

Fear of missing out: Influence of FOMO on impulsive buying behavior in young consumers

RESEARCH

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Abstract

Fear of Missing out (FOMO) has become a pervasive psychological phenomenon with profound implications for consumer behaviour in this hyper-connected digital era, where social media platforms and e-commerce sites constantly expose consumers to peer activity, limited-period offers, and product trends. This study examines the relationship between FOMO and impulsive buying behaviour, using a quantitative, cross-sectional research design, among young consumers exposed to FOMO-induced marketing strategies such as "Only X items left in stock", "Sale ends in X hours", "Trend now", etc. The data were collected from 320 young consumers using a convenience sampling technique. The results indicate a strong, positive correlation between FOMO and impulsive buying behaviour, and regression analysis confirms that FOMO significantly predicts impulsive buying behaviour, explaining 66.4% of the variance. These results highlight how dominant is FOMO as a psychological factor influencing impulsive buying, and also contribute valuable insights to marketers to consider the ethical side of FOMO-based strategies while encouraging FOMO as an important trigger for unplanned purchases.

Keywords: *Fear of missing out, impulsive buying behaviour, consumer psychology, digital marketing, consumer behaviour.*

1. Introduction

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is a psychological phenomenon that is being faced by everyone in the era of social media and digital connectivity. Who initially introduced this concept, define FOMO as "The pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent" [1]. This anxiety happens when people feel left out of socially rewarding activities, which makes them always want to stay in touch with what other people are doing [2]. On the other hand, impulsive buying means making purchases without much thought or planning. Describes impulse

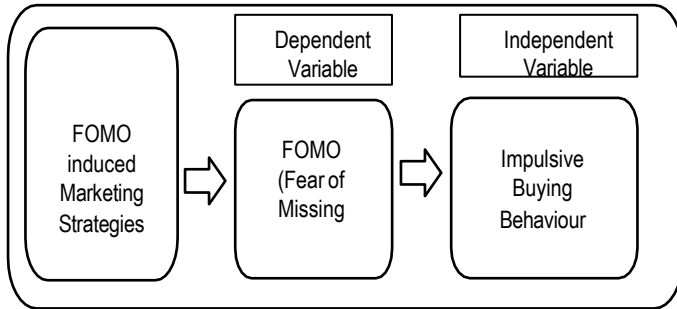
buying as a consumer experiences a sudden, often powerful and persistent urge to buy something immediately [3]. Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is becoming a more common marketing tool for getting people to buy things. Says that digital marketing strategies that use FOMO include limited offers, pricing strategies, urgent tones like "Book now" and "Reserve now", cues of scarcity, and visually appealing content that makes people feel like they need to buy right away [4]. These strategies intentionally instill the fear of exclusion, leading consumers to engage in impulsive, unplanned purchases. The present study utilises the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework which asserts that environmental Stimuli (S) influence internal Organismal states (O), subsequently eliciting behavioural Responses (R) [5]. Figure has been created illustrating that FOMO-induced marketing strategies serve as the Stimulus (S), Fear of Missing Out as the Organism (O), and impulsive buying behaviour as the

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Response (R). The participants in this study are individuals who have encountered FOMO-induced marketing strategies. In this context, the present study specifically investigates the correlation between FOMO (Organism) and impulsive buying behaviour (Response) through regression analysis (Figure 1).



Source: Combined by the author

Figure 1: Conceptual model

2. Literature review

The connection between Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and impulsive buying behavior has been widely documented in recent open-access literature. Surveyed 360 participants and found that sales promotions create FOMO, which drives impulsive buying among consumers eager to keep up with trends [6]. Their research showed that consumers who experience FOMO tend to follow trends and make impulse purchases to avoid feeling left out. Building on this, a study involving 420 Gen Z consumers in vietnam revealed that product scarcity triggers FOMO as a psychological response. This in turn, boosts herding behaviors and leads to impulsive purchases within the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework [7].

The psychological factors linking FOMO to impulsive behavior have been further explained. Sofiana and analyzed data from 130 Gen Z respondents and found that FOMO has a greater impact on impulse buying than other factors like discount prices and social media influencers [8]. Their research confirmed that FOMO is a major driver of online impulse purchases among young shoppers. Furthermore, a

study on content marketing and FOMO concluded that FOMO significantly influences impulsive buying, which affects post-purchase regret [9]. Recent studies have investigated specific situations and influencing factors. A study on live streaming e-commerce found that FOMO, along with social validation, strongly drives impulse buying in real-time shopping settings [10]. Explored the "Dark side" of brand passion and found that FOMO increases obsessive brand passion, leading to both compulsive and impulsive buying behaviour [11].

