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Non-sustainable buying behavior: How the fear of missing out drives purchase intentions in the fast fashion industry

Richard Bläse[1] | Matthias Filser[1,2] | Sascha Kraus[3,4] | Kaisu Puumalainen[2] | Petra Moog[1]

[1]School of Management and Law, Zurich Universitiy of Applied Sciences, Winterthur, Switzerland

[2]School of Business, Lappeenranta University of Technology, Lappeenranta, Finland

[3]Faculty of Economics and Management, Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, Bolzano, Italy

[4]Department of Business Management, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa

Correspondence
Matthias Filser, Center for Entrepreneurship, School of Management and Law, Zurich University of Applied Sciences, Theaterstrasse 17, CH-8400 Winterthur, Switzerland.
Email: matthias.filser@zhaw.ch

Abstract

Movements like "Fridays for Future" have heightened attention to the need for sustainability, particularly among Generations X, Y, and Z. However, the consumption of fast fashion and so-called ultra-fashion products—an ecologically harmful business model—continues to gain momentum, especially among young consumers, not least due to fear of missing out (FOMO). FOMO is well-known among marketing professionals as a strong trigger for frequently recurring buying behavior. Over the past 5 years, scholars have become increasingly interested in how FOMO triggers buying behavior and have begun to incorporate FOMO in their cognitive models. However, the influence of FOMO on individual fashion purchases and the relationship between brand credibility and sustainable fashion production is not yet well understood. Utilizing cross-sectional data from three distinct samples in Switzerland and the United States, our study, which included over 650 participants, reveals that brand credibility and FOMO exert direct influences on consumers' purchase intentions for fast fashion products. We identify that FOMO has a negative moderating effect on the relationship between brand credibility and fast fashion purchase intentions. Suggesting that consumers with strong FOMO are less interested in brand credibility when making a purchase decision than those without FOMO. Additionally, we demonstrate that our findings apply to both fast and slow fashion, the latter encompassing sustainably produced fashion. Ultimately, we provide novel empirical evidence of FOMO's influence on buying behavior and shed light on the complex interplay between brand credibility, sustainability, and consumer behavior in the fashion industry.

KEYWORDS
fashion, fear of missing out, non-sustainable buying behavior, purchase intention

Abbreviations: CSR, corporate social responsibility; FOMO, fear of missing our; NGOs, non-governmental organisations; SDGs, sustainable development goals.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Strikingly, most clothes are only worn seven or eight times on average before being discarded (Soyer & Dittrich, 2021). Close to three-quarters of the clothes produced are estimated to end up in landfills or incinerators, and only 15% of the clothes are recycled into new clothing or made into cleaning cloths or insulation material (Soyer & Dittrich, 2021). It is widely recognized that fashion cloth production is often unsustainable, as it emits 1.2 billion tons of CO_2 equivalents annually (Sanders & Mawson, 2019) and requires enormous quantities of resources (Niinimäki et al., 2020; Soyer & Dittrich, 2021). The business model of so-called fast fashion offers the latest fashion trends while flexibly responding to consumer demand at affordable prices (Caro & Martínez-de-Albéniz, 2015; Jin et al., 2012). At the same time, just-in-time production amplifies fashion trends that lead to overconsumption and generate fashion waste.

To meet increasing demands for clothing while keeping prices low, fashion companies often outsource production to low-wage countries, a practice that had serious environmental and social consequences locally (Niinimäki et al., 2020). The global market is expected to grow at a Compound Annual Growth Rate of 5.3% from 2025 and reach over 210 million USD in 2030 (Li, 2023). In the meantime, as demonstrated by the Fridays for Future phenomenon, environmental awareness has increased, especially among young people (Beckh & Limmer, 2022). A growing chorus of customers in Western societies is beginning to ask critical questions regarding the origin of their clothing and express disappointment in the lack of ethical practices in the fast fashion industry. Accelerated by the increasing awareness of members of Generations X, Y, and Z, for example, due to the collapse of Rana Plaza, a garment factory in Dhaka in 2013, fashion sellers started to implement communication strategies to report their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategies. Stemming from the need to address environmental sustainability in production, sustainable fashion referred to as "slow fashion" is assumed to be the opposite of fast fashion, produced on small scales with classical design via local resources and traditional production techniques (Şener et al., 2019). In a promising sign of change, well-known slow fashion brands like "Patagonia" or "Sézane", have been raising awareness among customers and paving the way for a more sustainable future.

With the rise of social media, sellers' advertising strategies have adapted to 21st-century consumer behavior (Chaparro-Peláez et al., 2022). Fashion boutiques, for example, have been moved to the virtual world, and influencers and social media marketing are driving attitudes among younger generations (Dinh & Lee, 2021). Despite widespread knowledge about the unsustainable practices of the fashion industry, the consumption of fast fashion continues to surge, propelled by 21st-century consumer behavior. To explain individual purchase decision-making, marketing scholars described fashion decisions as the product of an interaction between objective criteria such as price, quality, and personal hedonistic motivation and accessibility and subjective criteria including attitudes, social norms, and aesthetic preferences (Yuan et al., 2019). Consumers who care about the environment are assumed more likely to purchase products labeled as environmentally friendly (Mainieri et al., 2010) than those who are less environmentally conscious (Rejikumar, 2016). Previously scholars report a positive correlation between the (ecological) credibility of a brand and a strong purchase intention (Granskog et al., 2020; Spry et al., 2011). But the empirical situation remains contradictory, as existing data does not conclusively support the claim that environmentally friendly attitudes and beliefs fully translate into environmentally conscious behavior (Bocti et al., 2021; Park & Lin, 2020). This so-called intention–behavior gap describes that although consumers claim to have environmentally friendly attitudes and purchase intentions, their actions do not match their words (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). While previous research has cited a lack of information, higher prices, and the unreliability of green claims as reasons for non-green purchasing behavior (Rejikumar, 2016), there is evidence that anticipated negative emotion, that is, fear of missing out (FOMO) could directly affect individual consumers' purchasing behavior (Dinh & Lee, 2021; Hodkinson, 2019) and may also mitigate individual ecological attitudes.

Despite the increasing availability of sustainable fashion options, the fashion industry's environmental impact remains dire and consumers' attitudes toward sustainability often fail to translate into sustainable purchasing behavior. This article addresses this pressing issue by examining the relationship between fashion credibility, purchase intention, and FOMO, a newly identified driver of consumer behavior in the age of social media. To fill important knowledge gaps, this study examines the link between social influence and buying behavior by introducing the FOMO as an additional explanatory factor. FOMO, a construct that originated from psychology, has only recently gained the attention of marketers as a new construct to further explain consumer behavior (Dinh & Lee, 2021; Hodkinson, 2019). The rationale is that constant access to information via social media puts pressure on people to keep up with what others are saying, doing, and buying (Abel et al., 2016).

Derived from Self Determination Theory, the FOMO phenomenon was initially defined as the "pervasive apprehension that others might have rewarding experiences from which one is excluded" (Przybylski et al., 2013, p. 1841). It describes why people want to belong to a certain group (Kang et al., 2020). The positive correlation between extreme consumerism and following influencers who share their consumption experience on social media was identified only recently (Dinh & Lee, 2021). This highlighted FOMO as a strong driver of purchasing behavior (Argan et al., 2018). Despite the extensive attention given to the FOMO phenomenon in various contexts such as social media consumption (Shabahang et al., 2021), heavy alcohol and drug use (Brunborg et al., 2022; Riordan et al., 2015), organizational performance (Fridchay & Reizer, 2022), and career decision-making, little academic research has examined how FOMO interacts with other key drivers of purchasing behavior, particularly in the context of sustainable fashion.

