

Consumer impulse buying behavior based on FOMO psychology in the digital era

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Abstract: This study examines the influence of "Fear of Missing Out" (FOMO) on impulsive purchasing decisions within the context of consumer behavior in the digital era. Using a qualitative approach, the study explores the triggering factors of FOMO and investigates the relationship between the intensity of FOMO and the level of impulsivity in purchasing. The research methodology involves in-depth interviews with consumers experiencing FOMO and impulsive buying behavior. Thematic analysis is utilized to identify thematic patterns from the interviews, while content analysis is conducted to identify patterns of the relationship between FOMO and impulsive purchasing. The research findings indicate that FOMO plays a key role in driving consumers towards impulsive buying as a response to curiosity, social connectedness, and urgency. Furthermore, the intensity of FOMO significantly influences the level of impulsivity in purchasing, with individuals experiencing higher FOMO intensity being more susceptible to impulsive actions.

Keywords: Consumer Behavior; Marketing; Psychology; Impulsive Purchasing; FOMO

INTRODUCTION

In the rapidly evolving modern era, the revolution of information and communication technology has altered human behavior patterns in various aspects of life (Sima, et al., 2020). The digital age has ushered in a new paradigm where global connectivity and fast access to information have become central to daily routines. The development of digital technology has led to transformation in nearly every aspect of life (Li, F, et al., 2020), including how humans interact, work, and shop. Amidst this revolution, the role of social media has emerged as a dominant phenomenon, deeply integrating itself into society's life and becoming inevitable.

Social media, as part of the digital era, has changed the way humans communicate and interact with the world around them (Aichner, et al., 2021). Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok allow individuals to connect with friends, family, and even strangers from all corners of the globe. In this context, social media has become more than just a communication tool; they have become spaces where information is disseminated, ideas are debated, and trends are initiated (Manca, 2020). The role of social media has also extended beyond interpersonal aspects, expanding into the realms of economics and business. Marketers and producers have found new ways to reach potential consumers through effective digital marketing campaigns. By engaging consumers in two-way interactions, companies can portray their brands and build deeper, more personal relationships with their audiences (Matikiti-Manyever, et al., 2020). Additionally, social media has also shifted consumer paradigms in their purchasing decisions, with product reviews, recommendations from friends, and behavior-based advertising becoming key factors in the decision-making process.

However, behind the convenience and benefits offered by social media, there are also challenges and psychological impacts to consider. One phenomenon that has emerged is the



"Fear of Missing Out" or FOMO. FOMO is the fear or anxiety that arises when someone feels they are missing out on interesting experiences or information being experienced by others (Tanhan, et al., 2022). In the context of social media, where many people showcase the important and best moments of their lives, FOMO can generate psychological pressure that drives individuals to engage in impulsive or compulsive behaviors, including in terms of purchasing.

The increasing and widespread digital connections have fueled the growth of an individual's "Fear of Missing Out" (FOMO) both as individuals and consumers (Holte, 2023). The digital age has created the ability to instantly share moments, activities, and achievements via social media. One can now access updates about others' lives instantly, regardless of geographic location or time difference. Consequently, the continually increasing digital connections have fed the tendency for FOMO, where individuals feel the need to always be connected to the latest developments and fear missing out on what's happening.

Technological advancements and innovations in social media have also significantly contributed to the growth of FOMO. Visually appealing and impressive content, such as images and videos, tend to trigger stronger emotional reactions and encourage impulsive behavior. With constantly updated news feeds and a variety of content presented in interactive formats, individuals are increasingly drawn to remain within these digital environments (Wu, Zhao, et al., 2023).

Thus, the growth of FOMO as a result of continually increasing digital connections is a complex and significant phenomenon in the modern era. Investigating how FOMO affects consumer behavior, especially in the context of impulsive purchasing, is important for understanding the psychological impacts that may arise from the pressures of an increasingly connected digital environment.

The relationship between "Fear of Missing Out" (FOMO) and impulsive buying behavior is an important aspect that needs to be investigated in the context of an increasingly connected digital era. FOMO, as an emotional response to feelings of missing out and unsatisfied curiosity, can have significant implications for consumer purchasing decisions. In a digital environment filled with information and visual stimuli, FOMO can trigger tendencies for impulsive purchases that may not align with the consumer's initial intentions. The importance of studying the relationship between FOMO and impulsive buying lies in the psychological and behavioral impacts it incurs. FOMO can create a strong urge to act immediately, as individuals fear missing out on opportunities or experiences deemed important or attractive (Aydin, Selvi, et al., 2021). In the marketing context, this urge can be leveraged by companies to prompt consumers to make quick purchasing decisions, even without careful consideration.

