

# Social Media Marketing and Impulsive Buying Behavior among Chinese College Students: A Literature Review

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**Abstract:** *Nowadays, social media marketing offers the global market unprecedented opportunities to connect with consumers in personalized and engaging ways. The rise of influencer marketing, user-generated content, and targeted advertising has further augmented the impact of social media marketing on consumer purchasing decisions. The study of impulsive buying behavior among college students in the context of social media marketing offers valuable insights into consumer behavior in one of the world's largest and most dynamic markets, China. The aim of this general literature review is to conduct a thematic review of existing peer-reviewed publications on the concept and various aspects of social media marketing and its influence on impulsive purchasing behavior. This study summarizes literature under three themes: social media marketing among Chinese college students, impulsive buying behavior in the Chinese context, and the impact of social media marketing on impulsive buying behavior. Future research could address the identified theoretical, conceptual and demographic gaps from this study to create a more inclusive understanding of impulsive buying behavior in the digital age.*

**Keywords:** Social media marketing, consumer buying behavior, Chinese college students, literature review

## 1. Introduction

From Facebook and Instagram to emerging platforms like TikTok and Xiaohongshu (XHS), social media channels offer global market unprecedented opportunities to connect with consumers in personalized and engaging ways. The rise of influencer marketing, user-generated content, and targeted advertising has further augmented the impact of social media marketing on consumer purchasing decisions (Kim & Johnson, 2016).

The study of impulsive buying behavior among Chinese college students under the context of social media marketing offers valuable insights into consumer behavior in one of the world's largest and most dynamic markets. China, which boasts the world's largest e-commerce sector, has approximately 1.14 billion online shoppers, representing 27% of the global online population (Statista., 2024). The impact of digital platforms on consumer behavior in this vast market is particularly pronounced.

The pervasive integration of technology into everyday life has not only transformed social interactions but has also accelerated the rapid expansion of e-commerce, fundamentally altering consumer behavior patterns. Given the ongoing shifts in consumer preferences and technological advancements, a comprehensive literature review of how social media platforms shape modern young consumer behavior is necessary. Summarizing peer-reviewed articles on social media marketing of Chinese college students is of academic importance. Furthermore, synthesizing high-quality empirical studies on impulsive buying behavior in the Chinese context can help to identify key drivers behind this behavior, shedding light on the various factors that contribute to impulsive buying.

By mapping past studies academically, this review contributes to a broader understanding of college students' behavior and social marketing in China. It also add understanding of the relationships between individual characteristics, environmental factors, and consumer actions within the domain of online shopping.

## **2. Social Media Marketing among Chinese College Students**

The rise of e-commerce platforms in China has significantly changed the retail industry, providing consumers with unparalleled ease and access to a diverse range of items and services. Especially among younger demographics like university students, online shopping platforms become more widespread. Unlike traditional retail models focused solely on transactions, social commerce platforms foster a sense of community and belonging among users, blending social interaction with commercial activities (Ma, 2021). College students, naturally immersed in various communities, are particularly influenced by peer connections and interpersonal relationships in their consumer preferences and purchasing decisions.

Hence, social media has a significant impact on consumer decision-making, particularly among college students who often utilize different social media sites in China (Boardman et al., 2022). Research findings from experts such as Sembada and Koay (2021) highlighted the increasing acknowledgment by businesses of the efficacy and productivity of social media marketing in reaching and engaging certain audiences. Social media functions as both a platform for social interaction and a potent marketing tool that influences college students perceptions, preferences, and purchase choices (Zhao et al., 2019). Social media platforms provide advertisers with wider reach, precise targeting, and better measurability compared to traditional advertising channels, making them more appealing possibilities. Conducting a literature review on how social media affects impulsive buying behavior in this population is crucial for comprehending the fundamental factors influencing consumer behavior in the digital era.

Luo et al. (2021) conducted a study exploring the complex social factors influencing impulsive buying behavior in Chinese college students, highlighting the subtle relationships between social exclusion, self-esteem, and risk preference. The research provides vital insights into the psychological factors that drive impulsive buying behavior in this cohort by examining these complex interactions. Another research has shown that when it comes to making purchasing decisions, younger individuals frequently prioritize consumerism over price considerations (Lu et al., 2022).

