



FOMO and Conformity Consumption: An Examination of Social Media Use and Advertising Online among Egyptian Millennials

Ayah A. Ezzat, Asser Ezz El Din, Hisham Abdelmoaty

College of Management and Technology-Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport (AASTMT),
Alexandria, Egypt
Email: ayahalaaeldin@gmail.com

How to cite this paper: Ezzat, A.A., El Din, A.E. and Abdelmoaty, H. (2023) FOMO and Conformity Consumption: An Examination of Social Media Use and Advertising Online among Egyptian Millennials. *Open Access Library Journal*, 10: e10279.
<https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1110279>

Received: May 20, 2023

Accepted: June 12, 2023

Published: June 15, 2023

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Abstract

Due to the current increase of social media usage and online advertising, multiple scholars were able to relate this to consumer behavior. This study is done with the aim to investigate the mediating role of FOMO (fear of missing out) and how it intervenes the relationship between social media usage, advertising online, and conformity consumption. The target group of the study is Egyptian Millennials. The researcher collected data from 384 Egyptians from the Millennial group, aging between 25 and 40 in the year 2022, and utilized a quantitative approach that is self-administered surveys. Findings suggest that social media usage and advertising online have a significant positive impact on FOMO, which acts as a mediator between these variables and conformity consumption. Findings of this study hold significant academic and practical implications for marketers, scholars, and policy makers.

Subject Areas

Advertising, Consumer Behavior, Marketing

Keywords

FOMO, Social Media, Online Advertising, Conformity Consumption, Egyptian Millennials

1. Introduction

Recently, the usage of social media platforms and online advertising has become a growing phenomenon all over the globe. Social media platforms were found to

completely revolutionizing in terms of the methods humans use to interact, communicate and consume information, products, experiences and services; it enabled users to look at real-time occasions and events at the time of occurrence, thus, always knowing what others are doing, achieving or consuming [1]. Different platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok and more have created new opportunities for businesses to reach their customers, raise brand awareness and improve customer engagement. In the digital era, businesses have also shifted their focus from traditional marketing strategies to online advertising to attract and retain their customers. Online advertising has enabled advertisers and marketers to effectively reach their target customers and understand their needs and expectations with higher precision and at a lower cost [2]. Social media is now being utilized as a tool to inform customers, gather information about competition, receive feedback, and promote products and services [3].

Egypt is one of many countries where social media has been rapidly adopted by its citizens. According to a report published by [4], the users of social media in Egypt have increased by 13% since 2020, reaching 43 million users in 2021. The report also indicated that Facebook came first in terms of popularity when compared to other social media platforms in Egypt, having more than 33 million active users. Furthermore, the use of online advertising has also been on the rise in Egypt due to the increasing number of internet users and the adoption of e-commerce. In 2020, the total digital ad spending in Egypt was estimated to be worth \$264 million, and it is projected to reach \$385 million by 2025 [5].

The variables social media usage and advertising online are found to have a significant impact on consumer behavior, specifically millennials who happen to be the largest demographic group in Egypt. According to The World Population Review, millennials were found to be 33% of the total Egyptian population [6]. This generation is one of the most to be involved with technologically, thus, are expected to use social media platforms and consume online content more than the majority of the other age groups, which indeed has a significant impact on their consumer behavior, including purchase decision and consumption pattern [7].

The change in consumption patterns and purchasing behavior occurs due to the human need to belong and fit in, humans engage in a conformity behavior. Conformity consumption as a concept could be traced and linked to the bandwagon effect [8]. Conformity consumption is defined as the tendency to follow others' behavior and preferences in consumption decisions [9]. Researchers have linked that to the FOMO phenomena which is a psychological phenomenon that has gained growing attention in recent years, especially in the terms of social media use. FOMO is defined as "the uneasy and sometimes all-consuming feeling that you're missing out, that your peers are doing, in the know about, or in possession of more or something better than you" [10]. FOMO was found to have a significant impact on individuals' behavior, including their social media use and consumption patterns [11].

2. Literature Review

2.1. Social Media Usage

Social media is immensely used by people globally, and even Egyptian millennials are no exception. Social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, have brought about a significant change in how individuals communicate and interact with each other. Social media has the potential to impact consumer behavior and their buying decisions. A study conducted by Chen *et al.* (2022) reveals that social media usage has a positive influence on the purchase intention of consumers. The study found that social media usage can enhance the trust, perception, and purchase intention of consumers towards a product [12].

