Impression Management and Social Validation in the Social Media Era: A Systematic Review of Consumer Behavior Across Goods and Experiences

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ABSTRACT

Backgrounds: Social media makes consumer choices highly visible, allowing goods and experiences to signal identity and social standing. However, evidence on impression management, social validation, and their links to consumption is scattered across product categories and platforms.

Objectives: This review examined how impression management, social validation, and related social-psychological mechanisms relate to consumer motives, decisions, and post-consumption behavior across goods, services, experiences, and hybrid consumption.

Methodology: A systematic review following PRISMA 2020 and MMAT 2018 guidelines. Of the 100 highest-ranked OpenAlex records screened, 55 empirical journal studies (2020–2026) met eligibility criteria. Findings were integrated through narrative and thematic synthesis.

Findings: Eight interrelated themes emerged. FOMO was dominant (50/55 studies), mainly linked to purchase intention, impulse buying, and purchase decisions though relationships were not always significant. Social comparison appeared in 11 studies, materialism in 7, and self-presentation/consumption display in 14. Influencer, digital content, and algorithm research highlighted social exposure's role in shaping urgency and perceived social proof. Product knowledge, brand evaluation, and individual characteristics limited these relationships. Evidence is concentrated on goods consumption and pre-transaction purchase intention; experiential consumption and post-consumption sharing remain understudied.

Conclusions: Digital social influence is neither uniform nor sufficient to explain consumer behavior. A key research gap concerns whether anticipated audience responses before purchase relate to how consumption is presented afterward.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Consumption on social media is not merely a matter of acquiring useful products. A purchase, a restaurant visit, or a shared photograph may also communicate taste, identity, and social position. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok expose users to others' purchases while giving them opportunities to document their own. This environment brings social comparison, materialism, and fear of missing out (FOMO) into everyday consumer decisions (Bläse et al., 2023; Dinh et al., 2023; Dinh & Lee, 2021; Kumar & Kumar, 2024). It also makes conspicuous consumption and self-presentation relevant to how goods and experiences are selected and displayed (Dantas & Abreu,

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2020; Dinh & Lee, 2024a, 2024b; Jiang & Chang, 2025). Nevertheless, sharing a purchase is not, by itself, evidence of a desire for external validation; people may also post for enjoyment, information sharing, or self-expression.

Consumption activity on Instagram and TikTok is related not only to product purchases but also includes the consumption of digital content that shapes users' preferences, perceptions, and social evaluations. TikTok, through its algorithmic recommendation system, presents content that its users find relevant and entertaining (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022; Schellewald, 2023). However, the intensity of content consumption on the platform is also related to excessive use driven by the need for social interaction and psychological compensation (N. Zhang et al., 2023). Meanwhile, Instagram's characteristics, which are oriented toward visual imagery and influencer content, provide room for social comparison. Longer Instagram use duration is associated with body dissatisfaction and decreased self-esteem (Alfonso-Fuertes et al., 2023). Exposure to ideal beauty representations is also related to lower body satisfaction, especially through comparison with peers and influencers (Pedalino & Camerini, 2022; Silva & Steins, 2023).

In the context of product consumption, both platforms also shape purchase considerations and decisions through content characteristics and user experience. On TikTok, hedonic and utilitarian values are related to purchase intention, while visual appeal, enjoyment, and perceived benefits can encourage impulse buying (Tee et al., 2023; W. Zhang et al., 2023). In the Indonesian context, hedonic value and consumer trust were also found to be related to purchase decisions through TikTok Live (H. Zhang et al., 2024). On Instagram, purchase intention is related to perceived benefits, user characteristics, influencer attributes, and sponsored posts (Gross & von Wangenheim, 2022; Herzallah et al., 2022; Masuda et al., 2022). Nevertheless, most of this evidence comes from cross-sectional research with samples of university students or young adults, so the relationships found are not sufficient to explain causal mechanisms or long-term consumption dynamics.

Theoretically, this phenomenon can be explained through several fundamental perspectives in social and consumption behavior. Impression Management Theory, proposed by Goffman (1959), explains that individuals seek to form particular impressions before others through the management of behavior and self-presentation. In the context of digital consumption, purchased products and shared experiences can serve as a means of representing identity and building self-image. Furthermore, Social Comparison Theory by Festinger (1954) explains individuals' tendency to evaluate themselves by comparing themselves with others. Exposure to representations of others' lives and consumption on social media can strengthen this comparison process. Meanwhile, the Conspicuous Consumption perspective introduced by Veblen (1899) views consumption as an activity oriented not only toward fulfilling needs but also usable to display wealth, prestige, and social position. These three perspectives provide a conceptual foundation for understanding the relationship between self-presentation, social comparison, and consumption motives oriented toward social recognition.

Existing findings are far from uniform. Some studies report associations between FOMO, influencer exposure, social comparison, and purchase intentions or impulsive purchases. Others show weak or nonsignificant direct relationships, particularly when product knowledge, brand credibility, and individual differences enter the analysis (Bläse et al., 2023; Dwisuardinata & Darma, 2022; Puspitasari et al., 2025). These differences matter because wanting to buy is not equivalent to buying, and social visibility does not necessarily imply approval-seeking. The literature is also divided by what it observes. Research on digital promotion frequently stops at pre-purchase intentions, whereas studies of conspicuous consumption focus more closely on identity and social display. Far less is known about whether consumers anticipate an audience before purchasing and subsequently use the purchase or experience for self-presentation. Evidence is especially limited for experiential consumption and for direct comparisons between physical goods, services, and hybrid practices. Cross-sectional designs further constrain causal interpretation.