College students in China have considerable difficulties due to their tendency to have higher disposable money but a lack of knowledge in wise financial management (Liu & Zhang, 2021). The widespread usage of social media platforms, such as XiaoHongShu (XHS), increases their

susceptibility by encouraging a consumerist and rapid gratification-focused mindset among young users (Claussen et al., 2014).

Within platforms where college students frequently engage in impulsive purchase, the utilisation of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) and community marketing methods can have a substantial impact on shaping customer behaviour (Luo et al., 2021). Utilising electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and community marketing strategies can significantly improve customer brand engagement, trust, and buy intentions.

Scholars such as Chan et al. (2017) have suggested investigating the connection between impulsive purchase behavior and social media marketing, acknowledging the significant influence of social media on consumer decision-making. Factors such as perceived pleasure, affection outcome expectation, and subjective norms affect market mavenism and viral marketing attitudes among young Chinese consumers (Yang, 2013).

These studies highlight the growing importance of social media marketing in shaping consumer behavior and decision-making processes among Chinese college students, emphasizing the need for businesses to leverage these platforms effectively to engage with this demographic and influence their purchasing decisions.

### **3. Impulsive Buying Behavior in the Chinese Context**

Kakaria et al. (2023) provided a thorough description of impulsive purchasing as a sudden and spontaneous acquisition without prior intent or planning. This description aligns with Mishra's (2021) definition of impulsive shopping, highlighting the spontaneous and instinctive quality of these purchases, typically made without deliberate search or planning. Luo et al. (2021) emphasized the spontaneous aspect of impulsive buying, noting the lack of premeditation in these transactions.

Impulsive buying behavior is also a common tendency in today's digital era, crossing geographical borders. Studies on impulsive buying behavior have been carried out in Iran, India, the United States, Australia, Malaysia, the United Kingdom, the Philippines, Indonesia, China, and Singapore. The worldwide study environment highlights the broad interest in comprehending and dealing with impulsive purchasing behavior in various cultural and socioeconomic settings.

Zhang (2023) further on impulse purchases, stating that they went beyond ordinary spontaneity. Zhang defined impulsive purchasing behavior as being rushed and unplanned, driven by thoughtlessness, and lacking cognitive reflection. This viewpoint highlights the spontaneous quality of such actions, emphasizing their inclination to happen in reaction to external triggers or convincing communication.

Gender dynamics play a significant role in the context of impulsive purchasing behaviors among young adults as well, particularly college students. Research indicates that females are often more susceptible to impulsive buying tendencies, influenced by societal pressures, marketing strategies, and the pursuit of social validation (Yue et al., 2023).

China's swift and strong growth of its e-commerce industry has established it as a worldwide front-runner in online retail, with impulsive buying habits significantly influencing customer transactions. A research by the Chinese Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM, 2021) shows that

the country's e-commerce business had remarkable growth, with total sales exceeding 37 billion RMB in 2020, a significant rise from 26 billion RMB in 2016. The notable growth, with an annual rate of 6.3%, highlights the substantial impact of impulsive buying habits on the growing e-commerce sector in China.

Impulsive purchases in China's online market are frequently influenced by a combination of practical and pleasure-seeking reasons, with positive online evaluations playing a crucial role in shaping consumer decisions (Ming et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2022). Understanding the significant impact of online reviews on consumer behavior, it is crucial to further investigate the cognitive mechanisms that drive impulsive purchasing decisions among Chinese consumers. This involves reevaluating impulsive purchasing inclinations and analyzing the cognitive impact of stimuli to better understand impulsive buying behavior in the Chinese market, especially as online sales platforms expand and succeed in China's digital economy (Shiu, 2021). Research has shown that the want to buy things is a significant factor that leads to impulsive shopping behavior. Lee and Chen (2021) and Chen et al. (2020) offer empirical evidence that persons with a strong want or compulsion to buy are more prone to impulsive purchasing behaviors. Impulse buying can be driven by emotional triggers, situational circumstances, or psychological variables, leading to spontaneous and emotionally charged purchasing behavior.