Individuals today receive a large amount of information on daily basis, and that increases with people who engage in social activities. The growth of social media platforms and widespread of internet enabled people to be heavily depend on their electronic devices as they can now do almost anything with a few taps on their devices' screen. Thus, being always connected, also increased the social media usage amongst humans [13].

In terms of conformity consumption, social media can create a social pressure to follow the consumption patterns of others. People use social media to flaunt their lifestyles, experiences, and possessions, leading to a desire among others to conform to similar lifestyles and experiences [14]. This can result in the phenomenon of FOMO among social media users. Przybylski *et al.* (2013) discovered an unbreakable relationship between social media and FOMO [10]. In addition, social media enables individuals to compare themselves with others, leading to social pressure to conform to the consumption patterns of their peers [11].

Previous studies have discovered a positive relationship exists between social media usage and conformity consumption. For instance, it has been found that social media usage has a significant positive impact on consumers' conformity consumption, particularly in the context of luxury goods [15]. The study demonstrated that social media can create social pressure to conform to the consumption patterns of individuals perceived to be socially desirable.

Other researchers have revealed that social media addiction has a positive impact on FOMO. They suggested that individuals who spend more time on social media are more prone to experience FOMO due to the constant exposure to their peers' experiences and lifestyles [16].

2.2. Online Advertising

In this digital era, businesses have diverted their efforts from traditional marketing and started relying on online advertising strategies with the aim of attracting and retaining customers. With its growing use, online advertising has evolved to become one of the most powerful and essential tools used by businesses seeking to efficiently reach the target customers. This shift of online advertising has had its impact on purchasing decisions and consumption patterns.

The American Marketing Association has defined Advertising as “*The placement of announcements and messages in time or space by business firms, non-profit organizations, government agencies, and individuals who seek to inform and/or persuade members of a particular target market or audience regarding their products, services, organizations or ideas.*” Advertising has been used as a method to communicate messages, ideas, or information to a large number of their audience. Due to the growing dependability on online advertising and the advancements in social media platforms, advertisers are now able to better understand their customers’ needs and their expectations. Furthermore, it has become easier to track competitors’ platforms and understand their different strategies and communication techniques even more frequently and constantly [2].

Online advertising spending had grown to surpass traditional methods, namely television advertising, by 2016 in the United States [17]. Additionally, according to estimates, nearly 100% of all large organizations (B2B or B2C) will use social media platforms in 2021 to inform their customers, gather information, receive feedback, assist customers by providing after-sale service and consultancy, and finally promote their products and services to customers. [3].

Marketers and brands use FOMO in their online advertising strategies by exploiting the fear of missing out on their products or deals. They evoke the feeling of FOMO while positioning the products and services in their market offering as the solution to allow their target market to avoid it [18]. According to Hodgkinson (2016) advertising serves as an impersonal commercial method that marketers frequently use to elicit FOMO [19].

The consumption behavior of consumers can be influenced by online advertising through creating social pressure to conform to the consumption patterns of different individuals. By providing a platform for businesses to showcase their products and services, online advertising can create a desire in consumers to conform to similar consumption patterns, as well as a sense of urgency and scarcity known as FOMO, as defined by [9]. Studies have shown that online advertising has a positive relationship with conformity consumption; it found that online advertising has a significant positive impact on consumers’ conformity consumption of fashion products by creating a sense of social pressure to conform to the consumption patterns of socially desirable others [20].

2.3. Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

Marketing strategist Dan Herman first introduced the term FOMO in academic papers in 2000. Herman had begun researching consumer attitudes towards various products in 1996 and found that many experienced fear or anxiety about missing out on opportunities and the resulting joy. Based on this observation, Herman developed the consumer psychology concept of FOMO. The popularity of FOMO increased with the advent and widespread use of smartphones and social media platforms in daily life [21].

Humans have a social nature and our desire to belong drives our behavior [22]. FOMO is a term that describes the widespread fear that one will miss out on rewarding things other people are experiencing [10]. FOMO is defined as an uneasy and sometimes overwhelming feeling that others are doing, possessing, or aware of more or better things than oneself [18]. The current generation has a strong desire to stay connected, leading to an excessive reliance on social media to monitor their networks for updates and avoid missing out [23]. However, excessive news from friends and brands on social media can create a feeling of FOMO if users are not up to date on the latest developments [24].

