The Impact of Influencer Marketing on Impulse Buying: The Role of Social Influence and Situational Factors in Online Shoppers

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Abstract: The fast growth of influencer marketing has greatly influenced how consumers behave in online retail environments. However, its impact on impulse buying—meaning unplanned or spontaneous purchases—is still not fully understood, particularly when combined with social and situational factors. This study aims to investigate the impact of influencer marketing on impulse buying behavior among online shoppers. To provide a stronger theoretical foundation, the research integrates the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) and Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) frameworks to explain how psychological mechanisms drive impulsive behavior. We explore how social influence (peer pressure, online reviews, and influencer credibility) and situational factors (time pressure, discounts, limited offers, and browsing environment) interact to trigger impulse purchases. The study also considers moderating consumer traits such as self-control, materialism, and trust, as well as platform-specific influences (Instagram vs. TikTok). Finally, we discuss the ethical implications of influencer marketing in promoting responsible and sustainable digital consumerism.

I. Introduction

In recent years, influencer marketing has become a key part of online advertising, with brands increasingly turning to social media influencers to promote their products. These influencers—individuals with the ability to affect the purchasing decisions of their f ollowers—have been shown to significantly impact consumer behavior, particularly in online shopping. However, while the effec ts of influencer marketing on purchase intention and loyalty have been well-documented, its influence on more immediate and spontaneous behaviors, such as impulse buying, remains under-explored.

Impulse buying means making unplanned purchases triggered by emotional or psychological factors. The rise of e-commerce platforms, paired with the pervasive reach of social media influencers, has created a unique environment where impulse purchases are more frequent and easier to trigger. However, the mechanisms through which influencer marketing encourages impulse buying, especially in conjunction with social and situational factors, are yet to be fully understood. To strengthen this understanding, the present study incorporates the S-O-R model, which explains how external stimuli (influencer content) shape consumers' internal emotional and cognitive states that lead to responses (impulse buying), and the ELM, which explains how persuasion through central and peripheral cues influences decision-making. Together, these frameworks provide a robust base for examining the psychological mechanisms at play in influencer-driven impulse buying. This study aims to bridge this gap by exploring the relationship between influencer marketing and impulse buying behavior, and how various psychological and contextual elements play a role in shaping online shopping decisions.

II. Literature Review

Innfluencer marketing has gained substantial attention in recent years due to its potential to shape consumer behavior. Previous studies have focused on its impact on purchase intention, brand awareness, and consumer loyalty (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011). Influencers, particularly those with high credibility and relatability, are seen as more effective in persuading consumers (Boerman, Kruikemeier, & Zuiderveen Borgesius, 2017). However, much of this research has been confined to examini ng purchase intentions rather than spontaneous buying behaviors.

Theoretical Foundations: S-O-R and ELM Frameworks

To explain the psychological processes that connect influencer marketing and impulse buying, this study integrates two theoretical perspectives—the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) model and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). The S-O-R fr amework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) suggests that environmental stimuli such as influencer posts act as triggers (stimuli), generating internal emotional or cognitive responses (organism), which then lead to behavioral outcomes (response), such as impuls e buying. The ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) explains how persuasion occurs via two routes: the central route (logical, message-based processing) and the peripheral route (emotional or source-based cues). Influencer marketing often relies on the peripheral route, where factors like influencer attractiveness, credibility, and authenticity play a significant role in shaping consumer decisions.

Moderating Factors: Consumer Traits and Platforms

Consumer traits like self-control, materialism, and trust influence how individuals respond to influencer stimuli. Low self-control increases impulsivity, materialism amplifies purchase desire, and trust enhances acceptance of influencer messages. Additionally,

platform-specific factors, such as Instagram's aesthetic appeal versus TikTok's fast-paced content, shape engagement and impulse tendencies differently.

Impulse buying, as a distinct form of consumer behavior, has been explored extensively in traditional retail settings. Researchers such as Rook (1987) and Puri (1996) highlighted the role of emotional triggers, product attractiveness, and environmental factors in influencing impulse purchases. More recently, studies have shown that online shopping environments, which provide greater ease and immediacy of purchase, may amplify the likelihood of impulse buying (Chevalier & Goolsbee, 2003).

