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Fashion Frenzy: How Social Pressures and FOMO Drive Impulse Buying among Youth

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Abstract

The fast fashion industry often targeted youth into taking advantage of their interest in trends and impact of peers and social media. This study examines how consumer behaviour reacts to this phenomenon and social factors prevalent in the fast fashion sector through analysis of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) along with perceived scarcity, peer pressure and purchase intention influences. Sheer social media promotion and marketing tactics intensify these choices. Fast fashion's unsustainable consumption manifests through purchasing behaviours which create financial challenges and environmental burden and physical deprivation. This research is driven by the fact that FOMO has continued to increase its grip on youth purchasing behaviour, especially in instances where financial constraints cut across the social pressures. Its most significant contribution is to provide a psychological explanation of how FOMO connects the indicators of scarcity and peer pressure with impulsive purchase and thus enhances the knowledge of consumer behaviour in the field of fast fashion and provides some practical implications to prevent irresponsible and unsustainable consumption.

Keywords: Fear of Missing Out, Perceived Scarcity, Peer Pressure, Fast Fashion, Impulsive Buying

Introduction

The rapidly evolving fashion “Fast Fashion” industry, which is characterised by its swift changes to trends through a mere click on the “New Arrivals” button, is significantly influenced by the psychological phenomenon of what we call it now as FOMO. Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) historically linked to social interaction and life events, which has now permeated the retail industry, prompting consumers to remain vigilant in their pursuit of the latest and newest fashion trend (Przybylski et al., 2013). The fast fashion production line that focuses on the fast turnover of products has incorporated FOMO as a tool that creates the complexity of shopping as a desire, an action (Hodkinson, 2016).

Marketing strategies such as exclusivity cannot be overlooked since fast fashion builds its products based on exclusivity and temporary buying opportunities, which acts as a need to belong and to have what others wish to have (Byun and Sternquist, 2011). This is further reinforced by social media, where opinion leaders introduce the newest trends that people must follow making fashion statements indicators of one's standing (Zhang et al., 2020). At the same time, this environment constructs a rather negative narrative since FOMO related behaviours result in impulse buying and people buying things they don't need. Within this context, our proposed model, wherein peer pressure, perceived scarcity, and purchase intention are important facilitators of FOMO with regards to fast fashion consumption, is of paramount importance.

The purpose of this study will therefore to determine how these factors independently and jointly make up FOMO with reference to university students who bear the burden of restricted financial resources but are sucked into the importance of fashion in the contemporary society. Through analysing these dynamics, the research aims at identifying processes that lead to impulse buying within this population. Concerning the target population as university students at University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), this study examines the psychological motives of fast fashion consumption. Instead of simply seeking to uncover why consumers buy things, it wants to map how FOMO and other factors get entwined and contribute toward consumer behaviour and cast light on the real-life behind some of the most important commercial processes in recent history. In doing so, it is the intention of this study to provide findings that extend beyond the commercial approach, effectively steering both brands and consumers toward a purposed, responsible, and thus sustainable approach to fashion.

Past Studies

According to Prospect Theory, No Loss Aversion Theory introduced by Kahneman and Tversky (1979), avers that while perceiving gains and losses, losses are more felt than gains of with respect to proportional value. Loss aversion triggers a psychological motivation thus lead to action of not letting go, and this is a clear link to FOMO in doing the same thing with consumers and trends, whereby missing out on a trend is seen as a loss of social or personal relevance.

According to another study` by Cengiz and Şenel (2024), perceived scarcity is important to fast fashion because it causes consumers' FOMO, and limited time promotions usually appeal to consumers' fear of missing an opportunity, as Singh et al., (2024) pointed out. As for consumers involving loss aversion in fast fashion, it means sparing no time in buying fashionable items to avoid the social loss which, in fact, holds great importance. This accords with perceived scarcity strategies in which consumers are quick to purchase products since they see the loss associated with missing the purchase of such products.

