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Caught in the Click: Micro-Moments, Dark Patterns, and Consumer Decision-Making in India's Mobile-First Economy with special focus on Quick Commerce Industry in India

[1]Dhiti Desai, [2]Dr. Chinmay Gandhi, [3]Jash Vadgama, [4]Hitanshi Songar

[1]Research Scholar, GLS University, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India

[2]Assistant Professor, Faculty of Management, GLS University, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India

[3,4]Student, Faculty of Management, GLS University, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India

Abstract

The rapid growth of India's mobile-first economy has significantly transformed consumer purchasing behaviour, particularly with the emergence of quick commerce platforms that emphasize speed, convenience, and instant delivery. This study examines how micro-moments and dark-pattern interface elements influence consumer decision-making within India's quick commerce ecosystem. The research focuses on identifying behavioural triggers that shape impulse purchases and user engagement on mobile applications such as Blinkit, Zepto, Instamart, and BigBasket Now. A quantitative research design was adopted, and primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms from 115 urban quick-commerce users across major metropolitan cities including Bengaluru, Mumbai, Kolkata, Delhi, and Ahmedabad. Statistical analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics, reliability testing, Chi-square analysis, correlation, and regression techniques. The findings indicate that most consumers complete purchase decisions within 1–5 minutes, highlighting the role of micro-moments in quick commerce environments. The results also reveal that certain interface nudges particularly free-delivery thresholds and fast payment convenience have a statistically significant influence on impulse purchasing behaviour. The study concludes that persuasive interface design strategies combined with moment-driven consumer behaviour can subtly shape purchasing decisions in mobile commerce environments, raising important implications for ethical digital design, consumer awareness, and regulatory oversight in India's rapidly expanding quick commerce sector.

Keywords: Micro-Moments, Dark Patterns, Quick Commerce, Consumer Decision-Making, Mobile-First Economy, Impulse Buying Behaviour.

1. Introduction

Over the last decade, India has experienced a transformation in its digital economy, mainly by the rapid adoption of smartphones and affordable internet access. With over 800 million smartphone users and one of the world's fastest-growing internet populations, India has emerged as a mobile-first economy, where digital interactions, commerce and consumer decision-making increasingly occur through handheld devices rather than traditional desktop platforms. Mobile applications now provides for everyday consumption activities, ranging from entertainment and communication to food ordering, grocery shopping and financial transactions.

Within this evolving digital ecosystem, Quick commerce has emerged as one of the most disruptive retail models in India. Quick commerce platforms promise ultra-fast delivery often within 10 to 15 minutes by leveraging dark-store or warehouses, advanced logistics networks and real-time demand forecasting. Companies such as Blinkit, Zepto and Swiggy Instamart have redefined convenience in urban retail by enabling consumers to order everyday essentials almost instantly. Market reports suggest that India's quick commerce sector has witnessed exponential growth, with the market size estimated to exceed $5 billion by 2025 [Quick Commerce Market in India and Key Players, A Sharma], driven largely by urban consumers seeking speed, convenience and instant gratification. Industry data further indicate that millions of Indian users now rely on these platforms weekly, with major cities such as Bengaluru, Mumbai, Kolkata, Delhi and Ahmedabad emerging as strong adoption hubs.The rapid growth of quick commerce is closely tied to the rise of micro-moments, a concept in digital marketing which describe

brief, intent-driven interactions when consumers turn to their mobile devices to satisfy an immediate need or curiosity. These moments typically occur when individuals suddenly realize they require a product, seek quick information or act impulsively. In quick-commerce, such micro-moments may arise when a consumer suddenly needs groceries late at night, remembers a missing ingredient while cooking or experiences a sudden craving. Because quick-commerce platforms are designed for speed and convenience, the time between need recognition and purchase completion is often extremely short, with many users reportedly completing orders within 5 to 10 minutes of opening an application.