Given the disparity between the growing interest in sustainably produced fashion and the extensive purchasing patterns of fashion, the following research question arises: How does FOMO interrelate with brand credibility in terms of sustainability in fast and slow fashion

purchasing decisions? To better understand the drivers of consumer behavior in the sustainable fashion industry, this study examines the relationship between FOMO and brand credibility in fast and slow fashion purchasing decisions across three independent samples. We aim to shed light on the factors that contribute to the attitude–behavior gap in this domain and provide a new perspective on the FOMO phenomenon through a marketing lens. Employing fast fashion purchase decisions as an example, we used structural equation modeling in samples one and two to illustrate that FOMO is a significant driver of fashion purchasing. By adding FOMO as a moderator between brand credibility and purchase intention, the data from the two first studies also suggest that FOMO has the potential to further explain the so-called attitude–behavior gap. This may explain why people often act contrary to their attitudes. A third sample collected data using a slow (ecologically and fairly produced) fashion to test the FOMO mechanism. Our results expose the enormous potential of the FOMO phenomenon in the context of the purchase of fast and slow fashion. Taken together, our paper sheds important early light on the potential impact of FOMO on the cognitive processes of consumers making purchase decisions in the context of fashion and provides insight into the extent to which FOMO influences purchasing behavior for fast and slow fashion. In the following sections, we introduce the conceptual background and develop the hypotheses, describe the research context and the methodology, and explore the results and implications of our results, including acknowledging limitations and suggestions for future research.

2 | THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

With the success of social media platforms, there is considerable interest in understanding the mechanism of how to ensure online marketing reaches a larger number of customers. In the beginning, marketers and researchers noted the great potential of social media in steering consumer purchases (Dinh & Lee, 2021; Hermanda et al., 2019). As shown by the rise of social media such as Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram, and the recent acceleration during the COVID-19 pandemic, social platforms are becoming meeting places as consumers spend many hours of the day online (Lemenager et al., 2021). Daily purchases take place more often online compared to pre-pandemic times, confirming a new potential for fashion sellers (Bridges & Fowler, 2022). In support of this trend, social media marketing literature observed a positive relationship between credibility and consumer purchases in 2010, suggesting a new strategy to sell through brand credibility (Hodkinson, 2019). More so than ever, fashion manufacturers utilize social media marketing to draw consumers' attention to their products and customize fashion blogs and influencer testimonials to promote their products, create brand credibility, and bind customers on social networks (Dinh & Lee, 2021). Online brand reviews from influencers are considered among the most influential types of electronic word of mouth, influencing consumer attitudes and brand awareness and facilitating purchase decisions (Godey et al., 2016). By cultivating online relationships and sharing their lifestyles, uploading photos, videos, and other materials on social media platforms, influencers are seen as "role models" and "effective sources for building positive relationships with customers because they transfer brand messages to their followers" (Dinh & Lee, 2021, p. 347).

By employing motivational theories (e.g., Ajzen's theory of planned behavior), prior research has investigated purchase behavior by measuring the quantity of individual decision-making using the construct of purchase intention (Liu et al., 2021; Yusuf, 2021). According to the theory of planned behavior, intention is a mediating variable between attitudes, social norms, and actual behavior. A meta-analysis of empirical studies from different disciplines found a positive correlation between intention and subsequent behavior (Schwenk & Möser, 2008). The higher the purchase intention, the greater the consumer's desire to buy a product or service (Martín-Consuegra et al., 2018). Since then, measuring intention has become a valid proxy in empirical research to test subsequent behavior (Hussain et al., 2022; Yusuf, 2021).

In marketing research, purchase intentions are defined as a combination of consumers' interest and their ability (financial possibilities) to buy a product. In other words, purchasing intention refers to the likelihood that customers will buy a product/service from a specific brand (Gowdy & Mayumi, 2001). Intention is an attitudinal variable used to measure customers' future contributions to a brand. To address the high interest of marketing scholars, previous research has studied drivers of purchase intention. For example, Liu et al. (2021) investigated the importance of a brand's country of origin, sensory perception, and shopper personality in consumer purchase decisions. They reported that the haptic perception of clothing from fast fashion brands positively affects purchase intention. Vuong and Nguyen (2018) concluded that the perceived quality of clothes, but also individuals' brand consciousness and hedonistic shopping value shape purchase habits.

2.1 | Brand credibility in fashion

With increasing public recognition of climate change, both scientists and practitioners have noted a growing customer demand for more sustainable products, including fashion (Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013). This demand can be quantified, with environmentally conscious consumers being willing to pay up to 20% more for sustainable clothing (Soyer & Dittrich, 2021). Customers are expected to become more environmentally conscious in the future, requiring the fashion industry, including fast fashion, to incorporate these changing attitudes.

Sustainable consumption refers to the use of goods and services to improve the quality of life and minimize negative implications in terms of environmental resource use and waste generation during the life cycle of a product (Soyer & Dittrich, 2021). The sustainable production, distribution, and recycling of consumer goods have become an important issue at various levels of society in recent years, from politics (accelerated by the Green Deal at the EU level) to industry,

trade, production, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and customer behavior. In the fashion sector, the regulatory framework and growing competition in the field of sustainable production have motivated companies to develop and implement corporate responsibility policies and disclose them to their stakeholders. In line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), many slow as well as fast fashion brands have also begun setting their own sustainability goals to ensure customers' future propensity to purchase.

To date, fast fashion brands capitalize on this trend and the additional sales potential by setting up CSR departments and creating extra marketing to highlight green production. Zara, which represents around 70% of the Inditex group, has vowed to utilize more sustainable fabrics and increase their use of renewable energy to 80% by 2025 (Guardian & Conlon, 2019). Similarly, the fast-fashion giant Primark decided to increase its use of sustainable cotton, training Indian, Pakistani, and Chinese farmers to produce it. Its goal is to utilize 100% organically grown cotton in their collections (Guardian & Conlon, 2019). The Swedish brand H&M engages in sustainability by setting a 2020 goal for sustainable cotton use and a 2030 goal for materials meant for other products. However, progress toward sustainability in the fast fashion industry is often prevented by their own business model based on the need to produce clothes cheaply and to offer new fashion trends in quick succession and at low prices. Companies communicate about their sustainable production and create "green labels" for their products to influence consumer behavior. To achieve a return on CSR investments in the form of corporate reputation, customer loyalty, and customer identification with the brand, companies must be transparent about their CSR achievements and measures.

Although there is a growing interest in environmentally sustainable clothing, slow-fashion brands such as Patagonia are still not well known or are considered too costly compared to normal fashion for the vast majority of consumers. As a result, the circle of slow-fashion customers is still relatively small compared to fast-fashion consumption. For both fast fashion and slow fashion brands, marketing today has the function of communicating brand sustainability efforts in a customer-oriented way, placing particular emphasis on the eco-credibility of their brand. Customer-centric marketing, including social and online marketing, is now a high priority in the fashion industry to create purchase incentives for consumers. Using influencers, marketing via advertising on social media platforms is becoming highly personalized, including addressing concerns regarding sustainability. The industry's marketing and pricing efforts have been successful in influencing consumer behavior. Prior marketing research explicitly addressed the mechanism of promoting customer perception toward sustainable or eco-fair brand credibility in the context of consumption behavior (Hsiu-Ying Kao et al., 2020; Lili et al., 2022). The general concept of brand credibility (sensu Hovland et al., 1953) is rooted in the idea that a brand provides accurate and truthful information. Credibility is seen as "a subcategory of trust, especially important for communication and defined as a feature attributed to individuals, institutions of their communicative products (written or oral texts, audio-visual presentations) by somebody (recipient), with regard to something (an event, matter or fact, etc.)" (Bentele & Will, 2008, p. 49), While credibility is mainly a concept that concerns all stakeholders, including end customers (i.e., external perception), companies make great efforts to appear credible (Colton & Poploski, 2019). A company's credibility impacts a customer's satisfaction, loyalty, opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and purchases (Castro-González et al., 2021). In fashion industry, a brand's credibility depends largely on its marketing platform because consumers have only limited insight into the production and origin of the clothing. They perceive a company's CSR measures through its corporate communication (Bowen & Aragon-Correa, 2014). The coherence, quality, and density of this information is an important construct in the architecture of brand credibility.

