

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) as a Psychological Catalyst for Online Consumer Purchase Behaviour

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Abstract

The rapid digitization of consumer markets has transformed Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) from a social-psychological phenomenon into a significant driver of online consumer purchase behavior. Despite increasing attention in digital marketing literature, FOMO is often treated as a unidimensional emotional state rather than a complex psychological construct. This study critically examines FOMO as a psychological catalyst for online purchasing behavior, focusing on the emotional, cognitive, and social mechanisms that influence impulsive and compulsive buying in digital environments. Using a systematic literature review guided by a PRISMA-inspired protocol, the study synthesizes 50 peer-reviewed articles published between 2023 and 2025 from Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, and Emerald Insight. The analysis is grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, Social Comparison Theory, and Self-Determination Theory, while exploring themes such as impulsive buying, scarcity marketing, influencer dynamics, platform-specific behavior, and hedonic motivation. Findings reveal that FOMO operates as a multidimensional psychological state shaped by social exclusion anxiety, identity-maintenance pressure, and hedonic urgency, all of which suppress rational decision-making and increase purchase intention. Digital triggers including flash sales, live-commerce countdowns, scarcity cues, and influencer-driven social comparison intensify FOMO across platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Shopee, whereas religiosity and dispositional self-control act as moderating factors that reduce FOMO-driven consumption. The study contributes theoretically by refining the S-O-R framework through the disaggregation of FOMO's psychological dimensions, extending Self-Determination Theory by positioning FOMO as a mechanism of motivational externalization, and adding behavioral insights to Social Comparison Theory. Practically, the findings provide guidance for digital marketers while emphasizing the ethical responsibility to avoid exploiting psychological vulnerability. Future research should prioritize longitudinal studies, cross-cultural comparisons, and AI-driven FOMO personalization.

Keywords: Fear of Missing Out (FOMO); online consumer behavior; impulsive buying; scarcity marketing; social comparison; digital commerce; S-O-R framework; influencer marketing

Introduction

The rapid proliferation of digital commerce has fundamentally transformed the landscape of consumer decision-making, giving rise to psychological phenomena that were previously unobservable in traditional retail environments. Among these, the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) has emerged as a particularly potent driver of impulsive online purchasing behavior. As e-commerce platforms increasingly leverage time-sensitive promotions, social proof, and personalized advertising, understanding the psychological underpinnings that compel consumers to act impulsively has become a matter of both theoretical and practical urgency.

FOMO, at its conceptual core, refers to the worry or anxiety individuals experience about missing significant social events or opportunities. Kurnianingsih et al. (2025) situate FOMO within established theoretical frameworks — specifically Social Comparison Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model — positioning it as both a mediator and a trigger in impulsive digital behavior. This dual theoretical role distinguishes FOMO from simpler emotional responses; it is not merely a reactive feeling but an internalized cognitive state that actively shapes consumer intentions. Furthermore, research examining online buying behavior among adolescents during the pandemic period (Korelasi Kepribadian Fear Missing Out, 2023) defines FOMO as a worry about missing social events and reports a significant correlation between FOMO traits and impulsive online buying among younger demographics, underscoring the construct's broad applicability across age groups.

The psychological mechanisms through which FOMO influences purchasing behavior are multifaceted and interact with broader personality and cognitive variables. Falajuhan et al. (2025) demonstrate that low self-control, when combined with FOMO, contributes significantly to impulsive buying, with social network impulsiveness and positive attitudes toward targeted advertising serving as key mediating variables among Generation Z e-commerce users. This finding is reinforced by Barbu Kleitsch et al. (2025), who establish that FOMO interacts with time-limited offers and reward cues in digital commerce to heighten shopping motivation and compulsive buying tendencies, particularly among young adults. Taken together, these studies suggest that FOMO does not operate in isolation but is amplified by structural features of digital shopping environments that are designed to exploit psychological vulnerabilities.

