Given the fact that the study aimed at assessing consumer emotions, perceptions, and experiences, thematic analysis was deemed appropriate, due to its flexibility and the capacity of thematic analysis to interpret the responses of the participants in detail.

The expectations were analysed using the six steps of thematic analysis suggested by Braun and Clarke (2021). These six stages involved being familiarised with the data, creating the initial codes, searching themes, revising themes, defining and naming the themes and producing a final report. The application of these steps meant that the analysis was systematic, transparent and within the scope of the research.

Familiarisation with the Data

The initial step was to familiarise oneself with the data from the interviews. In the process, the researcher had to read the interview transcripts severally to develop an in-depth insight into the

experiences of the participants and shopping behaviours. Reading and rereading aided in uncovering emotional expressions, recurrent behavioural patterns and customer responses that relied on Zara promotions.

Now, some common thoughts started to emerge among responses given by the participants. When sharing information about their shopping experience at Zara, many of the respondents regularly brought up the discounts, flash sales, using apps, seasonal sales and limited-time offers. Emotional responses like excitement, urgency and enjoyment around promotional periods were also discussed by the participants.

Indicatively, P1, P6, P9, and P15, among many others, kept repeating that seasonal discounts are what attracted them and got them to be more active in exploring the products. Likewise, P2, P7 and P14 talked about urgency and fear of missing out, describing flash sales and limited-time offers. P4 and P8 also emphasised the effect of online advertisements and app alerts on their online browsing patterns and decisions to make purchases.

The familiarisation period also allowed the researcher to witness the effect of the promotional exposure on the customer thinking prior to the time when they actually make a purchase decision. Promotional cues frequently were recognized by customers even without their conscious thought of the need for the product. This implied that promotional awareness was playing a precocious role as a behavioural antecedent in the shopping process.

Moreover, the scholar found connections between the experience of the participants and the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model. Sometimes promotional activities (discounts or electronic reminders) were viewed as external stimuli, but the emotional responses (excitement, urgency, and curiosity) were internal stimuli that resulted in impulse buying behaviour.

This phase was very significant in that it ensured that the process of coding and developing themes was strongly supported analytically. The frequent interaction with the data minimised the chances of missing significant meanings among the responses of the participants.

Generating Initial Codes

The second phase was the creation of initial codes out of the interview information. Coding can be defined as determining meaningful concepts, recurring words and key behaviour patterns that

take place in the responses of the participants. It was at this phase that the researcher thoroughly studied each interview transcript and gave them descriptive tags to important answers associated with promotional influence and impulse buying behaviour.

Multiple codes came out as a result of the data. These were awareness of discounts, interest in flash sales, urgency, a feeling of fear of missing out, attractive presentation, Push notification, online exposure, cold blood excitement, a sense of perceived savings, sensitivity to price, shopping window window shopper and impulse buying.

To illustrate, answers of participants who mentioned discounts and seasonal sales were coded as promotional awareness and price sensitivity. The ones related to low-stock pressure and time-limited offers were coded as urgent and fear of missing out. Reports about pleasure, the excitement of shopping and emotional influence were rated as being part of the emotional stimulation category and hedonic shopping.

Those who talked about store layout, visual merchandising and online reminders were coded as the influence on the store environment and digital exposure. These codes indicated that physical and online retail settings had an impact on consumer behaviour.

It was also noticed during the coding process that numerous answers of the participants had an emotional and rational aspect at the same time. Indicatively, a number of the respondents were able to defend impulse buying by citing the perceived discounts and affordability and acknowledging that they were thrilled when shopping. Thus, interview responses were assigned more than one code to capture the sophistication of the consumer behaviour.

The importance of this step was that it helped to convert raw interview responses into structured units of analysis. Coding helped the researcher to discover the relationship between the experiences of the participants rather than focus on each individual response. Consistency between the research findings and between the research objectives and the interview findings was also a part of the coding process with regard to promotional influence and impulse buying behaviour.

Besides, the coding enhanced the interpretive nature of the analysis as it put emphasis on both psychological and environmental factors that affected customer decisions. The results indicated

that not only was consumer attention influenced by what Zara was selling through promotions, but also emotional responses and perceptions of value and behavioural responses.

Searching for Themes

The third phase consisted of the finding of the broader themes through cluster grouping of similar codes. In the process, the researcher studied links between individual codes and found greater behavioural categories, which represented overall recurring patterns within experiences of the participants.

Promotional Awareness codes involved with discounts, flash leads, seasonal sales and application alerts were integrated under the theme, Promotional Awareness. Likewise, codes that were related to urgency, fear of missing out pressure, low-stock pressure, and making quick decisions were sorted under the theme of Urgency and Scarcity.

Themes of Perceived Value and Price Sensitivity were codes which talked about savings, affordability and discount justification. Emotional responses, like excitement, fun of shopping, and emotional stress, were included in the theme of Emotional and Psychological Triggers. Lastly, codes touching on store layout, display merchandise, app alerts and online advertisements were the theme Store and Digital Environment Influence.

This phase allowed the researcher to get beyond individual responses and form similar wider meanings of the data through analysis. Themes depicted recurrent behavioural patterns, but not in a personal shopping experience. The individual themes each presented a particular process by which the promotional tactics of Zara affected impulse buying behaviour.

The searching-for-themes stage also displayed that the impulse buying behaviour was influenced by numerous interrelated factors as opposed to just a single promotional one. Consumer decision-making involved a combination of discounts, urgency, emotions and exposure to the environment working all at the same time.

SOR model proved especially helpful at this stage as the themes were characterised by the interactions between the external promotional stimulus and internal emotional reaction. Expressed external stimuli are affected by promotional awareness and store environment,

whereas internal cognitive and emotional responses that result in impulse buying behaviour are urgency, excitement and perceived value.

The outcomes at this phase also coincided with past scholarly research on the topic of scarcity marketing, emotional appeal and visual merchandising in the retail environment. This further enhanced the theoretical applicability of the emerging themes.

Reviewing Themes

The fourth step was to revisit and narrow down the identified themes. In the process, the researcher looked at whether the themes were adequate to reflect the interview data and whether the themes were clear-cut.

