



THE EFFECT OF LIMITED-TIME DISCOUNTS ON CONSUMER URGENCY AND PURCHASE BEHAVIOR

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ABSTRACT

In today's highly competitive and digitally driven marketplace, marketers often rely on limited-time discounts to create urgency and accelerate consumer purchase decisions. This study explores the psychological mechanisms and behavioral outcomes triggered by such promotional strategies. Limited-time offers – including countdown timers, flash sales, and expiring coupons – are designed to exploit the consumer's fear of missing out (FOMO), perception of scarcity, and decision fatigue, thereby influencing both impulse buying and overall purchase intent.

The review integrates empirical studies evidence and marketing theories like loss aversion, psychological reactance, and commodity theory, all of which emphasize the potency of urgency cues. Customers subjected to time-limited discounts are more apt to register emotional arousal, reduced decision-making time windows, and diminished price sensitivity. These responses are especially potent for deal-prone consumers and hedonic product classes. Moreover, the research indicates that urgency cues can divert consumers from making logical comparisons or assessing alternatives, resulting in hastened purchasing that may not be suited to their real needs.

But the results also indicate risks and limitations. Consumer fatigue, cynicism, and loss of trust can occur if urgency-based promotion is overused. Further, post-purchase satisfaction will reduce if the hurry-driven decisions make consumers regret their purchases. The research stresses that limited-time offers should be applied ethically in order to match short-term profit with long-term customer relationships.

Another important observation is the influence of contextual variables like cultural background, product category, and shopping channel (online vs. offline). For example, urgency seems to work better in individualistic cultures and digital channels where decision horizons are inherently shorter. These subtleties imply that one-size-fits-all urgency strategies might not deliver consistent outcomes across various market segments.

This study argues for a more strategic and consumer-oriented approach to urgency marketing. It also urges longitudinal research to realize how exposure to repeated limited-time promotions impacts brand perception, consumer loyalty, and long-term sustainable purchasing behavior.

KEYWORDS: Limited-Time Discounts, Consumer Urgency, Impulse Buying, Scarcity Marketing, Flash Sales, Purchase Behavior

INTRODUCTION

In the fast-paced and very competitive retail environment of today, firms are continually utilizing innovative promotional strategies in an effort to attract consumers' attention and induce purchase decisions. Among the most prolific of these tactics is the limited-time discount—a time-limited offer that prompts prompt action by creating a time limitation. This marketing strategy has taken off to a great extent, especially in online spaces, where real-time communication allows retailers to present urgency signals such as countdown clocks, "Ends in 2 hours," or "Only 3 items left" messages. These strategies are now used not just to drive conversions but also to shorten decision time and cart abandonment rates.

Underlying limited-time promotions is the psychological factor of urgency that energizes emotional and cognitive processes among customers. The perceived time scarcity induces a fear of missing out (FOMO) that motivates customers to make

quicker decisions—sometimes on impulse—to avoid losing the opportunity, which is perceived as temporal and fleeting. The principles of loss aversion and scarcity heuristic also apply, where customers value time-limited offers simply due to their limited duration. Consequently, they are more inclined to favor these offers over normally priced products, even going so far as to overlook product comparisons or reviews.

Although the success of urgency-based strategies in generating short-term sales is well-documented, their wider effects on consumer trust, post-purchase satisfaction, and brand loyalty are not as well understood. Frequent or manipulative application of urgency can have adverse consequences like consumer fatigue, scepticism, or regret after purchase. These issues question the ethical limits and long-term viability of urgency-driven marketing.

This study seeks to investigate the impact of time-limited discounting on consumer urgency and buying behavior both



from psychological and behavioral standpoints. It relies on previous literature to investigate how these strategies impact impulse purchases, affective reactions, and decision-making mechanisms. Moreover, it attempts to find differences in consumer reaction across demographic profiles, product categories, and online versus offline environments. Through an assessment of the advantages and limitations of urgency promotions, this research adds to a deeper insight into how marketers can both ethically and successfully employ time-limited discounting as a means of impacting customer behavior.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Urgency-based marketing has become an increasingly prevalent strategy in consumer behavior and promotional contexts, particularly in digital commerce. A wide body of research highlights its psychological underpinnings, effectiveness in various contexts, and potential drawbacks when overused. Sharma and Keller (2006) laid a foundational framework by exploring how time-limited discounts act as psychological triggers that encourage rapid decision-making among deal-prone consumers, especially for hedonic products. They cautioned that the repeated application of urgency tactics could erode brand credibility and long-term trust, highlighting the delicate balance marketers must maintain.