The application of FOMO - as a psychological catalyst - in shaping online consumer purchase behavior is especially pronounced in the domain of promotional strategies and social media marketing. To examine this relationship comprehensively, the present paper draws on a systematically curated body of literature (total papers identified: $n = 100$; papers examined: 70; papers used: 50; timeframe of selected studies: 2023—2025). Karunia et al. (2025) find that flash sale promotions amplify the positive relationship between FOMO and impulsivity, functioning as a marketing mechanism that strengthens the FOMO-to-impulsivity link. Similarly, Kurniawati and Umam (2025) establish that social media marketing stimuli — including flash sales and exclusive promotions — act as environmental triggers that heighten FOMO and lead to impulsive purchases among Generation Z consumers. At the platform level, Platon (n.d.) demonstrates that hedonic triggers increase online impulse purchase intentions and that FOMO further amplifies this effect in the context of discounted products, while Hamizar et al. (n.d.) identify social signals and perceived scarcity as proximal triggers of FOMO-driven impulsive purchasing in digital contexts.

Taken collectively, the extant literature converges on a coherent narrative: FOMO is not a peripheral emotional state but a central psychological mechanism with measurable, replicable effects on online consumer behavior. Nguyen (2025) confirms the empirical linkage between FOMO and impulsive purchasing among young consumers, highlighting the role of promotional tactics as key facilitators of this relationship. Building on this foundation, the present study aims to critically examine how FOMO functions as a psychological catalyst across diverse online purchasing contexts, with particular attention to the marketing strategies and individual-level variables that moderate its influence. By synthesizing current empirical evidence, this paper seeks to contribute a theoretically grounded and practically applicable understanding of FOMO's role in shaping the modern digital consumer.

Literature Review

Introduction

The rapid digitization of the global marketplace has fundamentally altered the architecture of consumer decision-making. As e-commerce platforms and social media ecosystems become increasingly intertwined, a specific psychological phenomenon has emerged as a primary driver of consumption: the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). Historically defined as a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent, FOMO has evolved into a potent "psychological catalyst" within the digital economy.

This literature review synthesizes current research—primarily from the 2023—2025 period—to examine how FOMO influences online purchase behavior. By analyzing 40 key research papers, this review explores the transition of FOMO from a social anxiety to a commercial engine. It investigates the role of specific platforms like Shopee, TikTok, and Instagram, and examines the mediating effects of marketing strategies such as flash sales and influencer endorsements. The objective is to provide a comprehensive understanding of how FOMO triggers impulsive and compulsive buying, particularly among younger demographics like Generation Z and Millennials.

Theoretical Background: FOMO and Consumer Psychology

At its core, FOMO is rooted in the human need for social belonging and the psychological distress caused by perceived social exclusion. Zhang (2018) provided a foundational contribution to this field by developing scales to measure FOMO and its direct impact on brand loyalty, suggesting that the fear of being "out of the loop" can be leveraged to create consistent consumer-brand relationships.

Within the realm of consumer psychology, FOMO operates as a state of heightened anxiety that impairs rational deliberation. Alvita et al. (2025) utilize a PRISMA systematic review to categorize FOMO as a cornerstone of modern

digital consumer behavior, noting that it often bypasses logical cognitive processing in favor of affective, emotion-driven responses. This is further elaborated by Jaworska (2025), whose qualitative investigation reveals that FOMO manifests through specific context-dependent emotions and coping strategies, often resulting in "remedial" purchasing to alleviate the stress of potential exclusion.

The psychological landscape of the consumer is also shaped by their ability to manage this anxiety. Pratiwi (2025) discusses consumer anxiety management strategies, arguing that while consumers attempt to navigate the impact of digital advertising, the sheer velocity of e-commerce often overwhelms these defense mechanisms. Consequently, FOMO acts as a bridge between social comparison and economic action.

FOMO in Digital and Online Environments

The ubiquity of smartphones and the "always-on" nature of social media have created a fertile environment for FOMO to flourish. Saibaba (2024) identifies a clear link between smartphone addiction, social media addiction, and FOMO among young consumers in India, suggesting that the device itself acts as a conduit for the psychological triggers of compulsive buying. This environment is not just a backdrop but an active participant in behavior modification. Ortiz et al. (2023) expand this by exploring "uncontrolled social media use" alongside "Fear of Better Options" (FOBO) and "Fear of Doing Anything" (FODA), illustrating a complex web of digital anxieties that drive purchase intent.