Thus, there remain limitations in the literature that integrates social-psychological mechanisms with consumption behavior oriented toward self-presentation, both at the pre-purchase stage and after consumption is shared with the public. Previous research tends to examine FOMO, social comparison, and purchase intention separately from impression management and conspicuous consumption, so the relationships among these mechanisms across various consumption categories have not been comprehensively described. This limitation is even more apparent in experiential

consumption, services, and hybrid consumption practices that involve physical products and digital experiences.

Based on this gap, this systematic review aims to analyze and synthesize empirical evidence on how social-psychological mechanisms, particularly impression management, social validation, FOMO, social comparison, and status signaling, are related to consumption motives and decisions in digital environments. This review specifically explores the variation of these mechanisms across various consumption categories, identifies their role in the stages of consumer behavior from content exposure to purchase and sharing of consumption experiences, and evaluates the relationships among social, functional, emotional, and identity motives. To achieve these objectives, this study is formulated into the following four research questions: (RQ1) How are social-psychological mechanisms related to consumption motives and decisions? (RQ2) How do social validation, self-presentation, and status signaling differ across consumption categories? (RQ3) How do digital social mechanisms work as consumers move from viewing content to considering, purchasing, and sharing consumption experiences? (RQ4) How do social motives interact with functional, emotional, and identity considerations, and what are the limitations of the available empirical evidence? Through this approach, the review is expected to provide a more integrated understanding of consumption behavior in digital environments while identifying directions for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Impression Management and Social Validation in Digital Consumption

Impression management concerns how people influence the impressions others form of them. In consumer settings, goods, services, and experiences can communicate preferences, belonging, or social identity. Social media provide a visible setting for such self-presentation, including the circulation of consumption-related posts (Dantas & Abreu, 2020; Dinh & Lee, 2024b). Social validation, by contrast, concerns approval or recognition received from others, or anticipated before an action is taken. These concepts overlap but are not interchangeable: a person can express an identity publicly without making approval the primary goal.

Impression management is rooted in Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective, which explains that individuals seek to form particular impressions through their appearance and behavior before others. Leary and Kowalski (1990) divided this process into impression motivation, namely the drive to control others' perceptions, and impression construction, namely the effort to form the impression one wishes to present. In digital consumption, this is reflected through the selection of products, brands, and experiences as representations of self-identity. Meanwhile, social validation relates to the need to obtain recognition and positive responses from the social environment, such as likes and comments on consumption content. The two have different focuses: impression management emphasizes the formation of self-image, whereas social validation is oriented toward social acceptance. Thus, publishing consumption activity can serve as a means of identity expression while also obtaining social recognition (Belk, 1988; Leary & Kowalski, 1990).

2.2. Fear of Missing Out, Social Comparison, and Status Signaling

FOMO describes concern about missing rewarding opportunities or experiences. Exposure to trends and other consumers' activities can make such concerns salient, although their association with purchasing varies across studies (Bläse et al., 2023; Dinh et al., 2023; Dinh & Lee, 2021). Social comparison involves evaluating oneself relative to others, whereas status signaling uses consumption to communicate social position. Both may contribute to conspicuous consumption, particularly where products carry symbolic value (Dinh & Lee, 2024a; Jiang & Chang, 2025; Kumar & Kumar, 2024). Distinguishing these mechanisms avoids treating every form of socially influenced consumption as FOMO.

Przybylski et al. (2013) defined Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) as the concern that others are gaining rewarding experiences while the individual is not involved in them. In digital consumption, exposure to others' trends, products, and experiences on social media can encourage individuals to follow trends so as not to feel left behind. Meanwhile, social comparison is grounded in Festinger's (1954) theory, which explains individuals' tendency to evaluate themselves through comparison with others. In the digital context, comparisons of lifestyle, product ownership, and experiences can

influence consumption patterns, especially when individuals compare themselves with those perceived as being in better conditions (upward social comparison). Thus, FOMO relates to the concern of missing out on experiences, whereas social comparison focuses on self-evaluation through social comparison.

As for status signaling, it relates to Veblen's (1899) concept of conspicuous consumption, namely the use of consumption to display wealth, prestige, and social standing. In digital consumption, branded products, exclusive services, and certain experiences can become status symbols displayed to the public. This perspective is reinforced by Belk's (1988) concept of the extended self, which views possessions as part of an individual's identity representation. Thus, consumption is oriented not only toward fulfilling functional needs but also serves as a means of communicating identity and social position.

2.3. Consumer Decision-Making and Consumption Categories

Consumer decision-making extends from need recognition and information search to evaluating alternatives, purchasing, and post-consumption responses. Digital content, influencers, reference groups, and anticipated audience judgments may enter at different points. This review distinguishes tangible goods, services, experiences, and hybrid practices that combine products or activities with digital sharing. Functional utility, enjoyment, symbolic value, and public visibility may carry different weight across these categories. Viewing post-consumption sharing as a possible continuation of consumer behavior, rather than an automatic outcome of purchase, is central to the analysis.

From a consumer behavior perspective, purchase decisions include need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase, and post-purchase responses. Each stage can be influenced by the social environment and digital media, such as trends, user reviews, influencer recommendations, and other consumers' experiences. These influences can differ by consumption category. For tangible goods, brands and status symbols become considerations; for services, reputation and reviews influence perceived quality; whereas in experiential consumption, such as travel and entertainment, social value emerges through experiences that can be shared with the public.

