

The Impact of FOMO Culture and Digital Social Pressure on the Ethical Behavior of Young Consumers Toward Local Products

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ABSTRACT

The rise of social media and digital culture has reshaped how young consumers make moral decisions, particularly in purchasing local products. The phenomenon of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) has emerged as a psychological driver that fuels impulsive and symbolic consumption among Generation Z. This study aims to analyse the extent to which digital social pressure and FOMO culture influence the ethical behaviour of young consumers when buying local products in the era of algorithmic capitalism. A qualitative conceptual approach was employed through a systematic literature review of relevant studies published between 2020 and 2025. The analysis followed a deductive-thematic process to explore the relationships among intrinsic moral motivation, digital social pressure, and ethical fading in consumer behaviour.

The findings reveal that while ethical awareness toward local products is increasing, social pressure and FOMO culture tend to shift consumers' moral orientation from intrinsic values to extrinsic motivations based on trends and social validation. This phenomenon amplifies the attitude-behaviour gap and indicates a transformation of morality from personal reflection to algorithmic conformity. The study concludes that ethical consumer behaviour in the digital age must be understood as the outcome of an interaction between individual values, technological design, and social media pressure. It recommends enhancing digital moral literacy and encouraging local businesses to build authentic ethical narratives so that young consumers' decisions remain grounded in moral awareness rather than transient digital trends.



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INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of social media and the digital economy has transformed how young consumers interact with products, values, and social identities. Generation Z, who have grown up entirely in an era of limitless connectivity, view social media not merely as a communication space but also as a moral and economic arena where personal and collective values are negotiated. The phenomenon of *Fear of Missing Out* (FOMO) has emerged as a powerful psychological force influencing how consumers make purchasing decisions (Tandon et al., 2020).

In the context of local product consumption, FOMO often triggers impulsive and symbolic buying behaviour. Young consumers purchase not only based on sustainability or ethical awareness but also on the desire to stay relevant within viral trends on platforms such as TikTok and Instagram

(Rizomyliotis et al., 2024)(Flecha-Ortiz et al., 2023). This phenomenon raises an ethical question: to what extent does digital social pressure displace moral reasoning among consumers who claim to support local products?

Recent studies have shown a persistent gap between moral attitudes and actual purchasing behavior – the so-called "attitude-behavior gap." While younger generations express strong concern for sustainability and social responsibility, their real-world decisions are often shaped by external factors such as self-image, social validation, and digital algorithms (Salinero et al., 2022)(Nuhu et al., 2025). Within the fast-paced, popularity-driven ecosystem of digital capitalism, ethical values are at risk of *fading*, as moral considerations diminish under social pressure or hedonic temptation (Bocian et al., 2024).

This trend is particularly relevant in Indonesia, where national campaigns such as **#BanggaBuatanIndonesia** have leveraged social media to promote local pride and ethical consumption. However, a critical question remains are these purchasing behaviours genuinely motivated by moral awareness, or are they primarily driven by the dynamics of digital trends

Therefore, this study seeks to **analyse the extent to which digital social pressure and FOMO culture shape the moral reasoning of young consumers (Gen Z) when purchasing local products**. The analysis focuses on comparing intrinsic moral motivations (such as empathy and social justice) with extrinsic motivations (such as self-image and trend conformity), aiming to provide a conceptual understanding of ethical behaviour in the age of algorithmic capitalism.

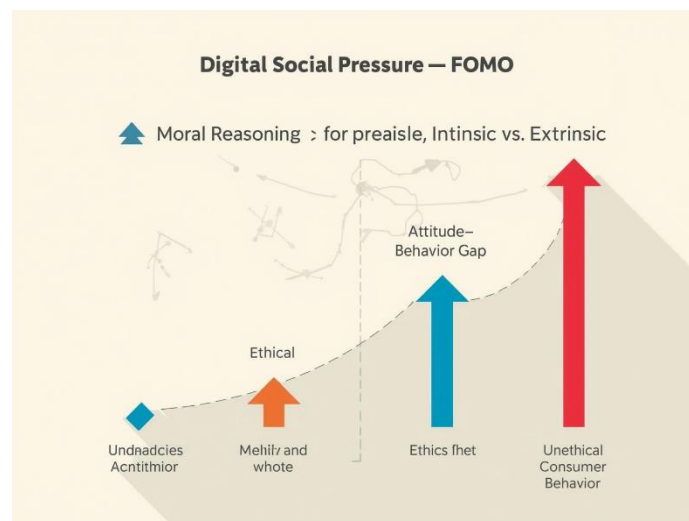


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Impact of FOMO and Digital Social Pressure on Ethical Consumer Behavior

