
The Dark Side of Digital Consumption: A Phenomenological Study of Consumer Anxiety Over Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) in Impulsive Purchasing Behaviour in Response to Digital Advertising

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ABSTRACT

Digital consumption is now an important part of everyday life, and it has significant emotional and psychological effects on users. The purpose of this study is to explore consumers' subjective experiences with social media advertising pressure, particularly in relation to the phenomena of anxiety and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), which drive impulsive purchasing behaviour. This study focuses on the depth of individual experiences when exposed to powerful advertising algorithms. This is done using a qualitative phenomenological approach. The results show that digital advertising on social media presents an ideal lifestyle that creates constant social pressure rather than simply marketing messages. The fear of being left behind by trends or other people's experiences (FOMO) is a cause of consumer anxiety, which drives them to make impulsive purchases. The results indicate that digital consumption behaviour is more influenced by communicative experiences and social constructs than by rational economic actions. Theoretically, this study enriches marketing communication research by providing a critical perspective on the dark side of digital consumption through a phenomenological lens.

Keywords: Consumer Anxiety; Impulsive Buying; Digital Advertising; Fear of Missing Out (FOMO); Phenomenology



Received: 20 February 2026

Accepted: 21 April 2026

Available online: 29 April 2026

DOI: 10.61242/ijabo.26.706

JEL Classifications: D91, M31



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INTRODUCTION

Digital consumption has become an integral part of daily life and can have a significant impact on a person's emotional and psychological well-being. The intensity of exposure to algorithmic advertising on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok and Facebook exacerbates this phenomenon. Studies show that this algorithmic exposure influences consumer purchasing decisions by 56.8% (W. P. Sari, 2025). These advertisements do not merely sell goods, but also serve as representations of an ideal lifestyle, success, and happiness, which subtly create social pressure. Consequently, purchasing decisions often shift from functional needs to a process of seeking social acceptance and self-identity. Ultimately, this situation leads to impulsive shopping behaviour as a communicative response to symbolic pressure. Shopping becomes a temporary means of alleviating anxiety, social insecurity, and the phenomenon of fear of missing out (FOMO) (Mufidah *et al.*, 2023).

Based on preliminary research, the researcher interviewed five consumers about their subjective experiences with this symbolic pressure. Researcher found that it was revealed that online social media advertisements have a powerful influence on their feelings. When they see promotional content, customers feel an automatic sense of 'pressure' (Rachman *et al.*, 2024). This is especially true for content related to current trends or comments from their favourite influencers. This shows that advertisements have evolved beyond mere information; they have become tools for evoking feelings and making users believe that they must follow certain standards or lifestyles through what they see on their mobile phones. This condition is reinforced by limited discount strategies that create a sense of urgency. FOMO arises when discount offers seem to be about to expire. As a result, there is a strong psychological urge to buy something without thinking twice (Mulyadi & Efawati, 2024). FOMO is a feeling of anxiety or fear of missing out when others have enjoyable experiences, exciting opportunities, or experiences that we do not have (Noviani *et al.*, 2026). FOMO is not an abstract idea, instead, it is a feeling experienced by many people. They experience anxiety, depression, feelings of inadequacy, and pressure to make immediate purchasing decisions. According to research conducted (P. Sari & Jannah, 2025), the Gen Z population (18-25 years old) has a high level of FOMO, at 24%, indicating that FOMO has transcended human experience and become a significant social phenomenon. This percentage indicates that nearly 25% of people in the 18 to 25 age group experience FOMO in their daily consumption behavior. This shows that the fear of missing out has become part of Generation Z's social interaction patterns and their digital technology habits. Therefore, FOMO can be considered a structural phenomenon produced by the social media ecosystem and digital communication practices. According to research (Jordan *et al.*, 2025), there is a significant positive correlation between FOMO levels and impulsive purchasing behavior. Customers with higher levels of FOMO are more likely to make impulsive purchases, especially through social media. Additionally, previous research has found that the fear of missing out has a positive effect on consumer behavior when purchasing products through advertisements (Apolo *et al.*, 2023). Based on the findings of the two previous studies, it can be concluded that when consumers fear being left behind by trends, promotions, or experiences that others have, they no longer rely entirely on rational considerations such as product needs or usefulness when making purchasing decisions (Efawati & Hermawan, 2020). Instead, their anxiety and emotional urge to act immediately drives their behavior.

