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Research Article

Impact of Viral Social Media Content on Gen Z's Impulsive Purchases of Personal Care Products: The Moderating Role of Gender

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Abstract: The rapid spread of viral social media content has significantly reshaped the consumption behaviour of Generation Z, particularly within the personal care product segment. As digital natives, Gen Z consumers are highly exposed to short-form videos, influencer promotions, and trending content that often led to unplanned purchases. Based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response theory, the research has attempted to find how viral social media content affects the impulsive purchasing behavior of personal care products by Gen Z and exploring the moderating relationship of gender. A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was adopted, and data were collected from 412 Gen Z respondents in Tamil Nadu using a structured questionnaire. The constructs were confirmed through exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, and reliability was validated using Cronbach's alpha. Required analyses were conducted using Jamovi software to substantiate the objectives. The results indicate that impulsive buying behaviour is strongly and positively affected by the viral social media content, with 26.3 percent variation in impulsive purchases. Moreover, the influence of gender also moderates this relationship since, the tendency of getting influenced by viral content and leading to impulsive purchase is higher in female consumers than male. The study contributes to the growing literature on digital consumer behaviour by validating gender as a moderator and by integrating a sustainability perspective aligned with sustainable development goal twelve: Responsible Consumption and Production. Practical implications are offered for marketers and policymakers to encourage more responsible digital marketing practices targeting Gen Z consumers.

Keywords: Social Media Content, Gen Z, Impulsive Buying Decision, Responsible Consumption and Production

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INTRODUCTION

Generation Z, are the people born between 1997 and 2012, this is the group that has grown up in an entirely digital background [1]. Compared to any other generation, Gen Z had the access to technology on their childhood that has greatly influenced their communication patterns, their learning styles and even their purchasing behaviour [2-3]. This particular generation is distinguished by innovation, when convenience is demanded, when security is valued, and escapism is a tendency [4]. Their pragmatism and financial habits are shaped by events such as the 2008 global financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, this further distinguish them from earlier generations [5]. Since, Gen Z has been raised with smartphones and social media as part of everyday life, they are more likely to prefer online platforms and judge brands through the lens of transparency and personalization [6-7].

Social media platforms such as Instagram Reels, TikTok, and YouTube Shorts are having great influence on the purchase decisions among Gen Z than reasons such as price or utility of the product [7-9]. In the personal care segment,

Gen Z consumers rely more on online reviews and influencer recommendations before making purchase decisions [10]. Viral content on these platforms often triggers unplanned purchases and FOMO [11], this frequently resulting in the purchase of products that consumers may not really in need [12-13].

In this context, the present study examines how viral content on social media influences impulsive buying tendencies among Generation Z consumers, along with the moderating role of gender in light of established differences in online shopping behaviour between males and females. Furthermore, this research aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 12 on Responsible Consumption and Production. Since, viral social media trends often encourage excessive consumption, identifying the behavioural factors that drive impulsive buying is crucial for fostering more sustainable and responsible purchasing practices among Generation Z consumers.

Literature Review

Viral Social Media Content and Consumer Engagement: Viral social media content refers to user generated or brand generated posts, particularly short videos, that spread rapidly across various social media platforms through high engagement, emotional resonance, and algorithmic augmentation. Berger and Milkman argue that content becomes viral when it evokes emotions such as excitement, amazement, or anxiety, that trigger the users to share and interact. Similarly, Hinz et al. emphasize that spread of content is not merely organic but also shaped by network structures and platform dynamics. Capriotti and Zeler [14] further highlight that virality of a content enhances brand visibility and consumer involvement. Kaye et al. and Luo et al. show that virality is notably driven by platform recommendation algorithms that prioritize emotionally engaging and visually stimulating content, particularly in short-video formats such as Tik Tok and Instagram Reels. These findings ensure that viral contents make strong influence by creating immediacy and social proof. Even though these studies highlighted on information spread and engagement metrics, the least focus was given to actual behavioural impact, such as impulsive purchasing. The transition of planned purchase to unplanned consumption behaviour remains insufficiently explored, especially among Generation Z consumers.