Social influence is another key factor influencing impulse buying behavior. Peer pressure, online reviews, and influencer credibility are all components of social influence that may shape purchasing decisions (Cialdini, 2007). Influencers, who have the ability to sway consumer attitudes and perceptions, have been shown to exert significant influence over their followers' purchasing habits. Yet, little attention has been paid to how these social influences interact with situational factors, such as time pressure, discounts, and limited-time offers, in triggering impulse buying behavior in online shoppers.

Research Gap

While existing studies have extensively investigated the impact of influencer marketing on purchase intention and brand loyalty, they fall short of exploring how influencer marketing, when coupled with social influences and situational triggers, specifically leads to impulse buying. Impulse buying is a highly spontaneous, emotion-driven behavior, and understanding how it manifests in an online environment shaped by influencer marketing, peer pressure, and contextual factors is an area that remains under-explored. This research intends to fill this gap by analyzing the combined effects of these factors on consumer buying patterns in e-commerce.

Problem Statement

Despite the significant rise of influencer marketing, there is a limited understanding of how it drives impulse buying among online shoppers, particularly when shaped by social influences and situational factors. This lack of understanding presents challenges for brands trying to design effective and ethical marketing strategies that encourage consumer engagement without exploiting psychological vulnerabilities. Without a clear understanding of how influencer marketing, combined with social influence and situational factors, triggers impulse purchases, businesses may struggle to optimize their marketing campaigns for the digital age.

Objectives

The primary objectives of this research are:

To examine the relationship between influencer marketing and impulse buying behavior among online shoppers.

To analyze the role of social influence (peer pressure, online reviews, and influencer credibility) in shaping impulse buying decisions.

To investigate how situational factors (time pressure, discounts, limited offers, and browsing environment) affect online shoppers' tendency to make impulse purchases.

To explore the combined effect of influencer marketing, social influence, and situational triggers on consumer buying patterns in e-commerce platforms.

To provide managerial and strategic recommendations for businesses on effectively leveraging influencer marketing while addressing the psychological and situational factors that drive impulse buying.

III. Research Methodology

This study will employ a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research techniques to explore the complex relationship between influencer marketing, social influence, situational factors, and impulse buying.

1. Quantitative Analysis

A survey-based methodology will be used to collect data from online shoppers who regularly engage with influencer-marketing content. The survey will include items measuring:

The frequency and type of influencer marketing exposure (e.g., product endorsements, sponsored posts).

The level of social influence perceived (e.g., peer pressure, influencer credibility).

The situational factors present during the shopping process (e.g., time pressure, discounts).

Impulse buying tendencies (e.g., spontaneous purchases, emotional triggers).

Data will be analyzed using statistical techniques such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to examine the relationships between influencer marketing, social influence, situational factors, and impulse buying behavior.

2. Qualitative Analysis

In-depth interviews will be conducted with a subset of participants to gain a deeper understanding of the psychological mechanisms at play when influencer marketing triggers impulse purchases. These interviews will focus on exploring participants' emotional and cognitive responses to influencer marketing, social influence, and situational factors.

3. Sampling Strategy

The study will target online shoppers aged 18-45 who frequently use e-commerce platforms and follow influencers on social media. A stratified random sampling method will be used to ensure a diverse sample in terms of gender, income, and geographical location.

4. Data Collection Tools

Survey Instrument: A structured questionnaire incorporating validated scales to measure key variables.

Interview Guide: A semi-structured guide for in-depth interviews to explore consumer attitudes and experiences.

5. Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data will be analyzed using SPSS and AMOS for SEM, while qualitative data will be analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes related to impulse buying.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Sample Characteristics (N = 100)

Demographic Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	48	48%
Female	52	52%
Age Group		
18-25	45	45%
26-35	35	35%
36-45	20	20%
Frequency of Online Shopping		
Weekly	30	30%
Monthly	50	50%
Occasionally	20	20%

Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev	Range	Scale Description
Influencer Marketing Exposure	3.8	0.9	1–5	1 = Low, 5 = High
Social Influence (Composite)	3.6	1.0	1–5	Includes peer pressure, reviews
Situational Factors (Composite)	3.4	0.8	1–5	Includes time pressure, discounts
Impulse Buying Tendency	3.9	1.1	1–5	Frequency of impulse purchases

Reliability Analysis

Using Cronbach's Alpha to test the internal consistency of the multi-item scales:

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Influencer Marketing	5	0.85
Social Influence	6	0.88
Situational Factors	5	0.82
Impulse Buying Tendency	4	0.87

All scales show good reliability ($\alpha > 0.8$).

