



The Instant Gratification Trap: Managerial and Societal Challenges

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ABSTRACT

The rise of ultra-fast delivery is fundamentally altering consumer habits, fostering a culture of immediacy where waiting has become an anomaly. This position paper examines the managerial and societal implications of the consumer's relentless pursuit of instant gratification. By analyzing how speed reshapes consumer expectations, it demonstrates that the perceived value of goods and services is now determined not only by their quality or price but also by their immediate availability. The cult of speed is transforming decision-making processes, promoting impulsive behavior, and forcing companies to realign their supply chains to meet the demand for immediacy. Beyond business, this culture is influencing social interactions, even affecting how individuals approach human relationships. Far from being a trivial matter, this transformation presents significant challenges: reduced time for reflection, heightened logistical pressure on companies, and a disruption of social and environmental balances. By paving the way for critical reflection on the limits of the cult of speed, the author raises concerns about the troubling future of societies where time becomes a resource to be optimized at any cost.

Keywords: Consumer behavior, Cult of speed, Instant gratification, Logistics, Supply chain, Time, Ultra-fast delivery

INTRODUCTION

Imagine a world where, instead of taking the time to plan or carefully think about purchases, everything the modern consumer needs miraculously arrives at our door within just 30 minutes of placing an order. This is no longer a futuristic concept, but an everyday reality in major European and North American cities. From buying convenience goods to ordering freshly prepared meals, the relentless quest for immediate gratification has deeply taken root in contemporary consumer behavior [10] [30]. Ultra-fast delivery services, once a luxury reserved for the elite, are now a widespread standard of service that consumers increasingly demand with unwavering expectations. A simple mobile app is now enough to instantly satisfy nearly any need in a matter of minutes, almost completely eradicating the very idea of waiting. What appears to be a remarkable "civilizational advance," symbolizing an unprecedented level of convenience offered to consumers, nonetheless opens the door to a major question: are we truly ready to sacrifice our patience, our thoughtful reflection, and, ultimately, our long-term well-being for fleeting instant gratification? This profound paradigm shift, far from being insignificant, extends well beyond the simple consumption of products and services. It radically redefines the way citizens interact with the world around them and carries with it societal, economic, and environmental implications of the utmost importance.

Instant gratification is a central concept in marketing, referring to consumers' desire for immediate satisfaction of their needs. This phenomenon, accentuated by the rise of digital technology, has led to a veritable "*cult of speed*," as analyzed by Rosa [27]. Companies are exploiting this trend by offering services such as one-click purchasing, ultra-fast deliveries, instant streaming, and flash promotions, reducing lead times and simplifying access to products to meet growing demands for speed and convenience. Recent research has underscored the impact of the pursuit of instant gratification on consumer behavior. Chua & Banerjee [4] report that online reviews influence purchase intentions, with consumers seeking immediate answers when searching online. Kemps & Childers [17] examine the effects of social networks on consumption, revealing that online engagement and the expectation of instant responses significantly affect emotional well-being and purchasing decisions. Additionally, Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick [3] present numerous examples of online platforms integrating instant gratification mechanisms, such as push notifications and real-time personalized recommendations. Ultimately, the cult of speed is reshaping consumer expectations, accustoming them to impulsive, ultra-fast access to products and services. As a result, this shift not only alters consumer behavior but also redefines the standards for customer experience across industries.

Inspired by Bergadaà's [1] phenomenological approach to the consumer's temporal system, this position paper examines the growing phenomenon of instant gratification in consumption from several critical perspectives. It explores how ultra-fast delivery is fundamentally transforming purchasing behavior, reshaping expectations, and redefining the overall consumer experience. As immediacy becomes an increasingly vital satisfaction criterion, it is essential to question the long-term effects of this relentless obsession with speed. Is this shift an inevitable evolution, or an unsustainable excess that could lead to social drift, where urgency continually takes precedence over reflection, conscious decision-making, and even personal fulfillment? Beyond its impact on individuals, this phenomenon profoundly affects companies, which must navigate a rapidly evolving landscape of new managerial challenges, particularly in adapting their supply chains to meet ever-increasing consumer demands. At the same time, they must contend with a complex, volatile, and uncertain world where operational agility is essential. My goal is to illuminate the intricate new dynamics emerging between consumers, companies, and society while identifying the far-reaching social, economic, and environmental consequences of speed-driven consumption. The result is a set of pressing theoretical and managerial issues that should inspire further research on the future of consumption and production patterns in an interconnected, hyper-globalized world.

