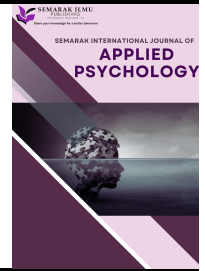




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Regret After Impulse Buying in Social Media Environments: A Secondary Data Analysis of Consumer Psychology

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ABSTRACT

Social media platforms have significantly reshaped consumer behavior by creating highly stimulating digital environments that promote unplanned, emotionally driven purchases. Unlike traditional retail settings, platforms like Instagram and TikTok use personalized algorithms, urgency cues, and influencer content to trigger impulsive consumption. Despite the convenience and excitement of digital shopping, many consumers report feelings of regret after making impulsive purchases, particularly when the product fails to meet expectations or leads to financial dissatisfaction. The problem this study addresses is the psychological consequence of impulsive buying in social media contexts, specifically, the emergence of post-purchase regret and its influence on future behavior. The purpose of this research is to explore the emotional and cognitive pathways from impulsive decision-making to regret and to identify how regret functions not only as an outcome but as a feedback mechanism in digital consumption. This study adopts a secondary data approach by analyzing findings from 25 peer-reviewed articles published between 2013 and 2024. Through qualitative thematic analysis, the research identifies four major themes: emotional arousal, interface design, social influence, and post-purchase regret. The results reveal a cyclical behavioral pattern where emotional triggers lead to impulse buying, followed by regret, which in turn influences self-regulation and future purchasing decisions. The study concludes that while impulse buying is often viewed as an isolated act, it sets in motion a psychological cycle that can affect brand trust, digital consumption habits, and long-term decision-making. The findings offer practical insights for marketers and platform developers on how to reduce harm and encourage responsible consumption through ethical and transparent design.

1. Introduction

Social media platforms have rapidly transformed the global retail landscape by merging social interaction, entertainment, and commerce into highly immersive digital ecosystems [1]. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook have evolved beyond their original networking purposes, embedding in-app shopping features, influencer-driven campaigns, and algorithmically targeted

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advertisements [2]. This evolution has significantly shifted consumer decision-making processes from planned, rational evaluations toward impulse buying, spontaneous, affect-driven purchasing behavior characterized by minimal cognitive deliberation [3].

Impulse buying in traditional offline retail was historically driven by store atmospherics, strategic product placement, and promotional cues [4]. In contrast, in social media contexts, these stimuli have intensified due to the immediacy, personalization, and emotional resonance of digital content [5]. Research demonstrates that urgency cues (e.g., “limited-time offer,” countdown timers) [6,7]. Visually captivating content and peer influence through likes, shares, and comments bypass rational decision-making, fostering unplanned purchases. Influencer endorsements enhance perceived trustworthiness and social validation, accelerating purchase intent and reducing perceived risk [8].

While impulse buying may yield short-lived gratification, it frequently leads to post-purchase regret, a negative affective state arising when products fail to meet expectations or when purchases conflict with an individual’s values, needs, or financial constraints [9]. Drawing on Cognitive Dissonance Theory [10]. Such regret can be interpreted as the discomfort resulting from inconsistencies between consumer actions and internal beliefs [11]. In digital commerce, this dissonance is often triggered by product dissatisfaction, unmet delivery expectations, or financial strain caused by impulsive spending [12].

Existing literature [13,14] suggests that regret can diminish brand loyalty, reduce repurchase intention, and stimulate negative word-of-mouth. However, regret can also function as a self-regulatory mechanism, prompting consumers to adopt more cautious, information-driven purchase behaviors [15]. Despite these findings, few studies have examined the cyclical nature of impulse buying and regret within social media commerce, where continuous social proof, algorithmic persuasion, and real-time engagement create a unique decision-making environment.

