

5

Assessing the Influence of FOMO on Compulsive Consumer Behaviour: A Study of Self-Regulation as a Psychological Moderator

Dr. Krupa Bhatt*

Faculty of Commerce GLS University, Ahmedabad, Gujarat.

*Corresponding Author: krupa.bhatt@glsuniversity.ac.in

Abstract

The expansion of internet access and digital platforms has brought substantial changes to consumer purchasing patterns. Among the psychological factors shaping these behaviors, compulsive buying and the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) have gained increasing attention. This research investigates the influence of these factors on contemporary consumer decision-making and assesses the degree to which individuals are affected by them. Data were gathered from 109 participants through structured questionnaires and analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The results indicate a growing reliance on the internet in everyday life, significantly impacting how consumers make purchasing decisions. The study also examines the level of awareness regarding mindfulness and conscious shopping habits, as well as individuals' readiness to minimize the adverse effects linked to impulsive, compulsive, and FOMO-driven consumption. FOMO is defined as the anxiety experienced when individuals perceive that others are enjoying rewarding experiences in their absence. This feeling is often fueled by social comparison, regret, or guilt, prompting individuals to engage in similar activities to avoid exclusion. With the rise of social media and digital connectivity, such experiences have become increasingly widespread. Marketers have actively leveraged FOMO in their promotional strategies by employing techniques that evoke urgency, anticipation, and social influence. These approaches include limited-time offers, exclusive deals, and restricted availability, all designed to accelerate consumer decision-making. Digital platforms frequently incorporate features such as flash sales, countdown timers, and real-time availability updates to intensify this effect. Similarly, fashion and e-commerce brands utilize large-scale promotional campaigns with time-bound discounts and stock limitations to encourage immediate purchases. Overall, these strategies significantly contribute to impulsive buying behaviors by creating a heightened sense of urgency and perceived scarcity.

Keywords: Imitative Behaviour, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), Compulsive Buying, Impulsive Purchases, Mindfulness, Mindful Shopping.

Introduction

People's buying habits have always been influenced by comparing themselves with others and following what others do. Even before the rise of the internet, individuals often shaped their choices and lifestyles based on those around them. However, with the rapid growth of the internet and the widespread use of social media, these patterns have become much stronger. In today's digital world, the concept of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) has become highly noticeable and is closely linked to impulsive and excessive buying behaviour. The easy availability of online shopping platforms, along with simple payment methods and quick product searches, has made it even easier for people to make unplanned purchases.

The increasing use of the internet also reflects people's desire to stay constantly updated about others' lives. While this helps in staying connected and informed, it can also create pressure to stay socially active and accepted. As a result, too much time spent on social media can lead to feelings of stress, dissatisfaction, and a strong need for approval, which may negatively affect mental well-being.

Social media has changed the way people communicate, interact, and understand their surroundings. At the same time, the growth of digital technology has been linked to several mental and emotional concerns, with FOMO being one of the most common. FOMO refers to the feeling of worry that others are having enjoyable or rewarding experiences without you. This often creates a strong urge to stay updated and involved in social activities.

Over the past few years, FOMO has become more common, especially among younger people and active social media users. This feeling often pushes individuals to stay involved in trends or activities to avoid feeling left out, which can lead to unnecessary or impulsive purchases. As internet access has expanded to people from different income groups, exposure to others' lifestyles has increased, leading to more comparison and social pressure.

A major feature of FOMO is the frustration people feel when they think they cannot take part in everything at once. This can create anxiety about missing important experiences or opportunities that may not come again. People experiencing FOMO may also feel less confident and try to stay constantly involved in trends to appear active and socially connected.

However, not everyone experiences FOMO in the same way. It tends to be stronger in individuals whose emotional and social needs are not fully satisfied. Younger people are generally more affected, although the level of impact differs from person to person. Many individuals regularly compare their lives with others and feel that others are doing better or enjoying more.

In consumer studies, impulsive and compulsive buying are often seen as negative forms of consumption. In these cases, people buy things not because they

need them, but to reduce boredom, express themselves, or feel entertained. Studies have also shown that negative feelings caused by social media can increase the chances of such behaviour. For example, people who feel ignored or excluded are more likely to make impulsive purchases to feel better.