In the research of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by Deci & Ryan (1985), suggests that that motivation originates from basic psychological needs to exercise control, competence, and to feel connected with others. According to Przybylski et al. (2013), poor satisfaction in these domains makes the target behaviour more appealing since FOMO serves the purpose of the need to belong (Buglass et al., 2017). Some individuals who engage with fast fashion may be utilising FOMO to have associated, compliance needs for relatedness to

peer pressure that dictate that people must purchase items that are deemed trendy or popular. In fast fashion, necessity for other social standing sees consumers being compelled to make purchase in hope to be relevant socially due to FOMO.

Another research by Laibson (1997), who introduces the Hyperbolic Discounting suggests that people are willing to consume immediately and choose impulsive decision-making since the sources are nearer as compared to benefits far away. In the fast fashion context, these bias leads consumers to seek utility from a popular garment within the shortest time possible leaving out the long-term impacts of consuming more garments than required (Niinimäki et al., 2020). Various and diverse benefits are listed. However, consumers neglect future consequences driven by the always-available nature of fast fashion products and the fear of products getting out of stock. Promotions using scarcity cues such as flash sales, limited time offers and others allure consumers and trigger their rate of hyperbolic discounting.

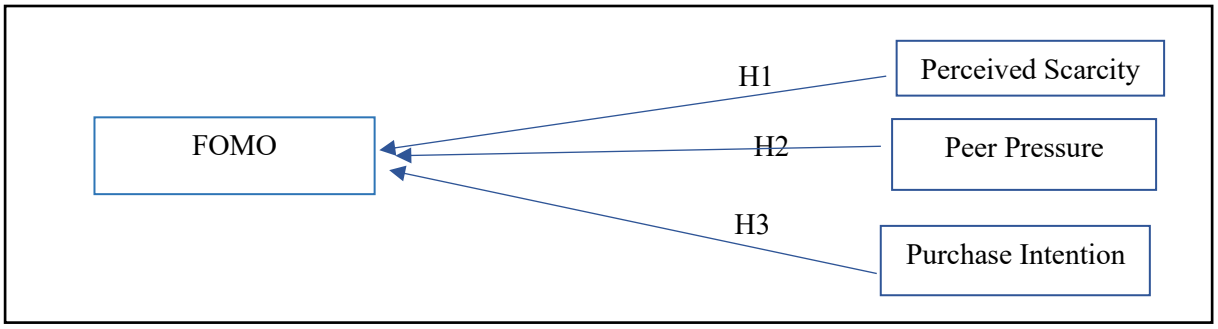

Figure 1. Research Framework of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), Perceived Scarcity and Peer Pressure as Economic Drivers in Fast Fashion

Data and Methodology

Research Design

The result of this research utilised a correlational research approach to investigate how peers, influence shopping decisions and FOMO levels among UNIMAS students. Correlational research helps discover data links through its design structure because it tracks FOMO response changes when independent elements are added (Creswell, 2014). This research gathers basic information from respondents using a structured questionnaire that mixes both number and non-number rating methods.

Youth at UNIMAS make up the target population since they show elevated risk of experiencing FOMO because of their strong social media presence alongside susceptibility to peer influence along with marketing techniques using scarcity (Przybylski et al., 2013). Researchers will implement convenience sampling to gather study participants because this method works well in simple and unbiased research approaches (Etikan, 2016). The survey segments will divide between demographic information and components about FOMO and peer pressures that include perceived product scarcity together with purchasing behaviour assessments through Likert scales (Likert 1932).

A combination of descriptive and inferential analytical techniques will be applied to analyse collected data. Analysis techniques combine descriptive methods with inferential analyses to summarise sociodemographic patterns alongside response patterns and examine

variable relationships. The selected statistical analysis methods enable the study to achieve its research goals by extracting more insights about FOMO demand effects together with the relationships between chosen independent variables.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted using a self-administered online survey to ensure accessibility and efficiency. This study uses a quantitative survey design to examine FOMO, peer pressure, perceived scarcity, and purchasing intentions among Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) students. A convenience sample of 150–200 participants will be recruited. Data is collected through a Google Forms questionnaire with five sections: demographics, FOMO (Przybylski et al., 2013), peer pressure (Huang & Yang, 2013), perceived scarcity (Cialdini, 2009), and purchasing intentions (Kee et al., 2021). All items use a 5-point Likert scale. Data analysis will be conducted with SPSS programme using descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, will be ensured.