REDEFINING CONSUMER EXPECTATIONS THROUGH SPEED

The advent of ultra-fast delivery has radically transformed the way consumers perceive the act of purchasing. Once defined by careful planning and the anticipation of waiting for a product to become available, the process of acquiring goods is now driven by a logic of instantaneity. This shift is rooted in the expectation that everything must be accessible immediately—a demand shaped by companies like Amazon, which introduced innovations such as the Dash Button, followed by Prime and its one-day delivery services [29]. Other major players, such as meal delivery platforms Uber Eats and Deliveroo, have reinforced this mindset by promising food deliveries in under 30 minutes, aligning with the concept of "*aspatial real-time*" [8]. Even luxury purchases are following this trend, with haute couture brands like Artémis Paris now offering express delivery of high-end clothing and accessories, transforming what was once a carefully

considered investment into an impulse buy satisfied within hours. The promise of immediacy is no longer confined to physical products: platforms like Netflix, Spotify, and Kindle Unlimited have conditioned consumers to expect instant access to entertainment and culture [21]. This acceleration is redefining not only the relationship with time but also the very perception of value—when a product takes too long to arrive, it risks seeming obsolete, regardless of its inherent material attributes.

Immediacy is also transforming consumer decision-making by encouraging impulse buying and reducing deliberation time [19]. When a product can be delivered within hours, the line between desire and necessity blurs, as what once required careful consideration becomes an almost automatic decision driven by instant availability. Research shows that ultra-fast delivery significantly increases online conversion rates, strongly reinforcing a culture of immediacy and spontaneous consumption [5][11][24]. During the Black Friday operations, when time pressure is heightened by limited-quantity promotions, the speed of delivery—whether online or in-store—becomes a key trigger for purchase. This effect is even more pronounced with same-day delivery services, which promise 30-minute deliveries for everyday products, fostering an environment where instant gratification overrides traditional shopping habits. The most emblematic example is pizza delivery, as shown in Table 1. The psychological impact is powerful: by drastically reducing wait time, these platforms also shorten reflection time, making purchases feel almost automatic. Even in grocery shopping, weekly planning is gradually disappearing in favor of frequent, spontaneous purchases—simply because large retailers and e-tailers have made it effortless. As a result, consumers no longer buy based on real need but rather on what is immediately available and conveniently accessible.

This speed-driven model has a lasting impact on the relationship between consumers and products. Perceived value is no longer determined solely by quality or price but increasingly by immediate availability [31]. As a result, delivery speed is becoming just as decisive a factor in purchasing decisions as the product's intrinsic characteristics. This trend is particularly evident in the fast-fashion industry, where e-tailers like Shein and Temu rely on rapid collection turnover and accelerated shipping to fuel compulsive buying. In the leisure sector, platforms like Steam for video games and Audible for audiobooks illustrate how even the brief wait for a download has become a barrier to consumption. Companies must now meet these escalating demands or risk being sidelined by more responsive competitors, as long delivery times or stock shortages are no longer seen as minor inconveniences but as outright failures in customer experience. Moreover, consumer loyalty is increasingly tied to logistical efficiency rather than brand attachment, particularly in e-commerce [18]. An Amazon Prime shopper, for instance, does not choose a seller based on brand image or service quality but simply because they qualify for overnight delivery. This shift is profoundly reshaping commerce, establishing a new norm where immediacy is no longer a luxury—it is an expectation.

