

The Impact of the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) Phenomenon on Impulsive Purchasing Decisions in Generation Z

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Abstract:

The rapid development of digital technology and social media has significantly transformed consumption behavior, particularly among Generation Z as digital natives. One psychological phenomenon emerging from intensive digital interaction is Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), defined as anxiety arising from the perception of missing valuable information, trends, or social experiences. This study aims to analyze the influence of FOMO on impulsive buying decisions among Generation Z. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed through a literature review, supported by interview, observation, and documentation data. The findings reveal that FOMO functions as a dominant psychological factor driving impulsive buying behavior, particularly through social media exposure and digital marketing strategies emphasizing urgency and scarcity. Impulsive buying is interpreted as an emotional response intended to reduce social anxiety and maintain personal relevance within digital environments. The results indicate that, in the absence of adequate self-regulation and digital literacy, Generation Z is vulnerable to excessive consumption patterns that may negatively affect financial stability and psychological well-being. This study contributes to the conceptual understanding of consumer behavior in the digital era and provides insights for the development of more ethical and reflective marketing practices.

Keywords: *Fear of Missing Out, Impulsive Buying, Generation Z*

Abstrak:

Perkembangan teknologi digital dan media sosial telah mengubah secara signifikan pola perilaku konsumsi, khususnya pada Generasi Z yang tumbuh sebagai digital native. Salah satu fenomena psikologis yang muncul akibat intensitas interaksi digital adalah Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), yaitu kecemasan individu terhadap kemungkinan tertinggal informasi, tren, atau pengalaman sosial yang dianggap bernilai. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh FOMO terhadap keputusan pembelian impulsif pada Generasi Z. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan metode studi literatur yang didukung oleh data hasil wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa FOMO berperan sebagai faktor psikologis dominan yang mendorong perilaku pembelian impulsif, terutama melalui paparan media sosial dan strategi pemasaran

digital yang menekankan urgensi dan kelangkaan. Pembelian impulsif dipahami sebagai respons emosional untuk mereduksi kecemasan sosial dan mempertahankan relevansi diri dalam lingkungan digital. Temuan ini mengindikasikan bahwa tanpa kemampuan regulasi diri dan literasi digital yang memadai, Generasi Z berpotensi mengalami pola konsumsi berlebihan yang berdampak pada kesejahteraan finansial dan psikologis. Penelitian ini diharapkan dapat memberikan kontribusi konseptual bagi kajian perilaku konsumen serta menjadi dasar bagi pengembangan strategi pemasaran yang lebih etis.

Kata Kunci: *Fear of Missing Out, Pembelian Impulsif, Generasi Z*

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology and the widespread use of social media have fundamentally transformed contemporary consumption patterns, particularly among Generation Z (Harahap et al., 2023). As digital natives, this generation has grown up in an environment characterized by constant connectivity, instantaneous information flows, and pervasive online social interaction (Noronha-Sousa et al., 2022). Social media platforms function not only as channels for communication but also as primary spaces for identity construction, trend dissemination, and lifestyle representation (Wilska et al., 2023). Consequently, Generation Z is continuously exposed to curated content that shapes perceptions of normality, desirability, and social relevance, thereby influencing their attitudes and behaviors as consumers.

One notable psychological phenomenon emerging from intensive social media engagement is Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). Conceptually, FOMO refers to a pervasive sense of anxiety stemming from the perception that others may be experiencing more rewarding, meaningful, or enjoyable events in one's absence (Zhang et al., 2020). This condition is closely linked to the fundamental human need for social connectedness and belonging. In the digital context, where social comparison occurs continuously and in real time, FOMO becomes increasingly intensified, particularly among younger generations who rely heavily on online platforms to maintain social presence and validation (Nesbit & Lole, 2025).

Within the digital economic landscape, FOMO functions as an emotional catalyst that can distort rational decision-making processes. Digital marketing strategies frequently capitalize on this psychological vulnerability through mechanisms such as limited-time promotions, flash sales, influencer endorsements, and algorithm-driven trend amplification (Syafila et al., 2025). These strategies create artificial urgency and perceived scarcity, encouraging consumers to act quickly to avoid the discomfort associated with missing opportunities (Frank & Otterbring, 2024). As a result, purchasing decisions are often driven more by emotional impulses than by deliberate evaluation of needs or long-term utility.

