

Fear of Missing out and Impulsive Purchasing Among Generation Z Social Media Users: A Systematic Literature Review

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Keywords:	Abstract
fear of missing out; impulsive buying; Generation Z; live streaming; social commerce	The constant stream of notifications and the rapid turnover of viral content have shaped the digital environment in which Generation Z has grown up, giving rise to fear of missing out (FOMO)—a form of social anxiety that increasingly drives impulsive buying behavior. This issue has become more pressing with the expansion of social commerce and live-streaming platforms, which have shortened the gap between product exposure and purchase decisions. This study maps publication trends on FOMO and impulsive buying among Generation Z, traces the antecedents that trigger this behavior, examines the mechanisms underlying the FOMO–impulsive buying relationship, identifies the theoretical frameworks most frequently applied, and delineates remaining research gaps. Following the PRISMA protocol, 94 documents were retrieved from Scopus and manual searches, of which 26 articles met the inclusion criteria. The review shows that FOMO most often functions as a mediator within the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, triggered by scarcity cues, live-streaming exposure, and personality traits such as covert narcissism. Two findings diverge from the prevailing consensus: Islamic religiosity does not attenuate the effect of FOMO, and social comparison appears less relevant within the TikTok context. Purchasing contexts beyond conventional retail, such as in-game transactions and travel bookings, remain largely unexplored. This study contributes by consolidating fragmented theoretical perspectives and proposing a research agenda for underexplored purchasing contexts among digital-native consumers, particularly through longitudinal and cross-cultural research designs.

INTRODUCTION

Pew Research classifies Generation Z as individuals born between 1997 and 2012, characterized by the fact that social media has been an integral part of their lives since childhood, unlike previous generations. This context gives rise to psychological consequences, notably the “fear of missing out” (FOMO)—anxiety stemming from the feeling of being left behind regarding experiences or opportunities enjoyed by others (Pramesty & Merida, 2025). TikTok and Instagram play significant roles in this phenomenon; their algorithms continuously deliver viral content, leaving almost no time gap between viewing a product and clicking the “buy” button (Truong & Tien, 2026).

Generation Z experiences the direct impact of this phenomenon in their purchasing behavior. A study by Abero et al. (2026) identifies impulsive purchasing—purchase decisions made without prior planning—as a recurring behavioral pattern rather than an isolated incident. Live streaming exacerbates this situation by reducing consumers’ opportunities for reflection; one moment, a key opinion leader offers a flash discount, and the next, the item is already in the shopping cart (Tran et al., 2025). Another recently popularized term, “doom spending,” refers to impulsive shopping behavior used as an emotional escape from economic anxiety. Pramesty and Merida (2025) found a strong association between this behavior and FOMO

among Generation Z, although it remains unclear whether this pattern represents a persistent behavioral tendency or merely a temporary reaction.

This phenomenon extends beyond conventional retail products to include viral beauty products such as Skintific (Syafitri, 2024), in-game transactions such as Robux top-ups in Roblox (Suminar et al., 2026), and travel bookings through online travel agencies (Ferdowsi & Moradi, 2026). The breadth of these contexts demonstrates that FOMO is not merely an individual psychological symptom but also a consumer behavior pattern that continues to evolve alongside digital transformation. Given the significant economic and psychological impacts involved, a systematic mapping of the literature serves as a crucial step toward understanding the underlying mechanisms and identifying existing research gaps.

An analysis of these 26 articles reveals four recurring theoretical frameworks used to explain the relationship between FOMO and impulsive buying among Generation Z: the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), and Social Comparison Theory (SCT). Notably, these four theories rarely operate independently; many researchers integrate them into a single conceptual model, even though each theory originates from distinct fundamental assumptions.