Table 1: 30-minute delivery pizza: A logistical achievement

Process	Time	Objective
Packing the pizza (phase 1)	1 minute	Initiate the logistical process and record the customer's order.
Route and order check	1 minute	Ensure the pizza meets quality standards.
Announcing out-the-door time	1 minute	Prepare the pizza for delivery.

Pizza preparation	1 minute	Confirm the delivery route and final order details.
Baking the pizza	10-12 minutes	Record the exact time the pizza leaves for delivery.
Just-in-time inventory	2 minutes	Assemble the pizza with the required ingredients.
Time management	5 minutes	Cook the pizza to perfection.
Delivery time review	Continuous process	Ensure fresh ingredients are available as needed.
Packing the pizza (phase 2)	Continuous process	Plan and organize operations efficiently and effectively.
Route and order check	Post-delivery	Identify late deliveries and improve service.

Source: Adapted from <https://www.iienstitu.com/> (Accessed July 6, 2024).

RESHAPING SOCIAL INTERACTIONS THROUGH IMMEDIATE SATISFACTION

The obsession with speed is also reshaping Western societies, where waiting is increasingly perceived as an anomaly, a dysfunction to be corrected. The promise of ultra-fast delivery not only shifts consumer expectations but also gradually establishes a mental framework in which everything must be accessible immediately, or risk being deemed obsolete. This logic extends even to human relationships, with dating apps, for instance, transforming the frantic search for a partner into an almost logistical process [26]. Tinder, Bumble, and Hinge function as desire-distribution platforms, where sexual experience becomes a question of algorithms and instant compatibility. The swipe—the central gesture of these apps—imposes a frenetic pace, where each profile, whether male or female, is treated as a product to be evaluated in seconds. Just as Amazon conditions consumers to expect delivery within hours, these platforms set relational expectations where immediate availability is the norm, and long-term commitment becomes secondary. The phenomenon is so powerful that it extends beyond the search for a partner: services like Lunchr and WeWork infuse a logic of instantaneity into professional and social interactions, reducing human relationships to interchangeable, immediately accessible commodities.

The cult of speed is not only redefining human relationships but also profoundly altering how people perceive and experience time. The rise of on-demand services, such as voice assistants or automated ordering platforms, reflects a growing impatience with all forms of delay. Even the most unexpected fields are bending to this logic. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, medicine has seen a proliferation of express video consultations [23], learning is accelerating with training condensed into micro-modules, and gastronomy itself is being reshaped by concepts like “fast casual,” where the culinary experience is designed to be both high-quality and instantaneous [20]. Once associated with preparation and tasting, food is increasingly becoming an optimized logistical service, where the criterion of speed can sometimes overshadow that of quality. In leisure, long stays are now giving way to lightning-fast escapades, planned in a few clicks just days before departure and executed as an “optimized mission” [14]. The key is to maximize the experience in the shortest possible time, an approach that even extends to sleep management, with the rise of micro-napping techniques designed to condense rest into the smallest window of time.

However, this perpetual acceleration gives rise to a fascinating paradox: the shorter the time between desire and fulfillment, the greater the impatience. In the United States, demand for two-hour delivery is already exceptionally high for products such as alcohol, healthcare and pharmaceutical items, and grocery (see Figure 1). Accustomed to instant gratification,

consumers develop an increasing intolerance for even the slightest delay, leading to heightened expectations for brands and services—but also to constant frustration. A minor delay in delivery, an unanswered email, or a brief wait at a restaurant can provoke disproportionate reactions, symptomatic of collective conditioning to immediacy, a phenomenon Dube-Rioux *et al.* [7] conceptualized as early as the late 1980s. As a result, the user experience becomes a relentless race to eliminate any temporal friction, often at risk of diminishing the experience itself. By streamlining every interaction, the logistics of immediacy transform the simple pleasure of anticipation into an unbearable constraint, raising fundamental questions about the nature of desire and satisfaction in modern society. Ultimately, the cult of speed may even lead to emotional saturation: when everything is instantaneous, pleasure fades as quickly as it arrives, leaving behind a void that can only be filled by an insatiable demand for even faster gratification.