Thus, digital consumption behavior includes not only purchase decisions but also activities after consumption. Experiences shared through social media can receive audience responses that subsequently influence self-perception and later consumption considerations. This indicates that digital consumption involves linkages among purchase decisions, identity representation, and social interaction (Belk, 1988; Leary & Kowalski, 1990).

2.4. Conceptual Framework of Socially Influenced Digital Consumption

Based on the theoretical foundation outlined above, consumption behavior in digital environments can be understood through the linkages among self-presentation, social influence, psychological motivation, and status considerations. Impression management explains how individuals use consumption activity to form self-image before others, whereas social validation relates to social responses and recognition that are expected or obtained. In this process, exposure to others' consumption activity can give rise to social comparison and FOMO through self-evaluation and concern about missing out on experiences considered valuable (Festinger, 1954; Przybylski et al., 2013).

Furthermore, the desire to represent identity and social status can be reflected in the selection of goods, services, and experiences that carry symbolic value. This mechanism relates to status signaling and conspicuous consumption, which explain that consumption can function as a means of communicating social position, not merely fulfilling functional needs (Veblen, 1899; Belk, 1988). These various mechanisms can interact with the stages of consumer decision-making, from need recognition to post-purchase evaluation. Therefore, the conceptual framework of this study positions digital consumption behavior as a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by self-presentation motives, social evaluation, concern about missing out on experiences, and status representation (Figure 1).

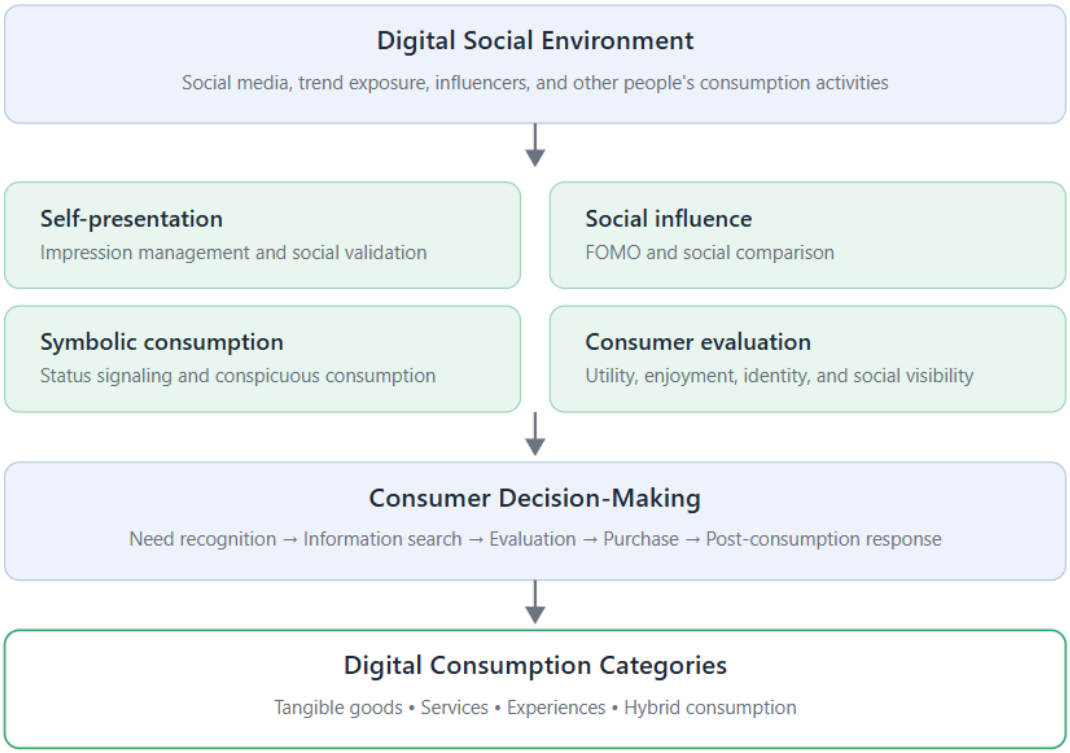


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework
Source: Developed based on Goffman (1959), Festinger (1954), Veblen (1899), Belk (1988), Leary and Kowalski (1990), and Przybylski et al. (2013).

3. METHOD

3.1. Design and Review Framework

The study used a systematic literature review to identify, assess, and synthesize empirical evidence on the social-psychological dimensions of consumption. Study identification and selection were reported using PRISMA 2020 (Page et al., 2021). Methodological appraisal was framed by MMAT 2018 (Hong et al., 2018). The review protocol specified questions, eligibility criteria, search and screening procedures, extraction fields, and synthesis steps, but was not publicly registered. Research questions were organized around Population, Exposure, and Outcome (PEO): individual consumers; social-psychological mechanisms in social media settings; and purchasing motives, intentions, decisions, or post-consumption behavior.

3.2. Eligibility Criteria and Search

Eligible records were peer-reviewed empirical journal articles published between 2020 and 2026 in English or Indonesian. Studies had to examine individual consumers in social media contexts, address at least one relevant social-psychological mechanism, and report outcomes related to consumer motives, choices, purchases, or post-consumption behavior. Reviews, nonempirical papers, conference proceedings, and reports whose methods or findings could not be checked in full text were excluded.

