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FOMO and Emotional Exhaustion in Social Commerce: A Cross-Country Study on Consumer Impulsive Buying Behavior in Pakistan & Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The growing influence of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) in social commerce raises concerns about consumers' emotional well-being and impulsive buying behavior, particularly in digital shopping environments. This study examines the relationships among FOMO, materialism, emotional exhaustion, and impulsive buying tendency in Malaysia and Pakistan. Using a quantitative research approach, data from 150 respondents were collected through an online questionnaire and analyzed using correlation and regression analyses with SPSS. The findings indicate that FOMO is the strongest predictor of impulsive buying tendency ($B = 0.296$, $p < 0.001$), followed by emotional exhaustion ($B = 0.184$, $p < 0.05$) and materialism ($B = 0.175$, $p < 0.05$). Furthermore, materialism significantly predicts emotional exhaustion ($B = 0.446$, $p < 0.001$), followed by FOMO ($B = 0.201$, $p < 0.01$). The regression models explain 27.6% of the variance in impulsive buying tendency and 32.0% in emotional exhaustion. These results suggest that FOMO acts as a primary psychological trigger of impulsive purchasing, while materialism contributes more strongly to emotional exhaustion, which is also associated with impulsive buying. The study highlights the importance of responsible social commerce marketing strategies that minimize psychological pressure, protect consumer well-being, and encourage more informed and sustainable purchasing decisions.

Keywords: Consumer Decision-Making Quality; Emotional Exhaustion; FOMO; Impulsive Buying Tendency; Materialistic

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of social commerce has transformed how consumers interact with products, brands, and purchasing decisions. Social media platforms now function not only as communication tools but also as influential marketplaces where consumers are continuously exposed to curated content, peer recommendations, and time-sensitive promotions. In this environment, psychological triggers play a critical role in shaping consumer behavior (Mandel et al., 2017). Recent studies highlight that social commerce environments intensify consumer engagement and stimulate unplanned purchasing through interactive and social learning mechanisms (Ng et al., 2023a). One such trigger is the fear of missing out (FOMO), which refers to the anxiety that others may be experiencing rewarding opportunities from which an individual is absent. In modern digital contexts, FOMO is amplified by features such as limited-time promotions, influencer marketing, and real-time engagement, making it a powerful driver of consumer decision-making (Bright & Logan, 2018).

Despite the growing importance of FOMO in consumer behavior, its underlying psychological mechanism and consequences on decision making quality remain insufficiently explored. Recent empirical findings confirm that FOMO significantly influences impulsive buying behavior, particularly during promotional events and in highly interactive e-commerce settings (Bright & Logan, 2018). Consumers driven by urgency and social comparison are more likely to make spontaneous purchases without careful evaluation. However, the pathway through which FOMO leads to impulsive buying is not always direct. Emotional exhaustion may serve as an important mediating mechanism. Continuous exposure to digital stimuli, social pressure, and information overload in social commerce environments has been shown to affect consumer well-being and increase psychological fatigue negatively (Ng et al., 2023a). This exhaustion can reduce consumers' cognitive control and self-regulation, thereby increasing their vulnerability to impulsive purchasing decisions.

Furthermore, recent research emphasizes that FOMO driven consumption is often strengthened by individual and contextual factors. For instance, digital payment systems, promotional strategies, and technological convenience have been found to further encourage impulsive buying behavior in online environments (Sheng et al., 2023a). In addition, materialism plays a crucial moderating role. Individuals with higher levels of materialism are more likely to associate possessions with happiness and social status, making them more susceptible to FOMO based marketing and impulsive buying. Empirical evidence suggests that younger consumers, especially those engaged in social commerce platforms, are particularly influenced by materialistic values and social comparison pressures. Such consumers are often faced with peer pressure, endorsement by influencers, and curated online identities that fuel their need and keep up with trends. Therefore, the impacts of FOMO on materialism leads to an increase in emotional exhaustion and make impulsive buying behavior are likely. This highlights that both aspects psychological and contextual factors is important in understanding consumer decision-making in social commerce environments.

