



# The Psychology Behind Over-Consumerism and Trend Driven Marketing

Arora S and Rajan G\*

Department of Psychological Sciences, FLAME University, Pune, India

**\*Corresponding author:** Dr. Garima Rajan, Assistant Professor of Psychology, Department of Psychological Sciences, FLAME University, Pune, India, Email: garima.rajan@flame.edu.in

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4874-2228>

Opinion

Volume 8 Issue 4

Received Date: October 11, 2024

Published Date: October 23, 2024

DOI: [10.23880/eoij-16000333](https://doi.org/10.23880/eoij-16000333)

## Opinion

The Stanley Cup - a seemingly ordinary water bottle - recently hit the shelves in India. At first glance, it appears no different from the numerous water bottles already available on the market. However, a closer look at Instagram would reveal that this product has evolved into much more than a functional item. It has now morphed into a symbol of cultural capital. In the United States, this phenomenon reached cult-like status when hundreds of citizens camped outside Walmart stores, desperate to get their hands on this accessory [1]. What caused this shift? Social media platforms like Instagram which transform 'wants' into 'needs' through trend-based marketing. People's perception of their own possessions has begun to change dramatically as a result of influencer culture. The water bottle once considered perfectly functional feels inadequate in comparison to the latest version flaunted in a reel online set to the sound of a trending song. This is the psychological trap of trend-driven consumerism. It takes advantage of cognitive and emotional processes; envy, the fear of missing out (FOMO), and social comparison and leaves consumers feeling unsatisfied with what they have. The Stanley Cup has thus become an archetype of how social media can drive mass consumer behaviour. The result is a cycle of dissatisfaction and consumption, which is fuelled by trend-based marketing.

**Keywords:** Consumer; Market; Fear; Psychological Factors; Material

## Understanding Consumer Culture

In today's consumerism culture, consumption is not limited to its utilitarian function anymore. It has become

an extension of one's personal identity and self-worth [2]. Individuals often define themselves through the products they possess [2]. No one purchases iPhones to purely gain a technological advantage. Owning an iPhone is a lifestyle and a status marker. Karl Marx's [3] 'commodity fetishism' (where the value of a product is elevated beyond its practical use, and individuals focus on the item itself rather than the human labour and social relations that produced it), has never been more relevant. People become more concerned with the symbolic meanings attached to commodities (this can be status, luxury, and exclusivity) rather than considering the human implications of production. The latest iPhone in your hand is fetishized not for its technical capabilities, but for the status it confers.

This is further leveraged by global markets using social media. Platforms like Instagram flood users with an endless stream of products and create a cycle of consumption and dissatisfaction [4]. We are led to believe that purchasing these goods will bring us closer to happiness. You might think that acquiring an overpriced, celebrity-endorsed, niche-scented candle might offer a fleeting distraction from your demanding job. However, this pursuit of material satisfaction is more often than not elusive; as the pressure to keep up with trends leaves us feeling perpetually unsatisfied.

## The Psychology of Trend-Based Marketing

Employing the psychological factors that frequently influence our decisions without our awareness, trend-based marketing wins. Social proof, or the idea that we look to others to decide what's desirable or acceptable, is one of its most effective tools. Social networking sites like Instagram also serve to amplify this effect [5]. These influencers are

marketing lifestyles rather than just mere products. When they post about the latest must-have item, that product instantly transforms from ordinary to aspirational. This is because people see others embracing it, and suddenly, it becomes a marker of popularity. This desire is deeply connected to the human need for social belonging, where material goods become markers of inclusion in specific social or cultural groups. Social media and advertising further amplify this by presenting curated lifestyles where ownership of certain products equates to social success.

Jin, et al. [6] study demonstrates the power of influencers- especially micro-influencers. Compared to established celebrities, these smaller-scale influencers are frequently seen as more trustworthy and relatable. They feel more intimately connected to their fans as a result. Their posts evoke stronger sentiments of social presence and, most importantly, envy. Their fans get the impression that they are a part of a select few that is “in the know” when they support a product. This increases the desire to get hold of whatever it is they are pushing. These influencers, in a manner, give their followers the impression that they, too, can lead that lifestyle by purchasing the same goods. What we don't realise is that the latter is a carefully curated faux narrative. Moreover, Ackerman, MacInnis, and Folkes' [7] study on consumer dissatisfaction corroborates this dynamic. People's happiness with their possessions decreases once they perceive others as owning better versions. Trend-based marketing thrives on this envy.

