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INFLUENCE OF LIMITED-TIME DEALS & FLASH SALES ON CONSUMER DECISION-MAKING

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Abstract

This study analyses the impact of Limited Time Offers (LTOs) and flash sales on consumer behaviour. The research emphasises certain factors, including the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), discounts, time pressure, and scarcity messaging, as well as their connections with impulse and unplanned purchases. The data collection process was done using structured questionnaires distributed among 103 respondents in Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh, through purposive sampling techniques. The analysis of data was carried out using descriptive statistics and chi-square tests. The results show that there are strong correlations between FOMO and unplanned purchases, discounts and purchase probability; as well as scarcity messages and impulse buying behaviour.

Keywords

Limited-Time Deals, Flash Sales, Consumer Decision-Making, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), Impulse Buying, Scarcity, Purchase Intention, Consumer Behaviour

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of e-commerce has positively affected consumers' purchasing behaviour. To attract customers, companies use various promotional methods, including limited-time deals and flash sales, which are based on offering discounts for a limited period. Such methods aim at encouraging consumers to act quickly. Research studies prove that time pressure may have a great impact on consumer response to online flash sales. The efficiency of flash sales is linked to such phenomena as perceived scarcity and time pressure. Time pressure and perceived scarcity lead to an increase in purchase intention and a reduction in time spent analysing alternatives by consumers. In addition, some research papers prove that scarcity-based promotions encourage impulsive consumer behaviour.

Another important concept is FOMO. Customers may be concerned about delays in their purchase because they think it will result in no discounts and fewer desirable products for them. At present, scholars are investigating the relationship among flash sales, FOMO, and impulse buying.

This research focuses on the effect of limited-time offers and flash sales on the economic and psychological reactions of consumers. The research stresses the role of several major psychological factors such as urgency, scarcity, fear of missing out (FOMO), and perceived value and tries to explore how these factors affect the behaviour of consumers in their buying process and in their impulses. Additionally, the research tries to investigate the methods used by marketers to apply psychological triggers to attract customers and increase their sales through flash sales.

1.1 Rise of Flash Sales and Limited-Time Offers

The quick expansion of e-commerce has made flash sales and promotional offers popular as a way of marketing products. Such offers from online sellers aim to grab customers' attention, sell more in a short span of time, clear the stock, and make the products look exciting. In contrast to regular discounts, flash sales are generally offered for a certain short and specified period of time, along with messages about their quick expiry or limited availability.

The other reason for the popularity of these offers is that they are tied to the changing behaviour of consumers online. They are bombarded with notifications about promotions, countdowns, discounts, and special sales. Such promotional cues can generate urgency and scarcity among consumers, making them purchase something instantly instead of delaying their decision. According to research carried out on flash sales online, time pressure can affect consumer behaviour and purchase intentions.

Moreover, flash sales are increasingly popular because of economic as well as psychological factors behind them. Consumers get the feeling of economic benefit in terms of discounts, and limited availability makes them fearful of losing their chance. As a result, they do not only influence what consumers buy, but the quick expansion of e-commerce has made flash sales and promotional offers popular as a way of marketing products. The aim of such offers from online sellers is to grab customers' attention, sell more in a short span of time, clear the stock, and make the products look exciting. In contrast to regular discounts, flash sales are generally offered for a certain short and specified period of time, along with messages about their quick expiry or limited availability.

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Moreover, flash sales are increasingly popular because of economic as well as psychological factors behind them. Consumers feel an economic benefit from discounts, and limited availability makes them fear losing their chance. As a result, they not only influence what consumers buy but also **how quickly and with how much deliberation they make their purchasing decisions.**

1.2 Psychological Factors Influencing Flash-Sale Purchases

Flash sales influence consumer behaviour not only through discounts but also through various psychological factors. Four important factors are time pressure, perceived scarcity, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), and perceived value.

1.2.1 Time Pressure:

Time pressure occurs when consumers have a limited period to decide whether to purchase a product. Countdown timers and messages such as “offer ends in 30 minutes” encourage consumers to make quicker decisions. This reduced decision-making time may limit the evaluation of alternatives and increase purchase intention or impulse buying. Research has found that time pressure plays an important role in consumer responses to online flash sales.