On the other hand, impulsive buying behavior involves spontaneous purchases made without deep thought (Gogoi, 2020). Emotional triggers like FOMO can stimulate this behavior, where consumers may feel compelled to buy something just to alleviate anxiety or feelings of missing out. Consumers experiencing FOMO tend to be more susceptible to impulsivity in purchasing decisions, prioritizing the fulfillment of current emotions over long-term considerations.

Therefore, this research attempts to delve deeper into the complex relationship between "Fear of Missing Out" (FOMO) and impulsive buying behavior in the context of a connected digital era. The modern era dominated by digital technology and social media has accelerated the growth of FOMO, where individuals feel anxious about missing out on experiences, trends, or information displayed on social media. The emotional impact of FOMO often triggers

impulsive actions in the form of purchases, which can lead to undesirable long-term consequences for consumers.

METHODS

This research method utilizes a qualitative approach to explore a deep understanding of the relationship between "Fear of Missing Out" (FOMO) and impulsive buying behavior from the perspective of consumers. The qualitative approach was chosen because of its focus on deep understanding and the meaning behind behavior, aligning with the research goal to explore the context and emotional factors influencing the relationship between FOMO and impulsive buying. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews with a sample of consumers who have experienced FOMO and impulsive buying. Respondents were selected considering variations in backgrounds, ages, genders, and experiences. Interviews were recorded to accurately document responses and interactions. In-depth interviews were conducted to gain insight into the experiences, motivations, and emotions driving impulsive buying behavior related to FOMO. Interview questions were designed openly to encourage respondents to speak about their experiences, factors influencing purchasing decisions, and how FOMO plays a role in that process.

Content analysis was performed on additional data, which might include written or visual responses provided by respondents. This analysis aimed to identify patterns of the relationship between feelings of FOMO and impulsive purchasing actions. The use of content generated by respondents could provide further insights into how FOMO is reflected in consumer actions. To ensure the reliability and validity of the data, steps such as data triangulation and collaborative analysis between researchers were conducted. Transparency and reflection in the analysis process were also applied to ensure accurate and consistent results with the collected data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

"Fear of Missing Out" (FOMO) is a psychological phenomenon referring to the fear or anxiety that one is missing out on interesting or important experiences, opportunities, or information (Zhang, Jiménez, et al., 2020). FOMO arises from uncertainty about what may be happening elsewhere or with others, especially in the context of the connected digital life. Individuals experiencing FOMO feel a strong emotional urge to be involved in what others are doing or experiencing, as they worry about feeling excluded or left behind (Kang, Cui, H, et al., 2019).

The main characteristics of FOMO include a sense of dissatisfaction associated with the inability to be in many places or do many things at once. This creates anxiety about missing out on experiences or opportunities that may not be repeatable (Tanhan, Özok, et al., 2022). FOMO is often triggered by exposure to achievements, activities, or positive events showcased by others on social media. This content provides glimpses into seemingly attractive and envy-inducing lives, prompting individuals to engage in actions they might not consider otherwise without the feeling of FOMO.

Furthermore, FOMO is also marked by strong social comparison. Individuals experiencing FOMO tend to compare their achievements and activities with others, often leading to feelings of inadequacy or not meeting the standards set by others. This results in feelings of inferiority and motivation to try to keep up with what's happening to feel more involved and relevant (Tandon, Dhir, et al., 2021). The impact of FOMO often affects perceptions of time and priorities. Individuals burdened by FOMO may feel the need to be involved in many activities at once,

leading to increased stress and feelings of overwhelm (Taswiyah, 2022). Additionally, FOMO can also affect an individual's ability to fully enjoy the present experience, as they become overly preoccupied with what they might be missing out on.

Impulsiveness Tendency is a theoretical approach in consumer psychology that focuses on individuals' tendencies to act without careful consideration or deep thought, especially in situations involving strong emotional impulses or stimuli (Ahn & Kwon, 2022). In the context of consumer behavior, this theory explains how impulsivity affects purchasing decisions and how psychological factors, such as "Fear of Missing Out" (FOMO), can trigger impulsive actions. Characteristics of impulsiveness tendency include:

Emotional Urges: As an emotional response to uncertainty and anxiety about missing out, FOMO is one form of emotional urge that can drive individuals to act impulsively in the context of purchasing. FOMO generates a desire to immediately engage in experiences or acquire specific products to avoid feelings of missing out. **Lack of Mature Consideration:** In the context of FOMO, individuals experiencing emotional pressure to avoid feelings of missing out may not consider whether the purchase truly aligns with their values or needs.

