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Research Article

The Influence of Promotional Discounts, Perceived Scarcity, and Emotional Appeal on the Purchase Intention of College Students at a State University in Cebu City

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to explore the impact of promotional discounts, perceived scarcity, and emotional appeals on the purchasing intentions of college students attending a state university in Cebu City. The study employed a quantitative method that integrated descriptive, correlational, and predictive designs. Data were gathered from 395 students through a modified survey questionnaire, yielding a Cronbach's alpha of 0.924. The study employed descriptive statistics, Spearman's rho correlation, and multiple regression to test the gathered data. The results showed that all three factors significantly influenced students' purchasing intentions; the highest predictor among the three was emotional appeal, followed by promotional discounts and perceived scarcity. This suggests that students may be influenced by marketing strategies that invoke urgency; however, what ultimately affects them more are those that give emotional sentiments while providing value with discounts and promotions. The study, therefore, concludes that students' purchasing intentions are probably influenced more by marketing strategies that combine emotional engagement with a reasonable price and scarcity acting as a supporting marketing strategy. Furthermore, this research offers valuable insights into how sales promotions, feelings of scarcity, and emotional appeal impact college students' purchasing intentions.

Keywords: *Promotional Discounts, Perceived Scarcity, Emotional Appeal, Purchase Intention, College Students, State University, Cebu City*

Background

One of the key drivers of business growth is an effective marketing strategy. It helps a company stay competitive by identifying target customers, creating products with genuine value,

selecting the most effective channels to promote them, and setting fair yet profitable prices. At its core, a marketing plan should strengthen customer loyalty, open new markets, and boost sales without compromising

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product quality (Guzun, 2025). To remain relevant, businesses must find innovative ways to capture attention and influence purchasing decisions (Raibukha, 2024). These marketing tactics are not only designed to influence consumer behavior but also to create a sense of urgency, enhance product desirability, and foster emotional connections with a brand or product.

Research has shown that price-based promotional strategies increase consumers' likelihood of purchasing by reducing perceived risks and enhancing value-for-money perceptions. In fact, a study reveals that specific discount patterns in price promotions have a significant impact on perceived price attractiveness and purchase intention, with females being more likely to prefer discounts (Büyükdag et al., 2020). Even in the digital business landscape, e-commerce should implement reasonable discount strategies on social media, considering the platform's reputation, to increase sales and foster a sustainable shopping environment (Lv et al., 2020).

Perceived scarcity, such as limited-time offers or "only a few items left" messages, has been proven to trigger a sense of urgency that influences quick decision-making. Kim et al. (2020) and Wu et al. (2021) reached the same conclusion: perceived scarcity, such as limited supplies and short expiration dates, increases arousal in customers, leading them to make impulse purchases. Meanwhile, emotional appeal in advertisements, such as the use of humor, nostalgia, or inspirational messages, has been linked to stronger consumer attachment and an intention to buy. In fact, Du (2025) indicated that aside from time-limited discounts, emotional experiences influenced impulse buying behavior, as demonstrated by an effective marketing strategy. Additionally, a study concluded that the heightened emotional state of consumers when presented with scarcity leads to an increased intent to purchase a product (Birgalia et al., 2021). The studies mentioned all argue that sales promotion tricks, scarcity perception, and affective persuasion are potential indicators that can be used in crafting marketing strategies to help firms attract and convert potential customers into actual sales. In contrast, these investigations have been conducted in

international settings and focused on general consumers, which leaves a critical gap in understanding how these marketing strategies affect the purchase intentions of college students in a Philippine university context, particularly in Cebu City.

Several international studies have shown how price discounts, scarcity cues, and emotional messaging shape consumers' buying intentions. However, research in the Philippine higher education setting—especially among college students in Cebu City—remains limited. Most existing studies focus on general consumers, leaving little understanding of how these marketing tactics influence students, who often make decisions based on tight budgets and emotional resonance. As this group becomes an increasingly attractive market for brands, both online and offline, exploring this gap is crucial. Understanding what drives their choices can help marketers and business owners craft strategies that genuinely connect with their needs and spending habits.