This dynamic is closely associated with impulsive buying behavior, which is defined as spontaneous and unplanned purchasing that occurs without prior intention or thorough cognitive deliberation (Suher & Hoyer, 2020). Impulsive buying is primarily influenced by affective responses rather than rational assessment, causing consumers to prioritize immediate emotional

gratification over financial planning or functional considerations (Parfenova & Romashova, 2020). For Generation Z, whose media consumption habits are deeply embedded in visually stimulating and fast-paced digital environments, the likelihood of impulsive purchases is further amplified by persuasive online stimuli and seamless e-commerce integration (Radyi et al., 2024).

From a theoretical perspective, prior studies have consistently demonstrated a strong relationship between FOMO and impulsive buying behavior. FOMO generates psychological tension and emotional discomfort, which individuals attempt to alleviate through consumption, particularly by acquiring products or services that are socially visible or trend-related (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2025). In this sense, impulsive buying serves not merely as a consumption act but as an emotional coping mechanism aimed at restoring social relevance and reducing anxiety (Wan et al., 2024). The need for peer validation and social inclusion often overrides rational considerations such as budget constraints or actual necessity.

Moreover, recent critical perspectives suggest that FOMO should not be understood solely as an individual psychological condition but also as a structural outcome of social media architecture. Digital platforms commodify attention and experience by emphasizing visibility, immediacy, and performative presence (Qu et al., 2025). Individuals may feel compelled to remain constantly connected and responsive to avoid social invisibility or perceived irrelevance (Cecil et al., 2022). This hyper-connectivity fosters a continuous cycle of comparison and urgency, in which consumption becomes a symbolic tool for maintaining one's position within fluid and competitive social hierarchies.

Given these conditions, a comprehensive examination of the relationship between FOMO and impulsive buying behavior among Generation Z is both timely and essential (Lazuardi & Usman, 2025). Understanding this relationship contributes to a deeper comprehension of shifting consumption paradigms in the digital era while offering valuable insights for ethical marketing practices and consumer well-being (Kalogeras & Mejri, 2025). Therefore, this study aims to analyze the impact of FOMO on impulsive purchasing decisions among Generation Z through a descriptive qualitative approach, drawing upon relevant theories and previous empirical findings to construct a nuanced understanding of this contemporary phenomenon.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach using a literature review (library research) design. This methodological choice is grounded in the research objective, which seeks to develop an in-depth conceptual understanding of the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) phenomenon and its influence on impulsive buying decisions among Generation Z, rather than testing hypotheses or statistically measuring variable relationships. The descriptive qualitative approach enables a comprehensive examination of FOMO as a psychological and social construct through theoretical interpretation and critical synthesis of relevant prior studies within the context

of digital consumer behavior.

The data utilized in this study consist of secondary sources obtained from scholarly publications that are directly related to the research topic. These sources include national and international peer-reviewed journal articles, academic textbooks, and research reports addressing FOMO, consumer behavior, impulsive buying, and the characteristics of Generation Z. Source selection was conducted selectively based on the credibility of authors, the reputation of publishers, and the relevance of the content to the research focus. Priority was given to recent publications to ensure that the analysis reflects current developments in digital consumer behavior and the digital economy.

The researcher served as the primary research instrument, actively engaged in the processes of data collection, organization, and interpretation. Data were collected through documentation techniques, involving systematic searching, selection, and review of relevant academic literature. The analysis was conducted using qualitative descriptive analysis, beginning with data reduction to filter information aligned with the research objectives, followed by thematic categorization and narrative presentation. To ensure validity, source triangulation was applied by comparing findings across different types of literature, while logical consistency among theoretical frameworks was maintained. This approach aims to produce a coherent and theoretically grounded understanding of the relationship between FOMO and impulsive buying behavior among Generation Z.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

1. Fear of Missing Out as a Dominant Psychological Experience among Generation Z

The results of the study indicate that Fear of Missing Out is a dominant psychological experience among Generation Z participants. Based on in-depth interviews, informants consistently expressed feelings of anxiety when they perceived themselves as being left behind in trends, information, or social activities shared on digital platforms. Observational data further revealed that participants frequently checked social media to monitor updates related to lifestyle, consumption, and peer activities. This behavior reflects a persistent concern about social relevance and inclusion within their digital environment.

Documentation analysis supports these findings by showing a strong presence of trend-oriented and time-sensitive content within participants' digital consumption spaces. Promotional visuals, viral product reviews, and influencer-generated content were repeatedly encountered in the digital records examined. These materials appeared to reinforce participants' perceptions that certain products or experiences were socially mandatory. As a result, FOMO emerged not merely as a temporary emotional response, but as an ongoing psychological condition embedded in daily digital routines.

