



## Research Article

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# The Impact of Social Media on (Fear of Missing Out) Fomo-Driven Consumer Behaviour - A Study of Sneaker Customers

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## ABSTRACT

Social media's visual power has reshaped how we shop, often fueling a 'Fear of Missing Out' (FoMO). This paper explores how compelling visuals on platforms spark FoMO, especially in the high-end sneaker market, driving consumer behavior. Recognizing a gap in understanding this emotional link, we surveyed sneaker enthusiasts.

Our findings reveal that influencer content and unboxing videos significantly boost engagement and impulsive buying. Crucially, the more time spent on visually rich social media, the stronger FoMO becomes. This intense feeling directly translates into quick, impulsive purchases and a rush to acquire limited-edition sneakers. This research offers practical guidance for brands and marketers, alongside enriching our theoretical understanding of consumer psychology in the digital age. It highlights FoMO's potent role as an emotional trigger in niche cultures, offering valuable insights for brands in the digital landscape. Ultimately, it sheds light on the subtle yet powerful psychological influences shaping contemporary consumer choices.

## INTRODUCTION

Social media has evolved from a networking tool into a primary arena for marketing and brand engagement, particularly in fashion and lifestyle. Visual-first platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest drive product discovery and shape aspirational consumer behavior through curated imagery and narratives. Within this environment, the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) has emerged as a defining element of consumer psychology. FoMO, the anxiety that others are accessing experiences or products from which one is excluded, is amplified by limited-time releases, exclusivity, and scarcity-driven marketing.

Sneaker culture exemplifies this phenomenon. Built on "drop culture," it thrives on hype, scarcity, and community-driven desire. Brands carefully orchestrate product releases to manufacture urgency and elevate symbolic

value, often relying on social media as the primary channel for storytelling and hype generation. While prior research has examined FoMO in broader online contexts, its role in sneaker consumption remains underexplored. This is a critical gap, as sneaker purchases are frequently driven less by utility than by cultural identity and fear of exclusion from shared moments of status and belonging.

Focusing on sneaker consumers provides a clear rationale. Unlike many fashion items, sneakers operate at the crossroads of fashion, music, sport, and street culture, giving them symbolic weight beyond their functional use. Millennials and Generation Z—who dominate sneaker culture—are also the most active users of visual-first platforms, making them highly susceptible to FoMO-based marketing. Studying sneakers therefore provides an ideal lens to understand how visual media and scarcity cues interact with consumer psychology.

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## PROBLEM STATEMENT

Traditional marketing frameworks inadequately explain how visual social media environments shape impulsive, emotionally charged consumption. Platforms like Instagram and Pinterest are not passive spaces for browsing; they actively construct desire, anticipation, and urgency. Yet, little empirical research examines how sneaker brands specifically leverage social media to induce FoMO. This neglect limits understanding of how FoMO influences impulse buying, brand attachment, and post-purchase regret in a subculture where identity and exclusivity are central.

## Research Aim and Objectives

### Aim

To examine how social media's visual influence impacts FoMO-driven consumer behavior among Sneakers customers.

### Objectives

- To analyze the key social media marketing strategies employed by brands of expensive sneakers.
- To explore how visually rich social media content triggers FoMO among consumers interested in expensive sneakers.
- To assess the impact of FoMO on consumer actions related to expensive sneakers (e.g., impulse buying, saving content, brand engagement).

### Hypotheses

- Scarcity cues (e.g., exclusivity messaging, limited-time releases) on social media significantly heighten FoMO among sneaker consumers.
- FoMO positively influences impulse buying behavior in sneaker culture.
- FoMO-driven purchases generate short-term excitement but also increase the likelihood of post-purchase regret.

## Research Questions

- How do brands of expensive sneakers utilize social media for marketing their products?
- What elements of social media content (imagery, scarcity messaging, influencer collaborations) related to expensive sneakers trigger FoMO in consumers?
- How does FoMO influence purchasing decisions and post-purchase emotions among customers of expensive sneakers?
- Can social media marketing of expensive sneakers lead to sustained engagement or primarily facilitate fleeting impulse purchases?