This study aims to understand how strongly modern consumers are influenced by FOMO and how often it leads to impulsive or excessive buying. It also explores how aware people are of mindful shopping practices and what steps they take to avoid unnecessary spending.

- An analysis of study based on 200 respondents answers shows as follows.

Distribution of participants' daily internet usage, indicating extensive online engagement among respondents.

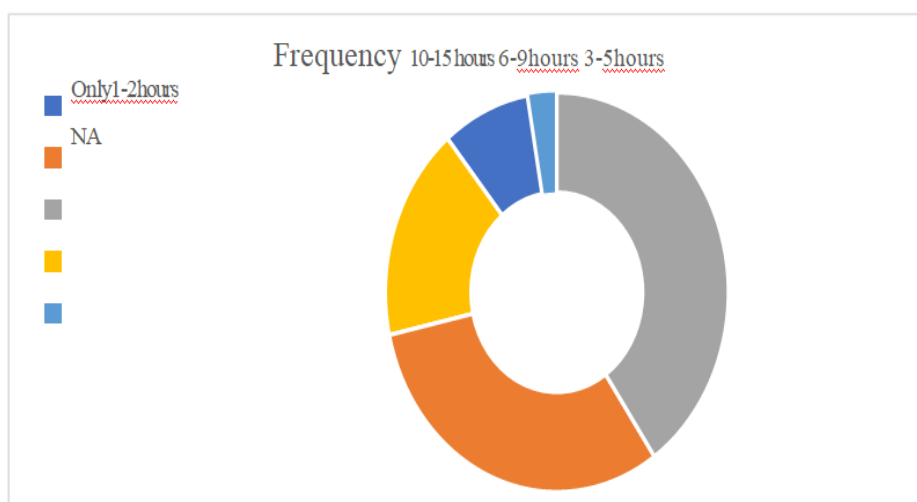


Figure 1: Number of Hours Spent on Internet Browsing

Source: Field Data

The high levels of engagement suggest that the majority of participants are exposed to online marketing campaigns, social comparison cues, and influencer-driven content, all of which may contribute to impulsive and FOMO-driven purchases.

- **Determinants of Buying Behaviour**

Figure 1 illustrates participants' reported determinants of shopping behaviour. While many respondents emphasized need-based purchases, a substantial portion acknowledged that their buying decisions were influenced by trends, peer behaviour, and social media exposure, reflecting impulsive purchasing tendencies.

Comparison between need-driven and trend-driven purchasing, highlighting the prevalence of impulsive consumption patterns.