All the responses of participants referring to any of the themes were carefully read in order to achieve coherence and consistency. There are cases where some of the codes seemed to be similar, and it was necessary that they be separated out. As an illustration, urgency and emotional excitement at times coincided since both led to impulse buying behaviour. But the urgency was primarily time pressure and insufficiency, as the emotional excitement was directed more toward the pleasure and enjoyment of shopping. Thus, these were distinct themes.

The reviewing phase also made sure that every theme had enough supporting evidence in the form of the responses of the participants. Those themes with an insufficient level of analysis or redundant evidence were simplified or eliminated. The last themes were chosen as they were the same topics appearing in several interviews with the participants and were directly connected with the purposes of the research.

This step also proved the point that Zara did not promote itself solely through the use of price-cutting tactics. Whilst this is often mentioned during their descriptions of their shopping experiences, many participants talked about emotional pressure, browsing behaviour, digital reminders and attractive displays. This implied that impulse buying behaviour was a result of an interplay of multiple psychological and environmental factors.

The themes were further susceptible to the literature review and theoretical framework by the researcher. Results on the urgency and scarcity resonated well with the past study on fear of missing out and impulsive consumer behaviour in online shopping platforms. Similarly, the

concepts related to emotional excitement and visual merchandising coincided with research about hedonic shopping behaviour and surroundings stimulation.

The examination of the themes enhanced the level of credibility and trustworthiness of the analysis, as the final themes used by the analysis were actually a reflection of the experiences the participants had and not what the researcher thought. Making relationships between promotional exposure, emotional reactions and behavioural responses more specific also helped the process to enhance analytical clarity.

Defining and Naming Themes

The fifth phase consisted of giving clear definitions to the final themes. In the process, the researcher narrowed the meaning of each theme according to which she elaborated on brief descriptive statements about how each theme is going to help us understand impulse buying behaviour in Zara clients.

The initial theme was called Promotional Awareness as it concerned the nature of the customer perception and reaction to promotional stimuli prior to making a buying decision. This theme featured promotional awareness, flash sale enticement, application notifications and online promotional publicity.

The second theme was called Urgency and Scarcity since it was the emotional pressure customers felt when encountering time-limited offers, low inventory messages, and fear of missing out. This was a theme that emphasised the element of urgency in making decisions impulsively.

The third theme, “Perceived Value and Price Sensitivity, identified the perceptions customers placed on the promotional discounts as a means of achieving financial gain and demonstrated unplanned purchase justification caused by perceived affordability.

The fourth theme, “Emotional and Psychological Triggers,” focused on emotional reactions such as excitement, enjoyment, pleasure and emotional pressure generated through Zara’s promotional environment.

The final theme, “Store and Digital Environment Influence,” represented the impact of visual merchandising, store layout, online advertisements and mobile notifications on customer browsing and impulse buying behaviour.

The clarity with which the themes were defined enhanced the quality of the interpretation of the findings chapter. The themes were each considered to be the behavioural mechanism describing how the promotional activities at Zara affected the customers. Properly naming the themes also enhanced the dissertation findings' readability and organisation.

The concluding themes also illustrated that the Zara customers had a multidimensional impulse buying behaviour. Discounts and affordability did not alone affect consumer behaviour, but rather emotional stimulation, urgency and environmental exposure did.

Producing the Final Report

The last phase was to generate the thematic analysis report and synthesise the findings in the dissertation. In this phase, the researcher structured the themes into a logical story that is backed by examples given by participants, theoretical explanations and theoretical literature.

The results showed that the promotional practice of Zara had a strong impact on the impulse buying behaviour of the consumers in the UK. Discounts, flash sales and seasonal deals brought customers closer and made them consider the potential of purchasing products that they were initially not planning to buy. Promotional messages founded on urgency posed emotional urgency and lowered cautiousness in decisions made when making purchases.

It also found that perceived value and the financial savings were commonly admitted by customers in their justification of impulse purchases. Such emotional responses as excitement, enjoyment and feeling outplayed a large part in spontaneous buying behaviour. In addition, customer focus and online and offline browsing behaviour were stimulated by Zara store layout and digital reminders as well as visual merchandising.

The Stimulus-Organism-Response model was well supported by the thematic analysis. Promotional strategies acted as external stimuli; emotional and cognitive reaction actions were internal organism reactions, and impulse buying behaviour was the ultimate behavioural reaction. On the same note, it was found that the Impulse Buying Theory was supported, as the responses

given by the participants revealed that a large number of purchases were made abruptly, with emotions and without planning.

The results conformed to the prior study that talks about scarcity marketing, emotional stimulation and digital promotional influence. To illustrate, the results align with those of Bandyopadhyay et al. (2021), who posit that, through sales promotions, consumers are more likely to pay attention and exhibit greater motivation to buy. The findings were also congruent with those of Almutanafisa and Retnaningsih (2021), who describe that digital exposure to online promotions affects impulse buying behaviour through repetitive digital cues.

As well, the results were related to those of Konuk (2019), who indicates that observed value and price fairness play important roles in purchasing intentions among customers. The emotional and hedonic aspects found in the current research were also consistent with the report provided by Mashilo et al. (2025), who believe that the emotional shopping experience enhances impulsive buying behaviour among fashion stores.

In general, the six-step thematic analysis procedure offered a standard and dependable method of comprehending the connection between sales promotion and impulse buying behaviour among Zara customers in the United Kingdom. The analytical process also allowed the researcher to derive meaningful behavioural patterns but also retained good links between the experiences of the participants, theoretical framework and available academic literature.

Thematic Analysis

Theme 1: Promotional Awareness

Promotional awareness was one of the most powerful themes identified using the data of the interviews. This theme clarifies the manner in which the promotional efforts of Zara were followed and reacted to by the participants before they made decisions to make purchases. In the coding, similar items like discounts, flash sales, app notifications and seasonal sales were categorised under this theme. The results indicate that promotional awareness served as a significant baseline affecting impulse buying behaviour of Zara customers in the United Kingdom.

Some of their participants, like P1, P6, P9 and P15, added that discounts and seasonal sales caught their eye immediately when they were shopping. According to these participants, promotional deals made them consider buying products that they had not initially intended to acquire. This shows that sales promotions resulted in higher customer attraction and active involvement in Zara products. The customers frequently paid more attention to the promotional signs, and then they thought about whether this product seemed to be valuable or attractive or not.

