How social media usage and the fear of missing out impact minimalistic consumption

Fang-Chi Lu
Department of Management and Marketing, The University of Melbourne,
Parkville, Australia, and

Jayati Sinha
Department of Marketing and Logistics,
Florida International University, Miami, Florida, USA

Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to examine the influence of social media usage (SMU) on minimalist consumption and how the fear of missing out (FoMO) underlies this effect.

Design/methodology/approach – Four preregistered correlational/experimental studies (n = 1,763) are used. A pilot study (n = 436) examines the correlations between SMU, FoMO and minimalism. Studies 1 (n = 409), 2 (n = 415) and 3 (n = 503) further investigate the influence of SMU on minimalist consumption intentions, including mindful purchase, forgoing free products and decluttering, and test for evidence of mediation via FoMO by measuring or manipulating FoMO.

Findings – The results show that a high SMU makes consumers susceptible to FoMO, leading to impulsive purchases and careless product acquisition. However, when campaigners promote minimalism as a social media movement, they can activate FoMO, persuading consumers to practice decluttering.

Research limitations/implications – Future research might examine how subjective age affects FoMO and minimalist consumption tendencies. Could campaigners use young social cues to make older consumers more susceptible to FoMO appeals? Could old social cues cause younger consumers to perceive greater social responsibility and to embrace minimalist consumption?

Practical implications – Minimalist lifestyles can promote sustainable consumption. This research provides insights into how SMU is a double-edged sword – it can cause FoMO users to disdain minimalism. However, it can promote minimalism if a minimalist campaign is strategically positioned as a social media movement using a FoMO-laden appeal.

Originality/value – Extant consumer behavior research on minimalism has just begun to investigate the antecedents of minimalist consumption. FoMO is conceptually related to minimalism, but the relationship between FoMO and minimalist consumption has not yet been empirically tested. This research fills these gaps by examining SMU and the associated FoMO as antecedents of minimalist consumption. Empirical evidence for the impact of SMU on various minimalist consumption behaviors and the mediating role of FoMO is provided.

Keywords Consumer minimalism, Fear of missing out, Minimalist consumption, Social media usage

Paper type Research paper

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1. Introduction

Minimalism is a consumer mindset that embraces mindful acquisition of few material possessions to focus on what matters most (Kang et al., 2021; Wilson and Belezza, 2022). Minimalism promotes purpose-based, mindful consumption, which contributes to the reduced consumption of goods (Martin-Woodhead, 2021; Zafar, 2022). The nascent minimalist movement suggests a promising solution to a more sustainable future (Davies et al., 2020), which represents one of the prevailing socio-political challenges nowadays. Indeed, only about 17% of consumers in the USA recognize the threats overconsumption poses to sustainability and consequently restrain their consumption (Ballard, 2019). Considering the gravity of the problem and the important implications that minimalism on sustainability, understanding what drives minimalism assumes great significance.

Extant consumer behavior research on minimalism has just begun to investigate the antecedents of minimalist consumption. In the current research, we identify one such factor – social media usage (SMU) and unravel its influence on minimalist consumption.

Social media have infiltrated nearly 60% of the global population (Statista, 2022) and nearly 72% of Americans spend approximately 20% of their online time on social media (Pew Research, 2021). Frequent SMU increases hedonic consumption desires (Djafarova and Bowes, 2021; Kozinets et al., 2017) and reduces mindfulness and mental clarity (Sriwilai and Charoensukmongkol, 2016). Moreover, higher usage of social media increases levels of fear of missing out (FoMO) (Buglass et al., 2017; Elhai et al., 2020; Tandon et al., 2021), an essential fear of not being part of rewarding experiences that others have (Przybylski et al., 2013). FoMO motivates consumers to act on hedonic temptations and relax self-regulation (Keinan and Kivetz, 2008), leading to careless consumption or overconsumption (Dinh and Lee, 2022; Good and Hyman, 2020). FoMO has become a new buzzword in business (Lokhande, 2022). Advertisers often use FoMO to evoke innate loss aversion and prompt consumers to buy (Dinh and Lee, 2022; Good and Hyman, 2020; Xi et al., 2022). Considering the potential counterforce that increased SMU and the consequent elevated FoMO have on sustainability, it is imperative to understand the interplay between SMU, FoMO and minimalism.

In this investigation, we examine minimalism as a consumer value dimension that influences consumption decisions regarding product acquisition, retention and disposal. We explore SMU, frequency of using various social media features (Dempsey et al., 2019), as an antecedent to minimalist consumption. We demonstrate that SMU is positively associated with FoMO, which lowers consumer willingness to adopt minimalism. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to bridge the literature on FoMO and minimalism to advance our understanding of how FoMO affects consumption. Although public interest in both minimalism and FoMO has been rising steadily and FoMO is conceptually related to minimalism, the relationship between FoMO and minimalism has not yet been empirically tested. In addition, empirical research on the antecedents of minimalist consumption is scant. Except for a few recent studies identifying situations or environments that promote interest in minimalism, extant research has primarily focused on conceptualization and consequences of minimalism. The current research uncovers the antecedent role of SMU and the mediating role of FoMO on minimalist consumption.

Our findings not only advance knowledge in these burgeoning research areas but also provide practical implications on interventions that could encourage sustainable consumption. Minimalism has positive influence on sustainability (Kang et al., 2021; Martin-Woodhead, 2021; Zafar, 2022). By understanding that SMU and FoMO drive minimalism, this research offers pragmatic insights for marketers and policymakers on how to leverage social media and FoMO appeal to promote minimalist and sustainable consumption.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature on minimalist consumption, SMU and FoMO. We then present a conceptual framework and two hypotheses in Section 3 and report the findings across four studies in
Section 4 through Section 7. Finally, in Section 8 we discuss the theoretical and policy implications and outline future research opportunities.

2. Conceptual development

2.1 Minimalist consumption

Google Trends data regarding the most frequent word searches indicate that the last decade has seen an increased worldwide interest in the concept of *minimalism*. Specifically, within the realm of shopping, the global popularity index of minimalism culminated in a score of nearly 100 in 2021 from a score below 40 in 2012 (Web Appendix S1), suggesting a noteworthy and sustained upward trend in the pursuit of minimalistic shopping. Despite the popularity of minimalistic lifestyles and designs, the concept only received academic attention recently. As summarized in Table 1, the focus of extant research on consumer minimalism has primarily been the conceptualization and development of scales, the investigation of consumers’ responses to minimalist design and the exploration of its effect on consumer well-being. For example, Kang *et al.* (2021) proposed a hierarchical minimalism structure that consists of distinct but related consumer behavioral representations: clutter removal, cautious shopping, longevity and self-sufficiency. Consistently, Wilson and Belezza (2022) suggested that minimalism is a consumption value in which consumers seek mindful acquisitions, limit possessions to a few curated acquisitions and prefer sparse aesthetics. In contrast, Pangarkar *et al.* (2021) broadly defined minimalism in consumption as voluntary simplicity, reduced consumption, anti-consumption and inconspicuous minimalism.

In this research, we define minimalism as a mindset that embraces mindful acquisition and possession of few material possessions to pursue purpose-driven lives, consistent with the one by Kang *et al.* (2021). We consider minimalism to be a construct distinct from voluntary simplicity and anti-consumption. Although both minimalism and voluntary simplicity emphasize the need to reduce material consumption and accumulation, environmental and sociopolitical orientations are the core values for voluntary simplicity but not necessary for minimalism (Elgin and Mitchell, 1977; Kang *et al.*, 2021; Matte *et al.*, 2021). Minimalism is also different from anticonsumption, which characterizes the active avoidance of consumption and complete detachment from consumerism (Kang *et al.*, 2021; Lee *et al.*, 2009). Specifically, we study minimalism as a consumer value dimension that guides consumption decisions on product acquisition, retention and disposal.