Although prior research has explored the antecedents of impulse buying and the consequences of regret in e-commerce, there is limited integration of these constructs within the dynamic, socially interactive context of social media commerce. The lack of synthesized frameworks connecting emotional triggers, platform design features, and regret, both as an outcome and as a moderator of future behavior, leaves a critical gap in understanding consumer well-being, brand reputation, and ethical marketing implications.

This study advances the literature on consumer psychology and digital marketing by developing a conceptual framework that integrates impulse buying and post-purchase regret in social media contexts. Insights from this research aim to help marketers balance persuasive strategies with ethical responsibilities, while guiding platform designers in fostering sustainable digital consumption.

Objectives: The objectives of this study are to:

- To identify the key psychological and contextual triggers of impulse buying in social media environments.
- To examine the antecedents and emotional manifestations of post-purchase regret following impulsive purchases.
- To explore regret as both an emotional consequence and a moderating factor influencing future purchase intentions.
- To propose a conceptual framework linking emotional triggers, digital interface design, and consumer self-regulation.

Table 1

Summary of key literature on impulse buying and post-purchase regret in social media contexts (2013–2025)

Study	Context / Sample	Methodology / Focus	Theory / Framework	Key Findings
[16]	236 Vietnamese livestream shoppers	PLS-SEM survey	SOR / FOMO	FOMO mediates between streamer attractiveness, info quality, interactivity, and impulse buying in livestream commerce
[9]	Systematic literature review (54 studies)	Review	TCCM / ADO frameworks	Classified outcomes of impulse buying; mapped cyclical process, including regret/regulatory mechanisms
[17]	467 Chinese livestream shoppers	SEM survey	FOMO / Social Validation	FOMO and social validation jointly mediate the effects of visual appeal on impulse buying
[18]	General consumers	Survey experimental FOMO	Cognitive-affective theory	FOMO appeals strongly predict impulse buying via emotional arousal
[19]	TikTok users	Survey analysis	FOMO / Sales promotion	FOMO and promotions elevate impulse buying in social commerce
[20]	IM-based social commerce users	Qualitative interviews	Trust / Social influence	Mutual trust and shared identity in IM platforms drive purchasing behavior.
[21]	Social commerce users	Mixed-method modeling	SOR / Learning theories	Observational and reinforcement learning drive impulse buying online
[22]	Online consumers	Moderation survey	Personality / Regret	Post-purchase regrets moderate future impulse buying depending on neuroticism and time perspective
[23]	Social media users	Survey analysis	Conspicuous consumption theory	Conspicuous portrayal on social media motivates purchase intentions

The selection of studies published between 2013 and 2025 is intentional and grounded in both theoretical and practical considerations. The year 2013 marks the period when social commerce began its global expansion, driven by the integration of in-platform purchasing features on major social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WeChat [2,24]. This technological shift fundamentally altered consumer decision-making by merging social interaction, entertainment, and commercial transactions into a seamless digital experience.

In the years that followed, rapid advancements in mobile internet penetration, algorithmic targeting, influencer marketing, and live-stream commerce significantly transformed the dynamics of impulse buying and post-purchase regret. Selecting studies up to 2025 ensures the inclusion of the most recent empirical evidence and conceptual developments, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated e-commerce adoption and altered online purchasing behavior patterns [25].

Focusing on this time frame allows for a comprehensive synthesis of both early-stage conceptualizations of social media-driven impulse buying and the latest post-pandemic insights, thereby providing a robust foundation for understanding the evolving interplay between digital triggers, consumer psychology, and regret dynamics in contemporary social commerce environments.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative secondary data synthesis approach to integrate and interpret empirical evidence on the relationship between impulse buying and post-purchase regret within social media environments. Secondary data analysis was selected because it enables the identification of cross-study patterns and theoretical linkages that might be overlooked in a single primary data study, especially given the multifaceted and platform-specific nature of social media commerce. By drawing on diverse empirical sources, the study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological drivers, emotional consequences, and behavioral implications of impulsive online purchasing. The research follows a descriptive–interpretive design, utilizing thematic analysis to extract recurring psychological triggers, emotional responses, and behavioral outcomes reported in prior studies.