Although prior studies have examined FOMO and impulsive buying behavior, many have focused on single variables or specific contexts, leaving a gap in understanding the combined effects of psychological and individual factors within a comprehensive framework. In particular, there has been limited focus on understanding the psychological processes, including emotional exhaustion, and personal factors such as materialism that may affects the consumers behavior responds in social commerce environments. Moreover, most studies are conducted within a single country, limiting cross-cultural generalizability. This study addresses these gaps by integrating FOMO,

emotional exhaustion, impulsive buying tendency, and materialism into a unifies moderated mediation model, while also adopting a cross-country comparative approach between Pakistan and Malaysia. Such an approach responds to recent calls for more holistic and cross-cultural investigations in social commerce research and comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior in digital environments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundation

Ego-Depletion Theory

Ego-Depletion Theory posits that self-control operates as a limited psychological resource that becomes depleted after continuous use (Baumeister et al., 1998). In digital environments, repeated exposure to FOMO-related stimuli requires individuals to regulate their emotions and impulses, which gradually exhausts their self-control capacity. Hagger et al. (2010) provided strong meta-analytic evidence supporting the ego-depletion effect, demonstrating across 198 independent studies that depleted individuals exhibit significantly reduced self-control capacity. Inzlicht and Schmeichel (2012) further elaborated on the mechanistic model of ego depletion, highlighting that initial bouts of self-control increase susceptibility to impulsive and reward-driven behavior by shifting both motivation and attention toward immediate gratification. Thus, ego depletion explains how continuous exposure to FOMO leads to emotional exhaustion and weakens resistance to impulsive buying.

Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory

The Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory suggests that individuals strive to obtain, retain, and protect valuable resources such as emotional energy and psychological well being (Hobfoll, 1989). Stress occurs when these resources are threatened or depleted. Hobfoll et al. (2018) extended this theory by demonstrating how resource loss in one domain creates cascading negative effects, leading to psychological strain and behavioral outcomes. Halbesleben et al. (2014) further emphasized that depletion of emotional resources through technology-related stressors results in

Compensatory coping behaviors, including consumption-related responses intended to replenish lost resources. In this context, FOMO can be seen as a threat to social and emotional resources, leading to emotional exhaustion and compensatory behaviors such as impulsive buying.

Compensatory Consumption Theory

Compensatory Consumption Theory explains that individuals engage in purchasing behavior to compensate for psychological deficiencies or feelings of inadequacy (Mandel et al., 2017). Rucker and Galinsky (2008) found that individuals experiencing powerlessness are more likely to engage in status consumption, paying higher prices for status related products in order to symbolically restore a sense of power and self-worth. Similarly, Sivanathan and Pettit (2010) demonstrated that individuals use consumption of status goods to restore self-worth and maintain a positive self-image when their sense of competence or status is threatened. Therefore, this theory explains why individuals engage in impulsive buying as a way to cope with emotional distress caused by FOMO and resource depletion.

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Impulsive Buying Behavior

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is defined as a pervasive apprehension that others may be having rewarding experiences from which an individual is absent, driven by an inherent desire to remain socially connected and informed (Przybylski et al., 2013). In social commerce environments, FOMO is continuously reinforced through algorithmically curated feeds, real-time peer activity notifications, and time-sensitive promotional stimuli

such as flash sales and countdown timers. These platform features generate a persistent psychological urgency that bypasses deliberate evaluation and triggers reactive purchasing responses. Empirical evidence consistently links FOMO to impulsive buying behavior in digital environments. Tandon et al. (2021) demonstrated that social media-induced FOMO significantly intensifies compulsive platform engagement and emotionally reactive consumption decisions, establishing FOMO as a primary psychological antecedent of unplanned purchases. Similarly, Ng et al. (2023a) confirmed that FOMO-inducing stimuli generated by social media content and key opinion leaders drive emotionally motivated purchasing decisions among Malaysian consumers, reflecting a pattern consistent with impulsive buying. In the social commerce context specifically, Lim et al. (2025a) found that scarcity cues and urgency appeals embedded in platforms such as Shopee redirect consumer behavior toward rapid, unplanned, and affectively driven purchase decisions a behavioral profile that directly characterizes impulsive buying. Drawing upon these arguments, the following hypothesis is proposed,

H1: Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) has a significant positive influence on impulsive buying behavior in social commerce.