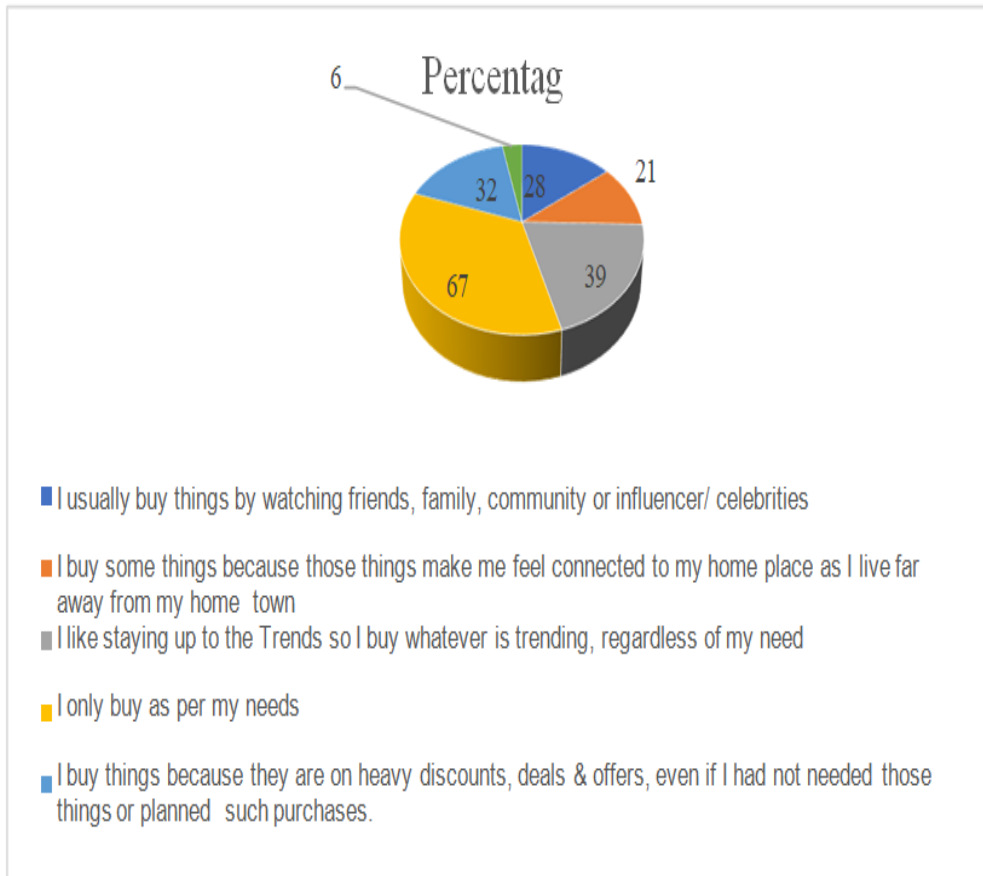


Figure 2: Determinants of Buying Behaviour

Source: Field Data

These findings align with prior research indicating that social and emotional cues significantly affect modern consumer decision-making, often leading to purchases that go beyond actual requirements.

- **Gender Differences in Retail Therapy**

The study examined engagement in retail therapy across genders. As shown in Figure 3, women were more likely than men to engage in retail therapy, using shopping as a coping mechanism or mood enhancer. This suggests that emotional and psychological factors contribute differently to consumption behaviour across gender lines.

Comparison of retail therapy participation, demonstrating higher engagement among female respondents.

