

The Effect of Viral Marketing and Experiential Marketing on Purchase Decisions with Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) as a Mediating Variable among Skincare Consumers

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ABSTRACT

The development of digital marketing through social media has changed consumer behavior in making purchase decisions, especially in skincare products. Marketing strategies such as viral marketing and experiential marketing are increasingly used by business actors to attract consumer attention through engaging, interactive, and easy-to-share content. This phenomenon also gives rise to consumer psychological responses in the form of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), which is the fear of missing out on trends or experiences that are currently popular. This condition encourages consumers to follow the growing trend on social media and accelerate the decision to purchase skincare products. This study aims to analyze the influence of viral marketing and experiential marketing on purchase decisions with Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) as a mediating variable in skincare consumers. This research was conducted on UNISRI Surakarta students with a total of 93 respondents. The analysis method used is Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) based on Partial Least Square using the SmartPLS application. The results of the study show that viral marketing and experiential marketing have a positive and significant effect on FOMO. Furthermore, FOMO has a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions. However, viral marketing and experiential marketing do not have a significant effect directly on purchasing decisions. The results of the study also show that FOMO is able to mediate the influence of viral marketing and experiential marketing on skincare consumers' purchasing decisions.

Keywords: Viral Marketing, Experiential Marketing, Fear of Missing Out, Purchase Decisions.

I. Introduction

Although various studies have examined the influence of viral marketing, experiential marketing, and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) on purchasing decisions, the results still show inconsistencies. Some studies have found that viral marketing has a significant effect on purchasing decisions through FOMO, while other studies show that the influence is insignificant because consumers are more concerned with product knowledge and rational needs. Different results were also found in the relationship between experiential marketing and FOMO as well as purchase decisions. Some studies have shown that interactive marketing experiences improve FOMO and drive purchasing decisions, but other studies have found that marketing experiences do not always lead to FOMO, especially when consumers are more oriented towards product quality and

functional benefits. In addition to the inconsistency of the research results, most previous studies still tested viral marketing, experiential marketing, and FOMO separately or only focused on one digital marketing variable. Research that integrates viral marketing and experiential marketing simultaneously with FOMO as a mediating variable in the context of skincare products is still relatively limited. In fact, the viral skincare phenomenon on social media shows that consumers' purchasing decisions are not only influenced by the massive dissemination of information, but also by the experience that consumers feel when interacting with products and brands.

This research offers a different theoretical approach by using the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Theory as the basis for explaining the psychological processes that occur in consumers. In the S-O-R perspective, viral marketing and experiential marketing are positioned as the stimulus (S) that consumers receive through social media and brand experiences. The stimulus then gives rise to an internal or organismal response (O) in the form of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), which is the fear of missing out on a trend or experience that is currently popular. Furthermore, this psychological condition encourages a response (R) in the form of a decision to purchase skincare products. Using the S-O-R framework, this study not only explains the direct relationship between variables, but is also able to describe the psychological mechanisms that bridge the influence of digital marketing strategies on consumer purchasing decisions. Based on the inconsistencies of previous research findings and the limited research that integrates viral marketing and experiential marketing with FOMO as a mediating variable in the context of skincare consumers, especially in students as a group who actively use social media, this research is important to be conducted. Therefore, this study examines the influence of viral marketing and experiential marketing on purchase decisions with Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) as a mediating variable in UNISRI Surakarta students.

II. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Marketing Management, Consumer Behavior, and Purchasing Decisions in the Digital Era

Marketing management in the digital age has shifted from simply product distribution to a technology-based strategic process to build consumer engagement (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2022). This shift is profoundly influencing consumer behavior, especially Generation Z, whose purchasing decisions rely heavily on social validation, online reviews, and digital experiences (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Purchasing decisions in this study are conceptually defined as an integrative process that involves the recognition of needs to post-purchase actions triggered by digital stimulation and environmental psychological pressures (Kotler & Keller, 2021). In the digital age, these decisions are no longer linear, but are very dynamic and impulsive due to massive exposure to information.

2.2. Viral Marketing and Its Relationship with FOMO

Viral marketing is a strategy of exponentially spreading marketing messages through social media that utilizes the effects of networking and interaction between users (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Stephen, 2020). The main characteristics of this strategy are speed, wide reachscale, and high reliance on user-generated content. Logically, massive viral marketing creates the illusion that a product or trend is being consumed by everyone. When a piece of content goes viral on social media, it triggers a psychological boost in consumers—especially Generation Z—in the form of fear of social isolation if they don't participate in the trend. This psychological phenomenon is known as Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), which is the compulsive anxiety that another person is enjoying a valuable experience that he or she does not follow (Przybylski et al., 2013). Recent studies show that constant exposure to viral content is positively correlated with increased consumer social anxiety (Al-Maroofof et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2023). Based on this line of thought, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Viral marketing has a positive and significant effect on FOMO.

