

Understanding Online Impulsive Buying in Chinese e-commerce: A Conceptual Framework Integrating Big Five Personality Traits, Emotional Intelligence, and SOR Theory

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Abstract

This conceptual paper proposes an integrated framework to understand online impulsive buying among Chinese consumers. Drawing on Big Five personality traits and emotional intelligence (EI), and grounded in Stimulus, Organism, Response (SOR) theory, the framework conceptualizes personality traits as the stimulus, emotional intelligence as the organism, and online impulsive buying as the behavioral response. The study emphasizes how individual differences in personality predispose consumers to varying levels of impulsive buying, while EI regulates the extent to which these predispositions translate into behavior. The framework provides theoretical propositions linking each Big Five trait and EI to online impulsive buying tendencies. This research contributes to theory by integrating personality and emotional regulation into the SOR model and offers practical guidance for e-commerce platforms to design interventions and personalized marketing strategies that account for consumers' psychological characteristics.

Keywords: Online Impulsive Buying, Big Five Personality Traits, Sor Theory, Emotional Intelligence, E-Commerce

Introduction

In recent years, online impulsive buying has become an increasingly important phenomenon in China's rapidly developing e-commerce environment. Innovative business models, such as live-streaming shopping, social commerce, and algorithm-driven promotions, have intensified the prevalence of unplanned and emotionally driven purchases (iResearch, 2024; Zhang et al., 2024). Consumers are frequently exposed to a variety of digital stimuli, including time-limited discounts, social proof cues, and real-time product recommendations, which can accelerate decision-making and increase the likelihood of impulsive purchases. For example, large-scale shopping events such as "Double Eleven" utilize scarcity and social

recognition cues, encouraging consumers to make rapid purchasing decisions (Li, 2019; Wang & Lin, 2020).

While previous research has examined impulsive buying behavior from situational and marketing perspectives, less attention has been given to individual differences that shape susceptibility to online stimuli. Personality traits, particularly the Big Five dimensions, have been shown to influence consumer preferences, self-control, and emotional responsiveness, which are closely linked to impulsive purchasing behavior (Bratko et al., 2013; Kulbida et al., 2024; Meng & Leung, 2021). For instance, highly neurotic consumers may be more sensitive to urgency cues in flash sales or live-streaming promotions, leading to heightened emotional pressure and impulsive purchases (Badgaiyan et al., 2016). Similarly, consumers with high extraversion often seek social interaction and immediate gratification, making them more likely to engage in spontaneous online purchases when stimulated by social cues (Jasrotia et al., 2025).

Emotional intelligence (EI), defined as the ability to perceive, understand, and regulate emotions, may further influence how individuals respond to online shopping stimuli (Bru-Luna et al., 2021; Yip & Côté, 2013). Consumers with higher EI may better manage emotional arousal triggered by digital marketing, potentially mitigating impulsive purchasing tendencies. In contrast, consumers with lower EI may be more vulnerable to external cues and affective triggers, amplifying impulsive behavior (Vaughan et al., 2019; El Othman et al., 2020). Therefore, incorporating emotional intelligence provides a more nuanced understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying online impulsive buying.

Despite these insights, existing research has not adequately integrated personality traits and emotional intelligence within a conceptual framework that explains how individual differences interact with digital marketing stimuli to influence online impulsive buying. Most studies focus on direct relationships or situational factors, neglecting the complex interplay between internal predispositions and external triggers (Good, 2019; Naeem, 2020; Lee et al., 2023). As a result, there is a need for a systematic theoretical framework that captures these relationships, particularly in the context of China's highly dynamic e-commerce ecosystem.

To address this gap, the present conceptual paper proposes an integrated framework grounded in Stimulus, Organism, Response (SOR) theory, wherein personality traits (Big Five) serve as the stimulus, emotional intelligence constitutes the organism, and online impulsive buying represents the response. This framework enables an examination of how stable individual differences predispose consumers to varying levels of impulsive purchasing behavior and how emotional intelligence moderates the translation of these predispositions into action. By doing so, the study provides a foundation for formulating theoretical propositions linking the Big Five personality traits, emotional intelligence, and online impulsive buying. Overall, this framework contributes to theory by integrating personality and emotional regulation within the SOR model, while offering practical insights for e-commerce platforms to design personalized and responsible marketing strategies that consider consumers' psychological.