Impulsive Buying in Digital Environments

Impulsive buying is defined as spontaneous, unplanned purchase driven by emotional stimuls and situational cues rather than rational evaluation [15]. In digital contexts, the triggers impulse buying more because online platforms provide continuous exposure to attractive stimuli, easy purchase, and instant gratification [16-17]. Several studies agree that emotional arousal is the prominent reason for impulsive buying. Nurudin [12] pointed out that emotional triggers mediate the relationship between social media exposure and impulsive purchase behaviour. Similarly, the study of Ha Nam Khanh [11] highlights that fear of missing out generated by viral trends significantly increasing the impulsive purchasing tendencies. These results align with the S–O–R framework, where digital stimuli activate emotional reactions that weaken self-control and promote impulsivity. Yet, a contradiction emerges in the literature, while most studies ensure the role of emotional mechanism on impulse buying, those studies were examined the general online shopping behaviour or e-commerce purchases, rather than product-category specific behaviour such as personal care consumption. Moreover, many investigations stop at purchase intention instead of analysing actual impulsive decision-making, creating a conceptual gap between stimulus and response.

Gender Differences in Impulsive Buying and Digital Consumption

Gender has long been recognised as a salient factor influencing consumer decision-making processes, particularly in relation to emotional responses, information processing, and impulse buying behaviour. Early consumer behaviour research suggests that males and females differ systematically in their cognitive and affective orientations toward consumption, with females exhibiting greater emotional involvement and sensitivity to symbolic and aesthetic cues, while males tend to emphasise functional and utilitarian attributes [18-19].

In the context of impulse buying, several studies report that female consumers demonstrate higher impulsive buying tendencies compared to males, primarily due to stronger affective reactions and lower reliance on cognitive control during purchase situations [19-20]. Beatty and Ferrell [21] further argue that impulse buying is closely linked to emotional arousal and hedonic motivation dimensions in which female consumers often score higher, particularly in appearance-related and self-expressive product categories. These differences become more pronounced in digital environments, where marketing stimuli are visually rich, emotionally framed, and rapidly delivered.

With the rise of social media and influencer-driven marketing, gender-based differences in digital engagement have received increasing scholarly attention. Prior studies indicate that women are more likely to engage with social media content, follow influencers, and rely on peer validation cues, making them more susceptible to persuasive digital stimuli [22-23]. Influencer credibility, visual storytelling, and aspirational messaging are the common characteristics of viral

social media content, have been shown to provoke stronger emotional and behavioural responses among female consumers, particularly in the beauty and personal care segments [24-25].

However, despite consistent evidence of gender-based differences in impulsive buying and social media engagement, the majority of existing studies treat gender merely as a control variable or descriptive characteristic, rather than explicitly theorising and empirically testing its moderating role. Many investigations examine gender differences through mean comparisons or demographic profiling, without integrating gender into behavioural models as a conditioning factor that alters the strength of stimulus–response relationships. As a result, the interactive effect of gender in shaping how viral digital stimuli translate into impulsive purchase behaviour remains underexplored.

From a theoretical standpoint, the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework provides a useful lens to conceptualise gender as a moderator rather than a direct predictor. Within this framework, gender can influence how external stimuli are emotionally processed at the organismic level and subsequently converted into behavioural responses [26]. Prior research suggests that females exhibit higher emotional reactivity and aesthetic sensitivity when exposed to symbolic and appearance-related cues, whereas males tend to adopt a more instrumental processing style, potentially weakening the stimulus–response linkage in emotionally charged digital contexts [20].

Despite these theoretical indications, empirical studies explicitly examining gender as a moderating variable in the relationship between viral social media content and impulsive purchase behaviour particularly among Generation Z consumers remain unexplored. Moreover, limited attention has been given to product-category-specific contexts such as personal care, where gendered consumption norms, self-presentation motives, and identity construction play a critical role. This omission represents a significant gap in digital consumer behaviour literature and limits the explanatory power of existing impulse buying models.

