IMPULSE BUYING IN E-COMMERCE: DIGITAL DRIVERS, CONSUMER RESPONSES AND ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

Student, Erick Nicolae FURDUESCU
Bucharest University of Economic Studies, ASE, Romania
E-mail: furduescuerick24@stud.ase.ro

Abstract: *Online shopping has made the act of buying faster, easier and more present in everyday life. In this context, impulse buying becomes an important topic because many purchases are influenced by what consumers see while browsing, not only by what they planned to buy in advance. This paper examines how electronic commerce can encourage unplanned purchases through platform design, product recommendations, social media signals, limited offers, visual content and simplified payment systems. The study is based on recent scientific literature and official sources, using a qualitative approach. The analysis suggests that impulse buying should not be understood only as a personal weakness or as a simple emotional reaction. It is also connected to the way online platforms organize attention, create urgency and reduce the effort needed to complete a transaction. For companies, these mechanisms can increase sales and customer engagement. For consumers, they may also create pressure to buy quickly, compare less and regret some purchases afterwards. The paper highlights the need to understand impulse buying as both a marketing opportunity and a consumer protection issue.*

Keywords: *digital consumer behavior, impulse buying, electronic commerce, online marketing, consumer decision-making.*
JEL Classification: *M31, D91, L81.*

1. Introduction

In many online shopping situations, browsing does not remain a passive activity, as consumers can end up buying products they had not planned to purchase. This situation is common in e-commerce, because the consumer is constantly exposed to recommendations, discounts, reviews, short videos and simple payment options. The purchase decision becomes faster, and sometimes the distance between interest and payment is reduced to only a few clicks (Anoop and Rahman, 2025; Nyrhinen et al., 2024).

In this context, impulse buying should not be seen only as a moment of weak self-control. The online environment is built in a way that can encourage quick decisions. Product suggestions, targeted advertising, mobile applications, live streaming sessions and limited-time offers all create pressure, curiosity or urgency around products. Therefore, the platform itself becomes part of the buying decision, not just the place where the transaction happens (Escobar-Farfán et al., 2025; Li et al., 2025).

For companies, this behavior can be useful because it may increase sales, improve conversion rates and keep consumers more engaged with the platform. For consumers, however, the same mechanisms can lead to purchases made too quickly, without enough comparison or reflection. This is why online impulse buying has to be discussed from both a marketing and an economic perspective, especially as digital commerce becomes a normal part of everyday consumption (Kathuria and Bakshi, 2025; Bhardwaj et al., 2026).

This paper analyses the main drivers of impulse buying in e-commerce, using recent scientific literature on online consumer behavior, mobile commerce, social media and live streaming commerce. The objective is to identify how technological, social, psychological and marketing factors influence consumer decisions and how these mechanisms may affect firms and consumers (Singh et al., 2023; Li and Deng, 2026).

2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

2.1. Digital Consumer Behavior

Digital consumer behavior refers to the way consumers search for information, evaluate alternatives and make purchasing decisions in online environments. Digital commerce changes the buying situation because the consumer is not only searching for products, but is also constantly guided by what the platform displays. Compared with a physical store, the online space brings together product information, advertising, reviews, recommendations and social media influence in the same decision environment. Therefore, the consumer's choice can be shaped before a clear purchase intention is formed (Nyrhinen et al., 2024; Singh et al., 2023).

A key characteristic of digital consumer behavior is that the buying process is no longer linear. Consumers may move from social media to an online store, from a review to a product page, or from a live streaming session directly to checkout. This creates a more fragmented but also more persuasive consumer journey, where purchasing decisions can be influenced at several points. In this context, digital platforms do not only provide access to products, but also organize the way products are displayed, recommended and promoted (Li et al., 2025; Escobar-Farfán et al., 2025).

Another important aspect is personalization. Online platforms collect and use data about consumer preferences, browsing history and previous purchases in order to display more relevant products and advertisements. While personalization can improve the consumer experience, it can also increase the probability of unplanned purchases, especially when consumers are exposed to products that match their interests at the right moment (Nyrhinen et al., 2024; Bhardwaj et al., 2026).

