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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Immersive Experience and Impulsive Buying in Livestream Commerce: A Review of the Stimulus-Organism-Response Literature

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ABSTRACT

With the advent of mobile internet and its exponential growth, coupled with the meteoric rise of digital commerce, livestream e-commerce has emerged as a multi-layered ecosystem that brings together entertainment, consumer interaction, and direct commerce. Within the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theoretical framework, this paper reviews theoretical and empirical studies on the impact of immersive experiences in livestream commerce settings on impulsive buying behavior. This review builds on the existing literature on basic scholarship while also incorporating more recent studies on digital commerce, examining how the concepts of visual appeal and interactive atmosphere relate to psychological factors such as cognitive and emotional immersion, and to behavioral outcomes, including cognitive and emotional impulsive buying tendencies. The theoretical background, construct definitions, and proposed relationships emerging from recent academic research are thoroughly summarized. The focus is particularly on the digital-native consumer, in this case mainly undergraduates, because of their different consumption habits. The paper concludes with a discussion of theoretical contributions, recommendations for platform designers and consumer education for digital-native consumer, and areas for future research.

1. Introduction

In the e-commerce world, mobile connectivity and the digital sphere have permeated and transformed live streaming into a multi-layered business phenomenon, effortlessly integrated with entertainment, social interaction, and consumer engagement. Compared to conventional e-commerce, live streaming commerce has been found to offer unique

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and immersive shopping experiences such as live product demonstrations, interactive question-and-answer sessions with the seller and the buyer, and a community-based shopping environment (Dang & Hoang, 2025; Irfan et al., 2025). It isn't just about how consumers are eating, drinking, and using products, but also about the shopping experience (Qi et al., 2026; Sun et al., 2026).

If someone was born at a time when digital is pervasive, then you'll be right to call him or her a “digital native” (Helsper & Eynon, 2010). When it comes to digital shopping, the term “digital native” seems an apt description of an individual born into a world saturated with digital (Kirschner & De Bruyckere, 2017). Rather, it is considered a means of entertainment and socialization, and an integral part of the identity and lifestyle of many people, in many instances. This group tends to be spontaneous rather than planned, emotional towards products, and a seeker of experiences (Mertala et al., 2024). If rich imagery, live interaction, and mass content are all emerging trends, then the live context in which this content is streamed would appear to be the perfect enabler, with the potential to have a powerful impact on consumers' thinking and behavior.

The research of impulsive buying on a cognitive basis and affective basis is not a new concept, as it has been studied for a long time (Beikverdi et al., 2024; Redine et al., 2023). The affective basis is an urge in the buyer to buy something, not for rational reasons. When multiple senses are stimulated at once, emotional stimulation (with prolonged processing time), emotional contagion, and the “more” to “immediately” concept in livestreaming environments can cause the elimination of cognitive control and provoke purchase behavior that would not have been experienced in any other situation (Gulfraz et al., 2022). This process and its workings have been a prominent topic of study in the literature.

A simple theory of stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) can be used to study and explain this sequence of stimulus, organism, and response (Pereira et al., 2023). The framework has been demonstrated to be flexible and comprehensive, as digital commerce experts can customize its components to the particularities of digital commerce transactions (Li et al., 2022).

This review examines the findings and theories derived from the current literature on the environment, immersive experience, and impulsive buying tendencies, and how these factors relate to livestream commerce. This synthesis is based on two main questions: How do the concrete stimuli (at the scene level) in the live stream environment affect the user's cognitive and emotional state during immersion? Secondly, how do the psychological results of impulsive buying manifest themselves, and what are their psychological aspects and emotions? How do they come from the dimensions of the immersive experience? This paper aims to highlight current research, refine the S-O-R theory in the context of digital consumption, and support more detailed research on impulsive consumer behavior among digital natives.

2. Theoretical Foundations

2.1 The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Framework

The S-O-R framework helps describe the connection between individuals' environment and their actions in environmental psychology (Bai & Lai, 2025; Jacoby, 2002). The key

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idea of the S-O-R framework is that an external environmental occurrence/stimulus (S) will trigger cognitive or emotional activity within a person (O). This cognitive/emotional activity will lead to an action/response (R), whether towards or away from the particular situation (Zhu et al., 2020).

