
THE PHENOMENON OF IMPULSE BUYING OF GENERATION Z CONSUMERS IN AN INTERACTIVE SOCIAL MEDIA-BASED TRADING ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

This study aims to explore in-depth the phenomenon of impulsive buying among Generation Z consumers in an interactive social media-based commerce environment (social commerce). The rapid development of interactive features such as live streaming, personalized algorithmic recommendations, and the integration of instant transactions has significantly changed the shopping behavior patterns of the younger generation. Using a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method, data were collected through in-depth interviews with 12 Generation Z informants who actively transact on social media platforms, and reinforced by digital observation. The results show that the urge to impulsive buy is triggered by a combination of technological stimulation and subjective emotional dynamics. Real-time interactive features trigger the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) phenomenon and create a sense of emotional attachment between viewers and presenters. Furthermore, the ease of navigating digital payments minimizes rational barriers to decision-making. This spontaneous experience is often followed by immediate emotional gratification, although some informants also experience post-purchase regret. The implications of this study confirm that Generation Z's impulsive behavior on social media is not simply a response to discounted prices, but rather the result of constructing a highly interactive and immersive shopping experience. These findings provide practical contributions for business actors in designing ethical and persuasive digital marketing strategies, as well as serving as an academic reference regarding digital consumer psychology.

Keywords: Impulse Buying, Generation Z, Interactive Social Media

INTRODUCTION

The exponential development of information and communication technology over the past two decades has fundamentally changed the global trade landscape. Digital transformation is no longer simply moving physical stores into cyberspace; it has redesigned the way consumers interact, search for information, and make purchasing decisions. One of the most significant manifestations of this evolution is the emergence of interactive social media-based commerce, widely known as social commerce. The convergence of social media features and store functionality within a single, integrated digital ecosystem creates an intuitive, immersive, and highly personalized shopping experience (Purcărea et al., 2025). Unlike conventional e-commerce platforms, which tend to focus on utilitarian and directive product searches, interactive social media integrates entertainment, social connectivity, and real-time economic transactions. This paradigm shift creates new space for the growth of dynamic consumption behavior, where the

boundaries between social interaction for fun and shopping activities are increasingly blurred.

In this increasingly complex digital landscape, Generation Z has emerged as the most dominant consumer demographic and plays a crucial role. Born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, Generation Z grew up in an environment fully connected to the internet, often dubbed digital natives (Rodriguez, 2023). The presence of smart technology and social media platforms from an early age shaped the cognitive structure, social values, and shopping expectations that are very unique to this generation. Generation Z tends to prioritize rich visual experiences, fast information access, practicality, and high interactivity compared to previous generations (Hernandez-de-Menendez et al., 2020). These characteristics make them highly responsive to digital stimulation provided by various modern social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and other livestreaming commerce.

The unique nature of Generation Z, which is deeply integrated with the digital world, has a direct impact on their psychological dynamics and consumption behavior. One of the most prominent phenomena that has attracted the attention of marketing researchers is the high tendency of Generation Z to make impulse purchases. Impulse buying is defined as a spontaneous, unplanned purchase decision, often driven by strong emotional or affective stimulation when faced with certain triggers in the shopping environment (Chaudhary et al., 2025). In the interactive social media ecosystem, this impulse buying incident is massively accelerated. The combination of exposure to visual content tailored by sophisticated algorithms and the lure of temporary promotions triggers an internal drive that is difficult to contain with rational cognitive evaluation.

Theoretically, external triggers present in interactive social media environments can be explained through the stimulus-organism-response (SOR) framework. External stimuli in the social commerce space are no longer limited to product attributes such as price or written descriptions, but rather encompass high-level interactive features (Almahdi, 2018). Live streaming, live chat, and interactive product demonstrations by content creators act as powerful stimuli that stimulate consumers' emotional aspects. When Generation Z is exposed to these visual and social triggers, affective drives arise within them (organisms) that ultimately lead to spontaneous and immediate purchasing decisions (responses).

The dynamics of interactivity in social commerce are a key instrument that differentiates today's digital shopping experience from previous eras. Interactivity encompasses not only the two-way relationship between buyers and sellers but also the interactivity dimension between consumers (peer-to-peer interaction). The presence of live streaming features allows potential buyers to ask questions, request product demonstrations, and view other consumers' responses and reviews simultaneously within seconds (Ang et al., 2018). This sense of direct engagement and transparency builds immediate trust and a lively shopping atmosphere. Digital buzz and product popularity, as evidenced by the number of likes, shares, and positive comments, create a perception of reliability and increase the urgency to purchase the product immediately.