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation coefficients among main constructs:

Variables	Influencer Marketing	Social Influence	Situational Factors	Impulse Buying
Influencer Marketing	1	0.62**	0.56**	0.70**
Social Influence	0.62**	1	0.48**	0.68**
Situational Factors	0.56**	0.48**	1	0.65**
Impulse Buying	0.70**	0.68**	0.65**	1

p < 0.01

Interpretation: There are strong positive correlations between influencer marketing exposure, social influence, situational factors, and impulse buying tendency. This indicates that as exposure to influencer marketing and social/situational pressures increase, so does impulse buying behavior.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

A simple SEM was conducted to test the hypothesized relationships:

Model Fit Indices:

Chi-square (χ^2) = 120.3, df = 85, p = 0.01

Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.95

Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) = 0.93

Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.05

These indices suggest an acceptable model fit.

Path Coefficients (Standardized Estimates)

Path	Coefficient (β)	Significance (p-value)
Influencer Marketing → Impulse Buying	0.42	< 0.001
Social Influence → Impulse Buying	0.35	< 0.001
Situational Factors → Impulse Buying	0.28	< 0.01
Influencer Marketing → Social Influence	0.60	< 0.001
Influencer Marketing → Situational Factors	0.45	< 0.01

Interpretation of SEM Results:

Influencer marketing has a strong and significant direct impact on impulse buying ($\beta = 0.42$).

Social influence also significantly affects impulse buying behavior ($\beta = 0.35$).

Situational factors have a moderate but significant effect on impulse buying ($\beta = 0.28$).

Influencer marketing significantly predicts social influence and situational factors, indicating that influencer campaigns may enhance perceived social pressure and situational triggers.

Overall, the model explains approximately 62% of the variance in impulse buying behavior ($R^2 = 0.62$).

IV. Summary of Findings:

Influencer marketing significantly increases impulse buying tendencies among online shoppers.

Social influence-through peer pressure, online reviews, and influencer credibility-plays a substantial role in impulse buying decisions.

Situational factors such as time pressure and promotional discounts contribute meaningfully to impulse purchases.

Influencer marketing indirectly influences impulse buying by shaping social influence and situational contexts.

Ethical considerations

While influencer marketing can effectively drive impulse purchases, it raises ethical concerns regarding consumer manipulation and digital well-being. Ethical marketing requires transparency in sponsorship disclosures, responsible persuasion tactics, and a commitment to preventing exploitation of vulnerable consumers. This study emphasizes balancing persuasive strategies with ethical digital consumerism, encouraging marketers to design campaigns that promote informed decision-making and sustainable consumption.

V. Conclusion

This study provides empirical evidence on the significant impact of influencer marketing on impulse buying behavior among online shoppers. The findings reveal that influencer marketing not only directly encourages spontaneous purchase decisions but also amplifies the effects of social influence factors such as peer pressure, online reviews, and influencer credibility. Integrating S-O-R and ELM theories provides a psychological basis for understanding these processes. Additionally, situational factors like time pressure, discounts, and limited-time offers further enhance consumers' tendency to make impulse purchases. Future research should also consider how consumer traits (e.g., self-control, trust) and platform differences (e.g., Instagram vs. TikTok) moderate these effects. Finally, businesses must balance effective persuasion with ethical responsibility to foster long-term consumer trust and well-being. Additionally, situational factors like time pressure, discounts, and limited-time offers further enhance consumers' tendency to make impulse purchases.

The structural equation modeling results demonstrate that influencer marketing plays a pivotal role in shaping the online shopping environment by increasing both social and situational triggers that lead to impulse buying. Together, these factors explain a substantial proportion of the variance in impulse buying behavior, underscoring the multifaceted nature of consumer decision-making in e-commerce settings.

For managers, these findings show how influencer marketing strategies can connect better with social and situational factors to encourage impulse buying more effectively. At the same time, marketers should ensure their strategies remain ethical and do not take advantage of consumers' vulnerabilities.

In summary, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how influencer marketing, combined with social and situational factors, drives impulse buying in online shopping contexts, offering valuable guidance for both academics and practitioners aiming to optimize digital marketing strategies.

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