



From Watching to Buying: A Netnographic Study of Impulsive Buying Behavior on TikTok and Shopee Live Shopping

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Abstract

The rapid growth of live commerce has reshaped Indonesian consumers' purchasing behavior, encouraging impulsive purchases even among viewers who initially had no intention to buy. Prior studies on impulsive buying in live-streaming commerce have been dominated by quantitative approaches, leaving the in-the-moment social and emotional processes that precede a purchase underexplored. This study aims to explore how and why viewers with no prior purchase intention are drawn into impulsive buying during TikTok Live and Shopee Live sessions, focusing on the roles of social presence, scarcity, and emotion (pleasure and arousal). A netnographic approach was employed, comprising nonintervening observation of live-shopping sessions in the fashion, skincare, and makeup categories, documentation of the comment column, and in-depth interviews with 9 informants who experienced impulsive purchases. Data were analyzed thematically in NVivo using a word frequency query and a matrix coding query. The word frequency analysis showed that host utterances marked by intimate address terms such as "kakak" and "sayang," together with urgency cues such as "boleh," "ambil," and "langsung," dominated the discourse of the sessions, reflecting strong communication and emotional presence. The matrix coding query further showed that product scarcity and arousal exhibited the strongest co-occurrence with impulsive-buying references, particularly the emotional-impulse type, while social togetherness and payment convenience played a comparatively minor role. These findings provide a qualitative foundation for the subsequent quantitative validation of a social presence-scarcity-emotion-impulsive buying model and offer practical implications for digital business and SME live-selling strategies.

Keywords: *Live shopping, Impulsive buying, Social presence, Scarcity, Netnography*

INTRODUCTION

The growth of e-commerce in Indonesia has been marked by the rise of live shopping features on social media and marketplace platforms, with digital transactions projected to reach approximately Rp 1,027 trillion, largely driven by live streaming (Yesidora, 2024). Live shopping is no longer merely a promotional channel; it has become a digital social space that integrates entertainment, real-time communication, and economic transactions (Gumay et al., 2024). This convergence has shifted consumer behavior away from search-based, planned purchasing toward more spontaneous, experience-driven decisions (Xing et al., 2025).

A recurring pattern in live shopping is that viewers often enter a session with no intention to buy – they intend only to “look around,” pass the time, or be entertained – yet end up making a purchase once the session is underway. This pattern reflects a shift from non-purchase intention to impulsive buying, a phenomenon that conventional, rationality-based models of consumer decision-making struggle to explain (Solikha & Putranto, 2025; Tedry & Tulipa, 2025). Understanding the mechanism behind this shift is important both theoretically, for the study of



digital consumer behavior, and practically, for the responsible management of live commerce by digital businesses and SMEs.

Existing research on impulsive buying in live-streaming commerce is dominated by quantitative, survey-based designs that test causal relationships among constructs such as social presence, scarcity, and impulsive buying (Chung et al., 2025; Kumar & Taneja, 2024; Pangastuti & Kusumaningtyas, 2025; Qu et al., 2023). While these studies establish that social presence and scarcity cues significantly influence impulsive buying, they say comparatively little about how this influence is experienced, negotiated, and made meaningful by consumers in the moment. The subjective process by which a non-buying viewer becomes a buyer – including the language used by hosts, the emotional texture of the interaction, and the specific triggers viewers themselves report – remains largely unexamined.

This paper addresses that gap by presenting the qualitative, netnographic phase of a broader sequential exploratory mixed-methods study on impulsive buying in TikTok Live and Shopee Live shopping. Specifically, it reports (1) the results of a word-frequency query on live-session transcripts and comment data, and (2) the results of a matrix-coding query cross-tabulating four types of impulsive buying (first-time, emotional, planned, and reminder impulse buying) against ten social-presence, scarcity, emotion, and situational factors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Presence in Live Commerce

Research on paradiplomacy shows that local governments engage in international activities to attract investment, expand trade, strengthen identity, facilitate cultural exchange, and enhance institutional capacity (Eppler et al., 2024; Harakan & Taufik, 2023; Paquin, 2018). Forms of engagement have broadened beyond sister-city or sister-province arrangements to include transnational social presence. Social presence refers to the degree to which a medium allows users to feel the psychological presence of other people during interaction. In live-shopping contexts, hosts generate social presence through direct address, real-time responsiveness, and personalized communication, which together create a sense of interpersonal closeness between host and viewer (Gumay et al., 2024; Nasution et al., 2025). A bibliometric review of live-streaming commerce research confirms that social presence, together with information quality, is among the most consistently studied antecedents of viewer engagement and purchase behavior (Luo et al., 2022).

