

Hedonic Factors and Purchase Intention: The Mediating Role of Hedonic Emotion in Experiential Retail Settings

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The current study aims to investigate the impact of hedonic factors, specifically sensory experience, entertainment, and social factors, on purchase intention among Gen Z consumers in Sri Lankan shopping malls, with a mediating role of hedonic emotion. As consumer purchasing behavior evolves toward experience-driven consumption, physical retail environments must adapt to meet these shifting expectations. Despite global retail trends favoring immersive and emotionally engaging shopping environments, Sri Lankan malls remain primarily utilitarian, with limited focus on hedonic design. This study addresses this performance gap by examining how experiential elements influence consumer decision-making.

Design/methodology/approach: A quantitative, deductive research approach was employed, with data collected through structured questionnaires distributed among 410 Gen Z shoppers in Colombo's leading shopping malls. Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM).

Findings: The findings support all proposed hypotheses, confirming that sensory experiences, entertainment, and social interactions significantly influence purchase intentions. Moreover, hedonic emotion partially mediates these relationships, emphasizing the emotional foundation of experiential shopping. The current study contributes to retail strategy by highlighting the need for emotionally enriching, multi-sensory mall environments to attract and retain Gen Z consumers in the post-pandemic retail landscape.

Originality: This research contributes to extending knowledge of consumer behavior towards experiential marketing. The present study is grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theoretical model identifies sensory, entertainment, and social stimuli as external factors (stimuli), hedonic emotion as the internal response (organism), and purchase intention as the behavioral outcome (response). Thus, it empirically contributes to broadening the understanding of comprehensive consumer behaviour on experiential marketing practices in large retails that has been paid little attention.

Implications: This study enhances SOR model by validating hedonic emotion as a key mediator in purchase decisions and offers practical insights for mall managers. By designing sensory-rich, socially engaging, and culturally relevant environments, marketers can emotionally connect with Gen Z shoppers in Sri Lanka, boosting engagement and purchase intentions.

Keywords:

Entertainment, Hedonic Emotion, Purchase Intention, Sensory Experience, Social Factors

Introduction

The contemporary retail landscape is undergoing a profound transformation, driven by evolving consumer expectations and a growing emphasis on experiential over utilitarian consumption. In particular, the shift from traditional product-oriented shopping to experience-driven retail has positioned shopping malls as multifunctional environments that offer not only goods but also entertainment, social interaction, and sensory stimulation. Scholars such as Bilgihan et al., (2016) and Husain et al., (2022) argue that this evolution reflects a broader trend where consumers seek emotional and hedonic fulfillment through shopping, rather than merely engaging in transactions. Consequently, mall operators are increasingly investing in environmental elements such as lighting, music, décor, and scent to create atmospheres that captivate and engage shoppers at a sensory and emotional level.

This experiential focus is grounded in the theoretical foundation laid by Philip Kotler (1973), who introduced the concept of atmospherics, which refers to the deliberate design of physical retail environments to influence consumer perceptions and behaviors. In today's context, where e-commerce poses a formidable challenge to brick-and-mortar retailers, the in-store experience has emerged as a key differentiator. The ability to provide memorable and emotionally resonant shopping experiences has become essential in attracting and retaining customers, particularly among younger demographics such as Gen Z. In the United States, for example, over 80 percent of consumers regularly visit malls, which now average 14 million visitors annually per mall (Lindner, 2024), underscoring the enduring social and recreational value of these spaces.

In contrast, shopping malls in many developing countries, including Sri Lanka, have not fully embraced this experiential retail paradigm. While there has been a resurgence in mall visitation following the COVID-19 pandemic, much of the consumer experience remains anchored in functionality rather than immersion. This reflects a strategic and empirical gap in understanding how hedonic factors, namely sensory experiences, entertainment, and social interactions, shape consumer decision-making and purchase intentions within these environments. Research suggests that while mall atmospherics contribute to positive emotions, they do not always lead to increased spending (Morrison et al., 2011), highlighting the complexity of consumer responses to environmental stimuli. The situation is further compounded by the rising expectations of Gen Z shoppers, who prioritize engagement, emotion, and personalization. Yet, Sri Lankan malls have largely lagged behind, offering a limited experiential environment that fails to meet the hedonic needs of modern shoppers.