1.2.2. Perceived Scarcity:

Perceived scarcity can be defined as an idea held by people that the availability of a certain product or offer is limited in terms of time or quantity. Examples of perceived scarcity include “only 2 left” and “limited stock”. The scarcity of products and offers makes them more desirable.

1.2.2 Fear of Missing Out (FOMO):

FOMO can be defined as the fear of missing out on opportunities, especially attractive ones when others can take advantage of them. During flash sales, buyers can have the fear of losing an opportunity to get a discount or buy a certain product that would expire at the end of the sale period. Such fears can create an urgency that forces buyers into buying things that they normally would not have considered buying.

1.2.3. Perceived Value:

Perceived value represents the consumer's overall assessment of whether the benefits received from a product justify its price. In flash sales, substantial discounts can create a perception that consumers are receiving greater value for their money. This perceived economic benefit may increase purchase intention, particularly when consumers believe that the opportunity to obtain the product at that price is temporary. Research on online flash sales has identified perceived value as an important factor in influencing purchase intention.

1.3. Role of Urgency and Scarcity in Marketing

Urgency and scarcity are important promotional techniques used by marketers to influence consumer behaviour. Urgency is all about creating an urgent need to act fast because there is a particular time period during which the promotion is available. The use of limited-time messages could have an effect on reducing the decision time, thus encouraging faster purchases by consumers. Khetarpal and Singh (2024)¹¹ have revealed that limited-time messages in online promotions could affect impulse purchases through FOMO.

Scarcity, on the other hand, refers to creating a perception that a product or promotional opportunity is available in limited quantity or may soon become unavailable. Scarcity cues can increase the perceived value and desirability of products and consequently influence purchase intentions. Barton, Zlatevska, and Oppewal (2022)², in a meta-analysis of 131 studies, found that scarcity cues generally increase product value and purchase intentions, although their effects vary according to the type of scarcity and product context.

1.4. Research Problem

With the emergence of flash sales and limited offers, the buying behaviour of consumers has changed drastically. Although there are discounts in the offers, they cause psychological pressure due to limited time and a feeling of scarcity. They result in consumers making impulsive buying decisions without evaluating their needs and alternatives.

Despite the fact that flash sales were thoroughly analysed from the perspectives of impulse buying behaviour, purchase intention and perceptions of scarcity, there is a need to explore the impact of different factors of limited-time offers on the whole process of consumer decision-making. That is why the current research is dedicated to exploring the influence of limited-time deals and flash sales on consumer decision-making in terms of time pressure, perceptions of scarcity, FOMO, perceptions of value, purchase intention and impulse-buying behaviour.

¹ Khetarpal and Singh (2024)

² Barton, Zlatevska, and Oppewal (2022)

1.5 Objectives of the Study

The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- To examine the influence of limited-time deals and flash sales on consumer decision-making.
- To assess the influence of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) generated by flash sales on consumers' purchase intention.
- To analyse the relationship between discount levels offered during flash sales and consumers' likelihood of purchase.
- To examine the effect of scarcity messages and time pressure on consumers' impulse purchasing behaviour

1.6 . Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. Do limited-time deals and flash sales significantly influence consumer decision-making?
2. Does time pressure influence consumers' purchase intention during flash sales?
3. Do limited-time deals and flash sales encourage impulse buying behaviour?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Dsilva, Elangovan (2021) - The study examines the characteristics of flash sales in E-Commerce, a sector experiencing significant growth. Despite existing research on the impact of flash sales on sales volume and visibility, there is limited investigation into their specific attributes. This paper focuses on aspects such as effective duration, product variety, online shopping enjoyment, and the influence of perceived perishability and scarcity on consumer attitudes toward flash sales, aiming to enhance understanding in this area.

Lamis, Handayani, Fitriani (2022) - The research finds that there is potential for impulse purchasing through the flash sales offered by online marketplaces. In this study, the predictors of impulse purchases during the flash sales period have been studied using models such as Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR). Conducted on a sample size of 1093 people, the results of this study show that impulse purchase is heavily dependent on arousal and pleasure. Limited quantity and time scarcity influence arousal, while information, entertainment, and economic benefit affect both arousal and pleasure. Moreover, the attitudes towards flash sales are influenced by the same set of variables.

