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Short-Video Marketing and Impulse Buying Among Young Indian Consumers

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ABSTRACT

Short-form video has become one of the most influential marketing environments for young Indian consumers, combining entertainment, social interaction and product discovery in a single scrolling feed. Brands, creators and platforms increasingly use this format to move audiences from attention to purchase within seconds. This paper examines how short-video marketing may stimulate impulse buying among young consumers and what psychological, social and technological mechanisms sit behind the process. Drawing on published secondary material from academic journals, regulatory documents and industry commentary, the study develops a conceptual framework based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response model, supported by flow theory, uses and gratifications theory and the elaboration likelihood model. The analysis argues that impulse purchases arise less from any single advertisement than from the interaction of rapid content pacing, creator credibility, scarcity cues and a shortened path from viewing to payment. The paper also discusses ethical concerns, including blurred disclosure of paid promotion, financial strain among young buyers and post-purchase regret. Managerial and policy suggestions are offered, and five propositions are presented for future empirical testing. The study contributes a structured explanation of an emerging marketing phenomenon and a research agenda for scholars working in consumer behaviour and digital marketing.

Keywords: Short-Video Marketing, Impulse Buying, Social Commerce, Influencer Marketing, Consumer Behaviour, Gen Z, Digital Advertising

1. INTRODUCTION

Marketing communication has moved steadily from long, planned messages towards brief, repeated and highly personalised ones. The latest stage of this shift is short-form video, in which a clip of fifteen to sixty seconds can introduce a product, show it in use, display a price and link to a purchase page. Platforms built around vertical video have attracted very large audiences in India, particularly among young people who spend a significant part of their leisure time on mobile phones. After the restrictions imposed on several foreign applications in 2020, domestic and global alternatives expanded their presence, and short-video features were added to existing social media and video platforms.

For marketers, this format is attractive for three reasons. It captures attention quickly, it feels less like advertising than traditional commercials, and it can be connected directly to e-commerce functions. For the consumer, the experience is pleasurable, immersive and social. The same qualities that make the format enjoyable also create conditions in which unplanned purchases become more likely. A viewer who opens an application for entertainment may encounter a product demonstration from a trusted creator, see a limited-time discount and complete payment within a minute, without having intended to buy anything.

Impulse buying has been studied for decades in physical retail and, more recently, in online shopping. It is generally understood as a sudden, often powerful urge to buy something immediately, with limited deliberation about consequences. Short-video platforms offer a new setting for this behaviour because they merge the stimulus, the emotion and the transaction in a continuous stream. Understanding how this happens is useful both for marketers who wish to design effective campaigns and for regulators and educators who are concerned about consumer welfare.

This paper asks how short-video marketing influences impulse buying among young Indian consumers, which elements of the format are most relevant, and what responsibilities arise for brands and platforms. It develops a conceptual explanation based on established theories and secondary evidence, and it proposes propositions for later empirical research.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The study of impulse buying has its foundation in the work of Rook (1987), who described the buying impulse as a spontaneous and compelling urge that is accompanied by emotional involvement and sometimes conflict. Beatty and Ferrell (1998) extended this line of research by modelling the precursors of impulse buying, including the shopper's affective states, the time and money available and the in-store browsing activity. Their work showed that the urge to buy is influenced by both internal dispositions and external triggers, a distinction that remains central in digital contexts.

The Stimulus-Organism-Response framework proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974) explains how features of an environment act as stimuli that shape internal emotional and cognitive states, which in turn produce approach or avoidance behaviour. This model has been widely adapted to online retail, where website design, visual appeal and social cues are treated as stimuli and pleasure, arousal and involvement as organism states. Short-video environments fit this logic closely, since each clip is a compact bundle of visual, auditory and social stimuli.

Flow theory, associated with Csikszentmihalyi (1990), describes a state of deep absorption in an activity in which time perception is altered and attention is fully engaged. Hoffman and Novak (1996) applied the concept to online navigation and suggested that flow increases exploratory behaviour and positive attitude. Uses and gratifications research, originating with Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1973), explains media use through the needs that audiences seek to satisfy, such as entertainment, social interaction, information and escape. Together these perspectives suggest that users come to short-video platforms for gratification, become absorbed in the stream and are then exposed to persuasive messages while their critical guard is relatively low.

Persuasion research contributes a further dimension. The elaboration likelihood model of Petty and Cacioppo (1986) proposes that persuasion operates through a central route, involving careful evaluation of arguments, and a peripheral route, involving cues such as attractiveness, popularity and credibility of the source. Short videos with limited time for argument tend to rely heavily on peripheral cues. Cialdini (2009) identifies principles such as social proof, scarcity and liking that are frequently used in influence settings, and each of them is visible in creator-led promotional content.

Research on influencer marketing indicates that audiences develop one-sided parasocial relationships with creators, feeling familiarity and trust without personal interaction. This trust can transfer to products endorsed by the creator. At the same time, concerns about transparency have led regulators to act. In India, the Advertising Standards Council of India issued guidelines for influencer advertising in digital media in 2021, requiring clear disclosure of material connections, and the Central Consumer Protection Authority

has addressed misleading advertisements and endorsements under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019. These developments show that the persuasive power of creators is now recognised as a matter of consumer protection as well as marketing.

