

E-Commerce Flash Sales on Consumer Impulse Buying and Decision Making: A Study Based on Literature Review

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Abstract

Impulse buying has become an important area of study in consumer behavior, especially within India's rapidly growing retail and e-commerce sectors. This literature review examines how flash sales influence impulse buying behavior by creating urgency through limited-time offers, heavy discounts, and scarcity cues. The study identifies key triggers such as personalization, promotional notifications, social proof, and pricing strategies that reduce rational evaluation and prompt unplanned purchases. Results show that emotional factors like excitement, hedonic motivation, and fear of missing out (FOMO) significantly drive impulsive decisions. While flash sales enhance perceived savings and shopping enjoyment, they also lead to post-purchase outcomes such as satisfaction or regret and raise ethical concerns about consumer vulnerability. The synthesized findings provide a strong theoretical foundation for future research on impulse buying in digital marketplaces.

Introduction

Impulse buying has gained substantial attention in consumer behavior research, particularly in the context of India's rapidly evolving retail and e-commerce sectors. The expansion of organized retail, increased internet penetration, and aggressive digital marketing practices have significantly altered consumer purchasing patterns. Indian consumers are now frequently exposed to promotional stimuli such as flash sales, limited-time discounts, and scarcity messages, which are designed to create urgency and emotional excitement. Prior research suggests that these stimuli often disrupt rational decision-making processes, leading consumers toward spontaneous and unplanned purchases driven more by emotions than by necessity (Verma & Verma, 2012; Prasad & Aryasri, 2011).

The literature consistently establishes impulse buying as a multidimensional construct shaped by emotional

arousal, hedonic motivation, and situational cues rather than purely cognitive evaluation. Studies conducted in the Indian context emphasize that excitement, pleasure, and emotional gratification play a dominant role in impulsive purchase behavior, while rational assessment is often minimized or postponed until after the purchase (Mitta Chawla & Sondhi, 2016; Dash, Schiffman & Berenson, 2013). Promotional cues such as discounts, attractive displays, and limited-period offers have been shown to significantly reduce consumers' self-control and increase unplanned buying across both offline and online retail environments (Sinha & Uniyal, 2005; Mathur & Gupta, 2014).

With the rise of e-commerce, flash sales have emerged as one of the most powerful tools for stimulating impulse buying. Research indicates that perceived scarcity, time pressure, and exclusivity associated with flash sales heighten consumers' urge to buy by limiting deliberative thought and amplifying emotional responses (Dsilva & Elangovan, 2021; Bedi & Sharma, 2017). Digital platforms further intensify impulsive behavior through ease of navigation, visual appeal, and instant checkout options, which shorten decision-making time and encourage spontaneous purchases (Sharma & Mittal, 2014; Tandon, Kiran & Sah, 2016).

Several studies also highlight the role of individual differences and psychological drivers in impulsive buying behavior. Materialism, hedonic orientation, and fear of missing out (FOMO) have been found to significantly increase consumers' susceptibility to flash sale tactics, particularly among millennials and young consumers (Sen & Nayak, 2019; Pandey & Chawla, 2020). While such promotions enhance shopping enjoyment and perceived value, they are often followed by post-purchase guilt or regret, indicating an internal conflict inherent in impulsive decisions (Mitta Chawla & Sondhi, 2016; Badgaiyan & Verma, 2014).

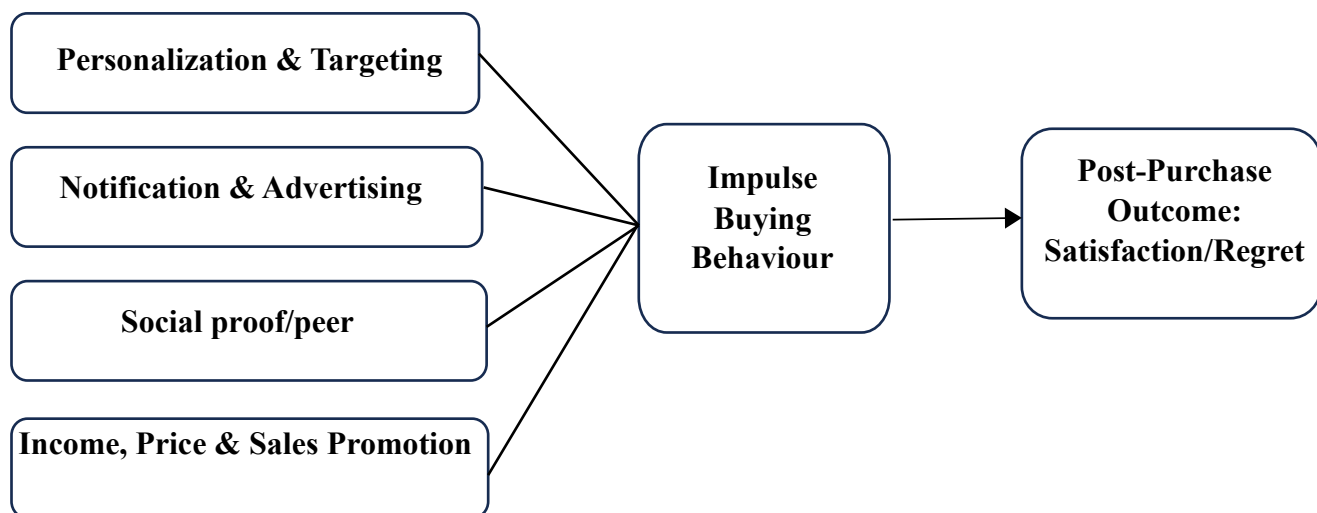
Although extensive research has examined impulse buying and promotional strategies independently, there

remains a need to integrate these insights to better understand how flash sale mechanisms uniquely influence consumer behavior in the Indian digital marketplace. Recent empirical evidence further underscores ethical concerns, noting that excessive reliance on scarcity cues and urgency may exploit consumer vulnerability by triggering emotional decision-making at the expense of rational evaluation (Suguna & Nivedha, 2025). Therefore, the present literature review synthesizes prior studies to establish a comprehensive theoretical foundation for analyzing impulse buying behavior during flash sales, with particular emphasis on emotional arousal, situational triggers, and digital marketing stimuli within the Indian context.