This intense environmental stimulation closely triggers internal psychological turmoil in Generation Z consumers. One of the most dominant emotional drives is the presence of the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) or the fear of being left behind. The FOMO phenomenon is defined as the anxiety that others might have a valuable experience while one is not present (Casale et al., 2020). In the context of interactive social media commerce, FOMO is deliberately designed and amplified through limited-time offers, exclusive live stream discount coupons, and limited product stocks. When sellers or streamers announce that coupons will run out in seconds, the fear of missing out on this valuable opportunity triggers emotional panic in Generation Z, thus overriding financial budget considerations.

In addition to the FOMO phenomenon, parasocial relationships between Generation Z and influencers or live streaming hosts also play a pivotal role in driving shopping behavior. Parasocial interaction is a psychological state in which an individual feels a one-way relationship of friendship, trust, and emotional closeness with a public figure or content creator they frequently see on social media (Lotun, 2022). For Generation Z, influencers are no longer mere advertising stars, but rather trusted voices conveying aspirations, lifestyles, and recommendations. When an admired influencer enthusiastically and interactively recommends a product, consumers feel an emotional urge to support or emulate that figure's lifestyle, ultimately triggering a quick purchase without critical evaluation.

Technological convenience in payment and app navigation also contributes significantly to reducing consumer cognitive barriers. The integration of digital payment methods such as e-wallets, one-click checkout features, and pay-later systems eliminates the time lag between the onset of a shopping urge and payment execution (Wagdi et al., 2026). In consumer psychology theory, this time lag, or friction, typically serves as a rational pause for consumers to reconsider the utility and actual need for the item they wish to purchase. However, when transaction channels are streamlined, the emotional impulse generated by social media stimulation can be directly translated into a financial transaction within seconds.

Although the phenomenon of impulse buying on interactive social media provides instant emotional gratification, its long-term impact on Generation Z is complex. After making an impulsive purchase, many consumers experience post-purchase regret or cognitive dissonance (Lochab et al., 2025). This feeling arises when rational evaluation returns to work after the emotional stimulation subsides, and consumers realize that the purchased product is not entirely necessary or beyond their financial means. The contradiction between the immediate pleasure of a transaction and the subsequent emotional or financial burden demonstrates how vulnerable Generation Z is to the decision architecture designed in the social commerce environment.

Several previous empirical studies have attempted to examine the variables influencing impulse buying in e-commerce. However, the majority of previous research tends to focus on conventional quantitative approaches that examine linear relationships between isolated variables through structured questionnaires (Yanan et al., 2024). While quantitative approaches can provide overviews and statistical correlations, they often fail

to capture the depth of subjective meaning, volatile emotional nuances, and the context of life experiences that underlie consumers' spontaneous decisions holistically. This limitation leaves an academic gap (methodological and contextual gap) that requires further exploration through qualitative approaches.

The importance of a qualitative approach in studying this phenomenon lies in its ability to reveal consumers' subjective realities from their own perspective (emic perspective). Through techniques such as in-depth interviews and digital observation, researchers can dissect how Generation Z weaves meaning from their shopping experiences, how inner turmoil occurs when faced with live shopping stimuli, and how the social context influences the rationalization of their decisions (Creswell et al., 2023). The phenomenological approach in particular allows researchers to explore the structure of consumers' consciousness regarding the essence of satisfaction, anxiety, and spontaneous urges they experience directly in the digital real world.

The urgency of this research is also highly relevant to the current dynamics of the digital marketing and consumer protection industries. For business actors and marketing strategists, a deep understanding of the qualitative factors and psychological motives behind Gen Z's decisions can be a foundation for building more empathetic, ethical, and sustainable brand communications, rather than simply exploiting consumers' emotional fragility for short-term sales (Kotler & Keller, 2016). On the other hand, for policymakers and public educators, the results of this exploration are crucial for formulating more effective digital financial literacy guidelines to protect Generation Z from excessive consumerism that could potentially harm their financial well-being in the future.