Extant research supports the impact of minimalism on consumer behavior and well-being. When consumers adopt minimalism, they make voluntary choices to embrace simple, sustainable living (Martin-Woodhead, 2021), acquire only essential possessions, practice mindful retention and avoid waste (Kang *et al.*, 2021). They pay close attention to the quality and longevity of purchases (Bardey *et al.*, 2022; Wilson and Belezza, 2022), prefer experiential consumption (Matte *et al.*, 2021) and are more likely to be concerned with ethical and environmental issues (Liu *et al.*, 2019; Mathras and Hayes, 2019; Martin-Woodhead, 2021). Unlike materialistic consumers, minimalist consumers exhibit autonomy, competence and awareness (Lloyd and Pennington, 2020); experience greater happiness, life satisfaction and well-being (Fu *et al.*, 2023; Jain *et al.*, 2023; Malik and Ishaq, 2023; Shafqat *et al.*, 2023); and lesser stress and depression (Bardey *et al.*, 2022; Kang *et al.*, 2021).

The application of minimalism, specifically minimalist design, is gaining popularity in marketing. Minimalist package design signals to consumers that the product contains few ingredients and creates a perception of purity, leading to higher willingness to pay (Ton *et al.*, 2023). Consumers with lower socioeconomic status less favor brands using minimalist appeals due to their higher preference for quantity versus quality (Chen and Liu, 2023). Recent research has identified several situational factors that trigger preference for minimalist design. For instance, consumers tend to prefer food packages with minimalist aesthetics when a start (vs end) temporal landmark is salient due to lower need for arousal...
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<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Key variables</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Key findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To and Patrick, 2017</td>
<td>IV = minimalist (vs maximalist) packaging designs; DV = self-brand connection; moderator = power</td>
<td>Experiment</td>
<td>Low (high)-power consumers showed greater self-brand connection when a packaging design featured maximalist (minimalist) aesthetics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liu, Yildirim and Zhang, 2019</td>
<td>IV = minimalistic consumption of luxury; DV = signal of wealth</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>The authors derived the minimalist luxury equilibrium and showed that when high-quality counterfeits exist, the wealthy may purposefully restrain from consumption of luxury goods to separate themselves from the mimickers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathras and Hayes, 2019</td>
<td>IV = minimalism; DV = identity curation</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>The process of becoming minimalistic consumer is a three-phase identity curation process, including (1) defining the present self; (2) maintaining focus on the present self during dispossession, retention and acquisition decisions; and (3) actively maintaining one’s collection of “just enough” possessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eckmann and Landwehr, 2020</td>
<td>Minimalism in material possessions (MMP)</td>
<td>Scale development</td>
<td>The authors developed a scale that measures consumers’ preference for a low quantity of material possessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lloyd and Pennington, 2020</td>
<td>IV = minimalism; DV = well-being</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Minimalism (low-consumption lifestyle) provided various well-being benefits, including autonomy, competence, mental space, awareness and positive emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliveira de Mendonca, Rocha, and Tayt-son, 2021</td>
<td>Development path of minimalists</td>
<td>Netnography; Cultural texts analysis; Interviews</td>
<td>Consumers become minimalists through a nonlinear process including awakening, learning, transformation and adaption, while subjecting to external barriers and personal constraints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hook et al., 2021</td>
<td>IV = voluntary simplicity/ minimalism; DV = well-being; mediator = control of consumption desires; psychological need satisfaction</td>
<td>Literature review</td>
<td>The authors showed a consistent positive relationship between voluntary simplicity and well-being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kang, Martinez and Johnson, 2021</td>
<td>IV = minimalism; DV = positive emotion (flourishing); negative emotion (depression)</td>
<td>Scale development</td>
<td>The authors identified an operationalization of minimalism that contains four behavioral representations: clutter removal, cautious shopping, longevity and self-sufficiency. They also found that minimalism enhances flourishing and alleviates depression</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Key research on minimalism (continued)
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
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<th>Method</th>
<th>Key findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Martin-Woodhead, 2021</td>
<td>IV = capsule wardrobe experience; DV = consumption behaviors</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Minimalists (in UK) exhibit sustainable (non)consumption via buying less, using up and maintaining what is owned, and intentionally engaging ethical consumption when acquiring objects. Minimalism are motivated by ethical and environmental motivations or pursuit of personal well-being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matte et al., 2021</td>
<td>IV = minimalism; DV = experiential consumption; life satisfaction</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Minimalism was positively associated with experiential consumption, but did not influence happiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pangarkar, Shukla and Taylor, 2021</td>
<td>Typology of minimalistic consumption</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
<td>The authors provide a conceptualization of minimalism that identify four types of minimalistic consumption: (1) voluntary simplicity, (2) reduced consumption, (3) anticonsumption and (4) inconspicuous consumption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilson and Belezza, 2022</td>
<td>IV = minimalism; DV = consumer preferences and behaviors</td>
<td>Scale</td>
<td>The authors developed a Minimalist Consumer Scale that consists of three dimensions: (1) number of possessions, (2) sparse aesthetic and (3) mindfully curated consumption. They also showed that consumer minimalism predicts consumption behaviors, including choosing quality over quality, selecting minimalist brands, forgoing free products and preferences for minimalist (vs nonminimalist) designs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bardey, Booth, Heger and Larsson, 2022</td>
<td>IV = capsule wardrobe experience; DV = fashion consumption</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>The authors showed that lived experiences with a capsule wardrobe made consumers less stressed, detach from fashion trends, find joy in their fashion style and enhance awareness of conscious consumption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ton, Smith and Sevilla, 2023</td>
<td>IV = simple versus complex package design; DV = WTP</td>
<td>Archival Data; Experiment</td>
<td>The authors show that when packaging is simple, consumers associate the product with few ingredients and perceive it to be purer and more valuable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chen, Sun, Zhou and Shu, 2023b</td>
<td>IV = temporal landmarks (start vs end); DV = purchase intention</td>
<td>Experiment</td>
<td>The authors show that priming a start (end) temporal landmark leads to a greater preference for food packages with minimalist aesthetics (ornate aesthetics). The need for arousal mediates the impact of temporal landmarks on preference for food packages</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Social media usage
Tourists experiencing goal conflict have a greater desire for control and, thus, tend to prefer simpler aesthetics on souvenirs and brochures (Chen et al., 2023a, 2023b). In a similar vein, encounters of aversive experiences, like social crowding and threat of contagious disease, increase need for order to cope with chaos, consequently increasing minimalistic consumption (Chen and Ran, 2023; Gong et al., 2023).

In summary, minimalism has important implications for sustainability by reducing material consumption and increasing the desire for products that will last for a long time. Nevertheless, research on the antecedents of minimalistic consumption remains either conceptual or limited to qualitative studies with small sample sizes, except for a few recent studies identifying environments or situations that increase minimalist consumption (e.g. Chen and Ran, 2023; Chen et al., 2023a, 2023b; Gong et al., 2023; Jain et al., 2023). Extending this nascent stream of research, our investigation examines social media engagement as another factor shaping minimalistic consumption intention.

### 2.2 Social media usage and minimalistic consumption

Social media is integral to modern life, vital for social interactions, brand–consumer connections, market–consumer engagement and influences prepurchase (Song and Yoo, 2016) and purchase decisions (Alalwan, 2018; Appel et al., 2020). Moreover, social media allows consumers to be active creators of information and active participants in purchase processes rather than passive information recipients (Heinonen, 2011).

We predict that SMU will be negatively associated with minimalistic consumption. Two theoretical streams inform this prediction. First, Belk’s theory of desire suggests that marketing stimuli, such as advertising and retail displays, and social milieu, like narratives recounted by others or word-of-mouth, stimulate passion for consumption (Belk et al., 2003).
Advancement in digital technology further dampens consumer desire (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth, 2010). Kozinets et al. (2017) introduce an extended desire theory in the digital era, which suggests a technologically enhanced networks of desire. Computer networks, smartphones and social media sites spur desires in consumers through sharing information about purchases in the form of images and text. Software records, tags and algorithmic feed further facilitate the formation of networks of connections that share a similar desire, leading to an increased passion for consumption (Kozinets et al., 2017). Consistently, the stimulus-organism-response framework suggests that external stimuli in social media, such as advertisements, influencers and user-generated content, evoke pleasant and arousing emotions and trigger impulse buying behavior (Djafarova and Bowes, 2021) and experienced, tech-savvy and social media-prone consumers are more susceptible to those marketing influences (Kumar et al., 2016). It follows that consumers who are more active in social media should experience greater hedonic arousal due to increased exposure to simultaneous shares and interactions with others. To the extent that the arousal of consumption desires is negatively associated with minimalism (Hook et al., 2021), it is expected that consumers who actively participate in social media interactions will be less likely to embrace minimalist consumption.

