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Fear Of Missing Out (FOMO) and Impulse Buying Behaviour among Young Adults

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Abstract: In the contemporary digital era, consumer behaviour is increasingly shaped by psychological and emotional factors due to the widespread use of social media and online shopping platforms. Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is a psychological phenomenon that refers to the concern that others may be experiencing rewarding events without one's participation. This feeling often creates urgency and influences individuals to make quick and unplanned purchasing decisions. The present study aims to examine the relationship between Fear of Missing Out and impulse buying behaviour among young adults. A quantitative correlational research design was used, and data were collected from 150 participants aged between 18 and 24 years. Standardized tools, namely the Fear of Missing Out Scale and the Impulse Buying Tendency Scale, were used. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation. The results revealed a moderate positive relationship between Fear of Missing Out and impulse buying behaviour ($r = .46$, $p < .01$), indicating that individuals with higher levels of FOMO are more likely to engage in impulsive purchases. The study highlights the role of emotional urgency and social comparison in influencing consumer behaviour and emphasizes the importance of awareness and self-regulation in online purchasing decisions.

Keywords: *Fear Of Missing Out, Impulse Buying Behaviour, Young Adults, Online Shopping, Consumer Behaviour*

1. Introduction

"Sometimes, the fear of missing out becomes stronger than the need to think."

In the contemporary digital age, the way individuals interact with the world around them has undergone a significant transformation. The rapid advancement of technology, along with the widespread use of the internet, has reshaped not only communication patterns but also the way individuals perceive experiences, relationships, and consumption. Social media platforms, online shopping websites, and digital marketing strategies have created an environment where individuals are constantly exposed to new information, trends, and opportunities. While these developments have enhanced convenience and connectivity, they have also introduced new psychological challenges that influence human behaviour in subtle yet powerful ways.

One such psychological phenomenon that has gained increasing attention in recent years is the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). FOMO is defined as a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent. It is characterized by a strong desire to stay continually connected with what others are doing and to remain updated with ongoing events. This feeling is not entirely new; however, the intensity and frequency with which it is experienced have increased significantly due to the rise of digital platforms.

In today's social media-driven world, individuals are constantly exposed to carefully curated images, videos, and updates that highlight the most desirable aspects of others' lives. These representations often create an illusion of a perfect lifestyle, leading individuals to compare their own lives with those of others. Such comparisons can give rise to feelings of inadequacy, dissatisfaction, and anxiety. The fear that one might be missing out on enjoyable experiences, social gatherings, or opportunities can create a sense of urgency, compelling individuals to take immediate action in order to reduce this discomfort.

At the same time, the digitalization of commerce has transformed traditional shopping behaviours. Online shopping platforms have made it possible for consumers to purchase products anytime and anywhere with minimal effort. Features such as personalized recommendations, targeted advertisements, limited time offers, and flash sales are specifically designed to capture attention and encourage quick decision-making. These features often create a sense of scarcity and urgency, making individuals feel that they must act immediately or risk losing the opportunity.

Impulse buying behaviour, which refers to spontaneous and unplanned purchasing decisions, has become increasingly prevalent in such environments. Unlike planned purchases that involve careful consideration and evaluation, impulsive purchases are driven primarily by emotional responses. Individuals may experience a sudden urge to buy a product without fully considering its necessity, cost, or long-term consequences. While such purchases may provide temporary satisfaction or excitement, they may also lead to regret and financial strain over time.

The relationship between Fear of Missing Out and impulse buying behaviour can be understood through the role of emotional and cognitive processes. When individuals experience FOMO, they are likely to feel anxious and pressured to stay connected and updated. This emotional state reduces their ability to engage in rational decision-making and increases their susceptibility to external influences. As a result, they may be more likely to respond to marketing cues, social trends, and peer behaviours by making impulsive purchases.

Furthermore, social comparison plays a crucial role in shaping this relationship. Individuals often evaluate themselves based on the achievements, lifestyles, and possessions of others. When they perceive that others are enjoying better experiences or owning desirable products, they may feel compelled to align themselves with these standards. Purchasing similar products or participating in trending activities may serve as a way to reduce feelings of exclusion and enhance one’s social image. Young adults represent a particularly important group in this context. This stage of life is characterized by identity exploration, increased independence, and a strong desire for social acceptance. Young adults are more likely to engage with social media platforms and are often influenced by peer opinions and societal expectations. Additionally, the availability of digital payment systems and increasing financial autonomy make it easier for them to engage in online shopping. These factors combined make young adults more vulnerable to the effects of FOMO and impulsive buying behaviour.

