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The Role of Social Media in Triggering FOMO and Its Influence on Baby Care Product Purchases

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Abstract

The increasing use of social media has played a major role in influencing the buying decisions of consumers, especially in the case of sensitive products such as baby care. Influencer endorsements, content created by users, flash sales, and limited-time offers create urgency and psychological pressure that bombard parents all the time. This environment creates an important psychological factor known as Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). FOMO is defined as the anxiety that one is missing better opportunities or better product choices. The present study explores the impact of FOMO on consumers' purchase decision-making with a particular focus on baby care products and determines the social media elements that trigger FOMO. Data were collected from 90 online shoppers of Kottayam district with the help of a structured questionnaire in a descriptive and analytical research design. The statistical tools used were Cronbach's alpha, multiple linear regression, Mann–Whitney U test, and Kruskal–Wallis H test. The results show that there are significant effects of FOMO on the evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post-purchase behavior. There are significant differences in the FOMO responses for the income level. The research points out the necessity of ethical and responsible marketing practices on social media.

Keywords: Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), Baby Care Products, Social Media Influence, Consumer Decision Making, Purchase Behaviour

Introduction

Baby care products have become an important part of household purchasing decisions. Unlike daily purchases, parents often approach these products with a greater sense of care because they are closely related to a baby's health, safety, comfort, and overall well-being. For most of the parents, each purchase is a strong sense of care and responsibility and an emotional need to provide the exact possible beginning for their child. As most of the parents are aware of the early care and consumption choices, they may influence a child's health and development, they often feel considerable pressure to make the right decisions. This combination of emotional involvement, psychological factors, and social expectations makes parental purchasing behaviour in the baby care market an important and interesting area of consumer research.

With the advancement of technology, the way parents search for the purchase of baby care products has changed considerably. Nowadays, Social media platforms have become an important source of information and influence. They helps parents connecting with various brands, parenting communities, and other consumers. Parents are no longer simply passive recipients of information. They actively engage with online content by reading reviews, sharing experiences, participating in discussions, comparing products, and seeking opinions from other parents before making a purchase. As a result, social media has become an increasingly important part of the decision-making process for baby care products. Through various product review, visual contents, testimonials and other influencer recommendations, these social media platforms change the perceptions of a products quality, its effectiveness and safety. Now a days parents are not simply considered as the receipts of information only. They may actively engage with reading reviews, sharing their own of experiences, comparing products etc. Based on this , social media has increasingly become an important part of parents decision making products in choosing baby care products.

Fear of missing out (FOMO) has become as a most important psychological factor in this digital era. It means the uneasiness people experience when they believe that others are benefiting from better opportunities, choices, or experiences while they may be missing out. When it comes to parenting this feeling can become much stronger through their continuous exposure to carefully curated social media content. It has emerged as an important psychological factor in the digital environment. It refers to the uneasiness people experience when they believe that others are benefiting from better opportunities, choices, or experiences while they may be missing out. In the context of parenting, this feeling can become stronger through continuous exposure to carefully curated content on social media. Posts featuring highly recommended baby products, expert opinions, positive reviews, and other parents' experiences may create the impression that certain products are essential for providing the best care. Consequently, parents may feel compelled to purchase products that they might otherwise postpone or consider unnecessary, largely because of the concern that failing to choose them could mean missing out on what is perceived to be the best option for their child.

Fear of missing out (FOMO) has emerged as an important psychological factor in the digital environment. It refers to the uneasiness people experience when they believe that others are benefiting from better opportunities, choices, or experiences while they may be missing out. In the context of parenting, this feeling can become stronger through continuous exposure to carefully curated content on social media. Various posts which features highly recommended baby products, positive reviews, opinion from experts may create an impression on the mind of parents that certain products are really essential for babies as best care. After that parents may feel compelled to purchase such products which they might otherwise postpone or consider unnecessary because they have the concern for this fear of missing out.

