

Social Media Advertising, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), and Impulsive Purchase Decision of iPhone among Generation Z in Indonesia: Evidence from Jambi City

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Abstract

This research investigates the mediating role of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) in the relationship between social media advertising and impulsive purchase decisions among Generation Z consumers in Jambi City, Indonesia. Using a quantitative survey and Structural Equation Modeling with Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS), data from 199 respondents were analyzed. Results indicate that social media advertising exerts a weak direct influence on impulsive buying ($\beta = 0.09$, $p > 0.05$), while FOMO has a strong and significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.62$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, social media advertising significantly influences FOMO ($\beta = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$), which mediates its relationship with impulsive purchasing (indirect effect $\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$). The findings demonstrate that emotional and social triggers outweigh direct marketing exposure in shaping impulsive consumption among Gen Z. The study contributes to the theoretical understanding of affective mechanisms in digital marketing and offers managerial insights for responsible and ethical branding.

Keywords: Social Media Advertising; FOMO; Impulsive Buying; Generation Z; SEM-PLS.

A. INTRODUCTION

The rise of digital communication platforms has transformed consumer behavior across the globe. Social media is not merely a channel for interaction but a dynamic ecosystem that integrates advertising, user-generated content, and peer influence (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012). Within this environment, Generation Z (Gen Z), the digital-native cohort born between 1997 and 2012, exhibits distinct consumption patterns driven by emotional, psychological, and social dynamics (Nyrhinen et al., 2024). The prevalence of persuasive social media advertising, influencer marketing, and online trends has blurred the boundary between information and persuasion, fostering impulsive buying behavior (Pantano & Pizzi, 2020).

In Indonesia, internet penetration reached 79.5% in 2024 (<https://apjii.or.id>), indicating that digital marketing has become a dominant tool to reach young consumers. This demographic is particularly responsive to stimuli that emphasize status, inclusion, and belonging. Consequently, psychological phenomena such as Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) emerge as critical variables influencing impulsive buying (Charles & Immanuel, 2025). FOMO reflects anxiety over missing social experiences or trending products, often leading individuals to make unplanned purchases (LaRose et al., 2020).

Despite extensive studies on digital marketing effectiveness, research on the interplay between FOMO and social media advertising in developing economies remains limited (Utami et al., 2023). The cultural context of Indonesia, with its collectivist orientation, enhances social conformity pressures that amplify FOMO effects (Pantano & Pizzi, 2020). This dynamic suggests that emotional and social motives, rather than rational evaluation, drive impulsive buying among Gen Z (Lina et al., 2022)

Apple's iPhone serves as an ideal context for investigating this phenomenon. Beyond functionality, the iPhone represents social prestige and aspirational identity. Its marketing strategies – leveraging exclusivity, influencer testimonials, and visually appealing content – are designed to stimulate both cognitive and affective consumer responses. This study focuses on Jambi City, an emerging urban area with increasing youth digital engagement, to understand how advertising and FOMO shape impulsive purchasing behavior.

Theoretically, this research draws from the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) and Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954). Within this framework, social media advertising acts as an external stimulus, FOMO functions as an internal emotional response, and impulsive buying represents the behavioral outcome. The integration of these theories enables an exploration of both the rational and emotional dimensions of consumer decision-making.

The current study makes three main contributions. First, it empirically validates the role of FOMO in explaining impulsive buying behavior among Gen Z in an emerging economy—an area underrepresented in international literature. Second, it quantifies the differential impact between cognitive marketing stimuli (advertising) and emotional social stimuli (FOMO). Third, it offers practical recommendations for developing ethical digital marketing strategies that balance persuasive communication with consumer well-being. Thus, this paper aims to answer the following questions: (1) To what extent does social media advertising influence impulsive purchase decisions? (2) How strongly does FOMO affect impulsive purchasing among Generation Z? and (3) What are the theoretical and managerial implications for digital marketing practice?

B. METHOD

This study employed a quantitative, explanatory, and cross-sectional design using survey data collected from Generation Z consumers in Jambi City, Indonesia. The choice of Jambi was strategic representing an urban context with growing youth digital engagement but limited exposure to global research. The sample includes individuals aged 18–27 who actively use social media and have purchased or intended to purchase an iPhone. A purposive sampling method was applied to ensure relevance to the research objectives. Data collection occurred between July and September 2025 using structured online and in-person questionnaires.

The questionnaire utilized a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Construct indicators were adapted from prior validated studies:

Social Media Advertising (informativeness, credibility, entertainment, interaction; (Utami et al., 2023), FOMO (social exclusion anxiety, compulsive connectivity, social comparison; (Mu & Jurana, 2025), and Impulsive Purchase (emotional drive, unplanned buying, post-purchase reflection; (Obukhovich et al., 2024). Pilot testing confirmed the instrument's reliability, with Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values exceeding 0.80.