## Significance of the Study

This research adds to the scarce existing literature examining the psychological effects of visually dominated

social media sites on consumer behavior. This research is practically useful for brand planners, online advertisers, and e-commerce professionals working in the pricey sneakers' competitive market. In revealing how emotional drivers such as FoMO are triggered and harnessed (or avoided ethically) by social media, this study is helpful in providing advice for crafting enduring brand relationships. In addition, it contributes to consumer behavior research by examining the crossroads of platform design, visual narrative, and impulse psychology in a unique and powerful consumer subculture. In conclusion, this research highlights the increased significance of platform-specific marketing strategies and their insidious but strong psychological influences on contemporary consumers.

## Scope and Delimitations

This study will largely address the effect of social media visual content by high-end sneaker brands. The main audience of interest here will be consumers of Millennial and Generation Z generations who enthusiastically interact with sneaker culture. Analysis will focus on marketing content and consumer impressions of this content, as opposed to sales statistics or algorithm data on platforms. This research will aim specifically at marketing high-end sneakers and will keep outside general categories like overall fashion marketing or athletic wear outside of the domain of collectible, high-end sneakers.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumer psychology and shopping behavior in the digital age are increasingly shaped by the phenomenon of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). In an environment dominated by live updates, limited product drops, and peer comparisons, FoMO emerges as a powerful motivator of consumption, particularly on social media platforms (Alfina *et al.*, 2023). Among younger consumers, especially sneaker enthusiasts, the pursuit of exclusivity, novelty, and online validation amplifies FoMO's effects. Understanding this interplay is essential for examining how social media marketing strategies shape consumer engagement, impulse buying, and brand loyalty. This review organizes relevant literature across three themes: FoMO in consumer psychology, FoMO and social media validation, and FoMO in sneaker culture, while also identifying theoretical anchors and existing research gaps.

### Thematic Categorization of Literature

#### *FoMO in Consumer Behavior and Marketing*

FoMO has been conceptualized as both a motivational driver and a psychological burden (Alfina *et al.*, 2023). Classic theories in consumer behavior, including the Scarcity Effect (Cialdini, 2001) and Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) theory, suggest that external cues—such as limited supply, time constraints, and social approval—stimulate heightened desire and urgency. Empirical

evidence shows that marketing tactics like countdown timers and low-stock signals significantly increase impulsive purchasing behavior (Rashad, 2022).

However, prior research often stops at demonstrating FoMO's ability to drive short-term sales, without fully addressing its long-term consequences on consumer satisfaction, regret, or sustained loyalty. This creates an incomplete picture, particularly for markets where cultural attachment and identity, not just utility, shape consumption.

#### *FoMO and Social Media Validation*

Social media provides fertile ground for FoMO because it directly connects consumption with social visibility. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) highlights how belongingness, autonomy, and competence are central to human motivation. Studies confirm that digital validation—likes, comments, and shares—intensifies FoMO by reinforcing these needs (Puri et al., 2024).

Building on Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), Yaputri and Dimyati (2022) demonstrate that FoMO correlates strongly with social media addiction and psychological distress. Consumers measure their self-worth against highly curated online profiles, which fosters compulsive consumption to “keep up.” While these findings explain FoMO’s link with digital validation broadly, most studies treat consumers as a homogeneous group. They rarely consider specific subcultures, such as sneakerheads, where validation is tied to niche community norms and symbolic ownership.

#### *FoMO and Consumer Well-being*

FoMO not only drives purchasing behavior but also has emotional and psychological consequences. Research suggests FoMO-based marketing campaigns evoke mixed emotional states, including excitement, anxiety, and post-purchase dissonance (Rachman et al., 2024). These findings align with Arousal Theory, which explains heightened physiological states in anticipation of rewards, and Cognitive Dissonance Theory, which accounts for the regret or discomfort following impulsive consumption.