However, while quick commerce enhances convenience, it also raises critical questions regarding the design strategies used by digital platforms to influence consumer behaviour. In recent years, researchers have increasingly examined the role of Dark patterns interface techniques that subtly manipulate user decisions or drive them toward actions they might not otherwise take. Dark patterns often exploit cognitive biases, emotional triggers and time pressure to shape user choices. Examples include countdown timers, exaggerated discount displays, pre-selected options, free-delivery thresholds encouraging larger carts and persuasive notifications that push users to revisit applications.

In India, the discussion around dark patterns has gained regulatory attention as well. The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has issued guidelines identifying and discouraging manipulative interface designs that may mislead consumers or impair informed decision-making. Despite these regulatory developments, the intersection between dark patterns and micro-moments remains relatively under-explored in the Indian context, particularly within the rapidly expanding quick-commerce industry.

Quick-commerce platforms operate in an environment where consumer decisions occur under conditions of high urgency, limited planning time and frictionless payment systems. Payment infrastructures such as UPI have significantly reduced transaction time, allowing users to complete purchases within seconds. While this convenience improves user experience, it may also increase impulsive purchasing behaviour when combined with persuasive interface designs. Consequently, consumers may add items to their carts, respond to limited-time offers, or complete purchases more quickly than originally intended within this highly engineered interface.

The micro-moments and dark patterns thus creates a unique behavioural pattern in which consumer decision-making becomes increasingly influenced by interface design, psychological nudges and time-sensitive stimuli. In such environments, traditional models of rational consumer decision-making may be challenged, as decisions are shaped by sudden needs and persuasive digital cues rather than extended evaluation processes.

This study explores how these dynamics works within India's quick-commerce ecosystem. Specifically, it studies how dark-pattern design strategies interact with micro-moment triggers to influence consumer purchase behaviour on quick-commerce platforms. By examining user experiences, behavioural patterns and perceptions of interface design, the research aims to provide deeper insights into the ways digital environments shape current consumption patterns.

Understanding these interactions is particularly important in a country like India, where rapid digital adoption, growing urban lifestyles and evolving retail technologies continue to reshape consumer markets. As quick commerce becomes an integral part of everyday consumption, examining the ethical and behavioural implications of its design strategies becomes crucial not only for academic research but also for policymakers, platform designers and marketers seeking to balance innovation with responsible digital practices.

Ultimately, this research contributes to the broader discussion on digital consumer behaviour by highlighting how mobile-first environments, micro-moment triggers and interface-driven persuasion collectively shape modern purchasing decisions in India's quick-commerce landscape.

2. Literature Reviews

Micro-Moments and Mobile Consumer Behaviour

The concept of **micro-moments** was introduced by Google to describe intent-driven moments when consumers turn to their smartphones to act on immediate needs such as learning, doing, discovering, or buying (Google,

2015). These moments are characterized by quick decision-making and limited information processing time. Studies indicate that mobile users often make purchasing decisions within minutes when acting during micro-moment interactions (Chowdhury, 2024; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

In mobile commerce environments, micro-moments significantly influence consumer behaviour by shortening the traditional decision-making process. Rather than following extended evaluation stages, consumers frequently respond to immediate needs and contextual triggers. Research suggests that mobile-based purchasing behaviour often occurs within short interaction windows, reinforcing the importance of interface design and user experience in influencing decisions (Shankar & al., 2016) (Oulasvirta, Rattenbury, Ma, & Raita, 2012)

Several studies also indicate that mobile devices create highly personalized consumption environments where users rely on convenience and immediacy to guide their purchasing decisions (Deloitte, 2023; McKinsey & Company, 2022).In emerging digital economies such as India, where smartphone adoption has grown rapidly, micro-moments have become increasingly central to consumer decision journeys (Bain & Company, 2023; Statista Research Department, 2024)

Dark Patterns in Digital Platforms

Dark patterns refer to interface design techniques that intentionally guide users toward decisions that may not align with their original intentions. These strategies manipulate user behaviour by exploiting cognitive biases, emotional triggers, and time pressure (Gray, Kou, Battles, Hoggatt, & Toombs, 2018). Dark patterns often appear in digital environments where consumers interact with interfaces quickly and may not carefully evaluate each option presented.