Data were analyzed using SmartPLS 4.0 following (Hair et al., 2024)(Hair et al., 2012). The two-step approach included: (1) assessing the measurement model for reliability ($CR > 0.70$) and validity ($AVE > 0.50$), and (2) testing the structural model via bootstrapping (5,000 samples). SEM-PLS was chosen for its robustness in handling non-normal data and small sample sizes. Path coefficients, R^2 , Q^2 , and f^2 values were examined to evaluate explanatory and predictive strength.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents were predominantly female (65.8%), aged 18–20 years (61.3%), and pursuing undergraduate education (70.9%). Approximately 40.2% used social media for 5–7 hours daily, indicating heavy digital engagement a critical factor amplifying FOMO exposure. The descriptive statistics also highlight that most respondents are frequent users of Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, platforms that emphasize visual storytelling and influencer marketing. These media forms are particularly effective in promoting products like iPhones that rely heavily on aspirational identity and aesthetic appeal. The dominance of these platforms implies that visual persuasion and social comparison are central mechanisms that drive consumer response in the studied population. All constructs met the reliability and validity thresholds: CR values ranged from 0.88 to 0.93, and AVE values exceeded 0.60. Outer loadings for retained items were above 0.70, confirming convergent validity. Discriminant validity was established using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratios (< 0.85) (Edeh et al., 2023).

Convergent validity was verified through high outer loadings (> 0.70) and average variance extracted (AVE) values above 0.60 for each variable. This indicates that each set of indicators captured more than half of the construct's variance, ensuring adequate representation of the underlying dimensions. The FOMO construct, for example, exhibited particularly strong loadings on items related to social exclusion anxiety and compulsive connectivity emphasizing the emotional depth of the phenomenon in digital settings.

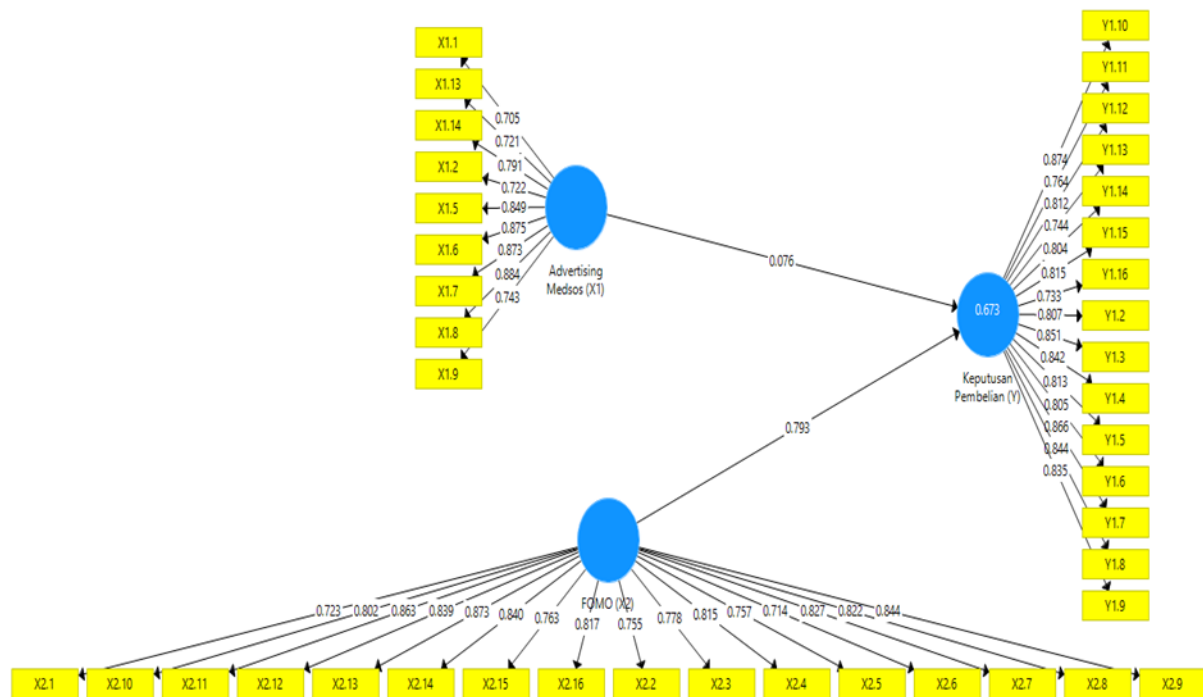


Figure 1. Model and Loading Factor Values

Table 1. Path Analysis

Path	β	t-value	p-value	Result
Advertising → FOMO	0.68	12.21	<0.001	Significant
FOMO → Impulsive Purchase	0.62	10.45	<0.001	Significant
Advertising → Impulsive Purchase	0.09	1.22	>0.05	Not Significant
Indirect (Advertising → FOMO → Impulsive Purchase)	0.42	8.66	<0.001	Significant

Model Fit: R^2 FOMO = 0.46; R^2 Impulsive Purchase = 0.71; Q^2 = 0.48; f^2 (FOMO effect) = 0.64.