Scarcity and Urgency Cues

Scarcity serves as a persuasive heuristic: when a resource, such as stock or time, is perceived as limited, its subjective value rises, and consumers feel pressure to act quickly to avoid missing out (Qu et al., 2023). In live shopping, scarcity is typically communicated through explicit verbal cues from the host (e.g., countdowns, “last stock” announcements) and visual indicators on the platform interface. It has been shown to interact with viewers’ anticipated emotions to shape impulsive purchase decisions (Qu et al., 2023; Tedry & Tulipa, 2025).

Emotion as a Mediating Mechanism

Building on the classic Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, emotional states – commonly operationalized as pleasure and arousal – are theorized to mediate the relationship between environmental stimuli (such as social presence and scarcity cues) and behavioral responses (such as impulsive buying) (Chung et al., 2025; Gumay et al., 2024). Flow-like immersive engagement during a live session has similarly been found to induce impulsive buying, sometimes followed by post-purchase regret, underscoring the affective and largely non-deliberative nature of

the decision process ([Kumar & Taneja, 2024](#)).

Typology of Impulsive Buying

Impulsive buying is not a single, uniform behavior. Classic consumer-behavior scholarship distinguishes between purely spontaneous (first-time) impulse purchases and purchases that are emotionally charged, prompted by an external cue, or only partially planned in advance ([Rook, 1987](#)). This typology is useful for the present study because it allows the analysis to move beyond asking whether impulsive buying occurred toward asking which type of impulsive buying was most strongly associated with which social, emotional, or situational triggers during TikTok Live and Shopee Live sessions.

Netnography as a Research Approach

Netnography adapts ethnographic principles to naturally occurring online communities and interactions, enabling researchers to observe communication, symbols, and emotional expression as they unfold, without the artificiality of a laboratory or survey instrument ([Kozinets, 2015](#)). When combined with a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design, netnographic findings can serve as the empirical and conceptual foundation for the subsequent development and refinement of a quantitative measurement model ([Creswell, 2012](#)).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study constitutes the qualitative phase of a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design ([Creswell, 2012](#)). A purposive sampling strategy was used to select informants who had watched live-shopping sessions on Shopee Live and TikTok Live at least once a week and reported making a purchase during such a session. Data were collected through netnographic observation ([Kozinets, 2015](#)) of live-shopping sessions on TikTok Live and Shopee Live, focusing on three product categories in which impulsive buying is commonly reported: fashion, skincare, and makeup. Six live-shopping sessions from active accounts with a high level of viewer interaction (at least 10,000 followers and 30 active viewers) were screen-recorded, each approximately one hour in length, yielding a total of six hours of recorded material to preserve host utterances, visual cues, and the real-time comment column for subsequent analysis. Data collection was conducted between May and July 2026.

In addition to observation, in-depth interviews were conducted with 9 informants who reported making a purchase during a live session despite having no prior intention to buy. Informants varied by gender (6 female, 3 male), age (20–45 years), and occupation (5 university students, 2 private employees, 2 others). The interviews explored the informants' in-the-moment experience: what they noticed about the host and other viewers, how they felt, and what specifically prompted the purchase decision.

Table 1. Informant's characteristics

Gender		Occupation		
Female	Male	University Students	Private Employee	Others
6	3	5	2	2

All qualitative data – session recordings, comment-column transcripts, and interview transcripts – were imported into NVivo and analyzed thematically. Two complementary query techniques were used in the analysis reported in this paper. First, a word frequency query was run across all observation transcripts to identify the most frequently occurring terms used by hosts and viewers, and the results were visualized as a word cloud. Second, a matrix coding query was used

Table 2. Matrix Coding Query: Antecedents of Impulsive Buying

	A: Arousal	B: Easy payment	C: Pleasure	D: Product Scarcity	E: Resource Scarcity	F: Coexisting presence	G: Communication presence	H: Emotional Presence	I: Social Togetherness	J: Watching time
1: Impulsive buying	23	1	12	24	10	10	12	14	3	12
2: 1st time	6	1	6	11	4	5	9	9	3	5
3: Emotional	13	1	7	15	7	8	15	15	3	6
4: Planned impulse buying	5	1	3	5	2	5	6	6	1	3
5: Reminder impulse buying	5	1	3	7	3	6	7	7	1	3

At the aggregate level, Product Scarcity (D, $n = 24$) and Arousal (A, $n = 23$) show the most coding overlaps with references to impulsive buying, followed by Emotional Presence (H, $n = 14$), Communication Presence (G, $n = 12$), Watching Time (J, $n = 12$), and Pleasure (C, $n = 12$). Social Togetherness (I, $n = 3$) and Easy Payment (B, $n = 1$) show the fewest overlaps. This pattern indicates that, qualitatively, viewers' impulsive purchases were discussed and experienced most strongly in relation to perceived scarcity and heightened arousal, echoing the scarcity-emotion pathway identified in prior quantitative work (Qu et al., 2023). By contrast, the mere convenience of the payment process was rarely, if ever, mentioned as a salient trigger – a notable contrast to assumptions in some technology-adoption-oriented studies of e-commerce.