Empirical research has reviewed different attributes of the credibility of sustainable advertising to gain a better understanding of the latent construct (Barchiesi et al., 2018). For example, the brand's product design and communication strategies are essential to develop companies' responsibility. However, credibility requires that a consumer perceives the brand as both capable (i.e., competent) and willing (i.e., trustworthy) to deliver regularly on what is promised (Martín-Consuegra et al., 2018). In other words, credibility is a key advantage for companies selling, or interested in selling, sustainable products because fashion purchasing decisions depend on the credibility of the fashion brand (e.g., Wigley, 2015). The credibility–purchase link was highlighted as critical in a recent study on airline security management (Hsiu-Ying Kao et al., 2020). They found that the more credible an airline is perceived by potential clients, the more likely travelers were to choose this airline. Further Martín-Consuegra et al. (2018) found empirical evidence that brand credibility improves brand image and fosters purchase intention. Earlier, Wang and Yang (2010) investigated how brand credibility, consisting of trustworthiness, competence, and attractiveness, affects consumer purchase intention in emerging markets, focusing on the Chinese automotive industry. In addition, Lili et al. (2022) reported a positive relationship between brand credibility and purchase intention for sustainable cosmetics, demonstrating that customers care about the reliability of the claims made by a company. The results of their study support the hypothesis that brand credibility is an important consideration for consumers when purchasing fashion. Li et al. (2011) claimed that the credibility of a corporate brand influences consumers' purchase intentions toward a brand more strongly than the perceived origin of the corporate brand. Thus, the following hypothesis can be developed based on the earlier findings:

> **H1.** Brand credibility of fashion brands positively affects the purchase intention of fashion products.

2.2 | Social media in the context of purchasing behavior

Prior research found evidence that social media influencers have a significant impact on the purchasing decisions of their followers (Dinh & Lee, 2021; Shin & Lee, 2021). The psychological mechanisms shaping

the relationship between social media and customers' perceptions of brands have received considerable attention (Çelik et al., 2019; Hodkinson, 2019; Van Solt, 2019). In particular, the pattern of influencer advertising and its impact on purchases and perceptions of brand credibility has been identified as key to understanding how social media indirectly accelerates consumption (Dinh & Lee, 2021; Hussain et al., 2022; Martín-Consuegra et al., 2018; Shin & Lee, 2021). Due to highly individualized content and broad engagement, influencers seek to steer their followers' perceptions toward the commissioned brands and promote brand credibility by actively cultivating relationships with followers and by actively sharing pseudo-private content in the form of videos and pictures (Good & Hyman, 2020). Consumers are more likely to seek information and advice from friends, other customers, and influencers when making purchasing decisions to reduce information overload on social media. Using a causal model that measures both the evaluation and the effects of credibility, Huber et al. (2015) demonstrated that the trustworthiness of an influencer is an important factor in the attribution of credibility to a demonstrated product. They concluded further that the credibility of advertising has a direct influence on a consumer's attitude toward the product advertised, triggering purchase decision-making. Another line of research has emphasized affective mechanisms, such as fear, guilt, and regret, that explain consumer behavior related to social identity and group pressure (Dinh & Lee, 2021; Van Solt, 2019).

Unlike traditional advertising, social media influencers seek to inform consumers about new products, as well as convey emotions regarding the FOMO if not purchased (Dinh & Lee, 2021). FOMO triggers an individual's social surveillance system because of the perceived threat to social relationships (Baker et al., 2016). Despite the FOMO phenomenon having long-standing recognition in popular media (Hodkinson, 2019), the psychological mechanisms underlying linkages to consumer purchasing behavior have only recently been researched (see a review of the current literature in Tandon et al., 2021). Empirical evidence suggests that FOMO, as an anticipatory emotion, can explain individual decision-making and corresponding behavior, including heavy media use (Hunt et al., 2018), WhatsApp use (Blackwell et al., 2017; Rautela & Sharma, 2022; Sha et al., 2019), and online purchasing (Çelik et al., 2019; Good & Hyman, 2020; Van Solt, 2019). Most scholars, follow the conceptualization of Przybylski et al. (2013), who described FOMO as the uneasy feeling that others might have better (i.e., more rewarding or beneficial) "experiences."

FOMO is associated with the feeling of being excluded from a desirable experience (social exclusion) and a strong desire to constantly stay connected to what others are doing (Buglass et al., 2017). In their literature review, Tandon et al. (2021) compiled various theories and approaches that are currently employed to explain the origin of the FOMO phenomenon. According to Przybylski et al. (2013) who draw on the self-determination theory of Deci and Ryan (1985), some studies have operationalized FOMO as deficits related to inherent needs for belonging, competence, and autonomy. Empirical evidence indicates that the satisfaction of the need for belonging motivates users to engage on social media platforms (Hadlington & Scase, 2018). In their study on excessive conformist consumption behavior, Kang et al. (2020) demonstrated that FOMO has a significant impact on individuals, compelling them to conform to the behavior of the collective or group, thereby reflecting a strong desire to remain within the mainstream and avoid deviation.

In the context of online marketing, "if a genuine fear of missing out is engendered by a FOMO-appeal, then reactive individuals will tend to be driven to take up the offer rather than to reject it (avoid)" (Hodkinson, 2019, p. 68). As a result of the social comparison on social media, FOMO encourages followers to increase their social status by consuming the items preferred by their favorite influencer (Van Solt, 2019). Moreover, the negative emotion of FOMO increases the desire to take advantage of all available offers, especially those that are perceived as special. Along these lines, previous FOMO research has demonstrated a strong link between FOMO and purchasing motivations, for example, even in contexts considered more rational than fashion purchases, such as cryptocurrency transactions (Martin et al., 2022) and real estate purchases (Evans et al., 2023). In light of previous research demonstrating how FOMO can strongly influence individual behavior, including purchase, we propose the following hypothesis:

> **H2.** Fear of missing out has a positive effect on the purchase intention toward fashion.

2.3 | FOMO moderates the relationship between brand credibility and purchase intention

Planned purchases—referring to rational consideration of the product prices, quality, or uniqueness of the item (Ahmed & Ting, 2018)—apply predominantly to rare investments such as purchases of real estate, properties, and automobiles. Purchases of ecologically produced fashion (a.k.a. slow fashion), which is initially motivated by moral considerations, can also be described as a rational process. In theory, when making a sustainable purchase decision, it is crucial to consider various factors such as the price, quality of the product, as well as production methods, retail practices, and the carbon footprint of the entire transaction. In this context, brands with sustainable products that credibly and transparently report on them should arouse a positive purchase desire among consumers (Mainolfi et al., 2022; Wang & Yang, 2010), as argued above in hypothesis one. Research on eco-fashion consumer purchasing decisions recently conducted by Niinimäki et al. (2020) in Finland concluded that consumers indeed consider the ethical aspects and the environmental impact of products when making purchase decisions. However, this same study found that consumers' ethical and environmental considerations tended to decrease at the time of purchase, suggesting that non-rational decision-making processes may be at play.

People may also consume certain products and brands to identify as members of a social group (Matthews et al., 2021). Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), a theory originating in the field of social psychology, explains that individuals often conform to the behavior typical of their social group in order to maintain or enhance

their social status within the group. This may mean that individual attitudes and beliefs are less important than group norms in purchase decisions when people identify strongly with the group. Notably, people can also belong to imaginary groups where the members do not know each other directly, such as the influencer–follower relationships cultivated on social media platforms. This results in the phenomenon of collective consumption behavior that mimics the actions of others and reflects a person's social status, membership in a particular group, and conspicuous consumption (Kang et al., 2020).

Individuals experiencing FOMO may have a stronger tendency to conform to group norms in purchase decisions, as they might be inclined to buy items popular within their social group to avoid the feeling of missing out. The tendency to conform can be attributed not only to product-specific factors but also to psychological motivations, such as an individual's receptiveness to the behaviors, lifestyles, and influences of their social circle (Kang et al., 2019). When consumers are faced with the choice of buying fast-fashion products, their desire to conform to their social group may override rational sustainability considerations, especially if they are experiencing FOMO. As a result, rational considerations regarding sustainability may be given less weight in purchase decisions. Thus, we predict that the negative interaction between rational decisions and the subjective FOMO will be particularly pronounced for fast fashion products, as individuals experiencing FOMO may prioritize the desire to conform to their social group over rational sustainability considerations when making purchase decisions. This leads to the hypothesis:

> **H3.** FOMO moderates the relationship between fast fashion brand credibility and purchase intention: The relationship is weaker when FOMO is high and stronger when FOMO is low.