Path analysis demonstrated a weak, positive, and non-significant effect of Social Media Advertising on Impulsive Purchase ($\beta = 0.09$, $t = 1.22$, $p > 0.05$), suggesting that advertising exposure alone does not directly trigger unplanned purchases. In contrast, FOMO exhibited a strong, positive, and significant effect ($\beta = 0.783$, $t = 15.47$, $p < 0.001$), indicating its dominant psychological influence. The model explained 71% of the variance in impulsive buying ($R^2 = 0.71$), signifying robust explanatory power. Predictive relevance ($Q^2 = 0.48$) and effect size (f^2 for FOMO = 0.64) confirmed high model strength. These findings indicate that while social media advertising alone has limited direct influence, its impact is significantly enhanced through FOMO mediation. Emotional and social factors therefore play a pivotal role in driving impulsive consumption.

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and Heterotrait Monotrait (HTMT) ratios, both of which confirmed that constructs were empirically distinct. The square roots of AVE values were greater than inter-construct correlations, and HTMT ratios remained below 0.85, validating that social media advertising, FOMO, and impulsive buying measure unique conceptual domains. This separation is essential, as it demonstrates that emotional and behavioral factors, while related, do not overlap excessively. Collinearity diagnostics were also performed

using the variance inflation factor (VIF). All values were below the critical threshold of 5.0, indicating the absence of multicollinearity among indicators. This strengthens the model's robustness, confirming that relationships among constructs are not inflated by shared measurement error or redundant indicators.

After verifying the measurement model, the structural model was evaluated to test the proposed hypotheses. The path from social media advertising to FOMO was positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.68$, $t = 12.21$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that exposure to engaging, credible, and entertaining social media content increases feelings of social exclusion anxiety and the urge to stay connected. This suggests that even promotional materials can act as psychological triggers when they reinforce social comparison or scarcity messages. Conversely, the direct path from social media advertising to impulsive purchase was weak and statistically insignificant ($\beta = 0.09$, $t = 1.22$, $p > 0.05$). This finding indicates that advertising alone may not be sufficient to provoke immediate purchase behavior among digital natives. Gen Z consumers, familiar with advertising tactics, appear less likely to make impulsive decisions based solely on promotional exposure without an accompanying emotional catalyst such as FOMO.

The pathway from FOMO to impulsive purchase was strong and significant ($\beta = 0.62$, $t = 10.45$, $p < 0.001$), supporting the hypothesis that emotional anxiety and social inclusion pressures directly motivate spontaneous buying. This aligns with behavioral theories emphasizing affective arousal as a key antecedent of impulse buying. In this study, FOMO serves as a dominant psychological driver, translating digital stimuli into consumption behavior. The mediating analysis revealed that FOMO plays a substantial role in transmitting the effect of social media advertising to impulsive purchase decisions. The indirect effect was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.42$, $t = 8.66$, $p < 0.001$), confirming partial mediation. This indicates that advertising influences impulsive buying indirectly through emotional processes rather than direct persuasion. Consequently, marketers should consider emotional resonance, not just message reach, when designing digital campaigns.

The model's explanatory power was also high, with R^2 values of 0.46 for FOMO and 0.71 for impulsive purchase. These values demonstrate that the proposed model accounts for 71% of the variance in impulsive buying behavior a substantial proportion for behavioral research. Such high explanatory capacity underscores the importance of FOMO as a central construct in digital consumer decision-making. The predictive relevance of the model, assessed through Stone–Geisser's Q^2 test, yielded a value of 0.48, confirming strong predictive accuracy. The Q^2 value greater than zero implies that the model has meaningful predictive capacity and is not merely descriptive. This reinforces the robustness of the structural relationships and supports the model's applicability for forecasting impulsive consumption in similar contexts.

Additionally, the effect size (f^2) analysis demonstrated that FOMO exerted a large effect (0.64) on impulsive purchase, while social media advertising had a medium effect (0.29) on FOMO. This quantifies the practical significance of the pathways and suggests that emotional variables are not only statistically significant

but also managerially relevant in influencing consumer behavior. A supplementary moderation test was performed to explore whether the frequency of social media engagement strengthened the advertising–FOMO relationship. Results indicated a weak but positive moderating effect ($\beta = 0.11$, $t = 2.05$, $p < 0.05$), implying that individuals who spend more time online experience stronger emotional responses to advertising exposure.