Prior research also suggests that psychological factors such as lifestyle aspirations and fear of missing out intensify impulse buying in digital contexts [19,11]. However, these organismic mechanisms are not explicitly examined in the present study and are acknowledged as potential mediators for future investigation. However, these psychological explanations are rarely integrated into sustainability-oriented discussions. While impulse buying is known to contribute to overconsumption, waste, and regret, most studies neglect its broader societal implications, particularly in relation to SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production.

Research Gap

Even though existing research has examined the influence of TikTok like specific platform videos on consumer behaviour, these studies largely focus on general purchase intention or attitude formation rather than impulsive buying, particularly among Generation Z. When we consider the role of gender, it has not been empirically tested as a moderating variable in the relationship between viral social media content and impulsive purchase decisions. Existing studies generally treat gender only as demographic variable rather than examining its interactive effect on behavioural outcomes. Additionally, current literature seldom integrates a sustainability perspective, overlooking how impulse purchases triggered by viral content may contribute to overconsumption, a key concern under SDG 12-Responsible Consumption and Production.

Therefore, this study fills these gaps by investigating how viral social media content influences Gen Z's impulsive purchase of personal care products and examining gender as a moderating factor, while also highlighting sustainability implications.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) Theory explicated by Mehrabian and Russell [26] that elucidates the effect of external stimulus on internal psychological conditions and consequently determines behaviour. In this paradigm, the stimulus (S) is viral social media content. These organismic reactions (O) are manifested in the form of the increase in arousal, and the Previous studies have established that these emotional and mental processes weaken rational consideration and enhance impulsiveness. The outcome (R) is that of impulsive purchase behaviour which is spontaneous, unthought-out buying that is driven by emotion stimulation yet not necessities. The resulting response (R) is impulsive purchase behaviour, characterized by spontaneous, unplanned buying motivated by emotional triggers rather than necessity. Viral content accelerates this process by creating urgency, desire, and trend participation within the personal care segment.

Overall, the S–O–R framework positions viral social media content as a powerful stimulus that shapes Gen Z's internal states, ultimately driving impulsive purchase behaviour.

Conceptual Framework

This study explains how external environmental cues influence internal psychological states and subsequently shape behavioural responses. In this model, Viral Social Media Content act as the stimulus (S), representing the external digital

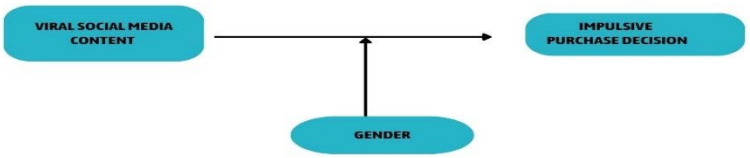


Figure 1: Proposed Model of the Relationship Between Viral Social Media Content and Impulsive Buying Behavior
Source: Author's own work

cues encountered by Gen Z consumers. Such contents weaken the rational consideration and enhance the impulsiveness. Although the organismic (O) state is conceptually acknowledged in the S–O–R model, the present framework focuses on the direct effect of the stimulus on the behavioural response. Given the exploratory nature of the study and the objective of examining direct behavioural outcomes, organismic variables were not explicitly modelled but are acknowledged as important avenues for future research. The behavioural outcome, Impulsive Purchase Decision, represents the response (R), which is spontaneous and unplanned purchasing as a result of exposure to trending or viral personal care posts.

Gender is introduced as a moderating variable, influencing the strength of the relationship between viral social media content and impulsive purchase decisions. Previous researches evident that males and females differ in how they process digital stimuli, particularly in the personal care context. Women are more aesthetically sensitive, while men often consider lifestyle-oriented cues. In line with this, gender is supposed to have an impact in the extent to which viral content is converted to impulsive purchase Figure 1.