Literature Review

Online Impulsive Buying

Online impulsive buying refers to a sudden, unplanned, and emotionally driven purchase that occurs without prior deliberation (Rook & Fisher, 1995; Liu et al., 2013). Unlike planned purchases, impulsive buying is largely influenced by immediate emotional responses and situational triggers rather than rational evaluation. In digital contexts, such behavior is intensified by the unique characteristics of online platforms, including continuous accessibility, convenience, and immersive user experiences (Koay et al., 2021; Mandolfo & Lamberti, 2021). Social commerce and live-streaming platforms provide additional stimulation through real-time interaction, product demonstration, and persuasive messaging, further increasing consumers' likelihood of acting on impulse (Zhang et al., 2023; Akram et al., 2021). Thus, online impulsive buying represents a complex interplay of emotional arousal, situational urgency, and behavioral immediacy.

Big Five Personality Traits

Personality traits provide a systematic framework for understanding individual differences in behavior, emotion, and cognition (McCrae & Costa, 1992; Akhtar et al., 2015). The Big Five model consists of extraversion, neuroticism, openness to experience, conscientiousness, and agreeableness, each representing stable psychological tendencies that influence consumer behavior. Extraverted individuals are sociable and responsive to external stimulation, making them more likely to react to social cues in online shopping. Highly neurotic consumers are sensitive to stress and emotional fluctuations, which may increase their susceptibility to impulsive purchases. Openness reflects curiosity and a preference for novelty, potentially enhancing engagement with innovative digital platforms. Conscientious consumers tend to exercise self-discipline and control, often limiting unplanned purchases. Finally, agreeableness relates to cooperative and socially oriented tendencies, which can make consumers responsive to peer influence and social recommendations in e-commerce contexts (Lixăndroiu et al., 2021; Ai et al., 2019). Collectively, the Big Five traits serve as internal organism factors that shape individual responses to online marketing stimuli, highlighting the importance of considering personality differences in understanding impulsive buying behavior.

Emotional Intelligence (EI)

Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to an individual's ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and utilize emotions effectively (Bru-Luna et al., 2021; Yip & Côté, 2013). In the context of online consumer behavior, EI shapes how individuals process emotional stimuli and respond to affective triggers. Consumers with higher EI can identify their own emotional states and adjust their behavior accordingly, allowing them to manage impulses and make more deliberate purchasing decisions (Vaughan et al., 2019; El Othman et al., 2020). Conversely, individuals with lower EI are more susceptible to immediate emotional arousal from promotions, flash sales, and live-streaming interactions, increasing the likelihood of impulsive purchases (Abd El-Hameed Zaghoul & Al-Kardousi, 2023; Wang et al., 2022).

EI also interacts with personality traits to moderate impulsive buying. For instance, high EI can help neurotic consumers recognize and regulate heightened emotional responses, thereby reducing unplanned purchases, while reinforcing conscientious consumers' goal-directed behavior and self-control (Vaughan et al., 2019; Bratko et al., 2013; Shahjehan et al.,

2012). This suggests that EI acts as a boundary condition rather than a universal regulator, with its effectiveness depending on the underlying personality configuration and situational context (Kulbida et al., 2024; Ai et al., 2019).

Furthermore, in highly stimulating online retail environments, such as social commerce and live-streaming platforms, EI enables consumers to reflect on emotional triggers and mitigate affect-driven decisions. By enhancing self-awareness and emotional regulation, EI not only reduces impulsive buying but also supports more rational engagement with marketing stimuli, ultimately contributing to more controlled and satisfying online shopping experiences (Lixăndroiu et al., 2021; Pelau et al., 2018). Integrating EI into the study of online impulsive buying provides a critical lens to explain individual differences in consumer responses to digital marketing environments.