Materialism and Impulsive Buying Behavior

Materialism is defined as the degree to which individuals prioritize the acquisition of material possessions as a central life goal, associating ownership with happiness, social status, and personal success (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Materialistic consumers are inherently predisposed toward consumption as a means of self-expression and social validation, rendering them disproportionately susceptible to the purchase stimuli prevalent in social commerce environments. The relationship between materialism and impulsive buying has received robust empirical support. Islam et al. (2021) confirmed that materialistic values significantly amplify impulsive and compulsive buying responses to social media stimuli, as highly materialistic consumers are more likely to act on acquisition opportunities without deliberate evaluation. Kaur et al. (2022) further established that materialism intensifies consumption-related behavioral responses in digital environments, with materialistic individuals exhibiting heightened purchase reactivity to aspirational consumption content. In cross-cultural contexts such as Pakistan and Malaysia, where aspirational influencer content and luxury consumption imagery are pervasive in social commerce, materialism is expected to directly drive impulsive purchasing by elevating the perceived desirability and social signalling value of platform-promoted products. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Materialism has a significant positive influence on impulsive buying behavior in social commerce.

Emotional Exhaustion and Impulsive Buying Behavior

Emotional exhaustion refers to a state of chronic depletion of emotional and cognitive resources resulting from sustained exposure to psychologically demanding stimuli (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). In social commerce contexts, continuous exposure to information overload, social comparison pressures, and FOMO-inducing content progressively depletes consumers' self-regulatory capacity, creating conditions under which impulsive purchasing emerges as a compensatory coping mechanism. Ego Depletion Theory (Baumeister et al., 1998) provides the theoretical foundation for this relationship, positing that self-control draws upon a finite pool of psychological resources. When these resources are depleted through sustained emotional demands, individuals are rendered incapable of resisting impulsive behavioral urges. Sheng et al. (2023a) directly confirmed this mechanism in social commerce contexts, demonstrating that emotionally exhausted consumers engage in hedonic and impulsive purchasing as a means of achieving immediate emotional relief, bypassing deliberate self-regulation in favor of affective gratification. Wang and Kee (2025) further established that emotional

exhaustion substantially compromises individuals' behavioral and cognitive functioning, increasing their susceptibility to peripheral cues and emotionally reactive decisions. Avcı et al. (2025) additionally demonstrated that social media-induced exhaustion reduces consumers' capacity for self-regulation, directly facilitating unplanned and impulsive consumption. Based on these arguments, the following hypothesis is proposed,

H3: Emotional exhaustion has a significant positive influence on impulsive buying behavior in social commerce.

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Emotional Exhaustion

Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) posits that individuals experience psychological resource depletion when they are repeatedly exposed to threats to their valued resources, including social belonging, social identity, and emotional security. In social commerce environments, FOMO functions as a persistent psychological stressor by continuously demanding social monitoring, identity comparison, and emotional regulation, progressively depleting consumers' emotional reserves and culminating in a state of emotional exhaustion. Bright and Logan (2018) empirically established that FOMO constitutes the strongest predictor of social media fatigue, demonstrating a direct pathway from fear-based digital engagement to emotional depletion. Their findings indicate that individuals driven by FOMO engage in sustained and compulsive platform monitoring, which progressively exhausts cognitive and emotional resources. Sheng et al. (2023b) further confirmed that information overload and privacy concerns both consequences of FOMO-driven engagement on social media are significant antecedents of emotional exhaustion. Anwar et al. (2022) demonstrated in the Pakistani context that sustained exposure to negative and overwhelming social media content significantly impairs psychological well-being and leads to emotional depletion, underscoring the cross-cultural applicability of this mechanism. Li et al. (2025) additionally confirmed that psychosocial stressors in demanding digital environments deplete individuals' emotional resources through the mechanism of emotional exhaustion. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed,

H4: Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) has a significant positive influence on emotional exhaustion among social commerce consumers.