Based on the background of the problem, the complexity of psychological dynamics, and the methodological gaps in previous literature, this study is designed to focus on exploring the phenomenon of impulsive buying among Generation Z consumers in an interactive social media-based commerce environment. The main focus of this study is aimed at understanding in-depth the emotional triggers, the meaning of spontaneous shopping experiences, and the self-control mechanisms of Generation Z consumers when interacting with interactive features on social media platforms.

Specifically, this research aims to answer several fundamental questions regarding how Generation Z interprets social media interactivity in their purchasing decision process, how forms of digital stimulation trigger emotional dynamics such as FOMO and parasocial attachment, and how they perceive post-purchase psychological experiences. Thus, this research is expected to provide significant theoretical contributions to the development of digital consumer behavior and media psychology literature, while also providing practical contributions in the form of relevant digital literacy policy recommendations for relevant stakeholders.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive study design to in-depth explore the phenomenon of impulsive buying among Generation Z consumers in an interactive social media-based commerce environment. The choice of a qualitative approach is based on the need to fully understand the subjective meanings, perceptions,

and real-life experiences of individuals directly from their natural context. As explained by Pugu et al. (2024), qualitative research focuses on a holistic understanding of phenomena by emphasizing processes, interactions, and in-depth interpretation of narrative data obtained from informants in the field. The presence of this method allows researchers to dissect the emotional and psychological dynamics of Generation Z that cannot be simply measured through numbers.

The data in this study were collected through two main techniques: semi-structured in-depth interviews with Generation Z consumers who actively transact on interactive social media platforms and digital observation of interactive features such as live streaming shopping. Informants were selected using purposive sampling with specifically designed criteria to ensure data relevance. The data analysis process followed systematic stages, encompassing data reduction, presentation in descriptive narrative form, and conclusion drawing and verification. Nevertheless, the methodological framework of this qualitative research was also enriched by a basic understanding of the principles of research design and variable classification, as outlined by Priadana and Sunarsi (2021) in the context of research methodology. This helped the researchers maintain a rational, measurable, and systematic structure of thought during the process of mapping the triggers and impacts of spontaneous purchasing behavior. Data validity was tested using source and method triangulation techniques to ensure the validity, relevance, and reliability of the qualitative findings.

RESEARCH RESULT

This study comprehensively describes field findings regarding the phenomenon of impulsive buying among Generation Z consumers on interactive social media-based commerce platforms. Based on a series of in-depth interviews with purposively selected informants and regular digital observations of live streaming commerce activities, it is revealed that spontaneous purchasing decisions are not simply mechanical responses to product offerings, but rather the result of the construction of highly complex interactive experiences. These findings map how the stimulation of technological features, subjective emotional dynamics, the role of digital public figures, and the efficiency of transaction systems interact simultaneously in shaping unplanned shopping behavior. This research involved a series of primary data collections extracted directly from the thoughts, feelings, and transaction histories of Generation Z informants who regularly access interactive social media such as TikTok Shop and Instagram Shopping.

The research began by mapping the profiles of key informants, providing an overview of their demographic background, intensity of interactive social media use, and estimated frequency of impulse purchases each month. The informants' backgrounds, consisting of students and young workers, provided a rich perspective on how their personal financial allocation is affected by the temptation to shop online. Understanding these informant profiles is crucial for providing a contextual foundation for the qualitative narrative presented in the discussion of the findings.

Table 1: Research Informant Profile and Characteristics of Interactive Shopping Behavior

Code	Name (Initials)	Age / Profession	Main Platform	Main Trigger Features	Impulsive Frequency / Month
INF-01	Rizky (21)	Student	TikTok Shop	Live Streaming Discount	4 - 6 times
INF-02	Anisa (22)	Student	Instagram Live	Influencer / Host Review	3 - 5 times
INF-03	Bagas (23)	Private sector employee	TikTok Shop	Flash Sale & Vouchers	5 - 8 times
INF-04	Dian (20)	Student	Shopee Live	Chat Column Interaction	2 - 4 times
INF-05	Dawn (24)	Content Creator	TikTok / Instagram	FYP Algorithm Recommendations	6 - 9 times
INF-06	Nadia (21)	Student	TikTok Shop	Live Streaming & Paylater	4 - 5 times

Based on the profile data in Table 1, it appears that the TikTok Shop and Shopee/Instagram Live platforms dominate Generation Z's shopping preferences. The majority of informants' use of interactive social media has shifted from purely communication to entertainment platforms integrated with commercial activities. Most informants admitted that they did not intentionally open the apps to search for specific items, but rather simply sought entertainment in their spare time. However, the visual exposure of live streaming consistently triggered a sudden desire to make a transaction.