Hence, this study responds to a growing need to understand the hedonic dimensions on experiential retailing in Sri Lanka. It seeks to uncover how sensory, entertainment, and social factors interplay with emotional states to influence purchase intention, with a particular focus on Gen Z consumers. In doing so, it aims to inform both scholarly discourse and managerial practice, to promote the development of more engaging, competitive, and emotionally resonant shopping environments in Sri Lankan malls.

Research Objectives,

1. To identify the relationship between sensory experiences, entertainment, and social interaction on purchase intention among Sri Lankan mall shoppers.
2. To identify the mediation effect of hedonic emotion on the relationship between sensory experiences, entertainment, social interactions and purchase intention

Literature Review

S-O-R framework

As per the previous literature, consumer behavior in experiential environments lies in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, a foundational theory introduced by Mehrabian and Russell (1974). This framework posits that external environmental cues, or Stimuli (S), trigger internal psychological and emotional states within an individual, the Organism (O). These internal states, in turn, lead to observable behavioral Responses (R). Bagozzi (1986), expanded this, explaining that marketing mix elements and ambient conditions act as stimuli, initiating internal consumer processes that culminate in actions such as prolonged store visits or increased spending (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982).

Within the context of a shopping mall, the meticulously designed architecture, the curated music, the exciting entertainment options, and the very presence of other people all serve as powerful stimuli. These stimuli are not passively absorbed; rather, they are processed internally by the consumer's "organism," leading to a range of emotional and cognitive reactions. Crucially, this review posits that Hedonic Emotion – feelings of joy, excitement, and delight derived from pleasure-seeking – is a central component of this "organism" in experiential retail. This internal emotional state then drives the Response, which, for this study, is Purchase Intention, reflecting the consumer's likelihood to buy (Shahira Ariffin et al., 2024). While the S-O-R model provides the overarching structure, a critical gap often exists in precisely detailing how specific hedonic stimuli translate into distinct emotional states and subsequently impact purchase intention, especially within the evolving multi-sensory and entertainment-rich environments of modern malls.

Sensory experience, hedonic motivation and purchase intention

The retail environment is a multi-sensory landscape where individual elements combine to create a holistic experience (Spence et al., 2014). Barros et al., (2019) and Raajpoot et al. (2008) detail how components like color schemes, lighting, temperature, sound, music, and aroma work in harmony to capture attention and evoke emotional responses. For instance, empirical studies show that a well-designed multi-sensory setting significantly increases browse time and engagement (Helmefalk, 2019).

The relationship between sensory experiences and purchase intention is thus direct and profound. In essence, when a mall or store environment is perceived as a recreational space, the sensory stimuli, from aesthetic storefronts to inviting scents, enhance enjoyment, encouraging longer visits and higher spending (Vilnai-Yavetz et al., 2021; Nair, 2018). Furthermore, physical interactions with sensory cues can even trigger impulse

buying, as stimuli like touch, scent, and taste increase foot traffic and sales (Underhill, 1999; Das & Varshneya, 2017). This indicates a clear pathway where a rich sensory environment directly contributes to a consumer's intention to purchase.

Furthermore, the immersive nature of multi-sensory retail environments is designed to evoke positive emotional states. The Elaboration Likelihood Model suggests that in emotionally driven, hedonistic shopping settings, store atmospheres profoundly impact consumer spending by enhancing hedonic value (Chebat et al., 2014). Well-structured store layouts and functional elements increase enjoyment and excitement (Chebat et al., 2014b). Positive shopping experiences reduce stress and improve mood, which are essential aspects of hedonic emotion (Deb, 2012). Music triggers positive emotional responses (Garlin & Owen, 2006), and lighting enhances visual appeal and evokes excitement (Mohan et al., 2013). Pal et al., (2024) confirm that multi-sensory experiences directly influence shoppers' hedonic emotions. Thus, a rich sensory environment stimulates feelings of pleasure and excitement, which then drive purchase intention. Hence following respective hypotheses have been derived.

H1: There is a significant relationship between sensory experiences and purchase intention.

H5: There is a significant relationship between sensory experiences and hedonic emotions.

H8: Hedonic emotion mediates the relationship between sensory experiences and purchase intention.

Entertainment, hedonic motivation and purchase intention

Modern shopping malls have transcended their traditional retail function to become dynamic social and entertainment destinations. Bloch et al., (1994) elaborated that consumers view malls as multifunctional environments offering activities beyond shopping. This perspective has evolved to recognize entertainment as a multidimensional construct, encompassing various interactive and experiential elements (Sit et al., 2003).

