

INVESTIGATING THE INFLUENCE OF FEAR OF MISSING OUT (FOMO) ON TIKTOK-BASED IMPULSIVE BUYING BEHAVIOR AMONG GENERATION Z CONSUMERS IN HO CHI MINH CITY, VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to clarify the relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and impulsive buying behavior among Generation Z consumers on the TikTok platform in Ho Chi Minh City. Employing a quantitative research approach through a survey of 321 respondents, the findings reveal that FOMO is significantly influenced by four key factors: viral marketing, advertising, and influencers. Furthermore, FOMO exerts a significant effect on impulsive buying behavior. The results provide practical implications for businesses in designing marketing strategies that better align with the psychological characteristics and consumption tendencies of young consumers.

Keywords: Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), impulsive buying behavior, TikTok, Generation Z.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social commerce has reshaped how young consumers discover and buy products, and TikTok sits at the center of this shift in Southeast Asia. Through TikTok Shop, users can purchase directly from in-feed videos and livestreams, blending entertainment with shopping [4]. Such environments, with influencer endorsements, flash sales, and limited-stock cues, encourage impulsive buying, i.e., unplanned purchases made immediately upon encountering a stimulus. A key psychological driver is the fear of missing out (FOMO), the apprehension that others are having rewarding experiences from which one is absent [10], which marketers can exploit through scarcity and urgency appeals [6].

This study therefore investigates the influence of FoMO on TikTok-based impulsive buying behavior among Generation Z consumers in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND - LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical Background

[10] define FOMO as a pervasive apprehension that others are having rewarding experiences from which one is absent. People with high FOMO feel pressure to stay constantly informed about others' activities, which leads to more frequent social media use [10]. In marketing, FoMO appeals, built around scarcity, limited-time opportunity, and the need for quick decisions, are regarded as a powerful purchase trigger [6].

Impulsive buying is an unplanned purchase made immediately upon encountering a product or a stimulus representing it [9]. Drive-reduction theory offers a link to FOMO:

individuals who experience anxiety about being left out act quickly to relieve that tension, and a purchase can provide this relief [4].

The S-O-R model [8] proposes that environmental stimuli (S) shape an individual's internal cognitive and affective states (O), which in turn drive behavioral responses (R).

2.2. Empirical Studies

A growing body of research links FOMO to impulsive buying in online environments. Studies of students and young adults indicate that FOMO increases impulsive purchasing under time pressure and limited-time promotions: [12] found that time pressure and FOMO both significantly affected impulse buying, with FOMO showing the stronger effect and partially mediating the influence of time pressure. FOMO has been tied to impulse buying and post-purchase regret in retail settings [1].

Evidence from Southeast Asian e-commerce is consistent with this. [11] found that FOMO, shopping enjoyment, and hedonic shopping motivation each had a significant positive effect on online impulse buying among Gen Z Shopee users in Indonesia.

Marketing scholars regard FOMO as a purchase trigger that works by making consumers anxious about missing rewarding opportunities [6]. Empirical work supports this link. FOMO tendencies have been associated with impulse buying and post-purchase regret [1] and scarcity cues raise impulsive purchasing [13]. Among 209 Gen Z students in Jakarta, FOMO was the strongest predictor of impulsive buying ($\beta = 0.465$; [7]), and [12] found that FOMO, shopping enjoyment, and hedonic motivation each increased impulse buying among Gen Z Shopee users.

Viral marketing increased FOMO among Gen Z students ($\beta = 0.303$), and FOMO transmitted part of its effect to impulsive buying [7]. [3] likewise found that exposure to influencers triggered social comparison and FOMO. Retargeted advertisements stressing scarcity or urgency can also elicit FOMO-related reactions in young people. [2]

Inconsistencies and gap. Results are not uniform. FOMO was not a direct significant predictor of impulsive buying in an Indonesian Shopee sample [5], FOMO failed to moderate the direct path from influencer exposure to purchase intention (Lady et al., in press. Moreover, most studies test only one or two stimuli, or focus on TikTok Shop and on broad “young people” rather than Gen Z. No study located here tests viral marketing, social media, advertising, sales promotion, and influencers together as antecedents of FOMO among Gen Z consumers on TikTok in Ho Chi Minh City, which motivates the hypotheses below.

