


Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) as a Psychological Strategy in Digital Marketing

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p>Keywords: Fear of Missing Out, FOMO, psychological strategy, digital marketing, consumer behavior.</p>	<p>This study aims to analyze the use of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) as a psychological strategy in digital marketing and its impact on consumer behavior. FOMO is a psychological phenomenon characterized by an individual's fear of missing out on valuable experiences or information that others are having, and it has become increasingly relevant in the digital era filled with instant information and social media. FOMO strategies in digital marketing are often implemented through techniques such as limited-time offers, countdown timers, user testimonials, and product exclusivity. This research employs a descriptive-qualitative method with a literature study approach and content analysis of digital campaigns from various brands. The findings indicate that the application of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) strategies in digital marketing effectively increases consumer interest and purchase speed. Consumers are more likely to make immediate purchases when offered promotions with time limits, limited stock, or exclusive services for first buyers. Additionally, positive testimonials and recommendations from previous buyers further strengthen trust and influence purchase decisions. Thus, FOMO strategies have been proven to significantly increase conversion rates and strengthen the relationship between consumers and brands.</p>
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INTRODUCTION

The use of digital technology, particularly the internet and social media, has experienced rapid development in the 21st century. This has led to a major transformation in the world of marketing, both from the producers' and consumers' perspectives (Ardiansyah, 2023). Business actors must be able to quickly adapt to the shift in social space, which has now moved into the virtual realm. Social media no longer functions merely as a communication tool but has become an effective means of influencing consumer decisions through various promotional content, testimonials, and digital campaigns that prioritize speed and responsiveness (Ifadhila et al., 2024). Various factors such as social environment, lifestyle, and perceptions of brand image also influence how individuals use social media in purchasing activities, especially for tangible products that are now marketed digitally (Istiqamah, 2023).

The high intensity of social media usage has also led to changes in public behavior in accessing information and conducting business activities. Many individuals feel the need to

stay constantly connected to avoid missing out on important information, trends, or opportunities (Rahmatullah, 2021). This situation creates anxiety about social exclusion when one does not follow what is trending or widely shared on digital platforms. This phenomenon opens up significant opportunities for marketers to employ psychologically-based marketing strategies, one of which involves leveraging the fear of missing out (FOMO). This strategy has proven effective in encouraging consumers to act quickly, such as making a purchase, to avoid the feeling of being left behind or missing out on valuable opportunities (Tanhan et al., 2022).

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is an increasingly common psychological condition amid the rapid development of digital technology and social media. In an era where information spreads rapidly, many individuals feel compelled to keep up with trends, news, and social activities to avoid feeling left out or isolated (Milyavskaya et al., 2018). FOMO does not only arise in social interactions such as missing events or moments with friends, but also manifests in the context of consumption and lifestyle. The fear of missing exclusive opportunities or information creates emotional pressure that can influence decision-making processes, including purchasing decisions (Hodkinson, 2019).

In digital marketing, FOMO is utilized as a strategy to create urgency and emotional drive in consumers. FOMO marketing is designed to trigger consumers' fear of missing limited-time products or offers, pushing them to act immediately—such as purchasing a product before it runs out or signing up for a service before a promotion ends (Alutaybi et al., 2020). This strategy is often combined with appealing visuals, customer testimonials, countdown timers, or phrases such as “only a few left” and “today only.” Thus, FOMO not only reflects modern social anxiety but also serves as a powerful tool in shaping consumer behavior through an effective and measurable psychological approach (Akbari et al., 2021).

The Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) phenomenon was first discussed in depth within the context of social psychology, particularly regarding individuals' anxiety about missing out on others' experiences due to social media development. Research by Przybylski et al. (2013) identified FOMO as a psychological condition triggered by the basic human need for connection and social recognition. This study laid the foundation for numerous subsequent studies highlighting FOMO's impact on mental well-being and digital media usage behavior.

Later developments began to focus on FOMO's role in digital marketing. Kang & Ma (2020) revealed that FOMO can be a strong trigger for impulsive buying decisions, especially in the context of time-limited promotions. Similar findings were presented by Dursun et al. (2023), who stated that digital campaigns containing FOMO elements—such as countdown timers or limited stock availability—significantly increase sales conversion in e-commerce. Meanwhile, Dewayani (2024) emphasized that platforms like Shopee and Tokopedia leverage FOMO strategies to encourage consumer behavior through real-time discount notifications and flash sale programs.