Platform-Specific Dynamics

Different platforms utilize FOMO in distinct ways. In Southeast Asia, e-commerce giants like Shopee and Lazada are central to research. Phuong et al. (2025) highlight "preferential hunting behavior," where consumers actively scan these platforms to ensure they do not miss out on exclusive deals.

- TikTok: Widodo (2023) and Pham et al. (2025) emphasize the role of TikTok Live-streaming. The real-time nature of "live-selling" creates an immediate social presence and a ticking clock, which significantly heightens the FOMO effect for young users.
- Instagram: Rolando et al. (n.d.) focus on the visual nature of Instagram, where influencers curate lifestyles that trigger social comparison and FOMO in Millennial audiences.
- Shopee: Safitri et al. (2023) and Jumarni et al. (2025) specifically examine Shopee, finding that the platform's "twin date" events (e.g., 11.11 or 12.12) and flash sales are engineered to maximize the "On-FOMO" (Online FOMO) experience.

Impact on Purchase Behavior and Decision-Making

The primary behavioral outcome of FOMO in the literature is a shift from planned consumption to impulsive or compulsive buying.

Impulsive Buying

Impulse buying is characterized by a sudden, powerful, and persistent urge to buy something immediately. Karunia et al. (2025) find that FOMO significantly impacts impulsivity, with flash sale promotional strategies acting as a critical mediator. Similarly, Pratama et al. (2025) demonstrate that for specific products (such as Kahf grooming products), the combination of hedonism and "On-FOMO" creates a state where the consumer feels compelled to buy to maintain a certain self-image. Sunday et al. (2025) add another layer by looking at the "Buy Now, Pay Later" (BNPL) trend, noting that the ability to defer payment lowers the barrier to FOMO-driven impulsive purchases of trendy items like sneakers.

Compulsive Buying

Beyond the occasional impulse, FOMO can lead to chronic compulsive buying behavior. Verawati et al. (2025) describe online compulsive buying as a cycle driven by financial social comparison and materialism. In India, Saibaba (2024) notes that FOMO is a direct predictor of this maladaptive behavior. For children and adolescents, an anonymous study (2023) suggests a correlation between FOMO-related personality traits and addiction to impulsive online buying during the isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Preferential Hunting and Post-Purchase Behavior

FOMO does not only affect the moment of purchase; it dictates the "hunting" phase and the post-purchase experience. Nasr et al. (2023) examine how FOMO influences Indonesia's Generation Z not just during the buy, but in their post-purchasing evaluation, where the relief of "not missing out" competes with potential buyer's remorse.

Influencing Factors: Mediators and Moderators

The relationship between FOMO and buying behavior is rarely direct; it is moderated by various internal and external factors.

Marketing Tactics: Scarcity and Time Pressure

Scarcity cues (e.g., "only 2 left!") and time pressure are the external triggers of FOMO. Dahmiri et al. (2023) demonstrate that scarcity cues in fashion products directly engage FOMO to drive impulse buying. An anonymous study (2024) reinforces this, showing that time pressure under online time-limited promotions significantly exacerbates the FOMO effect, forcing quicker, less rational decisions.

Social Influence and Influencer Marketing

Influencers serve as the human embodiment of what a consumer might "miss. "

- **Mediating Role:** Solaiman et al. (2024) find that FOMO mediates the relationship between influencer marketing and purchasing decisions.
- **Engagement:** Habib et al. (2025) suggest that FOMO drives social media engagement, which in turn leads to the impulse buying of lifestyle products.
- **Viral Marketing:** The "FOMO effect" is also a byproduct of viral marketing. Abdillah et al. (2025) and Sondag et al. (2025) illustrate how viral trends create a "Kazamarts" or "sneakerhead" culture where the fear of being socially left behind outweighs the cost of the product.

Internal Drivers: Hedonism and Motivation

Hedonic shopping motivation—shopping for pleasure rather than utility is a recurring theme. Ramdani et al. (2024) and Pratama et al. (2025) both identify hedonism as a significant variable that works alongside FOMO to bypass financial prudence. An anonymous study (2023) specifically highlights how hedonic motivation and FOMO fueled impulsivity during the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia, as online shopping became a primary source of entertainment and social connection.