Flash sales, as well as limited-time offers, also strongly impacted shopping behaviour. P2 and P7 said that offers like this gave a sense of excitement and urgency in shopping. Though the respondents realised that flash sales formed commercial tactics, the temporality of the deals still imposed emotional stress. When there was a time-based proposition, participants often feared not taking advantage of the opportunities.

One of the other aspects that seemed relevant in the responses of the participants is the digital promotional exposure. P4 and P8 have clarified how online advertisements and app notifications made them more aware of Zara products, even when they were not considering shopping. These results show that the promo influence of Zara was not limited to the physical store and went on through online reminders.

The results are aligned with Bandyopadhyay et al. (2021), who comment that customer attention and purchase motivation rise with the sales promotions. In the same project, Almutanafisa and Retnaningsih (2021) write that online promotional messages could have a great impact on impulse buying behaviour due to recurring exposure to digital promotions.

This theme is explicated by the SOR model. External stimuli were promotions, flash sales and notifications. These stimuli brought about internal responses like curiosity, interest and excitement. The last behavioural reactions involved shopping, visits and impulsive buying at the stores.

In general, this theme indicates that customers of Zara were very sensitive to the promotional signals. The promotional awareness played an important role in attracting attention and the shopping behaviour of customers in the UK fast-fashion retail store.

Theme 2: Urgency and Scarcity

The second theme identified in the interview data that was significant was urgency and scarcity. This theme describes how promotional tactics used by Zara put pressure on customers to make immediate purchase decisions due to the perceived scarcity. In coding, it was possible to identify common concepts like fear of missing out, low-stock pressure, and limited-time offers and quick decision-making, which were included under the same theme.

A number of the participants described that urgency was a powerful contributor to their shopping behaviour. P2 explained that time-based offers were motivating, making faster decisions since waiting would lead to the loss of the discount or the availability of the product. Likewise, P7 and P14 revealed that messages with low stocks exerted pressure since they thought that products were likely to run out. These results imply that scarcity lowered the time taken by the customers to assess the need to make purchases.

Contributors usually concentrated not only on not making a loss, but also on being thorough when it came to assessing the usefulness of products. Emotional strains were also observed to be quite high in the responses of the participants. P1 and P11 gave the explanation that low product availability stimulated instant buying even where a customer had not even intended to purchase anything in the first place. Products hence seemed to be more tempting due to the perception that they may not be available in the coming days.

The results further reveal that a sense of urgency undermined rational judgement in shopping. A few respondents acknowledged buying things without taking into consideration their financial means or necessity. P11 clearly stated that beautiful displays and time pressure led to making several impulse purchases.

These results back up the argument by Djamhari et al. (2024), claiming that scarcity-based promotions and fear of missing out exert a strong effect on impulse buying behaviour. On the same note, Santini et al. (2015) put forward that messages that are promotional and shaped by urgency influence strong impulses as compared to normal promotions.

This theme is also explained by the SOR model. External stimuli were limited-time offers and low-stock messages. These stimuli caused intrinsic emotional responses such as anxiety, excitement and jealousy. These behavioural responses that followed were the rapid decision-making in purchase and the rise in impulse buying behaviour.

In general, this theme illustrates that the urgency and scarcity had a significant impact on impulse buying behaviour in Zara customers. The promotional methods of Zara added emotional stress and provoked momentary buying decisions by forming the impression that goods and deals were on a time limit.

Theme 3: Perceived Value and Price Sensitivity

Perceived value and price sensitivity were the third theme of importance. This theme reveals participants' perceptions about discounts and other promotional activities as chances to save money and support spontaneous buying with a sense of affordable retail. When coding, similar concepts like bargains, affordability, discounts and savings were included under this theme.

Some of the respondents indicated that discounts made products more attractive; according to them, even when they did not initially intend to purchase anything. P1, P6, P9 and P12 opined that discounted prices prompted them to think about products that they would not otherwise think of. Indicatively, P1 used a discounted jacket as an example, stating that it seemed to be a good chance due to the discounted price.

These results imply that customer judgement based on the value of products was distorted by discounts. Customers rated products not just on need but also on the perceived financial benefit. Discounts then affected cognitive evaluations in decision-making towards shopping.

The perception of savings also explained the use of impulse purchases by the participants. A high number of respondents did not regard their buying behaviour as irresponsible since promotional prices led to products seeming affordable. This illustrates that impulse buying behaviour was associated with rationalisation processes and emotional reactions.

The results are consistent with Konuk (2019), who postulates that perceived value and price fairness have a strong effect on purchase intentions. In line with this, Jee et al. (2025) describe the effect of promotional discounts as they enhance positive emotional responses and stimulate impulse purchasing behaviour.

The results also show that perceived financial risk was lower with promotional prices. Customers felt that it was more prudent to buy the products with discounts promptly rather than postponing

their purchases. This effect was reinforced in the fast-fashion climate that Zara works in, since players were afraid that the products could be sold fast.

This is explained in the SOR model. The presence of discounts and promotions served as external motivation that led to internal comparisons in terms of affordability and value perceptions. The last behavioural reaction was higher impulse buying behaviour as the customers felt that there were financial opportunities.

Compared to other themes, this one shows that perceived value and price sensitivity had a great impact on impulse buying behaviour among customers of Zara.

Theme 4: Emotional and Psychological Triggers

The other theme that stood out as an important theme based on the interview data was that of emotional and psychological triggers. This theme covers how customer feelings impacted impulse buying behaviour in the customers who were exposed to Zara promotions, new entry and favourable displays. The identical concept, e.g. excitement, enjoyment, emotional pressure and buying without thinking, was combined under the same theme during the coding.

The identified emotional reaction was one of the strongest: excitement. The reason that shopping in Zara is quite fun and rather thrilling was explained by P4, P5 and P11, as it was usually accompanied by new arrivals, flash sales, and stunning displays. The significance of these findings is that the excitement of feelings diminished sound judgement when making decisions about shopping. The respondents were more concerned with instant gratification and pleasure, rather than the need for products.

The fear of missing out was also present in the participant responses at high rates. P2 and P14 justified that they were made to feel pressured to make purchases now since there might be no discounts or products left afterwards. This indicates that emotional pressure was a great factor that affected decision-making behaviour.

Some of the participants confessed that they bought things which they did not require, as the shopping environment was thrilling and emotive. P11 also gave a specific explanation, that is, excitement and urgency combined to stimulate impulse buying behaviour.