2.2 Data Sources and Search Strategy

A systematic literature search was conducted across three major academic databases, Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar, to ensure broad and high-quality coverage of peer-reviewed studies. Google Scholar was included to capture relevant studies from emerging regions or newly indexed journals that may not yet be fully represented in Scopus or ScienceDirect. The search was performed between January 2024 and March 2024, using the following keyword strings and Boolean operators:

("impulse buying" OR "impulsive purchase") AND ("post-purchase regret" OR "consumer regret") AND ("social media" OR "digital platforms" OR "online shopping")

The search was limited to English-language publications from 2013 to 2024. This period was chosen because 2013 marks the onset of significant integration of shopping features into major social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WeChat, as well as the acceleration of algorithm-driven personalization and mobile payment adoption, both critical enablers of impulsive buying in online environments.

2.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies were included if they met the following criteria:

- Published in peer-reviewed journals or reputable conference proceedings.
- Empirically examined impulse buying and post-purchase regret in online or social media contexts.
- Provided measurable psychological or behavioral outcomes.
- Used consumer-based samples rather than seller or managerial perspectives.

Studies were excluded if they:

- Focused solely on offline retail environments.
- They were conceptual papers without empirical evidence.
- They were opinion pieces, editorials, or non-academic reports.

2.4 Data Extraction and Coding Process

The full text of each eligible study was reviewed, and key information was extracted into a structured data matrix. Extracted variables included:

- Author(s) and publication year
- Study context and sample characteristics
- Theoretical framework
- Methodology used (quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods)
- Key findings related to impulse buying and post-purchase regret
- Reported mediators, moderators, or influencing factors

Before full-scale coding, a pilot coding round was conducted on three randomly selected studies to refine the coding schema and ensure shared understanding between coders. The extracted data were then imported into NVivo 14 for systematic coding. Two independent coders were involved to minimize researcher bias. Codes were first generated inductively from the data and later refined into broader themes.

2.5 Data Analysis Technique

A thematic analysis was conducted following Braun and Clarke's [26]. Six-phase framework:

- I. Familiarization with the data.
- II. Generating initial codes for key psychological and behavioral constructs.
- III. Searching for themes by grouping related codes.
- IV. Reviewing themes to ensure coherence and consistency.
- V. Defining and naming themes for clarity.
- VI. Creating the final thematic map that links impulse buying triggers, post-purchase regret, and subsequent consumer behaviors.

Thematic analysis was chosen due to its flexibility in identifying both manifest and latent patterns in qualitative evidence, making it particularly suitable for synthesizing findings from diverse empirical studies. The resulting thematic map is presented in the Findings section.

2.6 Summary of Included Studies

A total of 25 peer-reviewed studies published between 2013 and 2024 were included in the final synthesis. These studies cover diverse cultural contexts, platform types, and consumer demographics, providing a comprehensive view of how emotional arousal, interface design, and social influence interact to shape impulse buying behavior, post-purchase regret, and future purchase intentions.