The S-O-R model is the most widely used framework, appearing in 10 of the 26 studies reviewed. This framework positions FOMO as an organismic variable—a link between external stimuli (such as scarcity cues or social media advertisements) and the final response of impulsive buying (Abero et al., 2026; Ferdowsi & Moradi, 2026). The popularity of S-O-R is understandable. Wulan et al. (2025), for instance, reported a notable finding: the direct influence coefficient of advertising on impulsive buying was nearly zero; however, after FOMO was introduced as a mediator, the coefficient increased to 0.42. This pattern appears consistently in several other studies within the first research theme, leading researchers to favor a framework that positions FOMO as a mediating mechanism rather than merely a supplementary variable. In other words, S-O-R provides an appropriate framework for explaining FOMO not as an independent cause, but as a pathway through which stimuli influence purchasing decisions.

Unlike S-O-R, which begins with external stimuli, SDT originates from internal consumer motivations. This theory views FOMO as a response to unmet basic psychological needs, particularly the need for social connection or “relatedness” (Doan & Lee, 2023). When this need is not fulfilled through direct social interaction, individuals may attempt to satisfy it through consumption by purchasing products that make them feel connected to a particular trend or community. Although this explanation provides greater motivational depth than S-O-R, it is more challenging to test empirically because psychological needs are latent constructs that cannot always be measured directly.

TPB begins from a different theoretical premise. Rather than focusing on stimuli or unmet psychological needs, this theory emphasizes attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control as factors that shape purchase intentions (Khoa, 2026). Within this framework, FOMO plays a secondary role; it functions as one factor influencing attitudes rather than serving as the primary mediating pathway, as proposed in the S-O-R model. Juliandhani and Tjahjawati (2025) applied this theory to compare Millennials and Generation Z, producing interesting findings: although the direction of FOMO’s influence was consistent across both

groups, its intensity differed significantly. Age and digital experience appear to influence the extent to which FOMO shapes purchasing decisions.

SCT is arguably the most established among the four theories. It conceptualizes FOMO as a consequence of social comparison, whereby observing others' lifestyles or consumption behaviors on social media generates a perceived need to maintain social relevance (Masnan et al., 2025). For years, SCT has been regarded as a fundamental explanation for FOMO. However, a study from Vietnam challenged this assumption. Truong and Tien (2026) found that social comparison and relatedness did not significantly influence FOMO among TikTok users; instead, covert narcissism and fear of exclusion emerged as the primary determinants. These findings are significant because they suggest that SCT may not provide a universal explanation of FOMO, particularly on short-form video platforms such as TikTok, where personality traits may play a more prominent role than social comparison alone.

Ultimately, these four theories complement rather than contradict one another. Some studies have integrated S-O-R, TPB, and SDT into a single model (Setiarini et al., 2026), demonstrating that researchers recognize the limitations of relying on a single theoretical perspective. Nevertheless, the tension between SCT and the findings of Truong and Tien (2026) remains an important issue, highlighting the need to reassess the generalizability of conventional FOMO theories when applied to different platforms or cultural contexts. The research gap is evident: despite increasing scholarly attention, a comprehensive synthesis is still needed to map the current state of knowledge, identify consistent findings and contradictions, and establish clear directions for future research. The urgency of this study is reinforced by the rapid growth of social commerce and the increasing susceptibility of Generation Z consumers to digital marketing strategies that leverage psychological vulnerabilities. This study contributes to the literature by consolidating fragmented theoretical perspectives, identifying the contextual boundaries of existing theories, and proposing a structured research agenda. The novelty of this research lies in its systematic application of the PRISMA protocol to synthesize empirical and theoretical studies across diverse contexts, providing a comprehensive mapping of FOMO–impulsive buying research among Generation Z social media users. The objective of this study is to map publication trends, identify antecedents and mechanisms, examine theoretical frameworks, and delineate research gaps in the literature on FOMO and impulsive buying among Generation Z social media users. The benefits of this research include providing a clear roadmap for future studies, offering practical insights for marketers and policymakers, and contributing to theoretical refinement in understanding digital consumer behavior.

METHOD

Research Question

The five research questions outlined in Section 1.3 served as the primary guide for the literature search, screening, and synthesis processes in this study. These questions ensured that each stage of the PRISMA process was directed toward identifying publication trends, FOMO antecedents, relationship mechanisms, dominant theoretical frameworks, and research gaps. Consequently, the contribution of each document included in the synthesis process was mapped to one or more research questions.