Examples of dark patterns include:

- countdown timers
- exaggerated discount displays
- auto-selected options
- subscription traps
- delivery threshold nudges

These elements are frequently used in digital commerce platforms to encourage users to complete transactions quickly or add additional items to their cart. Research suggests that these strategies influence consumer decision-making by increasing perceived urgency and reducing the time available for rational evaluation (Mathur, et al., 2019)

Recent studies have highlighted that the widespread use of dark patterns raises ethical concerns regarding consumer autonomy and transparency in digital environments (MicroSave, 2025; Bar & Bench, 2025). As digital platforms increasingly rely on persuasive interface design to increase engagement and conversions, the debate surrounding dark patterns continues to grow among policymakers and researchers.

Quick Commerce and Instant Consumption Behaviour

Quick commerce represents an evolution of traditional e-commerce models by focusing on ultra-fast delivery and hyperlocal fulfilment networks. Platforms such as quick grocery delivery services have introduced a retail model where consumers can receive products within minutes of placing an order. This model is supported by advanced logistics infrastructure, localized warehouses, and real-time inventory systems.

The rise of quick commerce is closely associated with urban lifestyle changes and increased demand for convenience. Studies suggest that consumers increasingly rely on quick commerce platforms for everyday purchases due to their ability to satisfy urgent needs quickly (Bain & Company, 2023)

In India, quick commerce platforms such as Blinkit, Zepto, and Instamart have rapidly expanded in major metropolitan cities, driven by changing consumption habits and digital adoption (Economic Times, 2025).

Research suggests that the promise of fast delivery significantly influences consumer purchasing behaviour by reinforcing the expectation of instant gratification (PwC, 2022; Accenture, 2023)

However, the emphasis on speed and convenience also creates conditions where consumers make rapid purchasing decisions with minimal evaluation. This environment makes quick commerce platforms particularly susceptible to the use of persuasive interface design strategies that influence consumer behaviour.

Interface Nudges and Impulse Buying Behaviour

Digital platforms often use interface cues such as product recommendations, urgency prompts, and free-delivery thresholds to influence user behaviour. These cues act as behavioural nudges that encourage users to complete purchases or increase their cart value.

Research in behavioural economics suggests that such nudges can significantly affect decision-making by altering how options are framed and perceived by consumers (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008; Ariely, 2008). In digital commerce environments, these nudges frequently interact with micro-moment behaviour, increasing the likelihood of impulsive purchases.

Empirical studies have shown that delivery incentives, limited-time discounts, and frictionless payment systems can reduce consumer deliberation time and increase purchase frequency (Verhagen & Van Dolen, 2011).

Similarly, research on impulse buying behaviour indicates that situational triggers, emotional cues, and convenience factors significantly influence spontaneous purchase decisions (Rook, 1987; Beatty & Ferrell, 1998). When these behavioural triggers are combined with digital interface design strategies, they can significantly shape consumer purchasing behaviour in online environments.

Digital Payment Systems and Frictionless Transactions

The growth of digital payment systems has further accelerated the development of mobile commerce ecosystems. In India, the introduction of the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) has transformed the digital transaction landscape by enabling instant and seamless payments.

Research suggests that frictionless payment systems reduce transaction barriers and increase the likelihood of impulse purchasing behaviour (KPMG, 2023). When consumers can complete transactions within seconds, the time available for reconsidering a purchase decision is significantly reduced.

Several studies also indicate that simplified checkout processes and one-click payment options play an important role in increasing conversion rates in digital commerce platforms (Forrester Research, 2024)These mechanisms are often integrated into quick commerce applications to facilitate faster decision-making and encourage repeated purchases.

Research Gap

Although previous studies have explored micro-moments, dark patterns, impulse buying behaviour, and digital interface design independently, limited research has examined the combined impact of these elements within the quick commerce ecosystem, particularly in the Indian context.

Most existing studies focus on traditional e-commerce environments, whereas quick commerce platforms operate within highly compressed decision environments characterized by instant fulfilment, real-time logistics, and mobile-first interactions.

Therefore, there is a need to examine how dark-pattern interface strategies interact with micro-moment triggers to influence consumer decision-making within India's rapidly expanding quick commerce industry.

