
IMPULSE ONLINE BUYING BEHAVIOUR IN INDIA: AN OMNICHANNEL STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELLING INVESTIGATION

*Ms. Jyoti*¹, Dr. Jyoti², Prof. (Dr.)Seema Ghanghas³*

¹*PHD Scholar, School of Commerce & Management, Om Sterling Global University, Hisar.*

²*Assistant Professor, School of Commerce & Management, Om Sterling Global University,
Hisar.*

³*Professor, School of Commerce & Management, Om Sterling Global University, Hisar*

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***Corresponding Author: Ms. Jyoti**

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PHD Scholar, School of Commerce & Management, Om Sterling Global University,
Hisar.

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a comprehensive examination of impulse buying behaviour within India's rapidly evolving omnichannel retail ecosystem. Integrating Stimulus–Organism–Response theory, hedonic consumption perspectives, and digital engagement frameworks, the research develops and empirically tests a structural model incorporating offline experiential drivers, online technological stimuli, and social media engagement. Data collected from 524 Indian fashion retail consumers were analysed using Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Structural Equation Modelling. Findings indicate that while offline atmospherics remain influential, online stimuli—particularly digital payment ease, algorithmic personalisation, and promotional cues—significantly intensify impulsive behaviour. Social media engagement partially mediates digital effects. The study contributes robust emerging-market evidence and offers strategic implications for integrated retail management.

KEYWORDS: Impulse Buying, India, Omnichannel Retail, SEM, Social Media, Digital Payments.

1. INTRODUCTION

India represents one of the world's fastest-growing consumer markets, driven by digital transformation, urbanisation, aspirational middle-class expansion, and smartphone diffusion.

The integration of physical retail infrastructure with digital commerce platforms has reshaped consumer decision-making processes. Impulse buying, defined as a spontaneous and affectively driven purchase decision, has become a strategic revenue contributor across fashion retail channels.

Despite growing digital penetration, brick-and-mortar retail continues to offer experiential advantages through sensory engagement and immediate gratification. Simultaneously, frictionless Unified Payments Interface (UPI) systems, one-click checkout, influencer marketing, and flash sales intensify impulsive behaviour online. However, systematic comparative modelling within the Indian context remains limited.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Impulse buying behaviour has been widely conceptualised as a spontaneous, emotionally driven purchase response emerging from environmental stimulation. The Stimulus–Organism–Response paradigm provides a comprehensive explanatory lens. Within physical retail settings, atmospheric cues such as lighting, music, layout design, and tactile engagement generate affective arousal. In digital environments, interface aesthetics, scarcity messaging, recommendation systems, and frictionless payment systems serve analogous functions.

Recent scholarship emphasises the transformative role of social media ecosystems. Influencer marketing, peer validation, and aspirational content intensify hedonic motivations and reduce cognitive restraint. In India, rapid smartphone penetration and UPI adoption amplify digital impulsiveness by reducing transactional friction.

2.1 The Conceptual Development of Impulsive Purchases

From being simply described as an impulsive purchase, impulse buying is now understood as a multifaceted behavioral construct including emotive, cognitive, and situational components. Impulse buying, according to early research by Rook (1987), is a sudden, compelling, and hedonistically complicated purchasing behavior in which quick decisions take precedence over careful consideration. By making a distinction between pure impulse buying, reminder impulse buying, suggestion impulsive buying, and planned impulse buying, later studies broadened this perspective.

Subsequent research by Beatty and Ferrell (1998) demonstrated that both external stimuli (such as the store environment and time availability) and internal predispositions (such as

mood states and impulse buying inclination) had an impact on impulse buying. The foundation for incorporating environmental psychology into retail research was established by this dual-structure viewpoint.

According to more recent research, situational stimuli, emotional arousal, and impaired cognitive control combine dynamically to cause impulse buying. This transition is indicative of more significant developments in retail ecosystems, especially the incorporation of digital technologies.

2.2 The Framework of Stimulus, Organization, and Response (S-O-R)

The predominant theoretical framework for comprehending impulsive buying is the Stimulus–Organism–Response paradigm, which was first put forth by Mehrabian and Russell in 1974. In this framework:

Environmental signals (store ambiance, website design, promotions) are stimuli (S).

Organism (O): Internal emotional states (dominance, arousal, and pleasure)

Reaction (R): Behavior result (impulse buy)

The main inputs influencing affective responses in offline retail settings are ambient signals like lighting, music tempo, store layout, aroma, and tactile interaction. The association between store atmospherics and purchase intention is mediated by pleasure and arousal, as empirical research regularly shows.

Online stimuli use technical affordances in place of tangible sensory cues in digital situations. Digital triggers include scarcity messaging, algorithm-driven recommendations, website aesthetics, and ease of navigation. Personalized targeting and interface interactivity make up for the lack of tactile engagement.

S-O-R theory offers a strong explanatory model for comparative analysis in the Indian environment, where organized physical retail and e-commerce are both growing quickly.