Databases and Search Strings

The literature search was conducted primarily using Scopus Advanced Search, supplemented by manual searches in Sinta and DOAJ to capture relevant Indonesian national journals. Key search terms included combinations of "fear of missing out" (FOMO), "impulsive buying," "impulse buying," "Generation Z," and "social media," linked via Boolean operators (AND and OR) and applied to article titles, abstracts, and keywords. The search timeframe spanned from 2019 to 2026, covering the period when this topic began to gain significant attention among researchers. Scopus yielded 81 documents, supplemented by 13 additional documents from the manual Sinta and DOAJ searches—all of which were individually cross-checked. A total of 94 unique documents proceeded to the next stage.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to ensure that all included documents were genuinely relevant to the topics of FOMO, impulsive buying, and the Generation Z population. A summary of these criteria is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Document inclusion and exclusion criteria for the PRISMA process

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Population	Generation Z (born 1997-2012) or samples that can be explicitly verified to fall within that age range	Populations outside Generation Z without clear age information, or mixed populations without data disaggregation
Variables	Explicitly addresses fear of missing out (FOMO) and impulsive/impulse buying	Does not address FOMO, or does not address impulsive buying at all
Publication Type	Journal articles (empirical or conceptual) addressing the relationship between FOMO and impulsive buying	Proceedings without full peer review, opinion pieces, or editorials
Language	English or Indonesian	Languages other than English and Indonesian
Access	Full text or complete abstract available for extraction	No abstract or accessible summary available at all

PRISMA Diagram

The document selection process follows the four stages of PRISMA—identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion—as visualized in Figure 1.

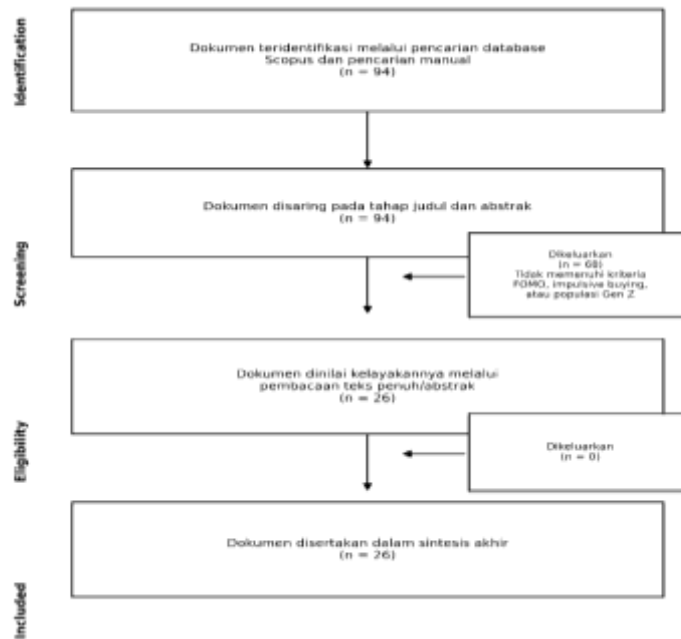


Figure 1. PRISMA flowchart of the document identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion process.

The identification stage yielded 94 unique documents following deduplication. During the screening stage, the titles and abstracts of all 94 documents were reviewed; 68 documents were excluded for failing to explicitly meet the criteria regarding FOMO, impulsive buying, or the Generation Z population, leaving 26 documents to proceed to the eligibility stage. The eligibility stage involved assessing these 26 documents through full-text or complete abstract reviews, with no further exclusions occurring at this stage. Consequently, all 26 documents were included in the final synthesis stage.

Data Extraction and Thematic Analysis

Data from each document that passed the eligibility stage were manually extracted into a table to record research contexts, methods, sample sizes, variables, key findings, and applied theories. Three of the 26 documents required a different approach: Ndruru et al. (2026), Syafila et al. (2025), and Syafitri (2025) were conceptual in nature and lacked primary data. Therefore, these three documents served only to reinforce the theoretical discussion for RQ4 and could not be used to synthesize empirical findings for RQ2 and RQ3.