FOMO is a psychological phenomenon that causes anxiety or apprehension from the belief that others are having more enjoyable experiences or opportunities that one is missing out on [10]. Social media is a common source of FOMO as it allows individuals to compare themselves with others [25].

In addition to this, FOMO can influence consumer behavior by creating social pressure to conform to the consumption patterns of peers, leading to a desire to purchase socially desirable products or participate in activities [26]. Studies have revealed a positive association between FOMO and conformity consumption, indicating that FOMO can create a sense of social pressure to conform to others' consumption patterns [25].

2.4. Conformity Consumption

How human beings respond in terms of their consumption choices is often influenced by their aim to find balance between fitting in with their social groups and maintaining a sense of oneself, all while pursuing both prestige and self-actualization [26]. Multiple study disciplines, including psychology, sociology, neuroscience, and marketing have attempted to understand the topic of conformity and its motivators. Social psychologists were able to prove that individuals often conform to the behaviors and beliefs of their surrounding groups and communities, and this has led to conformity becoming a critical variable in understanding social influence [15]. Conformity, also known as herd or collective behavior, is a type of psychological behavior that involves individuals obeying the opinions and behaviors of the majority in a group [27].

The bandwagon effect, which refers to the increased demand for a commodity due to others consuming it, is a form of conformity consumption [8]. This behavior is often driven by the desire for social approval, success, and belonging [28] [29].

It was discovered that consumers can be influenced by their close circle members' likes, appraisals, or consumption of a product on social media, even if they have no intention of clicking on an advertising message or reading sponsored content. This suggests that social conformity is a significant factor that affects consumers' purchase decisions [30]. Ou *et al.* (2022) proposed that conformity consumers can be classified into two groups: the first group consists of consumers who lack interest and knowledge about a product, but are motivated by the fear of missing out on their social circle, the second group, on the other

hand, has a specific demand for a product, but their brand choice is based on the commonly used brand among their group members instead of evaluating each product's specifications [27].

The influence of FOMO and its impact on conformity consumption has been investigated by Argan *et al.* (2022) who have revealed in their findings that consumer-centric FOMO is a trigger that influences conformity consumption. Their findings suggest that marketers and practitioners have the ability to strategically utilize FOMO and be able to reach consumers prone to engage in the conformity consumption behavior [26].

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Questions

The main purpose of the study is to understand and analyze the role of FOMO in mediating the relationship between social media usage, online advertising, and conformity consumption among Egyptian millennials. The researcher aims to answer the following research questions in precise terms:

- RQ1. Does social media usage trigger FOMO on Egyptian Millennials?
- RQ2. Does advertising online trigger FOMO on Egyptian Millennials?
- RQ3. What's the effect of the informative aspect of advertising online on Egyptian Millennials consumer behavior?
- RQ4. What's the effect of the entertaining aspect of advertising online on Egyptian Millennials consumer behavior?
- RQ5. What's the effect of the irritating aspect of advertising online on Egyptian Millennial's consumer behavior?
- RQ6. What is Fear of Missing Out and how it affects Egyptian Millennials' conformity consumption?
- RQ7. Does triggering FOMO through online advertising yield a positive or negative outcome both on the brands and consumers?

3.2. Sample and Data Collection

The researcher's main group of interest, or the population of the study, is Egyptian millennials, with an age ranging between 25 and 40. The sample is selected through a non-probability sampling technique, specifically based on convenience. This occurs when respondents are found to be at right place on the right time. Consequentially, the questionnaire was distributed on social media platforms including Facebook and Twitter, Participants were informed about the purpose of the study. The purpose of the study was declared to participants. Additionally, consent from those who participated in the survey was obtained prior to participation.

The questionnaire was left open until the target of 384 respondents was met. The size is determined according to Sekaran and Bougie (2016) who stated that the maximum number of respondents is 384 for a sample of more than 1,000,000 in their book *Research Methods for Business* [31].