2.2. Impulse Buying in E-commerce

Impulse buying can be understood as a spontaneous and unplanned purchase, usually made with limited reflection. In e-commerce, impulse buying is closely linked to the way the purchase process is organized. A product can be seen, evaluated and bought in a very short time, sometimes without the consumer leaving the same application or page. This makes the decision less separated into clear stages and gives digital platforms a stronger role in transforming attention into purchase (Anoop and Rahman, 2025; Li and Deng, 2026).

Online impulse buying does not usually come from one isolated cause. It appears when consumer related factors, such as emotions, hedonic motivation, self-control or the desire for immediate satisfaction, meet platform related factors, such as discounts, product recommendations, limited-time offers, visual design, social media influence and easy payment options. For this reason, recent studies treat online impulse buying as the result of an interaction between the consumer and the digital shopping environment (Kathuria and Bakshi, 2025; Escobar-Farfán et al., 2025).

Newer forms of digital commerce have strengthened this tendency. In live streaming commerce, the consumer sees the product being presented in real time and can react immediately to the host, the comments of other viewers and the purchase link. In mobile commerce, the buying opportunity is even more accessible, because the consumer can shop almost anywhere and at any moment. Both formats make impulse buying more likely by bringing stimulation and transaction very close to each other (Li et al., 2025; Escobar-Farfán et al., 2025).

From this perspective, impulse buying in e-commerce should be analysed as part of a wider digital consumer behavior process. It is not only the result of individual emotions, but also the result of how platforms combine technology, marketing and social influence. This makes the phenomenon important for companies, because it can support sales growth, but also important for consumers, because it can lead to less rational spending decisions (Anoop and Rahman, 2025; Bhardwaj et al., 2026).

3. Research Methodology

This paper is based on a qualitative and literature-based research approach. The analysis does not use primary data, such as surveys or interviews, but relies on recent scientific articles, books and official sources related to online impulse buying, digital consumer behavior, mobile commerce, social media and live streaming commerce.

The scientific articles used in this paper were selected from recognized academic platforms and publishers, including ScienceDirect, Wiley Online Library, Emerald Insight, Taylor & Francis Online and MDPI. The selected studies were published mainly between 2023 and 2026 and cover different aspects of impulse buying in digital environments, such as targeted advertising, social media influence, mobile commerce, limited-time deals, live streaming and technological factors that affect consumer decisions.

The academic literature was complemented by books on digital marketing and by official sources from international and European institutions. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the European Commission and Eurostat were used to place the topic in a broader economic and digital context, especially regarding the development of online shopping, digital markets and consumer conditions.

The main limitation of the methodology is that the paper does not test the phenomenon through primary empirical research. Therefore, the results should be understood as a synthesis and interpretation of existing studies, not as direct statistical evidence collected by the author. However, by combining recent academic literature with official sources, the paper offers a structured perspective on the main factors that explain impulse buying in e-commerce.

4. Drivers of Impulse Buying in E-commerce

4.1. Technological factors

Technology influences impulse buying mainly by making the buying process shorter and less demanding for the consumer. In a physical store, the consumer usually has more time to observe, compare and decide. In e-commerce, the path is more direct: a product appears on the screen, the platform suggests similar products, and the payment can be completed almost immediately. This does not mean that every online purchase is impulsive, but it shows why the digital environment can favour faster and less planned decisions (Anoop and Rahman, 2025; Nyrhinen et al., 2024).

Personalization is one of the clearest examples of this influence. Online platforms do not display products randomly. They use browsing history, previous purchases and consumer preferences to place certain products in front of certain users. This can improve the relevance of what the consumer sees, but it also makes the shopping process less neutral. The consumer is not only searching for products, but is also being guided toward products that the platform considers attractive for him or her (Nyrhinen et al., 2024; Bhardwaj et al., 2026).