Following extraction, all 26 documents were grouped into themes based on similarities in variables, contexts, and the relationship mechanisms tested, resulting in seven thematic clusters. This thematic grouping process was performed manually by the researcher and subsequently triangulated with a keyword co-occurrence analysis using VOSviewer across two data levels: a map derived from the 94 documents in the identification stage and a map derived from the 26 documents in the inclusion stage. This triangulation aimed to ensure that the thematic clusters resulting from the manual synthesis were consistent with bibliometric keyword co-occurrence patterns, thereby grounding the thematic categorization in both qualitative content analysis and quantitative keyword data patterns.

2.6 Quality Assessment and Risk of Bias

Each study that met the eligibility criteria was also assessed for risk of bias using criteria adapted from the JBI Checklist for Analytical Cross-Sectional Studies, given that the majority of studies in this corpus employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design. The assessment covered four criteria: clarity regarding the population and sampling technique, justification of sample size, reporting of instrument validity and reliability, and the presence or absence of a common method bias test. Each study was assigned a rating of low, moderate, or high based on the number of criteria adequately met. Three conceptual articles (Ndruru et al., 2026; Syafila et al., 2025; Syafitri, 2025) were not rated, as they lacked primary data for assessment.

The uniform cross-sectional design across all 23 quantitative studies was noted separately as a structural limitation of the corpus—rather than as part of the individual quality scores—because this characteristic applied universally and is discussed further in Section 3.3. Table 3 presents the risk of bias assessment results for each study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overall, the risk-of-bias assessment showed a fairly homogeneous pattern across the 23 primary quantitative studies: two were rated low risk, eighteen moderate, and three high risk. The moderate-risk pattern was mainly driven by the widespread use of non-probability (purposive or convenience) sampling common in this field, together with limited explicit reporting of common method bias (CMB) tests, even though instrument validity and reliability were generally well reported through PLS-SEM approaches. The two high-risk studies, Chetoui and El Bouzidi (2023) and Aydin et al. (2019), both limited generalizability from the outset — one through an urban-student-only sample and the other through a correlational design without modern validity testing.

Synthesis of the Articles

A keyword co-occurrence map generated from the 26 included documents (VOSviewer) revealed three color clusters. The red cluster was the most dominant, consisting of the keywords fear of missing out, impulsive buying, Generation Z, and social media, forming the core of the entire corpus. The blue cluster contained gender and materialism, reflecting the sub-theme of individual antecedents tied to consumers' demographic and psychological characteristics. The green cluster contained self-control and impulse buying, reflecting self-regulation as a mechanism interacting with impulsive buying. This three-cluster pattern was consistent with the seven themes derived from the manual synthesis, reinforcing the credibility of the thematic categorization used in this study.

Theme 1 — FOMO as a Mediator within the S-O-R Framework (8 articles). A common thread across these studies is that FOMO is almost never treated as an endpoint variable; it consistently functions as a bridge to another outcome. Chan et al. (2026), Johan et al. (2026), and Abero et al. (2026) each tested a different stimulus — BNPL adoption, social media use, and scarcity cues — yet arrived at the same conclusion: the stimulus alone is not strong enough to drive purchasing without first passing through FOMO. Abero et al. further extended the chain to post-purchase cognitive dissonance, although the duration of that dissonance was not addressed. Among online travel agents, Ferdowsi and Moradi (2026) found that chatbot and blockchain features do trigger impulse buying, but once FOMO was included in the model, trust was displaced as the stronger predictor — a somewhat unusual result given that travel decisions are typically associated with careful deliberation rather than impulse. Charles and

Immanuel (2025) added materialism as a variable, with effects differing by gender, though the underlying cause of that difference was not explained. Duong et al. (2025) modeled a staged chain in which scarcity triggers FOMO, FOMO triggers herding, and herding then drives purchasing. The most notable finding is from Wulan et al. (2025) in Jambi, where the direct effect of advertising on impulsive buying was nearly zero and non-significant, but jumped to 0.42 once FOMO was included as a mediator — a difference large enough to serve as one of the corpus's strongest arguments that digital advertising works indirectly, through emotion rather than exposure frequency.