Earlier research by Inman and McAlister (1994) emphasized urgency's influence through the lens of regret aversion, noting that consumers are more inclined to redeem coupons nearing expiration. This behavior was especially apparent in low-involvement product categories, where urgency not only increased redemption rates but also altered brand consideration sets. Their findings pointed to the role of perceived loss in triggering consumer responses and proposed that timing promotions strategically could optimize campaign performance.

Building on this psychological dimension, Suri and Monroe (2003) demonstrated that urgency significantly reduces consumers' price sensitivity. Under time constraints, individuals are more likely to make heuristic-based rather than deliberative decisions. This emotional decision-making process, while effective for short-term conversions, suggests a risk of undermining informed consumer choice. Their work highlights the need for marketers to balance immediacy with transparency to preserve consumer autonomy.

Aggarwal and Vaidyanathan (2003) similarly framed urgency within loss aversion theory. Their study found that urgency not only accelerates purchase behavior but may also temporarily amplify brand preference. However, they warned of diminishing returns from repeated exposure to urgency, suggesting that its intermittent application yields better long-term results. This points to the importance of variability and novelty in campaign design.

Chatterjee (2011) focused on urgency in the context of impulse buying, particularly during promotional events and festive seasons. Utilizing countdown timers and real-time promotional cues, the study found that urgency can significantly increase conversion rates. However, post-purchase satisfaction was

mixed, depending on whether consumers perceived the deal as valuable and satisfying. The study advocated for the use of event-based urgency to align with heightened consumer engagement during special occasions.

Expanding the perspective to experiential marketing, Grewal et al. (2017) proposed that urgency can enhance the shopping experience by making it more dynamic and emotionally charged. They argued that urgency-based promotions could be more effective when personalized based on consumer behavior, rather than applied uniformly. Their findings support the integration of urgency with customer segmentation to preserve brand equity while enhancing promotional responsiveness.

The digital shift in retailing brought forward new dynamics, as highlighted by Herhausen et al. (2015), who found urgency tactics to be especially effective in online contexts. Consumers in digital environments, often exhibiting focused and task-oriented behavior, are more susceptible to time pressure, leading to faster decisions. However, the long-term impact on brand perception and the risk of consumer fatigue from repetitive urgency cues remain underexplored. This underscores the need for more research into omnichannel strategies that integrate urgency thoughtfully.

Further complicating the narrative is the work of Ku, Malhotra, and Murnighan (2005), who discussed urgency within auction and competitive settings. Their concept of "competitive arousal" demonstrated how time pressure can lead to irrational bidding behaviors, suggesting parallels with consumer behavior during flash sales. They advocated for a balance between urgency and transparency, especially in contexts where consumers are vulnerable to overbidding or overspending due to heightened emotional states.

Cultural differences also shape how urgency is perceived and acted upon. Zhang and Shrum (2009) revealed that consumers from individualistic cultures are more impulsive in response to urgency than those from collectivist cultures. Their findings emphasized the importance of cultural self-construal as a key segmentation factor in designing urgency-based promotions, supporting the call for global marketers to adapt urgency tactics to regional consumer psychologies.

From a foundational perspective, Verhallen and Robben (1994) explored how scarcity and urgency jointly elevate product value and consumer desire. They found that the co-presence of these cues heightens perceived product worth, although excessive use can backfire by inducing skepticism. Their study provided early empirical support for what would later evolve into core principles of scarcity marketing.