Overall, prior research suggests that FOMO acts not only as an independent factor but also as a powerful mediating mechanism linking marketing stimuli to consumer behavior.

Hypotheses 1: Viral marketing has a positive effect (+) on fear of missing out (FOMO).

Hypotheses 2: Social media has a positive effect (+) on fear of missing out (FOMO).

Hypotheses 3: Advertising has a positive effect (+) on fear of missing out (FOMO).

Hypotheses 4: Sales promotion has a positive effect (+) on fear of missing out (FOMO).

Hypotheses 5: Influencers have a positive effect (+) on fear of missing out (FOMO).

Hypotheses 6: Fear of missing out (FOMO) mediates the relationship between marketing factors and impulsive buying behavior on TikTok among Generation Z consumers in Ho Chi Minh City.

Based on the synthesis of previous studies, the research model proposes that the following factors influence FOMO:

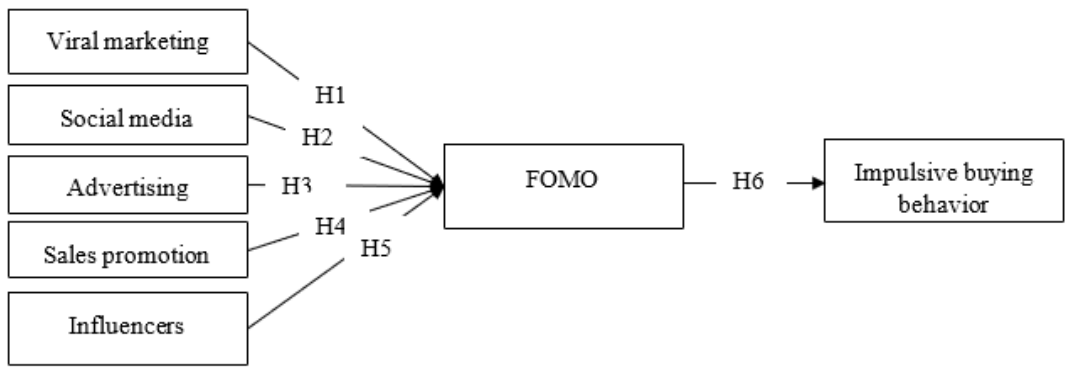


Figure 1. Proposed Research Model

Source: Authors' elaboration (2025)

3. METHODOLOGY

Data was collected through an online survey designed using Google Forms and distributed via Zalo, Facebook, and Messenger. The data collection period was from March 10 to March 16, 2025.

The minimum sample size should be at least five times the number of observed variables. With 33 observed variables, the minimum required sample size was 165. However, to enhance reliability, this study employed a sample size of 321 respondents.

Data was analyzed using SPSS 26 and SmartPLS 3. Cronbach's Alpha was used to assess reliability, while Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was applied to evaluate the research model.

Sample Characteristics

Table 1. Sample Characteristics (n = 321)

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Valid Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage (%)
Gender				
Male	83	25.9	25.9	25.9
Female	238	74.1	74.1	100
Total	321	100	100	
Age				
< 18	14	4.4	4.4	4.4
18 - 22	231	72	72,0	84.1
22 - 25	51	15.9	15.9	100
> 25	25	7.8	7.8	12.1
Total	321	100	100	
Purchase Frequency				
Rarely (at most once per month)	94	29.3	29.3	29.3