Theme 2 — Live Streaming and Social Commerce (4 articles). Across these studies, live viewing consistently shortens the gap between watching and buying. Khoa (2026) combined TPB with herding and signaling, showing that viewer crowding and social signals on social commerce platforms sharpen Gen Z's impulsive buying intention. Setiarini et al. (2026) found that on TikTok Shop specifically, livestreaming functions as a mediator linking FOMO, price perception, and hedonism. Tran et al. (2025) focused on the influencer behind the screen, finding that key-opinion-leader persuasiveness combined with live-streaming attributes both shape purchase decisions, though their relative weight was not established. Doan and Lee (2023) took a different angle through flow experience, finding that an uninterrupted viewing flow deepens the urge to buy on TikTok — a finding more closely aligned with flow psychology than conventional marketing-stimulus models.

Theme 3 — Individual Antecedents and Cultural Moderators (4 articles). Truong and Tien (2026) produced the most discussed — and most disruptive — result in this theme: covert narcissism, scarcity, and fear of exclusion emerged as drivers of FOMO, while social comparison and relatedness failed significance tests, raising the open question of whether religious values truly play no role or whether religiosity was simply measured too narrowly as a single cognitive score. Chetioui and El Bouzidi (2023), sampling in Morocco, added a gender dimension, finding that women reported higher impulsive buying alongside higher FOMO scores, though the urban-student-only sample limits generalizability. Aydin et al. (2019) took an entirely different route, linking FOMO, impulsivity, and biological rhythm to compulsive buying. Chairiyati et al. (2026) tested Islamic religiosity as a moderator of viral food purchases and found no dampening effect — personal and social FOMO remained significant regardless of respondents' religiosity level, a reminder that not all explanations of consumer impulsivity need to be rooted in social or digital-platform factors.

Theme 4 — Cross-Generational and Employment Contexts (2 articles). Juliandhani and Tjahjawati (2025) compared Millennials and Gen Z in Bandung, finding the same direction of FOMO's influence for both, though differing in strength. Rahmadhani and Oktarisa (2025) sampled working Gen Z in Padang and found that both FOMO and electronic word-of-mouth significantly affect impulsive buying in that group — a signal that FOMO does not simply disappear once someone graduates and enters the workforce.

Theme 5 — Niche Product Contexts (3 articles). Suminar et al. (2026) examined in-game transactions, specifically Robux top-ups in Roblox, uniquely finding self-control functioning as a mediator — rather than merely a control variable — between FOMO, hedonic motivation, and impulsive buying. Putra et al. (2025), in Bali, examined how celebrity endorsement interacts with both FOMO and FOPO (fear of other people's opinions) in shaping digital consumer decisions. Lintong et al. (2025), in Manado, found a simpler pattern: FOMO

and social media use intensity both influence impulsive buying of viral food and beverage products, without additional mediators.

Theme 6 — Non-Purchase Outcomes (2 articles). Pramesty and Merida (2025) linked FOMO to doom spending with a fairly strong correlation ($r = 0.827$). Masnan et al. (2025) extended the discussion to life satisfaction, finding that impulsive buying mediates the relationship between FOMO, novelty seeking, and life satisfaction, with internet use moderating the overall relationship.

Theme 7 — Conceptual Articles (3 articles). Ndruru et al. (2026), Syafila et al. (2025), and Syafitri (2025) contributed theoretical rather than empirical perspectives, each proposing a combination of the S-O-R framework with Self-Determination Theory. While they cannot address RQ2 or RQ3 due to the absence of empirical data, they remain valuable for RQ4.