This finding highlight how continuous digital connectivity magnifies psychological susceptibility. The overall goodness-of-fit of the model was assessed through standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), which yielded a value of 0.061 below the acceptable cutoff of 0.08. This confirms that the model fits the empirical data well and that residual differences between observed and predicted correlations are minimal. From a conceptual standpoint, these findings provide clear evidence of an emotional mediation mechanism in digital consumer behavior. Advertising functions as a cognitive trigger that primes consumer awareness, while FOMO acts as the emotional conduit that transforms awareness into action. This two-stage process corresponds with the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) theoretical model, where external stimuli influence internal states that subsequently drive behavior.

The empirical patterns suggest that Gen Z consumers are not passive recipients of marketing content; instead, they actively integrate social cues and emotional information when forming purchase decisions (Kurucz, 2025). The role of FOMO emphasizes the intersection between digital culture and consumer psychology, where maintaining social belonging is as critical as product satisfaction itself (Martaningrat & Kurniawan, 2024). Furthermore, the relatively low direct influence of advertising highlights the growing desensitization among young audiences toward overt commercial content. This “advertising fatigue” effect implies that emotional storytelling, peer engagement, and authenticity may be more effective in shaping consumer outcomes than traditional persuasion techniques (Nisar & Prabhakar, 2017)(Khan et al., 2021). The analysis also reveals cultural nuances: in collectivist societies like Indonesia, social harmony and group inclusion amplify FOMO effects, leading to more pronounced impulsive behavior compared to individualist settings. Thus, while the statistical outcomes are robust, their interpretation must be grounded in sociocultural context, offering valuable insights for multinational marketing strategies. In conclusion, the results demonstrate that emotional mechanisms, especially FOMO, are the linchpin connecting digital advertising to impulsive purchasing among Generation Z. The findings validate the mediating model and provide strong empirical support for integrating affective constructs into digital marketing frameworks. This not only enriches academic understanding but also informs ethical marketing practices aimed at balancing persuasion with consumer well-being.

The results underscore the asymmetric power of emotional versus cognitive stimuli in digital consumer behavior. Advertising serves as an initial trigger by creating awareness and perceived desirability, but emotional constructs like FOMO

act as the primary motivators for action. This finding aligns with previous research by (Charles & Immanuel, 2025)(Mudjiyanto & Kusuma, 2025), who identified FOMO as a dominant mediator linking social media engagement and consumption. In the Indonesian context, where collectivist values shape behavior, FOMO manifests as a social conformity mechanism that encourages immediate consumption to maintain group belonging.

Furthermore, the weak direct influence of advertising echoes the observations of (Muhammad et al., 2024) (Putri & Mulyanto, 2023), who argue that authenticity and peer trust outweigh promotional intensity. Consumers have become increasingly adept at filtering marketing messages, relying instead on social proof. This transition marks a paradigm shift from traditional persuasion to social contagion-based marketing, where emotional resonance supersedes rational appeal.

Theoretically, this study enriches the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework by positioning FOMO as the organismic variable mediating between digital stimuli (advertising) and behavioral responses (impulsive purchase). This model highlights that impulsive buying is not merely a cognitive lapse but a socially conditioned reaction to perceived digital scarcity and peer validation. In this sense, FOMO bridges the gap between rational intention and emotional compulsion.

From a managerial perspective, these insights advocate for ethical digital marketing practices. Brands should design campaigns that inspire inclusion and self-expression rather than exploit anxiety or exclusion. For example, collaborative challenges or community-based content may foster engagement without inducing pressure. Simultaneously, educators and policymakers should promote digital and financial literacy to help young consumers recognize manipulative tactics and manage emotional triggers.

The findings also contribute cross-culturally by revealing how collectivist societies amplify FOMO effects compared to individualistic cultures. This underscores the necessity for culturally adaptive models of digital consumer behavior that account for local norms and emotional constructs. Future multinational studies can further validate this framework across Southeast Asian contexts.

D. CONCLUSION

This research confirms that FOMO plays a significant mediating role between social media advertising and impulsive purchase decisions among Generation Z consumers in Jambi City. While direct advertising effects are minimal, the emotional resonance generated through FOMO strongly influences unplanned buying. The interplay of social validation, digital connectedness, and identity expression drives consumption in the digital age.

Theoretically, the study advances understanding of affective mechanisms in online consumer behavior. Practically, it encourages businesses to balance persuasive innovation with ethical responsibility. Future research should incorporate variables such as self-control, materialism, and brand attachment to deepen insights into impulsive consumption patterns. By contextualizing emotional and cultural

dynamics, this study provides a foundation for promoting responsible consumerism in emerging digital markets.

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