

SPEED MEETS CONSUMPTION: QUICK COMMERCE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON IMPULSIVE FMCG PURCHASES

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of quick commerce (Q-commerce) usage on impulse buying of Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) among urban consumers in Tamil Nadu, investigating the mediating roles of perceived convenience and instant gratification, along with the moderating effects of age and income. Adopting a quantitative, cross-sectional research design, data were collected from 425 urban Q-commerce users across major cities in Tamil Nadu through a structured questionnaire based on a 5-point Likert scale. Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics and Hayes' PROCESS macro. The results indicate a significant positive influence of Q-commerce usage on impulse buying of FMCG, with perceived convenience and instant gratification serving as significant partial mediators. Additionally, age and monthly household income were found to significantly moderate this relationship, with stronger effects observed among younger and higher-income consumers. The study extends the S-O-R framework and refines impulse buying theory within the context of ultra-fast delivery services in Tamil Nadu. From a managerial standpoint, the findings offer actionable insights for Q-commerce platforms and FMCG brands to enhance digital merchandising, promotional strategies, and user experience, particularly by focusing on affluent and youth-driven urban segments to leverage impulse purchasing behaviour.

Keywords: Quick Commerce, Impulse Buying, Perceived Convenience, Instant Gratification, FMCG, Consumer Behaviour

Introduction

The retail landscape is rapidly evolving across the globe, driven by digitalization and shifting consumer preferences toward convenience and immediacy (Verhoef et al., 2017). With the advent of e-commerce, traditional buying patterns have undergone a significant transformation, offering consumers enhanced convenience and seamless transactions (Constantinides et al., 2018). The latest wave of this digital revolution is quick commerce (Q-commerce) a retail model emphasizing hyper-local, ultra-fast delivery within 10–30 minutes of ordering (Kearney, 2023; Mordor Intelligence, 2024). In India, Q-commerce has gained substantial traction, particularly in economically vibrant and digitally advanced states such as Tamil Nadu. The state's high urbanization rate, widespread smartphone penetration, and strong digital infrastructure have accelerated the adoption of Q-commerce, especially in major cities like Chennai, Coimbatore, and Madurai. Supported by India's overall digital expansion with over 1.2 billion smartphone users (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India [TRAI], 2024) Tamil Nadu's consumers are increasingly embracing instant, tech-enabled retail experiences. India's quick commerce market has surged from USD 300 million in 2022 to an estimated USD 7.1 billion by FY 2025, projected to reach USD 35 billion by 2030 (RedSeer Consulting, 2023; Economic Times, 2024). Within this national context, Tamil Nadu reflects the broader transformation in consumer behavior, characterized by a growing demand for immediacy, convenience, and digitally driven purchase experiences.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the meteoric rise of quick commerce in India, there remains a noticeable empirical gap concerning its direct and specific impact on consumer behaviour particularly within regional contexts such as Tamil Nadu. While the broader implications of fast-paced e-commerce on buying behavior have been widely studied (e.g., Kim et al., 2011), the unique appeal of ultra-fast delivery in quick commerce presents distinct psychological stimuli that may influence consumer choices, especially in the realm of impulse buying. Traditionally, impulse buying defined as a sudden and compelling urge to purchase immediately (Rook & Gardner, 1993) has been explored primarily within non-digital or slower delivery frameworks, such as brick-and-mortar retail and conventional e-commerce, where the time to fulfillment is considerably longer (Mattila & Wirtz, 2008).

However, as quick commerce continues to evolve rapidly in Tamil Nadu, driven by high smartphone penetration, digital literacy, and urban consumer dynamism, it becomes crucial to revisit conventional impulse buying theories. These theories often overlook the near-instant gratification and perceived convenience offered by Q-commerce, particularly for FMCG products and low-cost items (IBEF, n.d.). The empirical evidence explaining how these convenience-driven factors within Q-commerce platforms stimulate impulse purchases among urban consumers in Tamil Nadu remains limited. Therefore, this study seeks to address this knowledge gap systematically by analyzing the intricate mechanisms through which quick commerce reshapes grocery and FMCG purchasing patterns among the state's urban population.

Significance of the Study

This study holds importance from academic, managerial, and societal perspectives, particularly within the context of Tamil Nadu's fast-evolving urban retail environment.