For sneaker consumers, this emotional cycle is especially visible: successfully acquiring a limited sneaker drop can generate intense social gratification, while failure can provoke exclusion and disappointment. Yet, existing studies largely emphasize short-term emotional reactions and neglect long-term well-being or coping strategies for highly involved consumer groups.

#### *FoMO in Sneaker Culture*

Sneaker culture exemplifies FoMO-driven consumption more distinctly than many other consumer markets. Sneakerheads are deeply embedded in online communities where exclusivity and hype are central. Brands such as Nike and Adidas use tactics like influencer endorsements, countdown clocks, and limited-release messaging to

deliberately heighten FoMO (Rashad, 2022). This creates not only purchasing urgency but also symbolic capital, where ownership signals status and cultural belonging.

Despite sneakers being one of the most visible categories associated with FoMO marketing, empirical research focusing directly on sneaker consumers remains scarce. Existing work tends to generalize FoMO effects across e-commerce or social media users at large, overlooking the unique identity-driven and community-centered dimensions of sneaker culture. This leaves a gap in understanding how FoMO operates in a subculture where consumption reflects both personal identity and collective belonging.

#### **Research Gaps**

From the reviewed literature, three key gaps emerge:

##### *Overemphasis on short-term behavior*

Many studies highlight FoMO’s role in triggering impulsive purchases but neglect its longer-term implications for brand loyalty, satisfaction, or regret.

##### *Limited focus on subcultures*

Research often generalizes FoMO across broad consumer groups, overlooking niche cultures like sneakerheads, where consumption is tied to identity and social belonging.

##### *Insufficient integration of theory*

While consumer psychology theories (scarcity effect, social comparison, arousal, dissonance) have been referenced, they are rarely synthesized to explain FoMO’s complex influence on both behavior and well-being.

Addressing these gaps, this study examines how visual-first social media content drives FoMO-driven consumer behavior specifically in sneaker culture, offering insights into both immediate purchase decisions and broader psychological consequences.

## **THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS**

#### **Self-Determination Theory (SDT)**

As (Puri et al. 2024) point out, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provides a basic theory of how intrinsic human competence and relatedness needs drive individuals towards seeking approbation from society. In FoMO, this is best exemplified in terms of consuming commodities and seeking online approbation. SDT comes in handy to explain why people are driven to acquire products that are seen as bestowing status or belonging, particularly when compounded by social media activity.

#### **Consumer Behavior Models**

(Rashad 2022) applies both classical economic and behavioral models implicitly to explain how the external cues of scarcity and urgency may influence cognitive choice processes. The models demonstrate how short-term

propositions and limited-time product releases are able to bypass rational consideration to generate swift, instinctive buys based on the fear of losing a bargain. These traditional models, such as the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, provide a framework by which to consider outside marketing stimulation (S) being elicited as a precursor to internal mental states (O - FoMO) that then lead to certain consumer responses (R - purchase).

### Social Comparison Theory

(Yaputri & Dimyati 2022) use Social Comparison Theory directly to explain the underlying mechanism by which peer pressure and consumer-generated social media content induce feelings of inferiority and desire for conformity via consumption. The theory is extremely relevant in trying to make sense of how continual observation of others' buys on social media gets one to buy items, like limited-drop sneakers, as a way of filling perceived gaps and gaining social belonging.

### Observation:

Although theoretically grounded strongly, the studies reviewed tend to use these models in an isolated or disconnected manner. For example, some studies may explore social comparison exhaustively without necessarily embracing the motivational framework of SDT, and so on. Such isolated theoretical application diminishes generalizability of results to other consumer niches and online media platforms to a productive understanding of FoMO's multi-pervasive impact.