More recently, Oberoi (2024) investigated urgency through contemporary examples from brands such as Amazon and Starbucks. Her work connected academic theory with practical brand executions, illustrating how urgency triggers like FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) and scarcity increase purchase intent. Nevertheless, she noted that consumer resistance and brand fatigue may emerge over time if these tactics are overused, particularly in loyalty-driven markets.



In parallel, a study from *Journal of Web Engagement* (JWE, 2024) argued that urgency intensifies cognitive biases such as anchoring and loss aversion, especially in e-commerce. It called for stronger ethical guidelines and transparency in urgency-based pricing, particularly given the manipulative potential of such strategies. This study contributes to the growing discourse on responsible marketing in digital environments.

A second JWE study specifically addressing flash sales (JWE Flash Sales Study, 2024) examined the long-term impact of frequent urgency promotions. While these sales were effective in boosting conversions, they also risked diminishing perceived product value and satisfaction, particularly when consumer expectations were unmet. The authors advised aligning urgency with actual value delivery to preserve customer trust and mitigate backlash.

Finally, a 2024 study from the European Psychology of Habits (EPH) Institute examined the role of urgency in driving impulsive purchases. It emphasized that while urgency effectively triggers buying behavior, it may compromise brand trust and customer loyalty if post-purchase experiences are negative. The researchers recommended monitoring post-sale satisfaction and engagement as a strategy to buffer the negative effects of urgency fatigue.

In conclusion, urgency remains a powerful but double-edged tool in marketing strategy. Its ability to prompt rapid consumer action, enhance emotional engagement, and increase sales is well-documented across various contexts—from promotions and flash sales to cultural nuances and digital platforms. However, its long-term implications on brand equity, consumer trust, and satisfaction necessitate careful, ethical, and strategic deployment. Literature collectively calls for moderation, personalization, and alignment with value delivery as essential principles for sustaining effectiveness without undermining consumer relationships.

RESEARCH GAP

While various thorough studies have investigated the effects of

sales promotions and discount policies on consumer buying behavior, few have directly analyzed the psychological effects of time-limited discounts on consumer urgency. Most past research has delved into various generic promotional strategies, price responsiveness, and consumer decision-making behaviors without controlling for the time constraint effect. In addition, the moderating effect of consumer demographics like income and age on urgency purchases under limited time offers has been understudied. There is also limited empirical research in the Indian retail environment, specifically how cultural and market-specific determinants influence perceptions of urgency. This study seeks to close these gaps by examining the immediate link between temporary discounts, urgency among consumers, and purchase behavior in the Indian retail market.

OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the psychological and behavioral effects of time-limited discounts on consumer decision-making.
2. To develop strategic and ethical guidelines for marketers to effectively and responsibly implement urgency-based promotional tactics, ensuring enhanced consumer response without compromising brand credibility or long-term customer relationships.

Hypothesis Development

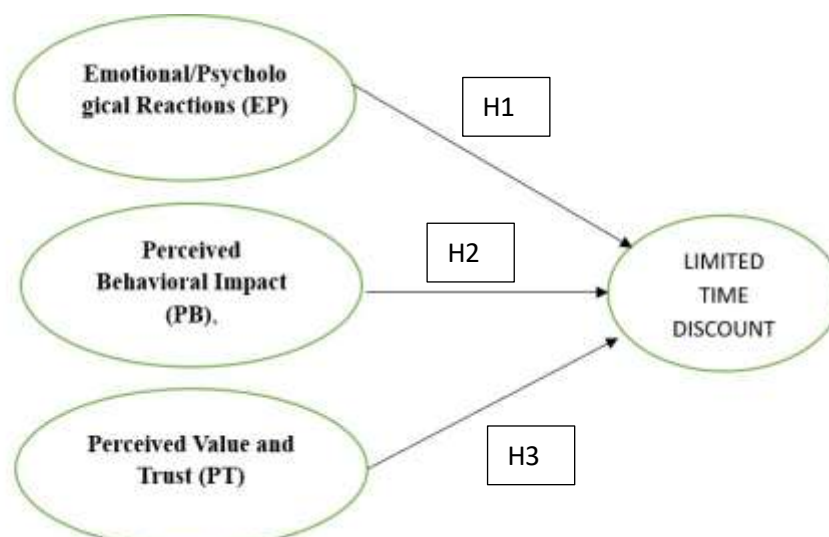
- **H1:** Emotional and psychological reactions significantly and positively influence consumer perceptions of limited-time discounts.
- **H2:** Perceived value and trust have a significant and positive impact on consumer perception of limited-time discounts.
- **H3: Perceived Behavioral Impact (PB)** has a significant and positive impact on consumer perception of limited-time discounts.

