

Fear of Missing Out in the Experience Economy: A Conceptual Framework for Event Attendance

*Nurakmal Ramli, Ayu Rohaidah Ghazali, Norhidayah Mohd Rashid, Wan Soraya Wan Abdul Ghani
Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Selangor Branch, Puncak Alam Campus,
Malaysia

Email: *nurakm2956@uitm.edu.my, ayuroh2956@uitm.edu.my, norhidayah_rashid@uitm.edu.my,
wansor2956@uitm.edu.my

Corresponding Author: Nurakmal Ramli

Abstract: The experience economy revolution has transformed events into carefully designed emotional encounters that deliver more than entertainment through the promise of identity and social capital and exclusive experiences. Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) functions as a fundamental psychological force that directs consumer engagement, specifically among digitally connected audiences in the present context. Research has studied FOMO in relation to social media and impulsive behavior, yet the conceptual application of FOMO in event design and marketing requires further development. The research fills this knowledge gap through its proposed conceptual framework, which demonstrates how FOMO functions as an intentionally designed element in event marketing strategies. The paper examines how event marketing uses psychological mechanisms from Self-Determination Theory and Social Identity Theory to enhance emotional engagement through social proof and scarcity, exclusivity, and post-event content. The mechanisms operate within the event experience timeline to influence how people feel before events and during them, and after they finish. The marketing and design practices incorporate these triggers to create emotional urgency and influence identity signaling while driving attendance intentions. The framework shows that FOMO functions as a purposefully developed mechanism that connects with fundamental human requirements for relatedness and belonging, and status. The paper develops FOMO as an event experience framework that expands emotional behavior knowledge while creating ethical marketing methods for audience participation. The model serves as a foundation for future research to study FOMO's impact on decision-making processes while reinforcing involvement across physical and digital spaces.

Keywords: *FOMO, experience economy, event marketing, event attendance, consumer behavior, social media*

1. Introduction and Background

The experience economy has fundamentally changed the way consumers interact with brands as well as their products and services. According to Pine & Gilmore (2020), experiences now function as commodities that are developed to create deep involvement and easy sharing, and emotional depth. Events in this environment move beyond their basic functions to become carefully designed experiences that offer exclusive status and social validation to participants. The shift of consumers toward experience-based value requires marketers and event designers to understand the psychological factors that drive event participation (Smilansky, 2017). FOMO stands out as a dominant psychological force that directs consumer decisions in digital media environments. Social content visibility on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube makes FOMO stronger because users feel left out of enjoyable experiences their friends and followers are having (Przybylski et al., 2013; Elhai et al., 2021). Although FOMO has been studied concerning social media usage, smartphone addiction, and millennial consumer behavior (Abel et al., 2016; Blackwell et al., 2017), its specific role in shaping event participation and design remains conceptually fragmented.

The marketing strategy of FOMO engineering has become a common practice for events that include music festivals as well as branded pop-up activations. The combination of scarcity cues (e.g., limited tickets), social proof (e.g., influencers attending), and real-time content from peers functions as FOMO triggers that generate purchase urgency and attendance decisions (Bright & Logan, 2021). The practice application of these tools exists, but academic research lacks a standard framework that explains FOMO's systematic operation throughout event touchpoints and its connection to event design components. The paper investigates how marketers use scarcity and social proof and ephemerality, and need deprivation as FOMO triggers to create event attendance motivation by intensifying urgency and boosting event attractiveness. The paper develops a marketable FOMO concept that draws from Self-Determination Theory and Social Identity Theory to present FOMO as a construct that exists within event design and promotion of live and digital experiences. The study

aims to establish the marketing mechanism of FOMO while examining its alignment with psychological requirements for belonging and status, and identity formation. This paper presents a theoretically supported conceptual framework to understand emotion-based consumer engagement while providing practical advice for ethical FOMO usage in event promotion.

2. Literature Review

Pine and Gilmore (2011) introduced the Experience Economy concept, which separates experiences from commodity goods and services in economic value creation. The new economic model shows that people now value meaningful immersive interactions above material acquisitions. Events such as concerts, festivals, conferences, and hybrid experiences have become essential platforms for this kind of value. They allow organizers to deliver structured, time-bound experiences that feel immersive, purposeful, and emotionally resonant. These events serve both functional and symbolic roles. These events fulfill an entertainment purpose while also addressing deeper psychological and social needs, which helps participants develop their identity and status (Smilansky, 2017). Modern consumers are drawn to experiential consumption because they seek authentic experiences that create emotional connections and personal development, especially when they are digitally connected and experience-oriented (Pine & Gilmore, 2020; Schmitt, 1999). As a result, the event industry now moves beyond basic logistics to design environments that encourage emotional engagement, co-creation, and post-event social value.