2.3. Experiential Marketing and Its Relationship with FOMO

Experiential marketing is a marketing approach that focuses on creating deep sensory experiences (sense), emotional (feel), cognitive (think), behavioral (act), and relational (relational) between consumers and brands (Schmitt, 1999; Batat, 2021). In the digital era, this strategy is transformed through interactive and personalized virtual interactions. The theoretical relationship between experiential marketing and FOMO lies in the aspects of exclusivity and emotional attachment. When a company succeeds in creating a unique, aesthetic, and shareable digital experience, consumers who feel it will show off the moment on social media. For other consumers who only see it from a gadget screen, visualizing this intense and enjoyable experience will trigger social envy and anxiety that they are missing out on an important aesthetic moment. Thus, the more attractive the digital experience presented by a brand, the higher the potential for FOMO to be triggered by an audience that has not experienced it (Lemon & Verhoef, 2020; He et al., 2024). Based on this argument, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Experiential marketing has a positive and significant effect on FOMO.

2.4. The Role of FOMO Mediation in Purchasing Decisions

In the fast-paced digital era, FOMO is no longer just a social psychological phenomenon, but has transformed into a very powerful economic driver (behavioral marketing). FOMO serves as an emotional bridge that transforms marketing stimuli (viral and experiential) into instant buying actions. When viral marketing and experiential marketing succeed in triggering high levels of FOMO, consumers will feel the psychological urgency to act immediately. They feel that they have to buy products or go to these trending places as soon as possible to relieve anxiety and maintain their social status in cyberspace (Hodkinson, 2019; Gupta & Sharma, 2022). In this context, FOMO acts as a mediating variable that accelerates the process of evaluating alternatives in purchasing decisions, transforming rational considerations into impulsive purchasing decisions for the sake of social validation (Ainin et al., 2023). Based on this theoretical relationship, the following mediation hypothesis is proposed:

H3: FOMO mediates the influence of viral marketing on purchase decisions.

H4: FOMO mediates the influence of experiential marketing on purchasing decisions.

III. Research Method

This study applies a quantitative approach with an explanatory causality design that aims to test, prove, and explain the cause-effect relationship and the power of influence between independent variables on bound variables. Specifically, this design was used to analyze the influence of viral marketing and experiential marketing on consumer purchase decisions, by placing Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) as a mediating variable. The object in this study is positioned on active students of Universitas Slamet Riyadi (UNISRI) Surakarta who are consumers or users of skincare products. Because the total population of skincare users in the location is not known for sure (infinite population), the sampling technique used is non-probability sampling with the purposive sampling method. The scientific reason for the selection of this purposive sampling technique is to screen respondents so that they really have characteristics that are relevant to the psychological phenomenon of FOMO and exposure to the digital marketing strategy being researched, so that the primary data obtained is accurate and objective. To maintain the accuracy of the data, the researcher set strict inclusion criteria for respondents, including active students of Universitas Slamet Riyadi (UNISRI) Surakarta, having made a purchase transaction of skincare products at least once in the last 6

months, and actively using social media every day and having been exposed to viral marketing content (such as products included in For Your Page or trends on TikTok and Instagram) as well as experiential marketing content (such as texture review videos, wearing effects, or direct digital interaction with skincare brands). The sample size in this study was determined based on the Hair guideline through the 10-times rule, which states that the minimum sample limit is 5 to 10 times the number of observation indicators. Thus, based on the total research indicators used, the minimum sample size set and successfully collected in this study was 85 respondents. The primary data collection procedure was carried out chronologically and transparently using a structured survey instrument in the form of a Google Form designed with a Likert scale of 1–5, ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

