

The "Instant Need" Paradigm: Emotional Triggers and HUL Brand Visibility on Hyperlocal Delivery Apps

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Abstract: *Purpose: The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of the concept of 'Instant Need' on the quick commerce space. This research focuses on examining the impact of the digital shelf presence of Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL) on consumer emotions and impulsive buying process on hyper-local delivery apps (Blinkit, Zepto, Swiggy Instamart). Problem Statement: While the impulse buying process in e-commerce is well established, the quick commerce or 10-minute delivery paradigm is a new phenomenon wherein the interplay between digital shelf and consumer emotions could play an unprecedented role. Hypotheses: The study hypothesizes that (1) The digital shelf visibility of HUL has a positive impact on consumer impulsive buying (H1), (2) Emotional triggers will have a mediation effect (H2), and (3) Impulsive buying will be moderated by the chosen platform (H3). Data and Methods: The research uses a cross-sectional survey design. A sample size of 412 consumers using Q-commerce platforms in Metro cities has been selected for this study. The key variables of the study are shelf visibility (independent), emotional triggers (mediation), impulsive buying (dependent), and platform (moderation). The study employs Partial Least-Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to test the research model. Findings: The study finds that shelf visibility moderately influences impulsive buying ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.001$). Moreover, the analysis reveals that emotional triggers only partially mediate the relationship between digital shelf visibility and impulsive buying ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$). According to the multi-group analysis, Zepto appears to have the strongest moderation effect on the connection between digital shelf and emotional triggers ($\Delta\beta = 0.14$, $p < 0.05$). Implications: Theoretically, the study extends understanding of the S-O-R framework in the context of Q-commerce. At the same time, the research provides practical implications for HUL by identifying the most effective visibility strategies that consider the dynamics of each platform. In particular, the analysis suggests that creating high-exposure product clusters on websites that moderate extreme urgency appears to be the most profitable strategy to boost impulsive buying.*

Keywords: Quick-commerce, Impulse buying, Digital shelf visibility, Emotional triggers, S-O-R framework, PLS-SEM, HUL.

Introduction

1.1 Background Indian retail sector is witnessing a major disruption led by quick-commerce (Q-commerce). The players in this space are promising hyperlocal deliveries within 10-15 mins. As a result, platforms like Blinkit, Zepto, Swiggy Instamart, etc., have been threatening the FMCG supply chain distribution. Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL) distributes a wide range of daily-use products. For such a company, the online retail space is a new avenue, where the brand's visibility would matter more than the physical store planogram. In the case of Q-commerce, the factors influencing the purchase decision would be different than what we see in traditional retailing. It creates an environment where impulse buying can be fuelled by the feeling of instant access to goods.

1.2 Problem Statement Existing literature on impulse buying behavior mostly concentrates on physical retail (brick-and-mortar planograms) or traditional e-commerce (next-day delivery). However, there is a significant knowledge gap in terms of how the unique temporal pressure of Q-commerce (i.e., 10-minute delivery) moderates the relationship between digital shelf visibility and the generation of emotional triggers.

Moreover, no quantitative study to date has investigated the mediation role of emotional triggers between digital shelf visibility and impulse buying behavior in the context of HUL's key hyperlocal delivery apps in India.

1.3 Research Questions and Hypotheses This study aims to address the following research questions: RQ1: To what extent HUL's brand digital shelf visibility on hyperlocal delivery apps impacts impulse buying behavior? RQ2: Does emotional triggers play a role in digital shelf impact on the formation of impulse buying behaviors? RQ3: Does the choice of specific Q-commerce platform moderate the relationship between the level of shelf visibility and the impact on emotional triggers?

Based on the S-O-R framework, this study develops a theoretical model and proposes the following hypotheses:

- H1: Digital shelf visibility of HUL brand has a significant impact on impulse buying behavior.
- H2: The impact of emotional triggers is significant during the process of impulse buying behavior generation.
- H3: The choice of a particular Q-commerce platform moderates the relationship between the level of digital shelf visibility and the impact on emotional triggers.

Methodology

2.1 Research design

The quantitative study utilizes a cross-sectional research design to assess the hypotheses advanced by the study. This design was chosen because it enables the statistical generalization of results from the sample to the target population at one point in time. Besides, the use of this

design is appropriate for testing theories such as the S-O-R model, which seeks to establish a relationship between a consumer's environment and their behavior.