OpenAlex was searched on 15 October 2026 using three concept groups combined with AND. The first group covered social media environments (“social media”, Instagram, TikTok, “social networking sites”, “online sharing”, “media sosial”). The second covered social-psychological mechanisms (“impression management”, “self-presentation”, “social approval”, “social validation”, “social rewards”, “social return”, “social comparison”, “status signaling”, “conspicuous consumption”, “fear of missing out”, FOMO, “social identity”, “reference group”). The third covered consumer behavior (“purchase intention”, “purchase decision”, “purchase behavior”, “buying behavior”, “consumer behavior”, “consumer choice”, consumption, “post-purchase”). Results were restricted to publication years 2020–2026, English or Indonesian, records with an abstract, and non-paratext items. The search returned 39,519 records. JurnalHub supported record management and

initial screening, and only the 100 records ranked highest for relevance were imported. The review therefore covers this selected subset, not the full OpenAlex result set.

3.3. Screening, Extraction, and Appraisal

The literature search was conducted through OpenAlex and yielded 39,519 records. Of these, 100 records with the highest relevance ranking (approximately 0.25%) were imported into JurnalHub for screening, while the remaining records were not individually examined. No duplicate articles were found among the 100 records. Four records were automatically excluded because they were review articles (review publications) rather than empirical studies. Subsequently, 96 titles and abstracts were screened, with 39 articles excluded for not meeting the inclusion criteria based on topic relevance, suitability to the scope of the review, and characteristics of empirical research. Full texts of 57 reports were sought, but one report could not be accessed. A total of 56 reports were assessed for eligibility based on full text, and one conference proceeding was excluded for not meeting the specified publication criteria. Thus, 55 empirical studies were included in the final synthesis. Additional searches were conducted through publishers' websites and academic repositories to verify publication information and study characteristics. Artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted tools were used to support initial screening and data extraction. However, all selection decisions were made by a single reviewer without independent checking by a second reviewer.

Data extraction used a structured form covering publication information, research context, sample, research design, social media usage context, consumption category, psychosocial constructs, decision-making stage, findings, and reported limitations. AI-assisted extraction results were rechecked against the available full texts, while information that could not yet be verified remained recorded as unverified. The methodological quality of the studies was assessed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) 2018, which comprises two screening questions and five specific assessment criteria based on study design, with the assessment categories Yes, No, and Cannot tell. The assessment results were used as a consideration in interpreting findings and were not combined into a single overall quality score. This review protocol was not prospectively registered. The limitations of the study include a search scope that processed only 100 of 39,519 records, so other relevant publications may not have been identified. In addition, the use of a single reviewer and AI assistance without independent verification by a second reviewer potentially increases the risk of bias in the selection and data extraction processes.

3.4. Synthesis

Given heterogeneity in designs, measures, and outcomes, meta-analysis was not appropriate. Instead, findings were coded and grouped using a narrative and thematic approach adapted from Thomas and Harden (2008). The synthesis compared mechanisms, consumption categories, and pre- versus post-purchase stages. Nonsignificant and conflicting findings were retained rather than treated as exceptions to an assumed positive effect.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Research Results

4.1.1. Study Selection

Figure 2 summarizes the screening process. The 55 included studies represent the eligible reports found among the 100 relevance-ranked OpenAlex records that were processed. The initial database search identified 39,519 records, but those not imported were not individually screened.

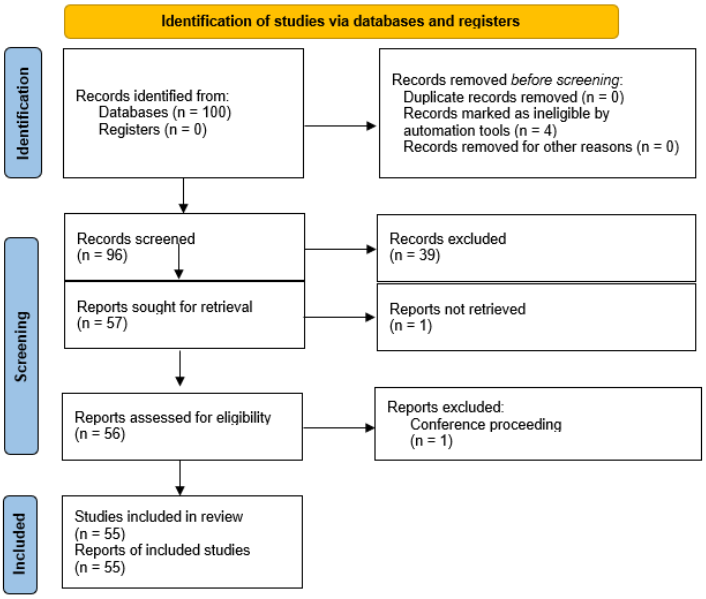


Figure 2. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram of the Study Selection Process

Source: Authors' adaptation of the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram. Note: The diagram begins with the 100 records imported into JurnalHub from 39,519 OpenAlex search results

4.1.2. Study Characteristics

The 55 studies were published between 2020 and 2026, with the largest groups appearing in 2025 (19) and 2026 (17). Most were conducted in Indonesia, alongside studies from India, China, the United States, and other settings. Samples frequently comprised students, Generation Z, millennials, or active social media users. Quantitative designs predominated, while qualitative studies provided additional accounts; the classification of some multi-study designs still requires verification. Research concentrated on fashion, beauty, and other tangible or symbolically valued goods; experiences, services, and post-consumption behavior received less attention. Table 1 summarizes findings relevant to the research questions.