2.3 Emotional Arousal and Hedonistic Consumption

Hedonic consumption is intrinsically tied to impulsive purchasing. Hedonistic shopping incentives place a strong premium on escapism, fantasy, emotional fulfillment, and

experience satisfaction. Hedonistic purchasing is not as restricted by rational assessment as utilitarian consuming.

Hedonic desire raises the likelihood of making impulsive purchases, according to research. Impulsive decisions are often preceded by emotional states including exhilaration, stress release, and mood enhancement. This is especially important in the retail fashion industry, where identity creation and symbolic self-expression are important.

Fashion consumption is becoming more and more entwined with social identity, prestige projection, and lifestyle signaling in India's aspirational middle-class market. Therefore, when compared to product categories that are solely utilitarian, hedonic motives may have higher impulsive impacts.

3. Research Objectives

RO1: To examine the impact of offline retail stimuli on impulse buying behaviour in India.

RO2: To analyse the influence of online technological stimuli on impulse buying behaviour.

RO3: To investigate the role of social media engagement in shaping impulsive purchases.

RO4: To test the mediating role of social media between online stimuli and impulse buying.

RO5: To evaluate the moderating effect of digital payment ease.

4. Hypotheses Development

H1: Offline sensory stimuli positively influence impulse buying behaviour.

H2: Online technological stimuli positively influence impulse buying behaviour.

H3: Social media engagement positively influences impulse buying behaviour.

H4: Social media engagement mediates the online stimulus–impulse buying relationship.

H5: Digital payment ease moderates the relationship between online stimuli and impulse buying.

5. Methodology

A structured questionnaire was administered to 524 Indian consumers across metropolitan and Tier-II cities. Validated multi-item scales measured constructs on seven-point Likert scales. Reliability was confirmed through Cronbach's alpha (>0.80). Convergent validity was established via AVE (>0.50), and discriminant validity through HTMT ratios (<0.85). Structural modelling was conducted using SEM.

6. Measurement Model Results

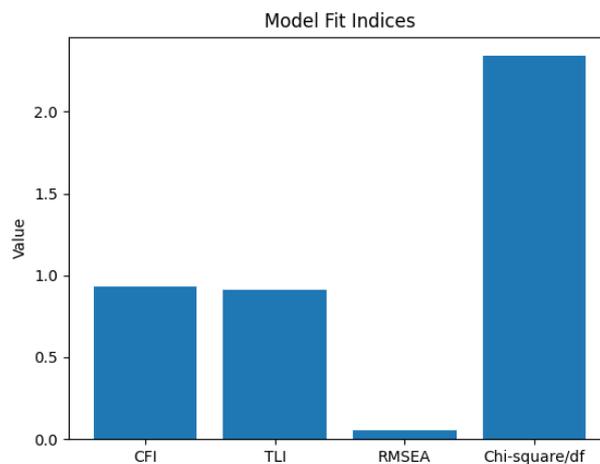
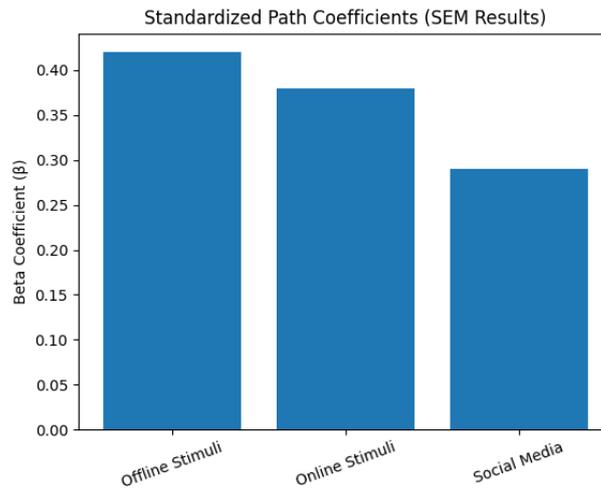
Construct	CR	AVE	Alpha
Offline Stimuli	0.89	0.62	0.87
Online Stimuli	0.91	0.65	0.89
Social Media	0.90	0.63	0.88
Impulse Buying	0.92	0.67	0.90

7. Structural Model Results

Path	β	t-value	Decision
Offline \rightarrow Impulse	0.42	6.85	Supported
Online \rightarrow Impulse	0.38	5.94	Supported
Social Media \rightarrow Impulse	0.29	4.76	Supported
Online \rightarrow Social Media	0.51	8.12	Supported
Moderation Effect	0.17	3.66	Supported

Model Fit: CFI=0.93; TLI=0.91; RMSEA=0.052; $\chi^2/df=2.34$

8. Graphical Presentation of Results



9. DISCUSSION

The empirical findings demonstrate that both physical and digital stimuli significantly shape impulse buying behaviour in India. Although offline atmospherics retain experiential richness, digital environments are increasingly narrowing the gap through AI-driven personalisation and frictionless UPI-enabled payment systems. Social media platforms amplify impulsiveness by embedding consumption within aspirational social narratives.

10. CONCLUSION

This research advances emerging-market retail scholarship by integrating experiential, technological, and social drivers within a unified SEM framework. The findings underscore the strategic necessity of synchronising physical store design with digital ecosystem innovation.

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