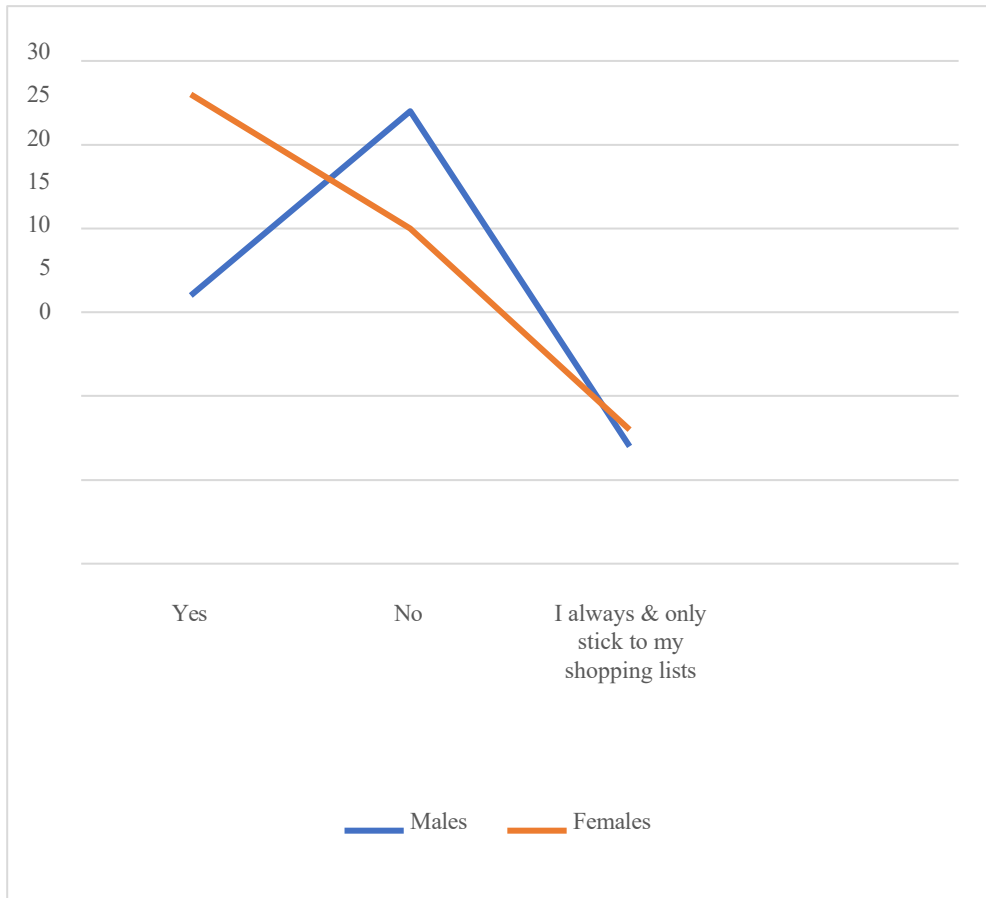


Figure 3: Retail Therapy Trends Among Males and Females

Source: Field Data

The results indicate that marketers targeting female consumers may find greater responsiveness to campaigns that combine emotional appeal with social or trend-based incentives.

- **Awareness of Mindful Spending**

Participants were also assessed on their awareness of mindful spending practices. Figure 4 shows that a notable proportion of respondents reported understanding the concept of focused purchasing and actively attempting to reduce unnecessary expenditures. This indicates a growing consciousness among consumers to counteract the effects of FOMO and compulsive buying.

Percentage of participants familiar with and practicing mindful purchasing, highlighting the potential for sustainable consumption strategies.



Figure 4: Awareness of Mindful Spending

Source: Field Data

The findings suggest that businesses should consider long-term strategies that promote responsible purchasing rather than relying solely on FOMO-based or scarcity-driven marketing tactics.

- **Influence of Key Factors on Purchase Decisions**

To assess the impact of various influences on consumer purchasing behaviour, participants rated the strength of each factor on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Unlikely, 5 = Very Strongly). Figure 4.5 summarizes these results.

Participants' ratings of how strongly various determinants—such as social influence, limited- time offers, trends, and influencer marketing—affect their purchasing decisions.