Nagadeepa, Mukthar KP (2024) - The research finds that flash sales have become one of the important dimensions of online marketing due to their time-bound promotional activities. In this study, the authors have focused on the impact of the Big Five personality characteristics on the consumer's behaviour towards flash sales. From the study involving 350 participants, it has been found that extraversion is positively correlated with participation because sociable people participate in flash sales. Other characteristics play a role in consumer behaviour in different ways.

Hakim, Farid (2025) - The study suggests that fear of missing out, also known as FOMO, is an aspect of psychology that is used by flash sale companies to create feelings of urgency and pressure. This is a qualitative study that involved the use of interviews with people who frequently engage in flash sales and marketing professionals. The data collected through the use of multiple techniques, like online ethnography, were analysed thematically and showed that FOMO flash sales encourage impulsive buying that could end up creating buyers' regret and stress. Marketing professionals acknowledge the ethics behind the use of psychological triggers to maintain trust in consumers. Consumers tend to succumb to psychological pressure created by the scarcity signal and make impulse purchase decisions.

Rachmania, Ramadhan, Fatimah (2025) - This study examines the impulsive purchase of cosmetics by consumers using online commerce websites, with the specific factors used being scarcity and flash sale tactics. The quantitative research conducted involved 398 participants from Cirebon City, and Structural Equation Modelling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) was used as the data analysis technique. The findings suggest that the two methods influence impulse purchasing, but scarcity has a more significant effect than flash sales. Scarcity increases perceived value because of the availability of products, while flash sales generate urgency through timed discounts. It is recommended that both methods be combined to increase urgency and desire.

Rani, Vinothkumar, Dharman (2026) - The paper investigates the role of flash sales and social media advertising in the impulse purchase and switching of brands that goes against consumer loyalty. The paper identifies an important area of research relating to the ethical and cultural issues associated with impulse purchasing. The objectives include evaluating the impact of social media ads on consumer preferences and detecting changes in purchasing patterns, particularly concerning brand loyalty and impulse buying. Conducted using a cross-sectional study design with 520 responses, primarily from individuals aged 18-25, the research aims to reshape perceptions of impulsive and urgency-driven buying. As consumer behaviour shifts towards impulsivity due to these marketing strategies, businesses must rethink their brand loyalty strategies and consumer engagement approaches.

3. Research Methodology

The study employs a descriptive and quantitative research design to investigate how limited-time deals and flash sales affect consumer decision-making and purchasing behaviour. Key factors analyzed include Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), discount levels, time pressure, scarcity messages, and impulse buying. Data were primarily gathered through a structured questionnaire created via Google Forms and distributed to online shoppers. The questionnaire included demographic queries and items focusing on consumer responses to limited-time offers. A purposive sampling technique was used, resulting in 103 valid responses from participants experienced in online shopping and familiar with flash sales. The geographical scope of the primary survey was limited to **Bilaspur City, Chhattisgarh**, ensuring that the study captured the responses and purchasing behaviour of consumers within the selected geographical area.

The questionnaire is divided into two main sections: the first collects demographic details (age, gender, occupation, income, online shopping frequency, and spending during flash sales), while the second assesses consumer reactions to flash sales. A five-point Likert scale was utilized for attitudinal statements, and frequency-related questions were rated on a scale from "Never" to "Always."

Variable Used - This study includes individuals from different age groups, namely below 18 (5.8%), 18–30 (47.6%), 30–40 (28.2%), and above 40 years (18.4%). The gender distribution comprises Male respondents (45.6%) and Female respondents (54.4%). The respondents' occupation was classified into three categories: Students (34.0%), Employees (34.0%), and Other Professionals (32.0%). The study also considered online shopping frequency, monthly income, and average spending during limited-time deals and flash sales as relevant variables.