### RESEARCH GAP IDENTIFICATION

Even though FoMO has been studied in a wide range, its in-depth extension to sneaker consumer behavior identifies some key shortcomings:

- Too Limited Integration of Psychological and Behavioral Theories: A highly high proportion of studies either lacks robust theoretical grounding or uses theories in an unbalanced state. Such imbalance in the application of theory is harmful for conceptual clarity and makes it hard to arrive at a similar theoretical understanding of FoMO across varied consumer situations. There exists a vast knowledge deficit that relies heavily upon the utilization of theories like Self-Determination Theory, Social Comparison Theory, and Arousal Theory to fully understand the psychological and behavioral expressions of FoMO-induced consumption.
- Deficiency of Longitudinal Research: Most respondents' existing studies utilize cross-sectional data that reports consumer behavior at a specific point in time but does not reflect the reality or representativeness of the phenomenon in question. The method does not reflect the dynamic and changing nature of FoMO's impact, especially among sneaker consumers who adjust their buying habits and engagements with fashion trends over time. Longitudinal research is

needed to determine long-term behavioral patterns, loyalty to a brand, and long-term effects of FoMO.

- Underserved Contextual Differences and Subcultures: The majority of research predominantly aims at generic mainstream social media and global consumer cultures, and most of specialized subcultures such as sneakerheads or regional consumptions are excluded mainly. The special dynamics, motivations, and social arrangements of these specialized subcultures tend to be vastly different from the average citizen, therefore generic findings are less relevant.
- FoMO as a Mediator: There has been very little research to study FoMO as a mediator in the social media consumption to end-consumer outcome associations, i.e., impulse buying, brand loyalty, and post-purchase regret. Knowledge about FoMO as a mediator would provide improved understanding of the cause-effect chain in which social media is influencing purchasing behavior.
- Inconsistent Methodological Approach: The researchers are noted for having a range of methods such as qualitative interviews, questionnaires, and literature reviews. It is clear that there is no triangulation or mixed-method designs that involve both quantitative and qualitative information to facilitate a richer and deeper understanding of FoMO.

### JUSTIFICATION FOR THE PRESENT STUDY

With the gaps determined in existing literature, the current research seeks to fill such gaps by presenting a more refined insight into the unique impact of FoMO among consumers of sneakers. Specifically, the current research will:

- Put forward an expanded theoretical framework that integrates ideas from behavioral psychology (e.g., SDT, Arousal Theory), media studies on digital media, and marketing theory to present a more enhanced conceptual perspective of FoMO.
- Explore FoMO as a mediating variable in the connection between social media activity (e.g., Instagram trend exposure, influencer postings, limited drop notifications) and real-world consumer purchase habits.
- Carry out a longitudinal mixed-methods investigation to thoroughly explore the long-term psychological and behavioral consequences of FoMO in the evolving sneaker culture environment.
- Target a specific consumer group (sneakerheads) traditionally underrepresented in general FoMO research, allowing for a more focused and detailed analysis.
- Aim not only to contribute theoretically but also to offer practical insights for brand promotion campaigns and digital platforms working within the extremely competitive sneaker industry.

## BIBLIOMETRIC MAPPING OF LITERATURE

The bibliometric analysis was carried out using VOSviewer, which is a dedicated software package for creating and visualizing bibliometric networks. The operation started by importing metadata from the Scopus database, specifically peer-reviewed literature on FoMO, consumer behavior, social media, and sneaker culture. Keywords, author affiliations, and years of publication were uploaded into VOSviewer to produce co-occurrence maps, which represent visually co-occurring relationships among terms used most frequently. Three forms of visualizations were generated: network visualization (displaying thematic clusters through keyword links), density visualization (identifying pools of concentrated research activity), and overlay visualization (depicting temporal progression in research themes). This multi-faceted mapping technique allowed the determination of prevailing themes, breaking trends, and research areas of utmost significance in the literature addressing FoMO-driven consumer behavior within the sneaker market.