Research, like the one carried out by Seo and Park (2018), has revealed the connection between consumer experiences and impulsive purchasing choices. The study showed that people who felt happy when seeing product displays on social media were more prone to making impulsive buying behavior than those who did not feel such pleasant emotions. This highlights the significant impact of emotional reactions triggered by social media material on customer behavior.

The study conducted by Luo et al. (2021) is a noteworthy addition to the research on impulsive purchasing habits in Chinese college students. The research provides vital insights into the psychological mechanisms that drive impulsive purchase inclinations in this group by explaining the intricate relationship between social dynamics, self-esteem, and risk choice. The results lay the groundwork for creating specific interventions to tackle temptations caused by social exclusion and encourage appropriate consumer behavior in college students.

Through summarizing related literature on the cognitive mechanics behind impulsive buying behavior in China's e-commerce system, firms and marketers can gain a deeper insight into consumer preferences, motives, and decision-making processes. This increased comprehension can help to guide the creation of specific methods to better online purchasing experiences, utilizing favorable online reviews, and engaging Chinese consumers effectively in the digital market. Furthermore, by a thorough examination of impulsive purchasing habits in the Chinese market, policymakers and industry stakeholders may create strategies to encourage responsible consumption, protect consumer rights, and support sustainable development in the e-commerce business.

#### **4. The Impact of Social Media Marketing on Impulsive Buying Behavior**

Impulsive buying is on the rise in today's consumer culture, marked by sudden and unplanned spending triggered by outside influences (Ünsalan, 2016). Social media platforms are crucial in influencing customer behavior by serving as conduits for advertising, marketing, and social influence in today's interconnected digital world (Kumar et al., 2016). Social media's

widespread reach exposes consumers to a continuous flow of appealing offers, captivating imagery, and convincing messaging that might lead to impulsive purchasing choices.

Recent studies have started investigating impulsive buying patterns on social media platforms, especially in the field of social commerce. Kakaria et al. (2023) have elucidated the connection between social media involvement and impromptu shopping choices. The research emphasize a significant change in consumer shopping behaviors, especially towards more exploratory and pleasure-driven approaches in online shopping and social commerce.

The rise of impulsive purchasing behavior in online settings has sparked worries about possible negative consequences. Chang et al. (2023) and Madhu & Soundararajan (2023) have studied the effects of impulsive buying habits enabled by social media platforms. Research indicates that impulsive buying habits in social commerce environments might result in unforeseen repercussions for customers, including overspending, regretting purchases, and financial pressure.

The relationship between exposure to social media and impulsive buying behavior is intricate and influenced by various factors such as platform design, content type, and consumer traits (Shao, 2024). Studies indicate that specific aspects of social media, like tailored suggestions, limited-time promotions, and recommendations from peers, can greatly influence impulsive purchasing behavior.

Individual variations in sensitivity to impulsive purchase are crucial in influencing the connection between exposure to social media and buying behavior (Chen et al., 2016). Personality factors, emotional state, and cognitive biases might influence how consumers respond to online stimuli and their likelihood to make impulsive purchases.

The researchers have decided to use the Impulsive purchase Scale created by Godelek & Akalın (2018) to assess impulsive purchase behavior in relation to social media exposure. This scale consists of nine items created to evaluate the frequency and intensity of impulsive buying inclinations, providing a thorough structure for understanding the subtleties of impulsive purchasing behavior. One item in the scale is reverse-coded, which requires careful attention during data processing. The researchers have chosen to eliminate the reverse-coded item for this study, leading to the selection of eight items from the Impulsive Buying Scale.

The increasing research on impulsive purchasing highlights its importance in the retail industry and emphasizes the interdisciplinary approach taken to understand its complexities. Researchers aim to enhance understanding and tackle the issues and opportunities presented by impulsive buying behavior in modern consumer markets through teamwork and interdisciplinary discussions (Han, 2020).