Occasionally (2–3 times per month)	170	53.0	53.0	82.2
Frequently (more than 4 times/month)	57	17.8	17.8	100
Total	321	100	100	
Spending Level				
<500.000VNĐ	125	38.9	38.9	38.9
>2.000.000VNĐ	32	10.0	10.0	48.9
1.000.000 - 2.000.000VNĐ	31	9.7	9.7	58.6
500.000 - 1.000.000VNĐ	133	41.4	41.4	100
Total	321	100	100	

Source: Authors' elaboration (2025)

4. RESULTS - ISCUSSION

The reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha for the independent construct "social media," which consists of five observed variables, yielded a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of -0.070 (< 0.6), indicating that the scale does not meet the required reliability threshold. Furthermore, all corrected item–total correlations for the observed variables are below 0.3, suggesting weak internal consistency among the items. Therefore, this scale is considered unreliable and will be excluded from subsequent analyses.

4.1. Outer Loading

After the first estimation of outer loadings, the authors removed items VM2 and VM4 due to factor loadings below 0.7. The model was then re-estimated, and the results are presented in the following table:

Table 2. Outer Loadings

	AD	FM	IB	IF	SP	VM
AD1	0.845					
AD2	0.847					
AD3	0.903					
AD4	0.939					
AD5	0.916					
IB1			0.884			
IB2			0.908			
IB3			0.902			
IB4			0.906			
IB5			0.912			
FM1		0.932				

FM2		0.916				
FM3		0.928				
FM4		0.937				
IF1				0.913		
IF2				0.922		
IF3				0.929		
IF4				0.948		
SP1					0.890	
SP2					0.893	
SP3					0.910	
SP4					0.917	
SP5					0.923	
VM1						0.744
VM3						0.844
VM5						0.800

Source: Authors' elaboration (2025)

According to the literature, an outer loading of 0.7 or higher indicates that an observed variable has good measurement quality and a strong relationship with its corresponding latent construct. The results show that all items measuring the constructs AD (Advertising), IB (Impulsive Buying Behavior), FM (Fear of Missing Out), IF (Influencers), and SP (Sales Promotion) have outer loadings exceeding 0.7, confirming strong associations between the observed variables and their respective latent constructs.

For the latent construct VM (Viral Marketing), the retained items VM1, VM3, and VM5 also exhibit outer loadings above 0.7, indicating acceptable measurement quality after the removal of low-loading items.

4.2. Reliability and Convergent Validity

Table 3. Reliability and Convergent Validity

	Cronbach's alpha	rho_A	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)
AD	0.938	0.944	0.953	0.803
FM	0.946	0.946	0.961	0.861
IB	0.943	0.945	0.956	0.815
IF	0.946	0.948	0.961	0.861
SP	0.946	0.947	0.958	0.822
VM	0.714	0.727	0.839	0.636

Source: Authors' elaboration (2025)

The results indicate that most measurement scales in the study achieve high reliability and satisfactory convergent validity. Specifically, Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for all constructions exceed the recommended threshold of 0.7, ranging from 0.714 to 0.946, confirming strong internal consistency. In addition, the Composite Reliability (CR) values for

all constructs are above 0.7, ranging from 0.839 to 0.961, demonstrating high composite reliability and indicating that the observed variables adequately represent their respective latent constructions.

Regarding convergent validity, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for most constructs exceed the threshold of 0.5, ranging from 0.636 to 0.803, suggesting that more than 50% of the variance in the observed variables is explained by the latent constructs. Overall, the measurement scales meet the required criteria for both reliability and convergent validity.

4.3. Discriminant Validity

Table 4. HTMT Matrix

	AD	FM	IB	IF	SP	VM
AD						
FM	0.539					
IB	0.510	0.603				
IF	0.489	0.742	0.493			
SP	0.456	0.584	0.445	0.590		
VM	0.301	0.473	0.314	0.389	0.360	

Source: Authors' elaboration (2025)

Based on the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) results presented in the table, all values are below the threshold of 0.85, indicating that the latent constructs in the model exhibit good discriminant validity. This confirms that the measured constructs are distinct and do not overlap, ensuring the reliability of the measurement model. Therefore, the model is deemed suitable for further hypothesis testing.