When linked to the dynamics of social media that emphasize visibility and social comparison, the FOMO experience becomes even more complex. Customers not only compare themselves to the models or influencers advertised, but also to others who openly display their consumption. In situations like this, social media ads serve as more than just

marketing messages; they also encourage a continuous process of self-evaluation, which often leads to anxiety. The direct impact of advertising is not always the cause of consumer anxiety in digital consumption. Many people consider it a natural feeling, such as worrying about missing out on opportunities or wanting to follow trends. However, at a deeper level of experience, this anxiety can affect customers' perceptions of themselves, their ability to manage their emotions, and their ability to make purchasing decisions that are not entirely rational or reflective. Previous studies have found that FOMO affects interest in purchasing products. To avoid falling behind their social group, respondents tend to buy goods. Many respondents worry about missing out on promotions or limited edition products for fear of missing out. This feeling encourages impulse buying (Jurnal & Mea, 2025). Previous studies show that the motivation behind purchasing decisions does not solely stem from personal needs, rather, the motivation to maintain social status and a sense of group belonging are major factors (Thariq & Efawati, 2024). Products become symbols of social participation, so interest in purchasing them increases as a way to avoid feelings of isolation or social exclusion.

How customers perceive the pressure of digital advertising can be influenced by variables such as their social status, level of social media usage, and interpersonal communication experiences (Rifathurrahman et al. 2024). On a broader level, the phenomena of FOMO and consumer anxiety signal a shift in the way digital societies communicate. Social media serves not only as a medium for distributing advertisements, but also as a space where new social norms are formed regarding consumption, lifestyle, and self-identity. Unfortunately, however, there remains a lack of comprehensive research on the 'dark side' of digital consumption from the consumer's personal perspective. Most research on social media advertising focuses on technical elements and end results such as message success, purchase intent, or consumption behaviour. These methods tend to treat customers as statistically measurable objects, thus failing to observe how consumers feel, understand, and cope with advertising pressure and internal conflicts in their daily lives. Furthermore, phenomena such as FOMO and anxiety are often dismissed as normal feelings or mere percentage figures. However, there remains a gap in understanding how these feelings influence consumers' self-perception and their ability to regulate their emotions at a deeper experiential level. Therefore, a phenomenological approach is employed in this study to bridge this gap by uncovering the deepest underlying structures of meaning behind why and how consumers experience anxiety and instinctive urges.

Furthermore, the two main theoretical frameworks Edmund Husserl and Alfred Schutz's Phenomenological Theory of Communication and Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's Social Construction of Reality also lend academic legitimacy to this research. The focus of the research has shifted from merely measuring the mechanical impact of advertising to a deeper understanding of how anxiety and FOMO emerge in consumers' subjective consciousness as real-life experiences. Meanwhile, social construction theory is used to explain how digital advertising algorithms on social media create standards of an 'ideal lifestyle' which are subsequently internalised by consumers. This research has a strong academic foundation to explain that impulsive purchasing is not merely an irrational economic act but a communicative response and an attempt to negotiate human identity amidst the symbolic pressures of the modern digital ecosystem.

By examining consumers' experiences regarding FOMO and their anxiety regarding the pressure of social media advertising, this study is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the fields of marketing communication and digital communication, whilst also opening the door to critical reflection on advertising practices in an era of increasingly personalised and intense social media.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Theory of Communication Phenomenology (Edmund Husserl – Alfred Schutz)

In communication research, phenomenology is a theoretical and methodological approach that focuses on human subjective experience and how humans understand communication phenomena directly. According to this perspective, the meaning of communication arises from the life experiences, consciousness, and socio-cultural context of the participants rather than as something objective and fixed. Phenomenology, which originated from Edmund Husserl's theory, places consciousness at the core of analysis. Rather than being defined theoretically or measured empirically, phenomena are understood as they 'appear' in human consciousness. To understand this, researchers must perform epoche or bracketing, which is to suspend prejudices, assumptions, and prior knowledge. Schutz argues that the meaning of communication is formed through intersubjectivity, which is the continuous relationship of meaning between humans in social interactions. Motivation because (previous experience) and in-order-to (goals to be achieved) form the basis of human social action (Maulana *et al.*, 2024).

According to phenomenology, the discipline of communication studies, the meaning of a message comes from the audience's interpretation based on their experiences, emotions, values, and social context. The meaning of a message does not come from the text alone. Media and communication messages are considered symbolic experiences that are felt, encountered, and interpreted differently by each individual. Therefore, communication responses such as anxiety, tension, or the urge to act are not mechanical consequences of the message; they are more the result of a person's personal experience. Therefore, rather than generalising behaviour or examining cause-and-effect relationships, the phenomenology of communication aims to reveal the deepest meaning structures of human communication experiences. Researchers can understand how humans experience, interpret, and respond to modern communication phenomena using this method. Social change and advances in digital technology are some of the factors that shape modern communication experiences (Maulana *et al.*, 2024).