Significance of the Study

In order to understand the changing pattern of baby care product consumption, it is important to examine the role of social media to identify how it contributes to the feelings of FOMO. With regard to the introduction, discussion, comparison, and purchase of baby care products, digital platforms have transformed. The images of parenting are frequently and carefully shared by influencers, parenting bloggers, and brand ambassadors they recommend particular products as part of childcare. These contents can shape parents' expectation about what they should provide for their children and may raise the standards of parenting which are considered to be difficult in achieving everyday.

The continuous exposure to personalised and continuously updated social media content can create a feeling that certain products should be purchased immediately, even when they may not be needed for baby care. Social comparison and the desire to keep up with other parents can influence purchase decisions. In this context, it is important to note that FOMO may encourage impulsive purchases, unnecessary spending, and a greater dependence on the opinion and approval of others. The present study helps to create a better understanding of both psychological and social factors that encourage the decisions of the parents when they are purchasing baby care products. This study is important in understanding the awareness of parents of persuasive techniques used in digital marketing. Such awareness can help parents in order to evaluate the online contents more critically and helps them to make various purchase decisions based on the actual needs of their children without simply rely on social pressure, trends and fear of missing out.

Statement of the Problem

In the olden days for purchasing baby care products, parents usually depends on suggestions from family members, health care professionals, personal experience and evaluation from stores directly. Their choices usually centered on various factors such as safety, quality, sustainability and affordability of the products. But now the decision-making process changed due to the growth and their exposure towards social media.

Various social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, youtube etc has become an important space for their choices. Much of this content presents carefully constructed images of parenting and frequently draws attention to new product launches, popular brands, special offers, and limited-time deals. Such messages can create a perception that certain products are in high demand or available only for a short period. At the same time, likes, shares, comments, ratings, and reviews provide visible signs of social approval. These forms of online validation may influence parents' perceptions of what other parents are buying and, in turn, create pressure to follow prevailing trends and expectations.

Various studies have examined the psychological phenomenon of FOMO and its influence on consumer behaviour, but there are limited studies where its specific role in the purchase decisions of baby care products has been examined. Examining these aspects can contribute for a clearer understanding of how social media has influenced the purchasing behaviour in baby care products.

Scope of the Study

The study examines how FOMO influences parents' consumer decision-making regarding baby care products. It considers four key stages of the purchase decision process: information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior. The study also investigates social media factors that may contribute to FOMO, with particular attention to the types of content encountered, the characteristics of the social media platforms used, and parents' personal experiences of FOMO. In addition, the study examines whether FOMO-related responses vary across demographic characteristics such as age, gender, income, educational qualification, and marital status. The geographical scope of the study is limited to Kottayam district.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the various elements of social media that trigger FOMO among consumers of baby care products.
2. To examine the influence of FOMO on different stages of the baby care product purchase decision process.
3. To analyse demographic differences in FOMO responses.

Hypotheses of the Study

H1: FOMO has a significant influence on the stages of the baby care product purchase decision process.

H2: FOMO responses differ significantly across age groups.

H3: FOMO responses differ significantly across income levels.

H4: FOMO responses differ significantly between genders

H5: FOMO responses differ significantly across education levels.

H6: FOMO responses differ significantly across marital status

Operational Definitions

FOMO:
An anxiety-driven psychological state in which parents or caregivers feel compelled to purchase baby care products due to fear of missing safer, better, or more beneficial options.

Baby Care Product Purchase:
The act of buying products intended for infant health, hygiene, nutrition, and development, influenced by psychological, social, and marketing factors.

Social Media:
Digital platforms enabling creation, sharing, and interaction with content related to baby care products, brands, and parenting experiences.

Literature Review

Prior studies have established Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) as an important psychological construct shaping consumer behaviour in digital environments. With rapid technological advancement and the expansion of social media, marketing communication has evolved from one-way promotion to interactive engagement, enabling brands to influence consumers' emotions and purchase tendencies more effectively (Bekman, 2022). Research indicates that FOMO arises when individuals perceive that others are enjoying more rewarding consumption experiences, which generates anxiety and motivates compensatory purchasing behaviour (Hodkinson, 2019).