Table 1. Characteristics and Principal Findings of the Included Studies (n = 55)

Study	Context, design, and sample	Finding relevant to the review
Abdrabbo et al. (2025)	Multiregional luxury consumers; experiment (n=208)	Uniqueness was positively associated with luxury purchase intention, with FOMO strengthening the link. Scarcity and social comparison had no significant direct or moderating effects.
	Indonesia; TikTok comic fandom; survey (n=385)	Storytelling and e-WOM related positively to comic purchase decisions; FOMO was a significant mediator.
Adinata and Sudarmiatin (2025)	Indonesia; restaurant brand; survey (n=202)	Brand image predicted both FOMO and purchase decisions; FOMO mediated their relationship.
	Indonesia; TikTok fragrance promotion; survey (n=400)	Influencer appeal and persuasive content predicted FOMO and purchase intention.
Akbar et al. (2025)	Cross-cultural restaurant context; survey (n=345)	Anticipatory emotions associated with FOMO related to restaurant purchase intention: anticipated envy and comfort positively, and spending regret negatively.
	Indonesia; Gen Z fashion; survey (n=120)	Social media exposure and FOMO were each associated with fashion purchase decisions.

Study	Context, design, and sample	Finding relevant to the review
Alfarizi and Sudradjat (2025)	Indonesia; Gen Z fashion; survey (n=61)	Only mental toughness was individually significant; FOMO and social comparison were nonsignificant predictors.
	Indonesia; TikTok Shop beauty; survey (n=120)	Self-congruity predicted purchase intention and decisions. FOMO predicted intention but not decisions directly (p=.567); intention mediated the FOMO association.
An and Ahn (2024)	Indonesia; TikTok gorpcore fashion; survey (n=105)	Content and FOMO predicted purchase decisions; content showed the stronger association.
	Indonesia; social media users; survey (n=308)	FOMO correlated with consumerist behavior (r=.67), including impulse-buying tendencies.
Anggarawati and Suwendra (2026)	Indonesia; Gen Z TikTok fashion; qualitative (n=6)	Algorithmic trends were linked to FOMO, symbolic purchases, and perceived digital validation; responses differed.
	Europe/US; fast and slow fashion; three surveys (n=652)	FOMO weakened the brand credibility–purchase intention relationship in both fashion contexts.
Apriliandi et al. (2026)	Indonesia; Gen Z purchases; survey	FOMO predicted purchase decisions; the separate social media effect was nonsignificant.
	Brazil; Instagram fast fashion; qualitative (11 interviews)	Fashion display was associated with identity construction, belonging, and socially responsive self-images.
Aprrillia and Ajizah (2026)	Online influencer followers; survey (n=243)	Influencer imitation related to comparison, materialism, and FOMO, which were linked to purchase intention.
	Influencer audiences; survey (n=272)	Imitation and materialism mediated influencer effects on intention; FOMO moderated pathways.
Arasid et al. (2026)	Online influencer audiences; survey (n=272)	Comparison, FOMO, imitation, and materialism linked influencer exposure to conspicuous consumption.
	United States; social sharing; survey (n=400)	Conspicuous consumption mediated FOMO and sharing; self-presentation and network type moderated associations.
Ayu et al. (2025)	Indonesia; Balinese arak (alcoholic beverage); survey (n=153)	FOMO had no significant direct association with purchase intention; product knowledge was stronger.
	Indonesia; TikTok beauty; survey (n=350)	Influencer marketing and materialism predicted intention; materialism also moderated the relationship.
Aziz et al. (2026)	Indonesia; social media users; survey	FOMO, materialism, and parasocial interaction each related positively to purchase intention.
	Indonesia; TikTok skincare; survey (n=100)	FOMO and TikTok content predicted purchase decisions; their interaction was negative but significant.
Bläse et al. (2024)	Social media users; survey (n=543)	Digital engagement and anticipatory emotions were associated with FOMO, which related to intention; fear of better options and fear of doing anything were linked to decision hesitation.
	Indonesia; university students; survey (n=91)	Lifestyle, FOMO, and TikTok use were associated with consumerist behavior.
Borshalina et al. (2022)	India; online shopping; survey (n=380)	FOMO, instant gratification, and social validation were positively associated with buying behavior.

Study	Context, design, and sample	Finding relevant to the review
	India; ephemeral social content; survey (n=103)	FOMO related to content engagement, but had no significant direct association with purchase intention.
Dantas and Abreu (2020)	India; lifestyle products; survey (n=367)	FOMO mediated the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention.
	Indonesia; Gen Z tea consumers; survey (n=100)	Influencer marketing related to FOMO and purchase decisions; FOMO served as a mediator.
Dinh and Lee (2021)	Indonesia; student fashion; qualitative	Trend-driven purchases supported digital image management; some participants prioritized affordability.
	China; working adults; survey (n=561)	FOMO related to conspicuous consumption and lower self-esteem; gender moderation was nonsignificant.
Dinh et al. (2023)	Indonesia; TikTok beauty; qualitative (15 informants)	Before–after videos, flash sales, and influencer social proof were associated with FOMO and reported impulsive buying; the analysis was observational.
	India; young adults; quantitative	Comparison and FOMO mediated compulsive social media use and buying; self-esteem buffered susceptibility.
Dinh and Lee (2024b)	Indonesia; TikTok food SMEs; survey (n=100)	FOMO strongly predicted purchase intention, not observed purchase behavior.
	Indonesia; novelty donuts; survey (n=100)	FOMO-based promotion correlated with purchase decisions and post-purchase recommendations.
Dinh and Lee (2024a)	Indonesia; Gen Z/millennial drinkware; survey (n=210)	Social comparison, materialism, and FOMO connected influencer imitation with purchase intention.
	China; WeChat; survey (n=408), experiment (n=160)	Self-presentation related to conspicuous consumption through comparison, mainly among heavier social media users.
Dwisuardinata and Darma (2022)	Indonesia; minimalist consumption; survey (n=275)	FOMO neither predicted minimalist consumption significantly nor mediated social media effects.
	Indonesia; Gen Z e-commerce; survey (n=417)	FOMO was strongly linked to subjective norms; purchase intention was associated with purchasing behavior and subsequent post-purchase responses.
Falajunah and Hendayani (2024)	Indonesia; Gen Z smartphones; survey (n=100)	Uniqueness and FOMO predicted intention; conspicuous consumption was nonsignificant individually.
	Indonesia; TikTok skincare; survey (n=331)	TikTok use and FOMO each predicted skincare purchase intention.
Farasandy and Arafah (2023)	Indonesia; secondary-school shoe trends; qualitative (n=6)	Peer comparison and recognition seeking accompanied FOMO even without following trend accounts.
	Indonesia; Gen Z TikTok; qualitative (n=6)	Repeated promotions and algorithmic exposure accompanied social validation and impulsive consumption.
Fauziah et al. (2025)	Indonesia; viral products; qualitative	Peer pressure and validation seeking accompanied impulsive buying and reduced attention to usefulness.
	Indonesia; TikTok skincare; qualitative (n=10)	Repeated influencer reviews and user testimonials were linked to urgency and rapid purchase decisions.