Academic Contribution:

The research extends consumer behavior theories within digital retail by applying the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). It empirically demonstrates how quick commerce (stimulus) triggers perceptions of convenience and instant fulfillment (organism), leading to impulse buying (response) among urban consumers in Tamil Nadu. The findings provide a contemporary perspective on on-demand shopping behaviour in emerging markets, contributing to the theoretical understanding of digital consumption patterns in rapidly modernizing regions like Tamil Nadu.

Managerial / Practical Implications:

For FMCG firms, quick commerce platforms, and local retailers in Tamil Nadu, the study offers actionable insights to enhance e-merchandising, digital promotions, and product bundling for instant consumption. Q-commerce platforms can utilize these insights to refine user interface design, personalized recommendations, and delivery efficiency. Traditional retailers may adapt competitive strategies such as improving in-store experiences or adopting quick delivery models to retain consumers in a market increasingly driven by speed and convenience.

Societal Implications:

The widespread use of quick commerce in Tamil Nadu's urban centres also raises social and environmental considerations. Increased impulse buying may encourage smaller, frequent purchases, influencing household budgeting, waste generation, and packaging use. The rapid delivery ecosystem further contributes to carbon emissions and gig economy pressures. While these factors are not the central focus, the study lays a foundation for exploring the broader societal effects of instant consumption culture in Tamil Nadu.

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundation: The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Model: This study is grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), which explains how external stimuli (S) trigger internal psychological processes (O), leading to specific behavioural responses (R). In retail contexts, stimuli such as store ambience, product presentation, or digital interface design shape consumer emotions and cognition, ultimately influencing purchase behaviour. In the context of quick commerce (Q-commerce) in Tamil Nadu, elements like ultra-fast delivery, user-friendly mobile apps, and real-time tracking serve as stimuli. These evoke perceptions of convenience and instant gratification, which in turn drive impulse buying tendencies among urban consumers.

Understanding Quick Commerce (Q-Commerce): Quick commerce represents the newest phase of e-commerce, emphasizing hyper-local and ultra-fast delivery typically within 10 to 30 minutes of ordering (Kearney, 2023; Mordor Intelligence, 2024). Unlike traditional e-commerce that caters to planned or bulk purchases, Q-commerce fulfills immediate, small-scale, and spontaneous needs. Its defining features include lightning-fast delivery, seamless digital experiences, and a curated range of frequently purchased, low-cost items such as groceries, beverages, and personal care products. The success of this model depends on micro-fulfillment centers, advanced logistics, and strong technology integration that together enable near-instant service.

Q-Commerce in the Context of Tamil Nadu: In Tamil Nadu, Q-commerce has become an integral part of the urban retail ecosystem, driven by high smartphone penetration, digital literacy, and dense city populations. Major cities such as Chennai, Coimbatore, and Madurai have witnessed a surge in platforms like Blinkit, Zepto, and Swiggy Instamart, reflecting changing consumer expectations for immediacy and convenience. The adoption of Q-commerce in Tamil Nadu highlights a broader behavioral shift toward digital impulsiveness, where consumers increasingly value speed and accessibility over traditional shopping methods. This makes Tamil Nadu a vital case for studying how technological stimuli translate into rapid consumer responses, aligning perfectly with the S-O-R model's theoretical framework.

Impulse Buying Behaviour: Impulse buying refers to spontaneous, emotion-driven purchases made when consumers experience a sudden and compelling urge to buy something immediately (Rook & Gardner, 1993). Such behaviour is typically unplanned and influenced more by emotional arousal than by rational decision-making (Cunha & Caldeira, 2022). In traditional retail settings, factors such as attractive in-store displays, appealing packaging, sensory cues, and a pleasant shopping atmosphere stimulate impulse buying (Dawson & Kim, 2009; Mattila & Wirtz, 2008). Psychological elements like mood, personality traits (e.g., impulsiveness), and the desire for instant gratification further enhance the likelihood of spontaneous purchases (Hausman, 2000; Rook, 1987).

In the digital retail environment of Tamil Nadu, these traditional triggers have evolved into technology-driven stimuli. E-commerce and mobile shopping platforms engage consumers through personalized recommendations, limited-time offers, and seamless one-click purchasing options, which recreate the impulsive appeal of physical stores (Koufaris, 2002; Parboteeah et al., 2009). With Tamil Nadu's high urban connectivity and smartphone penetration, consumers are increasingly exposed to these digital cues that encourage on-the-go buying behaviour.