3.1. Hypothesis

- **H1(Alternative Hypothesis)** - Limited-time deals and flash sales have a significant impact on consumer decision-making.
- **H0₁(Null Hypothesis)** : Limited-time deals and flash sales do not have a significant impact on consumer decision-making
- **H2 (Alternative Hypothesis)** : FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out) created by flash sales positively influences consumer purchase intention.
- **H0₂ (Null Hypothesis)** : FOMO has no significant influence on consumer purchase intention
- **H3 (Alternative Hypothesis)** : Higher discounts in flash sales lead to a higher likelihood of purchase.

- **H0₃ (Null Hypothesis)** : Discount levels have no significant relationship with purchase decisions
- **H4 (Alternative Hypothesis)** : Scarcity messages (e.g., “Only 2 left”, “Offer ends soon”) significantly increase impulse purchases.
- **H0₄ (Null Hypothesis)** : Scarcity messages do not significantly affect impulse purchases.

Test 1 – Limited-Time Deals and Flash Sales Vs Consumer Decision-Making

H0: Limited-time deals and flash sales do not have a significant influence on consumer decision-making.

H1: Limited-time deals and flash sales have a significant influence on consumer decision-making.

Chi-Square Value – 25.4114

Critical Value – 26.2962

Since the **Chi-Square Value (25.4114)** is less than the **Critical Value (26.2962)**, the null hypothesis will **not be rejected**.

Therefore, we can say that **there is no statistically significant association between limited-time deals and flash sales and consumer decision-making**.

Test 2 – FOMO Vs Unplanned Purchase Behaviour

H0: FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) created by flash sales has no significant influence on consumers' unplanned purchase behaviour.

H1: FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) created by flash sales has a significant influence on consumers' unplanned purchase behaviour.

Chi-Square Value – 91.5747

Critical Value – 26.2962

Since the **Chi-Square Value (91.5747)** is greater than the **Critical Value (26.2962)**, the null hypothesis will be **rejected**.

Therefore, we can say that **FOMO created by flash sales has a significant influence on consumers' unplanned purchase behaviour**.

Test 3 – Discount Level Vs Purchase Likelihood

H0: Discount levels have no significant association with consumers' purchase decisions during flash sales.

H1: Higher discounts in flash sales have a significant association with consumers' likelihood of purchasing.

Chi-Square Value – 350.7465

Critical Value – 26.2962

Since the **Chi-Square Value (350.7465)** is greater than the **Critical Value (26.2962)**, the null hypothesis will be **rejected**.

Therefore, we can say that **discount levels have a significant association with consumers' likelihood of purchasing during flash sales**.

Test 4 – Scarcity Messages Vs Impulse Purchasing Behaviour

H0: Scarcity messages such as “Only 2 left” and “Offer ends soon” do not have a significant influence on consumers’ impulse purchasing behaviour.

H1: Scarcity messages such as “Only 2 left” and “Offer ends soon” have a significant influence on consumers’ impulse purchasing behaviour.