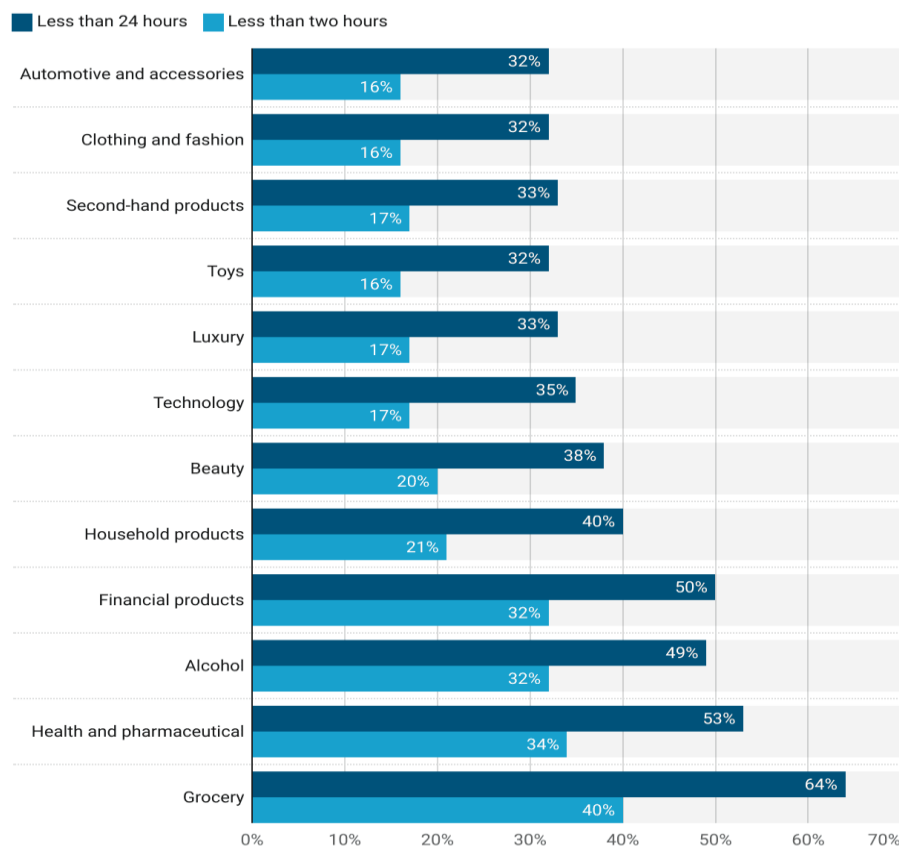


Figure 1: Expected times for faster delivery of online purchases, by category (United States, 2024)

Source: Market.us Scoop (2025).

UNPACKING THE SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL COSTS OF ULTRA-FAST DELIVERY

As previously mentioned, the rise of ultra-fast delivery operations is fundamentally redefining the way consumers interact with products. In the past, purchasing an item involved visiting a store, engaging with a salesperson, or planning a purchase overtime. Today, the process is instantaneous. The relentless demand for immediacy is now generalized across all types of products and services, creating a consumption model that is increasingly transactional, impersonal, and dehumanized. The act of buying is presented less as an experience and more

as a simple mechanical gesture. Social interactions—whether between consumers, large retailers and e-tailers, or among consumers themselves—are increasingly sidelined in favor of the rapid execution of tasks that have a strong logistical focus. This shift transforms the human relationships built around the exchange into mere formalities, sometimes even leading to total anonymization, with invisible delivery drivers dropping parcels at doorsteps without any direct interaction. Worse still, the cult of speed risks excluding a significant portion of the population, particularly individuals in geographically isolated or underserved areas, or those with limited access to the logistics networks that serve large urban centers [28].