Social Construction Theory of Reality (Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann)

According to the theory proposed by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, social construction theory produces social reality through social processes that occur every day in everyday life (Luckman, n.d, 2021). Reality is understood as the result of a dialectic between objective reality (social structures, institutions, and norms) and subjective reality (human consciousness, experience, and meaning). Three dialectical moments externalisation, objectification, and internalisation are used to construct social reality, according to Berger and Luckmann. The process by which humans express themselves and create social order through actions and interactions is known as externalisation. The results of externalisation solidify into an objective reality, become institutionalised, and are regarded as social facts unrelated to humans (Living *et al.*, 2024). In addition, internalisation is the process by which individuals reabsorb reality into their consciousness, changing the way they think, their attitudes, and their social identities. Within this framework, knowledge and meaning are considered to be the result of social interaction and not solely the result of human thought. Language, symbols, and communication are essential for maintaining and replicating social reality because it is through communication that humans negotiate, legitimise, and normalise meaning. Therefore, society is considered a product of humans, and humans are considered a product of the society they have built (Dharma, 2018).

Consumer Anxiety

According to Nurkhin (2020), anxiety can be defined as a mental condition that indicates a short-term negative emotional response of humans to circumstances or human nature that refers to a continuous condition of being under pressure from the situation. The inhibiting effect of this anxiety has an impact on several values that are considered important by humans as individuals. In certain situations, such as shopping, consumer anxiety is defined as the fear of falling behind the times in terms of trends. In a previous study, (Saputri & Supriyanto, 2024) found that fear of FOMO influences customer behaviour when shopping. When shopping, customers usually feel anxious and often make potentially dangerous decisions. This can have negative consequences, such as a wasteful lifestyle and compulsive behaviour, because customers worry about impulsive purchases. A previous study by (Julianti, 2020) reinforced this statement, showing a positive relationship between anxiety and impulsive buying during the Covid-19 pandemic. Research by (Saragih & Pusvitasari, 2022) found a positive and significant correlation between the anxiety variable and impulsive buying behaviour ($r = 0.528$, $p = 0.000$). In other words, the higher the anxiety, the more impulsive purchasing behaviour occurs. Anxiety is a major factor that inhibits consumer response to online shopping. This occurs when they purchase products via the internet due to unclear quality, promotions, and security (Issn, 2024).

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is a psychological condition characterised by a chronic fear that one is missing out on experiences, information, or social opportunities that others have (Chyquitita, 2024). FOMO arises from the basic human need for social connectedness (relateness) and a sense of belonging, which drives humans to constantly observe the social activities of others, especially through digital media and social media. On social media, FOMO is reinforced by repeated exposure to representations of idealised lives, success, and the symbolic consumption of others (Sultan & Tirtayasa, 2022). People not only compare themselves to others, but they also internalise the social standards presented by the media as a measure of how well they can achieve what they want. This process causes emotional tension such as feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and fear of being left behind, which drives people to stay strongly connected to social media as a way to control their emotions. FOMO is strongly associated with anxiety, psychological stress, and a decline in subjective well-being, especially when people feel unable to control their behaviour towards digital media (Franchina *et al.*, 2020).

A study conducted (Asyifa *et al.*, 2024) found that Generation Z experiences a positive and significant effect of fear of missing out or FOMO on impulsive online food purchases ($p < 0.05$). Thus, higher FOMO scores can be associated with more impulsive purchases made by an individual. Therefore, FOMO acts as a psychosocial pressure mechanism that influences customer purchasing decisions, including the tendency to act impulsively to gain social validation and reduce anxiety. Therefore, FOMO is not only considered a human fear, but also a psychosocial phenomenon created through social interaction and digital communication. FOMO has developed into a bridge between human subjective experiences and social pressures generated by contemporary media communication systems; ultimately, this has an impact on human emotions, identity, and consumption behaviour (Fitri *et al.*, 2024).

Impulsive Consumer Purchasing Behaviour

Impulsive buying, also known as 'impulse buying', is a style of shopping based on emotions that originate from within the buyer, causing them to ignore social factors and interactions in their decision-making. In carrying out such activities, emotions are the most important factor. Impulsive buying is the same as unplanned buying. When the country is safe and stable, consumers or buyers usually make impulsive purchases. This is related to the environment where people shop, such as a comfortable retail environment like a supermarket or hypermarket, or easy access to transportation to the location (Rook in Oktaviani & Keni, 2024).