Table 2
Summary of the 25 studies included in the thematic analysis

Study	Country/Context	Sample Size & Characteristics	Research Tool	Main Findings	Theme Category
(27)	China (WeChat social commerce)	(WeChat users; cross-sectional survey)	SEM (signaling theory)	Recommender & product signals affective trust/affection, a stronger urge to buy impulsively.	Impulse buying triggers
(28)	China (s-commerce)	(s-commerce users)	SEM (social influence model)	Social support + source credibility, + peer influence significantly increase impulsive purchase behavior.	Impulse buying triggers
(29)	China (Mogujie image-sharing s-commerce)	(platform users)	SEM (PSI theory)	Parasocial interaction with opinion leaders/users raises the urge to buy impulsively.	Impulse buying triggers
(30)	China (short-video scenario)	Survey + 3 lab experiments	SEM + experiments	Social presence, co-presence, physical presence, impulse-purchase intention; customer inspiration mediates.	Mediating factors
(31)	China (live streaming)	(live-stream viewers)	PLS-SEM	Streamer/environmental cues (interactivity, visibility, entertainment), online impulse buying.	Impulse buying triggers
(32)	China (livestream commerce)	(consumers with livestream shopping)	Literature-grounded empirical synthesis	Identifies livestream impulse buying as spontaneous, irresistible behavior; consolidates antecedents.	Impulse buying triggers
(33)	Taiwan (online promotions)	N=501 consumers (survey) + physiological signals experiment	DSS: survey + field/EEG-like measures	Time-limited promotions + monetary discounts + online reviews significantly increase impulse purchase; time pressure matters.	Impulse buying triggers
(6)	China (e-commerce)	N=580 online shoppers	Survey + ANOVA (Sustainability)	Public self-consciousness, impulse buying, and post-purchase regret; time pressure moderates positively.	Post-purchase regret
(34)	Vietnam (Shopee video, Gen Z)	N = 438 Gen Z users (Likert-scale survey)	PLS-SEM	Internal stimuli (entertainment, educational, escapist, aesthetic) arousal & pleasure impulse buying.	Impulse buying triggers (video stimuli)
(35)	China (short-video live broadcast)	N=709 (clothing category)	Survey (ELM framework)	Comment quality/comprehensiveness/quantity significantly raise impulse buying; commentator credibility.	Impulse buying triggers
(36)	China (short-video live e-commerce)	questionnaire data from 411 short video live-streaming consumers	S-O-R framework	Short video live streaming significantly influences impulse purchases.	Impulse buying triggers (short video)
(37)	China (online reviews)	Eye-tracking participants in simulated shopping	Eye-tracking + behavioral analysis	Review valence/credibility & visual attention shape purchase decisions under the online review's context.	Mediating factors

(38)	China (short-video content)	N = 372 online consumers	SEM	Usefulness, ease of use, entertainment, trust, and purchase intention.	Impulse buying triggers (content features)
(39)	Europe (field experiment)	Online ad field experiment	EJM: introspective pre-study + field experiment	Promotional price cues (–20%) shift click-through & intention, demonstrating real-world promotion effects.	Impulse buying triggers
(40)	UK (steady discount context)	(retail shoppers)	Journal of Public Affairs	Purchase regret under steadily increasing discounts reduces repeat purchases.	Post-purchase regret
(41)	China (live-stream shopping)	(LSS users)	SEM (ECT framework)	Perceived interactivity/quality/value confirmation & satisfaction repurchase; addresses low repurchase & returns.	Post-purchase outcomes
(42)	India (online shoppers)	(multi-retailer sample)	Expectation-confirmation + regret theory (Benchmarking)	Regret reduces repurchase intention and increases brand switching; satisfaction has the opposite effect.	Post-purchase regret
(43)	India (grocery retail)	N=402 shoppers	Survey (correlation analysis)	Positive, significant association between impulse buying and post-purchase regret in low-involvement grocery purchases.	Post-purchase regret
(44)	Vietnam (livestream platforms)	N = 348 livestream viewers (random + snowball sampling)	PLS-SEM	Streamer appearance & competence perceived hedonic/utilitarian value impulsive purchase behavior.	Impulse buying triggers (streamer value)
(45)	China (livestreaming commerce, conceptual review)	Multiple studies (literature synthesis)	Literature review (S-O-R)	Synthesizes S-O-R mechanisms (stimuli-organism-response) across live-stream impulse buying literature.	Theoretical consolidation (S-O-R)
(46)	India (livestreaming commerce context)	N = 463 Indian livestream shoppers	Online survey + PLS-SEM	Sense of flow induced by livestream shopping experience mediates the effect on return intention via impulse buying and regret.	Mediating factors (flow, regret)
(47)	China (s-commerce)	(Mogujie users)	IJIM	Mood-related features: enjoyment; social features PSI; PSI impulse buying tendency.	Mediating factors
(48)	Live streaming commerce (streamer characteristics)	250 valid questionnaires	Questionnaire survey; SEM	Streamer charisma, professionalism, interactivity, trust & flow, impulsive purchase behavior.	Mediating factors (streamer influence)
(49)	Multi-country (services)	(online consumers)	SAGE Open (survey)	Price promotion under a time limit significantly shifts purchase intentions toward immediate buying.	Impulse buying triggers

