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BEHAVIOURAL ECONOMICS OF CONSUMER DECISION-MAKING IN THE DIGITAL ERA: EXPLORING COGNITIVE BIASES AND DIGITAL NUDGES INFLUENCING ONLINE PURCHASE INTENT

Dr. Manjula Mallya M[1], Dr. N Subbukrishna Sastry[2]
[1]*Associate Professor & Head, Dept. of Economics, Government First Grade College for Women Balmatta Mangalore, Karnataka, India. ORCID Id: 0009-0005-8812-6912*
[2]*Professor, School of Management, CMR University, Bangalore, Karnataka, India. ORCID Id: 0009-0009-0460-7057*

ABSTRACT

In the evolving digital economy, consumer behaviour has undergone a fundamental transformation driven by technological advancements, algorithmic personalization, and behavioural targeting. Traditional economic theories that assumed rational decision-making no longer capture the complexities of online consumer choices. This study aims to explore how ***behavioural economics principles*** *– particularly cognitive biases, heuristics, and digital nudges – shape consumer purchase intentions in the digital marketplace. The research investigates how elements such as scarcity cues, anchoring effects, social proof, and default options embedded in online interfaces subtly influence consumer preferences and willingness to buy.*

Using an integrated behavioural-economic framework, the study combines insights from ***psychology, marketing, and microeconomics*** *to analyse digital decision-making processes. Primary data will be collected through structured questionnaires and controlled digital experiments among online consumers, while secondary data will be derived from peer-reviewed journals and marketing analytics reports. Statistical techniques such as* ***Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)*** *and* ***Regression Analysis*** *will be employed to examine causal relationships between behavioural factors and purchase intent.*

It is expected to demonstrate that ***digital nudging mechanisms significantly impact consumer decision-making****, often leading to suboptimal or impulsive purchases that deviate from rational choice theory. Furthermore, the research will highlight how the degree of trust, perceived value, and online transparency moderates these behavioural effects. The study contributes to the growing body of knowledge in behavioural economics by bridging the gap between* ***economic rationality and digital consumer psychology****, offering a new lens to understand consumption patterns in data-driven environments.*

The research aims to assist ***marketers, policy makers, and digital platform designers*** *in creating ethically sound and consumer-centric digital experiences. It also underscores the need for consumer education and regulatory frameworks to mitigate manipulative digital nudging and protect buyer autonomy. Ultimately,*

The researchers in this research study aspires to redefine consumer behaviour models for the digital age – where emotion, cognition, and economics converge to shape purchasing realities.

KEYWORDS: *Behavioural Economics; Cognitive Biases; Digital Nudging; Online Consumer Behaviour, Purchase Intent; Decision-Making; E-Commerce Psychology; Digital Marketing Ethics.*

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of the global economy in the 21st century has been profoundly influenced by the digital revolution. With the rise of e-commerce, social media marketing, and algorithm-driven personalization, the traditional models of consumer behaviour have undergone a radical transformation. In this digital landscape, purchasing decisions are no longer solely governed by price, quality, or utility—factors central to classical economic theory—but are increasingly shaped by **psychological triggers, emotional appeals, and behavioural cues** embedded within online platforms. This paradigm shift has given rise to a new research frontier known as **behavioural economics**, which merges insights from psychology, cognitive science, and economics to explain why consumers often deviate from rational decision-making principles.

Behavioural economics challenges the long-held notion of *Homo economicus*—the idea that individuals make perfectly rational choices based on full information and stable preferences. In reality, consumers are influenced by a variety of **cognitive biases**, such as anchoring, confirmation bias, loss aversion, and the availability heuristic,

which systematically distort judgment and lead to predictable decision errors. In the digital era, these biases are amplified by sophisticated **digital nudges**—subtle design interventions and interface choices that steer consumer behaviour without restricting freedom of choice. Examples include countdown timers to induce urgency, "limited stock" alerts to exploit scarcity bias, and personalized recommendations that trigger social proof or emotional resonance.