This research addresses the growing concern that constant exposure to curated parenting content on social media platforms may exacerbate anxieties regarding child-rearing choices .(Gokul & C., 2023) Specifically, the study evaluates whether this psychological phenomenon compels caregivers to prioritize perceived social status and peer-recommended products over traditional domestic choices (Pakkala & Shivashankar Bhat, 2022) . Furthermore, by focusing on the unique socio-economic landscape of Kottayam, this research aims to highlight how demographic variables and personal experiences mediate the relationship between digital exposure and impulsive buying tendencies (Habib & Almamy, 2025), (Tripopsakul, 2026). By synthesizing these factors, the paper contributes to a deeper understanding of how modern parental responsibilities are increasingly mediated by the digital landscape (Pakkala & Shivashankar Bhat, 2022) . This shift reflects a broader trend where parents, driven by a desire to provide optimal care, increasingly rely on digital consensus to validate their purchasing decisions (Pakkala & Shivashankar Bhat, 2022) Consequently, this heightened sensitivity to external trends often compels parents to favor popular, market-leading brands to mitigate the perceived risks of suboptimal care (Pakkala & Shivashankar Bhat, 2022) , (Senthilkumar, 2018). Other studies indicate that self-control and mindfulness can mitigate FOMO-driven impulsive purchases, whereas emotional motivation and sales promotion intensify such behaviour (Hussain et al., 2023) . Demographic factors such as education and income have also been associated with differences in FOMO responses, while gender differences appear less consistent (BEKMAN, 2022)

Baby care products constitute a sensitive and high-involvement category of consumer goods, as they are directly related to infants' health, safety, and overall development. Purchase decisions in such categories are commonly characterised by elevated perceived risk and emotional involvement, which increase consumers' dependence on external information sources and social validation .Parents and caregivers frequently rely on online reviews, electronic word-of-mouth, and recommendations shared through social media when evaluating baby care products, as digital platforms facilitate continuous access to peer experiences and product-related information (Karlinda et al., 2023)

The rapid expansion of social media has transformed parenting practices by creating virtual communities where caregivers exchange opinions, usage experiences, and product endorsements. Prior research demonstrates that social media content can heighten FOMO and stimulate purchase behaviour by generating anxiety about being left behind or not

selecting the optimal product (Ilyas et al., 2022) . In contexts where consumers perceive strong responsibility for outcomes, such as child wellbeing, this anxiety may be further intensified. Consequently, parents may feel compelled to purchase widely recommended or trending baby care products to avoid the perception that they are missing safer or more beneficial options. Although FOMO has been widely examined in fashion, luxury goods, tourism, and general e-commerce contexts, its role in shaping baby care product purchase decisions remains largely unexplored.

Theoretical Background

This study looks at how online cues affect how people feel and act, using ideas from persuasion and social influence. Social media pushes you to buy by showing how many people like something, how limited it is, what influencers say, and what others are saying, making it feel like what's popular or praised must be worth getting. People use social cues and context to make buying choices, a pattern Cialdini nailed in 2009.

Studies show FOMO connects social media use to buying behavior. Social media posts make people feel left out, which pushes them to buy stuff just to feel included (Ilyas et al., 2022, Karlinda et al., 2023) FOMO pushes people toward impulse and compulsive buying, especially when shopping online (Dahmiri et al., 2023; Hussain et al., 2023) In baby care stuff, where parents feel the weight of choice and worry about messing up, the fear of missing out hits harder. Accordingly, this study conceptualises FOMO as the central psychological mechanism through which social media influences baby care product purchase decision processes.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the influence of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) on baby care product purchase decisions. Primary data were collected from 90 online shoppers residing in Kottayam district using a structured questionnaire administered through convenience sampling. The instrument measured respondents' FOMO experiences, perceptions of social media influences, and their responses across different stages of the purchase decision process, namely information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase behaviour. Demographic information such as age, gender, income, education, and marital status was also collected. The reliability of the scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, multiple linear regression, Mann–Whitney U test, and Kruskal–Wallis H test with the support of SPSS software.

