



## Instant gratification and impulse buying behaviour in quick commerce platforms

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### Abstract

New fast shipping shopping apps have changed online shopping again because their main focus is to deliver packages as quickly as possible while still providing a seamless buying experience. This focus directly addresses the psychological need for instant gratification which affects decision making and consumption patterns. Instant gratification is the desire for an immediate reward for an action and one of the main psychological reasons for impulse buys in shopping apps, which are emotionally driven purchases that a customer did not plan to make. This paper reviews available literature to look at instant gratification and impulse buying in the context of quick commerce. Using the S-O-R theory, hedonic consumption theory, and the time and convenience theories, the review analyses the psychological and technological aspects that drive customer behaviours. Previous studies in online and mobile commerce were used to address the outcomes, key factors, and the gaps that still exist in quick commerce. The review outlines the problems with quick commerce and suggests that a customer's desire for instant gratification is more likely to result in impulse buying when they experience emotionally engaging digital platforms that require little to no effort for their packages to be delivered.

The review assists in developing digital commerce literature by integrating disparate studies and establishing a basis for forthcoming empirical research.

**Keywords:** Quick commerce, instant gratification, impulse buying behavior, consumer psychology, digital commerce

### Introduction

The growing digitisation of the retail industry has changed how customers look for, evaluate, and buy products. E-commerce used to serve as a way to substitute physical retail, but now it has become essential to almost all consumers' daily buying activities. More recently, with the emergence of quick commerce, which emphasises ultra-rapid and hyperlocal delivery, the role of e-commerce has been further advanced and transformed. There is a notable evolution in this in the quick commerce industry as the competitive value proposition has shifted from product availability and price to velocity and immediacy, which aligns with urban, time-oriented hyperconsumption (Hübner *et al.*, 2016). In regards to quick commerce, the immediacy of certain businesses has led to ultra-impulsivity in consumer behaviours. Instant gratification, which in this case would be the preference of immediate rewards versus the delayed consequences of receiving the reward, drives impulsivity (Hoch & Loewenstein, 1991) [8]. Instant gratification can be found in the digitally created environments as they lower the amount of effort needed, as well as the time it takes to make decisions. These environments use techniques such as order tracking, saved payment methods, and streamlined purchasing to reinforce the desire to make immediate selections. Given the digital environments, consumers are less likely to contemplate the numerous alternatives available to them and are more inclined to make purchasing decisions.

The phenomenon of impulse buying has been studied within consumer research for many years and is described as an unplanned purchase that reflects an urge to buy and a positive emotional state (Rook, 1987) [16]. Unlike the extensive research covering impulse buying as a general phenomenon within physical retail and e-commerce, there is a significant research gap regarding impulse buying in quick commerce as an emerging retail format. The integration of

cutting-edge developments in retail technology that provide instant gratification (as opposed to e-commerce) and lightning-fast delivery offers the potential for transformational impulse purchasing that is different from the experience of conventional online retailing. The academic community has largely failed to keep pace with the rapid expansion of new quick commerce businesses. Most of the literature has focused on more traditional forms of online and mobile commerce. Little to no academic work has been done to study the impact of instant gratification in quick commerce on impulse buying. Therefore, this literature review aims to fill this gap by analyzing how existing research in quick commerce explains impulse buying.

### Conceptual Framework & Key Definitions

The phrase "digital retail systems" signifies the types of delivery platforms that allow for quick commerce: the digital systems that allow for retail delivery within exact time frames, say, 10-30 minutes, of receiving an order (Woelburg, *et al.*, 2018). To achieve such rapid delivery, quick commerce platforms must rely on hyperlocal fulfilment centres/warehouses, sophisticated (for example, technologically-augmented) logistical infrastructure, and demand algorithms and forecasting of the order inflow/delivery requests. Unlike traditional (i.e., nonblitz) e-commerce, which involves planned purchases and consumption to occur at a later date, quick commerce focuses on the consumer's immediate demand and thus fosters the cognitive/emotional attachment of the consumer to the process of purchasing something (Wollenburg *et al.*, 2018) [24].

The gratification that an individual receives right away or at that moment is an example of a quick reward, and, as such, it can serve as a motivation to an extent, but the purchasing of a product that is initiated in an online system evokes

stress. Such stress can be caused, for example, by a lack of self-control. From the behaviour of individuals as consumers, it can be noted that stress that is caused by a lack of purchasing control increases. This is due to the digital quick order platforms providing immediate order completion, thereby further increasing the desire for control (Baumeister, 2002) <sup>[1]</sup>.