The literature unequivocally demonstrates the transformative impact of entertainment on the overall mall experience and, consequently, on purchase intention. The integration of engaging entertainment features, such as family entertainment centers, arcade gaming zones, and cinemas, significantly enhances foot traffic and extends customer dwell time (Ismail El-Adly, 2007). For example, movie theatres practice encouraging unnecessary purchases by inducing hedonic emotion (Dugan et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2023). Therefore, shopping malls with diverse entertainment options are perceived as more attractive and engaging environments that foster brand loyalty and repeat visits, which naturally translate into higher purchase intentions.

Moreover, entertainment is a primary driver of hedonic shopping experiences, offering a competitive advantage that directly influences consumer preferences (Kesari & Atulkar, 2016). Beyond its functional role, entertainment intrinsically enhances emotional

engagement and pleasure, adding significant hedonistic value (Kim & Kim, 2008). Elements like music, events, gaming zones, and food courts create an immersive atmosphere that fosters excitement and enjoyment (Kesari & Atulkar, 2016). Engaging entertainment transforms shopping into a sensory-rich, emotionally stimulating experience (Bloch et al., 1994). Therefore, the entertainment offered at a mall can directly fuel positive hedonic emotions, which in turn motivate purchasing. Given this background, the following hypotheses have been generated.

H2: There is a significant relationship between entertainment and purchase intention.

H6: There is a significant relationship between entertainment and hedonic emotions.

H9: Hedonic emotion mediates the relationship between entertainment and purchase intention.

Social factors, hedonic motivation and purchase intention

Shopping is often a social activity, and the dynamics of social interaction within a mall significantly shape consumer behavior. The concept of "seeing and being seen" plays a crucial role, as shoppers' behaviors are influenced by their interactions with the mall's social environment (Roggeveen et al., 2020). Even the mere presence of others can subtly affect consumer decisions, with individuals often conforming to perceived social norms (Argo et al., 2005; Puntoni & Tavassoli, 2007).

Beyond passive observation, companionship-based shopping, or "social shopping," profoundly enhances the overall experience (Borges et al., 2010; Chebat et al., 2014). The presence of friends, family, or partners fosters emotional satisfaction, shared decision-making, and heightened enjoyment, making shopping an inherently pleasurable activity (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003). Crucially, social interactions directly influence purchase intention. Research shows that shoppers accompanied by companions tend to spend more than those shopping alone, as co-shoppers often encourage purchases (Merrilees & Miller, 2019). Moreover, social shopping can reduce price sensitivity, shifting the focus from cost to experiential enjoyment, leading to higher spending (Merrilees & Miller, 2019). The desire for social connection and shared experiences has transformed malls into leisure destinations where social interactions often take precedence over actual purchasing (Tauni et al., 2019; Calvo-Porrall & Lévy-Mangín, 2018).

Further, the presence of companions enriches the emotional dimension of shopping by fostering social interactions and shared enjoyment (Hart & Dale, 2014; Merrilees & Miller, 2019). Hedonic shopping motivations, encompassing personal and social factors, emphasize group interactions and shared experiences as key drivers of emotional engagement (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003; Horváth & Adıgüzel, 2018). Shoppers with stronger hedonic motives are more influenced by social interactions in retail settings (Chang et al., 2011). Companions also increase emotional arousal, whether through shared purchases or passive observation (Das & Varshneya, 2017), heightening excitement and pleasure. This indicates that social interaction fosters positive hedonic

emotions, which then become a crucial link to purchase intention. Hence, based on the above proclamation, below hypotheses have been derived,

H3: There is a significant relationship between social factors and purchase intention.

H7: There is a significant relationship between social factors and hedonic emotions.

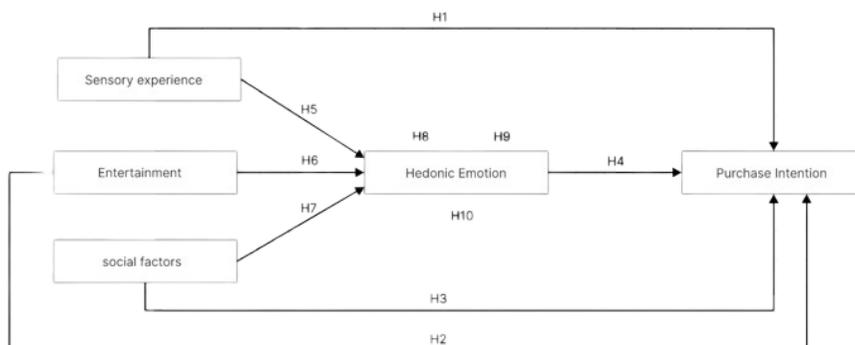
H10: Hedonic emotion mediates the relationship between social factors and purchase intention.