Study	Context, design, and sample	Finding relevant to the review
Ortiz et al. (2023)	Indonesia; Instagram shopping; phenomenological (n=10 key informants)	Comparison and FOMO accompanied trend purchases and maintenance of digital identity.
	Indonesia; TikTok Shop; survey (n=101)	Social media use and FOMO predicted purchase decisions.
Futri et al. (2026)	Indonesia; social media fashion; survey (n=180)	FOMO related positively to purchase decisions; brand image weakened the association.
	Indonesia; K-pop photocards; qualitative (2 reported informants)	Community pressure and FOMO accompanied panic buying and identity-related collecting.
Gaur et al. (2026)	Indonesia; TikTok purchases; survey (n=210)	Influencer marketing, FOMO, and hedonic motives related to purchase decisions; the direction of the reported mediated effect requires verification.
	Turkey; online shoppers; survey (n=694)	FOMO mediated influencer exposure and materialism in conspicuous consumption; status anxiety also mediated.
Goel and Singh (2025)	Indonesia; social commerce; quantitative (n=450)	FOMO and perceived scarcity accompanied impulsive buying; influencer cues provided social proof.
	Indonesia; Gen Z blind boxes; survey (n=100)	User-generated content and FOMO predicted purchase intention (model R^2=.556).
Habib and Almamy (2025)	Indonesia; ready-to-drink coffee; qualitative (n=16)	Social trends, peers, and identity-related FOMO encouraged purchases, facilitated by product availability.
	China/United States; three experimental studies	Under FOMO, consumers preferred sharing identity-relevant products; self-esteem qualified the pattern.
Hendryawan and Permana (2026)	Indonesia; teenage viral purchases; survey (n=30)	Seventy percent reported post-purchase regret and half reported peer influence.

Source: Authors' extraction and synthesis of the 55 included studies. Sample sizes that could not be verified are not reported

4.1.3. Methodological Appraisal

The corpus was weighted toward quantitative and often cross-sectional research, frequently using purchase intention as the outcome. These features limit what can be inferred about causation and actual purchasing. Several reports also offered incomplete information on sampling, design, or analyses. Missing reporting details do not establish poor research conduct, but they reduce the certainty with which study quality can be assessed. Differences in design and reporting were therefore considered when interpreting the synthesis; a numerical MMAT ranking was not imposed.

4.1.4. Thematic Synthesis

Eight overlapping themes emerged (Table 2). FOMO was prominent in studies of purchase intention and impulse buying, but associations differed in significance and across reported decision outcomes (Aprrillia & Ajizah, 2026; Dwisuardinata & Darma, 2022). Social comparison, materialism, and status-related motives explained aspects of symbolic consumption, while influencer content supplied exposure rather than a sufficient explanation for purchase. Evidence on experiential consumption and post-consumption self-presentation was substantially thinner than evidence on physical goods and pre-purchase intentions.

Table 2. Thematic Synthesis of the Included Studies

Theme and illustrative studies	Cross-study synthesis	Interpretive relevance
FOMO and consumer decisions (Aprrillia & Ajizah, 2026; Dinh & Lee, 2021; Dwisuardinata & Darma, 2022)	FOMO related to intentions, impulse buying, or decisions, but direct effects were not consistently significant.	Distinguishes intentions from reported purchase decisions.
Comparison and materialism (Dinh & Lee, 2021, 2024b; Lu et al., 2024)	Comparison and materialism linked digital exposure to consumption aspirations and self-image.	Shows how symbolic aspirations may arise.
Self-presentation and display (Dantas & Abreu, 2020; Dinh & Lee, 2024a; Xi et al., 2022)	Socially visible consumption supported identity display; posting did not invariably imply validation seeking.	Distinguishes image-oriented choice from later sharing.
Influencers, content and algorithms (Aziz et al., 2026; Putri & Fadhilah, 2025)	Digital content and influencers were associated with trend salience, urgency, and perceived social proof.	Identifies exposure pathways, not inevitable effects.
FOMO as a mediator (Adinata & Sudarmiatin, 2025; Habib & Almamy, 2025)	Several studies reported indirect associations via FOMO, although model pathways and significance varied.	Explains indirect links between exposure and response.
Identity, uniqueness and status (Abdrabbo et al., 2025; Novalia et al., 2025)	Uniqueness and identity-related motives sometimes predicted symbolic purchasing; status effects varied.	Clarifies motives beyond product utility.
Functional and individual limits (Bläse et al., 2024; Mutiarasari et al., 2025)	Knowledge, brand judgments, and personal differences qualified or nullified some social effects.	Prevents assuming that social motives dominate.
Experiences and hybrid practices (An & Ahn, 2024; Sekarwangi et al., 2025; Wardah et al., 2026)	Restaurant experiences involved anticipatory emotions; fandom linked collectibles with digital communities. Trend-driven coffee purchases did not necessarily constitute experiential consumption.	Identifies gaps across categories and stages.

