

Digital Influence and Smartwatch Purchase among Youth in a Saturating Indian Market: A Stimulus-Organism-Response Framework for Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar

(How Influencers, Online Reviews and Sales Offers Shape Young Buyers)

Nandini Sharma
Research Scholar, Alard School of Business Management
Alard University
Pune, Maharashtra, India

Abstract- Smartwatch shipments in India have fallen for two consecutive years after a period of rapid, discount-led growth, yet digital media continue to shape how young consumers discover, evaluate and buy these devices. This paper develops a conceptual framework, grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response model, that explains how three forms of digital influence (influencer credibility, peer reviews and electronic word of mouth, and platform promotion intensity) act on youth purchase behaviour through perceived value, parasocial attachment and perceived lifestyle fit. The framework separates two responses that earlier work often merges: deliberate purchase intention and impulsive purchase urge. It also treats ownership status and price sensitivity as boundary conditions that become important when a market moves from first-time adoption to replacement and upgrade. Nine propositions are derived and a measurement and sampling design is outlined for testing them among young consumers in Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar, Maharashtra. The paper contributes a market-stage perspective to digital influence research and offers practical guidance for brands and retailers operating in tier-two Indian cities.

Keywords- digital influence; smartwatch; youth consumers; Stimulus-Organism-Response; impulse buying; influencer marketing; India

I. INTRODUCTION

The smartwatch has moved within a few years from a niche accessory to a mainstream consumer device in India. Domestic brands built this category by pairing low prices with a heavy presence on social media and online marketplaces. The expansion has now stalled. According to IDC, smartwatch shipments in India fell by 17.6 percent in 2025 to 28.9 million units, the second annual decline in a row, while advanced smartwatches kept a small but slightly larger share of the category [1]. Counterpoint Research similarly describes the budget segment as saturated and reports that consumers are beginning to look beyond entry-level devices [2].

This change in market stage matters for consumer research. Most studies of digital influence assume a growing market in which the main task of marketing is to create first-time adoption. When the base of owners is already large, the same influencer video or discount banner may be doing different work: it may trigger an impulsive purchase, support a considered upgrade, or simply be ignored by people who

already own a device. Young consumers, who are the heaviest users of short video, review platforms and online marketplaces, are the group in which these processes can be observed most clearly.

Existing research on wearables has examined acceptance, fashion value and health motives [3], [4], and a large literature has examined influencers, parasocial relationships and impulse buying on social platforms [5]-[8]. These streams have seldom been combined for a specific durable-goods category, and almost none of the work distinguishes between planned and impulsive responses within a single model. Studies that consider Indian cities outside the metropolitan centres are also scarce. Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar, a fast-growing educational and industrial city in Maharashtra, provides a useful setting because its young population is digitally connected but has a more varied income profile than the large metros.

The purpose of this paper is therefore conceptual. It aims (i) to organise the main forms of digital influence into a Stimulus-Organism-Response framework for smartwatch purchase, (ii) to separate deliberate and impulsive purchase responses, (iii) to specify how ownership status and price sensitivity may change the strength of these relationships, and (iv) to propose a design for empirical testing in Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar. No primary data are reported here; all empirical statements about the market are drawn from the published industry sources cited in the reference list.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

A. Stimulus-Organism-Response Model

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model proposes that features of an environment act as stimuli, that these stimuli change the internal state of the person, and that this internal state in turn produces approach or avoidance behaviour [9]. The model has been widely used to study online shopping because digital interfaces consist of cues that can be separated, measured and manipulated. Its strength for the present purpose is that it places the person's cognitive and emotional reaction between the marketing cue and the purchase, which allows the framework to explain why the same content produces different outcomes for different consumers.

B. Digital Influence as Stimulus

Three groups of stimuli are most relevant to smartwatch buyers. The first is the credibility of the influencers who demonstrate and review devices. Credibility is usually understood as a combination of perceived expertise, trustworthiness and similarity to the viewer, and evidence suggests that it affects trust in sponsored content and purchase decisions among young social media users [7], [8]. The second is peer-generated information, including ratings, written reviews and comments on marketplaces and video platforms. Because a smartwatch combines technical features with fashion value, buyers have reason to look for the opinions of people who have already used a product [4]. The third is the intensity of platform promotion: time-limited sales, festival offers, bank discounts and countdown displays, which are especially prominent in Indian online retail.