Research Methodology

Research Design: This study adopts a quantitative, descriptive, and analytical research design to examine how micro-moments and dark patterns influence consumer decision-making within India's mobile-first quick commerce ecosystem. The research focuses on identifying behavioural triggers that influence impulse purchases, app engagement, and user perception of interface manipulation in quick commerce platforms.A survey-based

research method was employed to collect primary data from users of major quick commerce applications such as Blinkit, Zepto, Instamart, and BigBasket Now. The study evaluates consumer responses to design nudges including urgency prompts, push notifications, limited-time offers, and algorithmic product recommendations.

Data Collection: Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of multiple-choice and Likert-scale questions designed to capture respondents' demographic profiles, quick commerce usage patterns, and perceptions of interface design features. Secondary data was obtained from academic journals, industry reports, and publications related to digital commerce, consumer behaviour and interface design practices. These sources provided theoretical grounding and contextual insights into the rapid growth of India's quick commerce ecosystem and the increasing use of persuasive design strategies in mobile applications.

The target population comprised urban smartphone users who actively engage with quick commerce applications in India. The study employed non-probability convenience sampling, allowing efficient data collection from active users of mobile commerce platforms. A total of 115 respondents participated in the study. Data was collected from users residing in major metropolitan cities including Bengaluru, Mumbai, Kolkata, Delhi, and Ahmedabad, which represent key urban markets with high smartphone penetration and significant adoption of quick commerce services.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the usage patterns of quick commerce applications among urban consumers.
- To analyse the influence of micro-moments on consumer behaviour in quick commerce platforms, including situations that trigger immediate app usage and purchase decisions.
- To evaluate the impact of persuasive interface elements and dark patterns, such as push notifications, urgency prompts, discounts, and product recommendations on consumer decision-making and impulse purchasing behaviour.
- To assess the relationship between app engagement and consumer purchasing behaviour in the quick commerce ecosystem, with specific focus on how digital design strategies influence consumer choices.

Limitations of the Study The study is limited to selected metropolitan cities and a convenience sampling method, which may restrict broader generalization. Additionally, the research relies on self-reported responses, which may involve subjective bias.

Hypothesis

H01: There is no significant association between age group and frequency of quick commerce usage among consumers.

H02: There is no significant association between gender and impulse buying behaviour in quick commerce platforms.

H03: There is no significant association between city of residence and quick commerce usage patterns.

H04: Dark-pattern interface elements such as free delivery threshold prompts do not significantly influence impulse buying behaviour among quick commerce users.

H05: Dark-pattern interface elements such as limited-time deals and discount offers do not significantly influence consumer purchase decisions in quick commerce platforms.

H06: Highlighted discount displays do not significantly influence impulsive buying behaviour among consumers.

H07: Product recommendation features do not significantly influence consumer purchase decisions in quick commerce applications.

H08: Fast payment and checkout convenience do not significantly influence impulse buying behaviour among quick commerce users.

H09: Notifications from quick commerce apps do not significantly influence users to revisit the platform.

H10: There is no significant relationship between dark-pattern interface elements and impulse buying behaviour among consumers in the quick commerce ecosystem.

3. Analysis & Interpretation

Descriptive statistics were first conducted to understand the demographic profile and usage behaviour of respondents.

Age Group (coded)	Frequency	Percentage
1 (17–21)	36	31.0%
2 (22–25)	45	38.8%
3 (26–30)	18	15.5%
4 (31–40)	17	14.7%

Table 4.1 Age group of Respondents

Interpretation:

The majority of respondents fall in the **22–25 age group (38.8%)**, followed by the **17–21 group (31%)**, indicating that the sample is dominated by young consumers who are more likely to use quick commerce platforms.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	46	39.7%
Female	70	60.3%

Table 4.2 gender of Respondents

Interpretation

Female respondents represented **60.3% of the sample**, suggesting that women may be slightly more active users of quick commerce platforms within the collected dataset.

