
POST-PURCHASE REGRET IN OTA: EXPLORING THE ROLE OF IMPULSE BUYING

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Abstract

The growing popularity of OTAs and increasing competition have sparked academic research on consumer behavior related to these platforms. Therefore, this paper aims to examine the role of impulse buying and post-purchase regret in the context of OTAs. A mixed methodology has been employed for the study. SmartPLS 4.0 software was used for the quantitative data analysis, while NVivo software was used for the qualitative data analysis. The findings reveal that (a) social media, eWOM, hedonic motivation, and FOMO significantly impact impulse buying and (b) impulse buying positively impacts post-purchase regret. It is important to highlight that this is one of the first studies to explore the antecedents of impulse buying and its impact on post-purchase regret within the context of OTAs. As such, it can serve as a foundation for future research.

Keywords: *Online Travel Agency, Post-Purchase Regret, Impulse Buying, Mixed Methodology.*

Abbreviations Used: *OTA (Online Travel Agency), PPR (Post-Purchase Regret), eWOM (Electronic Word of Mouth)*

Introduction

The service industry is experiencing substantial transformations in the Internet age, with information technology serving a crucial function in facilitating the development of new services and allowing service firms to adapt their management frameworks. Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) exemplify the integration of the Internet with the tourist sector. In 2023, the global market size of the online travel industry saw a sharp increase, reaching nearly 600 billion U.S. dollars. This figure is expected to continue growing steadily, with projections indicating it will exceed 800 billion U.S. dollars by 2028 (Statista, 2024).

The primary function of OTAs is to earn commissions by offering travel-related services, integrating products, reducing costs, and providing consumers with more affordable solutions (Wei et al., 2023). OTAs provide numerous benefits compared to direct routes. Initially, they function as a comprehensive one-stop destination for tourists, providing an array of services such as hotel rooms, airfare, car rentals, cruises, and various activities. This substantially diminishes the search expenses that customers generally face while organizing a trip. Secondly, OTAs provide a diverse array of accommodations, encompassing conventional hotels, guesthouses, rental homes, villas, resorts, and flats. Third, OTAs often offer guest feedback from prior customers, aiding travellers in making more educated purchasing choices. Ultimately, the marketing initiatives of OTAs are typically more extensive than those of individual hotels, enabling them to draw greater traffic to their platforms and potentially convert a portion of this traffic into hotel reservations (Chen & Chen, 2024).

OTAs often highlight attractive information to encourage customers to make a purchase while minimizing details that could lead to hesitation, which may eventually result in post-purchase regret (Mirsarraf et al., 2017). This can happen in several situations. First, after making a booking, customers frequently question whether they made the right decision. Since a hotel room is an experiential product, anxiety about the choice persists until the stay, and if the experience turns out to be negative, this discomfort can lead to regret (Jo et al., 2022). Second, tourism suppliers often change discount rates and impose fees for altering or canceling bookings, which can create uncertainty and make customers doubt their purchase. Even if customers believe they

secured a good deal, they may still wish to reverse their decision and feel regret (Park & Jang, 2018).

Regret is an emotion that arises from negative thoughts, occurring when we realize or imagine that our current situation could have been better if we had made different decisions in the past (Joseph-Williams et al., 2011). People often blame the e-commerce website involved in their transaction for negative outcomes, as this helps them alleviate their sense of guilt (Chen & Chen, 2024). Thus, OTAs are expected to be the focus of animosity and post-purchase regret, particularly after impulsive purchases. This regret can lead to a lack of trust in OTAs and an intention to switch to other booking platforms (Román, 2010).

Therefore, this study aims to explore the factors that affect impulse buying and how they contribute to post-purchase regret in the context of OTA in Jharkhand, using a mixed methodology for a deeper understanding. The findings of this research will provide valuable insights for OTAs, helping them improve their strategies and reduce customer dissatisfaction.

