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+91 99405 72462



+9163819 07438



ijmrsetm@gmail.com



www.ijmrsetm.com

Social Media and the Creation of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) Implications for Consumer Buying Behavior

Dr. Joina Jaiswal

Department of Commerce

ABSTRACT: The role of social media in creating FOMO (Fear of missing out) and its implications for consumer buying behaviour is studied in this research. In an age where social media reigns supreme as our daily ritual, users are being fed highly edited content posted by others living out their experiences, making purchases, and presenting lifestyles that leaves us feeling inadequate and feeling we can't keep up with the latest trendy products, social experiences or social status. The research explores how social media induced FOMO causes consumers to impulsively or unplanned make purchases due to the needs to follow peers, or to identify with a community. The study by analyzing user behavior, emotional responses and decision making processes points out how social media influencers, ads targeted toward users, and peer comparison promote the sense of urgency as well as desire to get a product or service so as to avoid the feeling of social rejection. Moreover, it sheds light on how marketers put these mental hooks to use to build the urgency in consumers to buy, including using limited time offers, exclusive sales, and social proof. These findings indicate that FOMO plays a critical role in consumer buying behavior, especially among the young set who are compelled to purchase a lot more based on emotional and social hyped responses than the rational reason. As digital marketing continues to be associated with spawning FOMO for consumers, this research provides insights for both marketers seeking to capitalise on social media as a lever for FOMO or avoidance FOMO to shape consumer behaviour, and consumers to better understand the psychological ploys used in digital marketing.

I. INTRODUCTION

In modern communication, social media has grown to be a major force that both influences the way people communicate with each other as well as when they are making purchase decisions. By use of Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter, users can engage with a nonstop feed of content curated from feeders, showcasing the possessions, experiences, and even social status of users these platforms would like to see in the world. While users scroll throughout these different platforms they are often exposed to images of friends, influencers, and celebrities showcasing products or experiences which may trigger a psychological phenomenon known as FOMO (Fear of Missing Out). FOMO is defined by its constant feelings of anxiety or insecurity brought on by the thought that others are having the time of their lives, wishing they were doing the things that those people are doing so that they don't feel left out. Various consumer behaviors, from purchases to buying decisions, are a result of feeling this missing out and consumers often make impulsive purchasing decisions in order to compensate and avoid the social exclusion that FOMO triggers. With the importance of FOMO on consumer buying behavior, it leads to unplanned and impulsive purchases by consumers triggered with emotional factors, rather than on the basis of rational thinking. With the understanding of FOMO's potential, marketers have tended to modify their strategies, leveraging the emotional response it triggers through limited time offers, exclusive promotions and social proof, to generate urgency and exclusivity with regard to their products. Marketers can activate FOMO by presenting products as 'in high demand' or 'only available to a certain few', so consumers don't want to miss out which pushes them to act quickly. Younger generations have simply been more exposed to the social comparison and peer pressure that FOMO creates, and are more on social media where this dynamic is more pronounced. Given this, understanding the relationship between social media, FOMO, and consumer behavior is important to businesses trying to maximize their marketing efforts and consumers wanting to make more informed as well as mindful purchases.

1.1 Defining FOMO (Fear of Missing Out)

What FOMO does, is it creates a psychological phenomenon where somebody is feeling anxious all the time, or insecure, and they're in this insecurity because they believe that other people are having a better time than them and there's something happening that's more fun than what they're doing, and so they're kinda missing out on that best time of their life and they've got to participate in it. Initially derived in the situation of social interactions, FOMO is more common with the brand name of social media systems like instagram, facebook, or twitter. These platforms are curating content that is an idealized version of what someone else is doing in their life, like their social activities, where they're going, what they're doing, with what they're surrounded in, all of these different things, constantly putting up a one up

on the way we're supposed to be living our lives. FOMO happens when a person feels that others are living a better or more exciting life, and ends up fearing they will miss out on that. FOMO in the context of consumer behavior can be seen as an impetuous to buy products or services, not out of need or want, but mostly due to the fear that a purchase may be missed on a product launch, a trend or an exclusive offer. This emotional response creates unplanned or rushed purchases, wherein consumers want to avoid feeling like they missed out which ultimately fuels the increasing presence of social media in contemporary consumer behaviour.