Second, social media platforms inundate users with a constant stream of information, notifications and messages. Those who are additive to social media are urged to check updates in social media sites (Rosen et al., 2013), and the constant switch of attention leads to distraction, impairs cognitive functioning (Xanidis and Brignell, 2016) and lowers mindfulness and mental clarity (Sriwai and Charoensukmongkol, 2016). As a result, they tend to exhibit low productivity and task performance (Brooks, 2015; Rozgonjuk et al., 2020). The self-control strength model (Muraven and Baumeister, 2000) suggests that self-regulation is effortful, and it demands cognitive resources. To the extent that minimalist consumption entails self-regulation and thoughtful curation of material goods that serve essential needs and major life purposes (Kang et al., 2021; Wilson and Belezza, 2022), we expect that frequent social media use will reduce consumers’ mental clarity on discerning what is essential versus nonessential, and, thus, diminish mindful consumption.

Formally, we predict:

$$H1. \text{ Consumers with a high (low) level of SMU are less (more) likely to engage in minimalistic consumption.}$$

2.3 Mediating role of fear of missing out

The FoMO is a general sense of anxiety that one experiences when not being part of rewarding experiences or activities that others are engaging (Przybylski et al., 2013). Zhang and colleagues further suggest that experiences of FoMO threaten one’s public or private self-concept (Zhang et al., 2020). Psychological threats, therefore, promote a growing need to stay continually connected with what others are saying or doing (Abel et al., 2016; Przybylski et al., 2013). Previous studies has identified individual differences in susceptibility to FoMO. Individuals with anxious attachment, attachment avoidance, neuroticism and interdependent self-construal (Blackwell et al., 2017; Dogan, 2019; Rozgonjuk et al., 2021) tend to experience FoMO, while satisfaction of psychological needs (e.g. competence, autonomy and belongingness) and personality traits such as extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness are negatively associated with FoMO (Rozgonjuk et al., 2021; Xie et al., 2018).

In the consumer space, FoMO has been identified as an important factor in explaining consumer behavior (Table 2 summarizes selective consumer behavior research on FoMO).
Table 2. Representative FoMO-related consumer behavior research

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Research focus</th>
<th>FoMO as...</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Key findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conlin et al., 2016</td>
<td>FoMO and TV consumption behaviors</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>FoMO predicts TV viewing habits, including binge-watching and the consumption of one-time megaevents (Super Bowl)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larkin and Fink, 2016</td>
<td>Fantasy Sport, FoMO and Traditional Fandom</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Online survey</td>
<td>FoMO serves as an antecedent to fantasy sport involvement, social media involvement and team identity salience during games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bright and Logan, 2018</td>
<td>FoMO and social media advertising</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Online survey</td>
<td>FoMO leads to consumers’ social media fatigue; the more consumers rely on social media to stay informed, the more they experience social media fatigue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celik et al., 2019</td>
<td>FoMO and tendency of impulsive purchase and post-purchase regret</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>FoMO increases impulse purchasing, and consequently leads to post-purchase regret</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kang, Cui and Son, 2019a</td>
<td>Conformity consumption of culturally associated brands</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>FoMO-induced stability and concern lead to excessive conformity for consuming culturally associated Korean clothing brands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kang, Son and Koo, 2019b</td>
<td>Consumption of culturally symbolic global brands</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>FoMO leads to brand excitement which results in culturally symbolic global brand engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hodkinson, 2019</td>
<td>Consumers response to FoMO marketing appeals</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Focus groups</td>
<td>A conceptual model of consumer responses to externally initiated FoMO appeals is provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clor-Proell et al., 2020</td>
<td>FoMO and information dissemination via mobile app</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Online survey, experiment</td>
<td>A scale (I-FoMO) is validated to capture investors’ fear of missing out on investment information. In the presence of push notification, receiving ungrouped content via a mobile app greatly influences investment allocations for higher (vs lower) I-FoMO investors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good and Hyman, 2020</td>
<td>Antecedents of FoMO and its downstream effect on purchase likelihood</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Online survey</td>
<td>Anticipated elation and envy increases FoMO, while comforting rationalizations decreases FoMO. FoMO increases purchase likelihood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hayran et al., 2020</td>
<td>Intention to repeat and valuation of an experience</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Lab and field studies</td>
<td>FoMO decreases one’s intentions to repeat a current experience and valuation of the current experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kang et al., 2020</td>
<td>Herd consumption behavior</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Chinese consumers with high FoMO and high attachment to Korean luxury cosmetic brands develop higher brand involvement, leading to herd consumption behavior toward such brands</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kang and Ma, 2020</td>
<td>Bandwagon consumption behavior</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>High FoMO and luxury goods show the strongest bandwagon consumption, followed by low FoMO and necessities, high FoMO and necessities and low FoMO and luxury goods, respectively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osemeahon and Agoyi, 2020</td>
<td>FoMO and consumer engagement in social media brand communities</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Longitudinal study</td>
<td>Both FoMO and smartphone use influence consumer engagement, leading to consumer loyalty in social media brand communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saavedra and Bautista, 2020</td>
<td>FoMO and consumption of masstige-brand</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>FoMO significantly predicts Gen Z consumers’ motivation toward and purchase intentions of masstige brand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good and Hyman, 2021</td>
<td>FoMO appeals on purchase likelihood</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Experiment</td>
<td>FoMO-laden appeals can induce context-specific FoMO, which boosts purchase likelihood via self-enhancement and anticipated elation and weakens purchase intention via expense regret.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee et al., 2021</td>
<td>FoMO and consumer happiness</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Secondary data</td>
<td>Social media influencer-related activities jointly mediate the relationship between FoMO and consumer happiness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Munawar et al., 2021</td>
<td>FoMO-laden appeal and purchase likelihood</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>The impact of FOMO on the purchase likelihood of hedonic services is mediated by anticipated elation and anticipated expense regret and gender moderates the effect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinh and Lee, 2022</td>
<td>FoMO and buying intention for products endorsed by influencers</td>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Online survey</td>
<td>FoMO helps explain buying intention toward endorsed products in the context of social media influencers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xie et al., 2022</td>
<td>FoMO and social media posting preferences</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Experiment</td>
<td>FoMO leads consumers to post more about identity-relevant (vs functional) products on social media. In addition, self-esteem influences motivation to engage the identity-relevant post; consumers with high self-esteem are more motivated to present themselves positively, while ones with low self-esteem are motivated to avoid social attention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blase, Filser, Kraus, Puumalainen and Moog, 2023</td>
<td>FoMO and purchase intentions for fast fashion products</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Online survey</td>
<td>FoMO positively influences consumers’ purchase intentions for fast fashion products. FoMO also negatively moderates the relationship between brand credibility and fast fashion purchase intentions.</td>
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</table>

Table 2. Social media usage
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<tr>
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<th>Research focus</th>
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<th>Method</th>
<th>Key findings</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dinh, Wang and Lee, 2023</td>
<td>FoMO, purchase intention and materialism</td>
<td>Moderator</td>
<td>Online survey</td>
<td>FoMO moderates the relationship between exposure to influencers and materialism, as well as the relationship between exposure to influencers and purchase intention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friederich, Meyer, Matute and Palau-Saumell (2023)</td>
<td>FoMO and consumers engagement in crypto trading</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Experiment</td>
<td>Externally evoked FoMO appeals influence consumers’ investment decisions and this effect is mediated by affective processes and moderated by impulsivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hussain, Raza, Haider and Ishaq, 2023</td>
<td>FoMo and compulsive buying behavior</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>FoMO has a positive and significant effect on compulsive buying behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current research</td>
<td>Social media usage, FoMO and minimalistic consumption</td>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Survey; experiment</td>
<td>Consumers with low (high) social media usage are more (less) likely to engage in minimalistic consumption and the effect is driven by fear of missing out (FoMO)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Authors' own work
For instance, FoMO predicts whether individuals will binge-watch TV, view one-time mega-events (Conlin et al., 2016), make impulse purchases (Celik et al., 2019), make risky investments (Friederich et al., 2023), engage in compulsive buying behavior (Hussain et al., 2023) or purchase nonsustainable fashion products (Bläse et al., 2023). FoMO is associated with high levels of social anxiety and loneliness (Przybylski et al., 2013). That probably explains why consumers experiencing FoMO are more likely to conform to culturally symbolic brands (Kang et al., 2019a, 2019b), follow herd consumption behavior (Kang et al., 2020) and be susceptible to social influence by showing higher purchase intention for influencer-endorsed products (Dinh and Lee, 2022). Moreover, individuals who experience FoMO devalue recent experiences and avoid repeating them (Hayran et al., 2020; Rifkin et al., 2015), and cope with FoMO by posting identity-relevant products on social media (Xi et al., 2022). Due to the profound impact of FoMO on consumer behavior, FoMO is commonly used as an advertising appeal. Hodkinson (2019) provided a conceptual model of consumer responses to context-specific FoMO appeals. The model indicates that FoMO appeals affect purchase likelihood through psychological mechanisms, including self-enhancement, anticipated elation and expense regret (Good and Hyman, 2020, 2021).