The digital questionnaire link is distributed in a targeted manner to various UNISRI Surakarta student communities, such as WhatsApp chat groups of the class or study program, student activity unit (UKM) organizations, and through direct messages to relevant student social media accounts. In order to ensure the validity of the filling and minimize information bias, the researcher applied two layers of screening procedures. The first layer is in the form of screening questions on the first page of the Google Form that must be answered related to student status, skincare purchase history, and social media intensity; The system will automatically stop charging if the respondent does not meet the inclusion criteria. The second layer is in the form of data cleaning after the data is collected in a spreadsheet, where the researcher eliminates respondents who fill out the questionnaire in an unnatural time (less than 2 minutes) or show a monotonous (straight-lining) answer pattern because it indicates careless filling. All variables in this study were operationalized using indicators adapted from marketing literature and trusted consumer behavior to ensure content validity. The viral marketing variable (X1) is measured through the dimensions of the quality of messages or interesting content, the ease of content to be forwarded, and the power of digital recommendations (electronic word-of-mouth) adapted from Stephen and Ducoffe's theory. The experiential marketing (X2) variable was measured through the dimensions of sense (visual appeal of content/packaging), feel (emotional touch or pleasure when interacting), and think (triggering curiosity about product efficacy) adapted from Schmitt and Batat. The FOMO (Med) variable as a mediator was measured using the dimension of social anxiety due to lagging behind the latest skincare trends, the need for social validation in the campus environment, and the buying impulse to remain relevant in the association adapted from Przybylski.

Meanwhile, the purchase decision variable (Y) was measured through the dimensions of stability and confidence in choosing skincare brands, the speed of making purchase transactions, and the willingness to provide recommendations to others referring to the theory of Kotler and Keller. The data analysis technique in this study applied the Structural Equation Modeling method based on Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) using the help of SmartPLS 4.0 software. The PLS-SEM method was chosen because of its highly effective ability to test complex structural models that involve direct and indirect relationships through simultaneous mediating variables (FOMO), has high predictive power, and does not require normal distributed data. The data analysis stage is carried out through two main evaluations, namely the evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) and the evaluation of the structural model (inner model). The outer model evaluation was carried out to test the validity and reliability of the instrument by looking at the loading factor value (required greater than 0.70), the Average Variance Extracted or AVE value (above 0.50), the discriminant validity through the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio or HTMT approach (less than 0.90), and the reliability through Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values (above 0.70). Furthermore, an internal model evaluation was carried out to test the research hypothesis through a bootstrapping procedure by looking at the value of the determination coefficient (R^2) for the contribution of variance, the value of predictive relevance (Q^2) for prediction accuracy, the value of the measure effect (f^2) for the practical contribution of the predictor variable, and the value of the path coefficient. The direct and indirect relationship (FOMO mediating effect) was declared to be significant simultaneously if the t-statistical value showed a number greater than 1.96 and a p-value less than 0.05, while the overall goodness of the model was assessed using the Goodness of Fit (GoF) or SRMR indicator.

IV. Result and Discussion

4.1. Smart Bootstrapping Test Results Pls

The path coefficient value obtained from the results of the bootstrapping procedure was used to determine the direct influence between latent constructs in the study. The indirect influence, namely the influence between exogenous constructs on endogenous constructs through mediated constructs, can be seen in the value of specific indirect effects resulting from the bootstrapping process in the SmartPLS program.

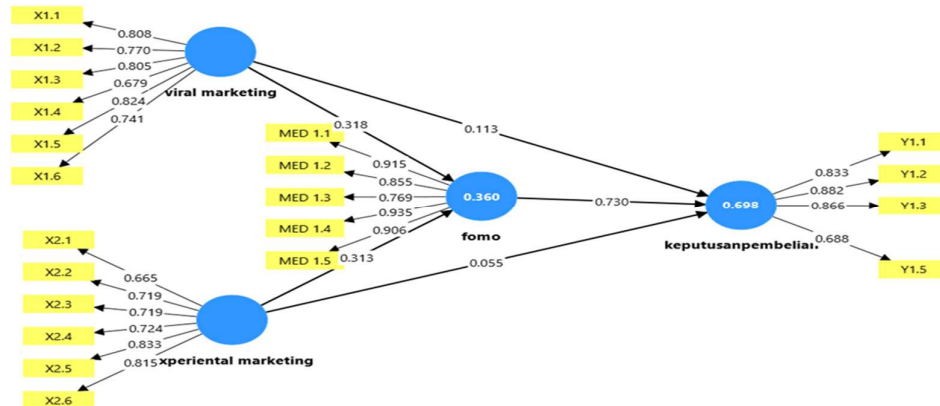


Figure 2. Smart Bootstrapping Test Results Pls

The hypothesis test in this study is seen from the large t-statistical value obtained through the bootstrapping procedure in the SmartPLS program. The t-statistical value is used to determine the significance of the estimated parameters so as to provide information about the influence between variables in the research model. In structural model testing, the prediction model can be seen from the t-statistical value and path coefficient between the independent variable and the dependent variable shown in the direct effect table. If the t-statistical value > 1.96 at a significance level of 5% (0.05), then the hypothesis is declared accepted, while if the t-statistical value < 1.96 , then the hypothesis is rejected.