What constitutes a "stimulus" varies across environments. In a traditional retail environment, aspects of the physical location, such as the layout of the location, the atmospheric elements, such as ambient lights, background sounds (music), and sensory elements, such as scents, could all be considered external stimuli. On the other hand, in the digital environment, what makes up the stimuli will shift to include items related to the design of the website: the ability of the customer to navigate the site, the quality of visual images on the page, and the ability of customers to interact with the site (Laato et al., 2020). The "organism" aspect of the S-O-R framework is essentially the internal state of the customer's mind, where activity serves as a mediator between the various elements of the external environment and the action(s) the customer takes. This internal state includes cognitive and affective domains, such as the amount of attention paid to stimuli, the perceptual processing that customers undergo as they review the stimuli, the integration of all information about the stimuli to make an informed purchase decision (Islam & Rahman, 2017), and the level of enjoyment/arousal/excitement that is generated in the customer based on their direct and indirect interaction with the stimuli. The actions that a customer may take are either immediate (the actual act of purchasing) or long-term (establishing brand loyalty or repurchasing).

Over the past five years or so, the S-O-R theory has been significantly revised to be more relevant in a digital environment. For example, Zhang et al. (2025) expanded the concept of the "organism" aspect of S-O-R by viewing immersive experience as a multidimensional psychological state that acts as a mediator between stimulus and action (behavior) in a digital environment. Erensoy et al. (2024), in their study of the live shopping environment, have experimentally broken down the "stimulus" component into more situationally specific stimulation elements and shown that the theory has utility as digital shopping evolves.

2.2 Application of S-O-R in E-commerce Contexts

This has made the framework a popular choice for researchers across a wide range of e-commerce domains. For cross-border platforms, the research of Zhao and Chung (2025) concluded that digital stimuli (such as livestream features and culturally adapted content) reliably elicited both cognitive and affective organismic states, which, in turn, influenced purchase intentions. They obtained results that confirmed the explanatory power of the framework across cultures.

As part of the agricultural e-commerce, Pan et al. (2026) conducted a bibliometric analysis to determine whether stimuli such as product visualization tools and traceability video content address information gaps and enhance consumers' trust in e-commerce. The theory can be easily applied in niche commercial environments that place special importance on transparency and trust, as illustrated in this work.

Valaskova et al. (2022) also expanded it and used it to describe metaverse retail spaces. There, virtual stimuli, such as interactive 3D product preview and virtual asset display using blockchain technology, were found to create immersive inner states that

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stimulated buying behavior both online and in-store. The application reinforces the theory's ability to continue to learn from new technological contexts.

Livestream-based stimuli are particularly significant for the engagement of consumers in the context of livestreaming: presentation quality and real-time interaction have been identified as stimuli that drive consumer engagement (Xu et al., 2020), and interactive features in a livestream, such as bullet comment streams and collaborative tasks, are found to increase emotional engagement better than conventional online content (Li et al., 2026). All of this indicates that S-O-R theory remains pertinent to the relationship between consumer behavior and the digital environment.

2.3 Key Constructs in Livestream Commerce Research

Visual appeal is the appeal of a livestream environment's visual presentation, which strongly engages the user's senses, is called “Visual Appeal”. In reality, this involves factors such as video resolution, color coordination, lighting, composition, and the onscreen presentation of the product and host (Tang et al., 2026). Unlike static ecommerce images, the live element of livestream visuals adds dynamism - as products are handled in real time, camera angles shift, the demonstration and narration flow seamlessly, and the overall experience is more engaging and immersive.

Interactive atmosphere aims to portray the nature of community and live interaction made possible by the interactive tools embedded in livestream platforms. There are several ways to achieve such a setting, such as bullet comment feeds, live polling of viewers, Q&A, virtual gifting, and collaboration (Lu et al., 2025). The overall impression is that of a co-presence, both with the host and with a larger community of fellow participants, a feeling of 'synchronized co-presence.