1.2 FOMO and Its Influence on Consumer Behavior

FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) has a profound impact on consumer behavior, driving individuals to make impulsive, unplanned purchases often motivated by emotional triggers rather than rational decision-making. In a social media-driven environment, users are constantly exposed to curated content showcasing the lifestyles, experiences, and possessions of their peers, celebrities, and influencers, creating a sense of urgency and social pressure to keep up. As consumers see friends or influencers flaunting new products, exclusive experiences, or limited-time offers, they may experience a fear of being left behind or excluded from these desirable trends. This fear of missing out can lead to hasty buying decisions, as consumers act impulsively to avoid the feeling of inadequacy or social exclusion. In this context, FOMO becomes a powerful emotional motivator that overrides careful consideration, pushing individuals to make purchases driven by the desire to belong or keep up with the latest trends. Marketers have capitalized on this behavior by designing campaigns that trigger FOMO, such as using time-sensitive promotions, flash sales, or "limited edition" products, which create a sense of urgency and exclusivity. These tactics tap into the fear that if consumers don't act quickly, they might miss out on an opportunity or become disconnected from the social group. FOMO is particularly influential among younger consumers, such as Generation Z and Millennials, who are highly engaged with social media and more susceptible to peer influence and social comparison. FOMO not only shapes consumer decision-making but also enhances the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies that rely on urgency and exclusivity to drive purchases.

1.3 Objective of the Study

Aim

The aim of this study is to explore the relationship between social media exposure and the creation of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) among consumers. It seeks to investigate how FOMO influences impulse buying behavior, emotional responses to advertisements, and purchase decisions. Additionally, the study aims to assess how FOMO impacts brand recall and the overall effectiveness of FOMO-driven marketing strategies in shaping consumer behavior in the digital age.

1. To examine the role of social media in triggering FOMO among consumers.
2. To explore how FOMO influences impulse buying behavior in digital marketing.
3. To assess the emotional responses to FOMO-driven advertisements on social media.
4. To evaluate the impact of FOMO on brand recall and purchase decisions.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Bekman, M. (2022). In public relations practices, the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) is quite consequential in terms of purchasing behavior, as well. FoMO stimulates a feeling of rush and worry you can be missing out on, the exclusive offer, undate deal, trend products. Brands in the public relations space create campaigns around scarcity, exclusivity and time sensitive promotion and leverage FoMO to compel consumers to act upon the message. Consumers, when noticing others interacting with a product or service, via social media or word of mouth, are running and buying right away for a variety of reasons. PR strategies that resonates the fear of missing out on popular events, product launches and even social parties amplify these emotions and prompt consumers to pulled the trigger in order not to left out. Why does it work so well with younger audiences who are hyper active users of social media and hungry for validation from their peers? In the end, FoMO in PR triggers the impulse to buy now, and intensifies consumer brand attachment.

Dinh, T. C. T., et al (2022). The "Fear of Missing Out" (FoMO) is a powerful motivator that drives buying intentions, especially when products are endorsed by social media influencers. Consumers, particularly younger audiences, often aspire to replicate the lifestyles and trends that influencers showcase, creating a desire to stay relevant and up-to-date. When influencers promote products, they make them appear exclusive or essential for achieving a certain social status, leading followers to fear missing out on the latest trends. This fear is amplified by the constant exposure to influencers' content, where they showcase their experiences with products, often presenting them as must-haves for anyone who wants to fit in. As a result, consumers feel pressured to purchase these products quickly, fearing that they will be left behind or seen as outdated. In this way, FoMO fueled by influencer endorsements drives impulsive buying behavior, making consumers act on their desire to be trendy and aligned with the influencer's lifestyle.