The first and most dominant finding in this study is the role of technological stimulation and real-time visuals in undermining consumers' rational judgment. In live broadcast sessions, the host does not simply display the product statically as in a conventional online storefront, but rather tries the product directly, showing details of texture and size, and providing instant demonstrations of use. This live visual aspect creates a high level of product transparency, which quickly eliminates consumer doubts. Informants revealed that seeing an item being demonstrated in real life by another human being provides an immediate conviction that the product is of high value and usefulness, even if they had never thought about it a few minutes before.

Beyond tangible product visualization, the two-way interactivity of the live chat section acts as a powerful emotional catalyst. When potential buyers can ask questions about sizing or specifications and receive a personal response from the host within seconds, it creates a sense of personalized attention. This sense of attention fosters a strong bond of engagement between consumers and sellers. Furthermore, this interaction is collective, with viewers seeing questions, spontaneous reviews, and responses from other buyers watching simultaneously. The buzz in the comments section creates a social atmosphere similar to a bustling physical fair, where public enthusiasm serves as a psychological driver for action.

The second finding in this study is closely related to psychological conditioning designed through the manipulation of urgency and scarcity. Features such as countdown

timers, live announcements of remaining stock, and the provision of very limited-time discount coupons have been proven to trigger the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) phenomenon in Generation Z. When a live streaming host dramatically announces that a fifty percent discount is only valid for the first ten buyers or that the item will run out of stock in two minutes, the cognitive mechanism of budget considerations in Generation Z is hampered. The fear of missing out on valuable opportunities (loss aversion) overcomes their economic awareness.

This study found that anxiety about missing out on a trend or missing out on a bargain price triggers a reflexive urge to immediately press the buy button. Informants reported that under the time pressure created by the host, their ability to analyze whether the item was truly needed became ineffective. Their focus shifted entirely from the product's utility to securing the discount before other viewers sold it. The thrill of winning this competition for limited stock provided a unique sense of satisfaction that encouraged swift payment.

The third finding in this qualitative study identified the significant influence of parasocial relationships between Generation Z and influencers or content creators who host live streams. Unlike previous generations who viewed celebrities as distant figures accessible only through mass media, Generation Z views their favorite content creators as close friends, lifestyle role models, or trusted references. Regular daily interactions through social media content build a deep sense of closeness and one-way emotional trust.

When a favorite influencer recommends a fashion, beauty, or gadget product during a live broadcast, Generation Z doesn't perceive it as a manipulative commercial promotion, but rather as genuine advice from a friend. This framework of trust significantly lowers consumers' critical defenses. Informants stated that they no longer feel the need to conduct price comparison research or read third-party reviews because their favorite influencer's reputation and taste are already considered a guarantee of quality. The desire to share a similar lifestyle or simply support their favorite creators triggers spontaneous impulse purchases during live broadcasts.

The fourth finding explores the role of convenient digital transaction infrastructure in facilitating the execution of impulsive impulses. The acceleration of spontaneous purchases on interactive social media is greatly supported by the integration of modern payment systems that minimize transactional friction. Features like one-click payment, digital wallet integration, and recurring payment (paylater) facilities enable the transition from emotional impulses to real transactions in a matter of seconds.

This research reveals that the lack of a complicated payment process leaves consumers with no room for reflection. The paylater feature, in particular, acts as a double trigger for impulsive behavior. By allowing consumers to receive goods immediately without having to spend cash immediately, the perception of financial burden is temporarily blurred. Generation Z consumers tend to separate the immediate satisfaction of receiving goods from the future consequences of payment, ultimately increasing the frequency of unplanned shopping.

To provide an integrated theoretical overview of the above findings, this study maps the relationship between environmental triggers, internal psychological processes, and behavioral manifestations experienced by informants into a qualitative findings matrix.