Hedonic emotion and purchase intention

Hedonic experiences in consumption are deeply rooted in sensory, emotional, and fantasy-driven aspects (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Unlike utilitarian consumption, hedonic consumption is about pleasure, enjoyment, and intrinsic satisfaction derived from the shopping process itself (Dang, 2021). These emotions, such as joy, excitement, and delight, emerge spontaneously and effortlessly, creating a deeply engaging and pleasurable shopping experience (Chang & Meyerhoefer, 2021). Consumers engaging in hedonic shopping seek sensory stimulation, emotional highs, and escapism (Chu et al., 2015). Ultimately, research consistently links hedonic emotions to various positive consumer outcomes. Palacios et al., (2016) show that stimulating atmospheres that create excitement directly boost purchase intention. Positive shopping experiences correlate with higher purchase intentions (Ma et al., 2020), and hedonic motivation directly influences impulse buying (Dey & Srivastava, 2017). Therefore, when sensory, entertainment, and social factors successfully evoke positive hedonic emotions, consumers are more likely to develop a strong intention to purchase. Hence, based on the above proclamation the hypothesis below has been derived,

H4: There is a significant relationship between hedonic emotion and purchase intention.

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework
Source: Authors



Methodology

Sampling and data collection

This study employs a quantitative research approach, rooted in a positivist philosophy, to investigate consumer behavior in Sri Lankan shopping malls. The research focuses on Gen Z consumers (born 1997-2012) who have visited shopping malls in the Colombo area as they prioritize engagement, emotion, and personalization in the shopping experience. The study specifically targeted those aged 18 and above, as this specific demographic is known for their tech-savviness and inclination towards experiential shopping (Mueller, 2023), by focusing on visitors of malls in Colombo, which are vibrant commercial hubs in the Western Province. The study utilizes a convenience sampling technique that allows for efficient data collection from readily accessible Gen Z consumers at shopping malls in Colombo, which is practical given the time and resource constraints (Barros et al., 2019; Calvo et al., 2018; El et al., 2013). Data collection relies predominantly on primary data gathered directly from respondents. The core method was a structured survey questionnaire, consisting of closed-ended questions.

Measurement

The measurement of variables in this study is meticulously conducted through the structured questionnaire, with two filtering questions to ensure that respondents meet the necessary criteria, such as being a Gen Z and visited a mall in Colombo. To assess the core variables, a five-point Likert scale 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree) is employed. In total, the comprehensive questionnaire comprises 21 questions: distributed across the independent variables (sensory experience, social factors, entertainment), the mediating variable (hedonic emotion), and the dependent variable (purchase intention). The variables were then further tested through a pilot study using 50 responses, to ensure that the wording of the questionnaire was clear, and to evaluate the quality of the content and the reliability of the measures. 410 valid questionnaires were retained for data analysis.

Table 1
Measurement Items
Source: Survey Data,2025

Variable	Measurement Item	Source
Sensory experience (SE)	The shopping mall has mall decorations	(Li, Cheung and Tse, 2021)
	The shopping mall provides comfortable lighting	
	The shopping mall offers good air quality and temperature	
	The shopping mall plays pleasant background music	
Social factors (SF)	The mall is a good place to see different people	(Khare, 2012)
	The mall is a good place to relax and spend time	
	I enjoy meeting friends in the mall	
	I love walking in the mall without buying	
	The mall is a good place to do window shopping	
Entertainment (E)	The cinema theaters are good in the mall	(Khare, 2012)
	The mall has good entertainment facilities	

	The food courts are good in the mall The mall offers a good variety of food items	
Hedonic emotion (HE)	Shopping is fun in the mall Shopping is exciting in the mall Shopping is delightful in the mall Shopping is enjoyable in the mall	(Pal et al, 2024)
Purchase Intention (PI)	I plan to pay for shopping mall’s products in the future I intend to purchase at this shopping mall in the future I am willing to buy at the shopping mall in the future The probability I would consider buying from this shopping mall is high	(Alavi et al., 2015)

Data analysis and results

To address the research objectives and test the proposed hypotheses, this study employed Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using SmartPLS. SEM is a robust multivariate technique that allows simultaneous examination of both measurement models (relationships between latent constructs and their observed indicators) and structural models (relationships among latent constructs) (Hair et al., 2014).