3 | ANALYSIS

To enhance the external validity of our findings, we conducted three separate analyses to test our hypothesized model (see Figure 1). The first analysis was based on a sample of participants from Switzerland and France, the second analysis used data from participants in the United States, and the third analysis was conducted with US participants but focused on slow fashion purchases as the dependent variable. We adopted this approach to account for potential cultural biases and to test for the generalizability of our results. The data for the second analysis were collected using the online platform prolific.co, which is a commonly used tool in social science research. Analysis 3, in contrast, was conducted to test the hypothesized model in the context of slow fashion purchases, also using data from US participants via Prolific.co.

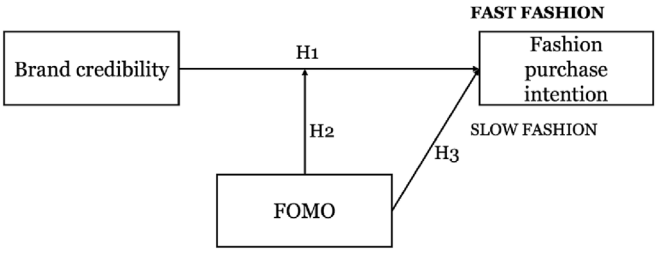

FIGURE 1 Conceptual model.

3.1 | Analysis 1—Fast fashion in a European context

3.1.1 | Sample

For Analysis 1, a quantitative approach was employed, and data was collected online through a survey conducted in Switzerland and France. In May 2021, participants were invited to take part in the survey via social media such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram. Using SurveyMonkey, an online survey tool, participants were informed about data use and data security, as well as being informed about the general topic of the survey. Before conducting Analysis 1, the questionnaire was pretested with a random sample of participants ($n = 8$) to assess the completeness, wording, clarity, structure, and appropriateness of the measurement points. The selection of an online context for Analysis 1 (France and Switzerland) can be considered appropriate as the international e-commerce market in 2019 comprised 3153.43 million users worldwide, and the fashion segment generated the highest revenue (USD 571,000 million) of all market segments (Rabe, 2022).

After giving their consent, each participant completed a short demographic survey. The survey population consisted of 202 participants, of which 53.0% live in France ($n = 107$), 40.6% in Switzerland ($n = 82$), and 6.4% in other countries ($n = 13$). The sample consisted of 68.8% ($n = 139$) females, and 1.0% ($n = 2$) did not want to declare their gender orientation. Most respondents (52.5%) claimed to belong to the medium-income group ($n = 106$), 28.2% to the low-income group ($n = 57$), and 14.9% ($n = 30$) to the high-income group.

In terms of participants' purchasing habits, 28.7% ($n = 58$) reported that 25% to 50% of the clothing they own is fast fashion; 26.7% ($n = 54$) own less than 25%, and 22.8% ($n = 46$) own between 50% and 75% fast fashion. Of the 202 respondents, 94 (46.5%) indicated that they purchase from fast fashion stores occasionally. Only 10 respondents (5.0%) indicated that they never buy fast fashion brands. In terms of the stores that the millennials we surveyed shop at, H&M is the leader, with 142 respondents (70.3%) stating they regularly shop there. The next most popular brand, with 120 respondents (59.4%), is Zara.

3.1.2 | Measurement

Dependent variable

Purchase intention. To test our hypothesis, the present contribution draws on previous marketing research on fast fashion purchasing (Chang & Jai, 2015; Chetioui et al., 2020; Liu, 2022). Following Liu

et al. (2021), the dependent variable purchase intention was operationalized with a three-item scale. The scale aims to measure the likelihood of the respondents purchasing from a brand in the future. We modified the items to suit the research aims, which resulted in the following items: (I) "I will purchase from fast fashion brands the next time I need a product"; (II) "It is very likely that I will buy fast fashion brands in the future"; and (III) "I will definitely buy products from fast fashion companies." Scale reliability measured by Cronbach's alpha was suitable with $\alpha = .88$.

Independent variables

Brand credibility (BC). To measure brand credibility, four items were employed, designed as a five-point Likert scale following Portal et al. (2019), to measure respondents' perception of the credibility of fast fashion brands and their corporate responsibility. The items were further modified to fit the social and sustainability purpose of fashion consumption in the Analysis: (I) "I believe that fast fashion brands will keep their promises regarding their sustainability actions"; (II) "I believe that fast fashion brands are dishonest in communicating their sustainability performances"; (III) "My experience with fast fashion has shown me that it does not keep its sustainability promises"; and (IV) "I believe that fast fashion brands' promises concerning sustainability are credible." Scale reliability measured by Cronbach's alpha was $\alpha = .70$.

Fear of missing out (FOMO). To measure FOMO, the single item developed by Riordan et al. (2020) was employed. Currently, there are several measurement tools to operationalize the phenomenon of FOMO, which have been presented in various languages (Al-Menayes, 2016; Tomczyk & Selmanagic-Lizde, 2018). However, the recently published instrument by Riordan et al. (2020) has been recognized by the research community; it correlated with $r = .87$ ($p < .001$) with the original scale presented by Przybylski et al. (2013). A slightly modified version of the five-point Likert scale, adapted to the fast-fashion context, has the following wording: "I will experience fear of missing out (FOMO) if I don't buy the latest product of my favorite fast fashion brand."

Control variables

According to the earlier fashion literature, multiple influences determine consumers' purchase intention: Gender was controlled for as men are usually less interested in fast fashion (Pentecost & Andrews, 2010); age was controlled for because older consumers may be more affluent and may, therefore, be less interested in fast fashion products. Frequency of fast fashion purchases (occasionally, once a month, or up to several times a week) and perceived quality of sustainability information provided by the brands also served as control variables.

3.1.3 | Analysis, discriminant validity, and common method variance

The analysis was carried out using R (Version 4.2.2). The R lavaan package Version 0.6–12 (Rosseel, 2012) was used to specify the models and later run the structural equation analysis. The MVN package (version 4.0.2) was used to test normality (Korkmaz et al., 2014). Before testing the hypotheses, confirmatory factor analysis was carried out to verify the distinctiveness of our measurements (discriminatory validity) and to estimate the effects of commonly measured variances. The criterion of Fornell and Larcker (1981) has commonly been used to assess the degree of shared variance between latent variables of the model, and it was used to test convergent validity. On the basis of a confirmatory factor analysis ($X^2[65] = 535.1$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = 0.179, CFI = 0.74, TLI = 0.69), convergent validity can be investigated by calculating the average variance extracted (AVE) using a cut-off point of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2017). The inspection of the AVE values for all factors suggests an acceptable convergent validity (AVE > 0.50 is considered as acceptable, and AVE > 0.70 is very good).

Discriminant validity was evaluated in two ways. First, it was evaluated by comparing the constructs' values of the squared root of the AVE ($\sqrt{AVE}$) with the correlation of the other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). A value of √AVE that is higher than the coefficient of the correlation between factors provides evidence of discriminant validity. All factors met the criterion and demonstrated discriminant validity. Second, discriminant validity was evaluated by using a more recent technique, the heterotrait–monotrait ratio of the correlation (HTMT) (Henseler et al., 2015). HTMT is the average of the heterotrait–heteromethod correlation relative to the average of the monotrait–heteromethod correlation. If HTMT is below 0.90, a discriminant validity between two reflective constructs can be assumed. Results show that the HTMT values between the respective constructs appeared to be below 0.90 (the highest value of HTMT = 0.52 for the link between purchase intention and credibility). The results provide evidence of convergent and discriminant validity.