Impulsive purchase behavior is studied in multiple academic areas, each providing insights into different aspects and influences that contribute to this consumer phenomena. Mihić and Kursan (2010) explored the psychological and emotional factors that influence impulsive buying choices in marketing. Their research has offered vital insights on the impact of advertising, product placement, and consumer psychology on impulsive buying behavior. Marketers can create more effective methods to encourage impulsive purchase behavior and increase sales by comprehending these characteristics.



Halim et al. (2020) have studied how digital technology and online platforms affect impulsive buying behavior in the field of information systems. They have studied how social media, e-commerce platforms, and mobile apps impact customers' tendency to make impulsive purchases. It is essential for firms to comprehend how digital platforms enable impulsive purchasing in order to take advantage of the digital marketplace.

Ahmed et al. (2020) and other academics in business management have studied how organizational tactics and retail practices influence impulsive buying behavior. Their research has emphasized the significance of merchandising methods, pricing techniques, and store layouts in promoting impulsive purchasing and increasing income for businesses. Retailers can boost their revenue by adjusting these aspects to create environments that promote impulsive purchases.

These studies highlight how consumer behavior is changing in the digital age, with social media platforms having a major influence on purchasing decisions. Businesses and politicians can develop measures to reduce risks and improve consumer well-being in online shopping settings by studying impulsive purchasing habits in social commerce contexts.

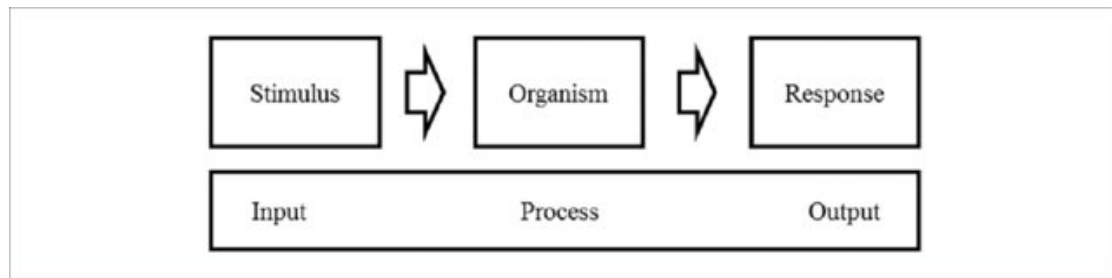
In conclusion, social media marketing has emerged as a widely adopted strategy in the business world, attracting significant attention from both researchers and practitioners (Cheung, Pires & Rosenberger, 2019). By examining the factors that influence consumer purchasing behavior, the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) have been integrated as key theoretical approaches in several studies, such as discussed in Setiawan et al., (2018), Sharifi et al. (2023), and Azizah et al. (2022).

## **5. Theories Applied in Previous Research**

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model, initially proposed by Woodworth in 1928, is crucial in understanding impulse purchase behaviour. This model has emerged as a fundamental framework in consumer behaviour research for analysing the cognitive and emotive elements that impact purchase choices. The SOR framework offers a thorough understanding of impulsive online purchasing behaviours by examining the links between external cues, internal psychological states, and behavioural outcomes.

Prior research has consistently used the SOR paradigm to examine how particular environmental cues affect consumers' internal states and result in impulsive buying behaviours (Suh & Prophet, 2018; Wu et al., 2020). These studies highlight the significance of environmental psychology in comprehending how external stimuli combine with internal psychological processes to influence consumer behaviour.

Figure 1 visually represents the stimulus-organism-response paradigm in impulsive online shopping behavior, showing how environmental cues, psychological processes, and behavioral results are interrelated.



**Figure 1: S-O-R model**

The Technological Acceptance Model (TAM) offers an alternative viewpoint by placing primary emphasis on the determinants that impact the adoption and utilization of technology by individuals (Azizah at al., 2022). Research indicates that social media marketing significantly influences consumer purchasing decisions (Wong, 2018). TAM has been found to mediate the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intentions (Makmor et al, 2024). Additionally, a bibliometric analysis research reveals that mobile, technology, market research, and online marketing were the top trends in marketing which applied the TAM model. (Musa et al., 2024).