This result validates the work of Nasution et al. (2025), who clarify that the connection among promotions and impulse buying behaviour revolves around emotional responses. Likewise, Mashilo et al. (2025) claim that hedonic shopping has a strong effect on impulsive buying in fashion stores.

This theme is highly explained through the Impulse Buying Theory, as the responses by the participants portrayed spontaneous and emotionally instigated buying behaviour. On the whole, this theme proves that emotional and psychological concerns were significant elements that critically contributed to impulse buying behaviour in Zara customers.

Theme 5: Store and Digital Environment Influence

The last theme discovered was store and online environment influence. This topic describes how the physical store design, how products are displayed in stores, as well as the online advertisements and mobile notifications, did impact impulse buying behaviour on the part of the participants in Zara. This theme was coded with similar concepts like attractive displays, store layout and app notifications as they were repeated.

One of the most influential environmental factors, which was found among responses of the participants, was visual merchandising. P5, P8 and P14 elaborated that attractive displays associated products with being more desirable and thereby promoted browsing behaviour. Browsing thus made it more likely to make impulse buying.

Respondents also described the way Zara was organised in its stores in terms of exploration. A number of the respondents related Zara stores to be well laid out and attractive. The new-arrival areas and product positioning facilitated traffic all over the store and for the products.

These results complement those of Jhawar and Kushwaha (2017), who clarify that visual merchandising plays a significant role in the impulse buying behaviour in the retail context.

Digital influence was also one of the issues that were evident among the responses of the participants. P4 and P8 shared that their favorite alert and, web ads, and website notifications prompted them to come back to Zara products with a regularity. Online presence then made Zara extend their promotion across the board of physical stores.

This theme is elucidated by the SOR model. External stimuli were store layout, visual and online prompts. These stimuli led to internal responses including interest, pleasure and curiosity. Browsing, store visits and impulse purchases were the resulting behavioural responses.

On the whole, this theme shows that customer behaviour in both physical and digital retail environments highly affected Zara and the impulse buying behaviour within UK Zara customers was made stronger.

Integration with Research Questions

The results directly answer the research questions of this paper. To begin with, the interviews verified that common promotional strategies used by Zara in the UK fast-fashion market include discounts, flash sales, app notifications, and limited-time offers. These promotional activities were highly recognised among participants.

Second, the results show that sales promotions have a strong implication on purchasing decisions as it creates a sense of urgency, excitement, and perceived value. The participants also repeatedly confessed to costly purchases that were not initially planned due to a promotion that made people take action now.

Third, there are also psychological factors like urgency, missing out fears, excitement and value perceptions as being major contributors to impulse buying behaviour. It was common to have an emotional response that overwhelmed rational judgment when people went shopping.

Fourth, it is within the scope of the study that promotional offers considerably enhance unplanned purchasing behaviour. Periodically, the participants mentioned the fact that they made impulsive decisions because of discounts, out-of-stock items, and attractive displays of the products.

Lastly, the results indicate that there is a strong positive correlation between the sales promotion strategies and impulse buying behaviour among the customers of the Zara store. These results are consistent with Cheah et al. (2023), who claim that the level of promotion involvement and the attractiveness of deals are key factors in enhancing impulsive consumer behaviour in a retail setting.

Summary of Key Findings

This chapter discussed the research results of interviews with 15 customers of Zara in the United Kingdom. Five key themes of influence concerning the effects of impulse buying behaviour, kindly named during the analysis, were promotional awareness, urgency and scarcity, perceived value and price sensitivity, emotional and psychological triggers, and influence of store and electronic environment.

The results indicate that promotional activities at Zara entail a significant implication on consumer behaviour in that they generate emotional pressure, augment the perceived value, as well as induce spontaneous purchases. Promotional tools such as discounts, flash sales, app notifications, and limited-time offers were spotted as very effective. Emotional arousal, such as excitement and fear of missing out, had a significant influence on the decision-making process by the participants, and, in most cases, it lowered the rational decision-making process.

The results also verify that both physical and digital store settings support impulse buying behaviour through visual merchandising, store layout, and exposure to promotions. Carrying the general argument to its logical conclusion, the findings are highly supportive of the Stimulus–Organism–Response model that holds promotional activities as stimuli, emotional reactions as the organism, and impulse buying behaviour as the response.

Discussion

Introduction to the Discussion

This chapter addresses how the findings of the study can be related to the existing literature and theoretical frameworks. This discussion is aimed at interpreting the effects of sales promotion strategies as they have an impact on the impulse buying behaviour of the Zara customers in the United Kingdom. The results are attributed to the amount of prior scholarly literature and theoretical approaches such as the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model, the Impulse Buying Theory and the Consumer Decision-Making Theory. Based on the chapter, the value of promotional awareness, urgency, perceived value, emotional reactions and retail environments has been assessed in influencing customer purchasing behaviour in the fast-fashion industry. Moreover, the research questions are answered by providing explanations of the relationship that

exists between promotional activities and spontaneous consumer buying decisions as it pertains to the Zara marketing environment.

Promotional Awareness and Consumer Attention

The results point out that awareness through promotion had a strong impact on consumer attention and buying behaviour among Zara clients. Offers (such as discounts and flash-sales), notifications about apps and seasonal offerings were very familiar to respondents and often prompted exploration behaviour and consideration of purchase. Several respondents clarified how initially promotional messages captured their attention even before they started to have an interest in the products. This shows that promotions play the role of attention-seeking activities in the fast-fashion trade setup.

The results corroborate Bandyopadhyay et al. (2021), who claim that promotional advertising makes consumers pay more attention and engage in impulse buying behaviour by enhancing purchase motivation. Similarly, Al Mutanafisa and Retnaningsih (2021) articulate that online marketing activities influence online consumer choices greatly. Younger consumers in the current research seemed particularly sensitive to online promotion messages and app notifications, so online marketing turned out to be even more effective in the contemporary shopping environment.

The SOR model can be used to interpret the findings as well. External stimuli, such as promotional activities like discounts and app notifications, attracted customers' attention and piqued their curiosity about products. It is these internal responses which then stimulated browsing and purchase intention. Promotional awareness was thus put as the initial step into the impulse buying process.