Disaggregating by impulsive-buying type reveals a more nuanced picture. Emotional impulse buying is the most frequently coded category across almost every factor and shows the highest overlaps with Product Scarcity (15), Communication Presence (15), Emotional Presence (15), Arousal (13), and Coexisting Presence (8). This concentration suggests that, among the four types, emotionally driven impulsive purchases are most tightly bound to the host's relational and emotional communication style, corroborating the argument that emotion functions as the key mediating mechanism between social/scarcity stimuli and impulsive response (Chung et al., 2025; Kumar & Taneja, 2024).

First-time impulse buying shows a moderate overlap profile (Product Scarcity = 11; Communication Presence = 9; Emotional Presence = 9; Pleasure = 6), consistent with the idea that purely spontaneous, unplanned purchases are triggered primarily by an immediate stimulus – typically a scarcity cue reinforced by the host's direct engagement – rather than by a cumulative emotional build-up (Qu et al., 2023; Rook, 1987). By contrast, Planned impulse buying and Reminder impulse buying show the lowest and most similar overlap profiles across almost all factors (e.g., Product Scarcity = 5 and 7; Communication Presence = 6 and 7, respectively), suggesting that these two types are less dependent on the social-emotional atmosphere of the live session and more dependent on a pre-existing latent need or an external reminder that the session merely activates (Rook, 1987).

The very low overlap for Social Togetherness (I, ranging from 1 to 3 across all four types) is a notable finding that diverges somewhat from the emphasis some prior studies place on the crowd or community aspect of live shopping (Nasution et al., 2025). In the observed sessions, viewers appeared to respond far more strongly to dyadic, host-to-viewer relational cues captured by Communication Presence and Emotional Presence than to a sense of togetherness with other co-present viewers. This aligns with the word-frequency finding that terms such as “kakak” and “sayang”, which address the individual viewer, were far more prominent than collective or crowd-oriented language.

Integration of Findings

Read together, the word-frequency and matrix-coding results converge on a coherent qualitative narrative: hosts on TikTok Live and Shopee Live sessions construct a personalized, emotionally warm register (“kakak”, “sayang”) that supports communication and emotional presence, and they pair this register with urgency and scarcity cues (“boleh”, “ambil”, “langsung”, limited-stock announcements) that signal scarcity. The combination appears to elevate viewers’ arousal and, to a lesser extent, pleasure, which in turn is most closely associated with emotional impulse buying rather than the other three types. This qualitative pattern provides empirical grounding for the quantitative model proposed for the next phase of the study, in which social presence (X1) and scarcity (X2) are hypothesized to influence impulsive buying (Y) through the moderating role of emotion – pleasure and arousal (Chung et al., 2025; Gumay et al., 2024). By contrast, the comparatively minor role of easy payment and social togetherness suggests these constructs may warrant a smaller or more carefully specified role in the quantitative instrument, or should be tested as boundary conditions rather than as core predictors (Creswell, 2012).

CONCLUSIONS

These findings make two contributions. Theoretically, they provide fine-grained, in-the-moment qualitative evidence for the social presence-scarcity-emotion-impulsive buying pathway, which has so far been tested primarily through cross-sectional surveys (Chung et al., 2025; Qu et al., 2023). They also show that not all impulsive purchases are equally social-emotional in origin, a distinction that existing SEM-based studies have generally not made (Kumar & Taneja, 2024). Practically, the findings suggest that digital businesses and SME live sellers seeking to grow sales responsibly should pay close attention to how hosts are trained to combine relational language with urgency cues, while also being mindful of the ethical implications of intentionally engineering emotional closeness to prompt unplanned spending (Solikha & Putranto, 2025).

LIMITATIONS & FURTHER RESEARCH

This study is limited by its focus on three product categories (fashion, skincare, and makeup) and a relatively small number of interview informants, which restricts the generalizability of the qualitative patterns identified here. Future research should therefore proceed, as planned in the broader mixed-methods design, to validate the proposed model quantitatively using SEM-PLS with a larger survey sample of TikTok Live and Shopee Live users (Chung et al., 2025). Subsequent stages of the research agenda may also extend this line of inquiry to the ethics and governance of emotionally persuasive live selling, and to emerging phenomena such as AI-generated hosts and virtual influencers, whose scripted “emotional presence” raises new questions for consumer protection in digital business (Kozinets, 2015).

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