The emergence of quick commerce (Q-commerce) has further intensified impulse buying among urban Tamil Nadu consumers, particularly in metropolitan cities such as Chennai, Coimbatore, and Madurai. The promise of 10–30 minute deliveries effectively removes the waiting period between desire and possession, thereby lowering the psychological barrier to unplanned purchases. This reduction in “waiting cost” makes it easier for consumers to indulge their impulses, positioning Q-commerce as a key driver of spontaneous FMCG purchases in Tamil Nadu's fast-paced, digitally enabled consumer market (LogiNext, 2023).

FMCG Sector in Tamil Nadu: The Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector represents one of the most vibrant and resilient segments of Tamil Nadu's economy, encompassing essential products such as packaged foods, beverages, personal care, household, and healthcare items (India Brand Equity Foundation [IBEF], 2023). Tamil Nadu, being one of India's most urbanized and industrially advanced states, contributes significantly to the country's FMCG market through its diverse consumer base, strong retail network, and growing digital adoption. The state's major urban centers Chennai, Coimbatore, Madurai, and Tiruchirappalli serve as key consumption hubs where modern retail formats and digital platforms coexist with traditional trade.

With rising disposable incomes, a young working population, and increasing smartphone penetration, Tamil Nadu has witnessed a marked shift in consumption patterns toward convenience-driven and digitally enabled purchasing behaviours. Consumers are progressively embracing online and quick commerce platforms for day-to-day essentials, aligning with broader trends of immediacy and accessibility. The FMCG products' inherent nature of low involvement, high frequency, and affordability makes them particularly susceptible to impulse buying, especially when paired with the speed and ease offered by Q-commerce services (PwC, 2022). Thus, in Tamil Nadu's evolving retail ecosystem, the FMCG sector stands at the crossroads of digital transformation and consumer impulsivity, reflecting how technology, convenience, and lifestyle changes converge to redefine purchasing behavior in one of India's most progressive consumer markets.

Perceived Convenience: Perceived convenience refers to the extent to which consumers perceive a reduction in time, physical, and mental effort during their shopping experience (Berry et al., 2002). In Tamil Nadu's rapidly digitalizing retail landscape, convenience has emerged as a key determinant of consumer satisfaction and platform adoption, particularly in the context of online and quick commerce shopping. With increasing urbanization, busy lifestyles, and widespread smartphone usage, consumers in cities such as Chennai, Coimbatore, and Madurai value platforms that minimize shopping effort and provide instant fulfillment. In this environment, quick commerce platforms offering 10–30 minute deliveries are redefining convenience by seamlessly integrating speed, accessibility, and reliability factors that significantly enhance consumer loyalty and repeat purchase behaviour (Loiacono et al., 2002; Parasuraman & Grewal, 2000).

Instant Gratification: Instant gratification refers to the innate psychological tendency of individuals to seek immediate pleasure or fulfillment without delay (Loewenstein, 1996; Ruan et al., 2020). In Tamil Nadu's fast-paced and digitally connected urban environment, this desire has become a key driver of consumer behaviour, particularly among younger and working populations. The growing preference for immediate access to goods and services reflects a broader lifestyle shift shaped by time constraints, convenience needs, and technological integration.

Quick commerce (Q-commerce) platforms operating in cities such as Chennai, Coimbatore, and Madurai directly cater to this desire by drastically reducing the time gap between desire and acquisition. The promise of 10–30 minute deliveries for affordable, frequently consumed FMCG products intensifies consumers' impulse to purchase, offering near-instant emotional and practical satisfaction (Business Standard, 2023; LogiNext, 2023). This rapid fulfillment not only eliminates the discomfort of waiting but also makes the shopping experience more rewarding and habit-forming. Consequently, in Tamil Nadu's evolving retail ecosystem, instant gratification acts as a central psychological mechanism through which Q-commerce transforms impulsive purchase behaviour into a routine part of urban consumer life (Kearney, 2023).