FOMO, or the ‘Fear of Missing Out,’ is another psychological hook that trend-based marketing exploits for its own gain. FOMO has become a near-constant presence in our lives since the advent of social media, and it drives us to keep up with the newest trends in order to prevent feeling left out of the experiences that others seem to be having. FOMO, or fear of missing out on something amazing, is a persistent feeling that makes us want to keep up with what other people are up to Przybylski. Social media marketing capitalises on this anxiety by fostering a sense of immediacy. Everybody has been through the Instagram flash sale where the influencer tells you to ‘act fast’ before the item sells out. It is designed to make people feel that they do not buy the product, you are missing out on being part of an experience that everyone else is already having.

This fear of falling behind also shows up in the relentless push for product upgrades. Anxiety is fuelled by the introduction of new limited-edition versions in areas such as technology, fashion, and even beauty. Following these trends turns into more than just want the newest thing—it is additionally about avoiding the social discomfort of being seen as ‘out of touch.’ Hence, FOMO fuels ostentatious consumption- the desire to purchase items not only for

their intended use but also as a way to flaunt one's status [8]. Consumers are purchasing more than just goods; they are purchasing a sense of community and an assurance that they will not fall behind. These psychological triggers are the vitality of trend-based marketing, which turns consumption into a psycho-social game.

## The Psychological Impacts of Over-Consumerism

Over-consumerism does not just affect our wallets, it also takes a toll on our mental health. Constant exposure to social media trends and influencers creates a culture of comparison. Self-worth thus becomes contingent on ownership. This leads to anxiety, stress, and a persistent feeling of dissatisfaction [9]. The pressure to keep up with the latest trends is further overwhelming, making it increasingly difficult to escape the cycle of wanting more. For many, consumerism becomes a way to cope with deeper emotional struggles. Shopping offers a brief escape; it is a temporary rush that distracts from feelings of loneliness, stress, or insecurity. For others, the act of buying is less about the product and more about seeking comfort in an uncertain world. This relief, however, is short-lived. As soon as the initial thrill fades, the cycle starts again. In extreme cases, this behaviour resembles addiction. The fleeting pleasure of a new purchase leads to a cycle of wanting more [10]. To break free, one must embrace mindful consumption, focusing on emotional well-being rather than status-driven purchases [11].

## Conclusion

Are we truly content with this never-ending search for products and trends, or are we just trapped in a never-ending cycle of discontent? It's past due that we reevaluated how we view consumption. Rather than continuously pursuing status via material belongings, one could strive for more thoughtful consumption; a style of life where mental health takes precedence over compliance to trends. One way to do this is by practising intentional buying. Ask yourselves if you truly need something before purchasing it. Moreover, limiting social media exposure and focusing on meaningful experiences over material goods can also help. We can resist our temptation to always own the newest thing and reflect on what actually fulfils us by growing more cognizant of why we buy what we do.

## References

1. Demopoulos A (2024) Stanley cups took the world by storm. Then the backlash began. *The Guardian*.
2. Bauman Z (2007) *Consuming life*. Polity Press, Cambridge, UK.

3. Marx K (1867/1976) *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy. The Process of Capitalist Production* Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, UK, 1.
4. Polanyi K (1944) *The great transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. New York.
5. Amblee N, Bui T (2011) Harnessing the Influence of Social Proof in Online Shopping: The Effect of Electronic Word of Mouth on Sales of Digital Microproducts. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce* 16(2): 91-114.
6. Jin SV, Muqaddam A, Ryu E (2019) Instafamous and social media influencer marketing. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning* 37(5): 567-579.
7. Ackerman D, MacInnis D, Folkes V (2000) Social comparisons of possessions: When it feels good and when it feels bad. *Advances in Consumer Research* 27: 173-178.
8. Argan M, Argan MT, Aydınoğlu NZ, Özer A (2022) The delicate balance of social influences on consumption: A comprehensive model of consumer-centric fear of missing out. *Personality and Individual Differences* 194: 111638.
9. Sweeting H, Hunt K, Bhaskar A (2012) Consumerism and well-being in early adolescence. *Journal of Youth Studies* 15(6): 802-820.
10. Rosenthal EC (2006) *The era of choice: The ability to choose and its transformation of contemporary life*. MIT Press, Cambridge, UK, pp: 336.
11. Campbell D (2018) *The romantic ethic and the spirit of modern consumerism*. Singer, Blackwell, London, UK.