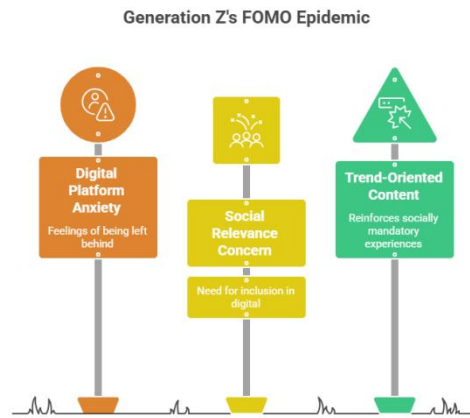


Figure 1 : Generation Z's FOMO Epidemic

The image “Generation Z’s FOMO Epidemic” explains that FOMO in Gen Z is triggered by three mutually reinforcing components: first, Digital Platform Anxiety, which is the anxiety when seeing other people’s activities on social media, resulting in a feeling of being left behind; second, Social Relevance Concern, which is the urge to remain “relevant” and accepted in the digital space, so that individuals feel the need to join in on certain trends or conversations; and third, Trend-Oriented Content, which is a flood of trend-focused content that continuously reinforces social comparison and the fear of missing out. The combination of these three creates a cycle: the more frequently exposed to trends and other people’s activities, the stronger the need to participate, which ultimately increases anxiety and exacerbates FOMO.

2. The Influence of Social Media Exposure on Impulsive Buying Behavior

The findings demonstrate that intensive social media exposure plays a significant role in shaping impulsive buying behavior among Generation Z. Interview data revealed that participants often encountered products incidentally while browsing social media without any prior intention to purchase. Many participants reported that visually appealing content and peer usage displays triggered sudden desires to own similar products. These impulses frequently occurred without deliberate consideration of necessity or budget constraints.

Observations conducted during the study indicated that participants tended to make purchasing decisions shortly after exposure to trending content. The immediacy of digital platforms, combined with seamless links to online marketplaces, reduced the time available for reflective decision-making. Documentation of transaction histories further showed patterns of unplanned purchases closely following social media engagement. This suggests that impulsive buying behavior is closely intertwined with habitual digital media consumption.

3. Digital Marketing Stimuli as External Triggers of Impulsive Purchases

The results reveal that digital marketing stimuli function as powerful external triggers that intensify impulsive purchasing decisions. Interview participants frequently mentioned limited-time promotions, flash sales, and influencer endorsements as factors that created a sense of urgency. These marketing cues generated emotional pressure to act quickly in order to avoid

missing perceived opportunities. Participants acknowledged that such pressure often overrode rational evaluation of product usefulness.

Observational findings showed that participants responded more rapidly to purchases when marketing messages emphasized scarcity or exclusivity. Visual countdowns, stock limitations, and viral endorsements were particularly effective in prompting immediate action. Documentation analysis confirmed that these strategies were consistently embedded in the digital platforms accessed by participants. Together, these findings illustrate how marketing stimuli amplify emotional responses associated with FOMO, leading directly to impulsive buying behavior.

4. Impulsive Buying as an Emotional Regulation Strategy

The study found that impulsive buying often functions as an emotional regulation strategy for Generation Z consumers. Interview data indicated that participants experienced temporary emotional relief and satisfaction after making spontaneous purchases. This relief was commonly described as a reduction in anxiety related to social comparison and perceived exclusion. However, participants also reported that this satisfaction was short-lived and frequently followed by feelings of regret.

Observational data supported these accounts by showing repetitive cycles of emotional tension, purchasing, and post-purchase reflection. Documentation of participants' shopping patterns revealed repeated impulsive transactions over relatively short periods of time. These patterns suggest that impulsive buying is not an isolated behavior but a recurring response to ongoing emotional discomfort. Thus, purchasing acts as a short-term coping mechanism rather than a solution to underlying psychological pressure.

5. Implications for Consumption Patterns and Individual Well-Being

The results indicate that persistent FOMO-driven impulsive buying contributes to the formation of excessive consumption patterns among Generation Z. Interview participants expressed concerns about financial strain resulting from repeated unplanned purchases. Some participants acknowledged difficulties in managing expenses due to frequent exposure to consumption-oriented digital content. These experiences highlight the long-term consequences of emotionally driven consumption behavior.