Variables Independent Variables

- Emotional and psychological reactions
- **Perceived Behavioral Impact**
- Perceived value and trust

Dependent Variables

- **Limited Time Discounts**





CONSTRUCTS are:

- Emotional and psychological reactions
- **Perceived Behavioral Impact**
- Perceived value and trust
- **Limited Time Discounts**

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

i. Sample

The sample consists of e-commerce consumers who shop on online platforms. These participants represented a diverse set of online shoppers in terms of age, gender, occupation, and shopping frequency.

ii. Sampling Method and Size

This study utilized a Non-Probability Convenience Sampling method. The questionnaire was distributed through online platforms including personal networks, making it accessible to respondents who frequently engage in e-commerce activities.

The sample had 303 respondents, all of whom were active e-commerce customers familiar with online shopping platforms.

Participants were asked to respond to a questionnaire consisted a set of predefined questions .

Research Design

This research analysis follows a descriptive and Quantitative, where descriptive analysis was aimed to systematically describe how Emotional and psychological , perceived value and trust and purchase behaviour influence on Limited time discounts and the quantitative analysis of data was done by gathering the responses through a structured questionnaire using a 5-

point Likert scale.

iii. Data Collection

The questionnaire floated through Google form was divided into main sections:

- Demographic Information like Age, Gender, Occupation and Shopping frequency. Data was collected via a google form distributed through social media and personal networks.

iv. Statistical Tools Used

- **SmartPLS (Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling)** was Applied for model testing and path analysis to assess relationships among the core variables
- **Correlation is done using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences).**

RESULTS

Demographic Analysis

The demographic breakdown of the study sample, which comprised 303 valid responses, was carried out using SPSS. The age breakdown pointed out that 24.3% of the participants fell in the 18 - 24 category, followed by 23.9% in the 25-40 category. Also, 21% of the respondents were accounted for in the category of under 18 and remaining in the category above 40. The total percentages reveal that most of the participants were bunched in the lower to middle age groups. Gender breakdown disclosed that 45% of the participants were males, and 55%, females, showing more female responders to the survey. Frequency of online shopping analysis disclosed that a mere 5.8% of the respondents said they shopped Daily, 26.1% shopped online weekly, 42.4% shopped online monthly, and 25.7% were shopping Occasionally.

Construct Reliability and Validity

Construct reliability and validity

Overview

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Ave
EP	0.948	0.949	0.967	
LD	0.964	0.965	0.977	
PB	0.862	0.885	0.917	
PT	0.858	0.876	0.917	

The reliability of the constructs was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients, and the results confirmed excellent internal consistency across all constructs. Specifically, EP (Cronbach's alpha = 0.948), LD (Cronbach's alpha = 0.964), PB (Cronbach's alpha = 0.862), and PT (Cronbach's alpha = 0.858) all exceeded the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating a high level of reliability . These findings suggest

that the measurement items for each construct consistently captured the underlying latent variables, providing a solid foundation for further structural modeling and hypothesis testing. The high reliability values also reinforce the validity of the model, ensuring that subsequent analysis results are both credible and robust.



Path Coefficients

List	
	Path coefficients
EP -> LD	0.499
PB -> LD	0.226
PT -> LD	0.364

Interpretation of Path Coefficients

The path analysis in the image reveals how three constructs—**Emotional/Psychological Reactions (EP)**, **Perceived Behavioral Impact (PB)**, and **Perceived Value and Trust (PT)**—influence **Limited- Time Discounts (LD)** as perceived by consumers.