From an environmental perspective, ultra-fast deliveries create significant negative externalities. Each online order activates a complex logistics network, often relying on short but frequent delivery routes to meet demand. Urban ultra-fast delivery companies, for instance, design minute-by-minute delivery circuits, causing the same product to cross multiple streets to reach different consumers within the same neighborhood [2]. This intensifies pollution through CO₂ emissions and requires substantial energy to maintain rapid delivery speeds. Research in Mexico by Muñoz-Villamizar *et al.* [22] shows that an increase in fast deliveries leads to a corresponding continuous rise in greenhouse gas emissions (kg of CO₂) (see Figure 2). Additionally, the urgency of transport results in excessive packaging waste: small orders may arrive in oversized boxes or be wrapped in unnecessary layers of plastic. Beyond greenhouse gas emissions, this overuse of materials—such as plastic, cardboard, and other packaging—drives the overconsumption of natural resources. This is particularly evident in food supply chains and the ultra-fast fashion industry [15]. The push for instant consumer gratification, especially in large cities, often obscures the significant environmental costs of speed-driven logistics. Despite these external impacts, companies struggle to resist the demand for ever-faster deliveries [12].

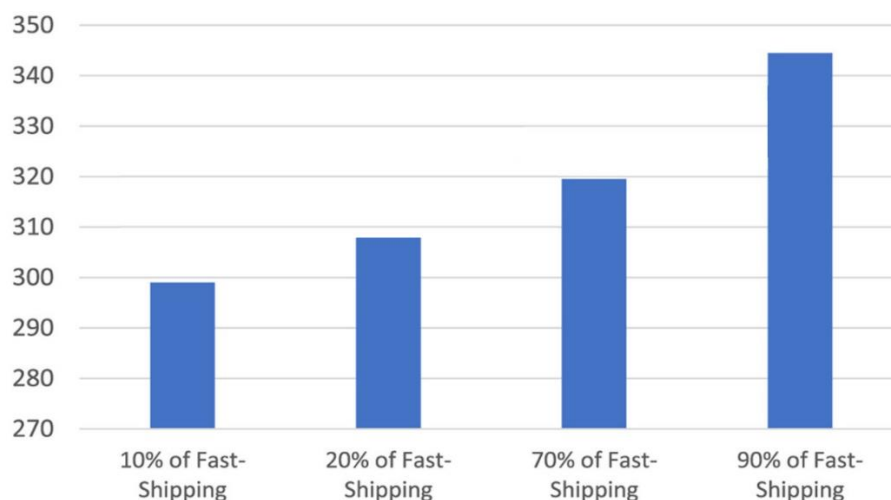


Figure 2: Impact of fast shipping on greenhouse gas emissions (kg of CO₂)

Source: Adapted from Muñoz-Villamizar *et al.* [22].

Finally, from a social perspective, ultra-fast delivery exacerbates existing economic and geographical inequalities, which have worsened significantly since the Covid-19 pandemic. While major cities and urban centers benefit from excellent logistical services, disadvantaged suburbs often lack access, as their lower volume of activity is deemed unprofitable by service providers. For instance, a small business in a low-income suburb does not have the same access

to transport infrastructure as a supermarket chain or a local restaurant in the heart of a major city like Paris, Madrid, or London. The relentless obsession with speed benefits certain populations while systematically excluding others, further widening the social divide. The large-scale street violence that erupted in France's suburbs during the summer of 2023 can, at least in part, be linked to this form of *logistical discrimination*, which fuels growing frustration in peripheral and neglected areas, as analyzed by Fourquet [9]. In these areas, communities marginalized by the dominant consumption model feel increasingly disconnected and left behind. Not only are they less engaged with the culture of speed, but their limited access to a full range of products and services reinforces the bitter perception that speed is a privilege reserved for an economic elite to which they do not belong, deepening their sense of exclusion.