4.2. The Influence of Viral Marketing on Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

The results of the hypothesis test showed that viral marketing (X1) had a positive and significant effect on FOMO (Med). This can be seen from the beta coefficient value of 0.318, the t-statistical value of 2.264 which is greater than 1.96, and the p-value of 0.024 which is smaller than the significance level of 0.05. Thus, the hypothesis that viral marketing has a significant effect on FOMO in skincare consumers is proven. These results show that the higher the intensity of the spread of viral skincare product content on social media, the tendency for FOMO to appear in consumers is also increasing. The results of this study are in line with the theory of Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019:344) which states that viral marketing is a digital marketing strategy that spreads messages through social networks and user-generated content so that information can be spread quickly and widely and has the potential to trigger consumer emotional responses such as Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). These findings are also supported by research by Sari and Darma (2024) who stated that viral marketing has a positive and significant effect on FOMO, which shows that the widespread dissemination of product information through social media can increase the fear of falling behind trends in consumers.

4.3. The Influence of Experiential Marketing on Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

The results of the hypothesis test showed that experiential marketing (X2) had a positive and significant effect on FOMO (Med). This can be seen from the beta coefficient value of 0.318, the t-statistical value of 2.264 which is greater than 1.96, and the p-value of 0.024 which is smaller than the significance level of 0.05. Thus, the hypothesis that experiential marketing has a significant effect on FOMO in skincare consumers is proven. These results show that the stronger the experience felt by consumers when interacting with skincare products, the tendency for FOMO to appear in consumers will also increase. The results of this study are in line with the theory put forward by Leahy, Fenton, and Barry (2022:12–14) which states that experiential marketing is a marketing approach that creates meaningful and memorable experiences for consumers so that it is able to build emotional engagement that can influence consumer behavior and psychological responses, including the emergence of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). This finding is also supported by research by Rizqy, Widayanto, and Amani (2025) which shows that experiential marketing has a significant effect on consumer behavior, which means that the positive experience felt by consumers towards a product can encourage the emergence of emotional impulses to try the product so as not to feel left behind from the experience felt by others.

4.4. The Effect of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) on Purchase Decisions

The results of the hypothesis test showed that FOMO (Med) had a positive and significant effect on the purchase decision (Y). This can be seen from the beta coefficient value of 0.730, the t-statistical value of 12.773 which is greater than 1.96, and the p-value of 0.000 which is smaller than the significance level of 0.05. Thus, the hypothesis that FOMO has a significant effect on purchase decisions in skincare consumers is proven. These results show that the higher the level of FOMO that consumers feel, the greater the tendency of consumers to make a purchase decision immediately. The results of this study are in line with the theory put forward by Jones and Carson (2021:45–47) which states that Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is an emotional impulse that arises due to an individual's desire to stay connected and participate in other people's experiences through digital media so that it causes the fear of missing out on important opportunities or experiences that are trending. This condition can encourage individuals to make purchasing decisions faster. The findings of this study are also supported by the research of Purbaningrum, Astuti, Miftahuddin, and Fauziridwan (2025) which states that FOMO can strengthen consumer purchasing decisions, because consumers tend to be encouraged to buy trending products so as not to feel left behind by others.

4.5. The Influence of Viral Marketing on Purchase Decisions

The results of the hypothesis test showed that viral marketing (X1) had a positive but not significant effect on the purchase decision (Y). This can be seen from the beta coefficient value of 0.113 which indicates the direction of positive influence, but the t-statistical value of 1.271 is smaller than 1.96 and the p-value of 0.204 is greater than the significance level of 0.05. Thus, the hypothesis that viral marketing has a significant effect on purchase decisions in skincare consumers is not proven. These results show that although the spread of viral content about skincare products can attract consumers' attention, these conditions do not necessarily directly encourage consumers to make purchasing decisions. The results of this study are not entirely in line with the theory put forward by Rakhmat (2020:45) which states that viral marketing is a marketing technique in digital marketing that is designed to create content that is easy to share online so that it is able to reach a wide audience through strengthening digital word-of-mouth and can theoretically increase consumer awareness and interest in making purchase decisions. The results of this study are also different from the research of Noviana L. Eban and Nainggolan (2025) which concluded that viral marketing has a positive and significant effect on the purchase decision of Skintific skincare products. The findings show that consumers' purchasing decisions are not only influenced by viral content on social media, but can also be influenced by

other factors such as product user experience, recommendations from other users, and consideration of consumers' personal needs.

