

Analysis of Factors Triggering Impulsive Buying Among Culinary Tourists at the Rahma Waterpark Semedo Cafeteria, Tegal Regency

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Abstract

This study aims to explore and explain in depth the environmental factors and psychological phenomena that trigger impulse buying behavior in culinary tourism visitors at the Rahma Waterpark Semedo Canteen, Tegal Regency. The approach used in this study was qualitative with an analytical descriptive method. Primary data collection was carried out through direct observation and in-depth interviews with canteen owners and 38 visitor informants who were selected using purposive sampling techniques. Data analysis is applied using a flowing model that includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. The results of the study showed that the majority of visitors were dominated by large family groups and elementary school children who made sudden transactions while resting. The most consistent external factors driving tourists' spontaneous shopping decisions are the atmosphere of the canteen environment that is clean and family-friendly, as well as sensory marketing in the form of the strong aroma of cuisine through the open canteen layout. This combination of stimuli successfully builds a comfortable mood (positive affect), thus loosening cognitive control and collapsing the shopping rationality of visitors in order to get instant emotional satisfaction at tourist sites.

INTRODUCTION

The Culinary Industry is a business sector that includes various forms of business such as restaurants, cafes, catering, to the production of packaged food and beverages (Davis et al., 2013). This industry focuses on presentation, processing, production, and service. The culinary industry plays a major role in supporting the regional economy and also expanding employment and supporting tourism through regional specialties (Putri, 2024). In line with this, in the context of recreational tourism, the culinary industry is no longer seen only as a complement to travel but a main attraction sought after by consumers (Azmi et al., 2023; Hall & Gossling, 2016; Marín-Arroyo et al., 2025; Vuksanović et al., 2024). In addition to improving the quality and diversity of the menus served, the management of the culinary sector in recreational areas has been proven to provide visitor satisfaction and contribute economically and significantly benefit business owners and the community around tourist attractions (Sinaga, 2023).

The existence of culinary facilities in a recreational object such as a canteen plays an important role in enriching the tourist experience as a provider of basic needs for consumer consumption in tourist sites, where the majority of visitors will not plan specifically about what food or drink they will bring or buy from home. This will then open up a great opportunity for impulsive buying behavior (Aiolfi et al., 2022; Nyrhinen et al., 2024; Rani & Rex, 2023; Tanveer et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2024; M. Zhang & Shi, 2022; X. Zhang et al., 2024). The phenomenon of shopping is an interesting thing to dissect from a social and economic point of

view, one of the phenomena that is currently being discussed is Impulsive Buying. Impulsive buying is defined as a spontaneous, sudden, and unplanned shopping action that is usually driven by momentary emotions, not because they need the goods (Humairah, 2026).

The emergence of the urge or stimulus to shop basically does not just happen but is triggered by the emergence of a combination of internal and external factors, the indicators that affect can be from attractive menu variations, attractive sales promotions, to the sales atmosphere itself which stimulates consumers to make shopping decisions as soon as possible. Conceptually, impulsive buying is defined as a sentimental transaction that occurs spontaneously without any prior intention or planning (Chasanah & Mathori, 2021). This psychological phenomenon is driven by the physical and emotional closeness of consumers who want to get instant satisfaction while traveling. This spontaneous shopping activity is basically not based on need, but because of seeing an interest in a commodity, so emotional considerations sometimes dominate so that it obscures the actual function of the product and the behavior becomes uncontrollable.

Micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to increase income. By understanding the factors that trigger impulse purchases, tour managers can design more effective marketing strategies. This research is also important to contribute to the development of tourism marketing science, especially in the context of consumer behavior in culinary tourism destinations. The novelty of this research lies in an in-depth exploration of the interaction between the physical environment and sensory marketing as a trigger for impulse purchases in water tourism canteens, which has not been extensively researched qualitatively. This research offers a new perspective on how physical elements such as cleanliness, open layout, and the aroma of cooking play a role in loosening the cognitive control of visitors. This research also contributes to the development of theories in the context of culinary tourism that is different from previous research that focused more on digital and online factors.

This dynamic is the background for the observation of economic activity at the Rahma Waterpark Semedo Canteen. As one of the main supporting facilities for the sustainability of swimming pool tourist attractions, this canteen is required to be able to maximize marketing and present visual appeal and present unique aromas in order to stimulate the emotional interest of visitors which ultimately has a big impact on impulsive purchase decisions in order to optimize the income of local micro business actors. The management of the right marketing strategy in tourist areas not only has an impact on increasing the daily turnover of local MSME actors, but also helps determine the overall satisfaction of tourists in spending their time at these tourist attractions.

Definition and Concept of Impulsive Buying

The sudden impulse to buy often makes consumers pay immediately without thinking, which ultimately triggers the phenomenon of impulse purchases. When this instant craving arises, the rationality in shopping tends to be neglected due to the collapse of self-control due to stimuli around the shopping area. As a result, transactions occur only to fulfill momentary emotional satisfaction, not because of the function or urgency of the usefulness of the item (Humairah, 2026). There are several conditions where a person often makes purchases unwisely, one of which is due to environmental factors and weak self-control so that it can stimulate individuals to make impulsive purchases (Amalia, 2024).

