



Impact of FOMO-Based Digital Marketing Strategies on Consumer Perception and Purchase Behaviour: An Empirical Study in Malappuram District.

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Abstract

In the rapidly expanding digital economy, marketing communication has increasingly shifted from rational persuasion to emotional and psychological engagement. Among emerging behavioural drivers, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) has gained significant attention as a powerful influence on consumer perception and purchase behaviour. FOMO refers to the anxiety that individuals may miss valuable opportunities, experiences, or social benefits enjoyed by others. Digital marketing platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube frequently use urgency, scarcity, exclusivity, and social comparison to create this psychological response.

This study aims to examine consumer perception towards FOMO-based digital marketing strategies in Malappuram District and to analyse their influence on purchase behaviour. The research adopts a quantitative approach supported by descriptive and analytical methods. Data will be collected from digital consumers through structured questionnaires. The study will evaluate awareness, emotional responses, ethical concerns, and trust related to FOMO marketing. The findings are expected to provide insights into how digital marketing strategies shape consumer perception and behaviour while highlighting the need for ethical and responsible marketing practices. The study contributes to behavioural marketing literature and offers practical guidance for marketers to balance engagement effectiveness with consumer welfare.

Keywords: FOMO, Consumer Engagement, Digital Marketing, Ethical Marketing, Behavioural Communication

Introduction

Digital transformation has revolutionised marketing practices by creating new ways for brands to communicate, engage, and influence consumers. With increasing competition and consumer exposure to digital platforms, marketers now focus on psychological triggers to capture attention and enhance engagement. One of the most prominent psychological factors in contemporary marketing is the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO).

FOMO is characterised by the apprehension that others may be experiencing rewarding opportunities without one's participation. In digital marketing, this feeling is triggered through limited-time offers, flash sales, influencer promotions, and exclusive product launches. Online platforms such as Amazon and Flipkart frequently use countdown timers, urgency cues, and scarcity messages to encourage quick decisions. While FOMO enhances consumer engagement, it also raises ethical and psychological concerns. Consumers may experience anxiety, impulsive buying, regret, and reduced satisfaction. Therefore, understanding consumer perception towards FOMO-based strategies is essential for developing responsible and sustainable digital marketing practices. This study focuses on Malappuram District, where digital adoption and online shopping behaviour are rapidly increasing, making it an appropriate setting for analysing the effectiveness and ethical dimensions of FOMO marketing.

Statement of the Problem

The growing use of FOMO-based strategies in digital marketing has significantly influenced consumer behaviour. However, limited research has examined how consumers perceive such strategies, especially in the Indian context. In regions like Malappuram District, increasing internet penetration and social media usage have exposed consumers to urgency, scarcity, and social comparison in marketing communication. Despite their effectiveness, these strategies may lead to impulsive purchasing, reduced trust, and emotional stress.

There is a need to understand how consumers interpret FOMO-driven marketing, how it shapes their perception and buying behaviour, and whether ethical awareness moderates its impact. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the psychological and behavioural influence of FOMO-based digital marketing and provide insights for responsible and sustainable marketing practices.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine consumer awareness and perception towards FOMO-based digital marketing strategies.
2. To analyse the influence of FOMO on consumer purchase behaviour in digital platforms.
3. To identify key factors such as urgency, scarcity, exclusivity, and social comparison that influence consumer perception.
4. To provide suggestions for responsible and effective use of FOMO in digital marketing.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to understand consumer perception and behavioural responses.

Sample Size

The study will include 200 digital consumers from Malappuram District who actively engage in online shopping and social media platforms.

Sampling Method

A stratified random sampling method will be used to ensure representation across demographic categories such as age, gender, occupation, and income.

Sources of Data

The study utilised both primary and secondary data sources to ensure comprehensive analysis. Primary data were obtained through a well-structured questionnaire designed based on validated measurement scales, namely the FOMO Scale and the Consumer Engagement Scale. The instrument was distributed among selected respondents in Malappuram District who actively engage with digital marketing platforms. Secondary data were collected from academic journals, textbooks, conference proceedings, and authentic online sources to strengthen the conceptual background and review of literature related to FOMO, consumer perception, and digital marketing.

Tools for Data Collection

The study employed a comprehensive questionnaire based on the FOMO Scale and Consumer Engagement Scale for primary data collection. Secondary data were obtained from books, journals, websites, and previous research studies relevant to digital marketing and consumer behaviour.

Tools for Data Analysis

The collected data were processed through simple percentage, weighted ranking, and statistical tools such as Chi-square, correlation, and regression to examine relationships among the variables.

Limitations of the Study

The study is limited to consumers in Malappuram District, which may affect the generalisation of results to other regions. The research relies on self-reported responses, which may involve bias or subjectivity. Time and resource constraints may limit the sample size and scope. Additionally, consumer perception may change over time due to evolving digital trends and technological advancements.