Smartphone and social networking site addiction (Blackwell et al., 2017; Dempsey et al., 2019; Salo et al., 2018) contribute to experiences of FoMO. Mobile devices create a continuously available digital world that provide opportunities to engage with others and brands (Adler, 2016; Mangold and Faulds, 2009). However, the opportunities to know what others or brands are doing and saying also amplify desires (i.e. the network of desires), increasing levels of FoMO (Buglass et al., 2017; Elhai et al., 2020; Tandon et al., 2021). FoMO can be experienced without engaging in social media (Milyavskaya et al., 2018), but “social media is kerosene on FoMO’s fire” (Miller, 2012). That is, the compulsion to maintain social connections and keep up with what others are doing increases FoMO (Abel et al., 2016).

We posit that the experiences of FoMO underlies the proposed effect of SMU on minimalist consumption. Practicing minimalism requires one to exercise self-control over consumption and thoughtfully curate one’s possessions of goods to selective ones that are essential (Kang et al., 2021; Wilson and Belezza, 2022). However, FoMO experiences are often accompanied by high-arousal emotions, such as fear and anxiety of missing out on rewarding experiences (Hodkinson, 2019). Self-control theory suggests that activating a fear response can motivate consumers to act on hedonic temptations and relax self-regulation to avoid regret (Keinan and Kivetz, 2008). Indeed, FoMO is associated with consumer impulsivity (Aydin et al., 2021; Celik et al., 2019; Conlin et al., 2016). Furthermore, social pressure is often integral to FoMO experiences. Absence from desired experiences may threaten one’s belongingness and self-esteem (Hodkinson, 2019; Zhang et al., 2020), prompting consumers to follow innovations and actively search for rewarding experiences to feel included (Aydin et al., 2021). Taken together, increased social media engagement leads to FoMO, which is expected to result in careless consumption decisions or maximalism in acquisition as a way to not miss out. Formally:

\[ H2. \text{ The increased use of social media will heighten FoMO, reducing the intention to adopt minimalist consumption.} \]

3. Overview of studies
We examined the hypotheses in four preregistered studies, including one pilot study and three main studies. We begin with the pilot study to explore the association between SMU, FoMO and attitudes toward minimalism using established scales measuring individual differences in those key constructs. Specifically, we consider minimalism as a sustainable
lifestyle, including four key behavioral representations: clutter removal, focus on longevity (of goods), cautious shopping and self-sufficiency (Kang et al., 2021), and measured FoMO and SMU using well-known scales (Dempsey et al., 2019; Przybylski et al., 2013). After providing initial evidence that SMU affects attitudes toward the four key minimalist behaviors via FoMO, we focused on two minimalist representations that correspond to two essential stages in the consumption journey, including product acquisition: cautious shopping (Studies 1 and 2) and product disposal: clutter removal (Study 3). Studies 1–3 aimed to replicate the effect of SMU on FoMO and its consequential impact on minimalist consumption, including purchasing mindfully, forgoing free products and decluttering. Specifically, in Study 1, we used consumers’ impulsive purchase tendencies as a proxy for cautious shopping because minimalists carefully consider their purchases and eschew impulsive buying (Kang et al., 2021; Wilson and Belezza, 2022). Study 2 tested another proxy for cautious shopping: foregoing free products. That is, we studied whether consumers who value minimalism are less likely to accept free products to reduce excess possessions by making cautious decisions on what to acquire. Finally, in Study 3, we tested another minimalist behavior, clutter removal. We chose closet decluttering as the decision context and limited the sample to female participants. We expect women to be more likely than men to resonate with the idea of closet decluttering for at least two reasons. First, women purchase apparel more frequently than men (Stuart, 2019). Second, women use closets as an active space where they have difficulty finding something to wear (Roberts, 2016).

Among the four studies, we operationalized FoMO using multiitem measures (pilot study and Study 1) and scenario-based manipulations (Studies 2 and 3). We examined the causal impact of SMU on minimalistic consumption by manipulating FoMO in Studies 2 and 3. In Study 2, we found that the effect of SMU on minimalistic consumption was rendered nonsignificant in the presence of a FoMO appeal. In addition, Study 3 was designed to guide marketing managers and policymakers on how social media platforms might use FoMO appeals to encourage minimalistic behavior.

For the benefits of research transparency and reproducibility (Simmons et al., 2021), we preregistered all the studies. We applied a mix of prescreening questions and attention checks to ensure data quality. We prescreened and limited participants to only those who used a computer to answer the survey and who passed a Winograd Schema test question (Levesque et al., 2012), which effectively eliminates bots and participants with insufficient English proficiency (Biliciler et al., 2022). Furthermore, we interspersed decoy questions in which participants were asked to choose a specific response or leave the response blank.

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual model and operationalization of the key constructs. Table 3 summarizes the sample demographics, compensation, preregistration links and data exclusions (based on preregistration) for the studies. The Web Appendix includes methodological details, stimuli and additional analyses for each study.

4. Pilot study
The main objective of this pilot study was to provide initial evidence of the associations between SMU, FoMO and consumer minimalism. We used a correlational research method to assess individual differences in the three key constructs using established measures.

4.1 Participants and method
In exchange for monetary compensation, 436 American adult participants (62.2% female, $M_{age} = 43.2$, age range = 19–90, $SD_{age} = 13.5$) from CloudResearch (an online data collection platform that provides access to respondents worldwide) answered a set of individual difference inventories that measured FoMO and consumer minimalism. We counterbalanced
the order in which inventories were presented. We measured FoMO using an established scale (FoMO-P); the 10-item, 5-point scale developed by Przybylski et al. (2013). We measured consumer adherence to the value of consumer minimalism using a 13-item 5-point scale (Kang et al., 2021), which contained four behavioral representations: clutter removal (M-CR), cautious shopping (M-CS), longevity (M-LG) and self-sufficiency (M-SS). Finally, participants indicated their SMU using a five-item, eight-point established scale (Dempsey et al., 2019) and reported their demographics (see the detailed measures in Web Appendix S2).

4.2 Results

4.2.1 Preregistered correlation and mediation analysis. Following Kang et al. (2021), we formed a minimalism index for each of the four components by taking the average of the items measuring each corresponding component: M-CR (α = 0.86, M = 3.80, SD = 0.92), M-CS (α = 0.85, M = 3.66, SD = 0.90), M-LG (α = 0.84, M = 4.20, SD = 0.76) and M-SS (α = 0.89, M = 4.29, SD = 0.76). Because the four components were highly correlated and showed good reliability (α = 0.82), we also created an aggregate minimalism index by taking the average of all 13 items: M-AGG (α = 0.91, M = 3.96, SD = 0.67). We create an SMU index by taking the average of the five items (α = 0.85, M = 3.21, SD = 1.73) and formed a FoMO index (α = 0.88, M = 2.05, SD = 0.77) by averaging the 10 FoMO items.