The results, however, also indicate that the unrelenting exposure to promotions can promote needless consumption behaviour. Although promotional visibility would enhance customer activity and immediate sales, the habitual exposure to discounts and offers with expired dates can normalise the tendency towards impulsive purchasing in consumers. This begs the question of how these aggressive promotions of fast fashion may influence behavioural changes on a long-term basis.

Urgency, Scarcity and FOMO

Urgency and scarcity were discovered to play a significant role in the impulse buying behaviour of customers at Zara. Respondents recalled numerous times that limited-time offers, messages of low stock and final sale messages made them choose to make quicker buying decisions. The fact that one was afraid of losing the product or promotional deals generated emotional stress, making them unable to be cautious in their judgment and instead more impulsive.

These results are highly consistent with Djamhari et al. (2024), who discuss that the feeling of missing out and promotional approaches grounded in scarcity are significant causes of impulse purchasing in online stores. In the same spirit, Santini et al. (2015) present the argument that urgency-oriented promotional messages will produce greater emotional consumer reaction than regular promotional messages. In this research, subjects tended to have higher values for the fear of missing a chance rather than the need for the product.

This process of behaviour has been well reconciled using the SOR model. The external stimulus was scarcity signals and time constraints on promotions that evoked emotional responses of anxiety, excitement and desire to miss out on the event at the stage of the organism. These emotional reactions then stimulated instant behavioural reactions by way of impulse purchases. The findings are also supported by the Impulse Buying Theory, as the intensive buying did not depend on rational thinking, but rather on an emotional urge.

The results also show that urgency decreased rational decision-making among the participants. A significant number of the respondents acknowledged that they have bought items without having to think about prices, usability or worth in the long-term. This implies that marketing strategies driven by urgency reduce the range of consumers to act in the moment instead of thinking critically.

At the same time, despite the high efficiency of urgency strategies to boost sales in the short term, there are ethical concerns about the findings. When promotions are dependent on scarcity, over-reliance can foster the behaviour of consumption under emotional pressure and undermine the practice of responsible purchase of the product by the consumers.

Perceived Value and Price Sensitivity

The results indicate that the perceived value and price sensitivity had a strong impact on impulse buying behaviour among customers of Zara. Promotional discounts were commonly linked by the participants with financial benefit, and fiscal excess purchases were made by giving reasons of saving. Price cuts gave the perception that items were good deals, even in instances when buyers had not intended to buy them in the first place.

These results are in line with Konuk (2019), who elucidates that the perceived value and price fairness play a considerable role in consumer purchase intention and satisfaction. The participants gave a positive response when they thought that promotional prices offered by Zara were good. Correspondingly, Jee et al. (2025) state that promotional discounts produce an emotional appraisal that enhances impulsive purchasing behaviour and is positive in nature. Discounts brought enthusiasm to this work, but at the same time, they minimised the perceived financial risk.

These behaviours have also been explained by the Consumer Decision-Making Theory. It is typical that consumers consider price, need and benefit when making judgments about products. But this process of evaluation was changed by promotion discounts, which made products seem to be economically beneficial. That is why participants rationalised impulsive buying by beliefs of them saving money instead of the necessity of the product.

The results also show that there is cognitive bias. The low-priced products were widely construed by the consumers as prudent investments, even when they did not really need the product. This shows that not only emotional responses, but also the way to enhance cognitive judgement processes, are affected by promotions. The idea of saving money was often mixed with spending wisely by customers, whilst the aspect of unnecessary purchases still required some money spending.

The SOR framework also underpins the results, as discounts were external stimuli and that they operated to affect the internal mental assessment of value and affordability. It was these evaluations that enhanced the likelihood of impulse buying behaviour.

On the whole, consumer judgment and impulse buying behaviour in the fast-fashion retail setting of Zara were highly influenced by two factors, perceived value and promotional pricing.

Emotional and Psychological Triggers

The results indicate that emotional and psychological stimuli were a key factor in determining the impulse buying behaviour of Zara customers. Feelings of excitement, pleasure, enjoyment and fear of missing out frequently came up among the participants when they were exposed to promotions, new arrivals and attractive displays of products. These feelings tended to eclipse rational analysis when it came to buying.

The results confirm Nasution et al. (2025), who suggest the mediating effect of emotional response between sales promotion and purchase behaviour based on impulse buying in the retailing context. On the same note, Mashilo et al. (2025) articulate that hedonic shopping intentions have a strong effect on impulsive consumer behaviour in the fashion industry. Respondents of this research tended to narrate shopping as an emotionally gratifying and entertaining experience, instead of a functional one.

These behaviours can be explained using the Impulse Buying Theory, as a lot of the buying choices were not based on logic but rather were impulsive and driven by emotional factors. Respondents have confessed to spending money on unneeded goods owing to emotional stimulation and temporary gratification caused by the promotional atmosphere created by Zara. Excitement and FOMO thus entered into the psychological stimuli that lowered rational judgment.

The results are also closely correlated with the SOR model. Promotional activities and new product releases were identified as stimuli that aroused emotional reactions like excitement, pleasure and urgency that occurred in the organism stage. It is on this basis that these inner emotional responses would stimulate impulse buying behaviour as a result.

But the results also indicate that emotionally-based marketing campaigns can lead to unhealthy consumption behaviour. Even as emotional marketing enhances customer involvement and anticipation, overstimulated emotions can lead to unnecessary expenditure and a lack of proper consumption habits. This is a key ethical issue about emotionally ubiquitous promotional tactics in the fast-fashion sector.

In general, emotions and psychology played a great role in promoting impulse buying behaviour in Zara shoppers in the UK retail setting.

Store and Digital Environment Influence

The results prove the fact that the physical and online retail space of Zara played an important role in impulse buying behaviour. Participants reported that appealing product displays and visual merchandising, store layout and online information alerted them to experience more browsing behaviour and product exposure. The manner in which the stores were organised made consumers keep browsing the products, and the digital reminders ensured exposure to promotions even when the consumers were not in the physical shopping premises.

The present results confirm the works of Jhawar and Kushwaha (2017), who mention that the aspect of visual merchandising has a powerful impact on impulse buying behaviour in stores. On the same note, Aragoncillo and Orus (2018) state that the purchasing climate and online prominence of social media networks elevate impulsive consumer behaviour by placing consumers into a state of constant promotion.