3.3. Measures

The questionnaire consisted of five sections: demographics which collected data on the participants' age, gender, education level, and income. Social media usage which measured the participants' frequency of social media usage, duration of social media usage per day, and the number of social media platforms used. Online advertising measured the participants' exposure to online advertising, the type of online advertising they encounter, and their attitudes towards online advertising. FOMO identified the different levels of FOMO faced by respondents. Finally, conformity consumption section measured the participants' conformity consumption behaviors.

The measures used in this study were adopted from previous scholars as follows (**Table 1**):

Social Media Usage: Social media usage was measured using the Social Media Usage Scale developed by Al-Menayes (2016) [32]. The scale consists of twelve items that measure the frequency of social media usage, the emotional and psychological consequences of social media usage, and the extent to which social media usage interferes with daily life.

Online Advertising: Online advertising is measured using the Attitude Toward Online Advertising Scale developed by Cheng *et al.* (2009) [33]. The scale consists of twelve items that measure consumers' attitudes toward online advertising, including their perceptions of the credibility, informativeness, and entertainment value of online advertising.

Conformity Consumption: Conformity consumption is measured using the Conformity to Consumption Norms Scale developed by Bearden *et al.* (1989) [34]. The scale consists of nine items that measure the extent to which individuals conform to the consumption patterns of their peers.

FOMO: FOMO is measured using the Fear of Missing Out Scale developed by Przybylski *et al.* [10]. The scale consists of ten items that measure the extent to

Table 1. Questionnaire development.

Variable	Article Title	Year	Authors
Social Media Usage	The Fear of Missing out Scale: Validation of the Arabic Version and Correlation with Social Media Addiction.	2016	Al-Menayes, J.
Advertising Online	Consumer attitudes and interactive digital advertising	2009	Cheng, J., Blankson, C., Wang, E. and Chen, L
FOMO	Motivational, emotional, and behavioral correlates of fear of missing out.	2013	Przybylski, A., Murayama, K., DeHaan, C. and Gladwell, V
Conformity Consumption	Measurement of Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence.	1989.	Bearden, W., Netemeyer, R. and Teel, J

which individuals experience anxiety or apprehension due to the belief that others are having more enjoyable experiences or opportunities.

3.4. Research Framework and Hypothesis

The conceptual model is a graphical depiction of the concepts, variables, and relationships introduced in a research study. It can be created at any point during the research process. The conceptual model provides a clear and concise picture of the research, which can be used to communicate the research to others and to ensure that the research stays on track (Figure 1).

Previous researchers have suggested that FOMO may act as a mediator in the relationship between social media usage and consumer behavior. Buglass *et al.* (2017) discovered that increased connectivity and constant exposure to social media updates fuels FOMO [35]. As a result, social media has been described as “like kerosene on FOMO’s fire” [36]

Similarly, FOMO could act as a mediator in the relationship between online advertising and conformity consumption. Marketers have used social media to stay seen by their consumers at all times, a matter which increased both establishing anxiety and FOMO in their communication techniques, then practitioners were able to position their products as the solvent to the problem [37]. Further studies have revealed that that using FOMO in advertising strategies can stimulate bandwagon consumption behavior, also referred to as conformity consumption, and help users feel the sense of belonging and overcome anxiety of missing out [8]. Furthermore, it was discovered that FOMO mediates the relationship between social media usage and overall life satisfaction, thus, with the increase of social media usage, FOMO increases and life satisfaction decreases due to the feeling that consumers are missing out on something, pushing consumers to find a way to increase satisfaction through consuming or experiencing what they are missing out on [10].

The research model outlines a number of hypotheses that are being tested in the study:

H1: *There’s a positive relationship between social media usage and the feeling of FOMO.*