FOMO, or Fear of Missing Out, has emerged as a significant psychological phenomenon within our modern cultural and digital environment. FOMO describes the persistent worry about others experiencing fulfilling events that one is not present to enjoy (Przybylski et al., 2013). The psychological state of FOMO emerges when individuals experience unmet needs for autonomy and relatedness, and competence according to Self-Determination Theory. Digital platforms enhance anxiety through their presentation of carefully selected images, which display exclusive lifestyles and achievements. People encounter live content that presents others' experiences as more valuable and meaningful, and socially important than their own experiences (Elhai et al., 2021). Research shows that FOMO leads people to make impulsive purchases while overcommitting and making choices based on social comparisons instead of personal interest (Bright & Logan, 2021). These behaviors directly relate to how people engage with events.

Since its initial study in social media use, FOMO has transformed into a major concept in marketing, along with consumer behavior, and recently, the experience economy. People experience dual mental and emotional concerns about missing out, which stem from observing edited event or experience content on digital media (Baker et al., 2016; Milyavskaya et al., 2018). The event industry faces high relevance from FOMO because all events are social, and their durations are fixed. Event attendance functions as a social identifier and status indicator and connection builder, which intensifies the psychological distress of being excluded (Hodkinson, 2019). Research on tourism and festivals demonstrates that FOMO can influence early ticket purchasing, drive up online engagement, and even affect event happiness levels (Bright & Logan, 2021). People often anticipate regret before missing something, which heightens the emotional value of attending and encourages earlier or more impulsive commitment.

Although FOMO has been studied in consumer psychology, marketing, and digital communication, its role in event marketing has not received the same attention. Most studies focus on the negative effects of FOMO on well-being or general digital behavior, but fewer have examined how event organizers or marketers intentionally or unintentionally leverage FOMO to influence participation. This gap is significant, given how often FOMO appears in event marketing language, visuals, and social campaigns.

Social Proof

Social proof represents a proven psychological process that drives people to follow others' actions during uncertain situations (Cialdini, 2001). According to Alabri (2022), social proof functions as a strong psychological trigger that intensifies FOMO through human natural tendencies to follow group behavior. People display this behavior most intensely when they encounter ambiguous situations because they need guidance from others regarding their actions and desired outcomes (Ezzat et al., 2023). Social proof in FOMO occurs when people observe others participating in activities or acquiring things that they cannot access (Alfina

et al., 2023). Social media has created an environment where this phenomenon spreads throughout every aspect of life. The presentation of curated content featuring celebratory events and luxurious lifestyles, and meaningful social interactions produces an ongoing stream of comparative stimuli. People develop higher social value perceptions about events after viewing their portrayal through peer and influencer, and celebrity endorsements (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019). The combination of peer validation with visible attendance signals and repeated engagement creates a social signal that makes events important, which drives people to participate. People experience relative deprivation when they believe they miss out on valuable or rewarding experiences (Milyavskaya et al., 2018). Social proof functions through two mechanisms: normative influence, which stems from social acceptance needs, and informational influence, which relies on others' superior judgment or knowledge (Braghieri et al., 2022). The mechanism strengthens FOMO by presenting exclusion as both socially and personally detrimental in its two operational forms.

Scarcity

The psychological mechanism of scarcity stands as a major factor that intensifies FOMO experiences. According to classical psychological theory, the scarcity principle shows that people value opportunities and products and experiences more when they believe these things are scarce or have limited availability (Chakrabarti, 2024). People experience an urgent feeling combined with competition, which leads them to choose emotionally rather than logically because of perceived scarcity. This scarcity principle has been used extensively by digital marketing and event promotion through restricted access periods and limited availability, and exclusive offers to implement the FOMO manifestation (Aggarwal et al., 2011). The delivery of scarcity cues through language elements such as "only a few tickets left" and "limited edition" and visual countdowns creates psychological time anchors that focus on loss instead of gain. The fear of running out of a limited opportunity creates a powerful emotional reaction that drives people to make impulsive decisions based on anticipated regret instead of genuine interest (Alabri, 2022).

Event marketing achieves its highest effect when exclusive access or VIP entry creates a perceived value increase that drives stronger participation motivation. Furthermore, social media acts as a key factor that strengthens the impact of scarcity. Users who see others accessing exclusive items or experiences through influencer content or peer-generated posts experience stronger feelings of deprivation. Vicarious exposure both confirms the lack and makes the personal experience of exclusion more immediate and stronger, hence the experience of exclusion gets more intense. Chakrabarti (2024) explains how the digital environment transforms temporary scarcity into a publicly observable experience, which intensifies its psychological effects. The fundamental cognitive trigger of scarcity operates through time-sensitive mechanisms that activate competitive instincts and social comparison to produce its effects. Scarcity operates as a fundamental cognitive trigger that uses time sensitivity and competitive instincts, and social comparison to create its effect. The combination of real-time social validation and digital platform exposure with scarcity creates a vital FOMO amplifier specifically in experience-driven consumption contexts such as events.