Sensation and Immediate Satisfaction: Individuals' urge to experience sensation and satisfaction instantly. Those experiencing FOMO may feel compelled to feel relevant or involved in ongoing moments or trends. To satisfy this sensation, they may engage in impulsive purchases without considering the consequences. Impulsive behavior often emerges as a response to strong and deep feelings. In the case of FOMO, individuals feeling anxious or stressed by the fear of missing out may seek emotional fulfillment through impulsive purchases. These purchases can provide relief and alleviate the feelings arising from FOMO. Through this theoretical perspective, we can understand how FOMO can play a significant role in triggering impulsive buying behavior, with the sacrifice of deep thought or mature consideration. Therefore, research exploring this relationship can provide deeper insights into how FOMO and impulsivity are intertwined in the context of consumer behavior.

Consumer Decision Making

The Consumer Decision Making is a conceptual framework that attempts to explain how individuals make decisions regarding purchases, including the factors influencing the decision-making process, information processing mechanisms, and external environmental influences. This theory encompasses several approaches that provide a deeper understanding of how consumers navigate available choices and ultimately make purchasing decisions.

Decision-Making Process: Depicts the complex process through which consumers gather information, analyze alternatives, and ultimately select the products or services deemed most suitable to their needs and preferences. In the context of FOMO and impulsive buying, consumers experiencing FOMO may go through this process quickly and tend to choose products or services promising immediate emotional gratification. This can lead to neglect of deeper rational considerations (Cengiz & Şenel, 2023).

Emotional Influence: Emphasizes the role of emotions in consumer decision making. Emotions can play a significant role in stimulating the desire or motivation to purchase. In the case of FOMO, emotions such as anxiety or curiosity may drive individuals to avoid feelings of missing out by purchasing products associated with specific trends or moments. These emotions can override rational considerations and influence impulsive buying decisions.

Social Influence and Norms: Acknowledges the influence of social norms and social pressure in consumer decision making. In relation to FOMO, individuals may feel the need to comply with norms perceived from their social environment. They may feel compelled to purchase products or engage in certain activities out of fear of being left behind or appearing less

relevant. These social norms can steer individuals towards impulsive purchases that may not align with their values or preferences.

Risk and Benefit Considerations: Highlights that consumers tend to consider the risks and benefits associated with a purchase before making a final decision. However, in the context of FOMO, consumers may be more inclined to weigh immediate emotional benefits over long-term risks. They may feel that the purchase can provide satisfaction in avoiding feelings of missing out, leading to impulsive buying decisions.

In the context of FOMO and impulsive buying, the theoretical foundation of consumer decision making provides insights into how psychological factors, emotions, social influences, and risk considerations can influence how consumers respond to FOMO feelings with impulsive purchasing actions. This understanding helps us see the mechanisms behind this relationship and how these factors play a significant role in consumer decision making.

The interview results with consumers who have experienced FOMO indicate several key factors that trigger the emergence of "Fear of Missing Out" feelings. Some of these factors play a role in creating emotional impulses that lead individuals to engage in impulsive buying behavior.

Engaging Social Media Content: Respondents revealed that social media content showcasing exciting experiences or products deemed as trends often triggers FOMO. Through images, videos, or stories, consumers feel interested and compelled not to miss out on those experiences. For example, when seeing friends or influencers showcasing popular activities or products, consumers feel the need to participate to feel connected and relevant.

Comparison with Others: Respondents highlighted that comparisons with others, especially on social media, are key triggers of FOMO. When observing others' achievements, lifestyles, or positive experiences, consumers feel anxious about missing out and want to feel equal or better. These feelings can trigger the desire to immediately engage in activities or purchases that may not have been considered before.

Time and Availability Constraints: One factor triggering FOMO is the time and availability constraints of an opportunity or product. Respondents expressed that when they realize that an event or offer has a limited time or quantity, emotional impulses to participate or purchase arise. They worry about missing out on the opportunity if they don't act quickly.

Feeling Disconnected: Another factor that emerges is the feeling of being disconnected from trends or popular activities. Respondents feel that being involved in what is happening in their social environment, such as discussions about a particular event or trend, is a way to feel more connected to others. Therefore, when feeling lacking in relevant information or experience, FOMO drives them to seek ways to feel involved.

Sense of Urgency: The interview results also indicate that a sense of urgency is a significant factor in triggering FOMO. When respondents see others engaging in an activity or owning a particular product, a sense of urgency arises because they want to avoid feeling left behind. This sense of urgency creates emotional pressure that triggers quick actions, including impulsive buying.

Based on these interview findings, it can be observed that the triggering factors of consumer FOMO involve stimulation from the social environment, engaging content, time constraints or availability, and a desire to connect. These factors work together to create FOMO feelings that direct individuals towards impulsive buying actions in an effort to avoid feeling left out.