The review reveals three gaps. Much of the literature on impulse buying concerns websites and physical stores, with fewer works on short-video feeds. Studies of influencer marketing often focus on purchase intention rather than unplanned purchase. And few studies integrate the psychological, social and technological aspects of the format into one framework, which this paper attempts to do.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To explain the features of short-video marketing that are relevant to consumer purchase behaviour.
- To analyse the psychological and social mechanisms through which short-video content may trigger impulse buying among young consumers.
- To examine the role of creator credibility and shoppable features in shortening the path from attention to purchase.
- To discuss ethical and regulatory concerns arising from impulse-oriented video marketing.
- To suggest practical measures for marketers, platforms and policymakers and to propose testable propositions for future research.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study follows a descriptive and conceptual design based on secondary sources. The material consulted includes peer-reviewed articles and classic texts on consumer behaviour, persuasion and media use, regulatory documents and guidelines related to advertising and consumer protection in India, and commentary published by industry bodies and platforms on digital marketing trends. Sources were chosen for their relevance to short-form content, social commerce and impulse buying, and for the credibility of the publisher.

Thematic analysis was used to group the evidence into stimulus features, psychological states and behavioural outcomes, consistent with the Stimulus-Organism-Response structure. The resulting themes were then used to derive propositions. Since no primary survey was conducted, the paper makes no statistical claims about a particular sample of consumers. Its findings are analytical and intended to guide empirical work.

5. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The framework treats the short-video environment as a set of stimuli, the consumer's internal reaction as the organism, and the purchase decision as the response. The stimuli include content pacing and autoplay, creator presence, visual and audio appeal, price and scarcity messages, social signals such as likes and comments, and embedded shopping features. These are not independent. A product demonstration by a trusted creator becomes more persuasive when combined with a visible countdown and a purchase link.

The organism stage consists of affective and cognitive states. On the affective side are enjoyment, arousal, curiosity and fear of missing out. On the cognitive side are reduced deliberation, reliance on peripheral cues and a sense of trust in the creator. Flow plays a mediating role because absorbed viewers are less likely to pause and evaluate. Individual traits such as impulsiveness, materialism and self-control moderate how strongly these states translate into action.

The response stage covers the urge to buy, the decision to purchase and post-purchase outcomes such as satisfaction, regret and returns. Situational conditions, including disposable income, availability of digital payment methods and cash-on-delivery or easy return options, determine whether an urge becomes an actual purchase. The framework therefore suggests that the same content can lead to very different outcomes depending on the viewer's disposition and circumstances.

6. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Stimulus Features of Short-Video Content

The first notable feature is pacing. Short videos are edited quickly, change visuals frequently and are delivered through an endless, autoplaying feed. This pattern keeps attention continuously engaged and gives little natural pause for reflection. Because the next clip begins automatically, the viewer makes many micro-decisions about whether to continue, and a product that appears within this rhythm receives attention before deliberate evaluation begins.

The second feature is the use of demonstration. Unlike static advertisements, video shows a product in action, which reduces uncertainty about appearance and function. For categories such as fashion, beauty, kitchen gadgets and accessories, a vivid demonstration can create a strong desire at once. The third feature is the presence of scarcity and price cues, such as limited stock, countdown timers and festival discounts, which push the viewer towards immediate action. Other stimulus elements, such as likes, comments and shares, add social validation and create a bandwagon effect that reinforces the desirability of the product, while shoppable links and instant payment reduce friction between desire and purchase.

6.2 Emotional and Cognitive Responses

The emotional appeal of short videos lies in humour, music, trends and relatable storytelling. Positive emotion and arousal have long been associated with unplanned buying, since people in a good mood are more willing to reward themselves. When the product appears as part of entertaining content, the positive feeling may attach to the product itself. Fear of missing out strengthens this effect, particularly when the viewer sees peers or admired creators using the item.

Cognitively, the format encourages reliance on quick judgements. With only seconds available, there is little room for detailed argument, so viewers rely on cues such as the creator's popularity, the number of likes and the apparent enthusiasm of the presentation. According to the elaboration likelihood model, this peripheral processing tends to produce attitudes that are formed easily but may be less stable. This may partly explain why some purchases made after viewing short videos are later regretted or returned.

6.3 Creator Credibility and Parasocial Trust

Creators occupy an unusual position between friend and advertiser. Their audiences follow them for entertainment or advice and often perceive them as more authentic than conventional brand spokespersons. This perceived authenticity increases the persuasive force of product mentions. Micro-creators with smaller but closely engaged audiences are often considered particularly credible because their recommendations appear personal and less commercial.