### Network Visualization

As seen from Figure 1, the network visualization portrays clear thematic clusters based on keyword co-occurrences. The central and most significant node is “fear of missing out,” acting as a hub connector to many related ideas. These major clusters are noted for “consumer behaviour” and “consumption behavior,” and these two are heavily connected with the words “compulsive buying behaviour,” “compulsive use of social media,” “consumption,” and “belonging.” This trend suggests a large volume of work committed to examining the immediate behavioral effects and underlying social drivers related to FoMO. Another significant cluster is the collection of “marketing” and “advertising,” connecting to “product scarcity,” “fast fashion,” and “purchase intention,” representing the strategic use of FoMO in marketing strategy. The presence of a cluster that includes “happiness,” “fear,” and “adult”

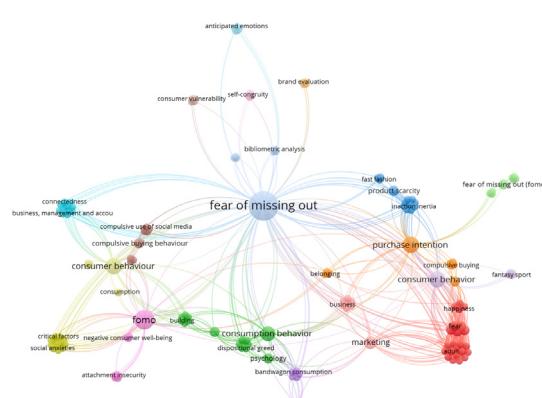


Figure 1: Network Visualization

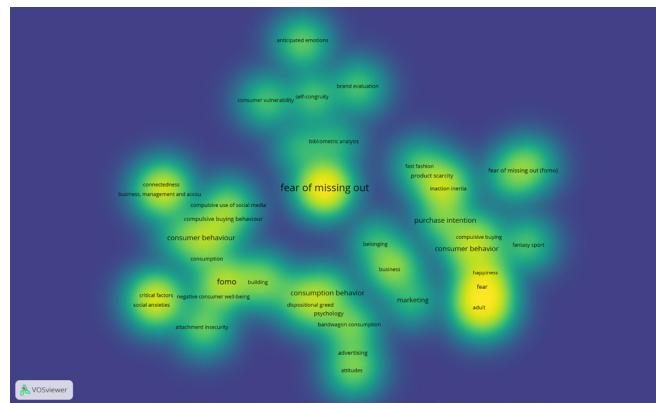


Figure 2: Density Visualization

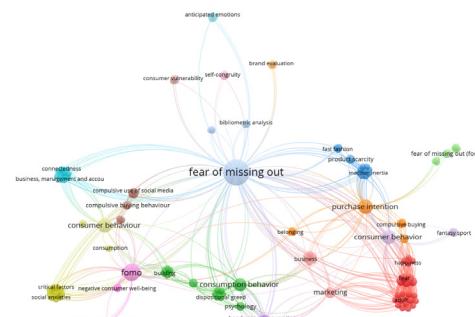
also implies an investigation into the emotional and psychological aspects that come with FoMO. Although “fear of missing out (fomo)” is a node itself, its connections to extremely precise subcultures such as “sneaker” or “sneaker culture” are not highly emphasized as a core cluster, indicating a more general orientation in much of the literature instead of a specialty orientation in respect to niche markets. This visualization solidifies the fact that FoMO’s impact on consumer behavior, specifically compulsive buying and social media, is a solidly established field of academic research.

### Density Visualization

The density visualization (Figure 2) clearly shows the points of greatest research focus and keyword co-occurrence frequency, where brighter (yellow) colors show higher density. The brightest spot with the highest density is for “fear of missing out,” solidly placing it in its core position within the current body of scholarship. Other high-density spots also surround “consumer behaviour,” “consumption behavior,” and “purchase intention,” indicating a high level of scholarly focus on these direct consequences of FoMO. The cluster for “marketing” and “product scarcity” also has high density, indicating research activity in how marketing initiatives play on FoMO. Although there are terms such as “critical factors negative consumer well-being” and “social anxieties,” their density is relatively low, and it implies that the negative psychological effects of FoMO, although recognized, might not be as vigorously questioned in light of their specific mechanisms as the behavioral effects. Critically, this visualization does not show a clear high-density cluster with the express linkage of FoMO with words indicative of “sneakers” or specialized fashion subcultures, thus supporting the determined research gap in this focused area.