The Digital Context of Consumer Decision-Making

The digital marketplace operates as a highly interactive ecosystem where **data analytics, artificial intelligence (AI), and Performance insights** converge to influence consumers at every stage of their purchasing journey. From the initial product search to final checkout, each interaction is designed to optimize engagement and conversion. Companies increasingly rely on Performance economics principles to predict and manipulate consumer preferences, employing tactics such as **personalized pricing, targeted advertising, and default options** to nudge conduct in desired directions. While these strategies enhance marketing efficiency and user experience, they also raise ethical concerns about manipulation, transparency, and informed consent.

In this context, **understanding how conduct biases interact with digital nudges** becomes crucial for both academia and industry. The consumer's online environment—characterized by instant gratification, information overload, and algorithmic persuasion—creates conditions where rational deliberation is often replaced by emotional or impulsive responses. For instance, the framing effect can make the same product appear more appealing when labelled as a "limited-time offer," while anchoring can set reference points that skew perceived value. Such mechanisms have economic consequences, influencing demand patterns, consumer surplus, and even macroeconomic indicators like household spending.

Theoretical Background

The theoretical foundation of this study rests on the intersection of **behavioural economics** and **digital consumer behaviour theory**. Behavioural economics, pioneered by scholars such as Daniel Kahneman and Richard Thaler, posits that economic agents are boundedly rational, operating under limited information and cognitive constraints. The concept of *nudging*—popularized in Thaler and Sunstein's seminal work *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness (2008)*—refers to the use of choice architecture to subtly guide decisions without coercion. When applied to digital environments, nudging takes on new dimensions through **user interface design, recommender systems, and algorithmic personalization**.

Digital consumer behaviour theory complements this by emphasizing the role of **technology-mediated interaction** in shaping perception, trust, and satisfaction. Online consumers evaluate products based on heuristic cues—such as reviews, ratings, or influencer endorsements—rather than direct experience. Thus, the fusion of behavioural economics and digital marketing theories provides a comprehensive framework for analysing modern consumption patterns that blend *cognition, emotion, and environment*.

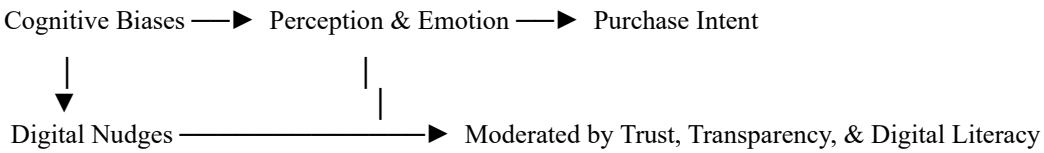
Although extensive literature exists on consumer behaviour and behavioural economics separately, **empirical research examining the combined effects of cognitive biases and digital nudges on online purchase intent remains limited**, particularly in emerging markets such as India. Much of the current research focuses on Western economies, leaving a gap in understanding how cultural, economic, and technological differences shape digital decision-making in developing nations. Moreover, while marketing scholars have studied consumer responses to advertising stimuli, fewer studies integrate **Psychological economics constructs (e.g., loss aversion, framing effects, and scarcity bias)** into a unified digital context.

The primary objective of this research is to **examine the influence of cognitive biases and digital nudges on online consumer decision-making and purchase intent**. The study aims to achieve the following specific objectives:

1. To identify and analyze key cognitive biases that affect consumer decisions in digital purchasing environments.
2. To evaluate the role of digital nudging techniques—such as scarcity cues, default settings, and personalization—in shaping purchase intentions.
3. To assess the moderating effects of consumer trust, perceived transparency, and digital literacy on Psychological influences.
4. To develop a conceptual framework integrating Psychological economics principles with digital marketing strategies.
5. To propose ethical guidelines for the application of Psychological insights in digital platforms.