Stimulus, Organism, Response (SOR) Theory

The Stimulus, Organism, Response (SOR) framework provides a robust theoretical lens for understanding how stable individual differences influence consumer behavior (Yu & Chen, 2022; Sun & Zhang, 2006). In this study, the Big Five personality traits are conceptualized as the stimulus (S), representing enduring psychological predispositions that can trigger affective and cognitive reactions in online shopping contexts. Each personality dimension, extraversion, neuroticism, openness, conscientiousness, and agreeableness, may differentially predispose consumers to impulsive buying behaviors by shaping their sensitivity to situational cues and propensity for emotion-driven decisions (Mammadov, 2022; Shahjehan et al., 2012; Rizki et al., 2022).

Emotional intelligence (EI) constitutes the organism (O) component, functioning as a moderating and regulatory mechanism that influences how personality traits translate into behavioral outcomes (Quílez-Robres et al., 2023; Schutte et al., 2021). High EI enables consumers to recognize, interpret, and manage their emotional responses, thereby mitigating the impulsive tendencies associated with extraversion, neuroticism, and other traits. Conversely, low EI may amplify personality-driven impulses, increasing susceptibility to affective triggers in online retail environments (Schneider et al., 2013; Tang et al., 2024).

Finally, the response (R) is represented by online impulsive buying, which reflects unplanned, spontaneous, and emotion-driven purchase behaviors (Lin et al., 2023; Yaqub et al., 2024; Gao et al., 2022). By positioning Big Five traits as stimuli and EI as the organism, this framework highlights how stable personality differences interact with emotional regulation mechanisms to determine online impulsive buying tendencies. This adaptation not only aligns with SOR theory but also provides a comprehensive lens to explain variability in consumer behavior in digital retail contexts, laying the groundwork for the propositions developed in the subsequent section.

Conceptual Framework

Model Description

The present conceptual framework applies the Stimulus, Organism, Response (SOR) theory to examine the mechanisms through which individual personality traits influence online impulsive buying behavior in digital retail environments. In this framework, the Big Five personality traits constitute the stimulus (S), representing enduring individual differences that

predispose consumers to varying levels of affective and behavioral responses (McCrae & Costa, 1992; Bratko et al., 2013). Each trait potentially triggers distinct internal processes: for instance, extraversion and neuroticism may enhance responsiveness to emotional arousal, promoting impulsive buying, while conscientiousness and openness may support deliberation and self-control, attenuating spontaneous purchasing tendencies (Thalmayer et al., 2022; Sofi & Najar, 2018).

The organism (O) component is conceptualized as emotional intelligence (EI), which serves as a regulatory mechanism that moderates the influence of personality-driven impulses on behavior (Bru-Luna et al., 2021; Vaughan et al., 2019; El Othman et al., 2020). EI enables consumers to perceive, understand, and manage their own emotional states as well as the affective cues generated by digital retail contexts, such as live-streaming promotions, social proof, and algorithmic recommendations (Lin et al., 2023; Gao et al., 2022). High EI allows consumers to exercise emotional regulation and inhibitory control, thereby mitigating the tendency of traits such as neuroticism or extraversion to translate into impulsive purchases. Conversely, low EI consumers may exhibit heightened affective reactivity, allowing personality-driven impulses to more readily influence purchase decisions (Jie et al., 2024;).

The response (R) corresponds to online impulsive buying, which is characterized by sudden, unplanned, and emotion-driven purchase behaviors (Yaqub et al., 2024; Qin et al., 2024). By positioning personality traits as the stimulus, EI as the moderating organism, and impulsive buying as the behavioral outcome, the model emphasizes the dynamic interplay between enduring individual differences and emotional regulation in shaping consumer behavior in e-commerce contexts. Furthermore, this conceptualization aligns with recent empirical studies demonstrating that personality interacts with affective regulation mechanisms to influence online consumer decisions, highlighting the importance of considering both stable predispositions and psychological regulatory capacities when analyzing online impulsive buying (Zhang et al., 2022; Karim et al., 2021; Sun & Zhang, 2006).

Overall, this adaptation of the SOR framework provides a structured theoretical foundation to explore how internal individual differences act as stimuli, moderated by emotional intelligence, to predict behavioral responses in online shopping environments. It also lays the groundwork for developing specific theoretical propositions that link each personality dimension with impulsive buying under the boundary condition of EI, which will be presented in the subsequent section.