Impulsive buying, also known as impulse buying, is purchasing behaviour that is not rationally thought out. Because the purchase is made quickly and is not planned in advance, it is considered irrational. The presence of emotional impulses that are not in line with one's thoughts also causes impulse buying. These emotional impulses encourage people to immediately buy something without considering the negative effects. Thus, a person will feel satisfied with impulsive buying behaviour because they fulfil their emotional desires (Rook in Oktaviani & Keni, 2024)). Technological developments in Indonesia are one of the factors that encourage impulsive buying. With technological advances, new applications have emerged in the trade industry.

Doing business in the modern era is not only about opening physical stores but also keeping up with trends by bringing their stores into the online world. Consumers can save time and energy by not having to visit the store in person. The increasing interest in online shopping shows that a new behaviour, namely impulse buying, is emerging when shopping. Therefore, it can be concluded that customers are merely fulfilling their emotional desires when browsing shopping applications such as e-commerce, and once their desire to own the item arises, they eventually purchase it. Some customers even buy items because they are cute, unique, and inexpensive (Morven and Minor in Akuntansi, 2025).

Digital Advertising

Currently, advertising has become an important part of a company's marketing strategy. Kotler and Kevin state that advertising itself includes promotion by paid sponsors for products, ideas, goods, or services as well as various forms of non-personal presentations (Suryawijaya & Rusdi, 2021). Considered the most effective method to suppress and increase sales of certain products or brands, advertising is currently being used. According to (Darmawati *et al.*, 2025), digital media in business is defined as a means of business communication that utilises the benefits of online activities.

Digital advertising is a type of marketing conducted by a company or brand to promote its goods or services using digital media or the internet with the aim of reaching consumers or potential consumers more quickly and more widely (Syafira & Akbar, 2023). For digital marketing, there are many media that can be used, which are even cheaper and only require an internet media or social media account. Consumers can enquire about or purchase the items they want directly via the internet. Effective digital advertising considers and understands customer needs, conveys specific benefits, and emphasises immediate action (Aprilianti & Hasbi, 2024). Good digital advertisements also understand that people do not buy products, but rather the benefits of those products. Furthermore, effective digital advertisements attract attention, are memorable, and make people interested in purchasing the product. A study conducted by (Akhyar, 2023) found that digital advertisements have a significant influence on buyers' impulsive actions.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study is entitled ‘The Dark Side of Digital Consumption: A Phenomenological Study of Consumer Anxiety Experiences Regarding Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) in Impulsive Purchasing Behaviour in Digital Advertising on Social Media’. The purpose of this study is to reveal how consumers experience and understand the pressure caused by social media advertising. This study uses a phenomenological approach as a qualitative research method. By using phenomenology, researchers can concentrate on consumers' subjective experiences, such as feelings of anxiety and internal conflict, as well as personal strategies used to negotiate consumption urges. Therefore, the research does not focus on what customers do, but rather on how and why they feel that experience. According to Libarkin *et al.* in Fitrah (2017), qualitative research is a type of research that uses descriptive data from subjects and actors that can be observed. To gather information from the five different informants with the informants during the pre-research stage, the researcher used structured and open-ended questions to conduct focus group discussions and direct interviews with them (Creswell, 2018:254).

To explore the informants' subjective experiences, this study employed intensive data collection methods, including in-depth interviews and focused group discussions. To gather information on the informants' anxiety levels, the interviews were conducted face-to-face in the city of Medan. The interview sessions, which lasted approximately sixty to ninety minutes per informant, provided the researcher with the opportunity to apply in-depth probing techniques to uncover the motivational background and the goals of the actions underlying their impulsive purchasing behaviour. The researcher used a structured yet open-ended questionnaire throughout the ten-month research period. This allowed the five selected informants to describe their internal conflicts and personal strategies for coping with exposure to advertising algorithms. All the data collected in the form of audio recordings was then transcribed into descriptive text for analysis, with the aim of identifying the underlying structure of meaning behind the FOMO phenomenon. Next, data was collected from the informants. The information is usually in the form of words or text, and this data is then analysed. The results can be in the form of images or descriptions, which will then be explained in the research results. Using the purposive sampling method, the research subjects were selected based on the criteria of the required informants. Researchers selected informants with the following characteristics: they must spend at least 3–5 hours a day on social media platforms with strong advertising features (such as Instagram, TikTok, or X), they must have purchased a product through social media advertising spontaneously without prior planning within the last 3 to 6 months, and they must consciously feel anxious, worried, or ‘afraid of missing out’ if they do not have the product being discussed. Focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were the data collection methods used in this study.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Digital Ad Exposure as a Daily Communication Experience