In the SOR context, store map, digital alerts and display were viewed as environmental cues that elicited emotional arousal, including curiosity, enjoyment, and urgency. It is these in-store responses that prompted browsing and impulse buying behaviour.

The results also show that physical and physical space reinforces promotional exposure at all times. Shoppers kept in touch with the promotional culture of Zara via app notifications, online notifications and store visuals. Therefore, online and in-store retailing platforms contributed significantly to the enhancement of the impulse buying behaviour of the fast-fashion setting.

Overall Discussion Summary

In general, the results reveal that the sales promotion strategy has a considerable impact on the impulse buying behaviour of the customers of Zara in the United Kingdom. The influence of promotional awareness, urgency, emotional responses, perceived value and retail setting on purchasing behaviour in the case study is examined in a contentious manner. The findings provide strong support for the SOR model and Impulse Buying Theory, which substantiate that the fast-fashion promotional setting in Zara encourages impulsive consumer decision-making.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

Recommendations

Ethical and Balanced Promotional Strategies

These results reveal that promotional activities based on urgency have a high impact on the impulse buying of Zara customers. Though tempting to drive up quick sales, too many scarcity messages and time-limited promotions could lead to emotional pressure and compulsion to buy. Hence, Zara should consider a more balanced and ethical promotional strategy, which keeps promoting and rebuilds the customers' faith in the brand.

The company should not involve too much of the “last chance”, “limited stock” and extremely pressing promotional messages that can affect the customers' emotions. Rather, promotional communication should be informative, open and responsible. Retailers should also make sure not to make their promotion seem too urgent or scare the person into thinking there is a limited quantity. Promotional practice in accordance with ethical norms can positively enhance long-term relations with customers and consolidate customer image. The balance between sales growth and responsible marketing is crucial, given the consumers' growing awareness of responsible consumption and transparent business behaviour in the fast-fashion industry.

Personalised but Transparent Digital Marketing

The value of digital promotions and notifications in apps is demonstrated in the study, which reveals that these can be an important driver of consumer behaviour, particularly among younger consumers. Thus, Zara's digital marketing should be enhanced in terms of ethical personalised marketing and transparency. Whilst it's likely that personalised notifications can help to boost customer involvement, overpromotions can result in pressure, irritation and impulsive consumer behaviour.

Zara's strategy to notify customers via email should be more controlled, with the customer able to specify how and at what frequency they would like to be contacted. This would enhance the comfort of customers and cut down the level of promo fatigue. Moreover, the promotion deadlines and terms of the offer should be clearly communicated, and consumers should not be led to think otherwise. Clear visibility into discounts and how long the offer lasts can foster customer loyalty and enhance the overall online shopping experience. Thus, ethical digital marketing can assist Zara in engaging customers without exacerbating the drawbacks of continuous exposure to promotional content.

Improve In-Store Experience Strategically

The results have shown that visual merchandising and store layouts substantially have an impact on stimulating the attitude of browsing and impulse buying behaviour. As a result, terrain with good displays and well-arranged shop counters would continue to be maintained, as this would also enhance customer engagement and product visibility for Zara. But the business ought not to induce too much sensory pressure, which could overwhelm customers when they go shopping.

Product displays should be aesthetically pleasing in addition to promoting easy browsing habits. Improvements should be made to the system of store layouts to provide product discovery in a natural way rather than pressuring customers to make an emotionally charged purchase. Zara can also embrace the idea of better-than-average navigation within the stores and better organisation of products, which will enhance customer experience. Creating an in-store environment that is balanced can improve customer satisfaction and keep them emotionally engaged. Consequently, intelligent use of VM should be used to give customers a better environment to enjoy and be informed about their purchases, and not only to overstimulate them and make them rush to buy.

Build Long-Term Customer Relationships Beyond Discounts

The results show that Discounts and Promotions were an important criterion on which many resorted when they wanted to buy a product. Promotions do certainly help to boost sales in the short term; however, if overused can lead to decreased brand loyalty and a greater tendency for impulse purchasing. Hence, Zara should try to create a more sustainable relationship with customers rather than making short-term promotions.

Emotional brand engagement and loyalty programmes, personalisation and sustainable fashion campaigns are the way the company needs to foster brand attachment. Eating habits and fashion choices are healthier and more responsible from the customers' point of view, particularly among younger customers. Therefore, Zara can promote the quality of products, sustainability and responsible consumption rather than on urgency and marketing based on discounts.

In addition, the company should promote value purchasing practices, whereby they would speak about the usefulness of the products rather than the excitement of this promotion. Transparency, sustainability and emotional connections can boost customer trust and loyalty, lessening the need for heavy promotional campaigns over the long haul. This would be beneficial for the

sustainability of businesses and more responsible consumerism in the fast-fashion retail sector in the UK.

Limitations and Future Research

Limitations of the Study

The study has certain limitations which should be noted in the interpretation of the results. Firstly, a small number of participants ($n = 15$) were used in the study. While these are suitable methods in qualitative research and thematic analysis, it is possible that the data presented may not reflect the experiences and behaviours of all Zara customers in the United Kingdom. Thus, the findings are generalizable only to a very limited extent.

Secondly, the study used a qualitative-interpretivist approach so that the findings were based on the subjective experiences perceived by the participants and the interpretation of the researcher. Consumer emotion, perception and shopping experiences could be quite different for each consumer, affecting the uniformity of response. Also, self-reported responses to interviews could have response biases, as sometimes, interviewees may not be able to recall their purchasing behaviour or be able to articulate it.

Another limitation of the study is that the data collected and respondents included in this study were all customers of Zara within the context of the fast-fashion retail industry in the UK. This means that the results may not be relevant for customers of other fashion brands and for consumers in other countries and cultures. The data collection and data analysis were also limited due to time constraints. Ignoring these restrictions, the research offers some valuable insights into the association between sales promotion and impulse buying in the UK fast-fashion market.

Future Research Directions

This study can be carried out in the future in a number of different ways. Firstly, if quantitative studies are conducted with larger samples of participants, the generalisability of findings and statistical evidence about impulse buying behaviour can be stronger. Secondly, comparative studies with other fast fashion brands, like H&M, Primark and Uniqlo, could help gain a greater understanding of the effect that different promotion methods have on consumer behaviour.