A theoretical synthesis on hedonic motivation and FOMO supports the idea that when FOMO combines with hedonic motivation, the desire to act quickly increases, especially when faced with limited time discounts or appealing offers [12]. Overall, these open-access studies consistently identify FOMO as a major predictor of impulsive buying across contexts such as live streaming, social media, and e-commerce platforms. Since most existing research has used complicated mediated and moderated models like PLS-SEM or structural equation modeling, this study aims to directly assess the impact of FOMO on impulsive buying behavior through a simpler regression analysis.

3. Research gap

Even after the contributions of the studies mentioned, a significant gap still exists. Most existing research has relied on complex models that include mediation and moderation. However, few studies have looked at the straightforward direct relationship between FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) and impulsive buying behavior through basic regression analysis. Additionally, most research has concentrated on young consumers in east asian or western settings, which obscures the relationship in other groups. This study fills that gap by directly investigating the effect of FOMO on impulsive buying behavior using simple regression analysis. It offers essential evidence for the link between these two concepts [13].

4. Objectives

- To determine the correlation between FOMO and impulsive buying behaviour.
- To examine the predictive power of FOMO on impulsive purchasing.

5. Hypotheses

H1: The FOMO scale demonstrates acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha \geq 0.70$).

H2: The Impulsive Buying scale demonstrates acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha \geq 0.70$).

H3: There is a significant positive correlation between FOMO and impulsive buying behaviour among young consumers regularly exposed to FOMO-inducing marketing strategies.

H4: FOMO is a significant predictor of impulsive buying behaviour.

6. Research methodology

This research aimed at understanding how FOMO correlates with impulsive buying behaviour through a cross-sectional quantitative approach. The study population was comprised of 18-35-year-old active online shoppers who experienced FOMO inducing marketing tactics regularly in both e-commerce platforms and social media channels. The sample was drawn with a convenience sampling method that allowed for the recruitment of 320 respondents that completed a structured online questionnaire. Data analysis was completed using jamovi statistical software (v.2.6.44) and included assessment of reliability through Cranach's alpha, assessment of correlation using Pearson's, and the validation of predictive capabilities using simple linear regression. All of the ethical guidelines associated with data collection (Informed Consent, Anonymity, and Voluntary Nature of Participation) were strictly adhered to during the data collection process [14].

7. Analysis and findings

Out of the total 320 respondents, 276 (86.25%) were females. Most (73.5%) of the respondents were within the age range of 18 to 22 years old, and the majority of respondents (70.0%) reported spending less than ₹1000 every month this supports the assumption that online shopping has a strong presence in today's marketplace. The respondent's social media usage can indicate their level of social media engagement. Approximately 90% of the respondents reported spending over one hour a day on social media therefore, it would be safe to predict the respondents would regularly see marketing messaging related to what is commonly referred to as "Fear of Missing Out" (FOMO) on social media.

7.1. Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to evaluate both measurement scale's internal consistencies. Reliability statistics for FOMO and impulsive buying scales

Table 1: Reliability statistics

Scale	Number of Statements	Cornbrash's α	Interpretation
FOMO	6	0.847	Good
Impulsive Buying	5	0.857	Good

Source: Author's calculation

(Table 1) Shows that both of these scales were highly consistent internally (Cronbach's alpha for FOMO = 0.847 Cronbach's alpha for Impulsive Buying = 0.857). The values for both scales exceed the acceptable threshold (0.70) and, therefore, indicate that all items included within each scale accurately reflect what they are attempting to measure.

H1: The FOMO scale demonstrates acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha \geq 0.70$)-supported.

H2: The impulsive buying scale demonstrates acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha \geq 0.70$)-supported.

7.2. Correlation Analysis

To assess the relationship between FOMO and impulsive buying behaviour Pearson correlation was used.

Table 2: Pearson correlation matrix

Variable	R	p-value
FOMO	-	-
Impulsive Buying Behaviour	0.815	< 0.001

Source: Author's calculation

(Table 2) Shows that there was a strong, positive, and statistically significant correlation between FOMO and impulsive buying behaviour ($r(320) = 815, p < .001$). This indicates that people who experience higher levels of fear of missing out (FOMO) will tend to make significantly more impulsive purchases [15].