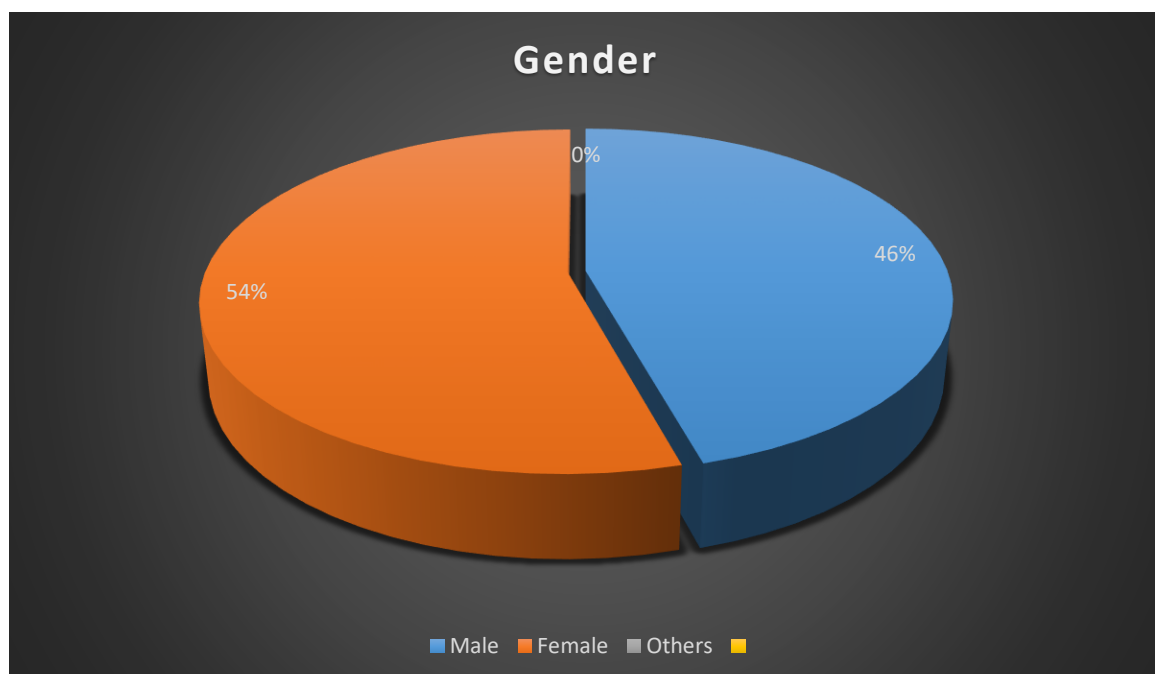
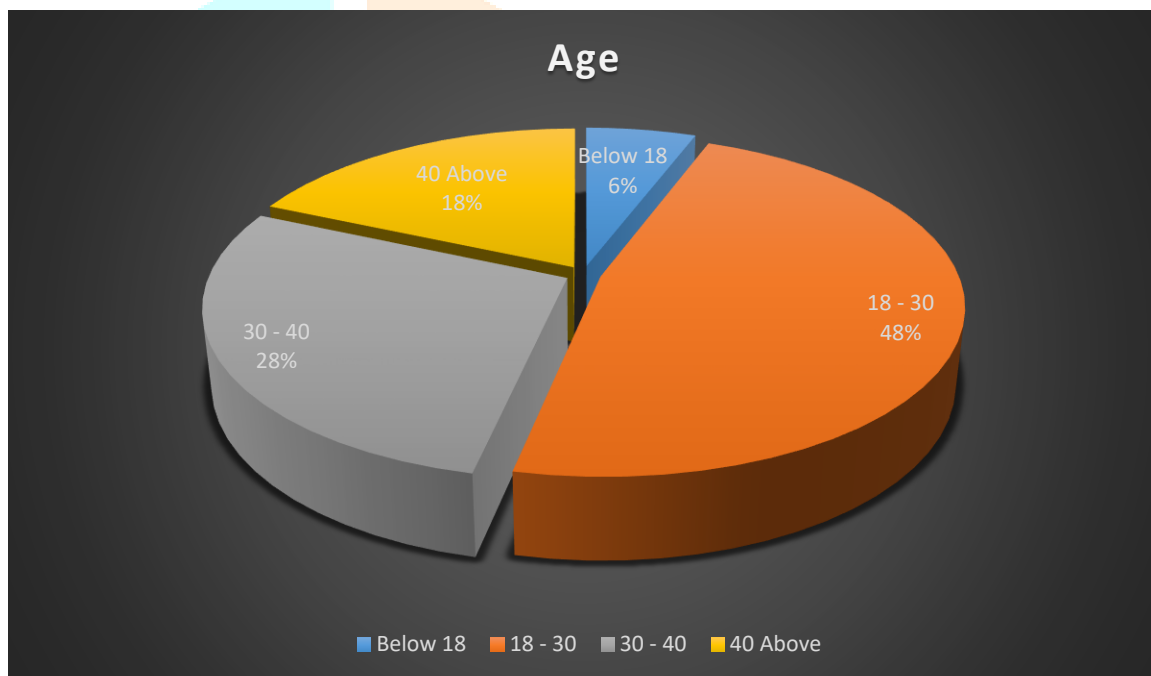
Chi-Square Value – 55.1691