Observational and documentation data further suggest that without adequate self-regulation, these consumption patterns may negatively affect psychological well-being. Participants showed signs of digital fatigue and emotional exhaustion linked to constant monitoring of trends and social validation. The findings emphasize the importance of developing critical awareness and reflective decision-making skills. Overall, the results demonstrate that FOMO-related impulsive buying poses both economic and psychological challenges for Generation Z.

Discussion

The findings of this study reinforce the growing body of literature that positions Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) as a central psychological driver of

impulsive buying behavior among Generation Z. Prior research has consistently shown that intensive social media engagement heightens social comparison and anxiety related to social exclusion, which in turn influences consumption decisions (Pellegrino, 2024; Rawat et al., 2022). Studies on digital natives indicate that constant exposure to curated lifestyles creates perceived social norms that normalize rapid and unplanned purchasing as a means of maintaining relevance. The present findings align with this perspective by demonstrating that impulsive buying among Generation Z is closely intertwined with emotional responses triggered by digital environments rather than by rational need assessment.

The results are also consistent with previous studies that emphasize the role of digital marketing strategies in amplifying FOMO-driven consumption (Eitan & Naor, 2025). Earlier research has documented how scarcity cues, time-limited promotions, and influencer endorsements intensify emotional arousal and reduce consumers' capacity for reflective decision-making. These findings support the argument that impulsive buying is not solely an individual predisposition but is structurally reinforced by the design of digital platforms and marketing ecosystems (Kathuria & Bakshi, 2024). The current study strengthens this argument by showing that marketing stimuli act as external catalysts that accelerate purchasing decisions in moments of heightened emotional vulnerability.

From a psychological perspective, the interpretation of impulsive buying as an emotional coping mechanism aligns with prior consumer behavior theories that highlight the dominance of affective processes in spontaneous purchases. Previous empirical studies have demonstrated that consumers often engage in impulsive buying to alleviate negative emotions such as anxiety, insecurity, or stress (Akin, 2025). The findings of this study support this view by revealing that purchasing temporarily reduces feelings of social discomfort associated with FOMO (Good & Hyman, 2021). However, this short-term relief is frequently followed by regret, suggesting a cyclical pattern of emotional regulation through consumption, as also noted in earlier qualitative and experimental research.

Nevertheless, some prior studies present perspectives that partially challenge the universality of this relationship. Certain research suggests that not all members of Generation Z are equally susceptible to FOMO-induced impulsive buying, emphasizing the moderating roles of self-control, financial literacy, and personal values. These studies argue that individuals with higher levels of cognitive control and awareness are better able to resist emotional triggers embedded in digital media (Zahrai et al., 2022). While the present study acknowledges these differences, its findings indicate that for many participants, emotional impulses still tend to outweigh rational considerations, particularly in highly stimulating digital contexts.

Overall, the discussion highlights that the relationship between FOMO and impulsive buying among Generation Z is complex and multidimensional. The findings are largely supported by prior research, particularly those emphasizing emotional, social, and technological determinants of consumer

behavior, while also resonating with critical perspectives that call attention to individual variability (Li et al., 2024). This synthesis suggests that addressing FOMO-driven consumption requires not only ethical marketing practices but also the development of consumer resilience through digital literacy and emotional regulation skills. Consequently, the study contributes to the broader discourse on sustainable consumption by situating impulsive buying within the intersection of psychological needs, social dynamics, and digital infrastructures.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) plays a significant role in shaping impulsive buying behavior among Generation Z within the digital consumption environment. The findings demonstrate that intensive exposure to social media, combined with emotionally driven digital marketing strategies, intensifies anxiety related to social relevance and perceived exclusion. As a result, purchasing decisions are frequently made spontaneously without thorough rational consideration, functioning as a temporary emotional response to psychological pressure. Impulsive buying, therefore, emerges not merely as a consumption pattern but as an emotional coping mechanism embedded in the daily digital experiences of Generation Z.

Furthermore, the study highlights that FOMO-driven impulsive buying carries broader implications for both financial stability and psychological well-being. Persistent engagement in unplanned consumption increases the risk of excessive spending and emotional fatigue, particularly in the absence of adequate self-regulation and digital literacy. These findings underscore the importance of fostering critical awareness among consumers and encouraging more reflective consumption practices in digitally mediated environments. Overall, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of contemporary consumer behavior by emphasizing the interplay between psychological dynamics, social influences, and digital infrastructures in shaping consumption decisions among Generation Z.

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