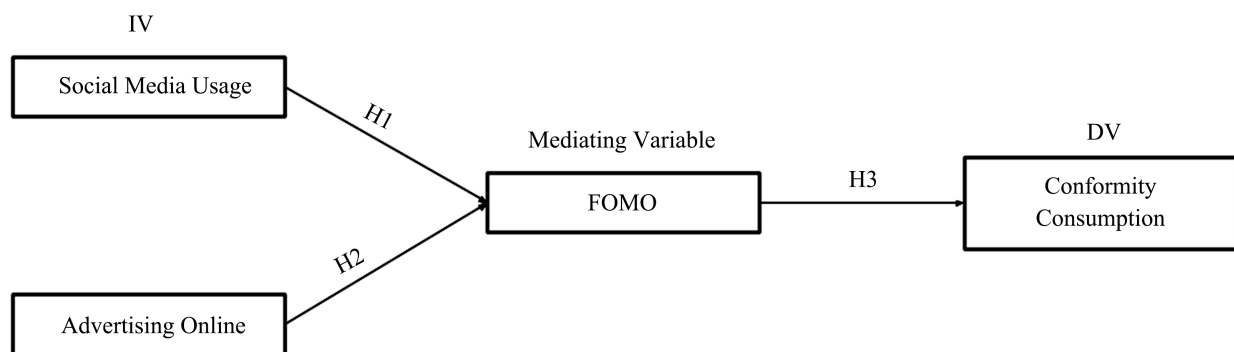


Figure 1. Research framework.

H2: *There's a positive relationship between advertising online and the feeling of FOMO.*

H3: *There's a positive relationship between FOMO and Conformity Consumption.*

4. Data Analysis

Prior to distribution, a non-probability sample of 40 respondents completed a pilot survey to assess the questionnaire's reliability and validity. Minor changes were made to improve reliability; a few statements were excluded from the survey to enhance the reliability. The final survey was then distributed online, the correlation, and regression were also used to test the proposed hypothesis and framework. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used to test 384 questionnaires distributed online.

4.1. Scale Reliability

The reliability of an analysis is used to indicate the "goodness" of a measure or scale; it demonstrates the level or degree of consistency and stability with no bias to items in a measure [31]. Following the pilot survey, the questionnaire was adjusted, and the reliability scores were shown from the distributed survey are presented in **Table 2**.

The scores of Cronbach's α reached are indicators that the questionnaire is of high reliability due to being able to achieve high internal consistency. A measure is normally accepted if it reaches a Cronbach's α of 0.70 or above.

The survey used in this study has fallen in the accepted range, and the variables have shown the following results in terms of reliability: Social Media Usage has reached a Cronbach's α score of 0.793 with 7 items in the scale. Advertising Online has reached a Cronbach's α , a score of 0.738 with 10 items in the scale. FOMO has reached a Cronbach's α score of 0.849 with 9 items in the scale. Finally, Conformity Consumption has reached a Cronbach's α score of 0.879 with 8 items in the scale.

4.2. Correlation Analysis

Statisticians use correlation in order to determine and evaluate the strength of a relationship between variables in a study. The study uses correlation to test the hypothesis.

Table 2. The reliability analysis of studied variables.

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's α
Social Media Usage	7	0.793
Advertising Online	10	0.738
FOMO	9	0.849
Conformity Consumption	8	0.879

Table 3 demonstrates the r Pearson value (Correlation Coefficient) between Social Media Usage and FOMO, as well as that of Advertising Online and FOMO.

Social Media Usage and FOMO have shown a correlation coefficient with a value of (0.610**) and significance at (0.01), indicating that there is a positive and significant relationship between FOMO and social media. According to the findings presented in **Table 4**, H1 is accepted, and there is a positive significant relationship between Social Media Usage and FOMO.

H1: There's a positive relationship between social media usage and the feeling of FOMO.

Regarding Advertising Online, the r Pearson value between FOMO and Advertising Online was found to be (0.401**) and significant at (0.01), indicating that FOMO and Advertising Online have a positive and significant relationship. As a result, we can accept the hypothesis implying a positive relationship between Online Advertising and FOMO.

H2: There's a positive relationship between advertising online and the feeling of FOMO.

A second correlation test was performed to understand the relationship between the mediating variable (FOMO) and the dependent variable (Conformity Consumption).

In **Table 4**, the r Pearson value between FOMO and Conformity Consumption was (0.603**) and significant at (0.01), indicating a positive and significant relationship between FOMO and social media. Based on the results shown in the table, H3 can be accepted (5).

H3: There's a positive relationship between FOMO and Conformity Consumption.

4.3. Regression Analysis

The study used the stepwise multiple regression analysis to understand the distinct impact and degree of variance between the studied variables.

(**Table 5**) The regression analysis in the case of social media usage shows that the b value was 0.722, the t value was 12.835, and the significance level was 0.01. These findings furthermore indicate that 37.2% of the variance in FOMO can be directly linked to social media usage, which supports the hypothesis that social media has a positive impact on FOMO among Egyptian Millennials.