Source: Authors' data extraction and synthesis of the 55 included empirical studies

4.2. Discussion

4.2.1. From Social Motivation to Purchase (RQ1)

The synthesis results show that the motivation to purchase (purchase intention) needs to be distinguished from the realization of purchase (actual purchase). FOMO can encourage interest, urgency, and concern about missing out on certain opportunities or experiences, but does not always lead to an actual transaction. This distinction is consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior, which positions intention as one of the factors forming behavior, although the realization of action is also influenced by individual control and the conditions faced (Ajzen, 1991). Thus, an increase in purchase intention due to FOMO cannot be directly interpreted as an increase in actual purchases.

The differences in findings of Dinh and Lee (2021), Dwisuardinata and Darma (2023), as well as Aprrillia and Ajizah (2026) show that the influence of psychological factors on consumption depends on the behavioral indicator used. Studies that measure purchase intention only describe consumers' tendency to make a purchase, not proof that a transaction occurred. This needs attention when reading FOMO research findings because the construct has diverse conceptualizations and

behavioral consequences, as explained in the systematic reviews of Alfina et al. (2023) and Tandon et al. (2021).

In addition, social comparison, materialism, and FOMO are distinct psychological mechanisms. Social comparison relates to self-evaluation based on others' conditions (Festinger, 1954), materialism reflects an individual's orientation toward possessions, whereas FOMO relates to concern about missing out on experiences or opportunities obtained by others. The three can appear simultaneously in consumption behavior, but do not show identical mechanisms or consequences. Therefore, the relationship between social motivation and purchase decisions needs to be understood by considering consumer characteristics, product type, and consumption context.

4.2.2. Symbolic Consumption Is Not Always Approval Seeking (RQ2)

Consumption of goods and experiences relates not only to fulfilling functional needs but can also represent an individual's identity and social image. Nevertheless, symbolic consumption is not always driven by the need to obtain recognition from others. From the perspective of impression management, individuals can manage the impressions they wish to display through consumption choices and behavior without necessarily making social approval their main motivation (Goffman, 1959).

Research findings on fashion and conspicuous consumption show that products can be used as a means of representing identity and social status (Dantas & Abreu, 2020; Dinh & Lee, 2024b). However, the activity of displaying or sharing products through social media does not directly prove a need for social validation. This behavior can also reflect self-expression, personal preference, or the desire to document experiences. In experiential consumption, such as restaurant visits, consumer satisfaction can also come from the experience itself without necessarily being accompanied by a desire to share it with the public (An & Ahn, 2024).

Thus, the available empirical evidence is not adequate to conclude that consumption of goods is more strongly influenced by social validation than consumption of experiences, or vice versa. RQ2 is more appropriately positioned as a research gap, particularly regarding the differences among identity expression motivation, impression management, and the need to obtain social recognition. Future research needs to test these mechanism differences across categories of goods and experiences in a more targeted manner.

4.2.3. Connecting Pre-purchase and Post-consumption Behavior (RQ3)

Most of the reviewed studies focus on exposure to social media content and its influence on purchase intention. Meanwhile, the linkage between pre-purchase motivation and post-consumption behavior has not been widely explained empirically. Yet consumption activity on social media potentially forms a continuous chain of social exposure. Individuals who see others' consumption activity can develop a desire to buy, make a purchase, and then share their consumption experience with their audience. That content subsequently has the potential to become a source of exposure for other consumers.

This pattern can be explained conceptually through the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, namely that environmental stimuli can influence an individual's psychological state and produce behavioral responses. In this context, consumption content on social media can give rise to social comparison and FOMO that potentially influence consumer responses. However, this framework cannot yet be used to conclude that social motivation before purchase consistently determines sharing behavior after consumption.

Dinh and Lee (2024a) and Xi et al. (2022) provide indications that self-presentation and consumption display through social media are relevant aspects of consumer behavior. However, these findings have not proven a causal relationship between anticipated social approval before purchase and the decision to share experiences after consumption. Therefore, RQ3 cannot yet be answered conclusively based on the available evidence. The linkage between the two stages is more appropriately positioned as a research gap that requires testing through longitudinal or experimental designs. Measurement needs to cover pre-purchase motivation, transaction realization, and post-consumption sharing activity so that the relationships among stages can be identified more comprehensively.

4.2.4. Boundary Conditions and Evidence Limits (RQ4)

The differences in results across studies show that FOMO is not always the dominant factor in explaining consumption decisions. Bläse et al. (2024) found that brand credibility has a smaller role when FOMO is at a high level in the fashion context. Conversely, Dwisuardinata and Darma (2023) showed that product knowledge has a stronger relationship with purchase intention than FOMO. Apriliandi et al. (2026) also reported that FOMO and social comparison did not show significant individual influence after other psychological variables were taken into account in the research model.