Objectives

- To examine the impact of viral social media content on Gen Z's impulsive purchases of personal care products
- To determine whether gender moderates the relationship between viral social media content and impulsive purchase decisions

Research Hypothesis

- **H01:** There is no significant impact of viral social media content on Gen Z's impulsive purchases of personal care products
- **H02:** The relationship between viral social media content and impulsive purchase decisions is the same for all genders

Hypotheses Development

The present study is grounded in the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework proposed by Mehrabian and Russell [26], which explains how external environmental stimuli influence individuals' internal psychological states and subsequently shape their behavioural responses. In digital consumption environments, viral social media content functions as a powerful stimulus that captures attention, evokes emotional arousal, and reduces cognitive deliberation. Short-form videos, influencer endorsements, trending challenges, and algorithm-driven recommendations intensify immediacy, social proof, and perceived urgency, thereby weakening rational evaluation and encouraging spontaneous decision-making. Prior studies consistently show that emotionally charged and visually engaging online content increases impulsive buying tendencies by triggering excitement, curiosity, and fear of missing out [12-13,15-16]. Within the S–O–R paradigm, viral content therefore acts as an environmental stimulus that activates affective reactions, which in turn increase the likelihood of impulsive purchasing behaviour. In the context of personal care products, where visual appeal, beauty standards, and influencer credibility play a crucial role, the persuasive power of viral content becomes even more pronounced. Hence, it is theoretically expected that greater exposure to viral social media content will significantly elevate impulsive purchase behaviour among Gen Z consumers.

Accordingly, the first hypothesis is proposed as follows:

- **H1:** Viral social media content has a significant and positive impact on Gen Z's impulsive purchase behaviour of personal care products

Beyond the direct effect of viral content, consumer behaviour literature suggests that individuals differ in how they emotionally process marketing stimuli. Gender, in particular, has been widely acknowledged as a meaningful psychological and behavioural differentiator in impulse buying research. Prior studies indicate that females tend to exhibit higher emotional involvement, aesthetic sensitivity, and responsiveness to symbolic consumption cues, especially in categories related to beauty, personal care, and self-presentation [19-20]. Women are also more likely to engage with influencer content, experiential storytelling, and visual product demonstrations, which are dominant features of viral social media marketing. Conversely, male consumers are often found to rely relatively more on functional and utilitarian considerations, which may reduce the strength of stimulus-driven impulsive responses in emotionally framed digital environments.

From the perspective of the S–O–R framework, gender can be conceptualised as a moderating condition that shapes how strongly an external stimulus is translated into internal affective reactions and subsequent behavioural responses. In other words, while viral content may stimulate impulsive buying across all consumers, the magnitude of this effect is not uniform and depends on individual-level psychological characteristics such as gender. Introducing gender as a moderator therefore extends the S–O–R model by acknowledging heterogeneity in stimulus sensitivity and behavioural susceptibility within digital marketing contexts. This theoretical positioning moves gender beyond a mere demographic control variable and reframes it as a psychologically meaningful factor that conditions impulse-driven consumption.
Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- **H2:** Gender significantly moderates the relationship between viral social media content and Gen Z's impulsive purchase behaviour

Furthermore, drawing on prior findings that female consumers display stronger emotional engagement with social media content and higher impulsive buying tendencies in hedonic and appearance-related product categories [19-20,22], it is theoretically reasonable to expect a directional moderation effect. In the personal care segment, viral content often emphasizes beauty enhancement, social identity, and lifestyle aspiration, which resonate more strongly with female consumers' affective and symbolic consumption motives. Therefore, viral digital stimuli are likely to exert a stronger behavioural impact on females than on males.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopted an explanatory cross-sectional research design to test the theoretically grounded relationships derived from the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework. The design is appropriate as impulsive buying behaviour is situational and driven by immediate emotional reactions to environmental stimuli such as viral social media content [15,21]. The study examines how viral social media content influences Gen Z consumers' impulsive purchasing of personal care products and whether this relationship is moderated by gender.

The target population comprised Generation Z individuals (born between 1997 and 2012) residing in Tamil Nadu, India, who actively use social media and purchase personal care products. Gen Z was selected due to their high exposure to short-form videos, influencer content, and algorithm-driven marketing [2,7]. Tamil Nadu provides a suitable empirical setting because of its high smartphone penetration and strong digital commerce engagement.

