

THE INFLUENCE OF FOMO ON IMPULSE BUYING BEHAVIOR: CONSTRUCTING SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION HABITS FOR VIETNAMESE MIDDLE-AGED CONSUMERS

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ABSTRACT

Digital retail environments increasingly combine scarcity cues, livestream interaction, algorithmic recommendations, and visible peer behavior, creating conditions in which fear of missing out (FOMO) can accelerate unplanned purchasing. Research has concentrated primarily on younger consumers, leaving the implications for middle-aged consumers in emerging markets insufficiently specified. This study examines the mechanisms through which FOMO can intensify impulse buying and identifies intervention points for sustainable consumption among Vietnamese middle-aged consumers. To avoid unsupported primary-data claims in the earlier version, the revised study adopts a structured integrative review and theory-building synthesis. Nineteen substantive peer-reviewed studies published from 2022 to 2025 were retained after relevance and verifiability screening; all sources have DOI or stable journal records. Evidence was coded for digital stimuli, FOMO-related psychological responses, impulsive or compulsive outcomes, life-stage factors, Vietnam-specific context, and sustainability implications, and then interpreted through stimulus-organism-response logic, social comparison, and self-regulation. The synthesis indicates that scarcity, social visibility, anticipated regret, and low-friction checkout compress deliberation. For middle-aged consumers, susceptibility is likely to be expressed through value-preserving rationalization: an unplanned purchase is reframed as thrift, household usefulness, or avoidance of a lost opportunity. Repeated exposure may normalize excess acquisition and conflict with financial and environmental sustainability. Sustainable consumption therefore depends on consumer-level pause routines, transparent platform design, and proportionate oversight of manipulative urgency. The study contributes a context-sensitive agenda for empirical research on Vietnamese consumers aged approximately 40-59.

Keywords: Consumer behavior, fear of missing out, impulse buying, middle-aged consumers, sustainable consumption.

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital commerce has made impulse buying easier to trigger, faster to complete, and more difficult to separate from entertainment and social interaction. A recent systematic review shows that contemporary impulse-buying research increasingly emphasizes platform stimuli, affective activation, and reduced deliberation rather than treating unplanned purchase as a stable trait alone [1]. Vietnam is a particularly relevant setting. Studies of Vietnamese e-commerce users report that social comparison, scarcity, platform features, and online buying intention are associated with impulsive or compulsive purchasing [2]-[4], while livestream

commerce in Hanoi demonstrates how social presence and platform-related perceptions can intensify impulse buying [5].

Fear of missing out (FOMO) provides a plausible psychological bridge between these digital stimuli and rapid purchase. Scarcity can heighten FOMO and thereby increase impulse buying [6]. Influencer exposure can work through social comparison, materialism, imitation, and FOMO [7], [8], while recent evidence links compulsive social-media use to impulsive and compulsive buying through social comparison and FOMO [9]. FOMO is also associated with compulsive buying, with mindfulness operating as a protective moderator [10]. These findings indicate that FOMO in commerce is not simply a desire for a product; it is an aversive anticipation of losing access, social relevance, or economic advantage.

The sustainability implications are increasingly difficult to ignore. FOMO can strengthen non-sustainable purchase intentions when urgency displaces evaluation of long-term value [11]. Recent reviews of responsible and sustainable consumption likewise emphasize that durable behavior depends on the interaction of social values, ethical obligations, environmental concern, and everyday economic reasoning [12], [13]. Yet the demographic distribution of this research is uneven. Evidence directly focused on middle-aged consumers remains limited, even though work on mindfulness and conspicuous consumption suggests that midlife status concerns, materialism, and self-regulation can meaningfully shape purchasing behavior [14].

The research object is the mechanism linking digitally activated FOMO to impulse buying and, in turn, to sustainable or non-sustainable consumption practices among Vietnamese middle-aged consumers. The intended population is adults approximately 40-59 years old who use e-commerce, social-commerce, short-video, or livestream shopping services. The geographical scope is Vietnam, with Hanoi retained as the focal urban context because several relevant studies have been conducted there; evidence from other Vietnamese locations and comparable Asian markets is used only to clarify mechanisms, not to claim demographic equivalence. The temporal scope of the evidence review is 2022-2026, with the final substantive corpus comprising 19 peer-reviewed studies published from 2022 to 2025. Three questions guide the analysis: (RQ1) Which digital stimuli most consistently activate FOMO-linked impulsive purchasing? (RQ2) How may middle-age responsibilities and self-regulation alter these mechanisms? (RQ3) Which consumer, platform, and policy interventions are most defensible for sustainable consumption in Vietnam?

