# How FOMO and the Pursuit of Individuality Influence Generation Z's Consumer Purchasing Behaviors in the Age of Social Media

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**Abstract**

Generation Z is characterized both as a cohort driven by the fear of missing out (FoMO) and as one committed to individuality. These two orientations have mainly been studied separately, and how they interact within individual consumers has not been examined for this generation's fashion and lifestyle purchasing. This thesis addresses that gap with a mixed-methods design combining a standardized online survey (n = 43) with eight semi-structured interviews. The survey establishes that the two orientations coexist. FoMO and the pursuit of individuality correlate positively ($r$ = .39), and no respondent combined pronounced FoMO with a weak pursuit of individuality. The interviews show how this coexistence is managed. FoMO appears as bounded, product-specific episodes rather than a constant state. The same visibility that builds desire for a trend devalues it once a saturation point is passed. Participants manage the resulting tension not through a fundamental decision for one side, but purchase by purchase, through appropriation, exit, self-tests, and credibility filters. In retrospective accounts, FoMO declines with age. The findings support the direction of FoMO's reported mediating role between uniqueness-seeking and conformity and indicate that trait-based measurement can miss episodic FoMO.

# 5 Conclusion

## 5.1 Summary of Findings

This thesis set out to answer how FoMO and the pursuit of individuality influence Generation Z's consumer purchasing behaviors in the age of social media. Considered together, the two orientations appeared to be in conflict. FoMO directs attention toward the purchases of others and encourages alignment with them, while the pursuit of individuality pushes toward a personally defined style. Previous research had studied each side separately, and the literature reviewed in this thesis included no study of how the two interact within individual consumers in Generation Z's fashion and lifestyle purchases. To address this gap, the study combined a standardized online survey (n = 43) with eight semi-structured interviews, both drawn from the adult segment of Generation Z. The survey established whether the two orientations coexist within the sampled population, and the interviews examined how participants experience and manage this coexistence in specific purchase decisions. Both strands were analyzed separately and brought together at the interpretation stage.

The first breakout question asked to what extent FoMO shapes the purchasing decisions of Generation Z consumers in fashion and lifestyle categories. On the adapted scale, FoMO scores were low, yet the interviews contain vivid FoMO episodes tied to specific products (section 4.3). These episodes are bounded rather than constant. They begin with a trigger, intensify, and then fade out or recur. Purchases made at the height of an episode often disappoint afterwards, while a missed purchase can later appear fortunate. The distinction between situational and chronic need deficits reconciles the two results. The scale is more likely to capture a chronic disposition, while the episodes represent the situational form (section 4.8). Other explanations for the low scores, including self-report bias and the composition of the

sample, remain open. FoMO shapes purchasing decisions, but as a state that comes and goes with specific products, not as a constant trait of the person.

The second breakout question asked how the pursuit of individuality manifests in these purchasing decisions. In the survey, this pursuit is clearly visible. The individuality block fell in the moderate-to-high range, and the statement on expressing one's identity through purchases received the highest agreement of all items (section 4.2). The interviews specify how it is practiced. Individuality emerges as something participants do rather than something they have. They test whether a liking is genuine, translate trends into formats of their own, and give up liked items once these become too widespread (sections 4.5 and 4.7). At the same time, the findings qualify the image of a uniformly individualistic generation. Where a participant stands between fitting in and standing out differs from person to person and shifts with the situation (section 4.6).

The third breakout question asked how the two orientations relate to each other within individual consumers. Both strands give the same answer. In the survey, FoMO and the pursuit of individuality correlate positively ($r$ = .39), and no respondent combined pronounced FoMO with a weak pursuit of individuality (section 4.2). In the interviews, the same pattern emerges within single episodes. The visibility that builds desire for a trend also devalues it once it spreads too far, often in one and the same person (section 4.4).

Taken together, these answers respond to the central research question of how Generation Z consumers manage the tension between FoMO and the pursuit of individuality in their purchasing decisions. In this sample, they do so not by settling on one side once and for all, but purchase by purchase, through appropriation and exit, self-tests and credibility filters (sections

4.5 and 4.7). These two orientations occur together because the same visibility drives both, pulling consumers into a trend and, past a saturation point, pushing them out again.

### 5.2 Contribution to the Literature

Beyond answering its own questions, this study connects to the literature in three ways. First, the coexistence pattern is consistent with Argan et al. (2022, as cited in Alfina et al. 2023), who identify FoMO as the mediator between the need for uniqueness and conformity-driven consumption. The mediation itself could not be tested with a cross-sectional sample of 43 respondents, but the data support the direction of the finding. Second, the findings give the generational characterizations of Francis and Hoefel (2018) and Goldring and Azab (2021) a behavioral form. What these accounts describe as a desire for uniqueness appears in the data as routines, in which liking is tested and trends are reworked, rather than as taste alone. Third, the results complicate the measurement of FoMO. Scales of this kind capture stable differences between persons and can therefore report low scores even when episodic FoMO is present, a gap that corresponds to Przybylski et al.'s (2013) distinction between situational and chronic deficits.

The literature review proposed self-concept clarity as a possible explanation for this interplay (Mittal 2015). The interviews contain patterns consistent with it. Participants attribute the narrated decline of FoMO to a clearer sense of identity, growing confidence, and their own purchasing power, and uncertain self-presentation turns to external reassurance (section 4.6). The negative cases, however, prevent a stronger conclusion. The study therefore reports patterns consistent with the explanation rather than a confirmed mechanism, and no single construct accounts for both orientations.

## 5.3 Practical Implications

For brands and marketers addressing Generation Z, the findings suggest three things. First, marketing built on scarcity and hype can trigger purchases, but the episodes it sets off carry their own ending. What is bought at their peak often disappoints later, and the desire fades even when nothing is bought (section 4.3). Second, visibility has a saturation point. The same exposure that builds desire begins to devalue a product once it is seen as belonging to everyone, so maximum visibility is a risk rather than an aim, particularly for trend products (section 4.4). Classics are the exception and survive this saturation. Third, participants take part in trends in formats of their own and rank purchase impulses by credibility, with paid advertising and brand-controlled channels at the bottom (sections 4.5 and 4.7). Product lines that leave room for this kind of appropriation, and communication through voices that participants consider credible, match the routines the interviews describe.

## 5.4 Limitations and Future Research

The limitations described in section 3.8 frame these conclusions. Both strands rely on nonprobability samples drawn from the researcher's network, so the findings describe this sample rather than Generation Z as a whole. All data are self-reports collected at a single point in time. The study can therefore establish that the two orientations occur together, but not how they develop or whether one produces the other. The accounts of declining FoMO are retrospective narratives, not observed change.

These limits mark the opening for future research. Studies that follow the same consumers over several years could test whether the narrated decline of FoMO with age holds when development is observed rather than remembered. The same questions can also be carried

to the cohorts that follow. Whether the patterns described here reappear in a generation that grows up with social media from early childhood, and whether the decline of FoMO repeats itself there, would show how far these findings are tied to Generation Z itself. The episodic character of FoMO calls for instruments that capture the feeling in the moment rather than as a general tendency. The mediation reported by Argan et al. remains to be tested for Generation Z with larger samples. Finally, the differentiation logic described here may be category-specific. One observation from the interviews, not pursued further in the analysis, points in this direction. For functional purchases, one participant explained, the prevalence of an item plays no role (P4, 16:09). Whether the dynamics of visibility and exit extend beyond visible fashion and lifestyle categories is therefore an open question.

Within these limits, the central finding stands. FoMO and the pursuit of individuality do not exclude each other. The consumers in this study manage both at once, purchase by purchase.