H3: There is a significant positive correlation between FOMO and impulsive buying behaviour-supported.

7.3. Regression Analysis

In order to see if FOMO was a significant predictor of impulsive buying behaviour, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted. The model summary can be found in (Table 3).

Table 3: Regression model summary

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²
0.815	0.665	0.664

Source: Author's calculation

Table 4: Regression coefficients

Predictor	β (Standardized)	T	p	95% CI
FOMO	0.815	25.122	< .001	[0.752, 0.879]

Source: Author's calculation

In the regression model, FOMO was a significant predictor of impulsive buying behaviour. The R² value of 0.665 shows that FOMO explains 66.4% of the variance in impulsive buying behaviour therefore, it has a substantial impact. The standardized coefficient ($\beta = 815, p < .001$) indicates a strong positive predictive relationship, thus demonstrating that as FOMO increases, so do levels of impulsive buying behaviour in active online shoppers (Table 4) [16].

H4: FOMO is a significant predictor of impulsive buying behaviour-supported.

The core finding of this investigation indicates that FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) is a primary psychological factor driving impulsive purchasing behaviour among young consumers. The extremely strong positive correlation ($r = 0.815$) and excellent predictive power ($R^2 = 0.665$) of the relationship between young consumers experiencing FOMO are high in likelihood of causing them to make impulsive purchases. Among the group studied, this was most apparent within an active population of online shoppers frequently utilising social media, with ongoing exposure to marketing techniques intended to elicit FOMO-related behaviour, e.g. scarcity messages (X Left) urgency messages (Offer expires in X hours) and social proof (Trendy right now). Thus, the more consumers perceive that there is a risk of missing out on advantageous experiences or opportunities, the greater chance they have of making impulsive, unplanned purchases. These results also confirm the effectiveness of using FOMO-based marketing tactics and demonstrate the psychological vulnerabilities that exist for young consumers within digital marketplaces [17].

8. Suggestion

Marketers are advised to be judicious with their use of FOMO techniques and to avoid creating artificial scarcity in order to preserve consumer trust. Consumers need to be aware of the FOMO effect as a psychological driver and give themselves access to a cooling period before making an impulse decision. Decision-makers should implement digital literacy training for younger consumers to help them avoid being victimised by manipulative marketing. Additionally, e-commerce platforms need to provide awareness-based shopping options, such as reminders to hold off on purchases when power-usage signals exist. Further research opportunities exist for addressing moderating variables such as age, gender, and personality characteristics, which influence the relationship between FOMO and impulse-purchase behaviour.

9. Conclusion

In this research project, we investigated the relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and impulsive buying behaviour among young consumers who are often exposed to marketing tactics designed to evoke FOMO. Our analysis demonstrated that there is a statistically significant relationship between FOMO and impulse buying, with a regression model indicating that FOMO is predictive of buying behaviour, accounting for 66.4% of the variance in behaviour. Both measurement scales were found to be reliable measures and can therefore be used for further studies. This research establishes the relationship between FOMO and impulsive buying as a strong psychological basis for the use of FOMO-based and socially-aware urgency marketing strategies for advancing consumer impulse buying. Additionally, it adds to the field of consumer psychology by quantifying the relationship between FOMO and impulse buying, along with providing effect sizes for future explorative studies. Furthermore, marketers can benefit from understanding the impact of FOMO-based techniques while

understanding their ethical responsibilities in promoting FOMO-based impulsive buying behaviours. For consumers, this study emphasised that recognising FOMO as an essential part of budgeting would help consumers make wiser decisions on purchases while utilizing technology to make better-informed decisions for purchasing within an increasingly digital marketplace.

Conflict of interest statement: The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this research article. The author confirms that there are no financial, professional, or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper. The research was conducted independently, and the results presented are free from any external influence.

Funding statement: This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors. The study was carried out as part of the author's academic and research activities without any external financial support.

Data availability statement: This study is based on primary data collected through a questionnaire. The dataset generated and analysed during this research is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Ethical approval statement: Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and informed consent was secured from every respondent. Participation was voluntary, and anonymity was strictly maintained throughout the research process.

Acknowledgement: The author sincerely thanks all the respondents who participated in this study and shared their valuable time and honest responses. The author is also grateful to our academic mentors and peers for their guidance and encouragement.

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