Mobile commerce adds another important element. Because the smartphone is always available, shopping is no longer limited to a specific place or moment. A consumer can see an advertisement on social media, open the product page and complete the purchase during a short break or while travelling. When payment details are already saved in the application, the act of buying becomes even easier, which reduces the time available for reflection (Escobar-Farfán et al., 2025).

4.2. Social and psychological factors

The social side of online shopping is stronger than it may seem at first sight. A product page is rarely just a product page anymore. It usually contains reviews, ratings, comments, reactions, recommendations or links with social media content. These elements can change the way a product is perceived, because the consumer does not judge only the product, but also the visible reactions around it. When many users approve, recommend or discuss a product, the purchase may feel less risky and more justified (Singh et al., 2023; Li and Deng, 2026).

Impulse buying also has an emotional component. Sometimes the consumer is not looking for a product with a precise function, but reacts to what the product suggests at that moment: novelty, pleasure, status, comfort or reward. In e-commerce, this reaction can be intensified by images, short videos, collections, product bundles or entertaining presentations. The attraction created around the product may become more important than a careful evaluation of price, need or long-term usefulness (Kathuria and Bakshi, 2025; Li and Deng, 2026).

Self-control should also be discussed in relation to the environment in which consumers make decisions. Young consumers, for example, do not encounter buying opportunities only when they deliberately enter an online store. They may meet them while scrolling on social media, watching videos, reading comments or receiving targeted advertisements. In such situations, the temptation to buy appears repeatedly and in ordinary moments of online activity. This makes impulse buying less a single isolated act and more a consequence of constant exposure to persuasive digital cues (Nyrhinen et al., 2024).

4.3. Marketing stimuli

Marketing stimuli are among the most visible tools used to encourage impulse buying. Discounts, limited-time offers, flash sales and promotional messages work because they make the consumer feel that delaying the purchase may mean losing an opportunity. This pressure can reduce comparison between alternatives and can make the consumer decide faster than usual. The effect becomes stronger when the promotion is combined with simple payment options and fast delivery (Kathuria and Bakshi, 2025; Bhardwaj et al., 2026).

Live streaming commerce uses a different but very effective logic. The product is not only displayed, but presented in real time, often by a host who explains, demonstrates and reacts to viewers. The comments of other users, the direct purchase link and the idea that the offer is available during the live session can create a stronger feeling of immediacy. In this situation, the consumer is not simply reading product information, but participating in a commercial event (Li et al., 2025).

Visual design also has an influence on impulse buying. The way a product page is built can make the purchase seem simple and natural. Clear images, visible buttons, product suggestions and an easy layout reduce hesitation and guide the consumer toward the next step. Therefore, design should not be seen only as an aesthetic element. In e-commerce, design also organizes attention and can influence how quickly a consumer moves from interest to purchase (Escobar-Farfán et al., 2025; Bhardwaj et al., 2026).

Taken together, these elements show that impulse buying in e-commerce is not produced by a single isolated factor. It is more often the result of several mechanisms acting at the same time: the platform makes products visible, marketing messages create urgency, social signals increase trust, and payment systems make the transaction easier. What is important is that these mechanisms do not work separately. A consumer may first notice a product through a recommendation, then become more interested after seeing reviews or social media reactions, and finally decide to buy because the offer seems limited or the payment process is very simple. This combination explains why impulse buying in e-commerce should be understood as a process shaped by both consumer reactions and platform strategies. The consumer still makes the final decision, but the digital environment influences the speed, context and emotional intensity of that decision. For this reason, the main drivers can be summarized by connecting each digital trigger with the consumer reaction, the economic effect for firms and the possible risk for consumers (Table no. 1).

