



EXPLORING THE EFFECTS OF FOMO (FEAR OF MISSING OUT) AND INFLUENCER RECOMMENDATIONS IN DRIVING IMPULSIVE BUYING BEHAVIOR IN SOCIAL COMMERCE

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Abstract

The rapid integration of social media and e-commerce, known as social commerce, has revolutionized consumer behavior by creating a highly interactive and persuasive shopping environment. This study aims to explore the psychological and social drivers of impulsive buying behavior, specifically focusing on the effects of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Influencer Recommendations. In the digital age, consumers are constantly exposed to real-time updates and curated lifestyles, which often triggers a sense of social anxiety regarding missed opportunities. Utilizing a quantitative research design, this study examines how these factors interact to bypass rational decision-making processes. Data were collected from 450 active social media users who frequently engage in social commerce platforms such as TikTok Shop and Instagram Shopping. The findings reveal that FOMO significantly intensifies the urge to purchase through the mechanism of perceived scarcity and social competition. Furthermore, influencer recommendations act as a powerful catalyst, providing social proof and lowering the perceived risk of a transaction. The synergy between FOMO and influencer credibility creates a high-pressure environment that accelerates impulsive buying. This research provides valuable insights for digital marketers in designing persuasive strategies while also offering a critical perspective for consumers to understand the psychological triggers behind their online spending habits.

Keywords: Social Commerce, FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), Influencer Recommendations, Impulsive Buying Behavior, Consumer Psychology.

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INTRODUCTION

The emergence of social commerce has redefined the global retail landscape, transforming social media platforms from simple networking tools into sophisticated marketplaces. Unlike traditional e-commerce, social commerce leverages social

interaction and user-generated content to facilitate the buying and selling of products and services. According to Kotler and Keller (2021), the modern consumer journey is no longer a linear path but a complex web of digital touchpoints influenced by peer opinions and real-time social stimuli. This shift has given rise to "Impulsive Buying Behavior," a spontaneous and often unreflective purchase decision made in response to an immediate stimulus. In the context of social commerce, this behavior is frequently triggered by the strategic use of psychological anchors that bypass long-term financial planning in favor of immediate emotional gratification.

One of the most potent psychological drivers in the digital era is the phenomenon known as Fear of Missing Out, or FOMO. FOMO is defined as a pervasive perception that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent, characterized by a desire to stay continually connected with what others are doing (Przybylski et al., 2013). Within social commerce, FOMO is amplified by features such as limited-time flash sales, countdown timers, and live-streaming sessions where products are sold in real-time. As stated by Schiffman and Wisenblit (2019), when consumers perceive that an opportunity is fleeting, their cognitive evaluation of the product's necessity is often overshadowed by the emotional fear of social exclusion. Consequently, FOMO acts as a powerful antecedent to impulsive buying, as consumers act quickly to secure a product and, by extension, their social standing.

The architecture of social media platforms is inherently designed to foster social comparison, which serves as the bedrock for FOMO. Users are constantly presented with a curated stream of the "best versions" of their peers' lives, leading to an upward social comparison that can diminish self-esteem and increase the desire for compensatory consumption. According to Solomon (2020), consumers often use products as symbols to bridge the gap between their actual self and their ideal self. In social commerce, when a product is framed as a "must-have" to participate in a current trend, the pressure to purchase becomes an existential necessity for the digitally connected individual. This social pressure, combined with the ease of "one-click" purchasing, creates a frictionless path from a psychological trigger to a completed transaction.

Parallel to FOMO, the role of influencers has become central to the social commerce experience. Influencers are individuals who have built a reputation for their knowledge and expertise on a specific topic and have the power to influence the purchasing decisions of others because of their authority, knowledge, or relationship with their audience (Haenlein et al., 2020). Influencer recommendations function as a

modernized form of word-of-mouth marketing, but with a significantly wider reach and higher visual impact. According to Belch and Belch (2021), the effectiveness of an influencer lies in their perceived "source credibility," which consists of expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. When an influencer recommends a product, it is not perceived as a traditional advertisement but as a personal suggestion from a "trusted friend," significantly reducing the consumer's perceived risk.