### Overlay Visualization

Overlay visualization (Figure 3) adds a temporal element to the landscape of the research, with colors ranging from



**Figure 3:** Overlay Visualization

blue (older publications, around 2020) to yellow (indicating newer publications, 2024-2026). This illustration shows that although key ideas like “fear of missing out” and “consumer behavior” have been time and again examined throughout history (marked by a combination of colors), there is definitely an inclination towards more recent studies (marked by yellow nodes) on “product scarcity,” “fast fashion,” “inattention inertia,” and “brand evaluation.” This indicates shifting academic interest in the strategic marketing implications of FoMO, along with its connection with speedy market trends. Terms such as “anticipatory emotions” and “consumer vulnerability” also appear in more recent hues, indicating a growing psychological exploration of FoMO’s emotional antecedents and effects. While the overarching phenomenon of FoMO in consumer settings remains a topic of continued and developing research, the overlay visualization again corroborates the perception that particular, targeted research on FoMO’s direct impact within the very special sneaker customer base, as existing, is an area with significant room for new contributions, as clean yellow clusters qualitatively identifying FoMO with “sneakers” are not strongly evident.

## QUANTITATIVE METHODOLOGY

## Research Approach

This study adopts a post-positivist approach, recognizing that consumer behavior under the influence of social media visuals and FoMO in sneaker culture can be explained probabilistically rather than absolutely. By testing hypotheses with quantitative data, the research aims to identify generalizable patterns while acknowledging multiple contributing factors and contextual variability. This approach enables a statistically informed yet nuanced understanding of FoMO-driven consumption in high-end sneaker markets.

## Research Design

A correlational survey design is employed to examine the relationships between three core constructs: (1)

exposure to visual sneaker marketing on social media, (2) levels of FoMO experienced by consumers, and (3) behavioral outcomes such as impulse buying and brand engagement. This design is appropriate because it allows the observation of naturally occurring associations without manipulating variables in artificial settings. For example, variations in social media exposure can be statistically tested against differences in FoMO levels and purchase behaviors, offering insights into how these variables covary in real-world contexts.

A survey method is particularly suitable for studying FoMO-driven behavior because FoMO is a psychological and perceptual construct best captured through self-reported experiences. Previous studies on FoMO (e.g., Przybylski et al., 2013) also validate surveys as the standard method for quantifying subjective feelings of anxiety, social validation, and consumer impulses.

## Sampling

The study will use simple random sampling to recruit participants from a population of active social media users engaged with sneaker-related content.

- Sample size: 150 respondents, which is sufficient for statistical reliability in correlational analyses.
- Demographics: Focus on Millennial and Generation Z consumers (18–35 years old), as these groups represent the most engaged sneakerhead communities and the heaviest users of visual-first platforms.
- Location: Respondents will primarily be drawn from urban areas in India, where sneaker culture is growing and social media adoption is high, while maintaining inclusion of globally connected sneaker communities.
- Recruitment: Participants will be approached via Instagram sneaker pages, and university-level youth networks to ensure relevant exposure to sneaker culture.

This approach ensures both diversity and relevance while enhancing the generalizability of the findings to the broader sneakerhead demographic.

## Data Collection

Data will be collected using a structured online questionnaire, administered via Google Forms. The questionnaire will include validated scales and structured items to measure the following:

- Exposure to Social Media Marketing: Items assessing frequency and intensity of sneaker-related content exposure across platforms (Instagram, Pinterest, TikTok). Measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “Never” to “Very Frequently.”
- FoMO: Measured using the FoMO Scale (Przybylski et al., 2013), a widely validated instrument assessing fear of exclusion, social validation anxiety, and compulsive checking behaviors. Items will be rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Not at all true of me, 5 = Extremely true of me).

- Consumer Behavior: Impulse buying tendencies will be measured using the Impulse Buying Scale (Rook & Fisher, 1995) adapted for sneaker purchases, while brand engagement will be assessed through items on following, liking, commenting, and sharing sneaker brand content. Brand loyalty will be measured using established items from Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001).

All scales included have demonstrated high reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha > 0.70$ ) in prior studies, ensuring construct validity.

