

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) as Mediating Factor Between Social Engagement and Influencer Marketing on Smartphone Purchase Decision in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of FOMO as a mediating factor between influencer marketing and social engagement on Indonesian consumers' decisions to buy smartphones with advanced features. The primary goal of this study is to clarify how digital marketing stimuli affect consumers' decisions to buy high-involvement products in a highly competitive marketplace. Using a quantitative method, information was gathered from 100 Indonesian social media users—mostly Gen Z and students—through an online survey. To evaluate the suggested hypotheses, the data were examined utilizing partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). These findings imply that purchasing decisions are profoundly and significantly affected by both FOMO and influencer marketing. Nonetheless, there is a minimal observable direct effect from social engagement. The findings indicate that FOMO acts as a significant mediator between influencer marketing and social engagement. This illustrates that FOMO is the primary psychological mechanism that transforms online social interactions into actual purchasing activities.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, the smartphone market has witnessed unprecedented technological progress, driving manufacturers to fiercely compete in delivering cutting-edge innovations that captivate consumers and redefine industry standards. Features that were once considered niche have become mainstream selling points, as evidenced by leading brands such as Samsung, OPPO, and Huawei aggressively promoting these innovations in flagship devices (Canalys Newsroom, 2024).

These technological advancements are no longer merely product enhancements, but have become core differentiators in brand positioning and consumer appeal. In addition, innovations have evolved into critical competitive differentiators and are emerging as central themes in digital marketing strategies designed to engage consumers, particularly through social media platforms and influencer partnerships. Brands now collaborate with influencers and content creators to showcase these features in real-life contexts, often sparking emotional reactions and aspirational desires among online audiences (Andika et al., 2024). As a result, the convergence of technological innovation and emotional marketing tactics has shaped a new era in smartphone consumer behaviour.



Figure 1. Southeast Asian Smartphone Shipment
Source: Canalysis (2024)

In the Indonesian market, this trend is sharply visible. As seen in Figure 1, Indonesia ranks among the top five nations with the highest count of active social media users, with over 139 million users as of early 2025. Leading smartphone manufacturers, particularly Chinese OEMs such as Xiaomi or Samsung, have systematically capitalised on the digital ecosystem through substantial investments in influencer partnerships and data-driven digital campaigns, transforming their marketing approaches to align with evolving consumer engagement patterns. Brands frequently collaborate with local celebrities, tech reviewers, and lifestyle influencers to promote their latest innovations, such as the famous local YouTuber David from GadgetIn, with nearly 14M Subscribers, who directly receive devices from brands to be tested out and reviewed for the public. Additionally, the brand’s user-generated content campaign across Asia encouraged users to share.

This marketing approach has led to a new consumer phenomenon called “Fear of Missing Out” or FOMO, where people feel anxious about the potential of being left out of enjoyable events, including owning or using trendsetting technology. In the digital age, FoMO has been found to be a major psychological factor influencing customer behavior, especially when it comes to social media and online purchasing platforms (Neha and Walia, 2025). According to Tanhan et al. (2022), FOMO is a psychological concept defined by the need to be constantly aware of what other people are doing, which frequently leads to rashes or emotionally motivated decisions. FoMO is fostered in the context of smartphone marketing by materials that show peers or influencers using new gadgets, going to special launch parties, or taking advantage of capabilities that others might not have.

Parallel to this market strategy, consumer purchasing decisions, especially among younger Indonesians, are increasingly influenced by social media interactions

encompassing both broad social engagement and targeted influencer marketing (Cube Asia, 2023). Studies by Agustin and Amron (2022) on skincare purchases via TikTok Shop and Solaiman and Pangaribuan (2024) on online toy store customers affirm the significant direct important role of influencer marketing towards purchase intentions and decisions in Indonesia. Concurrently, the psychological construct of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) has become a significant influence, with research indicating its role in driving consumer behaviour across various e-commerce contexts (A. S. Sampoerna, 2025; Solaiman; Pangaribuan, 2024).