An immersive experience is understood as a multidimensional psychological state characterized by in-depth engagement with live-stream content. The construct is broken down into two components in line with Joo and Yang (2023) and Wang et al. (2026). Cognitive immersion is a hyperattentive state in which viewers' attention is fixed on what's happening in the stream. Emotional immersion, on the other hand, is defined as a strong emotional involvement in which viewers' emotions match those of the host and the atmosphere and context.

Impulsive buying tendency refers to the tendency to make impulse purchases in response to situational environmental factors (Qureshi et al., 2025). This construct has been divided into two types: cognitive and emotional, based on the suggestions provided by Qu et al. (2023). Impulsive buying is a buying decision made without carefully considering a product or searching for information, a shortcut to rational evaluation. Emotional impulse represents a choice made from the ‘flow' of the strong positive emotions (excitement, pleasure, increased arousal) that drown out more thoughtful consideration of needs and/or constraints.

3. Conceptual Framework and Proposed Relationships

3.1 Scene Stimuli and Immersive Experience

Immersion does not happen by itself; it's the sense of immersion that is created by particular aspects of the environments where viewers are placed. Theoretically, the

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various stimuli types have different ways of impacting cognitive and emotional immersion in livestream commerce.

It is important to make effective visual presentations that engage the attentional system. If a livestream is visually well presented, with good video quality, well-prepared products, and well-arranged compositions, then less will be required to process what is presented. The more viewers' focus shifts to the content, the more peripheral information fades as they delve into it. Hence, it is theorized that visual appeal would be a positive factor in inducing cognitive immersion.

The interactive aspect is different; it is more attention-seeking than socially and emotionally connecting. Real-time exchanges, where viewers can leave comments that the host reads back to them, collective polling for which viewers vote on the products they are viewing, and virtual present-giving, what one could call an emotional contagion, can be said to bring a sense of shared excitement, anticipation, and fun to the viewing community (García-Avilés, 2012). This emotional stream feels like an "in" event for viewers, and their emotions become tied to it, enriching the feeling of immersion. Thus, the proposed interactive environment is proposed to be a positive antecedent of emotional immersion.

3.2 Immersive Experience and Impulsive Buying Tendency

It is not likely that the two components of immersion will have the same behavioral effects. However, theory indicates that they affect different types of impulsive buying, and in different ways.

Given the high level of cognitive immersion, viewers' working memory is engaged in processing information in the stream (visual + narrative) (Baldwin & Kosie, 2021). Accordingly, less mental capacity may be available to process the corresponding and comparative aspects of the act of deliberate purchase, such as checking a price, reading the specification, contrasting the alternatives, or taking time to reflect on whether a purchase is really necessary. Such purchases occur when people don't fully consider the options available to them, and are called cognitive impulse purchases. It is therefore hypothesized that cognitive immersion will be positively related to cognitive impulse.

Emotional immersion enhances the emotional impact of the experience of seeing. These enhanced positive moods and feelings can be powerful motivators in themselves when a viewer experiences emotional engagement, energization, entertainment from the host, and inspiration from the lifestyle story (Bartsch, 2012). When it comes to fun, the excitement of a purchase is much more tangible and more satisfying, and expenses and use seem to take a back seat. This pattern is representative of emotional impulse - buying as a result of strong emotion, not rational thought. Emotional Immersion is thus suggested to predict emotional impulse positively.

3.3 Integrated Theoretical Model

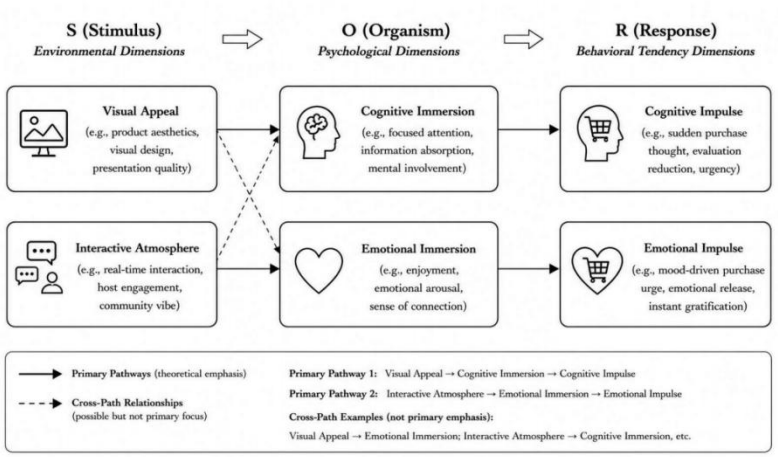
These relationships can then be synthesized to form a multi-dimensional application of S-O-R theory in the context of livestream commerce, as shown in Figure 1. These relationships can then be combined into a multi-dimensional application of S-O-R theory in livestream commerce contexts. The stimulus level comprises two environmental variables: visual appeal and interactive atmosphere. Cognitive immersion and emotional