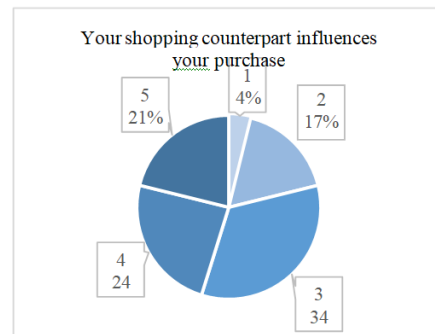
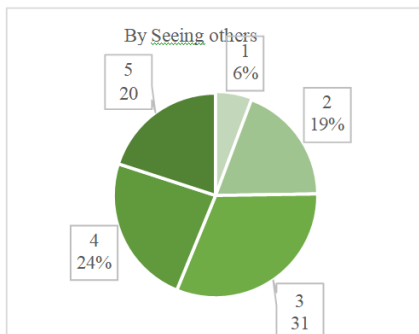
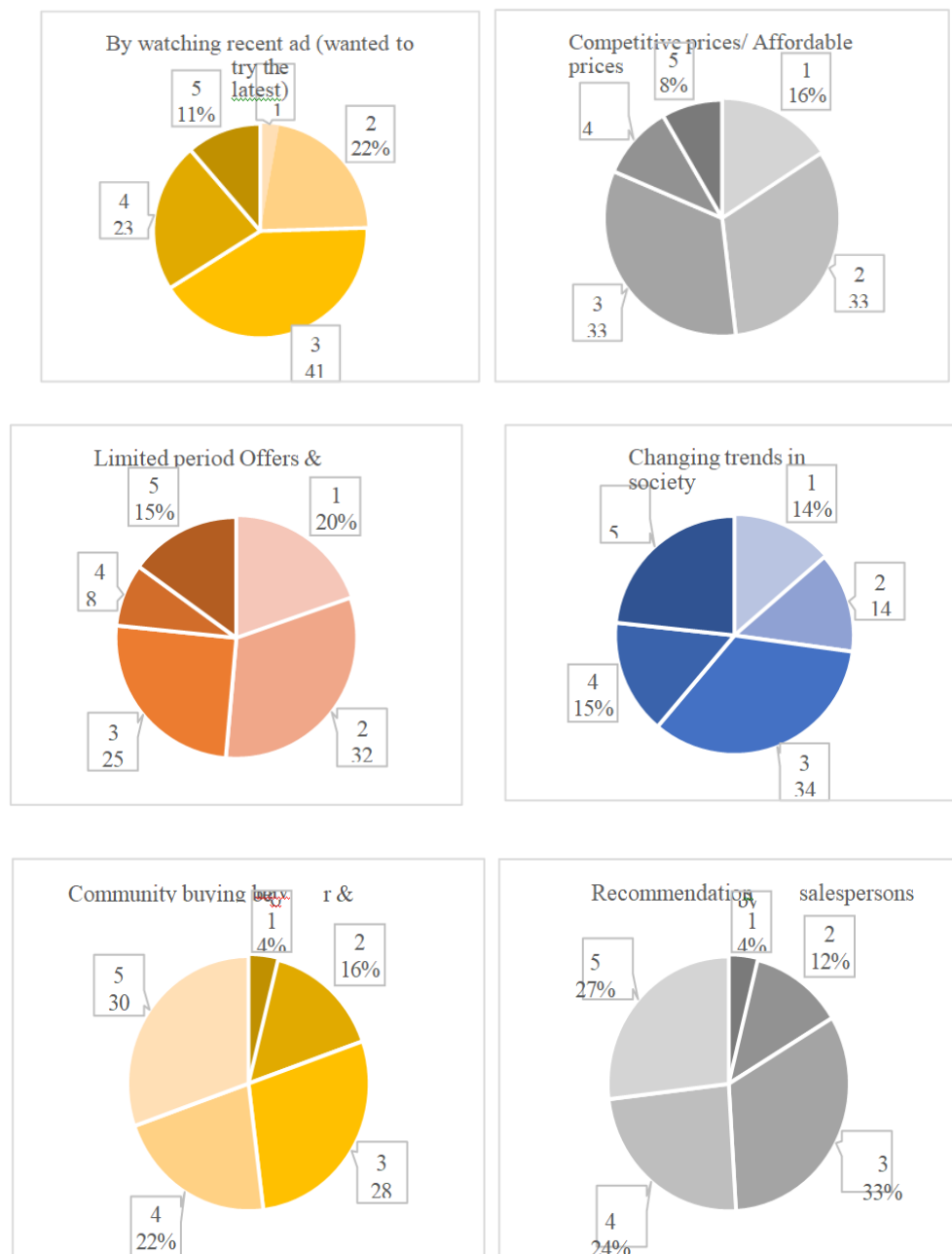
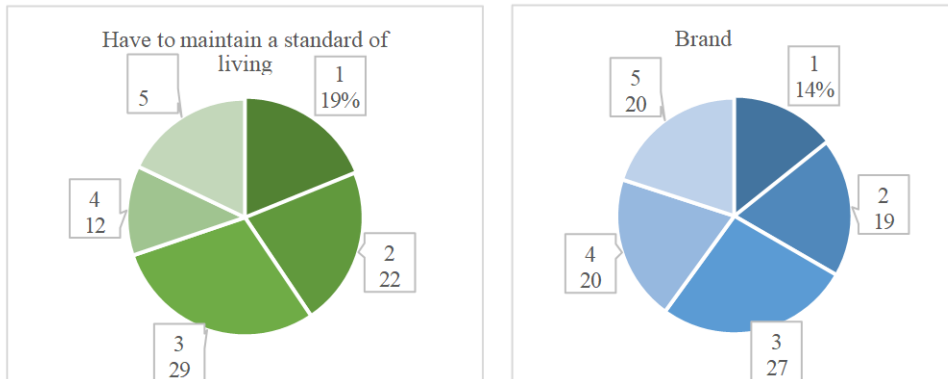


Figure 5: Intensity of Influence of Different Factors on Purchase Behaviour

Source: Field Data

The data indicate that social influence, trends, and time-limited promotions are among the most significant factors driving purchasing behaviour. These results reinforce the notion that psychological and social drivers, including FOMO, play a central role in both impulsive and compulsive buying tendencies.