Hence, the existing literature often examines general e-commerce, specific product categories such as skincare or toys, or broader digital marketing strategies. The unique considerations for high-cost, technologically advanced products, such as smartphones with innovative features, where consumer decision-making processes are typically more deliberative, warrant a dedicated investigation. The interplay of social influence (both general social engagement and specific influencer marketing) and the anxiety of FOMO in this particular product domain within the Indonesian cultural and economic context has not yet been fully elucidated. This study considers the findings on the direct and indirect influence of social engagement and influencer marketing, with fear of missing out (FOMO) as a mediating factor in purchase decisions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Comparison Theory

Social Comparison Theory by Leon Festinger adapted by Renee (2024) states that humans are naturally inclined to assess their own beliefs and capabilities. This assessment is done by comparing themselves to those around them, a process that helps individuals assess their standing in various domains, such as success, wealth, attractiveness, or access to material goods.



Figure 2. Social Comparison Theory (Holstee)

Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) is a psychological construct that is closely associated with these affective responses. According to Tanhan et al. (2022), FoMO is the uneasiness or worry a person has when they believe others have worthwhile experiences that they are not. According to Elhai et al. (2020), people who use social media frequently and have a propensity for upward social comparisons are far more likely to report high levels of

FOMO. In a similar vein, Servidio et al. (2024) showed that social comparison tendencies are amplified by the passive consumption of social media information, such as scanning through posts without engagement, which in turn raises FoMO. This theory is particularly relevant in the context of smartphone marketing. When users see influencers or peers showing off innovative smartphones with cutting-edge features (AI cameras or foldable designs), they may feel excluded or left behind.

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

The Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) is a nearly recent psychological construct that captures a person's anxiety about being excluded from rewarding or socially significant experiences. FoMO typically comprises two interrelated dimensions. The first is cognitive-perceptual, an internalized belief that one is missing valuable experiences (events, trends, or social moments). The second is behavioural, manifested in compulsive tendencies to stay updated via social networking platforms, which can negatively impact their personal well-being (Babiker et al., 2023). For example, individuals may scroll excessively on Instagram or TikTok to see what their peers or influencers are doing, which fuels a cycle of emotional dissatisfaction and information-seeking behavior (Halder et al., 2020). In digital marketing contexts, FoMO is often deliberately evoked through limited-time offers, exclusive product drops, or influencer content that frames ownership as socially rewarding. According to Febrianty et al. (2025), consumers who experience FoMO are more inclined to make unplanned purchases, especially if the products are endorsed by peers or influencers on social media platforms.

Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Model

Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) model as a psychological tool to explain consumer behavior. The central idea of the model is that an external stimulus (S) triggers an internal change in a person's psychological or emotional state (the organism, O). This internal change determines their final behavior (R) (Hochreiter, 2023). In the context of marketing, stimuli may include a brand's promotional content, website design, social media interactions, influencer endorsements, or even product aesthetics. The organism represents the consumer's internal cognitive and affective states, such as emotions, attitudes, and psychological drives, triggered by stimuli.

Conceptual Framework

H₁: Social engagement significantly influences purchase decision of smartphones with innovative features for Indonesian consumers

According to Social Comparison Theory, individuals who actively use social media are continuously seeing specially selected content showcasing the experiences, possessions, or achievements of others, especially peers and influencers. Saher Parveiz et al. (2023) established a link between high social media engagement and social comparison tendencies, correlating them with significantly higher levels of FoMO.

H₂: Influencer marketing significantly influences purchase decision of smartphones with innovative features for Indonesian consumers

Parasocial Interaction Theory explains how followers form emotionally intimate, one-sided relationships with influencers, despite the absence of real interaction. These influencers frequently present idealized lifestyles and desirable products, subtly implying that followers who do not partake are “missing out”. Bartosiak, Loibl and Lee (2024) indicated that exposure to social media influencers significantly increases FoMO,

especially among younger audiences, in intensifying both social comparison and perceived exclusion.

H₃: FoMO significantly influence purchase decision of smartphones with innovative features for Indonesian consumers

FoMO itself is a motivational state that leads consumers to act quickly. From an emotional perspective, FoMO creates urgency (“I must get this phone or I’ll miss out”), which translates into a higher intention to purchase. Solaiman and Pangaribuan (2024) report a large positive path coefficient from FoMO to purchase decisions.

H₄: FoMO significantly mediates between social engagement and purchase decision of smartphones with innovative features for Indonesian consumers

Consistent with the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework, active participation on social media platforms acts as a marketing stimulus. According to Vaharani and Halim (2024), consumer purchase intention is significantly impacted by social media engagement indicators such as likes, shares, and comments, particularly when users find information amusing or reliable. Therefore, this study uses FoMO as a mediator to find stronger smartphone purchase intention in Indonesia.