THEORETICAL AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The theoretical implications of the cult of speed are profound and multifaceted. The transformation of consumer expectations necessitates a revision of classic models of purchasing behavior, an evolution brilliantly anticipated by Derbaix & Filser [6]. Traditionally, business models have been based on a hierarchy of needs and relative rationality in purchasing decisions. However, with the rise of ultra-fast delivery, rationality is gradually giving way to mechanisms driven by impulse and emotion. The notion of "need" is becoming increasingly blurred and is being replaced by a relentless desire for instant gratification, prompting researchers to rethink traditional consumer theories by integrating deeper psychological elements that explain this growing quest for immediacy. Moreover, contemporary consumer society provides fertile ground for exploring the impact of the cult of speed on the perceived value of goods, as well as the transformation of social norms, which are now less linked to quality or durability and more to immediate accessibility and convenience. Work on consumer psychology and theories of instant gratification must undoubtedly evolve to incorporate this new dimension of purchasing behavior, as seen in recent research (for a synthesis, see Huang [13]).

From a managerial perspective, the transition to ultra-fast delivery presents both a significant challenge and a unique opportunity for companies. On the one hand, businesses must rethink their logistics and supply chain strategies to meet the increasing demand for speed. In this regard, integrating advanced technologies, such as automation, drone-based food delivery [16], and artificial intelligence, has become essential to satisfy the demand for immediacy and optimize the management of products flow. On the other hand, the cult of speed is reshaping customer relationship management, forcing companies to adopt loyalty strategies that go beyond the product itself to include the promise of a seamless, instantaneous shopping experience—ultimately strengthening consumer commitment. Additionally, the pressure to meet new demands underscores the need to reassess the sustainability of business models, particularly in vehicle scheduling [25]. Companies must strike a balance between delivery speed and environmental concerns by optimizing logistics processes, minimizing ecological impact, and exploring alternative solutions like electric vehicles or shipment pooling. This remains a critical issue, as failing to address it risks sacrificing future generations in the pursuit of the present generation's demand for "everything, and everything now," regardless of the cost to the planet.

CONCLUSION

This position paper explores the profound impact of the cult of speed, highlighting a phenomenon that is transforming purchasing processes and reshaping social and environmental relations. Starting with an analysis of the quest for immediacy in consumer choices, I examine how time pressure influences not only the nature of purchasing decisions but also the perception of the value of products and services. Contrary to conventional models, which emphasize the so-called rationality of consumer choices, immediacy introduces an emotional dynamic that requires a revision of certain fundamental assumptions in economic theories of consumption and buyer behavior. I focus on the social and environmental effects that are often overlooked in discussions about the efficiency of hyper-reactive supply chains, emphasizing the hidden costs associated with the extreme speed of delivery of multiple products, particularly in terms of waste, overconsumption, and pollution. In this way, it is possible to propose a new framework for understanding the tensions between immediate consumer comfort and long-term corporate sustainability, while offering thought-provoking insights on the evolution of consumer behavior and the compromises companies will need to make to balance speed, profitability, social responsibility, and environmental consciousness.

Several promising research avenues emerge from the issues raised in this position paper, particularly regarding the sustainability of supply chains and the new forms of social inequality linked to the cult of speed. A key research avenue would be to explore how companies can integrate sustainable development strategies while responding to demands for immediacy and optimizing their operational models. Studying customer satisfaction management in this context could open a second research avenue focused on long-term consumer expectations and how companies align their logistics with increasingly prominent societal concerns, such as environmental responsibility and business ethics. Additionally, an in-depth analysis of the psychological impacts of the need for speed could provide valuable insights into the transformations occurring in purchasing behavior and consumption patterns. Lastly, further investigation into the cultural shifts driven by immediacy could lead to a third research avenue, exploring the evolution of social structures, the rise of consumer loneliness, and, conversely, new forms of collaborative consumption, especially through digital platforms and shared delivery services. These research directions would deepen the understanding of modern consumer dynamics and their broader implications for both today's and tomorrow's society.

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