Relationship between Q-Commerce and Impulse Buying in Tamil Nadu: This study, grounded in the S-O-R model, emphasizes that the distinct features of quick commerce (Q-commerce) actively stimulate and enhance impulse buying behaviour. While emerging research has begun linking Q-commerce directly to impulse purchases, broader online shopping studies provide relevant insights. The removal of geographical and time constraints in e-commerce has long been recognized as a driver of unplanned buying (Verhagen & Dolen, 2011). Q-commerce further amplifies this effect by eliminating the delivery-time limitations typical of traditional online shopping.

In urban centers of Tamil Nadu, such as Chennai, Coimbatore, and Madurai, the instant availability of FMCG products through Q-commerce aligns perfectly with the spontaneous nature of impulse buying (RedSeer Consulting, 2023). Consumers can fulfill sudden cravings for snacks or urgent household needs within minutes, without visiting a physical store or waiting for standard online deliveries. This immediacy makes Q-commerce a powerful catalyst for unplanned purchases in Tamil Nadu’s digitally empowered and time-conscious urban markets (PwC, 2022).

Research Methodology: The study adopts a quantitative research design to empirically examine the impact of quick commerce (Q-commerce) on impulse buying of Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) among urban consumers in Tamil Nadu. The research specifically investigates the mediating roles of perceived convenience and instant gratification, as well as the moderating effects of age and income. Data were collected from residents of major urban centers such as Chennai, Coimbatore, and Madurai to capture the consumption patterns of digitally connected, time-sensitive consumers in the state.

Research Design: This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional, descriptive, and explanatory research design to investigate the influence of quick commerce (Q-commerce) on impulse buying of FMCG products among urban consumers in Tamil Nadu. The quantitative approach enabled the systematic collection of measurable data for statistical testing, while the cross-sectional design captured a snapshot of consumer behaviour at a single point in time. The descriptive aspect aimed to characterize the patterns of Q-commerce usage and impulse buying, whereas the explanatory component focused on uncovering mediation (perceived convenience and instant gratification) and moderation (age and income) mechanisms that explain how and under what conditions Q-commerce affects impulse purchases (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Population and Sampling: The target population comprised urban consumers in major Tamil Nadu cities such as Chennai, Coimbatore, and Madurai, who frequently use Q-commerce platforms for FMCG purchases. These cities were selected due to their high digital adoption, dense urban populations, and strong presence of Q-commerce services, making them ideal for studying spontaneous and convenience-driven purchase behaviour. In the absence of an official list of all Q-commerce users, a non-probability sampling strategy was employed, combining convenience and snowball sampling through online questionnaires shared on social media and relevant digital forums to reach digitally active consumers effectively (Etikan et al., 2016).

Sample Size and Analytical Approach: A total of 425 valid responses were collected, which is sufficient for conducting multivariate analyses, including regression-based mediation and moderation models using Hayes’ PROCESS macro. This sample size exceeds the recommended thresholds for reliable estimation in multiple regression and path analysis, providing adequate statistical power (Hayes, 2018; Hair et al., 2019). The collected data offer a robust basis for examining the complex relationships between Q-commerce features, psychological mechanisms, and impulse buying behavior among Tamil Nadu’s urban FMCG consumers.

Demographic Profile of Respondents: The study collected data from 425 urban consumers in Tamil Nadu, primarily from Chennai, Coimbatore, and Madurai. The sample showed a fairly balanced gender distribution, with 55% male and 45% female respondents. Most participants were young to middle-aged adults, with 42% aged 25–34 years and 31% aged 35–44 years, reflecting the typical profile of active digital users. In terms of monthly household income, 39% earned INR 50,001–100,000, and 37% earned above INR 100,000, indicating a predominance of middle-to-high-income urban consumers. Educationally, 78% held a bachelor’s degree or higher. Among Q-commerce platforms, Blinkit (46%), Swiggy Instamart (33%), and Zepto (22%) were most popular, with over 70% of respondents using these platforms for FMCG purchases at least 2–3 times a week, highlighting high engagement in Tamil Nadu’s urban markets.