Table 2: Qualitative Theme Mapping of Triggers and Psychological Dynamics of Impulsive Buying

Main Theme	Specific Features / Stimuli	Internal Psychological Dynamics	Manifestation of Consumer Behavior
Visual & Interactive Stimulation	Live streaming, instant yellow basket, real product trials.	Increased sense of trust, sense of involvement, decreased critical attitude.	Buying items without looking at outside reviews or price comparisons.
FOMO Pressure & Scarcity	Countdown timer, limited quota voucher, low stock announcement.	Anxiety of being left behind, emotional panic, high scarcity perception.	Rush orders within seconds while live is live.
Parasocial Attachment	Favorite influencer recommendations, warm communication in the chat column.	Social validation, validation of taste, a sense of trust in idol figures.	Purchasing goods due to marketer personality factors rather than needs.
Barrier-Free Infrastructure	Paylater feature, one-click e-wallet, delivery data automation.	The illusion of affordability, the neglect of real costs, instant gratification.	Spontaneous transaction execution when personal cash funds are limited.

The fifth finding in this study highlights the post-purchase psychological reflections and experiences experienced by Generation Z. The impulsive shopping experience on interactive social media does not end when the transaction is completed, but continues into the evaluation phase after the goods are received at home. The results of in-depth interviews revealed a highly dynamic duality of emotional responses, namely between instant emotional satisfaction (instant gratification) and the emergence of post-purchase regret (cognitive dissonance).

In the initial phase immediately after successfully checking out, informants reported a surge of joy and satisfaction triggered by the thrill of securing a discounted product amidst the competitive nature of live streaming. However, once the product arrived and the emotional stimulation from the social media platform dissipated, consumers' cognitive awareness returned to full swing. Many informants realized that the product they purchased lacked utility in their daily lives, was of a quality below visual expectations, or was actually beyond their financial budget.

This sense of regret triggered various psychological defense mechanisms and behavioral adaptations among Generation Z. Some informants tried to rationalize their decisions by viewing the purchases as a form of self-reward for the tiring routine of

college or work. Others expressed temporary discouragement and attempted to delete the apps or limit screen time on social media, although these defenses often collapsed again when exposed to new interactive offerings later.

Overall, the results of this study confirm that the phenomenon of impulsive buying by Generation Z consumers in an interactive social media-based commerce environment is the result of a synthesis between the sophistication of social media technology architecture and the psychosocial characteristics of Generation Z. The high need for visual interaction, attachment to digital public figures, and vulnerability to scarcity pressure make this generation highly responsive to this new commerce model. Impulsive buying can no longer be viewed simply as a failure of individual self-control, but rather as a result of a digital environment that is systematically designed to minimize cognitive considerations and maximize spontaneous emotional responses.

CONCLUSION

Based on the overall findings and discussion in this study, it can be concluded that the phenomenon of impulsive buying among Generation Z consumers on interactive social media-based trading platforms is not simply a form of self-control failure or fundamentally irrational actions, but rather the result of a systematically integrated digital experience construction. The dynamic interaction between the stimulation of live broadcasting technology, emotional attachment to digital public figures, scarcity-based psychological conditioning, and a seamless payment infrastructure has created a shopping ecosystem that aggressively encourages spontaneous decision-making. The integration of live streaming features that present real and transparent product visualizations has proven effective in breaking down consumers' initial doubts, while interactive chat columns trigger social engagement bonds that strengthen the urge to transact instantly.

Furthermore, this study concluded that psychological manipulation through scenarios of urgency and scarcity—such as countdown timers and limited quota discounts—significantly triggers the fear of missing out, overriding rational analysis of real needs and budget constraints. The influence of parasocial relationships with influencers or content creators further reinforces this phenomenon, where product recommendations are perceived as genuine advice from trusted friends rather than commercial marketing strategies. The impact of these digital environment triggers is further exacerbated by the convenience of modern payment options such as digital wallets and paylater, which minimize transaction friction, allowing emotional impulses to translate into checkout actions within seconds without giving consumers cognitive pause for reconsideration.

However, this impulsive shopping experience consistently results in a dual emotional response in the post-purchase phase. Although consumers experience instant gratification upon successful completion of a transaction, the loss of digital stimulation after receiving the item often triggers post-purchase regret and cognitive dissonance due to the realization of a product's inconsistency in utility or disruption to personal financial stability. Therefore, this study emphasizes the need for increased digital financial literacy

and self-awareness among Generation Z in managing their social media interactions. It also serves as an ethical reflection for e-commerce industry players in designing marketing strategies that do not overly exploit the emotional vulnerabilities of young consumers.

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