Consumer buying behaviour can often be spontaneous and fully unplanned. These decisions can be described as having little cognitive thinking. These behaviours are often influenced by emotions rather than by any needed functional (Rook and Fisher, 1995) <sup>[17]</sup>. In digital environments, personalised suggestions and easy access to technology make impulse buying even easier. In environments where purchases are made quickly, impulse purchases are seen to be completely normal as they can be perceived to be effortless, low risk and instantly rewarding.

### Theoretical Foundations

The Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) model is one of the most popular frameworks when it comes to analysing consumer behaviour in retail settings. Based on the S-O-R model, external stimuli affect psychological states, which in turn trigger behaviour (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) <sup>[13]</sup>. In the case of quick commerce, stimuli would be things like the app's delivery time, the user interface, promotions, and notifications. Each of these stimuli influences psychological states, like the emotions and cognitive assessment of excitement, urgency, and perceived ease, which ultimately leads to impulse buying. Of the many frameworks that assess psychological processes and technology in quick commerce, the S-O-R model is most appropriate.

Hedonic Consumption Theory suggests that consumers want to engage in behaviour that is enjoyable and provides experiential or emotional stimulation (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982) <sup>[9]</sup>. Purchasing behaviour is at the impulse buying level of the emotional spectrum and is driven by hedonic motivation. Quick commerce made phenomena like hedonic consumption much easier to experience by creating effortless, immediate gratification. Furthermore, the time of arrival of a purchase is a critical variable in consumer behaviour, and in quick commerce, it is the most important factor which leads to impulsive buying.

Time scarcity and convenience theory explain more why impulsive behaviours happen in environments where consumption occurs quickly. The theory of time scarcity outlines that when there is a perceived lack of time, individuals lose the ability to process information more fully, and instead rely on decision-making by heuristics (Dhar & Nowlis, 1999) <sup>[4]</sup>. According to convenience theory, the consumer selects the alternative requiring the least amount of effort and time. Time and convenience are two of the primary attributes that quick commerce companies promote, and this reinforces the perceived scarcity of time and prompts customers to make rapid purchases that require less thought. These theories, combined, are the most effective for explaining the relationship between impulse buying and instant gratification in quick commerce.

### Review of Literature

Digital commerce literature has mainly examined the phenomena of instant gratification as the cause of changes in customers' purchasing habits. Digital commerce removes

all cognitive and time barriers to copious purchasing decisions. Customers' substantial demand for instant gratification and impulse purchasing due to easy and quick searches and payments, as well as rapid delivery times, is documented (Hoch & Loewenstein, 1991) <sup>[8]</sup>. Emotionally motivated rational purchasing evaluation imbalance is widely documented in cases where no time delay is perceived between purchasing and product usage.

Digital commerce literature has widely documented impulse purchasing as being more common in digital settings compared to real-life environments. There is also documented evidence that impulse buying is facilitated through website structure, personalisation, and digital marketing (Verhagen & van Dolen, 2011) <sup>[22]</sup>. The adoption of digital commerce and impulse purchasing phenomena has also increased through the availability and access to mobile devices. Instant access and mobile real-time notifications, coupled with the emotional attachment's users develop with mobile devices and diminished cognitive thinking, lead to an increased influence of mobile devices in impulse purchasing (Liu *et al.*, 2019) <sup>[12]</sup>.

On the other hand, in the case of quick commerce, platform attributes are more significant than in traditional e-commerce because the speed of delivery is the main distinction between quick commerce and e-commerce, and instant delivery eliminates purchasing anxiety and provisionally enhances purchasing pleasure, leading customers to feel "go for it" (Wollenburg *et al.*, 2018) <sup>[24]</sup>. Furthermore, the user interface and user experience design increase the ease of impulse buying by minimising both effort and the anxiety associated with decision-making. For instance, payment structures, recommendations tailored specifically for the individual consumer, and traffic flows designed to ease decision-making are all strategies that lower cognitive effort and lead customers to make purchasing decisions in an automated manner.

Strategies like discounts, flash sales, and time-sensitive promotions are all designed for one purpose, and one purpose only, to induce an impulse purchase. With these strategies, marketers create a sense of urgency and a corresponding reduction in analytical thinking regarding the purchase (Dholakia, 2000) <sup>[5]</sup>. In quick commerce, the marketing messages, particularly the speed-oriented notifications, are designed to fulfil instant gratification, and because of the interruptive external stimuli, trigger an impulse purchase.