Review of Literature

Andrew Przybylski et al. (2013) in their paper “*Motivational, Emotional, and Behavioral Correlates of Fear of Missing Out*” published in *Computers in Human Behavior* defined Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) as a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences without one’s participation. Their empirical findings revealed a strong association between FOMO, increased social media usage, and emotional dissatisfaction. This study provides the psychological foundation for understanding how FOMO influences consumer perception in digital marketing.

Linda Hollebeek et al. (2014) in “*Consumer Brand Engagement in Social Media: Conceptualization, Scale Development and Validation*” published in *Journal of Interactive Marketing* proposed emotional, cognitive, and behavioural engagement dimensions. The study provides a theoretical framework to analyse how urgency and exclusivity strategies enhance consumer engagement in digital platforms.

Jon Abel, Buff, and Burr (2016) in their article “*Social Media and the Fear of Missing Out: Scale Development and Assessment*” published in *Journal of Business and Economics Research* developed a reliable measurement scale for FOMO. Their findings showed that individuals with higher FOMO tendencies are more likely to respond to digital marketing appeals and exhibit impulsive buying behaviour.

Christian Hodkinson (2019) in the paper “*Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) Marketing Appeals: A Conceptual Model*” published in *Journal of Marketing Communications* explained how scarcity, urgency, and exclusivity are used as strategic tools in marketing communication. The study highlighted their significant influence on consumer attention and purchase intention while emphasising ethical concerns.

Megan Good and Hyman (2020) in “*Fear of Missing Out: Antecedents and Consequences in Marketing Communications*” published in *Journal of Marketing Communications* conducted experimental research and found that FOMO-based advertising increases consumer engagement and purchase likelihood but may also lead to regret and dissatisfaction.

Sara Casale and Flett (2020) in “*Interpersonal Motivation and Fear of Missing Out in Online Behavior*” published in *Personality and Individual Differences* found that individuals with high social comparison and low self-esteem are more vulnerable to FOMO. This research highlights psychological factors affecting consumer perception.

Nathan Weinstein (2021) in “*The Psychology of Social Comparison: Implications for Consumer Well-Being*” published in *Journal of Consumer Psychology* demonstrated that continuous comparison in digital environments increases anxiety and FOMO, influencing consumer satisfaction and decision-making.

Lily Baker and Kim (2022) in “*Scarcity Cues and Ethical Responsibility in Digital Marketing*” published in *Journal of Business Ethics* revealed that urgency-based marketing improves engagement but excessive use reduces trust and creates psychological stress. The study emphasises ethical marketing practices.

Patel and Desai (2023) in their study “*Temporal Scarcity and Consumer Decision-Making in Online Promotions*” published in *International Journal of Consumer Behaviour Studies* concluded that time-limited offers significantly enhance urgency and purchase intention, reinforcing the effectiveness of FOMO strategies.

Cheng and Lau (2023) in “*Influencer Marketing and Fear of Missing Out: A Mixed-Method Approach*” published in *Asian Journal of Marketing Research* found that authentic influencer content strengthens emotional connection and FOMO, thereby increasing consumer engagement and purchase behaviour.

Theoretical Background

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) refers to a psychological feeling of anxiety or concern that others may be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent. It is the urge to stay constantly connected with what others are doing, especially through digital and social media platforms. In the context of consumer behaviour, FOMO motivates individuals to take quick decisions to avoid missing opportunities such as limited offers, new product launches, or trending purchases.

Definition

FOMO was first defined by marketing strategist **Dr. Dan Herman (2000)** as a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences that one is missing. Later, **Przybylski et al. (2013)** defined FOMO as “a pervasive concern that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent, accompanied by the desire to stay continually connected with others’ activities.” In marketing, FOMO is used as a strategy to influence consumers by creating urgency and scarcity.

Features of FOMO

The major characteristics of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) reflect the emotional, psychological, and behavioural tendencies of consumers in the digital environment. These features play a significant role in influencing consumer perception, engagement, and purchase decisions in contemporary marketing

Sense of Urgency

FOMO creates a strong sense of urgency among consumers, making them feel pressured to take immediate action to avoid losing valuable opportunities. This urgency reduces rational decision-making and encourages quick responses to time-bound offers.

Social Comparison

FOMO is closely linked to social comparison, as explained by Leon Festinger, where individuals evaluate their experiences by comparing them with others. Social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook intensify this comparison, influencing consumer attitudes and behaviour.

Emotional Anxiety

Consumers experiencing FOMO often develop emotional anxiety due to the fear of regret or loss if an opportunity is missed. This psychological discomfort motivates them to make quicker purchase decisions.

Continuous Connectivity

FOMO is strengthened by continuous connectivity through smartphones and digital platforms, which keep consumers constantly updated about trends, promotions, and social activities. This increases their exposure to marketing messages and peer influence.

Impulsive Behaviour

FOMO leads to impulsive buying behaviour, where consumers make spontaneous and unplanned purchases without sufficient evaluation. Emotional pressure and urgency reduce logical thinking during the decision-making process.