4.4. Path Coefficients

Table 5. Effects of Factors in the Research Model

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistic (O/STDEV)	P Values
AD -> FM	0.180	0.178	0.050	3.610	0.000
FM -> IB	0.571	0.573	0.041	14.087	0.000
IF -> FM	0.483	0.483	0.056	8.617	0.000
SP -> FM	0.163	0.163	0.058	2.817	0.005
VM -> FM	0.143	0.146	0.043	3.311	0.001

Source: Authors' elaboration (2025)

Based on the analysis results, the construction IF (Influencers) has the strongest effect on FM (Fear of Missing Out), with a path coefficient of O = 0.483 and a significance level of P = 0.000 (< 0.05). This indicates that influencers play a dominant role in increasing FOMO among Generation Z users on TikTok in Ho Chi Minh City.

The construct AD (Advertising) shows the second strongest effect on FM, with a path coefficient of O = 0.180 and P = 0.000 (< 0.05), indicating a statistically significant but relatively weaker influence compared to influencers.

The construction SP (Sales Promotion) ranks third in terms of impact on FM, with $O = 0.163$ and $P = 0.005 (< 0.05)$, confirming a significant positive effect.

Finally, the construction VM (Viral Marketing) has the weakest impact on FM, with $O = 0.143$ and $P = 0.001 (< 0.05)$, although the relationship remains statistically significant.

4.5. Specific Indirect Effects

Table 6. Specific Indirect Effects

Indirect Effect	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T-statistic	p-value
SP → FM → IB	93	93	35	2.672	0.008
IF → FM → IB	275	276	37	7.370	< 0.001
AD → FM → IB	103	105	28	3.663	< 0.001
VM → FM → IB	82	81	24	3.374	< 0.001

Table 6 presents the specific indirect effects of SP, IF, AD, and VM on IB through FM. The results show that all indirect effects are positive and statistically significant. Specifically, SP has a significant positive indirect effect on IB through FM ($\beta = 0.093$, $t = 2.672$, $p = 0.008$). IF also exhibits a significant positive indirect effect on IB through FM ($\beta = 0.275$, $t = 7.370$, $p < 0.001$). Similarly, the indirect effects of AD and VM on IB through FM are statistically significant, with $\beta = 0.103$ ($t = 3.663$, $p < 0.001$) and $\beta = 0.082$ ($t = 3.374$, $p = 0.0001$), respectively. These findings indicate that FM significantly mediates the relationships between SP, IF, AD, VM, and IB.