According to the research results, all informants stated that they were regularly exposed to digital ads in their daily social media activities. Informants said that ads had become entertainment content, friend posts, and personal interactions on social media. Some of them said that they often only realised the content was an advertisement after seeing the promotional label or purchase link. In addition, informants said that when advertisements appeared, they made them seem very close to their personal interests and needs, giving

the impression that the advertisements 'knew' what they were thinking or needed. This condition made informants view advertisements as part of everyday communication that was difficult to avoid, rather than as a nuisance.

Construction of Ideal Lifestyles and Social Comparison

Furthermore, informants are considered to be representations of social standards and ideal lifestyles depicted in digital advertisements. Most informants said they often saw product advertisements featuring models, influencers, or social media users who appeared happy, confident, and successful after using the product. According to the informants, the appearance and narrative of the advertisements made the products seem like symbols of a better life. Informants stated that they unconsciously began to compare their circumstances with these representations and other users' posts. Feelings of inadequacy, not keeping up with trends, or feeling left behind by their social environment arose as a result of this comparison process. Informants stated that these feelings arose emotionally and spontaneously rather than as a result of planned rational thinking.

FOMO and Anxiety as Consumer Emotional Experiences

In the process of social comparison, informants said they experienced strong Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). Informants described FOMO as a feeling of anxiety when they saw limited promotions, popular trends, or positive testimonials from others. Some informants said they were worried that if they did not have the same product, they would be considered out of touch. FOMO then developed into consumer anxiety, manifested in restlessness, pressure, and the desire to make immediate purchasing decisions. It is interesting that some informants initially considered this anxiety to be normal in the internet world, but later realised that these feelings stemmed from intense and repeated exposure to social media advertisements.

Impulsive Purchasing as an Emotional Response and Identity Practice

Informants said they often made impulsive purchases as a spontaneous response to FOMO and anxiety. Informants said that purchasing decisions were usually made instantly without careful consideration of needs and without prior planning. Because they had followed trends and not fallen behind socially, some informants said they felt calmer and more at ease after making a purchase. This relief, however, is not permanent. Some informants said that ambivalent feelings arise: happiness or regret, especially when they realise that the product is not really needed. Informants said that impulsive buying is considered normal in a social environment that normalises consumptive behaviour. Informants consider digital consumption a way to maintain their identity and social relevance while relieving emotional pressure.

DISCUSSION

Advertisements have evolved into a communication experience that is ingrained in the lives of audiences, as demonstrated by the exposure to digital advertisements by informants during their daily social media activities. Edmund Husserl (1931) said that reality is something that is 'experienced and perceived in the consciousness of the subject' (phenomena as they appear to consciousness), not something that is objective outside of humans (Nugraheni *et al.*, 2023). The results of the study show that digital advertisements are present in the minds of informants as part of their world, not as separate promotional messages. The information provided by informants shows that it is difficult to distinguish

advertisements from non-commercial content, indicating that advertisements have become part of the structure of everyday communication experiences.

Alfred Schutz (1967), who argued that the social world is a meaningful world because it is understood intersubjectively through everyday experiences, facilitates the understanding of these experiences (Erawati & Afifah, 2025). How algorithmic technology reinforces the subjective experiences of audiences through digital advertisements that are considered relevant and personal by informants is an example of this. Advertisements here are seen as something that 'coexists' with the informants' social activities rather than simply being consumed as messages. Therefore, digital advertisements function as a communication tool that works within the domain of conscious experience, rather than as a marketing tool. Furthermore, the interpretation of digital advertisements as representations of an ideal lifestyle demonstrates a process of social construction that serves to alter reality. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), the processes of internalisation, objectification, and externalisation shape social reality (Christian *et al.*, 2022).

Advertisements depict figures who are happy, successful, and confident. This externalises certain values about the ideal life when these images are repeated and distributed through social media. As a result, these values are accepted as a picture of a 'normal' and 'desirable' life. In the process of internalising an objectified reality, informants unconsciously make social comparisons. Informants say that when they compare their situation with people who appear in advertisements or other people who use social media, they feel a sense of lack or being left behind. These feelings arise before humans make rational considerations, according to the phenomenology of communication. Schutz (1967) says that social meaning is often experienced emotionally before being realised reflectively (Wita & Mursal, 2022). This can be seen in situations where informants experience pressure without being able to identify its source.