Materialism and Emotional Exhaustion

While FOMO operates as an externally triggered stressor, materialism amplifies the internal psychological sensitivity with which consumers process social commerce stimuli. Highly materialistic individuals place central importance on consumption as a source of self-worth and social standing, meaning that exposure to aspirational content, peer consumption comparisons, and unattained acquisition opportunities constitutes a more profound threat to their psychological resources than it does for less materialistic consumers. Kaur et al. (2022) empirically demonstrated that materialism significantly accelerates social media-induced emotional exhaustion, with highly materialistic consumers depleting their emotional resources more rapidly in response to consumption-related social comparisons. This occurs because materialistic individuals invest substantially greater psychological effort in monitoring, evaluating, and responding to peer consumption activities on social commerce platforms, continuously taxing their emotional and cognitive reserves. Islam et al. (2021) further confirmed that materialistic values heighten emotional reactivity to social media stimuli in online shopping environments, suggesting that materialism functions as a dispositional amplifier of digital stressors. In the social commerce contexts of Pakistan and Malaysia, where aspirational influencer content and visible luxury consumption are prevalent, highly materialistic consumers are expected to experience accelerated emotional exhaustion as they continuously process the gap between their current possessions and the consumption

ideals displayed on platforms. Drawing upon these arguments, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Materialism has a significant positive influence on emotional exhaustion among social commerce consumer.

Cross-Country Differences: Pakistan and Malaysia

The present study adopts a cross country comparative design encompassing Pakistan and Malaysia, two emerging social commerce markets characterised by distinct yet overlapping cultural, economic, and digital adoption profiles. Both nations have witnessed rapid growth in social commerce penetration, driven by increasing smartphone accessibility, expanding social media usage, and the proliferation of integrated shopping platforms. However, differences in cultural values, digital literacy levels, consumer protection infrastructure, and economic development may moderate the strength of the relationships proposed in this study.

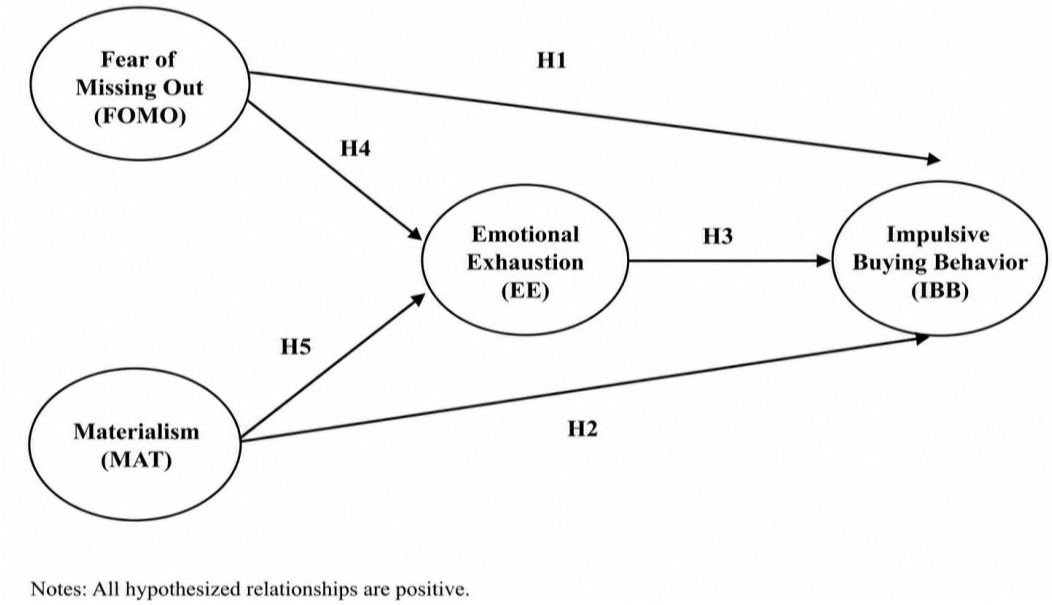
Aryani et al. (2021) documented that consumers in developing Asian economies are actively transitioning toward online and social commerce, yet this transition introduces heightened psychological vulnerabilities, including susceptibility to FOMO-driven impulsive behaviour and reduced decision quality. The cross country comparative framework enables the identification of whether the FOMO emotional exhaustion-decision quality pathway operates equivalently across both national contexts or whether cultural and contextual factors introduce meaningful moderation. Anwar et al. (2022) established in the Pakistani context that social media-induced psychological distress is a significant determinant of behavioural outcomes, while Ng et al. (2023b) and Lim et al. (2025b) confirmed analogous mechanisms in the Malaysian social commerce context.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the present study is illustrated in Figure 1. Drawing upon the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989), Ego-Depletion Theory (Baumeister et al., 1998), and Compensatory Consumption Theory (Mandel et al., 2017), the model positions FOMO as the primary independent variable exerting both direct and indirect effects on consumer impulsive buying behavior in social commerce contexts. Emotional exhaustion serves as the mediating mechanism through which FOMO depletes psychological resources and impairs deliberate decision making, while materialism functions as a boundary condition that amplifies the FOMO emotional exhaustion relationship among consumers with higher acquisitive orientations. The model is tested comparatively across Pakistan and Malaysia to assess cross cultural generalisability.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