Measurement of Constructs

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) Experience

FOMO experience was measured using five items capturing emotional and psychological responses such as mood changes, anxiousness about missing out, feelings of exclusion, envy, and perceived missing experiences. These items were adapted from the

original Fear of Missing Out scale and subsequent FOMO-related studies (Hodkinson, 2019) and were contextualised to the baby care product context.

Social Media–Based FOMO Triggers

Social media–related FOMO triggers were measured using two dimensions: content-based triggers and platform-based triggers. Content-based triggers included flash sales, limited-time discounts, limited-edition announcements, user-generated content, new trends, contests/giveaways, and exclusive events. Platform-based triggers measured the extent of FOMO experienced across Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Pinterest, and e-commerce platforms. Measurement items were adapted from studies examining FOMO in social media environments (Hodkinson, 2019; Ilyas et al., 2022; Karlinda et al., 2023) .

Influence of FOMO on Purchase Decision Process

The influence of FOMO on the purchase decision process was measured across four stages: information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post-purchase behaviour. Items assessed the extent to which FOMO motivates information seeking, affects comparison of alternatives, encourages purchase, and shapes post-purchase feelings such as relief, satisfaction, regret, repeat purchase, and overspending. These items were adapted from prior studies on FOMO and consumer buying behaviour (Hussain et al., 2023) (Ilyas et al., 2022)

All items were measured using five-point Likert-type scales. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha indicated acceptable internal consistency for all constructs, with values exceeding 0.70.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic characteristics of respondents provide important context for interpreting FOMO-driven baby care product purchase behaviour. The sample is largely composed of young adults aged 20–40 years, with a slightly higher proportion of male respondents. Most participants are daily users of social media and shop online occasionally, indicating high digital exposure and moderate purchasing frequency. Instagram emerges as the most frequently used platform, highlighting its relevance in shaping product awareness and engagement.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	55.6
	Female	44.4
Age	Below 20	3.3
	20–40	88.9
	41–60	7.8
Monthly Income	Below 15,000	53.3
	15,001–30,000	24.4
	30,001–45,000	2.2
	45,001–60,000	4.4
	Above 60,000	15.6
Social Media Usage	Daily	92.2
Online Shopping Frequency	Occasionally / As needed	66.7
Most Used Platform	Instagram	63.3

Source: Primary data

Discussion

The dominance of young adults and heavy social media users supports prior evidence that intensive digital engagement increases exposure to persuasive cues and emotional triggers that stimulate FOMO (Hodkinson, 2019) . The prominence of Instagram further aligns with research indicating that visually oriented platforms play a central role in shaping consumption-related emotions and social comparison.

Key FOMO Triggers

Psychological factors, content characteristics, and platform features were examined to identify major triggers of FOMO.

Table 2. Key FOMO Triggers (Mean Percentage Score)

Category	Top Trigger	MPS (%)	Rank
Psychological factor	Social media affects mood	68.22	1
Content type	Flash sales / limited-time offers	51.12	1
Platform	Pinterest	60.66	1

Source: Primary data

Discussion

The finding that mood changes after viewing social media content are the strongest FOMO trigger is consistent with (Hodkinson, 2019) , who emphasised the central role of emotional and cognitive responses in consumer reactions to FOMO appeals. The dominance of flash sales supports earlier evidence that scarcity cues intensify FOMO and impulsive buying tendencies (Dahmiri et al., 2023) . Pinterest's prominence as a FOMO-triggering platform may be attributed to its visually curated and idea-oriented structure, which facilitates aspirational consumption and social comparison (Karlinda et al., 2023) .