Correlation and mediation analyses were conducted using individual and aggregate measures of minimalism. Correlational analyses showed that FoMO was negatively correlated with each component of minimalism and the aggregate measure of minimalism: M-CR (r = −0.15, p = 0.002), M-CS (r = −0.24, p < 0.001), M-LG (r = −0.22, p < 0.001), M-SS (r = −0.18, p < 0.001) and M-AGG (r = −0.25, p < 0.001). Furthermore, FoMO was positively correlated with SMU (r = 0.36, p < 0.001).

We then performed a set of mediation analyses (PROCESS Model 4; Hayes, 2017; SPSS bootstrapping macro with 5,000 bootstrap samples) to test the mediation path: SMU → FoMO → minimalism. Four separate mediation analyses were conducted for each minimalist component. The results reveal a significant mediation for M-CR [effect = −0.0256, se = 0.0113, CI95 (−0.0495, −0.0053)], M-CS [effect = −0.0371, se = 0.0112, CI95 (−0.0606, −0.0163)], M-LG [effect = −0.0315, se = 0.0099, CI95 (−0.0525, −0.0132)] and M-SS [effect = −0.0254, se = 0.0093, CI95 (−0.0456, −0.0087)]. We then performed a mediation analysis for the aggregate minimalism measure (M-AGG) and found a consistently significant mediation via FoMO [effect = −0.0304, se = 0.0092, CI95 (−0.0496, −0.0137)].

Source: Authors’ own work

### Figure 1

Conceptual model and operationalization of key constructs across studies

- Measured (Przybylski et al., 2013) (Pilot Study, Study 1)
- Manipulated (Good & Hyman 2020) (Studies 2-3)
- Measured (Dempsey et al., 2019) (Pilot Study, Studies 1-3)
- Consumer Minimalism Scale (Kang et al., 2021) (Pilot Study)
- Impulsive Buying Tendency (Dholakia et al., 2006; Sultan et al., 2012) (Study 1)
- Likelihood to Forego Free Products (Wilson & Belezza) (Study 2)
- Behavioral Intentions toward Decluttering (Study 3)

Control variable
- Socioeconomic status (Study 1)
- Income (Study 2)
- Decluttering Habits (Study 3)
### Table 3. Details of sample demographics, preregistration and data exclusion for all studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pilot study</th>
<th>Study 1</th>
<th>Study 2</th>
<th>Study 3</th>
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<td><a href="https://osf.io/2cjdb/">link</a></td>
<td><a href="https://osf.io/st2uh/">link</a></td>
<td><a href="https://osf.io/q6ntf/">link</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raw data sample size</td>
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<td>427 American adults</td>
<td>428 American adults</td>
<td>529 American female adults</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sample size for analysis</td>
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<td>415</td>
<td>503</td>
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<td>$0.20</td>
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<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
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<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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<td>12.8</td>
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<td>1.2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>41.8</td>
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<td>12.8</td>
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<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>100.0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Authors’ own work
Reverse mediations (FoMO-P → SMU → minimalism) for each minimalist component and an aggregate measure of minimalism were nonsignificant.

4.2.2 Additional (non-preregistered) analysis. We conducted additional analysis using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to verify the four-factor model of minimalism. The result showed a reliable structure accounting for approximately 78.75% of the total variance, a Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy of 0.90, communalities ranging from 0.59 to 0.81, and factor loadings ranging from 0.61 to 0.86. The EFA statistics were consistent with those reported by Kang et al. (2021). One item (i.e. “I try to live a simple live and not to buy articles which are not necessary”), which was expected to load on the factor M-CS (“Cautious Shopping”, factor loading = 0.44), also loaded on the factor M-CR (“Clutter Removal”, factor loading = 0.63). To assessed construct reliability and validity for the items measuring each factor, we calculated composite reliability and convergent validity (using average variance extracted, AVE). The result showed that all the AVEs were greater than 0.4 and composite reliability is higher than 0.6, suggesting the 13-item minimalism scale by Kang et al. (2021) to have an acceptable validity and reliability (Hair et al., 2016). We provided details of the analyses and possible reasons for this discrepancy between our finding and the one of Kang et al. (2021) in the Web Appendix (S2).

We removed the item that cross-loaded on the factors of M-CS and M-CR to calculate a new minimalism index for the component of cautious shopping and a new aggregate minimalism index by taking the average of the rest of the 12 items. We then performed similar correlational analyses and mediation analyses. The results revealed consistent significant correlations of FoMO to minimalism and the mediation path of SMU → FoMO → minimalism (see Web Appendix S2 for the detailed results).

4.3 Discussion
The pilot study provides initial evidence to support H1 and H2. Using reliable and valid measurements of minimalism, FoMO and SMU, we found that social media engagement led to consumer experiences of FoMO, which was further associated with their intention to live a minimalistic life. This was manifested in four behavioral representations: clutter removal, cautious shopping, emphasis on longevity and self-sufficiency in product purchase and consumption. We found a consistent, significant effect of SMU on the four behavioral representations of minimalism, and on a composite measure of minimalism. Mediation analyses also revealed consistent and significant mediation via FoMO across the individual and composite minimalism measures.

In our next study, we focused on one minimalist behavior, cautious shopping. We used a common shopping context, impulsive buying, to examine how impulsive purchase tendencies depend on SMU and FoMO experience.

5. Study 1
The objective of Study 1 was to examine how SMU impacts FoMO and consequent impulsive purchase tendencies. Consumers who uphold minimalist values consider their purchases carefully and eschew impulsive buying (Kang et al., 2021; Wilson and Belezza, 2021). Social media engagement should exhibit greater impulsive tendencies toward tempting purchases if they increase consumers’ FoMO on things or experiences that could improve their lives.
5.1 Participants and method
We recruited 409 American adults from CloudResearch (58.7% women, $M_{\text{age}} = 40.9$, age range = 18–76, $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.5$). First, the participants read a typical consumption choice scenario that measured the likelihood of making impulsive purchases. To overcome the obstacles inherent in explicit consumer attitude measures, we adopted a well-established impulsive buying stimulus using a projective technique (Steinman, 2009). Participants were first instructed to imagine that they were financially constrained college students who encountered a stylish shirt on sale (adopted from Dholakia, 2000; Rook and Fisher, 1995; Sultan et al., 2012). They then viewed a gender-based matching choice task and reported their reactions to three statements describing urge and impulsivity toward making a purchase (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). They also indicated the extent to which they perceived the scenario to be realistic (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) and the likelihood they would encounter a similar situation (1 = very unlikely, 7 = very likely). The findings indicated that participants generally believed that the scenario was real (for details of the scenario reality check results, see Web Appendix S3). They then answered the 10-item FoMO scale ($\alpha = 0.91$, $M = 2.08$, $SD = 0.83$; Przybylski et al., 2013) and the 5-item SMU scale ($\alpha = 0.85$, $M = 3.42$, $SD = 1.73$; Dempsey et al., 2019), before completing demographic questions including income and socioeconomic background (see detailed measures in Web Appendix S3).

5.2 Results
5.2.1 Impulsive purchase. We averaged the three items ($\alpha = 0.92$) to create an impulsive purchase score; higher scores indicated greater tendencies to make impulsive purchases. We performed a regression analysis with the impulsive purchase score as the dependent variable and SMU as the independent variable. SMU ($b = 0.28$, $se = 0.05$, $t = 5.35$, $p < 0.001$) showed a significant positive effect. As SMU increased, participants reported a greater tendency to make impulsive purchases, thus supporting $H1$.

5.2.2 Mediating role of FoMO. We created the FoMO score by averaging the ten items as we did in the pilot study ($\alpha = 0.91$); higher scores indicated greater FoMO. We performed a regression analysis with FoMO score as the dependent variable and SMU as the independent variable. SMU ($b = 0.17$, $se = 0.02$, $t = 7.66$, $p < 0.001$) showed a significant positive effect. As SMU increased, consumers reported higher FoMO.

To test whether FoMO mediates the effect of SMU on impulsive purchase tendencies, we conducted a mediation analysis (Process Model 4; Hayes, 2017; SPSS bootstrapping macro with 5,000 bootstrap samples). Supporting $H2$, FoMO mediated the effect of SMU on tendencies to purchase impulsively [effect = 0.0622, $se = 0.0231$, $CI_{95} = (0.0197, 0.1105)$] (Table 4). We found that people with higher socioeconomic status reported greater impulse purchases ($r = 0.10$, $p = 0.04$). Importantly, the mediation effect of FoMO remained consistently significant after the socioeconomic background was included as a covariate.