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Notes: All hypothesized relationships are positive.

RESEARCH METHOD

Data for this research were gathered using an online questionnaire distributed by Google Forms. The survey link was shared across various digital platforms, including WhatsApp, Instagram, and Telegram, as well as through academic and professional channels to maximize participation diversity. A convenience sampling approach was adopted, focusing on individuals actively engaged in social commerce activities in Malaysia and Pakistan. In total, 150 usable responses, comprising students from Malaysia and students from Pakistan, were collected and included in the analysis.

All constructs were measured using previously validated scales adapted to the context of social commerce. Responses were recorded using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”, unless otherwise specified)

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) was measured using a multi-item scale adapted from recent studies (Przybylski et al., 2021). Sample items include: “I worry that others enjoy online shopping more than I do”, and “It bothers me if I miss a hot deal or trend on social media.” This construct captures users’ anxiety about missing out on online trends and experiences.

Emotional Exhaustion was assessed using a scale adapted from contemporary research on social media fatigue and digital burnout (Han, 2018). Respondents indicated frequency on a scale from 1 (“never”) to 5 (“always”). Example items include: “I feel very tired after scrolling social media or online shopping” and “Keeping up with fast online trends makes me feel tired”.

Materialism was measured using an adapted version of a validated consumer values scale (Islam et al., 2021). Sample includes: “My belongings show how successful I am in life” and “I feel very happy when I buy new things.” This construct reflects the importance individuals place on material possessions.

Impulse Buying Tendency was evaluated using scale adapted from recent e-commerce and social commerce literature (Hu et al., 2019). Example items include: “I often buy things on social media suddenly, without planning” and “When I see something in my feed, I buy it immediately without thinking.”

To ensure the reliability and validity of the measurement model, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) were assessed, with values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2021). Additionally, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to establish construct validity, including convergent and discriminant validity. Data were analyzed using statistical software such as SPSS.

RESULTS

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics Example (N =150)

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	43	28.7
Female	107	71.3
Country		
Pakistan	111	74.0
Malaysia	39	26.0
Employment Status		
Student	104	69.3
Employed	21	14.0
Self-employed	7	4.7
Unemployed	18	12.0

According to the data in Table 1, it presents the demographic characteristics of the 150 respondents. The gender composition reflects a relatively respondents were female (N=107, 71.3%), while males respondents represented (N=43, 28.7%). In terms of country, most of the respondents are from Pakistan (N=111, 74%), whereas (N=39, 26%) are from Malaysia. Regarding for employment status, students are the largest group of respondents (N=104,69.3%), followed by employed (N=21, 14%), unemployed individuals (N=18, 12%) and self-employed (N=7, 4.7%).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficients, and Zero-order Correlations for All Study Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4
Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)	0.819			
Materialism	0.447**	0.726		
Emotional Exhaustion	0.400**	0.536**	0.776	
Impulsive Buying Tendency	0.448**	0.406**	0.396**	0.858
Number of Item	6	6	6	6
Mean	2.6922	2.2856	2.9356	2.2967
Standard Deviation	0.87123	0.92652	0.90853	1.03785

Note. N =150, *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001. The diagonal entries indicate Cronbach's alpha.

According to Table 2, it presents the descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients, and zero-order correlations for all study variables. The Cronbach's alpha values range is from 0.819 to 0.858. Its demonstrate that all constructs have acceptable reliability. From all the variables, emotional exhaustion has the highest mean among of all variable (M=2.6922), followed by fear of missing out (FOMO) (M=2.6922). On the other hand, impulsive buying tendency (M=2.2967) and materialism (M=2.2856) have the lowest means.