4.6. The Influence of Experiential Marketing on Purchase Decisions

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4.7. Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) mediates the influence of viral marketing on Purchase Decisions

The results of the hypothesis test showed that viral marketing (X1) had a positive and significant effect on the purchase decision (Y) through FOMO (Med). This can be seen from the beta coefficient value of 0.229 which indicates the direction of positive influence, the t-statistical value of 2.164 which is greater than 1.96, and the p-value of 0.030 which is smaller than the significance level of 0.05. Thus, the hypothesis that FOMO mediates the influence of viral marketing on purchase decisions in skincare consumers is proven. These results show that although viral marketing does not have a significant direct effect on purchase decisions, through the intermediary FOMO the influence becomes significant, so that FOMO plays a mediating variable in the relationship between viral marketing and purchase decisions. The results of this study are in line with the theory put forward by Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2022) which states that viral marketing is a strategy in digital marketing that emphasizes the spread of interesting and easily shareable content through social media so that it can create broad exposure and shape consumer psychological responses to product trends. Exposure to intense viral content can give rise to Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), which is consumer anxiety when they feel they are missing out on information or experiences that are popular, which encourages the acceleration of purchase decisions. This finding is also supported by research by Sari and Darma (2024) which proves that viral marketing can increase FOMO and FOMO plays a mediating variable that strengthens the influence of viral marketing on skincare product purchase decisions. This shows that the spread of viral content about skincare products on social media is able to trigger FOMO feelings in consumers, which ultimately encourages consumers to immediately make purchasing decisions so as not to be left behind in developing trends.

4.8. Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) mediates the influence of Experiential marketing on Purchase Decisions

The results of the hypothesis test showed that experiential marketing (X2) had a positive and significant effect on the purchase decision (Y) through FOMO (Med). This can be seen from the beta coefficient value of 0.232 which indicates the direction of positive influence, the t-statistical value of 2.225 which is greater

than 1.96, and the p-value of 0.026 which is smaller than the significance level of 0.05. Thus, the hypothesis that experiential marketing has a significant effect on purchase decisions through FOMO in skincare consumers is proven. These results show that the marketing experience that consumers perceive not only gives a positive impression of the product, but can also give rise to FOMO which ultimately encourages consumers to make a purchase decision immediately. The results of this study are in line with the theory put forward by Smilansky (2020) which states that experiential marketing is a marketing strategy that focuses on creating emotional, immersive, and memorable experiences for consumers so that they can increase engagement and form psychological responses to brands. Strong and enjoyable experiences can trigger Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), which is the worry of consumers lagging behind positive experiences that others feel, thus driving accelerated purchase decisions. This finding is also supported by research by Patrisya, Afifah, and Purmono (2025) which shows that experiential marketing can increase FOMO which acts as a mediating variable in strengthening its influence on purchasing decisions. This shows that the more intense the interactive experience that consumers feel for skincare products, the higher the FOMO that appears, thus strengthening consumers' motivation to make purchase decisions.

V. Conclusion

Based on the results of research and data analysis that has been carried out regarding viral marketing, experiential marketing, and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) on purchase decisions in skincare consumers (a survey of UNISRI Surakarta students), it can be concluded as follows:

- a. Viral marketing (X1) has a positive and significant effect on FOMO (Med) in skincare consumers. These findings show that the higher the intensity of the spread of viral content about skincare products on social media, the higher the tendency for FOMO to appear in consumers.
- b. Experiential marketing (X2) has a positive and significant effect on FOMO (Med). These results show that the experience that consumers feel when interacting with skincare products can increase emotional engagement, leading to FOMO.
- c. FOMO (Med) has a positive and significant effect on the purchase decision (Y). These results show that the higher the level of FOMO that consumers feel, the greater the tendency of consumers to immediately make purchasing decisions so as not to be left behind in popular trends.
- d. Viral marketing (X1) has a positive but insignificant effect on purchase decisions (Y). These findings show that the spread of viral content about skincare products on social media does not necessarily directly encourage consumers to make a purchase decision.
- e. Experiential marketing (X2) has a positive but insignificant effect on purchasing decisions (Y). These results show that consumers' perceived experience of skincare products does not necessarily directly influence purchasing decisions.
- f. FOMO (Med) is able to mediate the influence of viral marketing (X1) on purchasing decisions (Y). These findings suggest that viral content circulating on social media can give rise to FOMO in consumers which ultimately drives purchase decisions.
- g. FOMO (Med) is able to mediate the influence of experiential marketing (X2) on purchase decisions (Y). These results show that the positive experience felt by consumers towards skincare products can increase FOMO, thereby strengthening consumers' motivation to make a purchase decision.

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