The research also looked more into the relationship between online advertising and FOMO. The findings of the regression showed that the b value was 0.284, the t value was 5.262, and the significance level was also 0.01. While the results of regression support the hypothesis proposed, the findings indicated that online advertising contributes in only 4.2% of the variance in FOMO.

Table 6 investigates the mediating role of FOMO and shows the association between FOMO and Conformity Consumption. The findings reveal that FOMO has a positive impact on Conformity Consumption, explained by the 36.4% in variance. Additionally, Advertising Online and Social Media Usage have limited

Table 3. The correlation coefficients between FOMO and independent variables.

Variable	r Pearson	Significance
Social Media Usage	0.610**	0.000
Advertising Online	0.401**	0.000

Table 4. The correlation coefficients between FOMO and dependent variable.

Variable	r Pearson	Significance
FOMO	0.603**	0.000

Table 5. The results of stepwise multiple regression between independent variables and FOMO.

Variable	b value	t value	Significance	Explain Variance	
				Unique	Accumulative
Social Media	0.722	12.835	0.000	0.372	0.372
Advertising	0.284	5.262	0.000	0.042	0.414
F value = 134.72**					
R Square = 0.414					

Table 6. The results of Stepwise multiple regression between independent variables and FOMO.

Variable	b value	t value	Significance	Explain Variance	
				Unique	Accumulative
FOMO	0.371	7.699	0.000	0.364	0.364
Advertising	0.282	5.364	0.000	0.052	0.416
Social Media	0.272	4.293	0.000	0.027	0.443
F value = 100.846**					
R Square = 0.443					

direct impact on Conformity Consumption, explaining only 5.2% and 2.7% of its variance, respectively. These findings indicate that FOMO plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between the studied variables.

5. Findings and Conclusion

The aim of this research was to understand the FOMO phenomena and how it could affect Egyptian millennials and lead to conformity consumption. The study focused on understanding the decision-making and consumption behavior of the target group, and to better understand their social media usage behavior

and impact of online advertising on them. The research identified variables influencing millennials to adopt to certain behaviors, brands, and experiences.

The analysis of collected data has revealed that the hypotheses of the researcher are accepted; a positive relationship between social media usage and FOMO was found, indicating increased social media usage leading to increased FOMO. It has been revealed that social media usage alone is responsible for 37.2% of the variance in FOMO. While online advertising can cause FOMO, social media usage has a much greater Influence. Advertising online was found to only account for 4.2% of the variance in FOMO. The study also revealed the mediating effect of FOMO, showing that FOMO is directly related to 36.4% of the variance in conformity consumption. The findings suggest that social media usage is the primary driver for FOMO, and FOMO is the primary driver of Conformity Consumption.

The findings have significant implications for Egyptian marketers and policymakers. As a conclusion, the thesis discusses how social media usage and online advertising can affect the consumption habits of Egyptian millennials, with FOMO acting as a mediator between the independent variables and conformity consumption as the dependent variable. The study reveals three key implications for businesses. Firstly, marketers and advertisers should tailor their campaigns to target FOMO-prone consumers, highlighting the advantages of their product or service and emphasizing the social status that comes with it. Secondly, the study emphasizes the importance of creating an online presence and engaging with customers through social media to increase brand visibility and loyalty among Egyptian millennials, which can lead to higher sales and revenue. Finally, the study stresses the need for companies to understand psychological factors such as FOMO to create more effective marketing campaigns that can result in increased sales and customer satisfaction.

6. Research Limitations

Although the study has limitations, they do not make the study insignificant, and they provide opportunities for further research. One limitation is the use of non-probability convenience sampling, which makes it difficult to generalize the findings to the population. Another limitation is the cross-sectional nature of the data, which captures data at a specific point in time and cannot explain behavior over time or establish cause-and-effect relationships. Additionally, the study relies on questionnaires for data collection, which have limitations such as the potential for misinterpretation and lack of insight into the thought processes and motivations of respondents. Finally, the study focused solely on FOMO and its impact on conformity consumption through social media and online ads among Egyptian Millennials, excluding other variables that could provide insights into cognitive and psychological impacts and post-purchase behavior.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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