Result and Discussion

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1

Respondent Demography

Demographic variable	Description	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	66	43.6
	Female	85	56.3
Race	Malay	36	23.8
	Kenyah	4	2.6
	Chinese	20	13.2
	Indian	17	11.3
	Melanau	9	6.0
	Kelabit	17	11.3
	Bugis	1	0.7
	Iban	10	6.6
	Punjabi	1	0.7
	Bidayuh	36	23.8
Current Educational Level (Active)	Bachelor's Degree	146	96.7
	Master's Degree	5	3.3
Current Year of Study	Year 1	8	5.3
	Year 2	48	32.5
	Year 3	74	49.0
	Year 4	20	13.2
Faculty	FACA	15	9.9
	FEB	56	37.1
	FENG	17	11.3
	FSSH	4	2.6
	FMHS	13	8.6
	FCSHD	10	6.6
	FBE	16	10.6
	FLC	11	7.3

	FCSIT	9	6.0
Source of regular monthly income	Loan	44	29.1
	Allowance	55	36.4
	Part-time	25	16.6
	Scholarship	24	15.9
Monthly income	RM 100 – RM 200	7	4.6
	RM 300 – RM 400	35	23.2
	RM 500 – RM 600	37	24.5
	RM 700 – RM 800	33	21.9
	RM 800 – RM 900	16	10.6
	RM 1000	22	14.7

Multiple Regression Analysis

Reliability Test

The reliability test reveals that the indicators of Peer Pressure, Perceived Scarcity, and Purchase Intention showed a Cronbach alpha value greater than 0.70 as recommended by Hair et al. (2011) category of acceptable to good internal consistency.

Table 2
Reliability Test

		Reliability Statistics	
		Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
IV1	Perceived Scarcity	.932	10
IV2	Peer Pressure	.956	6
IV3	Purchase Intention	.939	9
DV	Fear of Missing Out	.164	10

The Cronbach Alpha value of FOMO however was 0.6859, which is below the acceptable level of 0.70. That value is slightly smaller but is accepted as a good choice in exploratory research, especially in the area of social science studies where small deviations are allowed (Taber, 2018). This diminished reliability was slightly reduced because of the phrasing or format of some of the questions in the FOMO scale or incongruence in the understanding of respondents. Nevertheless, the value is near to the acceptable range that makes the inclusion of FOMO in further analyses worth it.

Pearson Correlation Matrix

In this analysis, we can comprehend the possible ways in which these variables are statistically associated and gain a better understanding of the interactions between the psychological and social factors that stimulate the consumer behaviour in the fast fashion scenario. Through significant correlations, the study will be in a better position to fill the gap of what exactly is most closely related to an increased level of FOMO among university students.

Table 3
Pearson Correlation Analysis

Correlations

			FOMO	Perceived Scarcity	Peer Pressure	Purchase Intention
1.	FOMO	Pearson Correlation	1	.0657**	.0799**	.526**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		< .001	< .001	< .001
2.	Perceived Scarcity	Pearson Correlation	.657**	1	.757**	.706**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		< .001	< .001
3.	Peer Pressure	Pearson Correlation	.799**	.757**	1	0.629**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	< .001	< .001		< .001
4.	Purchase Intention	Pearson Correlation	.526**	.706**	.629**	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	< .001	< .001	< .001	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 3 shows the Pearson correlation coefficient between the key variables in the current study whereby FOMO was positively correlated with the three other independent variables. The results of the analysis show that there is a significant, positive relationship between FOMO and perceived scarcity whereby the correlation coefficient $r = 0.657$ ($p < 0.001$) implies that those who perceive that the product or opportunity is scarce have a higher possibility of reporting a higher level of FOMO. In like manner, the correlation between FOMO and peer pressure is quite high; the result is $r = 0.799$ ($p < 0.001$). This means that peer pressure contributes a lot towards increasing the experience of FOMO possibly because people feel there is the draw to belong or not to miss out on something worthwhile as a group. Moreover, the purchase intention has a strong positive correlation with FOMO ($r = 0.526$, $p < 0.001$), and the higher the purchase intention, the more people are likely to be affected by FOMO. Altogether, these results shed light on the fact that the elevated degree of perceived scarcity, peer pressure, and purchase intention are linked with the higher likelihood of experiencing FOMO in respondents

Normality Test

The result revealed that the significance values cut-off (<0.001) of all the variables was not normally distributed. Nevertheless, the researchers have indicated that this non-normality was not a problem because the sample size was large (n=151) and the multiple linear regression is normally very robust to non-normality violations when one has sufficiently large samples.