Cultural and Religious Moderators

A unique contribution of recent research is the role of religiosity in tempering FOMO. Dahmiri et al. (2023) and Fitrah (2025) both investigate Islamic religiosity as a moderating variable. Their findings suggest that higher levels of religiosity can act as a buffer, reducing the impact of FOMO on consumptive behavior by encouraging mindfulness and discouraging excessive materialism. Similarly, Haryono (2025) notes that "Halal awareness" among Surabaya's Generation Z influences how FOMO drives the purchase of Korean skincare, indicating that cultural values can redirect FOMO-driven urges.

Critical Analysis and Comparison of Studies

A comparison of the literature reveals a shift in how FOMO is perceived. Earlier studies, like Bekman (2022), focused on foundational mediators like gender and "audience surveillance" (the feeling of being watched by one's digital peers). However, the 2025 studies (e.g., Peter et al., 2025; Mahmood et al., 2025) adopt a more critical lens, questioning whether FOMO marketing is "digital persuasion or digital exploitation". There is also a geographic trend. A significant portion of the most recent research (2023—2025) originates from Indonesia and Vietnam. This suggests that the high penetration of mobile-first e-commerce platforms like Shopee and TikTok in these regions has made them the "ground zero" for studying FOMO's evolution. For instance, the work by Elviana et al. (2024) on imported beauty products highlights a specific intersection of globalization, FOMO, and live streaming that may differ from Western contexts where traditional

social media ads still dominate. Furthermore, while most studies agree that FOMO increases buying, the type of buying varies. Samsura et al. (2025) and Kumianingsih et al. (2025) provide systematic reviews that attempt to bridge these findings, suggesting that FOMO's "psychological outcomes" can range from temporary satisfaction to long-term digital addiction.

Research Gaps and Future Directions

Despite the depth of current research, several gaps remain:

- **Long-term Psychological Impact:** Most studies are cross-sectional, focusing on the moment of purchase. There is a need for longitudinal research on the long-term psychological well-being of consumers frequently driven by FOMO.
- **Cross-Cultural Comparison:** While there is excellent data from Indonesia, India, and Turkey, there is less comparative research between these emerging economies and more mature digital markets in Europe or North America.
- **The "FOBO" and "FODA" Dynamics:** As mentioned by Ortiz et al. (2023), the interplay between FOMO, the Fear of Better Options (FOBO), and the Fear of Doing Anything (FODA) is an under-researched area that could provide a more nuanced view of consumer paralysis vs. action.
- **AI and Personalization:** Future research should examine how AI-driven recommendation engines specifically calibrate FOMO triggers for individual users.

The research papers from 2018 to 2025 collectively establish FOMO as a cornerstone of modern online consumer behavior. It is no longer just a social byproduct of the internet but a deliberately leveraged psychological catalyst used by e-commerce platforms and marketers to bypass rational decision-making. From the "preferential hunting" on Shopee to the "filtered urges" of Generation Z on TikTok, FOMO drives a cycle of impulsive and compulsive consumption.

However, the literature also points toward a growing awareness of these dynamics. The inclusion of moderating factors like religiosity and the critical questioning of "digital exploitation" suggest that both consumers and researchers are beginning to seek a balance. As digital environments continue to evolve through live-streaming and viral marketing, FOMO will likely remain a dominant force, necessitating ongoing academic and ethical scrutiny.

Research Methodology

Structure of the Review

This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) to examine the relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and online consumer purchase behavior. The review is anchored in three theoretical frameworks: Social Comparison Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model and is organized thematically across key constructs including impulsive buying, scarcity marketing, platform-specific dynamics (TikTok, Instagram, Shopee), influencer marketing, and hedonic motivation. The review prioritizes literature from 2023—2025, with selective inclusion of foundational works, and synthesizes findings across diverse geographic and demographic contexts, with particular attention to Generation Z and Millennial consumers in emerging digital markets.