5.3 Discussion
Study 1 used a common shopping scenario to support the proposition that SMU is associated with impulsive shopping and product acquisition. Extensive social media exposure heightens general FoMO, increasing the tendency to make impulsive purchases. Moreover, Study 1 replicated the findings of the pilot study in a minimalist consumption context, namely, impulsive buying. The results remained significant after accounting for socioeconomic status.

Pilot study and Study 1 adopted a correlational research method and thus did not allow the testing of direct causal relationships. Therefore, in the following study, we used a
moderation-of-process design (Spencer et al., 2005) and manipulated FoMO to provide further process evidence. In addition, we tested minimalist consumption in the context of mindful product acquisition and possessions. In other words, people would forgo the opportunity to receive a free product.

6. Study 2

The main objective of Study 2 was to provide further support for FoMO as an underlying mechanism. Scenario-based FoMO has been demonstrated as an effective method for activating FoMO states (Good and Hyman, 2020; Hayran et al., 2020). We adopted a moderation-of-process design (Spencer et al., 2005) to manipulate FoMO. We expected to replicate the SMU effect on minimalist consumption in the absence of FoMO appeals; compared with high SMU; low SMU would make consumers who value minimalism less interested in receiving free products. However, if FoMO mediates the relationship between SMU and the desire to forgo free products, FoMO appeal should eliminate or weaken the SMU effect. Furthermore, we used consumers’ willingness to forgo free products as a proxy for minimalist consumption. We predicted that consumers who value minimalism would be less likely to accept free products due to their careful decisions about what to purchase.

6.1 Participants and method

We recruited 415 paid American adults (59.8% women, $M_{\text{age}} = 41.4$, age range = 19–80, $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.9$) from CloudResearch. Using the randomizer function in Qualtrics we randomly presented either the FoMO or non-FoMO condition to the participants. Participants in the FoMO condition were asked to imagine how they would feel about missing out on the fun if they could not attend a concert with friends who later reported having a wonderful time. Participants in the non-FoMO condition read a similar concert scenario in which friends said nothing about the concert later. The participants then answered a two-item manipulation check on a seven-point scale. Next, they viewed a consumption scenario in which they were offered up to three free products. We measured the number of free products selected as a proxy of the likelihood of forgoing free products. We measured the number of free products selected as a proxy of the likelihood of forgoing free products. Finally, participants responded to the five-item SMU scale from Study 1 ($\alpha = 0.80, M = 3.36, SD = 1.74$) and reported demographics (see detailed measures in Web Appendix S4). Thus, this study used a 2 FoMO appeal (FoMO-laden vs non-FoMO) $\times$ SMU (continuous) between-participants design.

6.2 Results

6.2.1 Manipulation check. We averaged the scores of perceived fear and anxiety of missing out on the concert to form a FoMO index ($r = 0.8, p < 0.001$). Using Process Model 1 (Hayes, 2017; SPSS bootstrapping macro with 5,000 bootstrap samples), we then regressed the FoMO index on appeal (FoMO-laden = 1, non-FoMO = 0), mean-centered SMU and their

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indirect effect</th>
<th>Coefficients</th>
<th>Bootstrapping 95% CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coeff.</td>
<td>se</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total indirect effect</td>
<td>0.0622</td>
<td>0.0231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMU $\rightarrow$ FoMO</td>
<td>0.1710</td>
<td>0.0223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FoMO $\rightarrow$ impulsive purchase</td>
<td>0.3637</td>
<td>0.1137</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: SMU = social media usage (continuous); FoMO = fear of missing out (continuous)
Source: Authors’ own work

Table 4. Mediation analysis – study 1
interaction term. The appeal had a significant main effect ($b = 1.63, se = 0.16, t = 10.51, p < 0.001$), such that participants in the FoMO-laden condition reported higher fear and anxiety than those in the non-FoMO condition. SMU also had a significant main effect ($b = 0.28, se = 0.06, t = 4.47, p < 0.001$): higher SMU was associated with greater FoMO. The interaction effect of appeal and SMU was nonsignificant ($b = -0.03, se = 0.09, t = -0.38, p = 0.70$). Overall, the result suggests a successful manipulation of FoMO.

6.2.2 Likelihood of forgoing free products. We ran a similar regression (Process Model 1; Hayes, 2017) with the number of products as the dependent variable. SMU had a significant main effect ($b = 0.06, se = 0.03, t = 2.05, p = 0.04$). However, the appeal had a nonsignificant main effect ($b = -0.04, se = 0.08, t = -0.58, p = 0.56$). As expected, appeal significantly interacted with SMU ($b = -0.09, se = 0.04, t = -1.94, p = 0.05$; Figure 2). In the non-FoMO condition, we replicated SMU’s effect on minimalism. That is, participants with lower SMU selected fewer free gifts than did participants with higher SMU ($b = 0.06, se = 0.03, t = 2.05, p = 0.04$). However, the activation of FoMO eliminated the SMU effect on the likelihood of forgoing free products ($b = -0.02, se = 0.03, t = -0.70, p = 0.48$). We found that income level is weakly positively correlated with the number of free products selected ($r = 0.1, p = 0.05$). However, the socioeconomic background was not ($r = 0.01, p = 0.88$). The results were consistent after controlling for income levels.

6.3 Discussion
Upon directly manipulating the presence of FoMO appeal and testing its moderating effect on the relationship between SMU and consumer minimalism, we provide additional evidence to support FoMO as a mediator. We demonstrate that, in the absence of FoMO, those low in SMU selected fewer free gifts than those high in SMU. However, when FoMO

![Figure 2. Interaction effect – Study 2](image-url)

**Notes:** The SPSS bootstrapping macro developed by Hayes (2017, PROCESS Model 1) with 5,000 bootstrap samples and 95% CI were used for analysis. The conditions were coded as follows: Appeal (X) (0 = non-FoMO, 1 = FoMO-laden); Social media usage (W) (a continuous measure) was mean-centered before analysis. The figure was developed based on the output from PROCESS macro that provides W values +/- SD from the mean to visualize the conditional effect of the focal predictor (Y).

**Source:** Authors’ own work
was activated, the willingness to forego free products was eliminated. These findings suggest that even people with low SMU could eschew minimalism if they experience FoMO. Furthermore, we use another behavioral representation of minimalistic consumption and show that the proposed effect of SMU can be generalized to the likelihood of forgoing free products, a product acquisition decision aligned with minimalist values.

Our next study was to test whether social media, with its potential to enhance interpersonal communication and expand social influence, could be used to promote minimalism. In addition, we chose to study closet decluttering as a context for minimalism, which is relevant to another minimalism domain: clutter removal. Study 3 was designed to help understand how marketing managers and policymakers might leverage social media, and FoMO appeals to influence minimalism in consumption.

7. Study 3

Findings from the pilot study, Studies 1 and 2, support our contention that SMU evokes FoMO, causing many consumers to devalue minimalism. Considering that FoMO strongly affects consumers’ decision-making with high SMU, we conducted Study 3 to examine whether SMU platforms might use FoMO appeals to encourage minimalistic behavior. We selected closet decluttering as the decision context and conducted the study at the end of the fall season because consumers often declutter at the end of the season (Ewer, 2021; McQueen et al., 2022; Weber et al., 2017). We recruited only female participants for this study because the study involved a scenario in which one likes shopping for clothes and decluttering intentions. First, the academic research suggests that on average, women consumers have a more positive attitude toward shopping than men (Campbell, 1997), women shop more frequently than men (Roy Dholakia, 1999) and women are more interested in fashion than men (O’cass, 2004). In addition, women tend to be more involved in decluttering than men because of traditional gender roles associated with household chores (Belk et al., 2007; Muster et al., 2022; Roster and Ferrari, 2023). Second, popular media and industry reports also suggest that on average, female consumers have higher purchase rates for apparel categories and are more engaged in purchasing apparel than male consumers (Stuart, 2019). Women use closets as an active space where they have difficulty finding something to wear (Roberts, 2016). Thus, we expected that women would be more likely to resonate with the closet decluttering scenario than men. In addition, recruiting only female respondents allowed us to control for gender effects.