All hypotheses were tested using a structural equation model via the SEM function of the lavaan package. This method allows researchers to test path models, including latent variables that are not affected by measurement error. The following fit indices were evaluated according to standards in social science after Kline (2015): chi-square $\left(X^2\right)$, comparative fit index (*CFI*) [for testing the overall fit], root mean square of approximation *(RMSEA*) [for model complexity], and Tucker–Lewis index (*TLI*) (34). According to best practice, a good model fit is considered by *p* value for the model >0.05, RMSEA <0.06, and CFI and TLI ≥0.90.

Table 1 presents the zero-order correlations with Bonferroni correction between all variables used to investigate the prediction model for the explanation of purchase intention. In line with the theoretical expectations, brand credibility, and purchase intention are correlated ($r = .38$, $p < .001$).

A single-group SEM can reveal the proportionality and strength of individual correlations in a matrix of correlations; a multi-group SEM further allows for a comparison of both the fit of the models and the individual paths between the groups. Finally, one can calculate the effect size of the latent variable mean changes between groups. By using the SEM approach, the hypothetical model (H1) and (H2) were tested, with brand credibility and FOMO as predictors of fast fashion purchase intention (measured as latent variables in the model),

TABLE 1 Means, standard deviations, and correlations with confidence intervals.

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5
1. Fast fashion purchase intention	3.28	1.00					
2. Fast fashion brand credibility	2.65	0.76	0.38** [0.23, 0.51]				
3. FOMO	2.28	1.18	0.49** [0.36, 0.61]	0.31** [0.16, 0.46]			
4. Gender (male)	0.32	0.47	0.90 [−0.8, 0.25]	0.30 [−0.13, 0.20]	0.10 [−0.6, 0.26]		
5. Low income	0.30	0.46	−0.50 [−0.21, 0.12]	−0.20 [−0.18, 0.14]	0.50 [−0.11, 0.21]	−0.06 [−0.22, 0.11]	
6. Student	0.42	0.50	−0.07 [−0.23, 0.10]	−0.70 [−0.23, 0.9]	0.50 [−0.11, 0.21]	−0.70 [−0.23, 0.10]	0.49** [0.36, 0.61]

Note: *M* and *SD* are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively. Values in square brackets indicate the 95% confidence interval for each correlation. The confidence interval is a plausible range of population correlations that could have caused the sample correlation (Cumming, 2014).
*indicates $p < .05$, and **indicates $p < .01$.

including the control variables. Due to missing data (less than 3%), the full information maximum likelihood (FIML) estimation was used (Enders & Bandalos, 2001). The model fit was good (X^2 [43] = 55.49, $p = .096$, RMSEA = 0.048, CFI = 0.95, TLI = 0.94), indicating that the measurement of the latent variables was sound. The model explained 30% of fast fashion purchase intention. Brand credibility had a significant effect of $\beta = .24$ ($p < .01$) on fast fashion purchase intention, indicating support for H1. Also, in support of H2, we found that FOMO has a direct effect on fast fashion purchase intention ($\beta = .42, p < .001$). Among the control variables, we did not observe any significant effect on fast fashion purchase intention.

In H3, we postulated a moderating effect of FOMO on the relationship between (sustainable) brand credibility and purchase intention (the criterion). By applying a mean split of FOMO (Mean = 2.28, SD = 1.18, Median = x, Mi = 1; Max = 5), two groups were created (high FOMO; $n = 110$ and low FOMO; $n = 94$). The results of the multi-group model show that in both groups, different magnitudes of intention variance were explained by the model (21% and 5%). Aligned with our expectations, brand credibility positively explained purchase intention ($\beta = .45, p < .001$) within the low FOMO group. In the high FOMO group, purchase intention was not explained by brand credibility ($\beta = -0.17, p = 0.16$). The results indicate, that in the low FOMO group, brand credibility has a strong influence on purchase intention.

In the next step, it was examined whether observed differences between the two FOMO groups were statistically significant. A Chi-square difference test revealed that the unconstrained and constrained (factor loadings and measurement intercepts) did not significantly differ in their fit (ΔX^2 [26] = 24.3, $p = 0.56$), indicating measurement invariance across both groups. The next step was to test the unconstrained model against models where one of the paths was always set equal across both groups. Evidence of a significant moderating effect was observed, specifically in the case of the link between brand credibility and purchase intention (as indicated by the significant ΔX^2). Therefore, H3 was supported by the data. Accordingly, there is a negative moderation effect of FOMO on the relationship between brand credibility and purchase intention.

3.1.4 | Implications

Analysis 1 provides compelling evidence according to a real sample of millennials in France and Switzerland that people experience FOMO during fashion shopping. This is supported by prior research on the FOMO–action link in online marketing (Dinh & Lee, 2021; Hodkinson, 2019). The data of Analysis 1 supports H1 by showing that perceived brand credibility concerning sustainability is an important factor in the decision to buy fast fashion. However, as evidence of FOMO as a predictor of fast fashion purchasing (H2) and of a negative FOMO-moderated interaction between brand credibility and purchase intention (H3), our data support the hypothesis that brand credibility has a weaker influence on purchase intention when consumers experience a large amount of FOMO.

3.2 | Analysis 2—Fast fashion in a US context

The second analysis focused on replicating the observed effects concerning purchase intention toward fast fashion by recruiting a target population of $n = 255$ individuals exclusively from participants residing in the United States. Analysis 2 is also based on cross-sectional data collected using the online survey tool Prolific, which is commonly used for academic research and online experiments. As prior research has found, compared to other crowd sample platforms (e.g., Amazon MTurk), Prolific has demonstrated a high-quality online data return, especially when using quality filter items (Goodman & Wright, 2022). Critical voices have identified Prolific "… as a source of crowdsourced samples that generally reflect the perceptions and experiences of

Americans" (Tang et al., 2022, p. 12). In Questback, linked to the Prolific community, participants were asked to answer the above questions to replicate the results of the first analysis. Data for this analysis were collected between April 2022 and May 2022, by an online survey.

3.2.1 | Sample

In Analysis 2, the sample size consisted of 255 participants. To form our final samples, when collecting duplicate responses from the same IP address or prolific worker ID, we included only the chronologically first response. We also excluded responses from subjects who did not complete all key measures (defined as our dependent measures and potential mediators) and who did not correctly answer the quality test item ("please state disagree"). This left us with $n = 230$ subjects in Analysis 2 (Mean age = 33.0, 20% male).

3.2.2 | Analysis and test of the moderation

Table 2 contains the means, standard deviations, and correlations for all variables. Consistent with the theoretical expectations and findings from Analysis 1, brand credibility and purchase intention were strongly correlated ($r = .53$, $p < .001$), and FOMO was correlated with purchase intention ($r = .28$, $p < .001$). Interestingly, FOMO was rather less present in the participant group of the second analysis (Mean = 1.86, SD = 1) compared to Analysis 1. By employing structural equation modeling to test H1 and H2 and multi-group analysis to test for moderation in H3, the following analysis tests the hypothesized model and compares it with the results of the first analysis.

Similar to Analysis 1, the hypothetical model (H1) and (H2) were tested with brand credibility and FOMO as predictors of purchase intention (measured as latent variables in the model), including the control variables. Due to missing data (less than 3%), the FIML estimation was used (Enders & Bandalos, 2001). The model fit was acceptable (X^2 [170] = 237.0, $p < .001$, RMSEA = 0.06, CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.92), indicating that the measurement of the latent variables was sound. The model explained 32% of fast fashion purchase intention. Brand credibility had a significant effect of $\beta = .52\,(p < .001)$ on intention, indicating support for (H1). Also, in line with H2, the results of Analysis 2 show that FOMO has a direct effect on purchase intention $(\beta = .15, p < .05)$. Among the control variables, gender (female) positively affected fast fashion purchase intention $(\beta = .02, p < .05)$.

In order to test the moderating effect of FOMO, a multi-group analysis using the lavaan package was conducted. By applying a mean split of FOMO (Mean = 1.86, SD = 1, Median = 2, Mi = 1; Max = 5), two groups were created (high FOMO, $n = 104$, and low FOMO, $n = 126$).