Building on this, the study aimed to investigate how discount offers, perceived scarcity, and emotional appeal influence the buying intentions of college students at a state university in Cebu City. It first assessed students' levels of awareness and perception of these factors, then analyzed whether significant links exist between each marketing element and their intent to purchase. At the same time, the study sought to identify which of the independent variables — promotional discounts, perceived scarcity, and emotional appeal—serves as the strongest predictor of purchase intention. Finally, based on the findings, the study aimed to propose recommendations that could be crafted and endorsed for practical application and policy considerations by relevant stakeholders.

Methodology

Design:

This study employed a quantitative method, specifically utilizing descriptive, correlational, and predictive research designs to examine the influence of promotional discounts, perceived scarcity, and emotional appeal on purchase intention. The mentioned approaches primarily aim to measure the

relationship and predictive influence of promotional discounts, perceived scarcity, and emotional appeal on students' purchase intentions.

Environment and Respondents:

The study was conducted in one of the state universities in Cebu City, Philippines, where the principal researcher is currently connected. The chosen setting is ideal since college students in this institution are frequently exposed to marketing promotions, both on campus (through student discounts, food stalls, etc.) and off campus (on online platforms and nearby commercial establishments).

Additionally, the study's respondents were college students currently enrolled in the Bachelor of Science in Business Administration and Entrepreneurship program at the state university during the 2025–2026 academic year. Also, to determine the sample size, an a priori power analysis was conducted using G*Power 3.1 (F test: linear multiple regression — R^2 increase) to calculate the required sample size. Assuming a small incremental effect ($f^2 = 0.02$) for a single

predictor, $\alpha = .05$, one tested predictor, and three total predictors, the analysis indicated a required sample of $N = 395$ (actual power = .8006). They represent a suitable population since they were expected to understand marketing strategies, regularly encounter promotional campaigns, and make purchase decisions based on financial constraints and social influence.

Instrument:

The study employed a modified survey questionnaire derived from existing validated instruments and relevant literature. This included adaptations from Chandon et al. (2000) and Kotler and Keller (2016) for promotional discounts; Lynn (1991) and Wu et al. (2012) for perceived scarcity; Hollbrook and Batra (1987) and Morris et al. (2002) for emotional appeal; and Dodds et al. (1991) and Ajzen (1991) for purchase intention. Regardless of a standardized tool from a different source, the researchers decided to conduct a reliability test.

Table 1. Reliability Analysis

Scale Reliability Statistics	
scale	Cronbach's α
	0.924

A reliability test was conducted with 20 respondents to assess the internal consistency of the instrument, yielding a Cronbach's α of .924. This suggests that the items were highly consistent in measuring the target construct.

Data Collection:

The researchers first obtained formal approval from the Dean of the Center for Advanced Studies (CADS), which was a requirement for securing a permit to conduct this research. After that, the researchers began distributing survey questionnaires to students to gather data, along with informed consent forms that were signed by all respondents, ensuring they understood the study's purpose, procedures, and the voluntary nature of their participation.

Data Analysis:

To determine the perceived levels of promotional discounts, perceived scarcity, emotional appeal, and purchase intention among college students, the researchers analyzed the gathered data from survey questionnaires using descriptive statistics, such as standard deviation and mean. Next, to examine the relationships among the variables, the researchers employed Spearman's rho. Lastly, to determine the extent to which promotional discounts, perceived scarcity, and emotional appeal affect the purchase intentions of the respondents, the researchers utilized multiple linear regression analysis.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers conducted this study with a focus on safeguarding and upholding human rights. The researchers ensured that every

respondent provided informed consent before data collection, clearly explaining the study's purpose, procedures, and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Furthermore, confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained by not collecting personal data and ensuring that all responses were used solely for research purposes.