Karimkhan, F., et al (2021). The Fear of Missing Out (FoMo) can in fact be viewed as a cultural construct, as it can be viewed from a marketing perspective. Though the wish to belong and stay connected cuts across cultures, FoMO is highly determined by cultural values and how social media has influenced consumer behaviour differently in different societies. FoMO in an individualistic culture, such as where personal achievement and uniqueness are both actively revered, may take the express desire to have access to the experience or to the product, whereby the experience or the product, stand as status or VIP signifiers. FoMO in collectivist cultures may derive from fear of not taking part in shared social experiences or in group based trends. This is why marketers take advantage of this and set up campaigns that exploit customers' phobia of getting excluded via limited offers, product scarcity, or social proof. Understanding the cultural nuances of FoMO as a brand can help brand's to tailor brand strategies to address certain consumer anxieties, which in turn help brands to enhance the business by creating impulsive buying behavior, therefore making FoMO a marketing tool that can be used in cross cultural contexts.

Bright, L. F., et al (2018). FoMO can indeed lead to social media fatigue, particularly when it's coupled with the pressure to be up to date thanks to endless exposure to advertising and influencer driven content. Promotions, limited time offers and promoting the local hot topic or experience on social media often pushes consumer into feeling like they have to act now or risk being left behind. Because of this persistent pressure to engage and make fast buying decisions can be emotional exhausting, leaving consumers feeling frustrated or exhausted. Pushing a new product or experience can spur the fear of missing out — which can put the mental strain on users, pulling them away or experiencing burnout from social media. In effect, this fatigue can be a problem for the brands where consumers get numbed to perpetual promotional message. Brands must seek to provide that authentic and meaningful content that is relevant to consumers, so that we all don't contribute to this very pervasive fatigue, and create that urgent feeling, and then eventually lead to long term brand loyalty.

Ilyas, G., et al (2022). The Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) can create a temporary sense of satisfaction when purchasing based on social media content, but it may not lead to long-term fulfillment. FoMO triggers impulsive buying behaviors, often driven by the desire to keep up with trends or secure limited-time offers endorsed by influencers or peers. When consumers make a purchase out of fear of missing out, they may initially feel a sense of excitement or validation, as they believe they are part of an exclusive group or experience. This satisfaction tends to be short-lived, as it is primarily driven by external pressures rather than genuine need or personal desire. Over time, consumers may experience buyer's remorse or dissatisfaction, especially if the product does not meet their expectations or align with their true preferences. While FoMO can drive immediate purchasing decisions, it often lacks the deeper emotional fulfillment associated with more thoughtful, deliberate buying behavior.

Van Solt, M. (2019). Consumer purchase decisions, along with social media and online shopping, are all driven by the Fear of Missing Out (FoMo). FoMO is a psychological trigger that causes consumers to take action and purchase immediately because they are happy that they have gotten in on what they feel is an exclusive, or time sensitive offer. This fear is amplified on social where we see endlessly influencers, friends or peers engaging with trending products, experiences or lifestyle choices. The fear that these posts create in consumers is that they think they will be left out, or be left behind, spurring them to make impulsive purchases lest they miss out. This is used by brands to create limited time offers, flash sales, or exclusive product drops whose scarcity and urgency you are alerted to. These strategies are very effective for younger, social media savvy generations who feel that they need to have the latest, the greatest and be connected to what's all popular. Though FoMO may spur you to make immediate purchases, the truth is frequently these purchases fail to deliver lasting satisfaction because you are purchasing out of external pressure rather than genuine need or desire.

Hussain, S., et al (2021). The Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) can fuel compulsive buying behavior, especially in environments driven by social media and constant exposure to trends. When consumers feel they are missing out on exclusive products or experiences, they are more likely to make impulsive, emotionally-driven purchases. This impulsivity can lead to compulsive buying, where purchases are made without careful consideration or necessity. Mindfulness can play a moderating role in this behavior. Mindfulness, which involves being fully aware and present in the moment, helps consumers regulate their emotions and impulses. Consumers who practice mindfulness are less likely to succumb to the pressure of FoMO, as they are more attuned to their true needs and values. Mindful consumers are able to assess the real worth of a product or experience, reducing the likelihood of making purchases driven purely by external influences or the fear of exclusion. This awareness helps in breaking the cycle of compulsive buying behavior driven by FoMO.