(50)	Saudi Arabia (social media users)	survey questionnaire to 342 Saudi Arabian consumers	Survey-based analysis	Social media significantly influences impulse buying behavior among consumers.	Impulse buying triggers (social media)
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These studies collectively provide a comprehensive understanding of how emotional arousal, interface design, and social influence interact to shape impulse buying behavior, post-purchase regret, and future purchase intentions.

2.7 Reliability and Validity

To ensure inter-coder reliability, Cohen's Kappa was calculated and achieved a value of 0.86, exceeding the 0.80 threshold recommended by Landis and Koch [51]. For strong agreement. Triangulation was achieved by comparing patterns across multiple databases and methodological designs. Audit trails were maintained to document decision-making during the coding process, ensuring transparency and replicability.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

Since the research relied exclusively on publicly available academic publications, no direct human participation was involved, and formal ethics approval was not required. All sources have been properly acknowledged to respect intellectual property rights and academic integrity. Care was taken to ensure that the interpretation of each study's findings remained faithful to the original authors' conclusions, avoiding selective reporting or misrepresentation.

3. Results

3.1 Overview of Analysis

The thematic analysis of 25 peer-reviewed studies published between 2013 and 2024 revealed four dominant and interrelated themes explaining how social media environments influence impulse buying and subsequent post-purchase regret. Using NVivo 14 for systematic coding, two independent coders applied Braun and Clarke's [26]. A six-phase framework to ensure analytical rigor and minimize bias.

The synthesis shows that emotional triggers, platform design features, and social influence mechanisms act synergistically to stimulate impulsive consumption in digital environments. Post-purchase regret emerged both as a direct consequence of such purchases and as a behavioral regulator influencing future buying intentions.

3.2 Summary of Themes

Four overarching themes emerged from the synthesis, each supported by multiple studies across diverse platforms, consumer demographics, and cultural contexts (see Table 3). The number of studies per theme reflects the frequency of coded references in NVivo, ensuring transparency in theme development.

Table 3
Summary of main themes derived from thematic analysis

Theme No.	Theme Title	Description	Supporting Studies (n)
1	Emotional Arousal	High-arousal emotions (e.g., excitement, curiosity, urgency) generated by social media content drive unplanned purchases.	18
2	Interface Design	Platform UX/UI features (e.g., infinite scroll, one-click purchase, embedded checkout) that reduce decision-making time and increase buying likelihood.	15
3	Social Influence	The effect of social proof mechanisms, including likes, peer reviews, and influencer endorsements, on purchase decisions.	20
4	Post-Purchase Regret	Emotional and cognitive consequences following impulse purchases, including dissatisfaction, cognitive dissonance, and reduced brand trust.	22

3.3 Detailed Thematic Findings

Theme 1: Emotional Arousal

Eighteen studies demonstrated that social media platforms generate emotionally charged experiences through visually appealing content, personalized advertising, and urgency-driven prompts. Such stimuli elevate excitement levels while reducing cognitive deliberation, increasing the probability of impulse buying. Time-limited offers, perceived product scarcity, and narratives from trusted influencers frequently amplified emotional arousal.

Theme 2: Interface Design

Fifteen studies emphasized how platform architecture encourages impulsive consumption. Features such as infinite scrolling, AI-driven product recommendations, and frictionless checkout systems significantly shorten the gap between initial interest and transaction completion. By minimizing friction in the purchasing process, these design elements diminish the opportunity for rational evaluation and amplify spontaneous purchasing tendencies.