Propositions

Based on the conceptual framework and SOR-based logic, the following ten propositions are proposed regarding the influence of Big Five personality traits on online impulsive buying and the moderating role of emotional intelligence (Shown in figure 1):

P1: Extraversion positively influences online impulsive buying, such that more extraverted consumers exhibit stronger impulsive buying tendencies.

P2: Neuroticism positively influences online impulsive buying, such that consumers with higher neuroticism exhibit stronger impulsive buying tendencies.

P3: Openness to experience positively influences online impulsive buying, such that consumers with higher openness exhibit stronger impulsive buying tendencies.

P4: Conscientiousness negatively influences online impulsive buying, such that consumers with higher conscientiousness are less likely to engage in impulsive buying.

P5: Agreeableness positively influences online impulsive buying, such that consumers with higher agreeableness exhibit stronger impulsive buying tendencies.

P6: Emotional intelligence negatively moderates the relationship between extraversion and online impulsive buying, reducing the effect of extraversion driven impulsivity.

P7: Emotional intelligence negatively moderates the relationship between neuroticism and online impulsive buying, reducing the effect of neuroticism driven impulsivity.

P8: Emotional intelligence negatively moderates the relationship between openness to experience and online impulsive buying, mitigating the effect of openness to experience driven impulsivity.

P9: Emotional intelligence positively moderates the inhibitory effect of conscientiousness on online impulsive buying, strengthening self control tendencies.

P10: Emotional intelligence negatively moderates the relationship between agreeableness and online impulsive buying, reducing the effect of agreeableness driven impulsivity.

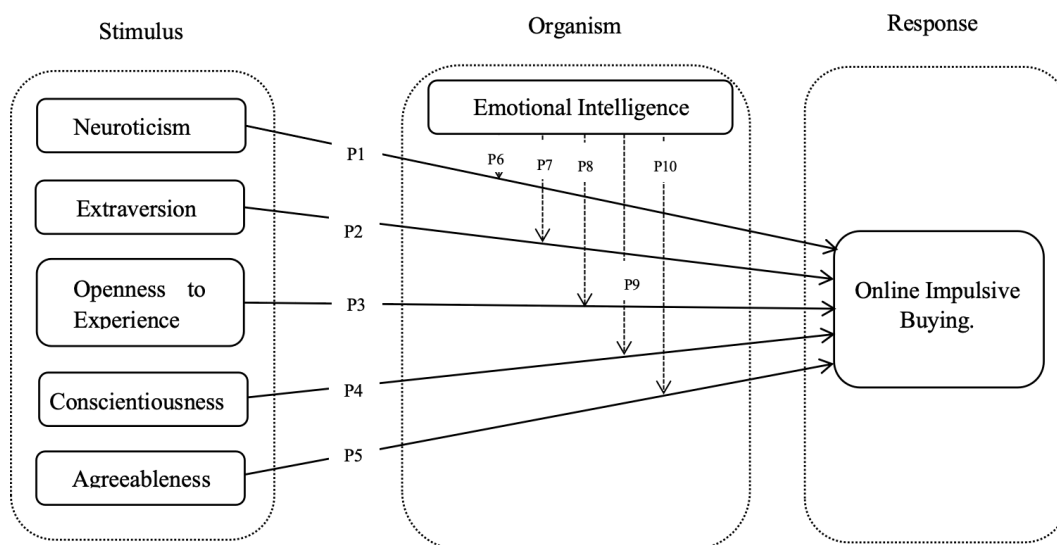


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretical Contributions

This study offers several important theoretical contributions. First, by integrating the Big Five personality traits and emotional intelligence (EI) within the SOR framework, it extends existing research on online impulsive buying, which has traditionally emphasized external marketing stimuli or direct links between personality and behavior (Lin et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2022; Gao et al., 2022). This integration conceptualizes personality traits as internal stimuli, representing enduring individual differences that can predispose consumers toward impulsive behavior, thereby providing a novel perspective on the antecedents of online impulsive purchasing.