From the results of the correlation, it is clear that all the variables are positively and significantly correlated. FOMO is positively with materialism ($r = 0.447$, $p < 0.01$), emotional exhaustion ($r = 0.400$, $p < 0.01$), and impulsive buying tendency ($r = 0.448$, $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, materialism is positively correlated with both emotional exhaustion and impulsive buying tendency, suggesting that respondents who hold the highest level of materialism values will also likely experience FOMO, emotional exhaustion, and impulsive buying tendency.

Table 3. Summary of Regression Analysis

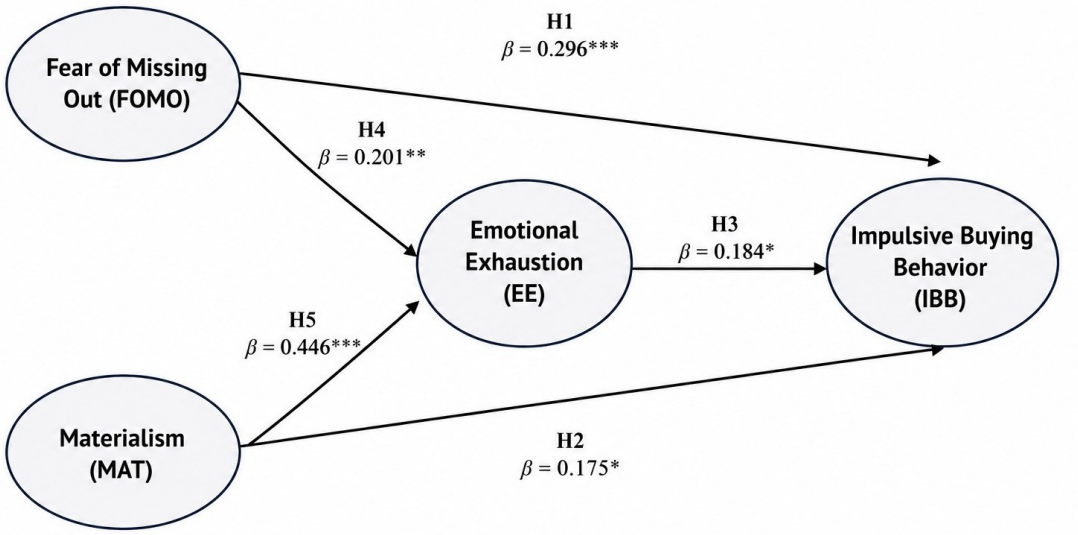
Variables	Emotional Exhaustion	Impulsive Buying Tendency
Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)	0.201**	0.296***
Materialism	0.446***	0.175*
Emotional Exhaustion	-	0.184*
R-Square	0.320	0.276
F-Value	34.543	18.587
Durbin-Watson Statistic	1.480	2.099

Note: N = 150, *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001

The SPSS results indicate that all hypothesized relationships were supported. For H1, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) has a significant positive relationship with Impulsive Buying Tendency (IBT) ($\beta = 0.296$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that higher levels of FOMO are associated with stronger impulsive purchasing tendencies. For H2, Materialism is also significantly and positively related to IBT ($\beta = 0.175$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that individuals with stronger materialistic values are more likely to engage in impulsive buying tendency. For H3, Emotional Exhaustion (EE) shows a significant positive effect on IBT ($\beta = 0.184$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that emotionally exhausted individuals tend to exhibit higher impulsive buying tendency. Regarding the antecedents of emotional exhaustion, H4 is supported as FOMO significantly predicts EE ($\beta = 0.201$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that individuals experiencing higher FOMO are more likely to feel emotionally drained. Similarly, H5 is strongly supported, as Materialism has a significant and relatively strong positive effect on EE ($\beta = 0.446$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that materialistic individuals are more prone to emotional exhaustion. Overall, the findings demonstrate that both FOMO and Materialism not only directly influence impulsive buying tendency but also indirectly contribute through emotional exhaustion, highlighting its partial mediating role in the model.

Figure 2. Overview Result

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Notes: Standardized path coefficients (β) are reported.
All hypothesized relationships are positive.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests).