- **EP → LD ($\beta = 0.499$):** Emotional and psychological reactions have the **strongest positive influence** on perceptions of limited-time discounts. This suggests that consumers who experience emotions like excitement,

urgency.

- **PT → LD ($\beta = 0.364$):** Perceived value and trust also significantly contribute to LTD effectiveness. When consumers believe that a discount is genuine and trustworthy, it enhances their likelihood of engagement.
- **PB → LD ($\beta = 0.226$):** Although still positive, perceived behavioral impact shows the **least strong relationship**, indicating that prior discount-driven behavior moderately reinforces current perceptions of LTDs but may not be as emotionally compelling.

Correlations

		Limited time discount	Emotional/psychological reaction
Limited time discount	Pearson Correlation	1	.952**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	303	303
Emotional/psychological reaction	Pearson Correlation	.952**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	303	303

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation between **limited-time discounts** and **emotional/psychological reactions** is extremely strong ($r = 0.952$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that as consumers perceive more urgency from LTDs, their emotional responses—like excitement or FOMO—increase significantly. This suggests

that LTDs are not just marketing tools but also trigger strong emotional engagement, which can influence purchase decisions. The result is statistically significant and highlights the powerful psychological impact of time-sensitive promotions.

Correlations

		Limited time discount	Perceived value and trust
Limited time discount	Pearson Correlation	1	.897**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	303	303
Perceived value and trust	Pearson Correlation	.897**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	303	303

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).



There is a strong positive correlation between **limited-time discounts** and **perceived value and trust** ($r = 0.897, p < 0.01$). This suggests that as consumers recognize and engage with LTDs, they are more likely to perceive those offers as valuable and trustworthy. The high level of statistical significance indicates that this relationship is not due to chance and is consistently observed across the sample. This finding highlights the importance of LTDs in shaping consumer confidence and the perceived quality of promotional offers.

Correlations

		Limited Time Discounts	Behavioral impact
Limited Time Discounts	Pearson Correlation	1	.683**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	303	303
Behavioral impact	Pearson Correlation	.683**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	303	303

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation between **limited-time discounts** and **perceived value and trust** is **very strong and statistically significant** ($r = 0.897, p < 0.01$). This indicates that when consumers are exposed to time-sensitive offers, they tend to perceive those offers as more valuable and credible. The strength of this relationship suggests that LTDs do more than create urgency—they also enhance the overall attractiveness and trustworthiness of the product or brand in the eyes of the consumer. This could be due to the psychological association of scarcity with higher value or the impression that brands offering LTDs are providing exclusive deals. The statistically significant correlation means this pattern is highly consistent across the sample of 303 respondents and unlikely to be due to chance. Overall, this finding emphasizes that **LTDs play a dual role**—they not only influence emotions and urgency but also **positively shape how consumers evaluate the value and trustworthiness** of an offer.

Overall Correlation summary

Summary of Correlation Analysis in Relation to Hypotheses

The correlation analysis provides strong empirical support for the hypothesized relationships between limited-time discounts (LTDs), perceived value and trust, and emotional/psychological responses:

- **H1: Emotional and psychological reactions significantly and positively influence consumer perceptions of LTDs.**

The correlation between LTDs and emotional/psychological reactions is extremely strong ($r = 0.952, p < 0.01$), indicating that LTDs trigger heightened emotional responses such as excitement and FOMO. This confirms that emotional engagement is a

Limited-time offers may signal exclusivity or special opportunity, which can increase the **perceived worth of a product**. Additionally, the presence of a time-bound promotion can create an impression that the brand is offering a genuine deal, thereby **reinforcing trust**. Consumers often associate urgency with value—believing that if something is available for a limited time, it must be worth acting on. This perception can be particularly strong in digital environments, where competition is high and quick decision-making is common.

critical mechanism through which LTDs affect consumer behavior.

- **H2: Perceived value and trust have a significant and positive impact on consumer perception of LTDs.**

Supported.

A very strong and statistically significant correlation was found between LTDs and perceived value/trust ($r = 0.897, p < 0.01$). This validates that consumers associate LTDs not only with urgency but also with increased value and credibility, reinforcing the trustworthiness of the offer or brand.