The following are the internal and external factors that trigger impulsive buying in

consumers in the research of Arifianti & Firsanty (2025):

Internal factors that influence impulse buying include: 1) Hedonistic motivation to seek pleasure, instant gratification, or relieve stress and boredom. 2) Strong emotional tendencies such as excitement, euphoria, or distracting anxiety. 3) Lack of self-control makes it difficult for individuals to resist their emotional urge not to shop. 4) The phenomenon of FOMO or the fear of missing out on trends in order to maintain image or popularity. 5) The use of non-cash payments that reduce the psychological burden when spending money.

External factors that influence impulse buying include: 1) Attractive sales promotion strategies and store styling techniques. 2) Strategic and visually prominent product arrangement such as near the cashier area. 3) Quality, appearance, diverse product variety, alluring design, and the impression of product rarity. 4) Supportive store atmosphere such as lighting settings, colors, scents, and background music. 5) Social interaction is in the form of influence from salespeople and other people around shopping places.

Impulse purchases are seen as a consumer's preference for executing transactions instantly, suddenly, and beyond the initial plan. He added that this phenomenon is present in the form of an instant emotional urge that moves a person to transact without any intention or preparation. Consequently, such spending actions are executed reflexively by ignoring the financial effects or risks for the coming period (Rook & Fisher, 1995; Baumeister, 2002, in Khalisha & Mukhsin, 2026). This behavior is characterized by a strong, urgent, and sometimes emotionally difficult to control urge to have a product right away. When experiencing this stimulation, consumers tend to ignore logical consequences or long-term financial considerations, and instead prioritize instant gratification felt in the moment.

The atmosphere around the shopping place that is able to create a relaxed psychological state has been proven to trigger the emergence of positive affection and loosen the cognitive control of consumers. When a person feels happy and joyful while doing shopping activities, those emotional urges will mask the functionality of their shopping plan. This entertaining emotional state significantly encourages a person to immediately execute spontaneous transactions while ignoring long-term logical considerations (Azid et al., 2024).

METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with an analytical descriptive method. This approach was chosen to explore, understand, and explain in depth the psychological phenomena and environmental factors that trigger impulsive buying behavior in culinary tourism visitors at the Rahma Waterpark Semedo Canteen, Tegal Regency.

Research Informants The selection of informants in this study was carried out using purposive sampling techniques, which are deliberately determining certain criteria in order to obtain relevant and credible data. The key informant in this study is the owner and manager of the Rahma Waterpark Semedo Canteen to obtain internal management data. In addition, the criteria for supporting informants set are visitors who make spontaneous or unplanned food or beverage purchase transactions before entering the canteen area. The total number of visitor informants involved in the in-depth interviews was 38 people, with a primary focus on the productive/young age group that dominated the market segmentation at the location.

Primary and secondary data collection techniques in this study were compiled through three main instruments, namely:

1. In-Depth Interview: Conducted directly and openly with the owner and manager of Rahma Waterpark Semedo to explore data on marketing strategies, area arrangements, and sales dynamics at tourist sites. In order to get a balanced perspective, interviews were also directed to a number of visitors who made spontaneous transactions in the area
2. Direct Observation: Applied by carefully observing the physical environmental conditions, product layout, and atmosphere around tourist areas in stimulating the emotional response of visitors.
3. Documentation Study: Optimized through the analysis of written documents in the form of profiles and data on tourist attraction visits, as well as a compilation of scientific literature from previous journals to strengthen the theoretical argumentation base.

Data Analysis Techniques The data analysis process applies an adapted flow model to be drawn into descriptive conclusions, including the following stages:

1. Data Reduction: Summarize, select main things, and focus field data from direct interviews with owners and visitors, observations, and documentation studies related to perception of the canteen atmosphere and sensory attraction.
2. Data Display: Presenting data that has been reduced to a narrative text description to facilitate the mapping of psychological characteristics and informant responses on location.
3. Conclusion Drawing/Verification: Review the entire data collected to draw a final conclusion about the most dominant external stimulus patterns in driving visitors' spontaneous shopping emotions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Visitor Characteristics

Based on field data collected from 38 informants at the Rahma Waterpark Semedo Canteen and strengthened by official profile documents and tourist attraction visit data, it is known that the majority of tourists come in groups with extended family on weekends. In addition to family groups, this canteen also often receives a surge of visitors from school groups, especially elementary school (SD) children who carry out extracurricular activities or book places for school events. Groups of productive age teenagers are still seen coming to visit the location, but the number is relatively small when compared to the segment of families and school children who are the main market in this tourist attraction.