H₅: FoMO significantly mediates between influencer marketing on the purchase decision of smartphones with innovative features for Indonesian consumers.

Influencer marketing can directly influence consumer behavior through the mechanisms of parasocial bonding and perceived credibility. Mathea and Laksmidewi (2024), influencer endorsement positively affects purchase intention, especially when mediated by parasocial interaction and emotional triggers such as envy or admiration. Hence, independent of FoMO, strong exposure to credible influencers is expected to positively influence smartphone purchase decisions. However, the research framework shown in Figure 3.

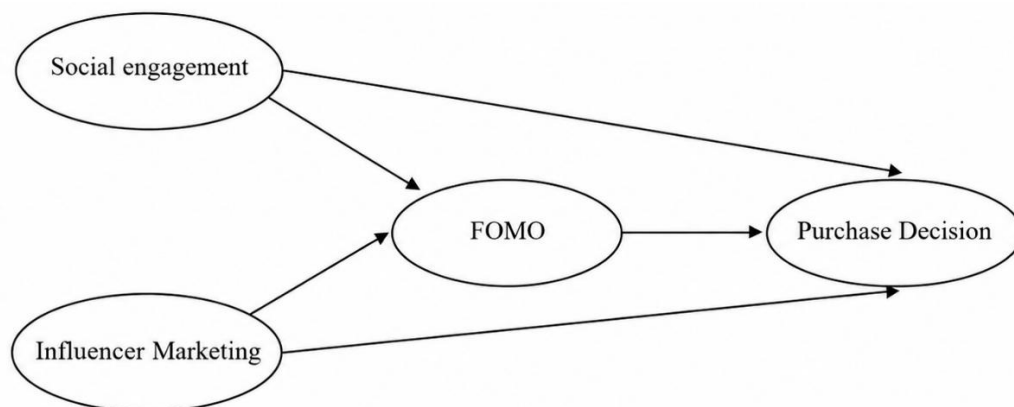


Figure 3. Research framework

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a quantitative, explanatory design to understand the causal relationship between the key variables: social media engagement, influencer marketing, FoMO, and consumer purchase decisions for innovative smartphones. The target population comprised Indonesian consumers known for being active on social media and

having engaged in smartphone-related content or influencer promotions in the past five years. The geographic scope are urban and semi-urban areas in Indonesia, focusing on Jakarta, Surabaya, Bali and Yogyakarta, where smartphone penetration and social media usage are highest (Kompas, 2022). The sample size for this study was approximately 22-26 indicators with 100 respondents, according to rules of thumb, such as the sample size being a multiple of how many indicators are in the measurement model. The respondent demographics included middle-class to upper-middle-class consumers, Gen Z (18–26 years old), and frequent users of YouTube, Instagram, and Tiktok.

The measurement model (outer model) and the structural model (inner model) are the two primary phases of the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) method used in this work. The measuring approach uses discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker criterion), convergent validity (outer loadings > 0.708 and AVE ≥ 0.50), and reliability tests utilizing Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha (both ≥ 0.70) to assess the validity and reliability of indicators. Following validation and reliability, the structural model is examined to test the relationships between variables using the Predictive Relevance (Q^2) test to verify model accuracy ($Q^2 > 0$) and the Coefficient of Determination (R^2) to evaluate explanatory power. Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is a mediating variable, Purchase Decision is the dependent variable, and Social Engagement and Influencer Marketing are independent factors

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Respondent Characteristics

The majority of respondents in this study were female (62 %), while male respondents comprised the remaining 38%. Respondents were categorized into two main generational cohorts relevant to the study: Gen Z and Millennials. Most respondents were Gen Z individuals (72 %), which aligns with the research focus that is highly active on social media and susceptible to trends and FOMO. The largest groups of respondents are students (66.0%) and private sector employees (22.0%), which is consistent with the target population of young, digitally native consumers. Last, most of the respondents are holders of a bachelor's degree (52 %).

Convergent Validity Test

Convergent validity is used to assess how well the indicators for a variable align with the theoretical constructs that they are intended to measure. The outer loading table presents the loading factors, which demonstrate the strength of the correlation between indicators and their latent variables. A loading factor is considered valid if its value is greater than 0.50, with a value above 0.70 being ideal. According to the estimation results, all indicators achieved a good level of validity. One indicator, X1-1 (0.639), has a loading factor above 0.50, which is considered acceptable, whereas all other indicators have a loading factor well above the ideal threshold of 0.70. Having satisfied the validity criteria for the outer loadings, the measurement model is ready for further evaluation.