Table 2. Summary of data extraction from the 26 included articles

Author (Year)	Country/Context	Method	Theory/Model	Key Findings
Chan et al. (2026)	Malaysia/Indonesia/Iran	Quantitative, survey	Digital nudging, S-O-R	Algorithmic personalization increases BNPL adoption through FOMO and urgency
Truong & Tien (2026)	Vietnam	Quantitative, SEM	S-O-R	Social comparison and relatedness not significant; fear of exclusion and narcissism dominant
Khoa (2026)	Vietnam	Quantitative, PLS-SEM	TPB, Herding, Signaling	Herding and signaling cues strengthen impulsive buying intention via the TPB path
Johan et al. (2026)	Indonesia (Bogor)	Quantitative, explanatory	Not specified	FOMO mediates social media use on impulsive buying
Abero et al. (2026)	Philippines	Quantitative, survey	S-O-R	Scarcity, payment convenience, and FOMO drive impulsive buying and post-purchase dissonance
Ferdowsi & Moradi (2026)	Iran	Quantitative, PLS-SEM	S-O-R	Chatbot and blockchain features trigger impulse buying; FOMO is the strongest mediator
Setiarini et al. (2026)	Indonesia	Quantitative, SEM-PLS	TPB, S-O-R, SDT	Livestream mediates FOMO, price perception, and hedonism on impulsive buying
Ndruru et al. (2026)	Indonesia (Nias)	Conceptual	Not specified	Conceptual synthesis positioning FOMO as an antecedent of Gen Z impulsive purchase decisions
Chairiyati et al. (2026)	Indonesia	Quantitative, PLS-SEM	Not specified	FOMO significant; Islamic religiosity not significant as a moderator
Juliandhani & Tjahjawati (2025)	Indonesia (Bandung)	Quantitative, comparative	TPB	FOMO significant for both Gen Z and Millennials, with differing strength
Tran et al. (2025)	Vietnam	Quantitative, PLS-SEM	S-O-R	KOL persuasion and live-streaming attributes influence impulsive buying

Author (Year)	Country/Context	Method	Theory/Model	Key Findings
Syafila et al. (2025)	Indonesia	Conceptual	S-O-R	Synthesis of psychological, social, and emotional mechanisms shaping online shopping behavior
Charles & Immanuel (2025)	Indonesia	Quantitative, survey	S-O-R	FOMO and materialism drive impulse buying and dissonance, differing by gender
Pramesty & Merida (2025)	Indonesia	Quantitative, correlational	SDT	Strong correlation between FOMO and impulsive buying in doom-spending context ($r = 0.827$)
Rinonce & Jannah (2025)	Indonesia (Surabaya)	Quantitative	Not specified	FOMO significantly drives impulsive buying
Duong et al. (2025)	Vietnam	Mixed-method	Herding FOMO &	Scarcity triggers FOMO, which drives herding and impulsive buying
Rahmadhani & Oktarisa (2025)	Indonesia (Padang)	Quantitative	Not specified	FOMO and e-WOM significant on impulsive buying among working Gen Z
Suminar et al. (2026)	Indonesia	Quantitative	Not specified	FOMO and hedonic motivation affect in-game purchases; self-control acts as mediator
Wulan et al. (2025)	Indonesia (Jambi)	Quantitative, SEM-PLS	TPB, SCT, S-O-R	Direct advertising effect not significant; FOMO-mediated effect strongly significant
Putra et al. (2025)	Indonesia (Bali)	Quantitative	Social Influence, SDT	Celebrity endorsement interacts with FOMO and FOPO
Lintong et al. (2025)	Indonesia (Manado)	Quantitative, regression	SCT, SDT S-O-R,	FOMO and social media use drive impulsive buying of viral food/beverage trends
Masnan et al. (2025)	Malaysia	Quantitative, SmartPLS	SCT	FOMO and novelty seeking increase impulse buying, which mediates life satisfaction
Syafitri (2025)	Indonesia	Conceptual	SDT, S-O-R	Conceptual framework of FOMO on impulsive buying of viral beauty products
Chetioui & El Bouzidi (2023)	Morocco	Quantitative, PLS-SEM	Not specified	FOMO, hedonism, materialism significant; women show higher impulsive buying
Doan & Lee (2023)	Vietnam	Quantitative, SEM (AMOS)	SDT, UGT	FOMO increases flow experience, which drives impulse purchase
Aydin et al. (2019)	Turkey	Quantitative, correlational	Not specified	Biological rhythm, impulsivity, and FOMO correlate with compulsive buying