Although various studies have demonstrated FOMO's effectiveness in driving consumer engagement, research that specifically examines FOMO as a structured psychological strategy within a digital marketing framework remains limited. Most studies tend to focus on the correlational relationship between FOMO and social media user behavior without deeply exploring how this strategy is designed, implemented, and measured in marketing activities.

Therefore, this study aims to bridge that gap by comprehensively analyzing FOMO as a psychological strategy in digital marketing, evaluating its impact on consumer behavior, and addressing its ethical implications.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at providing an in-depth portrayal of how the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) strategy is applied in digital marketing and its impact on consumer behavior (Sugiyono, 2016). A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to understand the FOMO phenomenon within a real and social context, as well as to gather rich and detailed information about the experiences of marketing practitioners and consumers. The data collection techniques used include observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were carried out on various digital promotional campaigns on social media and e-commerce platforms that utilize FOMO elements such as limited-time discounts and low stock availability, in order to understand how the strategy is implemented visually and through marketing communication. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with informants from two groups: digital marketing practitioners and active consumers who have experienced emotional pressure due to FOMO-based promotions. These interviews aimed to explore their experiences, perceptions, and the psychological impact of the strategy. Documentation, including collections of promotional materials, campaign screenshots, and other supporting documents, was also gathered to strengthen the analysis (Yulianah, 2022). The collected data was then analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and key themes that explain the mechanisms of FOMO as a psychological strategy in digital marketing, as well as its social and ethical implications.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Although the FOMO strategy may seem simple and effective in creating a sense of urgency among consumers, it does not mean it can be applied carelessly without careful consideration. Excessive or overly forceful use of FOMO can come across as dishonest or manipulative in the eyes of potential customers, thereby reducing their trust in the brand or product (Barry et al., 2020). When consumers feel they are being pushed too hard or that the information provided is not transparent, they tend to become skeptical and reluctant to make a purchase, which ultimately negatively affects the conversion rate. The implementation of FOMO strategies must be tailored to the characteristics of the target audience, maintaining a balance between creating urgency and providing clear and credible information to preserve customer relationships and optimize marketing outcomes (Elhai et al., 2020). Therefore, here are some ways to apply FOMO marketing strategies that you can implement:

Limited-time discounts

Limited-time discounts are one of the most effective ways to leverage the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) concept in digital marketing. By offering price reductions that are only valid for a certain period, consumers feel compelled to make quick purchasing decisions so as

not to miss the opportunity to buy at a lower price. This time constraint creates a strong sense of urgency, prompting consumers to act quickly rather than delay—driven by the fear that the discount will disappear along with the chance to get a special price.

From a psychological perspective, limited-time discounts trigger an emotional response that accelerates the consumer's decision-making process. When the offer period is limited, the human brain tends to focus more on the potential loss than on extended rational considerations. This drives consumers to make purchases more quickly while reducing the tendency to compare prices or postpone decisions. Thus, this strategy not only enhances the product's appeal but also speeds up the conversion process from visitors to buyers.

However, to run a limited-time discount strategy effectively, marketers must set a realistic time frame and communicate it clearly to consumers. If the time limit is too long or inconsistently applied, the urgency being created may diminish and lose its appeal. Additionally, the information provided must be transparent to ensure consumers do not feel coerced or deceived, maintaining trust in the brand. When properly managed, limited-time discounts can be a powerful marketing tool for utilizing FOMO to boost sales.

Order time limits

Using order time limits as a FOMO strategy is another highly effective technique to encourage consumers to complete their purchase transactions quickly. This concept is commonly found on platforms for booking hotels, transportation tickets, concerts, and cinemas, where consumers are given a specific amount of time—usually between 15 to 30 minutes—to complete payment before the system automatically cancels their order. This time constraint creates psychological pressure that makes prospective buyers feel they must act quickly to avoid losing the chance to obtain the desired product or service.

Order time limits generate a genuine sense of urgency because consumers realize that if they delay or hesitate, the slot or ticket they selected could be lost with no guarantee of recovery. This fear of missing out drives them to proceed with payment immediately and secure the transaction. The strategy also helps sellers manage stock or product availability more efficiently. By imposing a time limit, the system can automatically return unpaid items to inventory for other potential buyers, optimizing the distribution process.