Theme 3: Social Influence

Twenty studies identified social proof as a decisive driver of impulsive purchasing. Peer endorsements, positive online reviews, and influencer promotions cultivate perceptions of popularity, credibility, and trustworthiness. This social validation often overrides initial consumer hesitation, accelerating purchase decisions, particularly in collectivist cultural contexts where conformity to group behavior is more pronounced.

Theme 4: Post-Purchase Regret

Post-purchase regret was documented in 22 studies as a common consequence of impulsive buying, often triggered by unmet product expectations, financial dissatisfaction, or perceived product misrepresentation. The behavioral consequences of regret were dual:

- A corrective mechanism, where consumers adopt greater caution in future purchases.
- A negative brand impact, where consumers experience reduced trust and loyalty, sometimes resulting in brand switching.

3.4 Thematic Map

Figure 1 illustrates the relationships between the identified themes. Emotional arousal, interface design, and social influence function as primary impulse buying triggers. These triggers lead to post-purchase regret, which in turn influences future purchase intention, either by encouraging more cautious decision-making or by undermining brand loyalty.

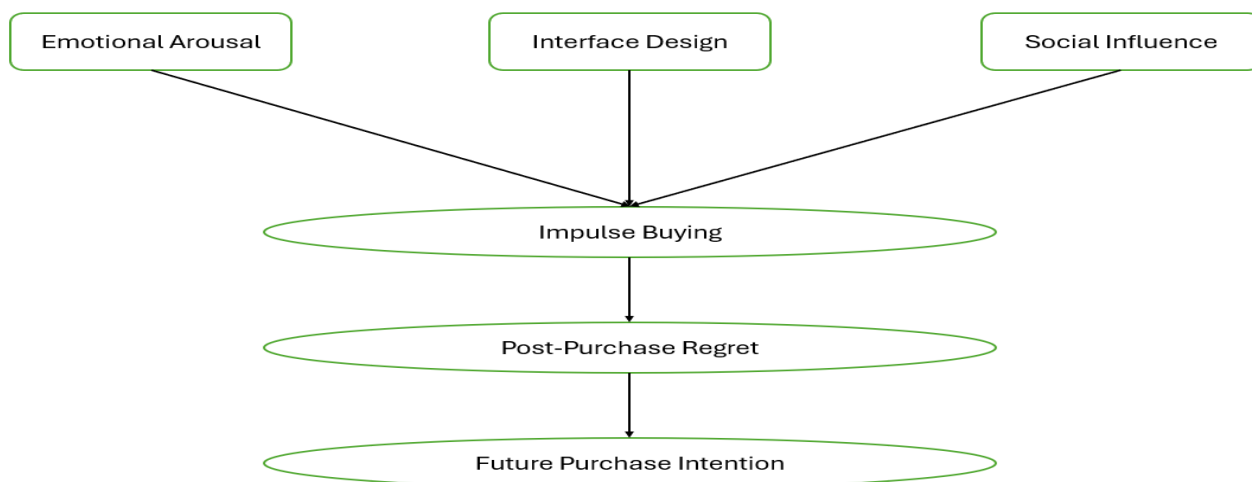


Fig. 1. Thematic map linking impulse buying, post-purchase regret, and future purchase intention in social media contexts

3.5 Transition to Discussion

The results indicate that impulse buying in social media contexts is a multi-layered phenomenon, shaped by emotional, design-related, and social factors, with regret serving as a pivotal moderating mechanism. These findings align with consumer behavior theories such as Impulse Buying Theory and Cognitive Dissonance Theory, which suggest that emotional stimuli and reduced decision-making friction can heighten impulsivity, while post-purchase regret acts as a cognitive corrective force. The following section will interpret these findings within the broader theoretical framework, highlighting practical implications for marketers and directions for future research.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of the psychological and structural mechanisms driving impulse buying and post-purchase regret in social media environments. The thematic analysis identified four interrelated drivers: emotional arousal, interface design, social influence, and post-purchase regret, that together create a cyclical behavioral pattern influencing future purchase intentions.