From these social comparisons, the fear of missing out (FOMO) emerges as the primary emotion. Przybylski *et al.* (2013) first defined FOMO as the fear of missing out on important social experiences when others appear to be enjoying them (Multilingual *et al.*, 2023). In this study, digital advertisements with continuous trends, limited promotions, and positive testimonials reinforce FOMO. FOMO is a social pressure mechanism based on visual and symbolic communication. Informants admitted to feeling anxious and worried that they would be considered out of touch if they did not have certain products. Furthermore, the FOMO experienced by informants developed into consumer anxiety. Lee & Cotte (2009) consumer anxiety is an emotional condition consisting of tension and anxiety that arises during the consumption decision-making process (Ilmiah, 2020).

It is interesting that some informants initially stated that they normalised this anxiety as part of digital life. This is in line with the theory proposed by Berger and Luckmann (1966) that internalised realities are considered natural and acceptable (Pramono *et al.*, 2024). Humans no longer question the communication mechanisms that cause anxiety when they are considered normal. Therefore, digital advertising not only changes consumer behaviour but also makes their emotional experiences commonplace in everyday life.

According to Rook (1987) Impulsive buying emerges as a spontaneous emotional response in such conditions of anxiety. One definition of impulsive buying is a purchase made without prior planning and driven more by emotion than rational consideration (Chasanah & Mathori, 2021). This study shows that impulsive buying helps overcome anxiety and FOMO. Although the situation becomes calmer after purchasing a product, informants say that this is only temporary. However, the relief after impulsive buying is

usually followed by emotional uncertainty. There is a conflict between emotional impulses and reflective awareness when informants feel satisfaction and regret. This condition can be described in Husserl's phenomenology (1931) as a shift from pre-reflective consciousness to reflective consciousness, when humans begin to reconsider what they have experienced (Asih, 2025). This ambivalence suggests that impulsive buying is part of an emotional cycle that is repeated by exposure to digital advertising rather than a permanent solution. Ultimately, the research results show that digital consumption is a communication practice that has many symbolic meanings and identities.

According Berger & Luckmann (1966) Digital advertising not only influences buyers' choices but also changes the way people see themselves and their position in society. Impulsive buying affirms human social existence and identity relevance in the perspective of social construction of reality (Konstruksi Anriani *et al.*, 2024). Therefore, the dark side of digital consumption is how advertisements, FOMO, and consumer anxiety mutually influence each other to shape social reality and consumers' subjective experiences in the digital media era.

CONCLUSIONS

According to research findings, digital advertising on social media is now part of This study aims to explore in depth consumers' subjective experiences of advertising pressure on social media, particularly in relation to the phenomena of anxiety and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) in driving impulsive purchasing behaviour. The findings indicate that digital advertising has become an integral part of everyday communication experiences, one that is difficult to separate from social interactions and entertainment content. These advertisements systematically construct an ideal lifestyle that triggers social comparison and feelings of 'inadequacy' in consumers. This condition gives rise to FOMO, which develops into consumer anxiety, where impulsive purchasing is ultimately chosen as an immediate emotional response to alleviate internal pressure and maintain the relevance of one's social identity. Theoretically, this study confirms that digital consumption is not merely a rational economic act, but rather the result of social construction and symbolic experiences within the digital media ecosystem.

The practical implications of this study highlight the importance of improving digital literacy amongst the public so that they are able to recognise and manage the emotional stress arising from exposure to advertising algorithms. For marketing practitioners, these findings serve as an ethical reminder not to simply exploit consumers' psychological vulnerabilities, as impulsive purchases are often followed by emotional ambivalence in the form of regret. On the other hand, this study has limitations in that the sample size was limited to just five informants in the city of Medan, meaning the results are highly specific and cannot be generalised. Furthermore, the research focus was restricted to platforms with strong advertising features such as Instagram, TikTok, and X, and relied heavily on the informants' reflective ability to express their internal experiences during the phenomenological interview process.

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, terutama pada Generasi Z yang tumbuh di era internet . menyalurkan ekspresi , berbagi ide , dan mengikuti berbagai tren populer . Namun , kebiasaan ini kesepian yang justru berlawanan dengan tujuan awal media sosial sebagai alat koneksi sosial . 3.

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