Table 2
Demographic profile of the Respondents
Source: Survey Data, 2025

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	198	48.3
Female	212	51.7
Age		
18-23 years	284	69.3
24-27 years	126	30.7
Most Frequently Visited Shopping Mall		
One Galle Face Shopping Mall	150	36.6
Colombo City Centre	91	22.2
Havelock Mall	122	29.8
Marino Mall	24	5.9
Majestic City	23	5.6

Common method bias and normality

To ensure the robustness of the analysis, several diagnostic tests were conducted. Common method bias was evaluated using Harman’s single-factor test, which revealed that the first factor accounted for only 27.853% of the total variance well below the 50% threshold indicating no significant common method bias. Normality was assessed through skewness and kurtosis values, all of which fell within the acceptable range of -3 to +3, confirming that the data approximated a normal distribution. Furthermore, Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for all independent variables ranged between 1.569

and 1.865, with tolerance values above 0.3, suggesting that multicollinearity is not a concern and that the data meet the assumptions required for structural equation modeling (Table 3).

Measurement model assessment

The measurement model in this study follows a reflective model structure. To assess internal consistency reliability, both Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability (ρ_a and ρ_c) were evaluated. Cronbach’s alpha value for all constructs were above the recommended threshold of 0.7, (Table 3), indicating satisfactory internal consistency.

Convergent validity was tested through Average Variance Extracted (AVE), with 0.50 as the recommended benchmark. Initially, HE and SF had AVE values slightly below this threshold. However, after removing the low-loading item SF2, the AVE for Social Factors improved to 0.563. All other constructs, including Entertainment, SE, and PI, showed acceptable AVE values above 0.50 (Table 3). Despite HE's AVE remaining at 0.488, its strong composite reliability (0.800) supports its inclusion, indicating overall acceptable convergent validity.

Discriminant validity was confirmed through multiple methods. Cross-loading analysis showed that each item loaded highest on its respective construct. The Fornell-Larcker criterion further supported discriminant validity, with the square root of each construct’s AVE being higher than its correlations with other constructs. While one HTMT value (HE ↔ E = 0.891) slightly exceeded the ideal threshold, bootstrapping revealed that no HTMT confidence intervals contained the value 1, reinforcing that discriminant validity was satisfactorily established.

Table 3
Reliability and Validity Table
Source: Survey Data, 2025

	SK	KU	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
E1	-0.808	2.22	0.722	0.770	0.824	0.547
E2	-0.743	0.535				
E3	-0.812	0.327				
E4	-0.962	0.367				
HE1	-0.772	0.504	0.626	0.627	0.800	0.488
HE2	-0.564	0.488				
HE3	-0.277	0.435				
HE4	-0.673	1.386				
PI1	-1.007	1.222	0.762	0.780	0.847	0.581
PI2	-0.993	1.999				
PI3	-0.776	1.178				
PI4	-0.946	0.711				
SE1	-0.937	1.529	0.708	0.729	0.816	0.528
SE2	-1.02	0.492				
SE3	-1.168	2.524				
SE4	-0.765	0.795				

SF1	0.944	0.468	0.743	0.758	0.837	0.563
SF2	-0.738	1.225				
SF3	-1.019	1.114				
SF4	-0.532	1.849				
SF5	-1.064	2.847				

Table 4
Discriminant Validity (Fornell Larcker Criterion)
Source: Survey Data, 2025

	E	HE	PI	SE	SF
E	0.741				
HE	0.599	0.688			
PI	0.454	0.555	0.763		
SE	0.314	0.422	0.544	0.727	
SF	0.368	0.532	0.584	0.591	0.697

Table 5
Discriminant Validity (HRMT Ratio)
Source: Survey Data, 2025

Construct Pair	HTMT Value
HE <-> E	0.891
PI <-> E	0.569
SE <-> E	0.408
SF <-> E	0.464
PI <-> HE	0.769
SE <-> HE	0.574
SF <-> HE	0.744
SE <-> PI	0.717
SF <-> PI	0.769
SF <-> SE	0.820

Structural model

Prior to hypothesis testing, multivariate assumptions such as normality, linearity, and multicollinearity were assessed and met, allowing for the continuation of regression analysis. As presented in Table 5, all proposed direct paths were found to be statistically significant.