Usage Frequency	Frequency	Percentage
Daily	78	67.2%
Few times a month	34	29.3%
Rarely	4	3.4%

Table 4.3 Usage frequency of Respondents

Interpretation

A significant majority of respondents (67.2%) reported using quick commerce apps daily, indicating high reliance on such platforms for everyday purchases. Decision Time Frequency

Percentage

Less than 1 minute	3	2.60%
1–3 minutes	49	42.20%
3–5 minutes	43	37.10%
More than 5 minutes	21	18.10%

Table 4.4 Decision time of Respondents

Interpretation

Approximately **79% of respondents complete purchase decisions within 1–5 minutes**, supporting the concept of **micro-moments**, where decisions occur quickly in mobile environments.

Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
0.888	11

Table 4.5 Reliability Analysis

Hypothesis

H0: The scale measuring dark pattern influence is not reliable.

H1: The scale measuring dark pattern influence is reliable.

Result: Since **Cronbach's Alpha = 0.888 (>0.70)**, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Interpretation

The scale demonstrates **high internal consistency**, indicating that the Likert items **reliably** measure consumer responses to dark patterns and micro-moment triggers in quick commerce platforms.

Chi-Square Test

Test	Value
Chi-square statistic	6.512
Degrees of freedom	6
p-value	0.368

Table 4.6 Chi-Square Test

Hypothesis

H0: Age group has no association with quick commerce usage frequency.

H1: Age group has a significant association with quick commerce usage frequency.

Decision: Since **p = 0.368 > 0.05**, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

Interpretation

The analysis indicates **no statistically significant relationship between age group and quick commerce usage frequency** within the sample.

Correlation Analysis

Spearman correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between **dark pattern elements and impulse buying behaviour**.

The dependent variable used was: "After placing an order, I sometimes realise I bought more items than necessary."

Variable	Correlation (ρ)	p-value	Result
Free delivery threshold influence	0.225	0.015	Significant
Quick purchase decision behaviour	0.225	0.015	Significant
Fast payment convenience	0.225	0.015	Significant

Variable	Correlation (ρ)	p-value	Result
Limited-time deals	0.177	0.057	Marginal
Discount highlighting	0.130	0.164	Not significant

Table 4.7: Spearman Correlation Results

Hypothesis

H0: Dark pattern interface elements do not influence impulse buying behaviour.

H1: Dark pattern interface elements influence impulse buying behaviour.

Interpretation

The results reveal **significant positive relationships between impulse buying behaviour and certain interface nudges**, particularly:

- free delivery threshold prompts
- fast checkout systems
- quick purchase decision behaviour

These findings indicate that specific digital design strategies may increase impulsive purchasing during micro-moment interactions.

Regression Analysis

Statistic	Value
R^2	0.069
Adjusted R^2	0.035
F-statistic	2.046
p-value	0.092

Table 4.8: Regression Analysis

Interpretation

The model explains approximately **6.9% of the variance in impulse buying behaviour**, indicating a modest but observable influence of interface design features.

Variable	Coefficient	p-value	Result
Free delivery threshold	0.176	0.027	Significant
Fast payment convenience	0.176	0.027	Significant
Limited-time deals	0.038	0.791	Not significant
Discount highlighting	-0.044	0.735	Not significant
Product suggestions	-0.179	0.272	Not significant

Table 4.9: Regression Analysis

Hypothesis

H0: Dark pattern interface elements do not significantly influence impulse buying behaviour.
H1: Dark pattern interface elements significantly influence impulse buying behaviour.

Decision

The results indicate that free delivery threshold prompts and fast payment convenience significantly influence impulse buying behaviour, while other variables do not show statistically significant effects.

Overall Interpretation says that consumer decision-making in quick commerce environments is influenced by specific interface nudges associated with dark patterns. In particular:

- Free delivery thresholds encourage consumers to add additional items to their cart.
- Fast payment systems reduce decision friction, accelerating purchase completion.
- Quick decision-making behaviour during app interactions increases the likelihood of impulse purchases.

These findings support the argument that micro-moment interactions combined with persuasive interface design can subtly shape consumer purchasing behaviour in mobile-first commerce environments.