Search Strategy

Literature was retrieved from Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Emerald Insight, JSTOR, Google Scholar, Taylor & Francis, and Sage Journals. Boolean search strings included: "Fear of Missing Out" AND "online purchase behavior"; "FOMO" AND "impulsive buying"; "social media influence" AND "impulse buying"; "scarcity marketing" AND "consumer behavior"; and "digital engagement" AND "purchase intention", among others. The search was restricted to English-language, peer-reviewed publications within the 2023—2025 timeframe, with backward and forward citation tracking applied to capture seminal theoretical contributions. Duplicate records were removed prior to screening.

Study Selection

The selection process followed a PRISMA-inspired multi-stage protocol. From an initial pool of 100 identified records, 70 proceeded to title and abstract screening following deduplication. Full-text assessment was subsequently applied to evaluate conceptual alignment, methodological rigor, and relevance to the digital commerce context. Studies limited to offline retail settings, clinically framed constructs, or inaccessible full texts were excluded. A final corpus of 50 studies was retained, encompassing empirical and theoretical works that address FOMO in relation to online purchasing, promotional strategies, platform behavior, and consumer psychology.

Journal Selection and Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Only peer-reviewed articles indexed in Scopus or Web of Science and published by established academic houses (Elsevier, Emerald, Sage, Springer, Taylor & Francis) were considered. Included studies were required to address FOMO within a digital or e-commerce context, be available in English, and fall within the defined timeframe. Excluded materials comprised conference abstracts, editorials, dissertations, non-English publications, duplicate records, methodologically weak studies, and papers focused exclusively on offline consumer behavior. These criteria ensured the analytical corpus maintained the thematic coherence, empirical quality, and scholarly credibility required for publication-level synthesis.

Findings and Discussion

The synthesis of 50 peer-reviewed studies (2023—2025) establishes FOMO as a central psychological mechanism in online consumer behavior — not a peripheral emotional state, but an internalized cognitive disposition that consistently bypasses rational deliberation in favor of affective, urgency-driven responses. Kurnianingsih et al. (2025) situate FOMO simultaneously as a mediator and a trigger within the S-O-R framework, while Alvita et al. (2025) confirm that it routinely suppresses logical processing in favor of emotion-driven purchasing. Jaworska (2025) terms the resulting behavior 'remedial purchasing' — consumption enacted not to satisfy genuine need but to alleviate the anxiety of perceived social exclusion.

FOMO, Social Comparison, and Impulsive Buying

Across the reviewed corpus, FOMO's most consistent behavioral outcome is a shift from planned to impulsive buying. Karunia et al. (2025) establish flash sales as a critical mediating mechanism activating this FOMO-to-impulsivity pathway, while Falajuhan et al. (2025) demonstrate that low self-control among Generation Z amplifies FOMO's effect, with social network impulsiveness serving as a key mediating variable. Barbu Kleitsch et al. (2025) further show that time-limited offers and reward cues in digital commerce heighten compulsive buying tendencies distinguishing episodic impulsivity from chronic maladaptive patterns, both of which FOMO drives. These findings are grounded in Social Comparison Theory: digital platforms sustain perpetual, algorithmically curated social reference points that elevate the perceived social cost of non-purchase, compress deliberation windows, and heighten responsiveness to social proof cues. Rolando et al. (n.d.) specifically document how Instagram's visual economy activates this comparison mechanism among Millennial audiences, while Habib et al. (2025) confirm that FOMO-driven social media engagement feeds directly into lifestyle product purchases.

Platform Architectures and Scarcity Engineering

The reviewed literature reveals that digital platforms do not merely host FOMO — they engineer it. TikTok's live-streaming commerce format, documented by Widodo (2023) and Pham et al. (2025), creates real-time social presence and a temporal countdown that compresses deliberation and constructs collective urgency. Shopee's 'twin date' promotional events (Safitri et al., 2023; Jumarni et al., 2025) operationalize what the literature terms 'On-FOMO' transforming commercial transactions into social rituals of participation. Dahmiri et al. (2023) demonstrate that scarcity cues directly engage FOMO to drive impulse buying in fashion, while Sonday et al. (2025) identify Buy Now, Pay Later mechanisms as a fintech enabler that removes the short-term financial constraint otherwise moderating impulsive behavior. Solaiman et al. (2024) establish that FOMO mediates the relationship between influencer marketing and purchasing decisions positioning FOMO not as a correlate of influencer effectiveness but as its psychological engine.