4.6. Structural Model Results

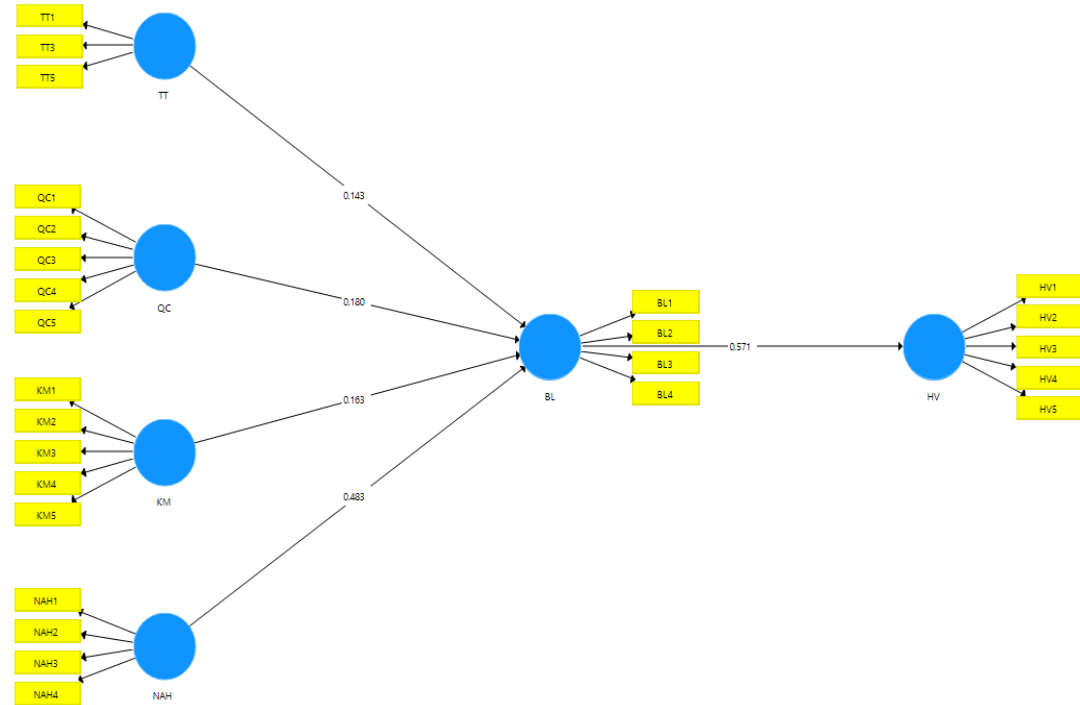


Figure 2. Structural Model Results

Source: Authors' elaboration (2025)

Table 6. Hypothesis Testing Results

H	Hypotheses	(O)	P Value	Conclusion
H1	Viral marketing positively influences fear of missing out (FOMO).	0.143	< 0.001	Accepted
H3	Advertising positively influences fear of missing out (FOMO).	0.180	< 0.001	Accepted
H4	Sales promotion positively influences fear of missing out (FOMO).	0.163	0.005	Accepted
H5	Influencers positively influence fear of missing out (FOMO).	0.483	< 0.001	Accepted
H6	Fear of missing out (FOMO) mediates the relationship between marketing factors and impulsive buying behavior on TikTok among Generation Z in Ho Chi Minh City.	0.571	< 0.001	Accepted

Source: Authors' elaboration (2025)

H1: Viral marketing has a positive effect on fear of missing out (FOMO), with a path coefficient of +0.143. Although this is not the strongest factor in the model, it still indicates a meaningful influence of viral marketing on consumers' FOMO.

H3: Advertising positively affects FOMO, with a path coefficient of +0.180. Despite its relatively low impact, advertising still plays a role in triggering FOMO among consumers.

H4: Sales promotion has a positive effect on FOMO, with a path coefficient of +0.163. This finding confirms that promotions contribute to FOMO, and although not the most influential factor, they remain an important component in the research model.

H5: Influencers have the strongest impact on FOMO, with a path coefficient of +0.483. This result highlights that consumers are highly susceptible to FOMO when exposed to content created and promoted by influencers.

H6: The mediating effect of FOMO on the relationship between marketing factors and impulsive buying behavior is significant, with a path coefficient of +0.571. This indicates that FOMO plays a crucial mediating role, through which marketing factors can effectively influence consumers and accelerate impulsive purchasing behavior.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings highlight that FOMO plays a crucial role in shaping impulsive buying behavior among Gen Z consumers. Based on the results, several managerial implications are proposed:

First, businesses should collaborate with relevant influencers to enhance product visibility and stimulate impulsive purchases.

Second, advertising strategies should emphasize exclusivity and product uniqueness through visually appealing content.

Third, promotional campaigns should incorporate scarcity tactics, such as limited time offers or quantity restrictions, to create urgency.

Fourth, firms should encourage user-generated content and trend-based challenges to foster community engagement and trigger FOMO.

Fifth, businesses should focus on selecting suitable social media platforms and diversifying communication channels.

Finally, integrating promotional strategies with influencer marketing and viral campaigns can significantly enhance marketing effectiveness.

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