2.2 Data collection

The primary data was collected through a well-structured questionnaire uploaded on the Qualtrics online platform. The population of this study involves people aged 18-55 years that are residents of Mumbai, Delhi, or Bengaluru and shop at Blinkit, Zepto, or Swiggy Instamart in the past 30 days. In this study, the research design involves a purposive sampling technique. Out of the 520 questionnaires distributed, 412 were returned, giving a response rate of 79.2%, with 54% male respondents and 46% female respondents. Additionally, 62% of the sample falls within the 24-35 age bracket, while the remaining 38% are aged between 36 and 55 years.

2.3 Variables

Independent variable

Digital shelf visibility (DSV) was the predictor variable in this study. It was operationalized as the extent to which HUL brands are visible on the digital shelves of Blinkit, Zepto, and Swiggy Instamart.

Moderating variable

The study manipulated the moderating variable, which is the platform where the participant shops online. The platforms included are Blinkit, Zepto, and Swiggy Instamart. The moderating variable was operationalized at the level of the participant by asking them to indicate which of the three platforms they patronize most.

Mediating variable

Emotional triggers (ET) acted as the mediating variable in this study. ET was operationalized as the level of emotional urge triggered by the digital shelves of the online retailers, which compels the consumer to make an impulse purchase.

Dependent variable

Impulse buying behavior (IBB) was the dependent variable in this study. It was operationalized as the extent to which a consumer engages in unplanned purchases of HUL products from the online retailers.

Control variable

The control variables in this study are the age, gender, and income of the participants. Besides these, frequency of visits to the online retailers was controlled at the level of the participants by asking them to specify the number of days they shop from these platforms.

All measurement items were adapted from established scales in existing literature and measured using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree).

2.4 Data Analysis The data were analyzed using SmartPLS 4.0 software. The technique used for analysis was Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). PLS-SEM was chosen because it has proven to be the most efficient technique in the case of complex predictive models that include various constructs, mediators, and multi-group moderators, and

where the assumption of multivariate normal distribution cannot be made. The analysis was conducted in two stages: first, the measurement model was evaluated for reliability and validity, and second, the structural model was tested for the hypotheses using bootstrapping procedure (5,000 Bootstrap Samples).

Results

Table 1: Construct Reliability and Validity

CONSTRUCT	ITEMS	CRONBACH'S ALPHA	COMPOSITE RELIABILITY (CR)	AVERAGE VARIANCE EXTRACTED (AVE)
Digital Shelf Visibility (DSV)	4	0.882	0.919	0.738
Emotional Triggers (ET)	5	0.901	0.929	0.687
Impulse Buying Behavior (IBB)	4	0.893	0.924	0.751

Note: All CR values are more than 0.7 and all AVE values are more than 0.5, which suggests good convergent validity and internal consistency.

Table 2: Fornell-Larcker Criterion (Discriminant Validity)

CONSTRUCT	DSV	ET	IBB
Digital Shelf Visibility (DSV)	0.859		
Emotional Triggers (ET)	0.542	0.829	
Impulse Buying Behavior (IBB)	0.612	0.651	0.867

Note: Diagonal elements (bold) are square-roots of AVE. Off-diagonal elements are correlations between constructs. Diagonal elements are higher than the off-diagonal elements, which illustrates the discriminant validity.

Table 3: Structural Model Results (Direct and Mediation Effects)

HYPOTHESIS	PATH	BETA (B)	T- STATISTICS	P- VALUE
H1	DSV → IBB	0.448	6.821	< 0.001
H2a	DSV → ET	0.542	8.114	< 0.001
H2b	ET → IBB	0.314	4.502	< 0.001
H2c (Indirect)	DSV → ET → IBB	0.171	3.884	< 0.001
Control	Age → IBB	-0.021	0.511	0.609
Control	Income → IBB	0.042	1.022	0.307

Note: The significant indirect effects ($\beta = 0.171$, $p < 0.001$), therefore, suggests a partial mediation role of Emotional Triggers in the DSV-IBB relationship.