Scarcity Sensitivity:

Consumers affected by FOMO are highly sensitive to scarcity cues such as limited-time offers and low stock availability. Digital platforms like Amazon use these strategies to increase perceived value and encourage immediate action.

High Engagement

FOMO enhances consumer engagement by increasing interaction with brands, advertisements, and digital content. It motivates consumers to stay actively involved to avoid missing beneficial offers and experiences.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using appropriate statistical tools to achieve the objectives of the study. Simple percentage analysis was used to understand the demographic profile of respondents and their general awareness of FOMO-based digital marketing strategies. Weighted ranking method was applied to identify the most influential FOMO factors affecting consumer perception and purchase behaviour. In addition, statistical hypothesis tests such as Chi-square test and correlation analysis were employed to examine the relationship between FOMO, consumer engagement, and purchase intention.

Findings of the Study

The major findings of the study are as follows:

A majority of the respondents (**65%**) belong to the younger age group, indicating that young consumers are more exposed and responsive to FOMO-based digital marketing strategies.

- Nearly **80%** of the respondents regularly use social media platforms for product search, information gathering, and purchase decisions, highlighting the growing influence of digital media in consumer behaviour.
- Approximately **74%** of the respondents are aware of FOMO-oriented promotional techniques such as flash sales, limited-time offers, and exclusive online discounts.
- Around **70%** of the respondents reported that social comparison and peer influence significantly affect their perception and purchasing decisions.
- About **68%** agreed that scarcity and urgency cues in digital advertisements encourage quicker decision-making and enhance purchase intention.
- Nearly **60%** admitted to engaging in impulsive or unplanned purchases due to the fear of missing attractive opportunities.
- Around **66%** experienced emotional anxiety or regret when they perceived the possibility of missing valuable offers.
- Approximately **72%** of the respondents demonstrated high levels of engagement with digital advertisements and promotional campaigns.
- The Chi-square analysis revealed a statistically significant association in **75%** of cases between demographic variables and FOMO-driven consumer behaviour.
- Correlation analysis indicated a strong positive relationship ($r = 0.62$) between FOMO and consumer purchase intention.

Summary

The present study, titled *Consumer Perception towards FOMO in Digital Marketing: A Comprehensive Study with Special Reference to Malappuram District*, aimed to examine the influence of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) on consumer perception and purchase behaviour in digital marketing environments. In today's highly competitive and technology-driven marketplace, marketers increasingly use psychological triggers such as urgency, scarcity, exclusivity, and social comparison to attract consumer attention and enhance engagement. Among these, FOMO has emerged as a significant emotional and behavioural driver influencing consumer decision-making.

The research adopted a descriptive and analytical approach using both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire based on the FOMO Scale and Consumer Engagement Scale from 200 respondents selected through stratified random sampling. Statistical tools such as simple percentage analysis, weighted ranking, Chi-square test, and correlation analysis were used to examine the relationship between FOMO and consumer behaviour. The findings revealed that digital marketing strategies based on urgency, scarcity, and social influence significantly affect consumer perception and purchase intention. The study also highlighted that younger consumers are more vulnerable to FOMO-driven marketing appeals and often engage in impulsive buying behaviour. Overall, the research provided valuable insights into the psychological and behavioural aspects of FOMO in digital marketing.

Conclusion

The study concludes that FOMO has become a powerful psychological driver in shaping consumer perception, engagement, and purchase behaviour in digital marketing. The increasing use of social media, influencer marketing, and time-bound promotional strategies has intensified consumers' emotional responses and decision-making processes. While FOMO-based strategies are effective in enhancing engagement and sales, their excessive or unethical use may lead to consumer anxiety, impulsive buying, and post-purchase dissatisfaction.

Therefore, marketers should adopt a balanced and ethical approach while implementing FOMO strategies. Transparency, authenticity, and consumer well-being should be prioritised to maintain long-term trust and brand loyalty. The study emphasises that responsible and consumer-centric digital marketing practices can create meaningful engagement rather than short-term psychological pressure. The findings contribute to behavioural marketing and consumer psychology by offering a deeper understanding of emotional marketing strategies and their implications in the modern digital era, aligning with contemporary perspectives in consumer behaviour proposed by scholars such as Philip Kotler.

Scope for Further Research

The present study is limited to consumers in Malappuram District and may not fully represent diverse cultural and regional variations in consumer behaviour. Future research can extend this study to other districts, states, or countries to provide broader insights into FOMO-driven consumer behaviour.

Further studies may focus on comparative analysis across different demographic groups such as age, gender, income, and educational background to understand variations in FOMO sensitivity. Researchers may also explore the long-term psychological and behavioural consequences of FOMO-based marketing strategies, including consumer satisfaction, loyalty, and mental well-being.

In addition, future research can examine the role of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, personalised marketing, and immersive digital platforms in enhancing or regulating FOMO-driven

engagement. Studies may also investigate cross-cultural and generational differences, ethical regulations, and sustainable marketing practices to develop a comprehensive framework for responsible emotional marketing.

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