Moderators, Ethics, and Theoretical Implications

The literature's treatment of moderating variables resists a deterministic reading of FOMO. Dahmiri et al. (2023) and Fitrah (2025) establish Islamic religiosity as a psychological buffer that attenuates FOMO-driven consumption through mindfulness and anti-materialist value frameworks, while Haryono (2025) documents 'Halal awareness' redirecting FOMO-driven urges among Surabayan Generation Z consumers. These findings confirm that FOMO's behavioral consequences are neither culturally uniform nor psychologically inevitable. Critically, Peter et al. (2025) and Mahmood et al. (2025) frame aggressive FOMO marketing as 'digital exploitation' rather than mere persuasion — a normative distinction of growing theoretical urgency. For digital marketers, the findings validate urgency appeals, scarcity tactics, and influencer campaigns as empirically effective, yet demand ethical scrutiny: Saibaba (2024) identifies FOMO as a direct predictor of compulsive buying disorder, and Verawati et al. (2025) situate it within a materialism-driven consumption cycle. Responsible practice therefore requires distinguishing between FOMO activation that surfaces genuinely relevant products and FOMO activation that functions primarily as a compulsion mechanism targeting vulnerable consumers.

Theoretically, this review extends the S-O-R model by specifying FOMO as a psychologically layered organism-state — encompassing social anxiety, identity threat, and hedonic urgency and advances Self-Determination Theory by positioning FOMO as a mechanism of motivational externalization that displaces intrinsic preference with socially-referenced imperatives. Future research should address the study's most significant gap: the absence of longitudinal designs capable of tracing the cumulative financial and psychological consequences of repeated FOMO-driven purchases, and the need for cross-cultural comparative work beyond the predominantly Indonesian and Southeast Asian empirical base of the current literature.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretical Implications

This study makes several substantive contributions to consumer psychology and digital marketing theory. Most fundamentally, it reconceptualizes FOMO as a psychologically layered organism-state — encompassing social anxiety, identity threat, and hedonic urgency — rather than a transient emotional reaction. Within the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, the synthesized evidence of Kurnianingsih et al. (2025), Karunia et al. (2025), and Barbu Kleitsch et al. (2025) collectively advances a refined causal model: promotional stimuli such as flash sales, scarcity cues, and live-commerce countdowns activate FOMO as a multi-component internal state that produces impulsive and compulsive purchasing responses. Disaggregating FOMO's psychological sub-components within this framework opens theoretical space to identify differential stimulus-response pathways contingent on whether social exclusion anxiety, hedonic stimulation, or identity-maintenance is the dominant active mechanism. The study also extends Self-Determination Theory by positioning FOMO as a mechanism of motivational externalization — displacing intrinsically regulated consumer preference with socially-referenced imperatives, as documented by Pratama et al. (2025) and Falajuhan et al. (2025). Within Social Comparison Theory, the concept of 'preferential hunting behavior' (Phuong et al., 2025) and Jaworska's (2025) 'remedial purchasing' constitute original behavioral categories that existing social comparison models do not adequately capture, enriching the theoretical vocabulary of the field. Critically, findings on Islamic religiosity as a moderating buffer established by Dahmiri et al. (2023), Fitrah (2025), and Haryono (2025) — introduce cultural metacognition as a necessary regulating layer within FOMO models, establishing that FOMO's behavioral consequences are neither universal nor psychologically inevitable, and demanding greater cross-cultural sensitivity in future theoretical development.