Literature Review

Social Media and Impulse Buying

Social media ranks among the most extensively utilized sources of information globally. The affordable and convenient access to the internet, along with the substantial number of people registered on these websites, renders them among the most efficient and accessible means of disseminating information (González-Padilla & Tortolero-Blanco, 2020). Singh et al. (2023) measured the impact of social media on impulse buying and found that social media significantly influences impulse buying intentions. Konga Subba Reddy and B Abdul Azeem (2022) argued that social media marketing directly affects impulse buying behavior, suggesting that unplanned purchases increase due to social media marketing, leading to up to a 40 percent rise in additional expenses attributed to social media factors. Furthermore, the findings of Khokhar et al. (2019) reveal. Social media exerts a favourable and substantial influence on customers' impulsive buying behavior. Thus, web retailers and marketers must acknowledge the significance of social media in facilitating online impulsive purchases. Based on these findings, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

H₁ – Social Media significantly impacts impulse buying.

eWOM and Impulse Buying

eWOM is defined as “the dynamic and ongoing information exchange process between potential, actual, or former consumers regarding a product, service, brand, or company, which is available to a multitude of individuals and institutions via the Internet” (Akbari et al., 2022). Nguyen et al. (2024) investigated the impact of eWOM on impulse buying tendencies and found a positive relationship between the two. Additionally, Kurniawan and Setiawan (2023) aimed to elucidate the impact of eWOM on impulse purchasing behavior and found that eWOM does indeed have a positive effect on impulse buying behavior. These findings suggest that eWOM serves as a key driver of impulse purchases by shaping consumer perceptions and increasing the likelihood of spontaneous buying decisions. Therefore, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

H₂ – eWOM significantly impacts impulse buying.

FOMO and Impulse Buying

FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) may be described as “an emotional anxiety” or “a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent” (Good & Hyman, 2020). The findings of Hamizar et al. (2024) demonstrate that FOMO significantly influences customers’ propensity for impulsive purchasing, driven by factors such as social connectedness, urgency and curiosity. Similarly, Kopřivová and Bauerová (2024) corroborated that FOMO influences purchase decisions, highlighting its significance in shaping consumer behavior. Furthermore, the findings of Arifin and Anwar (2024) reveal that FOMO significantly impacts impulse buying, reinforcing the notion that the fear of missing out drives spontaneous purchasing behavior. These studies suggest that marketers should consider FOMO as a critical factor when developing strategies to encourage impulse buying, particularly in online environments. Based on these findings, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

H₃ – FOMO significantly impacts impulse buying.

Hedonic Motives and Impulse Buying

Hedonic shopping motivation refers to behavior associated with fun, amusement, fantasy, and the sensory aspects of consumption (Srivastava et al., 2024; Tyrväinen et al., 2020). Additionally, some research studies reveal that hedonic motivations positively correlate with impulsive purchasing behavior (Gawior et al., 2022). Widagdo and Roz (2021) examined the relationship

between hedonic shopping motivation and impulse buying, finding that hedonic shopping motivation influences impulsive buying behavior in online stores. Their research also indicates that individuals with a tendency to shop based on hedonic motivation often spend considerable time browsing online retail stores, which increases the likelihood of unplanned purchases. This suggests that the enjoyment and excitement derived from online shopping can lead consumers to make spontaneous buying decisions. Therefore, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

H₄ – Hedonic Motives significantly impacts impulse buying.

Impulse Buying and Post-Purchase Regret

Numerous essential characteristics can elucidate the notion of impulse purchasing. First, impulse purchasing is generally spontaneous. Secondly, it is a habit or inclination influenced by external factors. Third, impulse purchasing is characterized by immediacy, with less attention devoted to information gathering or the assessment of other options (Dodoo & Wu, 2019). Impulse buying also grows in developing economies, such as India (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2021). Saleh (2012) aimed to investigate the relationship between unplanned purchases and post-purchase regret, concluding a positive association between unplanned buying and post-purchase regret. Similarly, Chen et al. (2023) investigated the effect of impulse purchase on consumers' dissonance after purchase and return intentions, revealing that impulse buying had a direct and positive effect on product dissonance. Additionally, Lee et al. (2023) found that impulse buying induces emotional stress in consumers. Based on these findings, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

H₅ – Impulse Buying significantly impacts the post-purchase regret.