Critical Value – 26.2962

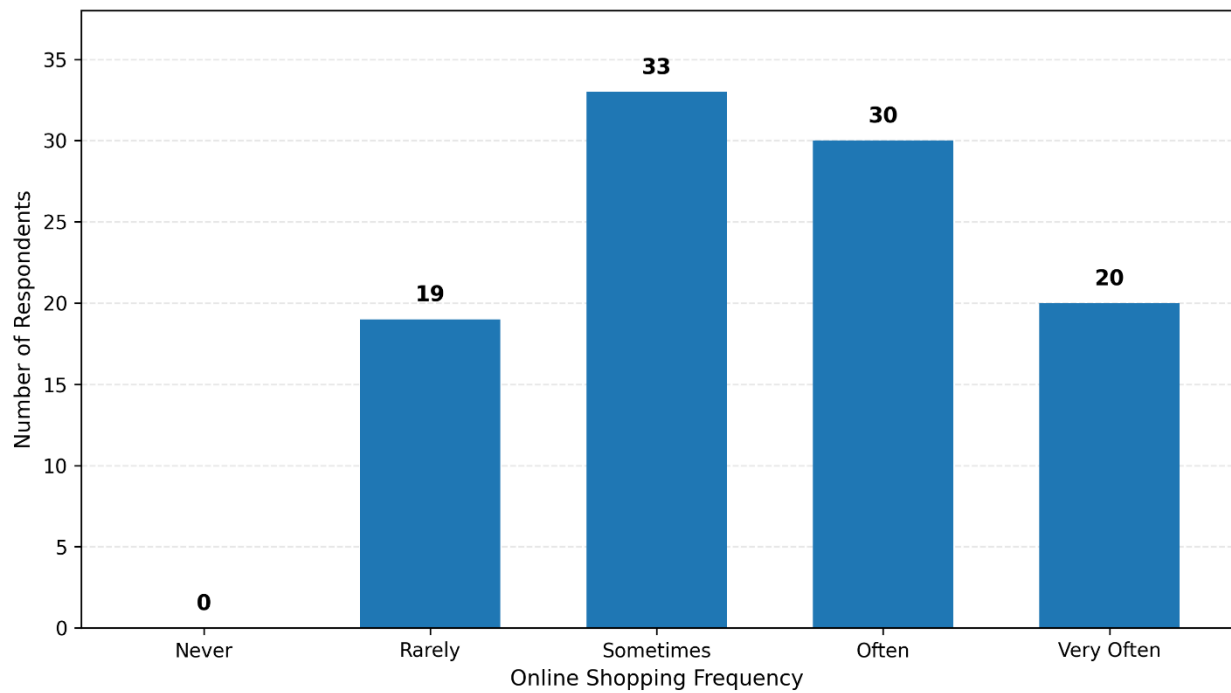
Since the **Chi-Square Value (55.1691)** is greater than the **Critical Value (26.2962)**, the null hypothesis will be **rejected**.

Therefore, we can say that **scarcity messages have a significant influence on consumers’ impulse purchasing behaviour**.