DISCUSSION

This study advances understanding of impulsive buying behavior (IBB) by integrating Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), materialism, and emotional exhaustion (EE). Our findings contribute to theory by clarifying the relative strength of cognitive-social triggers, value-based orientations, and affective depletion in shaping impulsive consumption in digitally saturated environments.

First, we find that FOMO is the strongest predictor of impulsive buying behavior, exceeding both emotional exhaustion and materialism in its explanatory power. Our findings reveal the central role of anticipatory social anxiety and perceived opportunity loss in driving immediate consumption decisions. Consistent with social comparison and scarcity-based attention perspectives, FOMO functions as a high-velocity cognitive-affective trigger that compresses deliberation time and heightens perceived urgency. In contemporary digital environments characterized by constant exposure to peer consumption cues, algorithmically curated content, and time-sensitive promotions, FOMO operates as a dominant situational force that translates attention into action. Importantly, our findings suggest that impulsive buying behavior is increasingly influenced less by stable dispositions and more by contextually activated psychological pressure**.**

Second, although both materialism and emotional exhaustion significantly predict impulsive buying behavior, their effects are comparatively weaker than FOMO. Emotional exhaustion reflects depleted self-regulatory resources, which increases susceptibility to external cues and reduces resistance to immediate gratification. However, its effect appears more enabling than initiating, it facilitates impulsive behavior once triggered rather than independently driving it. This pattern is consistent with self-regulation perspectives, which posit that resource depletion primarily amplifies responsiveness to environmental stimuli rather than generating consumption impulses directly. Materialism, while significant, similarly exerts a more modest direct effect on impulsive buying behavior, suggesting that value-based orientations alone are insufficient to explain immediate purchase decisions in high-stimulation digital contexts.

Third, our findings reveal a more structurally important role for materialism in influencing emotional exhaustion. Materialism emerges as the strongest predictor of emotional exhaustion compared to FOMO, indicating that materialistic values impose a deeper and more persistent psychological cost. We interpret this finding as evidence that materialism operates as a chronic cognitive orientation that intensifies social comparison, elevates aspiration gaps, and sustains dissatisfaction over time. These processes accumulate psychological strain, ultimately depleting emotional resources. Materialism operates as a deeper value-based driver that increases emotional exhaustion through sustained psychological strain and resource depletion. Prior evidence suggests that structural and individual-level economic and value pressures contribute to heightened insecurity and psychological strain, reinforcing depletion-based outcomes (Han et al., 2026). In contrast, FOMO appears more episodic and situational, generating acute pressure without producing the same sustained emotional depletion.

Taken together, our findings support a dual-pathway model. On one path, FOMO operates as a proximal and immediate driver of impulsive buying behavior, directly translating perceived opportunity loss into consumption urgency. On the other path, materialism functions as a distal value-based antecedent that increases emotional exhaustion, which in turn indirectly contributes to impulsive tendencies by weakening self-regulatory capacity. This structure clarifies the hierarchical ordering of effects across cognitive-social triggers, dispositional values, and affective resource states.

From a theoretical perspective, our study refines existing explanations of impulsive buying behavior by integrating situational activation mechanisms with deeper value-based and affective processes. We extend prior research by demonstrating that FOMO is not merely another antecedent of impulsive buying but the most potent proximal driver in digitally mediated consumption contexts. At the same time, we reposition materialism as a foundational upstream factor that operates primarily through emotional resource depletion rather than direct behavioral activation. From a practical standpoint, these findings suggest that firms' use of FOMO-based marketing tactics is likely to be particularly effective in triggering impulsive purchases. However, our findings also highlight a potential longer-term cost: sustained exposure to such tactics may exacerbate emotional exhaustion, particularly among highly materialistic individuals. This raises important implications for consumer well-being and suggests that interventions aimed at promoting more sustainable consumption should address both immediate situational triggers and underlying value orientations. In sum, our study shows that impulsive buying behavior is influenced by a layered psychological system in which FOMO serves as the dominant proximal trigger, emotional exhaustion functions as a facilitating state, and materialism operates as a deeper antecedent that primarily influences behavior indirectly through emotional depletion.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explain impulsive buying behavior (IBB) by integrating Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), materialism, and emotional exhaustion (EE) within a unified structural framework. Overall, our findings reveal a better understanding of how immediate cognitive triggers, deep-seated value orientations, and affective resource states jointly shape impulsive consumption in digitally intensive environments. A key contribution of our study is the clear identification of FOMO as the most powerful direct predictor of impulsive buying behavior. This finding underscores that impulsive consumption in contemporary contexts is driven primarily by situationally activated psychological pressure rather than stable dispositional traits alone. FOMO operates as a dominant proximal mechanism that translates perceived social exclusion and opportunity loss into immediate purchasing action. In contrast, both emotional