Hodkinson, C. (2019). This paper presents a conceptual model of 'Fear of Missing Out' (FoMO) marketing appeals, studying how brands can utilize the psychological trigger of FoMO to draw consumers into engagement and purchase behavior. FoMO marketing is tapping into consumers' fears of not being there when the exclusive offer, limited time

sale, or trending product disappears. The model proposes that FoMO appeals are most effective when they combine several elements: Social proof, scarcity and urgency. On hand, scarcity causes fear of the avail being risked out, while on the other it reinforces the desirability of the item based on social proof aka. Countdowns, flash sales, or product drops which drive consumers to take action right now creates urgency. In addition, the model finds emotional appeal has a significant role in FoMO marketing and brands take advantage of visually compelling content, persuasive messages, and limited stock to make consumers impulsively purchase. FoMO marketing appeals work with the goal of getting the immediate consumer action, communicate a sense of urgency, but, for the sake of brand trust and satisfaction over the long run, it needs to be balanced with it by not resulting in buyer's remorse.

2.1 Marketing Strategies that Exploit FOMO

Marketing strategies that exploit **FOMO (Fear of Missing Out)** are increasingly prevalent in the digital age, as brands recognize the psychological impact of social media on consumer behavior. These strategies leverage consumers' anxiety about missing out on exclusive offers, limited-time deals, or trending products to create a sense of urgency and drive purchasing behavior. One of the most common tactics is the use of **limited-time offers**, where products or services are available for a short window, prompting consumers to act quickly to avoid missing the opportunity. This creates a fear of lost value, pushing individuals to purchase impulsively before the offer expires.

Another powerful strategy is **social proof**, where brands highlight the popularity of a product by showcasing how many people have purchased or are talking about it. This technique taps into the fear of being left out of something that everyone else is engaging with, whether it's a viral product, an exclusive event, or a trending experience. Social proof is often amplified through **influencer marketing**, where influencers promote products to their large follower base, further embedding the idea that "everyone" is participating in or purchasing something desirable.

Flash sales and **early-bird access** are also effective FOMO-driven strategies, offering consumers special pricing or early access to products if they act quickly. Additionally, **countdown timers** on websites or within emails enhance the urgency, reinforcing the idea that time is running out and that immediate action is necessary. Lastly, **exclusive memberships** or **invite-only sales** give consumers a sense of privilege and fear of being excluded from a "special" opportunity. These FOMO-triggering tactics not only increase consumer engagement but also accelerate purchasing behavior by amplifying the emotional response associated with missing out.

III. METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this study employs a quantitative, experimental design to examine the impact of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) on consumer buying behavior, particularly in the context of social media marketing. Participants were categorized into two groups based on their self-reported levels of FOMO: Low FOMO and High FOMO. A total of 200 participants, aged 18-35, were recruited through online platforms, ensuring a balanced distribution across demographic factors such as age, gender, and social media usage. Participants were first exposed to a series of FOMO-driven advertisements on popular social media platforms, specifically targeting high-urgency, limited-time offers and influencer endorsements. Data was collected through surveys that measured impulse buying frequency, spontaneous purchase decisions, and emotional response to ads, brand recall, and purchase likelihood on a 5-point Likert scale. Statistical analyses, including t-tests and Cohen's d, were used to compare the behavioral responses between the low and high FOMO groups. Effect sizes were calculated to assess the magnitude of differences between the groups. The study's design ensures internal validity by controlling for external variables such as prior brand loyalty and prior exposure to the products being advertised, while self-reported data were cross-verified with behavioral tracking through the participants' social media interactions. The results provide insights into how FOMO influences consumer behavior in the digital marketing landscape.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 Impact of Social Media-Induced FOMO on Consumer Buying Behavior

Variable	Low FOMO Group Mean (SD)	High FOMO Group Mean (SD)	T-Value	P-Value	Effect Size (Cohen's d)
Impulse Buying Frequency	2.1 (1.0)	4.4 (1.3)	5.92	0.0001	1.32
Spontaneous Purchase Decision (%)	28.3%	62.1%	6.73	0.0001	1.57

Emotional Response to Ad	3.2 (1.1)	4.7 (1.0)	6.04	0.0002	1.25
Brand Recall (%)	58%	80%	5.15	0.0003	1.08
Purchase Likelihood	3.0 (1.2)	4.6 (1.1)	6.37	0.0001	1.30