## RESULTS / FINDINGS

### Respondent Profile

The survey sample ( $N = XXX$ ) primarily consisted of Millennials and Gen Z, with a majority aged 21–23 (58.7%). Gender distribution was 58% male and 42% female. The average daily time spent on social media was between 2.5 to 3 hours, with Instagram (72%), YouTube (55%), and Pinterest (41%) being the most used platforms.

### Social Media Marketing Strategies and Consumer Engagement

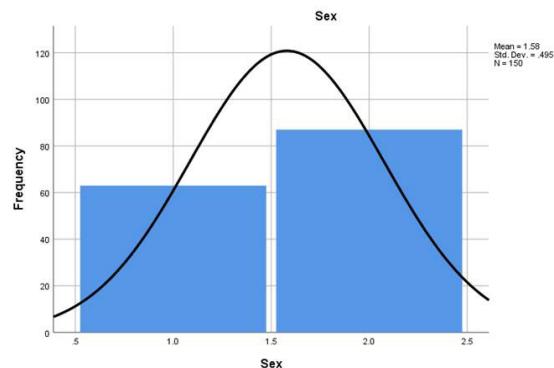
To address the first objective, the analysis showed that influencer-based content and unboxing videos had the strongest correlations with both impulsive buying and engagement. Instagram usage also showed moderate positive effects, highlighting its role as a marketing hub for sneaker culture.

### FoMO Triggers from Social Media

FoMO was significantly triggered by time spent on social media ( $r = 0.544$ ), active engagement with posts ( $r = 0.549$ ), and visually immersive content like unboxing videos ( $r = 0.457$ ) and Instagram content ( $r = 0.470$ ). This highlights how continuous exposure creates psychological urgency and competitive consumption.

## DISCUSSION

This study deepens our understanding of the intersection between visually dominant social media platforms,



Graph 2: Gender distribution of the survey respondents

the psychological phenomenon of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), and consumer purchasing behavior in the sneaker subculture. The findings confirm that visually immersive formats such as influencer posts and "unboxing" videos function as persuasive cues that trigger aspiration and encourage spontaneous acquisitions. These results align with scarcity effect theory (Cialdini, 2001), which posits that limited availability amplifies perceived value, and with consumer behavior models that highlight the role of external stimuli in shaping impulsive consumption.

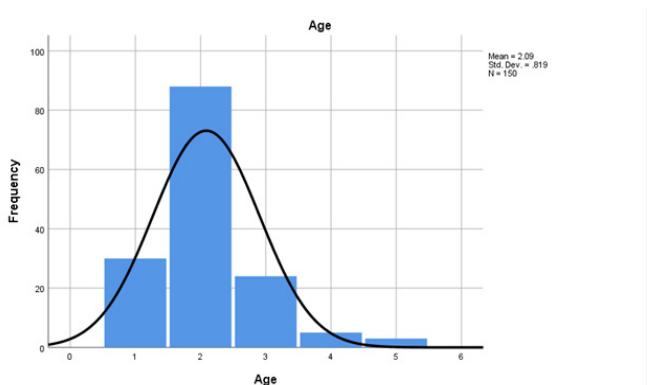
Importantly, the evidence demonstrates that visually rich content does not merely inform but also intensifies FoMO. Extended exposure to sneaker-related posts on platforms like Instagram and YouTube, combined with active engagement (liking, sharing, commenting),

Table 1: Correlation of Social Media Variables with Impulsive Buying and Engagement