The difficulty arises when the commercial nature of the content is not obvious. If paid promotion is mentioned only briefly or hidden among many hashtags, viewers may take the endorsement as spontaneous opinion. This is the reason for disclosure rules, and compliance with them is a matter of both legal obligation and long-term trust. Brands that depend on concealed promotion risk damage to credibility once audiences realise how the content was produced.

6.4 The Shortened Path to Purchase

Traditional marketing models describe a sequence from awareness to interest, desire and action, with each stage separated by time and effort. Social commerce compresses this sequence. A viewer can move from awareness to action in one continuous interaction through shoppable tags, in-app stores and saved payment credentials. Digital payment systems, particularly instant account-to-account transfers, remove the need to enter card details or visit another website.

From a marketing viewpoint this reduction of friction is an advantage because it captures interest while it is at its peak. From the consumer welfare viewpoint it raises a concern, since the usual cooling-off interval in which a person reconsiders an unplanned purchase is removed. Payment options such as cash on delivery and generous return policies partly offset this concern but also add cost to sellers and may encourage careless ordering.

6.5 Ethical and Regulatory Considerations

Impulse-oriented marketing is not inherently improper, and many purchases made after video exposure bring satisfaction. However, young consumers may be especially vulnerable because they have limited income, strong peer orientation and developing financial habits. Repeated unplanned spending can lead to debt, use of buy-now-pay-later schemes and conflict with family. Practices such as fake urgency, misleading before-and-after demonstrations and undisclosed sponsorship deserve particular scrutiny.

Regulatory attention in India has increased through influencer advertising guidelines and consumer protection rules on misleading advertisements. Even so, enforcement across a very large number of creators is difficult. Industry self-regulation, platform tools for labelling sponsored content and consumer education are therefore important supplements to legal rules.

7. PROPOSITIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

On the basis of the analysis, the following propositions are suggested for empirical testing through a structured questionnaire or experimental design involving young consumers.

- P1: The intensity of exposure to short-video product content is positively associated with the urge to buy impulsively.
- P2: Perceived creator credibility strengthens the relationship between product exposure and purchase urge.
- P3: Scarcity and time-limited price cues increase the likelihood that an urge is converted into immediate purchase.
- P4: The presence of shoppable links and instant payment options reduces the time between exposure and purchase and increases impulse buying.
- P5: Trait impulsiveness and low self-control amplify, while clear disclosure of sponsored content moderates, the effect of video exposure on impulse buying.

A suggested design would use a sample of college students and young professionals across cities, with constructs measured on a five-point scale and analysed through structural equation modelling. Control variables should include age, gender, income, time spent on short-video platforms and prior online shopping experience.

8. FINDINGS

- Short-video marketing combines entertainment, social proof and purchase functions in one continuous experience, which makes unplanned buying more likely than in many traditional media.

- Impulse buying in this setting is the product of interacting stimuli, namely pacing, demonstration, scarcity cues and creator influence, and not of any single element.
- Creator credibility and parasocial trust are powerful peripheral cues, but their value depends on honest disclosure of commercial relationships.
- Shoppable features and instant digital payments reduce friction and shorten the time for reflection, creating both a marketing opportunity and a welfare concern.
- Young consumers with high impulsiveness and limited financial resources are most exposed to regret and financial strain.

9. SUGGESTIONS

For marketers, the most durable approach is to build campaigns that create genuine value and not merely urgency. Honest demonstrations, clear disclosure of paid partnerships, realistic claims and fair return policies lower the chance of regret and protect brand reputation. Working with creators whose audiences match the product, and measuring long-term outcomes such as repeat purchase and return rates in addition to immediate sales, would support healthier growth.

For platforms, design features that give users more control would help. These could include prominent sponsorship labels, optional spending reminders, easy access to order history and a short confirmation step for high-value purchases. Such measures can be presented as part of responsible design without damaging the core experience.

For policymakers and educators, consumer awareness programmes aimed at young people can build understanding of persuasive techniques, fake urgency and responsible use of credit. Regulators may consider clearer standards for disclosure in video formats and stronger mechanisms to handle complaints against misleading creator promotions.

10. LIMITATIONS

This study depends on secondary sources and offers a conceptual explanation without primary data. Much industry commentary on short-video marketing is produced by organisations with commercial interests, which may influence how results are presented. The paper treats young Indian consumers as a broadly similar group, although behaviour differs by language, region, income and education. The speed at which platforms and regulations change may also make some observations dated. Future research using surveys, experiments or platform-level data can address these limitations.

11. CONCLUSION

Short-video marketing has altered the way products are discovered and purchased by young consumers. By combining engaging content, trusted creators, persuasive cues and instant payment, the format shortens the distance between attention and action. This is valuable to marketers, but it also increases the possibility of impulsive and regretted purchases.

The analysis suggests that the future of the format depends on balance. Brands that use its power responsibly, with transparency and respect for the consumer's judgement, are likely to build lasting trust. Platforms and regulators have a complementary role in ensuring that persuasion does not become exploitation. The propositions presented here provide a basis for empirical work that can measure the strength of these relationships and guide ethical practice in a rapidly developing area of digital marketing.

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