The article proceeds as follows. Section 2 develops theoretical synthesis around FOMO, social comparison, impulse buying, self-regulation, and sustainable consumption. Section 3 explains the review protocol, research scope, evidence coding, and analytical procedures. Section 4 reports the thematic synthesis. Section 5 discusses theoretical, managerial, policy, and consumer-education implications. Section 6 concludes with limitations and a concrete agenda for primary empirical research among Vietnamese middle-aged consumers.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. FOMO as an organism-level response to digital stimuli

Contemporary digital commerce repeatedly converts ordinary browsing into a time-sensitive decision. In S-O-R terms, scarcity labels, countdown timers, expiring vouchers, livestream prompts, and visible purchase activity function as stimuli; FOMO, anticipated regret, arousal, or perceived opportunity loss are organism-level reactions; impulse buying is a behavioral response. Recent evidence directly supports this chain. Scarcity has been shown to increase impulse buying through FOMO [6], and scarcity-induced livestream purchases are

mediated by anticipated emotions, particularly prospective regret and rejoicing [15]. The theoretical relevance of FOMO is therefore temporal: it changes the perceived cost of waiting.

The same mechanism can be social rather than purely economic. Influencers and peers make consumption visible, allowing users to infer what is current, valued, or already validated by others. Dinh and Lee [7] show that imitation of influencers is connected to social comparison, materialism, FOMO, and buying intention; a later study shows that FOMO also changes the strength of influencer-related pathways to purchase intention [8]. Recent consumer research similarly shows that social comparison and FOMO can mediate the path from compulsive social-media use to unrestrained buying [9]. Together, these studies justify treating FOMO as a state that can be commercially activated, not only as a general personality tendency.

2.2. Impulse buying in livestream and platform-mediated commerce

Livestream and short-video commerce intensify impulse buying because persuasion, entertainment, social interaction, and transaction occur in the same interface. Product scarcity, perceived value, immediate feedback, and involvement can produce a felt urge to buy before a planned need has been evaluated [15], [16]. Livestream evidence also indicates that promotion strategy and streamer characteristics can increase unplanned buying, particularly when usefulness and immediacy are salient [17]. In Vietnam, Shopee video and livestream studies identify comparable platform effects, including scarcity, hedonic motivation, social presence, trust, and platform usability [3], [5].

Low-friction transaction architecture is consequential because it compresses the interval between arousal and commitment. Stored payment credentials, one-click checkout, time-limited coupons, and notifications reduce the number of moments in which a consumer can reconsider need, affordability, and substitution. This does not imply that all impulse purchases are irrational. Instead, platform architecture can change which considerations are cognitively available at the decisive moment.

2.3. Middle-aged consumers, rationalization, and self-regulation

Literature offers much less direct evidence on middle-aged consumers than on younger users. This gap should not be filled by assuming that findings from university-age samples transfer unchanged. The clearest recent age-specific evidence shows that mindfulness is associated with lower conspicuous consumption among middle-aged Chinese consumers through lower materialism and status anxiety [14]. This is important because it suggests that self-regulation and social-evaluative concerns remain active in midlife, even when consumption is more strongly embedded in household responsibilities.

For the Vietnamese context, the present review develops the concept of value-preserving rationalization as an analytical proposition rather than an observed interview finding. A middle-aged consumer may experience the same scarcity or social cue as a younger consumer but justify the resulting purchase through a different vocabulary: avoiding waste of a discount, securing household utility, buying ahead, or making a financially prudent decision. Vietnamese evidence that links scarcity and social comparison with impulsive or compulsive buying [2]–[5], together with direct evidence on FOMO-driven herd behavior in Vietnam [18], makes this proposition plausible. It nevertheless requires primary testing in a 40–59-year-old Vietnamese sample.

2.4. Sustainable consumption as a countervailing decision logic

Sustainable consumption is broader than choosing products marketed as green. It includes reducing unnecessary acquisition, extending product use, considering total cost and durability, and aligning consumption with long-term environmental and household well-

being. Recent syntheses characterize responsible consumption as a multidimensional behavioral domain involving ethical, social, environmental, and economic motives [12], [13]. Values, beliefs, and norms also predict multiple forms of sustainable behavior across adult age groups [19].

FOMO creates tension with this logic because it privileges immediacy over lifecycle value. Evidence from fast fashion shows that FOMO can increase purchase intentions even when sustainability is salient [11]. A sustainable response therefore requires mechanisms that restore temporal distance and reflective evaluation. Mindfulness is especially relevant because it weakens the association between FOMO and compulsive buying [10] and is associated with lower conspicuous consumption in middle age [14].