Table no. 1 – Mechanisms through which e-commerce platforms stimulate impulse buying

Driver category	**Digital trigger**	**Consumer reaction**	**Economic effect for firms**	**Possible consumer risk**
Technological factors	Personalized recommendations, targeted advertising and saved payment systems	Faster movement from attention to purchase	Higher conversion rates and lower purchase friction	Less time for reflection before buying
Mobile commerce	Smartphones, mobile applications and permanent access to online stores	Buying becomes possible in ordinary daily moments	More frequent purchasing opportunities	More spontaneous and less planned spending
Social influence	Reviews, ratings, comments, influencer content and social media signals	Products appear more trustworthy, popular or desirable	Stronger engagement and stronger social proof effects	Decisions may rely more on popularity than real need
Psychological factors	Emotional appeal, novelty, pleasure and desire for reward	The consumer evaluates the product more emotionally	Higher probability of unplanned purchases	Post-purchase regret or weak price evaluation
Marketing stimuli	Discounts, limited-time offers, flash sales and live shopping offers	Urgency and fear of missing an opportunity	Short-term sales growth and traffic stimulation	Overconsumption and pressure to buy quickly

Driver category	Digital trigger	Consumer reaction	Economic effect for firms	Possible consumer risk
Platform design	Visual appeal, clear product display and visible purchase buttons	The next step in the buying process becomes easier	Reduced hesitation and faster checkout	Purchases made without enough comparison

Source: Own elaboration based on Anoop and Rahman (2025), Nyrhinen et al. (2024), Li et al. (2025), Escobar-Farfán et al. (2025), Kathuria and Bakshi (2025), Singh et al. (2023), Bhardwaj et al. (2026) and Li and Deng (2026).

5. Results and discussion

The reviewed literature points to one central idea: impulse buying in e-commerce does not usually start with a clear decision to buy. It often begins with exposure. A product appears in front of the consumer through a recommendation, an advertisement, a social media post or a live presentation. After that, other elements may intervene: reviews make the product seem safer, a discount makes the offer seem urgent, and a saved payment method removes the last practical obstacle. The purchase appears spontaneous, but the context around it is carefully organized (Anoop and Rahman, 2025; Nyrhinen et al., 2024; Bhardwaj et al., 2026).

This is why the digital platform cannot be treated as a simple intermediary between seller and buyer. In e-commerce, the platform decides what becomes visible, what is repeated, what is recommended and how quickly the consumer can complete the purchase. The buying decision is therefore influenced not only by the product itself, but also by the route created around it. This idea is consistent with the evolution of digital marketing, where technology is used not only to promote products, but also to shape the entire consumer journey (Kotler et al., 2017; Kotler et al., 2021; Escobar-Farfán et al., 2025).

The expansion of online shopping makes this discussion more concrete. Eurostat indicates that 78% of European Union internet users bought online in 2025, compared with 62% in 2015. This change shows that e-commerce is no longer a marginal channel, but a normal part of consumption. As consumers buy online more often, they also meet more recommendations, visual content, reviews, discounts and quick payment options. Therefore, the mechanisms that can encourage impulse buying are not rare situations anymore, but regular elements of the online shopping experience (Eurostat, 2026).

Social signals also appear as an important result of the analysis. In online shopping, consumers often use the reactions of others to reduce uncertainty. Reviews, ratings, comments and influencer content can make a product seem safer or more attractive before the consumer has analysed it in detail. This does not mean that the decision is completely irrational. Rather, the consumer uses visible approval as a shortcut, especially when there are too many alternatives and little time to compare them carefully (Singh et al., 2023; Li and Deng, 2026).

For firms, these mechanisms have a clear commercial meaning. A platform that obtains attention, reduces hesitation and makes payment simple can turn browsing into purchases more easily. Digital competition is therefore not only about price or product quality, but also about how well a company manages visibility, speed and the user experience. This interpretation fits the broader economic context described by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, where digital technologies play an increasing role in market development and business models (OECD, 2024).

The same mechanisms, however, raise concerns from the consumer perspective. When purchasing becomes too easy and too fast, comparison may become weaker. A consumer may buy because the offer feels urgent, because the product appears repeatedly, or because payment requires almost no effort. The European Commission reported that 94% of consumers expressed worries about online targeted advertising, especially regarding personal data, profiling and cookies. This concern is important because targeted advertising is one of the same tools that can make impulse buying more effective (European Commission, 2023; Kathuria and Bakshi, 2025).