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immersion are two psychological states that mediate stimuli to behavior at the organism level. The behavioral outcome is broken down at the response level into two dimensions: cognitive and emotional impulses.

This design is based on two sets of parallel sequences rather than a single path. Visual appeal relates to cognitive immersion, and cognitive immersion relates to cognitive impulse; the interactive atmosphere relates to emotional immersion, and emotional immersion relates to emotional impulse. A certain degree of overlap is possible, and images, either bright or muted, can evoke emotions, while lively interaction can draw in attention; these interdependencies are considered secondary. The model focuses on routes with the most obvious connection between the stimulus and the outcome, and in which the theoretical explanation is clearest.

Figure 1: Theoretical framework constructed based on the S-O-R theory



4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Refining S-O-R Theory for Digital Contexts

The framework presented in this review suggests novel approaches to develop the S-O-R theory further. Perhaps most basic of all, it generates a rationale for seeing each of the theoretical components, stimulus, organism, and response as multi-dimensional rather than mono-dimensional. The earlier uses of the theory were more focused on stimulus-response connections than on the ‘organism', which was a relatively underdeveloped part of the theory. It is no wonder this is important in the context of a live stream, because visual stimuli don't just add up to produce an undifferentiated psychological effect. Rather, they activate other internal processes, which, in turn, give rise to behaviorally distinct outcomes. But in recent times, new ecommerce tactics are capitalizing on just the opposite – on identifying the psychology that must be awakened, as Chaudhary et al. (2025) explains. Matching the type of stimulus to the organismic state and the resulting behavior, rather than the model as a three-step sequence, is important because a match between the type of stimulus/situation and the organismic state and resulting behavior can significantly increase the explanatory precision.

The second is the theoretical construction of immersive experience as a mediating construct, bringing it to the fore. If cognitive and emotional immersion are conceptualized separately, the framework becomes more specific in outlining the conditions that lead to each. This is because Balcerak Jackson and Balcerak Jackson

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(2024) claim there are four analytically different kinds of immersion: representational, participatory, affective, and narrative. The all-around immersion provides space for more in-depth investigations into the design decisions that lead to specific experiential outcomes.

The framework emphasizes digital natives, thereby questioning the impact of demographic factors on the S-O-R dynamics. Digital fluency is a condition Gen Z customers have acquired naturally, driven by their demand for intent, personalization, and interactivity, compared with older customers. Empirical studies have now begun to show that live stream users may be more susceptible to the immersive nature of the live stream environment and, therefore, more prone to impulsive buying behavior stemming from this immersion. Such dynamics will impact the current evolution of S-O-R theory and research on demographic heterogeneity in Digital Consumer Behavior (Kim et al., 2025).

4.2 Model Expansion

The current framework is deliberately designed to be narrow and clear, with only two aspects of each construct included. This is a frugality with restrictions, however. Other studies should incorporate host-specific factors, knowledge, attractiveness, perceived trustworthiness, product type (hedonic/functional), and platform-specific features such as recommendation systems or social sharing. Telepresence, perceived control, and trust are variables that may be added as potential mediators and/or moderators to enhance the organism layer.

In turn, researchers could move beyond impulsive purchases to assess repurchase intention, informal word of mouth, and post-purchase emotions, including regrets, so as to form a complete research chain covering pre-purchase psychology, in-purchase behavior and post-purchase feedback. Individual variables (e.g., chronic impulsiveness, need for cognition, prior livestream experience) that could facilitate or hinder the proposed pathways, as well as situational variables (e.g., time pressure, social context when content is viewed) that can introduce meaningful variation, can also be examined within this framework. Integrating these personal trait and situational variables can further clarify the heterogeneous effects of immersive experience on consumer behaviors, make up for the limitation of the current model's single research perspective, and greatly improve the explanatory power and universality of the S-O-R-based research framework in livestream commerce research.