Specifically, the influence of Sensory Experience (SE) on Purchase Intention (PI) was significant ($\beta = 0.247, p < 0.05$), supporting Hypothesis 1. Likewise, Entertainment (E) \rightarrow PI ($\beta = 0.146, p = 0.013$) and Social Factors (SF) \rightarrow PI ($\beta = 0.266, p < 0.05$) were also supported. Hedonic Emotion (HE) showed a significant direct effect on PI ($\beta = 0.222, p < 0.05$), validating Hypothesis 4. Additionally, SE, E, and SF all exhibited significant effects

on HE ($\beta = 0.098, 0.455, \text{ and } 0.307$ respectively, all $p < 0.05$), confirming the proposed mediation structure.

Figure 2
Conceptual Framework
Survey Data, 2025

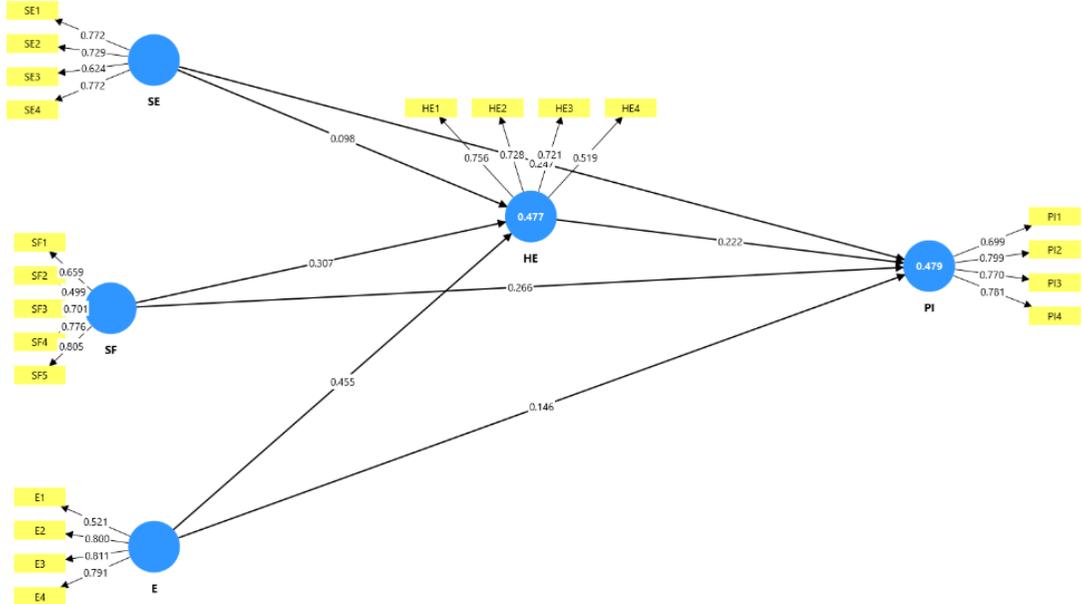


Table 6
Hypothesis Testing of Direct Relationship Between variables
Source: Survey Data, 2025

Hypothesis	Path	Path Coefficient	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values	Accepted/ Rejected
H1	SE -> PI	0.247	0.059	4.190	0.000	Accept
H2	E -> PI	0.146	0.059	2.491	0.013	Accept
H3	SF -> PI	0.266	0.056	4.725	0.000	Accept
H4	HE-> PI	0.222	0.063	3.552	0.000	Accept
H5	SE-> HE	0.098	0.045	2.178	0.029	Accept
H6	E -> HE	0.455	0.055	8.296	0.000	Accept
H7	SF-> HE	0.307	0.068	4.484	0.000	Accept

Assessment of mediating effects

The study examined the mediating role of hedonic emotion in the relationships between sensory experience, entertainment, and social factors with purchase intention. Based on Hair et al., (2014), both direct and indirect effects were tested, and results revealed that all paths showed statistically significant mediation ($p < 0.05$).