Purposive sampling was employed to ensure theoretical relevance, as impulsive buying triggered by viral content can only be meaningfully examined among digitally active consumers. The sample size was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan table, which suggested a minimum of 380 respondents. The final sample of 412 respondents exceeded this requirement, ensuring adequate statistical power for regression and moderation analysis [27].

The research instrument was developed using validated scales adapted from prior studies. Viral Social Media Content was operationalised using items related to digital virality and short-form content engagement. Impulsive Buying Behaviour was measured using the scale developed by Rook and Fisher. All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), ensuring consistency and construct validity.

Measurement Model and Validation

Exploratory Factor Analysis and Confirmatory Factor Analysis were conducted to assess construct validity. The Viral Social Media Content scale was refined to three items with strong factor loadings, and the Impulsive Buying Behaviour scale retained four items forming a unidimensional structure. Reliability analysis showed high internal consistency, with

Cronbach's alpha exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 [27]. These results confirm that both constructs are psychometrically sound and suitable for hypothesis testing.

Normality

Descriptive statistics indicated moderate variability in responses. Although the Shapiro–Wilk test showed departures from normality, this is common for Likert-scale data. Given the large sample size, the analysis proceeded using parametric techniques, which are robust to minor violations of normality [27].

Model Specification

The research model is grounded in the S–O–R framework, where Viral Social Media Content represents the stimulus (S) and Impulsive Purchase Behaviour represents the response (R). Viral Social Media Content is specified as the independent variable, and Impulsive Purchase Behaviour as the dependent variable, corresponding to Hypothesis 1 (H1).

Gender is incorporated as a moderating variable, reflecting its role as a psychological factor that conditions individuals' responsiveness to digital stimuli. This allows the model to test whether the strength of the relationship between viral social media content and impulsive buying differs between males and females, as proposed in Hypotheses H2

Thus, the model examines:

- The direct effect of viral social media content on impulsive purchase behaviour (H1), and
- The moderating role of gender in this relationship (H2)

Analysis

Impact of viral social media content on Gen Z's impulsive purchases (H1)

The findings of the study provide strong empirical support for Hypothesis 1, confirming that viral social media content has a significant and positive impact on Gen Z's impulsive purchase behaviour of personal care products. This result reinforces the fundamental proposition of the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework that external environmental stimuli, when emotionally engaging and cognitively salient, can directly shape behavioural outcomes. In the present digital context, viral content functions as a high-intensity stimulus that captures attention, evokes affective responses, and reduces the role of rational evaluation, thereby increasing the likelihood of spontaneous and unplanned purchasing decisions.

The moderate explanatory power of the model ($R^2 = 0.263$) is theoretically meaningful in impulse buying research, where behaviour is known to be influenced by a constellation of psychological, situational, and contextual factors [21,17]. Rather than indicating limitation, this level of explained variance reflects the complex and multifaceted nature of impulsive consumption. It demonstrates that viral social media content alone constitutes a substantial behavioural driver, even in the absence of explicit organismic mediators such as emotional arousal, self-control, or fear of missing out. This strengthens the argument that digital stimuli have acquired an autonomous persuasive power in contemporary algorithm-driven marketing environments.

The results are consistent with prior studies showing that emotionally charged and visually engaging online content significantly enhances impulse buying tendencies [12-13,16]. However, the present study extends existing literature in two important ways. First, most earlier studies in digital marketing and social commerce predominantly examine purchase intention or general online shopping behaviour, whereas limited empirical attention has been given to actual impulsive purchase behaviour triggered by viral social media content. Prior review and meta-analytic studies highlight that intention-based models dominate the literature, leaving a gap in understanding spontaneous, emotion-driven consumption responses in digital environments [17,28-29]. This distinction is theoretically important because impulse buying represents a more spontaneous and less cognitively mediated form of consumption than intention-based decision-making. By directly linking viral content to impulsive buying behaviour, the study strengthens the behavioural validity of the S–O–R framework in digital marketing research.