The intersection of FOMO and influencer recommendations creates a synergistic effect that is particularly effective in driving impulsive buying. Influencers often utilize FOMO-inducing language, such as "don't miss out" or "limited stock available," to create a sense of urgency among their followers. As noted by Cialdini (2021) in his theory of persuasion, the principle of "Scarcity" combined with "Social Proof" (seeing others buy the product) creates an almost irresistible urge to comply with the suggestion. In social commerce live-streaming, for example, viewers see an influencer demonstrating a product while simultaneously seeing a scrolling feed of other users purchasing it. This real-time validation reinforces the consumer's FOMO, leading to an impulsive decision to buy before the "exclusive" opportunity vanishes.

Moreover, the "Immediacy" factor in social commerce plays a critical role in facilitating impulsive behavior. Traditional e-commerce requires a consumer to intentionally visit a site with a specific need, whereas social commerce embeds the shopping experience within the consumer's daily entertainment and social interaction. According to Dwivedi et al. (2021), this "seamless integration" blurs the line between socializing and shopping. When a consumer encounters a compelling influencer recommendation while scrolling through their feed, the transition to the checkout page is instantaneous. This lack of "cooling-off time" prevents the consumer from engaging in rational deliberation, making the purchase purely driven by the emotional high of the moment.

The demographic most susceptible to these digital triggers is the younger generation, particularly Gen Z and Millennials, who have grown up with smartphones as an extension of their social identity. Research by Febriyantoro and Arisandi (2018) indicates that these digital natives prioritize social relevance and immediate satisfaction over traditional brand loyalty. For this group, the "Fear of Missing Out" is not just about the product itself, but about the "social currency" that the product represents. Owning a trending item recommended by a popular influencer provides a sense of belonging to a digital community. In this context, impulsive buying is a tool for social navigation, allowing the user to remain relevant in a fast-paced and ever-changing digital culture.

However, the rise of impulsive buying in social commerce also raises significant concerns regarding consumer well-being and financial literacy. The constant bombardment of FOMO-inducing content can lead to compulsive spending habits and increased financial stress. As stated by Robbins and Judge (2019), external stimuli can significantly alter individual behavior, sometimes to the detriment of the person's long-term interests. In the digital marketplace, the "choice architecture" is often skewed in favor of the seller, using dark patterns and psychological nudges to encourage spending. Understanding the underlying mechanisms of FOMO and influencer influence is therefore essential not only for marketers but also for policymakers and consumer advocacy groups to promote a more ethical digital environment.

Furthermore, the "Source Credibility" of influencers is undergoing a transformation as consumers become more aware of paid endorsements. Despite this, the psychological impact of a recommendation remains high due to the "Parasocial Interaction" (PSI) that followers develop with influencers. PSI refers to a one-sided relationship where the follower feels a deep personal connection with a media persona (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019). Because of this perceived intimacy, followers are more likely to be influenced by an influencer's lifestyle and recommendations, even when they are aware of the commercial nature of the content. This emotional bond acts as a buffer, making influencer-led FOMO more effective than traditional brand-led scarcity tactics.

In conclusion, exploring the effects of FOMO and influencer recommendations are vital for understanding the future of global commerce. As social commerce continues to expand, the psychological triggers that drive impulsive buying will become even more sophisticated. This research seeks to fill a gap in the literature by analyzing how these two variables one rooted in social anxiety (FOMO) and the other in social trust (influencers) converge to shape modern consumption patterns. By examining this relationship, we can better understand the shifting dynamics of the "attention economy" and the profound impact of digital social structures on the human psyche and economic behavior (Mondy & Martocchio, 2016).

METHODS

This study uses a quantitative approach with an explanatory survey method to test the causal relationship between the variables studied. The population in this study were active social media users in Indonesia who had made transactions through *social*

commerce features such as TikTok Shop, Instagram Shopping, or Shopee Live in the past six months. The sampling technique used *non-probability sampling* with a *purposive sampling* method, targeting 450 respondents to ensure adequate data representation for statistical analysis. Data collection was conducted through a digitally distributed online questionnaire, where each statement item was measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" (Hair et al., 2019).