Exclusivity

The concept of exclusivity, closely linked to scarcity, functions as a key FOMO trigger because it activates fundamental human needs for belonging and recognition, and social distinction (Agarwal & Kumar, 2025). Exclusive experiences, along with products and communities, grant members a feeling of superiority because they belong to a limited group of privileged individuals. The belief in exclusivity activates strong social inclusion and status elevation desires, which intensify FOMO according to Wang et al. (2024). People seek exclusive offers because they believe these experiences will boost their social standing and give them special privileges and personal value. In addition, the awareness of others participating in unique opportunities makes exclusion fears more intense, which leads to feelings of social displacement and envy. These exclusive contents on events and products that are showcased prominently through social media platforms strengthen the perception of an elite "inner circle," according to Liu et al. (2024) and Ngo et al. (2024).

The social signal and marketing strategy work together through exclusivity as a mechanism. According to Kapferer (2015), marketers use limited-edition products and VIP access, and gated communities to create a sense of prestige and urgency. Social stratification emerges through invitation-only events and membership-based tiering systems, which simultaneously reveal social rankings. Such events allow people to validate their identity, yet exclusion triggers severe FOMO because it jeopardizes their sense of belonging and importance.

Exclusivity generates dual symbolic and emotional worth, which separates people into insider and outsider categories and activates FOMO psychological mechanisms.

Real-Time Content

Real-time content functions as a digital age characteristic that intensifies FOMO through its creation of time-sensitive and scarce content experiences (Chakrabarti, 2024). The short-lived nature of digital media platforms, including Snapchat and Instagram Stories, creates limited content availability, which leads users to feel anxious because they worry about missing exclusive time-sensitive experiences (Chakrabarti, 2024; Vemuri, 2024). Digital content's time-sensitive character makes FOMO worse since users must act quickly to prevent losing content, which increases their awareness of its brief lifetime. Because users of social media get constant updates and notifications that foster a sense of perpetual connection and information need, social media runs in real time and strengthens the sense of urgency. According to Hudson et al. (2015), digital content produced by attendees functions as live "advertising" that shows the immediate excitement of an event.

The content allows people who did not attend to experience the event through virtual participation, which deepens their feelings of being left out. The continuous flow of social updates creates information overload, which makes people anxious about missing important experiences (Ezzat et al., 2023). People with FOMO experience psychological self-projection into fictional alternative realities, which makes them feel like they have wasted time (Nolan, 2021). The condition affects people with unsatisfied basic needs more strongly, especially young individuals (Alfina et al., 2023) who experience anxiety about social exclusion and feeling out of touch with current events (Hayran & Gürhan Canli, 2023; Pang, 2022). The digital environment increases social comparison activities, which leads to FOMO affective states because people must navigate through a continuous stream of carefully selected experiences (Bonsteel, 2012; Alabri, 2022).

Event Attendance

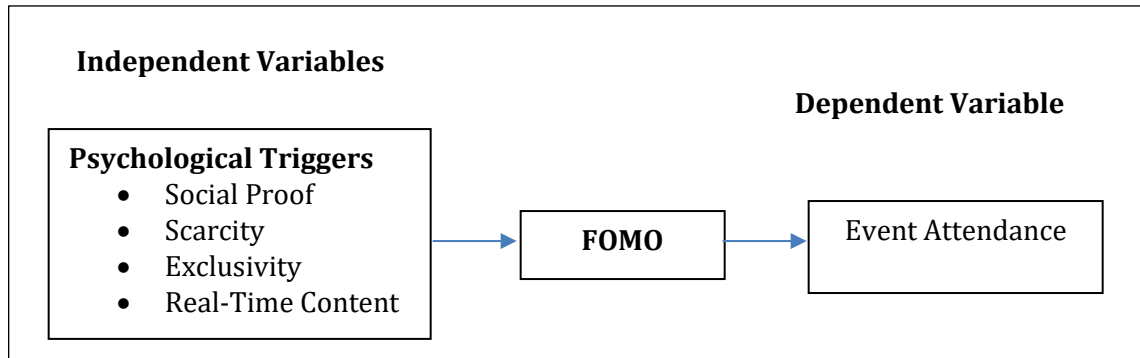
Event attendance includes both actual attendance and planned attendance, depending on the specific situation and consumer decision-making stage. In the context of experience economies, it is essential for both academic research and industry practice to understand the attendance drive that focuses on personalized immersive shareable events (Packer & Ballantyne, 2016). Event organizers use real-time content and social media virality to create exclusivity, which serves as a dual purpose for event marketing and generates fear-based motivation that pushes consumers to make quick decisions about attendance (Hodkinson, 2019). This combination of emotional urgency and social validation creates a strong consumer desire to attend events because they want to prevent psychological distress and social rejection (Przybylski et al., 2013). In addition, the act of attendance serves two purposes because it strengthens personal identity and allows people to show off their social status, especially when they gain VIP access or participate in influencer events or prestige events (Kapferer, 2015). The act of attendance serves multiple purposes beyond consumption because it allows people to signal their status while integrating into social groups and performing online.