The main result of the paper is therefore not that e-commerce simply increases impulse buying. The more important result is that digital platforms create a buying environment where attention, emotion, social approval, urgency and payment convenience are brought very close together. This proximity changes the nature of the purchase decision. The consumer still chooses, but the choice is made in an environment designed to make action quick and attractive. For this reason, impulse buying should be seen both as a source of economic value for firms and as a challenge for responsible digital marketing (Anoop and Rahman, 2025; Bhardwaj et al., 2026; OECD, 2024).

Table no. 2 – Synthesized results regarding impulse buying in e-commerce

Main result	Explanation	Economic and marketing meaning	Consumer-related concern
Impulse buying is created by combined mechanisms	Recommendations, reviews, urgency and simple payment often act together	Firms can transform browsing into purchases more efficiently	Consumers may decide before fully evaluating the purchase
Platforms influence the buying route	Product visibility, repetition, recommendations and checkout design shape the decision path	Platform design becomes part of digital marketing strategy	The decision may be guided more by the interface than by real need
Social approval reduces hesitation	Reviews, ratings, comments and influencer content make products appear safer or more desirable	Social proof can increase trust and conversion rates	Popularity may replace careful comparison
Mobile and live shopping increase immediacy	Consumers can buy during ordinary moments or live commercial interactions	Firms gain more touchpoints and faster sales opportunities	Shopping pressure becomes more constant
Firm value and consumer risk coexist	Impulse buying supports sales, engagement and conversion	It creates short-term commercial value	It may also lead to overconsumption, regret or weak price evaluation

Source: Own elaboration based on the analysis of selected scientific literature and official sources.

6. Conclusions

Impulse buying in e-commerce cannot be reduced to the simple idea that consumers buy too fast or without thinking. The analysis developed in this paper shows that the phenomenon is more complex. In many cases, the consumer does not enter the platform with a strong intention to buy, but the buying intention is gradually formed through exposure to products, recommendations, reviews, discounts, visual content and easy payment options. Therefore, impulse buying appears less as a random accident and more as a result of the way the digital shopping environment is organized.

The main conclusion of the paper is that impulse buying in e-commerce is created at the intersection between consumer reaction and platform strategy. The consumer still makes the final decision, but that decision is influenced by what the platform makes visible, how urgent the offer seems, how much trust is created by other users and how easy the payment process becomes. This is why impulse buying should not be treated only as a psychological weakness. It should also be seen as a consequence of digital market design.

The value of this article is that it brings together the consumer side and the platform side of impulse buying. Instead of explaining the phenomenon only through emotions or self-control, the paper shows how consumer reactions are shaped by concrete digital mechanisms, such as recommendation systems, social proof, urgency-based promotions and simplified payment. This perspective is useful because it connects consumer behavior with firm strategy and with the broader functioning of digital markets.

From a business perspective, impulse buying can bring clear advantages. It can increase sales, improve conversion rates and help firms transform simple browsing into actual purchases. However, these advantages should not be interpreted only in the short term. If firms rely too much on pressure, urgency or excessive personalization, consumers may start to feel manipulated rather than assisted. In the long run, trust can become more valuable than a quick transaction.

From the consumer perspective, the problem is not that every impulse purchase is negative. Some spontaneous purchases may bring satisfaction or help consumers discover useful products. The risk appears when the decision becomes too fast, too frequent or too strongly shaped by external stimuli. In such situations, consumers may compare less, spend more emotionally and regret some purchases afterwards. This makes online impulse buying relevant not only for marketing, but also for consumer protection.

The paper also has some limitations. The research is based on secondary sources, so it does not include original survey data, interviews or statistical testing. Future research could examine how different age groups react to impulse buying mechanisms, especially in mobile commerce and live streaming commerce. Another useful direction would be to compare consumers from different countries or to analyse whether transparency tools, such as clearer advertising labels or payment warnings, can reduce excessive impulse buying without eliminating the benefits of digital commerce.

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