Moreover, the incorporation of emotional intelligence as a moderating organism variable elucidates the boundary conditions under which personality traits influence impulsive buying. High EI enables consumers to recognize, interpret, and regulate affective

responses, mitigating the translation of trait-driven impulses into online purchases, whereas low EI amplifies susceptibility to impulsive tendencies (El Othman et al., 2020; Abd El-Hameed Zaghloul & Al-Kardousi, 2023). This highlights the nuanced interplay between stable personality traits and dynamic emotional regulation processes, offering a more comprehensive theoretical explanation than models that consider these factors independently.

Importantly, the conceptual framework bridges the gap between personality psychology and digital consumer behavior, demonstrating how individual differences interact with internal regulatory mechanisms to shape online impulsive buying in e-commerce environments (Qin et al., 2024; Karim et al., 2021; Sun & Zhang, 2006). By positioning personality traits as internal stimuli and EI as a moderator within the SOR structure, this study provides a coherent theoretical lens for understanding variability in consumer responses, enriching the literature on online shopping behavior and offering a foundation for future empirical testing.

Practical Implications

From a managerial perspective, the proposed framework provides actionable insights for e-commerce platforms and marketers seeking to optimize user engagement while promoting responsible consumer behavior. Understanding the differential impact of personality traits on online impulsive buying allows platforms to tailor promotional strategies, recommendation systems, and interface designs to match consumers' predispositions (Huang et al., 2024; Lixăndroiu et al., 2021). For example, highly extraverted or neurotic consumers may respond more strongly to social and affective cues, whereas highly conscientious consumers require more deliberate or incentive-based approaches to influence purchasing behavior.

In addition, recognizing the moderating role of emotional intelligence suggests practical interventions to enhance consumers' self-regulation. Platforms could design features or nudges that encourage reflective evaluation, such as reminders of budgets or delayed-purchase options, thereby helping consumers manage affect-driven impulses and reduce regret (Bru-Luna et al., 2021; Lin et al., 2023; Feng et al., 2023). This approach aligns with the broader goal of personalized marketing balanced with ethical responsibility, enabling e-commerce businesses to optimize sales without encouraging overconsumption.

Finally, the framework provides guidance for consumer education and awareness initiatives. By highlighting how personality and emotional regulation influence online shopping behavior, marketers and policymakers can develop interventions aimed at increasing consumer awareness of impulsive buying triggers, ultimately promoting more informed and rational decision-making in digital retail contexts (Vaughan et al., 2019; Qin et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2022).

Limitations and Future Research

Limitations

Despite the contributions of this conceptual study, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the framework is theoretical and has not been empirically validated, which limits the ability to quantify the strength of the proposed relationships between Big

Five personality traits, emotional intelligence, and online impulsive buying. Second, the model focuses on individual-level psychological factors while largely ignoring contextual and cultural influences, such as platform-specific design, social norms, and national consumption culture, which may affect online purchasing behavior (Lin et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2022). Third, the framework considers emotional intelligence as a singular moderating mechanism, but other potential moderators, such as perceived value, risk tolerance, or situational urgency, are not included, which may constrain the model's explanatory power. Finally, as a conceptual paper, the framework does not capture temporal dynamics or longitudinal behavioral changes, leaving questions about how personality and EI influence impulsive buying over time.

Future Research

Future research should empirically test the proposed framework to validate the theoretical propositions and quantify the effects of personality traits and emotional intelligence on online impulsive buying. Multi-method approaches, including surveys, experiments, or behavioral tracking, could provide richer evidence and assess the relative contributions of each trait. Cross-cultural studies are also recommended to examine whether the framework holds in different e-commerce contexts and consumer populations, addressing potential cultural moderating effects (Calabretta et al., 2017; Qin et al., 2024). Moreover, future work could explore additional organism-level moderators, such as perceived value, self-control, or privacy concern, to capture the complexity of consumer decision-making. Longitudinal studies may further illuminate temporal changes in impulsive buying behavior and the dynamic role of emotional intelligence in regulating personality-driven impulses, enhancing the robustness and generalizability of the framework.

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