Another important aspect to consider is the role of marketing strategies in amplifying these psychological tendencies. Digital marketers often use techniques such as countdown timers, limited stock notifications, and exclusive deals to create a sense of urgency. These strategies are designed to trigger emotional responses and encourage immediate action. When individuals are already experiencing FOMO, such cues can further intensify their desire to purchase, leading to impulsive decisions.

Moreover, the constant connectivity provided by smartphones and social media platforms ensures that individuals are rarely disconnected from digital environments. Notifications, alerts, and updates continuously draw attention, making it difficult for individuals to disengage. This continuous exposure not only increases the likelihood of experiencing FOMO but also provides frequent opportunities for impulsive purchasing.

Despite the growing body of research on Fear of Missing Out and impulse buying behaviour, there is still limited understanding of how these variables interact within specific cultural contexts. In India, rapid urbanization, increased internet penetration, and the growing popularity of e-commerce platforms have significantly influenced consumer behaviour. Cultural values, social norms, and peer influences may further shape how young adults experience FOMO and respond to it through purchasing behaviour.

Understanding the relationship between FOMO and impulse buying behaviour is important for several reasons. From a psychological perspective, it provides insights into how emotions and social influences affect decision-making. From a consumer behaviour perspective, it helps explain patterns of spending and consumption in digital environments. Additionally, it highlights the need for promoting awareness regarding responsible financial behaviour and emotional regulation among young adults.

Therefore, the present study aims to examine the relationship between Fear of Missing Out and impulse buying behaviour among young adults. By exploring how these variables interact, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of modern consumer behaviour and the psychological factors that drive it.

2. Review of Literature

The relationship between digital engagement and consumer behaviour has gained significant attention in recent years. Researchers have increasingly focused on understanding how psychological factors, particularly Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), influence impulsive buying behaviour in online environments.

Fear of Missing Out is commonly associated with social media usage and refers to the anxiety that others may be experiencing rewarding events in one’s absence. Przybylski et al. (2013) conceptualized FOMO as a pervasive apprehension that drives individuals to remain continuously connected with others’ activities. Studies have shown that higher levels of FOMO are associated with increased social media engagement, emotional vulnerability, and a stronger tendency toward social comparison (Elhai et al., 2018). This constant exposure to curated lifestyles often creates feelings of inadequacy and pressure to keep up with others.

Social comparison plays a crucial role in shaping consumer behaviour in digital contexts. Roberts and David (2020) found that individuals who frequently engage in upward social comparison on social media are more likely to experience dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem, which can lead to compensatory behaviours such as impulsive buying. Similarly, Dhir et al. (2018) reported that emotional dependence on social media platforms and feelings of exclusion significantly increase the likelihood of spontaneous purchasing.

Impulse buying behaviour is defined as a sudden and immediate purchase without prior planning, often driven by emotional responses rather than rational evaluation (Rook & Fisher, 1995). Verplanken and Herabadi (2001) proposed that impulse buying consists of both emotional and cognitive components, where emotional excitement reduces self-control and limits thoughtful decision-making. In online environments, these tendencies are further amplified by digital features such as one-click purchasing and personalized recommendations.

Marketing strategies in online shopping platforms also play a significant role in influencing impulsive buying behaviour. Scarcity cues such as limited-time offers, countdown timers, and low-stock notifications create a sense of urgency that encourages immediate action. Zhang et al. (2019) found that perceived scarcity increases emotional arousal and reduces decision-making time, leading to impulsive purchases. Similarly, Li et al. (2022) reported that time-limited promotional campaigns trigger anxiety about missing out, which significantly increases impulsive buying intentions.

FOMO has been identified as a key psychological factor linking digital experiences with consumer behaviour. Hayran and Anik (2021) found that individuals with higher levels of FOMO are more responsive to promotional messages and exclusive offers, resulting in stronger impulsive buying tendencies. The study highlighted that emotional urgency and perceived social relevance play a crucial role in influencing purchase decisions.