Discussion and Conclusions

The idea of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is not limited to sectors like fast-moving consumer goods and fashion; it is widely observed across industries such as real estate, commodities, entertainment, and services, as well as in areas like marketing, finance, and human resource management. FOMO acts as a strong psychological influence that often pushes individuals to make quick and emotionally driven financial choices. For instance, investors sometimes follow market trends instead of careful analysis because they fear missing profitable opportunities.

A clear example of this can be seen in the rapid growth of cryptocurrencies, especially Bitcoin during its 2017 boom. Many small investors entered the market due to the fear of missing potential gains, which contributed to a sudden rise in prices. In the real estate sector as well, developers create urgency by promoting increasing property prices and limited availability, encouraging buyers to make quick decisions during housing booms.

FOMO is also used in hiring strategies. Well-known companies like Google and Facebook build attractive work environments by offering flexible schedules, creative projects, and additional benefits. This creates a sense of exclusivity, making these organizations more desirable and increasing competition among job seekers.

The concept of “exclusive access” is another example of how FOMO is used in marketing. Brands such as Nykaa, Pantaloons, and Meena Bazaar offer limited-edition products, special memberships, and invite-only events to create a feeling of uniqueness and urgency. Partnerships between companies, like Uber collaborating with Spotify or Tim Hortons launching limited-edition Timbiebs products, further show how businesses use exclusivity to attract consumers and boost demand.

The findings of this study confirm that FOMO plays an important role in influencing consumer buying behaviour, often leading to impulsive or compulsive purchases. At the same time, the study highlights the growing importance of mindful consumption. Mindful buying means being aware and thoughtful while making purchase decisions, avoiding unnecessary spending, and considering the wider social, ethical, and environmental effects of consumption. This reflects a gradual shift toward more responsible and sustainable consumer habits.

However, the study has certain limitations. The small sample size limits how widely the findings can be applied. The research also does not deeply examine the link between FOMO, emotional stress, and compulsive buying. Additionally, relying on a single questionnaire may have restricted the depth of responses, and future studies using long-term methods could provide more detailed insights.

Overall, the study provides useful understanding of the psychological and social factors influencing modern consumer behaviour, particularly the impact of FOMO and the increasing awareness of mindful shopping practices.

Suggestions

- Future research should include a larger and more diverse sample to improve the reliability of the findings.
- Studies can explore the connection between FOMO, stress, and mental health in greater detail.
- Long-term research methods can be used to better understand changes in consumer behaviour over time.
- Awareness programs can be developed to educate consumers about mindful spending habits.
- Companies should adopt ethical marketing practices that do not excessively exploit consumers' fear or emotions.

References

1. Przybylski, A. K., Murayama, K., Dehaan, C. R., & Gladwell, V. (2013). Motivational, emotional, and behavioral correlates of fear of missing out. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29(4), 1841–1848. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2013.02.014>
2. Alkis, Y., Kadirhan, Z., & Sat, M. (2017). Development and validation of social anxiety scale for social media users. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 72, 296–303. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.03.011>
3. Shoham, A., Gavish, Y., & Segev, S. (2015). A cross-cultural analysis of impulsive and compulsive buying behaviors among Israeli and US consumers: The influence of personal traits and cultural values. *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, 27(3), 187–206.