4.1 Emotional Arousal and Impulsive Consumption

The theme of emotional arousal reinforces earlier work by Verhagen and van Dolen [52], which demonstrated that heightened emotional states increase susceptibility to unplanned purchases in online settings. In our synthesis, algorithmically curated content, particularly visually appealing and emotionally charged formats on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, was shown to intensify

arousal and override rational evaluation. This supports Impulse Buying Theory, which posits that strong emotional stimuli can suppress cognitive control, leading to unplanned consumption. Importantly, our results confirm that such purchases, while initially gratifying, often result in dissatisfaction once the hedonic excitement fades, thereby feeding into the cycle of regret.

4.2 Interface Design as a Structural Enabler

Consistent with Sonia Pal [53], interface design emerged as a critical structural enabler of impulse buying. Features such as one-click checkout, persistent "limited time offer" banners, and personalized product recommendations significantly reduce cognitive friction and accelerate purchase decisions. Our analysis suggests that these frictionless mechanisms shorten the deliberation window, increasing the probability of post-purchase regret. From the perspective of the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework, such design features act as powerful stimuli that elicit emotional responses and hasten behavioral reactions.

4.3 Social Influence and Perceived Norms

The pivotal role of social influence aligns with Cialdini's [54]. Social Proof Theory highlights the persuasive power of peer behavior and social validation. In our synthesis, cues such as peer purchase visibility, influencer endorsements, and real-time purchase notifications created a perception that buying is both desirable and timely. Prior literature confirms that such cues can override self-regulatory mechanisms, especially among younger, digitally native consumers with high social media engagement. This dynamic was particularly evident in collectivist cultural contexts, where group conformity pressures are stronger.

4.4 Post-Purchase Regret as a Behavioral Regulator

Our results underscore that post-purchase regret is not merely an emotional after-effect, but also a behavioral regulator influencing future consumption patterns. Consistent with Cognitive Dissonance Theory [10], regret prompts consumers to re-evaluate purchasing criteria, sometimes leading to more deliberate buying strategies. However, the corrective effect is often short-lived when emotional triggers recur frequently, resulting in a reactivation of impulsive tendencies. This supports earlier research suggesting that regret can serve both corrective and maladaptive functions depending on context.

4.5 Theoretical Integration

This study advances theory by integrating insights from:

- Impulse Buying Theory (emotional triggers reduce cognitive control).
- Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) Theory (environmental cues shape internal states that drive behavior).
- Social Proof Theory (peer behavior influences decision-making).
- Cognitive Dissonance Theory (regret acts as a feedback mechanism that can alter future behavior).

This integration offers a multi-layered conceptualization of how emotional, structural, and social cues interact to produce impulse buying and post-purchase regret within social commerce ecosystems.

4.6 Practical Implications

The findings carry important implications for social media platforms and digital marketers. Ethical and consumer-centric design practices could include:

- Transparent product information and clear cost disclosures.
- Cooling-off periods before finalizing high-value purchases.
- User interface nudges promoting informed decision-making rather than urgency.
- Easy return mechanisms to mitigate dissatisfaction and preserve trust.

Such measures can reduce the negative psychological consequences of impulsive digital shopping while fostering long-term brand loyalty.

4.7 Limitations and Future Research

The reliance on secondary data enabled cross-platform and cross-cultural comparisons; however, it also limits the ability to assess causal relationships between identified factors. Future research could:

- Conduct primary studies targeting specific demographics or cultural contexts.
- Experimentally manipulate interface features or social cues to assess causal effects.
- Explore longitudinal impacts of repeated exposure to impulse triggers on consumer well-being.