METHOD

This study adopts a conceptual qualitative approach supported by a structured literature review design. Initially, the research was described as a systematic literature review; however, given its conceptual and interpretive orientation, it is more accurate to position it as a conceptual literature review with systematic elements. This clarification ensures methodological consistency between the study's philosophical stance and its analytical process.

The conceptual approach was chosen because the research questions concern ethical reasoning, moral motivation, and digital perception – themes that are inherently normative and value-laden rather than measurable by quantitative means. Therefore, the emphasis of this study lies not in the statistical synthesis of findings but in the theoretical integration and moral interpretation of existing scholarship (Creswell & Creswell, 2017)(Braun & Clarke, 2021).

The data collection process followed a structured literature review procedure involving four main stages:

- Identification – Searching for relevant studies in databases such as Scopus, Google Scholar, and ResearchGate using keywords including “FOMO and ethical consumption,” “Gen Z and social media influence,” and “local product and digital ethics.”
- Screening and Selection – Applying inclusion and exclusion criteria to retain studies focusing on digital consumer ethics, FOMO, and Southeast Asian or Indonesian contexts.
- Categorisation and Thematic Coding – Grouping findings into major analytical dimensions such as digital social pressure, moral motivation, and the attitude–behaviour gap.
- Interpretive Synthesis – Integrating theoretical insights to develop a conceptual model explaining how algorithmic systems, moral values, and social validation interact in shaping ethical consumer behaviour.

Throughout the process, the study employed deductive–thematic analysis, tracing how general ethical theories connect to specific behavioural cases in digital contexts. To maintain credibility and reflexivity, triangulation was performed by comparing insights from empirical studies, theoretical works, and industry reports (Tokopedia Report, 2023; Shopee Insights, 2024). Reflexive analysis also ensured that the researcher’s interpretation remained aware of potential bias and theoretical preconceptions (Noble & Heale, 2019)

By clarifying its position as a conceptual–systematic literature review, this study aims to produce a coherent theoretical framework that connects individual moral values with digital social structures and algorithmic pressures influencing ethical consumer behaviour among Generation Z.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION



Figure 2. Thematic Map of Ethical Consumption in the Digital Era

1. Shifting Consumption Patterns and Ethical Identity among Young Consumers

The synthesis of the reviewed literature reveals that young consumers, particularly Generation Z, construct their social identity through digital consumption. Purchasing behaviour is no longer just an economic act but also a form of *self-expression* and social validation. Most young consumers engage in social media-centric consumption (SMCC), with 84% of respondents indicating that they purchase products primarily to post about them on social media platforms such as TikTok (Shah et al., 2023)

In Indonesia, national campaigns such as #BanggaBuatanIndonesia have strengthened a sense of local pride, yet the motivation behind such behaviour often remains symbolic, reflecting *performative ethics* (Butz, 2009). In other words, consumers display ethical behaviour primarily to gain social validation rather than from genuine moral commitment. This signals a transformation of

morality from substance to digital representation, where being *seen as ethical* becomes more important than *acting ethically*.

2. FOMO Culture and Digital Social Pressure as Drivers of Impulsive Consumption

The culture of *Fear of Missing Out* (FOMO) plays a central role in explaining changes in ethical consumption patterns. According to Tandon et al. (2020), FOMO triggers impulsive buying behaviour as individuals strive to remain relevant within their social groups. In digital spaces, algorithms reinforce this cycle: viral local products experience sudden spikes in sales not because of their ethical value but due to the *exposure effect* generated by recommendation systems (Chaney et al., 2018)(Lyons et al., 2022).