4. Findings

Sr. no.	Research Objective	Key Findings of the Study
1	To examine the usage patterns of quick commerce applications among urban consumers.	The descriptive analysis indicates that quick commerce platforms are predominantly used by younger consumers, particularly those between 17–25 years of age. A majority of respondents reported using quick commerce applications daily, demonstrating the increasing integration of these platforms into everyday consumption behaviour.
2	To analyse the influence of micro-moments on consumer behaviour in quick commerce platforms, including situations that trigger immediate app usage and purchase decisions.	The analysis of purchase decision time revealed that approximately 79% of respondents complete purchase decisions within 1–5 minutes after opening the application. This behaviour strongly supports the concept of micro-moments, where consumers make rapid decisions in response to immediate needs or impulses within mobile commerce environments.
3	To evaluate the impact of persuasive interface elements and dark patterns, such as push notifications, urgency prompts, discounts, and product recommendations on consumer decision-making and impulse purchasing behaviour.	Correlation analysis indicates that certain interface elements associated with dark patterns have a statistically significant relationship with impulse buying behaviour. In particular, free delivery threshold prompts, quick purchase decision behaviour, and fast payment convenience showed significant positive relationships with consumers purchasing more items than originally planned.

4	To assess the relationship between app engagement and consumer purchasing behaviour in the quick commerce ecosystem, with specific focus on how digital design strategies influence consumer choices.	Regression analysis suggests that free delivery thresholds and fast payment convenience are among the most influential design features affecting impulse buying behaviour. These interface elements encourage consumers to increase their cart value and complete purchases more quickly, indicating that digital design strategies can significantly shape consumer purchasing behaviour in quick commerce platforms.

Table 5.1 Findings of the research

Overall, the findings suggest that quick commerce platforms combine micro-moment interactions with persuasive interface design strategies, which together influence consumer purchasing decisions within mobile commerce environments.

5. Conclusion

The rapid growth of India's mobile-first economy has transformed the retail landscape, particularly with the emergence of quick commerce platforms that emphasize speed, convenience, and instant fulfilment of consumer needs. This study aimed to examine how micro-moment behaviour and dark-pattern interface elements influence consumer decision-making within quick commerce platforms in India. The findings of the study demonstrate that quick commerce platforms operate within a behavioural environment where consumers frequently make purchase decisions within extremely short timeframes. These micro-moment interactions create conditions where interface design cues such as delivery incentives, promotional highlights, and frictionless checkout systems can significantly influence consumer behaviour. The results further indicate that certain interface elements associated with dark patterns can subtly encourage impulse purchasing behaviour. In particular, features such as free-delivery thresholds and fast payment mechanisms reduce decision friction and increase the likelihood of consumers adding additional items to their cart. While these design strategies enhance convenience and efficiency, they also raise important questions regarding the ethical implications of persuasive interface design in digital commerce platforms. As quick commerce continues to expand rapidly in India, it becomes increasingly important to understand how digital design practices influence consumer behaviour. Overall, the study contributes to the growing body of research on digital consumer behaviour by highlighting the role of micro-moments and dark-pattern interface strategies in shaping purchasing decisions within India's quick commerce ecosystem.

6. Recommendations

Ethical Platform Design Quick commerce platforms should adopt more transparent and responsible interface design practices to ensure that consumers are not unintentionally influenced by manipulative design elements. Ethical design approaches can help maintain long-term consumer trust.

Balanced Use of Delivery Threshold Incentives Free-delivery thresholds should be presented carefully so that they inform users about available benefits without encouraging excessive or unnecessary purchases.

Consumer Awareness and Digital Literacy Consumers should be made aware of persuasive design strategies used in digital platforms. Increased digital literacy can help users recognise how interface cues may influence their purchasing behaviour.

Regulatory Oversight Regulatory authorities should continue monitoring digital commerce platforms to ensure compliance with consumer protection guidelines related to dark patterns and manipulative interface practices.

Future research could expand the scope of this study by including a larger and more diverse sample across additional cities and demographic groups. Researchers may also explore experimental methods or behavioural tracking techniques to better understand real-time consumer interactions with digital interface elements.

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