Table 3. Summary of bias risk assessment for the 23 primary quantitative studies

Author (Year)	Sampling	Validity/Reliability	CMB Test	Bias Risk
Chan et al. (2026)	Non-probability	Reported	Not reported	Moderate
Truong & Tien (2026)	Non-probability	Reported	Not reported	Moderate
Khoa (2026)	Not detailed	Reported (AVE, CR, HTMT)	Not reported	Moderate
Johan et al. (2026)	Not detailed	Not reported in detail	Not reported	Moderate
Abero et al. (2026)	Non-probability	Reported	Not reported	Moderate
Ferdowsi & Moradi (2026)	Convenience (n=388, power analysis)	Fully reported (AVE, CR, alpha)	Not reported	Low
Setiarini et al. (2026)	Purposive (n=150, minimum threshold)	Fully reported (VIF, HTMT)	Not reported	Moderate
Chairiyati et al. (2026)	Not detailed	Reported	Not reported	Moderate
Juliandhani & Tjahjawati (2025)	Not detailed	Reported	Not reported	Moderate
Tran et al. (2025)	Convenience (n=360, justified)	Fully reported	Tested (Harman, 35.4%)	Low
Charles & Immanuel (2025)	Purposive (n=444, Davis-Cosenza formula)	Reported	Not reported	Moderate
Pramesty & Merida (2025)	Purposive (n=165, G-Power)	Reported (adapted scale)	Not reported	Moderate
Rinonce & Jannah (2025)	Not detailed	Not reported in detail	Not reported	Moderate
Duong et al. (2025)	Non-probability (n=420)	Reported (validated scale)	Not reported	Moderate
Rahmadhani & Oktarisa (2025)	Not detailed	Reported (classical method)	Not reported	Moderate
Suminar et al. (2026)	Not detailed	Not reported in detail	Not reported	Moderate
Wulan et al. (2025)	Not detailed	Reported	Not reported	Moderate
Putra et al. (2025)	Not detailed	Reported	Not reported	Moderate
Lintong et al. (2025)	Not detailed	Not reported in detail	Not reported	Moderate
Masnan et al. (2025)	Not detailed	Reported	Not reported	Moderate
Chetioui & El Bouzidi (2023)	Purposive, urban students only	Reported	Not reported	High
Doan & Lee (2023)	Not detailed	Reported	Not reported	Moderate
Aydin et al. (2019)	Simple correlational	Not reported in detail	Not reported	High

Comparison of Findings

Three findings from the synthesis stand in direct tension with one another and warrant separate discussion, as each challenges a core assumption commonly held in FOMO theory.

First, on religiosity: Chairiyati et al. (2026) tested whether Islamic religiosity could dampen FOMO's effect on impulsive buying and found that it did not — contradicting the

common assumption that religious values should restrain consumptive behavior. One possible explanation is that religiosity measured cognitively or ritually may not actually be present at the moment of everyday shopping decisions, particularly for socially consumed viral products such as trending food. Future research may need to distinguish intrinsic from extrinsic religiosity before concluding that religion plays no role at all.

Second, and perhaps most surprising, concerns social comparison. In the TikTok context in Vietnam, Truong and Tien (2026) found that social comparison and relatedness were entirely non-significant predictors of FOMO, despite Social Comparison Theory long being regarded as the most classic explanatory foundation for this phenomenon (Masnan et al., 2025). Platform characteristics may determine which psychological mechanisms are relevant — on short-video platforms such as TikTok, personality-driven drivers such as covert narcissism and fear of exclusion appear more influential than conscious social comparison, raising questions about the cross-platform generalizability of SCT.