Table 4
Normality Test Result

	Tests of Normality
Variables	Shapiro-Wilk Sig.
1. FOMO	<.001
2. Perceived Scarcity	<.001
3. Peer Pressure	<.001
4. Purchase Intention	<.001

According to table 4, all values are less than 0.05 hence indicating that the variables are not normally distributed. Nonetheless, this is because of large sample size (n = 151) and resilience of regression to lack of normality, especially with Likert scale data. The results of all the variables revealed the value of B<0.001 ($p < 0.05$), which implies that the variables are not normally distributed. But, in the cases that require large sample size (n = 151, in this study), the effect of non-normality is usually downplayed to the parametric test that constitutes of robust regression analysis measurement such as multiple linear regression. As such, on the one hand, though it is not normality, the data can be said to be acceptable given the condition off the chart.

Multicollinearity Test
Multicollinearity arises where two or more independent variables are highly correlated and has an effect of lowering the accuracy of the estimates of parameters. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was also checked in the current research to determine the existence of those issues. All the VIF scores are far less than the generally accepted significance mark of 10, hence showing the existence of insignificant multicollinearity between the predictors.

Table 5
Multicollinearity Test Result

	Multicollinearity	
Variables	Tolerance	VIF
Perceived Scarcity	0.339	2.950
Peer Pressure	0.409	2.447
Purchase Intention	0.481	2.078

Dependent Variable: FOMO
The AVF and the Tolerance values were used to check the Multicollinearity as proved in Table 5. These indicators determine that the degree of correlation between independent variables is too high, and this might undermine the validity of the regression estimates. Based on traditional levels, any Tolerance which is less than 0.1 and VIF greater than 10 is a severe instance of multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2010). Here all the predicted variables had VIF < 3 and all Tolerances > 0.1, and thus we can say that that there are no concerns of multicollinearity. Perceived Scarcity demonstrated Tolerance (= 0.339), VIF (= 2.950), Peer pressure

demonstrated Tolerance (= 0.409) with VIF (= 2.447), and Purchase Intention demonstrated Tolerance (=.481) with VIF (= 2.078). These findings affirm that no single independent variable is redundant in the regression model to the other; there is no much redundancy and overlap. Therefore, the assumption of there being no multicollinearity was adequately addressed thus guaranteeing the integrity of the regression coefficients and hence the overall validity of the regression analysis.

Conclusion

This paper examined the influence of the combinations of psychological and social factors including Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), perceived scarcity and peer pressure on purchase intention to fast fashion products by university students. Findings show that FOMO has a significantly and positively interrelationship with the three independent variables, out of which peer pressure is the best predictor. In turn, the results support the idea that students at the university age, living in the environments of the peer pressure, and being active users of social media outlets, are highly vulnerable to the effects of emotion and social stimuli in the purchasing process. The analyses also demonstrated that FOMO mediates the mechanisms by which scarcity and peer pressure leads to impulsive buying behaviours. A test of descriptive statistics presented moderate to high mean scores of FOMO, peer pressure, and purchase intention, and that perceived scarcity had a slightly less significant but still significant mean variance. The conceptual model has been proved by the multiple regression analysis with the R squared value of 0.651, so over 65 percent of the variation presented by FOMO is explained by the combined effects of these variables. These findings are concurring with the theoretical topics including the Self-Determination Theory, the Loss Aversion Theory, the Veblen Goods Theory, the Hyperbolic Discounting Theory, and reflect the way that the psychological requirements and behavioural biases are misused in the marketing approaches of fast fashion to encourage consumption. All the findings together favour the claim stating that the reason why university students buy fast fashion is not just rooted in style preference or affordability, it is much more profound in psychological and social terms, especially FOMO.

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