Conceptual Model

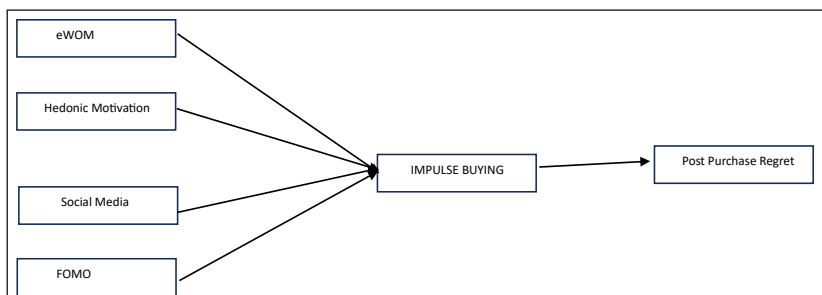


Fig. 1: Conceptual Model

Methodology

This study investigates the key antecedents that directly or indirectly impact impulse buying and its impact on post-purchase regret related to OTA. The data collection for this study was carried out in two phases: the first phase involved qualitative data collection, while the second phase focused on quantitative data collection. In the qualitative phase, data were gathered through literature reviews, and in-depth interviews were conducted with ten different OTA users in Jharkhand. In the quantitative phase, primary data were collected from individuals in Jharkhand using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was circulated by email and social media sites (WhatsApp, and Telegram, and Facebook).

The target population for this study comprised individuals who have used OTA. Since the population was considered infinite, a non-probabilistic sampling method (convenience sampling) was employed. Initially, 300 questionnaires were distributed online, and following regular reminders, 256 completed responses were received.

Table 1 presents the sample profile of respondents, showing that the majority were male (77.34%) and aged between 20 and 25 years. The largest proportion of respondents held a graduate degree (36.32%).

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Variables		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	198	77.34
	Female	58	22.65
Marital Status	Married	119	46.48
	Unmarried	137	53.51
Educational Qualification	Above Postgraduate	10	3.90
	Postgraduate	89	34.76
	Graduate	64	25
	Undergraduate	93	36.32
Age	20-30 years	116	45.31
	31-40 years	72	28.12
	41-50 years	68	26.56
Income	Less than 500000	148	57.81
	500000 - 1000000	41	16.01
	1000000- 1500000	63	24.60
	Above 1500000	04	1.56

Data Analysis Tools and Techniques

This study adopted a mixed-methodologies approach, integrating qualitative as well as quantitative methods to achieve a more profound comprehension on the research problem. Quantitative research includes numerical data from observations to elucidate and delineate the processes being investigated. The data is then analysed using mathematical techniques (Taherdoost, 2022). However, qualitative research creates insights by individual reflection instead of depending on quantitative information, measurement, and causal assessment. It emphasizes the complexity and profundity of human perspectives and experiences, providing crucial insights that quantitative methodologies may neglect (Phillips, 2023).

Quantitative data analysis was conducted utilising partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS 4.0 software. The decision to employ PLS-SEM is centered on its capacity to manage intricate models, encompassing several constructs and indications (Srivastava et al., 2024). Also, it can manage higher-order constructs and nonlinear relationships (Magno et al., 2024). Furthermore, NVivo software is used for qualitative analysis due to its numerous advantages. First, it offers greater flexibility in categorizing rich-text data, enhancing the results' quality generated. Second, it helps reduce the time and effort involved in manual data analysis. NVivo also facilitates the identification of trends and the cross-examination of information, enabling the discovery of key themes relevant to the study and supporting the development of more informed conclusions (Alam, 2021).

Results

Quantitative Analysis

Measurement Model

The measurement model examines the associations between indicator factors and their associated constructs. It delineates the indicators for measuring the construct and clarifies the directional association between the construct and the indicators. The measuring model often encompasses assessments of composite reliability, and average variance extracted.