Interview Results with Owner

A direct interview with the owner and manager of the Rahma Waterpark Semedo Canteen revealed that the canteen's operational strategy is deliberately focused on strengthening the comfort aspects of the place and the uniqueness of the food aroma. The manager prioritizes the hygiene of the dining area and the open layout so that air circulation brings the aroma of cooking directly to the water recreation area. The management admits that most of the consumption menus sold every day do not come from written orders that are planned from the beginning by tourists, but sudden orders when visitors start to rest around the canteen. Moreover, when there are bookings from elementary school groups or large family visits, the management of the capacity of the dining area and the speed of serving are the main keys for managers to trigger additional transactions outside of the ordered package.

Data from observations and supportive interviews with visitors confirm the two main factors that most consistently drive spontaneous shopping decisions:

1. Atmosphere of the Canteen Environment

According to Handoko & Pranata (2024), the atmosphere inside the outlet greatly influences consumer shopping decisions through spatial elements designed to build psychological stimulus. These elements include:

- a. Color: Able to trigger certain emotional responses, such as blue that gives a sense of calm and relaxation.
- b. Aroma: The presence of the right fragrance in the outlet effectively stimulates consumers' positive view of the product and the place.
- c. Sound: A sound system that supports the convenience of consumers while in the shopping area.

Visitors gave very positive testimonials about the cleanliness and tranquility of the dining area. This neatly organized and family-friendly physical environment has succeeded in building a comfortable mood (positive affect) for parents and children after activities in the pool area.

2. Sensory Appeal (aroma)

Scent-based marketing is usually applied in conjunction with other marketing tactics. Unbeknownst to the target market, the application of sensory marketing through the sense of smell functions to compile product images in their minds while being closely related to the consumer decision-making process (Handoko & Pranata, 2024).

The olfactory stimulus through the strong aroma of cooking became the most instant biological trigger in the field, many informants from family representatives admitted that they initially did not intend to buy a heavy meal in the canteen, but the stimulus of the appetizing aroma immediately triggered their momentary emotions and the request from their children to make transactions on the spot.

Based on field data, the comfort offered by the Rahma Waterpark Semedo Canteen has proven to be effective in changing the psychological dynamics of consumers. When the family group or school children finish swimming and decide to rest in the canteen area, their tired physical condition combines with the atmosphere of a clean, calm, and neat place. The environmental conditions around this family-friendly outlet automatically trigger positive emotions (positive affect) in visitors.

Theoretically, the outpouring of joyful emotions and relaxed feelings during recreation acts as a relaxation of the consumer's cognitive control. When the mood is good, the fortress of one's rationality in spending money tends to loosen. Young consumers and parents at the study site became less concerned about long-term financial risks or their initial spending plans from home. This relaxation of self-control is the main bridge why even a small environmental stimulus in the tourist attraction area can be responded to immediately through instant transactions on the spot.

The use of sensory marketing strategies through food aromas is the most aggressive trigger that drives visitors' impulsive shopping behavior. The ingenious move of the canteen manager who applies the concept of open layout makes free air circulation to bring the aroma of cooking directly to the pool area. Exposure to this powerful scent acts unconsciously on the consumer's brain, acting as an instant biological stimulus that triggers hunger as well as momentary emotional attraction.

The majority of informants from family representatives admitted that there was no

intention at all to buy heavy food in the canteen. However, the appetizing aroma of the cuisine immediately triggers an emotional urge, which is then amplified by spontaneous requests from their children. This phenomenon confirms that emotional considerations and instant satisfaction when traveling often dominate common sense, so that the main function of culinary products is consumed no longer because of the planned hunger need factor, but a reflex response to sensory stimulation in the surrounding environment.

The characteristics of visitors to the Rahma Waterpark Semedo Canteen which is dominated by large family groups and elementary school children create a strong social impulse. In consumer psychology, impulse buying actions are not only triggered by personal factors, but also by social interactions around shopping places. The presence of group members who show interest in the canteen menu triggers an infectious effect or peer pressure.

When children start whining for food after smelling the smell of cooking, parents tend to immediately execute transactions instantly to maintain their children's joy and satisfaction during recreation. This unplanned purchase eventually transformed into a sentimental collective decision to fulfill the common pleasure of the moment. The proper management of atmosphere and aroma by the management has not only succeeded in triggering tourist satisfaction, but also succeeded in exploiting this psychological gap into a significant economic advantage for local culinary MSME actors.

CONCLUSION

This study concluded that impulse buying at the Rahma Waterpark Canteen in Semedo, Tegal Regency, is triggered by the interaction of physical environmental factors and sensory marketing, particularly the canteen's clean, family-friendly atmosphere and the strong aroma of food delivered through its open layout. These two factors proved effective in building positive affect and loosening visitors' cognitive control, thus encouraging spontaneous purchasing decisions. The characteristics of the visitors, dominated by large families and elementary school children, reinforce this phenomenon through mechanisms of social pressure and demands from children. Recommendations for further research include conducting quantitative research to measure the influence of each factor on impulse buying, and expanding the research location to other culinary tourism destinations with different visitor characteristics.

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