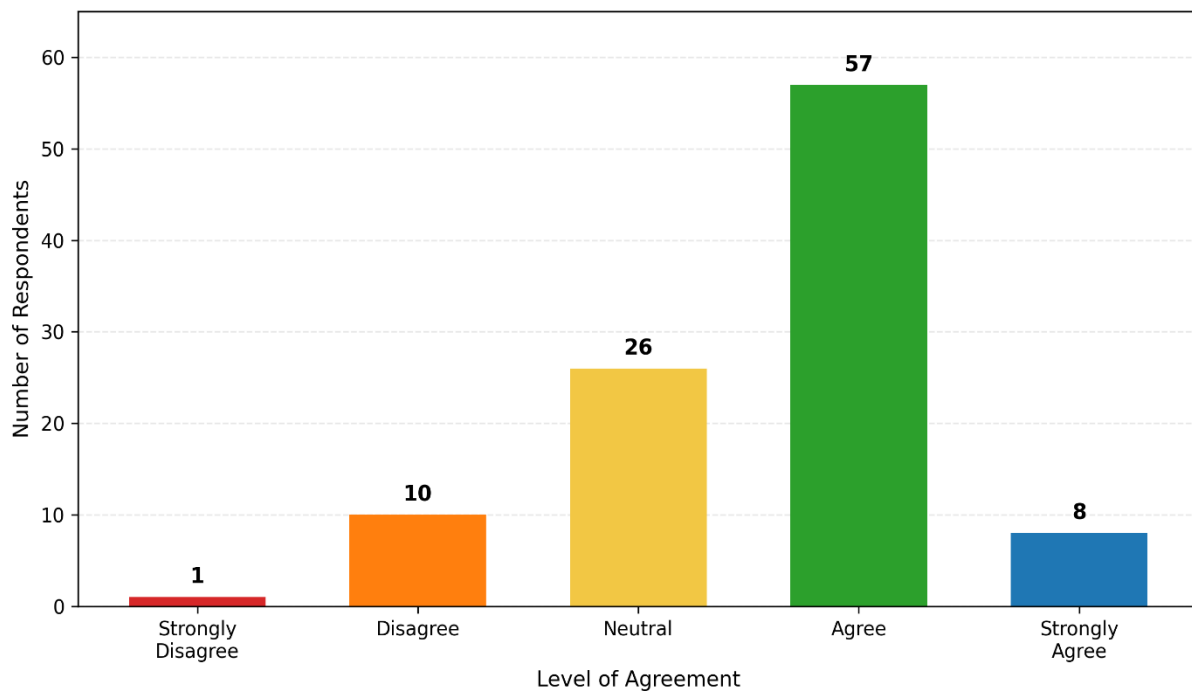
INTERPRETATION



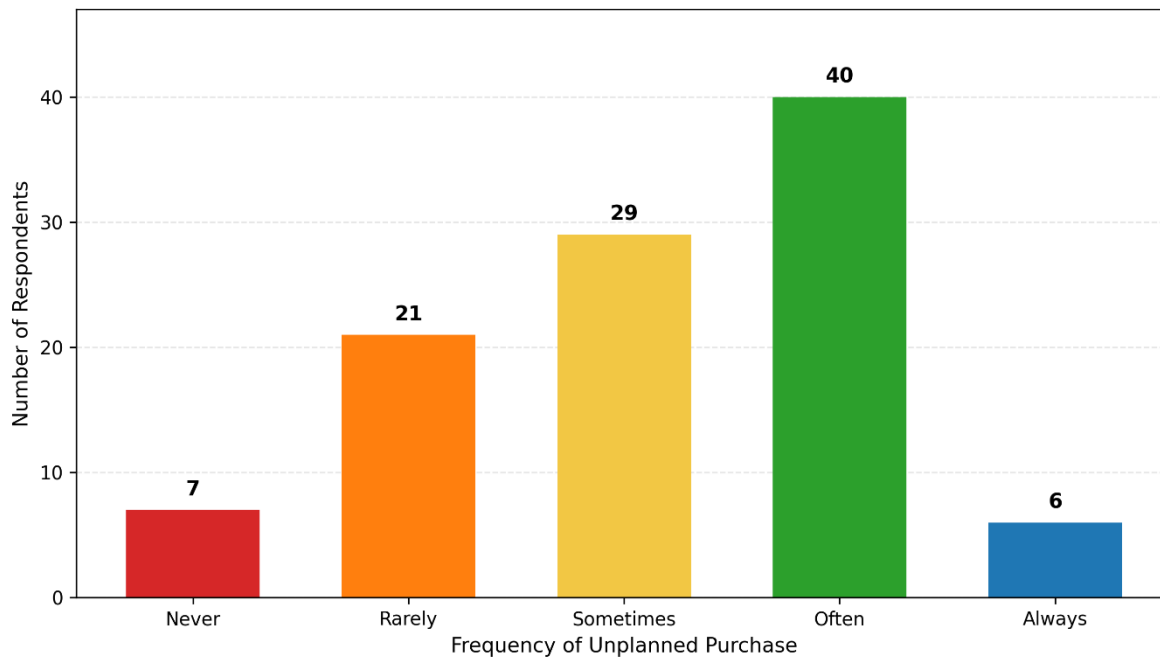
Online Shopping Frequency of Respondents