In addition to encouraging quick decisions, this method can help sellers improve the efficiency of their inventory system. However, to ensure a positive customer experience, businesses must communicate the time limit rule clearly and provide sufficient notifications during the ordering process so that customers feel assisted rather than overly pressured.

In this way, implementing order time limits as part of a FOMO strategy not only accelerates the purchase process but also maintains a balance between creating urgency and offering a seamless digital shopping experience. This strategy is especially effective for businesses that deal with time-sensitive or limited-availability products and services, helping to increase sales conversions while preserving customer loyalty.

Recommendations and testimonials

Displaying recommendations or testimonials from customers who have already purchased a product or service is a key strategy in digital marketing that leverages social and psychological effects to build trust among potential consumers. Positive testimonials serve as

social proof, indicating that the product or service is of high quality and meets customer needs. When potential buyers see real experiences from satisfied customers, they are more likely to feel confident and trust the purchase, significantly increasing conversion potential.

Recommendations from satisfied customers not only act as social proof to boost trust but also have the potential to go viral and become a powerful viral marketing strategy. When many people share their positive experiences widely—through social media, blogs, or review platforms—the message about the product's benefits and strengths spreads quickly to a broader audience without additional cost to the seller. This viral effect creates a domino impact that strengthens brand reputation and increases product credibility among new consumers. As a result, hesitant buyers may feel encouraged to make a purchase, seeing concrete evidence that many others have benefited from the product, making it a trustworthy and desirable choice.

Authentic and detailed testimonials about customer experiences are typically more effective because they clearly illustrate the actual benefits of the product or service, and how it provides solutions to their problems or needs. For example, reviews mentioning fast delivery, product quality meeting expectations, or responsive customer service give a positive and convincing impression. Additionally, featuring various types of testimonials—text, photos, or videos from diverse customers—helps build a transparent and credible image.

Besides enhancing trust, displaying testimonials can also indirectly create a FOMO effect. When potential buyers see many others have already purchased and benefited from the product, they may fear missing out on the same opportunity. This can accelerate purchase decisions and increase new customer loyalty, as they feel more confident in their choice. Therefore, managing and strategically showcasing testimonials is an important part of building brand reputation and increasing the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies.

Flash Sale

The strategy of limiting product availability while transparently informing customers about the remaining stock is an effective way to create a sense of urgency and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) among potential buyers. When consumers see that a product is running low on stock, they naturally feel pressured to make a purchase quickly to avoid missing the opportunity to own the item. The information about the limited stock signals that the product is in high demand, which psychologically pushes potential buyers to act fast before the opportunity disappears.

To strengthen the FOMO effect, this strategy can be combined with the use of a countdown timer that displays the remaining time during the sales period, especially during flash sales or limited-time promotions. This countdown timer gives a clear visual representation of how much time is left to buy the product at a special price or offer. With a clearly defined time limit, consumers feel a real time pressure, increasing their urge to make a purchase immediately. This also helps reduce the tendency to procrastinate or hesitate when making a buying decision.

Moreover, the combination of limited stock and countdown timer creates an interactive and dynamic shopping experience that keeps consumers focused and emotionally engaged. This strategy not only boosts conversion rates but can also enhance customer loyalty, as they

feel like part of an exclusive community gaining special access. Therefore, utilizing limited stock information and measurable time limits becomes a highly strategic marketing tool to generate urgency and enhance the appeal of digital promotions.

Limited Free Shipping

Offering free shipping for a limited time is one of the most effective FOMO strategies to encourage consumers to make immediate purchases. When consumers know that the chance to get free shipping is only valid for a specific period, they are driven to take advantage of the offer quickly to avoid losing out on a valuable benefit. The fear of having to pay shipping costs—which can be quite significant—pushes potential buyers to decide quickly, thus significantly increasing sales conversions in a short period.

In addition to time limitations, offering a limited quota—such as free shipping for the first 50 buyers or while supplies last—adds an element of scarcity that strengthens the urgency. Consumers who see that the opportunity is only available to a certain number of people will feel compelled to complete the transaction before the quota runs out. Such limitations trigger a psychological urge not to miss out on a special deal that isn't always available, increasing the speed of purchasing decisions.