Table presents the comparison between Low FOMO and High FOMO groups across various consumer behaviors driven by social media exposure. The data clearly shows that individuals with higher FOMO exhibit significantly stronger impulsive buying behaviors and emotional responses to ads. For impulse buying frequency, the high FOMO group has a mean of 4.4 (SD = 1.3), compared to the low FOMO group's mean of 2.1 (SD = 1.0), with a t-value of 5.92 and a p-value of 0.0001, indicating a strong and statistically significant difference. The spontaneous purchase decision percentage is significantly higher for the high FOMO group (62.1%) compared to the low FOMO group (28.3%), with an effect size of 1.57, reflecting a large impact. Similarly, the emotional response to ads is significantly more intense for high FOMO individuals (4.7) compared to low FOMO individuals (3.2), with a Cohen's d of 1.25. Brand recall and purchase likelihood are also notably higher in the high FOMO group, with a p-value consistently less than 0.05, confirming that FOMO leads to stronger emotional and purchasing responses to marketing efforts.

Table 2 Influence of Social Media Usage Frequency on FOMO-Driven Consumer Behavior

Variable	Low Social Media Usage (1-2 hours/day)	Moderate Social Media Usage (3-4 hours/day)	High Social Media Usage (5+ hours/day)	F-Value	P-Value
FOMO Level (Scale 1-5)	2.5 (0.9)	3.8 (1.1)	4.5 (1.0)	11.23	0.0001
Impulse Buying Frequency	2.1 (1.1)	3.2 (1.3)	4.7 (1.5)	9.74	0.0002
Purchase Likelihood	2.9 (1.3)	3.8 (1.1)	4.6 (1.2)	8.13	0.001
Emotional Response to Ad	2.9 (1.2)	3.9 (1.1)	4.8 (1.0)	10.29	0.0001
Brand Recall (%)	60%	75%	85%	7.29	0.002

Table 2 examines the influence of social media usage frequency on FOMO-driven consumer behavior, revealing that increased social media engagement significantly correlates with higher levels of FOMO and more impulsive purchasing behaviors. Consumers who use social media for 1-2 hours per day report lower levels of FOMO (mean = 2.5), while those who engage for 3-4 hours per day experience moderate FOMO (mean = 3.8), and those spending 5+ hours daily have the highest FOMO (mean = 4.5). This pattern is mirrored in impulse buying frequency, where the low usage group reports fewer impulsive purchases (mean = 2.1), moderate users report more (mean = 3.2), and high users exhibit the most impulsive buying behavior (mean = 4.7). Similarly, purchase likelihood, emotional response to ads, and brand recall all increase as social media usage rises, with the high usage group exhibiting the strongest emotional reactions and better brand recall. Statistical analyses (F-values and p-values) confirm the significance of these differences, showing that higher social media engagement drives FOMO, impulse buying, and emotional engagement with ads, making it a powerful factor in shaping consumer behavior.

V. CONCLUSION

The impact of fear of missing out (FOMO) in consumer buying decisions was further highlighted as a result of this study. By constantly broadcasting curated content, social media platforms can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and of feeling left out, so consumers fear that if they do not seize up on whatever experience, trend, or product is being broadcasted, then they risk missing something—anything—important. An emotional response is a response that compels people to make impulsive buying decisions and skip rational decision making processes. We find that having higher exposure to social media leads to higher susceptibility of FOMO, impulsive buying frequency, and purchase likelihood. Furthermore, consumers with a higher tendency to FOMO respond more strongly to advertising, showing a greater emotional reaction when adverts are time limited or the products are special offers. The results also reveal that brand recall is substantially increased in high FOMO groups, as a result of FOMO based marketing techniques, whilst influencing instantaneous buy decisions, also results in better long term brand recall. As social media use grows,

understanding how FOMO impacts consumer behavior is important for marketers hoping to construct more interesting and effective campaigns. If brands can tap into consumers' fear of missing out, targeted advertising through urgency, exclusivity and/or social proof can drive impulse purchases as well as long term brand loyalty. Social media has become a powerful tool that creates FOMO to restrict consumer's behaviors, implying that there is a demand for marketers to walk a fine line between bringing in sales and conducting ethical marketing.

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ijmrsetm@gmail.com

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