Thus, FOMO operates as a form of digital social conformity, pressuring individuals to follow collective behaviour while suppressing moral reflection. Govind et al. (2019) describe this as *moral displacement*, where ethical reasoning is replaced by emotionally driven decisions shaped by algorithmic environments. Consequently, FOMO becomes not only a psychological phenomenon but also a moral phenomenon, as it shifts decision-making from internal conviction to external social pressure.

3. Ethical Fading in the Digital Economy

The findings also confirm the occurrence of *ethical fading* among young consumers. Continuous exposure to promotional content and social validation blurs moral sensitivity. (Hochstein et al., 2024) describe this as a “decline in ethical awareness caused by the normalisation of consumerist behaviour.”

In Indonesia’s digital context, ethical fading manifests in three forms:

1. Social rationalisation: buying viral products is justified because “everyone else is doing it.”
2. Moral delegation to influencers: assuming that if influencers endorse a local brand, it must be ethical (Ortová et al., 2023).
3. Trend normalisation: shifting moral loyalty from one brand to another based on fleeting digital popularity.

These findings indicate that digital social pressure not only reshapes economic decisions but also challenges the moral foundation of individual agency in the digital space.

4. The Attitude–Behaviour Gap

Prior and recent studies consistently highlight a significant *attitude–behaviour gap* among young consumers. While they claim to support sustainability and local products, actual behaviour tends to be driven by aesthetics, trendiness, and social prestige.

(Zollo, 2024) argue that this gap stems from the conflict between two moral systems:

- Intrinsic morality (individualising foundations): driven by empathy, fairness, and social responsibility.
- Extrinsic morality (binding foundations): driven by loyalty, social recognition, and conformity.

FOMO strengthens extrinsic morality by making individuals seek belonging and validation from their digital peers, even if it means compromising their ethical values. Consequently, the *attitude–behaviour gap* widens in the context of algorithmic consumerism.

5. Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study reinforces that ethical consumerism in the digital age cannot be understood solely as an individual moral choice but rather as a dynamic outcome of interactions among personal values, social environments, and technological systems. In other words, morality today is mediated by digital design and platform architecture.

Practically, the findings offer two key implications:

1. For local businesses: Building an *authentic ethical narrative* is crucial – emphasizing transparency, sustainability, and social impact rather than relying solely on viral trends.
2. For policymakers and educators: There is an urgent need to promote *digital moral literacy* among young consumers, helping them distinguish between *ethical signalling* and *ethical action*.

Understanding these dynamics will enable society to foster consumption that is value-driven rather than trend-driven, where ethical awareness remains central amid the noise of digital capitalism.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that digital culture and the phenomenon of *Fear of Missing Out* (FOMO) have become new social forces shaping the moral behaviour of young consumers. Within the context of local product consumption, FOMO and social media pressure have contributed to a moral shift from intrinsic moral orientations, such as empathy, justice, and social responsibility, to extrinsic motivations, centred on social validation, viral trends, and self-image.

This transformation amplifies the attitude-behaviour gap in ethical consumption. Although young consumers express strong concern for sustainability and local economic support, their actual purchasing decisions often fail to align with these values. Algorithms, influencer marketing, and the culture of digital conformity foster conditions for *ethical fading*, in which moral awareness weakens under the weight of social approval and instant gratification.

Conceptually, the study expands the understanding that consumer ethics in the digital era cannot be viewed solely as an individual attribute but must be seen as the product of interaction between moral values, technological systems, and algorithmic pressures. Morality today is not formed in isolation but mediated through social media dynamics that privilege speed, popularity, and exposure over reflection and responsibility.

For local entrepreneurs, these findings highlight the importance of developing authentic ethical narratives emphasising transparency, fairness, and genuine social contributions rather than short-lived viral trends. For educators and policymakers, the study underscores the urgency of embedding digital moral literacy into educational frameworks, enabling younger generations to navigate social media pressures with greater ethical awareness.

Ultimately, the central challenge in the age of algorithmic capitalism lies not only in how products are marketed but in how humans sustain their capacity for moral reasoning and ethical action within an environment dominated by immediacy and competition. Nurturing moral consciousness in digital spaces is not merely a technological task; it is a collective social responsibility.

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