These differences indicate that consumer responses to social pressure in digital media are not uniform. Consumption decisions can also be influenced by product knowledge, brand credibility, personal preference, and functional benefit considerations. This finding is consistent with the review of Alfina et al. (2023), which shows that FOMO is related to various antecedents and consumer behavior consequences. Thus, the influence of FOMO needs to be understood based on product context, consumer characteristics, and other variables used in the research model.

Nevertheless, these differences in results cannot be fully interpreted as variation in psychological influence across contexts. It is possible that some findings are affected by methodological limitations, especially small sample sizes and low statistical power. This condition can cause relationships among variables to go undetected as significant. In addition, this review has not applied a formal methodological quality assessment to all included studies. The possibility of publication bias also needs attention because the tendency to publish significant results can cause the available evidence not to fully represent the entire body of research findings. Therefore, differences in results need to be interpreted carefully and not directly used as a basis for determining the dominance of a psychological mechanism.

Other limitations relate to the search scope and synthesis process. The 100 highest-ranked records processed cover only a small portion of the entire OpenAlex search results. The AI-assisted screening and extraction process was checked by the authors but has not been independently replicated by a second assessor. The completeness of methodological reporting in the reviewed articles also varied. In addition, the dominance of cross-sectional survey designs and the use of purchase intention indicators limit this review's ability to explain causal relationships and actual purchase behavior.

Based on these limitations, future research needs to use longitudinal or experimental designs, involve adequate sample sizes, and apply systematic study quality assessment. Measurement of actual purchases and post-consumption sharing behavior is also needed to strengthen understanding of the relationship between social motivation and consumer behavior in digital environments.

4.2.5. Contribution to Consumer Research

This review provides a mapping of the linkages among FOMO, social comparison, materialism, impression management, and social validation in social media-based consumption behavior. The synthesis results show that these constructs are conceptually related but cannot be treated as identical mechanisms. FOMO relates to concern about missing out on opportunities or experiences, social comparison relates to self-evaluation through others, whereas impression management and social validation relate to how individuals form and display their self-image in the social environment.

The main contribution of this review lies in distinguishing among psychological motivation, purchase intention, actual purchase, and post-consumption sharing behavior. This distinction clarifies that each stage of consumption has different characteristics and indicators. These results complement previous FOMO reviews, such as Tandon et al. (2021) and Alfina et al. (2023), by mapping the linkages between social motivation and the stages of consumption behavior. However, this contribution remains at the level of conceptual synthesis and has not produced proof of a new causal relationship model.

Theoretically, the results of this review affirm the need to distinguish consumers' psychological responses from actual behavior. Purchase intention cannot be equated with transaction realization, just as the activity of sharing consumption content does not automatically indicate a need for social validation. The linkage between pre-purchase motivation and post-consumption sharing behavior also still requires empirical testing. Therefore, future research needs to integrate consumer

behavior, social comparison, and self-presentation perspectives through research designs capable of observing behavioral change at each stage of consumption.

From a practical standpoint, marketers need to consider that consumption activity visible on social media does not always reflect consumers' need for social recognition. Marketing strategies that emphasize identity, social proof, urgency, or functional benefits need to be adjusted to consumer characteristics and product categories. Efforts to encourage consumers to share consumption experiences also need to consider the personal values and social meanings underlying that behavior. These implications need to be applied proportionally given that empirical evidence directly linking pre-purchase motivation with post-consumption sharing behavior remains limited.

5. CONCLUSION

The synthesis of 55 studies shows that social media-related consumption behavior cannot be explained solely through FOMO or the need to obtain social recognition. For RQ1, FOMO is related to purchase intention and impulse buying, but the relationship is not always significant and is not sufficient to prove that actual purchases occurred. For RQ2, symbolic consumption can be related to social comparison, impression management, materialism, and status display, but the available evidence is not adequate to ensure that consumption of goods or experiences is always driven by the pursuit of social validation. For RQ3, the relationship between pre-purchase motivation and post-purchase consumption display behavior remains a research gap because few studies have tested both stages simultaneously. For RQ4, the relationship between psychological factors and consumption behavior is influenced by several conditions, including product knowledge, individual characteristics, and functional considerations.

Overall, the main contribution of this review lies in distinguishing between the decision to consume and the decision to display consumption to others. This distinction clarifies that consumption activity visible on social media does not automatically indicate a need for social validation. These findings need to be interpreted by considering the limitations of the search scope, the variation in methodological reporting completeness, and the dominance of research with cross-sectional designs. Therefore, future research needs to directly compare consumption of goods and experiences, measure actual purchase behavior, and test the linkage between pre-purchase motivation and post-consumption self-presentation through longitudinal or experimental designs. This approach is needed to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between social motivation and consumption behavior in social media environments.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest concerning the preparation or publication of this article.

Author Contributions

D.A.L.: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Visualization, Project Administration, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – Review & Editing.
E.H.: Validation, Writing – Review & Editing.

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Data Availability

Records and extraction and synthesis materials supporting this review are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies

During manuscript preparation, JurnalHub and ChatGPT (OpenAI, GPT-6) assisted with initial literature screening, preliminary data extraction, and language editing. The first author [D.A.L.] reviewed, rewrote, and corrected the outputs against accessible source articles. No second reviewer independently verified the screening and extraction. Both authors remain responsible for the accuracy, interpretation, originality, and integrity of the manuscript.

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