The findings regarding the triggering factors of FOMO that influence consumer behavior in impulsive buying are consistent with several previous studies. For example, previous research has also identified that engaging social media content and comparisons with others are crucial

factors triggering FOMO (Brown & Kuss, 2020). These factors often emerge in the context of social media use, where users are exposed to others' achievements and positive experiences. Other studies also indicate that time constraints and availability, as well as feelings of disconnection, also contribute to triggering FOMO. These findings are consistent with the evolving trends in modern consumer research, which increasingly understand the influence of social media and social pressures in shaping purchasing behavior (Alutaybi, Al-Thani, et.al, 2020).

The research findings reveal that "Fear of Missing Out" (FOMO) has a significant impact on impulsive buying decisions. Respondents consistently stated that feelings of curiosity and fear of missing out generate emotional impulses that drive them to engage in unplanned and quickly executed purchasing actions. FOMO acts as a primary trigger influencing the affective aspect of consumer behavior. Respondents reported that when experiencing FOMO, they feel compelled to immediately purchase products or services associated with ongoing experiences or trends. They believe that by making a purchase, they can feel relevant, connected with others, and avoid feelings of being left out. FOMO triggers a desire to promptly address the discomfort arising from uncertainty or curiosity.

The impact of FOMO is further reinforced by the element of urgency. Respondents reported that feelings of curiosity and the emotional urge to avoid missing out are exacerbated by the understanding that specific opportunities or products have limited time or availability. These feelings create psychological pressure to act immediately, directing them towards impulsive buying actions without thorough consideration. Feelings of curiosity and fear of missing out, stemming from FOMO, generate emotional impulses that influence the perceived value and importance of a product or service as a consumer. Respondents in this study conveyed that these feelings trigger impulsive buying actions in an effort to feel relevant, engaged, and avoid missing out on ongoing trends or experiences. These findings align with the evolving understanding of consumer behavior in the digital era. Previous studies have also indicated that FOMO plays a significant role in shaping impulsive buying behavior. For example, some studies suggest that FOMO can trigger a desire to immediately engage in activities or purchase trendy products (Aurel & Paramita, 2021).

However, the findings of this research provide a new nuance by emphasizing the influence of FOMO intensity on the level of impulsivity in purchasing. This adds a deeper dimension to understanding how FOMO intensity can strengthen or weaken the effects on impulsive buying. The link between FOMO intensity and the level of impulsivity provides richer insights into explaining the variations in individual responses to FOMO stimuli.

The Intensity of FOMO on Impulse Buying Level

Furthermore, the research findings also reveal a significant relationship between the intensity of FOMO and the level of impulsivity in purchasing. Respondents reporting higher levels of FOMO intensity tend to be more vulnerable to impulsive buying behavior. They feel more compelled to engage in purchases to avoid more intense feelings of missing out. The intensity of FOMO affects to what extent the feelings of curiosity and fear of missing out drive individuals to act impulsively. Respondents with higher levels of FOMO intensity report stronger urges to immediately engage in what is happening in their social environment. This results in neglecting rational considerations and long-term consequences of purchases, as the emotional urge to avoid missing out is more dominant.

These findings indicate that the higher the perceived intensity of FOMO by individuals, the more likely they are to engage in impulsive purchases. This connection can be explained through the strong emotional role in the decision-making process. Respondents reporting

higher levels of FOMO intensity tend to experience stronger emotional urges to avoid missing out. These emotional urges can override rational considerations and influence purchase decisions based on current emotional fulfillment.

These findings are in line with the trend of understanding the role of emotions in consumer decision-making. Previous studies have also highlighted the importance of emotional factors, such as FOMO, in influencing impulsive buying behavior. Some previous studies have identified that strong emotional urges can trigger impulsive actions and override rational considerations. However, findings regarding the specific relationship between the intensity of FOMO and purchasing impulsivity provide a new dimension in understanding how intensity variables can have a more specific impact on the level of impulsivity. Previous research may not have delved as deeply into how the intensity of FOMO can shape to what extent individuals tend to make impulsive purchases.

CONCLUSION

In an increasingly interconnected digital era, the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) has played a significant role in shaping consumer behavior, particularly in the context of impulsive buying. In this study, the findings from exploring FOMO-triggering factors, such as engaging content on social media, comparison with others, time constraints, and feelings of disconnection, provide the emotional backdrop that drives individuals to engage in impulsive purchases. Additionally, this research reveals that the intensity of FOMO has a strong influence on the level of impulsivity in purchases. Respondents with higher levels of FOMO intensity tend to be more vulnerable to making impulsive purchases in an effort to address more intense feelings of missing out.

These findings support and complement previous research that has identified the association between FOMO and impulsive buying behavior. Prior studies have also highlighted the crucial role of social media and social pressure in triggering FOMO and its influence on impulsive purchasing actions. However, the findings of this research contribute new insights by exploring the influence of FOMO intensity in reinforcing purchasing impulsivity. This enriches our understanding of the complex interaction between emotional factors, FOMO intensity, and impulsive responses in the context of modern consumers.

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