The Variance Accounted For (VAF) values for each path indicate partial mediation, with SE (31%), E (51%), and SF (31%), respectively. According to the criteria suggested by Hair et al., (2014) when the VAF value falls between 20% and 80%, the mediation effect

is considered partial. This indicates that the mediating variable explains a meaningful portion of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables, while a direct effect still remains. Therefore, the mediation hypotheses H8, H9, and H10 are all supported (Table 6).

Table 7
Mediation Effect of Hedonic Emotions
Sources: Survey Data, 2025

Path	Direct Effect Without Mediator	Direct Effect With Mediator	Specific Indirect Effect	P-Value	VAF (%)	Mediation Type	Decision
SE → HE → PI	0.247	0.375	0.171	0.000	31%	Partial Mediation	Accepted
E → HE → PI	0.146	0.240	0.258	0.000	51%	Partial Mediation	Accepted
SF → HE → PI	0.266	0.404	0.183	0.000	31%	Partial Mediation	Accepted

Discussion of the findings

This study confirms that sensory experience, entertainment, and social factors have significant direct effects on purchase intention among Gen Z shoppers in Sri Lankan shopping malls. Among these, social factors demonstrated the strongest direct impact ($\beta = 0.266$), followed by sensory experience ($\beta = 0.247$), and finally entertainment ($\beta = 0.146$). The relatively high effect of social factors reinforces the cultural salience of social engagement in collectivist societies like Sri Lanka, where shopping is often a socially embedded activity. This finding aligns with previous studies such as Guèvremont and Grohmann (2018) and Amos et al., (2014), which showed that peer presence and social interactions significantly increase purchase likelihood, particularly among younger consumers. Similarly, the direct effect of sensory experience supports prior research by Spence et al., (2014) and Krishna (2012), who argue that multi-sensory atmospherics (such as scent, lighting, and music) influence consumer mood and purchase decisions. However, the weaker direct effect of entertainment, while still statistically significant, suggests that Gen Z consumers may engage with entertainment more as an emotional trigger than a direct purchase motivator. This nuance contrasts with some prior studies in Western contexts (Kim & Sullivan, 2019), which emphasize entertainment as a strong driver of purchase intention. Hence, the results validate and extend prior literature by highlighting cultural variability in hedonic consumption drivers, showing that social and emotional relevance outweigh mere stimulus presence in the Sri Lankan context. All direct hypotheses were supported, confirming that hedonic environmental cues are powerful predictors of impulse purchase intention, consistent with earlier works like Fiore and Kim (2007); Mattila and Wirtz (2001), yet revealing their contextual expression among Gen Z in an emerging market.

Furthermore, a significant contribution of this study is the confirmation of partial mediation by hedonic emotion in the relationship between sensory experience, entertainment, and social factors and purchase intention. The VAF values (SE = 31%, E = 51%, SF = 31%) indicate that while each factor exerts direct influence, a considerable share of its effect is transmitted through emotional arousal. This confirms that emotions serve as a core psychological mechanism linking environmental stimuli to consumer response. The strongest mediating effect was found for entertainment, which had the highest impact on hedonic emotion ($\beta = 0.455$) and a VAF of 51%. This suggests that entertainment features in malls like interactive zones or live events affect consumer behavior primarily by enhancing emotional engagement rather than directly prompting purchases. This aligns with past research by Chang et al., (2011) and Tsai (2010), who demonstrated that affective responses mediate the effect of entertainment on shopping outcomes. Likewise, social factors showed a strong path to hedonic emotion ($\beta = 0.307$), reinforcing the idea that companionship, social validation, and collective enjoyment heighten emotional gratification and indirectly shape purchase intention. This supports findings from Arnold and Reynolds (2003) and Dennis et al., (2014), who observed that socializing enhances shopping enjoyment and can trigger impulsive spending, especially among youth. While sensory experience had the weakest influence on hedonic emotion ($\beta = 0.098$), its mediation effect (VAF = 31%) still confirms that emotional responses are part of how sensory cues impact behavior, a concept supported by earlier studies like Vieira (2013).

The confirmation of these mediation hypotheses enriches the theoretical discourse by illustrating that hedonic emotion operates as a partial, but significant, mediator between environmental stimuli and behavioral outcomes. It also validates the emotional dimension of hedonic consumption, showing that even in an emerging market context, Gen Z consumers do not make decisions purely on functional or cognitive grounds. Instead, they are highly responsive to affective triggers, consistent with theories rooted in emotional and experiential marketing.