Managing the impulse purchase phenomenon in quick commerce is all about understanding consumer psychology. According to Rook [1987] <sup>[16]</sup>, stress, fatigue, boredom, and time pressure are all contributing factors to impulsive consumption. Quick commerce is in itself a solution to these emotional and situational stressors, as it provides stress relief with instant (or quick) order fulfilment. The stress-relieving nature of quick commerce, coupled with the phenomenon of post-purchase boredom, encourages the consumer to develop a habit of impulse purchasing, without any post-purchase remorse, and it does, over time, tacitly encourage the consumer to develop a habit of impulse purchasing.

### Synthesis of Findings

The relationship between the behaviours of impulse buying and instant gratification has consistently been documented across studies. There is broad consensus in the literature that

the drivers of unplanned purchases are time and effort immediacy, emotional arousal, and convenience. Because extremely fast delivery and seamless digital interfaces are now standard in many quick commerce applications, they are arguably positioned to be the most effective in stimulating time and reward preferences of consumers.

There is an abundance of research that has identified common antecedents to the behaviour of impulse buying that include speed of delivery, promotional offers, simplicity of use, customised experiences, and the emotional state of the individual. These antecedents create an environment of reduced rational thinking and increased emotional thinking and therefore, higher occurrences of impulse buying. The effects of impulse buying are often contradictory. On one hand, they are associated with an immediate positive emotional state, gratification, and increased engagement with the digital platform (Beatty and Ferrell, 1998) <sup>[2]</sup>. On the other hand, they are often associated with negative outcomes such as self-control issues, overspending, and regret after a purchase, especially when this behaviour becomes routine.

There is general agreement on the core drivers of impulse buying, but there are conflicting views on the impact of impulse buying on consumer psychology over time. Some studies noted that increased consumer satisfaction was due to the convenience and instant gratification of the purchase, while other studies noted increased consumer dissatisfaction, loss of trust, and buying regret. Moreover, most studies in the existing body of knowledge focused on online and mobile commerce, with very few studies analysing quick commerce separately. The absence of context-specific studies in quick commerce shows that more studies are needed to understand the impact of hyperlocal delivery and ultra-fast shipping on consumer behaviour.

### Methodology

Apart from the use of secondary data obtained from credible news outlets and industry publications, we have used a systematic literature review (SLR) approach. This approach ensures that the findings are thorough, verifiable, and peer-reviewed. Literature Search

Methodology includes Google Scholar, PubMed, ScienceDirect, Web of Science, and Scopus.

### Proposed Conceptual Model

A conceptual framework has been formulated whereby features of quick commerce platforms act as external stimuli impacting consumers' internal psychological processes. Construct features of the platforms such as promotion, notification, and the speed of delivery operate as stimuli and encourage emotional responses and perceptions of psychological convenience. The centre of the framework is instant gratification, which serves as a mediating variable in behavioural responses caused by stimuli.

Emotional arousal, perception of effort, and anticipated satisfaction all represent psychological processes and substantially impact the organism's response, which in behavioural terms, is impulse buying. Impulse buying is conceptualised in the framework as the response of the consumer resulting in spontaneous and/or unplanned purchasing acts. Other factors such as individual self-control, time pressure, and shopping parameters are proposed as moderating factors in the framework. The proposed framework highlights the interplay of technology

and psychological aspects in explaining impulse buying in quick commerce, thus laying the groundwork for empirical studies in the future.

### Managerial Implications

The consequences of the research are beneficial to quick commerce platforms that are interested in optimising consumer engagement and sales. Recognising the impact of instant gratification on the design of the commerce experience would help strengthen the alignment of the platform with consumer needs. Tools that minimise consumer effort, maximise personalisation, and add the dimension of speed to delivery are likely to trigger buying impulses and increase the number of purchases. That being said, having a consumer satisfaction and trust framework that is activated through a high level of impulsive purchasing is likely to be problematic in the short-to-long-term.

The implications for design and marketing of such a platform are to state that there is a level of tension that exists between the commercially driven outcomes and the purposeful, positive outcomes of the design. Ethical use of sales, clear and honest pricing, and limits on the number of times that a consumer is notified about the platform are likely to prioritise consumer peace over negative outcomes and consumer engagement. The opportunity for consumers to have the control that some spend limits, consumption alerts, and notification preferences would provide is likely to strengthen loyalty.