Result and Discussion

This section presents and interprets the study's findings on the influence of promotional discounts, perceived scarcity, and emotional appeal on the purchase intentions of college students at a state university in Cebu City.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Promotional Discounts, Perceived Scarcity, Emotional Appeal, and Purchase Intention (N=395)

Variable	M	SD	Interpretation
Promotional Discounts	5.14	0.62	Agree
Perceived Scarcity	4.24	0.90	Slightly Agree
Emotional Appeal	4.55	0.90	Agree
Purchase Intention	4.70	0.74	Agree

Descriptive statistics were performed to find the average scores and standard deviations for promotional discounts, perceived scarcity, emotional appeal, and purchase intention. As shown in Table 1, the results indicate that promotional discounts, emotional appeal, and purchase intention were rated as "Agree." At the same time, perceived scarcity received a lower mean score, interpreted as "Slightly agree." These findings suggest that respondents recognized scarcity to some degree; however, promotional discounts and emotional appeals had a more substantial influence on their purchase intentions.

According to Büyükdag et al. (2020), strategies such as discounts and emotional appeals, as seen in advertisements, tend to be more influential than scarcity alone, which explains the

higher levels of agreement in this study. Similarly, multiple studies confirm that discounts are the most effective trigger for both impulse and planned purchases among college students. They significantly increase the likelihood of unplanned purchases and are a key factor in students' purchasing decisions, especially in online and e-commerce settings (Hartati et al., 2025; Song, 2024; Zhong et al., 2022). Additionally, emotional engagement—such as creating excitement, happiness, or a sense of belonging—strongly boosts purchase intention. Positive emotions can mediate the effect of discounts, making students even more likely to buy when they feel emotionally connected (Kim et al., 2020; Kumar & Venkadasalpathy, 2024).

Table 2. Spearman's Rho Correlations between Promotional Discounts, Perceived Scarcity, Emotional Appeal, and Purchase Intention

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Promotional Discounts				
2. Perceived Scarcity				
3. Emotional Appeal				
4. Purchase Intention	.596**	.632**	.730**	

Note. * $p < .001$

Spearman's rho was used to examine the relationships between promotional discounts, perceived scarcity, emotional appeal, and purchase intention, which shows a significant positive correlation, as shown in Table 2. Among all

independent variables, emotional appeal showed the strongest positive correlation with purchase intention ($r = .730, p < .001$). At the same time, promotional discounts demonstrated a moderately strong correlation ($r =$

.596, $p < .001$), and perceived scarcity demonstrated a moderately strong positive correlation ($r = .632$, $p < .001$). These findings reveal that the increase of promotional discounts, perceived scarcity, and emotional appeal also significantly increases the respondents' purchase intention.

The findings align with the study of Büyükdağ et al. (2020), which suggests that price attractiveness and purchase intention increased due to discounts, especially double discounts and significant price drops, with perceived quality mediating the relationship between discounts and impulsive buying. Along

with this, Zhou (2024) stated that scarcity and emotional appeal have a positive correlation with purchase intention, with emotional factors and expected outcome commonly mediating. Additionally, businesses should not only provide value-driven promotions but also design campaigns that evoke positive emotions such as excitement, happiness, or a sense of belonging (Guro et al., 2023). Students also value the overall shopping experience, product quality, and after-sales service, suggesting that promotions should be paired with genuine value and service to build trust and loyalty (Kumar & Venkadasalapathy, 2024).

Table 3. Multiple Linear Regression Predicting Purchase Intention from Promotional Discounts, Perceived Scarcity, and Emotional Appeal

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	0.41	0.17		2.35	.019
Promotional Discounts	0.34	0.04	.29	8.47	<.001
Perceived Scarcity	0.13	0.03	.16	4.17	<.001
Emotional Appeal	0.43	0.03	.53	14.27	<.001

Note.

$R = .834$, $R^2 = .695$, Adjusted $R^2 = .693$, $F(3, 391) = 297.20$, $p < .001$.