Conclusion and implications of the study

Theoretical Implications

This study significantly advances the theoretical understanding of consumer behavior in hedonic shopping contexts, especially in emerging markets like Sri Lanka. It empirically validates hedonic emotion as a mediating variable between sensory experience, entertainment, social factors, and purchase intention, a relationship previously underexplored. The findings reinforce and extend the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model by highlighting hedonic emotion's pivotal role in translating environmental stimuli into purchase intentions. Additionally, the study aligns with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) by showing how peripheral cues influence affective responses and decisions. By focusing on Gen Z consumers in Sri Lanka, the research contributes novel insights to consumer behavior theory in emerging economies, enriching the global perspective on hedonic consumption.

Managerial implications

The findings offer practical guidance for shopping mall managers and marketers aiming to boost purchase intentions among Gen Z consumers in Sri Lanka. Sensory elements such as lighting, scent, music, and layout should be designed to evoke positive emotions, encouraging longer visits and impulse buying. Entertainment options like cinemas and live events play a critical role in enhancing emotional engagement, turning malls into leisure destinations. Social factors too strongly affect consumer emotions and spending, hence mall designs should foster social interaction through communal spaces and group-friendly areas. Emotional branding and storytelling are essential strategies to appeal to this emotionally driven demographic. Finally, incorporating culturally relevant elements such as Sri Lankan music and festivals can further enrich the sensory and emotional experience, making malls more attractive to local consumers.

Limitations and directions for future research

This study focuses solely on Gen Z consumers in Sri Lankan shopping malls, limiting generalizability to other age groups and cultural contexts. The cross-sectional design restricts causal conclusions and understanding of changes over time. Self-reported data may introduce bias, and the study measured purchase intention rather than actual buying behavior. Hedonic emotion was assessed broadly without examining specific emotional dimensions.

Future research should extend beyond Gen Z by including other generational cohorts such as Millennials and Gen X to explore potential differences in how hedonic experiences influence purchase intentions across age groups. Additionally, conducting studies in varied cultural and geographic contexts would provide insights into cultural influences on hedonic consumption and enhance the generalizability of the findings. Further, to better understand the dynamics of these relationships over time, longitudinal or experimental research designs are recommended. Such approaches would help track changes in consumers' hedonic responses and purchase intentions, as well as examine causality and the potential effects of repeated exposure or shifting market conditions.

Moreover, investigations should also focus on identifying and testing additional psychological mediators, such as discrete emotions (e.g., excitement, arousal), flow state, or impulse control, which may refine understanding of the emotional processes linking sensory, entertainment, and social stimuli to purchase behavior. Including moderating variables like gender, personality traits, disposable income, and shopping frequency can provide a more nuanced view of individual differences and contextual factors that influence these relationships.

Moreover, future studies should aim to bridge the gap between intention and actual purchasing behavior by incorporating objective measures such as point-of-sale data, transaction records, or field experiments in real retail environments. This would improve the practical relevance and accuracy of the research.

Lastly, as the retail landscape continues to evolve with increasing digitalization and the rise of omnichannel shopping, it is critical to investigate how hedonic emotions operate within online and hybrid retail contexts. Understanding these emotional drivers in virtual

environments will offer valuable insights for retailers aiming to optimize consumer engagement and purchasing behavior in a post-pandemic, technology-driven marketplace.

Conclusion

This study examined the influence of hedonic factors sensory experiences, entertainment, and social interactions on purchase intention among Gen Z consumers in Sri Lankan shopping malls, emphasizing the mediating role of hedonic emotion. Using structural equation modeling, the findings confirmed that all three factors significantly affect purchase intention both directly and indirectly through hedonic emotion. Sensory elements such as music, lighting, and atmosphere positively enhanced emotional engagement and purchase likelihood. Entertainment amenities and social interactions, particularly shopping with companions, were also strong drivers of hedonic emotion and purchase intention. Theoretically, the study advances consumer behavior research by empirically validating hedonic emotion as a mediator in an emerging market context, highlighting the emotional and experiential aspects of shopping. Practically, it offers valuable insights for mall managers and marketers to design immersive, socially engaging environments that boost emotional connection and sales. Overall, the research contributes culturally relevant knowledge on hedonic consumption and provides a foundation for future studies and retail innovations in Sri Lanka and similar markets.

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