exhaustion and materialism, while significant, play comparatively secondary roles in directly shaping impulsive buying behavior.

At the same time, our results reveal an important indirect pathway through which consumption behavior is shaped. Materialism emerges as the strongest predictor of emotional exhaustion, indicating that value-based orientations exert a more profound and enduring psychological cost. This suggests that materialism functions as a deeper structural driver that gradually depletes emotional resources through sustained social comparison and chronic dissatisfaction. Emotional exhaustion, in turn, serves as a facilitating state that increases susceptibility to impulsive behavior, but it is not the primary initiating force.

Taken together, our findings reveal a layered psychological architecture of impulsive buying behavior. On one level, FOMO acts as an immediate and powerful trigger that drives real-time consumption decisions. On another level, materialism shapes longer-term emotional vulnerability by increasing exhaustion, thereby indirectly contributing to impulsive tendencies. Emotional exhaustion occupies an intermediate position, translating underlying psychological strain into reduced self-regulation and heightened behavioral susceptibility.

Theoretically, this study extends impulsive consumption literature by clarifying the hierarchical ordering of effects across situational cognition, dispositional values, and affective depletion. We reveal that FOMO is not simply one of many antecedents of impulsive buying but rather the most influential proximal determinant in digital consumption environments. We also reposition materialism as a foundational upstream factor that primarily operates through emotional exhaustion rather than exerting strong direct behavioral effects. From a practical perspective, our findings suggest that marketers should recognize the particularly strong effectiveness of FOMO-based tactics in stimulating impulsive purchases. However, the same mechanisms that enhance short-term sales may also contribute to emotional exhaustion, especially among highly materialistic consumers. This raises important implications for both ethical marketing practices and consumer well-being, suggesting the need for a more balanced approach to engagement strategies in digital marketplaces.

In conclusion, impulsive buying behavior is best understood as the outcome of a multi-layered psychological system in which FOMO serves as the dominant immediate trigger, emotional exhaustion functions as a facilitating state, and materialism operates as a deeper antecedent that primarily exerts its influence indirectly through emotional depletion.

LIMITATION

Several limitations should be acknowledged in this study. First, the study used a convenience sampling method and focused only on university students in Pakistan and Malaysia. Therefore, the findings may not fully represent the broader population of social commerce consumers, particularly older consumers or individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Future studies should include more diverse demographic groups and apply probability sampling techniques to improve the generalizability of the findings.

Second, the study employed a cross-sectional research design, which only captured respondents' perceptions and behaviors at one point in time. As a result, the causal relationship among FOMO, emotional exhaustion, materialism, and consumer decision-making quality cannot be fully confirmed. Future researchers are encouraged to conduct

longitudinal studies to examine how these psychological effects develop over time in social commerce environments.
Third, all variables were measured using self-reported questionnaires, which may introduce common method bias and social desirability bias. Respondents may have underreported or overreported their emotional experiences and impulsive buying behavior. Future research may combine survey methods with behavioral tracking data or experimental approaches to obtain more accurate and objective findings.

Finally, this study focused mainly on FOMO, emotional exhaustion, and materialism, while other potentially important factors such as self-control, financial literacy, personality traits, peer influence, and platform characteristics were not examined. Future studies should extend the current framework by including additional psychological and contextual variables to provide a more comprehensive understanding of consumer decision-making behavior in social commerce.

Studies on digital consumer behavior in developing Asian economies have similarly noted that contextual and cultural differences may influence how consumers experience psychological pressure and impulsive buying behavior in online environments (Aryani et al., 2021; Ng et al., 2023a). Therefore, future comparative studies across more countries and cultural settings would further strengthen the understanding of FOMO-driven consumer behavior in social commerce.

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