Multiple linear regression was conducted to determine the extent to which promotional discounts, perceived scarcity, and emotional appeal influence purchase intention. As shown in Table 3, the results indicate that promotional discounts, perceived scarcity, and emotional appeal significantly predict purchase intention, $F(3, 391) = 297.20$, $p < .001$, accounting for 69.5% of the variance ($R^2 = .695$, Adjusted $R^2 = .693$). Among these, emotional appeal was the strongest predictor ($\beta = .53$, $p < .001$), followed by promotional discounts ($\beta = .29$, $p < .001$) and perceived scarcity ($\beta = .16$, $p < .001$).

These findings reveal that emotional appeal has a significant influence on the purchase intentions of the respondents, aligning with the study by Zhou (2024). A previous study also supports these findings, additionally stating that implementing these strategies can maximize consumer motivation to purchase (Maharani et al., 2020). Marketers are encouraged to focus on developing campaigns that generate positive emotions, as emotional appeal has the most substantial impact on purchase intention (Ganassali & Ganassali, 2025). Discounts and

scarcity can boost motivation but are most effective when paired with emotionally engaging messages, as emotional value often serves as the decisive factor in consumer decisions (Barton et al., 2022).

Conclusion

Marketing strategies, including discounts, scarcity promotions, and emotional advertising, are well-known for influencing consumer behavior. However, most previous studies have focused on general consumers rather than specific groups, such as college students, who often face financial limitations. This research, therefore, explored how price discounts, scarcity cues, and emotional appeal shape the buying intentions of college students and identified which of these factors has the most substantial impact on their purchasing behavior.

Findings showed that students essentially recognized the influence of discount offers and emotional messaging, while the effect of scarcity was less pronounced. This suggests that although limited-time offers can draw attention, students are more persuaded by

marketing strategies that highlight affordability and emotional connection. The correlation analysis supported this pattern, revealing that all three factors have a positive relationship with purchase intention, with emotional appeal emerging as the strongest driver, followed by price incentives. In short, students are more likely to purchase products that resonate with their emotions and align with their budget.

At the same time, the results showed that price discounts, scarcity cues, and emotional appeal collectively explained 69.5% of the variation in students' purchase intentions, underscoring their combined impact on consumer behavior. Among these, emotional appeal emerged as the most potent influence, followed by discount offers, with scarcity having the weakest effect. This means that ads that connect emotionally with students—especially when paired with meaningful price reductions—are the most effective in motivating them to make a purchase. Perceived scarcity, on the other hand, functions more effectively as a complementary strategy rather than a primary motivator.

The study offers practical implications for marketers and business leaders seeking to influence this group, suggesting that they should focus on campaigns that resonate emotionally, backed by discounts that offer genuine value and enhanced through techniques that create a sense of scarcity to maximize their impact. Also, the results suggest that emotionally driven advertising, supported by genuine promotional discounts, is more effective in influencing college students' purchase intentions than scarcity-based tactics. Campaigns that evoke emotional connection and highlight affordability are likely to resonate more strongly with this financially conscious segment. At the same time, for academics, the findings underscore the need to strengthen students' media and consumer literacy by integrating lessons on marketing persuasion, emotional influence, and responsible consumption.

While this research provides valuable insights into how sales promotion tactics, scarcity perception, and affective appeal influence the buying intentions of college students, it also has its limitations. First, the study was

conducted in only one state university in Cebu City, which means the findings may not fully reflect the viewpoints of students in other schools or consumer groups. Second, because the data came from self-reported surveys, responses may have been influenced by how students interpreted the questions or by their tendency to answer in a socially desirable way. Third, the study examined only three marketing factors, leaving out other important influences such as peer pressure, brand loyalty, or product quality, which could also be factors that might affect purchasing decisions. Lastly, since the study used a cross-sectional design, it cannot fully explain cause-and-effect relationships. Future studies may address these gaps by including a broader group of respondents, exploring additional factors, and employing methods such as longitudinal or experimental research to provide more in-depth insights.

These findings help deepen the understanding of student purchasing behavior within the local environment and provide deeper insights for companies, brands, and campus-based businesses seeking to increase sales and cultivate brand loyalty among young consumers.

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