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	235	55.3
	Female	190	44.7
Age Group	< 25 years	64	15.1
	25–34 years	179	42.1
	35–44 years	131	30.8
	45–54 years	42	9.9
	55+ years	9	2.1
Monthly Household Income (INR)	< 50,000	104	24.5
	50,001–100,000	164	38.6
	100,001–150,000	89	21
	> 150,000	68	16
Highest Education	School Level	46	10.8
	Undergraduate	198	46.6
	Postgraduate	134	31.5
	Doctorate	47	11.1
Primary Q-Commerce Platform	Blinkit	195	45.9
	Swiggy Instamart	138	32.5
	Zepto	92	21.6
QC Usage Frequency for FMCG	Once a week	121	28.5
	2–3 times a week	158	37.2
	4–5 times a week	95	22.4
	Daily	51	11.9

Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables: The study’s descriptive statistics indicate strong engagement with quick commerce platforms. Quick Commerce Usage (M=3.95, SD=0.78) and Perceived Convenience (M=4.12, SD=0.69) recorded high mean scores, reflecting frequent adoption of quick commerce services and favorable perceptions of their convenience. Impulse Buying Behaviour (M=3.78, SD=0.85) and Instant Gratification (M=4.01, SD=0.75) also showed elevated means, suggesting a notable tendency toward spontaneous purchases and satisfaction from immediate rewards.

The correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships among all key constructs. Quick Commerce Usage was strongly correlated with Perceived Convenience ($r=0.72$, $p<0.001$), Instant Gratification ($r=0.68$, $p<0.001$), and Impulse Buying Behaviour ($r=0.53$, $p<0.001$). Additionally, Perceived Convenience ($r=0.58$, $p<0.001$) and Instant Gratification ($r=0.62$, $p<0.001$) were both strongly linked to Impulse Buying Behaviour.

These findings from Tamil Nadu highlight a pattern where the convenience and gratification offered by quick commerce platforms drive higher usage and a greater likelihood of impulsive purchasing, suggesting underlying psychological and behavioural pathways for deeper analysis.

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of Key Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Quick Commerce Usage	3.95	0.78	1	0.53**	0.72**	0.68**
2. Impulse Buying Behavior	3.78	0.85		1	0.58**	0.62**
3. Perceived Convenience	4.12	0.69			1	0.75**
4. Instant Gratification	4.01	0.75				1

Note: ** p < 0.001

Managerial and Practical Implications

For Tamil Nadu, the managerial and practical implications emphasize the importance of streamlining logistics and technology to ensure fast and reliable delivery, which remains the key driver for convenience and satisfaction in quick commerce. Platforms should prioritize smooth user experiences with simple ordering and payment processes, as well as features that encourage impulse purchases, such as personalized recommendations and one-click reorders. Marketing campaigns should focus on instant gratification, promoting products that fulfill immediate needs like snacks and beverages.

For FMCG brands, success in Tamil Nadu requires visually appealing digital merchandising, strategic product placement on quick commerce platforms, and promotions tailored for impulse buys. Brands are encouraged to target younger, wealthier urban consumers who are more likely to engage in quick commerce and impulse-driven shopping. Collaborative efforts with quick commerce apps help place popular products in high-visibility sections, while smaller, convenient packaging aligns with frequent, smaller purchase patterns.

Traditional retailers in Tamil Nadu can remain competitive by adopting hybrid models, such as partnering with quick commerce services or developing rapid delivery capabilities. Enhanced in-store experiences, with a focus on customer service and experiential elements, offer value that online channels cannot replicate, providing a balanced proposition for local consumers.

Conclusion

The study in Tamil Nadu demonstrates that quick commerce platforms play a critical role in prompting impulse buying of fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), especially among younger, affluent urban consumers. By streamlining delivery speed and focusing on perceived convenience and instant gratification, these platforms directly and indirectly increase spontaneous purchases. The unique features of quick commerce like rapid order fulfillment and an easy digital interface act as powerful motivators that align with the local population's growing appetite for immediate access to daily essentials and trending products.

Practically, this means that FMCG brands and quick commerce providers in Tamil Nadu must continuously innovate in logistics, digital merchandising, and targeted marketing to remain competitive. Brands should develop appealing digital channels and launches promotions tailored for the most impulsive segments, while traditional retailers are encouraged to integrate hybrid delivery models or enhance in-store experiences to offer differentiated value. Understanding demographic trends, such as age and income, helps businesses effectively allocate resources and capture the growing demand for impulse-driven purchases in the region's dynamic digital retail environment.

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