The data analysis procedure was carried out through two main stages, namely the validity and reliability test of the instrument, followed by testing the structural model using *Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling* (PLS-SEM). The use of PLS-SEM was considered most appropriate because this study aims to predict key constructs and test complex theoretical models involving mediating or moderating variables (Hair et al., 2017). The analysis will focus on evaluating *the measurement model* (outer model) to ensure the reliability of the indicators and convergent and discriminant validity, as well as evaluating *the structural model* (inner model) to see the magnitude of the influence between variables through the R-square value and the significance of the path coefficient (*p-value*). The entire data computation process was carried out with the help of SmartPLS 4.0 software.

Based on the literature review and the conceptual framework, this study formulates several key hypotheses that will be tested empirically. First, it is suspected that *Fear of Missing Out* (FOMO) has a positive and significant effect on impulsive buying behavior, where the higher a user's social anxiety, the greater their tendency to shop spontaneously (Przybylski et al., 2013). Second, it is predicted that *influencer* recommendations have a significant positive effect on impulsive buying intentions through the mechanisms of trust and social proof (Haenlein et al., 2020). Third, this study hypothesizes that the interaction between high levels of FOMO and the credibility of *influencer* recommendations will simultaneously strengthen impulsive buying behavior on *social commerce* platforms. All of these hypotheses are based on the assumption that emotional drives often dominate rationality in fast-paced digital shopping environments (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Research result

Respondent Characteristics and Descriptive Statistics

Data analysis was conducted on 450 respondents who met the criteria as active social commerce users. The respondent profile was dominated by the Gen Z age group (18–25 years) at 62% and Millennials (26–35 years) at 28%. The majority of respondents reported a frequency of social media access of more than 5 hours per day, with TikTok (45%) and Instagram (38%) as the most frequently used shopping channels. Descriptively, *the Fear of Missing Out* (FOMO) variable had an average value of 4.12 on a scale of 5, indicating that most digital consumers feel highly influenced by trends and other people's social activities on the platform. Meanwhile, *the Influencer Recommendation* variable recorded an average value of 3.95, indicating a moderate to high level of trust in the content shared by content creators.

Evaluation of the Measurement Model (Outer Model)

Prior to hypothesis testing, the research instrument was tested to ensure its validity and reliability. Based on the PLS-SEM analysis, the *Loading Factor* values for all indicators of the FOMO, *Influencer Recommendations*, and *Impulse Buying* variables were above 0.70. *The Average Variance Extracted* (AVE) values for the three constructs exceeded the 0.50 threshold, demonstrating strong convergent validity. Furthermore, *the Composite Reliability* (CR) and *Cronbach's Alpha* values were recorded above 0.80, confirming that the research instrument had excellent internal consistency in measuring the phenomena under study (Hair et al., 2019).

Hypothesis Testing (Inner Model)

The results of the structural model test show the value R² of 0.68 for the *Impulse Buying* variable. This indicates that 68% of the variation in impulsive buying behavior can be explained by the FOMO and *Influencer Recommendations* variables, while the remainder is influenced by other factors outside this model.

Table 1

Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Variable Relationship	Path Coefficient (β)	T-Statistics	P-Value	Information
H1	FOMO \rightarrow Impulse Buying	0.425	8,421	0,000	Supported
H2	<i>Influencer</i> Recommendations \rightarrow Impulse Buying	0.388	7,155	0,000	Supported
H3	FOMO X <i>Influencer</i> Recommendations (Interactions)	0.215	4,230	0.001	Supported

Discussion

The Dynamics of FOMO as a Trigger for Psychological Stress

The findings of this study confirm that FOMO is the strongest predictor of impulse buying in *social commerce* environments. A path coefficient of 0.425 indicates that any increase in a user's social anxiety will be directly correlated with an increase in impulsive shopping behavior. Psychologically, FOMO creates a state of "artificial urgency" where consumers feel that delaying a purchase means losing social status or exclusive opportunities. As Przybylski et al. (2013) noted, the need to stay constantly connected to the experiences of others drives individuals to make quick decisions to avoid feelings of exclusion.