- **The Perceived Behavioral Impact has a significant and positive impact on consumer perception of LTDs.**

Supported.

A very strong and statistically significant correlation was found between LTDs and perceived Behavioral Impact ($r = 0.683, p < 0.01$).

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study provide compelling empirical support for the hypothesized relationships between limited-time discounts (LTDs) and key consumer perception constructs: emotional/psychological reactions, perceived value and trust, and perceived behavioral impact. The internal consistency reliability, as indicated by Cronbach's alpha values (all > 0.85), confirms the robustness and validity of the measurement scales, ensuring that the constructs were accurately and reliably captured.



The path coefficient analysis reveals that **emotional/psychological reactions (EP)** have the **strongest influence** on consumer perception of LTDs ($\beta = 0.499$). This underscores the powerful role of affective responses—such as excitement, urgency, or fear of missing out (FOMO)—in driving consumer engagement with time-sensitive offers. The exceptionally strong correlation ($r = 0.952$) reinforces that emotional stimuli are not just peripheral but central in shaping how consumers respond to LTDs.

Similarly, **perceived value and trust (PT)** emerged as another significant predictor of LTD effectiveness ($\beta = 0.364$), with a strong correlation ($r = 0.897$). This indicates that LTDs do not merely trigger impulsive actions but are also evaluated in terms of credibility and value. Consumers are more likely to act on LTDs when they perceive the deals as authentic and beneficial. This highlights the importance of trust-building in promotional messaging and branding strategies.

Although **perceived behavioral impact (PB)** had a weaker path coefficient ($\beta = 0.226$) compared to the other constructs, its relationship with LTDs was still statistically significant ($r = 0.683$). This suggests that prior experiences with discounts or promotional campaigns do play a role in reinforcing LTD effectiveness, albeit in a more subdued way. Behavioral patterns can solidify brand-consumer relationships over time, leading to habitual responses to similar offers in the future.

Overall, the study confirms that **LTDs operate through both emotional and cognitive mechanisms**, influencing not just what consumers feel in the moment but also how they evaluate the offer and recall past experiences.

Recommendations

1. **Leverage Emotional Triggers**
 - Use urgency-based cues such as countdown timers, limited stock notifications, or emotionally charged language ("Last chance!", "Don't miss out!") to maximize the emotional impact of LTDs.
 - Pair LTDs with visuals or messages that evoke excitement, scarcity, and exclusivity to strengthen emotional engagement.
2. **Build and Maintain Trust**
 - Ensure transparency in LTD campaigns by clearly stating terms and conditions, actual savings, and product availability.
 - Avoid overuse of LTDs which might lead to skepticism or consumer fatigue—consistency in the genuineness of offers will maintain consumer trust.
3. **Utilize Behavioral Data for Personalization**
 - Track past purchase behavior and tailor LTD campaigns to align with consumer preferences or shopping patterns.
 - Offer loyalty-based LTDs that reward repeat customers, reinforcing positive behavioral cycles.
4. **Integrate Multichannel Strategies**
 - Deploy LTD promotions across digital platforms

(social media, email, apps) to amplify reach and create a synchronized urgency across customer touchpoints.

5. Educating While Promoting

- Combine LTDs with value-driven content (e.g., product benefits, use-cases) to enhance the perceived worth of the offer and avoid the perception of being purely sales-driven.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that limited-time discounts are more than just tactical promotional tools- they are **psychological catalysts** that significantly affect how consumers perceive value, trust, and urgency. The strongest predictor, emotional/psychological response, emphasizes the need for emotionally intelligent marketing. Trust and value perceptions also play a crucial role in ensuring long-term consumer-brand relationships. Even though behavioral impact is slightly less influential, it remains a critical element in reinforcing LTD strategies through consumer experience.

Together, these insights contribute to a deeper understanding of consumer psychology in the context of time-sensitive promotions and offer actionable guidance for marketers aiming to optimize LTD strategies. Future research can explore moderating factors such as cultural context, product category, or consumer personality traits to expand on these findings.

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