4.3 Comparison with Existing Research

The differentiated pathways theorized here are supported by prior empirical work and clarify mechanisms that past studies left murky. Peng et al. (2024) noted that environmental stimuli in livestreams were more directly linked to cognitive engagement than had been typical in prior e-commerce research, consistent with the suggestion that the more dynamic, attention-grabbing nature of livestreams marked an important difference from traditional e-commerce sites built around static images. Shen et al. (2022) found that social interaction is a key precursor to emotional engagement in livestreams; their results provided a direct empirical basis for the suggested link between the interactive environment and emotional engagement and shed light on the particular mechanism through which social cues elicit emotion.

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The bifurcation of impulsiveness examined here into cognitive and emotional pathways is also a response to a gap that's acknowledged in prior work. Yang et al. (2024) noted that impulsive purchase can emerge from various psychological processes, an idea that is not reflected in their classic operationalization. In contrast, the framework developed here directly engages this idea, allowing for a more nuanced examination of why and how impulsive purchasing takes particular forms in livestreams and the nature of the drivers behind these impulses.

5. Conclusion

This paper has synthesized the theoretical and empirical literature on how the immersive experiences afforded by livestream commerce environments impact impulsive buying, within an S-O-R framework. The framework made in this paper lays out two parallel and analogous pathways viewed through the lens of theories of S-O-R: from visual appeal to cognitive immersion to cognitive impulse, and from interactive atmosphere to emotional immersion to emotional impulse. Both reflect the mechanisms by which livestream environments impact purchase behavior.

There are three contributions to theory offered by this work. First, by reviewing papers that draw on S-O-R in the analysis of the impulsive buying of digital natives according to the principles of S-O-R, the value of assembling the parts of this model of consumer psychology is afforded a fuller view when they are treated in detail and not as some unitary 'black box' as is typical. Second, by taking a relatively small number of cases in which S-O-R's S-O-R model has been operationalized and used to trace how the designs of such environments are bridged to psychological impact, we expand what is known about this vital experience among digital natives. Third, the framework offers a conceptual map of constructs and theoretical connections that the empirical work of other studies can build on, including the specific identification of the constructs to focus on and which methods and other approaches to pursue.

The audience for which this paper is most relevant extends beyond the academy. Platform designers can benefit from thinking more carefully about the features of the environment they prioritize and how this emphasizes certain psychological states over others in consumers. Educators working with students who are true digital natives may find our description helpful for discussing digital media literacy and the importance of reflexivity regarding consumer over-identification with brands. And consumers, as individuals, may find the information we present helpful in understanding how environments like livestreams work to engage and sustain immersion, so that decisions to buy are made more intentionally. This topic should be of great importance to further investigate, as the trend of livestream commerce spreads worldwide, and the oversaturation of competition for consumers' attention makes understanding the psychology of this area globally important.

Despite its theoretical refinements, this review also acknowledges several inevitable research limitations. First, the current framework only focuses on core environmental stimuli and basic psychological mechanisms, ignoring the moderating effects of individual trait differences, platform characteristics, and product attributes. Second, this paper mainly summarizes existing literature focusing on young student groups, lacking systematic discussion on the consumption characteristics of other age groups, which limits the universality of the model. In addition, this review only discusses impulsive buying behaviors, without extending to post-purchase behaviors such as repurchase

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intention and word-of-mouth communication. For future research, scholars can integrate host characteristics, platform algorithms, and situational factors to optimize and expand the S-O-R model. Empirical research covering diverse consumer groups and product categories is also needed to verify and revise the dual-path mechanism. Furthermore, subsequent studies can explore the dynamic evolution mechanism of immersive experience and consumer behavior in real-time livestream scenarios, so as to further enrich and improve the theoretical system of livestream commerce consumer behavior.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

Not applicable

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the present research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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