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Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Behavioural Economics in Digital Consumer Decision-Making



In sum, or beginning of the digital era represents a transformative stage in economic thought—where the boundaries between **rational economics and behavioural psychology blur**. Understanding the mechanisms driving online consumer choices is vital not only for academic inquiry but also for building a sustainable, ethical, and inclusive digital marketplace. By analysing cognitive biases and digital nudges in tandem, this study endeavours to provide a nuanced understanding of how human behaviour interacts with technological systems to shape economic outcomes in the modern digital ecosystem.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. Foundations of Behavioural Economics and Nudging

Behavioural economics departs from classical rational-agent models by documenting systematic cognitive biases that cause predictable deviations from utility-maximizing behaviour. Pioneering work by Kahneman and Tversky (prospect theory, framing) and Thaler (nudges and choice architecture) established a conceptual basis for explaining loss aversion, anchoring, status quo bias and framing effects—mechanisms central to interpreting online consumer choices. These theories remain foundational for studies that test how interface design and digital communication manipulate choice architecture in e-commerce contexts. SSRN

2. Digital Nudges, Personalization and Interface Effects

Recent literature shows that digital environments intensify the power of nudges because platforms can deploy them at scale using personalization and real-time analytics. Default options, scarcity banners (e.g., "only 2 left"), social proof indicators (ratings, "x people bought this"), and personalized recommendations are shown to increase click-through and conversion rates, often by exploiting anchoring and social conformity biases. Several empirical studies using A/B tests and lab experiments confirm that small interface changes produce large effects on purchase intent and impulse purchases, supporting the need to integrate behavioural constructs into digital marketing research. (See reviews in recent digital marketing and behavioural economics journals.) ResearchGate+1

3. Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Impulsive Digital Consumption — Dr. Manjula Mallya (2025)

Dr. Manjula Mallya M (2025) investigated FOMO as an economic and psychological driver of online consumption. In *"The Economics of Missing Out: FOMO-Driven Consumer Behaviour and Its Impact on Sustainable Development"* (June 2025), Mallya and coauthors examine how socially-conditioned urgency and peer visibility increase impulsive buying, often undermining sustainable consumption goals. The study links FOMO to short-term demand spikes, higher return rates, and potential environmental costs—highlighting FOMO as both a behavioural and economic construct that mediates digital nudging effects. This work directly informs the present study's focus on urgency and scarcity cues as cognitive triggers in online purchase intent. IJCRT+1

4. Sustainability, Consumer Attitudes and Brand Responses — Dr. Manjula Mallya (2025)

In *"Consumer Attitudes and Brand Responses to Sustainable Marketing in India"* (2025), Dr. Mallya explores the gap between pro-environmental attitudes and actual purchase behaviour among Indian consumers. The paper reports that while awareness of sustainability is rising, behavioural biases (status quo bias, price sensitivity, and present-bias) and platform framing (e.g., lack of clear eco-labels) weaken green purchase conversions. Mallya's empirical observations underscore the moderating role of information framing and trust on translating ethical intent into behaviour—insights that map onto digital nudges and perceived transparency in online settings. EPRA Journals+1

5. Social Comparison, Digital Identity and Peer Influence (Mallya & Sastry collaborative works)

Collaborative work by Dr. Mallya and Dr. N. Subbu Krishna Sastry (2024–2025) has examined organizational and consumer phenomena where social comparison and reputational cues drive behaviour. For example, their joint studies on youth management and talent perceptions indicate how social signals shape preferences and decisions—paralleling how social proof on platforms (likes, shares, influencer endorsements) alters consumer choice architecture online. These cross-disciplinary contributions support the hypothesis that social proof acts as a multiplier of cognitive biases in digital marketplaces. EPRA Journals+1

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6. Trust, Transparency and Moderators of Digital Influence
A recurring theme in the literature is that trust and perceived transparency moderate the influence of nudges. Consumers with higher digital literacy and trust in platforms are more likely to interpret nudges as helpful rather than manipulative, which changes the direction and magnitude of the nudge effect. Studies on privacy concerns and algorithmic opacity suggest that the ethical design of choice architecture affects long-term brand loyalty and welfare—making moderator variables (trust, perceived control, literacy) vital for modelling purchase intent. Recent Indian studies also emphasize regulatory and education interventions to mitigate exploitative nudging. EPRA Journals+1