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research design

The revised study uses a structured integrative review and theory-building synthesis. This design replaces the earlier interview-based wording because the submitted manuscript did not contain a verifiable participant count, socioeconomic profile, transcript corpus, or auditable primary-data record. Retaining empirical interview claims without those materials would create an evidentiary problem. The integrative design is therefore used to preserve the research question while aligning all claims with verifiable published evidence. Recent integrative-review guidance was used to structure problem identification, literature search, evaluation, data analysis, and presentation [20]. Because the objective is theory-building rather than exhaustive effect aggregation, the study is not presented as a systematic review or meta-analysis.

3.2. Research object and scope

The research object is the FOMO-impulse buying-sustainable consumption relationship in digital commerce. The target consumer segment is Vietnamese adults approximately 40-59 years old. The contextual scope includes e-commerce marketplaces, social commerce, short-video shopping, livestream commerce, and associated promotional practices. Vietnam is the principal context; studies from other markets enter the synthesis only when they test a mechanism that is directly relevant to FOMO, scarcity, mindfulness, social comparison, or sustainable consumption. Because the extant Vietnam literature is weighted toward younger or general adult samples, age-specific claims are explicitly distinguished from mechanism-level inferences.

3.3. Evidence identification and eligibility

Evidence identification covered publications from January 2022 through June 2026 using combinations of the terms “fear of missing out” or “FOMO,” “impulse buying,” “compulsive buying,” “scarcity,” “social comparison,” “livestream commerce,” “social commerce,” “sustainable consumption,” “middle-aged,” “mindfulness,” “Vietnam,” and “Vietnamese consumers.” Searches were cross-checked against publisher pages, DOI landing records, and open scholarly indexes. Inclusion required a peer-reviewed journal article, a publication date within the stated window, direct relevance to at least one analytical construct, and a DOI or stable journal record that could be independently accessed. Duplicates, non-verifiable references, conference abstracts, purely technical platform studies, and items outside the five-year window were excluded. Nineteen substantive studies met the final eligibility criteria. Two additional methodological references were retained to document review reporting and thematic-analysis quality [20], [21].

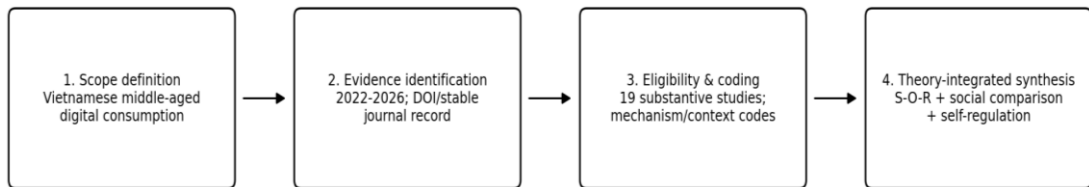


Figure 1. Review and analytical workflow. Source: author's synthesis.

3.4. Data extraction, processing, and thematic analysis

Each eligible study was entered into an evidence matrix and coded on six dimensions: (1) study context and consumer segment; (2) digital or marketing stimulus; (3) FOMO, comparison, arousal, regret, or other organism-level process; (4) impulsive, compulsive, herd, or purchase-intention outcome; (5) self-regulatory or sustainability-relevant mechanism; and (6) relevance to Vietnam and/or middle age. Coding was completed at the article level rather than by extracting isolated statistical coefficients because the objective was mechanism synthesis rather than effect-size aggregation.

Analysis followed a reflexive thematic procedure consistent with recent quality guidance [21]. First-cycle codes were assigned to recurring mechanisms such as scarcity, social visibility, anticipated regret, low-friction purchase, materialism, mindfulness, and post-purchase consequences. In the second cycle, these codes were clustered into higher-order themes and mapped onto the S-O-R sequence. A final interpretive pass examined where middle-age responsibilities and sustainable-consumption goals could interrupt or alter the sequence. Trustworthiness was strengthened through an explicit source-verification rule, repeated comparison of claims against article-level findings, attention to contradictory or boundary evidence, and clear separation of direct age-specific evidence from contextual inference. No inter-coder reliability statistic is reported because the synthesis was conducted by a single author using reflexive rather than coding-reliability thematic analysis.

Table 1. Coding framework for the 19-study substantive evidence corpus.