Regarding brand attractiveness, participants from the high FOMO group were more likely to report being attracted to the H&M brand (38.1%; $n = 48$) than participants from the low FOMO group (27.7%; $n = 29$). However, in both groups, the first fast fashion brand mentioned was H&M (33.5%; $n = 77$), followed by Gap (19.1%; $n = 44$).

Subsequently, a number of mean difference tests of the manifest variables of each scale (e.g., mean value of purchase intention) were

TABLE 2 Means, standard deviations, and correlations with confidence intervals.

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Fast fashion purchase intention	3.45	0.93							
2. Fast fashion brand credibility	3.15	0.70	0.53** [0.42, 0.61]						
3. FOMO	1.86	1.0	0.27** [0.15, 0.39]	0.31** [0.18, 0.42]					
4. Gender (male)	0.27	0.44	−0.04 [−0.17, 0.09]	0.13 [−0.00, 0.25]	0.04 [−0.09, 0.17]				
5. Low income	0.3	0.46	−0.01 [−0.14, 0.12]	−0.01 [−0.14, 0.12]	−0.07 [−0.20, 0.06]	−0.02 [−0.15, 0.11]			
6. Student	0.15	0.36	−0.02 [−0.15, 0.11]	−0.09 [−0.22, 0.04]	0.04 [−0.09, 0.16]	−0.08 [−0.21, 0.05]	0.02 [−0.11, 0.15]		
7. Employment	0.45	0.5	0.03 [−0.10, 0.16]	−0.09 [−0.22, 0.04]	0.04 [−0.09, 0.17]	0.16* [0.04, 0.29]	−0.32** [−0.44, −0.20]	−0.38** [−0.49, −0.26]	
8. Age	33.05	9.92	0.02 [−0.13, 0.13]	0.20** [0.07, 0.32]	0.02 [−0.11, 0.15]	−0.01 [−0.14, 0.12]	−0.08 [−0.21, 0.05]	−.48** [−0.58, −0.38]	0.09 [−0.04, 0.21]

Note: *M* and *SD* are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively. Values in square brackets indicate the 95% confidence interval for each correlation. The confidence interval is a plausible range of population correlations that could have caused the sample correlation (Cumming, 2014).
Abbreviation: FOMO, fear of missing out.
*indicates $p < .05$, and **indicates $p < .01$.

performed. The two groups differ in terms of the dependent variable intention ($t[154.63] = 5.076$, $p < .001$), and independent variable credibility ($t[188.01] = 5.26$, $p < .001$), but not in terms of gender ($X^2[1] = 0.19, p = .66$), or whether participants still have the status of students ($X^2[1] = 0.16, p = .69$). The results of the multi-group model are reported in the next step. Credibility showed a significant effect of $\beta = .60$ ($p < .001$) on purchase intention among participants with low FOMO and an effect of $\beta = .40$ ($p < .001$) on purchase among participants with high FOMO, indicating a negative moderating effect of FOMO. In terms of variance elucidation, independent and control variables explained more variance in the low FOMO group ($R^2_{\text{LowFOMO}} = .37$, $R^2_{\text{HighFOMO}} = .28$).

In the next step, it was examined whether the observed differences between the two FOMO groups were statistically significant. A Chi-square difference test revealed that the unconstrained and constrained (factor loadings and measurement intercepts) did not differ in their fit ($\Delta X^2\,[20] = 15.4, p = .75$), indicating measurement invariance across both groups. Next, the unconstrained model was tested against models, where one of the paths was always set equal across both groups. Evidence arose of a significant moderating effect in the case of the link between brand credibility and purchase intention (as indicated by the significantΔX^2). Therefore, H3 was supported by the data. Accordingly, there is a negative moderation effect of FOMO on the relationship between brand credibility and purchase intention.

3.2.3 | Implications

Analysis 2 tested the hypothesized model and replicated the results of the first analysis. H1–H3 found support in both analyses, showing a strong direct influence of brand credibility (H1) and FOMO (H2) on purchase intention toward fast fashion. In addition, as in the first analysis, the multi-group analysis revealed a moderation effect, showing a weaker influence of sustainability issues (brand credibility) on fast fashion purchase decisions among those participants who perceived high levels of FOMO and a stronger influence among those with low levels of FOMO. Thus, along with the second sample, H3 remained supported.

By using data from the United States, this analysis contributes to the generalizability of the results of Analysis 1 within a non-European context. While the first two analyses focused on the context of fast fashion, Analysis 3 further explored whether the hypothetical model can also be applied to the context of slow fashion. Thus, Analysis 3 tested the extent to which FOMO and brand credibility can serve as a general principle to promote fashion and even guide marketing professionals to promote slow fashion consumption in the future.

3.3 | Analysis 3—Slow fashion in a US context

The aim of Analysis 3 was to test H1–H3 in the context of slow fashion. By using data from participants residing in the United States, Analysis 3 was based on cross-sectional data collected via Prolific. Analysis 3 is similar to Analysis 2. We assembled a target population of $n = 200$ individuals from the United States. Analysis 3, however, focused on replicating the observed effects on our measure of purchase intention in the context of slow fashion.

3.3.1 | Sample

The sample size consisted of 220 participants. To form our final samples, when collecting duplicate responses from the same IP address or prolific worker ID, we included only the chronologically first response. We also excluded responses from subjects who did not complete all key measures (defined as our dependent measures and potential mediators) and who did not correctly answer the quality test item ("please state disagree"). This left us with $n = 201$ subjects in Analysis 3 (Mean age = 34.2, 29% male).

3.3.2 | Analysis

Table 3 contains the means, standard deviations, and correlations for all variables. Consistent with theoretical expectations and findings from Analysis 1, slow fashion brand credibility and purchase intention correlate with ($r = .56$, $p < .001$) and FOMO correlates with slow fashion purchase intention ($r = .24$, $p < .001$). As in the sample of Analysis 2, FOMO was rather mild among participants in the sample of Analysis 3 (Mean = 1.94, SD = 1.01). Brand credibility in the context of slow fashion was higher than in Analyses 1 and 2 (Mean = 3.78, SD = 0.54). By employing structural equation modeling to test H1 and H2 and multi-group analysis to test for moderation in H3, the following analysis tests the hypothesized model and compares it with the results of Analyses 1 and 2 in the context of slow fashion.

While Analysis 2 focused on the context of fast fashion, Analysis 3 investigated whether the hypothesized model applies in the context of slow fashion. Similar to Analysis 2, the hypothesized models (H1) and (H2) were tested with brand credibility of slow fashion brands and FOMO as predictors of slow fashion purchase intention (measured as latent variables in the model), including the control variables from Analysis 2. Due to missing data (less than 3%), the FIML estimation was used (Enders & Bandalos, 2001). The model fit was excellent (X^2 $[102] = 122.3$, $p = .083$, RMSEA = 0.03, CFI = 0.98, TLI = 0.97), indicating that the measurement of the latent variables was sound. The model explained 52% of slow fashion purchase intention. Brand credibility had a significant effect of $\beta = .65$ ($p < .001$) on intention, indicating support for (H1) among the sample of Analysis 3. Also, in line with H2, the results of Analysis 3 show that FOMO has a direct effect on purchase intention ($\beta = .23, p < .01$). Among the control variables, low income negatively affected slow fashion purchasing. The analysis also revealed no other significant influences of the other control variables (e.g., gender, age, or occupation) on purchase intention toward slow fashion.

As in Analyses 1 and 2, a multi-group analysis was conducted to test the moderating effect of FOMO. By applying a mean split of

TABLE 3 Means, standard deviations, and correlations with confidence intervals.