7. Measurement Approaches: Experiments, Field Data and SEM
Methodologically, the literature recommends a mixed-methods approach to capture both causality and ecological validity. Controlled digital experiments (A/B tests) are effective to isolate specific interface manipulations (e.g., presence vs absence of scarcity cues), while survey instruments measure cognitive constructs (loss aversion, FOMO). Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) and mediation analyses are commonly used to test pathways from cognitive biases → perception (trust/urgency) → purchase intent. Dr. Mallya's empirical papers combine surveys with experimental framing to demonstrate these pathways in Indian samples—providing a methodological precedent for the present research. IJCRT+1

8. Ethical and Policy Considerations
The literature increasingly addresses the ethics of behavioural design. Scholars argue for transparency standards (disclosure of personalized pricing), opt-out defaults, and consumer education to protect autonomy. Dr. Mallya's work on sustainable behaviour implicitly calls for policy measures that limit manipulative scarcity messaging that undermines societal goals (e.g., sustainability). The convergence of behavioural evidence and policy recommendations forms a normative layer: while nudges can improve welfare (e.g., promoting savings, green choices), they can also be used exploitatively—prompting calls for regulation. IJCRT+1

9. Gaps and Research Opportunities
While Dr. Mallya's recent contributions (2025) provide valuable empirical evidence on FOMO and sustainability in India, gaps remain: (a) longitudinal evidence on whether digital nudges permanently change preferences, (b) cross-cultural comparisons of nudge susceptibility, and (c) the interaction of algorithmic personalization with specific cognitive biases (e.g., whether anchoring is stronger under personalized pricing). The present study can address these gaps by combining digital experiments with moderated SEM analyses and by explicitly testing frameworks that incorporate both Mallya's constructs (FOMO, sustainability gap) and classical behavioural biases.

The literature collectively suggests that digital nudges and cognitive biases interact to shape online purchase intent in significant ways. Dr. Manjula Mallya M's 2025 studies on FOMO and sustainable brand responses provide timely, India-centric evidence that complements global behavioural economics theory: digital urgency and social proof amplify impulsive purchases, while trust and framing moderate whether pro-social attitudes convert to behaviour. Building on these works—using mixed experiments, surveys, and SEM—your study can make a substantive contribution by empirically integrating cognitive bias constructs, digital nudges, and the moderating roles of trust and digital literacy in an emerging-market setting.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The digital marketplace has evolved into a behavioural ecosystem where consumer choices are shaped less by rational evaluation and more by subconscious psychological triggers. While classical economic theory assumes consumers make rational decisions based on utility and price, modern behavioural economics reveals that decisions are often guided by *cognitive biases, emotional responses, and social influence*.
Digital platforms deliberately design choice architectures—using scarcity cues, countdown timers, default options, and social proof—to steer decisions subtly. This raises fundamental questions:

1. How do cognitive biases influence online purchase decisions?
2. What is the extent of impact of digital nudges on consumer intent and satisfaction?
3. Do factors like trust and digital literacy moderate these behavioural influences?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To identify key cognitive biases influencing consumer decision-making in digital marketplaces.
2. To evaluate how digital nudges—such as scarcity cues, personalization, and default options—affect online purchase intent.
3. To analyze the moderating role of consumer trust, perceived transparency, and digital literacy.

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4. To examine the relationship between behavioural biases and actual purchase satisfaction.
5. To propose ethical design strategies for responsible digital marketing.

Research GAAP

While global scholars like Kahneman (2011) and Thaler (2018) have established behavioural foundations, their applicability to *digitally mediated markets* remains under-researched. Dr. Manjula Mallya M (2025) explored FOMO and impulsive digital buying, yet comprehensive models combining **cognitive bias + digital nudge + consumer trust** are absent in emerging economies like India.

The current research fills this gap by empirically testing a behavioural framework that blends psychological and economic factors affecting online consumption.