### Future Research Directions

The needs of rapid expansion of quick commerce platforms will be important for future research relating to consumer behaviour and digital commerce. The literature has shown how online and mobile commerce have offered opportunities for impulse buying and instant gratification; however, literature related to quick commerce is both new and limited. Future research should examine quick commerce as a new consumption environment rather than as an extension of traditional e-commerce. The environments created through ultra-fast delivery, hyperlocal fulfilment, and time-compressed decision making require unique studies.

The empirical validation of the conceptual relationships offered in this review will be one of the most important frameworks for future studies. The relationship between platform stimuli, instant gratification, emotional response, and impulse buying behaviour can be analysed through structural equation modelling with quantitative research. This type of modelling will help provide direction and strength to the relationships and will determine how instant gratification functions as a mediator. Moreover, research designs will likely need to be experimental in order to determine the impact of certain platform characteristics (e.g. delivery speed, push notifications) on impulsive buying behaviour.

The prospects for future research include longitudinal studies as a promising area of potential exploration. The majority of research conducted to date has been based on cross-sectional studies, which results in a limited perspective on the long-term outcomes of impulse buying behaviour. Longitudinal research would examine the effects of instant gratification cues in quick commerce on consumer self-control, spending behaviours, and general well-being

over a defined period of time. This would result in a greater understanding of the potential positive and/or negative outcomes of impulsive consumption in quick commerce, and whether it contributes to sustained positive outcomes, or to negative outcomes such as regret and financial distress (Rook, 1987; Beatty & Ferrell, 1998) <sup>[2, 16]</sup>.

It is also suggested that future research increase depth in assessing individual differences, particularly in self-control, income level, shopping orientation, and personality traits, as they may play a role in the way consumers respond to immediate gratification. These would be valuable to explain the discrepancies in the existing literature on outcomes of impulse buying behaviour. In addition, time pressure, emotional state, and urgency are situational factors which are suggested for future research in developing models which incorporate the fluid nature of quick commerce consumption.

The intersection of culture and consumer behaviour is largely overlooked and presents another avenue of promising research. Cultural values shape consumer beliefs and attitudes regarding impulsivity and instant gratification. A majority of consumer research studies are conducted in Western and/or urbanised settings, which limits the cross-cultural applicability of their findings. Therefore, an analysis of the interplay between culture and the economy in the context of quick commerce may be of considerable value.

The final research direction focuses on the ethics and regulation of impulse buying. As providers of quick commerce services continue to employ behavioural cues to stimulate consumption, it becomes necessary to evaluate the effects of such practices on consumer autonomy (and welfare). Research of this kind is likely to be of the utmost importance to quick commerce policymakers and platform designers who want to find the right equilibrium between creative disruption and responsible consumption.

### Conclusion

Quick commerce apps emphasise instant gratification. In this review, we focus on the impacts of instant gratification on impulse buying within quick commerce by integrating disparate streams of digital commerce, consumer psychology, and marketing literature. The research shows that instantaneous delivery, frictionless digital platforms, and emotionally stimulating platform features reduce cognitive effort regarding the purchase and encourage the purchase.

The research shows that, unsurprisingly, instant gratification functions as the salient psychological mechanism connecting impulse buying to the various features of the platforms. In quick commerce, the reduction of effort, as well as the reduction of time, aggravates the emotional state and the anticipated pleasure of the impulsive purchase. The positive side of impulsive purchasing is that, at least in the short term, consumers feel good, and they tend to use the app more. The negative side for the consumer is the lack of self-control, a sense of regret after the purchase is made, and possibly spending more money than intended. This is the paradox of impulse buying in fast-moving digital environments.

In wrapping up the literature, the review made an effort to describe and appraise the potential of fragmented literature in terms of established theories and the emerging phenomenon of quick commerce. Utilizing the Stimulus–

Organism–Response model, hedonic consumption, and theories of time scarcity and convenience, the review attempts to explain the technological and psychological dimensions of the phenomenon of impulsive consumption. The review will help in shedding some light and thus contribute to the development of the theories of impulsive consumption in the context of quick commerce.

On a positive note, the review appreciates responsible platform design and marketing. Instant gratification as a mechanism can lead to further engagement and a positive sales outcome, but if too much reliance on impulsive consumption occurs, the fostering of trust and satisfaction over time may be lost. This is the dilemma for quick commerce: to achieve a balance between the commercial aims and the ethical aims.

The paradox of quick commerce is the balance between instant gratification and impulsive consumption. With further evolution of the model, the implications will continue to expand, and research interest in the phenomenon will be a necessity. The review provides a necessary starting point and invites scholarship in a developing and considerably complex area.

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