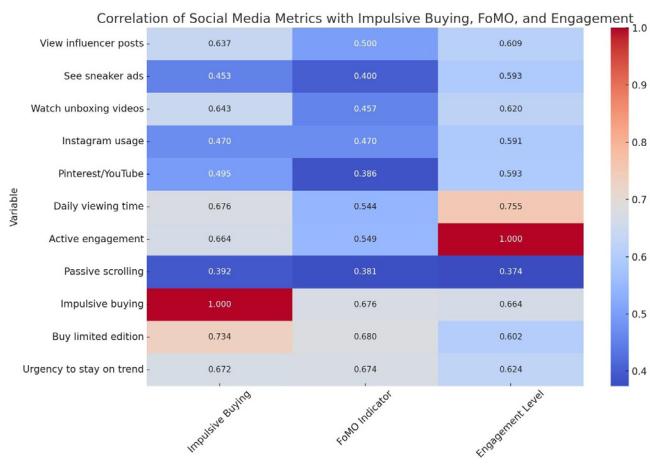
Social Media Variable	Correlation with Impulsive Buying	Correlation with Engagement
View influencer posts	0.637	0.609
See sneaker ads	0.453	0.593
Watch unboxing videos	0.643	0.62
Instagram usage	0.47	0.591
Pinterest/YouTube	0.495	0.593
Daily viewing time	0.676	0.755
Active engagement	0.664	1
Passive scrolling	0.392	0.374
Impulsive buying	1	0.664
Buy limited edition	0.734	0.602
Urgency to stay on trend	0.672	0.624

Table 2: Correlations between FoMO Indicators and Sneaker Buying Behavior

Social Media Variable	Correlation with FoMO	Correlation with Impulsive Buying
View influencer posts	0.5	0.637
See sneaker ads	0.4	0.453
Watch unboxing videos	0.457	0.643
Instagram usage	0.47	0.47
Pinterest/YouTube	0.386	0.495
Daily viewing time	0.544	0.676
Active engagement	0.549	0.664
Passive scrolling	0.381	0.392
Impulsive buying	0.676	1
Buy limited edition	0.68	0.734
Urgency to stay on trend	0.674	0.672



Graph 1: Age distribution of the survey respondents



**Figure 4:** Heatmap of Social Media Correlations with FoMO, Engagement, and Impulsive Buying

significantly heightens psychological pressure to conform and participate in ongoing trends. This pattern reflects social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), as consumers benchmark themselves against curated online portrayals, and resonates with prior research showing that FoMO mediates the relationship between social media use and compulsive consumption (Yaputri & Dimyati, 2022; Puri et al., 2024). However, while earlier studies explored FoMO in general digital contexts, the present study narrows this relationship to sneaker culture, highlighting its unique vulnerabilities.

Sneaker culture is particularly susceptible due to its reliance on scarcity, exclusivity, and symbolic status. Limited-edition “drops” and countdown releases create artificial scarcity that amplifies urgency. Sneakers also function as status goods, signaling identity, belonging, and subcultural capital, making FoMO-driven behaviors even more pronounced. The strong correlations between FoMO and premium spending found here expand on prior studies that focused primarily on short-term impulse buying (Alfina et al., 2023). Unlike those broader findings, this research shows that within sneaker culture, FoMO also sustains longer-term patterns of brand engagement and justifies higher financial outlays for exclusivity.

These findings thus bridge theory and practice: FoMO emerges as not only a psychological tension but also a mechanism converting affect into action—from heightened arousal (Arousal Theory) to rationalization post-purchase (Cognitive Dissonance Theory). The study reinforces that in sneaker markets, emotional and social drivers outweigh rational decision-making, situating FoMO as a central determinant of both impulse buying and loyalty behaviors.

## CONCLUSION

This study provides a focused contribution to both consumer psychology and digital marketing literature

by demonstrating how visually driven social media strategies amplify FoMO and directly influence consumer decision-making in sneaker culture. Academically, it extends theories of scarcity effect, social comparison, and impulsive consumption by showing their heightened relevance in passion-driven, status-oriented markets. From a managerial perspective, it highlights how influencers, platform-specific video content, and scarcity messaging can be leveraged to drive engagement and sales—while also cautioning against the ethical risks of overexploiting psychological pressure.

Practically, the findings suggest that sneaker brands can optimize influencer collaborations, emphasize immersive storytelling formats like unboxing videos, and strategically frame exclusivity to generate buzz without alienating consumers. At the same time, marketers must recognize the long-term importance of balancing urgency with authenticity, ensuring that FoMO-based campaigns foster sustainable brand loyalty rather than fleeting impulse purchases.

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