7.1 Participants and method

We recruited 503 American women (M\text{age} = 42.4, age range = 19–89, SD\text{age} = 14.0) from CloudResearch. First, the participants read the #ClosetDeclutterChallenge for the #OneDay scenario, showing images detailing the processes and outcomes associated with decluttering. We then randomly assigned participants to a FoMO-laden or non-FoMO condition. Following previous research (Good and Hyman, 2020), participants in the FoMO-laden condition read an imaginary scenario in which their friends posted photos/videos sharing the fun they experienced by taking the challenge. Participants in the non-FoMO condition read a scenario in which friends posted no photos/videos of the challenge. We measured behavioral intentions toward the decluttering challenge by asking participants whether they were likely to take the challenge and whether they were likely to post about it (1 = very unlikely, 7 = very likely). They also indicated the number of friends they would tag to take the challenge. Finally, participants responded to the SMU scale (α = 0.84, M = 3.73, SD = 1.78) and reported how frequently they declutter their homes (1 = not often at all, 7 = very often) (M = 4.00, SD = 1.57) and their demographics (see detailed measures in Web Appendix S5).
7.2 Results

7.2.1 Manipulation check. We regressed the FoMO index (average of the fear and anxiety scores: \( r = 0.86, p < 0.001 \)) on FoMO appeal (FoMO-laden = 1, non-FoMO = 0), mean-centered SMU and their interaction term using Process Model 1 (Hayes, 2017; SPSS bootstrapping macro with 5,000 bootstrap samples). Regression analysis revealed a significant main effect of SMU (\( b = 0.16, se = 0.05, t = 2.87, p = 0.004 \)) and appeal (\( b = 1.27, se = 0.14, t = 8.95, p < 0.001 \)). The two-way interaction was nonsignificant (\( b = 0.07, se = 0.08, t = 0.88, p = 0.38 \)). As expected, participants in the FoMO-laden condition experienced higher FoMO than did those in the non-FoMO condition, suggesting successful FoMO manipulation.

After validating that the scenario-based paradigm successfully activated different FoMO states, we then conducted three separate regression analyses with FoMO appeal (FoMO-laden = 1, non-FoMO = 0), mean-centered SMU and their interaction as predictors, and the three behavioral intention measures served as the dependent variables.

7.2.2 Likelihood of participating in the decluttering campaign. SMU (\( b = 0.36, se = 0.06, t = 6.13, p < 0.001 \)) and appeal (\( b = 0.96, se = 0.15, t = 6.34, p < 0.001 \)) both had significant main effects. SMU had a marginally significant interaction with appeal (\( b = -0.16, se = 0.09, t = -1.83, p = 0.068 \)) (panel A, Figure 3). Under both non-FoMO appeal (\( b = 0.36, se = 0.06, t = 6.13, p < 0.001, CI_{95\%}(0.2417, 0.4697) \)) and FoMO-laden appeal (\( b = 0.20, se = 0.06, t = 3.21, p = 0.001, CI_{95\%}(0.0778, 0.3225) \)), participants with higher (lower) SMU were more likely to take the declutter challenge. However, FoMO appeal strengthened the SMU effect. Overall, both SMU and FoMO appeal affected behavioral intentions toward the declutter challenge; participants who had high (low) SMU and viewed (did not view) a FoMO appeal indicated the highest (lowest) intentions.

7.2.3 Liking the decluttering campaign. For liking of the challenge, SMU (\( b = 0.44, se = 0.06, t = 6.96, p < 0.001 \)) and appeal (\( b = 0.92, se = 0.16, t = 5.62, p < 0.001 \)) had similar main effects. SMU interacted with appeal (\( b = -0.19, se = 0.09, t = -2.03, p = 0.04 \)). The interaction pattern mirrored the likelihood of participation (Panel B, Figure 3). Participants with higher (lower) SMU liked the declutter challenge under non-FoMO (\( b = 0.44, se = 0.06, t = 6.96, p < 0.001, CI_{95\%}(0.3125, 0.5584) \)) and FoMO-laden appeals (\( b = 0.25, se = 0.07, t = 3.72, p < 0.001, CI_{95\%}(0.1177, 0.3815) \)).

7.2.4 Number of friends tagged. Finally, the regression on the number of friends tagged to join the challenge revealed that SMU (\( b = 0.64, se = 0.19, t = 3.41, p < 0.001 \)) and appeal (\( b = 1.92, se = 0.49, t = 3.94, p < 0.001 \)) had significant main effects. SMU had a marginally significant interaction with appeal (\( b = 0.54, se = 0.27, t = 1.98, p = 0.05 \)). The interaction pattern was consistent with the patterns of other behavioral intention measures (Panel C, Figure 3). Specifically, participants with higher (lower) SMU were more likely to tag more friends to join the challenge under both non-FoMO appeal (\( b = 0.64, se = 0.19, t = 3.41, p < 0.001, CI_{95\%}(0.2712, 1.0073) \)) and FoMO-laden appeal (\( b = 1.18, se = 0.20, t = 5.89, p < 0.001, CI_{95\%}(0.7885, 1.5787) \)).

General decluttering habit is significantly correlated with the three behavioral intention measures (\( p’s < 0.01 \)). We performed three separate regression analyses, controlling for general decluttering habits and found consistent results.

7.3 Discussion

Study 3 demonstrates the potency of FoMO appeals in encouraging minimalistic behavior when the behavior is framed as a social media movement. Specifically, the findings showed that under non-FoMO appeal, high rather than low SMU led to more favorable behavioral intentions toward the social media-based declutter challenge. The FoMO appeal further
Notes: The SPSS bootstrapping macro developed by Hayes (2017, PROCESS Model 1) with 5,000 bootstrap samples and 95% CI were used for analysis. The conditions were coded as follows: Appeal (X) (0 = non-FoMO, 1 = FoMO-laden); Social media usage (W) (a continuous measure) was mean-centered before analysis. The figure was developed based on the output from PROCESS macro that provides W values +/- SD from the mean to visualize the conditional effect of the focal predictor (Y).

Source: Authors’ own work
8. General discussion

8.1 Key findings
Supporting the networks of desire theory (Kozinets et al., 2017), we find evidence that engagement in social media sites is positively associated with FoMO, and the experienced anxiety of missing out on what others own or experience shapes consumption desires and predicts minimalistic consumption. Consumers with high SMU are particularly susceptible to FoMO, making them exhibit lower general tendencies toward minimalist behaviors (pilot study), have higher tendencies to buy impulsively (Study 1), acquire products carelessly (Study 2) and decrease their interest in decluttering. We find convergent evidence supporting our hypotheses when operationalizing FoMO and minimalist consumption in multiple ways. Despite the established mediating effect of FoMO, we cannot rule out the possibility of a bidirectional relationship between minimalism and SMU; those who practice minimalism in consumption are likely to maintain similar values in social media engagement. Indeed, many minimalist influencers have advocated extending the practice of minimalism beyond physical consumption to mental spaces, such as limiting the time spent on digital devices and social media, namely digital minimalism (Humayun et al., 2021; Katuna, 2017; Newport, 2019). Overall, we expect that people who practice minimalism in consumption are likely to engage with social media minimally, and digital minimalism will further reinforce people to consume less via reduced FoMO, as demonstrated in the current research.

8.2 Relation with previous research
This study demonstrates that, consistent with previous research, minimalism acts as a personal value that guides consumption choices (Wilson and Belezza, 2022) and further finds that increased engagement in social media heightens the experiences of FoMO and consequently reduces minimalism in consumption. Replicating what was found in previous research (Buglass et al., 2017; Elhai et al., 2020), our findings showed that constant connectivity to social media sites is associated with increased levels of FoMO. Past research has used scenario-based FoMO as an effective method for activating FoMO states (Good and Hyman, 2020; Hayran et al., 2020). Using similar approach by manipulating the presence and absence of FoMO in Study 2, we found that the effect of SMU on minimalistic consumption was rendered nonsignificant in the presence of a FoMO appeal, suggesting that even consumers with low SMU could eschew minimalism if they experience FoMO from alternative sources. Moreover, we demonstrate that consumers with high SMU are more likely to buy impulsively (Study 1), similar to earlier research showing impact of FoMO on impulse buying (Celik et al., 2019).