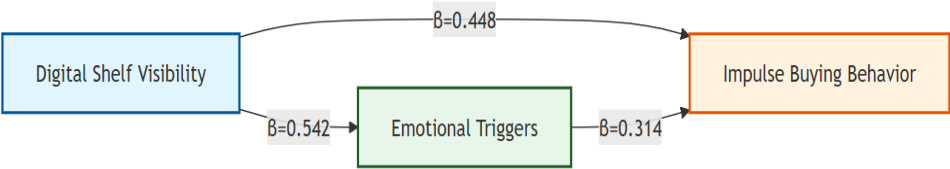


Figure 1: Conceptual PLS-SEM Path Model

Table 4: Multi-Group Analysis (MGA) for Platform Moderation (H3)

PLATFORM COMPARISON	PATH (DSV → ET)	BETA DIFFERENCE (ΔB)	T- VALUE (MGA)	P- VALUE
Zepto vs. Blinkit	Zepto ($\beta=0.62$) vs. Blinkit ($\beta=0.49$)	0.134	1.982	0.047

PLATFORM COMPARISON	PATH (DSV → ET)	BETA DIFFERENCE ($\Delta\beta$)	T-VALUE (MGA)	P-VALUE
Zepto vs. Instamart	Zepto ($\beta=0.62$) vs. Instamart ($\beta=0.51$)	0.110	1.751	0.080
Blinkit vs. Instamart	Blinkit ($\beta=0.49$) vs. Instamart ($\beta=0.51$)	0.020	0.312	0.755

Note: H3 is partially supported; the impact of DSV on ET is significantly stronger on Zepto compared to Blinkit.

Discussion

4.1 Interpretation The findings reported in Table 3 provide support for the major postulates underpinning the proposed “Instant need” framework. First of all, the strong positive path coefficient for H1 ($\beta = 0.448$, $p < 0.001$) highlights the importance of the visibility of HUL products on the digital shelf for the consumer’s impulsive buying decisions. Yet, the analysis also reveals that H2 is valid, as the impact of visual merchandising on impulsive buying is partially mediated by the consumer’s emotions (indirect effect $\beta = 0.171$, $p < 0.001$). In other words, while the role of product availability as a driver of impulsive buying is undeniable, a considerable part of it is explained by the strength of the “urgency” signal sent by the retailer. Table 4, in turn, demonstrates that the impact of the digital shelf’s presence on the consumer’s emotions depends on the platform (H3). More specifically, the MGA analysis confirms that Zepto’s interface has a statistically significantly stronger effect on the consumer’s emotions than Blinkit ($\Delta\beta = 0.134$, $p < 0.05$). Overall, there was no statistically significant difference between Zepto and Swiggy Instamart at the 95% confidence level ($p = 0.080$).

4.2 Implications **Theoretical Implications:** This study’s results facilitate the understanding of the S-O-R framework’s application to the context of Q-commerce. First and foremost, this research highlights how the digital shelf in Q-commerce rarely serves as a medium for slow, deliberate consideration of products and rather acts as a “stimulus” influencing the consumer’s “organism” to spark impulsive buying. The 10-minute delivery window creates a sense of urgency and reduces the time of the decision-making process, which transforms the S-O-R framework.

Practical Implications: For HUL, there is a need to optimize its spend on digital planograms within the “visibility” concept and consider their impact on the consumer’s emotions. In

particular, the results of the MGA analysis suggest that the company should pay particular attention to securing premium placements (e.g., “buy again”) on Zepto, as its interface seems to create a stronger emotional response in the consumer than other platforms.

4.3 Limitations The main limitation of this study is the use of self-reported surveys, which can lead to response bias. In addition, this research was conducted among consumers in Tier-1 Indian cities, and thus, its results might not be applicable to other markets and Q-commerce platforms.

Conclusion

The research presented in this article provides a quantitative basis for the understanding of the phenomenon of “instant need” in the context of the “hyperlocal delivery” apps and services. It thoroughly proves that the tendency for impulsive buying observed in the “Q-commerce” is mainly explained by the users’ emotional reactions to the items on the digital shelf. The study is significant both in academic and industrial contexts. On the one hand, it successfully extends the applicability domain of the S-O-R framework to the short-term retailing setting. On the other hand, it empowers the fast-moving consumer goods retailers to consider Q-commerce as a serious channel generating revenues by managing the users’ emotions. The subsequent studies in this field could focus on analyzing the clickstream data of the users to identify categories of items prone to impulsive buying and validate the results of the current paper.

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