Except S-O-R and TAM, several other theories are commonly applied to support empirical studies of social media marketing and impulsive buying behavior. Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) has been applied to investigate factors influencing impulse buying intentions, with attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control found to positively affect these intentions (Li & Kang, 2023; Zhang & Chen, 2023). Social presence theory has also been utilized to examine how live streaming affects consumers' urge to buy impulsively, with social presence of live streamers, other viewers, and products influencing affective intensity and perceived risk (Zhang et al., 2022).

## 6. Discussion of Gaps in the Literature

While considerable research has been devoted to understanding impulsive buying behavior in the context of social media marketing, several notable gaps remain. These gaps limit the development of comprehensive frameworks and effective interventions that could better explain and mitigate impulsive purchasing tendencies.

The research conducted by Ahmadova and Nabiyeva (2023) highlighted the existing conceptual gaps and emphasized the importance of a comprehensive understanding in order to develop effective measures to reduce impulsive buying behaviour on social media marketing platforms, such as XHS in China. Conceptual gaps referred to understanding the complex relationship between internal factors, external influences, consumer traits, and marketing stimuli in impulsive buying behaviour. Although the importance of these aspects is recognized in current literature, there is a noticeable lack of a comprehensive conceptual framework that combines them into a coherent model.

Moreover, as noted by Wang and other coauthors (Wang at al., 2022), there is still a dearth of comprehensive investigation into the exact cognitive processes and emotional reactions that underlie impulsive purchasing decisions. Current theoretical frameworks frequently lack the ability to adequately explain the intricate interaction between internal mechanisms and external cues, resulting in gaps in our understanding of how these components combine to trigger impulsive buying behaviours (Wang et al., 2020). The lack of clear explanation in theory hinders the progress of creating efficient methods to reduce impulsive purchase habits.

Another critical gap in the literature is the underrepresentation of specific demographic groups. The existing research frequently overlooks demographic diversity, which limits the generalizability of findings. There is a noticeable lack of research investigating impulsive buying tendencies in other demographic groups, such as older adults, minority populations, and individuals from non-Western cultures (Afrouz & Vassos, 2024). Given the importance of demographic variety, it is crucial to conduct research that includes a wider range of demographic features and cultural backgrounds.

In conclusion, addressing these conceptual, theoretical, and population gaps is essential for advancing the understanding of impulsive buying behavior. Expanding the scope of research to include diverse populations and more nuanced theoretical models will contribute to a more comprehensive and applicable framework for social media marketing and consumer behavior interventions.

## **7. Conclusion and Future Directions**

In conclusion, the literature on social media marketing and impulsive buying behavior among Chinese college students illustrates the profound impact of digital platforms on consumer decision-making processes. Social media platforms, particularly those prevalent in China like Xiaohongshu (XHS) and TikTok, have become significant players in shaping consumer behavior. They do this by providing personalized advertising, leveraging influencer endorsements, and fostering community interactions that amplify the tendency to make impulsive purchases.

Theoretical frameworks such as the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) play pivotal roles in explaining how marketing stimuli and emotional responses influence impulsive buying behavior. These models provide a structure for understanding how external cues (e.g., advertisements, influencer posts) trigger internal psychological states (e.g., emotional arousal, cognitive dissonance), leading to unplanned purchases. However, while these frameworks offer valuable insights, they still fall short of fully explaining the cognitive processes and emotional reactions that underlie impulsive buying in social media environments.

This literature review also points to a significant gap in the representation of demographic diversity in impulsive buying research. Most studies focus on younger consumers from Western populations, neglecting other demographic groups such as older adults, minorities, and non-Western populations. This lack of diversity limits the generalization of the findings and calls for further research to include a wider range of cultural and demographic backgrounds.

Moreover, there is a clear need for the development of a more comprehensive conceptual model that integrates various factors, such as external influences and marketing stimuli, into a coherent framework. The absence of such a model restricts the ability of researchers and marketers to effectively mitigate impulsive buying behavior.

Future research should address these conceptual and demographic gaps to create a more inclusive understanding of impulsive buying behavior in the digital age. By doing so, both academic scholars and marketing practitioners will be better equipped to develop strategies that not only enhance consumer experiences but also promote more responsible buying behaviors in online settings.



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