This paper bases its conceptual framework on two theories that support each other: Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Social Identity Theory (SIT). These theories explain the underlying psychological mechanisms through which event design triggers FOMO and influences event-related behaviors such as participation, content sharing, and brand loyalty. According to Deci and Ryan (2000), individuals are motivated by the three fundamental psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In the context of FOMO, two of these needs, autonomy and relatedness, are especially relevant. Autonomy is undermined by FOMO because people feel forced to join or participate in events when they see others doing so, rather than having a personal interest. The perception of social exclusion through FOMO increases relatedness by making people feel the need to reconnect with their peer group (Milyavskaya et al., 2018). The need for relatedness is directly met by event design elements such as social proof, scarcity, and real-time content, which also exploit the discomfort of reduced autonomy. The dual mechanism helps explain why emotionally charged and socially visible events succeed in driving engagement. People develop part of their identity through their group affiliations according to Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Specific events that are exclusive, prestigious, or culturally meaningful serve as identity signals when people participate in them (Kapferer, 2015). The absence of FOMO emerges from being excluded from such events because it threatens one's social identity. These theoretical concepts show how marketing elements function

as group affiliation indicators rather than straightforward promotional methods. The perception of social anxiety and status deficit emerges when individuals do not attend certain events because these events help them affirm their membership in valuable social groups like lifestyle tribes, fan communities, and elite circles. This theoretical framework demonstrates that event participation serves two purposes: it strengthens identity while delivering experiences. Together, SDT and SIT offer a comprehensive theoretical explanation for the activation and effects of FOMO in event contexts. While SDT explains emotional and motivational dynamics, SIT provides insight into social-symbolic behaviors. These theories reinforce the argument that FOMO is not just a transient emotional state but a strategically cultivable driver of event participation, engagement, and post-event advocacy.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework illustrating the influence of FOMO on event attendance



3. Research Methodology

The research uses quantitative methods through cross-sectional surveys to validate the theoretical framework's proposed relationships. The research investigates how particular FOMO triggers affect FOMO intensity, which subsequently affects event attendance intentions. The research focuses on a broader demographic of respondents between 18 and 45 years old with varying levels of social media engagement who have participated in at least one live or virtual event during the previous year. This broader sample allows a more inclusive understanding of how FOMO operates across different age groups and digital behaviours, improving the external validity and applicability of the findings. Non-probability purposive sampling will select participants, enabling the intentional recruitment of individuals who meet the specified criteria. The recruitment process will utilise three online channels: email distribution lists, social media platforms (Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook), and online communities or forums that focus on event attendance. The selected platforms align with the online behaviour of the target respondents, thereby reaching a wide audience. The research will analyse data using SmartPLS software and employ structural equation modelling (SEM). The research benefits from using SEM because it allows for the assessment of measurement models regarding construct validity and reliability, as well as structural models that test relationships between theoretical constructs. The research employs Partial Least Squares SEM (PLS-SEM) because it demonstrates strength in handling small sample sizes and works well with exploratory models and complex models containing multiple constructs. The assessment of the measurement model's quality includes tests for reliability and validity, specifically Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity.

4. Conclusion

The research presents a conceptual framework that connects FOMO triggers to activation phases and moderating variables to explain how FOMO affects event attendance in the experience economy. The research demonstrates that event-related FOMO functions as an emotion-based state that event planners can purposefully create through their marketing strategies and event planning. Social proof, along with scarcity and exclusivity, and real-time content, serve as FOMO triggers which activate the FOMO Activation Cycle across pre-event anticipation and during-event engagement and post-event reflection to boost perceived social value and sense of urgency. The framework uses Self-Determination Theory and Social Identity Theory to

demonstrate how FOMO uses psychological needs for relatedness and social identity reinforcement but occasionally reduces autonomy. The proposed model fills an important conceptual void by showing how FOMO shapes event consumer choices and how personality traits (such as social comparison orientation) influence its impact. The proposed model provides practical value to event organizers who want to use FOMO ethically to boost attendance and digital participation. The model provides a foundation for future research through structural equation modeling to establish causal relationships between FOMO constructs and attendance intentions. The structured framework of FOMO provides researchers with enhanced comprehension of modern event behavior in digital environments. The paper makes a significant contribution to event literature through its development of a systematic FOMO framework within the experience economy. The research connects theoretical psychology to practical event planning and marketing strategies, which creates new opportunities for academic research and business development.

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