Table 2: Cronbach Alpha and Composite Reliability

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho_a)	Composite Reliability (rho_c)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
EW	0.862	0.862	0.916	0.783
FM	0.904	0.905	0.940	0.839
HM	0.911	0.914	0.937	0.789
IB	0.875	0.875	0.923	0.800
PPR	0.838	0.844	0.902	0.755
SMI	0.898	0.899	0.929	0.766

The reliability of the research model was evaluated using composite reliability, while the internal consistency of the variables was measured through the Cronbach alpha coefficient (Hair et al., 2010). The results presented in Table 2 show that both Cronbach alpha and composite reliability values for all constructs are greater than 0.7, thereby confirming the reliability of the model (Hair et al., 2010). In terms of convergent validity, following the criteria outlined by Chin (1998), it was observed that all constructs have an AVE greater than 0.50, indicating sufficient convergent validity (Srivastava et al., 2023).

Structural Model

Table 3

	R-Square	R-Square Adjusted
IB	0.847	0.846
PPR	0.771	0.771

Table 3 presents the results of the structural model. The R^2 values represent the percentage of variability in the dependent variables elucidated by the independent variables, which are 0.847 (84.7%) for impulse buying behavior and 0.771 (77.1%) for post-purchase regret.

Hypothesis Testing

The SEM analysis was conducted using Smart PLS 4.0 software. The significance of the structural parameters was estimated through a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 bootstrap samples. Fig. 2 presents the main results of the PLS analysis, including Cronbach alpha, path significance (p-values) and explained variance (R^2 values). A 5% significance level (based on two-tailed t-tests) was applied in all statistical tests (Mishra et al., 2023). The results presented in Table 4 support all the hypotheses in the model, as the p-values are less than 0.05.

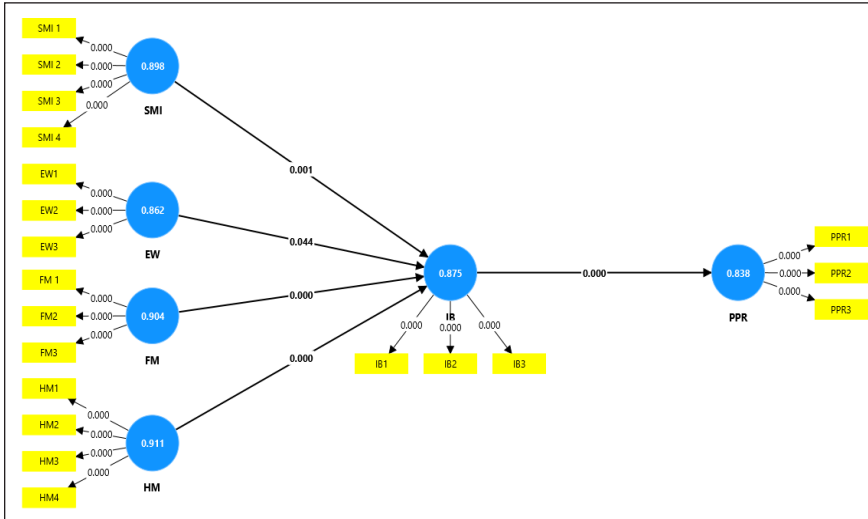


Fig. 2: The Result of the Structural Model

Table 4: Hypothesis Testing

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values	Result
EW -> IB	0.119	0.120	0.059	2.014	0.044	Supported
FM -> IB	0.308	0.306	0.065	4.752	0.000	Supported
HM -> IB	0.301	0.303	0.067	4.479	0.000	Supported
IB -> PPR	0.878	0.878	0.011	81.218	0.000	Supported
SMI -> IB	0.226	0.225	0.068	3.343	0.001	Supported

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative analysis is an approach that allows researchers to explore complex phenomena in depth, gain insights into individuals’ experiences, beliefs, and behaviors, and uncover underlying patterns and meanings. NVivo, one of the most widely used tools for qualitative analysis, is considered as a crucial resource for conducting qualitative research in the fields of Social Sciences and Management Studies (Kraiwaniit & Limna; Pongsakorn Siripipatthanakul, 2023).