Second, by focusing on the personal care product category, the findings highlight the heightened susceptibility of appearance-related and identity-driven consumption domains to viral digital influence. Prior research suggests that personal care and beauty products are closely linked to self-image, social identity, and symbolic self-presentation, making consumer responses in this category more emotionally charged and socially influenced than in utilitarian product domains [19]. In digital environments, viral social media content amplifies these symbolic meanings through visual storytelling, influencer embodiment, and aspirational cues, thereby intensifying consumers' affective engagement

and impulsive responses [22,25]. Consequently, personal care products become particularly responsive to viral stimuli that reinforce aesthetic ideals, lifestyle aspirations, and social comparison mechanisms. The positive and significant regression coefficient further suggests that viral social media content operates not merely as an information source but as an emotional and social catalyst that restructures consumers' decision-making processes. In line with Rook's [15] conceptualisation of impulse buying, viral content reduces deliberation time, enhances desire, and increases perceived urgency, all of which weaken cognitive control and promote spontaneous action. Within the S–O–R paradigm, this indicates that the stimulus component has become increasingly dominant in digital environments, capable of directly triggering behavioural responses without necessarily requiring explicitly measured organismic intermediaries.

Overall, the confirmation of H1 demonstrates that viral social media content constitutes a powerful behavioural trigger in Gen Z's consumption landscape. Theoretically, it validates the extension of the S–O–R framework into algorithm-driven, short-form video marketing contexts and establishes viral content as a critical environmental stimulus shaping impulsive buying behaviour. This moves the study beyond descriptive digital marketing outcomes and positions it as evidence of how contemporary digital ecosystems structurally transform consumer decision-making processes.

Moderation of Gender on the Relationship

The findings provide robust empirical support for H2, confirming that gender significantly moderates the relationship between viral social media content and impulsive purchase behaviour, with the effect being stronger among female Gen Z consumers. This result reinforces the argument that gender should not be treated merely as a demographic descriptor but as a psychologically meaningful moderator that conditions individuals' responsiveness to digital stimuli.

From the perspective of the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework, gender functions as a conditioning variable that influences how intensely external stimuli are processed at the organismic level and subsequently translated into behavioural responses. Prior consumer behaviour literature consistently demonstrates that female consumers exhibit higher emotional involvement, greater aesthetic sensitivity, and stronger affective engagement with marketing communications, particularly in appearance-related and hedonic product categories [19-20]. Viral social media content—characterised by visual intensity, aspirational storytelling, and influencer-led narratives—therefore generates stronger emotional arousal among female consumers, amplifying impulsive purchase tendencies.

The stronger stimulus–response relationship observed for female consumers is also consistent with research showing that women are more likely to engage with influencer content, social validation cues, and experiential consumption signals on social media platforms [22-23]. In the personal care context, where consumption decisions are closely linked to self-presentation, beauty ideals, and social identity, viral content intensifies processes of social comparison and symbolic self-enhancement. These mechanisms reduce cognitive deliberation and heighten susceptibility to impulse-driven decisions, particularly among female Gen Z consumers.

Importantly, the moderation effect identified in this study advances existing literature by repositioning gender within the S–O–R framework. While earlier studies often include gender as a control variable or descriptive characteristic, the present findings empirically demonstrate its role as a behavioural amplifier that strengthens the stimulus–response pathway in digital consumption environments. This theoretical extension acknowledges heterogeneity in stimulus sensitivity and contributes to a more nuanced understanding of impulse buying behaviour in algorithm-driven social media ecosystems.

Furthermore, the gender-based asymmetry observed in impulsive buying responses carries important ethical and sustainability implications. Since female consumers exhibit heightened vulnerability to viral marketing stimuli in the personal care segment, excessive reliance on emotionally manipulative content, fear-of-missing-out appeals, and idealised beauty portrayals may disproportionately encourage impulsive and potentially unsustainable consumption patterns. This reinforces the need for responsible digital marketing practices that recognise differential consumer susceptibility and align with principles of Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12).