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Slow fashion purchase intention	3.61	0.75							
2. Slow fashion brand credibility	3.78	0.54	0.56** [0.11, 0.37]						
3. FOMO	1.94	1.01	0.24** [0.11, 0.37]	0.04 [−0.10, 0.18]					
4. Gender (male)	0.30	0.46	−0.01 [−0.15, 0.13]	−0.10 [−0.23, 0.04]	−0.10 [−0.23, 0.04]				
5. Low income	0.26	0.44	−0.15* [−0.28, −0.01]	0.02 [−0.12, 0.16]	0.02 [−0.12, 0.16]	−0.14* [−0.27, −0.00]			
6. Student	0.07	0.25	0.01 [−0.13, 0.15]	0.06 [−0.08, 0.20]	−0.13 [−0.26, 0.01]	−0.08 [−0.22, 0.06]	−0.02 [−0.16, 0.12]		
7. Employment	0.47	0.50	0.07 [−0.07, 0.21]	−0.10 [−0.23, 0.04]	0.07 [−0.07, 0.21]	0.11 [−0.03, 0.25]	−0.15* [−0.28, −0.01]	−0.25** [−0.38, −0.12]	
8. Age	34.30	9.44	−0.19** [−0.32, −0.06]	−0.17* [−0.31, −0.04]	−0.07 [−0.20, 0.08]	0.06 [−0.08, 0.19]	0.01 [−0.13, 0.15]	−0.32** [−0.44, −0.18]	−0.06 [−0.20, 0.08]

Note: *M* and *SD* are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively. Values in square brackets indicate the 95% confidence interval for each correlation. The confidence interval is a plausible range of population correlations that could have caused the sample correlation (Cumming, 2014).
Abbreviation: FOMO, fear of missing out.
*indicates $p < .05$, and **indicates $p < .01$.

FOMO ($Mean_{FOMO} = 1.94$, $SD = 1.01$, $Median_{FOMO} = 2$, $Min = 1$; $Max = 5$), two groups were created (high FOMO; $n = 119$ and low FOMO; $n = 81$). In terms of brand appeal, participants in the high FOMO group stated that they were attracted to a variety of different slow fashion brands, indicating a greater interest in existing brands in this segment than participants in the low FOMO group. However, in both groups, the most frequently mentioned slow fashion brand was "Patagonia" (44.8%; $n = 90$). Subsequently, a number of mean difference tests of the manifest variables of each scale (e.g., mean value of slow fashion purchase intention) were performed. The two groups differ in terms of the dependent variable intention ($t[128.32] = 2.59$, $p < .01$) but not in terms of slow fashion brand credibility ($t[153.38] = 0.12$, $p = 0.90$), gender ($\chi^2[1] = 0.17$, $p = .19$), or whether participants still have the status of students ($X^2[1] = 0.52, p = .48$).

Exploratively, we asked participants whether they follow influencers on social media who promote slow-fashion products and whether these influencers affect participants' purchasing behavior. Compared to participants in the low FOMO group, participants in the high FOMO group more frequently confirmed that they follow fashion influencers ($t[128.32] = 2.59$, $p < .01$). However, when we asked whether participants' purchasing behavior was influenced by these influencers, we found significant differences ($t[178,16] = 4.93$, $p < .001$) between participants in the low FOMO group ($M = 1.8$; $SD = 1.06$) and those in the high FOMO group ($M = 2.59$; $SD = 1.12$).

The next step was to test the moderation of FOMO on the relationship between slow fashion brand credibility and slow fashion purchasing using SEM multi-group analysis. The model fit was good ($X^2[214] = 288.44$, $p < .01$, $RMSEA = 0.05$, $CFI = 0.93$, $TLI = 0.92$). Credibility showed a significant effect of $\beta_{Low\ FOMO} = .65$ ($p < .001$) on slow fashion purchase intention among participants with low FOMO and an effect of $\beta_{High\ FOMO} = .62$ ($p < .001$) on purchase among participants with high FOMO, indicating no significant moderating effect of FOMO in Analysis 3. In terms of variance elucidation, independent and control variables explained more variance in the low FOMO group ($R^2_{Low\ FOMO} = .53$, $R^2_{High\ FOMO} = .43$).

Next, it was examined whether the observed differences between the two FOMO groups (low and high) were statistically significant. A Chi-square difference test revealed that the unconstrained and constrained (factor loadings, measurement intercepts) did not differ in their fit ($\Delta X^2[21] = 32.0, p = .05$), indicating measurement invariance across both groups. The next step was to test the unconstrained model against models where one of the paths was always set equal across both groups. Evidence arose of a non-significant moderating effect in the case of the link between brand credibility and purchase intention (as indicated by $\Delta X^2[1] = 0.27, p = .60$). Therefore, H3 was not supported by the data of Analysis 3. Accordingly, there is no moderation effect of FOMO on the relationship between slow fashion brand credibility and slow fashion purchase intention. An overview of all results can be found in Figure 2.

3.3.3 | Implications

Using a sample of participants from the United States, we further tested the hypothesized model by shifting the context to the sphere of slow-fashion consumption. In contrast to fast fashion, slow fashion

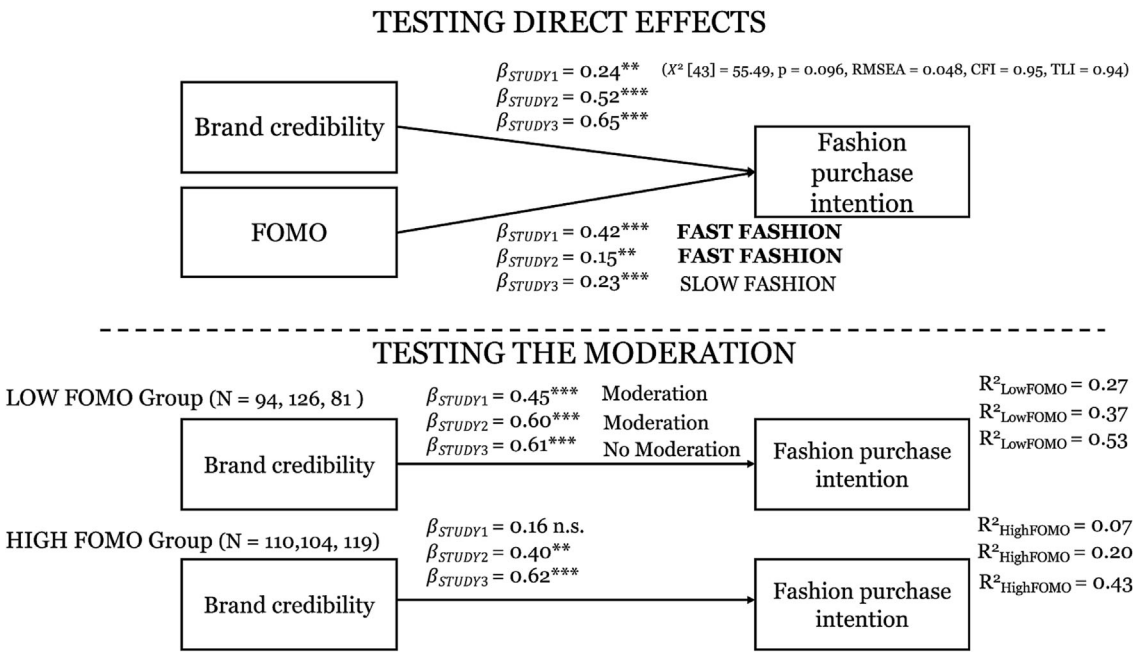

FIGURE 2 Results from model estimations.

means the consumption of sustainably and ecologically fairly produced clothing, which often has different environmental standards (Şener et al., 2019), but is also more expensive than fast fashion. Slow fashion brands such as Patagonia invest a lot of attention in making sustainable fashion products visible and appealing to customers through the attributes of social and ecological sustainability (Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013). In the third analysis, therefore, we not only sought to replicate the findings from Studies 1 and 2 and test FOMO as an important driver and moderator of clothing purchase but also changed the context from fast fashion to slow fashion.