“If my friends or family recommend a certain online agency, I tend to book without thorough consideration, trusting their suggestions.”

Social Media

The majority of participants stated that social media significantly influences their online booking decisions, primarily due to user reviews and testimonials, influencer recommendations, and community discussions. They highlighted that authentic feedback from other users provides valuable insights into the quality and reliability of services. Additionally, recommendations from trusted influencers often help guide their choices by offering expert opinions or showcasing personal experiences. Community discussions further contribute by allowing potential customers to engage with others, ask questions, and share tips, ultimately enhancing their confidence in making informed booking decisions.

“Social media platforms provide user reviews and testimonials that provide first-hand experiences, contributing to the credibility of online booking agencies.”

“Social media platforms enable users to engage in discussions, allowing people to exchange experiences and share knowledge, which enhances the accuracy of information regarding booking agencies.”

eWOM

Respondents confirmed that they read online reviews before making an online booking to ensure they are making the right choice. They emphasized the importance of gathering feedback from previous customers to gauge the quality of services or products offered. Many respondents noted that reviews help them identify potential issues, such as hidden fees or poor customer service, which may not be apparent from the booking site itself. By reviewing the experiences of others, they feel more confident in their decision-making process and are better equipped to avoid unpleasant surprises.

“I always check product reviews before making an online booking. By reading others’ experiences, I can make sure the platform is trustworthy and is likely to satisfy my requirements.”

“To ensure I make the best booking, I rely heavily on consumer reviews. Reading both positive and negative reviews helps me make a balanced, informed decision that aligns with my preferences and needs.”

Fear of Missing Out

Respondents expressed a strong inclination towards experiencing FOMO due to limited-time offers and the sight of others booking similar trips. They mentioned that seeing social proof of popular bookings, such as posts from friends or influencers, intensified their desire to secure a deal quickly. The fear of missing out on exclusive offers or experiencing a sense of urgency often prompted them to make hasty decisions. Additionally, the visibility of others' bookings reinforced the feeling that they might be missing an opportunity, leading them to act impulsively to avoid regret.

“The realization that other travelers are also competing for the same options leads me to fear that I might miss out on the perfect booking.”

“When an online travel agency offers packages with discounts or added perks for a limited time, I feel compelled to book to avoid losing out on the best offer.”

Hedonic Motivation

Participants mentioned that they feel excited during their online booking process due to the possibility of securing the best travel deals and having the ability to customize their options. They appreciate the convenience of comparing different offers, which allows them to select the most suitable options for their needs. Additionally, the flexibility to personalize their travel plans, such as choosing specific accommodations, activities, or services, adds to their sense of satisfaction and anticipation. This excitement is further fueled by the potential to uncover exclusive discounts and offers that enhance their overall travel experience.

“When I see discounts or special offers for flights, hotels, or packages, it makes the process more thrilling and motivates me to continue searching.”

“The ability to choose flights, accommodations, and activities according to my preferences gives me control over my travel plans and makes the process more thrilling.”

Post-Purchase Regret

Many respondents expressed regret over their online travel bookings due to hidden charges, discovering better deals later, and failing to thoroughly review the terms and conditions before making their reservations. They

highlighted that the unexpected additional costs often led to dissatisfaction, while others found that more favorable offers became available after their booking was completed. Additionally, some participants noted that they had overlooked the fine print of the terms and conditions, which contributed to unpleasant surprises during their travel experience. This has led many to be more cautious and diligent in their future booking decisions.

“I have sometimes regretted my booking, especially when I found a better deal. Sometimes I feel I rushed into booking through an online travel agency without fully comparing prices or reading reviews.”

“Yes, I have regretted my booking decisions in the past. Often, the regret stems from not fully understanding the terms and conditions or failing to double-check the details of the travel arrangements before confirming.”

“It sometimes happens when I realize that I missed an important detail, such as hidden fees, or when the accommodation or service didn't meet my expectations.”