Table 1. Outer Loadings

Variables	Loading Factor	Cut Off	Information
Social Engagement	0,639	0,5	Valid
	0,856	0,5	Valid
	0,789	0,5	Valid
	0,785	0,5	Valid
Influencer Marketing	0,780	0,5	Valid
	0,830	0,5	Valid
	0,737	0,5	Valid
	0,838	0,5	Valid
Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)	0,915	0,5	Valid
	0,865	0,5	Valid
	0,875	0,5	Valid
	0,927	0,5	Valid
Purchase Decision	0,871	0,5	Valid
	0,856	0,5	Valid
	0,889	0,5	Valid
	0,926	0,5	Valid
	0,787	0,5	Valid
	0,867	0,5	Valid

Average Variance Extracted Result

Table 2. AVE Test Results

Variables	Loading Factor	Cut Off	Information
Social Engagement	0,595	0,5	Valid
Influencer Marketing	0,636	0,5	Valid
Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)	0,784	0,5	Valid
Purchase Decision	0,754	0,5	Valid

The variables in this study are valid as they have surpassed the cutoff value of 0.5, as indicated in the table above. All variables in the AVE test exhibited values exceeding 0.5.

Reliability Test

Table 3. Reliability Test

Variables	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha	Information
Social Engagement	0,853	0,768	Reliable
Influencer Marketing	0,874	0,808	Reliable
Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)	0,956	0,945	Reliable
Purchase Decision	0,925	0,890	Reliable

From the table 3 The tests for Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha confirmed that all constructs are reliable. This is supported by the values for both measures, which were well above the recommended threshold of 0.7.

Structural Model Testing (Inner Model)

The structural model (or inner model) was evaluated by examining its R-Square value, which functions as a goodness-of-fit test.

Table 4 R Square Values

R Square	R Square Adjusted
0,574	0,568
0,601	0,593

The coefficient of R-Square for FOMO was 0.574. The model could explain the phenomenon of FOMO by 57.4%. The R-squared value for the Purchase Decision is 0.601. This signifies that the model can elucidate the Purchase Decision phenomenon by 60.1%. This study evaluated the predictive relevance of the model. The Q-squared value was analyzed to assess the model's predictive significance. This value, derived from a blindfolding method, assesses the model's efficacy in generating observed values.

The calculation for this research is as follows:

$$Q^2 = 1 - (1 - R^2_{\text{FOMO}}) \times (1 - R^2_{\text{Purchase Decision}})$$

$$Q^2 = 1 - (1 - 0.574) \times (1 - 0.601)$$

$$Q^2 = 1 - (0.426 \times 0.399)$$

$$Q^2 = 1 - 0.170$$

$$Q^2 = 0.830$$

The Q-Square calculation resulted in a value of 0.830. Since this value is significantly above 0, it is concluded that the model possesses strong predictive relevance.