Findings

The results of the regression analysis reveal that viral social media content exerts a statistically significant and positive influence on Gen Z's impulsive purchase behaviour of personal care products. The model explains 26.3% of the variance in impulsive buying behaviour ($R^2 = 0.263$), indicating a moderate explanatory power, which is considered robust and theoretically meaningful in behavioural and consumer research [30]. The standardized regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.513$, $p<0.001$) demonstrates that increased exposure to viral content substantially elevates the likelihood of unplanned and spontaneous purchase decisions among Gen Z consumers. This finding reinforces prior research suggesting that emotionally charged digital stimuli significantly enhance impulsive consumption tendencies [15-16].

Although the explained variance is moderate, it is theoretically appropriate given the complex and multifaceted nature of impulsive buying behaviour. Impulse buying is not driven by a single factor but emerges from the interaction of multiple psychological, social, and situational influences [17,21]. In alignment with the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework, the present model captures the direct influence of viral social media content as an external stimulus, while several unobserved organismic and contextual variables—such as emotional arousal, self-control, fear of missing out, peer influence, and situational context—may account for the remaining unexplained variance [19,26]. Therefore, the observed level of explained variance is consistent with established impulse buying literature and does not indicate any methodological limitation.

Further analysis confirms the moderating role of gender in the relationship between viral social media content and impulsive purchase behaviour. The interaction effect between viral content exposure and gender is statistically significant ($\beta = 0.121$, $p = 0.009$), indicating that gender alters the strength of this relationship. Although the moderating effect size is modest, it remains meaningful in large-scale digital marketing contexts where even marginal behavioural differences translate into substantial commercial impact [19]. Simple slope analysis reveals that while viral social media content positively influences impulsive buying behaviour among both male and female consumers, the effect is significantly stronger among females. This suggests that female Gen Z consumers exhibit greater affective sensitivity and emotional responsiveness to viral digital stimuli, particularly in the personal care product category, leading to higher susceptibility to impulse-driven purchases. These findings are consistent with prior studies that document gender-based differences in impulse buying tendencies and emotional consumption patterns [20,26].

Recommendations

Based on the empirical findings that viral social media content significantly influences Gen Z's impulsive purchase behaviour, particularly among female consumers, brands and digital marketers should adopt more strategic and responsible content practices. While emotionally engaging and trend-driven content is effective in driving attention and sales, marketers are encouraged to balance virality with transparency by clearly communicating product utility, ingredients, and suitability. Prior studies suggest that transparent and informative digital communication enhances consumer trust while reducing post-purchase regret associated with impulsive buying [17,21].

Given the stronger susceptibility of female Gen Z consumers to viral content–induced impulsive buying, brands in the personal care sector should consider gender-sensitive content strategies. Instead of excessive emotional appeals or fear-of-missing-out tactics, marketers can employ authenticity-driven influencer collaborations and educational content that emphasizes long-term product benefits and responsible usage. Research indicates that authentic influencer communication improves perceived credibility and fosters more mindful purchase decisions [22,25].

From a sustainability perspective, the findings underscore the need for ethical digital marketing practices aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 12—Responsible Consumption and Production. Policymakers and regulatory bodies should encourage guidelines that limit misleading claims, exaggerated before–after visuals, and over-promotional viral challenges that contribute to overconsumption of personal care products. Responsible advertising frameworks have been shown to moderate impulsive consumption tendencies and promote sustainable consumer behaviour.

Educational institutions and consumer advocacy organizations can play a crucial role in strengthening digital and consumer literacy among Gen Z. Awareness programs focusing on impulse control, algorithmic persuasion, and emotional triggers in social media marketing can help young consumers develop critical evaluation skills. Prior research highlights that improved consumer literacy enhances self-regulation and reduces susceptibility to impulse-driven purchases [17,19].

Finally, social media platforms themselves should integrate choice-architecture nudges, such as cooling-off prompts, product comparison tools, or delayed checkout options, especially for highly promoted viral content. Behavioural intervention studies suggest that subtle digital nudges can effectively reduce impulsive online purchases without restricting consumer freedom.

Scope for Future Research

- power, and price Inclusion of organismic variables such as emotional arousal, fear of missing out, self-control, and materialism as mediators
- Examination of influencer characteristics such as credibility, authenticity, and expertise
- Comparative analysis across different product categories beyond personal care
- Integration of income level, spending sensitivity as control variables

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