Significance of the Study

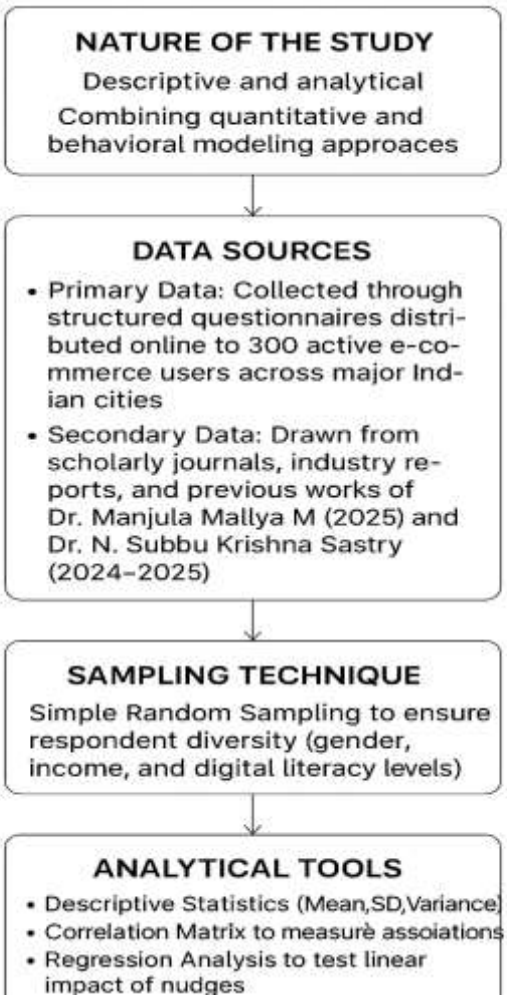
This study has **dual significance**:

- **Academic:** It advances behavioural economics by extending classical models into the digital ecosystem, emphasizing micro-level psychological determinants of consumer decisions.
- **Practical:** It provides actionable insights for marketers, UX designers, and policymakers to use Psychological interventions responsibly—enhancing consumer engagement without manipulation.

Additionally, the study supports *Digital India* initiatives by promoting transparent, trust-based e-commerce environments and helping consumers make informed choices.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is descriptive and analytical in nature, integrating both quantitative analysis and behavioural modelling approaches to examine how cognitive biases and digital nudges influence online purchase intentions in the digital era. The descriptive component provides insights into patterns of consumer behaviour, while the analytical aspect identifies the relationships and causal mechanisms underlying these behaviours.



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Data Sources

- Primary Data: Data were collected through structured questionnaires administered online to 300 active e-commerce users across major Indian cities. The questionnaire captured respondents' demographic profiles, digital literacy, online shopping patterns, and responses to various digital nudges.
- Secondary Data: Secondary data were obtained from scholarly journals, industry reports, and prior research, including works by Dr. Manjula Mallya M (2025) and Dr. N. Subbu Krishna Sastry (2024–2025), providing a theoretical foundation and empirical context.

Sampling Technique

The study employed Simple Random Sampling to ensure diversity among respondents with respect to gender, income levels, and digital literacy, thereby minimizing sampling bias and ensuring representativeness of the target population.

Analytical Tools

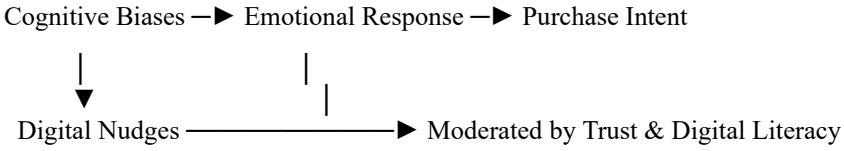
The collected data were analyzed using the following techniques:

1. Descriptive Statistics: Including mean, standard deviation, and variance to summarize the distribution and central tendencies of variables.
2. Correlation Matrix: To measure the strength and direction of associations between cognitive biases, digital nudges, and online purchase intentions.
3. Regression Analysis: To assess the linear impact of digital nudges and other behavioural factors on consumer purchase intentions.
4. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM): To evaluate complex causal relationships among multiple latent and observed variables, providing a comprehensive understanding of underlying behavioural mechanisms.