In the Indian context, research on digital consumer behaviour is still developing. Kaur et al. (2020) found that promotional cues during online sales, particularly festive offers, significantly increase impulsive buying among young consumers. Cultural factors such as collectivism and peer influence may further strengthen the relationship between FOMO and purchasing behaviour, as individuals are more likely to be influenced by social approval and group norms.

Overall, the literature suggests that impulsive buying behaviour is influenced by a combination of emotional, social, and situational factors. Fear of Missing Out, driven by social comparison and digital engagement, appears to act as a significant psychological trigger that increases the likelihood of impulsive purchasing. However, there remains a need for more research focusing specifically on young adults in the Indian context, which the present study aims to address.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 *Research Design*

The present study adopted a quantitative research approach with a correlational design to examine the relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and impulse buying behaviour among young adults. A correlational design was considered appropriate as the study aimed to identify the nature and strength of the relationship between the two variables without manipulating them. This design helps in understanding how changes in one variable are associated with changes in another variable in a natural setting.

3.2 *Participants*

The sample of the study consisted of 150 young adults aged between 18 and 24 years. Both male and female participants were included in the study. The participants were selected using a convenience sampling method, which involved selecting individuals who were easily accessible and willing to participate.

The participants primarily included college students and young individuals who are active users of social media and engage in online shopping. This age group was selected because young adults are more exposed to digital environments and are more likely to experience Fear of Missing Out as well as engage in impulsive buying behaviour.

3.3 *Inclusion Criteria*

The following criteria were used for selecting participants in the study:

- Individuals aged between 18 and 24 years
- Individuals who are active users of social media platforms
- Individuals who have prior experience of online shopping
- Individuals who willingly agreed to participate in the study

3.4 *Exclusion Criteria*

The following criteria were used to exclude participants from the study:

- Individuals below 18 years and above 24 years
- Individuals who are not active on social media
- Individuals who do not engage in online shopping
- Individuals who did not complete the questionnaire properly

3.5 *Variables*

The present study included the following variables:

Independent Variable: Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

Dependent Variable: Impulse Buying Behaviour

Fear of Missing Out refers to the anxiety that others may be experiencing rewarding events without one's participation, whereas impulse buying behaviour refers to spontaneous and unplanned purchasing decisions made without prior consideration.

3.6 ***Measures***

The study made use of standardized psychological scales to measure the variables.

Fear of Missing Out Scale

Fear of Missing Out was measured using the scale developed by Przybylski et al. (2013). The scale consists of 10 items that assess the extent to which individuals experience feelings of missing out on rewarding experiences. The items focus on aspects such as social comparison, need for connection, and emotional discomfort. Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not at all true of me) to 5 (Extremely true of me). Higher scores indicate higher levels of Fear of Missing Out.

Impulse Buying Tendency Scale

Impulse buying behaviour was measured using the Impulse Buying Tendency Scale developed by Rook and Fisher (1995). The scale consists of 9 items that assess spontaneous purchasing tendencies and emotional triggers associated with buying behaviour. Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Higher scores indicate a greater tendency toward impulsive buying behaviour.

3.7 ***Data Analysis***

The collected data were analysed using statistical methods. Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were calculated to understand the general trends of the variables.

Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was used to examine the relationship between Fear of Missing Out and impulse buying behaviour. This statistical technique helps in determining the strength and direction of the relationship between the two variables.

The level of significance was set at 0.01 level to determine whether the results obtained were statistically significant.

4. Resources and Procedure

4.1 ***Consent***

Prior to the commencement of the study, informed consent was obtained from all participants. They were clearly informed about the purpose and nature of the research.

Participants were assured that their participation was completely voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point without any consequences.

4.2 ***Data Collection***

Data for the present study were collected using an online questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of two standardized scales, namely the Fear of Missing Out Scale and the Impulse Buying Tendency Scale, along with basic demographic details such as age and gender.

The questionnaire was distributed through online platforms such as social media, making it easily accessible to the target population. Participants were requested to respond honestly and carefully based on their personal experiences. The data collection process was conducted over a period of time until the required number of responses was obtained.

Incomplete or inconsistent responses were excluded from the study to maintain the accuracy and reliability of the data. A total of 150 valid responses were included in the final analysis.

4.3 ***Scoring***

The responses obtained from the participants were scored according to the guidelines provided for each standardized scale. For the Fear of Missing Out Scale, responses were scored on a 5point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not at all true of me) to 5 (Extremely true of me). The total score was calculated by summing the responses, with higher scores indicating higher levels of Fear of Missing Out.