Objective of the Study

- ✓ To analyze the impact of flash sales characteristics on consumers' impulse buying behavior
- ✓ To assess the effects of flash sales on consumer satisfaction.

Research Methodology



(Conceptual Model of Influencing Factors and Post-Purchase Outcomes in Impulse Buying)

Factors Influencing Impulse Buying Behavior

The conceptual framework begins with key factors that trigger impulse buying. Personalization and targeting provide tailored recommendations that increase product relevance and draw immediate attention (Sharma & Mittal, 2014). Notification and advertising use timely

The present study adopts a literature review-based research methodology to examine impulse buying behavior during flash sales in the Indian context. The study is conceptual in nature and relies entirely on secondary data collected from published journal articles, research papers, books, and credible online academic sources related to impulse buying, flash sales, consumer psychology, and digital marketing. A systematic review approach was used to identify and analyze relevant studies, which were then examined through qualitative content analysis to identify common themes such as emotional arousal, urgency, fear of missing out (FOMO), and promotional influence. This methodology helps in synthesizing existing knowledge, identifying research gaps, and developing a strong theoretical foundation for future empirical research.

Conceptual Framework

This conceptual diagram highlights the major factors influencing impulse buying during flash sale events and explains how they impact shoppers' emotions and buying outcomes.

alerts and promotional messages, creating urgency and prompting quick decisions (Dsilva & Elangovan, 2021). Social proof and peer influence, such as ratings and reviews, reduce uncertainty and encourage conformity (Yadav & Pathak, 2017). Income, attractive pricing, discounts, and sales promotions make purchases more accessible and desirable, motivating spontaneous buying (Sen & Nayak, 2019; Mathur & Gupta, 2014).

These factors work together to stimulate impulsive purchase tendencies.

2. Impulse Buying Behavior

Impulse buying behavior refers to unplanned and spontaneous purchases made when consumers are exposed to emotional or situational triggers. In this framework, marketing stimuli like personalization, urgency cues, social influence, and sales deals reduce consumers' rational evaluation and increase impulsive actions. Such behavior often occurs during flash sales when perceived scarcity and limited time heighten emotional response. Rather than comparing alternatives, consumers act on immediate desire and perceived opportunity. The behavior reflects a shift from deliberative to affective decision-making. This process highlights how external triggers can override cognitive control and prompt impulsive purchases.

3. Post-Purchase Outcomes

Following an impulse purchase, consumers may experience either satisfaction or regret. Satisfaction arises when the purchase meets or exceeds expectations, providing emotional gratification and reinforcing the positive outcome (Mitta Chawla & Sondhi, 2016). In contrast, regret occurs when consumers later perceive the purchase as unnecessary or financially imprudent, leading to internal conflict (Dash, Schiffman, & Berenson, 2013). Regret often reflects the tension between emotional impulse and rational judgment. These outcomes influence future shopping behavior and overall consumer well-being. Understanding both outcomes helps explain the emotional consequences of impulse buying.

Findings

The present study finds that flash sales strongly influence impulse buying by creating urgency through limited-time offers, heavy discounts, and scarcity messages. Emotional factors such as excitement, hedonic motivation, and fear of missing out (FOMO) reduce rational thinking, leading consumers to make unplanned purchases. While flash sales enhance perceived savings and shopping enjoyment, many consumers experience post-purchase guilt, showing internal conflict and reduced satisfaction.

These findings are supported by prior research. Mitta Chawla and Sondhi (2016) found that emotional arousal and situational triggers drive impulsive buying and

often lead to regret. Dsilva and Elangovan (2021) reported that scarcity and time pressure in flash sales significantly increase impulsive purchases. Bedi and Sharma (2017) and Pandey and Chawla (2020) highlighted FOMO as a major psychological driver of spontaneous buying. Suguna and Nivedha (2025) emphasized ethical concerns, warning that excessive urgency-based promotions may exploit consumer vulnerability. Overall, both the present study and previous research indicate that flash sales stimulate impulsive behavior through emotional and situational factors.

Conclusion

The review of literature clearly indicates that impulse buying during flash sales is driven primarily by emotional and psychological factors rather than rational decision-making. Limited-time offers, heavy discounts, scarcity cues, and exclusivity create a sense of urgency that encourages consumers to make spontaneous and unplanned purchases. Emotional arousal, hedonic motivation, and fear of missing out (FOMO) significantly reduce self-control, often resulting in post-purchase guilt or regret. While flash sales enhance shopping enjoyment and perceived value, they also raise ethical concerns, as repeated exposure to urgency-driven promotions can exploit consumer vulnerability, particularly among young and frequent online shoppers. Overall, understanding the emotional, situational, and psychological triggers of impulse buying can help both consumers make more informed decisions and marketers design ethical promotional strategies.

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