Further research can also be conducted to make cross-country comparisons and investigate the impact of cultural and economic factors on impulse buying in fast fashion. Furthermore, cross-study research between offline and online environments may also indicate potential variations in the effectiveness of a promotion and the emotional response of consumers.

In addition, it would be useful to conduct further studies on Generation Z consumers within a retail marketing context, as the younger consumers seem to be very receptive to digital marketing activities and promotional exposure. Lastly, more research is needed to analyse the impact of social media influencers and content creators on impulse buying within today's fast fashion retail space.

Conclusion

Overall Research Conclusion

This study was aimed at analysing the effect of Sales promotion on Impulse buying behaviour of Zara customers in the UK. It was conducted using a qualitative research approach and was themed to examine the impact of promotions on consumer emotions, perceptions and buying decisions in the context of fast fashion retail.

The results showed that sales promotions played a significant role in the impulse buying behaviour of Zara customers. Because promotional awareness was found to be important, discounts, market buzz, flash sales, app alerts, seasonal discounts and similar promotions have proven to grab the attention and pique the interest of customers. Furthermore, urgency and scarcity were also highlighted as effective motivators, as limited-time offers and low-stock messages generated emotional points of pressure and fear of missing out, which drove consumers to make more urgent purchase decisions.

The other factors that influenced impulse buying were perceived value and price sensitivity. It was common for people to rationalise purchases, although they were not necessary, using the terms of savings and discount compared to other shop discounts. Emotional and psychological factors such as excitement, pleasure and FOMO also played a major role in the tendency towards high impulsive buying and low rational evaluation while shopping.

The results also showed that Zara's physical and digital stores had a positive effect on impulse purchasing by providing visual merchandising, a systematic layout pattern, and constant digital

promotion. Comprehensively, these findings provide strong support for the Stimulus–Organism–Response model and Impulse Buying Theory, as it indicates how stimuli are accepted by the subject that triggers the emotional and thinking reactions before impulsive purchasing is conducted.

Contributions to the literature are that the study offers a qualitative understanding of the effects of impulse buying behaviour in fast-fashion retailers in the UK, especially for the case of Zara customers. The results can also be of immediate relevance to retail managers and marketing staff who try to understand how their promotion can affect consumers' decision-making and emotional response.

In conclusion, the study suggests that modern fast-fashion promotional environments, both emotionally, psychologically and environmentally, have a significant influence on consumers' behaviour overall. The role of sales promotion on impulse buying behaviour is very significant with respect to retail marketing, which is increasingly digital and experience-oriented in the present environment for both retail academia and responsible retail management.

Summery

This research paper discussed how sales promotion would affect the impulse buying behaviour of Zara customers in the United Kingdom. It also centred on the effect of promotional approaches like discounts, flash sales, application notifications and time-specific offers on the feelings, imaginations and buyer conduct in the fast-fashion retail setting.

Subjective consumer experiences were to be learned with an interpretivist philosophy and inductive approach. Qualitative case study design was employed, and data were obtained by conducting semi-structured interviews with 15 Zara customers who were chosen through purposive and convenience sampling methods. Reflexive thematic analysis was used to determine recurrent behavioural patterns and significant themes of promotional influence and impulse buying behaviour.

This analysis provided five central themes, including promotional awareness, urgency and scarcity, perceived value and price sensitivity, emotional and psychological triggers, and influence of store and digital environment. Results indicate that promotional activities are very appealing among customers and promote browsing behaviour. The flash sales and discount notifications proved to be the most effective in arousing interest and prompting unplanned buying. Promotions of urgency and limited product made people fear the wish to be missing out, which resulted in faster decision-making and less rational assessment.

Even unplanned purchases were often rationalised in terms of perceived monetary savings and promotion, even by consumers. Excitement, pleasure and temporary satisfaction, which are emotional reactions, also contributed to impulsive behaviour. Also, visual merchandising, store layout and digital prompts enhanced product exposure and further prompted impulse buying online and offline.

The results play a strong role in supporting the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model and the Impulse Buying Theory, which shows that promotion stimuli invoke emotional and mental reactions leading to impulse buying behaviour. The research not only aids in the comprehension of consumer behaviour in the UK fast-fashion industry but also explains that there are practical implications of the research findings on how retailers balance effective promotion strategies with ethical and responsible marketing in the highly competitive retail industry.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Participant Consent Form

Research Title:

The Impact of Sales Promotion on Impulse Buying Behaviour: A Case Study of Zara Customers in the United Kingdom

Researcher:

Shakil Morad

MBA Dissertation, University of Wales Trinity Saint David

Module Code: LCMB7035

Supervisor:

Shahrukh Irfan

Consent Statement

Please read each statement carefully and tick the box if you agree.

Consent statement	Tick
I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information for this research.	☐
I understand the purpose of the study and what my participation involves.	☐
I understand that my participation is voluntary.	☐
I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.	☐
I understand that my responses will be used only for academic research purposes.	☐
I understand that my identity will remain anonymous in the dissertation.	☐
I understand that all information I provide will be treated confidentially.	☐
I agree for the interview to be audio-recorded for transcription and analysis purposes.	☐
I understand that anonymised quotations from my interview may be used in the dissertation.	☐
I confirm that I am aged 18 or above.	☐
I voluntarily agree to take part in this research.	☐

Participant Details

Participant Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher Confirmation

I confirm that I have explained the purpose of the research, the participant's rights, and how the data will be used.

Researcher Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 2: Interview Questions

1. How often do you shop at Zara, and what usually motivates your visit?
2. Do you normally plan your purchases before shopping, or decide while in-store or online?
3. What types of promotions (e.g., discounts, seasonal sales, limited-time offers) have you noticed at Zara?
4. Which type of promotion attracts you the most, and why?
5. Can you describe a time when a promotion influenced you to buy something at Zara?
6. Would you have purchased that item without the promotion? Why or why not?
7. Have you ever made an unplanned purchase at Zara? What triggered it?
8. What factors most influence your spontaneous buying decisions (e.g., price, display, urgency)?
9. Do limited-time offers or “last chance” deals create urgency for you? How?
10. Do discounts make you feel you are getting better value, even if you did not need the product?
11. How do Zara’s store layout, product displays, or frequent new arrivals influence your buying behaviour?
12. Overall, how strongly do sales promotions influence your impulse buying decisions at Zara?