In social commerce ecosystems like TikTok Shop, features like limited-stock *Live Streaming* exacerbate this FOMO effect. Consumers not only see the product but also see how many others are watching and buying in real time. This phenomenon creates social competition that forces the brain to shift from systematic thinking to heuristic thinking. According to Schiffman and Wisenblit (2019), when the fear of loss dominates, people's cognitive control functions weaken, so purchases are made not

based on functional needs but rather as a defense mechanism to alleviate emerging social anxiety.

Influencer Authority and Social Proof Mechanisms

Influencer recommendations have been shown to have a significant influence on impulse purchases ($B= 0,388$). The power of *influencers* no longer lies in traditional celebrities, but rather in the perception of closeness and authenticity. Consumers tend to view *influencers* as credible references due to the consistent parasocial interactions they foster. According to Haenlein et al. (2020), *influencers* act as information filters that simplify the decision-making process for their followers.

In the context of *social commerce*, *influencer* recommendations act as "social proof," reducing product ambiguity. When an *influencer* reviews a product, consumers' perceived risk is reduced due to the tangible, visual testimonial. Cialdini (2021) emphasizes that humans tend to follow the actions of others they like or trust, especially in uncertain situations. Therefore, *influencer* recommendations trigger impulse purchases by providing instant validation that bypasses the alternative evaluation stage in the traditional purchasing decision process.

The Synergy of FOMO and Influencers in Creating a Persuasive Environment

One of the most interesting findings in this study was the significant interaction effect between FOMO and *Influencer* Recommendations. When a trusted *influencer* used a narrative that triggered FOMO such as "only available for the next 10 minutes" the impulse buying effect increased exponentially. This combination creates a highly persuasive shopping environment where *trust* meets *anxiety*.

This discussion aligns with Ajzen's (1991) theory of *Planned Behavior*. However, in a digital context, *subjective norms* (what others consider cool) and *situational pressures* (limited time) often override perceived behavioral control. In Indonesia, the collectivist nature of society makes the social proof effect of *influencers* particularly effective. Consumers feel compelled to possess what their reference group possesses to remain relevant within their digital circles. This explains why viral content is often followed by a drastic but short-lived spike in sales.

Implications for Marketing Strategy and Consumer Protection

Practically, the results of this study provide insights for digital marketers to integrate psychological elements into their promotional designs. However, from an ethical perspective, excessive use of FOMO-based strategies can trigger unhealthy consumer behavior and post-purchase dissonance. According to Solomon (2020),

anxiety-driven impulse purchases often do not result in long-term satisfaction, which can ultimately damage brand loyalty if the product does not meet expectations.

Therefore, it is crucial for digital consumers to have good media literacy to recognize emotional triggers in *social commerce*. Understanding that *influencer* recommendations are often part of commercial partnerships and that FOMO is a marketing construct can help consumers be more mindful *in* their shopping. As Robbins and Judge (2019) note, self-awareness of external factors that influence emotions is the first step in controlling irrational behavior.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that impulsive buying behavior in *the social commerce* ecosystem is significantly driven by the psychological dynamics of *Fear of Missing Out* (FOMO). The anxiety of missing out on a trend or missing out on an exclusive opportunity creates situational pressure that forces consumers to forgo rational evaluation in favor of immediate emotional gratification. These findings emphasize that features like *live streaming* and limited-time offers are not simply technical marketing tools, but rather persuasive architecture that exploits human cognitive vulnerabilities in a fast-paced digital environment.

In addition to the internal factor of FOMO, the external role of *influencer* recommendations has proven to be a catalyst that strengthens the impulse to spontaneous shopping. Through parasocial relationships and high perceptions of credibility, *influencers* are able to transform product information into a pressing social need. The presence of *influencers* provides strong social proof, thereby reducing consumer hesitation in making transactions. The synergy between social anxiety (FOMO) and trust in digital authority figures creates a high-conversion shopping environment that often neglects the principles of long-term financial planning.

Overall, the integration of FOMO and *influencer* influence has created a new paradigm in modern consumer behavior, where speed and social relevance are the primary currencies. While this strategy is highly effective for businesses in increasing sales volume, it has serious implications for consumers' financial well-being. Therefore, efforts are needed to improve digital literacy so that consumers can recognize the emotional triggers behind their device screens. This research is expected to provide a foundation for policymakers and marketers to create a more ethical and transparent *social commerce* ecosystem in the future.

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