Our results provide support for the hypothesis that brand credibility (H1) and FOMO (H2) drive purchase decisions in slow fashion. In all three of the samples of our analyses, we found support for the hypothesis that brand credibility (cognitive consideration of sustainability aspects of a brand), as well as the irrational FOMO, are key determinants for purchase behavior. However, in the third analysis, no moderation relationship was evident between brand credibility and the purchase decision for slow fashion products moderated by FOMO. There may be two reasons for this pattern. First, slow fashion brands—with the exception of Patagonia and Sézane—are perhaps not yet as well known to customers as those of the fast fashion industry (e.g., H&M, ZARA, and MANGO). However, we believe a more compelling argument is that slow fashion is inherently perceived as sustainable, unlike fast fashion (Watson & Yan, 2013). If people feel they are missing out on something that their friends are already consuming, this feeling acts as an incentive to buy those products rather than as a negative moderator. Therefore, individuals would not devalue the brand credibility of these brands, as they did with fast fashion brands in Analyses 1 and 2. The third analysis is particularly important for slow fashion marketers because, compared to fast fashion marketing, the potential of FOMO and social media consumption is not yet being exploited to the same extent.

4 | DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Given the steadily increasing demand for fast fashion alongside growing consumer interest in sustainability, we studied the mechanisms that drive online sales via social media platforms. More specifically, we examined FOMO as an additional motivational driver in the context of purchasing fashion. Consistent with previous research explanations, a distinction was made between purchasing fast fashion (Studies 1 and 2) and slow fashion (Analysis 3, the consumption of organically produced clothing) (Liu, 2022; Şener et al., 2019). Although there is mounting interest to understand the mechanisms of promoting sustainably produced fashion, a research gap remains concerning the motivational driver of fashion purchasing. Marketing researchers have found that advertising using FOMO-based marketing can be highly effective (Hodkinson, 2019). However, as this is still a psychological black box, no systematic research has yet addressed the FOMO mechanism, especially with regard to the disparity of credibility and behavior in the fashion context.

To narrow the above-mentioned gap, we conducted three analyses with a total of 652 participants in Europe (Sample 1) and the United States (Samples 2 and 3), obtained from three independent online surveys conducted in 2021 and 2022. In Analysis 1, we tested the hypotheses using data collected from participants in Switzerland and France. In Analysis 2, we replicated the effects of Analysis 1 using data collected in the United States, and in Analysis 3, we tested the relationship of the hypotheses in the context of slow fashion. To analyze the data, we employed structural equation modeling and multigroup analysis. Furthermore, we tested a moderation relationship in which FOMO moderated the relationship between brand credibility and purchase intention toward fast fashion (in Analyses 1 and 2) and slow fashion (in Analysis 3).

This paper contributes to the existing literature on consumer behavior in three ways. First, our research provides robust evidence that brand credibility, as perceived by consumers in terms of ecological and social responsibility (Yang et al., 2022), significantly and positively influences the willingness to purchase fashion products in both the fast and slow fashion domains, extending and strengthening the findings of previous research on consumer behavior (Hsiu-Ying Kao et al., 2020; Wang & Yang, 2010). Therefore, the way in which brands demonstrate or signal what is perceived as credibility through their CSR strategies and online channels has a major influence on the fashion industry. As demonstrated by our results, the credibility-purchase effect applies to both slow and fast fashion marketing strategies in terms of reaching customers in the future. In other words, our data suggest that a major mind shift toward sustainable consumption is currently happening among customers, as customers consider sustainability standards for fashion products during their shopping. Second, our main results show conclusively that FOMO has a major influence on customer decision-making in both fast and slow fashion. Our desire to elucidate this relationship was motivated by previous studies reporting a significant relationship between FOMO and purchasing (Çelik et al., 2019; Dinh & Lee, 2021). With the increasing visibility of influencer marketing, the literature has cited FOMO as a key mechanism for brands to successfully advertise on social media, getting customers to follow influencers and sell fashion products. This outcome aligns with prior research (see Kang et al., 2019) that has demonstrated excessive conformist consumption behavior where high FOMO enacts a strong tendency and willingness to conform to group behavior. Earlier research has examined the phenomenon of FOMO across various consumption scenarios (Çelik et al., 2019; Rautela & Sharma, 2022; Tandon et al., 2021), revealing that FOMO is likely to elicit greater and more intense following-driven behavior (Gartner et al., 2022).

Last, the present study addresses the interaction between brand credibility and brand purchase intention, moderated by FOMO, to test whether FOMO alters the cognitive mechanism of customers in their consumption decisions. For this purpose, the context chosen was the fast fashion industry as the gap between attitude and behavior seems to be the widest among customers. The results from two independent samples (Analyses 1 and 2) show that FOMO moderates this relationship in fast fashion consumption. Individuals with low FOMO are more influenced by the motives of environmental sustainability and fair production, which is reflected in brand credibility, while individuals with high FOMO are less motivated by brand credibility in the fast fashion domain. Interestingly, the results of Analysis 3 did not confirm this mechanism in the context of slow fashion. Because of the slow fashion movement, which by definition takes a different approach and emphasizes the need to produce organic and fair-trade products, we report that FOMO may not compromise brand credibility. To our knowledge, our study is the first to show that FOMO negatively moderates the relationship between brand credibility and fast fashion consumption.

This study offers actionable insights for fashion brands aiming to strengthen their sustainability credentials and increase online sales through social media platforms, particularly for slow fashion brands seeking to capture the growing consumer demand for ethically and ecologically conscious fashion products. First, slow fashion brands should prioritize their sustainability credentials in their marketing and advertising campaigns to enhance their brand credibility and increase purchase intention among consumers. They should also concentrate on highlighting their sustainable production methods and fair-trade practices to increase their appeal to consumers. Second, brands should consider incorporating FOMO appeals in their social media advertising strategies to increase their online sales. Overall, this study highlights the importance of brand credibility and FOMO in driving consumer behavior in the fashion industry and provides practical insights for marketers seeking to increase their online sales.

Overall, our findings highlight the complex interplay between brand credibility, FOMO, and consumer behavior in the fashion industry. This study provides valuable insights for fashion brands seeking to enhance their sustainability credentials and increase online sales while also contributing to the broader literature on consumer behavior and the challenges facing the fashion industry in the era of sustainability.

5 | LIMITATIONS

We recognize a number of limitations to our study. First, cross-sectional approaches are subject to criticism because there are no controls for individual-level effects. Our conclusions could be strengthened by longitudinal data that further investigates FOMO's effects on purchase behavior. Second, the current study sought to measure FOMO using a single-item scale. The validity of the measurement should be assessed using different samples and scenario studies. The limitations of our study point to potential avenues for future research. First, more research is needed to better understand the origin of FOMO. Although previous research has used various approaches to explain the patterns and occurrence of FOMO, there is not yet a conclusive model to explain the FOMO phenomenon (Hodkinson, 2019; Tandon et al., 2021). This would entail investigating the underlying psychological mechanisms and exploring the role of social comparison and social identity in the FOMO–fashion consumption relationship. Further research is also called for to test whether the FOMO moderation mechanism also explains real-world fast fashion shopping behavior and to test the generalizability of study findings across diverse populations and cultural contexts. To this end, various research designs such as longitudinal, mixed-method, experimental, and cross-cultural studies can be employed. Furthermore, research should examine the impact of sustainability labeling and certification on the FOMO–fashion consumption relationship.

6 | CONCLUSION

Although interest in sustainable products has generally increased, with plenty of options for consumers who prefer clothes that are produced in an environmentally-friendly manner and under fair working

conditions (e.g., circular economy and slow fashion providers), there is still a gap between consumers' intentions and their subsequent behavior (Park & Lin, 2020). Our study reveals that FOMO, a well-known trigger of frequently recurring buying behavior, has a significant negative moderating effect on the relationship between brand credibility and purchase intention toward fast fashion products. This finding highlights a major challenge facing the fashion industry, as the consumption of fast fashion and ultra-fashion products continues to have a negative impact on the environment and society, and FOMO exacerbates this problem by driving frequent buying behavior among young consumers. Our paper is the first step in assessing the impact of FOMO on the cognitive processes of consumers making purchase decisions in the context of slow and fast fashion. It highlights similarities between the two different settings and invites slow fashion marketing strategists to consider new opportunities in social media marketing. Our study showed that FOMO has both direct and indirect influences on the purchase decision process. The results contribute toward a better understanding of the relationship between ecological brand credibility and purchase decision-making of consumers with varying levels of FOMO.

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ORCID

Matthias Filser https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1031-2820
Sascha Kraus https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4886-7482

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