C. Organismic States

Three internal states are proposed as mediators. Perceived value is the buyer's overall judgement of what is received relative to what is given [10]; for smartwatches it is shaped by the balance between price, features, battery life, appearance and brand reputation. Parasocial attachment refers to the one-sided sense of familiarity and closeness that audiences develop with media personalities [11]; research on social commerce indicates that this attachment can raise the urge to buy impulsively [5]. Perceived lifestyle fit captures the extent to which the device is seen as consistent with the buyer's self-image, routines and social group, which links the model to evidence that smartwatches are judged partly as fashion products and not only as information technology [4].

D. Purchase Responses

Planned purchase intention reflects a deliberate evaluation of the product and is traditionally modelled through attitude and perceived control [12], [13]. Impulsive buying, by contrast, is an unplanned and emotionally driven purchase that is often triggered by a stimulus in the shopping environment [14]. Its precursors include the urge to buy, which is distinct from the final behaviour and can be restrained or enabled by situational factors [15], [16]. Treating these two responses separately is central to the framework because the stimuli and mediators are expected to influence them in different proportions.

III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND PROPOSITIONS

Fig. 1 presents the framework and Table I summarises the constructs. Influencer credibility and peer reviews are expected to work mainly through the evaluative and identity-related states, whereas platform promotion is expected to act more directly on the urge to buy.

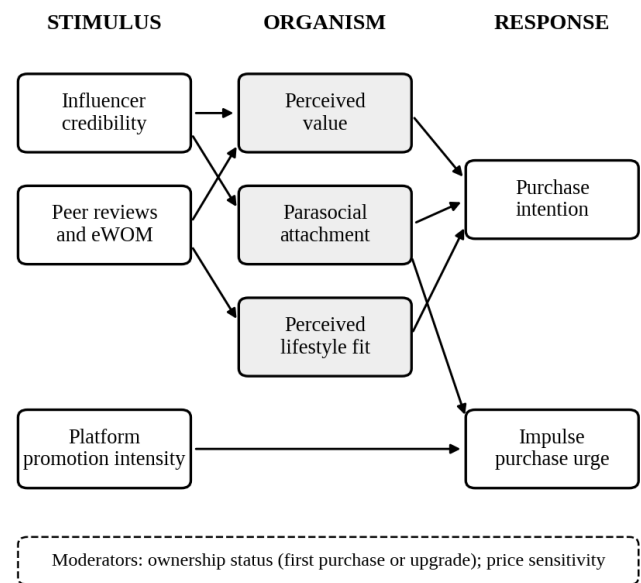


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework of digital influence and smartwatch purchase

A. Influencer Credibility

Young consumers are more likely to accept a product recommendation when the person making it appears knowledgeable, honest and similar to themselves. A credible reviewer who explains battery life, sensor accuracy or build quality in concrete terms gives viewers information they can use to judge value. Credible communicators also tend to attract loyal audiences who feel they know them. Two propositions follow.

P1: Influencer credibility is positively related to perceived value of a smartwatch.

P2: Influencer credibility is positively related to parasocial attachment to the influencer.

B. Peer Reviews and Electronic Word of Mouth

Reviews posted by earlier buyers reduce uncertainty about durability and real-world performance, which are difficult to judge from advertising. They also help young buyers calibrate whether a lower-priced device is actually good value. Reviews that are detailed, recent and consistent with one another should therefore strengthen perceived value and help the buyer judge whether the watch fits the intended lifestyle.

P3: Quality and consistency of peer reviews are positively related to perceived value.

P4: Quality and consistency of peer reviews are positively related to perceived lifestyle fit.

C. Platform Promotion Intensity

Online marketplaces use urgency cues that compress the time available for deliberation. Where a discount is large and available for a limited period, a buyer may form the urge to purchase before completing a comparison. Such cues are expected to work on the urge to buy more directly than on planned intention.

P5: Platform promotion intensity is positively related to impulsive purchase urge.

D. Mediating States and Responses

A device that is judged to offer good value and to suit the buyer's lifestyle is more likely to be selected through a deliberate process. Emotional closeness to an influencer, on the other hand, is more likely to create a spontaneous wish to buy what the influencer uses or recommends.

P6: Perceived value and perceived lifestyle fit are positively related to purchase intention.

P7: Parasocial attachment is positively related to impulsive purchase urge, and its relationship with purchase intention is weaker.