Coding dimension	Operational question	Typical evidence
Context and segment	Who was studied and in which digital market?	Vietnam/general adult, youth, middle-aged, livestream, marketplace
Stimulus	Which platform or promotional cue initiates pressure?	Scarcity, countdowns, influencers, social presence, video/livestream features
Organism	Which psychological process links cue and action?	FOMO, social comparison, anticipated regret, materialism, arousal
Response	What purchasing outcome follows?	Impulse buying, compulsive buying, herd behavior, purchase intention
Regulation/sustainability	What inhibits or redirects the response?	Mindfulness, delay, reflective evaluation, responsible-consumption norms
Contextual transfer	How defensible is application to Vietnamese middle age?	Direct evidence, Vietnam-specific mechanism evidence, or bounded inference

Note: Coding domains are analytical categories and are not mutually exclusive.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1. Scarcity transforms delay into perceived opportunity loss

Across the evidence base, scarcity is the most consistent trigger connecting platform design with urgency. The mechanism is stronger than a simple preference for limited products. Scarcity changes the reference point: waiting is experienced as a potential loss. Zhang et al. [6] identify FOMO as a mediator between scarcity and impulse buying, while Yi et al. [15] show that anticipated emotions transmit scarcity effects in livestream settings. In digital commerce, a countdown or low-stock label therefore alters the meaning of hesitation. Deliberation is no longer neutral; it appears costly.

This mechanism is especially important for sustainability because it can make acquisition appear preventive rather than excessive. Consumers may buy to avoid the future regret of missing a discount, even when the product is not needed. The economic framing of the message can obscure the fact that an unplanned transaction has occurred.

4.2. Social visibility converts comparison into self-relevant pressure

A second theme is the social production of relevance. Influencer endorsement, peer behavior, product popularity, and visible engagement provide cues about what others value. FOMO then becomes a response to perceived social lag as well as product scarcity. Studies of influencer marketing show that social comparison, materialism, imitation, and FOMO can jointly increase buying intention [7], [8]. Kumar and Kumar [9] likewise show that social comparison and FOMO mediate the relationship between compulsive social-media use and unrestrained buying. Vietnamese evidence adds contextual support: FOMO has been linked to herd behavior on Shopee among consumers in Hanoi [18].

For middle-aged consumers, social pressure need not resemble overt trend competition. It may instead operate through perceived household competence, value awareness, status maintenance, or the expectation that an experienced consumer should recognize a worthwhile opportunity. This is a theoretically bounded inference, not a direct empirical finding from a Vietnamese midlife sample.

4.3. Value-preserving rationalization may be the distinctive midlife pathway

The synthesis suggests a life-stage-specific proposition: FOMO can be reconciled with a self-image of prudence by translating urgency into the language of value. A consumer can regard the purchase as sensible because the discount is large, the item may be useful later, or the opportunity appears unlikely to recur. This preserves a narrative of financial competence even when the purchase was unplanned. Vietnam-focused studies show that scarcity, social comparison, and platform stimuli are meaningful predictors of impulsive outcomes [2]-[5], while the age-specific study by Tan et al. [14] confirms that mindfulness, materialism, and status anxiety remain consequential among middle-aged consumers.

This mechanism helps explain why age and responsibility should not be treated as simple protection against impulse buying. Greater household responsibility may strengthen deliberation, but it also supplies credible justifications for buying ahead, stocking up, or capturing a bargain. The proposition should be tested directly among Vietnamese adults aged 40-59 using maximum-variation sampling across income, gender, education, household role, and platform-use intensity.

4.4. Anticipated regret and low-friction interfaces compress need assessment

Anticipated regret is repeatedly implicated in rapid online purchase. In scarcity-induced livestream settings, expected regret or rejoicing mediates purchase decisions [15]. Livestream research more broadly shows that immediate interaction, perceived usefulness, and promotion

strategy can increase impulse buying [16], [17]. When payment is frictionless, the consumer can move from social cue to checkout before need assessment is completed.

This temporal compression matters because sustainable consumption depends on asking questions that require time: whether a similar item is already owned, how often the product will be used, whether the discount is genuine, and whether the purchase would still be attractive without urgency. Platform design that systematically removes this pause can be commercially effective while weakening consumer autonomy.

4.5. FOMO-driven repetition creates a sustainability problem

The sustainability concern is cumulative rather than confined to any single transaction. Bläse et al. [11] show that FOMO can drive non-sustainable purchase intentions in fashion. Reviews of responsible and sustainable consumption emphasize moderation, ethical evaluation, environmental concern, and long-term consistency as core features of sustainable behavior [12], [13]. Repeated urgency-based purchases work in the opposite direction by normalizing duplication, stockpiling, and product turnover.