Hypothesis Testing

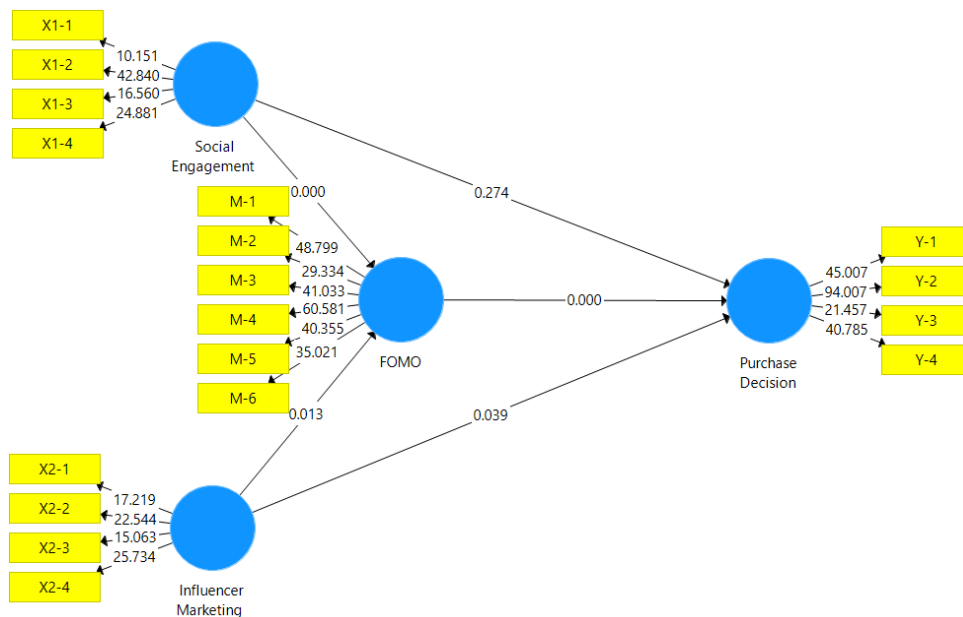


Figure 4 Inner Model with P-Values

This study examined the direct and indirect effects of social engagement and influencer marketing, with fear of missing out (FOMO) serving as a mediator in the purchase decision process. The initial hypothesis was rejected because the p-value of 0.274, which is greater than the 0.05 threshold, indicates that Social Engagement does not influence the purchase decision. However, the second hypothesis is supported; thus, Influencer Marketing significantly influences Purchase Decision with p-value $0.039 < 0.05$. The third hypothesis found that FOMO significantly influences purchase decisions with p-value $0.000 < 0.05$, indicating that FOMO has a very strong and significant positive direct influence on purchase decisions.

However, the indirect influence discussed in Hypotheses 4 and 5. Hypothesis 4 revealed that Social Engagement influences purchase decisions through FOMO, showing a path coefficient of 0.374 and a P-value of 0.000. Since this P-value was less than 0.05, the hypothesis was supported, confirming that FOMO significantly mediates this relationship. Notably, while Social Engagement lacked a direct effect, it exerted a strong and significant indirect effect on Purchase Decision, operating entirely through the mechanism of FOMO.

Hence, Hypothesis 5 was supported, as evidenced by a P-value of 0.014 (which is below the 0.05 threshold). The path coefficient for the influence of influencer marketing on purchase decisions via FOMO was 0.095. This finding confirms that FOMO functions as a significant mediator. The implication is that Influencer Marketing exerts influence through two pathways: it not only directly impacts Purchase Decision but also indirectly does so by amplifying the consumer's level of FOMO.

Discussion

Hypothesis 1: Influence of Social Engagement on Purchase Decision

Social Engagement especially on general social media engagement, such as likes, follows, or comments, does not directly drive consumers to make purchases, especially for high-involvement products like smartphones. Based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, Social Engagement acts as an external stimulus that affects consumers' internal states but does not directly lead to a purchase response. Social Comparison Theory further supports this, suggesting that while online engagement raises awareness and comparison, it does not create the urgency needed to buy. Similar findings by Sampurno et al. (2024) show that digital marketing impacts purchase decisions only through mediators such as FOMO, confirming that engagement mainly builds psychological readiness rather than immediate action. Additionally, since Social Engagement combines various behaviors, its broad definition may dilute potential effects, implying that future studies should analyze active and passive engagement separately to better understand their influence.

Hypothesis 2: Influence of Influencer Marketing on Purchase Decision

Marketing Influencer, or simply influencers, play a strong and direct role in shaping consumer behavior in Indonesia's smartphone market. Unlike general social engagement, which only has an indirect impact, influencers can directly influence purchase decisions through persuasive communication. According to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), when faced with complex product information, consumers often rely on the peripheral route of persuasion—using cues like influencer credibility instead of detailed product analysis. Supported by Source Credibility Theory, the findings show that consumers view influencers as trustworthy and knowledgeable, reflected in a high credibility score (mean = 4.05). This trust builds a personal connection that reduces skepticism and encourages purchase intent. Consistent with previous studies by Agustin and Amron (2022) and Solaiman and Pangaribuan (2024), this study reinforces that in Indonesia's trust-based culture, influencers serve as credible, relatable figures whose endorsements directly and effectively drive consumer buying decisions.

Hypothesis 3: Influence of FOMO on Purchase Decision

FOMO was identified as the most influential factor driving consumers' smartphone purchases in Indonesia, showing that social anxiety and fear of exclusion are powerful

motivators. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) posits that FOMO intensifies subjective norms, compelling individuals to fit in to peers and trends to preserve social relevance. In the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) concept, FOMO signifies the internal psychological condition (Organism) elicited by external stimuli such as social interaction and influencer marketing, thereby prompting the behavioral response of purchasing. This finding aligns with Tanhan et al. (2022), who described FOMO as the fear of missing rewarding experiences, and is supported by studies by Sampurna et al. (2024) and Solaiman and Pangaribuan (2024). Overall, the study confirms that in Indonesia's digital consumer culture, FOMO is a dominant emotional force that directly compels consumers to purchase new smartphones to avoid being left behind socially.