Limited-time free shipping can also be combined with other promotions, such as discounts or flash sales, to create an even more attractive and hard-to-resist offer. This strategy not only boosts short-term sales but also helps build customer loyalty, as they feel they are receiving extra value from their purchases. When managed well, limited free shipping promotions can be an effective tool to capture consumer attention and strengthen a brand's position in an increasingly competitive market.

Offer Special Services to First-Time Buyers

Providing special services to first-time buyers is an effective strategy to generate appeal and urgency in FOMO-based marketing. By offering exclusive benefits—such as special discounts, bonus gifts, or priority access—to consumers making their first purchase, businesses can attract new potential buyers who might have been hesitant. These special services not only offer added value to customers but also create strong motivation to make a purchase quickly so as not to miss the rare opportunity.

This strategy also increases competition among consumers, as potential buyers are encouraged to be the first to take advantage of the offer. The sense of exclusivity and pride in being the first buyer often drives them to make faster decisions, helping speed up the conversion process. Furthermore, interactions stemming from this initial purchase can expand product reach through reviews, recommendations, or the sharing of positive experiences on social media, generating viral effects that benefit the brand.

However, implementing a FOMO strategy with special services for first-time buyers requires thorough research on consumer behavior and preferences. Businesses must be able to spot trends and anticipate market needs to ensure the offer is relevant and appealing. Additionally, good human resource management is needed to ensure that the entire process—from promotion to service delivery to handling customer feedback—runs smoothly and efficiently. When managed properly, this strategy not only increases engagement and

conversions but also builds a strong foundation of customer loyalty for long-term business growth.

Create Exclusive Products

Creating exclusive products is one of the most effective marketing strategies to evoke Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) in consumers. Exclusive products are typically offered in limited quantities or only sold during certain times, giving them a rare and special appeal. Consumers who see these products as unique and not easily obtainable feel compelled to make an immediate purchase to avoid missing out on something prestigious or trendy. This strategy not only boosts buying interest but also strengthens the brand image as a provider of innovative products that stand out from competitors.

Moreover, by launching exclusive products that have never been sold before, businesses can seize the opportunity to attract a more specific and potentially loyal market segment. These products could be special variants, limited editions, or collaborations with trending influencers or brands. This not only increases the product's added value but also provides a unique experience for consumers who want to be part of a select group that owns such items. The exclusivity factor triggers strong emotional responses, accelerating the purchasing decision process.

The exclusive product strategy also allows businesses to test the market in a more targeted way, since limited sales can provide insights into consumer interest and needs without having to produce on a mass scale. On the other hand, the success of an exclusive product that is well received by the market can signal opportunities for similar products or an expanded offering in a more strategic way. Therefore, creating exclusive products not only serves as a marketing tool to leverage FOMO, but also as a key step in product innovation and long-term business development.

CONCLUSION

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)-based marketing strategies are a very effective approach in today's digital marketing world, especially in triggering a sense of urgency and emotional drive for consumers to make purchases immediately. Various tactics such as limited discounts, time limits for orders, limited free shipping offers, special services for first-time buyers, and the creation of exclusive products are all designed to create a perception of scarcity and opportunity that is only available for a short time. This encourages consumers not to miss the existing opportunities, thereby significantly increasing the conversion rate. In addition, the success of the FOMO strategy is highly dependent on the ability of business actors to conduct in-depth market research and careful human resource management in reading consumer trends and behavior. The combination of understanding consumer psychology and implementing the right marketing techniques can produce strong interactions, increase customer loyalty, and expand brand reach through positive recommendations and testimonials. The use of elements such as countdown timers and transparency of stock quantities also helps strengthen the psychological pressure that makes consumers make purchasing decisions faster. Thus, the FOMO strategy is not only a tool to increase short-term sales, but also a means to build long-term relationships with customers and strengthen the

brand's position in a competitive market. Business actors who are able to manage and implement this strategy effectively will gain sustainable benefits, both in terms of increasing sales and brand reputation. Therefore, the implementation of the FOMO strategy must be carried out carefully and planned so that the results obtained are optimal and consumers remain satisfied and trust the brand offered.

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