5. Implications

5.1 Theoretical Implications

This study advances the scholarly understanding of impulse buying and post-purchase regret in social media environments by integrating Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) Theory, Social Proof Theory, and Cognitive Dissonance Theory into a unified explanatory framework.

The contribution is threefold:

- I. **Extension of SOR Theory** – The findings reveal that emotional arousal and interface design can act as dual, simultaneous stimuli, amplifying impulsive tendencies through both affective and structural pathways. This dual-trigger model extends traditional SOR applications, which often examine stimuli in isolation.
- II. **Advancement of Cognitive Dissonance Theory** By positioning post-purchase regret as a moderating force rather than a passive consequence, this research demonstrates that regret can either reinforce self-regulation or perpetuate impulsive cycles, depending on contextual cues and emotional intensity.
- III. **Cross-Platform Generalizability** The identification of recurring patterns across different social media ecosystems (e.g., Instagram, TikTok, Facebook) enhances the external validity of impulse buying models. The thematic synthesis provides a conceptual pathway for future quantitative research to operationalize these variables and empirically test their interrelationships.

5.2 Practical Implications

The findings offer actionable guidance for marketers, platform designers, and policymakers seeking to balance commercial objectives with consumer well-being.

For Social Media Platforms:

- Integrate cooling-off periods for high-value or emotionally charged purchases.
- Display transparent cost breakdowns and delivery expectations at checkout.
- Implement customizable purchase reminders that encourage reflection before finalizing payment.
- Incorporate ethical nudges (e.g., highlighting long-term value instead of urgency) to counterbalance aggressive sales tactics.

For Marketers:

- Prioritize authentic influencer collaborations over urgency-based promotions.
- Avoid over-reliance on scarcity and time-limited offers, which may damage long-term brand trust.
- Develop campaigns that emphasize value, quality, and informed choice, thereby reducing the likelihood of regret-driven brand switching.

For Policymakers and Consumer Advocates:

- Establish consumer protection guidelines for digital marketplaces that regulate the use of high-pressure sales techniques.
- Promote educational initiatives to raise consumer awareness about the psychological triggers of impulsive spending.
- Require clear opt-out mechanisms for personalized recommendations and algorithmic targeting.

6. Conclusions

This study synthesized empirical evidence from 25 peer-reviewed studies (2013–2024) to examine the psychological and behavioral dynamics linking impulse buying and post-purchase regret in social media environments. By employing a qualitative secondary data approach and conducting a thematic analysis, four interrelated drivers were identified: emotional arousal, interface design, social influence, and post-purchase regret, which collectively form a cyclical process shaping consumer decision-making in digital contexts.

The findings reveal that while social media platforms create immersive and persuasive purchase environments, the same design and social mechanisms that stimulate spontaneous buying also elevate the risk of regret, financial dissatisfaction, and erosion of brand trust. Importantly, this research reframes regret not only as a negative outcome but also as a behavioral moderator that can either reinforce self-control or perpetuate impulsive consumption cycles, depending on contextual and emotional factors.

From a practical perspective, the study underscores the necessity for ethical and transparent digital marketing strategies. Marketers, platform developers, and policymakers should integrate consumer protection measures, transparent cost disclosures, and reflective decision-making tools to balance commercial goals with consumer well-being.

From a research perspective, this synthesis offers a conceptual foundation for future studies to:

- Validate the impulse–regret cycle model using primary quantitative and experimental research.
- Conduct cross-cultural comparisons to explore variations in consumer responses across different socio-economic and cultural contexts.
- Examine the effectiveness of specific interventions (e.g., cooling-off periods, ethical nudges) in reducing harmful impulsive purchasing behaviors in digital marketplaces.

By integrating multiple theoretical perspectives and mapping their interplay within a rapidly evolving social commerce landscape, this study contributes to a more nuanced and actionable understanding of consumer behavior in the age of algorithm-driven digital marketing.

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