The third contradiction comes from Wulan et al. (2025), where the direct effect of social media advertising on impulsive buying was nearly zero and non-significant, but became substantial and significant once FOMO was included as a mediator. Advertising apparently does not work alone; an emotional process must first occur before it truly changes a purchasing decision. Practitioners focused solely on ad-exposure frequency, without considering how to activate consumers' psychological urgency, may be disappointed with the results.

Research Gaps

Three clear gaps emerge from this review of 26 articles. The first concerns limited context diversity: most studies focus on physical products or conventional digital services, while less conventional contexts — in-game purchases (Suminar et al., 2026), online travel agent bookings (Ferdowsi & Moradi, 2026), or Buy-Now-Pay-Later adoption (Chan et al., 2026) — remain scarcely studied.

The second gap concerns cultural and religiosity variables. Only one article explicitly tested religiosity (Chairiyati et al., 2026), and its results ran counter to common expectations. Other cultural variables, such as individualism-collectivism or power distance, are almost entirely untouched, despite the majority of studies in this corpus originating from collectivist cultures such as Indonesia and Vietnam.

The third and perhaps most fundamental gap concerns research design: all 26 articles rely on cross-sectional data without exception. As a result, the claim that FOMO causes impulsive buying has never been tested longitudinally, leaving the direction of causality uncertain — repeated impulsive buying could plausibly reinforce FOMO tendencies through psychological feedback. The risk-of-bias assessment reinforces this concern: while instrument validity and reliability are generally adequately reported, common method bias testing is minimal, leaving the potential inflation of relationships from single-source self-report data largely unaddressed.

Implications and Future Research

Theoretically, this synthesis shows that the generalizability of SCT and the moderating role of religiosity both warrant re-testing across different platforms and cultural contexts, since two of the three key contradictions above directly involve these constructs. Practically, the findings suggest that marketing strategies are more effective when directed at activating

psychological urgency through FOMO rather than relying solely on advertising exposure frequency.

For future research, longitudinal or experimental designs are now warranted to better clarify the direction of causality between FOMO and impulsive buying. Product contexts should also be expanded into still under-explored areas such as in-game purchases and BNPL adoption, while cultural variables should be tested more systematically through cross-country samples. Religiosity moderation testing should also move beyond a single composite score to consider more granular dimensions of religiosity.

CONCLUSION

Returning to the five research questions posed at the outset, several conclusions can be drawn. Regarding publication trends, research on FOMO and impulsive buying among Generation Z increased substantially in 2025 and 2026, with Indonesia and Vietnam contributing the highest number of studies. Quantitative approaches using SEM-PLS also emerged as the most frequently applied research method.

Regarding antecedents, three recurring categories were identified throughout the reviewed literature: marketing stimuli, such as scarcity cues and payment convenience; platform-related stimuli, such as live streaming and key opinion leaders; and individual psychological factors, such as covert narcissism and materialism. These antecedents were often interconnected, although several factors traditionally considered influential were not consistently found to be significant across different contexts.

Regarding the mechanism underlying the relationship between FOMO and impulsive buying, the findings consistently indicated that FOMO functioned primarily as a mediating variable rather than solely as a direct predictor within the Stimulus-Organism-Response framework. The moderating role of gender produced inconsistent findings across contexts, while Islamic religiosity was not consistently shown to reduce the influence of FOMO on impulsive buying behavior, challenging assumptions regarding the role of religious values in regulating consumption tendencies.

Regarding the dominant theoretical frameworks, the Stimulus-Organism-Response framework was the most frequently applied, followed by Self-Determination Theory and Theory of Planned Behavior. Meanwhile, the applicability of Social Comparison Theory required further examination, particularly within short-form video platforms such as TikTok, where individual psychological traits may have a stronger influence than social comparison processes.

Regarding research gaps, three major areas were identified: limited exploration of non-retail purchasing contexts, inconsistent examination of cultural and religiosity-related variables, and the dominance of cross-sectional research designs that restricted causal interpretations. These gaps provided clear directions for future research, particularly through longitudinal approaches, cross-cultural investigations, and broader examination of digital consumption contexts.

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