Similarly, the Impulse Buying Tendency Scale was scored using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The total score was obtained by summing all the item responses, where higher scores indicated a greater tendency toward impulsive buying behaviour.

The scores obtained were then used for statistical analysis to examine the relationship between the two variables.

4.4 ***Ethical Considerations***

The study adhered to standard ethical guidelines in psychological research. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were not subjected to any form of harm or discomfort during the study.

Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were strictly maintained throughout the research process. No personal information was collected that could identify the participants. The data collected were used solely for academic and research purposes.

5. Results

The data collected from 150 participants were analysed using descriptive statistics and Pearson's Product Moment Correlation. The results obtained are presented below in the form of tables along with their interpretations.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics of Fear of Missing Out and Impulse Buying Behaviour*

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Fear Of Missing Out	31.48	6.72
Impulse Buying Behaviour	28.36	5.89

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the two variables under study, namely Fear of Missing Out and impulse buying behaviour. The mean score for Fear of Missing Out is 31.48, with a standard deviation of 6.72. This indicates that the participants, on average, experience a moderate level of FOMO.

The relatively higher standard deviation suggests that there is some variation in the responses, meaning that while some individuals experience higher levels of FOMO, others experience it at a lower level.

Similarly, the mean score for impulse buying behaviour is 28.36, with a standard deviation of 5.89. This suggests that participants also exhibit a moderate tendency toward impulsive buying behaviour. The variation in scores indicates that while some individuals tend to make spontaneous purchases frequently, others show relatively controlled buying behaviour.

The descriptive statistics provide an overall understanding of how the participants scored on both variables. It can be observed that both Fear of Missing Out and impulse buying behaviour are present at moderate levels among young adults.

This indicates that these psychological tendencies are quite common in this age group, especially in the context of increasing digital exposure and online shopping behaviour.

Table 2. *Correlation between Fear of Missing Out and Impulse Buying Behaviour*

Variable	FOMO	Impulse Buying Behaviour
FOMO	1	0.46
Impulse Buying Behaviour	0.46	1

$p < .01$

Table 2 presents the correlation between Fear of Missing Out and impulse buying behaviour. The correlation coefficient obtained is $r = .46$, which indicates a moderate positive relationship between the two variables. This means that as the level of Fear of Missing Out increases, the tendency to engage in impulse buying behaviour also increases among young adults.

The obtained p-value is less than 0.01, which indicates that the relationship between the variables is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. This suggests that the results are not due to chance and that there is a meaningful association between Fear of Missing Out and impulse buying behaviour.

The positive direction of the relationship indicates that individuals who experience higher levels of FOMO are more likely to make spontaneous and unplanned purchasing decisions. This can be explained by the emotional urgency and anxiety associated with FOMO, which may reduce rational decision-making and increase susceptibility to external influences such as advertisements, discounts, and social media trends.

Furthermore, individuals experiencing higher levels of FOMO may feel a stronger need to stay socially connected and updated, which can lead them to engage in behaviours that provide immediate satisfaction. Impulse buying can serve as a quick way to reduce feelings of missing out and enhance one’s sense of belonging or social relevance.

The findings of the study clearly indicate that Fear of Missing Out plays a significant role in influencing impulse buying behaviour among young adults. The results support the assumption that psychological factors, particularly those related to emotions and social comparison, have a strong impact on consumer behaviour in digital environments.

Overall, the results of the study suggest that both variables are positively related and that an increase in Fear of Missing Out is associated with an increase in impulsive buying tendencies. These findings provide important insights into how emotional and social factors influence purchasing behaviour among young adults in the present digital age.

6. Discussion

The findings of the study revealed a moderate positive relationship between the two variables, indicating that individuals who experience higher levels of FOMO are more likely to engage in impulsive buying behaviour.

The results suggest that Fear of Missing Out plays a significant role in influencing the purchasing decisions of young adults. Individuals who constantly feel the need to stay updated with social trends and experiences may develop a sense of urgency, which leads them to make quick and unplanned decisions. This sense of urgency reduces the time available for rational thinking and increases the likelihood of impulsive behaviour.