For middle-aged households, this tension is also financial. An individual purchase may look inexpensive because it is discounted, yet repeated “savings” can increase total expenditure and household clutter. Sustainable consumption should therefore be understood as behavioral resilience: the capacity to preserve long-term goals when the digital environment repeatedly creates short-term urgency.

4.6. Self-regulation can interrupt the escalation pathway

The strongest protective mechanism in the recent literature is mindfulness. Hussain et al. [10] reports that mindfulness moderates the association between FOMO and compulsive buying, while Tan et al. [14] link mindfulness to lower conspicuous consumption among middle-aged consumers. These findings support interventions that restore attention to current need rather than imagined future loss.

Practical routines consistent with this evidence include delayed checkout, notification control, pre-set budgets, wishlists, inventory checks, and a rule that a discounted item should still be considered desirable at its ordinary price. These specific routines are offered as theory-consistent behavioral tools; they have not all been separately tested in the reviewed Vietnamese studies. Platform-level equivalents include transparent promotion duration, disclosure of repeated “limited-time” offers, friction for high-frequency impulsive purchases, and optional cooling-off reminders.

5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The review produces three theoretical implications. First, FOMO should be treated as an adaptive mechanism whose surface justification can vary by life stage. The core process - anticipated loss under social or temporal pressure - may remain stable, while the narrative that legitimizes purchase changes. For middle-aged consumers, value-preserving rationalization may allow an impulsive decision to coexist with an identity of prudence. This proposition extends current FOMO research without claiming that youth-based findings are directly transferable.

Second, the synthesis places rationalization between organism-level arousal and behavioral response. Digital stimuli do not merely overwhelm reason; they can recruit a form of reason that is locally persuasive. “Buying now saves money” or “the family may need it later” can convert urgency into a defensible household decision. This is especially relevant to Vietnam, where recent studies show that scarcity, social influence, and platform characteristics are consequential in online buying [2]-[5], [18].

Third, impulse buying should be connected more explicitly to sustainable consumption. FOMO-based conversion can be profitable in the short term but may generate product redundancy, dissatisfaction, and material throughput. Firms therefore face a strategic trade-off between immediate conversion and long-term trust. Ethical promotion should avoid fabricated scarcity, reset countdowns, ambiguous stock claims, and artificially obscured reference prices. Transparent promotions can still communicate genuine scarcity without manipulating the consumer's perception of time.

For platform governance, the implication is not that scarcity marketing should be prohibited. Rather, regulators and platforms should distinguish truthful urgency from manipulative urgency. Consumer-protection guidance can require accurate disclosure of stock and promotion duration, prohibit countdown mechanisms that restart automatically, and improve auditability of personalized urgency cues. These measures would be consistent with a broader policy objective of digital consumer well-being.

Consumer education should combine digital literacy, financial capability, and sustainable-consumption skills. Middle-aged users may benefit from interventions framed around household resilience rather than moralized messages to “consume less.” A 24-hour delay for discretionary purchases, disabling non-essential sale notifications, comparing a proposed purchase with existing household inventory, and tracking cumulative monthly spending can make the hidden cost of repeated impulse purchases more visible.

6. CONCLUSION

This study examined how FOMO can intensify impulse buying and how sustainable consumption can be strengthened among Vietnamese middle-aged consumers. The revised evidence base shows that digital scarcity, social visibility, anticipated regret, and low-friction transaction design consistently reduce the psychological distance between exposure and purchase. The main context-specific proposition is that middle-aged consumers may rationalize urgency as value preservation, household utility, or prudent opportunity capture. FOMO can therefore coexist with a deliberate self-image rather than simply replacing rationality with emotion.

The study also clarifies the limits of the available evidence. It is an integrative review, not a primary interview study, and it does not estimate the prevalence or causal magnitude of FOMO among Vietnamese adults aged 40-59. Only a small share of the recent literature directly studies middle-aged consumers, while much Vietnam-specific work focuses on younger or general online shoppers. These constraints limit demographic generalization. They are stated explicitly to avoid overclaiming.

Future research should collect primary data from a stratified Vietnamese midlife sample. A qualitative phase could purposively recruit approximately 24-30 consumers aged 40-59 with maximum variation in gender, income, education, household responsibility, occupation, and platform-use intensity; a subsequent survey could test the proposed value-preserving rationalization mechanism and the moderating roles of mindfulness, financial literacy, and household structure. Longitudinal or field-experimental designs would be especially useful for determining whether cooling-off tools and transparent promotion interfaces reduce repeated impulse buying without materially harming legitimate consumer choice.

The practical conclusion is narrower but consequential: sustainable digital consumption depends not only on what consumers value, but also on whether platforms and routines preserve enough time for those values to enter the purchase decision.

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