FoMO is often termed as a dark side manifestation of social media as it has detrimental impact on psychological well-being (Buglass et al., 2017; Tandon et al., 2021). On the other hand, minimalism reduces negative emotions (Bardey et al., 2022; Kang et al., 2021) and contributes to happiness and individual well-being (Malik and Ishaq, 2023; Shafqat et al., 2023). Our findings in Study 3 suggest a potential strategy to mitigate the negative effects of SMU on well-being (Buglass et al., 2017; Tandon et al., 2021) by advocating minimalist
practices using a FoMO appeal. Past findings reveal that the effect of FoMO on consumer loyalty in social media brand was mediated by smartphone use (Osemeahon and Agoyi, 2020). In contrast, we show that the effect of SMU on minimalist consumption is driven by FoMO.

8.3 Theoretical contribution
To the emerging body of research on minimalism, our primary contributions are in situating SMU and FoMO as antecedent variables that predict minimalist consumption. Going beyond the established effect of SMU on FoMO (Buglass et al., 2017; Elhai et al., 2020), we demonstrate the links between FoMO and minimalism in the consumption context. Our research is one of the first to bridge the research streams of FoMO and minimalism.

We also contribute to minimalism research by advancing the understanding of antecedents to minimalism, which represents a major knowledge gap in the minimalism literature. As summarized in Table 1, extant research on minimalism has focused on its conceptualization (Kang et al., 2021; Wilson and Belezza, 2022), the psychological benefits of practicing minimalism (e.g. Bardey et al., 2022; Lloyd and Pennington, 2020; Malik and Ishaq, 2023) and consumer preferences between minimalist and maximalist designs (e.g. Chen et al., 2023a, 2023b; Chen et al., 2023a, 2023b; Ton et al., 2023). Our findings suggest that FoMO, stemming from intensive SMU or as a communication appeal, shapes minimalist consumption.

Finally, this study adds to the body of knowledge on FoMO in marketing context. Although FoMO advertising appeals are common in the marketplace, consumer researchers have only recently examined their effects as a marketing appeal (Hodkinson, 2019). For instance, consumers who anticipate greater elation and envy from others are more responsive to FoMO; therefore, framing an experiential consumption with a FoMO-laden appeal increases the purchase likelihood of that experience (Good and Hyman, 2020, 2021). We add to this burgeoning literature by demonstrating that using a FoMO-laden appeal to promote minimalism as a social media movement could encourage consumers to embrace it. To the best of our knowledge, this is one of the first studies to provide empirical evidence for the influence of FoMO on consumer minimalism.

8.4 Managerial implications
Our findings have important implications for both managers and policymakers. The American consumer market generates more than $13 trillion in spending each year, accounting for approximately 70% of the nation’s GDP (Davis, 2021). Collective overconsumption is environmentally detrimental: it clutters homes and overwhelms landfills. Consumption could be more sustainable if consumers adopt minimalist lifestyles (Kang et al., 2021; Rosenau, 2020; Zafar, 2022).

The recent pandemic has changed where people find meaning in their lives and slowed some forms of consumption. For instance, compared to 2017, more Americans in 2021 believe that society makes life more meaningful (van Kessel and Silver, 2021). The pandemic caused people to reconsider the purpose and meaning of consumption and how they should consume; the pandemic deprived them of opportunities for social interactions, making many people rethink why they buy and wear things (Waters, 2021). Meanwhile, the increased time spent working from home and on the Internet and social media during the pandemic has led to heightened FoMO and motivated consumption (Kamalia et al., 2022; Koban et al., 2022). Those phenomena motivate us to question whether increased SMU has caused consumers to experience elevated FoMO and how that would affect their willingness to adopt minimalist consumption.
Our findings suggest that cutting down on SMU promotes mindful product acquisition. Furthermore, by identifying FoMO as the psychological mechanism underlying the effect of SMU on minimalist consumption, our research provides practical insights into how to influence consumer minimalism. Our findings show that SMU is a double-edged sword: it can cause users to disdain minimalism, but it can be used strategically to promote minimalist consumption. Consumer engagement in consumption restraint (e.g. #BuyNothingDay) is becoming increasingly popular, and social media plays a vital role in promoting its popularity (Paschen et al., 2020). Study 3 provides actionable insights for policymakers, allowing them to leverage FoMO-laden appeals to encourage participation in decluttering, a behavioral representation of minimalism.

8.5 Limitations and future research directions

This research has limitations, which suggest directions for future research. First, we recruited American participants from an online panel; thus, the results might not be generalizable globally. Future research could test this phenomenon in a more diverse consumer sample or an online field setting. Indeed, recent research suggests that FoMO is a cultural phenomenon that strongly correlates with collectivism and ethnic identity (Karimkhan and Chapa, 2021). In addition, people who use social media primarily in their ethnic languages behave differently and perceive the content they encounter on these platforms differently than those who use social media in other languages (Karimkhan and Chapa, 2021). Future research could investigate how cultural identity moderates the effects of SMU on minimalism.

Second, we used scenario-based stimuli and projective techniques in Study 1. Although projective techniques have been used successfully in marketing to overcome the obstacles inherent in explicit consumer attitude measures (Steinman, 2009), this could also affect our findings. Furthermore, we used consumers’ impulsive purchase tendencies as a proxy for cautious shopping because minimalists carefully consider their purchases and eschew impulsive buying (Kang et al., 2021; Wilson and Belezza, 2021). Although we acknowledge the potential influence of shopping norms (Rook and Fisher, 1995) and constraining factors (Dholakia, 2000), exploring the role of these factors is beyond the scope of the current research. Future research could use more direct measures to assess minimalist consumption, considering the role of normative evaluation and constraining factors.

Third, in pilot study and Study 1 (Web Appendix S2 and S3), we find that Millennials and Gen Z use social media much more than previous Gen X and Boomer generations. Furthermore, generational differences in SMU predict FoMO and downstream minimalist consumption tendencies. Younger consumer segments are most responsive to FoMO appeals and most likely to shun minimalist consumption. Age has been shown to be a malleable subjective perception, independent of chronological age, with the potential to influence prosocial behaviors (Park et al., 2021) and choices of contemporary versus traditional products (Amatulli et al., 2018). Future research might examine whether subjective age affects FoMO and minimalist consumption tendencies. Could campaigners use young social cues to make older consumers more susceptible to FoMO appeal? Could old social cues cause younger consumers to perceive greater social responsibility and embrace minimalist or sustainable consumption?

Finally, across the four studies, we measure individual differences in SMU and find that participants who self-report high social media exposure also report experiencing FoMO, which is detrimental to minimalist consumption. Future research might examine whether interventions could change consumption behaviors by using digital detox, the practice of unplugging from digital technology, temporarily or permanently (Syvertsen and Enli, 2020).
Moreover, we focus on minimalist consumption, in which consumers limit their possessions to essentials, avoid unnecessary acquisitions and practice mindful retention. Future research might examine the effects of SMU on sustainable consumption or the choice of environmentally friendly products.

9. Conclusions
This research sheds light on the interplay between SMU, FoMO and minimalist consumption. The findings underscore the ambivalent role of social media, wherein it can either drive impulsive and excessive consumption or serve as a catalyst for minimalist and sustainable lifestyles. This research not only contributes to the empirical understanding of these dynamics but also highlights how minimalist campaigns can be used in social media to harness FoMO’s persuasive power in promoting sustainable consumption.

References


Supplementary material
The supplementary material for this article can be found online.
About the authors

Fang-Chi Lu is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Management and Marketing at the University of Melbourne. Dr Lu’s research examines consumer information processing and decision-making in the domains of customer–brand relationship, consumer motivation and goal pursuit and marketing communication with socially excluded or lonely consumers. Dr Lu’s research has appeared in numerous marketing and psychology journals.

Dr Jayati Sinha is an Associate Professor at FIU College of Business. Dr Sinha’s research focuses on contextual factors in decision-making, and consumer health and wellbeing across cultures. Dr Sinha has (co)authored numerous publications in marketing and psychology journals. Dr Sinha serves in the Board of Directors of Alliance for Aging, Inc. Jayati Sinha is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: jsinha@fiu.edu

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