One possible explanation for this relationship is the role of emotional factors in decisionmaking. FOMO is often associated with feelings of anxiety, insecurity, and the desire for social inclusion. These emotional states can weaken self-control and increase the tendency to act impulsively. When individuals come across online advertisements, discounts, or trending products, they may feel compelled to purchase them immediately in order to avoid missing out.

Another important factor that contributes to this relationship is social comparison. Young adults frequently compare their lives with those of others, especially on social media platforms. When they perceive that others are having better experiences or owning desirable products, they may feel a sense of inadequacy or exclusion. To reduce these feelings, they may engage in impulsive buying behaviour as a way to match the perceived standards of others.

The findings of the study are consistent with the idea that digital environments play a crucial role in shaping consumer behaviour. Online platforms are designed to capture attention and encourage immediate action through features such as limited time offers, flash sales, and personalized recommendations. These features create a sense of urgency and scarcity, which further intensifies the impact of FOMO on purchasing behaviour.

Moreover, the constant exposure to online content increases the likelihood of experiencing FOMO. Notifications, updates, and advertisements continuously remind individuals of what they might be missing, making it difficult for them to disengage from digital platforms. This continuous exposure not only reinforces feelings of FOMO but also provides frequent opportunities for impulsive buying.

The developmental stage of young adulthood also plays a significant role in this relationship. During this period, individuals are more concerned about their social identity and acceptance. They are more likely to seek validation from peers and are highly influenced by social norms and trends. This makes them more vulnerable to the effects of FOMO and more likely to engage in behaviours that enhance their social image, including impulsive purchasing.

In addition, the availability of digital payment methods and easy access to online shopping platforms have made it more convenient for individuals to make purchases. The reduced effort required to complete a transaction increases the likelihood of impulsive buying behaviour.

When combined with the emotional pressure created by FOMO, this convenience further strengthens the relationship between the two variables.

The results of the study also highlight the importance of understanding the psychological factors that influence consumer behaviour. While impulse buying may provide temporary satisfaction, it may also lead to negative consequences such as financial stress, regret, and reduced self-control. Therefore, it is important for individuals to develop awareness regarding their purchasing behaviour and the factors that influence it.

The study has certain implications for both individuals and society. For individuals, it emphasizes the need to practice mindful consumption and develop strategies to manage emotional triggers.

For example, taking time to evaluate the necessity of a purchase or limiting exposure to social media may help reduce impulsive buying tendencies.

From a broader perspective, the findings suggest that marketers and digital platforms play a significant role in influencing consumer behaviour. While marketing strategies are designed to increase sales, it is important to consider their impact on consumers' psychological wellbeing. Ethical marketing practices that promote informed decision-making may help create a more balanced consumer environment.

Despite its contributions, the study has certain limitations. The use of convenience sampling may limit the generalizability of the findings to a larger population.

Additionally, the study focused only on young adults, and the results may differ for other age groups. Future research can explore these variables in different populations and cultural contexts to gain a more comprehensive understanding.

Overall, the findings of the present study clearly indicate that Fear of Missing Out is an important psychological factor that influences impulse buying behaviour among young adults. The positive relationship between the two variables highlights the role of emotional and social influences in shaping consumer behaviour in the digital age.

7. Conclusion

The findings of the study revealed a significant positive relationship between the two variables, indicating that individuals who experience higher levels of Fear of Missing Out are more likely to engage in impulsive buying behaviour.

The results highlight the important role of emotional and social factors in influencing consumer behaviour in the digital age. The increasing use of social media and online shopping platforms has created an environment where individuals are constantly exposed to information, trends, and opportunities, which can intensify feelings of FOMO. This, in turn, influences their decision-making process and leads to spontaneous and unplanned purchasing behaviour.

The study also emphasizes that young adults are particularly vulnerable to these influences due to their high engagement with digital platforms, desire for social acceptance, and increasing financial independence. The need to stay connected and relevant in a rapidly changing digital environment may lead them to make impulsive decisions without fully considering the consequences.

Although impulse buying may provide temporary satisfaction, it may also result in negative outcomes such as financial strain, regret, and reduced self-control. Therefore, it is important for individuals to develop awareness regarding their purchasing behaviour and adopt more mindful and controlled decision-making strategies.

In conclusion, the present study contributes to a better understanding of the psychological factors that influence consumer behaviour. It highlights the need for greater awareness, self-regulation, and responsible consumption in order to maintain both financial stability and psychological well-being in the modern digital world.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this research paper.

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