Discussion

This study empirically examines the influence of Electronic Word of Mouth, Social Media Influence, Fear of Missing Out, and Hedonic Motivation on impulse buying tendency, as well as the impact of impulse buying on post-purchase regret within the context of Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) in Jharkhand. The results reveal that Social Media Influence positively affects consumers' impulse buying urges, supporting hypothesis H1a ($p=0.001$). This finding is consistent with Reddy and Azeem, 2022, which supports that social media significantly influences impulse buying. Chen et al. (2016) corroborated that social media promotes impulsive buying for several reasons. It provides tools that facilitate purchasing and enable users to interact with friends and family rather than just browsing products.

The study found the relation between eWOM and Impulse Buying significant ($p=0.044$). These findings are consistent with (Husnain et al., 2016), who corroborated that electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has a significant impact on impulse buying behaviour. This suggests that the widespread diffusion of such communication can increase consumer awareness of a product and reduce uncertainty. eWOM also plays a formative role in shaping consumer attitudes and behavior, indicating that consumers consider eWOM when making purchasing decisions, particularly in the case of impulse buying.

Furthermore, the internet allows consumers to easily find more information about products or services relevant to their interests.

The influence of Fear of missing out was found to have a significant impact on Impulse Buying ($p=0.000$). These findings align with the result of (Ghaniyah & Rufaidah, 2024), which reveal that FOMO significantly causes impulsive buying. The feeling of “missing out” plays a significant role in shaping consumers’ purchasing decisions during online shopping. This sensation can drive consumers to swiftly overcome initial hesitations and doubts, leading to spontaneous and impulsive purchasing actions.

The hedonic motivation was found to have a positive impact on impulse buying ($p=0.000$). These findings are consistent with (Gültekin & Özer, 2012), who stated that hedonic motives provide consumers with fun, enjoyment, fantasy, and sensory stimulation. As a result, consumers driven by hedonic motives may purchase without any prior intention.

The study confirms that impulse buying significantly impacts post-purchase regret ($p=0.000$), validating the findings of (Saleh, 2012). This outcome can be attributed to the sense of irrationality felt by consumers when making impulsive purchases, especially among low-income individuals with limited resources. This irrationality leads to dissatisfaction with their purchase decisions, often influenced by marketers. Consequently, this dissatisfaction results in post-purchase regret.

Conclusion and Implications

This study empirically examines the influence of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM), Social Media Impact, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), and Hedonic Motivation on consumers’ impulse buying behaviors, along with the effect of impulse buying on post-purchase regret in the context of Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) in Jharkhand. The results indicate that all four factors, i.e., social media, eWOM, FOMO, and Hedonic Motivation, significantly impact customers’ impulse purchasing behaviour. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that impulse buying directly leads to post-purchase regret, emphasising the emotional consequences of impulsive travel-related purchases. These insights highlight the complex association between digital marketing elements and consumer behaviour in the online travel sector.

The implications of the study are essential for both marketers and Online Travel Agencies. Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) should harness the

influence of social media, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), and the fear of missing out (FOMO) to stimulate impulse purchases, utilising techniques that embrace these emotional and social motivators. Simultaneously, marketers must acknowledge the possibility of post-purchase regret and ensure their ads are structured to harmonise urgency with ethical accountability. OTAs should provide better, more open information to alleviate post-purchase regret and give post-purchase assistance. Future research may examine the impact of demographic characteristics on the correlation between these parameters and impulse buying behavior and investigate the long-term consequences of impulse buying on consumer loyalty and satisfaction.

Limitations

The study does have some limitations, which, although not affecting the validity of the research, should be acknowledged and addressed in future studies. One key limitation is that the research is based on a single geographic location (Jharkhand), which means the findings may not fully apply to other contexts and may only be relevant within this specific setting. Therefore, it is recommended that future research be conducted in cross-cultural environments to improve the generalizability of the results. Additionally, researchers may identify other variables that could moderate the relationship between impulse buying and post-purchase regret, providing further insights into this dynamic.

Data Availability

The data are available upon request to the corresponding author.

Declarations

There is no conflict of interest to declare.

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