Appendix 3: Interview Responses

Note: The following section presents summarised interview transcripts from 15 semi-structured interviews conducted with Zara customers in the United Kingdom. It is also notable that questions were not presented to all the participants with identical questions. The semi-structured interview format made it possible to be flexible in the questioning since it is possible to pose particular questions to various respondents depending on the direction of the discussion and the appropriateness of the answer. This methodology allowed a more natural conversation and allowed to elicit more information about personal experiences of sales promotion and impulse buying behaviour among Zara customers in the United Kingdom.

Appendix 3.1: Participant P1 Interview Transcript

Participant: Emma Wilson

Age: 24

Country: United Kingdom

Researcher: How often do you shop at Zara, and what usually motivates your visit?

Participant: I usually shop once every month because I like checking fashion trends and seasonal collections.

Researcher: What usually influences your impulse buying behaviour?

Participant: Discounts, urgency and attractive displays strongly influence me.

Researcher: Overall, how strongly do promotions influence your purchases?

Participant: Promotions have a very strong influence on my buying decisions.

Appendix 3.2: Participant P2 Interview Transcript

Participant: Sophie Brown

Age: 28

Country: United Kingdom

Researcher: How often do you shop at Zara?

Participant: I visit occasionally when I want new fashion items.

Researcher: Which promotion attracts you most?

Participant: Flash sales because they feel urgent and exciting.

Researcher: Have you made unplanned purchases?

Participant: Yes, especially during limited-time sales.

Appendix 3.3: Participant P3 Interview Transcript

Participant: James Taylor

Age: 31

Country: United Kingdom

Researcher: Do you normally plan purchases before shopping?

Participant: Yes, I usually plan my purchases before visiting.

Researcher: What influences your buying behaviour most?

Participant: Mainly price reductions and discounts.

Researcher: How strongly do promotions influence you?

Participant: Moderately.

Appendix 3.4: Participant P4 Interview Transcript

Participant: Olivia Harris

Age: 22

Country: United Kingdom

Researcher: What type of promotions do you notice most?

Participant: App notifications and online discounts.

Researcher: Have promotions influenced online purchases?

Participant: Yes, app offers often encourage quick purchases.

Researcher: What triggers impulse buying for you?

Participant: Convenience and digital reminders.

Appendix 3.5: Participant P5 Interview Transcript

Participant: Daniel Clark

Age: 27

Country: United Kingdom

Researcher: How often do you shop at Zara?

Participant: I browse Zara weekly.

Researcher: What usually triggers spontaneous purchases?

Participant: Visual displays and new arrivals.

Researcher: Do promotions influence your purchases strongly?

Participant: Yes, very strongly.

Appendix 3.6: Participant P6 Interview Transcript

Participant: Mia Roberts

Age: 25

Country: United Kingdom

Researcher: When do you usually shop at Zara?

Participant: Mostly during sales periods.

Researcher: Which promotions attract you most?

Participant: Seasonal discounts.

Researcher: How do store displays influence you?

Participant: Attractive displays encourage me to explore products.

Appendix 3.7: Participant P7 Interview Transcript

Participant: Charlotte Evans

Age: 30

Country: United Kingdom

Researcher: Which promotion type affects you most?

Participant: Limited-time deals and flash sales.

Researcher: Why do these promotions affect you?

Participant: They create urgency and fear of missing out.

Researcher: Overall influence of promotions?

Participant: High influence.

Appendix 3.8: Participant P8 Interview Transcript

Participant: Harry Walker

Age: 26

Country: United Kingdom

Researcher: What promotions do you usually notice?

Participant: Discounts and online advertisements.

Researcher: What influences your impulse purchases?

Participant: Price and product displays.

Researcher: How important are store displays?

Participant: They strongly influence my shopping behaviour.

Appendix 3.9: Participant P9 Interview Transcript

Participant: Amelia Turner

Age: 23

Country: United Kingdom

Researcher: Do discounts influence your decisions?

Participant: Yes, discounts increase product attractiveness.

Researcher: What triggers unplanned purchases?

Participant: Price reductions.

Researcher: Overall promotional influence?

Participant: Moderate.

Appendix 3.10: Participant P10 Interview Transcript

Participant: George Mitchell

Age: 29

Country: United Kingdom

Researcher: Are you strongly influenced by promotions?

Participant: No, promotions usually do not affect me much.

Researcher: Have you made impulse purchases at Zara?

Participant: Very rarely.

Researcher: What influences your purchases most?

Participant: Need rather than promotions.

Appendix 3.11: Participant P11 Interview Transcript

Participant: Lily Adams

Age: 21

Country: United Kingdom

Researcher: How often do you shop at Zara?

Participant: I visit Zara weekly.

Researcher: What usually triggers impulse buying?

Participant: Flash sales, urgency and attractive displays.

Researcher: How strongly do promotions influence you?

Participant: Very strongly.

Appendix 3.12: Participant P12 Interview Transcript

Participant: Thomas Green

Age: 34

Country: United Kingdom

Researcher: Which promotions influence you most?

Participant: Seasonal sales and discounts.

Researcher: Have you made unplanned purchases?

Participant: Yes, mainly because of sale urgency.

Researcher: Overall influence of promotions?

Participant: High.

Appendix 3.13: Participant P13 Interview Transcript

Participant: Freya Carter

Age: 24

Country: United Kingdom

Researcher: What attracts you most at Zara?

Participant: Discounted prices.

Researcher: Do store displays strongly affect you?

Participant: Not significantly.

Researcher: Overall influence of promotions?

Participant: Moderate.

Appendix 3.14: Participant P14 Interview Transcript

Participant: Jack Phillips

Age: 32

Country: United Kingdom

Researcher: What type of promotion affects you most?

Participant: Flash sales and limited offers.

Researcher: Why do these promotions influence you?

Participant: They create urgency and quick decisions.

Researcher: How strongly do promotions affect your impulse buying?

Participant: Strongly.

Appendix 3.15: Participant P15 Interview Transcript

Participant: Isla Bennett

Age: 27

Country: United Kingdom

Researcher: What promotions do you usually notice?

Participant: Discounts and online advertisements.

Researcher: What triggers your impulse buying?

Participant: Discounts combined with product displays.

Researcher: Overall influence of promotions?

Participant: High influence.