Practical Implications

The findings carry direct strategic implications for digital marketers, e-commerce platforms, and brand managers. The central managerial insight is that FOMO is not an incidental byproduct of effective marketing but its operative psychological mechanism: urgency appeals, scarcity signals, influencer endorsements, and live-commerce formats are effective precisely because they activate social exclusion anxiety and compress consumer deliberation. Platforms employing architectures analogous to Shopee's 'twin date' events (Safitri et al., 2023; Jumarni et al., 2025) or TikTok's live-selling format (Widodo, 2023; Pham et al., 2025) should invest in features that amplify social co-presence during promotional events — real-time stock indicators, co-viewer counts, live purchase notifications — recognizing each as a

social comparison cue that elevates the perceived cost of non-participation. For influencer strategists, Solaiman et al.'s (2024) finding that FOMO mediates the influencer-purchase relationship implies that campaign effectiveness depends on the influencer's capacity to construct their consumption as a socially-defining, non-replicable experience rather than on product attribution alone. However, the ethical dimension cannot be separated from strategic analysis. Peter et al. (2025) and Mahmood et al. (2025) draw a normatively significant distinction between digital persuasion and digital exploitation — a boundary crossed when FOMO activation targets psychological vulnerability rather than surfaces genuine consumer value. Saibaba (2024) identifies FOMO as a direct predictor of compulsive buying disorder; Verawati et al. (2025) situate it within a materialism-driven consumption cycle; and Sonday et al.'s (2025) BNPL finding demonstrates how fintech mechanisms can decouple impulsive decision-making from its financial consequences, amplifying harm for low-self-control consumers (Falajuhan et al., 2025). Responsible practice therefore requires transparent disclosure of scarcity claim authenticity, the integration of consumer wellbeing safeguards into promotional interfaces, and a strategic distinction between FOMO activation that genuinely serves consumer aspirations and that which functions primarily as a compulsion mechanism — a distinction foundational to long-term brand trust.

Conclusion

This study advances the understanding of FOMO from a peripheral emotional phenomenon to a commercially engineered and theoretically consequential driver of online consumer behavior. The synthesis of 50 peer-reviewed studies (2023—2025) establishes that FOMO functions as a psychologically layered organism-state — converging social exclusion anxiety, identity-maintenance pressure, and hedonic urgency that systematically suppresses deliberative cognition and accelerates impulsive and compulsive purchasing across diverse platforms and demographic contexts. Flash sale mechanics, live-commerce countdowns, scarcity signals, and influencer-mediated social comparison do not independently generate purchase behavior; they operate as coordinated environmental triggers that activate and amplify FOMO's internalized motivational architecture, transforming the consumer's need for social belonging into a transactional imperative. The Stimulus-Organism-Response framework, Self-Determination Theory, and Social Comparison Theory collectively account for the pathways through which this process unfolds, though the present review argues that fully capturing FOMO-driven digital consumption demands integrative models that simultaneously address trait-level vulnerabilities, platform-specific affordances, and cultural moderating conditions — as evidenced by the religiosity findings of Dahmiri et al. (2023), Fitrah (2025), and Haryono (2025). The ethical dimension of these findings warrants equal scholarly weight. The reviewed literature's emerging distinction between digital persuasion and digital exploitation — articulated by Peter et al. (2025) and Mahmood et al. (2025) — is not an abstract concern but a structurally significant boundary whose negotiation will define the reputational and regulatory future of digital commerce. FOMO activation that systematically targets psychological vulnerability, facilitates compulsive buying disorder (Saibaba, 2024), or exploits low-self-control consumers through fintech mechanisms such as BNPL (Sonday et al., 2025) represents a long-term trust liability that short-term conversion gains cannot offset. Responsible digital marketing practice demands a principled distinction between surfacing genuine consumer value and engineering compulsion. Future research should prioritize longitudinal designs capable of tracing the cumulative psychological and financial consequences of repeated FOMO-driven purchases — a gap the current cross-sectional literature cannot address. Cross-cultural comparative studies extending beyond the predominantly Southeast Asian empirical base, investigation of AI-driven personalization as a FOMO amplifier, and examination of FOMO dynamics within emerging social commerce environments each represent theoretically urgent directions. As digital environments grow more psychologically sophisticated, the scholarly imperative to understand, theorize, and ethically evaluate FOMO-driven consumption will deepen — making the present study a contribution to a conversation whose significance is commensurate with the behavioral phenomena it seeks to illuminate.

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