4. Pham Thi Thuy, Nguyễn Thi Giang Huong, Dao Thi Kim Lan. University of Labour and Social Affairs, Vietnam. The Impact of the Fear of Missing Out on Purchasing Trendy Fashion Products among Young Consumers on Social Media Platforms [International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research and Studies]
5. Nada Morsi, Elisabete Sá, Joaquim Silva. Walking away: Investigating the adverse impact of FOMO appeals on FOMO-prone consumers
6. Sajjad Hussain, Ali Raza, Ali Haider, Muhammad Ishtiaq Ishaq, Qurat-ul-ain Talpur. Fear of missing out and compulsive buying behavior: The moderating role of mindfulness [Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services]
7. Arizal Hamizar, Fitria Karnudu, Dety A. Relubun, Salma Saimima. Consumer impulse buying behavior based on FOMO psychology in the digital era [International Conference of Multidisciplinary Cel: Proceeding1(1), 2024, 134-142]
8. Bobby, Remy Ros. Examining the Effects of Fear of Missing Out FOMO Social Comparison and Materialism on the Online Compulsive Buying of the Addictive Users of Social Networking Sites
9. Sheldon Reid and Casey Clark, Reviewed by Melinda Smith, M.A. The Psychology of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)[Tips for Coping with FOMO]
10. Sonya Collins, Medically Reviewed by Smitha Bhandari, MD. How Do You Deal With FOMO? Shuaib Azam, Retail Therapy: Harness the Power of Shopping to Feel Good!
11. Katherine Chen, Misha Wichita and Kayla Otoo, Chiara Chen. Retail Therapy: The Science Behind Treating Yourself To Happiness
12. *Clinic*, Cleveland Clinic, 20 Jan. 2021. "Why Retail 'Therapy' Makes You Feel Happier." *Cleveland*
13. Sharlene Tan, Medically Reviewed by [Dan Brennan, MD](#). Is Real Therapy for Real?
14. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_learning_theory
15. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S258900422402741X#:~:text=Summary,and%20possibly%20drive%20cultural%20evolution.>
16. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Echopraxia>
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fear_of_missing_out
17. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/373543989_FOMO_related_consumer_behaviour_in_marketing_context_A_systematic_literature_review
18. <https://neuronup.us/psychology/fomo-fear-of-missing-out-on-the-digital-age/>
19. <https://jier.org/index.php/journal/article/view/532/476>
20. <https://socialbuddy.com/fomo-meaning/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CFOMO%20was%20felt%20no%20matter%20how>

21. <https://proceeding.ressi.id/index.php/IConMC/article/view/29/16>
<https://www.meetreflect.com/blog/mindful-shopping/>
<https://www.ourmental.health/mindfulness/transform-your-buying-habits-with-mindful-shopping>
<https://www.multiresearchjournal.com/admin/uploads/archives/archive-1697779065.pdf>
https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/588574/5/05_chapter%201.pdf <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S096969892300259X>
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10630266/>
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0007681324001575>
<https://www.scribd.com/document/408135109>
22. <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/understanding-fomo>
<https://www.helpguide.org/mental-health/wellbeing/fear-of-missing-out-fomo>
<https://mpowerminds.com/blog/the-psychology-of-fomo>
<https://www.webmd.com/mental-health/fomo>
<https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-compulsive-shopping-disorder->
23. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/medicine-and-dentistry/compulsive-buying-disorder> <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-compulsive-shopping-disorder-> <https://solink.com/resources/industry-insights/quotes-about-retail-therapy/>
<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&q=retail+therapy&commit=Search>
24. <https://offers.myhubble.money/blog/retail-therapy-harness-the-power-of-shopping-to-feel-good#:~:text=The%20Benefits%20of%20Retail%20Therapy,-There%20are%20several&text=Shopping%20can%20be%20a%20great%20way%20to%20reward%20yourself%20after,treat%20yourself%20to%20something%20special.>
25. <https://www.scienceholic.org/post/retail-therapy-the-science-behind-treating-yourself-to-happiness>
26. health.clevelandclinic.org/retail-therapy-shopping-compulsion.
27. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/355903110_Shopping_Is_A_Serious_Affair_Alleviating_Negative_Emotions_Through_Retail_Therapy
28. <https://www.webmd.com/balance/features/is-retail-therapy-real>
<https://www.healthline.com/health/retail-therapy>
29. <https://librefomo.com/case-studies-brands-that-mastered-fomo-and-social-proof/> <https://www.iima.ac.in/sites/default/files/2022-11/7.pdf>
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/389400211_Case_FOMO_Copyright
<https://fastercapital.com/topics/case-studies-of-successful-fomo-marketing-campaigns.html>.