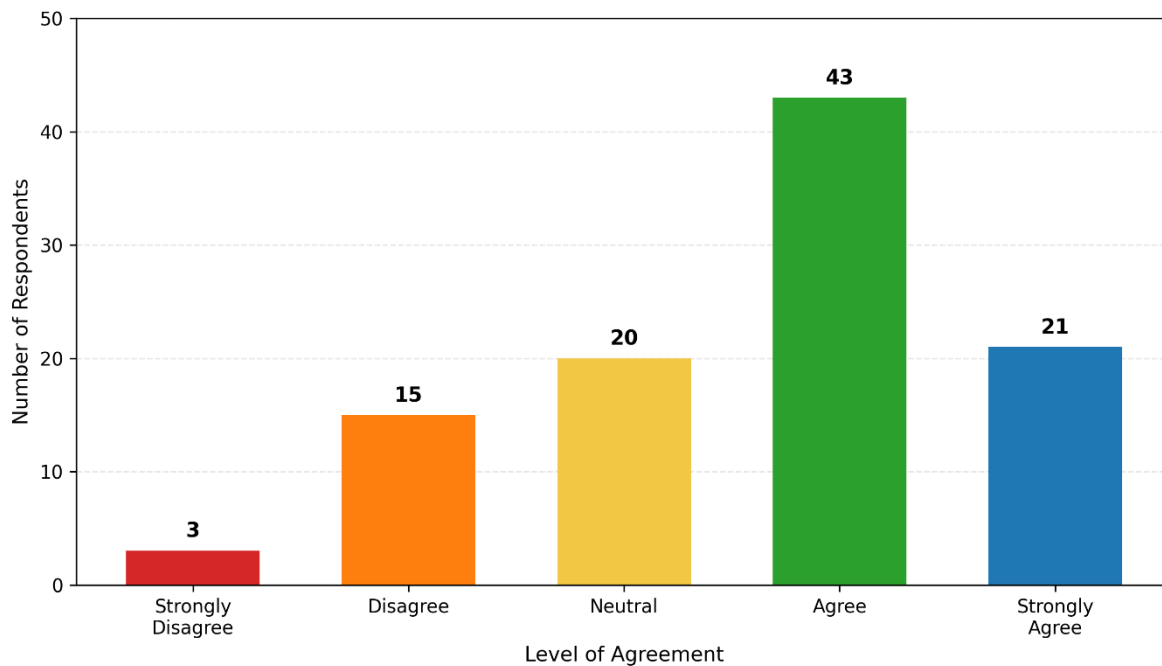
Influence of Flash Sales on Consumer Decision-Making



FOMO and Unplanned Purchase Behaviour



Impact of Scarcity Messages on Impulse Purchase



4. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that limited-time deals and flash sales have a considerable influence on consumers' online purchasing behaviour. The respondents were from different age groups, genders, and occupational backgrounds, providing varied perspectives on flash-sale behaviour. Most respondents reported shopping online sometimes, often, or very often, indicating regular exposure to online offers. A majority agreed that flash sales influence their purchase decisions and that they sometimes or often purchase products that were not originally planned.

The findings also show that FOMO, discounts, and scarcity messages play an important role in consumer behaviour. Many respondents reported feeling pressure to purchase quickly because of the fear of missing a deal, while a large majority agreed that higher discounts increase their likelihood of purchasing. Similarly, messages such as "Only 2 left in stock" and countdown offers create urgency and encourage faster purchasing. Respondents also indicated that flash sales can encourage them to shop more frequently than originally planned.

The study further considered the respondents' income and spending patterns. Among the 103 respondents, 44 earned below ₹50,000 per month, 32 earned ₹50,000–₹100,000, and 27 earned above ₹100,000. In terms of spending during flash sales, 51 respondents spent below ₹10,000, 21 spent ₹10,000–₹25,000, 20 spent ₹25,000–₹50,000, and 11 spent above ₹50,000. This indicates that although

spending levels vary across income groups, flash-sale purchasing is observed across different economic categories.

Overall, the study establishes that FOMO, discount attractiveness, scarcity cues, and time pressure are important factors influencing consumers' purchasing behaviour during flash sales, while income, spending capacity, shopping frequency, and demographic characteristics provide useful background for understanding these consumer responses.

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