E. Boundary Conditions in a Saturating Market

As ownership spreads, a growing share of buyers are replacing or upgrading a device and not buying their first one. Upgraders already know what a smartwatch can do and may weigh technical features and ecosystem compatibility more heavily, which is consistent with the reported movement towards higher-value devices [1], [2]. First-time buyers, in contrast, have little experience to rely on and are likely to depend more on external cues. Price sensitivity is expected to amplify the response to promotions because a visible discount changes the perceived price-value ratio.

P8: Ownership status moderates the framework such that influencer and peer cues have stronger effects among first-time buyers, while perceived value has a stronger effect on intention among upgraders.

P9: Price sensitivity strengthens the relationship between platform promotion intensity and impulsive purchase urge.

TABLE I. CONSTRUCTS IN THE FRAMEWORK

Construct	Role	Anchor
Influencer credibility	Stimulus	[7], [8]
Peer reviews, eWOM	Stimulus	[4]
Platform promotion	Stimulus	[14], [16]
Perceived value	Organism	[10]
Parasocial attachment	Organism	[5], [11]
Lifestyle fit	Organism	[4]
Purchase intention	Response	[12], [13]
Impulse purchase urge	Response	[14]-[16]
Ownership, price sensitivity	Moderator	[1], [2]

IV. PROPOSED RESEARCH DESIGN FOR EMPIRICAL TESTING

The propositions are intended to be tested through a cross-sectional survey of young smartwatch buyers and prospective buyers in Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar. The target population would be residents aged roughly 18 to 30 who have bought, or seriously considered buying, a smartwatch in the previous twelve months. Because a complete sampling frame of such consumers does not exist, quota sampling across age band, gender, student or employed status and ownership status is suggested, with respondents recruited through colleges, coaching institutes, workplaces and retail outlets. The minimum sample can be set using a standard sample-size formula for a large population [17] and should be increased to allow for partial least squares modelling with several mediators and two moderators [18].

Constructs would be measured with multi-item five-point agreement scales adapted from published instruments for

source credibility, perceived value, parasocial interaction, impulse buying tendency and purchase intention, with item wording reviewed by marketing academics and pre-tested on a small pilot group. Because respondents in the city may prefer Marathi or Hindi, translated versions should be back-translated before use. Analysis would proceed through reliability and validity checks, estimation of the structural model with partial least squares structural equation modelling [18], and multi-group comparison of first-time buyers and upgraders. Common method bias should be examined, since all constructs would be self-reported at a single point in time.

V. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

A. Theoretical Implications

The framework extends S-O-R applications in two directions. First, it applies the model to a durable, high-involvement wearable product and not to the low-cost fashion or grocery items that dominate impulse buying research. Second, it links the stage of the market to the influence process by treating ownership as a boundary condition. If the propositions are supported, they would indicate that the effectiveness of a given digital cue is not fixed but depends on whether the audience is adopting, replacing or upgrading.

B. Managerial Implications

For brands, the framework suggests that spending on influencers and spending on promotions should not be judged by a single conversion metric. Credible, informative creators are expected to build value perception and planned intention, which suits premium and feature-led models, while sharp short-term offers mainly produce impulsive purchases, which are more likely to be followed by regret or return. Retailers in tier-two cities could use local creators and verified buyer reviews to reach first-time buyers, and offer comparison tools and upgrade incentives to existing owners. Policy makers and consumer-protection bodies may also find the distinction useful, since disclosure of sponsorship and clear presentation of discounts matter most in the impulse pathway.

VI. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The study is conceptual and its propositions are not yet empirically supported. The framework includes a limited set of stimuli and states; other variables such as health motivation, privacy concern, brand trust, fear of missing out and family influence could be added in later work. The proposed setting is a single city, so findings may not generalise to other regions. Future research could test the model with longitudinal data to see how responses change after purchase, compare smartwatches with other wearables such as earbuds and fitness bands, and include observed behaviour, such as clickstream or purchase records, to reduce reliance on self-report.

VII. CONCLUSION

As smartwatch demand in India shifts from rapid expansion to a slower and more selective phase, the question for researchers and marketers is no longer only whether digital influence works but for whom and through which mechanism. The framework proposed here explains how influencer credibility, peer information and platform promotions may act on young buyers through value, attachment and lifestyle fit, and how these paths lead to planned and impulsive purchase in different ways. The nine propositions provide a basis for

empirical work in Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar and comparable cities.

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