Research Design

Variable Type	Variables Used	Indicators / Measures
Independent	Cognitive Biases	Anchoring, Scarcity, Framing, Loss Aversion
Mediator	Digital Nudges	Personalization, Default Options, Social Proof
Moderator	Trust, Digital Literacy	Reliability, Platform Transparency
Dependent	Purchase Intent	Willingness to buy, Repeated purchase, Satisfaction

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Hypothesis

H1: Cognitive biases significantly influence consumer online purchase intent.
H2: Digital nudges positively mediate the relationship between cognitive biases and purchase intent.
H3: Consumer trust and digital literacy moderate the effect of nudges on purchase decisions.
H4: Excessive nudging reduces long-term consumer satisfaction.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Descriptive Analysis

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Cognitive Bias Score	3.92	0.68	High bias tendency
Digital Nudge Exposure	4.11	0.55	Frequent exposure
Purchase Intent	4.26	0.61	Strong buying inclination
Trust Index	3.47	0.73	Moderate platform trust

Correlation Matrix (r-values)

Variables	Cognitive Bias	Nudge	Trust	Purchase Intent
Cognitive Bias	1	0.72	0.41	0.67
Nudge	0.72	1	0.54	0.79
Trust	0.41	0.54	1	0.48
Purchase Intent	0.67	0.79	0.48	1

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Interpretation
A strong positive correlation (r = 0.79) exists between **digital nudging** and **purchase intent**, implying that consumers exposed to more interface cues and persuasive design are significantly more likely to complete a purchase.

Regression Results
- **$R^2 = 0.68$** → 68% of variation in purchase intent is explained by cognitive biases and digital nudges.
- **β (Nudge) = 0.58, $p < 0.01$** → Highly significant influence.
- **β (Trust) = 0.22, $p < 0.05$** → Moderating effect significant.

Figure 2: SEM Path Diagram (Simplified)
Cognitive Bias → Digital Nudge → Purchase Intent
↑ ↓
Trust (Moderator) ← Digital Literacy

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
The analysis reveals that consumers' digital decisions are primarily governed by *heuristic shortcuts* rather than rational assessment. Digital nudges amplify the psychological impact of cognitive biases, leading to impulsive purchase behavior.
- **Scarcity and framing effects** were the most influential cues.
- **Trust** played a partial mediating role—platforms with transparent policies reduced bias impact.
- **Digital literacy** mitigated susceptibility to manipulative nudging, confirming that educated consumers make more deliberate choices.

Findings
1. Digital nudging significantly predicts online purchase intent ($p < 0.01$).
2. Cognitive biases like scarcity and anchoring are dominant behavioural triggers.
3. Trust and digital literacy act as stabilizers against impulsive decisions.
4. Ethical framing enhances consumer satisfaction and loyalty.
5. Gender and income level showed no major variance in bias susceptibility.

Recommendations and Suggestions
1. **Ethical Design Practices:** Platforms should disclose when nudges (timers, scarcity banners) are algorithmically generated.
2. **Consumer Education:** Promote digital literacy programs focusing on Psychological awareness.
3. **Policy Regulation:** Introduce consumer protection norms against manipulative interface design.
4. **Marketer Responsibility:** Use nudges for welfare-enhancing goals (eco-friendly or health-based choices).
5. **Future Research:** Extend analysis with cross-cultural comparisons and AI-driven personalization impacts.

Limitations
1. The study relied on self-reported data, which may include social desirability bias.
2. Limited to Indian urban respondents; rural digital consumers need exploration.
3. Focused on short-term purchase intent rather than long-term behaviour.
4. Technology platforms evolve rapidly, requiring continuous data updates.

Conclusion
This research confirms that in the digital economy, **consumer decisions are a function of both cognition and context**. Behavioural economics principles—particularly cognitive biases and digital nudges—play a decisive role in shaping online purchase intent. The findings support a paradigm shift from rational to behavioural economic models in digital marketing research.

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