Hypothesis 4: FOMO as a Mediator Between Social Engagement and Purchase Decision

Regarding the indirect influence, it was discovered that FOMO completely mediates the relationship between social engagement and purchase choice; social engagement has no direct impact on purchase decision. Social engagement is the exterior stimulus (S) in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model that sets off the internal psychological state (O) of FOMO, which then results in the behavioral response (R) of buying. According to Social Comparison Theory, frequent exposure to others' lifestyles and possessions on social media prompts upward comparisons, creating feelings of inadequacy and anxiety about being left behind, which intensifies FOMO. This emotional state ultimately motivates consumers to buy in order to restore social balance. The result aligns with Sampurna, et al. (2024), confirming that for Indonesian consumers, social engagement influences purchasing behavior only by cultivating FOMO. Thus, in the context of high-involvement products like smartphones, FOMO acts as the emotional bridge transforming passive social interaction into active buying behavior.

Hypothesis 5: FOMO as a Mediator Between Influencer Marketing and Purchase Decision

Influencer Marketing influences purchase decisions both directly and indirectly through FOMO. The direct effect occurs when influencers, viewed as credible and trustworthy sources, persuade consumers via rational shortcuts as described by the Elaboration Likelihood Model and Source Credibility Theory. The indirect effect operates emotionally through Social Comparison Theory, as influencers showcase aspirational lifestyles that evoke feelings of inadequacy and fear of being left behind, thereby triggering FOMO. Within the Stimulus-Organism-Response framework, Influencer Marketing (S) acts both as a direct stimulus leading to purchase (R) and as an emotional trigger that shapes the consumer's internal state (O) through FOMO, which further drives the purchasing behavior. This dual-path influence aligns with findings by Solaiman and Pangaribuan (2024), reaffirming that in Indonesia's social-media-driven market, influencer marketing succeeds through a blend of rational persuasion and emotional stimulation.

Research Implication

A key contribution of this study is its validation of the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) model within the modern digital context. The findings empirically show how external marketing stimuli (Social Engagement and Influencer Marketing) trigger an internal emotional state in the organism (FOMO), which subsequently leads to a behavioral response (Purchase Decision). Furthermore, the study refines our understanding by

showing that not all stimuli are equal; targeted Influencer Marketing has a direct impact, while general Social Engagement relies entirely on the mediating effect of FOMO.

However, the practical implications for smartphone brands, digital marketers, and content creators should be focused on Triggering FOMO, Not Just Engagement: The goal of a social media campaign should not be merely to generate likes and comments. Instead, strategies should be designed to create a sense of urgency, exclusivity, and the feeling that consumers will be left behind if they do not adopt new technology. Brands should continue to invest in influencer marketing, recognizing that its power lies in both direct persuasion and its ability to evoke FOMO. Finally, marketing messages should appeal to consumers' emotions and social aspirations. Highlighting how a new feature can enhance one's social standing, creativity, or connectivity is likely to be more effective in generating FOMO than simply listing technical specifications.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that Social Engagement does not directly influence smartphone purchase decisions, as simple interactions such as likes or comments are insufficient to drive buying behavior. In contrast, Influencer Marketing has a strong direct impact, with influencer credibility and expertise effectively persuading consumers to purchase innovative smartphones. FOMO mediates the connection between social engagement and purchase decisions, indicating that social media interactions primarily stimulate purchases by provoking thoughts of missing out. Furthermore, FOMO serves as a partial mediator in the impact of Influencer Marketing, whereby influencers directly affect purchases and simultaneously amplify followers' FOMO, thus establishing FOMO as the primary psychological connection between social media engagement and purchasing behavior in Indonesia's smartphone market. However, the study's sample primarily consisted of Gen Z individuals and students from Indonesia; hence, the findings may not be applicable to other demographic groups. The measurement relied on self-reported data, which are prone to social desirability bias. In the future, research can expand to employ a longitudinal study design to track consumer perceptions and FOMO levels over time, particularly before and after a major product launch, to better understand the evolving nature of these effects.

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