Influence of FOMO on Purchase Decision Stages

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to assess the influence of FOMO on stages of the baby care product purchase decision process.

Table 3. Regression Results – Influence of FOMO on Purchase Stages

Purchase Stage	β	p-value	Result
Information search	0.056	0.821	Not significant
Evaluation of alternatives	0.788	0.002	Significant
Purchase Decision	0.602	0.000	Significant
Post-purchase behaviour	0.665	0.000	Significant

Source: Primary data

Discussion

The significant influence of FOMO on evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post-purchase behaviour corroborates (Hussain et al., 2023) , who found that FOMO strongly affects emotion-driven buying outcomes. The non-significant effect on information search suggests that parents may seek information irrespective of FOMO, but emotional pressure shapes how alternatives are judged and how consumers feel after purchase. This extends existing literature by showing that FOMO's strongest impact lies in affective and evaluative stages rather than purely cognitive stages.

Hypothesis Testing Summary

Table 4. Hypothesis Testing Summary

Hypothesis	Statement	Test Used	p-value	Decision
H1	FOMO influences purchase decision stages	Regression	0.000	Accepted
H2	FOMO differs across age groups	Kruskal-Wallis	0.261	Rejected
H3	FOMO differs across income levels	Kruskal-Wallis	0.043	Accepted
H4	FOMO differs by gender	Mann–Whitney U	0.845	Rejected
H5	FOMO differs by education	Kruskal-Wallis	0.367	Rejected
H6	FOMO differs by marital status	Mann–Whitney U	0.878	Rejected

Source: Primary data

Discussion

The results indicate that income level significantly differentiates FOMO responses, while age, gender, education, and marital status do not. This partially supports (BEKMAN, 2022) , who reported variations based on income and education but not gender. The present study extends this evidence to the baby care product context, highlighting income as a key factor influencing susceptibility to FOMO.

Managerial Implications

1. Baby care brands should design social media campaigns that emphasize product safety, quality, and scientific credibility rather than relying excessively on urgency-based appeals.
2. While flash sales and limited-time offers are effective in attracting attention, marketers should use them responsibly to avoid encouraging unnecessary or impulsive purchases in a sensitive product category such as baby care.
3. Visual platforms such as Pinterest and Instagram should be strategically prioritized, as they have been found to strongly trigger FOMO among consumers.
4. Marketing strategies can be tailored according to income segments, since income level significantly influences FOMO responses.
5. Brands should incorporate educational and informative content, such as expert tips, usage guidelines, and evidence-based claims, to balance emotional appeals with

rational decision-making.

Scope for Further Research

1. Future studies may examine FOMO in specific baby care product categories such as infant food, diapers, skincare, and healthcare products.
2. Longitudinal research designs could explore how FOMO-driven behaviour evolves over time as parents gain experience.
3. Qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews or focus groups may provide deeper insights into emotional and psychological processes underlying FOMO.
4. Future research may consider additional moderating variables such as parental experience, number of children, and digital literacy.
5. Comparative studies across different regions or cultural contexts could enhance the generalizability of findings.

Conclusion

This study examined the influence of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) on baby care product purchase decision-making and identified key social media-related factors that trigger FOMO among consumers. The findings confirm that FOMO plays a significant role in shaping consumer behaviour in digital environments, even within essential and high-involvement product categories such as baby care products.

The study demonstrates that psychological reactions to social media content, particularly mood changes and feelings of missing out, are the strongest antecedents of FOMO. Flash sales and limited-time offers emerge as the most influential content-based triggers. Furthermore, FOMO significantly affects the evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post-purchase behaviour, while its influence on information search is not significant.

Income level is the only demographic factor that significantly differentiates FOMO responses, whereas age, gender, education, and marital status do not show significant variation. This suggests that FOMO is a broadly experienced phenomenon among digitally active consumers.

Overall, the study extends existing FOMO literature by applying the concept to the baby care product context and highlights the growing impact of social media-driven emotions on essential household purchasing decisions.

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